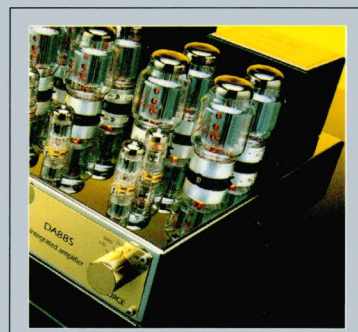
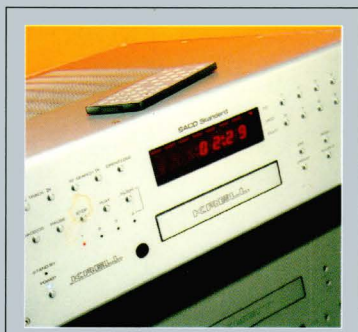


SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

# HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND

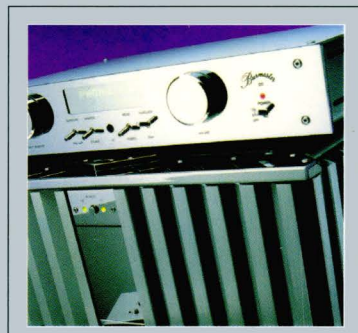
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IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF THE WORLD'S FINEST HI-FI

# *2005*







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# CLASSE



# HI-FI CHOICE

OCTOBER 2005 ISSUE 272

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## WELCOME TO HI-FI CHOICE

To ensure you get the best information, opinion and advice, *Hi-Fi Choice*  
employs the most knowledgeable and experienced hi-fi writers in the business...

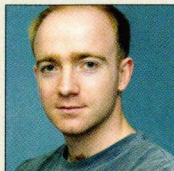


**"Music digs deep into our emotional core like no other art form. It touches the soul and makes grown men weep. Hi-fi is simply a means to a musical end – it provides the conduit for its energy and detail, delivers scale and space, ensures you get closer to the tone and impact of the original performance. It makes music seem more real and hence achieve its emotional goal. Quite simply, the music that moves you, moves you more."** Tim Bower, Editor



### PAUL MESSENGER

A former *HFC* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for nearly 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



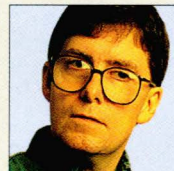
### DAN GEORGE

Dan is a huge hi-fi nut whose dream came true when he became *HFC*'s reviews editor. Armed with a bristling contacts book and a pair of razor-sharp ears, he ensures that only the most interesting products make it into *HFC*.



### ALVIN GOLD

Alvin cut his hi-fi teeth in retail, and has been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed his encyclopaedic knowledge to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides).



### JIMMY HUGHES

Jimmy got 'into' hi-fi in the 1960s and after ten years in retail, his first article was published in 1979. He's an avid tweaker and his 'firsts' include solid-core cables and, er, listening to your speakers back to front – well, you can't win 'em all...



### RICHARD BLACK

Richard is a professional musician, an experienced recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He has a particular knack for writing about complicated subjects in a comprehensible way – and he only writes for *HFC*.



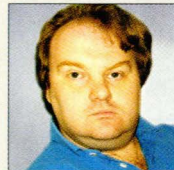
### ART DUDLEY

One of the most respected commentators on the American hi-fi scene, Art has written for numerous titles including *Hi-Fi Heretic*, *Sounds Like and Listener*. Among other things, he is currently 'editor-at-large' of US journal *Stereophile*.



### JASON KENNEDY

Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found swanning about the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational (trust us) and his love of music knows no bounds.



### ALAN SIRCORN

After a stint selling hi-fi, Alan began his journalistic career at *HFC* some 13 years ago. Now a successful freelancer, you too can benefit from his extensive hi-fi knowledge, from purist two-channel stereo to the latest multichannel gear.

## ESTABLISHED 1975

**HI-FI CHOICE** is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 30 years, our unique tests have brought you the most thorough and reliable hi-fi journal around. And our mix of cherry-picked kit, rigorous group tests and in-depth equipment reviews continues to ensure that **HFC** is the magazine you can trust. Published 13 times a year, it's the smarter hi-fi read...



## HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE >>



## The Collection

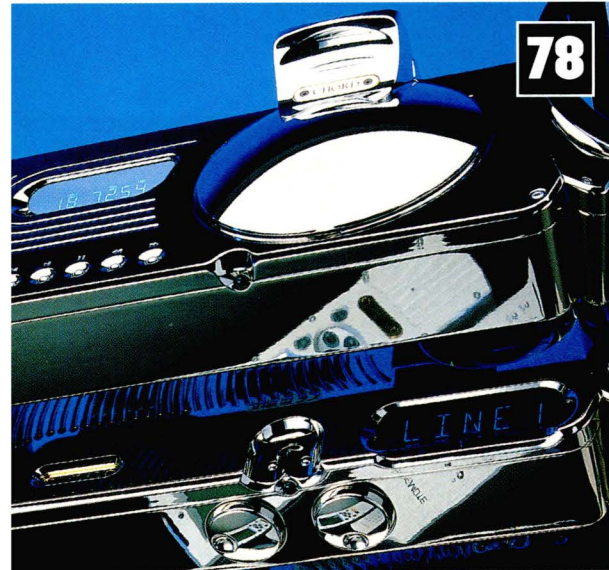
This very special edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* is rather different from the norm. From p30 onwards, following our regular *AudioFile* news and views section, the entire issue is dedicated to the finest collection of high-end hi-fi ever assembled on these shores. This encompasses 45 in-depth product tests with a combined value of more than £400,000. Some of these tests (the single-page reviews) are old favourites revisited, while many others are reviewed here for the very first time. Whether you are looking for a superb source, an amazing amplifier, a lovely loudspeaker, or are just looking on with wonder... enjoy the ride!





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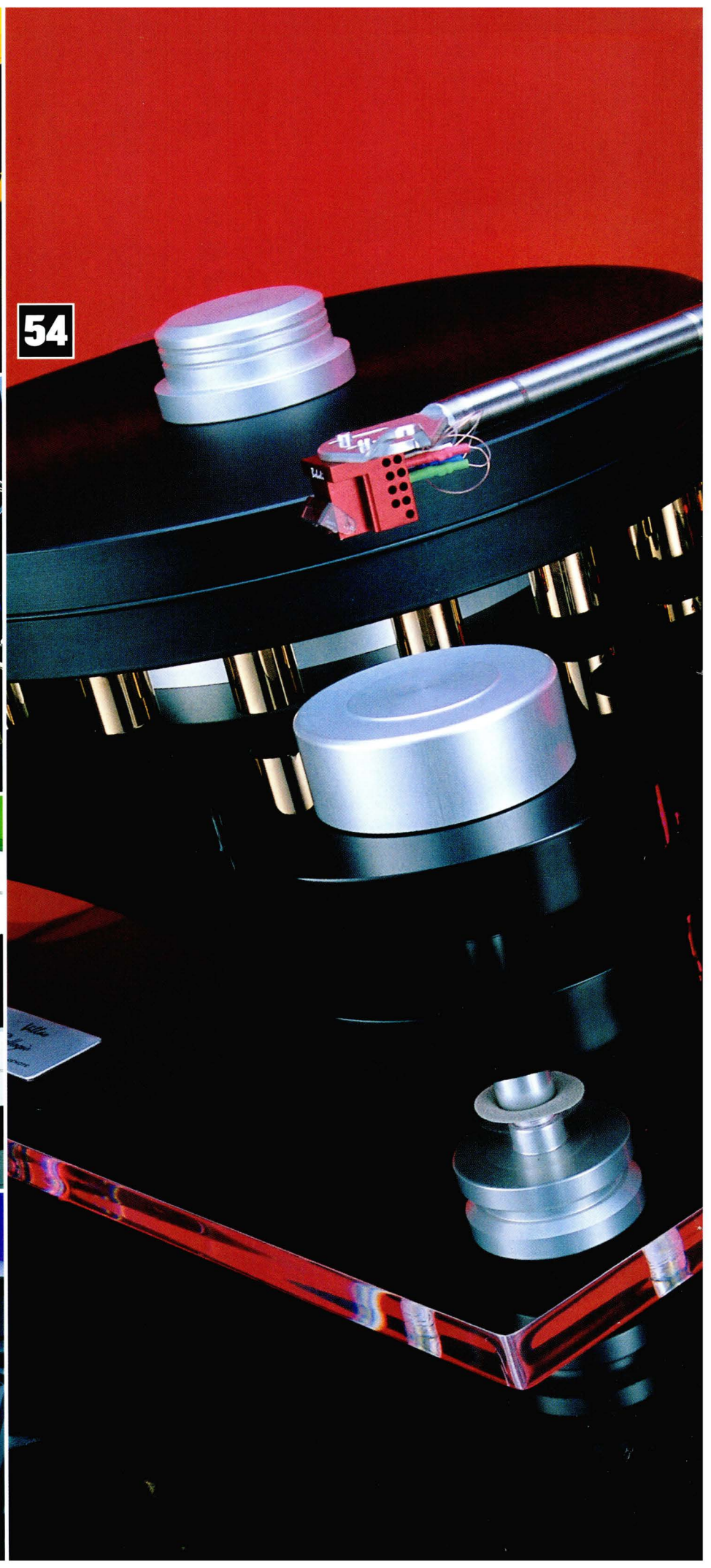
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Inside your free 2nd-hand hi-fi mini-mag...

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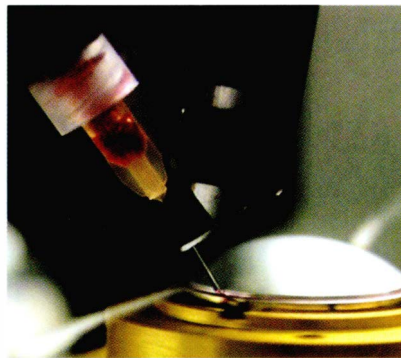
# All you need to know about your free Bowers & Wilkins DVD\*

To celebrate the launch of its new 800 Series flagship speaker range, B&W has produced a fascinating, feature-length DVD – including over an hour of great music



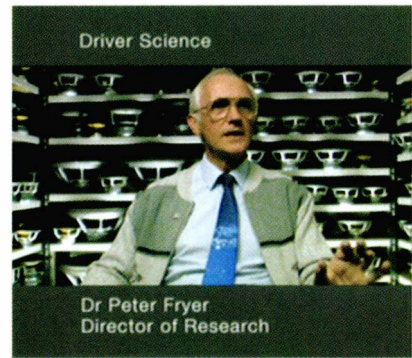
## CHAPTER 1 – LISTEN AND YOU’LL SEE

A beautifully filmed introduction to the 800 Series, set to concert footage of Peter Gabriel playing *In Your Eyes* from his recent *Growing Up Live* tour. Complete with high-quality photography of the range-topping 800D loudspeaker, this stunning introduction – in both PCM stereo and DTS surround sound – clearly demonstrates what B&W has long stood for: a passion for music and sound.



## CHAPTER 2 – ART OF SOUND

A short film with commentary about the making of the new 800 Series. The film features striking footage of the 800 Series manufacturing processes, from the magic of producing diamond tweeter domes to traditional ‘wood-bending’ techniques perfected by Scandinavian craftsmanship. The film is set to the music of Jon Hopkins, from his beautiful album *Contact Note*.



## CHAPTER 3 – UNIVERSITY OF SOUND

A detailed account of the key technologies used in the 800 Series, delivered by B&W’s own engineers and filmed at the B&W Research Institute in Steyning, West Sussex. The Research Institute ensures that creativity and scientific research can take place in an idealised environment. The many journalists and academics that have visited over its history have dubbed it the ‘University of Sound’.



## CHAPTER 4 – PASSION FOR MUSIC

Some of the world’s greatest performers, and owners of 800 Series speakers, talk about their passion for music and sound. Included are interviews with legendary pianist Alfred Brendel and Cassandra Wilson, described by Time magazine as “One of America’s most important and jazz vocalists”, alongside Dave Stewart and Jan Garbarek. Each artist has provided a piece of music to accompany his or her interview.



### A Sound Experience

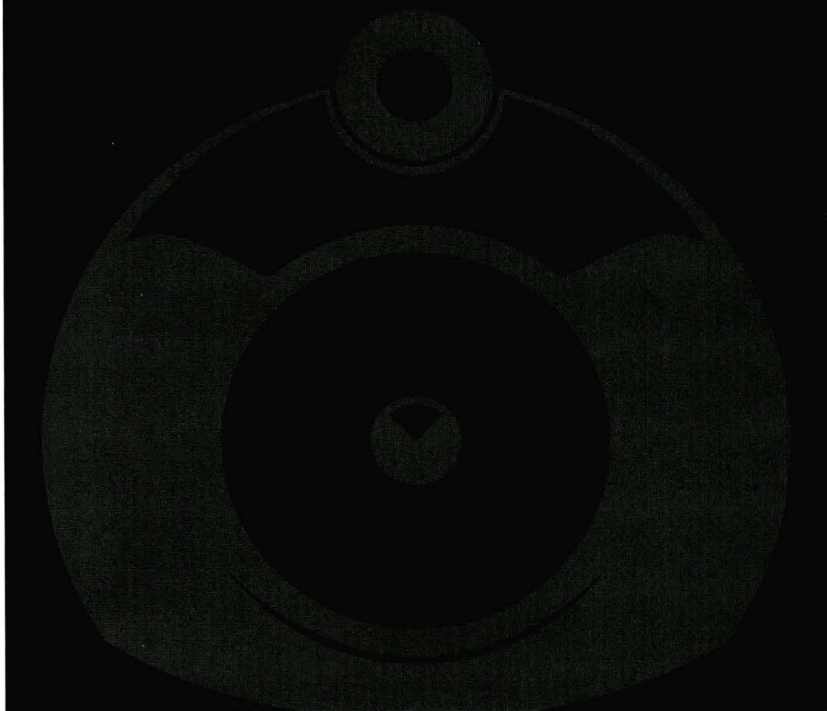
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- 2 Art of Sound
- 3 University of Sound
- 4 Passion for Music
- 5 Sound Mirrors
- 6 Music and Sound
- 7 Credits

[www.bw800.com](http://www.bw800.com)



**B&W** Bowers & Wilkins

A Sound Experience



**“This stunning introduction clearly demonstrates what B&W has long stood for: a passion for music and sound.”**



#### CHAPTER 5 – SOUND MIRRORS

A one-off piece commissioned by B&W to achieve a multichannel recording that explores the creative potential of the format. A collaboration between pioneering producers – contemporary soundsmiths Coldcut and classical composer Michael Price – it was recorded and mixed in London's Abbey Road Studios using 800 Series speakers throughout. Also included is an interview with Matt Black from Coldcut.



#### CHAPTER 6 – MUSIC AND SOUND

A selection of multichannel music provided by some of B&W's many friends in the industry. These tracks cover a vast array of different styles, some pushing the boundaries of both musical and recording technology, and are only available in their DTS multichannel versions. If you think DTS is only good for home cinema surround sound, you'll soon change your tune after hearing this choice selection.

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## ARCAM FMJ C31 PREAMPLIFIER

▶ Arcam says its new C31 stereo preamp is the best it has ever made and a long and impressive spec sheet only bolsters the claim. It boasts an all-new design over its C30 predecessor and omits tone controls, favouring instead a short signal path for a clean sound with low distortion. Burr-Brown supplies the improved volume control and op-amps, both fed by a huge toroidal power supply. Most of the design work, from the four-layer PCBs to the audiophile-grade capacitors, is said to keep noise and distortion low. There's also a new version of the Acousteel damped chassis with 'Stealth Mat' material to keep electromagnetic currents at bay.

Arcam has specified both balanced and unbalanced connections at the output stage and a processor mode for integration with AV surround receivers. The matching FMJ P1 mono power amps (pictured) create the potential for out of this world sound at down to earth pricing.

*To find out more see our exclusive, in-depth review in the November edition of Hi-Fi Choice*

**PRODUCT** Arcam FMJ C31

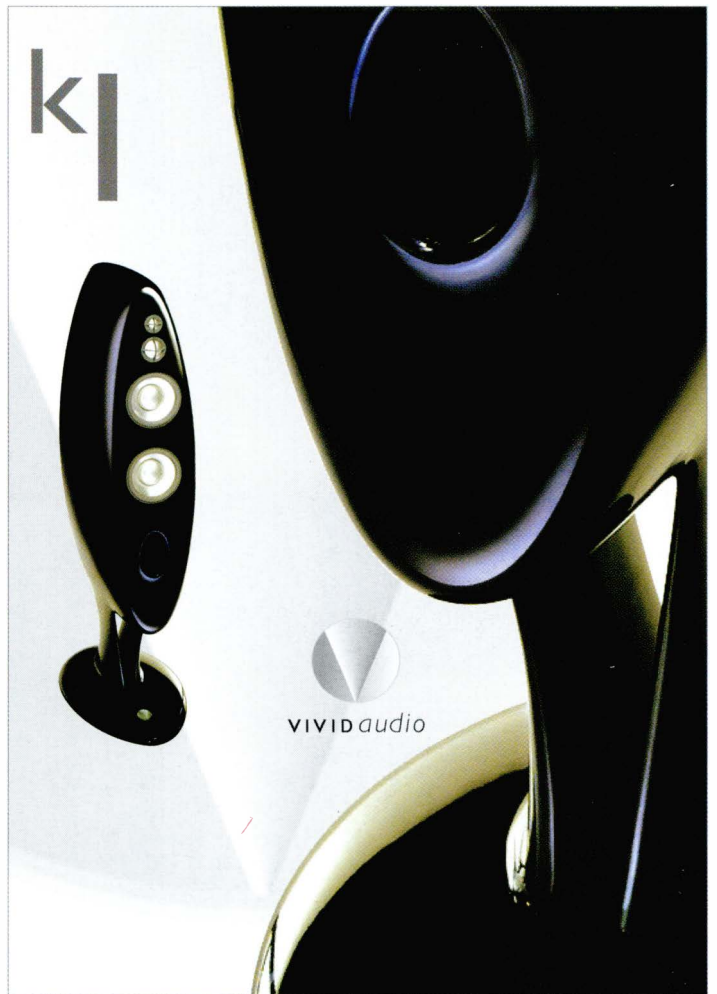
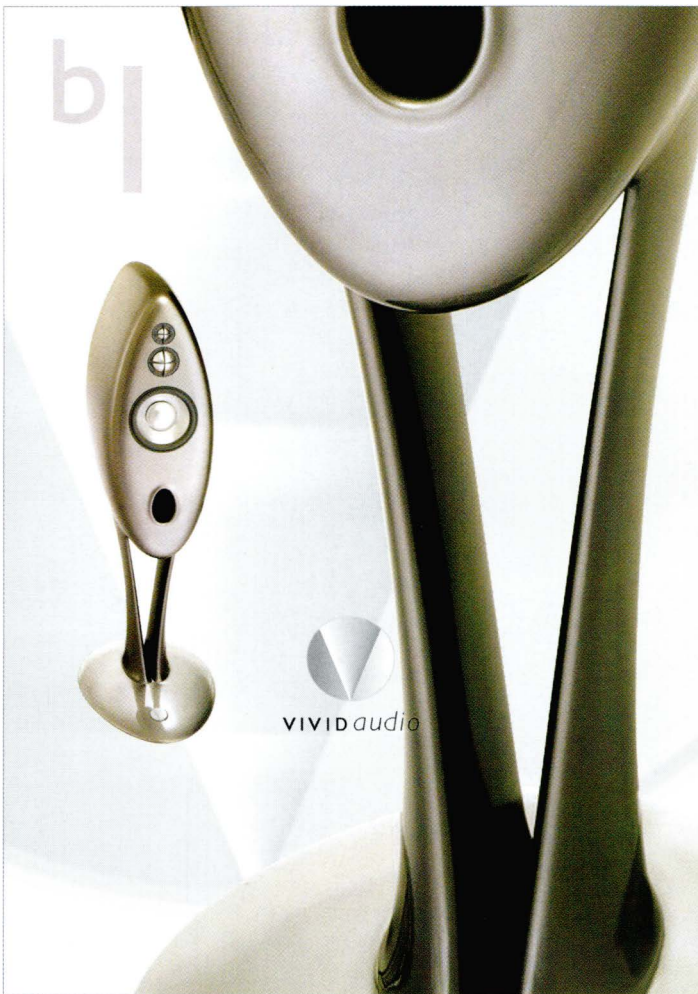
**TYPE** Stereo preamplifier

**PRICE** £1,200

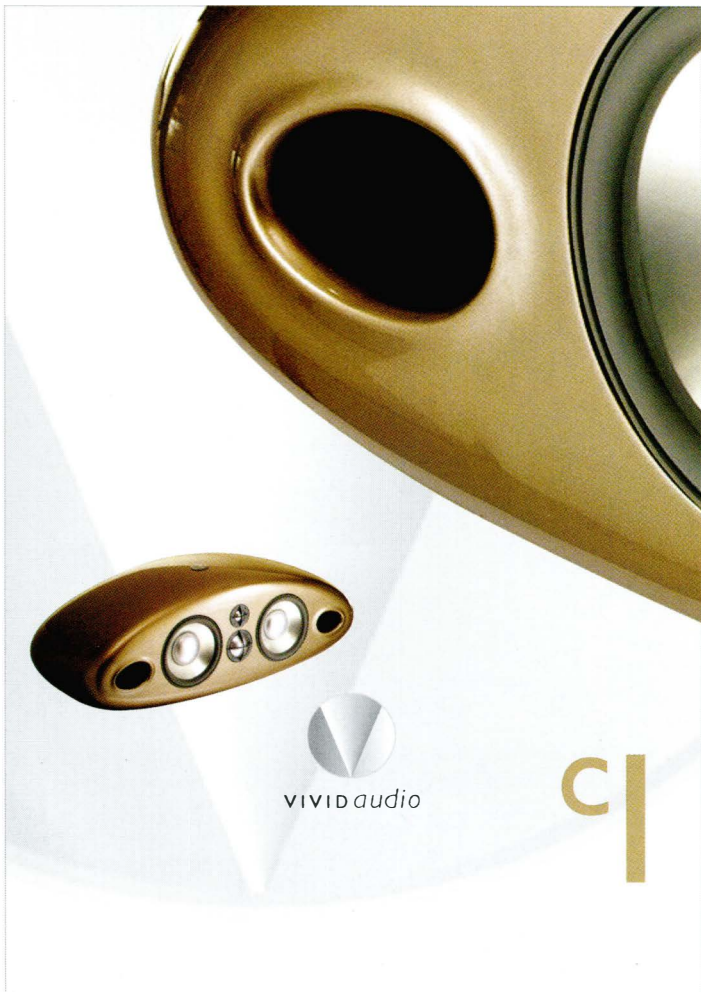
**KEY FEATURES** All new design ▶ Burr-Brown volume control ▶ Optional phono stage ▶ Processor mode ▶ Acousteel chassis with 'Stealth Mat'

**CONTACT** ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk





c1 shown in Sahara Beige finish



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Jason Kennedy, Hi-Fi Choice



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# KEF iQ9 LOUDSPEAKER

▶ This is our first taster of KEF's all new Q-Series speaker range. It's called the iQ9 and sits at the top of the fresh eight-model line-up, offering the potential to deliver thundering bass levels from the newly-developed 165mm reflex-loaded bass cones. Partnering this impressive driver complement is the latest, upgraded version of KEF's respected Uni-Q driver array, which is said to offer a number of improvements over previous versions.

The upgrades include titanium-coated cones and long-throw suspension for better bass. Its time-aligned Uni-Q array, with the tweeter at the centre of the bass/mid cone, effectively acts as a single point source. This gives excellent off-axis response, so it's not just the sweet spot that sees all the hi-fi action. The numbers read well too – a claimed 91db sensitivity and an eight-ohm impedance make an easy load for even the weediest of partnering amps.

*To find out more see our exclusive, in-depth review in the November edition of Hi-Fi Choice*

**PRODUCT** KEF iQ9

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £800 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Three-way bass reflex design ▶ Upgraded Uni-Q driver array ▶ Twin 165mm bass drivers ▶ Sensitivity (claimed): 91dB ▶ Impedance (claimed): 8 ohms

**CONTACT** ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.com





## NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



### FOCAL-JMLAB ELECTRA 1000 BE

Focal-JMLab has just lowered the price of entry to its stunning, hi-tech beryllium tweeter technology. Its new Electra 1000 Be line-up slots in below the flagship Utopia Be range, but like its more costly cousins all tweeters feature superior beryllium diaphragms. The first phase of the six-strong range includes the 1007 Be standmount and the 1027 Be floorstander, both featuring the latest IAL incarnation of Focal's famous tweeter. The speakers retain the distinctive Focal 'W' sandwich driver and the same OPC crossover filtering, benefiting from a new moulded aluminium housing for the tweeter plus a double radius cabinet to minimize internal reflections. A subwoofer, centre channel model and rear effects speaker are expected to follow later this year.

**Price** 1007 Be £2,300; 1027 Be £4,000 per pair  
**Due now** ☎ 0845 6602680 🌐 www.focal-uk.com



### ONKYO DV-SP503E

Onkyo's new entry-level universal disc player can play SACD, DVD-Audio, MP3/WMA and (of course) standard CD, plus DVD-Video, VCD, SVCD and DivX video discs. The player sports cutting-edge chipsets including 24-bit/192kHz audio and 12-Bit/108MHz video DACs. As with all Onkyo DVD players, the video outputs operate concurrently, allowing users to feed multiple display devices simultaneously. Expect a review in the December issue of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

**Price** £300 **Due now**  
☎ 01494 681515 🌐 www.onkyo.co.uk

### JAS AUDIO ORSA AND ORIOR

New to the UK this month is JAS Audio, a high-end loudspeaker manufacturer from China. Two standmount models are currently on offer – the Orsa two-way and the Orior three-way – that both employ ribbon tweeters, wood veneers and a 14-coat piano lacquer finish. The Orsa is a twin cabinet design with a 150mm paper bass/mid driver, while the Orior comes equipped with a 175mm ceramic cone. JAS Audio speakers come with a 30-day money-back guarantee, courtesy of distributor Shadow.



**Price** Orsa £1,400; Orior £2,300 per pair **Due now**  
☎ 01592 744779 🌐 www.shadowdistribution.co.uk



### MONSTER MPA 5150

If you need an American muscle amp, cable giant Monster's new MPA 5150 five-channel reference could be just the ticket. At its heart lies Monster's proprietary current feedback technology (MMAT), which is said to deliver low distortion at the highest levels. It also boasts fully complimentary differential circuits, helping to lower noise. High-current MOSFETs can be found at the output, plus the front and rear channels each have their own transformer and power supply. Monster rates the amp at 150 watts per channel into eight ohms continuous, but offers the product as a special order only.

**Price** £3,500 **Due now**  
☎ 01923 431634 🌐 www.monstercable.com





## CREEK CLASSIC 5350SE

Building on the strengths of the 5350SE, Creek's latest stereo amplifier – the Classic 5350SE – sees a number of improvements over the old model. The new amp is the first in a new line of products from Creek to be announced in the coming months. It has a smaller preamp circuit board and no tape selector switch, plus redesigned casework to accommodate the changes. Connections between the preamp and power amp are made with a semi-hidden push switch on the rear panel, which also provides an output for a subwoofer. Rated at 90 watts per channel, the Classic 5350SE will be given the full *Hi-Fi Choice* test treatment soon.

**Price** £850 **Due** September ☎ 01442 260146 # www.creekaudio.com



## REVEL CONCERTA

The Concerta line represents the most affordable Revel range to date. All five Concerta models – the F12 floorstander, M12 standmount, centre speaker, surrounds and subwoofers – use proprietary Organic Ceramic Composite (OCC) material for the drivers, high-order filter networks and optimised driver motor structures.

The M12 two-way monitor uses a 162mm woofer and 25mm tweeter, both formed from the OCC material, with a proprietary tweeter waveguide for a seamless integration between woofer and tweeter. The larger, three-way F12 floorstander uses four OCC drivers – twin 200mm bass woofers, a 130mm midrange unit plus a 25mm tweeter – and extends down to a claimed 33Hz.

**Price** from £400 to £900 per pair **Due** now  
☎ 01423 359054 # www.revelspeakers.com



## DENON TU-1800DAB

Denon has added a new DAB radio tuner to its range of full-width AM/FM radios. The TU-1800 DAB/FM tuner is Band III and L-Band compatible and supports RadioText, plus FM RDS. There are 200 memory presets with full remote control, a two-line dot matrix display and back-up memory. An impressive feature set includes a 24-Bit/192kHz DAC, three levels of dynamic range control, plus optical and coaxial outputs. Expect a review soon.

**Price** £250 **Due** now  
☎ 01234 741200 # www.denon.co.uk

## ARCAM ALTO

Arcam has launched its first speaker since the Delta 2, which ceased production in 1995. The Alto standmount has been developed using a range of Arcam electronics and, despite being styled to match the Solo CD/receiver, it will compliment any suitably priced Arcam system. This compact two-way uses a 100mm mineral-loaded driver with a 25mm cotton-dome, carbon-loaded tweeter, housed in a two-part, 20mm thick baffle. The bi-wirable design has a claimed sensitivity of 85dB with a four-ohm impedance and sings from 60Hz to 20kHz.

**Price** £400 per pair **Due** now  
☎ 01223 203 200 # www.arcam.co.uk



## Soundbites



**DENON** has two new sub-£500 AV receivers. The AVR-2106 (£450) is a 7.1-channel amp, with all surround sound processing done at 96kHz. At just £329, Denon's AVR-1906 offers 115 watts across seven channels, a Fast Auto Setup feature plus new high-performance 32-Bit DSP.  
☎ 01234 741200

**ART VINYL** provides openable picture frames to display record sleeve art. The Play and Display holds both the record and the sleeve. They are designed to fit both 12" singles and LP sleeves. Available from October, the frames are priced at £30.  
☎ 020 7241 4129

**PURE's** new Evoke-2XT DAB/FM portable has several upgrades over its predecessor, including redesigned drive units and a line input for connecting external devices. Features include improved battery performance, a white-on-blue display and a wake up alarm. Expect to pay £150.  
☎ 01923 260511

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY** has launched the world's first Wi-Fi internet radio capable of accessing over 10,000 stations across the globe. The radio links into any Wi-Fi network with a broadband connection to access an internet radio gateway that uploads channel listings. It can even access your PC's audio content, in MP3, WMA and Real Audio files. The AE Wi-Fi radio costs £130.  
☎ 01285 654432



**PSS** is a UK pro-audio manufacturer, with a new line in domestic amplifiers. The MkIII Studio A (£900) and Studio B (£1,300) models offer 150 and 300 watts respectively and feature twin power transformers. The amps are available from Surrey-based retailer Smart Sound Direct.  
☎ 01883 346647



### The Insider

#### THIS MONTH HFC TALKS TO...

##### RICHARD STEVENSON

**Job Title:** Director  
**Company:** RSPR (hi-fi PR and marketing consultancy)



#### What's your most exciting product in development at the moment?

Acoustic Energy's Wi-Fi internet radio by miles. A world first in that it handles MP3, Real and WMA streaming, accesses 10,000 internet radio stations subscription-free and is simpler to use than a spoon.

#### What's the future of hi-fi?

Server-based media storage and music downloaded at user-defined quality. As audiophiles, would we pay a premium to download in PCM or even 192kHz/24-bit rather than MP3? Of course we would. User-defined quality downloading gives music publishing houses an additional revenue generating opportunity on every release. It has got to be the way ahead for hi-fi.

#### DVD-Audio or SACD - and why?

Neither. I love them both, but they are also dead in the water for the mass market. Downloading at user-defined quality makes much more sense for everyone.

#### What's a great album you've heard recently?

Martha Wainwright's eponymous debut album. Fantastic from start to finish, great sound and the track *Bl\*\*dy Mother F\*\*king A\*\*hole* made me rediscover my acoustic guitar.

### Hi-Fi Diary

#### SEPTEMBER

23-25 **The Hi-Fi and Home Entertainment Show**  
The Renaissance and Park Inn hotels, Heathrow, London  
020 8515 2151  
*London's best-established hi-fi show*

#### OCTOBER

29-30 **Home Entertainment Show**  
Renaissance Hotel, Manchester  
01206 391001  
*Manchester's home cinema expo*

#### NOVEMBER

4-6 **What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision Show 2005**  
Novotel, London  
020 8267 8378  
*Third year for this new London show*

## Seven-inch single boom



Annual sales of seven-inch vinyl singles have increased by a massive 64% to 1.4million units, thanks to British bands such as the Libertines, Babyshambles, Kaiser Chiefs and Franz Ferdinand. The best sales for the format in six years suggest that vinyl is clearly back in fashion because of the efforts of record companies behind these indie bands. However, the best selling seven-inch single last year was a limited edition reissue of Iron Maiden's *Number of the Beast*.

BPI Chairman Peter Jamieson said: "Despite the incredible growth in download sales, there is still a huge demand for the collectible physical formats. It would be wrong to write-off physical formats just yet." Not 'arf, as Alan 'Fluff' Freeman always used to say!

## DVD-A cracked

A mysterious hacker, only known by the pseudonym MaximA, has devised a way to copy the content of DVD-Audio discs onto a PC.

The code by-passes CPPM (copy protection for pre-recorded media) encryption and allows the creation of .WAV files, when used with WinDVD 5, 6 and 7. This is said to work with both stereo and multichannel discs. The Verance watermark, designed to detect illicit DVD-A discs, is not removed, although some burning software is capable of avoiding even this protection.



The RIAA's lawyers forced the popular hacker's website Rarewares to stop distributing the code crack. The site complied, but countless mirror sites had already made it available.

## TacTical decision



Peter Lyngdorf, the Danish hi-fi entrepreneur who owned NAD and started the speaker brand Dali, has put his name to his latest - and last - venture: Lyngdorf Audio. The company effectively replaces the Danish arm of the New York-based digital amp and room EQ specialist TacT Audio, that Lyngdorf also started.

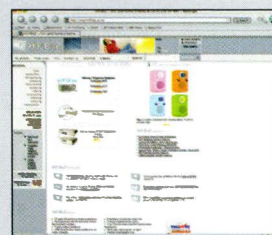
Based in Skive in Denmark, Lyngdorf Audio is expected to build products of TacT standards and above, but at more accessible prices. The first component with the Lyngdorf brand will be the all-digital TDA 2200 integrated amp. This will retail for £2,150 and is said to be an equivalent to the TacT Millennium Mk3. More components will follow, such as the Foundation series that will offer complete system electronics with room equalisation for £2,500.

## Clicks gaining on bricks

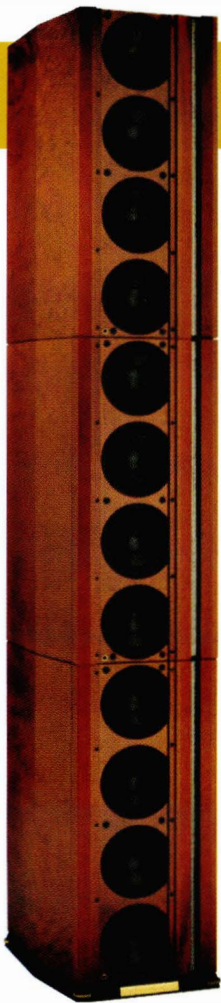
A recent study by the Consumer Electronics Association found that consumer electronics are increasingly being purchased online, with five per cent of products being sold this way. In certain product categories, such as portable audio, the figure rises to ten per cent. The survey of 1,000 US adults found online buyers had higher customer satisfaction due to convenience, product variety and product availability. Perhaps surprisingly, online stores also inspire higher loyalty among their customers, who spend 67 per cent more per year than those who have traditional shopping habits.

Poor availability of specific products is also a major issue, driving more hi-fi enthusiasts to the 30-day money back offers of online retailers.

It would seem that retailers such as Sevenoaks, which recently put out an ultimatum to manufacturers to support them or take to the online highway, might have less clout than first hoped.







## Dali settles in the UK

➤ Danish speaker specialist Dali has set up a UK operation to improve its penetration into this market. The company, which was started in 1983, had a UK presence for some time, but will now be focusing on improving its sales here through an office in Hook, Hampshire. Dali has a wide range of loudspeakers, including the Helicon 400 reviewed on page 113.

Dali accepts that the UK market is a tough one and Sales and Marketing manager Tony Clausen has said, "Being honest, I have to say that our lack of success in the UK to date has only been surpassed by the amateurism of the approach we have taken". This obviously being with regard to its marketing efforts rather than the attention Dali pays to manufacture. Clausen also commented: "Historically, we have been very poor at telling people just how scrupulous we are about quality control".

## JIMMY'S TWEAKS #35

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES – HI-FI'S SUPER TWEAKER



### Noisy Environments

For the proper enjoyment of music, a quiet environment is essential. If your attention is constantly being interrupted by extraneous noises, it's harder to concentrate and lose yourself in the music. Yet, sadly, noise is a part of modern everyday urban life.

Unless you live alone in a house in the middle of a empty field, it's likely you'll have noise to put up with – be it cars whizzing past, neighbours, people in the street, passing trains or aeroplanes, or other residents in your house. Interestingly, the annoyance value of noise depends on how clear your hi-fi system sounds – if it's really good, you should find it easier to concentrate on the music without outside sounds becoming a distraction.

## TOP 10 LOUDSPEAKER LEGENDS

- 1 **Acoustic Energy** AE1
- 2 **B&W** Nautilus 800/800D
- 3 **Spendor** BC1
- 4 **Wilson** WATT/Puppy
- 5 **Quad** ELS
- 6 **Linn** Isobarik
- 7 **Rogers** LS3/5A
- 8 **Wharfedale** Diamond
- 9 **Living Voice** Air Partner
- 10 **JBL** K2 S9800



## ➤ New Music

### IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY ABSENT FROM THE CUT AND THRUST OF SHOWBIZ HYPE DUE TO FINISHING THEIR LATEST ALBUMS



#### DEPECHE MODE

**Title:** *Playing The Angel*

**Release date:** October

Depeche Mode follow-up 2001's *Exciter* with a set of new songs that includes such titles as *Macrovision*, *I Want It All*, *Sinner Me*, *Precious*, *John The Revelator*, *Suffer Well* and *A Pain That I Used To Be*. The album will be followed by a US tour with European dates in January.



#### RADIOHEAD

**Title:** *tbc*

**Release date:** 2006

Radiohead recently began work on the follow-up to 2003's *Hail To The Thief*. "It's a bit like *Kid A*, when we were going through a period of change", says Thom Yorke. "But that's good." Song titles include *House Of Cards*, *Glass Flowers*, *Reckoner* and *Arpeggi*.

#### PAUL MCCARTNEY

**Title:** *Chaos And Creation In*

*The Backyard*

**Release date:** autumn

Macca revealed the title of his follow-up to 2001's *Driving Rain* just after *Live 8*. His first studio album since his 2003 *Back In The World* tour, he's on prolific songwriting form, with two album's worth of material.

#### MADONNA

**Title:** *Confessions On A Dancefloor*

**Release date:** November

Madonna's tenth studio album finds her working with long-time collaborator Mirwais plus Swedish producers Bloodyshy & Avant

on an all dance music set. *I Love New York* is being tipped as the likely first single, to be released this autumn.

#### FRANZ FERDINAND

**Title:** *Franz Ferdinand*

**Release date:** autumn

Scottish art-rockers Franz Ferdinand plan to follow their Mercury-winning debut with an album bearing the same eponymous title and identical artwork, distinguishable only by a different colour scheme.

### ALSO COMING SOON

#### JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

**Jamie Cullum** *Catching Tales* (Sep),

**Pharoah Sanders** *Anthology* (Sep),

**Mark Murphy** *Once To Every Heart* (Sep),

**Andreas Scholl** *Arias For Senesino* (Sep)

#### SACD/ DVD

**Eric Clapton** *Back Home* (DualDisc, Sep),

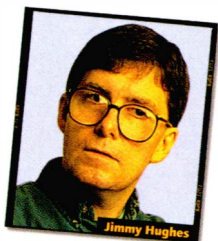
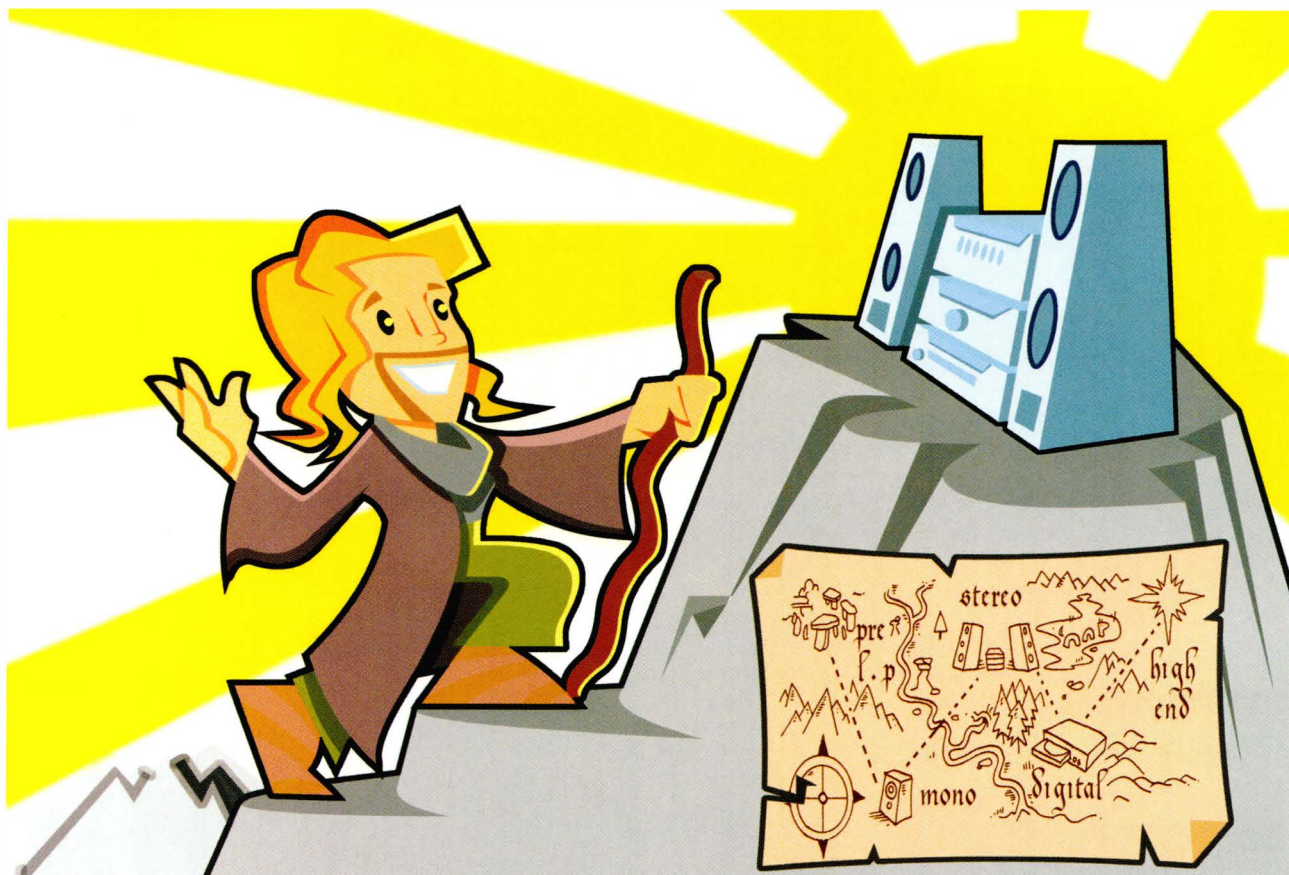
**Beethoven** *Complete Sonatas And*

*Variations* (SACD, Sep), **Keaton Simons**

*Drive Away* (DVD-Audio, Aug), **Earth,**

**Wind and Fire** *That's The Way Of The World* (SACD, Sep)





Jimmy Hughes

## Sound or status?

*Why choose high-end hi-fi in the first place?*

Where's the justification for spending many thousands of pounds on a hi-fi system? What's the point – apart from making a select group of hi-fi dealers, importers and manufacturers filthy rich? With High End, aren't we talking Expensive Status Symbols rather than something that gives real musical pleasure?

Only you can answer that. But for me, having a high-end system means being able to listen to a very broad range of music recorded over a vast time scale – from the pre-LP mono era, through to stereo and the modern digital age – without having to worry over-much about differences in sound quality adversely affecting my enjoyment of the music. It's more about the music than aesthetics or ideology, in the Hughes House.

## “If you own an average sort of system, but want to progress to something high end in stages, choosing the right path is vital.”

This isn't everyone's idea of what high end is (or should be). For some, high end is about creating impressive three-dimensional soundstaging that conjures up the illusion of depth, width, and height beyond the loudspeaker boundaries. For others, it's the ability to play music loudly and have it sound rock-solid, with shattering dynamics, plus extended deep bass and high treble.

A good high-end system can sound absolutely thrilling. Trouble is, you can easily end up listening to your hi-fi perform, and not to the music. Good recordings – those that really put your equipment through its paces – sound exciting and enthralling. But less well-recorded material may disappoint – making the overall listening experience frustrating. Your hi-fi starts to dictate which music/recordings you enjoy. And that's not good.

Many of us build our hi-fi systems piece by piece. We start with something of middling standard, then spend the next few years (or the

rest of our lives!) improving and upgrading. If you own an average sort of system, but want to progress to something high end in stages, choosing the right upgrade path is vital. You must evaluate each change from the standpoint of as many different types of music and recording as possible.

So, when you finally get those new expensive speaker cables (for example), don't just listen to the effect on your very best recordings. Dig out material that has always disappointed or never quite sounded as it should. If your best recordings sound better than ever, and the slightly 'iffy' ones are improved as well, the new cables really have made a worthwhile difference. Your enjoyment of the music will be enhanced.

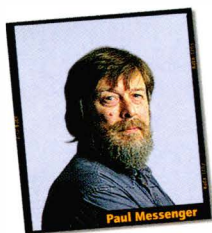
Same goes for a new amplifier or CD player. Listen to your best discs, but also pull out the ones that have always given trouble or disappointed. If every disc you play sounds better, your new toy is doing the business. But, suppose the results are mixed, and some



recordings now sound worse – what then? Well, you have to analyse the nature of the change to understand what's going on...

Is the sound improved, or simply altered, so that some things now sound better and others worse? Ask yourself if the new component is revealing faults in your source material, or exaggerating them. A real high-end system with extended bandwidth, fast transient attack and massive reserves of power won't always produce a comfortable, friendly sound. But neither should it spit, snarl, and scream at you!

*Jimmy Hughes is one of the country's best known hi-fi experts. His knowledge of tweaking and his record collection know no bounds*



## Treble twister

*The times, they are a-tweeterin'*

**T**weeters have become something of an obsession among speaker designers in recent years. The launch of SACD and DVD-A provided both an inspiration and an excuse to extend the high frequency range of upmarket speakers well beyond the 15-20kHz normally regarded as the limit of human hearing.

Whether this is necessary or even advantageous remains entirely debatable. Some manufacturers are advocates, others are not, and one can argue that marketing departments are the main beneficiaries. Whatever the engineering or aural issues, wide-bandwidth, hi-tech tweetry is a good story, in an era where spin is undoubtedly effective.

The current vogue for extended-bandwidth 'super-tweeters' began with Tannoy in the late 1990s, first built into its costly retro-styled Prestige models, and subsequently as a 'universal' accessory that could be placed on top of existing speakers. This was enough of a commercial success, especially in Far Eastern territories, to focus the attention of rivals.

Focal-JMLab made the (entirely valid) point that adding a super-tweeter was rather haphazard, because it was virtually impossible to guarantee good integration between tweeter and supertweeter at wavelengths of just a couple of centimetres. Focal instead developed a tweeter technology that would provide the required extended bandwidth without the need for an extra supertweeter. ▶

# R

## RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

KRELL KPS-25SC  
CD PLAYER



I have had close encounters with excellent CD players over the years, but this one was truly something awesome, and fully

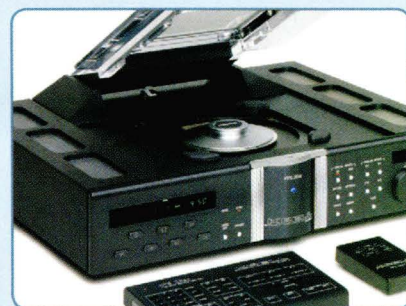
justifies the term 'classic'. But the KPS-25sc was more than just a CD player.

It was a combination CD transport, an A-to-D and D-to-A converter with four inputs (two optical and two electrical) and a preamplifier (one balanced and three single-ended inputs plus tape), in each case with state-of-the-art performance. It was no shrinking violet either. It stood 48.3cm wide, 50cm high and 39.1 cm deep with the cover open, and had an all up weight of 20.5kg. Moreover, when fully warmed to its task, it ran hotter than hell. Fortunately, though, it just stopped short of actually cooking the disc that was playing, or frying any fingers inadvertently left on top.

The player featured a toploading JVC Professional mechanism, the disc being covered by a large clamp, and by a heavy acrylic damped cover. Introduced as the KPS-25s in January 1998, it was extensively customisable though a menu system that accessed input naming, volume control operation, display brightness and various other parameters, even the operation of the LCD shutter (see later). The later sc-suffix version of the player, introduced a year later, included a proprietary CAST current-mode interface that was fitted alongside single-ended and balanced mode outputs at fixed and variable output levels. Some improvements were also made to the digital converter section with this version.

'Theatre Throughout' allowed easy integration with multichannel external controllers in a home cinema setup, and multiroom operation was fully supported. The unit was supplied with a large and weighty full-feature tabletop remote and a smaller, simplified handset, both of which were supplied in the sort of finish Krell does so well (Krell moved from its classic brushed gunmetal grey finish to an equally rich shade of deep black gloss livery around the time the KPS-25s became the KPS-25sc).

The hot running of the KPS-25sc was one of several surprises to greet the user. A bigger surprise, and always a talking point when I have



**"It didn't block impinging light, it just dispersed it, turning the window a uniform frosted grey."**

had one on tap, was the integral viewing window in the hinged top cover that was equipped with an LCD shutter. It didn't block impinging light, it just dispersed it, turning the window a uniform frosted grey. Krell claimed that it protected the CD data, implying that it enhanced sound quality, but I was never able to hear anything of the sort, and it appears that it was essentially for show.

Not that the sound needed much improving. I was lucky enough to have had access to a KPS-25sc at various times for a total of several months, which was used both as a CD player and as a fully fledged front-end for a number of high-profile reviews, and in my opinion it qualifies as arguably the consummate CD player, as well as being one of the finest preamplifiers I have used. It always sounded supremely detailed and articulate, but most of all, it was alive to the nuances of recorded music in a way that few other similar units have been able to match – at least without some impact on the way that recorded dynamics are expressed. In its role as a disc player, in particular, the KPS-25sc was vivid and bold, but also subtle and organic-sounding. Sadly, it was done for by JVC's decision to scrap the mechanism that made it tick, and it was discontinued at the back end of 2004. Its final selling price was £25,000. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



At the end of 2002, Focal launched new versions of its top-of-the-line Utopias, featuring tweeters equipped with pure beryllium diaphragms. Although beryllium has been used elsewhere, by Yamaha in the 1970s, and currently by JBL, Focal is particularly proud of having developed the technology to make inverted domes just 20-25 microns thick.

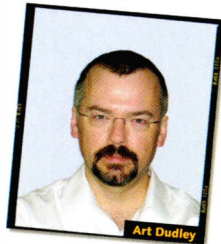
A very rare – and extremely costly – metal, beryllium has a number of physical benefits over alternatives like aluminium and titanium. It has significantly lower density and much higher stiffness, as well as possessing good self-damping and transmitting sound at a very high velocity. As a result, the beryllium tweeter's frequency response goes up to nearly 40kHz, significantly higher than that achieved by other metals. Furthermore, the entry price is coming down – the new Electra 1000 BE models, with a newly developed type IAL beryllium tweeter, are half the price of their Utopia equivalents.

In 2004, B&W got in on the act, again opting to develop a tweeter with extra high frequency extension, but this time achieving it through an even stiffer diaphragm, made from pure diamond. Diamond is three times stiffer than beryllium, giving even greater high frequency extension, but its density is higher and the diaphragm thicker, so the moving mass is significantly higher too.

Both these hi-tech tweeters sound very good, no question – significantly better than their more prosaic predecessors. But it isn't just the diaphragms that have changed. Both companies have also introduced important changes to other elements of their designs, notably the

surround/suspension arrangements, but also the motors and back chambers. All these factors, as well as the crossover networks that feed the tweeters, make their own contribution to the sound improvements. The fancy diaphragms and extended bandwidth might be important, but the case is by no means proven.

