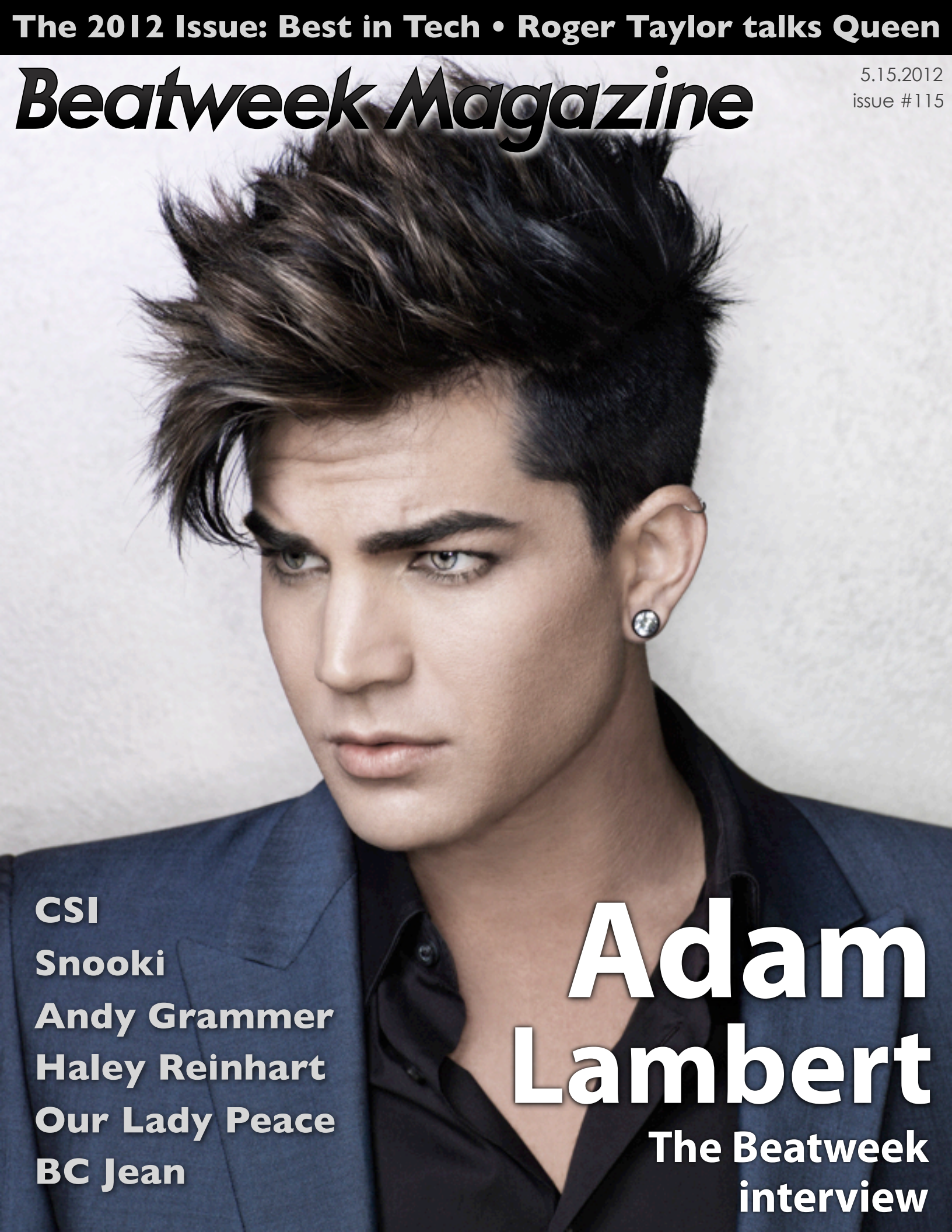


The 2012 Issue: Best in Tech • Roger Taylor talks Queen

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CSI

Snooki

Andy Grammer

Haley Reinhart

Our Lady Peace

BC Jean

Adam Lambert

**The Beatweek
interview**

About this issue...

The 2012 Issue... and it's still only May?

The calendar may not say so, but the timing seems right. Much of the best new music of each year comes out in the spring. And with Mothers Day and Fathers Day and Graduation Day upon us, the time is now to declare the best consumer technology on the market.

In this issue we talk to pop star Adam Lambert about his new album *Trespassing*. We also talk to Roger Taylor, drummer for legendary rock band Queen, about his band's new "Queen Extravaganza" project. And of course they both talk about their upcoming collaborations with each other. Haley Reinhart (Adam's favorite contestant on the last season of *American Idol*) tells us about her new album which surfaces this month, and star-in-waiting BC Jean (Adam's songwriting partner) discusses her own impending debut album.

Much buzzed about singer Andy Grammer tells us about his rise from street performer to radio star, and veteran rockers Our Lady Peace talk about their surprising new album.

On the television side Snooki dishes on the latest season of *Jersey Shore*, while *Frasier* star Peri Gilpin talks about joining the cast of *CSI*.

When it comes to gear, we've tested thousands of consumer tech products and here we include the top headphones, stereos, iPad and iPhone accessories, computer upgrades and more.

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cover photo by Lee Cherry

Queen

The Beatweek interview

by Keri Franz



Within the last few years, Queen have made a resurgence in the media worldwide. From the *We Will Rock You* musical on London's West End to Adam Lambert fronting the band for a few UK gigs, it seems Queen have maintained a standing most all places save the US. Promotion of the band hasn't been strong since the mid 1980's when Queen did a major US tour. Aside from a resurgence in the early nineties thanks to *Wayne's World*, not until this year has Queen been highlighted in the media for more than just a one-off *American Idol* guest spot.

The current buzz is surrounding the Queen Extravaganza, a Queen tribute band put together by Queen's drummer, Roger Taylor. There are other tribute outfits that have been around for some time, like *Almost Queen*, *Killer Queen*, and *One Night of Queen*, but this will be the first official, remaining Queen members-approved one.

"The other Queen tribute bands were the reason I wanted to start this one," so says the Extravaganza creator and producer himself. "I want our music to be represented in a scintillating way and not in an average kind of way."

By choosing four vocalists, two guitarists, one bassist, one drummer, and one keyboardist, Taylor has created something akin to an experience, rather than just a

rehashing of old songs from the catalog. With the help of Queen guitarist, Brian May, Taylor sorted through hundreds or thousands of submitted online videos to try and compile his idea of a fitting lineup.

"We weren't just looking for copies of us, we were looking for ... great musicianship, ... great charisma, and the right people," states Taylor. The people chosen for the job may not be experts on the stylings of Queen; however, they do have a one-up on the average musician. Taylor says, "Everybody in the Extravaganza has a tremendous knowledge of our body of work. They are absolute Queen aficionados, and I think some of the times they seem to remember things I've forgotten."

There is surely a hope that new fans will jump on the Queen bandwagon because of the project. With all the hype surrounding the Coachella Tupac Shakur hologram, it leaves one curious as to which musician will next be represented posthumously as a

hologram. Apparently, not the late Queen frontman, Freddie Mercury. "I would not like to perform with a hologram of Freddie." Taylor's response should not really come as a huge shock. Since Freddie Mercury's passing in November 1991, the remaining members have been very protective of both Mercury's and Queen's legacy. "It's the real one or no hologram for me," asserts Taylor. "It just doesn't fit too well with me. I don't want to appear with a hologram of my dear friend."

Show-goers unfortunately cannot expect a Freddie sighting at the Extravaganza gigs; however, Taylor thinks that "[One can expect] a fantastically uplifting night out, ... a revelatory sort of trip through our cannon of music, and hopefully a lot of audience participation." According to Marc Martel, one of the project's vocalists, "I believe there's going to be some great possibly never before seen [video] footage."

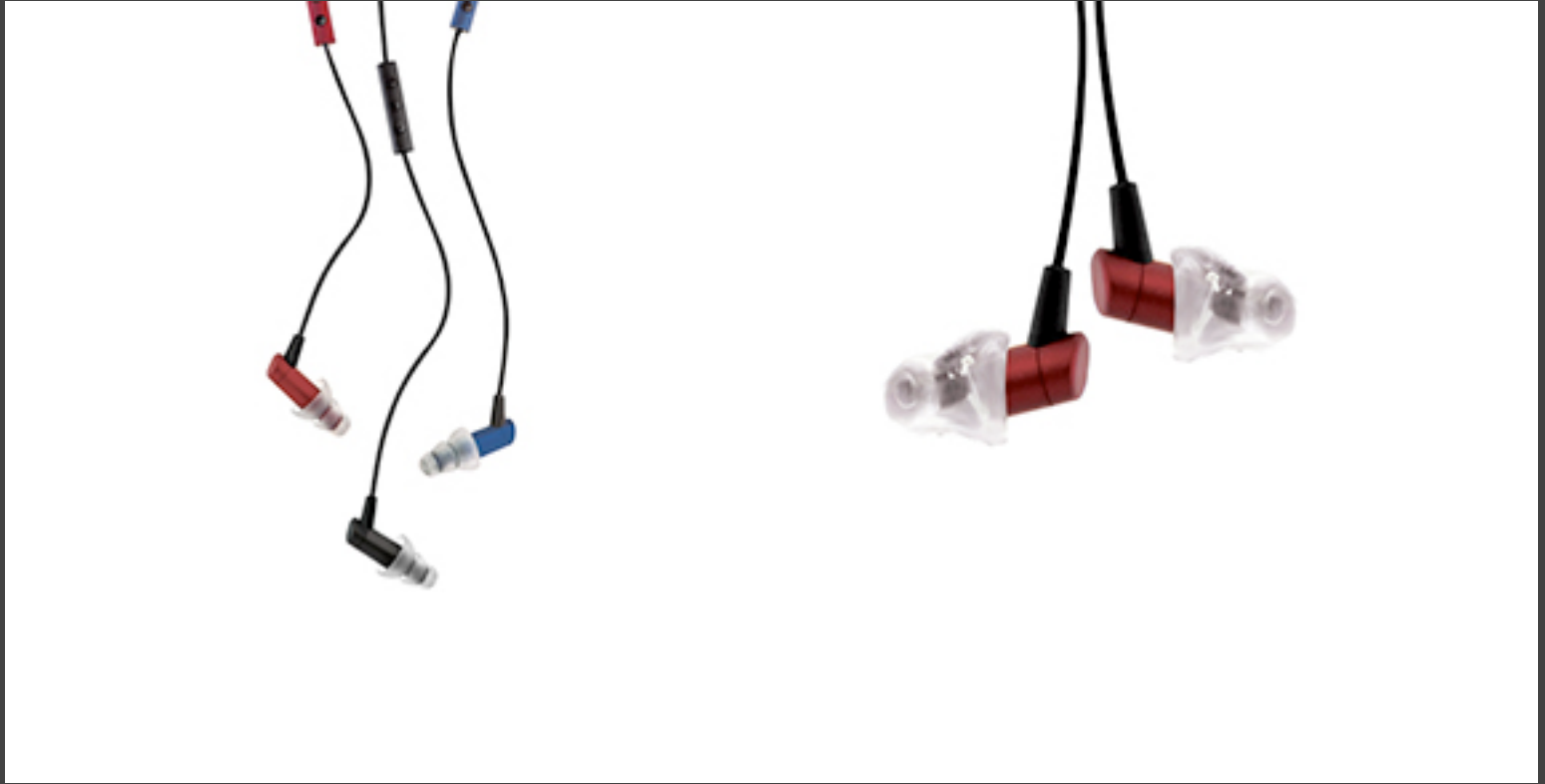
For those not living in the US, Taylor and May are performing with Adam Lambert for a few European dates this summer. Some die-hard fans always get a little riled up with news of a new singer performing with Queen. "Regarding our tour, it's not really a tour of Queen. We're doing five gigs with Adam Lambert as the singer in the summer."

For Queen fans both new and old, the Queen Extravaganza is going to be a great show. It is without a doubt the closest that anyone stateside will come to seeing an official Queen production.



Etymotic hf3

elite earbuds • \$179



Not everyone is in a position to spend as much on earbuds as they did on their iPhone or iPod in the first place. But there's a balance between price tag and audio quality, and the pinpoint of that equilibrium in 2010 is Etymotic's hf3 earbuds. At \$179 they're clearly not in everyone's price range (which is why our Best of 2010 awards also include value priced earbud categories). But after having tested dozens of earbud products over the years whose price tags have ranged from less than twenty dollars to more than five hundred dollars, the hf3 is a winner for 2012.

Here's why it rates out on top: in a word, clarity. The crispness of the hf3's sound makes it easily worth paying extra in comparison to the various \$119-\$129 earbud products out there, the best of which sound fantastic in their own right. But the hf3 has a clarity to its audio which not only makes the music feel complete, it also makes you believe you're wearing full-on headphones instead of tiny earbuds.

We've made the decision to focus our earbud coverage only on those earbuds which offer button control (preferably three, but at least one), as iPhone and iPod users routinely tell us that's what they're looking for. And in that department, the hf3 delivers over its one-button hf2 predecessor by offering full three-button controls (plus a mic for phone calls and voice control) in a manner that's both tiny and easily accessible.

Bowers & Wilkins C5

elite earbuds • \$179



The new C5 earbuds from Bowers & Wilkins have a lot to live up to, both in terms of audio quality and in styling. This is, after all, the company which has delivered products as jaw dropping as the Zeppelin iPod stereo dock (which is shaped as its namesake suggests) and as pristine as the svelte P5 headphones which seem to violate the laws of audio physics. The C5 largely goes for a minimalist approach, employing dark grey with black highlights throughout, and delivers yet another winner for the company.

Serving up in-line three buttons controls and a mic which will make iPhone users as pleased as their iPod using brethren, the C5 buds are in the shape of a sliced-off cylinder and offer a unique looped-around cable which can be adjusted to wrap within the inner lining of your ear so as to help hold the bud in your ear; it's both a handy feature and a cool aesthetic twist. For those who don't need any such help, the loop can be undone so the cables will hang in a traditional manner instead.

I initially thought the C5 had made the classic design mistake of placing the rubber tip too close to the untapered earbud, which in other products I've tested has resulted in discomfort. But my tests showed that the C5 has no such issue and is fully comfortable. Included are a zippered semi-hardshell case and a couple audio adapters plus the usual assortment of rubber tips (unfortunately, however, no foam tips as is often the case with earbuds in this price range).

So with all that out of the way, as with any audio product, the worthiness of the C5 comes down to its audio quality in comparison to its price tag. And the C5 serves of the best overall breadth of sound of any earbuds in the \$179 price range I've tested. In direct comparison to Beatweek's reigning "best of" winner in this range, the competing Etymotic hf3, I found the C5 offers better overall breadth although I'd have to give the edge to the hf3 in the "stunning clarity" department. That makes for an overall tie. So if the museum-quality styling of the Bowers & Wilkins C5 earbuds are to your tastes, and if you can afford the price tag, there's no reason not to go for it.

V-MODA Vibrato

mid priced earbuds • \$129



V-moda's previous vibe and vibe ii earbuds were long ranked as our best earbuds in this price range, with the only thing missing of late was that the vibe ii still sported a mere one button in an age when three-button controls are almost a given at this price point. But v-moda has gone further than merely launching a vibe iii with this controls, as the new vibrato – despite looking suspiciously similar to the vibe ii – finally gives v-moda's flagship earbud product the one thing it's been missing: in addition to having by far the best bass of any earbuds at this price point, the vibrato's mid and high ranges are strong enough to edge out other competitors in what has turned out to be a very strong category.

In fact, some of you may well do better with Shure's SE115m+ (slightly better noise isolation) or the \$99 options from Etymotic, Scosche, or ThinkSound, each of which come respectably close to living up to the vibrato despite being thirty dollars cheaper. But in a year in which we expected another vendor to finally, full wrest this category away from v-moda based on lack of three button control alone, the last minute arrival of the vibrato on the market has realigned the mid priced in-ear earbud market for iPhone and iPod users once again.

aJAYS Four

Earbuds with three-button mic • \$69



JAYS, the earbud maker out of Sweden, has long made products which are impressive but not exciting. Something has changed with the new a-JAYS Four, however, as this product has a sense of swagger – and that's something you're not supposed to find in a \$69 earbud product. But the requisite pieces are all there. The new design features the trendy flat ribbon-style cables which are less likely to tangle than traditionally circular ones, and are also arguably more stylish. The audio quality is crisp and strong across all ranges, and sounds almost too good for its price point. And the three buttons and mic setup preferred by iPhone, iPod and iPad users but still too rarely found south of \$100, is here in all its glory.

Still, I was expecting to find fault with the same issue I've found fault with on every previous JAYS product I've tested: they all had a cable length which was almost absurdly short, requiring the use of the included cable extender, which then made the overall length so long the cables would drag on the ground if your mobile device was in your pocket. But apparently JAYS got tired of me (and presumably others) complaining about it, because the a-JAYS has no trace of the bizarre extender system and has instead been replaced by a perfectly standard built-in cable length. As is the case with every other aspect of the a-JAYS, they nailed that too.

To be clear, you can spend north of \$100 and get audio quality that's far superior to this. But I've tested enough earbuds in the \$69 range to be able to state with confidence that the a-JAYS Four blows the rest of them away. This is the first time we've ever given a perfect five star rating to a sub-\$100 earbud product.

Westone 4

audiophile earbuds • \$449



A product like the Westone 4 evokes the same question often raised with razors: will adding yet another blade, or in this case yet another audio driver, serve to improve the product even more – or is there such a thing as one too many? Fortunately for fans of the Westone TrueFit 3, the addition of a fourth driver for the Westone 4 has turned out to be just what the audiophile doctor ordered. The 3 already offered the best audio experience we've ever found on consumer-level earbuds, and the 4 takes that to another level. This appeared to be the case when I was able to briefly test out a preproduction unit of the 4 at a trade show earlier this year. But after having spent quality time with a finalized 4 unit at home, I can confirm that it does indeed represent a step up from the 3 in the audio department.

The trick with the 4 is that it offers such an immersive, expansive listening experience that you'll swear you're wearing full size headphones instead of earbuds. In fact, more than once I instinctively reached up to remove the headphone cups from my ears before remembering that I was in fact listening to the Westone 4 earbuds as opposed to my high-end cup headphones. The 4 had darn well better sound this good, of course, as its price tag clocks in at a gut-wrenching \$449 which means

you're likely paying more than twice as much for your earbuds as you are for the iPod or other device you're using them with. The good news, however, is that the 4 is only fifty dollars more than the previous \$399 price tag of the 3, which has subsequently been reduced to \$349.

Speaking of iPods and other devices, there's really only one thing not to like about the Westone 4, depending on how to plan to use it. While nearly all other consumer-level earbuds now come with at least the option to have a mic, volume, and playback controls built into the cabling for use with an iPhone or other smartphone, the 4 lacks such controls. Westone has begun building such controls into the low end of its lineup, and we assume those controls will make their way up to the 4 eventually if user demand is there for it.

But at present, the 4 simply comes with a detachable volume wheel good for controlling your audio level but still providing no compatibility for making or taking phone calls (although you can of course use the 4 to listen to music with your iPhone). In other words, the 4 is aimed either at users who, even if they plan to use it with their phone, don't plan to use it for phone call purposes.

Because Westone makes no bones about the product being aimed in this



manner, we're not going to subtract off its star rating due to the lack of iPhone controls; we just wish they would be added to a future version so we don't have to keep another set of mic-enabled earbuds handy for phone calls.

But if phone call compatibility isn't something you care about anyway, there's really nothing not to like here. The Westone 4 offers the best consumer-level earbud experience we've ever tested. Despite its sticker-shock \$449 price, for those can afford it, the 4 is worth every penny. And based on my tests, the difference between the three-driver and four-driver audio experience is noticeable enough that the 4 is worth the extra \$100 over the 3. The Westone 4 is one of those products that's worth saving up for.

Monster Turbine Pro Copper

audiophile earbuds • \$329 to 449



It was long ago established that Monster makes more than just cables, and as it turns out, Beats by Dre aren't the only earphone products up the company's sleeve. Enter the Turbine Pro Copper In-Ear Speakers, a four hundred dollar luxury-level set of earbuds made of copper and offering the crispest overall audio we've ever heard out of earbuds in this price range. And as a bonus, even as plenty of earbud products in this market ignore users of iPhones and other smartphones who want a microphone and on board playback controls, the Turbine Pro offers an optional built-in three button and mic "ControlTalk" set up for an additional thirty dollars.

I've had up-and-down results with metal based earbuds in the past, as they can tend to sound, for lack of a more artful word, overly metallic. But this is a different story. I put the Turbine Pro, which (naturally) features copper colored buds with silver trim and black cabling, head to head with "other favorite" set of four hundred dollar earbuds, the competing Westone 4. In short, while the Westone product delivered a wider range of audio overall, I found the Turbine Pro to be a tad more crisp and clear overall.

Of course this is comparing perfection to perfection in the eyes of anyone who's stepping up from less expensive earbuds, but at this price point it's okay to be picky. My verdict: it's a tie. We very rarely have two five-star products in the same subcategory and price range, but you win either way here. For iPhone users who are looking to make calls, however, the choice is easy: unlike the competing product, the Turbine Pro has that optional built-in mic along with the three buttons (iPad and iPod users will also appreciate the volume and playback control offered by said buttons). As a bonus, the Turbine Pro comes with a stunning number of different sized and shaped earbud tips (I lost count at fifteen), including triple flanged ones.

At this price point you want to be very picky about your earbuds, as you're probably paying more for them than you are for the device you're using them with. But after having spent time with the Monster Turbine Pro, I've concluded that the only reason they wouldn't be recommendable is if they're not in your budget.

