

The Best Purchase Of My Life

My trusty **Realistic** brand receiver/amplifier that I bought new in the summer of 1978 — still working in 2024!

Emphasizing that I have had this running for an average of 12 hours daily! (with a few break years) A mighty long time, and with music being so important (I frequently listen attentively as most would a book or movie), has been an ultra-great investment of good old audio technology made in the era of built-to-last.

I first encountered this **Realistic STA-78** in the **Radio Shack** store at **Southdale** shopping mall, while going to another viewing of the ever popular movie *Star Wars* that was released the previous year in 1977 to great aplomb. This was still in theaters for a mighty long stretch, because everyone wanted to see it multiple times, myself and friends included. I went with my junior high school friend **Mike Doyle**, who played a good part in finding this amp.

Wandering Southdale before the movie was fun, going to the arcade in the era of *Asteroids*, and we found ourselves in Radio Shack to peruse a sale at Mike's encouragement. We check out the receivers, and he took a shine to this one. I believe it was on sale for around \$140. Steep for us 14 year old kids at the time, but a great deal for what it was. A quality receiver with decent power, and a very cool look — its solid black face felt kinda *Star Wars*-like — equipment from the future, and the wood veneer casing made it like a piece of furniture. We loved it! The sales guy gave his cool audiophile pitch, boasting of its features. I believe Mike probably would have bought it right then if he could. Being outside of our teen wallets, we walked away, dazzled by the possibilities,

and commenced to the theater, blown away again by the groundbreaking sci-fi action movie of the times.

I don't remember how long before I decided to get this model. A few days? Weeks? What made it possible were some savings I had in a bank account made for me at the too-young-to-contemplate-money age of 7. This began with a small amount, and and a few years later some of my winnings from a maze game from 1974* were added by my wise parents.

Meanwhile, interest was good and my 1974 winnings added about \$60. In the years following, there was enough with savings from my paper route earnings to buy that very amp. I asked Dad if I could and knew I was really into this, agreed! So I withdrew it all, and had a check made. Brother Brian was staying at the house for a portion of that summer, who'd been working on his Porsche 912, now painted dark cherry maroon, he drove me to Southdale (south of Minneapolis) and I bought that beautiful piece of essential sound equipment! I was thrilled!

With speakers and turntable loaned from Bri, (before I got my own) I can't wait to crank some tunes! The first day good fellow music enthusiast friend Matt shows up after I rave about this purchase. We really had fun testing its limits. With KQRS-FM on, turning the volume up notches at a time. We never put it all the way up. I think we dared push the volume knob to **7** — the loudest I ever had it. (parents were away.) I soon learn that it's best to never push the volume beyond **3**, usually leaving it at **2** for inside my room is a decent limit. It's better to have sound filling the room with good speakers at low volume, especially to not disturb others in apartments years later. I did annoy dad with the bass

rumbling through the floor a few too many times. (dang kids! sorry dad.)

And wow, what a companion this amp has been ever since! I grew up using it — as close to a spiritual shrine for me of sorts, transcendent music adoration occurred through its circuitry. Moved by countless hours of discovering album after album for nearly 46 years now! A sacred cultural generator, a beacon of music with this amp as its vehicle — its nervous system brain.

I went through speakers, tape decks and turntables over the years. Now I have it reading from a Mac playing good 21st century digital recordings. Whenever hi-def 24 bit files, the better! Sounding rich through Klipsch brand speakers that brother Bri found for me about 14 years ago!

I had to replace its fuses every few years, until I brought it in for repairs at a reputable stereo system repair shop in Berkeley, around 1999 (?) They must have used better quality fuses, I haven't had to replace them ever since! It has a short in one button I never use, which is a problem only when accidentally jostled out of position. And some of the lights of the radio numbers are burned out. Otherwise it's still working great! In life I became an accomplished visual artist. Creating several hundred artworks when listening to music through this. The best purchase I ever made. Easily!

I would love to thank Mike Doyle for the impetus to get this in the first place, but we lost touch long ago. A few things we did was to canoe the Minnehaha Creek, tape records, sometimes with good friend Dave Werntz, and we saw the movie *Alien* with Brian when released. We didn't hang out anymore by 11th grade. I became a real Washburnout, running with pothead crowds, then a gf, then bands. I haven't seen Mike since running into him by 1983 at the classic

hangout near Washburn high school where we went, **The Malt Shop**. Didn't have much to say. I can't find him online here in the Googling future. I hope that my old friend is alive and well, and should know that the amp he encouraged is still running, and has supplied a lifetime of absorbing countless musical experiences!

The music appreciated through this solid state vessel? Too much to summarize with justice. That topic will have to be another essay, and a lengthy one at that.

[* and now here's a story within a story, **Winning big in 1974!**]

Friends of my parents, around a dozen guests from India, were over for a big dinner party. I was 10, and had one of those wooden boxes with a labyrinth and holes on a swiveling platform. The goal was to guide a small metal ball through without it dropping into its several holes. One of them, KK, bet if I could get it beyond hole #12 that I'd get \$2! Done. Then he gets a \$5 bill out for me if I make it to hole #20. Good! Then Babbu places a \$100 bill on the table and challenged I get *that* if I made it to the end!!! Wow! There were 60 holes to bypass, and I don't think I ever did before. I somehow straightened my concentration and calmly did all of the tilts and turns of the two lateral dials, and got all the way to the end. *Winner of the 100 dollar bill*, to rounds of applause!! Mom said that I couldn't take that much, in that humble Minnesota nice fashion. I protest briefly, then they all chime in that I earned it! (none of them could get past hole #5) so that made my night! [I ended up spending less than half of the \$107 total, on a small Panasonic cassette player that I wore out in a few years.]

- Dean Gustafson, May 2024