

HI-FI CHOICE

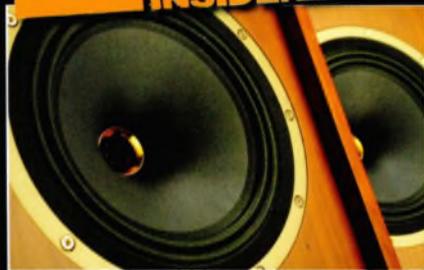
PASSION FOR SOUND JULY 2007 £3.95 WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK



WIN!
NAD's new T585 universal disc player worth £800!
See page 26



IN-DEPTH TESTS INSIDE!



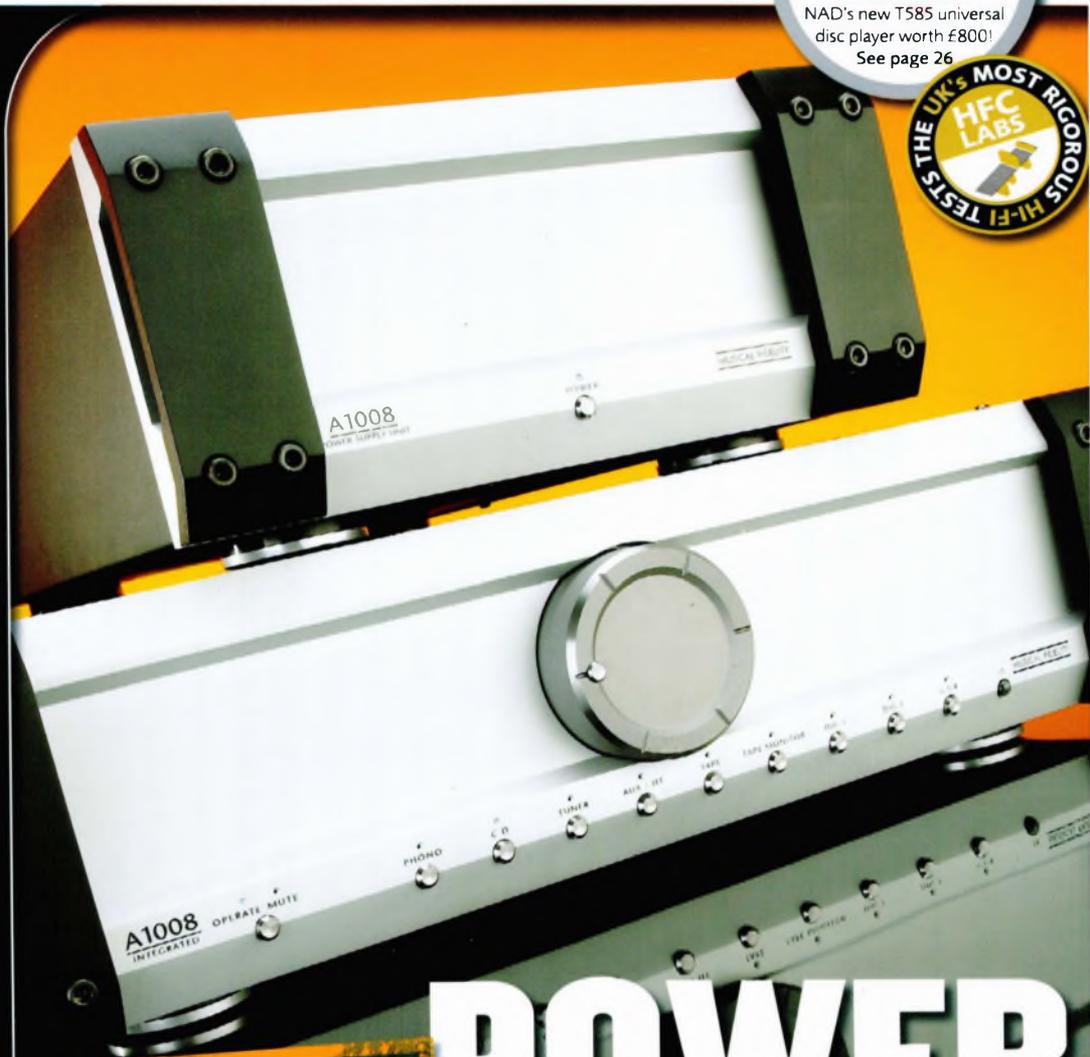
TANNOY New Glenair 10 speakers seduce our ears



CLEARAUDIO Top-notch turntable makes musical magic



RUSS ANDREWS Micro-sized amp system is a sonic stunner



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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>>
CD PLAYERS

- FEATURING**
- > Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R
 - > Marantz SA-15S1
 - > Unison Unico CD
 - > Lyngdorf CD-1
 - > Meridian G06
 - > Rega Saturn

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The world's best hi-fi rated





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CLASSE

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE JULY 2007 ISSUE 295

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



And so, the time has come: this is my last issue at the helm of *Hi-Fi Choice*. For my final *Ed's Intro*, I'd like to quote from the copy I wrote for my first; it was intended to express my love of hi-fi, and is as relevant now as it was when it was first published, 70 issues ago...

"I went to a Ryan Adams gig the other day. The tousle-headed talisman of alternative country was in the finest of fettle; voice like an angel stumbling from grace, band with whisky sours in their hearts and honey dripping from their fingertips. It was raining outside. When I reached home I lunged straight for *Heartbreaker* (my favourite Adams CD), slipped it in the drawer and stabbed 'play'. That voice was still with me, the band still striking the same emotional chord. Because of my hi-fi it will always remain, not just a fleeting moment in time but something I can call upon whenever its needed.

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

At this point, my original copy went on to describe *HFC's* dedication to audio excellence, before concluding: "One particular Adams song, *The Bar Is A Beautiful Place*, helped me through a tough time recently. So here's to the author of its heart-tugging beauty. And here's to my hi-fi for making it real."

And here's to the next 30-odd years of *Hi-Fi Choice!* I leave you in the capable hands of Dan George, *HFC's* new Editor. Take care, and happy listening.

Tim Bower

Tim Bower 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



Wooden it be nice?



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 *HFC's* deputy editor. Armed with a bristling contacts book, an encyclopaedic knowledge of what's what in hi-fi 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*.



MALCOLM STEWART

Former editor of *Hi-Fi Review* magazine, Malcolm was one of the best known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently edits hi-fi industry bible *The British Audio Journal*.



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).



ALAN SIRCOM

Alan began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. Now a successful freelancer, you too can benefit from his extensive hi-fi knowledge, from purist two-channel stereo to the latest multichannel gear... and beyond.



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.



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.

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 guide to high performance hi-fi and AV equipment, gathering together all our favourite products for you. Your shortlist starts here...

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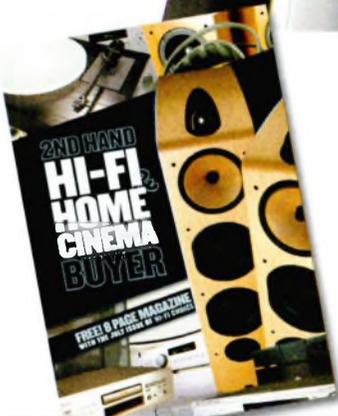
FREE MINI-MAG!

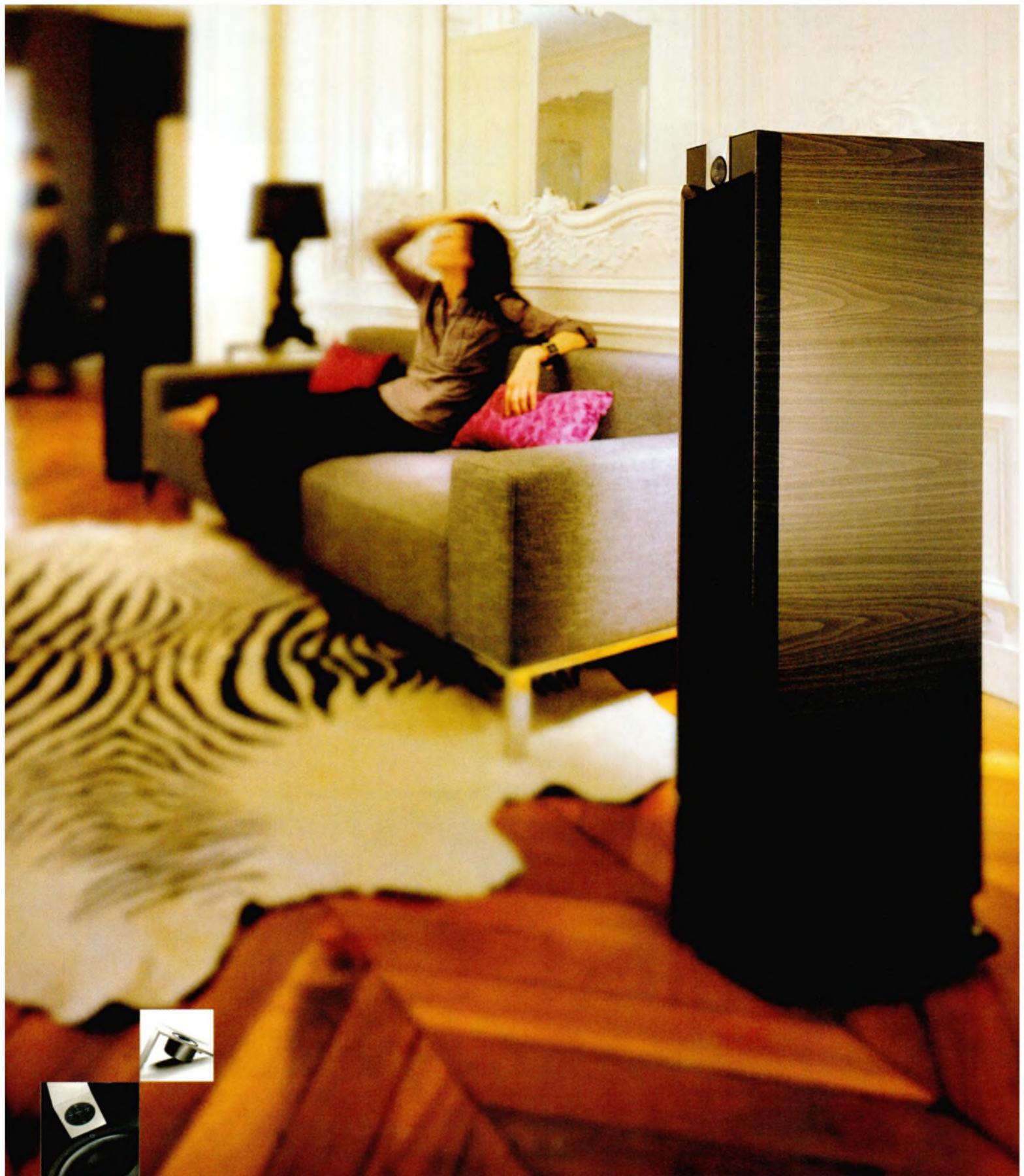
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Chorus 800 V: the affordable luxury

Can we be uncompromising on sound quality, and at the same time sensitive to the aesthetics of a loudspeaker? Chorus 800 V proves that it is possible, with original solutions and choices at previously unseen prices. Acrylic (organic glass) of an exceptional lustre, non-parallel walls of ultra-rigid 25 mm MDF, and the double-vented Powerflow® system for a deeper and more dynamic bass are major, high-end innovations that integrate with exclusive Focal technologies (Polyglass membrane, Aluminium/Magnesium inverted dome tweeter, DPC crossover). With Chorus 800 V, luxury finally becomes affordable. Now available in Mako and Ebony finishes, www.focal-fr.com





SUGDEN A21a SERIES TWO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

▶ Few amplifiers have made such an impression on so many as Sugden's legendary A21a. The much-admired A21a stereo amplifier has been re-worked and updated, and now comes in Series Two guise. It still operates in pure Class A, yet its performance has been improved and it now has a higher specification. Engineers at Sugden have made gains by introducing a more direct signal path, removing the mono and tape switch facilities and balance control, as well as repositioning the preamp board. Power delivery has been improved too, giving greater bass performance and the possibility of a wider range of loudspeakers to partner the 20-watt output.

The in-house casework has also been improved, with the amp showing the same build quality and materials as the Masterclass products. Further new features include a motorized Alps volume control with remote operation and a custom heatsink.

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

PRODUCT Sugden A21a Series Two

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £1,300

KEY FEATURES Class A operation ◊ Rated power output: 20 watts per channel ◊ Five line level inputs ◊ Built-in phono stage

CONTACT ☎ 01924 404088

www.sugdenaudio.com

Isotek®

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"Excellent build quality, protection circuits, a fully adaptive filtration circuit and stunning performance make the Sigmas a true bargain." HI-FI NEWS, BEST ACCESSORY 2006



"IsoTek is the UK's biggest name in filtration...this year we hail a new product, the Sigmas." HI-FI CHOICE, BEST MAINS CONDITIONER/CABLE 2006

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

Accessories
IsoPlug, DeMag CD, etc...

HI-FI CHOICE ★★★★★

Multi-Ways
Available in 4, 6 or 8 sockets

Solus

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

GII Mini Sub & Vision

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

Orion & Gemini
Two levels of high quality filters

BEST PRODUCT OF THE YEAR WINNER 2006

Sigmas

Nova

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

Titan

IsoTek is committed to the creation of truly cutting edge designs through the development of unique proprietary technologies. Every product is designed and developed in the England and hand assembled in their factory in Hampshire.

Only the finest quality components are used, and many of these are uniquely developed and built to 'Military Of Defence' specifications.

IsoTek has consistently established a class leading reputation, a fact that has been proved by numerous reviews throughout the world and over 21 industry awards.

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NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



B&W SIGNATURE DIAMOND

This is B&W's radical new limited-edition speaker, the Signature Diamond. It's a result of a co-operative effort between B&W's senior development engineer Dr. John Gibb and the company's design collaborator, Kenneth Grange CBE. Signature Diamond was described by a B&W spokesperson as the finest two-way floorstander the company has produced in 40 years, and each pair takes six man-months to make. The cylindrical and elliptical enclosure is Matrix-braced and stands one-metre tall with a Diamond Dome Nautilus tweeter on its top, housed in a pod carved from Italian marble. This is joined by a 180mm Kevlar bass/mid driver with a new noiseless phase plug and B&W's Flowport downward firing reflex port. Only 1,000 are being made, so be quick!

Price £11,000 **Due** now ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.bwspeakers.com



MARANTZ SA-7S1

This is Marantz's finest CD/SACD player, the SA-7S1. The flagship, reference disc spinner follows in the tradition of the SA-1, demonstrating the best of Marantz' and Ken Ishiwata's engineering know-how. The player offers a switchable three-mode filtering option said to give either a more dynamic output, or a more 'analogue' sound, in addition to the standard filter available. The 22kg chassis is full of audiophile-grade components and features comprehensive copper shielding throughout, a double-layer bottom plate and a segmented power supply that includes a high-capacity toroidal transformer – even the disc drawer sits in its own 10mm extruded aluminium case. The signal is treated to a pair of mono DACs, each comprising four separate processors for DSD and PCM playback. Expect an exclusive review soon.

Price £5,000 **Due** June ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

TIVOLI MUSIC SYSTEM

The iconic Tivoli Audio range has gained a fully functioning newcomer, the Tivoli Music System. It combines stereo speakers with a slot-loading CD player, amplifier, AM/FM radio and a digital alarm clock. Tivoli CEO Tom DeVesto is quick to point out that the Music System is a "home entertainment system for any room in the house" and at £650, it's clearly more than your average table-top radio. Features include a built-in subwoofer, digital and manual radio tuning and "sophisticated electronics". Expect a review soon.

Price £650 **Due** now

☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.tivoli-audio.co.uk



THIEL CS3.7

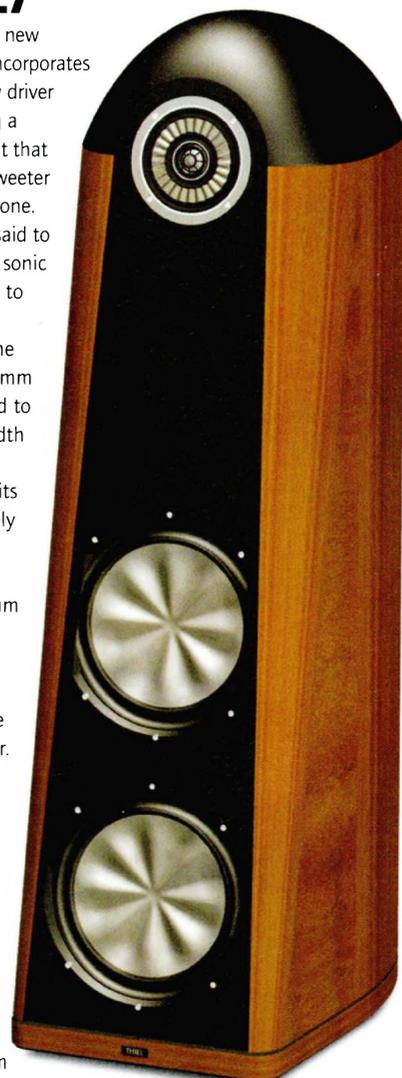
Thiel's striking new floorstander incorporates some innovative new driver technology including a coaxial midrange unit that combines a 25mm tweeter with a 125mm mid cone. This ribbed driver is said to offer an "uncoloured sonic spectrum," according to designer Jim Thiel.

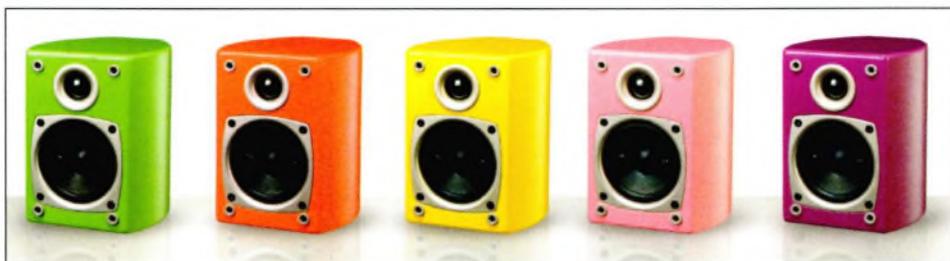
The geometry of the unconventional 250mm bass driver is claimed to give greater bandwidth as well as higher efficiency, owing to its low mass. The shapely cabinet is just as innovative and features an aluminium head, curvaceous sidewalls and a sloping baffle, all designed to enhance sound quality further.

The baffle itself is made from machined aluminium to reduce unwanted vibrations from the proprietary drivers.

Price £6,495 per pair **Due** now

☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.thielaudio.com





AUDIO PRO ALLROOM SATELLITE

☞ If your second system could use a little colour, then Audio Pro's fruity Allroom Satellite speaker could be for you. The tiny two-way standmount packs in a 25mm soft-dome tweeter and a 90mm shielded bass/mid driver and boasts a frequency response of 100Hz to 22kHz. Its audiophile credentials include a teardrop-shaped cabinet and heavy-duty speaker terminals. The colourful high-gloss finish is achieved using eight layers of hand-applied lacquer. A matching centre speaker and subwoofer are also available.

Price £180 per pair **Due** now ☎ 01423 359054 # www.audiopro.com



TEAC R-X1 DAB

☞ TEAC has launched a new DAB tabletop radio, complete with NXT loudspeaker technology. The R-X1 DAB is TEAC's first foray into NXT-equipped radio and is based on four 25mm exciters. Being NXT, it is very slender and it even omits a grille, yet it still manages to squeeze in a DAB/FM radio with push-button operation and jog wheel tuning. It's fully remote controllable and has a 3.5mm auxiliary input for the connection of portable music devices.

Price £150 **Due** now

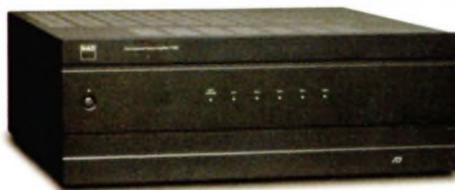
☎ 0845 1302511 # www.teac.co.uk

NAD T955

☞ NAD's new T955 multichannel power amplifier employs a monoblock construction, with the company's proprietary PowerDrive circuitry. The T955 is said to echo NAD's 'Music First' philosophy and features a number of proprietary technologies to eliminate crosstalk and other unwanted distortions. It offers 5x100 watts, Class A input circuit topology and high-current Holmgren toroidal transformers.

Price £900 **Due** now

☎ 01279 501111 # www.nadelectronics.com



KEF MUON

☞ KEF's £70,000 Muon loudspeaker is now available, but only to 100 customers. The two-metre tall statement speaker has been sculpted by the famous industrial designer Ross Lovegrove, whose brief to create the ultimate speaker looks fulfilled. It's a four-way design with two additional bass drivers mounted in the back of the cabinet. KEF has retained its Uni-Q drive unit array, which it says is where some of the Muon's key technology lies. The speaker is fabricated from super-formed aluminium – a technique using malleable sheets of heated aluminium to create otherwise unachievable shapes. KEF says: "It's the best you can get."

Price £70,000 per pair **Due** now

☎ 01622 672261 # www.kef.com



Soundbites

THE CHORD COMPANY has a new budget interconnect called Crimson. The entry-level wire replaces the Calypso and Chrysalis cables and is constructed around two sets of multi-stranded OFC conductors in a twisted pair configuration. The Crimson, in RCA form, is a true semi-balanced design and uses a full floating shield. It comes with upgraded gold-plated plugs as seen on the Cobra cable. Prices start at £35 for a 0.5m pair.

☎ 01980 625700



ETON SOUND'S 102 DAB/FM tuner has been developed for audiophiles, and offers remote control functionality, plus an iPod docking station. Features include an alarm clock, snooze timer and large LCD display. Expect to pay £140.

☎ 023 92 313090

BLACK RHODIUM has launched two new HDMI cables, both verified for 1080p under Silicon Image's Simplay HD programme. The Choral and Pearl will play 1080p up to 3m and 12.5m respectively. The cables support Deep Colour and Lyp Sync technology. Prices start at £95 for a two-metre length.

☎ 01332 342233

PRO-JECT has launched a new USB compatible turntable allowing users to record vinyl direct to computers. The £210 Pro Ject Debut USB will join the Czech manufacturers respected entry-level turntable range and is broadly based on the Debut III. Expect a review soon.

☎ 01235 511166

GOLDRING'S new in-ear headphones have been designed to colour-match the various iPod finishes and deliver a 'hi-fi' sound. The GX200 uses patented 'Comply' canal tips as worn by US military helicopter pilots to isolate the user from outside noise. The tips use special memory foam to provide a comfortable seal, with noise reduction up to a claimed -42dB. Based on 9mm drivers, the headphones retail for around £50.

☎ 01279 501111



The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

GREG STIDSEN

Job Title: Director of Product Development
Company: NAD



What is your most exciting product currently in development?

A new range of receivers this year that are brimming with the latest technology. The user interface combines remarkable flexibility with simplicity of operation.

What is the future of hi-fi in the home?

Integration. People want their hi-fi to seamlessly blend with other electronic devices.

What is the best innovation you've encountered recently?

Audyssey acoustic room correction: it works well and is affordable.

Can generation iPod be turned on to hi-fi?

Many already have been, but they don't know it yet! When music is important in your life, you aspire to a more fulfilling musical experience. Not all iPod owners will end up with a real hi-fi, but a certain percentage definitely will.

Are audio servers the future?

When the music industry finally figures out how to thrive in the digital age, music will be high definition, plentiful and cheap. There will be no need to store it locally.

CD or vinyl, and why?

It takes esoteric knowledge to get the most out of vinyl, which has its own satisfaction – a bit like being able to operate a vintage automobile.

Hi-Fi Diary

JUNE

25-28 Cedia UK Expo 2007
ExCel London
www.cedia.co.uk
The UK's biggest custom install show

SEPTEMBER

22-23 London Sound and Vision show 2007
Park Inn, Heathrow
www.chestergroup.org
London's finest hi-fi show

29

Musicmania
Olympia 2 London
www.vip.24.com
One of the UK's largest CD, DVD and vinyl fairs

Digital medium wave

The BBC and National Grid Wireless will be conducting test broadcasts in the digital radio mondiale (DRM) standard. The tests are in the Plymouth area and using a medium wave frequency, making it the first digital radio signal broadcasting at frequencies below 30MHz. The service will replace BBC Radio Devon's regular medium wave service in Plymouth and use the existing MW transmitter in the city.

A listening panel will be recruited from Radio Devon listeners, who will be equipped with a radio that can receive DRM, DAB and FM. National Grid Wireless will supply, commission and operate the transmission equipment and will be involved with the validation of the results which are expected to be published by mid 2008. The BBC will be conducting research with the listeners over this period.

The BBC's John Allen said: "The trial will help us understand whether DRM has a role to play in the all-digital future for BBC Local Radio in the UK." The trial will be broadcast on 855kHz.



Amazon vs iTunes

Amazon.com is planning to make a bid for the MP3 download market. It plans to compete with the dominant force in this section, Apple's iTunes, by offering all of its content with little or no copy protection. Amazon has approached all of the major record companies with its proposals and is expected to launch a download service imminently.

Amazon is banking on its reputation to attract customers. It is also expected to sell branded MP3 players that can be ordered preloaded with the music of your choice. Speculation about the way the company intends to do this is rife, but one possible avenue is that offered by Microsoft's PlaysForSure, which supplies a service to existing MP3 service providers.

Amazon also offers 'hard' software such as CDs and will undoubtedly use its success in this sector to try and push a download service. With iTunes cornering up to 80 per cent of the download market, serious competition is needed. But is it Amazon?



Print your own PCB

Researchers at Leeds University have

developed a means of using a desktop printer to create circuit boards. Seyed Bidoki adapted a Hewlett-Packard inkjet printer, loading one ink tank with a solution of silver salts and another with ascorbic acid (vitamin C). The resulting mix forms a solid silver track on any flexible substrate, not just paper. A spokesman said: "We wanted to use a water-soluble base. That allows for more eco-friendly processes."

Still in its early stages, this could offer even small hi-fi manufacturers the ability to print circuit boards in-house, cutting costs and improving quality.



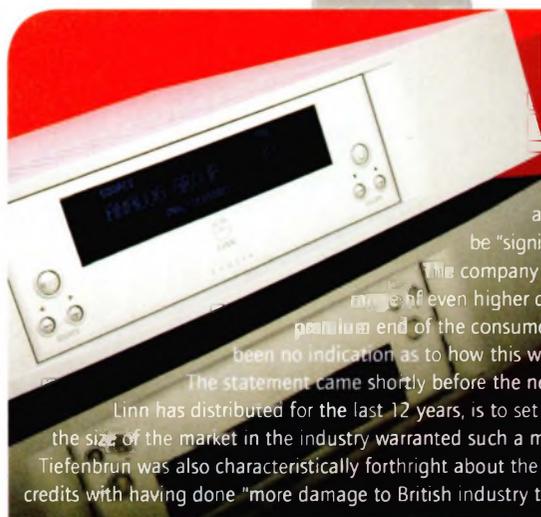
Linn Kutback

Linn Products has announced it will "realign its business order," as founder Ivor Tiefenbrun put it. It's not known how many of the 280-strong workforce will be affected by the 'realignment', only that there will be "significant redundancies".

The company plans to concentrate on "a more focused range of even higher quality products, specifically aimed at the premium end of the consumer electronics market". Thus far, there has been no indication as to how this will change Linn's extensive range.

The statement came shortly before the news that Loewe, the German television brand Linn has distributed for the last 12 years, is to set up its own UK operation. Loewe stated that the size of the market in the industry warranted such a move.

Tiefenbrun was also characteristically forthright about the incumbent Labour government, which he credits with having done "more damage to British industry than the Luftwaffe."



Currys ejects cassettes

⊕ The cassette is dead. That's the verdict from Currys, who has announced that it will stop selling blank tapes altogether when current stock has sold through.

Peter Keenan, managing director of the 500-outlet group, told us: "For today's MP3 generation, it's just a few clicks of the mouse to achieve what's arguably a better outcome."

The move is not without its nostalgic regrets. "I remember the tape with some fondness," Keenan reminisced. "It has been a remarkably durable format. The hours spent putting together compilation tapes, and the all-too-familiar experience of finding that your deck had chewed your tape, will resonate with many now in their 30s and 40s."

The other half of the equation – tape decks – are included in less than five per cent of systems sold in Currys today. These, too, will be phased out over the next 18 months. Cassettes are still popular in India and much of South East Asia, so these markets should maintain sufficient demand to keep the format alive. But it would seem that, in the long term, the days of the cassette tape are numbered.



JIMMY'S TWEAKS #52

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

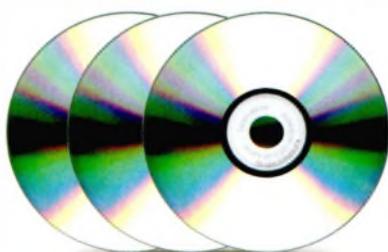


Don't get con-fused

For safety reasons, all electrical equipment sold in the UK is supplied with fuses, designed to blow should something untoward happen. And there's a lot of safety between you and life-threatening mains for good reason, but this does mean there will be fuses in the mains plug that goes in the wall socket, in the distribution board itself, in the mains plug for each individual item of equipment, and inside each separate piece of hi-fi. That's a lot of connections that could be improved. So, having completely unplugged the system from the mains, clean each and every fuse and its connectors with a good contact cleaner. You could also upgrade the fuses to audiophile versions. However, it's distinctly unwise to replace fuses with higher values (if it used a 3A fuse, replace it with a 3A fuse) or to by-pass fuses altogether.

TOP 10 FORGOTTEN MUSIC FORMATS

1. DVD-Audio
2. Compact cassette
3. DualDisc
4. Philips DCC
5. MiniDisc
6. Elcassette
7. CD-i
8. 8-track
9. Quadraphonic
10. dbx vinyl



⊕ New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



SUPER FURRY ANIMALS

Title: *Hey Venus!*

Release date: August

Even more prolific than Jack White is SFA frontman Gruff Rhys. Fresh from the January release of his first solo album *Candyfloss*, he announced the formation of Neon Neon: a side project which will release its first record this summer. Then, just as SFA fans were fearing the worst, last month he announced that the band's follow-up to 2005's *Love Kraft* will also be ready for late summer release.

THE RACONTEURS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: autumn

You can't keep Jack White down. With the new White Stripes album barely in the shops, he's already at work on the second album from his side project with Brendan Benson. Currently holed up in Nashville, they hope to finish before the Stripes hit the road this summer. According to White, it sounds "very different" from the 2006 debut *Broken Boy Soldiers*.

FOO FIGHTERS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: autumn

Dave Grohl's crew are working with Pixies producer Gil Norton on the follow up to 2005's *In Your Honour*. Former Nirvana drummer Grohl describes it as "a big powerful record" (the surprise would be if it wasn't) but says it will also find the Foo Fighters "moving in a few different directions". Presumably not jazz, though.

SIGUR RÓS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: autumn

The Icelandic sonic wizards are holed up in the converted swimming pool that acts as their studio outside Reykjavik, recording an all-acoustic album. But don't expect gentle strumming: even without the electronics, they promise the usual and highly



innovative cathedrals of sound. In a hectic schedule, they also plan to release their soundtrack to the film *Hlemmur* and a live recording of their 2002 orchestra piece *Odin's Raven Magic*.

SUZANNE VEGA

Title: *Beauty & Crime*

Release date: July

Now signed to Blue Note, the seventh studio album from the New York-based singer-songwriter is her first album of new material since 2001's *Songs In Red and Gray* was recorded in Manhattan and London. Song titles she's already unveiled live include *Unbound*, *(Edith Wharton's) Figuines* and *New York Is A Woman*.

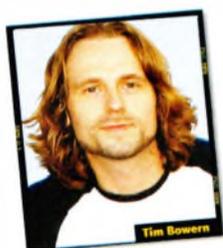
ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Abbey Lincoln Abbey Sings Abbey (Jun); **Harry Connick Jr** Chanson Du Vieux Carré (Jun); **Charles Mingus** In Paris – The Complete America Session (Jun); **Atlantic Symphony (Robert Spano)** Vaughan Williams: Fantasia On A Theme By Thomas Tallis (Jun)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

Glenn Gould Bach: Goldberg Variations, (Jun, SACD); **Spyro Gyra** Good to Go-Go, (Jun, SACD); **Bamberger Symphony Orchestra (Nott)** Janacek: Sinfonietta, Taras Bulba, (Jun, SACD); **Philharmonia Orchestra (Simon)** Ravel: Valley of the Bells, (Jun, SACD); **Netherlands Philharmonic (Haenchen)** Wagner: Das Rheingold (Jun, SACD)



Brass rubbings

Kessler's bold stance isn't there to please:

One could hardly fail to notice the presence of a certain Ken Kessler in recent issues of *Hi-Fi Choice*. He of the controversial hi-fi prose and extravagant facial hair had signed up for a run of 'feature columns', which we decided to tag *Natural Born Kessler*. The accompanying cartoon said it all: Ken with a cowboy-style revolver, shooting from the lip.

NBK ran for six issues, with the last in the present series published last month. We knew that it would cause a stir – few current hi-fi writers possess and equivalent ability to stir the blood – and while some readers were glad to have Ken's entertainingly forthright prose added to the mix, others voiced their concern.

A number of disgruntled letters and emails pinged their way to *HFC* Towers, some accusing

“As alliterative freedom fighters go, William Wallace has the edge over Ken Kessler. But Ken represents *editorial* freedom.”

Ken of bigotry, others going so far as to describe him as a fascist. Come now, dear readers – Mr Kessler is certainly an avowed capitalist, and his perpetual refusal to sit on the fence has ruffled many feathers down the years. But while you may not agree with his politics, it is his opinionated and vociferous character, coupled to his fluid and eloquent writing style that makes him a rarity in specialist journalism, and a valuable asset for any publication.

Great print journalists fall into one of two camps. First there's the news-based journalist, whose impeccable contacts and great powers of analysis result in groundbreaking, balanced and expertly researched stories. Then there's the columnist, or features-based journalist. Here, the writing style is less rigid, and the concept of factual balance may be replaced by subjective opinion. Of course, if this opinion is weakly researched or poorly expressed, the results will be worthless. But an expert feature writer can entertain and inform in equal measure – and in my book, that's what makes great magazines.

When I was a scruffy, music-obsessed teenager in the late 1980s/early 1990s, I used to adore a weekly 'paper' called *Melody Maker*, lapping up its imaginative and open-minded journalism. For sure, a deluge of grandiose and precociously opinionated copy poured from its pages, and much of the time I would find myself scoffing and snarling in response. But the point is this: I was royally entertained by the purple prose that its writers revelled in – I might not have always agreed with them, but they shared my passion for music and pricked my imagination with each and every keyboard flourish.

This kind of opinionated, feature-based journalism was once present in the hi-fi press, but now there's precious little individualism left. There's a time for considered and calculated research – an in-depth *HFC* review, for example – but there's also a time for colourful, eloquent, entertaining feature copy, and that's what *Natural Born Kessler* was all about.

A good magazine should contain pace, variety and balance – something we've tried hard to

achieve with *HFC*. One might, or might not, agree with Ken's comments, but who else can provoke reaction with his eloquence? And for those who called Ken a fascist, and demanded his immediate removal, perhaps the irony has escaped you. As a supporter of liberal ethics and freedom of speech, isn't it a bit rich to demand that a writer should be censored simply because his opinions do not correspond with yours?

As alliterative freedom fighters go, William Wallace has the edge over Ken Kessler. But for me, Ken represents *editorial* freedom within the hi-fi press. And today, that's priceless.

Tim Bowen has been *Hi-Fi Choice's* Editor for the past five years and is shortly departing for a life in PR and contract publishing



The Generation Game

Father and son speakers

It's not often that you come across father and son craftsmen in hi-fi manufacturing, but on a recent visit to Swiss loudspeaker maker Piega, I did just that. Aldo and Mario Ballabio work together building their unique driver, the coaxial ribbon.

The driver features a midrange ribbon, which is square in shape and has a hole in its centre for the high frequency ribbon. The most critical part of the building process with these drivers is getting the tension of the ribbons correct on the back plate. Only Aldo and Mario have the skill required to do this.

The magnetic power required for this drive unit is massive, so Piega uses bars of neodymium on the two plates which enclose the driver. As the magnets on either metal frame have to mount in magnetic opposition, Messrs Ballabio Snr and Jr have built jigs that are immensely strong to hold the sides together during construction.