Ultimate Ears 4 Pro

custom in-ear monitors • \$399



Consumer level “in-ear” earbuds, which can run in price from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars, typically consist of choosing from one of a few different sized rubber tips and attaching them to the included buds. Some vendors take it up a notch by offering to mold custom shaped rubber tips to precisely fit your ear canals. But professional musicians do it differently: the entire earbud unit is manufactured based on a custom mold of your ear canals, with nothing to attach or remove. And while these custom buds can run into the thousands of dollars, the Ultimate Ears 4 Pro Custom In-Ear Monitors cost a comparatively affordable four hundred dollars. As such, Ultimate Ears (now owned by Logitech) asked me to test them out for consumer level suitability.

Custom moldings provide not only a more comfortable fit, but a superior level of sealing off outside sounds. That creates an intimate listening experience more typically associated with large headphones. Accordingly, the audio provided by the 4 Pro is as expansive as that of headphones; instead of merely feeling like audio is being piped into your ears, you’re left feeling as if you’re in the middle of a wide sonic landscape. The audio is impressively crisp from the treble down to the bass, creating a flawless listening experience.

Consumers are often hesitant to spend large amount of money on physically small products, writing off a product like this as being “too expensive” even as they spend the same amount on full sized headphones. But I would suggest that a product like the 4 Pro is about as close as you’ll ever come to being able to fit a pair of headphones into your pocket. Go back and listen to your favorite music, and you’ll hear details in the recording that you’d have never picked up on even with two hundred dollar non-custom earbuds.



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Haley Reinhart

The Beatweek interview

by Bill Palmer

photos by
Harper Smith



"There was so much boldness from people," Haley Reinhart says of the old Motown era in which her debut album finds its roots. As such she's called the record 'Listen Up!' complete with an exclamation point, and that's precisely what audiences have been doing since she first took the American Idol stage last year. Her run on the show earned her public support Adam Lambert to Led Zeppelin. It's since taken her a full year to craft the album, which surfaces this month, but

that's because she took the time to involve herself in the writing process of nearly every song on it.

"That's something that I really wanted to make sure happened," she says. "I was touring with the Idol group and things were so busy, people wanting me to come out as soon as possible with a record. I really stressed the fact that I wanted to be a part of it

completely. I have this huge opportunity given from Interscope, and I wanted them to realize that I am a creative type. I've been a songwriter before Idol. I've been surrounded by music. So all these visions that I have, I wanted to be able to have that time, that space, to make it come to life."

The first single, entitled Free, is an upbeat sounding number with soaring vocals which belie the fact that it's about a breakup. Still, she says, "it's more of an empowering breakup song. You should feel good after hearing it, knowing that even though we love each other we need to break this thing off so we can truly be happy."

But if Free is along the lines of what fans were expecting from Haley, opening track Oh My might be a different story. A minute and a half into the old-school tune, hip hop artist B.o.B. makes an appearance. "It was very short and sweet," she explains regarding her own part for the song, "so we wanted to add to it. We thought a rapper part would be cool. We were thinking about different people, and I really wanted somebody cool and slick that could add that



depth and vibe to the song, and B.o.B. did a great job of it."

Back in the days when she was studying jazz and traditional music, could she have imagined she'd be including a rapper on the first song or her first major label album? "No, probably not," she admits. "It just all depends on where you're coming from. The song itself still has that old swampy New Orleans jive to it." The priority, she says, was in "getting a rapper and making sure that it was tasteful. That's the most important thing. There's a lot of rap out there, but the kind that I would like to represent on the album, if I do that, would definitely have to be somebody who's tasteful about it."

In the middle of an otherwise loud album is the gently soaring ballad *Undone*, which Haley wrote with neo-Motown singer MoZella and Rob Kleiner, a song which took her into new territory. "I'm not used to ballads," she says honestly. "It's a little bit more poppy than I'm used to, the changes and everything. It's different for me. What I found from showing people is that they're captivated by it. I'm happy that people can really truly relate to it. I put myself in a really heartbroken place, and I think that's something that everybody has felt at some point."

The second half of the album picks back up the pace. *Now That You're Here* sounds like it could garner airplay in dance clubs, of which she says "I really like funk and R&B, the stuff that you can groove to." *Wonderland* is a pure throwback. "It's an anthem for ladies out there. It's a love song. I've felt love, so it's around the corner if you just look for it. That's a tribute to old Motown."

Lollapalooza has tapped her for its 2012 lineup, and it's the first time an *American Idol* veteran has been invited into the festival. "It's a really big deal," she says of the three day affair in Chicago, down the street from her hometown of Wheeling. "I've never been able to attend the actual show and I've always wanted to. So being able to not only go and see people like Black Sabbath who I'm playing on the same day as, and the Black Keys and The Shins, I'm playing there with my band. It's really an honor to be the first *Idol* to be invited to something so cool. I've always been into festivals and live music, live performing in general. That's what I grew up with all around."

But the true hometown show comes when Haley performs at the Wal-Mart in Wheeling later this month. "That's gonna be pretty wild. I'm sure it'll be a zoo."

Verge of LA



"All Eyes on Me" shot by Mac Danzig

Mixed Media Magazine

Featuring:

Mac Danzig

Larry Winfield

Joseph Dougherty

John in the UK

Dan Klass

Beverly Mickins

Holly Port

Paul Hutchinson

C.C. Chapman

Dan Farren

Lance Anderson

Dr M

Julio Martinez

Cush

Tim Coyne

Contact: vergefringe@gmail.com

iHome iA100 - iA91 - iD85

dockable stereo alarms • \$99 to 199



iHome invented the iPod stereo alarm concept years ago, and the reinvented it last year with the iA100 which offered everything from app integration to superb audio quality. Of course that left a gap in the company's lineup between the \$199 iA100 and the \$99 standard model. This year iHome has bridged that gap and upped the value ante, respectively, with the iD85 and the iA91.

The new \$99 model, the iA91, offers most of what the iA100 brought to the table last year, including integration with iHome's in-house apps for iPhone and iPod touch including iHome+Sleep and iHome+Radio, but does so in a more value-oriented package. The unit is smaller front to back and serves up audio quality which, while no match for the iA100, still positions it as one of the best sounding \$99 dockable stereos on the market, alarm functionality or otherwise.

The iD85 is priced at \$139 and offers a more sophisticated-looking hardware design complete with knobs instead of buttons. The audio quality on the iD85 is superior to that of the cheaper iA91. Tablet users will zoom in on one feature in particular: the iD85 features a docking mechanism which allows for the iPad and iPad 2 to be docked on top of the unit just as easily as an iPhone or iPod. That stands in contrast with the dock built into the iA91, which can only fit an iPhone or iPod.

Aside from the hardware design, audio quality, and iPad docking, the rest of the feature list on the iA91 and iD85 reads largely the same: AM-FM radio with twelve station presets, bass-treble adjustment, similar front screen displays, and an included remote. Having spent time with both units, I'm left to conclude that each represents a strong value for its relative price tag.

So which one is for you? The short answer: the iA100, if you can afford it. Otherwise it depends on your budget and how much emphasis you place on each of the three primary factors which earn the iD85 its higher price tag. Having woken up to all three of these devices, I can't find a complaint to make about any of the lot.

Altec Lansing MIX iMT810

dockable portable stereo • \$299



It often doesn't take much alteration to keep a great product on top as time goes on, and Altec Lansing has proven that by revving its iMT800 "MIX" boombox for iPhone and iPod of a year and a half ago into the new iMT810 version which is reviewed here. The MIX concept is loosely based on Altec's old original iM7 boombox from nearly a decade ago, which was the pre-eminent iPod boombox of its era. But the MIX eschews the old tubular motif in favor of a black trapezoidal design with silver carrying handles on the top and sides. And despite weighing ten pounds or more, it can run on batteries and is meant to be carried.

The most immediate evolution you'll notice from the 800 to the 810 is that the dark gold is gone from the front of the unit entirely, with the gold highlights and the gold-hued screen having been replaced with a more understated silver, and the top EQ buttons now glow blue. It's a nice change, as the unit is large enough that it doesn't need big-color highlights to make it stand out even more; the 800 looked fine but the 810 looks sleeker based on those minor cosmetic changes alone. But much of what worked with the previous iteration is still in place: the slide-down roll bar on the

iPhone-iPod dock to make sure it stays put when the stereo system is being carried, the slide-out FM antenna which gets strong reception, and the remote control which can clip onto your belt loop are still there.

The touted “mix” feature is still intact as well, with a pair of aux-in ports on top allowing you to hook up two other users’ devices (in this case it doesn’t have to be an iPhone or iPod) so that the “source” button will allow you to toggle between inputs, introducing multiple music libraries to the equation if you’re hosting a party for instance. Many or perhaps even most users will never put the mix feature to use, but either way it doesn’t get in the way or add any bulk to the unit, so it’s a net-plus.

Oh and by the way, the iMT810 is a stereo system first and foremost, which means its audio output is the primary decider of its worthiness as a product. What made the iMT800 a winner thankfully stays intact here: the massively impressive sounding for being a single-unit portable stereo. You can crank it loud, and I mean LOUD, before you’ll distort the music coming



out of your iPhone or iPod. And the EQ controller allows for a broad range of bass to treble ratio. The MIX is the ideal portable big-boombox product for iPhone and iPod users.

That said, for those looking for a strictly stationary system, my money is still on the competing iHome iP1 which is about the same size (a bit smaller) and same price but offers an even more pristine-sounding audio experience. But the iP1 must be plugged into a wall to operate, which means the MIX is a whole different beast in that you can load it up with D batteries, grab it by the handles, and take your music with you. So if you want amazing loud audio and portability for your iPhone or iPod, the Altec Lansing MIX iMT810 is your new best friend – it outright owns the big-box portable category.

iHome iP1

dockable home stereo • \$299



With an impressive rollout at CES in January that included a hands-on demonstration by legendary record producer Tony Bongiovi, and seven months of subsequent anticipation before it finally officially hit the market, iHome's space-age looking and not-inconsequently priced iP1 was destined to be the biggest new accessory to hit the iPhone and iPod market in that year – or the biggest flop – and nothing in between. Could a company known primarily for its “great sounding (for its price tag)” iPod alarm clocks in the hundred dollar price range manage to successfully conquer the high end of the dockable stereo market with one ambitious first swing?

After we spent some time with the iP1 inside iHome's sound room in January, we were betting on the affirmative, as we found it surprisingly easy to peg the iP1 as the best-sounding dockable stereo system in this price range we'd ever heard – and that was before the “B” button was even demonstrated for us.

But just as anyone can sound decent while singing in the isolated confines of the shower, any speaker system can sound better in an acoustic room than it does in the real world. I needed to hear the iP1 outside of a constructed sound room and in more typical end-user surroundings, in this instance sitting on a kitchen table. And after having put the system through its paces with my iPhone, my iPod nano, my music, and my surroundings, I'm even more impressed with it now than I was in January.

Although the iP1 would be worth its price tag even without the “B” button (the “B” stands for Bongiovi, who designed the technology for iHome), it's the ability to fire up

this button that puts the iP1 over the top into category-killer territory. While I've seen plenty of cheaper stereo systems that included a button that would either enhance the bass or expand the spatiality of the audio, such options have generally had a synthetic quality to them, much like how a digital zoom on a camera is better than nothing but is really just a poor man's substitute for a true optical zoom. But with the iP1, the Bongiovi button is a whole different creature, monitoring the music's frequency spectrum for peaks and valleys and accentuating them appropriately.

If that sounds like a bunch of technical mumbo jumbo, then all you have to know is that it works. The catch is that the worse-sounding the music, for instance an older recording that has lost something when compressed into AAC or MP3, the more the B button can do for it. But even when testing out the iP1 with current albums that were purchased straight from iTunes (which are typically encoded right from the master recording), there was almost always a noticeable and desirable improvement when the B button was activated.

I suspect that much like how the "enhance" button in iPhoto will occasionally turn a photo purple in its attempts to improve the color and light balance, there is perhaps the oddball occasional song that actually sounds

worse with the iP1's B button activated – but after having tested more than fifty songs from various eras and genres, I couldn't find one. In any case, as its name implies, the B button effect can be turned off with the touch of a, well, *button*, if and when it's not desirable.

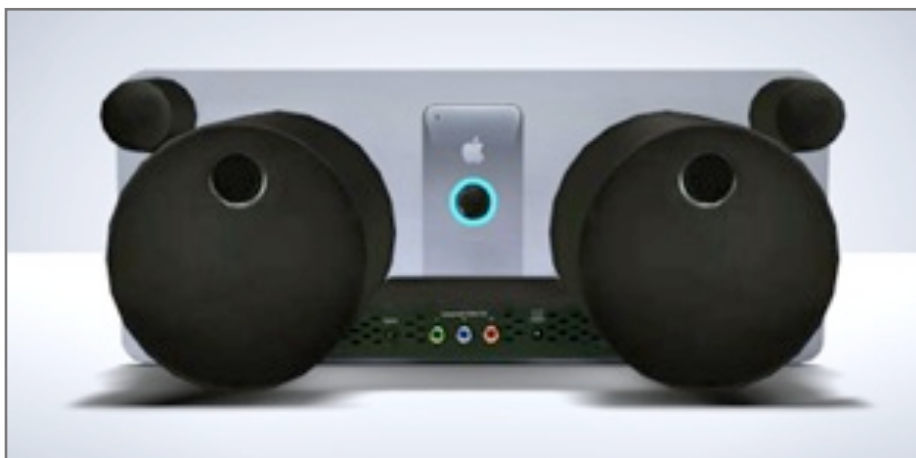
The aesthetics of the iP1 are daring beyond just choice of shape or material. In fact the entire unit only has one solid face, that being the thick slab of tinted clear plastic that constitutes the unit's front face. Two large cylindrical speakers protrude from the back of the front face, with a black slab between them, and the unit reclines on the cylinders. Despite not having a true back, top, or sides, the unit is plenty stable and is arguably the first speaker system so far in the twenty-first century that actually looks like it belongs in the twenty-first century, looking ultra-modern without feeling gimmicky. Ultimately, aesthetics are something each user will have to judge on their own, but I found that the unit looked equally impressive in a trade show sound room and on a cluttered kitchen table.

Down to the details, the iP1 comes with a remote that includes adjustable bass and treble along with iPod/iPhone menu navigation and, of course, another B button on the remote. Also in the box are a pair of open-face speaker grilles for aesthetic purposes.

And built-in video-out allows you to play your iPhone or iPod's video on your television while using the iP1's audio.

The iP1 eschews Apple's official universal docking system of custom-fit inserts for each iPhone and iPod model, in favor of a simple protruding shelf for docking your iPhone or iPod, along with cylindrical rubber stopper that twists out to rest against the back of your device. Some super-cheap systems sidestep the universal dock simply to avoid the cost of licensing it. But here it makes sense both from an aesthetic and functional standpoint, adding to the minimalism of the unit and staying consistent with the exposed styling.

When it comes to competing dockable iPhone/iPod stereo systems in this price range, I've spent time with them all. It's not a surprise that the iP1 sounds better than the identically priced system from Bose, as the Bose unit has always been a nice \$200 product saddled with a \$300 price tag. And although it's not a fair comparison since none of Altec Lansing's dockable units costs more than \$200, the iP1 blows them away. A more fair comparison based on price would be Apple's own recently discontinued iPod HiFi, which sounded fantastic and sold for \$349 but didn't come all that



close to sounding as good as the iP1.

None of this is to denigrate any of the competing products out there, some of which are excellent in their own right. But improbable as it may seem for a newcomer in this price range, the iP1 immediately becomes the new king of the hill even before you consider the B button technology – similarly, come to think of it, to how iHome's original iH5 product immediately became the best-sounding \$99 dockable iPod stereo system out there before you even considered its alarm clock functionality. The iH5 sent the industry scrambling for an answer which eventually brought a whole wave of impressive competing \$99 products to market. And the same thing will likely happen now, as the established vendors in this price range attempt to recover from having been simultaneously leapfrogged in design, audio quality, and underlying technology.

ADDITIONAL FINALISTS: Parrot by Starck, Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Mini

Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Air

AirPlay dockable stereo • \$599



Bowers & Wilkins launched the original Zeppelin years ago as the first dockable iPod stereo system to simultaneously feature heart-melting audio quality and a heart-breaking price tag. But for those who could shell out for the product, which was shaped like an actual zeppelin blimp and delivered the kind of audio thought not possible from a single-unit stereo not more than a few feet wide, the Zeppelin was worth every penny. Now B&W strikes back with a new Zeppelin Air which very much takes advantage of 2011 technology.

The dock on front for iPod and iPhone is still there for those who want to put their device front and center. But with Apple having introduced its AirPlay wireless streaming system, the Zeppelin Air builds in that technology as well. Now you can keep your iPhone in your pocket while beaming its music wirelessly over to the Zeppelin across the room. AirPlay setup is as easy as you'd hope, and the audio quality is nothing short of stunning. Compatibility also goes beyond iPods and iPhones, as you can stream your music wirelessly from an iPad or from iTunes on your computer.

The goal here, with the built in dock and the built in streaming, was apparently to offer the best of both worlds within the same single unit stereo system. Mission accomplished.

iHome iD28

portable dockable stereo • \$199



If iHome's lineup of dockable stereo products consists equally of dedicated alarm clock models like the iA91 and more general listening experience products like the iP1, then the company's iD28 attempts to split the difference. It's also refreshingly portable. While it doesn't include the intricate hard-button alarm controls of some of iHome's other products, the iD28 instead offers a simple digital clock face and offloads the alarm functionality to free included apps like iHome+Sleep, which are some of the best of their kind that we've tested. So this hybrid product is one which you can use as an alarm on your nightstand, take into the living room for general listening, and toss into your bag when traveling. But how does it sound?

At \$199, the iD28 needs to sound excellent. The good news is that based on my testing, it does. By virtue of being portable, the unit is only about two inches deep and about four inches tall, meaning that you can't fairly compare its audio to a much larger stationary unit like the iP3 despite the identical price tag. It's more fair to compare the audio of the iD28 to similar competing products from other vendors, and it wins that battle easily enough. What puts it over the top and makes it a five star product is the fact that comes with a number of niceties. It uses a built in lithium battery so you won't have to mess with disposable ones while traveling. There's a built in FM radio, which integrates with iHome's free radio app, along with a wireless remote. And the retractable dock is designed such that it works with an iPhone, iPod, or much wider iPad.

The same caveat applies to the iD28 as to all other portable audio products: you've got to use it in a portable manner at least part of the time for it to be the right fit, or else you're paying for portability you don't need. But as far as fairly compact portable dockable stereos go, the iHome iD28 might be the best one to come to market yet.

CSI: Peri Gilpin talks season finale

by Dana Feldman



Peri Gilpin walks into the well-known coffee shop on the west side, as it is referred to, in Los Angeles, where a plethora of writers can always be found working on their latest scripts and novels. It is always jammed packed, so full of life in there. We order some lunch and sit at a corner table near the fireplace. The sound of furious typing on laptops surrounds us and the energy in the place is palpable. She knows a thing or two about this type of contagious energy as she starred on the hit show "Frasier" as the much-loved Roz Doyle for the entirety of the shows run. Any actor's dream, a show like that. But, now she has a new role on CSI. The Las Vegas version, already in its twelfth season, is a fan favorite on CBS.

Looking at her it's as if the years haven't passed. She radiates a certain glow as she tells me of this new role that she has taken on as Ted Danson's wife on the show, Allison

Russell. She will first appear on the upcoming finale entitled "Homecoming" that airs next Wednesday, May 9th on CBS at 10PM.

Of the part, Gilpin says that the powers that be at CSI were very specific about this role. "The character breakdown of this woman was very detailed and I was given a lot to play and work with." Going on further, Gilpin explains the many layers of this woman. "She rules his heart and she rules his life and she is written as extremely gentle, kind and humorous. She has a deep love for her husband and has learned to live with his job and support him unconditionally. But, this is a job you never really get used to."

No stranger to working on a hit television show, when the topic of "Frasier" came up in the conversation, Gilpin's face quickly brightened and the smile that came said it all. Having to ask at least one question about the monumental hit sitcom, I ask if they all knew what a success it would become when they first started. "Of course, no one ever really knows if something is going to be a hit, but what we did know was that it was a fantastic script." Pausing for a moment, she quickly adds, "When a script is that good you almost don't care if it's a hit. You just want to do it. The pilot script was the best I've ever read." What followed would become television history.

Gilpin and her husband welcomed twin daughters just as "Frasier" was coming to an end and life quickly shifted gears. "Our daughters were born on a Friday and the finale was the following

Thursday. To say that life changed dramatically is the understatement of the century." Laughing, she quickly adds, "Our lives changed, but, I think our daughters transitions were even more dramatic!" Definitely a huge life change of the good kind, one era came to an end and another began as Gilpin went from starring in a top rated network sitcom to raising a family, a role that she cherishes.

Fans are extremely happy to see her yet again on another hit show. Working with Danson, as he and his team at the Crime Scene Investigations bureau with the LVPD use forensics to neatly wrap up their cases, has been a fantastic experience. "One of the wonderful things about working with Ted is that he never stops. He's always looking for new ways to make the characters better. He has one of the largest ranges of anyone in the business and he's known for that."

She came into the mix at an interesting time during filming. It was the last week for the last episode of the twelfth season. "This is a great group of people and I'm thrilled to be on the show." Laughing she says, "Especially with all the raw energy of the last day of the season it was still an amazingly well-oiled machine and really great to be a part of."

So, with the introduction of this new character on the show, how much do we get to look forward to seeing her? Per Gilpin, "As of now it's the finale and the premiere. After that, it's whatever they deem!" If the audience has any say, it'll be for many episodes to come.

Speck FitFolio

iPad case • \$39



With protection from front to back, the Speck FitFolio can keep your new iPad 2 safe and sound. This form-fitting case is easy to use and can be set in many functional positions. To put your iPad 2 in the case, you'll need to first align all the ports to the hard cover interior. Then just snap it in place. It's as simple as that.

