

fatal. Finalize the CD-RW – which can be “unfinalized” and subsequently erased – and use “Make CD” to cut the final. The Maxell audio CD-RWs I was using claim to be rerecordable up to a thousand times, so this seemed like an attractive option. However, the “Make CD” transfer to CDR crashed at the 20th of 27 tracks, and the CD-RW read as “unfinalized.” After repeating the procedure with the same result, I called the help line. The Philips technician was comprehensively methodical, having me relate the steps I took one by one. It turned out that a corrupt CD-RW was the culprit, and a subsequent run with a different CD-RW proved the Philips diagnosis correct.

Given the controversies surrounding home digital recording and the RIAA’s campaign to ban home digital recorders altogether, I decided that acting quickly was wiser than waiting. I guess I could still do all this stuff on my PC, but with that pesky hourglass a constant worry and finding the logistics of connecting my rig to the PC a headache of Brobdingagian proportions, it seemed less hassle and more prudent to invest in a dedicated recorder. Even the cost of an outboard CD writer for my laptop, thereby skirting the logistics issues, was roughly equivalent to that of the 778. You may have different priorities and find the PC route more to your liking (e.g., recording to hard disk first then burning the CDR). However, if you decide on a home digital recorder, the Philips CDR 778 is an excellent investment. Recommended.

-KE

TSS

Rotel RQ-970BX Phono Equalizer

Manufacturer: Rotel of America, PO Box 8, 54 Concord St., North Reading, MA 01864-0008; 800/370-3741, 508/664-4109; www.rotel.com

Price: \$199

Source: Reviewer purchase

Reviewer: Kevin East

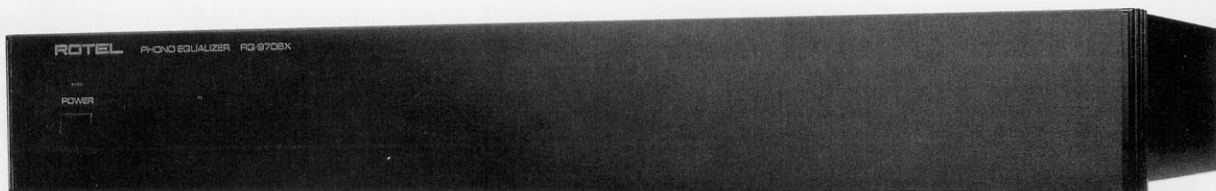
As part and parcel of my digital home recording saga, shipping my phono-equipped AVA Omega III EC preamp back to AVA for the addition of tape buffers and a general upgrade reintroduced the Adcom GTP-350 tuner/preamp (reviewed in No. 64) into the reference rig. The

Adcom is a fun unit, limited only by its lack of digital audio inputs and a phono section. If I was going to indulge in vinyl while the Omega III EC was in the shop, then the acquisition of a phono preamp was in order. After calling around to the Washington area’s handful of hi-fi shops, I settled on the Rotel RQ-970BX Phono Equalizer. I couldn’t find any reviews either in print or on the net so I went with a brand I’ve grown to trust, already owning the RP-955 turntable, RCD-955AX CD player, and RT-850 tuner, and a local dealer who, despite the expected tendency toward “more expensive sounds better,” is a fairly straight shooter. Besides, the price was right. Its local retail competition all started at a grand and ascended from there.

The Big Rig. The amplifier is an original Sunfire. The CD players are the newly repaired Parasound C/DP 1000 and the Integra DX-C606 carousel changer. Analog is jointly handled by a vintage (ca. 1979-80) Technics SL-Q3 turntable and arm equipped with an equally vintage Shure M95ED cartridge, which sports a new stylus, and the Rotel RP-955 ‘table and arm on which is mounted the Shure V15 Type VxMR cartridge. Interconnects include AudioQuest Ruby, Kimber PBJ, a bunch of Radio Shack gold plated jobbers, Monster Cable, and some manufacturers’ inclusives. Speaker wire is Kimber 4VS. Everything’s plugged into an Adcom ACE-515 power conditioner, which in turn is plugged into a dedicated power outlet equipped with industrial grade receptacles.