Building one of these coaxial drive units takes Aldo or Mario three hours. The purpose of this lengthy exercise is to combine mid and treble drivers to operate as a true point source. Because both ribbon elements are in the same plane, they can achieve this theoretical ideal. It also results in a system with 100dB sensitivity, which means that it has unusually good

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

MARK LEVINSON ML2
POWER AMPLIFIER



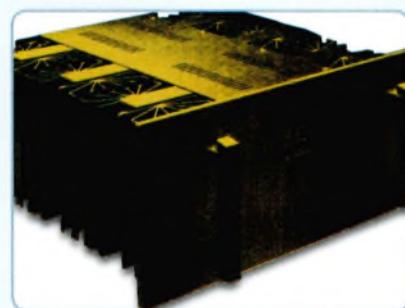
The ML2 was the first power amplifier to be designed by Mark Levinson and was partly, if not largely, responsible for the esteem

in which the marquee has been held ever since. It was introduced in 1977 and remained available until 1986, though it was produced largely by hand in relatively small numbers. It also spawned a couple of derivatives – see below. It was a 25-watt mono amplifier, operating in Class A, and what is not altogether obvious from the photograph is that it is a large and imposing design, and that the standard of build quality and finish was nothing less than impeccable. The matching preamplifier by the way was the ML-1.

There was never an amplifier like this before, and in many ways, it set the agenda for those that followed. It was a fully Class A design, which is rarely the case even with designs that claim to be Class A, and it remained so down to two ohms, at which point it was pumping out up to 100 watts, irrespective of electrical phase angle. Below two ohms, the output dropped progressively into Class B. Like many Class A amplifiers, the numbers serve to deceive, and in practice the ML2 was a practically bottomless pit of power, which would almost never clip. It was reputed to be *the* amp for driving the stunning, but amp-crushing Apogee full-range ribbon speakers.

Even at idling, the ML2 consumes 900 watts, so this is no green machine, and naturally it gets very hot. The external heatsinks (also believed to be a first) are divided into six, with the first pair on each side devoted to power supply regulation. Only the last two provide cooling for the final output stage. This is a fully regulated design both on the input and the output side.

Sonically, too, the ML2 set new standards. Aside from consistency and longevity, both hallmarks of the brand even then, the ML2 was renowned, though not specifically for the amount of detail it extracted from records (this, of course, was largely before the age of digital sources) or its transparency. It was known principally for its rich, flowing sound, the sense of musical architecture, and the shape and



“There was never an amplifier like this before and it set the agenda for those that followed.”

individuality of separate instruments in the sonic mix – its dimensionality if you like. It was a very desirable amplifier at the time, and it remains so today. Anecdotally at least, used units still change hands at high prices, typically £7-£8k when they become available at all, and remember that you need two. Even by current standards, this remains an extraordinarily fine amplifier, one that is seldom equalled even now.

It was one of the first fully balanced amplifiers, though very few were ever set up to provide a balanced input. This required that one of the two input cards carrying the CAMAC inputs sockets be inverted, (the CAMAC interface, which involved locking connectors, was originally designed by the Swiss nuclear industry, and manufactured by WW Fisher in Switzerland). Few listeners had access to balanced mode sources, so this was really an idea before its time.

Later, when Madrigal acquired Mark Levinson, the first new product was essentially a revision of the ML2, known as the 20.5, followed later by the 20.6. These models were rated at 100 watts each, still in pure Class A, so they ran even hotter than the original, and featured a fully updated internal architecture. At this point, the CAMAC inputs were substituted by the more familiar XLR balanced connectors used more widely today. *HFC*

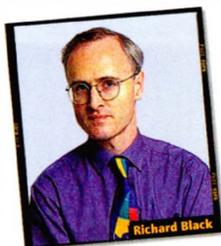
Alvin Gold

power handling for a ribbon driver. Another bonus is unusually good measurements.

These coaxial units are installed in Piega's TC X series of loudspeakers. The resulting speakers are good-looking, great sounding and, not surprisingly, quite expensive. So perhaps there is more to the Swiss than cuckoo clocks, personal banking and chocolate, after all!

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



Microphonophiles

Musos hate hi-fi, but love the sound it makes

You may remember that a few issues ago (HFC 290) I was waxing lyrical about my new microphone – a Royer stereo ribbon. Since then it's had quite a few outings, mostly to record opera singers, and the reaction I've received has been extraordinary.

Some of the singers I'd recorded before with other kit, others not, but almost all of them, on hearing a bit of the recording at the session, have been complimentary about the sound quality. I had a few nice comments before, but never as many or as strongly worded.

So what? Well, these are typical musicians, not much interested in sound quality and certainly not audiophiles. But they immediately spot that there's something a bit special about the sound. They don't whitter on, as many audio professionals and aficionados might, about imaging, transient response, bass extension and control... they simply say, 'Hey, that's a really good recording' or words to that effect, and look happy.

Now of course in this magazine, as in any other, we writers use a lot of that sort of jargon to try to describe to interested parties (assumed at least somewhat conversant with said jargon) not only if, but more to the point why, they might like or loathe some bit of kit, and I'm not about to recant everything I've written over nearly two decades. But just now and then it's really refreshing to get someone round to listen to a bit of kit who's not

interested in kit as such, but who does at least listen to a fair amount of live music, and ask them simply, 'Is this any good or not?' It's surprising how often they spot the really classy stuff. Try it on friends – you never know, you may win some converts to the cause!

I can't let this column go without paying tribute to our departing Editor, Tim. HFC has been lucky with Editors but by any standards Tim has been a fine example of the breed. Few if any readers can be aware just how hard (and frequently how late!) he has worked to make this magazine inviting, informative, accurate and literate. He couldn't have had the job at a trickier time for the hi-fi industry as a whole, what with the collywobbles over whether home cinema and the internet might see us all packed off to hell in a handcart, and he even managed to increase circulation while dealing unflappably with everyday problems from manufacturers' strops to contributors' invoice worries. Thanks, mate, and enjoy the new job!

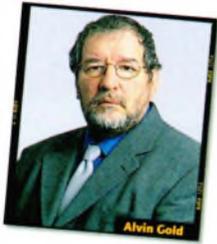
Richard Black is a professional musician, recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He writes about hi-fi exclusively for HFC

“It's had quite a few outings, mostly to record opera singers, and the reaction I've received has been extraordinary.”

Greetings From Bayreuth



Have A Gotterdammerung Day!



Psychosonical

Hardcore audio geekology in Cambridge

Every year, the Audio Engineering Society holds a convention in the UK, currently at a college in Cambridge. This year, all the contributors themed the presentations on the idea of multichannel audio in one form or another. The formal title was *Illusions in Sound, the Application of Psychoacoustics to Audio*

One of the more intriguing topics that came up this year was a new take on Ambisonics, originally developed by Michael Gerzon of the Mathematical Institute, Oxford, and colleagues. Ambisonics was also addressed last year, but on a more academic level. Ambisonics, for those who need a brief refresher, is a surround sound matrix, often associated with Soundfield multichannel microphones or equivalents. The idea is to record a multichannel signal that can be reconstructed through a number of loudspeakers (usually a minimum of four for a full horizontal soundfield, but more means more spatial resolution and greater stability). The standard B format Ambisonics information is encoded into four channels: W, X, Y and Z. The W channel is the general mono level of the signal, corresponding to the output of an omnidirectional microphone. The X, Y and Z channels are the directional components in three dimensions, corresponding to the outputs of three figure-of-eight microphones, facing forward, to the left, and up respectively.

A stumbling block for Ambisonics was that a practical system should be playable without dedicated replay equipment in the users home, other than the additional power amplification and speakers which are generally available as part of any surround sound system.

Nimbus then hit on the idea of eliminating the decoder in the users home by decoding the Ambisonics audio at the mastering stage and recording the decoded audio stream onto disc. This meant throwing away one of strengths of Ambisonics recordings, namely the flexibility of design of the replay system. However, with suitable speaker arrays, generally arranged in a square, a slightly squashed rectangle or the ITU arrangement, consistently good replay results were obtained on test.

The final discs, in DVD format, include a DVD-Video layer with a PCM UHJ soundtrack (providing stereo compatibility for those who



Steve McQueen is one of the great lost pop masterpieces of the 1980s. The crystalline beauty of its arrangements, the deceptively rich harmonies, those complex, though not quite opaque lyrical constructions, those gorgeous melodies. It's an album with a legion of committed, even fanatical fans, yet for all its embarrassment of artistic riches, it never quite reached the iconic status of other eighties thinking-pop cornerstones like the Smith's *The Queen Is Dead*, New Order's *Low-Life* or REM's *Reckoning*.

Opening with the exhilarating faux country of *Faron Young*, the record takes us on a trip through the inside-out sexual politics of *Appetite*, the heartbreak of *When Love Breaks Down*, the broken romanticism of *Goodbye Lucille #1* and finishing up with quite possibly the only Marvin Gaye tribute which makes no reference to the man in either word or music in *When The Angels*.

Their second album in 1985 should have broke the Sprout big, but it never happened. Not properly. The album (renamed *Two Wheels Good* in the US incidentally, after objections from the late actor's estate) yielded but one hit from its four singles (*When Love Breaks Down*, and that only scraped the Top 30 after four attempts) and they didn't really make a name for themselves until their next album both made and cursed them (ironically, it included their only Top 10 hit, *The King Of Rock 'N' Roll*, about a one-hit wonder doomed to play the same song forever – it saddled them with the line 'Hot dog, jumping frog, Albuquerque', which haunted them for the rest of their career).

Following their promising but creatively cluttered debut *Swoon*, self-styled 'greatest songwriter in the world' Paddy McAloon augmented the line-up, which included his brother Martin on bass and girlfriend Wendy Smith on ethereal backing vocals, with drummer Neil Conti and, inspirationally, studio boffin Thomas Dolby as producer.

No stranger to the odd hit himself, Dolby draped McAloon's songs, culled from an alleged clutch of hundreds of possibles, with all manner of artful intelligence and subtly



“Enough depth to ensure the songs would still be revealing surprises even after dozens of listens.”

appropriate arrangements, bringing in keyboard swashes, string and horn samples and finely balanced sonic nuances to create a lush, richly textured document that offered toe-tapping rhythms, singalong hooks and catchy melodies aplenty, but with enough depth to ensure the songs would still be revealing surprises even after dozens of listens.

Revealingly, the 2007 special edition gives the lie to the commonly held belief that McAloon's quirky songs were held together by Dolby's studio trickery. Its bonus disc features acoustic versions of nine of the songs, mostly with just McAloon's soft Durham burr and acoustic guitar – they still sound great.

But for all its arch cleverness and technical perfectionism, pale imitations of the Sprout such as the anaemic Deacon Blue or Lloyd Cole stole much of the chart thunder.

Perhaps if McAloon hadn't let his lyrical muse get quite so convoluted, perhaps if they'd projected an image of romantic bedsit poets rather than wayward pop mavericks, or perhaps if their label Kitchenware had simply brought more promotional muscle to bear, Prefab Sprout might have become a household name. Whatever the reason, millions missed out on a classic album, but for those many thousands who've discovered it over the years, it's a warmly treasured gem. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

M

MUSO

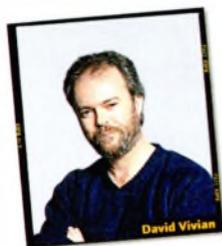
CLASSIC ALBUMS

PREFAB SPROUT
STEVE McQUEEN

have Ambisonics decoders), a DVD-Video layer with 4.0 speaker feeds, DTS compressed (this is the main output) – the compression does not appear on the audio output – and a DVD-Audio layer + 4.0 sound with Meridian's MLP lossless compression code.

Recordings made this way have been made available for the last two years, and it is not known whether they will continue to be made available in the long term, but they did sound effective in the demonstrations provided at the AES conference. This does look like a viable and musically satisfactory way of mastering music in surround sound that works on any DTS-capable replay system. And it can be accessed by anyone with a DTS replay system. If you're interested, check them out on www.wyastone.co.uk/nrl/dvd.html.

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



Show business

Hi-fi shows are better than you think

How do you feel about hi-fi shows? I mean, do you honestly believe they give you the opportunity to hear hi-fi systems you could never dream of owning and, perhaps more importantly, those that you just might - performing at the height of their abilities? Of course not. But the point is, you can hear them. Okay, more often than not, it's in a pokey, airless hotel bedroom crammed with the curious, the inanimate and lost souls transported to a temporary resting place between the jostling puffa jackets of career brochure collectors. But, hey, at least you get a rough idea. They're not just inert exhibits.

Think how much worse it is at motor shows, which, by and large, are a complete waste of time. This isn't meant as a criticism – like me, you probably know how to waste time brilliantly – more a statement of fact. Let me explain. At hi-fi shows, you don't merely have the opportunity to look and touch the hardware, you can listen to the world's most expensive and powerful kit flat out. For a motor show experience to match that, someone would have to lob you the keys to a



“Someone would have to lob you the keys to a Ferrari Enzo and invite you to drive it at 220mph down the central causeway.”

Ferrari Enzo and invite you to drive it at 220mph down the central causeway. At a computer show you can get lost in cyberspace for so long, friends will assume Dr Who has abducted you while loitering at the intersection of the space-time continuum.

But at a motor show: Frankfurt, say, where the exhibition halls are larger than the city itself, you just get lost. Forever. People have been known to die. Stimulation? Sitting at the wheel of a car you can't switch on is about as stimulating as trying to watch *Top Gear* during a power cut. And even then you'll only be there a matter of seconds before the small hairs on the back of your neck are singed by the glare of the next punter desperate to relieve the numbing tedium of, well, looking at impossibly shiny cars under headache-inducing spotlights. Why do so many people queue to sit in the cars? Because, sadly, short of vaulting the perimeter ropes of the Ferrari stand and applying 100 fingerprints to the bodywork of a Superamerica before getting rugby tackled by a security guard employed to make sure you adhere to the 'look but don't touch' policy, it's the most exciting thing you can do at a motor show.

Well nearly. If you must attend a motor show, do it on Press Day, when all manner of celebrity posturing will be taking place. Disguise yourself as a plumber and say you've come to fix a blockage in the toilets. Once you're in, I recommend this. Target your most hated celebrity chef – most of the usual suspects will be in action – and start a fight. Go up to Gordon Ramsay, for instance, and in your best

Eric Cartman, call him a 'c**kmeister'. If you win the fight, let Ainsley Harriott serve you lunch, eat a mouthful then collapse to the floor clasping your throat. You'll get kicked out, but you'll have had some fun. Fights with tellychefs is one thing you won't get at a hi-fi show.

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



Modern Life is Rubbish

Paul profoundly influenced by Blur songs

I don't consider myself a technophobe by nature, and indeed find all manner of technological devices useful in my everyday life – as was recently rammed home when a nighttime power cut emphasised our enormous dependency on electrical power.

But there's no avoiding the conclusion that technology hasn't done a great deal to advance the cause of high fidelity down the years. I'll make exceptions for the replacement

of shellac with vinyl, and (with some reservations) the introduction of FM radio, but those were both 50 years ago. But neither CD nor DAB digital radio can be said to have offered significant sound quality advances on those 1950s formats.

What 'progress' we have seen has been more to do with quantity than quality, and making things cheaper and/or more convenient. That said, the desire to over-complicate seems to be an exasperating part of the 21st Century human condition.

When consumers as end-users make the final choice over technologies, the process is essentially democratic, as in choosing vinyl over SACD or DVD-Audio as the preferred alternative to CD. Not so when it comes to centralised broadcast media such as television and radio, where lobby groups and politicians take over, usually for ill rather than good.

It's probably too late to save analogue TV from a digital takeover, which has clearly and obviously reduced picture quality in the interests of extra channels. Satellite-delivered HD services presumably provide a picture quality palliative for those prepared to pay a premium. I've no idea whether terrestrial HD will be introduced to provide an alternative to the poor quality pictures currently available via Freeview after analogue switch-off.

It may not be too late to save analogue radio, as decisions on the switch-off date have been repeatedly postponed. DAB is a real mess. It was started too early, using 1980s technology, by a BBC anxious to maintain its network hegemony, using MP2 digital codecs that were already dated by the time the service started. Now all the discussion is about a more efficient but essentially incompatible DAB+ format using more efficient AAC+ codecs (see www.digitalradiotech.co.uk for an antidote to pro-DAB propaganda).

High power consumption makes DAB difficult for portable applications; motor manufacturer inertia seems to have kept it out of the in-car market, digital radio is already available with generally higher bit rates via Sky satellite and Freeview TV platforms. But the real challenge to DAB, and a potential saviour of AM/FM, lies with broadband internet radio.

I've been playing with Acoustic Energy's AE1716B Wi-fi Internet radio recently, and while it's clearly still early days, and the ergonomics are still a little clunky, the considerable potential of this alternative route is unmistakable. Access to thousands of stations around the globe makes it intrinsically far more interesting, while the spread of broadband and wi-fi should ultimately deliver quality that's superior to DAB, though not FM.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

WHAT'S NOT WRONG
WITH CD PLAYERS



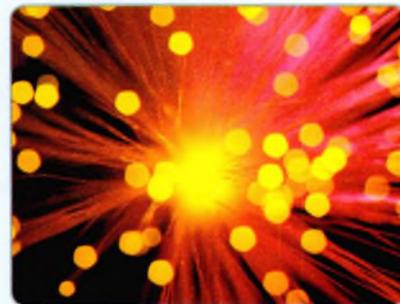
Now and then one comes across statements about how hi-fi works that become accepted as 'wisdom' despite being wrong.

Sadly, these sometimes originate with folks who should know better. With CD players being the focus of this issue of *HFC*, we thought it's high time to knock on the head a couple of myths about what's supposedly wrong with CD.

First, the speed of CD. We've seen it suggested recently that changes to the mains voltage that supplies a CD player will affect the speed at which a disc plays. The motor that spins the disc, we're told, goes round at a speed determined by the voltage applied to it and if the mains voltage rises so does the speed of the motor. Allegedly the speed of the music would be affected by this but not the pitch.

This is wrong on several counts. First, while the speed of an electric motor is indeed dependent on voltage, the whole disc-reading system of motor/laser/decoder/memory buffer is what's called a 'servo loop' which is under the control of the highly stable crystal oscillator that defines the speed of every part of the audio system. The disc spins just fast enough to feed data into the D/A converter at the required rate, and while the motor's speed may vary minutely from moment to moment, the use of a buffer memory serves to even this out so that the final data rate is entirely controlled by the crystal. This also largely eliminates jitter due to the transport, maybe not completely (due to various second-order coupling effects) but pretty efficiently nonetheless.

In any case, if for some reason the crystal's speed changed, the sound would change in both speed and pitch, exactly like an LP or analogue tape. Actually, the speed of the crystal is minutely affected by the power supply voltage: according to a few data sheets I looked at, a mains voltage change of 10 per cent (about the worst case one's likely to see) might cause a change of around 0.003 per cent in the supply to the



"We thought it's high time to knock on the head a couple of myths about what's wrong with CD."

crystal oscillator, which in turn would affect frequency by perhaps 0.000000003 per cent.

The other CD myth is that the data read off the disc is so dodgy that interpolation (computerised guesswork) must be used by the player and so the output will never be accurate. Yes, there are invariably a few errors (typically anywhere from one to ten per million bits) in the readout from the laser, but there is enough data correction built into CD replay to ensure that even disc damage clearly visible to the eye need not cause loss of data. Rather than trying to prove this (data correction is a bit of a headache-inducing subject) I'll simply cite several years of personal experience: I've checked many discs in many players via the digital output and found that basically any disc that plays without skipping gives the correct bits out every time, compared with the master files from which the disc was made. I check this to ensure factories have not messed with my disc masters, and occasionally as a double-check on the performance of players under review.

Sure, bad disc damage and/or dirty or worn-out CD player optics can cause skipping, but with discs and players that are in good condition, loss of digital data just isn't a problem in the real world. **HFC**

Richard Black

Sonus faber.

Sonus Faber Grand Piano Domus



For over two decades, Sonus faber have treated us to speakers so beautiful that they've revolutionised the entire industry. Where once there were only parallel sides, we now have curves. Where once we suffered poor veneers, we now savour finishes worthy of the finest furniture. From the exquisite Homage series, representing the ultimate in Sonus faber artistry, to the Cremona range, offering the pleasure of Homage for a wider audience, Sonus faber has addressed the needs of the majority of music and cinema lovers. Now, the audience is wider still.

Imagine an affordable range of loudspeakers able to join the Homage and Cremona families. Imagine a full selection, from centre channel to main and surround speakers to subwoofer, floorstanding or shelf mounting, a complete selection of stands, with the unmistakable lute shape, leather details, fine woods, and - above all - deliriously musical, truly sublime sound quality. Imagine no more: Sonus faber offers you Domus.

Sonus Faber Gravis, Center Domus



Sonus Faber Concertino Domus



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SYSTEM FILE

Paul Marchant has terabytes of music to hand everywhere in the house

THE SYSTEM

A multitude of kit, culminating in Quad amps, Quantum music servers and B&W Matrix 801 S3 and Spendor BC1 speakers

Some folk have a hi-fi system. Some have more than one, in different rooms. And some have slick WAG-friendly invisible multiroom systems. Not Paul Marchant. His multiple room installation is far from the norm. It's the perfect integration between old and new, with classic amplifiers and speakers coupled to a level of high-technology most space agencies would aspire to.

Technology at Paul's place is measured by the metre. He has nigh on two metres of 'legacy' gear – tuners, CD and DVD players and more, all woven into the audio matrix, but these seldom see action anymore. Instead, his fully wired house has 2.4TB of Quantum Snap server storage under the stairs, where most people keep the kitty litter and old paint pots.

And it's full. The understair storage holds 23,292 uncompressed tracks, all ripped from a vast collection of CDs and stored as .WAV files. Depending on how you consider it, that's more than 80 days of non-stop music, or enough music transfer to wear out three CD drives.

CALL FOR CLIENTS

Anything that can be used as a client to access the servers is called into use. Hewlett-Packard PDA handsets, Dell PCs and touchscreen panels, even an old Microsoft Xbox through a plasma screen. All using Winamp as an interface. And, depending on the room, these sounds hook up to some extremely good loudspeakers, like one of two pairs of B&W Matrix 801 S3 speakers (that were formerly used in Abbey Road's studios) and a pair of Spendor BC1s. The Spondors are driven by an equally classic brace of Quad 50E pro monoblock amps from the early 1970s.

It may look daunting to those of us who get flustered by pause buttons, but in fact it's simple to navigate. The touch screens are so easy to drive, even a rubber chicken can access any track in a matter of seconds. Paul's original discs never see action anymore – they will always be around, but aren't as immediate as looking up a file. And that's why the system is as it is: for convenience, not compromise. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



C'MON - JOIN IN THE FUN!

If you'd like your system to be featured in *System File*, simply write a 'review' of your system consisting of 500 words or less and send it to: System File, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email it to: hifisub@futurenet.co.uk (please include your name and address) If we pick you, you'll get a visit from one of our reviewers, plus a special 'goody bag' consisting of a Hi-Fi Choice T-shirt, IsoTek's System Enhancer CD and Russ Andrews' Sound Solutions book... so get writing!



The world according to...

Cambridge Audio

This month, *Hi-Fi Choice* talks to **Matthew Bramble**, technical director of the ever-innovative Cambridge Audio. Interview: Malcolm Steward

Matthew Bramble is acknowledged as being a fine and very accomplished designer, yet he plies his trade not at the stratospheric end of the market, but in the budget sector. We visited him at the South London headquarters of Cambridge Audio where he works at taking the company beyond what is traditionally expected of entry-level hi-fi

HFC How did you come to be in charge of design at Cambridge Audio?

MB I've been at Audio Partnership, Cambridge Audio's parent company, for about eight or nine years now. Before that I'd spent about seven years at Musical Fidelity, which was my first job in hi-fi and provided fantastic training for me. I applied for a position in the

engineering department there but didn't get it because they promoted somebody internally. Subsequently they offered me a job in the technical support department, which I accepted because it gave me a foot in the door, and it turned out to be excellent and gave me a lot of experience. I did several jobs there, which all added to my experience in hi-fi, before ending up as R&D manager. Before that I'd studied Physics at university, but I dropped out of that when I decided that I wanted to become a sound engineer, which I did, but didn't enjoy: it's a horrible job! Then I did an HND in electronics, which got me interested in hi-fi and so I started writing hundreds of letters to various companies before ending up at Musical Fidelity.

HFC You mentioned Audio Partnership, which many people still perceive wrongly as being the manufacturing arm of Richer Sounds.

MB AP is a stand-alone firm. Our involvement with Richer, even though it's our UK distributor, is quite limited. We've been focusing on export increasingly and, although Richer does a fantastic job for us in the UK, it's not going to help us grow our business worldwide.

HFC Does being a British-owned brand, even though you manufacture in China, still carry weight in foreign markets?

MB Yes, but that 'glow' surrounding British companies is waning slightly – as companies disappear – and we would honestly welcome more competition because marketing a British company in, say, the Far East, is easier if you have a strong British industry behind you.

HFC Do you think that the commercial advantages that have encouraged companies to manufacture in China will still exist in a couple of years? Surely, the social, political and economic climate must alter shortly and there'll be no advantage to be had?

MB There's little advantage now, simply because everybody is manufacturing there. The only way to enforce any competitive advantage is to manufacture a better product. You can't compete on price: you have to have products that are genuinely better. And we think that with our engineers we are truly competitive.

HFC Manufacturing in China means that you can give consumers a lot of product at little cost, but if building products there becomes more expensive, as it surely must, will you still be able to do that?

MB There is always somewhere else where one can make products. Eastern Europe and India are opening up to a lot of manufacturing, for instance, and it is not inconceivable that we might move there if it were to our advantage. However, we're not one of those companies that hops from one manufacturer to the next. We've had a very strong relationship with our manufacturing partner in China for a long time.

“We welcome more competition, because marketing a British company is easier if you have a strong British industry behind you.”



Breaktime: the Cambridge boys develop the website for in-house band 'Bramble & Co.'

HFC Are you moving away from the entry-level market with your new products?

MB We still operate in the budget sector and we're definitely not moving away from that. We've moved up in that sector but we've not removed ourselves from that market, which many companies have. We enjoy being in it and intend to stay. Our range will probably top out at £800 to £1,000 per unit.

Some of the companies who move up market find that although their profit margins rise their volumes drop because they're selling, say, a few thousand very expensive items rather than tens of thousands of cheaper products. The problem is that if you want to be high-end, technology and chipset manufacturers won't be interested in you, because they want volume sales: they're not interested in selling a handful of chipsets to a small manufacturer.

HFC So there are no plans for Cambridge Audio products at real high-end prices?

MB No, although many of the engineers here are real hi-fi fans and have worked on such products. It might be fun to show what we could do, but it's honestly unnecessary and we have so much else to do.

HFC So where is Cambridge Audio heading?

MB We have more products coming in our 8 Series, but we're unlikely to go much higher than these. We're more likely to diverge into other branches and types of products.

HFC You have been adventurous with products like the 640H server.

MB We were probably one of the first to produce a hard disk server. We learned so much from doing that and it has stood us in good stead for the future. For instance, it taught us how important customer support is with that type of product, which has to interface with things outside typical hi-fi. You have to provide far more support than you do with a CD player. It's a far different situation when you – or your distributor or retailer – have to explain to a customer that the problem doesn't lie with the unit but that he needs a patch or a service pack from Microsoft for his computer's operating system to get his 'hi-fi' to work!

The Azur 640H was a bold move for us, but the market is moving that way and the knowledge we've gained has been very useful. It was a massive learning curve for us and it taught us how different things are when you start playing with the really big boys.

HFC What comes next for the technology?

MB Apart from introducing slightly higher end products to broaden our hi-fi range, we're also planning to develop our networked playback products and we'll be expanding our AV range with AVRs and DVD players. We've been ▶



Jamaican reggae fanatic Matthew 'Jonah' Bramble is quick to bust a move. Here he demonstrates 'dancehall style' body poppin'



“If you buy a two-channel system from us, all you have to do is plug in a keypad and off you go with a multiroom set-up.”

getting deeper into the chips to create products that are truly unique and offer better performance. Also multiroom: that's a big strand for us because InCognito is designed to work with our regular hi-fi systems: if you buy a two-channel system from us, all you have to do is plug in a keypad and off you go with a multiroom set-up. InCognito was targeted at the sort of customer who wants a multiroom system but doesn't want to spend vast amounts of money on it and wants something that's very easy to install – either by himself, an electrician, or by his hi-fi dealer, who doesn't need to go on extended training courses, learn programming and so forth: it's a very simple system and can be installed using just CAT5 cable, which most people are familiar and happy with. In that respect, the system was targeted partly at the retailer as well as the customer: it's a way he can do his first custom install without tearing his hair out and worrying about programming!

HFC Is it all about audio or is there a video element as well?

MB We have a video switcher, too. And the system will also integrate with home automation systems, although we do that through placing, say, lighting keypads next to

our own. There's a clear delineation between the two systems because there's a problem with complete integration in that if one thing goes down, everything can go down with it. We like to make it clear that if your lighting stops working then it's not a problem with the audio system! We deliberately made the system simple: we could have added many other functions but we wanted it, for example, to be programmable with a remote control for installers. We didn't want to reinvent the wheel, that sort of system is available already and we wanted to develop something different.

HFC You talk about the AV market but isn't there a danger, with AV products becoming commodities, that there's no profitability in that market?

MB There's certainly less margin than there is on hi-fi. Everybody making AV receivers is making less than they do on their core products, I should think, but there's still margin to be made. It's awkward because and this is driven to some extent by the press, is that the feature count that seems to matter more than the inherent performance of the product. We, for instance, are criticised for not having auto

set-up or that kind of functionality on our receivers when we're compared to other brands but what the reviewer really wants are the same features in every product. What we do, when we decide where to spend our money and engineering effort, is to focus on the audio quality more than the number of tick boxes we can fill in. We're happy to spend the money on better power supplies rather than, say, auto set-up, because we know that a Cambridge buyer is making an informed choice, probably reads hi-fi magazines, knows how to set up a receiver, and is prepared to spend 10 minutes on setting it up. He doesn't need that function and if he did use it, he'd probably go in and readjust it manually anyway. But he is likely to appreciate enhanced sound quality. And that is the kind of customer we're aiming at. We believe that performance is more important than being at the same level as Japanese brands with respect to the level of functions.

HFC When I spoke to Roy Gandy recently, he said that Rega wasn't interested in AV because it was virtually impossible to differentiate one's products because they were all based on the same chipsets and there was little one could do to enhance their performance.

MB I tend not to agree. That's the same argument as saying that all CD players sound the same. In the AV market, which is driven by features, I think the customer is perhaps less aware of the differences that can be achieved. You can make a difference and it's a fast-moving area – quite scary, in fact. The hard part is getting those differences across!

Much of the work done in AV has given us knowledge that's spun off into other products. For example, receivers are DSP-based and that features in our upsampling CD players. It's good for a company to take on those design tasks because it's highly educational.

HFC Let's talk, then, about the Class XD technology you're using.

MB That was first seen in the 840A amplifier and, at its simplest level, it involves moving the crossover point from being at zero crossing to one side of that. The problem with zero crossing is that distortion happens when the signal is at its quietest, which is the worst possible time. If you displace that crossover it happens at another level, which is one advantage. Another advantage of XD is that it changes the harmonic spectrum significantly: it reduces the odd harmonic content, which improves the sound. You can't make NPN and PNP transistors 'join' perfectly in the middle (it's an intrinsic quality of the silicon) but as you move away from the zero point, the curves become much smoother and if you place the crossover point in that region they 'join' much better and so you get lower distortion. There are more benefits to the technology than you might at first imagine.

We've developed, and are developing, enhancements to Class XD so you don't simply displace the crossover point statically, but dynamically according to the signal. A lot of our ongoing work is to find out how we can make amplifiers perform better with XD and take more advantage of it. We have a power amplifier coming this year that exploits this: it's enormously powerful (200wpc), bridgeable (500wpc mono) and, we think, very exciting.

HFC What do you suggest that people partner this high-end design with?

MB There'll be a matching preamplifier based on new hybrid technology we've developed. And we consider the 840C CD player to be the perfect front end for the system because we think it would be hard to improve on that

After that final comment we decamped to AP's listening room and enjoyed some time auditioning products from the company's range. This just served to reinforce the impression I'd already gained, that Cambridge Audio is deadly serious about making radical changes in the world of affordable hi-fi and sufficiently well equipped to make it happen. **HFC**

"this system is something of a musical genius"

- What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision

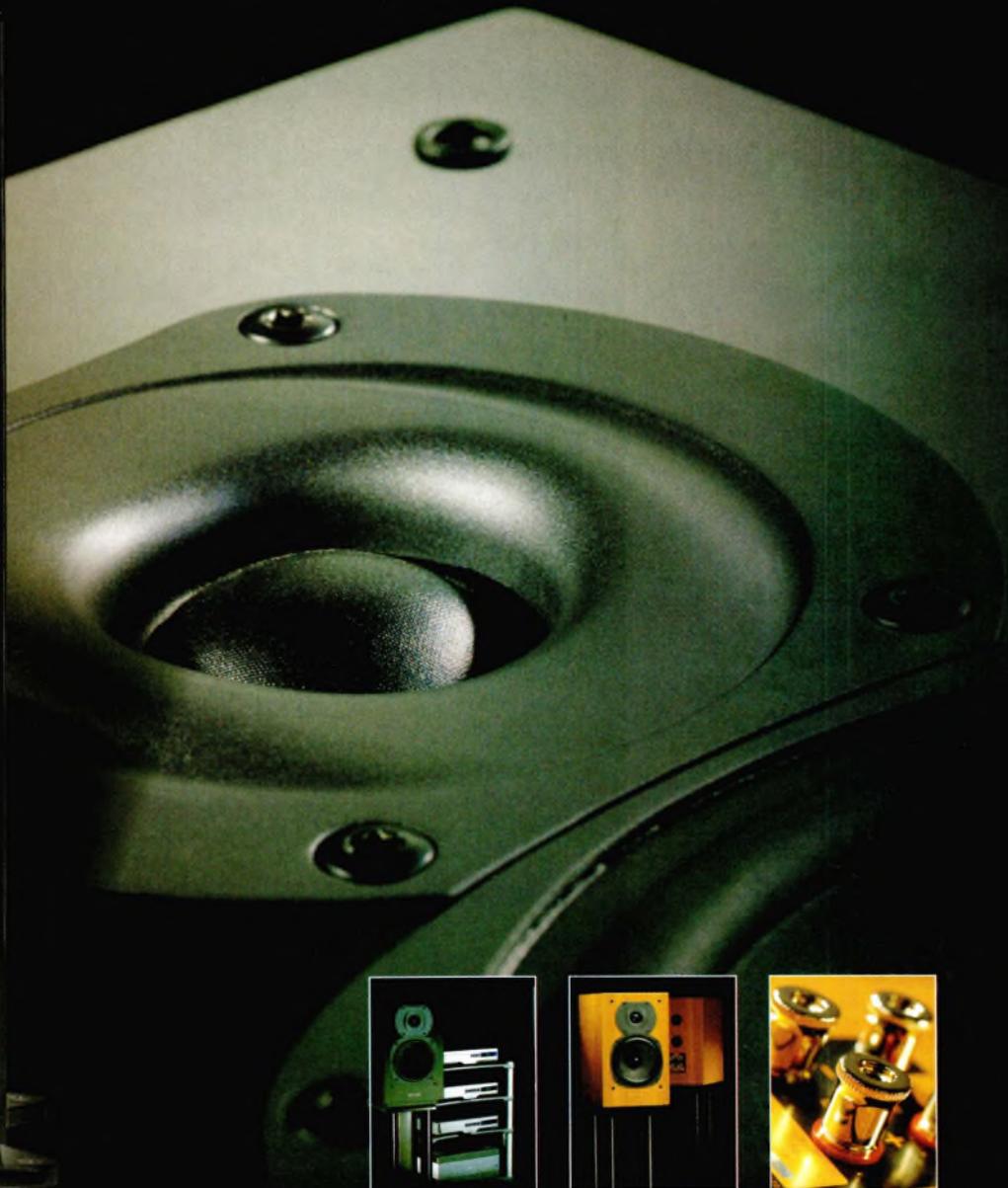
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SOUND AND VISION



January 2007

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WIN! A NAD T585

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NAD's new T585 universal disc player is a cracker. It's a stripped-down version of the flagship Masters Series M55 player, and the nod it gives to the high end is only too apparent. From the Sony disc drive to the 24-bit/192kHz Burr-Brown DACs, the player exudes quality and is ready to get the best from a wide range of formats. Not only will the player add a touch of magic to your music collection, its video upscaling and HDMI output brings 1080i picture quality to compatible screens. SACD and CD sound performance is particularly strong, and acoustic music thrives. Add an intuitive user interface with a comprehensive set of picture and music tweaking options and the T585 is clearly deserving of the Best Buy badge awarded to it in our last issue (*HFC 294*). For your chance to win one, simply answer the question below. The lucky winner will be drawn at random after the closing date.