*Paul Messenger is a former editor of Hi-Fi Choice and has been writing about his favourite hobby for nearly 30 years*



### Art's great legacy

*Fighting ignorance with high-end audio*

For years, I detested the label 'high-end audio', which is both elitist and poncey, and stresses the materialistic aspect of our hobby over everything else. Now I've made an uneasy peace with it, if only because the high end of the market really is the only place where domestic audio lives, having been

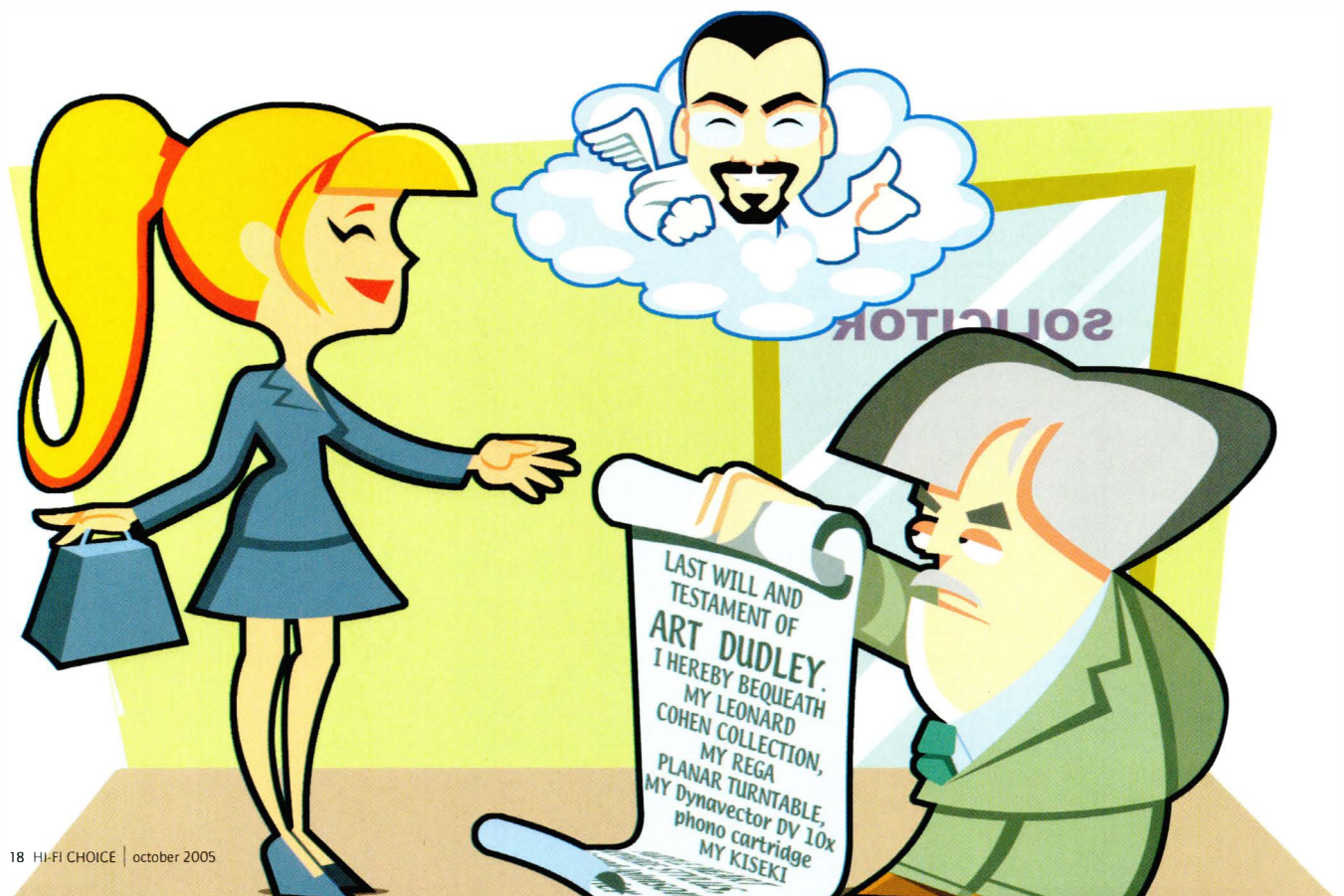
chased there a long time ago by the industrialists and assorted media hacks.

My own first high-end audio purchases, made in the early 1980s, cost surprisingly little by today's standards (although I could scarcely afford them at the time): a Rega Planar 2 turntable, Dynavector DV10x phono cartridge and a Conrad-Johnson PV3 preamp, the latter bought as a kit. I'll never forget how those things enhanced my relationship with music, and stimulated my drive to keep adding to my LP collection at a steady pace. (Some 23 years ago, Leonard Cohen's *New Skin for the Old Ceremony* was the first album I played on the Rega, and I still remember how much texture and nuance that deck found in those grooves.)

And materialistic though it may be, there's no denying the sheer pleasure of involving oneself with very good gear. Restoring and setting up my first Linn LP12, purchased in rough condition second-hand, was actually a lot of fun – as was building my first single-ended triode amp some years later. And I've cherished the times when I've been able to buy something that was hand-crafted by an individual artisan – like my first really expensive phono cartridge, a Kiseki Purpleheart Sapphire. What better antidote is there for the commoditisation that poisoned our hobby so many years ago?

I've never been the sort who demands 'the best' of all things, being perfectly content with

**“I hope some day my daughter will assume the stewardship of my record collection.”**

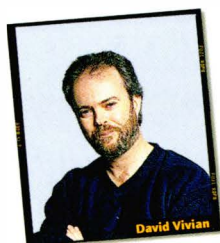




Gap jeans, run-of-the-mill table wine and an aging entry-level Subaru – yet my hi-fi remains a luxury. To some, it's an obscene waste of cash; to me, a Linn LP12 and those frightfully expensive Lamm amplifiers I've just bought are heirlooms, and I hope that some day my daughter will assume the stewardship of my record collection.

High-end audio's greatest legacy is that a very good music system encourages serious listening – a rare thing in an age when people who might have been music lovers have instead developed strategies, albeit subconsciously, for not listening to music, so bombarded are they on a daily basis by a nearly constant soundtrack. It isn't our fault that a short attention span is one of the side effects of having to build those defence mechanisms. But putting a good music playback system together with a good music collection is like having a 24-hour museum or an art gallery or a library on every block. And while the stuff ain't cheap, ignorance is, and always will be, a great deal more expensive.

*Art Dudley has written for Hi-Fi Heretic, Sounds Like and Listener. He lives in the US and works as Stereophile's editor-at-large*




## Addicts united

*The A-400 got David hooked on high-end*

What's the greatest bit of kit ever? I'm not talking about the usual committee decision suspects, here – yes, we know how great the Quad ELS was, thanks – but the single item of hi-fi that sparked the addiction, drew you in black-hole deep, so deep you'd never escape.

My hunch is that it happened early, in the formative years. And that it wasn't particularly pricey, despite it being the one piece of hi-fi that pulled you into the high-end mind-set. Mine certainly fitted the profile. Truth is, having started to review vastly more expensive systems for magazines, I wasn't that easy to impress and, given my modest budgetary reach, I couldn't see things changing dramatically. What I needed was a miracle.

In the Pioneer A-400 I found one. At first, I thought it might make a decent stand in for those days when there was nothing gleaming and esoteric to play with. What I found, however, was that I didn't miss the esoteric stuff, because I almost always reinstated the A-400.

I suppose I liked its strengths so much – its uncanny transparency and precision, its focus, 

# MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

THE BEATLES  
ABBEY ROAD



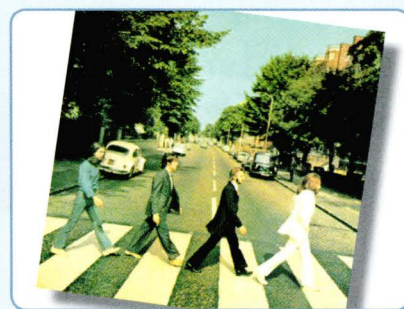
Today, it seems impossible to grasp the sheer intensity of 1969 for the Beatles. The group began the year with the bummer that was *Let It Be*. It could've been all over, but in February 1969, McCartney, with his irrepressible enthusiasm, rang George Martin and suggested making another record. This seemed like sheer folly in the circumstances – an accelerated situation, which saw Allen Klein gain control of their finances, two Beatles marry, George Harrison busted for drug possession, the group lose control of their publishing empire and Lennon cope with a near-fatal heroin addiction and a car smash in Scotland.

The sessions began at Trident studios in Soho, with the group convening in Feb 1969 to record Lennon's super-heavy *I Want You*, a song which drips with the icy coldness of the heroin he was taking at the time. They postponed the rest of recording until the summer.

The Beatles converged on EMI's Abbey Road studio in July and August of 1969 to give it one last shot. The sniping continued. Lennon nearly came to blows with Linda McCartney and George Harrison had a vicious argument with Yoko Ono over a biscuit! Lennon argued for his songs to be on one side, the rest on the other.

Harrison came armed with two brilliant songs, *Something* (Sinatra considered this one of the greatest songs ever) and the jaunty *Here Comes The Sun* (penned in Eric Clapton's garden). Paul had something up his sleeve called the *Long Medley* and two 'fun' songs titled *Oh! Darling* (a spoof doo-wop) and *Maxwell's Silver Hammer* (a ditty about a maniac, which almost drove the group mad). Even Ringo had *Octopus's Garden* (written on holiday in Sardinia), but the shock was that Lennon felt *I Want You* was enough from him... and arrived at Abbey Road seriously jagged on heroin! Evidence of this is his lack of contribution to *Here Comes The Sun* and *Maxwell's Silver Hammer* (understandably) and almost nothing to *Oh! Darling*.

Yet, once he'd woken up, Lennon would stamp his presence on the project. It was he (with Paul) who came up with Side Two's wondrous segued track *Medley*, which saw motifs, melodies and snatches of lyric repeated and re-phrased in a



**“The sniping continued. George Harrison had a vicious argument with Yoko Ono over a biscuit!”**

way that made the album one of the first cyclical rock masterpieces. His rallying *Come Together* featured a unison double-tracked guitar solo of brilliant attack whilst his intense *I Want You* (originally the planned ending for the album) featured a beguiling unison guitar solo with Harrison and an outstanding white noise finale built on a Moog synthesizer. His *Because* used a wonderful tri-part harmony on guitar, synth and harpsichord. And to top all that his fuzz-toned heavy guitar solo at the tail of *The End* would predict the rise of heavy metal.

McCartney would equal Lennon's achievements on his best contributions, namely the mini-suite *You Never Gave Me Your Money* (a rebuke to The Beatles' messy finances in which he plays wind chimes and tape loops) and the beautiful harmonies and segues of Side Two including *Golden Slumbers* and *Carry That Weight*. With various orchestral and keyboard arrangements and additions by George Martin and “the love you make” finale, the record was finished in style. *Abbey Road* was released on 26 September 1969 in the UK and 1 October in the US. An immediate No.1 smash, it would stay 81 weeks on the UK charts and ride the US listings for 121 weeks, becoming the Beatles' bestselling US album ever. McCartney was proved right and the Beatles ended the 1960s as they had begun, on a high. **HFC**

*Mark Prendergast*

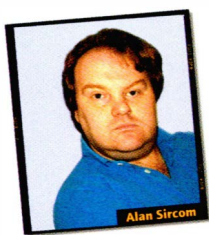


organisation and resolving power – that I hadn't allowed its noticeable shortcomings to get to me. Numerous reviewers had mentioned the hint of glare in the upper midrange, for example, or the occasionally overblown sense of spaciousness. But to me it was fluid, lucid and clear – an exotic, high-grade sound that locked me firmly into the high-end groove.

The A-400 didn't get much wrong and it was almost absurdly good value for money. But, when you finally needed to upgrade from that classic little amplifier, nothing short of the best in high-end would pass muster. Suddenly, going back to the same ol' mid-1980s Flat Earth system just wasn't going to satisfy any more. And many of those who were enthralled by the A-400's magic have followed suit, especially those who realised its potential and tried using the Little Pioneer That Could with some seriously exotic partners, rather than a £200 player and £100 speakers.

If the A-400 had been a car, it would have been a Honda NSX for the price of a VW Golf GTI. Obviously, this wouldn't have been much good if what you really wanted was a hatchback with four seats, but then the Pioneer never set out to be an 'all-things-to-all-people' product. It set out to be the best-sounding amplifier a talented designer (Kimihiko Sugaro) and a huge R&D budget could build for not very much money. For me, with just a few provisos, it succeeded heroically.

*David Vivian has been wallowing in gorgeous hi-fi and then describing its virtues and vices in Hi-Fi Choice since 1990*



Alan Sircom

## Back to two channel

*It's official! High-end stereo is back in fashion*

The high end has been through a troubled time recently. In many respects, the problem has been an intellectual one, with the likes of home cinema, multiroom and multichannel audio all seeming to move people away from thinking about high end.

For several years, it has been almost impossible to sell a disc player on the basis of CD replay alone. However, many are now returning to 'stereo first' players – either CD players in their own right or multiformat models extensively modified to improve stereo CD



## “As Armani found out, there's more money to be made from selling 100 pairs of £20 underpants than there is from a £2,000 suit.”

performance specifically. It's interesting to track the spread of disc players across this and last year's edition of *The Collection*, both those reviewed and those used to review. Suddenly, with the likes of the Zanden, Towshend and Audio Research, we are back to good ol' stereo CD. Of course, the inability of the music labels' marketing departments to take either DVD-A or SACD seriously has made it easy to move back to CD as if nothing happened. This may be a crying shame – well-handled music (in both stereo and multichannel) through these high-resolution sources can be a music lover's dream – but it is also a commercial reality.

The move back from home cinema is less of a shame. It's also a slower return to the status quo, as home cinema is still selling reasonably well. It's just that those who fell off the high-end bandwagon a few years ago, to build a cinema in their homes or squirt audio and video into every room in the house, have started to realise there was something missing. And that something was the sort of musical magic that only high-end hi-fi can produce. At its peak, home cinema transports you into the very best cinema you could envisage, and this will improve, as HDTV sources – both broadcast and on the likes of Blu-Ray disc – proliferate in the latter half of this decade. But, no cinema on the planet can recreate the passion you get when you hear music like you are hearing it for the first time. This is what high end hi-fi is all about.

With a good home cinema system, you tend to buy new material to play through it, and then maybe play some old 'classics' in your collection. With a good hi-fi, you ransack your existing CD collection first, then go looking for new releases. The two sensations are very different.

As for multiroom, there are manufacturers and dealers who have learned how high-end hi-fi and multiroom mix: you use the latter to act as the revenue generator, and the former to build the prestige end of your market. As Armani found out, there's more money to be made selling 100 pairs of £20 underpants than there is from a single £2,000 suit, but if you want to really coin in big money, sell both.

Our dalliance with other forms of entertainment has left its mark, however, and that mark's a good one. Products function better, look better and sound better than ever before. If this is a direct by-product of clawing back the audio market, what a bonus.

*Alan Sircom began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. He has since become one of the hi-fi and AV industry's most respected scribes*



Alvin Gold

## Room to breathe

*New listening room, new problems*

Producing copy for *The Collection* was harder graft for me than usual this year, as the allocated time window coincided with a move to new accommodation. One compensation is that I now have two listening rooms where previously I had only one. Not only are the



acoustics different to each other, they are both radically different to what I had been used to.

My previous listening room was a long, narrow space, with the speakers pointing down its length and with large openings at the sides and behind the listening plane. The room had been measured at various times, to help tune out the usual low frequency resonances with certain speakers and subwoofers. This meant I knew objectively what was already apparent by observation, which was that the bass was relatively free of nasty resonances, and that it was smoothly extended at its lower reaches. But it was impossible to deal acoustically with the number of speakers that were invariably on tap.

The new situation is quite different. First, although neither of the two new rooms is as large as the previous single room, they're both a decent size, one rectangular, the other more nearly square, but quite irregular locally with major dimensions of about five by nearly six metres. The second room, which is to be predominantly a stereo listening room, is the larger of the two, and is currently uncarpeted. To simulate the sound of a carpeted room, I had to improvise by laying down thick velvet curtains on the floor for some of the listening sessions.

The most obvious difference between old and how however is not the groundplan, but height. The rooms are a good meter taller than before, which makes a very obvious difference. This appears to be identifiable separately from the other changes, and imparts a consistent quality to the two rooms. The extra height means that the enclosed air volume in each room is greater than the groundplan suggests, and the larger room especially sounds airier, partly perhaps because the speakers are less hemmed in.

In both rooms, I hear a more expansive sound, and a bolder, harder-hitting quality, a greater feeling of space and air, even a richer and more varied tonality. The uncarpeted larger listening room is clearly too lively and reflective at present, especially at low frequencies and through a quite sharply defined patch of the upper midband, though a carpet is about to be laid which should help. But the other qualities appear to be largely unrelated to this lack of carpeting, and are consistent in both rooms.

Despite being early days for both listening rooms, the systems I auditioned for *The Collection* sounded interesting and compelling, and the contrasts between the various components I was using were larger than I had expected. All of which is an object lesson, reinforcing the fact that the listening room is truly the final link in the chain, on a par with any of the other elements of the system.

*Alvin Gold began writing about hi-fi more than 20 years ago and has since become one of the UK's most internationally renowned reviewers*

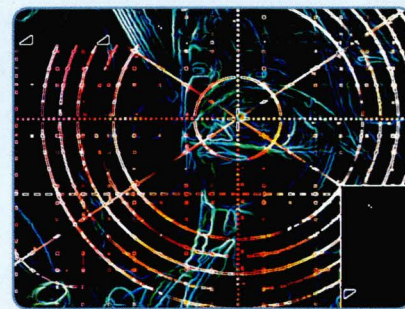


A high-end issue demands a high-end *Techno*. Let's start, then, with the technical definition of 'high end'. Ah, ahem, er, there isn't one. Not even a rule of thumb, in fact. There were once (in the days when the term 'high fidelity' was newly invented) some guidelines as to what constituted hi-fi as distinct from mere gramophones and wireless sets, but they're long superseded and forgotten. Could we perhaps create some kind of high-end specification?

The problem is that there's hardly a single measurement that any two people will agree on as regards its significance in the great audio scheme of things. This column has touched more than once in the past on the subject of distortion, and how its definition and audibility are anything but clear cut, so it's only to be expected that high-end products show no consistent pattern of distortion. Taking extreme examples, the basic THD figures of Halcro amplifiers, at 0.0001% worst case, are more than 10,000 times better (on the face of it) than those of most single-ended triode amplifiers.

Frequency response? A bit more hopeful, that one. Flat within a whisker from at least 20Hz to 20kHz is generally considered a good thing and the majority of amps and source components manage it. But loudspeakers can fall lamentably short of this benchmark and still justifiably flaunt a high-end banner. (In fact, compared with most electronics, the superficially appalling performance of even the best loudspeakers is almost paradoxical: how can we hear subtle flaws in electronics though such limited transducers?) Noise isn't a terribly helpful statistic either. If it were, LPs would have ceased to qualify as high-end music carrier years ago.

There will always be folks who turn up their nose at the whole concept of high-end audio – are we saying that they have a point? Emphatically, no. What is clear, however, is that the most refined and sonically sophisticated audio equipment cannot be conveniently summarised by any number or even set of numbers. Completely walking away from any kind of scientific consideration is a cop-out, though, and even the most hand-wavingly intuitive designers of exotic valve amps will



**“The problem is that there's hardly a single measurement that any two people will agree on.”**

spend hours poring over specifications of individual components for inclusion in their audio masterpieces. They may well use a circuit from the 1930s, but they will know what goes into it.

The true high-end character becomes apparent in a piece of equipment when myriad little details have been attended to. What's rather fascinating is that we have very little idea what these details actually do in terms of improving the sound. Take passive electronic components: in a high-end amplifier, the designer will take great care selecting types which not only meet their basic specs but also offer enhanced sound. There's often a correlation between better sound and some particular characteristic of the component – for instance, bigger metal-film resistors often sound better than small ones, all else being equal. Bigger resistors tend to have lower 'induced noise', a figure one might expect to improve audio measurements, but in most cases the audio in and out of amplifiers seems to measure the same independent of the resistors it's met on the way.

This kind of discovery merely reinforces the suspicion that we aren't measuring all the right things. The ear is known to be highly critical, and matching its discrimination is a tough assignment. But we're working on it! **HFC**

*Richard Black*

# TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

HIGH-END  
SPECIFICATIONS



# ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman and Nigel Williamson



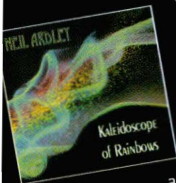
## AUDIOPHILE VINYL

### NEIL ARDLEY

#### Kaleidoscope Of Rainbows

Gull/Pure Pleasure 2x180g vinyl

**Music:** The late Neil Ardley was one of the most innovative composers on the British jazz scene of the 1960s and 1970s. While his previous works used conventional instruments in unconventional arrangements, this 1976 album also features synthesisers alongside a cast of 14 players including Ian Carr on trumpet and flugelhorn. On its release, this was compared to Gil Evans/Miles Davis's *Miles Ahead* and *Tubular Bells* among others and it's easy to hear why. There is a modal quality that is reminiscent of Oldfield's classic combined with highly inventive use of jazz orchestra. An intriguing album clearly ahead of its time, this certainly warrants a fresh airing. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** The original *Kaleidoscope* was a single LP only and its 27 minutes a side meant that the sound inevitably suffered. Here, the bass is sumptuous and the midband superb. The production, though of its time, is nonetheless first class. ★★★★★ **JK**



### LOU REED

#### Transformer

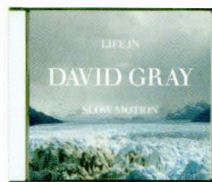
RCA/Speakers Corner 180g vinyl

**Music:** There will be few who have not heard the evergreen *Walk On The Wild Side* or the whole album for that matter, yet the original RCA pressings are pretty thin on the ground and its good to hear a decent pressing on fresh vinyl. *Transformer* literally transformed Lou Reed's career, and it's not difficult to hear why. David Bowie and Mick Ronson's production is remarkable, bringing out Reed's impressive songwriting skills and couching each track in a perfect soundscape. The songs go from the scorching punk guitar of *Vicious* to the sweet strings of *Perfect Day*, but nothing is ever quite what it seems with lyrics like these. Essential. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** This Speaker's Corner pressing is rich with detail and has oodles of bass, so much so that VTA tweaking is in order, but it's also equal to the quality of music, which is quite an achievement. ★★★★★ **JK**



These audiophile-quality LPs are available from:  
Vivante ☎ 01293 822186 @ www.vivante.co.uk  
Speakers Corner @ www.speakerscorner.de

## COMPACT DISC & VINYL

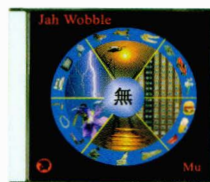


### DAVID GRAY

#### Life In Slow Motion

Atlantic/14th Floor Recordings

**Music:** David Gray seemed almost embarrassed when *White Ladder* sold six million copies and 2003's follow-up *New Day At Midnight* was a deliberately self-effacing and low-key collection. *Life In Slow Motion* is a much more determined move away from lo-fi bedroom programming. With Marius de Vries (Madonna/U2) assisting in the production, songs such as *Alibi* and *The One I Love* drip with strings, although they never topple over into schmaltz. Infectious melodies and melancholic lyrics are sung in his exceptionally soulful voice. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Although there are some intimate moments between Gray and his piano, de Vries's expansive production makes him sound like anything but an introspective troubadour. ★★★★★ **NW**

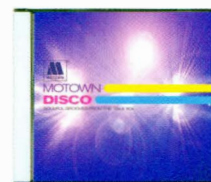


### JAH WOBBLE

#### Mu

Trojan

**Music:** As rhythmic as tomorrow's dance-floor hits but with an intensely evocative atmosphere, *Mu* is both a poignant and refreshing CD. The opener, *Viking Funeral*, is a dubby *Waterloo Sunset*, the energetic *Universal Dub* a relentless slice of world music ambience with touches of both Miles Davis and Weather Report, while the tumbling, powerful *Sansara* seems to concern the endless circle of mistakes that people make over and over ("All that glitters tends to be cold"). With its breezy defiance and superb sub-sonics, this is a mesmerising album from the veteran East End bass ace. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Wobble and co-producer Mark Lusardi have spent decades working on deep, deep bass and crystal clear melodies – and it's experience you can hear. ★★★★★ **PS**



### VARIOUS ARTISTS

#### Motown Disco

Motown

**Music:** When most people think of Motown they tend to remember the classic 'sound of young America' typified by the Supremes and the Temptations, or the latterday groove exemplified by Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye. But somewhere along the way in the mid to late 1970s, Motown made some cracking dancefloor cuts. They may not have had the sales of Chic or Earth Wind & Fire, let alone the Bee Gees, but there are enough gems gathered here to kick-start any latterday Studio 54 and keep it pumping for a month. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Music designed to be listened to with the benefit of designer drugs rarely stands up to audiophile analysis, but there's enough wit and wonder amidst the often innovative production to reward attentive listening. ★★★★★ **DO**

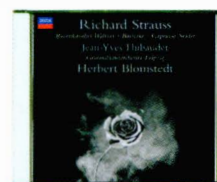


### KRONOS QUARTET/ ASHA BHOSLE

#### You've Stolen My Heart: Songs From RD Burman's Bollywood

Nonesuch

**Music:** The Kronos Quartet have negotiated the problematic field of world music/classical crossover with albums based on musical themes from Africa, Romania and Mexico. Now they've ventured into the wild world of Bollywood soundtracks, with a disc that reworks some of the best-loved tunes of RD Burman, the most talented Indian film composer of them all. The venture is topped by some thrilling vocals from Asha Bhosle, a huge Bollywood star in her own right who also happens to be Burman's widow. But even in the hands of such super-serious musos, there's still a playfulness and a panache that's irresistible. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Clever arrangements by the string quartet are overdubbed with tablas, Chinese lutes and much else besides while Bhosle's voice has a sparkling sweetness that belies the fact she's now in her sixties. ★★★★★ **NW**



### RICHARD STRAUSS

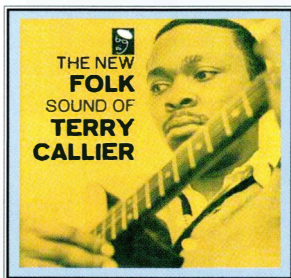
#### Rosenkavalier Waltzes, Burleske, Capriccio Sextet

Herbert Blomstedt (cond),  
Gewandhausorchester Leipzig,  
Jean-Yves Thibaudet

Decca 475 6550

**Music:** This collection comprises two suites of waltzes from *Rosenkavalier*, the *Burleske* for piano and orchestra and the exquisite *Capriccio Sextet* scored for two violins, two violas and two cellos. The waltzes are disposable, but the *Burleske* shows early signs of Strauss's greatness. The real gem is the *Capriccio Sextet*, which anticipates Strauss's *Metamorphosen*. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** A top class recording made in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, this recording is hard to fault. The sound has superb articulation, clarity and density, and is an easy match for the superb musicianship. ★★★★★ **AG**





## THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Brimful of feeling and understated power."

**TERRY CALLIER** The New Folk Sound Of Terry Callier Prestige/Fantasy

**Music:** Terry Callier was quietly whiling away his days as a computer operator when DJs Russ Dewbury and Gilles Peterson discovered the music he made for Cadet, brought him over to the UK and relaunched his career some 25 years later. This first recording from 1965 consists of traditional songs performed on acoustic guitar and bass with Callier's voice providing depth and colour. His voice is never forthright but this does not stop it being brimful of feeling

and understated power. An album that has appeal beyond the 'scene', it warrants comparison with earlier blues artists as well as those in the current folk vanguard. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Recently re-released on vinyl this is a surprisingly good-sounding recording for its time. The bass gives away its vintage somewhat but the voice and guitar have presence and subtlety that would not be out of place on contemporary albums. ★★★★★ JK



**LAURA VEIRS**  
Year Of Meteors

Nonesuch

**Music:** Past albums from the Pacific North West's favourite bedsit troubadour have tended to be sparse affairs, largely realised on acoustic guitar with the band added almost as an afterthought to complement Veir's winningly straightforward vocals. Her latest sees her write and arrange songs with a full band in mind from the off and the result is as rewarding and emotionally charged an album as you're likely to hear all year. She clearly has a gift for a melody and you'll be humming the refrains from *Galaxies* and *Secret Someones* for weeks. The arrangements are sparky too, with harp, viola, organ and electronic effects teasing out the subtleties in Veirs' descriptions of sun, sea and Seattle boho life. Americana you don't have to be depressed to enjoy. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Tucker Martine's production is warm and analogue-sounding, but with plenty of room for each nuance of the loose but well-nigh perfect arrangements. It's close to being an audiophile recording, but with better music. ★★★★★ DO



**SEPHARDIC ROMANCES**  
Traditional Jewish Music from Spain  
Thomas Wimmer, Director

Naxos Early Music 8.553617

**Music:** This eclectic collection of songs and short instrumental pieces from the Sephardic community of early Spain, which was established in the fifth century BC, and ended with the Inquisition in the 12th century AD. The music is folksy and redolent of other Jewish traditions. A mezzo-soprano and six instrumentalists are involved here, playing various combinations of pochette, gadulka, arpa doppia, hurdy gurdy, fiddles, recorders, bamboo-flute, kavel and percussion. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Only a limited amount about the provenance of much of this music is known, but a little more information would have been helpful to context. Excellent performances though, and a clean, vivid recording. ★★★★★ AG



**JON HASSELL**  
Maarifa Street (Magic Realism 2)

Label Bleu

**Music:** Maarifa means 'knowledge' or 'wisdom' in Arabic. For years, Jon Hassell has played the avant-garde card with spectacular results. Here he weaves together three concerts from Milan, Montreal and Paris, with a fourth performance in two LA studios. As a trumpeter, he has picked up where Miles Davis left off. Yes, there's the locked grooves of *On The Corner* but plenty of ethnic chanting, oud, mellifluous bass riffs and that rising, pitch-shifted trumpet which was first inspired by Indian chant. In a word: mesmerising. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** At times liquid, at times ferocious, this album is layer upon layer of sonic surprise. You'll be playing this again and again just to satisfy your amazement. ★★★★★ MP

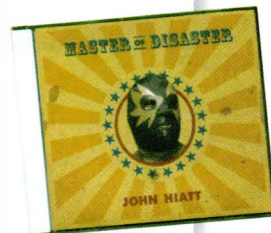
## DVD-AUDIO & SACD

**JOHN HIATT**  
Master Of Disaster

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

New West Records

**Music:** In contrast to Hiatt's last album, 2003's *Beneath This Gruff Exterior*, his latest outing on SACD is more introspective and relaxed. This selection of love songs, ballads and tongue in cheek numbers roll along very easily yet maintain more than enough character to keep you listening. *When My Love Crosses Over* is a beauty, a poignant tale of love lost and found, its carefully honed tune underpinning a song that seems entirely genuine. This selection of love songs, ballads and tongue in cheek numbers rolls along very easily yet maintains more than enough character to keep you listening. The ballad *Cold River* has a rolling feel as the song tells of flight and escape. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** Recorded using Sony's 24-track DSD Sonoma workstation by Jim Dickinson this has a luxury analogue feel to it thanks to his long experience with digital recording. Quite warm with good bass and plenty of detail but no obvious reverb, this should make most systems sound classy. ★★★★★ JK



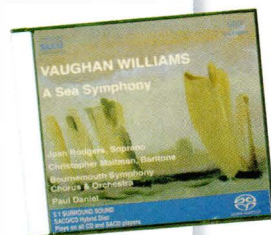
**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**  
A Sea Symphony

Paul Daniel (cond), Bournemouth Symphony Chorus & Orchestra, Joan Rodgers (soprano), Christopher Maltman (baritone)

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Naxos 6.110016

**Music:** Quintessentially English, the *Sea Symphony* is redolent of the sea in its various moods, and is built around sea shanties, giving the work a structure quite unlike previous symphonic form which had been mainly wedded to the German/Austrian model. The Bournemouth Symphony Chorus are committed, and of the soloists the soprano, Joan Rodgers, is particularly exhilarating. Generally, the vocal performances are superior to those of the Robert Spano/Atlanta Symphony version on Telarc, which is the BSO's main modern competitor. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** One obvious attraction of this recording is that it is a multichannel SACD at a bargain price, but the sound quality disappoints. It all sounds too close and rather thick in texture. There is some peculiar balancing too – the baritone, for example, is far too up-close. ★★ AG



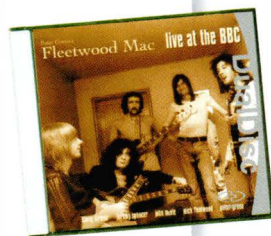
**FLEETWOOD MAC**

Live At The BBC

DualDisc (one side CD stereo, the other DVD-Audio 5.1)

Silverline

**Music:** Not the multi-platinum line-up of *Rumours*, this is the band led by Peter Green, legendary English blues guitarist and mentally delicate recluse. Of these 36 tracks recorded for the Beeb in 1969/70, there is a broad mix of Fleetwood Mac hits (*Albatross*, *Oh Well*), blues covers (*Need Your Love So Bad*, *Preachin' Blues*) and even a few jokey rock 'n' rollers (*Talahassie Lassie*) to remind us that although the Mac certainly had the chops, they were a long way from the reverential seriousness of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, which incidentally spawned two of their members. ★★★★★  
**Sound:** This was originally recorded for what would still have been a largely mono radio audience, but there's clarity and an earthy mix that does the blues-based material no harm at all. The DVD-Audio surround mix opens things out a bit but adds little to the feel. Overall, it feels like an odd addition to the DVD-Audio pantheon, although it's a fine adjunct to those who already have *Rumours* on DVD-A. ★★ DO





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**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION



R56 Sept 2005

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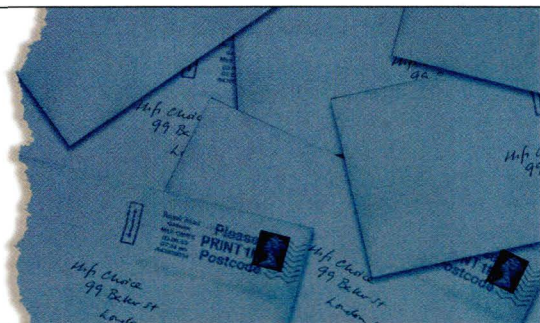


# ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6PP. Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



## ★ LETTER OF THE MONTH

### SOUND OF THE SUBURBS

You don't hear much about the UK sound any more. Time was when Japanese gear was tuned for UK ears, but I've noticed an increasing amount of both European and Japanese kit getting favourable reviews in *Hi-Fi Choice* without reference to any tuning. Is this German, French and Italian gear really as good as the best Brit-fi? I'd be amazed if it was. Equally, I've not seen much stuff from Linn and Naim recently – what have they been up to while you've been inundated with foreign gear?

Shane Wood via email

**HFC** Be amazed – there *is* good hi-fi designed and built outside of the UK. But, the days of 'UK tuning' are long gone – we aren't that important in the global market. This doesn't mean the end of 'Brit-fi' though: Linn, Naim and the like continue to make great hi-fi, and we still review lots of it.



WIN KIMBER TIMBRE INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a free pair of 0.5m-long Kimber Timbre interconnects worth £72, featuring a trio of hyper-pure copper conductors and Teflon insulation. So get writing! (250 words max please...)

### BACKWARDS SOUND

My CD player failed to read a perfectly normal disc recently. I cleaned the CD and the lens but still no joy. I rang the store where I got the player ex-demo and they were really helpful and arranged to have a courier pick it up from my house the next day. Then, I put my old Rotel RCD-1072 into my system as replacement and couldn't believe the difference. Some CDs just sounded flat and lifeless. This really took me by surprise, particularly as I always felt there was less difference between CD players than other components. No discredit to Rotel at all, but maybe those who say that you need to spend twice as much to get a real difference are right – £600 against £1,500 in this case.

Barry K via email

**HFC** You really value your equipment when it goes off to service and you're forced to use a courtesy player or an old relic from the loft. It's often easier to hear differences in hi-fi when taking this sort of backwards step, than when auditioning a potential upgrade. There's a hidden bonus: it'll be a real treat to get your player back in action, too!

### REVIEW ROTA

I have been reading various hi-fi magazines for a while and have never understood why some products simply do not get the attention that others do. *Hi-Fi Choice* has reviewed and consistently rated the Tannoy DC1 very highly, but has never to my knowledge had the Quad 11L in its pages. Another magazine devoted a tiny review to the DC1, giving them four stars, while the Quad 11L has appeared favourably numerous times in its pages.

Ash via email

**HFC** We endeavour to source the finest and most relevant equipment for our readers across a broad spread of price points and product types. Sadly, many items we would love to test are unavailable to us, as some brands refuse to supply and others seem intimidated by our comprehensive test program. Some manufacturers will avoid giving out products if they have scored well in another publication, not wanting to jeopardise a good result. Of course, as hi-fi has its subjective side, it is possible for publications to disagree on the



Above: Tannoy DC1 loudspeakers

**“Hi-Fi Choice has consistently rated the Tannoy DC1 very highly, but has never had the Quad 11L in its pages.”**

same product. However, our unique combination of extensive listening and scientific lab reports is unrivalled in the magazine business.

### FIGHTING TALK

I think I've reached the end of my hi-fi road. To my perhaps untutored ears, what I've now got makes a joyful noise and I don't see any point in investing any further money. Looking back on a hi-fi journey that started in 1972, I thought to myself, what myths have I come across?

1. 'Turntables sound better than CD players.' Records have clicks and pops and CDs don't. Otherwise, they are not one whit different. I haven't heard a difference between CD players and turntables, but I'm sure that it happens. But turntables sounding superior? Not in my experience.





Above: A Beautiful System of Primare electronics and Revel loudspeakers

2. 'Stands make a difference to the sound.' This is what started me down the road to scepticism. I am convinced that any good, solid support is as good as any specialised hi-fi stand. Of course, if you prefer the cosmetics, go for it.

3. 'Cables make a difference to the sound.' I used to hear a difference because I wanted to. Before you've connected your elephant's trunk-sized cable to your amp, have a look at what kind of wire is on the other side of the connection – odds are it'll be a skinny runt of a thing. If you're a believer, perhaps you should re-do the inside of the amp too.

**Still Tones** HFC online forum

**HFC** Sadly, we couldn't fit all of the 'myths' in, but we hope we have included the most controversial ones. What do you think? Do you agree with our friend on our website forum, or is this just sour grapes and sabre rattling? We'd love to hear from you, please write to us at the address above.

#### BEAUTIFUL SYSTEMS

I've noticed that a number of your *Beautiful Systems* include speakers that cost much more than the cost of the amplification and front end. Is this indicating a move away from the old adage of spending the largest proportion of a budget on the front end? In my humble opinion, many of these systems would seem both musically and financially unbalanced as I still believe in the 'rubbish in, rubbish out' principle.

**Dean Marshall** via email

**HFC** Most of our systems are created in liaison with dealers and manufacturers who painstakingly put beautifully balanced systems together for us.

**"The 'rubbish in, rubbish out' principle is one school of thought, although from the days when LP was king."**

The 'rubbish in, rubbish out' principle is certainly one school of thought, although one that originated in the days when LP was king – it seems slightly less significant in these digital times. Others put speakers first and some favour an even split of the hi-fi budget. We're increasingly warming to the speaker first principle as they undoubtedly are the most influential link in the high-end chain these days.

#### SIMPLY RED

I keep reading references to the Red Book in relation to CD. What is this Red Book exactly?

**Craig** via email

**HFC** Back in 1980, Sony and Philips, the creators of CD technology, agreed the definitions of Compact Disc. Called the Red Book, the standard described the technical specifications of the new format – a 16-bit/44.1kHz coded data system arranged in tracks and blocks on a standardised optical disc. The name derives from legend that the book, which formed the basis for all later CD technologies, was bound with red covers.

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## @ ONLINE FORUM

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at [www.hifichoice.co.uk](http://www.hifichoice.co.uk)

I've just ordered some brand new speakers – Revel F32 Performa floorstanders – without ever listening to them or seeing them in the flesh. They should be here in a week or so, I hope they'll sound fine, fingers crossed...!

**Boseman**

...I hope you like them Boseman. Do they have a money back guarantee? Some dealers offer a 30-day return period.

**Umberto Vanni**

I wondered what your view is on the quality of older amps and preamps (perhaps Quad or Leak) versus modern gear? If you were buying today, would you even consider old stuff...?

**Wingless Garuda**

...I would have a listen to some older amps before you buy new. I use a Leak ST20 valve amp with a passive preamp. My front end is a Linn LP12 turntable with a Marantz CD17. The LP12 beats the CD player hands down. To my ears, the older stuff sounds better. Have a listen and see what suits you.

**Swithers**

I replaced my Pioneer DV-565 with Pioneer DV-868 – the top model. It has 24-bit/192kHz upsampling for stereo outputs and four filters which mainly affect mainly frequencies outside the audible range. The differences on paper may just be the chips but boy can you hear it.

**iBug**



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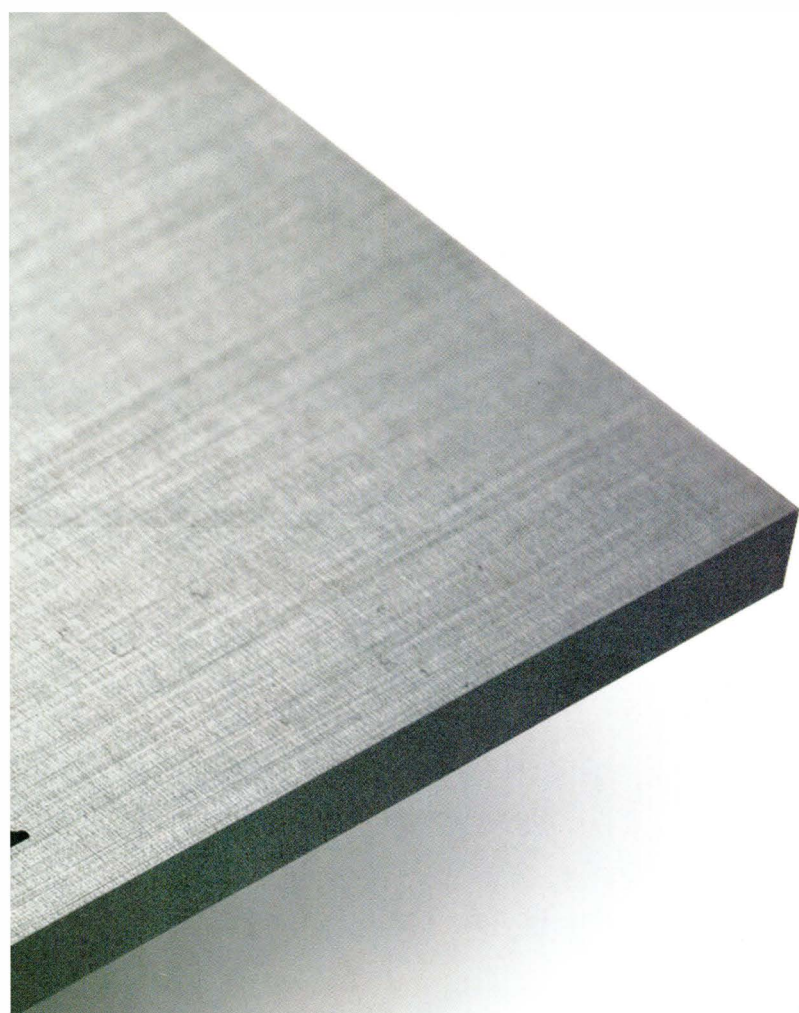
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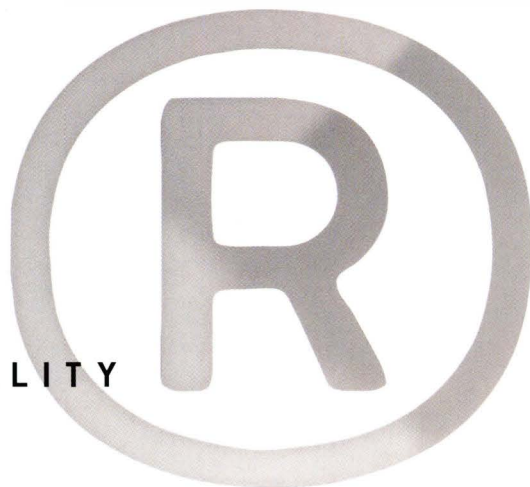


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SOUND QUALITY



Creating a new reference

No one factor can deliver perfect sound. All parameters must be considered if new technologies are to move us closer to that ultimate goal. Our Beryllium tweeter is a clear example. It is not just this material's exceptional rigidity, nor its super light weight form that changes our perception of what sound quality means. It's these elements in combination with Beryllium's natural inherent damping factor that simply set a new reference for what can be achieved.







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# WELCOME TO

# *The Collection*

**F**rom this point on, this special edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* is devoted to just one thing – our quest to find the very best hi-fi the world has to offer. If you like music, you'll love this line-up; you may even feel like buying some of it. But even if you can't afford the ticket today, we can help you plan your sonic journey for tomorrow – after all, we all need something to strive for...

But before we show you your future, let's take a glimpse at the past. *The Collection* has a rich history that dates back to the 1980s, when *Hi-Fi Choice* first decided to assemble a special issue dedicated to the finest hi-fi in the world. Several annual editions ensued, creating a series much loved and fondly remembered by those with a penchant for the highest standards of music reproduction. But in publishing few things remain unchanged for long – while *Hi-Fi Choice* continued to evolve through the 1990s, *The Collection* did not, and the concept was quietly dropped in 1993.

And so this high-end special lay dormant, until woken from its slumber in 2004. Whispers of a comeback had grown to a clamour, and last year our wishes came true. This, then, is the second annual edition in a new era for *The Collection*, and we're proud to relight this torch for hi-fi's highest performers once more.

Nestling within the next 90 pages, you'll find no fewer than 45 in-depth reviews of some of the finest hi-fi components on the market today, conducted by the most experienced set of reviewers ever assembled. Some of these components – those featured on single pages – are recent *Hi-Fi Choice* favourites, revisited here especially for *The Collection*. Others are reviewed for the first time, including many UK and world exclusive tests of new products from famous high-end marques like Sonus Faber, Audio Research

and Krell. It all adds up to a drool-worthy selection of state-of-the-art products from many of the world's top hi-fi designers, each one constructed in deliberate pursuit of the ultimate in sound reproduction.

So why now is *The Collection* reborn? Because as we sit on the cusp of something radically new, the doyens of hi-fi's high-end are facing their greatest ever challenge. The way home entertainment programming is delivered, stored and played back is changing, and the concept of the 'media server' will come to affect us all. And yet, there will always be those who demand the highest levels of performance. The high-end hi-fi community is responding by producing the most amazing range of dedicated components yet seen.

The results are fascinating. Vinyl and valves remain in strong demand, with decades of refinement culminating in exquisite form and function. Then, there are the digital dream machines, each engineered to make the most of the format(s) it plays, from CD-only players to high-performance, multichannel audio/video *tours de force*.

Excellence has never come cheap. Like the finest watches or motor cars, these finely tuned, supremely engineered examples of audio art simply ooze desirability. It's always great to dream, but if these top-end exhibits seem too far out of reach, take solace – many manufacturers also produce more affordable models, often featuring 'trickle-down' technologies derived from these flagship components. You'll find such products nestling within the pages of every other issue of *Hi-Fi Choice*...

As for us, there's only one problem with doing a special issue like *The Collection* – giving all the fabulous hi-fi back when we've finished.

**Tim Bower** Editor







# Krell SACD Standard 5.2

*Krell has updated its SACD player – does this latest model set a new Standard?*

PRICE: £4,244 CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

**T**he Krell SACD Standard is discontinued... long live the Krell SACD Standard! The new Standard 5.2 is identical to its earlier namesake except for three things. First, it sports an updated version of the previous Philips disc mechanism, which has now been discontinued. Second, there is a new front panel display, which has larger and more widely spaced characters. Finally, the filter buffering has been improved at the analogue output stage for enhanced sound performance.

You may have read that SACD is yesterday's news. But while this may make for great headlines, it simply isn't true. There are uncertainties concerning SACD's future that will be resolved one way or another, probably within the next 12 months. But unlike DVD-Audio, SACD as a format has already reached critical mass. If they stopped making the discs tomorrow, a substantial demand for players would continue for years to come, from classically-oriented hi-fi buffs in particular.

More interestingly, no-one has told the equipment manufacturers. The last year has seen an unprecedented number of ambitious new players, some in a 'new' category – stereo CD/SACD – which appear to have been developed to address a demand for high performance, purist players that exists in the Far East – Japan in particular. The Krell SACD Standard is multichannel, but it is aimed squarely at the same audiophile market.

The basic construction of the SACD Standard was covered in our earlier review of the original version. Its feature set broadly parallels the much more costly and more elaborately engineered TEAC Esoteric X-01, which is reviewed on p102 of this issue. It plays stereo CD or SACD through single-ended or balanced outputs from a differential discrete output stage. The other channels are in single-ended form only from slightly simpler electrical clockwork, though processing internally in the Krell is DSD using hybrid Burr-Brown digital chipper, and all channels use Krell's current mode circuit topology. Internal processing is in balanced mode for the entire circuit path, and Krell recommends using the balanced outputs to take advantage of the common mode rejection available this way. Note that neither the Krell nor the TEAC offer digital outputs from SACD, though as usual both provide a digital output in optical or electrical form from CD. One important feature of the Krell is the provision of two CD mode and four SACD mode output filters, which have broadly the same characteristics as their predecessors, despite the fine tuning that has taken place.

Construction of the player is not quite in TEAC Esoteric class. The Krell is based on a standard OEM Philips engine, where Teac uses something altogether more exotic and impressive. Construction also mirrors the price differential, but it's a close run thing, thanks to Krell's customarily superb non-ferrous 'Arkitek' construction (described in the Krell KAV-280P/KAV2250 review on p110) and 'Krellcoat' silver or black finishes. In common with the Esoteric, the player is compatible with SACD, CD, CD-R and CD-RW discs, but Krell explicitly warns about CDs with Copy Guard which are not compatible, and which do not comply with Red Book standards – in other words, they are not strictly CDs at all.

**“SACD outstrips CD, with a sound that is more complex, smoother and more organic.”**

(Readers should note that the CD side of DualDiscs can be objected to on the same grounds.) An IR input, 12-volt triggers and an RS232 interface provide the support necessary for custom installation.

Operationally, the Krell is disadvantaged by a remote control that is not quite as ergonomic as some, though it makes up for it by looking really, really cute, and by a front panel layout which uses a surprising number of poorly differentiated controls. In the longer term, it is hamstrung to an extent by extended finger-tiddling times before the disc starts playing (about 23 seconds, which is two to three times as long as the Esoteric, depending on disc type).

## SOUND QUALITY

We auditioned the SACD Standard 5.2 though a Krell pre/power amp (alternating with a pair of Theta Enterprise monoblocks), with both Revel Ultima Studio and MartinLogan Summit speakers, and in the main the findings are not too different to the comments made of the original version of the player. It could of course be that the new model is incomparably better than the old, though gut feeling suggests they're closer than that, but as is the way when held up against more costly alternatives like the Esoteric, the comparison tends to highlight mainly what is wrong with the less ambitious model. The reality, of course, is that very many fewer people will be able to afford the Esoteric even if they want to, so the comparison is not altogether valid.

Nevertheless, tiptoeing between the landmines that any such comparison is bound to throw up, the new SACD Standard seems to be close to the original in spirit, though perceptibly cleaner, more transparent and agile. The same attributes fell out of the listening as were noted previously when we exhumed the original review text. The Standard is a superb engine for CD and SACD replay, one that slightly underplays the muscle and authority of a recording and instead majors on transparency, litheness and articulation. It has a slicker, more fine-grain quality than most, especially with SACD, which leaves the X-01 (twice the price, remember) sounding more muscular and architectural in its responses.

With SACD sources the SACD Standard clearly outstrips CD, with a sound that is more complex, smoother and more organic, and less grainy and mechanical, though on the whole CD replay by the Krell avoids falling into the normal traps. Each format (to the extent it allows) is exquisitely refined and detailed when played on the Krell, both in the way it permits individual instruments to be followed even though dense, complex mixes, and also in its ability to convey subtle expressive changes in the way music is performed. This is the kind of cue that is often lost in the woodwork when well-recorded discs are played on lesser machines.

With the Krell you can, as already noted, roll your own sound by invoking one of the various filters, each of which stays in force once selected until overridden with a new selection. For our money, Filter 1 was preferred on balance with both disc types. It sounded more open, airy and also consistent between recordings. But this is largely a matter of personal preference as different aspects of overall performance are traded against each other. In practice it may also partly depend on the partnering amplifier, some of which will not be happy with the ultra-wideband signal available from SACD with this filter.

The bottom line is that this is an excellent audio disc player, though at the price it should be. It resoundingly makes the case for SACD, and shows that this format, which involves no video element, need not compromise CD replay. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*





PHONO

Burmester  
011

POWER  
ON  
STANDBY  
OFF

INPUT SELECTOR

VOLUME

SURROUND MONITOR  
PRE AMP SOURCE R  
MONO STEREO  
SHELLACK RIAA

POWER  
ON

Burmester  
RECEIVER



# Burmester 011 and 911 Mk3

*Burmester's 'Top Line' range includes this fabulously finished stereo pre/power amp combo*

PRICE: 011: £9,495; 911 Mk3: £13,195 CONTACT: Standsign Ltd, Unit D7, Heritage Business Park, Heritage Way, Gosport PO12 4BG ☎ 02392 501888 🌐 www.burmester.de

**G**erman craftsmanship doesn't come cheap. The Burmester 011 preamp costs £9,495, while its partnering 911 Mk3 power amp is an even pricier £13,195. Such hefty prices take some justification, especially since the 911 Mk3 looks virtually the same as the 032 integrated amp that we reviewed back in *HFC* 252. That similarity is superficial, however, as only the casework is shared: 032 is part of the Basic Line, whereas the 011 and 911 Mk3 come from the Top Line range, with superior ingredients, tighter tolerances (electronic components are matched right down to the individual transistor, resistor and capacitor level) and even more power.

Certain key elements are found throughout Burmester's ranges of electronics. Beautiful chrome-plated fascias are the most visible, and while the small engraved legends are not that easy to read, the look gives a timeless air of quality. The potentially upgradable modular circuitry is DC-coupled throughout, avoiding capacitors in the signal path, and its balanced too, with extensive use of XLR connectors for signal inputs and outputs.

From the front, the 011 preamp looks simple enough, with just a handful of toggle switches, a modest display section and two large chrome plated knobs. Appearances are deceptive, however, as a surprising number of extra features are hidden from immediate view, and one can only applaud the intelligent way the ergonomics have been organised to combine simplicity and flexibility.

Hands-on operation is intuitive and straightforward – one knob selects the input, the other the volume – though in practice, these major functions will normally be accessed via the remote handset. The five toggle switches are hands-on-only controls. Power on/off, mono/stereo and source/monitor (for recording) are standard enough. More unusual is an ability to change the moving coil phono cartridge input between 33/45rpm vinyl (RIAA) and 78rpm shellac equalisation standards. The final switch, labelled surround/preamp, effectively disables the preamp functions allowing the stereo system to be used as part of a multichannel system, under full control of an external processor.

The back panel is rather more daunting, as it's chock full of input and output sockets, mostly of the rather bulky three-pin XLR balanced variety. Strongly biased towards balanced operation, there are eight pairs of XLRs, seven of them inputs, including a

pair surprisingly devoted to the vinyl input, which seems rather obsessive. Phono-to-XLR adapters are available, but making the extra connection at microscopically small moving coil cartridge levels would seem better avoided. Four pairs of phono sockets are fitted, two pairs each for inputs and outputs, and there's also a headphone socket, with optional muting.

Tucked away within its tiny electronic heart is an additional 'configuration' menu, which incorporates a whole variety of other handy functions. Key examples include the ability to preset the sensitivities of each input across a usefully wide range, so that each source delivers roughly the same loudness for the same volume control setting. And, although the vinyl/78 phono input doesn't suit MM type cartridges, a choice of eight different impedance loadings for MC types is available.

Crucially, the 61-step electronic volume control, backed by the digital display, was particularly nice to use, hands-on or by remote control, though the omission of any sort of balance adjustment seems a regrettable (though not uncommon)

**“It's possible to run out of power, but only by creating silly sound pressure levels...”**

oversight. Furthermore, the all-metal system remote handset is a little too bulky and heavy for easy one-hand operation. It looks great and works fine, but the labelling is quite difficult to read.