There are cutouts for all the ports. The cutouts also make it easy to get to all of the buttons without much trouble. Folio. The Speck FitFolio, as the name suggests, can be nicely used as a folio for your iPad 2. It covers both the front and back of your new device and looks highly elegant and professional. There's also a handy bungee cord that holds the front cover in place when it's closed, or secures it to the back of the case when it's open. This works very nicely for both landscape and portrait mode. Again, the multiple use for this case is very nice.

Upright positions. The FitFolio is also a stand for the iPad 2. On the soft interior cover, there are four different indentations that you can place the iPad in, ranging from position angles between 45 to 75. This makes it really handy to watch movies and videos from your iPad 2, or even games.

Typing position. Flip the case around and you got yourself a nice typing stand for your iPad. Talk about universal! To get the case into this position, hold the iPad 2 in landscape mode with the front cover pointing down. Now take the front cover and pull it backwards. Pull the front cover so it meets the back cover and pull the rest of the cover around. This will form a nice pedestal for your iPad in landscape typing mode. This makes it very convenient to type when the iPad is in your lap or on a table.

Overall, the Speck FitFolio iPad 2 case is slim, form-fitting, and stylish. As an added bonus, it has multiple uses which makes it a nice all-in-one case. Best of all, the FitFolio protects both the front and back of the iPad and costs just under \$40; that's the cost of just an Apple Magic cover that only protects half of the device.

Moshi Concerti

iPad case • \$54



If you have an on-the-go lifestyle, the Moshi Concerti may be just the iPad 2 case for you. Not only is it stylish, but it also provides complete protection for your precious device. In addition, there are many ways to use it, making your iPad 2 experience quite enjoyable.

The Concerti is a folio-style case made of a beautiful microfiber material from the inside and out. On the inside of the case is a silicone enclosure that securely holds the iPad in place. This soft silicone interior case covers the edges of the iPad, keeping it safe from everyday wear and tear. It has cutouts for the dock, speakers, on/off button, camera, headset jack, and mic. The volume buttons are not cut out, but the material is soft enough that you can easily press on the side.

This case offers many different functional positions. After you put your iPad in, you'll notice that it's on the left side, unlike most iPad 2 cases. This allows it to open up in a way where you can use the camera without needing a camera hole in the microfiber part of the case. If you're holding it in portrait position, open and fold the cover to the left to expose the camera.

Another way to use the case is to turn it into a stand. The case allows three different stand positions in landscape mode. All great for web surfing, gaming, and video viewing. To use, open the case and have the iPad in landscape position (Home button will be on the left). Select a position to stand it in — there are three set of bumps on the interior of the case that will hold the iPad in the position you wish it to be. Also, if you enjoy carrying your iPad around in your hand — like to take roll in a class or notes while you're walking, there's a built-in hand pocket to help alleviate wrist stress in the case.

To keep the case closed, there's a convenient elastic strap that holds the front cover in place. Simply lift up the strap and wrap it around the case.

Incipio Smart Feather

iPad case • \$34



If you own an Apple smart cover for your iPad, I bet you love it. It flips, folds, stands, protects the front screen and makes your iPad more useful. But sometimes, you may find that the smart cover falls off too easily. For example, when you're reading in bed and you slightly shift the iPad's position, the cover just pops off. Although the magnet is strong, oftentimes, it will remove itself from the iPad when you prefer it not to.

That's where the Incipio iPad 2 Smart Feather Ultralight Hard Shell Case comes in! It's a light back cover for the iPad 2 that works seamlessly with your Apple Smart Cover. It's form fitting, looks great, and you'll hardly notice it's there. It protects the back side of your iPad 2 very well, but what makes this back cover stand out is the side hinge holder (custom molded feather, as they call it) that holds your iPad 2 smart cover in place. Yes, that means no falling off when you don't want it to. You can have the Apple Smart cover open and hold onto that, and it won't shake off.

The Smart Feather also has cut outs so all your buttons and ports are available. In addition, the Smart Feather also comes with the Incipio® Vanity Kit, which is one clear screen protector, applicator card, and cleaning cloth.

Incipio iPad 2 Smart Feather Ultralight Hard Shell Case comes in an array of colors that complements the Apple Smart Covers — black, gray, blue, green, orange, pink, red, cream, tan, navy, and frost (lovely if you want to see the Apple logo through it).

Marware CEO Hybrid

iPad case • \$49



Think of the Marware C.E.O. Hybrid iPad 2 case as the mini convertible car of iPad 2 cases. It's lightweight, sleek, and transforms into different cases for the desired functionality.

Folio. This folio-style iPad 2 case has a sleek and professional design on it's shell. To use the case, insert the iPad on the right side by sliding it into the two holders. If you want to use the case as a portfolio, push the other edges into the the remaining corners and close the front. You'll notice that the iPad will be in sleep mode when it's closed (and will automatically wake up when open). When the case is closed, only a little bit of the top and bottom edges are exposed, but most of the iPad is well protected. This folio case is quite thin and light for a folio-style case which is an absolute plus! The interior is made of a soft microfiber material that prevents scratches on the screen when closed. The case itself also has cutouts for the camera and speaker on the back shell of the case. All other ports and buttons have cutouts along the edges as well, making it easier to sync and charge with the case on.

Stand and Typing. This case also transforms into a stand. Not only that, it can position the iPad in a nice typing angle too. To do this, leave the iPad in the case, but push it out of the two corner holders (left side). Now bend the case along the fold and let the iPad rest in one of the grooves on the interior of the shell. There are three grooves, allowing your iPad to adjust to three different angles — 120°, 140° and 165° angles — ideal for typing, viewing and FaceTime.

Hand Strap. If you open the folio case, there's an elastic strap that you can put around the iPad. This holds the front cover against the back cover. Also on the front cover is an elastic hand strap made from the microfiber that helps you hold the iPad in just one hand. This makes it easier for you to use FaceTime or display your iPad during a presentation or demonstration.

Incipio Kickstand

iPad case • \$39



If you're looking for a nicely padded folio-style iPad 2 case, the Incipio iPad 2 Premium Kickstand Case may be the one you want. It has a unique three-fold design that converts your iPad into many different positions and uses. First of all, putting your iPad 2 into the case is absolutely easy. Open the case and simply slide your iPad into the four sturdy clips. It's best to hold the case in landscape mode when doing this and slide in from left to right. Once it's in, you have yourself a good looking iPad 2 folio. But transform itself to be much more.

The exterior of the case is made of a rugged rip-stop nylon. It's thick enough to provide a lot of protection for your iPad 2. To protect it from bumps and scratches, the interior is made of a soft micro-suede material, along with four sturdy clips that hold your iPad 2 in place. There are cutouts in the flaps for the camera and the buttons and ports are not covered, making them easily accessible.

A stand. The tri-fold design allows this case to become a stand. On the front interior flap of the case is a soft rubber strip that has 3 grooves (or indentations) in it. Fold flap with the iPad 2 on it and set it on one of the grooves. This then converts your case into a nice iPad stand. There are three angles that you switch between. Each one is good for surfing, video viewing, and email reading.

Typing Mode. It was such a pleasant surprise when I learned that the case can be converted into a typing position. You'll first need to flip the case inside out (backwards). Then you'll notice on the front flap, there's a smaller mini front flap that can be pulled up. Open and pull up and you'll see three ribbon stays. Now fit the flap with the iPad 2 into the exposed ribbon stays and it's in the perfect elevated position for you to type your notes or documents. This feature makes the case work very well in the classroom or business meetings.

Screen View Only. Perhaps you're playing a game or reading a book and prefer to have your screen exposed. So you need the front flap to not get in the way. To do this, flip the front flap back so it touches the back side. On the back flap is an elastic band. Pull this band over the front flap so it gets held in place. Now the case won't get in the way of your reading/game playing!

GumDrop Drop Tech Military Edition

iPad case • \$59-69



Need a super sturdy iPad 2 case? The GrumpDrop Drop Tech Series: Military Edition iPad 2 case is one designed for civilians but inspired by the military. This little gem contains not just one or two, but four layers of protection! And it does that without adding too much bulk. This rugged case features multiple barriers of shock absorption, a built-in polycarbonate screen protector, and microfilm dust filters.

Layers of Protection. The first layer is the polycarbonate front. This is an interior layer that protects the front edges of the iPad 2. It completely covers the front edges, leaving only cutouts for the Home button, front camera, dock port, and headphone jack. The cutout for the front camera has a thin film on it to protect it from any scratches. Before putting this layer on, you need to slide in the second layer, the screen protector frame.

The screen protector frame is nice because you don't have to deal with any sticky situations. No adhesives to worry about, just simply place it in the first layer and put these two layers on top of the iPad screen. It protects your screen without any of the mess!

The third layer is the Polycarbonate back. This piece is placed onto the back of the iPad and snaps into the front layer. This piece covers the entire back of the iPad 2 with cutouts for the headphone jack, mic, back camera, rotation button, volume buttons, and dock port. There are also some narrow holes in the back to add in some design. The speaker area has a cutout, but has a thin mesh around it to keep debris from getting into the speaker. The camera has a clear protective film so it doesn't get scratched.

Finally, the last layer is the military green silicone skin. This piece completes the whole look of the iPad case. When you have all of the other layers snapped in place, put this silicone skin cover around it and push in the edges in place. The soft texture and grooves in this skin makes it easy and nice to hold. This layer covers up the Home button, dock, and headphone jack so no dust or debris will get in.



If you're looking for an iPad 2 case that's fun to use as well as protective of your device, look no further! The Ekto² for iPad 2 by Uzibull may be just what you need.

The case is one piece, made entirely of an easy to clean silicon. Simply slide your iPad 2 into the case, one edge at a time, and press down on each of the sides to make sure it's securely in. You'll notice that both the front and back sides have raised bevels. This is important, especially if the iPad 2 should land face down on a drop.

There is also extra silicon on the corners and edges of the case to make holding the iPad 2 much easier. The ribs on the back side of the case adds an extra layer of durability and the grooves within the inner part of the case absorbs any impact the iPad 2 should encounter.

All ports and buttons are accessible in the Ekto 2, so you can charge and plug in headsets as usual. Both the front and back cameras are completely unobstructed as well. There is also an opening on the back of the case to display the beautiful Apple logo. In addition, there are two cutouts in the back to place an optional strap that can be used to tie around a car headrest.

The best use for this case is when you're playing racing games or apps that make heavy use of the gyroscope. Being able to grip both sides of the iPad in your hands makes your movements more accurate. Which means, your car is crashing less in racing games!

Overall, what makes this case a good choice is the maximum protection without adding too much weight and the ease of grip it adds on the iPad. The only thing that can be improved is if the case had a film or something to cover the Apple logo. I can see a child using this case and scratching that back part of the iPad. But other than that, this case is one of the best gaming case for the iPad 2 yet.

Kensington Protective Cover & Stand

iPad case • \$39



Just as the iPad 2 has users wondering how Apple managed to pack in all the same goodness as the original while making it significantly less bulky, Kensington's new iPad 2 case rather descriptively called the Protective Cover & Stand will leave users wondering the same. It's a one piece hinge case with a hardshell backpiece covered in a woven pattern, along with a front piece which bends back around to form a low-angle stand for typing and velvet padding on the inside. And improbably, it does all that while adding almost no bulk to the iPad 2.

It's the simplicity of the product, then, which makes it work. No complex hinge system, as it simply folds open. No bulky manner of keeping the iPad 2 in place, as it simply snaps into the hardshell corners. And speaking of which, this case gets something right which far too many other cases of its kind get wrong: it actually covers and protects the iPad's four corners, which is where impact is likely to happen first when you drop it.

If there's one thing not to like in the coverage department, it's that two-thirds of the iPad's bottom edge is exposed thanks to one large combined cutout for the docking port and the speaker, rather than a pair of cutouts which would have covered more surface area. And by design, the stand only works with the iPad in landscape (wide) mode, not in portrait position, so you'll need to be a fan of typing on the iPad's wider keyboard. But these are quibbles. This case is a winner because it does so much with so little material and, in the spirit of the iPad 2, keeps things thin and light while fully functional.

iFrogz Summit

iPad case • \$59



Love the folio style, but want the slim case protection too? Now you can have both with the iFrogz Summit iPad case. Compatible with both the iPad 2 and the new iPad, this case brings a stylish touch to the familiar folio look.

This case has two layers. The first is the folio part that covers the entire iPad (front and back). This gives the case a polished and professional look, while protecting both sides of the iPad from bumps and scratches. The second layer is on the interior of the case, which is a snap-in polycarbonate core. Just snap your iPad into this part and it holds the iPad securely in place, making slipping and sliding impossible, yet ensuring maximum protection. Not to mention, this part adds a bit of style and pop of color to the boring folio case. You also have access to all ports and buttons, whether the case is closed or opened.

The interior of the case is made of a soft polyethylene vinyl that protects your iPad screen. There's also a small pocket on the interior front flap for business cards, so no need to carry them in your purse or wallet. This front flap also has a magnetic enclosure, making it simple to open and close, as well as put your iPad in sleep mode when it's not in use. The interior is a nice gray color with black stitchings around it. Between the snap-on core and the back of the case is a strong velcro holding the iPad in place. If you lift up the iPad and pull the Velcro apart, your case now becomes a horizontal stand, which is a huge plus. There's three indentations on the interior front cover that you can position the iPad in.

Finally, if you enjoy writing or drawing with your iPad, there's a loop on top to hold your stylus which is really handy! iFrogz also has a line of stylus to match with the Summit case.

iLuv Smart Back Cover

iPad case • \$39



Already own an Apple Smart Cover for your iPad 2? One of the best complement for it is the iLuv Smart Back Cover. It's a hard shell case that is smooth to the touch, yet sturdy and rigid for everyday use. The texture on the case feels really soft and doesn't scratch easily. This makes it a nice slim solution for those of us who like to toss our iPads in our bags.

The iPad 2 fits nicely in the iLuv Smart Back Cover. There are cutouts for all the ports and camera, and even a cutout for the speakers so your audio isn't muffled. What I really like about this case is how smooth the cutouts are. There are no sharp corners that can leave you any scratches. The back case is lightweight and fully protects the back of your iPad from dust and bumps.

It's available in colors that match and coordinate with your Apple Smart Cover. The iLuv Smart Back Cover also works best with an Apple Smart Cover, as this will cover all the edges of the iPad.

Andy Grammer

The Beatweek interview

by Dana Feldman



There is a certain light that emanates from musician Andy Grammer that is somewhat contagious. Whether it is watching him perform onstage or sitting across the table from him as I find myself now, it is a difficult thing to describe. My job as a writer is to figure out how to translate this into words, so as we lunch on club sandwiches at the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills, I try desperately to think of how it is that I can best explain it. Well, he definitely has what some might describe as the “it” factor and others might call charisma. It is both. He has this constant grin that crosses his face ear to ear. You start to feel it yourself and when

you hear his music, well, then there is no turning back.

This is what took him from the streets at the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, CA, where he spent three years performing, to where he sits today. His sound is upbeat and uplifting as he croons to “keep your head up yeah yeah.” Remarkably, your energy is lifted, as well, and well this is why he is a star on the rise. He, in part, credits his manager, Ben Singer, whom he calls “the best manager in the world” for his success. The other part, he says, is because he is the master of his own domain. “You have to do what you want to do and I genuinely believe that if you start interacting in the world that way, that there is a respect in that.” Music was the only thing he wanted to do and that desire created the energy he needed to create this life for himself. “It doesn’t happen overnight, but it does happen.”

So, of all of the performers sitting along the promenade waiting for their turn to perform, why does he think that he made it to this point? “The only thing that I can point to is a little luck, a genuine work ethic and a desire to learn.” His eyes light up when he explains further. “How do I write songs that will make people’s day? How do I write music that will make someone stop and smile?” He

learned the skills needed and maintains that his intentions are never to preach with his music.

Needing to know more, the next question is simply to ask if he was ever afraid sitting out there that he might not go beyond the streets. “The trick is to be truly psyched about what you’re doing.” Stopping for a moment to think, he adds, “There is an element of fear that I try to run straight into.” He admits that there is a fine line between being motivated and being ridiculously insane. “I don’t want to lead people astray, but who’s to say that there weren’t those who thought ‘poor guy sitting there singing on the promenade’ when I was out there?” Saying that he has no judgments or resentments with anyone who may not have believed that he could do it, he adds, “Those judgments were made when I was where I was at that time and if I am to be honest with myself, I understand it.”

So, he perfected his skills. “I had to ask myself how do I get good at this? To be a good musician, you need to give people what they want, what they need. When you cross that corner, people will come to you. It’s not easy to get there.” His goal was to write music that people would connect to and as he says “would feed them.” He would ask himself what one gets from music and how

to get to that place. He likens it to being an inventor of sorts. "You go to the lab and create and then you come out and see if it works. The Promenade was great for that."

When asked the next question, did he know that this would work, this experiment at the promenade? He answers with questions himself. "Did I know that I was supposed to create music? Yes. Did I know that it would work out? No."

The music itself being so uplifting and happy, the next question asked is whether he is a happy person himself. "Well, there are two kinds of happiness, grounded and ungrounded." I am sitting forward at the edge of my seat waiting for him to explain the art of happiness that is sometimes so very elusive. "Ungrounded happiness is cheesy and not based on reality. Grounded happiness is informed happiness based on the knowledge that the world sometimes sucks, but even then you have to believe in yourself." But, how? I ask now as if he has in his bags a crystal ball and not a guitar. "There were times on the promenade where I was sitting out there and I didn't have enough money to pay my rent, but I would just keep going and I was always



smiling and having fun. I love the ocean and had the ocean breeze to keep me going."

Now he adds the gem of knowledge, the trick for us all. "You might as well figure out a way to be happy wherever it is that you are right now in this very moment." He says that he was just as happy and fulfilled back then as he is today. I now ask for him to tell me what advice he would give to the artist out there right now. It might be cold and they might be feeling a bit hopeless. "Love what you do, keep smiling." Going further, he explains, "I'm a humble guy, but I'm audacious. It was really almost

arrogant of me to have thought that I was going to be the one that was going to make it out there. But, I had no other option." It doesn't get easier, he says, and he learned that lesson at a young age. "Life will always be filled with obstacles. Just when you think you're in the clear, something else comes along."

Curious to know what he made back then on the promenade, he shocks me with his answer. "I would usually get there at say eight in the morning to wait for a slot which would open somewhere between noon and two in the afternoon. Those were the best times. I was usually there until about ten at night." Having to move every two hours to ensure everyone getting a fair shake, he averaged anywhere between four hundred and a thousand on a really good day. What, really? "Yes, my best day I think I sold about ninety CD's at ten dollars a piece." He worked with a cajon player who took a cut of twenty to thirty percent. During his three years he worked an average of two or three days a week doing this.

He credits his manager with seeing his potential at that time. "I was twenty pounds heavier then. I ate McDonald's everyday because it was the cheapest thing to eat. But, Ben didn't say let's get you some nice clothes. He said let's get you

healthy, in shape, and let's get you a better rug, a nicer cart and a good amp. We need you to win the promenade!" Singer saw the diamond in the rough here. "I said to him, look my voice isn't the best, but I am working on it." And work on it he did, tenaciously.

Smiling, he explains, "If you're doing something artistic, people need to get that you're excited and inspired because that's your job as an artist, to touch and inspire people. If you're hopeless then what are you doing out there? I have no time for the give-up element."

So, the final words of wisdom from Grammer are to be a healthy person, which he likens to working out. "When you've worked out you're sore, but it's a good sore. You need to do that artistically. You need to grow and that hurts. When I'd get home from the promenade I knew that I had done everything that was possible that day. You just don't stop."

This work ethic paid off for the recently engaged musician who found real love with a girl who knew him back in his promenade days. You can follow him on Twitter where he regularly posts uplifting messages of inspiration for tenacious dreamers everywhere.

Architect Stylus

iPad stylus • \$22



Slick and beautiful, the Architect Stylus may have been created from a minimalist's dream. Made of anodized aluminum, this stylus perfectly complement the iPad.

The Architect Stylus is made up of two parts — a distinctive cap and an anodized aluminum body. The cap has a unique loop cutout in it that's a perfect fit for a lanyard or keychain. This cap can also be screwed on either end of the stylus. When the stylus is in use, you can screw it on the top end. When not in use, you can screw it on the end with the nub, protecting it from any dust or scratches.

Using the stylus on your iPad (or any capacitive touch screen) is wonderful. Simply glide the stylus on the screen like you would with your finger. Write, draw, or browse with high accuracy. It feels ergonomically-correct in your hand with just the right weight and thickness. The Architect also comes with an optional small case to prevent any scratches on your stylus (\$2).

Overall, the architect is a beautiful stylus that's both functional and enjoyable to see and use. My favorite part is how it complement the iPad perfectly, as well as the unique design.

Just Mobile Alupen Pro

iPad stylus • \$39



From the makers of the elegant Alupen and Upstand comes their latest product — the Alupen Pro. Not only is it a beautifully designed stylus, it also functions as a pen!

This cleverly designed stylus takes me back to the days of elementary school. The Alupen Pro resembles a number 2 pencil. Sculpted out of a high-quality aluminum, the stylus has the hexagon shape that prevents it from rolling on the table. On the end where an eraser is normally found on a pencil is the stylus nib. On the other end is a fine-point pen. To use the pen, simply twist and the point of the pen slides right out.

Writing with the Alupen Pro is easy and accurate, no matter which side you choose. The package also comes with an extra rubber nib if you should ever need to replace the stylus part, and a genuine leather pouch to store and protect your stylus. Another big plus about this product is the lack of too many parts that could be lost. It's just one solid pen/stylus. The stylus end works on all capacitive touch screens, including iPad, iPhone, etc. so you can use it for multiple devices.

