Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Intersections

A Few Small Essays

This time around, I'm going to offer a few essays, most of them related to open access one way or another. The first introduces an interesting new resource and offers some informal commentary on that resource. One other discusses an issue I *don't* currently plan to track and cover, and why that is. The others? Read on.

Szczepanski's List of Open Access Journals: An Informal Commentary

Jan Szczepanski sent me email at the end of August 2018 noting this new resource and wondering whether I'd take a look at it—and possibly offer a critical review.

Inside This Issue

The resource, as you might guess, is Szczepanski's List of Open Access Journals and it's being made available—*for free*—by EBSCO at https://www.ebsco.com/open-access/szczepanski-list. Here's the full blurb from the EBSCO page:

> After decades of experience in acquisitions in humanities and social sciences, Jan Szczepanski began collecting free e-journal titles in the late 1990s. He was inspired first by an important journal he could not purchase, then by a study which uncovered just how many free high-quality e-journals there are.
>
> Now Jan maintains what is probably the world's largest list of open access journals in the humanities and social sciences, which he makes publicly available. Titles on the list come from all over the world and in many languages, and cover a wide range of humanities and social sciences disciplines, including music, philosophy, art and history.

His email says the list includes 35,000 titles "mainly in the humanities and social sciences."

The Good and the Remarkable

It's an amazing effort, and quite wonderful that he's making it freely available—and that EBSCO's supporting that free effort.

There do appear to be more than 35,000 entities on the list—my estimate is somewhere around 35,871. While the list includes what I'd think of as earth sciences and mathematics (more specifically, geography, geology, oceanography, meteorology, mathematics and statistics), those make up about 5,115 of the total, leaving around 30,756.

That's still a phenomenal number, given that I count 4,785 active *DOAJ* journals in the humanities and social sciences, plus 329 in earth sciences and 211 in mathematics (including statistics). Jan's list has around 6.7 times as many entities.

If you have the resources and interest, this could be an interesting (and enormous) resource to explore. The list always includes the title, ISSN(s) if present, at least one URL, and usually a date range (open ended or otherwise) and publisher name, and sometimes brief additional information.

Szczepanski (henceforth JS) deserves plaudits for what had to have been an enormous effort over two decades.

The Less Good

There are problems, some of which make the list less useful than it might be. First, and foremost, it's a list—one massive Word document, something over 9 megabytes. After a contents list that gives page number ranges for each of the 29 subjects, it's arranged by subject (they're not alphabetic, at least in English) and alphabetically by entity within subject—except that a fair number of entities are in the wrong place (and sometimes, apparently, in the wrong topic).

Here's what the first two records look like:

> **AARGnews. Newsletter of the Aerial Archaeology Research Group**
> **ISSN 1756-753X**
> http://www.univie.ac.at/aarg/index.php/AARGnews.html
> **1990-**
> Ed: Aerial Archaeology Research Group
>
> **ACOR newsletter**
> https://www.acorjordan.org/research/publications/acor-newsletters/
> **1989-**
> Ed: American Center of Oriental Research

Usually, the title and ISSN (if present, and there may be both print and electronic ISSNs) are in bold—except when they're in bold italic. Always, the URL appears as a link (there may be more than one—and, unfortunately, a

date annotation may appear at the end of a URL, making it difficult to do a quick copy-and-paste). Usually, there's a blank paragraph between entries, but once in a while there's a tab and forced line break instead.

As for styles and other usages, I gave up trying to analyze the large number of styles (many of them character styles, sometimes to bring in different language support), because my attempts were choking Word.

Choking Word? Indeed, attempting to do anything in the document was nearly hopeless unless I closed all other applications and browsers, and even then things proceeded at a glacial pace. When I finally gave up and cleared all formatting and styles throughout the document (which took a little while), it became *somewhat* more manageable.

Fact is, though, this doesn't work very well as a humongous Word document. OK, so my computer is a couple of years old, has a mere 4GB of RAM and 500GB of hard disk, and is only running an Intel i3—but even the enormous spreadsheets I've used in the *DOAJ* project have never slowed me down. Neither have ordinarily large and complex Word documents.

And, of course, the tens of thousands of paragraphs can't really be dealt with except linearly: you can't sort them or extract subsets except at the subject level.

There's a reason that *DOAJ* downloads as a spreadsheet equivalent (it downloads as comma separated values, which can be opened directly in Excel or imported—a better bet, so you can retain Unicode characters). Translating JS' list to spreadsheet form would be a long and boring job, but the result—a spreadsheet about 36,000 rows long and perhaps 10-12 columns wide—would be much easier to manipulate and extend. Just for fun, I took the January 1, 2018 *DOAJ* spreadsheet, about 10,700 rows and 59 columns—and copied rows so that I had 35,978 rows and 59 columns: as many entities as in the JS list, but far more complicated. Sorting that spreadsheet on a three-level text sort (country, publisher, title) took somewhere between two and three *seconds* on my underpowered notebook. (Excel does have size limits, primarily the amount of available memory but also row and column limits, but they rarely come into play.)

No, I'm *not* suggesting transforming this list into a spreadsheet, unless some crowdsourced effort came into play. It would be a lot of effort, one paragraph at a time for 197,404 paragraphs, and I'm not sure the results would be worth the effort.

If you want to work with this list, I have a suggested process that may make it less cumbersome:

- After downloading the Word file (downloading, *not* opening!), close all applications.
- Open Word. Start a new document. Go to the Options tab on the File page. In Proofing, turn off all spell-checking and grammar-checking. In Save, turn off autosave. (Remember to restore these

settings—which are *not* document-specific—when you go to work on other Word documents.)

