

# FANFARE FT-1 FM TUNER

Steven Stone

FM stereo tuner with analog tuning and full-function remote control. Usable sensitivity: 10.5dBf/mono, 11.5dBf/stereo. 50dB quieting sensitivity 15.0dBf mono; 35.0dBf stereo. Capture ratio: 1.5dB. Selectivity: 55dB/wide, 75dB/narrow. Adjacent-channel selectivity: 10dB/wide, 25dB/narrow. Tuning range: 87.5–108.5MHz in 50kHz steps. S/N ratio: 75dB (A-weighted). THD: 0.15% mono, 0.30% stereo. Stereo separa-

tion (1kHz): 50dB. AM suppression: -70dB. SCA suppression: -70dB. Power consumption: 25W. Dimensions: 19" W by 3.5" H by 10.25" D. Weight: 15 lbs. Serial number of unit tested: 1002. Price: \$1195. Approximate number of dealers: 20. Manufacturer: Fanfare Electronics, Ltd., 2100 Old Union Road, Buffalo, NY 14227. Tel: (800) 26-TUNER, (905) 793-7953. Fax: (905) 793-5984.

The official designation for FM is Frequency Modulation, but I think FM stands for Fresh Music. Since before the age of recorded time, FM has been where you go to hear new music, be it the latest Jimi Hendrix album or a recent release from the Kronos Quartet.

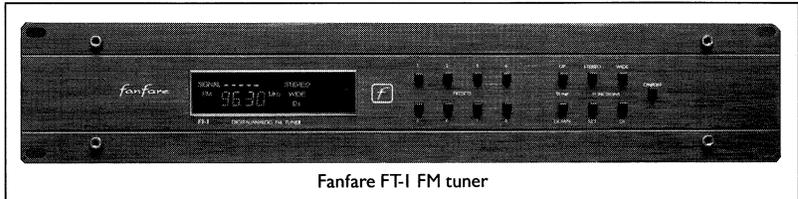
FM is my mainline for new music—I'm a total FM junkie—but FM is also responsible for my involvement with high-end audio gear. It started in 1977 with this little Lynn, Massachusetts FM station that I couldn't pick up with my Pioneer receiver, so I purchased an NAD FM tuner. Then I replaced the rest of the receiver with separates; then I replaced the separates with Revox gear; then I replaced the Revox gear with Quad gear; then I replaced the Quad gear with . . . you get the picture. A rabid audiophile was born, and FM is to blame.

Marv Southcott, President of Fanfare Electronics, Ltd., is also a rabid FM junkie (although he'd be the last person to describe himself as such; unlike yrs trly, Marv is a *civilized* human). He was one of the founders of Magnum Dynalab, where he worked with Manfred Breunig on the original Magnum Dynalab FT-101 tuner project. Marv is also the author of *Rediscover FM Stereo*, an excellent primer on FM stereo for the terminally confused. Marv left Magnum Dynalab in 1991, and in early '93 founded Fanfare Electronics, Ltd.<sup>1</sup> to develop products for the FM-tuner and FM-reception market. The FT-1, Fanfare's premier product, represents quite an auspicious beginning.

## TECHNICAL STUFF

The Fanfare FT-1 owner's manual states that "The Fanfare FT-1 is a highly sensitive FM tuner augmented by excellent selectivity and offering a host of important features. Not the least of these features is clear full-spectrum stereo reception with excellent sonic accuracy and soundstage reproduction." Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Fanfare Electronics is *not* associated with Victor Goldstein's Fanfare Distribution, which imports Jadis, Siltech, and Combak Harmonix products.



The FT-1 also has an infrared remote control with all-front-panel functions: eight presets, wide/narrow IF band switching, two-position DX switching for "local only" reception, fast up/down manual tuning in 50kHz steps, auto-seek mode to automatically find stereo FM stations, silent pushbutton controls, and a special "band" switch for future RF bandwidths. The Fanfare features special noise-reduction circuitry, two sets of unbalanced audio outputs (Hi and Lo), one set of balanced XLR audio outputs, and a composite output (for FM broadcast use). In other words, the FT-1 has all the bells and whistles of a mid-fi digital tuner, plus sound quality associated with the best audiophile products. It's available in either rack-mount (19") or non-rack-mount (17") versions finished in goes-with-anything black. Other finishes may be available upon request, depending on how hard you beg and how much you're willing to pay. The sample unit was the rack-mount version in ubiquitous black.