Sometimes when I use the stylus, I feel like flipping it around since I'm drawing with the "eraser" side of it. But that feeling goes away after I used it for a while.

Overall, I just love how Just Mobile drew inspiration from a pencil and turned it into a beautiful accessory for our digital world. The Alupen Pro is a lovely choice if you want a pen/stylus combo. The only downside I could find for this product is the price, but beauty and great design does come with a price.



Just Mobile is known for their simple and elegant designs and their latest iPad Stand, the Encore, is just that. It's light, portable, and highly functional. The Encore iPad stand has a beautiful circular base with a silver finishing that matches the back of the iPad perfectly. This makes it look seamless, as if it was part of the Apple iPad suite.

Attached to the back of this circular base is a hinged arm that holds the iPad in place. This hinged support is easy to move up or down so you can place the iPad in your preferred viewing angle. On the front of the base is a 2 inch rubber stopper that follows the circular pattern of the stand. This soft base holds the iPad in place, and at the same time, prevents any scratches to your device.

To use the stand, simply place your iPad in the middle — between the front stopper and the hinged back. Move the hinge to the angle you want and you're ready to play your game, read a book, or just surf. The iPad can stand in either landscape or portrait mode in the Encore. What's nice about this stand is that even though you may put it in portrait mode, you still have access to the Home button. The front stopper is low enough to not cover the button.

This iPad stand is recommended for the frequent traveler since it's portable, or if you enjoy playing games, or reading a book at your desk. Although it does fold down into a typing mode, the angle is still steeper than what you may be use to. I don't recommend using this stand if you plan on typing long documents on-screen.

Logitech Keyboard Case / ZAGGmate 2

iPad portable keyboard • \$99



The original ZAGGmate with Keyboard, released for the iPad 1.0 last year, tested out well enough that it was Beatweek's portable iPad keyboard of the year winner. Suffice it to say, then, that expectations were high for the product we thought would be called the ZAGGmate 2. Instead, still made by ZAGG, the iPad 2 version of the product is officially known as the Logitech Keyboard Case by ZAGG. Having tested out this new iteration, I can tell you that not much has changed beyond the fact that there's now a Logitech logo above the volume keys – and from where we're sitting, that's a good thing.

But lest we get ahead of ourselves, here's what you need to know about the product now known as the Logitech Keyboard Case: it's a metal shell which snaps onto the front of the iPad 2 and, when removed, reveals a low-profile physical keyboard inside. An adjustable slide out leg allows you to stand the iPad 2 up in portrait or landscape mode. The iPad 2 and the keyboard talk to each other not through a cable, but instead through a wireless bluetooth connection. The included micro-USB cable allows you to recharge the keyboard's battery. The only reason the original ZAGGmate had to go by the wayside was that the svelter dimensions of the iPad 2, regrettably, kept the product from snapping on securely. But the new svelter version of the product works great with the iPad 2, and we can recommend it just as strongly as its predecessor.

So what's still not to like? As a case, the product doesn't do anything to protect the iPad 2's rear surface; ZAGG is likely hoping you'll use its Invisible Shield product for that purpose. And we still prefer the feel of Apple's own physical iPad keyboard, which is almost exactly like typing on a Mac computer – except that it's not portable. When it comes to portable iPad 2 keyboards, the Logitech Keyboard Case wins hands down. Of course we expect more such keyboards to come to market, and we'll keep you posted as they do.

Kensington KeyFolio Pro and KeyLite

iPad keyboard cases • \$99 and \$119



Nothing like a second chance to make a first impression. Kensington's original KeyFolio for the iPad 1 didn't impress us and felt like a rare mis-step for the company. The keyboard was made out of an uncomfortable rubber material, and some of the keys were even in the wrong places in a misguided attempt to cram them all in. But it's night and day with the new KeyFolio for iPad 2. From afar it still looks like the same product: a black leather folio case which folds open to reveal a bluetooth wireless keyboard on one internal panel and an iPad 2 sleeve on the other. But this new iteration for iPad 2 makes enough fundamental changes that it zooms to the head of the pack when it comes to folio keyboards.

The keyboard feels right when you type on it. The keys respond well and they're in the right place. The iPad 2 can be rotated to landscape or portrait mode depending on your preference and which kind of app you happen to be using. There's even a camera cutout. We've tested half a dozen iPad folio keyboard cases, and while none of them are perfect owing to the cramped amount of space involved, the KeyFolio Pro came out on top. We do want Kensington to work even harder on the next iteration, but rather than having a specific list of complaints, we just want to see what more they have up their sleeve. But that can wait until the iPad 3. For now, iPad 2 users who want a keyboard folio case have found their winner.

The \$119 KeyLite goes even thinner by using touch capacitive "keys" which are essentially flat with slightly raised outlines.

Snooki

The Beatweek interview



"When you're a reality star," says Nicole Polizzi over the thumping backdrop of a Las Vegas nightclub, "you get a lot of opportunities." The most recognizable star of the megahit television show Jersey Shore is here for CES, where she's launching her own line of bodacious looking headphones through iHip. But even when she's being a businesswoman she just can't stop being Snooki. Hours earlier, tech industry journalists and analysts were standing in an interminably

long line at her booth just to get their picture taken with her in what ends up being the largest celebrity draw at a trade show known for its celebrity draws.

This is all happening, of course, during the same week in which *Jersey Shore* is debuting its fifth season. If she's is a long way from home here in Vegas, it's an on-air homecoming for her and the gang on television; after a season in Italy, Snooki at *JWoww* and *The Situation* have returned to New Jersey even amidst fresh on-air drama and departures. The ratings are still strong enough to suggest that the show will be around as long as its stars want it to be, and in the mean time Nicole is clearly diversifying her efforts.

"It's going to be something awesome," she says of her iHip lineup as camera flash bulbs go off around her in rapid succession. She sounds excited. "It's going to be animal print, bling bling, pretty much stylish headphones." Meanwhile she's wearing thoroughly bejeweled headphones in pink and silver on the red carpet, while sporting the (spoiler alert) new nose ring which she gets done in the already-taped season five finale. She blows kisses to the photographers, who eat it up.

This kind of thing is nothing new for CES or the consumer tech industry. A few booths down from iHip, a major hip hop star launches his own earbuds. Nearby, a pro football legend signs autographs. The difference here is that "reality stars" were supposed to be mere throwaway



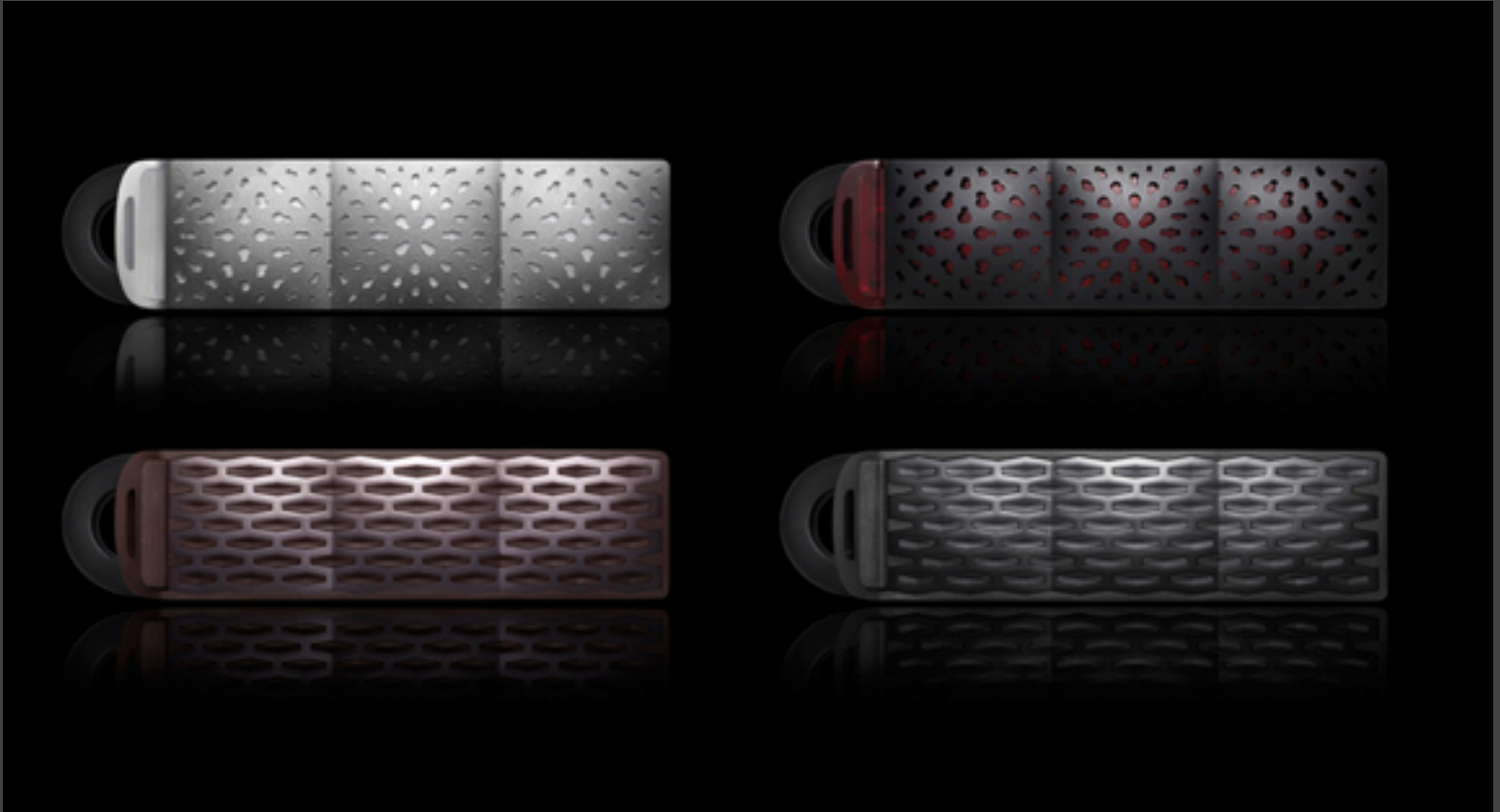
items, anonymous people off the street cast as themselves on the premise that, if thrown into the right situations, they might be able to generate enough conflict to make things interesting. As opposed to high priced famous actors, reality show participants were supposed to be powerless, controllable, secondary to the premise of the show itself. But one look around at the parade of people following Nicole's every move in Vegas this week, and becomes clear that she's the one with the power. In fact she might be the first reality star to gain so much mainstream fame that she can pull this off. After all, she drew bigger crowds than the traditional TV show stars who showed up this week.

Interestingly, she's billing the iHip line as "Snooki by Nicole Polizzi" which suggests that she's ready to push her real name to the forefront alongside her ubiquitous nickname. Could it be that she's now more popular than the show which made her famous?

I ask her one last question about finding the time to be both a businesswoman and a reality star. "I'm just taking advantage of it," she says as I find myself unable to resist the urge to get my picture taken with her. "I'm really excited about everything."

Jawbone Era

bluetooth earpiece • \$129



Jawbone has always made some of the more interesting looking bluetooth wireless earpieces on the market and the new “Era” holds true with four interesting combinations of color and style. But the company says that its new Era earpiece is in fact the start of a new era – and Jawbone may be right about that, if its “magical motion controls” catch on. Although the Era has a traditional button on it, users can instead use the entire earpiece as an interface of its own.

Shake the Era to pair it with your phone. Tap anywhere on the earpiece to answer a call. Each user will need to decide whether such features sound useful or gimmicky, but in my tests, I found that they work as advertised. It’s the same story with the above-average 5.5 hour battery life when it comes to talk time.

Of course the true measure of a bluetooth earpiece is a combination of audio quality and comfort, and the Era scores high on both. I’ve tested other earpieces that are smaller and lighter, but the Era isn’t obtrusively heavy or large. And the audio quality of phone calls and music is superb.

Plantronics Savor M1100

bluetooth earpiece • \$99



Thin is in, as slimmed down bluetooth earpieces increasingly don't have to scrimp on quality or specs in the name of not weighing you down. The \$79 M100 from Plantronics the model you'll see more often in retail stores, but after having tested both, our money is on spending the extra twenty bucks for the deluxe M1100 mode, which Plantronics has also branded as the "Savor" model. In essence, the Savor is the standard M100, but with a svelter design and a third microphone built-in for improved audio even in difficult situations.

Additional niceties with the Savor include a free year of Vocalyst voice command services, which won't appeal to all users but can't hurt, along with a battery meter for the Savor which appears directly in the iPhone's menubar when the two are paired (although this feature is becoming more common among bluetooth products in general).

The only real caveat with the Savor M1100 is that its cheaper M100 counterpart actually comes with a longer battery, thanks to the latter's larger body. But the battery life of the Savor is long enough that we expect it to be plenty suitable for the typical user, and the impressively slimmed down design is more than worth the tradeoff.

Bluetrek Carbon

bluetooth earpiece • \$69



We've become accustomed to bluetooth wireless earpieces so small you can barely see them from a distance. But how about one which maintains a full-size boom mic but is made from material so lightweight you can barely feel it when you pick it up? That's the Bluetrek Carbon in a nutshell. As its name suggests, it's made primarily of carbon fiber – a unique material so sturdy that it can be used in remarkably thin amounts. Bluetrek tells us the Carbon weighs less than six ounces, and in our tests it didn't feel any heavier than a toothpick would. But as with any audio product, the primary question for this black-hued earpiece with the silver trim and the signature carbon fiber criss-cross pattern is this: how does it sound?

Interestingly enough, despite some past instances we've encountered where carbon fiber products such as iPhone cases could cause some minor signal reduction in the iPhone, it turns out the Bluetrek Carbon has no such issues. Signal strength is full and clear, and audio quality is better than what we'd have expected from a \$69 wireless earpiece. It includes a hardshell carrying case, a (very) short-neck micro USB charging cable, and a variety of earpiece attachments. In short, the Carbon is a nice value-priced alternative for those users who've been eyeing bluetooth earpieces with boom mics in the \$100 range but find themselves on a budget – particularly if they value virtual weightlessness in an earpiece product.



Universal car mounts for iPhone and iPod, no matter how well done, are invariably a crapshoot because the interior of every car is laid out different. The only way to ensure your device is mounted in a way that works well in your car would be to get your hands on a mount which was specifically designed for your car make and model – fortunately, as improbable as it sounds, ProClip has done exactly that.

Over the years we've had the opportunity to test out ProClip's mounts in various kinds of vehicles, and the results have always been about the same: our iPhones and iPods have been mounted a place that's easy to reach and stable. The ProClip consists of two components, first a mounting kit specific to your vehicle and then a holder that's specific to your device and your usage patterns. Holders include options for a built-in charging cable, a method of semi-permanently attaching your own cable, swivel options and more.

Two things to know: Many of the mounts include a small amount of (non-permanent) installation. And the product doesn't come cheap, as you'll pay about \$25 to \$80 for the device holder plus another \$29 for the car mount. But it's worth it if you prefer to have your iPhone or iPod mounted in your car on a regular basis.

Monster iCarCharger 1000

car charger and stereo connection • \$49



Featureless iPhone and iPod car chargers are a dime a dozen, and even those users with a line-in/aux-in port on their car stereo who are looking for a car charger with a built in line-out cable have plenty of options to choose from. But Monster's new iCarCharger 1000 stands out from the pack with two distinct additional features.

The less immediately apparent (but probably more widely useful) of the two is that the line-out cable, which deceptively appears to be very short in the photo above, is actually wrapped around a spool inside the head of the charger. Slide the head open, unravel precisely how much cable you need for your car setup, lock it into place, and you won't have one inch more cable running from your charger to your stereo than necessary. In a word, it's a brilliant concept – and it works as advertised.

The second feature is flashier but may or may not be of practical value to you. The front of the charger includes basic playback features that allow you to play or pause the music and jump to not only the next or previous song, but also the next or previous playlist. This can come in super handy if your car setup is such that your iPhone or iPod isn't easily available to you while driving (or if you find trying to operate it via the screen while driving to be a distraction). The problem, though, is that far too many cars have their charging port in a position too far away from the driver for the buttons to be easily reached. In my own car I could barely reach it with my fingertips, and I've owned other cars in which the buttons would have been completely unreachable. The fact that the head of the charger can be rotated upward or downward can help, but the usability of the buttons is a crapshoot based on your particular car layout.

ADDITIONAL FINALISTS: Griffin iTrip DualConnect

JustMobile Highway and Highway Pro

car chargers • \$34 and \$39



When we are out-and-about, what's the best way to juice up your iPhone? With a car charger, of course! But there are so many of them out on the market, so how do you choose? Fortunately, there's an exceptionally great one out there that you should definitely check out if you are in the search for the perfect car charger — the Highway and Highway Pro from Just Mobile.

Both the Highway and Highway Pro look the same — black plug that goes into your car's lighter socket, topped off with a solid, diamond-tread aluminum head that reminds me of my own MacBook Pro (a black-only option is also available). A small and subtle LED light is found on the aluminum head, which will show the charging status. They both come with Apple-certified coiled 30-pin connector USB cables so you can charge up your iOS device (you can even use any other USB cable for a device to charge pretty much anything). The only difference between the two is that the Highway only charges one iPhone or iPad, and the Highway Pro has two USB slots for two devices (ideally an iPhone and an iPad).

So what makes the Highway/Pro so special? Not only does it look great in your car (it's looking way better than other plain car chargers), but it also provides a high-powered 2.1A output, with a built-in fuse to protect your devices from power surges.

From my testing, I would be able to charge up my iPhone about 10 to 15 percent for about 20 minutes of driving. If you do a lot of commuting, then this car charger should be able to power up your iPhone to full capacity by the time you get back home. The charging is rapid and much better than the previous charger I used (a basic one from Griffin).

So, if you have been looking for a great car charger for juicing up your iDevices (or anything else, really), then look no further than the Highway and Highway Pro from Just Mobile. These are simply some of the best car chargers out there for the money. Say goodbye to low batteries with no way to recharge them.

Kensington AssistOne

bluetooth speakerphone • \$99

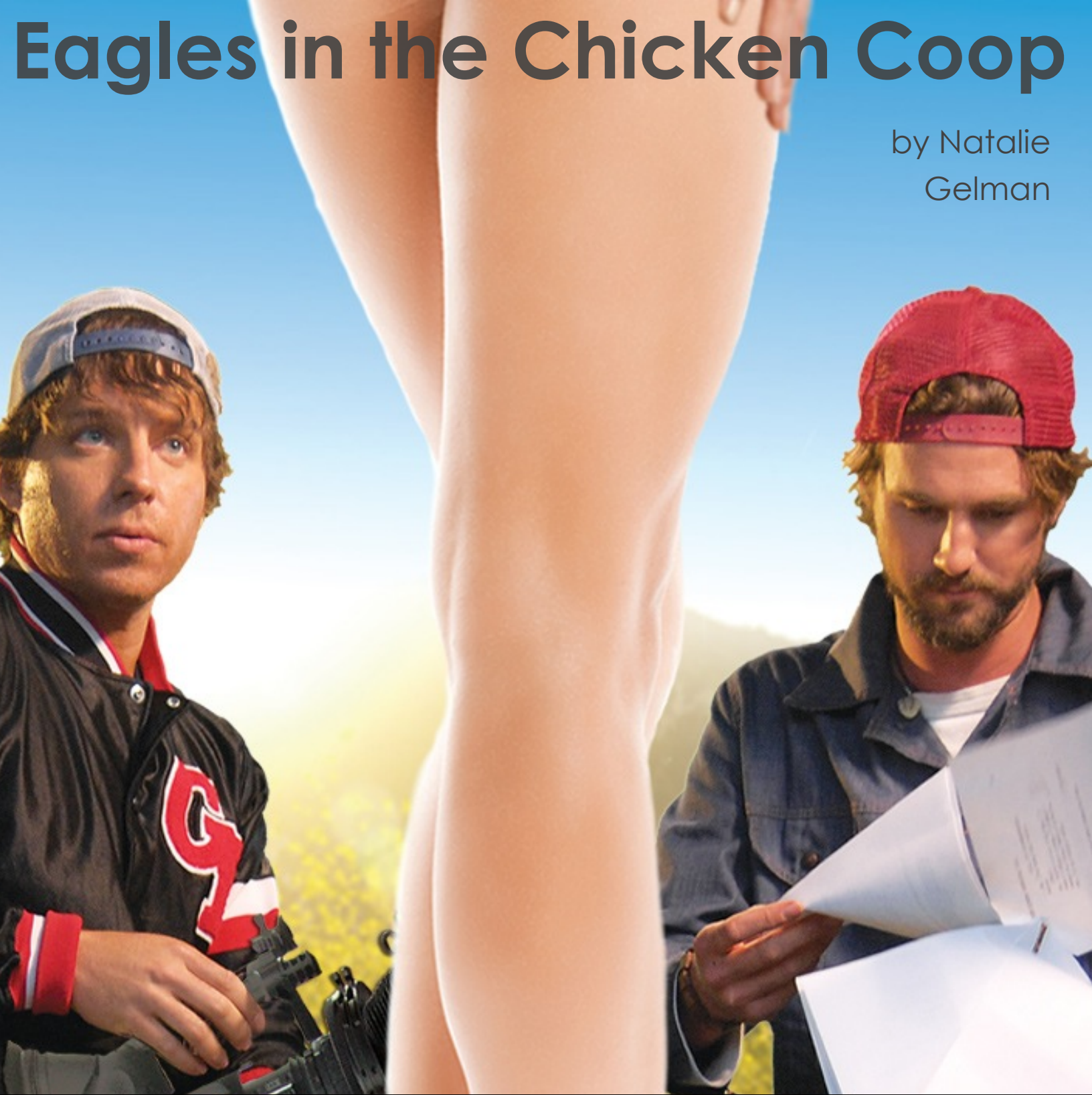


How about the idea of a bluetooth speakerphone for your car which doesn't force you to stick your iPhone elsewhere? That's the basic idea behind Kensington's AssistOne. We've tested plenty of visor-mount bluetooth speakerphones designed to allow you to leave your iPhone in your pocket which get the job done well (in fact one such product won in this category last year), but such products are designed around the notion that you'd *never* want your phone visible or accessible while in your car – which makes plenty of sense for a generic flip-phone but doesn't quite jive in the iPhone era, particularly when it comes to also having your iPhone hooked up to your car's stereo for music playback purposes.

