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See p23

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A y r e

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 symmetry

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WELCOME...

HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2008 ISSUE 313

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Although I should be 'cutting back' in readiness for the impending recession, I've been bashing the plastic at my two favourite record stores: booboorecords.com in San Luis Obispo and streetlightrecords.com in Santa Cruz. Both of these Californian outlets are just like record shops used to be here in Britain, only bigger, better and (most importantly) still open for business! The reason for all this new music? Well it's that *Awards* time of year, where we get to revisit the best hi-fi money can buy, spending endless listening sessions whittling down our list of contenders. It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it. Hope you enjoy our findings and put them to good use.

Dan
Dan George Editor

WHY WE ARE NO.1 FOR HI-FI...

- Since 1975, *Hi-Fi Choice* has delivered the world's most thorough, most reliable, no-nonsense guide to buying high-performance hi-fi.
- Every issue contains a potent mix of the latest hi-fi news, views, music, reviews and in-depth tests, brought to you by a prestigious team of expert writers who are the best audio journalists in the UK.
- Our test regime is the most rigorous in the business and we are the only hi-fi magazine to offer 'blind' listening sessions, along with user-friendly laboratory tests in our six-way *Ultimate Group Test*.
- That's why *Hi-Fi Choice* is...

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THE MOST RESPECTED NAMES IN HI-FI JOURNALISM...



PAUL MESSENGER

A former *Hi-Fi Choice* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for more than 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected scribes and is undoubtedly 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 *Hi-Fi Choice*.



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* and also writes exclusively for *Hi-Fi Choice*.



ALVIN GOLD

Alvin has been writing about his obsession for more than 25 years. In that time he has contributed his encyclopaedic knowledge to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides). He is widely regarded as one of Britain's finest hi-fi reviewers.



ALAN SIRCOM

Alan began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. He brings his extensive hi-fi knowledge to *Hi-Fi Choice* in his role as Operations Editor and is always on hand to help with your questions and hi-fi related queries at hifisub@futurenet.co.uk



JASON KENNEDY

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice* and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now a freelance hi-fi journalist with a system that'll blow your socks off, he remains a key player in keeping *Hi-Fi Choice* great.



DOMINIC TODD

A highly experienced journalist, Dominic's sharp ears and retail experience are a valuable mix for *Hi-Fi Choice*. Each month, Dom dispenses priceless second-hand buying advice that will save you time, money and a lot of legwork.

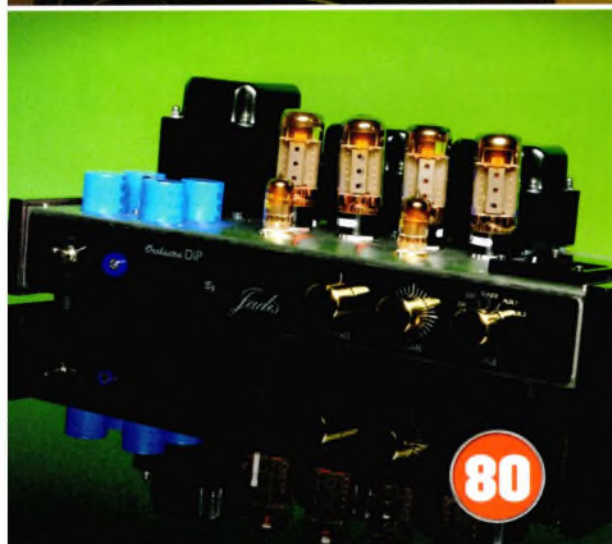
To ensure you get the best information, opinion and advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most knowledgeable and experienced hi-fi writers in the business.



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THE HI-FI AWARDS 2008

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BUYER'S BIBLE

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

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PRE-LOVED GEMS

Buy or sell your hi-fi in our special second-hand section...

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MYRYAD MI

An audiophile one-box system with the promise of digital class

Myryad – the prestigious Armour Electronics-owned hi-fi manufacturer – has been very quiet over the last few years. Its range of hi-fi and home cinema products has remained unchanged for considerable time and you could be forgiven for forgetting its presence in the market. But things are about to change. The new Myryad Mi one-box hi-fi system propels the company back to the forefront of audio technology and promises new and exciting things from the audio expert.

The Mi comprises a CD player, DAB/FM tuner (AM/FM in countries with no DAB) and a 100-watt (into four ohms) Class D amplifier. It also has extensive support for iPods and other next-generation portable audio devices; if you plug your iPod into the Mi, the front panel of the system replicates the iPod display, plus the Mi supports Bluetooth-enabled devices, thanks to its optional BluePlay receiver. This receiver can be used with the Mi to receive high-quality music streams via Bluetooth from an 'A2DP'-compliant MP3 player, or even a high-quality mobile phone. This works in a virtually plug 'n' play environment, without compromising copy protection and looks set to be a significant musical data carrier format of tomorrow.

Myryad's feature-rich iPod interface is just as innovative, as it provides unparalleled system integration between iPod and amplifier. The Mi takes the interface data from the iPod to generate a system of copy-cat menus on its full colour display screen. These mirror the menus found on the iPod, but because the Mi includes dynamic text sizing, the text can be scaled up so that it can be read from across the room – so you can access artists, albums, songs, playlists, podcasts and musical genres without having to go to your equipment rack to peer at a tiny iPod screen.

It's a totally digital experience inside the Myryad Mi; FM radio and line-level sources are digitised to run through the system. The tone controls are also entirely in the digital domain and the DAB tuner allows for DAB Live Text displays (plus RDS on the FM stations). Instead of converting the music back into analogue for the final output stage, the speakers are driven by a 384kHz pulse-width-modulated (PWM) signal generated from 48kHz sampling, which is ground-breaking for a one-box hi-fi system.

We're eagerly awaiting the first review samples from the factory, but if you can't wait until then, why not try and win one? Turn to p23 now.

Price £1,250 **Due now** ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.myryad.co.uk





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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO SONATA/FUSION

Small hi-fi for small budgets as Cambridge Audio announces two new product lines

Cambridge Audio has called its all-new compact system Sonata, because it's a musical event in four parts, which is not strictly true, but why let facts get in the way of a good story? The four Cambridge Audio devices that form Sonata comprise the £179 CD30 CD player, the similarly priced DV30 DVD player and two, 2.1 channel receivers, the £229 AR30 with FM/AM tuner and the £299 DR30, which brings DAB (band III and L band) to the party. Both receivers support RDS and both feature a custom Sonata iPod dock (not compatible with Shuffle or iPhone, however).

With their low prices and small cases, you could be forgiven for thinking the products were built for compromise, but the specs say otherwise. The CD player sports a high-grade Wolfson WM8716 DAC, the DVD delivers 1080p-upsampled pictures through its HDMI terminal and both the 40-watt receivers hold a beefy toroidal transformer within their impressive casework. The Sonata range should be available in the shops from February 2009.

Cambridge Audio has also hinted at a smaller version of the existing S30 standmount loudspeaker to partner the new electronics. Advanced prototypes/mock-ups of the product were shown at the Top Audio show in Milan (see our show report on p26) and are expected to hit the market around the same time as Sonata.

Perhaps an even more bold departure is the new £299 Fusion – a one-box system, comprising CD player, DAB/FM tuner, 30-watt amplifier and custom-designed iPod dock. The Fusion is the first one-box system from the company and is also the first unit to feature digital audio

connectivity, it sports both USB and SD card inputs on the front panel and these can send data to the display to show album, artist and track on the two-line text read-out. It can also replay MP3 and WMA files from CD-Rs. Like the Sonata, it supports both band III and L band DAB radio and also features a subwoofer output.

Designed to challenge head-on similar all-in-one systems from the likes of Onkyo and Denon, the 215mm-wide system still manages to sport a custom-designed metal chassis and thick aluminium front panel. In other words, the Fusion may combine the best elements of several components in one box, but potentially sacrifices nothing in the process. Fusion will be in the shops in November.

Both Fusion and Sonata systems will be available in black or silver finish, with both colours priced identically.

Price £179 - £299 **Due** nov 2008/feb 2009 ☎ 0845 090 2866

www.cambridge-audio.com



ROKSAN KANDY K2

Roksan's ever popular Kandy system has climbed to new heights with its K2 CD player and integrated amplifier. Building on the strengths of the previous L111 models, the two bristle with new innovations. These include the use of a totally redesigned main circuit board on the CD, with a new ultra-stable master clock. Meanwhile the Kandy K2 integrated amplifier has seen extensive redesign of all sections of the product, now all fitting on a one-piece main amp board.

Perhaps more immediate is the radical design change across the new Kandy range, the new products featuring a more up-to-date front panel design, matching mirrored inserts and a finish that brings the Kandy combo bang up-to-date.

Price £750 per unit **Due now** ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.roksan.co.uk



YBA DESIGN SERIES

The French high-end audio company YBA has announced a wholly new range – the Design series. The new range is claimed to build on YBA's traditional strengths of advanced technology wrapped in an elegant shell, while supporting custom install remote controls.

The three Design products begin with the YC201 CD player. Capable of upsampling to 192kHz with 24-bit precision, the player sports a Wolfson WAM8740 DAC in what YBA claims to be a proprietary low-jitter design. This is joined by the YA201 integrated amplifier, a 100-watt per channel, six line input design with an over-sized linear power supply and a 128 step (at 1dB per step) digitally controlled volume control. The RDS-equipped YT201 AM/FM tuner with 40 presets, completes the trio. YBA is in the process of setting up a dedicated UK office, so watch this space for further availability information.

Price (YC201) £890; (YA201) £1,290; (YT201) £690 **Due now** 🌐 www.ybadesign.com



ADVANCE ACOUSTIC MAP800

French low-cost audiophile brand Advance Acoustic has just announced its new range-topping integrated amplifier, the MAP800. Capable of delivering a whopping 200 watts into eight ohms (and 300 watts into four), the Class AB power amplifier is claimed to have an internal layout specially designed to minimise radiation and features short signal paths, plus a large 800VA toroidal transformer in its own shielded cabinet. The four line input amplifier also sports a phono stage.

Price £1,300 **Due now** ☎ 01623 517000

🌐 www.advanceacoustic.com



KEITH MONKS OMNI MK VII

Following the death of Keith Monks in 2005, it was feared the legendary record cleaning machine would disappear, but son Jonathan Monks has recently announced a return to form to celebrate the company's upcoming 40th anniversary. The new Keith Monks Omni Mk VII is the result. With a fully adjustable wash system, using a new 'discOvery' cleaning fluid and the vacuum pump from a kidney dialysis machine, the Omni looks set to keep LPs clean for another four decades or more.

Price £2,995 **Due now** ☎ 01983 857079

🌐 www.keithmonks-rcm.co.uk

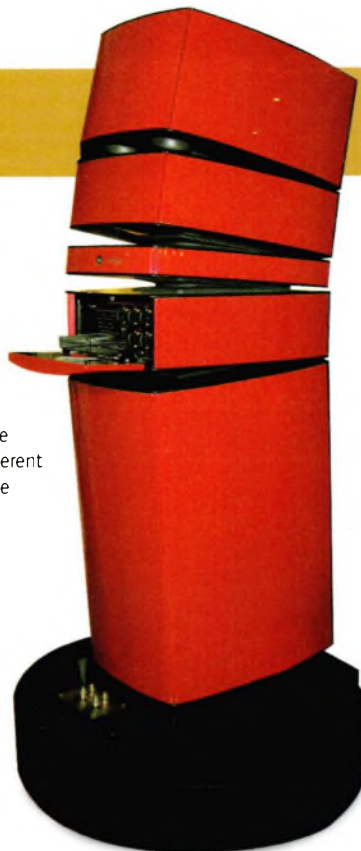


FOCAL GRANDE UTOPIA EM

➤ Aiming directly for the top of the loudspeaker tree, Focal's new Grande Utopia EM forms the flagship of the upcoming Utopia III range. And what a flagship! The four-way floorstander features a 400mm sub-bass unit, a 270mm bass driver, two 165mm midrange units and a 27mm inverted Beryllium dome tweeter. It weighs a mere 260kg and stands a healthy two metres tall, although the 1,458 different combinations of body slope between the speaker sections can change that height dimension considerably.

Price £110,000 per pair **Due now** ☎ 0845 660 2680

🌐 www.grande-utopia-em.com



CABASSE MC40

➤ Cabasse has 'returned' to the UK (the company now runs things directly from its French HQ) and has launched a number of new loudspeakers. The new MC40 series uses the company's unique Spatially Coherent System technology in its proprietary BC-10 driver, which covers the whole range from 900Hz-23kHz. This drive unit is shared across five stereo models – from the standmount Minorca to the floorstanding Java and Majorca models. A centre channel speaker, rear surround pair and active subwoofer are also available.

