

STEREO POWER ON CAMPUS OR VITO PLANAMENTO'S BIG SET by Robert V. Weinstein photography by Maddy Miller

Holstra University, Hempstead, Long Island, surrounded by a bustling thick- by settled middle-class community of spit-level houses of all shapes and sizes, constructed to each homewore's budgetary limitations. Some are lavishly set back on an eighth of an acre, but most are spaced at sufficiating intervals within shouting distance of each other.

The University is easy to get to and for our purposes will serve as your typical average American university. The object was to find a university with a fairly heterogeneous cross-section of American students and informally sample the componenty students buy and get some insight into the music they listen to.

Hofstra is sleek, tall, sharply angular buildings spread over a flat block. The long guard-posted entrance which tunnelled through an iron gate reminded me of the stark icy feeling I used to get visiting mental hospitals and prisons. The buildings were gray and uniform as if machine-pressed to specifications and erected fully equipped within one day. Clearly not an Ivy League-type school. No foliage, no long rambling hills of green, no wooden frame Victorian buildings, no ivy climbing red brick walls. I missed the smell, the clean cut All American boys and girls in khakis and loafers, the neatly sloppy professors in their twentyyear · old · finely · broken · in Brooks Brother's tweeds, and the student lovers who did not amble hand-inhand down narrow pathways like Ryan O'Neil and Ali McGraw. Six thousand students are enrolled at the university. Roughly four thousand are men.

The college is uncomfortably close to frenetic New York City. Like most colleges close to urban centers, it has absorbed a great deal of the city's movement. The students who leatily moved from building to building were most probably preparing to enter that city, or possibly another city of similar sature. They were just on the outskirts of it all, and yet far enough away so that they could, if they wanted be, lock at the dirt, the people, and their movements with a certain decree of distance.

Having lived in a big city all my life. I knew the look in their eyes; the absent Innocence juxlaposed against prematurely-mature manner were all city tatis. I remember visiting Holyoke, Dartmouth and Tale. The atmosphere there was surreal; images of Wall Street, nightmarish fantasies of being locked into one of the vaults in Dry Dock Country, being seated at a custom made mahogany desk and being called Mr. with a strongly accented M, ran through my mind at a respectable trot. City boys will often react that way.

Requesting intimate information about a person's sound equipment can prove to be a racy topic. I had to broach it with some degree of caution. But most of the young men I spoke to were more than cooperative—they welcomed me into their cluttered rooms and were delighted to tell me about their sound equipment.

One nineteen year-old from Baltimore wondered if there wasn't some ulterior motive to my visit, like pulling some phony rap about being from a magazine called Modern Hi-Fi when you really want to search the room for dope. This lad took some convincing, eyed our photographer suspiciously and wondered if he might be saying the wrong thing.

Rick Shore is nineteen and comes from Philadelphia. Like most of the men I talked to, he occupies a small room in a large dormitory. When not in classes, at meals, or just out, Rick is in his room playing his stereo.

Music holds an important place in his life. Unlike most of the rooms I visited, Rick's room was strategically laid out; two speakers were located at opposite ends of the room, and in the center part of the room were a turntable and tuner. In order to get decent equipment, about one year ago he pursued bargains and items being replaced by new and more modern lines. He had a five-year-old Garrard turntable, an old Sansui receiver and two KLH speakers. Total estimated cost. \$600.00. Rick Shore used \$200 of his own money and borrowed the rest from his father.

"I plan on paying my dad back," he said confidently. "But you know it's not that easy when you are in school." Discussing money made him uncomfortable. "Lock," he said intently. "Let me demonstrate my set for you. If you know anything about sound you will appreciate this."

Rick knew all the intricate details of his equipment. He knew the watesque specifications and was proud to have more power than he actually needed. Power was a key word that kept on coming up as I made any way through the dormitory. Rick Shore demonstrated his set—the first sounds of loud music to break the early difference in the control of the company of the control of the con

A tall twenty-year-old guy in need of a shave, wearing a sweatshirt and one of those tan rain hats men wear to play golf, asked if I would like to hear his set.