The AssistOne allows you to mount your iPhone within your car or leave it in your pocket, and it also allows you to rely on the AssistOne's built in speaker (which in our tests sounds good for its size) or connect the entire thing to your car's stereo system. It's a jack of all trades product which may finally solve all the tasks you're likely to perform with your iPhone in your car – at least all the cellphone-related tasks that aren't hazardous to your ability to drive.

Eagles in the Chicken Coop

by Natalie
Gelman



It was an ordinary cold day at the Sundance Film Festival when I met filmmaker Brent Florence. Typical of many young independent filmmakers, Florence wrote, directed, edited and acted in his latest feature film, *Eagles in the Chicken Coop*. He gave me an early edit of the film while I was street performing on Main Street in Park City and a few weeks later I put it in my laptop to watch while eating dinner.

Knowing nothing about Florence or the film, I started hesitantly watching and decided that if I wasn't into the story by the time I was finished with dinner I could always turn it off and do something else with my night. That's not what happened at all...

Eagles caught me from the start, or should I say, caught me off guard from the start... The story follows two idealistic artists chasing their dreams in Hollywood and their hilarious journey while making a late-nite mature film. Their big break directing turns out to be anything but as they struggle to shoot required sex scenes and make art with a jaded cast of "skin-flick" regulars.

I found myself laughing, embarrassed for them and even sympathizing for Bill and Armondo too. I think any artist who has struggled and felt the pull of art vs. business can relate to this film. It should be a must see for film students and hopefuls moving to LA or NY to be filmmakers.

The story in the film stemmed from real-life experiences Florence (and his friends) had as relatively unknown writers and directors in Hollywood. After releasing his first feature length Independent film, *A Girl, Three Guys and A Gun*, Florence got his first taste of the brass tax reality behind the business of selling movies. "It can be pretty ugly. I found out the hard way the levels people and companies will go to to stay above water. The excitement and promises we were given went out the window quick after we signed off on our film."

He spent a year disheartened by the experience before becoming inspired to make *Eagles in the Chicken Coop*.

Florence and his friend and fellow actor Kenny Luper decided put their pens to the paper to tell a high concept story about artists who land in the most

formulaic and "least artistically" driven movie genre in Hollywood; the Mature genre.

After finishing the script Florence assembled a team of talented friends including Bryan Bihari and James Bass as producers to make the most of what budget they had raised to produce *Eagles*. They knew to accomplish the film without major infrastructure they would have to stay on their toes and be ready to adapt to the elements constantly.

On set, they dealt with leaking school buses during storms, fires, accidents and injuries. I discovered that one of my favorite scenes in the film came as a result of an accident: While prepping to shoot a scene, they realized they didn't have a mustache they needed for an actor. Without time to drive hours to get one they decided to cut real human hair and make a mustache themselves. The situation was so honest and funny they added it to the story and shot the entire experience.

"We were very lucky with the cast who came on board, not only were they talented- but they let us glue freshly cut hair onto their lip as a make-shift mustache before a love scene!" Florence added laughing.

Eagles in the Chicken Coop was performed by an impressive and eclectic ensemble. It was lead by a trio of young actors in Florence, Kenny Luper and Chloe Snyder. However, it also stars Oscar nominated Kathleen Quinlan (*Apollo 13*, *Made of Honor*),

Dwight Ewell (Chasing Amy, Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back), Bruce Abbott (Humble Pie, Re-Animator), Vincent Young (Beverly Hills 90210) and Alex Holdridge and Sara Simmonds who won the Independent Spirit Award for their film In Search of a Midnight Kiss.

Since it began the festival circuit, Eagles in the Chicken Coop itself has picked up awards at nearly every festival it has entered. Premiering in Hollywood at the famous Egyptian theater, Eagles took home the Best Director award and has gone on to win awards on two continents with multiple Best Picture Awards, Best Directing, Best Screenwriting and Best Editing awards.

"It's amazing now how much you can do on a reasonable budget. A small talented team can turn a passion project into a real film. The technology is there now from production and post production through exhibition to get it done and out there!"

Eagles was all edited on one Apple computer which attracted representatives from Apple's iTunes Movies who after seeing the film early in it's festival run approached Florence with the opportunity to release it on iTunes Movies home page.

"Our film was made just outside the system but after Apple released it, it went straight to a mainstream audience! It's a dream come true to have audience members, real people, across the country watching your film and even reviewing it, if they wanted! Oh, and of course liking it.—We were in iTunes Top Charts for "all" Comedies.

Beside the biggest studio comedies of the year!"

Florence explained that as a young filmmaker, if you're serious, you can make films that are on a mainstream level, even in the ballpark of the studio films... "while you're waiting to get noticed by the studios.

"Everyone has the ability to do this with independent film now."

Eagles has been building its audience slowly between film festivals and over the Internet. You can watch it on iTunes or come to its New York premier on Friday May 11th at the New York United Film Festival where it will open the festival with Florence and some of the cast in attendance.

Although all indie films hope to be the breakout film of the year Florence and Treasureview Pictures (the company formed to make Eagles) are happy to know there is a place now through all the digital platforms where non-studio films can have a home. Treasureview Pictures has chosen to maintain the rights to Eagles and release the film strategically through the various Internet and television platforms.

They are currently developing multiple feature film projects and a television series spin-off from Eagles.

I don't know of another independent film that has done so well that hasn't been sold to a major distributor and as an artist myself who has taken this route of self-release with my music I'm excited to see filmmakers doing this now too.

iFrogz Luxe Original

iPhone 4 case • \$29



I've been a fan of sliding snap-on cases for a while. It's because they're easy to put on, take off, and offer the right amount of protection for your device. And with the iFrogz Luxe Original for iPhone 4, I'm not disappointed. This case is a two piece snap-on with a luxurious, silky smooth matte finish. Each piece of the case is a separate color - the sample I received was a royal blue [top] and black [bottom], so it adds a unique look to your iPhone. The inside of both pieces has a felt lining so that the back of your iPhone doesn't get scratched. Inside the case is a groove along the sides so that you can slide in the phone without any harm to come to the sides, especially where the volume buttons are.

It's super easy to get the case on - just slide the phone in the top half and then close it off with the bottom. It will snap together with the trademark 'button' design of the Luxe line. If you need to take it off for any reason, just pull the two pieces apart. No harm done, but don't overdo it.

The ringer toggle and volume buttons get a nice big space for easy access, like the Luxe Lean. The bottom charging port is also open, so it will work with your older iPhone and iPod cables. The headphone port is easily accessible as well. Only problem I had was that the power button seems to be a bit too deep with the case on - it ended up being a little harder to push it down. But it's nothing major. The camera and flash get a nice little cutout that is nonintrusive on photos. Due to the matte finish of the case, it's far from being a fingerprint magnet. However, it will start showing fingerprints or smudges if your hands have natural oil on them. But it's very easy to clean with a cleaning cloth or by simply rubbing it on your clothes.

Also worth noting - due to the 'button' enclosure on the back, the snap is pretty tight. I'm not guaranteeing anything, but I believe that this case should be able to withstand most drops. Overall, I am going to say that this is my favorite two piece snap-on case for my iPhone 4 so far. It feels great, looks amazing, and allows easy access to everything. What more do you really need? Looking for a snap-on case? Then definitely get the iFrogz Luxe Original, or at least check it out.

Speck PixelSkin HD

iPhone 4 case • \$29



Speck's PixelSkin HD case for iPhone 4 is similar to the original PixelSkin case that I've previously reviewed, however, the blocks on the back of the case are smaller. It's advertised as "18 dpi" as compared to the 4 dpi of the original PixelSkin. And if you had to choose between the two, the HD is the way to go. Here's why.

Unlike the original PixelSkin, it's not as 'rubbery,' so I haven't noticed much of the stickiness that causes dust and dirt to get stuck on the case. The entire one-piece case has a matte finish on the rubber, combined with the shinier plastic that is in between the tiny block pattern on the back. These smaller blocks combined with the matte finish give the case an overall better grip and feel than the original version.

There is dust that seems to collect occasionally around the edges of the screen. However, the case is so easy to take off and put back on that this really isn't a problem. There are side and top button guards that add extra protection. The opening for the ring switch is also spacious enough for those with larger fingers to be able to reach in and toggle the switch easily without hassle. The bottom also leaves enough space for the device to be compatible with older iPhone/iPod cables.



Ah, there is nothing finer in life than having excellent quality leather, is there? And if you have an iPhone 4, then you can expect only the finest leather to protect your iPhone in. That's where Vaja brand leather cases come in. The sample I received is the plain Black Series for iPhone 4. It's a snug case in which you slide your device in and then cover the screen with the flap that stems from the bottom.

The Black Series is made of rich cowhide leather, with a customizable inner lining in the color of your choice. These cases are handcrafted from the moment you place your order, and takes approximately 45 days, but I can assure you the quality is well worth the wait.

When you close the flap, you do so by snapping the top clasp on the top of the phone. This encloses the phone in the leather, it looks sleek and fashionable. The case also has openings for the side buttons as well as the headphone port and power button. The camera and flash are exposed as well so there's no need to remove the case to take photos or video. The only drawback is that if the phone is dropped and lands on the corner of the camera, it's not guaranteed to be protected. But the rest of the phone has no problems, so hope you don't drop the device on the camera!

The minor annoyance is when you need the device plugged in - you will have to have the flap open since it covers the dock connector when it's closed. But not a huge problem by any means. Overall, the Black Series case from Vaja is very protective (sans camera corner) that should protect your device through the rough and tumbles of everyday wear. It also looks slick and stylish as well. It's hard to make a great leather case for a device, but Vaja has great history and track record in that area.

OtterBox Defender

iPhone 4 case • \$49



Are you the clumsy type? Or just paranoid with your new iPhone 4? Then there's a case to suit your iPhone up in pretty much what would be indestructible armor. Meet the OtterBox Defender case for the iPhone 4.

This is quite possibly the most rugged case you'll ever come across. If you just want protection, then it's got you covered, although the design is less than attractive. But that's not the point here, the point is protection.

The Defender case is a two-piece snap on polycarbonate shell with a silicone cover to add shock absorption. When you first get the case, it must be taken apart in order for you to be able to install it on your device. The process is 1) pull the silicone cover from the bottom-up, 2) pull apart the snaps at the sides and top of the polycarbonate shell, and 3) take the two halves apart. You should now be left with a silicone skin, and two halves of a plastic shell.

The front piece of the Defender for iPhone 4 actually has a built-in screen protector, which is pretty awesome. The back half has a see-thru window for the Apple logo, so

that you can still show off that what you're using is pretty much an armored iPhone.

When you install the case, you need to insert the phone into the front half, then get the back piece on and snap the three enclosures together to make sure it's in place. Then the silicone skin goes back on it.

The process to get the case on and off is a bit tedious, but the protection that the case offers is simply amazing. Once I got the case on, I felt as if I could literally just throw my phone around on concrete and nothing would happen to it since it's sealed in super-protective armor. The entire phone is buried in two layers of silicon and polycarbonate casing.

As far as buttons and ports go, these are all covered and protected as well. The case is pretty much a box around your device. The volume and power buttons are covered by the case, and the ringer switch, headphone jack, and charge sync terminal are all covered with a silicon port cover to ensure maximum protection. It may be a little annoying having to open the cover up each time to use the button or port if you use them



frequently, but it's a minimal trade for all the protection it offers.

My only little problem with the case is that the silicon is a bit sticky - meaning

that it will attract bits of dust and lint and what-have-you. But in the end, the case makes your iPhone a tank in exchange for looks. Seriously, get this case on and just throw it around a little. Nothing will happen to your phone.

So if you're willing to sacrifice looks for the ultimate in protection and never have to worry about breaking the glass or getting scratches ever again, then the OtterBox Defender case is for you.



It's all about going green, so why shouldn't your case for your iPhone 4 do the same?

Amazingly, there's a case for that. Meet the Eco Brand b&a Natural WoodCase for your iPhone 4.

The entire case is made of natural wood in a choice of natural colors and finishes. It also carries a natural wooden scent, so it's a bonus to those that enjoy the great outdoors. Another great thing about this case is that the entire thing is biodegradable - no harming the environment if you ever decide that it's no longer the right case for you.

Getting the case on is pretty simple - just slide your iPhone in from the top until the wood is fitting snugly on your device. You may be worried about how to get it out though, but that's pretty easy too. The top left side of the case is left with an opening that allows you to pull the phone out after you push it up to the top

by placing your thumb on the screen and push up. The overall process was pretty smooth.

The wood gives the phone a nice, natural feel and offers it some grip in your hand, but not really when placed on surfaces. Since the area for the ringer toggle and volume buttons is exposed, there's no worry about being able to access the buttons. The top is also open since the device goes out that way, but this leaves your headphone port and power buttons exposed to the elements. The bottom leaves plenty of room for your older USB cables and the device speakers/microphone.

The cutout for the camera seemed a bit small, but it looks well once the device is in. I found no obstruction in



photographs when it was on. There is also a cutout for the ambient light sensor on the front as well, since the case is just one big shell, and thus covers the glass above the screen.

If you're looking for a unique look to give your phone, then this is one of the better options out there. The wood gives it a sophisticated and polished look, and you will stand out amongst the crowd with it. Plus, it's environmentally friendly - what's not to

like about protecting your phone and not harming the earth at the same time?

It just may feel weird at first, since you are sticking your modernized, glass phone **in some wood**. It also added a bit of bulk, but not enough that it became hard to get in and out of pockets.



iSkin solo FX

case for iPhone 4 • \$34



Ever since I graced my iPhone 3GS with an iSkin Solo FX case, iSkin became one of my favorite companies for cases for my iDevices. Since they released the Solo and revo 4 a bit late for the iPhone 4, I have tried and tested them, and they proved to be excellent. But they've recently released the Solo FX for the iPhone 4, and it doesn't disappoint.

The Solo FX is different from the version for last year's 3GS model. Instead of being the traditional shell that wraps around the back and edges of the phone, the Solo FX for iPhone 4 is a flexible shell that you slide your phone in from the top. This is because this version has all of the front protected, leaving only the screen exposed with the top microphone and camera. The home button is also covered up with a layer of the flexible Microban TPU material...

So getting the iPhone into the Solo FX is easy, though I am not too fond of the opening flaps at the top, but that's not a big problem. The TPU material is thick enough that it provides protection at the top as well. Once the case is on, it gives your iPhone a nice grip, and the circular texture pattern on the back makes it feel amazing to hold.

My favorite thing about the Solo FX is that it's a frosty matte, so unlike the original Solo, it won't get gunked up with skin oils over time. So the grip is always there and never gets slippery.

Like I mentioned earlier, the top of the phone is left exposed, but protected by the thick flaps. So the headphone port and power button are easily accessible. The volume buttons are covered by a bauble-like layer of the TPU material, while the ringer toggle is given a space to be accessed from. The bottom has holes for the microphone and speaker, while having a tight fitting opening for the charging port.

There may be some slight problems with older cables since the opening is a tight fit with the new iPhone cable. I had to wiggle my car charger a bit to make it fit and stay when it would get slightly disconnected. So just a word of caution.

I did find that it can get a bit hard to press the home button down since it is covered with a layer of case. This just takes some getting used to and is not a major problem.



I found the overall experience with the Solo FX to be an enjoyable one. The case is not too thick but it is thick enough to provide great protection for your device. It also looks stylish with the circle patterned back and matte, frosty appearance. It provides complete coverage on the front of the screen so you no longer have anything to worry about. And you'll always have a grip on your iPhone 4.

If you're looking for a slim and stylish case that will give you great protection, look no further than the iSkin Solo FX.

Learn more at iSkin.com

Element Vapor Pro Chroma

Case for iPhone 4S and iPhone 4 • \$149



When it comes to most cases for your iPhone, they are usually made of plastic or silicon, and can give your phone a somewhat “cheap” look. So what can you do if you want a bit of style to your shiny new iPhone? Look no further than the Vapor Pro Chroma series case for the iPhone 4 and 4S from Element Case.

The Vapor Pro Chroma is one of the signature cases from the company. It is made from solid aluminum, so from the moment you pick it up, you can tell that it is quality material and quite sturdy. The case itself is an aluminum bumper that is held in place by four screws. On the bottom left corner, there is a plastic see-thru portion that sticks out a bit from the rest of the case (this is also on the top right corner, where the power button is). These small bulges provide a nice grip on the device once it’s installed.

Now you’re probably wondering, how do I get the case on? The case comes in a carrying case and also includes a tool that will take out and install the screws.

The first step once you get the Vapor Pro Chroma is to remove the screws (two on the bottom left and top right). There is a suede backplate that is included, which is optional to install (the adhesive does not leave residue and can be easily removed and preserved for later use). If you choose to use the backplate, I would advise to install it before putting the aluminum pieces on (and make sure that you align it properly) — at least, this was how I chose to do it.

When you are installing the two pieces of aluminum, you will have to make sure that the phone is lined up properly with the pieces, and then screw them in together. Once the two pieces are tightly in place, your device will look much sleeker (and

id America Dry Ice

Case for iPhone 4S and iPhone 4 • \$19



So you have a new iPhone 4S, and you want to show it off, but keep it protected at the same time. What do you do? Pick up a frosty clear case from id America. The Dry Ice is a hardshell case for your iPhone. It is separated into two pieces: the front and back. To install it on your iPhone, just put your device in the back piece first, and then snap on the front piece.

Once this case is on, your device will be protected by a soft touch, frosty shell. The plastic has a matte finish, so fingerprints won't show too much. Because of the matte finish, the case gives the phone a nice and smooth grip. With the snap enclosures, the Dry Ice case will be pretty hard to remove, so you can be sure that the case won't come off accidentally in case you drop it.

In addition to giving your device a nice look and grip, there is plenty of space in each of the cutout areas for full access to the device. The volume buttons and mute switch are given plenty of space, so the case is actually compatible for both the iPhone 4 and 4S (there is a difference between the two models and the placement of the mute switch).

The headphone port and power button are also left uncovered, so that you may feel the actual button rather than some plastic or rubber coating. The dock connector is left open as well, so there is no need to worry about your older cables not fitting properly. On the back, there is plenty of space for the camera and LED flash without obstructing any of your magnificent photos.

This is one of my favorite cases that I have used so far. It not only provides ample protection from everyday wear-and-tear, but it is subtle (your phone still shows through the frosty plastic), and the grip is comfortable. If you are looking for a simple case to show off your phone and get some protection, then look no further than Dry Ice from id America.



When it comes to iPhone cases, I prefer them to be simple, yet effective. I also tend to lean towards the soft shell cases too, just because they are usually easier to apply and remove (when you need to clean the device). Thankfully, these are qualities I found with the Gelato case from iLuv. The Gelato case is an opaque matte plastic one-piece shell that you simply push your iPhone 4 or 4S into. Once the shell is on, the front screen is protected by the plastic lip on the edges.

Unlike some of the other cases I've reviewed, there isn't as much space for the buttons. The volume buttons are covered by the soft plastic material (with the accommodating + and – symbols), as well as the power button. Despite the buttons being covered in the plastic, they still felt very comfortable to push, and didn't require any extra effort. It just felt natural, as if there was no case at all.

The volume switcher area gets a pretty spacious cutout, and from the looks of it, the opening should accommodate both the original AT&T iPhone 4, Verizon iPhone 4, and the iPhone 4S. Also left open is the headphone jack as well as the dock connector, with enough space for older cables to work.

On the back, the oval-shaped cutout is big enough for the camera lens and flash so that your images aren't blocked. I found the material of the Gelato case to be the best thing about it. The matte finish doesn't really get fingerprints or oil on it, and it's smooth, so it will slide easily into your pocket. While it's smooth, it also adds a great texture to the device, so that it is easier to hold and use.

Of course, branding is important, so iLuv has a small logo on the back side in the bottom right corner. There is also a "Designed by iLuv in New York" on the left edge of the case. However, these are pretty minor, and definitely shouldn't affect the appearance of the case. It's also fairly subtle branding, not obnoxious, so it's fine.

This has definitely become one of my favorite cases so far for my iPhone 4S. They make this soft shell case in a variety of colors, so it is easy to find one that will match your style.

iFrogz Mix

case for iPhone 4S and iPhone 4 • \$29



When it comes to iPhone cases, I love the ones that are easy to put on and take off, all while protecting your phone, and even providing some style to make your phone stand out. Fortunately, that is what you'll get with the iFrogz Mix for iPhone 4 and iPhone 4S.

The Mix is a single shell case made from a sturdy TPU material. It easily goes on your iPhone and can be taken off quickly for cleaning. There are five designs, so you'll be hard-pressed to find the same look anytime soon.

While some of the designs feature an opaque back, some will have a see-thru back that shows off the Apple logo. This is great for those that like to show off their latest Apple gear.

Once the case is on, you'll get a nice firm grip on your new phone. The edges are made of a rubberized material and are raised around the edge of the front glass. Like all cases that feature a lip on the front screen, it's great to prevent the front glass from touching surfaces. The one on the Mix is also thick, so I can guarantee that nothing will harm your phone when you set it down.

