

**HDtracks**

**Head-Fi**

# Open Your Ears



**The Ultimate Test Disc for Headphones**



## Open Your Ears

When David Chesky reached out with his idea to work with Head-Fi.org on a sampler album with tracks specifically hand-picked to help wring out and test headphone audio systems, I smiled from one headphone-covered ear to the other.

I'm a long-time fan of Mr. Chesky and his label. If you're a music-loving audiophile, then you know the names David Chesky, Chesky Records, and HDtracks.com. David is a wonderful composer and musician in his own right, and his works have been a beloved part of my music collection. Through his Chesky Records label, David also brings us the works of others like McCoy Tyner, Bucky Pizzarelli, John Pizzarelli, Peggy Lee, John Hammond, Paquito D'Rivera, Badi Assad, Rebecca Pidgeon, and so many more.

Each and every track assembled for this, *The Head-Fi/HDtracks Open Your Ears Sampler*, was carefully selected by David and additionally reviewed by Steve Guttenberg (author of The Audiophiliac high-end audio blog at CNET) and myself. If you have a 96kHz/24-bit-capable system, this album is also available in a 96/24 FLAC version, which shouldn't be surprising considering Chesky Records was one of the early producers and purveyors of high-res music, and Chesky's HDtracks.com is now leading the downloadable high-res charge.

Prepare to put your headphone audio rig through its paces with *The Head-Fi/HDtracks Open Your Ears Sampler*, and enjoy some absolutely terrific music doing it!

Jude Mansilla  
Founder, Head-Fi.org



## Open Your Ears

If you want to know how good your headphones can sound listen to great sounding recordings. Each track on this sampler was selected to demonstrate specific audio qualities like transparency, dynamic range, imaging, etc.

**HDtracks** is your source for high-resolution music. How high is high? Our CD quality 44 kHz/16 bit files run at 1411 kbps and our 96 kHz/24 bit music files run at 4608 kbps! No wonder they sound vastly better than the usual 128 or 256 kbps downloads available elsewhere on the Web. That's why **HDtracks** are great to test your headphones.

The recordings all feature minimal or no dynamic range compression, overdubs or equalization. Close mic-ing of instruments is also avoided, as are digital effects or processing. The recordings are therefore more accurate than the vast majority of commercial recordings on the market. Enjoy!

--Steve Guttenberg

## 1 - Midrange Tonality, natural as can be



### **“Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of”** *The Persuasions Sing U2 - The Persuasions*

It's a thrill to hear the Persuasions' pure a cappella treatments of U2's best tunes. The recording is as straight ahead as you can get – just a bunch of guys singing around a very special microphone – within the natural acoustic setting of St. Peter's Church in New York City. If your headphones are up to snuff, the men's voices should sound like, well, voices.

Written by A. Clayton, D. Evans, P. Hewson, L. Mullen  
Universal Music (ASCAP)  
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## 2 - Low-Level Resolution, hearing the subtle stuff



### “Money”

*Jazz Side of the Moon, The Music of Pink Floyd* - Seamus Blake, Ari Hoenig, Mike Moreno, Sam Yahel

This is really amazing. Listen to the way Ari Hoenig’s drums convey the very start of this familiar tune. The drums are way over on the right, and the subtle shading of each beat and the way they fill the acoustics of St. Peter’s Church should be very clear. It’s all pretty quiet stuff and a rather demanding test of your headphone and headphone amp’s low-level resolution.

Written by George R. Waters  
Hampshire House Pub Corp., The Richmond Organization (ASCAP)  
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## 3 - Transparency, see-through sound



### “Get Behind the Mule”

*Rough & Tough* - John Hammond

Low distortion plays a big part in what audiophiles call transparency. It accounts for the sound’s purity and clarity. Low noise and fast transient response are also part of the mix. Over the best headphones, Hammond’s full-throated voice and clear guitar should sound fully present and real. Of course, no headphone is perfect, but the ones that get closest to that ideal are the most transparent.

Written by Kathleen Brennan, Thomas A Waits  
Jalma Music (ASCAP)

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## 4 - Visceral Impact, feel the sound



### “Saré Tete Wa”

*Love Drum Talk* - Babatunde Olatunji

On this track, Olatunji and the other drummers' beats are as much felt as they are heard. This sort of power isn't easy to hear over headphones, but the best ones convey the drums' impact and palpable texture. The headphone amplifier can make a huge difference with this sort of demanding program material; the best headphone driven by a puny amp will constrict the drums' power.

Written by Babatunde Olatunji

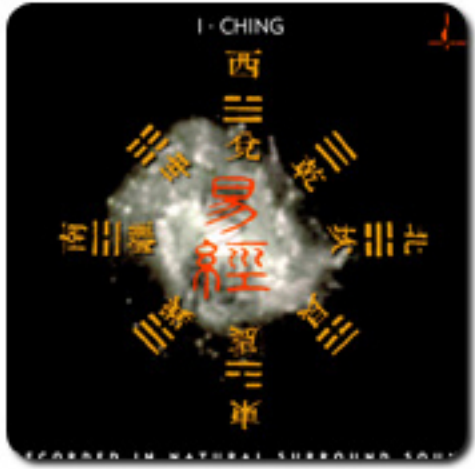
Arranged by Babatunde Olatunji and Hui Cox

Amin Music / Coconut Bay Music (BMI)

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## 5 - Out-Of-Head Imaging



### “Gadamaylin”

*Of the Marsh and the Moon - I-Ching*

The birds and low murmuring voices first heard on “Gadamaylin” should sound far away, well outside your headphones. Later, the high ringing tones should float free in space. Through the track, you should hear a marked contrast between close and distant sounds. “Gadamaylin” also has remarkable front and rear spaciousness.