The FT-1 is an analog tuner design. It doesn't use a frequency-synthesis "black box," but discrete circuitry using tuned coils and MOSFET solid-state devices. It does use a proprietary digital microprocessor circuit called UNISET\*, which constantly samples for accuracy the frequency tuned to—if it detects any drift, the UNISET\* monitor immediately adjusts the tuner to keep it properly tuned.

RF stages in the FT-1 use high-quality varactor tuning devices and MOSFET RF amplifiers; IF stages utilize hand-selected ceramic filters for best group-delay characteristics. The low-level RCA output is direct-coupled, while the high-level output is boosted by an audio-grade amplifier stage. As long as the FT-1 is plugged into a working AC outlet, the

tuning circuit stays on: If you listen very carefully, you can hear some signal coming from the FT-1 when it's turned off. Don't worry, your system hasn't developed RF problems—it's just the FT-1's way of letting you know it's still there.

## ERGONOMICS

I own several tuners,<sup>2</sup> each of which requires a trip to the component rack for tuning and adjusting. Katy, my cat, hates it when I get up to fiddle with anything in my system—she thinks listening sessions were created so she can bed down and catch a few winks in SS's lap. The FT-1's remote control gets a five-paw rating from Katy, since it allows me to make all the adjustments from my chair. Not only can I change stations from my sitting position, I can also jump through and change presets, switch from wide to narrow band, change into mono if the signal is bad, and turn the tuner on and off. Only thing it doesn't do is make Katy lighter. Yep, remote control is a must for the cat-encumbered FM listener.

The FT-1 looks pretty plain. But most tuners are positively plug-ugly. At least the FT-1 avoids the Ginza-at-midnight, cacamorphic, lights-bells-and-whistles look. Its layout is workmanlike and logical, resembling a piece of pro broadcast gear more than home-electronics equipment. Its LED display indicates signal strength, frequency, stereo/mono information, Wide/Narrow setting, DX setting, and a setup display when you're changing presets. While the FT-1 probably won't steal any industrial-design awards away from B&O, it's simple enough that you'll never get a headache looking at it.

<sup>2</sup> Currently I have a Dyna FM-3, Scott/Ampex LT-110B, Fisher 200B, Harman/Kardon Citation IIIX, Marantz 20B, and a Magnum Dynalab Etude.

## SYSTEM

See my Green Mountain Audio Diamante review elsewhere in this issue for the full list of equipment I used during the preparation of this review. I used two different antenna setups for tuner comparisons: The first system consisted of the Magnum Dynalab Silver Ribbon indoor dipole antenna attached to the Magnum Dynalab model 205 Signal Sleuth; the second system was an outdoor TV/FM antenna from Radio Shack with a Radio Shack rotor and distribution box. I also made much use of the collected works of Philip K. Dick.

## SOUND

The Denver/Boulder area is blessed with a wide variety of FM stations ranging from left-leaning, all-volunteer community stations like KGNU to slick, all-classical-music, Mercedes-and-brokerage-services-laden commercial stations like KVOB. I live in the foothills outside Boulder. Here, multipath and weak signals abound, making FM reception something of an interesting spectator sport. Since dipole ribbons scrunched up in dust-laden corners don't cut it at 6880', an outdoor antenna feeds my video room, and a Silver Ribbon dipole antenna is hooked up to a Magnum Dynalab Signal Sleuth in my large listening room. For the last three years, my reference tuner has been the Magnum Dynalab Etude. I've needed it.