There's plenty of space available for your volume and power buttons, mute toggle, 30-pin connector, and camera/flash. There is a wide space at the bottom so the case should be compatible with most older cables and accessories, which is a good thing.

Overall, I liked the Mix. It offers enough protection for everyday wear-and-tear and looks great (with plenty of choices of designs). If you want something that's easy to maintain, check this one out.

Speck FabShell

case for iPhone 4S and iPhone 4 • \$34



While we all love our iPhone, it can be a bit boring to have the same look as everyone else. That's why you have to dress up your phone in style, and the FabShell from Speck is a great way to do that.

The FabShell is a single piece shell case that is made from a hard rubber material with fabric on the back and side edges. Unlike the CandyShell, though, the Speck logo is found on the right-hand edge, adjacent to the camera. Installing the shell is easy, and very similar to the CandyShell line, also from Speck. Simply put the iPhone in bottom-first, and then push it in to the case — when it snaps into place, your iPhone is ready to go.

The fabric material provides grip for your device, so you will be less likely to let it slip out of your hands. With the FabShell on, it's pretty easy to slide the phone in and out of a pocket, and there will be no lint or dust being caught on the rubber material.

There are cutouts for the mute switch, 30-pin dock connector, headphone port, and power button. The back features a wide enough cutout for both the camera and flash without any possibility of obstructions. The volume buttons are covered in the rubber material, but I did not find them much harder to press down when I needed them.

Also, a rubber lip will surround the front edge of the screen, so that you may put your phone face-down on a surface and the glass won't be touching. The shell also provides enough protection for most of your everyday wear-and-tear.

If you're looking for a simple and fashionable solution for your iPhone 4/4S, then make sure to check out the FabShell from Speck. With over 10 different styles to choose from, you're sure to find a design to fit your style.

Griffin Technology Woogie 2

for iPhone and iPod touch • \$19



Does your child love his/her iPod Touch? Make them love it even more with a Woogie case! What's a Woogie you may ask? It's a soft and huggable case for your child's iPod Touch. This squeezable and lovable toy not only protects the device, but also has a clear plastic window screen in front for full access to games and apps.

To use, simply slip the iPod Touch (or iPhone) into the front see-through pocket. On top are two strong Velcro clasps that the device securely in the front window. Touch the plastic screen to use your child's favorite apps. No assembly required.

These adorable Woogies have five feet that can be use as a stand for your child's iPod Touch. There's a clear plastic window in front that both protects and allows your child to use the multi-touch display. Imagine them watching their favorite movies, playing games, or reading their educational books on it. It's simply adorable, unique, and makes the perfect child present for this holiday season. As advertised, *it's 50% fuzzy friend, 50% protective case, and 100% fun.*

The Woogie is "surface washable," meaning it can't be washed in the washing machine, but can get slightly damp. To clean, gently apply upholstery cleaner or detergent diluted in water to fabric with a sponge. Just make sure not to saturate the Woogie so the liquid doesn't soak into the stuffing.

This fuzzy and huggable case is recommended for children 3 years and older and comes in two colors – bright pink with light pink highlights and blue with green highlights. It's available exclusively online at GriffinTechnology.com for \$19.99.

Note: The Original Woogie is also available for purchase, on sale now for \$17.99. It only comes in green, and has 6 legs (tuck in the bottom legs to be used as a stand). The original version also comes with built-in speakers (requires 2 AAA batteries which are included), hidden under one of the legs, secured with strong Velcro. It's also available exclusively online at GriffinTechnology.com.

Both Woogie versions are compatible with all current iPhone and iPod Touch devices.

BC Jean

the Beatweek
interview

by Bill Palmer



"No more waiting," she says of the newly accelerated stage of her career she's finally entered. BC Jean will be a household name eventually, but the twenty-four year old has dealt with some fits and starts in the name of getting there. She wrote one of the biggest hit songs of the past few years in If I Were A Boy, but she didn't get to be the one to sing it. And her first live performance last year with her backing band was washed away in a monsoon. But momentum has finally kicked in, and the artist who sings like a rocker and writes like a pop star is

being tapped left and right. Her single I'll Survive You scored her invites to perform it on the Tonight Show and The View. What was originally supposed to be a mere mentoring role landed her an acting gig in a TV series. Maxim has even come calling.

Relaxing in a lounge on Hollywood Boulevard after a day of filming scenes for her TV show auspiciously called Talent, BC's laid back nature suggests that there's nothing that fazes her. But the lyrics she writes tell a different story as they reveal her insecurities, her bad breakups. "I'm just honest, is the problem."

"This is super lame for me to say," she warns, "but I'll have moments where I'm like god, I miss my ex-boyfriend or whoever it may be. I miss my friend that I got in a fight with. But you feel like you have to hold that pride. It's like maybe you should just write them, and it's like no, you have to go back to that moment. So I'll go back and turn on a song that I've written in the past."

The songs she's amassed for her debut album are "love-hate with relationships, friends, boyfriends, the city." Just A Guy is a bookend to If I Were A Boy, in which she accepts the fact that men are going to act according to their nature. I'll Survive You is a vulnerable emotional ballad ("I've got those down to a T on this

record," she jokes). The song Anyone has her earnestly pleading "soulmate, find me" and exploring "the idea of monogamy, especially being in this town and this industry."

And yet for every somber moment in her musical arsenal, there's the feeling that the rocker in her is just begging to be let out. She's got a hard charging song called Break Up Sex which is about exactly what you think it's about, although she admits that she doesn't recommend it "because then you never really break up." And then there's the up-tempo song Hell.A. which has made it into her live set, even though she's not sure whether it'll make the record. Nor is she sure when her label Sony will push her album out the door.

"It's scary," she says of waiting on fame's doorstep, "because you don't know. Like I've always said, you've got to work really hard, you've got to accept the no's and know that's one step closer to the yes, you've got to be patient and keep making your craft the best it can be, and then there's that little bit of fate and fairy dust. I felt like I was ready at fourteen to be in this business. I was ready to be on the radio then, in my head. And now looking back I'm like oh my gosh, can you imagine? My career would have been ruined. I wasn't an artist then."

It's no coincidence that BC portrays a character in talent who has to deal with the ups and downs of the music industry as both a singer and a songwriter. She wasn't even supposed to be a part of the show. But after serving as a guest judge for the competition in which the star of the show was being cast, the producers rewrote the script and created the co-starring role of Harper specifically for her. In the fictional show, Harper essentially trades a song she wrote to a label in exchange for a record contract; in real life, it's always been a little vague as to just how Beyonce ended up with BC's song. But there

are other parts of the Harper character which BC can take more direct credit for. Has she ever thrown a snowball at someone, as Harper does in the show's opening scene? "Probably." Ever jumped in a swimming pool with her clothes on? "Yes." Care to share that particular story? "No," she says with a laugh.

"Every day is different," she says of how she's been spending her time of late. "That's the best part for me because I'm major ADD girl." In her alone time, she paints. The results, which she's willing to show off, reveal a hidden secondary talent. And she's been doing co-writing sessions with

labelmate Adam Lambert for a song on his new album called *Outlaws Of Love*. "I really dug this collaboration because I feel Adam and I are really similar in a lot of ways. So we really got along and became a little friendly off of it."

Writing songs for a living means that little gets held back, and in fact has served as an outlet. "I used to not even cry when I was really young," she says. "I remember I was like four and I was watching *Bambi* and the mom dies in the beginning. My mom said she was crying, and I was just sitting there like this, with a stone cold face. She goes, 'aren't you sad?' I'm like no. I wouldn't show emotion. I



was tough girl. And I still am, to a certain degree. But at the end of the day I would go in the closet and cry about the boy in my life in junior high who didn't like me or whatever it was, and I'd write about it."

Her mom, by the way, is also her manager. And while that scenario has infamously not worked out well for some other artists, it's exactly how BC wants it. "I don't really know another way to do it," she says of keeping it in the family, "because I can say whatever I want to her and she still has to love me at the end of the day. There's going to be times when the mother in her comes involved and I'm like 'Alright, you're either mom and you've got to leave the room and come back in as a manager or we've got to just not talk for the rest of the day.' We definitely have our little moments but it's healthy."

In describing herself, she admits that "I'm stubborn in every part of me. Everyone who knows me knows that. I'm also loyal and honest and reasonable, but I'm stubborn. I'll know when to back down, but even when I know it I still don't want to." So did she have to be talked into the doing the Maxim shoot? "No, not at all," she says. "Dream come true. Being there, yes, it was tough, I'll admit that. As much as I like to get dressed up and sexy, there's definitely a part of you that's like, you



never now how the pictures are going to turn out, so you don't want the wrong look. It's Maxim. It's sexy. I'm like okay, feeling a bit naked here, but let's try it out."

There's still plenty to be figured out. There's the ongoing question of whether the natural lefty will eventually evolve into left or right handed guitarist. And there's the seeming tug of war as to whether the final cut of her album will lean more toward her rock tendencies or her pop affinities. But one way or another the wheels are finally in motion to position BC Jean as the next big thing. She says she's ready for it, or for this next stage at least. The rest may simply have to be figured out along the way. Or as she puts it, "I think we're, as people, always developing."

Mophie Juice Pack Air and Plus

iPhone 4 battery cases • \$79 and \$99



It's nice when a product evolves from one generation to the next and improves in every facet in the process, and that's the case with Mophie's new Juice Pack Air 4 for iPhone 4. After starting with the Juice Pack battery cradle for the original iPhone, the product then evolved into a two-piece form fitting battery case for the iPhone 3G and 3GS known as the Juice Pack Air. The product was a revelation in that it wasn't that much thicker than a regular hard plastic case, and yet came close to doubling an iPhone's battery life.

With the iPhone 4 seeing a radical redesign, the JPA 4 has evolved accordingly. In fact the case is a stylistic extension of the iPhone 4 itself, complete with silver brushed metal sides, top, and bottom. The rear surface eschews the acrylic plastic of yore in favor of a rubbery-feeling material, which makes for a better grip and is less likely to get scratched. And there are functional improvements. The cutout for the silencer switch on the 3G model was too small, but that's fixed here. The indicator lights have moved from the back to bottom, and while I'd still prefer that they be on the front, looking at the bottom of the device is easier than flipping it completely over. The screen is recessed just a fraction, to keep it from coming flush with anything.

We can't emphasize enough how impressive looking the JPA 4 is, particularly in terms of how well it matches the iPhone 4 itself as well as how relatively little bulk it adds; in terms of thickness, this looks more like a regular case than a battery case. All that said, looks are only part of the equation when a battery product is involved. So while the \$79 Juice Pack Air 4 offers 1500 mAh of battery life, its slightly thicker cousin the Juice Pack Plus 4 offers an extra mAh for twenty dollars more.



After years of two piece hardshell battery-enabled cases coming to market for various iPhone generations, you'd think someone would have thought up the idea of a one-piece soft silicone battery case sooner. Enter the PowerSkin iPhone 4 battery case, which takes advantage of the flexible nature of silicone rubber such that the top of the case can simply be stretched back to allow the iPhone to be slid in. No assembly required each time you go to use it. No losing the separate top piece.

That particular trick, however, is not the only reason the PowerSkin is among our winners. At \$69 and offering the same 2000 mAh of juice found on the most powerful of battery cases, this a value play; elsewhere you'd pay ten to thirty dollars more for the same amount of battery life. The top button and volume buttons of the iPhone 4 are covered with play-through rubber, the four status lights are on the bottom, and the micro-USB port is on the bottom left side.

Initial fears that the PowerSkin could be a pocket-lint collector, like so many other silicone cases, turned out to be unfounded. Like any other soft rubber case, the PowerSkin isn't going to be quite as effective as a true hardshell case when it comes to drop protection. But overall, this one's a winner, especially at this price.

i.Sound Portable Power Max

external USB battery • \$129



With an astounding 16000 mAh of battery power, i.Sound isn't bragging when it refers to its new external USB battery brick as Power Max; rather it's merely stating a fact. The typical form-fitting iPhone battery case might offer a tenth that much power, and even other battery bricks I've tested only tend to deliver about a third as much. But with five USB ports for charging up to that many devices at once, and a design which measures about six inches by three inches by one inch, the Power Max isn't messing around.

The practical question right off the bat is what you'd need this much portable power for. It's enough to charge an iPhone about seven to ten times, and an iPad two to three times. You could take it with you on a camping trip where there will be no power, or keep it around your own home for power outages (the built in micro-flashlight suggests that i.Sound has planned ahead for people who end up using it in this manner). And then there are those who want to keep their iPhone charged up on the nightstand each night even though there are no power outlets within reach. And of course it's not limited to merely iDevices, as any rechargeable USB product such as a digital camera or other brand of smartphone could also be among your five devices.

The drawbacks to using a brick like this as opposed to form-fitting battery cases are

obvious: you can only charge your devices when they're plugged into the brick, which means you've got to sit right next to the brick if you want to use the devices while they're charging. It's not like you can easily slip the Power Max (or in fairness, any sized battery brick) into your pocket so as to charge your devices while you're carrying them around unless you've got it all plugged together in a backpack.

But the Power Max offers such an overwhelming amount of juice that it's clear its intended use is for instances in which you need a ton of power for one device or a good amount of power for a lot of devices, and in that role it excels quite strongly. My only quibble is that unlike some competing

battery bricks which themselves can be charged via USB by being plugged into a laptop for instance, the Power Max can only be recharged via the included wall plug. However, unlike many bricks which come with no device cables of their own, the Power Max does come with a combo-cable which works with either mini-USB, micro-USB, or both. That's on top, of course, of being able to use the cables which came with your devices. It's got to be the right kind of user in the right kind of situation in order to get \$129 worth of use out of this product. But for the right users, this product is worth every penny – particularly when considering that battery cases typically cost \$80 to \$100 and deliver about a tenth of the juice.

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Just Mobile Gum Pro and Gum Plus

external USB battery • \$59-69



iPhone battery cases are all the rage. But while external battery bricks are less portable and often viewed as a poor man's option, they do tend to offer better bang for your buck. Case in point: the Gum Pro and Gum Plus from Just Mobile, a company best known for its Xtand products. Despite their \$59 and \$69 price tags weighing in at less than all but the cheapest of iPhone battery cases, these two bricks each offer about three times as much battery power as the typical battery case. This despite each being about the size of a floss dispenser.

Not that carrying your iPhone or iPod around in your hand or pocket with an external brick attached to it via short-stem USB cable is in any way practical. Rather, these products are intended to be used for charging your device back up once it's stationary. That can be on a nightstand or desk, in a travel bag, or wherever else the need strikes. The batteries themselves recharge via USB.

Functionally, the Gum Pro and Gum Plus are the same product. The Plus costs ten dollars extra because it comes with a pretty silver brushed metal exterior which matches up nicely with some of Apple's products such as the iMac and MacBook, while the Pro is housed in standard black plastic. And while I still recommend that iPhone users start by looking at form-fitting iPhone battery cases, these two products from Just Mobile are strong options for those who have a tight budget, a great need for a large amount of battery power, or both.

Our Lady Peace

The Beatweek
interview

by Bill Palmer



Twenty years into it, and Our Lady Peace are coming out swinging. “We always liked the image of a fighter,” says Duncan Coutts of the band’s eighth record *Curve*, whose cover is graced with the image of a boxer in mid-punch and whose lead single is titled *Heavyweight*. The Canadian quartet’s unconventional brand of rock has always evolved from one album to the next, as evidenced by the sonic differences among its biggest radio hits over the years like *Superman’s Dead*, *Starseed*, and *Somewhere Out There*. But as the title implies, this time out might represent the biggest curveball yet....

"This is our most left of center record that we've ever made," he says, and explains how it was almost entirely a different record. Five or six songs had reached the preproduction stage before a friend of the band, Jason Lader, asked them why they were making tunes that they themselves didn't even want to listen back to. "I think it was a question that we had been, maybe just out of comfort, hadn't been willing to ask of ourselves. When we really started to think of what it was that we wanted to do, we realized that we needed to challenge ourselves a lot more in terms of rhythms, in terms of writing and playing and all of these different things. With the exception of the weirdest idea we had from the first batch, we discarded everything and started over." Lader then became producer.

From there things began moving more swiftly, or at least swiftly as they can when the band members now live in two different countries. "Two of us live in LA and two of us live in Toronto, so it's

never a fast process in terms of organizational meetings," Duncan admits of the fact that while he and drummer Jeremy Taggart still live near where the band first got started, singer Raine Maida and guitarist Steve Mazur are in a warmer locale. "What's fast is that we didn't spend a lot of weeks doing it. When we were together we spent a week here, two weeks there. We did a lot of writing on our own. Songs would come from someone's demo, or guitar riff, or what have you. The earliest song in that process ended up being a song called Fox In the Henhouse. It actually existed as a different song that was called The Wolf, and we were playing it live last year. We really liked it, but I think we always realized that we were trying it into something that it wasn't. It was this really cool riff and hypnotic drum groove that then went to a big chorus, which is what we had been trying to do the last five or six years, and we weren't letting the song be what we wanted it to be. So we reinterpreted the song at the eleventh hour."



As is a sign of the times, Our Lady Peace have been an indie band for their past two records, now only using the major record label system for distribution. That leaves them free to toy with old school concepts like singles in new ways. A few days before Christmas, the band simply posted Heavyweight to iTunes without any promotion. "Radio stations in Canada purchased the single off iTunes and started playing it" of their

own volition, he reveals. "We knew we were gonna go for adds about four weeks later, but we figured you know what, let's just let our fans have a new song quickly. It was such a liberating experience."

The boxer who appears on the cover of *Curve* wasn't chosen at random. Canadian fighter George Chuvalo, who had competitive losing matches against Ali, Frazier, and Foreman, and has outlived three of his own children, has been through it all. "There was an image that Raine had found on the internet of a fighter, and then we got to talking about a Canadian fighter, and then George's name came out. We reached out through social media, and his wife Joanne facilitated a meeting. Jeremy and I went up and met him. He was such a fantastic guy. He's seventy-four years old and sharp as a tack, and never been knocked out in close to eighty professional fights. Muhammed Ali said he was the hardest fighter that he's ever fought. So we ended up spending four and a half, five hours at George's house and he actually gave us three pictures from his own personal photo album to choose from. He just seemed like a natural fit. Not only has he had a lot of challenges in the ring over the years, but he's had a lot of challenges outside the ring."

Chuvalo even makes an appearance on the record itself. "His stories were so fantastic that we told Raine about it, and when Raine came back to Toronto the next time the three of us went up and asked George if it would be okay if



we recorded him just talking about some of his life experiences. That ended up becoming a narrative on the final song on the record called *Mettle*. To see the outlook that he has on life and the positivity that he puts into the way he lives his life is inspiring. It really goes with our original analogy of a fighter getting knocked down and getting back up, and it's not just inside the ring, it's outside the ring. It applies to everybody."

While *Curve* represents the band's biggest departure, it at least partially owes its roots to another departure made more than a decade ago. For their 2010 tour, *Our Lady Peace* took the novel approach of performing the 1996 album *Clumsy* and the 2000 concept album *Spiritual Machines* in their entirety to open the shows. "We've never allowed ourselves to look back on our career," Duncan explains. "We're always just trying to make the record that we've never made before. We feel like we have a long way to go

as writers and players and musicians and human beings. That was the first time that we'd been forced to look back because we had to relearn all these old songs in their entirety, and we had to experience the records with their whole through-lines. I would say that when we went back to Spiritual Machines, we probably got a little bit inspired by the sonic landscape of that record. At that point that was, to me, our most daring record, sonically speaking. So I think we used that, whether it was conscious or

subconscious, as a jumping off point for this record sonically. I think Curve has taken that and gone even further off the path, while still managing to have a couple songs that you can tap your foot to."

Although the band is finishing up a brief tour stretch right now, plans are underway for a full North American tour starting in late summer or early fall. In the mean time, the current handful of shows may serve as a hint at what's to come. "We're treating this initial tour like a promo tour. We're in small clubs yet we're bringing essentially an arena lighting show in it. From a business standpoint it doesn't make a lot of sense, but selfishly it's a hell of a lot of



fun. Through social media, through Twitter and Facebook, we reached out to our fans and got their input on what songs they wanted to hear."

In the mean time, Our Lady Peace fans can sink their teeth into the left hooks and subtle moments of Curve. "It's a record of more. And by that I mean we let the songs be more quiet when they wanted to be, and we let more outside and interesting chord progressions happen than they have in the past, and let it be more loud and brash when it called for. I think that Raine has gotten back to writing lyrics more cryptically than he has in the last five or six years. To me that's what this record is about."

Bowers & Wilkins P5

headphones • \$299



The rise of in-ear earbuds has full-size headphones feeling like something of a lost art when it comes to mobile devices. But the right headphones can bring your iPhone or iPod audio experience to a level that no earbuds, no matter how well designed, can pull off. This year a number of premium headphones came to market which fit that description. After spending time with the various candidates, the the P5 Mobile Hi-Fi Headphones from Bowers & Wilkins is our winner.

Three factors came into play here, each with significantly different levels of impact on our decision. The overriding factor, of course, is audio quality: the word that comes to mind is “unbelievable.” The three dimensional sound space created around your head gives your music such new life that in some cases it’s like listening to your favorite songs again for the first time.

The second factor is the combined svelteness and comfort level of the P5. It looks too small to sound this amazing, which is a good thing, and the flat pads are surprisingly more comfortable than cup-style headphones. Finally, in the “et cetera” category, the P5 comes with the three-button setup you’d more typically find on high earbuds, for volume and playback control.

ADDITIONAL FINALISTS: V-modi Crossfade

V-MODA Crossfade M-80

headphones • \$229



Having found success with earbuds, it was a matter of time before DJ Val Kolton's V-MODA expanded into the headphone realm. With the company's Crossfade M-80 comes expectations: trendsetting styling, lightweight design, and more importantly, high quality audio. Fortunately for Kolton, his M-80 scores well across the board.

