

HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND APRIL 2006 £3.90 WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK

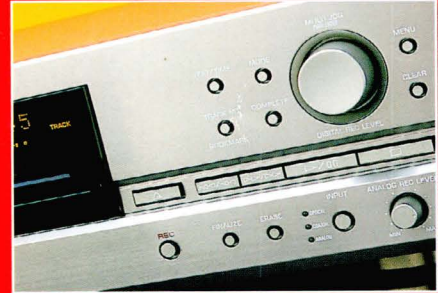


WIN!
Hi-tech PMC speakers worth £2,700!
See page 30

THE BEST NEW HI-FI TESTED INSIDE



ROKSAN New Caspian amp and CD player



YAMAHA Digital recording for the modern age



CLASSE Class-leading multichannel amps



IN-DEPTH TEST!

SUPERMODEL

B&W's new XT4 speaker is slim, elegant... and sounds fantastic!



APRIL 2006 £3.90
Future MEDIA WITH PASSION 9 770955 111076 04 >

FREE!
2nd hand hi-fi
mini-mag!



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>>
AMPLIFIERS

- FEATURING**
- > Arcam A65 Plus
 - > Denon PMA-1500AE
 - > Micromega A60
 - > Myryad Z140
 - > Onkyo A-933
 - > Rotel RA-1062

BUYER'S BIBLE
World's best hi-fi rated

INTENSE

The RA-03 integrated Amplifier



Individually, Rotel's O2 Series products will make a striking difference to the way you hear music.

The RA-03 integrated amplifier, for example, is the latest in a long line of Rotel products that have benefited from meticulous component selection, painstaking refinement and balanced design. When partnered with the RCD-02, though, it's a match made in HiFi heaven. The chemistry is instant, and a powerful listening experience. Get them connected.

To find out how the Rotel O2 Series can take you to the world's greatest musical menus, visit www.rotel.com.



Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE APRIL 2006 ISSUE 278

Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW ☎ +44 (0)20 7042 4000



It's cold outside. The February sky is drab and rainy, the winter blues refuse to loosen their icy hold... But we have the perfect antidote: it's called hi-fi. There's nothing better to warm your spirits than good music on a fine system – it's aural medicine for the soul.

For best results, a liberal dose of hi-fi should be taken daily. And to enhance the effect, it's always best to wash it down with a regular helping of *Hi-Fi Choice*. This issue, it all kicks off on p9 with *AudioFile*, our regular recipe of news and views; this month's mix includes the results of our first-ever *Music Awards*, as voted by you (p28).

Then there's the third and final part in our series exploring the workings of the most important hi-fi component of all – your ears (p39). And, of course, the UK's most comprehensive cocktail of hi-fi reviews, distilled using our rigorous test regime. Great speakers from B&W and Design E, stereo and multichannel amps from Bryston and Classé, the latest Caspian components from Roksan... we've cherry-picked the best new kit and laid bare its virtues and vices, starting on p47.

Plus, in this issue's *Ultimate Group Test*, four European stereo amps around the £500 mark take on newcomers from two of Japan's top brands. (Two-channel sound still rocks, incidentally.)

Ahhhh. We feel better already...

Tim Bown

Tim Bown Editor

WHY WE'RE NO.1 FOR HI-FI...

- Since 1975, *Hi-Fi Choice* has delivered the world's most thorough, no-nonsense guide to buying high-performance hi-fi.
- We now publish 13 issues a year, including two special editions: *The Collection*, an issue dedicated to the finest high-end components, and *The Hi-Fi Awards* – the most important annual awards in the hi-fi calendar.
- Every issue contains a potent mix of the latest hi-fi news, views, music, interviews and in-depth tests, brought to you by a prestigious team of expert writers from the UK and around the world.
- We only review the most interesting and worthy new hi-fi components – high-performance audio products across a wide range of price points. We obtain more genuine hi-fi exclusives than any other magazine – if it's worthy of your attention, you'll read about it first in *Hi-Fi Choice*.
- Our tests are the most rigorous in the business, conducted by the UK's most experienced team of hi-fi reviewers.
- Alongside in-depth component reviews and accessory round-ups, every regular issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* features an *Ultimate Group Test* on a core hi-fi product category – from source components to amps and speakers.
- Each *Ultimate Group Test* is conducted using a uniquely thorough three-step test regime. This consists of carefully controlled 'blind' and sighted listening sessions, a full set of laboratory tests and extended 'hands on' testing by the primary reviewer. No other magazine goes to such lengths to ensure accurate comparative reviews.
- Components that best meet our exacting standards are listed in the *Buyer's Bible* section – the world's most reliable reference guide for the hi-fi buyer.
- That's why *Hi-Fi Choice* is...
The Essential Guide To Audio Excellence In The Home

Beautiful in-house photography, so you see the product in all its glory

Cherry-picked kit – only the most worthy components make it into *Hi-Fi Choice*

Comprehensive in-depth reviews – we give you the full story

Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

Carefully considered verdict scores, so you really know what we think of a product



THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT WRITERS AND REVIEWERS INCLUDE...



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 scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



DAN GEORGE
Dan is a 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 interesting products make it into *HFC*.



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



DOMINIC TODD
Like many industry types, Dominic started his hi-fi life working in the retail sector. But he is better known as a hi-fi reviewer, columnist and all-round audio journalist. He has been writing about his passion since 1993.



ALVIN GOLD
Alvin 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).



DAVID VIVIAN
An award-winning journalist, David's sharp ears and equally sharp powers of description are a valuable mix for *HFC*. He also writes about cars, but who needs the latest Lotus when you've got the finest hi-fi to test drive.

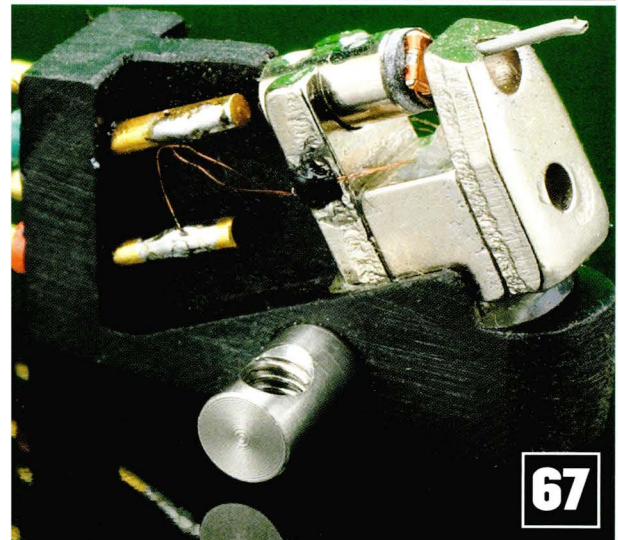


JASON KENNEDY
Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found in the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational and his love of music knows no bounds.



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

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.



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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

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BUYER'S BIBLE

The ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV gathering together all our favourite products for your perusal. Your shortlist starts here...

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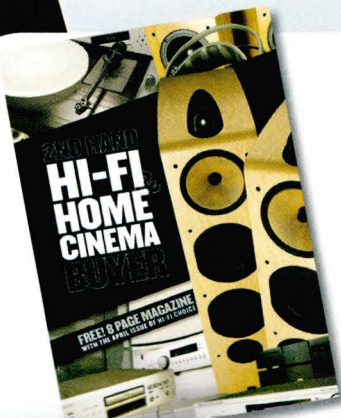
FREE MINI-MAG!

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

2 Guide to 2nd-hand kit – this issue, Rotel, plus DIY tips

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“No PC 4 MP3”

And no, we don't mean **Politically Correct**.

What we do mean is you can now record MP3 copies directly to your MP3 player or USB storage device* without using your PC. Not only that, but you can also record your CDs and DAB radio in MP3 format. And playing back your music couldn't be easier through the USB port or the AUX input on the front panel which is suitable for iPod playback.

Our new Reference Series CR-H255 CD Receiver has total connectivity by way of USB front panel connection.

All these new features coupled with the exceptional build quality and component level of performance that you have come to expect from TEAC.

So now you can connect directly to your MP3 Player without the need of a computer.

**The new Reference CR-H255.
DAB radio + MP3 record and playback via
the USB port.**

TEAC. CD ripping made easy.

Now you can get connected at your nearest retailer.

Contact TEAC on 0845 130 2511 or at info@teac.co.uk

*Please check with your retailer or TEAC for compatibility



**The NEW Reference
CR-H255 USB/DAB**

**MP3 record and playback
via the USB port**

Are you connected?



MP3 player not included

CoolBrands

TEAC

www.teac.co.uk

nbienTM
www.nbien.com

The new *Dx-5*
Series

with Fabric Ceramic Composite Technology



VISIT US AT
SOUND & VISION
THE BRISTOL SHOW
24 - 26 FEBRUARY
2006

To experience how we can enhance your listening pleasure, visit your nearest dealer.
Details can be found on our website : www.nbien.com or you can email us at info@nbien.com.



MARANTZ PM7001 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

▶ The award-winning, class-leading Marantz PM7200 stereo amp is no more. This thoroughbred has been replaced with the new, shinier PM7001. But how has Marantz improved *Hi-Fi Choice's* favourite sub-£500 amp of 2004? Power has gone up from 105 to 120 watts, thanks to a dual-mono circuit layout featuring super-short signal paths. The casework is a bit special, too – it's an acoustically-damped, low-resonance chassis that is much slimmer

than its predecessor, yet is all-metal with a thick aluminium faceplate.

Perhaps it's the new HDAM-SA2 amp modules placed at crucial points in the circuit that will push the sonic boundaries forward? Or maybe it's the bespoke current feedback design that keeps power levels up, whatever speakers you throw at it? You could just be looking at a new budget superstar...

To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Marantz PM7001
TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier
PRICE £350
KEY FEATURES 120 watts per channel • Bespoke current feedback design • Dual-mono circuit layout
• Acoustically damped, low-resonance chassis
• HDAM-SA2 proprietary amps modules
CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com



DALI Loudspeakers



Stillpoints Isolation



Vertex AQ



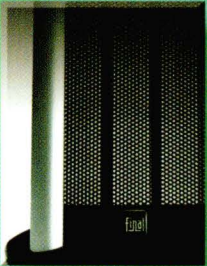
ExactPower Conditioners



AudioDeskSystems



Final Electrostatics



Tact/Lyngdorf Audio



Announcing RoomPerfect™

our most exciting technology yet!

RoomPerfect™ is the eagerly awaited room correction system, developed and patented by Lyngdorf Audio. The UK launch is at the Sound & Vision Show, Bristol.

Why use RoomPerfect?

The quality of your CD player, amplifier and speakers might be exemplary, but the system may still not be cutting it at home. It's often the case that even highly acclaimed speakers sound great in some rooms, and disappoint in others.

The speakers are not at fault. The performance of a speaker is known to be highly dependent on the acoustics of the room and relative positions of the speaker and listener.



RoomPerfect™ conceptually and effectively removes the negative influence of your room from the music, allowing your system to sing as designed.

The performance of the RoomPerfect™ system is outstanding, with no trace of compression or other negative artefacts. The system is easy to set up and requires no room acoustic knowledge or even a computer



The first implementation of the RoomPerfect™ system is an integrated module for our True Digital Amplifier (TDA2200), offering a great leap in performance for a modest outlay.

The TDA2200 becomes a single high performance unit replacing a DAC, room correction system and pre/power amplifier – a truly scalable, versatile product. Following this, a pre-amplifier and combined CD player/preamplifier, both including RoomPerfect™, will be available. Allowing you to integrate and benefit from RoomPerfect™ in almost any system.

Innovative technology

The unique RoomPerfect™ system measures both the listening position(s) and a number of other room positions, mapping a 3-dimensional sound-field of your room.

The RoomPerfect™ system is then capable of combining the listening position(s) information with the sound-field information in a wholly new and innovative way, ensuring that you achieve superior sound, irrespective of your room, speaker and listening position.

The TDA2200 becomes a single high performance unit replacing a DAC, room correction system and pre/power amplifier – a truly scalable, versatile product. Following this, a pre-amplifier and combined CD player/preamplifier, both including RoomPerfect™, will be available. Allowing you to integrate and benefit from RoomPerfect™ in almost any system.

Simple to use

The RoomPerfect™ system is very advanced, but easy to use. A computer is not required. The calibration procedure will guide you through setting up the supplied microphone in a number of positions, each measurement taking a few seconds. The system evaluates and displays the quality of the sound-field, to help you optimise the results.

And the results...?

Sweet, dynamic, detailed, coherent and musical performances free from booming, smearing, congestion, shouting and other room-induced distortion.

Lyngdorf Audio UK distribute the ground-breaking Lyngdorf digital products, together with ExactPower conditioners, Stillpoints and AudioDeskSystems CD enhancers. We also compliment these products by offering/dealing with a very few, select components such as the award winning DALI speakers, Vertex AQ accessories and the new range of Final Electrostatic panel speakers



tel: 0870 9 100 100
www.lyngdorfaudio.co.uk

CYRUS CD XT CD TRANSPORT

Following the launch of the superb DAC X last year, Cyrus has now released the crucial counterpart for its take on reference-quality CD – the CD XT. The two-box combo is likely to challenge the best CD players on the market, despite its modest price tag – achievable due to financial and mechanical investments made elsewhere in the Cyrus portfolio.

It's mechanically based on the CD 8's modular platform chassis, with specially

developed power and decoding sections. The analogue power supply topology is a modern development from the original Cyrus Discmaster CD transport, which "has resulted in a huge 'resolution hike' over the CD 8x," according to Cyrus. And because of its modular design, Cyrus users can advance all the way from the CD6 up to the full transport and DAC. So, is the two-box CD player back?

To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Cyrus CD XT

TYPE CD transport

PRICE £800

KEY FEATURES Designed to match DAC X

• Modular design • Upgrade path from CD6

• New power supply topology • PSX-R upgradable

CONTACT 01480 435577 • www.cyrus.com



NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640A v2

Having recently released new 'v2' versions of its excellent budget CD players, Cambridge Audio is now giving its amps the same treatment. The Azur 640A v2 is more powerful than its predecessor, delivering a healthy 75 watts per channel yet costing just £50 more. Other key improvements include redesigned preamp circuitry, plus upgraded volume, tone and balance controls. It also has a more sophisticated control bus for multiroom integration and supports 'Incognito ready' outputs.

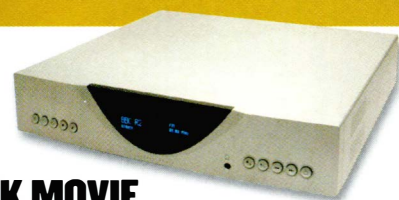
Price £300 **Due** now
☎ 0870 900 1000
🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com



AUDIO RESEARCH REFERENCE CD7

The Red Book standard lives on with Audio Research's new Reference CD player, the CD7 – the first digital product from ARC to warrant 'Reference' status. Based around a clever new gain stage developed for the Reference 3 preamp, the new player builds on the existing CD3 MkII using a Philips Pro2 transport and Crystal 24-bit DAC. Proprietary capacitors are used in the audio stage, which is coupled to a sizeable power supply. Audio Research claims the new player has significantly lower noise and distortion than the CD3 MkII, with improved dynamics and soundstaging. Expect an exclusive review next issue.

Price £8,000 **Due** now ☎ 020 8947 5047 🌐 www.audioresearch.com



LINN CLASSIK MOVIE

Linn's hi-fi/home cinema all-in-one Classik Movie system has been refreshed for 2006. The new package contains a CD/DVD player, FM/AM radio, plus a preamp and integrated five-channel power amp, rated at 75 watts a channel. It also boasts a sleek new design with the disc drawer cleverly concealed in the display window, plus technology derived from Linn's Chakra amplifiers.

Meanwhile, Linn is now offering its Artikulat speaker range in active form. It comprises three full-range models, built around Linn's proprietary driver array.

Price Classik Movie £2,750 **Due** now
☎ 0500 888909 🌐 www.linn.co.uk

THORENS TD350

The TD350 is the new flagship turntable from vinyl legend Thorens. It returns to a traditional aesthetic and is the only deck in the portfolio that uses a suspended design. Incorporating a unique double damped, leaf-spring suspension system, the new flagship is said to resist horizontal and vertical vibrations. Coupled with a 4kg platter and low-friction bearing, Thorens claims "exceptional smoothness" from a design that also boasts an electronic, speed controlled, AC synchronous motor. The deck comes supplied with a Thorens TP 250 variant of the popular Rega RB250 tonearm and weighs in at a hefty 10kg. Thorens has also used the launch to hint at a possible comeback for the classic TD160.

Price £1,900 **Due** now
☎ 0870 199 3914
🌐 www.thorens.com



REGA APOLLO

Apollo is the first of two new CD players from Rega's Essex plant. Arriving marginally before the more costly Jupiter, the Apollo is a top-loading design that has been three years in the making. It boasts a new transport mechanism with a mounting ball chuck that eschews the conventional magnetic puck system for better laser accuracy and stop/start speeds. Rega has also included proprietary error correction chips, plus an advanced servo controller using the latest signal processing techniques. Further key features include the latest Wolfson DACs, a newly designed output amplifier and a low noise bus design. Expect a review soon.

Price £498 **Due** now
☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk





ROTEL RMB-1077

Powerful multichannel amplification just got smaller, thanks to Rotel's new seven-channel Class D (digital) power amp. The RMB-1077 is just 6cm tall and houses two new proprietary Rotel technologies, said to deliver "entirely new levels of efficiency". First up is Controlled Oscillation Modulation (COM), which aims to stabilise the switching-type digital power supply whilst maximising efficiency. The second technology involves special circuit topology that brings the power supply and amp circuits together to boost efficiency by a claimed 90 per cent. The result is a 7x100-watt powerhouse that weighs just 7.8 kg.

Price £1,695 **Due** now ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.rotel.com



MARANTZ PM7001 KI

Last issue, we revealed Marantz's new PM7001 amp as the replacement for the *Hi-Fi Choice* Award-winning PM7200. A month later and Marantz has announced the Ken Ishiwata Signature version – the PM7001 KI – which carries a £200 premium. This is the first component to be tweaked by Ken in more than two years and includes a high-grade power supply and extensive copper plating throughout. The chassis has also been upgraded to a dual layer design, with analogue signal and control circuits separated and shielded to prevent interference.

Price £550 **Due** now

☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

MORDAUNT-SHORT AVANT 900i

After last year's Performance, Mordaunt-Short is back to grassroots speaker design with the new Avant 900i range. The six-strong line-up includes a number of revised technologies and new design ideas, including revoiced bass/mid drivers.

Mordaunt-Short's 25mm aluminium tweeter has been developed over 20 years and now includes special alloys that, coupled with assembly changes, are said to provide improved balance and better treble performance. Further modifications have been made to the cabinet, crossover and driver cone.

Price From £150 to £500

Due now

☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 www.mordaunt-short.com



Soundbites



ARCAM Solo owners can now gain full two-way remote control of Apple's iPod thanks to a new accessory cable called the rLead. It allows users to control the iPod from the Solo's remote, showing the portable's data on its fascia display. The rLead also charges the device and is compatible with any 30pin iPod portable, including Video and Nano varieties. ☎ 01223 203200

KEF has revised its popular and innovative 'egg' 5.1 surround speaker system. The new KHT3005 (£1,000) package is a completely new design comprising four new Uni-Q-based satellites, a centre speaker and a subwoofer. KEF has modified the Uni-Q drivers and concentrated on the centre speaker, which has two additional bass drivers for added dynamic clout. Expect a March launch. ☎ 01622 672261

ION is the name given to the world's first USB turntable – a mass market solution to mastering vinyl to PC audio. Its software allows direct conversion to CD or MP3 and offers a 'clean up' package for ropery discs. There's also a line-level output for hi-fi use. Amazingly, it doesn't need special drivers. Availability is currently limited to the US. 🌐 www.ion-audio.com

SUPRA has a new HDMI lead certified for 10 and 12 metre lengths. The HF100 is guaranteed to work over 12 metres and is both designed and produced by Supra. Prices start from £45.

☎ 01223 441299



QED is expanding its new Qonduit range of mains products to include three distribution blocks. The 'hubs' are made from extruded aluminium and are surge suppressed, filtered and reject RF interference. They're available in two, four and six socket configurations and prices start at £90. ☎ 01279 501111



PATHOS ENDORPHIN

Behold the first ever CD player from exotic amplifier specialist Pathos. It's called the Endorphin and although details are very limited, we do know the new player uses dual-differential, 24-bit delta-sigma DACs with a Class A tube analogue stage. The reference-level player is the first disc spinner in Pathos' 12-year history and is a suitable match for the marque's wide variety of amplifiers. Expect an exclusive, in-depth review in a few months' time.

Price £4,500 **Due** April

☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.pathosacoustics.com

Bristol Show '06

VISIT THE UK'S NO.1 HI-FI SHOW!

Bristol's Sound and Vision show is not only the UK's largest hi-fi and home cinema event, it's also our favourite. Why? Because of its friendly atmosphere and the sheer range of kit on display – from the most venerable hi-fi brands to the latest in high-performance AV.

This year's show takes place 24-26 February and *Hi-Fi Choice* will be present – in person! Our stand (in the Conservatory) will feature a daily prize draw to win a Tivoli DAB radio, alongside a fantastic subscription offer and selected back issues of the magazine, all available at a special 'show price'.

We'll also be holding 'meet the reviewers' sessions, with different key reviewers on each day of the show. If you've got a question you're just dying to ask Alan, Alvin, Dan, David, Paul, Richard or Tim, now's your chance!

Reviewers will be appearing at the *Hi-Fi Choice* stand at the following times:

FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY

Tim Bowern: 1pm-2pm

Alan Sircom: 2pm-3pm

Dan George: 3pm-4pm

SATURDAY 25 FEBRUARY

Paul Messenger: 1pm-1.30pm

Alvin Gold: 2pm-3pm

SUNDAY 26 FEBRUARY

Richard Black: 1pm-2pm

David Vivian: 2pm-3pm

As usual, the show will be held at the Marriott Hotel in Lower Castle Street, Bristol. Several floors of the hotel will be commandeered by the hi-fi industry for the weekend, with room after room featuring demonstrations of the latest, most vital hi-fi components currently on the market. What's more, many manufacturers will use the show to launch new products – this will be your first chance to see/hear them for yourself. So we'll see you there!

THE DETAILS

WHAT: Sound and Vision 2006 – The Bristol Show

WHERE: Marriott City Centre Hotel, Lower Castle Street, Bristol

WHEN: 24-26 February 2006, 10am-5pm

TICKETS: Adults £7, students/senior citizens £3.50, accompanied children under 16 free
www.bristolshow.co.uk

TOP 10 NEW PRODUCTS WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE/ HEAR AT THE BRISTOL SHOW

1. **NAD** Masters Series (component range)
2. **Naim** n-Vi one-box AV system
3. **Cyrus** DAB tuner
4. **Arcam** AV9 processor
5. **Rega** Apollo CD player
6. **REL** subwoofers (new range)
7. **Meridian** DSP3100 speakers
8. **Audionet** VIP G2 universal disc player
9. **Anthony Gallo** Reference speakers
10. **Denon** AVR-3806 multichannel receiver

Show report – CES 2006

It's early January – time for the world's biggest consumer electronics show. Alan Sircom says welcome to Vegas, baby!

By its own OTT standards, the scale of the 2006 Consumer Electronics Show in the Las Vegas Convention Center was mind-numbing. Even the Specialty Audio expo was a hi-fi show on steroids, complete with pool and palm trees.

This is an American show, so naturally American brands were in full effect. Well-known names like **Audio Research** (showing its new Reference series CD player and power amplifiers, as well as the new PH-7 phono stage) and **Conrad-Johnson** (with its first integrated amplifier – the CA200 – a custom reengineered C-J version of the McCormack UDP-1, two new power amps and a new multichannel pre/power combo) rubbed shoulders with the not so well known, including **Michael Yee Audio** (with its \$2,800 SuperNova phonostage) and **MSB** (a fascinating company that even builds its own discrete DACs in its \$9,995 Reference III CD player).

One American name that proved a welcome return was **Day Sequerra**, the tuner expert. The company is back with its \$4,995 M1 tuner and – instead of relying on external radio sources – it built its own radio station in the next room.

“Convergence remains the Holy Grail for the big CE brands, but it's good to see so many companies still pushing the boundaries of audio excellence.”

Wadia ended a couple of years of relative quiet with two new product ranges. The Series 9 'Decoding Computer' system represents a new reference point in CD replay (a snip at \$28,000), while the \$6,950 581 and \$8,450 581i players are its first multiformat CD/SACD models.

One of the best-known names in Chinese high-end – **Shanling** – showed off its new 500-series products, a large and striking \$5,000 valve CD

player and \$6,000 class A amplifier, with a look straight out of a sci-fi movie. Meanwhile, Italian firm **Audio Analogue** announced a new amplifier, a behemoth integrated called, innovatively, the Class A.



The British were there, with dozens of big UK names dotted around the various show sites. Many products had already been seen in the UK but were getting their first Stateside airing. **Naim** was displaying its n-VI home cinema system, **ECS** was demonstrating its striking EA 1 monoblocks and showcasing its new £4,680 ECSpre preamplifier, **Cambridge Audio** showed its latest 'v2' innovations to the American audience, while **Arcam** was demonstrating its AV9 processor as well as the Apple-certified rLead and forthcoming rDock two-way iPod controllers for its Solo system.

Back to the main Convention Center and there were many British and American names taking on the 150,000-strong throng. **Meridian's** demos of its updated 800 Series flagship system (in conjunction with **Faroudja's** projection technology) was a highlight of the show, as was **PMC's** kitting out of the DTS room. Meanwhile, **Krell** had more than 10 new products on show, including the EVO range and the FBI (fully balanced integrated) amplifier.

There were also companies who went 'off piste', in private rooms. **Wilson Audio** showcased the wholly new Duette. This \$11,000 speaker – which can be supplied with a custom-made stand – was boldly demonstrated on low-cost, conventional bookshelves.

Of course, pure hi-fi is only a small piece of the CES puzzle. The big 'tech' stories were things like **Toshiba's** \$499 HD-A1 HD-DVD player, expected in the spring, and **Intel's** Viiv processor, which aims to turn PCs into true home entertainment platforms. Convergence remains the Holy Grail for the big consumer electronics brands, but it's good to see so many companies still pushing the boundaries of audio excellence. **HFC**

New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



PET SHOP BOYS

Title: *Fundamental*
Due: April 17

After a four year gap, the Pet Shop Boys have finally recorded the follow-up to 2002's *Release*. Helmed by veteran producer Trevor Horn, the first single is titled *Minimal* and in addition to the duo's own compositions, the tracklist also includes the Diane Warren-penned *Numb*.

NEW YORK DOLLS

Title: *tbc*
Due: summer 2006

Rock legends the New York Dolls entered the studio on 15 Jan to begin recording their first album of new material since 1974's *Too Much Too Soon*. Only singer David Johansen and guitarist Syl Sylvain remain from the original line-up, but Johansen claims new songs, including *Punishing World*, *Plenty Of Music* and *Rainbow Store*, are the best they've ever written.

PRINCE

Title: *3121*
Due: summer 2006

Having now reverted to his original name again, Prince will follow-up 2004's *Musicalology* later this year with *3121*. Typically he's offering no clues as to the meaning of the title of the album, which he has licensed to Universal on a one-off deal. The video for the first single *Te Amo Corazon* can already be seen on his website, Npgmusicclub.com.

SNOW PATROL

Title: *Eyes Open*
Due: spring 2006

Singer Gary Lightbody has revealed that the follow-up to 2004's multi-platinum *Final Straw* is nearly finished and is provisionally titled *Eyes Open*. "As far as the lyrics go it makes perfect sense so it's likely it'll stick,"



he says. Recorded in Dublin, Glasgow and London, song titles include *Make Me Go On Forever*, *The Only Noise*, *Warmer Climate* and *Chasing Cars*.

VAN MORRISON

Title: *Pay The Devil*
Due: March

There have long been touches of country in Morrison's musical mix but *Pay The Devil*, the follow-up to 2005's *Magic Time*, is his first all-country album. The 15-track set features Morrison originals plus covers of songs made famous by Webb Pierce, Hank Williams, Conway Twitty and George Jones among others.

ALSO COMING SOON...

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

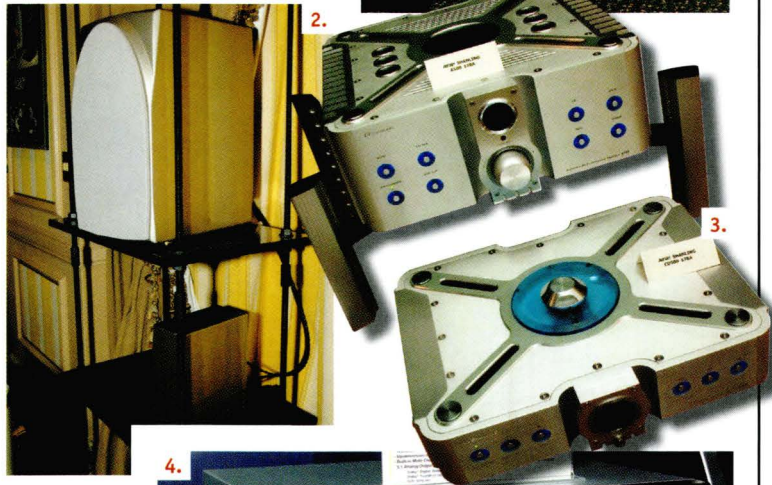
Anne-Sophie Mutter Mozart: Piano Trios (Feb); **Various** Mozart Jubilee Editions (Feb); **Jimmy Cobb** Jimmy Cobb (Mar); **Toots Thielemans** Over The Rainbow (Mar)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

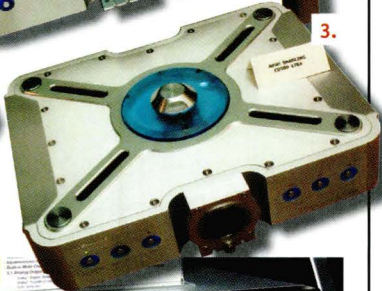
Various Artists Absolute Sound (SACD, Jan); **Arthur Pizarro** Chopin Sonatas (SACD, Feb); **Porcupine Tree** Stupid Dream (DVD-Audio, Feb); **INXS** Switch (DualDisc, Feb) **Boston Baroque** Vivaldi: Gloria/Bach: Magnificat (SACD, Jan)



1.



2.



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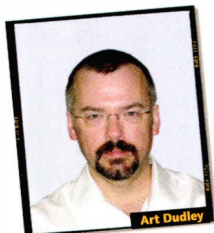


5.



6.

1. Audio Research Reference 210 power amplifiers
2. Wilson Audio Duetto 'bookshelf' speakers
3. Shanling 500 CD and amp
4. Toshiba's \$499 HD-DVD
5. MSB Reference III CD player
6. Arcam rDock
7. Audio Analogue Class A integrated amplifier



Requiem for a pre-frog

Like mail order tadpoles, has SACD snuffed it?

My sister (a remarkable woman) gave my seven-year-old daughter (a remarkable pre-woman) a gift called Planet Frog. Planet Frog is like an ant farm, except it has water instead of potting soil and a tadpole (a remarkable pre-frog) instead of ants.

It came with a coupon redeemable for one tadpole, but when I mailed it in I added a few extra dollars so the tadpole could have a friend. They arrived several months later, deader than doornails. My daughter and I buried them in an empty Sugar Pops box on a miserable rainy day, while I intoned as much of the committal rite from the *Book of Common Prayer* as I could remember. Julia cried huge, bursting sobs at the unfairness of it all – not for her, but for the helpless little taddies that never evolved, never grew up and never had a shot at true frogginess.

“And it’s unfair, because SACD never grew legs. It never had the chance.”

When we came inside, I got on the phone to the Planet Frog company, and I don't think I've ever scolded anyone quite as harshly as I scolded the dumb, sullen woman who took my call: What the hell kind of company goes around breaking the hearts of little girls?

The replacements arrived three weeks later, and lasted long enough to be named: Cheng and Eng. That was July. Cheng crossed The Great Divide in September, but Eng, renamed Sibyl, lives on.

Yet none of them ever grew legs.

I don't know about all the other reviewers, but I don't get my SACDs for free, and I certainly didn't get my SACD player for free: I paid good money for all of them. I also invested my own time and effort in promoting SACD – not in a commercial sense, of course, but in the hope of helping an especially praiseworthy example of technology in the service of music. And how have any of us been repaid? A simpering retreat by a corporate entity whose *New Releases* webpage hasn't been updated since 2003, and whose product line-up is in confused recession. The good ship SACD has all but been abandoned, leaving those of us who supported the cause from the

trenches with our extra copies of *Blonde on Blonde*, *Kind of Blue*, and Leonard Bernstein's *Mahler First* – and little more.

All I can say to our readers is that I'm sorry for being so wrong. I thought SACD would take off, once everyone heard how good it sounds and how much better it is compared to PCM digital at putting across the sense of flow and momentum in a piece of music. I thought the software industry would invest in the technology, and I thought the hardware industry would invest serious money in promoting the thing. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

All I can say to Sony is: What the hell kind of company goes around breaking the hearts of middle-aged men?

And it's unfair, because SACD never grew legs. It never had the chance.

Meanwhile, the audio world carries on. Another CES comes and goes. Products are designed and re-designed, and people go about their busy lives, buying the things they need and ignoring those that they don't. And in the midst of life we are in death.

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



Stuart M Robinson

Point...

Hi-res multichannel music is not dead!

Held just a couple of weeks apart in December and January, the Surround Professional and CES expos give those of us whose interest is high-resolution, multichannel music, both a taste of things to come and an idea of the market as it stands today.

In Hollywood at the Surround Music Awards, the year's outstanding DVD-Audio and SACD productions were recognised by a group of industry experts. The night's big winner was the Talking Heads *Brick* DualDisc, which walked away with four gongs including the coveted Best of Show, while John Hiatt's *Master of Disaster* SACD was presented with the *High Fidelity Review Listener's Choice* award. Other notable winners included Jackson Brown and Phil Ramone.

At the conference, producers were bullish about the state of DVD-Audio (bolstered by the emergence of DualDisc) but unlike in previous years, SACD's promotional/marketing team had vanished. Prominent SACD labels such as Telarc are sticking with the format, yet even they had a surprise up their sleeve, the announcement of their acquisition by the Concord Music Group. Like so many other labels, Concord's SACD catalogue has dried up in recent months but Telarc's Michael Bishop was keen to point out that their DSD/surround projects would continue and their CES booth was as upbeat as usual, giving attendees details of at least eleven new releases in 2006 and advance copies of first-quarter titles.

A number of the Surround Expo panels concerned the development of HD-DVD and Blu-Ray, the two high-capacity disc formats that will be soon fighting it out for market dominance as a replacement for 'standard definition' DVD, a theme that was carried forward to CES, albeit in that typical Las Vegas peroxide style.

The HD-DVD format, backed primarily by the DVD Forum, Toshiba, NEC and Warner appears to have an early lead. Affordable players from Toshiba (\$400 and \$800) are due to roll out in the U.S. during March, Warner has announced a list of launch titles to accompany them and Toshiba is planning a road show to promote the format to the masses. ▶



RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

LINN KAN
LOUDSPEAKER



Back around 1980, which is when the original version of the Linn Kan was first launched on an unsuspecting world, Linn

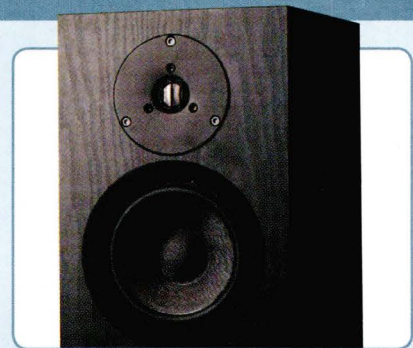
Products was hot as a hi-fi brand – in many ways the hottest of them all. The Kan was introduced when LS3/5a-mania was at its height, and appears to have been a deliberate riposte to that particular sacred cow. It would be more accurate, in fact, to describe the Kan as the LS3/5a's antithesis.

As you may well know, the LS3/5a was a specification for a small monitor from the BBC, primarily for location recording. The product was made by a number of manufacturers, of which Rogers was the best known at the time. Without going into details, the LS3/5a was notable then for its easy going tonality, and a slight upper bass prominence that, apocryphally at least, was intended to render noise from air conditioning (and other steady state LF background sounds) audible before they were transmitted in error. But the LS3/5a was also very low in sensitivity and even lower in power handling, and this was not a speaker that knew much (or cared) about dynamics.

The Kan was originally a deliberately rough and ready attempt to outdo the LS3/5a where it was at its weakest. In other words, it was a compact speaker, identical in size to the shallow, 300mm tall LS3/5a, with real dynamics and much more musical resolution.

Although some very early Kans were apparently sold in chipboard enclosures, production soon settled down to veneered birch ply (the same as the LS3/5a), and the unit's bass alignment was determined by its sealed enclosure, though later versions were ported. An active version was available, as was the case for all Linn speakers of the era

Whether you liked or loathed the sound of the Kan was dependent on whether you sympathised more with low colouration or dynamic speakers generally. On the negative side, the Kan was an aggressive, forward sounding design that always needed immaculate control from a powerful amplifier to work as it could. Low sensitivity and fairly strong power handling was part of this



“The Kan was originally a deliberately rough and ready attempt to outdo the LS3/5a.”

equation, of course. On the plus side, it was dynamically far superior to the LS3/5a. In the right room and with the right system in charge, it sounded like a bigger scale speaker than its diminutive dimensions implied, and it really could pack a punch. Ultimately it may not have been a great speaker, but it certainly served to show where the LS3/5a got it wrong.

The Kan's instruction manual warned against having any other speakers in the same room, even a TV or a telephone, and that further system improvements could be best pursued by improving the source signal – familiar preoccupations at the time. The Kan, which was available in an active as well as passive form, was intended for use near a back wall, which helped add some body to what was otherwise a rather raw, lean bass.

The Kan was replaced by the bi-wirable Kan II in 1989, which looked identical, even after becoming mass-loaded with Ku-Stone in 1991. It was radically changed in 1998 (pictured), but as a budget shadow of its former self.

During the research for this piece, I stumbled across a piece of information that may explain how the Linn Kan got its name. Although many believe it's because it was because it was Linn's 'little speaker that Kan', Linn turns out to be a place name in Kansas, and guess what? Kansas is normally shortened to Kan. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

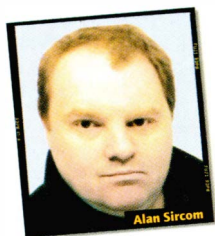
❑ The Sony/Philips Blu-ray format is being backed by Panasonic, Samsung, Sharp and Pioneer, who by all accounts will be the first to market with product, albeit a \$1,000 computer drive, followed by the Elite BDP-HD1, a \$1,800 stand-alone player.

From an audio standpoint both HD-DVD and Blu-Ray will use the same technologies. Even Sony/Philips have abandoned DSD in favour of the PCM-based Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD, both of which are lossless. Gone will be the days of arguments about which 'sounds' better; instead, the format of choice for producers will be the one that creates the smallest files and offers the most features – for example, the Dolby codec, with its pedigree Meridian Lossless Packing (MLP) background, can carry up to 14 high-resolution channels. Other supported formats include Dolby Digital Plus, DTS and good old linear PCM. It'll be up to HDMI to carry the signals to our new, whiz-bang processors but analogue will be available for backward compatibility.

DVD-Audio and SACD players have not been forgotten amid all this talk of high-definition, with launches of affordable machines from all the major players at CES, together with notable high-end introductions from Krell (SACD) and Conrad-Johnson (universal) amongst others.

The most surprising high-resolution audio news out of CES came from MusicGiants. In the coming months, it'll be providing lossless 96/24 surround downloads of many existing DVD-Audio titles in the Windows Media Lossless format, complete with Digital Rights Management to deter those pesky pirates.

Stuart M Robinson is editor and publisher of HighFidelityReview.com, a website dedicated to high-resolution digital sound



...Counterpoint

Unless you look for it, hi-res has vanished

You are going to read a lot of conflicting things about this year's CES show. In part because the thing was so damn bewilderingly vast, it would be easy to find justification and support for practically any position in consumer electronics. With 150,000 souls, thousands of exhibits over the sort of acreage that could swallow a small town centre, chances are there was someone supporting

Elcassette, 8-track and even Edison wax cylinders. This doesn't mark a resurgence in these devices and neither does the launch of a handful of DVD-Audio or SACD titles or players constitute buoyancy in either format. In fact, aside from a few Alamo-like outposts keeping the faith, in Vegas Elvis had very definitely left the building... and taken all of today's high-resolution disc formats with him.

The overarching stories from the show were nothing to do with hi-res anything, except possibly hi-res Sony and JVC camcorders with built-in hard disk drives. Instead, the likes of Microsoft and Google announced extensive broadband video-on-demand services while sport broadcaster ESPN can now deliver sophisticated video content to 3G mobile phones (with twin tuners, so you can call your bookie while watching the game).

The convergence buzz-word (dormant for a decade) was back, with Intel's Viiv platform, designed from first principles to act as a home entertainment nexus rather than using a PC shoe-horned into the task, as we have today. Factor in brands like Dell and HP producing big HDTV screens and DVD-spinning entertainment boxes, companies like Arcam making two-way connections between the Solo and the iPod and a brace of new, user-friendly and more affordable custom install and home automation systems. Suddenly, that distant dream of a fully interoperable, convergent home doesn't seem so distant.

There are still a couple of jigsaw pieces to fit in place. Worse, we aren't exactly sure these

pieces are from the right jigsaw at all and no-one has any idea of what the picture on the jigsaw is supposed to look like, but most of the pieces are slotting together at last. For example, even though a show home demonstrated the first ever IP-addressable water faucet, there's still a gap between digital audio and video data files and home automation that will need to be crossed before we get (or, in fact, need) a truly IP-enabled washing machine or toaster. Similarly, there needs to be a single, two-way method of content delivery, but right now HD programming is largely from satellite and terrestrial broadcasters, where lo-res product is delivered across wired broadband networks.

Predictions are a dangerous thing in consumer electronics, but if we logically extend the parts of the CES show that received the most coverage, your HD-DVD (or possibly Blu-ray) player/games console will likely be the last disc format you will ever buy. Fast forward half a decade or more and your music, video and gaming content will be derived almost entirely from the internet and – chances are – you will rent, not buy, much of your media.

Unfortunately, in trying to rail quixotic against this radically diverse yet converging marketplace, high-definition audio barely registered a blip on the consumer electronics radar at this year's CES. Even HDTV was considered passé by many pundits, although improvements in screen design by DLP did garner great interest. "HD is great" they say, "but who wants to watch *Everybody Loves*

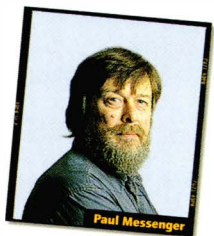
“In Vegas, Elvis had very definitely left the building... and taken all of today's high-resolution disc formats with him.”



Raymond in HD?" Well, give us a chance to watch it, and we'll tell you!

We are approaching a time – very soon – where (daft and circular as it sounds) television is only one of many ways of watching TV, just as hi-fi is only one of many ways of listening to recorded music these days. Whoever won the DVD-Audio/SACD war – and whoever wins the HD-DVD/Blu-ray battles – will be the winners of pyrrhic victories.

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



NXT generation

Is BMR from NXT the future of loudspeakers?

The hi-fi loudspeaker has long combined a bass/mid drive unit with a tweeter. However, even those responsible for designing these devices are aware that a single full-range driver still represents a desirable ideal.

NXT – the company responsible for developing and licensing distributed mode loudspeakers (DML) – has come up with a new way of enjoying the benefits and avoiding the problems of a single full range driver. It's called BMR (for balanced mode radiation), and is virtually impossible to explain properly in a column of this length. In its barest essence, however, it's a technique that allows a drive unit to carry on operating smoothly, coherently and with wide dispersion above the point at which its diaphragm goes into flexing and bending modes.

NXT doesn't manufacture. It's strictly a research, development and licensing operation, so while it has no intention of making BMR drive units or speakers, designs sporting the drivers could well appear under other brands. In the meantime, the company has made up a few samples, and used two of these to put on a very persuasive demonstration.

These were small sealed box enclosures fitted with 100mm BMR drive units with flat, homogenous disc diaphragms. Such a diaphragm alone is already essentially balanced, modally speaking, but this balance is upset when a voice coil is added. NXT has worked out the maths that enables the diaphragm to be re-balanced, by adding a calculated ring mass a few millimetres in ▶

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

TALKING HEADS
FEAR OF MUSIC



Strange to think that Talking Heads were once considered a punk band, sharing the bill at New York's now legendary CBGBs with the likes of The Ramones. But, in truth, they never fitted easily into that spit-flecked category and were instead one of first and most innovative of the bands that would come to be known as new wave. Their melodicism, musical experimentalism and indeed the jerky, paranoid image of lead singer David Byrne set them apart from the start, and their early albums were exercises in wired, weird, art-pop with a cerebral edge.

By the time of their third album in 1979, they were well-established on the new wave scene. This became all the more vital and alive as punk imploded and the talent scattered in myriad directions. They'd recorded their previous album with producer Brian Eno and he remained for this one (and the follow-up, *Remain In Light*, which saw them finally hit the big time with the single *Once In A Lifetime*).

The sound is spare, and the line-up is the traditional guitar/bass/drums, but there's a depth to these songs that sets them apart. These aren't just pretty tunes or catchy rock riffs; the music reflects many of the song's preoccupations. *Electric Guitar's* iconic treatment of the instrument is reflected in its marching beat and spooky atmospherics, while the ethereal qualities of *Air*, and the disconnected, spaced out rhythms of *Drugs* could paint sufficient aural pictures with the help of the sparse titles alone, without the need for singer David Byrne's dementedly clever lyrics.

Lyrical it's awash with paranoia. Byrne (credited as sole songwriter, although most of the tunes were developed from jamming sessions) seems to have no end of irrational fears lurking in his psyche – fear of animals, fear of air, fear of drugs, fear of cities. But through the haze he never forgot to have fun – and if you can't express a fear of paper and electric guitars on your own album, where can you? Apparently he would jog around the block a couple of times before he recorded his vocals, so that much of it sounds desperate



"If you can't express a fear of paper and electric guitars on your own album, where can you?"

and a little out of breath, which certainly adds to the tense atmosphere throughout.

