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- Rega Cursa 3/Maia 3 • Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1



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FEBRUARY 2008 £3.99 02

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Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE 303

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Welcome to the first issue of 2008 – even if the cover month says February! And if this edition is anything to go by, 2008 is going to be a bumper year for audiophiles. The really welcoming news is that, due in a large part to the weakening dollar, we're noticing a trend for increased affordability across a number of brands.

And speaking of affordability, this month's issue sees two big-brand manufacturers launch their most affordable products ever. Inside, we have exclusive reviews from both Boulder and MartinLogan, each of whom have new entry-level hi-fi. One small difference separates them, however: £6,150! At one end of the scale, MartinLogan has launched the most budget-conscious electrostatic in its history at £1,600 and, at the other end, Boulder has launched its first-ever integrated – which also represents its most affordable amp at £7,750. So as we said, affordability is on the increase!

Whatever your budget, we also have some great news for anyone with a large analogue collection. Part three of our new technical feature, *Understanding* (on p32), explains how you can make high-resolution copies of your old LPs onto DVD-Audio disc. Expert, Martin Pipe, demonstrates that with just a modest budget and a sprinkling of PC know-how, you too can make 24-bit/96kHz recordings of your precious LPs. And that's the best news we've heard all year! Can't wait for the rest of '08...

Dan

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

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

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

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

Annotated shots show you what's really going on inside

Interviews with designers give you extra background information

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



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



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



JIMMY HUGHES
With more than 40 years as an enthusiast under his belt, Jimmy is one of the country's best known hi-fi experts. His knowledge of system matching, hi-fi tweaking and record collecting is unmatched in the industry.



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 STEWARD
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.



DOMINIC TODD
A highly experienced journalist, Dominic's sharp ears and retail experience are a valuable mix for *HFC*. Each month, Dom dispenses priceless second-hand buying advice that always comes in handy.

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.

SUBSCRIBE TO HI-FI CHOICE... THIS MONTH AND YOU'LL RECEIVE A FREE BLIK DAB DIGITAL RADIO CALL 0844 848 2852 OR TURN TO P76 NOW



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Perfection is closer than ever!

B O U L D E R 8 6 5 I N T E G R A T E D



NEW
865 Integrated

S E R I E S
800 | 1000 | 2000



810



850



860



1010



1012



1050 & 1060



2008



2010



2020



2050 & 2060

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North: Lintone Audio, (t) 0191 477 4167
Midlands: Zouch Audio, (t) 01530 414 128

South / Ireland

South: Sounds of Music, (t) 01435 865 212
Ireland: Kronos Hi-Fi, (t) 028 8775 3606

Central London

KJ West One, (t) 0207 486 8262/3

Boulder

Distributed in the UK by Metropolis Music
www.metropolis-music.co.uk tel: 01435 867 438

Please call for additional product information, and literature.

KEF XQ20 LOUDSPEAKER

▶ KEF's impressive Uni-Q drive unit array forms the backbone of many of the company's finest loudspeakers. Those who dream of owning the company's illustrious Reference Series can now get a step closer with the new XQ series.

The XQ20 is the top standmount in the range. It sports a 19mm aluminium dome tweeter bang in the centre of a 165mm Uni-Q bass unit. With the new 'tangerine' wave guide technology, KEF claims this speaker delivers true point source accuracy.

KEF has also managed to squeeze ultra-high-frequency performance from the XQ20

without having to resort to a supertweeter. This means the front-ported beauty will happily deliver music from 52Hz right up to an impressive 55kHz, it is claimed.

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

PRODUCT KEF XQ20

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,000

KEY FEATURES Two-way bass reflex design

• 19mm aluminium dome tweeter in acoustic centre of bass driver • 165mm Uni-Q bass driver

• Sensitivity: 88dB • Impedance: eight ohms

CONTACT ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.com

PERSONAL AUDIO

PRO AUDIO

HI-FI & HOME CINEMA

CUSTOM INSTALL



BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND

In 1987 Acoustic Energy launched its first product: a compact near-field monitor featuring metal diaphragm drivers and a composite lined cabinet. The iconic AE1 was an immediate hit with music broadcast professionals and hi-fi enthusiasts worldwide and many mourned its passing in the late 90s. So many in fact we decided to bring it back...

We believe 20 years later the AE1 Classic is perhaps the only speaker to reach its predecessor's standards.

The AE1 Classic is now available from selected UK dealers and completes the award winning Reference Series.

For your nearest stockist please call 01285 654432 or visit www.acoustic-energy.co.uk



ACOUSTIC ENERGY



PS AUDIO DIGITAL LINK III DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTER

It's a little-known fact these days, but PS Audio – now perhaps better known for its power products – actually invented the digital to analogue converter. While other companies were struggling to deliver a first CD spinner, the PS Audio team reverse engineered the S/PDIF connector and the DAC was born.

Fast forward nearly a quarter of a century and PS Audio is back in DAC, with the Digital Link III. It is based around a balanced TI PCM1798DB Texas Instruments (formerly Burr Brown) DAC and Crystal CS8416 receiver (both state-of-the-art components),

coupled to a fully discrete, FET-based, Class A output stage. And with a 24bit/192kHz converter with eight times oversampling, it could save your ageing CD player from eBay.

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

PRODUCT PS Audio Digital Link III

TYPE Digital to analogue converter

PRICE £800

KEY FEATURES 24-bit/192kHz digital converter

• Eight times oversampling • Optical, coaxial and USB input • Single-ended phono and balanced XLR outputs • Discrete FET output stage

CONTACT ☎ 020 8480 3333 🌐 www.psaudio.com



NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



ACCUSTIC ARTS TUBE DAC

The first product in its new Reference Series range, Accustic Art's new flagship Tube-DAC II is a hybrid valve design sporting two selected and matched 12AX7 double triode valves in the output stage and a unique twin 32-bit digital converter stage. This converter is technically a custom-designed microcomputer in its own right, featuring a high-precision quartz oscillator, a 32-bit digital filter and 26 parallel operating processors (multiplying processors). The multiplying processors scan the incoming signal and calculate two 32-bit signals, one for the right and one for the left channel. All digital operations, therefore, take place with the accuracy of true 32-bit instead of the standard 16- or 24-bit. With balanced and single-ended output, the DAC is designed to work in tandem with Accustic Arts top-loading Drive I Mk II CD transport, but, of course, can also work independently.

Price £4,995 **Due** now ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.accusticarts.com

NAD C715

Just in time for the festive season, NAD has joined the mini system brigade. The hi-fi stalwart has released two virtually identical compact music systems. Comprising CD player, tuner, 2x 25 watt amplifier, digital output and a front panel USB inputs for MP3 players and recorders, the models differ in their choice of tuner – the standard C715 sports a 30-preset AM/FM tuner, while the C715DAB (as the name suggests) brings digital radio to the party. The C715 models share a trio of analogue stereo inputs, analogue recording output, a headphone socket and even a timer/alarm function. Unusually for a stereo product, the C715 models both feature a subwoofer line-level output for 2.1 channel connection.

Price £325 (C715); £425 C715DAB **Due** now ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com



LEEMA STREAM AND PULSE

First seen at the London Sound & Vision show in September 2007, the Leema Stream CD player and Pulse integrated amplifier are now available. The Stream utilises a similar Multi-DAC concept first seen in Leema's Antila CD player (tested in HFC 291), this time featuring 16 converters instead of 20. The DACs are all 24bit/192kHz multibit, Delta-Sigma designs and combine thanks to Leema's proprietary MD2 Active Differential Multi-DAC technology. Unlike the Antila, Stream delivers a single-ended output only.

The Pulse amplifier is an 80-watt integrated, based around the company's existing £2,000 Tucana amplifier. The Pulse features a front-mounted MP3 input, plus moving coil and moving magnet inputs. Both products 'talk' to one another, too without moving their LIPS (Leema Intelligent Protocol System).

Price £1,095 (Stream); £1,195 (Pulse) **Due** now ☎ 01938 811900 🌐 www.leema-acoustics.com



DWV ART.ENGINE

Meridian is no longer alone in designing audio in association with Ferrari. The US design studio, David Wiener Ventures, has announced the new Art.Engine, a single-tower (stereo) active WiFi loudspeaker. The V-shaped Art.Engine sports eight 75mm long-throw (or 'long stroke' in Art.Engine's Ferrari-flavoured terminology) carbon fibre drivers coupled to a single 28mm soft dome tweeter per side of the v-shaped chassis. These are driven by four 200 watt digital amplifier modules and these connect to a conventional source via side mounted phonos, or through 802.11 WiFi protocols for computer sources. The speaker's stereo sound is developed by careful on-site DSP correction, included in the price. And we love the red 'engine start' button. It's just a shame you can't drive it.

Price £18,000 **Due** now ☎ 020 8896 3555 🌐 www.dwartengine.com



CLEARAUDIO CARTRIDGE BREAK-IN

Clearaudio's dominance of the vinyl market shows no signs of abating. Following record cleaners and disc flatteners, the company has announced an LP designed especially to reduce the length of break-in time for cartridges. The 12-tracks of pink noise on the £45 Cartridge Break-In record are said to significantly reduce the many, many hours required to break-in good cartridges. The LP also includes test tracks to improve turntable set-up.

We asked Goldring vinyl guru Steve Reichert about running in cartridges. He believes that "they all seem to get better after a time, but it is more obvious (and takes longer) with moving coil cartridges.

Price £45 **Due** now ☎ 01252 702705 # www.clearaudio.de



THIEL SS1

Thiel's new range of SmartSub subwoofers are intended for hi-fi use as much as home cinema. The first out of the Kentucky-based company is the SS1. This bass speaker comprises a 250mm long-throw woofer and a 500-watt amplifier in a small cabinet. Thiel claims that it's capable of delivering 99dB at 20Hz

and up to 106dB at 30Hz. The subwoofer is designed to work with a companion Integrator unit, which automatically matches the subwoofer to the output of the main speakers without recourse to microphones or measurements. As opposed to home cinema-intended subs, the SS1 is designed to produce a uniform and dynamic performance across its frequency range.

Price From £1,895 **Due** now ☎ 01727 865488

www.thielaudio.com



CRYSTALROC HEADPHONES

Is bling your thing? Do you look at most headphones and think "hmm, if only they were encrusted with Swarovski crystals?" Well, your days of bland cans are over, thanks to CrystalRoc. The bejeweled UK customiser rose to fame by creating Rhianna's 24ct gold Swarovski Crystal Sennheiser microphone and is now busy encrusting Sennheiser's cx300 in-ear and the pro's choice – the closed HD25 – in a choice of light rose, light sapphire or 'crystal AB' finish. The perfect commuter wear... just remember to pay for your minder's ticket, too.

Price £99 (CX300); £299 (HD25)

Due now ☎ 0870 0044450

www.crystalroc.co.uk



NAD C315BEE

NAD returns to its budget audiophile roots with the C315BEE CD player, its cheapest yet. Designed to accompany the C315BEE integrated amplifier, the new slimline CD and CR-R/RW player may be inexpensive, but still boasts full 24-bit/192kHz digital conversion and audio-specific op-amps in the output stage. The player also sports carefully selected capacitors and passive components throughout. It also includes sophisticated programme play features, accessed from the remote control, for those more accustomed to iPod functionality from their audio players.

Price £165 **Due** now ☎ 01279 501111 # www.nadelectronics.com



Soundbites

DENON'S AVR-3808 7.1 channel AV receiver combines the latest home cinema standards (such as Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD) with audio and video network connections, allowing it to interface with internet radio stations and video or photo streaming sites. The £1,300, 160 watts per channel receiver also sports full HDMI 1.3a connectivity, with four inputs and full 1080p upscaling.

☎ 01234 741200



MARANTZ'S SR7002 THX Select AV receiver acts as a full home entertainment hub, thanks to twin HDMI 1.3a outputs, that can deliver HD pictures into two screens. In addition to the wealth of new video features, the new SR7002 also features HD sound with totally lossless coding in all channels thanks to Dolby True HD.

☎ 01753 680868



AUDIOQUEST'S new flagship interconnect cable is called Sky. It features three high-purity 'Perfect Surface Silver' conductors per side, each with Teflon insulation allowing air as the insulator. This 'Triple Balanced' construction allows the cable to be wired in RCA single-ended phono or XLR balanced connection. And the cost is Sky high, too: £1,633 for a one metre pair.

☎ 01452 858060



SILTECH: Weighing in at a healthy 380kg each and costing a cool 75,000 euros per pair, the 1.53m tall Pantheon speaker sports an electrostatic tweeter, a 180mm midrange unit and a whopping great 400mm bass driver. Just 39 pairs will be made, so have your butler point your web browser to...

www.siltechcables.com



MARANTZ'S professional division has announced the £300 PMD620 pocket-sized solid-state audio recorder. Designed to work with both SD and high capacity SDHD flash media cards, the PMD620 can record from 24-bit/48kHz stereo PCM, down to 32kbps mono MP3. It also features a pair of internal microphones.

☎ 01753 680023



ROBERTS RADIO Robi is the world's first DAB radio for the iPod and comes complete with earphones and a remote. The £50 DAB tuner add-on simply docks to your iPod. It even allows you to control the iPod from its own interface, too.

☎ 01709 571722



The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

STEVE REICHERT
Job Title: PR Manager
Company: Armour Home Electronics



What is your most exciting product in development?

I'm really excited by the new Q Acoustics Q-AV system, which is the world's first system to use NXT's new BMR technology. It sounds fantastic, hides in plain sight and although it sounds presumptuous, I really expect it to revolutionize the style AV market.

What is the future of hi-fi?

People are already walking round with their entire music library on their MP3 players. Naturally, they want to enjoy this music in their home as they do on the road, but without having to stick headphones in their ears.

What music are you listening to?

Everything! I bought an iPod two weeks ago and I'm listening to CDs that I haven't heard in years.

Is there a two-channel revival?

More people than ever are listening to stereo, courtesy of the iPod. It's becoming the de facto source component.

Will CD still exist in five years time?

Many people don't want to buy CDs anymore, but they want better sound quality than downloading currently offers. The Sonos/Napster monthly subscription idea sounds so logical that it must be the way to go, but I fear for the sound quality.

Hi-Fi Diary

JANUARY

26-27 Northern Sound & Vision Show
Radisson SAS, Manchester Airport
www.chestergroup.org
Manchester's newest hi-fi show

FEBRUARY

10 Audiojumble 2008
Angel Leisure Centre, Tonbridge, Kent
www.audiojumble.co.uk
One of the UK's largest vintage hi-fi fairs

22-24 Sound & Vision - The Bristol Show
Manott City Centre Hotel, Bristol
www.bristolshow.co.uk
The UK's premier hi-fi show

Real reels

The Tape Project is a collaboration of mastering engineers Paul Stubblebine, Dan Schmalte and Michael Romanowski, who have come up with the idea of offering literal master-tape quality reel to reel tapes direct to the sound appreciating fraternity. The tape itself is quarter-inch half-track recorded at 15 ips (inches per second) and EQ'd to the IEC curve, something previously known as CCIR. According to the Tape Project there are many tape players that are compatible with this, and its website has a list of them: www.tapeproject.com.

To acquire the fruits of this project is not inexpensive, one tape will cost you \$329 or you can have six for \$1,200. If you don't have suitable machine to play them on Tape Project can sell you a rebuilt Technics RS1500 with Flux Magnetics tape heads and electronics from Paul Joppa and Dan Schmalte's Bottlehead Corp. This tape recorder will set you back \$7,500.



Bowers & Wilkins in Jags

Bowers & Wilkins loudspeakers are the driving force behind a 14-speaker sound system being fitted to the top spec version of Jaguar's new XF luxury saloon. Earlier this year the two companies unveiled the C-XF: a concept car that has morphed into the XF, with a loudspeaker system that consists of four metal dome tweeters, nine Kevlar midrange units and a subwoofer. That said, the specially designed drivers and a Dolby Pro Music II 7.1 channel system is far from standard. In fact, it's the first instance of a car maker changing the shape of the chassis to accommodate an audio system - a space in the boot was made to accommodate the subwoofer. According to B&W's Martin Lindsay "great cars need an audio experience to match". This speaker system, which adds a £2,000 premium to the car, aims to do just that.



Sticky singles

Universal Music has recently released singles by Keane and Nicole from Pussycat Dolls, on USB sticks. The key reason, according to the company, is to revive the flagging retail sales of singles by introducing a format that's designed to have youth appeal. The incentive to spend £4.99 (two pounds more than the cost of a CD single) will, it's hoped, be encouraged by the additional video and multimedia content that a USB stick can hold. Presumably, the USB stick can be recycled when the recording holds no more interest for the listener.

With CD single sales down yet again, this time ten per cent, year on year, record companies are desperate to find a way of holding onto the lucrative retail sales market. And it would seem that Universal's lead has inspired others to follow. EMI, for example, is planning to release Pink Floyd's studio albums on the format and Warner Music is releasing a partly finished album by Hadouken! for £7.99, with six new songs and five older ones.

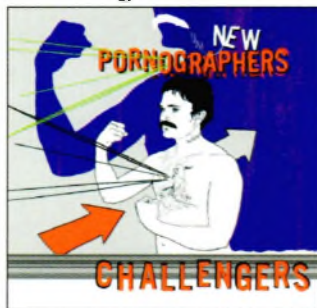
Mothership overblown?

With a much-rumoured world tour on the way, Led Zeppelin has released an album containing remasters of its classic hits. *Mothership* has, however, attracted criticism for being just a louder version of the 1990's *Remasters*, which contained the same material. Abbey Road remastering engineer Peter Mew agrees that it's louder, but points out that "to make it louder, you have to compromise on some of the detail, because there's only so much information a CD can process." But he also accepts that many songs, such as *Good Times*, *Bad Times*, while not as good as the original vinyl are an improvement on the *Remasters*. Mew also points out that remastering is all about reinterpreting the original sound so that it appeals to modern ears and using compression to increase perceived volume is a very popular method, stating that these things are often done "Because of fashion. No other reason."



More vinyl revival

Vinyl is on the upswing in the US, where pressing plants are ramping up production and independent record companies are seeing a significant increase in demand. Patrick Amory of Matador Records, whose artists include the New Pornographers and Cornelius, opines that "The size and presence of the artwork, the division into sides, the better sound quality, above all the involvement and work the listener has to put in, all make it the format of choice for people who really care about music." Matador is among several that have started to include coupons in the vinyl packaging that allow customers to download MP3 versions of the songs, so you get something to play on your iPod as well. Pressing plant Record Technology's owner Don MacInnis predicts production will be up 25 per cent year on year with "new albums, reissues, majors and indies ... jazz, blues, classical, pop and a lot of (classic) rock." The fact that Amazon.com now has a vinyl-only section would suggest there's some credence in this, but whether, as has been suggested, it will still be around when CD disappears remains to be seen.



JIMMY'S TWEAKS #56

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



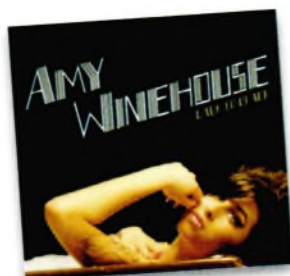
"Mens sana in corpore sano"

Juvenal's famous Latin phrase translates as 'a healthy mind in a healthy body' and it's perhaps one of the most important tweaks to any hi-fi system. Let's start with the healthy mind bit... music has powerful mood-enhancing abilities, so listening to Billie Holiday singing *Gloomy Sunday* when you are chock full of melancholy is

not a good idea. Now the healthy body part - in general, the healthier you are, the better your hi-fi sounds. This is especially true of alcohol consumption - a glass of fine wine may well enhance the music listening experience, but eight pints and a curry will do nothing but harm. Especially when you come to only to discover you've been listening to AC/DC on repeat at full volume all night... and so has the rest of the street.

TOP 10 TUNES WE'VE BEEN LISTENING TO THIS MONTH

1. Amy Winehouse - Back to Black
2. Feist - Let It Die
3. EPMD - Rampage
4. Richard Hawley - Cole's Corner
5. Scott Walker - Four
6. Ryan Adams - Everybody Knows EP
7. Iris Dement - Let the Mystery Be
8. DJ Psyllage - Keep it Rustic
9. Goodfellas - OST
10. Tori Amos - Boys for Pele



New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



SHERYL CROW

Title: *Detours*

Release date: Feb 4

After such frothy smash hits as *All I Wanna Do* and *Soak Up The Sun*, Crow is getting serious on the follow-up to her 2005 album *Wildflower*, recorded on her farm in Nashville. "We seem to be very distracted by some lightweight topics," says the singer, who's been battling with breast cancer. I think it's time to start writing about the reality of what's around us."



LENNY KRAVITZ

Title: *It Is Time For A Love Revolution*

Release date: Feb 4

Recorded in New York, Miami, Paris, the Bahamas and Brazil, Kravitz wrote, produced, arranged and plays everything on all 14 tracks of his first album for three years. Expect "raucous rock 'n' roll jams, heavy drums, tight hip-shaking grooves and frenetic guitars," according to one who has heard the new songs. But then what else would you expect?

MY BLOODY VALENTINE

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

Nobody expected to hear from MBV again. But Kevin Shields, the reclusive creative force behind one of the most influential indie bands of the past 20 years, confirms the follow-up to 1991's classic *Loveless* is finally on its way. The record will feature reworked material from aborted sessions dating from 1996/97, plus "a little bit of new stuff," according to Shields.

GOLDFRAPP

Title: *Seventh Tree*

Release date: Feb 25

Alison Goldfrapp has been working with producer Will Gregory on her fourth album at their own studio deep in the English countryside. The follow-up to 2005's platinum-selling *Supernature* is described by

one insider as "an electric whirlpool of sound over which Alison's glistering voice soars." The singer herself calls it "English romanticism with a hint of California sunshine."

QUEEN & PAUL RODGERS

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

Former Free/Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers, is in the studio with Queen's Brian May and Roger Taylor, working on an album of new material. "With any band there's two sides - there's the image and there's the music," Rodgers says. "I don't feel that I stepped into the image of Queen. But I really stepped into the music. We're quietly excited about what we're doing."

ALSO COMING SOON

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Melody Gardot *Worrisome Heart* (Jan),
Mikhail Pletnev *Beethoven Piano Concerto 5* (Jan), **Chick Corea/ Gary Burton** *The New Crystal Science* (Feb),
Tom Scott *Cannon Reloaded* (Feb)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

Muza Rubackyte (piano) *Bach, Beethoven and Schubert*, (SACD, now),
Blackfield *Blackfield II*, (DVD-A, now),
Various Cinema Returns (SACD, now),
Amsterdam Loeki Stardust Quartet *Fade Control* (SACD, now)



Going for a Gong

Settling old scores

What do you think hi-fi journalists talk about when they get together? In my experience, almost anything but hi-fi. But I have had some interesting tête à tête on the subject of – wait for it – the scoring of hi-fi products in magazine reviews. I've never been much of a fan of the process of awarding scores and badges (in *HFC's* case, *Best Buy* and *Editor's Choice*) and some recent conversations have reinforced my feelings considerably. Especially when it was painstakingly explained to me by one aggrieved manufacturer, that the only score that was of any use to him was five stars and that anything less was tantamount to the kiss of death. His mood had been further dampened by glaring inaccuracies he claimed to have found in the review of his product which, as you've probably guessed by now, did not acquit itself of a five star status. He was talking about another magazine, of course – no names, no pack drill. But was this just the sound of grinding axes?

“If it's done right, the scoring is consistent between reviewers so that everyone is dealing with a level playing field and understands what the score means.”

Just to show that not all the arguments are one sided, I also had a conversation with someone who is a firm advocate for product scoring. His starting premise, for which I have no direct counter, is that readers want scores. In fact, they insist on them and won't read magazines that don't include them. If it's done right (which is not always the case), the scoring is consistent between reviewers so that everyone is dealing with a level playing field and understands what the scores mean.

In *HFC's* case, a *Best Buy* represents a high value product. One which may not be state of the art but which does represent, in the view of the person handing out the gongs a high level of performance for the price.

A good example is the MartinLogan Dynamo subwoofer, which I reviewed in *HFC* 301 and which received a *Best Buy* flag. The Dynamo is clearly not state of the art and cannot compete with some other high level subwoofers. This includes other models from the MartinLogan range, all worthy candidates for an *Editor's Choice* badge. But, here a touch of mea culpa is in order. The 'value for money' score (87%) was awarded when the price was £500. The price then dropped by £50, due to currency fluctuations. So the new price just made it into the review, but there wasn't time to tweak the value rating which, in retrospect, could have been higher.

There are lessons to be learnt here for the reviewer, the editor and for the reader. US sourced product (like MartinLogan) represent increasingly good value. So readers need to understand the issues involved, and just what the various gongs actually mean.

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



Expert knowledge

Breaking taboos in the speaker industry

It's not very often that one gets to meet a household name, so I was keen to hear what loudspeaker guru Siegfried Linkwitz had to say at the Audio Engineering Society's monthly meeting in November. OK, so he's principally a household name among audio


boffins - immortalised in the 'Linkwitz-Riley crossover' which divides the frequencies in most commercial loudspeakers - but to the assembled crowd he was certainly a 'Face'.

In the best rhetorical style, Linkwitz started off his talk on the subject of achieving high quality sound reproduction from two loudspeakers in domestic rooms, by reciting a few facts which everyone in the room almost certainly knew. "Two speakers can only create an illusion of the sound heard in the concert hall". Well, stone me, I never would have guessed, etc. Then, seamlessly, he dropped in some rather more controversial stuff; the most disturbing suggestion being that conventional box loudspeakers could never be completely satisfactory! (Hmm, that rules out all but a very small handful of the models in our Buyer's Bible). He then said that, apparently, most electrostatics (he specifically excluded the Quad models) are hardly any better.

In the course of his talk, Linkwitz did a good job of convincing us that his reasoning is sound. His central theme is that loudspeakers must have the same response off-axis as on and, if one accepts that, then it automatically follows that front-radiating boxes are unsuitable. He pointed out that room reflections are a fact of life and do no harm to our understanding of everyday sounds in a room. But when those reflections are from the off-axis sound and not very closely related to what comes out of the front, the result is compromised spatial sound.

Two types of speaker have the same frequency response in all directions, essentially: the omnidirectional and the dipole. Most electrostatics (and other panels) are dipoles, radiating from the rear out of phase with the front - and nothing from the sides, while omnidirectional speakers radiate in all directions in phase. We've reviewed a few of the latter in these pages, but they've never really caught on.

Actually, I did make attempts to get a review sample of the Beolab 5, a tiny near-omni speaker that I thought shockingly good when I casually auditioned it one day in a Bang & Olufsen showroom. And the completely outrageous MBL Radialstrahler models sound amazing, but then it damn well ought to for the price of a house in rural France. But Linkwitz's exposition of the virtues of omni operation has most certainly piqued my curiosity. If, in turn, this article has piqued yours, then you can find more information at www.linkwitzlab.com

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

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

LEXICON
MC-1



This month's Retro is a little different. In common with the rest of the magazine, we generally avoid home cinema, unless there is a substantial element of full-on high fidelity as part of the product mix. Well, in a nutshell, this is exactly what we have here in the shape of the Lexicon MC-1 processor. Not only home cinema (or multichannel audio), but serious high fidelity too. It's the same reason why TAG McLaren processors (and others) have also appeared in the pages of *HFC*.

There are not many dedicated multichannel processors, but the MC-1 should appeal to those who want all the qualities required in a high fidelity system and who want to add multichannel processing to a full-on high end system. Indeed, for this very reason, the Lexicon RV-8 receiver was also reviewed (as a current product) in *HFC* 267.

The history of the MC range dates back to the MC-12, which debuted in March 1999. The DC-1 followed in 1996 and the DC-2 in 1998. The MC-1 was launched shortly thereafter at a US list price of \$5,995. This THX Ultra processor had the highest wow factor of the range and quickly established itself as the most acclaimed of the MC series. It offered the fastest and most flexible operation in the digital domain with unusually high resolution, thanks to its use of 24-bit/96kHz analogue-to-digital conversion on all channels. It also boasted five state of the art DSP engines for soundfield processing

One of its more impressive features was a refined version of Lexicon's proprietary LOGIC-7 processing, which had been around for some time in slightly simplified form. Intended for film soundtrack and stereo music sources (among its other capabilities), LOGIC-7 was designed to develop 7.1 channels with full stereo encoding of the side and rear channels. It could also down-convert 5.1 channel recordings to 2-channels, so that it could be recorded onto a stereo recorder, and then re-expanded using LOGIC-7 on replay. I have no direct experience of the recording function, but the LOGIC-7 matrix was extremely powerful. It boasted unusually smooth, three-dimensional imaging, which was clearly superior to Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS-Neo:6.



"...the MC-1 should appeal to those who want all the qualities required in a high fidelity system."

The MC-1's powerful DSP section was also designed to allow the maximum tweaking of film soundtracks and music, with adjustable dual precision individual digital crossovers for all channels (40, 80, 120Hz). Later versions included 24 effects for film and music, included Dolby Digital™, DTS™ and Logic 7, with auto azimuth error correction for matrixed soundtracks, plus logic, ambience extraction, and concert hall simulation. Video switching was broadcast quality, albeit limited to composite and S-Video (component video and HDMI had still to be invented). The MC-1 was also an early example of a processor which provided what, at the time, was a high level of upgradeability. A/D and D/A conversion used 24 bit Delta Sigma processing at up to 96kHz, with 8x oversampling, which is not state of the art now, but was at the time.

And that wasn't all - 12V triggers, and full multizone operation (now standard features with much cheaper hardware) were also included. But, even by modern standards, the quality of sound processing was something more than a little special. It would make a very powerful purchase as an audio first processor even if acquired today at a sensible price. The only problem is that the lack of HDMI would make it obsolete in any system that included a high definition HD display. *HFC*

Alvin Gold



Total Recall

Thanks for the memories

Strange how the senses can evoke such a strong a recollection of things past. For me, the smell of gravy and Yorkshire pud is inextricably linked to childhood days spent in my aunt's kitchen on a Lincolnshire farm. The warm fug of the cooking lacing the windows with condensation.

Staring through a kaleidoscope, the swirling colours transport me back even further to when as an infant I spent a good half-day happily gurgling at the fairy lights on the tree. Incidentally, that reminds me... how many parents does it take to change a bulb on the fairy lights? Answer: One, if they're wired in parallel, and twenty if they're in series. It still takes one to find the blown bulb while the other 19 stand around complaining why they don't have mulled wine and Stilton more often.

“Crammed 10-storeys tall with commuters and shoppers and bursting with all sorts of cutting-edge goodies that rarely make it to Europe.”

The same kick of nostalgia comes from music. In my early twenties, I spent a year in Japan teaching English. Despite having learned enough of the language to be able to get around without looking like the archetypal tourist (armed only with a phrase book and blissful ignorance), the culture shock was still very impressive. It was in the depths of winter when I and two other Brits arrived at our apartment in a bland suburb of Yokohama. It was 2am and there was no heating, no bedding and no furniture. Obviously, after 14 hours on a plane this didn't put us in a very good frame of mind. Salvation came in the form of beer vending machine, which sits on every street corner. In fact, every time I hear Soundgarden's *The Day I Tried To Live*, I'm right back in Totsuka, trying to sleep in my clothes on a cold lino floor, consoled only by a litre can of one of Kirin's dark winter beers and the Japanese original of the pot noodle.

Happier memories are also provoked by Bjork's *Venus as a Boy*, which wound its way into my subconscious as I wondered happily

amongst the temples and city tower blocks which form such a strong contrast in Japan. Every time I hear that song, I catch a whiff of the sweet potato and coffee coming off the back of the hawk's van as he trundled round the back streets at walking pace.

Most vivid of all are the neon-blasted alleys and buildings of Akihabara, Tokyo's 'Electric Town'. Crammed 10-storeys tall with commuters and shoppers and bursting with all sorts of cutting-edge goodies that rarely make it to Europe, Akihabara makes London's Tottenham Court Road look like a car boot sale on a rainy Sunday morning. Strolling around, walkman loaded with a crusty old tape of Hoodlum Priests *Heart of Darkness* and the track *Tyrell* on repeat, I was in a dystopian heaven, *Blade Runner* incarnate as the leaden clouds scraped so low across the roofs of the skyscrapers you could almost hear the concrete crack and groan.

Jon Marks has been happily addicted to hi-fi for 20 years, especially since becoming a member of the hi-fi press in the mid-1990s



Dominic Todd

Retail Experience

The best job in the world?

The New Year sales is probably the best time to buy new hi-fi. Yet, as you excitedly ponder the next upgrade and, perhaps more importantly, the large price reduction have a thought for those on the other side of the counter.

For the poor souls that provide us with our hi-fi, December and January can be the most stressful of times. Picture the scene. A demo has been booked an hour before the store closes. The salesperson has probably already resigned him or herself to the fact that they aren't going to get away on time, that they'll need to catch a later bus and that they'll definitely be late for a Christmas party.

A large delivery at 7.30am that morning has already left this poor retail assistant physically exhausted. And now it's now 5pm and as they hurriedly unpack the hi-fi the carton's razor edge inflicts a nasty paper cut. Then there are the sharp edges on the underside of the case to contend with as the unit is unceremoniously yanked out of its glove tight box.

But, at least the hi-fi is on now on show and as for all those polystyrene chips, they can easily be vacuumed up after work. Now comes the wiring. As this particular audio emporium always recommends banana plugs (using them for all demos) the assistant is required to remove the dreaded 4mm socket bungs. As usual, the black plugs relinquish their grip on the socket with ease. The red ones, however, are a different matter. They finally come out after several screwdrivers, nail clippers and teeth have all been used in the extraction process. Why is red plastic so much more "sticky" than black?

Never mind, time to move on. Only it isn't, because the phono leads have been placed in the wrong sockets. Unfortunately, like the 4mm bungs, they're so tightly fixed that their removal also brings with it a sorry pair of RCA phono socket covers (expletive). Things aren't going too well and nor do they get any better when the amplifier briefly lights up, only to go "pop" and fill the listening room with an acrid smell (perhaps, it wasn't such a good idea to have nailed that speaker cable to the walls after all). Still, a few tweaks and all is now set up and raring to go. The only problem is ☐

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD
DUSTY IN MEMPHIS, ATLANTIC, 1969



It comes as something of a surprise to learn that Dusty Springfield recorded the vocals for *Dusty In Memphis* in a studio in New York, singing to backing tracks playing at top volume through headphones. "Pure hell ensued," recalled producer Jerry Wexler to southern literary journal *The Oxford American*. "The psychic struggle between me and Dusty was Machiavellian..." It's true that, being a perfectionist, Dusty would earn herself a reputation for being difficult to work with.