CONGRATULATIONS...

...to our last winner, Glyn Davies of St Albans, who wins a superb Imerge music server worth £2,000!



HOW TO ENTER:

Simply answer the question below by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and daytime telephone number and pop the form in the post to: **NAD Competition, Hi-Fi Choice magazine, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.** Please also take the time to fill in our small questionnaire – we want to make *Hi-Fi Choice* as good as you deserve, dear reader.

QUESTION:

What is the T585 a stripped-down version of?

- a) A Masters Series M55
- b) A 3 Series BMW
- c) A traffic signal from the M5

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Closing date for entries is 29 June 2007. No purchase necessary. Employees of Future Publishing (including freelancers) and Armour HE, their relatives and any agents involved are ineligible to enter. Future Publishing reserves the right to verify the eligibility of all entrants. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash. The entries will be judged after the closing date and all winners will be notified by telephone within ten working days of that date. Prizes will be sent out within 28 days of notification by the company (or companies) supplying the competition prizes, not Hi-Fi Choice or Future Publishing. Photocopied entries will be accepted, but multiple entries will be disallowed. By submitting a competition entry, entrants will be deemed to have accepted these terms and conditions and to have agreed to be bound by them. Any personal data relating to entrants will not be disclosed to a third party.

What would you like to see more of in *Hi-Fi Choice* each month?

What would you like to see less of in *Hi-Fi Choice* each month?

How much do you intend to spend on your next single item of hi-fi?

How do you feel about downloading music from the internet?

What do you think your next hi-fi purchase will be, and when?

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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

THE PRETTY THINGS

The Pretty Things
Fontana/Sundazed
120g vinyl



Music: This Dartford band competed with the Rolling Stones for the title of meanest, bad ass SOB on the scene in the mid-1960s. Clearly much

influenced by the likes of Bo Diddley, one of whose songs gave them their name, they produced driving, pulsating grooves that made you want to dance. Their first album from 1965 contains their first two hits: *Rosalyn* and *Don't Bring Me Down*. Occasionally, the distortion is overdone, but there are some fine blues moments when they rein things in. *I Can Never Say* being a stand out. ★★★★★

Sound: This pressing is in what is called 'electronically created stereo'. In other words, mono with a bit more reverb added. Tonally, it's on the thin side, but if you want to hear these tracks as they were meant, it's as close as you'll get. ★★ JK

STACEY KENT

Dreamsville

Candid/Pure Pleasure
180g vinyl



Music: Kent started singing in the early 1990s, influenced by the great crooners of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Sinatra and Nat 'King' Cole,

and her voice harks back to those seemingly halcyon days of sharp suits and big orchestras. Her tone is extraordinarily radiant, the recording delivering an intimacy that is rare via a selection of dreamy, soft ballads that were selected on the basis of requests from family and fans alike, including *I've Got A Crush On You* and *Isn't It A Pity*. Kent's sultry voice is backed by a very smooth band, but one that's rescued from 'dinner jazz' schmaltz by the quality of the recording. ★★★★★

Sound: Candid was revived in the late 1980s and if this album is any indication, it has upheld the qualities found in its original 1960s incarnation. Stunningly real and present sound, one of the best in a while. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure and Sundazed
www.purepleasurerecords.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



RICHARD THOMPSON

Sweet Warrior

Proper

Music: Thompson has been on a prolific run of late and *Sweet Warrior*, the follow-up to 2005's solo acoustic set *Front Parlour Ballads* continues the hot streak. This time, Thompson's backed by a full band and it suits his mood for the former Fairport Convention guitarist is angry – indeed on *Dad's Gonna Kill Me*, a harrowing tale of an ordinary soldier's lot in Iraq, he's positively furious. Yet even those songs such as *Needle and Thread* and *Too Late To Come Fishing*, which report on the battle of the sexes rather than the Baghdad frontline share the same combative intensity. ★★★★★

Sound: Aside from his claims to songwriting greatness, Thompson is also one of our finest electric guitarists and his snaking, spitting lead lines here are not so much passionate as downright venomous. ★★★★★ NW



BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 6 'Pastoral', No. 2
Bernard Haitink (cond), LSO
LSO Live LS00082

Music: This is Beethoven at his most contented and least anguished. The *Pastoral* is a work suffused by the sounds of nature and for the most part is a relaxed affair in line with the title, albeit punctuated by the violence of a brief but intense storm (fourth movement). The Haydnesque second symphony is a good foil for the *Pastoral*. The playing is utterly assured as you would expect, and tempi are generally on the lively side of expectations, though never rushed. ★★★★★

Sound: Recorded live at the Barbican, the sound is forward and sometimes too close and aggressive for comfort, but it's generally clear with good stereo positioning. The same programme is available on a stereo SACD hybrid disc, still at a low price. ★★★★★ AG



BARTOK

Mikrokosmos (Complete) Books 1-6
Jenő Jandó (piano), Tamata Takács
(mezzo soprano), Balázs Szokolay (piano)
Naxos B 557821 22 (two-disc set)

Music: This is a complete recording of a series of 153 miniatures that constitute a series of graded exercises – a few with a second piano or a mezzo soprano support. The early pieces are of no real musical interest unless you're learning piano, but gradually, the compositions become more meaningful and musically involving, and more characteristic rhythmically and harmonically of Bartok's oeuvre. ★★★★★

Sound: The performances are crisp, clean and exacting, and they appear to be highly idiomatic. Clearly of interest mainly to the student of classical piano, others should treat this as a musically worthwhile disc (disc 2), with an exercise disc (or a silver drinks coaster) thrown in. ★★★★★ AG



RAY LAMONTAGNE

Till The Sun Turns Black

14th Floor

Music: The belated UK top ten success of Lamontagne's debut *Trouble* has thrown the release schedule out of kilter, so that the bearded American troubadour's second album, released in the States last year, is only now being rolled out here. On first hearing, it's less immediately arresting: the voice, previously pitched so passionately somewhere between Van Morrison and Otis Redding, sounds oddly subdued while the folk-rock arrangements have been given a lush and seemingly unnecessary makeover. Yet repeated listening unveils hidden layers of subtle beauty as the vocals that initially seemed undercooked insinuate their way into your brain with a whispering soulfulness and the songs emerge to reveal their rich, brooding poetry. Masterful. ★★★★★

Sound: Some may find the strings and horns intrusive but ultimately they add fresh depth to Ethan Johns' production, without losing the naturalness that made *Trouble* so special. ★★★★★ NW



EDDIE HAZEL

Game, Dames & Guitar Thangs

Collectors' Choice/Warner Bros

Music: The guitar lynchpin of George Clinton's P-Funk axis, Brooklyn-born Hazel became a post-Hendrix guitar superhero in the early 1970s. Drugs and other problems beset him for years, but Clinton and Hazel still managed to produce this 1977 solo masterpiece, with its grand tributes to the 1960s in the form of blistering covers of The Mamas & The Papas *California Dreamin'* and The Beatles *I Want You*. Though Hazel died of liver complications in 1992, everyone should make time for this minor miracle in sound. ★★★★★

Sound: A finely textured analogue recording that favours the bass of Bootsy Collins and Bernie Worrell's psychedelic keyboards, yet the laurels go to Hazel, whose Hendrix guitar dominates throughout. ★★★★★ MP



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC 'Strange and adventurous stuff'

THE ORB The Orb's Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld Big Life

Music: Strange and adventurous stuff this seemed back in 1991, but it turned out to be highly influential. Seminal even. It was the first album to make extensive use of sampling from Apollo moon shots, as well as musical sources as diverse as violin symphonies, choral music and the hippie vibes of Steve Hillage. It also used dub in an imaginative way by adding elements that would never have appeared in Jamaican music. This is an album whose title is

pretty descriptive – it's a voyage through space that's propelled by rhythms that never get too lively, but keep one fully engaged, with or without the chemical assistance used in its creation. ★★★★★
Sound: Its early 1990s period and the extensive use of sampling means that *Ultraworld* lacks dynamic realism, but the wide bandwidth and enthusiastic use of reverb means that it will go 'large' in enthusiastic fashion. ★★★★★ JK



TORI AMOS American Doll Posse

Epic

Music: The ninth album from Cornwall's most famous immigrant is a concept number in which she expresses herself through the personalities of five 'American dolls', each with their own personality, song cycle and wardrobe. There's more electric guitar than you might expect from an Tori album, and not always in a good way, unless you're a fan of big-haired stadium rock and can get down with the honky-tonk, country-rock of lead single *Big Wheel* (unfortunately, this single failed to get airplay in many US radio stations because of its extensive use of the acronym 'MILF'). It's quite a jump from the introspective piano ballads we're used to, but there's also plenty of room for the old Tori dotted through the generous 23 tracks. ★★★★★

Sound: Despite its high concept intention, the album has a looser and more improvisational feel than Amos's usually rather pristine compositions. But, after the navel-gazing seriousness of *The Beekeeper*, this cut gives the impression that she's learning to have some fun with her music again. ★★★★★ DO



VARIOUS ARTISTS Stax/Volt Singles Collection

Rhino/Atlantic

Music: Between the nascent company's first cuts in 1959 and when it eventually split with distributor Atlantic in 1968, Stax defined a newly evolving genre – southern soul. Grittier and funkier than the pure pop coming out of Detroit's Motown, much of it was written and performed by the same close-knit team, which led to an exceptionally consistent sound and spawned classic cuts from Otis Redding, Sam And Dave and many more. They're all here, plus many of the significant B-sides and a host of lesser-known musical gems. ★★★★★

Sound: All of the 244 tracks were remastered in their original mono mixes and the result is a warts 'n' all time capsule, where sonic limitations are very much part of the legacy. ★★★★★ DO



HONEYROOT The Sun Will Come

Just Music

Music: Honeyroot is Glenn Gregory of 1980's art heartthrobs Heaven 17, and various new bods, and their noise is usually tagged 'electronica'. But this set, already the best album of the year so far for many, is much, much wider than that. Some tracks are electro, others ambient, others really rock, others are in the Air-cum-Lalipuna bag (like the bluesy *The Way I Do*) while *Heavy Drops* is heavy dance floor action and *Where I Belong* is a ska-ragga-country number with surreal female vocals. TSWC will either become a cult CD or will sell millions. Dazzling. ★★★★★

Sound: Like Heaven 17, this is both the 'height' of fashion and a work of real quality. Solid bass that morphs and bends when it should and a top end that dances. A hi-fi treat. ★★★★★ PS

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

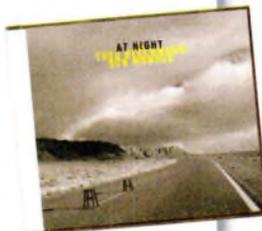
THEO BLECKMANN AND BEN MONDER At Night

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Songlines

Music: Theo Bleckmann is a singer who vocalises without words as often as with them, using all sorts of devices and effects to create an ethereal sound that is at times ghostly and at others hard and sharp. Ben Monder, meanwhile, is a guitar player who is described as "playing chords you've never heard before" and his strings do sound strange at times, but at others they simply sound beautiful, rich and resonant. Along with percussionist Satoshi Takeishi, the three make some truly out-there pieces, that are interesting without resorting to extremes. This delivers an atmospheric and expansive soundscape that varies considerably, but retains a subtle emotional power that draws you in. ★★★

Sound: It's difficult to separate the sound from the material here – the two are totally intertwined, but this is essentially a beautiful and open recording with considerable clarity and scale. ★★★★★ JK



DAVID CHESKY Concerto for Piano and Orchestra etc

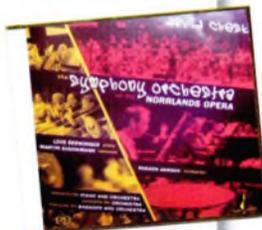
Rossen Gergov (cond), Symphony Orchestra of Norlands Opera, Love Denwinger (piano), Martin Kuuskmann (bassoon)

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Chesky SACD326

Music: These three closely related works are described by their composer as "urban music: it reflects the sounds of my city. The Upper West Side, Central Park on a summer weekend and Greenwich Village on a loud Friday night... a hard-driving concrete jungle that pulsates around the clock." The music is appropriately taut and rhythmic, a little like Bernstein on speed, and suffused by jazz influences and tonalities. Overall, though, this is eclectic, exciting and thoroughly contemporary music making. ★★★★★

Sound: The list of credits includes many of hi-fi's best products and the recordings boast no overdubs, no compressors, no multitracking and no large mixing consoles. True to its word, this is a superb recording with a real sense of space, tremendous instrumental colour and vivid large scale imagery, which really benefits from the SACD multichannel mastering. ★★★★★ AG



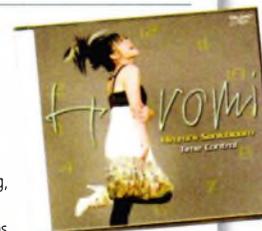
HIROMI'S SONICBLOOM Time Control

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

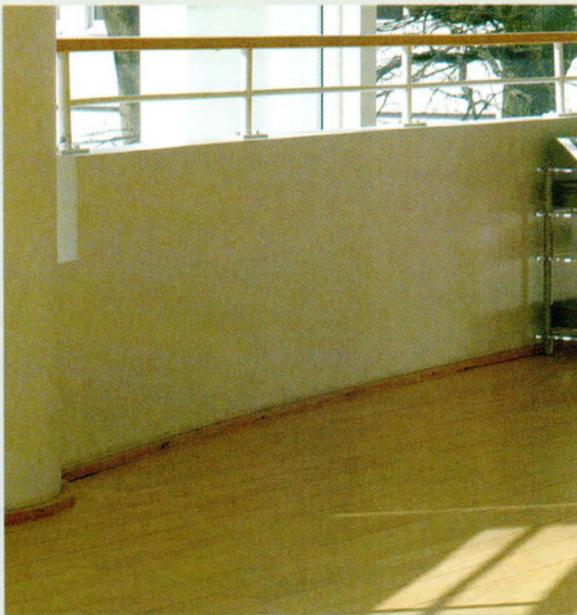
Telarc

Music: Hiromi Uehara has made a virtue of leaping between jazz genres on each of her albums, churning avant garde atonality balanced by lyrical balladeering, evocative expressionism segueing into jazz-rock fusion, bop, ragtime and more. Her fourth album in as many years is also her most focused, for good or ill, with her regular trio augmented by fusion guitarist David Fiuczynski. Her virtuosity and energetic enthusiasm are very much in evidence, but there's something a bit strained about the stop-start rhythms and forced time signature changes that seem to conspire against emotion and settle instead for artful noodling – probably more fun to do than to listen to. ★★★

Sound: There are detailed notes on the recording technicalities on the sleeve, right down to the manufacturers of the cables and mixing console, which is nice. Regardless, the sound is exceptionally clean and precise, which only serves to make the playing sound all the more clinical. ★★★★★ DO



P R I M A R E



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Gold Award, HiFi Choice, October 2006



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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



I'M A BELIEVER

First of all and as a new subscriber, I'd like to say well done on a fantastic magazine and swift delivery service. I recently I went through a spate of looking at hi-fi forums, including www.hifichoice.co.uk for advice. One interesting point that seems to come up in a lot of forums, is the issue of cables. A lot was said about the minimal difference between freebie cables and the high-end stuff.

So, as I was looking to buy some new speaker cable, I decided to listen to your advice instead and I am very glad I did. I bought some QED Silver Anniversary XT wire and it has made a huge difference – to my

ears, almost as much as a different amp or player. I now firmly believe in the difference cables can make and I will upgrade my others when money permits.

Ian Hancox via email

HFC We are big fans of cable in general and QED Silver Anniversary XT in particular. It makes a surprisingly big difference.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

I often wonder why after over 40 years of complaints about transistor sound, things haven't improved. Your amplifier *Ultimate Group Test* in your may issue (HFC 293) reminded me of the comments that appeared in *Gramophone* and *Hi-Fi News* back in the 1960s and 1970s, when transistors 'took over' from valves. The trannie sound was hailed by some as the new Jerusalem, giving improved transients and quieter backgrounds, plus they meant less bulk, longer lifespans and no output transformers. We still get remarks about tonal differences between amplifiers, as your review points out. You also said that no amp could cater for all musical types, but I disagree. It's a common mistake to assume that one has to tailor one's

"I now firmly believe in the difference cables can make and I will upgrade."

system to suit the type of music played. Any good amp should be able to reproduce any music with fidelity. Some may consider me a 'Victor Meldrew', but forty plus years of using hi-fi has taught me that flogging a dead horse still goes on. Good magazine by the way, unlike some others who seem to appeal to the folk with loads of dosh.

Cliff Millward via email

HFC Glad you like the mag. We agree that amplifiers should be able to faithfully reproduce all genres of music and so would most manufacturers. But, under blind listening conditions, it becomes possible to identify strengths and weakness when using a varied programme of listening material. This means that we can confidently recommend one amp from another for those readers who we know specifically want the best from their preferred genre. From organ music to rock, chances are there's an amp that has an advantage with your favourite music. ☺



Above: QED Silver Anniversary XT cable

Letter of the month

DANCING IN THE DARK

Jimmy Hughes, *Hi-Fi Choice's* resident tweaking expert, has come up trumps with some blinding tips in the past. Most have involved no expenditure and some of his best tips have cost under five pounds, and meant no more than a trip to B&Q. It is, however, one of his simplest tips that I hold most dear and that's listening to music with limited lighting. Jimmy's take is that a lack of visual stimuli helps concentrate the brain on the music, which I'm sure many a psychologist would concur with. Of course, the simplest

way to experiment with this, is to close the eyes. Although total darkness is an extreme and domestically questionable option, it can focus the experience like nothing else. Could this be Jimmy's simplest, cheapest and most effective tweak yet? I think it is.

Simon Craig via email

HFC Our man Jimmy has saved us all a few quid over the years and his expertise knows no bounds. We also like his limited lighting idea, especially those of us with the stamina to stay awake.



WIN CRYSTAL CABLE PICCOLO INTERCONNECTS!

☎ 020 8971 3909 @WWW.CRYSTALCABLE.COM

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...)

Below: Audio Note's bijou valve system



“Voices being vivid and lifelike. I’m totally sold on the valve sound!”

I'm totally sold on the valve sound!

Shane Rolls Perth Western Australia

HFC We've heard some excellent valve-based systems earlier this year, including the reference products from Audio Note, and we hope to review more in *The Collection* issue later this year. So keep an eye out for this very special edition coming soon.

ARMY OF ME

Is it possible to add a tonearm section to the *Buyer's Bible*? Even if it's a sub-directory to your turntable section, in much the same way that you have phono cartridges and phono stages. I'm trying to find a review of the SME IV tonearm as a logical upgrade from the Michell Technoarm (Rega) for a Michell Orbe SE, but cannot recall a recent review in *Hi-Fi Choice*. I recall the old review way back in Issue 60, but not the verdict.

Phil Udall Stokesley

HFC The *Buyer's Bible* is due an overhaul and we welcome your suggestion to restore tonearms to our listings. We will be looking at more tonearms later in the year for the upgraders out there, so keep an eye out for that. For the record (no pun intended), the SME IV tonearm received a Recommended tag back in *HFC* 60... that's roughly a Best Buy in today's money.

WAITING ROOM

In contrary to the instant gratification society we appear to be living in, there's a hell of lot to be said for waiting lists. Like the most desirable of the small-run cars, hi-fi also has long waiting lists and there's an indescribable satisfaction in holding out for what you truly desire. Sounds odd eh? I suppose it's about getting exactly what you want, the excited anticipation and the 'knowing' that you've entered a select group by buying into a small-scale product. I believe that absolutely regardless of cost, the 'buy right, buy once' philosophy will in fact actually save you money in the long-run as your contentedness will last and last.

Jason Hargreaves Cardiff

HFC True. Your points echo our ethos of 'try before you buy'. It's the confidence in your decisions, that only comes from auditioning, which provides lasting satisfaction.

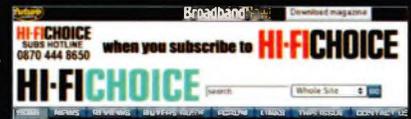
AUSSIE RULES

I read Ken Kessler's article on Chinese valve amps in the March issue (*HFC* 291), as I have recently bought one – a 40-watt Dared MP60 push-pull design, using four 5881 valves. It replaced a Myryad MP120, which it betters in every aspect, apart from bass weight, although the individual notes are much better defined.

In an 8x3.6m room with the speakers some 2m from the back wall, the amp throws up a large, detailed and genuinely three-dimensional sound stage with voices being vivid and lifelike.

Onlinef@rum

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



A few weeks ago I upgraded my CD and SACD/DVD player. Both are from the same brand, have the same cables and play through the same amp. I purchased two albums I know well: *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Machine Head*. I compared SACD with CD and found the CD better. Where's the

'Super' in Super Audio CD? **Snowy White**
...I own those albums, too, and my Sony SACD player is far better than my regular CD player (which cost four times that of the SACD). For a few notes you can get a dedicated SACD player on eBay, such as the Sony SCD-780

or 790. My 780 kicked my CD player in the teeth. **Trizza**
Don't like stuffing those iPod bud things in your ears? Try this: an Shanling iPod player, this time with valves! Just in case you don't like the iPod sound, it also has an AM/FM tuner and

even a CD player. **Blue_Max**
That *Grand Designs* show is amazing isn't it? Huge budgets,

stunning houses, occasionally a castle, but never a Castle Severn, Howard or even an Avon in sight. This is where the high-end hi-fi marketers fall over if you ask me, they just fail to sell it to the glitterati. Most high-end fans are the ones with least money. **SofaSurfer**





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ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES POWER AMPLIFIER | ROKSAN FR-5 LOUDSPEAKERS | £11,725

Rok of ages

Roksan opened for business with a great turntable years ago. Now it's got the rest of the system to match

Roksan didn't so much arrive on the British hi-fi scene 22 years ago as thud into it with a reverberant twang, rather like the first of the three wood-splintering arrows in the Strongbow cider ad. The other arrows would follow at a later date but, for the time being, that first arrow was the one that mattered, both shattering some cherished beliefs and, just as the cider ad implied, bringing with it instant refreshment to a somewhat jaded palate.

It was called the Xerxes, a turntable that literally turned the tables on what, at the time, many believed to be the definitive way to extract music from the vinyl LP, the already legendary Linn LP12. The timing was, in many ways, as significant as the product. With compact disc up and running and some commentators duly predicting the death of analogue, the LP12 had actually strengthened its position, providing the warmth, tunefulness and boogie factor the emerging digital format singularly lacked. The Xerxes didn't sound much like the cuddly Linn, though, possessing a level of precision, pace and clarity CD seemed to promise (but, at this stage failed to deliver) while retaining the seemingly magical musicality that made the LP12 such a rewarding source, albeit in a leaner, tauter form.

Not a bad result for a group of hi-fi loving friends, led by a young designer called Touraj Moghaddam who, at the 1985 Heathrow Hi-Fi Show, dared take on a true giant and gave it a bloody nose. We're still enjoying the upshot today. The Xerxes introduced a more accurate, master tape-like turntable sound that not only forced Linn to look to its laurels, but also set the bar for successive generations of vinyl spinners. It's no surprise that the battle between the Xerxes and the LP12 – both massively evolved since the mid-1980s,

continues to this day. Or that, in its latest '20' form (signifying 20 years of development), the Xerxes still takes centre stage in our first all-Roksan *Beautiful System*.

A MUSICAL DARIUS

Such an ensemble wouldn't have been possible until 1990, when the company's second product, the 1986 Darius speaker (yes, amazingly, it is safe to mention music and Darius in the same sentence), was joined by the first Roksan amp, the Rok S1, and soon after that, the Rok DP1 CD player. A butch-looking combo it would have made, too, but we'd have had to wait until 1998. It was only nine years ago that the electronics line up we recognise today – which is characterized by that distinctively slim, nuggety industrial design with its exposed bolt heads – was launched under the Caspian model name. The look has been subtly tweaked since then, but the internals have undergone major upgrades, culminating in the current Caspian M Series components you see here. This, in the idiomatic Brit-fi fashion, aims to deliver genuine high-end talent minus the outrageous price tag. There's even a Caspian floorstanding speaker: the appropriately slim, elegant and business-like FR-5, finished in a rather gorgeous lacquered bird's eye maple. That rounds off our dual source, pre/power amp stereo system.

But, as it's ages since a turntable has featured in *Beautiful Systems* (a crime, really), let's start with the Xerxes. Or, rather, the Xerxes 20, Artemiz 2 arm (with intelligent counterweight), Shiraz moving coil cartridge, DXP SE Reference phono amp and Reference Speed Control. Not much change out of £6,700 for that lot, but we've a sneaking suspicion the results will more than justify the expense. ▣

"A young designer called Touraj Moghaddam who, at the 1985 Heathrow Hi-Fi Show, dared take on a true giant and give it a bloody nose."



Roksan Xerxes 20 turntable

£6,625

The British turntable that took on the Linn LP12 has come a long way in 22 years.



Roksan Caspian M Series CD player

£1,100

Not a substitute for the Xerxes, but good enough to live alongside it... and that's something for a CD player.



Roksan Caspian M Series preamp

£1,250

Another M Series component that punches way above its weight with great transparency and dynamic expression.



Roksan Caspian M Series stereo power amplifier

£750

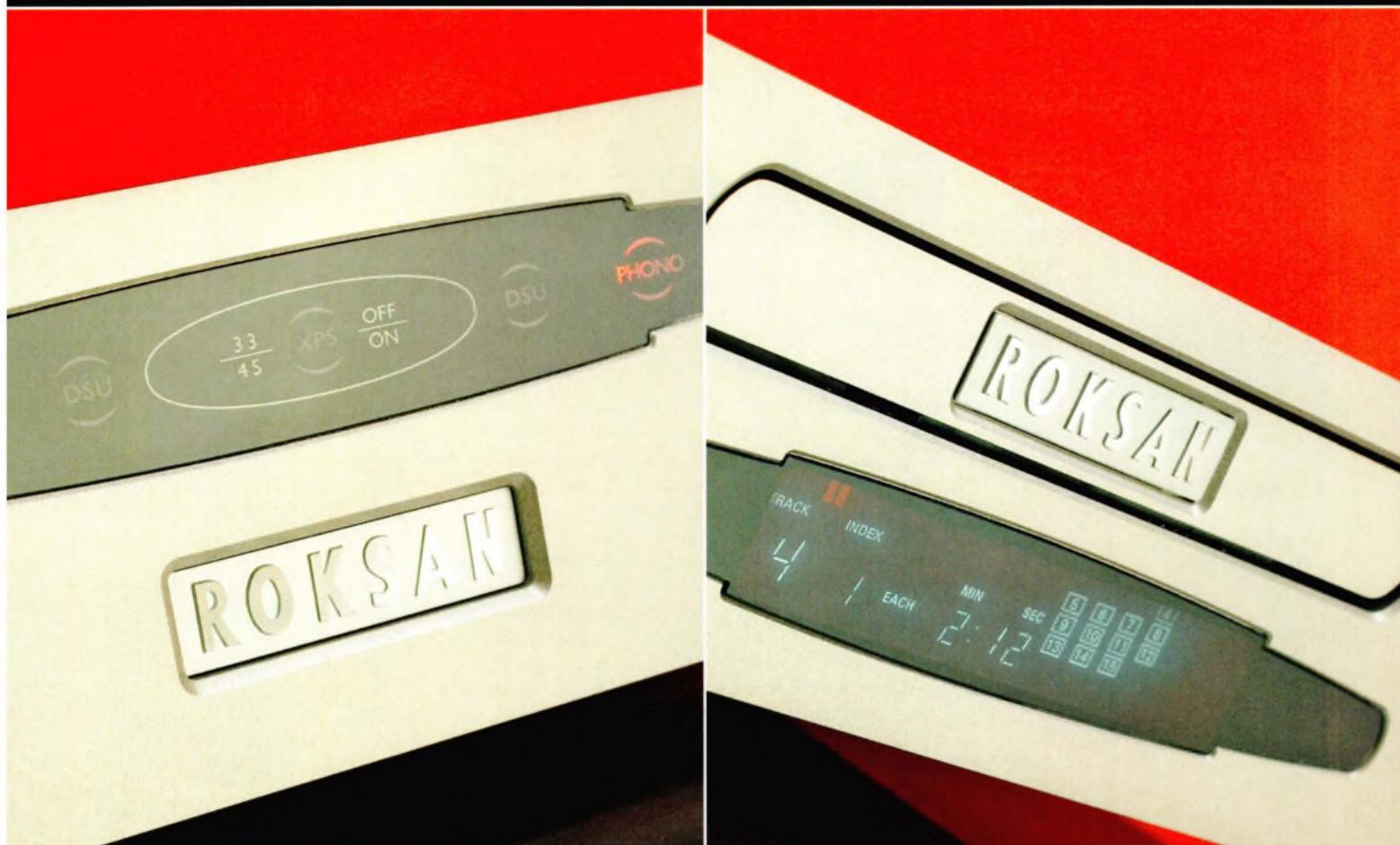
85 watts sounds far more muscular in practice, marrying grip with delicacy and deep, fluid bass.



Roksan FR-5 loudspeaker

£2,000 per pair

Beautifully built and well-engineered speaker with an open, even and musical presentation.



Give or take a few stylistic and functional mods, the 2007 Xerxes looks much like the 1985 original – clean, chunky and deceptively simple. The basic design principles are the same, too, built around a self-centring, ultra high precision bearing assembly and a drive motor which has a defined freedom to pivot and rotate in order to absorb transient speed changes, rather than transmit them to the platter via the belt. And as the task of centring the record is taken care of by a removable cap rather than the usual fixed spindle, the only contact between the vinyl and the platter is via the felt mat.

X MARKS THE SPOT

The Xerxes X (the 10th anniversary evolution) introduced a raft of changes to the design, but the most far-reaching is what Roksan calls “the three plinths and triple layer isolation system” and is its answer to the more conventional sprung sub-chassis. The job of the top plinth is to prevent vibration reaching the record/cartridge interface. The sub-plinth beneath supports the main bearing/platter assembly and the tonearm decouples the stylus/groove interface from external disturbances. Finally, the detachable armboard is machined from a billet of acetal and

provides a further level of isolation with complimentary coupling between the tonearm and the sub-plinth. The bottom line is optimal performance, simple set-up and minimal maintenance.

The Artemiz 2 tonearm and Shiraz moving coil cartridge are familiar names from the Xerxes’ beginnings and continue in their latest guises. The arm’s entire tube and head shell is machined from a single piece of solid aluminium alloy and undergoes sixteen engineering operations to achieve the headshell construction, this ensures the arm’s rigidity. It uses Roksan’s Intelligent Counterweight System, which dynamically optimises the tracking force and single point suspension minimises the transmission of unwanted mechanical noise to the cartridge while the low centre of gravity improves dynamic stability. The moving coil Shiraz cartridge is based on an EMT design, but with Roksan’s spike mounting for the generator. Great emphasis is placed on the contribution of the Swiss-made Gyger II stylus, which Roksan claims to be the world’s best diamond profile design.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

As an alternative source, the £1,100 Caspian CD Player has an almost impossible task, but equips itself well

with a 24-bit/192kHz PCM1730E DAC mounted on an all new, double-sided copper board fed by six separate power supply regulators. All the power supplies and their components feeding the digital and analogue circuits have been up rated for lower distortion, lower noise and greater dynamic range. The sled-driven laser head system is decoupled from the chassis, which is said to provide effective shock resistance and enhance resolution.

The £1,250 Caspian preamp is a dual mono, fully symmetrical design with four regulated power rails for the left and right channel amplification sections, two regulated power rails for the buffer section, and two regulated power rails for the optional internal phono amplifier. The control and logic circuits have their own independent regulated power supplies to eliminate unwanted interference with the audio section. There are five line-level inputs and a tape loop, plus three pairs of unbalanced outputs for power amp connection. In this case, it’s the £750 Caspian stereo power amp, which is rated at 85 watts a side and, like the CD player and preamp, has a wonderfully substantial and weighty feel, despite its slim casework.

Apart from their suavely svelte appearance and gorgeous finish, there’s nothing too unusual about the £2,000





“Yes, it casts its spell within the first few bars, but the more you listen, the more you grow to love it for the way it effortlessly focuses on the music and encourages you to listen for hours.”

FR-5 speakers – certainly not by the standards of Roksan's first speaker (Darius) with its spring suspended tweeter. This is a two-and-a-half-way design using a pair of 130mm coated-paper cone bass/mid drivers and a 25mm coated fabric dome tweeter. The internally braced MDF cabinet uses 25mm thick panels and is rear ported.

ISN'T HI-FI BRILLIANT?

Now, let's not pull any punches, here. Some hi-fi systems are brilliant. Brilliant at impressing your friends. Brilliant at annoying the neighbours. Brilliant at making certain CDs and records in your collection sound better than they've ever sounded before. And, ultimately, brilliant at exercising your arse as you get up, once again, to search out, well, another one of those discs that you hope will sound better than it ever has before.

This isn't one of those systems. Choose an album. Any album (assuming it contains music you actually like, of course). I promise you this. Once the

stylus has descended into the groove or the CD drawer closed you will stay seated until the music stops. Because, quite simply, you will be listening to the music and not the system. Fundamental stuff, this. Music systems play music; it's their *raison d'être*. Or so you'd think. But we all know the score. All too often we end up listening to the system. Some facet of the hardware snags our attention. It can be exciting, sure: a snare that hits you between the eyes, a rim-shot that has you checking for the flesh wound, bass that causes ripples in the fish tank. This is what some hi-fi enthusiasts live for, the very thing that fuels their enthusiasm. If you're one of them, this isn't the system for you.

If, on the other hand, you want a system to live with (pretty much forever) you'll want to give this combo very serious consideration. Yes, it casts its spell within the first few bars, but the more you listen, the more you'll grow to love it for the way it effortlessly focuses on the music and encourages you to listen for

hours on end with zero fatigue. True, it's possible to analyse the reasons for this: the satiny yet beautifully detailed treble; the balance between vibrancy and definition; the palpable presence of the mid range; a dynamic compass that accommodates a wonderfully deft lightness of touch, alongside true visceral impact; the unstrained, easy breathing delivery; the deep, lush soundstage; the warmth and solidity. But, more than these elements, it's the coherence of the whole that leaves the deepest and most lasting impression.

And all because – I can sense you thinking – a world-class turntable is in charge at the front. But this is with CD, a stunning endorsement of the digital format's worth. The Xerxes takes the system's performance to another, still more emotionally replete, enduringly satisfying, level. After 22 years, the organic, reach-out-and-touch believability of analogue still rules. It seems that Roksan got it right from day one. **HFC**

David Vivian



exposure



Those who appreciate good sound will prefer the tighter "S."

New **3010S** series:

Tighter bottom-end, livelier sound, more drive...same price

CD player £1200

- Brand-new "CD solution" – custom-made transport mechanism, servo units and control mechanisms
- Twin Burr-Brown PCM 1704 mono DACs and a discrete output stage
- Low jitter clock and a large toroidal transformer with separate windings for the transport mechanism and audio stages.

Integrated Amplifier £1000

- Larger power supply
- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- 6 line inputs, bi-wiring and bi-amping compatible
- Option to fit a MC or MM phono cartridge
- Remote control

Power Amplifier £800

- Larger power supply
- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- Capable of driving sophisticated speaker systems, in bi-amping mode or monoblock mode
- Clean and extended low frequency response

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

- 40** Musical Fidelity A1008 integrated amplifier
- 44** Tannoy Glenair 10 loudspeaker
- 48** Russ Andrews HP-1 preamp/headphone amp and PA-1 power amplifier
- 50** Clearaudio Performance turntable, arm and cartridge
- 52** Yamaha Soavo-2 loudspeaker
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- 59** Eastern Electric MiniMax BBA buffer stage
- 60** Clearer Audio Copper-line Alpha interconnect cable
- 60** Shure SE420 earphones
- 61** Nimzi Vibro Max loudspeaker driver
- 61** Atlas Questor interconnect cable

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

- CD PLAYERS £1,000-£2,000**
- 65** Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R
 - 67** Lyngdorf CD-1
 - 69** Marantz SA-15S1
 - 71** Meridian G06
 - 73** Rega Saturn
 - 75** Unison Research Unico CD



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

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%

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...