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"—You should really see Vito's set first," intruded a thin bearded man wearing a dirty blue and white polo shirt and cut down dungarees. "He's



al Almestead and his Pioneer SX J 25 receiver, BSR turntable, and Pioneer, 100 Speakers. Cost: about \$450.



got the best fuckin' set in the dorm."

Despite the interruption, the fall man introduced himself: Paul Almstead. He shrugged his shoulders, "Before you see Vities, come and see my equipment." Paul must have resented the mention of Vito's equipment. In this dormitory, equipment was a status symbol analogous to the superpowered rebuilt Chevrolets and Fords students used to boast off in the fiftles. Just like the cars that could do zero to sixty in a few seconds, the equipment with the highest wattage deserved immediate recognition.

Paul Almstead's equipment was far from ordinary.

His room was approximately thirteen by sixteen. One speaker slood at one end of the room. The other was partially buried beneath a desk. In another corner was an unmade bed—some clothes strewn on it. Practically everything in the room was covered with something, from clothes on the bed to papers and books covering the desk in a disorderly protective layer.

Only his stereo equipment stood by itself, proudly on display. These were the formidable student shrines kept in top condition, ready to be revved up at the turn of a dial.

Paul had a Pioneer SX J 25 receiver, a BSR turntable and two Pioneer 100 speakers. Total cost, \$450. Where did he get the money? A present from his father.

The receiver's total waitage was over seventy, 35 waits per channel. More power than he needed. "Do you wanne hear It?" he pleaded. He had a little bit of trouble getting the funer going but once the power was on, the sound of the Fabulous Rhinestones bounded off the four walls like a jai alai ball. An electric guitar jumped out at me, and the room started to guiver from too much bass. Paul smilled proadly.

What about the other students who occupy adjoining rooms, does the music ever bother them. I asked. "Sometimes," he said, and then he smiled, "but often everyone will turn their sets up at the same time and nobody knows who is playing their set the loudest." Total pandemonium.

Paul is a journalism major and finds music an essential part of his study habits; hard, loud grinding rock, the kind those Paulous, Rhinestones play to disiorition levels is what has taken Paul Almstead through two years of college. Late at night he often uses a head set to avoid disturbing the rest of the dormitory. But he prefers to be in the middle of wide open sound; his bed

...students often leave their expensive equipment home and purchase additional equipment for school...

rests on either side of his speakers, so he can feel the sound and absorb every decibel. He had enough additional power to fill a room four times the dimensions of his cell.

Six men were already standing in the doorway watching intently. Some remained silent. But one heavy set man with hair to his shoulders in uneven matted strands shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

He finally muslered the energy to compete with Paul's speakers, "You've heard enough of his set," he said. "You're from a big New York hi-fi magazine." he said, eyeing me suspiciously. "You should really hear Vilo's set." With that the other five men aimmed into the doorway and real-firmed what he said in unison. The time had come to move on. Even if I didn't want to see Vilo's big set, these mere determined to indoctrinate me to Hoistina's biggest and fastest sound front and real Paul's room escorted front and real Paul's room

Vito Planamento was not around to tell me about his set. According to his friends, he was at the beach diligently studying for finals. His roommate David Smith gave me a guided tour and came close to deafening me when he demonstrated Vito's rig.

Vito Planamento, a twenty-year-old sophomore, was the exception according to his friends. Many students do not have the money to invest in sophisticated systems. Vito had a Sansii receiver (AU 9500), two Bose 901 speakers, and a Dual 1229 turntable. Total cost, about \$2,000.

David Smith started by emphasizing the incredible power of the set. The tuner could push maximum 75 watts per channel, and each Bose speaker could take up to 300 watts. How's that for conservative mild-mannered listening apparatus?

David Smith, fortunately shares Vito's love of power—and loud rock music. When he put on one of Paul Butterfield's early albums and turned the volume up to numeral seven, my entire body momentarily levitated. What kind of music do Smith and Planamento study to? Hard rock—the louder the better. Vito also owned a comprehensive library of over 500 albums from the Beatles to Crabby Appleton to Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention.