Born Mary O'Brien and raised in north London, she first found pop-folk fame in 1963 with she sang with her brother Dion in The Springfields. She went solo and scored grand, symphonic pop hits with the enduring likes of *I Only Want To Be With You* and *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*. In 1968, her first flush of chart success waning, the increasingly soul-leaning Dusty signed with the US Atlantic label and prepared to make an album in Memphis at the famed American Recording Studio, with the production triumvirate of Wexler, master arranger Arif Mardin and innovative engineer Tom Dowd.

Was there a risk, this British-born singer going to the Deep South to record in a studio patronised by Wilson Pickett and Elvis, with a top house band steeped in soul? Dusty later admitted it was; her nerves were manifested, Wexler remembered, by her lack of confidence in the studio and initially rejecting the 80 songs he'd suggested for the album.

But when work began, supported by The Sweet Inspirations (a Memphis chorus led by Whitney Houston's aunt Cissy) she provided guide vocals for crisp versions of songs written by heavy hitters including Bacharach & David, Randy Newman and Goffin & King. Throughout, the singer doesn't bust a gut to emote like some British soul wannabes would, but lets it out naturally. The closely detailed arrangements blend jazz, soul and pop, exhibiting an orchestral European opulence alongside the southern heat, rhythmic accents and subtle guitar licks.

It's an album of standouts, including *I Can't Make It Alone* and *I Don't Want To Hear It*



"It's true that, being a perfectionist, Dusty would earn herself a reputation for being difficult ..."

Anytime, but particularly wonderful are the smouldering, yet tasteful, *Son Of A Preacher Man* (made famous again in 1994 by the movie *Pulp Fiction* and sampled comically by ganja-rappers Cypress Hill for their '93 hip hop banger *Hits From The Bong*) and the warmly ambiguous *Breakfast In Bed*. Both songs are frank and grown up in their carnality, but in a casual, affectionate and honest manner.

The album was not a success, reaching number 99 on the US charts and a meagre 43 in Britain. There were meant to be more recordings with Wexler, but instead Dusty headed for Philadelphia to work with the Gamble and Huff production team. With the seventies marred by booze, drugs and commercial underachievement, she didn't return to the UK top ten until her 1987 duet with the Pet Shop Boys, *What Have I Done To Deserve This?*

None of this affects the strange, unchanging majesty of *Dusty In Memphis*, which lives on in the best-albums-ever rankings, wholly disproportionate to its sales at the time. For her part, Dusty, who died in 1999, said she hated it, wouldn't listen to it for a year afterwards and always preferred Aretha Franklin's version of *Son Of A Preacher Man*. In 1995, she relented. "It took me a long time," she said, "but I finally liked it." **HFC**

Ion Harris

that the customer hasn't turned up yet. They do eventually, of course, but it's now only 20 minutes to closing time. To make matters worse, a quip about how this must be the "best job in the world" falls upon deaf ears. Two hours after closing time, the punter leaves with a cheery, "thanks very much for the help, I'll give it some serious consideration". Of course, the sales assistant has heard this before, and knows that the punter will go straight home and order it on the Internet!

Domonic Taylor began his hi-fi career in the retail business and has been a freelance hi-fi reviewer and columnist since 1993



HD humbug!

Is hi-def all it's cracked up to be?

While the family were enjoying themselves over the festive period, I escaped the madness of party crackers and mince pies by locking myself away in a darkened room with my trusty hi-fi and a bottle or two of fine wine. Believe me, I needed the quality time after my festive encounter with the world of AV. In fact, I'm convinced that there's little fun to be had with the new technology. It's frequently pointless and way too confusing. I can only appreciate 'advances' that have genuine merit and that I'm able to get my head around. If they don't offer superior performance over what I already have, or if they're too complex to work with, I really can't be bothered.

And the latest thing is HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface), which I confess nearly defeated both me and my technically savvy 18-year-old son when we tried to wire up a simple 5.1 channel surround sound system to a new Full HD plasma screen.

The AV receiver and DVD player are both very recent HDMI-ready models, so it came as a surprise when we wired them up and received no pictures or sound through the HDMI connections. I found this annoying as HDMI is supposed to be a simplistic technology, in that it removes the need for discrete sound and vision connections and puts both signals digitally down the same cable. In fact, the receiver allows up to three HDMI sources to be routed to an appropriate screen



"If they don't offer superior performance over what I already have, or they're too complex, I really can't be bothered."

using just one feed. It sounds like it should make life plain sailing for anyone assembling an AV system, which can only be a good thing.

Unfortunately, life is never that straightforward. And after a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, cursing, accusations and several phone calls to tech support, it transpired that the system would only function using two of the three aftermarket HDMI cables with which I'd been supplied. The cables all came from the same source and had been supplied by the manufacturer of the receiver and DVD player, so there shouldn't have been any problems. As it turned out, the cable that caused all the malfunctioning was the most expensive of the bunch (And before anyone pipes up with "I'll bet you were using extra long cables," the answer is a resounding no – unless you consider two and three metres especially lengthy). We also discovered why we couldn't switch on the OSD (On-Screen Display) required to enable HDMI, because the S-Video cable we were using wasn't playing ball either.

Five hours later we finally had a working system. I subsequently spoke to a pal who earns his living installing AV systems: "HDMI? I don't touch it unless I have no choice," he said "You should've stuck with RGB!" What a shame that earlier that day all my RGB leads had been consigned to the darkest recesses of my garage. Ironically, around the same time as the postman delivered those HDMI cables –

cables designed to release me from the misery of multiple connections!

Malcolm Stewart was one of the country's best-known hi-fi reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently publishes the hi-fi industry trade bible, the British Audio Journal



Improved Sound

Buying remastered material

"Newly Remastered for Improved Sound" or words to that effect used to be a common sight on CDs compiled from reissued material. And there's no question that advances in digital technology did make it possible to improve the sound of older recordings.

Such claims were an inducement to buy – even if you already had an earlier copy of the recording in question. I'd love to know how many Jazz fans have more than one copy of



TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

PARDON, HOW LOUD?

Miles Davis' classic album *Kind of Blue*.

After it had been out on CD for a few years, Sony claimed to have unearthed a previously unknown original master tape with even better sound. The album was duly reissued at premium price and pressed on a gold disc.

Now any Miles fan would want to hear the improved copy – even if they felt happy with the standard issue – just to get a little closer to the original performance. The prospect of hearing a familiar disc in greatly improved sound is compelling.

At least that's my attitude to newly remastered material that I want to buy, even if I already own a copy. So I'm a bit dismayed to see fewer and fewer reissued recordings sporting claims of improved remastering.

Now there may be a reason for this. Perhaps the recording is remastered, but because the improved digital technology used such as 24bit/96kHz for example, is hardly 'new' there seems little point in making a big fuss about it.

It's similar to the way early stereo LPs had the word STEREO emblazoned on the sleeve in letters larger than those used to advertise the music or the performers. As time passed, stereo recordings became more the norm, so emblazoning the name across the record cover ceased to be a selling point.

Nevertheless, I'm still interested in knowing if a reissued recording has been remastered. Technologies such as HDCD, Super Bit Mapping, or JVC's K2 process, potentially have me reaching for my credit card.

Even in cases where I already have the music, I'd be very tempted to buy the reissue if the sleeve indicates that the original tapes have been sourced and the sound quality improved. Comparisons between original and remastered recordings can be fascinating.

In my opinion, record companies who ignore the specialist/enthusiast collector do so at their peril. With classical music it used to be common for the sleeve art to be changed when a disc is reissued (the original LP cover would rarely be used). But that's happening less and less as numerous reissues utilise the original LP cover art. Believe it or not, there are people who will buy the reissue of a disc they already have for no other reason than it has the same cover as the original LP. Indeed, I've done it myself...

Ok, you've got to be a bit of a sad old git to do that. But – if I'm looking at a CD reissue of a much-loved LP, and the cover art is original – I find it hard to pass up the opportunity to buy it once again. Especially if it also says "Newly Remastered..."

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



I had already half-decided on the subject for this month's column when *HFC 301* popped through the door with Paul Messenger's

excellent – and lengthy – feature on *Understanding Power*. In case the dog chewed up your copy, I can reveal that Paul was opining on the recent claims by product manufacturer Musical Fidelity, that high-power amps are absolutely essential if we are to enjoy full concert-hall sound pressure levels at home.

Paul's conclusion was 'well, maybe'. But having recently taken a few measurements of live music SPLs, I can add some evidence to that. I've been skulking about in various concerts and rehearsals with my trusty SPL meter or, occasionally, my Edirol R-09 portable recorder; which I've calibrated against the meter with interesting results. Typical figures for peaks in orchestral concerts are around 100dB, reaching (for a brief second or two) 102dB. Predictably that's the result of full orchestra, including percussion and large chorus.

During one public rehearsal, at a distance of about 10 metres from the front of the band, I found the loudest sound was the solo soprano Elaine McKrill. At 99dB, she beat the combined forces of 70 instrumentalists by about 2dB – a lot of sound from one set of vocal chords!

Elaine is a good friend and often comes to me for assistance when she's learning a new opera role, so I've heard her singing in my front room though not, as it happens, since I got the SPL meter. Another singer, visiting me the other day, registered 108dB, so I should probably be wearing earplugs while playing the piano...

Anyway you don't necessarily want Elaine singing in your listening room, you want to hear what the overall singer-plus-orchestra picture was like. And, having recorded the rehearsal, I was able to try that at home with the same SPL meter. Equalling (at the listening seat) the level I had heard live, I found my amplifier was delivering almost exactly 50-watt peak to the loudspeakers, the notoriously insensitive ATC SCM20s in a 200-square-foot room. That 102dB peak would in turn need 100 watts. As it happens, my subjectively preferred level is a little lower than that,



“... at 99dB, she beat the combined forces of 70 instrumentalists by 2dB.”

so 50-watt amps are more than capable of meeting my everyday demands.

But there are several, possibly conflicting, side issues to consider. Probably the most important is how recordings are made. While a very few 'audiophile' titles really are made from a lone pair of microphones, with no dynamics processing, most recordings of large forces use spot-miking to achieve a balance you won't hear in any seat in the hall. Voices will be more present than natural, so should one aim for the 108dB I've measured at close range? That would almost certainly boost the orchestra unnaturally loud, so the answer should be no.

And what of non-classical music? With its lower dynamic range, this tends to sound even louder for the same measured peak SPL, so amplifier requirements are not likely to be tougher. Peaks of 100dB imply average levels in the mid-90s and that's louder than is comfortable for most people – indeed, louder than is considered safe.

The limit for workplaces is 80dB. But that's a conservative figure, so unless you listen regularly at loudness levels to make your ears ring, you're not taking too high a risk. Unfortunately, hearing loss is a fact of life for musicians. I once temporarily joined a professional opera orchestra and was horrified how many players, whose average age was mid-30s, had early symptoms of hearing loss. The simple answer is, don't mess with your hearing! **HFC**

Richard Black

The world according to...

UKD

This month Hi-Fi Choice meets **Nick Green**, MD of UKD – the importer of GRAFF, Pathos, Unison Research, Opera, Audio Analogue, Monrio, Thorens and more! Interview: Malcolm Steward

Founder and managing director of UK hi-fi distributor UKD, Nick Green is responsible for a portfolio of classy hi-fi products from Europe and in particular, Italy. We visited him at his office near Slough for an insight into his business practices and his hi-fi philosophy.

HFC: You started out by importing British hi-fi to Italy and then wound up in the UK importing Italian hi-fi. How did that chain of events come about?

NG: I came back from Italy in 1976, having worked there for several years in the film industry. I got a job with the Rank Organisation's Audio Visual division, which owned Wharfedale and Leak and distributed lucrative Japanese brands such as Rotel and Akai. In those days,

of course, hi-fi was big business and we were selling it by the truckload. I was responsible for the European exports of Rotel and Wharfedale and we had a great market in Italy. The importer brought us a lot of business, then one day his company just collapsed. So, I proposed to the board that we open our own subsidiary there – which was all the fashion in business at that time – and the directors said "Good idea: you go and set it up," which wasn't exactly what I wanted to hear having just returned to the UK. But I agreed to go back for a couple of years. We used to have a 70m³ trailer full of amplifiers and loudspeakers delivered every two weeks and all that stock would be gone by the time the next one arrived. That went on for a few years, but then Wharfedale started to encounter difficulties. The Rank

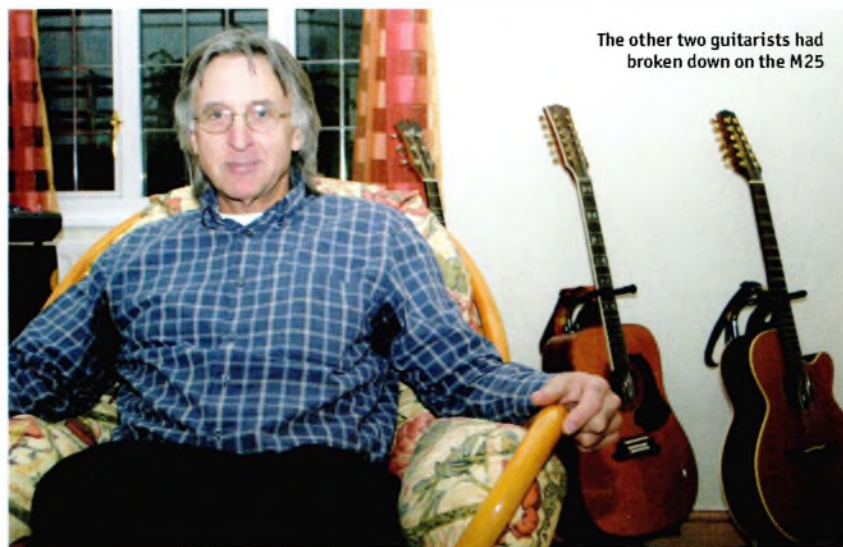
Organisation looked at Wharfedale's accounts and decided that it was time to rid itself of all its hi-fi interests.

The day that Rank made that announcement was truly astonishing. Wharfedale had organised a distributors' conference at Leeds Castle in Kent and people had flown in from all over the world, including the Chief Executive of Audio Technica who was also Wharfedale's distributor in Japan. He was an elderly gent who had never been outside of Japan, so it was a major event for him. Especially when, right at the start of the conference, a Rank Executive stood up and announced that it was closing Wharfedale down. All this was being translated for the poor man and he thought it was some perverse English joke. But Wharfedale was in decline and over the next few years it was twice sold to new owners.

The company in Rome that I'd set up had been doing very well, however. It had a big market share and lots of dealers, so I thought it wise to acquire some new products and I began to import Radford, Gale, Ariston turntables, Musical Fidelity and a few other brands.

Business was good during the 1980s, but at the end of that decade the Italians had begun to produce hi-fi themselves and were pushing the previously dominant British products out of the market. As the Italians are very strong on style, fit and finish, it was easy to see why. The vinyl-wrapped black box loudspeakers we were importing just weren't cutting the mustard any longer – not only in terms of appearance, but also in sound. Those were the days when British manufacturers seemed obsessed with metal and ceramic domes and their sound quality didn't satisfy the Italians who wanted a nice, open, generous sound with bags of detail and naturalness. So, they began making their own. In fact, I helped by importing Wharfedale drive units and soft-dome treble units and had the cabinets made in Italy – a sort of fusion of British acoustic know-how and Italian cabinetry and style. And that was the start of Opera loudspeakers.

"I imported Wharfedale drive and treble units and had the cabinets made in Italy – a fusion of British acoustic know-how and Italian style."



The other two guitarists had broken down on the M25

HFC: *Was it was Wharfedale that effectively gave birth to Opera?*

NG: Indeed. The first speaker Opera made was a D'Apollito version of the Wharfedale Diamond called the Pavarotti Project. We sent a pair to Pavarotti, who'd been kind enough to allow us to use his name, and, as far as I know, he kept them until the day he died.

HFC: *And from that grew a hugely successful operation... that you walked away from at the start of the 1990s?*

NG: I'm pleased that Opera has grown and developed the way that it has under the ownership of my former top salesman, Giovanni Nasta – a driving, dynamic person who's turned it into a pretty darned impressive operation. People might think of Opera and Unison Research as cottage industry-type operations, but they have a brand new, three-floor, 5,000m² factory that is filled with all the latest machinery and technology.

HFC: *So Opera loudspeakers became UKD's first products?*

NG: Yes and thanks to colleagues in Italy, who later became friends, I was introduced to other products such as Audio Analogue, GRAAF and Monrio. These all came from people I'd known and respected and their products have all done very well, especially the valve amplifiers, which I started importing in 1994. Back then they weren't regarded with the same credibility – reverence, even, in some quarters – that they are today. That was the end of the Linn/Naim era and valves were not part of most retailers' way of thinking. It sometimes felt as if I were banging my head against a brick wall.

Gradually, I built up a network of retailers and gained some acceptance and recognition from the press, as UKD's portfolio grew to include many fine products, each with their own particular appeal. People might ask why UKD handles, say, two valve amplifier brands such as Unison Research and GRAAF. That's because we've found that customers are typically attracted to one sound – and look – and not to the other. There's no conflict there.

HFC: *Not all of your brands are Italian nowadays, are they?*

NG: The latest brand I've taken on certainly isn't. It's Thorens and it's the first time I've had a turntable in the portfolio in 20 years. I've always enjoyed working with turntables since the days when I was selling dear old John Carrick's Ariston RD11 Superior back in the days of the Scottish turntable wars – when Ariston, Fons and the Linn were all battling for supremacy.

In fact, when I was in Italy in the early days I had a visit from the British Commercial





More tea, Vicar?

“It’s wonderful when someone tells you that you’ve sold them something that has really transformed their enjoyment of music.”

► Attaché and he proposed Linn to me. He was effectively working on the company’s behalf, as the commercial section of the British Embassy used to do in the Thatcher years. They were overtly commercial and pushed the interests of British businesses, which they no longer do. I decided to take a look at it because I’d just had my first batch of Aristons delivered and I wanted to compare them. I thought that the Ariston was a better turntable, despite being less costly, so I declined the Commercial Attaché’s offer. The rest, of course, is history. The fellow who started importing the Linn into Italy made heaps and heaps of money and I didn’t. Such is life, though. It’s not all about money. Other things are far more important. I get excited making customers happy. It’s wonderful when someone tells you that you’ve sold them a component or system that has really transformed their enjoyment of music, and if you can make a living at the same time then that is fabulous.

HFC: Many pundits are predicting the demise of hard media. Can you envisage a time in the foreseeable future when we download all our music and no longer purchase CDs or vinyl?

NG: No. I actually think that owning a disc, which you can add to your collection, is something that most people want to do. It has to be more satisfying than owning something that only exists floating in the ether. It was much better in the old days when you had ‘proper’ record sleeves, but even a CD liner with photos and song lyrics is tangible and nice to own.

HFC: So is this just misinformation being put about by those who want to sell music servers? “This product will allow you to throw all those troublesome CDs in the loft”: a statement that presupposes that everyone considers CDs a nuisance to store?

NG: If you go back far enough, you’ll find that people of a certain class, intelligence and wealth had libraries, so I suppose you could say that owning items to which you could refer has a strong historical significance. That is probably not quite as relevant for the younger generation and I can see the potential for the disappearance of hard media. But it will be a sad day if and when it does disappear. On the other hand, who would have predicted that the turntable, dead and buried 15 years ago, would make the comeback that it has.

HFC: We’ve recently had the autumn hi-fi shows and they seem to have lost their appeal despite attempts to revive them. Do you think

they can be made to attract more new blood to hi-fi?

NG: We need to if we want to attract young buyers, although their approach to music seems to be less formal than that of our age group. They don’t tend to sit down to listen to music, or give it their undivided attention, like we do. They prefer to listen through headphones while they’re on the move.

However, if we can expose them to what we do then we might even be able to change their habits. For that reason I wouldn’t exclude AV or suchlike from a hi-fi show. If it brings in new buyers then it’s welcome. We certainly want more new people – especially young people – becoming interested in hi-fi.

I don’t agree with the way shows charge such high prices for admission. A fiver is okay if it’s a really good event but £10 a ticket or more is ridiculous, particularly when you have couples with children who want to look around.

HFC: Hi-Fi Shows in Europe still seem popular. Is this really just a UK phenomenon?

NG: I think the UK has a fundamental problem that European countries don’t appear to suffer from. We don’t appreciate or respect high-end,

high-quality hi-fi, luxury hi-fi or things of beauty in general. We want the cheapest rather than the best. Above everything else, we are obsessed with price.

Mind you, part of that problem might have come from the way hi-fi was sold to a whole generation during the 1980s. Whenever I came back to the UK and visited hi-fi shops I was appalled by the way that customers were treated. Many dealers forced their opinions onto customers, belittling them if they didn’t own the ‘right’ product, ignoring their wants and requirements, and failing to recognise that their opinions were just as valid as their own. They were guilty of preaching rather than exalting what was good. I never encountered that in Europe: there was no cult of what was right and what was wrong, of what was absolutely correct and what was not. It came down to how musically enjoyable the customer thought the product was, how much he liked its appearance and how much he was willing to spend.

Someone should have spoken out about what was happening at the time, but I think people feared ridicule if they did. There really are no ‘absolutes’ or ‘bests’ in hi-fi; every customer’s requirements are unique and individual. We are selling people musical enjoyment; we are giving them pleasure, not selling them hardware. And that’s not totally about the sound because with the attractive-looking products that are available today, I’m sure pride of ownership is a big driver for many buyers.

Music is one of those things in life that is really good for the soul and good for the spirit, and that is official. A year or so ago there was a series of TV programmes called ‘Making Slough Happy’. Slough, which is a few miles away from here, is supposed to be the most miserable town in the UK so they sent a team of researchers out to find out how they could make its inhabitants happier. Apparently, there’s been a lot of similar research carried out all around the world. The results were not as you’d probably expect: money wasn’t at the top of the list and neither was a good relationship. Strangely enough, activities such as ‘growing things’ – gardening for example – are guaranteed to make you happy. Provided you do it with passion and have music all around you, whether playing or listening to it. Maybe that’s the message we should be sending out as an industry that, above everything else, hi-fi is good for the soul. And that philosophical observation conveniently also provides an answer to one of hi-fi’s great mysteries that has puzzled me for years, who buys those ugly outdoor loudspeakers designed to look like rocks? Clearly, it’s the contented cucumber cultivators of Slough! **HFC**

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Eight hyper-pure copper conductors separately insulated with Teflon®, Kimber's unique cable weave and a **NEW cryogenically treated Wattgate 320i IEC connector** combine to give a low-impedance, interference-cancelling mains cable that's in a class of its own. The Russ Andrews Classic PowerKord™ improves your CD player or amp's connection to the mains supply, helping your music sound dynamic, detailed and musical.

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Mr C Donnelly, London



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88%, Richard Black, Hi-Fi Choice magazine, November 2007

The Signature PowerKord™ with Wattgate™ 350i IEC £275 for 1m



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HI FI CLUBE / JOSÉ VICTOR HENRIQUES / CREMONA ELIPSA

Sonus Faber's introductions in the early "Noughties" of the floor-standing Cremona and the smaller Cremona Auditor were hailed as milestones in the Industry's long standing quest to achieve the highly-desired marriage of both aesthetics and sound quality. Such a marriage would please both ends of the consumer spectrum, the audiophile as well as the cineaste.

Indeed, it seemed incredible that the legendary, exquisite craftsmanship of the original Cremona and the Cremona Auditor could have been surpassed.

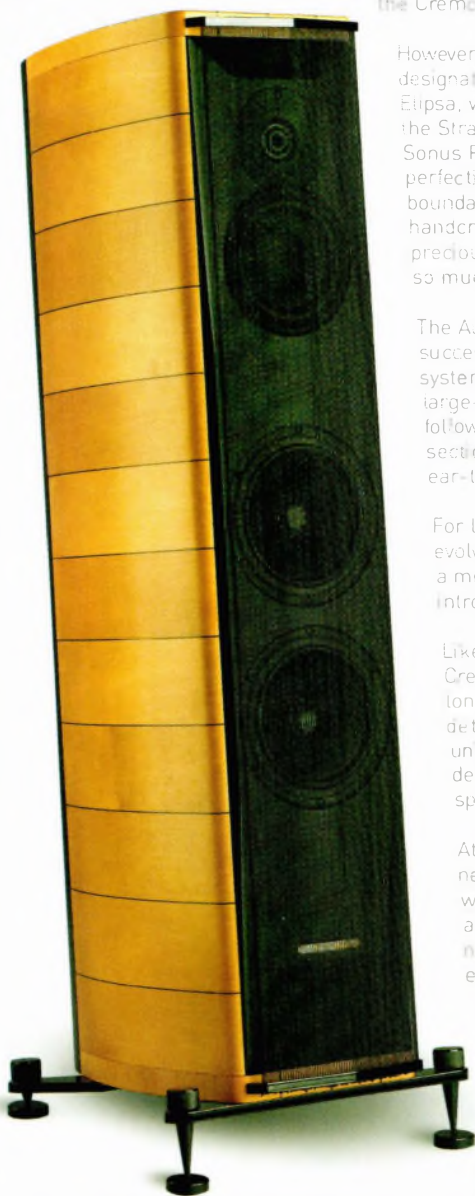
However, the recent launch of two new models with 'M' designations, along with a flagship speaker, the Cremona Elipsa, were inspired by that most astounding of transducers, the Stradivari. Thus, they are testaments to the fact that Sonus Faber's designers are in a constant process of perfecting the art of music reproduction, and of pushing the boundaries in the creation and engineering of awe-inspiring handcrafted works of art. These speakers are all the more precious because of their rarity, in a world characterised by so much automation and mechanisation.

The Auditor M, the smallest of the new Cremonas and the successor of the original Auditor, is a versatile two-way system ideally suited for smaller environments craving a large-scale musical picture. Its natural maple enclosure follows the Sonus Faber signature form of a lute in cross-section, while its components and final sound have been ear-tuned by the Sonus Faber team.

For larger rooms, the original floor-standing Cremona has evolved into the new superior Cremona M, which displays a more elegant, stylish finish and benefits from the introduction of new components.

Like their Homage siblings, both the Auditor M and Cremona M reflect the findings of Sonus Faber team's longstanding research, with attention paid to every detail, from small components, to wiring, to the drive units themselves. Equally, the aesthetics and external details have been refined to indicate a new stage in the speakers' evolution.

At the top of the new Cremona range lies the brand-new Cremona Elipsa, designed for the connoisseur with both the means and the environment to exploit a larger system. The Cremona Elipsa provides near-Stradivari performance in a more compact, economical package. Its sound is room-filling, open and natural, while its form is as beautiful as the speaker that inspired it. The Elipsa is, without question, another Sonus Faber masterpiece.



Sonus Faber CREMONA M



Sonus Faber CREMONA ELIPSA

For your nearest dealer contact:



absolute sounds ltd
58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW
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audiofile

COMPETITION

WIN! A CD & AMPLIFIER WORTH £1,000!



French-designed Advance Acoustics is a new name on the UK hi-fi scene. It builds high-end gear at affordable prices with a comprehensive features list on every one of its products. In fact, it's not that long ago that a system with the same specification as the CD player and amplifier on offer in this month's competition would have cost much, much more. The £400 Advance Acoustic MCD-203II CD player, "offers astonishingly upmarket build quality" (*HFC* 301) with a sturdy metal chassis, quarter-inch thick aluminium panels and valve-driven balanced and single-ended outputs. It also sports the latest in digital audio trendsetting with a 24-bit/192kHz Analog Devices DAC. It has a perfect partner in the *HFC* 'Best Buy' Advance Acoustic MAP-305DAII. This £600 integrated amplifier delivers 100 watts into eight ohms, doubling up to 200-watts into four ohms, and sports two large VU meters on the front panel. It is also the first amplifier under £1,000 to feature a built-in 24-bit/192kHz DAC and an MM/MC phono stage. During our test (*HFC* 300), we praised the amp for its lively, dynamic sound, with excellent bass and tight and tuneful presentation. And now, for the mere cost of a phone call, one lucky winner could receive both the player and the amplifier together.

For your chance to win, either: (a) call **0906 5852157** and follow the instructions, leaving your selected answer (**A, B or C**) and your details where prompted or (b) send the letter of your selected answer (**A, B or C**) by email, including your name, address and a daytime telephone contact number to: hificomp@futurenet.co.uk

QUESTION:

The Advance Acoustic MCD-203II has quarter-inch thick panels made of...

A: Actinium **B:** Aluminium **C:** Astatine

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Answers must be received between **10 January 2008** and **6 February 2008**. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received between the relevant dates and will receive an Advance Acoustic MCD-203II CD player and MAP-305DAII integrated amplifier free of charge. Each winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date and will be required to give details of a delivery address in the UK to which the headphones should be sent. Telephone calls will be charged at 50p per minute. By taking part in a Competition you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurenet.com/futureonline/competitionrules.asp. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

CHOICE CUTS



This month's varied musical morsels

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

AUDIOPHILE VINYL



SONNY ROLLINS

East Broadway Run Down

Impulse/Speakers Corner 180g vinyl

Music: Sonny Rollins continues to be the most musical sax player of his era. In the mid sixties when this recording was made his peers were exploring free jazz. Here we find him investigating the same country, but unable or unwilling to squawk like a goose. Coltrane's cohorts Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones drive all three tracks at a thrilling pace but it's the brass of Rollins and Freddie Hubbard that make it so engaging.

Sound: Bob Thiel's Impulse recordings define the art of jazz recording in the sixties and this reinforces that. **JK**

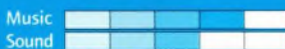


MOBY GRAPE

'69

Columbia/Speakers Corner 180g vinyl

Music: Moby Grape made a huge impression with their debut album, but suffered from personnel and management problems, thereafter, and arguably never regained their early form. This later offering finds them delivering a chugging rocker in *Hoochie* (not unlike eighties ZZ Top). The highlight, however, is the final track written by the band's 'Syd Barrett' character and it's worth having for this. Sound: A high-energy and bass-heavy recording, it delivers the power and the funk in full effect, although side two has some tape hiss. **JK**



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

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Best Of Bob Dylan's Theme

Time Radio Hour Chrome Dreams

Music: You don't get the voice or the stories that punctuate the best radio show in recent memory, but you do get a fascinating glimpse into the magnificently eclectic musical world of Dylan, with a track from each of the 50 themed programmes from the first series. Chuck Berry and Duke Ellington will be familiar, but many of his choices are revelatory. Where, for example, did he dig up *Ain't Got No Money To Pay For This Drink*, by George Zimmerman for his show about booze?

Sound: Nothing here is less than half a century old, but they knew how to record a live room back in the days of valve technology. **NW**



LENNOX BERKELEY

String Quartets Nos 1-3

Maggini Quartet Naxos B 570415

Music: As well as being one of the UK's most successful chamber groups, led by violinist Lorraine McAsian, the Maggini Quartet have become champions of British music. The quality of the playing is assured throughout, which helps make difficult music very approachable. Sound: This recording dates from 2006. The miking is fairly close, without being too bright and the unexaggerated recording detail is well realised. **AG**

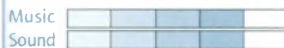


VARIOUS

Bearded Ladies Bird CD

Music: This mixed bag features up-and-coming – and unsigned – female singers mingling with obscure, but brilliant, acts from the Sixties and Seventies. And what an amazing album it is, too, by turns mysterious, energetic and intriguing. It's pleasing as well, that much of the best stuff comes from today's performers such as singer-songwriter Emma Tricca and the gospel-psychedelic Speck Mountain. This is a very, very good selection of female vocal.

Sound: Considering that these tracks are either 35 years old, or were recorded live in the studio, their quality is surprisingly good. A hi-fi treat for vocal fans. **PS**

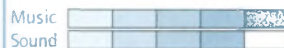


JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

Oxygene (30th Anniversary Edition) EMI

Music: Here we are talking about the *Stairway To Heaven* of Electronica, that nagging five-note riff on a Mini Moog synthesiser that turned the shy son of a French film composer into a pan-global multi-platinum superstar in 1977, the year of punk. And yes, it only appears after eighteen minutes of Arp, Moog and VCS3 synthesizers, noodling away in some ecological concept of Jarre's own making.

Sound: With a huge dynamic range this new hi-res 24-bit master version is the ultimate *Oxygene*. For real fans there'll be two bonus DVD *Live In Your Living Room* versions. **MP**



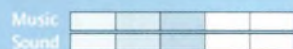
CAT POWER

Jukebox Matador

Music: Indie cult figure Chan Marshall (aka Cat Power) took a step towards the mainstream with 2006's *The Greatest*. The follow-up – her second covers

album out of eight – might seem like a sideways step, but it's an engaging and sometimes gorgeous one. Power breathes new life into songs by Hank Williams, Janis Joplin, Billie Holiday and Joni Mitchell and even manages to make Sinatra's *New York, New York* sound fresh and interesting.

Sound: Her trademark ethereal vocals sound less ghostly and more self-confident than in the past, while the minimalism of earlier recordings has given way to a more rounded and exotic elegance. **NW**





THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC

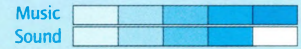
"This is concentrated rebellion and makes for explosive listening."

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE *Rage Against the Machine* Epic

Music: RATM's 1992 debut introduced heavy metal to hip-hop with so much anger and power that it could not be ignored. Rarely has a band's first album placed it so firmly at the top of its game so effectively. This is concentrated rebellion and the combination of powerhouse riffs, tight

funky bass and lyrics that redefine bad attitude makes for explosive listening. I'd challenge any red-blooded male not to leap about when confronted by this album played at the appropriate volume. Tracks include *Killing in the Name*, *Bullet in the Head* and *Freedom*. Although, I can't play more than two at

a time as it's so exhausting and exhilarating!
Sound: How can you check the stereo image when you're banging your head? For a hip-hop/metal fusion, it's fab. **JK**



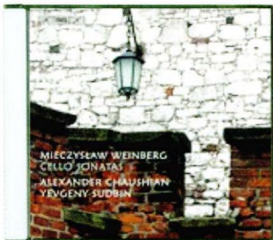
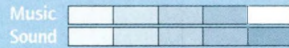
RÓISÍN MURPHY

Overpowered EMI

Music: The second solo album from the former Moloko chanteuse is a much more focused effort than her debut. She's a long way from the

household name status of Madonna and Kylie, but she's got a stronger voice than either and with this album she's got the tunes with (most of) the quirky edges smoothed off to create a Saturday night electro disco gem. There are squelching synth bass lines, four to the floor rhythms, lush strings and parping horns aplenty, all in service of that glorious voice.