Boxing clever

Musical Fidelity has a new heavyweight champion in this two-box, one-box superamp

PRODUCT Musical Fidelity A1008

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £2,999 (including separate power supply)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x12.5x40cm (main unit); 25.4x12.5x38cm (power supply) • Weight: 13kg (main unit); 9.7kg (power supply) • Analogue inputs: four line-level RCA phono, plus MM/MC phono stage • Analogue outputs: preamp out, tape out • Digital inputs: one USB, two coaxial, one optical • Digital outputs: one coaxial digital, one optical • Rated power output: 250 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

By name and styling, Musical Fidelity sets out its plans for the A1008 integrated amplifier. Its name harks back to the classic A1000 amplifier of the early 1990s, so you know it's going to sound enticing. Its looks are almost identical to the mighty and current kW 550 amp, so you know it's powerful.

There's more to this amplifier than meets the eye on casual inspection. The A1008 is a large, two-box integrated amplifier design. That's not an oxymoron – the amplifier has a separate

power supply, but the signal handling and gain stages are all in the one big box.

Alongside the normal line-level inputs, it sports not only a MM/MC switchable phono stage (now rare in new amps) but comes with a built-in 24-bit/192kHz Delta-Sigma DAC, not too dissimilar to the company's own X-DACv8. This even includes a USB socket, allowing the computer to join forces with the hi-fi electronics without compromising the sound through a PC sound card. With an



“Most companies might be content with one hawser to tie the amp to its juice box, Musical Fidelity uses a trio of the things.”

increasing number of computers being used as music servers, this is becoming an important aspect of hi-fi replay and Musical Fidelity has anticipated the increasing demand.

One of Musical Fidelity's mainstays in the catalogue has been the X-10D in all its guises. It's a tube buffer stage featuring ECC88 double triode valves, which effectively irons out any inconsistencies between the output of the source component and input of the amplifier – some source components deliver a high output impedance, which is precisely *not* what most amplifiers want at their input stages. By buffering that input impedance and delivering a more amp-chummy lower output impedance, all's well. The X-10D proved extremely popular... and that circuit is in the A1008, nestling snugly at the input stage of the preamp section.

The rest of the amplifier is pure solid-state meat. The power amp stage comprises two monoblocks in the same case, capable of delivering 250 watts into eight ohms and a healthy 400 watts into four, running in Class AB. This is essentially a scaled-down version of the kW 550 design, to such a close degree that Musical Fidelity claims that – if using loudspeakers of 89dB sensitivity or higher – the two products are indistinguishable from

one another. The bigger, more expensive kW 550 will have the edge when played through less efficient speakers because of its greater headroom. That's it.

If a two-box, one-box amp is not oxymoronic, how about this... the A1008 is an integrated amp that's almost totally separated. Musical Fidelity separates out the preamp, left and right channels almost totally. Each one has its own separate power supply and is even fed from a different tap from the external PSU box. That means where most companies might be content with one hawser to tie the amp to its juice box, Musical Fidelity uses a trio of the things: two meaty Speakon-connected cables for the left and right power amps and a slightly smaller XLR-type connector for the preamp and DAC feed. Ignore the last one at your peril: the amplifier will protect itself and your speakers, but it's not a good idea.

Because of the sort of power on offer here, you'd be wise to hook everything up and double check before powering up the device. A quarter of a kilowatt is like a slumbering amplifier beast; waking it up by making a source scream down the speaker wires isn't good for drive units (but is still better than overdriving an underpowered amplifier into speaker-killing clipping day in, day out).

Operationally, the A1008 is a 'fit and forget' device... but it's a *big* fit and forget device: the main box is larger than most standard hi-fi tables. Fortunately, it will sit on the top shelf of every regular stand. It runs mildly warm in use (power consumption maxes out at 700 watts, and runs 120 watts in idle/standby mode) but nothing like the Class A devices of old – the small, sweet sounding 25-watt A1 had a ribbed top-plate that could just about double up as a griddle. Build quality is good, although not without its quibbles. In particular, the motorised central volume control did get raspy through the speakers as it moved through the higher regions of its travel. In fairness, this was hardly audible at volume levels that would make a whisper seem like a jet engine at full throttle, but volume pots tend to get more noisy, not less, with age.

SOUND QUALITY

The oft-used cliché of 'the mail'd fist in the velvet glove' takes on new meaning here. Musical Fidelity has managed to combine the grunt of a 250-watt beast with the gentle sweetness of a sensitive, 25-watt, Class A flower. The result is musical mastery.

There's an enormous temptation to get things totally wrong and hook this amp up to some inefficient, concrete-coned loudspeaker to see how the amp behaves – this is, at best, of academic interest for a reviewer, useless in reality. Instead, go for an efficient loudspeaker of 90dB+ sensitivity and see how the speaker behaves with 250 watts gripping it by the cones. Now that's an interesting exercise. ▣

Q&A

Antony Michaelson, the brains behind Musical Fidelity, discusses how power does not corrupt when it comes to driving even efficient loudspeakers and why measurements are not always what they seem...



HFC You believe we need more power to drive loudspeakers than most suggest. Why?

AM Loudspeaker sensitivity is a measure of how much sound a loudspeaker will give for one watt at one metre. It's critical to note that this is not at a typical listening position of about three and a half metres. Sound attenuates over distance at a rate of 6dB with each doubling of the distance, so at a normal listening distance from a loudspeaker, its perceived sensitivity will be reduced by approximately 10dB.

Amplifier power is measured in watts, which are a measure of heating power and have no apparent relationship to what we hear. If you calibrate amplifier power in dB watts, you get a dramatically different view of what amp power really means – an increase in amplifier power, for example from 50 watts to 100 watts, only gives a 3dB increase.

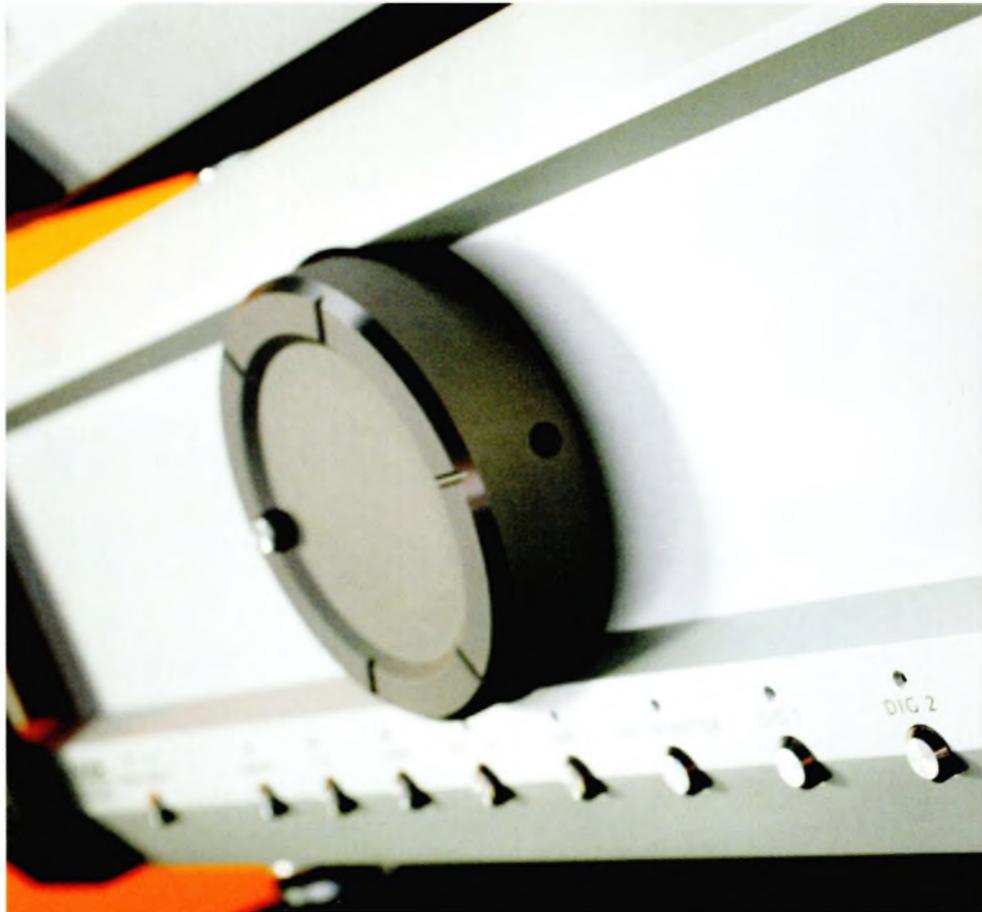
What does this mean in the real world?

Take your loudspeaker sensitivity (better yet, check back to a technical review to find out what its sensitivity really is, because we have seen several examples of respected manufacturers' products specifications overstating their sensitivity by 5dB or more). Now deduct around 10dB for attenuation over distance (and add back 3dB because there are two loudspeakers in the room). This is the practical, real world, in-room sensitivity of your loudspeakers.

Measurements of live music have recorded 109dB peaks and – in my opinion – an ability to produce unclipped peaks of 105dB is the minimum starting point for a really good hi-fi system. Some people think 110dB is more appropriate.

If you deduct the result of your loudspeaker system's real world sensitivity from this figure, you will see how much amplifier power you require in dB watts. We calculate that if you have a loudspeaker with an accurately rated sensitivity of 89dB/W/m, you would need a 200-watt amplifier to achieve 105dB peaks.

But people like the sound of low-powered hi-fi... If they have a low-powered amplifier and relatively insensitive loudspeakers, the system must be clipping, distorting and limiting regularly. Maybe the listeners like the distortion clipping!



“Naturally, the amplifier goes loud. Loud enough to leave some speakers a smoking ruin. But that’s missing the point.”

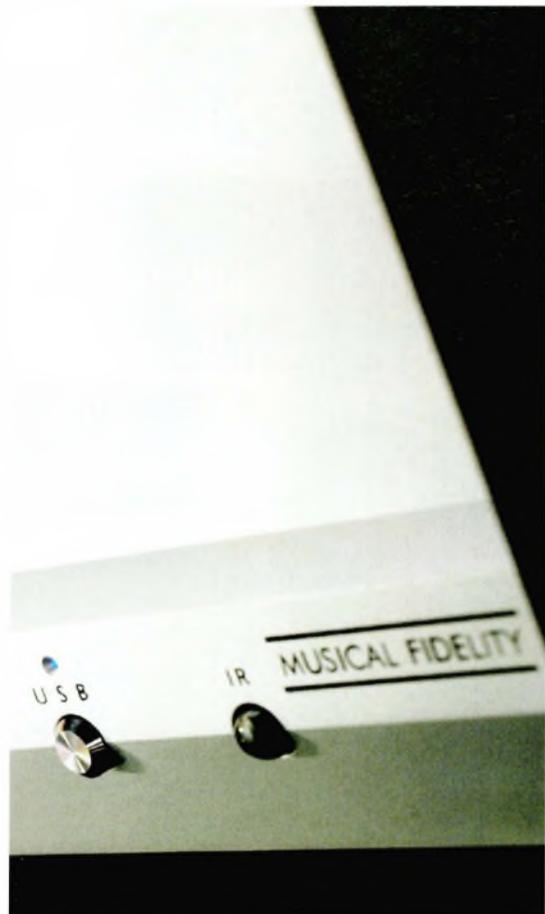
❑ Couple this amp to such speakers and you get near-infinite headroom and dynamic range, together with a curious smoothing out of some idiosyncrasies in the speaker itself. No, the A1008 is not capable of transforming the worst speakers into the best, but it does give a loudspeaker the chance of showing what it can do under 'ideal' conditions.

Naturally, the amplifier goes loud – loud enough to leave some speakers a smoking ruin. But that's missing the point. It doesn't go 'loud', it goes 'right' – you tend to use the A1008's volume control to adjust the level to get the correct volume for any given piece of

music, not just to wick the sound up and down in some arbitrary fashion. Once again, this comes down to near infinite headroom and dynamics. Freed from having to place limits on the volume ceiling, you set the volume level according to the scale of the piece of music, not the point where the amp or speaker starts to get out of control. You don't cut back because the flutes distort, because the flutes aren't likely to distort. You don't hold off because the bass guitar gets out of control for the same reason.

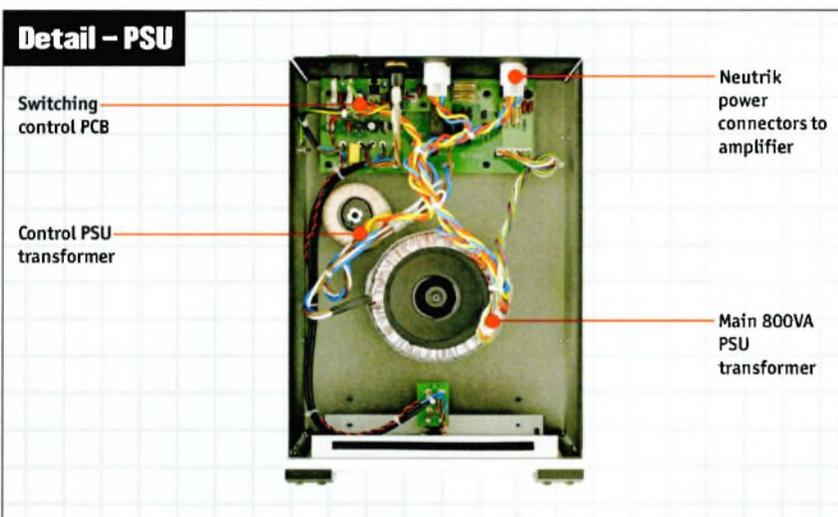
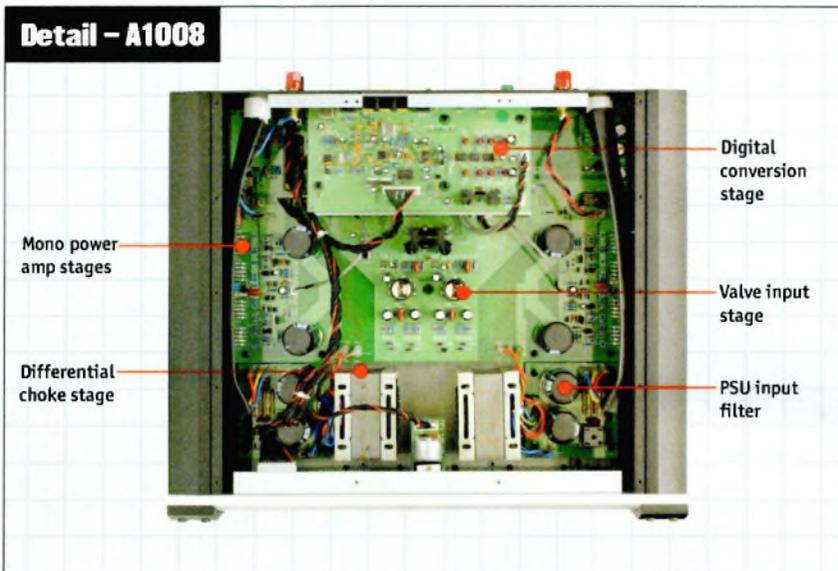
This doesn't mean the amplifier is without a sound. Far from it. It sounds controlled, detailed





and yet sort of chocolatey-rich. But these are the sort of attributes that do not make themselves directly apparent. The amp doesn't shout its features at you, you just realise that you are listening further into the mix and you can understand an awful lot of what's going on in the inner structure of the music. The midband is particularly fine: sounds project into the room beautifully and the nature of those sounds is extraordinarily easy to listen to. The words 'listener' and 'fatigue' simply do not exist side by side with this amp. No audiophile minute-long chunks of sound, here – you get the full cut, the whole symphony not just the key movement, and still come back hungry for more.

This just scratches the surface. There's still the DAC and the phono stage to work through. In fact, these sound remarkably similar, in all the right ways. Both deliver a similar performance to the line stages – rich, detailed (but not hyper-detailed and etched sounding), effortless. Of the two, the DAC is arguably more important these days, especially with that USB port. This does wonders for the sound off a PC, raising even a humble stock soundcard to the performance of the best in computer audio. But don't count out the phono stage – it's a noise-free stage, far better than almost all integrated units and more enticing than many lesser aftermarket models. You'll get better stereo separation from the best standalone devices, but as it stands, this is a lot more than a makeweight.



This isn't the only 250-watt (or larger) amp on the market. Some are a lot cheaper, but generally sound cheap, too, with bright and steely tops and floppy, ill-controlled bottoms (now there's an image you might not want to think too hard about). Some are more expensive, but tend to sound 'impressive' with extended high treble and an open midrange, at the expense of a well-controlled but slow bass. There are a handful of products that improve upon the Musical Fidelity sound. Comparing the A1008 to the best of breed does pin-point a minor sense of disassociation between the bass and the rest of the frequencies, as if the bottom end is fractionally out of step with the rest of the sound. But this is the only limitation to the sound of the A1008 and, in fairness, it's both very slight and very difficult and expensive to eliminate without sacrificing the rest of the sound in the process.

Perhaps that's the key thing about the A1008. It does so much for the sound across the board, it's hard to think of anything that can do better without costing a lot more. That makes it a tough act to follow. **HFC**

Alon Sircom



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90% [Progress bar]	PRO Effortless-sounding amplifier with the dynamic headroom to control almost any speaker with ease. In-built DAC and phono stage are good enough to work as standalones in their own right.
FEATURES >> 90% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 87% [Progress bar]	CON Noise on volume pot; vague disassociated effect between bass and rest of sound when compared to the big boys.
VALUE >> 88% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION A one-size-fits-all design that will make any good pair of speakers sound better than you might imagine. Given that anything with the same power deliver and performance costs a lot more, this is a real groundbreaker (and groundshaker).	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 89%	

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★



Modern classic

Tannoy's new Glenair 10 is intended to give its Prestige range more modern appeal

PRODUCT Tannoy Glenair 10

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £2,999 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 36x100x35cm

• Weight: 28kg • 250mm Dual Concentric main driver with central 25mm tweeter • Real cherry-wood veneer

• Sensitivity: 91dB • Impedance: eight ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

The Glenair 10 is an attempt to bring an up-to-date aesthetic to Tannoy's classic, top-end Prestige loudspeaker range. The number refers to the driver size – the other model in the Glenair series has a 375mm drive unit in place of the 250mm driver found here. However, the standard Glenair is less likely to find favour in any but the most dedicated of living rooms. The Glenair 10, with its narrower front baffle, is far more visually appealing to those of us not stuck in the 1950s.

What brings the design up to date is the trapezoidal cabinet section and American cherry veneer, complete with a grille that forms a gentle curve. This shape has been used by Tannoy in the past for more affordable models and has the advantage of reducing the number of parallel surfaces within the box, which of course reduces the potential for standing waves internally.

This particular box is not made of MDF – as is the case with almost all loudspeakers – but plywood, and not any old plywood at that. This, apparently, is made from "birch grown in slow-growing cold regions of the world and selected for its denser quality," according to the brochure. No indication is given as to its thickness but the cabinet is claimed to be heavily damped and comprehensively braced to reduce resonance from the large panels that flank the speakers.

Its grille fits flush with the edges of the cabinet, which looks great and aides the magnetic system used to hold the grille in place. Removing the grilles is assisted by removing a brass thumbscrew from its resting place at the back of each speaker, screwing it into the base of the grille where a brass circle can be seen and pulling it out... you then realise how heavy a grille frame it has as it falls to the floor some three inches below! This isn't as exciting or as complicated as it sounds, but is actually a nicely thought out system that means there are no ugly plastic sockets ruining the look of the front baffle.

The drive unit is a ten-inch (250mm) framed example of Tannoy's classic dual concentric design with a pulped paper cone and twin rolled fabric surround, the latter being a retro approach to edge termination that's highly regarded by our fellow hi-fi nuts in Japan. It limits excursion and makes for a stiff overall drive unit. In its magnetic centre is a 25mm metal dome, with an output guided by a short exponential horn, the result being that both drivers operate around the same central axis. A true point-source driver would have both drivers in the same plane, but as the cone is so much deeper than the dome this is not possible with dynamic drivers. However, the coaxial arrangement produces a symmetrical polar dispersion both vertically and horizontally, which should aid image precision.

The speaker terminals are arranged in circular fashion, which looks attractive and allows for a fifth terminal beside the bi-wire pair. This green terminal is included to allow you to earth the speaker to your amplifier. This apparently optimises the performance further than mere bi-wiring but the literature does not

explain why. Still, we gave it a spin with another length of cable connected to a chassis fixing on the amplifier.

SOUND QUALITY

This is an elegant but generously sized loudspeaker, more efficient than average and thus easier to drive. The specification suggests amplifiers that can deliver 50 watts or more, but it seemed to work rather well with the new Sugden A21 Series 2 that we have lined up for a review next issue. This is no doubt due to the Class A operation as much as anything else, but whatever it was, it made for a beguiling combination. The smooth style of the amplifier brought a touch of polish to the all-revealing nature of the Glenair's midrange. However, this did nothing to disguise the fact that the Tannoy has an uncanny ability to delve deep into the mix and deliver seemingly every last nuance of the recording. The depth of soundstage it found on Keith Jarrett's *Carnegie Hall Concert* proved highly revealing of the ailments that seem to afflict many of those lucky enough to attend – there's a fair amount

“The Tannoy has an uncanny ability to delve deep into the mix and deliver seemingly every last nuance of the recording.”



of coughing going on as well! Then there are the master's vocalisations, which are still inclined to flow freely and which you can almost touch when this degree of 'being there' is brought into the living room.

The Glenair is adept at revealing the timbral signature of instruments and voices, thanks to the paper-based nature of its main driver. Whatever gets piped through its electrical veins is delivered in clear-cut form; whether it's the layered harmonies of the Kings Singers or the layers of samples produced by Timbaland and Missy Elliott, you'll hear what's going on.

This is probably also related to its dynamic capabilities. It can swing from low to high level with such speed and clarity that the attack of an instrument seems to be captured in all its vitality. For all its speed, however, the Glenair does not emphasise the rhythmic aspects of the music – some speakers will make your foot tap come what may. We are not sure this is any indication of fidelity, but it's a quality that some feel is fundamental. The Glenair does ▶

[Review] Tannoy Glenair 10 loudspeaker



POSITIONING

Tannoy is specific in the instruction manual about the Glenair's placement. It suggests that each be placed at least a metre from rear and side walls and that "the listening position is approximately 15 degrees from the axes of the speakers". It goes on to explain that the speakers' axes should cross slightly in front of the listening position. This is a well-tested technique for enhancing stereo image depth albeit usually with a reduction in image width. In our long but relatively narrow room we found that the speakers could be sited closer to the walls than is suggested, with about 60cm between cabinet and both side and rear walls. But it is essential that the speakers are not pointing directly at the listener because the energy from that horn-loaded tweeter is too great. Those that found this arrangement less convenient could toe the speakers so that their axes crossed behind the listening position.

Tannoy provides cone-shaped spikes that are said to be carpet-friendly. They probably won't pierce carpet, and they come with matching metal cups that can be used on wooden floors, which undoubtedly would show the effects of spiking. Those who would rather not use points can stick with the metal feet that are permanently fixed to the Glenair's base.

SYSTEM MATCHING

This speaker has a relatively high sensitivity and notionally benign load. On the amp front, we enjoyed everything from a 21-watt Sugden to a 200-watt Gamut. As for source components, this is a dynamic and revealing speaker, so we'd go with a Classe CDP-102 or Leema Antilla CD player in the upper price range, or Sugden's CD21 S2 or an Arcam FMJ CD36 at a more affordable level. Or any reasonably refined turntable and phono stage, for that matter.



Detail



☑ something that's far more important in our view, which is to make the reviewer want to carry on listening. Rather inconveniently, we reviewers have to stop listening to music occasionally, to type out our findings and submit our copy to the commissioning editor. So, only the most appealing products get more attention than is necessary for the job; this speaker counts as one of them because it makes well-worn test tracks seem fresh and interesting again.

It does this by scouring for detail and presenting it in a highly coherent fashion. Those of you who like to turn it up to '11' might find the degree of exposure through the mid and top to be a bit punishing, especially if you're playing stuff like old Prodigy albums, which are not so clean. Our solution to this was prompted by the music alone and involved getting off the sofa and dancing around. Not something to be encouraged, obviously, but it was in the privacy of private listening facilities, hidden from view.

By this point in the proceedings, the amplification had been upgraded to a Russ Andrews HP-1 preamp and Gamut D200 power amp, the latter's extra grunt factor inducing a very lively and energetic response with music of the bombastic persuasion. It did plenty of favours for sophisticated tunes as well, the speaker's ability to communicate being merely enhanced by the extra control on offer – though it seems a pretty easy load on the whole. We even tried the earth connection, which brought a small but discernible improvement

to stereo imaging and seemed to reduce distortion a shade.

Overall, the Glenair 10 is a highly enjoyable and revealing loudspeaker that delves into the mix but keeps the musical message at the forefront. It requires refined ancillaries but not necessarily expensive ones and can be heartily recommended for combining great looks with a highly engaging and revealing sound. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 90%

PRO

Extremely revealing of detail, with excellent timbre and speed, and it doesn't need a lot of power. But it's the ability to keep you listening that marks it out as a winner.

EASE OF DRIVE >> 88%

BUILD >> 91%

CON

Looks more complete with the grille on but that muffles detail. Bass doesn't plumb the depths like some of the similarly sized competition.

VALUE >> 87%

CONCLUSION

Tannoy has done a good job of bringing its Prestige speakers up to date with the Glenair – a generously proportioned, highly resolute speaker for a very good price. Spend the same again on source and amp and you'll have a cracking system.

HI-FI CHOICE

OVERALL SCORE

>> 89%

Join a great team!

Owing to the strength of our people, Cambridge Audio has rapidly become one of the world's most successful hi-fi and home cinema brands. Following expansion in key overseas markets, we wish to strengthen our 70-strong team with yet more ambitious, flexible, hard-working colleagues.

Business Development Executive

This key role will focus on helping to grow our global distribution. Reporting to our busy Business Development Director, you'll be a flexible, high-performer with strong commercial awareness. You'll be tenacious and energetic, possessing the ability to divide your attention across numerous clients. A genuine passion for products and the ability to transmit your enthusiasm to others are vital. Possibly ideal for someone currently in retail. A valid passport and an interest in travel are also absolutely critical!

Software Design Engineers – Embedded

Our successful candidates will be experienced in; C and assembler programming for both low level 'bit bashing' and higher level processing techniques with a good appreciation of hardware design and schematic capture. Experience of developing consumer products would be highly advantageous.

Electronic Design Engineers (Audio products)

To qualify for one of these exciting roles you'll be experienced in the following; high performance analogue audio design, amplifier, digital audio, DSP, radio systems, digital and analogue video. Experience of consumer electronic product development is essential as is the desire to squeeze the maximum performance out of any given budget!

Electronic Design Engineers (A/V products)

We're looking for candidates with a background in the following; Crystal/Cirrus Logic DSP systems, HDMI, analogue and digital video systems, video upscaling, surround-sound processing/room EQ, AV receivers, DVD players, schematic capture/PCB layout, design for LVD/EMC compliance. Experience of A/V product development is essential as is an in-depth knowledge and interest in the features, technology and specifications that characterise these products.

Test Development Engineer

Responsible for creating hardware and software test systems for our manufacturing sites, the successful candidate will develop testing regimes and fixtures for both complete products and individual PCBs and sub-assemblies. You will be expected to specify test plans and to design, build and commission the test fixtures delivering hardware, software and documented procedures for use by our manufacturing partners.

Product Design Manager

We're seeking a product designer - probably from an engineering background - who wishes to move to a product management / architectural design role. The successful candidate will need a strong appreciation of analogue and digital audio design techniques and in-depth knowledge of high performance audio/video systems along with their features and specifications. A desire to create innovative products coupled with strong commercial awareness is crucial. The successful candidate will also possess the ability to research and absorb new technologies. The ability to select and manage relationships with technology providers, development partners and Asian factories is a pre-requisite for this pivotal role.

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Russ Andrews[®] HP-1



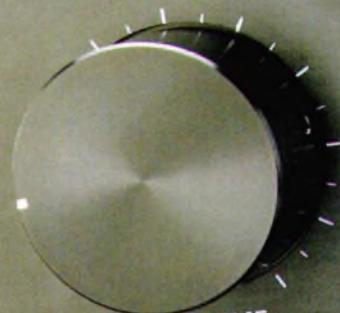
POWER



INPUT



GAIN



VOLUME

Russ Andrews[®] PA-1



POWER

Small is beautiful

Hi-fi accessories king Russ Andrews turns his hand to tiny, minimalist amps

PRODUCT Russ Andrews HP-1 and PA-1

TYPE Preamplifier/headphone amp and power amplifier

PRICE (HP-1) £499; (PA-1) £699

KEY FEATURES (HP-1) Size (WxHxD): 21x5.5x29cm

• Weight: 3.5kg • Inputs: 2 line level (unbalanced)

• Outputs: Headphone, line • Maximum gain: 8dB

• (PA-1) • Size (WxHxD): 21x5.5x29cm • Weight:

4.5kg • Input: one fixed-level unbalanced • Output:

speaker terminals (one pair) • Rated power output: 50

watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 @ www.russandrews.com

Shobox-size hi-fi has a long and honourable history, but with these little components Russ Andrews is offering a new take on the genre. Okay, the power amp does what most do – boost the signal from the single pair of inputs to a single pair of outputs with fixed gain – but the preamp has at least

three unusual features. First, it is conceived equally as a preamp and a headphone amplifier: many preamps do also drive headphones, but this one was evidently conceived first as a headphone amp and then expanded to do a basic preamplifying job.

The second unusual feature lies in that word 'basic', for the HP-1 offers a mere two inputs. We can imagine plenty of systems where that will suffice, though, from traditional set-ups with, say, a CD player and tuner to modern affairs with music server/computer sources.

And the third oddity? There's a little switch on the back of the HP-1 marked 'Filter', offering choices A and B. It turns out that A is in fact pretty much unfiltered – flat from 20Hz to 20kHz in the accepted manner and indeed some way beyond. B, however, has a noticeable treble cut, -3dB at around 12kHz. Not to put

too fine a point on it, it's a tone control, though fairly subtle in its effect.

Finally, the HP-1 has a switch marked 'gain' which selects an overall gain (as a preamplifier) of 0dB or 1:1 ('Low') or about 8dB/2.5:1 ('High'). All this does is make a bit more of the volume control's range usable when a sensitive power amp (such as the PA-1) is used, or – for that matter – sensitive headphones.

In terms of build quality, there's a lot to like about these units. The case of each is solid and the innards are well assembled, using entirely through-hole-mounted components of good quality. The power amp features entirely discrete transistors, while the HP-1 has one pair of op-amps and a goodly number of discrete transistors. Socketry is basic but again of good quality, especially the RCA phono sockets, which are very nice. All the switches have a clean,



“The HP-1 has real delicacy and poise, and it drives headphones with authority, giving great tonal definition to instruments.”

positive action. The headphone output appears on an ingenious connector, which manages to be both quarter-inch jack and XLR in one, not that we've ever seen headphones with an XLR connector fitted. The volume control is a traditional mechanical type, by ALPS.

There's one more interesting thing about these amps (and the impressive matching DAC reviewed in *HFC* 289) – they're made by Stello in South Korea. Russ Andrews has apparently conducted some modifications but the basic design is certainly Stello, as are the user instructions... complete with misprints!

SOUND QUALITY

As it happened, the HP-1 arrived for review before the PA-1, so its performance as a headphone driver was checked first. That proved to be a very happy experience. Various high-quality headphones, including Grado's spectacular GS1000 flagship model and Sennheiser's HD650, were put to test.

All of those showed the benefits of using a good-quality dedicated headphone amplifier. Headphones, with their typically middling impedance and power consumption, are not trivial to drive and while 'free' headphone outputs do a reasonable job they invariably leave some room for improvement. Just how much room, one comes to realise when hearing a fine specialised amplifier like this.

For a start, there is more detail and refinement. Depending

on the headphones you are using you may also hear slightly more bass too, because the low output impedance of

the HP-1 ensures that the individual drive units are better controlled than is the case with most CD player or integrated amp headphone sockets – these most often put a resistor in series with the output. You probably won't hear more treble, and this can cause a brief feeling of disappointment, until one realises that what's missing is in fact edgy brightness that has more to do with distortion than extension.

The HP-1's treble is creamy smooth but very well extended indeed, at least with the filter switch set to A. Switched to B, there is definitely some audible cut in very high treble but plenty of headphones are more than a little top-heavy and this filter is just enough to tame them. But with or without it the HP-1 has real delicacy and poise, and across the band it drives headphones with authority, giving great tonal definition to instruments and voices and delivering very fine images, too.

What of the PA-1? We're less inclined to go overboard for this one, though we did still enjoy it. It has an energetic sound with plenty of rhythmic drive and impetus, plus good extension at both ends of the spectrum and good dynamic 'kick'. But, it doesn't match the HP-1 for refinement and the imaging is forward compared with established reference amps around the same price.

There's a slight complicating factor with the PA-1 in that its treble is rolled off, not by enough to make it sound dull, but definitely

sufficient to be audible in direct comparisons with normal, flat response, amps. Depending on the choice of recording, and

indeed the speakers you're using, this may sound like sweetening of the sound or closing in of the treble, but the change is minor and one can get used to them after a bit of listening, often as little as a few minutes. Beyond that it's really a question of taste.

Regardless, we found the sound lacking in detail and rather uninvolved, especially with music that lacks a strongly rhythmic character: a slow movement of a string quartet is in no position to benefit from the PA-1's rhythmic qualities, but the sound suffers from veiling and doesn't draw the listener in.

We've saved the best until last – the HP-1's preamplifier qualities. It's neutral, detailed and very, very close to the 'straight wire with gain' principle. With various power amps, it put up a performance in its limited role with which we have little argument: we love it! **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT – HP-1

SOUND >> 89%	CONCLUSION A lovely headphone amp that drives dynamic cans with grace, subtlety and authority, and doubles as a fine, though minimalist, preamp.
FEATURES >> 80%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 89%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 89%	

VERDICT – PA-1

SOUND >> 81%	CONCLUSION Although drive, energy and power are not lacking, we would have appreciated a little more delicacy and musical insight at the price.
FEATURES >> 60%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 75%	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 78%	





BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Magnetic charm

Clearaudio levitates its new turntable platter on two magnetic donuts. Mmmmmm...

PRODUCT Clearaudio Performance

TYPE Turntable

PRICE £1,670 (including arm and cartridge)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD) 42x13x33cm

• Weight: 9kg • Belt-driven turntable • Ceramic magnetic bearing • Acrylic platter • Supplied with Satisfy Carbon Fibre tonearm and Maestro cartridge

CONTACT ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.clearaudio.de

You might have been mistaken for thinking that all the innovations in turntables had been long done with. Now well into its dotage, the senior format not only refuses to die off, but also continues to break new ground. Clearaudio is unquestionably leading the charge in modern turntable development, and – from here at least – it doesn't seem like vinyl's last hurrah

The Performance is a fine example of how Clearaudio continues to push the audio

envelope. Looking similar to the Ambient turntable (tested in *HFC 271*), but with a less over-engineered power supply, and very much in line with the Champion decks that came before, the new Performance has an ace or two up its bearing.

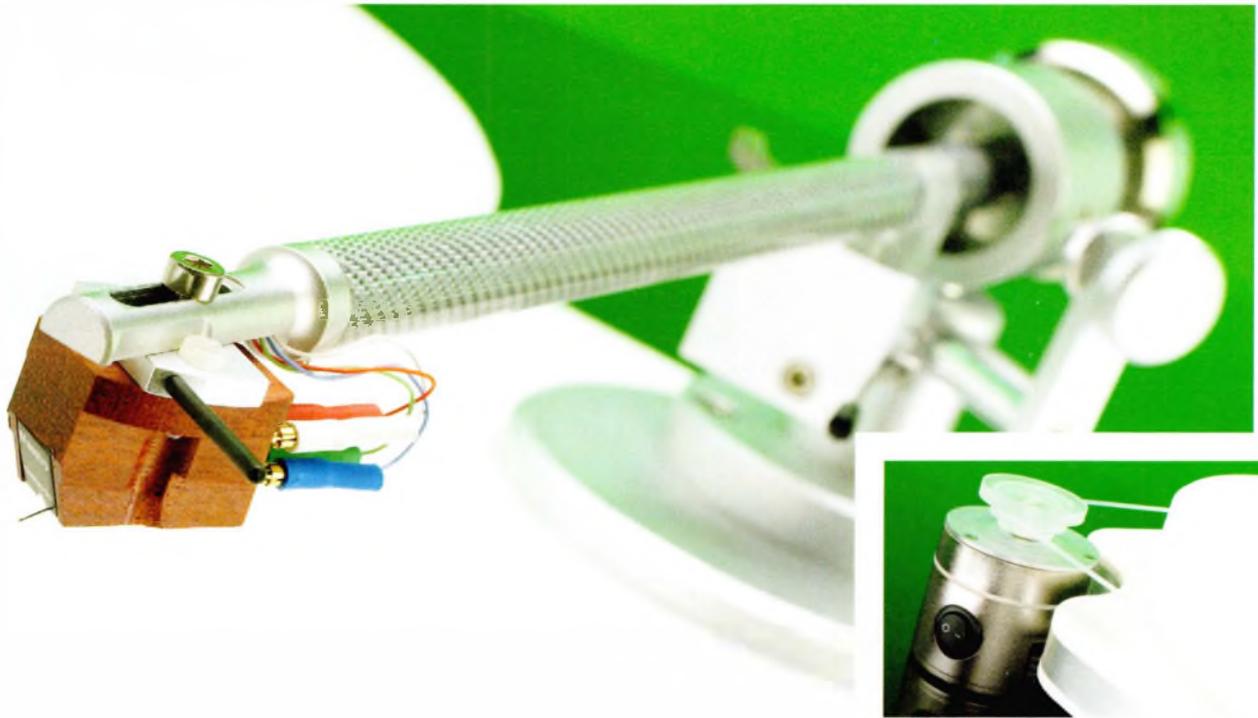
The Performance features a ceramic alloy bearing material for the main shaft, to dramatically reduce friction. That alone would be dandy in its own right, but the base of the deck and of the bearing housing feature donuts of magnetic material that repel one another – without the main acrylic platter to mass load the bearing, the housing floats toward the top of the bearing shaft. This means that the platter effectively floats on air. The chaps at Clearaudio are jolly good eggs, so this bearing is offered as an upgrade to all existing decks, except for the entry-level Emotion.