Price £638-£1,438 (per pair)

Due now ☎ 0033 298 058888

🌐 www.cabasse.com



PRO-JECT BOXES

➤ Pro-Ject has beefed up its boxes, the series of small electronics units to complement the company's turntable range. Unique to the UK, the new Juke-Box is the most innovative. It combines phono stage, preamp and 25-watt power amp slung beneath a customised Pro-Ject Debut turntable. It's joined by the Dock Box, which allows an iPod to join in to the Pro-ject party and a USB box, that allows line level sources to reach a PC through a USB port.

Price: (Juke-box) £399; (Dock-box) £80; (USB-box) £75

Due now ☎ 01235 511166

🌐 www.project-audio.com



Soundbites

CETECH has re-introduced its upgrade for the Linn LP12. Shipped all the way from Auckland, NZ, the combination carbon-fibre/ aluminium composite honeycomb sub-chassis is claimed to reduce ringing and improve bass on the classic deck. **Price:** £299 (£325 for Cirkus version).

🌐 www.derwent.co.nz



QUADRASPIRE'S modular and upgradable Media Wall is designed to encapsulate everything from hi-fi to screens, subwoofers, DVDs and CDs. The system starts at £2,000 and is sold exclusively through the House of Linn in Manchester.

☎ 0161 766 4837



ULTRASONIC'S new Pro 900 headphone is the first of the company's Pro line with S-Logic, said to improve spatial performance.

The closed-back headphones are Mu-metal shielded to reduce radiation from computers. No UK price yet, but US price is \$600.

☎ 01494 511711



BOSTON ACOUSTICS' £160 i-DS2 iPod dock is designed to change with your décor. A range of six interchangeable grilles offsets the white or black body. Perfect for when you decide to paint your house a lovely shade of 'spanish moss'.

🌐 www.bostona.eu



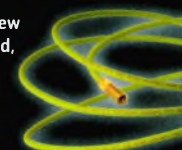
ROBERTS Sound 43 'multifunction sound system' is actually a stereo DAB/ FM receiver with built-in CD player, alarm clock and iPod dock. It also has an auxiliary input, a headphone socket and a snazzy piano gloss finish. All for £200.

☎ 01709 571722



VAN DEN HUL has three new interconnects. Wave Hybrid, Tide Hybrid and Waterfall Hybrid. Prices start from £100.

☎ 01233 511166



ERRATUM The impedance rating for Creek's Best Buy winning Evolution integrated amplifier (HFC 371) was accidentally switched from a plus to a minus rating, last month. So it's even better than we reported in our test!



ICON AUDIO STEREO 25

➤ Continuing its range of H J Leak-inspired valve amplifier designs, the Icon Audio Stereo 25 is a three-input integrated pentode design delivering 30 watts per channel. The handmade, point-to-point wired amplifier also sports custom-wound transformers. Icon Audio also offers a range of upgrades to the basic Stereo 25 design, including a 15-watt triode rewired version and replacement of the standard capacitors with paper and oil designs plus redesigns to use KT88 power valves in place of the regular EL34s.

Price £499 **Due now** ☎ 0116 244 0593 🌐 www.iconaudio.com



Hi-Fi Diary

OCTOBER/ NOVEMBER 2008

31-02 **Stuff Live Show**
ExCeL London
www.bestofstuff.co.uk

JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 2009

31-1 **Smartlife North**
Radisson Hotel
Manchester Airport
www.chestergroup.org

20-22 **Sound & Vision: The Bristol Show**

Marriot City Centre Hotel
Bristol
BS1 3AD
www.bristolshow.co.uk

MARCH

28-29 **London High Fidelity Show**
Park Inn
Heathrow Airport
www.chestergroup.org

JUNE

13-14 **Northern High Fidelity Show**
Radisson SAS
Manchester Airport
www.chestergroup.org

SEPTEMBER

18-20 **London Sound and Vision**
Park Inn
Heathrow Airport
www.chestergroup.org

NOVEMBER

14-15 **Smartlife Scotland**
Thistle Hotel
Glasgow
www.chestergroup.org

New flatpanel

Infinity has developed a new variation on the flat panel drive unit for its latest Prelude Forty loudspeaker. The rectangular drive unit has a very thin aluminium diaphragm, which is anodized with a ceramic coating to make it exceptionally light, yet also highly rigid. The MRS driver (maximum radiating surface) uses two elliptical voice coils and rectangular neodymium magnets to provide "maximum contact and superior coupling between the voice coils and the diaphragm".

The claimed benefit of this drive unit is that it operates more like the piston ideal that all drivers seek to achieve. The MRS unit operates as the midrange driver in the Prelude Forty loudspeaker, with a metal dome tweeter and twin eight-inch bass units. All three drivers incorporate the CMMD (ceramic metal matrix diaphragm) coating used on the MRS.



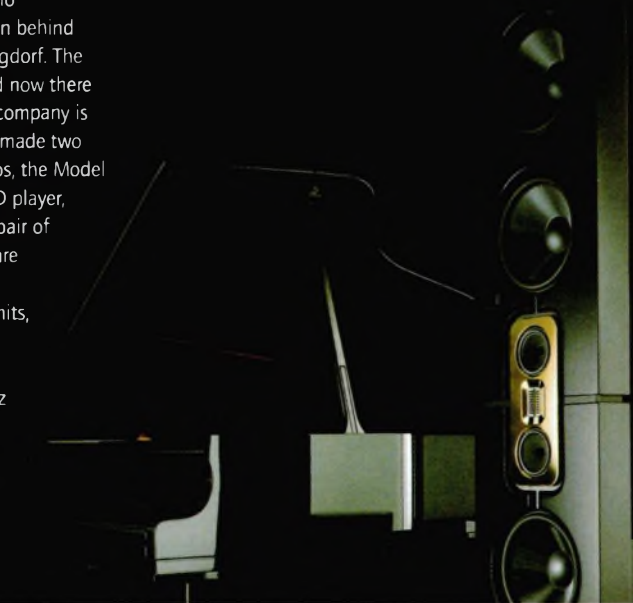
The HDMI connection

It's official, HDMI connections have come to the high end. A tour of the recent CEDIA show in Denver showed many of the more serious brands adopting the latest A/V interface on their products. These products were largely preamp/processors designed to satisfy the needs of audiophiles who also want decent home cinema. Among the brands involved is Classe who unveiled its SSP-800 processor for the first time in the US and Simaudio (makers of Moon components) had its CP-8 and a separate HDMI switcher. Anthem has the robotic-sounding D2v2 with eight HDMI inputs and processing for Dolby and DTS high-def sound, while Bryston offers the most customer-friendly array of options anywhere. Its SP3 is available as an audio-only unit with a single HDMI input, an AV preamp/processor with multiple HDMI's, or with video processing onboard to boot. So far, the only 'audio only'-source with HDMI outputs is Sony's SCD-XA5400ES (see page 72), but that situation looks likely to change.



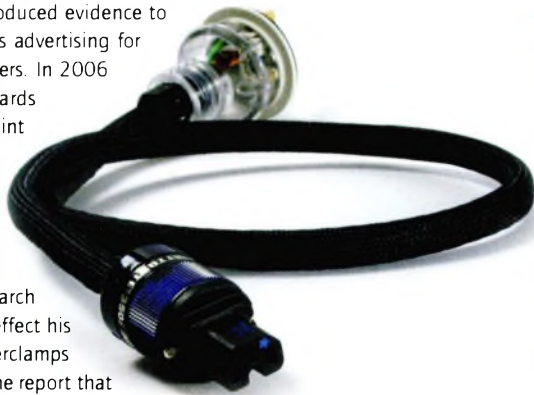
Piano lacquer

Steinway has taken the lead set by Bosendorfer and taken the plunge into the high-end hi-fi market. It is not doing so alone, but has teamed up with Danish audio entrepreneur Peter Lyngdorf, the man behind NAD, DALI and of course TACT/Lyngdorf. The pairing was announced in 2005 and now there is a range of products to show. The company is called Steinway Lyngdorf and it has made two systems named after Steinway pianos, the Model D is a stereo system containing a CD player, RoomPerfect DSP EQ system and a pair of seven-foot loudspeakers. The latter are active 400-watt behemoths, built in aluminium with four 12-inch bass units, two five-inch midranges and a Heil ribbon tweeter. The active crossover is digital and takes a 24-bit/192kHz signal. The \$150,000 price of the system includes installation and full room EQ. Steinway provides the hallmark black lacquer finish.



Russ Andrews vs ASA

➤ Russ Andrews has produced evidence to combat criticism of its advertising for cables and mains conditioners. In 2006 the ASA (Advertising Standards Authority) upheld a complaint that such product had not been scientifically proven to reject RFI (radio frequency interference). To prove his case, Russ has employed Ben Duncan Research to establish precisely what effect his Powerkords and Mega/Superclamps have on RFI. According to the report that RA has submitted to the ASA, Ben Duncan's tests prove that these products have a beneficial (reductive) effect on RFI, in as much as they reduce the amount that enters components to which they are connected. Now all Russ has to do is wait and see if the ASA agrees.



Return of the Sax

➤ Record mastering legend Doug Sax has got together with recording engineer Bill Schnee to develop a new recording system, in an attempt to bring audio recording standards to a new high. Schnee feels that "The level of true high fidelity in recorded music has consistently gone down from the LP to the overly compressed CD and now finally to the MP3. With HDTV being the current state-of-the-art for video, shouldn't we once again have high-definition audio for music?" Sax and Schnee have worked on audiophile recordings before and pioneered direct to disc recording for their Sheffield Labs record label. The new system is pure audiophile with tube mics and preamps feeding JCF Audio 24-bit/192kHz converters and a Tascam DA-RV1000 recorder.



Free Marillion

➤ Marillion has decided to go one further than Radiohead and offer its latest album for free online. Radiohead made *In Rainbows* available for any amount of your choosing, but Marillion, which has such a good relationship with its fans that they paid for the recording of the album *Happiness is the Road*, is giving it away in exchange for email addresses. According to keyboard player Mark Kelly, "While we don't condone illegal file-sharing, it's a fact of life that a lot of music fans do it.

We want to know who our file-sharing fans are. If they like our new album enough, then we want to persuade them to, at least, come and see us on tour."

Fans who want a hard copy of the 110-minute album can buy the CD in two separate packages, or as a Deluxe double set.



Insider comment

Sax and the city

Doug Sax's bold move – to create a new recording system – is born of frustration and upset at the way sound quality is being squandered in modern CDs and downloads. We hope that it does not fall on deaf ears in the music business, but we can't help worrying that it might be too little, too late.

The city – what's left of it – doesn't care about musical content, it just cares about bottom line. And the music business is struggling to make that bottom line look good in the 21st Century; all bets are off as downloads replace CD in the sales figures. Although there's far less money to be made from downloading, no record company can afford to ignore the significant shift away from physical media in the under-30s.

This sends the corporate types into a flat panic. Back in more enlightened times, the decisions about audio quality in recordings were largely made by the engineers and producers. Now, whatever works, no matter what it does to the musical quality, stays. And, sadly, dynamic compression coupled with a significant loudness boost works. It makes recordings sound initially loud and impressive. Eventually, that just becomes 'loud', but the A&R people don't care about 'eventually'. Who cares that playing loud, compressed music tends to make people play at higher volumes and consequently damage hearing faster? The combination of signal compression and loudness has been associated with some big hit records and this meant loud, compressed CDs became increasingly commonplace in the 1990s. Today loud, compressed downloads are virtually the norm.

There's a perception that downloads are the ultimate in poor-quality audio that helps reinforce this mindset in A&R people. Because there's no physical media to possess, any downloaded track is one keystroke away from permanent deletion, so downloads are considered temporary things. So, there's no such thing as 'eventually' in downloads, either. Plus, because that shift away from CD hasn't happened in the over-30s, hi-fi enthusiasts have little or no understanding of the format and dismiss downloads as 'lo-fi'.

Ultimately, this is short-term thinking on behalf of audiophiles, just as tweaking the sound for immediacy is for the record companies. Whether we choose to download or not, there is a sea-change in the way records are produced because of the likes of iTunes. Recordings are mastered from the outset to sound good as downloads and the re-working to make a CD or LP cut is becoming second-fiddle. It's impossible to put the download genie back in its bottle, so we should be pushing to improve the nature of downloads instead of wishing them away or ignoring their influence. This is what Doug Sax is doing... and so are a handful of audio companies with an eye to the future.