Basics. The all-steel RQ-970BX measures 17.375” x 2.875” x 7.75” and weighs all of 6.8 lbs. The front panel has only a power switch and an accompanying LED indicator. The rear panel has a set of RCA inputs and outputs, a grounding screw, and a switch for choosing between moving coil (MC) and moving magnet (MM) cartridges. The MC section has an input sensitivity of 210 microvolts and an input impedance of 100 ohms. The MM section has an input sensitivity of 2.5 mV and an impedance of 47K ohms. The output sensitivity is 150 mV with an impedance of 100 ohms. S/N ratios are 70 dB for the MC section and 75dB for the MM section.

Setup. The RQ-970BX, like virtually any outboard phono section, is a snap to set up. The turntable’s interconnects were plugged into the unit’s inputs, and the unit’s outputs were routed to an available line level input on the Adcom. The grounding screw was also useful because the all-



Rotel RQ-970BX Phono Equalizer

line level Adcom had none.

Performance. I cued up the fabulous timepiece *Sea Train* and sat back to hear what I anticipated would be significant, audible differences between the Omega III's inboard phono section and the Adcom/Rotel combo. Hmm. Well, maybe *Sea Train's* a bit too raucous for this kind of evaluation, so on goes Tanita Tikaram's more laid back *Ancient Heart*. Okay. Let's try Andre Watts's lovely "Fur Elise" (*Andre Watts Plays Beethoven*, Columbia) — you can't get much more laid back, indeed sedated, than that. Oh, dear, this will never do. What I heard was...little difference at all. The impeccable production of *Sea Train*, especially the engineer's manipulation of the instruments in acoustic space, was no less astonishing than its first hearing some 30 years' past. Tikaram's husky contralto growled through "Twistin' My Sobriety" with its unwavering, keening oboe gently offset from the voice. Even Watts's delicate rendering of "Fur Elise" stood out against an utterly silent background. Now, I'd put the Rotel equalizer and Adcom units into the rig after I'd shipped the Omega III back to AVA. So, I was relying on unreliable aural memory as my reference. When the Omega III came back, magically transformed into the OmegaStar, a mano-a-mano test was in order.

I alternated both turntables between the OmegaStar's phono section and the Rotel connected to one of the OmegaStar's open line level inputs. Both the Technics and Rotel 'tables are excellent analog sources, and both went through their paces again using the three recordings from the earlier tests. Although I thought I occasionally heard some minute differences in frequency extension — higher highs and lower lows, I couldn't swear by them: there one minute, gone the next and more likely artifacts of the 'table, arm, and cartridge than the preamps. The inescapable conclusion was that the Rotel acquitted itself admirably, proving a suitable and capable outboard phono section that

neither added nor detracted from either turntable's ability to render excellent analog playback.

Conclusion. Long after purchasing and testing the Rotel RQ-970BX, I ran across a number of ads in audio catalogs for outboard phono preamps from Creek, Sumiko, and Parasound. The Creek OBH-8 accommodates only MM cartridges and costs the same as the Rotel. However, both the Sumiko Pro-Ject Phono Box and the Parasound will handle both MM and MC cartridges, and both cost only \$120. I'm recommending the Rotel RB-970BX based on its performance, but you should check out the less expensive competition before making your decision. 'Twould be the *Sensible* thing to do.

-KE

TSS

Spread Spectrum Technologies, Inc. Trinaural Processor

Manufacturer: Spread Spectrum Technologies Inc.,
716 N. G St. #2, Lompoc, CA 93436; 805/740-9902;
sstinc@earthlink.net; www.ampzilla2000.com

Price: \$1,500

Source: Manufacturer loan

Reviewer: David Rich

The name "James Bongiorno" may not be as familiar to audiophiles as it was in the '70s and early '80s. He has been out of circulation for a number years because of some serious medical problems that brought him to death's door more than once. He now appears to be completely healthy and is in charge of a company named Spread Spectrum Designs.

James is perhaps the most important innovator that high end audio has seen in the analog transistor era. He has been directly involved in almost every major breakthrough in power amplifier design. In his field of