There are elements of minimalism in the design, from the black cover with embossed industrial pattern to most of the titles, which consist of a single word – *Mind*, *Paper*, *Air*, *Heaven*, *Animals*. One of the few exceptions is the peerless *Life During Wartime*, which discusses the various day-to-day issues of survival (finding food, keeping out of sight) in a country under siege. Listening to it again, the song acquires a new meaning in an America that feels itself under siege within and without from fundamentalist religious bogey men.

Musically too, this was where David Byrne's interest in African rhythms would begin with the choppy guitar and fluctuating rhythms of *I Zimbra*, and would later be explored more fully in the following year's *Remain In Light*.

Fear Of Music is a bridge between the punky/jerky minimalism of the first two albums and the funkier, more fleshed out approach of the next two, and catches them just as their skills and ambitions have caught up with each other, and just before they got really big. It's a transitional album, but one that captures Talking Heads at their very best. And in these days of one-dimensional imitators, it defines what makes them still such an important band today. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

from the edge of the disc. (In this case the mass ring was part of the surround.)

In practice, this re-balancing doesn't completely remove the effect of the first bending mode, but it does render it virtually inaudible. It replaces the obvious peak and trough of an unbalanced mode with a narrow and modest notch, while output is properly matched above and below the notch. A brief listen showed the speaker behaved as claimed. Inevitably, given its modest size, bass was limited, but the mid and top sounded exceptionally clean and coherent, extending well up into the treble and showing no trace of beaming towards the top end.

This is radical stuff indeed, the more so because it is also claimed that the technique is 'scaleable' – that is, it can be applied to much larger units than the 100mm one used for the demonstration. It's too early to predict the likely impact of the BMR principle of operation, but it could well be considerable.

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



Bubblicious

Jason's system is forever blowing bubbles

"My turntable is exploding with bubbles" is not a quote from Monty Python's legendary Hungarian phrasebook sketch, which translated 'may I have a box of matches' as "my hovercraft is full of eels". Instead, it's a reasonably apt description of the 'technology' featured in two accessories that I have been using on my vinyl spinner. The bubbles referred to are to be found in two slabs of foam; the first is a relatively small one called the Cartridge Man Isolator. This is a small square of foam sandwiched by aluminium plates – one side is stuck to the top of a cartridge and the other bolts to the tonearm. The idea is that it decouples cartridge from arm and stops resonances in the cartridge getting into the arm and vice versa.

The second bubble-infested device is Funk Firm's Achromat. In 3mm guise, this is an alternative turntable mat that has a similarly decoupling effect between vinyl and platter. It is made of expanded polyvinyl, or vinyl for short, the same material as a record. The air bubbles make all the difference, providing a



“My turntable is exploding with bubbles’ is not a quote from Monty Python’s legendary Hungarian phrasebook sketch.”

means for the material to dissipate energy as heat with significantly greater efficiency than solid vinyl and thus avoid the resonance problems that plague most platters.

The Isolator revealed detail, opened up the soundstage and even reduced surface noise. It also appeared to reduce distortion so significantly that one could play music a lot louder without it becoming uncomfortable. It improved the bass, bringing more power and articulation to low frequencies while adding sparkle to the highs. It also improved the sense of space in recordings, rendering some of them in truly holographic fashion. It was this set-up that revealed the true magnificence of Pure Pleasure's remastering of Stevie Ray Vaughan's *Couldn't Stand the Weather*, allowing the wick to be well and truly cranked and the sound to get closer to that in the studio than I've previously encountered at home.

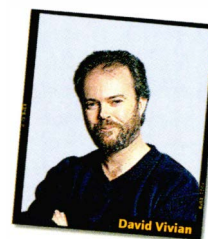
The Achromat brought improvements in bass, dynamics and imaging to the EAR Disc Master, but undermined absolute bass extension. Putting it on the rather more modest Project RPM 5 brought a significant upgrade in the energy department and allowed the deck to deliver greater separation and imaging. The Achromat does an awful lot for its £44 asking price (but it does require a height-adjustable tonearm, otherwise VTA will be thrown out).

Combining both these devices and sandwiching the vinyl record in air bubble infused foam brought a greater sense of calm and detail resolution with tremendous acoustic space. The turntable sounds calmer with these bubbles yet when you add the Achromat there is a tremendous increase in energy coming off the disc – it actually sounds louder. This makes

me wonder if its not adding a resonance of its own. But if this were the case, detail would be blurred and contrasts between recordings reduced, but the opposite is true.

These results got me to thinking about using expanded polyvinyl as a potential audio panacea. In truth it's too soft/flexible for situations that require physical stiffness but it would probably work between a shelf and component if the latter weren't too heavy. Used in the right way, air bubbles clearly have great potential for dissipating resonance. They could well herald a revolution in hi-fi design.

Jason Kennedy began working on Hi-Fi Choice over 15 years ago, eventually rising to the position of editor. He's currently indulging his passion as a freelance hi-fi writer



Connect phwor

Are hi-fi cables sexy or just pseudo-science?

Once upon a time, if anyone thought about hi-fi cables at all, it was an afterthought. You plonked the gear on the sideboard and the speakers on the floor, switched on... and then went in search of some old door bell wire or bits of twin-and-earth 15A mains wire from a friendly electrician to connect it all up.

These days we know differently. The cables that connect components together are as important as the components themselves. They're hi-tech, they're sexy, they can cost a bomb. And there are literally hundreds to choose from and they are invariably packaged in seductively snazzy boxes.

Problem is, with the elevated importance of the 'humble cable' has come a barrow-load of balls: wacko claims, pseudo-science, marketing manipulation – all intended to turn what should be a straightforward, cost-effective purchase into a tense, 'more expensive must be better' guilt trip.

But more expensive isn't necessarily better. What's important – as with most things hi-fi – is real science, good design, appropriate materials and attention to detail. Expense isn't the arbiter of such things. Yes, it's tempting to splash out, but it's more important to know what speaker and interconnect cables should do when they're working properly.

The speaker cable's job is to transfer the signal energy between the amp and speaker with minimal losses. This is best achieved with a low resistance cable to ensure the flattest possible frequency response with a wide variety of speakers. There, simple.

As for interconnects, signal integrity and immunity from induced noise are the keys to high performance. These are optimised by using a low-loss LDPE dielectric (low density insulation material that inhibits signal leakage between conductors) and high purity 99.999% Oxygen Free Copper (OFC) conductors. Silver Plated 99.999% OFC conductors provide even greater conductivity, delivering better resolution and finesse in a high quality system. Also, a cable's jacket can absorb mechanically induced vibration and, beneath that, multiple screening of the conductors prevents electrostatic and electromagnetic interference.

The technical ideal, of course, is cables that are sonically invisible, that they add nothing to the signal and take nothing away. Fit them and forget them. Most claim nothing less. The reality is that they all do something different to the sound of a system. Sometimes the difference is subtle, sometimes a little more dramatic. Believe the hype and there's a cable out there that will modify, massage, manipulate, moisturise, exfoliate, tauten, rejuvenate and otherwise quick-fix the sound of your system.

All true. Except the 'quick-fix' which is piffle and rot. You cannot improve the performance of a component with a cable, only allow it to do its best. Finding the right stuff is a worthwhile pursuit, just remember not to spend too much.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

HOW GREEN IS YOUR HI-FI?



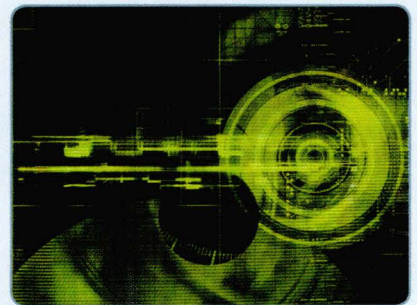
First, apologies if you were expecting part two of our examination of spectrum this month, but something came up that's topical and, to judge from the *Hi-Fi Choice* online forum, of interest to many. I refer to the business of power consumption of hi-fi, especially amplifiers. Should one leave equipment on, which is widely considered to be best for sound quality, switch it off and save kilowatt-hours, or hope that standby (if available) will offer the best of both worlds?

A group of six integrated amps seemed the ideal test bed on which to study this matter, so I knocked up some dodgy-looking test jigs on the back of a mains plug, connected up my trusty isolation amplifier and got to work. Using said kit, I was able to record both the voltage waveform of the mains and the current waveform drawn by each amplifier under various conditions. The deviation of both from the ideal sinusoidal shape is in itself interesting and will almost certainly provide material for future *Techno* or other articles, but the point here is that knowing that shape allowed accurate calculation of power drawn, as recorded by your electricity meter.

Under idling conditions (that is, switched on and ready to play but with no audio signal) the six amps consumed between about 18W and 44W. Five had standby modes and they took between 0.9W and 9W. Playing a test tone at a steady level of 20W per channel, consumption rose as high as 200W or so, but playing music (a bit of Ian Dury) at that peak level demand varied from 25W to 60W.

Even 44W at idle isn't a lot and equates to a fraction over 1kWh per day, or about 7p per day, £25 per year. Hardly bank-breaking stuff and the typical 30W idling power works out to even less. In standby, at less than 10W, we're talking about under a fiver a year. Big deal.

The figure of 200W when playing at only 20W/channel looks alarming, but a high-power amp playing low-power signals will always be inefficient as it must drop lots of power supply volts across its output stage. This is where Class D amps score – the Onkyo took only 75W for the same job. Anyway, as the



“Should one leave equipment on for the best sound quality, or switch off and save kilowatt-hours?”

figures show, real music requires much less average power, typically 10W-20W more than idling power for healthy listening levels.

Now, all the amplifiers in the group are budget/midprice models which operate either in Class AB or Class D and as such draw relatively little current through the output at idle. Class A valve amps are a very different kettle of fish and a modest 30W/channel model can easily require 200W or more, but the heat such beasts give out provides an obvious clue to that power consumption!

Of course, heat is where all the idling power ends up and if your equipment isn't getting very hot it ain't drawing much power, simple as that, but it's nice to have some concrete numbers for once. As for sources such as CD players, power consumption in the 10W region (operating or not) seems to be par for the course, with more esoteric models occasionally reaching the heady heights of 25W.

There is another issue. Leaving any product in standby mode places a drain on our planet's resources and environmentalists will point at you in the street. Or something.

Ultimately though, the choice is yours. If you feel that leaving your equipment powered up long-term enhances sound, unless it's a proper little furnace, we'd say do it with a clear – if not entirely green – conscience. **HFC**

Richard Black

SUPER NATURAL BALANCE

esgaard laursen



TAKE A STAND: HELICON 300

"They ooze finesse, and deliver generous doses of authority and scale. If that sonic character appeals, take a listen to them. You will be impressed."

What Hi-Fi | Sound & Vision


"This is a delicious loudspeaker that's very easy to like, because of the way it projects and communicates the music with a fine combination of delicacy and enthusiasm."

Paul Messenger | Hi-Fi Choice

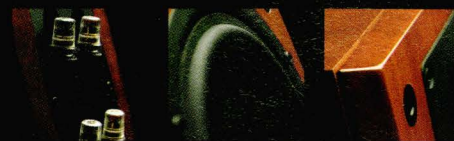
"There are very few loudspeakers - even at considerably higher prices - that can reproduce triangles, cymbals or acoustic guitar so breathtakingly..."

Holger Biermann | Stereoplay

FEATURES

-  Wide Dispersion
-  3D Audio
-  Low Resonance Cabinets
-  Time Coherence
-  Hand Crafted
-  Amplifier Optimised

[HELICON300 STAND AVAILABLE]



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

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www.dali.dk



ANTIFERENCE DAB2301 DAB AERIAL £15

⊕ If you can get breakup-free DAB reception with a bit of damp string hanging from the back of your tuner, this aerial will bring you no benefits. For the other half of the population though, it could be a godsend. It's designed for outside use, but can equally well go in the loft or anywhere else – the higher the better. It's dimensioned for the DAB band and, being omnidirectional, will use to the full DAB's advantage of being able to pick up two transmitters simultaneously, boosting signal strength. Typical of Antiference's products, it's sturdy and easy to assemble and is light enough to mount safely with only two screws. You'll need some good quality cable to go with it, but if you're in any doubt about the strength of your DAB signal don't hesitate to buy this!

☎ 01543 267160 # www.antiference.co.uk

WIREWORLD CHROMA 5 DIGITAL INTERCONNECT (COAXIAL) £30

⊕ The price of two CDs isn't really all that much to ask for a specialist cable, and you get quite a lot for the money here. Conductors are stranded oxygen-free copper with polythene insulation, which is basic but good quality stuff. In contrast, the plugs are funky PTFE insulated affairs with a tubular copper centre pin. It's a practical cable, too, nice and flexible. In use it easily proved its worth over giveaway digital leads, with a beautifully clear sound that seemed to arise from a 'blacker' background than previously. Really upmarket leads can add a greater degree of precision, but for this kind of money we like Chroma 5 a lot.

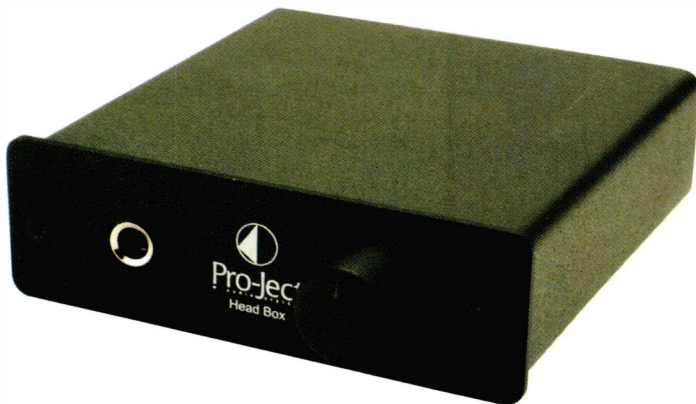
☎ 020 8992 9100 # www.wireworldaudio.co.uk



PRO-JECT HEADBOX MKII HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER £75

⊕ It's a truism that the headphone outputs built into most equipment are a bit of an afterthought and seldom worthy of high-grade cans. So, this tiny bit of kit usefully fills a market niche, as it is priced below most similar products. It has the essential features: line in, line out (wired straight to the line input, saving cable splitters), volume control and one headphone jack. Inside is a moderately sophisticated power amp expressly designed to pump a few tens of milliwatts into typical headphones, a job it fulfils with considerable style. Bass is strong and tuneful, treble effortless and midrange liquid and detailed, and images seem to extend far in all directions. There's enough volume rattle your head should you wish it – more to the point, enough to compensate for under-mastered recordings – and all in all this does a lot to realise the potential of good headphones.

☎ 01235 511166 # www.project-audio.com



CLEARER AUDIO COPPER-LINE POWER CABLE £95 (1M)

⊕ Quite frankly, even if this cable made no difference whatsoever to the sound you'd want it, wouldn't you? Just how impressive is that mains plug? But we're equally impressed by the fact that this cable can actually be handled and positioned without using tools – far too many mains wires are completely unmanageable. This is due to the flexible yet thick conductors and shielding, factors which presumably (together with Caig-treated plug and Wattgate IEC connector) contribute to its 'sound', or rather the sound improvement it brings to amps and source components. Expect subtly improved detail and deeper images. Recommended.

☎ 01702 543981 # www.cleareraudio.com



QUAD

...the closest approach to the original sound



Product of the Year 2002-2004
What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision (11L Loudspeakers)

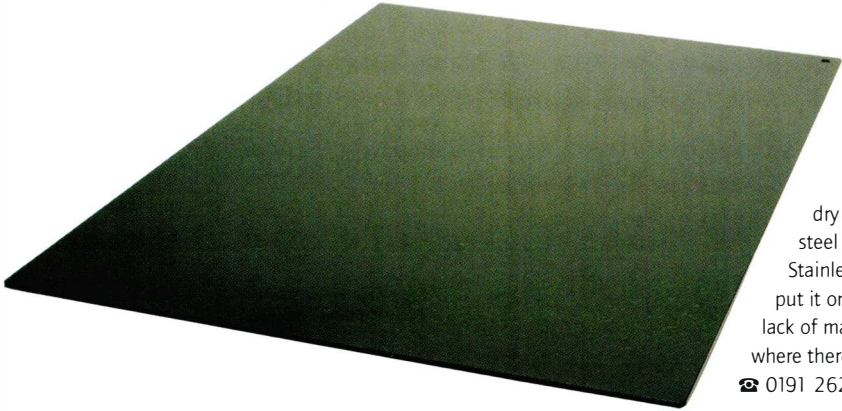
Product of the Year 2004-2005
What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision (Full size surround speakers)

Separates System of the Year 2003-2005
Hi-Fi News (99 Series)



QUAD

Quad Electroacoustics Ltd, IAG House, Sovereign Court,
Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 6XU
Download brochures and reviews from www.quad-hifi.co.uk
Tel: 0845 4580011. Fax: 01480 431767



CUSTOM DESIGN iRAP STAINLESS ANTI-RESONANCE SHEET £70

➤ In HFC 275, we reviewed Custom Design's platter mat, lamenting its ferro-magnetic construction. Hardly was the ink dry on the review when we received not only a non-magnetic stainless steel mat but also this revised iRAP sheet, made of the same 'Acoustic Stainless' material. This is still one of our favourite no-brain accessories: put it on equipment and kill casework resonances, simple as that. But the lack of magnetic coupling can make it more useful near mains transformers, where there is less tendency to rattle in the stray field.

☎ 0191 262 4646 🌐 www.customdesign.co.uk

VAN DEN HUL THE ORCHID ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT £300 (1M PAIR)

➤ Not only is this cable unusually thin, it's all even more remarkable when one considers that there is a full 'triaxial' construction in there – that is, core, insulation, screen, more insulation, second screen, jacket. That makes three conductors, which means you can get this in balanced form with XLR connectors. But, even as an unbalanced cable, it already offers some very fine performance indeed. Van den hul's promotional literature talks of 'Tunnel Technology' and the virtues of Linear Structure Carbon, all of which is scientifically unproven but... well, he may be on to something as the sound is exceptionally clear and clean. It really is like cleaning a slightly dirty window – you don't notice what was wrong until it's gone. If you're feeling a bit flush do give this one a try.

☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.vandenhul.com



ISOTEK FULL SYSTEM ENHANCER CD BURN-IN & DEMAGNETISATION DISC £15

➤ We put 'highlights' of this disc on our covermount CD that came with HFC 270, but have never yet reviewed the complete thing. It's not the only burn-in and demagnetisation disc in the world, of course, and opinions vary as to whether these things work at all and if so quite how. Isotek appears to have gone into this in some scientific detail and the main aim seems to be to stress a system without actually endangering it. Various whistles, bumps and noises do that and then gently wind down so as to demagnetise the system, taking half an hour (full version, optimised for small or large loudspeakers) or five minutes (quick version). And, well, we did think our trial systems sounded a little fresher and livelier after treatment. Go on – satisfy your curiosity!

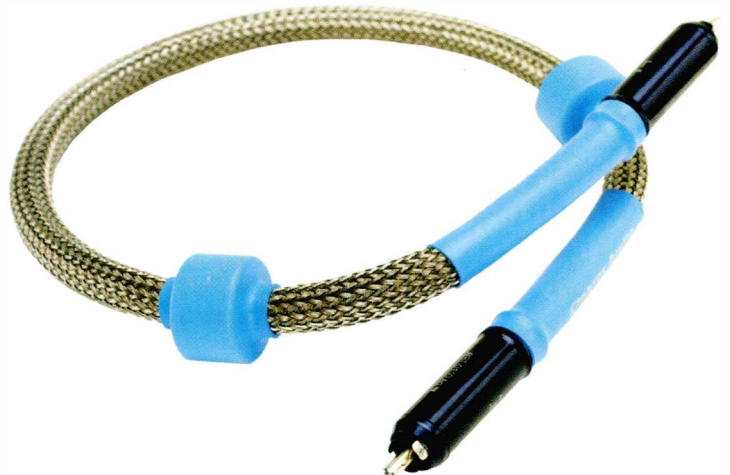
☎ 0870 240 7228 🌐 www.choicebits.co.uk



CLEARER AUDIO SILVER-LINE DIGITAL INTERCONNECT (COAXIAL) £125 (0.5M)

➤ You get a lot of material value here. Silver-plated centre conductor, twin ferrite interference suppressors, genuine WBT phono plugs (the new plastic-body ones with low-area ground contact and screw-down clamping) and an impressive-sounding shielding arrangement that claims to give 130dB interference suppression – not sure how you'd measure that! The outer shield is not insulated and we'd advise keeping it clear of metal chassis: there's no shock hazard but interference pickup could be severely compromised by currents circulating from it to equipment casework. Bearing that in mind, we certainly found the performance most satisfying with very finely etched detail enhancing familiar recordings and a new-found sweetness in the treble. Good images, too, second only to Kimber KS2020.

☎ 01702 543981 🌐 www.cleareraudio.com





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A box of Partridge

Eccentric English popsters XTC were less than prolific in the 1990s... then they released a quadruple album. We asked front-man Andy Partridge what's in the box?



guitar numbers, quirky lyrical eccentricities and a full 40-piece orchestra. It seemed a strange move after several years of no releases, so we asked Mr Partridge why.

"Just to make it value for money really, something we've done all the way through our career. I was so naïve – all the free albums we gave away or singles attached to stuff or singles with another single – I didn't know we were paying for 'em. But then I thought, why stop the trend now?"

"The demo versions were just made for our

listening to, there's usually a lot more weight and a lot more gravitas to a good studio recording. There seems to be a solidity, a heft to it. You can only get that by using nice valve amplifiers, and valve EQs and compressors, stuff that has a weight and a warmth and a real life to it. Computer plug-ins are okay but they tend to strip out all the harmonics and the sound gets increasingly thin the more plug-ins you use.

"We started *Apple Venus* in a converted stable. I say 'converted', but I think all they did really was push the horse out. Just a whitewashed room with a bare light bulb. We finished it in Colin Moulding's front room.

"You spend the money in the part of the chain where it really matters – decent microphones, limiters, compressors – and a ludicrously expensive day in Abbey Road for the orchestra. A lot of the live acoustic guitar on *Apple Venus* was done in Colin's hall, because he's got some nice Victorian tiles in there and there was a really good zing off them. We just had to pray that his missus didn't come in with the shopping half-way through a great take. We'd

For almost 30 years, XTC have been a lost treasure of homegrown pop. From their punky beginnings in 1977 to indie psychedelia and a very English mix of popcraft and eccentric whimsy, they're perhaps what Pink Floyd could have been if Syd Barrett had kept it together.

The group's nucleus and core songwriters of Andy Partridge and Colin Moulding are still together, considerably less prolific than they've been in previous years and getting by on their publishing royalties (they haven't toured in support of an album since Partridge suffered a near nervous breakdown in the early 1980s). They produced just two albums in the 1990s and these have now been collected – along with two mirror image demo albums – as a quadruple box set. It's some of the best material they've ever done, including acoustic

"We started *Apple Venus* in a converted stable. I say 'converted', but I think all they did really was push the horse out."

benefit, to find out how the songs would eventually go. The majority of them are if not lo-fi, then definitely medium-fi. There comes a point where you have to say to yourself, 'is this going to get recorded properly or is it in fact good enough'.

"Some people say that, with modern recording equipment, you do can just as well at home these days as you can in a studio, but I think that's a bit of a fallacy. There's a sort of an audio appearance of it sounding good, but if you really think hard about what you're

have liked to have done the orchestral stuff there as well, but there's not much room and it would have led to a lot of broken Stradivari.

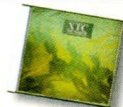
"I'm still writing material, but I wouldn't make an XTC album without Colin and at the moment he's not really writing stuff. So we may do an XTC album in three or four years and I'll do a solo album later this year or whatever. XTC's not split, it's just that we've done a hell of a lot so far and we feel it's important not to go over old ground." **HFC**

Dave Oliver

ESSENTIAL XTC RECORDINGS

Mummer (1983)

The first album after Partridge suffered a virtual nervous breakdown in the early 1980s is a quiet, largely acoustic affair, evoking pastoral scenes.



Skylarking (1986)

Todd Rundgren produced this slice of pure pop with myriad nods to the Beatles and Beach Boys, but with an overall sense of what it is to be XTC.



Apple Box (2005)

Both of XTC's nineties albums – the often experimental *Apple Venus* and more traditional guitar pop *Wasp Star*, plus bonus demo albums of each.



The 2006 HI-FI CHOICE Music Awards

As voted by our readers

At the end of 2005, we gave you the chance to vote in the first-ever *Hi-Fi Choice Music Awards*. The idea was simple: you're all fans of high-quality hi-fi gear, so it stands to reason that you're also

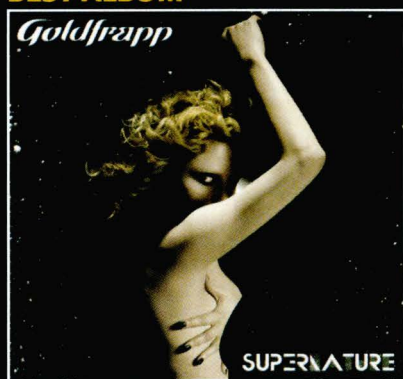
passionate about music. Why not give you the opportunity to share your favourites with the rest of the hi-fi fraternity?

We created a series of categories – focused on the best new releases of 2005, as well as

your all-time greats – and invited you to vote either online or by post. Now, we've sifted through all of your nominations and here are the results, at last – the world's best music, according to the readers of *Hi-Fi Choice*!

PART ONE BEST OF 2005

BEST ALBUM



1. **GOLDFRAPP** *Supernature*
2. **SUPERGRASS** *Road to Rouen*
3. **KT TUNSTALL** *Eye To The Telescope*

BEST NEW ARTIST/ BAND



1. **KAISER CHIEFS**
2. **EDITORS**
3. **KT TUNSTALL**

BEST CLASSICAL RECORDING



1. **MAHLER** *Symphony No. 6*
Claudio Abbado (cond),
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
(DGG 00289 477 5684 – two-disc SACD/CD hybrid)
2. **BEETHOVEN** *Late String Quartets*
Takacs Quartet
(Decca 470 8492)
3. **ARVO PART** *Lamentate*
The Hillard Ensemble, Alexei Lubimov
(piano), Andrey Boreyko (cond), SWR
Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra
(ECM 1930)

BEST MUSIC RETAILER



top dog for music-dvd-games

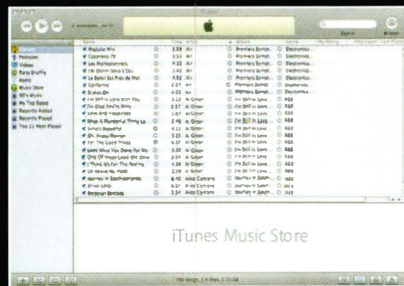
1. **HMV**
2. **AMAZON**
3. **VIRGIN, PLAY.COM** (equal)

BEST LIVE ACT



1. **PINK FLOYD** (at Live 8)
2. **CREAM**
3. **FOO FIGHTERS**

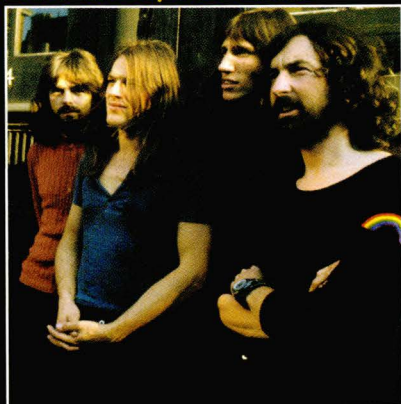
BEST INTERNET DOWNLOAD SERVICE



1. **ITUNES**
2. **HMV**
3. **LIMEWIRE**

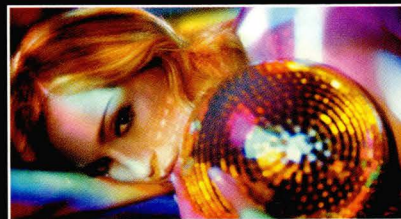
PART TWO BEST OF ALL TIME

BEST ROCK/POP BAND



1. PINK FLOYD
2. THE BEATLES
3. QUEEN

BEST DANCE ACT



1. MADONNA
2. FAITHLESS
3. THE PRODIGY

BEST MALE VOCALIST



1. ELVIS
2. FRANK SINATRA
3. VAN MORRISON

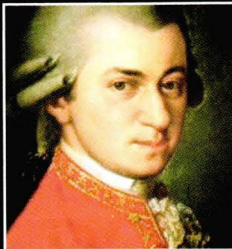
BEST FEMALE VOCALIST



1. JANIS JOPLIN
2. JONI MITCHELL
3. KATE BUSH

BEST CLASSICAL COMPOSER

1. MOZART
2. BEETHOVEN
3. BACH

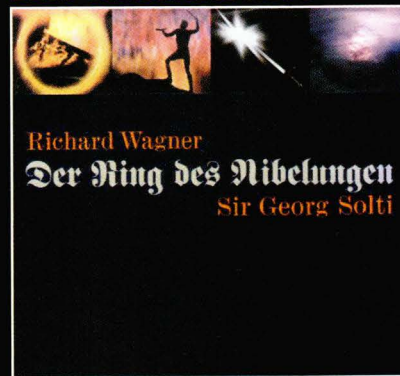


BEST ALBUM



1. PINK FLOYD *Dark Side Of The Moon*
2. THE BEATLES *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*
3. JEFF BUCKLEY *Grace*

BEST CLASSICAL RECORDING



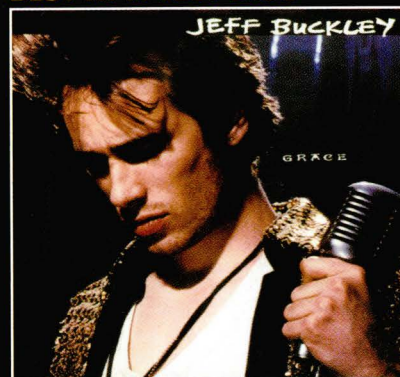
1. WAGNER *The Ring Cycle*
Georg Solti, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Vienna State Opera Chorus etc.
(Decca 4555552 - 14 discs)
2. BEETHOVEN *Symphonies 1-9, Piona Concertos 1-5, Fantasia for Piano, Chorus & Orchestra*
Otto Klemperer, Philharmonic & New Philharmonic Orch, Daniel Barenboim (piano)
(EMI CZ55738952 - 9 discs)
3. FAURÉ *Requiem*
David Willcocks (cond), New Philharmonia Orchestra, Choir of King's
(EMI CDM7 64715-2)

BEST LIVE ACT



1. PINK FLOYD
2. THE ROLLING STONES
3. THE WHO

BEST HI-FI TEST DISC



1. JEFF BUCKLEY *Grace*
2. DAVE MATTHEWS BAND *Busted Stuff*
3. TORI AMOS *Boys For Pele*

THE HI-FI WRITERS' BEST ALBUMS OF 2005

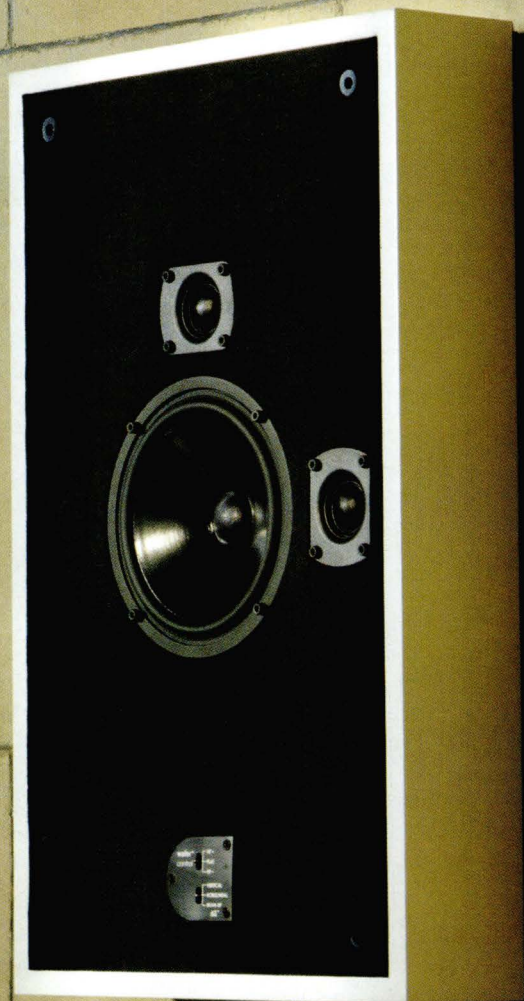
RICHARD BLACK	MAHLER	<i>Symphony No. 5</i> (Water Lily WLA-WS-76-CD)
TIM BOWERN	BLOC PARTY	<i>Silent Alarm</i>
ART DUDLEY	BOB DYLAN	<i>No Direction Home: The Soundtrack</i> (The Bootleg Series Vol. 7)
DAN GEORGE	KATE BUSH	<i>Aerial</i>
ALVIN GOLD	RY COODER	<i>Chávez Ravine</i>
JIMMY HUGHES	MOZART	<i>Violin Concertos</i> (DG 474 215-2)
JASON KENNEDY	JAGA JAZZISTS	<i>What We Must</i>
JON MARKS	CHARLIE DORE	<i>Sleep All Day and Other Stories</i>
PAUL MESSENGER	THE ARCADE FIRE	<i>Funeral</i>
ALAN SIRCOM	GORILLAZ	<i>Demon Days</i>
DOMINIC TODD	KATE BUSH	<i>Aerial</i>
DAVID VIVIAN	PAUL ANKA	<i>Rock Swings</i>

CONGRATULATIONS!

Everyone who voted in *The Hi-Fi Choice Music Awards* before 14 December 2005 was entered into a prize draw for the chance to win one of three HMV vouchers, worth £50 apiece. The winners are as follows: Chris Anelay of Harlech in Gwynedd, J. Carter of Epping in Essex and Alex Killpartrick of Bath. You will all receive your vouchers shortly - happy listening!



WIN! TWO PAIRS OF HI-TECH PMC WAFER SPEAKERS WORTH £2,750!



PMC has been at the forefront of innovation in domestic and professional loudspeakers for several years. Its new Wafer advanced transmission line (ATL) in-wall/on-wall loudspeakers have clearly set new sonic standards among their peers. Wafer's sophisticated structure permits an ultra-shallow 'H-Line' transmission line system to operate within a slender box, giving louder, deeper and better-defined bass extension than conventional designs.

The innovation doesn't stop there, however. PMC's twin tweeter 'TT Technology' offers 'steerable' imaging – meaning the Wafer can be placed horizontally, vertically and even above or below the listening position without affecting performance! PMC has also addressed the issue of baffle reflections with a special absorbent 'Stealth Baffle' that prevents unwanted reflections. The PMC Wafer range consists of the in-wall/on-wall Wafer 1 and Wafer 2 models, with 125mm and 150mm bass drivers respectively.

The first lucky winner will receive a pair of range-topping Wafer 2s worth £1,650, while the second name out the *Hi-Fi Choice* hat will win a pair of £1,100 Wafer 1 speakers. For your chance to win, simply answer the question below. The winners will be drawn at random.



CONGRATULATIONS...

...to our last winner, Mr. Ian Johnson of Chorlton in Manchester, who wins an Audio Analogue system and Triangle speakers worth over £1,200!

QUESTION:

What does Wafer's sophisticated structure permit?

- A:** A 'H-Line' transmission line system?
- B:** Storage for a full packet of digestives?
- C:** A racecourse for voles?

TO ENTER:

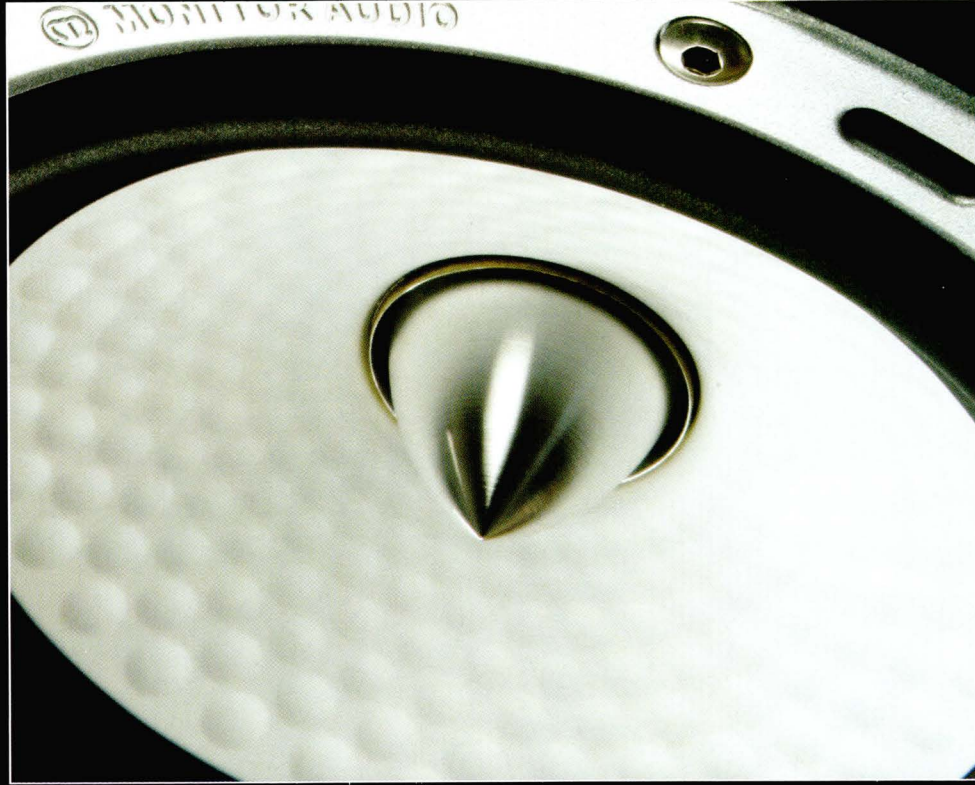
By Phone: Simply call **0906 403 1013** and follow the instructions (maximum cost of call: £1.50).

By Text: Simply send the text message **WAFER** (followed by a space) with the answer A, B or C to **80889**. For example, if you think the answer is C: A racecourse for voles, then kindly text WAFER C to 80889.

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The New Gold Standard



Gold Signature

The Power of a Thousand Small Impressions

The radiating surface of Monitor Audio's innovative RST^{®2} drivers, used exclusively by the new Gold Signature speakers, is patterned with hundreds of concentric dimples, meticulously fashioned to preserve cone geometry at all volume levels. This means you'll enjoy smoother, distortion-free sound however hard you play music and film.

With a choice of slender stand, floor, centre and surround speakers, expertly engineered in beautiful real wood and lacquer finishes, the new Gold Signature range will make a big impression all round.

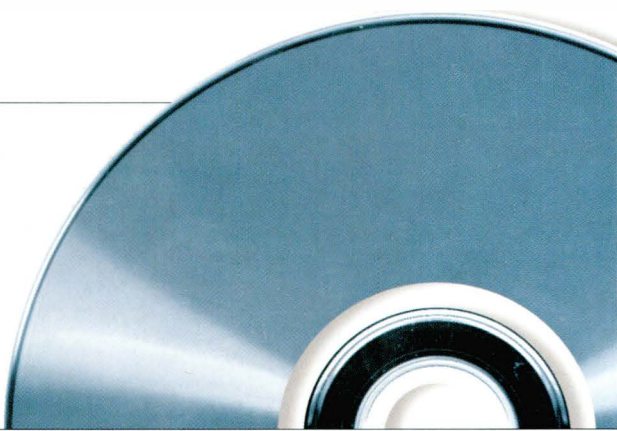
For details of the new GS Series please visit:
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ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

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



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

BAKER PEPPER SEXTET

Picture Of Heath

Pacific Jazz/Pure Pleasure

180g vinyl

Music: Recorded in 1956 and released under the title *Playboys*, this was the third time that Chet Baker (trumpet) and Art Pepper (alto saxophone) had combined their talents in the studio, and for many it was their most successful collaboration. Six of the seven numbers were written by sax and flute player Jimmy Heath, the exception being Pepper's *Tynan Tyme*, but the style of playing is upbeat and fresh throughout thanks to the backing of Phil Urso (tenor), Curtis Counce (bass), Carl Perkins (piano) and Lawrence Marable (drums). ★★★★★
Sound: Pure Pleasure does a very good job when it comes to mastering and pressing its vinyl and this is clearly evident on this pressing. The subtleties of dynamic and instrumental tone are fully preserved against a silent background. ★★★★★ JK

ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis Is Back!

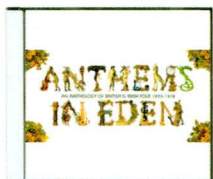
RCA/Speakers Corner

180g vinyl

Music: Recorded in 1960 (within weeks of Elvis finishing military service) this was a comeback album of no little significance for the most successful artist of the era. The hits include *Fever* and *The Girl Of My Best Friend*, while the remaining tracks reveal Elvis' range and maturity with everything from rock'n'roll in *Dirty, Dirty Feeling* to ballads such as *Thrill of Your Love* and the blues of *Like A Baby*. This is a sophisticated production as well, with extreme use of reverb and double tracking of the oft larger than life voice. ★★
Sound: This luxury, gatefold-covered Speaker's Corner release reflects the big RCA Living Stereo sound on the vinyl. While the focus is soft, it has a richness of tone that could only have been achieved with tube electronics. The pressing is exemplary. ★★★★★ JK

These LPs were supplied by Speakers Corner and Pure Pleasure and can be purchased from Vivante: ☎ 01293 822186 ● www.vivante.co.uk

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Anthems In Eden

Castle

Music: This mammoth four-disc, 84-track folk set – 'an anthology of British and Irish Folk 1955-1978' – comes in a lush package about the size of a shoe box. The set spans Lonnie Donegan's near-rockabilly skiffle to Ron Copper's earnest declamations, Ian Campbell's ringing renditions and Bill Fay's atmospheric ditties. Not to mention Bert Jansch, Nick Drake, Sandy Denny, Davy Graham, Spirogyra and Shelagh MacDonald. All this and an entertaining 48-page booklet from David Wells. ★★★★★
Sound: Dryly crisp without being too 'crunchy', the sound delivered by The Town-House's Nick Watson – no doubt with some transfer help from Tim Hunt – reveals the best of these decades' old gems. ★★★★★ PS



THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Fillmore West 1969

Warners/Rhino

Music: At last The Dead's high watermark gets the lavish treatment it deserves. *Fillmore West 1969* not only comes from the same source as the majority of *Live/Dead* but is put together with so much love – full colour 76-page booklet, deluxe packaging, band portraits and CD calligraphy (this is only a snapshot of a huge ten-CD sold-out Deadfest of every single note played at the Fillmore in early 1969!). The highlight is the *Mountains Of The Moon/Dark Star/St. Stephen/The Eleven/Death Don't Have No Mercy* suite, which is here honed to perfection – and played as if their very lives depended on it. ★★★★★
Sound: A mix of HDCD and the original 16-track Ampex tapes (the world's first such live recording) make for a terrific sonic blast. ★★★★★ MP



JENNY LEWIS

Rabbit Fur Coat

Rough Trade

Music: Anyone searching for a successor to the late, great Lauro Nyro need look no further than the debut solo album from Rilo Kiley singer Jenny Lewis. There's the same aching white soul quality to the voice and the melodic sophistication of songs such as *Rise Up With Fists* and *Born Secular* rival Nyro classics such as *Stoney End*. Add the haunting folk-epic that is the title track and a cover of the Traveling Wilburys' *Handle With Care* that's as inspired as it is unexpected, and Lewis's *Rabbit Fur Coat* will keep you warm until spring. ★★★★★
Sound: The band plays with a lazy southern gothic feel but the vocals that command centre stage, with Lewis's own honeyed tones augmented by the other-worldly harmonies of Chandra and Leigh Watson. ★★★★★ NW

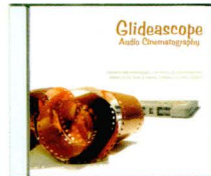
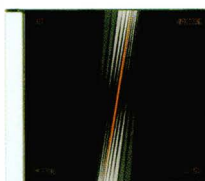


THE STROKES

First Impressions Of Earth

DO

Music: Little sign of 'difficult third album' syndrome for The Strokes. The band appears to have circumvented the problem by the clever trick of doing pretty much exactly what they have done on their last two albums. Pocketfuls of guitar-driven hooks? Check. Archly sardonic, deceptively simple vocal lines that could be sung by a tone-deaf 12-year-old and still sound tuneful? Check. Effortless sense of cool? It's all here, along with a half a dozen songs that stand easy comparison with their fantastic, yet still overhyped, debut. Standouts are *You Only Live Once* and *Razorblade*, but the album seems to run out of steam about half-way through – if they'd kept it as short as *Is This It*, it could have been almost as good. ★★★★★
Sound: They've moved on from their initial thin and lo-fi sound to a bigger beast which, though possibly more appropriate for playing stadia, still manages to retain plenty of bite. ★★★★★ DO



GLIDEASCOPE

Audio Cinematography

Akara Music

Music: London-based producer Glideascope's debut album is a sound clash of downtempo beats, African and Indian folk musics, dub reggae, the roots of hip-hop and cinematic strings. It's a cornucopia of an album that finds room for the tropical sun kiss of opener *Welcome To My World* and the freewheeling dub of *Big Big Disgrace*, with plenty of space left over for the east/west collision of *Road To Istanbul* and the faux classical fun of *Sonata No3 (Adagio Ma Non Trip Hop)*, all segueing together with surprising ease in a seamless mix. ★★★★★
Sound: Much of this keyboard and sample-based album could have been recorded in a bedroom, but the live strings give it a fuller sound than likely with electronics alone. ★★★★★ DO

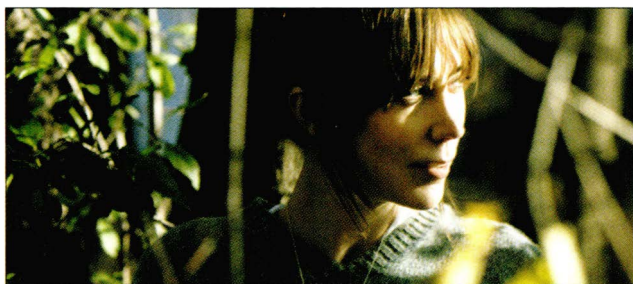


THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Elastic vitality that has rarely been matched."

