

Audiophile Pressings

By Jeff Dorgay

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RECORDINGS OF SPECIAL MERIT

When it comes to CD mastering, many labels claim to have reinvented the wheel. But KK Wong has rewritten the rulebook. Utilizing his own process, referred to as "AudioXact Master's Match" (which he does not describe in any kind of detail), he claims that the CD sounds better than vinyl, and that his approach is "the most truthful carrier of recorded music, ever."

Indeed, Wong's statement is a pretty healthy claim. But after repeated listening, I can state that these two CDs are the best-sounding examples of a 16/44.1 recording I've ever heard. The degree of timbral accuracy, astonishing delicacy, and complete lack of digital harshness needs to be experienced to be believed.



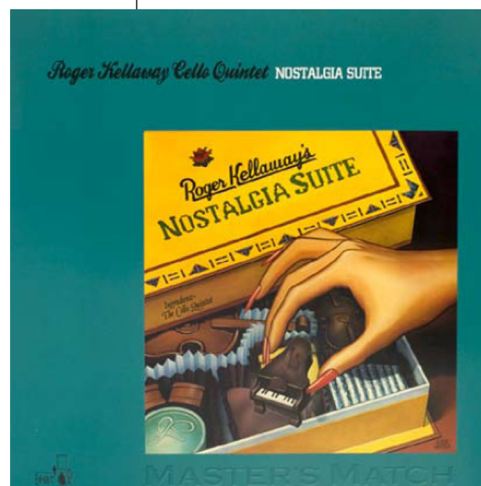
Vivaldi Four Seasons Chinese Baroque Players

Exhibit Records,
180g LP and CD

Switching back and forth between the CD and LP of the Vivaldi album was, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable. The flute and violin are perfectly liquid, and I was indeed fooled into believing these musicians were playing in my room.

Since I'm not a classical music aficionado, I do not feel qualified to comment on the quality of the performance, save to say I tremendously enjoyed it. I feel that this classical standard, played with traditional Chinese instruments, puts an interesting twist on convention and yields tremendous fun. I'm guessing that classical music geeks will either love or hate it. But those that approach the piece without predetermined attitudes will almost undoubtedly enjoy it.

Nostalgia Suite is a straight-ahead jazz record that borrows from myriad styles. Van Morrison fans will instantly recognize Roger Kellaway as the piano player and bandleader behind Van the Man's *Astral Weeks Live at the Hollywood Bowl* record.



Roger Kellaway Cello Quintet

Nostalgia Suite
Exhibit Records,
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He also produced two records for A&M in 1971 and 1973. Kellaway teamed with Joe Pocar (father of the guys from Toto and drummer on the audiophile classic *James Newton Howard and Friends*) to form a quintet in 1978, the year *Nostalgia Suite* was captured.

Again, here, the difference between CD and LP is slight. Still, the slight nod in high-fidelity clarity goes to the LP—at least on my system. However, the CD sounds more lifelike than most 24/96 files I've heard, especially when it comes to the cymbals, which Pocar plays with an incredibly light touch.

Both titles sell for \$49.95, and include both the LP and CD. Every aspect of the packaging is gorgeous, and the imprint recently won awards for its graphic designs. Anyone seeking a pair of outstanding acoustic discs to really show off what their system can do should put these two Exhibit recordings at the top of their list. Let's hope we see more from this label in the future.