Inner Mongolian Folk Song

All arrangements by Joel Goodman

IDNAR Music & Chesky Productions (ASCAP)

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## 6 - Center Focus



### “Texas Ranger”

*Four Marys* - Rebecca Pidgeon

Many headphones do not localize center images well, but some tend to sound monophonically claustrophobic. That certainly should not be the case with Rebecca Pidgeon’s track. Her voice should appear within the soundstage flanked by a fiddle and banjo. The centered voice and instruments should have equal focus and presence within the sound stage.

Traditional

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## 7 - Palpable Detail and Texture



### “Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra, Movement 3”

*Urban Concertos* - David Chesky

Listen for the palpable realism of the handclaps right from the beginning of the track. It's just the right combination of quick transients and tonal accuracy we're looking for. Handclaps should have a fleshy, human quality that's very distinct from other percussive sounds. The bassoon's full and rich sound isn't the easiest to get right, but when you hear it, you'll know it.

Composition by David Chesky (ASCAP)  
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## 8 - Rhythm, do your headphones swing?



“Haji Baba”

*Calypso Blues* - Monty Alexander

This one's a little tougher to explain. Other aspects of sound quality are somewhat easier to quantify. Rhythm, however, is more a matter of energy and time. That is, does the music set your body in motion? If your 'phones are up to snuff, Monty Alexander's piano, Lorin Cohen's bass and George Fludas' drums should lay down a seriously formidable groove. It should set something in motion.

Written by Dimitri Tiomkin and Ned Washington

Catharine Hinen (ASCAP)

Patti Washington Music, Leslie Wallake Music Services (ASCAP)

Volta Music Corporation, Universal Music Corporation (ASCAP)

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## 9 - Spatial Depth, it's all in your head



### “Percussion Imaging Test”

*Best of Chesky Jazz and more Audiophile Tests Volume 2*

This time, we're going by the numbers. You will hear Richard Crooks playing his drums in a very large and reverberant recording studio at 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 30 and 70 feet away from the microphone. As the distance increases, you will hear more and more room sound, that is, the sound of the drums filling the studio. Do your headphones let you hear the depth encoded into these recordings? The drums are also extremely dynamic. They're a tough test for any headphone and amplifier.

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## 10 - Depth, Music



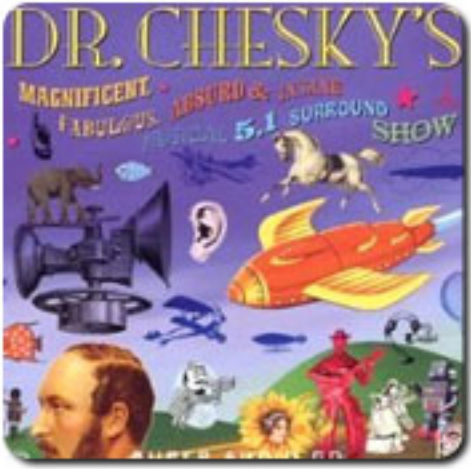
### “Tumbao De Tamborito” *Jazz Descargas* - The Conga Kings

Listen for the way Mario Rivera’s baritone sax appears in front of the band’s three conga players. The bass should be further back in the soundstage. Over the best headphones, you should also hear the entire group’s sound fill the massive acoustic space of St. Peter’s Church in New York City.

Written by Guillermo Edghill  
GEJE Publishing (BMI)  
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## 11 - Bass Extension, how low can you go?



### “Heartbeat”

*Dr. Chesky's Sound Show*

Listening to bass over headphones is very different from listening to it over speakers. With speakers, really deep bass is a whole body experience – you feel it as much as you hear it – but good headphones can reproduce very deep bass. With these tests, you will hear 50, 40, 30 and finally, 20 hertz bass. Of course, human hearing is naturally less sensitive to very low frequencies, so even if your headphone isn't rolling off the lowest bass frequencies, your ears will.

Composed & arranged by David Chesky  
Chesky Productions (ASCAP)  
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## 12 - Bass, Music



**“Everything is Broken”**

*Memphis in Manhattan* - Billy Burnette

If your headphones are really good, it should be easy to differentiate between David Roe's profoundly deep upright bass and George Ricelli's thundering bass drum. What's more, the bass should have an open and more life-like quality than what you hear from commercial recordings.

Written by Bob Dylan

Special Rider Music (SESAC)

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## About HDtracks

Founded by David and Norman Chesky of the audiophile record label Chesky Records, HDtracks is a high-quality music download service offering a diverse catalog of great music from the world's finest record labels. HDtracks does not believe in DRM, and as a result, all of the files that we offer are unencrypted files that play on any computer or portable device. As consumers are left with few options to purchase high quality recordings, HDtracks was founded to fill the void. It is our purpose to allow our customers access to the largest online library of DRM-free CD and DVD-Audio quality downloads complete with liner notes in a PDF format.