Vito was top man in his dorm.
Everyone knew him, or more accurately everyone had heard his set. The two
are generous with the sounds they produce from their Bose speakers.
Frequently they share their music with
the rest of the eight-storey dormitory by
merely opening their door or provide
music for passers-by within a two block
radius by opening their window.

Michael Newman, the nineteenyear-old sphomore who guided us said most students have budget-line sets. Because of the short duration of their college stay, they often leave their "good" (expensive) equipment home, purchase inexpensive equipment home, purchase inexpensive equipment and sell it on graduation. There is a great deal of equipment trading off. Seniors sometimes sell inexpensive sets at below \$100 and students are often able to pick up an adequate console model for as little as \$50.00.

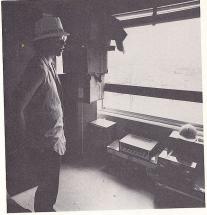
What do you get for \$50,007 Before the very word component became of the most important words in hi-fi jargon, one referred to a very basis meet-all-your-needs hi-fidelity set as a phonograph. The word phonograph now connotes an archalic, inferior listening device. It pales in the light of the word component, which rings of sleek acoustic technology and the dynamics of billored sound.

One man, in class when I visited, left is keys so I could look at his set. His room looked as if if had just been ransacked by storm troopers. This guy had to be the dorm's resident recluse high liver. I slepped over empty beer cars, overloaded ashtrays, sheets, and old copies of Medorfy Maker to discover his compact Zentith Allegro, and two small speakers.

This console model sells for about \$197.00. According to Michael, it was a more realistic example of student equipment.

The man was an ardent rock and roll fan. Large posters of Dylan, Mick Jagger, the Beatles and Grace Slick covered the walls. His record collection of over 200 records included everything the Beatles have ever does either individually or as a group. The Beach Boys and Rolling Stones were also represented.

He was also very partial to Schaefer Beer. This individual knew he couldn't put his meager console stereo up



Rick Shore and his Garrard turntable, KLH speakers, and Sansui receiver. Total cost: about \$600.



Allegro



against the powerful components of dorm mates like Vito, but when it came to guzzling hops he was obviously someone to be taken seriously. Beer cans were everywhere. On the small window sill, a neatly piled pyramid spiraled right to the ceiling. Here was a multi-faceted twentieth-century man who would have no trouble grappling with the pressures of today's society.

As I moved down the corridor, I heard Stan Getz' mellow sound making its way into the hall. I followed the sound to the right door and knocked.

Jeremy Davis, a twenty-year-old junior was surprised that I even wanted to bother with his modest console set. Davis said he knew little about the intricacies of sound, nor did he care what the wattage of his set was. He was not impressed with power. He carries on a running battle with his next-door neighbor, who blasts his set to all hours of the night.

Davis was clearly a man who stood apart from his fellow students. Just by looking at his room, you could tell he was not a common dormitory student. His room was clean, a veritable phenomenon. Everything had its place; clothes, books, and accessories were all exactly where they should be.

Jeremy Davis had to be an honour student

He looked at me with a bewildered expression on his face, "I just don't understand why they have to blast their sets so," he said shaking his head from side to side. "I can hear the bass on the guys set next door all the way down to my toes. I don't give a damn about bass and treble specifications.

Davis loved jazz best. He was more concerned with entertaining himself than breaking the sound barrier with ultra powerful equipment. His small compact unit which neatly folds up like a suitcase cost \$45.00

Five men were sitting on the floor of another dormitory room listening to Sly Stone and smoking cigarettes. Richard Alpirn and Chuck Cederbaum lived there. Their system was a montage of collected equipment: two ten-year-old speakers purchased at Lafayette, a Nikko 301 40 watt tuner, and an old Garrard turntable.