The Fanfare FT-1's performance is definitely on a par with the Etude's—differences in audio quality between the two were very subtle, similar to the differences between two different meter lengths of top-quality audio cable. The tuners sounded very similar, with virtually no discernible differences in balance, dynamics, or tonal quality. On strong stations like Boulder's KBCO, the Etude had slightly better focus and soundstaging. On medium-strength stations like KBDG ("Big Dog Country") from Denver, I couldn't detect any differences between the units. On poor-reception stations like KUNC public radio from Greeley, CO, the Fanfare FT-1 had less hash and trash than the Etude. Again, most of these differences were very slight: The two tuners sounded so similar that, other than hearing the click of the switch, it was virtually impossible to hear when I had switched them.

The transparency of both the Etude and the FT-1 was often scary. For example, I host an audio show on KGNU, Boulder's local community radio station, called *Audio 101*, created "by audio nerds for audiophobes." My partner Terry Reardon and I tape our show in KGNU's

less-than-state-of-the-art production studio, outside of which is a building under construction, complete with a chorus line of grunting dumptrucks. When I listened to one of our recent shows while comparing the Etude and the FT-1, I could track the trucks rumbling across the back of the soundstage. Nice high-tech production values: terrifying fidelity, perfect reproduction of low-level truck rumble.

## CONCLUSION

One of my least favorite publications is *Consumer Reports*. Even before they trashed the Suzuki Samurai,<sup>3</sup> I found their value-for-money, lowest-common-denominator analysis of audio products repugnant. Sound never seems to matter to *CR*, just features and price. Feh.

It is ironic, therefore, that I find that what sets the Fanfare FT-1 above its competition is its value for the dollar. While the FT-1 is the Magnum Dynalab's equal in performance and sonics, the Fanfare is ergonomically superior and costs \$155 less. If you add to the Magnum Dynalab the optional remote, which gives remote control of the five presets, tuning, and on/off capabilities, the difference is \$634 plus shipping. That's enough to pay for quite an elaborate antenna. Also, the FT-1's special "band" switch allows for the possibility of upgrading for future RF bands, assuming Fanfare makes this available.

While the Rotel RHT-10 tuner reviewed by Don Scott in the November 1993 *Stereophile* (Vol.16 No.10, p.230) is also worthy competition, the Fanfare has superior output capabilities, with both low- and high-level single-ended RCA, and balanced XLR and composite outputs. This choice of outputs allows you to avoid the RHT-10's Achilles' heel: the excessive output level on heavily modulated stations. The Rotel costs \$1500—\$305 more than the Fanfare.

Given that both the Magnum Etude and the Rotel RHT-10 are rated as Class A tuners in *Stereophile's* most recent "Recommended Components," I strongly believe that the Fanfare FT-1 deserves not only Class A status, but the bargain "\$\$\$" rating as well. You can spend more bucks on a tuner if you want to, but smart money will purchase a Fanfare FT-1 and spend the extra *dinero* on a supercalifragilisticexpialidocious antenna. FM may not stand for Free Music, but with the Fanfare FT-1 tuner, your FM source might be the least-expensive Class A input in your system. **S**

<sup>3</sup> I've owned one of these four-wheeled mechanical mountain goats for over two years. Great car. Only rolls over if you do wicked stupid stuff with it while driving drunk. Serves you right.

# SALE

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ance and its effect on the effective frequency response of a given speaker (most notably in the bass region), we must point out one important factor: Frequency-response variations caused by the loudspeaker/room interaction are *far more* prominent than those caused by the above-noted characteristic of our amplifiers. Response variations of  $\pm 10$ dB (or more) are typical in the range of 20Hz to 200Hz in most audiophile listening rooms. Therefore, our overriding concern is ultimately the believability of the reproduced sonic illusion to the most sensitive and resolving of all test instruments, the human ear!

Thanks again, Dick, for your positive evaluation. We look forward to your comments on some of our future amp designs, which will once again push the envelope of reference-caliber sound in tube-amplifier design.

CHRIS JOHNSON  
President  
JOHN SLOAN  
VP, Product Development

CHRIS JENSEN  
VP, Marketing  
Sonic Frontiers

### GRYPHON EXORCIST SYSTEM DEMAGNETIZER

Editor:

We would like to thank Jonathan Scull for evaluating the sonic improvements possible from the Gryphon Exorcist. He describes the results as being "easily discernible," with a "quieter, wider presentation coming from a 'blacker,' more 'velvety' background."

