FURUTECH
HiFi News (UK) – ADL Esprit mention

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Letter of the Month

RECORDING VINYL

It was with great interest that I read your article in the February 2013 issue about recording vinyl to digital formats. Having recently embarked on the task of transferring a couple of thousand 12" singles and albums to Lossless files, I investigated a few different software options and hardware setups. I think I may have a software tip for you and your readers, and maybe you'll have some hardware suggestions for me...

This recording process is a labour of love but a very enjoyable way of rediscovering forgotten favourites and bringing back memories. I actually digitised about 200 of my favourite tracks about 10 years ago, but back then disk space was at a premium (my laptop only offered a tight 40GB in total) and I didn't understand much about the limitations of compressed audio. I was a digital sinner: most of those recordings were AAC files made at 192kbps using Rogue Amoeba's excellent Audio Hijack Pro. It's a very easy to use application for recording (or "hijacking") any audio flowing through your Mac. It includes many audio plug-ins for processing incoming audio and offers many file format options, which it records natively.

However, I needed to move on from Audio Hijack Pro because (apart from AIFF files) it only records in 16bit up to 48 kHz, and my plan was to record to Apple Lossless files at 24/96. Also, as Audio Hijack Pro focusses on

recording, you need a separate App to edit – such a Rogue Amoeba's very fine Fission, which has a very similar feel to the Audacity App you reviewed.

In search of the (my) perfect solution, I trialled a number of free, shareware and pro paid-for options. GarageBand, Logic, Peak, Sound Forge, Final Vinyl, Audacity and more. They are all fantastic pieces of software but none are particularly tailored to the

vinyl digitiser's needs. Many are full-on multichannel audio workstations, which is a bit of an overkill for dubbing a Lloyd Cole 12". Others are sadly too simple and don't stretch far enough in terms of audio quality.

Finally I stumbled upon Vinyl Studio from Alpine Soft. This ticks all the boxes. Recording to all the major formats (including WAV files up to 32/192) is done natively, avoiding quality issues

VinylStudio from AlpineSoft (www.alpinesoft.co.uk) costs just £24 and is the best software for digitally recording vinyl and tape, says Nöel Cottle.

with transcoding after recording. Files can be easily split into tracks. All the regular useful features are included too: you can adjust level and EQ after recording, remove hiss and rumble, even correct pops and clicks automatically – or manually by "re-drawing" the sound wave. But what really pushes Vinyl Studio beyond the competition is its integration with the Discogs.com database. You can search by artist, song title or – as I prefer – catalogue number, and your recording will populate with all the correct metadata for all an album's tracks, including artwork. In terms of workflow, not having to manually type in the details for every track saves me hours.

Sadly, nothing is perfect and I need to throw out a few caveats. Vinyl Studio won't win any design awards. The GUI is not pretty and it has a tendency to chucking everything at you, rather than guiding you through the steps, and too many windows pop up unnecessarily.

Getting to grips with its workflow is quite counter-intuitive. For example, most of the software listed above let's you record audio first, then name and save it. Vinyl Studio sort of does this backwards: you must create a record 'Collection' first and then title-up the file you are about to record.

Many things could be streamlined, but you soon find your way and the time saved thanks to the Discogs integration makes the process quite painless. And by avoiding typing out song names, I can focus on the music and those rediscovered memories.

On the hardware side, 10 years ago I was using a Technics SL-1210 turntable plugged into my Mac's Line In jack, via a Pioneer DJ mixer. Sounded awful. Flat and muffled. My system now is certainly not high end but hopefully a happy mid-range affair: Dynavector 10X5 cartridge on a Rega RP3 turntable with separate PSU. This is hooked up to a Naim Stageline (N version) powered by a 'borrowed' Supercap. I am a little concerned by the low gain that the Dynavector allows through the Naim phono stage, but having auditioned it against Dynavector's own P-75, I preferred the Naim's warmer tone despite the lower volume and slightly reduced level of detail. Sometimes I think I made the wrong choice of stage, but the rest of my system is Naim so it may be a better match.

Finding an affordable Analogue-to-Digital Convertor (ADC) was more difficult. The Benchmark ADC1 would be great for mixing down a multitrack

The Furutech Esprit preamplifier turns analogue to digital through a 24/96 convertor, then delivers it to USB for recording to a computer. At present there are few stand-alone hi-fi products able to do this.

masterpiece from Logic, but my requirements are simpler and budget smaller. Options are quite limited here. I wanted a hi-fi product rather than a 'pro-sumer' one (e.g. brands like M Audio).

I was quite impressed with Project's Phonobox USB V as a budget combo solution, but it's quite a noisy little box and only offers 16bit at 44.1kHz sample rate via USB. Just as I was giving up the search, I read in your magazine that HRT were launching the Linestreamer + ADC. This asynchronous bus-powered little box delivers music at up to 24/96 and nothing else but the music: it is very low noise and neutral in character. At the time (2012) I think it was the only hi-fi ADC product on the market in this price range (£300). I took the plunge without even auditioning it and couldn't be more pleased. It's perfect for the task.

That task of turning LP to digital is taking a long time. An hour snatched here and there after 4 months I've done less than 10% like I said, a labour of love.

If you find any of the above worth sharing with your readers, I'd be very honoured and won't mind one bit if you hack away at this email to make it relevant / interesting / much shorter! Many thanks and keep up the good work!

Noël Cottle

Hi Noël. That's all very interesting and I'm sure it will interest a lot of readers – it certainly interests me! Turning LP to digital isn't a straight-forward business and you have identified and found a solution to many of the problems it appears.

The only ADC I have found to date I felt up to the task – of hi-fi quality rather than 'studio' quality

– is the Furutech Esprit preamp, with its 24/96 ADC that offers true high quality digital, without the noise and quantisation products of cheaper/older ADCs. Ortofon MC cartridges offer higher output than most and I would suggest you consider one of the Cadenzas, perhaps the Blue. I hope that helps. **NK**

RECORDING VINYL 2

Thank you for the article by Martin Pipe in February, 2013 Hi-fi World describing how to make use of the free Audacity software to convert old audio sources to digital. This article was very informative and explicit, and doubtless will be of immense interest to your readers, particularly those like myself who have sizeable collections of music on vinyl and tape cassette.

Although I have been aware of Audacity, I have never used it. I did try Nero some years ago, but gave it up in favour of Magix Audio Cleaning Lab, which to my mind is a superb product for anyone who wishes to archive old analogue recordings. Not only does it incorporate the usual range of features which one would expect to find in software of this type, but it has one function which in my experience sets it apart from the opposition, namely that it permits track numbers to be placed automatically and numbered during the transfer process from the analogue input. As I understand it, with Audacity and Nero, track numbers have to be added after the digital conversion has taken place.

On the odd occasion when, for one reason or another, Magix doesn't get these quite right, it is simple to either insert any missing track numbers, or to drag them into their proper place on the recording screen.

I use Version 12, which came out