Trouble is, the movement to produce high-quality audio is pretty far from the mainstream at the moment. The likes of Sax and Bob Dylan can rant about sound quality, but until a 'now' mainstream artist like Leona Lewis (or similar) decides to turn the sound down and the quality up, this will continue to be viewed as the swan song of the Baby Boomer generation.

Still, it's something for us grumpy old men to be grumpy about!



Jason Kennedy

Visual hi-fi

Audiophilia in the movies

Just recently, a national newspaper dedicated three pages of its arts review section to beach scenes in films and it got me thinking about hi-fi in movies.

The film that got me started was *Infernal Affairs* (remade by Martin Scorsese as *The Departed*), a film made in Hong Kong where hi-fi is relatively high profile stuff. In the story, one of the characters works part time in a hi-fi store and you see a good selection of valve amplifiers and high-end speakers. That scene while omitted from *The Departed*, did feature a complete McIntosh system and Sennheiser headphones, so it would seem that Scorsese picked up on that detail after all.

One of the best movie scenes to feature hi-fi has to be in the underrated *9 1/2 Weeks* from 1986. Its hi-fi highlight was a Nakamichi RX-202 cassette deck, which features because it flips and turns the whole cassette in order to play the other side. In reality it does this very

“...the earliest example of hi-fi as *objet d’art* in the movies that I’ve seen is the Transcriptors Hydraulic Reference turntable in *A Clockwork Orange*.”

quickly, but in Adrian Lyne’s film its slowed down to great effect, possibly the only occasion on which cassette has looked sexy on celluloid, or anywhere else for that matter.

I’m told that the 1960 film *Peeping Tom* features a Quad system, but the earliest example of hi-fi as *objet d’art* in the movies that I’ve seen is the Transcriptors Hydraulic Reference turntable in *A Clockwork Orange*. The central character Alex, played by Malcolm McDowell, has a very stylish bedroom where he constantly plays Beethoven’s 9th Symphony as a stimulant for his thuggish behaviour. The turntable was given to director Stanley Kubrick by David Gammon who owned the company that eventually became Michell. Apparently Transcriptors turntable parts also crop up in Kubrick’s science fiction epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Ironically, the film *High Fidelity* did not feature any decent hi-fi that I can recall, but then again it was about obsessive record collecting and should really have been called Vinyl Anorak! On the other hand, *Pulp Fiction*, directed by Quentin Tarantino features a very nice Teac X-2000R reel-to-reel tape recorder in the home of Uma Thurman’s mobster husband.

Hi-fi also crops up on TV in the least likely places, a Roksan turntable used to be seen on

Inspector Morse and I’m told that Eastenders regularly features props from the Cambridge Audio range. Just imagine Phil Mitchell playing some bangin’ choons on a pukka high-end system – the mind boggles.

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



David Vivian

More Choice

The listening rooms

The age old conundrum is why some hi-fi shops stock such a limited range of brands, when it’s obvious that satisfaction depends on having a proper choice? Not to mention a decent cup of coffee.

The hi-fi market has changed dramatically over the past decade – most notably in its diminution, squeezed out by mass appeal technologies that have little or nothing to do with listening to music. Remarkably though, the number of products chasing our custom remains bewilderingly vast. And we all need a little help to make the best choice. The key word here is ‘choice’. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with buying someone else’s idea of a good system. At the very least it means you haven’t had to undertake all the tedious legwork of sifting through mountains of mediocre hardware. The only trouble is you can end up buying an ideology rather than a system and you might not want that.

There seems to be an ideological chasm between the ‘trust us’ approach (which tends to focus on just a few well-respected British brands) and the ‘what-sort-of-system-do-you-really-want?’ initiative espoused by dealers like London’s The Cornflake Shop and the Listening Rooms who have the compass of expertise to sell you anything from a hairshirt system to a six-figure multi-room/multi-media epic.

The most refreshing demo I ever sat in on was, indeed, at The Listening Rooms on the Old Brompton Road many years ago when the original Acoustic Energy AE1 was the mini monitor of choice for the seriously clued-up audiophile. This chap staggered into the shop carrying an industrial-sized Technics integrated amp of uncertain pedigree and incalculable complexity. He wanted to buy a pair of Acoustic Energy AE1s and he wanted his Technics monstrosity to drive them. A less suitable match would have been hard to imagine. And yet it was duly connected up to the small metal boxes on their extravagant stands and given every chance to show what it could do. To the considerable surprise of the staff, if not the customer, what it could do wasn’t merely good, but terrific. A pair of KEF 101/2s were tried to see if the Technics would sound even better with an easier load – but no, it liked the AEs.

The last thing the man with the Technics amp needed was a lecture in hierarchical system building and an expensive pre-power combination. In fact, the last thing anyone needs are dogmatic, doctrinal dealers. Choice and an open-minded attitude are the keys to this beleaguered industry’s future.

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

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

FOCAL JMLAB UTOPIA
LOUDSPEAKER



The Utopia series were the first from the French Focal JMLab marque to impinge on the British audiophile scene. The first model to do so in a meaningful way was the flagship Grand Utopia, a massive, four-way monolith, with a glorious build and finish. It sold in minuscule quantities in line with its necessarily astronomical price, but it must have paid for itself many times over with its very impressive musical presentation at various hi-fi shows in the late ‘90s (it was launched in 1996) and it effectively established the brand name as a force to be reckoned with in this country, the USA and continental Europe.

The Utopia, which debuted in 1997, was a slightly smaller and more manageable model, based closely in the Grand Utopia’s blueprint. It was a little more sensitive than the flagship, and therefore less demanding of partnering amplification and the layout of the drivers more closely mirrors that of the current range, with a massively engineered bass unit at the bottom and a large midrange driver at the top. Focal (it dropped the JMLab name recently) now describe this as their Focus Time alignment, which is time aligned at normal listening distances. This is the model that provides the closest template for Focal’s more recent designs. The other drive units are sandwiched between the outer bass and midrange drivers, and are also staggered in the depth plane to ensure time alignment.

Focal started life designing and manufacturing drive units and is a supplier to some highly respected brands, such as Avalon and Wilson Audio. The tweeter in the Utopia range is an inverted dome titanium dioxide dome and the bass units early versions of the current sandwich cone.

Another technology is closely associated with the brand and that had its first outing with the Grand Utopia, before being transferred to the smaller Utopia. It is the use of separate dedicated enclosures for each drive unit, which



“The first model was the Grand Utopia, a massive, four-way monolith, with a glorious build and finish.”

are attached to the others via solid side panels. The arrangement has various benefits, which understandably do not extend to simplicity or low costs. Each drive unit works into its own enclosure volume, which is correct for the characteristics of each driver and there is almost zero mechanical intermodulation between units. There is free air between the various enclosures, each of which is built of exotic hardwoods and which are superbly, if simply finished.

This is a great speaker which earned its stripes with a smooth, perceptibly warm and large scale musical presentation. It could be pushed hard without fear and would respond manfully when asked to do so. The bass was also phenomenal in its reach and power, qualities that extended throughout the frequency range. The inverted tweeter dome, a geometry that Focal has always favoured, also has a very strong reputation. The hard finish meant it was less mechanically lossy than traditional soft domes and the level of information retrieval was unusual.

Above all, the Utopia was a solid and thoroughly musical design that worked well with almost any material, from chamber to full-bore rock. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



Live on stage

It's what you do with it that counts!

On holiday recently in Brussels, I stumbled across a lovely illustration of that old saying, 'It's not what you've got, it's what you do with it'. In the town square of Brussels there are often public events and while we were there that included some live music gigs. One evening, after dinner, we wandered into the square and encountered some folksy rock band from Quebec. The music was infectiously jolly and really thoroughly enjoyable and the sound was also very good, clear and full-range with excellent intelligibility.

The band completed its set as we watched and left the stage, but as something else was clearly imminent we hung around and watched some roadies remove a few instruments and

“Twenty minutes later another band appeared on stage.. but the sound was terrible. Really unclear, muddy, distorted, poor intelligibility...”

bring a few more on, plus the odd chair and music stand – but apart from minor adjustments to the positioning of microphones there was no change of electronic equipment. I didn't check, but I have a feeling they didn't change the large mixing desk in the sound booth on the other side of the square either, which would probably have been a forklift job anyway.

Twenty minutes later another band appeared on stage. It seemed good, but the sound was terrible. Really, unclear, muddy, distorted, poor intelligibility, little or no rhythmic involvement – you get the idea. The musicians were clearly highly competent and giving it plenty of welly, but it was hard to hear what they were playing and singing.

And yet the equipment in use was the same from start to finish. Oh, they might have had a couple of microphones that were different types, but that's all. Otherwise, it was the same mixer, amps, cables, speakers, backline, foldback.... most of it in the same position, even, certainly the main speakers. But almost

certainly there was a different mix engineer, evidently less skilled in the job.

If that can happen with live music, clearly it can also occur with sound reproduction. A given bunch of kit can potentially sound great or lousy depending on how it's been set up. OK, we don't have some of the variables that go into live sound mixing, like 60 inputs to a mixer for instance, but we do have plenty else. Apart from the most obvious consideration of loudspeaker positioning, there are issues of level matching, especially in LP-based systems, cable routing, tone controls and so on. It is definitely worth putting a bit of time into reading the manuals or indeed commissioning your local dealer to set the kit up properly for you. You may have to forklift over a modest sum of money for this, but it might be the best investment you can make in your audio system!

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



The shock of the new

Happy memories of the Sony Walkman

Ever heard the sentence, "I remember when you could still..." Pretty often, the second half relates to buying half a ton of toffee for thr'pennce ha'penny, or a house for 10 guineas. These days though, you're just as likely to hear this sentence-opener from the mouth of a thirty or forty-something like myself.

Glancing boredly around the tube on my way around London a week ago, I spotted a sight which provoked a surge of audio nostalgia – a commuter with a portable cassette player. Cue rose-tinted flashback – I remember when you could still buy a Sony Walkman and get barely any change from a week's wages.

25 years ago, music on the move was the size of a brick and played cassettes, pure and simple. These days, it's the size of a chocolate bar and will allow you to browse the web and call overseas (if you don't mind a 10-minute call abroad not leaving you much change from a week's wages). I can see that all of this convenience in such a small package is alluring, but all this convergence worries me.

One techno trend from the 1980s onwards has been not so much the miniaturisation of technology (which, let's face it, is inevitable) but rather the resulting combination of multiple functions in one device. OK, you can't get a mobile phone that'll make a cup of tea and take the kids to school, but it'll probably happen one day. More worrying to me as an audiophile are gizmos that may have a major 'buy-me' factor, but which whittle away ever further at the market for true hi-fi separates.

Before MP3 players swept all before them, at least midi and mini systems ruled the roost in homes across the land. They might have provided the sort of reproduction reminiscent of yoghurt cups and damp string on the whole, but at least a lot of them still bore a token visual resemblance to the real thing. Fast forward to the 21st century and there are more and more MP3 players sat at home in 'docks', with cheap, scrawny amplifiers and three-inch drive units which sound as tinny as they look. ☐

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

BLACK SABBATH PARANOID



Emerging from the Birmingham suburb of Aston, Black Sabbath were certainly out of step with many of the musical mores of their time – chart successes of 1970, for example, included the cheery likes of Mungo Jerry and The Jackson 5. But they marked the end of the sixties' love decade like no other commercially successful group.

Building on the sound of 1969's self-titled debut album, *Paranoid* was informed by Hammer Horror films and the occult fiction of Dennis Wheatley, with an extra jolt of demonic frisson from closer to home.

Bassist Geezer Butler, who'd naughtily painted his flat black and hung upside-down crosses on the wall, has memorably recalled being "scared shitless" one night in 1969 by a diabolical presence at the bottom of his bed. Suitably spooked, thereafter the group started sporting chunky upright crosses, made by vocalist Ozzy Osbourne's dad. Lyrics would not be horror-for-horror's sake, but entreaties to avoid damnation, delivered in a medicated doom-zombie wail to a soundtrack of super-heavy blues rock.

Recorded at Regent Sound studios near London's Tottenham Court Road in just five days in June 1970, *Paranoid* had already been road tested by the heavy-gigging group. As Geezer Butler told Mick Wall in 1997, they wrote by following the huge riffs of guitarist Tony Iommi, who, astonishingly, had lost the tips of two fingers on his right hand in a welding accident when he was seventeen and had made his own prosthetic replacements out of a plastic bottle. "Tony would solo," remembered Geezer, "we would join in and we would go onto this great long jam."