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART AND THE MAGIC BAND *Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller)* Virgin

Music: In 1978, four years after the lame (by Beefheart's standards) *Unconditionally Guaranteed*, Don Van Vliet returned to the scene with a truly magic album. *Shiny Beast* revealed that he had lost none of the energy and excitement found on *Clear Spot* and *Trout Mask Replica*. Van Vliet sings his twisted poetry in everything from his best Howling Wolf to a higher pitched tunefulness that makes *Owed TA*lex a nice contrast. The stand-out tracks are *Tropical Hot Dog*

Night and The Floppy Boot Stomp, which both have an elastic vitality that has rarely been matched. ★★★★★
Sound: Recorded at the Automat in San Francisco, this is a clean and clear-cut album that allows the music to cut through without being hard edged. It's the sort of production that appreciates a system with great timing. Imaging and tone can be found but it won't make sense if something in the chain holds back on the groove. ★★★★★ JK

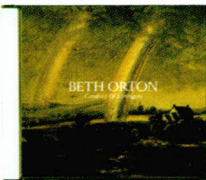


BETH ORTON *Comfort Of Strangers*

EMI

Music: After three albums of dreamy, introspective pop-folk, Orton has turned to American producer Jim O'Rourke (best known for his work with Wilco and Stereolab) for a musical makeover. Where before she floated, she now bounces on tracks such as *Worms*, *Conceived and Rectify*. Although *Shopping Trolley* kicks with an abandon we've not heard before, it's not exactly her rock album, for there are still plenty of ethereal melodies such as *Heart Of Soul* and *Feral Children*. But O'Rourke fleshes them out with piano, marimba and other textures that make you feel you've only heard her in B&W before... and now she's gone Technicolor. Despite the fuller sound, there's still a freshness and spontaneity and the entire album was done and dusted inside two weeks. Remarkable. ★★★★★

Sound: Masterful production from O'Rourke and compelling vocals from Orton, whose unique diction and phrasing may technically be as flawed-as-hell but somehow fits just perfectly. ★★★★★ NW



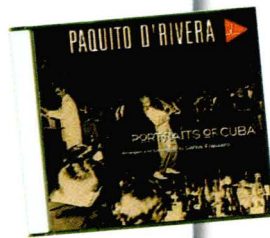
DVD-AUDIO & SACD

PAQUITO D'RIVERA, CARLOS FRANZETTI *Portraits Of Cuba*

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)
Chesky

Music: This Chesky recording from 1996 brought together Cuban saxophone and clarinet player Paquito D'Rivera and arranger/conductor Carlos Franzetti. Combined with a 14-piece orchestra this pairing bring a genuine flavour of Cuban jazz, something that might come as a bit of a shock if all you've heard so far is the Buena Vista Social Club. With ten brass instruments blazing away, often all at once, the sound is highly energetic. The music encompasses approximately 100 years of Cuban music, from Jose White up to the compositions of one-time child prodigy D'Rivera. It's easy to hear why it won Best Latin Jazz Album at the 39th Grammy Awards. ★★★★★

Sound: This music sounds best on the horn speakers that were popular in its heyday – only such efficient designs can do justice to the energy of a full brass ensemble. But there is plenty of bass power to balance the mid and, being a Chesky recording, it's very clean indeed. ★★★★★ JK



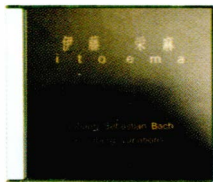
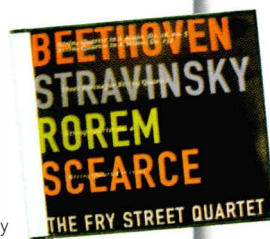
BEETHOVEN, STRAVINSKY, ROREM, SCEARCE

Beethoven: String Quartet in A Major Op. 18 No. 5, String Quartet in A Minor Op. 132; **Stravinsky:** Three Pieces for String Quartet; **Roem:** String Quartet No. 4; **Scearce:** Quartet 1 (Y2K)

The Fry Street Quartet

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)
FSQC03

Music: This quartet is only a few years old. True, they play with all the vitality and passion of young musicians, but their almost superhuman articulation and perfect intonation speaks of the kind of maturity that only normally comes with age. The Beethoven pairing consists of an early classical quartet, *Opus 18*, and the sublime *Opus 132*. The Stravinsky pieces are short vignettes, and the Roem and Scearce (the former is the more interesting piece) are clearly 20th Century, but not exactly radical. ★★★★★
Sound: This is a stunning four-channel recording made with Ray Kimber's IsoMike microphone and baffle system, which gives superb three-dimensional imagery and clarity, though you may want to turn down the back channels from their nominal level. ★★★★★ AG



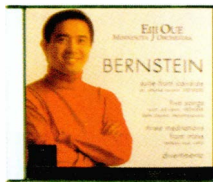
JS BACH *Goldberg Variations*

Ito Ema (piano)

MA Recordings CD/M024A

Music: The *Goldberg Variations* is one of the great monuments of the Western classical tradition, a set of 31 exquisite variations on a theme so banal that no other contemporary composer was able to make much of it. This version is quite exceptional in its lyricism, discipline and in the way each phrase is shaped. The performance has clearly been painstakingly prepared, but it always sounds fresh and is never lacking in spontaneity. ★★★★★

Sound: This is one of three recordings made in parallel – this one is solidly audiophile from tip to toe. The piano sound is as real as I have ever heard from CD: it has tremendous presence, subtlety and, when needed, power. A great recording. ★★★★★ AG



LEONARD BERNSTEIN *Candide Overture, Suite From Candide, Three Meditations From Mass, Five songs, Divertimento For Orchestra*

Eiji Oue (cond), Minnesota Orchestra, Beth Clayton (mezzo-soprano), Anthony Ross (cello)

Reference Recordings RR-87CD

Music: An eclectic mix of Bernstein music, this is a *tour de force* even by Bernstein's own exacting standards. Eiji Oue was a one-time collaborator with Bernstein, and the performances are both affectionate and thoroughly idiomatic. ★★★★★

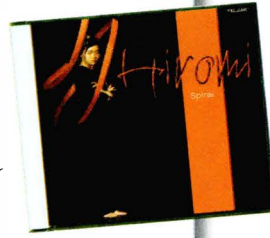
Sound: The Reference Recordings sound captured by the HDCD process is warm, powerful and finely detailed, with good stereo perspectives. This one, which was engineered by Keith Johnson, originator of the process, is up there with the best. ★★★★★ AG

HIROMI

Spiral
SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Telarc

Music: On her third album, the young Japanese-born, US-based jazz pianist Hiromi Uehara appears to have moved beyond her early fusion-inspired pyrotechnics. Elements of the album's central four-part suite *Music For Three-Piece Orchestra* conjure up sweeping melodic flourishes and grand orchestral statements but these regularly fuse with gravity-defying ease with impressively technical jazz figures and off-kilter rhythms. There's sensitive backing from her regular trio, the bass of Tony Grey and drums of Martin Valihora conjuring up a wide range of textures, at times stripped down to basic rhythm, at others suggesting a much larger group. However she could have done without the ten-minute *Return Of Kung-Fu World Champion*, which revisits the hectic key-battering and quirky rhythms of one of her past fusion compositions. ★★★★★
Sound: The album is also available as a DVD-Audio disc with some additional video material, but this SACD version offers a crystal-clear sound that shows off Hiromi's digital dexterity brilliantly. ★★★★★ DO



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HIGH-END, THOROUGHbred AND UTTERLY MUSICAL.”**

DECEMBER 04 / HI FI NEWS / CD3MKII / KEN KESSLER

ARC ANGELS

“SOUNDS ARE PRODUCED FROM AN UNSHAKABLE FOUNDATION... YOU FEEL LIKE YOU COULD TRIP OVER THE MUSICIAN”

ISSUE 37 / HI FI PLUS / CD3MKII / ALAN SIRCOM

“THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THEIR SIMPLE 1950'S STYLING; THEIR USE OF VALVES AND THEIR UNDOUBTED ABILITY TO PRODUCE MUSICAL SOUNDS THAT MAKES THE PRODUCT EXTREMELY DESIRABLE.”

JUL/AUG 04 / YOUR GUIDE TO HI FI AND HOME CINEMA / SP16 / STAN CURTIS

“A SUPERB ALL-ROUNDER AND AN OBVIOUS BEST BUY”

THE COLLECTION 04 / HI FI CHOICE / VM220 / ALAN SIRCOM

“OUTSTANDING SOUND QUALITY AND EXCEPTIONAL EASE OF USE”

ISSUE 35 / HI FI PLUS / PH5 / JIMMY HUGHES



Audio Research has studiously applied the technology gained from their Reference series amplifiers to every model in their range, right down to the entry-level designs.

The SP16 preamplifier, VS55, VS110 and VM220 power amplifiers, the state-of-the-art CD3 Mk II CD player, the multi-channel amplifier and the VSi55 integrated amplifier are not only packed with knowledge gained from the company's legendary flagship models, but they herald a change in the way reasonably-priced high-end equipment is perceived. The astonishing PH5 brings Reference Phono performance to a remarkably affordable price point. The LS25 Mk II Pre-amp clearly shares parentage with the Reference pre-amplifiers. And the VT100 Mk III boasts DNA derived from the Reference 300 and 600 power amps.

Now, there is new inspiration. Joining these classics is the most radical product yet to wear the AudioResearch logo: the Reference 3 preamplifier. An absence of conventional controls, refined circuitry, better sound.

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ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



MUGGED

If there is a new way to fleece the consumer, rest assured, the hi-fi industry will be first to exploit it. Fuses for £35 (*AudioFile: Essentials*, HFC 276, Furutech fuse), 'audiophile grade' wet wipes, magic stones etc. Do they make any difference? I would love to know the profit margins on some of this gear.

John Boys via email

HFC As with many other industries, some simple accessories can cost an arm and a leg: "Sat nav option for your new car, Sir? – that'll be £800, please".



Above: Furutech's 'audiophile grade' 13A fuse

As an astute consumer, you can of course vote with your wallet and ignore ridiculous demands, if you believe them to be ridiculous. Ultimately, all hi-fi products stand or fall on their sound quality. So, we have to stay open to the performance claims of any product, no matter how left-field those claims may seem.

iLOONS

The future of SACD and DVD-Audio seems to have been in serious doubt for some time now and the Red Book CD standard seems to be unassailable, but I am not so sure. Is music as a 'physical' medium going to disappear if the current trend continues unabated? For how long will the 'big four' record labels be able to maintain their grip on recorded music and when will the hard disc become the alternative to the CD? If I were a manufacturer of CD players I would be seriously concerned about my business in the medium term.

Artikulat HFC online forum

HFC It's true to say the silver disc is under threat, led by a new generation of music lovers favouring convenience over quality. It's sadly an ethos echoed throughout our modernising society in all aspects of consumerism. There remains, however, the issue of CDs in UK homes. Sales of CD will certainly slow, but consumers will still need

"If there is a way to fleece the consumer, the hi-fi industry will be first to exploit it."

devices to play them on. A possible pointer towards hi-fi's future has been demonstrated with the phenomenal success of Arcam's Solo – the stylish, one-box CD/receiver. This 'lifestyle' hi-fi product has shown that demand for hi-fi replay still exists and perhaps more crucially, outside of audiophile circles. Perhaps our industry may have to wise up to the style-conscious consumer in order to survive beyond kitchen table production.

AVI GOOD

I enjoyed David Vivian's AVI review (*HFC* 276) – I am the very satisfied owner of Lab Series electronics. While noting David's comments about AVI's lack of advertising (could that be the reason the rest of the hi-fi press resolutely ignores these gems?) he might have mentioned AVI's excellent website – www.avihifi.com – which concentrates on facts and information, not adjectives and opinions. Thanks for an excellent magazine.

Rob Cochran via email

Letter of the month

EARS THEY ARE A CHANGIN'

Do you think it's possible for an individual's perception of hi-fi to change with age and musical tastes? Hearing ability deteriorates with age and we all begin to lose the top end of the frequency range. We may unwittingly compensate for this by preferring a brighter, more forward balance, thus shifting our perception of balance over time. Also, a shift from dance/electonica to acoustic, rock to vocal/folk, for example, could indeed bring new sonic priorities. This only serves to demonstrate that hi-fi is in the

'ear' of the beholder and we all really should have the confidence to use our ears and buy what we like, not what we are told is good.

Jeremy Guzman via email

HFC You're certainly right about hearing losses. We can see your point on evolving tastes too, although there are certain hi-fi fundamentals that will always be prerequisite to convincing sound. Buying with your own ears is a message we've always supported – your hi-fi equipment should be as individual as you are.



WIN CRYSTAL CABLE PICCOLO INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a one-metre pair of Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo interconnects worth £260, featuring a silver/gold conductor with Kapton insulation, plus a transparent Teflon jacket. So get writing! (150 words max please...)



Left: AVI Trio loudspeakers

AVI BAD

David Vivian's appraisal of the AVI system (*Beautiful Systems, HFC 276*) was very good. I use AVI electronics and wish for a whole system. Having had my current loudspeakers for 25 years I thought maybe the AVI Trios would fit the bill. I wanted to listen in my own room... and this is where the story ends. AVI does not have a loan pair, so it is impossible to listen at home. AVI has kindly invited me

to Stroud to listen, but it's not the same as a home dem and sadly dealers do not carry demo pairs. I have exchanged emails on the subject with AVI, but to no avail. I will just have to do something boring with the money and save it!

Mike Bickley via email

HFC We can appreciate why home demos can be uneconomical for smaller hi-fi companies, but it remains an excellent way for consumers to appraise kit and ultimately create sales. Some of the best systems for appraising kit operate at those excellent dealers where you leave a wad with the shop and borrow demo pairs of speakers until you find the ones for you. It's well worth asking about this at stores in your area.

TWEAK MY LOVELIES, RUSS

Tweaking hi-fi can be rewarding without excessive expenditure, but it is sometimes difficult to demonstrate the benefit achieved. Russ Andrews sells 'shorties', which stop RFI entering amplifiers through unused RCA phono inputs. I had these on trial and found that my speakers stopped making the 'popping' sound that always coincided with vacuuming the carpet. A case proven? On a more familiar conundrum, Russ Andrews also suggests leaving most types of amplifier powered up and CD players on stand-by, but *HFC's* Jimmy Hughes says, power the CD player and preamp but not the power amp. My Arcam amps have been left on for some years but I leave my Arcam CD off (it takes about 20 minutes to warm up). Will it damage the CD player to leave it powered up?

Jeff Borland via email

"I wanted to listen in my own room... and this is where the story ends."

HFC We've entered the power on/ power off debate so often that we're not going give it too much space here. Often it's personal choice, but we asked Arcam for its official line on your behalf. An Arcam spokesperson said: "Arcam units are designed to be left powered on all the time. All units will sound best after a period of warm up and keeping a unit powered up will ensure they always sound their best. However, it is advisable to switch off kit if left for a considerable time – when going on holiday, for example."



Onlineforum

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at www.hifichoice.co.uk



Thanks to those on the *HFC Forum* who suggested the Humax Freeview box for digital radio a while ago. I bought a new box, auto-tuned it, connected it to my amp and bingo – great sound, no hiss, just pure music or speech on 25 radio stations. Happy bunny.

Pat

What did you think of Nordost's Eco 3 static wipe that came free with *Hi-Fi Choice* issue 276? I thought the difference was immediate and awesome. In as much the same way as using a good demagnetising or system tune up disc for the first time, everything got clearer, more

defined, more spacious and dynamic...

Justafan

...I thought, 'more shite they are trying to con me into buying'...

Vegetableman

...Nordost's Eco 3 wipe was a *free* gift from *Hi-Fi Choice* so nobody was being conned! We

were delighted to be able to give you the chance to try the popular hi-fi accessory for free – you can decide for yourselves, of course, whether or not to buy more Eco 3.

HFC

I'm trying to find a hi-fi repair centre without much success. Can

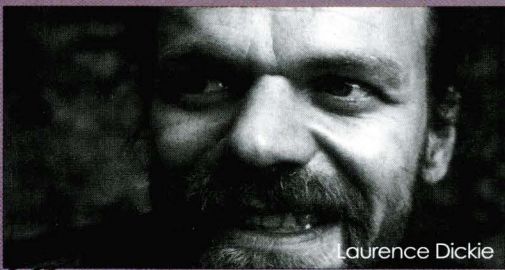
anyone recommend amplifier or DAC repairers? I live in the Hampshire region...

Manhar

...I'm not sure about the logistics or his location relative to yours, but this fellow has done the trick for me:

www.cptacoustics.com

Scarrygsxr



Laurence Dickie

vivid audio .co.uk

Laurence Dickie, world-renowned designer of the famous Nautilus Loudspeaker system, has developed and patented new advanced drive units which are integral to the striking new Vivid Audio range of Loudspeakers. A true technical tour de force - both visually stunning and unquestionably musically rewarding.

It takes a special combination of characters to achieve successful partnerships. Vivid Audio has come into being because of the coming together of just that sort of team. Much of the innovation is the brainchild of the Brighton-based designer Laurence Dickie. Since a young age, Laurence Dickie has been passionate about music and the sciences but his particular obsession has been with loudspeakers. With his insatiable zest for learning and discovering, he has been developing his passion from school days through University and beyond. Laurence (Dic) has honed his skills in the design of loudspeakers of extraordinary performance. His achievements to date are noteworthy, to say the least, and he commands a deep respect from his peers. But, Dic does not simply design loudspeakers.....
.....he takes the proposed design concept and improves it beyond the point most designers are happy to "sign off".

Joining forces with the South African contingent of Bruce and Deone Gessner and Philip Guttentag (forming Vivid Audio), was the ideal career move since he could now be involved in designing and engineering products in their entirety. It meant his having a say at every stage of development, from the acoustic performance to the aesthetic design of each product. Dic's involvement in the Vivid Audio story is one that started approximately five years ago when he set out to create a range of drivers for professional monitors. He was introduced to the other members of Vivid two years later when it quickly became clear that these same drivers would be eminently suitable for a new range of groundbreaking designs they had been developing.

For a new high-end speaker manufacturer to succeed it was clear from the outset that such a company would have to deliver products featuring more than just innovative engineering. These products would have to deliver an acoustic performance rendering them virtually invisible. They would need to refine acoustic performance to a new level which encourages the listener to want more, rather than tire and need a break.

Vivid Audio wanted to achieve all these things but not just at any price. That's why they made considerable effort to extract the best performance imaginable from each component using customary materials wherever possible. Which is why there are no standard parts to be found in any of their loudspeakers.

Every component is made to their own exacting specification. Most hidden away but quietly delivering a listening experience not to be forgotten.

" Even a seasoned speaker designer was just transported into the film, effortlessly and instantly. And that after all, is what the filmmakers' art is all about and what we hope our home cinema kit will deliver to us in our homes. Only the best kit does it this well and Vivid is up there. It is big and it is clever. "

Vivid Audio Surround Sound System (B1, K1, C1)
Adam Rayner, Home Cinema Choice, August 2005.
Gold Star Reference Status

" An extremely revealing and genuinely neutral loudspeaker with dynamic range, timing and imaging to die for. "

A true world class loudspeaker from a brand that knows how to get results. "

Vivid Audio B1
Jason Kennedy, Hi-Fi Choice
Editors Choice Award

" Seamless is a much-banded term in describing speaker sound, but the K1 gave a definitive reference point for applying the description. What may be termed the aspiration of this speaker was nigh-on perfect. "

Vivid Audio K1
Andrew Harrison, Hi-Fi News, Dec 2005

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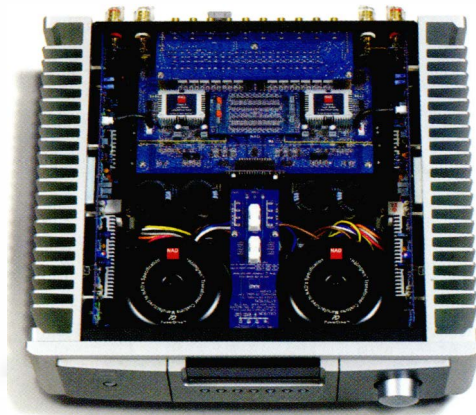
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The Science of **Hearing** Part Three

In this, the last of our three-part series, hearing expert R. A. Lawrence goes deeper in his exploration of the most important components in your hi-fi system – your ears. Welcome to the 'inner ear'

In the first two articles of this series, we saw how the outer ear collects and selectively amplifies sound, which ultimately causes vibration in the eardrum. The components of the middle ear pass that vibration to the 'oval window', the border of the inner ear, via a system of levers that reduce movement while increasing pressure. This is an acoustic transformer necessary to couple vibrations in air to vibrations in liquid.

And it is in liquid, within the inner ear, that those vibrations must now proceed. The inner ear can be divided into the 'semicircular canals', which serve as the body's balance organ and the *cochlea*, which converts vibrations (sound) from the outer ear into electrical impulses. This process is called transduction (microphones and loudspeakers are also transducers). Those impulses are passed on to the brain, via the auditory nerve.

The illustration titled *The Construction of the Ear* in HFC 276 shows the relative positions of the various part of the ear. The *cochlea* (from the Greek word meaning 'snail') in its simplest form is essentially a set of three tubes running parallel to each other and coiled up like a snail. The whole complex is broader at its base and narrows towards the apex of the spiral form. Tubes one and three connect at the apex of this spiral, which has a height of only 5mm but in ▶

its uncoiled state would be about 30mm long. This is represented in simplified form in the illustration below.

BLOOD TIES AND BRAIN JUICE

All three tubes contain fluid with constituents very similar to blood, but lacking the cells like the red and white blood cells. The fluid in the central tube, however, is subtly different in terms of its constituents. This is similar to cerebrospinal fluid, which fills the protective sac around the brain and spinal cord.

Vibration is coupled into the fluid from the oval window and travels round the spiral to the apex, round the apex and back down to the round window, which dissipates any sound energy that hasn't been absorbed on the way. Nature has thoughtfully provided overload protection, since the round window prevents vibration amplitude within the *cochlea* from reaching levels that could cause damage.

Meanwhile, a good deal of the sound is coupled to the middle tube which contains two

essential components, the 'basilar membrane' and the 'organ of Corti'. The basilar membrane is thick but narrow (and therefore stiff) at the base, near the oval window, and thin but wide (hence flexible) at the apex of the spiral. It vibrates principally at the base in response to high frequencies and at the apex in response to low frequencies. The organ of Corti is situated on the membrane and consists of approximately 20,000 hair cells, which send electrical impulses back to the brain in response to vibrations.

DIGITAL HAIR FIRE

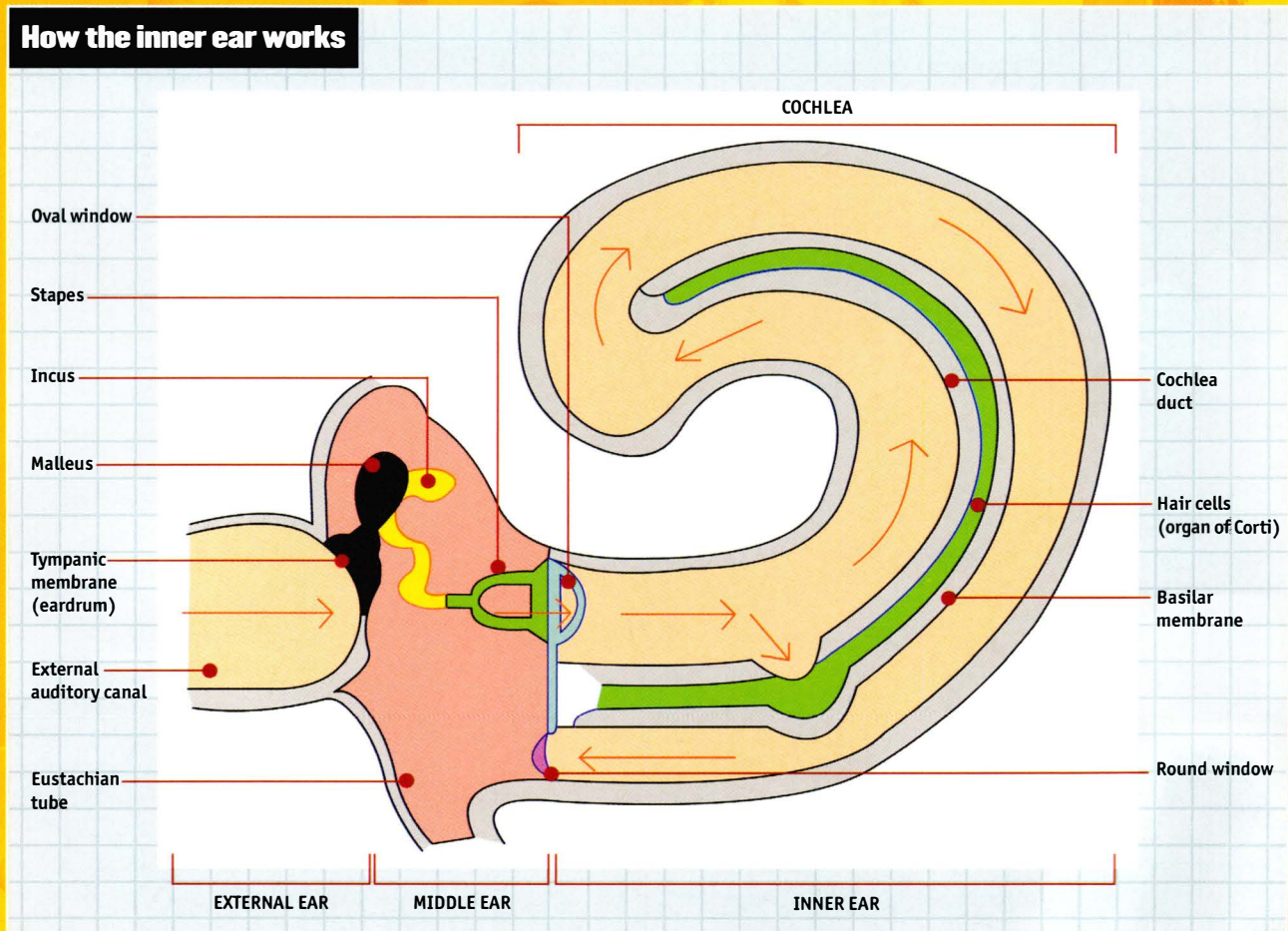
Hair cells are basically digital devices, which either 'fire' and send an electrical impulse or don't. The maximum rate at which they can fire is about 300Hz. How then can they respond to very high frequencies? After all, young humans at least can hear to over ten times that frequency! The answer lies in the way the basilar membrane reacts to different frequencies. Hair cells near the base send signals to the brain, which are interpreted as

high frequency, and vice versa. The more cell firings there are going on, the louder the sound is perceived to be.

This process is anything but linear, and is very clever. For a start, we can typically discriminate at least 1,500 different pitches across the range of 20Hz to 20kHz and the basilar membrane does not show anything like that degree of selectivity in the position of different resonances. When a sound is heard at, say, 1 kHz, the brain interprets the hair cell firings not just from the 1 kHz position on the membrane but either side as well, and uses this extra data to interpolate the 'real' pitch. There's actually an analogy of sorts with oversampled low-bit analogue-to-digital converters in audio equipment, in that both systems use extra information about one parameter (hair cell firings, or input samples) to extract more detailed information about another parameter (position/pitch, or amplitude).

In addition, cell firing frequency is not at all linearly related to amplitude. On the contrary, very roughly ten times the amplitude causes twice as many electrical impulses. Because of that and the way pitch discrimination works, we cannot strictly hear all the details in a piece of music at once – though the extent to which we can, though years of experience, interpret

“The round window prevents vibration amplitude within the *cochlea* from reaching levels that could cause damage.”



“A loud sound will effectively ‘mask’ a quieter sound at a nearby frequency, within a ‘critical bandwidth’.”

the information that gets back to the brain is pretty astonishing. A loud sound will effectively ‘mask’ a quieter sound at a nearby frequency, within a ‘critical bandwidth’. The width of the critical band itself depends on centre frequency. This is why it is possible to get reasonably good fidelity from systems like MP3, which store only a few percent of the original audio data. An MP3 coder is a ‘knowledge engine’, which uses information about the ear’s limitations to decide which bits of the music are inaudible and therefore unnecessary to store.

Yet another subtlety arises from the fact that the base, high-frequency-sensitive, part of the basilar membranes vibrates to some extent in response to all frequencies, while the apex has practically zero response to high frequencies. This asymmetry has implications for our perception of complex sounds, where low-frequency sounds can interfere with our perception of high-frequency sounds but not vice versa.

So far, we have considered just the route to the inner ear via the bones (ossicles) of the middle ear. This is not the only possible route. Sound (i.e. airborne vibration) can cross the middle ear from the eardrum to the oval and round windows, bypassing the ossicles.

NO OSSICLES, NO PROBLEM?

Given the symmetry of the cochlea it is evident that identical sound stimuli on the round and oval windows will cause little or no vibration of the basilar membrane, which responds to travelling waves in the outer tubes of the *cochlea*, but although the middle ear is a small space there will be a slight difference between the sound at the oval window and at the round window, so there will be some acoustical coupling of this kind. In the normal ear, the magnitude of this acoustically-coupled signal is small, of the order of 60dB less than ossicular coupling – effectively negligible. However, acoustic coupling can play an important role when ossicular coupling is

compromised, as in some diseased and reconstructed ears.

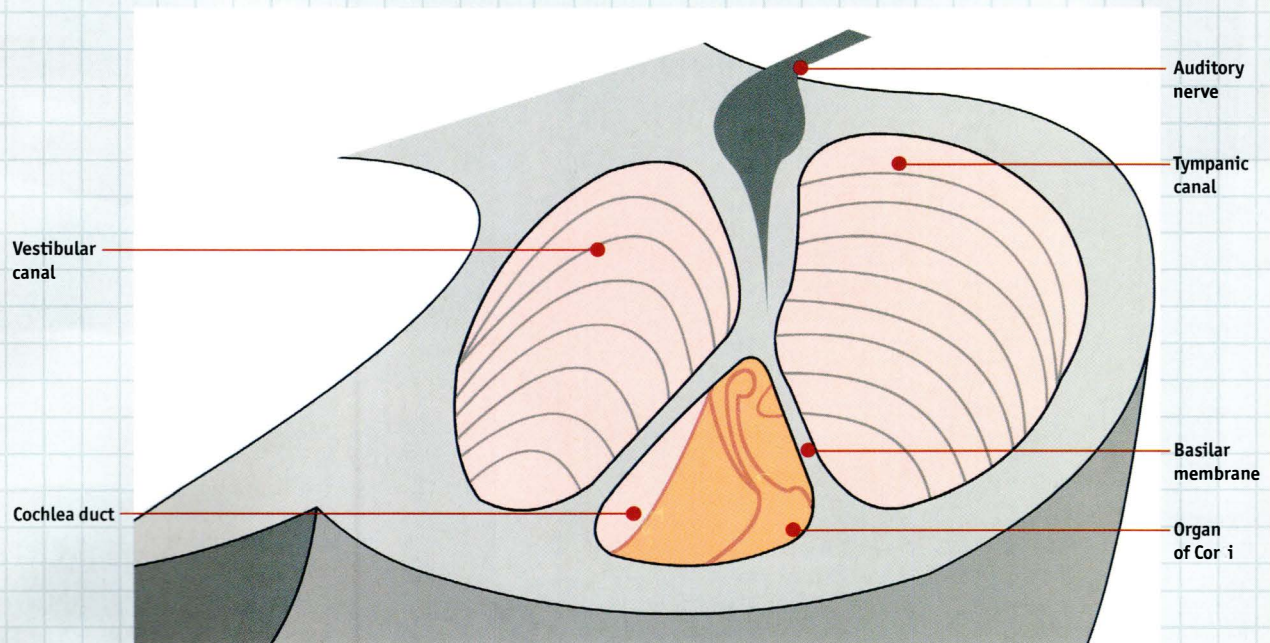
Environmental sound can also reach the inner ear by producing vibrations of the whole body and head, so-called whole-body sound conduction. Sound-induced vibrations of the whole body and head can stimulate the inner ear by (1) generating external ear or middle ear sound pressures via compressions of the ear canal and middle ear walls, (2) producing relative motions between the ossicles and inner ear, and (3) direct compression of the inner ear.

Little is known about the contribution of whole-body sound conduction to normal hearing. However, measurements of hearing loss caused by pathology such as congenital defects suggest that the whole-body route can provide a stimulus to the inner ear that is about 60dB smaller than that provided by normal ossicular coupling.

We’ve talked mostly about the physical bits of the process. The role of the brain is considerably more complex. How the electrical stimulus leads to awareness is still an enigma. Awareness is the product of learning, memory and considerable crosstalk between the various senses – hence the need for ‘blind’ testing when evaluating hi-fi components. **HFC**

R. A. Lawrence

Cross-section of the cochlea





PRIMARE CD21 CD PLAYER | PRIMARE I21 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
AUDIO PRO BRAVO FX-04 LOUDSPEAKERS | £2,750

Cool paradise

Style statement hi-fi is something Scandinavians know all about. But when it looks and sounds this good, it's a bit of Nordic heaven

That Swedes like their hi-fi is, of course, a given. True, not all of those long, sub-zero winter evenings are spent listening to music (a lesson in priorities to us all), but the very idea of high-calibre sound in the home is a natural fit with the climate and the lifestyle of the people. The Swedish hi-fi cognoscenti are also really into their music, especially jazz – many of the big jazz record labels (ones that aren't Blue Note, anyhow) are either of Scandinavian decent or feature a list of musicians and engineers that reads like a Viking legend. And the small but vibrant hi-fi industry very much mirrors the industrial preoccupations of the country, with the emphasis on clean, understated design and high-quality engineering at a reasonable price.

Which isn't to say you have to drive a Saab or a Volvo to fancy a Swedish hi-fi system. All you Merc drivers out there – tell me you're not drawn to the cool cut and sonic subtlety of the combo we've lined-up this month. The spare yet refined aesthetic mien of the electronics is the unmistakable work of Primare (no stranger to *Hi-Fi Choice*), while the slightly less well-known Audio Pro (actually founded a few years before Primare in the mid-1970s) contributes a pair of speakers that have to be among the most sensually elegant yet to grace these pages.

The way both companies enthusiastically embrace the 'affordable high-end' ethos suggests the possibility of natural synergy and outstanding value. Admittedly, giving the law of diminishing returns a sharp kick in the shin isn't always top of the agenda here at *Beautiful Systems* – remember, the best of the best always costs an arm and a leg – but there is certainly a case to be made for keeping the cost anchored in

the real world and, as we've discovered time and again, no shortage of companies only too willing to mediate the eternal conflict between price and performance. This system falls far from the 'arm and a leg' tree... it barely costs two fingers and a toe.

BO SELECTA!

Primare grew out of Danish industrial designer (and passionate audiophile) Bo Christensen's frustration with the sound quality, aesthetics and user interface of what he called "typical audio gear". In the late-1980s, he formed a team of like-minded designers, including electronics engineer Bent Nielsen, and formed Primare, its mission to design hi-fi of exceptional sound quality, elegance and user-friendliness. And eschew the industry standard twelve-month product life cycle by having the flexibility to evolve in line with technologies and methodologies. Christensen combined clean Scandinavian design, simple circuitry and straightforward operation. A trend-setting 'minimalist aesthetic' was born, which echoes in hi-fi (and not simply Nordic hi-fi) to this day.

Although Christensen left Primare in 1994, Nielsen remained, working alongside Copland luminary Lars Pedersen and renowned audio engineer Michael Bladelius (formerly of Pass Labs and Threshold among others) to advance and focus Primare's art in the digital and analogue domains. Today, the company's reputation for superior sound and style is stronger than ever.

Primare likes to put that down to the fact that it has its own rule book. Even the £800 entry-level CD21 that kicks off this system uses "the best optical media disc drive currently available", proprietary servo-controlled software, multiple



Primare CD21
CD player
£800

The less expensive of Primare's two CD players is not a poor relation. It uses the same meticulous engineering to deliver a similar sonic signature – and it really comes into its own with the I21.



Primare I21
integrated amplifier
£750

Although not the most muscular integrated amplifier at the price, the I21's generous current delivery helps it to sound more powerful than its 75 watts a side suggest. A really engaging listen.



Audio Pro Bravo FX-04
loudspeaker
£1,200 per pair

You'd suspect speakers as unconditionally gorgeous as these couldn't possibly sound as good as they look. You'd be wrong. Beauty and the beat.

“The small, vibrant hi-fi industry very much mirrors the preoccupations of the country, with the emphasis on clean, understated design.”



isolated power supplies, optimised digital to analog conversion stages and generously engineered output stages.

The transport mechanism and circuit boards are housed in an alloy and heavy gauge steel chassis which, as well as giving off up-market visual and tactile cues, provides strength, rigidity, and screening while, at the same time, damping vibrations from external sources. The front panel, which is a couple of centimetres proud of the main chassis, isolates the display circuitry from the audio circuitry to avoid interference. Digital-to-analogue conversion is performed by two Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz PCM1738 DACs, configured in an internally balanced topology to cancel out noise and distortion products. The signal path is balanced until its last stage where it becomes single ended. There is no upsampling as Primare believes it can colour the sound.

Signal paths are kept as short as possible and an internal mains filter ensures that any high frequency disturbance is removed before it reaches the power transformer, which is placed as far away as possible from the delicate analogue circuits. The player has an R-core transformer with separate windings for all of the different power requirements (mechanical, analogue, digital and so on). Each is individually

regulated in ten steps to ensure that enough power is constantly available.

Analogue outputs are by unbalanced phono connections while, on the digital side, there's one coaxial 75-ohm S/PDIF, one optical Toslink and one professional XLR 110-ohm AES/EBU output. The RS232 port is used for servicing and future upgrades. Most of the functions can be accessed through just six front panel push buttons but the full set, including scan and programming, need the remote.

Meticulous attention to the power supply and ultra-short signal paths are at the heart of the I21 integrated amp's design, too. As with the most expensive Primare powerhouse, the entry-level model's power supply is fully discrete with true dual-mono construction and separate transformer windings for each channel. The generous physical size of the 800VA toroidal transformer makes it an inherently good mains filter and its low output impedance promotes good voltage stabilisation. Power to the driver stage and preamp stage is individually regulated in seven steps, as is the digital supply to the front panel. Even though the power output of 75 watts per channel into eight ohms sounds less than Herculean, the I21's high current output means tricky speaker loads shouldn't be problem. The main circuit design uses J-FET input and bipolar

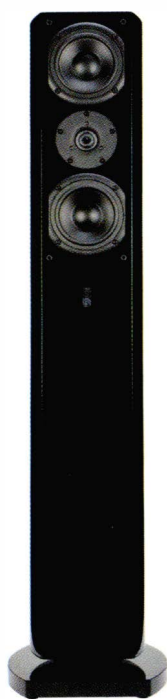
output devices (warmer sounding than MOSFETS) while the preamp section is derived from the circuit designs in the top-end PRE30 dedicated preamplifier.

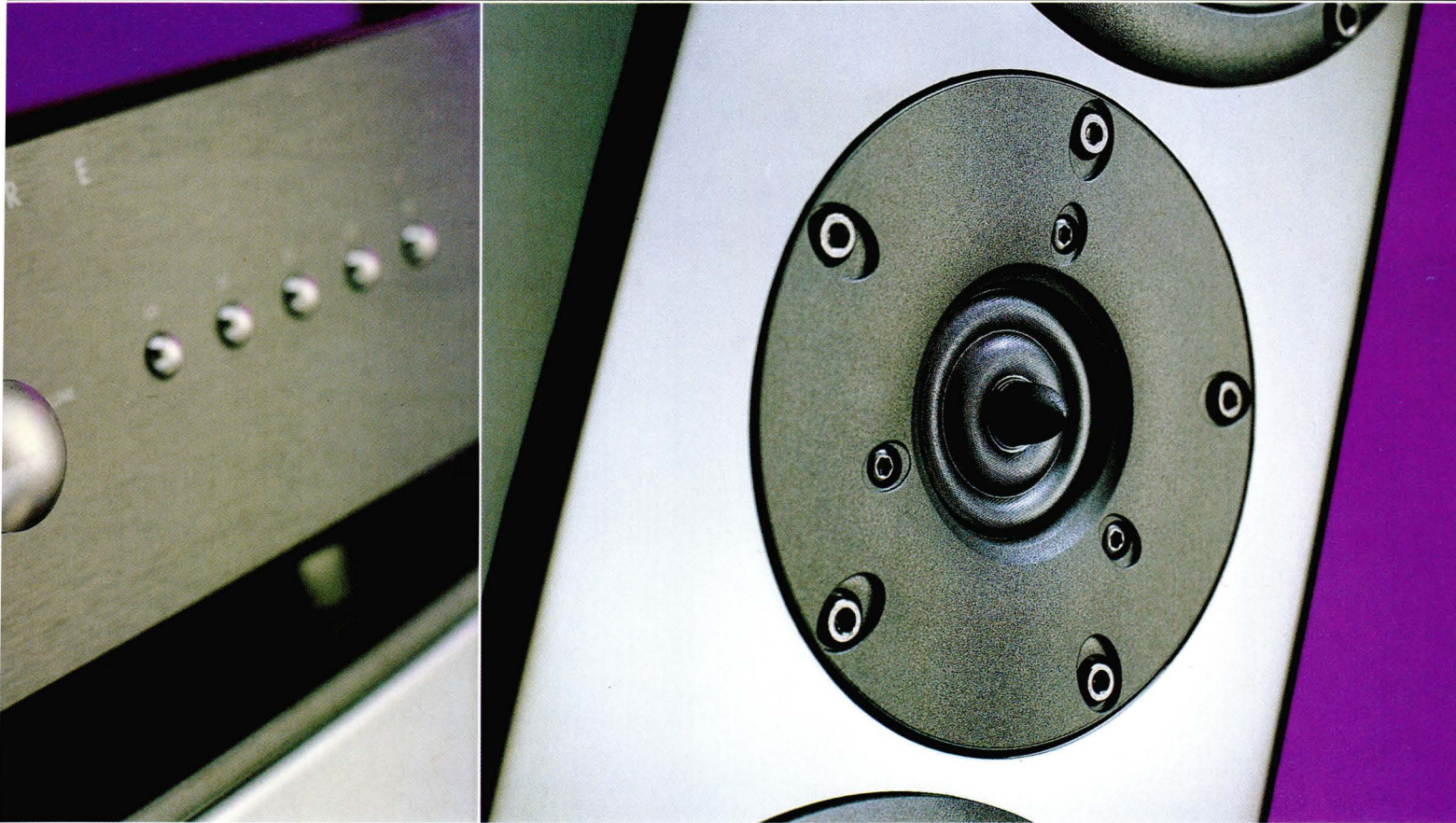
Like the CD player, the I21 has a steel chassis, alloy casing and split front panel which, apart from the input selection buttons, sports just the milled digital volume control and small numeric level display. There are just four line-level inputs labelled CD, Tuner, Line 1 and Line 2. Round the back, the single set of chunky gold-plated speaker terminals can accommodate most audiophile speaker cables.

THE STAHL FILE

Which leads us to those tall, slim and artfully contoured glossy piano black columns. It all began for Audio Pro some 30 years ago with a subwoofer designed by a young electronics engineer called Karl-Erik Stahl. A small box with a deep, clean bass, the world was well and truly shaken – in fact, Audio Pro subs were the bass delivery systems of choice for the discerning LS3/5a owner of a decade or two ago. Today, Audio Pro also has a burgeoning range of two-channel and home theatre speakers and electronics, alongside a reputation for combining sumptuous looks and top notch sonics.

The £1,200 Bravo FX-04 is the second-best speaker in the Audio Pro line-up and is designed to be equally at





“It sounds properly integrated with a warm, natural balance. You never get the feeling that it’s holding back or intentionally tailoring the music to produce a particular effect.”

home in stereo and multi-channel systems. Certainly, it’s hard to imagine a room decor than wouldn’t be enhanced by the presence of its gorgeously svelte, hand-lacquered teardrop cabinet.

The curved back design discourages the propagation of standing waves within the cabinet. It houses two 135mm bass/mid drivers and a 25mm tweeter in a D’Appolito configuration, claimed to deliver a more precisely defined soundstage.

Pedestal-mounted for extra stability, the cabinet’s downward-firing ‘AirFlow’ bass reflex port – much like some ProAc floorstanding designs – aims for better bass connection with the room. This seems to be justified by the 32Hz-42kHz (-3dB) frequency response. With a quoted sensitivity of 91dB, the Bravos don’t need a lot of power to go loud.

IT’S GENEROUS... HONEST!

What’s immediately likeable about this system is its basic generosity and musical honesty. Strong on detail, focus and intelligibility, it sounds properly integrated with a warm, natural balance.

You never get the feeling that it’s holding back or intentionally tailoring the music to produce a particular effect. Ebullient and energetic with rock, expansive with big orchestras, intimate and tactile with simpler acoustic material, the Primare/Audio Pro partnership has the canny ability to lay bare the spirit of the music.

Leonard Cohen’s vaguely melodic mumbling on the generally slow-burning *Ten Songs* album has a convincingly earthy quality. And when, as it occasionally does with Leonard, the music picks up pace, so does the system, its alacrity, assurance and dynamic freedom allowing the energy to swell with ease.

It’s the Audio Pro speakers that bring a sense of richness and air to the party. Their smooth, extended treble has fine inner detail and integrates smoothly with a midband that’s poised, open and articulate. The weighty yet thoroughly tuneful bass is impressive, too, sounding full and firm without verging on the warm and cuddly. Well, maybe just a little...

Few systems have passed through these doors that have sounded smoother or sexier with jazz. This perhaps isn’t surprising, given the Swedish love of the idiom, but the combination of detail (from the electronics) and warmth (from the speakers) makes this system a jazz natural. If it got any jazzier, it’d have to take up smoking Gauloises and grow a goatee beard.

