

Especially for audio-philos who can take a cosmic view of audio and dedicate themselves to the pursuit of 'musical ecstasy': Harvey's back

Anti-tweak backlash may be at a peak, but rearguard action is underway. I've already written in these pages about that estimable publication, *Sound Practices*, and its devotion to things tubular. We know that George Kaye is shipping his Tube Checkers, Audio Alchemy introduced a phono stage, Immutible has just launched another Transfiguration cartridge, Croft has a new sub-£1000 giant-killer [see page 38] and there are rumours of a radical and affordable turntable made in the wilds of East Kent. Whatever the downturn in hi-fi generally, there's still a counterculture intent on keeping things interesting. Which makes it much easier to welcome the return of fringe hi-fi's messiah and erstwhile tube god. Yes, Harvey's back.

No, not the giant white rabbit and, no, I don't have a James Stewart fixation. It's Harvey Rosenberg, late of New York Audio Labs, caretaker of the Julius Futterman Archive and torchbearer for all that is, or was, fun about fringe audio practices. He's written another book, more ambitious than his earlier tube-god musings, and it deserves to be read by every disillusioned music lover who can't understand why the common denominator continues to be lowered. It's for those whose buttons really do pop at the thought of transcendent music in the home, who understand that Harley-Davidsons are more than mere motorcycles, who hear the difference between cut-pile and loop-pile carpeting, who prefer messy fountain pens to drip-free ballpoints. It's *Which?* for aliens, *The Robb Report* for the borderline insane.

Not since the early days of *The Absolute Sound* has there been so spiritual, so metaphysical a study of the effects of good sound on receptive ears. *The Search For Musical Ecstasy & The Archaic Auric Revival*, though it seems at first reading to be the kind of crazed musings previously linked to the ingestion of industrial-strength hallucinogens, has

— beneath its post-Leary, post-McLuhan surface — a practical theme and a type of logic which will make sense to anyone who ever did anything irrational for the cause of better sound. It embraces every basket-case cause from Lumleyites to Belters to early Linnies, tube freaks, ESL lovers, cable fetishists — you name it. If there is any work to which it might be compared, it has to be the three-volume *Illuminatus* by Wilson and Shea. It is, in other words, a trip.

But who'd have thought that audio could inspire such dedication, such intensity, such devotion? Hell, we've all been accused of being too enthusiastic about that which does not warrant such passion, but Rosenberg takes musicmania to new heights of obsession. The chapter headings contrast a duality, his purely sensible advice juxtaposed with philosophical musings. There are thoughts spoken which too many fear to utter. It's a reaffirmation. Where else can you read 'The Cure For MTV-itis', 'Horns For The Masses', 'Rhoda, A Nice Jewish Girl From Brooklyn, Has the World's Best Sound System!', 'I Was A Teenage Mutant Audio Nerd', 'Which Sounds Better: Transistors, Tubes or Sour Pickles?' and the seminal chapter, 'Why Our Home and Not The Concert Hall Is The Primary Place Of Musical Ecstasy'.

I'm not convinced that I have the cosmic wherewithal to comprehend fully that which Rosenberg is proposing. The book is a call to arms — tonearms as it were. Rosenberg has had his fill of wussy, junky, plastic hi-fi. He sees music as an aphrodisiac, musical ecstasy a measure of one's development, a yardstick of maturity. Rosenberg overturns the standard values, telling us that sheer realism and total accuracy are not the final goals. The goal is musical ecstasy. Nearly all that has been written about hi-fi has been of the 'what' and 'how' variety. *The Search For Musical Ecstasy* tells us why.

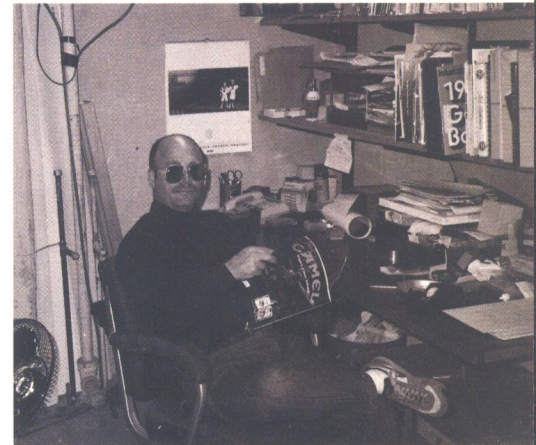
This 200-page tome — part autobiography, part tube primer, part novel, part Kaballah — is a special-order item available from Moth Marketing for £22.50 including post and packaging. Call (0234) 741152 to check delivery details.

A SPOT OF SELF DEFENCE

In response to two types of critics, please allow me a spot of self-defence. First, for those who think I'm deaf, I've just had my ears tested by the NHS. Although measuring only the midband (actually 125Hz to 8kHz), it was thorough and painstaking and I haven't been so nervous since I sat for exams to

get into university. The result? Virtually flat with a wee dip around 4kHz and near-perfect, ear-to-ear symmetry. The doc was impressed.

Secondly, a reader asked why I hate classical music and religion. This shouldn't be an issue, because everyone is entitled to personal preferences, and, whatever my beliefs, I have never attempted to dissuade anyone from supporting/believing in either. But, to answer him, I hate classical music because I find it unpleasurable and its adherents to be elitist. As proof of the latter, I



Harvey Rosenberg

recount many instances when classical fans have derided pop music fans in one way or another, yet I've never heard a rock, pop or jazz fan call for the castration, beheading or defenestration of classical fans. As for religion, well, you don't need to be a history buff to realise that more people have been murdered in the name of religion than for any other cause since the dawn of time.

But the dumbest religion of all? Hi-fi. The only consolation is that its disciples are unarmed.

Ken Kessler