These songs may have become cornerstones of heavy metal, but there are other elements at play too. See Iommi's jazzy, heat-hazed playing on the super-strange interstellar trip *Planet Caravan*, for example, or how drummer Bill Ward swings his breakbeats on the percussive *Rat Salad*.



"Bassist Geezer Butler naughtily painted his flat black and hung upside-down crosses on the wall"

There's a wrongfooting mix of back-and-forth complexity and primitivism that shows the same kind of casual, future-predicting genius you get on early Bo Diddley records. The livid title track is punk in all but name, complete with Ozzy's proto-John Lydon vocal and lyrics of extreme outsiderdom that find more vengeful expression on the clanging *Iron Man*. And it all seems so effortless – the air-raid siren-rocking opener *War Pigs* even speeds up into oblivion, mid-jam.

For all its darkness, confusion and asymmetric madness, it went to number one, and Black Sabbath went on to enjoy titanic highs and extraordinary lows until the expulsion of Ozzy killed off the original group in 1979. Their influence has been massive, ranging from the big selling likes of Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers to innumerable diabolist metal acts like Venom and Slayer, onto full-on experimental nutbags including Japan's Acid Mothers Temple, who in 2006 released a tribute entitled *Starless And Bible Black Sabbath*. This month, a new deluxe edition of *Paranoid* offers another chance to hear and wonder at this still-intoxicating, landmark album. Just don't listen to it on your own in the dark...HFC

Ian Harrison

■ If SACD is the last disc-based audio format before downloading changes the face of music retailing forever, is it a case of duck and cover for audiophiles, as a plague of lo-fi equipment hammers yet more nails into the coffin of quality hi-fi? If you'd like to find out the answer to that one, keep an eye out for me at Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park – I'll be the one toting a sandwich board with the words 'Hi-fi: the end is nigh!' scrawled on it, while I await my turn on the podium.

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



Killer speakers

Size isn't everything

When Jason Kennedy told me he'd ordered a pair of PMC MB2-XBDi's for *HFC's* annual high end magazine *The Collection* (on sale now), I looked the model up on the website and reckoned I must have drawn the short straw, since it was the largest and heaviest speaker I'd had at home in twenty years.

All was quickly forgiven once I'd heard these magnificent beasts, with their extraordinary headroom and splendid timing and dynamic integrity. Although much PMC muscle had facilitated the installation, moving the speakers out on my own proved almost impossible, so they were never going to be a practical proposition for a reviewer who has to keep changing speakers. I wondered whether PMC might have something a little more manageable which didn't sacrifice too much performance, especially since the MB2-XBDi had substantially more bass than my room needed.

When the time came to collect the Big Ones, the van brought down a pair of EB1i's and a pair of IB2s for me to try. These models are quite similar, but the EB1i is a floorstander while the IB2 is a large standmount. Both share the same 250mm flat honeycomb diaphragm bass driver, though the EB1i has a slightly longer transmission line and slightly greater bass extension. Its 'i' suffix means it has the latest tweeter, crossover and enclosure



“I must have drawn the short straw, since it was the largest and heaviest speaker I'd had at home in twenty years.”

mods and these haven't quite reached IB2 production yet. Both models have versions of PMC's 75mm dome midrange drivers, but the IB2 has the variation with the massive large magnet, as used on the bigger studio monitors, while the EB1i has the less costly, smaller magnet version.

And it was the smaller standmount's superior midrange grip and dynamic expression that really rattled my cage, even though it didn't have the latest tweaks. It also came as a surprise to find that this model has been largely ignored by the hi-fi market and that the overwhelming majority of its sales are to the professional audio sector.

This has much more to do with fashion than function or performance, I reckon. Twenty or thirty years ago, some of the very best full-range speakers around adopted the large standmount format – models like the Spondor BC3 and Linn Isobarik both had enclosures of around 120 litres that sat 30cms off the floor. Nearly all of these have now disappeared, essentially to be replaced by taller, slimmer floorstanders that someone, somewhere has presumably deemed more lounge-friendly.

Nowadays the only British brands that I can think of that are still making large standmounts are ATC, Spondor, Harbeth and, of course, PMC. And it's no coincidence that those four brands all have a strong presence in professional as well as domestic audio.

Frankly, having stared at a pair of IB2s for a couple of weeks, I find their combination of chunky proportions and fresh air underneath rather attractive. I suspect that both these factors also offer certain performance advantages too, so it's a shame that there aren't more such models out there to offer consumers the choice. Maybe performance could still win out over style.

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



The point of hi-fi

The music experience

I have long pondered the role of high-fidelity systems in the appreciation of music. Are they there just to make music sound more beautiful (surely not, as music is not always meant to sound beautiful in the first place) or to extract detail and plug the

gaps between the notes? Many moons ago, I remember writing to the effect that a good hi-fi system is the best possible advocate for the new and the unfamiliar, indeed that this was probably the best reason for the pursuit of high-fidelity in the first place. My thinking at the time was that a hi-fi system at the top of its game provides an unparalleled tool for stripping bare the intricacies of the unfamiliar and the difficult.

I found myself returning to this subject after a couple of Promenade concerts. The first date included a performance of Messiaen's *Turangulila Symphony*, a vast, complex and truly bizarre piece, but still an authentic masterpiece, for large orchestra and various keyboards, including piano and famously the Ondes Martenot, which effectively marks one of the first major orchestral outings for an early form of synthesiser. My eldest son took me to this concert, I think to please me, as he had taken his girlfriend to a performance of the same work a month or two earlier and both of them had thoroughly hated it.

As it happens I had given him a disc of the work to familiarise himself with the music, but schedules intruded and he never got a chance to hear it first. This is music which doesn't reveal all its secrets on first hearing. But despite some ribbing, by the time the second performance came around, he found the music much more palatable and he ended up impressed, if not necessarily a fully paid-up member of the Messiaen appreciation society. A few days later, I went with another son to a performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Kashchey the Immortal*, a short opera, that neither of us had heard before. On this occasion we were both pleased and impressed, though neither of us knew a note of the score, and the libretto might as well have been in Russian for all we could understand it (Actually it was sung in Russian).

Based on these experiences, and many others there is no room here to explore here, I am now fully convinced that although a good hi-fi system can indeed provide access to music in a way that is difficult to gainsay, live music making is an even more powerful advocate for the unfamiliar and the difficult, especially when the live venue itself helps provide a sense of community, which is one area in which the Royal Albert Hall excels, partly thanks to its unique shape of all things.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

LOUDNESS



There's been plenty of discussion recently in the hi-fi press (including this column) about loudness, in the sense of how much of it we want from our audio systems. This month, I'd like to take a slightly different look at the subject, prompted by recent discussions on the subject hosted by the Audio Engineering Society. That august organisation includes representatives of all branches of sound, including recording, broadcasting and live sound, some of whom met to discuss what is meant by loudness and how to quantify the subject.

That at first sounds a very dry exercise of largely academic interest, but it has implications for every recording you ever listen to. With most recordings, there's a lot more to loudness than simply the maximum level recorded. Some recordings are that simple, principally classical ones made with 'minimalist' microphone techniques: there's no adjustment of dynamics during editing and mastering and the overall level is adjusted just before manufacture so that the very loudest peaks are just below digital clipping level.

Most recordings, however, use either multiple microphones or deliberate dynamics processing and the concept of loudness is not at all the same as simply maximum level. By compressing dynamics on both a small and large timescale, the subjective loudness can be increased when compared with unprocessed recordings, and engineers find it increasingly useful, in an age of 'loudness wars', to be able to put numbers on just how loud a recording is.

Loudness wars originated with radio broadcasts and to this day pop radio is in the forefront of dynamics compression. Tune in Radio 1, monitor its output on the level meters of any recording device and you'll find they hardly twitch. It seems that music downloads also bring the same imperative to be the loudest, so compression continues apace.

But it's interesting, looking at the comments made by the AES's panel of experts, to find that



“...there's a lot more to loudness than simply the maximum level recorded.”

significant audio engineering opinion is turning against mindless loudness and not just on purist artistic grounds. As engineers have learned to quantify loudness better, they have also been able to correlate it against subjective effects, one of which is listener fatigue. In the rarified atmosphere of specialist hi-fi we quite often come across that term, but it is evidently a scientifically respectable concept and one of growing concern to people for whom the bottom line is the number of people listening to a given track.

What the recording business is starting to realise, thanks not least to the efforts of a few enlightened souls such as Bob Katz (mastering engineer extraordinaire), is that, at least, a bit of a dynamic range is a Good Thing.

At the same time as raising such issues, the aforementioned Katz and some of his colleagues have devised means by which recordings can be rendered attention-grabbing, dynamic and communicative, all at the same time. I'm not trying to suggest there will be a revolution in the way recordings will be made, but there is reason to be hopeful that evolution will proceed in a direction of benefit to all who care about musical sound quality. **HFC**

Richard Black

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TIME DOMAIN AUDIO SYSTEM

TD508II

WIN!

A Myryad Mi system worth £1,250!

The new Mi is a bold departure for Myryad. The company is, perhaps, best known for its resolutely minimalist separates, so an all-in-one system – combining CD player, DAB/FM tuner, 100-watt amplifier and extensive connectivity to iPods and the rest – comes as a bit of a shock. However, the Myryad sticks so closely to its audiophile guns with the Mi, it makes a lot of sense.

The system is fully digital in construction, from its ability to navigate through iPod menus on its large front panel and its built-in Bluetooth connectivity, to the high-speed Class D amplifiers, driving the loudspeakers using a 384kHz PWM (pulse width modulation) signal generated from 48kHz sampling. Even the tone controls are operated digitally. All of which means the Mi might be the best one-box system you've ever heard. And you can win one at the click of a mouse.

HOW TO ENTER:

For your chance to win, go online to www.futurecomps.co.uk/myryad and follow the instructions, leaving your selected answer and details where prompted:

QUESTION:

What does PWM stand for?

A: Pulse Width Modulation **B:** Proper Watt Mastery **C:** Primary Weight Mass

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Answers must be received between 16 October 2008 and 12 November 2008. The prize winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received between the relevant dates and will receive a Myryad Mi system free of charge. The 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 system should be sent.

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.





Heathrow Show

Unlike last year, the hi-fi enthusiast had to do a fair bit of digging to find the really choice product at the 2008 Hi-Fi and AV show. **Malcolm Steward** reports in for *Hi-Fi Choice*

The third weekend in September traditionally witnesses UK audiophiles making their annual pilgrimage to the Park Inn hotel for the Heathrow Hi-Fi and AV show. Traditionally, again, that event has seen the launch of a whole raft of new products to start the industry's buying season.

In recent years, though, the show has become a shadow of its former self and has been subject to a whole lot of politicking that has resulted in many manufacturers staying away preferring, instead, to launch their new products elsewhere.

This year, the manufacturer turnout was poorer than the previous year and there was quite a number of dealer-cum-distributor operations present. As we noted last year, however, it is the big names that draw the crowds and there was a distinct absence of these: **Arcam, Bowers and Wilkins, Linn, Meridian, Naim**, and their like did not exhibit. Regardless, there was plenty of stuff to see and some of it was indeed rather interesting.



2. From Australia comes the highly priced Continuum Criterion-Copperhead turntable

1 One of the most fascinating products was the American **Sooloos** server system being presented by Absolute Sounds. Sadly it was a virtually static display, so we were unable to hear how it performed. All that one can say, though, is that if its sound approaches the slickness of the rich graphical interface that Sooloos has bolted on to the AMG database, then it will be a force to be reckoned with. The four-box unit on display consisted of the Control. One unit with the touch-screen display and slim-line CD-ripper, the Source One playback unit and a pair of Store One mirrored hard disk units. This, the 'audiophile' system, will set you back around £12,000, while there are other versions available that are less costly and some that handle video as well.

2 Standing, but a few feet away, was the baby brother of the if-you-need-to-ask-the-price-you-cannot-afford-it, Australian **Continuum** turntable. Retailing for a mere £35,000, the massively engineered 'junior' Criterion-Copperhead record-playing-machine is a three-box confection: the player and motor itself, the stealth mode vacuum pump that sucks the record down onto the platter and the power supply that keeps that 30kg platter rotating at a constant, accurate

speed. Among its multitude of advanced engineering features is a decoupled arm-board using a magnetic stabilisation system, for which there is a patent pending.

3 Shown in the photograph (opposite page, top) standing alongside a Tannoy Prestige Canterbury, to afford some sense of scale, is the imposing **Klipsch** La Scala II, which was filling a vast demonstration room with absolute ease driven by Macintosh amplification. The original La Scala of 1963 was launched as a public address speaker and the three-way Mark II version, with its 105dB rated sensitivity, still seems to be able to deliver PA sound pressure levels. In fact, with that degree of sensitivity you probably ought to be able to drown out The Who using a 0.5-watt SET amplifier! The retro styling of the horn-loaded cabinet might not be to everyone's tastes, but we found its Bauhausian simplicity rather appealing and its £6,500 suggested retail price very competitive.