- Now Insert the downloaded file into your new file (Insert menu, Object dropdown, Text from File). It will take a while, and Word will want to repaginate (which you can probably Escape out of).
- Save the new file under some appropriate name. The page numbering will probably have changed, but you should find that this file is at least workable. When I did this, the resulting file was also considerably smaller than the original—6.3MB rather than 9.1MB.
- If you are interested in specific topics, it probably makes sense to cut-and-paste the topic's pages to a new document: even the largest of those documents will be about one-seventh as large and should be easy to work with. (Word does not appear to have any particular limit on how much text you can highlight, cut, and paste in one process, and of course you don't have to do it all in one process.

How did I come up with 197,474 "paragraphs"? The new, smaller document that resulted from the process listed above was workable enough that I could use Word's Word Count, which gives a paragraph count. It took a little while, but it wasn't hopeless.

I should note that this would be a more usable document if EBSCO offered it as a menu of downloadable topic subsets, but that would require splitting the document and having a more elaborate website.

Now, back to the informal commentary, which isn't really a review.

"Entity" and Breakdown

I've used the word "entity" rather than "journal" above—because the list does *not* include 35,000-odd open access peer-reviewed journals, not by a long shot.

Here's how the list itself describes what's there:

> Scholarly, academic, intellectual, cultural, peer-reviewed or of interest, open access or accessible without cost

"or of interest" and "or accessible without cost" are pretty big loopholes—especially when it becomes clear that "accessible" sometimes means "partially accessible." Thus, for instance, *Wired Magazine* shows up, since some of its articles are freely readable.

The list *does* include thousands of open access journals. It also includes thousands of newsletters and magazines, ceased journals and newsletters, journals that make *some* articles available, and unreachable entities. Note that the two examples near the beginning of this commentary are newsletters, not journals.

I examined two subjects in more detail, literally visiting the first URL for each entity: Architecture and urban design, and Library and information science (these may not be the precise wordings in the original list).

	Architecture	%	**Library Sci**	%
In DOAJ	86	15.4%	132	11.7%
In Gray OA list	2	0.4%	4	0.4%
Ceased	86	15.4%	187	16.6%
Unreachable/malware	129	23.2%	344	30.6%
Not a peer-rev journal	60	10.8%	227	20.2%
Not open access	25	4.5%	67	6.0%
OA, but not yet in DOAJ	167	30.0%	153	13.6%
Clear duplicates	2	0.4%	11	1.0%
Total	**557**		**1125**	
Apparent OA	253	45.4%	285	25.3%

This table shows the results. By row:

- **In DOAJ**: As of January 1, 2018.
- **In Gray OA List**: the combined "predatory" and "formerly in DOAJ" spreadsheet I used in mid-2017.
- **Ceased**: Either shown as a closed date range or with no issues past 2016 when visited (or explicitly ceased since then).
- **Unreachable/malware**: 404s, DNS failures, reaching parent pages with the journal title not apparent, permission failures and everything else, including a few cases of malware (maybe ten in all).
- **Not a peer-rev journal**: Newsletters, magazines, annual reports, statistical tables, etc.: quite possibly valuable, but not an OA journal.
- **Not open access**: Mostly "embargoed" journals.
- **OA, but not yet in DOAJ**: The most interesting category: journals that may be eligible for *DOAJ*.
- **Clear duplicates**: Cases where "other title" in one entity also shows up as a separate entity.

I began checking these subjects with the hypothesis that the list was so heterogeneous that the breakdown of one subject would *not* be indicative of the whole list—and that no "sampling" methodology would yield meaningful numbers. I believe that comparing the percentages for the two subjects supports that hypothesis, at least for the most interesting categories.

You could suggest that the full list might have some 9,000 current OA journals (25% of the list), or 16,000 (45%)—but it could also be fewer than 7,000 or more than 20,000. Similarly, what is to me the key question—how many *more* active gold OA journals in the humanities & social sciences could be added to *DOAJ*?—only has one real answer: "Thousands." Possibly 4,878; possibly 10,761; possibly fewer or more than either of those figures.

Subject by Subject

Subject	Estimate
Antiquity	682
Archeology	524
Architecture, Urban Design	557
Art	1,041
Comp. Literature	1,793
Ethnology/Social Anthropology	609
Feminism/gender/queer/family	417
Fiction (Literature)	259
Film	228
General, interdisciplinary	3,624
Geography	490
Geology, Oceanography, Meteorology	1,178
History	2,438
History of Ideas	160
Journalism & Media	806
Law	287
Library & Info Science	1,125
Linguistics	1,735
Mathematics	1,317
Music	475
Pedagogy (education)	4,604
Philosophy	1,123
Photography	81
Political Science	3,426
Psychology	981
Religion, Theology	1,247
Social Sciences	4,270
Statistics	182
Theatre and Dance	212

This table shows *estimated* entity counts for each topic (I've simplified and changed some topic names). I peeled off each topic as a separate document, then counted the apparent number of entities (by replacing two successive paragraph marks with themselves and noting the count, since two successive paragraph marks normally separate journals/entities).The numbers might be slightly high or low, but probably by less than 1%.

I compared these numbers with the *Gold Open Access Journals 2012-2017* numbers—an approximation at best, given differences in treatment and topic breakdowns. Among the nine topics where I could pretend to see similarities, dividing *DOAJ* count by this list's count yields percentages ranging from 6% (political science) to 91% (law).The overall average, to be sure, is around 15%.

In Closing

It's a remarkable list and a remarkable gift. Some readers will find it interesting, as a source of free resources if nothing else. There are problems, to be sure, but it's still a remarkable resource.

When Good Scholars Publish in "Bad" Journals

As *Cites & Insights* 18.6 demonstrated—even as it covered roughly half of the selectively-cited articles from recent months—there seems to be a growing cottage industry of Articles Viewing With Alarm based on the discredited (as far as I'm concerned) blacklists of a retired librarian.