We are pleased to see a comparison between the various system-enhancement products available today. The Exorcist is different from other similar products in that it is actually a miniature signal generator producing a very precise and full-bandwidth pulse tone which we feel is essential for proper system demagnetization. We avoided using the CD medium as a vehicle for demagnetization due to the inherent problems of signal loss and limitation in bandwidth reproduction.

DOUGLAS SPITLER  
Gryphon USA

### FANFARE FT-1

Editor:

I'm not quite sure how to respond to this review. It has me somewhat overwhelmed.

Now that I have recovered: If I may, I would like to clarify some things mentioned by SS that are potentially misleading. First, the "band" switch on the remote is for "future development." While there are a few projects out there that are worthy of consideration, none have been prototyped yet. However, I am not a proponent of "planned obsolescence" either, so I can only say to those who purchase an FT-1 that factory upgrades will be offered wherever appropriate.

Second, the mention of being able to "hear" the tuner even when it is turned "off": this occurs only when the preamplifier's volume level is turned way up. The audio is about 70dB down. It was not mentioned in any literature because I felt

it might spark some experimentation. And, that is usually the time when a great big spike decides to visit the user's audio system. Suffice it to say, it is not bothersome to low-level audio passages from other components.

Also, if I may, I would like to mention a couple of important features that were not addressed in the review. One is that the FT-1 is "field serviceable." Either of its four PC boards are "swappable," including the RF board, with no further alignment required. Also, the FT-1 carries a limited three-year, transferrable warranty.

Contrary to SS's comments about having to "beg" for a different faceplate finish, come June (or thereabouts) we will have faceplates available with graphics that will match, generally, with the motifs of several of the major audio electronics manufacturers. More information on this and a faceplate switch program is available by contacting Fanfare FM. For now, only Fanfare's original motif will be available in 17".

Over the past few years I have had the pleasure of working somewhat as an advocate for the FM listener, and for the FM station. Because of the FT-1's reference quality, it allowed an answer to a question usually asked of FM stations: "How do you know how good you sound if you can't tell how good you sound?" The FT-1 is already in broadcast service as a repeater demodulator, and as a means to sample true "off-air" quality. But it is my wish that as

many FM stations who are truly interested in their actual sound [can have an opportunity to hear it]. I can think of no better way to do it than to make a demo FT-1 available to them. All they have to do is pay the shipping and handling. A sale in this case is much less important than the net result of the actual test. Perhaps it's the altruist surfacing in me, but the station will now have a reference to go by. Who knows? Maybe they will adjust their audio to more pleasant and realistic levels. And those who are already "optimizing" their audio will be able to do even better. In any case, it is the listener who will ultimately benefit. Based on the success of that program, a dedicated "pro" model will be on the market come January '95.

Finally, I think it very important to mention that the FT-1 is a product of US design and US manufacturing excellence. And I have a lot of people to thank for helping me bring the FT-1 to market, especially those out there in audio land with whom I have had the pleasure of being associated over these past 10 years.

Thank you, *Stereophile*. And thank you, SS.  
MARV SOUTHCOTT  
President, Fanfare Electronics

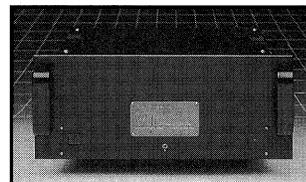
### MARTIN-LOGAN CLS IIZ

Editor:

Thank you for reviewing our full-range ESL, the CLS IIZ. Throughout the years the CLS has, in many ways, remained our favorite. As Jack English described, the

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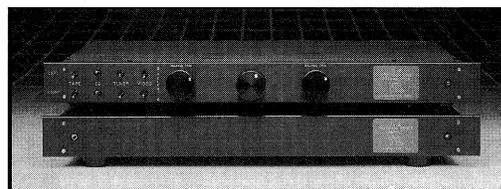


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