



information piece about CD's for *The Gateway*, and in view of all that has happened since then, an update of some sort seems appropriate. This week we'll take a look at the way things have gone with the discs themselves.

While it may be too early yet to state that we consumers have been led down the garden path, the evidence is mounting that record companies have botched, at various times, virtually every aspect of the process of selling CDs, from mastering the recordings to pricing to selection and packaging. There's potentially a lot to be said about each of these categories, so I'll try to stick to one or two contrasting examples apiece.

The admittedly complex job of remastering existing recordings for CD has apparently taxed the organizational abilities of more than one record company. While most classical and jazz recordings I've heard have been well done, poor remastering jobs abound in rock material. WEA has been re-remastering titles like Fleetwood Mac's *Rumors*. Even worse, both Jethro Tull's *Aqualung* and the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* have been released with small amounts of musical material missing. Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* has been released in an "audiophile" CD version by an American

company specializing in premium quality LP pressings. Some CDs, it seems, are more equal than others.

The price of CDs has been coming down slightly on average, but mostly on re-issues of older material. New releases continue to hover in the \$25 list price range, while many older titles have dropped into the \$14-\$20 range, with a few even lower. Many labels have made sincere attempts to give value for money, using more of the recording time potential of CDs, which presently stands at just over 80 minutes. Yet the early Beatles' CDs, each about 30 minutes long, were released individually. Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* now exists in three different CD versions, two of which edited tracks on this double album to make it fit on a single CD, and the last of which restored all the cuts as maximum disc lengths increased.

Selection and general availability of CDs have improved considerably over the last two years, although many obvious blanks remain. These include the complete David Bowie catalogue on RCA, which

appeared briefly but now sits in legal limbo, and the entire Roxy Music catalogue excepting *Avalon*. These are available only as expensive British imports.

Finally, there is the packaging. CD has the advantage over cassette of being able to duplicate the album cover properly, at least in miniature. Beyond that, however, lyrics and other artwork are often scrapped completely in favour of a simple track listing. There are too many examples of this to try to list. On the other hand, there have been some really nice packages, including Rykodisc's Jimi Hendrix CD-only release, *Live at Winterland*.

Fortunately, the kinds of things which I have been pointing out have been recognized by the industry and the situation is improving. And even as these problems are being remedied, companies are introducing new products such as the 20-minute, 3-inch CD singles. But the biggest test for CDs is just around the corner, with the first DAT (digital audiotape) machines now available in Canada. More on this subject next time.

**W**elcome to my semi-weekly column. It is my fine hope that I'll have something interesting to say that often, although I tried a weekly column once and it didn't quite work. While we're on the subject of columns, anyone "out there" who feels enough in touch with a particular area of the arts to make noise in a similar fashion (or even in a strictly humorous way) is more than welcome to give it a try. My own area of interest is most things musical, which doesn't exclude anyone else from doing a musical column, it just means you'll find lots about music herein.

Today's topic is Compact Discs. A couple of years ago, I wrote a massive

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