If the preamp is cunningly complex, the power amp is utterly simple and straightforward. With the trademark chrome restricted to a modest central control panel and a top strip, this massive 37kg lump has a touch of brutality in the way most of the outside edges are devoted to sharp-edged heatsinking. Heavy duty gardening gloves are mandatory during installation.

Front controls are limited to a button that switches on from standby, with appropriate LED status indicators, though this can also be accomplished remotely via an umbilical connector to the preamp. The rear has two pairs of massive socket/binder speaker terminals, two balanced XLR inputs, the remote input sockets, and an hefty IEC mains input. Adaptors are supplied for phono inputs, and the power amp may also be configured for bi-amping or bridged mono operation.

The power supply has a 750VA transformer with 130,000µF capacitance, and is capable of 40A continuous current via eight matched power transistors per channel. In normal stereo operation, power output is 250 watts per channel into eight ohms and 350 watts into four ohms, with a damping factor better than 3,000.

## SOUND QUALITY

Creamy, smooth and exceedingly delicious seems the best way to summarise the sound of this amplifier combination. There's a great feeling of confidence with this pairing, helped by its almost inexhaustible reserves of headroom. It's possible to run out of power, but only by creating silly sound pressure levels, sufficient to threaten the architectural integrity of the listening room and risk the possibility of neighbours applying for ASBOs against you. While exploring the power envelope was intriguing in itself, it merely served to confirm the more than ample power that the 911 Mk3 could deliver when asked, and the very fine consistency of the sound at all listening levels.

The Bluenote Ballagio turntable (reviewed on p54 of this issue) provided a handy means of checking the 011's MC phono stage, which is clearly a top quality affair, demonstrating notably low background noise and great delicacy, as well as fine consistency with the sonic character found with the line stages.

There's very little in the way of 'character' here, and certainly nothing that could be called 'coloration'. The bass end in particular shows great poise and agility – which might well have something to do with the fact that Dieter Burmester plays a mean electric bass guitar. At the same time, the voice band and presence region is a little more obvious than the slightly reticent extreme top end.

Imaging is as good as it gets, and the best thing about this pairing is just how relaxed it is in getting its musical messages across. It didn't start out that way – initial power-up brought a tinge of disappointment. But, given a day or three to settle down, things got much more interesting, and by the end of a week a serious love affair looked imminent. Then it was time to bid *adieu*. Shame! **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*



# PROVOance



THE WILSON AUDIO  
**SYSTEM 7**  
HIGH-END PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



Provo, Utah's hi-fi artisans, the speaker builders of Wilson Audio, have now been at the top of the high-end tree for three decades. Recent recognition of their achievements tells us that complacency has yet to affect David A. Wilson's enthusiasm. As if challenged by rave reviews and countless awards, David has launched a new flagship to supplant the legendary WAMM – surely the longest-running, true high-end speaker design of all time. The Alexandria has already been acknowledged as the greatest cost-no-object speaker available today. Its sister speakers in the WATCH range achieve the ultimate in home theatre sound playback.

As the Alexandria paves the way for new and exciting advances in music reproduction, so, too, does the Wilson WATT Puppy System 7 remain the benchmark for consumers who desire compact speakers that demonstrate zero compromise. It is with great pleasure we note that the WATT Puppy, closing in on 20 years of production, was awarded the honour of High End Product of the Year 2003 by Hi-Fi News. Now that's what we call provenance.



**absolutesounds ltd.**

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# Meridian 808i Signature

*Meridian applies two decades of hi-tech know-how to possibly the finest one-box CD player yet*

PRICE: £8,250 CONTACT: Meridian Audio, Latham Road, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 6YE ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

**M**eridian was first off the block with an audiophile CD player, the MCD, back in 1984. The company has kept its technological edge and these days offers highly advanced DVD solutions and digital loudspeakers among its products, so we were slightly surprised to see a brand new CD-only player. But as Meridian's chairman and chief designer Bob Stuart explained to us in *HFC 263*, the 808i's exclusion of the video and associated circuitry required in a CD/DVD player allows performance to be taken just that shade further, recognising at the same time that the queuing music lover will find relatively little material on any hi-res format.

So here we have one of the world's top integrated CD players. A little odd, though, to find so many sockets on the back, and many of them are *inputs*. Yes, this gorgeous and aspirational device is also a digital preamplifier, with analogue and digital inputs and outputs, volume control, source selection – and, of course, a high-grade analogue-to-digital converter to digitise analogue inputs prior to digital processing.

Construction is first-rate, the substantial case including several circuit boards which carry the various input, output and processing modules, plus a computer-type DVD-ROM drive which gives excellent data recovery from marginal discs and seems to load discs faster than many of its breed. Importantly for a machine of this class, it's really nice to use too, especially the remote control which is a million miles from the little 'use-and-lose' things supplied with far too much high-end audio... this one has 'Pride Of Ownership' practically oozing out of its buttons.

## SOUND QUALITY

You would expect that the basics are well taken care of at this level, and they are. But it's in the little details that sheep are sorted from goats; or at any rate, that's undeniably true from a technical point of view. Subjectively, though, this player makes its greatest impression as an integrated whole. It just doesn't sound like an 'ordinary' CD player. Completely vindicating its manufacturer's faith in high technology, it produces a sound whose overriding characteristic is musicality.

Most hi-fi terminology has its baggage, and 'musicality' is no exception, so we'll explain. Crucially, it sometimes carries implications of added euphonic colorations or distortions. That's in no way the

case here – the sound is pure, unsullied and crystal-clear (both to the ear and pretty much to the resolution of our testing instruments). Probably for that very reason, the listener is drawn into the musical sound-world in a most convincing way. It seems extraordinary that a 'mere' CD player can make such a difference, especially when players

**“When the going gets tough it blossoms, delivering unfailingly natural instrumental timbres.”**

at a tenth the price come mighty close on the technical front, but aside from a handful of significantly more expensive and notably exotic multi-box CD players, we've not heard a more natural and inviting presentation from the original silver disc.

We took particular delight in the 808i's tendency to understatement, at least compared with other players: it never forces the sound at you, never exaggerates minor climaxes within the music. By contrast, when the going gets really tough it blossoms, delivering rock-steady images, unhindered dynamics and unfailingly natural instrumental timbres. It has no trouble at all with one of the greatest bugbears, quiet basslines, maintaining consistent tune, timing and level where others flounder or become woolly. It retrieves details you never dreamed existed from familiar recordings, and does all this with such calm assurance that it never draws attention to itself, merely flattering the music. If you like, it is to music as Jeeves was to Bertie Wooster: just as something is about to be demanded, one finds it has already been done.

It's pretty hard to criticise this player. Even its value for money seems perfectly reasonable when one considers the magnitude of its improvement in all areas – bass, treble, detail, imaging, tonal purity – over the run of the mill. And then there's its second (but hardly secondary) function as preamplifier, a task it fulfils no less admirably. Its size is imposing but not unmanageable. It is, in short, a prime example of hi-fi to aspire to. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

*See HFC 263 (February 2005) for our original review of this product*







# Sonus Faber Amati Anniversario

Pay Homage to the floorstanding loudspeaker that just got the mother of all makeovers

PRICE: £13,500 per pair (violin red), £14,200 per pair (graphite) CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com

New Sonus Faber Homage speakers don't come along very often. There are only three models, the latest being 2003's Stradivari (there haven't been many new violin makers worth pay homage to in the last half millennium). They don't need upgrading often, either; the Amati Anniversario is the first revised design in a dozen years of Homages.

What's changed? The Amati is still midway through the Homage series – bigger than the Guarneri, smaller than the Stradivari. The original Amati had a time-aligned front baffle; the Anniversario tilts the whole speaker back. Unless you are dumb enough to use this as the world's most expensive plant-pot stand, the back tilt is an all-round improvement. The stunning lute-shaped cabinet back has remained, but the rear ports are now two large lozenge-shaped slots instead of three little ports. Physically, the 27cm wide, 56cm deep and 117cm tall speaker weighs in at a healthy 57kg, but this is not too dissimilar from the size and weight of its predecessor.

Beneath the beautiful exterior is a very clever, extraordinarily solid design. The enclosure is a multilayer affair, featuring constrained-mode damping and formed using hand-selected layers of the finest chunks of real tree. These are graded and oriented for carefully optimised resonance control. Then, sub-structural ribs are strategically placed for a near-absolute vibration-free cabinet.

But perhaps the biggest change is to the drive units. The 25mm ring radiator tweeter, with dual toroidal wave-guide, the 150mm midrange unit with its 'eddy current free' CCAW/Kapton voice coil and the pair of 220mm aluminium/magnesium alloy cone bass drivers are remarkably similar to the driver complement in the range-topping Stradivari Homage.

This driver line-up demands a fine crossover network, and Sonus Faber doesn't disappoint. This one is designed with phase and amplitude response uppermost, which is extremely useful with so many drive units in the signal path. The multi-slope design crosses over at 350Hz and 4kHz and is designed to keep the speaker amp-chummy. With claimed sensitivity of 92dB and a nominal impedance of four-ohms, the Amati Anniversario is said to perform well with any decent amplifier from 30-300 watts. We listened to the Amatis hooked up to the lovely Jadis DA88 Signature amplifier (reviewed on p46), with an Audio Research CD3 MkII as the source. This is a fitting level of equipment for a speaker of the Amati's calibre.

Sonus Faber is keen to draw your attention to the attractive and innovative string grille, as proudly displayed in our picture. This is an effective way of hiding speaker drive units without relying on a sonically deleterious lump of wood with a bit of cloth wrapped around it. Instead, battens are affixed to the top and bottom of the front baffle and the thin ropes of material stretched between them don't get in the way of the music.

These are remarkably house-friendly speakers, save for the dents that big spikes and almost nine stone of speaker will put in the average shag pile. The rear ports necessitate some breathing space between speaker and rear wall, but these don't need to be in a barn of a room – under a metre from side and rear walls, with a slight toe-in is sufficient.

## SOUND QUALITY

There are people who won't like the sound of the Sonus Faber Amati Anniversario, just as apparently there are straight men who don't fancy Angelina Jolie. These individuals should be pitied, or maybe hunted for sport.

Why so strong a reaction? Because these speakers put the joy back into music so profoundly and so effortlessly, anyone not liking these speakers must simply have had their fun button pulled off years ago. Joy... that's a word that rarely appears on the pages of a hi-fi magazine, yet that's the most prevalent feeling that strikes you when you listen to the Amati Anniversario.

**“Anyone not liking these speakers must have had their fun button pulled off years ago.”**

Whatever you play through the Amati Anniversario, it leaves you hungry for more. The first disc comes and goes, filling you with wonder and the sheer thrill of listening to entertaining music once again. Then, you find yourself criss-crossing through your collection, and the collections of others, to find the perfect contrast to the first disc, and so the process goes on. You might have to forcibly eject yourself from the listening room, because you don't just turn off or walk away from this kind of sound.

The scale of the music is immense. Not in that Wilson-esque big sound, or the sort of hyper-analytical monitor speaker presentation. No, we are talking about the scale of the music itself, not just the sound. You get to feel the passion that the musicians and

the composer put into the music, whether that's one guy strumming a guitar and wondering where his life went or a full orchestra attempting to parse Rachmaninov's philosophical heaviness.

Of course, such musical insight is only possible with a speaker that delivers the audiophile goods, and the Amati Anniversario does that in spade-loads. It's possessed of one of the most open sounds around, with a soundstage to match. It presents more of a wall of sound, instead of a walk-in soundstage, but this seems to be perfectly in line with the musical integrity of the Amati. It also has an extraordinarily deep and fast bass – play something adrenalin-filled like Count Basie and the speed of the speaker is exhilarating, leaving you exhausted and nursing a groin strain from too much toe-tapping.

But there are many speakers that can deliver a good soundstage and tight, deep bass. The Amati Anniversario has something more, an almost intangible element. Maybe it's a secret harmonic to all sound, like that which differentiates an okay violin from one made by – you guessed it – Andrea Amati.

It is said of the Homage series that the speakers only suit classical music. If this is the case, are Led Zeppelin, the White Stripes and Eminem 'classical'? It's not that the Amati Anniversario is only good for classical music, it's just that it's so good at doing the classical thing that people tend to assume it can't possibly be as adept at playing jazz or rock.

Yet, if you're that way inclined, this speaker rocks out like it was born wearing denim (as opposed to gorgeous real wood)

We played our pair of Amatis with all sorts of music at all sorts of volume levels, from whisper-quiet to upset-parts-of-your-anatomy loud. It wasn't just that nothing phased the speaker; it kept coming back for more and put a Cheshire Cat smile on any listener's face while doing so. You name it, the Amati Anniversario made it sound wonderful.

This is what most people get into hi-fi for. Few speakers are named after top-quality musical instruments and that's how it should be, because those few have become musical instruments in their own right. It's simply a joy to sit in front of these speakers. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



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IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC



# T+A G10R

*This impressive one-stop shop for vinyl replay includes a built-in phono stage*

PRICE: £2,750 (including tonarm and cartridge) CONTACT: Transparent Distribution, Coxmoor Road, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, NG17 5AA ☎ 01623 517000 🌐 www.taelektroakustik.de

**W**hen T+A decided to reinvent the wheel, it went back to basics. The company decided against a purist turntable, reasoning that their target market was more likely to be attracted to a simple solution in which the arm and cartridge are supplied and fitted, and the player is more or less ready to play from the box. The purist turntable market is also saturated with deeply exotic designs and those manufacturers with decades of vinyl heritage, so making a more plug-and-play device is a fundamentally sassy piece of marketing and a clever design exercise to boot.

Set-up in the case of the G10R is largely a matter of dropping a bearing ball and oil into the main bearing housing, assembling the two-part metal and acrylic platter (a simple push fit) and dropping it into place while threading the belt around the motor spindle. The bearing, meanwhile, is a very close fit and takes a satisfyingly long time to drop to its final level. The deck's suspension is well damped and is preadjusted for the supplied arm.

In fact, the turntable part of the G10R is technically available on its own, but this doesn't appear in the UK price list. Instead, most are supplied as reviewed here, with a Rega RB300 arm, mildly customised for its role and prefitted with a Benz-Micro C-05 high-output MC cartridge. A more costly option involves the SME M2-9 arm and the low-output Benz C-05 cartridge, but this package commands a hefty price premium. In both cases, an MM/MC phono stage – the PH-G10MC – is fitted internally to supply gain and RIAA equalisation and is preadjusted as received, though loading values can be altered. The phono stage is physically located adjacent to the arm base, which is much closer to ideal than it would be in the amplifier, at the end of a long interconnect lead. This also means that any line level amplifier can be used, without the complication of an outboard phono stage. Other options available (but not examined by *Hi-Fi Choice*) include a brass centre weight and an acrylic cover.

## SOUND QUALITY

It all starts with the basic pedestrian aspects of the G10R's performance, without which the subtleties would not be apparent. These basic properties are functions of the turntable itself, in so far as if the deck itself is suspect, no amount of gift-wrapping with a good arm and cartridge can save the sound. So, in no particular order, stereo imagery is stable, and pitch integrity is such that there is no apparent drift in speed, either of the low-rate type that can give a rather seasick effect with sustained piano notes and similar (or an effect akin to some of the more infamous pop divas before their inability to pitch a note is 'fixed' in the studio) or the high-rate flutter residuals that generally manifest as a graininess or harshness. In fairness though, this kind of problem is unusual in half-decent turntables.

The Rega arm is a known quantity – a stable performer with no vices and a taut, tidy performance at the frequency extremes, and the

Benz-Micro cartridge is equally impressive, and largely free of obvious character. The only technical shortcoming encountered was some high and mid-frequency noise, possibly due to imperfect motor screening, but the problem was minor.

The G10R has a bold, outgoing musculature, and brings an unusually physical sense of strength to the sound. The bass is most impressive, with a light, open touch and a palpable tunefulness in place of the heavy-handed drone of some quite expensive and

**“It has an outgoing musculature, and brings an unusually physical strength to the sound.”**

apparently more elaborately-engineered disc spinners. At the high frequency end, the performance remains clean and tidy, with the moderate resolution expected of a cartridge whose stylus profile is not as sharp as some, but gives a quiet output free of groove noise (and is kind to impulsive effects due to groove debris).

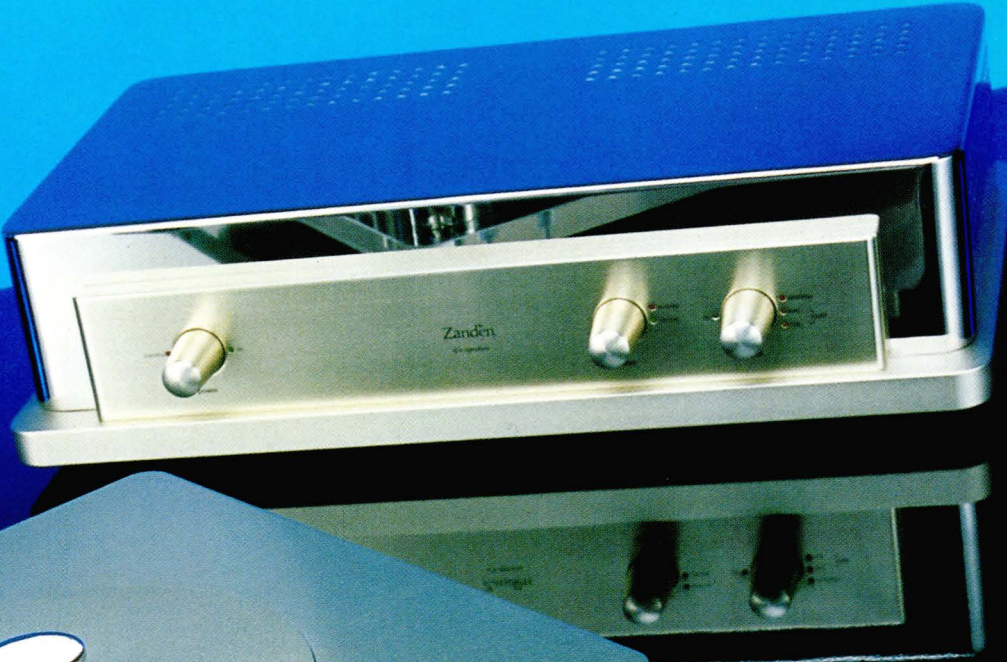
Overall, this is an excellent design, which is visually and musically in keeping with other T+A V-series components. Its particular advantages are easy set-up and use. There are other record playing components that are slightly more exacting still and arguably can be fine-tuned to even better ultimate effect, but the combination of fuss-free usability, style and musical euphony make a highly compelling case in its favour. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 261 (December 2004) for our original review of this product*









# Zanden Model 2000 and Model 5000 Signature

Who needs multichannel music? Just buy a £31,500 CD player and discover your discs anew!

PRICE: Model 2000: £19,000; Model 5000 Signature: £12,500 CONTACT: Audiofreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 7QT ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.zandenaudio.com

Even the heady wine of *The Collection* seems a bit wan in comparison to a £31,500 CD player. This Zanden quartet of Japanese-built boxes (representing CD transport, DAC and a power supply for each) might seem considerably more expensive than any other CD player, ever. But, when you factor in a decade and a half of inflation, this isn't so far removed from the cost of big Wadia and Mark Levinson players of the early 1990s.

The £19,000 Model 2000 CD transport and £12,500 Model 5000 Signature DAC are the first products of the Zanden range to make it to British shores; there are also three phono stages, a line preamp, four power amps and another (cheaper) DAC in the wings. But, if the first two products reflect the performance of the others, we have a lot of quality to come.

Finished in brushed champagne gold, with 15mm thick acrylic and 15mm or 25mm thick aluminium throughout, the exterior look is appealing and luxurious in the extreme. Internally, the levels of damping, noise absorption and isolation are virtually without equal. The transport is a top-loader with absolutely no automation; you lift the cookie-jar lid, stick the disc in the silo, place the magnetic puck on the disc and replace the lid. This takes some juggling to get the workflow right at first – you often feel you need another hand to cope with lid, puck and CD at once – but it soon becomes second nature. After a few seconds, the disc is read and then the front panel controls, the remote handset and the blue LED display make this transport as user friendly as any mid-price player.

Don't expect any fancy features like CD-Text, of course – these are all sacrificed to deliver a digital datastream with absolute accuracy. Zanden deploys the most accurate digital clock in audio and features the all too infrequently used I<sup>2</sup>S digital connection to produce the sort of jitter-free, phase-noise-free and timing-accurate performance we could have only dreamed about a few years ago.

Keeping the digital signal as pure as possible means separating the power supply from the transport itself. Normally, 'separating' means putting the power supply in a little copper sub-chassis, but Zanden goes for overkill and places the PSU in a box about the size of a small monoblock power amp. This can make a significant difference, although sadly precious few manufacturers make two-box transports these days.

The two-box approach, separating the power supply from the audio electronics, extends to the Model 5000 Signature DAC, too. Based on the standard Model 5000 MkIV, and – like the transport – a Philips derived design, this 16-bit/44.1kHz DAC is one of the most simple and straightforward you'll find these days. But this is deliberate: Zanden believes the Philips TDA-1541A Double Crown DAC chip to be the best there is, and the rest

The combo is exceptionally natural sounding. It's not just the level of detail, the warmth and the beautiful soundstaging; it manages to have that organic entertainment factor that usually only happens when a high-end turntable is involved. However, the Zanden combination is not particularly vinyl-sounding and it certainly doesn't try to emulate the sound of LP – it's very definitely a CD player, just one of the best money can buy.

**“This is one of those CD replay systems that change the way we look at the medium.”**

is purely down to Zanden's approach to digital audio. No oversampling, no negative feedback, no up-sampling and no brick-wall filter – Zanden makes its own digital filter to aid its minimalist approach. It also makes the DAC's zero negative feedback valve line output stage too, sporting a single 6922 double triode tube. The power supply is just as comprehensively specified, also sporting valves in place of diode rectification, with two 6CA4 and one 6X4 valves in the big, well-made box.

## SOUND QUALITY

There's something almost quaint about the Zanden. Four boxes, top loading, valves... how very mid-1990s. In fact, it's not that the Zanden is dated in approach, it's more that we've just dumbed down and are no longer ready to countenance a four-box CD player.

Shame on us. This is one of those CD replay systems that change the way we look at the medium. When you get to the high end of CD replay, you generally lose that bright digital sheen found in cheaper CD and especially DVD players. By the time you reach Wadia/Mark Levinson/Audio Research CD player levels, you expect the player performance to be extremely natural sounding, but the jump from the five grand mark to the twenty grand mark must mean diminishing returns kick in?

If anything, the jump from these excellent players to the Zanden is arguably greater than the jump from a £500 to a £5,000 player. Of course, you need to have a system in place that can open the window wide enough to justify a £30,000+ CD player, but in this context, the player truly shines.

Everything that's played through the Zanden combination sounds utterly beautiful. Perhaps the rough edge of hard rock may be slightly smoothed, but even the electronic snap of Kraftwerk's music was delivered with effortless dynamics and scale. Play anything live or unamplified and you seem to have a direct connection to the music, but it's not a sense of veils being lifted or anything as trite as that. What you get is a feeling of living, breathing musicians making real music with as much accuracy and integrity as you'll find anywhere, short of hiring the musicians themselves to play in your living room. This might be cheaper in the short term – after all, hiring the LSO and a good concert hall for a night may cost less than the asking price of the Zanden.

The sound doesn't present itself forward of the speakers, but has near-infinite depth and width. This creates an almost perfect 'third seat of the concert hall' effect. You are drawn into the music subtly, but irrevocably; things make more sense than ever before and you settle down for a night's music. Every night.

This sounds like SACD or DVD-Audio should. With these newer formats, you get the extra resolution, the extra detail... but you often lose the realism and neutrality. Of course, anyone exposed to Zanden-standard CD replay who doesn't have thirty or so spare big ones burning a hole in their pocket will spend the rest of their days listening to their music with a tinge of *recherche du temps perdu*. Once you've heard just how good CD can sound with the Zanden, all else is gaslight. You might even trade in your LP collection, turntable and phono stage, because you may not need them any more. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



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# Tannoy Yorkminster

*Retro styling and technology can still have a place in our modern world*

PRICE: £9,000 per pair CONTACT: Tannoy, Rosehall Industrial Estate, Coatbridge, Scotland ML5 4TF ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

**F**ifty years ago, plenty of speakers looked a lot like this, but in today's world Tannoy's Yorkminster looks as odd as a vintage Bentley on the M25. Speakers have undergone dramatic changes down the years, for a number of reasons both logical and fashion-led. But the laws of acoustics haven't altered one iota, and hi-fi has repeatedly shown an all too regular tendency to discard the old and embrace new technologies with excessive enthusiasm.

Most of Tannoy's retro-classic speakers are shipped to customers in the Far East, where there seems a greater awareness of some of the virtues that modern speakers lack. Perhaps it's time that the British hi-fi enthusiast learned to appreciate some of the classic virtues of historic speaker technologies, which have been all too hastily swept aside in the name of progress and/or fashion.

**“These speakers are nothing less than magical when they're playing really quietly.”**

The Yorkminster is the largest in the three-strong Prestige range, all closely related in style and content. It has a large and costly 300mm alnico-magnet dual-concentric driver in a large and costly 200-litre enclosure. Alnico (an aluminium/nickel/cobalt alloy) is a vastly more expensive magnetic material than the usual ferrite, but some enthusiasts have always claimed it sounds better than ferrite, even if the reasons remain obscure.

The solitary dual concentric drive unit that Tannoy uses here is really two-in-one, firing a horn-loaded tweeter through the centre of the main cone. The latter is paper pulp around 250mm in diameter, terminated by a pleated fabric surround and mounted on a massive cast chassis.

The huge port-loaded enclosure stands just over a metre tall, is 62cm wide and 45cm deep. Small rooms need not apply! It's built from relatively lightweight 18mm birch plywood, stiffened by complex bracing, and has classic 1950s styling cues, with high-class teak veneer and mouldings, and a mottled brown/cream grille. Presets provide five options each for treble energy and roll-off, and the terminal block has five socket/binders – two for each driver, allowing bi-wiring or bi-amping, plus an extra earth terminal for the driver chassis.

The drive unit might have its roots in the 1940s, but the crossover network uses the latest top-quality components, and that undoubtedly makes a major contribution towards a quite delicious sound quality, which has a midband delicacy that's wonderfully natural and communicative.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Yorkminster has a superbly wide bandwidth with ample – perhaps a little too ample – bass weight, and a very well judged top end, but it's the midband that really stands out. Operatic material usually finds me reaching for the remote handset, but these speakers even found me enjoying the singing, simply because they make voices sound that much more believable, realistic and engaging.

It's not so much that they'll play loudly – which they certainly will, with massive available headroom. It's more that these speakers are nothing less than magical when they're playing really quietly. Fine details like the subtle texture of orchestral strings remain clear and distinct, even close to inaudibility. They're particularly well suited to valve amps, the high sensitivity helping less powerful single-ended designs, while the superb midband delicacy is ideally suited to the acknowledged strengths of thermionic amplification.

The basic laws of acoustics mean that this speaker's large main driver cone and horn-loaded tweeter give a more directional sound than conventional speakers. As a result you hear more of the recording but less of your listening room, and the stereo imaging is unusually precise. This is a matter of taste, rather than right or wrong, but does play an important part in the total experience.

The Yorkminster won't suit everyone, and is by no means beyond criticism. The sheer bulk of a pair of these speakers, not to mention the massive low bass, ensures it's a box only suited to large rooms. That large wooden enclosure unquestionably adds a fair helping of box coloration, and the tonal balance does slightly emphasise the upper midband. But those are minor criticisms, and the Yorkminster's best trick is simply the way it drags you into – and cuddles you up with – whatever kind of music you choose to play. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

*See HFC 255 (July 2004) for our original review of this product*







*Jadis*

DA88S  
Integrated amplifier

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BALANCE

SOURCE

DVD TUNER  
CD TAP

ON

OFF

OPERATE

STANDBY



# Jadis DA88 Signature

*The French have a knack when it comes to romance. And they look stylish, too!*

PRICE: £6,999 CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.jadis-electronics.com

**T**he Jadis DA88 Signature. It's an integrated valve amp costing a healthy seven grand, but if you have the cash and appreciate being seduced when you listen to music, it's also your next purchase.

Clichés like 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' abound, but this thing really is a *beaut*. The polished finish with heavy, hand-made transformers sets this amp apart from all others, and even though it sports seemingly retro devices like toggle switches and should be used with a valve cage, it still manages to look more like some *objet d'art* instead of a slab of audio electronics.

The back features the homespun transformers Jadis is so rightly famous for. There are three: a large power transformer on the left and two output transformers centre and right. This accounts for much of the back-breakingly heavy 40kg mass. It also accounts for the extremely wide bandwidth for a valve design, with the amp claimed to be capable of delivering sound from 10Hz-29kHz.

Essentially, the DA88 Signature is a power amp with a passive preamp built in. Even so, the tube complement is quite vast. It uses five double triode tubes (three ECC82 and two ECC83) in the input and regulation stages, plus two pairs of KT88s per side for the output stage. Thirteen valves is not an unlucky number, though, at least as far as the sound quality goes. With eight KT88s in push-pull mode, the amp delivers 60 watts in Class A for speakers with from one to 16-ohm impedances. This is measured at two per cent distortion, but this is common with valve amps and the distortion is usually benign odd harmonic distortion instead of the abrasive-sounding first and third harmonics.

The manual is an important read, because a set of jumpers are used on the transformers to connect the right output taps to match the impedance of the speakers used. Strangely, however, it describes the settings for two-to-eight-ohm speakers and for speakers up to eight ohms (the identical images confirm the tautology). Fortunately, this is the right setting for most speakers, but if your chosen transducers have an impedance outside of this range, you should contact Jadis to find the correct jumper positions. The manual also explains that the amp inverts absolute phase, so put the red wire where the black should go and vice versa.

The price puts this amplifier very much into two-box pre/power territory, with really high-class combinations from valve and solid-state manufacturers (including a couple

from Jadis itself) as distinct competition. In fact, the Jadis is almost in a class of its own in terms of integrated amplification. But, if you fall under its spell, the need for two boxes simply falls away...

## SOUND QUALITY

The Jadis name is built on fantasy. You listen to Jadis, you live the fantasy. And the DA88 is the best exponent of that fantasy world you can imagine. You can play absolutely anything through it and it sounds completely fantastic. Rose tinted? You betcha. Warm and sugar-coated? Absolutely. And you'll love it for that. Of all the amps on the market, this is the only one where you could line up the absolute worst discs you (or your friends) have and still get a sound that brings out the best in the disc. Never mind the primo recordings, or the audiophile pressings, this is the amp that makes even compilation discs sound fine. It's truly uncanny.

So, what is it about the performance that makes the Jadis DA88 so damn special? Well, the sound is so harmonically rich, it brings out the musician and the dancer in all of us. There is no passive interaction with music – this amp gets past the normal hi-fi perspectives and simply plays music with passion.

**“The sound is so harmonically rich, it brings out the musician and dancer in all of us.”**

Don't expect strict neutrality, however – it doesn't do that at all. Instead, you begin to question whether neutrality is really that important after all. That legendary 'cuckoo clock' speech about the Swiss from *The Third Man* springs to mind. Who needs accuracy, it's so boring! In most cases, this would be audiophile heresy, but not when a Jadis is in the dock.

Coming from the country that ended the divine right of kings in such a dramatic manner, the DA88 Signature sums up baroque majesty, in sound as well as looks. The soundstage isn't just large and open-sounding, it's positively seductive. It doesn't just turn your home into a concert hall; close your eyes and it transforms the room into a Renaissance chapel, complete with frescos by Michelangelo.

It's also got this passionate articulation going on, that turns even the most base crooner into Sam Cooke and Al Green all rolled into one. It's deeply un-PC to discuss

such things today, but back in the 1950s and 1960s, hi-fi as status symbol briefly became as seductive as serving cocktails. If we mine this politically incorrect seam a bit, this must be the ultimate make-out amp: it looks rich and fabulous, sounds delicious and gets you hot and sweaty. In other words, buy this amplifier and get laid more. Yes, it's that good (and that kind of) an amplifier – you don't own it, you have a love affair with it.

Okay, back to Planet Hi-Fi. This is a deeply insightful amp on a musical level, even if it doesn't aim for neutrality. You get the sense of musical occasion, of the passion behind the music. It's extremely detailed, beautifully articulate and comes with a deceptively deep, powerful bass and the most sumptuous, clean and extended treble this side of reality.

But it's the midband that really marks out the DA88 Signature for greatness – it's so open and natural-sounding that you wonder what you were doing with all that lesser hi-fi in the past. Female voice is a particularly tough call for the midband of even the best amps yet it's with female vocals that the DA88 Signature makes its strongest case. Play KT Tunstall through this in demonstration and you'll have to either buy the amp or burn the disc. Here, her voice takes on nuances entirely missing on

other amps and suddenly the lyrics become all the more poignant. Even decade-old complaint rock from Alanis Morissette becomes all the more impassioned and even more angry, yet takes on a fragile beauty that almost makes *Jagged Little Pill* acceptable to males.

One could ask whether these nuances are a function of the disc or the amplifier, but not if you have listened to the DA88 Signature. Its brainwashing is instant and instantly successful – the answer to this 'recording or playback' question is 'who cares?'

It seems valve amplifiers are the finest expressions of the national hi-fi zeitgeist you can muster. Italian valve amps look beautiful and sound rich. American amps are big and sound it. British valve amps are either elegantly understated or have that kitchen table 'chic'. And the French have that self-assured romantic charm. Right now, the French are winning the valve war, and the Jadis DA88 Signature is their weapon of mass delight. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*





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# Marantz SA-11S1 and PM-11S1

Hot from Marantz's Premium range come this excellent two-channel SACD player and matching amp

PRICE: SA-11S1: £2,000, PM-11S1: £2,500 CONTACT: Marantz UK, Kingsbridge House, Padbury Oaks, 575-583 Bath Road, Longford, Middlesex UB7 0EH ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

These are two of the latest products to join Marantz's prestige Premium series: PM-11S1, a technically innovative and superbly built integrated stereo amplifier with purist appeal, and the SA-11S1, a stereo SACD player, one of an increasing number that have been introduced in the recent past. This is an innovative product with some unusual features, but most of all it is a high-grade player in both primary roles, CD and SACD, without any of the subtle but inevitable degradation you may have come to expect in a multichannel component, and especially such multichannel AV components as a DVD-Audio player. Which is not to say that SACD necessarily sounds better than DVD-Audio, but a stereo SACD player with no video subsection stands a better chance of reaching Nirvana, all things being equal – and this is the way it appears to pan out in practice.

**“The amplifier is not massively powerful, but it consistently punches above its weight.”**

The amplifier delivers 100 watts per channel into eight ohms (200 watts/four-ohms) and is said to be largely impervious to the nature of the load – and that includes the latest SA1 version of Marantz's discrete HDAM buffer amplifier between stages. HDAMs are also employed each side of the volume control, itself a high-tech multiturm design based on a Wolfson resistive ladder, which works in imperceptible 0.5dB steps. Other highlights include a choke-regulated power supply and a mechanically and electrically quiet 'super ring' transformer. The amplifier has five standard inputs plus a single balanced input, that can be fed from the corresponding output on the SA11 SACD player. Pre-out and main-in sockets are available too, which can be patched in with additional SA-11S1 amplifiers for bi-amp or

even full 5.1/7.1-channel operation. The SA-11S1 is an equally impressive design, with a total of six output filters, three each for CD and SACD, that can be chosen to taste, and a DC filter. The two units make extensive use of non-magnetic metalwork and copper screening. The structures are well damped, and the displays and the player's digital outputs can be turned off.

There was a time when big, high-end amplifiers from the Far East had little credibility over here, in the main because they simply sounded like bigger and badder versions of the mainstream hardware at the time, but didn't even have the excuse of being cheap. Or because they were clearly outperformed by less costly counterparts that were simpler, more transparent and lacked only muscle. The two Marantz components here have nothing in common with this kind of equipment, and this is what most divides the historical approach of the big names to the high end from the modern approach exemplified by the SA-11S1 and the PM-11S1. Put another way, these are palpably products that have been informed and developed by people with ears, and who care about the mechanics of sound reproduction. These are truly musical boxes that compete with the euphemistically named high end in everything but price, which is where the big names have an obvious advantage over the smaller producers that have traditionally dominated the sector.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is a smooth and sweetly detailed combination. The amplifier is not massively powerful, but it punches well above its weight, and consistently so, irrespective (within reason) of the nature of the load. But what it is chiefly notable for is its expressiveness and transparency, and here we are talking about the combination, as each component makes its own powerful contribution. Neither is left in the shade by the other, but in the case of the disc player, compact disc is clearly outperformed by SACD using the CD layer of a range of hybrid discs as a control. Typically with modern recordings of classical material,

where the starting point is a well engineered recording, SACD sounds more organic, more progressive and, as one would expect, more detailed and transparent. CD can hit most of the right spots, and the SA-11S1 is a good enough CD player to show much of what it can achieve when placed in the right hands. The sound is detailed and open, but compared to SACD it just doesn't have the same resolution. It's more deliberate, less subtle and less expressive – and the SA-11S1 is more than good enough to resolve the differences. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

See HFC 265 (April 2005) for our original review of this product









# Revel Ultima Studio

*A true Californian heavyweight with meticulous manners and serious dynamic punch*

PRICE: £8,500 per pair (£9,500 with gloss finish) CONTACT: CSE, Unit 9, Centre Park Holdings, The Airfield, Tockwith, York YO5 8QF ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.revelspeakers.com

The Ultima Studio is the second largest speaker from Revel, the prestige speaker-making arm of the Harman group. Weighing about 70kg each, the Studio is an impressive floorstander built into an enclosure measuring 32x111x49cm. Some of the intersecting curves suggest the original Ford Focus, aesthetically one of the cleanest ever mass production cars, and set up and ready to go they look absolutely stunning, a comment that a number of visitors made unprompted during the too-short test period.

Frequency response within a tight  $\pm 1.5$ dB window is 31Hz-20kHz, and with -10dB coming in at 22Hz, this is a speaker that will rattle the floorboards given the chance. It is not necessarily the easiest speaker to drive, with a nominal six-ohm impedance and a minimum of three ohms, but moderate phase angles mean that it shouldn't (and didn't) cause problems with high-quality amps.

The Ultima Studio is intended to showcase all the technologies that have been so painstakingly developed by Revel, and uses drive units which Revel makes, or in the case of the tweeters, commissions from ScanSpeak in Denmark. Bass is delivered by two 200mm dished mica-loaded copolymer cone drivers with large voice coils to maximise power handling coupled to a 130mm inverted dome midrange of similar construction, and an aluminium alloy dome tweeter. A second textile dome tweeter for ambience reinforcement is fitted at the back. The crossover operates at 220Hz and 2.2kHz, with 24dB slopes to minimise overlap and the level of each tweeter can be adjusted. The speaker is available in a range of finishes and the side cheeks can be swapped around, with a number of contrasting finishes available.

Revel is one of the most punctilious and exacting loudspeaker brands out there. In the past, and from other brands, this kind of attitude has led to a succession of bland, sterile loudspeakers as new designs were produced by the numbers. That was clearly the danger with Revel, but as we discovered when we visited the Northridge, California headquarters, Revel has managed to avoid this trap, perhaps because the company is run by engineers with oil running through their veins, and not by marketing oiks. There is a palpable enthusiasm for the minutiae of magnetic circuit design, cone materials and frequency selective spatial distribution curves. Their approach to speaker design is set by Kevin Voecks, one-time chief engineer at Mirage (API) and Snell Acoustics, along with

Floyd Toole, who established the technical parameters for the brand, and in fact for all the loudspeaker production under the Harman umbrella. He is also responsible for the blind panel listening facility, the best in the industry, which uses a large group of trained listeners, who must demonstrate their listening prowess before being accepted onto the programme. Their job is to establish a ranking order of criteria when judging loudspeakers, and also fair comparisons with key competitors. I have reservations about some of the elements of this programme, but there is no gainsaying the meticulous nature of what they do, or that they achieve impressive results.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Ultima Studio turned out to be the second loudspeaker to be used in my new listening room, which has a respectable floorplan with an unusually tall ceiling, and at the moment a fairly lively acoustic (it's furnished, but not yet carpeted). Speaker sensitivity (87dB) is on the lowish side for such a large brute, but more to the point the balance of the speaker invites it to be pushed hard. There are plenty of examples

**“It’s a meticulously constructed, straight down the middle design with added balls.”**

of music that show the soft, feminine side of the Studio – Jennifer Warnes on SACD for example – but this is a loudspeaker that really likes to rumble. It did great things with Radiohead and Capercaille, and it really comes into its own with broad symphonic works, where its natural analysis and its devastatingly deep, solid bass and image scale come into play.

Don't take this to mean that the Revel Studio is all about power and depth, or anything so crude. It strikes us, in fact, as very similar in all-round achievement to the F32, which is a more conventionally proportioned, and more affordable floorstander. Allow us to remind you how we concluded that review in *HFC* 265: “It is not necessarily a loudspeaker that you will warm to immediately, but over an extended period you will probably find that it has an undeniable musical verity and as such does not favour certain types of music. It speaks in an unglamoured, unvarnished manner, (which) makes it a superb tool for exploring a valued musical collection”. These words could have been

written about the Studio too, which is larger, goes deeper and does it louder, but which at its core is the same kind of animal – a meticulously constructed, straight down the middle design with added balls.

There's nothing contrived about the tonal balance, and although the treble did sometimes sound a little hard or forward in the test listening room, this is partly a consequence of how this room sounds in its present state. In any case, it's readily amenable to adjustment with some tweaking of the controls on the backplate.

Talking of which... there is also the question of the ambience tweeter, which will need to be adjusted according to personal taste, speaker orientation and the local geometry of the listening room – the distance to the back and side walls, for example. We found this adjustment to be a godsend as it helps to firm up the image, and to produce an ambient soundfield that works in concert with the listening room. It also helps to ensure that the speakers sound more consistent when heard from the sides, and that the shape of the soundfield is more, well, realistic and better focused. It is possible to overcook this

setting, but when right, the Studio gives a great impression of depth, and of the sound being divorced from the woodwork.

Most of all, this is a spectacularly fine loudspeaker, one of the true heavyweights in every sense. Okay, so the tweeter doesn't have quite the transparency of the Focal-JMLab beryllium dome or of the B&W diamond equivalent, and although something in the Studio's stance and weight suggests a parallel to the B&W 801D, this is a smaller (and less expensive) speaker. But it's still a real roomful, and one that is capable of cruising at high SPLs with not a hint of stress or strain, along with a neutrality and supreme dynamic punch that will keep just about anyone enthralled. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

## MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

For high-end surround sound, try this: Revel Ultima Studio (L/R); Revel Ultima Voice (centre channel); Revel Ultima Embrace (rear L/R); Revel Ultima Sub 30 (subwoofer).

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £22,850**

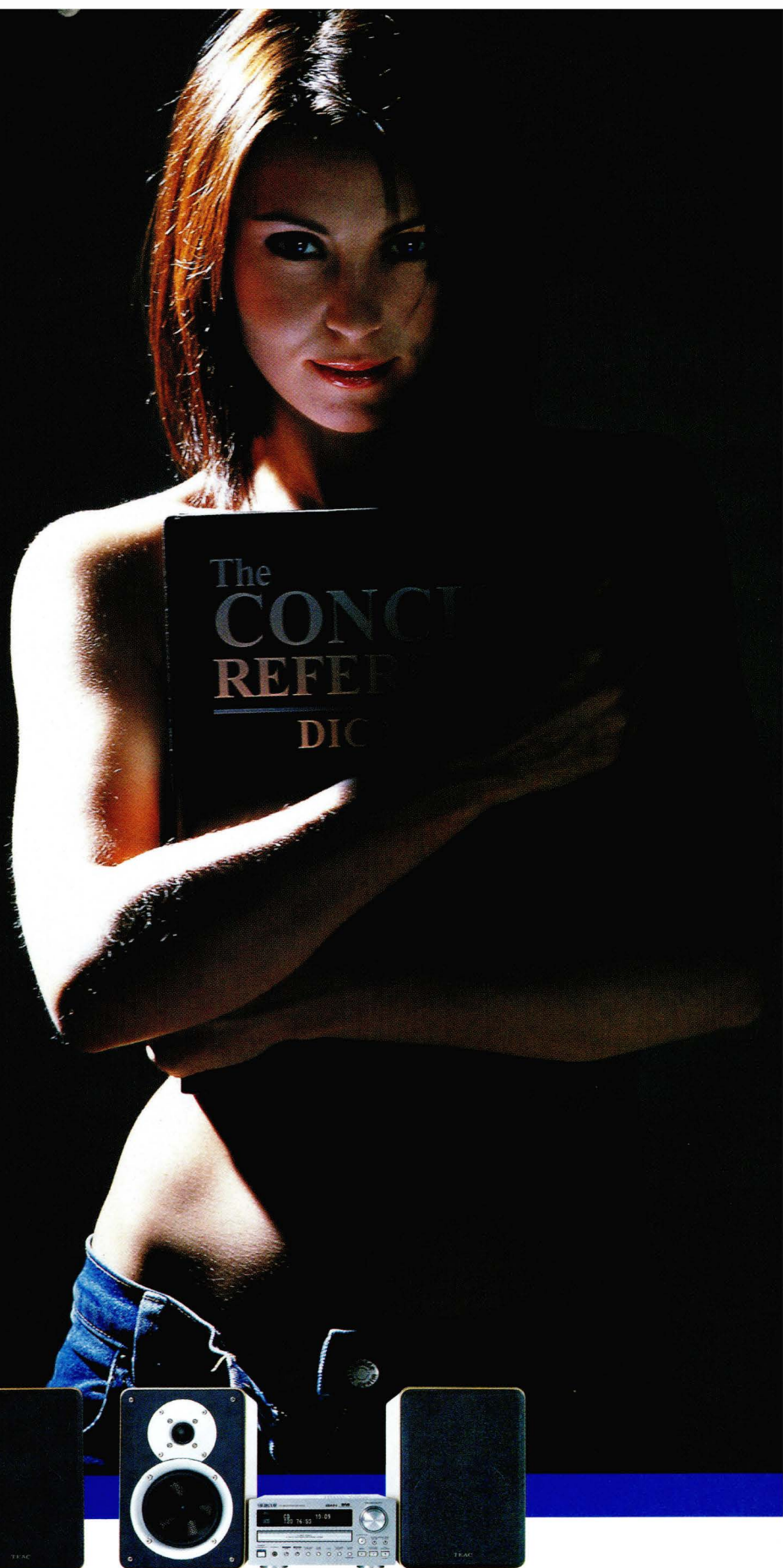


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# Lexicon RV-8

*A meticulous take on multichannel receiver design aimed squarely at the sonic purist*

PRICE: £5,000 CONTACT: CSE, Unit 9, Centre Park Holdings, The Airfield, Tockwith, York YO26 7QF ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.lexicon.com

All multichannel amplifiers represent the synthesis of a series of compromises. In this case, what you don't get are some of the more fashionable, state-of-the-art digital widgets such as HDMI and i.Link/IEEE1394, but on the other hand this is an amplifier that majors on very high quality, mainly analogue interfaces, and one whose analogue signal processing is much closer to the audiophile mainstream than most.

Basic nuts and bolts first though. The RV-8 is a 7.1 channel receiver, which means an FM/MW radio tuner is included (in contrast to the UK, tuners are normally included on high-end AV amplifiers from the US). The amplifier is rated at 140 watts per channel, which unusually remains the case even with all channels operating together.

The RV-8 is more button-heavy than most, but this doesn't translate into operational complication. The front panel is divided into three sections: main zone, zone 1 and zone 2, with various options on tap to drive the extra zones with video or without, and at variable or fixed levels. (The latter is applicable with local power amplification in the relevant zone). A good-quality dot matrix display keeps the user in touch

**“Internally, it is striking how much like a high-quality purist amplifier the Lexicon is.”**

with what's going on and in addition, the RV-8 is extensively equipped with remote control, trigger socketry and an AMX/Crestron-compatible RS232 port. Whilst many other amplifiers are similarly equipped, Lexicon is better recognised in this area than most, and the way the company's equipment communicates with third party controllers and the like is almost certain to be more trouble-free than many.

It is striking how much like a high-quality purist amplifier the Lexicon is internally, with its logical circuit layout and massively endowed power supply. But the RV-8 has other aces up its sleeve, including the ability to fine tune most areas of performance and system set-up to match the exact requirements of the system, and perhaps above all,

the inclusion of Lexicon's Logic 7 surround mode. In the early days, Logic 7 was a simple (but nonetheless effective) matrix extension of 5.1 channel processing which often gives a much more developed and enveloping surround mix. Now it is a more complex process, which is much more flexible in the way it is applied to different types of source material, and of course it is up against much stiffer competition from record/replay codecs like DTS Neo:6 and Dolby Pro Logic IIx.

Logic 7 (which, like Dolby Pro Logic IIx, is a 7.1 channel codec) is replay only and is therefore to a certain extent open to the criticism of being arbitrary in its effect. But for much of the time it retains its edge, and a more solid and believable sound with sources that pan to the sides, while maintaining a high level of consistency with the central dialogue channel. In the end it is a matter of personal preference, but you do have the choice. Note, however, that although our original RX-8 test sample lacked DPL IIx, this is no longer the case.

## SOUND QUALITY

Less open to interpretation is the audio quality of the Lexicon, which by AV amplifier standards may not always be quite as concise and holographic in its imagery as the best, but which is more solid, open and spacious than most (and this includes most of the current market leaders). It is all the difference between good, exciting stuff and the kind of rock solid sound with integrity that is the special reserve of high-end audio. In terms of Dolby and DTS steering, the Lexicon is as good as any, though no better – it doesn't set standards except for the inclusion of the proprietary Logic 7 system, which is found only on Lexicon and Harman Kardon products (they're part of the same group).

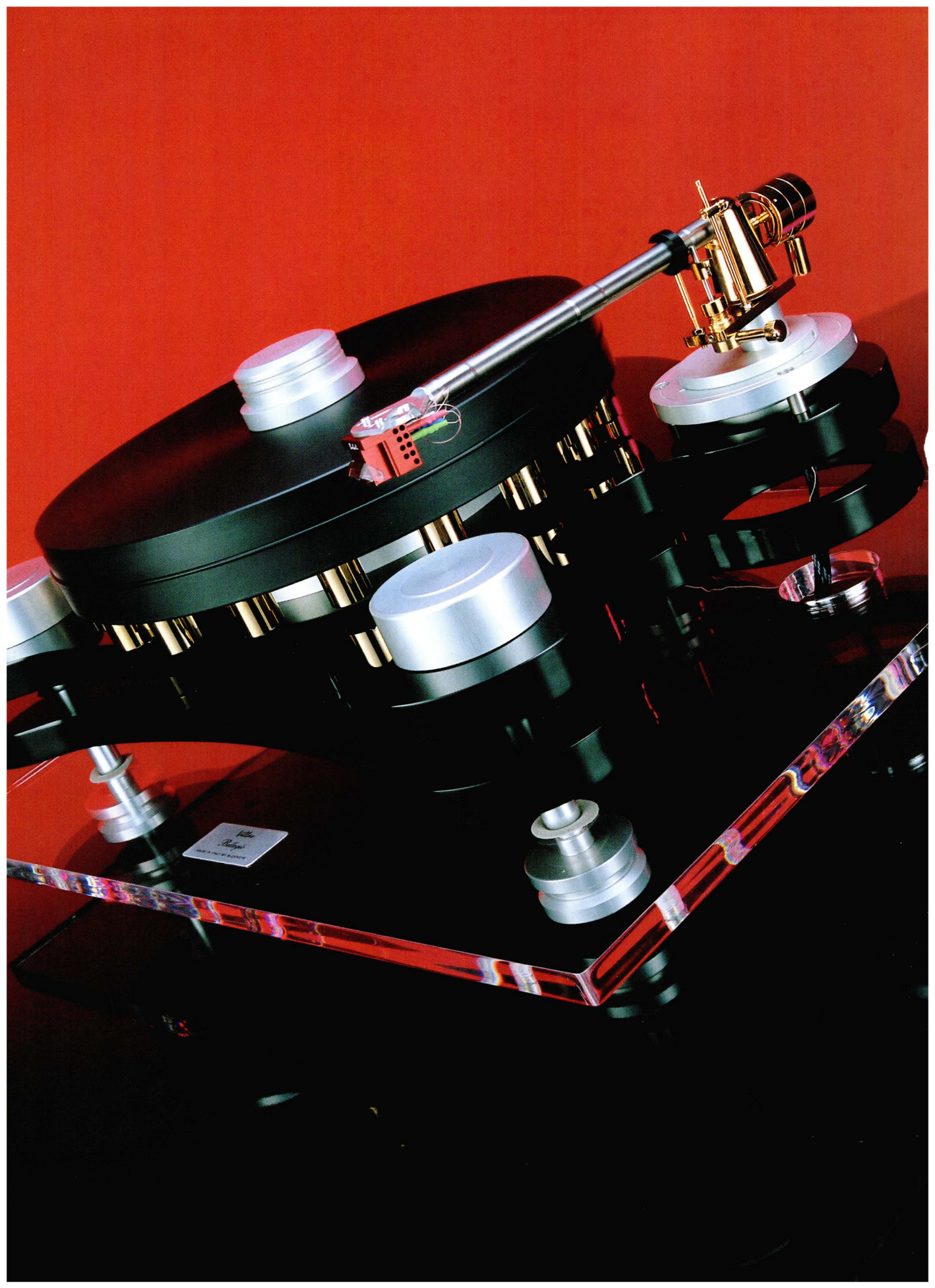
However, in absolute sound quality, the Lexicon punches well above its weight. It is more fluid and progressive in its responses than most, and never sounds fazed by film sound tracks, no matter how misjudged or excessive the engineering. It is also more powerful than other comparably rated mainstream equipment – not necessarily in absolute attainable volume levels, but in its consistency and punch at the higher levels within its compass. But most of all, if there's an integrated multichannel receiver that's built for audiophiles, this is it. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 267 (June 2005) for our original review of this product*









# Bluenote Ballagio and Bellaria

*Italian craftsmanship has sculpted this gorgeous vinyl replay system in titanium, brass and acrylic*

PRICE: Ballagio: £3,995; Bellaria: £995 CONTACT: The Pleasure Home, 24 Kings Chase, Bushey, Hertfordshire WD23 4PZ ☎ 020 8420 4333 🌐 www.bluenote.it

**T**here's only limited room for creatively styled hi-fi electronics, and history suggests a conservative approach is most likely to be commercially successful. Quite the reverse is true of vinyl turntables, where innovative styling and mixtures of materials seem more popular than the sober and restrained.