One new room in that cottage is occupied by articles that show how Lots of Scholars in Country X or Region Y or Reputable Institutions Z have published in the Listed Journals (I think "listed" is a much more accurate term than "predatory"), how awful this is, and what should be done about it. I've read one or two and skimmed a couple of others; I suspect there are some that are behind paywalls. Institutions Z have certainly included places such as Harvard and, I suspect, my own alma mater (UC Berkeley).

The more I think about it, the more I believe these articles proceed from a shaky assumption. Perhaps rephrasing the overall basis for these articles might clarify the situation:

> Thousands of scholars in many specific fields, most with doctorates and many faculty in prestigious institutions, have used their own professional judgment to submit articles to journals that one (now-retired) anti-OA librarian considers unworthy, usually without providing evidence.

I believe that's an absolutely fair summary of the situation, and I believe starting out from that summary changes the direction of the investigation or whatever follows. Namely: Maybe it's *not* the case that all (or most) Listed Journals are actually predatory or fake or substandard or otherwise unworthy.

When I've read or skimmed these articles, I haven't seen authors independently investigating the journals and making the case that they are, in fact, seriously defective. (Remember: being published by a publisher with one or two problematic journals is no more damning than, say, being a medical journal published by a publisher who also publishes a homeopathy journal or journals devoted to alternative medical systems. If you disagree, take a close look at journal lists, starting with the Big E.)

That's true, to be sure, of nearly all Viewing With Alarm articles: they *assume* that Listed Journals are Bad—otherwise, why would they be listed? (I have *not* read every When Good Scholars Go Bad article, and it's possible that one or more has involved independent evaluation of the journals. If so, my apologies—and I'd love to see the article[s].)

I don't want to get into an extended discussion of peer review—well, I do, but I'm trying to avoid it—but, since lack of Appropriate Peer Review seems to be the usual attack on Listed journals, it's worth noting that:'

- I will assert that all the problematic papers in all the Listed journals combined have not been responsible for as many deaths as one article that appeared in a highly respected, peer-reviewed, selective journal—and that wasn't retracted at all for six years and not *fully* retracted for a dozen years. The journal is still around.
- As a non-scientist, I'm going to guess that most peer review considers methodology and consistency: that it does not involve validating the actual research. (I don't see how it could.)
- It's clear that some peer-reviewed journals with good reputations publish articles *despite* negative recommendations from peer reviewers: the editor has the final say.
- I *will* suggest that single-blind peer review (which seems to be common in STEM and medical journals) increases the chance that authorial reputation and connections will influence reviews and publication chances. (Then again, I don't believe most scholars have any reason to publish fraudulent or defective papers—life is too short and the chances of eventually being caught out too great.) And even if the review is double-blind, the editor knows the authorship.

I'll stop there. Open peer review helps (and can show readers the extent and limits of peer review), but we seem a long way from that being common. And peer review as such isn't really the argument here.

Failing to disclose APCs until articles have been submitted and accepted certainly makes a journal's publisher predatory—but it doesn't actually say anything about the quality of the articles.

This may already be going on for too long, and I doubt that it will slow the stream of OMG Viewing With Alarm articles—but I really do believe that the boxed sentence above represents a much more reasonable approach to thinking about articles that appear in Listed journals.

The Colors

Green and gold. I believe those are the only two OA colors we need to use—and I should apologize for using "Gray OA" to refer to non-DOAJ Gold OA journals.

I'm currently thinking of the colors in two ways" journals and papers.

Journals

Gold OA journals make all peer-reviewed content available to anybody with an internet account, without registration or identification, to read, download to read offline, and copy to others—and does so immediately on publication, and permanently after that.

That's longer than the common definitions, but I think it's clear—and it *should* be clear that, although it rarely happens, a journal could be legitimately Gold OA while charging for news and other non-peer-reviewed material (book reviews, overviews, what have you).

I think gold is the only color of OA *journal* we need. There are green publisher policies, but that's a different matter. Alternatively, you could say that most gold OA journals are also green OA, since most that I've checked both allow and *encourage* authors to deposit articles in repositories and make those articles available—but I think that confuses the issue.

Note what is *not* gold: embargoed, registration required, hybrid, or readable only within some restricted online mechanism.

Articles

If an article is freely and permanently available in final published form, without registration or identification, to read, download and copy as soon as it's published, I'd call it a gold OA article—even if it appears in a "hybrid" journal.

If an article in a depository is freely and permanently available to read, download and copy, without registration or identification, but is *not* in the final published form, it's a green OA article.

Are green OA articles citable? I don't see how, except as draft material.

Magic

As you must know by now, I don't believe we'll achieve 100% OA of any legal sort within my lifetime—and discussions of Plan S (see next essay) and the extent to which (some) scholars are revealing what they *really* care about in terms of article publishing, don't change my doubt.

But at least Gold OA can get us partway there. I honestly have never seen how Green OA can, no matter how often it's called the only or ideal solution. Any way I look at the supposed path from Green OA to full OA, there's this huge cloud in the middle where Magic Happens.

But that's an argument I'm tired of making.

Platinum, Diamond, Bronze, Mauve, Livermorium…

Oh please. Why is "no-fee gold OA" so difficult? Why do we need to pretend that non-OA journals are really some form of OA? Yes, I made up the last two colors (I think). (Livermorium OA is a little-known form in which, after you've had at least three glasses of wine from Livermore—and there are sixty wineries to choose from—you can read an article, but only for sixty milliseconds before half the words disappear. Read fast!)

Note: I wrote all but one sentence of this before getting involved in a post-related discussion with people who assert that gold *does* imply APCs and that the "standard definition" now says that, leaving diamond or platinum for no-fee journals. I find that sad, but obviously my ability to do anything about it is as limited as my ability to overcome the nonsensical "420,000 predatory articles" stuff.