The Ambient had a delicious, super-density, bullet-proof Panzerholtz material sandwiched

between the two brilliant-white synthetic marble layers in the main chassis. The Performance is more humble in plinth materials; the synthemarle is still there, but the Panzerholtz sandwich is replaced with more 'umble slice of MDF, hidden from view with a neat aluminium band.

The motor is physically removed from the deck itself (it sits in a cutaway top left of the plinth) and is essentially a drive-damped motor in a housing with a speed changing spindle and a round-profile belt. The motor has enough torque to move the 40mm-thick acrylic platter, but does quiver a bit for the first few seconds and many will want to give the platter a little push on start-up.

Like the Ambient deck tested in *HFC 271*, the Performance comes supplied with an arm and cartridge. The arm is identical to the one fitted to the Ambient – the Satisfy Carbon Fibre – while the cartridge is the extremely fine,



“It’s as fast, dynamic and precise as the record on the platter and as quiet as the phono stage it’s hooked to.”

wooden-bodied Maestro moving magnet design. There’s even a little clear plastic clamp to hold the disc down.

SOUND QUALITY

The deck, when set-up properly, has one of the least obvious sonic signatures you can get from a turntable. The plinth’s influence on the sound seems minimal and all that’s left is you and the vinyl. Well, almost.

There’s an arm and cartridge there, too. The Satisfy is easy to set up, but also easy to fiddle with. If you’re the sort who can never ‘fit and forget’, you’re in for a lot of tweak-time (secretly, I think that’s more of a plus than a minus for those who enjoy a nice tweak). Fortunately, that means the arm has a degree of freedom that almost matches the turntable itself, and it’s a low-signature product, too. Which just leaves the cartridge... and that sounds open, fast and

very natural, in the manner of the very best MM cartridges. In fact, the Maestro is one of those MM cartridges that challenges the received wisdom that moving coil cartridges are intrinsically better (you can improve on the sweetness of the cartridge without sacrificing the speed with a good MC, but that would more than double the price of the turntable). Its only real limitation is that it sounds dry with some 1970s recordings, but this isn’t really a stumbling block, as many 1970s recordings do sound arid on modern equipment.

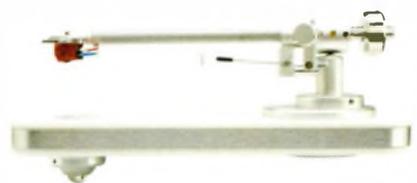
It’s perhaps the most telling aspect of the Performance’s, er, performance that sonic descriptions point toward the sound of the arm or the cartridge. When it comes to the turntable itself, the reviewer’s job gets very hard indeed... because there’s not a great deal to say! It’s as fast, dynamic and precise as the

record on the platter and as quiet as the phono stage it’s hooked to. And that, quite frankly, is high praise indeed.

We suspect that if you had a power supply akin to the one with the Ambient, with a more accurate speed control, the sound would improve by making the deck disappear still further. Perhaps if you changed the plinth structure, it would sound slightly deeper or even more accurate. But it’s already so good, it’s hard to pinpoint where improvements could be made.

If you want to liberate your vinyl, the solution seems to be to float the platter on air. You’ll be surprised at how good it can be. **HFC**

Alon Sircom



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90% [Progress bar]	PRO Remarkable absence of coloration makes your vinyl a true paragon of neutrality. hitherto only heard at breathless price levels. Arm and cartridge match well.
FEATURES >> 82% [Progress bar]	CON Tonearm is a tweeker’s delight. You might find you are so used to turntables influencing the sound that this is too much of a shock!
BUILD >> 89% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 94% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION A platter that floats has a stunning ability to rid the sound of the signature imposed by the turntable plinth, and that’s something few of us ever get to hear, especially at anything like a real-world price. Now we can, and our LPs are reborn. Cor!	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 92%	



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Oh so Soavo

Yamaha's first high-end loudspeaker in decades is a truly sophisticated performer

PRODUCT Yamaha Soavo 2

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,200 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 22x38x35.3cm

- Weight: 9.5kg • 25mm aluminium dome tweeter
- 160mm A-PMD bass/mid driver • Sensitivity: 88dB
- Impedance: 6 ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 01923 233166 🌐 www.yamaha-uk.com

Yamaha, now in its 120th year of operations, has long been a major player in speakers. It currently has an extensive range of high-value, low-cost multichannel packages, but formerly was perhaps best known for studio-oriented models and high-end designs like the legendary NS1000.

The new Soavo speakers mark a return to the high end for Yamaha. The range consists of the floorstanding Soavo-1, the two-way standmount Soavo-2 (reviewed here), a centre channel speaker, a surround speaker, and also an active subwoofer.

The Soavo-2 design is not revolutionary as loudspeakers go, but there is plenty of individualistic detail, and abundant evidence of exceptional build quality, which goes a long way to justifying the premium pricing. Undeniably the most impressive feature of the Soavo-2 from a design viewpoint is the enclosure, much of it predicated on the idea of maximizing clarity and imaging, in part by minimizing internal standing waves. Central to this is a heavy, stable enclosure made from

straight rather than curved panels, with standing waves dealt with by ensuring opposite sides are non-parallel, and with faceted enclosure sections. Internal slanted partitions are used for the same reason, and three axis mitred joints control air leakage.

The so-called DC-Diaphragm tweeter has a 25mm aluminium dome, but the moving parts clearly have a very low-mass construction, perhaps because of the one-piece integration with the voice coil, with a response extending (at -1dB) to 50kHz. It is mounted on a subtly shaped aluminium platform for control of directivity. The bass/mid driver has a 160mm diameter, and a cone made from A-PMD (Advanced Polymer-injected Mica Diaphragm), the material used being much lighter than



“A speaker that excels with small and medium-scale music, yet sounds at home with anything up to full orchestral material.”

paper or polypropylene according to Yamaha. It consists of a mica substrate loaded by talc, a standard material for stiffening polymer cones. The voice coil here uses an edge-wound ribbon, a spider from Kurt Müller and a diecast aluminium basket. High-quality components are used in the bi-wire crossover, including Solen metalized polypropylene capacitors, air core inductors, and the entire network is hard-wired instead of being mounted on a PCB. The bi-wire links are good-quality wire links rather than the usual stamped items. Even the reflex port is a high-quality item: a securely fixed, hand-carved, flared wooden port.

The system has a nominal impedance of six ohms and can handle 120 watts, and it gives every indication of being a relatively benign load. A dedicated column stand, the SPS-900, will be available for the Soavo-2, but was not ready in time for the test, where alternative stands of a similar height and geometry from Atacama were used.

SOUND QUALITY

The Soavo-2 arrived well run in and up to speed, as it were, and serious listening began within a day or so of arrival – just enough time to get any obvious rough edges out of the way, and to get the speakers fully up to room temperature. The most appropriate amplifier we had available was the Moon i-7 integrated amp, which seemed to have the softness, sophistication and resolution necessary for the Yamaha to sing. It is also an appropriate choice in terms of available power (150 watts per channel).

We first heard the Soavo-1 and Soavo-2 speakers under good

though not ideal conditions at a press launch in Morocco, a couple of months before this test. On that occasion, the equipment combination was completely different, and much of the listening was to the floorstanding variant, the Soavo-1. The smaller speaker seems the more homogenous of the two; of course, there is less bass weight and extension, but it is by no means lacking in this department.

The Soavo-2 is a speaker that excels with small and medium-scale music, and yet sounds at home with anything up to full-bore orchestral material – indeed, almost anything short of the largest organ pedal stops. The bass registers have been very well voiced, with a near-ideal mix of extension and control, and no hint of cabinet output once the musical stimulus has passed (in part, of course, because it is a relatively small loudspeaker). The enclosure is solid and well damped, with little evidence of boom or overhang, either when subject to the rap knuckle test or with real music. Yamaha also offers good timing, and the Soavo-2's imagery is expansive and airy, with little to tie the sound to the enclosures when carefully aligned.

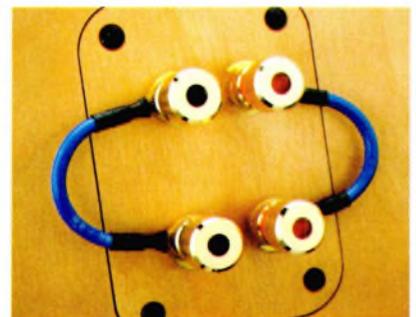
It doesn't take long to discover that the Soavo-2 has been very carefully tuned throughout the audio band. The 3kHz crossover is particularly well handled. The handover between the two units is virtually inaudible, and their behaviour is

immaculate within their respective operating bands. Tonally, the speaker is little short of exquisite. There is a refinement about the sound of acoustic instruments, like woodwind, strings and above all human voice, which in part is due to the

fact that this is an unusually smooth and well-integrated system. The midband is homogenous and the treble is exceptional: it is smooth, sweet and finely detailed, and there is no hint of the aggressive feel or granularity that many moving coil tweeters display under duress, though it would probably sound even better without the mesh fingerguard.

This is a refined and highly capable speaker, clearly bred for acoustic, jazz and classical, and with talents that may be wasted with rougher electronic material. Yamaha has an enviable track record with some of its loudspeakers, though the company has attempted nothing this ambitious, or in particular this well rounded, in decades. It is this overall sense of well-honed, all-round competence that marks the Soavo-2 out as something special. If you're a fan of classical or jazz, make sure you give it a long, hard listen. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT	
SOUND >>> 88% [Progress bar]	PRO Smooth and well extended at both ends of the audio band. An attractively balanced loudspeaker, which suggests that considerable care has been paid to voicing.
EASE OF DRIVE >>> 84% [Progress bar]	CON Quite pricey for its size. Mesh guard over tweeter helps to prevent the possibility of damage, but must take some toll on sound quality.
BUILD >>> 90% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >>> 87% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Yamaha's return to audiophile loudspeakers for the first time since the 1970s is a notable success. This sophisticated standmount may not be the first choice for electronics, but for acoustic instruments, it is a highly accomplished design.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 88%	

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87dB	320 watts per channel
89dB	200 watts per channel
91dB	130 watts per channel

Reference calculations can be found at musicalfidelity.com

MUSICAL FIDELITY

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HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Starry, starry night

Do glowing tubes and sparkling casework mean you should lend an ear to Vincent's amp?

PRODUCT Vincent SV-236

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £999

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x15.2x43cm

● Weight: 18kg ● Line-level inputs: six RCA phono

● Outputs: pre, tape, speakers (two sets) ● Tone controls

● Rated power output: 100 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 01702 601410 🌐 www.vincent-tac.de

We most recently visited the Vincent brand in *HFC 287*, when Ruark (Vincent's UK distributor) sent us a CD-6S MkII. That player whetted our appetite, so now Ruark has served up the SV-236 amp: a hybrid design that mixes valves and transistors to combine the tonal naturalness and dynamics of the former with the power of the latter.

The SV-236 is specified as delivering 100 watts into eight ohms and doubling that into four ohms. Given the price, this seems a little optimistic (that's according to the manual; the

specs from Germany rein this in to a more realistic 180 watts into four ohms). That the SV-236 is manufactured in the People's Republic helps to keep costs down, but even the Chinese have to pay for raw materials and one gets the impression with this unit that a fair amount of the cost is down to the casework, which is rather more fancy than you'll find on European or American amps at the price.

Just look at all those knobs for a start! The Japanese used to build behemoth receivers in this style back in the 1970s, at a time when they seemed to have the economic advantages that we now associate with China. But those receivers rarely competed on sound terms with the purist alternatives from this side of the globe. With its German design input, Vincent has a better chance of competing on the sonic front as well, as we saw with the CD-S6 MkII.

The design is impressive from any angle; it's attractively carved out down the flanks and pretty damn shiny round the back, too. There

are two sets of heavily gold-plated speaker terminals and six pairs of RCA phono inputs, plus preamp and tape outputs. The remote is a nice bit of aluminium, too – it's dedicated to the amp and isn't overloaded with buttons, with just input, volume, mute and dimming for the blue lights around the front-mounted valve window. The chunky tone controls (as the manual puts it, "the audio signal is decorated by tone") can be bypassed with one switch and 'loudness' can be engaged (or preferably not) with another.

Inside the case, there's valve-powered preamp section based around 12AX7 double triodes, including the one seen from the front of the unit. Shielding is used on the input relays and remote control circuitry to reduce the effects that stray RFI can have on the signal being amplified. The output stage is solid-state – Vincent doesn't specify whether these are bi-polar or MOSFET – and operates in Class A for the first (and most important, ten watts), reverting to class AB for the remaining 90.



“The Vincent offers a distinct alternative to amps in its price range, its hybrid element giving it a strong flavour of valve charm.”

Interestingly Vincent was one of the first European/Chinese collaborations. It was started in 1994 when the German Sintron company discovered a power amp made by the Chinese company Sheng Ya. Since then, the two have collaborated extensively to produce a huge range of components. UK distributor Ruark currently concentrates on the hybrid components that make up the so-called Design Line 3 but is planning to bring in the forthcoming 800 series later in the year.

SOUND QUALITY

We hooked the SV-236 up to a variety of loudspeakers to see how it coped and found that it could drive pretty much anything thrown at it, which would suggest that the power rating is not far off the mark. Initially, a pair of ATC SCM19s took the stage – analytical and revealing standmounts that require a steady hand to give of their best. The Vincent didn’t exactly exert a vice-like grip on this speaker, but that valve preamp section does stop the SV-236 sounding dry in the way that so many solid-state designs can. Some prefer to call this dryness ‘precision’, but in truth it reveals a lack of fluidity and fine detail.

The valve factor is also likely to be the reason for the Vincent’s upper midrange strength. It does a great job with cymbals and female vocals alike, bringing out the

depth and, in the case of hammered bronze discs, shine in the tonal pallet. This also makes for good image scale, because it’s the cues produced in this part of the band that seem to spotlight a singer, for instance. With the somewhat less challenging Ruark Sabre III at the end of the Isolda DCT speaker cable, the Vincent produced an almost lifelike rendering of Diana Krall that totally escaped the capable little standmount and sang in the room.

If this amplifier has a weakness it’s in the bass. The Vincent takes a more romantic view of the bottom end, fleshing it out rather than pinning it down. With a compact speaker like the Sabre III, this is appealing as it gives the impression of greater bass extension, but with a speaker that goes down further, there is a lack of control that lies at the root of the amp’s relaxed sense of timing.

Using the rather less than likely choice of an £8,000 pair of B&W 802D speakers, we enjoyed the life and vivacity that the Vincent brought to well known tracks. It makes the most of micro-dynamics, something that competing solid-state alternatives rarely do. The fact that it could drive this loudspeaker at reasonable if not high levels without sounding under duress is a testament to the power

reserves on tap; again the only respect in which you could tell that it might not have been entirely on top of

things was the bass, which remained relatively soft. In comparison, the 120-watt Cambridge 840A (£750) delivers more grip in exchange for rather less ‘air’ at higher registers. It also sounds more relaxed, suggesting the Vincent is not entirely comfortable with this level of demand from a pair of speakers.

The SV-236 offers a distinct alternative to the majority of amps in its price range, its hybrid element giving it a strong flavour of valve charm. It also offers a lot of shiny casework, not to mention an illuminated volume (it has to be illuminated because it doesn’t glow very brightly) Partnered with an upbeat speaker, it delivers a sound that’s highly enjoyable if not entirely neutral. Those of a romantic inclination could well be tempted. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 85% 	PRO A lot of impressively finished metalwork for the money and a sound that is charming with the right speaker. A neat remote control and distinctive illuminated tube chamber pile on the bing factor.
FEATURES >> 85% 	CON Not as precise in the bass as some of the competition and not as powerful-sounding as the specs would suggest.
BUILD >> 89% 	
VALUE >> 86% 	
CONCLUSION In casework alone, this is a lot of amp for the money. Its sound is as idiosyncratic as its styling: it’s short on neutrality but high on sparkle. With speakers that have the right balance, it produces a very enjoyable and revealing sound.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 86%	



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ISOL - 8

Isolate, *ī SŌ-lāt*, v.t. to render free from external influence





Eastenders

Eastern Electric tries to make a perfect link between hi-fi kit, but is it making a drama out of no crisis?

PRODUCT Eastern Electric MiniMax BBA

TYPE Active valve buffer stage

PRICE £699

CONTACT ☎ 01592 744779 🌐 www.easternelectric.co.uk

The MiniMax BBA is a valve-based buffer stage, inserted between source components and preamplifiers, or between pre and power amps. The unit comes in a modest-sized housing, with a set of in/out RCA phono sockets and a mains input on the back, and a power switch, gain control and volume control out front. The gain control sets the input conditions so that the source fully drives the internal amplifier without clipping – generally speaking, it is best set around the 12 o'clock position.

The BBA addresses the fact that components have impedance, sensitivity and overload characteristics that are not necessarily well suited to each other. It also sorts out volume controls with 'non-linear' characteristics.

It is nicely built and finished and it takes up little room, but it's a valve driven thingy. As such, the MiniMax BBA runs hot to the touch, and must be allowed to 'breathe' freely. We should add that if placed on top of any other component, it suffers audibly.

The main test platform was based on a Moon Supernova CD player and i-7 amplifier, but we

also used a number of additional components, from NAD, Arcam and others, to see if the BBA could bring worthwhile improvements.

SOUND QUALITY

First impressions were not altogether negative. BBA-equipped systems generally sound a little smoother and sweeter, easier on the ear and more relaxed. Very quickly, however, it became obvious that there was always a price to pay. To a greater or lesser extent, the outcome was always a warmer, rather woollier sound, with less detail and less presence. The bass became darker and the treble less transparent, while dynamics seem to be slugged. These effects were not necessarily very severe, but they were there, and it didn't take any special hearing acuity to realise what was going on. The shortfall of energy and inability of good recordings to crackle with life had been all too obviously impaired.

With most components of the type that will be used in a BBA-equipped system, we have never seen much evidence, aural or otherwise, of component mismatch of the kind the MiniMax is designed to counter. Even if there was, it's improbable that the BBA would be any real remedy. Indeed, there were voicing changes as the BBA's volume was adjusted that implies its own volume stage is not as linear or as transparent as it should be. Furthermore, it was never obvious why adding a whole new layer of

electronics should be expected to provide an improvement without some trade-off.

If the MiniMax BBA is doing its job, there should be an audible improvement in transparency, clarity, dynamics and musicality, and with an ideally optimized design I have no doubt such an outcome is possible. But there was no evidence of any such synergy in practice. The BBA sounded civilised and easy on the ear, but the essence of great music making just wasn't there. The electricity, the tactile quality was reduced, not enhanced. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 60% 	PRO A well-built and easy to use system 'upgrade'. Could be of some use to those seeking a smoother, sweeter sound from their system.
FEATURES >> 80% 	CON It seems that lack of transparency in the BBA acts as a barrier to the benefits in interface matching that the unit is meant to deliver, with rather woolly results.
BUILD >> 87% 	
VALUE >> 60% 	
CONCLUSION The predominant finding on test was of a loss of detail and musical articulation. This may be one of those cases where the cure is worse than the disease... some systems may benefit more than others, though.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 60%	

Clearer Audio Copper-line Alpha

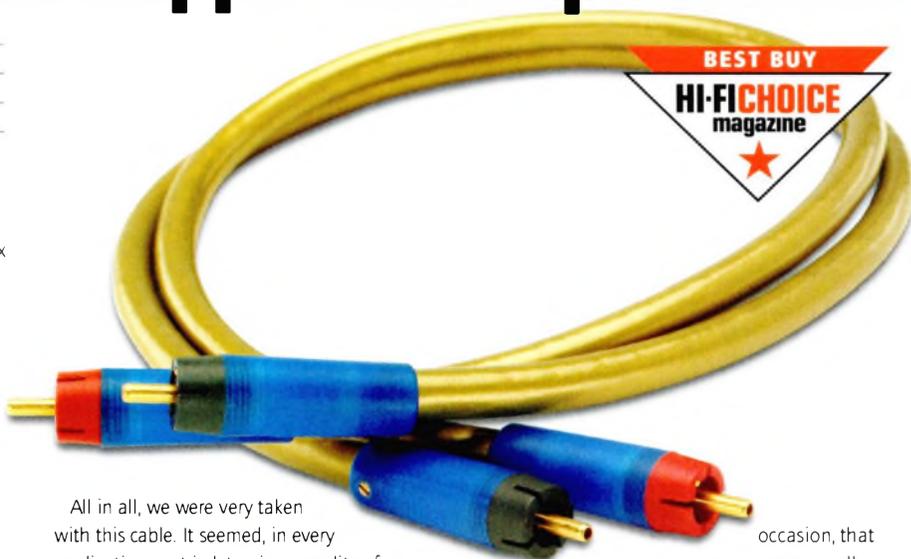
TYPE Analogue interconnect cable

PRICE £85 (1m terminated pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01702 543981 # www.cleareraudio.com

If Clearer's mains Hub (tested last issue) seems distinctly aspirational, a pair of interconnects costing about the same as six full-price CDs is a much less frightening proposition. Indeed, the 0.5m pair supplied for review comes in at only £70. The one argument some might find for using longer cables, particularly with stiff designs like this, is that it allows for easier routing. Still, this may be thick (8mm) but it is not too springy and showed no obvious signs of objecting to tight-radius bends.

Clearer has gone for a 'pseudo-balanced' construction where the screen is connected at one end only, with a conductor (identical to the 'hot' one) underneath the screen carrying the earth current. This can make the cable directional and, while Clearer has adhered to convention in marking direction, it's worth trying the 'wrong' way too. This may sound better, worse or the same. Termination is in Eichmann bullet plugs, which have a plastic body and lone earthing point.



All in all, we were very taken with this cable. It seemed, in every application we tried, to give a quality of sound way out of its class. Perhaps most notable is its excellent treble, which is open and airy and absolutely without the dryness that can afflict many cheaper interconnects. At the same time, detail across the audio band is very clear and beautifully etched, making for stable, plausible and precise stereo images. Finally, the bass is extended, strong and tuneful and, if it very slightly lacks in 'kick' on the odd musical

occasion, that seems a small price to pay for the excellence elsewhere. A great cable at a tempting price. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION
Sounding expensive, this cable offers a welcome taste of high end detail and seems highly compatible too.



Shure SE420

TYPE Earphones

PRICE £250

CONTACT ☎ 0208 808 2222 # www.shure.co.uk

Costing more than most upmarket portable music players, these earphones are clearly targeted at quality-conscious

listeners – and they're not even Shure's top model. The cost, of course, is in the detailed micro-engineering that goes into making them rather than the materials used, and when one reads Shure's technical description and discovers that separate woofer (bass reflex even!) and tweeter are fitted one realises that 'micro' is right.

You get a large selection of foam or floppy rubber earpieces and we'd almost given up swapping them before we finally found the right style. You see, if the phones are not properly sealed to your ears, the sound is scratchy and – frankly – rubbish. Once correctly seated, however, they can provide some excellent detail and a cleanly extended

frequency balance. They also block a high proportion of external noise, which not only makes the music much clearer but reduces one's tendency to listen dangerously loud in an effort to hear at least something. It wasn't enough to make listening on the London Underground in any sense fun, but on overground trains and in cars we could easily forget the background noise. The whole 'in ear' experience takes a good bit of getting used to for some folks and even after quite a lengthy acclimatisation period with these we felt the sound was a little topky, but the benefits over cheap in-ears are large in all areas: the deep but unforced bass is a particularly welcome change. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION
Perhaps not enough to persuade us away from conventional headphones but streets ahead of most in ears.



Nimzy Vibro Max

TYPE Loudspeaker driver

PRICE £80

CONTACT ☎ 0845 055 0005
 🌐 www.widget.com

Occasionally we're offered something for review that's so bizarre we just have to try it to see if it works at all. Frankly, when we were told that this ridiculously-named gadget turns any flat surface into a loudspeaker we didn't have very high hopes, expecting at best sound like a bad transistor radio and limited output. The device itself didn't bode too well either, being just a cube, quite heavy, a couple of inches each way, with a rubber base and a 'lump in a lead' power supply, which feeds the unit's internal 20-watt 'digital' amplifier. Input is via a supplied lead terminated in a 3.5mm stereo jack (expected to plug into some portable audio source, of course) and you even get a tiny remote control.

Imagine our surprise when the very first application we tried, with the Vibro Max on a thick pinewood table, resulted in sound, which while admittedly hardly hi-fi, was nevertheless perfectly listenable. The biggest

limitation is indeed output level and you'll hardly beat an ear-drum in a room of any size. In addition, the device is mono only (stereo gets mixed down) but for background music, you could do a lot worse. Highly resonant flat surfaces are a big no-no, predictably, but most kinds of table seemed to serve well. There's even some room for tweaking, by selecting the optimum position on the table, but basically the sound is pretty decent and for fun factor and raised eyebrows this is a hard gadget to beat. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

No, it's not hi-fi, but it's a bit of audio fun with a purpose if, for instance, you spend a lot of time in hotel rooms.

HI-FI CHOICE
 >> **78%**

Atlas Questor

TYPE Analogue interconnect cable

PRICE £70 (1m terminated pair)

CONTACT ☎ 0800 731 1140 🌐 www.atlascables.co.uk

This is a simple coaxial cable where the core is 'hot' and the screen carries return current. Nevertheless, it's a relatively bulky cable with a 9mm outer diameter. As a result, it's not amazingly flexible. The size is determined by the use of substantial conductors with sufficient spacing between core and screen to give low capacitance and an impedance of 75 ohms. So this cable can be used perfectly legitimately as a digital interconnect, too. Insulation (dielectric) is foamed polythene and conductors are high-purity copper. The screen is apparently a double layer 'lapped' arrangement where strands are laid side-by-side and twisted gently round the inner insulation, rather than being braided. Lapped screens give better coverage but are not too keen on excessive handling, so don't flex this cable more than you need to!

We found this cable to be a success in all areas bar the bass, which seemed oddly lacking in real body. Extension is there all right, but somehow the weight never seems to engage

and as a result some tunefulness is missing. This limitation is mild, certainly nothing disastrous, and we're inclined to be forgiving as it is the only real blemish on a performance that otherwise features beautifully sweet treble, clear and natural midrange and highly convincing levels of detail and stereo imaging. As a result, this cable scores highly for long-term listening comfort and, considering the attractively modest price, we like it. **HFC**

Richard Black



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
 magazine



VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Very open and informative in the top and middle frequency regions, and slightly dry bass is not too distressing.

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

GROUP TEST AND LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

CD PLAYERS

Between one and two grand, there are some lovely disc spinners out there

ON TEST



Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R
£1,400



Lyngdorf CD-1
£1,895



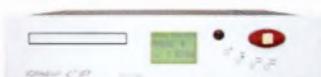
Marantz SA-15S1
£1,000



Meridian G06
£1,695



Rega Saturn
£1,298



Unison Research Unico CD
£1,495

Even as the bulk of the copy for this *Ultimate Group Test* was winging its way through the Internet to *HFC* Towers, issue 294 was being distributed, bearing within an interview with Roy Gandy of Rega. He proclaims the enthusiastic renaissance of faith in good old stereo. And so it seems to us, with new CD-only players (including, probably not entirely by coincidence, one of Roy's) popping up at an encouraging rate.

Okay, one machine here plays SACDs, though only in stereo and we can't help thinking that it's as much to do with Marantz justifying the heavy investment in its SACD transport as it is a desire to reach the SACD buyer market. The Lyngdorf is intended not least as a transport to partner the firm's digital amplifiers and in the absence of a digital output from SACD (and of any signs of life from DVD-Audio) that basically means a choice of CD or CD, but they could have made it play DVDs if they'd wanted. Meridian makes DVD players, but those models are definitely aimed at the home cinema market, ditto Cyrus: Unison Research has nothing to do with multichannel sources at all. So, that's six serious market players that all reckon CD has a future.

Of course, with LPs still spinning in large numbers, CD replay will evidently be with us for a good while. But even if you agree with these strong arguments in favour of continuing to invest in the format, there's a pretty big question mark, we reckon, of the advisability of digging deep enough into the wallet to buy any of the players in this group. By most standards, £1,000 for the cheapest

of them is a goodly chunk of money, the more so when (as we would be the first to proclaim) you can get some damn fine performance for £500.

Yes, but... in any sphere, the cognoscenti know that the best always costs a bit more than the merely good. Wine, cars, jewellery, you name it. And we are proud to be part of an industry where the term 'the best' is reflected – demonstrably in the case of these six fine fellows – not only in terms of performance (subtly but tangibly improved musical involvement assured) but also in terms of build quality, look and feel. We just loved having these beauties around. Read on and weep! **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- Ⓢ Russ Andrews HP-1 preamplifier
- Ⓢ EAR519 power amplifiers
- Ⓢ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- Ⓢ Atlas, Wireworld and assorted custom hi-fi cables

MUSIC USED

- Ⓢ Ian Dury *That's Enough of That*
- Ⓢ Penguin Cafe Orchestra *Concert Programme*
- Ⓢ Benedetto Pallavicino *Madrigals*
- Ⓢ Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*
- Ⓢ Donald Byrd *Mustang*

EARS USED

- As ever, we couldn't do all this without the keen ears and minds of our listening panellists who put their facilities so willingly at our disposal:
- Ⓢ Keith Haddock (Haddock PR)
 - Ⓢ Kulwinder Singh Rai (Rai PR)
 - Ⓢ Ed Selley (Audio Partnership)



STRUCTURED LAB AND LISTENING TESTS

Each of the players in the group was subjected to a rigorous programme of listening and laboratory tests. Measurements were made using a combination of custom-made CD-Rs, devised specifically for these tests, and a high quality ADC which converted the analogue output of each player back to digital for analysis on a PC, using principally Cool Edit Pro and Mathcad. To test aspects of SACD performance, since SACD test discs are not widely available and impractical to generate, commercial music discs were used and analysed by inference and comparison. Our methodology provides a searching analysis of a multitude of aspects, the most important of which are summarised in the bar graphs (with other significant findings mentioned in the text). A few measurements were carried out which are not reported unless results were alarming, for instance absolute speed accuracy – quite beyond reproach for all the players here.

Our comprehensive listening tests were no less rigorous, conducted under blind, level-matched (to 0.05dB) conditions with some of the industry's most experienced hi-fi panellists. In addition, there were extended sighted listening tests by the author, using a wider variety of equipment and music and under a varied range of volume levels to attempt to determine real-world performance.

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

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five key technical measurements. A percentage is given that falls above or below the group average. In this test, the five measurements are:

1) Total harmonic distortion: The classic distortion criterion, measured as the purity of a single sine wave at various frequencies and levels.

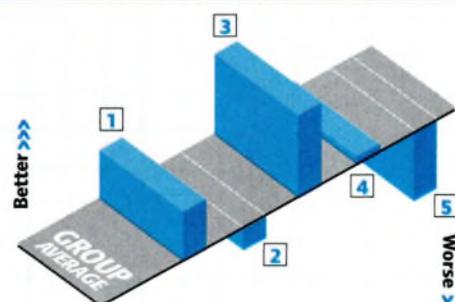
2) Jitter: A measure of how stable the timing clock is. Measured at the analogue output, this distortion shows up as increased noise and/or low-level interfering frequencies which can contribute to sonic 'grunge'.

3) Linearity: How accurately the output behaves at very low levels. Poor figures can lead to distortion rising considerably in quiet musical passages.

4) Dynamic range: This is effectively the same as signal-to-noise ratio, the difference between full output and the practical noise floor of each player.

5) Digital filtering: Frequencies above half the sampling frequency should be efficiently filtered off. The filter is tested by playing tones at various frequencies and looking for ultrasonic spurious ('alias') tones that appear in the output.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



Totem Arro

It's our slimmest floor standing speaker, with a 4.5" sandwich cone woofer with dual magnet, and a soft dome tweeter tuned for low resonant frequency. Although this design is very slim, it produces an amazing - never expected - deep bass. The Arro can perform comfortably even near walls. As with other Totem models, the Arro's small lateral dimensions are a virtue, not a compromise. Its very smallness allows it to project a completely believable stereo image most large speakers are unable to replicate.

The Arro brings Totem quality to smaller rooms and smaller budgets. Yet it performs like a champion, as its narrow cabinet has the rigidity of an expensive stand. It has the firm monochoque chassis you expect from Totem, with interlocked mitred joints, and unique borosilicate damping. It also has a hard-wired crossover network with bypassed oil capacitors, and it can be bi-wired.



Five different finishes are available-four types of veneer: cherry, mahogany, maple and black ash and the fifth being a sublime white satin lacquer.

The standard added plinth with four spikes can be mounted by our specialists, although optional, using the unique Totem "Claw" with ball bearing to floor system will give even better results.

The name is evocative of the arrow, which echoes the tribal theme suggested by our name, Totem.

The shape of this stand also mirrors an arrow, long and slim. Like a fine quality arrow, it is, at once, noticeably light and extremely rigid. And it reaches its target...the heart of the music. Listen to it, and you'll conclude that Totem has hit another bullseye with the Arro.

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Cornflake.co.uk, LONDON, Tel: 0207 6310472
Audio-T, CAMBERLEY, Surrey Tel: 01276 685597

South East

Audio-T, READING, Berkshire Tel: 01189 585463
Rayleigh Hi Fi, RAYLEIGH, Essex, Tel: 01268 779762
Rayleigh Hi Fi, CHELMSFORD, Essex, Tel: 01245 265245
Audio-T, TUNBRIDGE WELLS, Kent, Tel: 01892 525666
Rayleigh Hi Fi, SOUTHEND, Essex, Tel: 01702 435255
Rayleigh Hi Fi, COLCHESTER, Essex, Tel: 01206 577682
Norman Hobbs, HAYWARDS HEATH, West Sussex, Tel: 01444 413353

South

Audio-T, EASTBOURNE, Tel: 01323 731336
Audio-T, PORTSMOUTH, Hampshire, Tel: 023 9266 3604
Audio-T, SOUTHAMPTON, Hampshire, Tel: 023 8025 2827
Audio Destination, TIVERTON, Devon, Tel: 01884 243584

South West

Movement Audio, POOLE, Dorset, Tel: 01202 730865/380018
Audio Excellence, BRISTOL, Tel: 0117 926 4975

Midlands

Leicester Hifi, LEICESTER, Tel: 01162 539753
Audio Excellence, WORCESTER, Tel: 01905 619059

North

Audio Counsel, CHEADLE, Cheshire, Tel: 01614 916090
The Sound Organisation, YORK, Yorkshire, Tel: 01904 627108
Practical Hifi, WARRINGTON, Cheshire, Tel: 01925 632179

Scotland

Loud & Clear, EDINBURGH, Tel: 0131 5553963
Loud & Clear, GLASGOW, Tel: 0141 2210221

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CYRUS CD8x/PSX-R

Proof that two small ones can be better than one big 'un

Cyrus's CD players bear more than a little external resemblance to each other, but this is the company's top model among one-box players, mostly a CD8 but with the 'x' suffix, signifying that certain aspects owe much to the two-box CD Xt/DAC X combination. The CD8x is something of a stalwart that we have investigated before in these pages (see *HFC 270*) but on this occasion, we are giving it a boost by adding the PSX-R upgrade power supply.