And when you think of style, you think of Italy – the two are virtually synonymous, especially in the industrial age. Florence-based Bluenote was founded twenty years ago as an organisation that brought together engineers, musicians and audiophiles. After some years operating primarily as an importer, it started building its own equipment, and now has a considerable range of components that cover the whole hi-fi chain.

Turntables take pride of place, and the gorgeous looking Ballagio with its partnering Bellaria tonearm, is the top vinyl-spinning combination in Bluenote's Villa range. A key engineering technique found in both is the use of mass-damping, where two similar masses are mechanically coupled in order to damp any vibrations in either, as found in the platter, the counterweight and the arm tube.

The Ballagio is a very substantial piece of kit, based around three very thick slabs of acrylic. The lower transparent one is conventionally square, 15mm thick, and forms the plinth and the mounting for a large motor. It's supported by three handsome, adjustable pointed feet, and these continue upwards as 8mm titanium rods, from which the subchassis is suspended via springs. This offers some decoupling from environmental vibrations, but the springs are quite stiff so there's no isolation at subsonic frequencies to protect from footfall shock.

This subchassis is constructed from two 20mm-thick black acrylic platforms, linked and separated by four heavy brass cylinders and irregularly shaped to avoid standing wave resonances. The upper platform houses a substantial bearing system for the mass-loaded platter. This double platter design is 40mm thick, made from a solid black polymer called Sustarin, the two sections separated by 1mm Teflon discs, and the whole driven by a peripheral belt. Meanwhile, 16 gold-plated weights attached to the underside edge increase the rotational inertia (and dramatically enhance the visual appeal). Other interesting mechanical features include a flower-shaped drive pulley, the diameter of which can be adjusted to make fine-speed adjustment, and a 'split spindle' arrangement that firmly clamps the platter in place.

Arguably even prettier and more desirable than the turntable, Bellaria is Bluenote's Reference unipivot tonearm, made from titanium tubing and gold-plated bronze. The semi-conical Bell-Tower bearing housing, as well as the low-set multiple counterweight arrangement are both designed to place the centre of gravity well below the unipivot itself in the interests of stability.

The tonearm features an integral rest, hydraulic lift/lower and bias compensation, all beautifully finished in gold-plated brass, along with simple adjustment for azimuth and VTA (vertical tracking angle). The main arm tube is fabricated in several sections of titanium tube, swaging together 6mm and 1mm-thick sections. Effective mass (inertia at the headshell) is a fairly high 19g, and high-quality shielded cables are used both inside (hyper-Litz silvered OFC) and out

without a lift/lower device, while the fitted lift/lower proved unpredictable in operation, tending to stick in the 'up' position (possibly a sample problem). Furthermore, insufficient platform friction found the arm drifting outwards (due to the bias compensation) when cueing. The bias system is also rather fiddly to fit and adjust. Carelessly pushing the arm into its rest clip can unseat the unipivot, which is easily rectified, but I was surprised to find some horizontal play in this bearing, which I gather is deliberate (if perhaps controversial). All told, the Bellaria has something of the 1960s Ferrari about it, requiring the owner to form a love/hate relationship with his unquestionably beautiful piece of machinery.

Although the expected variations between the cartridges were audible enough, the underlying character of this record player came through strongly. Dynamic range is notably

**“There is great beauty here, both as exquisite physical objects, yet also in the sound they can create.”**

(silver/Teflon). A large, transparent acrylic cover (optional for £195) keeps dust off the whole ensemble, and is intended to be completely removed while a disc is played.

The arm was fitted with a Bluenote Boboli high-output moving-coil cartridge. Though this seems a decent enough component – it has an alloy body, a low-ish compliance (8cu) and high-ish mass (12g) – using a £495 high-output MC cartridge with a £4,995 turntable seems a bit of a mismatch, so alternative low-output cartridges, including a Van den Hul Condor and a Linn Arkiv B, were also used.

## SOUND QUALITY

The turntable side of this player seemed to work very well, with silent action and plenty of torque. A minor inconvenience was an occasional tendency for the belt to slip out of the groove in the middle of the platter, but it was easily guided back into place. The polymer platter is used without a mat, and a quite slippery surface supports the disc, so a heavy puck is placed over the centre spindle to hold the disc down securely.

If Ballagio was simple enough, Bellaria proved decidedly temperamental to set up and use. The finger-lift at the headshell is too short and poorly shaped to use the player

wide, and there was no evidence of rumble or wow. Sonically, it leads with the voice band, which has beautiful presence and the sort of sweet and delicate top end that puts CD to shame. Spinning Joni Mitchell's classic album *Blue*, one was immediately aware of the youthfulness of her voice in this relatively early recording – fascinating to track the way her voice changed over the subsequent thirty years.

While presence detail comes very much under the spotlight here, lower frequencies were rather less well served. It's not so much that there was any lack of actual weight, as a spin of the Chemical Brothers showed well enough, but there was also some sense of detachment. Joni's voice sounded sweet but a little thin, and textures seemed diluted, with some thickening but not quite enough richness and crispness through the lower midband. There was even one instance where a very heavy bass modulation (on Lambchop's *Is a Woman*) caused mistracking, which may have been due to that play in the unipivot.

The turntable leads the tonearm in both performance and ergonomics, but there's also great beauty here, both as exquisite physical objects, yet also in the sound they can create, especially towards the upper end of the audio band. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*



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# Bosendorfer VC 7

*A radical approach to loudspeaker design from the legendary piano maker*

PRICE: £4,745 per pair CONTACT: Audusa, 4 Arundel Road, Kingston Upon Thames KT1 3RZ ☎ 020 8241 9826 🌐 www.bosendorfer.com

**B**osendorfer is one of the world's great piano makers, with a history that goes back 175 years. It still makes its legendary pianos, for an enormous list of famous musicians, but has recently added loudspeakers to its product portfolio. However, these are in no way mere branded 'me too' products, built to cash in on prestigious name. Rather, they're notably unconventional, thoroughly

**“Its reproduction of piano music was miraculous.”**

original, and sufficiently different to prove quite controversial. In a world of homogenised products, they make a refreshing change.

The speakers are actually manufactured in the same Austrian factory that builds the pianos, and their most unusual feature borrows directly from the way pianos work. Most speakers are specifically designed to avoid the resonances that are fundamental to the way musical instruments operate, but the VC 7 embraces such resonances. According to the corporate literature, “the core of the Acoustic Active Principle is to view the loudspeaker cabinet as a vibrating, resonant body, allowing the creation of a three-dimensional, transparent, true-to-life sound”.

Not only is the enclosure undamped, it's equipped with two 'acoustic sound boards', each 132x16cm, excited by the reflex ports that are set into the sides. The justification is that 'real' (acoustic) instruments don't 'pump air' with small speaker diaphragms; instruments like cellos, basses, pianos and so on work by generating microscopic movement in large panels.

This VC 7 is the largest of three stereo models, with a starting price of £4,745 per pair, but that can double if the very prettiest veneers are specified. It's a tall (1.35m), deep speaker, but also very slim, and a proper plinth ensures good overall stability. This is a simple two-way design, though it actually uses six drive units. The front panel just features a pair of tweeters, apparently identical devices with 25mm soft doped fabric dome diaphragms.

On each side of the cabinet are two small bass/mid drivers with cast frames, relatively stiff surrounds and paper cones. Signal is fed via single pair of terminals low down at the rear.

Finding the right position to deliver a smooth balance proved elusive. Best results in our room were obtained with the speakers set a little wider apart than usual, angled directly towards the main listening seat. Even so, there was still significant excess around 50Hz, and also some rather uneven excess in the lower midband. Despite the twin tweeters, treble output is restrained. Sensitivity is a pretty generous 90dB, but this is a four-ohm load, so its current demands will be on the heavy side – puny amps beware!

## SOUND QUALITY

Given that the design approach deliberately uses resonators, midband coloration is inevitable. However, coloration isn't the only important thing, and the ear/brain can be quite accommodating of coloration, just as it adjusts to the character of different rooms.

Yes, the VC 7 suffers from significant lower-mid coloration that no amount of tinkering with positioning and angling seemed able to remove. And while this is a handicap, especially with speech, with some other material, it's hugely entertaining and involving, bringing a degree of sheer realism to classical music that's utterly captivating.

If coloration is one difficult area, stereo imaging is another. Presumably because of the unusual disposition of the drive units, and the relatively high ratio of reflected-to-direct sound that results, precise positional information isn't really available. But much the same is true in a concert hall. Precision imaging might help analyse the content of a recording, but it doesn't improve the realism of the musical experience. And it's the ability to make you believe you're hearing real instruments in a real acoustic that makes this speaker so remarkable. Indeed, any speaker that finds yours truly enjoying full scale operatic material has got to have a whole lot going for it. And its reproduction of piano music was, as you might expect, little short of miraculous.

The VC 7 is therefore a speaker of contrasts, representing an unusual set of compromises with important upsides and downsides. It's not an 'accurate' speaker in the monitoring meaning of the word, but it is an intensely musical one. And it's one which classical/acoustic music listeners are likely to find seductive in the extreme. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

*See HFC 265 (April 2005) for our original review of this product*



## MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

For high-end surround sound, try this: Bosendorfer VC 7 (front L/R), Bosendorfer CENTER H (centre channel), Bosendorfer WALL H (rear L/R)

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £7,780**







# Ayre K-1xe and V-1xe

*A classic pre/power pairing from Colorado, revised once more. Was Darwin right about evolution?*

PRICE: K-1xe: £4,995 (£5,995 inc. phono stage); V-1xe: £6,495 CONTACT: Symmetry, 17 Holywell Hill, St. Albans, Herts AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.ayre.com

**C**harles Hansen started Ayre back in 1993 with the V-3 power amplifier. The heavyweight V-1 power amplifier and K-1 preamp were the next two components Ayre developed, and in the decade or so since there have only been two revisions to these designs. The original V-1 and K-1 remained essentially unchanged until 2002, when the two models received a major refit and became the K-1x and V-1x. Now, the whole Ayre range is being changed once more, in what's called the Evolution upgrade (hence the 'e' in the new 'xe' suffix). Fortunately for current Ayre owners, all the Evolution upgrades are retrofittable.

Both these amps feature fully balanced operation with zero feedback and, even today, are the only Ayre components to incorporate inductor-input power supply filtering, or choke regulation as we call it in the UK. Ayre also pays a lot of attention to mains quality and these third-generation Evolution variants use power line conditioning to help stop radio frequency interference entering the system.

The K-1xe preamplifier is a substantial product with an outboard power supply and a stepped attenuator for volume control. A hefty motor is incorporated specifically for turning this when the remote is used – when it kicks in, the clunk can be heard across the room. This is because there are two attenuators inside the box, one for each channel, both featuring solid silver contacts and driven by an array of belts and tensioners that would make Harley Davidson owners jealous.

This preamp takes the dual-mono discipline to its ultimate conclusion. Everything inside this preamp is mirrored; even the back panel inputs, of which there are three single ended and three balanced, are an inverted reflection of one another. Like all Ayre components its design is fully balanced, with even the single-ended inputs being converted to balanced operation, which is unusual... but not as wild as the fact that the (optional) phono stage only has a balanced XLR connection! This is a state of affairs that's at odds with the majority of tonearm leads on the market, but Ayre's solution is to provide tonearm cables for arms with detachable leads (such as the SME we use as a reference). This cable uses Cardas wiring and costs around £700.

The optional phono stage is both very classy and extremely flexible. You can change both gain and loading by inserting your choice from the various supplied resistors, or just about any small scale resistor, into the screw terminals. This means you can match any cartridge's requirements precisely; it's the only

preamp we've come across that allows you to do this and the price premium it adds to the line version makes this phono stage a bargain.

The K-1xe is a fabulously built preamp with the highest quality internal components. The solid aluminium remote will not change input for you but does offer separate standby switches for preamp and power amp. There's even an 'illuminate' button for the remote itself, so you press the right button during those dark room listening sessions.

The V-1xe, meanwhile, is the heaviest power amp that this reviewer has had the 'pleasure' of evaluating, its 43kg making it a genuine two-man lift. Still, you don't generate 200 watts per channel into eight ohms (that will double power perfectly into a four-ohm load) with analogue amplification any other way. It incorporates five transformers – one split-winding mains unit and two more to form the choke regulation for each channel. These feed 32 output transistors per channel, which operate in Class A for the first 20 or so watts and thus keep the big heatsinks pretty cosy.

## SOUND QUALITY

These are extremely fine and entertaining amplifiers with an impressive balance of power and resolve. They do everything well: power, tonal colouring and transparency are all in the top league, and separation of detail is absolutely top flight. These amps will drag more clarity out of your loudspeakers and more detail out of your source components than you thought either were capable of.

**“To be frank, I want one and I want it bad. Better start buying lottery tickets, then!”**

This is particularly obvious when using a turntable, where the phono stage and arm cable compare more than favourably with outboard stages of some repute. One favourite album, John Fahey's *Let Go*, has always intrigued, because it is not clear whether there are one or two guitars playing on the title track. With the Ayre combination, not only is it abundantly clear that there are indeed two guitars, but that one starts before the other and has a completely different sound. This represents a staggering leap in transparency, which would appear to be down to the quality of high frequencies that both Ayres deliver.

High frequencies are the hardest thing for a transistor amplifier to do well. It's not easy for solid-state amps to reproduce instruments

like bells and cymbals with all their shine and body, but without any extra shimmer. Fortunately, that shimmer often sounds like detail, but when something that doesn't distort high frequencies comes along you hear it straight away. Instruments and voices alike reveal a lot more of their character and it becomes remarkably easy to differentiate between like instruments, even in dense mixes.

The sense of resolve is also enhanced by the quality of microdynamics the amps expose – the small differences in volume between one note and the next. Through the Ayre, this is extremely well preserved right across the band so that everything you play delivers more of its character, more of the tone and intonation of the musicians and their instruments.

This contributes to a strong sense of imaging, both in the solidity of sounds and the scale and perspective brought to the whole orchestra or band. The soundstage varies quite dramatically with recordings, up close and immediate with one album and far and wide with another. Orchestral pieces seem to benefit quite considerably from this, with instruments given enough space to breath in and enough tonal depth to reveal the breadth of their potential. Better still, we finally get to hear the quality of the drum recording on Metallica's eponymous 'black album' – the cavernous sound that is normally submerged in the 'thickener' effect added to the third guitar line on *Sad But True*.

There is plenty of power on tap here, as you would expect. Some records revel in the ability to deliver fulsome yet articulate bass,

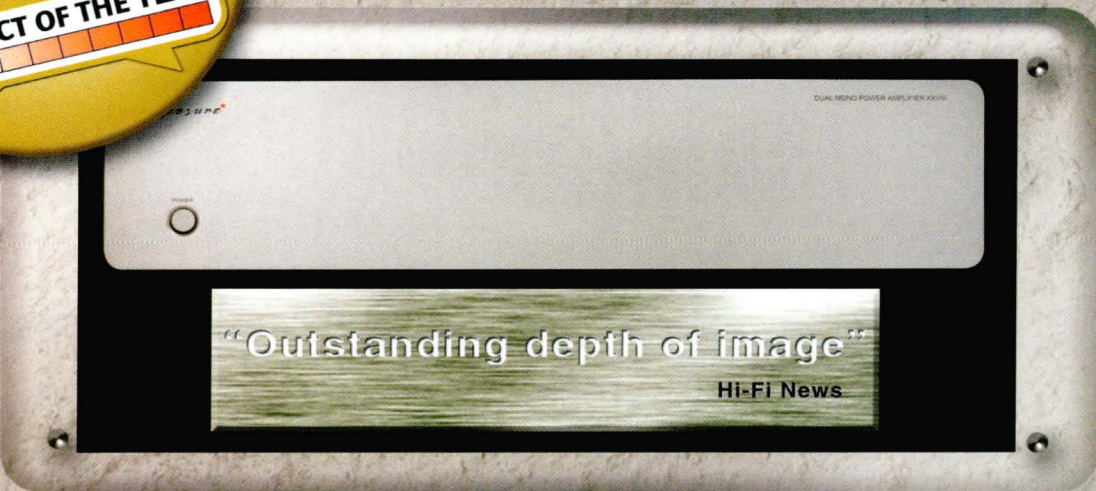
but you never get the impression that this is muscularity for its own sake, because the character of the bass is as varied as your speakers will deliver. It's also nimble, which is very gratifying in a big amp; our reference Gamut D200 power amp (also a 200 watter) is nowhere near as fine or rich as the V-1xe, which also has more dynamic kick as well.

We hooked up the K-1xe to ATC's SCM150A active speakers for a session and were astounded by the insight that the preamp brought to the party. Its ability to separate out instruments and to portray their sound is the best we've encountered. To be frank, I want one and I want it bad. Better start buying lottery tickets, then! **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*



# Winners Breed Winners



## The New Classics: Upholding an award-winning tradition

Attention to detail wins hands down. Purpose-built by hand, the new Classics from Exposure have been garnering rave reviews from hi-fi magazines far and wide; with our new Pre- and Power Amplifiers receiving the coveted Product of the Year 2003-2004 accolade by Hi-Fi Choice magazine. Adding yet again to the growing list of award-winning equipment already in Exposure's stable. And reaffirming our reputation as engineers of some of the world's finest hi-fi.

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# Classé CDP-100 and CAP-2100

Early models in the extensive Delta range display plenty of radical thinking

PRICE: CDP-100: £2,950; CAP-2100: £3,950 CONTACT: B&W Loudspeakers, Dale Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 2BH ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.classeaudio.com

The new Classé Delta range is finally being rolled out after the company became part of the B&W group. The CDP-100 is just a CD player in much the same way that a Jaeger LeCoultre is just a watch, and the CAP-2100 is just an integrated amplifier... well, perhaps not just. The Delta range is uniquely endowed with a user interface designed to attract those who feel alienated by the hair shirt stuff that dominates the high end. Without clamping down on versatility, operation is simplified by using a text and graphics user interface based on a TFT touch screen display. Each Delta series component (apart from the power amps) has a screen that displays a number of nested menus showing the basic user features at one extreme, and set-up and diagnostic screens when you drill down through the menus. The result is simple, elegant and user friendly, and the system is responsive – and fully updatable.

**“When it hits its stride, it can be almost unbearably radiant in the way it paints tonal colours.”**

One other reviewer who examined the CD player (for a different magazine) complained volubly about the length of time it took to initiate play once the button has been pressed, but we can report that this problem has been resolved. Most of all, though, he simply didn't like the touch screen-centred user interface.

True, it may not do much for a typical hard-boiled audiophile, but it's just this kind of clean sheet thinking that will help Classé appeal to those who aspire to audiophile performance while avoiding the agricultural interface designs of other equipment – which is precisely what the Delta series was designed to address. The two components provide a rich palette of features – you can normalise input levels and balance settings, adjust lighting intensity and timeouts, and

where fitted, adjust phono loading parameters from the display. The only issues we have with Classé's implementation is that the player mechanism doesn't support CD Text, and a greyscale display might have looked a little classier than the blue one chosen from the full colour palette available.

From the earliest days, Classé has been all about valve standards of sound quality with the reliability that silicon brings to the party. Differential mode, 24-bit Burr-Brown PCM1768 D-to-A converters, an HDCD decoder and a sophisticated power supply are used in the CD player, and the conservatively rated, DC-coupled, 100-watts-per-channel amp operates in balanced mode internally (it has a balanced input too, which can be used with the CD player's balanced output). The sophisticated amplifier power supply was built for speed, with multiple small valve reservoir caps, and three toroidal transformers. Both units use Classé's trademark extruded aluminium wrap, a styling statement that also acts as a mechanical 'ground'.

## SOUND QUALITY

These are sophisticated and superbly judged components whose performance is just about an ideal match for its target market. The CDP-100 is a strong and rhythmic player, mildly leavened with the warmth and grace for which Classé has become synonymous. With the right material, and for me this tends to be acoustic rather than electronic, live rather than studio-based, the Classé player has a quiet vitality, conveying an almost understated passion that is the very opposite of mechanistic, thanks in part to a very open yet precise soundstaging, and an unusually articulate upper bass and midband. If only stereo SACD compatibility had been included...

If anything, the amplifier is even better. It sounds remarkably detached from the mechanics of sound reproduction, again with that trademark ease, transparency and fluidity. Almost without seeming to try, the CAP-2100 is a bold and vivid-sounding amplifier, yet one that almost always sounds like it's operating well within its limits – an easy stride rather than an edgy lunge. Once more the same kind

of music is favoured.

The amp is a little too subtle and sophisticated in its performance to make the best of more raunchy, close-miked or electronically generated material, or perhaps it is just that this kind of recording doesn't allow the CAP-2100 to bloom. When it hits its stride, however, it can be almost unbearably radiant in the way it paints tonal colours, and in its supremely understated clarity and analysis. Definitely one, no, make that two, for the heart. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

See HFC 268 (July 2005) for our original review of this product









# MartinLogan Summit

*Hybrid electrostatic technology scales new heights with MartinLogan's latest creation*

PRICE: £8,498 per pair CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.martinlogan.com

**W**e first saw and, of course, heard the new MartinLogan Summit at last January's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. It was demonstrated in prototype form behind closed doors, and proved to be one of the highlights of the show. In this case, seeing is very much part of the deal – the Summit replaces the Prodigy and there is a clear family resemblance in their broad groundplans. What you can't see without having the two side by side is that the Summit is much smaller than the Prodigy. It has much sharper lines overall, the base section, which houses the moving coil drivers, is much more compact, and the electrostatic panel has a much thinner surround.

Of course, size by itself means very little, and merely calling one model a replacement for another could be just a form of words. But the Summit is not only physically smaller at 32x150x52cm (the Prodigy stood at 42x180x71cm, WxHxD), it is more sensitive at 92dB/watt/metre and has a wider frequency response, extending down to 24Hz for -3dB (the Prodigy made it down to 28Hz).

There are still ways in which this comparison could conceal the real situation, but it turns out that the two inhabit the same playing field. Even the panel crossover frequency, which isn't always quoted consistently in MartinLogan's literature, and which is clearly relevant, turns out to be the same for both, at 270Hz. So this is a speaker that should offer more than the Prodigy in a smaller, better looking and more easily accommodated package, and which incidentally costs considerably less – the Prodigy cost £11,998 per pair in the last price list in which it appeared (in 2004), while the Summit is just £8,498 per pair.

But as far as we understand, MartinLogan has not suddenly decided to cut its margins to the bone. What has happened is a full redesign that involves the implementation of new technology in an attempt to devise a more realistic proposition for its market both in price and practicality. The brief for the Summit was clearly very challenging, but the brief also extends to superior integration of the moving coil and electrostatic drivers.

Much of the development work has been carried out on the electrostatic panel, and the new design is a radical, though evolutionary improvement. The panel still features the curved profile that MartinLogan has always used, giving a vertically oriented cheese-wedge shaped dispersion pattern in the forward plane, and a converging pattern to the rear, which makes it less of a 'sweet

spot' design and easier to integrate into room acoustics. But the way the panel is terminated is different with the Summit.

The edges are encapsulated into an insulated liner around the perimeter, and embedded in the frame, which has changed from a thick wooden door-like style to extremely thin and very stiff aluminium. The top and bottom sections are solid billets of milled aluminium, drilled out to take tensioning truss rods that run through the long vertical sides and are tightened to give a stiffness said to approach concrete. A combination of the new termination and the frame, and changes to the 'Xstat' diaphragm technology means that the effective radiating area of a panel is increased by a factor of about two compared to previous designs.

**“With the new styling, and clearly improved value for money, the Summit is a stunner.”**

The other major change is to the bass section, which operates more like a subwoofer than a passive bass section. There are two proprietary 25cm bass drivers, one forward facing and one base-vented, driven by well endowed 200-watt power amplifiers with massive toroidal transformers at their core. Like most subwoofers, active equalisation is used to generate the required output response, from a system that is designed to minimise distortion and maximise control, while minimising the use of acoustic resonances (ports, resonant cavities and so on).

## SOUND QUALITY

Even the prototype pair in Las Vegas, heard under less than ideal conditions, was a revelation. And this held true for the production pair that we eventually received for our test. As always with electrostatics, however, the first task is to fine tune them to the listening room, which is achieved in the Summit's case by making separate adjustments using rear panel controls, one centred on 25Hz, and the other on 50Hz, both with a +/-10dB adjustment range. Out of the box, the default settings in our test room were excessively warm and woolly, but careful adjustment quickly led to a response shape in which the bass appeared to belong to the mid and treble in a seamless and consistent manner. But the Summit is unforgiving in one respect: it sounds more coloured and doesn't image properly if it is

cramped at the rear. Allow a clear couple of metres space behind the panels if you can, and experiment as small changes can have a dramatic influence on the sound.

MartinLogan is correct in its assertion that the bass integrates better with the mid and treble. The bass certainly extends well, but it has a tauter, drier feel than we recall of the Prodigy, more in keeping with the electrostatic panel. This improving trend is one that has been noted in previous years, but the step up this time is more dramatic. It could even be described as a quantum leap, and the overall result is much more homogenous and harder to distinguish from the adjoining midband.

The electrostatic element of the speaker has also been improved, though not quite out of all recognition. There is a quality to

MartinLogan speakers that is not completely neutral, as well as a defined and recognisable coloration that the best moving coil speakers manage to more or less sidestep. Transparency, however, remains a key strength of the electrostatic design. Notwithstanding the colorations, which in any case are mild, the Summit offers supreme clarity. It appears to respond, and to stop, quicker on the whole, which is perhaps the reason why small residual colorations are disproportionately audible.

And herein lies the Summit's greatest strength, which was identifiable time and time again with music from most genres – even studio-based rock and electronic material worked well though the Summits. But as always it was acoustic music using recognisable instruments in real-life acoustics that sounded the most breathtakingly 'real'. The Summit has a percussive quality with plucked or pizzicato strings and piano that was not previously part of their repertoire, and solo voice and choral ensembles alike have an unusual radiance and purity.

Despite the coloration artefacts previously identified, which are largely associated with the upper bass and midband, and which are clearly energy storage effects, the Summit has a precision, clarity and speed that tells another story altogether – that of a speaker that is unusually responsive to the musical input. With the new styling, and clearly improved value for money, the Summit is a stunner. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



# Performance and Value



At £775, the SDA 2175 Semi Digital Power Amplifier offers:

200W / 8 ohms, 375W / 4 ohms  
Balanced and single-ended analogue inputs  
Treble is sweet and accurate. Bass is tight and controlled  
Complete lack of noise  
Fully balanced design - all the way to the speaker terminals  
75% less heat than class AB amps  
Advanced protection circuits  
No relays or fuses in signal path  
High quality speaker terminals  
Chassis made entirely from precision machined aluminium  
Virtually immune to speaker back-emf  
Vice-like control of speaker cones

"Supremely smooth and well balanced in every respect, this amplifier starkly shows what other solid-state does wrong. Brilliantly engineered, it's nothing less than an epoch-making product.

VERDICT - Outstanding."

Hi-Fi World, June 2005

At £1095, the SDAi 2175 Semi Digital Integrated Amplifier shares the same impressive power engine as its brother and includes the following main features:

6 RCA inputs + 1 XLR balanced input  
Pre-amp output balanced and single-ended  
Tape Out  
User programmable attenuation for each input  
Individual level and balance adjustment for each input with 0.1 dB steps  
4 step display dimmer with programmable time-out  
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# Gamut D3

*A high-class preamp that offers the full gamut of musical capabilities at a very competitive price*

PRICE: £3,430 CONTACT: Audio Reference, Unit 8, Enterprise Park, Slyfield Ind Est, Guildford, Surrey GU1 1RB ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

**W**hen Poul Rossing purchased Gamut last year, he clearly had a mission to put this Danish company back on the audiophile map in no uncertain terms. The D3 is the first all-new preamp from the revitalised company and makes a statement of sonic quality that has been followed up with some frankly stunning loudspeakers (see *HFC* 271).

The D3 continues the company's policy of offering maximum resolution for the money, and while this is an ethos shared by many in the high end, Gamut seems a little more successful than most in actually delivering. This product has a few idiosyncrasies of ergonomics and input arrangement but delivers tremendous bang for your buck (or Euro).

It takes an existing model – the C3R preamp – and improves on the basic design. It features a mix of balanced and single-ended socketry and chunky, solidly made casework, with the company name laser cut stylishly into the top plate. There are four RCA phono inputs, one of which is a home theatre bypass input, which can be used to pass an incoming signal directly to the outputs, and there's also a balanced XLR input marked 'CD', which also offers the bypass function. One of these inputs is marked MM/MC, but this is merely a line-level input for an external phono stage and has no internal RIAA circuitry. Outputs include two pairs of balanced and one pair of phono single-ended sockets, with a tape out via phono as well.

Operationally, volume level control via remote is a little crude, the lightest of touches on the button producing a significant jump in volume. This is partly the case because gain is quite high and with efficient speakers you are limited to the low end of the volume range. Gamut power amps can be adjusted to reduce this effect.

## SOUND QUALITY

When we reviewed the D3, it was apparent that it's a genuinely wide bandwidth, highly transparent preamplifier that responds precisely to the input signal in a clean and smooth fashion. While it can sound a bit warm on first acquaintance, it soon becomes clear that this is because it has very low distortion. Musicians sound impressively relaxed, yet when there's an instrument or voice that has a bit of edge you know all about it. High notes have a purity and body to them that one rarely encounters in solid state amps, which have a subtle but distinct tendency to emphasise highs with a little bit of electronic 'frizz'.

This can inevitably give the impression that the D3 has a rolled off top end, but in fact its high frequencies are more natural than usual, a fact proved by the sense of transparency that grows with each familiar track you play. This is a trait associated with Class A components, yet the D3 does not claim to be that way inclined and its bass capabilities are rather more substantial than is the Class A norm.

We very much like the fact that it can play at higher levels without discomfort, which is nearly always an indication of lower distortion. The fact that you can hear that much more may mean you don't have to play loud – but if the rest of the system is up to it, then why not? This is certainly an engaging component; it won't let you just play the standard test track but keeps you hanging on for the next track, and the next, and the one after that...

**“It can play at higher levels without discomfort, which is an indication of low distortion.”**

When it comes to stereo presentation, the D3 is distinctly 3D. Instruments and voices are remarkably solid, real and in the room. From snappy brush strokes on snare drums to the resonant 'thunk' of bass strings, all is played with life and vitality thanks to the persuasive shapeliness of the sound. It's well served in terms of dynamics too – you wouldn't get that sense of life without it. The last critical factor, timing, is also entirely natural, it doesn't lay any emphasis on leading edges but you hear what the artist intends in this department as well as any other. And, of course, this is one of the most subtle preamps around – not the sort that shouts 'transparency' or the sort that places emphasis on timing. It's just entralling.

Coming back to the Gamut D3 after a gap of six months, it's still hard to say how it might be greatly improved in the sonic department. We've heard more transparent preamps, but they always cost more... The D3 is very competitively priced for a first-class preamp – qualities like these are rare at any price. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 265 (April 2005) for our original review of this product*





# Muse Model Eleven

*This Muse can be whatever you want it to be – just so long as it plays discs*

PRICE: £3,790 CONTACT: Audiofreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7QT ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.museelectronics.com

Unlike the likes of Mark Levinson, Krell or Wadia, Muse is not one of the first names to reel off when thinking of high-end American disc players. In part, this is because Muse does not release a new product every year and emblazon the magazines with glitzy advertising. Yet, perhaps it deserves to be better known. Muse's Model Eleven, introduced early in 2004 in the USA, is an idiosyncratic but extremely flexible disc player, definitely one to muse over, if you can forgive the excruciating but inevitable pun.

First and foremost it's a 'universal' player, with the ability to play CD, DVD-Audio, DVD-Video and SACD. A quick look at the price and front panel finish (impressively machined thick-section alloy) shows that the Model Eleven is meant to be seen as a high-end player aimed at the enthusiast market, though it's not so expensive that it's in danger of belonging to the bleeding edge.

Internally, it has a lot to do with Pioneer, with components from the generation before the introduction of HDMI and i.Link

by that company. The attractive and well organised menu system, familiar to users of recent Pioneer players, is also something of a giveaway. In fact, Pioneer's DNA appears throughout high-end audio, with Lexicon, Theta, Townshend and many others using Pioneer OEM designs.

But this is not simply a Pioneer player in an expensive case. The multiformat DAC is from Burr-Brown, and the reconstruction filter is an in-house passive design. As Muse explains: "The amplification is an instrumentation topology configuration comprised of Burr-Brown components, and the final line drivers are also Burr-Brown components".

So, the Model Eleven belongs to a rather specialised subset of upmarket players, but at first sight there seems little to distinguish it from a handful of others. That is, until you flip over to the B-side and see what's cooking, which is a truly profound collection of connectors and blanking plates on the back panel. The former consist of a pair of phono line-level audio outputs, and a matching

pair of balanced (XLR) audio outputs. Next come five BNCs, three for component video (PAL progressive), one composite video and an S/PDIF digital out, which is available for DVD-Video (multichannel) and CD, but not of course DVD-Audio or SACD. An alternative version of this basic module is available with an AES/EBU digital output instead of S/PDIF. Finally there's a Y/C connector for S-Video. In case you haven't twigged it yet, there are no multichannel analogue outputs. Stereo SACD players are now a well recognised product category in their own right, but stereo DVD-Audio is, well, unusual. DVD-Video is available in multichannel form via the digital output from Dolby Digital and from DTS recordings.

There is a solution to the lack of multichannel analogue outputs in the form of an accessory output module that replaces one of the blanking plates on the back panel. In fact, there are a number of such PC boards. Finally, add the optional input module, which offers two pairs of single-ended and





one balanced input pair, plus the so-called attenuator module and the Model Eleven becomes a complete single-chassis source component, with a built-in preamplifier that can drive a power amplifier directly.

#### SOUND QUALITY

This is a hard player to get to grips with. Compared to its Pioneer-based opposite numbers, although the component video output is good, it doesn't quite match the HDMI digital video output with compatible displays. On the audio side, the multichannel audio output from DVD-Video discs is essentially hard to distinguish from the equivalent output from other comparable players. In practice, the performance it delivers will be determined mainly by the processor to which it is connected.

But in the area of sound quality in stereo from the analogue output (in other words CD replay), the Muse shows real signs of improvement over its opposite numbers. In particular, it was more solid at the frequency extremes, and a bit more 'there' in the realism stakes. Even here though, there's a perceptible Pioneer 'flavour', namely a hint of upper bass warmth and a minor but noticeable midrange coloration combined with a slight loss of presence in the same region. It all sounds very tidy and controlled, with some additional power and projection when using the

balanced output. By introducing its own take on the core components the sonic signature is lessened – probably thanks to that passive reconstruction filter – but you can never entirely remove the basic character, even in balanced stereo.

The Muse performs well with high-resolution material, though only the stereo track (or in the case of DVD-Audio, an internally generated stereo mixdown) is available from these formats with the version of the player

**“Few players offer this level of adaptability... Muse should be congratulated for producing a smart, open-ended source component.”**

supplied here. On the whole, it was DVD-A that was most impressive, with SACD sounding a little softer, less crisply defined, and with a less obviously developed sense of depth by comparison. This is neither surprising, nor particularly unusual for a universal player of this type, but the limitations are subtle, and might even go unnoticed, unless you had recent hands-on experience of a state-of-the-art SACD player. In practice, users will probably be more exercised over the relative paucity of DVD-Audio material available compared to SACD, at least in some genres.

Where the Model Eleven should really come into its own is when equipped with external inputs and the attenuator module which, as explained earlier, transforms the player into a complete universal source component and preamplifier. We auditioned a multi-box prototype of this concept at the 2004 CES in Las Vegas, and it was one of the stars of the show. However, we were unable to try this version of the player, and so cannot comment on how it performs. On paper at least, this

looks like an excellent audiophile-flavoured proposition in stereo, with basic but adequate video and multichannel functionality – a true one stop shop, in fact.

Few DVD-compatible players offer this level of adaptability, with the ability to morph from a high-quality stereo playback device to the core of an exotic and flexible multichannel system. Muse should be congratulated for producing a smart, open-ended source component that can expand to suit your system as and when you need it. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



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# Mordaunt-Short Performance 6

*Mordaunt-Short spreads its technological wings and comes up with a stunner*

PRICE: £3,500 per pair CONTACT: Mordaunt-Short, Gallery Court, Pilgrimage Street, London SE1 4LL ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.mordauntshort.com

The Performance 6 is an excellent example of what our original review called 'holistic' design. This is not imply any New Age properties (as a Taurean I naturally have no truck with this particular species of arrant nonsense) but there is a fantastic story to tell of the enabling technologies that inform the Performance 6 that feed naturally into the way it performs.

The story starts with the shape. The largely asymmetric panels reduce internal standing waves, and the curved backbone acts as a mechanical ground for the drivers, which are fixed to it. At the front of the speakers, the drive units are resiliently decoupled to reduce excitation of the baffle. The real interest, however, lies in the enclosure

itself, which is not made from a traditional material like MDF, but instead from a structural foam composite formed using low-pressure moulding

techniques. The moulding process allows shapes of arbitrary complexity, and walls that can be varied in thickness according to the specific demands of the design. Better still, the foams can be produced in such a way that the wall density can be varied by depth, in this case with the outer skin being the highest density. By this method, the walls become effectively self-damping – an elegant piece of design work by any standard. A substantial cast iron weight in the base enhances stability and acts as an anti-vibration platform for the crossover. Technology in the service of art.

But there is more. Although the tweeter dome uses an unfashionably low-tech material, aluminium, the vexed question of back radiation is handled in an entirely novel way, by fitting a long rear extension, which instead of absorbing back radiation, allows it to

**“It’s an unusually clean and transparent device, and palpably low in coloration.”**

emerge from a logarithmically spaced spiral of holes. In effect it strips the phase information from the rear output, and thereby reduces the tendency for the front output to 'beam' in an excessively directional way. The larger units employ Mordaunt-Short's favoured smooth dish aluminium diaphragms in an improved form.

## SOUND QUALITY

Listening to the Performance 6 is to be immediately impressed by the quite individual set of compromises that have been struck. Although the bass is well extended and extremely tuneful, it lacks the weight and drive of some similarly sized speakers, apparently not because of any deficiency in its low frequency behaviour, but simply because the overall balance of the speaker tends to favour the upper midband and treble. In fact, the agility of the bass, the ability to change direction with alacrity when the music calls for it, sets it above much of the opposition. This is a loudspeaker that knows how to respond to changing musical landscapes with a dynamic expressiveness that usually matches that of the music itself. Conversely, the Performance 6 is an unusually clean and transparent device, palpably low in coloration, and in particular it is free of the usual box-type colorations that many of us take for granted or even expect as they tend to be part of the furniture with the majority of loudspeakers.

This remarkable speaker has some of the transparency associated with certain electrostatic designs, but without the subtle (sometimes not so subtle) colorations that are usually part of the package. The result can in some cases be rather intimidating in the way it responds so literally to the musical cues, for good or ill, but the bottom line is that if the recording warrants that kind of transparency and truthfulness, here is a speaker with the scalpel-like ability to do the job. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 264 (March 2005) for our original review of this product*

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# Theta Enterprise

An enterprising addition to the roll-call of ball-breaking, US-made high-end power amplification

PRICE: £4,444 each (£8,888 per stereo pair) CONTACT: Absolute Sounds Ltd, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.thetadigital.com

**T**heta's history goes back over fifteen years, in which time the North American company has built up a particularly fearsome reputation for high-end digital processing. Yet it also boasts more than a passing interest in high-grade power amps, the most noted of which are the Dreadnaught, a modular multichannel design, and the range-topping Citadel monoblock. The company's amp expertise comes mainly from the pen of David Reich, who previously worked for McCormack and for Classé, where he was responsible for the original Classé amp, the DR-2, back in 1981. This, by the way, was recognised as a solid state amplifier with some of the aural qualities of valve amps.

The Enterprise is directly descended from the Citadel. As you can see from our picture, it's a monoblock that inhabits a vertically oriented case, roughly similar in form factor to a standard PC case. Internal heatsinks dissipate heat to the outside world through mesh screens let into the case. Each 19kg monoblock measures 35x60x23cm, and a pair is supplied in left and right-handed enclosures, the front panel furniture being shifted around to suit its location.

A single Enterprise is rated at 300 watts into eight ohms, and 500 watts into four ohms, with 'typical' outputs said to be 350 and 525 watts respectively. Bi-wire connections are available as an option, and another option is Reich (Derlin) output connection, which was not examined for the purpose of our test, but which carries a dire warning in the manual about over-tightening or cross threading of the hex stud (sic), which "will not be covered under warranty". Inputs are single-ended (phono) or balanced (XLR). Other rear panel furniture includes LEDs for the +ve and -ve rail fuses, another LED for overheat protection, a power fuse, an RS232 interface in RJ45 and DB9 flavours, a remote trigger and a mains power switch. On/standby switching is accomplished using a front panel switch, which is associated with a discreet LED. Build quality and finish are good, but the Theta lacks the battleship solidity of the bigger Krells, or the precision of a Classé Delta range component.

In Theta's own words, the Enterprise is a fully balanced, zero feedback monaural amplifier. Fully balanced means single-ended inputs are concerted to balanced at the input by synthesising a signal with opposite polarity to the input signal, and that the signal path remains balanced up to the summing stage at the output, where common mode artefacts

(noise, distortion and so on) are cancelled out and subtracted from the output. Zero feedback is not quite what it seems. This is not a feedback-free amplifier, but one where each gain stage (there are three) has its own local feedback to minimise loop delays that can undermine global feedback strategies.

Each Enterprise is built around a 500-watt toroidal transformer. The amp is built onto a four-layer board (not unlike a computer

**“There’s a strong sense of grip, a feeling that the speaker is being told firmly what to do, while steering on the right side of sterility.”**

motherboard), one each for positive and negative power supply lines, one for ground, and one for the signal path (not at all like computer motherboards in other words). The Enterprise employs the same 'ultra-fast' bipolars used in the Citadel and Dreadnaught II power amps, and the same bridge rectifier and output capacitor bank as the Citadel, and the motherboard is the same too. The message is that the Enterprise is a Citadel-lite, with a little less power – for a lot less money – but it is designed to offer similar sound quality.

## SOUND QUALITY

We found the sound of the Enterprise not altogether easy to pin down. It was clear from the outset that it is a great solid state amplifier, among the best we've ever encountered. In the first place it has an airy and open cleanliness, and an unusual ability to paint wide open spaces, the subtle sound of a large concert hall for example. In this area, the Enterprise has few peers.

We also liked its basic tonality, which is not quite neutral as far as we can judge. We've heard it described as more valve-like than other well known solid state amps, perhaps like a scaled up version of the original Classé, and this may be true – but we suspect not. The comments on the Theta's tonality arose when it was substituted for the Krell KAV-2250, reviewed on p110 of this issue. Both power amplifiers were driven by the same Krell KAV-280P preamp, chosen by default in the absence of a matching Theta preamp. Both amps were interconnected using balanced Nordost Valhalla interconnects, though I heard little difference between balanced and single-ended using the same cable type, hopefully because single-ended

performance was being levelled up by the balanced internal circuitry, as Theta claims, rather than the other way around.

The immediate impression was that the Theta delivers a more expansive soundstage, and a subtly darker, richer tonality. The Krell sounds a little tighter, drier and more constrained – more disciplined if you like. As for which of the two is more transparent, it's hard to say. I lean in favour of the Krell, which

if it is not directly more transparent, is at least more consistent, at different volume levels, and with different speakers.

It's the Enterprise's slight edge of inconsistency that ultimately makes it so hard to nail down. It certainly appeared to favour some speakers over others – it was little short of mesmerising driving the Revel Ultima Studio, for instance. There is a strong sense of grip, a feeling that the speaker is being told firmly what to do, which nevertheless steers distinctly on the right side of anything that could be described as flat or sterile. This, if you like, is an amp with a human face. Yet with the MartinLogan Summit (see p62), the effect was rather different. Here there was a suggestion of something approaching midrange 'glare' and the bass registers seemed less secure than when the Krell was in charge.

There was also a trace of level dependency, the objectively less powerful Krell holding on with greater consistency as the volume was racked up in my new, fairly power-hungry listening room. In the final analysis, the Krell also has a more solid and stable bass, even though the Theta's low frequency voicing has a touch of richness and muscularity that Krell only really matches with its heavyweight (and hugely costly) FPB range, though most models in that series will do so at volume levels and with a devastating authority that lie outside the compass of the Enterprise. Still, the Theta managed to convey a sense of scale and architecture better than the KAV-2250, and there was a loose-limbed quality in the way it worked that somehow seemed better able to convey a feeling of relaxation and ease when the music called for these qualities. A great amplifier then – and a true individual. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



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# Lindemann 820

*This stereo SACD player is so well built that expectations are high before you've even plugged it in*

PRICE: £6,999 CONTACT: GT Audio, 5 Upper Rd, Higher Denham, Bucks UB9 5EJ ☎ 01895 833099 🌐 www.lindemann-audiotechnik.de

**T**his very classy SACD player is made in Germany by a guy who clearly knows how to build high-end electronics. His name is Norbert Lindemann and the 820 is his second hi-res player, a state of affairs that puts him in a very select club among small manufacturers. The 820 is also a digital preamplifier with an analogue volume control and four inputs, one of which is AES/EBU (on a balanced-style XLR connector). It will accept inputs up to 96kHz, so you can plug pretty well any digital signal into it and probably improve the sound you would otherwise be getting from that DAB tuner, MiniDisc player or even Freeview box.

The machine offers a little more than your average player/preamp too, with facility to control balance, muting and phase. A rather useful feature is the ability to name the inputs so that you don't have to remember that input 3 is your DAB tuner, for instance.

**“The 820’s sense of timing is nothing short of revelatory.”**

Under the lid, the attention to detail is just as high. The master clock is a high-frequency Colpitts oscillator that feeds the player's circuitry via a buffer to remove the potential for the various components to affect one another via this critical link. To keep the noise that inevitably escapes the digital processing circuitry from muddying things, Lindemann has utilised a clever device that it calls an I-coupler, an inductive isolator that passes the signal but not the ground where most of the noise is to be found.

Unlike some quite expensive alternatives, the 820 avoids the pitfall of converting the DSD digital signal that comes off an SACD into PCM in order to make conversion and filtering easier – the DSD goes all the way to the DAC. That should benefit the purity of the signal when playing SACDs (though TEAC might beg to differ – see p102).

One of the most instantly satisfying things about this player is the drawer mechanism, which operates without a sound except perhaps a

gentle puff of air (it has a tendency to close itself after a while, if you don't get around to it, but you won't hear it do so). Outputs include both balanced and single-ended options, but only the balanced XLR connector offers a direct output that bypasses the volume control.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is a relaxed and luxurious sounding player that can produce a good, solid stereo picture from any decent recording, be it on CD or SACD. It would take a very decent preamplifier indeed to get a better result than with the 820 plugged directly into a power amp.

With a good direct-to-DSD recording the sound is stunning, the speed and huge dynamic range enough to make you jump when a big musical transient kicks in. Bass guitar is rich, round and throbbing, cymbals sound convincing and in the middle things are clean and silky smooth – a bit like the drawer mechanism.

The 820's sense of timing is nothing short of revelatory. It makes difficult recordings enjoyable, where other players have tended to make them seem rather monotonous. The presentational style has a slightly deeper varnish than is strictly neutral but its quality of timing suggests that little is being smoothed over in terms of definition. It is perhaps not quite as strong at reverberant detail as some in its class, but this may be why its leading edges are so well defined.

The Lindemann has a rich, full-bodied sound and those lucky enough to own this player will derive a great deal of pleasure from their music collections, be they Super Audio CDs or regular compact discs. Instruments and voices have depth, shape and colour. Voices are 'for real' and often have a scary palpability, especially if the artists behind them are of the less sugary persuasion.

This player is a welcome addition to the select club of top-notch disc players – the fact that it plays SACDs should not distract from the fact that it is a luxury CD player in its own right and a very decent preamp to boot. It may seem expensive but just try to find these features in such a well built player elsewhere – it won't be easy. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 262 (January 2005) for our original review of this product*





SELFIE



# Eclipse TD712z

*Never mind balance or bandwidth, this stunning Eclipse is all about timing*

PRICE: £4,000 per pair CONTACT: Eclipse TD, LOE House, 159 Broadhurst Gardens, London NW6 3AU ☎ 020 7328 4499 🌐 www.eclipse-td.com

**E**clipse is a Japanese speaker brand, which makes its presence in the UK unusual, and it's part of a large industrial corporation which is also unusual. As for this TD712z, it transcends unusual and must qualify as unique, which makes its differentness all the more interesting.

The initials TD stand for Time Domain, and the purpose here is to create a speaker that accurately reproduces timing information, a feat that regular speakers with their phase-shifting crossover networks rarely achieve. To which end it uses a solitary 'full-range' drive unit (the term is used advisedly), covering the whole audio band with just a single voice coil, and no intervening network components.

It's a goal that others have tried before (Jordan, Bandor, Lowther and Rehdeko all spring to mind) and experience suggests some compromises are bound to be involved, but there's no denying Eclipse has approached the task with very serious intent.

To operate high into the treble, the solitary drive unit necessarily has a small, light diaphragm – it's actually woven glass fibre, just 85mm in diameter, and incorporates a number of improvements over previous Eclipse drivers. However, even with the help of a rear port, bass output is bound to be limited, yet at the same time the top end will tend to beam quite strongly, so best results will be found when listening fairly close to the main forward axis.

If the driver configuration is simplicity itself, the enclosure and its integral stand are quite the opposite. The enclosure itself is an egg-shaped casting, made in a mineral-loaded, fibre-reinforced resin that's described as 'artificial marble'. It's somewhat reminiscent of the midrange 'head' used by B&W in its 800-series, but is made from two pieces and ported through the rear point of the egg. It all feels exceptionally rigid, and looks acoustically ideal too, both inside and out, while the driver is decoupled from the 'egg' and mounted on an internal rib that directs any reaction forces downwards into the stand.

The stand section is even more elaborate, and also exceptionally stylish, especially around the very stable cast plinth. Clever spike arrangements at bottom and top avoid floor damage with captive pucks, and allow tilt adjustment. The central pillar section is shaped to avoid any forward reflections, and mass loaded with sand (quarried from a specific Chinese river bed). The whole thing is finished in high-quality metallic silver paint, with chrome feet.

One consequence of the single-driver approach is that power handling will be somewhat limited. That's partly because the small driver will have to work pretty hard to reproduce the bottom end, and if driven too hard will run out of excursion. Because of its inherent subsonic resonance, vinyl could exacerbate this. Furthermore, because the full bandwidth signal is fed to a single voice coil, thermal power handling will also be limited.

## SOUND QUALITY

You can't buck the laws of physics, so measurement revealed the expected shortfalls, alongside a number of positives. Under our usual far-field in-room regime, the real-world sensitivity is significantly better than the low 83.5dB that is claimed, at 87dB. The accompanying impedance stays around or above six ohms throughout, so the speaker should be a very easy amp load, though some evidence of cone resonance is seen between 500Hz and 2kHz. The driver/enclosure fundamental resonance is at a high-ish 110Hz, but the port is tuned an octave below this (55Hz) to give extra bass extension.

The tonal balance emphasises the upper midband and presence (700Hz-2.5kHz), peaking around 2kHz, while the treble rolls

the speaker and the room interact together and with the listeners. The weak off-axis treble of this speaker will tend to make the speakers sound a little dull to a listener seated in the 'far field' (around 3m or more away from the speakers) because the treble beaming will reduce the treble content in the room-reflected sound. And the further one sits away from speakers, the greater the ratio of room-reflected to direct sound in the mix.

For this reason, it seemed logical that the TD712z's best role might well be as a near-field monitor, placed maybe 2m away from the listener, so that the direct-to-reflected sound ratio is relatively high. This certainly turned out to be the case. With the speakers moved much closer to the listening zone, their advantages became much more apparent, and their strengths were emphasised. They were also set wider apart than normal, creating a beautifully holographic image that was totally divorced from the speaker boxes, and extraordinarily tactile to the imagination.

The single driver approach not only guarantees excellent imaging, it also means that no phasiness accompanies small head movements, which is often the case with two-way speakers, especially in the near field. Sitting down is essential for full treble

**“The TD712z represents a halfway house between speaker and headphone listening.”**

off quite strongly above this point under reverberant conditions. Both midband and treble are quite smooth. The bass is decidedly lean, lightweight and not particularly even, though reasonable output is maintained down to 50Hz under in-room conditions.

Initial listening was undertaken with the speakers placed in their usual positions – about 1.1m out from the wall, and 3.5m from the main listening zone. While a number of the qualities of the speaker were very evident – its exceptional coherence, well projected voices, pin-sharp imaging and vanishingly low enclosure coloration – one was also very conscious of the balance anomalies. The perceived lack of top end was very apparent, and this brought an obvious nasal coloration to human speech, for example, that proved quite intrusive and persistent.

Pondering this problem provided an interesting and at least partly effective solution. One reason behind the rather dull and shut-in character is to do with the way

output, standing up and moving around only resulted in a dulling of the sound, the image remaining gratifyingly stable, consistent and solid at all times – even behind the speakers!

The TD712z's biggest strength lies in its marvellous coherence and imaging through the broad midband and presence region, which was particularly evident with classical or choral material, where subtle textures and complex ensembles are endemic. Its weakness lies in a lack of real weight and warmth through the bass and lower mid, which often proved exasperating.

The secret to this speaker is not to regard it as a straight alternative to a normal stereo pair, but rather as a 'personal monitor', to be sited quite close to a single listener for optimum stereo reproduction. In a very real sense it represents a halfway house between loudspeaker and headphone listening, with all of the latter's sonic coherence without the accompanying encumbrance. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*





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# Townshend Audio Rock Anniversary

*A rocking revival of one of the most controversial and impressive turntables in hi-fi history*

PRICE: £4,900 (including tonearm) CONTACT: Townshend Audio, 7 Bridge Road, Hampton Court, Surrey KT8 9EU ☎ 020 8979 3787 🌐 www.townshendaudio.com

**M**ax Townshend has been threatening to revive the Rock turntable for years. In fact, we can't recall a time when the deck wasn't in a near-to-finished state and just waiting for the final touches before it was put into production. For a while, there were even plans to put a truly radical new tonearm on the deck – an arm that not only moved its base to counteract the effects of the stylus following an arc (the problem with all pivoted arms) but also had remote control VTA adjustment. The ultimate arm in other words, but complexity of engineering and the limited market size for OTT tonearms meant it was not to be. The Rock turntable, however, has made a most welcome comeback.