They were proud of the set, the big sound it was able to provide and the fact that it bore no impressive blood line. They liked the idea that it was makeshift. Alpirn said that he'd heard of Vito's set and voluntarily admitted it was one of the school's classiest rigs. But he was proud of his set, because it offered more than the budget console models. He found it a clever test of

...he was obviously someone to be taken seriously. Beer cans were everywhere...

man's ingenuity to put together a sound from relatively nothing. When asked the price of their set both men laughed. Cederbaum explained it was aggregated over a period of time and all of the components were purchased second-hand. The speakers' lineage was unclear.

The last stereo I listened to was Michael Newman's. He had a compact Kenwood system, a Dual turntable and a Kenwood tape deck. Newman was a self-acknowledged expert on the Beach Boys and demonstrated his set by playing a few tracks of an early Beach Boys album with power to spare. He said the Kenwood tape deck is probably one of the most valuable pieces of equipment he owned. With records as expensive as they are, he can use the small portable tape recorder and record off the radio, at live concerts or from friends' records and save a great deal of money. Newman's taste is predominantly rock and

The day was over. I had seen enough equipment at Hofstra to give me some insight into student tastes in equipment and music. But I had access only to a male dorm, and no idea what women's preferences in sound equipment were. To round out my informal sampling, I called a Boston friend and asked her to gather information at one of Boston University's women's dormitories. Phyllis Chait, a writer of pulp fiction, agreed to knock on a few doors and call me back in a couple of days.

Three days later she phoned at eleven p.m. From prying into roughly fifty rooms, her findings did not coincide with what I learned at Hofstra, Like fast cars and speed boats, apparently eleborate sound equipment is more a man's obsession than a toy for women. She reported only a few sets that involved high powered componentry. Most were consoles, compact units. She found one Fischer receiver, a Sony receiver, Scott and KLH speakers, Garrard turntables and more radios than components.

She also found women entertain a wider cross-section of musical tastes. The Boston University women prefer softer rock, folk and folk-rock. A large percentage listened only to classics (Bartok, Stravinsky, Mahler, and Schoenberg), and a small minority enjoy the hard rock exemplified by Slade, the Grateful Dead, The Doors,

The women who preferred music in the folk-rock genre leaned towards Helen Reddy, Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, Maria Muldaur, Carly Simon, Linda Ronstadt and a small contingent were avid Bonnie Raitt fans.

As to equipment, Ms. Chait reported that most of the women couldn't have cared less if a set put out 5,000 watts or 10 watts. They seemed, for the most part, to be more infatuated with music than sound per se, dynamics and the intricacies of sound equipment.

Our study was only a loose, casual random sample of two large universities. I doubt if any serious conclusions could be drawn. Based upon my findings and Phyllis Chait's at Boston University, college men, if they could afford it, would probably spend more money on componentry than women.

I also found no evidence of significant interest in quadraphonic sound. Most of the men had heard about it and all seemed relatively unimpressed. One man, a disciple of Vito Planamento, referred to the entire guad boom as just a "fad" and a record company 'sales gimmick." Another admitted it was just beyond his realm-too expensive, and too risky to warrant the investment. Michael Newman believed the major record companies lacked direction, not knowing which system to adopt, SQ, QS or CD-4.

As I listened to the students' thoughts on quadraphonic equipment, I wondered what their response might be ten years down the road. Would affluence, industry advances, and a new environment change their opinions?

The men at Hofstra were only a stone's throw from the reality of their fathers' world, and yet they seemed to lack the rigidity of the social world they are being trained to join. Doubtless they will upgrade their sound equipment as they move along, but I sincerely hope their outlooks remain the same.

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Additional Notation --

Vito Planamento's stereo system consisted of these components ---

- »» Sansui AU-9500 amplifier (75 watts x 2 at 8-ohms, 20 hz to 20,000 hz, both channels driven, THD and IM typically below 0.1%.
- »» Sansui TU-9500 Am/Stereo Fm tuner
- »» Dual 1229 turntable (the phono pickup was not identified)
- »» Bose 901 speaker system.

Any other components, such as tape recorder decks and/or players, TV set and Ham or Shortwave receivers, were not mentioned.

Total system cost, in 1974 dollars, was \$ 2,000.00 !!