Perhaps some of this jazz sexiness is smoke and mirrors. A more resolving system that retains the richness could certainly deliver a better overall performance, but here lies the system’s key feature. You may find a warmer or more detailed sounding system at the price, but you’re unlikely to find one that balances the two so deftly without seriously upping the dosh. Tack on the suave, sophisticated good looks and you can see why it deserves to sit among the great and the good of *Beautiful Systems*.

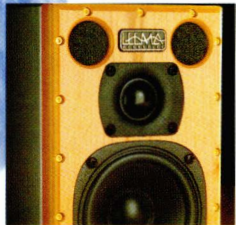
This isn’t the world’s most accurate hi-fi system but, for £2,750, its compelling musicality is nothing less than a revelation. **HFC**

David Vivian

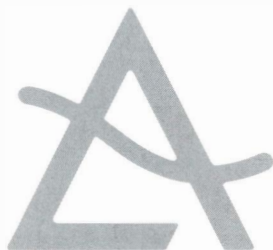




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REVIEWS

Welcome to the HFC hardware reviews section – the only place for definitive tests of the latest hi-fi components. Our unique combination of extensive listening, unsighted comparisons and scientific lab reports, conducted by the UK's most experienced set of reviewers, ensures you're holding the most comprehensive and reliable guide to high performance hi-fi in the world.



EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS £350-£600

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- 73** Micromega A60
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- 77** Onkyo A-933
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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Percentage ratings for various different criteria, like sound quality and value for money

Our overall conclusion

You can find more civilised players for the money. But few combine dynamics with fine timing skills as effectively as this. **HFC**
Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION
This is a highly entertaining and colourful player at a competitive price. The build quality is good and the feature list strong – it's not the most subtle 2.750 player but if you're looking for a spinner to inspire you it could prove a bargain.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

The product's final score. All criteria are taken into account but the emphasis is on performance. Components scoring more than 85% may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

A component receiving the coveted Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy Badge has been judged to deliver excellent performance at its price point, thereby offering outstanding value for money.



Editor's Choice

This Badge is awarded only to those components that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance, regardless of cost. These products may be considered among the very best of their kind.

Turn the page for the most rigorous tests of serious hi-fi in the business...



B&W's supermodel

More than just another style-led, AV-oriented slimline speaker, the alloy-clad XT4 breaks the mould

PRODUCT B&W XT4

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £1,699 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 15.2x114x20cm

Weight: 22.5kg Slimline design with extruded alloy back and sides 25mm alloy dome tweeter 95mm Kevlar midrange cone Two 95mm paper/Kevlar bass drivers Sensitivity/impedance: 86db/six ohms (nom)

CONTACT 01903 221500 www.bw-speakers.com

B&W is the biggest name in hi-fi speakers worldwide, with a powerful reputation to protect, and the considerable research facilities necessary to do just that. Even so, the really difficult trick is to build a speaker attractive and discreet enough to appeal to the AV enthusiast, yet which can also deliver stereo music without letting the hi-fi side down.

That is the underlying intention behind B&W's new XT-series, and especially the three-way XT4. This heads the range and is intended to be used for the main front left/right speakers of a multichannel system, or as the two stereo channels alone, with or without additional subwoofery. A full multichannel package is completed by the standmount XT2 for surround channels, the XTC centre speaker and the spherical PV1 subwoofer. Those using traditional CRT televisions should note that the XT4 is not magnetically shielded. But the svelte looks would likely place these speakers alongside LCD and plasma sets, where shielding is not an issue.

“High mass is no guarantee of quality, but it can play an important role and is indicative of the engineering content involved.”

At £1,699 per pair, the XT4 is unquestionably a costly loudspeaker, competing head-to-head on price with B&W's more conventional 700-series models – indeed, splitting the difference between the 703 and 704. The question this review needs to address is whether – and how – it competes sonically.

The key trend in the home cinema sector over the past seven years has been the success of flat panel plasma, and more recently LCD, TV/video displays, despite their indifferent picture quality and high prices. These sets invariably have silver 'picture frames' surrounding their screens, and this has led to a number of speaker systems following suit with 'matching' slim-line, silver-finish metal enclosures.

B&W has already gone some way down this route with its FPM (Flat Panel Monitor) series speakers, of which the largest is the FPM6 (£1,200 per pair). However, this XT4 looks a more serious proposition. It not only features elegantly curved, silver-finished alloy casework, with the sides and back extruded as a large single piece, it's also a full floorstander, and is three times the weight of the FPM6.

The considerable 22.5kg weight – again splitting the 703 and 704 – was one of the more surprising aspects of this slim and delicate looking design. Several visitors were invited to pick up an XT4, and all grunted with surprise on discovering this was easier said than done. High mass is no guarantee of superior quality, but it can play an important role nonetheless, and is also indicative of the sheer quantity of engineering content involved.

Exactly what is responsible for that mass proved difficult to determine, as the speaker resisted all attempts to gain access to its interior to find out what sort of damping compounds were concealed inside. Removal of the base did reveal what appears to be a chunk of mass-loading metalwork in the lowest part of the enclosure, a supposition confirmed by the discovery that the centre of gravity is only a little more than a third of the way up the speaker. Indeed, it's actually located below all four drive units, despite the considerable influence the drivers' magnets normally have on a speaker's weight distribution.

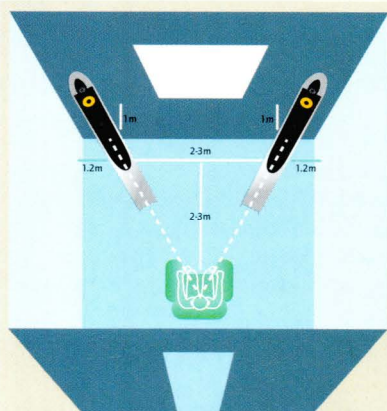
That substantial additional mass loading and its dramatic effect in lowering the centre of gravity has implications for this speaker's physical stability. 'Knock-over-ability' is a major potential problem that faces all slim, tall designs, and the usual solution is to use a plinth or outrigger arrangement. Incorporating this hefty lump of ballast low down allows B&W to achieve adequate stability without any need for extra base extensions.

That aside, its engineers have also come up with something clever and original for those willing and wanting to use spikes. Though undoubtedly beneficial from a performance perspective, spikes normally need to be set slightly in from the edge of the base, so they

reduce the footprint and therefore compromise stability. This is cleverly avoided in the XT4 by the provision of optional cast alloy spike sockets. These not only ensure a superior mechanical connection, but also set the spikes at an angle of around 30 degrees from the vertical. Each spike points outwards, so that ▶



SET-UP



POSITIONING

Although the bass drivers used here are very small, twinning them gives a combined diaphragm area close to a 200mm driver. And, while the enclosure looks very compact, the internal volume is actually larger than appearances suggest. Add in the contribution from the twin ports, which in tandem are tuned to 40Hz, and it's no real surprise to find that the XT4 likes to be kept well clear of walls, whereupon it can deliver decent bass output down to below 30Hz under far-field in-room conditions.

Close-to-wall siting is clearly best avoided, not only to avoid generating excessive output 50-100Hz, but also because it introduces extra unevenness further up the midband. This is all the more noticeable because the lateral dispersion of this slim enclosure is very good. If the speaker has to be located closer than 0.5m to a rearward wall, it would be worth experimenting with fitting either or both of the supplied bungs. (Note that if just one bung is used, this will re-tune the remaining port output to around 29Hz.)

SYSTEM MATCHING

The XT4's claimed sensitivity — precisely confirmed by our measurements — is a comfortably below average 86dB. Yet at the same time the minimum impedance drops to a very low and potentially very demanding three ohms at both 98Hz and again at 580Hz. The combination represents one of the trickiest amplifier loads we've encountered for some time, and while B&W is honest enough about this minimum figure, it does make a mockery of the claim of "eight ohms nominal" also mentioned in the spec.

Valve amplifiers should be avoided here, and while it's true that most solid state stereo amps will be able to handle three ohms without drama, cheaper AV amps might struggle. Such a low impedance, with its concomitant high current demand, is never a good idea for either amp or speaker. Ultimately, the XT4 is best partnered by good, strong amplification, especially if you like to play music loud.



its point-of-floor contact is comfortably beyond the edge of the enclosure, improving the speaker's stability in consequence.

To achieve that super-slim front view, it's necessary to have small diameter drive units, and these are used in multiples in order to maintain an adequate diaphragm area. The XT4 has a pair of small 130mm bass drivers operating in tandem; each has a paper/Kevlar fibre mix cone/dome diaphragm that's 95mm in diameter, and is loaded by a pair of ports. The solitary midrange driver is the same size as the bass units, but has a woven Kevlar cone and a pointed 'bullet' central dust cover. The flat driver-mounting section of the front panel, made from ABS plastics and lightly covered by a black rubbery blanket, provides a measure of damping for the whole.

A 25mm alloy dome tweeter is mounted at the very top of the speaker, so that half of

this drive unit actually protrudes above the top surface of the speaker proper — halfway towards the fully external tweeters featured in B&W's 700- and 800-series models. Like nearly all the company's tweeters, this one is loaded at the rear by a 'Nautilus' tube — hence the bulge behind the tweeter that extends for most of the depth of the speaker.

The tweeter dome has its own mesh grille, held magnetically in place, and removable for best

sound quality. The main black cloth grille covers the other drivers and ports, and is best left in place for aesthetic reasons. The silver finished metalwork might be inherently very rugged, but it has a lacquer coating that can be scratched if treated roughly.

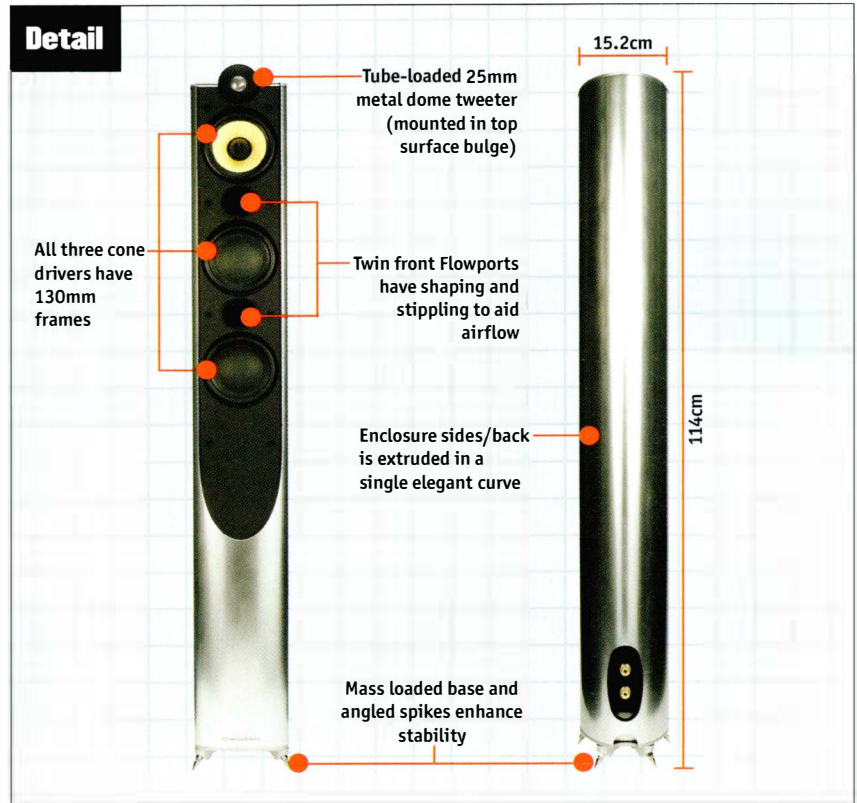
A single pair of terminals is mounted through the spine low down near the floor, and ducting is also included to keep the cable as tidy as possible. Following recent B&W practice, the crossover network is deliberately simple, with just a single-capacitor first-order feed to the tweeter; although a specialist 'audiophile' capacitor is not used here, the engineers chose the best option after auditioning samples from some twenty different makes.

SOUND QUALITY

In-room far-field averaged traces indicate that the XT4 is best kept well clear of walls, in order to achieve the smoothest and most even bass delivery. (Bungs are supplied to block either or both of the ports if bass output is too strong, or if the speakers need to be closer than 0.5m to a rearward wall.) And while the XT4 is no bass excavator in terms of depth, authority or power, it does have some engaging qualities nonetheless. The bass region here has a different character from that found with wood-based enclosures, the damped metal alloy bringing a crisp, clean quality that might lack a little warmth, but is also notable for its lack of coloration.

Indeed, the superior stiffness of the curved extruded casework, along with the intelligent application of damping compounds, seems





very effective in controlling all forms of boxiness and coloration right up into the midband. Add in the tall, slim enclosure and it's no surprise to find that the imaging is excellent, delivering a soundstage that has impressive height and no trace of boxiness, filling the zone at the end of the room with precision and airiness.

The overall tonal balance is notably well judged through the broad bass and midrange, with a slightly laid back and restrained character through the upper mid and presence regions. The treble is just right, unerringly and precisely treading the line between the too bright and the too dull, and consequently delivering ample and sweet detail without ever attracting attention to itself.

Inevitably, the small physical size and modest sensitivity of the drive units takes its toll and the XT4 is a touch weak in dynamic punch and expression. Like all slim designs, it also struggles to create the sort of grip and tension that can fool the ear/brain into believing that the music is actually real, rather than merely a reproduction of the 'real thing'.

But perhaps this is pushing the XT4 envelope too far. This design is partly intended for use with a subwoofer, such as B&W's excellent, silver-coloured PV1 sphere, as part of an XT-based 5.1-channel system. There's also a strong case for including a subwoofer in a stereo music context. This won't affect the dynamic behaviour in any way, but it will add extra bass authority and definitely provide a pair of XT4s with worthwhile assistance.

But don't take this as meaning the speaker is too bass light and needs subwoofer support as

“The limited bass weight was overshadowed by the freedom from overhang, and that’s a trade-off that is very welcome.”

standard. Much of the time, depending on the sort of material being played, the limited bass weight was effectively overshadowed by the freedom from overhang and thickening, and that's a trade-off that is very welcome. This was largely true with recent acquisitions like Jack Johnson's *In Between Dreams*, Christine Collister's *Love...* and KT Tunstall's *Eye to the Telescope*. The tonal delicacy of Johnson's acoustic guitar playing was particularly effective and convincing.

On the other hand, the powerful and deep electronic bass work on Laurie Anderson's *Life on a String* was less well served, and the transmission of a New Year firework display was bass light, in attempting to correlate the sound experience with the visuals. A PV1 placed in the system would deliver additional energy to bolster up the bass impact, here.

It's not a natural rock'n'roller, it must be said, perhaps because it errs a little too much on the side of politeness, and while the sweetness of that beautifully judged top end remains a major plus, a little more midband forcefulness would be welcome. But the flipside of that politeness becomes all the more obvious when playing classical and acoustic material. Here, the superior imaging, freedom from boxiness and crisp, clean lower registers are most obviously advantageous, and these genres are

clearly where this speaker's musical performance is shown to best advantage.

The bottom line is that the XT4 is very successful in playing to its strengths. It's not an easy load to drive, and doesn't do dynamic contrasts that well, but it does deliver a clean and very well balanced sound with notably low coloration, especially through the bass region. In a world where slim enclosures all too often result in compromised performance, this is an elegant exception. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 86% 	PRO Gorgeous silver styling. Mass loading and angled spikes ensure stability. Sound is sweet and clean with fine balance and low coloration.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 58% 	CON Dynamics are a little muted, lacking tension and drama. Though neutral and sweet, the sound is rather restrained and the bass would benefit from greater authority.
BUILD >> 92% 	
VALUE >> 85% 	
CONCLUSION Great-looking, super-slim extruded alloy enclosure gives notably clean bass. Sound is sweet and neutral, with fine overall balance and low coloration, though some may find it a little too polite. Adding a PV1 subwoofer would boost bass energy.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 86%	

Serious surround

It's been a while, but Classé delivers the multichannel goods with its new processor and power amp

PRODUCT Classé Delta SSP-600 and CA-5200

TYPE Multichannel preamplifier/processor and five-channel power amplifier

PRICE (SSP-600) £5,450; (CA-5200) £6,450

KEY FEATURES (SSP-600) Size (WxHxD): 44.4x17.2x41.9cm • Weight: 21kg • TFT touch-screen user interface • Stereo analogue inputs: 11 (line-level) • 7.1 channel input • Microphone calibration
(CA-5200) Size (WxHxD): 44.4x22.2x53.3cm
• Weight: 55kg • Rated power: 200W per channel

CONTACT ☎ 01903 221500 @ www.classeaudio.com

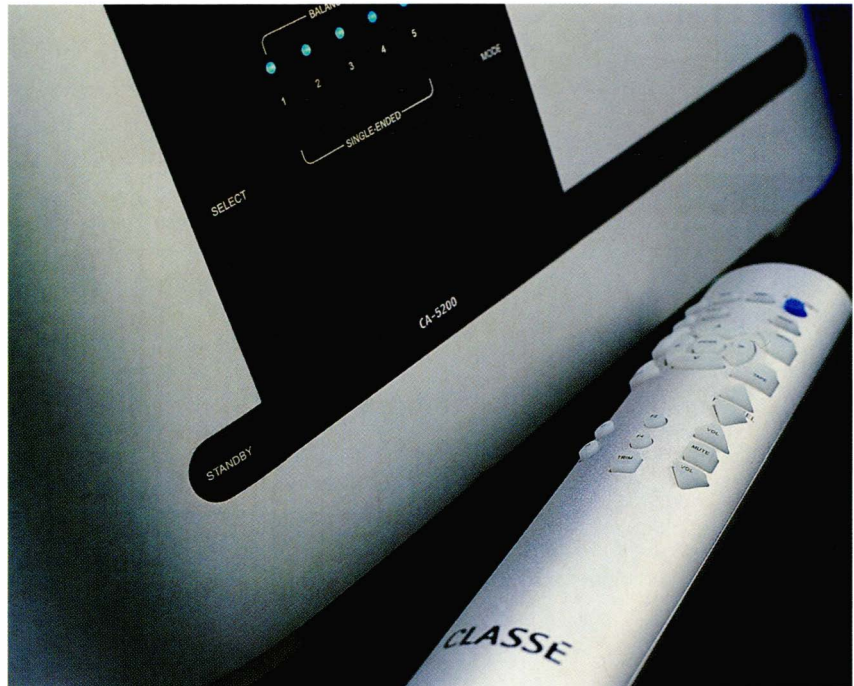
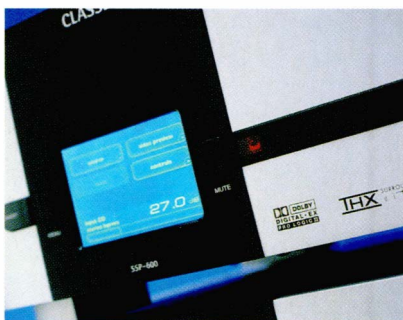
After a long gestation period (the products were first shown to the public in January 2004), Classé's multichannel hardware is finally coming to light. Both the CA-5200 multichannel power amp and the SSP-600 processor are built in Classé's unique house style, with a three-sided alloy vertical frame, which gives the range its 'Delta' prefix.

The SSP-600 processor, a THX Ultra compliant design, has the usual blue TFT touch screen panel that is fitted to most of the range. After a little acclimatisation, this makes the unit very easy, even intuitive, in day-to-day operation. It features some elegant and powerful routines so that different users with different requirements can access their own pre-programmed interface – his and hers, for example. The TFT panel can also be used to show on-screen menus, and optionally the video programme, while unused inputs can be skipped altogether. THX facilities include re-equalisation, timbre matching, Adaptive Decorrelation, Advanced Sound Array, THX Music/Movie mode and Boundary Gain Compensation. A microphone-driven auto system calibration set-up feature is included, and up to four such calibrations can be stored for instant recall.

It's essentially an 'analogue' processor – that is to say, the inputs are mostly analogue, with the exception of Red Book resolution optical and electrical inputs. There is no i.Link, no HDMI and no DVI digital connection. The way that Classé will accommodate itself with the future is by feeding HDMI from the forthcoming £4,950 Delta CDP-300 DVD player straight to the display screen. This means there is no digital video switching, and therefore limited ability to handle multiple HDMI sources.

There is also an internal component video pass-through mode, but this allows no mixing with other data streams. On the plus side, the Classé will transcode all video inputs up or down – composite to S-Video up to component and down again, if you can think of an excuse for doing so. But progressive component video is not available in a remote zone, which is limited to interlaced composite video.





“This is a very expressive amplifier. It can cope with material of arbitrary complexity without sounding artificial.”

The processor is well endowed for high-quality analogue pictures, with broadcast-quality, wide bandwidth video and an enormous range of in and outputs. The list also inputs a balanced analogue and an AES/EBU digital input, and a full set of eight balanced outputs. Indeed, if balanced operation is not on your wish list, you could opt for the cheaper but essentially similar single-ended model, the SSP-300. The processor is also very well equipped for multiroom and custom installations, with a full roster of IR and DC triggers, and the CA-5200 is similarly equipped.

The CA-5200 (not technically THX compliant, by the way, though it greatly exceeds THX requirements in most respects as far as we can determine) is a massive five-channel, passive convection cooled power amplifier rated at 200 watts per channel into eight ohms. It virtually doubles to 370 watts into four ohms in true audiophile tradition, thanks to its massive 2.5kVA toroidal transformer that feeds the power supply, with dedicated secondaries feeding a large reservoir bank for each channel. The output stage uses bipolar devices, and in common with other Classé amplifiers, the input uses high-impedance J-FETs, feeding a MOSFET stage. Bias varies according to the duty cycle in such a

way that about 30 per cent of the output is in Class A, sometimes described as enriched Class AB. Each channel can be driven via single ended or XLR based balanced inputs, and the internal gain circuitry is also balanced from stem to stern, again as usual for this marque.

SOUND QUALITY

Although not strictly related to sound quality, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the user interface. It is not that it includes an all-singing TFT panel, or even that it can be turned off. (One much more affordable processor has a display that is permanently stuck on!) It is the

depth and subtlety of the thinking that has gone into the SSP-600's extremely powerful control firmware that makes it special. It's all readily updatable, too. An example is the variable speed volume control law, which can be reprogrammed if required through the menu system. We cannot think of another processor that gives such fine control to those who want it, while providing a parallel control chain for those who just want absolutely bare bones press-button convenience without frills or complication. And the software that drives the TFT is a dream.

But of the two components, both of which are superb by any reasonable standard, it is the CA-5200 that we ultimately find more convincing. It is a very heavy and bulky unit, and it runs very warm, but visually its has a simplicity of line, and an elegance that is unique. Most of all, however, is its superb audio performance – not just alongside other multichannel power amplifiers, but qualitatively it is absolutely up there with high-end stereo amplifiers too, making due allowance for the number of channels. It has a muscular, very deliberate style of low frequency reproduction that is strikingly more solid and ultimately believable than most other AV power amps. What impresses most, though, is that this is a very expressive amplifier. It can cope with material of arbitrary complexity without sounding artificial.

Objectively, the SSP-600 is an expressive jewel of a preamplifier when used in stereo and in balanced mode, which sounds noticeably bolder and more open than the single-ended option. In effect, this meant using a balanced mode stereo CD player (actually a Krell ▶



Q & A

We spoke to Dave Nauber, Classé's executive VP responsible for Brand Development, about these new multichannel components



HFC: Why doesn't the SSP-600 include hi-res digital video and audio inputs?

DN: If HDMI were included, you would still need all the other input/output features offered in the SSP-600. In a system – where HDMI is used by the display device – all analogue video sources should be converted to digital, then de-interlaced and scaled if necessary. Doing this at a level commensurate with the quality of the SSP-600 is far from free. Proper HDMI functionality can be added by way of the CDP-300 DVD player.

How does a buyer cope with more than one device that uses HDMI?

The CDP-300 is designed to be upgradeable to a model coming later this year called the CDP-300V. The V, for video, has two HDMI inputs as well as inputs for component and S-Video. Analogue video is converted to digital, de-interlaced and scaled up to 1080p. When used with an SSP-300 or SSP-600, the main video outs of the SSP can be routed through the CDP-300V for processing and connected by a single HDMI output to your display. This simplifies both the system cabling and switching requirements. This solution accommodates three HDMI sources, which should suffice for quite some time.

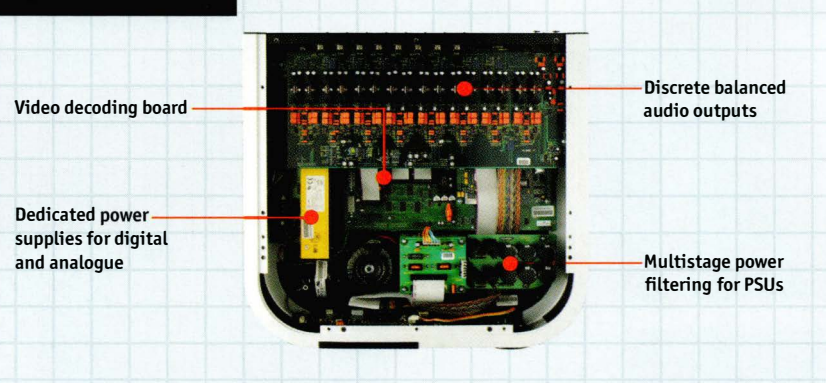
What upgrades are envisioned long term and what is the RJ-45 socket for?

The touch screen control allows us to change the way the processors work. One such addition was the profile buttons. Next up will be multiple speaker configurations to accommodate different crossover, level and bass management settings, depending on the type of source. We will also be adding CAN bus support (using the RJ-45s) for status and control of Classé amplifiers as well as Classé system interoperability.

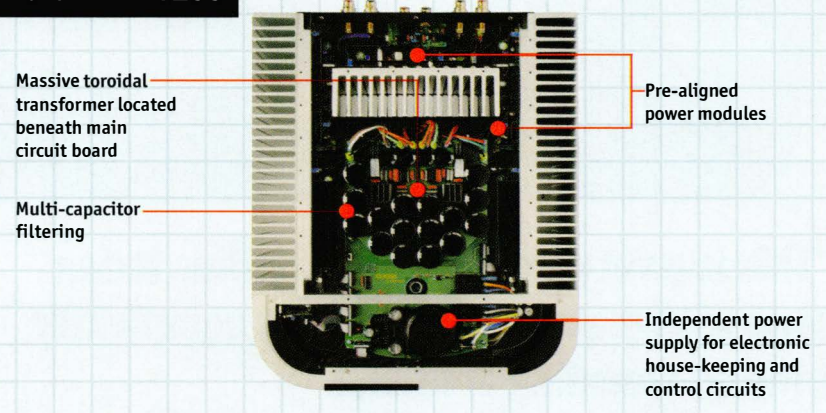
Are these two products intended for hi-fi or home cinema buyers?

The balanced output circuits of Delta components are ultra-high performance and the SSP-600 balanced input connects directly to the output through a volume control when in analogue bypass mode. People respond to Classé's Delta series because, whether two-channel or multichannel, performance is optimized for serious listeners.

Detail – SSP-600



Detail – CA-5200



❑ SACD Standard) as we had no access to a balanced-mode DVD player during the test period. From this point of view, the SSP-600 fulfils its brief of being an excellent stereo preamplifier, though perhaps not quite in audiophile stereo territory, compared to which it sounds ultimately a little grainy and 'flat'.

Nevertheless, as a home cinema processor using Dolby and DTS codecs, the Classé is superb. It has expansive yet stable imaging that is capable of presenting the dialogue, main and surround channels exactly where they should be. At the same time, though, it retains the intelligibility of individual channels – especially the central dialogue channel – even when practically drowned out by what's happening elsewhere. It also offers superb performance with video signals, especially through the component channel, which is every bit as precise and clean as HDMI.

The CA-5200 power amplifier is a very straightforward, near transparent and extremely power amplifier that is as good as anything multichannel out there. It's even capable of showing a clean set of phono sockets to many a stereo power amp, too. The preamp/processor comes close the same ideal, but it is hard to avoid concluding that it is the best of the last generation rather than ushering in the new. The lack of high-resolution digital audio and encrypted digital video connections suggests that the SSP-600 is based on a somewhat dated platform, though Classé would argue

that its own design solution (incorporating the forthcoming CDP-300 DVD player) is both elegant and effective. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT – SSP-600

SOUND >> 90%

FEATURES >> 89%

BUILD >> 95%

VALUE >> 79%

CONCLUSION

Superb user interface and sound quality that verges on complete transparency. The only real shortcoming is the lack of digital interfaces.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 85%

VERDICT – CA-5200

SOUND >> 95%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 95%

VALUE >> 84%

CONCLUSION

A superb, if heavy power amplifier, which fully complies with requirements for quality stereo reproduction of audiophile standards.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 90%



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Rok idols

Roksan has upgraded its Caspian CD player and integrated amp. Are they still class leaders?

PRODUCT Roksan Caspian M Series-1

TYPE CD player and integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE (CD player) £1,100; (integrated amp) £1,000

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x8x33cm (each)

● (CD player) Weight: 10kg ● CD-R/RW playback
● (Amp) Weight: 12kg ● Rated power: 85W per channel (eight ohms) ● Inputs: five line-level plus tape

CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.roksan.co.uk

The Roksan Caspian range has always gone down well in hi-fi circles. In 2003, *HFC* awarded the second-generation 'M Series-1' integrated amp a Best Buy badge, together with a top gong in our annual Awards. But Roksan has never been a company to rest on its laurels, and has since made a number of running changes to both the amp and the matching M Series-1 CD player. These changes have enhanced performance significantly, says Roksan – so much so that they are effectively new products (though the nomenclature stays the same). For that reason, a fresh review of both components is wholly appropriate.

One of the most distinctive things about the original Caspian M Series-1 CD player was its fold-down display/drawer unit. This has been replaced by a more conventional drawer mechanism, with a new Sanyo transport adding the benefit of CD-R/RW replay. Further changes include a switch from the unusually implemented Philips TDA1305 DAC to a more fashionable 24-bit Burr-Brown PCM1730e. Much work has also been done on board layout and power supplies, making the player less complex to set up during production, which will improve reliability. The boards themselves are now double-sided and of higher quality.

The twin toroidal power supplies are still in place. One of these is used solely for the analogue output stage, while the other powers the rest of the machine. Internal build quality is much improved compared to earlier versions of the player, which is good news for the customer as it should lead to much higher product consistency. This is something that has been a weakness with Caspian products in the past. Finally, the latest player adds both XLR

balanced and optical digital connections to the existing coaxial digital output and, of course, analogue phono sockets.

The most recent changes have been made to the M Series-1 amplifier. Unlike the CD player, it looks just the same as before. Essentially, the changes focus around the power supply and power amp section, although there have been slight changes to the control software, too. New bridge rectifier diodes, smoothing capacitors and a host of other small components have been changed. The object has been to make the power amp side of the Caspian amp faster to react, less 'shouty' and to have superior harmonics at the bottom end.

Otherwise, all is pretty much as before, including the same sturdy metal chassis that received improved ventilation during the last round of changes. As soon as you lift the lid, the first component to grab your attention is the oversized toroidal power supply. It's a real whopper and looks as though it should provide the Caspian with dynamic clout to spare. This is fed by a mains inlet filter and is separated



from the main board by a die-cast heat sink. The amplifier is a fairly conventional Class AB design, with dual bipolar transistors. The main output capacitors have been changed from Aerovox to unbranded but more powerful (10,000µF) devices, but there's still more than a smattering of high quality components from the likes of Elna and Alps throughout the design. Although there's no phono stage – Roksan do a separate Caspian one – there are five line-level inputs and a tape loop. The pre and power sections can also be divided when upgraded, although this does require internal work for activation.

SOUND QUALITY

While reviewing the new Caspian M Series-1 CD and amp, we had the benefit of having to hand a two year old example of both. Although the CD player sports the most obvious changes since, it has to be said that the latest model still reflects the 'Caspian sound'. With Prokofiev's, *The Montagues and the Capulets*, however, the performance was smoother and more cohesive than before. Percussion detail benefited from noticeably superior resolution and there was the impression of more space around the individual musicians.

Switching to Peter Cincotti's *On The Moon*, the vocalists notes had a more cohesive form and structure to them. As with the older player, there was a very open soundstage the would suit more restricted sounding amps and speakers especially well. Also in common with the old player, and indeed the amplifier, was an intimacy to the sound. Unlike the amplifier, I didn't detect any real improvement in bass's depth, but it was more fluent and quite strong enough in any case.

With Kate Bush's *Sunset*, although the sound was tidier, faster and offered improved articulation, a little of the old



“The great thing about the Caspian amp is that it makes you forget about the ‘hi-fi’ so you can just get on with enjoying the music.”

Philips DAC's character had been lost with the move to Burr-Brown. It's hard to define but there were just certain notes, usually stringed, that had more resonance with the older machine – they tugged at the senses with just that bit more conviction. Over all, though, the CD player is still an improvement. The trouble is that there are so many fine, 24-bit DAC-equipped CD players around this price now that it doesn't quite do enough to stand out from the crowd as a Best Buy.

As has always been the case with the Caspian amp, listening to it was a unique experience. Playing the Kate Bush disc again, ours were greeted by a euphonic and distinctive sound that, whilst not entirely neutral, was certainly highly involving. As before, there was a fine sense of space and dimensionality to the sound, although this time it was certainly more taut. Bush's vocals had that sense of engaging intimacy that the Caspian amp has always excelled with, only this time it was less cluttered – if still not immaculately 'formed'.

Vocal projection is still a strong point for the Caspian M Series-1 amp, but the latest version sounds less forced and more focused in its efforts. The tweaks to the power supply certainly appear to have worked in eking out a deeper bass – or at least giving the impression of doing so. While still not a hard-hitting amp, the bottom registers appear to be more sustained and deeper than before. Crucially, though, this

hasn't come at the expense of integration with the midband. The great thing about the Caspian amp, and particularly this latest version, is that it makes you forget about the 'hi-fi' so you can just get on with enjoying the music.

Together, the latest Caspian M-series 1 CD player and amp are an involving and competitive combination. Taken individually, the CD player is fine enough, but it's the amp that has star quality: that magical Caspian intimacy, now with added focus. Neutral? Not entirely, but it's a wonderfully engaging listen. **HFC**

Dominic Todd



VERDICT – CASPIAN CD PLAYER

SOUND >> 84%

FEATURES >> 80%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 80%

CONCLUSION
 Improved build and features, but some of the original's character has gone. Still a competitive design, however, especially with the amp.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 82%

VERDICT – CASPIAN AMPLIFIER

SOUND >> 89%

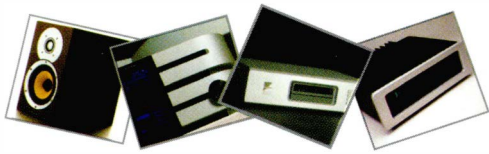
FEATURES >> 80%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 87%

CONCLUSION
 Thoroughly involving amplifier that now boasts deeper bass and enhanced focus. Build and features are as well judged as ever.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 88%



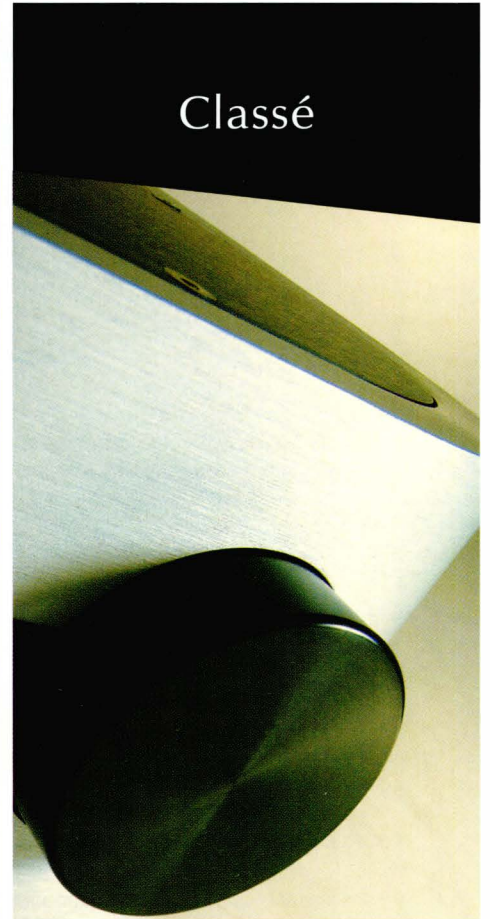
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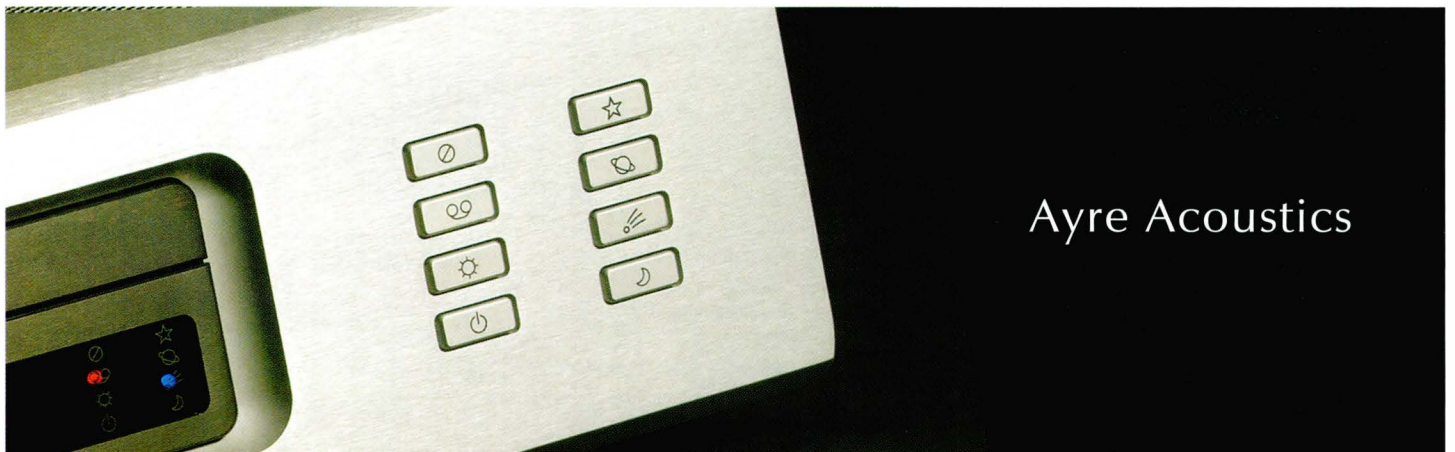
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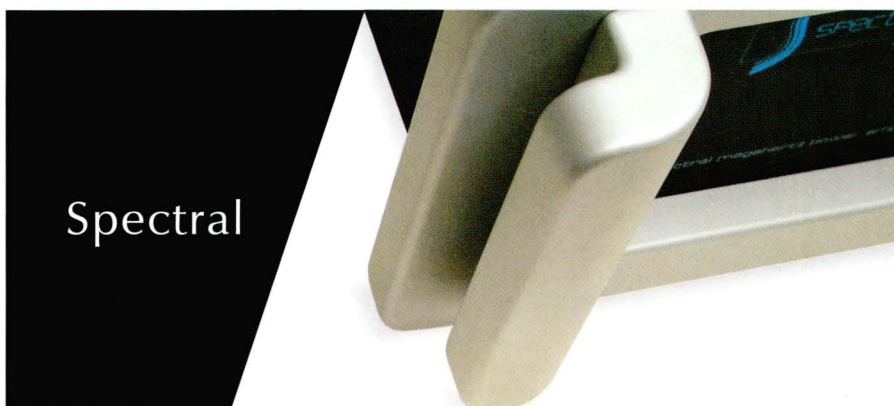
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Norse legend

Fancy a slice of Valhalla but can't afford the ticket? Try Heimdall for an illuminating cable experience

PRODUCT Nordost Heimdall

TYPE Interconnect and loudspeaker cables

PRICE Interconnect cable: £370 (1m pair, unbalanced). Add £35 per pair for balanced XLR or DIN terminations) Loudspeaker cable: £1,615 (5m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.nordostuk.com

Nordost's flagship Valhalla cable range is stunning, but unconsciously expensive. Heimdall, a new range of loudspeaker cables and interconnects (named after the Norse god of light) mirrors the key technologies of Valhalla, but at a much more affordable price level. ('Affordable' is a relative term here, of course...)

Like Valhalla, the Heimdall speaker cable is a completely flat, wide cable that can be laid under carpets, though it is a good deal more tractable. It uses the same micro-monofilament construction, in which a number of silver plated copper conductors laid side by side are individually wound with spirals of PTFE insulation before being covered by an extruded jacket of FEP, a form of PTFE. The interconnects are similar, but round in section. Where they differ is that Heimdall uses fewer conductors – 24 instead of 40 for the speaker cable and four instead of eight for the interconnect – and the conductors have a thinner silver coating.

As before, about 80 per cent of the surface area of the conductor is covered only by air, and again Heimdall makes the familiar claim

of being very fast, conducting electrical signals at 90 per cent of the speed of light *in vacuo* (against Valhalla's 96 per cent claim) for the speaker cable, and 80 per cent for the Heimdall interconnect (against Valhalla's 87 per cent). Capacitance and inductance are also very low, though again not quite in Valhalla class.

SOUND QUALITY

During the review period, we compared Heimdall directly to its counterparts in the Valhalla range. The two cable families are clearly remarkably alike in their fundamentals. Valhalla is tight and dry but with incredible definition and transient impact, which really pays off with complex acoustic material. Heimdall has the same properties; in fact, it's surprisingly difficult to tell the two apart for much of the time. But in a first-rate system the differences are audible. Heimdall doesn't have the authority, and ultimately is less detailed.

It is no poor relation, however. Heimdall in interconnect and speaker forms has the same freshness, the same taut, impactful bass and the same lack of colouration as Valhalla, and it is transparent enough to leave most cables sounding vaguely coloured. Nothing that is easy to put a finger on unless they are compared side by side, but under such conditions, differences are obvious enough. Another common factor with the more costly cable is that contrary to popular preconceptions, it is a very stable performer

and works consistently well with a wide range of hardware. The only important difference is that with low-resolution electronics, Heimdall doesn't have the same opportunity to shine.

Heimdall in interconnect or speaker form is a very high performance cable, probably as close to Valhalla as you can reasonably expect, and for a great deal less money. It has the familiar micro-monofilament properties of superb definition, lack of obvious colour and transparency. It's still priced at the elite end of the market, but is highly recommended. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT – INTERCONNECT CABLE

SOUND >> 92%



PRACTICALITY >> 86%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 81%



CONCLUSION

High-definition cable with a fast, fresh and transparent sound. Fine build quality and more practical than many high-end cables.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> **87%**

VERDICT – LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

SOUND >> 93%



PRACTICALITY >> 88%



BUILD >> 92%



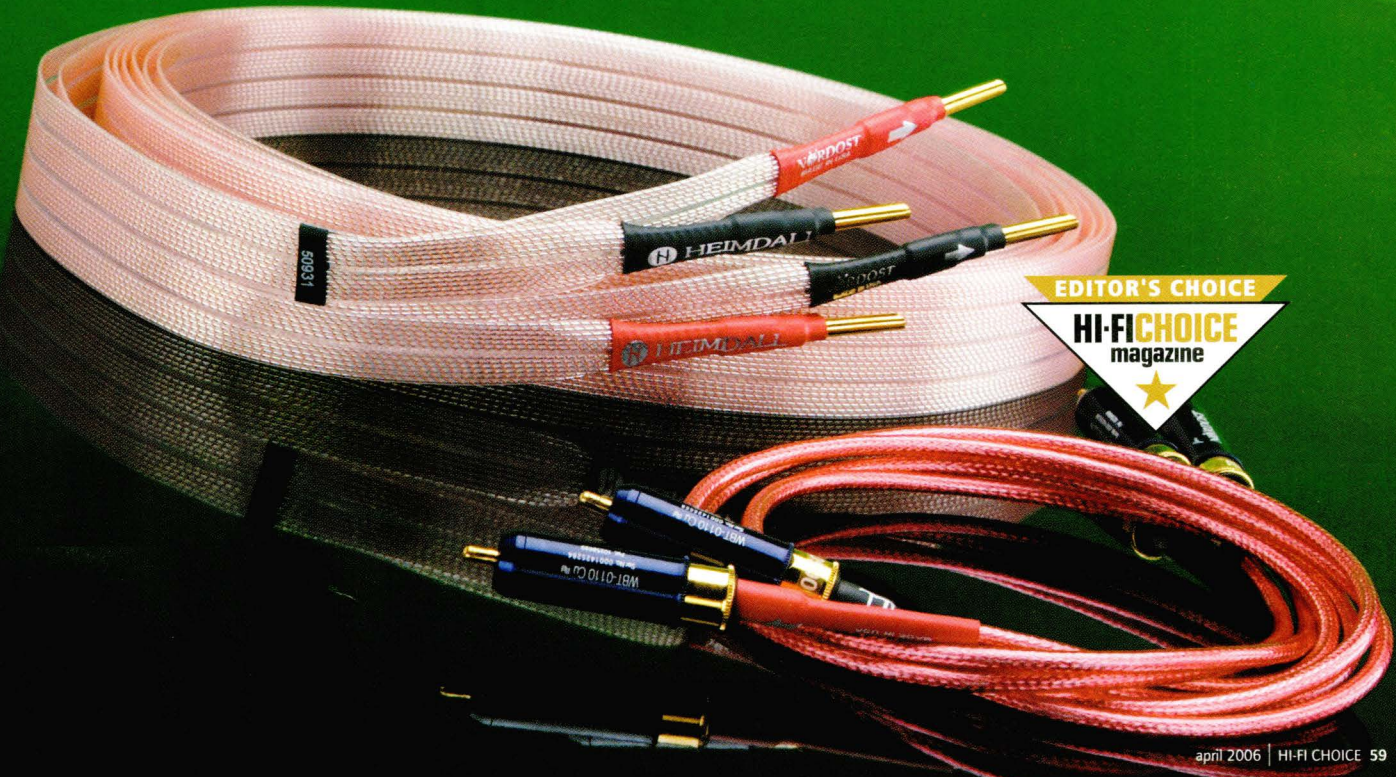
VALUE >> 82%



CONCLUSION

An exceptional speaker cable that works well across the board, with low perceived colouration levels and very high resolution.