Sound: It's a big, enveloping wet kiss of a record, blending electronics with real instruments to an exciting and masterful effect. **DO**



MIECZYSLAW WEINBERG

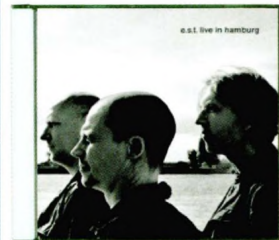
Cello Sonatas

Alexander Chaushian (cello),

Yevgeny Sudbin (piano) BIS CD-1648

Music: Weinberg was one of the Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany who eventually ended up in Russia. He became a friend and collaborator of Shostakovich, though he was no mere protégé. Both men were strong mutual advocates of each other, and it became increasingly hard to know who influenced whom. The three works on this disc are, therefore, full of Jewish idiom and angst.

Sound: These are compelling performances and this is an excellent disc, with a fullness from the excellent cellist and strong support from the pianist. **AG**

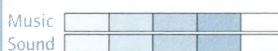


EST

Live In Hamburg ACT

Music: The success of Swedish pianist Esbjörn Svensson's trio has largely been based on their ability to blend exceedingly melodic jazz with profound, often electronically assisted atmospheric and occasional nods to rock histrionics and classical phrasing. They cover a lot of ground, musically speaking, but it always comes across as heartfelt, reflecting the interests of the members rather than a cynically blended potpourri of styles designed to appeal to a broad demographic.

Sound: The piano is given plenty of room to breathe, ably assisted by bass and drums in a beautifully recorded two-CD set. **DO**



HIGH-RES MUSIC

THE GYPSY LIFE

John Gorka

DVD-A (DualDisc 5.1 DVD-Audio/CD layer, plus DVD-V)

AIX Records

Music: John Gorka is a Texas-based native of New Jersey who mixes his music a little like his geography, straddling the line between country and folk. He has recorded for Wyndham Hill in the past, but his first multi-format extravaganza on AIX finds him in smooth form, laid back but heartfelt and continuing a musical tradition that fans of John Hiatt and even Neil Young will recognise. Playing with a five-piece, acoustic band except for fretless bass, he creates a rich and evocative sound that celebrates the American way in an understated but solid fashion.

Sound: Disc one contains an interactive DVD-V and disc two, (a DualDisc has 5.1 DVD-A and CD. The CD is not 100 per cent red book, but the DVD-A side is warm and extremely smooth and as luxurious as the packaging. **JK**



MAHLER

The Song of the Earth

Lan Shul (cond), Singapore SO

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD disc)

BIS SACD-1547

Music: This version, (based on Hans Bethge's *The Chinese Flute*) has the German poetry replaced by a Chinese counterpart. Paraphrased from Han's Hellmann's 1905 collection *Chinesische Lyrik*, which itself was based on French translations of an 8th Century Tang dynasty poem, this project is the work of Hong Kong based enthusiast Daniel Ng, though an alternative ending using the German text is included.

Sound: Featured tenor Warren Mok doesn't have the most robust voice and it's not the most idiomatic version on disc. But the Singapore Symphony Orchestra lead an accomplished performance with the unfamiliar cadences lending familiar music new interest. **AG**



TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony 6

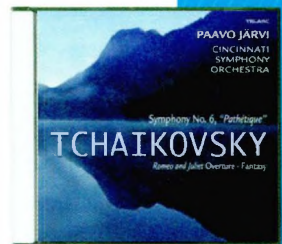
Paavo Järvi (cond) Cincinnati SO

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Telarc

Music: Tchaikovsky died certain that his final symphony was the best he had ever composed, despite its lukewarm debut in 1893. It's certainly the most intricate of his symphonies and in some ways the most austere, dealing as it does with the inevitability of fate, resignation and despair, all subjects likely to have been on the composer's mind as his death, possibly by suicide, approached.

Sound: Estonian-born, US-based Järvi's position as musical director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra has been a fruitful one and this latest disc doesn't disappoint. It's a recording that takes full account of the rich, dark tones that characterise the *Pathétique*. **DO**



A new star is born



Each year the European Imaging & Sound Association (EISA) assembles a panel of expert judges from some of the continent's leading hi-fi press to investigate the world's finest technology.

After rigorous evaluation they return to vote on one product in each category that they believe offers not only exceptional levels of performance but also provides incredible value. This year they chose the Cambridge Audio Azur 840A Class XD integrated amplifier.

"...a genuinely novel approach... a highly sophisticated, efficient and attractive-sounding amplifier" EISA citation



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CHOICE MAIL



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 hifimail@futurenet.co.uk

TOP GEAR, BOTTOM MARKS

After many years of enjoying your magazine I find myself dumfounded. Like many audiophiles out there, I love listening to music, but can't afford a truly high-end system, so I go for one that suits my budget. After all, how many car enthusiasts are ever likely to own a Bugatti Veyron, but oh... what a joy they are to look at!

Last week I received my copy of *HFC*, whipped off the polythene and flicked to the *Beautiful Systems* pages only to discover that it has been replaced with a rather unexciting feature on 'Power' (oohhhh!!!).

So, here's a simple analogy; how popular would *Top Gear* be if they stopped playing with supercars and, instead, spent the time explaining how the engine worked?

Rob Sherlock via email

“... how many car enthusiasts are ever likely to own a Bugatti Veyron...”

HFC Strange thing about *Top Gear*... the team may review supercars, but it's caravan conkers, playing football with Toyota Aygos and watching celebrities taking laps round the test track in a reasonably priced Chevy Lacetti that people discuss over the water-cooler.

But seriously... *Hi-Fi Choice* is still committed to regularly reviewing high-end equipment – both in the pages of the regular magazine and in our annual *Collection* issue. *Beautiful Systems* is simply taking a well-earned rest for a while, to make room for our new *Understanding* feature, which aims to cover a number of key hi-fi topics in the coming months.

NEW MUSICAL SUPPRESS

I often read comments by *HFC* columnists and correspondents bemoaning the younger



Above: Cairn and Piega join forces for one of our sorely missed *Beautiful Systems*

LETTER OF THE MONTH



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

Is there going to be a replacement for DVD-Audio and SACD? DVD-Video is looking a bit tired in the light of HD DVD and the picture quality on movies like *Transformers*, the five-disc *Blade Runner* import and *2001 A Space Odyssey* is so stunning I'll never need to go to the cinema again.

It would be excellent to have high-resolution audio quality make the next jump and use HD DVD (or Blu-ray) to deliver really top-notch sound quality that would put me in the front row of a concert hall or right in the

studio. It doesn't need to be surround sound, but a really high-resolution sound would be fantastic.

Steve Aylett via email

HFC There are moves to deliver the highest possible audio content on-line, and our very own Linn Products is one of the companies at the forefront of high-end data delivery systems.

It seems that 'high-definition' only exists in the video world, with the audio market more interested in compressed audio you can play down a telephone.



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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...)

generations' lack of enthusiasm towards hi-fi, with suggestions as to what the industry should be doing to address the matter.

I'm in my mid 30's and was lucky enough to inherit the hi-fi bug from my dad. However, he was not my only influence and I recall a 1989 issue of *Hi Fi Answers*, containing album reviews of both The Stone Roses first album and Pixies' *Doolittle*. Granted, this represented an exceptional brace, but reviews of quality new artists were a regular feature.

Yet, I noticed in December's *Choice Cuts*, that of the five non-classical new 'varied musical morsels' featured, four of them were from very established artists.

I have no axe to grind with Messrs Bowie, Springsteen and Young, but if you are serious about encouraging the next generation of hi-fi audiophiles, there are actions HFC could take.

Nick Turpin via email

HFC We couldn't agree more, Nick. Sadly, the music business views the hi-fi industry as a bunch of forty- and fifty-something males and the pre-release material we receive strongly reflects that demographic targeting. Given that the reality is close to this – the bulk of our readership does fit that target group – it is difficult to persuade the music biz to give us access to new music material as it is released. And that means we would review the latest chart releases long after everyone else. We do get some coups and scoops, but most of our music reviews are sadly pointing to a different market.

WALL OF SOUND

I currently have a bespoke Voodoo system rack which is too large for my listening room and, therefore, I want to mount my hi-fi equipment on the wall. The Voodoo rack is very good, but it's slightly annoying in that I have to pump up each shelf once a week and, in its current position, it can be tricky to get to the rear valves.

I am looking into buying a set of wall shelves but can't find any reviews and, as you can imagine, it's virtually impossible to audition them. The two that I'm presently considering are the Apollo WT1 and Quadraspire's Q4 Wall Bracket. Please can you let me know if these wall brackets have been reviewed anywhere and also what your opinion would be on using wall brackets rather than floor mounted supports. Considering I have a wooden floor,

do you think wall brackets would give me the best isolation?

My system comprises of a Michell Orbe SE Deck (with Origin Live Silver tonearm and Benz Micro Ref 2 cartridge), PS Audio GCPH shono stage, Pathos Logos amplifier, Meridian 506 CD player, Spondor S8 loudspeakers and all cables are Townshend Audio (Isolda and DCT300)

Simon Todd St. Neots, Cambs.

HFC Sadly, it's as difficult to arrange a review of a wall shelf as it is to arrange a demonstration. It's something to do with putting bolts in – and then out – of your wall... that's off-putting for many reviewers. So, we are unable to say with any certainty how any of the dozen or so models on sale in the UK compare to one another. Based on the performance of their equipment tables, we know Custom Design and Quadraspire are good products, but Apollo's WT1 is a good, no-nonsense design, too. Whether a wall shelf would be better than a table depends on just how bouncy your wood floors really are (given that a record deck acts almost like a seismograph in reverse). However, if you are having feedback problems (from the music itself or footfall), a well-mounted wall shelf will effectively eliminate the troubles.

THERE MUST AND SHALL BE ASPIRIN!

Like its owner, my hi-fi system is getting old and I thought it was time to replace it. I tried to find my dealer, but they went out of business long ago. So, I went in search of someone new, which was an exercise in frustration at best.

I remember a loud and painful visit to London's Tottenham Court Road some years ago, where it seemed that each shop tried to out-shout the other. Yet, that now appears to be the norm, rather than the exception. After one afternoon of trying out the latest hi-fi, I came home with nothing but a splitting headache. Whatever happened to those hi-fi shops that seemed like an oasis of calm in comparison? Do they still exist, or should I take aspirin with me for the next round.

Gareth Trevillion via email

HFC There are still dealers that provide quiet single-speaker demonstration rooms, where you can listen to hi-fi in a

simulacrum of your living room. A good place to start looking is our Dealer Directory in the back of the magazine. You could also try contacting the British Audio-Visual Dealer's Association (www.bada.co.uk) for your nearest BADA-affiliated dealer, but don't discount those dealers who don't belong to BADA.

PC – PHONE HOME

Strange to think that the iPhone might be the end of buying physical media for me. Okay, I'm a sucker for Apple products and the iPhone joins a whole host of other products I've used over the years, but I find the way I can buy music on a whim and download straight to the phone (and also to a file on my iTunes account) has simply stopped me from ever visiting a record store. One thing still surprises me though, the tracks I end up downloading after a night at the pub!

Carl Potts via email

HFC It's not inconceivable that the next generation of iTunes merely downloads a tag to play a piece of music, while the music remains on an iTunes file server. When you play the music, your stored tag will access the server and at no time will you end up 'owning' the track.

Below: The new iPhone



“Strange to think that the Apple iPhone might be the end of buying physical media for me.”



S p r e z z a t u r a

Famous for his 'Il Libro Del Cortegiano' (The Book of the Courtier, 1528), Renaissance humanist Baldesar Castiglione coined the word 'sprezzatura' to describe the ideal for courtly behaviour. He insisted that in order to be worthy, exceptional virtuosity should be conveyed with an unaffected, effortless dignity. In essence, sprezzatura is the art of making something difficult look easy.

Created from the finest materials and complex technologies, our superlative Platinum loudspeakers are a sophisticated blend of craftsmanship and science, making music so gracefully that it sounds naturally effortless.



Understanding: DVD-AUDIO RECORDING

High-resolution home recording is here at last, making DVD-Audio copies of analogue LPs a reality.

Nearly ten years ago, DVD-Audio attempted to partner CD's convenience with unprecedented sound quality, courtesy of developments in storage media and digital audio technology. With DVD-A, the sample rate was upped from CD's 44.1kHz to 96kHz (or 192kHz). At the same time, the resolution was increased to 24-bit (i.e. nearly 17 million possible voltage-levels per sample, against 16-bit CD's 65,536). As it turned out, though, the general public were quite happy with CDs, so DVD-A and its biggest rival (Super Audio CD, or SACD) were relegated to audiophile nichedom.

DIY DVD-A DISCS

Although the choice of DVD-Audio titles may be limited, it's possible to make high-resolution copies of your LPs and cassettes at home. What's more, the total outlay is less than £1,000 (about the price of a good-quality music server). You'll need a modest Windows XP PC with reasonable amounts of hard disk space, a good soundcard and a DVD burner. The DVD-As we're proposing will have a sampling rate of 96kHz (that's a theoretical bandwidth of nearly 50kHz, more than enough for hi-fi analogue sources). More importantly is the 24-bit resolution, which will do better justice to analogue than CD's 16-bit. ☺

MAKE THE CONNECTION

1

Start by simply connecting your analogue source to the MPMax, and the MPMax's digital output to the coaxial digital input of your soundcard.

If you're working with vinyl, don't forget that a RIAA-qualified phono preamp will also be needed, whether separate, or built into an amplifier (use the line-level tape 'record' output here). We tried a number of different sources: a Technics SL1200 and Pro-Ject phono stage; a Linn LP12 and Naim preamp; a Revox B77 reel-to-reel and a much-modified Nakamichi BX300 cassette deck.

All worked exceptionally well with a variety of genres that included rock, classical and electronica. The most satisfying results, however, came from a mint copy of the *Assemblage* LP, by art-rockers Japan.

The resulting DVD-Audio disc – as auditioned on a Pioneer universal disc player driving Rogers floorstanders via Naim amplification – was clearly superior in terms of detail and involvement to the CD. Even vinyl's 'X-factor' appears to survive largely intact – something that cannot be said of self-made CDs.

At last, here is a high-resolution DIY format that does justice to vinyl resolution.

In the next three boxes, we describe the steps needed to making your very own bona-fide DVD-As, which can then be played on any DVD-A or universal disc player. Although hard-disk recorders are gaining ground for home archiving, most of these are geared towards CD-quality audio and, therefore, don't support high-resolution. Far better to make a high-res DVD-A master and treat yourself to a universal disc player.

“Although the choice of DVD-A titles may be limited, it's possible to make high-resolution copies of your LPs and cassettes at home.”



Pictured: Meridian's MPMax 221 24-bit/192kHz analogue-to-digital converter

RECORDING SOFTWARE AND PREPARATION



First, you'll need Goldwave's audio recording and editing software (license \$45). If you visit the firm's website (www.goldwave.com), you can

download an 'evaluation' version'. Like most modern audio editing software, Goldwave is directly compatible with the 24-bit/96kHz format needed here.

It's important to get the recording levels correct, just as it is with analogue and other digital recording formats. Too low, and you won't get the full dynamic range; too high, and 'clipping' (distortion) will result. Ideally, the absolute 'peaks' (crescendos and so on) should register at or just before 0dB.

Goldwave allows you to monitor the current level on a pair of bargraph-type VU meters.

Your soundcard's digital line-input volume control can usually be accessed from the 'taskbar', which normally resides at the lower right of the Windows display. When you open it, you're presented with a window that contains a range of mouse-operated 'virtual faders'. Usually, the default is 'playback' mode – click on 'options', and then 'properties'. You should now be able to switch to 'adjust volume for recording'. Click 'OK', and this mixer control-panel should now have a 'recording control' label.

At this stage, uncheck all of the 'select' buttons that don't correspond to the wanted input – that way, you avoid unwanted noise. If you're using the Meridian converter, the only one you'll need will be the S/PDIF (i.e. digital) input. Go to Goldwave's 'default save options' (you'll find this listed under 'file format' in the 'options' menu) and ensure they're set to 'Wave (*.wav)' and 'PCM signed 24-bit, stereo'.

Next, click on the 'new' box in Goldwave and in the 'new sound' pop-up window that appears, select two-channel audio with a sampling rate of 96kHz. All options are chosen from pull-down lists. Note that Goldwave 'forces' you to specify a preset recording time – choose a longer one, because recording can thankfully be stopped manually.

Press Goldwave's record button, and while the source plays, raise or lower the relevant mixer fader until the peaks 'touch' the red regions of the meter. It's better to go (slightly!) below than above, you can change the volume with software later. If your source equipment has output-level controls, try experimenting with those too. Once the levels have been set, stop recording and then select 'close' (from the 'file' menu) to delete the temporary capture.

So why would you want to make DVD-As from high-quality material that you already own? Let's take vinyl as a specific example. Records don't last forever, even with top-quality turntable/arm/cartridge combinations and low tracking-weights. If you have an irreplaceable collection, it makes sense to transfer them to a medium that retains as much of the original fidelity as possible.

But this rules out the average consumer CD recorder. Once copied, the original precious record can then be stored away safely.



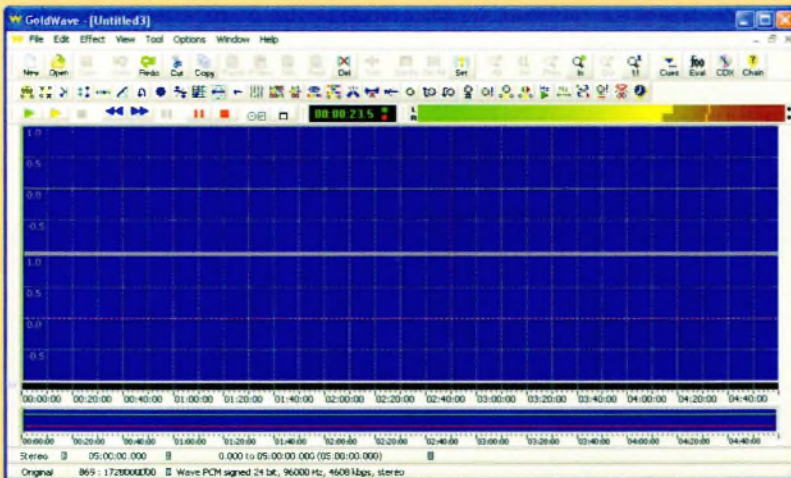
Above: Creative Sound Blaster Audigy2 Platinum soundcard

GET YOUR CARDS RIGHT

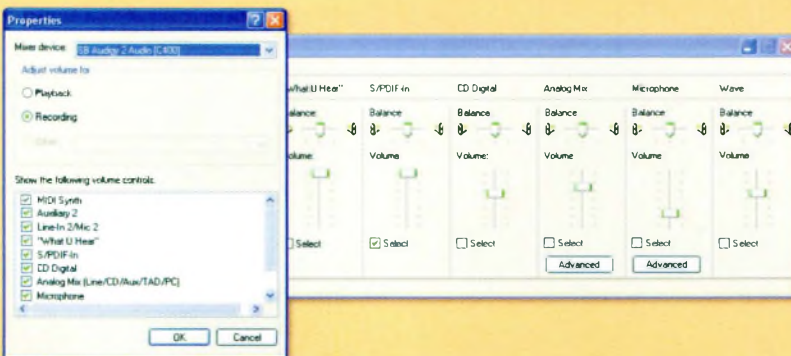
Key to the recording process is a good-quality soundcard. Although most modern PC soundcards (like the one we're using) will capture audio at up to 24-bit/96kHz from their analogue inputs, the quality is unlikely to be up to audiophile standards: the card's analogue-to-digital converter (ADCs) and op-amps are likely to be cheap devices. Another potential problem is the digital 'noise' inside PCs. This tends to be picked up by the sensitive analogue electronics, and can be heard as background 'whooshes' and 'whines'.

Thankfully, soundcards like the Audigy2 (above) will take 24-bit/96kHz from their S/PDIF digital inputs – although it stands to reason that if your PC's audio hardware can't accommodate such technology then you'll need to arrange for a compatible card to be fitted. If you use an external ADC, then better results should be achievable.

One such device is Meridian's MPMax 221 24-bit/96kHz ADC (left), originally intended to drive the company's digital



Pictured: Goldwave's audio recording and editing software is simple with practice



Above: Go to 'default save options' window and ensure they're set to 'Wave (*.wav)'

RECORDING AND EDITING

3

Now you can re-cue your source and carry out a 'proper' recording. Once the music has finished, click 'stop' and your recording will be

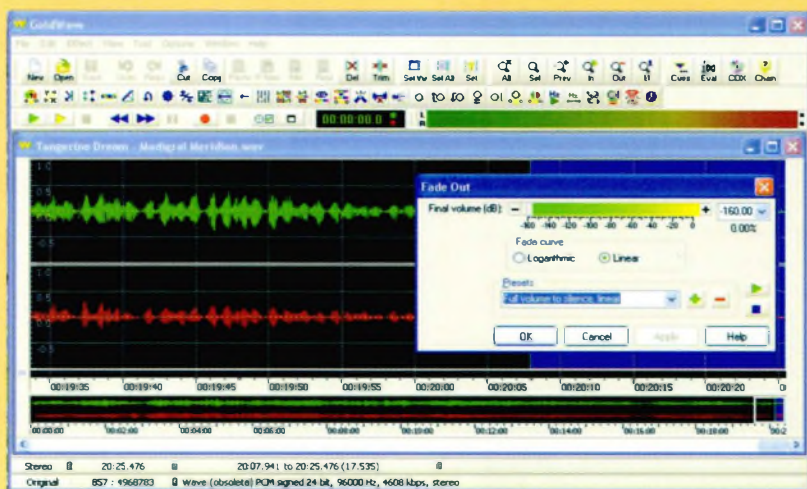
visible on-screen as left and right-channel waveforms. Click 'save', and the recording will be deposited onto your computer's hard disk as a file. Because of their extra data, 24/96 WAV files will obviously occupy more space than CD 'rips'. A 10-minute passage, for example, will occupy around 350MB of space. Not really an issue, though, with modern PCs.

Goldwave offers some useful editing tricks that can give you recording a 'professional' feel. You can split long captures (like a LP side) into individual songs and trim them accurately. Pre-/post-fading, meanwhile, can 'disguise' the crackles and pops that are

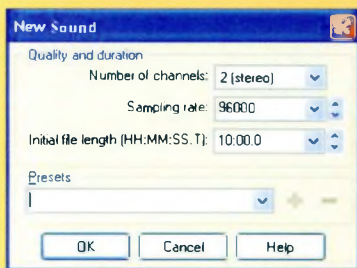
noticeable at the beginning and end of a vinyl track.

Also available is 'declicking' and noise-reduction, although in our experience it's better to go through the recording and simply eliminate obvious 'clicks' by manually-replacing them with silence. Highlight the target click, and select 'mute' from Goldwave's 'edit' menu.

These clicks are very short (milliseconds) in duration and so you'll need to use Goldwave's zoom tool (view/zoom) to 'home in' on each click. The slider at the base of the window allows you to progress through the recording. Another useful feature in Goldwave is 'maximize volume'. This analyses recording and amplifies it so that it peaks at 0dB without clipping. After processing, save your work.



Above: Left and right channel waveforms Below left: Quality and duration Right: Zoom tool



MAKING THE DVD-A

4

DVD-A authoring was once the 'big-bucks' province of recording studios. However, a

company called Cirlinca sells its DVD-A Solo authoring package for a mere \$35 and a time-limited beta can be downloaded from its website (www.cirlinca.com). This programme is very simple to use, because it's so basic.

In other words, you won't get the 'polished' results of commercial high-resolution audio discs – DVD-A's only concession to fanciness is the ability to specify your own background image. Menu-navigation screens aren't supported either, so the tracks will have to be selected with your DVD-A player's 'skip' buttons, CD-style. But such simplicity doesn't, of course, detract from your enjoyment of the music!

Simply select the recorded/edited WAV files you want in the order in which they should be played, and DVD-A Solo does the rest. A standard (single-layer 4.7GB) DVD-A will accommodate over two hours, around three typical LPs-worth of material. Usefully, DVD-A Solo can also import and upconvert CD-quality formats, although this feature isn't required here.

The result can be written directly (burnt) to a blank DVD-R (from a compatibility standpoint, the best type of medium for this kind of application) or an ISO 'image' file for subsequent burning. These 'images', which can be retained on your hard drive for backup purposes, can easily be recorded to DVD-Rs by software like Ahead's Nero. And there you have it: high-resolution masters of your favourite LPs.



“Although most PC soundcards will capture audio from their analogue inputs, the quality is unlikely to be up to audiophile standards.”

active-speakers from analogue sources. On the rear panel is a pair of gold-plated phono inputs for analogue equipment ('fixed' to consumer levels) and inside, analogue-to-digital conversion takes place to Meridian's exacting standards. The £220 MPMMax

is also supplied with an audiophile-grade coax cable, which proves to be perfectly compatible with our soundcard. With your new equipment in place, all you need do is follow our four-step guide to home DVD-A recording. Enjoy. **HFC**

Martin Pipe



MEGALINE
EUPHONIA
· HELICON | 400 MK2
MENTOR
IKON
CONCEPT
SUBWOOFER



THE NEW DALI HELICON 400 MK2

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- Matched real wood veneer in high-gloss Rosewood or Cherry finish
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REVIEWS

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



EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion after a lively... through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snapper sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable fidelity and ease. It even seems to be

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

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> **84%**

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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



Boulder

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

3 INPUT THREE
VOLUME -57.5dB

865
INTEGRATED
AMPLIFIER

ONE TWO TUNING
THREE FIVE BALANCE AUTO

AMPLIFIER
INTEGRATED
865

VOLUME -57.5dB
3 INPUT THREE

ONE TWO TUNING
THREE FIVE BALANCE AUTO

A bolder Boulder

The new 865 is the first integrated from Boulder. It's also the most affordable in the range

PRODUCT Boulder 865

TYPE Integrated amplifier

PRICE £7,750

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x18.7x38.7cm

⊕ Weight: 23.6kg ⊕ Inputs: 4x XLR balanced

⊕ Outputs: 1x XLR balanced ⊕ Input naming, level setting and bypass mode

CONTACT ☎ 01435 867438 🌐 www.boulderamp.com

The 865 amplifier might be one of the most expensive ever to grace the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice*, but it's also the most affordable in the entire Boulder range.

To put this into perspective; Boulder's 'entry-level' 810 and 860 pre/power pairing retails for £11,400, while at the other end of the scale, the 2008 phono stage costs £22,000 and the 2050 monoblock power amps are £49,000 a pair! The 865 is, therefore, a keenly priced component in the general scheme of things.

While the 865 is still expensive, the fact that its design and construction comes from the same stable as the distinctly ultra-fi kit should be a definite advantage. The 810 preamplifier and 860 power amp mentioned earlier are the ingredients that go into making up the 865, which is why the integrated looks like a higher version of an 810. According to the company literature, the 865 can deliver 150 watts into both four and eight ohm loads. This is quite unusual for a solid-state design. As a rule, valve amps have the same power regardless of load and, up to a point, transistor designs increase output as impedance decreases – see our interview with Jeff Nelson on the next page for more on this subject.

As is nearly always the case with high-end American products, this is a fully balanced component. Where Boulder take this a step further is in the use of exclusively balanced XLR input and output sockets. If you have a source component that only has single-ended phono sockets you will need a cable that has XLRs at one end and phonos at the other, or a converter plug such as the Boulder ones that UK distributor Metropolis loaned us for this review. There are four inputs and one auxiliary output that can be used in a fixed or variable form. In other words, it can be an output to a recorder or processor, or to a second power amplifier for bi-amp operation.

Each input can be named, but the sheer range of characters including upper and lower case letters, numbers and an assortment of

'runes' and symbols, complicate the process somewhat. A list of these in the manual would have been useful.

Input gain can also be adjusted so that different sources can be matched as much as possible. Difference in recording levels tend to be the dominant factor, but older components

allows half-decibel increments in level via the large rotary on the amp, or the attractively curvy remote handset (which probably accounts for £250 of the retail price alone). The volume range goes from 0 to -100dB in half-decibel steps, but in practice, you are unlikely to need more than twenty per cent

“All Boulder amps include protective circuits. These are said to make Boulder power amps virtually indestructible.”

can have much lower output levels than modern ones. Integration with what Boulder calls 'home theater' [sic] is aided by a bypass mode that you can assign to an input from a multichannel processor. This uses the power amplifier side of the 865 to drive front left and right channels.

Boulder is unusual among the high-end companies for making extensive use of surface-mount components. These are chosen because Boulder considers them to sound better as a result of reduced capacitance and inductance: the fact that they don't have 'legs' in the same way that regular capacitors and resistors do, being a factor here.

A discrete-resistor stepped volume control, developed for the 2010 preamplifier (£30k),

of this, although this may vary according to speaker sensitivity. The switches on both amplifier and remote are interfaced with ball bearings, which is a neat, albeit expensive way of doing things.

All Boulder power amplifiers include circuits to protect against defective cables, damaged loudspeakers, crossovers, or 'operator error'. Designed not to activate unless absolutely necessary, these circuits in the 800 series are indicated by the amplifier muting for three seconds and then retrying for 1/10 second. There are no fuses and thus, theoretically, no user frustration – the circuit is designed to recover and allow you to go on listening. This feature is also said to make Boulder power amps virtually indestructible. ▶



Q&A

Boulder was founded in 1984 by Jeff Nelson, an electronics engineer with a background in professional audio and a reputation for his design skills. We spoke to Jeff about the 865 integrated amplifier...



HFC What prompted you to build an integrated amplifier?

JN For some time Boulder has recognised that there exists a certain kind of audiophile or music lover who prefers a one chassis solution. The Boulder 865 is the first time we have undertaken to put both preamplifier and power amplifier into one chassis. The advantages are less interconnect cables and a lower total price.

What differences are there between an 865 and an 810/860 pairing – apart from the separate casework?

The 810 preamplifier is a bit more comprehensive in that it includes a proper output stage capable of driving cables of any practical length. This is not necessary in the 865 Integrated. But otherwise, the audio path has the same design approach, and number of gain stages. The power amplifier section uses the same PCB, transistor complement and transformer as the 860 power amp.

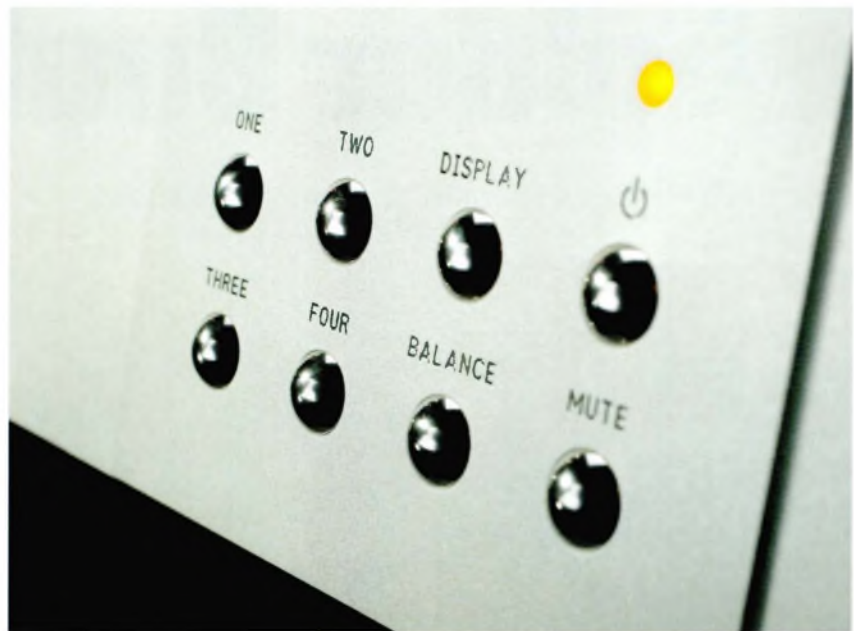
What is it that you do technologically that sets Boulder amplifiers apart from the competition?

I coordinate the responses of a wide variety of listeners with the knowledge I have gained over some 40 years designing audio circuits. Very few people have been able to devote so much time to theoretical design and the associated laboratory work necessary to gain sufficient knowledge to make a true contribution to the "state of the art." In other words, there aren't many experienced true analogue guys like me.

Our designs, even within the lower priced 800 series, include all the parts that I feel are absolutely necessary to do the job. Others touting "minimalist" designs are either penny pinching, or aren't sophisticated enough to know how to make it better.

In contrast to other solid-state manufacturers you quote the same output power for both four and eight ohm loads. Why is this?

Our power ratings are more honest and are used for the continuous power. Our data sheets also show short-term ratings (such as peaks in music or kick drums), which are mostly the doubled power we're used to seeing. This short-term rating is often presented as the "power rating" by some competitors



❑ SOUND QUALITY

We were surprised to find that we could hear the volume changing through the speakers. This is only apparent when there is no signal and is probably due to the design, but there is an audible clicking. Once you are in the zone, however, this becomes irrelevant as you don't need to change level that much (we stayed within 10dB for most of our listening). Metropolis lent our test team a pair of Boulder SE to balanced XLR converters so that our largely single-ended sources could be used. These plugs cost around £100 a pair, however, and the extra level and dynamics you get from a direct balanced connection would suggest that the 865 is best suited to all balanced systems.

Hooked up to the Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player and B&W 802D loudspeakers, the Boulder delivers phenomenal low-level resolution from our test discs. The new Manu Katché album *Playground* on ECM revealed extremely fine detail right down to the sax player's breathing. The sound is super-smooth, ultra refined and, perhaps, a little smooth at high frequencies. There is a noticeable loss of 'air' and sparkle in the uppermost registers,

which is surprising given that you can hear so much through the midband. It's possible that speaker cable choice might be an issue here, but when we asked Jeff Nelson what he recommends, his specification was almost an exact description of the Townshend DCT used.

The bass on the other hand, is remarkable in its extension and resolve. One male voice choir was utterly convincing, but Diana Krall's *All Or Nothing At All* reveals a small but clear shortage of snap: the track didn't really gel in timing terms, which is surprising given that the timing seems pretty decent, if not remarkable. The sheer detail on offer, though, is so strong, we are happy to let this pass. Unfortunately, when Rage Against the Machine hits the turntable, the situation became more problematic because the music didn't have the drive and energy that it usually does.

