

Going in Circles Again

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A number of years ago I wrote an article for Radio Guide (April, 1991) about turntable maintenance. I concluded that article with the following statement: "Who knows, in a few more years broadcast engineers and dyed-in-the-wool analog nuts may be the only ones left who know how to set up a tone arm."

If you're reading this and thinking that this has nothing to do with you, read on. This may affect every broadcast engineer in the country.

The radio station I work for is one of the few left which regularly uses LP's. We are a classical format, and some of the older recordings have not been re-released on CD. As a result, we are forced into keeping some turntables around. In fact, we even use 78's regularly. Now I know that the classical broadcasters are few and far between, but many stations do have a turntable or two around for playing "oldies" that have not been re-released. You may only be playing them enough to transfer to tape, but that is enough.

We recently moved our radio station (which is partly responsible for the absence of this column over the last few months), and one of the more interesting challenges was relating to turntables.

As we investigated the possibility of new equipment in all areas of the facility, it became painfully obvious that we were going to have trouble with turntables. Most of the more common turntable models have been discontinued. For instance, as near as I can determine Technics only has one model available. Many others have simply quit making turntables all together. There are a few "purist" turntables available, but they are just too expensive for most radio stations (some cost as much as \$10,000). As a result we decided that we had to keep our old SP-15's going for a few more years. We need fewer turntables in our new space than we did in our old, and were offered quite a bit for our old turntables, but they're not for sale. They may become our primary parts supply in a few more years.

The next part of the puzzle is the tone arm. Again we decided that the only practical approach was to keep our old tone arms. Fortunately we were able to get the manufacturer to completely refurbish our tone arms so they should be good for a while.

Phono cartridges and styli are yet another problem. We have been informed by one of the major manufacturers of cartridges that they will be cutting back on the variety of models available. This is partly due to demand and partly due to the escalating cost of industrial diamonds in the diminishing quantities they are using. Unfortunately, the lines they will be keeping are not necessarily the ones we

need, but the ones that sell the most. At this point we are talking about styli for LP's. 78's are another story. They have informed us that they have already discontinued the 78 styli for the cartridge we use. In another year or so the only 78 styli you can buy may be from specialty manufacturers at greatly inflated prices.

We found a similar story as we looked at phono preamps. It appears that there are only one or two on the market for broadcast use. If you want to pay for it, you can buy a "purist" unit (maybe even one with vacuum tubes) but the price will be up in the stratosphere. We opted to build our own using some Analog Devices IC's. The circuit is an update of one found in their 1991 Audio Applications Guide.

Now that I've told you all of this, what does it mean to you? If you are currently using turntables and plan to continue to use them, you may want to stock up on parts and supplies. You may want to consider the possibility of transferring all of your black vinyl to some other medium for air play. Be sure to keep your tone arms adjusted properly to minimize wear on the stylus and the record. If you aren't using turntables, just file this away in the back of your mind somewhere. When the Program Director decides to pull out the "oldies" from black vinyl, you may have quite a search to find the means to play them back.

Black vinyl is not dead yet, but it sure isn't healthy. Just ten short years ago we thought that nothing would replace it, but the CD has. How long will it be until something comes along to replace the CD? **RG**

Radio Guide Quick-Tip

From SBE Chapter 17 Newsletter

Everyone knows about Radio Shack, but here are a few more parts companies that may be of help:

Palomar Engineers

PO Box 462222, Escondido, CA 92046

Phone: 619-747-3343

C. Crane and Company

558 10th St., Fortuna, CA 95540

Phone: 800-522-8863

Ramsey

793 Canning Parkway, Victor, NY 14564

Phone: 716-924-4560

Grove Enterprises Inc.

300 South Highway 64 West, Brasstown, NC 28902

Phone: 800-438-8155