4 There are times when we are pleased to be given a press pack complete with photographs and the launch of the unfeasibly shiny and

1. The American Sooloos four-box system with its natty touch-screen display





6. The £30,000 turntable, The Jubilee celebrates Thoren's 125 years in hi-fi

range and there's a swish touch-screen remote available, too.

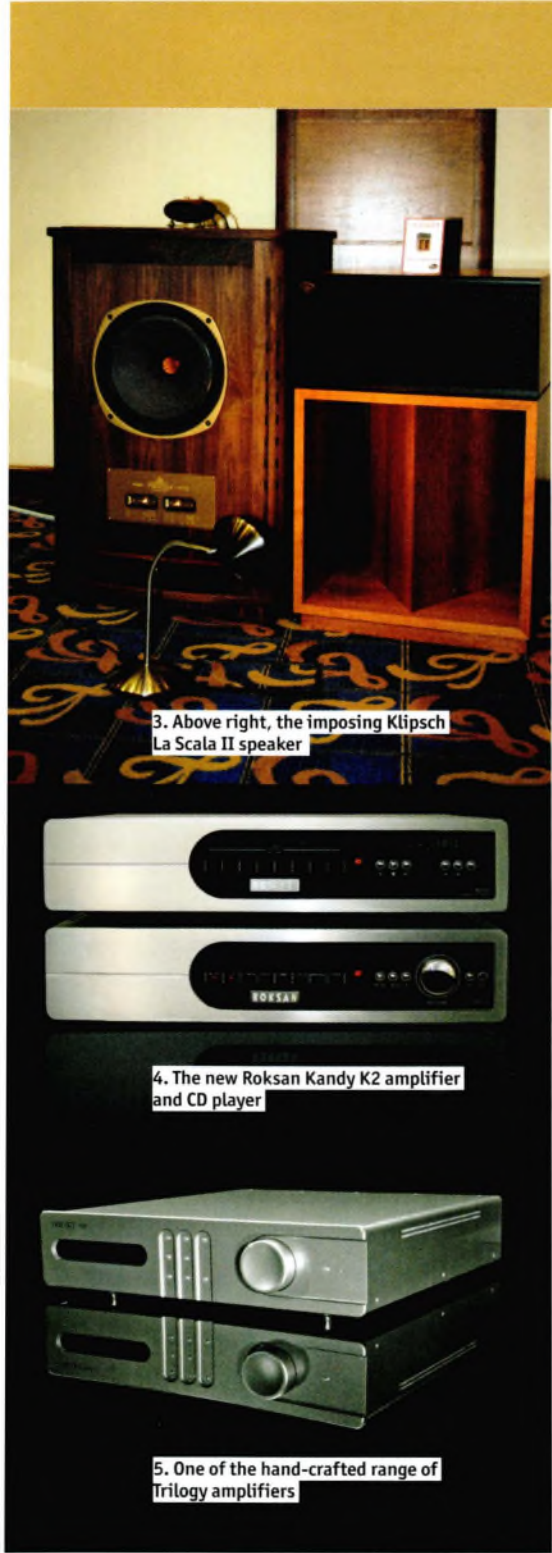
The Jubilee is available now from Thorens retailers for around £30,000.

5 Designer Nic Poulson, of Isotek and Isol-8 Technologies fame, returned to the amplifier fold with his hand-crafted **Trilogy** range: the 909 preamplifier at £3,995; the 60-watt, 968 power amplifier at a similar price (offering switchable pentode or triode operation) and the £4,150 version fitted with KT88 valves. Rounding out the line-up is the 120-watt stereo 968 hybrid design with a valve input stage, selling for £5,495. These exciting designs, which mix valve technology and minimal signal paths with DSP and optical signal transmission, can, if you so desire, be supplied in bespoke finishes to deliver maximum pride of ownership.

7 After its recent re-introduction to the UK, the **Electrocompaniet** concern, best known for its amplifiers, revealed a striking-looking loudspeaker, The Nordic Tone – Model 1. Using SEAS and ScanSpeak drivers, the most outstanding feature of the Tone is its curvaceous, damped aluminium cabinet. Within the enclosure there are rods to pre-stress the walls and wedge-shaped sound absorbent panels, all of which aim to reduce any contribution the cabinet cares to make to the performance. The enclosure has ports that can be opened to switch the bass-loading to reflex rather than infinite baffle. If you fancy a pair, go and withdraw £15,000 from your bank straightaway.

6 Thorens celebrated 125 years in the hi-fi business with the release of its Jubilee turntable. An impressive hunk of a two-arm deck, it offers manual operation and 331/3 to 78 rpm speeds along with the purposeful, but understated aesthetics that Thorens does so well. Driven by two belts, the unit comes with an external power supply and can be delivered with an optional stand that features a similar design to the turntable's Specification-Defined Mass isolation system.

8 There was certainly no shortage of distinctive looking loudspeakers at Heathrow, one of which was the junior version of the **Rountree Acoustics** £6,600 Omnimon 1, the £3,300 Omnimon 2. The omni-directional design features a progressive shift to mono-polar radiation at higher frequencies. It uses a transmission line to load the bass driver and has an ultra-light ribbon tweeter mounted, like the bass unit, on the outside of the cabinet. It is an unusual and thought-provoking approach, but one that seems to be widely appreciated by reviewers and customers



3. Above right, the imposing Klipsch La Scala II speaker

4. The new Roksan Kandy K2 amplifier and CD player

5. One of the hand-crafted range of Trilogy amplifiers

reflective **Roksan** Kandy K2 amplifier and CD player was one of those occasions. The K2 models extend the performance and appeal of the previous Kandy designs and deliver high-end produce at entry-level prices – £750 per box. Not only that, but they have been tweaked to satisfy the demands of today's customers and provide them with a rewarding performance across a wide variety of music and an equally wide range of partnering loudspeakers. Much of the K2 technology has trickled down from the high-end Platinum



7. The impressive-looking Nordic Tone loudspeaker from Electrocompaniet



8. The uniquely designed Rountree Acoustics family of speakers

9 A ribbon tweeter also appeared on a much smaller design, the 25cm tall **Audiosmile** Kensai. Designed to be the 'absolute best micro monitor', it marries the isoplanar ribbon with a 12cm surface-treated magnesium cone, costs £1,799 per pair, and was being demonstrated with a pro-audio Behringer DAC that the company modifies to make it better suited to domestic audio applications

10 Henley Designs was enthusiastic about the launch of its new Boxes from **Pro-Ject**. We should explain that by Boxes, we mean miniature electronic components squeezed into identically sized aluminium cases, that can be combined to build up a genuinely mini and inexpensive, mini system. There's a PreBox, an AmpBox and even an AmpBox mono if you want monoblocs in your mini system. There's a USBBox, a DAC to extract digital sound from your computer and an £80 DockBox for your iPod, along with all manner of other modules including phono accessories and valve amps. There is, naturally, a DesignBox sleeve to keep all your Boxes tidy. Henley really should have continued the theme and called them BoxBoxes but never mind

9. The Audiosmile Kensai micro-monitor loudspeaker



10. Boxes galore from Pro-Ject contain an assortment of new hi-fi separates



11 With the glut of vinyl at the show, it was fitting that the latest record cleaning machines from the masters of the discipline, the revitalised **Keith Monks** company, were on display. If you, like many people these days, scour charity shops and boot sales for vinyl, you definitely need something to de-louse your purchases. And what better than the machine that the BBC has been using to do the job since 1969? With models ranging from around £2,000 to nearly £4,000, they're hardly an impulse buy, but they are superb performers

and beautifully engineered – for example, using ultra-reliable vacuum pumps normally fitted to kidney dialysis machines. What's more, they can even make your new vinyl sound better!

So, a disappointing show in several respects but there was still enough to entertain the hardcore enthusiast provided he was prepared to make an effort. You might have had to sift through a great many oysters to find the pearls but they were there, nonetheless. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward



11. How to get the best from your vinyl recordings with the latest record cleaner



“And the Award goes to...”



SC-11S1
Premium Control Amplifier



SM-11S1
Premium Control Amplifier

**European High-End Audio 2008-2009
Marantz SC-11S1/SM-11S1 – EISA Jury, 2008**

“Marantz is no stranger to the world of high-end hi-fi and the spectacularly well-engineered SC-11S1/SM-11S1 pre/power amplifier combination is a perfect illustration of the company’s talents”.

“The stunning metal finish and architectural build brings an unmistakably tactile quality to this pair of precious gems”.

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“These amplifiers are true ‘high-end statements’ that stand for the very best in musical reproduction”.

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CABINETS MONEY CAN BUY”**

HI FI CHOICE / ALAN SIRCOM / GUARNERI MEMENTO

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SMALL SPEAKER EVER MADE, WHICH JUST
HAPPENS TO SOUND AS AMAZING AS IT LOOKS,
TURN YOUR EYES TOWARD ITALY”**

HI FI NEWS / KEN KESSLER / GUARNERI MEMENTO

**“THIS OUTSTANDING SPEAKER CARRIES MY
ENTHUSIASTIC RECOMMENDATION”**

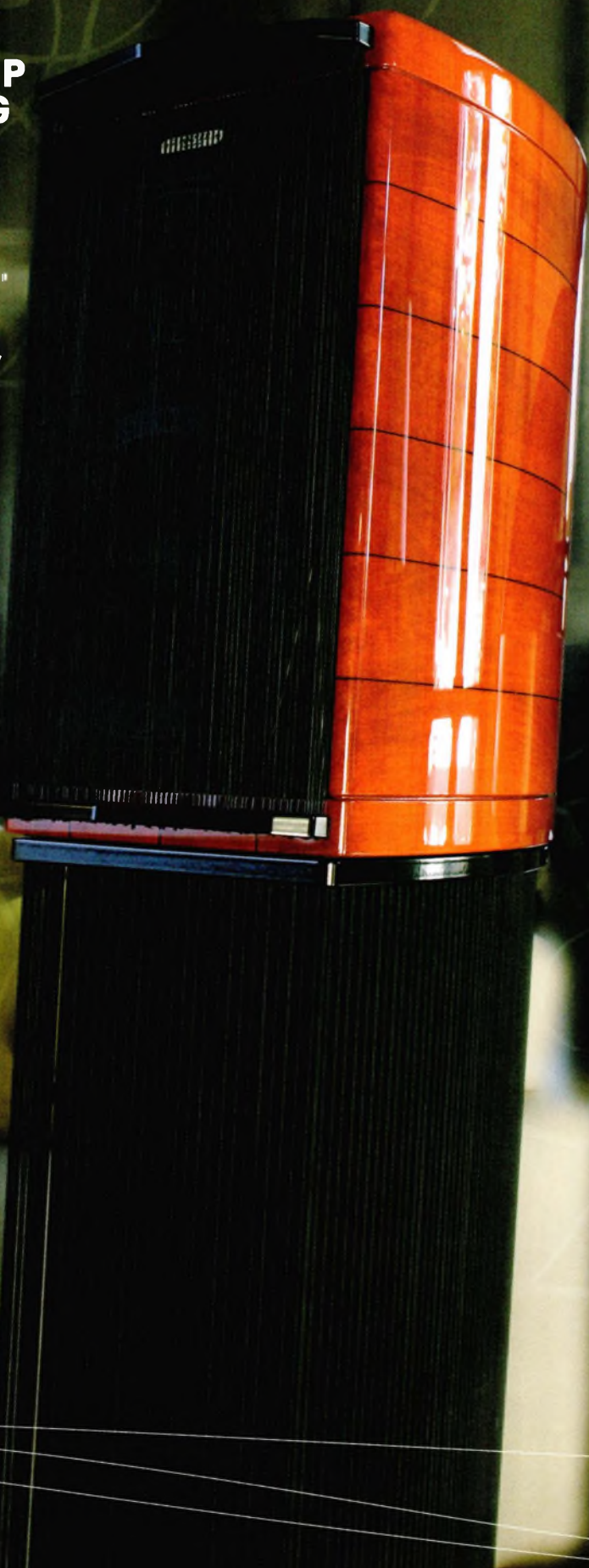
HI FI NEWS / MARTIN COLLOMS / AMATI ANNIVERSARIO

For nearly three decades, Sonus Faber have treated us to speakers so elegantly styled and crafted that they've revolutionised the entire audio industry. Where once there were only parallel sides, we now have curves. Where once we suffered poor veneers, we now savour finishes worthy of the finest furniture. The exquisite Homage series represents the ultimate in Sonus Faber artistry, exhibiting all the virtues of the company's philosophy and the vision and passion of the Sonus Faber team, without any recourse to compromise.