Naturally, it became necessary to find something suitably appropriate with which to compare the £7,750 Boulder. So we phoned B&W and requested a Classé CP-700 preamp and CA-2200 power amp, knowing from experience that this class-leading combination would work nicely as a reference. This pairing retails for £9,400 and needs an interconnect

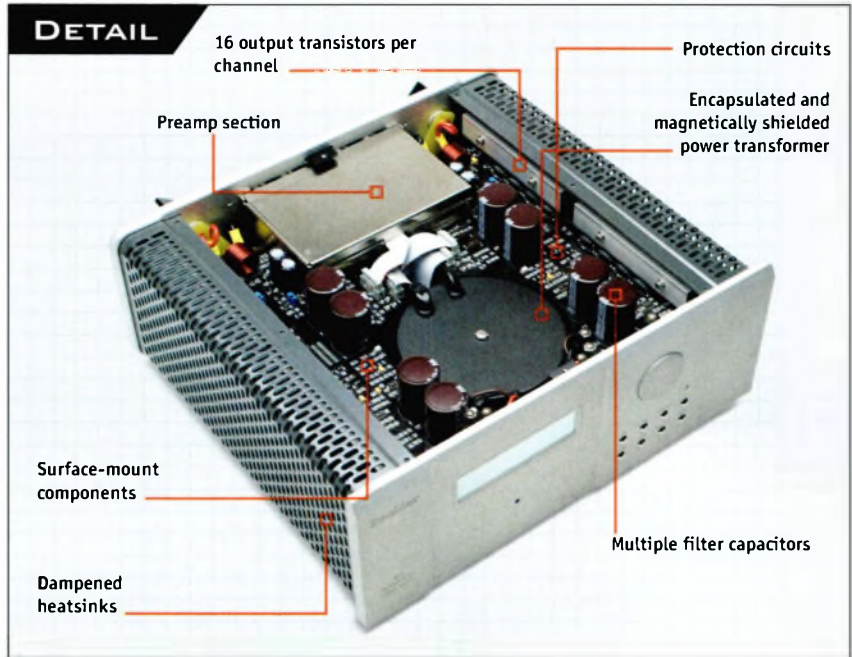




that warrants another £250 at least, so is clearly the next step up. This combo does not produce as smooth and creamy a midband as the 865, but it can deliver considerably greater energy and a more open top-end – check out the review of Rage Against the Machine's debut album in *Choice Cuts* on p26 and hopefully you'll get the picture.

We started to wonder whether the SE to XLR converter might be part of the problem and compared the sound of the two different connections from a Cairn Fog 3 CD player reviewed last month (*HFC* 302). With the levels matched, balanced connections are 6dB louder than single-ended ones. It was a close call, but the balanced option does get you that much closer to the music. This particular source is not well suited to the Boulder, however, because the combined sound is distinctly edgy. Which is okay with relaxed material whereby it adds electric realism, but with music that's already energised it's plain uncomfortable.

The energy factor is seemingly irrelevant when it comes to more relaxed music, which is delivered with such incredible transparency and delicacy that it brings a lump in your throat. Gillian Welch's *14th Day Of April Part One*, has the power to do this, which means that any system with this amp in has the potential to be great. Metropolis had also delivered a set of Hansen's The Knight



“The Boulder 865 is incredibly smooth and revealing. It may lack a little speed, but its resolving power is remarkable.”

loudspeakers for us to test drive with this amp. These £11,000 floorstanders produce a sound that's remarkably close to the larger 802Ds but have, perhaps, a little more swing, if less firepower. This similarity did not transform the Boulder into an amp to rock out with, rather it continued to revel in the incredible finesse and subtlety that it extracts from familiar records. We also tried some KSL SPC speaker cable to see if that would suit the amp's balance better and

found that it served to improve the realism of voices and acoustic instruments, the combination proving highly engaging with more intimate pieces.

The Boulder 865 is an incredibly smooth and revealing amplifier. It may lack a little speed, but its resolving power is quite remarkable. Head down to the superb dem-rooms at Metropolis and see if you agree. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 86% [Progress bar]	PRO Very high build quality and supremely confident, luxurious sound quality, beautiful remote, and plenty of power.
FEATURES >> 85% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 94% [Progress bar]	CON Only four inputs and they are balanced only. Lacks something in the energy retrieval department when faced with aggressive music.
VALUE >> 78% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
The 865 presents a smooth and seemingly transparent sound that does a remarkable job with relatively intimate music. It's timing and dynamics are not as good as its detail resolution, though, which remains its most alluring quality.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 85%

Reliable Source

MartinLogan's Source is its most affordable hybrid electrostatic to date

PRODUCT MartinLogan Source

TYPE Floorstanding hybrid electrostatic loudspeaker

PRICE £1,599 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 24x130x37cm

• Weight: 21.4kg • Rear vented two-way hybrid electrostatic/moving coil speaker • Impedance: 5 ohm (nominal) • Frequency response: 42Hz - 22kHz +/-3dB

CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.martinlogan.com

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Electrostatic speakers are generally costly, bulky and need lots of space. They are also known to have expensive tastes in partnering equipment and the MartinLogan's reviewed here are no exception. Fortunately, MartinLogan has been driving down the cost of its speakers for some time (including the entry-level models), which makes the Source the most affordable yet by a significant margin. And like any good electrostatic there is a certain magic – a transparency and sophistication, a cohesiveness that's in a class of its own. In fact, if you've never heard a properly set-up pair of electrostatic speakers, then you're missing out on something very special indeed.

The Source electrostatics have, to a large extent, been made possible by the development of hybrid technology, which in the early days was deservedly criticised for lack of integration between the moving coil bass driver(s) and the ELS panel, which took over in the lower midrange. Over the years, MartinLogan has spent a great deal of time and effort on the arcane art of marrying these two apparently irreconcilable technologies. Matters regarding integration can't be taken for granted and, for that reason alone, MartinLogan speakers are effectively seamless across the audio band.

And the reasons for the low entry-level price? Well for starters, the absence of voicing controls on the back panel, and the displacement of the power supply (necessary to energise the electrostatic panel – a requirement for any true electrostatic) which has been removed from inside the speaker, and now lives in a small box on the end of trailing leads. The bass unit – the hybrid part of the deal – has also been simplified, with a pulp cone instead of aluminium alloy, which means it costs less to build and is less demanding of partnering amplification. But, don't assume that a pulp cone will necessarily sound worse. As it happens, the unit in the Source is very well integrated into the fabric of the sound as a whole and is a very sensible choice.



The Source looks familiar enough and follows the pattern of other floorstanding MartinLogan speakers. It has clear visual and technical references back to the Summit electrostatic: the angular bass driver enclosure and the slimmed-down surround on the panel, which was introduced a few years ago and consequently set the pattern for most of the speakers that have followed.

One major difference from its immediate predecessor, the entry-level Clarity, (which actually cost considerably more than this model) is the removal of the bypassable moving coil tweeter. This supplemented the electrostatic panel with the aim of widening the vertical listening window. It was useful when listening to the speaker while standing (or partying!) or, when your ear level was too high-up to detect a properly balanced account of the music. Given the Source's £1,599 price tag, it was probably considered too expensive, although other measures may have been substituted to improve vertical dispersion. It doesn't, however, prevent a loss of presence in the upper mid and treble, particularly if you're walking around the room while they're playing. They are definitely directional on both the vertical axis and, to some extent, on the horizontal.

SOUND QUALITY

The Source may not be what it says on the tin, but by any of the usual measures, it is a 'proper' MartinLogan. It's a real thoroughbred: very neat and tidy with considerable refinement and polish and there are no gimmicks: not even in the supplementary moving coil tweeter mentioned above. Even by MartinLogan standards, the Source doesn't put too much of a sheen on proceedings. It is not a lush sounding speaker by any means, but anyone who has acquired a taste for the kind of qualities that MartinLogans bring to the



“MartinLogan has been driving down the cost of its speakers, which makes the Source the most affordable yet.”

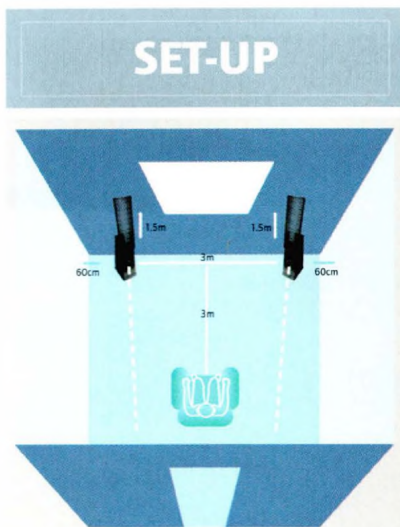
table will feel immediately at home here. It's a speaker with the unmistakable feel of a thoroughbred electrostatic.

It does, however, require careful running-in, which requires time and patience and low SPLs in the early days, until its find its feet. This is crucial, because at first, we found that the speakers paint the sonic picture in uneven lines, and at first, you too might find it too analytical for comfort.

But, once carefully run-in, the Source is pure MartinLogan quality. You will need to fine-tune the spacing to the back wall to find a comfortable volume level, though, (see Set-up, left). We tried the Source with a number of new amplifiers that were available to us. With the (digital) T+A Power Plant (see p56), the results were always on the wooden, hard-edged side of where we wanted to be. But with a more high-end solution, in the form of Denon's PMA-SA1 integrated amplifier, the

Source was better equipped to come on song.

While we have no proof, we have a strong feeling that the Source is not really an easy loudspeaker to drive. The impedance drops precipitously low at high frequencies and although it can't be drawing too much current at these frequencies, we doubt that MartinLogan's designers see their job as making life easy for amplifier designers! The Source needs a very clean sounding amplifier and one that's reasonably at ease with difficult loads. It could also benefit from a touch of valve like warmth, which will help to flesh out the midbass which can sound a little desiccated. MartinLogan's UK distributor, Absolute Sounds, could no doubt advise on suitable partnering amplification – it brings in Prima Luna, Krell and Audio Research amongst others. The Source is a true high-end speaker in everything but price, even if it does require a little molly-coddling as far as partnering. ▶



POSITIONING

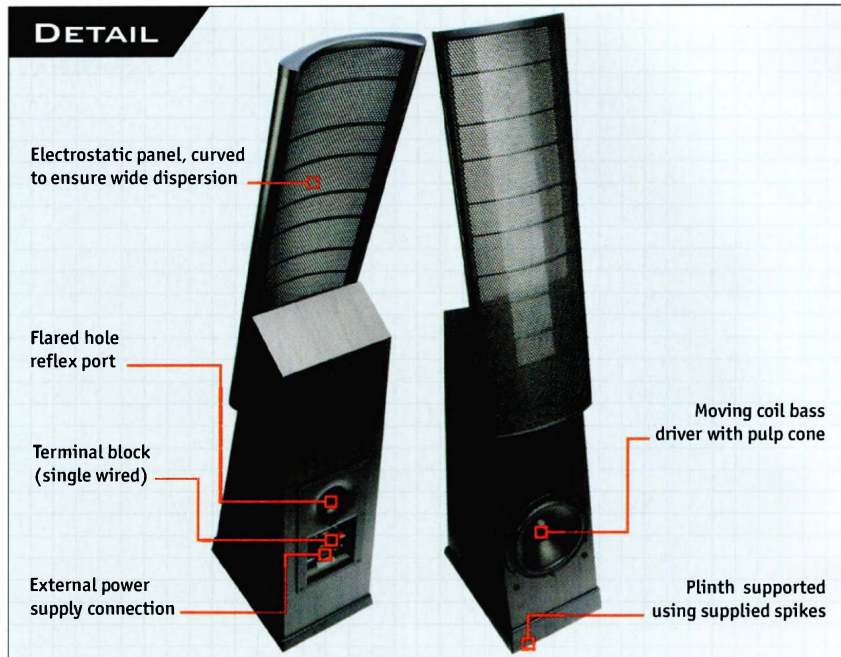
As always, you will have to allow for the way the Source talks to the room as a whole. This won't be too much of an issue if your room is long and relatively narrow. We arranged the speakers to fire from our room's narrow end down its length, well out from the back wall. Dipoles like The Source don't interact much with the side walls, so positioning can be close, but they do need space behind. In our room we were able to place them more than a metre and a half from the back wall.

But room integration could be an issue in shorter, squatter rooms, especially if this means they will end up close to the back wall. Be aware, however, that as much sound is radiated from the back of the electrostatic panel as from the front and is subsequently reflected by the wall.

The electrostatic panels, which generate almost all the midband, lean backwards at a fairly sharp angle (though some vertical re-orientation can be accommodated). And while this gives the sound stage some height, it only does so when the speakers are at a fair distance from the listening plane. Three metres is suggested.

SYSTEM MATCHING

Although the Source is not expensive, it has quite ambitious tastes in partnering equipment. One of its duties was to act as a sounding board for a new amplifier on test at the same time – the T+A Power Plant. Although the T+A had more than enough grunt on tap, it didn't quite cut it (see the review on p56). For reasons that must have something to do with resolving ability, the Source is unusually responsive to the sound of the electronics that are used in its company. For example, they're not especially current hungry, but they need high-quality amplification that is happy driving low impedance, high frequency loads, or they'll just sound ill at ease.



equipment is concerned. But proper running-in, an impeccable source component and some quality cables will help, too. And, if like this reviewer, you have a penchant for classical music, (or other well recorded acoustical material that needs a high-resolution system, and medium replay levels), then the Source is a must-hear loudspeaker. And at this new ground breaking price of £1,600 per pair, Martin Logan ownership is now in reach of almost everyone. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 93%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 89%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 90%



PRO

A real full size MartinLogan hybrid electrostatic for the lowest price ever, this newcomer is fully deserving of the best electronics and cabling you can afford

CON

Although it's affordable, it's not truly universal: you'll need plenty of space and good quality partnering equipment to get the best out of it.

CONCLUSION

Brilliant performance in the MartinLogan style, this newcomer offers tremendous resolution at a bargain price, but needs care in setting up and choice of partnering equipment. It also requires room to breathe, but for the money it's cracking value.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **90%**
OVERALL SCORE

amphion



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www.pmc-speakers.com/i-series





Music manager

Escent's Fireball music server/recorder can hold 1,500 hours of uncompressed audio

PRODUCT Escent Fireball SE500i

TYPE Music server/CD recorder

PRICE £1,200

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x11.5x29cm

● Weight: 4.5kg ● 500GB capacity ● Audio outputs: 1x RCA analogue ● Audio inputs: 1x optical digital; 1x RCA analogue ● Video: composite, SVCA, RGB ● Networking: Ethernet control, 2x RS232 inputs

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680023 🌐 www.escent.co.uk

It's a fair bet that in twenty years' time we'll look back and realise that, even by 2007, we'd hardly got the measure of the audio possibilities offered by music servers and the internet. Yet, we're more clued-up today than we were, say, five years ago and hardware manufacturers are starting to capitalise on it in mutually useful ways. Take the Fireball SE500i as a case in point. Escent calls it a 'Music Manager', which is not a bad description as it keeps copies of your CDs and, more importantly, keeps tabs on them, too. It also gives access to internet radio stations. It doesn't, however, allow you to download MP3 files from websites, although you can hook it up to your computer and copy over files downloaded on the latter.

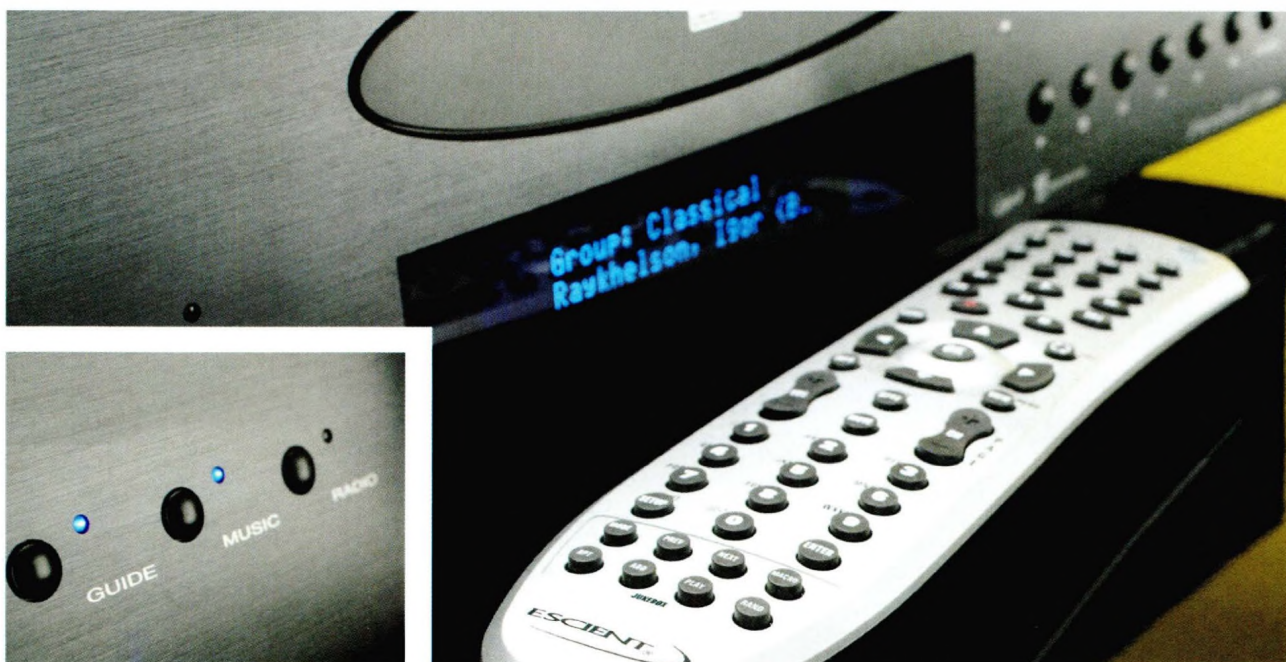
Keeping all your CDs in one place is not by any means a new concept. CD changers did the job a decade ago and since servers took over about five years ago, they've been getting bigger, better and more able to cope with large collections. The hard drive in this model is 500GB in size, which would work out at about 800 hours of audio in the CD format, but since Escent has built in FLAC encoding (the L stands for 'Lossless') there's more like 1,500 hours on offer, which will handle most collections. Of course, MP3 is available for even greater capacity, but we'll not dwell on that.

Internet radio is a bit more of a novelty and many folk will already have experimented with it via a home computer. What we really like about the Fireball, though, is the ease with which it accesses such services. Slightly nervously, we plugged in the unit, connected a TV borrowed from a neighbour (when Escent made this device entirely dependent on an external video display, they forgot that some people prefer to live without TV!) and connected the Ethernet cable to a BT Home Hub – most broadband modems connected to most ISPs should work perfectly well. About four clicks on the remote

control later and the Fireball was registering itself with the server and downloading a list of radio stations, making it absolutely no more of a headache to set up than a DAB tuner.

Ethernet also connects to a home computer allowing for an infinitely expandable network should the Fireball's 500GB prove insufficient. With a bit of free software from Escent's website you can use the Fireball to play music on the computer, but copying files to the Fireball is no sweat. Neither is loading CDs as there's a high-speed CD drive on the Fireball, which apart from playing discs allows very quick and easy copying to the hard drive. Naturally, this includes the Gracenote-derived information. Displaying the disc information and artwork on the video display is seamless thanks to the connection with the Gracenote online database – listing a surprising number of even quite obscure discs.

The first servers on the market with internet connectivity relied on dial-up, but applications like this really benefit from continuous broadband and the display will be showing full disc details in only about the same amount of time it takes some regular CD



“The internet radio can be quite addictive and fun to use, but from an audiophile perspective we have mixed feelings.”

players to load up a disc. It's possible to set the Fireball up so that discs are automatically loaded to the hard disc when they are inserted. This really minimises the pain of getting a collection transferred – just put in a new disc each time you walk past the machine! 'Ripping' time seems to be in the order of five or six minutes, which isn't quite as fast as the best computer drives, but is bearable. And yes, we did check that the audio extraction is bit-accurate. Reversing the process, the CD drive also writes discs and it's possible to make CD compilations of tracks on the hard drive.

SOUND QUALITY

How fussy can we be about sound quality? To some extent, the answer depends on the application. If the Fireball is going to feed a round-the-house music system from a cupboard under the stairs, maybe we shouldn't be too particular. Leaving aside the question of internet radio, which is the modern equivalent of medium wave because of its use of low bit-rates, there are basically two issues to address; sound from the CD drive and sound from the hard disc. In the case of the latter we're looking exclusively at FLAC-encoded material so, in principle, given the same bits are put out by each there should be little or no difference.

We were rather surprised, though, to find that hard disc sounded better than CD. Having checked that the settings



were all correct we ran a few lab tests to make sure we weren't imagining things and, sure enough, performance direct from CD really is quite shabby – by a considerable margin, the roughest we've seen for a long time. Perhaps, direct play from CD was only intended as a feature for occasional use or to check the disc about to be recorded. And what if you chose to make the Fireball the centre of a stereo system? Then you certainly won't want to record every disc you own.

Sound from the hard disc isn't brilliant either. It's not bad tonally, but detail definitely takes a beating compared with even very modest performing CD players, while bass is vague and treble rather coarse. There's a semblance of imaging, but it's not what we've come to expect from modern kit at any price.

There is a way of mitigating all this, and that's to use an external DAC. The digital output of the Fireball works just fine and when we connected up even quite a basic DAC, in the form of the monitor circuit of a MiniDisc recorder, the sound picked up no end. Going for broke and hooking up a dCS did indeed lift quality to full-on audiophile levels. But then the mechanical noise of the Fireball, which includes a fan as well as a hard disc, is a serious setback if the machine is in the same room as the loudspeakers. Incidentally, that fan is on

even when the player is in standby mode, and

draws a continuous 25 watts twenty-four hours a day unless the mains cord is removed. So it's not the most eco-friendly either!

The internet radio can be quite addictive and is a pleasure to use, but from an audiophile perspective we have mixed feelings. A decent audio output would have been possible without costing a fortune and quieter mechanical operation surely isn't beyond the company's capability either. The lone audio output, as noted, counts against installation duty and the TV/video display requirement makes that seem still less attractive. So what's the point? Pimped with a DAC and a sound-absorbent cabinet it looks much better, but the cost rises by a few hundred pounds. And as a last resort there's always a cheap laptop computer and a DAC. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND >> 60% [Progress bar]	PRO Vast internal disc capacity will swallow up most collections. Internet connection and on-screen display make operation simple, flexible and fun.
FEATURES >> 85% [Progress bar]	CON Compromised audio circuitry and mechanical noise make it a less than audiophile experience. Not likely to replace your CD player.
BUILD >> 80% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 78% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION:
In the 'toys for boys' category, this scores highly and ergonomically it's a mature example of its breed. However, it doesn't seem to fit happily into either installation or main hi-fi system duty and so we're left with doubts.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 75%



Winning formula

If you're quick, you can snap up this incredible Cambridge Audio/KEF system for £900!

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 740C, Cambridge Audio Azur 740A, KEF iQ7

TYPE CD player, amplifier and loudspeaker

PRICE £899

KEY FEATURES (Cambridge 740C) Size (WxHxD): 43x11 5x31 5cm • Weight: 6.4kg • 24-bit/384kHz upsampling • (Cambridge 740A) Size (WxHxD): 43x11 5x35cm • Weight: 10.7kg • Power output: 100w/8ohms • (KEF iQ7) Size (WxHxD): 22x86 5x32 7cm • Weight: 14.5kg • Sensitivity: 90dB

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000 • www.richersounds.co.uk

Combine a Cambridge Audio CD player and amplifier: Azur 740C and 740A, (both winners in *The Hi-Fi Awards 2007, HFC 300*) with a KEF speaker (iQ7) and you can expect to pay something in the region of fifteen hundred pounds. Alternatively, if you're quick, drop by your nearest Richer Sounds, sporting a copy of *Hi-Fi Choice* and the complete system can be yours for under £900. We first spotted this bargain last issue,

but the deal is still on (see details on p90). Both the 740C CD player and 740A amplifier come recommended from past tests. And as mentioned, both products have won awards, too: the former grabbing a Gold Award in the £500 to £1,000 CD player category, while the latter snatched a Silver Award in the same price bracket for amplifiers. Being a part of the Richer Sounds empire, the choice of Cambridge product makes a



great deal of sense. But the decision to include the KEF iQ7 speaker, instead of an in-house brand like Mordaunt-Short, is less obvious. According to Phil Jubb, a member of the company's purchasing team, "It's (KEF) an iconic speaker that we really like and it really works well with the Cambridge".

It also looks remarkably good for a simulated wood finish and is available in a range of colours including apple, black and walnut (pictured). All three are complemented with subtle badging and cable terminals. The tweeter on the Q series models sits in the midst of the midrange driver in a coaxial arrangement, that's designed to produce better imaging. The idea being that by having both drivers working from the same point source, it should mean the wavefronts they produce will be aligned. The only drawback with the arrangement is that the tweeter sits behind the midrange cone and thus aligning the two, time-wise, is a challenge for the engineer who only has a passive crossover to work with.

Cambridge's 740 series benefits from the work done on its flagship 840 series and offers many of the features found on the more expensive units, including LCD displays and, in the case of the amp, variable input gain. Recordings tend to vary in level rather more than source components usually do, unless you have an old tuner or tape deck. So it's not always possible to maintain consistent volume from source to source even with such a feature.

Given that both source and amplifier were designed and engineered by the same people, the chances are that they will have the same intrinsic character, strengths and weaknesses. So the key compatibility issue with this, and any system, is matching the amplifier to the speaker in terms of power availability from the amp, compared with the sensitivity of the speaker. Here we have a high-powered 100-watt amplifier and a high-sensitivity (90dB)

loudspeaker – a pairing which, on paper at least – looks very sensible indeed.

SOUND QUALITY

The Azur 740C is a lively and dynamic CD player with a good sense of timing, but is not, perhaps, the most refined in terms of balance. It has a surprisingly upfront and engaging sound and – in the context of this system –

backwards. Experimentation here is worthwhile and pulls the sound together to form a cohesive image with better tonal balance and considerably larger scale.

Under these circumstances, you can hear right into the mix and begin to appreciate the level of resolution. This extends to hearing pretty much everything, from the tap of fingers on a table to the snap of a snare drum. You

“Cambridge’s 740 series benefits from the work done on its 840 series and offers many features found on the more expensive units.”

does a great job of pulling you into the music. The Azur 740A backs this up with bags of power, which it delivers with remarkable ease.

The bass is taut and solid, so bass guitars, double basses and kick drums have real body and weight. In some other systems, the 740 amp can seem a little dry: its high frequencies lacking the fluency of some of its competitors, but in this particular Cambridge/KEF combo it doesn't appear to be the case.

The sound at first is a little on the small side, but this improved when we extended the spikes at the front of the speaker and tilted it

won't always be able to tell precisely how each instrument or voice has been recorded, but there's no missing the fundamentals. With a male choir piece, such as *Born in Bethlehem* by the Blind Boys of Alabama, you can easily appreciate the variety of voices in the mix, as well as the broad dynamics and timbral textures of the recording.

Tonally, it's not the sweetest of systems, something that with the better recordings firms up the leading edges and adds definition. But with more popular titles, the sound is slightly metallic and this can be a ▶



[Review] Cambridge Audio 740C/740A and KEF iQ7 system



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 740C

The latest CD player in the Azur range is based on its 840C sibling and incorporates the same 32-bit DSP (digital signal processing). It uses this to upsample the 16-bit/44.1kHz digital signal to 24-bit/384kHz for the purpose of employing a Bessel filter. Conversion to analogue is courtesy of dual Wolfson WM8740 DACs used in differential mode to minimise noise and maximise channel separation.

It has digital inputs and allows changes to word width (bits) and dither on the digital output, but this is only relevant when making digital recordings. The metal faced remote handset operates both the player and any Azur series amplifier, as well as offering basic iPod controls if a dock is connected up.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 740A

As with the 740C this amplifier benefits from the R&D that Cambridge put into the 840 series, thus you get the option of changing input names and adjusting the gain for each input in order to match level across different sources. It's specified to deliver 100 watts per channel and can accept up to six line level inputs as well as having support for multi-room integration. The volume/balance control uses a silicon gate rather than a potentiometer and level is indicated both with a large numeric display and a series of markers that form a semi-circle above the number.

KEF iQ7

This KEF floorstander matches the Cambridge electronics in the value for money stakes. An elegant boat tail cabinet that's finished in very convincing vinyl wrap veneer, contains a Uni-Q coaxial midrange and tweeter with a titanium coated 160mm cone and a 19mm aluminium high frequency dome, as well as a long-throw bass driver. Very saucy chrome plated bi-wire terminals come with proper cable links rather than the popular, but sonically degrading flat links. 8mm spikes help the bass driver to deliver plenty of grip and grunt. The MDF cabinet's shape is designed to kill internal standing waves in the back/front direction and substantial baffles keep the whole thing braced.



☑ shade fatiguing. Cabling proved to be the key here, our test DNM interconnect being one of those inexpensive cables that oddly works better with an 'expensive' system. Our Chord Chameleon cables took the edge off the midband further and delivering a more fulsome sound that suits rather well, even if it does take some of the edge off the timing.

This system's sense of timing allows everything it plays to have the requisite drive, however, whether it's simple singer/songwriter stuff like Gillian Welch, or full blown orchestral works such as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. It's not a quality to be underestimated either, as some pretty ambitiously priced equipment can also fall down here from time to time.

It is very hard to criticise this system given its

incredible asking price. If pushed, we would identify its limited ability to produce a concrete image. It's difficult to tell whether it's the speaker or the electronics that restricts the image depth, however. But in truth, asking for a walk-in soundstage is too much a demand at this price, a mere £900 for the whole system.

We mentioned earlier that the Azur 740A and iQ7 looked like a sensible match on paper, but this pairing would seem to extend beyond the merely technical to the musical. Combined with the 740C CD player, the system provokes a lively and dynamic sound that should have you on the edge of your seat. Snap it up and you'll be as pleased as punch. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%



FEATURES >> 90%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 98%



PRO

An impressive selection of quality kit for the money, features aplenty and well timed, wide band sound.

CON

Sound could be a little bigger, tending to be a shade too dry for some tastes. Setup also benefits from a low seating position for the best results. Smooth sounding cables are also an essential requirement.

CONCLUSION

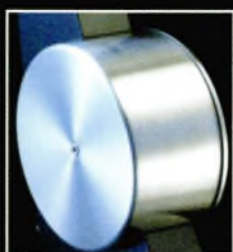
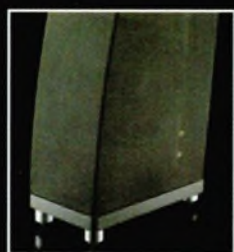
Richer Sounds consistently brings the best deals to the high street. But this one takes the biscuit, with electronics that are among the best in class and very capable speakers. Coupled with the limited period price tag, this is a definite winner.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **92%**
OVERALL SCORE

The new Reference 3 with CDT II™ Tweeter Technology

Anthony Gallo isn't one to follow the crowd, a characteristic he shares with the people who buy his loudspeakers.

His latest speaker design, the Reference 3, is rewriting the price versus performance equation. So much so in fact that influential U.S. publication *The Absolute Sound* have bestowed on it their ultimate honour - product of the year.



"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

www.anthonygallo.co.uk

tel. 0870 350 1348

nonconformist

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



That's the Spirit!

Pentode and triode operation are both available from this muscular, integrated amplifier from Austria

PRODUCT Ayon Spirit

TYPE Integrated valve amplifier

PRICE £1,745

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 46x26x40cm

• Weight: 29kg • Output power: 50 watts per channel

• Output impedance: four-ohm or eight-ohm

• Operating modes: Triode/Pentode

CONTACT ☎ 01435 867438 @ www.metropolis-music.co.uk

Ayon Audio might not be that well known to UK enthusiasts, but it's a situation that is sure to change. Brought into the UK by John Jeffries' Sussex-based distribution firm, Metropolis Music, Ayon is based in Gratkorn in the Styrian region of Austria, where it produces high-end valve amplifiers, cables, loudspeakers and a pair of CD players. As if that wasn't enough, the company even designs and manufactures its own valves. All of these products, according to Ayon, are designed to: "reward music lovers with an authentic and excitingly realistic reproduction of music as a real live event."

The new Ayon Spirit is an entry-level, four-input, integrated design that can operate in either Pentode or Triode mode thanks to a small rotary switch that nestles on the amplifier's

top-plate, between the valves and the shrouded transformers. The layout of the Spirit is delightfully straightforward. The fascia houses a volume knob, an infra-red eye for the remote control, a backlit logo that glows red when the amplifier is powered up and an input selector to choose between the four line-level inputs.

At the rear, you'll find RCA phono connectors for the inputs, two sets of chunky binding posts for four-ohm or eight-ohm speaker connections, trim pots and test points for setting the bias on the output valves, and the mains connector/switch alongside a phase-indicating lamp that illuminates to tell you whether your mains is wired with the correct polarity. Unless you are of a super-tweaky disposition, or have to change the valves without help from your dealer, you can safely ignore the trim pots and test points and simply plug your speaker cables and interconnects into the relevant orifices. The only concern will be whether to use the four- or eight-ohm sockets: if you are in any doubt, phone your dealer.

On top of the amplifier you'll find two shrouded output transformers flanking a similarly encased mains transformer and seven

exposed valves: a trio of 12AU7s and two pairs of KT88 output types. Apart from its substantial weight and bulk, the Spirit gives the impression of being very well built, no matter from which angle you assess it. Every part of its construction, is reassuringly solid and robust. If the Spirit were a 4WD vehicle it would definitely be a no-nonsense, farmer's Land Rover, rather than some prissy school-run special. Its 50-watt power output speaks volumes for this amplifier. In fact, that wouldn't be a shameful figure if this were a push-pull design, which it can be, but 50 watts is very respectable for a single-ended Triode.

SOUND QUALITY

To fully assess the Spirit's performance it was hooked it up to a Naim CDS CD player, with Chord Company Indigo interconnects and Signature bi-wire speaker cable to Neat Acoustics' Momentum 4i speakers. The Spirit happily drives these to the sort of listening levels we enjoy with enthusiasm and ease, even in its lower-powered, single-ended Triode mode.

Mind you, the Spirit does encourage you to listen to rather more thoughtful music than you might do under other (solid-state powered)



“This isn’t an amp for drum’n’bass fans because such music doesn’t really offer it appropriate scope for expression.”

circumstances. This certainly isn't an amplifier designed for drum'n'bass fan, for example. That's not because it can't handle the genre, but because such music doesn't really offer it appropriate scope for expression. We're not being snobby, simply pointing out that the range of musical 'colour' and expressive vocabulary that this amplifier is capable of delivering is wasted on music that doesn't properly exploit it.

The Spirit seems particularly enamoured with vocalists, especially female ones. A selection of our favourite female singers sounds particularly splendid through this amplifier, especially when it's in Triode operating mode, which seems to bring out the subtlest qualities in their voices. The way in which Christine Collister or Pat Mears can dig into the lower, almost masculine registers of their ranges, yet retain the obvious femininity in their voices is particularly rewarding, while it simply adores Nancy Griffiths.

Similarly, the male voice also relishes Triode operation. The Spirit, despite its Austrian origins, does a superb job of unravelling Christy Moore's often convoluted Irish lyricism and Dr John's lazy Louisiana drawl, rendering both with the utmost clarity and expressive feeling.