One I Do Not Plan to Cover

I make no pretense of dealing with all aspects of open access. Once upon a time, Peter Suber did a remarkably good job of identifying and commenting on most of the significant OA developments—but that was a long time ago, with a lot less going on.

I *never* attempted to be comprehensive. Instead, I've tagged articles that I could get to, that seemed to say something interesting about some access of OA, focusing on gold OA (since that term was established: I first started writing about what's now called OA in 2001 or before).

This little item is mostly saying that, at least for now, I am *not* tagging items related to cOAlition S or Plan S. The link here, to https://www.scienceeurope.org/coalition-s/, is a reasonable place to start if you want to know what Plan S is all about—briefly, a declaration by a group of European funding agencies to work toward 100% OA for papers resulting from their funding published in 2020 and beyond.

And that's as much as I plan to say about—at least for now.

Why? Some reasons:

- There's just too much being written about it, much of it not in English. I can't even read it all, much less try to comment on it.
- It's European. I'm not.
- Less glibly: I have no reason to believe I understand all of the issues involved, some of which may be European in nature.

- I've never published in APC-based gold OA journals and haven't published a peer-reviewed article in quite some time—and my article publishing activity never (as far as I can tell) had any positive impact on my work situation or chance of tenure (which was always zero).
- From the small sample of Plan S-related things I have been reading, it appears that quite a few scholars are being honest about what drives their publishing activity and choices, and I find too many of those discussions disheartening. (Although they do support my basic belief that we will not see 100% OA in my lifetime.)
- I'm also seeing some remarkable assertion about academic freedom, and I don't want to get into that particular swamp either.

I'll let it go at that. I don't want to insult scholars I have no acquaintance with. I believe there will be a *lot* more discussion of Plan S. It may suck me in at some point, but I'll resist as long as I can—and maybe by the time it's too compelling I will have stopped *C&I* altogether. (Maybe not.)

Observer, Advocate or Skeptic?

Is it possible to observe (and write about) developments in open access without being either an advocate or a skeptic? Is it *desirable* to do so?

I believe the first question arose recently in discussing Richard Poynder's coverage of OA. At times, Poynder appears to be an observer—but he sometimes admits to being a skeptic. In my mind, he's both an advocate and a skeptic—a Harnadian, advocating green OA and being critical of gold OA. That may not be fair, but that's the slant I've seen. I am not saying there's anything wrong with that, to be sure.

On a more general basis, I'm not entirely sure it *is* possible to observe and discuss OA with any depth or over much time without becoming somewhat of an advocate or a skeptic. Or that it's desirable, for that matter.

Myself? As far as I can tell (without reading through several hundred pre-2001 publications), I started writing about "free online scholarship" in 2001, with the article "Getting Past the Arc of Enthusiasm," a study of *very* early OA journals (started before 1995) and what happened to them. As with much of my work since then, this was based on seeing an interesting situation that hadn't been explored—and exploring it. Or, much of the time, seeing what I regarded as questionable statements being made and trying to correct them.

I would suggest that I was an interested observer at that point. In 2002, I could even be considered a skeptic—or at least enough of one so that Stevan Harnad called me out for "glib nay-saying" and said I would deserve "historic credit" for *slowing* the inevitable triumph of OA.

At some point, I found that I was being critical of anti-OA forces more often than not, and that I was becoming more and more aware not only of

the huge damages done to academic libraries by Big Deals but also of the desirability for society and progress of having access to scholarly articles. Little by little, I became somewhat of an advocate, although still skeptical and more interested in seeking the facts than in the politics of OA.

Am I really more of an advocate than this summary suggests? Possibly. If I'm treating parties unfairly, I apologize (and welcome feedback). But I don't apologize for having opinions.

And if it isn't clear: while Poynder and I frequently disagree, I don't think he should apologize for having opinions either.

Blockchain in Libraries and Scholarly Communication

I feel it's time to fulfill my mandate as a Senior Pundit and Thought Leader Emeritus to provide a comprehensive look at this Vital New Technology that Every Library Should Be Involved In. So here are the obvious uses of blockchain in your library:

1. Computer Efficiency

If your public and staff computers are typical, they're effectively idle most of the time—all those CPU cycles being wasted! Blockchain can fix that.

2. Global Warming

Widespread implementation of blockchain in libraries can help accelerate global warming and make sure your public spaces are toasty warm. [Hat-tip to Barbara Fister.]

3. Getting Back in Your Power Company's Good Graces

We know how it goes. First you installed huge solar power arrays. Then you replaced all your lights, cutting power usage dramatically in the process. Now your electricity utility is mad at you—and won't pay you a fraction of what that power's worth if you persist in generating too much.

Blockchain can help, soaking up all that extra power and making sure you're paying the electric company.

4. Improving Library Systems and Scholarly Communications

Oh well, blockchain can't do *everything*…

Postscript

Item 2 came about because I asked for suggestions on a forum (on a little-known social media network that I'm not about to name) involving more than 170 librarians and fellow travelers. The discussion has continued, including two candidates: Blockchain to track a book—you know, because a 13-digit ISBN is too simple; and Blockchain: because you haven't spied on your patrons enough. My thanks to the participants, who constantly keep me in touch with informed (and international!) librarianship.

Why "Intersections"?

Why does the flag at the top of this article say "Intersections"?

Take a look at the banner on the top of Page 1. Below the title proper (*Cites & Insights*) and the subtitle (Crawford at Large) it has what's essentially the tagline or motto: **Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media**.

That tagline has been there since early 2005 (the Midwinter 2005 issue, 5:2), which is also when I switched to Berkeley or Berkeley Book as the body type for *Cites & Insights*. (Don't look for it on your Windows or Mac PC: it's an ITC licensed typeface—yes, originally designed for my alma mater—that I paid for.)

OK, so it's not "Democracy Dies in Darkness," but it's also not "Quietly Normalizing the Kakistocracy Seven Days a Week," so there's that. (No, that's not my reading for the *Washington Post*. It's what I think of another publication that will go unnamed.)