When Sonus Faber created the Homage family, as an homage to history's greatest lute makers, it was always intended that its three original members would evolve. Benefiting from the discoveries made during the development of the flagship Stradivari, both of its predecessors - the Guarneri and Amati - have arrived their in second 'generations'.

Amati Anniversario and Guarneri Memento have been subtly refined externally, to identify the new editions, while key components have been changed to improve the performance. The floor-standing Amati Anniversario provides full-range sound for rooms that demand a larger speaker, while the Guarneri Memento, with redesigned pedestal, satisfies the demand of those for whom a smaller system will suffice.

Beyond the sheer beauty of the Homage systems is the sound, intended to reflect the majesty of the violin makers that they honour. For the only time in the history of audio, here are loudspeakers that - truly - sound as beautiful as they look.



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HAPPENINGS

SHOW REPORT

Top Audio Video Show



Forget the fashion parades, this is the big event in the Milanese calendar

1 Top Audio. Based in the Atahotel Quark in downtown Milan, the Top Audio (pronounced 'Ow-dio', not 'Aw-dio') Video Show ran from September 18-21. Open from 9am until 8pm most days, it covered all things audio and video (but mostly audio) and admission to the public was free. The show had 128 exhibitors, many of whom were distributors, so practically every brand you could think of (and some you've never heard of) were demonstrating. With plenty of people coming through the doors from early morning to late at night, you couldn't help wondering where the Heathrow show (see page 24) went wrong.

2 Cambridge Audio Sonata. The most important launch of the event was by Cambridge Audio. The company announced five new products – the four-piece Sonata system and the one-box Fusion (see page 11). It also showed prototypes of the Cambridge Audio S30's little brother. We had a demonstration of the Sonata and its iPod dock and the sound is extremely impressive. So watch this space...

3 Waterfall Niagara. Classy glassy Waterfall from France also chose the Top Audio show to announce the forthcoming Niagara loudspeaker. This two-and-a-half way flagship loudspeaker sports a glass horn tweeter (using a normal dome instead of a compression driver), is expected by the end of the year and costs a cool €27,800.

4 Rise CD player. Some Italian design rarely leaves the country, like this understated little floorstanding CD player. Sold in a trio of flight cases, the washing machine-sized transport and DAC are suspended off three struts thanks to an intricate collection of bungee cords. The price? Don't ask... but anything that looks like an oil rig usually costs as much as an oil rig.

5 Cocaine speakers. Not everything in the Top Audio show cost a fortune. The new ranges of Nero valve amplifiers, the Monster Audio HP-02 single cabinet floorstanding stereo system and speaker and the new range of Cocaine loudspeakers is



exceptionally reasonable, with loudspeakers starting at just €250 for a two-way standmount. The proprietor, Antonio Scialò of Openitem, is looking for distribution and dealers in the UK. We doubt he'll have trouble finding a Cocaine dealer in most cities...

6 47 Lab tuner. Uber minimalist Japanese manufacturer 47 Laboratory has added an FM-only tuner to its Reference Series products. The tiny new Midnight Blue 4730 will feature an analogue tuner, with just one tuning dial, two LEDs and that's it. No presets, no LED readouts... Will this be FM radio's last, best hope? Price to be confirmed.

7 cdsdesign II. We're not sure where the design cues for the €8,000 Synthesis loudspeaker came from, but we think it might be galactic. Armed with front and back tweeters, midrange and bass units, this unique bass reflex design sounds pretty good... for a bright red Catherine wheel. **HFC**

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



BLOOMFIELD, KOOPER, STILLS Super Session

Columbia/Speaker's Corner 180g vinyl

Music: This 1968 recording heralded the supergroup, where top-notch musicians abandon their regular bands for a one-off session. The bill is Mike Bloomfield (guitar, Electric Flag), Al Kooper (keyboards, Blood, Sweat & Tears) and Stephen Stills (guitar, Buffalo Springfield), but one side is Bloomfield/Kooper and the other Stills/Kooper. The latter pair's covers include a fine version of Dylan's *It Takes A Lot To Laugh*, while the first has a strong blues feel.

Sound: The vintage is obvious, but there's plenty of life in the mix. *JK*



THE MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA WITH JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

The Inner Mounting Flame

Columbia/Speakers Corner 180g vinyl

Music: Mahavishnu's 1971 debut is a powerhouse of jazz rock fusion that remains incandescent to this day. Billy Cobham on drums, John McLaughlin on guitar and Jan Hammer on keyboards combined compositional and technical skills that have rarely been surpassed in electric music. Mahavishnu produced truly transcendental music. This is arguably its finest 40 minutes.

Sound: This is a superb pressing of a blinding album, you won't find a better sounding copy. *JK*



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

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



NITIN SAWHNEY

London Undersound Positiv-ID

Music: Unafraid to confront the political and social issues of the day, Sawhney tackles the lies of our leaders, war, race, religion and cultural identity. Sawhney is not a singer, so he relies on coaxing brilliant performances from guest vocalists, including Paul McCartney, whose voice on *My Soul* is appealingly cracked and timeworn in a way he's never allowed on his own albums. Weighty but impressive.

Sound: A swirling mix of contemporary urban and Asian influences with interludes of sampled street sounds creates a compelling aural picture of life in our capital. *NW*



THE HEART STRINGS

Try Fly Blue Sky Rough Trade

Music: The Heart Strings are a London quartet who play a unique and extremely tuneful mix of pop, loungecore and post-Beach Boys harmonies. This, their debut set, is by turns tender, unreal, childlike and anthemic, featuring everything from trumpets and harpsichords to whispered backing vocals and glockenspiels. Think opening a particularly impressive jewellery box. And *Pedala* is one of very few songs that both captures and transcends the idea of childhood.

Sound: Despite the rich dynamics there's a wealth of delicately sweet touches carefully (half) hidden. *NW*



EDVARD GRIEG HOLBERG SUITE

Katya Apekisheva (piano)

Quartz Music QT22061

Music: Here are some of Grieg's best-known miniatures. The piano transcriptions work well, avoiding the over-romanticism of orchestral versions and adding a sense that this is quintessentially Nordic music, though Katya Apekisheva herself is Russian.

Sound: Apekisheva is a likeable and highly talented player, with an empathy combined with natural fluidity in her playing. An excellent recording, clear and easy to follow, yet adept at recreating the ambience of the acoustic space. *AG*



PAUL SIMON

The Essential Paul Simon Warners

Music: It's a little-known fact that the New Jersey half of the world's most famous folk duo is one of pop's greatest guitar players. This 32-track set excels with his precise fills and beautiful guitar harmonies. Whether on his first solo album in 1972 or 1986's South African rhythmic masterpiece *Graceland*, Simon's guitar shines all the way through.

Sound: Having spent his childhood training his voice and months in studios perfecting albums with Garfunkel, Simon is one of the great sonic alchemists. The sound on this is, in a word, brilliant. *MP*



DAMON ALBARN

Monkey - Journey To The West XL

Music: Damon Albarn's Chinese opera is a spectacular east-meets-west, tradition-confronts-modernity hybrid, combining an authentically Chinese aesthetic with electronic and programmed elements. Adopting a self-imposed discipline of working within the Chinese pentatonic scale, he uses authentic instruments and performers, including a 60-piece Beijing choir and various Chinese singers. But that's really only half the story as he adds melodically inventive string and brass arrangements and audacious splashes of studio wizardry.

Sound: Serious-minded and yet fun, complex but at the same time pragmatic and highly accessible, it's

hard to think of any other contemporary composer who could have pulled off anything quite so audacious. *NW*





THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC

"Fashions must have changed because it's musically and sonically superb."

ME'SHELL NDEGEÓCELLO *Peace Beyond Passion* Maverick

Music: This 1996 album followed her successful debut two years earlier, but failed to garner the same response from listeners. Fashions must have changed because it's musically and sonically superb. This talented bass player is something of a modern-day Nina Simone, her

lyrics are clearly conscious and her music powerful and taut. A fusion of jazz and R'n'B styles dominated by her voice and bass, it's slick but with plenty of muscle. An unusual sonic style to mix with songs that have strong religious and spiritual themes, but it's a combination that works well.

Sound: This is a bass-fest with the electric bass high in the mix and the quality of recording in that department is deep, chewy and chunky; big cones are given a full work-out. *JK*



STEREOLAB

Chemical Chords Duophonic/4AD

Music: It's been four years since Stereolab's last full-length album, *Margarine Eclipse*, but not much has changed. The analogue synths, 1960s French pop shimmers, mellifluous vocals and baroque horn arrangements are all present and correct, though there's less of the Krautrock repetitive motoring that characterised their earlier work. Each of the 14 tracks is a compact pop gem, with standouts including the joyous horns and complementary strings of *Self Portrait With 'Electric Brain'* (the arch lyrical conceits are all here in

abundance too) and the jaunty 'joe de vivre' of *Neon Beanbag*.

Sound: The 'Lab retain that slightly claustrophobic, lo-fi feel that's synonymous with their sound – if you like their other stuff, you'll need this, if you didn't, you won't miss it. *DO*



PORTICO QUARTET

Knee-Deep In The North Sea

Babel Vortex

Music: This album by four London University students is more than just this year's Mercury Prize-nominated jazz curio. Jack Wyllie's alto and soprano saxophones owe something to Coltrane's earlier lyrical period and possibly Andy Shepherd, but it's the distinctive sound of Nick Mulvey's hang and the rhythmic interplay between this, Duncan Bellamy's drums and Milo Fitzpatrick's pumping double bass that gives the quartet their edge. They create a sound that is edgy and accessible – expect to hear more.

Sound: This acoustic jazz recording has just the right balance of bite and cosiness. *DO*



BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS VOL 6

András Schiff (piano) ECM 1947

Music: This Beethoven sonata cycle was recorded chronologically, an approach with a great deal to recommend it, not least by highlighting the progression of the the later years of the composer's life. It will be fascinating to hear the final recording in the series, Opus 110 and 111, due this autumn.

Sound: The Zurich Tonhalle, where this was recorded, does not have the most graceful acoustic. Combined with the Fabbrini piano used here, the combination gives a bold, but ultimately rather hard sound. But in the right room, this is an unusually alive and informative issue. *AG*



HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

ERIC BIBB AND NEEDED TIME

Spirit & The Blues

Opus3

SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid plus stereo CD)

Music: This album was originally released on CD in 1994, but has recently been given a new lease of life on SACD. Bibb is a second generation blues singer/acoustic guitar player with similarities to Keb' Mo' but arguably with a degree more soul. He grew up meeting many of the greats of the 1960s folk scene and seems to have picked up some of their understanding that the blues often works best when it's pared down to the essence. The titles are either his interpretations of traditional tunes or originals, many of them recorded with gospel quartet the Deacons. Easy and sweet contemporary blues.

Sound: Sweden's Opus3 has always made great sounding discs and this live to valve electronics cut is no different, delivering the goods in open and effortless fashion. *JK*



JS BACH: ST MATTHEW PASSION

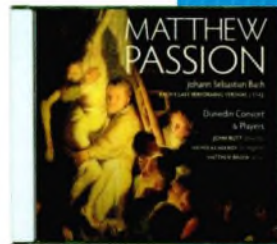
Dunedin Consort & Players

Linn Records CKD313

SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid plus stereo CD)

Music: As one of Bach's masterpieces, with a stature similar to the B minor Mass, this is a recording for those who gravitate towards the intimate, almost chamber music-like qualities of the Dunedin, which is performed here predominantly with one voice per part. As a result it is a million miles from the big band qualities of a large modern orchestras and vocal forces. Just 12 singers – primarily two choirs of four voices are used – and it's based on the final performance version from Bach's own time, the first time this has been done on disc.

