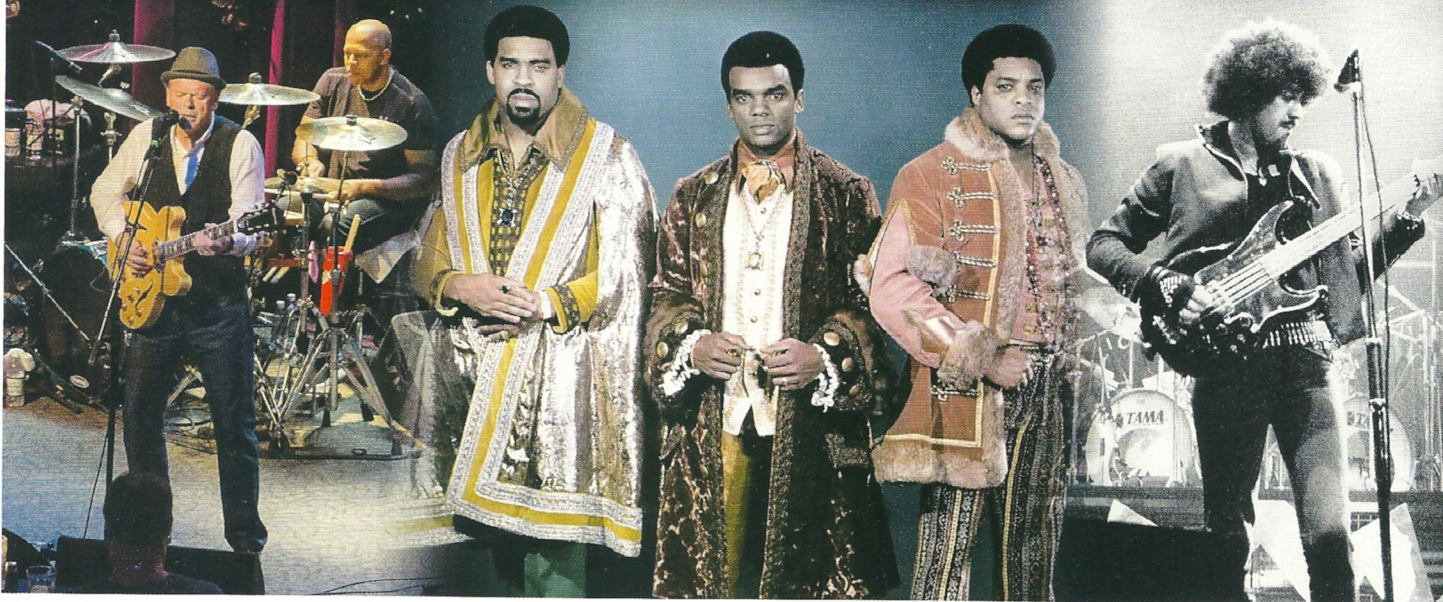


Surround sensations



From Mingus to Mancini, The O'Jays to The Doors, **Ken Kessler** brings you an audiophile's A-list of 20 brand-new surround sound albums ready to wrap you in all their 360° glory

Paraphrasing Mark Twain when he read his obituary, reports of the death of surround sound are greatly exaggerated. The ascent of decent soundbars and reticence among normal people to house five or more speakers have taken their toll, but – undaunted – 2L in Norway and Dutton-Vocalion in the UK have been producing surround sound discs for years, as have some Japanese labels. Last year, the Rhino division of major label Atlantic joined the club with its Quadrio range.

For those so equipped, the riches of multichannel sound are worth exploiting. Here are 20 brand-new SACDs, DVDs and Blu-rays offering a mix of DTS and Dolby formats. Aside from 2L's and Squeeze's recordings, nearly all date from the original 'quadraphonic' era of the 1970s.

DOLBY VS DTS

Quadrio releases are DTS 24/192 'hi-res' and use true 4.0 mixes, while most convert 4.0 to 5.1 or 7.1. A few appear in surround for the first time, having only been issued in

stereo back in the day. And most genres are covered, from disco/funk to country rock, 'proper' jazz and more.

In 'Off The Leash' [HFN Aug '24], I wrote that discrete digital sources free us 'from the vagaries of matrix'd LP playback' while 'the sad realisation is that they were far more enjoyable than we knew back then'. If you're surround sound-ready, you can compare DTS vs Dolby via discs with both. The get-out clause? If surround sound doesn't impress you, *all* will play two-channel stereo so there's nothing to lose.

HENRY MANCINI

The Best Of Vols 1 & 2/
Concert Sound Of/Salutes Sousa

Vocalion 2CDLK4636 2xSACDs DSD stereo/quad

Providing four Mancini albums on two SACDs allows you to savour the wide-ranging scope of this genius's work, and his prowess as a band leader/arranger. The albums include *The Best Of Vols 1 & 2* from 1964 and 1966 respectively, both with 1971 quadraphonic mixes; *The Concert Sound Of Henry Mancini*, also from 1964 with the 1971 quad update; and 1973's *Mancini Salutes Sousa* issued during the



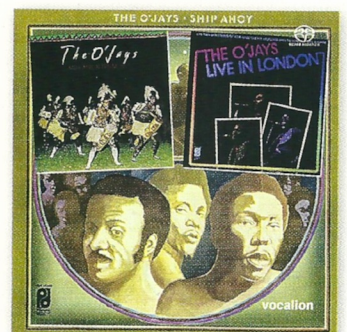
quad era. The last will knock you out if, like me, you enjoy huge marching bands without constraint, while the rest are feasts for those who love soundtrack scores. Sublime.