The latter is a clever addition to the Cyrus range, with applications across the board. Most of Cyrus's units have a five-pin XLR connection ready for the PSX-R, which is basically a very large toroidal transformer in a box. Well, a bit more than that – there are power supply regulators and enough intelligence fitted to make this the ultimate in effortless upgrades. You just plug the flying lead into the CD player (or whatever) and connect both boxes to the mains. The PSX-R automatically takes over powering the critical bits of the circuit, with its on/off status slaved to the main unit.

The CD8x itself already includes two tiny toroidal transformers. The audio circuit board is fitted above the transport and carries the usual DAC and output buffer chips, power supply regulation and so on. The front panel is a little squeezed but once you get used to the button layout it's easy enough to use, and the display is easy to read. At the rear, twin analogue outputs are joined by both flavours of digital output and Cyrus's MC-Bus remote control system. Cyrus's cheaper CD players can be upgraded (at the factory) to '8x' specification.

SOUND QUALITY

The dominant impression left on our panellists by the CD8x/PSX-R combination was of clean, fast, agile sound, and yet not all found it entirely to their taste. The difference hinges on where one perceives the dividing line to be between agility and over-brightness. We mention that at the outset because there's no



point pretending: if you have a horror of bright sound this may not be the player for you.

That said, there is plenty going for it. The aforementioned agility is part of that and indeed this is a player that can adapt seamlessly to the ebb and flow of any musical style. But beyond that it also has a real sense of coherence, resulting in believable images and musical lines that follow the performers' intentions. Tonally it is well balanced, and one listener said that it had great 'composure', a word we can't remember seeing in this context before but the implication is clear enough.

Vocals are a high point, the diction and emotion of the singer coming over very clearly with any kind of backing or none. And perhaps surprisingly in a player that has such lightness of touch, the bass is good too – both strong and subtle, as required. One listener questioned whether it extends quite as low as one or two of the other players, and in our sighted listening, with the opportunity to swap back and forth and check for that sort of thing, we could see what he meant. All the same, it is admirable for its clarity and has no trouble keeping up with lively rhythms either.

Finally, the player's grasp of fine details of a recorded acoustic and ambience is clearly comprehensive, and it was praised highly for its natural portrayal of space. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >>> 89%	Lightness of touch is the key here, with all that implies for listener preference, but there is also good bass and some very fine detail on offer, too. The addition of the optional PSX-R power supply does make a lot of musical sense.
FEATURES >>> 83%	
BUILD >>> 85%	
VALUE >>> 88%	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 89%	

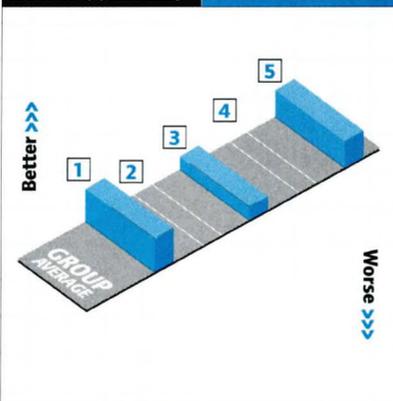


LAB REPORT

In a world full of technically excellent CD players, the CD8x still stands out as just that little bit better than most. Almost all of its imperfections hover around the limit of our confidence in measuring them at all. Take distortion, for instance: at worst (full level output) it is certainly no worse than 0.002% and as the output level drops even a little, it vanishes into the noise floor, across the frequency range. Jitter is excellent, speed accuracy likewise. Once again, the digital filter is not as fast-acting as we'd like, just -6dB at 22kHz, but above 24kHz there is nothing leaking out.

The interesting question has to be: does the PSX-R make a measurable difference? Given that we had trouble measuring anything in the first place, it may not be too surprising that the answer seems to be 'no'. No parameter we could think of to measure changed by anything we'd call significant. But we all seemed to prefer the sound with it attached!

HOW IT COMPARES

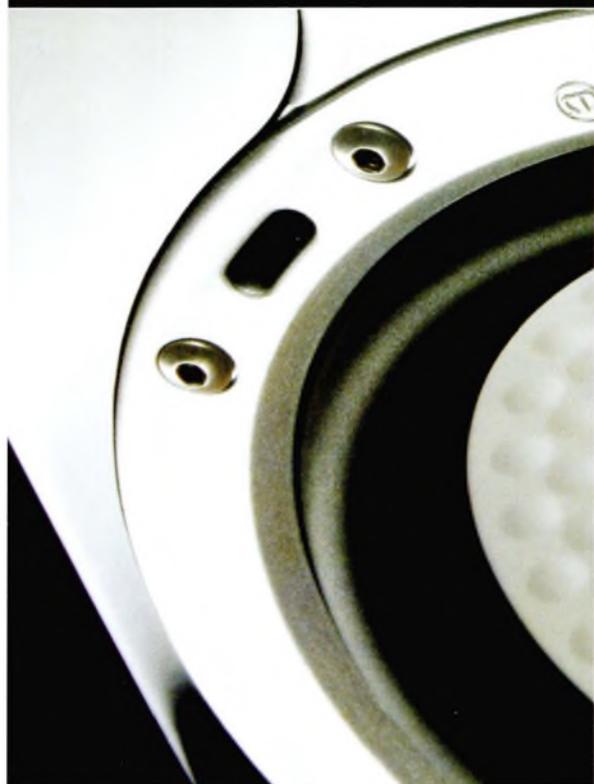


- 1] Distortion >>> +25%
- 2] Jitter >>> 0%
- 3] Linearity >>> +10%
- 4] Dynamic range >>> 0%
- 5] Digital filter >>> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.1V	2.19V
Total harmonic distortion	0.005%	0.0015%
Signal-to-noise ratio	>110dB	107dB

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LYNGDORF CD-1

Danish digital doyen now has a CD player to match its amps

Lyngdorf is best known for its range of digital amplifiers and the room correction built into them, but a digital source is a natural enough extension for such a company. It doesn't do anything but play CDs, but none too surprisingly it is a highly technological device with extras like a choice of oversampling rate at the digital output and digital control of the analogue output level.

The outward appearance of this player is smart and it has a good display. Lyngdorf's decision to use a 'jog dial' for track selection and menu navigation is to be applauded and we found this a fine player to use. It's flexible, with balanced as well as unbalanced outputs, and it boasts RS232 ports for connection to a computer for remote control or updating of the internal firmware. There are three flavours of digital output: electrical and optical S/PDIF and AES on an XLR connector. It's even possible to disable analogue outputs, because Lyngdorf's amps all have digital inputs.

One interesting feature deserves mention: Intersample Clipping Correction. Lyngdorf points out that all too many CDs are recorded at very high levels with frequent clipping of waveforms, and because this is an oversampling player it is possible to correct to some extent for clipped audio. There's a limit to how much this can correct, but it will certainly prevent any further nastiness from occurring at the D-A conversion stage.

This is a very well built machine internally, with a 'proper' CD-Audio transport, generous toroidal mains transformer and good quality parts throughout.

SOUND QUALITY

Looking through the rather varied notes our expert listeners made on this player, the conclusion we are drawn to is that its sound is too dispassionate and uninvolved for some tastes. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's passionless and uninvolved – it depends on the music and how it's recorded. Taking first



the comments on specifics, its bass is warm in tone but restrained in level and extension, a combination that isn't self-contradictory but does lead to differing reactions from listeners. Midrange is okay though, and treble seems open and detailed.

Dynamics attracted a good deal of comment, not all of it favourable. One listener thought the player downright compressed, while another found it at least a little tame in this regard. But the third felt that the sound had very good integration, which merely seemed to reduce dynamics when in fact it was producing a less aggressive approach to loud passages of music. Another comment seemed to point in a similar direction, suggesting that the player may be too refined for its own good.

Lacking an absolute reference point, it's hard to be sure whether the rawness is being lost from recordings or added by other players, but in a group context like this it's useful to be able to make peer comparisons, and this is certainly a highly civilised player. All the same, we would add a warning note about its detail, which all listeners (blind and sighted) rated as no better than par for the course. That apart, it has an attractive presentation – just don't expect it to be the most exciting-sounding player in the shop! **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >>> 86%	Its natural home may be with Lyngdorf digital amps, where most of our subjective findings will go for nought, but standing apart, the CD-1 offers superbly refined sound – maybe just too refined for some.
FEATURES >>> 89%	
BUILD >>> 90%	
VALUE >>> 81%	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 84%	

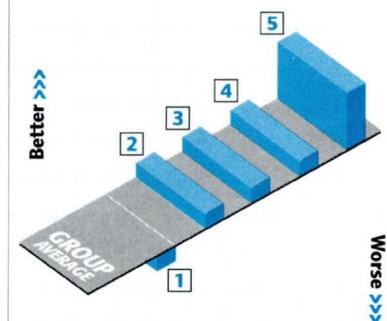


LAB REPORT

Apart from a trace of anomalous distortion at an inaudible level on the left channel, this player put out an exemplary set of measurements. Speed accuracy was spot on and jitter hardly measurable, while under most conditions distortion of any kind was conspicuous by its absence. We looked at the digital filter response via both the analogue and digital outputs and found that the response is highly consistent between all the various modes: it's not ideally fast enough in its attenuation above 20kHz, but it's very slightly better than most.

The one oddity is output level. At the default volume setting of 0dB, the level at the phono sockets is a very high 3.8V, which is enough to overload the inputs of a few modern amps, whatever the volume setting. We would recommend a lower setting, with -5dB being about par for the course. But you do get spectacular noise figures when using the high output!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >>> -10%
- 2] Jitter >>> +10%
- 3] Linearity >>> +10%
- 4] Dynamic range >>> +10%
- 5] Digital filter >>> +40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	3.8V	3.8V
Total harmonic distortion	0.0018%	0.005%
Signal-to-noise ratio	>115dB	108dB

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MARANTZ SA-15S1

CD and SACD combine in this upmarket model from Marantz

Size and weight are key considerations with this player – it must be one of the biggest (in depth at least) and heaviest players around at this sort of price. The weight is accounted for not least by the thick steel panel screwed to the bottom which reduces audio-frequency resonance in the chassis, while the size... well, there's plenty going on inside.

The journey taken by the signals starts with the SACD transport, a familiar unit from other Marantz and Denon machines we've seen, and progresses via a DAC that handles both SACD (DSD) and CD (PCM) data in native form. Its output goes to circuits using Marantz's 'HDAM' modules, effectively discrete-transistor op-amps that use current feedback (rather than voltage feedback) for high-speed operation. Output stages and even the headphone driver use discrete transistors, and only a single integrated circuit (the DAC) is in the audio's path.

The looks may be a bit of an acquired taste for some, but we think they're smart and the display is easy to read (though in some lighting conditions it's a bit too easy to see what's *not* illuminated). Button layout has definitely sacrificed usability for looks, but you get used to it. Round at the rear are high quality sockets for analogue output (stereo only from SACD), plus both the usual flavours of digital and remote control connections. The power supply uses an encapsulated frame transformer and some unusually generous smoothing capacitors, and there are all sorts of audiophile touches like copper-plated screens on key components and sections.

SOUND QUALITY

Although our listeners liked many aspects of this player's performance, they don't seem to have been particularly captivated or moved by it. It's always a danger sign when comments written at the time of listening refer more to sonic aspects (dynamics, bass and so on) than to the music or the performers, and it emerged that while everyone seemed to find this player



quite impressive, none of them put it top of the pile for musical qualities.

Bass is extended and weighty, with plenty of kick in rhythmic music, but soft when playing a full orchestra – the more continuous nature of the bass doesn't seem to suit so well, though it does dig deep. Midrange and treble are good tonally but without the detail that some other players can offer, nor the pin-sharp imaging.

The sound is very lively, with plenty of pep and pizzazz, making for enjoyable times with energetic pop, rock and so on. This suited the Penguin Cafe Orchestra well during our blind listening tests, though it seems our listeners could have wished for slightly more detail.

In fact, detail seems to be the weakest area for this player. While the high 'bop' factor does to some extent make up for this, we're not convinced it's a trade-off one should have to make at this price. Mildly compromised imaging is a partner to the lack of detail, and images tend to be flattened and pushed forwards. Playing SACDs, this was slightly ameliorated but the basic sonic character seemed much the same – not so surprising when most of the signal path is common to both formats. Still, with the right music the SA-15S1 is an exciting listen. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 84%	Somehow the whole doesn't quite seem to equal the sum of the parts, on SACD or CD. There's plenty of bass, excitement, fine tonality, and yet not the sort of musical involvement that some can offer.
FEATURES >> 87%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 84%	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 84%	

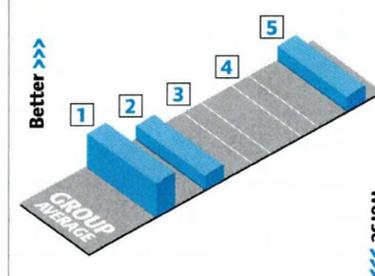


LAB REPORT

As so often happens these days, we were struggling to find anything to say regarding the SA-15's measured performance, beyond 'very good'. Noise, distortion, jitter, speed accuracy – they're all pretty much exemplary. That just leaves filter response and SACD performance. The latter is pretty much the usual, with quite high levels of ultrasonic noise, but this is most unlikely to be sufficient to upset even timid amplifiers, while audio response extends to over 40kHz pretty much flat.

And then we'll have to have the usual gentle moan about filter response, which as with all the players in this group, allows some aliasing to take place near the theoretical cut-off frequency of 22.05kHz. Yes, even under worst-case conditions this isn't a huge problem and with some music ceases entirely to be an issue, but it's just one more wrinkle in CD performance, which can be, but seldom is, ironed out.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +25%
- 2] Jitter >> +10%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> 0%
- 5] Digital filter >> +10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.1V	2.08V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.0015%
Signal to noise ratio	>100dB	107dB



Lucy just couldn't understand Tom's sudden lack of interest in an early night



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Following the magnificent Grand Concert and Concerto, Triangle and UKD are proud to announce the arrival of two new models in the Magellan Series - the Quatuor (£7,500 - pictured) and the Cello (£5,500). These have all the quality, finish and technology of their larger brothers. They're luxurious, emotionally involving speakers that will satisfy the most discerning music lovers. As Alvin Gold (Hi Fi Choice/feb.2007) wrote of the Concerto "it looks fantastic...with a wonderfully passionate style of music-making..."



PATHOS

Everything that comes from the Pathos factory at **Vicenza, Italy** has real class about it. A big hit already with audiophiles worldwide, the Endorphin (£4,500) is a fine example of the Pathos commitment to excellence. Other players may have good looks or performance, but none deliver both to the standard of this wonderful player. The Endorphin is a musical treasure, to admire and enjoy. If you're looking for a CD player that delivers the highest performance combined with superlative design and build, look no further.



Unison's goal is simple: beautiful, fine sounding valve amplifiers made for a lifetime of musical enjoyment. The new Preludio keeps faith with this tradition. This £1,795 integrated sets the standard for high-quality, affordable valve amplifiers. As What Hi-Fi noted in the latest issue: "There might be cheaper valve amplifiers but none we've heard come close to this Italian integrated when it comes to all-round talent." Arrange an audition and discover this for yourself!



The latest model in the Final range of high definition flat panels is the 300i. This elegant, slimline floorstander * offers all the insight and detail of the best electrostatic designs, and at a very attractive price. A stereo pair with matching subwoofer costs under £1,500 - astonishing value for a top quality electrostatic loudspeaker. The 300i is unique - whether used for 2-channel stereo or in a home theatre system. Call your nearest UKD dealer to arrange an audition.



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UNISON RESEARCH UNICO CD

Valves and digits... the perfect combination?

Unison's Italian styling is distinctive. The Unico CD's wood-mounted logo, graphical display, button layout and thick finished front panel look fantastic. The remote's a pretty piece of gadgetry too, just slightly let down by two very ornery screws holding it together from the front.

Inside is a wobbly-looking CD-ROM drive, but it loads discs quicker than many of its breed and makes relatively little mechanical noise. It interfaces to the audio circuit via its digital audio output. The usual line receiver and then a sample-rate converter, which irons out the jitter to which CD-ROM drives are notoriously prone, intercept the bits. The DAC is fed a 96kHz datastream, and its output passes to a pair of ECC82 valves (a typical Unico touch) plus some discrete transistors. Both phono and balanced outputs are provided. We couldn't spot a single op-amp, making this a very unusual player – most 'valve' machines still include an op-amp or two in the filter stages.

There's even a digital input. Selection between this and the internal CD transport is by a little slide switch likewise mounted on the back panel, but it gives the player the option of functioning as an upsampling DAC or indeed, via the digital output, a digital upsampler. There's no front-panel indication of that switch's position, and Unico CD owners may wonder why their player is broken when, in fact, they've merely flicked the switch and either not noticed or forgotten.

SOUND QUALITY

Another notably well-received player, this one came very close to matching the Rega in our blind listening sessions, despite some clear differences of approach. In this case, timing was the strongest unifying thread between the varied comments from our listeners. The Unico clearly has a great knack of keeping a rhythm flowing naturally and invitingly, and it's a mark of distinction when, as here, that keeps up unwaveringly through a range of overlaid



sounds in the midrange and treble. Not surprisingly, that makes this a good player for pretty much any popular music style.

It's hardly less keen on classical music, though. Thanks particularly to its confident handling of dynamic swings and its (slightly) forward treble, it positively relishes the wide-ranging demands of the genre and the complex, treble-rich sounds of instruments like violins and trumpets. Good detail retrieval like this helps the listener follow the different strands within the music, without separating them unnaturally.

If there is a weakness it's the human voice. A couple of comments suggested that the *a cappella* vocal track had slightly less individual character on each of the several voices than had been heard previously. On the other hand, the sense of ensemble was excellent and, as one listener pointed out, the musical purpose was exceptionally clear, here and elsewhere.

Tonally, the Unico seems excellent, with no favouring or neglect of any register. Imaging is precise and easily fills the space between the speakers, even extending somewhat beyond with good recordings. Just now and then we felt the detail was a shade behind one or two of the others, but not by any serious margin. This is a fine all-rounder. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90% [Progress bar]	The Unico is particularly strong on timing and rhythm, thanks not least to a confident and clear bass response. It is also well equipped for the challenges of more melodic music, with good detail resolution.
FEATURES >> 87% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 87% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 91% [Progress bar]	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 90%	

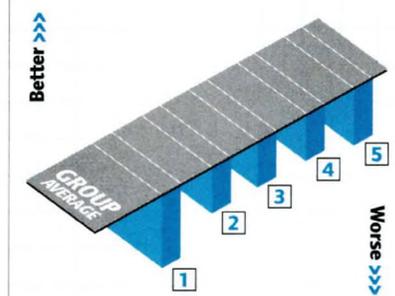


LAB REPORT

With valves in the circuit, one might expect distortion to be higher than average and that's indeed the case, though it's all relative and the actual level is not exactly frightening. We found worst-case levels around 0.02% at full output, but as one would hope, this drops rapidly with decreasing output level and there is no sign of low-level irregularities.

The digital filter is the usual slightly-too-slow affair, but there's also a touch of roll-off within the audio band. This is a little over half a dB by 20kHz, which just may be picked up by sharp-eared listeners in direct comparisons with more conventional players. Noise is a little poorer than normal and there's a trace of jitter too. Absolute speed is not very accurate, but for once this doesn't matter even via the digital output as the upsampling is permanently in circuit. ±400ppm is still closer tolerance than most musicians tune their instruments to!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -50%
- 2] Jitter >> -30%
- 3] Linearity >> -30%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -30%
- 5] Digital filter >> -40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.18V
Total harmonic distortion	-	0.02%
Signal-to-noise ratio	-	97dB

CONCLUSIONS

So, did six of the best players under £2,000 live up to expectations? Absolutely!

Even given that our expectations of grand-plus CD players are pretty high, we found this group almost entirely admirable and frankly hated having to criticise most of the players at all. Still, as we are always keen to point out, there's right, wrong and the matter of taste. And whereas in days of old the latter could to some extent be decided by reference to 'studio master' recordings or formats, even that fails as an arbiter now that studio formats are most often the same as domestic (16-bit/44kHz) and many

professionals turn to domestic audio kit for the highest quality of replay.

Lowest scorer of the group sonically, but far from a duffer in absolute terms, the Marantz SA-15 features the bonuses of SACD replay and the lowest price, plus impressive looks (we really miss that cool blue illumination now it's gone!) and great show-off potential. The price excuse can't apply to the next unit on the scale, Lyngdorf's relatively expensive CD-1... but on the one hand that's clearly been conceived as a very upmarket transport to feed digits to its digital

amplifier brethren; on the other, we harbour a sneaking feeling that it is the kind of unit that appeals more in the long term than in the necessarily short period of a group listening test. We were able to spend days with it before the main listening took place and it hadn't stopped growing on us in that time.

The same is arguably true of the Meridian, though circumstances prevented us spending quite so much time with that this time around. Our faith in rapid-fire blind tests is unshakeable but all the same, in the rarefied world of the

high end, certain sorts of sonic achievement just seem to take longer to sink in. So, give either of those a try – preferably a *long* try.

The Cyrus, Rega and Unison Research players certainly impressed rapidly, though, nor did any of them show signs of boring us in longer sessions. They have quite a lot in common and some interesting differences in approach, and though the Rega just about scraped top honours in our listening tests, we have absolutely no qualms about recommending any of them. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

» When auditioning players, be aware that output levels are not always perfectly matched: louder often sounds 'better' in quick-fire demonstrations.

» CD players aren't particularly microphonic, but any problems can be minimised by putting them out of the direct line of fire of the speakers.

» Some players need a little warm-up time to sound at their best. If there's a 'standby' switch, use that instead of the mains switch unless you're sure you won't be listening for a few days.

» If the option exists to switch off the display and any other circuits, take it. The sound may well improve a touch.

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R	Lyngdorf CD-1	Marantz SA-15S1	Meridian G06	Rega Saturn	Unison Research Unico CD
PRICE	£1,400	£1,895	£1,000	£1,695	£1,298	£1,495
SOUND						
FEATURES						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Lightness of touch is the key here, but there is also good bass and some very fine detail on offer, too.	Standing apart from Lyngdorf's digital amps, the CD-1 offers superbly refined sound – maybe just too refined for some.	Plenty of bass, excitement, fine tonality, and yet not the musical involvement that some can offer.	Highly refined player with a combination of analysis and self-effacing response to musical demands.	Good detail, lively and natural bass, and good integration of musical strands without losing their individual character.	Strong on timing and rhythm, this player is also well equipped for more melodic music, with good detail resolution.
KEY FEATURES						
ELEC DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OPT DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
CD R-W	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
CD TEXT	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
BALANCED O/P	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
OTHER FORMATS	-	-	SACD	-	MP3, WMA	-
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
DISTORTION	0.0015% G	0.005% A	0.0015% G	0.0018% G	0.005% A	0.2% P
JITTER	<0.12ns G	<0.11ns E	<0.11ns E	<0.11ns E	<0.12ns G	<0.15ns A
LINEARITY	<0.1dB E	<0.1dB E	<0.2dB E	<0.1dB E	<0.2dB E	<0.3dB G
S/N RATIO	107dB E	108dB E	107dB E	108dB E	108dB E	97dB A
STOPBAND REJECTION	110dB E	114dB E	105dB E	102dB E	104dB E	90dB G

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This issue, it's time to go power mad. Just as a good-quality phono plugs can make a significant difference to sound, good-quality IEC connectors can improve the mains feed to your system and hence its sonic performance. And there are few as good as IsoTek's finest!

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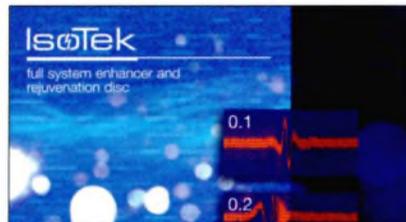
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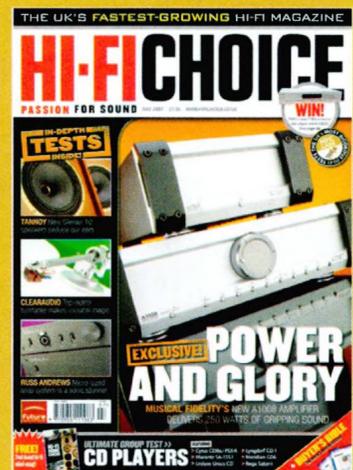
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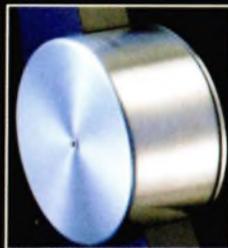
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"Gallo's Reference 3's are rewriting the book on value in high-end loudspeakers, making accessible a level of performance that might previously have been far beyond the reach of most of us."

The Absolute Sound

For further information or to locate your nearest dealer, please visit our website

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nonconformist

adj. an individual who does not comply with conventional norms or socially approved patterns of behavior or thought

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 44.1 kHz 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



Rega Apollo £498

Rega's latest entry-level player is a splendidly musical performer, given its modest price. Bass is good, midrange is great and high frequencies are truly exceptional.



Cambridge Audio Azur 840C £750

Sitting at the top of Cambridge Audio's Azur range, the 840C is a technically innovative player with a sound that belies its sub-£1,000 price – open, subtle and refined.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **CD PLAYERS**

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000												
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player									285
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative									293
EC	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Purposefully undemonstrative, combining neutrality, detail and timing - enhanced by flexibility as a DAC									291
BB	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift; otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value									285
BB	Cyrus CD8x	1,000	Impressive mix of detail, musicality, analysis and appearance. Even better with the PSX-R power supply (£400)									270
EC	Denon DCD-700AE	250	Excellent entry level quality CD player lacks for nothing. Musicians please note: even has variable speed replay									284
BB	Marantz SA7001	430	Easy, relaxed sound arguably lacks true grit, but is extremely listenable from CD and SACD									281
BB	Musical Fidelity X-RAY v8	1,098	Accurate, yet musical performer. £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system									288
BB	Naim CD5i	825	Bass has great extension but lacks control, slightly. Tonal neutrality higher up is excellent, however									291
BB	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation; smaller-scale works can lack focus									291
BB	Rega Apollo	498	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out - musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer									285
EC	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance									276
BB	Vincent CD-S6 MkII	999	With its tube output stage, a beguiling midrange, sweet highs and attractively figured lows plus fine dynamics									287
ABOVE £1,000												
BB	Arcam FMJ CD36	1,200	Fine detail, extension, dynamics and neutrality: 'bland' or 'honest' according to listener taste!									280
EC	Audio Research Ref CD7	8,000	Top of the CD playing tree, with a sound as open and musically accomplished as you'll ever find from the format									279
BB	Ayre CX-7e	2,195	If you want a clean-sounding, revealing and entertaining player with fabulous build this is a strong contender									281
BB	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced									286
EC	Classé CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs									284
BB	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too									280
BB	Cyrus CD XI/DAC X	1,900	Greater resolve than the single box competition, and DAC X has six digital inputs for whole system conversion									279
EC	Esoteric X-03SE	4,995	Resolution and musicality close to the top of the game. For out and out transparency and build quality it's hard to beat									285
BB	Gamut CD3	3,500	Superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music									289
EC	Krell Evolution 505 SACD	8,777	Brilliant replacement for SACD Standard, superb musical discrimination. No high-res digital output									289
BB	Leema Antilla	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best									291
BB	Linn Majik	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm									283
BB	McIntosh MCD201	3,400	Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control.									284
BB	Meridian G06	1,695	Great combination of all-round attainment with superb looks and build quality, plus superb remote control									281
BB	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance									280
EC	Naim CDX2	2,800	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply									238
BB	Rega Saturn	1,300	Attractive simple player does the basics superbly, delivering performance with great poise, precision and range									286
EC	Resolution Audio Dpus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source									244
BB	Sugden CD21SE	1,395	Delivers its particularly musical touch brilliantly and warrants the attention of all true music lovers									271
BB	T+A CD1230R	1,500	Filter options make this a player for all tastes, aided by top quality engineering									280
EC	Wadia 302	3,999	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits									253

ISSUES 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.



Esoteric X-03SE £4,995

Esoteric's entry-level CD/SACD player delivers astonishing sonic detail and precision, coupled with a gorgeous sense of musical structure. Truly, it's brilliant.

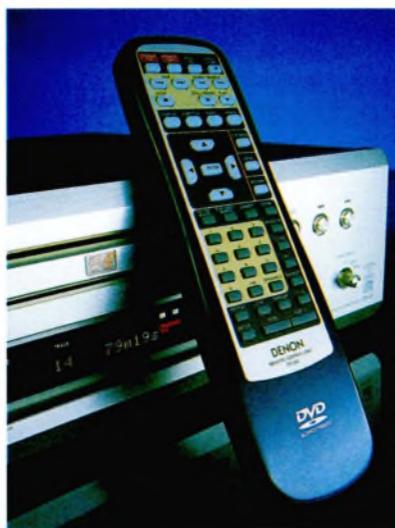
DVD PLAYERS

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

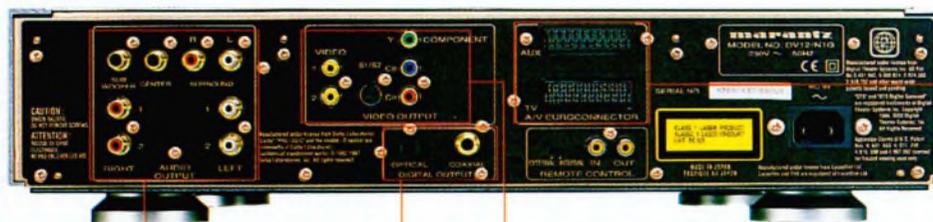
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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 DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG. OUTPUT	OPT DIG. OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	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
	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem						276
	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation						274
	NAD T585	800	Easy to live with universal player that shows clear signs of rejuvenation of the Classic range						294
	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video						275
	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
	Sony DVP-NS9100ES	1,000	Video playback is foremost, with the iLink delivering significantly better sound than the analogue counterparts						274
	Yamaha DVD-S2500	700	Universal player, slightly stronger with video than audio, but well turned out with a wide range of analogue and digital in and outputs						280
ABOVE £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA DV137	1,250	Good overall audio performance and excellent upscaling HDMI DVD-Video player, but stereo-only SACD playback at time of writing						285
	Denon DVD-3930	1,100	Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing						287
	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD						266
	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi						259
	Marantz DV9600	1,500	With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat						280
	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too						265
	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
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity						279
	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' 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



Marantz DV7600 £600
A universal player that's strong with all formats, including music on CD/SACD/DVD-A.



NAD T585 £800
This universal player borrows from NAD's Masters Series to make a cracking all-rounder.



Arcam Diva DV137 £1,250
The first 'universal' player from this top British brand is a cracker, sonically and visually.



Meridian G98AH £3,625
A digital *tour de force* – as exceptional with both audio and video as you'd expect.

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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages

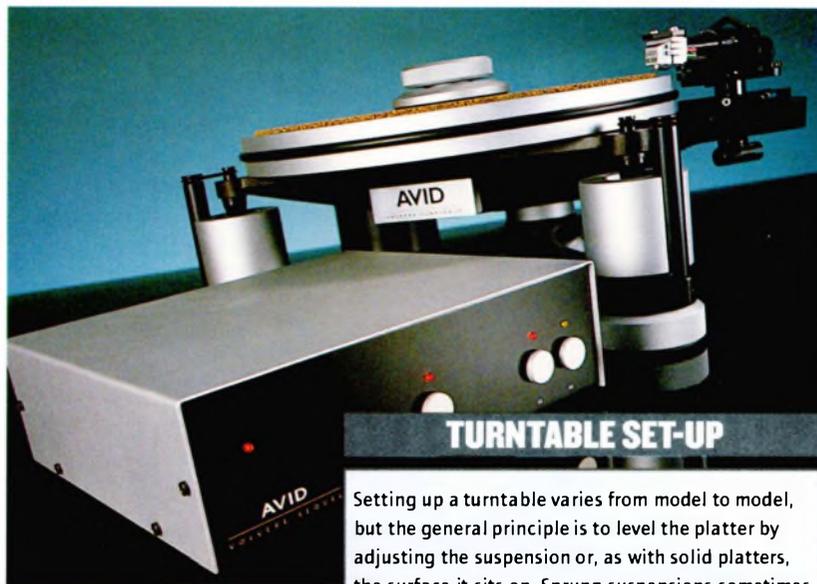


Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True,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

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.

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.

TOP BUYS



Pro-Ject
 RPM 5 £400

Pro-Ject's entry-level RPM deck is a good-looking, great-sounding package that delivers terrific value for money. A class act and no mistake.



The Funk Firm
 Funk V £760

The more costly of two turntables from The Funk Firm, the Funk V builds on its sibling's virtues to deliver a sound of sheer class - dynamic, detailed and refined.



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 📌 EDITOR'S CHOICE TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				SPEEDS	SUPP 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
📌	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
📌	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45		🔄	📌	271
📌	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
🏆	The Funk Firm Funk	450	You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail	33/45		📌	opt	279
🏆	The Funk Firm Funk V	750	Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer	33/45		🔄	opt	284
🏆	Goldingr GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			📌	266
🏆	Michell Technodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45			📌	268
🏆	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	📌	📌		239
📌	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
🏆	Pro-Ject Expression II	250	A smooth and engaging turntable with the ability to revel in the glory of vinyl, with upgradable arm cable	33/45		📌	📌	289
🏆	Pro-Ject RPM 5	400	Great looks plus an on the ball, engaging sound that puts it in the serious league, needs good isolation for best results	33/45		📌	📌	279
🏆	Pro-Ject RPM 6.1	550	With its minimal chassis and huge platter this is a steady design that's capable of fine results with a decent cartridge	33/45/78		📌	📌	294
🏆	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 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
📌	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
📌	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	📌	📌	📌	195
📌	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	📌	📌	📌	186
📌	SME 20/12A	11,133	Brings a calmness and precision to vinyl replay that we have rarely encountered, build quality is second to none	33/45/78	📌	📌	📌	293
📌	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 📌 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
🏆	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around		📌		285
🏆	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	📌		📌	235
📌	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	📌			215
🏆	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound		📌		290
🏆	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
📌	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for		📌		265
📌	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 📌 EDITOR'S CHOICE PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL 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
📌	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

TURNTABLES SPECS KEY SPEEDS Speeds offered in rpm. **SUPP 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.

*The Dawn of a
new Era*

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Stratford Hi-Fi, Leamington

Zouch Audio, Ashby de la Zouch

Audio Destination, Tiverton

Sevenoaks, Lincoln

Kronos Hi-Fi, Dungannon

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 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.



T+A T1210R £1,000
This FM tuner looks, feels and sounds top-notch – great detail and imaging.



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	ROT. 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
	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply	FM	7	●	●	●	●	283
	Denon TU-1500AE	130	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto	FM,M,L	100	●	●	●	●	281
	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, the generally decent performance on both bands makes this an great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200	●	●	●	●	283
	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
	Marantz ST7001	300	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper!	200	●	●	●	●	●	283
	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
	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little	DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	283
	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM,M	20	●	●	●	●	283
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●	●	●	242
	T+A T1210R	1,000	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too	FM	100	●	●	●	●	283
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-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.

Some decisions are just so simple

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

AWARDS 2006

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

ROKSAN KANDY L.III



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



Yamaha
CDR-HD1500 £599

Combining hard disk with CD-R adds flexibility to digital audio recording.



Cambridge Audio
Azur 640H £600

Rip and store CD tracks on hard disk, create playlists, connect to a PC and more.



Hermstedt
Hifidelo Pro £850

160GB hard disk and CD-R/RW drive in a box – as music servers go, this is a cracker.



Imerge
S3000 £2,800

A flexible audio server that's well designed, easy to use and sounds great too!

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1				218
BB	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
EC	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
EC	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1				205
EC	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 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								
BB	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
BB	Hermstedt Hifidelo Pro	850	Can be used as a CD player, but also as a recorder, and can encode MP3, play AAC and form the heart of a distributed audio system	1	160			280
BB	Imerge S3000	2,800	Thought-out solution to the problem of storing, sorting and accessing a music collection. Sound wouldn't shame a good midrange CD player	1	160			291
BB	Yamaha CDR-HD1500	599	Great for archiving a music collection or making compilations without compromising on flexibility or sound quality	1	250			278

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.

Items purchased online are shipped to UK Mainland only. Delivery: £2.50 per item, and £1 per addition item.

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Lifestyle, Amplifiers, CD Players, Loudspeakers, Tuners, Turntables, Audiophile Recordings (CD, Vinyl).