Anyway, the tagline describes what I believed to be *Cites & Insights* principal areas of coverage—and I think that's been true, by and large. ~~I dropped some older section flags and added The Front and The Back as needed.~~ Whoops: I was about to provide bad history. The tagline does date from Midwinter 2005, but I didn't adopt those four flags (along with **Words**, **Social Networks**, **The Front**, **The Back** and others as needed) until 2012, when *C&I* was reborn after a near-shutdown. During 2005-2011, I still used the old section flags such as "Bibs & Blather" and "Writing About Reading" and "Trends & Quick Takes" and others.

"Intersections" comes into play for topics that aren't primarily in one of those four areas but rather at the intersection of two or more. As far as I can tell, OA is at the intersection of libraries, policy and technology—and maybe even media.

The Back

Audiophile System Prices 2018

While it hasn't been a year since the previous look at audiophile system prices, the October 2018 *Stereophile* is out, so instead of waiting another three months, I'll do it now. This time, headphone and cable/interconnects prices are from stereophile.com (from the extended online form of the already-massive print article) and others are from the October 2018 print issue—also available online.

As always, I'm *not* recommending any of these systems and I haven't checked for possible mismatches, such as low-power tube amps that might not be able to drive inefficient speakers well. This time, however, I do note output wattage for amps as available.

I am also *not* saying "it's stupid to spend more than $x on a sound system or component, because you probably can't hear the difference." I

don't know what differences you can discern or what differences you care about; nor do I know your financial resources. I've always liked the rule of thumb that your music software (CDs, LPs, downloaded tracks) should be worth more than your music hardware, but who am I to make that judgment for you? (If all your listening is streamed, at anything below Tidal quality, I *really* wonder whether you'll hear some of the differences in very expensive equipment, but, again, who am I to say?)

Of course the law of diminishing returns comes into play, especially given that system prices here (for systems playing LPs and CDs) range from $3,286 to $832,223, a 253-to-1 ratio. Or, if you include the *true* minimal system, $1,918 to $832,223—a 434-to-1 ratio.

Changes

Some significant changes from last year in coverage and presentation—but also in source material. The last first: *Stereophile* no longer seems to care much about CDs, and especially affordable players: the under-$1,000 players from 2017 have disappeared.

As for coverage, I've added a third price category, because it strikes me that both the least expensive and the most expensive units in a given category might be (or might be thought of as) outliers. So I'm now including a *median* system—representing the median price in the category.

I've also separated tube and solid-state amplification at both the Class A level and the Class B (and below) level.

To make things more interesting, I'm now including speakers based on whether a system uses an integrated amplifier or amp/preamp separates: in the former case, I list non-full-range speakers and subwoofers; in the latter, I list full-range speakers (that is, speaker systems that should go down to well below 40Hz). I can give you a philosophical basis for that decision (yes, there is one), but mostly it allows me to offer a more interesting range of systems—now 24 in all, or 48 if you split LP and CD.

Finally, listings are in a very different order, with the low, median and high-priced systems for a given category (tube vs. solid-state, integrated vs. separate, A vs. B-E) appearing together. Price comparisons to last year appear where feasible, which boils down to Class A categories and Low and High prices. Prices rounded up to the nearest dollar and, in a few cases, converted to US$ as of late September 2018.

Simple Systems

Two very simple systems that still appear to be audiophile-quality, probably best used on a desktop and not expected to reach the lowest notes. The key to simplicity: the speakers include amplifiers.

LP only
Listed first because it's now the cheapest physical-medium system. **Source:** Same as last year, the Sony PS-HX500 USB turntable (includes arm, cartridge, preamp *and* digital conversion to USB for direct ripping)—but it's $100 cheaper at $499.95. **Powered Speakers:** AudioEngine A2+, $249.95—same as last year. **Cables:** AudioQuest Tower, $26—same as last year. **System price:** $773.90.

CD only
Same speakers and cable. **Source:** Rega Apollo CD player, $1,095. **System price:** $1,360.95.

Want both? You'd have to add a preamp to switch between them. Schiit Audio Sys costs $49, so make the **Total system price**: $1,918.

Cables and Interconnects

Since *Stereophile* listings don't break down into classes or grades, I'm giving these first. I add cables as needed for each system—normally one pair of interconnects and one pair of speaker cables, but with an extra set of interconnects for each preamp and an extra set of speaker cables when a subwoofer is involved. (Note: I may be misunderstanding speaker price specs: maybe the actual price should be *doubled*, one pair for each speaker—which makes a $34,000 difference for the high-priced spread!)

Prices for speaker cables are for a minimum of 2 meters or 7 feet (most cables are specified at 8 feet, 10 feet, or 2 or 2.5 meters).

Interconnects
These go between components—e.g., CD player to amplifier or preamp to amp. I'm assuming RCA connectors and unbalanced systems.

- **Low:** AudioQuest Tower, $26.
- **Median:** Audience Au24 SE, $1,190
- **High:** Fono Acustica Virtuoso, $20,384. (*Still* not making that up!)

Speaker Cables
Prices are for a pair of cables—and I'm now unsure whether that means enough cable for one speaker (two connections) or two. If it's the former, *double* the prices here.

- **Low:** Kimber 4PR, $137.
- **Median:** MIT CVT Terminator 2, $1,999.
- **High:** TARA Labs Omega Evolution SP, $34,000.

Note that low and high options for cables and interconnects are unchanged from last year. Each system price includes cables and interconnects as apparently needed.

Portable Players

Self-contained portable digital music players and headphones. As with all remaining categories, Class A means "best available essentially regardless of price" while Classes B and above are also audiophile quality but with some compromises. (I just say "Class B" but that can include C, D and E.)