THE O'JAYS

Ship Ahoy/Message In The Music/
Live In London

Vocalion 2CD5ML8582 2xSACD stereo/quad

All three of these O'Jays albums from 1973-1976 were issued in quadraphonic form, with the live one benefitting the most from surround sound. Taste rules, so the studio albums also come across as smooth and enveloping. This quintessential Philly Soul outfit delivered music that was slicker than the previous decade's funkier, grittier Stax/Volt/Atlantic-type soul, so the technology actually suits it.



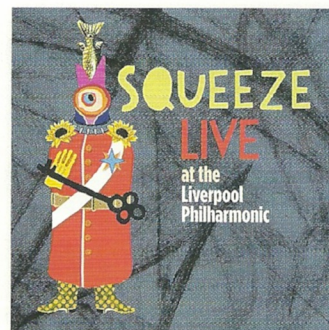
As for the material here, the themed *Ship Ahoy* hit No 1 and gave us 'Put Your Hands Together', while a No 1 was gained, too, by *Message In The Music*'s title tune. Classy stuff.

NIDAROS DOMKOR

MOR

2L 2L-176 Blu-ray/SACD Dolby Atmos/DTS-HD Master Audio

Not MOR as in 'middle of the road' but another atmospheric, format-loaded two-disc set from 2L, the title meaning 'mother'. This continues the label's enabling users to try every type of surround up to 7.0.4, via Blu-ray and SACD, plus stereo (including MQA). It's particularly interesting if you have two transports that are feeding the same processor, for A/B testing. The material here begs the capabilities of surround, creating a cavernous effect from performers including the Nidaros Cathedral Choir accompanied by cello and organ. The music celebrates motherhood from joy to tragedy, so it's not for the fainthearted.



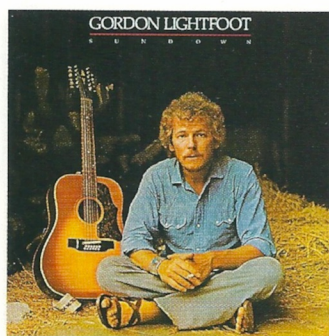
SQUEEZE

Live At The Liverpool Philharmonic

Love Records LVRCD007

2CDs/1Blu-ray DTS-HD Master Audio 2.0/5.1

Squeeze performed this set in Liverpool in 2019 with the same lineup that played at Glastonbury 2024, save for the bassist. Captured as audio-only on two CDs, the video Blu-ray contains the entire concert plus documentary scenes. As it's a live gig, this lends itself to surround sound – in fact some would argue that concerts are the only music which should come out in multichannel. All the hits, and all superb.

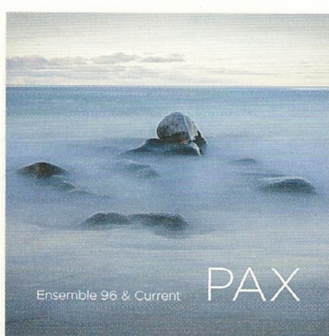


GORDON LIGHTFOOT

Sundown

Rhino/Reprise Quadrio BA2 2177
Blu-ray DTS-HD Master Audio 4.0

Lightfoot was one of the singer-songwriter greats of the past half-century and this album's title track ranks with classics like 'If You Could Read My Mind' and 'Early Morning Rain'. Issued in 1974, this set was treated with supreme taste in 4.0 mode. The prime acoustic is folk-rock – one to accompany America's *Hideaway* in this group for soft, introspective music. As for 'Sundown' itself? No-wasted-words storytelling to compete with Dylan.

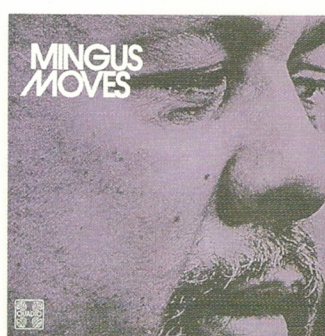


ENSEMBLE 96 & CURRENT

Pax

2L 2L-174-SABD SACD/Blu-ray 2.0-7.1.4 options

Five performers each deliver a track with the Current Saxophone Quartet conducted by Nina T Karlsen. As they differ so much, it seems more like a compilation than a unified album, but all are new works by Norwegian composers in the 'sacred space' of Norway's Uranienborg Church. The theme is peace, the goal 'an immersive experience' achieved through stereo modes up to various surround sound formats from DTS 5.1 to Dolby Atmos 7.1.4. Goal accomplished.



CHARLES MINGUS

Mingus Moves

Rhino/Atlantic BA2 1653
Blu-ray DTS-HD Master Audio 4.0

As this involves a quintet – bassist Mingus plus Ronald Hampton on trumpet, pianist Don Pullen, George Adams on tenor sax and flute, with drummer Dannie Richmond – it might seem like an artificial audio event in surround sound. Looked at another way, this 1973 set delivers enhanced intimacy: the 4.0 mix places the listener smack in the middle of the group. Amusingly, there's no LFE ('0.1') channel, but plenty of Mingus to savour.



ENOCH LIGHT

4-Channel Dynamite/
Big Band Hits Of The '30s

Vocalion CDLK4655 SACD DSD stereo/quad

Two Enoch Light albums from 1972/1974 serve as reminders that he championed early audiophile sound and stereo, his original LPs and tapes being essentials in the late 1950s. A title like *4-Channel Dynamite* mandates extensive use of the rear channels, which work superbly for big band covers of hits of the day, eg, The Beatles' 'Penny Lane'. The second set is more of the same, only pre-rock era material like 'Stardust' and 'Caravan'. The sound? Killer! ↪