**“The vigour this turntable brings to familiar recordings is quite startling.”**

Designed in 1980 at the Cranfield Institute of Technology, the original Rock took a unique approach to controlling resonance in turntables. It was designed to damp resonance at the point where it is most detrimental to the turntable's ability to extract information from the groove. It uses a silicone fluid-filled trough that swings across the record and accepts a 'paddle' fitted to the end of the tonearm. This clever use of fluid engineering eliminates the resonances that result when you drag a vinyl groove past a stylus. The Rock also seeks to minimise the effects of vibration by using plaster of Paris damping inside the plinth and a spring suspension for the whole turntable.

This latest 25th Anniversary version includes the original John Bugge-designed Excalibur tonearm, itself a distinctive design that uses two counterweights to keep the mass as close as possible to the pivot. It also bonds a magnesium headshell to a stainless arm tube for the best stiffness-to-weight ratio and is 20mm shorter than

average in order to push resonance as far out of band as practical. Its vertical bearings are in the same plane as the vinyl to maintain constant tracking force and its headshell is doubled up for maximum transfer of energy to the silicone in the trough.

## SOUND QUALITY

After the warm 'analogue' sound of most turntables, the neutrality of the Rock is a shock. The extent to which it negates vinyl's primary resonance is so great that it initially seems almost cold and digital.

The lack of the 'romance' of vinyl is probably the reason why the original Elite Rock did not achieve world domination in the 1980s. But for those more concerned about accuracy, it was a huge hit. Jazz pianist Keith Jarrett was so impressed that he wrote a glowing affidavit for it. Playing Jarrett's *Köln Concert* on the Rock does nothing to play down the hard sound of the instrument but reveals a lot about that piano's bottom end, and about the acoustic of the venue. Studio recordings sound remarkably calm and assured, low-level detail makes more sense, and sampled voices become more intelligible. The way that individual instruments and voices have been recorded is also very clear, the sensation being one of great insight and very fine resolution.

The vigour this turntable brings to familiar recordings is quite startling – some have a level of energy and low frequency grunt that beggars belief. It's easy to get carried away with the Rock's bass capabilities but you also hear fine detail on everything it spins, and you get genuine insight into the playing and production that other turntables smooth over. It offers a degree of resolve that is rare.

The latest Rock is a constantly engaging and revealing record player, and the visceral reality of the sound it produces gets to grips with all kinds of music in no uncertain fashion. In the bass it has no peers, and while alternatives may be able to match it in some other respects, as a complete package it's a revelation. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 259 (October 2004) for our original review of this product*







# Chord Electronics Choral System

Chord's shiny new Brilliant finish ensures the Choral system looks as sparkly as it sounds

PRICE: £10,140 (complete system, in Brilliant finish) CONTACT: Chord Electronics, The Pumphouse, Farleigh Bridge, Farleigh Lane, East Farleigh, Kent ME16 9NB ☎ 01622 721444 🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk

**W**hile it's not generally recommended that you choose audio components with your eyes, Chord's Choral system is an exception to that rule. Choral is a modular system, in this case comprising the One integrated CD player (£2,995), Prima line-level preamp (£2,850) and Mezzo 50 stereo power amp (£1,900). The complete combination can either be used free-standing or housed in a special Chord rack. The rack can be configured to suit the number of components in your Choral system – three slots (a snip at £930), if you've the system reviewed here, four or even five tiers if you have more Choral components.

The superbly finished casework, machined from solid billets of aluminium, creates an immediate impression of class and solidity. Lift regular products up, and the lack of weight points to the use of thin aluminium skins to create a facade. Not so with Chord products – what you see is what you get.

The components featured here came supplied in the new 'Brilliant' finish option, as pictured – all surfaces are hand-polished to a high gloss that's almost like chrome in terms of reflectivity. It's then electroplated with nickel for durability. Because of the extra labour costs involved, there's a premium to pay for the Brilliant finish, and this varies with each component. In round figures, it adds £1,025 to the price of the basic three-component system, plus an extra £440 for the rack, all contributing to the £10,140 price tag.

Quite apart from its stunning appearance, the Brilliant finish is said to improve sound quality, having a beneficial effect on eddy currents and electromagnetic shielding. Inevitably it's prone to fingermarking (Chord actually supplies a pair of white cotton gloves to help you avoid paw prints when installing the units), but the finish itself seems very tough and scratch resistant. It looks fabulous – really striking and classy. It also has the curious effect of making the units look slightly smaller than their brushed matt counterparts – don't ask us why...

While the Prima offers a choice of one balanced and four single-ended inputs, it only features has balanced outputs. Because the One CD player offers a choice of balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs, it's possible to use balanced operation throughout... and the improvement justifies the added cable costs.

Despite its diminutive size, the Mezzo 50 is quite powerful, delivering 50 watts per channel into eight ohms. You can bridge a second Mezzo 50, which increases output power to

100 watts and improves sound quality. There's a built-in cooling fan to lower the temperature should the Mezzo 50 really be pushed hard.

The Prima's display gives a numerical read-out of volume level from 0 to 95. There are six gain settings on each input, allowing you to tailor the preamp to suit the output voltage of your source components.

Control surfaces on all Choral products have been minimised, ensuring clean and uncluttered lines, although the lack of labelling in key areas – such as the back panels – can prove confusing. Fortunately, the

Many of the characteristics of the CD player extend to the amplifiers, too. Bass is solid and deep, with excellent tightness and control. Clarity is excellent, definition never falters and the amps are able to control even the slightest nuance. Although the presentation isn't notable for euphonic richness and ambient depth, neither is it dry or sterile.

The overall effect remains fluid and relaxed. The musical presentation has a crisp no-nonsense feel, without seeming over-damped or excessively regimented. This is especially true when the One is used as the

## “Accuracy and neutrality are the key qualities of Chord's Choral system.”

CD player's buttons have legends. As with many modern amps, there are no tone controls or filters. All mains on/off switches are situated at the rear, leaving only volume, left-right stereo balance and input selection accessible from the preamp. Most functions can also be accessed via remote control, and each of the preamp's five line-level inputs is individually adjustable for gain. An illuminated display indicates input selection and volume level.

### SOUND QUALITY

Before the introduction of the One CD player, Chord's Choral system would have been fronted by its £4,195 Blu transport and £1,995 DAC 64 digital-to-analogue converter – an exotic package we reviewed in last year's edition of *The Collection*, with sound quality to match. Could the One CD player possibly rival its more expensive siblings?

The simple answer is... not quite. Owners of the Blu/DAC 64 combination can rest assured that – good though it is – the new One player does not equal Chord's more costly two-box combo. The One is very good, and performance can be further upgraded by partnering it with a DAC 64. But even then, you don't get the full improvement produced by the Blu transport.

The One's analogue output level is slightly lower, giving the music a softer, rounder, less assertive quality. In absolute terms, some of the qualities that make the Blu/DAC 64 special are much less evident with the One. But the latter has its own strengths, offering a smoother, more relaxed style of presentation. This makes it easier to listen to. It's a sweeter, more comfortable and less contrasty sound, beautifully refined and effortlessly natural.

By virtue of its smoother, less assertive presentation, it helps ensure a warmer and friendlier musical presentation, without sacrificing clarity and detail.

Power output is more than adequate for most situations. Despite its diminutive size, the Mezzo 50 packs a real punch. The use of high frequency (800kHz) power supplies means outstanding operating efficiency, ensuring excellent reserves power, both on paper and subjectively – it sounds remarkably comfortable and unstrained, even when pushed hard. The cooling fan runs all the time, but it's so quiet it's barely audible, even with your ear close to the casework

Accuracy and neutrality are the key qualities of Chord's Choral system. It's a very truthful and neutral combination, one that gives you the music straight. There are no added 'extras' like euphonic warmth, no excessive romantic richness, no superimposed sweetness. Which is not to say these qualities won't ever be apparent – they will. But – and this is important – it won't be the system creating them; they'll be qualities in the original recording. It's that fundamentally natural.

Although the Choral range represents a departure from the big, rectangular studio-based power amp designs that form the backbone of Chord's business, it's clear the company has not forgotten its studio roots. These products deliver the musical truth, pure and unsullied. You might get even more sonic enlightenment with the two-box CD player compared to the One, but even as the system stands, it not only sounds as good as it looks, it lives up to the name of the finish... brilliant! **HFC**

Jimmy Hughes





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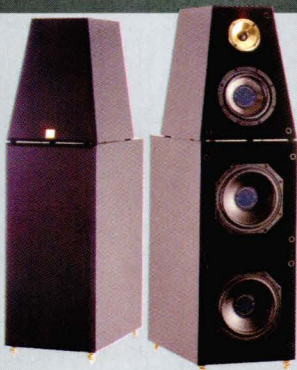
In practice, it means that speakers can be confidently mixed and matched according to SPL, room size, number of channels, and power and budget requirements. Even greater flexibility is available as a result of the wide variety of enclosure finishes. These range from a choice of real wood veneers, professional and piano black, and for many models, colour finished to match room interiors.

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# Hyperion 938

we are so confident that you will love these Loudspeakers, we even give you our peace of mind, unique 30-day money back guarantee\*



When a product wins this many awards in a single year, you know to expect something pretty special!

No matter what your expectations are, nothing will prepare you for your first encounter with the Hyperion 938 loudspeaker.

The beautiful piano high gloss finish and attention to detail can hardly fail to impress but it's the noise this speaker makes that will leave most speechless. Listen to other speakers and in most cases you'll find one aspect, one area that you wish you could change to create that perfect loudspeaker. Listen to the Hyperion 938 and the first thing you'll ears will tell you is just how balanced the 938 is. You really cannot fault its performance in any area.

A duo-cabinet design has been created for this full-range 3-way speaker. With a dedicated cabinet for the bass, two 8" S.V.F. woofers are used instead of a larger size woofer for truly amazing bass speed, resolution, coherence and impact. The New HPS-938 is your answer to a new level of audio experience.

The piano high gloss black version sells for £3,750 and birds-eye maple version for £4,500. Reviewers/customers are comparing the Hyperion 938 to speakers costing three or four times the price.

This high-efficiency loudspeaker (90db) can be driven by both valve and solid-state amplifiers with ease. Contact Shadow Audio for more information and to arrange an audition of these next generation loudspeakers!



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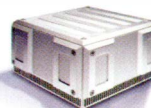
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## NEW IsoTek NOVA

(shown on the left)

Following the renowned Titan mains conditioner, comes the new NOVA.

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# Conrad-Johnson ACT2 and Premier 350SA

*Valve preamp and solid-state power amp. Is this the ultimate expression of amplification?*

PRICE: ACT2: £12,000; Premier 350SA: £8,000 CONTACT: Audiofreaks, Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7QT ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.audiofreaks.co.uk

**D**espite making some exceptionally fine solid-state products, Conrad-Johnson has a reputation first and foremost as a valve amp manufacturer. Until recently, no-one would ever consider putting Virginia's finest tube preamp with a transistorised design from the same stable. But that all changed with the ACT2 and Premier 350SA. They go together so well, the pairing is hard to fault.

The ACT2 is the first C-J flagship preamp to fit in a single box – the ART and Premier 7 before it both used two or more chassis to keep the channels separate. But the move to a single chassis does have a distinct advantage – it makes the preamp look gorgeous. The cutaway for the four triode valves, surrounded by protectors of clear Perspex, gives the preamp a distinct Art Deco look that offsets the gold finish beautifully.

**“There is so much information passed that the main limitation is often the listener.”**

As common to most modern C-J preamps, the line-only ACT2's interfaces are microprocessor and relay driven. This allows the preamp to run through 100 volume steps of approximately 0.7dB each, but the volume control is linear, not logarithmic as in most preamps and preamp stages, so you may have to turn up the volume more than usual to hear large differences in output. Add to that a lower than usual gain of 21.5dB and it's pretty clear, the ACT2 is about maximising refinement, even down to the way the volume and output gain stages are designed.

Normally, expensive preamplifiers are unremittingly complex. The ACT2 takes a simpler route. This is essentially one big amplifier stage, with the four 6N30P

double triodes acting as one big composite triode. This composite triode design is unique to Conrad-Johnson and is the key to the ACT2's performance, as it produces a low output impedance without necessitating a raft of active gain stages (in essence, there's just the one active stage here).

As mentioned above, the Premier 350SA power amp is a solid-state design, using both bi-polar transistors and FETs. It delivers 350 watts per channel in a stereo chassis. Like all Conrad-Johnson products (including the ACT2 it's partnered with here), the Premier 350SA is a zero feedback design, which makes it harder to design in the first place, but helps it to sound faster and cleaner than those amps with feedback in the system.

Both the power amp and the ACT2 preamp are single-ended designs, but there is no problem when it comes to using long interconnects from preamp to power amp, as the whole system is effectively noiseless when not playing music.

#### SOUND QUALITY

Taken separately or together, these products are two of the most transparent, least sonically intrusive components around. Yet the combination is not stark or desperately analytical and doesn't require you to continually change bits and pieces in a futile search for the ultimate. The amps will get the best out of every component, but they also present their hidden natures without damaging the sound.

There is so much information passed from disc to speaker that the main limitation with these amps in the system is often the listener. Sounds appear slow, but in fact it's just your brain processing the wealth of data. Usually, this only happens when listening to the live musicians themselves or in the recording studio. In short, this means C-J is doing something really right.

The two components blend together perfectly. If there is a flaw in the combination – which is questionable – it is that it's hard to get a raucous sound. Strangely, this is more to do with self-editing on behalf of the listener than any intrinsic smoothing in the amplifiers themselves. You simply move away from the raucous end of the spectrum.

The ACT2 is more rounded and beautiful sounding (in the manner of classic C-J products, only with even less in the way between you and the music), while the Premier 350SA is more 21st Century, excitingly dynamic and even fractionally forward sounding. The ACT2 isn't laid back, nor is the Premier 350SA upfront, though. And there's an added bonus in these slightly different balances too – they combine together brilliantly.

Of course, such clarity and effortlessness requires the best possible components elsewhere in the audio chain, but that's taken as read when you are thinking of blowing twenty grand on a brace of two-channel amplifiers. But in that heady, rarefied atmosphere of the highest of high-end, the Conrad-Johnson ACT2 and Premier 350SA do that very special thing – they raise the sonic standard. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*

*See HFC 264 (March 2005) for our original review of this product*









# B&W 800D

The top model in B&W's new flagship range is one of the best speakers ever built

PRICE: £13,000 per pair CONTACT: B&W Loudspeakers, Dale Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 2BH ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

**B**&W's 802D is good. So good, in fact, that it probably outperforms the top-of-the-line Nautilus 800 from the previous range (see *HFC* 267 for the review). So, how come B&W has bothered with a new 800D which, at £13,000 per pair, costs five grand more than the 802D, yet which looks remarkably similar? There is some engineering justification, but the real question to answer here, of course, is whether the sound has been improved to the same degree.

After a couple of hours installing these massive beasts – each one weighs 125kg – it took roughly ten seconds to realise that the 800D is very different and entirely superior to its junior range-mate. Appearances can be deceptive, and if the three-way 800D looks very like an 802D, with the same external mid and treble enclosures, its bass section is subtly larger. The 800D uses twin 250mm drivers (rather than the two 200mm units found in the 802D), and its main enclosure is significantly deeper and wider.

It also sits on an over-large, silver-finished plinth, which is arguably its least attractive design feature. Said plinth houses and isolates the crossover network from the speaker proper, and is supplied fitted with ball-casters; a reversible spike/foot kit has the option of nylon studs or massive, wicked spikes. The network is fed from twin terminals and uses the very finest and most costly components available.

Most of the bass enclosure is formed from a single piece of ultra-thick, heavy 38mm plywood, shaped in a continuous curve around the sides and back, and finished in a choice of three veneers. Inside, 'honeycomb' Matrix adds stiffening. Much of the mass comes from huge magnets and metalwork behind the twin 250mm bass drivers, a new design with 8mm thick, 200mm diameter Rohacell structural foam 'sandwich' diaphragms. The very flexible surround has been chosen with 'speed' in mind, and the enclosure is loaded by a flared Flowport between base and plinth.

The midrange and tweeter both have their own sub-enclosures. B&W's unique 'free edge' FST midrange driver has a 140mm woven Kevlar cone in a large teardrop-shaped enclosure made in mineral-loaded Marlan.

A substantial tapered metal tube on the very top houses a 25mm tweeter. This is made from a single piece of synthetic diamond. It has the best stiffness-to-density ratio on earth, and takes the break-up frequency up to 74kHz – more than an octave

above the 29kHz of the equivalent aluminium dome. A small mesh grille covers the fragile diaphragm, as an accident could be very costly. A new tweeter suspension has lowered its fundamental resonance, allowing a simple first-order crossover network with a single Mundorf capacitor. Both sections absorb radiation from behind the diaphragms, and are smartly finished in high gloss black.

With a speaker this deep, free space siting is unavoidable. In-room measurements showed a broadly similar tonal balance to that recorded for the 802D, but with more low bass and less mid-bass. Surprisingly, the 800D's sensitivity is about 1dB below our

## “Very rarely does a speaker hit the spot with such ferocity and certainty.”

figure for the 802D, though it still meets spec. However, it should also be seen in the context of a pretty nasty amplifier load, with a demanding 3.1-ohm minimum. The balance trend is marginally smoother, though still a bit heavy in the low bass, somewhat uneven through the upper bass and lower mid, and a little forward around 500Hz. The presence zone, 2-4kHz is just slightly restrained – but less than its Nautilus 800 predecessor.

### SOUND QUALITY

If the 802D is very, very good, the 800D takes things to another level. Its superiority is obvious, not just in its magnificent dynamic range, but also in the grip and control that is exerted throughout that range.

'Authority' is the first word that best sums up the 800D; 'honesty' is the second. It doesn't sugar any pills – aggressively balanced recordings, such as the Chemical Brothers' recent *Push the Button*, will continue to sound unpleasantly aggressive and edgy. But a first class recording, such as Laurie Anderson's excellent *Life on a String*, sounds quite wonderful, thanks to the speaker's magnificent bass extension and extraordinarily wide dynamic range.

Few can match the 800D's potential capabilities as a genuine monitor, telling it like it is without any artificial sweetening. Such sweetness as there is – notably through the exceptionally transparent contribution of that diamond tweeter – has more to do with its discretion, and an ability not to draw attention to itself, while still delivering the vital fine musical detail.

Imaging is first class, and especially realistic with choral material recorded in (or transmitted from) a large acoustic space such as a cathedral. However, because this speaker has consistently wide dispersion right across the audio band, the recorded acoustic will always be heard alongside the acoustic signature of the listening room. This may slightly dilute the precision of a live venue recording, but with dry, studio style material, it does create the impression that the musicians are actually there in the room.

The bass is just as impressive as the top end. It not only delivers prodigious weight, it also has exceptional grip – an ability to start

and stop instantly and shape the notes, but equally importantly an ability to create the silences between the notes as effectively as the notes themselves. There's absolutely no tendency to 'grumble along' with the music; for example, when a track begins with a gentle acoustic intro for a dozen bars before the bass line comes in. During the intro, one isn't even aware that this is a large loudspeaker – then when the bass comes in it can come as something of a shock.

In the course of this review, the 800Ds proved invaluable in establishing the sonic differences resulting from changes made elsewhere in the system. With a speaker as good as this, it proved particularly easy to tell immediately what effect a particular component change had made, even if this was merely concerned with what was used to connect the system to the mains.

The most impressive thing about B&W's new 800s, and this 800D in particular, is that the engineers have done so much more than merely add a classy diamond dome tweeter. The improvements are obvious throughout the whole of the speaker, with considerably better time-coherence perhaps the most significant of all the advances. Right now, it's difficult to see how it can get much better than this. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

### MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

For high-end surround sound, try this: B&W 800D (front L/R); B&W HTM1 (centre channel); B&W 802D (rear L/R).

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £26,250**



## Introduction

Combining exceptional workmanship and the highest quality components, JAS Audio brings to the world the 2-way speaker Orsa and Orior.

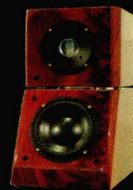
Both the Orsa and Orior are designed to deliver precise acoustic and vocal as well as rich tonal balance. The deep soundstage and extended frequency response are excellent for the enjoyment of HDCD and SACD.

Every model is handcrafted with quality and details that are seldom found in speakers at any price. For instance, inside the cabinet, pure natural wool is used for efficient damping/tonal signature and top grade heavy gauge silver interconnecting wire is used for signal fidelity. The authentic wood veneer and 14 coats of piano lacquer finish simply gives a JAS speaker the elegant look to match its exquisite timbre.

Most of all, its price/performance ratio is without peer hence our no risk 30-day money back guarantee.

Call us today to arrange a no-risk audition.

For additional information please visit  
[www.jas-audio.com](http://www.jas-audio.com).



### Orsa (£1,399.00)

This 2-way speaker has a distinct twin cabinet design. This vertically vented speaker has venting ports between the upper and lower cabinets, which produces a 360 degree sound field that give rise to excellent 3-D soundstage.

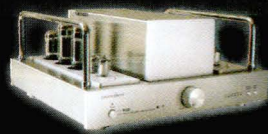
Description	2 way vented, twin cabinet, 2 units
Frequency Response	40 Hz - 60 kHz
Dynamic Range	10W-200W
Impedance	8 Ω
Nominal Power	150W
Sensitivity	88dB
Drive Units	5" twin ribbon tweeter 6" DPC cone midrange/bass
Crossover Frequency	2400Hz
Dimensions (cm)	W 23 x H 42 x D 34
Weight	11 kg/pc
Finishes	variety of 14 coat piano lacquer finishes

### Orior (£2,299.00)

Smooth, precise and powerful! Never has a 2-way speaker sounded so big and with such details in its sonic reproduction. The quick and agile bass region goes below 30Hz, easily outshining many large floor standing speakers at any price range.

Description	2 way vented, 2 units
Frequency Response	29 Hz - 60 kHz
Dynamic Range	10W-200W
Impedance	8 Ω
Nominal Power	130W
Sensitivity	88dB
Drive Units	5" twin ribbon tweeter 7" ceramic cone midrange/bass
Crossover Frequency	2200Hz
Dimensions (cm)	W 24.5 x H 39.5 x D 35.5
Weight	14kg/pc
Finishes	variety of 14 coat piano lacquer finishes

ALL PRODUCTS COME WITH A NO RISK 30-DAY MONEY BACK OPTION\* \*(CONDITIONS APPLY)



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## A Brief Introduction

Eastern Electric is a joint venture between US-based Bill O'Connell and Hong Kong-based electrical engineer Alex Yeung which began when O'Connell met Yeung in the cyber world and eventually ordered one of his 5wpc MA-1 amps with RGN2504 rectifier and 6L6 output tubes.

The rest as they say, is history..... and the results speak for themselves. A range of products that set new standards and a level of performance way beyond its price-point.

Eastern Electric has received world-wide acclaim, awards and praise from reviewers and listeners alike.

Visit [www.easternelectic.co.uk](http://www.easternelectic.co.uk) for more information.



"Put more succinctly yet, MiniMax is for music lovers, not theoreticians, critics and other cold-blooded experts."

"Known as a golden ear in Hong Kong, designer Alex Yeung voices all of his valved components to do justice to music's innate beauty. Music first, test tones ninth."

"Without endless money and a saint's patience for costly mistakes, you're far better off with something like the MiniMax."

"Yet another example of a true value product that's intelligently packaged with just the right - and some unexpected - features. My hat's off to the golden ears in Hong Kong."

FATIGUE FREE HIGH RESOLUTION MUSICALITY: Minimax Tube CD Player

ULTIMATE AFFORDABLE TUBE SYSTEM: Minimax CD Player, Pre-amp, Power Amp

"Within seconds it was obvious that the MiniMax was painting a big, very full and rich sonic picture."

"Pour yourself a warm bath and settle back with a glass of wine. You have just entered the MiniMax zone, a domain of luxuriant harmonic textures that envelopes and caresses the aural pleasure centers."



# Focal-JMlab Diva Utopia Be

*An attractively slim addition to Focal-JMlab's beryllium tweeter-equipped flagship range*

PRICE: £8,399 per pair CONTACT: Focal-JMlab UK, Jesson House, Tower Street, Coventry CV1 1JN ☎ 0845 660 2680 🌐 www.focal-uk.com

Last year, the Diva Utopia Be was a new entry into Focal's revised Utopia range. It fills the gap between the standmount Micro and rather more beefy Mezzo, providing a technically innovative floorstander that wouldn't overwhelm European living rooms.

The Diva Utopia Be has the same baffle width as a Micro Utopia but features a full-size cabinet with side-firing bass drivers to provide low frequency extension and gravitas. So, while this may appear to be a Micro with bass drivers attached, the presence of those drivers means that the midrange is a different unit – after all, it no longer has to try and extend down beyond the 180Hz crossover point. From there the two 210mm drivers take over and carry the range down to furniture-shaking 30Hz.

The reason for the 'Be' suffix is the beryllium tweeter, which has a massive 40kHz high-frequency extension and the perfect characteristics for the job of reproducing treble. It is superior in every way to both aluminium and titanium, with lower density and greater rigidity for a given mass. Interestingly, B&W has also taken up the high-tech tweeter gauntlet with its 800 Series and followed suit by producing a taller version of the 803, which has a diamond tweeter but more conventionally placed bass units.



Each category of drive unit in this speaker – midrange, treble and combined bass drivers – has its own enclosure within the Diva cabinet. You can't see through the gaps as you can on the Grande Utopia Be but the divisions are still there.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is a remarkably clean and revealing loudspeaker that displays less perceived distortion than the vast majority of coned speakers we've heard. It's hard to describe a lack of something but very easy to enjoy it – lesser speakers sound coarse by comparison. Imagine sanding a piece of wood – most decent speakers might give you a 250-grit type of finish, but these up the ante to 1,000 or higher. It's a fine presentation that reveals all of the smaller sounds that make up the whole; the notes' harmonics and decay make the overall sound that much richer. As a result piano tones have a shimmer but are solid and powerful as well, while brushed drum strokes have a realism that's uncanny.

The bass is very effective. In fact, it's difficult to imagine how conventionally mounted drivers would improve on this without something very similar for direct comparison. Low frequencies are deep, full and rich yet they time as nimbly as the rest of the speaker – which is well. Very well in fact. This is an extremely insightful loudspeaker, which means you can hear precisely what bands were up to in the studio when they put together multilayered tracks – the different treatments and effects used are startlingly apparent.

**“It's a fine presentation that reveals all of the smaller sounds that make up the whole.”**

The Divas' response to the signal they are sent is as clear and precise as you could ask for. If an album usually sounds lush and spacious it continues to do so, but with extra resolve. It's an efficient speaker and does dynamics well – even normally compressed-sounding albums open up and deliver their full, explosive impact.

Dynamics, as much as bass, is the area in which the Diva really puts its sibling, the Micro, in the shade. You might be able to add the low frequencies to a pair of Micros with judicious use of subwoofers but you'd never get the freedom of dynamic expression on offer here. The ease with which they reproduce dense jazz rock is highly gratifying and great drum work has a sound that's akin to sonic gymnastics – the energy is addictive. The bass is good enough to warrant the description 'visceral', perhaps not as much as a great active speaker, but more so than any other slimline floorstander we've heard.

This is an exceptional loudspeaker and if you value the cubic volume of your living room highly enough, it makes a very convincing argument for the slim, elegant approach. We could happily take them home... and our partners would love them too! **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

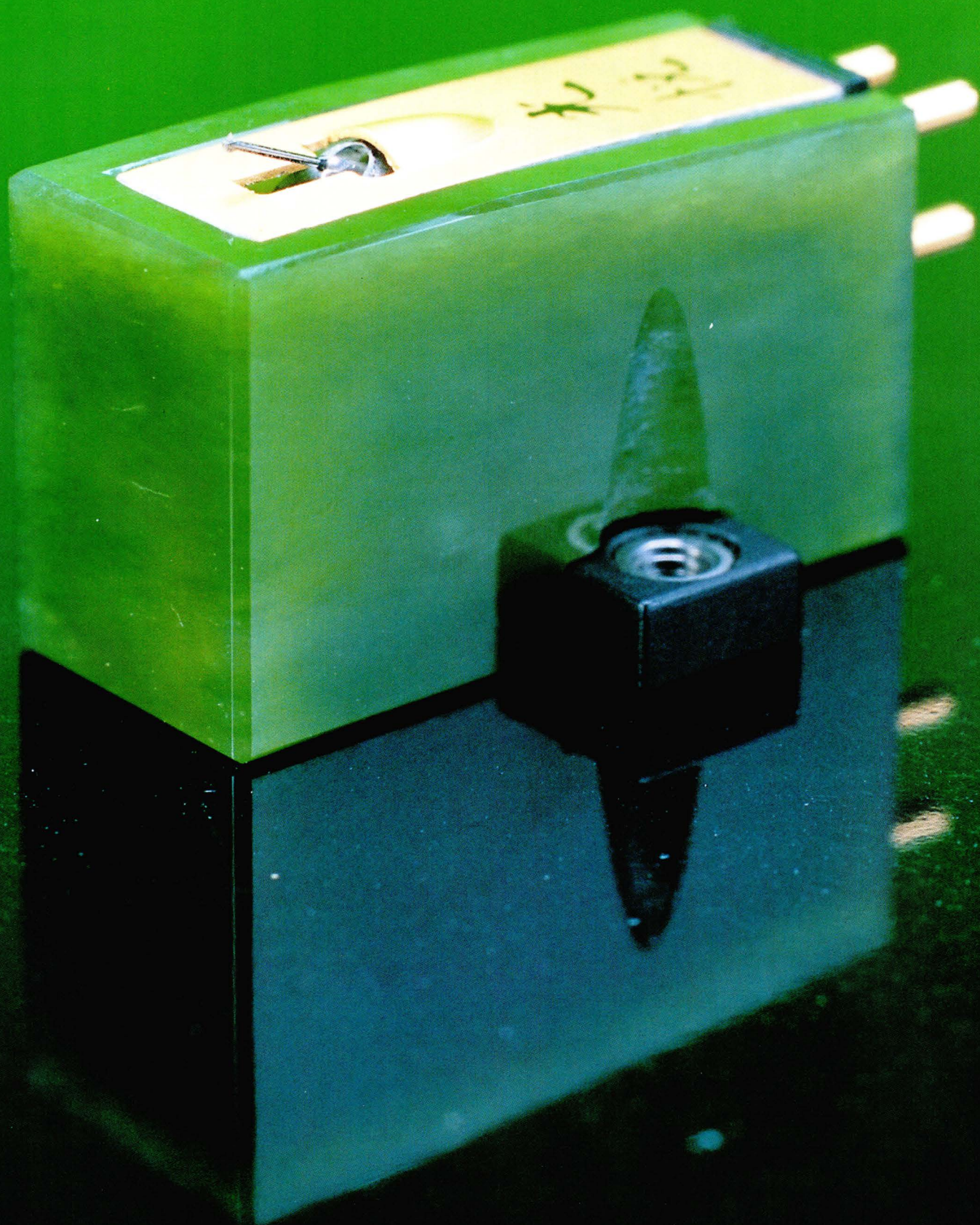
*See HFC 255 (July 2004) for our original review of this product*

## MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

For high-end surround sound, try this: Focal-JMlab Diva Utopia Be (front L/R), Focal-JMlab Center Utopia Be (centre channel), Focal-JMlab Micro Utopia Be (rear L/R), Focal-JMlab Sub Utopia Be (subwoofer).

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £19,796**







# Koetsu Jade Platinum

*Is Koetsu's first new moving coil cartridge in a decade the jewel in vinyl's crown?*

PRICE: £5,598 (£8,098 with diamond cantilever) CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Rd, London, SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.absolutesounds.com

**K**oetsu is an enigmatic company. Its founder, Yosiaki Sugano (1907-2002) was a remarkable man: an artist, musician, swordsman, calligrapher and business executive. In the late 1970s, he decided to manufacture high-quality pickup cartridges and named the resulting company after his inspiration – the 17th century Japanese artist, Honami Koetsu (1558-1637).

Sugano soon gained mythical status in hi-fi circles. Indeed, he used to joke that his 'death' had been erroneously reported no less than three times! It was one of many tales that became part of the Sugano legend – the image of a quiet, infinitely patient little old man, steeped in ancient wisdom, slowly and painstakingly creating magical-sounding pickup cartridges by hand.

Doubtless the truth was somewhat less fanciful, but there is definitely something magical about the sound of a Koetsu, something that goes way beyond science and measurement. Of course, precision engineering and the choice of the best materials are vital. But Sugano's alchemy brought something extra to the mix, and his sons (who have taken up the challenge since Sugano-san's passing) seem to have the same alchemical touch. Call it art; call it magic. It's the ability to produce results that vastly exceed than the sum of the parts.

The higher-priced Koetsu cartridges are exquisite to behold, with bodies made from exotic materials – from the lacquered Urushi finish, to the use of natural gemstones. Each one is packaged in a simple but beautifully made sandalwood box, so even the smell of Koetsu is good. As its name suggests, the Jade Platinum – the first truly 'new' Koetsu in a decade – features a body hand carved from a solid piece of jade. This gives each cartridge a unique and beautiful appearance, like a piece of exotic, hand-made jewellery.

It's a big cartridge, even for a moving coil design (23mm long and 14mm deep) and also quite heavy at 14.8g. You'll need a good tonearm with an extra-heavy counter weight. Optimum playing weight falls between 1.8g to 2g. At 1.8g, there's slightly greater transparency and fine detail, but our preference was for 2g, which reduces surface ticks and improves tracking slightly.

Koetsu uses 99.9999 per cent pure copper wire for its coils, along with a special silver cladding, whereby a silver sheath is slowly drawn over the copper conductor. Platinum alloy material is used in the magnetic assembly, which features Samarium Cobalt for

concentrated power. The cantilever is made from boron, but there's also an option with a one-piece cantilever and tip that's fashioned from a single solid piece of diamond, thereby avoiding the interface between stylus tip and cantilever. This costs an extra £2,500.

The Jade Platinum has a lower output than some Koetsu cartridges – around 0.2V to be precise. This results in a slightly less forward and exuberant musical presentation, but greatly increases refinement. If immediacy and presence count above all else, then possibly one of the higher output Koetsu pickups might be more to your liking. But don't expect the same levels of magical refinement and subtlety.

**“It turns those squiggly grooves on your records into living, breathing music.”**

Incidentally, although the initial cost of a Koetsu is high, experience says these pickups have an extraordinarily long working life. Even given relatively heavy use – say, two or three hours a night for four or five days every week – you can expect to get many years of entertainment from these cartridges. Given clean, well cared for LPs, there's very little tip wear, even with extensive use.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Jade Platinum offers a deceptively refined, almost velvety smoothness. It's wonderfully poised and relaxed sounding, with a musical delivery that's breathtakingly effortless and natural. The music just seems to 'happen' between the speakers. Voices and instruments materialise without effort or strain, sounding magically integrated and absolutely right in terms of tonal balance and timbre.

The presentation is luxuriously smooth and subtly shaded, yet tactile and immediate. It's a curious mix of opposites: chocolatey smoothness allied to great brilliance and attack. Tonally, the presentation is natural, with a solid bottom end, liquid midband and crisp, flowing highs. It's pin-point sharp on transient detail, yet very homogenous, too.

The uncanny ability to produce crisp, focused detail without sounding 'hard' or over-driven is the Jade Platinum's signature. It's a very engaging and positive-sounding cartridge. By virtue of its refinement and naturalness, the Jade Platinum is easy to listen to. Your brain has less 'processing' to do, so it's better able to take in the entire picture and make sense of the whole.

Clarity is outstanding – the way this cartridge allows individual vocal lines, or subtle instrumental passages, to cut through simply has to be heard to be appreciated. It's partly a question of aural space; each voice or instrument retaining more of its individuality and separation... and something subtler and more elusive. Somehow, you've got more time to listen, more time to explore the music and the separate individual strands that go to make up the whole.

Although refinement is one of the Jade Platinum's most notable qualities, it's not something false that's grafted on to each recording. The more you listen, the more you

realise that the pickup is faithfully reflecting the individual qualities of each recording. It really is an open window on the music, sounding sweet and beguiling one moment, then sharp and tactile the next – often during the same track.

Stereo soundstaging is wide and (on the right LP) vivid and holographic. As previously indicated, the music 'materialises' between the loudspeakers. It sort of hangs in free space between and around the enclosures, almost as though the speakers no longer existed. This is something only analogue LP at its very best seems to manage.

The great thing is, the Jade Platinum doesn't need special 'audiophile' LPs to produce the sort of results outlined. You can play really quite ordinary pressings and hear magical results. Your very best LPs will sound better than you ever thought possible, yet 'average' LPs surprise you by sounding fabulous too. Surface noise is very low, and the cartridge tracks cleanly and securely given a good tonearm and turntable.

The Koetsu Jade Platinum is a fabulous phono cartridge, one of the very best we have ever heard. It turns those squiggly grooves on your records into living, breathing music, making you listen to your hi-fi in rapt attention – much as you'd listen to real musicians playing live in front of you. It's that sort of direct experience. The results are endlessly fascinating and deeply rewarding, bringing a new depth to your appreciation of music and hi-fi. For sheer enjoyment, it doesn't get much better than this. **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*



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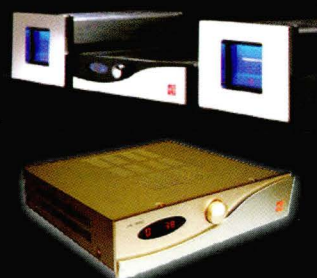
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# Naim DVD5

*Naim's first ever DVD player is every bit as musical as you'd expect*

PRICE: £2,350 (£2,465 with multichannel DVD-Audio upgrade) CONTACT: Naim Audio, Southampton Road, Salisbury SP1 2LN ☎ 01722 332266 www.naim-audio.com

Once Naim had decided that the time was right to introduce its first DVD player, the company faced a further decision: should it simply modify and enhance an off-the-peg player, in the manner of many other manufacturers, or should it shell out for all the various licences (Macrovision, Dolby and several others) that would be necessary to start from scratch? The latter course provides the greatest design freedom, but is extremely costly as the various licences are not designed to favour specialists like Naim. Nevertheless, and characteristically, this is the route that Naim has taken.

Naim has made good use of the creative freedom it has bought itself. The DVD5 has the familiar Naim user interface, down to the medieval four-figure display and just four buttons, though Naim's engineers had to defer to convention with a tray loading mechanism. Naturally, however, the remote control reflects the complexity of the beast, and so to a limited extent does the back panel. The other way that Naim put its mark on its first DVD player was to engineer it as a modular unit, which may take advantage of new technologies as they become available via software updates, or by adding accessory processing boards.

In its basic form, the DVD5 is a DVD-Video player, complete with the wherewithal to play two-channel, 24-bit/192kHz DVD-Audio recordings, if you can find any. If you prefer, it may also be supplied with full multichannel DVD-Audio capabilities (like our review sample) for an extra £115. The specification includes an encrypted DVI-HDCP digital video interface which can talk to HDMI displays via adaptor leads, but an HDMI upgrade card is in prospect that will ease the transition to high-definition video. Scaling of 480p/576p video from DVD up to 720p/1080p

CD players, though the audio character is different, and in a way, more conventional. That famous Naim 'bounce' – the propulsive sense of timing and dynamics – is present and correct, but if you didn't know it was a Naim, even the most rabbit-eared might well guess that it was from another marque. But then, those same people might be surprised to learn that it is a DVD player at all.

It is difficult to know what to say about DVD-Audio performance. From the limited range of worthwhile discs available, the DVD5 is as good, and probably better than most. The problem, as always, is finding worthwhile repertoire available in the format, but that is a

**“The DVD5 will do real justice to your DVD collection, while fully satisfying in its CD role too.”**

problem for DVD-Audio, not Naim Audio. As it stands, though, it's clear that the general comments attributed to CD replay are also applicable here – this is a DVD-A player that really loves music.

In its third major role, that of DVD-Video player, the Naim is meticulously designed and impressive. Shadow detail is subtle and well graduated, and colour is bold and dynamic. There's little evidence of video noise, plus image scaling and deinterlacing using the Faroudja engine is as slick and competent as ever (and if anything, rather better than some similar implementations in other players). But the video player market is just beginning to open up to more powerful video processors from Silicon Optix, for example, and this is the one area of possible vulnerability for Naim in the future. As things stand, however, this is a superb and timely machine that is also realistically priced. As a first DVD player from this important British producer, the DVD5 is an impressive achievement – it will do real justice to your DVD collection, while fully satisfying in its CD role too. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 263 (February 2005) for our original review of this product*

will soon become possible internally by means of a planned scaler upgrade.

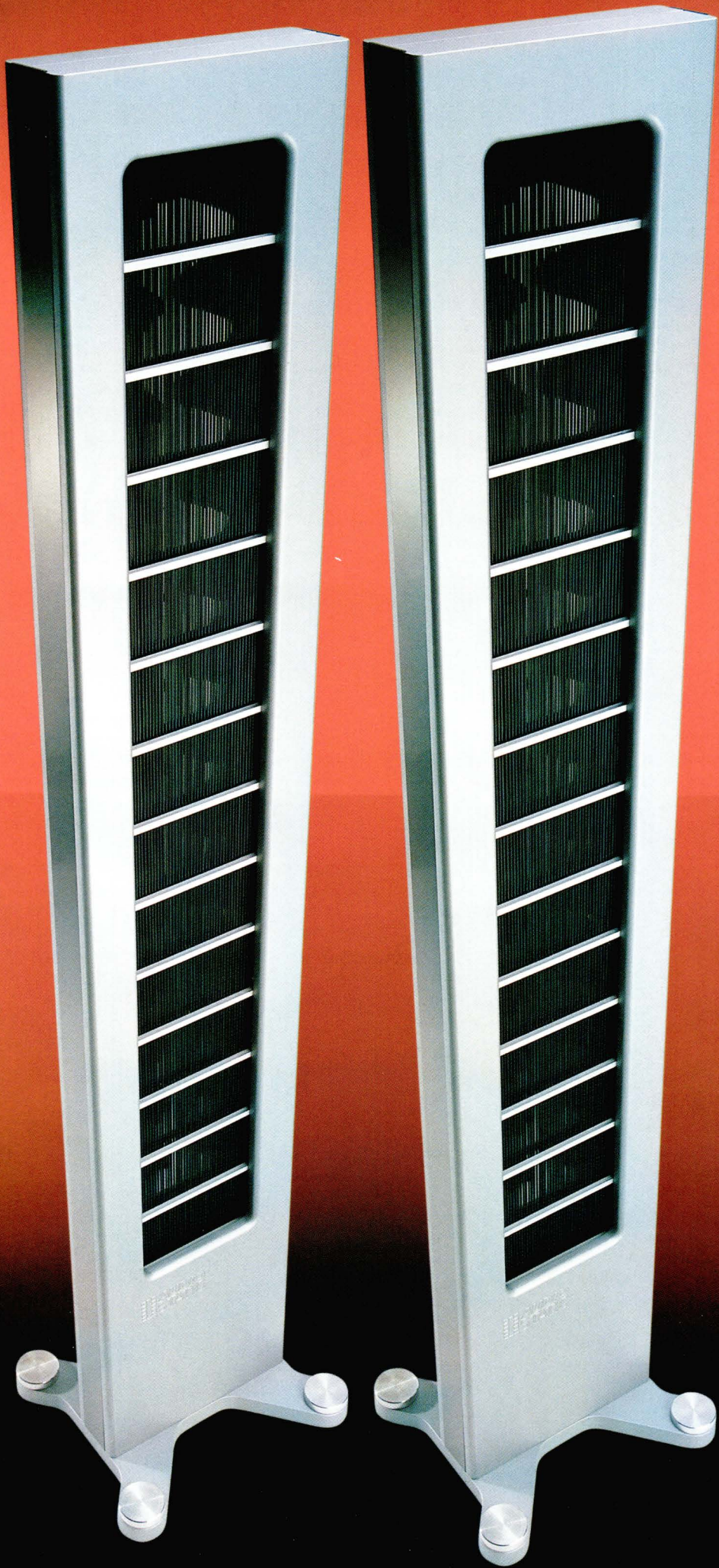
Naim has put a great deal of effort into the analogue signal path, which uses high-speed, wide-bandwidth video processors, with the ability to output from five-pin RGBHV and RGB (non-Macrovision) if required, as well as progressive component video. Video processing is by Faroudja and Conexant and a useful range of video test patterns can be generated as an aid to set-up. Red Book CD replay features include relocking of the digital audio to reduce jitter (Naim claims <120ps, which is less than most CD players) and 24-bit/192kHz differential mode Burr-Brown DACs.

## SOUND QUALITY

There are many justifications in spending this much on a DVD player and one is CD replay – after all, why have two players when one will do just as well? Naim's engineers have done an excellent job here with a video player that is essentially in the same ballpark as their dedicated









# Audiostatic DCM5

*A slimline electrostatic speaker that can do things dynamic box speakers can only dream about*

PRICE: £3,885 per pair CONTACT: Musicology, 12 Vernon Terrace, Brighton BN1 3JG ☎ 01273 700759 🌐 www.audiostatic.com

**E**lectrostatic panel loudspeakers were first brought to the market in the 1950s by Quad, but even today the technology that drives them is in a different ball-park to the majority of speakers. They work by creating an electrostatic charge around a large membrane thinner than clingfilm and employ transformers to increase the voltage of the incoming signal to scary levels – typically thousands of volts. They have significant advantages over conventional coned speakers because the membrane is incredibly light, and therefore easy to control. Also, because there is only one moving element, electrostatic panels do not need a crossover. On paper, this is unbeatable technology, yet the breed is less popular than it once was and shows little sign of usurping its crude competitor, despite the cone's limited bandwidth, high mass and potential for break up.

The reasons for this are partly historical. The original Quad electrostatics could not be played as loud and lacked the low frequencies of cones in boxes. They also cost a lot more than cones and domes. The other problem is that they are dipole speakers, which radiate sound equally to front and rear and require large panels and plenty of space to work well – both of which have become quite difficult things to get in a modern living room. But Audiostatic at least tries to make their speakers look more aesthetically pleasing than the typical slab-sided 'static.

This particular full-range electrostatic comes from Holland, where Ben Peters has been making Audiostatics for twenty years. This is the fifth incarnation of his DCM line source design. Unlike its predecessors, its transformers are built into the frame rather than a separate box. There are four step-up transformers and one Mirror Drive transformer that offsets the capacitive load of the loudspeaker by feeding the transformers with a mirrored signal that improves bass performance.

The DCM5s are slim but nonetheless imposing speakers that stand 1.85m tall, which makes their presence in the room rather obvious. But they are very elegant and because the panel's depth is so minimal (9cm) they don't actually take up much space. What's more, when back lit the central area is transparent and reveals the attractive toothed shape of the back panel.

This shape is more than decorative: it is also designed to break up any resonances within the MDF frame. Although the membrane is extremely light, it's a bit like a drum skin and therefore produces specific resonances that

need to be controlled. The little silicone blobs you can see behind each horizontal aluminium bar are also designed to help in this respect.

Connection to the amplifier is via a single pair of terminals, as there's only one drive unit. But, that drive unit requires mains power to develop the electrostatic charge, so you also need a mains supply for each channel. The stands accept adjustable spike feet that are a little shallow to get through carpet, but provide the required stability.

Audiostatic recommends the DCM5s sit at least a metre into the room. Sensitivity is rated at a slightly below average figure of 87dB, but this is room dependent with this sort of design. While the impedance is nominally eight ohms, the DCM soaks up more power than any box speaker we've tested. As with other electrostatics, the load is completely different to a box speaker, being largely capacitive and reactive but not resistive as is the norm. You'll need at least 100 watts to drive them, preferably more.

## SOUND QUALITY

There were many occasions when a bit of judicious gain riding had to be applied, but this is a highly sensitive speaker. It's sensitive in other respects too, but the most obvious sensitivity is to detail. It is phenomenally transparent to fine and coarse detail and puts the majority of box speakers in the shade when it comes to revealing precisely how albums have been recorded and the quality of musicianship upon them.

**“If your tastes are more sophisticated, this is an extremely difficult speaker to beat.”**

Tonal resolution is stunning. Whatever the instrument or voice, you hear its precise nature and colour; trumpets, guitars and voices all deliver their own distinct character with no apparent tailoring from the speaker. This level of resolve does, of course, place an onus on the partnering equipment to deliver the signal in a colour-free and high-power fashion, preferably with no sense of strain or emphasis. The Ayre pre/power amp reviewed on p58 of this issue proved a perfect match, as one might hope of an expensive and powerful combo. Our reference Bryston BP25/Gamut D200 Mk1 pairing worked well, too – it helped the DCM5s deliver truly three-dimensional imaging, and we revelled in the way they produced the full shape and texture of every note.

Electrostatics are not without their foibles and the Audiostatic is no exception. Essentially, dynamics ain't what they should be, because the bass doesn't have the drive and power that it should. There's no shortage of bass depth, but with music from the likes of Rage Against the Machine or Missy Elliott, there's quite a severe lack of energy. This speaker design will never deliver driving, powerful bass, hence the addition of so-called dynamic bass drivers to electrostatic designs from MartinLogan among others. And why the original Quad was not a bass-head's speaker.

If your tastes are more sophisticated, then this is an extremely difficult speaker to beat; Gillian Welch, Nick Drake, Keith Jarrett and more all sound sublime. Lambchop's *Is A Woman* is extraordinary on any speaker for the amount of detail that comes out of the mix – this album usually sounds like there are lots of different elements to its quiet intensity, but never before has it been possible to pinpoint them. Everything from the thump of a foot on the studio floor to the tiniest elements in the sound, and even the way the engineer has shifted those sounds about, is laid bare.

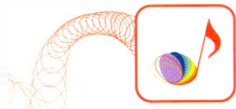
It's the sort of resolve that brings something new and worthwhile to even the most well worn reviewer's discs. This is because the DCM5 is extremely fast as well as transparent; it responds to the smallest variation in the signal as quickly as it does to the big ones, and there is absolutely no sense of overhang. The reverb and harmonics you hear are almost entirely in the signal, not from the cabinet or

the drive unit, as is so often the case with box speakers. It's an extremely engaging quality and one that had us enthralled with its ability to reveal a whole new layer of information on our favourite records.

The dichotomy of such wide dynamic range coupled with so little dynamic energy is the price you pay for the insight this speaker brings. It's almost impossible to find a box speaker that will deliver so much detail with so little distortion. The musical and emotional clarity it brings to the party is addictive; shut your eyes and it's easy to suspend disbelief and imagine the musician in the room. And that can't genuinely be said of many loudspeakers – whatever the price. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*





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**Kandy MkIII integrated amplifier**  
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**Kandy MkIII CD**  
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**Kandy MkIII integrated amplifier**  
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **Winner 2003 Awards**

**Kandy MkIII integrated amplifier**  
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **Winner 2002 Awards**

**Kandy MKIII integrated amplifier**  
**Five Stars**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **October 2003**

**Kandy CD**  
**Five Stars**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **First test July 2003**

**Kandy MkIII integrated amplifier**  
**Five Stars**

**2003 SUPERTEST WINNER (5 Star Gold)**  
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **May 2003**

**Kandy Integrated amplifier**  
**Five Stars**

**2002 SUPERTEST WINNER (5 Star Gold)**  
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **Feb 2002**

**Kandy CD player, Amplifier & Speakers**  
**Five Stars**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **January 2001**

**Kandy Integrated amplifier**  
**Five Stars**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **April 2000**

**Kandy CD**  
**Five Stars**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION **March 2000**

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# Triangle Magellan Concerto

*The French like to do things differently and this speaker is no exception*

PRICE: £9,995 per pair CONTACT: UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iver, Bucks SL0 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.triangle-fr.com

**T**he Magellan Concerto is the real-world follow-up to the flagship of this idiosyncratic French manufacturer – the Magellan. That model was a knockout in its own, very individual way, but it strains credibility with its three-part, pillar-like construction that extends to 2.18 metres tall.

The Magellan is much less idiosyncratic. At nearly 1.5 metres tall, the enclosure still has stature, but is not so tall that it needs to be packaged in more than a single, floorstanding box. The repackaging exercise was all that was necessary for a large price reduction with a relatively minor loss of bass extension (which is still impressive), and a midrange and treble that appear to be identical.

It has what appears to be the same narrow cross section, with deeply curved sides and a narrow baffle and rear-facing section, each of which houses a 160mm pulp cone midrange unit and compression horn tweeters with titanium domes and lethal-looking pointed central phase plugs. The combination provides a radiation pattern somewhere between bipolar and omnidirectional – there is a strong loss of high frequency energy to the sides, while three units similar in size to the midrange drivers provide the air-moving ability to deliver bass. The system has a punishingly variable load impedance, but sensitivity is high at 93dB, so enormous power is not strictly necessary unless you want to make full use of the prodigious 300-watt power handling capability.

In all conscience, the Magellan Concerto is not a loudspeaker that could be described as classically neutral. It is not, for example, the kind of loudspeaker you might choose for monitoring purposes where tonal accuracy comes high on the menu. This said, it has a curious ability to cut through and produce music that sounds gripping and engaging. We noticed this first when it was demonstrated in what was the fairly grim acoustic of a hotel sardine can – sorry, hotel room. It just sounded livelier and more engaging than most despite the low ceilings and

**“What really makes the Magellan Concerto work is its dynamic consistency.”**

spongy wall constructions that clamped down on any sound that was in danger of being any good. Musical textures and voices, and as we recall a particularly fine solo violin piece, sprang to life in a completely unexpected way. There was a strong sense of involvement, which was

reinforced later when we tried a pair at our usual listening venue. It provides an open, vivid account of the music – seamless from bass through to treble, and with a very obvious, almost extravagant sense of fine detail.

## SOUND QUALITY

We have to concede, however, that these positive findings are in part due to the – let's call a spade a spade – idiosyncratic balance of the Magellan Concerto. It is an undeniably bright loudspeaker; to the point where listening off-axis – or better still at longer than the standard-issue two-and-a-bit metre listening range – is called for. The bass is correspondingly lightweight in feel, though very impressive in terms of extension, and very well integrated into the fabric of the sound as a whole. It also has a natural, almost limpid ease and an equally natural control in the midband, with a sound that's tuneful in feel. What really makes the Magellan Concerto work, however, is its dynamic consistency, its ability to work well at different volume levels and the naturally expansive way that the sound ebbs and swells. The Concerto seems to have the capacity to energise the listening room, which we feel must be related to its very broad dispersion.