Mostly consisting of shiny black metal, the M-80 consists mostly of shiny black metal with red highlights thrown in. In an unusual design choice, the headphones are designed around an elongated hexagon motif, with both the outer metal backing and the headphone pads themselves taking on a six sided (taller than wide) shape. As far as headphone cup size goes, these are on the moderately petite side, which had me wondering just what kind of audio they could produce.

Fortunately, the Crossfade M-80 produces some of the clearest audio I've ever heard in this price range, superior to physically larger headphones in the \$200 range. In the end the M-80 only gets four and a half stars because at \$229, it should at least be able to hold a candle to three hundred dollar headphones. But in this instance I'd have to recommend that if you have the extra seventy bucks you should invest it. That said, if \$229 represents the outer limits of your budget, the M-80 is your clear winner – particularly if the petite form factor and sleek metal styling is to your liking.

JayBird JF3 Freedom

bluetooth wireless earbuds • \$99



Sometimes you just don't want a wire running from your earbuds to your iPhone – and that's when bluetooth becomes your best friend. The wireless technology allows your iPhone or other bluetooth-enabled device to push your music through thin air to a pair of earbuds which, aside from being connected to each other via rope behind your head, are cord-free. JayBird has already delivered the winner among hundred dollar bluetooth wireless headphones with its SB2, so the question now becomes whether its new JF3 “Freedom” product can deliver the same experience in an earbud product.

After having spent a week with the JF3, the answer is, in a word, yes. The technical stuff is all there: six hours of active battery life as advertised, a nice hardshell carrying case, and an audio sound which *almost* rivals that of wired audio products in this price range despite the fact that bluetooth usually takes a gash out of audio quality. Of course, like other JayBird products, you have to like a good amount of bass as the bass to treble ratio of the JF3 certainly leans more toward bass and less toward treble. But it's high quality bass, which is all too rare among bass-leaning products.

So what's not to like? I'd like to see the JF3 arrive in more colors than just black (the SB2 comes in nearly a dozen color choices), but beyond that the product is a winner. Because all wireless earbud products are a bit larger and clumsier than we'd like, we have yet to find one which achieves a perfect five star rating. But the JayBird Freedom JF3 scores an impressive four and a half.

JayBird Sportsband SB2

bluetooth wireless headphones • \$99



When a company nails a product the first time around (Sportsband SB1, 4.5 stars out of 5, released early 2010) and then revamps it barely half a year later, I always get a little concerned: did they actually find something to improve, or are they just tinkering for the sake of tinkering? But in this case the rich have gotten richer, as JayBird's new Sportsband SB2 manages to up the ante in the right ways.

JayBird products all have the same litmus test: if you like a good amount of bass, then you're in luck as they have the bass cranked higher than typically found on competing products, and that bass is pristine. If you don't care for bass no matter how pristine, best to look elsewhere. That disclaimer out of the way, I had no complaints about the audio quality of the SB1, as it sounded brilliant for its \$89 price tag, a surprise given the wireless nature of the product. But improved audio (literally) sounds good to me, which is to say that the product has improved in the most important way an audio product can (thanks to something called Apt-X, which you don't really need to understand in order to hear the improvement). The SB2 has a built-in microphone for taking phone calls when paired with an iPhone, and call quality has improved over the SB1, but again, I had no issues last time around.

My one real issue with the SB1, and the reason it didn't receive five stars despite the fact that it wasn't JayBird's fault, was the fact that the next and previous track buttons built into the right headphone simply didn't do anything with the iPhone. Apple never bothered to enable the technology in the iPhone, and so any such buttons on any bluetooth stereo headphones had the same problem (volume and play/pause worked just fine). But Apple finally enabled previous/next in iOS 4.1, and so the Sportsband gets better by default.

I'm not in love with the \$10 price increase from the SB1 to the SB2, but I can overlook it because the SB2 is more than \$10 better, and because the SB1 felt underpriced to begin with. Bottom line: JayBird made the Sportsband better, and Apple made the Sportsband's features work better. The SB2 is the king of wireless headphones.

iFrogz Frequency

headphones • \$79



iFrogz products are known for their fun and flamboyantly designed products, often matching up several colors and design motifs on the same unit. It's ideal for those who want to stand out in a crowd, but maybe not so much for those who are going for the refined look. The company's Frequency, then, represents the middle ground: the small-ish circular cupped headphones offer two-tone styling with a generous dose of secondary color highlights and an artistic logo on the outside of each cup that's faint but still visible.

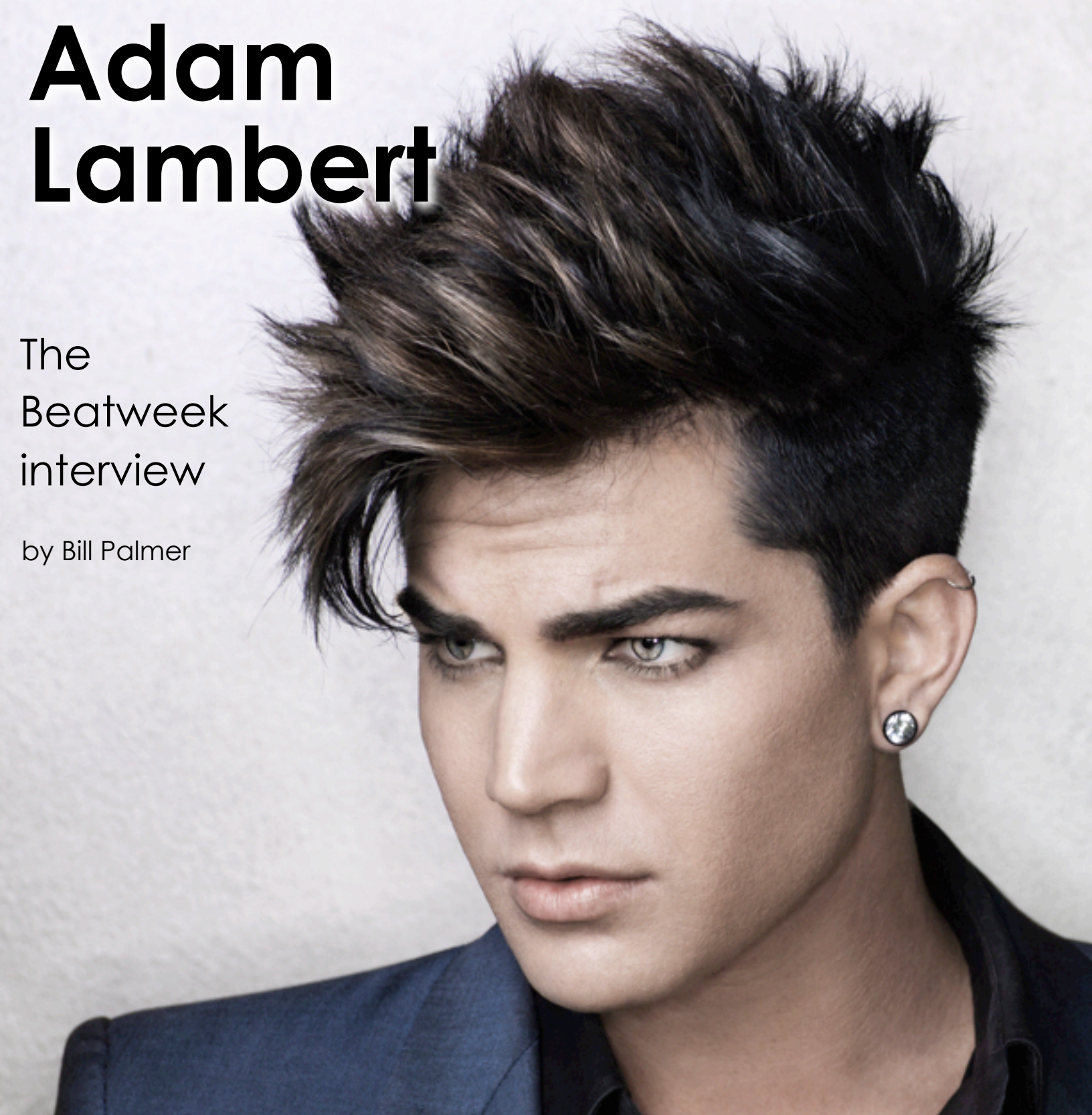
The audio for the Frequency is strong for this price point. It's superb in the bass and middle ranges, while the treble feels just a little too thin in comparison. Still, it's a potent audio mix overall in comparison to competing headphones with this size cups and in this price range. The underpadding on the headband is particularly comfortable.

One thing to potentially give pause is that unlike some similar competing products (including some of iFrogz's own less expensive headphones), this one doesn't offer a mic or button for making calls on your iPhone or controlling your iPod or iPad's audio playback. But if that's not an issue for you, the Frequency is a real winner for \$79. The black model with dark grey trim leans toward the subtle sophisticated side, while the black model with neon green highlights confidently leans toward getting noticed.

Adam Lambert

The Beatweek interview

by Bill Palmer



Adam Lambert is still a trespasser, figuratively speaking, even as his new album debuts at number one today on the charts. Nevermind that he's in his third year of fame, he has the most loyal fan base of perhaps any modern pop star, and he's the lead singer of Queen when he wants to be. The fact that his music doesn't fit into any particular genre means he's tasked with breaking new ground any time he makes music, and his new record runs the gamut. He starts out by buoyantly declaring "Wait til they get a load of me" over an electric guitar riff and a thumping drum line, and yet by the time it's all over he's

somberly exploring what's suddenly become the nation's most pressing social issue from a distinctively personal perspective. The process was a year long journey, in multiple cities, with multiple collaborators. But while *Trespassing* is frontloaded with upbeat material, it's the more vulnerable second half which came to him first.

"I have my good days and my bad days," he says of the record's two separate vibes. "When you're on the road for over a year, it takes a second to get back down to reality. It's an interesting kind of adjustment period. I found that my therapy was kind of writing through some of the darker stuff. So that's how I started the writing process, really connecting to the emotional and all that. Then I got settled back at home and I found myself really enjoying myself. I was reconnecting with old friends and my family. I was getting into relationships and I started realizing how much I wanted to write dance music and party music, and stuff that inspired liberation and a good time," he says with a laugh.

After changing some "management situations" and sitting down with his label, he made clear to all involved that he wanted to be more involved in the writing process this time around than he had been on his debut, for which he'd only co-written four songs and the biggest hit had been written by Pink and Max Martin without his input. "I

said look, I really want to be involved as much as possible. And it was like 'Great, we would love for you to be involved.' I think everybody was very excited about that because I think they know that when an artist gets in on the writing process and oversees the whole album, it makes for a better project. It makes for a more authentic project."

The album was originally scheduled to have been out sooner, but "things kept snowballing where we would stumble into another direction. I really appreciated that I got time. I think time is definitely a luxury compared to the last album, which was completed in about two months. So not only did I get to write a lot, I got to take the time to sit with the material and experiment and try a bunch of things out."

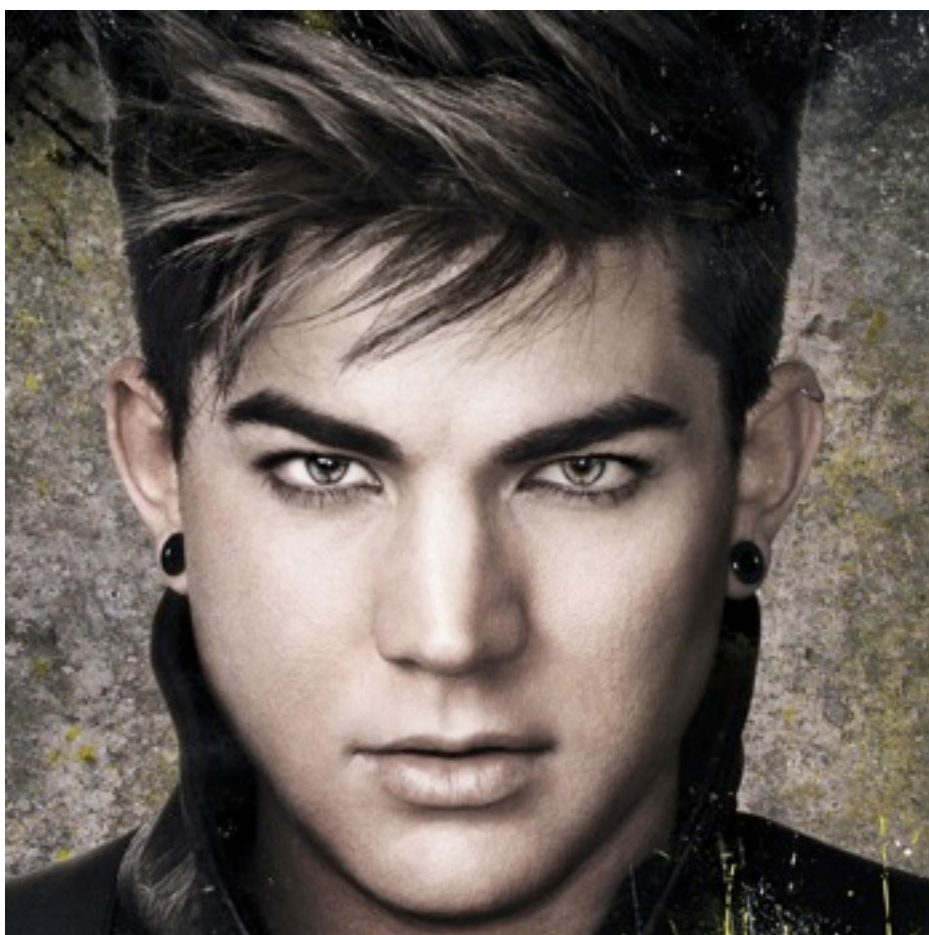
One of those experiments saw him traveling to Miami to work with Pharrell Williams on what would become two of the loosest tracks. "I'm a huge fan of his work, so I was just anxious to hear what he had in mind and where we were gonna take it. I walked in and we started talking about the music industry and what we loved about music, which artists influenced both of us as we were growing up, and the kind of statement that I wanted to make. And he was like well, check this out. He had a loop, an idea. He had the beat and he had the bass line. And I was just like, *what?* I was floored. I was like well, that's the coolest thing I've ever heard. We started

adding some stuff to it and started writing the song, and what I found so refreshing was that he didn't want to add too much. It wasn't about a bunch of bells and whistles and a bunch of ear candy. It was about the groove. That's what makes Pharrell so special."

Despite his emphasis on songwriting, he did record a song that had been served up for him by Bruno Mars. "I'm not so stubborn or in that mindset of saying it's only my stuff that I've worked on and that's it. The game is played a certain way, and when a song gets presented to you as a possibility as something to record, you've got to listen with open ears and an open mind. When I heard Never Close Our Eyes, I thought wow, that melody is beautiful. I loved the melody. It's one of Bruno's strengths. As a fan of Bruno Mars, I was also really excited to be working on a song that he wrote."

Adam Lambert is the most prominent openly homosexual pop star of his era, but not until now has he addressed the subject in his art. Outlaws Of Love, which he scribed with fellow singer BC Jean and Rune Westberg, tackles the issue of gay marriage head on. "I was knee deep in the honeymoon phase of my

relationship," he says, and "I was seeing something about the bullying that was going on, the struggle and the debate about gay marriage. Just kind of taking it all in, our whole community, and looking at it quite broadly, the LGBT community, and realizing that I had a lot of great, positive memories and experiences within the community. But one of the things that I felt all the sudden was that sadness that comes over me when I realize how many challenges we have, and when I realize that it is an uphill climb to reach total acceptance and tolerance. It just made me sad. That's what that song is about. It's about how sometimes it just sucks, you know? It just sucks that the reason why we're being discriminated



against and/or ostracized is because of who we're choosing to love. To me, when it comes down to it love is a great thing, and I was realizing how much I was falling in love and realizing that was the very reason why people were being called out. We're being outlawed for who we're choosing to love."

Our conversation takes place before the President endorses gay marriage. After the announcement he simply tweets "Yes!" and then later adds "I am completely in support of gay marriage. I also have an amazing boyfriend. This doesn't mean I'm getting married."

Lambert's fans, who somewhere along the way got dubbed the Glamberts, have proven to be an enthusiastic bunch. The Glam Nation tour in 2010 and 2011 brought him closer to them. "There was a core group of fans that we would see at more than two or three shows. They were really following us around all over the country. It made me smile. It was very sweet and they were very excited, and it was giving me something to look forward to and to get excited about."

Of course some of his fans are more famous than others. Last month Meat Loaf declared that Adam was "possibly one of the three greatest singers in the entire world" while the surviving members of Queen have been in his corner going back to his American Idol days. Is that in any way unnerving?

"No," Adam says. "I feel completely flattered by it, and I feel like it's validating. Like okay, cool. I'm doing something that these people who I respect and admire, they're admiring me back, so it's mutual. And I think that's, I don't know, maybe it is a little unnerving," he admits with a chuckle. "In the slightest sense maybe it's a little bit surreal. It's kind of bizarre to find that someone who you look up to, who has such a name, feels the same way about you. But it gives me a lot of motivation. It gives me a lot of strength to move forward."

Queen has gone so far as to tap him as their singer for a handful of scheduled 2012 performances. This has naturally led fans of both acts to want – and expect – a larger scale tour. "I think there is an expectation," he admits, "and I think it's a beautiful expectation and it's a very flattering one. But I stand by the idea that I'm an original artist and I have music that I've written that I would like to share with the world, that I'd like to tour. So my first priority is my work. And it's funny because certain people may say well, but it's Queen. Put your work on the backburner. I understand that concept but I also think that as an artist it's important for me to express my ideas that I've created and that are new for me. So I'm looking forward to the couple of dates with Queen but I do think that they're kind of isolated. And I think they're isolated for a reason. I think it's

going to be really special and really exciting. It's going to be pretty unforgettable, and I think I'm going to learn a lot from it. But I think that if we try to draw it out over more than that limited engagement, it's not going to feel the same."

Instead, Adam will be touring later this year with his own material. With the new album and its opening track both called *Trespassing*, it begs the question of whether the tour will carry the same name. "I don't know. I haven't thought about it yet. I haven't gotten to the tour. I love the idea of naming the tour something creative that goes with the theme, but I don't know if I'll just name it the album. I'll probably get a little bit more creative than that. It'll make sense. It'll be something clever. I hope," he adds, laughing.

In the mean time there's a slate of performances this month on television talk shows and at sporting events, along with a return engagement this Thursday on the *American Idol* set which first made him famous, giving fans plenty of live looks at the new material. They already have their hooks deep into it. There's a character named "Eddie" in the song *Pop That Lock*, and when we gave the Glamberts the opportunity to submit any question for Adam, the most popular submission was that of Eddie's identity. "Oh, those are my secrets," Adam says cryptically with yet another laugh. "What's the

point in confirming or denying? I mean I feel like it's a little more fun to just keep everybody imagining. Part of the great thing about writing from your own life is that I think people should wonder and should think about it and should analyze it and should try to deduce some sort of something from the lyrics. It's certainly not as much fun if I sit here and spell it out for everybody. I'm just going to let everyone come up to their own hypothesis. Or maybe it's nobody. Maybe it's just what sounded right in the song."

So why do the album and the first track share the same title? "I look at it as a mission statement." What did he learn from the last tour? "You've got to make it fresh every night." The next single? "It's not entirely my decision," he quips, laughing once again.

Despite the serious subject matter of the conversation, it's one defined primarily by laughter. Perhaps that lightness stems from having recently turned thirty, which took off more figurative weight than it added. "When I was younger I used to think it sounded old," he says, but "I don't feel old at all. I feel wiser in a lot of ways, but I don't feel old. I feel like as opposed to it being the end of a decade, I'm looking at it like, okay, this is the beginning of a decade. With the album coming out, just where I'm at in my life, I feel like I have a lot to look forward to."



Overheard at Disneyland

At Disneyland or Disney World? Hear something completely crazy? Share it so we can all have a laugh! Send a twitter message and include the #ohatdl or #ohatwdw hash tag and we'll broadcast it! Follow @OHatDL (overheard at Disneyland) or @OHatWDW (overheard at Walt Disney World) and enjoy the funny.

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FAILED AT TEACHING PATIENCE"
WIFE SAYS TO HUBBY IN FRONT OF
THE KIDS WAITING FOR TRAM

JOBBER99: @OHATDL GUY SAID
THIS W/ STRAIGHT FACE AT
CRITTER COUNTRY: "IS THERE A
BATHROOM IN POOH CORNER?"

IAMNOTAFOODIE:
#OHATWDW DADDY, WHY
IS JASMINE SO HOT?

@RGRRABBIT1: "HEY! WHERE
ARE YOU ALL GOING? DON'T
LEAVE ME ALL STRANDED HERE
LIKE A CARNIVAL CRUISE SHIP." -
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DAYS IN THE PARK
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review: "The Only Place" by Best Coast



by Ashley Goodman

It's been two years since California born Bethany Consentino of Best Coast released her first album, *Crazy For You*. I'll admit I blared "Boyfriend" windows down, in my truck, all summer long. In her new album *The Only Place*, Consentino wears her heart on her sleeve and shows a deeper side than we've seen on her previous album. Most of the songs on the new album are moody ballads. Consentino's dreamy 60's voice is reminiscent of a young Lesley Gore.

"The Only Place" the opening song on the album, references her home state, California. "We've got the ocean/ got the babes/ got the sun/ we've got the waves," a more positive vibe compared to "Why I Cry." Consentino describes her life as a "never ending hill." Best Coast's sound remains the same, but her lyrics give off a sense of hopelessness and a longing for affection.