Switching to Pentode mode does seem to benefit some music. The aforementioned D'n'B has more punch and rhythmic impetus, as does Rage Against The Machine, where the percussion and bass guitar have more overt snap and leading edge impact. Nonetheless, in Triode

mode it is far clearer how, for example, Tom Morello is extracting the weird and wonderful tones from his guitar.

Ultimately, Triode operation beats Pentode into a cocked hat with all musical genres. The slight lessening of rhythmic snap and impetus, along with the reduction in volume, is a small price to pay for the enhanced exposition of timbre, tonality and three-dimensionality that is so evident on vocals and all instruments.

The amplifier really shifts up a gear when presented with the John McLaughlin Trio recording *Live at The Rcyal Festival Hall*, which it savours for its mix of vibrant acoustic guitar, sonorous electric bass and Trilok Gurtu's dazzling array of percussion. It portrays this last element with an appropriately deft mix of delicacy and dynamics to complement McLaughlin's nimble guitar play and Kai Eckhardt's fluid bass-lines.

And therein lie the strengths and weaknesses of the Spirit. It isn't the ultimate pace, rhythm, and timing machine (understandably, it can't match our solid-state reference amps), but it is exceptionally and delightfully revealing of timbre, tonality and small dynamic shifts. And especially with voices, that can be truly captivating. If you're keen on stereo imagery you'll find much to like here, too. The Spirit

creates a broad and deep soundstage with sympathetically recorded material, and its dynamic capabilities generate tangible atmosphere

through picking up on reverberation and the subtlest of spatial clues. The same ability also makes light work of discriminating between period and modern orchestral instrumentation. Interestingly, the Spirit also seems to time more insistently with classical recordings than it does with rock, such that its musical presentation is on a par with the more cosmetic aspects.

In fact, the only question we really can't answer is why Ayon bothered with the Triode/Pentode switching when the single-ended mode sounds so superior to the push-pull alternative. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward



VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%



FEATURES >> 85%



BUILD >> 90%



VALUE >> 85%



PRO

Triode mode is a timbre-lover's dream, especially when coupled with silken, folksy female vocalists.

CON

One has to wonder why Ayon bothered equipping the Spirit with Pentode operation, when the alternative Triode mode clearly outperforms it.

CONCLUSION

If you're after the finest in pace, rhythm and timing you might prefer to look elsewhere. However, if you're seeking a bargain-priced slice of subtle, single-ended Triode magic, then look no further.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 85%



How the new 550K Supercharger from Musical Fidelity turns most hi-fi systems into 550w dynamic power houses.

The new 550K Supercharger is a low gain power amp that is connected to the system just before the loudspeakers.

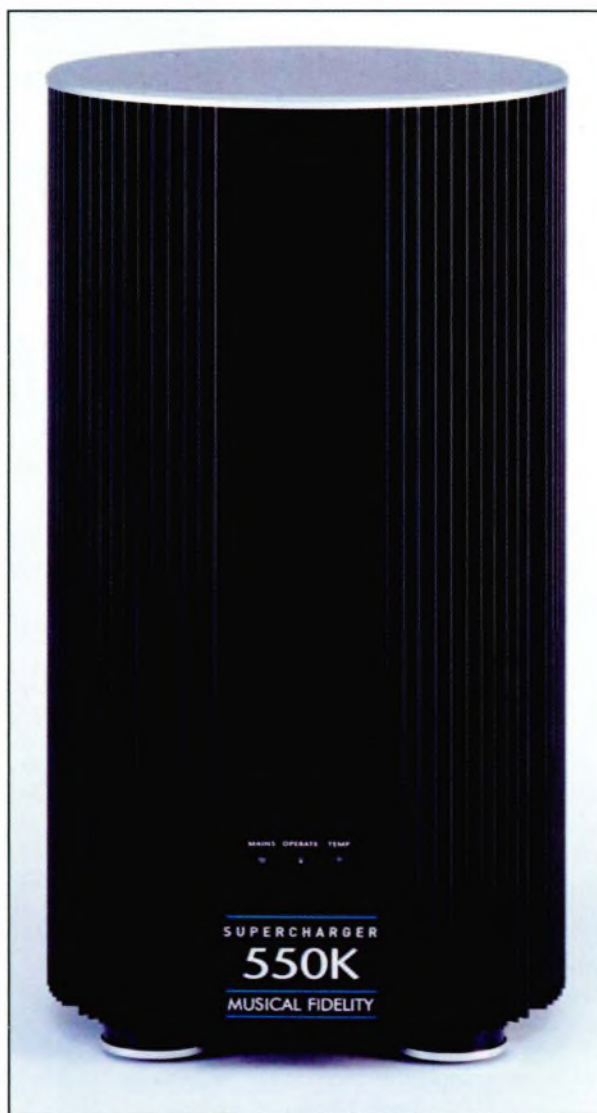
Used in a system with an amp rated between 50 and 200 watts, it will increase its power to 550 watts, and improve the system almost beyond recognition.

It dramatically increases dynamic range and enables the amplifier already in the system to function perfectly.

The 550K turns even a modest integrated amp into a state-of-the-art amplification system.

It works with any make of amp, and it works with valve amps, transistor amps and hybrids.

Visit musicalfidelity.com to find out more about the 550K Supercharger, or contact your audio dealer for an audition.



MUSICAL FIDELITY

Hearing is believing.



Cambridge Pro-Ject

Cambridge Audio's first turntable joins its extensive electronics portfolio

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio TT50

TYPE Turntable, arm & cartridge

PRICE £350

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000 # www.cambridgeaudio.com

Back in the late 1980s, the demise of vinyl was being widely predicted by both the specialist and mainstream press. Since then, however, things have actually improved for hi-fi's most enduring format. And now even Cambridge Audio – a brand that has never graced a turntable fascia throughout its 40-year history – has launched a turntable.

The TT50 is actually built for Cambridge by budget turntable specialist Pro-Ject and bears more than a passing resemblance to the firm's Expression model. There are a few significant differences, though, such as a platter that's covered with what Cambridge describes as elastomer coated acrylic – a combination that's claimed to be impedance-matched to vinyl in acoustic terms, with extremely low resonance. We've heard other brands make the same claim for plain acrylic, but this certainly feels substantial in hardness terms, at least.

The turntable has an alloy tonearm with integral headshell and magnetic anti-skate bias adjustment, which is neater than a thread and weight and also easier to set up. It is also

supplied with an Audio Technica AT95E cartridge. The subplatter is said to be mass loaded for speed stability, and the motor is hung on rubber in the traditional Pro-Ject style.

One strange omission is an arm lead – there are phono sockets under the armbase and an earth lead in the box, but no interconnect. This seems a bit cheap given the cost of the package. The plinth is MDF with a high-gloss finish and the on/off switch is hidden under its front edge. Both RPM speeds are catered for, but require platter removal to make a change.

PERFORMANCE

With The Chord Company Chameleon Silver Plus interconnects, the deck is highly engaging and entertaining: the TT50 has great timing and reasonably good bandwidth, too. Bass is a little on the soft side, though, and there's also a slight softness to leading edges across the band (presumably related to the choice of cartridge), but this seemed to improve with run-in and didn't get in the way of timing. Next to a Pro-Ject Expression II it seems to track crescendos rather better, but lacks the bass definition offered by its Ortofon-cartridge-equipped competitor. Even when using the same Chord cable with both decks, the TT50 has the upper hand in terms of solidity.

A well established reference, the original

Rega P3 (with Elys cartridge and arm lead), gives it rather more cause for concern and delivers a stronger overall sound with better dynamics and more precision. The Cambridge offers up its great sense of musicality, but the presentation is cruder, compared to the Rega P3. The TT50 is an attractive and entertaining turntable there's no doubt. Yet, compared to Rega's excellent original P3 (£298) and the £250 Pro-Ject (now called the Expression III at £325), it does fall down on value. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%



FEATURES >> 80%



BUILD >> 80%



VALUE >> 75%



PRO

Made in the Czech Republic, the TT50 is both stylishly finished and sonically engaging, with hours of vinyl thrills guaranteed.

CON

The lack of an interconnect and the price undermine its competitiveness against more established contenders such as the Pro-Ject's £325 Expression III.

CONCLUSION

The Cambridge TT50 is a good looking and highly enjoyable turntable that, unfortunately, is scuppered by the lack of an arm lead in the box and the quality of the competition at this price point.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> **79%**



T+A+digital

T+A breaks new price ground with its most affordable amp yet

PRODUCT T+A Power Plant

TYPE Integrated amplifier

PRICE £1,100

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x12x39cm

• Weight: 13.0kg • Rated power: 140 Watts (eight ohms)

• Inputs: five line level plus tape monitor

• Optional plug-in MM and MC boards • Outputs: preamp and headphone

• RS232 control interface

CONTACT ☎ 01623 517000 • www.taelektroakustik.de

Of conventional proportions, the Power Plant is not as slim or as button bound as most T+A components and is a little friendlier too, thanks to its smoothly rounded edges. Internally, the main feature of note is the use of a switch-mode PWM output stage, apparently of some sophistication and of proprietary design. The output stage is based on the 'valve-based' design of the power amplifiers in T+A's TCI active loudspeakers.

In T+A's own words, "the preamp section of the power plant has the same circuit as the R-series preamp P1230R and the PA1230/1530 integrated amps."

According to the literature, it also has a high-quality four fold ALPS motorised potentiometer for volume control and – as with all its amps –

hermetically sealed gold contact relays. "The power amp section does not use integrated 'off-the-shelf' IC-amps or the widely used B&O ICE-power based modules. The amp consists of a PWM modulator built around an Analog Devices AD 829 op-amp. PWM output signals drive the current (up to 50 Amps) output section which is equipped with latest generation high-speed IRFB4020MOSFETs. The power supply is an analogue design based on a big-shielded high power toroidal transformer, with high capacity low impedance smoothing capacitors".

T+A goes on to say that the switch-mode output stages generate the output signal as a large number of very short positive and negative signals. "Our new switch-mode output stages have been developed entirely in-house and include output stages of discrete construction, equipped with the latest, ultra-fast MOSFET transistors and high-power intelligent driver modules. The modulator is analogue, although the output stages feature analogue feedback circuitry designed to compensate for the effects of voltage fluctuations in the mains section, as

eliminating the power supply induced signal distortion is otherwise unavoidable."

T+A claims that this is not universal in switch-mode designs, however, the level of feedback is relatively low and is frequency-dependent, being more pronounced in the bass range where high currents flow and diminishing higher up the frequency band. The result is said to be a highly controlled, harmonious sound image which never tends towards harshness, with well defined and perfectly contoured bass. "The enormously lively nature and musicality of this concept is unique. If correctly designed, digital output stages can sound superb as well as generating enormous power, with significantly reduced losses and low levels of waste heat." As input impedance of the amp is a lowish 20k ohms, it's advisable to avoid high impedance sources.

The Power Plant is equipped with a bypassable tone control stage, though the loudness stage cannot be entirely removed from the circuit. It comes as standard with an infra red receiver, but no remote control is supplied. If you happen to end up with a matching CD player or music player, the



“An amplifier with its own personality, that’s subtly different from all the other amplifiers that we’ve tested.”

remote control supplied with it will also control the Power Plant. As an alternative, you can buy a remote control handset for use with the Power Plant as an accessory.

SOUND QUALITY

Listening to the Power Plant is, at times, a dispiriting experience and it quickly becomes apparent that it provides new and, for those weaned on traditional analogue amplification, a rather different set of priorities. Unfamiliar priorities, which cast musical values in a slightly different perspective. This reviewer yields to few, in respect for and liking of T+A’s previous products and for the innovative nature of many of them. But there is little beyond the clearly excellent engineering on what is, after all, a mainstream price amplifier.

The mental picture we developed of the T+A, apart from the fact that it is an attractive package, is that it’s easy to control and has plenty of power on tap. An amplifier with its own personality, that’s subtly different from all the other amplifiers that we’ve tested. Driving a pair of MartinLogan Source electrostatic hybrids (also reviewed this issue on p42) is a frustrating experience, with a sound that initially seems to be slightly unsettled, lacking in air and dynamics and with what is best described as a distinctly wooden feel. But it is also apparent that sound quality varied alarmingly with different sources, speakers and cables and

there were indications that the quality of the source disc player was reproduced through the speakers in a rather unfamiliar way. Luckily, the tone controls can be bypassed, which is just as well as this amp is far from transparent.

Using Denon’s high-end DCD-SA1 SACD player, a recording on CD of Mozart’s *Piano concertos 212/23* (Andras Schiff, Sandor Vegh, Camerata Academica des Mozarteums Salzburg) sounded unexpectedly mechanical and coarse-set, lacking in expression and life and with complex passages sounding smeared. Switching to an SACD recording of Bruckner’s *6th Symphony* (Gunter Wand/Berlin Philharmonic), the woodenness evaporated and the results were generally better, though this was not always the case when using lesser SACD players (in one instance, an old universal player from Pioneer which sounded uncomfortable with the same range of discs).

Again, the expected air and grace and the sense of being there, was muted. More correctly, simple recordings of single instruments or voices (a recently disinterred copy of Suzanne Vega’s *Solitude Standing*) sounded close to compelling, with strong presence and capella, but the same qualities were not retained when the music became more densely scored and complex. Here the music sound hardened and lost impetus, sounding more like a compact disc. Perhaps it

is users of this kind of hardware who would be most attracted to what

this amplifier has on offer, but for this listener, the Power Plant just doesn’t have the expressiveness, subtlety and resolving ability and the good audio manners necessary to make the grade.

Above all, this is a well engineered amplifier and it is certainly well specified. It is true to the brand’s innovative approach to engineering. Flexibility is also assured by the ability to add MM or MC stepups internally, with adjustable loading parameters and the ability to be reprogrammed by software updates. But, we are not convinced by this example of PWM-based amplification and this applies, to a greater or lesser extent, to most (but not quite all) of the switch-mode amplifiers this reviewer has been exposed to in recent months. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 75% [Progress bar]	PRO All the practicality of a PWM switch-mode output stage. Married to a high-capacity analogue power supply, it has plenty of power and a well balanced sound.
FEATURES >> 80% [Progress bar]	CON Loudness control cannot be bypassed, though it can be set to ‘flat’. Luckily the tone controls don’t fall in this trap.
BUILD >> 90% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 83% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
By linear amplifier standards, this PWM design will take some accommodating. It’s rather flat, with a dynamically inconsistent sound quality. Not unlikeable, but neither is this an audiophile design in our view.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 78%



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HEY DUSTBALL,
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ABOUT THE AMAZING
POTENTIAL THE PS3
HAS OPENED UP FOR
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THE CONNECTIVITY OF
THE TWO CONSOLES
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YOUR PSP WITH YOU,
YOU CAN STREAM ANY
NUMBER OF THINGS,
LIKE MOVIES,
PHOTOS OR MUSIC,
THAT HAVE BEEN
STORED ON YOUR
PS3 AND VIEW THEM
OR LISTEN TO THEM
ON YOUR PSP WHICH
MEANS YOU ARE NO
LONGER LIMITED TO
THE CAPACITY OF THE
MEMORY STICK TO
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Mains event

PS Audio's £1,000 mains conditioner improves upmarket systems

PRODUCT PS Audio Power Center Quintessence

TYPE Mains conditioner

PRICE £999

CONTACT ☎ 020 8480 3333 🌐 www.psaudio.com

PS Audio has a long history with mains filtering and conditioning, and was one of the world's first companies to market a complete mains regenerator (which it sells for £1,700). The Quintessence, tested here, is the company's top-of-the-range filtration product. A substantial unit – similar in size and weight to some of the chunkier amplifiers – it features five mains outlets, plus phone and TV aerial input and output sockets. These are fitted with voltage surge protection, principally aimed at reducing possible lightning damage.

Surprisingly, the Quintessence has a front-panel display. It shows the current mains voltage and distortion: not that the unit can do anything much about either, but it's interesting to find these things out. In fact, PS Audio is proud that the Quintessence does the least possible to the mains voltage thanks to its low internal losses at 50Hz. It uses 'Nano Crystalline' materials for high-value inductors. According to PSA this leads to unprecedented amounts of filtering – as low as 7kHz without any unwanted intrusion into the mains voltage and impedance at frequencies

up to a few hundred Hz. As we were able to observe, it does minutely reduce distortion by reducing the level of some very high mains harmonics. Each output socket is isolated from the others in a similar manner to that of the Isotek Sigmas – its nearest direct competitor.

In a nice touch, PSA has added the option of 'always on', 'switched' or 'delayed switched' operation to the sockets, in three groups (2+2+1). In this way, the front-panel switch or the remote control can activate an entire audio or home cinema system in sequence. Construction is beyond reproach, the rugged case being held together by numerous screws.

SOUND QUALITY

The effect of mains products is often more pronounced with upmarket equipment. With big budgets, manufacturers can come up with hi-fi components that are less prone to mains disturbance. And the refined sound of systems like the Quintessence makes it relatively easy to hear subtle improvements.

Typically, its areas of excellence are in the 'darkness' of the background and the precision of high treble. However, the two can easily make delicate treble details sound imprecise. With some (but not all) source components we also found a small improvement in bass tightness. This was most noticeable when we used the

Quintessence with an open-reel tape deck. The cheaper systems also had slightly better imaging depth than before: the high-end kit was much better at that in the first place!

It's a little frustrating that no one filter we've tried, at this price, does everything. This has a quantitatively similar effect to the Isotek and other models we've tried, but is qualitatively rather different. Maybe the even dearer models fit it all in, but this is a highly capable product which we are happy to recommend. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%



FEATURES >> 90%



BUILD >> 95%



VALUE >> 84%



CONCLUSION

Although it works well with cheaper kit, this would still struggle to be a cost-effective upgrade in that context. Its real home is with high-end systems, where its subtle improvements remain worthwhile.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **85%**
OVERALL SCORE

Chord Company Crimson

TYPE Analogue stereo interconnect

PRICE £38 (1m)

CONTACT ☎ 01980 625700 🌐 www.chord.co.uk

The Chord Company has been in the audio business for a very long time and has built up a substantial range of cables. The recent launch of Chord's current entry-level offering, gives a chance to revisit the portfolio. It's a harmless-looking product, actually not quite crimson in colour, of modest size and good flexibility, fitted as standard with good-quality phono plugs, although other terminations (minijack etc.) are also available. Construction is pseudo-balanced – two conductors twisted together, live and earth, with the screen connected to ground only at one end – which can make performance directional in some installations. Directivity isn't marked explicitly, but we adopted the usual convention of the signal following the direction of the text printed on the jacket.

Expectations of a cable at this price may not be particularly high, but we were pleasantly surprised by the attainments of this model. It's very much an all-rounder, with good detail, firm and extended bass and clear treble and



should have no trouble persuading the doubter to upgrade from giveaway cables. It does have a particular speciality, though, in the delicacy of acoustic decay, something that occasionally evades even quite upmarket cables. Here it is very well preserved, which is quite an achievement. Tonally there's a trace of lower-midrange lift which slightly affects male voices and lower melody instruments, but it's nothing serious. A good first upgrade cable, well suited to decent budget systems. **HFC**

VERDICT

CONCLUSION
For the modest money, this is a very capable cable which has no serious vices and offers high-end performance.

HI-FI CHOICE
>>> **85%**

IMP Audio Black Knight Interconnector 1

TYPE Analogue stereo interconnect

PRICE £55 (1m)

CONTACT ☎ 01525 376066 🌐 www.impaudio.co.uk

IMP Audio specialises in cables and supports, offering an attractively priced range in which this is a middling model. It's of interest, not least because it is one of the cheapest cables on the market to use the controversial Eichmann 'Bullet Plug' phono connectors. After over two decades of arguing, audiophiles seem no closer to agreeing on the relative importance of cable and plugs, but our feeling is that plugs certainly play a part. Where most phono plugs have solid metal centre and screen contact parts, the Eichmanns have a plastic body with only a thin, gold-plated, metal rod which contacts the screen part of the socket. This is claimed to avoid problems with randomly circulating currents in conventional connectors, though on the debit side it may in principle leave the connector more open to interference. At any rate the assembly guarantees a tight fit which doesn't seem to loosen over time. The wire itself is copper, double screened, and is remarkably flexible.



We had good results in some areas with this cable, though it seemed a little fussy regarding application, working better with some sources than others. Perhaps not by coincidence, it was happiest with a couple of moderately upmarket CD players, where its notably fine bass was used to best effect. Treble is a little less assured, seeming just a touch closed in and tight, while midrange is clear but lacking the last word in stereo image depth. As often happens, that combination suits some music better than others; we thought in this case jazz was a good match. **HFC**

VERDICT

CONCLUSION
One of the best performances in the bass department under £100, but midrange and treble are not quite as fine.

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

Nordost Wyrewizard Dreamcaster

TYPE Analogue stereo interconnect

PRICE £95 (1m)

CONTACT ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.nordost.com

Nordost's reputation was built on the company's distinctive flat cables, but that construction was never well suited to budget products and the 'Wyrewizard' models use more familiar outlines. Still, at least one classic Nordost feature remains in the use of multiple (four, actually) individually insulated conductors, twisted together under the braided screen. Insulation is FEP and conductors are silver plated, as is some of the screen. We can't help but wonder if some of the screen is left unplated as much for visual effect as for any electrical reason, as it does look very pretty! The overall diameter is only a little over 4mm but the cable is relatively rigid and the long length of heatshrink sleeving used at the rear of each plug does mean that a good three inches is needed behind equipment if cables are not to be forced round corners.

This seems to be another cable that's good at bass, with not only excellent extension but also real precision and control. It's not quite as tuneful as we've heard from a few high-end



interconnects, but it comes close. It's particularly good at stereo imaging, which is excellent in both dimensions. Definition in the depth direction is almost as good as it gets at any kind of sensible price, while ultimate extension is also admirable.

In the treble, there's just a trace of 'feathery' quality to the highest reaches (a slight lack of control) which principally affects close-miked recordings with too much energy.

Midrange tonality is pretty even, perhaps a trifle lifted in the high mid/low treble. On the whole, this is a cable that tells it like it is. **HFC**

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

Apart from a slight lack of precision in the top octave, this is a very detailed and neutral cable.

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

Townshend Audio Isolda DCT100

TYPE Analogue stereo interconnect

PRICE £99 (0.8m)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8979 2155 🌐 www.townshendaudio.com

The original Isolda used to be a vast and unwieldy speaker cable. Thankfully, Townshend cables have become more practical, so this wire won't raise many eyebrows. It's still unconventional inside, though, using flat strip conductors rather than the almost universal stranded wire. In Townshend's current speaker cables, a similar material is used to minimise inductance, but here another consideration is paramount. As Townshend explains, the thin strip has minimal contact with the insulating tube in which it is inserted, resulting in a dielectric which is mostly air. The tube (PVC) is still part of the equation and the cable does have relatively high capacitance as a result of the construction, but we see the point. There's an overall jacket of nylon braid but no screen, which we couldn't convince ourselves was a problem in practice.

There's no denying that this cable has a presentation all of its own. The bass is strong and clear, midrange is largely neutral (maybe



just a touch boosted in the bottom half), but treble has a rather special quality which seems to be something more subtle than simple rolloff, though the word 'mellow' does come to mind in some music. However, when real incisiveness is required it's there, suggesting that there's little or no actual attenuation of treble (nor could we measure any in typical applications). Rather, there's a smooth and luxurious quality to it which we like. We also liked the excellent detail and imaging, both at the forefront of affordable cable performance. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

CONCLUSION

A silky-smooth treble, with remarkably good detail attached, while midrange and bass are just as good.

HI-FI CHOICE
 >> **89%**

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

AMPS: 1 OR 2?

Thinking of buying a new amp? Three integrations challenge three hot pre/powers...

ON TEST



Arcam DiVA A90
£850



Consonance Tristan
£995



Flying Mole CA-S10
£995



Musical Fidelity X-T100/Triple-X170
£1,100



Rega Cursa 3/Maia 3
£1,546



Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1
£1,198

We've opted for a wider price range among the amplifiers on test this month. This is largely due to what's available at the £1,000 mark. Here, upmarket integrated amps start to give way to cheaper pre/power combinations, but the latter generally cost a bit more to put together, so there's usually a price gap in the majority of manufacturers' product ranges around that figure.

Even at a higher price, pre/power systems can end up being better value than an integrated because of the easier upgrade path. Then again, most modern integrated amps can also be used as a preamp, or beefed up with an additional power amp for bi-amping. It can look like a bit of a minefield if one wants to ensure that a purchase is 'future-proofed', but in the end the only sensible way to proceed is to buy something that suits you now and not worry about the future. In this regard, hi-fi is far less frustrating than computers, which are usually out of date the day after they're commissioned!

Most people who are planning to spend £1,000 on a new amplifier will be doing so as a means of upgrading their system. They will also probably have a fairly high expectation of what to expect for their money. Yet, for the budget-conscious there's also a large number of amplifiers available under the thousand-pound mark (including the Arcam DiVA A90 in this month's group test). It will be interesting to see how well it competes against the more expensive amps on offer. But go any further down the price scale and all notions of an 'upgrade' become academic. In fact, there really

ought to be more high-end virtues in the mid-priced amplifier range. It's an expectation that's in line with our long experience of what's available at various prices.

We weren't so fussy a few years ago, but manufacturers are now building more amplifier for less money. That's primarily down to a combination of cunning design and cost reductions in manufacture; everything from more highly automated production processes to full-scale offshore assembly. In the following pages you'll find out how we got on with some of the latest entries in this highly competitive market. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Pioneer PDR-609 CD recorder (as CD transport)
- ⊕ dCS Elgar D/A converter
- ⊕ Chord DAC64
- ⊕ Wireworld, Audioquest, Kimber and Bespoke Audio cables

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- ⊕ Miles Davis *Kind of Blue*
- ⊕ Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*
- ⊕ Grainger *Shepherd's Hey*

EARS USED

- Yet again, we are immensely grateful to the kind souls from within the industry who gladly come and listen, 'blind', to the amplifiers with the benefit of their highly-trained ears, tempted by nothing more than cake and coffee – this time round we thank:
- ⊕ Phil Hansen (Red Sheep Marketing)
 - ⊕ Steve Harris (Audioplus)
 - ⊕ Geoff Meads (Arcam)



LISTENING TESTS

In classic *HFC* fashion, the centrepiece of the listening was a 'blind' presentation of each amp to a panel of expert listeners, in an attempt to remain free of prejudices and preconceptions. Listening levels were accurately matched and the same programme of music was played through each amp with minimal distractions. In addition, each amp was auditioned separately, in order to get the fullest picture of its performance profile.

LAB TESTS

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

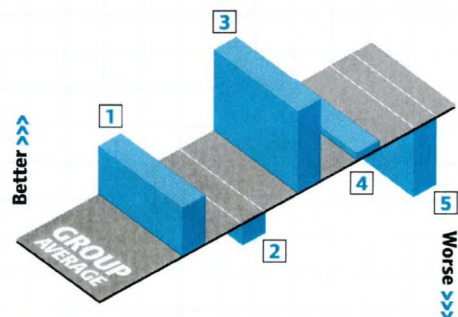
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average: higher percentage means better performance (e.g. lower distortion, lower noise, flatter response). In this case, the parameters are:

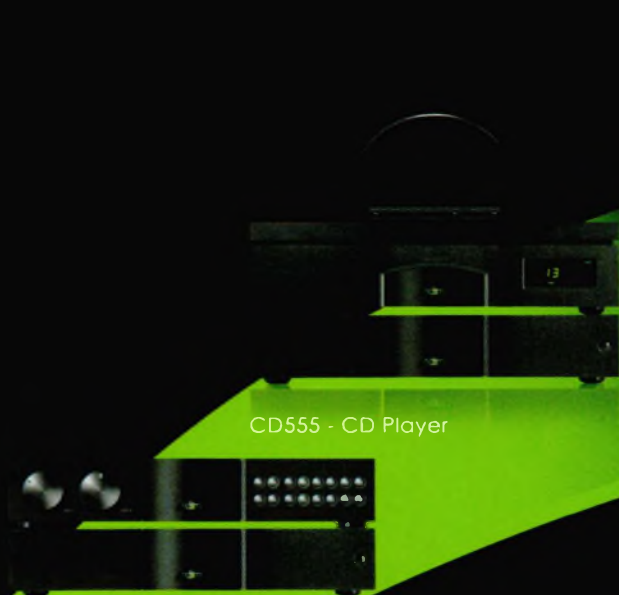
- 1) Dynamic power:** This reflects an aggregate of continuous and peak (instantaneous) power, giving an indication of power available under realistic conditions.
- 2) Frequency response:** This is a measure of precisely how smooth and linear the frequency response is within (and a little beyond) the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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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ARCAM DIVA A90

Keenly priced amp that gives the competition a run for its money

It's a pleasure to welcome back an old favourite, the Diva A90; a member of Arcam's 'Digitally integrated Video and Audio' range. Mention of video may already have some diehard stereoheads preparing to run for the hills, but fear not, as the multi-channel features are all part of an optional extra – an add-on that gives you multiple input and output channels.

The A90 is a stereo piece of kit, in many ways a typical line-level integrated with seven inputs, preout, twin speaker terminals and so on. Like many of its ilk, it offers a phono stage as an optional extra, in this case without losing a line input as the requisite socket occupies an otherwise blanked hole. There are two 'tape' recorder outputs and a rear-panel switch that disconnects the pre and power sections. This allows the power amp to be used separately, or a processor can be inserted between the two.

Arcam has also used the wonders of digital control technology to implement tone and balance controls and various display options. The menu system is pretty straightforward and we particularly liked the choice of three volume steps and 'thermometer' or numeric display of level. A headphone socket and separate switching for each speaker output rounds out the A90's all-purpose image.

Inside the unit, is a generous mains transformer and heatsink, which looks more than adequate to allow all-day high-level listening even in the hottest climates. Bolted to the latter are a single pair per channel of high-speed power transistors (bipolar, not FET), which are driven by a circuit using a mix of discrete transistors and integrated circuits, almost entirely surface-mounted on the circuit boards. The preamp section has its own board, with high-grade electronic switching, volume control and tone control circuits.

SOUND QUALITY

Reading through the comments made by our panel of 'blind' listeners during the main



subjective test of the amps, we came to the conclusion that this amp's place in the scheme of things is definitely in proportion to its price – one of the less impressive units but also one of the cheapest. It was also generally felt that there wasn't much wrong with the amp's basic performance, with largely neutral tonality, and broadly plausible dynamics.

What did seem to concern our listeners, though, was a slight lack of musical communication. Comments on 'clinical' presentation, low levels of emotional involvement and, worst of all, boredom definitely point that way. Bass seemed less present than with some of the others in the test. Treble was a shade over-bright and detail rather smudged. On the other hand, the sound was for the most part quite relaxed, but imaging was good.

Detail is certainly not the best in the group and, considering the pricetag, we'd have been surprised if it was. But the musical impact may be down to the A90's self-effacing, low-profile nature and the contrast it makes with the relatively upbeat, more forthright, presentation of most of the other test models. It's very much a question of taste, and so we're happy to report that this is an amp well suited to those who want to hear, not their hi-fi, but their music. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 85%



FEATURES >>> 91%



BUILD >>> 86%



VALUE >>> 88%



It seems clear that other amps can be livelier and more energetic. If you prefer the more laid-back approach, this practical, affordable and impressively flexible amp could be just your thing.

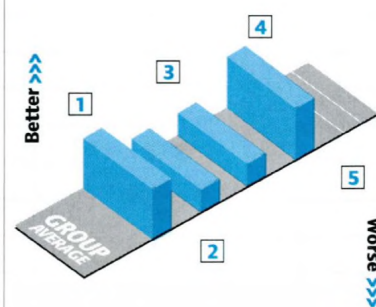
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 85%



LAB REPORT

Arcam has rated this model at 90W but could have got away with calling it a 100W model, as it just beats that figure. Power very nearly doubles into 4 ohms, making it a good choice for 'awkward' speakers that need hard driving. The frequency response is pretty much dead flat, at least, to an octave either side of the audio band. Output impedance is a little higher than average, but not sufficient enough to cause serious response irregularities (even with low-impedance speakers). Distortion is also low, but shows some evidence of mild crossover distortion, with slightly higher distortion figures at lower output, around 0.02% at one watt out. The consistency of distortion with frequency is admirable, which is better than an earlier sample of the A90 that we tested a while back. Noise is low along with power consumption in both idling and standby modes.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >>> +30%
- 2] Frequency response >>> +10%
- 3] Dynamic range >>> +10%
- 4] Distortion >>> +35%
- 5] Output impedance >>> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	90W	105W
Distortion (1kHz/ 8 ohms)	0.008%	0.004%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)		±0.2dB



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CONSONANCE TRISTAN

Opera lovers will appreciate this amp's Wagnerian performance

Opera Audio, a.k.a. Consonance, certainly has one of the widest ranges of audio electronics on the planet. This new model is part of the 'Forbidden City' range, which comes under the 'Stylist' heading on the company's website. It's a nice touch that all the models in the range are named after opera characters, in this case Tristan, the tragic lover from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*.

Many Consonance models feature valves, but this one is resolutely solid-state, with a transistor output stage driven by more transistors. Construction is partly dual mono, principally for practical reasons, with a separate output circuit board for each channel mounted on the appropriate side of the chassis with an internal heatsink. The preamp board is separate and is mounted at the rear, right up against the input sockets, while the mains transformer and power supply board are towards the front.

Unusually, for an integrated amp in this class, the Tristan features a phono stage as standard and it's quite a generous offering. It's built around one of the lowest-noise op-amp chips available and is actually better suited to moving coil duty than moving magnet. But as an overall compromise Consonance could have done a lot worse. Alongside the phono are three line level inputs, which pretty much conclude the list of features. Volume control is electronic and so is input selection. The + and - buttons for selecting input seem to be labelled incorrectly, but with only four inputs to cycle through it's hardly a big deal.

SOUND QUALITY

'Impressive' would probably be the best summation of our listeners' comments on this amp, with both 'good' and 'bad' connotations of the word. Good, in that there's plenty of drama at the start of a Michael Jackson track and in the heavy-duty sawing of the double basses in the Rachmaninov. Bad, in that the violins and other bright instruments quickly



became overbearing, with the fine line between treble clarity and over-brightness frequently being seen from the latter side.

This kind of sound has its place and with dull loudspeakers (in dull rooms) it could be just the thing to spice up a hi-fi system. Placed side-by-side with more neutral amps, however, it drew distinctly tempered praise in all the varied musical selections. In other aspects, the Tristan seems generally competent, indeed very assured in some. Imaging is good, for instance, with clearly defined instruments playing in clear, stable acoustical space, space that extends well beyond the loudspeakers.