So here is a thoroughly talented loudspeaker, but by any standards (even measured against other French loudspeakers), it has a distinctively strong personality, one that can sound 'in yer face', and which you may well end up finding yourself loving or loathing. Those into acoustic music and who have large listening rooms are likely to find it a very strong proposition, especially as this is a design that communicates musically at a whisper or a roar, but aggressively mixed studio pop lovers could ultimately find the Magellan Concerto wearing, and the dry, though extended, bass can bleach some of the tonal colour from the sound. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 262 (January 2005)  
for our original review of this product*







audio research

CD SE 35

|||||



VOLUME



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REFERENCE 3 HIGH DEFINITION

VACUUM TUBE PREAMPLIFIER

POWER PROC BAL/SE MUTE

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SELECT INPUT



# Audio Research Reference 3

*The Reference 2 was one of the best preamps ever built. But now there's a new Reference in town...*

**PRICE:** £9,250 **CONTACT:** Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.absolutesounds.com

**T**here are few companies that produce a product that really is deserving of the word 'Reference', but Audio Research is indubitably one. Its Reference class preamp, phono stage and power amplifiers really are Reference models in all senses of the word. They represent the acme of Audio Research sound, and are used in a wealth of other high-end manufacturers' labs as a benchmark and an accurate reference point to design their components around.

Traditionally, the Reference class preamp had a striking similarity to other Audio Research preamps, albeit on a larger scale. But with the Reference 3, that's all changed... sort of. The row of rotary knobs and toggle switches are gone, replaced by just two knobs (one for volume, one for input selection) and four black plastic square push buttons, first seen on the LS16 and CD3. These feel slightly tacky compared to the positive feel toggles of old, but we soon grew to love them in their own right.

Between all of these is the largest green LCD read-out this side of Piccadilly Circus. It takes up the middle third of the front panel real estate (it's a big preamp, more the sort of size you'd expect for a power amp) and tells you what source is used and what volume level is being played. And this volume level can (almost) be read from space... the numbers are nearly three centimetres high! Strangely, you soon get used to this, although most visitors will ask if you need your eyes testing. You can turn this off or dim it and the display is exceptionally user-friendly and manageable. It's just huge!

It also hides a secret on the remote control. Press 'Hours' and the amplifier will tell you just how many operating hours the tubes have been in service. Short of having a little chime that tells you it's time for servicing, this is the best way to keep a valve preamp in long-term service without tears or sonic degradation. It uses five tubes in the circuit: a single 6H30 and 6L6GC on one circuit block and four 6H30s along the second circuit board. Both boards are vertical daughter cards operating on a horizontal power supply motherboard in a manner akin to a PC design. The front PCB is the input switching, source selector and gain control (along with logic circuits and the rest), while the back board is the balanced and single-ended output stage.

All six inputs, tape and processor throughputs and main amp output have balanced and single-ended options. The manual warns you not to wire both kinds

of connections simultaneously to the same input, but many dealers have done just that in demonstrations with no ill effects. Generally, the change to single-ended entails a slight drop in volume and sound quality, although the former can be rectified and learned by the preamp. Switching from one source to another, even from balanced XLR to single-ended phono, is whisper quiet and entirely refined, as befits the product's Reference status.

The only thing not Referential is the remote control. It's a black plastic affair that's not dissimilar to those found with cheap TV sets. It could be argued that the Reference 3 is likely to be used with the likes of Crestron multiroom handsets (there are a pair of 12-volt triggers on the back panel), but something a bit more upmarket as standard would be fitting. Still, it does the job and button layout is clear, so it's streets ahead of those design-led, functionally-stupid designs that look beautiful, but only raise the volume if you hold down six identical buttons at once.

## SOUND QUALITY

There is a distinct evolution in Audio Research sound. The sound of old – typified by classic products like the SP11 preamp – was warm, yet detailed. The Reference 2 preamp was perhaps the ultimate expression of that old Audio Research sound. In contrast, the Reference 3 is the Audio Research preamp

neutral preamps in history, now sounds a bit 'obvious'. This is the start of 'phase one' of listening to the Reference 3; you begin to realise that this preamplifier is more neutral than any other preamplifier you have ever heard. Whichever preamp you compare it to has more of its own character than the Reference 3, which has the most natural soundstage, the most accurate tonality, the finest detail you'll ever hear. There's nothing more neutral on the market today.

But then, 'phase two' begins to kick in. It has a sense of tonal beauty that draws you into the music like no other. This is a true masterwork, because this character is so vital yet so subtle that you could almost miss just how richly harmonic this preamp is, because you are basking in the sheer detail and imagery. The whole inner structure of the music becomes clearer than ever before.

Everything else wears its colours like an LA gangbanger by comparison. The character this preamp has – rich, sophisticated, open – is so naturally benign and so deftly handled.

It's pointless to try and pin down the performance of the preamp with reference (no pun) to specific CDs. The Reference 3 basically does everything you could ever want from a preamplifier and sounds utterly fine with every kind of music you could wish to play through it. To be a true all-rounder takes real talent – and this one's better than Botham.

**“The Reference 3 has the most natural soundstage, the most accurate tonality and the finest detail you'll ever hear.”**

for the 21st Century. It's extremely clean sounding – in fact, it's just possibly the most revealing preamp yet designed.

This is a cerebral upgrade – it works on the head first, the heart later. This is very much at odds with the Reference 2, which was an immediate hit. In contrast, the Reference 3 is a grower. The first time you listen to the Reference 3, you get the absolute fidelity to the sound, the instant connection to the recording studio and the excitement of the music. However, that 'magical' element of the Reference 2's sound is not so prevalent. Strangely, this is a good thing.

You see, the Reference 3 does have all the magic of the Reference 2 but it doesn't present it in an overt way. This really is a revelation: the Reference 2, one of the most

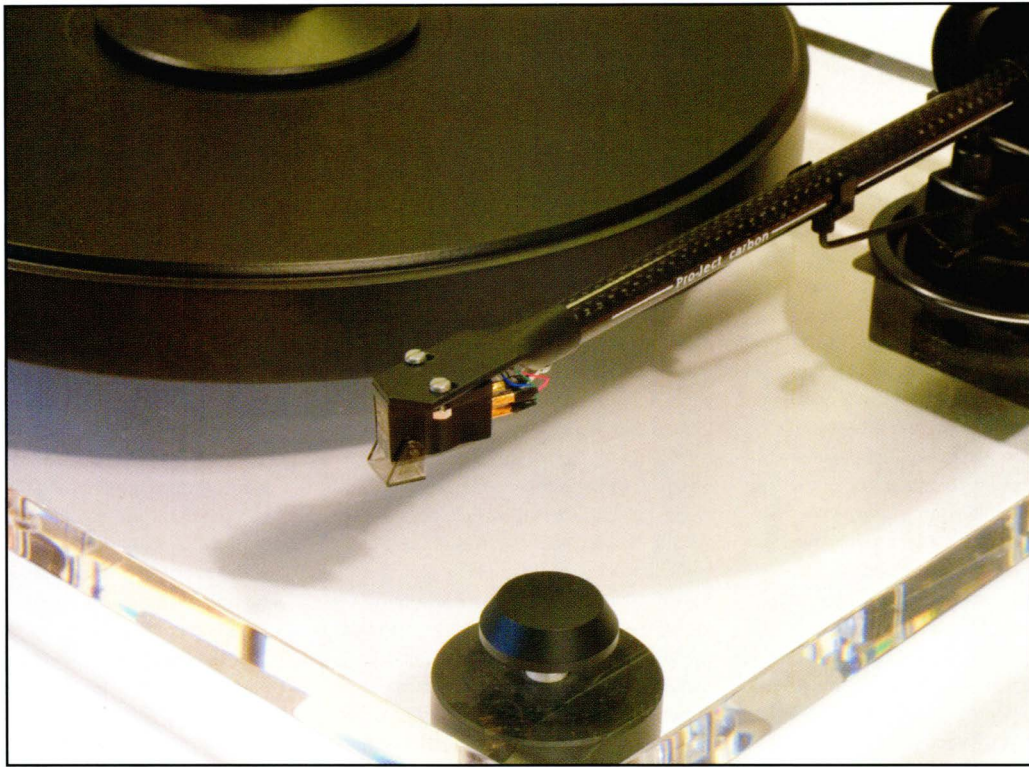
Of course, this virtually perfect performance from a preamplifier does mean everything else in the signal chain has to be of the absolute first water. In particular, the Reference 3 does so well with balanced inputs and outputs, it would seem a shame to lose that last fraction of performance by dropping down to single-ended operation. It's exceptionally good at switching noiselessly from one mode to the other, but if you can go balanced, do so.

As the hi-fi industry stands today, it's impossible to think of a product that is either better than the Reference 3 or will show up its limitations. That's because it effectively has no limitations. If you *really* want to know what your discs sound like, make sure this preamp is in your system. **HFC**

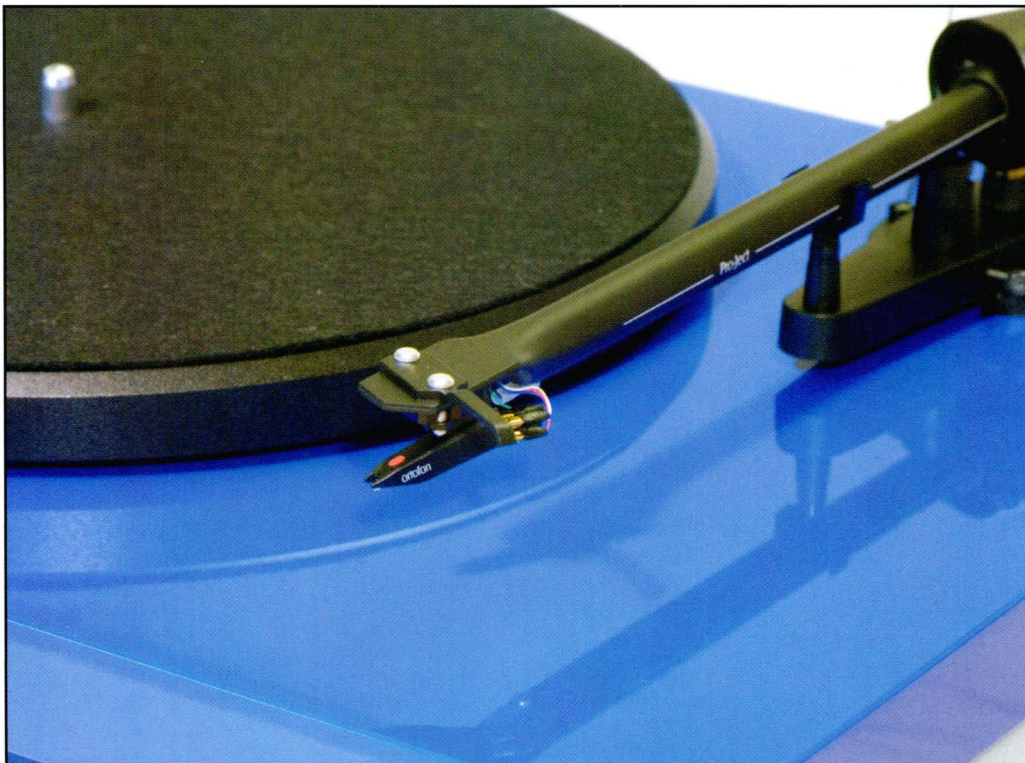
*Alan Sircom*



# *The colouration's in the finish*



# *Not in the music*







# Meridian G91

*Meridian's DVD-Audio player/controller/tuner is both unusual... and utterly brilliant!*

PRICE: £3,895 CONTACT: Meridian Audio, Latham Road, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 6YE ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

The £3,985 Meridian G91 is no ordinary DVD-Audio player. It's actually a CD and DVD-Audio player/controller/tuner, as it includes a built-in Meridian digital processor, together with an AM/FM radio tuner of a very high quality. But, instead of the regular six-channel analogue outputs found in most DVD-Audio/Video players, the player downmixes to stereo analogue audio, or delivers the audio digitally through a series of three digital links.

These links are designed specifically for connecting the Meridian G91 to Meridian Digital Active speakers, although these links can also be used with a Meridian G68 room-correcting surround sound controller. This means the G91 cannot deliver conventional analogue multichannel DVD-Audio to non-Meridian systems, where it's limited to acting as a CD/DVD-Video player through its conventional single S/PDIF connection (DVD-Audio signals cannot pass along the standard S/PDIF) or as a downmixing stereo preamp for the DVD-Audio/Video, CD and tuner sources. Those who want a more conventional DVD-Audio multichannel player, complete with 5.1-channel analogue outputs, should look at the equally excellent Meridian G98AH instead.

**“It has an intrinsic sense of balance that draws the listener into the music beautifully.”**

The player resolves data at 48-bit precision, which means up-scaling CD to 88.2kHz or 176.4kHz – or delivering 96kHz or 192kHz sampling rates for DVD-Audio – at 24-bit resolution is a doddle. Likewise, the player has a proper video scaler, which can convert humble analogue video pictures into high-density multimedia interface (HDMI) digital pictures, coping with current and high-definition formats. There is no Scart socket, but it will likely be used in systems where Scart is just too primitive.

With such a complex product, installing and fine-tuning the G91 is best left to the professionals. This leaves you with the MSR+ handset and the front panel to play with. The on-screen and especially front panel displays are complex, but need to be, because of the configurability of the player. This means overkill on the front panel (do you need to know the sampling rate of a disc when playing?) but

at least there's a human-friendly volume knob. Of course, this being a Meridian product, it's actually a fully digital, precision rotary shaft encoder which translates the rotational position of the knob into a specific digital signal that attenuates the volume.

## SOUND QUALITY

For once, here's a DVD-Audio/Video player with the sort of sonic authority that's usually the preserve of high-quality dedicated CD players – few video-capable players manage it, even when playing a hi-res music format like DVD-A. Factor in stereo imaging that's extremely focused, and possessed of the sort of wide, deep and even forward-projecting soundstage that cries out for the best speakers and the sort of detail that makes you able to hear into the recording, and you get some idea of what the player is doing right. It's not musically metronomic or charmingly unforced in its delivery of a beat, but it has an intrinsic sense of balance that draws the listener into the music beautifully. In essence, DVD-Audio 'simply' increases that balance, adding extension, detail... and eventually three and a bit more channels. That 'simply' is, in fact, crushingly difficult and no player we've encountered so seamlessly integrates CD and DVD-Audio.

No passage in particular highlights what the G91 does well, because it's uniformly good at all genres and all formats it can cope with. Damien Rice on CD sounded so real, so in the room, that you could almost reach out and hand the man some Prozac. While, on DVD-Audio, the moody *Riders on the Storm* (in stereo, remember) sounded so broody and malevolent, you might think you're in a flood.

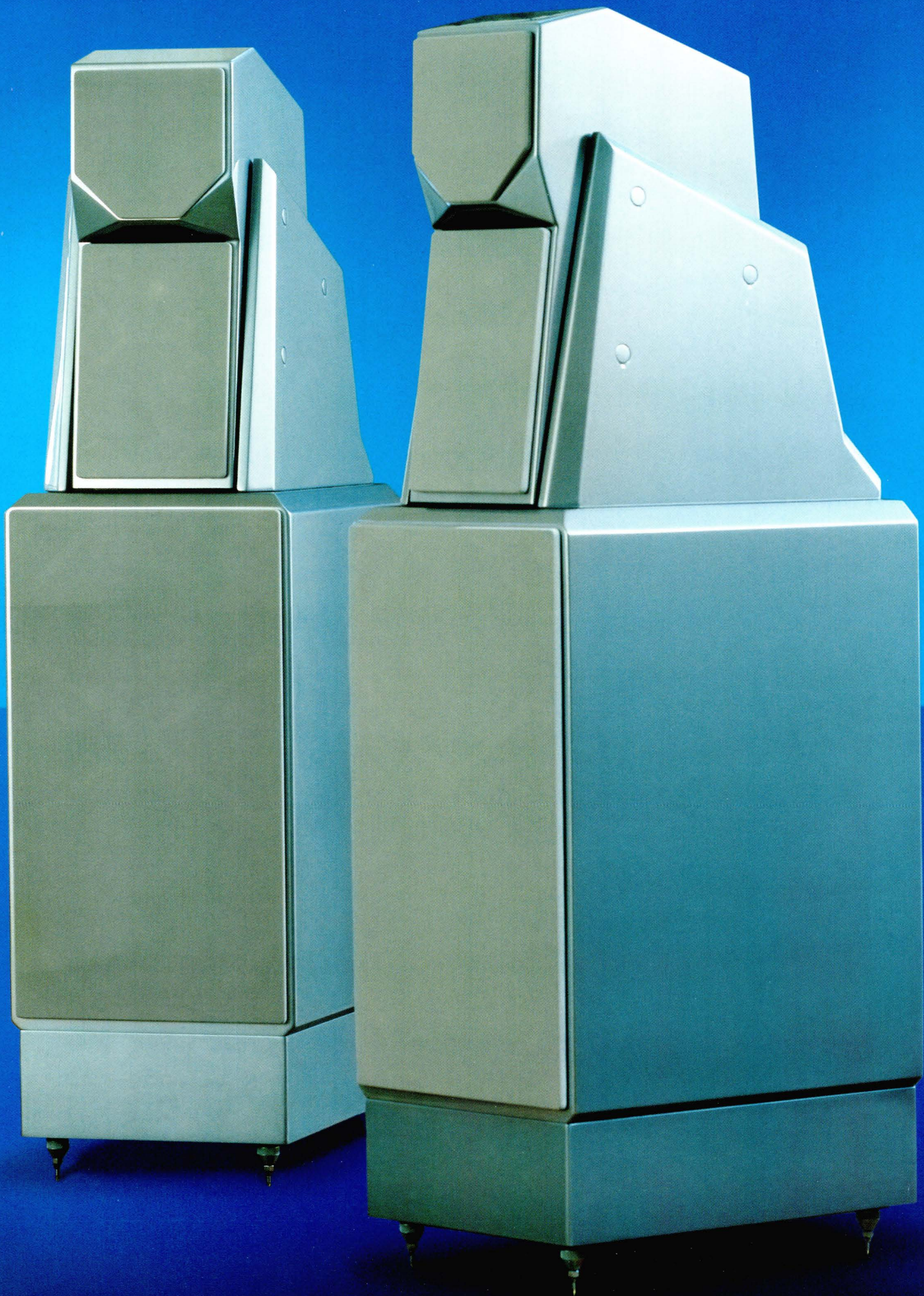
In picture terms, this is one of those rare players that raises the performance bar so high that its performance on S-Video is better than many cheaper players playing RGB. It has exceptional colour depth and focus, with the sort of precise detail that makes every disc look more like film. Move to one of the more upmarket output formats like HDMI and the picture is even more staggeringly real – state of the art, in fact.

What's not to like about the G91? It looks great, performs well and does about ten jobs at once. There's an aura of confidence surrounding this player/processor/things that is all too rare in hi-fi and practically non-existent in home cinema. It's a great CD player, a class-leading DVD-Video player and an exceptional DVD-Audio player – in stereo, or (with the help of other Meridian gear) in multichannel too. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*

*See HFC 260 (November 2004) for our original review of this product*







# Wilson Audio MAXX 2

*With speakers this good, who cares if they are ballerina tall, Rik Waller heavy and cost £41,000?*

PRICE: £41,000 per pair CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.wilsonaudio.com

**T**here's something intimidating about big Wilson speakers. The 'boat-tail' curved cabinet design that's currently so prevalent among high-end speakers isn't attempted here – the look is big, bold and hard-edged, like a mainframe computer from the early 1980s. The speaker shouts 'audiophile' from the rooftops, and looks a bit like a slightly anorexic Dalek on tip-toe.

The dimensions of the MAXX Series 2 give the game away. Let's forget metric for a moment; 160cm tall means nothing practical. These speakers are five foot three inches tall – smaller than the giant Alexandria, but that's still about the height of the average ballerina, or four Kylie Minogues laid end to end. The 43cm width and 56cm depth are pretty impressive too. But perhaps it's the weight that really sums up how physically massive this speaker is. The whole package weighs 500kg. Unboxed, each speaker weighs 186kg. So, despite the wishes of some, there's no way these babies will fit in a box room on the third floor of a rickety Victorian home.

The drive unit line-up is equally impressive. The bass module (itself taller than most regular speakers) sports one 330mm driver and another 267mm unit, while the moveable head module includes a pair of 178mm midrange drivers and an inverted 25mm titanium dome tweeter. All of which combine with a rear port to deliver sound from 20Hz right up to 21kHz, within claimed -3dB limits. Yet, this is achieved with remarkably easy drive capabilities – it's claimed to deliver a sensitivity rating of 92dB at one watt (2.83 volts at one metre) and have a nominal impedance of eight ohms, with a three-ohm minimum. Wilson suggests any amplifier of seven watts or more would be fine for driving these speakers, but realistically, to get decent levels out of the speaker, try an amplifier of ten or even 100 times that power. Of course, you need quantity *and* quality to get the best from these speakers.

Wilson has performed considerable changes to the MAXX since its first iteration. There's even more Alexandria DNA in this new version. It may look similar to all modern larger-than-System-Seven designs, but the cabinet has been substantially revised. The upper chamber has been especially modified to include a rear port and what Wilson calls its Group Delay mechanism: essentially a pivot to raise or lower the head module to time align it accurately. The head module then couples to the sides plates that stand tall from the top of the bass unit using a

sextet of nylon bushes. Clever, and remarkably effective. Of course, the redesigned crossover with even greater time-alignment properties helps. And don't forget the tweeter, which has been wholly revised, despite being the typical inverted dome used in all Wilson models.

The bass unit has undergone less dramatic upgrades, but features improved damping properties. This is in line with developments that have helped transform other Wilson speakers over the last few years. One thing that hasn't changed in Wilson designs is the total lack of bi-wiring. Despite some healthy

**“It's the height of the average ballerina, or four Kylie Minogues laid end to end.”**

cabling connecting the mid/tweeter module to the bass block, the main connections are single wired. The huge Puppy Paw style feet are a Wilson motif too, but these look entirely in keeping with the overall design.

The whole look is brutally sculpted (a bit like a Frank Lloyd Wright building is sculpted) and surprisingly effective, especially as Wilson can provide the MAXX 2 in almost any colour scheme you can envisage. But it's still huge...

## SOUND QUALITY

These are big speakers and need a big room and plenty of space to breathe. You need a good couple of metres behind and to the sides of the speakers, and at least a metre between the top of the tweeter box and the ceiling. A moderate amount of toe-in is required too, but this follows a prescribed Wilson formula. Good job too – there's no way you'll want to experiment with positioning a 29-stone speaker.

No matter how familiar you are with a disc, you are hearing it for the first time through the MAXX 2. It takes simply everything in its stride – Zappa's percussion noodling on *Civilization Phase III*, Leftfield's afro-techno polyrhythms, even the spoken word – and makes every sound the right size and with a sense of scale that is almost impossible to fault. The extremes we heard during our all too brief test sessions were remarkable; not just extremes of frequency, but of level too. We played some deep, widdly-widdly Jeff Beck guitar spanking at ear-splitting levels, followed soon after by ultra-genteel ECM jazzy sax meets choral singing on *Vivaticum*, played at little more than a whisper. With both extremes – and every volume level in

between – the Wilsons maintained their remarkable coherence and listenability.

Big speakers are often accused of sounding big at all times – not so the MAXX 2. If a sound is big, it sounds big, if it's small it sounds small. Better still, if there are both big and small sounds on the same recording, both have exactly the right image size. This really doesn't happen that often – usually the overbearing character of the speaker dominates the size of the image elements within a recording. The Wilsons never do this, and sound all the more remarkable for it.

Playing Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* was the clincher – the orchestra had all the right tonality and size, but when the solo saxophone kicked in, there was no sense of the image collapsing. In most systems, it's hard to tell this really is a saxophone, but here, you can almost tell what grade of reed the player was using.

Everything you might want from a speaker, like musicality, dynamic range, neutrality, an image that is cast far, wide and deep, coherence, articulation, detail and more – they are all here, and all better than from practically any other speaker on the planet. But there's something still more to get from the MAXX 2. This is a speaker that has a physical sense of music occurring in a very real, very tangible and very solid sense, as you might expect from a big loudspeaker cabinet, but it also has the speed and musical communication that's typically found in small-box speakers.

Such revelations are not easy to come by. This is not a speaker that reveals its magic in a ten-minute listening session – at that point, you are too wowed by the impressive sense of scale – but over several hours, it begins to show the true inner nature of its performance. It delivers supreme scale, accuracy and honesty, coupled with sublime coherence, timing and musicality, in a package that fits the dynamics of most big living rooms. It's an Alexandria for those with ceilings under 5m high.

This is almost a review that writes itself. All the boxes are ticked, all the 'i's are dotted and all the 't's are crossed. It behoves the job of a reviewer to find fault in anything under review, but sometimes that's impossible. This is one of those rare occasions – there's nothing to find, here. The MAXX 2 rocks. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*



FINE TWO CHANNEL AUDIO SYSTEMS



**a Eclipse-TD 712Z.**

These unusually shaped loudspeakers produce imaging and soundstaging that can equal that achieved with the best speakers costing several times their price. Very sharp focus, very fast and probably the best transients we have heard. Virtually no colouration, a most revealing loudspeaker. With their custom stand £4000 a pair.

**b Ayre Acoustics K-1 and V-1.**

This pre-power combination offers an exceptionally high level of transparency and deep soundstage for the price. With a characteristically sharp focussed image, the fully balanced circuits offer a very neutral tonal balance. On a par with the best amplifiers we have heard. K-1 pre-amplifier £4995. V-1 power amplifier (200wpc) £6495.



**c Conrad-johnson ACT 2 and Premier 350.**

This combination offers an exceptionally transparent and natural sound producing a very 3 dimensional, large soundstage. A reference system. ACT 2 valve pre-amplifier £13000. Premier 350 power amplifier (350wpc) £8000.



**d Thiel 2.4 loudspeakers.**

This speaker is rapidly becoming one of our best selling components. A very coherent sound producing a realistic, large soundstage. Tonal balance is very natural. Dynamics, at both macro and micro level, are accurately reproduced. An innovative design with a beautiful finish. Standard wood veneers £3495.



**e** At last we have heard some universal disc players that perform well and without compromise to the standard CD replay. The 3 units we have on offer will compare extremely favourably with any regular CD-only player at their respective price points. The extra replay formats available, DVD, DVD-A, SACD, MP3, etc, can be counted as a bonus. *Top to bottom:*

**Ayre C-5xe.** A universal stereo player, 2-channel only. By avoiding any video replay in the circuits, this results in a no compromise universal audio player that has an exceptional sound. Extremely natural tonal balance with a very focussed, deep soundstage. Up with the very best CD players we have heard, a remarkable achievement at £4495.

**McCormack UDP-1.** This player offers full multi-channel outputs as well as 2-channel replay. A neutral to warm sound with a big soundstage. Exceptional value at £3200.

**Bel Canto Player PL-1.** A high performance universal player. Leaving aside the universal bits, this is one of the best sounding CD players we have heard. It produces a large, believable soundstage and has extremely good bass character. Player PL-1 Audio £6990. DCDi and high performance DVI, SDI available as options at extra cost.

AMPHION ▶ AUDIO PHYSIC ▶ AVALON ▶ AYRE ACOUSTICS ▶ BEL CANTO ▶ BENZ-MICRO ▶ CARDAS ▶ CLEARAUDIO ▶ CONRAD-JOHNSON ▶ DALI ▶ EAR/YOSHINO ▶ ECLIPSE-TD  
FINAL ▶ GRAAF ▶ LYRA ▶ MCINTOSH ▶ MONO PULSE ▶ NORDOST ▶ NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE ▶ PAGODE ▶ PATHOS ▶ QUADRASPIRE ▶ RESOLUTION AUDIO ▶ ROGUE AUDIO  
SME ▶ SHUN MOOK ▶ SUGDEN ▶ THIEL ▶ TRANSGURATION ▶ UNISON RESEARCH ▶ VELODYNE ▶ VIRTUAL DYNAMICS ▶ WADIA ▶ WHEST AUDIO

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# Waterfall Victoria TWN

*Waterfall's glass enclosure engineering brings new meaning to the word 'transparent'*

PRICE: £2,000 per pair CONTACT: Transparent Distribution, Coxmoor Road, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire NG17 5AA ☎ 01623 517000 🌐 www.waterfallaudio.com

**A**ccording to most consumers, a loudspeaker should be heard, but not seen, so what could be more logical than to build a transparent loudspeaker? Even better, given its mechanical integrity and attractive appearance, why not make it out of glass? Those were the questions French loudspeaker brand Waterfall asked, and then answered with processes developed by glassmakers to slice sheets of glass with sufficient precision and accuracy.

The model under scrutiny here is the top-of-the-line Victoria TWN, a compact two-and-a-half-way floorstander. Creating a transparent enclosure imposes constraints that don't apply if the box is conventionally opaque. You can't simply stuff the enclosure with damping material, for example, because that would defeat the whole object of the transparency. Likewise, internal wiring must be handled with due care and sensitivity.

These potential difficulties – and also the location of the crossover and the port – have all been handled with cunning creativity. Although the enclosure proper is undamped, a foam pad is fitted behind the driver cones, providing some degree of resistive damping and absorption, while keeping everything neat and tidy. The cabling, using flat-section wires, actually looks like a decorative motif. The port and the crossover network are both concealed within a chunky little plinth, but there's no spike provision to ensure secure floor coupling.

The main drivers consist of two apparently identical 150mm devices sourced from Triangle, one operating as a bass/mid unit, the other merely augmenting the bass region. Both have paper cones just 85mm in diameter, with wide pleated fabric surrounds. The tweeter here has a small 20mm metal dome, with short horn flare.

## SOUND QUALITY

Measured sensitivity is an entirely respectable 89dB, and the load should be easy to drive. Sited clear of walls, the bass alignment suited our listening room very well, giving even and smooth bass down to below 40Hz, and the total tonal balance is unusually flat overall, bar a significant notch centred on 800Hz (presumably due to the lack of enclosure damping).

This speaker makes voices (especially speech) sound unusually open and explicit, which is particularly convincing and effective at low listening levels, bringing great clarity to song lyrics. It's consequently very easy to get

into new material, however unfamiliar it may be, although the downside is that the sound can become a bit aggressive and edgy with any material that is poorly recorded.

**“The net result combines a wide dynamic range with good clarity and expression.”**

There is a measure of midband coloration, and this is most noticeable immediately after the speakers are initially connected up, adding a degree of 'cupped hands' character to voices, for example.

However, the ears do adjust to this quite quickly, so one quickly becomes aware that the Victoria has a major compensating strength in its exceptional speed and freedom from time-smear and overhang.

The net result combines a wide dynamic range with unusually good clarity and expression, plus an overall crispness that is rarely found in more conventional wood-bodied speakers. This is almost certainly partly down to the limited damping in both enclosure and drivers, but it's likely that the sheer stiffness of the glass itself also plays a role. Glass might in essence be a liquid, but its immensely high viscosity provides a stiffness that wood composites can't match. Already very effective when used in equipment supports, the Waterfall experience suggests it can be equally potent when applied to speakers.

There's no boxiness here, and absolutely no tendency for the sound to cluster around the speakers themselves. Stereo imaging is consequently very impressive, as the speakers seem to 'disappear' sonically. This leaves just the image, precisely focused and convincingly spread between and behind the speakers themselves.

The first reaction to seeing this speaker is to assume that the glass is a cosmetic gimmick with eye-candy appeal. While the good looks are a major plus – and a major reason why this relatively affordable design has made it into *The Collection* – this is nevertheless an exceptional hi-fi speaker in its own right, capable of doing justice to top-quality sources and amps. The Victoria might not match the sheer muscle and bass weight of some of its peers, but it more than makes up for this with fine agility and taut timing plus good dynamic range and expression. The exceptionally pretty face might be the first thing to grab the attention, but this is a real sonic performer, too. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

*See HFC 262 (January 2005) for our original review of this product*



## MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

For high-end surround sound, try this: Waterfall Victoria TWN (front L/R), Waterfall Angel (centre channel), Waterfall Iguascu TWN (rear L/R), Waterfall HUR-SUB (subwoofer)

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £4,600**





# TEAC Esoteric X-01

*Hailing from Japan, this audio-only SACD player costs nearly £9K – and it's not even top of the range*

PRICE: £8,995 CONTACT: Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.teac.com

**T**hese days, TEAC is best known to the UK public for its mini systems, and to the studio world for its Tascam subsidiary. But TEAC is also the parent company of Esoteric, its high-end sub-brand that's now present in the UK thanks to specialist distributor, Symmetry.

The X-01 sounds like a great candidate for a range topper. A purist audio-only disc player that costs almost £9K, all it does is play CDs and SACDs, the latter both two-channel and multichannel. But the X-01 can be used with an external master clock generator, the G-0, which doubles the price, and which makes a very audible difference based on what was heard at a recent press event to launch the Esoteric range in the UK. Above that there is a separate SACD disc transport and D/A converter which sells for about £25K, or £34K with the Master Clock Generator. Well, perhaps another day...

To suggest that the X-01 is fabulously built would be to seriously understate the position. The carcass is fabricated from thick alloy

panels, with the brand name engraved on the top, and finished to watch standards of precision on all surfaces. At a pinch the remote control could be useful for self defence, and the player weighs in at an outrageous 25kg. In operation, the loading drawer is perhaps the quietest and smoothest around – it makes the Krell SACD Standard, no slouch itself, sound asthmatic, yet wait times before play starts with the disc in the open drawer are quick at eight seconds for CD, and a respectable 15 seconds for SACD.

Highlights of the player include the superb, in-house-built VRDS mechanism, a heavy and high-inertia drive that is built with the same kind of care and much of the material content of a respectable turntable. Mechanically at least it leaves other mechanisms gasping in its wake, but the relatively high-inertia, full-width disc stabiliser and platter have not been allowed to impact on start-up times thanks to a sophisticated brushless, low-cogging, high-torque motor. Much of the design effort has gone into physically correcting vibrations,

and stabilising the discs and the geometry of the laser assembly, even at high rpm and for discs that are not perfectly concentric.

One aspect of the design is initially worrying, however: rather than process the DSD signal off-disc in its native bitstream form, it is converted to PCM for digital processing, which seems both unnecessary and almost certain to impact on performance because a lossy translation layer is being added to the process. Possible conspiracy theory reasoning could include legal ones relating to using a home-grown mechanism with the relevant DSD chips, but there are simpler and more benign possibilities. We asked Japan about this, and received the following, only slightly paraphrased response:

"The X-01 converts SACD (DSD) to PCM at 88.2kHz/24-bit resolution, and to analogue using a Burr-Brown PCM1704 DAC. From our experience, one-bit DAC DSD converters can produce a very smooth and beautiful sound... and are good at providing a fine surface texture... but we think it lacks a certain body





or muscle which is very important for music. We have not turned our back on one-bit DSD conversion permanently, but at present, we feel compelled to produce what's missing using a multibit PCM DAC. In the future, when one-bit/DSD DAC technology has improved to the point where it meets our requirements, we may consider switching".

Indeed, a cheaper, 'universal' Esoteric disc player does use DSD conversion. It should be noted that the bass management and speaker distance settings available through the X-01 would have been difficult to achieve in DSD.

#### SOUND QUALITY

The X-01 was used in a system with a Krell KAV-280P/KAV2250 pre/power, the latter switched for the Theta Enterprise monoblocks for part of the time, mostly with Revel Ultima Studio and Krell Resolution 2 speakers. Now, we can't tell you if the X-01 is the finest SACD player in the world, but it's surely a close run thing, and with the demise of the Krell KPS25, it's close to the top of the CD playing hierarchy too. For this test, it was compared to the Krell SACD Standard, one of the very few SACD players that is remotely in the same class, and there will undoubtedly be those who prefer the Krell. The latter has a slightly punchier, more agile quality to its sound, as well as being slicker and somehow more polished.

But the X-01 has something else going for it. For a start, it has virtually no digital signature: no grain, harshness or mechanical edge, yet this has been achieved without compromising detail. It is also quite unlike other SACD players in that it has tremendous rhythm and timing. It has a bold musculature where its competitors are a little more 'analogue' in character (which in the absence of a player in the X-01 class

for the music before this became apparent. Music I didn't like remained stubbornly unlikeable, even with the benefits of the X-01's capabilities, which simply ensured that I could hear even more clearly just what it was that I didn't like. This is a paradigm shift from the kind of performance that you might expect from equipment that does a better job of camouflaging the limitations of the

**“The long and the short is that the X-01 redefines the edge of the envelope for SACD replay, and in this respect it is a revelation.”**

is generally taken to be A Good Thing). All this goes hand in hand with a strong, solid and propulsive bass, a midband that has real layering in depth, and a treble that is airy and precisely detailed in a manner that has more in common with the best of DVD-Audio. This presumably is partly the legacy of the PCM conversion stage, but perhaps not. Disc player design is a holistic exercise, after all.

Over and above these basic nuts and bolts of the sound, there is something else going on: an ability to bring music to life in a way that makes the music itself special, or if you prefer, which helps it communicate better. I admit that I had to have a certain sympathy

reproduction system, but which at the same time takes the edge off the music (we might for convenience call this 'the valve syndrome').

The long and the short of it is that the X-01 redefines the edge of the envelope for SACD replay, and in this respect it is a revelation. But with music that has the intrinsic ability to grip emotionally, and to cause the hairs on the back of the neck to stand on tiptoes, the X-01 is almost unique in being an instrument that brings it to life. In its own disarmingly uncontained and direct way, this player sets down a marker that makes the high selling price seem nothing less than fair. **HFC**

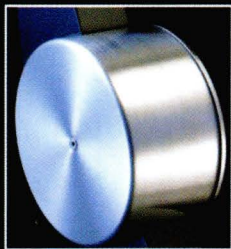
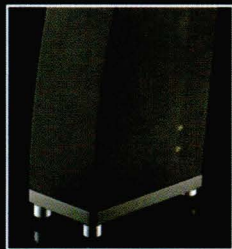
*Alvin Gold*



The new Reference 3  
with CDT II™ Tweeter Technology

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# nonconformist

*adj.* an individual who does not comply with conventional norms or socially approved patterns of behavior or thought



# T+A V10

*An innovative, German-made valve amp that's full of guts and drama*

PRICE: £4,600 CONTACT: Transparent Distribution, Coxmoor Road, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire NG17 5AA ☎ 01623 517000 🌐 www.taelektroakustik.de

**T**+A has come in from the cold in the last couple of years, and you can put this down to two factors. One is an increased openness by the manufacturer, which has talked to the press to explain what they are doing, and why they are doing it their way. The other, coincidentally announced at a press open day about two years ago, was the new inexplicably titled V series. T+A was already a prolific full-line producer of hi-fi and home cinema hardware, the announcement was that henceforth they would also produce a select line of high-grade audiophile components as part of their 25th anniversary programme: the valve integrated amplifier featured here, a record player and slightly further down the road, a stereo SACD player, also with a complement of valves in its output stage.

First and most obviously, the V10 is a visually stunning concoction of matt silver, grey for the main structure and black mesh covering the valves with a thick Perspex top plate. It really is strikingly original, and looks more like a cityscape in profile than a hi-fi component. It is surely worth the price of admission for its appearance alone, which is both contemporary and antiquated at once – quintessentially retro in fact. This in short is an amplifier that makes a loud and clear statement, and it does so even before you turn it on.

What ticks beneath the skin is a Class AB amplifier with an output rating of 80 watts per channel over a full 100kHz bandwidth (deemed necessary for the SACD player). It is driven by a curiously complex internal gain path known as SPPP (Single Primary Push Pull) which addresses the crossover notching associated with non-Class A amplifiers, but without the inefficiency and waste heat output of Class A. Rather than attempt a full explanation, perhaps the overriding point here is that SPPP can be judged by the way it performs, but that it is a curiously complex circuit that uses a multitude of valves and from our understanding a typical valve producer would have little chance of achieving consistency and reliability with such a circuit.

Another striking feature of the amplifier is that it is controlled by a microprocessor that is involved in a range of housekeeping duties, such as ensuring a slow turn-on of the high voltage circuits to reduce wear, monitoring hours of use to ensure adequate warning is given when a new valve set is required, controlling the ultra-quiet cooling fan, even monitoring audio signal levels and the characteristics of the load the amplifier is connected to.

## SOUND QUALITY

Much of the musical experience of this amplifier was in combination with the matching G10R turntable (reviewed on p41), which provides a line-level output into the amplifier. However, this was before spending some time with the McIntosh MA2275, another integrated valve amp with some of the same properties, but more history and – dare we say – breeding. But even without the benefit of a side by side comparison, there are some features in common. For example, they're both real powerhouses, which can barrel along with high octane music with gusto and dynamism, but with none of the

wimpiness that too often comes as part of the bargain with valves. If you're looking for a valve amp that'll deliver guts and drama, take a listen to the T+A.

In fairness, the V10 is not the most detailed and transparent amplifier around, but there is an underlying vitality and solidity to the sound that leads to a feeling of presence; of real music really taking place in the space just in front of the listener. It has a physical quality

**“This is an amplifier that makes a loud and clear statement, even before you turn it on.”**

that is too often missing from high fidelity when driving appropriate loudspeakers, and as pointed out in the original review, the Lumley Lampros 300AB turned out to work particularly well.

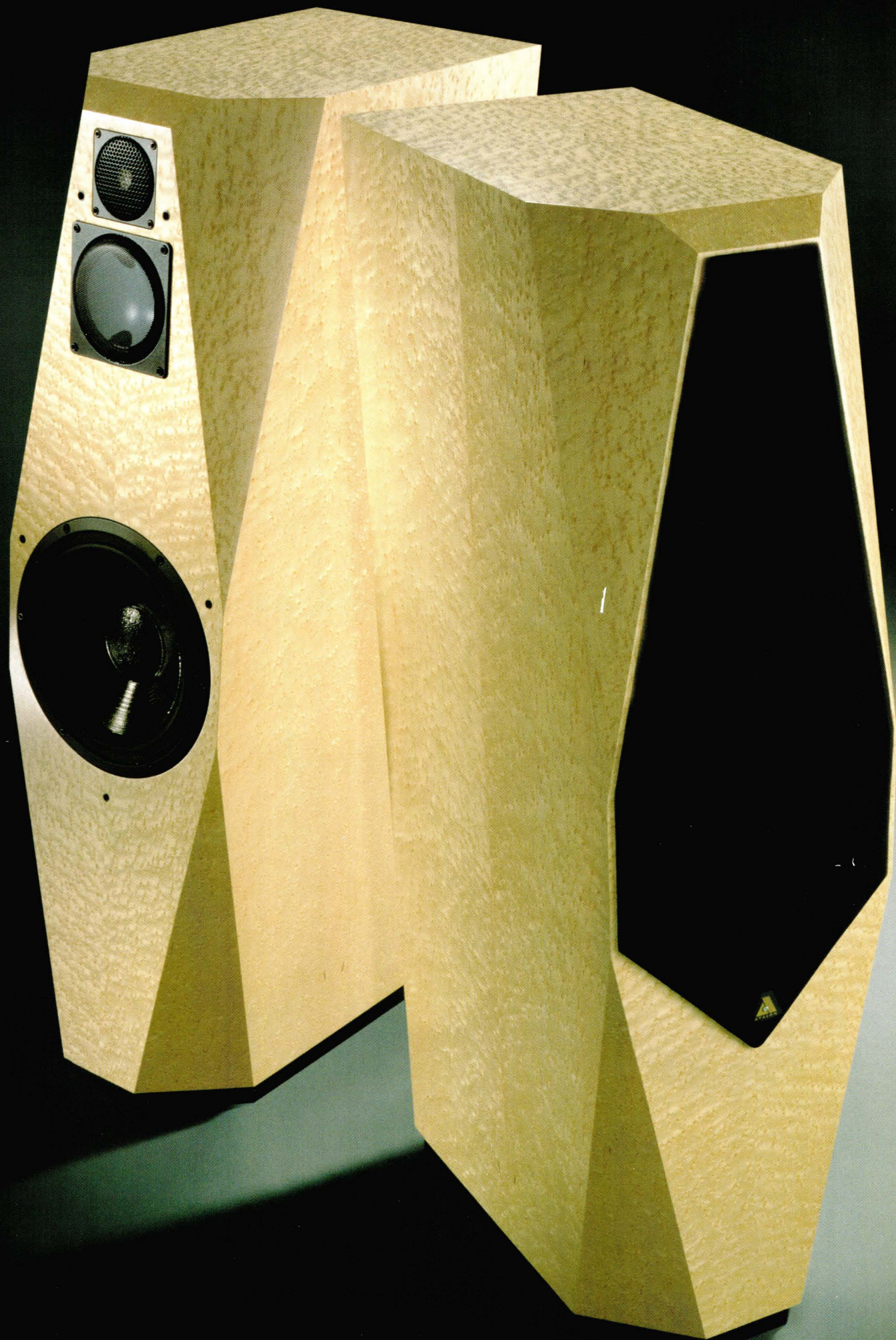
From later experimentation, suitability extends to the majority of mid-sized or larger moving coil loudspeakers – designs with some muscle and drive. There is nothing clinical about this amplifier; it is simply a thoroughly stylish performer (in every sense) that can be safely put in charge of large and/or low sensitivity speakers, and which is marvellously adept at delivering an enjoyable musical experience. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 261 (December 2005) for our original review of this product*









# Avalon Eidolon Diamond

*When it comes to diamond tweeters transforming high-end loudspeakers, Avalon got there first*

PRICE: £33,000 per pair CONTACT: Audiofreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7QT ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.audiofreaks.co.uk

**T**he combination of elegant styling, fine finish, good materials science and – probably most useful of all – a good set of ears in owner/chief designer Neil Patel have all combined to make Avalon Acoustics one of the most significant names in the high-end pantheon of recent years.

Right now, there is a lot of noise being made about diamond tweeters, largely because of the new high-end range by B&W. Because B&W is huge and home-grown, it would be easy to forget that it's not the first brand to develop a high-end speaker with this type of tweeter. Avalon Acoustics took the already popular and successful Eidolon floorstanding loudspeaker and added a diamond tweeter, developed by Accuton. This dramatically raised the price of the Eidolon to £33,000, but it's a necessary increase that also takes in the attendant improvements that need to be made to the crossover, the drivers and the cabinet itself to deal with so demanding a tweeter. These differences are not immediately noticeable on view – even comparing the two side by side will not show the differences – but they are there and unfortunately it means the standard Eidolon cannot be upgraded to Diamond status.

The backswept, three-way, reflex-ported Avalon Eidolon cabinet is a tall, elegant and rather uncompromising design; not in the brutal charm of Wilson Audio, but much more of a physical statement of intent than a normal rectangular box. It stands almost 110cm tall and 425cm deep and each speaker weighs in at a healthy 68kg; you'll also need plenty of space both to the sides and behind the speaker. Then you'll need a good distance between you and the time-aligned front baffle. In short, unless you have a room at least 5x8m, the Eidolon or Eidolon Diamond are just not for you. Bass delivery down to 24Hz, with high frequencies up to 100kHz (+/- 1.5dB, in anechoic conditions) also suggests the speaker needs plenty of room to breathe.

This exceptional frequency response comes from three drive units: the bass is covered by a 280mm Nomex-Kevlar composite driver (making the bass both fire-proof and bullet-proof – useful if you enjoy playing music in a war zone), midrange is covered by a 90mm inverted ceramic dome and treble is handled by the diamond tweeter, a 20mm inverted dome design. At the bottom of the speaker is the large downward-firing port and terminals, so no ugly back panel.

The diamond tweeter concept is extremely useful for audio. Being exceptionally hard

and rigid, it makes metal dome tweeters seem soggy and soft, but also means the diaphragm itself is exceptionally light and therefore exceptionally fast, too. It also has considerably better thermal properties than metal or fabric domes, which means it can handle higher power levels than conventional tweeter designs. The sonic effect of all this is the tweeter retains its sonic properties through a greater range of higher frequencies and volume levels, and those properties are closer to the notional ideal tweeter than any conventional dome design.

For all its high-tech approach to transducer making, the speaker doesn't present too demanding a load. It has a claimed sensitivity of a moderate 87dB and nominal impedance of four ohms, although this can drop to 3.6 ohms at a minimum. Avalon recommends amplifiers between 50 watts and 500 watts per channel. In short, the load the Eidolon Diamond presents is no more demanding than its peers and should suit high-end amps, save for single-ended triode designs.

## SOUND QUALITY

When you deal with the really top end of loudspeaker designs, descriptions are more observations instead of criticisms. And as such, there are no criticisms to be made of the Eidolon Diamond, just observations.

The intrinsic sound of the Avalon is one of ultimate insight into the music with a sense of flow both to the music and the

Fortunately, it can also work its magic on every other instrument or combination of instruments. It presents a very distinctly detailed presentation, with one of the most refined and precise soundstages you will hear from any speaker, regardless of price.

Part of that acclimatisation process means you need to get used to the level of dynamic resolution on offer. You learn how to listen all over again, just like you learned how to listen to classical music or understand jazz. You become gradually more aware of the dynamic shading on offer and how much more informative that is compared to other speakers. The Eidolon Diamond gets into the inner detail and inner dynamics of the performance, and once you begin to understand this, it's hard to go back to normal speaker sounds.

Other speakers seem perhaps less filled with micro-dynamic insights. You get the whole sound of the orchestra, and the tiny changes in level from instrument to instrument – while other speakers concentrate on the bigger picture first, the Eidolon Diamond tracks the little changes. Yet it doesn't make the common error of only looking at the little picture, it also takes in the dynamic scale of the performance as a whole.

One of the most common remarks about the Eidolon Diamond presentation is how sounds rise out of a noiseless blackness, and this is a comment with a lot going for it. Sounds really do appear out of nothingness

**“Sounds really do appear out of nothingness and form in front of the listener.”**

performance that is never less than absolutely compelling. It's a seductive sound: big but not lush, precise yet not overtly analytical.

It's not one of those immediate sounds, it's a slow burner. Part of this is acclimatisation, as you get used to a less coloured sound than you were hitherto used to.

This is unquestionably one of the most coherent and articulate speakers on the market. Female voices have a breathy, natural quality entirely free from the spit and spitch that can sometimes undermine an otherwise first-rate performance. Perhaps this is why the female voice is always one of the most important indicators of hi-fi performance. And it's an indicator of the quality of the Eidolon Diamond – female voices sound more natural and real through this speaker than any other.

and form in front of the listener within a deep, wonderfully wide and high soundstage. It's an uncanny presentation, as if every other speaker has a higher noise floor.

The Eidolon Diamond speaker is one of the most beautiful sounding speakers money can buy, yet its beauty doesn't come from trying to make the sounds deliberately beautiful. Instead, the Eidolon Diamond makes the sound just that bit more understandable and musically communicative. There are more direct, more immediate sounding speakers available, and there are more obviously romantic ones too, but none that provide so much insight and musical entertainment. This is a real grower, and one that will stay in your system for many, many years. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*





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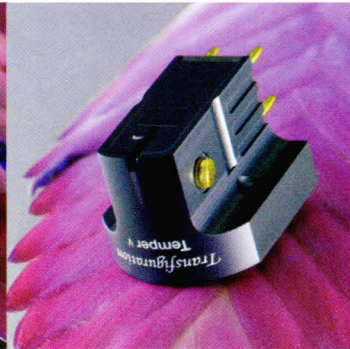
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# Van den Hul Condor XCM

*This tailor-made moving coil cartridge provides far more 'Condor moments' than a fully-charged pipe*

PRICE: £2,400 CONTACT: Henley Designs, Unit 11, Moorbrook, Southmead Industrial Park, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7HP ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.henleydesigns.co.uk

Just prior to our review of the most recent moving coil cartridge to join the impressive van den Hul line-up, we visited the man himself at his farmhouse in Holland. This building previously housed vdH the company, so there's plenty of space... or at least there was before AJ van den Hul filled it up with rare vinyl and a treasure trove of rare and beautiful hi-fi. And that's just the listening room!

The cartridge-building workshop is tiny but well stocked with the bits and bobs gathered over thirty years of cartridge building. When he finishes his day job running the cable company that bears his name, AJ retreats to this room to build cartridges to the specifications of a small but adoring group of customers.

**“Its ability to dig out depth and feeling from records has been an ongoing source of delight.”**

All of the open-bodied designs can be customised and of those the Condor is the least expensive. A number of parameters can be varied so that the cartridge will match the end user's tonearm, phono stage and listening tastes. AJ can make high or low compliance suspensions, though he prefers the former because it allows lower tracking weight and thus is more vinyl friendly. Coil wire can be had in copper, silver, gold and even platinum, and the amount of turns on the cross-shaped coil former can be altered to change output levels. So, when we review a Condor we are in fact listening to a moving target – if you want

a cartridge with a more spacious sound or one that seriously kicks buttock, then a Condor can be built that way for you.

The Condor is actually a hybrid of the £1,200 Frog and the £2,800 Colibri. Like the latter, it has only a single samarium cobalt magnet behind the coils, but it uses a Frog generator along with a vdH 1 tip on a shorter boron cantilever, the whole moving mass being lower on the Condor. One unique feature is the little red patch of foam-backed velvet which damps the cartridge and helps the Condor completely defeat needle talk.

## SOUND QUALITY

This moving coil design produces three-dimensional stereo in a way that few other source components we've heard can – the voices and instruments that it extracts from vinyl have a presence and realism that is uncanny. Voices have a depth and shape to them that is entirely captivating, while drums have a power and transient attack that makes for gripping entertainment. This is not a particularly fast cartridge – it prefers timbral resolve to pace and is thus more relaxed than some, but it's no slacker either. Electric guitar can slice into the soundscape and percussion delivers a vivacity that beggars belief.