Sound: The recording combines with the lean, open textures of the musicians to make for an unusually transparent sound in every sense. The SACD mix is particularly praiseworthy, with very explicit, well choreographed imagery. *AG*



CLAIRE MARTIN

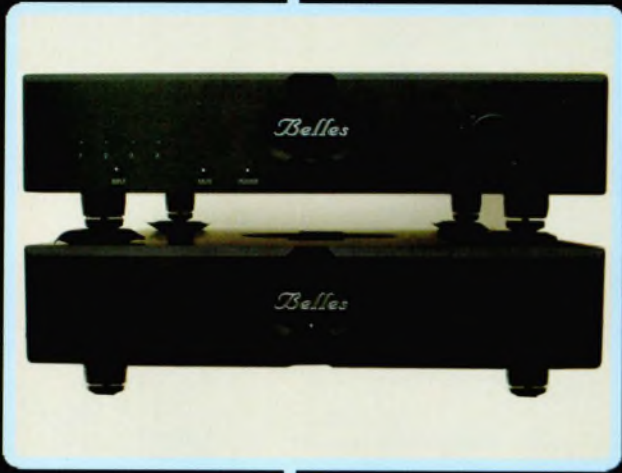
Perfect Alibi Linn

SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid plus stereo HDCD)

Music: Singer Claire Martin's 2000 album predated the likes of Norah Jones and Madeleine Peyroux with its interpretations of pop classics informed by jazz chops. Reissued on remastered double sample rate HDCD and 5.1 SACD it's a welcome return, with Martin wrapping her expressive, yet technically impressive vocal chords around neglected classics including the Stylistics' *People Make The World Go Round*, Hendrix's *Up From The Skies* and Laura Nyro's *He's A Runner*. There's even room for a guest vocal turn from John Martyn on his *Man In The Station*.

Sound: With its lush, clean and technically precise sound, this is classic hi-fi show fare, but the quality of the songs and the quiet intensity of Martin's delivery make it stand out. *DO*





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CHOICE MAIL



The pick of this month's best letters

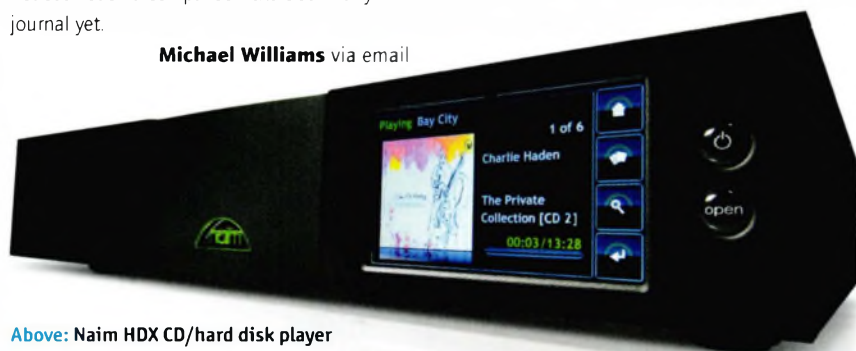
Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email your letters to alan.sircom@futurenet.com

ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

I've just read your review of the Naim HDX (HFC 311) and you've made it clear how impressive it is. I can see how this will appeal to people in the market with that sort of money to splash around. The question I would like you to address is this: how does it compare to a Logitech Squeezebox (or for the more flushed, a Transporter), coupled with half a terabyte of NAS (network attached storage)? This would obviously be a lot cheaper. In fairness, you've touched on these in your article on *Understanding... Music Servers (ibid)*. There are also dedicated ripper/PC devices on the market. More depth, please!

Can you at some point wrap your critical ears around these and do a comparison between Naim and Linn's devices in a group test? I've not seen such a comparison exercise in any journal yet.

Michael Williams via email



Above: Naim HDX CD/hard disk player

HFC Comparisons between music server and hard disk player products are more difficult than might first be imagined. How do you compare a product with a disk drive with one that relies on NAS boxes, for example? Also, how do you compare products that use different CODECs without ending up testing the CODECs, not the hardware? That said, music servers are becoming an aspect of the modern hi-fi system that's hard to ignore these days. Or maybe not...

PC-FREE MUSIC

I thought *Hi-Fi Choice* was supposed to be a hi-fi magazine. Why do you keep reviewing computers dressed up to be hi-fi? I have no interest in 'hard disk players', 'music servers' or any other so-called replacements to CD.

"...you are pandering to a market that's not interested in music."

And no one I know of is particularly interested, either. So please stop reviewing them. It seems you are just pandering to a market that's just not interested in music - have you seen HydrogenAudio (a forum dedicated to computer audio)? You won't win over this market to hi-fi, why try?

Frank Tibbs via email

HFC Many manufacturers beg to differ, Frank. Companies like Linn and Naim have outstanding audiophile credentials and both have made computer-based products that are potentially attractive to a wider audience than a 'mere' CD player. Whether widespread interest in this new species of product actually exists remains to be seen, but imagine how long a hi-fi magazine would have lasted if it refused to review CD players back in the 1980s?

QUITE QUIET

The desire, by some, to create live listening levels in domestic surroundings has always seemed to me somewhat beside the point

LETTER OF THE MONTH

FILTH-FI

I went shopping for a new amp recently and was horrified by some of the stores I visited. Equipment caked in dust, a window display that an undertaker would find too sombre and a demonstration room that looked like it last saw a lick of paint in 1987. I was in retail for many years and I know how important these things are to customers. I also know things are tough, but why are these stores so drab and dismal? How can they expect to drum up new business in a store that looks like the local shop in *The League of Gentlemen*?

Tony Blanco via email

HFC It's a fair point, Tony. Although not every store could be described in such grim terms, we've all visited hi-fi shops that look like they have seen better days. Worse, sometimes they looked like they had seen better days even during their 'better days'. So we certainly agree that there are many hi-fi retailers who could benefit from a freshen up and still more who could learn how to use a vacuum cleaner. It's amazing what a new paint job, a new sofa and some discs produced after 1991 can do...

WIN
RUSS ANDREWS'
SOUND
SOLUTIONS BOOK



The author of our 'letter of the month' will receive a free copy of Russ Andrews' excellent hi-fi book, *Sound Solutions*. This compact and invaluable tome is an excellent guide to getting the best out of the equipment you already own. So drop us a line, or email hifimail@futurenet.co.uk

with respect to high-fidelity sound reproduction. However, regardless of personal views on the subject, there are other factors to be taken into consideration.

Under typical (or natural) situations a human being is able to distinguish and interpret an incredible range of sounds, both in level, frequency and, courtesy of our 'stereo' configuration, direction. However, as with other human senses, there are safety mechanisms built in to protect us from excesses. In the case of sonic excesses, under continued exposure, the human hearing mechanism will progressively 'close up' in an attempt to protect us from lasting damage. Under most situations, this aural shut down is progressive and may be hardly noticeable in itself – there are exceptions, of course, where extreme sound pressures may quickly incur lasting damage.

However, the nature of that progressive 'closing up' of the system will affect not only the amount of sound being received, but the nature of its interpretation. One may liken it to extremes of compression in the audio electronics sphere. One still hears the music, but the dynamic range is heavily compromised, as is the perceived frequency bandwidth. It is my contention that a similar effect ensues when the human hearing mechanism moves into protection mode. It is almost as if we have placed our heads inside a pillow. The sound is there, but we can no longer determine delicacies of dynamics or the extremes of frequency range. The effect may be quite subtle to start with. However, increased exposure will accentuate the effect as we move towards the threshold of physical discomfort.

The point is, even when the effect is in its most subtle stages, we shall not be perceiving sound accurately. In other words, we shall not be experiencing high fidelity, no matter how sophisticated the equipment in use. This is also related to the realities of room reverberations – another subtle form of distortion – and relative power levels.

Do we really want to reproduce concert hall sound levels in our constricted living spaces? I don't think so. At least, not if we wish to conserve our hearing abilities and certainly not if we wish to experience true high-fidelity

“Of the dozen recordings listed, I absolutely agree with ten of them (and own all ten too).”

music reproduction, including the nuances of dynamic range and frequency envelope. I would further contend that, for a given listening position within a given room, there is an optimum sound pressure level, which will serve to realise a cognitive appreciation of the music being reproduced, with all its subtleties intact. Below this level, we may miss some very low-level detail.

Above this level, we shall certainly be entering into the realms of distortion brought about by a combination of hearing mechanism adjustment and room boundary reflections. I would suggest that this optimum level is considerably lower than many audiophiles might suppose.

My rule of thumb for setting levels would be to start off at a very quiet level and slowly increase the volume until you can hear a complete dynamic range. You might be surprised at how low this level can be, especially at times of low ambient noise. Furthermore, lower levels promote a more comfortable, sustained listening experience. Consequently, required amplifier power outputs for contemporary domestic listening situations may not necessarily be as high as we are lead to believe.

Much also depends, of course, upon loudspeaker sensitivity and the relationship between loudspeaker and room, but that is another topic.

Douglas Marc Berkhamsted

HFC The way the ear 'closes down' in the presence of high sound pressure levels influences the sound of some genres of music. This is one reason why high-octave rock sounds best played at high volumes, although the desire to play music loud enough to feel your ears start to compress must be tempered by the hearing damage that it can cause.

The desire to hear instruments at their native loudness levels is always appealing, even if it's a goal that may not be practical

and certainly is not always necessary to making a good noise. We have always judged the correct volume for any given disc to be a function of the recording level on that disc, though.

BLUES BLUES

I read your Blues music guide (HFC 311) with great interest. Of the dozen recordings listed, I absolutely agree with ten of them (and own all ten too), but why *The Healer* and why *Riding with the King*? Practically any John Lee Hooker compilation would feature more important recordings. *Boogie Chillen*, *Boom Boom* and *Live at the Regal*, or *Indianola Mississippi Seeds* would be a far better example of BB King's contribution, while the *Beano* album (Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton) shows what Eric Clapton was once capable of.

Greg Hofstadter via email

HFC Yes, JLH's earlier output is culturally important, but *The Healer* received praise, Grammys and chart success. This record, along with Stevie Ray Vaughan's output, brought the blues to a new audience, giving the likes of Robben Ford, Joe Bonamassa and even John Mayer and the White Stripes a more mainstream acceptability. Yes there are better BB King albums and better Eric Clapton albums, but as we said, *Riding...* brings together two artists that both deserve inclusion in the list.

NEVER THE TWAIN

Arcam recently stopped having hi-fi and home cinema products under the same banner, moving instead to FMJ models for hi-fi and DiVA for AV products. Is this the start of a trend? Will we see more AV products distinctly separated from hi-fi from the same manufacturer, or is this just Arcam trying to get two markets for the price of one?

Jack Maguire via email

HFC It does seem that hi-fi enthusiasts are not too happy with sourcing products from home cinema catalogues and vice versa. We expect to see more companies making a bigger play of their hi-fi credentials in the coming months and years, simply because there's less price erosion in hi-fi than in AV.



Above: Arcam FMJ A38 integrated amplifier

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Edinburgh	James Morrow	0131 229 8777	james-morrow.com
Exeter	Gulliford Hi-Fi	01392 491 194	gullifordhifi.co.uk
Gateshead	Lintone Audio	0191 477 4167	lintone.co.uk
Guildford	P J Hi-Fi	01483 504 801	pjhifi.co.uk
Huddersfield	Huddersfield Hi-Fi	01484 424 000	huddersfieldhifi.co.uk
Islington	Bartletts Hi-Fi	0207 607 2148	bartlettshifi.com
Manchester	Practical Hi-Fi	0161 839 8869	practicalhi-fi.co.uk
Nottingham	Nottingham Hi-Fi	0115 978 6919	nottinghamhifi.co.uk
Pinner	Music Matters	0208 420 1925	hatchend.co.uk
Saffron Walden	Chew & Osborne	01799 523728	chewandosborne.co.uk
Sheffield	Moorgate Acoustics	0114 275 6048	moorgateacoustics.co.uk
Southport	Southport Hi-Fi	01704 536 901	southporthifi.com
York	Vickers Hi-Fi	01904 629 659	vickers-hifi.co.uk



"It's a revelation. Quite simply this player is astonishing. Not astonishing for the price, you understand, but astonishing; full stop." What Hi-Fi Sept 2008 CD6 SE



"A stunning product for the money, offering performance startlingly close to what one would expect for a player three or four times as much." - Hi-Fi Choice Sept 2008 CD8 SE



"The CD 6SE is a landmark product that redefines the performance level at its price point. If we could award more than five stars, we would." What Hi-Fi Sept 2008 CD6 SE



"Timing, a traditional Cyrus strong suit, is immaculate here – each strum, pluck or hit starts and stops with great precision and easy fluidity, making light work of testing tempos or sudden changes of emphasis. There's an eye for detail the most nightmarish Sergeant-Major would be proud of, and the ability to lay the minutiae of a performance bare without ever losing sight of the performance as a whole. What Hi-Fi.com Sept 2008 CDXT SE



Researched, designed, manufactured and supported in the UK
For more information please visit www.servo-evolution.com
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W
elcome to...



Spread across the next 32 pages you'll find our pick of the very best hi-fi components currently available, painstakingly plucked from each relevant product category.