Detail is also good, with differentiation between sounds and players. But what this amp truly excels at is bop and 'fun factor'. It's not even notably rhythmic because in the end the rhythm is just a tiny bit untidy. But it is clearly audible and with the right kind of music there's an exciting level of energy and enthusiasm that makes the amp a very entertaining listen. The phono stage is unusually good, particularly with moving coil cartridges, and is quiet and detailed. Our overall view, though, is that for a grand there's not quite the kind of all-round achievement we're looking for and our recommendation is distinctly qualified. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 81%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

FEATURES >> 75%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BUILD >> 88%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VALUE >> 85%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Remarkably well built and well specified internally, this amp majors on excitement rather at the expense, it seems, of tonal neutrality and rhythmic precision. Features are limited, but then price is an issue here.

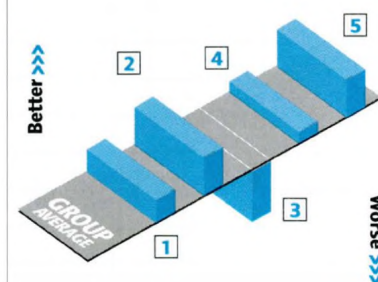
HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE **83%**



LAB REPORT

To be strictly accurate, Consonance's claim of 100 watts per channel is not quite met, but the shortfall is a fraction of a dB and if just one channel is tested the output comfortably exceeds that figure. A 4-ohm load is driven confidently too. In its literature, Consonance makes some rather vague claims about 'Class A' which certainly don't relate to the amp running in Class A. In fact, it is distinctly Class B, running cooler than most thanks to near-zero standing current. Despite that, distortion is perfectly respectable. There is a little crossover distortion in evidence and levels rise at high frequencies, but the worst we could find was only around 0.2%, which is a decent enough result. Noise isn't marvellous by current standards, but is unlikely to be audible through any but the highest sensitivity speakers. Power consumption when idle is quite low. When playing music it's the highest in the group, but only by a small margin.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +10%
- 2] Frequency response >> +20%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -30%
- 4] Distortion >> +5%
- 5] Output impedance >> +25%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	100W	95W
Distortion (1 kHz / 8 ohms)	0.02%	0.01%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.5dB	±0.15dB



£995 ☎ 01452 858260 🌐 www.flyingmole.co.jp

FLYING MOLE CA-S10

This amp's mellow sound is best suited to classical and jazz

Flying Mole is still fairly new in domestic hi-fi, but a force to be reckoned with in pro-audio. Its diminutive amplifiers are very popular in space-restricted recording studios, as well as finding a home in some of PMC's active monitors. They're diminutive because they use 'digital' amplification techniques alongside switching power supplies which happily manage without large mains transformers. (We've used quotes because they're Pulse-Width Modulation designs, which switch signals on and off in a digital fashion, though it's not clear whether control is actually digital or analogue).

Hence the CA-S10's surprising dimensions for an amp that puts out 100 watts. There's no trace of a heatsink, either. What little heat is generated transfers into the aluminium case; so continuous full-power operation may overheat the amp, although that certainly wasn't the case with the music we listened to. Flying Mole claims unusually high efficiency for the amp, around 85 per cent from half power upwards, which is considerably better than conventional linear amplifiers, which may crack 70 per cent at full power, but invariably worse at lower figures. It's also better than most switching amps. FM is proud to use its own PWM modules rather than any of the ready-made modules available and reckons that high efficiency is just one of the benefits.

This is, therefore, the amp of choice if you're concerned about energy wastage. It's certainly not the amp (not on its own, anyway), if you require access to multiple sources and complex features. It's true that there's a preamp output at the rear, but otherwise this is as plain a three-input, line-only integrated as one could imagine. There's not even the option of a remote control, the volume and selector switch being good old-fashioned mechanical devices.

SOUND QUALITY

If this little baby didn't entirely blow our listening panel away, it still gave them plenty



of complimentary things to say. It makes for a relatively analytical amplifier with good detail and stable imaging. Image depth didn't quite equal the best in the group, but laterally it was very clear while listening to music where each instrument was placed.

The other area typically to benefit from control is the bass, which may not have quite the reckless extension of some but goes quite deep and is both tuneful and precise. It is unusually easy to follow the bass line with this amp, no matter what is happening above, and that's pretty much welcome with musical style.

The downside of the amp's control is its slightly restrained treble – restrained, that is, in terms of life and energy. It's a touch forward when it comes to tonality, which seems like a contradiction in terms, but the overall effect is that the treble is very slightly bright, but not always purposeful. In natural recordings of classical and jazz tracks this is not really a problem and indeed the amp is notably mellow in naturally mellow music. But in treble-rich pop it can be a cause of some frustration, even the dreaded listener fatigue. Once again, then, we seem to be faced with an amp that does well with some music styles, but does not have the all-round excellence to warrant unqualified recommendation. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%



FEATURES >> 70%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 86%



If your favoured musical styles involve naturally miked recordings, this amp's refined and controlled character may suit well. For highly produced pop and so on, it's a little over-controlled and lacking get-up-and-go.

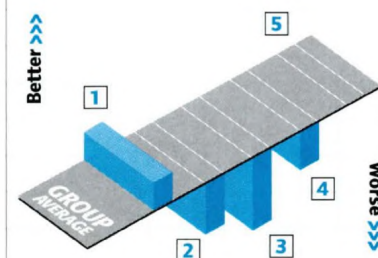
HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE 84%



LAB REPORT

Measurements of switching-type amplifiers do tend to look rather different from those of linear amps, not least because of the invariable presence of ultrasonic output under no-signal conditions. In this case it's about 350kHz at some 200mV. In other ways, this particular model is quite linear-like in its performance. While not the highest in the group, distortion is on the high side with noticeable hum modulation at much higher levels than any other amp. High output impedance can also be a weakness of switching amps, causing in turn variable frequency response into different loads. That's true here but to a smaller extent than with most other switchers we've looked at. The response (nicely flat into 8-ohms) droops a little into low impedances in the treble, or rises into (more common) high impedances. Noise is OK rather than really good, while output behaves much like most linear amps, nearly doubling into 4-ohms.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +15%
- 2] Frequency response >> -30%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -50%
- 4] Distortion >> -25%
- 5] Output impedance >> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	100W	98W
Distortion (1kHz/ 8 ohms)	0.05%	0.04%
frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.5dB	±0.5dB



£1,100 ☎ 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-T100/X170

Two boxes that together create a wide dynamic sound

There's some clever thinking going on in Musical Fidelity's X-series, as the amp, CD player and tuner all draw on the same power supply. This allows the distancing of the mains transformer from the sensitive electronics and for all the gubbins to be comfortably placed into a small case.

Inside the case is a fairly typical array of transistors, including a pair per channel of bipolar power devices and a couple of valves in the small-signal stages. One ECC88 per channel hardly makes this a true valve amplifier, but then (with valve prices being lower than ever) if using one seems like a good design decision, then why not?

Input selection is done electronically using a Sanyo part, which is happy to deal with higher input levels than the normal 2V, while the volume control is a mechanical potentiometer, motorised for remote control. There's a small daughterboard carrying the phono stage, which uses an integrated circuit op-amp.

We reviewed the X-T100 with the chunkier of the two available power supplies. Both the Triple-X170 and the basic Triple-X are just a transformer in a box, including mains switch and output sockets for the various X-series components.

SOUND QUALITY

As luck would have it, this amplifier group seems to be heavily populated with models that have distinctly audible tastes in music. This is one of the most opinionated, getting on very well with a symphony orchestra, but considerably less keen on pop and jazz. Our listening panel was united in finding it vaguely 'nice' but ultimately uninspiring with heavily produced studio recordings. Bass is reasonably extended, but lacked power for special effects, while the treble seemed lacking both control and precision. Vocals stood uncomfortably forward from the rest of the mix, while hard-hitting instruments seemed somehow softened and lacking in bite.



But with the orchestral track, everything picked up. The wide dynamic range was very well expressed, from the barely there opening to the full force of brass and percussion. The tonality seemed much more even, albeit with perhaps a slightly recessed upper midrange.

All the same, the musical connection didn't seem as strong as with others in the group and it seems the amp's analytical skill exceeded its thrill factor. In part, this must be due to the rather lazy way the X-T100 deals with rhythm, which consistently seems very slightly behind the melodic line. We spent some time after the panel listening trying to pin this down and ended up with the feeling that bass is just a touch too soft for its own good. If MF has tried with this amp to produce a mellow balance that above all is easy on the ear, we'd say it's a success. But even in the most laid-back 'Frank Sinatra' mood, we'd tend to go for a slightly more incisive sound, as with anything slightly gritty there's a perplexing lack of involvement and a sense of panic when the music goes wild. This is, at best, an interestingly different 'take' on amplification, but we can't get much more excited about it than that. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 79%



FEATURES >> 84%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 81%



A neatly built and presented amp, making a smart and practical system with the matching X-series components, which failed to impress our listeners with its mellow and oddly non-rhythmic sound.

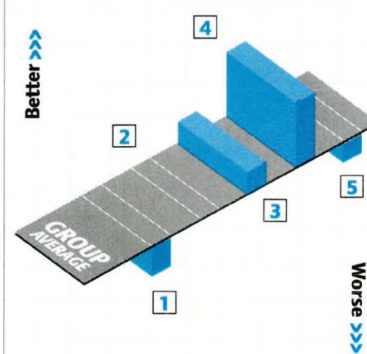
HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE 80%



LAB REPORT

It's not at all obvious from the measurements of the X-T100 where its subjectively perceived shortcomings originate. Taking the basics first, it's capable of around 72W into eight ohms, with relatively little dynamic headroom and very nearly double power into 4-ohm loads, both typical of the generous mains transformer. Output impedance is higher than most, but well short of problem levels, while frequency response is sensibly extended, 1dB down at 36kHz in the treble, around 4Hz in the bass. There's a little more DC at the output than we usually expect to find but 40mV is not normally enough to cause odd behaviour in speakers anyway, the ATCs are particularly tolerant of small DC offsets. Distortion is low under all conditions, even at high frequency, with the slightest trace of crossover artefacts. Power consumption is a little higher than most at idle, but similar to other amps in the group under music conditions.

HOW IT COMPARES



1] Dynamic power >> -15%

2] Frequency response >> 0%

3] Dynamic range >> +10%

4] Distortion >> +40%

5] Output impedance >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	70W	72W
Distortion (1kHz/ 8 ohms)	0.01%	0.0025%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.2dB	±0.3dB



£1,546 ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk

REGA CURSA 3/MAIA 3

Does this pre/power combination promise more than it delivers?

Rega's amplifier range is small (just five models in total) and they're all available in either black or silver. The Cursa3 and Maia3 are the only Rega preamp and (the lower-powered of the two) power amps to make a classic no-frills pre/power combination. The basic Cursa is line-only, but the review sample came with a moving magnet phono stage fitted inside. The moving coil version is the same price, while line-only is £50 cheaper.

You'll either love or hate the Rega's appearance, but it's an ingenious design and very practical. The top part is diecast aluminium which is both strong and non-resonant, while the front panel is also a solid casting which contrives to look a lot like the plastic used on some cheaper Regas.

You might at first miss the selector switch on the Cursa. Cleverly, the same knob does volume and input selection and both functions are achieved electronically with relays for input selection and a Wolfson part for volume. Overall preamp gain can be changed, though the default settings will do fine for almost everyone. The circuitry uses a mix of discrete and integrated semiconductors on a neatly built board powered by a small transformer.

The Maia is a heavy item, internal inspection revealing that this is due to the use of two mains transformers. Not dual mono, it turns out, but a more practical way of getting high power in the available space. There's an unusually generous provision of supply smoothing for the bipolar-transistor output stage. This system can also be easily upgraded thanks to a pair of 'link' outputs next to the inputs on the Maia and twin preamp outputs on the Cursa.

SOUND QUALITY

Although our listening panel liked these amps a great deal, they weren't carried away with their enthusiasm. Most of all, it seems, they would have wished for a bigger scale of presentation, more body and solidity to the



sound. Although many specifics were felt to be good, the sheer impact of the music seemed to be a little restrained and, as a result, it was difficult to become fully involved in the music.

Interestingly, the two most successful musical passages were highly contrasted; the special effects at the start of *Thriller* and the beginning of the Rachmaninov, a very quiet and delicate bit of orchestral writing. The former had plenty of scale, while the latter had a quite spine-tingling sense of anticipation. In each track, however, it was felt that the bass was lacking in real weight, while higher instruments and voices were slightly thin and even a little sibilant.

In the Miles Davis track, the amps' good detail retrieval was handy in making each instrument easy to follow. In general, imaging was good and percussion precise, with good integration of rhythm and melody. After the listening panel had departed, we tried some different musical styles (on both CD and LP) to see if a more corporeal sound could be coaxed from the amps and had best results with choral voices, which can certainly sound convincingly powerful. But somehow, as one of our listeners commented, there seems to be more optimism than actual solid achievement here. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%



FEATURES >> 87%



BUILD >> 88%



VALUE >> 82%



A detailed phono stage and good rhythmic performance, although this amp doesn't quite tie everything together to make a convincing whole. Best with voices, it falls short on big orchestral and rock panoramas.

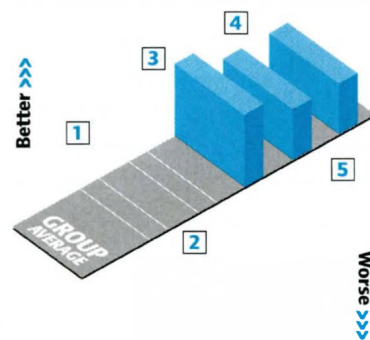
HI-FI CHOICE **83%**
OVERALL SCORE



LAB REPORT

Rega's 85W rating is pretty much bang on, with a little more available into a single channel and about 160W into 4 ohms. Output impedance is low in the midband, though it rises a little at high frequencies. Frequency response is not quite as wide as some, especially in the bass where the 1dB rolloff point is 9Hz. That's still plenty of bandwidth and there's an argument to be made for restricting the far subsonic frequencies as they can cause loudspeaker cone 'wander' with consequent increase in distortion. Treble similarly extends about an octave beyond direct audibility - notably also via the phono stage, which has a pretty much textbook treble response, while its bass adopts the 20Hz - 3dB specification of the IEC. Noise is the lowest in the group, in fact the lowest we've seen in this category. Distortion is once again commendably low under most conditions and just a little higher than some at low power.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> 0%
- 2] Frequency response >> 0%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +50%
- 4] Distortion >> +30%
- 5] Output impedance >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	85W	88W
Distortion (1kHz/ 8 ohms)	-	0.006%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.5dB	±0.3dB



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RUSS ANDREWS HP-1/PA-1

Tiny pre/power is a notable big hitter

Making a rapid return to these pages after some minor running changes to the power amp (which Russ Andrews was keen for us to hear) these two little boxes make up an unusual pre/power system. The power amp is the more conventional of the two, a 50 watts per channel unit in about the simplest form imaginable, but the HP-1 preamp is in itself a miniature power amp intended to drive high quality dynamic headphones (hence the jack/XLR socket on the front panel).

The HP-1 only has two inputs, selected with a simple toggle switch, but it sports a further switch for gain and another, at the rear, for a filter. Marked simply 'A' and 'B', these settings are basically flat (A) and rolled off in the very high treble (B). A subtle tone control, in other words, which is useful in taming over-fierce recordings and also in compensating for the bright nature of nearby speakers as in the case of desktop systems. In our normal domestic hi-fi we stuck resolutely to A to avoid complicating matters.

Very neatly designed and assembled, these amplifiers are in fact made in Korea by Stello, then subtly tweaked by Russ Andrews. Circuit design of each is fairly straightforward, with simple mechanical switching and volume control – no remote control – plus good-quality components throughout. The small case puts limits on the size of mains transformer in the PA-1, but it's perfectly capable of supporting the rated power output, while the one in the HP-1 is smaller but more generous.

SOUND QUALITY

Manufacturers submit previously well-liked products for reassessment at their peril. What if a different panel of listeners, playing different tracks should mark them down? Luckily, no such reversal of fortune affects RA on this occasion and, in fact, many of the most positive comments of the session refer to these amps. More than anything, it was the full-



bodied character of the sound that impressed our panel. Something that goes well beyond simple bass fullness (not in itself markedly more than with the other amps in the group) and gives a highly plausible, almost tangible, impression of live performers in a real space.

Low frequencies certainly play an important part in that, and there was praise for the duo's tunefulness and precision in the lowest octaves. Sudden bass notes appear startlingly, just as they should, and decay without undue overhang or blurring. As a result, the interplay between instruments and lines is made clearer, the harmonic structure of a piece of music likewise. The only warning note – and a gentle one – sounded by our listeners regarded quiet music, which doesn't quite match the grip and solidity of louder passages.

In terms of tonality, these amps seem to be pretty much blameless, while their grasp of detail is good and never maintained at the expense of emotion. Imaging is good laterally and certainly the best of the group in terms of depth, while rhythm is also fine, not quite as pronounced as some perhaps, but that's very much a question of taste. All in all, a happy blend of virtues. **HFC**

VERDICT

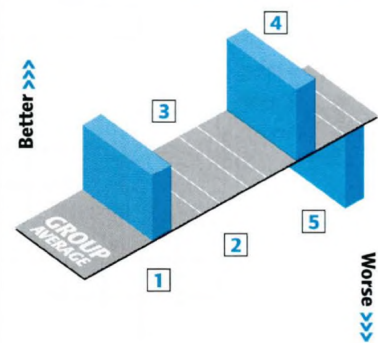
SOUND >> 88% [Progress bar]	If you don't need many inputs, or vast output power, the appealingly realistic and solid sound pictures painted by this little pair could be just the thing. Highly capable in all areas and practical, too!
FEATURES >> 75% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 86% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 86% [Progress bar]	



LAB REPORT

The relatively high distortion of these amps would appear to support the accusation that some distortion can subjectively enhance sound. We're not sure that's correct. For a start, that hypothesis usually invokes low-order distortion and there's quite a lot of high harmonic output from these amps (mostly from the PA-1), characteristic of mild crossover distortion. And then, in the worst case, it is still only about 0.15%. It just so happens that 1kHz at 2/3 power (our usual numeric specification condition) is worst case. In most other areas performance matches the other amps. Output impedance is high, but not by enough to tweak the overall frequency response more than a few tenths of a dB. The power amp now has a flat frequency response, in contrast with the earlier sample we measured which was 3dB down at 17kHz, and just about meets RA's power specification.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +40%
- 2] Jitter >> 0%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> +50%
- 5] Digital filter >> -50%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	50W	48W
Total harmonic distortion	0.02%	0.15%
Signal-to-noise ratio	±1dB	±0.3dB

CONCLUSIONS

There's a winner from both camps – pre/powers and integrations

In some group tests there's an obvious winner, and so it was this time. At least, Russ Andrews' headphone/preamp and power amp is a winner if you don't need more than two inputs, won't miss a remote control, have no need to drive a second set of speakers and don't want your hi-fi to look bulky and impressive. We're talking seriously minimalist here, but the musical qualities of the amps are well worth considering even if you do need some extra flexibility: if you can't stand the idea of a little replugging

to listen to some seldom-used source component, then there are such things as switch boxes.

There is a loss of quality with extra switches, of course, and it's extra hassle. And apart from the added flexibility, all the other amps in this test have other qualities of their own. The Flying Mole is even smaller than the Russ Andrews and – thanks to its adoption of switching technology for both power supply and amplification – packs a punch and delivers plenty of detail with good recordings of acoustic music. We felt

it could do with a little more abandon at times to make a success of pop discs, but do give it a go.

The Mole hardly offers any more flexibility than Andrews, but Arcam is in a whole different league in that respect. Plenty of inputs, twin outputs, phono option, remote control and considerably more – it's a wonder they had any budget left for the actual amplifying! But they did and they achieve it in style. Understated style, of course. Don't attempt to evaluate the A90 in a quick demonstration, as its qualities

take a little while to register. If you don't want your hi-fi to make a show of itself, this is a good place to look.

Rega's amp, a classic pre/power combo, seemed to lack some solidity but does have plenty of redeeming features, which includes good detail. Both the Musical Fidelity and Consonance units were disappointing on this outing, but the former makes an attractive system with its matching CD player and tuner, while the latter has plenty of excitement going for it. And there is room for taste in this. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

➤ Amps generate heat! In a rack, allow at least three inches above any amplifier to allow the heat to dissipate.

➤ Use decent cables in and out, and if your speaker cable has bare ends be careful to avoid short circuits from frayed ends. Tighten terminals occasionally.

➤ It's 'greener' to switch amps off at the mains than use standby: switch it on 30-60 minutes before listening, if possible, to allow it to warm-up.
➤ Routing cables neatly together does more than just look good – it helps to reduce interference.

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE	Arcam	Consonance	Flying Mole	Musical Fidelity	Rega	Russ Andrews
MODEL	DIVA A90	Tristan	CA-510	X-T100/ Triple-X170	Cursa3/ Maia3	HP-1/ PA-1
PRICE	£850	£995	£995	£1100	£1546	£1198
SOUND						
FEATURES						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	If you like a laid-back approach, this practical, affordable and impressively flexible amp could be just your thing.	Well-built, but majors on excitement at the expense of tonal neutrality and rhythmic precision.	Refined, controlled character may suit naturally mic'ed recordings. For highly produced pop, it lacks get-up-and-go.	A practical system with matching X-Series components, this failed to impress our listeners with its mellow and non-rhythmic sound.	Doesn't quite seem to tie everything together to make a convincing whole. At its best with voices.	Simply featured, but sounds appealingly realistic and solid. Highly capable in all areas.
KEY FEATURES						
LINE INPUTS	7	3	3	3	6	2
TAPE OUTPUTS	2	0	0	1	2	0
PHONO INPUT OPTIONAL	Yes	(MM/MC)	No	(MM)	Optional	No
SIZE (WXHXD)	43.5x10x34cm	43x11x39cm	28x5.5x25cm	22x9x36cm	43.5x9x29cm	21.2x5.5x29cm
WEIGHT	10.5kg	22kg	4kg	4+6.4kg	5+7kg	3.5+4.5kg
REMOTE CONTROL	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
BALANCED INPUT	No	No	No	No	No	No
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
CLIP POINT	29V G	27.5V G	28V G	24V A	26.5V G	19.5V A
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	±0.2dB E	±0.15dB E	±0.5dB G	±0.3dB G	±0.3dB G	±0.3dB G
DYNAMIC RANGE	102dB G	98dB G	96dB A	100dB G	106dB E	101dB G
OUTPUT IMPEDANCE	0.1 ohm G	0.04 ohm E	0.1 ohm G	0.12 ohm G	0.05 ohm G	0.3ohm A
POWER CONSUMPTION	20W/3W	18W/-	12W/-	27W/-	17W/-	20W/-

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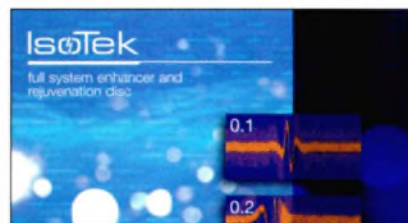
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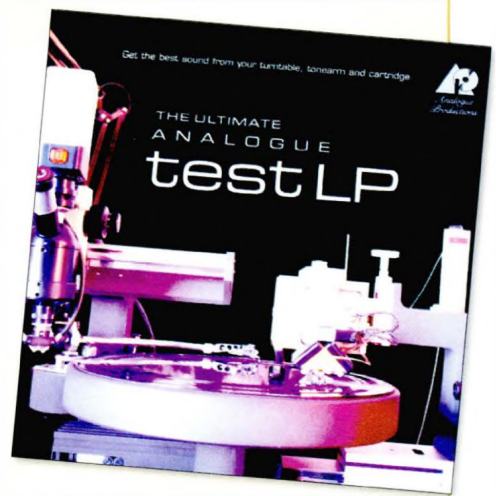
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SOUND & VISION

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CYRUS - the official launch of the CD6SE, CD8SE and CDXtSE CD players and transport. All based around Cyrus' new Servo Evolution (SE) platform.

DENON - receiving its UK launch... the AVP-A1HD THX Ultra2 High Definition home cinema pre/processor. Approx twice as large and heavy as it's humungous predecessors and sporting more technology than anything else on the planet (possibly!)

DYNAUDIO - Celebrating 30 years with the UK's first performance of the Sapphire.

WILSON BENESCH - UK debut of the Trinity loudspeaker and the Full Circle turntable stand.

KEF - see the stunning audiophile XQ series.

MONITOR AUDIO - UK show debut of the PL100 stand mount speaker.

PROJECTIONDESIGN - First UK showing of the M25 - the worlds smallest full HD projector.

VITA AUDIO - look out for the launch of the R4 radio... it's sure to be another hit!

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Or from the M4 take J19 (M32 - Bristol). Follow signs for City Centre and RAC signs to the Show.

We recommend that you check our website for the latest travel information where links to the relevant sites can be accessed.

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SOUND AND VISION

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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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

Reviews you can trust

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

How to use this guide

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

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

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

SUPER AUDIO CD



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

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

Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

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

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

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

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

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



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	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	SPECIFICATIONS	SIDE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000													
	Arcam DIVA CD73	450	Neatly built and well presented player that's especially good at bass and timing, with detail hardly less assured										301
	Audio Analogue Rossini	850	Valve-sporting player delivers a warm, engaging sound, but mediocre remote and no optical out may limit appeal										299
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	If you value the effortless flow of musical information, you should certainly hear this player										285
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative										293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Purposefully undemonstrative, combining neutrality, detail and timing; enhanced by flexibility as a DAC										291
	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift, otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value										285
	Denon DCD-500AE	160	Cheap, well built and good, if slightly soft-edged sound quality										295
	Denon DCD-700AE	250	Excellent entry level quality CD player lacks for nothing. Musicians please note: even has variable speed replay										284
	Marantz CD6002	280	A hint of treble unevenness is the only specific flaw: performance is class-leading in most areas										301
	Naim CD5i	825	Bass has great extension but lacks control, slightly. Tonal neutrality higher up is excellent, however										291
	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation: smaller-scale works can lack focus										291
	Rega Apollo	498	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out - musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer										285
	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance										276
	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													
	Bryston BCD-1	2,050	Not as open as some but rather more timely than most, it sounds a lot more gripping than it looks										300
	Carm Fog 3	1,995	Ergonomically challenged, high energy player with Gallic charm and digital preamp on board										302
EC	Chord Red Reference CD	13,345	The definitive statement in Red Book CD playing, this player's look and sound places it at the top of the tree										299
	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced										286
ES	Classé CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs										284
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too										280
	Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R	1,400	Lightness of touch is the key here, but there is also good bass and some very fine detail on offer too										295
ES	EMM Labs CDSA	6,995	Classy, stripped down to basics SACD/CD player with some excellent engineering below decks										302
ES	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
EC	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
	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best										291
	Linn Majik	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm										283
EC	Marantz SA-7S1	5,000	Something of a bargain even at this price, the SA-7S1 sets the benchmark for CD/SACD players of its ilk										297
	McIntosh MCD201	3,400	Superb CD performance and even better with SACD which has its own output level control.										284
	Meridian G06	1,695	Highly refined player with a combination of analysis and self-effacing response to musical demands										295
ES	Moon Supernova	4,500	Refined, high-performance player offers tremendous transparency and includes coaxial digital input										296
	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
	Rega Saturn	1,298	Good detail, lively natural bass, and good integration of musical strands without losing their individual character										295
	Unison Research Unico CD	1,495	Strong timing and rhythm, this player is well equipped for more melodic music, with good detail resolution										295

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



Copland CDA823 £1,750

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



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



Although players featuring both DVD-Audio and DVD-Video are thin on the ground, the universal disc player (that also supports SACD and CD alongside the DVD formats) continues to dominate the worlds of audio and video alike. In fact, it's rare to find a DVD player that doesn't support DVD-Audio and SACD these days.

So, what advantages do universal disc players hold over traditional CD players?

Put simply... choice. A DVD player or universal offer the listener the chance to use far more than just your CDs and build up a wider collection of music and video, all played through one device. The technology has matured now, and the performance of all formats played through these devices gets surprisingly close to dedicated players these days. The same cannot be said of Blu-ray or HD DVD players, many of which are not yet good enough to play CD well.



DVD-AUDIO, HD DVD AND BLU-RAY

DVD-Audio is a high-resolution music format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs.

The discs can be played on any DVD player, but can only be appreciated at their best with a DVD-A or universal disc player. In fairness, the DVD-Audio format has not proved to be a resounding success, and SACD discs are more readily available.

The two new kids on the block are HD DVD and Blu-ray. Both the same physical size as the CD and DVD disc, these formats offer even more data storage capacity than DVD (up to 50GB instead of DVD's 8.5GB). However, these formats are the exclusive domain of home cinema and gaming fans. Sadly, the possibility of super-high-resolution music-only Blu-ray or HD DVD discs remains distant at best.



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 HDMI, then component video, followed by RGB Scart. All these are 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.

WHAT IS 1080P?

HDTV is defined by the number of lines the picture creates and whether it's interlaced (like old TV) or progressive scan (like a PC monitor).

CONNECTIONS



HDMI LINK: A flat, multi-pin socket that carries digital audio and video, like a digital SCART lead. Arguably the best choice for HDTV pictures.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow socket is composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component; the small black multipin socket is S-Video; the big one is SCART.

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

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DiVA DV135	900	Unchanged looks and stereo-only DVD-A/SACD, but the overall performance is great across all formats. Stunning picture, too	●	●	●	●	●	296
	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 DV7001	600	Enhanced model based on DV6001, but with various improvements, including superior CD replay capabilities	●	●	●	●	●	296
	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
	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									
	Accoustic Arts Surr Player 1	4,495	A very high-quality Pioneer-based machine, excellent sound from both hi-res and regular formats	●	●	●	●	●	299
	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
	Linn Akurate CD	3,985	This highly engaging multiformat non-video player doesn't have huge transparency or a fancy box, but is musically addictive	●	●	●	●	●	299
	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

SPEC 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 DV135 £900

Stereo-only SACD and DVD-A, but excellent performance with audio and video.



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



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.

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.

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 BB EC **TURNTABLES**

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Avic Volvere	2,750	A combination of a heavy platter with a sprung suspension that makes the vinyl it spins sound powerful and solid	33/45	●	●	●	●	298
EC	Avic 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
BB	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45	●	●	●	●	268
BB	Clearaudio Performance	1,670	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncoloured performance. Good arm and cartridge	33/45	●	●	●	●	295
EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45	●	●	●	●	271
EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78	●	●	opt	●	276
BB	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
BB	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	opt	284
BB	Golding GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45	●	●	●	●	266
BB	Michell Tecnodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45	●	●	●	●	268
EC	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45	●	●	●	●	235
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Rega P3-24	398	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, much improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply	33/45	●	opt	●	●	298
BB	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
BB	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45	●	●	opt	●	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45	●	●	●	●	228
BB	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	●	●	●	●	248
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●	●	195
EC	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
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45	●	●	●	●	259

Our favourite BB EC **PHONO CARTRIDGES**

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
BB	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
BB	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around	●	●	●	285
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●	●	●	235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●	●	●	215
BB	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound	●	●	●	290
BB	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound	●	●	●	270
BB	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light	●	●	●	235
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for	●	●	●	265
EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money	●	●	●	253

Our favourite BB EC **PHONO STAGES**

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU AMP	AU MPEX/ANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	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
BB	Clearaudio Smart-Phono	250	Minute and very practical unit with slightly bright, but very detailed and low-noise, sound	●	●	●	●	268
BB	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
BB	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!	●	●	●	●	234
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP	●	●	●	●	201
BB	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

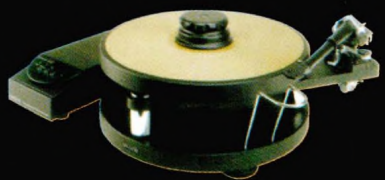
TURNTABLE SPECS KEY: **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM**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

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

SME

The way to play vinyl

Model 10A



Model 20/2A



Model 20/12A



Model 30/2A



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



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

DAB or FM?

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

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower

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

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

RECEPTION

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

TOP BUYS



Denon 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

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	TDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	SCALE 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, but the decent performance on both bands makes this a great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200					283	
EC	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	
EC	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	Some grain at low levels, but sound is lively, large in scale and tonally very natural. Very smart!	DAB,FM	16					299	
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10					248	
	Denon TU-1800DAB	200	Very good detail and a highly believable impression of real musicians playing. Imaging can be a little constricted	DAB,FM,M	200					299	
	Marantz ST7001	250	Midband detailed and precise: treble can be thick but bass is extended, and sound generally energetic	DAB,FM,M	200					299	
	NAD C445	300	FM is laid-back despite bright balance, but has good detail. DAB slightly livelier than most	DAB,FM	30					299	
	Onkyo T-4555DAB	350	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard in all areas on	DAB,FM	40					299	

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.

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"Does most things extremely well and has a remarkably good sense of poise for the money."

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Cambridge Audio Azur 540A v2

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- WHF? S&V magazine

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65 WPC. Usual Price £149.95



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Cambridge Audio Azur 740C

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- Hi-Fi Choice magazine

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AMPLIFIER

Cambridge Audio Azur 740A

"Excellent treble, very good imaging and a real sense of musical involvement are all well above the class average"

- Hi-Fi Choice magazine

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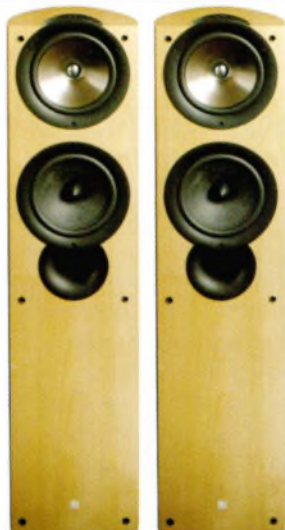
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Now that the iPod is the music source of choice for so many, we at Richer Sounds believe that everyone should be playing theirs through a decent amp and speakers, to this end the Cambridge Audio iPod dock at the crazy price of £9.99 makes this feat both ridiculously simple and inexpensive.

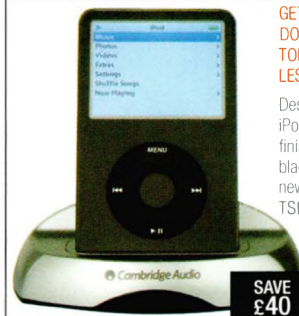
Our Cambridge Audio, Mordaunt-Short and Kef systems still represent fantastic value and whilst we are talking Mordaunt-Short, their eagerly awaited new Mezzo range arrives in the stores this month, so come in for a listen.

Also back on our shelves after a small absence are NAD with their highly reviewed C315BEE amplifier and C515BEE CD player, ask for a demo.