Stereophile no longer shows any Class B portable players and the low-priced Class A PonoPlayer is no longer manufactured. Class A systems are listed, with Class B headphones as alternatives.

Class A, Players and Headphones

- **Low:** LG V30 MQA-Capable smartphone, $799. That's right—a *smartphone* that's not only audiophile-quality as a portable player but Class A. 64GB internal, expandable up to 2TB via microSD (really? a two *terabyte* microSD chip? well. no—the biggest as I write this is an astonishing 400GB—but that's the theoretical limit of the card format). It's a high-resolution player and appears suitable as the front-end to a high-end stereo system. Amazing. **Headphones:** Sennheiser HD 650, $500. **System price:** $1,299.
- **Median:** Questyle Audio QP1R Portable Player, $1,030 (32GB internal, with microSD slot). **Headphones:** Sony Signature MDR-Z1R, $2,200. **System price:** $3,230.
- **High:** Astrell&Kern A&Ultima SP1000, $3,499 (256GB internal, with microSD slot). **Headphones:** HiFiMan Susvara, $6,000. **System price:** $9.499.

Class B Headphones

- **Low**: Koss PortaPro, $49.
- **Median**: Audeze EL-8, $699.
- **High:** Koss ESP/950, $1,000.

So system prices with Class A players and Class B phones would be $848, $1,729 and $4,499 respectively.

CD Drives

Putting this (and LP stages, next) first because there are only six choices, not the 24 once amplifiers are involved.

Class A

- **Low**: NAD Masters Series M50.2, $3,999.
- **Median**: AVM Ovation MP 8.2, $10,995.
- **High**: DCS Vivaldi 2.0, $114,996. (*Not a typo.*)

Class B

- **Low:** Rega Apollo, $1,095.
- **Median:** Hegel Music Systems Mohican, $5,000.
- **High:** Metronome CD8 S, $11,000.

What? You find it odd that the median-priced Class B CD drive is more expensive than a Class A drive and that the most expensive Class B is pricier than *half* of the Class A drives? Welcome to high-end audio!

LP Stages

Putting this early (turntable, arm, cartridge, phono preamp) as well because there are only six choices, not 24. I only add one cable, assuming that the turntable already includes a cable to the preamp.

Class A, Low Price

Turntable: PTP Audio Solid12, $3,452. **Tonearm:** Audio-Creative Groovemaster II, $1,348. **Cartridge:** EMT TSD 15, $1,950. **Phono Preamp:** Nagra BPS, $2,459. **Cable:** $26. **Total:** $9,234.

Change from 2017: up $27.

Class A, Median Price

Turntable: Brinkmann Spyder, $14,990. **Tonearm:** Linn Ekos SE, $4,950. **Cartridge:** Soundsmith Hyperion Mk, II, $7.999. **Phono Preamp:** Lamm Industries LP 2.1 Deluxe, $9,390. **Cable:** $1,190. **Total:** $38,629.

Median-to-low ratio: 4.2.

Class A, High Price

Turntable: TechDas Air Force One, $105,000. **Tonearm:** Acoustic Signature TA-9000, $19,997. **Cartridge:** Kuzma CAR-60, $12,995. **Phono Preamp:** Audio Tekne TEA-8695 PCS, $48,000. **Cable:** $20,384. **Total:** $206,376

Change from 2017: down $20,387.
High-to-median ratio: 5.3.

Class B, Low Price
Turntable: Rega RP1, $475. Includes tonearm and cartridge. **Phono Preamp:** Bozak Madison CLK-PH2, $20. **Cable:** $26. **Total:** $521.
Change from 2017: down $103.

Class B, Median Price
Turntable: Pioneer PLX-1000. $699. Includes tonearm. **Cartridge:** Dynavector DV 10X5, $750. **Phono Preamp:** Heed Audio Quasar, $1,200. **Cable:** $1,190. **Total:** $3,839.
Median-to-low ratio: 7.4

Class B, High Price
Turntable: PBN Audio Groovemaster Vintage Direct PBN-DP6, $8,500. **Tonearm:** Sperling-Audio TA-1, $9,750. **Cartridge:** Triangle Art Apollo MC, $8,000. **Phono Preamp:** Modwright PH 150, $7,900. **Cable: $20,384. Total:** $54,534.
Change from 2017: down $20,387.
High-to-median ratio: 14.2.

Systems: Tube Integrated Amplifier

Since CD prices appeared earlier, only the price (including cable) appears in these descriptions. These systems are specified with non-full-range speakers and subwoofers.

Class A, Low Price
Integrated Amp: Line Magnetic LM-5181A, $4,450, Power: 22Wpc/8 ohms. **Speakers:** KEF LS50 Anniversary Model, $1,500. **Subwoofer:** SVS SB-16 Ultra, $2,000. **Cables:** $300. **Total with $3,999 CD drive:** $12,275.
Change from 2017: Down $526.
Add LP: $9.234. **System total:** $21,483.
Change from 2017: Up $26.

Class A, Median Price
Integrated Amplifier: Leben CS600, $6,495. Power: 32Wpc/8 ohms **Speakers:** DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/96, $12,000. **Subwoofer:** MartinLogan BalancedForce 212, $3,995. **Cables:** $5,188. **Total with $10,995 CD drive:** $38,673.
Add LP: $30,329, **System total:** $69,002.
Median-to-low ratio: 3.2.

Class A, High Price

Integrated Amplifier: Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, $11,999. Power: 330Wpc/8 ohms. **Speakers:** Auditorium 23 Hommage Cinema, $55,490. **Subwoofer:** JL Audio F212V2, $7,000. **Cables:** $88,384. **Total with $114,996 CD player:** $392,379

Change from 2017: Down $114,510 (!)

High-to-median ratio: 6.8.

Add LP: $206,376. **System total:** $484,245.

Change from 2017: Down $134,897.