The new album gives a good insight into Consentino's life after achieving success from her first album. Substance abuse and depression are mentioned frequently. "All the things I'm taking are making me insane," a line from "My Life." Dissatisfaction can be sensed in "How They Want Me To Be" She complains about her friends sticking up their noses and asking how she spends her money, and of course her mom asking her a lot of questions "cus she's just wonderin."

The Only Place reigns as one of the best summer albums. It's the perfect album to play when you're missing someone or something. Despite Consentino's melancholic lyrics, you'll fall in love with her voice all over again.

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KRISHNA M. SADASIVAM

Bowers & Wilkins MM-1

AirPlay dockable stereo • \$499



For those who've long loved the audio from the Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin but were hoping to capture it in a package suitable for use with a computer, the MM-1 arrives as the ideal answer. These two speakers deliver the kind of audio quality you'd expect from a large system and yet, somehow, they're only about eight inches tall. There's always something which feels a little off about paying five hundred dollars for something so small, but in this case that's the whole point: the unobtrusive MM-1 takes up only a bit of desk space. Almost stunningly, this little system offers superb bass without including a separate subwoofer.

While there's a standard audio jack included, you can also hook the MM-1 up to your computer via USB, which offers even greater audio quality. Here's the fun part: even when we turned our Mac's volume up to 100% and our iTunes volume to 100%, the music still didn't sound distorted. Not only can you tick off your neighbors with the impossibly small MM-1, you can annoy them with pristine audio. If you can afford it, there's really nothing not to like here.

Soundmatters Foxl v2

bluetooth stereo • \$199



Pocket sized bluetooth soundbars are nothing new. They wirelessly pair up with your computer, phone, or tablet and provide it with the kind of audio quality that such devices can't typically produce through their own built in speakers. But the Foxl v2 from Soundmatters is a different beast entirely. While most other products of its size and type cost \$50 to \$100 and offer audio quality which could best be described as a "decent" upgrade over built-in speakers, the Foxl shoots for the moon. Despite being not much bigger than a king-size candy bar, it delivers the kind of pristine, powerful audio which will leave you scratching your head as to how that much audio power can come from something so compact – and checking your bank account to see whether you can justify its two hundred dollar price tag.

My testing with the Foxl turned out to be about as expected: pairing up wirelessly via bluetooth with both my laptop and my iPad was easy. Battery life was about five to ten hours depending on the volume I used it at. And from there it's all about the audio quality. The trick behind the Foxl's sound is that it has a small subwoofer built into its bottom, and it's powerful one. Lay it flat on your desk, fire up the right kind of music or a movie with the right kind of soundtrack, and your desk will physically vibrate. Of course the kickstand allows you to optionally stand up the entire unit almost perpendicular, if you prefer that the audio be aimed straight at you.

In short, I love this product and can't imagine traveling without it. And if space is a premium, nothing says you can't use it as your desktop speaker system as well. Keep in mind you're paying for the miniaturization, as \$199 could get you a multi-unit system with true stereo separation. But for those looking to travel with it or looking to save desk space, the Foxl is a killer product. There's nothing not to love here.

An audio-in port allows the FoxL to be used as a wired system for those times when being wireless doesn't matter (or if you're using it with the rare computing device these days which doesn't have bluetooth). And there's also a \$169 version available which is wired-only.

iHome iW1

AirPlay wireless stereo • \$299



iHome first demoed its iW1 for us back in January in preproduction form, and it was the most impressive implementation of Apple's AirPlay wireless content streaming technology we'd seen to date. It's taken the iW1 a big chunk of the year to finally make it to market, but it's here, and it's still impressive. The product is a departure from iHome's typical lineup. The company has long focused on dockable stereos for products like the iPod and iPhone, whereas the iW1 has no docking mechanism. In fact, when you take it out of the box, it doesn't even appear to have on-board controls.

Fire it up, and you quickly find that the top surface is lined with backlit touch-sensitive controls for volume and playback along with wireless. The idea behind the iW1 and other AirPlay-based products is that rather than docking your Apple device, you simply take advantage of wifi in order to stream your music wirelessly to the stereo. These kinds of products have been around for some time, but prior to AirPlay they could be difficult to configure. Now, as demonstrated by how quickly I was able to set up the iW1 with my iPhone 4S, it's a fairly trivial process even for non-technical users.

AirPlay and wifi offers an advantage of competing systems which stream over

bluetooth in that wifi is a higher bandwidth technology, allowing the music to still sound great once it's done being transmitted – that is, of course, if the receiving stereo offers great sound quality to begin with. Fortunately, the iW1 does. Although it's less than a foot tall, barely a foot wide, and only about three and a half inches deep, the rounded-rectangular system packs a punch which can fill a large room of your house with pristine audio.



But that's only half the fun. Part of what excited us about the iW1 back in January is that it's a battery-based portable product. There's an embedded hand-grip near the top of the rear surface which allows you to pick it up and take it with you from room to room, for as far as the wifi signal will take you. When you take the iW1 back to its regular resting spot, a small charging base sits flush underneath it which can be plugged into the wall for recharging. It also comes with a remote control, plus a USB port on the back for directly connecting your mobile device in case you're in a situation where wifi isn't an option; the port also charges your mobile device.

But if you're connecting your device with a cable, you're defeating the

intended point of the iW1 and reducing it to merely an impressive-sounding speaker. For this product to really shine at its \$299 price point, you'll want to use the AirPlay and do things wirelessly so you can take advantage of the flexibility you're paying for. That means you need to be an iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch user running iOS 5 or iOS 4, and you have to spend an initial moment setting things up which, thanks to the solid foundation Apple provided and the smooth manner in which iHome has implemented it, is easy.

The iHome iW1 was one of our Best of Show winners back at CES in January, and after finally getting a chance to test it further in-house, that sentiment still stands.

TwelveSouth BassJump 2

USB Mac subwoofer • \$69



The built-in speakers on a Mac laptop aren't bad, they're just thin sounding thanks to the lack of a subwoofer to properly handle the lower ranges. Traditional three piece computer speaker systems bypass your built-in speakers in favor of two external tweeters and a subwoofer. In contrast, the BassJump 2 from TwelveSouth goes for a more simple approach: instead of bypassing your built-in tweeters, it offers a subwoofer which pairs up with them.

Things aren't supposed to work with this way, so the BassJump 2 gets around it by connecting to your MacBook's USB port instead of its audio port. A small piece of free software is required to allow the subwoofer to work at all, and also allows its relative volume and bass level to be fine tuned. Because the unit gets its power via USB, there's no separate power cable involved.

What you end up with is 2.1 stereo sound coming from your MacBook by only adding a single small speaker unit which is about two inches tall and about four inches deep and wide. If you're looking to save desk space or travel light, and the fact that you bought a laptop suggests that you are, then the BassJump 2 will serve you well on both fronts. It even comes with a zippered travel pouch.

In purely sonic terms, you can get your hands on external tweeters which will sound better than the ones built into your MacBook. And you can find (much larger) subwoofers which sound better than than this one. But if sticking to a small package is a priority, then the BassJump 2 offers a lot of bang for the buck for its size. The difference between listening to your MacBook's speaker by themselves, and your MacBook's speakers paired with the BassJump 2, is astonishing. As a bonus, its brushed silver metal sidings and black trim make it stylistically compatible with Mac computers.

Notes: the primary difference between the new BassJump 2 and the original BassJump is in the software; if you already have the latter, you can grab the new software for free. This product is clearly aimed at Mac laptops like the MacBook Pro and MacBook Air, but also works with any Mac. It's not compatible with Windows. Be sure you set the unit right side up on your desk, as its symmetrical design makes it easy to accidentally place it upside down. Use the "12" logo on the front for guidance as to which side is up.

Booq Mamba Shift L

laptop backpack • \$149



Booq makes a number of impressive high-end backpack products, but the Mamba Shift L might be the most functional one yet. It takes everything Booq bags are known for, from inventive pocketry to lush padding all around, and combines it with a straightforward practical shape. The bag largely consists of a pair of zippered pockets, both being full height and width instead of wasting space by tapering them. Right off the bat you realize there's something clever going on here. While most backpacks have a laptop sleeve within one of the pockets, the Mamba Shift dedicates the first pocket entirely to the laptop, meaning that there's zero chance of any of your other belongings coming into physical contact with it.

The second pocket goes for the gee-whiz factor, and succeeds. There's a sleeve which could hold anything from an iPad to a magazine to (if you really want to go there) a second laptop. There are also several smaller pockets along with a general open area. Inside you'll find a handbag-sized zippered bag which you can use for storing small items you want to take with you when you're leaving the overall backpack behind. There's also a zipper down the front for a bit more storage, and pockets on both sides for beverages or other quick-grab items. The shoulder straps both have small compartments in them for holding an iPhone or iPod.

On the style side of things, the black bag (optionally comes in a white sand color) has an orange handle and an orange pinstripe down the front which give the Mamba Shift enough flair to stand out while still belonging in a grown-up environment. The padding up against your back is lush and comfortable, matched only by the internal padding aimed at keeping your laptop safe.

There's very little not to like here. More color choices would be nice (some less expensive competitors offer a choice of highlight colors, for instance). And while the laptop enclosure is perfect, the secondary enclosure could be a little more tablet-specific (padding, being closed off) rather than simply being a pouch which happens to hold something the size of an iPad. But that's not enough to detract from the overall lovability of this product, and so the Booq Mamba Shift L earns five stars.

ioSafe Rugged Portable Hard Drive

500 GB and 1 TB • \$199 to \$399



External hard drives are among the most fragile consumer products on the market. Knock it off your desk, and there's a good chance your data is gone as soon as it hits the floor. Travel with a portable one, and well, you'd better do a good job of protecting it. ioSafe tries to change that with the Rugged Portable, a 500 GB external hard drive for \$199, also available in a full terabyte (1000 GB) version for an extra two hundred bucks. While not necessarily any bigger than any other portable hard drive, this one is caked in a hefty metal outer body which aims to keep the fragile drive inside in good shape.

Tempted as I was to stunt-test the Rugged Portable by running it over with my car or tossing it off my balcony, I was left to conclude that these aren't the accidents which typically happen with external drives. So instead, I dropped it from desk height onto the floor several times, and then for the real test, tossed it (without any protection) into my suitcase and left it in the hands of the TSA and the airline for 2500 miles and back. The verdict? Keeps on ticking. I can speak from personal experience that the desk-height drops alone would have killed any other external drive I've owned. So I'm sold on this product.

The flipside is solely in the price to storage ratio. The other (far more fragile) external drives are 1000 GB each, and none of them cost more than a hundred bucks. Contrast that with the 500 GB Rugged Portable, which costs twice that and holds only half as much. The supersized version does reach the 1000 GB, but at four hundred dollars. In other words, you're paying quite a bit extra for the super sturdiness of the Rugged Portable. If you're not a klutz, if you've never knocked an external drive off your desk, if you don't travel with your drive, then you're paying for extra protection you don't need. But if you've tossed one too many external drives in the trash over the years because they took a physical blow – or worse, lost the data on them because of it – then the Rugged Portable is a godsend.

Technical notes: depending on which model you opt for, this product can connect via USB 2.0, FireWire 800, or USB 3.0 (for most of you, that means USB 2.0).

OWC 16 GB RAM for Mac



RAM is probably the most misunderstood component found in a computer, which is shame because it's the one component consumers would do well to automatically upgrade as their Mac or PC gets older. It's not that an older computer actually becomes a slower machine, but newer software programs, newer operating systems (Mac Snow Leopard or Windows 7, for instance), and even the ever increasing complexity of web page construction means your older machine will take longer than it used to when it comes to your regular tasks. So unless you plan to never install anything new on your computer, you'll eventually want to add more RAM once your computer is more than a couple years old. And if you're a power user, you may want to add more RAM from day one.

In my case I'd just bought a brand new MacBook Pro with a quad core i7 processor, which is a fancy way of saying that it's the most powerful laptop in the history of computing. It came with four gigabytes of RAM, which I upgraded to eight almost immediately. Then along came OWC with its new *sixteen* gigabyte offering, and I had to find out what the fuss was about. RAM, for those who've been perennially confused by the use of the word "memory" in association with it, actually has nothing to do with storage space. RAM is your computer's active memory, the place where programs do their thing while you're running them. The more RAM, the faster programs load. The faster they can call up resources. And the better chance your computer has of not slowing down when you start quickly moving between different apps as you pull in a photo off the internet in your browser, drag it into iPhoto, share it with Mail, and so on.

If you don't have enough RAM, your computer will start using empty hard drive space (the place where the stuff you're not using is stored) as a form of virtual RAM. The problem? It's slower that way. So if you're a power user, you'll want as much RAM installed as possible – or at least as much as you can reasonably afford. If you tend to push your computer at all while using it, RAM is the bottleneck. But while you can upgrade your MacBook Pro to eight gigabytes from OWC for a mere \$56, the sixteen gigabyte upgrade kit is a whopping \$179 – and that's nothing compared to the six hundred dollar price tag it carried when it first debuted late last year. So is the sixteen really worth it?

That depends on the user. I measure the adequacy of my RAM by peeking into a hidden file on my Mac which shows how many "swap files" have piled up, which is

to say how many times the computer has run out of RAM and had to carve out virtual RAM on the hard drive since the last restart. There's always a "swapfile0" present, but if swapfile1 or beyond shows up, it means I need more RAM. Sure enough, even on my new high-end MacBook Pro with eight gigabytes, it took less than a day before swap files began showing up. That meant it wasn't my imagination that it seemed to be slowing down every few days and needed to be restarted in order to get its full speed back. But then I'm a crazy power user who spends twelve hours a day on the computer for work purposes. How hard you push your computer is something only you can gauge.

In my case, after upgrading to sixteen gigabytes, I've had very few slowdowns (and rarely do I see a swap file). So that's the sweet spot for me, and worth every penny of the two-hundred plus dollar price tag. Those of you who don't push your computer as hard might get by just as well with a mere eight gigabytes for a fourth the price tag. Those of you who use your new Mac in a pedestrian manner will do fine with the four gigabytes that it came with – at least until you start installing newer software and applications and operating systems which will make it effectively a slower machine. And anyone with an older Mac that has less than four gigabytes of RAM should seriously consider upgrading the RAM if they plan to keep the machine around for much longer.

My installation required two different kinds of screwdrivers (including one I

had to buy from Home Depot for a few dollars) and the removal of more than a dozen screws. Was it difficult? No. But keeping track of the various screws required that I take my time with the process. Those who get queasy at the thought of removing the back panel from their MacBook Pro might be tempted to buy the RAM from a retail store and have it installed there – but doing so will send your price tag skyrocketing.

Plenty of companies sell do-it-yourself RAM and prices vary. It's a fragile product, so I don't like buying it from off-brand companies who might be sending you RAM chips that are bad by the time you get them or go bad shortly after you install them. So I look for a vendor in whom I have faith that the RAM will be of good quality to begin with, and that they'll take care of me properly if the RAM does happen to be defective. That's why I went with OWC, a reputable company I've been dealing with for years.

Things to keep in mind when buying: MacBook Pro RAM comes in pairs, and there are two RAM slots inside. If you have four gigabytes installed, it's a pair of two gigabyte chips. If you're buying eight gigabytes, it's a pair of four gigabyte chips, and so on. So whatever you're buying is going to replace your existing RAM, not add to it; your old RAM has to come out in order to make room for the new. And again, RAM has absolutely nothing to do with storage space or having "enough room" for things; if your hard drive is full, get a larger hard drive or a new computer.

GelaSkins

iPhone-iPad-iPod skins



Too substantial and durable to be dismissed as mere stickers, these stick-on skins for iPhone, iPod touch, iPod nano and iPod classic are easy to attach and easy to become addicted to, as they come in a nearly limitless number of custom patterns and designs from various artists. Also available for Mac and PC laptops, netbooks, and even gaming devices.

Blue Microphones Mikey

iPod microphone • \$58



Snap-on iPod microphones are nothing new, but it took until this year for an actual microphone company to get in the game and produce something that sound pristine. A little larger and more expensive than the \$50 standard fare we'd gotten used to, but this product is worth it on both counts. And the new Mikey 2 is even cooler than the original.

Booq Boa Flow

laptop backpack • \$199



The swiss army knife of laptop bags doesn't come cheap, and its backpack form factor won't appeal to those who prefer a hand-carried bag. But of all the laptop bags we've ever kicked the tires on, the Boa Flow stands out both for its excellent construction and its endless (and we mean endless) pouches and sub-pouches for storing everything while on the go.

Blue Yeti and Yeti Pro

desktop microphone • \$149 and 299



Podcasters and musicians who want to record straight into their Mac or PC will find themselves in awe of the Yeti and the Yeti Pro, a pair of USB desktop microphones (one with higher recording inputs than the other) which look pretty and capture fantastic audio.

Elgato HDHomeRun

digital TV tuner • \$179



Ever wanted to watch TV on your computer? HDHomeRun takes your cable or satellite TV feed sends it to you home computer(s) wired or wirelessly, where you can use software to watch it live or DVR it. Two different TV channels can be tapped at once. Unlike some previous elgato offerings, this one works with both Mac and Windows.

Seagate Momentus XT

hybrid computer drive • \$99 and \$149



Solid state storage drive in products like the MacBook Air is trendy, but it's expensive and doesn't come in overly large quantities. Seagate offers this hybrid drive which combines a solid state buffer with 500 or 750 GB of standard storage. Our tests showed a major speed-up of the MacBook Pro in which we tested it, an amazing upgrade for the price.

Audioengine A5+ and P4

desktop speakers • \$399/249



Not all speakers have to be dockable to be useful to iPhone and iPod users, as everyone has a computer – and Audioengine's full size speakers can go wired or wireless (if you add an AirPort Express to the mix). But most importantly, the audio is nothing short of pristine. Now available in powered (A5+, \$399) or passive (P4, \$249) versions.

Griffin Beacon

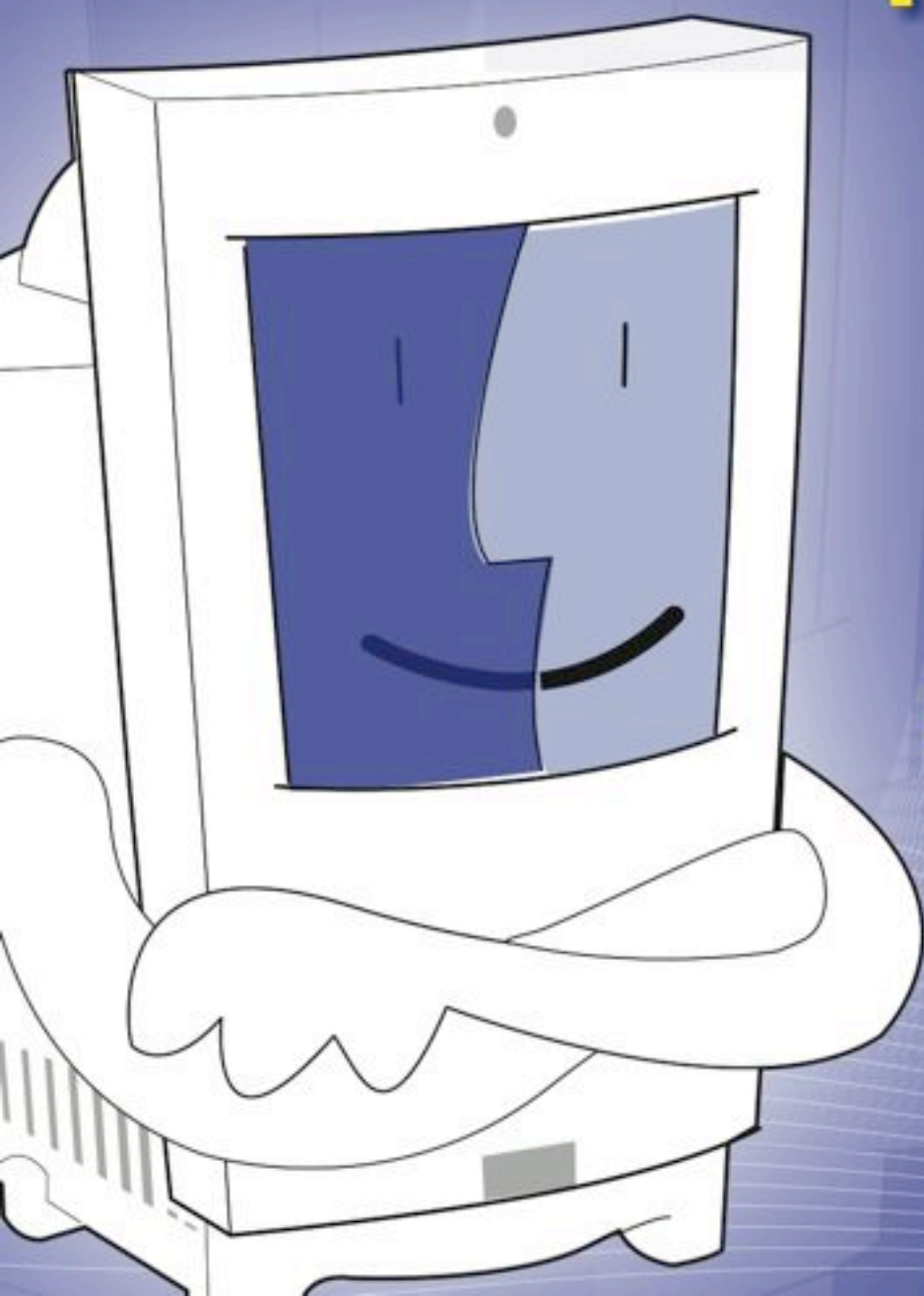
universal remote • \$79



This clever app for iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch comes with a wireless hardware bridge which turns your iDevice into a TV remote control - and unlike the hundred-button monstrosities from your cable company, the Beacon remote layout is eloquent and makes sense. Superior to competing products in that there's no dongle hanging off your iDevice.

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