HI-FI CHOICE
>> **88%**



EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Globalisation

Designer speakers feature an elegant spherical variation on the two-way standmount theme

PRODUCT Design E GT3 Series

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £745 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 30x51x30cm

• Weight: 7kg • Top-mounted 25mm fabric tweeter

• Spherical composite bass/mid enclosure with 120mm plastic cone • Sensitivity/impedance: 87db/8 ohms (nom)

CONTACT ☎ 01243 377899 🌐 www.designe.co.uk

Design E first came to our attention about two years ago. It's headed by industrial designer Ian Webster, whose first loudspeaker, the GT1 Series, used four separate units – two compact subwoofers plus two

standmounts with integral stands – to create an exceptionally elegant £4,000 stereo pair.

While the GT1 Series remains Design E's 'statement' product, Ian was very aware that the high price would severely restrict sales. Accordingly he has come up with this rather more modest but equally striking GT3 Series model. This adopts a more conventional 165mm-based two-way standmount configuration, and takes advantage of Chinese manufacture in order to achieve an altogether more realistic asking price of £745 per pair. That's still comfortably above budget level for such a speaker, but the

outrageously spherical styling would seem more than sufficient justification for the premium price.

The spherical enclosure is pressure-moulded in a polyurethane composite, as is much of the circular base; both were finished in high-gloss white on our samples, with black being the only other option. These two sections are joined together by a beautifully turned, lacquer-finished section of hardwood, flared above and below a narrow waist. More hardwood forms a little nacelle sprouting out from the top and housing the tweeter, and the lower part of the base. The whole thing has a lusciously organic quality which,



while vaguely reminiscent of the top section of B&W's top 800-series models, is different from the norm, and all the more refreshing for that.

Regular stands are not useable because the input terminal pair is located in the middle of the base, and although the terminal block is recessed, the plugs and wires inevitably protrude. The base is equipped with three sockets for 6mm spikes, which when fitted provide solid support and sufficient clearance to make the connection.

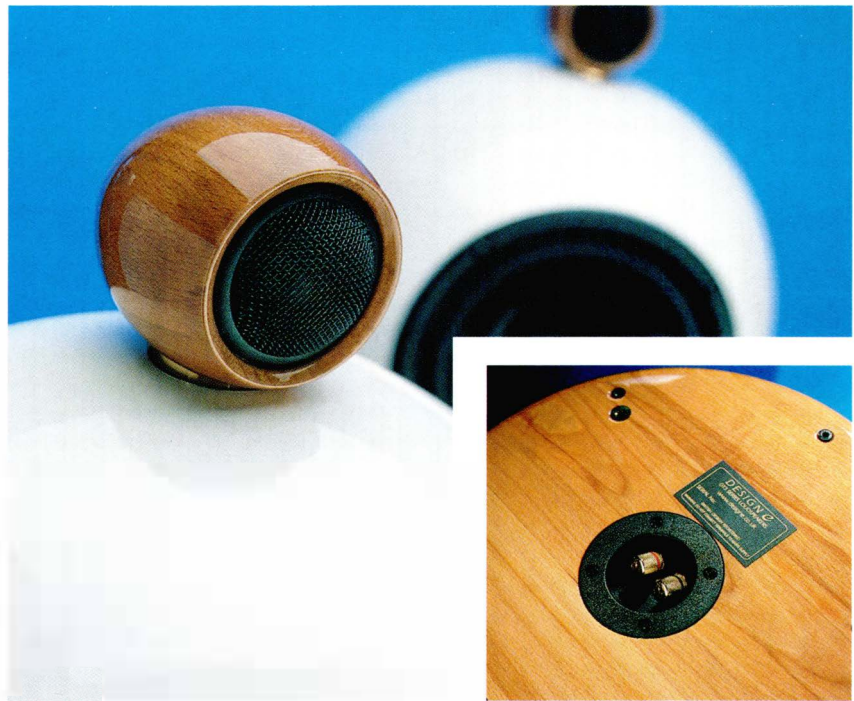
The decision to use a spherical enclosure does have both mechanical and acoustic consequences. Even with the cut-out required to mount the main driver, a sphere is inherently an exceptionally strong structure that should keep actual cabinet coloration under good control, though some vibration can still be felt through the shell. The shapes of both main enclosure and nacelle will ensure wide distribution with no fear of baffle-edge diffraction effects. The main worry with the spherical shape, however, is that all the internal dimensions will be identical, and the standing waves that are created will therefore be tightly focused to a single frequency.

The crossover, mounted inside the terminal block, uses high-quality air-cored inductors and foil capacitors. The 165mm main driver has a pressed steel frame and a 120mm diameter plastic cone, and is left naked to the world, while the tweeter has a 25mm doped fabric dome, protected behind a mesh grille. The whole thing feels substantially built, with an all-up weight of around 7kg, partly reflecting the shielded double-magnet, but also the decent thickness of the lightly damped sphere.

SOUND QUALITY

Sensitivity is a relatively modest 87dB, but that is a perfectly respectable figure in view of an easy-to-drive amplifier load, which stays comfortably above six ohms right up to 10kHz before dipping to around five ohms at 15kHz. This dip corresponds exactly to a treble peak in the far-field in-room response, and the speaker would have been rather better without either.

Placed in free space on 60cm stands, the in-room balance through the bass and lower midband looked rather wayward – too lean at 55-120Hz, and too strong at 130-300Hz. It seemed probable that close-to-wall siting could rectify this bass end imbalance, and this did indeed prove to be the case... up to a point. It resulted in an impressively even bass output 40-200Hz, though the 220Hz peak – possibly due to internal standing



“There is a thickening in voice textures, but the complete absence of the usual ‘wooden box’ effects are both evident and welcome.”

waves – remained. There's also the paradox that the combination of this speaker's inherently wide dispersion with wall proximity leads to significantly more unevenness up through the midband: the smoothness from 400Hz up to 3kHz seen in free space becomes altogether more uneven. Elsewhere, there's a mild dip around 3.8kHz as well as that 15kHz treble peak.

Auditioning certainly favoured siting the speakers quite close to the wall, whereupon the GT3 Series delivers a fundamentally clean, well balanced and slightly laid back sound. There is a degree of unwanted coloration, most obviously in a thickening in voice textures, for example, but the complete absence of the usual 'wooden box' effects are both evident and welcome.

While the laid back presence won't suit every taste, and does leave this speaker's dynamic expression sounding a little too restrained, there's the compensating benefit that it's unlikely to sound unpleasantly aggressive, even when that phrase might be an appropriate description for the style of recording being played.

This speaker is happiest when the volume is turned up, partly because this helps to make lyrics and speech more clearly intelligible. But it also brings a good sense of scale to the music, so the speaker sounds somewhat larger than appearances might suggest.

The GT3 Series is a very attractive and competitive proposition for those seeking something striking and unusual, though the anticipated matching stand would seem to be mandatory. While it might not have the most exciting or invigorating sound around, it still delivers an essentially competent all round performance, with only modest coloration if care is taken over positioning. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



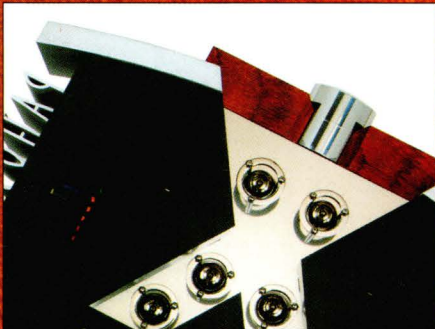
VERDICT	
SOUND >> 77% [Progress bar]	PRO A striking style statement, with an essentially laid-back sound, low enclosure coloration and good freedom from boxiness. CON Close-to-wall siting is needed for the best bass balance, but this upsets the midband. Could do with more vim and vigour, and needs a proper matching stand.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 85% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 90% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 78% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Strikingly original styling is clearly the major selling point, but it's also a very competent design sonically. The sound is rather laid back with some lower midband thickening, but imaging is notably 'out of the box'.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 78%	

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BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
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Hard as nails

Unlike multiroom-ready, internet-enabled devices, Yamaha's hard disk recorder is built for hi-fi systems

PRODUCT Yamaha CDR-HD1500**TYPE** CD/hard disk recorder**PRICE** £599**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 233166

www.yamaha-uk.com

This is a hard disk drive (HDD) recorder with a difference – it isn't built for the multiroom market. As a result, it's not equipped with multiple outputs to send sound to different rooms. Nor does it offer a variety of compression modes. In fact, it records in linear PCM at the standard CD rate of 16-bit/44.1kHz (great from a quality perspective) and will store up to 392 hours of music on its 250GB HDD.

It has a monitor output and will rip and record at high speed – CDs are usually transferred to hard drive at 10x speed, while burning operates at a maximum 8x. Because it holds everything on a hard drive, you can edit and rearrange tracks and, if you've got a PC with an RS232 connection, you can edit and title tracks on that prior to burning a disc. If you don't have a nearby PC, titling is somewhat compromised, compared to models that offer the option of an internet hook up to a database of album and track titles such as Gracenote. The best the Yamaha can do is to record titles from a disc with CD-text, but there aren't that many of them around.

But, as a means of making high-quality digital recordings, the CDR-HD1500 is an impressively flexible beast. You can record from external sources of both analogue and digital

persuasions, and create an 'album' (Yamaha's equivalent to a playlist) – a collection of tracks from different records. You can even vary the sensitivity of the automatic track interval sensing, so that it puts in track numbers where they should be with analogue sources, a bonus if you want to archive vinyl. 24-bit A-to-D and D-to-A conversion makes the most of both varieties of signal, from input to output.

SOUND QUALITY

Recording from an onboard disc is a pretty rapid if not initially intuitive process. There are optional rip speeds right down to 1x, but the 'Best Effort' default setting seems to do a good job. If you want, record level can also be adjusted – though rarely necessary, this facility may be useful when putting an 'album' together if the chosen tracks are at differing levels. This is something every amateur compilation maker will likely have come up against!

You can play straight off the hard disk or make a copy on an audio-specific CD-R/RW using standard dubbing techniques, or you can try Yamaha's AMQR (audio master quality recording) system. This reduces the amount of time you get from a blank disc (by around 15 per cent) and won't work with CD-RW. In return, it creates bigger pits and lands in the CD-R, in order to improve the recording accuracy and thus the sound quality of the finished disc. In practise, this does make for a more relaxed, three-dimensional and solid sounding recording. It's still a shade smoother than the original, but closer than with a conventional CD recorder.

The sound of the Yamaha when playing from the hard disk is sharp. Initially, this sounds like great clarity, but there is a 'digital' feel to the sound by the standards of a good CD player. That said, with a less analytical system, this characteristic will be smoothed to leave an appealingly detailed and clean sound that's significantly more resolute than you get from compressing HDD designs, even when they are operating at their highest quality.

The CDR-HD1500 makes great quality recordings of your CDs and LPs and allows terrific flexibility for compilation building. It also serves as a multiplayer-style music library, able to deliver hours of seamless entertainment. In a nutshell, it's hard disk for audiophiles. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

RECORDING 93% PLAYBACK 76%

FEATURES >> 87%**BUILD >> 84%****VALUE >> 89%**

PRO

Highly flexible recording features combined with great sounding copies. Better overall sound than the competition. Good build.

CON

Not that intuitive to use and difficult to title if you don't have a PC nearby. No direct keyboard connection. Lack of compression limits hard disk capacity (but benefits sound).

CONCLUSION

Anyone wishing to archive a music collection or make up compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality will have a great time with the Yamaha. Those looking to store their entire music collection should look elsewhere.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **87%**
OVERALL SCORE



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Top-down thrills

Bryston's C-Series upgrades have reached its top preamp and most affordable power amplifier

PRODUCT Bryston BP26 DA and 2B SST C-Series

TYPE Stereo preamplifier/DAC and power amplifier

PRICE (BP26 DA) £3,600; (2B SST) £1,950

KEY FEATURES (BP26 DA) Size (WxHxD): 43x5.7x28cm each (two boxes – preamp plus power supply) • Weight: 9kg each • Analogue inputs: four single-ended, two balanced • Digital inputs: two S/PDIF electrical • (2B SST) Size (WxHxD): 43x12x40.6cm • Weight: 12.7kg • Inputs: single-ended and balanced • Power rating: 100W per channel (8 ohms) • Bridging switch

CONTACT ☎ 0870 4441044 @ www.bryston.ca

Canadian amp meister Bryston has recently revamped its range, forming the comparatively shapely new C-Series. Back in *HFC* 275, we detailed the remarkable capabilities of the B100 DA, a 100-watt integrated amp with the option of adding onboard digital-to-analogue conversion. Now we've got the range-topping BP26 two-channel preamp, which also offers the ability to take digital signals and is partnered by a full-width external power supply for maximum separation of signal and power.

The BP26 comes in a variety of guises. The base model, including an MPS2 power supply, costs £2,600. For an additional £1,000 you can add an onboard DAC, as fitted to our review

unit (hence the 'DA'); alternatively, vinyl users may wish to specify an internal phono stage (£450 for MM or £900 for MC). It's an expensive preamp, but that flexibility is useful and build quality is exemplary – it's made to last as long as the 20 year guarantee would suggest. Compared to the BP25 that preceded it, this preamp has lower distortion, a "significantly improved" noise floor and "essentially nonexistent" crosstalk between inputs. These improvements are, to no small extent, brought about by the MPS2 high-current power supply, which has four outputs with individual 12volt triggers and can be purchased separately to upgrade a BP25 preamp.

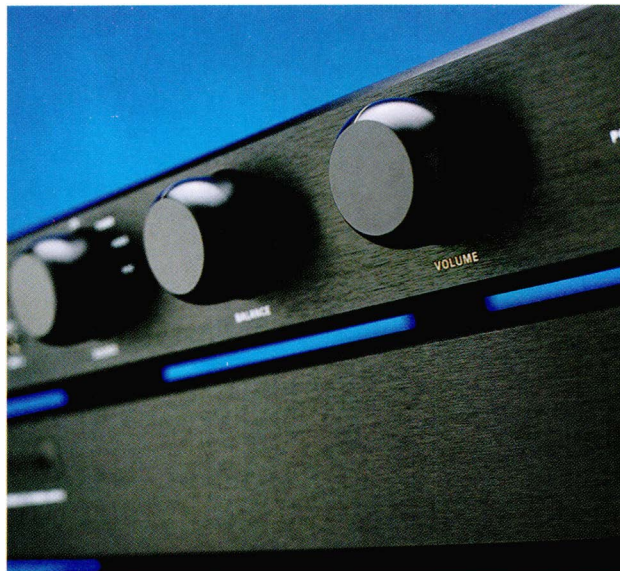
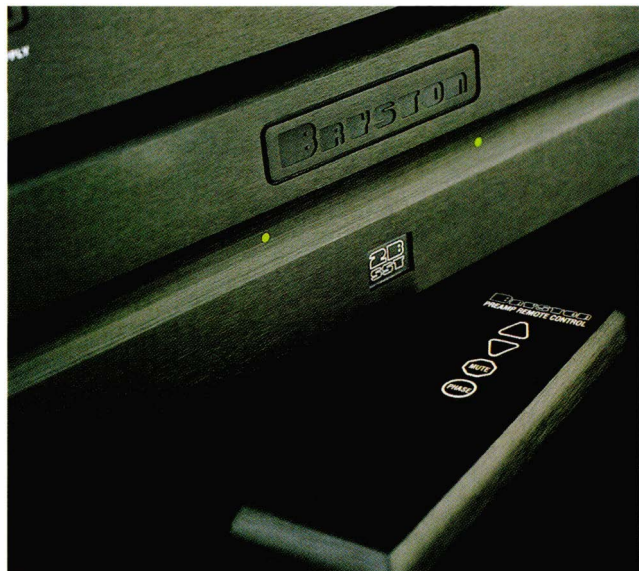
In standard guise, the BP26 offers seven line-level inputs: two balanced pairs via XLRs and five single-ended pairs accessed by unusually long phono sockets. You can't get a BP26 with both a phono stage and a DAC fitted at the same time, but if you must have everything, the outboard BP1.5 phono stage fits the bill, and it runs off the MPS2 power supply. As far as can be discerned, there are no other components in the range that will run off this supply, although presumably there are future products planned that will take advantage of the other power outputs.

The onboard DAC has two inputs, both S/PDIF coaxials, and will accept PCM bitstreams up to 108kHz/24-bit, which in practice means that you can plug in **anything** from a DAB tuner to a DVD-Audio player. However, you won't be able to play the highest oversampling (192kHz) DVD-Audio discs, but they're pretty rare beasts.

Unlike the B100, this preamp comes with a remote control as standard. It's a brick of CNC-honed aluminium with volume, mute and absolute phase controls. Input selection is a manual, walking over to the preamp, affair. The only feature that has not been carried over from the BP25 is the mono/stereo switch, which will be missed by some.

Bryston's least expensive stereo power amp – the 2B SST – remains a big, bulky, 100-watt beast after undergoing C-Series treatment. Aesthetically speaking, some off the hard edges on the casework have been subtly rounded, but the sound is much the same as its non-C-series predecessor – which is no bad thing!

The amp is said to be conservatively rated at 100 watts into eight ohms and 180 watts into four. It also has a bridging option so that you can use it as a monoblock for one channel, ramping its output ramps up to 350 watts.



“The BP26 represents a significant upgrade on its predecessor, which has been an HFC reference component for some time.”

Compared to the previous 2B SST, it has new output devices and increased power supply capacitance, plus lower noise and distortion. Usefully, gain can be adjusted and remote on/off achieved with a 12volt trigger – something you'll find on all C-Series components and very useful in multiroom and multichannel systems. That said, for best results it pays to keep these amps on permanently, if maximum sonic gratification is your goal.

SOUND QUALITY

The BP26 represents a significant upgrade on its predecessor, which has been an HFC reference component for some time, delivering cleaner high frequencies and a greater sense of openness. It's not a subtle change: the BP25 was a good, solid and consistent preamp but it had an electronic edge. This has now been removed from the sound, making music seem more natural and organic. The timing has likewise improved, but one can now follow nuances with greater ease and enjoy the ebb and flow of music in all its subtlety.

Adding the 2B SST power amp brings a 'pro' character to the sound. The most distinct element is the bass, which is demonstrative and weighty. The sense of timing introduced by the preamp is not undermined by the power amp, the pairing managing to combine muscle and agility with little sense of strain.

Imaging is particularly well served, with the

sense of scale varying quite dramatically from one recording to the next. On test, the pairing ensured that Lambchop's *Is A Woman* disc threw sounds way beyond the speakers, maintaining the full character of notes while doing so. There was a slight restraint in terms of image depth but none when it came to height and width. Dynamics were also well presented – the brass section on a mono Mingus album had an energy and vitality that's rare, backed up with suitably shiny tone.

The digital-to-analogue converter is more impressive than the one in the B100 integrated amp. It won't surpass the potential of a player that costs nearly as much as the preamp as a whole, but it'll do remarkable things for a mid or budget priced CD player. Most significantly, it drops the noise floor, which means more relaxed and better resolved sound with a greater sense of acoustic space and clearer low-level detail.

Bryston's extensive redesign work has clearly paid off with these components, delivering far more than minor cosmetic changes. The noise floor has been lowered to the point where new musical detail can be heard way down in the mix and across the band. There are low frequency tunes on the Jaga Jazzists album that had not previously been apparent, even with active speakers. With other tracks, the bass can be a bit keen. This is partly due to a lack of symbiosis between the 2B

SST and the B&W 802D speakers we used, but also a reflection of the lack of harmonics at low frequencies.

The preamp is inevitably the star of the show. Its resolve is easily among the best at this price and without the onboard DAC it's even more competitive. However, the chances are your CD player's own DAC will be bettered by that in the Bryston, and if you have another stereo digital source the advantage is doubled. We were quite taken aback at the removal of background 'hash' from some very capable players.

Bryston is a solid brand and its amplifiers make a solid sound. The 2B SST C-Series power amp is no exception; but the BP26 preamp is quite simply a revelation. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT – BP26 DA

SOUND >> 94%	CONCLUSION Bryston's top-of-the-range C-series preamp is a true reference-class component. The high-quality onboard DAC is a useful option, too.
FEATURES >> 90%	
BUILD >> 94%	
VALUE >> 88%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 91%	

VERDICT – 2B SST C-SERIES

SOUND >> 87%	CONCLUSION Bryston's least costly stereo power amp is revealing, powerful and well built, but it lacks ultimate refinement compared to the preamp.
FEATURES >> 80%	
BUILD >> 94%	
VALUE >> 83%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 85%	

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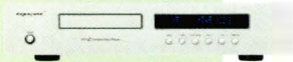


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CD Player XXII



Pre-Amplifier XXIII



Dual Mono Power-Amplifier XXVIII



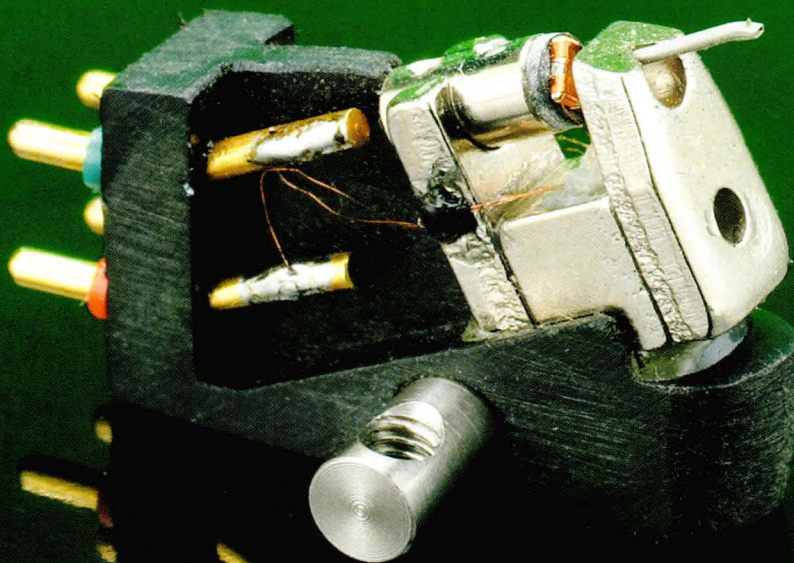
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Busy Bee

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PRODUCT 47 Laboratory MC Bee

TYPE Moving coil phono cartridge

PRICE £750

CONTACT ☎ 01562 731100

🌐 www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk

47 Laboratory is a small and unusual Japanese company that makes a range of electronics characterised by multiple small boxes and weird cables. While 47 Laboratory makes everything from CD transports to loudspeakers, it also works with a cartridge builder to produce the well-respected Miyabi range of moving coil cartridges. Prices start at over £3,000, and while this may be appropriate to top-level 47 Laboratory electronics, it's less appropriate to its Shigaraki range that can be combined to make a complete system for just over £5,000.

The MC Bee was produced to go with a Shigaraki system but doesn't carry that name, because it's not made out of the shigaraki earthenware ceramic used to form cases and bases for the electronics. The MC Bee is a slimline nude moving coil cartridge with no conventional top plate, but rather a stainless bar with mounting threads tapped into it.

It produces a medium/low 0.3mV output that will not be a problem for any good MC phono stage. Its preferred load impedance is specified as greater than 30ohms, so the 100ohms setting found in most stages will be fine. Compliance is high for an MC and the downforce range is between 1.8-2.2g, so it should work well in most medium mass arms.

There is nothing unique about its basic construction. The body is plastic, the cantilever is described as a "special aluminium alloy" and the stylus is elliptical – not special, but less fussy about alignment than line-contact tips.

SOUND QUALITY

We mounted the Bee into an SME V arm on the trusty SME Model 20 turntable and hooked it up first to a Trichord Delphini phono stage, initially set to an impedance of 100 ohms. In this company, it produced an engaging and relaxed sound that could be perked up with a bit of VTA tweaking in the upwards direction, but remained essentially smooth in the treble and a little rounded in the bass. Changing the impedance to 33 ohms lightened the balance and allowed the bass to start playing tunes rather nicely.

The Bee's midrange is clearly its strong point. This is where the gorgeous tonal resolution and its ability to communicate are immediately apparent. Piano, guitar, trumpet... you name it, this cartridge can reproduce its character with accuracy and ease. The relaxed top end means that nothing is likely to jar and as a result electric guitar isn't quite as searing as it might be, but the message is always clear.

With the Shigaraki Phono Preamplifier (£979) results were attractively nimble, especially in the bass, which delivered good pace and was slightly more upbeat all round. It was not necessarily any more rhythmically strong, but usefully, nor was it short on drive. Again, differentiation of tone is a distinct plus point, with the interplay of, say, trumpet and

sax delivered in style. Next to CD, the Bee supplies a rich and warm experience – a little more rich and warm than some MCs, but not to the extent that detail is lost. It is, in fact, pretty resolute but doesn't make a point of the fact, thanks to a natural-sounding balance.

Next to the impressive Music Maker III moving magnet cartridge, the Bee gives a more generous and full-bodied sound that doesn't resolve cymbals so clearly but has a similarly tuneful and well-timed bottom end.

The MC Bee strikes us as being one of the few 'affordable' MCs around that would suit a more lively turntable than the SME... for instance, most glass and acrylic platter designs would work well with it, and something like a Rega P7 or P9 would be a sweet choice. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%



FEATURES >> 80%



BUILD >> 82%



VALUE >> 80%



PRO

Generous and resolute sound with excellent tone, healthy output, low physical mass. Ideal choice for a good moving coil cartridge in a lively sounding turntable.

CON

A little rolled off at high frequencies, which can make the cartridge sound too rich and warm in some systems. No stylus guard.

CONCLUSION

This new addition to 47 Laboratory's select cartridge range combines the charm and tunefulness of analogue in a relatively unfussy package. Its trick is the ability to deliver resolution in an enjoyable, relaxed and extremely musical fashion.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **83%**
OVERALL SCORE

GROUP TEST AND LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

AMPLIFIERS

Six stereo amps around the £350-£600 mark, hailing from both Europe and Japan, each one sporting a phono stage. It's like 1990 all over again!

ON TEST



Arcam DiVA A65 Plus
£400



Denon PMA-1500AE
£500



Micromega A60
£399



Myryad Z140
£500



Onkyo A-933
£500



Rotel RA-1062
£595

For hi-fi fans, this group is refreshing for two reasons. First, because it contains two new stereo amps from major Japanese brands that had long been feared lost to the more fashionable (but dare we say less satisfying) world of home cinema. The fact that both Denon and Onkyo have seen fit to introduce new two-channel models at a relatively low price point is indicative of something of a stereo hi-fi resurgence in the UK – and frankly we're delighted!

Second, every amp in this £350-£600 group is equipped with a phono stage... and who would have predicted that in 2006! The rebirth of vinyl is a genuine force to be reckoned with – even for such broad-scale, market-conscious companies as these.

Vinyl isn't a throwback and neither, of course, is stereo. Admittedly, both looked a bit shaky for a while, but there's no doubt that both are once again being enjoyed widely for what they are: top quality music carriers. And music is the whole point of each these amps.

In all probability they would mostly do a pretty good job with home cinema special effects, but (lacking 25 channels and 115 inputs) they aren't going to be asked to prove it. We'll wear as wide a grin as the next citizen while watching (and listening to) aliens blowing things up with laser guns, but when it comes to music, well, it's just a whole different kind of entertainment, not so?

These six manufacturers certainly seem to agree with that premise. In common with the current trend, what we have here is civilised equipment intended to do a job without fuss or intrusion. Granted, some of the amps have tone controls, but they're all capable of being switched out of circuit. Otherwise, these are your typical

stereo amplifier, one that is expected merely to select an input and make it bigger – big enough to drive a speaker.

Speakers have changed a bit over the years and are, on average, smaller than they used to be. This, in turn, has made them a little less loud for a given input, but luckily improvements in materials and manufacturing mean they can handle more power, and these amps offer it, starting from 50 watts and working upwards. £400 is still a tidy sum, but you get quite a lot of amplifier for it, in terms of both quantity and quality. Don't believe us? Turn the page and read on! **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ▶ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- ▶ Rotel DCR-971 CD player
- ▶ dCS Elgar D/A converter
- ▶ Kimber, Furukawa and Bespoke Audio hi-fi cables
- ▶ Pink Triangle PT TOO turntable with SME309 arm and Highphonic MC-A3 phono cartridge
- ▶ EAR 'The Head' step-up phono cartridge transformer

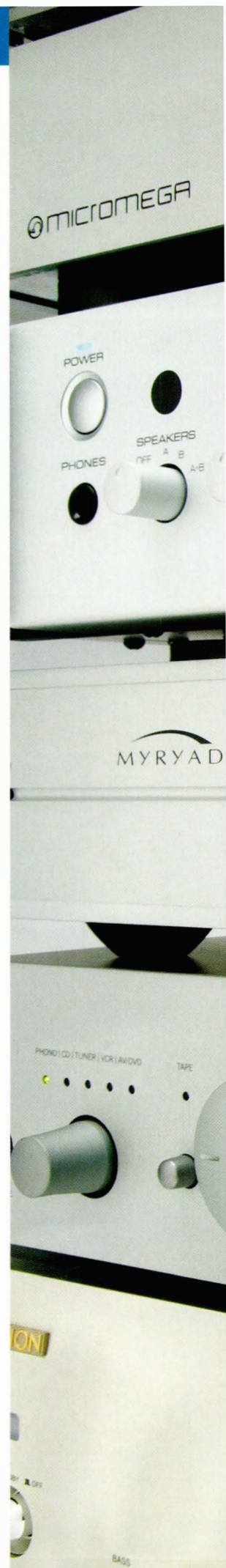
MUSIC USED

- ▶ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- ▶ Mahler *Symphony No.5*
- ▶ Dick Hyman *Tunes by Fats Waller*
- ▶ Miles Davis *Kind of Blue*
- ▶ Donald Tovey *Symphony*
- ▶ Pink Floyd *The Wall*

EARS USED

Once again, grateful thanks are offered to the kind souls who donated their time and listening skills at the service of our blind listening tests – on this occasion, we were assisted by:

- ▶ Roger Batchelor (Denon)
- ▶ Steve Reichert (Armour Home Electronics)
- ▶ Abbas Hussain (Wireworld)



ROTEL
STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER RA-1062

LISTENING TESTS

In classic *HFC* fashion, the centrepiece of the listening was a 'blind' presentation of each amp to a panel of expert listeners, in an attempt to remain free of prejudices and preconceptions. Listening levels were matched and the same programme of music was played through each amp with minimal distractions. In addition, each amp was auditioned more informally, at different listening levels to suit the particular character of each amp under test.

LAB TESTS

The amplifiers were measured with a variety of equipment, including a Hameg distortion measuring set and also items of audio equipment (ADCs and DACs) adapted to lab duty and reporting data for analysis to Cool Edit and Mathcad on a PC. This approach enabled us to build up a picture of the amplifiers' performance under different conditions of frequency, level and load. This allows truly accurate assessment of published amplifier specifications and precisely determines the amplifier's characteristics under real-world conditions.

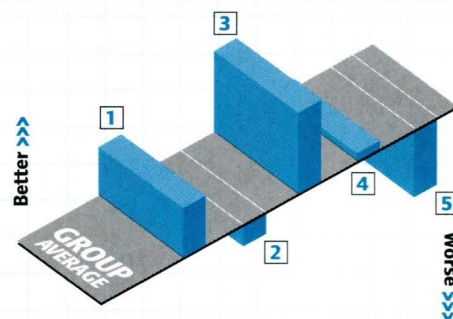
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our unique 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average.

- 1) Dynamic power:** This reflects an aggregate of continuous and peak (instantaneous) power, giving an indication of power available under realistic conditions.
- 2) Frequency response:** This is a measure of how smooth the frequency response is within the audio band and defines the upper frequency (-3dB point) limit.
- 3) Dynamic range:** An indication of the background hiss level, as compared to maximum power output.
- 4) Distortion:** An aggregate figure of measurements at different frequencies and levels.
- 5) Output impedance:** A measurement of how tight a grip the amplifier has upon the loudspeaker cones.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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ARCAM DIVA A65 PLUS

Arcam's entry-level amp upholds the brand's traditions

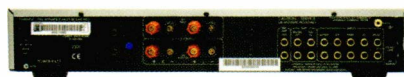
Arcam's heritage rests principally on good quality low to medium priced separates. Is this entry-level model worthy of its ancestors? The front-panel appearance is modern enough and little things like the 'DVD' input labelling give the game away, but in many ways, it appears to come straight out of the early 1980s. Phono plus five line-level inputs, tone controls (defeatable, of course), 40 watts per channel – it's all highly familiar stuff.

We'd tend to argue, though, that the reasons for such a specification are as sensible as they've ever been and if it ain't broke don't fix it. Anyway, it's really what's under the skin that counts and most of this model is bang up to date. Indeed, the first thing one sees under the lid is a circuit board that completely fills the case and looks awfully like something from the Far East, which it may well be. The circuit it bears is thoughtfully and efficiently designed with modern high-speed output transistors, a small handful of op-amps plus plenty of discrete transistors, integrated circuit input switching (happy enough to handle very high signal levels), a generous toroidal mains transformer and absolutely typical amounts of power supply capacitance.

The volume control is a motorised mechanical type, so the unit feels familiar in use. Bi-amping is possible thanks to 'Pre out' sockets at the rear, which could also be used to drive a second, remote system – or you could put the second speaker terminals (switched) to the same purpose. Construction is good: heatsinking is a little marginal but proved perfectly adequate with real music duty.

SOUND QUALITY

Two listeners said lots of complimentary things about this amplifier, while the third (whose opinions chimed much more closely with the others' elsewhere) absolutely hated it. At least, he did on its second presentation, though first time around (right at the start of the group) it pleased him much better. In all likelihood,



some external circumstance bugged him in the first music excerpt and after that the amp could do nothing right. There's probably a lesson there somewhere...

So if we overlook the momentary attack of aural pique, responses to the A65 Plus were positive in almost every respect. The general feeling is that it might not set the world on fire but it's fun, it's informative and it's honest. It can give detailed insights into recordings as diverse as Michael Jackson and a Mahler symphony, and it conjures up a generous and stable soundstage when required.

Particularly encouraging is a wealth of indications, from our panel and our subsequent sighted listening, that this amplifier is easy to listen to, which for a product that is also found to offer fine levels of detail, bass and treble extension and attack is praise indeed. Among many sub-£500 amps, easy listening and analysis can easily become either/or choices, but here you get both. Minus sides? Tonally there's the occasional tendency to brightness, though it's not gross, and it doesn't approach high-end levels of transparency. But then it never claimed to! As with all the other amps here, the phono stage will get you going happily enough. Well made, well specified, well liked, this seems to us to epitomise what good entry-level hi-fi should be about. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 82%

FEATURES >> 83%

BUILD >> 82%

VALUE >> 88%

It may not excel in any one specific area, but the A65 Plus is informative, pleasant to listen to and full of life. Imaging is good and detail more than decent. All-in-all, a strong all-rounder at the price.

HI-FI CHOICE 85%
OVERALL SCORE

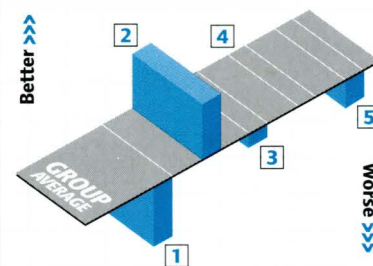


LAB REPORT

Arcam conservatively quotes a power output of 40W, but we had no trouble getting a steady 50W from both channels at 8 ohms, with even more into one channel alone and around 90W into a 4-ohm load. Bandwidth is wide, extending to 1Hz in the bass except via the phono input, which follows the IEC suggestion of rolling off bass below 20Hz. With modern small speakers, this is no bad thing and helps prevent bass cones from flapping about wildly, especially on phono inputs.

On the distortion front, results are good, if not state of the art. Some crossover distortion produces high harmonics at outputs above about 0.5W, but it's only around the 0.01% level and varies little with frequency. At lower levels, distortion vanishes into noise. It's not the lowest noise floor around either but comparable with that of CD – hardly significant. Distortion barely increases at all when driving a real loudspeaker, which is a good result.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> -40%
- 2] Frequency response >> +40%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -10%
- 4] Distortion >> 0%
- 5] Output impedance >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	40W	50W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.01%	0.008%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-	±0.1dB



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DENON PMA-1500AE

A return to hi-fi form for the master of home cinema

This model updates the PMA-1500R MkII, which we reviewed in *HFC* 263. Most of the internal and external features we noted last time round are still there, but all that means is that you still get some impressive material value for money from Denon. The surprising weight is the first clue, followed up by remarkably generous internal heatsinks and twin mains transformers. So far so good, and it gets even better when one examines the details, which include Schottky rectifiers (very fast types which produce little noise and cost a premium), extensive internal vibration damping, particularly effective on the heatsinks, and high-quality input switching integrated circuits.

The dual transformers are interesting, as they are not laid out in the more commonplace one per channel configuration. Instead, each one feeds half of the supply rectifier – normally this would be done simply by using two windings on one transformer. Denon claims this reduces magnetic interference from the transformers, which would appear to be borne out by the admirably low hum from the phono stage when handling a low-level moving coil cartridge. Moving-coil compatibility is another rare feature in an amp like this, but Denon makes MC cartridges, so this is hardly a shock.

Basic input and output provision is typical, with five line-level inputs, two 'tape' outputs, preamp out, and a useful 'P. Direct' input, which turns the amp into a power amp for bi-amping duties. As the size hints, power output is the highest in the group.

SOUND QUALITY

Our listening panel expressed divided opinions on this amp, but they refer to consistent characteristics which more or less pleased individual listening tastes. It's at once fun, lively, energetic and also bright and splashy, dry and not as clean as some. And indeed, listening sighted after the panel had left, we could see the both sides of the argument.



You see, the sound is slightly bright, though it's really quite subtle. All the same, if you like a bright sound, you'll revel in the undeniably impressive sense of scale this amp produces, and will be able to appreciate fully its strong but always tuneful bass. If, by contrast, you find any high-frequency exaggeration, however minor, an irritant you'll not be in the mood to enjoy what this Denon does well.

So, while not attempting to deny that limitation, we are delighted to commend this model for its achievements not least in the areas of insight and imaging, especially with large ensembles. It may appear to be a cliché (big amp equals big sound) but our panel couldn't see it and still found it particularly successful with full orchestra. At the other extreme, lively solo piano was exciting and easy to follow despite some serious rhythmic complexities. Dynamics are also a strong point, with no sense of constraint in rapid crescendos.

The phono stage of this amp seemed a step ahead of the others, too. With MC cartridges the noise is just about good enough, but with moving magnet performance is finer-grained all round and highly informative. Taking into account the high power and build quality of this amp, we are happy to recommend it. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 87%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 88%

This is a chunky beast that packs a punch and enjoys big-scale, dynamic music. Its slight brightness may grate on some ears, though, so listen carefully before buying. MC phono stage is a handy bonus.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **86%**

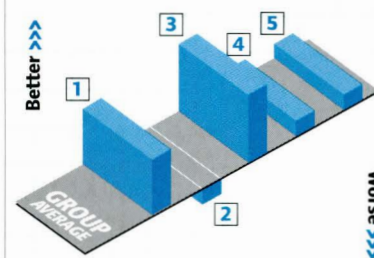


LAB REPORT

Power output starts at 105W per channel (both driven) and goes on from there, with peaks into 4 ohms of over 200W, proving the capabilities of Denon's 'Ultra High Current' output transistors. Bandwidth is very wide, especially in the bass, which extends below 1 Hz. Treble is essentially flat to around 60kHz. Response from the phono stage is also very flat in the audio band and barely rolled off an octave either side.

Distortion isn't quite vanishing but tries pretty hard, and we got slightly better results than with the PMA-1500 R MkII. The distortion is quite low order, around 0.005% or less at any frequency, and negligible below 1W output. What's more, it's almost completely unaffected by changing from a pure 8-ohm load to a real loudspeaker. Residual noise is excellent and barely more than the theoretical minimum offered by SACD and DVD-A. In fact, the highest level 'distortion' is the amp's 'singing' due to mechanical stress. Can this really be audible?

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +40%
- 2] Frequency response >> -10%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +50%
- 4] Distortion >> +10%
- 5] Output impedance >> +10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	70W	105W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.01%	0.007%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-	±0.2dB

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The New Densen B-110

The B-110 is the successor to the B-100, which became the most sold high-end amplifier ever from a Scandinavian audio manufacturer. The reviews have confirmed the quality of the "old" B-100 by awarding the B-100 a string of very favourable reviews: "You just can't beat it", "rhythmic magic" and "build quality that should embarrass everyone fighting in this price category" - words that tell you it is time to open your ears and listen! Even so the B-110 is in all aspects a giant step forward in terms of musicality, features, user friendliness and upgradability. This completely new design is simply sonically superior because of the high-end details and features it inherits from its close relation to the B-150. The B-110 even comes with lifetime warranty.

The B-110 employs a true attenuator, while everybody else uses potentiometers or cheap digital volume IC's. Densen use a sophisticated microprocessor controlled attenuator; this is the reason for the distinct click you hear as you adjust the volume and it is a definitive sign that Densen use the advanced relay driven attenuator instead of cheap inferior technologies, which substantially downgrade sound quality. The click is your assurance that Densen does not compromise!

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The B-150 has already been awarded Best Integrated Amp of the year in Portugal. The B-110 is a down-scaled version of the B-150, so it is a real High End killer!



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MICROMEGA A60

Micromega's integrated amp features integrated circuits

Faced with cost constraints, Micromega has plumped for letting an integrated circuit manufacturer do the hard work. Each channel of this diminutive unit features a power IC to boost signals to levels suitable for driving loudspeakers. This minimises Micromega's assembly time, not to mention component count and print-board area.

These days, power ICs can deliver performance that's more than decent, freeing up budget for better power supply, switching and ergonomics. In fact, Micromega seems to have a good nose for ICs generally, having chosen a far-from-obvious part to handle signal switching and volume control. Again, it clearly does a good job, although it is disinclined to handle unusually high signal levels: maximum input is 3.3V. A few sources will reach that.

It's all very up-to-date stuff, matched by a clear dot-matrix display that gives volume setting in dB. We aren't great fans of input selection by repeated button-pressing, but there's always the remote. This won't, however, improve on the multi-turn volume control on the front panel. Still, a rotary source selector would have spoiled the neat (and very Micromega-style) front panel, which is all part of a smart and efficient build quality. With six line inputs, plus phono and 'Pro in' (power amp mode), the feature count is good and – apart from some mechanical hum from the mains transformer – we could find nothing amiss.

SOUND QUALITY

There seems to be something for everyone in the A60's armoury. Our listeners' tastes were certainly varied, but they found both shared and individual things to praise about the amp's presentation, though each also had some mild reservations. The first track (Michael Jackson) brought forth unanimous comments on the fine bass extension – perhaps not the best of the lot but good nonetheless. As listening progressed, however, there were slight doubts



expressed as to just how detailed that bass is, and whether there is sufficient control to match the extension. This can make the sound over-warm at times, but with many speakers that can be a happy enough compromise.

The midrange is generally neutral and detailed, with the tonal palette topped off by a treble which is pleasingly extended without added brightness. As a result, our listeners found the sound easy on the ear throughout the tests, with no tendency to become wearing or exasperating.

Belying its size, the A60 offers a big sense of scale: it's not always utterly precise, but the thrill of a large recording venue is not something it shies away from. Opinions varied about how detailed the sound was within the image. On the whole though, we'd say fairly detailed, but if the big effect does it for you, that's what matters!

Probably the weakest area of the A60 is analysis, in the broadest sense. It would be unkind and untrue to suggest that it's seriously limited in such respects, but it may not be your first choice if you really like to listen between and behind the notes in your music collection. The sound isn't so much veiled as just a little homogenised and sweetened, but that in itself makes for pleasant listening and many folks will love it for that. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

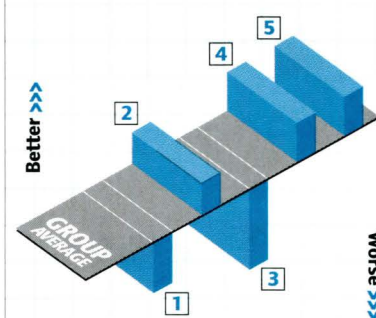
Micromega quotes power of 60W into 4 ohms, but in fact the A60 manages very nearly that (55W) into 8 ohms and peaks of around 100W into 4 ohms. Bass extends a couple of octaves below 20Hz and treble to a fine 120kHz within 1dB, while the phono stage manages a useful 8Hz to 27kHz, essentially dead flat.

Distortion under the usual test conditions is good, if not quite excellent. At high levels it hovers around 0.01% and at very low levels vanishes into noise, but in the critical 0.1W – 1W region rises to 0.03% or so when driving a real speaker load.

The astonishingly low output impedance at least keeps response dead flat into any speaker. Noise is fine, though some way short of the excellent best in the group. Mains hum is kept admirably low, including mains intermodulation with signal.