High-to-median ratio: 7.2,

Class B, Low Price

Integrated Amplifier: Rogue Audio Sphinx, $1,395. Power: 100Wpc/8 ohms. **Speakers:** Dayton Audio B652 Air, $50. **Subwoofer:** Tannoy TS2.12, $921. **Cables:** $300. **Total with $1,093 CD player:** $3,761.

[2017 coverage did not distinguish between tube and solid state for Class B integrateds.]

Add LP: $521. **System total:** $4,282.

Class B, Median Price

Integrated Amplifier: Rogers High Fidelity 65V-1, $4,000. Power: 2Wpc/8 ohms (at 3% THD; 0.27Wpc at 1%). **Speakers:** Klipsch Heresy III, $1,998. **Subwoofer:** JL Audio E110, $1,500. **Cables:** $5,188. **Total with $5,000 CD player:** $17,686.

Median-to-low ratio: 4.7

Add LP: $11,525. **System total:** $21,525,

Median-to-low ratio: 5.0.

Class B, High Price

Integrated Amplifier: Allnic T-1800, $7,490. Power: 40Wpc/8 ohms. **Speakers:** DeVore Fidelity Orangutan O/93, $8,400. **Subwoofer:** Same as median, $1,500. **Cables:** $88,384. **Total with $11,500 CD player:** $117,274.

High-to-median ratio: 6.6.

Add LP: $54,534. **System total:** $171,808.

High-to-median ratio: 8.0.

Systems: Tube Amp & Preamp

These systems are configured with full-range speaker systems. As above, only CD and LP prices appear. As always, speaker prices are per pair and "monoblock" amp prices are per stereo pair.

Class A, Low Price

Power Amp: McIntosh MC275, $5,500. Power: 75Wpc/8 ohms. **Preamp:** Loxman Classic CL-38USE, $5,995. **Speakers:** GoldenEar Technology Triton Reference, $8.498. **Cables:** $189. **Total with $3,999 CD player**: $24,181.

Change from 2017: up $6,586.

Add LP: $9,234, **System total:** $35,415.

Change from 2017: up $7,138.

Class A, Median Price

Power Amp: Shindo Haut-Brion, $10,995. Power: 20Wpc/8 ohms. **Preamp:** VTL TL6.5 Series II Signature, $15,000. **Speakers:** Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia Series II, $57,900. **Cables:** $4,579. **Total with $10,995 CD player:** $99,269

Median-to-low ratio 4.1

Add LP: $38,629. **System total:** $137,898.

Median-to-low ratio 4.1.

Class A, High Price

Power Amp: Jadis JA200 Mk.II Monoblock, $35,900. Power: rated at 160Wpc/8 ohms, but doesn't meet that spec. **Preamp:** Ypsilon PST-100 Mk 2, $37,000. **Speakers:** Wilson Audio Specialties Alexandria XLF, $210,000, **Cables:** $74,768. **Total with $114,996 CD player:** $472,664.

Change from 2017: down $29,100.

High-to-median ratio 4.8.

Add LP: $206,376. **System total:** $679,040.

Change from 2017: down $49,487.

High-to-median ratio: 4.9.

Class B, Low Price

Power Amp: PrimaLuna Prologue Premium, $2,199. Power: 35Wpc/8 ohms. **Preamp:** Rogue Audio RH-5, $2,495. **Speakers:** Neat Acoustics Iota Alpha, $1,995. **Cables:** $189. **Total with $1,095 CD player:** $7,084.

[2017 coverage did not distinguish tube from solid-state for Class B.]

Add LP: $521. **System total:** $7,794.

Class B, Median Price

There are only two tube power amps and two tube preamps in Class B and above, so I'm using the High Price amp and preamp; using the Low Price instead would lower the totals here by $4,205.

Power Amp: Margules Audio U280-SC Black, $6,000. Power: 60WPC/8 ohms. **Preamp:** PrimaLuna Prologue Premium, $2,199. **Speakers:** Paradigm Prestige 95F, $4,998. **Cables:** $4,379. **Total with $5,000 CD player:** $22,576.

Median-to-low ratio: 3.1.
Add LP: $3,839, **System total:** $26,415.
Median-to-low ratio: 3.4.

Class B, High Price
Same power amp and preamp as Median above. **Speakers:** Alta Titanium Hesta, $32,000. **Cables:** $74,768. **Total with $11,500 CD player:** $126,467.
High-to-median ratio 5.6.
Add LP: $54,354. **System total:** $181,001.
High-to-median ratio: 6.9.

Systems: Solid-State, Integrated Amplifier

Since speaker systems are the same regardless of amplifier type (in theory!), only the prices appear here—as with cables, CD player and LP configuration.

Class A, Low Price
Integrated Amplifier: NAD Masters Series M32, $3,999. Power: 190Wpc/8 ohms (as tested). Add $1,500 speakers, $2,000 subwoofer, $300 cables, $3,999 CD player, **Total:** $11,798.
Change from 2017: up $927.
Add LP: $9,234, **System total:** $21,032.
Change from 2017: up $1,479.

Class A, Medium Price
Integrated Amplifier: Luxman L-509X, $9,495. Power: 120Wpc/8 ohms. Includes MM/MC phono stage. Add $12,000 speakers, $3,995 subwoofer, $5,188 cables, $10,995 CD player. **Total:** $41,673.
Median-to-low ratio: 3.5.
Add LP (omitting preamp): $29,129. **System total:** $70,802.
Median-to-low ratio: 3.4.

Class A, High Price
Integrated Amplifier: Bel Canto Design Black Amplification System, $55,000. Power: 300Wpc/8 ohms. Add $49,995 speakers, $7,000 subwoofer, $88,384 cables, $114,996 CD player. **Total:** $315,375.
Change from 2017: down $114,005.
High-to-median ratio: 7.6,
Add LP: $206,376. **System total:** $521,751.
Change from 2017: down $134,392.
High-to-median ratio: 7.4.