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IPOD ACCESSORIES

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PORTABLE DAB

PURE EVOKE 1XT PRESTIGE



SALE!
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TANNOY F1



DEAL!
"A great budget speaker - whether on the end of a micro system or budget separates." WHF? S&V magazine. For a top quality, compact speaker that will suit a wide variety of components, the Tannoy Custom F1 comes highly recommended. TSP £109.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISUALS ★★★★★

AMAZING VALUE **£89.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £89.95

AMPLIFIER

MARANTZ PM4001



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISUALS ★★★★★

DEAL!
"Musically, this amplifier doesn't give a hoot what genre you ask it to drive." - WHF? S&V magazine.

With a commitment to stereo separates, Marantz have once again proven their knack of making a damn fine amp. TSP £179.95

Also Marantz CD5001 CD Player for only £79.95

30 WPC

SAVE £80 **£99.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £9.99

AMPLIFIER

NAD C315BEE



DEAL!
"Indeed, with no hesitation, I think it deserves to win every Product of the Year award available to a two-channel component." - Hi-Fi News magazine.

Also NAD C515BEE CD Player for only £159.95

40 WPC **AMAZING VALUE** **£179.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £17.95

AMPLIFIER

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 340ASE



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISUALS ★★★★★

DEAL!
"When it comes to getting to the heart of the music, its terrific." - WHF? S&V magazine

With an unmatched level of audio engineering at its price, first class build quality, and all the features you're likely to need, the Cambridge Audio Azur 340ASE looks set to take the market by storm.

Also Cambridge Audio Azur 340C CD Player for only £149.95

45 WPC **AMAZING VALUE** **£179.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £17.95

MINI STEREO SYSTEM

DENON DM35DAB



DEAL!
Add in first rate build quality, with aluminium front panel and volume knob, and it's clear to see that the Denon DM35DAB is a cut above the rest. TSP £299.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISUALS ★★★★★

SAVE £70 **£229.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £22.95

FLOORSTANDER SPEAKERS

MORDAUNT-SHORT 906i



DEAL!
"The Avant 906i is a very decent performer overall, especially in view of its very modest price. . . Well balanced overall, with the sort of top end restraint entirely appropriate for the equipment the speaker is likely to be partnered with. The bass end has impressive weight, boxiness is pretty well controlled and imaging is very effective." said Hi-Fi Choice magazine when reviewing the 906i at a price of £350. TSP £349.95

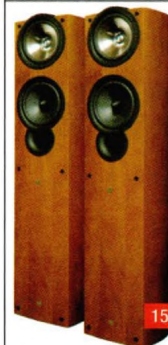
BEST BUY HI-FI CHOICE magazine

150 Watts **SAVE £100** **£249.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £24.95

FLOORSTANDER SPEAKERS

KEF IQ5



DEAL!
"The Kefs are among the tidiest floorstanding designs we've seen. . . The standard of build and finish is well up to KEF levels and the Uni-Q tweeter arrangement makes for intriguing looks. As welcome as this aesthetic tastefulness is, it counts for nothing if speakers don't perform - and these perform in spades." - WHF? S&V magazine. TSP £399.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISUALS ★★★★★

150 Watts **SAVE £120** **£279.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £27.95

BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS

MORDAUNT-SHORT MEZZO 2



DEAL!
If you don't want to compromise on quality, but have to with space, then Mordaunt Short has the answer. The Mordaunt Short Mezzo 2 may be small but it has a big heart, and offers up a performance that would embarrass many a larger speaker.

Also Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6 Floorstanders for only £799.95

120 Watts **AMAZING VALUE** **£449.95**

5Yr Supercare Only £44.95

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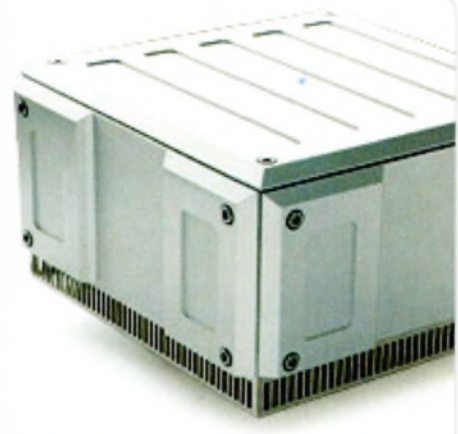
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McIntosh

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(save £251)

**Purchase a pair of the JAS Audio Orsa Speakers (£1399) at Shadow Audio and the incredible all-in-one Shanling MC-30 (normally £500) can be yours for just an additional £249.

- Shanling MC30 - Valve Amp, CD, Tuner, iPod Dock
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* 1) Customer spend has to be £500 or over.
 (2) Customer entitled to a free one year subscription to a Hi-Fi magazine from the Shadow Audio list, starting with next available issue. (3) Each issue will be sent to the customer by post. (4) Applies to UK only. (5) Promotion cannot be used in conjunction with any other promotion/trade-in or part exchange.

** Subject to conditions. Please call for further details. Applies to UK only.

Free 1 year subscription to a Hi-Fi magazine of your choice*

When you spend £500 or more at Shadow Audio*





Qinpu A8000 MK II

Hi-Fi World guessed the price of this integrated amplifier to be around £3k... imagine their surprise when we told them it sells for under £1500! One of our favourites.

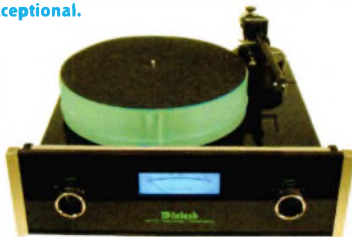


Musical Fidelity AS.5

New from Musical Fidelity is the AS.5 Integrated Amplifier and CD Player. Details are a little scarce at the moment but you can be sure of something very special for the money! Call for details.

McIntosh MT10 Turntable

Their first-ever turntable, marries classic McIntosh glass front panel cosmetics with serious mechanics to create a unique, ready-to-play LP solution, that you simply must hear! Exceptional.



Used Listing

Our list changes daily, so please visit web site for latest up-to-date list.

DIGITAL

AudioNet ART V2 CD player (£2400)	£1395
McIntosh MCD201, CD/SACD (£3400)	£2695
Musical Fidelity KW 250S (£4999)	£3795
Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC and Transport (£4000)	£2895
Shanling CDT300 Omega Drive CD player (£4000)	£2295

AMPLIFIERS

Accuphase E408 Integrated (£5000)	£3995
Audio Zone AMP 1 dual mono integrated (£1595)	£1295
Bel Canto S300i Integrated (£1799)	£1495
Bryston B-100 SST Integrated (£3995)	£2895
Cairn 4810 Integrated (£2700)	£1795
DK Design VS-1 Reference (£2500)	£1995
Minimax Power Amp (£995)	£649
Flying Mole PA-S1 Digital Pre (£999)	£795
McIntosh C2200 pre (£4850)	£3695
Musical Fidelity AS Pre (£1499)	£995
Musical Fidelity KW550 Integrated (£5000)	£3995
Musical Fidelity AS Integrated Amp (£1499)	£1095
Musical Fidelity KW500 Integrated (£4000)	£2495
Qinpu A1.0x Integrated (£300)	£230
Qinpu A-8000 MK II Integrated (£1295)	£795
TacT SDAi 2175 (£1245)	£749

LOUDSPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic (£845)	£650
ART Emotion Monitor (£4000)	£3250
ART Loudspeakers Expression V6 (£3500)	£2450
ATC SCM20SL (£2400)	£1395
JAS Orior (£2300)	£1495
JAS Audio Orsa (£1399)	£1095
JAS Audio Supertweeters (£649)	£449
Leema Acoustics Xone (£2245)	£1695
PMC FB1+ (£1695)	£1295
Soundlab Millennium M3 Electrostatics (£8995)	£2795
Waterfall Iguazu Loudspeakers (£1500)	£600

ANALOGUE

SME 20/2A (£6300)	£4495
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MISC

Hovland Reference Speaker Cable (£1200)	£795
Isotek Nova (£1750)	£1295
Isotek Gil Minisub (£545)	£399
Nordost Blue Heaven Speaker Cable (£695)	£349

Hyperion

A lot of speaker for sure! Even after several glances, you'll still be scratching your head as to how Hyperion give you so much for your hard earned money. Even model punches way above its weight and we suggest you start with the incredible HPS-938.



ATC SCM 7, 11, 19 and 40

At their respective price points, we don't think any other loudspeaker can tell you more about your music than the ATC range can. They offer exceptional value for money. We like the new and improved styling too!



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Even worse, you won't be receiving our weekly Used Items List, so will be missing out on yet more bargains.

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New Reference Range
SC-752 Pre-amplifier
MA-952 Mono Power Amplifier
SA-751 CD/SACD Player

Marantz Legendary
Full range available



Hi-Fi World
VERDICT



Hi-Fi Choice September 2007.
SA-751 Review.

Alvin Gold wrote: "If you want a disc player that will do the very finest musical job possible with your CDs and SACDs - the only really serious remaining audio disc formats - the Marantz SA-751 can even be considered a bargain at £5,000!"

FREE delivery**

design: www.audiography.co.uk

Specialist Brands include:

Apollo, ART Loudspeakers, Audio Zone, Audio Physic, ATC, AVI, Bel Canto, Bryston, Chord Cables, EAR/Yoshino, Eastern Electric, GamuT, Hovland, Hyperion, IsoTek, JAS Audio, JungSon, Manley Labs, Marantz Legendary, McIntosh, Musical Fidelity, Musical First, Music Tools, Nordost, Opera, Origin Live, Pathos, PMC, Project, Resolution Audio, Shanling, SME, Tannoy Prestige, Unison Research, Vertex AQ, VPI, Wadia, Wilson Benesch and many more.

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-AMPLING?

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	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DIVAA70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM			60	289
	Adv. Acoustic MAP305DA II	600	A lot of amplifier for the money and capable of revealing and exciting sound in the right company. Includes 4 digital inputs	5				100	300
	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt			90	286
	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6				75	279
	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
	Cambridge Audio 840A v2	750	The biggest differences between this and most amps at twice its price are in looks and show-off factor. Powerful and detailed	8				120	299
	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but its lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt			85	283
	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7				40	293
	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
	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
	Marantz PM7001KI	550	A self-effacing amplifier which serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail	5	MM			70	289
	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
	Orkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5				80	278
	Pioneer A-A9	600	Takes on the mantle of the legendary A400. Not as cuddly, but very resolute and revealing for the money. Has USB input	4				80	296
	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM			50	293
	Vincent SV-236	999	Valve hybrid whose sound is as idiosyncratic as its styling, short on neutrality but high on sparkie	6				100	295
ABOVE £1,000									
	AMR AM-77	4,400	A thrilling amplifier that brings you the dynamics of valves with the power of transistors in a substantial but well-featured design	6				180	299
	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8				100	280
	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
	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pitfalls of many valve amps, yet retains the euphony typical of the best of breed	6	MM			50	286
	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6				100	286
	Densen Beat B110	1,200	Great bass provides firm underpinning for involving and enjoyable listening - real 'smile factor'	6	opt			60	292
	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
	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4				200	289
	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
	Musical Fidelity A1008	2,999	With DAC, phono stage and built-in valve buffer, this powerhouse amp can really grab hold of a loudspeaker	4				250	295
	Mystère ia11	1,250	Small, deceptively powerful integrated valve amp with a crisp, pacy sound	4				40	302
	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkie	7				180	285
	Naim SuperNait	2,350	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6				80	294
	Primare i30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6				100	267
	Pure Sound A30	1,100	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though	3				30	298
	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,299	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor	5	opt			21	296
	Unison Res. Unico Secondo	1,200	Very good detail and coherence. Tonality is natural, imaging precise and deep, and dynamics are wide and unforced	6	opt			110	297
	Unison Res. Performance	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
	Unison Research P70	3,495	Delightful valve amplifier with fine neutrality, sweet midband, impressive bandwidth and ample power	4				70	302

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £2,000									
	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
	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
	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz			2			266
	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured			6		125	270
	Exposure 2010 S Integrated/Power	1,098	Bi-amping with the additional power amp increases the musical communication of an already fine integrated			6		75	264
	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design			6	opt	50	287
	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling			5		136	256
	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value			5		70	285
	Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1	1,198	A highly enjoyable pre/power combination with fine levels of detail, good rhythm, stable and precise imaging			2		50	297

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 CHOICESTEREO AMPLIFIERS *continued*

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE SPEAKERS	PHONO INPUT	FM/AM CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	SCALE NUMBER	
ABOVE £2,000											
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little	●	●	5	opt	●	273	273	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●	●	5	opt	●	277	277	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Classe 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	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8		opt	80	276	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●	●				180	253	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	265	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●				200	247	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes: one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt		125	250	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	238	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●				140	208	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6		●	233	233	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE 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
BEST BUY	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A11XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o	●	11	●	140	273
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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 gimmicky	●	3	●	160	255
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	●	6	●		230
	Naim AV2/NAP175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering	●	5	●	50	238
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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.



Trichord Research

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sales@trichordresearch.com

Fax: +44 (0)1684 311928
www.trichordresearch.com



Specialist items at great prices with

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£ CALL NOW



SPEAKER STAND
Nexus 10

INFORMATION

Atacama has always been known for offering customers outstanding value for money and the Nexus is no exception. The complete stand is manufactured from heavy gauge steel and the assembly is made using upgraded high tensile fixings to maintain optimum rigidity.

Pro-ject

CHECK ONLINE



TURNTABLE
RPM1 Genie

INFORMATION

The Pro-Ject Genie turntable offers exceptional sound and exceptional quality. This award winning manual turntable is fitted with a Ortofon OM 3E cartridge and with it's stunning design will without a doubt be the envy of your friends.

Infocus

£ CALL NOW



DIGITAL PROJECTOR
IN82

INFORMATION

Brand new from Infocus, the flagship IN82 DLP projector is their first Full-HD 1080p home cinema projector. The projector utilises the DarkSet 3 DLP chip from Texas Instruments, technology which guarantees amazing viewing. Deep black, pure white and subtle greyscales offers an experience which is unsurpassed across the home cinema projector industry.

> Products, technology and irresistible prices

FREE DELIVERY

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PRE-AMPLIFIER WITH POWER AMPLIFIER

The PRE30 employs a Class A coupled, discrete fully balanced circuit topology, utilised for the best possible signal to noise ratio and audio fidelity. This combined with the A30.2 Dual Mono Power Amplifier produces music and movie sound as vibrantly as at the moment it was recorded.
PRE30/A30 2

Primare

CHECK ONLINE



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

The new L.III Kandy integrated benefits from totally revised amplifier internals. The mains transformer and the AC circuitry are now moved to one side away from the amplifier main circuits thus dramatically reducing AC noise interference. After rectification circuitry, the power supply layout, distribution and tracking to different sections of the amplifier have been greatly improved.

Kandy L.III Integrated Amplifier MkIII
Roksan

5.1 HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE
M-Cube 5.1

IKON AV SPEAKER PACKAGE
Ikon AV Speaker Package

AV PACKAGE
L-ITE

5.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM
Xeno

£ CALL FOR PRICE

£ CALL FOR PRICE

£ CALL FOR PRICE

£ CALL FOR PRICE



BUY NOW-PAY 2008

MISSION

INFORMATION

Mission's Stunning M-Cube consists of an active 250W subwoofer with 2x200mm (8") bass driver, magnetically shielded centre and satellite speakers and 5 Wall brackets.



DALI

INFORMATION

This five star What HiFi award winning speaker package comprises of 2 Ikon 5 floor standing speakers, 1 Ikon Vokal 2 centre, 2 on wall rear speakers and the Dali Ikon subwoofer. All of which are also available individually with free QED speaker cable.



Quad

INFORMATION

The L-ite system is conceived as a complete 5.1 speaker system capable of delivering outstanding performance from unbelievably small speakers. Finished to the same high standard as the rest of the L-series range of speakers, the system sold complete includes four satellite speakers, a dedicated centre channel and a 300Wrms 10" powered subwoofer.



MJ Acoustics

INFORMATION

This amazing new XENO system features High Grade crossover, ability to be fed with a full range signal, Bass driver technology, Tweeter employing soft dome technology and Boundary effect rear ports to enhance the refraction effects from the lower frequencies.

CHECK ONLINE FOR MORE PRODUCTS & PRICES

Pioneer

CREEK AUDIO LIMITED

MONITOR AUDIO

polkaudio
the speaker specialists

Wharfedale

audio pro

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£ CALL FOR PRICE CHECK ONLINE

£ CALL FOR PRICE CHECK ONLINE



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

The Destiny integrated amplifier produces world beating audio performance with its use of discrete analogue MOS-FET, its new mains transformer which produces up to 100 Watts into 8 Ohm operation and its 3Hz - 80kHz Frequency Response.

Destiny Series
Creek



STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER

The 8000P is a classic two channel power amplifier delivering over 100W per channel and featuring a frequency response of 0.1 Hz - 75 kHz.

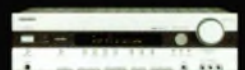
8000P
Audiolab



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Integrated Amplifier with 75 watts per channel into 8 ohms, 200VA custom-made toroidal power transformer, power supply capacitors and separate pre-amp output with class A buffer stage.

2010s
Exposure



7.1 AV AMPLIFIER

With the TX-SR505E HDMI transport enabling pass-through sources up to 1080p and component video supporting 720p and 1080i sources, this AV receiver is a fine investment for those who want the best of what is available today and tomorrow.

TX-SR505
Onkyo

Mordaunt Short



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HOME CINEMA AT AN INCREDIBLY AFFORDABLE PRICE

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ALUMNI 5.1 PACK BLACK

Introducing Alumni, the little home cinema speaker package that thinks big. Belying incredibly compact dimensions, Alumni is the latest in a long line of elegant Mordaunt-Short surround speaker systems. These stunning high-gloss designs utilise the company's forty year research and development expertise and truly make your movies and music come alive.

Tangent

CHECK ONLINE

Wi-Fi RADIO Quattro



INFORMATION

Tangent Quattro is the first internet-capable member of the Tangent audio family. Connecting to several thousands of internet radio stations is as simple as it is pleasurable. Reproduction of the digital signals sent through cyberspace fully lives up to your expectations with the powerful 3" up-firing driver unit performing to perfection.

Fatman

£ CALL FOR PRICE

VALVE AMPLIFIER iTUBE



INFORMATION

The entry-level Fatman product for use with iPod and any other audio device (e.g. CD). Utilising a hybrid-tube design platform, the iTube provides superb audio reproduction and attractive design at an affordable price. The performance of the amplifier and dock has been scrutinised by the world's press and they have awarded it the best accolades possible.

CHECK ONLINE

DVD SYSTEM DAV-IS10



INFORMATION

Breathtaking 5.1 surround sound DVD home-theatre system that creates an immersive sound through five tiny satellite speakers. Built-in upscaler generates a 720p or 1080i signal via HDMI cable for superb picture quality on your high-def TV. 450W (5x50W) plus 2x100W for subwoofer, using efficient, high-quality S-Master digital amplification.

InFocus

TEAC



MISSION



Finance options available through V12 Finance

Full terms and conditions of the sale are available at www.HiFiBitz.co.uk/terms.asp. The terms of sale do not affect your statutory rights. Finance options are available on all items priced over £390 e.g. Buy Now Pay May 2008. All calls are recorded for training purposes.

SALE

NOW ON

HOME CINEMA PLASMA AND LCD TV



Pioneer KURO 42/50" PLASMA TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

Featuring Pioneer's new ultra black panel technology and an amazing contrast ratio of 16000:1, these 8th generation plasma screens produce ever deeper blacks than before. Visit your local store and see the difference.



Samsung LE32R87BD • 32" LCD TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

This HD ready 32" model features all the latest technology and is guaranteed to deliver an amazing home cinema experience into your home. Key features include a built-in digital tuner for access to Freeview channels, picture-in-picture, SRS TruSurround and a gaming mode.



Panasonic TH-37/42PX70 37/42" PLASMA TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

Finished in a classy gloss black finish the PX70 screens will blend into any room. With a built-in Freeview tuner and excellent connectivity, they effortlessly handle motion and produce vibrant, natural colours. A choice of mounting options and screen sizes are available.



Loewe Individual 32" LCD TV • HD READY • FREEVIEW

With a choice of five different front colours and interchangeable side panels in nine different colours, these screens will match any decor. A wide range of mounting options are available.



Sony Bravia KDL-40W2000 40" LCD TV • FULL HD READY • FREEVIEW

With a super wide viewing angle giving you a great picture from almost anywhere and a fast response time, this award-winning LCD TV includes a built-in Freeview tuner, 1920 x 1080 resolution and two HDMI inputs.

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included with all Plasma and LCD televisions purchased at our normal selling price*

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SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

DLP PROJECTION



InFocus IN81/IN82
1080P FULL HD READY

Two outstanding projectors from InFocus. The IN81 produces a terrific picture with HD content while the IN82 has all the strengths of the IN81 but with an even better picture.



Sim2
GRAND CINEMA HT380
1080P FULL HD READY

Sim2 Multimedia is a world-leading manufacturer at the forefront of home cinema technology and a name synonymous with high-end home cinema projection.



ONKYO AV RECEIVERS



TX-SR875 AV RECEIVER

Exceeding even the highest expectations, the TX-SR875 features on-board decoding for all the latest key sound formats.

TX-SR605 AV RECEIVER

"With a surfeit of talent, especially where movie sound is concerned, this is a must-hear unit"



ARCAM SOLO

MOVIE 5.1 ALL-IN-ONE DVD SYSTEM

Solo Movie 5.1 represents a new dimension in experiencing music and movies. An all-in-one home cinema system that delivers the most advanced sound...ever.

- 5.1 Surround • 50 Watts Per Channel RMS
- Universal disc playback • HDMI digital output
- FM Radio & DAB digital radio
- Integrated iPod control via r-Lead/rDock
- Black Finish



"Image quality is simply gorgeous: it's sharp, vivid and packed with detail... The Movie 5.1 is something to get excited about."

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION #1 BEST TESTS • JULY 2007

HOME CINEMA SEPARATES AND SPEAKERS



Arcam DIVA
DV137 DVD PLAYER
AVR280 AV RECEIVER

Delivering 80w across all of its 7 channels, Arcam's new AVR280 produces terrific sound with both movies and music. It is an ideal partner for Arcam's DV137 universal disc player. Compatible with DVD-Audio and SACD discs along with standard DVDs, the 137 impresses with its crisp, vivid images.



Denon
DVD1940 DVD PLAYER
AVR2808 AV RECEIVER

Featuring 1080p upscaling, this award-winning DVD player provides first-class picture and sound quality and is also compatible with both MP3 and WMA audio discs. The New AVR2808 receiver features identical quality and power, 110 watts, for all 7 channels, HDMI inputs/outputs and auto set-up and room EQ.



Sony
RDR-HXD970 HDD/DVD RECORDER
STR-DA5200ES AV RECEIVER

Building on the abilities of Sony's award-winning HXD860, this recorder features both analogue and digital tuners, an HDMI output, a 250GB hard disk plus a USB input. When partnered with the STR-DA5200ES 7 channel receiver the combination delivers excellent sound and vision performance.



Yamaha
DVD-S1700 DVD PLAYER
RX-V1800 AV RECEIVER

Designed for top-notch sound quality, the new Yamaha RX-V1800 has 4 HDMI inputs and can decode HD audio formats. A host of impressive features hides behind its face. The multi-format DVD-S1700 disc player is an ideal partner, complementing the V1800 with both its looks and performance.

KEF KHT3005SE
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

This revised version of KEF's EISA award-winning KHT3005 backs-up its impressive looks with superb surround-sound. Powerful enough to fill even the largest of rooms, this SE version is a must audition speaker package.

"The new KHT3005SE is sensational!"



Pioneer BDP-LX70A
BLU-RAY DISC PLAYER

Enjoy outstanding high definition images with this award-winning Blu-ray disc player



Don't forget! Accessories make the difference

The quality of sound and vision a system produces is determined as much by its accessories as its main components. At Sevenoaks, accessories are not an afterthought - our staff can demonstrate the difference the right accessories can make to your home entertainment experience.



REL R Series SUBWOOFERS

The R-Series is designed to augment the performance of "full range" speaker systems and to provide linear response down to below 20Hz. The R series comprises the 205, 305 and 505. All models feature class D amplification and are available in a piano black lacquer finish.

B&W Mini Theatre
MT-30 • 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

With a combination of the latest R&D techniques and a passion for music, B&W produces a diverse range of products befitting the largest audio manufacturer in the UK.

The Mini Theatre MT-30 delivers excellent performance and is ideal for both home cinema and hi-fi applications.



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Spread the cost of buying.

Flexible finance options* are available on the majority of products we stock.

* Written details on request.

Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

ROKSAN

KANDY L.III INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER MKIII

Kandy integrated is now refined way beyond what would be expected of amplifiers approaching almost twice its price! The new Kandy sounds delicate yet powerful, far more dynamic yet so musical and easy to listen to and sets a new standard for affordable hi-end amplifiers in its class.



WHAT HI-FI FIT
AWARDS 2007
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
STEREO AMPLIFIER
ROKSAN KANDY L.III

"The new Kandy sounds spectacular...we sweated buckets of blood trying to make the Kandy L.III uncomfortable, but without success - it's a true all-rounder, excelling with every type of music you play through it!"

WHAT HI-FI FIT SOUND AND VISION • SEPTEMBER 2006

HI-FI SEPARATES AND SYSTEMS



Teac REFERENCE 300DAB MKIII MUSIC SYSTEM

Comprising three classy looking units, this CD player, DAB/FM/AM radio and amplifier system combines style with outstanding sound quality. Simply choose speakers from our extensive range in-store.

Onkyo CR-515DAB CD RECEIVER

This award-winning CD system is a rare thing: a truly musical micro system. It delivers a great performance even when compared with budget hi-fi separates. (Excludes Speakers)



Arcam SOLO MUSIC SYSTEM Monitor Audio RS1 SPEAKERS

A great package coupling Arcam's award-winning all-in-one hi-fi system with the excellent RS1 speakers.

Ask in-store about our recommended cables and stands.



Monitor Audio

Across a speaker range rich in its choice of style, shape and application, Monitor Audio's thirty year heritage of technical expertise guarantees great sound with tonal accuracy that is shared by every speaker. From on-wall, in-wall, ceiling and floor, Monitor Audio gives you the freedom to enjoy high-quality sound in every room of your home.



Ranges include Bronze Reference, Silver RS, Gold Signature and Radius

Spendor S Series

Each Spendor 'S' series speaker delivers a balanced energy output to guarantee a consistent sound and a seamless sound stage in a diversity of living environments. Each model features:-

- Hand-made 'e' generation bass-midrange drive units
- Dynamically damped cabinets which reduce energy re-radiation to inaudible levels.



Designed for on-wall installations, the SP5 (above) delivers exceptional sound quality and is ideal for hi-fi and home cinema applications

KEF iQ Series

From the second you spot the soft sheen of titanium on the main driver cones, you know you're in for something special. And you won't be disappointed.

Utilising KEF's trademark Uni-Q technology, the iQ series delivers consistently detailed imaging and unrivalled off-axis response so everyone in the room gets the full benefit, wherever they sit



iQ5SE

"These SEs are far more entertaining than the originals, yet leave the old speakers' fuss-free nature intact."

"A new class-leader: a true all-rounder"

MARANTZ CD6002 • WHAT HI-FI SOUND AND VISION • OCTOBER 2007



Marantz

Marantz products range from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and AV receivers. Its hi-fi range includes the CD5001OSE and new CD6002 CD players and the PM4001OSE amplifier, offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.

Rotel RA04 AMPLIFIER & RCD06 CD Bowers & Wilkins 685 SPEAKERS

Excellent performance and exceptional value for money. This combination creates a sound that, the more you hear it, the better it gets.



Primare

With class-leading build quality, and a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design, Primare build elegant, reliable, easy-to-use systems that promise years of high quality performance.



Cyrus

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price.

- High-definition audio and video performance
- Wide choice of both hi-fi and AV components
- Uniquely broad upgrade options
- **NEW** CD6 SE, CD8 SE CD players and CDX 1 SE transport

NEW

Pro-ject

Revive your record collection with Pro-ject turntables. The range includes the new award-winning RPM1 Genie. This belt drive, two speed player comes complete with Ortofon cartridge and combines style with excellent sound quality.



MULTI-ROOM AUDIO



Sonos

This wireless, multi-room digital music system, lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house - and control them from the palm of your hand. You can even play different songs in different rooms.

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BEDFORD 29-31 St Peters St 01234 272779	NORWICH 29-29a St Giles St 01603 767605
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BRISTOL 92b Whiteladies Rd, Clifton 0117 974 3727	OXFORD 41 St Clements St 01865 241773
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CHELSEA 403 King's Rd 020 7352 9466	POOLE Latimer House, 44-46 High St 01202 671677
CHELTENHAM 14 Pittville St 01242 241171	PRESTON 40-41 Lune St 01772 825777
EALING 24 The Green 020 8579 8777	READING 3-4 The Walk, King St 0118 959 7768
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EPSOM 12 Upper High St 01372 720720	SHEFFIELD 635 Queens Rd, Heeley 0114 255 5861
EXETER 28 Cowick St 01392 218895	SOUTHAMPTON 33 London Rd 023 8033 7770
GLASGOW 88 Great Western Rd 0141 332 9655	SOUTHGATE 77 Chase Side 020 8886 2777
GUILDFORD 73b North St 01483 536666	STAINES 4 Thames St 01784 460777
HOLBORN 144-148 Grays Inn Rd 020 7837 7540	SWINDON 8-9 Commercial Rd 01793 610992
HULL 1 Savile Row, Savile St 01482 587171	SWISS COTTAGE 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd 020 7722 9777
KINGSTON 43 Fife Rd 020 8547 0717	TUNBRIDGE WELLS 28-30 St Johns Rd 01892 531543
LEEDS ▶ RELOCATED TO WETHERBY 62 North St 0113 245 2775	WATFORD 478 St Albans Rd 01923 213533
LEEDS WETHERBY NEW 15 The Horsefair Centre 01937 586886	WEYBRIDGE 43 Church St, The Quadrant 01932 828525
LEICESTER 10 Loseby Lane 0116 253 6567	WITHAM (ESSEX) 1 The Grove Centre 01376 501733
LINCOLN 20-22 Corporation St (off High St) 01522 527397	WOLVERHAMPTON 29-30 Cleveland St 01902 312225
LOUGHTON 7-9 Goldings Hill 020 8532 0770	YEOVIL 14 Silver St 01935 700078
MAIDSTONE 96 Week St 01622 686366	■ Custom Installation Centre ■ Cedia Member

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10% OFF

RRP/SRP ON ALL

- All-in-One Hi-Fi Systems
- All-in-One AV Systems
- Projectors

15% OFF

RRP ON ALL

- Hi-Fi and AV Separates
- CD PLAYERS, AMPLIFIERS, DVD, AV RECEIVERS
- Subwoofers

Excludes Arcam FMJ, Cyrus, Onkyo, Project, Roksan and Sonos - but please ask and find out what we can do!

25% OFF

RRP ON ALL

- Hi-Fi Speakers
- AV Speaker Packages

Excludes B&W, KEF (SE/Reference), Monitor Audio (Gold/Platinum) and Spendor - but please ask and find out what we can do!

35% OFF

ORIGINAL SELLING PRICE ON END-OF-LINE

- Amps, CD, Receivers
- DVD and more...

We have a huge range of end-of-line products available with massive savings. See our website or separate adverts to find out more!

50% OFF

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- Speakers and more...

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PLEASE NOTE

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FLEXIBLE FINANCE OPTIONS¹

Spread the cost of buying.

Flexible finance options¹ are available on the majority of products we stock.

¹ Written details on request.

Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

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 floorstander 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 engrossing 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 (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	TEST 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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	18,295,255	A-	45				283
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	245,37,315	A	26				288
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aurousal A1	450	Single-driver system is coloured but wonderfully coherent and very effective at communicating emotions	20,5,36,27	A	40				299
<input type="checkbox"/>	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21	A-	65				260
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23				226
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28	A-	40				279
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 683	899	We have not come across this level of transparency in a sub-£1,000 speaker before, killer bass is sublime	19,8,98,5,34	A	38				297
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29	A	35				253
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	A	37				271
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34	A+	22				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Monitor 1	1,000	Beautiful miniature with advanced drivers sounds marvellously coherent with fine vocal expression	16,32,24	A	40				296
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dynaudio DM 2/10	775	Unfashionably bulky standmount has fine dynamics, grip, bass and headroom and is delicate and well-mannered	27,5,45,35	A	22				299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20	A-	28				273
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40				269
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M12.2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25	A-	40				265
	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25	A-	25				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal 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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Heco Celan 300	595	Does tone colour, dynamics and detail with aplomb and communicates superbly in its +2dB mode. Sensitive, too	23,36,33	A+	40				301
<input type="checkbox"/>	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	A	25				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF 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
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF IQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	A	25				273
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mission elan e34	400	A return to form for Mission with a pacy, vibrant sound matched to good looks	35,96,34	A+	48				298
	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	A+	28				271
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25	A-	30				294
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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

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)



Get the best

“ Isn't it easy to buy a new system? You read the magazine product reviews, you find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price, you order the system, get a friend who knows his onions to install it – and live happily ever after. ”

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a lot of wasted money. It's likely that the system will help you lose interest in music pretty rapidly. The problem is that there are more myths about hi-fi than Aesop's Fables. CD gives you perfect sound. All CD players sound the same. A £50 CD player plays high fidelity music. All magazine reviewers are experts. Big speakers are always better than small ones. More watts per channel is everything. MP3 format gives you high quality. A collection of 'Best Buy' components will be a great system. And so on and so on...ALL MYTHS!

Music - the real aim

Our aim must be to buy a hi-fi system that will prove musically satisfying, reliable and deliver true value for money. If the system doesn't excite you musically you've wasted your money. What is even worse is that you may not even realise you've bought a bad egg – you'll just switch the TV on instead and your desire to listen to music will gradually diminish. Have you ever been in a pub or club where you realise it's very difficult to conduct a conversation, even to the extent of being really tiring? A poor quality system continuously distorts but I don't mean it necessarily reaches the point of audibly breaking up. With a top quality system you can play music very loudly and still hold a conversation because it's free of distortion. A poor system is tiring to listen to even when it's played at low volume. If you want proof, go into a shoe or clothes shop where they play background 'music' and try to enjoy listening. It's odds on you'll fail.



What and Where to buy

The system you think you want may not be right for you. – So where do you start? Here's an important tip...don't start with WHAT, start with WHERE.