If this is how a good IC-based amplifier measures, we are more than a little impressed!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> -30%
- 2] Frequency response >> +20%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -50%
- 4] Distortion >> +25%
- 5] Output impedance >> +25%

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%
[Progress bar]

FEATURES >> 80%
[Progress bar]

BUILD >> 81%
[Progress bar]

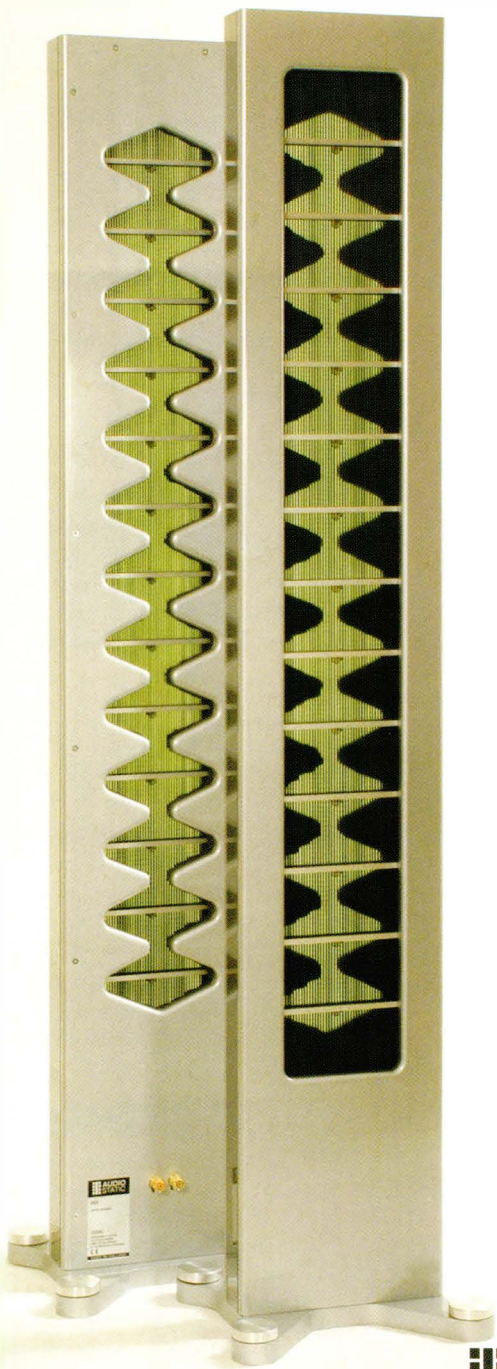
VALUE >> 88%
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This amp isn't the best choice for those who like to listen for buried details. But what it lacks in analysis it makes up for with a big musical heart, laying out an impressive canvas with broad, engaging strokes.

HI-CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **85%**

SPECIFICATIONS		
Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	–	55W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.02%	0.006%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	–	±0.15dB

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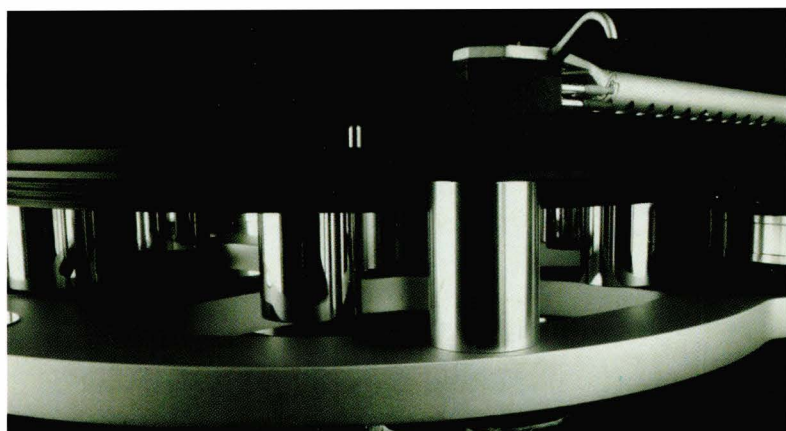
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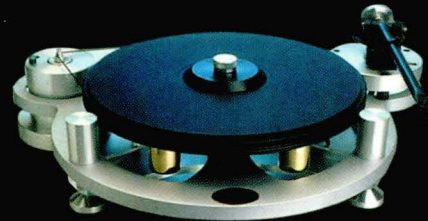
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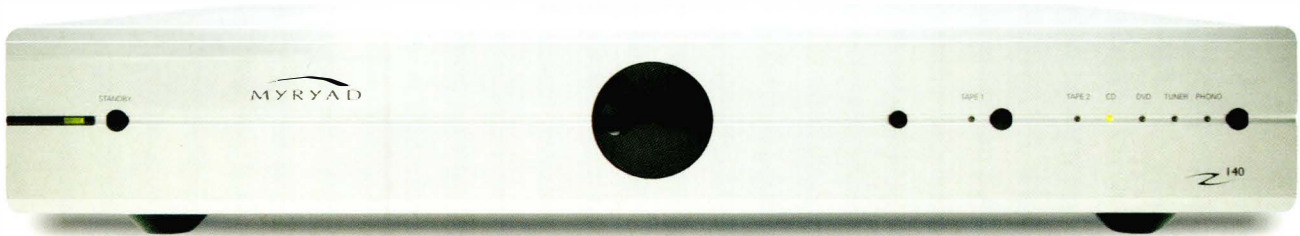
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MYRYAD Z140

Classic styling never dates. Just ask this fresh-looking three year old

The fact that this unit looks so completely up-to-the-minute in a fast-changing market is a tribute to its designer, since it's been on the market for over three years. Understated but not under-specified, it offers in effect six line-level inputs, plus phono. The phono stage shares an input with 'aux', but there are separate sockets for each and one merely needs to reach to the back and operate a pushbutton to switch between them. There are two tape outputs, bi-amp output, system remote connection – oh, and a 3.5mm headphone socket, masquerading as a fourth pushbutton on the front.

Inside the rugged, slightly resonant case, the generous toroidal mains transformer feeds a pair of high-current output transistors per channel, via typical supply capacitance. Most components are of good commercial grade discrete parts, with a few op-amps handling tape buffering (itself quite a luxury at this price), the DC servo and the phono stage. Input switching is through an integrated circuit which will handle high levels but isn't too keen on them, as distortion rises. The volume control is mechanical, though, and its trademark flush knob is nice to use once you get used to locating the finger indent on its surface.

SOUND QUALITY

Occasionally, we have on our 'blind' listening panel a representative from the maker or distributor of one or more of the units under review. In this case, Mr Myryad loved his amp to bits. Unfair? Hardly, since he had no idea which one was playing at the time: it's just another demonstration to cynics of human ability to distinguish between several audio products of broadly similar (and good) attainment. But he wasn't alone in liking it. Indeed, while once again there was some division of opinion over matters mostly based on the treble, everyone had some nice things to say about the Z140.

This amp is less than perfectly neutral in the higher frequencies. It has the slightest



tendency to enhance any existing brightness and so, as with the Denon, each listener's reaction to the overall sound is liable to be coloured by that. Does it have great attack, excellent speed and precision – or is it just a little dry and metallic? We can't decide that for you, but we can predict with some confidence that you'll find it very good at separating instruments within a mix and also at maintaining an even-handed balance in the midrange and treble. Once again, it also offers a precise soundstage with a particularly nice sense of depth, always a pretty tall order for kit at this relatively low price point.

Detail holds up well, though ultimately loses out a little in very dense music. Even when that point is reached, though, the sound maintains its sense of scale and perspective and the image does not collapse towards the centre, as can easily happen. 'Blind' and sighted listeners alike found it particularly keen on voices, with very clear vocals and natural vocal tone in a range of musical styles. The more percussive nature of the piano seemed slightly less well suited, especially via the slightly bland phono stage. Ultimately, though, setting a big scene seems to be the Z140's forte and we are particularly happy to commend it to lovers of large orchestral and rock sounds. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%

FEATURES >> 82%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 87%

While this amp is perfectly happy to reproduce a large group of players with a big sense of dynamic scale, with clearly separated instruments, its occasional dryness slightly limits ultimate detail resolution.

HFC CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **85%**

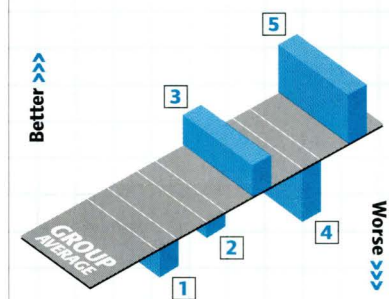


LAB REPORT

Sixty clean watts into 8 ohms and over 100W into 4 ohms – modern amps kick! Bandwidth is also good, reaching from 4Hz to 80kHz with only 1dB rolloff (19Hz to 31kHz for the phono stage). Noise is very good, too, several dB better than CD typically manages, and hum is vanishing from the line inputs – we found a trace on phono, but it's probably less than wires will pick up in most installations.

Distortion rises a little higher than in some of the amps here, but this is all relative and it's kept to a low level in absolute terms. It seems to decrease slightly under most conditions when moving from a 'friendly' exact 8-ohm load to a real speaker, which can only be for the good. As with all the amps in the group, DC offset is beyond reproach and it's hard indeed to find anything to criticise. But again, there's a detectable level of mechanical noise from the amp due to stresses in the power transistors – not much but still more than any of the electrical distortions.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> -20%
- 2] Frequency response >> -10%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +20%
- 4] Distortion >> -30%
- 5] Output impedance >> +35%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	50W	60W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.1%	0.015%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.3dB	±0.2dB

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ONKYO A-933

Onkyo turns to digits with this all-new, highly sophisticated amplifier

If any amp in this group stands out immediately, this Onkyo must surely be that item. For some, perhaps, the narrow shape may be reminiscent of distinctly sub-fi offerings of years not so long gone, but we've had some interesting results out of Onkyo recently, so don't be too hasty. And shape is, in any case, a rather unimportant difference. The biggest break with convention is inside the amp, where the power amplifying heart uses digital rather than analogue circuitry.

The insides don't immediately give this away. There are two big toroidal transformers, apparently both connected to both channels (this is probably to do with using available space in this case!), the usual pair of big power supply capacitors and a pair of power transistors (high-speed FETs) per channel, but the heatsink is on the small side and a handful of distinctive output filtering components provide a strong hint. Nor does the front panel make much of it – but then why should it? What matters is that the amp does its job, not how it does it.

By dint of some impressive shoe-horning, Onkyo has managed to provide a full set of features, including phono stage, tone controls (defeatable, of course), two tape outputs, system remote connections, two switchable speaker outputs and even a subwoofer output in this well-filled box. The sub output, by the way, is just a straight line-level signal, unfiltered, sensibly leaving processing to the sub itself. Build quality is decent – perfectly normal Far East stuff.

SOUND QUALITY

Of all the six amps in the group, this one probably proved the best all-rounder in terms of satisfying the various aural criteria of our listening panel. There were one or two very mild reservations about its bass extension and attack, which perhaps wasn't the best of the day, but otherwise it was pretty much praise all the way. Everyone thought its detail excellent



and all mentioned its high degree of involvement and enjoyment. What's more, it seemed entirely at home with all musical styles.

In fact, the comments on the A-933 are all the more encouraging when one notices that very few refer to technical aspects of the sound (bass, treble, tonality etc.) but rather tend to emphasise musical virtues. The sound was found to have plenty of swing, good dynamics, a great sense of drama and impeccable timing. Clearly our listeners found it particularly unintrusive, doing its thing in a self-effacing way that puts the emphasis where you want it – on the overall musical message.

If one prefers to listen analytically, there's still lots to like here, with a neutral balance. It's perhaps shy in the bass, but clear and open in the treble and uncoloured in the midrange.

There is next to no grain or harshness with all the usual difficult sounds like orchestral violins and female voices, and bass is invariably tuneful rather than 'thuddy'. The phono stage lets the side down a bit – it's indistinct and not the quietest around – but as a line-level amp this has a lot going for it, and it packs an impressive punch too. If this is the way digital amplification is going, we're all for it! **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

FEATURES >> 88%

BUILD >> 80%

VALUE >> 90%

A particularly musical amplifier that uses digital technology to best effect, chucking out power with gusto but never losing its grip. A good choice if you are interested in the music, not the equipment!

HI-FI CHOICE **88%**
OVERALL SCORE

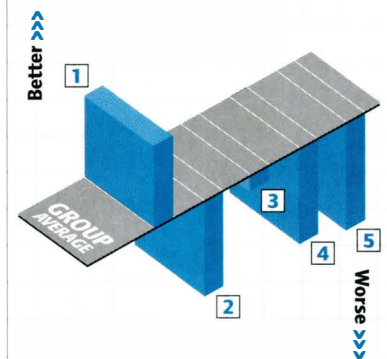


LAB REPORT

We were surprised at first to find at the output about 1V of ultrasonic (400kHz-ish) 'carrier' leaking from the digital circuits. We thought this was a fault, but it seems to be normal behaviour: and who can say it's a bad thing? That apart, we found relatively high levels of distortion (as much as 0.1% at high signal levels and including quite high harmonic orders), but distortion melts away as output drops, practically vanishing below half a watt or so. Distortion does rise into a real speaker load, though, so we expect varied results with different speakers.

Frequency response also varies a bit into differing loads, partly due to the high (valve-like!) output impedance. Essentially, though, the amp's flat across the audio band and at least an octave either side. Maximum output is hard to state exactly as 'clipping' doesn't occur quite like normal amps, but there's certainly a generous 100W available steady-state, and even more on peaks.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +50%
- 2] Frequency response >> -60%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -10%
- 4] Distortion >> -60%
- 5] Output impedance >> -70%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	80W	110W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.08%	0.1%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-	+0.1dB

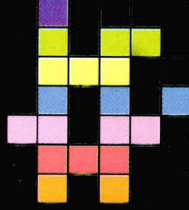


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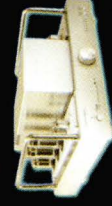
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ROTEL RA-1062

Good results in the lab – but does its sound measure up?

There's something particularly butch and pro-audio about this amp, not least due to the grab handles at the front corners. It's elegant too, though it's a pretty traditional product all round, with the usual complement of inputs, twin-switched speaker outputs and a preamp output.

Internal construction is traditional too – no surface-mounted high-tech parts here! There's the usual big toroidal transformer, and a pair of large power supply capacitors that proudly proclaim they are 'Made in England'. They're 'T-Network' capacitors, successors to the 'Slit Foil' components conceived by UK designer Denis Morecroft, and their stated intent is to provide a low-impedance supply at high frequencies, aiding the rapid delivery of power to the output stage and thence to the load.

This output stage uses two pairs of transistors per channel, preceded by an all-discrete circuit on daughterboards. Op-amps serve in the line and phono stages, while input switching is through relays. Together with the mechanical volume control, this architecture effectively removes any limits on input signal levels. Built quality is good and Rotel has thoughtfully provided some particularly nice output terminals; these are Rotel built, but reminiscent of 'designer brand' types.

SOUND QUALITY

This proved to be one of those slightly frustrating products that elicit 'Good... but' comments a lot. What makes this particularly poignant is that those 'goods' refer from time to time to almost every area of performance, but never all together. So, for example, one listener thought bass good in the Michael Jackson track but later would have preferred rather more of it in the Mahler. Meanwhile, for him the former track lacked some precision in the midband. For another listener, it had good detail, but not quite enough attack. The third listener also thought the bass good, but found vocals a bit brittle.



Taking the comments as a whole, the picture that emerges is of mostly good – but slightly upfront – detail, emerging from a background that's not as clear as it might be. There seems to be some occasional harshness and while each listener basically liked the sound as such, none seemed to find this the amplifier that most made one miss the remainder of each track as the (relatively short) excerpts faded out one after another.

In terms of basic tonality, there's little enough to argue with, and stereo images are basically where one expects them to be. Significantly, though, this was the only amp that was consistently found wanting in terms of image depth, always a hard thing to get right but one that increasing numbers of amps at this price seem to manage pretty well. The RA-1062 can indeed create some three-dimensional images, but when compared with those portrayed by other amps in the group, they seem to lack both rear extension and clarity of position.

It's not the first time that HFC has tested this amp; indeed, when it first emerged in 2003, technical reviewer Paul Miller declared it to be "the pick of this season's crop." Clearly, there is still a good deal to commend it. But, in the light of more recent and less costly competition, it's getting harder to justify the price. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 81%	Make no mistake, this is a fine amp in many respects – nicely put together with a nifty range of facilities. There is virtue in its sound, too, but fine detail and image depth suffer against the best of the competition.
FEATURES >> 85%	
BUILD >> 83%	
VALUE >> 80%	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 81%	

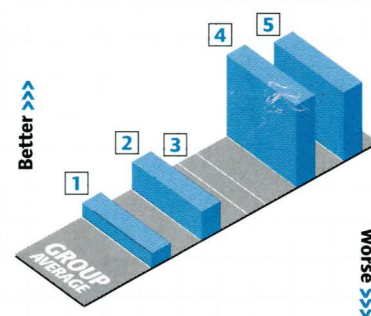


LAB REPORT

Of all the amps in this group, this is the most conservatively specified. It's capable of continuous output of 95W and peaks approaching twice the rated 60W. It also has the widest frequency response, always a Rotel strong point, reaching 6Hz in the bass and an astonishing 400kHz in the treble for a tight 1dB rolloff. The phono stage has a slight boost in the low bass, which might be audible in A/B comparisons.

Distortion is kept very low, barely exceeding 0.005% under any sensible circumstances. Oddly, traces of third and seventh harmonic pop up from very low-level outputs (tens of milliwatts), but at an absolute level of about 115dB below full output, it's hard to see why this should matter. Another odd result is some phase modulation (similar to jitter) at mains frequency, but again it's so low in level as to put audibility strongly in question. Noise is low and output impedance very low indeed.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +10%
- 2] Frequency response >> +20%
- 3] Dynamic range >> 0%
- 4] Distortion >> +50%
- 5] Output impedance >> +40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	60W	95W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.03%	0.003%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-	±0.15dB

CONCLUSIONS

When a group test is this tight, it's all a question of personal priorities

This group is almost perfectly split between respected, long-lived products (Arcam, Myryad and Rotel) and new challengers. That always makes for interesting reading, because last year's superstar can often be usurped by a brilliant newcomer. So it is here, it seems.

In no way could any of the six be described as incompetent. You could probably buy any of them and live with it for years and never be aware of faults or limitations. However, we would be prepared to bet that if you took all six and

auditioned them, as we did, one after another, you would hear differences and form preferences.

For our panel, it was the Rotel that impressed least – disappointing given that it's the most expensive of the lot. But then it gets more difficult, because there are aspects to like and to criticise in all the amps, and questions of personal taste must certainly arise.

The Arcam, Denon, Micromega and Myryad models all score very close together for sound, but each has its own particular strength. That said, the Arcam's strength is

in offering good – but not outstanding – performance in all areas, rather than highlighting a specific aspect at the expense of others. Regardless, its sound is pleasant, musical and quite detailed, and its presentation is thoroughly professional.

The Micromega A60, by contrast, has a distinct preference for its mellow, extended bass response. This may not always be the most detailed going, but it underpins a great large-scale performance.

The Denon and Myryad models share a slight tendency to

brightness, which will either make you love their attack, speed and general excitement, or will cause you to perceive dryness in the sound. It's all pretty subtle stuff, for sure, and even within that there's a difference between them, the Myryad being a little more detailed while the Denon has power to spare and loves using it.

All of them, though, are pipped by the Onkyo, which (perhaps surprisingly) turned in the star performance of the group with power, detail, neutrality and great musical involvement to spare. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

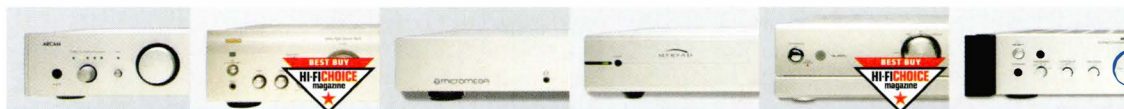
» Don't stack equipment on an amplifier – you could end up with overheating problems.

» Use decent cables in and out, and make sure that speaker cables are not frayed. Tighten screw-down speaker terminals from time to time.

» Use standby in preference to the mains switch, unless the amp will be off for a couple of days at least.

» Amps are seldom electrically microphonic, but the casework can resonate audibly. A few damping devices can work wonders.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE

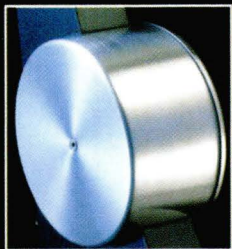
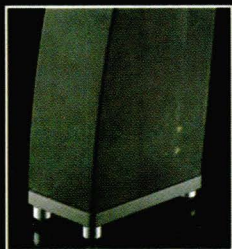


MAKE MODEL	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	Denon PMA-1500AE	Micromega A60	Myryad Z140	Onkyo A-933	Rotel RA-1062
PRICE	£400	£500	£399	£500	£500	£600
SOUND						
FEATURES						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	A good if not great amp, with a pleasingly rounded performance.	Very slightly bright at times but it's a lively, energetic and very powerful amp design.	A big-hearted amp that's better at the overall picture than at the details.	Occasionally a touch dry, but there's so much bounce to the sound that you may never notice.	Puts the music first, with a sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener.	A competent amp in many respects, but it looks a little pricey.
KEY FEATURES						
LINE INPUTS	5	5	6	6	5	5
TAPE OUTPUTS	2	2	1	1	2	2
PHONO INPUT	Yes (MM)	Yes (MM/MC)	Yes (MM)	Yes (MM)	Yes (MM)	Yes (MM)
SIZE (WxHxD)	43x8.5x29cm	43.5x13.5x41cm	43x7x30cm	44x8x31cm	27.5x10.5x33cm	43x9.5x35.5cm
WEIGHT	5.4kg	14.6kg	7.0kg	6.7kg	7.5kg	7.8kg
REMOTE CONTROL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
BALANCED INPUT	No	No	No	No	No	No
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
CLIP POINT (8 OHM)	20V A	29V G	21V A	22V A	30V G	27.5V G
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	±0.1dB E	±0.2dB G	±0.15dB G	±0.2dB G	±1dB A	±0.15dB G
DYNAMIC RANGE	99dB G	107dB E	96dB G	104dB E	99dB G	100dB G
DISTORTION	0.008% G	0.007% E	0.006% E	0.015% G	0.1% A	0.003% E
OUTPUT IMPEDANCE	0.07 ohm G	0.03 ohm E	0.02 ohm E	0.02 ohm E	0.18 ohm A	0.015 ohm E
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adj. an individual who does not comply with conventional norms or socially approved patterns of behavior or thought

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ISOTEK ISOPLUG

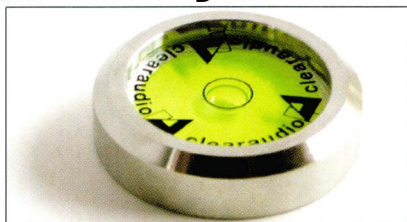
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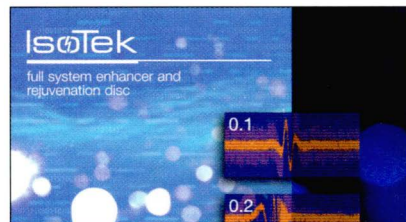
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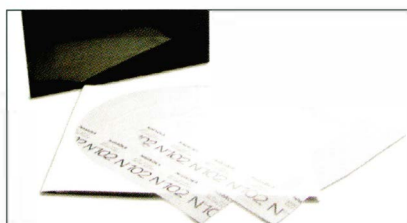
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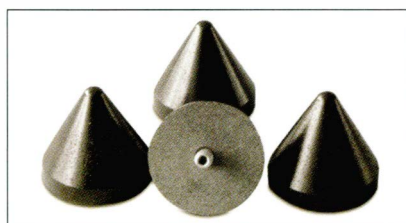
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a

a Esoteric X-01 CD/SACD player.

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b Audio Aero Capitole CD player.

This already superb sounding player has had a facelift and a software upgrade. The sound is now one of the most transparent and musically engaging we know. An exceptionally 3-dimensional soundstage, comparing favourably with players costing much more. It also includes a pure analogue pre-amplifier with inputs for other sources. £5500.



b



c

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c Dali Ikon 6 loudspeakers.

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d Clearaudio Champion Level 2 turntable.

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d



e

e Aesthetix Calypso Line pre-amplifier.

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f

f Gamut DI 150 integrated power amplifier.

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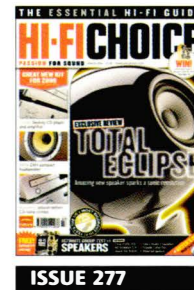
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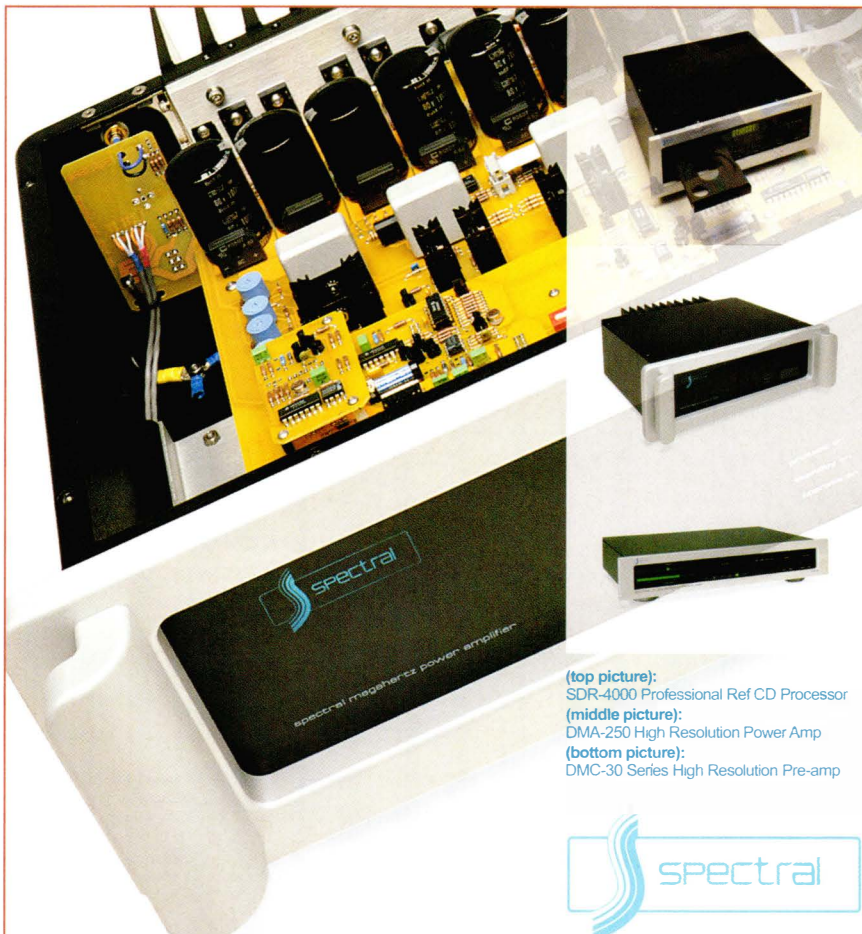
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May Issue: Read the feature on Accuphase

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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and multichannel gear you can buy. Here, you'll find our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, plus useful information on what to look for and how to get the most from your components.

Reviews you can trust

Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most stringent techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest multichannel disc players. Whether hi-fi stereo or high performance surround and vision, these components will take you a step closer to reality.

How to use this guide

The *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* is the best way to make a shortlist of components for your system. Pick the ones that best suit your taste and budget, then use our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can audition these components with your favourite discs.

Products that score more than 80 per cent overall are automatically considered for inclusion in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



Despite the emergence of new formats and the resurgence of an old one (vinyl), CD is still the king of formats if you require breadth of choice. And despite the fact that other sources will play CDs, if you want to hear your discs at their best, there's little substitute for a dedicated CD player.

It's also the most enduring format on the market. Despite high-resolution contenders like SACD and DVD-Audio, nothing has been able to undermine this universally popular format.

CD players work by reading a stream of 1s and 0s off a disc that spins at a constantly changing speed (to counteract the increasing length of 'groove'). This bitstream is then digitally filtered before undergoing digital-to-analogue conversion in the DAC (D-to-A convertor). Thereafter, the signal is filtered



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

The processes of reading the disc and converting the data are sometimes split between a CD transport and separate DAC in so-called two-box players. A popular approach with very high-end kit, this separates the electronically noisy elements from the sensitive analogue stages, but can introduce timing errors known as jitter, therefore one-box players usually offer best results where budget is a consideration.

SUPER AUDIO CD



SACD or Super Audio CD is a relatively new audio-only format introduced by Sony and Philips. It offers higher resolution than CD in the form of considerably greater bandwidth and improved dynamic range. It also has

the potential for uncompressed surround sound using up to six channels, and most new discs take advantage of this. SACD discs are usually hybrids and will play on normal CD players, but you won't be able to appreciate their highest quality or their multichannel capability without an SACD-compatible player. Some SACD players also play DVD and even DVD-Audio – these are listed in our DVD section.

Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

A DAC or digital-to-analogue convertor is a fundamental part of any CD player and converts the digits read from the disc into an analogue music waveform which is amplified to line level.

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

Discs are read by a transport or disc drive, which creates radio frequency 'noise'. Separating the DAC means the conversion can be done with less interference.

CAN I USE AN OUTBOARD DAC WITH MY INTEGRATED CD PLAYER?

Yes, if it has a digital output – and most do.

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

No. All analogue cables are suitable for connecting a CD player to an amp. Digital specific cables with 75ohms impedance are useful when connecting the player to a digital recorder or DAC.

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion.

Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

Yes. The vast majority of SACD discs are hybrids, with a CD layer that all CD players can read.

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

TOP BUYS



Cambridge Audio Azur 640C v2 £250

The old 640C was a fantastic low-cost CD player, and its new 'v2' replacement is even better – an extraordinarily graceful and dynamic-sounding player for the money.



Cyrus CD8x £1,000

The latest diminutive CD spinner from Cyrus is an absolute stunner. Highly detailed and supremely musical, it's more than a match for many more outwardly exotic machines.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

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	Arcam DIVA CD192	850	Beautifully built, well featured player with clear, open and involving sound								264
	Cambridge Azur 640C v2	250	Does most things extremely well and has a remarkably good sense of poise for the money								274
	Consonance CD120	795	Fine performance in all areas with the possible exception of slight treble harshness								269
	Cyrus CD6s	650	Small, efficient and cheerful, with plenty of energy and just the smallest lack of detail								276
	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400)								270
	Exposure 2010 S	599	Highly communicative sounds with good bass, though not always the most analytical								264
	Marantz CD7300	350	Astonishingly capable sub-£500 player with effortless bass, detailed mid and treble and vast soundstages								250
	Naim CD5i	825	As idiosyncratic as ever, but sonically the CD5i is the definitive player at the price								259
	Roksan Kandy MkIIID	650	Clean, tidy and expressive player – a more than worthwhile improvement on previous versions								259
	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance								276
ABOVE £1,000											
	Arcam FMJ CD36	1,400	Deeply revealing player that tells it like it is: if you can stand the unvarnished truth, you'll love it								271
	Audia Flight CD One	4,500	Sumptuously built toploader capable of real world dynamics with great recordings. Two digital inputs								269
BEST BUY	Ayre CX-7 CD Player	2,950	Superbly built and natural sounding player that will win you over with its range of capabilities and transparency								251
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Its ability to resolve micro dynamics and acoustic space is second to none								267
	Creek Destiny	1,200	A highly capable and particularly smart CD player which is both analytical and musically inviting								277
	Hegel CDP2A	1,500	A technically proficient and masterly-sounding player built by people who clearly know what they are doing								252
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Krell SACD Standard	4,244	A landmark SACD player and an excellent CD player at what by Krell standards is a relatively affordable price								251
BEST BUY	Lindemann 820	6,999	Stereo SACD player with sumptuous build and sound, onboard analogue volume control and multiple digital inputs								262
	Marantz SA-15 S1	1,200	Some inconsistency over imaging, but enjoyable performance, strong on detail								276
	Marantz SA-11 S1	2,000	A stereo player for audiophiles – lack of DVD and multichannel SACD lead to subtle, highly focussed sound								265
	Meridian G07	1,595	Immaculately conceived and executed player with a softly-spoken voice. Needs careful system matching								259
BEST BUY	Meridian 808i Signature	8,250	Stunning CD player with added preamp functions. Versatile and quite delightful								263
	Myryad MXC6000	1,400	A highly listenable player with excellent tonal balance and very fine detail								270
	Naim CD5x	1,450	A genuinely engaging CD player with remarkable musical grip and coherence								264
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Naim CDX2	2,800	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply								238
	Primare CD31	1,500	A well made player that may not appeal to timing freaks but does lovely things with large musical forces								270
BEST BUY	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source								244
	Sugden CD21SE	1,395	Delivers its particularly musical touch brilliantly and warrants the attention of all true music lovers								271
	Shanling CD-T100	1,650	Stunning-looking player that offers various operating modes: in any, sound is clear and assured								270
BEST BUY	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits								253
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Wadia 861se	9,995	Stunning player with a full digital preamp and an all-revealing sound that'll keep you up all night								256

SPECS KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in multichannel and/or two-channel mode. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **CD-RW COMPATIBLE** Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs. **CD TEXT** Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. **BAL ANALOGUE OUT** Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. **VARIABLE OUTPUT** Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs.



Copland CDA823 £1,750

This distinguished, yet minimalist Scandinavian CD player combines a real ear for detail with full-scale dynamics and an effortless musical style. A genuine hi-fi star.



Resolution Audio Opus 21 £2,850

This player is king of subtlety. Outwardly, the music sounds dynamic and well-scaled, but it's the level of inner detail resolved here that is truly outstanding.

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players – you can't really beat a multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are very good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio onto the disc alongside the video data. You can use



a DVD player with your stereo system by connecting the stereo outputs, though this won't give the surround sound benefits that the format specialises in.

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

Use the analogue outputs for CD, DVD-A and SACD, and the coaxial digital output for DTS and Dolby Digital movie soundtracks.

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

The best connection is component video closely followed by RGB Scart, which is clearly superior to S-video and the basic composite video option.

DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

It's worthwhile for the very best picture quality, but make sure your DVD player and display device support PAL progressive.

DVD-AUDIO

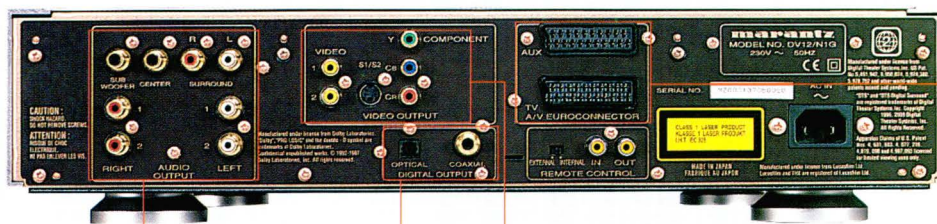
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for information – lyrics, images and so on. To save

you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, alongside CD and DVD-Video – a neat and relatively future proof route into high-resolution multichannel music. Higher-end models featuring high-bandwidth compatible digital audio links are now also appearing, enhancing DVD-A/SACD sound when used with similarly equipped amps.



CONNECTIONS



ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS: For stereo and multichannel connections, use these for best results with DVD-Audio, SACD and CD.

DIGITAL OUTPUTS: For Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM audio bitstreams.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow sockets are composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component which gives best results, while the black multipin socket is S-Video, which sits qualitatively between the two.

SCART CONNECTIONS: These are a good-quality option for video, especially ones that output RGB.

Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

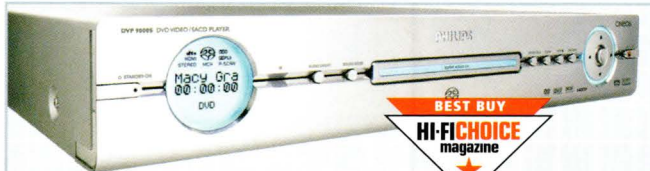
DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Arcam DiVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money	●	●	●	●	●	254
BB	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem	●	●	●	●	●	276
BB	Denon DVD-2910	600	Denon's entry-level universal player lives in the shadow of the '3910, especially on CD, but is a fine overall model	●	●	●	●	●	262
BB	Denon DVD-3910	900	Exceptionally well-specified universal player with a performance to match. A true class-leader	●	●	●	●	●	260
BB	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectations	●	●	●	●	●	274
BB	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video	●	●	●	●	●	275
EC	Philips DVP9000S	400	Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star	●	●	●	●	●	274
BB	Pioneer DV-585A	150	Don't expect tip-top performance for this kind of money – the fact that it's a competent universal player is impressive enough!	●	●	●	●	●	273
BB	Pioneer DV-868AVi	1,000	State of the art universal player with next-gen digital outputs – HDMI for video and i.Link for high-resolution audio	●	●	●	●	●	252
BB	Sony DVP-NS9100ES	1,000	Video playback is foremost, with the i.Link delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts	●	●	●	●	●	274
ABOVE £1,000									
BB	Arcam FMJ DV29	1,600	An excellent DVD player, very fine with both CD and DVD-Audio music discs and superb in its video role	●	●	●	●	●	263
BB	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs	●	●	●	●	●	238
EC	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD	●	●	●	●	●	266
EC	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi	●	●	●	●	●	259
EC	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too	●	●	●	●	●	265
EC	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio	●	●	●	●	●	263
EC	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good of' stereo CD	●	●	●	●	●	270

SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.

TOP BUYS



Philips DVP9000S £400

An attractive and well designed DVD player with a great picture and good CD/SACD sound.



Marantz DV7600 £600

A universal player that's strong with all formats, including music on CD/SACD/DVD-A.



Arcam FMJ DV29 £1,600

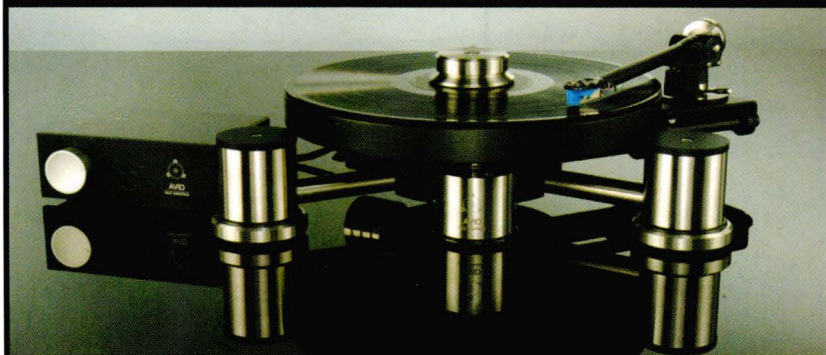
Arcam's best DVD player yet – a world-class, HDMI-equipped audio/video feast.



Meridian G98AH £3,625

A digital *tour de force* – as exceptional with both audio and video as you'd expect.

AVID DIVA - AFFORDABLE HI-END



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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.



TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce. Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

TOP BUYS



Goldring
 GR2 £265

This Rega-derived design is stunning value for money. Supplied with an RB250 arm and Goldring 1012GX cartridge, it'll blow most budget CD players into the weeds.



Michell
 Tecnodec £767

A distillation of all the good things from some of Michell's past masters, all knitted together beautifully. Understated looks and a full-bodied sound make this a star.



Clearaudio
 Champion £1,475

Current king of acrylic, the Clearaudio deck, arm and cartridge combination turns in a beautifully well-balanced delivery, but choose your support wisely.



Avid
 Volvere Sequel £3,500

Avid has been one of the most impressive exponents of the vinyl arts in recent years, and this mid-range deck is a stunning example of analogue engineering.

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART
 	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
 EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●		229
 	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45			●	268
 EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45		●	●	271
 EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78	●	●	opt	276
 	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	266
 	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
 EC	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45	●			235
 	Michell Tecnodoc	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			●	268
 	NAD C 555	250	A good budget turntable with plenty of potential for cartridge upgrades. Shames many comparable CD players	33/45			●	271
 	Nottingham Analogue Horizon	529	A fluid midrange and nimble but rich bass are two of the many attributes of this bargain deck (price inc RB250 arm)	33/45			●	253
 	Pro-Ject Debut SE	200	The best Debut has a quality cartridge and easy upgrade arm cable, it delivers a scale, energy and resolve with ease	33/45			●	276
 	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,000	A gorgeous turntable that sounds as good as it looks – vital and transparent! Price includes carbon-fibre arm	33/45			●	268
 	Rega P3/RB300	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
 	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			●	opt 257
 	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			●	opt 257
 EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
 	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	●		●	248
 EC	Roksan TMS2/Artemiz	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45	●	●		246
 EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●	195
 EC	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186
 EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45	●		●	259

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
 	Cartridge Man MM III	625	The MM III challenges MCs at twice the price, it produces detail, space and energy and has stunning resolve in the right arm	●			266
 	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too		●	●	214
 	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss		●	●	235
 EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality		●		215
 	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound			●	270
 	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light			●	235
 EC	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage			●	244
 EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for			●	265
 EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money			●	253

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	ADJ GAIN	ADJ IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
 	Cambridge Audio 640P	60	Tested with the almost-as-good £40 540P, this remarkable phono stage brings refinement and bass weight to budget vinyl	●	●			277
 	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound	●	●			268
 	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money	●	●			245
 	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!		●			234
 EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP	●				201
 	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

TURNTABLE SPECS KEY **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you. **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE** Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

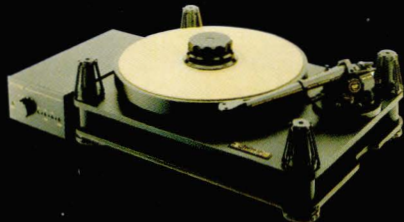
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Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



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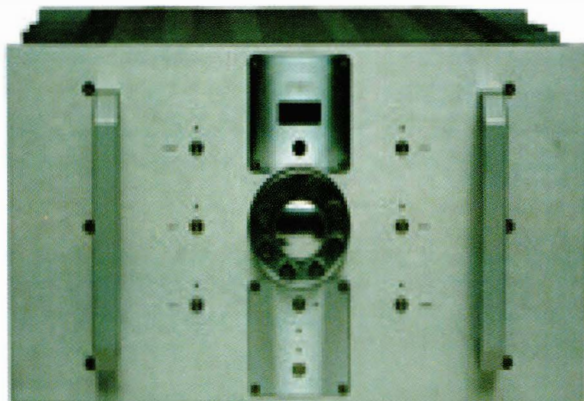
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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

DAB or FM?

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) is now said to be available to more than 80 per cent of the population and the long-term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital entirely, but hardware prices have yet to come down to a point where this would be acceptable. Its advantages over FM include hiss-free reception, the potential for a wider range of stations and the ability to display comprehensive programming information. FM's RDS system means that station name and occasionally track titles are displayed, but the range of information is fairly limited.

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

What is clear, however, is that there are more and more radio stations broadcasting on DAB that aren't available on FM. So if it's variety of programming you're after, they have a lot to offer.

RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio for details.

TOP BUYS



Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget FM/AM tuners, with great sound and features.



Denon TU-1800DAB £250

Combines DAB with FM/AM reception and good all-round design at a tempting price.



Creek T50 £550

A thoroughly accomplished AM/FM tuner with a substantial and detailed sound.



Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195

FM tuner with valves – 'affordable' for an MD, but still streets ahead of most radios.

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROTARY TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128	●	●	●	●	251
	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40	●	●	●	●	193
	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
	Magnum Dynalab MD 102	2,200	Superb remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	●	●	241
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30		●	●	●	250
	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30		●	●	●	230
	Rega Radio 3	398	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20		●			242
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30		●	●	●	242
DAB TUNERS										
	Arcam DiVA DT91	450	As good as any on DAB, with serviceable FM, this one-box solution offers good build and value	DAB,FM	16		●	●	●	269
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		●	●	●	248
	Cambridge Azur 640T	200	Slightly ahead of the pack in DAB performance, though FM is never better than decent	DAB,FM	60		●	●	●	260
	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	DAB reception is as good as any and FM performance clearly benefits from Denon's long experience	DAB,FM,M	200		●	●	●	274
	Pure Digital DRX-701ES	250	A good introduction to DAB – fine value and simple to use	DAB	99		●	●	●	234
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99		●	●	●	242
	Sony ST-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear	DAB,FM,M	60		●	●	●	259

SPECS KEY WAVEBANDS Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. PRESETS How many stations can be stored in memory. RDS Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). REMOTE CONTROL For the couch potato. SIGNAL STRENGTH METER Useful for setting up an aerial. ROTARY TUNING KNOB An ergonomic alternative to buttons.

AUDIO T & AUDIO EXCELLENCE have been selling hi-fi and home cinema equipment for over 65 years between us so there's no better place to go for unbiased advice and unrivalled expertise. Whether you need a two channel stereo system or a ten room distributed audio and video system, we have the expertise to do the job.

As members of the British Audio-Visual Dealers Association we have fully trained staff and always specify the best sounding products. We can even come round to your house and install the system for you to make sure it's working at its best. For more information please visit our websites.

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www.audio-t.co.uk

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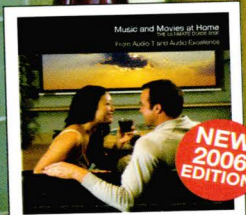
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NEW 2006 EDITION

FREE GUIDE

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Brands include: Arcam, Audiolab, B&W, Chord, Cyrus, Denon, Dynaudio, Focal, KEF, Linn, Meridian, M&K, Monitor Audio, NAD, Naim, Pioneer, PMC, ProAc, Quad, Rega, Rotel, Spendor, Tannoy, Totem, Velodyne, Wilson Benesch, Wharfedale, Yamaha and many more.

The Audio Research CD7 is a Reference Level model to complement the CD3MKII with an even higher performance. Incorporating the strongest aspects of the CD3MKII - its rugged construction, the Philips Pro2 laser mechanism, the Crystal 24 bit DAC, its user friendly menu of useful features and functions - the Reference CD7 breaks new ground with a gain stage taken directly from the REF3, incorporating the latest proprietary capacitor technology found only in Audio Research Reference components.



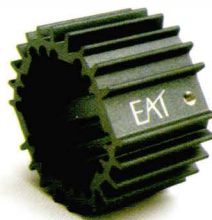
c d 7

e a t

The Cool Damper is a radical new device for the tube accessory industry from EAT - EuroAudioTeam.

This beautifully crafted audio product offers much more than simply adding a new styling twist to your valves. It brings exceptional acoustic performance and function to your system by delivering sound that redefines the tube dampening category.

No valve should be without one!



Brands Include:

- audio analogue
- audio research
- copland
- dream vision
- ecs
- epos
- goldring
- grado
- harmonic
- hyperion
- jadis
- koetsu
- krell
- magnum dynalab
- martin logan
- myriad
- opera
- pathos
- primaluna
- qed
- roksan
- sonus faber
- stands unique
- sunfire
- t+a
- theta
- townshend
- transparent
- unison research
- wadia
- waterfall
- wilson audio
- & many more..

Living in the shadow of the impressive Summit speaker is no easy task. Martin Logan 'Vantage' rises to the challenge by compressing Summit's groundbreaking ultra high-resolution XStat™, AirFrame™ and PoweredForce™ technologies into a surprisingly compact package and price.



v a n t a g e

e n i g m a

The Audio Analogue 'Enigma' multifunction audio valve unit is a superb solution for those music lovers who require minimal fuss, minimal space, yet maximum quality. It features a 50wpc amp, CD player and am/fm tuner.