Class B, Low Price
Integrated Amplifier: NAD D3020 V2, $399. Power: 30Wpc/8 ohms. Add $50 speakers, $921 subwoofer, $300 cables, $1,095 CD player. **Total:** $2,765.

Add LP: $521. **System total:** $3,286.

Class B, Median Price
Integrated Amplifier: Creek Audio Evolution 100A, $2,195. Power: 110Wpc/8 ohms. Add $1,998 speakers, $1,500 subwoofer, $5,188 cables, $5,000 CD player. **Total:** $15,881.

Median-to-low ratio: 5.7.

Add LP: $3,839. **System total:** $19,720.

Median-to-low ratio: 6.0.

Class B, High Price
Integrated Amplifier: Gamut D1150 LE, $12,990. Power: 180Wpc/8 ohms. Add $8,400 speakers, $1,500 subwoofer, $88,384 cables, $11,500 CD drive. **Total:** $112,774.

High-to-median ratio: 7.7.

Add LP: $54,354. **System total:** $177,308.

High-to-median ratio: 9.0.

Systems: Solid-State Amp & Preamp

Class A, Low Price
Power Amp: Benchmark AHB2, $2.995. Power: 100Wpc/8 ohms. **Preamp:** Rogue Audio RH-5, $2,495. Add $8,498 speakers, $189 cables, $3,999 CD player. **Total:** $19,676.

Change from 2017: up $3,341.

Add LP: $9,234, **System total:** $28,910.

Change from 2017: up $3,833.

Class A, Median Price
Power Amp: MBL Corona C15, $20,000. Power: 280Wpc/8 ohms. Preamp: Pass Labs XP-30, $16,500. Add $57,900 speakers, $4,379 cables, $10,995 CD player. **Total:** $109,774.

Median-to-low ratio: 5.6.

Add LP: $38,629. **System total:** $148,403.

Median-to-low ratio: 5.1.

Class A, High Price
Power Amp: darTZeel NHB-458 Monoblock: $176,083. Power: 450Wpc/8 ohms. **Preamp**: Boulder 2110, $59,000. Add $210,000 speakers, $74,768 cables, $114,996 CD player. **Total:** $625,847.

Change from 2017: down $1,078.
High-to-median ratio: 5.7
Add LP: $226,763. **System total:** $832,223.
Change from 2017: down $21,465.
High-to-median ratio: 5.6.

Class B, Low Price
Power Amp: Akitika GT-102, $488. Power: 60Wpc/8 ohms. **Preamp:** Schiit Audio Sys, $49. Add $1,995 speakers, $189 cables, $1,095 CD player. **Total:** $3,816.
Add LP: $521. **System total:** $4,337.

Class B, Median Price
Power Amp: Mytek Brooklyn Amp, $2,495. Power: 250Wpc/8 ohms. **Preamp:** Parasound Halo P7, $2,495. (There are only two solid-state Class B preamps, so this is also the high-price preamp.) Add $4,998 speakers, $4,379 cables, $5,000 CD drive. **Total price:** $19,167.
Median-to-low ratio: 5.0.
Add LP: $3,839. **System total:** $23,006.
Median-to-low ratio: 5.3.

Class B, High Price
Power Amp: Audio Alchemy DPA-1M Monoblock, $3,990. Power: 325Wpc/8ohms. **Preamp**: same as median, $2,495. Add $32.000 speakers, $74,768 cables, $11,500 CD player. **Total price:** $124,553.
High-to-median ratio: 6.5.
Add LP: $54,534, **System total:** $179,807.
High-to-median ratio: 7.8.
Yes, a system composed entirely of Class B (or lower) components costs more than the *median* Class A system.

But Wait! There's More!

The good news: you can put together a complete, LP and CD, stereo system that meets *Stereophile*'s standards for audiophile quality for $3,286—or, for that matter, for $1,918. I find the range of *median* systems interesting: $21,523 to $148,403. I also find it interesting that, *no matter whether you prefer tubes or solid state, integrated or separate,* the most expensive Class B or lower system is more expensive than *half* of the Class A systems (that is, the median systems).

The better news, for some folks: you can assemble a system that appears to meet the magazine's highest price-no-object standards for less than $22,000, with either tube or solid state amplification. Still a lot of money, to be sure.

But there are *lots* of ways to spend lots *more* money even without adding a digital music server. For example, two other Recommended Components categories:'

Powerline accessories: you'll surely want a power distribution system such as the AC Nexus ($28,000 with AC cord), a power conditioner such as the AudioQuest Niagara ($7,995.95—that crucial nickel below eight big ones), and some proper AC cables such as AudioQuest Dragon Source for $4,400 each (for one meter, add $2,500 for each additional meter).

Miscellaneous: along with lots of useful and inexpensive accessories, this group includes the $2,699.95 Nordost Qx4, a "scalar field generator"—oh, and you'll want one for each speaker; equipment stands that run as high as $15,530; speaker isolators (that sit under your speakers) for $1,199.98 (for 8, enough for two speakers); the Keith Monks Audio Works Mk. VII Omni record-cleaning machine ($6,995—and if you play records a lot, you *should* have a good cleaning system, but you can get a *Stereophile*-recommended manual system for $79.99 or a motorized vacuum system for $700). And, honestly, if you *are* playing LPs, you should at least have a good record cleaning brush and fluid (the AcousTech The Big Record Brush goes for $36.95; fluids can be as low as $25/pint), a stylus cleaning device, and maybe a static-discharge device (the Milty Zerostat 3 at $100 is probably a newer version of the Zerostat I used religiously in pre-CD days).

My primary home music systems haven't changed, so I won't repeat them. I still find the sub-$300 system and sub-$800 system eminently worthwhile.

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Masthead

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