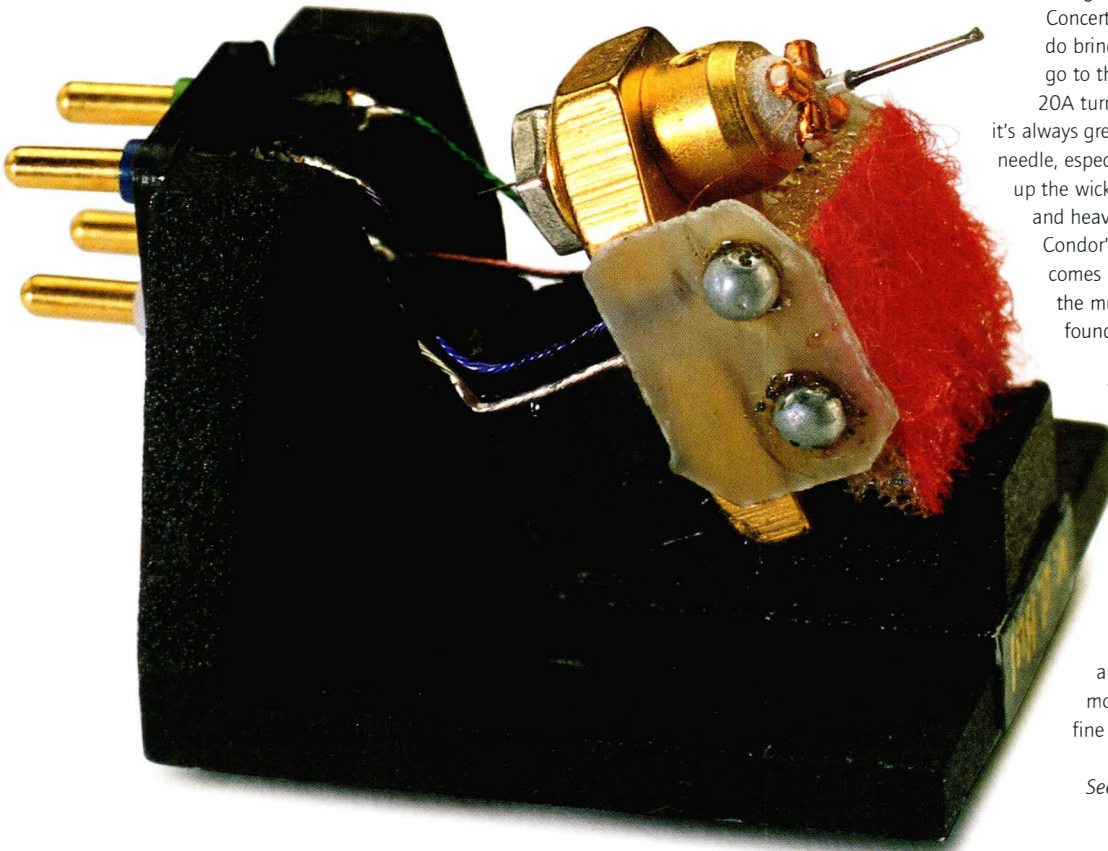
The Condor is also very strong on the shape of note. All manner of instruments and voices, from low to high registers, have a solidity and presence that makes for genuinely architectural imaging with the right piece of vinyl. In the time since our original review, we have been using this cartridge pretty much non-stop and its ability to carry on digging out more depth and feeling from our records has been an ongoing source of delight. The only area where newcomers have managed to get the upper hand is that of rhythm and timing. Pacier

cartridges such as the Clearaudio

Concerto and My Sonic Lab's Eminent do bring a bit more get up and go to the party and suit the SME 20A turntable a little better. Yet it's always great to get back to this fine needle, especially when you want to turn up the wick and enjoy something hard and heavy. It's at this point that the Condor's bass weight and articulation comes into its own, underpinning the music and providing a solid foundation for the soundstage.

Of the Condor's various flavours, the metal-bodied XCM model (our review sample) seems to give a good balance of spaciousness and dynamics. But if you prefer more of one than the other, simply pick a different version! Whichever one you choose, The Condor is a stunning phono cartridge that more than upholds van den Hul's fine sonic reputation. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy  
See HFC 265 (April 2005) for our original review of this product*







KRELL  
KAV-280p

KRELL  
KAV-2250

KAV-5500  
KRELL

050



# Krell KAV-280p and KAV-2250

*Pure pre/power class from the doyen of high-end solid state electronics*

PRICE: KAV-280p: £3,299; KAV-2250: £4,490 CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

**T**hese two Krell products are both two-channel components: the KAV-280p is a preamplifier and the KAV-2250 is a matching power amp, with the common criteria being as much aesthetic as electrical. But both can play a role in a multichannel audio or home cinema system. The preamp, for example, is fitted with a feature called Theater Throughput which fixes the gain setting and allows an external processor (such as the matching Krell Showcase) to control all speakers together. Similarly, the KAV-2250 is just one of two matching power amplifiers. The other is the KAV-3250, which is identical in power output per channel, but has three channels. Along with one or two KAV-2250s, the KAV-3250 can be used to meet the power demands of a very classy 5.1 or 7.1 system.

In other respects, the feature set is much as you might expect. The preamp has five inputs, of which four are single-ended, and one of which is a tape circuit, all at line level. The final input is balanced. There are two outputs, one single-ended and one balanced, and the power amp has matching inputs of both types. Other circuitry includes an external infrared input on the preamp, which may be used with touch screen controllers, and both units will respond to an external 12-volt trigger, or generate a trigger signal to wake up an external system component. A remote control is included with the preamp – a slim, compact unit with domed membrane switches. It's capable of controlling a complete stereo system, and it accesses the balance control, which cannot be adjusted in any other way.

The power amp is specified in typical Krell fashion as doubling in power output when the load impedance is halved, which indicates that current starvation is unlikely to occur in practice. The KAV-250 is rated at 250 watts per channel into eight ohms, and 500 watts into four ohms.

The internal architecture of the two Krell components is balanced, which suggests that optimum performance will be achieved when using the balanced option. As expected, both units are well endowed, the power amp tipping the scales at an impressive 29.5kg, a large part of which is devoted to a massive 2000VA toroidal transformer, and there are two sets of 14 parallel bipolar output devices to drive the load. The preamp circuit configuration is Class A as well as balanced, and employs Krell Current mode technology (KCT) gain stages. Fully discrete power supplies are available for the analogue and digital control circuits.

Physically the KAV-280p and the KAV-2250 follow standard KAV practice. The structures are fabricated entirely from alloy (non ferrous) panels, with the rounded corner blocks adding a distinctive touch.

We have had access to these two Krell components intermittently over several months and have been able to use them with a variety of loudspeakers and source components, including in recent times the new MartinLogan Summit and the latest version of the Krell SACD Standard player, both of which are covered elsewhere in this issue. The latter is a superb high resolution source, and gives the amp no excuse for getting it wrong, and the Summit is by far MartinLogan's finest speaker to date, and a searching test of the rest of the system.

**“Imagery is deftly handled, with the usual measured transparency that is so much a part of the ongoing Krell legacy.”**

The only operational caveat I noticed was that the power amp puts a heavy instantaneous load on the mains supply, which 'ducks' momentarily, dimming lights and the like when switched on, but it didn't blow any fuses. In normal use, the KAV-2250 will remain connected to the mains supply, and switched to and from standby using the front panel power switch which avoids the massive inrush of current. The other point to notice is that both products need to be run in over a long period, some tens of hours at a minimum, and a lot longer to reach their peak. The power amp is less critical in this respect than the preamp, and its probably best to leave the latter switched on if possible – it runs cool and is not power hungry.

## SOUND QUALITY

The reality is that it is difficult to differentiate between the two components sonically: the pre and power amps appear to be of like mind. They're tonally cool and clean, nothing less than exquisitely detailed and just a tad on the lean, dry side of neutral. It is a balance that works very well with many larger systems, including those involving Krell's own Resolution 2 speaker, which is also reviewed in this issue. It also works well with other wide bandwidth speakers, generating a sound that scales naturally according to the instrumental and vocal forces involved, so

that a solo singer, for example, sounds agile and relatively small, as in real life. It may not always be ideal with smaller, bass-light loudspeakers, however, where the results sometimes sound rather small scale overall.

Tastes in amplification tend to vary with the individual, and to each his own. This amp won't appeal to the valve aficionado, but its cool clarity has a cerebral kind of appeal. In a good system, and properly warmed up at the beginning of a session, we found it unusually transparent, in fact it was very difficult to latch onto its character at all. However, its ability to resolve fine detail is also apparent, and so is the superb bass, always a strong point with this marque. Although it may sound lean in balance in some systems, bass extension seems to go

almost subterranean. There is a texture and a feeling of understated power that is almost in a class of its own. Needless to say, there are no issues concerning tunefulness, and none of the subliminally perceived 'tugging' of pitch, or the detached, slow quality that you will hear from some even quite exotic amplifiers.

Imagery is also deftly handled, with the usual measured transparency that is so much a part of the ongoing Krell legacy. The Krell images with precision, with a clear idea of image depth, often forward of the speaker plane, though this seems to depend more on the character of the loudspeakers than the amplifier.

Make no mistake, this is a truly first class amplifier pairing. Its qualities are arguably a little too analytical to suit everyone's tastes, and it doesn't have the smoothly rounded quality that makes almost everything listenable. It does nothing to sanitise or cover inadequacies. On the other hand it is a particularly good tool for exploring high resolution recordings, and to this extent the pair make an obvious partner for the Krell SACD Standard player. What it does have is the lightning fast reflexes that allow it to track changes in musical and dynamic expression with great accuracy, and this is also an amplifier that is very difficult to drive beyond its musical capabilities. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



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# Dali Helicon 400

*This Danish speaker is both beautifully crafted and technically innovative*

PRICE: £2,999 per pair CONTACT: Dali UK, Lyde House, Greywell Road, Up Nately, Hook, Hampshire RG27 9PJ ☎ 0845 6443537 🌐 www.dali-uk.co.uk

**D**ali – the letters stand for ‘Danish audiophile loudspeaker industries’ – has a large product portfolio, with the three-strong Helicon series sitting quite close to the top. This heftily built Helicon 400 floorstander costs £2,999 and comes with rather more than its fair share of special features, including a very classy, lacquer-over-real-wood finish.

The speaker looks fashionably slim from the front, with elegant extra scalloping each side of the tweeter module, but has considerable front-to-back depth, and a chamfered plinth, which ensures impressive stability. Generous 8mm spikes should provide good floor coupling, but are only locked by thumbwheels that can tend to work loose.

Under the beautiful finish, the enclosure sides are formed into a shallow curve, so that the back is significantly narrower than the front. This not only looks good, it adds considerable stiffness, avoids focusing internal standing waves, and distributes reflections. Further stiffening is supplied by internal braces and partitions; a small sealed chamber at the base keeps the crossover clear of internal pressure changes and vibrations.

The four drivers are in a ‘two-and-two-halves-way’ configuration: it’s essentially a two-way design, with the main crossover at the usual 3kHz. Twin terminal pairs allow bi-wire or bi-amp connection. The lower bass/mid driver is used to augment the region below 700Hz, while the ribbon tweeter above the conventional dome in the treble module only comes in above 13kHz.

The two main drivers both have 165mm cast frames with 125mm diameter pulp cones, impregnated with long wood fibres. Each operates into its own sub-enclosure, and each is reflex-loaded by its own rear port. The treble module mounts a 25mm fabric dome and a 10x55mm ribbon device on a single alloy chassis, to ensure fine mechanical integrity.

Measurements point towards a very impressive performance overall, with an exceptionally smooth and neutral frequency response through the broad midband and treble, and just a very mild unevenness through the presence zone. The bass is deep and reasonably even,

if a shade strong below 60Hz, while the extreme top end is also just a touch stronger than average. Sensitivity measures a healthy 89-90dB, though amplifier current demands are a little on the high side.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Helicon 400 is one of the most neutral speakers we’ve encountered, both in its overall tonal balance, and also in a quite beautiful freedom from boxiness. The extreme bass and treble both make you aware of their presence occasionally, but never become

**“Shut your eyes and you simply aren’t aware of the location of the two speakers.”**

distractingly obtrusive. Indeed, the bass is clean, powerful and deep, adding convincing scale and weight without unwanted thump or thickening. And, if the top end has a slight tendency to draw attention to itself, it does so with such silky smooth sweetness that the result is a little extra air and detail, with no unpleasantness.

Imaging is superbly spacious and ‘out of the box’, with precise focus and good depth perspectives. Shut your eyes and you simply aren’t aware of the location of the two speakers, merely of a soundstage spreading out between, around and behind them. Any material involving acoustic instruments and unamplified voices, using simple miking in a spacious acoustic, was particularly effective. Colorations are very well controlled, with just a little extra nasality and a slightly ‘pinched’ character audible on speech.

Ultimately, the midband is just a little lacking in both transparency and dynamic tension, perhaps because the slight top and bottom excess leave the middle frequencies sounding a touch laid back. But this speaker proved very adept at revealing the differences when components were changed elsewhere in the chain. The very superior inherent neutrality, combined with the wide dynamic range and fine coherence, made it very easy to hear the changes made when swapping around source components and accessories.

Although a ‘two-and-two-halves-way’ configuration is rare, the Helicon 400 provides strong evidence that such an approach can deliver excellent results. In essence, it combines the fine coherence of a simple two-way design with the extra extension at both frequency extremes provided by the additional drive units – an effective mix indeed. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

*See HFC 264 (March 2005) for our original review of this product*



## MAKING IT MULTICHANNEL

For high-end surround sound, try this: Dali Helicon 400 (front L/R), Dali Helicon C200 (centre channel), Dali Helicon W200 (rear L/R), Dali Helicon S600 (subwoofer)

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £7,396**







# Clearlight Audio Private Edition

*It may not be a Diamond, but Clearlight's less expensive new speaker still sparkles*

PRICE: £6,995 per pair CONTACT: Activ Distribution, Unit 16, Plantagenet House, Kingsclere Industrial Park, Kingsclere, Hampshire RG20 4SW ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.clearlight-audio.de

**C**learlight Audio is a small German brand, headed by the intensely enthusiastic but very likeable Kurt Olbert. The company has developed a special Resonance Damping Compound (RDC), featured in a successful line of isolation cones and other accessories, which is why Clearlight's products are distributed here in Britain by accessory specialist and Isotek manufacturer Activ Distribution. By the same token, Clearlight acts as the German distributor for the Isotek mains conditioners.

The first speaker to appear under the Clearlight Audio marque was the extravagant Diamond Symphony Edition – a two-box, three-driver floorstander that costs £12,000 per pair, and features elaborately shaped and beautifully finished high-gloss cabinetwork. This is still the only speaker mentioned on Clearlight Audio's website at the time of writing, though a newer, cheaper and less attractive model was on display at the Munich High End Society show in May 2005.

First impressions might be that this is just a pared-down econo-version of the DSE, though in reality the similarity is deceptive, and this £6,995 Private Edition is quite different in many respects. It might also be a two-box three-driver floorstander, albeit with a much less complex enclosure and a black or grey Nextel finish, but thereafter the two diverge. The PE is a full three-way design, with a very different driver line-up and rather different basic intention for the sonic performance.

According to Kurt, the Diamond Symphony has greater transparency, dynamic range and powers of analysis, but the Private Edition – as its name implies – started out as a speaker that friends had asked him to build, with the main priority on delivering high musical enjoyment in the home. A key engineering target was to create a speaker capable of accurately reproducing a broad-band impulse, one that was essentially phase-accurate across most of the audio band. This combines the coherence of a single full-range driver with the even dispersion of a multi-way.

The Private Edition is commendably compact and discreet, its multi-angular construction and matt Nextel finish giving something of a Stealth appearance (or disappearance). It is substantially built, registering 38kg on the scales despite compact dimensions, and comes in two sections, both irregularly shaped to spread out internal reflections and standing waves.

The hefty bass enclosure houses a 280mm woofer made by German manufacturer Eton

and is equipped with a Hexacone – a Kevlar/Nomex honeycomb sandwich – and is loaded by a very heavily damped reflex port. It sits on RDC cone feet in place of spikes, and a single terminal pair takes the input signal, passing mid and top signals into the upper enclosure via a multi-way locking DIN plug. RDC is used internally to aid enclosure damping, but particularly to control vibration in the crossover network components.

The much smaller sealed mid/treble enclosure also has RDC cone feet that fit into similar sockets set in the bass module's top surface. A significant gap between the two modules is deemed important for midrange quality. A 125mm Eton Hexacone driver is used for the midrange, above which is

**“The lack of low bass was obvious, but so was this speaker's terrific time-coherence.”**

positioned a unique tweeter with a 25mm cone diaphragm made from natural chitin (pronounced kai-tin) – the stuff that forms the shells of beetles, prawns and the like.

The theory behind the Resonance Damping Compound is interesting, the intention being to create a deliberately non-homogenous material to inhibit the transmission of vibrations. The compound is made by bonding granules of different materials that have similar mass but which vary from one end to the other of the elasticity spectrum, thus creating a material that damps resonances equally across the whole audio band.

## SOUND QUALITY

The in-room measurements highlighted some interesting characteristics. The spec claims a rather modest 86dB sensitivity, which exactly corresponds with our findings. In context, an impedance that stays above five-ohms throughout is only to be expected, though substantial unevenness does indicate a quite complex crossover network.

Rather more surprising is the bass end, where there's no sign of either reflex or sealed-box resonances, confirming the remarkably tight damping here. Further evidence is seen in the in-room responses which, despite a large bass driver and generous enclosure, show a very dry bass alignment, gently rolling off below 45Hz. Free space siting is certainly preferable here, but close-to-wall positioning should not cause undue thickening or heaviness. And from

45Hz upward the balance is beautifully flat and smooth, holding within impressively tight  $\pm 3$ dB limits right across the band.

It was a tough task to expect the Private Editions to follow the massive B&W 800Ds (p50) into the listening room, but they stood up to the inevitable comparison remarkably well. The lack of powerful low bass here was immediately obvious, but so was this speaker's terrific time-coherence, which brought brilliant openness and realism to voice reproduction, clarifying lyrics that had previously been difficult to discern.

One can argue that some more bass weight would be desirable – Clearlight is actually hoping to introduce partnering subwoofers at some point in the future – but the bass it does

deliver is qualitatively quite exquisite: tight, quick, exceptionally coherent, and apparently entirely free from resonant overhang. The transitions between the drivers seem audibly seamless, and if the overall balance is perhaps just a shade on the thin side – the top end does sound just a little stronger than average, and this is more obvious because of the tight, dry bass – its beautifully integrated coherence still sounds supremely natural. Poor quality, edgy recordings can sound rather exposed, but by the same token the best recordings, on both vinyl and CD, sound wonderfully clean, clear and open.

The Proms season provided excellent opportunities to hear the speakers with naturally-miked live orchestral transmissions set in a large acoustic. The dry bass does dilute the full impact of the Albert Hall, but imaging is thoroughly convincing, and the ability to convey the texture of massed strings is very impressive. Brass instruments are particularly taxing to reproduce convincingly, and here again the Private Edition demonstrated comfortable superiority, while applause too sounds very realistic.

Sensitivity is modest, as is bass weight and extension, and the very plain finish won't suit everyone. But those drawbacks pale into insignificance. The freedom from time-smear, lack of boxiness, very superior neutrality and top-to-bottom consistency single this out as one of the most entertaining and enjoyable speakers on the planet. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*



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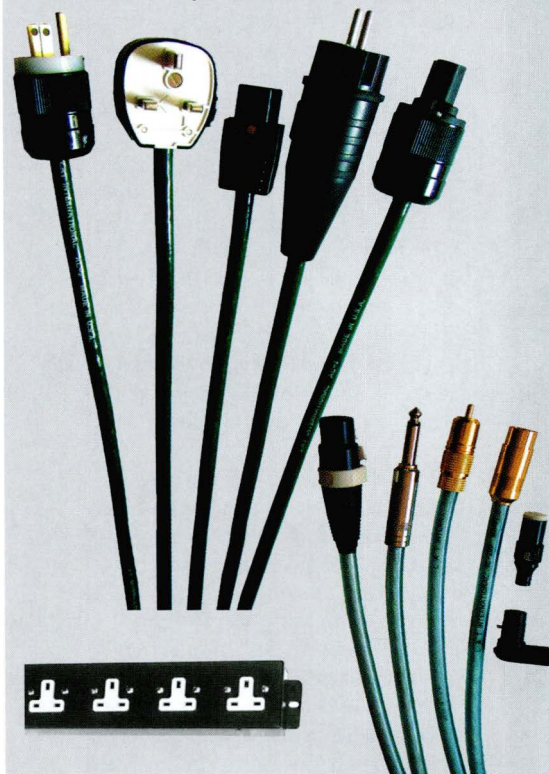
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# Denon DVD-A1XV and AVC-A1XV

*This 'universal' DVD player and amplifier combo is among the most sophisticated available*

PRICE: DVD-A1XV: £2,450, AVC-A1XV: £4,000 CONTACT: Denon UK, Chiltern Hill, Chalfont St Peter, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL9 9UG ☎ 01234 741200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

It's difficult to know where to start with this Denon pairing. It's even harder to know where to finish in a review of inevitably finite length when discussing two components as extravagantly equipped as these. So let's start with the observation that these are both groundbreaking products, with the widest range of features amongst their contemporaries. In itself this is no surprise. Having trailed Pioneer in product innovation for some years (after its VSA-AX10 realigned the goalposts for battleship multichannel amplifiers and affordable 'universal' DVD players), Denon has established a firm lead over most comers with its vigorous DVD development programme, culminating in the DVD-A1XV. Now is the time to leapfrog the opposition with its new top-of-the-line multichannel amplifier, the AVC-A1XV.

**“The sound is large in scale and impressive in its solidity, with very fine detail resolution.”**

As is so often these days, the story is one told most eloquently by what you can see around the back rather than from the front panels, which are well engineered, but essentially bland, and certainly no indication of the power locked beneath the bonnets. Both units are very well equipped, not only with analogue inputs and outputs, but also with a vast range of digital interconnections, including the proprietary Denon Link, which has just been upgraded to 'Third Edition' and now supports transfer of DSD data across the bus for processing in the amplifier. All AVC-A1XVs are so enabled, as are current production DVD-A1XVs. Existing players which aren't can be upgraded via Denon dealers, so nobody loses out, and in principle at least, sound quality using the link should outperform any other available means of transmitting high resolution audio data. However, we are not in a position to confirm this definitively at present.

The DVD-A1XV is a high-grade universal player, capable of dealing with almost any type of audio and video disc, with analogue stereo outputs available in balanced form in addition to the multichannel single-ended analogue and digital outputs. What really sets this player apart from the rest, however, is the domestic version of the ultra

high-speed Silicon Optix HQV (Hollywood Quality Video) processor, for which the DVD-A1XV is the launch vehicle. Exactly what this chipset does is a subject that could fill a book, but boiled down to its essentials, it does what is normally done by Faroudja, namely motion adaptive noise reduction, scaling, detail enhancement and the like.

The matching amplifier is a truly massive (28cm tall, 44kg) monster capable of processing up to 18 channels simultaneously, its party piece being the ability to feed up to two completely independent 5.1-channel systems simultaneously using all ten of its on-board power amplifiers, or up to four systems from independent sources in alternative configurations. Options of audiophile interest include the ability to bi-amplify up to five channels, and for multichannel operation, the Denon has a remarkably sophisticated automated room set-up and speaker equalisation package called Audyssey MultEQ.

## SOUND QUALITY

There's no point in pretending that the Denon combination makes sense in purely sound quality terms for the stereo listener. It is simply too fully equipped to satisfy the purist, and anyway in audio, as in so many other spheres, less really is more. But if you understand the nature of the beast there's no way you'll end up disappointed.

First and foremost, DVD player performance is stupendous, with improvements in picture quality from DVD that go a long way to closing the gap with the high-definition video demonstrations you may have seen at recent shows. What's more, the amplifier has superb multichannel steering, on a par or even better than just about any multichannel amplifier in its class. Add to this some serious sonic grunt, good dynamic ability and impressive consistency from format to format, and you've got a sound that excels with all manner of multichannel material, both music and movie based.

Even in two-channel mode, the Denon pair performs with surprising flair and competence. The sound is large in scale and impressive in its solidity, with particularly fine detail resolution, and even a more than acceptable boogie factor. Clearly, a good, dedicated two-channel system could do even more and do it better at this price, but this Denon pair is a superb one-stop shop with which we should effectively be free of the danger of technological obsolescence. Just make sure you have strong shelves. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold  
See HFC 266 (May 2005)  
for our original review of  
this product*









# Isotek Titan and Nova

*In a bid to design the ultimate mains conditioners, Isotek has employed some radical new thinking*

PRICE: Titan: £1,425; Nova: £1,495 CONTACT: Activ Distribution, Unit 16, Plantagenet House, Kingsclere Industrial Park, Kingsclere, Hampshire RG20 4SW ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.activdistribution.com

**T**he importance of the quality of mains electricity on the sound of a hi-fi system only really began to be appreciated during the 1980s. Prior to that you could argue that our hi-fi systems lacked the resolution to reveal the quality of the mains, or that the mains were much cleaner than they are today.

What used to be a relatively clean and pure 50Hz sinewave, delivering 240 volts from a very low source impedance (and therefore able to deliver prodigious quantities of current, rapidly and on demand) has become increasingly polluted by the myriad of new electrical devices we've been bringing into our homes over the past two decades. At the same time, the radio airwaves have become increasingly congested with mobile communications, which can be picked up by mains leads acting as aerials.

Mains pollution of various kinds has now become a fact of hi-fi life, and a number of different strategies have evolved to deal with it. The trouble is, it's difficult to predict how any given treatment will work in any given system or environment. One thing alone is sure: that mains matters, and this fact needs to be taken on board by anyone putting together a serious hi-fi system.

Isotek is one of the more recent arrivals on the scene, and it's no exaggeration to say that it has revolutionised British attitudes to mains conditioning. Its history has been short, but also turbulent. The first generation of models was based on using large – and ultimately gigantic – isolation transformers, but the company's founders split up and one left to found a rival called Isol-8. The others then set about creating a new generation of models based on sophisticated filtering, and with circuitry expressly designed to supply massive peak current capability.

Isotek has a wide range of mains-related products, starting at quite modest prices, but this review is specifically looking at the top two models, the Titan and the Nova, two slightly different and very sophisticated filter-based mains conditioners that may be used in tandem in order to provide the ultimate Isotek performance.

The two have much in common, but also significant differences. The Titan came first, and can be used alone to condition the mains feeding a complete system. Equipped with nine stages of series/parallel filtering, it's a hefty little unit fitted with two 13-amp mains sockets and two 20-amp Neutrik sockets. The two regular mains sockets are intended for

connecting to one or two power amps. One of the Neutriks feeds mains into the unit via a heavily shielded lead; the other is intended to feed an Isotek Multi-Link adapter, to increase the number of available sockets and hence supply preamps and source components.

However, it's claimed that even better performance is available by adding a Nova alongside a Titan, and using the former to supply mains to the sources and preamp. The Nova can also be used with integrated or power amplifiers, though this is not the prime intention as it doesn't match the Titan's current capability. It's constructed like a typical rack-mount component, takes its mains input via the same heavy-duty 13-amp/Neutrik lead, and is fitted with six unswitched 13-amp sockets. The filtering has a six-stage primary and five-stage secondary configuration, and incorporates 'adaptive gating' that adjusts the characteristics of each socket's filters to match

Nova (CDS-3, NAC 552) brought a quite different character to the sound. Indeed, much of the 'Naim-like' quality of the system seemed to have gone, and the sound quality was certainly cleaner and less coloured, with significantly lower background 'hash'.

The conditioners helped to focus the attention on the midband, clarifying voices and rendering lyrics more intelligible. But while the central image focus was very good, the overall scale and spaciousness of the stereo soundstage seemed to be reduced at the same time – the sound had rather less sense of freedom and coherence, and was more box-bound. With the Titan and Nova working in partnership, it all seemed a little too controlled, and the bass seemed rather less tonally distinctive to boot.

Indeed, with this system it seemed better just to use one of the conditioners at a time, as this improved the all-round musical

**“The crucial finding is never to ignore the mains, because its influence on high-quality hi-fi is profound and pervasive.”**

the component to which it's connected. Both the Titan and the Nova, by the way, are fitted with non-intrusive circuit-breaker protection.

As mentioned earlier, the sonic effect of mains conditioners will often depend upon the system being used. Furthermore, the Naim Audio components I use for my reference system (CDS-3 CD player, NAC 552 preamp and NAP 500 power amp) are well known for their sensitivity to mains quality and intolerance towards conditioners. Certainly, the original Isotek cubes had not proved a good Naim match, though it's claimed – and a brief listen to prototypes had tended to confirm – that the more recent GIIIs were much more suitable. A pair of (very) full bandwidth B&W 800Ds completed our test system, along with good quality ancillaries from Vertex AQ and others. A Burmester 001/011/911 III-based system provided an alternative view, particularly relevant since Burmester was one of the pioneers of mains conditioning.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Naim system works very well with straight unconditioned mains, and can be even better with an arrangement that integrates all the mains leads into a single plug. Connecting the system via the Titan (NAP 500) and

coherence. And although the Nova isn't really intended for power amp use, its effect on the sound seemed altogether preferable to the Titan, simply because it provided the benefits of conditioning without tying the system down to the extent that the Titan did. By using what sounded like more gentle filtering, the Nova got close to providing the best of both worlds.

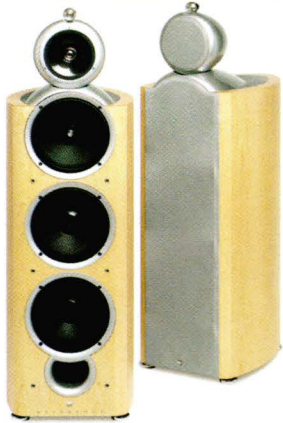
Not surprisingly, the Burmester system was much more obviously improved by mains conditioning, and while the full Titan/Nova combination worked well, the Titan again seemed to constrain the bass a little, and best results were found with the CD player and preamp connected via the Nova, and the power amp plugged directly into the mains.

The above findings should not be regarded as sacrosanct, however. What's true with a given system in a quiet provincial town might be significantly different in an urban/industrial environment where more filtering might be preferred. The answer has to be to experiment *in situ*, with the help of a friendly dealer, but the crucial finding is never to ignore the mains, because its influence on high-quality hi-fi is profound and pervasive. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*



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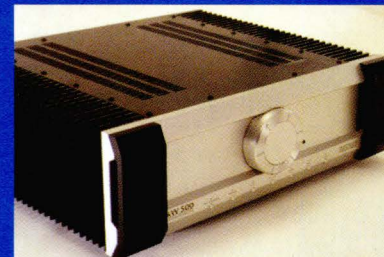
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# Anthony Gallo Nucleus Reference III

*From pots and pans to bold, propulsive high-end loudspeakers*

PRICE: £2,400 per pair CONTACT: Anthony Gallo Acoustics Europe, The Inox Building, Caldwellside, Lanark, Scotland, ML11 7SR ☎ 0870 350 1348 🌐 www.roundsound.com

In every season, there are loudspeakers that wear their technological hearts on their sleeves. You can see what makes them tick, and even perhaps manage an educated guess at how they will sound even before hitting the 'on' button.

Take the Anthony Gallo Nucleus Reference III, which is a compact, four-driver, three-way floorstander that is just under 90cm tall and around 20cm wide. The backbone of the design (literally) is the curved variable cross section 'spine' to which the various drivers are attached via decoupling elements. Its internal cavity houses both the crossover and an internal space that helps augment the acoustic loading for the bass driver, which is fitted in what looks like a large saucepan near the base of the system. Further up, and directed slightly upwards by the local curvature of the spine is the CDT tweeter, a unique design utilising a silver-plated polymer hoop that moves in response to an electrical signal applied across its ends. The unit is said to be flat to 50kHz and is essentially omnidirectional, at least in the horizontal plane.

**“Here is a speaker that is propulsive, bold and knows how to push the right buttons.”**

The remarkable CDT tweeter is flanked D'Appolito fashion by two 100mm woven carbon fibre midrange units, each mounted in a spherical anodised metal chamber, which provides an easily dealt with resonant factor (none at all according to the maker), and a near complete freedom from diffraction. The speaker is supplied with an enveloping frame to keep it looking tidy, as shown in our picture, but many will conclude, as we did, that this contraption is best discarded.

The Nucleus Reference III has two modes of use: one as described, the second with the bass augmented by tapping into a second voice coil attached to the bass driver. This mode has no bearing on this review, and is designed to be accessed using the so-called 'BAM' module (Bass Augmentation Module), which was being developed at the time of our test.

## SOUND QUALITY

For what looks like nothing more than a motley collection of kitchen ironmongery – pots and pans – the Ref III is remarkably effective as a loudspeaker. It's not that it is particularly neutral, and it's certainly open to criticism on a number of grounds. It's almost as though what makes it work is that the speaker seems somehow to believe in itself. It sells itself hard, and well. This is not meant anthropomorphically – it's just that the Nucleus Reference III carries itself with tremendous boldness and conviction.

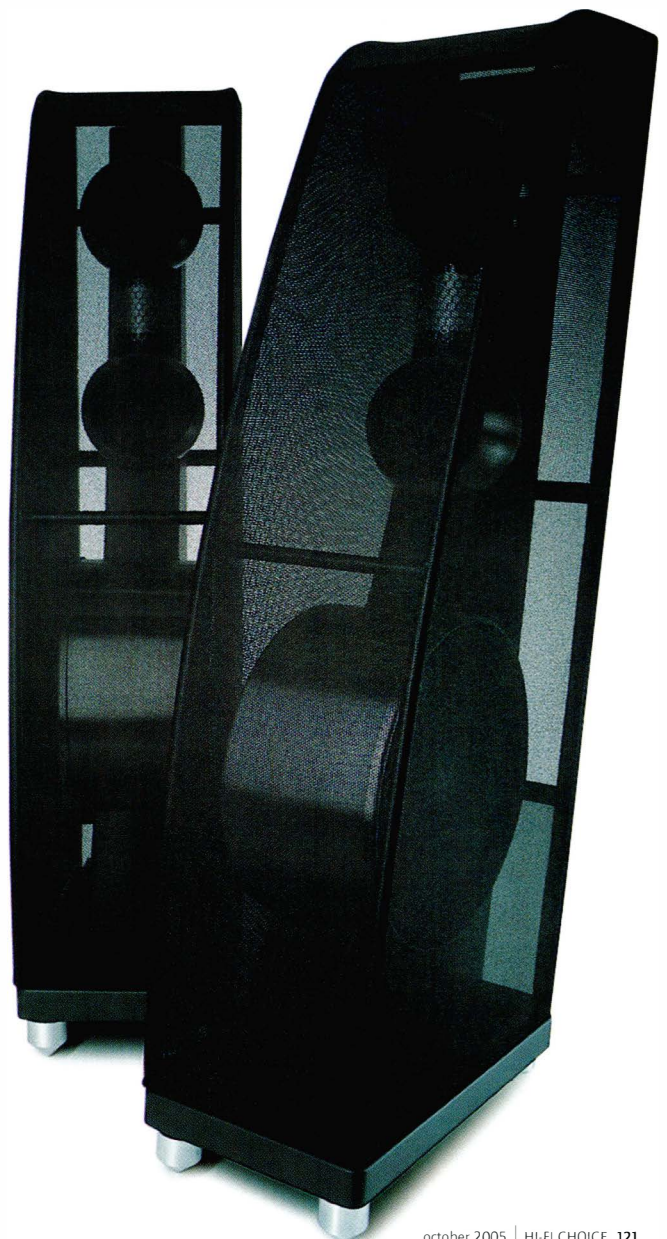
The bass is not especially deep, but what there is sounds very much in character with the midband, and the speaker as a whole has an ability to project itself forcefully and seamlessly across the frequency band. It's also free of the usual wooden box colorations, obviously because it does not involve the usual wooden box, and the metalwork that is there in its place is controlled enough not to have a strong signature of its own. Nevertheless, there is an element of

forwardness, even stridency in this speaker, and there is some volume dependency. In our original review, we pointed out that “music failed to communicate properly when the volume is set too low”, and it's difficult to put any other interpretation on this. Equally, however, it's difficult to gainsay. There is something in the Gallo's personality that likes it to be driven moderately hard. Its personality is more terrier than labrador.

It may be a tad too 'in yer face' for some, but the Nucleus Reference III carries itself with complete conviction. Here is a loudspeaker that is propulsive and bold, a speaker that knows how to push the right buttons. And after all, can you conceive of a better talking point for your visitors? This is more than just a loudspeaker – it is hi-fi art. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 257 (September 2004) for our original review of this product*





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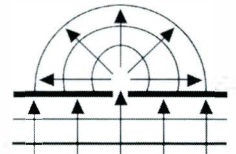
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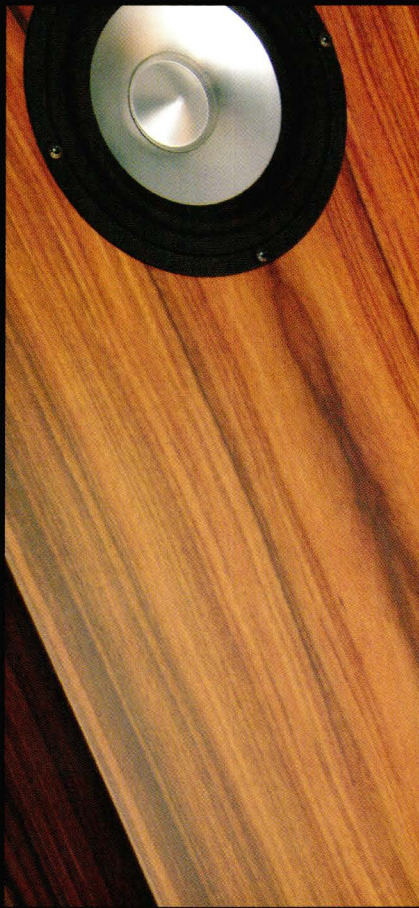
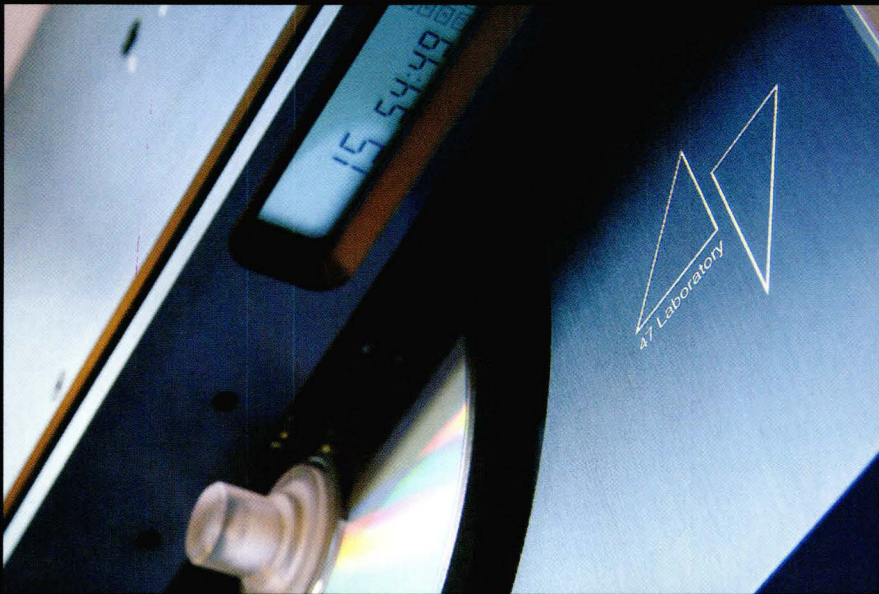
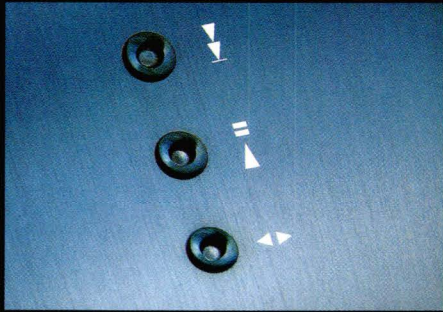
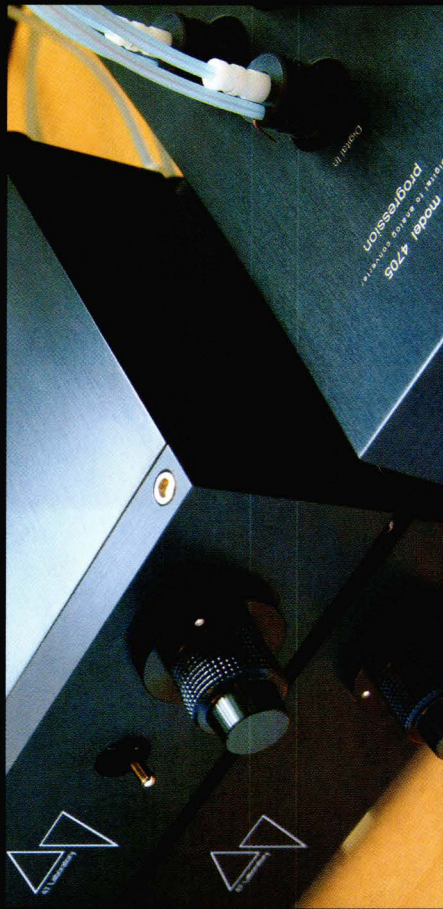
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### M/4704/04 PITRACER

Over 12 years of research and development, Junji Kimura finally completed the design of PiTracer CD Transport. This machine is the reason he established 47 Laboratory in 1992 to devote his time and energy solely to his own concept.

Now, the dream machine is finally here.

PiTracer will prove how much information were left unextracted in CDs or lost before they reach DA conversion. The first time in the history, we'll hear the true potential of the 16bit/44.1kHz format.

Poetry in motion.

### M/4706 25W GAINCARD

Extreme simplicity, minimum circuitry.

The heart of sound lives in the point of contact where musician and instrument meet. To trace this point-of-contact sound wave, Model 4706 utilizes a filter/condenser with the smallest possible capacity and a minimum number of parts, and the shortest signal pass length ever.

All the parts (except attenuators) are mounted on a circuit board measuring 45 x 30 mm per channel.

### M/4705 PROGRESSION DAC

Non-Oversampling, Digital-filterless DAC

Non-Oversampling DAC concept was first proposed by Ryohei Kusunoki in late 1966.

In recent interview, he states that "the issue is not either it is Non-Oversampling or Higher-rate-sampling, but the use of the digital filter can cause smearing in the time domain." We can confirm this smearing effect on the sound caused by the use of digital filter rather easily through listening experiments. This leads us to believe that the current problem with CD is not the limitation of 16bit/44.1kHz format, but the use of the digital filter which is preventing us to experience the true possibilities and the limitations of 16bit/44.1kHz format. The sound of Progression is enough to prove this matter.

### KONUS ESSENCE

Made by 47 Lab's European distributor, Sead Lejlic of Konus Audio, "Essence" incorporates Jordan 4" fullrange unit in a transmission-line cabinet.

The whole cabinet is dipped into a bath of resin after the construction to achieve the maximum rigidity. Then a thick, beautiful Bosnian Pine veneer is applied over it, followed by 6 coats of lacquer. The color of the wood grain becomes richer and darker by time. Each cabinet is handmade by proud Bosnian craftsmen.

Natural and coherent sound with unbelievable bass extension for such a small driver. Without crossover network and a stable 8 ohm load, it is an easy drive for an amplifier. Great combination with 47 Lab amplifiers.

Junji Kimura's reference speaker.

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Avid, Benz Micro, Dynavector, Koetsu, Kuzma, Lyra, Michell, Rega, Roksan, RS Labs, SME, Triplanar, VPI.



## The Beautiful Abby from Cain & Cain

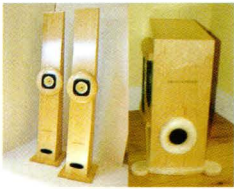
The openness and transparency that the Abby speaker delivers, combined with excellent tonal balance (in addition to high efficiency and dynamics), has made Abby "annoyingly good sounding" as one dealer remarked.

The Abby is a true introduction into high efficiency speaker systems of simple yet refined design. That pays tribute to "classic" forms and re-interpret them with current thinking. The result is that Abby has succeeded and found a soft spot in audiophile's ears, hearts and homes all across the world.

A superb matching subwoofer (Bailey) is also available.

Abby Speaker  
(from £1,399)  
Bailey Subwoofer  
(from £1,399)

Range of standard finishes are available. Custom finishes/colours can be produced to your exact requirements.



[www.cain-cain.com](http://www.cain-cain.com)

## ModWright SWL9.0 & SE Tube Linstage Preamp

ModWright are renowned for improving other people's products but what would happen if they released their own? Read on...

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The 6moons reviewer was so impressed that he purchased the review unit!

SWL 9.0 : £1599  
SWL 9.0SE : £1995



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## There is a NuForce of Amplifier in the UK

The first impressions from listening to a pair of NuForce™ amplifiers is its pristine and crystal clear tonality, wide soundstage, and realistic proportion of the musicians virtually playing in the listening room. It brings out tuneful bass resolution with addictive rhythm and drive. NuForce developed its revolutionary amplifier technology from the ground up to tackle absolute and faithful music reproduction. NuForce amplifiers offer unparalleled high bandwidth, with virtually no phase-shift in the audible frequency range. The output stage is fully regulated and offers extremely high damping factor for high-performance bass reproduction.

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Reference 9 : £809/each  
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[www.nuforce.com](http://www.nuforce.com)

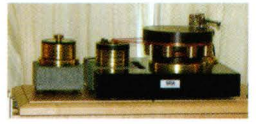
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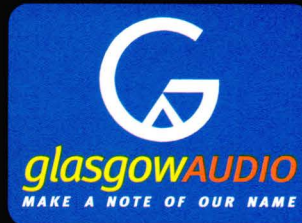


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AVI Lab Series CD CD Player	1400.00	1150.00
Classé CD Player	2950.00	2350.00
Quad 99 CD-P Upsampling CD/DAC	1000.00	749.00
Wadia 301 CD CD Player /Digital Pre (Silver)	3650.00	2750.00
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Classé CA201 Power Amplifier	3195.00	2500.00
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Mission 782SE Loudspeakers	899.90	750.00
Quad 12 Loudspeakers (Birdseye Maple)	499.95	425.00

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Harman Kardon DVD 506 LE DVD Player(Silver)	350.00	250.00
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Denon AVC-A1SR A/V Amplifier (Gold)	2999.99	1999.99
Harman Kardon AVR 4550 A/V Amplifier (Black)	800.00	575.00

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Mission V6c Centre (Cherry)	199.90	150.00
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**Mains Conditioning**

Isotek The Qube 2K 2 Way mains conditioner	1495.00	1150.00
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**Home Cinema Projectors**

Sim2 HT200 DLP Projector	4700.00	2000.00
Yamaha LPX500 LCD Projector	3300.00	2500.00

**Secondhand**

Classe CAP151 Integrated Amp	2195.00	1200.00
Seleco SDV-100 DLP Projector		1200.00
Meridian 588 CD Player	2100.00	1100.00
Meridian M33 Active Speakers	1560.00	850.00

Cyrus 7 Integrated Amplifier New Boxed NOW 350.00  
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**Ex display**

**CD Players / CD-R Recorders / Hard Disc Recorders**

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Quad 99 CD-P Upsampling CD/DAC	1000.00	749.00
Yamaha CDR-HD1300 mk2 CD Recorder HDD	600.00	499.00

**Amplifiers**

Cyrus Pre X Preamplifier (Silver)	1000.00	745.00
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Castle Howard S3 (Cherry) Floorstanding	1350.00	949.00
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Rega Alya Floorstanding Loudspeaker (Cherry)	525.00	325.00

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**Turntables**

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Loewe Aventos 3981ZP P 32" Widescreen CRT	1340.00	999.00

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Arcam AVR 200 DD/DTS AV Receiver (Black)	800.00	449.00
Cyrus AV8 DD/DTS AV Processor (Silver)	1100.00	850.00
Denon ADV-1000 DD/DTS AV Receiver /DVD	700.00	449.00
Denon AVR 3802 DD/DTS AV Receiver (Black)	850.00	499.00
Denon AVR 1602 AV Receiver (Black)	350.00	199.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 5500 DD/DTS AV Receiver	750.00	395.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 5550 DD/DTS AV Receiver	900.00	699.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 130 DD/DTS AV Receiver	350.00	279.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 230 DD/DTS AV Receiver	500.00	399.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 430 DD/DTS AV Receiver	800.00	639.00
Harman/Kardon AVR 630 DD/DTS AV Receiver	1000.00	749.00
Meridian G68ADV Surround Controller	4995.00	3996.00
Rotel RB 985 Mk 2 5 Channel Power Amplifier	700.00	450.00
Yamaha DVD-S550 (boxed)	130.00	109.00

**Audio Visual Loudspeakers**

Mission M5ds (black/boxed)	200.00	149.00
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Sim2 Domino 20 DLP Projector (Black)	3750.00	2700.00
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**Secondhand**

Cyrus Pre X Preamplifier (silver)	595.00	
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**Nobody else** in these areas carries all the following major hifi brands:

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DVD players: Arcam & FMJ, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha,

Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/FMJ, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.

Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,

Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.

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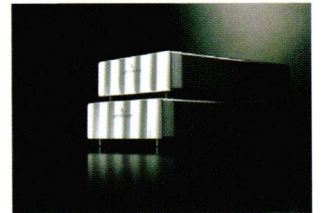
## Jeff Rowland

Jeff Rowland Design Group is a dedication to a single, heartfelt idea, the production of electronic components capable of unveiling the rich, emotional tapestry of music in a personally involving way.

The result is a product line that offers exceptional value for money, unrivalled musical revelation packaged in chassis designs of unparalleled beauty.

The end result of nearly a two-decade quest for musical truth is the creation of audio equipment of enduring value.

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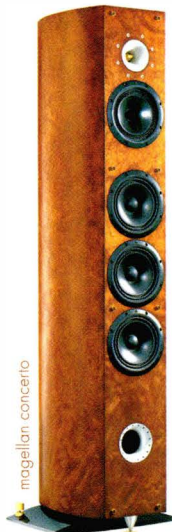
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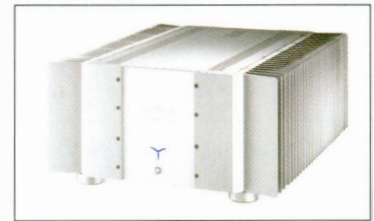
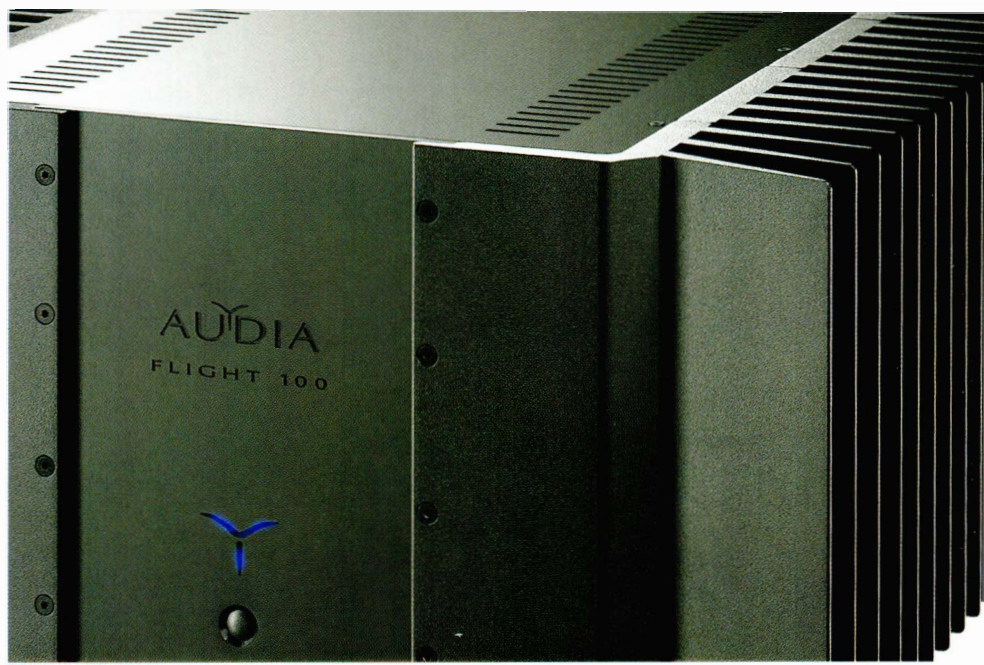
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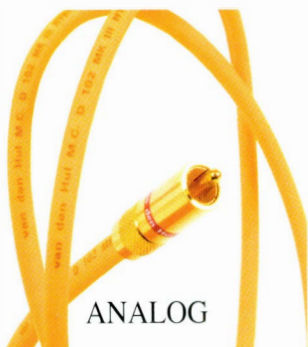


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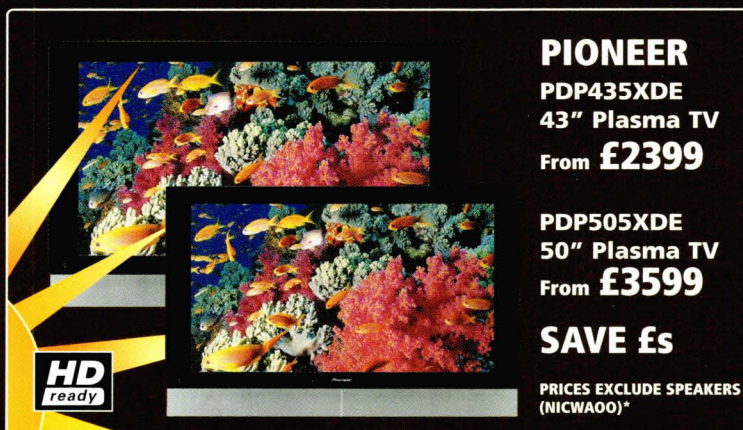
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**SCREENPLAY**  
 SP5700 DLP Projector  
**£1499** SAVE £500

FACTORY REFRUBISHED UNIT  
 INCLUDES 3 YEAR GOLD PLUS WARRANTY (NICWAOO)\*



**REL SUBWOOFERS**

**Quake** £299 SAVE £50  
**Stampede** £499 SAVE £50  
**Strata 5** £624 SAVE £75

ALL MODELS BRITTEK BLACK FINISH ONLY (NICWAOO)\*



**DENON**  
 DVD3910 DVD Player  
**£719** SAVE £30  
 AVR3805 AV Receiver  
**£799** SAVE £50

(NICWAOO)\*



**MONITOR AUDIO**  
 Bronze B2 Speakers  
**£179** SAVE £20

(NICWAOO)\*



**Free QED Cables**

CLAIM FREE QED SPEAKER OR INTERCONNECT CABLES WORTH AT LEAST £50

WHEN YOU PURCHASE SELECTED SPEAKERS OR CD/AMPLIFIER COMBINATIONS

Ask in-store for details. (NICWAOO)\*

QED

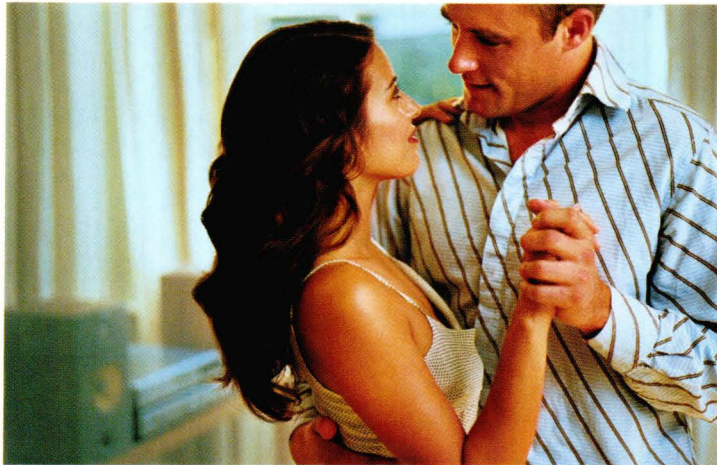
### MORE SUMMER EVENT OFFERS ON PAGE 6

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or see the brand locator on our website before travelling.  
 \*Added Value Offers - From range available in-store.  
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**AT LEAST 10% OFF**

OUR NORMAL SELLING PRICES ON A WIDE RANGE OF PRODUCTS  
 FOR OUR LATEST PRICES CALL YOUR LOCAL STORE OR VISIT  
**www.ssav.com**





## Specialist hi-fi

**Contemporary hi-fi** is constantly setting new standards in sound reproduction and design. Whatever you listen to, be it Robbie Williams or Rachmaninov, Sevenoaks can recommend separate components that will bring your music collection to life and complement your home. We're enthusiasts and experts, passionate about helping you build (or upgrade) a system that will delight for years to come.