There are other compact one-box audio solutions on the market but none offer the sound and build quality of the Enigma.



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01483 537 577

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard disk drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



Philips CDR802 £300

Multidisc recorder that's slick and capable, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



Marantz DR6000 £400

Quality in a box – it eschews gimmickry, but it does a simple job very well.



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 £600

Combining hard disk with CD-R makes CD recording a whole lot more flexible.



Cambridge Audio Azur 640H £600

Rip and store CD tracks on hard disk, create playlists, connect to a PC and more.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS
CD-R/RW RECORDERS							
✓	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1	●	●	233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2	●	●	243
✓	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2	●	●	233
✓	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1	●	●	205
✓	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1	●	●	243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1	●	●	218
MD RECORDERS							
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1	●	●	205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1	●	●	233
HDD RECORDERS							
✓	Cambridge Audio Azur 640H	600	Not so much a HDD recorder, more a complete audio computer and nerve centre in one useful box. Complex, but worth it	1	160	●	276
	Imerge S2000	1,599	Intended as the centrepiece of a multi-room installation, this three-output server combines flexibility with good sound	2	80	●	243
✓	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	Superb combination of high-speed CD-RW drive and hard disk, adding editing flexibility to CD recording	2	80	●	276

SPECS KEY **DECKS** Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.

SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

With over 30 years experience, **SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION** is one of the largest and most respected Audio/Visual retailers in the country.

Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from Hi-Fi separates and systems to DVD recorders, widescreen plasma televisions and projection systems.

Our fully trained installation experts can neatly and seamlessly integrate a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.

Whatever your requirements, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products and the expertise to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.



Specialist hi-fi & home cinema

Contemporary hi-fi is constantly setting new standards in sound reproduction and design. Whatever you listen to, 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.

The recent growth of DVD has led to a huge rise in demand for home cinema equipment - DVD players, AV receivers, projectors and plasma screens 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.

NEW STORES

LOUGHTON & YEOVIL

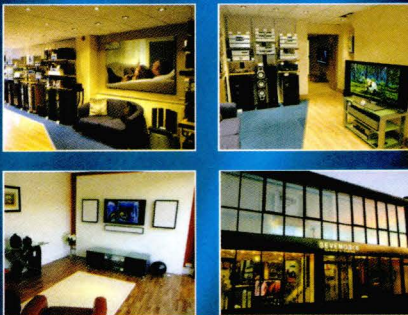
We are pleased to announce that these new stores are now open: -

LOUGHTON

7-9 GOLDINGS HILL • 020 8532 0770

YEOVIL

14 SILVER STREET • 01935 700078



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
15000 APPROVED
R02L RA03

Rotel

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.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2005
TURNTABLES
BEST SOUNDING DEBUT 01
PRO-JECT DEBUT 01



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.

B&W

The focus of Bowers and Wilkins Loudspeakers has always been to offer the best possible musical experience. With a combination of the latest R&D techniques and a passion for music, B&W produces a diverse range of products befitting the largest audio manufacturer in the UK.

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.



Audiolab **NEW** 8000 Series

Audiolab's new 8000 series offers a definitive and genuine hi-fidelity performance from a no-nonsense approach to engineering. These famous products have all been re-engineered to create a complete two channel range, including the 8000S, 8000Q, 8000M and 8000P models plus a all new CD player. A 7.1 channel pre and power amplifier completes the range.



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 includes the Award-winning Debut (pictured left), Xpression II, Perspective and RPM Series.



B&W MINI THEATRE MT-30

"Talented, covetable and worth every penny, the MT-30 (and PV1 especially) could well be heading for iconic status."

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★
EXCELLENCE 2005



WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2005
SUBWOOFERS
BEST SUBWOOFER 2005
R&W 01

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
COMPACT SPEAKER PACKAGES
R&W 02

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2005
CONTACT SPEAKER PACKAGES
R&W 03



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2004
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS
£229.900
Quad 111

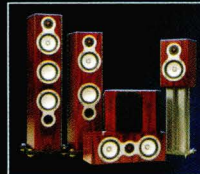
Quad

Founded in 1938, Quad's history is one of audio excellence. Today's range includes both electronics and speaker systems.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
BEST DOCKING STATION
MONITOR AUDIO I-DECK

i-Deck



NEW
Monitor Audio
Gold Signature
This exciting new range of high quality speakers is now available from selected Sevenoaks stores.

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 SIGNATURE, SILVER RS, BRONZE** and **RADIUS** speakers, plus the exciting new **i-Deck** docking station, an excellent any-room companion for your iPod.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
BEST AV PACKAGE
MONITOR AUDIO RS6 AV

Silver RS6 AV Package

Digital Radio

With Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) capability, these high-quality tuners deliver more stations and offers pure, distortion-free, CD-like sound, while providing useful radio and data services.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
RADIO
BEST DIGITAL RADIO
DENON TU-1800 DAB

Pure DRX702ES & NEW Denon TU-1800DAB

Wharfedale

Diamond 9.1
"Wharfedale has been updating and tweaking its Diamonds for 20 years - and rough they're not! Tight bass, clear midband, and sparkling treble for not a lot of cash."



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
STEREO SPEAKERS
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS
WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 9.1



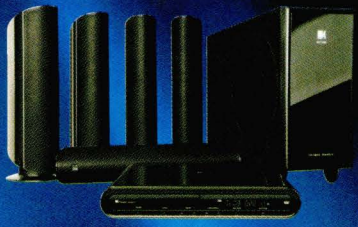
Diamond SW150
"Considering the price, the detail and definition to the bass are controlled and cohesive - equally adept with movies and music."

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
SUBWOOFERS
BEST SUBWOOFERS
WHARFEDALE DIAMOND SW150

KEF

Replacing the highly successful Q Series, KEF's New iQ line-up comprises eight models from the entry-level iQ1 bookshelf to the impressive iQ9 floorstander. All models incorporate KEF's Uni-Q driver technology and are available in a variety of finishes.

Other KEF ranges include XQ, KHT, the Award-winning KIT100 and new KIT200 home cinema systems.



NEW KIT200 - the complete DVD based 5.1 digital entertainment system that's specifically designed to match the new flat style flat screen TVs.



KEF iQ5
"The iQ5s are little stars, providing stunning scale and authority from discreetly sized towers... The iQ5s are fully deserving Products of the Year."

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
BEST SPEAKER
KEF iQ5



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2004
BEST STEREO SPEAKERS
OVER £5000
Acoustic Energy AE1100

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.

"The legendary AE1 lives on in this groundbreaking new version... It sets a new standard for small speakers."



KEF KHT1005
"The KHT1005 is an ideal first-time buy, and will suit those looking to 'downsize' to a more living-room friendly style of speaker."

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
BEST BUY
KEF KHT 1005



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
BEST AV PACKAGE
ARCAM DiVA DV7

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2004
BEST MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER OVER £1000
Arcam AVR250

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.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
BEST MUSIC SYSTEM
ARCAM SOLO



ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

The right accessories can make or break your system. Our carefully selected range, including **QED, SOUNDSTYLE** and **GRADO**, will ensure you get the very best performance from your system.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
ACCESSORIES
BEST CABLES
GRADO SBA

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
CABLES
BEST CABLES OVER £50
QED QUINCY SHIP II

Arcam Solo Music System
"Excellent all-round sound combined with the convenience of a one-box product."

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISUAL
AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
BEST MUSIC SYSTEM
ARCAM SOLO

Marantz

Marantz is introducing a host of new products ranging from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and AV receivers. The two main products groups are the 'premium' and 'range' series.

The SR9600THX Ultra2 AV receiver offers seven channels, each 140w, and features HDMI inputs. The groundbreaking DV9600 is one of the first DVD players capable of upscaling images to 1080p and is fully prepared for the high-definition future.

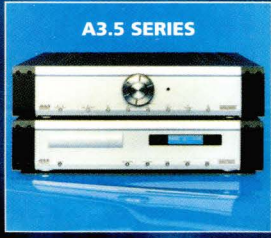


NEW MARANTZ SR9600 AV RECEIVER

PRIME
Best Buy
AWARDS

Musical Fidelity

Musical Fidelity's A3.5 Series amplifier, using circuitry closely related to A5's, and upsampling CD player combine high end performance, visuals and finish at a competitive price.



A3.5 SERIES



PLEASE NOTE Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or visit our website before travelling.
*Added Value Offers - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. ADVERT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 09/03/2006, E&OE.



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.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
DENON DVD-A1XV

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
SURROUND AMPLI. RECEIVERS
DENON AVR-1940

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
TECHNOLOGY
DENON DVD-A1XV & AVC-A1XV



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS
DENON SMARTLIFE S-301

DVD-A1XV "The most obvious winner of any category this year has to be Denon's evolutionary step in DVD deck design, the landmark DVD-A1XV... An astonishing piece of kit that has no equals."

AVC-A1XV "It's not often we can't find fault with a product, but as we said in our review, "It not only expands the home cinema envelope, it shreds it and then nukes it for good measure." **HOME CINEMA CHOICE • AWARDS 2005**



Harman Kardon

Harman/Kardon's high quality audio, audio/visual and multi-room products are more than just boxes with knobs on, they are declarations of passion for music and movies. Producing pure, realistic sound with ever smarter engineering and simpler design,

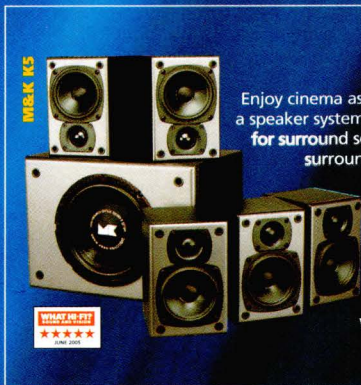
Harman/Kardon products delight both the audio purist and the film lover around the world. We invite you to experience the unique combination of artistry and engineering that is Harman/Kardon.



REL

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, REL is acknowledged as the leading provider of deep, clean bass frequencies.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004
BEST SUBWOOFER
REL SUBWOOFER



M&K

Enjoy cinema as the director intended with a speaker system that is genuinely designed for surround sound. Every Miller & Kreisel surround sound system is designed around the highest quality centre speaker available and partnered with two identical main speakers, producing seamless panning across the front soundstage, combined with remarkable clarity and effortless dynamics.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
★★★★★



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.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
DVD PLAYERS
YAMAHA DVD-S2500



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
YAMAHA DSP-AX75



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
SURROUND AMPLI. RECEIVERS
YAMAHA RX-V4600

YAMAHA'S DVD-S2500, DSP-AX7575E & RX-V4600



Onkyo DS-A1 iPod Connector Dock

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
MP3 PLAYERS & ACCESSORIES
ONKYO DS-A1

Onkyo

"A Dinky design that offers a vigorous listen, plus reassuringly solid build..."
Onkyo's CR-505DAB is a fab buy."



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS
ONKYO CR-505DAB

Pioneer

Pioneer's AV amplifiers and receivers are sound-tuned by the world-famous Air Studios to perfectly recreate the natural sound and energy of the original performance. The result is powerful, pure and crisp. Coupled with HDMI and iLink digital connectivity, as well as a connection for your iPod and PC, the audio adventure is even more absolute.



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 DVD only, hybrid DVD/hard-disk and multi-format models.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
DVD & HARD-DISK RECORDERS
PANASONIC DMR-ES10

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

The right accessories can make or break your system. Our carefully selected range, including **QED, SOUNDSTYLE** and **GRADO**, will ensure you get the very best performance from your system.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
CABLES
QED QUINEX TV

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
QED SILVER ANNIVERSARY XT

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005
CABLES
QED SMART ZS110

£ PRICING POLICY

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

FLEXIBLE FINANCE OPTIONS*

Spread the cost of buying. Flexible finance options are available on the majority of products we stock. *Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or visit our website before travelling. Special Offers and Sale Offers - Not in conjunction with any other offer. Advert valid until at least 09/03/2006, E&OE.



Specialist home cinema

At the heart of any home cinema is its screen: Sevenoaks Sound & Vision can put you in the picture with a selection of flat-panel displays and projection systems. LCD and plasma screens are just a few centimetres thick and come in sizes from a 13inch portable to over 60inches.



Sharp Aquos

Only Sharp Aquos LCD TV offers so much perfection. With supreme styling, the appeal of the Aquos range is obvious. The Titanium Series combines Sharp's sixth-generation LCD panel with stunning, angular-styling, titanium colour-finish and superb build quality to produce a premium class of LCD idTVs

TITANIUM SERIES LC-45GD1E LCD TV with integrated FREEVIEW

"Sharp's mammoth 45in LCD TV is a testament to the growing viability and performance of large-scale LCD. Its 1,920 x1,080 resolution panel allows high-definition pictures to be viewed without compromise and when exploited to its full potential, the results could see this screen hung in a gallery. Images are so crisp and sharp, it almost makes reality look dull. We think it's inspirational. Go pay homage." **HOME CINEMA CHOICE • AWARDS 2005**

FREEVIEW channel and service subject to coverage. Aerial upgrade may be required.

Panasonic Viera

There seems little doubt that the future of television is flat, and the future of flat is the award-winning VIERA range from the world leaders in screen technology, Panasonic. The VIERA range consists of both LCD and Plasma televisions. New additions to the range include 37, 42 & 50in **PV500** models with support for both high-definition and MPEG-4 recording.

TH-42PV500 PLASMA TV

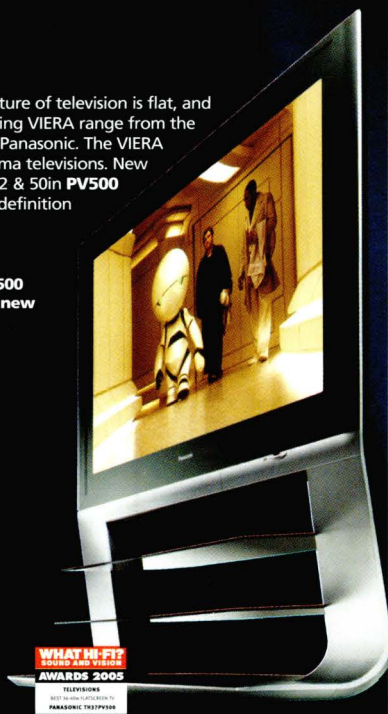
"All told, Panasonic's new TH42PV500 is a stunning set that's clearly the new class leader."



TX-32LXD500 LCD TV

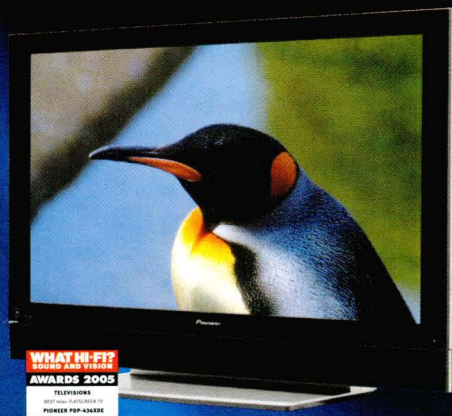
"A classy performer that excels in almost every area and restores Panasonic to LCD's top table."

WHAT VIDEO • ISSUE 269



SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION



Pioneer

Following its highly successful '5' series, Pioneer has unveiled its sixth generation of plasma TVs. The 43" PDP-436XDE and 50" PDP-506XDE models include built-in digital tuners plus dual HDMI inputs.

PDP-436XDE PLASMA TV

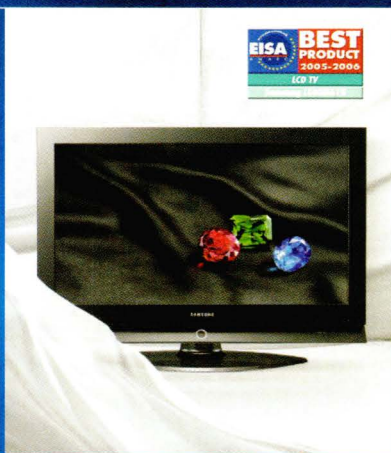
"Pioneer's latest is also its greatest: this is a truly wonderful HD-Ready TV."



Samsung

Milano LE40M61B 40" LCD TV

Samsung's New 40" LCD TV (LE40M61B) was honored with an EISA award for its premium display technology in terms of contrast ratio (5000:1), color expression (6.44 billion colors, 92% color gamut for NTSC), viewing angle (178°) and response time (8 ms). Also the model's simple body design focuses the viewer's attention on the screen. On the front of the minimalist design, the speakers are hidden from view in the bottom bezel and nothing distracts from the superb image quality



Toshiba LCD TV

These super-slim screens will take your breath away. Each model has been moulded from a stunning blend of cutting-edge design and state-of-the-art technology to create the ultimate audiovisual sensation. The collection comprises LCD screen technology, offering unrivalled combinations of image quality and sophistication and a variety of screen sizes and options, including integrated digital tuner.

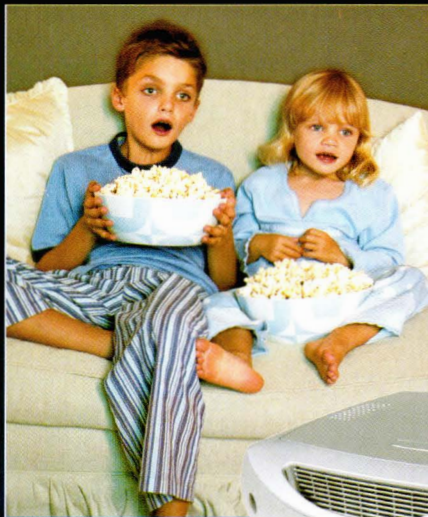


32WLT58 LCD TV

"All in all, this is a great set. The twin HDMI inputs lift it a step above the current competition, while the performance could easily grace something far costlier. The Toshiba 32WLT58 has everything you need at an incredibly reasonable price: can anyone trump that?"

WHAT VIDEO • XMAS 2005 #301





Projection

If you'd prefer to measure your screen-size in feet, how about one of the new generation of projectors? The latest designs are delivering superb results at increasingly affordable prices - and they're more home friendly than previous projectors, too.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2005
PROJECTORS
BEST PROJECTOR OVER £1000
SCREENPLAY 2318

ScreenPlay

From the worldwide leader in digital projection technology and solutions, InFocus® ScreenPlay™ DLP™ projectors are changing the face of home cinema offering market-beating performance, specification and value at every price point.

SP7210
"The new projector's picture is just phenomenal... Looks like ScreenPlay's success story is set to continue."



SP4805

"Another stunning success from ScreenPlay - there's never been a better time to take the big-screen plunge."

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2005
PROJECTORS
BEST PROJECTOR OVER £1000
SCREENPLAY 2318

Sim2

Sim2 Multimedia is a world-leading manufacturer at the forefront of home cinema technology and a name synonymous with high-end home cinema projection.



SIM2 C3X LITE
"The biggest leap forward in home cinema projection since the birth of DLP technology."
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
NOVEMBER 2005

HT300E "Spectacular, in a word... Another terrific projector from Italy's finest."
WHAT VIDEO • ISSUE 292



BEST
What Video
BUY

Themescene

Since its launch, the multi-award winning ThemeScene™ brand has rapidly established a five-star reputation for uncompromised image quality.



H30A "There are so many good points it's hard to know where to start... Just how much better can budget DLP projectors get?!"
WHAT VIDEO • ISSUE 292

BEST
What Video
BUY

£ PRICING POLICY

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

FLEXIBLE FINANCE OPTIONS*

Spread the cost of buying. Flexible finance options are available on the majority of products we stock. *Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or visit our website before travelling. *Added Value Offers - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. ADVERT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 09/03/2006, E&OE.

Product Selection

Listed below is a small selection of our extensive product range. **Please note:** Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call or check your local store's details on our new website for a list of brands that are currently stocked before travelling. www.ssav.com

TURNTABLES

Linn RANGE
Michell RANGE
Project RANGE
Roksan Radius 5

TUNERS

Arcam RANGE
Cyrus FM X
Denon RANGE
Harman Kardon RANGE
Linn RANGE
Marantz RANGE
Pure DRX-701ES DAB
Pure DRX-702ES DAB/FM
Rotel RANGE

CD PLAYERS

Arcam RANGE
Audiolab RANGE
Cyrus RANGE
Denon RANGE
Linn RANGE
Marantz RANGE
Meridian RANGE
Musical Fidelity RANGE
NAD RANGE
Quad RANGE
Roksan RANGE
Rotel RANGE

CD RECORDERS

Yamaha CDR-HD1500

AMPLIFIERS

Arcam RANGE
Audiolab RANGE
Cyrus RANGE
Denon RANGE
Linn RANGE
Marantz RANGE
Meridian RANGE
Musical Fidelity RANGE
NAD RANGE
Quad RANGE
Roksan RANGE
Rotel RANGE

HI-FI SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three
Acoustic Energy Aelite RANGE
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII
AVI Neutron IV
B&W RANGE
KEF RANGE
Linn RANGE
Meridian RANGE
Mission RANGE
Monitor Audio RANGE
Quad RANGE
Ruark RANGE
Wharfedale RANGE

HI-FI SYSTEMS

Arcam Solo Ex Speakers
Denon RANGE
Linn Classik Music Ex Spks
Monitor Audio i-Deck
Onkyo CR505DAB Ex Spks
Teac RANGE
Yamaha CRX-M170 Ex Spks

DVD SYSTEMS

Denon RANGE
KEF KIT100 Inc Speakers
KEF KIT200 Inc Speakers
Teac RANGE

MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

Cyrus Link RANGE
Living Control RANGE
Yamaha MusicCast RANGE

DVD PLAYERS

REGION 2 & MULTI REGION
Arcam RANGE
Cyrus RANGE
Denon RANGE
Denon DVD-A1XV
Harman Kardon RANGE

Marantz RANGE

Meridian RANGE

Panasonic RANGE

Pioneer RANGE

Samsung DVD-HD950

Toshiba SD350

Yamaha RANGE

DVD RECORDERS

REGION 2 & MULTI REGION

Panasonic RANGE

Pioneer RANGE

A/V AMPLIFIERS & RECEIVERS

Arcam RANGE
Audiolab RANGE
Cyrus RANGE
Denon AVC-A1XV A/V Amplifier
Denon RANGE
Harman Kardon RANGE
Lexicon RANGE
Marantz RANGE
Onkyo RANGE
Pioneer VSX-AX2AVi A/V Receiver
Pioneer VSX-AX4AVi A/V Receiver
Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai A/V Amplifier
Rotel RANGE
Yamaha DSP-AX757SE A/V Amplifier
Yamaha RX-V357 A/V Receiver
Yamaha RX-V557 A/V Receiver
Yamaha RX-V657 A/V Receiver
Yamaha RX-V1600 A/V Receiver
Yamaha RX-V2600 A/V Receiver
Yamaha RX-V4600 A/V Receiver

A/V SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

Acoustic Energy Evo 3B
Artcoustic RANGE
Audica RANGE
B&W RANGE
B&W Mini Theatre RANGE
KEF KHT1005
KEF KHT2005.2
KEF Q7 AV
M&K RANGE
Monitor Audio RANGE
Quad L-Series
Wharfedale Diamond 9 HCP
Yamaha YSP RANGE

SUBWOOFERS

B&W RANGE
M&K RANGE
MJ Acoustics RANGE
Monitor Audio RANGE
Quad L Series
REL RANGE
Wharfedale Diamond SW150

PLASMA

Fujitsu RANGE
Hitachi RANGE
LG RANGE
Loewe RANGE
Panasonic RANGE
Pioneer PDP436XDE 43"
Pioneer PDP506XDE 50"
Samsung RANGE

LCD TV

Hitachi RANGE
LG RANGE
Loewe RANGE
Panasonic RANGE
Philips RANGE
Samsung RANGE
Sharp Aquos RANGE
Toshiba RANGE

PROJECTORS

Optoma RANGE
Screenplay RANGE
ScreenPlay SP5700 (REFURBISHED, LAST FEW)
Sharp RANGE
Sim 2 RANGE
Sim 2 C3X
ThemeScene RANGE

ACCESSORIES

We have a wide range of Accessories from QED, Soundstyle, Grado, Goldring and more...

Who are Sevenoaks?

Established as Sevenoaks Hi-Fi in 1972, we have grown steadily onto one of the leading independent home entertainment specialists in the UK, earning a reputation for outstanding service, choice and value for money. In 1995, reflecting our commitment to the emergent new technologies in home cinema, our name was changed to Sevenoaks Sound & Vision. We now have 49 stores across the land stocking a broad range of exceptional equipment and accessories.

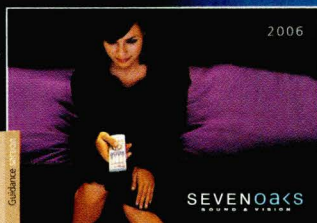
How to shop at Sevenoaks

When it comes to making big decisions about what to buy, there's no substitute for actually road-testing your prospective purchases - seeing, hearing and experiencing the products in action, with the benefit of our expert knowledge and guidance to help you choose.

Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Guide

New 2006 Edition

Pick-up a copy of our new **68 Page Guide** at your nearest Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store or order a copy via our Website. The brochure will be posted to you (UK mainland addresses only) **FREE OF CHARGE**.



New Sevenoaks Website

The fully re-designed Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest store. You will find information on our comprehensive product range plus hundreds of stock clearance items available from our stores nationwide.

To find out more, just click on www.ssav.com

Custom Install **A Vision for Every Home**

Many people would love to have the latest cutting edge home entertainment technology - but they don't want it at the expense of their living space. Home cinema, high quality hi-fi, DVD recorders and High-Definition TV make viewing and listening a pleasure, but the more kit added to a home, the more cluttered it can become.

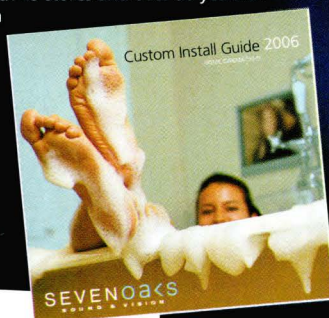
The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision **CUSTOM INSTALL SERVICE** can solve such problems. By working with customers to design their ideal home entertainment set-up, we can hide all the wires and help make the most of any space with a bespoke solution which complements the home rather than fighting against it.

Our service ranges from the most simple, affordable solutions to the most extravagant. We can transform every room and every home, whatever the needs and whatever the budget.

At Sevenoaks, we create bespoke home entertainment systems of the highest quality. We work with individual customers, architects, developers and interior designers to bring you the best in home entertainment. With 49 stores and over 30 years of experience, Sevenoaks creates systems that can transform your life.

New Custom Install Guide 2006

Our new Custom Install Guide 2006 is now available. Pick-up a copy at your nearest Sevenoaks store **FREE OF CHARGE** or order via ssav.com (UK mainland addresses only).



SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

NATIONWIDE STORE GUIDE

- ABERDEEN** 01224 252797
● 57 CROWN STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*
- BEDFORD** 01234 272779
● 29-31 ST PETERS 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 BURLINGHAM 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
- 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 *OPEN SUNDAY*
- GUILDFORD** 01483 536666
● 73B NORTH STREET
- HOLBORN** 020 7837 7540
● 144-148 GRAYS INN ROAD
- HULL** 01482 587171
● 1 SAVILE ROW, SAVILE STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*
- KINGSTON** 020 8547 0717
● 43 FIFE ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*
- LEEDS** 0113 245 2775
● 62 NORTH STREET
- LEICESTER** 0116 253 6567
● 10 LOSEBY LANE
- LINCOLN** 01522 527397
● 20-22 CORPORATION STREET (*OFF HIGH STREET*)
- LOUGHTON** 020 8532 0770 **NEW**
● 7-9 GOLDINGS HILL
- MAIDSTONE** 01622 686366
● 96 WEEK STREET
- MANCHESTER** 0161 831 7969
● 69 HIGH ST, CITY CENTRE
- NEWCASTLE** 0191 221 2320
● 19 NEWGATE STREET
- NORWICH** 01603 767605
● 29-29A ST GILES STREET
- NOTTINGHAM** 0115 911 2121
● 597-599 MANSFIELD ROAD, SHERWOOD
- OXFORD** 01865 241773
● 41 ST CLEMENTS STREET
- PETERBOROUGH** 01733 897697
● 36-38 PARK ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*
- PLYMOUTH** 01752 226011
● 107 CORNWALL STREET
- POOLE** 01202 671677
● LATIMER HOUSE, 44-46 HIGH STREET
- PRESTON** 01772 825777
● 40-41 LUNE STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*
- READING** 0118 959 7768
● 3-4 KINGS WALK SHOPPING CENTRE
- SEVENOAKS** 01732 459555
● 109-113 LONDON ROAD
- SHEFFIELD** 0114 255 5861
● 635 QUEENS ROAD, HEELEY *OPEN SUNDAY*
- SOLI HULL** 0121 733 3727
● 149-151 STRATFORD ROAD
- SOUTHAMPTON** 023 8033 7770
● 33 LONDON ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*
- SOUTHGATE** 020 8886 2777
● 77 CHASE SIDE
- STAINES** 01784 460777
● 4 THAMES STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*
- SWINDON** 01793 610992
● 8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD
- SWISS COTTAGE** 020 7722 9777
● 21 NORTHWAYS PDE, FINCHLEY RD *OPEN SUNDAY*
- TUNBRIDGE WELLS** 01892 531543
● 28-30 ST JOHNS ROAD
- WATFORD** 01923 213533
● 478 ST ALBANS ROAD
- WEYBRIDGE** 01932 828525
● 43 CHURCH STREET, THE QUADRANT
- WITHAM (ESSEX)** 01376 501733
● 1 THE GROVE CENTRE
- WOLVERHAMPTON** 01902 312225
● 29-30 CLEVELAND STREET
- YEovil** 01935 700078 **NEW**
● 14 SILVER STREET

OPENING HOURS: PLEASE TELEPHONE OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE
E-MAIL: [insert store location]@ssav.com



STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

TOP BUYS



NAD
C352 £350

NAD made its name building world-beating budget amps, and the C352 continues that tradition in style – powerful, dynamic and thoroughly enjoyable with all music types.



Arcam
DiVA A90 £890

Top dog in Arcam's DiVA range is this excellent integrated amp. Its strengths include a slick, flexible user interface and beautifully smooth and detailed sound.



Naim
NAC 112x/NAP 150x £1,475

Naim's new entry-level pre/power amp is a fabulously engaging combo. As you'd expect, rhythm and timing are to the fore, with a healthy dollop of finesse to boot.



Primare
PRE30/A30.2 £2,400

Beautifully made and with a sound to match, this Scandinavian pre/power combines warmth and body with energy and detail – a truly musical performer.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO AMPLIFIERS**

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £1,000								
	Arcam DIVA A80	600	A very competent mid-range amp with a sophisticated control system and crisp, detailed sound	6	●	●	●	90 251
●	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Very well specified, well built, a delight to use and a real musical all-rounder	7	opt	●	●	90 273
●	Audio Analogue Primo	475	Small, stylish amp with a smooth and beguiling sound. Makes a fine partner for AA's equally compact Primo CD player	5	opt	●		70 255
●	Cambridge Audio Azur 540A	200	A well built and fully featured amplifier that costs this little should not sound this revealing	6	opt	●	●	50 255
	Cyrus 6vs	600	Best seen in a Cyrus rack but capable of sweet sounds elsewhere too. Impressively clean and agile but lacking musical grunt	7		●	●	40 262
	Cyrus 8vs	800	Slightly inferior to Cyrus 6vs, but the tables are turned with the add-on PSX-R power supply – in that form it's a real Best Buy	7		●	●	70 261
●	Electrocompaniet EC13	999	Large and fairly powerful, with individual looks and very refined sound	6		●		70 262
	Exposure 3010I	1000	Full-bodied and enjoyable sound: phono stage well worth an extra £200	5	opt	●		100 273
●	Exposure 2010 S	599	Beneath the unassuming exterior lurks a very capable performer that's passionate about music	6	opt	●		75 262
●	Marantz PM4400 OSE	250	Highly competent and well specified – a lively performer that makes great music	5	●		●	50 256
●	Musical Fidelity X-80	600	The entry-level to Musical Fidelity's amplifier range sounds both powerful and refined	4		●		55 255
●	NAD C352	350	A dynamic and musical amp at a bargain price – another budget classic from NAD	7		●	●	55 253
●	Naim Nait 5i	699	A trade-off of more power and better connectivity against less inputs works surprisingly well in a grumpy, musical manner	4		●		50 252
●	Onkyo A-933	500	PCM amplifier facilitates dinky toy packaging, with full size performance, and more engaging musically than you might expect	5			●	80 275
●	Primare I21	750	A confident and energetic amp, with just a touch of veiling at times. Great build quality	4		●		75 273
	Rotel RA-03	499	Does all the basics commendably, only losing out to dearer competition in imaging and fine detail	5	●	●	●	70 273
●	Rotel RA-1062	595	A great value amp with a detailed and engaging sound, and the ability to drive almost any speaker in its path	5	●	●		95 251
●	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25 224
ABOVE £1,000								
●	Arcam FMJ A32	1,200	Ultra-civilised amp with plenty of features that's also highly revealing and musical	7	●	●	●	100 266
●	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6	●	●	●	100 275
●	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt	●		85 255
●	Creek Destiny	1,100	Adds impressive high-end virtues to the excellent basic performance we've come to expect from Creek	6	opt	●		100 277
●	Denon PMA-2000AE	1,200	Unusually refined and detailed medium power design with the attributes necessary for good stereo only SACD replay	5	●			80 275
●	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt		100 277
●	Exposure XXXV	1,599	Musical, powerful, tuneful and controlled, though not always the most analytical	6	opt	●		80 271
●	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6		●		180 275
●	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200 247
●	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5	●	●		75 271
●	Marantz PM-11S1	2,500	A good-looking, well-endowed, high-quality amp that's a great match for the impressive SA-11S1 stereo CD/SACD player	6	●	●	●	100 265
●	Moon i-3	1,595	Powerful Canadian amp whose lively presentation is particularly suited to big-scale music	6		●		100 265
●	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6			●	100 267
●	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4		●		40 268
●	Unison Research Unico 200	3,000	Hybrid integrated with high power/quality low power modes combines much of the best of solid state and valve design	5			●	200 269

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO AMPLIFIERS**

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL
UP TO £2,000								
●	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	100 227
●	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz	●		2	●	266
●	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured	●	●	6	●	125 270
●	Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power	1,098	Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated	●	●	6	●	75 264
●	Naim NAC 112x/NAP 150x	1,475	Uprated entry-level Naim pre/power is a master of musical communication	●	●	6	●	50 262
●	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with good strong sound and just a little veiling	●	●	5	●	136 256
ABOVE £2,000								
●	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little	●		5	opt	273
●	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B push-pull design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●			20 231
●	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●		5	opt	277

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	●	300	241
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		●	300	249
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269
EC	Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Prem 350SA	20,000	Valve preamp and solid-state power deliver some of the most transparent and naturally dynamic sounds around	●	●	5		●	350	264
E	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8		opt	80	276
	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6	●		50	254
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection		●				180	253
EC	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	●		5	opt	●		265
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●				200	247
EC	Halcro dm10/dm68	25,550	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	●	225	243
EC	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt		125	250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		●				700	234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●		4		●		238
	Naim NAC 202/NAP 200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		●	70	241
E	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●				140	208
E	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6		●		233
E	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer	●	●	7		●	128	256

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 is where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have built-in amplification and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as their movie

DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo. There

are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
DSP-AX757SE £499
 If you're looking for a multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is your best bet below £500.



Arcam
DIVA AVR300 £1,300
 Here's one for those who value great sound over numerous gizmos and gadgets – an integrated AV amp for audiophiles.



Denon
AVC-A11XV £2,500
 A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing formats without sacrificing sound quality.



Arcam
FMJ AV8/P7 £5,750
 A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand – a top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

MB BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5 CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
MB	Arcam Diva AVR300	1,300	Cracking all-round music and movie ability sets the Arcam apart from the AV crowd	●	8	●	100	257
EC	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A1XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o		11	●	140	273
EC	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inelegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously		●	●	170	266
EC	Lexicon RV-8	5,000	Classy multi-zone receiver lacks high tech digital attributes (HDMI etc) but majors on very effective audio engineering	●	10	●	140	267
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmickry	●	3	●	160	255
EC	Pathos Cinema-X	4,750	No processing, just sexy Italian style, a sextet of valves and the chance of 450 watts in stereo! Cultured sound, too		5		110	270
MB	Pioneer VSA-AX5Ai	1,200	A well specified receiver with a powerful, upfront sound. Includes i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	●	100	248
MB	Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai	3,000	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements		10	●	150	260
MB	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	●	7	●	100	273
MB	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	●	7	●	100	260
EC	Sony TA-DA9000ES	2,600	Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with i.Link encrypted outputs	●	10	●	200	253
MB	Yamaha DSP-AX757SE	499	Exceptional sounding budget/mid price receiver offers brilliant sound per pound; ergonomics could be better	●	9	●	100	273
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
MB	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got superb purist 5.1		8	●	90	250
	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power	●	8	●	135	275
EC	Arcam FMJ AV8/P7	5,750	High-quality preamp/processor (£3,150) and seven-channel power amp (£2,600). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	●	180	235
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
	Cyrus AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier		4			260
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	●	50	238
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value – processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
MB	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc
7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification.
5-CHANNEL POWER (W) Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.

Billy Vee
SOUND • SYSTEMS

SAVE UP TO 50% ON EX-DISPLAY BARGAINS

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 Credit options are available for purchases exceeding £660, please call for details. S/H = Pre-Owned unit. £&OE

Arcam AV8 A/V Preamp S/H (2Yr G/tee)	(3150.00)	£1795.00	Linn Majik Amplifier - Blk S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(945.00)	£375.00
Arcam P7 7 x 100w Power Amp S/H (2Yr G/tee)	(2995.00)	£1695.00	Linn LK100 Power amplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(650.00)	£325.00
Arcam FMJ CD33 CD Player (2Yr G/tee)	(1349.00)	£795.00	Linn LK140 Power amplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(750.00)	£459.00
AVI Lab Series CD Player (2Yr G/tee)	(1400.00)	£849.00	Linn 2250 Power Amplifier Silver (2Yr G/tee)	(1995.00)	£1195.00
AVI Pro 9 Speakers - Cherry (S/H) (2Yr G/tee)	(799.00)	£445.00	Naim 112 Preamplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(660.00)	£445.00
B&W DM604s3 Floor Speakers S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(799.00)	£495.00	Naim NAC52 Preamplifier Olive S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(3685.00)	£2190.00
Denon DV1400 Multi-format DVD Player (1Yr G/tee)	(399.00)	£219.00	Naim SuperCap P/Sup New Style S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(2315.00)	£1795.00
KEF Q Compact Speakers - Silver (2Yr G/tee)	(189.00)	£129.00	PMC OB1 Speakers - Oak E/D (2Yr G/tee)	(2450.00)	£1795.00
KEF Q4 Speakers (Cherry) (2Yr G/tee)	(399.00)	£249.00	Sugden PhonoMaster Bijou Preamp (2Yr G/tee)	(679.00)	£499.00
Linn Kairn Phono Preamplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(2200.00)	£859.00	Sugden CD21 CD Player As New (1Yr G/tee)	(1049.00)	£649.00
Linn 5103 AV Processor - Silver S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(4500.00)	£1995.00	Sugden A21a Line Amplifier As New (1Yr G/tee)	(949.00)	£595.00
Linn Kaber Spkrs + Stands - Blk S/H (6 Mth G/tee)	(1190.00)	£395.00	Yamaha HD1300 H/Disk CD Player (1Yr G/tee)	(599.00)	£429.00

For latest addition to our pre-owned and ex-display bargains please visit the marketplace section of our new website at billyvee.co.uk.

New Brand: Bryston

Bryston B100 SST



This new amplifier from Bryston is only their second integrated amplifier in 32 years. Not only will this 100wpc Amplifier bring your speakers to life but your CD Player and any other digital sources as well with its stunning optional onboard D/A Converter (4 inputs).

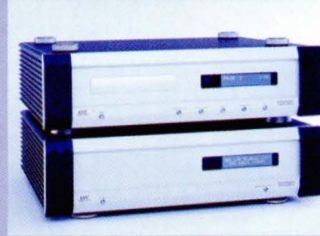
Was it worth the wait? You bet! Don't just take our word for it - come and listen for yourself!



Musical Fidelity KW (NEW)

KW DM25 Transport & DAC

Here's the problem... In general people believe that more expensive a product is the better it must be.



The kW DM25 system proves this not to be the case.

The kW DM25 system delivers dramatically more of that per pound than any other system available.



New Brand: PMC



PMC is a UK based, world-leading manufacturer of professional monitor and audiophile speaker systems that have won numerous awards - everywhere!

Take a listen to any of the models in the range and its easy to understand why PMC speakers sit in so many homes and studios around the world!

Models include:

DB1+, FB1, GB1 and OB1

The OB1 design, is not only ground breaking in its innovative bass loading system, but it also allows the listener to engage a piece of music and awe at the sheer scale of a truly massive sound stage. Superb!



New Brand: VPI

Super Scoutmaster Signature

A direct development of both the state of the art VPI TNT HR-X and the Scout entry level turntable.

The standard Scout uses an all acrylic platter, this one uses a composite platter manufactured from two slabs of acrylic, sandwiching a steel plate.

The bearing is the same design as used throughout the VPI range and is very much at the heart of the Scout's design. Harry Weisfeld has taken the drive system already used in the awesome HR-X.

Ships with a JMW - 9 Signature Tone Arm, critically acclaimed Worldwide and is wired with Nordost Valhalla Micro Monofilament tonearm cable.

The performance of the VPI Super Scoutmaster truly challenges the very best available. Retailing at £4995.



Hyperion

Hyperion 938



When a product like the Hyperion 938 wins this many awards in a single year, you know to expect something pretty special!

The beautiful piano high gloss finish and attention to detail can hardly fail to impress but its 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 your ears will tell you is just how balanced the 938 is. You really cannot fault its performance in any area.

Simply sensational!



New Brand: Marantz

Premium Series

In the long search for the perfect hi-fi, the Marantz philosophy is simple: to maintain the purity and integrity of the original signal at all times.



Premium-series are built to respond to the steepest signal attacks with incredible speed and accuracy, so none of the subtleties in the ebb and flow of the music are lost. Neither is the scale of music or truly massive sound stage.

We have four NEW products on demonstration:

Integrated Amplifiers
PM-15S1 (NEW) and PM-11S1 (NEW)

Super Audio CD Players
SA-15S1 (NEW) and SA11-S1 (NEW)

New Brand: EAR/Yoshino

EAR/Yoshino

Shadow Audio are very excited and pleased to represent EAR/Yoshino in Scotland.



All EAR amplifiers are truly original, including the custom transformers, metal work, printed circuit board. All the work of Tim de Paravicini.

Tim works by a simple premise: If he designs it, it must be a better design than anything else, or he will not manufacture it. His sole goal is taking audio to the furthest possible point of development. Current research is taking him further along this path than any single competitor.

We have the full-range of products on demonstration and the following will be arriving shortly:

Master Disk Turntable.
Primary Drive Loudspeaker.

New Brand: Pass Labs

Pass X.5 series power amplifiers

Select refinements from the balanced single-ended Class A circuits of the XA series amplifiers have been incorporated into several new X.5 series models, significantly improving their subjective performance while keeping the high power and reliability.

The new and sensational Pass Labs X350.5 and equally sensational X1 two box pre-amp have just arrived at Shadow Audio.

The entire natural colour and dynamics; from the thunder of a Bosendorfer piano to the subtle whisperings of a Stradivarius are delivered with startling precision. The air, space and emotional content of the recording come to life. The actual air and physical presence of the performing artists are thus recreated with uncanny palpable realism.

Contact Shadow today to arrange a Pass Labs demonstration.



Eastern Electric

MiniMax



The MiniMax Pre-amp (£769), Power Amplifier (£989) and CD Player (£879)

are three of the smallest, compact, valve products available in the world. Its not just their size, but the attention to detail and the sound, which truly amazes!

"... it's a remarkably tactile sound, tightly focused and projected well beyond the boundaries of the cabinets in all planes - truly, expensively three-dimensional sounding."

"If what you crave, however, is genuine high-end magic - a level of believability and musical coherence that you thought was the preserve of house-priced systems - this combo just might be the answer to your dreams."

David Vivian
Hi-Fi Choice March 2006



WHERE YOU SEE THIS BLUE SYMBOL - IT MEANS EACH PRODUCT IN THE BRAND COMES WITH OUR PEACE OF MIND, NO RISK, 30-DAY MONEY BACK OPTION* (CONDITIONS APPLY)



The finest selection of Hi-Fi Products in the UK, all under one roof:



ART Audio, ART Loudspeakers, Audio Analogue, Aurum Cantus, Audio Zone, Audio Physic, Audionet, ATC, AVI, Bel Canto, Black Rhodium, Blue Note, Border Patrol, Bryston, CEC, Custom Design, Croft, EAR/Yoshino, Eastern Electric, GamuT, Goldring, Graaf, Hovland, Hyperion, Isol-8, IsoTek, JAS Audio, JungSon, Living Voice, Lumley, Marantz, McIntosh, Micromega, Musical Fidelity, Musical First, Nordost, Opera, Origin Live, Ortofon, Pass Labs, Pathos, PMC, Project, QED, Qinpu, Ref 3a, Resolution, Roksan, Shanling, Soundstyle, Stello, TacT Audio, Triangle, Trichord, Townshend Audio, Unison Research, Wadia, Whest, Wilson Benesch, Vertex AQ, VPI and many more.

New Brand: Audio Zone

Audio Zone products are completely handmade in Canada. Each component down to the tiniest detail is beautifully machined. High-spec parts, short signal paths and attention to detail are quite simply staggering for the price.

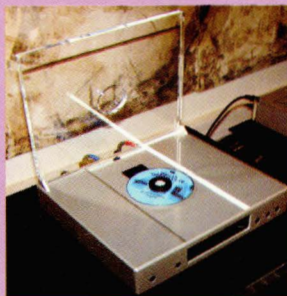
The range consists of four products:

AMP-1 Integrated
PRE-T1 Pre Amp
AMP-2 Monoblocks
DAC-1 D/A Converter.