SELECTED BRANDS:

Apollo, ART Loudspeakers, Bel Canto, Black Rhodium, CEC, Clearaudio, Custom Design, Duevel, Eastern Electric, Eclipse Speakers, JAS Audio, IsoTek, Nordost, Shanling, Slim Devices, Turtle Records, VPI & more to come....



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, Bryston, CEC, Custom Design, Croft, Dali, DK Design, Duevel, EAR/ Yoshino, Eastern Electric, Eclipse, GamuT, Goldring, Graaf, Hovland, Hyperion, IsoTek, JAS Audio, JungSon, Lumley, Manley Labs, Marantz, McIntosh, Musical Fidelity, Musical First, Musictools, Nordost, Opera, Origin Live, Ortofon, Pass Labs, Pathos, PMC, Project, QED, Qinpu, Ref 3a, Resolution, Roksan, Shanling, Slim Devices, Soundstyle, Stello, TacT Audio, Triangle, Trichord, Townshend Audio, Unison Research, Wadia, Whest, Wilson Benesch, Vertex AQ, VPI and many more.

For detailed product information and product images please visit the Shadow Audio web site.

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Music Fidelity launch a new integrated power house

In our experience, we have found that MF amplifiers work wonderfully with electrostatics...

Music Fidelity is an innovative company that never rests. With each new generation of product or series, MF pushes its advanced technology even further than previous models.

A1008 is the brand new amplifier from Musical Fidelity. Battleship build, advanced circuitry, built-in DAC and separate external power supply deliver a truly breathtaking performance. A matching CD player will follow shortly.

Interesting! Did you know that MF amplifiers work wonderfully with electrostatics?

Reference all-in-one

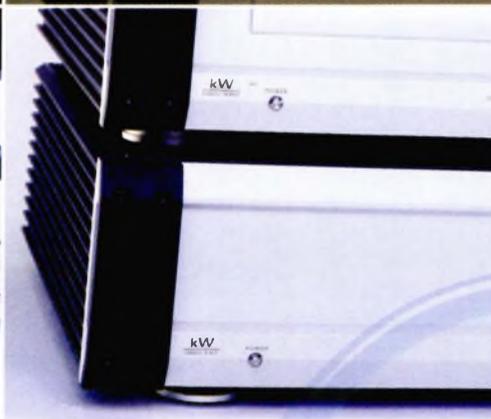
This single box is packed full of goodies...



The new Musical Fidelity kW250S super all-in-one incorporates a pair of 250 watt monoblock amps, a tube hybrid preamp, phono stage mc/mm, 24-bit 192k upsampling CD player, 24-bit 192k upsampling FM and DAB tuner, digital input on the back panel and ipod input on the front panel. Simply sensational..

Two box digital marvel

This transport and DAC combination is breathtaking...



We do understand that some people really want to have the most expensive thing available just because it's the most expensive. For ordinary music lovers like us (and maybe you?), it's all about the music.

The kW DM25 system delivers dramatically more of that per pound than any other system available...

Audiophile powerhouse

Nothing phases this power amplifier...



This powerhouse from Musical Fidelity will drive any loudspeaker load without breaking a sweat.

No matter what the music material, absolutely nothing phases the kW750. It really is that amazing. Don't need that much power? Think again!

X-Factor

A series of products that hit just the right spot...



" The beauty of this Musical Fidelity system is that the whole really is greater than the sum of the parts, and these parts are pretty damn good to start with. You could spend hundreds more and get less. "

Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi Choice Dec 06

“ At Shadow Audio we love Musical Fidelity products, as do our customers. Exceptional build quality, clever circuitry and a wonderful sound - add up to great value for money... ”

“ When Shadow Audio started, we were dedicated to two-channel and today, nothing has changed! There is no finer way to enjoy your music... call us today and see how we can help you. ”

- Tim Jordan

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Used Product Listing

Remember !! List is updated on Our web site daily!

DIGITAL

Micromega Aria, black, ex HiFi Choice review model (£2150)	£1395
AudioNet Art V2, silver / blue display, immac cond, boxed, remote (£2400)	£1595
Cambridge Audio Azur 840C, only 3 months old!, mint, fully boxed (£750)	£595
GamuT CD-1, mint condition, only 18 months old!, fully boxed (£2995)	£1995
Audio Research CD3 MK1, excellent condition, black faceplate (£5000)	£2295
Linn Classic, CD+AMP+Tuner, All in one system, only 6mths old, black (E995)	£749
Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC + Transport, only 1 month old (£4000)	£3395
Musical Fidelity KW 250S, All-in-one CD, DAB Tuner, Amplifier, mint (E4999)	£3795
AVI Lab Series CD, current spec, boxed, unmarked condition (E1499)	£1195
Shanling CDT300 Omega Drive, ex-dem, immaculate cond (£4000)	£2995
Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd player, boxed, black/silver (£2950)	£2295
Marantz SA-11S1, mint, 2mths old, silver finish, boxed (£1995)	£1395
Marantz SA15-S1, silver finish, unmarked condition, high end SACD! (£1100)	£795
Krell Standard 5.2 SACD, silver, mint, few months of use, original box (£4200)	£2995
Unison Research Unico Valve output CD, only 3mths old, latest ver (£1250)	£895

AMPLIFIERS

Krell 280p Pre Amp, silver, immac, only a few months use, fully boxed (£3000)	£1995
Mark Levinson 380 Pre, mint, fully boxed with manual, 3 years old (£6500)	£2695
Cairn 4810 Integrated, silver, immaculate cond, just over a year old (£2700)	£1795
Bryston 4B SST Power Amp, 2 months old!, like new, 300wpc (£2750)	£2249
EAR Yoshino 834T Hybrid Int, mint, boxed, 8 months old! Bargain! (£2800)	£1995
Qinpu A1.0x, ex What HiFi review model, boxed in immac cond (£300)	£230
Qinpu A-8000 MK II, ex HiFi World review model, boxed as new (£1295)	£795
Musical Fidelity A5 Int, 250wpc, 6 months old, boxed, as new (£1499)	£995
Musical Fidelity A5 Pre, mint, only a few months old, fully boxed (£1499)	£995
Bryston B-100 SST Int amp + DAC, unmarked condition, boxed (£3750)	£2995
McIntosh C220 Pre, only 2 months old!, boxed, mint. Simply stunning! (£3300)	£2795
Jadis DA30 valve integrated, mint, 2yrs old, fully boxed, 30wpc (£4000)	£1995
Bel Canto Evo 21 integrated, boxed, mint cond (£2800)	£1595
Primare i21 Integrated, black, immac, boxed with manual, 1 year old (£750)	£549
Musical Fidelity KW550 Integrated, only a few months old!, mint (£5000)	£3995
AVI Lab Series integrated, immac cond, only a few months old! (£1599)	£1095
AVI Lab Series Power Amp, immac, less than 1yr old, boxed (£1650)	£995
Linn LK280 Power Amp, 2 available, both in excellent condition (price of each)	£299
Pathos Logos, brand new sealed box!, canc order, great opportunity (£2700)	£2295
Eastern Electric M520 Int, What Hi-Fi 5 star review, 4 months old (£1539)	£1095
McIntosh MA2275, immaculate condition, only 1 year old! (£5700)	£3995
McIntosh MCS01 Monoblocks, mint condition - as new (£8050)	£5995
Minimax Power Amp, 1 year old, 1 owner, immaculate condition (E995)	£649
Manley Labs Neo Classic 300b Monoblocks, 25wpc, mint! Sensational! (£5895)	£3495
Nagra PSA Power Amp, very rare, only 6 months old!, immac, stunning	£3395
Moon P3 Pre, immac, black with silver legs, one owner from new (£2500)	£1495
Bel Canto S300i integrated, mint condition, only 2 months old (£1799)	£1495
Audionet SAM V2 integrated, mint, silver with blue display (£2400)	£1495
Shanling STP-80 Int, 18 months old, few slight marks, fully boxed (£1350)	£795
DK Design VS-1 Reference, only 6 months old, immac (£2500)	£1995
Moon W3 Power Amp, mint, black with silver legs, fully boxed (£3500)	£2495
Pass Labs X1 Pre Amp, mint, less than 1yr old!, sep power supply (£4700)	£3495

LOUDSPEAKERS

Hyperion 938, gloss black finish, immac cond, very low hours (£3750)	£2895
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic, ex-display, never been played, fully boxed (£845)	£650
Wilson Benesch Arc, silver stands and side cheeks, immac cond (£2600)	£1795
Thiel CS 0.5, Natural Cherry finish, immaculate condition (£1200)	£749
Ref 3a De Capo-i, redwood finish, superb cond, boxed (£2500)	£1695
Wilson Benesch Discovery, mint, silver stands, silver side cheeks (£5700)	£3995
JM Lab Diva Utopia BE, exc cond, boxed, tweeter covers and spikes (£7500)	£3995
PMC FB1+, cherry, boxed, immac cond, few months old! (£1695)	£1295
Soundlab Millennium M3 Electrostatics, black with black cloth, exc (£8995)	£2795
PMC OB1, in oak, boxed as new, 6 months old, simply stunning! (£2700)	£1995
Living Voice OBX-R2, cherry, immac, inc Nordost Red Dawn sok cables (inc. crossovers!), very efficient high end loudspeaker! (£5500)	£3495
JAS Orion, birds eye maple finish, mint, 10 months old!, fully boxed (£2300)	£1495
JAS Audio Orsa, ex HiFi Plus review model, poplar tumor (£1399)	£1149
Zingali Overture 3S, cherry, exc cond, orig packaging, 1 year old (£4250)	£2250
B&W PV1 Subwoofer, mint, only 2 months old!, fully boxed (£995)	£795
ATC SCM10A-2 Active's, 2 months old, mint, all original packaging (£1995)	£1649
ATC SCM20SL, rosewood finish, very low hours, superb condition (£2400)	£1395
ProAc Studio 140, mahogany finish, brand new - never used but box opened, recent 5 stars What Hi-Fi, evenly balanced sound with high quality finish!	£1195
JAS Audio Supertweeters, Review pair, sound awesome!! (£649)	£495

ANALOGUE

SME 20/2A, immac, inc factory silver tonearm wire upgrade!, less than a year old (£6300)	£4495
Trichord Dino Phonostage, black, excellent condition, 1yr old (£325)	£225
Trichord Dino+ PSU, silver, excellent condition, 1yr old, boxed (£249)	£175
Clearaudio Emotion, immaculate condition, only a few months old! (£690)	£575
Wilson Benesch Full Circle, boxed as new, exc cond. Inc Ply Cartridge (£2100)	£1495
Musical Fidelity Kw Phono, immac, fully boxed, ex Hi-Fi News review model, yes, the price is correct!, not to be missed!!! (£2400)	£1250
Audio Research PHS Phonostage, MM/MC, mint, only 6 months old! (£1800)	£1395
PI Scout inc JMW-9 tonearm, immaculate condition, boxed (£1650)	£1195

MISC

Nordost Blue Heaven Speaker Cable, ex-dem, 4m pair, bi-wire (£489)	£349
Isotek Gil Minisub, silver front, current spec, immac cond (£545)	£395
Isotek Nova, only 5 months old!, immac, fully boxed, great opportunity (£1700)	£1295
Hovland Reference Speaker Cable, exdem, boxed, 8ft pair, single wired (£1200)	£795
Townshend Supertweeters, titanium finish, boxed as new, exd (£800)	£649
Nordost Thor, ex-dem, immaculate condition, boxed, Valhalla wired (£1600)	£1195
Isotek Titan mains conditioner, few months old, boxed (£1500)	£1095
Nordost Valhalla Speaker Cable, 3m per side, bi-wire with z-plugs (£5700)	£3995

Clever little box

The Universal Audio Interface...



The BBA is an active device specifically designed to provide an optimal electrical match between any combinations of audio components. It can be used:

- Between a CD/SACD/DVD player, Digital to Analog Converter (DAC), Tuner, or phono preamp and the main control preamplifier
 - Between the main control preamplifier and a power amplifier
 - Between a CD/SACD/DVD player, DAC, Tuner, or phono preamp and a power amplifier without a control preamplifier.
- (Note: there is just one input). Call for more details on this clever little box!

2007 Speaker bargain

The speaker with big balls....



Duevel Planets
 £800/pair
 On a completely different planet.

Duevel's newest model called the 'Planets' brings omni-directional magic to a completely new audience.

Visually the 'Planets' will shock and the price will definitely surprise! Retailing at just £800, the beautiful 'Planets' look like no other loudspeaker and sonically they deliver a first rate performance that is nothing short of astonishing.

Hi-tech engineering, unique design, excellent frequency and phase response ensure the 'Planets' deliver a natural sound that can best be described as 'addictive'.

VERDICT £

Valve lifestyle

A wonderful sounding, space saving system...



Shanling MC-3: £500

MC-3 cleverly combines a high quality CD player, tuner, dedicated i-POD input and tube power amplifier in one chassis. Just add speakers! A brilliant one box solution.

Demand is going to be very high for the MC-3, so place your order early!!

Twin Ribbon Wonder

One of the best small speakers available!

"It was only a matter of time before they matched the sonic performance of their indigenous designs to the astonishing material content and this year we've seen the first evidence."

JAS-Audio Orsa hi-fi+, issue 43.



IsoTek

Mains filtration that really makes a difference...



Free cable and 30-day money back scheme*

IsoTek / Nordost Special Offers

IsoTek Nova	£1695
IsoTek Titan	£1495
IsoTek Sigmas	£995
IsoTek Gil Minisub	£595
IsoTek Gil Solus	£325
Nordost Thor	£1599

FREE IsoTek mains cable worth £59 and a 30-day money back guarantee*.

Baby Integrated

£899 really can buy you a lot of amplifier....



Eastern Electric MiniMax is a wonderful integrated amplifier in a very small package.

Its essence is simplicity and attention to detail. The MiniMax is the product of a company that firmly believes in the adage, less is more.

If you are looking for a simple, straight forward path to great sound on a budget, look no further than the MiniMax.

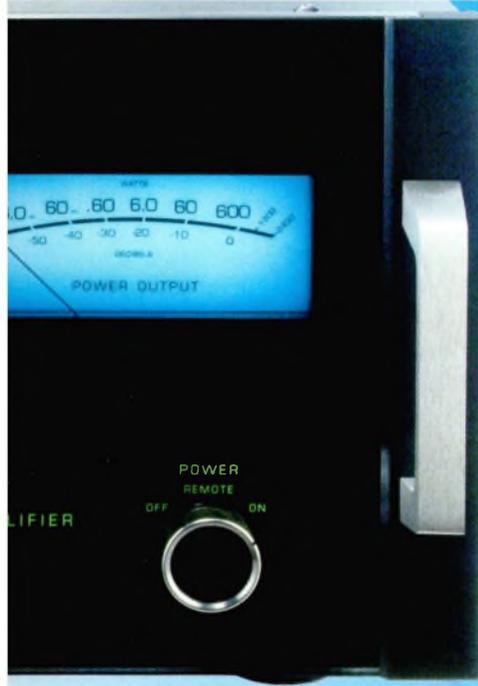
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*subject to conditions

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Complete McIntosh range is available for your listening pleasure...



One of our best selling brands!

McIntosh are famous across the world for producing some of the finest Hi-Fi Products available today.

Owning a piece of McIntosh is like owning the finest car, the finest watch, the finest painting the eye can admire.

Of course the difference is that McIntosh will delight your ears with music in a way that you inescapably just cannot put a value on - because it is priceless.

The McIntosh range caters for every possible client requirement from a simple two-channel system to an extreme multi-channel, multi-room system.

Interested, curious?

Maximum resolution

Opus 21 can now give you a complete system...

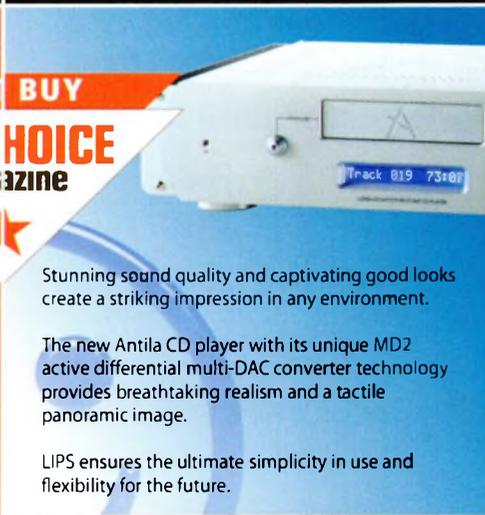


Available in a variety of configurations and colour combinations, the Opus 21 can start as a simple CD player and evolve to a complete two-channel system.

No analog interconnects are required, and only a single cord powers the entire system. The Opus 21 frees you to focus on the music, not the equipment.

It has 20 x DACs at its heart

Leema launch a CD Player that really delivers on every level...



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Stunning sound quality and captivating good looks create a striking impression in any environment.

The new Antila CD player with its unique MD2 active differential multi-DAC converter technology provides breathtaking realism and a tactile panoramic image.

LIPS ensures the ultimate simplicity in use and flexibility for the future.

Super Natural Winner

The Icon of IKON (Dali)...



Using the already famed and celebrated Hybrid Tweeter Module and 2 x 6 1/2" paper/wood fiber cone IKON drivers, the Dali IKON 6 has won the ears of both customers and the press alike.

"We've yet to come across a rival that can match the IKON 6's combination of full bodied midrange, treble sparkle and crisp timing."

What Hi-Fi

"A loudspeaker of exceptional resolve for the money, the IKON 6 will show what has been recorded in exquisite detail and with pin-sharp precision."

Hi-Fi Choice

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



"Next day a quick call from Shadow to make sure I was completely happy with my purchase added that extra personal touch to the whole deal." - Frank M

"Tim, I just can't thank you enough for the service you have provided, and I shall do my up most to spread the word about Shadow Audio. You set off to be the friendliest hi fi shop in the world, I think you have achieved that." - Jake B

"You've done a really nice job on your web site, enjoyed it very much. I think it's the best Hi-fi one I've come across so far. All the best Paul." - Paul M

"P.S. your service is world beating and I have told no end of people, cheers..." - Darren J

"Thanks for good advice, accurate descriptions, and fast and seamless delivery. Ordering equipment unseen and unheard over the internet always relies on honest and wise advisors - Shadow Audio are the best I have come across." - John P

"I wish you and Shadow Audio great success. You deserve to do very well!!" - Euan O

"I do not think you will find a better hifi shop!" - Brian G

For the latest news and exclusive offers, remember to sign-up online to our weekly e-newsletter.

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.

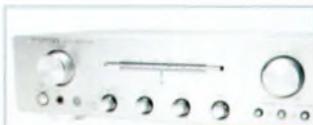
WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

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



Marantz PM7001 £350

If you thought the PM7200 was a great budget amp, just wait until you hear this! Its sound is so detailed and involving, you'll think it costs twice the price.



Cyrus 6vs2 £600

The latest 'singing shoebox' from Cyrus is an absolute peach! Strong rhythmic flow, tunefully extended bass and excellent stereo imaging are among the highlights.



Primare I30 £1,500

Are you looking for an amp that combines weight and musical gravitas with rhythm, detail and subtlety, with gorgeous build quality to boot? In that case... here it is!



Copland CTA405 £2,498

This amp's massively enjoyable musicality is hard to beat: all the effusiveness of a great valve amp and none of the stereotypical softness. Brilliant!

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
MB	Arcam DiVAA70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM	●	●	60	289
MB	Arcam DiVAA90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt	●	●	90	286
MB	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6		●	●	75	279
EC	Cambridge Audio Azur 740A	500	Ticks all the boxes for bass, clarity, imaging etc. and invites the listener into the music with uncommon grace	6		●	●	100	294
EC	Cambridge Audio Azur 840A	750	Excellent value - powerful and capable with useful features and clear, dynamic sound	8		●	●	120	293
MB	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt	●	●	85	283
MB	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7		●	●	40	293
MB	Denon PMA-1500AE	500	Well set up to make the most of big-scale music, with copious power and drive, though slightly bright	5		●	●	70	278
EC	Denon PMA-700AE	250	One of a growing number of new low cost amps, it offers good timing and analysis at up to moderately high volume levels	4	MM	●	●	50	284
MB	Flying Mole CA-S10	1,000	The Mole makes a mountain of detailed sound from its digital circuitry, if you choose your speakers well it's a short-cut to hi-fi nirvana	3			●	100	291
MB	Marantz PM7001	350	Detailed and highly communicative amp with fine treble and good bass extension - exceptional value for money	5		●	●	70	279
MB	Marantz PM7001KI	550	A self-effacing amplifier which serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail	5	MM	●	●	70	289
MB	Musical Fidelity X-T100	899	By separating amp and TRIPLE-X power supply, this deceptively powerful valve-sporting amplifier is both enticing and musical	3		●	●	70	288
MB	Naim Nat 5i	699	A trade-off of more power and better connectivity against less inputs works surprisingly well in a grunty, musical manner	4			●	50	252
EC	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5		●	●	80	278
MB	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM	●	●	50	293
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Audia Flight TW0	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8		●	●	100	280
EC	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6		●	●	100	275
EC	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6		●	●	130	281
MB	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt	●	●	85	255
MB	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pitfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM	●	●	50	286
MB	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6		●	●	100	286
MB	Densen Beat B110	1,200	Great bass provides firm underpinning for involving and enjoyable listening - real 'smile factor'	6	opt	●	●	60	292
MB	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
EC	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
EC	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●	●	200	247
EC	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4		●	●	200	289
EC	McIntosh MA2275	5,400	A valve amplifier that doesn't patronise. It's not soft-centred and it understands dynamics	5		●	●	75	271
EC	Moon Evolution i-7	4,750	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, very limited features, even by high-end standards	5		●	●	150	288
MB	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkie	7		●	●	180	285
EC	Naim SuperNat	2,350	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6		●	●	80	294
MB	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6		●	●	100	267
EC	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
MB	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
EC	Unison Research Perform	5,500	Massive and bulky valve amp sounds brilliant, with good power for a single-ended design, wide bandwidth and fine neutrality	5		●	●	40	287

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
MB	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
MB	Croft Precession I/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer	●	●	6		●	25	290
MB	Cyrus Pre Vs2/6 Power	1,000	Pre offers stunning resolution and feature count for the money and power is subtle, open and musical	●	●		●	●	50	290
EC	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	
EC	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
MB	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
MB	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design	●	●	6	opt	●	50	287
MB	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling	●	●	5		●	136	256
MB	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value	●	●	5		●	70	285

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				
				PREAMP/ENTER	POWER/AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL
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
EC	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●	●	5 opt	●	277
EC	Bryston BP26 DA/2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt	●	●	6 opt	●	100 278
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	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	13,350	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility. Sounds stunning, too	●	●	6 opt	●	400 293
EB	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	80 276
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●	●	6 opt	●	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	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
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●			140 208
EC	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6	●	233
EB	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-AX759SE £550

If you're looking for an affordable multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is a top buy.



Arcam
DiVA AVR350 £1,500

Arcam's latest receiver offers a good helping of processing and connection options, with exceptionally musical sound.



Denon
AVC-A11XVA £2,500

A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing formats without sacrificing sound quality.



Classé
SSP-600/CA-5200 £11,900

Anyone seeking a high-end multichannel solution that's equally adept with music and movies should park their ears here.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER	
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS									
	Arcam DiVA AVR350	1,500	Sets the standard for music and movie performance at the price, although features count low and HDMI limited	7	100	284			
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640R	600	Simple and elegant receiver. Attributes that reflect in good sound quality without the distracting toys you'll find elsewhere	7	100	292			
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			
EC	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			
	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	7	100	273			
EC	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	7	100	260			
	Yamaha DSP-AX759SE	500	More a stereo amp with basic multichannel thrown in, but a great performer with music at this price	6	100	287			
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS									
	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 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	Classé SSP-600/ CA-5200	11,900	Subtle, exacting sound, tremendous flexibility and high power audiophile standard amplifier - lacks hi-tech digital interfaces	11	200	278			
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			
	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	Linn Exotik + DA	3,245	Good analogue preamplifier with multichannel in/out up to 7.1 and a home cinema processor of quality combine to make a tempting package	8		291			
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			
	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.



After 5 years in production, the Dino is still one of the most popular phono stages around. Highly versatile with accessible switches on the baseplate to facilitate a wide range cartridges.

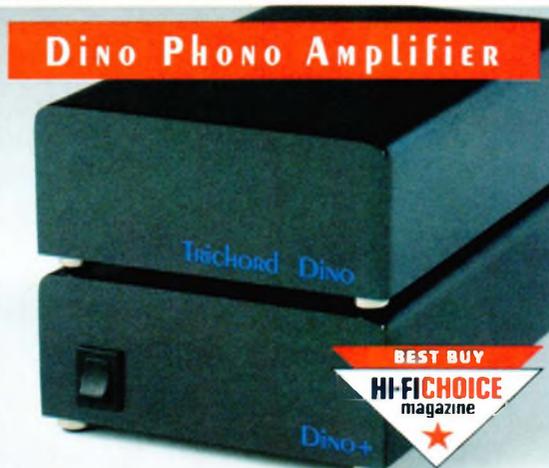
'Never Connected' power supply technology virtually removes all incoming mains noise allowing only the music to be heard.

Visit our website to learn more about this exciting product and the high performance Diablo phono stage.

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BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

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WHAT HI-FI?
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★★★★★
FEBRUARY 2006

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VALUE
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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VALUE
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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



Tannoy
Mercury F4 £350
Tannoy's Mercury speakers have a long history of 'quality' sound at low prices, and the latest range is no exception – this floortander is thoroughly engaging.



DALI
Ikon 6 £899
Complete with a ribbon super-tweeter, this is an exceptionally capable floorstander for the money, delivering a highly detailed and truly engaging sound.



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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM WALL	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SIZE NUMBER
	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
🏆	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	370	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24	A	24				294
🏆	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	750	Wood-veneered all-rounder has exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass	20,103,39	A	22				292
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,5,25,5	A-	45				283
🏆	ALR Jordan Entry L	500	Not the most pretty speaker but a sonic triumph, with a beautifully judged balance and impressive transparency	20,86,29	A	23				279
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,350	Costly but clever; adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount	24,5,37,31,5	A	26				288
🏆	ATC SCM11	849	A very fine little speaker that's at its best with good, natural recordings where it adds little and reveals much	21,38,25	A-	55				293
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28	A-	40				279
🏆	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
🏆	Castle Richmond 7i	900	Does all the musically important stuff flawlessly. A fine communicator that delivers reassuringly credible bass	18,92,5,26	A+	47				286
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	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
	Dynaudio Focus 110	850	Luxury real wood miniature with tapered enclosure sounds punchy, sweet and avoids boxiness	17,30,28	A-	38				279
🏆	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
🏆	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60				241
🏆	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40				269
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,000	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics, and a sweet top end, but could be smoother	28,100,37,5	A+	20				288
🏆	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
🏆	KEF iQ3	280	Shapely, vinyl-covered stand mount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter	22,37,33	A+	40				284
🏆	KEF iQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	A	25				273
	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
🏆	Monitor Audio BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25	A-	30				294
🏆	Monitor Audio BR5	400	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold sounding, good value and an easy electrical load	17,85,25	A-	36				293
🏆	Monitor Audio GS10	800	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. Quality stereo design which take's up little room and is easy to drive	20,36,27	A-	40				284
🏆	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	A	33				276
🏆	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i	350	The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes!	16,5,85,29,5	A	40				281

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 **STEREO SPEAKERS** continued

BEST BUY **EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOOR/STANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FREQ (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	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	
	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	
	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	
	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21,5,19,5	A	48		286	
	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,9,7,5,30	A+	28		284	
	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26	A-	30		292	
	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	
	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	
	Revel Concerta F12	900	The money has gone into the active hardware, so cosmetics are plain. Performance is on par with more costly designs	25,108,37	A-	28		283	
	Ruark Sabre III	799	Straightforward engineering combined with high finish quality that delivers a beautifully timed and engaging sound	20,33,5,27	A-	50		289	
	Tannoy Mercury F4	350	Floorstander has an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm, restrained output	20,5,97,29	A+	24		294	
	Totem Rainmaker	795	Standmount has a big sound, with a smooth midband and bright top. Could have more punch and warmth	17,35,5,23	A	25		291	
	Triangle Antal Esw	995	Smoother than its predecessors, with a beautifully balanced bass and midband, though the top end is uneven	20,108,34	A	20		288	
	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	
	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									
	A2T Mezzo	2,000	Seamless overall coherence, with persuasive monitoring capabilities. Sounds a little mid-forward. Top could be sweeter	27,5,40,26	A+	40		281	
	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,900	Luxury miniature has a laid back but bouncy sound, fine dynamic range and very superior imaging	18,5,31,25	A-	30		281	
	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	
	ATC SCM19	1,499	Super linear motor system, heavy weight construction and fabulous veneer that makes the ATC a pro favourite	22,44,31,5	A-	54		285	
	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	
	AVI Duo	1,299	Sophisticated floorstander, a natural partner for AVI's electronics. Unusually clean and honest musical presentation	19,77,28	A	50		280	
	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	
	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	
	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	
	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	
	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	
	Dynaudio Focus 220	1,850	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble. Could be more dynamic	20,5,98,29,5	A-	<20		281	
	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	
	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up.	28,104,37,5	A	45		287	
	Focal Chorus 836V	1,549	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier. Has good bass with genuine grip, but top could be sweeter	28,115,38	A	28		290	
	Focal 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 Electra 1027 Be	4,000	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,5,111,35	A-	25		276	
	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	A+	30		255	
	Focal 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	
	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	
	Jamo Reference R909	7,500	Top model (in a class of one) is open, full and easy on the ear, and surely a classic in the making	48,127,54	A-	25		280	
	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	
	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	A-	46		245	
	Meridian M3100	1,850	Attractive and capable active (125w) with great imaging and strong bass. High neutrality and good power handling	19,39,25	ACT	45	opt	280	
	Quad ESL 2805	4,500	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38,5	A-	45		294	



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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (W x D x H) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER?	FACE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREQUENCY	CLOSE TO WALL
	Monopulse 82	2,495	Could be more neutral, but excellent coherence, lively dynamics, fine imaging and a wide dynamic range	27,110,25		A	<20		281
EC	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
	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
	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
	PMC Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	335.57.5,10		A+	45		285
	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
EC	PMC EB1	5,950	The best argument for large speakers that we've heard in a long time	29,120.46.5		A	19		292
EC	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
EC	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
	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
	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
EC	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39		A	30		265
EC	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30		A-	48		274
	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,000	Sharp looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression. Could be warmer and richer	20,100,25		A	22		290
	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
	Sonus Faber Concerto D	1,799	The Concerto Domus performs significantly above its price level, especially with acoustic material	21,99,31		A	35		270
	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
EC	Sonus Faber Grand Piano D	2,498	The Grand Piano Domus has a fabulous physical appearance and delivers a clean, refined sound	21,106,31		A-	32		283
EC	Tannoy Dimension TDB	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30		A-	25		240
	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23		A	35		277
	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
EC	Triangle Magellan Concerto	14,750	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it's easier to live with and remains highly entertaining	60,160,45		A-	32		290
	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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 you 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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	●	opt	255
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22	●		224
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Sim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●		251
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A prince among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38	●		262
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1,000	18	246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Velodyne SFL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pile driver, with deep, state of the art performance	45,33,45	1,000	10	290

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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RECIPE CLIPPINGS

Special Announcement:

After popular request, Tannoy have produced a smaller Glenair! It is already flying off the menu and proving to be a very popular choice!

Recipe no.5 :-

Starter:

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Main:

1 x McIntosh MA6300 integrated amp

Dessert:

1 x Tannoy Glenair 10 loudspeakers (pair)

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RECIPE CLIPPINGS



Recipe No.6 :-

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The BabyBase Audio Support was developed to house high-quality 3/4 width equipment (up to 380mm) and the underside of the shelf component houses a resonance control disc.

StarBase



The StarBase Audio Support is a dedicated modular support system which uses a multi cut-out shelf component to provide a higher level of resonance control.

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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

BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	CSL# NUMBER
BT	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain						190		219
BT	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270		230
EC	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270		244
BT	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250		245
BT	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290		287
BT	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200		194
EC	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200		270
EC	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250		288
BT	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330		219
	Sennheiser LX90	35	Brings recognisably hi-fi sound to in-ear transducers, with surprisingly good resolution						35		290
BT	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable						270		266
EC	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience						260		252
	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead; high-quality stuff						20		285
	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity						280		268
EC	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

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUM-AURAL** 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.

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VERDICT

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Adam Smith, Hi-Fi World, July 07

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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

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	IS2E NUMBER
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Black Rhodium Harmony	60	Clear and well defined sound with good bass and admirable articulation	●	●	●	●		290
	Black Rhodium Prelude	80	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit	●	●	●	●		293
 	Black Rhodium Concerto	225	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise	●	●	●	●		270
 	Chord Company Chorus	215	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●	●	●	●		259
	Clearer Audio Silver-line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!	●	●	●	●		279
 	CrystalCable Piccolo	260	Thin cable, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid core type generically - notably resolution, focus and articulation	●	●	●	●		294
	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail	●	●	●	●		283
	Kimber Timbre	89	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●	●	●	●		248
	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too	●	●	●	●		281
	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere	●	●	●	●		284
 	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral	●	●	●	●		278
	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble	●	●	●	●		281
	Oehlbach Silver Express +	70	Good, firm bass is accompanied by clear treble and well defined stereo imaging	●	●	●	●		280
 	Supra Sword-ISL	379	Unusual inductance-free design, beautifully built, with bold, finely detailed and outgoing sound quality and excellent discipline	●	●	●	●		292
	TCI Tiger	30	Not the most detailed interconnect around, but performance belies its modest price, especially in the bass	●	●	●	●		285
 	Van den Hul MC Silver IT MkII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price	●	●	●	●	E	289
	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price	●	●	●	●		273
	Wireworld Solstice 5	70	A cables with all-round appeal – treble is slightly 'dark' but bass is excellent and the overall balance very good indeed	●	●	●	●		259
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
	Atlas Compass	50	Slight improvement in detail over giveaway cables, plus distinctly more tuneful bass and more open treble, make this fine value	●	●	●	●	E	289
 	Clearer Audio Silver-line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble	●	●	●	●	E	278
 	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price	●	●	●	●	E	260
 	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price	●	●	●	●	E	265
 	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance	●	●	●	●	E	279
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE									
	Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	A high degree of musical communication: detail is not perfect but one is seldom aware of the shortfall	●	●	●	●		290
	Atlas Ascent 2.0	55	A highly analytical cable, with more bass extension than at first appears and very fine detail across the board	●	●	●	●		294
	Chord Epic Iwinn	80	Good all rounder, which generally sounds relaxed and musical, and a full bass that stops the right side of sounding blowsy	●	●	●	●		287
	Clearer Audio Copper-line A	10	Copper-line Alpha's strong, ringing bass and neutral tonality are plus points, but treble is not the purest we've heard	●	●	●	●		283
 	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board	●	●	●	●		227
	Monster MCX-1s	8	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers. Good mid and treble	●	●	●	●		280
 	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, hi-res and suitable for exacting systems	●	●	●	●		278
	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging - a budget bargain	●	●	●	●		276
	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems	●	●	●	●		234
 	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical	●	●	●	●		287
 	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round	●	●	●	●		241
	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Better bass than treble, with good detail though a touch of constriction at times	●	●	●	●		291
	Wireworld Luna 16/4	5	Budget wire cable offering tuneful and extended bass, good treble, and midrange with just a little lack of detail	●	●	●	●		292
	Wyreizard Spellbinder	5.50	Sold off the reel, this entry-level cable is a surprisingly purist performer, lean yet powerful, with good detail resolution.	●	●	●	●		267

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

BB BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept
EC	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up
BB	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless
BB	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack
BB	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)
BB	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice
BB	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!
EC	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
80	66,46		5	Glass	247
81	50,50		4	Glass	217
82	43		4	MDF	193
87.5	48		5	MDF	193
75	53,5,45		4	MDF	217
75	56,37		4	Glass	286
65	60,42		4	Glass	293
75	57,41		5	Glass	263
74	48,40		4	Metal	247
62	49,44		4	Metal	271
75	45,36		5	Glass	261
51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
92	50,40		5	Glass	217
76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BB BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise
BB	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price
EC	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small
BB	Ine Cableway	395	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material
BB	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent
EC	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!
EC	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies
EC	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
50	20,17			1	293
56	16,5,18			1	281
61	18,16,3			4	283
63	17,20			1	220
62	18,15			4	232
61	17,15			5	261
53	31,22			6	287
60,50	15,21			3	280

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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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-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.