There is only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Now it's likely you have preconceived ideas that may put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. Again, just myths. Most specialist hi-fi dealers are running their business because, above all, they love music. They spend a large portion of their time listening to music and comparing systems to get the best possible result. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. But they all also know the system must suit you.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



Hi-Fi for your money....

Buying or being sold to?

Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met... and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problem you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by commendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Oscar Wilde wrote "...too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing." Specialist retailers know that not all potential purchasers will seek them out. They tend to attract the more discerning, thoughtful customers. Let's face it, a good deal is about more than just a good price. After all, unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

Listed below are **20 OF THE BEST HI-FI SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY**. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.



... Ask our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

LONDON

N1
GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road.
020 7226 5500

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road,
Battersea.
020 7924 2043

SOUTH

Aldermaston, Berkshire
HIFICINEMA
Mars House, Calleva Park.
0118 982 0402

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High Street.
01233 624441

Brighton

THE POWERPLANT
40 Church Road, Hove.
01273 775542

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street.
01245 265245

Colchester

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
33 Sir Isaac's Walk.
01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High Street.
01268 779762

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
132/4 London Road.
01702 435255

Southampton

PHASE 3 HI-FI
37 Bedford Place.
023 8022 8434

Worthing

PHASE 3 HI-FI
213-217 Tarring Road.
01903 245577

SOUTH WEST

Bath

AUDIENCE
14 Broad Street.
01225 333310

MIDLANDS

Banbury

OVERTURE
3 Church Lane.
01295 272158

Birmingham

SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street, Bloxwich.
01922 493499

Birmingham

MUSIC MATTERS
363 Hagley Road, Edgbaston.
0121 429 2811

Coventry

FRANK HARVEY
163 Spon Street.
024 7652 5200

Leicester

CYMBIOSIS
6 Hotel Street.
0116 262 3754

Nottingham

CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way.
0115 9584404

Stafford

ACOUSTICA
114 Wolverhampton Road.
01785 258216

NORTH

Cheadle

THE AUDIO WORKS
14 Stockport Road.
0161 428 7887

Chester

ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road.
01244 344227

Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS
184 Fitzwilliam St.
0114 275 6048

York

SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108
Gateshead
LINTONE AUDIO
7-11 Park Lane, Gateshead.
0191 477 4167

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh

LOUD & CLEAR
Bonnington Mill,
72 Newhaven Road.
0131 555 3963

Glasgow

LOUD & CLEAR
520 St Vincent St, Finnieston.
0141 221 0221

N. IRELAND

Belfast LYRIC HI-FI
429-431 Lisburn Rd.
028 90 381296

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				SPEAKER CM	FLOORSTANDER	EQL OF FREQ	BASS FROM Hz	FRE SPACE
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,97,5,30	A+	28		284
<input type="checkbox"/>	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26	A-	30		292
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Revel Concerta F12	900	Massive multi-driver floorstander is not pretty, but has great headroom, bass weight and impressive neutrality	25,108,36	A	22		296
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruark Sabre II	799	Straightforward engineering combined with high finish quality that delivers a beautifully timed and engaging sound	20,33,5,27	A-	50		289
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy Mercury F4	350	Floorstander has an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm, restrained output	20,5,97,29	A+	24		294
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34	A	40		265
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wharfedale Opus2-M1	1,000	Elegant mid to compact three way, a new direction in recent years for Wharfedale	23,51,36	A-	42		302
ABOVE £1,000								
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Amphion Prio 520	1,600	Gorgeous styling and a lively sound with good voice band integrity and a sweet top end	16,104,22	A	40		302
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC SCM1 6A	2,203	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Good value, including built-in amps, and fuss-free	27,45,33	ACT	42		300
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	AVI ADM9	1,000	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic, and they give good iPod, too	20,30,26	ACT	60		301
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	A+	30		255
<input type="checkbox"/>	Free FS1	3,000	An elegant active design for anyone after the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express	16,87,27	ACT	35		301
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	KEF Reference Model 231/2	3,500	Very classy but costly three-way stand-mount with much improved Uni-Q; could be more transparent	25x42x41	A	30		298
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monopulse 42A	1,495	Oddball styling, fine bass-to-mid balance and dynamics, and superb voice coherence, but untidy treble	26,110,25	A	25		302
<input type="checkbox"/>	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



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Linn Akurate Music Server

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Arcam Movie Solo 2.1 - High quality video output & features delivered in standard stereo for full range or Sub/Sat speakers.
AVI ADM9 Active Speakers - Do away with preamps and power amps as everything is built into the speaker including a USB link.
B&W 600 Series - New models that make a quantum leap in style and performance re-defining budget esoteria for speakers.
Naim SuperNait - A Nait on steroids with superb performance & truly flexible connectivity. A veritable 85wpc one box wonder.
Limited Offers - Linn Majik integrated system inc Majik CD + Majik Integrated + Katan Speakers. £3500 (Save £790). Upgrade to Majik 140 Speakers for £700 extra.
Arcam Solo Movie 2.1 + 2 Muso + Logo Speaker package £1999 (Save over £230)
Please visit billyvee.co.uk for full special offer list & great ex-display bargains.

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVING	BASS FROM Hz/2	POWER (W)	CLOSE TO WALL
EC	Monitor Audio PL300	5,000	Completely new level of sophistication from a brand best known for mainstream, cost effective designs	41,111,47		A-	28		301
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
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Neat Momentum 3i	1,745	Sounds a lot bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range	22,38,27		A-	23		302
MB	Opera Seconda	1,295	Classy cabinetwork plus beautifully judged neutrality with crisp, clean and deep bass	24,102.5,31.5		A-	20		297
MB	PMC Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	33.5,57.5,10		A+	45		285
MB	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	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
EC	Quad ESL 2805	4,500	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38.5		A-	45		294
MB	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
MB	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	25		271
EC	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39		A	20		256
EC	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30		A-	48		274
MB	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
MB	Ruark Talsman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31		A	22		259
MB	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
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 TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30		A-	25		240
MB	Tannoy Glenair 10	2,999	With a 250mm dual concentric driver this is a generously proportioned, highly engaging speaker for a good price	36,100,35		A+	38		295
MB	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23		A	35		277
MB	Triangle Genese Quartet	1,895	Great material value and a solid all round sonic performance with great loudness potential	23,117,37		A	25		302
MB	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
MB	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 ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,36		A	20		252
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	Wharfedale Airedale Neo	9,000	Expansive yet relaxed sounding, the Neo is a coloured but surprisingly musical and enjoyable speaker	52,115,45		A-	25		296
MB	Yamaha Soavo 2	1,200	Cunningly crafted stand-mount with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving	22,38,35		A	28		296

Our favourite MB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM Hz/2	ISSUE NUMBER
MB	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
EC	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
EC	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
EC	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
MB	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
MB	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
MB	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
MB	MartinLogan Dynamo	449	Refined, compact sub brings established MartinLogan virtues to a new price and size point	29,35,32	200	25	301
	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
EC	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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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

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

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN-BACK	CLOSED-BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
BB	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
	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250	245
	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
	Beyerdynamic DT880	200	Informative, neutral and surprisingly close to good loudspeakers. Good for occasional and long-term listening alike						205	300
	Grado SR225	180	Tonally shows the way to Grado's amazing GS1000 flagship, but detail and soundstage are not truly class-leading						200	300
BB	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200	270
BB	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250	288
	Sennheiser HD485	65	A great all-round headphone for occasional or even heavy use, refined in sound and comfortable, too						220	296
	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
	Sennheiser PXC450	299	Noise-cancelling model: as good as it gets for making the most of listening in planes, trains and automobiles						240	302
	Shure SE420	240	Expensive and no replacement for top conventional 'phones, but streets ahead of most in-ears with real refinement						15	295
	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						205	295

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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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

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER	
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER		DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Atlas Questor	70	Very open and informative at high and mid frequencies, with slightly dry bass. Imaging particularly fine						295
	Audioquest Sidewinder	45	A lively and detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm. Slight added upper-bass warmth does little to detract						297
	Black Rhodium Prelude	80	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit						293
	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass and excellently neutral and detailed midrange. Treble generally sweet with occasional slight constriction						299
EC	Black Rhodium Concerto	225	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise						270
	Cambridge Azur Reference	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price, especially adept in the treble with no trace of dryness						296
	Clearer Audio Copper-Line Alpha	50	Sounding like something a good deal dearer, this cable offers near high-end detail and seems highly compatible too						295
	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!						279
EC	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
	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
EC	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
	Profigold PGA3000	60	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good						299
EC	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
EC	Vanden Hul MC Silver IT MkIII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price						289
	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price						273
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
EC	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble					E	278
EC	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price					F	260
EC	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price					E	265
EC	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 1.5	10	Don't look to this cable to beef up the bass, but its performance at higher frequencies is revelatory at the price						299
	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 Twin	40	Good all-rounder, which generally sounds relaxed and musical, and a full bass that stops the right side of sounding blowsy						287
EC	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,480	Tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some of the qualities of a solid core type generically – notably resolution, focus and articulation						302
	Kimber 8PR	12	A cable that really enjoys the music, also admirable for the levels of analytical detail it allows through. Excellent value						299
	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
EC	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
EC	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical						287
EC	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 biwire cable offering tuneful and extended bass, good treble, and midrange with just a little lack of detail						292

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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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive

effect on sound because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Glass	217
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audiophile Base Std Supp't	900	Not cheap and quite bulky, but it's all worth it as sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57	46,35		3	MDF	302
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively	75	56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless	65	60,42		4	Glass	293
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested - standard version £300)	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
	Custom Design Milan	449	Respect is due to any stand that looks this good with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57	48,39		4	Glass	302
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright	62	49,44		4	Metal	271
	Partington Minim	420	Adds its own character to the benefit of rock most particularly, but slightly to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78	45,37	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Glass	302
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RA Torlyte Platform	130	This unassuming platform can be a godsend, cleaning away mid/treble muddle from the sound	8	48,36		1	Torlyte	302
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

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BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise	50	20,17	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	293
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price	56	16.5,18	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	281
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More a range than a model, capable of fine results especially with Acoustic Steel top plates	62	18,16.5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2	299
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16.3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers - and it looks great too!	61	17,15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	261
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies	53	31,22	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		6	287
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	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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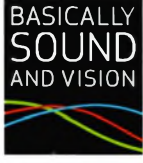
  

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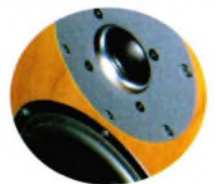
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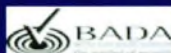
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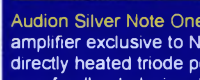


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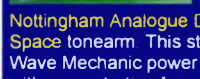
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2nd-hand shootout

It used to be the magic ingredient in CD playback, but is there still a future for DACs?

Once considered a major part of CD playback, the DAC is now seen as a hi-fi peripheral. Although, they are now considered unfashionable, there are still many good reasons for buying one. For starters, there are some superb second-hand buys to choose from and the DAC has no moving parts, ensuring its potential as a reliable hi-fi purchase.

Our first second-hand bargain was originally launched in 1990. The Cambridge DAC3 had a £450 price tag that put it comfortably ahead of competitors like Arcam. With an unusual technical specification and an equally intriguing sound quality, the DAC3 featured four Philips 16 x 4 "crown grade" DAC chips, piggybacked together. This allowed the product to boast a unique 16bits by 16 times oversampling (16x16) DAC, as well as an accurate clock, five power supplies, a toroidal transformer and the ALPS passive volume control.

Now approaching its eighteenth birthday, the Cambridge DAC3 can still put on a good show, with a wonderfully tactile mid-range, punchy bass and fine transparency (just don't expect the treble refinement of today's DACs). For £70-£140, this is one piece of digital nostalgia that's well worth checking out.

Four years after the DAC3, Arcam came up with a version of its own; the Black Box 500. It was more sophisticated and (at £750) a lot more expensive than the Cambridge and featured a customised 20-bit Sigma Delta DAC in discrete logic. It also sounded surprisingly punchy and expressive for an Arcam.



Above: Cambridge Audio DAC3

If you bought the matching 250 transport you could also sync lock the two for perfect clock timing. What still makes the DAC500 such a great product is the inclusion of five digital inputs, making it flexible enough to improve the sound of everything from your CD player to an Apple TV.

As a word of caution try and avoid the 1994 models, which still sound a little "grubby and restrained". Instead, opt for the improved post '95 version (ask to see the original receipt for proof) and you can expect to pay between £120 and £180.

In 1993, Pink Triangle made its first venture into digital audio with the Dacapo. Thanks to a series of interchangeable filters, the Dacapo was also one of the finest DACs of the mid-nineties. Over the course of its life there were six filters available, including 18, 20, 22, 24-bit, 1307 and an HDCD (the PMD100). The 18 and 20 bit versions should be avoided unless they're very cheap. On the other hand, the 1307 gives a warm sound (although it isn't

“...the DAC also has no moving parts, ensuring its potential as a reliable hi-fi purchase.”

the most precise), while the 22 and 24-bit filters still sound good. As for the HDCD filter, that always was the original designers favourite, so see if you can get one.

The Dacapo has four inputs, whereas the vast majority of DACs only came with one (extra digital 'cards' were optional). Another option was the DC battery power supply. Both these items are highly valued on the second-hand market and are well worth seeking out. In terms of reliability, the original Nippon capacitors had a design fault and could leak. This then rusted the copper tracking and could cause failure sometimes proceeded by a 'pink' noise. Unless the DAC is very cheap, do check the capacitors, inspect the board for



Above: dCS Elgar Plus DAC

damage, and ask the previous owner as to whether or not the original capacitors have been changed. Find a DC model with a couple of inputs and the 24-bit filter and you could be looking at £1,000. Given that this model cost over £3,000 new, this isn't such a bad deal.

If it's the very best you're after then, arguably, the finest second-hand DAC is the dCS Elgar. Although still available new for around £9,500, it was originally launched back in 1996. Back then it was the world's first 24/96 domestic DAC. By 1998 it was the world's first 24/192. Two years later it gained DSD (Direct Stream Digital) and became known as the Elgar Plus. A year later an IEEE1394 digital interface was added, which

Sony employs for SACD transmission. By 2003 there was another version (v4.22) and auto layer select software had been added.

We have a great deal of affection for this DAC, thanks to its stunning sound quality and value for money. But now that the Scarlatti has ousted the Elgar Plus (as the range-topping dCS DAC) the former has been somewhat neglected. Nearly new models, to the very latest specification, sell for £6,500 or less. A slightly older Elgar Plus, with the latest software costs £3,500. But if you fancy a taste of the high life, but can't stretch to this then the earliest models start from around £1,000, with 24/192 models kicking off at around £1,500. It's crucial, however, to buy from an official dCS dealer, who will not only warranty the product for you, but also ensure it has the latest software upgrades. And at this price point, you'll need that peace of mind. **HFC**

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MARANTZ SIZZLER

- Marantz CD6002 CD Player
- Marantz PM6002 Amplifier
- Q Acoustics 1030 Speakers



WHAT IS IT?
★★★★★
AWARDS 2006
Q ACOUSTICS 1030 SPEAKERS

WAS: £769.95
SAVE: £270
£499.95

Also available separately

Marantz CD6002 CD Player
£219.95 (Was £269.95, Save £50)

Marantz PM6002 Amplifier
£219.95 (Was £269.95, Save £50)

WHAT IS IT?
★★★★★
AWARDS 2007

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS
WHARFEDALE EVO 2-30

- Outstanding real-wood veneer
- Based on the 5-star-rated Evolution-30s
- 2 x Kevlar drivers for impressive, distortion-free bass extension
- Improved high-resolution tweeter delivers brilliant detail from all sources
- 5.1 package also available



WAS: £649.95
SAVE: £350
£299.95

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£119.95 (Was £249.95, Save £130)

DVD PLAYER
MARANTZ DV7001

- HDMI out with 1080p HD upscaling
- Plays DVD, SACD, DivX, MP3
- In-store exclusive



WHAT IS IT?
★★★★★
JUNE 2007

WAS: £599.95
SAVE: £120
£479.95

UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER
YAMAHA DVDS1700

- Multi-region DVD, DVD-Audio, SACD, DivX, MP3, WMA, VCD and JPEG Playback
- HDMI out with 1080p Faroudja HD upscaling



WAS: £399.95
SAVE: £200
£199.95

SPEAKERS
KEF IQ7SE

- Elegant floorstanders in a choice of finishes
- System and room friendly design
- In-store exclusive



WAS: £599.95
SAVE: £150
£449.95

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS
EPOS M15.2

- Floorstanding version of Award-Winning M12.2, with superior bass extension
- Dark cherry or black real-wood veneer



WAS: £699.95
SAVE: £300
£399.95

AMPLIFIER
ROKSAN KANDY LIII

- Remote control
- Black or silver
- 2 x 120 watts



WHAT IS IT?
★★★★★
AWARDS 2007

WAS: £649.95
SAVE: £50
£599.95

AMPLIFIER
CREEK EVO AMP

- Remote control, 2 x 85 watts
- Overspecified toroidal transformer and numerous audiophile enhancements
- Silver finish



WAS: £499.95
SAVE: £200
£299.95

WHAT IS IT?
★★★★★
ISSUE 283

DAB RADIO
PURE EVOKE 2

- DAB and FM reception
- Runs on mains or batteries
- Stereo speakers
- Real wood veneer
- B Grade - guaranteed for 12 months



WAS: £159.95
SAVE: £100
£59.95

WHAT IS IT?
★★★★★
JANUARY 2004

5.1 STYLE SPEAKERS
KEF KHT3005

- Four satellites, dedicated centre speaker and stylish subwoofer
- Flexible desk stands/wall mounts included
- Silver finish



WAS: £999.95
SAVE: £400
£599.95

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DECEMBER 2006

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Ex -demo and second hand items

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47 labs Dumpty S/H	1425	899	Martin Logan Fresco x-demo	850 635
47 Labs Flatfish MKII Transport S/H	3020	1995	Martin Logan Grotto Subwoofer x-demo	999 749
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade Balanced S/H	3600	1399	Monitor Audio Radius 360 Subwoofer Cherry S/H	350 249
dCS Verdi Encore Transport BNIB	9500	5999	ProAc D25 Maple Floorstanders S/H	2700 1599
Krell Showcase DVD x-demo	3698	2775	Pen Audio Charm Active Subwoofer x-demo	1995 999
Krell SACD Standard 5.2 x-demo	3998	2999	Pen Audio Rebel 2 x-demo	995 699
Linn Karik/Numerik S/H	3500	795	Rel Acoustics Studio III Subwoofer x-demo	4500 2995
Linn Numerik DAC S/H	1500	499	Sonus faber Concerto Domus x-demo	1799 1350
Nagra DAC x-demo	7250	3999	Sonus faber wall domus x-demo	787 590
Naim Audio CD3 S/H	N/A	399	Sonus faber Centre domus inc stand x-demo	986 739
Orelle CD100EVO S/H	1500	975	Sonus faber Gravis Domus subwoofer x-demo	1290 959
Rotel RCD 865 CD player S/H	N/A	99	Sonus faber Cremona Maple x-demo	5000 3999
Sugden CD21SE CD Player S/H	1499	1099	Spendor S3 Cherry S/H	599 379
Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	1299	Tsunami TS300 Beech Subwoofer S/H	299 169
Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Oscom/Balanced S/H	2990	695	Velodyne DD12 Subwoofer S/H	2350 1399
Wadia 270SE/271X Transport and DAC x-demo	16000	9499	Wilson Audio System5 Black S/H	18000 5499

Analogue

Heed Audio Orbit TT PSU New & Boxed	225	179
Benz Micro Refill Silver MC Cartridge S/H	1500	749
Clearaudio Signature MC x-demo	1500	699
Mc Cormack Micro Drive Phono Stage S/H	650	399
Phonomena BPS Battery supply for phono BINB	650	399
Phonomena Photo stage MM/MC BINB	650	399
Rega P5/Elys x-demo	772	579
Roksan Xerxes X with XX bearing & plinth x-demo	1795	1325
Sugden Stage 2 MM/MC phono stage x-demo	399	299
Tesseract Taada MM/MC Phono stage S/H	N/A	499
Vdh Grasshopper GLAII MC Cartridge x-demo	2500	1699
Vdh MCOne Special BNIB	950	649
VPI HR-X Turntable x-demo	9250	6999

Preamplifiers

Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preamplifier X-demo	625	399
Audio Research SP16 with Phono Stage x-demo	2249	1749
Conrad Johnson Premier 18LS x-demo	4000	1999
ECS Preamplifier S/H	5000	3999
Krell KRC3 Series II Remote Controlled Preamplifier S/H	2998	1695
Music First Silver Passive x-demo	2750	2099
Meridian 501 Preamplifier S/H	N/A	399
Musical Fidelity X P100 Preamplifier S/H	899	499
Orange MKII Ltd Ed Valve Preamplifier with Phono Stage S/H	2500	1299
Prima Luna Prologue 3 Preamplifier x-demo	1099	899
Roksan L1 Preamp (requires PSU) S/H	2299	995
Roksan L1.5 Preamplifier (requires PSU) S/H	2699	1299
Spectral DMC 30s Reference Preamplifier S/H	7600	3795

Amplifiers

47 Laboratory Shigaraki Intergrated x-demo	1500	1299
Audio Research VM220 Valve mono Amplifiers x-demo	9000	7499
Audio Research VS55 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	2500	1499
Audio Research VT60 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	1995	795
Conrad Johnson MV60 SE Valve Amplifier x-demo	2500	1895
Denon AVC-A11XV Surround Amplifier	2500	1495
Krell KAV400xi Black x-demo	2498	2199
Leben CS-200 Power Amplifier x-demo	1800	1350
McCormack DNA125 Power Amplifiers BNIB	2195	1499
Meridan 555 Poweramplifier S/H	N/A	399
Nagra MPA RCMI x-demo	10450	7999
Pathos Model 1 MKII x-demo	1295	975
Prima Luna Prologue 2 x-demo	1198	950
Prima Luna Prologue 4 x-demo	799	625
Prima Luna Prologue 5 x-demo	1099	899
Primare A31 x-demo	1500	1125
Veritas P400 Digital Amplifier S/H	N/A	1199

Loudspeakers

JM lab Alto Utopia be Signature S/H	11399	6499
JM Lab Micro Utopia be Classic x-demo	4700	3750
Living Voice Avatar OBXR2 Cherry x-demo	4400	3599
Martin Logan Aeon I Oak x-demo	3189	1999

Cables and Accessories

Audio Note AN-SPA Silver 2x1.5B1 wired Speaker Cables S/H	630	299
Audio Note AN-1 digital RCA cable S/H	N/A	99
Audioquest 1.5m Topaz RCA-RCA S/H	N/A	99
Cardas Cross 2M RCA-RCA S/H	590	399
Cogan Hall Intermezzo EMD 0.75m RCA S/H	N/A	99
Hovland HPC 1m RCA Interconnects S/H	749	250
Finite Elemente HD12 MR 3 tier table Black x-demo	4400	2999
Isotek Sigmas Euro Version x-demo	995	745
Madrigal MDC2 1m RCA/RCA 75ohm Digital Cable new boxed	420	249
Nordost Baldur 5m pair bi wired Speaker cable x-demo	1265	999
Shun Mook 1pr Spatial Controller x-demo	450	229
Shun Mook Ultra Diamond Resonators set of 3 x-demo	710	399
Sonic Link 1.4m Gold mains cable S/H	N/A	59
Spectral MI-330 10ft Interconnect RCA-RCA S/H	650	299
Spectral MH-750 8ft Speaker cable S/H	900	399
Spectral MI-330 15ft interconnect S/H	1257	599
Vdh CD102 MkIII 1.5 S/H	199	99
Wireworld Equinox 2.2.5m Biwire S/H	1299	399

Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies

Arcam Delta 80 LW/MW/FM preset Tuner S/H	399	169
Isotek Sigmas x-demo	995	745
Isotek Substation special version S/H	1600	695
Magnum Dynlab Etude101A S/G	1295	599
Magnum Dynlab FTR remote/Tuner for Etude S/H	395	199
PS Audio PS300 with muliwave S/H	1750	799
Rotel RT850L AM/FM Tuner S/H	189	99

Suppliers and installers of High Quality Audio Systems

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FOR SALE

ACOUSTIC ENERGY LINEAR 1

loudspeakers, one year old, mint, manual, boxed, piano black finish, £475 ono. Tel 07941 174804 (Berks).

ARCAM FMJ SYSTEM, CD, amp, poweramp, Castle Inversion 100 large floorstanders. High quality cables, accessories, rack. True high end sound, excellent condition, £2,595. Tel 01923 662295 (West Herts).

ATACAMA EQUINOX HI-FI

four-shelf rack in silver Five star award winner. Excellent sound, £200. Also legendary Marantz CD-63 KI Signature in black, £250. NAD 422 FM-only tuner. Great sound, £100. 020 8684 1274 (Surrey).

AUDIO ANALOGUE Bellini/Donizetti pre/power amps, silver, £400. Marantz CD63KI Signature CD player, £225. All boxed with manuals. Owned from new. Call Steve 07802 483911 or mcdonaldslawther@ricsonline.net (West London).

AUDIOLAB 8000A amplifier, £150. Cable Talk 3.1 bi-wire speaker cable, 2x3m, £15. Chord speaker cable, 2x2m, £10. 07964 660214 (Birmingham).

AUDIOLAB 8000A amplifier, black 60wpc boxed, with manual, £150. Creek T40 (FM only) tuner also boxed with manual, £25. 01268 637490 (Essex).

AUDIO NOTE ZERO valve pre/power and CD system. Huge soundstage, rarely available, one year use, recent service, mint condition, boxed (£3,000) £1,600. 01992 300713 (Herts).

B&W AV 7.1 speaker package (no sub), 703 main speakers, HTM 7 centre speaker in cherry finish. DS 7 dipole rear speakers in white finish (two pairs).

Main speakers used once, others unused. All boxed etc; cost today £4300, sell for £2,000 no offers. 07859 388167

B&W CM4 Maple, excellent condition, owned from new, orig box £400. Matching CMC Maple, second owner, no box, also great condition, £150. 07803 034 578 or email richard@worklogic.co.uk (Bedford).

COPLAND CDA 823 CD player and Copland CTA 405 valve amp. Both mint condition, as new. (£4,250) £3,000 plus postage. Cannot split. Please email alan395shona@btinternet.com

DALI IKON2 speakers, walnut, mint and boxed (can demo). Mission stance stands, black, mint. Both with warranty until August 2008, £280, bargain! Steve 07952 688661 (Derby).

DELTEC DPA 50S power amplifier plus special cables, £350 ono. Creek 4040 amp, £50. Pioneer PL12D record deck, £40. Technics SUV-900 amp, £130. 01708 457691 (Essex).

DENON DRM-710 cassette deck, three head system, Dolby B/C/HX-Pro, many features, can demo, super recording performance, in black, mint condition, £200. 07703 537210 (E. Sussex).

DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 42 wall speakers in white finish, as new condition, Cost £455, accept £195. 07729 600847 (W Sussex).

FANFARE FT1 Legendary Reference Quality FM tuner with balanced and unbalanced outputs. Complete with remote control and manual, £350. needs@bbsrc.ac.uk. Tel 01603 440405 after 7pm (Norfolk).

FOCAL JM-LAB MICRO

Utopia Be. Mint, manual, inc stands, £1,750 07968 189647 (London).

JEFF ROWLAND COHERENCE


One preamp with two Model 3 Mono power amps. 100W into 8 ohms, with manuals. £3,250 may split. 01255 421589 (Essex)

ICON AUDIO integrated amplifier 300B, remote, used one week, (£1,600), £1000. Magnum Dynalab MD308B integrated remote amp, 18 months old, (£2,200) £1,200. 01803 523553 (Devon)

KALIN KN-7 preamp (valve), Rotel RB-03 power amp. Both mint, less than year old, £495 pair. 01252 659058 (Surrey).

KEF IQ5 floorstanders, maple, mint and boxed, £200. 01473 410025 (Suffolk)

KIMBER 4TC jump leads, terminated both ends with PM25 spades, £25. Boxed, unused. QED Silver Anniversary bi-wire 2x5m, £60. Buyer collects. 01323 487640 (East Sussex)

KLIPSCH RF-82 floorstanding speakers, cherry, mint condition. One yr old w/manual, rare find in Britain. Clean and powerful sound. (£920) £600ono. 07806 434683 (Glasgow) 

WANTED

B&W DM303 speakers in good condition. 01689 818166 (Bromley).

CAN ANYONE HELP? Wanted. Small handheld CB transceiver with flexible aerial. 07833 751800 (Lancs).

CELESTION SL6, 600 or 100 loudspeakers, working, good condition, unmarked preferred, good price paid, private buyer, will collect. 01946 862815 (Cumbria)

COPLAND CSA 28 integrated amplifier. 01260 295804 (Cheshire).

PIONEER A300R precision amplifier. 1970's Sugden A21a. Onyx AO21, Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore. Sonneteer Champion amp. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

SD ACOUSTICS SD2 speakers (must be SD2) any condition considered. Contact marc 01642 864314 or email t.elliott30@ntlworld.com

WANTED top quality separates and complete systems – Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, etc. Fast, friendly response and willing to travel/pay cash. Please call John on: 0781 5892458

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

❑ **KRELL FPB300CX** in mint condition (unused) out of the box for taking photo. £5,950 plus shipping. For more details and offers send an email to erezvi@barak.net.il (Israel).

MARANTZ SR8001 receiver 7X125 watts, £695. Marantz DV7001 DVD player, £395. Marantz SA-751 CD/SACD player £3,950. Yamaha 759SE AV amplifier £175, all mint. 020 8951 3178 (Middx)

MERIDIAN 200 TRANSPORT with Trichord clock upgrade. Excellent condition. Manual and remote. Collectable. £150ono. 01494 727504 (South Bucks)

MICHELL ISO/Hera phono stage (separate power supply) for MC cartridges. Pristine condition. Cost £895 in 1998, not used since 2000. £100ono. Call 01359 259152 (Suffolk).

MODIFIED THORENS TD150 turntable, Linn armobard, P+C Rega RB300 arm, Denon 110 high output MC cartridge, £250. Various amp, tuners and speaker cables 07956 438044 (Kent).

NAIM NAIT 5I amplifier, Naim CD5i CD player, Totem Mite Monitor speakers in maple, mint, boxed, (£2,220) accept £1,400 01781 533054 (Swansea)

NAIM TO IPOD/MP3 Interconnect. Neutrik five-pin 180 degree DIN to 3.5mm MiniJack. OFC Copper with 100% foil screen. £9.99+postage. email johndavidwards@hotmail.com Tel 07733 441087 (Manchester)

PASS LABS X-350 stereo amplifier £2,950. Apogee Duetta Signature speakers £1,950. Both vgc 01926 653421 (West Midlands)

QED SILVER ANNIVERSARY biwire speaker cable, 3 metre pair with bananas £45 (£90). Mint. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands).

QUAD 33, 303, FM3 system, 33 for spares, £275. Inca Tech Claymore II, £125. NAD 4155 tuner, boxed £50. Denon TU-260L II tuner, boxed, £60. Leak Troughline Chassis, £75. 07956 438044 (Kent)

QUAD ESL988 electrostatics, black finish, three years old,

superb sound, major improvement over ESL63's, manual + spikes provided, (£4,000) £1,700. For demo ring 01453 544354 (Gloucs)

REVOX G36 valve quarter track 10.5in cap tape recorder. Replacement capstan assembly, hand book etc. fine example of machine £300. Leak valve Troughline 3 FM stereo tuner £50 01782 256087 or mobile 07791 048621 (Stoke-on-Trent)

ROGERS LS3/ 5a loudspeakers, 11 ohm (domestic) version, walnut finish, good condition, no boxes or manuals, £350ono. 01323 723292 (E. Sussex)

ROTEL RB-1090 power amp, 2x380 Watts @ 8 Ohms, Rotels flagship and best power amp. Mint, boxed, one owner from new, £825. 07979 903989 (Bristol)

RUARK SABRE III speakers, rich walnut finish, boxed, as new. HFC and WHF Best Buy. Lively and detailed, can demonstrate, £600. 01970 615386 (Wales)

SHANLING CDT 80 valve CD player, mint condition, lovely warm sound, 18 months old. Cost

£650, bargain, £325ono. Contact Rich 07751 537148 (Oxon)

TEAC A450 cassette deck. Very rare, never used, still in box. Battleship build quality. Offers over £250. 0161 865 9607 (Manchester)

STD 305M turntable, Mission 774 arm, Lentek Entre 1 MC cartridge. Meridian 101MC pre, 103D power. KEF 105 Ref speakers. Denon DRM 600 cassette. Sony DVP NS330 DVD/CD player. All good condition. Offers. Phone Bill 020 8660 9694 (South Croydon).

SONY DAT RECORDER, DTC-60ES, ES Range, £195. Musical Fidelity CDPre24, CD Player/Pre-Amp/Multi Input DAC, (£2,000) £595. JVC HM-HDS4EK, 80Gb HDD/S-VHS Video Recorder, New & unused (£700) £95. Tel: 01424 442802 (Sussex).

TRICHORD DINO Dino+ power chord, £495. Three Leak TL12+, £275 each. Quad IIs and pre, £600. Mitsubishi LT 5V parallel tracking upright turntable, £250. 01597 825018 (Powys).

TRICHORD NC PSU and high-performance interconnect Designed for Diabolo but suits Dino as well. Superb sound. C/w Russ Andrews mains lead, (£680) £300 01384 394441 (West Midlands)

TRIO 3X SYSTEM (turntable, tuner, graphic equaliser, amp and double cassette) with Jamo 52 speaker system and Philips CD160 CD player, £125. Geoff 01252 621308 (Hants).

WILSON BENESCH ARC speakers; four years old, gloss burr walnut cheeks, one owner, excellent condition and all original packaging. Will happily demo. £1,600. 07908 205519 (North London)

YAMAHA DSP-A590 Digital Sound Processing Cinema 5.1 surround sound amplifier. Annoy the neighbours for £80 (cost £350 new). Remote control included. 01993 843055 (Oxon).

VITA R1 DAB/FM Radios. Gloss Red or Gloss Grey, £90. Walnut or Cherry £80. Vita R2 Walnut, information display not working, £75. All excellent condition.



Above: Marantz SA-751

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ISSUE 304 ➤ MARCH 2008 ➤ ON SALE 07 FEBRUARY

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- Advance Acoustic MCD403 CD transport and MDA503 DAC
- EAR Acute valve CD player
- PS Audio Digital Link III DAC
- Pioneer PD-D9 CD/SACD player
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FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE 303

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Prices: UK £5.90, Europe £6.90, World £7.90 per issue

Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd,
2 East Pauly Avenue, London
E1A 9PT. Tel: 020 7429 4000

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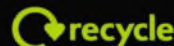
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