Prices start from £795 (DAC-1). Shown on the right is the unique passive PRE-T1 Pre Amp (£1,695). The best passive Pre we have ever heard!



Micromega



Micromega Aria

It's been a long wait, but world-famous manufacturer 'Micromega' - have finally unleashed their new Flagship Reference CD Player.

The Aria follows in the giant footsteps of the famous Duo and Trio models in the form of a single-chassis design. Available in black or silver, the £2,150 'Aria' without a doubt, will make its mark just as those have before it.



Micromega Killer Combo!

For a limited time only you can purchase the stunning Micromega A80 Integrated Amplifier (£659) and 'Special Edition' CDSE CD Player (£599) for the amazing price of:

£999* ~~£1258~~

Black/Silver Finish

*subject to conditions



JAS-Audio



JAS Audio ORSA

The 2-way Orsa speaker (£1,399 pair) 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.

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.

Quotes from recent press reviews include:

"In some ways it always feels more rewarding to review a product that punches above its weight and this is a special little speaker that sets a price/performance yardstick that is hard to beat."

Chris Thomas
Hi-Fi+ Issue 42

"Impressive sophistication considering the £1,399 per pair asking price, but the build quality and finish are, well bananas."

David Vivian
Hi-Fi Choice March 2006

QinPu Amplifiers

QinPu A-1.0x

"So, we know it isn't perfect. But what amp is? Some people might ignore this Qinpu because of its four-star rating. That would be a mistake."

What Hi-Fi, Feb 2006

At £299 you will not hear another amplifier offer a performance that comes even close to this very special box of tricks.

Delivering 100wpc the QinPu will happily partner and drive speakers costing 10 times as much!

Quite simply a bright star among amplifiers...



IsoTek / Nordost

Special Offers

On the following IsoTek/Nordost mains filtration systems:

IsoTek NOVA (new)	£1695
IsoTek Titan (new)	£1495
IsoTek GII Minisub	£545
IsoTek GII Solus	£325
Nordost THOR	£1599

FREE delivery, FREE Iso8/Isotek mains cable worth £49 and a 30-day money back guarantee*.

Nordost THOR

(shown on the right)

The Nordost Thor is an upgradeable solution to AC mains power distribution. By systematically improving the quality of the input and output power cords the performance of the unit increases dramatically. Upgrading through the range of Nordost cables, utilising Shiva, Vishnu and Valhalla, prioritising the input cable first will offer major performance enhancements. The THOR is a stunning achievement.



Gill Solus



Gill Minisub



Titan



THOR

Monthly Best Buy!



JAS Audio Super Tweeter (£649 pair)

Why change your speakers when you can easily improve them at a fraction of the cost of a new pair.

Connect the JAS Audio Super Tweeter to your existing speaker terminals and then place each unit on top of each speaker - that's it - simple!

Housed in a beautiful aluminium cylindrical shape cabinet, each speaker weighs less than 2lb. Using a very special twin-ribbon tweeter with 100kHz frequency response it dramatically improves soundstaging, clarity, layering, openness, airiness and resolution. Get ready to discover and restore what up until now has been missing from your music!

COMING SOON - the free Shadow Audio e-mail Newsletter. Full of news and exclusive offers to subscribers. To sign-up early, e-mail us with the word 'ADDME' as the subject!

STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



Rega R3 £448

A neat little floorstander that really knows how to communicate with music. Its sound is crisp and agile, and what it lacks in sheer bass weight it makes up for in energy.



KEF iQ9 £800

This superbly judged floorstander delivers a clean, powerful and transparent sound, with impressively taut bass. A very fine all-rounder for the money.



B&W 805S £1,600

A superbly well-engineered standmount that's capable of delivering magnificent musical communication, alongside superior subtlety and delicacy.



Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 £3,500

This extraordinary speaker stands at the pinnacle of Mordaunt-Short's current range. State of the art resolution and imaging are among its many attributes.

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AcousticEnergy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24	A	30	●			226
	Acoustic Energy Linear 1	250	Not at its best with classical but a well integrated, involving, timed aligned speaker nevertheless	19,36,26	A+	50	●			277
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26	A-	55		●		253
<input type="checkbox"/>	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21	A-	65	●			260
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23			●	226
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29	A	25	●			234
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W CM1	499	Luxury miniature has neutral, slightly laid back sound, with low coloration and fine imaging	16,5,28,28	A-	40	●			277
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●		231
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29	A	35	●			253
<input type="checkbox"/>	Castle Richmond 3i	320	Does most things well and the most important thing - musical communication - remarkably well for the price	17,33,23	A	60	●			260
<input type="checkbox"/>	Castle Conway 3	930	Lovely real wood finish and a beautifully balanced sound, fine dynamics and transients, but might have more 'air'	22,91,27	●	A+	30	●		237
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dali Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	●	A	37	●		271
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dali Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34	●	A+	22	●		275
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24	A	40	●			215
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dynaudio Audience 52	557	Brilliant neutrality, though a little understated dynamically (wood veneered version, as tested - £647)	20,33,26	A-	30	●			250
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20	●	A-	28	●		273
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60	●			241
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40			●	269
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M12.2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25	A-	40	●			265
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25	●	A-	25	●		275
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMlab Chorus 707 S	350	The size and shape might be unfashionable, but this is an outstanding all-round performer at a very sharp price	24,49,30	A	25	●			251
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMlab Chorus 716 S	550	Not the smoothest around, but combines coherent voicing with fine dynamic expression and real authority	22,95,30	●	A	20	●		250
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMlab Chorus 726 S	780	Big generous sound with good dynamic freedom, hampered by some voice-band congestion	22,100,32	●	A+	55	●		253
<input type="checkbox"/>	Harbeth NRG2	650	Strikingly styled standmount majors on dynamic excitement at some expense in smoothness and coloration	19,34,29	A+	42			●	263
<input type="checkbox"/>	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	●	A	25	●		275
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF iQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	●	A	25	●		273
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	●	A+	28	●		271
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio Bronze B4	350	A beautifully balanced loudspeaker with fine overall dynamic range and good imaging	19,85,26	●	A	23	●		255
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Too much bling, boldness and dynamics mark it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load which works well in big rooms	90,18,27	●	A	33	●	●	276
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906	350	Capable and engaging, this neat design will complement the majority of sub-£500-per-component systems	18,85,27	●	A	45	●		254
<input type="checkbox"/>	Naim n-SATS	695	Very discreet and informative, if a bit lean and forward. Just add an n-SUB for excellent all round results	20,29,21	A	50			●	268
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nbion NX6	899	Very nice cabinet work for the money and a decent speaker it makes too with good imaging and low noise	21,38,30	A	46	●			275

SPECS KEY SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active - the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes - the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO SPEAKERS** *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	PMC DB1+	625	Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced	16,29,24		A	50		261	
SP	PMC TB2+	795	This fine allrounder has a lovely laid-back neutrality, fine transparency, low coloration and a sweet treble	20,41,31		A	30		261	
HE	PMC GB1	995	Ultra-compact floorstander is beautifully clean, articulate and free from boxiness, with a notably delicate top end	16,92,24		A+	30		257	
HE	PMC TB2+	795	Classy transmission line stand-mount has superior midband, restrained presence and a bright clean top end	20,40,30		A	28		275	
HE	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	699	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its Signature brother costs £200 more and is even better!	15,27,23		A+	40		267	
HE	Quad 21L	695	Elegant lacquer finish floorstander has a smooth, well balanced sound, even bass and good detail projection	21,80,26		A+	25		263	
HE	Rega R1	298	Cute baby sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a touch thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	15,32,24		A	50		269	
HE	Rega R3	448	Discreet, pretty and fine value. A little lightweight but impressively open, it delivers music with great agility	20,76,28		A	40		265	
HE	Tannoy Fusion 4	350	This big d'Appolito twin two-way has fine coherence and dynamics. A neutral and even all-rounder	21,97,29		A	20		255	
	Tannoy Sensys DC2	649	Has impressive scale and weight with fine stereo imaging, but is also rather laid back, lacking easy agility	21,97,29		A	20		250	
HE	Triangle Antal ES	975	Neither pretty nor smooth but a very exuberant and involving communicator, with plenty of scale and expression	20,108,34		A	20		263	
HE	Triangle Titus ES	370	Not pretty but busy, coherent and involving, if a little thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	18,37,30		A-	40		269	
HE	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34		A	40		265	
ABOVE £1,000										
HE	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,690	Luxury miniature has a laid-back but bouncy sound, a marvellous dynamic range and very superior imaging	19,31,25		A-	30		251	
	Acoustic Energy AE3 MkII	4,490	A beautifully neutral speaker with very wide dynamic range and superior imaging, plus lovely Art Deco styling	19,99,29		A	20		251	
HE	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,200	Slim, laid back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range	17,99,26		A	28		275	
HE	ATC SCM35	1,999	If you want to hear the uncoloured truth about your record collection in all its glory, this is a speaker to treasure	23,88,30		A-	48		250	
HE	Audio Physic Spark 3	1,499	Classy and discreetly laid back floorstander has delightfully neutral balance and surprising bass weight	15,98,22		A+	27		271	
HE	Audiovector Mi 3 Signature	2,320	Smooth and beautifully balanced with superb neutrality, wide dynamic range and a warm, sweet character	20,100,29		A-	24		260	
HE	Audiovector Mi 3 Super	1,596	Dynamically very expressive, clear and intelligible voices, arguably even better value than the Signature version	20,100,29		A	20		267	
HE	Aurum Cantus Leisure 3SE	1,200	Fabulous lacquer finish and a classy ribbon tweeter. Sounds smooth and sweet, if a touch laid back	25,40,30		A	28		263	
HE	B&W 704	1,400	Cleverly tapered enclosure and external tweeter delivers superior bass and treble, with a laid-back midband	22,96,32		A	20		257	
EC	B&W 802D	8,000	Great timing, superior dynamics and a sweet top end all enhance musical communication. Makes sweet music	37,115,56		A	<20		267	
HE	B&W 805S	1,600	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back but otherwise a real delight	24,39,33		A	25		271	
HE	B&W 703	2,000	Bass is immensely powerful and even, and the overall sound is lively and dynamic, though not overly smooth	23,101,36		A-	20		260	
	Beauhorn B2.2 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75		A+	80		244	
HE	Canton Vento 809DC	1,800	Quick, lively and agile, with fine overall coherence and expressive dynamics. A thoroughly impressive allrounder	25,112,35		A	30		267	
	Chario Cygnus	1,200	Beautiful solid walnut sides. Port tuning suspect, but laid back sound has fine delicacy, imaging and refinement	20,96,27		A-	28		275	
EC	Dali Helicon 400	2,999	Advanced drivers and enclosure give a generous sound with wide dynamic range and no boxiness	22,103,46		A	20		264	
EC	Eclipse TD510	1,200	Replacement for the TD512 does astonishing things with musical timing. £600 floor stands also recommended	24,36,26		A	45		277	
	Elac FS 607 X-Jet	5,000	Highly revealing and capable, the mid/tweeter provides impressive detail and depth of soundstage	29,108,33		A	28		269	
EC	Focal-JMLab Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53		A-	20		248	
EC	Focal-JMLab Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53		A+	30		255	
EC	Focal-JMLab Electra 1027 Be	4,000	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,511,35		A-	25		276	
EC	Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia Be	3,799	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,42,5,38		A	50		245	
	Focal-JMLab Profile 908	1,300	Open and revealing especially of spatial and atmospheric detail, makes up for its bass restraint with joi de vivre	23,39,27,5		A	50		274	
	Focal Profile 918	1,999	Strikingly original styling, well balanced with sweet treble, but lacks smoothness and presence is very laid back	23,99,35		A-	25		277	
EC	Gamut L5	5,900	Impressive build and sophisticated driver design make the L5 a stunning speaker with rare transparency levels	20,116,43		A-	32		271	
EC	Krell Resolution 2	6,497	Large, but good looking with Sonus Faber type elasticated front. Musically a great full bandwidth all-rounder	122,29,61		B	28		273	
	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	Gloriously coherent and dynamic midband, though the top end is restrained and bass was uneven in our room	22,86,28		A-	30		247	

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Hi-Fi News, GII Titan

"...one of the most cost-effective home cinema and Hi-Fi upgrades there is."

What Hi-Fi, GII Vision



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Hi-Fi News, GII Mini Sub

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27	● A+	35	●		244
	MartinLogan Mosaic	1,799	Curious hybrid construction marries many panel speaker-like attributes with moving coil simplicity	24,102,30	● A-	46	●		257
<input type="checkbox"/>	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	● A-	46	●		245
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6	3,500	Revolutionary enclosure design and aspirated tweeter make for a fast, hi-res ride	24,121,37	● A-	35	●		264
	Naim Ariva	1,275	Cute and discreet floorstander has superb bass and a wide dynamic range, but it could be smoother and sweeter	23,88,31	● A	25		●	259
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neat Elite SE	1,499	Smooth and natural performer with notably expressive midband. Fine voice articulation and unusual sweetness	20,90,18	● A	25	●		267
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neat Motive 1	1,200	Beautifully neutral balance sounds open without aggression. Fine midband but could be more authoritative	16,92.5,20	● A-	20	●		276
<input type="checkbox"/>	PMC FB1+	1,695	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30	● A	20	●		260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47	A-	25	●		237
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	● A+	20	●		254
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega R7	1,498	Super-slim and super-smooth floorstander has fine agility with a slightly bright overall character	27,98,35	● A	25	●		271
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega R9	2,498	This subtle, laid back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass	17,103,39	● A	20	●		256
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	● A	30	●		265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30	A-	48	●	●	274
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	● A	22	●		259
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sonus Faber Concerto Domus	1,799	Great choice, especially for acoustic material, which performs significantly above its price level	21,99,31	● A	35	●		270
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sonus Faber Cremona A.	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32	A	48	●		246
	Spendor S6e	1,495	Combines deep, powerful bass with an attractively open midband, but perhaps too much restraint up top	30,88,19	● A+	23	●		257
	Spendor S9e	2,895	An improvement on the original S9 - very entertaining at high levels with a fabulously open and weighty bass	24,101,38	● A+	40	●		256
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	● A-	25	●		240
<input type="checkbox"/>	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23	A	35	●		277
<input type="checkbox"/>	Triangle Celius ESW	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34	● A	22	●		277
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Triangle Magellan Concerto	9,995	Scintillating midrange and treble, with tuneful, well-timed bass - a thoroughly engaging musical ride	28,149,34	● A	35	●		262
<input type="checkbox"/>	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build	35,127,65	A	20	●		270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vivid Audio B1	7,750	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	● A-	40	●		261
	WEGG3 Stellar 1	4,995	A full-range sound from a small(ish) box is possible, but only if you are very careful about set up, room and amps	35,97,45	● A-	28	●		275
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23,91,37	● A	28	●		254
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,36	● A	20	●		252

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a video

monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just your listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position - this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



Naim
n-SAT/CENT/SUB £3,385
Five n-SATs, and n-CENT and an n-SUB make a highly engaging and (for Naim) discreet multichannel package.



ATC
Concept 3 £4,877
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE-OF-DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BEST BUY	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	●	opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●		241
BEST BUY	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22	●		224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28		●	224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53	●		241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●		251
	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18	●		253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
BEST BUY	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28	●		241
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A price among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38		●	262
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25		●	210
BEST BUY	Naim n-SAT/n-CENT/n-SUB	3,385	Priced here as a 5.1 package, Naim's neat n-SATs and matching sub/centre make an exceptional compact ensemble	A	6	20		●	268
	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement	A	6	29		●	269

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from walls. **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
BEST BUY	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
EDITOR'S CHOICE	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
BEST BUY	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
BEST BUY	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
EDITOR'S CHOICE	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	200	20	239

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.
BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.



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- 8x Oversampling Digital Filter • Jog Dial • Music Calendar • Variable Analogue Output • 20-Track Program Play • Display Dimmer • Optical Digital Output **Model No. DCD685**

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with CD-R / CD-RW Playback



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PLASMA SCREENS

MAKE	MODEL	Sharp	LC26GA3E
Hitachi	32PD5200	Sharp	LC20SH1E
Hitachi	42PD5300	Sharp	LC32GD1E
JVC	AV42B50	Sony	LC37GD1E
LG	RZ42PX11	Sony	KLV17HR3B
Panasonic	TH37PE30B	Sony	KLV17HR3S
Panasonic	TH37PW7B	Sony	KLV20SR3S
Panasonic	TH42PE30B	Sony	KVL23M1SI
Panasonic	TH42PW7B	Sony	KVL23M1B
Panasonic	TH50PV30B	Sony	KLV21SG2
Philips	37PF9946	Sony	KLV26HG2
Philips	42PF9966	Sony	KVL32M1SI
Philips	42PF9986	Sony	KVL32M1B
Pioneer	PDP435XDE	Sony	KDL32MRX1
Pioneer	PDP435FDE-TE	Sony	KDL42MRX1
Pioneer	PDP505XDE	Toshiba	14VL44B
Pioneer	PDP503MXEV	Toshiba	17WL46B
Samsung	PS42V4SX	Toshiba	17WLT46
Samsung	PS50P3HXX	Toshiba	23WL46
Sharp	LC37GD1E	Toshiba	27WL46B
Sony	KDEP42M1SI	Toshiba	30WL46B
Sony	KEP37M1S	Toshiba	32WL48P
Sony	KDEP37XS1		
Sony	KDEP42SX1		
Sony	KDEP42MRX1		
Vision	PM4230		
Toshiba	42WP46B		

A/V SYSTEMS

MAKE	MODEL	AIWA	AVJX33
Sony	KDEP42M1SI	Denon	DHT500SD
Sony	KEP37M1S	Denon	DHT550SD
Sony	KDEP37XS1	JVC	THS3
Sony	KDEP42SX1	JVC	THS5
Sony	KDEP42MRX1	JVC	THSWB
Vision	PM4230	JVC	THA75R
Toshiba	42WP46B	JVC	QP112AL

LCD TELEVISIONS

MAKE	MODEL	DMTech	DML4117VD
DMTech	DML4117VD	JVC	QPF30AL
Hitachi	17LD4220	JVC	QPF70AL
Hitachi	26LD5200	JVC	QPF90AL
JVC	LT17C50	LG	LHT6740
JVC	LT17D50	Panasonic	SCHT520
JVC	LT23C50	Panasonic	SCHT05
JVC	LT26D50S	Panasonic	SCHT870
JVC	LT32D50S	Panasonic	SCHT25R
LG	RZ15LA70	Panasonic	SCHT1500
LG	RZ20LA70	Panasonic	SCST1S
LG	RZ17LZ40	Panasonic	SCHT37R
LG	RZ26LZ50	Philips	LX3900SA
Loewe	MIM015C	Pioneer	DGS222
Panasonic	TX20LA2	Pioneer	DCS323
Panasonic	TX22LX2	Pioneer	DCS222MR
Panasonic	TX26LXD1	Pioneer	HC51S
Panasonic	TX32LXD1	Pioneer	DCS424
Philips	15PF8946	Pioneer	NSDV1000
Philips	17PF9946	Sanyo	DCTS780
Philips	23PF8946	Sony	DAVD150
Philips	23PF9946	Sony	HTP1200
Philips	30PF9946	Sony	DAVSB200
Philips	32PF9976	Sony	HTDDW860
Philips	23HM8821	Sony	DAVSB300
Philips	32PF9986	Sony	DAVSR1
Philips	37PF9986	Sony	DAVSB500W
Philips	42PF9986C	Sony	DAVSR3
Samsung	LE15E31SX	Sony	DAVSR2
Samsung	LW20M11CX	Sony	HTR6100
Samsung	LW17N23NX	Sony	DAVSR4W
Sanyo	27LC3	Sony	DAVLF1
Sanyo	30LD3	Thomson	DPL915VD
Sharp	LC15SH1E	Toshiba	SD44HK
Sharp	LC15L1E	Yamaha	DVXS100
		Yamaha	DVXS120

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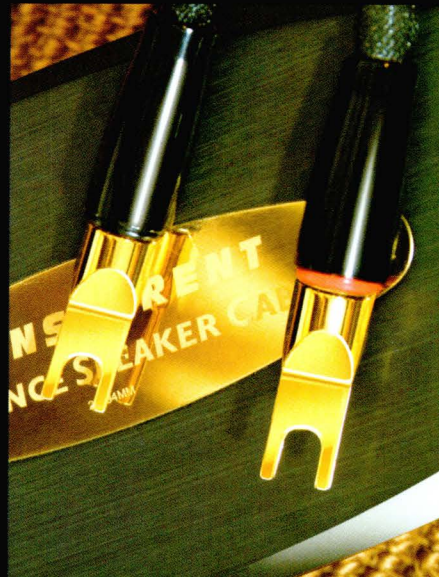
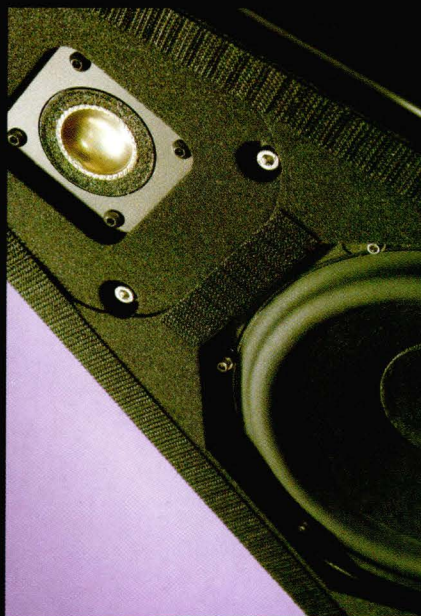
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THETA GEN. VIII

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TRANSPARENT

Reference XL Speaker Cable transfers the full power of the music along with the finest nuances of instrumental timbre and recording venue, stringent requirements for parts selection and matching, the precision placement of all components required by the XL technology Computer Model, the slow and careful assembly of the elements, and the many measurements taken to verify performance, it takes skilled artisans longer to hand-make a pair of XL cables than some companies take to build an amplifier.

WILSON SYSTEM 7.1

Wilson's unique materials research has led to the first new WATT cabinet in its 17-year history. For the first time, the Puppy has a new driver. And to better integrate the two, countless hours were spent refining the crossover.

The changes appear subtle; the difference they make is not. In terms of resolution, coherence, bass speed and impact, an already great loudspeaker has been raised to an astonishing new level. Finally, new styling cues join the WATT and Puppy more beautifully than ever.

It was a painstaking process, but at the end of the day we had to be able to say one thing with confidence: This is the best WATT/Puppy the world has ever known.

KRELL 750 MCX

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AUDIO RESEARCH REF. 3

"Breakthrough" is an overused term, but it is the most fitting word to describe the REF3. As you can probably imagine, it is difficult to write about a new product like this without sounding clichéd, but the REF3 is so good that it is startling when you hear it in your system. How is its presentation superior to the great products that have preceded it? Simply, in every way.

The REF3 is more musically transparent. It presents an immense soundstage that makes everything else sound one-dimensional. Voices and instruments have real body and weight, with pinpoint focus. The deep, powerful bass is fast, articulate, and controlled. It possesses a dynamic swing that is breathtaking. And, most importantly, there is a directness and immediacy that connects the listener with the performance. The results are simply thrilling.

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LOUDSPEAKERS

Audio Physic, ATC, Avalon, JM Labs, Konus Audio, Pen Audio, Proac, Peak Consult, Martin Logan, REL, Sonus Faber, Velodyne, Verity Audio.

CABLES / SUPPORTS / ACCESSORIES

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Avid, Benz Micro, Dynavector, Koetsu, Kuzma, Lyra, Michell, Rega, Roksan, RS Labs, SME, Triplanar, VPI.

HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier.

Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on

the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
<input type="checkbox"/>	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only				●		270		244
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250		194
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR325	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort		●			●	200	●	270
<input type="checkbox"/>	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable			●	●		270	●	266
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience			●	●		260	●	252
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stax SRS-2020 Basic Sys. II	349	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●		295	●	205
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity	●	●		●		280	●	268

SPECS KEY: **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc



Sound Fantastic



Olsons new *Sound Fantastic* range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
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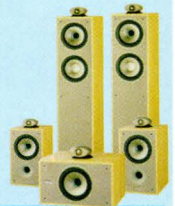
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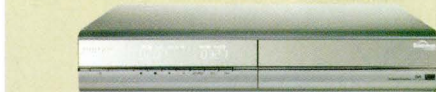


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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables				SPECIFICATIONS					
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though						248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Opera	297	Very open, clear and detailed sound, with excellent extension at frequency extremes						260
	Brilliance Hi-Fi Synergy	83	High quality materials help give this cable fine imaging: bass not as extended as some						275
	Chord Company Signature	499	Silver plated, triple screened. Some granularity but great resolving ability, a good match for Chord Signature loudspeaker cable						255
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chord Company Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass						259
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues						241
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed						248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound at a sensible price						224
<input type="checkbox"/>	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness						241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire						234
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Bay C5	55	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable						224
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Well	85	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance						241
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail						234
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price						273
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Solstice 5	70	A cable with all-round appeal – treble is slightly 'dark' but bass is excellent and the overall balance very good indeed						259
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Polar Scherzo	135	Highly detailed sound with notably solid and stable stereo imaging						E 270
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price						E 260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price						E 265
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price						E 234
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supra ZAC	32	High grade fibre and quality plugs add up to a noticeable improvement over giveaway optical leads						O 259
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types						O 234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE									
	Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll						241
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Disco	4	Lively and energetic with pretty good detail, if a touch bass-light						274
	Chord Company Signature	117	Dynamic, solid sounding cable, but it's bulky and not very tractable						255
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Electrofluidics 20/20	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available						241
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber BVS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board						227
	Kimber BPR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable						241
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber BTC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair						203
	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging - a budget bargain						276
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems						234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round						241
	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Lively, energetic and possessed of fine midrange detail and imaging						277
	Wyrewizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.						267
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Terra 5	5	Deep powerful bass, clear treble and very solid imaging add up to above-class performance						261
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight						248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Oasis 5 Biwire	38	Full-bodied and precise sound across the board – an excellent performer in bi-wire or single-wire mode						262

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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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** ,

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53,5,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Aspect 650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright	62	49,44		4	Metal	271
	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
	Isobue 'The Stand'	460	Attractive modular design that's as easy on the ear as on the eye	47	48,40		4	MDF	247
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14,5,18	●		3	202
	Custom Design RS 300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16,5,18	●		2	202
	hne Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20	●		1	220
	Kudos S50	159	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!	61	17,15	●	●	5	261
	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		4	220
	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48			0	202

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand.



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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

S.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz) and 'upper bass' the top octave (80-160Hz).

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp). Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire). Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced ('AES/EBU') interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

WOOFER Bass driver.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



What



How &



Where..

TO BUY YOUR HI-FI SYSTEM



“...too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing.”

Oscar Wilde

Isn't it easy to buy a new system? You read the magazine product reviews, you find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price, you order the system, get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a lot of wasted money. It's likely that the system will help you lose interest in music pretty rapidly. The problem is that there are more myths about hi-fi than Aesop's Fables. CD gives you perfect sound. All CD players sound the same. A £50 CD player plays high fidelity music. All magazine reviewers are experts. Big speakers are always better than small ones. More watts per channel is everything. MP3 format gives you high quality. A collection of 'Best Buy' components will be a great system. And so on and so on. All myths.

Music - the real aim

Our aim must be to buy a hi-fi system that will prove musically satisfying, reliable and deliver true value for money. If the system doesn't excite you musically you've wasted your money. What is even worse is that you may not even realise you've bought a bad egg - you'll just switch the TV on instead and your desire to listen to music will gradually diminish. Have you ever been in a pub or club where you realise it's very difficult to

conduct a conversation, even to the extent of being really tiring? A poor quality system continuously distorts but I don't mean it necessarily reaches the point of audibly breaking up. With a top quality system you can play music very loudly and still hold a conversation because it's free of distortion. A poor system is tiring to listen to even when it's played at low volume.

If you want proof, go into a shoe or clothes shop where they play background 'music' and try to enjoy listening. It's odds on you'll fail.

Get the best system for your money by asking our Top Twenty UK specialist hi-fi dealers.

What and Where to buy

The system you think you want may not be right for you. So where do you start? Here's an important tip... don't start with **WHAT** - start with **WHERE**. There is only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Now it's likely you have preconceived ideas that may put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. Again, just myths. Most specialist hi-fi dealers are running their business because, above all, they love music. They spend a large portion of





their time listening to music and comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. But they all also know the system must suit you.

Buying or being sold to?

Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met ...and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problem you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the

system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by commendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Oscar Wilde wrote "...too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing." Specialist retailers know that not all potential purchasers will seek them out. They tend to attract the more discerning, thoughtful customers. Let's face it, a good deal is about a great deal more than just price. After all, unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

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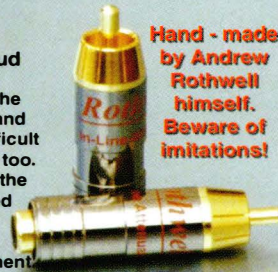
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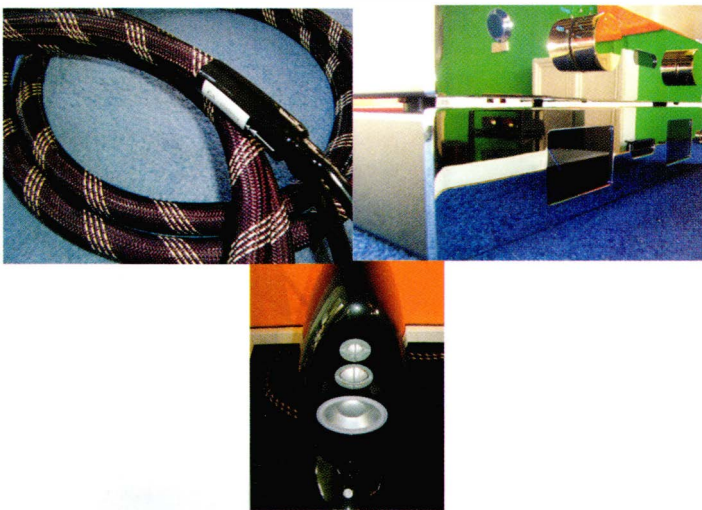
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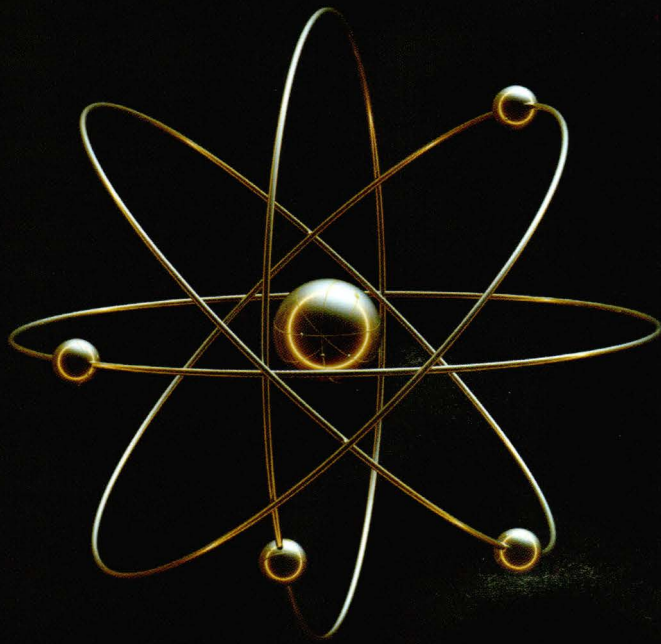
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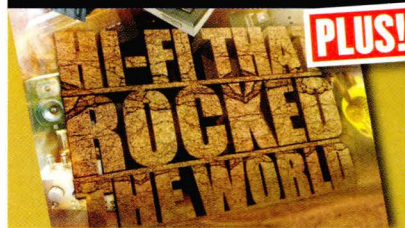
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A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT

#20 ROTEL

Many see Rotel as producer of some of the best-built and most reliable budget/mid range equipment about. With a close tie to Philips' technology, its CD players of the 1980s and 1990s fought closely with Marantz for CD supremacy. Remarkably, there have been very few disappointing Rotel CD players over the past 20 years. The RCD855 and 865 were particularly highly regarded in their day (around 1990), but it's the more recent models that make the best second-hand purchase. Launched just four years ago, the RCD-02 is still available brand new for £380. With the same Burr Brown PCM 1732 DAC as more expensive models (including Rotel's own RCD-1072), the sound quality is well-mannered and detailed for the price. As the product is so recent, there are also no failure points to check for... yet. The switch to a Sony mechanism means that there isn't the spares issue that earlier Philips-based players face, and Rotel assures us that parts will be available for at least seven years. Throw in the ability to play HDCD and a recent RCD-02 makes a cracking buy for £150-£200.

Although better known for budget equipment, Rotel has made some pretty impressive high-end gear in its time. The best example is undoubtedly the Michi RHB-10 series. Launched in 1992, this pre/power/phono combo looked like no other Rotel before or since. The silver aluminium front panel predicted the trend well before silver became

wrong and they can be had for as little as £150 if you're lucky. Bear in mind though that as the volume potentiometer is no longer available, it must be checked carefully for clear, crackle-free, operation.

The real star, though, is the power amp. With 200 watts and excellent transparency, its big-hearted presentation impresses even today.

“As the product is so recent, there are no failure points to check for.”

the norm, and the highly lacquered, red wood, side cheeks remain unique.

The important thing with the Michi range is to know your model numbers. The RHB-10 is the power amp, the RHQ-10 is the MM/MC phono stage, the RHC-10 the passive preamp and the RHA-10 is the active one. The phono stage is good, but at £1,000 new, offered reasonably mediocre value. It's a good bet if cheap enough, though. Of the preamps, it's the RHC-10 (£800 new) passive one that we'd favour. The simplicity means there's little to go

These amps have something of a cult following so you'll be hard pushed to find a real bargain. Even so, around £600-£700 should be enough to ensure a decent example. There are no known faults with the power amp although any board damage will be terminal – Rotel no longer keeps spare boards, so be very weary of blown or dropped examples. For this reason, Rotel recommends taking extreme care in posting these units.

Otherwise, Rotel still keeps many of the parts, so the Michi range remains mostly serviceable and for something a bit

different, the exotic sounding Michi is mostly free from exotic price tags and well worth a try. **HFC**

*Dominic Todd
Next month: SME*



Above: Rotel's RCD-02 CD player

DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 20 Enclosures

Although a superficial view sees the purpose of the enclosure as to provide a totally rigid and inert platform that allows the drive units to get on with their task, this is a virtually impossible task to achieve in practice. Any vibrations that are generated in the box, will be effectively magnified by the ratio of box-to-main-driver surface areas.

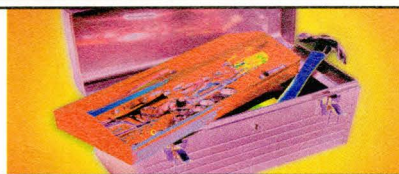
This could be seen as an argument in favour of tiny speakers, as these will tend to maximise that ratio, but little speakers have significant bass and dynamic limitations. Also, if you are taking on the task of building a pair of speakers, it would seem to be rather missing the point to restrict oneself to something tiny.

The majority of commercial speakers seek to control cabinet colorations by building an enclosure which is as stiff as possible. This makes some sense in minimising the sheer quantity (amplitude) of cabinet vibration. However, the stiffer the structure, the higher its natural frequency of vibration. Creating a very stiff enclosure might tighten up the bass end of things, but it tends to push the coloration up into the midband too, where human hearing is altogether more sensitive. When it comes to cabinet coloration, it's all about compromise, not winning.

One does occasionally encounter a speaker design – such as the Bosendorfer models –

that seeks to use its cabinet vibration to make a positive contribution to the sound. While the rewards can be great, such an approach is not advisable for the amateur constructor. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



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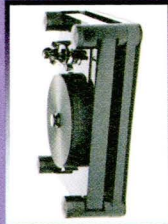
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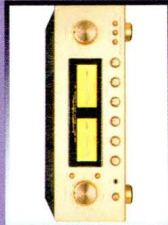
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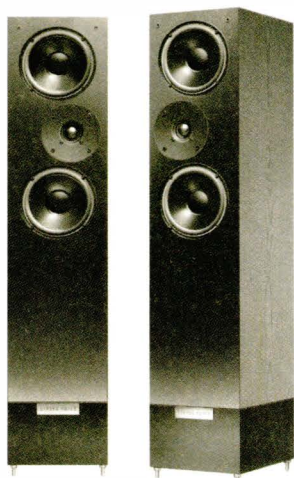
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Definitive Audio offers you a fresh and focused way of choosing a sophisticated sound for your home. Our service is bespoke, our philosophy is unique and our reputation peerless. The systems we create are infused with an elusive quality that will expand your musical horizons. We use a judicious selection of the world's most artful and ingenious creations, including the beautiful, beguiling Living Voice loudspeakers from England and Kondo KSL electronics from Japan.



Living Voice IBX-R2

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

	Sale	New
Voyd Reference turntable. Unique example of this benchmark design. Offered for sale on behalf of the designer - never previously sold. This turntable has a huge specification including, 30mm Lexan platter; massive Papst motor system; extreme power supply; beautiful satin rosewood plinth. Sale includes AudioNote wired Helius Cyalene tonearm and ANUK IO -limited field coil cartridge with PSU (15 hours use). Comes with manufacturers warranty on turntable.	£15000	£7500
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Living Voice OBX-R2 loudspeaker - walnut	£3400	£4400
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Cardas Neutral Reference speaker cable - 2 metres - very nearly new	£500	£780
Cardas Neutral Reference interconnect - 1 metre - very nearly new	£350	£500
Border Patrol Control Unit 1 - line pre-amp	£1000	£1700
Border Patrol Control Unit 2 - line pre-amp	£2000	£3000
Art Audio PX25 - 5watts - Single ended flea power for the sensitive type	£3000	£4000
Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck with RB300 & Living Voice Mystic Mat	£700	£1100
Helius Model 1 CD player	£500	£1300
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SJS Arcadia Model 2 line pre-amp - copper chassis - silver wiring - v. good	£750	£2000
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Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista MC integrated amp (2000) - as new - boxed	£1600	£3000
AVI S.2000 M1 integrated amp	£400	£1000
Border Patrol S.20 power amp - mahogany - nearly new	£5000	£7000
Audio Mecca Mephisto CD transport	£1000	£2500
Sugden Masterclass integrated amp	£2200	£3300
Canary Audio 301 300B stereo push-pull power amp	£3400	£5400
Canary Audio 303 [110v] - new - fillet mignon	£3800	£7200
Audio Innovations Series 1000 monos - fully serviced - class A classic	£900	
AudioNote UK CDT-Two	£1400	£2250
B&W CDM	£250	
Audio Innovations Series 500 integrated - classic - fully serviced	£800	
Aloia pre-amp - very new - very good condition - beautifully made - OK	£900	£2800

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Unison Research Unico CD Triode valve CD player, 24/192	£895
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Cyrus Discmaster CD Transport, Black, PSXR available, see misc	£295
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Croft TS1 hybrid power amplifier, ex-dem, boxed, unmarked (£2000)	£995
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Nordost Red Dawn revII 1.0m interconnect, as new.	£795
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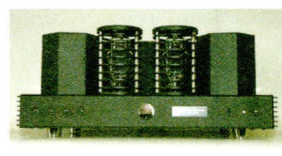
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CES Show in Las Vegas Report

This is a huge and extremely exhausting show, and impossible to get around in the two days I had allocated, but the 'high end audio' at the Alexis Park was different to UK shows, in that although 140K people attended the show, and Alexis seemed quite busy, you were able to get rooms to yourself and actually play your own CD's. The fact that the best sounding rooms were the actual Nola room with their latest version of the \$50K Pegasus, and the Soundstring room, where they used the Nola Viper IIa's £5.5K, was very pleasing as we sell these in the UK. The Pegasus is an upgraded version of the pair just given a rave review in Hi Fi +, but are also more expensive. I can't say that any other demo amazed me and equally good sound can be heard at UK shows. It was interesting to see the new Sim2 C3X Lite producing superb HD images, plus a pre-production version of the new single chip but higher resolution (1900 x 1080) unit which will sell for less than the Lite (£11K), but also looked excellent apart from some jitter on the image. Interesting to see an excellent demo by Meridian of their complete system including the Faroudja 1900 x 1080 resolution D-ILA projector, showing a superb image on Gladiator from an HD source. Interesting that they should go for the D-ILA technology, developed by JVC, and still one of the cheapest really good 3 Chip projectors around for £6K, and on demo here, and also a technology used by Vidikron, in addition to DLP. So do ring for a chat/demo of the best around!

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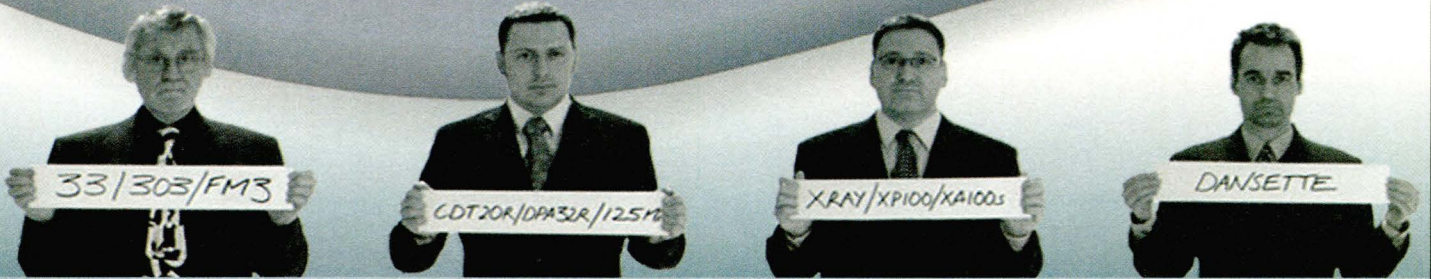
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- Cyrus CD70, ex, boxed
- Cyrus PSXR both colours, from
- Marantz DV41000SE
- Marantz CD63K1 Signature, ex remote
- Marantz CD17 KI nr mint
- Marantz CD85 ex boxed
- Meridian 208, ex 209 remote and phono stage
- Meridian 200 Transport, ex remote
- Meridian 263 DAC
- Meridian 507/24, ex, remote
- Micromega Stage 1
- Micromega Stage 2 and matching DAC
- Micromega T-drive and T-dac nr mint boxed
- Micromega Duo CD3/BS2 nr mint boxed
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- Monarchy DIP vgc
- Musical Fidelity XRay original
- Musical Fidelity CDT
- Musical Fidelity A3CD, nr mint boxed
- Musical Fidelity Kw SACD as new
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- NAIM CD3 ex
- NAIM CD52/XPS2 nr mint boxed
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- Rotel RCD991
- TEAC T1/D1 ex
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- 379 Quad 606, 606mk2 and 707 Power, each from
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- 299 Rotel RC995 superb preamp with system remote
- 149 Union Research S6 Integrated, nr mint
- 199 Union Research Mystery One Preamp - BARGAIN!
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- 499 Acoustic Energy AE1mk3 ex dem
- 729 Acoustic Energy AE2, ex black
- 999 Acoustic Energy AE2, ex piano black, c/w stands
- Call Acoustic Energy AE505 nr mint boxed
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- Isotek Cleanline
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- NAIM Flatpac
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- 149 Nordost Red Dawn RCA 1m
- 99 Nordost Blue Heaven RCA 1m
- 149 Nordost Blue Heaven XLR 0.6m
- 49 Nordost Solar Wind 1m
- 39 Project Headbox
- 69 Pure Eian portable DAB, new
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AUDIO RESEARCH LS5, fully balanced in/out, (£5,290) £1,590. ATC 20TASL, (£4,800) £2,200, part exchange welcome. 020 8504 1638 (London).

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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!

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MUSICAL FIDELITY A370 MkII power amp, mint, £1,100. Gary 020 8980 9003 (London)

MUSICAL FIDELITY E600 CD player, Balanced outs, £125. £50 FM tuner, £100 or £200 for both. Andrew 020 7663 1264 9am-6pm Weekdays (London).

MUSICAL FIDELITY XLPs phono stage MM/MC bought December 2003, black and silver, very good sound and in excellent condition, £85ono. Clem on 07962 672671 (Middlesex)

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANS V-3, Sennheiser HD600, Stefan AudioArt cable, Systemdeck 11X900, RB250, GR1006, Audiolab 8000A, Kenwood DP-X 9010 transport, Cambridge Audio DacMagic 2, Arcam Delta Black box 3 DAC, Sony DVP NS900V. Offers please to John 07855 121587 (W.Yorks)

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NAIM NAP500 power amp, just one year old, absolutely mint, boxed, £8,000. Naim NAC202 preamp, 18 months old, also mint and boxed, £850. Naim NACA5 speaker cable with Naim plugs, 2x5m, £65. 01285 862539 (Cirencester).

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RUSS ANDREWS Superpurifier, (£350) £220 and two yellow power mains cables (offers) 01202 680968 or 07983 0525185 (Dorset)

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SHUN MOOK MPINGO disc, boxed, (£50) £30 as new. Stuart, 01384 394441 (West Mids)

SHANLING CDT100 CD player, boxed, mint, £750. McIntosh 7100 power amplifier, 100W, balanced input, boxed, £550. 07968 429268 (Birmingham).

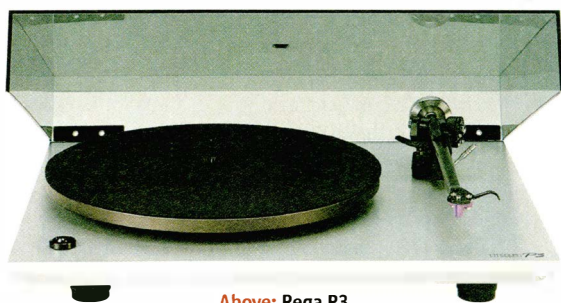
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TOTEM ARRO floorstanders, Dreamcatche centre, Lynx dipoles. Maple, mint, boxed, (£2,045) £1,300 (Swansea).

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Above: Rega P3



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