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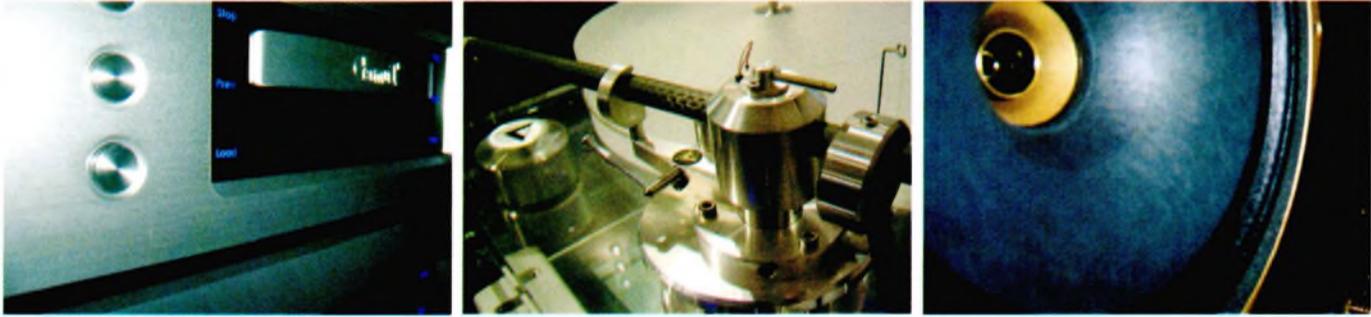
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HI-FI CHOICE

JULY 2007 ISSUE 295

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Prices UK £5.95 per issue, Europe £6.95 per issue,
rest of the world £7.95 per issue

Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th floor, Low Rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS. Tel: 020 7633 3300

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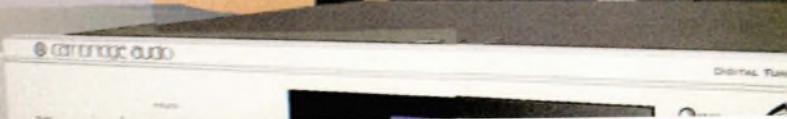


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2nd-hand shootout

The best tonearms in history can be yours for £750

The 1980s was arguably the heyday for reference tonearm design. It's no coincidence that three of the four arms here originated from that decade and all are still on sale today, in modified forms.

Few tonearms divide opinion quite like the SME Series V. This design is now over 20 years old, but if it's exquisite build and finish with a neutral sound quality you're after, then the V is still a major contender. Many think the arm has too much 'grip', but others revel in its ability to get the best out of most cartridges and motor units without laying down a strong sonic signature of its own. Such is the quality of this tonearm, that buying second-hand should be relatively hassle-free. SME will, of course, still service the arm but, in their own words, they "don't expect to see them again!"

Our budget should buy a ten-year-old model with the standard wiring. Upgraded silver litz cable versions are available and worth looking out for. The silver litz wire brings about superior transparency, while retaining the arm's quality of neutrality. If you want to bring bling to your hi-fi, then a gold-plated version is available, but the true audiophile is better off seeking out the cabling upgrades, and saving some cash.

At a time when half the audio world was in raptures about the SME Series V, the other half favoured the rivalling Linn Ekos. With a typical Linn sound, the Ekos was, and indeed still is, all about listener engagement. The Ekos is rhythmic, bold and entertaining in a way that can make the V sound dull. Though in terms of ultimate accuracy, the SME is still the superior arm. While as little as £400 can be paid for an early (1988) Ekos, our budget should be enough for the later '2' version. Crucially,

the newer model came with

improved bearings, earlier versions could prove troublesome. As with any tonearm, it's worth holding the arm by its base and swinging the arm gently across.

If it sticks at all, then it should be avoided. Also, check for sticking counter weights, especially with the Mk1. With a rebuild from Linn costing around £450, it's often uneconomical to buy cheaper tonearms in poor condition. Our advice is to buy as new as you can or buy an arm that has been recently serviced: with documented proof!

If neither of the above appeal, then you may warm to the Naim Aro (more recently known as the Uni-pivot). Like the others, it's beautifully built, but the Naim uses a completely different method of construction. The Aro uses a unipivot bearing with no oil-

damped cue as standard (there's an optional 'Aromatic' lift/lower device) and an old-fashioned weight and thread for bias. It does make the Aro a little tricky to handle, but many feel the sonic results more than make up for it. It's not as neutral as the SME or as punchy as the Linn, but when properly matched to cartridge and turntable, it does give the most beguiling and soulful of performances. With a three point cartridge fixing, the Aro was designed to be used with the Linn Troika. Although more cartridge fussy than the others here, a number of modern Ortofon and Rega cartridges suit it well – just check the mounting geometry specification or ask a dealer about suitable pairings. Regarding decks, its Linn



Above: SME's Series V magnesium tonearm

fitting makes the LP12 the obvious candidate although it is also said to work well with Michell decks. The unusual bearing, which also acts as a mechanical earth, is actually very hard wearing and problems are rare. With our budget buying a model less than a decade old, there should be no problems with wear, plus you have Naim's legendary service backup.

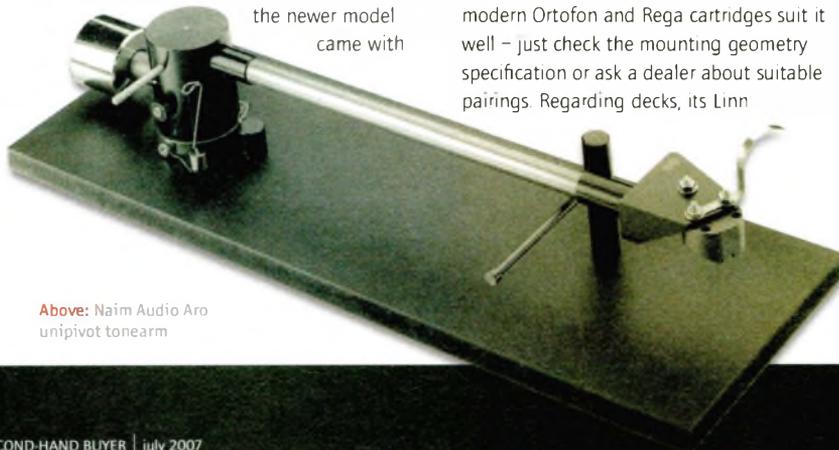
If all these choices seem a little predicament and perhaps even old to you, then one of the best nearly new options is the Origin Live Encounter. Origin Live has come a long way

“Whichever you choose, you can be sure your CD collection will see less action.”

from its days as modifiers of Rega arms, and the Encounter is proof of this. While it won't match the performance of the others here, it will get closer than you might think and has the distinct advantage blending their sonic traits. At £930 new, our budget is perfect for a typical Mk3 ex-demo model, with a further benefit being the remainder of the guarantee. The Rega fitting is available for most turntables with OL also selling a special arm board and shorted arm mount for LP12 owners. For those weary of buying older arms, the Encounter makes an excellent buy. The only problem that Rega and Rega-based arms can suffer from is a cracked base where the arm has been over-tightened. It's not a design fault, but caused by user neglect; it is, however, very easy to spot.

So it's the Origin Live for the cautious, the Linn for clout, the SME for neutrality and the Naim for soul. Whichever you choose, you can be sure that your CD collection will see less action. As advocates for vinyl, these four take some beating. **HFC**

Dominic Todd



Above: Naim Audio Aro unipivot tonearm

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Musical Fidelity A3.5 CD, immac cond, few months old, fully boxed (£995)	£595
Micromega Aria, black, ex HiFi Choice review model (£2150)	£1395
AudioNet Art V2, silver / blue display, immac cond, boxed, remote (£2400)	£1595
GamuT CD-1, mint condition, only 18 months old, fully boxed (£2995)	£1995
Micromega CD132, ex-dem, black finish, as new condition, boxed (£849)	£595
Audio Research CD3 MK1, excellent condition, black faceplate (£5000)	£2295
Linn Klassik, CD+Ampl+Tuner, All in one system, only 6mths old, black (£995)	£749
Arram Diva 93t, silver, exc cond, boxed, manual, r/c, 1 yr old, (£1000)	£595
Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC + Transport, only 1 month old (£4000)	£3395
AVI Lab Series CD, current spec, boxed, unmarked condition (£1499)	£1195
Shanling CDT300 Omega Drive, ex-dem, immaculate cond (£4000)	£2995
Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd player, boxed, black/silver (£2950)	£2295
AVI S2000 DAC, excellent cond, only 1 owner from new! fully boxed (£995)	£249
AVI Series 21 MC4 CD player, excellent cond, only 1 owner from new (£995)	£249
Marantz SA-1151, mint, 2mths old, silver finish, boxed (£1995)	£1695
Marantz SA15-S1, silver finish, unmarked condition, high end SACD! (£1100)	£795
Krell Standard S2 SACD, silver, mint, few months of use, original box (£4200)	£2995
Unison Research Unico Valve output CD, only 3mths old, latest ver (£1250)	£895

AMPLIFIERS

Exposure 23 Pre Amp, mint, boxed, remote (£1400)	£795
Exposure 28 Power Amp, mint, boxed (£1400)	£795
Krell 280p Pre Amp, silver, immac, only a few months use, fully boxed (£3000)	£1995
Cairn 4810 Integrated, silver, immaculate cond, just over a year old (£2700)	£1795
Bryston 4B-SST Power Amp, 2 months old, like new, 300wpc (£2750)	£2249
EAR Yoshino 834T Hybrid Int, mint, boxed, 8 months old! Bargain! (£2800)	£1995
Qinpu A1.0x, ex What HiFi review model, boxed in immac cond (£300)	£230
Qinpu A-8000 MK II, ex HiFi World review model, boxed as new (£1295)	£795
Musical Fidelity A5 Int, 250wpc, 6 months old, boxed, as new (£1499)	£995
Musical Fidelity A5 Pre, mint, only a few months old, fully boxed (£1499)	£995
Bryston B-100 SST Int amp + DAC, unmarked condition, boxed (£3750)	£2995
McIntosh C220 Pre, only 2 months old, boxed, mint. Simply stunning! (£3300)	£2795
Jadis DA30 valve integrated, mint, 2yrs old, fully boxed, 30wpc (£4000)	£1995
Bel Canto Evo 2i integrated, boxed, mint cond (£2800)	£1595
Linn Kaim Pre, immaculate condition, fully boxed with manual and remote	£699
Musical Fidelity KW550 Integrated, only a few months old, mint (£5000)	£3995
AVI Lab Series integrated, immac cond, only a few months old! (£1599)	£1095
AVI Lab Series Power Amp, immac, less than 1yr old, boxed (£1650)	£995
Linn LK280 Power Amp, 2 available, both in excellent condition (price of each)	£299
Pathos Logos, brand new sealed box, canc order, great opportunity (£2700)	£2295
Eastern Electric M520 Int, What Hi-Fi 5 star review, 4mths old (£1539)	£1095
McIntosh MA2275, immaculate condition, only 1 year old! (£5700)	£3995
McIntosh MCS01 Monoblocks, mint condition - as new (£8050)	£5995
Minimax Power Amp, 1 year old, 1 owner, immaculate condition (£995)	£649
Manley Labs Neo Classic 300b Monoblocks, 25wpc, mint! Sensational! (£5895)	£3495
Marantz PM15-S1 Integrated, silver, unmarked condition (£1100)	£795
Cyrus Pre X VS, immac cond, only 5 mths old, one prev owner (£1000)	£749
Nagra PSA Power Amp, very rare, only 6 months old, immac, stunning	£3395
AVI S2000 Pre Amp, excellent condition, only 1 owner from new (£995)	£249
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Lyngdorf (Tact) TDA2200, digital int, full room correction, excellent (£2395)	£1495
Pass Labs X1 Pre Amp, mint, less than 1yr old, sep power supply (£4700)	£3495

LOUDSPEAKERS

Hyperion 938, gloss black finish, immac cond, very low hours (£3750)	£2895
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic, ex-display, never been played, fully boxed (£845)	£650
Wilson Benesch Arc, silver stands and side cheeks, immac cond (£2600)	£1795
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Sonus Faber Cremona, natural maple finish, 5 mths old, boxed. Superb (£5k)	£3795
Thiel CS 0.5, Natural Cherry finish, immaculate condition (£1200)	£749
Ref 3a De Capo-i, redwood finish, superb cond, boxed (£2500)	£1695
Wilson Benesch Discovery, mint, silver stands, silver side cheeks (£5700)	£3995
JM Lab Diva Utopia BE, exc cond, boxed, tweeter covers and spikes (£7500)	£3995
PMC FB1+, cherry, boxed, immac cond, few mths old! (£1695)	£1295
PMC OB1, in oak, boxed as new, 6 mths old, simply stunning! (£2700)	£1995
JAS Orior, birds eye maple finish, mint, 10 months old, fully boxed (£2300)	£1495
JAS Audio Orsa, ex HiFi Plus review model, poplar tumor (£1399)	£1149
Zingali Overture 3S, cherry, exc cond, ong packaging, 1 year old (£4250)	£2250
ATC SCM10A-2 Active's, 2 months old, mint, all original packaging (£1995)	£1649
ProAc Studio 140, mahogany finish, brand new - never used but box opened, recent 5 stars What Hi-Fi, evenly balanced sound with high quality finish!	£1195
JAS Audio Super tweeters, Review pair, sound awesome!! (£649)	£495

ANALOGUE

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Trinchord Dino+ PSU, silver, excellent condition, 1yr old, box (£249)	£175
Clearaudio Emotion, immaculate condition, only a few months old! (£690)	£575
Wilson Benesch Full Circle, boxed as new, exc cond, Inc Ply Cartridge (£2100)	£1495
Musical Fidelity Kw Phono, immac fully boxed, ex Hi-Fi News review model, yes, the price is correct! not to be missed!!! (£2400)	£1250
Audio Research PHS Phonostage, MM/MC, mint, only 6 months old! (£1800)	£1395
PI Scout inc JMW-9 tonearm, immaculate condition, boxed (£1650)	£1195

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Audionote M8 pre-amp with phono stage (£19,500)	£9995
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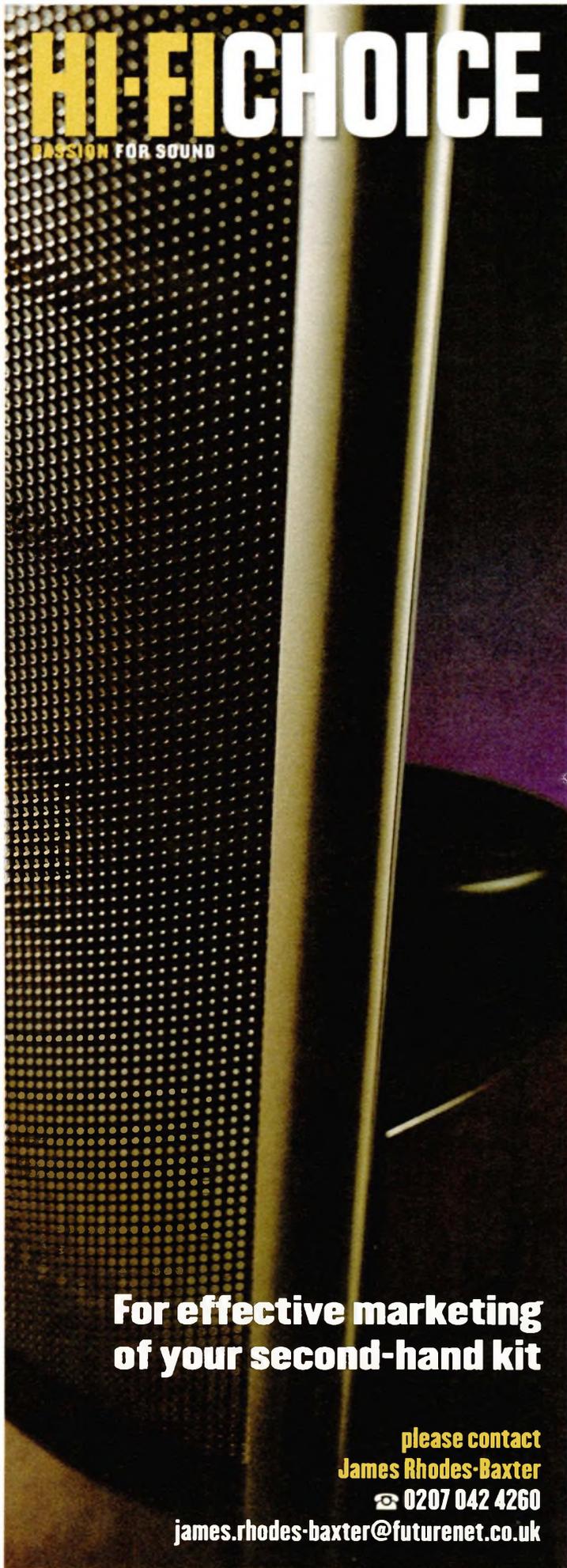
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Croft Charisma X phono/line pre-amp. Ex-dem ¹ .	£1500	£3000
Canary 903 4 box pre-amp - champagne facia - 3 mths old - boxed	£3250	£6500
Canary 608 Integrated amplifier - with LV upgrade VGC - serviced. nice	£1700	
Unison Research Smart 300B class A power amp - 1 year old	£2500	£4500
Art Audio PX25 - 5 watts - single ended stereo	£2500	£4500
Beard integrated amp - beefy boy - needs some help	£350	
Border Patrol 300B SE - Western Electric valves - 8 watts - charmer	£2500	£5000
Mactone MA300B 20 watts 300B power amp - 30 hours use	£2500	£6500
Nottingham Analogue Spocedekwith Rega RB300 tonearm, Reson Recca cartridge and Living Voice mat.	£900	£1633
Tube Technology Prophet pre-amp - 30 hours use	£1250	£2500
Clearaudio Goldfinger cartridge. Brand new, still in sealed box	£3500	£5640
Sugden Bijou mm/mc phono stage - 100 ohms - virtually new	£300	£650
Transfiguration Esprit - 10 hours use - perfect ex-review bargain	£600	
Michell Iso / Hero phono stage	£200	
Border Patrol Control unit - line preamplifier current spec	£1750	£3000
Mactone XX330 line pre-amp - 10 hours use	£2500	£8000
Placette passive line stage - 3 inputs - 120v - remote control - 6 mths old	£700	£1600
Conrad Johnson PV-14L pre amplifier	£1400	
Living Voice Avator, IBX-R2 / OBX-R2 / Auditorium ex-dem ¹ , part-ex, and seconds, from very young to very old.		please call
Sonus Faber Electa - Walnut - no stands	£900	
B & W 704 Cherry, vgc. Less than a year old. Original packaging.	£900	
Horning Agathans Silver - VGC - Oak finish.	£1500	£4000
Audio Note (UK) Ltd ANE loudspeaker	£500	
Ruark Crusader loudspeaker	£600	
Revel M20 bookshelf loudspeakers - Santos Rosewood -with stands	£850	£2000
Avalon Arcus loudspeaker - Maple	£3500	£7000
Shahinian Arc loudspeakers - oak. Good condition.	£1400	
Nairn SBL loudspeakers - latest specification	£1000	
Rega Jupiter CD player - professionally clocked + rebuilt with Black Gates	£600	
Mark Levinson ML-39 CD player	£1600	
Pink Triangle Dacapo II CD player	£900	
Townshend Audio Seismik Sink - 3DHD - 100 kilos, 48 x 37 cms	£300	
Townshend Audio Seismik Sink - 3DSS - 12 kilos, 48 x 37 cms	£250	
Michell Orbe SE with Techno arm. VGC. 2.5 yrs old.	£1600	
Ortofon Kontrapunkt B cartridge 150 hours	£450	
Art Audio Argento amplifier. Black with chrome. Excellent condition. Only 9 months use.	£6000	

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- Clearaudio Start Smart Emotion; nr smartphono & cover 650
- Clearaudio Exact Stylus gauge 79
- Clearaudio Smartphono, as new 179
- Clearaudio Champion Level 1, Satisfy Carbon arm, ex boxed 999
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- Thorens TD 125/SME3009, 329
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- Tom Evans M crogroove, ex dem 299
- VP1 16 S Clearing Machine, call for details 379
- Zeta, famous heavyweight arm, excellent 549

Digital

- Arcam CD72, vgc remote 149
- Arcam DV89, bargain 349
- Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 ex dem Call
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Radio and Recorders

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- Musical Fidelity E500 c/w remote 149
- Pioneer PDR509, as new boxed 149
- Rega Radio 149
- Sony 777ES DAB Tuner REDUCED 129
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Amplifiers

- AC Magnum MF125 Monoblocks, excellent monos in vgc 399
- Arcam A32, ex silver c/w remote 749
- Arcam Alpha 10, excellent boxed just serviced 399
- Audio Analogue Maestro Reference 150w monster Integrated 1199
- Audio Innovations Series 200 preamp 299
- Audiolab 8000/8000X7, as new processor/7 channel amp 1199
- Audio Research L57 Preamp 699
- Audio Research D130 Power, ex 999
- Audio Research D70 Pre, ex 899
- Audio Research SP12 Pre, ex 599
- Audio Valve Eclipse Preamp, ex boxed 1249
- Audio Valve Balour 200 Monoblocks - incredible (£10k new) 4499
- AVI S2000Pre, superb little preamp 449
- Cairn Mega Monoblocks, ex in silver 50w Class A, fabulous 749
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- Revel M20, scruffy with stands 249
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- Cairn Fog v2 Cd player and 4808 Integrated amp, ex dem Call
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- H Kardon AVR635 - was 1999 448
- Linn Klassik K with onboard tuner, as new boxed 599
- Linn Klassik original, as new boxed 399
- Musical Fidelity X-PSU v3 excellent 179
- Primare CD110, one box system, ex demo 899
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complete collection for sale, over 2,000 records must go. Terry 07908 750494 (Kent)

ARCAM A85/ P85 amplifiers, silver, pristine. Original packaging, remotes, lead etc, £650ono. Can split. 07766 078281 (London).

AUDIO RESEARCH LS5 I preamp, excellent condition, hardly used, (£5,290) £1,900. Part exchange welcome on any hi-fi product. 020 8504 1638 or 07733 261077 (Essex)

ARISTON RD11 series 80SL turntable, walnut plinth, Rega tonearm with MP30, £150 07757 162478 (Yorks)

AUDIO RESEARCH V555 amplifier, £1,300. B&W Nautilus 805 speakers, £950. B&W FSN805 speaker stands, £200. Linn Kann speaker stands, £50. 07940 507215 (London)

AUDIOZONE AMP-1 integrated amplifier, outboard power supply, superb sound, mint, £800. 07765 808374 (Lancs).

B&W DM601 S3 speakers, unmarked, as new condition in sorrento. Boxed etc, £180. Apollo Olympus 50cm stands, mint work very well with B&Ws, £35. May deliver, readvertised due to time waster. Chris 01766 781211 (Harlech)

B&W 604 S3 black, four months old, boxed, mint condition, (£800) £600. Thomas 07835 056237 (Notts)

B&W 704 in rich American Walnut. 18 months old, perfect, boxed, £800. Naim Flat-cap x2, 10 months old, only powered CD player, perfect, boxed, £400. Delivered in UK. 07729 458836 (Northern Ireland).

CABASSE 100-watt monoblocks. Lector two-box CD player, valve

preamp, Naim 03 tuner Shahinian Hawk gold speakers. Phone for prices. 020 8524 2181 (Essex)

CYRUS 8 integrated amp (black), three years old, mint condition, boxed, remote and standard accessories £450ono. 01604 643531 (Northampton).

DENON DAP 550 preamp with built in DAC, door hinge broken but looks OK, £180. 0191 417669 (Tyne & Wear)

DENON CDR-M30 CD recorder, £120. Nordost Cineflex speaker cable, 2x6m, £50. Toshiba SD350E DVD player, £50. Denon RCD-100 CD/amp/tuner in one box, £175. All excellent condition. 01285 862539 (Cirencester).

EPOS 12.2 standmount mahogany speakers, (£450) plus Epos black speaker stands, (£120). As new condition, boxed, will demo, £395 for both. Adam 07815 046623 (Surrey).

EPOS M15.2 speakers, light cherry, mint condition, £225 ono. Partington Superdreadnought speaker stands, graphite, mint condition, £75 ono. Philip 0208 923 9757 (London)

FOCAL MEZZO UTOPIA seven years old, one owner, modified, (£7,250) £2,800. Photos available +00352 407702 or +00352 621 500756 or email barig@internet.lu (Luxembourg).

GARRARD 401 in plinth with lid fitted, SME Series III, £300. Will swap for Thorens 124 in plinth. 01606 784767 (Cheshire).

GRYPHON CALLISTO 2200 integrated amplifier. 200 watts, vgc, terrific clarity and dynamics. (£4,500) £2,250. 07968 189647 (London)

KEF Q7 floorstanders, black, in excellent condition, boxed and still under warranty, (£800) £375ono. 01926 402824 or email pcs9@hotmail.co.uk (Warwick).

KRELL FPB300CX power amp, immaculate, new, boxed, £7,000ono. Email ewadv@hotmail.com (Israel).

KIMBER SELECT 1011 interconnects 0.5m pair, next gen WBT plugs. (£328) £175. Shun Mook Mpingo disc, (£50) £30 inc. postage. Ortofon Rohman cart (200hrs), (£1,050) £400. Trichord Diablo with NC power supply, (£1,500), 11 months old, £750. Stuart 01384 394441 (West Mids)

KIMBER SILVER STREAK interconnect 1m, (£250) £125. Russ Andrews Mega Clamp Ultra, (£250) £150. Both as new, £225 if bought together. Stuart 01384 394441 (West Mids)

LINN AKURATE 212 standmount speakers in rosenut, fabulous sound, cabinets unmarked, boxed, (£3,600) £1,950. Naim NAC552 preamplifier, Naim's flagship, immaculate condition and boxed, (£13,600) £8,495. 01285 862539 (Cirencester). □

WANTED

AUDIO TECHNICA AT1100 tonearm, will pay £50. 01462 456006 (Herts)

BRYSTON 3BST power amp or larger Bryston power amp(s). 01803 523553 (Devon)

LINN OR NAIM speakers. 01793 728103 (Wilts)

NAIM CDI in good condition, with box, manual and leads. Cash waiting, for the right player in the right condition. 020 7042 4522 (London)

PINCH ROLLER part number 642-001 for Ferrograph Series Y open reel tape deck. 01592 750643 (Fife)

PIONEER A300R precision amplifier. 1970's Sugden A21a. Onyx AO21, Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer Champion amp. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

REL / MJ ACOUSTICS subwoofer with remote. Possible part ex for my Quad L-Series sub. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

STAX OMEGA electrostatic earspeakers up to £1,000 for mint condition example. 01333 311247 (Scotland).

WHARFEDALE 708 speakers 023 8073 8935 (Essex).

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

FOR SALE

█ **LINN GENKI** CD player, silver 17 months old, boxed, (£1,100) £650. Linn LK85 power amp, (same), £350. Linn Kolektor preamp, £300. Arcam P75+ power amp, boxed, (£380) £220. 0115 960 3934 (Notts).

MANTICORE MANTRA turntable with Rega 250 arm, Audio Technica coil cart. Original box, lubes etc, as new, unmarked, black plinth, £150. Linn Helix bi-wire speakers, black ash, almost perfect, boxes, with Linn stands, £85. 07813 666686 (Bucks).

MARANTZ DV6001 universal multi-region, (£350) £250. Target Hi-Fi/TV stand 5-shelf black ash, £75. SENTEC phono preamp, sota, MM/MC, £75. 020 8951 3178 (London)

MARANTZ PM6010 OSE amp, CD6000 OSE CD player, Cambridge Audio DAB500 tuner, all black. Alphason five-tier glass rack with chrome legs. All as new, £400ono. Chris 01202 828383 (Dorset).

MERIDIAN 502 preamplifier with MM phono option. Balanced and unbalanced inputs and outputs, excellent condition, with box, manual and accessories, £575. 07729 626598 (Essex).

MERIDIAN 508 24-bit CD, 504 FM tuner, 551 integrated amplifier, AVI Neutron III monitor speakers, Atacama three leg stands, hi-fi cabinet as new, £2,750. 01427 717134 (Lincoln).

MISSION 771E speakers, £60. Award-winning speakers in rosewood. Good condition. Wharfedale 8.1 speakers, £60. Half price, boxed, in pristine condition. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands)

MONITOR AUDIO GR20 floorstanding speakers, cherry wood finish. Excellent condition, (£1,500) £650ono. 07802 936750 (Hampshire).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A5 pre/power amps, Cyrus CD8x, all brand new. Boxed, unopened, (£3,300). KEF 95 floorstanding speakers, black ash, (£150). 07896 708572 (West Yorkshire)

NAIM 180 power amps x3, £500 each. Hi Cap power supply, £400. 102 preamp, £500. Possibly TAG McLaren CD20R, DAC20 (offers). Mr Harrison 01323 486933. (East Sussex).

NAIM NAC 82 preamp (1999), with black style NAPSC, remote, leads, plug-ins, manual, box. Can demonstrate, £1,025 ono. 07973 785360 (Sussex)

NEAT CRITIQUE speakers, £120. Sony IAF 440E amp, £75. Philips 624 CD player, £50. Various other items 1960s-1990s, some classic, call for information.

01224 646473 (Aberdeen)
NEAT PETITE MKI speakers (8"x12") matt black with removable grilles, (£525) £200. 020 7328 5001 (London).

NORDOST RED DAWN REV 3m pair, 2 to 4 biwire config, £250. Phone Ian on 01789 261585 or 07941 424322 or email ian.brunt@zen.co.uk (Warwickshire).

NORDOST SOLAR WIND speaker cable 2x6m pair, one pair bi-wired speaker end, (£350) £85 per pair. Russ Andrews Crystal-Ag 0.5m interconnect, (£322) £160. QED Qunex Silver Spiral interconnect cables, 2x0.5m, 1x0.75m, (£85) £25 per pair. Call John 01932 580394 (day) 01202 516289 (eves) (Bournemouth).

OPTIMUM hi-fi/AV stand OTP5500 featuring five 6mm glass shelves, 610x520x63mm (WxDxH), with gold legs, as new (£349) £160ono. 07817 379 508 or email ejgrovewood@ukonline.co.uk (Stafford)

PMC OB1 speakers, 300 watts (£2,700) £1,700ono. Nordost Silver Shadow lead, 0.6m, (transport to DAC) (£360) £200ono. Musicworks six-way block (£230) £95. Gary 0117 9629725 (Bristol).

QUAD 99 and 909 pre/power amplifiers, boxed with manuals, Quadlink and remote control, £900ono. Quad ESL 2905 loudspeakers, new, sealed cartons. Why wait three months? Warranty, £5,750. Steve 07905 762363 or email sappleby@powelltuck.co.uk (Sussex).

REGA PLANET CD player plus Rega phono leads with gold plugs, £100. Rega Mira 2000 amp, £185. Both boxed with manuals and remotes, perfect condition. 07733 261077 (Berkshire).

REGA PLANET CD player, Rotel THX multichannel power amp (RB-985), Rotel (RSP-976) surround processor, Quad 12L2 speakers, Marantz DV6200 HDCD DVD, Loewe Vitros 32" TV and stand, £1,500ono. 07914 590086 (Oxford).

RUSS ANDREWS PowerPlus mains cable 1m as new, £15. Monitor PC interconnect cable 0.5m, gold plated phonos, £5. Excellent upgrade over freebie cables. 01766 781211 (Wales)

TRIANGLE VOLANTE floorstanders, boxed as new, superb sound, amber, upgrading, (£4,500) £2,250. No offers please. Paul 07931 314536 (Oxon)

USHER 1.5 power amp, 150 watts, pure Class A, both channels, weight 38kilos, (£1,550) £850. Usher P-303 preamp, both items, £1,100. Or preamp, (£1,200) £350. For more details call 01491 614325 (Oxford)

VAN DEN HUL CS122 2x 4.5m speaker, £40. Linn K20 speaker 2x 5m, £35. Chord Odyssey bi-wire 2x 1.5m, £25. Mission 771E rosewood speakers, £45. 01384 894284 (Stourbridge).

YAMAHA CDX 493 CD player, black, remote, instructions, original box, c/w Chord Cobra 3 gold plated interconnect phono to DIN, £110, will split. 01656 782523 (Porthcawl).



Above: Marantz DV6001 universal disc player

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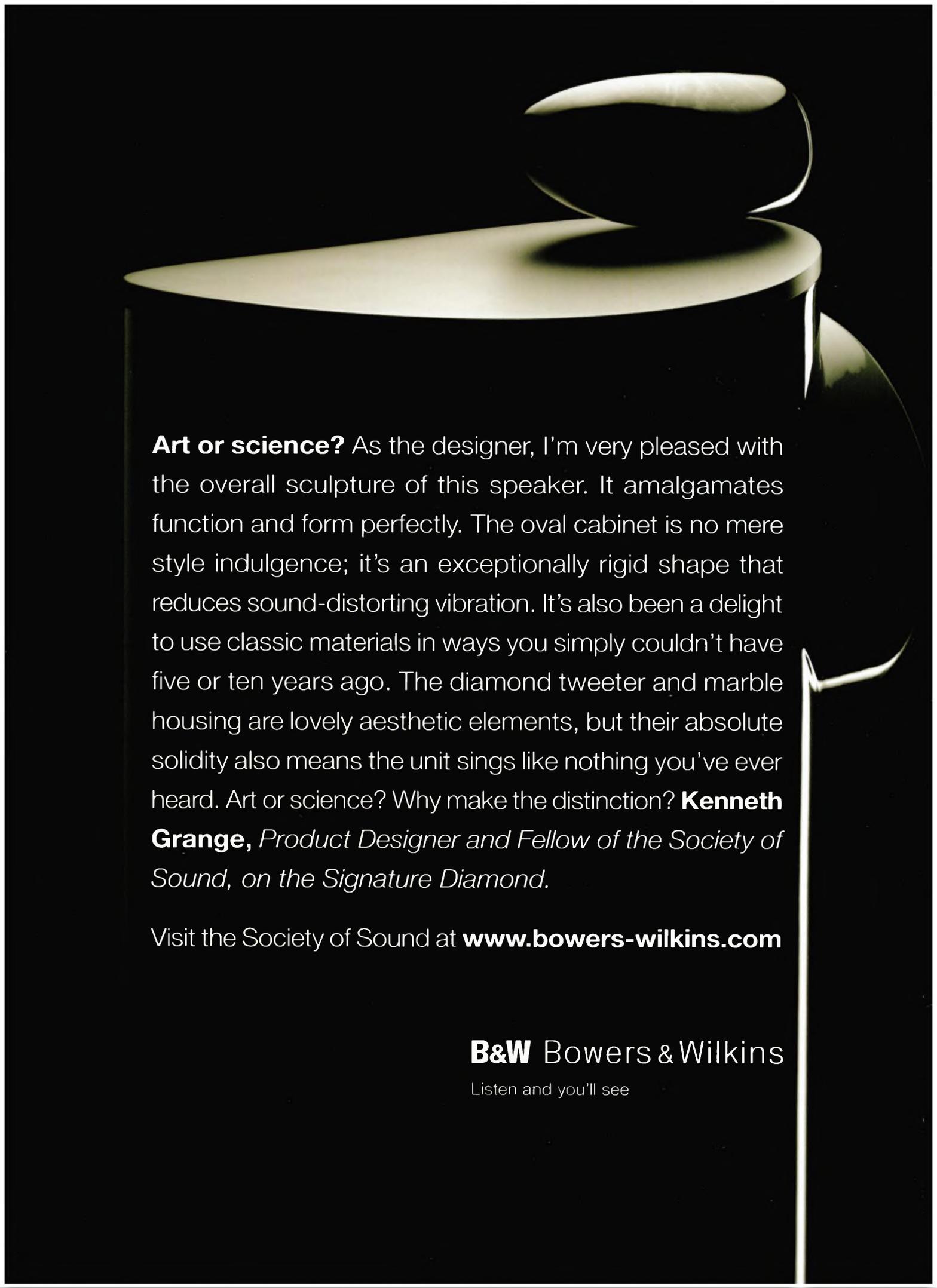


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Art or science? As the designer, I'm very pleased with the overall sculpture of this speaker. It amalgamates function and form perfectly. The oval cabinet is no mere style indulgence; it's an exceptionally rigid shape that reduces sound-distorting vibration. It's also been a delight to use classic materials in ways you simply couldn't have five or ten years ago. The diamond tweeter and marble housing are lovely aesthetic elements, but their absolute solidity also means the unit sings like nothing you've ever heard. Art or science? Why make the distinction? **Kenneth Grange**, *Product Designer and Fellow of the Society of Sound, on the Signature Diamond.*

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