**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)

### Rotel

Rotel is truly unique: a family-owned, specialist Japanese company whose passionate interest in music led them to manufacture audio components of uncompromised quality.

The **02 Series** is Rotel's entry-level range. The RCD-02 CD player combined with either an RA-01, RA-02 or RA-03 integrated amplifier represents true audiophile performance at an affordable price. For increased high-end performance, the RC-03/RB-3 pre/power amplifiers are available. The RT-02 tuner completes the range.

#### 02 SERIES

- RA-01 AMPLIFIER
- RA-02 AMPLIFIER
- RA-03 AMPLIFIER
- RCD-02 CD PLAYER
- RT-02 TUNER
- 10 SERIES
- RA-1062 AMPLIFIER
- RCD-1072 CD PLAYER

#### ROTEL RA-03 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

"The Rotel is simply the best-sounding amp here, and one of the cheapest - if you're after an amp, you must hear it."



## Arcam

Arcam has spent more than a generation building some of the finest high-fidelity products the world has ever seen. Whether you're interested in two-channel or a complete multi-channel AV system, the Arcam DiVA series offers the music and movie lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions from any specialist manufacturer.



**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)

#### NEW ARCAM SOLO ALL-IN-ONE MUSIC SYSTEM



**SOLO:** A sleek, easy-to-operate system. Featuring an audiophile CD player, a 50 WPC amplifier combined with a DAB digital radio and a high quality FM tuner, the SOLO music system will captivate all who listen.

- DIVA SERIES INCLUDES**
- A65 PLUS AMPLIFIER
  - A80 AMPLIFIER
  - A90 AMPLIFIER
  - CD73T CD PLAYER
  - CD192 CD PLAYER

- T61 TUNER
- DT91 DAB TUNER
- DV78 DVD PLAYER
- DV79 DVD PLAYER
- AVR250 AV RECEIVER
- AVR300 AV RECEIVER

## Project

Project is currently one of the world's leading suppliers of turntables, with a range of models designed to satisfy all levels of expectation and budget. The range is simple to use, maintenance free and will function for a lifetime.



- DEBUT III TURNTABLE WITH OM5E CARTRIDGE
- 2 XPERIENCE TURNTABLE (PICTURED RIGHT)



## Cyrus

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price. Invest in a Cyrus system and you'll be rewarded with a wealth of sound you wouldn't have thought possible.

#### RANGE INCLUDES

- CD6 & CD8X CD PLAYERS
- 6VS & 8VS AMPLIFIERS
- PRE X VS PREAMPLIFIER
- DAC-X DAC & FM X TUNER

#### LINKSERVER SOLO

A Cyrus CD Player with built in 80Gb hard disk drive. Keep all your favourite music instantly accessible in a single, easy to operate component.



**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)

AWARDS 2004  
BEST CD PLAYER  
Cyrus CDA

AWARDS 2004  
BEST 100W AMPLIFIER  
Cyrus 6VS

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### 0% FINANCE OPTION\*

Spread the cost of buying.

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## Roksan

Roksan designs and manufactures some of the most acclaimed hi-fi equipment currently available. All Roksan products are carefully evaluated by experienced engineers at every stage of the design process with the emphasis on performance and build quality.

**Kandy**  
KA1 MKIII AMPLIFIER  
KD1 MKIII CD PLAYER

**Caspian M SERIES**  
CD PLAYER  
AMPLIFIER  
PREAMPLIFIER  
STEREO POWER  
MONOBLOC POWER

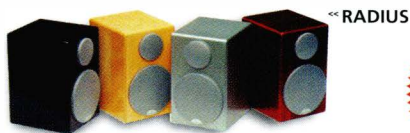
**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004**  
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £500-1000  
Roksan Kandy KA1

## Monitor Audio

Since 1972 Monitor Audio has been developing and perfecting the implementation of metal drivers, innovative crossovers, and exemplary speaker cabinet construction and finish to further the ideal of achieving sound which is to the original "as close as it gets"

The range includes - Gold, New Silver RS, Bronze and Radius, a seriously compact system bringing true hi-fi performance to both music and movies at home.



**MODELS INCLUDE**  
BRONZE B2, B2 AV, B4 AV  
SILVER RS1, RS6, RS8  
GOLD REFERENCE 10 & 60



**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)

«BRONZE B2

"Monitor Audio's Bronze B2s sound much more expensive than their £200 price tag would suggest. In fact, they sound superb... In the competitive world of budget hi-fi, speakers don't get much better than the B2s."

## Acoustic Energy

Established in 1987, Acoustic Energy is one of Britain's premier loudspeaker manufacturers offering one of the most targeted range of hi-fi and home cinema loudspeaker systems on the market today.



**AE1T THREE**

"The legendary AE1 lives on in this groundbreaking new version... It sets a new standard for small speakers."

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004**  
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS OVER £200  
Acoustic Energy AE1 T48

## Digital Radio Harman Kardon

**TU970 DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER**

With Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) capability, this high-quality tuner delivers more stations and offers pure, distortion-free, CD-like sound, while providing useful radio and data services.



**Pure**

**DRX702ES DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER**

**WHAT HI-FI? Product of the Year 2003**

## Wharfedale

**DIAMOND 9.1 SPEAKERS**

"The overall balance of the speakers is their finest characteristic. Thanks to near-perfect driver integration, music sounds wonderfully natural and transparent. This is a bar-raising effort from Wharfedale: these are ridiculously good speakers at the budget price level." digital technologies from one of the oldest hi-fi names.



**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004**  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR STEREO SPEAKERS  
WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 9.1

## Free QED Cables

**FREE QED SPEAKER CABLE** worth at least £50 when you purchase selected Speakers over £200. Ask in-store for details. (NICWAOO)\*

**FREE QED INTERCONNECT CABLE** worth at least £50 when you purchase selected CD and Amplifier combinations. Ask in-store for details. (NICWAOO)\*



## Marantz

The Marantz 'Range Series' offers flexible system building options for every lifestyle.

**RANGE SERIES INCLUDES**  
CD5400 CD PLAYER  
PM4400 AMPLIFIER  
PM7200 AMPLIFIER  
ST4000 TUNER  
SR4500 AV RECEIVER  
SR5500 AV RECEIVER  
DV4500 DVD PLAYER



**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004**

CD5400 "This is a remarkable CD player for the money, with superb sound, looks and feel - A very solid buy and a lot of fun."

## KEF Q Series

The Latest evolution of the acclaimed Q Series demonstrates how the benefits of KEF technology cascade down from the Reference Series to more affordable ranges. New Q features all the inherent advantages of KEF UNI-Q® technology and are available in a variety of Finishes.



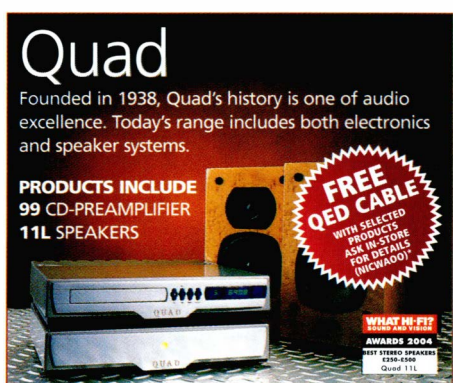
**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)

**Q SERIES INCLUDES**  
Q COMPACT BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS  
Q4 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS  
Q7 AV SPEAKER PACKAGE

## Quad

Founded in 1938, Quad's history is one of audio excellence. Today's range includes both electronics and speaker systems.

**PRODUCTS INCLUDE**  
99 CD-PREAMPLIFIER  
11L SPEAKERS



**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004**  
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS £200-500  
Quad 11L

## Musical Fidelity

Musical Fidelity's X-Series combines exceptional build quality with value for money.

**X SERIES** X-80 & X150 AMPLIFIER  
X-RAY<sup>3</sup> CD PLAYER

**A5 SERIES** A5 AMPLIFIER & CD PLAYER



**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)





## Specialist home cinema

The recent growth of DVD has led to a huge rise in demand for home cinema equipment. The prices of DVD players, AV receivers, projectors and plasma screens continue to fall but, with so many options, it's not easy to know which ones will suit your needs. Indeed, in the face of this quickly evolving and often bemusing array of products, we aim to assist you in assembling a home cinema system to be proud of – one that achieves outstanding picture and sound quality.



**DENON DVD-A1XV**  
"An astonishing piece of kit that has no equals. Prepare to be astounded."

HOME CINEMA CHOICE • AWARDS 2005



## Denon

Denon, Japan's oldest audio company, has established an enviable reputation for the performance of both its hi-fi and home cinema products, winning numerous awards and accolades over the years. Its stylish systems have succeeded in becoming the benchmark by which all other are judged.

### MODELS INCLUDE

#### A/V RECEIVERS

AVR-1905 • AVR-2105 • AVR-2805 • AVR-3805

#### A/V AMPLIFIER

AVC-A1XV

#### DVD PLAYERS

DVD-1710 • DVD-1910

#### UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYERS

DVD-2910 • DVD-3910 • DVD-A11 • DVD-A1XV

#### DVD SYSTEMS

DHT-500SD • DHT-550SD



**AVR-2805** "Last year's Award-winning AVR-2803 finally meets its match in the shape of this storming successor from Denon."

WHAT IF-FIT AWARDS 2004 BEST MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER £200-£750 Denon AVR-2805

#### DHT-500SD

"The Denon DHT-500SD is the best home cinema system you can find in one box. If you're not confident that separates are the answer for you - too complex or too expensive - then the Denon provides the ideal solution."



WHAT IF-FIT AWARDS 2004 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS Denon DHT-500SD

## Pioneer

### MODELS INCLUDE

**A/V AMPLIFIER** VSA-AX10Ai

**A/V RECEIVERS** VSX-D814 • VSX-2014i • VSX-AX5Ai

**UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYERS** DV668Av • DV868Avi



**DV-575A** "For outstanding all-round ability there are few players that can match Pioneer's DV-575A."



**VSX-AX5Ai** Tweaked version of the Award-winning VSX-AX5i with additional sound-processing modes.

## Yamaha

Yamaha is recognised as a world leader in the fields of musical instruments and audio equipment, and in more recent years, home cinema. New models for 2005 include upgraded A/V receivers, amplifiers, and DVD players plus the innovative YSP-1 virtual surround speaker (pictured right).

### MODELS INCLUDE

#### A/V AMPLIFIERS

DSP-AX757SE & DSP-Z9

#### A/V RECEIVERS

RX-V557 & RX-V1500

#### DVD PLAYERS

DVD-S557 & DVD-S1500



**NEW YSP-1**  
Digital Sound Projector



## Arcam

Whether you're interested in two-channel or a complete multi-channel AV system, Arcam offers the music and movie lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions from any specialist manufacturer.

#### DVD PLAYERS

DV78, DV79

FMJ DV29

#### A/V RECEIVERS

AVR250, AVR300

#### A/V PRE/PROCESSOR

AV8, AVP700

#### MULTICHANNEL POWER

P7, P1000



**FREE QED CABLE**  
WITH SELECTED PRODUCTS. ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS (NICWAOO)†

WHAT IF-FIT AWARDS 2004 BEST MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER £700-£1000 Arcam AVR300

WHAT IF-FIT AWARDS 2004 BEST DVD PLAYER £750-£1000 Arcam DV79

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## DVD Recorders

Although making digital recordings of TV broadcasts isn't new, the choice, versatility and quality of recorders keep getting better. Our product selection includes both DVD only recorders and hybrid DVD/hard-disk models.

### Panasonic

DVD RECORDERS

NEW DMR-ES10 (MULTI-FORMAT)

HARD-DISK MODELS (HDD)

NEW DMR-EH50 80GB (MULTI-FORMAT) • DMR-E500 400GB



"In all, the Pioneer DVR-720H is a fine machine with some nifty features and superb performance... Superb."

WHAT VIDEO AND WIDESCREEN TV • AUGUST 2004

### Pioneer

DVD RECORDERS (DVD-RW)  
DVR-220 • DVD-320

HARD-DISK MODELS (HDD/DVD-RW)  
DVR-420H 80GB • DVR-520H 80GB  
DVR-720H 160GB • DVR-920H 250GB



## KEF KHT

The Kef Home Theatre (KHT) series brings audiophile sound quality to affordable home entertainment – it's been breaking new ground ever since it was first introduced. As its many awards and 5-star ratings prove, the original outperformed every conventional system in its class.

MODELS INCLUDE

KHT1005 • KHT2005.2  
KHT5005 • KHT9000ACE



KHT2005.2 "KEF has done it. This is the new best system in its class... The KHT2005.2 is the new top surround dog. KEF should be very proud."

## KEF KIT100 Home Cinema System

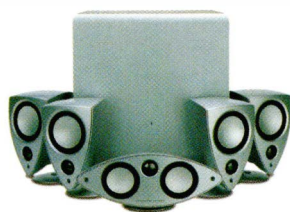
"Why take five speakers into the living room when you can use just two? Creating a virtual surround sound experience has never been simpler or more effective, thanks to this two speakers plus subwoofer concoction from KEF."



## Mordaunt Short

Genie

"Distinctive looks, practical to use, first-class sonics from the sats and the sub - it adds up to a winning cinema set-up... For seamless integration of sound, impressive integrity of build and all-round covetability, the Mordaunt-Short Genie package is hard to beat - and it looks rather splendid, too."



## Mission Elegante e82

"Performance with style - If you're looking for a speaker package without sonic sacrifices, then look no further than the Elegantes."



Elegante  
Colour Options Available



### M-Cube

"Mission has shaken up this market with an innovative, desirable product of rare ability - audition today."



## REL Subwoofers

In a market packed with subwoofers claiming to deliver the ultimate bass experience, only one brand of sub-bass system can prove its supremacy. With a record of review success stretching back over a decade and featuring no fewer than nine of the coveted What Hi-Fi? Awards, REL is acknowledged as the leading provider of deep, clean bass frequencies.



Q400E™



"A flawless performance from the REL Stampede leaves little room for criticism."

Q SERIES  
Quake • Q150E • Q201E • Q400E  
ST SERIES  
Stampede • Strata 5 • Storm 5



BEST FULL-SIZE SPEAKER PACKAGE UNDER £1000  
Acoustic Energy A82



## Acoustic Energy

Established in 1987, Acoustic Energy is one of Britain's premier loudspeaker manufacturers offering arguably the most targeted range of hi-fi and home cinema loudspeaker systems on the market today.

The multi-award winning AEGIS EVO Series is a budget separates range for hi-fi and home cinema enthusiasts alike, offering exquisite transparency, detail and clarity, coupled with awesome bass and dynamics.

AEGIS EVO SERIES INCLUDES

EVO One • EVO Three • EVO Centre & Sub

AELITE SERIES INCLUDES

Aelite Two • Aelite Three • Aelite Centre & Sub





## SUMMER EVENT

FOR OUR LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS  
CALL YOUR NEAREST STORE OR VISIT  
[www.ssav.com](http://www.ssav.com)

### CD PLAYERS

Denon DCD485	£119.95
Marantz CD5400	£119.95

### CD RECORDERS

Yamaha CDR-HD1500	£449.95
-------------------	---------

### AMPLIFIERS

Denon PMA355	£159.95
Marantz PM4400	£139.95
Marantz PM7200	£239.95
Yamaha AX396	£169.95

### SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£119.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£229.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£179.95

### DVD PLAYERS

Denon DVD-2910 Universal (Multi Region)	£499.95
Denon DVD-3910 Universal (Multi Region)	£719.95

### A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Denon AVR1705 AV Receiver	£199.95
Denon AVR1905 AV Receiver	£229.95
Denon AVR2805 AV Receiver	£549.95
Denon AVR3805 AV Receiver	£799.95
Pioneer VSX-1014s AV Receiver	£399.95
Pioneer VSX-2014i AV Receiver	£499.95
Pioneer VSX-AX5Ai AV Receiver	£749.95
Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai AV Amplifier	£1799.95
Yamaha DSP-AX757SE AV Amplifier	£399.95
Yamaha RX-V357 AV Receiver	£149.95
Yamaha RX-V57 AV Receiver	£299.95

### A/V SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£679.95
KEF KHT1005	£299.95

### SUBWOOFERS

REL Quake (Brittix Black)	£299.95
REL Stampede (Brittix Black)	£499.95
REL Strata 5 (Brittix Black)	£624.95

### PLASMA

Panasonic TH37PV500 (Wal) 37"	£1999.95
Panasonic TH42PV500 (Wal) 42"	£2299.95
Pioneer PDP435XDE 43" (Ex Display)	£2199.95
Pioneer PDP435XDE 43" (FROM)	£2399.95
Pioneer PDP505XDE 50" (Ex Display)	£3299.95
Pioneer PDP505XDE 50" (FROM)	£3599.95

### LCD TV

LG RZ32LZ50 32"	£999.95
Sharp Aquos LC32GA5 32"	£899.95

### PROJECTORS

ScreenPlay SP5700 (Factory Refurbished)	£1499.95
ScreenPlay SP7205 (New Lower Price)	£ CALL
ScreenPlay SP7210 (New Lower Price)	£ CALL

### Sim2 DLP Projectors

HT300 E-Link	£7999 SAVE £3000
HT300 E-evolution	£5999 SAVE £2000
Domino 18	£1999 SAVE £300



(NICWAOO)\*



### Monitor Audio

GR10 Speakers  
£599 SAVE £200  
(NICWAOO)\*

### Free QED Cables



CLAIM FREE QED SPEAKER OR INTERCONNECT CABLES WORTH AT LEAST £50

WHEN YOU PURCHASE SELECTED SPEAKERS OR CD/AMPLIFIER COMBINATIONS

Ask in-store for details. (NICWAOO)\*



KEF KHT2005.2  
5.1 Speaker Package  
£599 CLAIM FREE  
KEF SPEAKER STANDS WORTH £80  
(NICWAOO)\*



Roksan Kandy  
MKIII CD & Amplifier  
£999 CLAIM FREE  
QED CABLE WORTH £100  
(NICWAOO)\*

### Arcam Solo / Alto

Hi-Fi System  
£1399 CLAIM FREE  
QED CABLE WORTH £100  
(NICWAOO)\*



### Arcam DiVA

DV79 DVD Player  
AVR300 AV Receiver  
£2299 CLAIM £400  
TOWARDS THE SPEAKERS OF YOUR CHOICE  
(NICWAOO)\*



Denon  
DHT-500SD  
5.1 DVD System  
£429 SAVE £20  
(NICWAOO)\*



Yamaha  
YSP-1  
Sound Projector Speaker System  
£799 CLAIM FREE  
QED INTERCONNECT CABLE WORTH £80  
(NICWAOO)\*



### KEF KIT100

Home Cinema System  
£999 SAVE £200  
WHEN PURCHASED WITH ANY PLASMA OR LCD TV OVER £2000  
(NICWAOO)\*



Pure Digital  
DRX-702ES  
DAB/Analogue Tuner  
£219 SAVE £30  
(NICWAOO)\*



Toshiba 32WL56  
32" LCD HD Ready TV  
£999 SAVE £50  
(NICWAOO)\*

\*NICWAOO - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

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**SUMMER EVENT**  
EXTENDED UNTIL 24TH SEPTEMBER 2005

## Nationwide Store guide



**ABERDEEN** 01224 252797

• 57 CROWN STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

**BEDFORD** 01234 272779

• 29-31 ST PETERS STREET

**BIRMINGHAM** 0121 233 2977

• ARCH 12, LIVERY STREET

**BRIGHTON** 01273 733338

• 57 WESTERN ROAD, HOVE

**BRISTOL** 0117 974 3727

• 92B WHITELADIES ROAD, CLIFTON

**BROMLEY** 020 8290 1988

• 39A EAST STREET

**CAMBRIDGE** 01223 304770

• 17 BURLEIGH STREET

**CARDIFF** 029 2047 2899

• 104-106 ALBANY ROAD

**CHELSEA** 020 7352 9466

• 403 KINGS ROAD

**CHELTENHAM** 01242 241171

• 14 PITTVILLE STREET

**CRAWLEY** 01293 510777

• 32 THE BOULEVARD *OPEN SUNDAY*

**CROYDON** 020 8665 1203

• 369-373 LONDON ROAD

**EALING** 020 8579 8777

• 24 THE GREEN *OPEN SUNDAY*

**EDINBURGH** 0131 229 7267

• 5 THE GRASSMARKET

**EPSOM** 01372 720720

• 12 UPPER HIGH STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

**EXETER** 01392 218895

• 28 COWICK STREET

**GLASGOW** 0141 332 9655

• 88 GREAT WESTERN ROAD

**GUILDFORD** 01483 536666

• 73B NORTH STREET

**HOLBORN** 020 7837 7540

• 144-148 GRAYS INN ROAD

**HULL** 01482 587171

• 1 SAVILE ROW, SAVILE STREET

**IPSWICH** 01473 286977

• 12-14 DOGS HEAD STREET

**KINGSTON** 020 8547 0717

• 43 FIFE ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

**LEEDS** 0113 245 2775

• 62 NORTH STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

**LEICESTER** 0116 253 6567

• 10 LOSEBY LANE

**LINCOLN** 01522 527397

• 20-22 CORPORATION STREET (*OFF HIGH STREET*)

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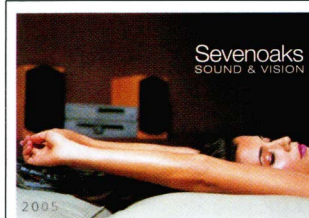
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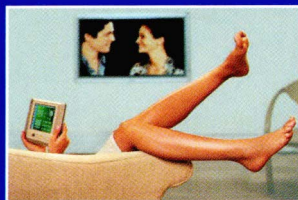
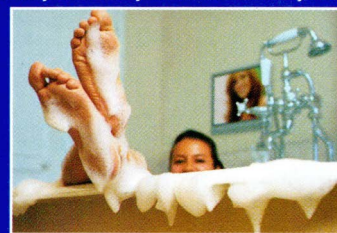
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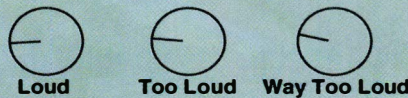
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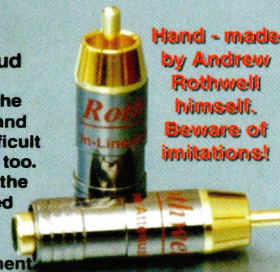
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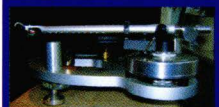
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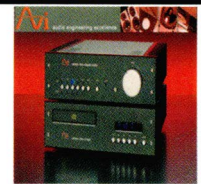
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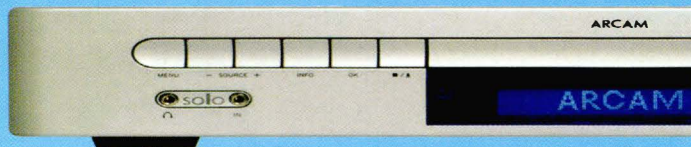
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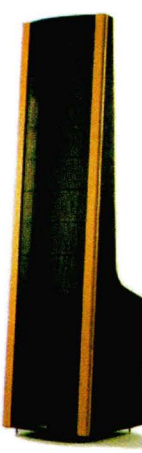
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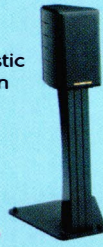
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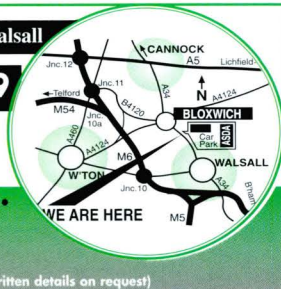
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WITH THE OCTOBER ISSUE OF HI-FI CHOICE**





# A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT

## #14 MERIDIAN

In 1984, Meridian launched the first UK-built 'audiophile' CD player. Just beating Cambridge's awesome CD1 to the market, the MCD showed just what potential the format had. Since then, Meridian has produced more than 20 CD players, none of which have disappointed. As ever though, that doesn't mean to say that some aren't better than others. It took a lot of deliberation, but after much research, it seemed best to focus on the 508-24. It has the perfect combination of being a relatively recent model, so spares aren't a problem, but is still available for a substantial saving on its new price.

Launched in 1998, the 508-24 followed on from the successful 508-20. While the two models looked exactly the same, there was one important change inside. Out went the 20-bit Crystal DAC and in came a new 24-bit chip from the same company. In 1998, this was real high-end stuff and when combined with Meridian's double buffering to reduce jitter, and beautifully designed and built transport, this became one highly covetable CD player. At the time, some thought Meridian CD players had become too lush sounding and refined so, while the 508-24 was no redneck, the extra vitality and detail was welcomed. As you'd expect from a newer design, the 508-24 is still highly capable, even by today's standards. Priced at a hefty £2,000 in 1998, excellent examples of this player can now be had for less than £800. Get lucky and you may well be able to get this down to around the £600

mark. All parts are available and the only reliability issue affects the Philips transport. As with other players using the CDM-12 mechanism, there was a poor batch that could cause the disc to skip. Even if this is the case, though, by simply cleaning and re-greasing the mechanism, all should be well.

As well as upper-class CD players, Meridian has long since done a nice line in amplifiers. While they may not have the kudos of, say, Quad or Naim, they benefit from this on the second-hand market. During the early 1990s, Meridian was keen to promote its DSP active speakers, which left its high-end amps somewhat overlooked. Yet, anyone wanting a



Above: Meridian's 508-24 CD player

**“While the 508-24 was no redneck, the extra vitality and detail was welcomed.”**

massively powerful amp with a vast soundstage, and plenty of precision and poise should not overlook the Meridian 605 mono power amps.

As part of the early 1990s 600-series, these were Meridian's range toppers, and had the build quality to prove it. Compared to some of the opposition, the 150 watt (per amp) power output appeared quite modest, but a MOSFET design ensured these beasts could hold their own against apparently more powerful designs. If anything, with today's typical speaker, these monoblocks sound better than ever. Like the

CD player, £800 should buy you a nice pair, but you may be able to find cosmetically scuffed ones for considerably less. Dealers reported these amps to be supremely reliable. Even if something does go wrong, then they are still fully serviceable and parts are reasonably priced – expect to pay around a fiver for a transistor, for example. Serviceable, reliable, well-priced and decent sounding – these two Meridians have all the qualities that make up first-rate second-hand purchases. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month: Musical Fidelity

## DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 14 Why do we need tweeters?

There are some distinct advantages in using a single drive unit to cover the whole of the audio range, but there are disadvantages too.

Although it's possible to make a single driver that covers the whole band, such an approach tends to struggle at the extremes. A full-range driver has to be light to get high up into the treble, so it has to be small, neither of which is ideal for generating deep or loud bass.

At high frequencies (above 2-3kHz for a typical 165mm bass/mid driver), where the wavelength becomes smaller than the cone diameter, the sound starts to be focused into a narrow beam. To avoid this, most speakers

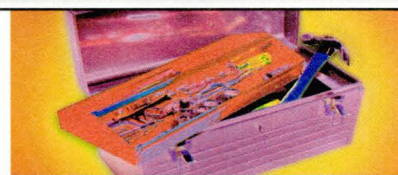
cross over to a tweeter. This has a much smaller diaphragm – usually a 25mm dome – to maintain wide dispersion right across the band and ensure consistent direct and reflected sound across the listening area.

If that's the core benefit of adding a tweeter, the disadvantage is the need to include the extra complexity of a crossover network – essential, if only to protect the relatively fragile tweeter from large bass signals.

Since the tweeter is designed to reproduce high frequencies, its moving parts have to be light and responsive. The diaphragm itself must be small, to deliver the wide dispersion described above, so it's easy to see why the

25mm edge-driven dome has evolved as the stereotype. A number of different diaphragm materials are encountered, and these will be discussed next month. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



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**NEXT MONTH:** Tweeter materials



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MINT/BOXED.....£495</li> <li>INFINITY SIGMA'S EXCLT.....£3750</li> <li>A.R.T PRECISION-2 PIANO BLACK MINT/BOXED.....£3250</li> <li>DYNAUDIO CRAFT/STANDS (FAB) MINT/BOXED.....£1595</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 5 VGC.....£195</li> <li>RED ROSE SPIRIT MONITORS (RIBBON) MINT.....£750</li> <li>CELESTION A-1 CHERRYWOOD MINT/BOXED.....£495</li> <li>EPOS ES-14 &amp; STANDS MINT.....£375</li> <li>TRIANGLE TITUS ES BOXED.....£250</li> <li>PROAC RESPONSE-3 BOXED.....£1595</li> <li>PROAC STUDIO 150 (YEW) EXCLT.....£995</li> <li>CELESTION A-2 SANTOS ROSEWOOD BRAND NEW/BOXED.....£1195</li> <li>CURA CA-30 MAPLE MINT/BOXED.....£895</li> <li>KELLY KT-3 (96 DB SENSITIVE) BOXED.....£695</li> <li>APOGEE CALIPERS RE-FINISHED EXCLT/BOXED.....£1195</li> <li>APOGEE CALIPERS COM. RE. BUILD.....£2250</li> <li>MIRAGE M18.....TBA</li> <li>MIRAGE BPS-20 SUB.....TBA</li> <li>SNELL C MKIV EXCLT.....£1295</li> <li>AUDIONOTE ANE ROSEWOOD.....£795</li> <li>CASTLE AVON EXCLT.....£375</li> <li>CASTLE HOWARD-2 BEECH EXCLT.....£650</li> <li>REGA XEL ROSEWOOD EXCLT.....£495</li> </ul> <p><b>CABLE/INTERCONNECTS</b></p> <p>TOO MANY CABLES IN STOCK TO LIST HERE<br/>PLEASE RING/SEE WEBSITE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RENAISSANCE XLR &amp; RCA.....RING</li> <li>RENAISSANCE SPEAKER CABLE.....RING</li> <li>HOVLAND 3 METRE SPEAKER.....£325</li> <li>HOVLAND XLR 1 METRE.....£275</li> <li>MISSING LINK 0.5 METRE XLR.....£125</li> <li>ACOUSTIC ZEN SILVER REF 3.5 METRE XLR.....£1450</li> <li>ACOUSTIC ZEN SILVER REF 1.5 METRE RCA.....£250</li> <li>ACOUSTIC ZEN SILVER REF.1 METRE RCA.....£495</li> <li>SILVER ARROW 1METRE XLR (£1200).....£495</li> <li>XLO 3 METRE PAIR EX.DEM/NEW.....£225</li> <li>AUDIOQUEST DIAMOND 2 METRE RCA.....£450</li> <li>AUDIOQUEST LAPIS 4 METRE PAIR.....£395</li> </ul> <p><b>STANDS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HNE GRANITE 5 TIER MINT.....£795</li> <li>SONUS ELITE 4 TIER MINT.....£295</li> <li>SOUNDSTYLE ST-105 NEW.....£275</li> <li>SOUNDSTYLE ST-100 NEW.....£250</li> <li>SOUNDSTYLE ST-95 NEW.....£175</li> <li>SOUNDSTYLE XS-105 NEW.....£195</li> <li>SOUNDSTYLE XS-100 NEW.....£195</li> <li>S.STYLE XS-250 CD RACK EX.DIS.....£150</li> <li>ELEMENTAL REF.SC2 MINT/BOXED.....RING</li> <li>TARGET R-2 SILVER.....£250</li> <li>SONUS/TARGET R-4 MINT.....£199</li> <li>ATACAMA R-274.....£149</li> <li>ATACAMA R-274 MINT.....£199</li> </ul> |
|---|--|--|





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Digital

- Accuphase DP67 CD player (£4500) £2995
- EAD DSP 9000 Pro S3 DAC pre £1495
- Wadia 302 CD player (£4000) £2995
- Meridian 566 24bit DAC £390
- Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista CD Player £1695
- DCS Verdi latest spec £3595
- Audio Analogue Maestro CD player £795
- DCS Verdi La Scala Transport (£9499) £6595
- Shanling CDT-100 (3D acoustics UK model) - £1600 £990
- Audio Analogue Paganini (£950) £795
- Musical Fidelity A300CD player £995
- Roksan Kandy MKIII silver/black ex-dem £450
- Audio Analogue Paganini £475
- Audio Analogue Maestro CD player £950

Amplifiers

- Parasound Halo JC-1 mono blocks (£5600) £2995
- AVI S2000M mono blocks (£2000) £695
- Quad II Forty valve pre/power system (£4000) £2495
- Copland CTA 305 and CTA 520 pre/power combination (£2997) £1595
- Boulder 1012 DAC pre (£12950) £6595
- Musical Fidelity A3 CR pre-amp (£1000) £395
- Musical Fidelity X-80 v3 £265
- ART Diavolo Power Amplifier (£5402) £1795
- Pathos Classic One mkII (£1400) £950
- Shanling STP-80 integrated valve amplifier £895
- Pathos Logos Integrated £1695
- Audio Synthesis Passion Ultimate passive pre £795
- Moon 15 integrated amplifier (£2695) £1295
- Plinius SA 100 MK3 £1695
- Plinius M16P (with phono stage) £1195
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- Classe CP 47.5 reference pre amp £1295
- BUY THE ABOVE PRE/POWER TOGETHER FOR ONLY** £3895
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- Plinius CD LAD balanced pre-amp £495
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- ES Lab DXS4 digital amplifier £1295
- Mark Levinson 28 pre-amplifier £995
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- ART Conductor Pre-amp £995
- Conrad Johnson 16LS pre-amp (£8000) £3750
- Musical Fidelity A3cr pre amp £395
- Sugden Masterclass Mono blocks (£6600) £3495
- Audio Note Soro SE + built in phono stage £995
- Musical Fidelity X-150 v3 (£799) £650
- Hovland HP100 pre+built in phstage (£5350) £3595
- Hovland Radia Power amplifier (£7995) £4995
- Hovland HP200 + phono stage (£7325) £4995
- Audio Analogue New Maestro (£1750) £1255
- Audio Analogue Primo Setanta £395
- Unison Research SR I £895
- Musical Fidelity A308 Power amplifier £995
- Musical Fidelity A308 Pre amplifier £995
- Roksan Kandy MKIII (silver or black) £450

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- Dali Helicon 400 (£3300) £1995
- Audio Note AN-ED speakers £695
- Mission 780 SE boxed £195
- Living Voice Avatar II, finished in cherry (£2700) £1595
- Nola (Alon) Elite Signature speakers (£8000) £3595
- Living Voice Auditorium mkII speakers (£1900) £895
- Diapason Karis III speakers + matching stands £1095
- Ref 3a Dacapo I, maple (£2700) £1650
- Living Voice Avatar II speakers in Maple (£2700) £1850
- JM Lab Cobalt 816s (£999) £595
- Triangle Heliaele, Champagne finish (£595) £395
- ATC SCM-50ASL, Yew (£7947) £4995
- Wilson Benesch ARC's with stands (£2500) £1699
- Triangle Australe in cherry (£3300) £1995
- Living Voice Avatar OXB-R in cherry £2695
- Wilson Benesch Discovery (£5700) £3895
- Quad 989 ESL Vintage, new £5000 £3600
- Quad 988 ESL in Nouveau, cost new £3750 £2999
- Audio Physic Spark3, Cherry or light maple £1250
- Audio Physic Tempo 3i, Cherry or light maple £1395
- Audio Physic Tempo 3i SE, Cherry/light maple £1799
- Audio Physic Virgo III, Cherry £2895
- Wilson Benesch ACT 1, Cherry £3595

Misc Analogue

- Michell Orbe SE with Techno Arm (Upgraded) + Never connected PSU (£3100) £1895
- Ortofon Jubilee, very low hours, boxed as new, be quick! £595
- Linn LP12, Naim Aero tonearm, Armageddon PSU, Cirkus bearing, excellent cond (£4000+) £1595
- SME 10, boxed AS NEW (£2800) £1895
- Audio Synthesis Passion Phono stage MM/MMC £795
- SME 20/2a + SME V tonearm (£5695) £3695
- Wilson Benesch Full Circle+PLY Cart (£2100) £1495
- Musical Fidelity M1 turntable, boxed as new £1990
- Michell Orbe SE boxed as new £1595
- SME 10A, boxed £2495
- Nottingham Analogue Spacedec £695
- EAR 834P de-luxe phono stage £250
- Trichord Dino - silver front £199
- Stax SRS-4040 tube system £595
- ISOL-8 2k Qube2 mains conditioner (£1500) £795
- Townshend Super Tweeters in Titanium matt £650
- Stax SRS 4040 tube system - boxed unused with Stax stand+cover £795

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Living Voice Auditorium 1 - walnut	£700	£1500
Living Voice Auditorium 1 - cherry	£800	£1500
Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2 - walnut - new, cosmetic second	£3200	£4000
Border Patrol Control Unit - line pre-amp	£1000	£1700
Audio Note Japan M7 pre-amp - line only	£3000	
Art Audio Quintet integrated - 6 months - hair-shirt, single input joy	£2400	£3100
Art Audio PX25 - 5watts - Single ended flea power for the sensitive type	£3000	£4000
Eastern Electric Mini Max pre-amp - new, boxed - compact, quality cutie	£400	£800
AudioNote (UK) Ltd P.Zero pre + monos - perfect condition	£400	
Audio Research Reference 600 monos - absolute giveaway	£8000	£30000
Nottingham Analogue Interspace - dodgy bearing	£200	£650
Ruark Crusader II - black - OK condition - tweed jacket style	£800	£1900
Sugden Masterclass integrated - nearly new	£2500	£3300
Helios Model 1 CD player	£700	£1300
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Canary 608 (blue) line integrated - great sound for low dough	£1900	£3000
Canary 303 [110v] - new - fillet mignon	£3800	£7200
Canary 309 - very nearly new - beef wellington	£4800	£10000
Canary 801 [110v] line pre-amp - lemon torte	£2500	£4500
Cyrus CD8 CD Player - 2 years old	£600	£1000
Cyrus DAC X - 1 month old - perfect	£900	£1100
Cyrus PSX - Black - 1 month old - 2 pieces	£300	£400
Monitor Audio Studio 15 in rosewood (Sept 93)	£500	£700
Chord DAC 64 - spotless	£1100	£1900
Aloia pre-amp - very new - very good condition - beautifully made - OK	£900	£2800
Thomas Sheu turntables (80mm platter with 12" arm)		ring for details
		(50mm platter with 9" arm)
Sugden A21a - titanium - classic integrated	£600	£1050
Audio Innovations 2nd Audio 2A3 Monos - a classic - tatty	£400	
Revolver 45 loudspeaker - cherry - unused	£500	£1200
Revolver 45 loudspeaker - grey + maple	£400	£900
Revolver 33 loudspeaker - grey + maple	£200	£600
Kimber Select inter-connect - 0.75m - new - in elaborate plastic box	£250	£500

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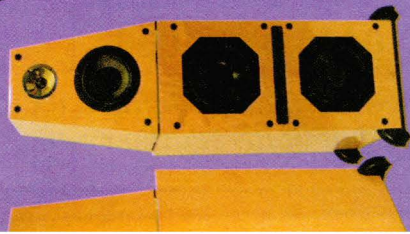
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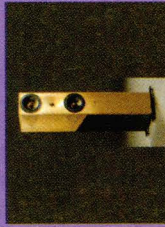
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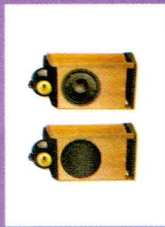
Acoustic Signature



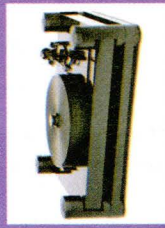
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- CASTLE HOWARD S2 SPEAKERS [OAK]
- CONRAD JOHNSON PREMIER 2 PREAMP
- COPULARE 4 TIER STAND
- CYRUS PRE X[SILVER]
- DCS ELGAR DAC [FIBRE WIRE LATEST]
- GAMMA 2.11 MONOBLOCKS
- HALCRO DM88
- KONDO [AUDIO NOTE JAPAN] KASSAI SILVER [POWERAMP]
- KRELL FPB 300
- LISSON PEKIN FM/AM
- MARANTZ SACD1
- MCINTOSH MC2000
- MERIDIAN 596 DVD PLAYER
- PROAC D15 SPEAKERS [YEW]
- SNELL TYPE A / TYPE Z SPEAKERS
- TOM EVANS THE VIBE
- TOWNSHEND SEISMIC SINC 4 TIER STAND
- VOYD REFERENCE CYCLEN AUDIO NOTE IO LTD [KONDO]
- WEISS MEDIA DAC
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- WILSON WITTS

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- AUDIO NOTE ANE-SP TEBONY FINNISH
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- AUDIO RESEARCH VT150 MONOBLOCKS
- AUDIO RESEARCH REFERENCE 600 MONOBLOCKS
- AUDIO RESEARCH LSI 6mk2
- AUDIO STATIC 5s [ELECTROSTATICS]
- AUDIO SYNTHESIS DAX DECADE [DAC PRE]
- AUDIO VALVE BALDUR 70 MONOBLOCKS
- B&W NAUTILUS 80's
- BATV3: PREAMP WITH REMOTE
- BEARD P35 MK2 POWERAMP
- BEARD CA35 PREAMP
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- CANARY AUDIO CA303 MONOBLOCKS
- CARY CAD300 SIGNATURE SE AMPS

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- £500
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- £4,000
- £9,000
- £6,000
- £1,200
- £7,500
- £13,500
- £30,000
- £8,800
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- £5,500
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- £9,000
- £4,500
- £22,000
- £1,800
- £10,000

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- £295
- £250
- £495
- £995
- £1,800
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- £1,100
- £1,800
- £3,500
- £2,500
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- JM LAB MINI UTOPIA
- LIN SONDEK LP12 [BOXED AS NEW] MARK [ORCL] STRAMPOLIN
- LIN SONDEK LP12 [AKITO] CIR CUS [TRAMPOLIN] K9
- LIN SONDEK LP12 [BASIC PLUS
- MARANTZ CD2 [VERY RARE]
- MARANTZ CD12
- MARK LEVINSON 383 INTEGRATED
- MARK LEVINSON ML380 PREAMP
- MCINTOSH MC2000
- MCINTOSH MA 6850 INTEGRATED
- MERIDIAN DSP 5000 SPEAKERS 9674 [LATEST]
- MERIDIAN DSP5000C [CENTRE]
- MERIDIAN 500 TRANSPORT
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- MUSICAL FIDELITY P250 MONOS
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- NAIM 101/SNAPS PSU
- NAIM O1 TUNER [2 BOX]
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- PASS LABS X350
- PROAC D15 SPEAKERS
- PS AUDIO CLASSIC 250 POWERAMP
- ROWLAND CONCENTRA 2
- SME 201/SME V
- TALON KHORUS X MK1 | I SPEAKERS
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**ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL** systems L1290 Loudspeakers. Huge American high end speakers. Three-way design with lovely walnut cabinets, can email pics, (£2,000) £3750no. 07788 807552 (London).

**ARCAM ALPHA 8** CD player, instructions, boxed, immaculate, (£450) £150. Yamaha KX580 cassette deck, Dolby B,C,S HX Pro. Boxed, hardly ever used, (£250) £30. Trevor 02476 842117 day or 02476 319920 evening (Bulkington, Warks).

**ARCAM ALPHA 8** integrated and 8P power amp, £100 each. Arcam 8SE CD, £200, all boxed, excellent condition. B&W 602 standmounts with Atacama stands, £100. 07793 725356 (Croydon).

**AUDIO RESEARCH LS5 I** line-level valve preamp, excellent condition, hardly used, (£5,290) £1,900. Part exchange welcome on any Hi-Fi product. Please call Kim Ip 020 8504 1638 (Buckhurst Hill, Essex).

**AUDIONOTE AZ2** speakers, maple, immaculate, £395. Fanfare FT1A FM tuner, aluminium face plate, silver wired, boxed, £750. Three van den Hul interconnects, carbon £250. Mr Clark. 020 8561 7915 (Heathrow).

**AURUM CANTUS LEISURE** 2SE, rosewood, as new, boxed, not even run in yet, (£900) £525. Townshend Seismic Sink stand, silver, three shelf, condition as above, (£670) £500. 07921 863717 (N.London).

**COPLAND CDA823** CD player, six months old. £1,200ono. 01744 732133 (St. Helens).

**CYRUS 8** amplifier with matching SmartPower. Black, mint, boxed, £800. 01384 395131 (West Mids).

**DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 42** wall speakers, white, including Target stands, three months old, £225. 07729 600847 (W.Sussex).

**EXPOSURE XXV RC** amp, £380. Castle Avon in mahogany finish (includes four metres of Audioquest bi-wire and plugs), £200. Both excellent condition with original packaging (can be demonstrated) 01482 887409 after 6pm. (Hull).

**GRADO SR60** headphones, £50. Superb condition 020 7536 0466 (London).

**GRYPHON** The Black Exorcist MM/MC cartridge demagnetiser, (£100) £60. Unwanted prize, Stuart 01384 394441 (West Mids).

**HITACHI STEREO** music centre SDT-2680R, 1976 with Hitachi copy of SME3009 tonearm. Needs attention, £75. 01493 665761 (Norfolk)

**ISOTEK** mains leads with Furutech upgrades. Mainline, (£270) £160 each and one digital, £180. 01772 314151 or 07751 475062 (Preston)

**KEF MODEL 203** in cherry veneer, latest model, four year guarantee remaining, (£3,000) £2,300. 01782 256087 (Stoke on Trent).

**KEF REF 1.2** rosenut, £675. Sennheiser HD650, £150. Ortofon MC30 Supreme cartridge, £350. All mint, boxed. World Audio KL59 speakers, call. 0115 9754070 (Notts).

**KOETSU BLACK MC** cartridge. Brand new (0 hours use). Still in wooden box. (£1,200) £775. Email only please [alan395shona@btinternet.com](mailto:alan395shona@btinternet.com) (Scotland).

**KUZMA STABI XL** turntable plus Stogi reference arm. Boxed, manuals, (£10,500) £5,000. 020 7622 5420 (London).

**LINN KELTIKS** black ash, with latest tweeters and Ku-stone stands, Linn TuneBox Active crossover, two Exposure VIII and Exposure IV single regulated power amps, £2,500. Lecson HL1, very rare and classic horn-loaded speakers, original instructions and brochure, in brown 1970s hessian. Amazing sound, very efficient, £350. Phone 07968 796490 (Newport, Wales).

**LINN KOLECTOR/LK85** pre/power, black, boxed excellent condition, £600 per pair, or separate. Marantz CD63 MKII KI Sig CD player, boxed, remote, manual, superb, £200. 020 8476 1416 (Heathrow).

**MARANTZ CD63 KI SIG**, box, manual, remote plus Cable Talk Reference interconnect, £250ono. Kimber 4TC speaker cable three metres, £80. 07747 618735 (Somerset). ▣

## BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

## WANTED

**GRADIENT EVIDENCE Mk11** floorstanding speakers and Celestion Ditton 66 studio monitors. Must be in excellent working order and condition 01622 692636 or 07801 25816 (Kent)

**MARANTZ CD63 MKII KI** Signature, fully functioning, black, made in Japan and in excellent working condition. Will pay reasonable price. Please call 07875 092215 (W.Yorks)

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A308CR** power amp and Clearlight Audio Aspekt rack four tier or Finite Element pagode E14 four tier. For more info call Andy 0115 9126424 (Mids)

**NAIM NAIT 2** Rega Kyte speakers. Linn Kans. All in good condition please. 07810 103908 (W.Yorks).

**RDC ASPEKT** rack. Please call with details on 01766 781211 (Porthmadog).

**ROYD MINSTREL** loudspeakers any finish considered but must be in perfect working order. Alternatively, new main driver units welcome. John 0161 439 5122 (Stockport).



**FOR SALE**

**MARANTZ CD17 KI SIG**, Champagne gold, £300. Gordon 07941 463474 (Ayr).  
**MARANTZ CD6000 KI SIG** OSE, Sony tuner and MiniDisc, Yamaha cassette deck, B&W 602 S2 speakers, Atacama stands, NAD C70 amp, Sound Organisation stand, £500. 01827 251282 (Tamworth)  
**MARANTZ CD84** (two of) Cambridge Audio DacMagic 2.Dynalab 2.8 SDA speakers (boxed).Bush MTT1 record player. Pioneer TX950L tuner, £250 ono. John 07855 121587 (W.Yorks).  
**MARANTZ CD94** professionally modified to highest spec (Reference standard), £695. QED X-Tube 400 cable, 3.5 metre pair, £75. Sentec PP9 phono preamp, MM/MC, £75. 020 8951 3178 (Middx).  
**MARANTZ PM8200** amp and CD 7300, (£800) £450 prestige condition or £225 each. 07903 613418 (London).  
**MERIDIAN DIGITAL THEATRE**; 500 transport, 568 processor, 518 anti-jitter device, pair DSP5500s, pair DSP5000s, DSP5000C. Excellent condition, black speakers. All boxes, manuals, cables and remote, £10,000. 07720 770717 (Essex).  
**MISSION M73** floorstanders in black ash. Complete with grills and in superb condition. £100 07899 808918 (Kent).  
**MONARCHY SM70** Class A, zero feedback power amp £375. Pioneer 565 Universal £195. Linn Kolektor preamp with remote £295. All mint boxed 01243 863371 (W.Sussex).

**MONITOR AUDIO** silver S6 in oak, excellent condition, £200. 01242 703721 (Cheltenham).  
**MUSICAL FIDELITY A3** CD and amplifier, £375 each. Dynaudio Contour 1.8MkIIs speakers, £850, immaculate all round condition. Please call 07985 935277 (Manchester)  
**MYRYAD MT100** tuner silver, boxed as new (£600+). Hoveland 1.5 metre Gen 3 interconnect (£400), £400 the pair. Acoustic Zen Hologram II 6ft bi-wire speaker cable as new, (£800) accept £350. Chris 07753 742021 (Essex).  
**NAD 3020A** amplifier MM/MC, £60, or swop for tuner. 01656 657484 (S.Wales).  
**NAIM NAIT 3** amp, boxed, excellent condition, (£608) £230 (S.Wales)  
**NORDOST MOONGLO** silver shadow one metre digital interconnect, (£365) bargain at £200. Martin 020 7684 2046 (London).  
**NORDOST VISHNU** power cable, two months old, just burnt in, (£450) £340. AVI Laboratory series CD player, still guaranteed. (£1,400) 020 8374 9788 (London).

**PHILIPS SACD 1000** CD/DVD high end player, (£1,050) £395, brand new, boxed. 020 8951 3178 (London).  
**PMC FB1** speakers, black ash £750. Musical Fidelity X-Ray V3 CD player, £600. NAD S400 tuner, £350. Terry 020 8482 0363 (Enfield).  
**PMC FB1S** in oak veneer, absolute mint condition, boxed, hardly used, £900ono. Buyer collects, Paul 07793 764436 (Peterborough).  
**PROAC RESPONSE 3.8** yew finish, excellent condition, superb sound, original boxes and manual approx five years old. Comes with additional granite bases. £1,950ono 020 8868 7835 (Middx)  
**PS AUDIO PCA2** pre, two HCA powers, 15 months old. £1,600 or £800 each, boxes, pristine. 020 8689 1188 (Surrey).  
**QED SILVER** anniversary, 3m pair, £15. Mitchell rewirable gold phono plugs (4), £6.50. Apollo Olympus stands, £39. (Wanted) RDC Aspekt rack. 01766 781211 (N.Wales).  
**QUAD 12L** speakers, birds eye maple, immaculate, £320. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

**QUAD 635 ONE**, updated but faulty. Luxman PD300, LF wired. Alphason HR100-S, AT31E cartridge, 160 Classical LPs, £1,200. 01626 367536 (Devon).  
**REGA PLANET** CD £200. Mira amp, £200. Pro-Ject turntable, £85. All excellent condition. 0191 2761682 (Tyne and Wear).  
**ROKSAN KANDY MK3** amp and CD player, black. Wharfedale Pacific Evo60 mahogany. QED X-tube 350 (bi-wired cables) QED Airlocked plugs, QED silver spiral i/cs, £1,400. 07789 813560 (Merseyside).  
**ROKSAN TABRIZ** tonearm, (£455). Roksan Corus cartridge (MM, £155). Rega Super Elys, (£150). Rega Elys (£100), £380 the lot. 07879 650913 (London).  
**RUARK EQUINOX** speakers with dedicated stands. Excellent condition with boxes. Superb sound, £675ono. Thorens TD150 with various cartridges, offers. 023 8073 8935 (Southampton).  
**SAE AMERICAN** pre/power. 240V export model with manuals. 200 watt with separate power supplies for each channel. Offers or part-ex for valve preamp. 01227 219639 (Essex).  
**SENNHEISER MD250II** linear closed back headphones (£170), £75. Two months old. Pioneer F-204 RDS tuner FM/AM, (£140) £30. 07891 533084 (Swansea).  
**SPENDOR S3E** speakers, rosenut, (£795) £485. Samuel Johnson ppa 100 and pca 100 pre/power amps, (£5,700) £1,695 the pair. Pathos TT integrated Class A hybrid amp with phono section, (£3,250) £1,895. Wadia 301 CD player, (£3,650) £2,250. 01202 767873 (Dorset).  
**SONY** DVD recorder RDR GXD500, one month old. Superb picture, built in tuner, (£400) £300 plus Panasonic VHS for free. 01526 320513 (Lincs)  
**TRANSPARENT CABLE** Music Wave Plus, late XL version, 35 ft pair, bought ex-demo six months ago, (£1,514) £750. 07968 972445 (Stourbridge).  
**VTL IT-85** integrated valve amp. Mint with box, remote and manual, 500 hours on the valves. (£2,250) £1,350ono. Chris 01892 547003 (Tunbridge Wells).



Above: Copland CDA823 CD player

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