As you'd expect from *Hi-Fi Choice*, we have rigorously filtered all our favourite products to come up with a final list of award-winning components to suit every pocket – after all, how could you possibly compare the best CD player costing less than £500 to the best priced at over £5,000? Both deserve to be judged against their peers, and that's just what you get with *HFC*.

THE JUDGING PROCESS

The process we undertake in judging what products make it into our *Awards* issue is painstaking. All the kit has been listened to and measured and we've sought the opinions of blind listening teams before embarking on extensive consultation with a judging panel of

exceptional experience: the *HFC* reviewing team. Taking into account their feedback, the list has then been gradually whittled down until we've reached a final, democratically agreed selection, with three products in each price category ranked in order of Gold, Silver and Bronze. We've also checked the availability of each product, to ensure you can still get them. Then – and only then – was the final list complete. The result is an *Awards* edition for those who really care about quality – hi-fi awards you can really trust.

Of course, an individual's choice of hi-fi will ultimately come down to personal taste and you'll find many other fine components worthy of your audition list nestling in our *Buyer's Bible* section at the back of the magazine. Yet all our special award winners have succeeded due to their exceptional mix of qualities at each individual price point – whether the gong is Gold, Silver or Bronze, these are products you simply have to hear. The shortlist for your next upgrade starts here...



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The Judging Panel



DAN GEORGE
Hi-Fi Choice's current editor



PAUL MESSENGER
Former *Hi-Fi Choice* editor, speaker master



ALVIN GOLD
Top hi-fi and home cinema journalist



JASON KENNEDY
Former *Hi-Fi Choice* editor, audio expert



ALAN SIRCOM
Virtuoso hi-fi and home cinema reviewer



RICHARD BLACK
Hi-Fi Choice's resident electronics guru



MALCOLM STEWARD
Former *Hi-Fi Review* editor, audio expert



RICHARD HOLLISS
Hi-Fi Choice's current production editor

Best CD player up to £500



Marantz CD6002

Price £280 **Type** CD ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

The CD6002 may not be the most expensive player around, but don't count it out – this is one player that considerably exceeds expectations at the price. Built to last, this dynamic-sounding player is good for almost any kind of music and features Marantz innovations like HDAM amplifier modules as well as CD-Text. Hard to beat at the price.

Cambridge Audio 740C

Price £500 **Type** CD
☎ 0845 090 2288
🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com



Pioneer PD-D6

Price £350 **Type** CD/SACD
☎ 0330 123 1240
🌐 www.pioneer.co.uk

Best CD player £500-£1,000



Yamaha CD-S2000

Price £999 **Type** CD/SACD ☎ 01908 366700 🌐 www.yamaha-uk.com

The two-channel revival shows no signs of stopping. Yamaha has shown a true return to stereo form with the new CD-S2000 player (and matching A-S2000 integrated amplifier). The CD/SACD player, in particular, showed what Yamaha is capable of; a sophisticated, beautifully controlled player in looks and sound that just happens to be built like a tank.

Cambridge Audio Azur 840C

Price £750 **Type** CD
☎ 0845 090 2288
🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com



Naim Audio CD5i

Price £875 **Type** CD
☎ 01722 426600
🌐 www.naim-audio.com

Best CD player £1,000-£2,000



Arcam FMJ CD37

Price £1,000 **Type** CD/SACD ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

Arcam's flagship player in its Full Metal Jacket hi-fi series is a stereo-only CD and SACD player. Using either format, this player serves up a musical treat, delivering excellent bass depth, superb imagery and first-rate resolution. It's also every bit the Arcam player, which means it will perform without fuss or bother for a long, long time...

Cyrus Audio CD 8SE

Price £1,100 **Type** CD
☎ 01480 410900
🌐 www.cyrusaudio.com



Leema Stream

Price £1,095 **Type** CD
☎ 01938 811900
🌐 www.leema-acoustics.com



Best CD player £2,000-£5,000



Marantz SA-11S2

Price £2,700 **Type** CD/SACD ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

One of the Marantz Premium series, the SA-11S2 turns in a first-rate CD and SACD performance, one that comes surprisingly close to the SA-7S1 flagship from the company. There is a sense of musical grace and poise with this heavyweight player, made all the more exciting by being able to select output filters for the ideal performance on any system.

Meridian G08.2

Price £2,250 **Type** CD
☎ 01480 445678
🌐 www.meridian-audio.com



Moon CD5.3 RS

Price £3,150 **Type** CD
☎ 0131 555 3922
🌐 www.simaudio.com



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Furutech's deMag Frees LPs,
Optical Disc Media,
Cables and Connectors of
Magnetically-Induced Distortion

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Disc Flattener



DF-2 LP Flattener

"... Those of you with voracious appetites for vinyl will find this little gadget indispensable."

—Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio.com

deStat



"... The Furutech deStat turned out to be a piece of tremendous value and it'll take permanent residence next to my turntable"

— John Potis 6moons
Brutus Award
Positive feed back online



Ag-12 Phono Cable Series

"I don't know if the Furutech Ag-12 is the best phono cable on the market, but it's the best I've heard, a fact made all the more meaningful by its mid-level price. It's one of the phono cables to beat, and it's affordable to boot."

—Marc Mickelson, Soundstage.com Reviews Choice Award



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Ag-12-L (L-DIN/RCA)

Ag-12-R4 (RCA/RCA)

Reference Series



"...Furutech's cables offer great transparency and purity, plus an uncanny ability to block out noise and grunge"

— Chris Martens The Absolute Sound 2007 Editors Choice Awards

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Tel: +44(0) 1435 867 438
www.metropolis-music.co.uk

Best CD player over £5,000



EMM Labs CDSA

Price £9,495 **Type** CD/SACD ☎ 01273 700759 🌐 www.emmlabs.com

This Canadian CD/SACD player is one of the most ideosyncratic and innovative disc playing products we've ever tested. Not content with playing both formats, the CDSA actually upsamples SACD to twice the normal data rate and takes CD to similar 5.6MHz sampling heights. This makes for a sound that just about redefines the performance of both formats.

Marantz SA-7S1

Price £5,000 **Type** CD/SACD
☎ 01753 680868
🌐 www.marantz.com



Chord Red Reference

Price £13,345 **Type** CD
☎ 01622 721444
🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk



InfoCD Players

It's been a fascinating year for disc players of all kinds. The very beginning of 2008 saw the end of HD DVD, leaving Blu-ray as the last disc standing in what looks like being the final physical format war. Despite effectively having no real competition, Blu-ray sales have yet to make the sort of paradigm-shifting inroads to the CD or DVD. Of course, it's still early days for the format and Blu-ray Audio is just around the corner...

If you look to the mainstream press, it's hard to avoid the fact that CD sales are in decline; the CD single has effectively dropped off the map, while albums on silver disc are down almost one-fifth on a year ago. This does, however, mask several trends that show continued interest in CD and SACD.

Yes, sales of physical discs are down and downloads are up, but this is a generational issue. People with big CD collections keep on buying CDs and players alike.

The move from a disc culture to a download culture has a knock-on effect in the sales of players. Like the LP backlash against CD in the late 1980s, the price of

“It's still early days for the format and Blu-ray Audio is just around the corner...”

the average CD player sold today has increased slightly. Whether this is people buying their 'final CD player' or just raising their game is immaterial, but CD quality is definitely rising.





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David Berriman
Hi Fi News - Oct 08



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Best turntable up to £1,000



Pro-Ject X-Pack

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Pro-Ject has transformed the record player market and with products like the X-Pack on its books, it's not hard to see why. A first-rate acrylic deck with a carbon-fibre arm and an award-winning cartridge, the whole package performs magnificently and is top value for money, too.

Michell Tecnodec

Price £886 (inc. arm/cartridge)

☎ 020 8953 0771

www.michell-engineering.co.uk



Clearaudio Emotion

Price £985 (inc. arm/cartridge)

☎ 01252 702705

www.clearaudio.de



Best turntable £1,000-£3,000



Funk Firm Saffire

Price £1,900 (exc. arm/cartridge) ☎ 01273 585042

www.thefunkfirm.co.uk

With its three-pulley Vector drive, K-Drive-powered DC motor, inverted bearing and deliberately lossy arm-mounting plate, the Funk Firm Saffire turntable redefines how a turntable should be made. It's possibly one of the most entertaining record decks ever made.

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www.clearaudio.de



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April 2008

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PowerMax Plus™, What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, April 2008.



Dec 2006

"Tweaks to such important areas as detail, bass extension and treble sweetness add up to a more appealing sound overall."

Original PowerMax™ cable, Hi-Fi Choice, issue 288

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"...significantly reduced background 'hash' and a subjectively lower noise floor, which in turn improves resolution of details."
Hi-Fi Choice, July 2006



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 🌐 www.sme.ltd.uk



Brinkmann LaGrange
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 ☎ 01727 865488
 🌐 www.brinkmann-audio.com



Turntable accessories



Ortofon Rondo Red

Price £325 **Type** MC cartridge ☎ 01235 511166
 🌐 www.henleydesigns.co.uk

With a body of hardwood and resin, an aluminium cantilever and elliptical stylus, Ortofon's Rondo Red is designed to bring high-end detail and resolution to mid-priced turntables. We loved it on the Pro-Ject X-Pack, and it will transform similarly priced decks, too.

Cambridge Audio Azur 640P

Price £60 **Type** phono stage
 ☎ 0845 090 2288
 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com



Dynavector DV-10X5

Price £250 **Type** MC cartridge
 ☎ 01665 830862
 🌐 www.dynavector.co.jp



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Best radio tuners up to £500



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Price £285 **Type** FM/AM ☎ 01442 260146 🌐 www.creekaudio.co.uk

Creek's entry-level Evolution range is small and built to meet the demands of a discerning audience. Forget DAB, RDS or any other three-letter acronym, good analogue radio is what the Evolution is all about. Whether using the dial to tune or to change presets, the sound is wonderfully cohesive and detailed. Fall in love with radio again with Creek.

Onkyo T-4555

Price £350 **Type** DAB/FM
☎ 01494 681515
🌐 www.eu.onkyo.com



Denon TU-1800DAB

Price £250 **Type** DAB/FM
☎ 01753 680568
🌐 www.denon.co.uk



Best radio tuners over £500



Magnum Dynalab MD-90T

Price £1,295 **Type** FM ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.magnumdynalab.com

A few years ago, an FM-only tuner looked like an expense too far. But the threat of an analogue radio switch-off is still a long way off, so any FM tuner should expect at least a decade of solid use. And few tuners define 'solid' quite so well as the powerfully built MD-90T. Fully analogue with a triode output stage, this striking tuner sounds fantastic.

T+A T1210R

Price £1,200 **Type** FM
☎ 01623 517000
🌐 www.www.taelektroakustik.de



Naim Audio NAT05

Price £925 **Type** FM
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POWERPLANT: is the integrated amplifier: a 480 Watt at 40 Ohms powerhouse, with the unique T+A switch-mode out-put stages.



CD-PLAYER: is the Audiophile CD player, metal disc drawer, brand new advanced mechanism decoder and High-End converter

Best hard disk audio component



Naim Audio HDX

Price £4,500 **Type** CD/HDD player ☎ 01722 426600
 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

A sign of just how significant the hard disk is becoming, hi-fi stalwart Naim Audio is championing the high-quality end of the format with the HDX. With 400GB of backed-up storage on board and the option of loading up terabytes of external storage, is this tomorrow's CD?

Imerge Soundserver S3000
Price £1,500+ **Type** Music server
 ☎ 01954 783600
 🌐 www.imerge.co.uk

HI-FI CHOICE SILVER AWARD



Brennan JB7
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 ☎ 01638 6151177
 🌐 www.3ga.org.uk

HI-FI CHOICE BRONZE AWARD



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Arcam Solo Mini

Price £650 ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

Take the well-loved CD player, DAB/FM tuner and amplifier sounds from one of the country's most respected hi-fi brands, put them all in one small box and keep the price realistic. Small wonder we fell in love with Arcam's little 25-watt wonder system. You'd be hard pressed to find a better component system for anything close to the same money. Excellent!

Primare CDI10
Price £1,200 ☎ 01423 359054
 🌐 www.primare.net

HI-FI CHOICE SILVER AWARD



Linn Classik Music
Price £1,250 ☎ 0141 307 7777
 🌐 www.linn.co.uk

HI-FI CHOICE BRONZE AWARD



Best stereo amp up to £500



Cambridge Audio Azur 740A

Price £500 **Type** Integrated ☎ 0845 090 2288
www.cambridgeaudio.com

Cambridge Audio has long managed to deliver high performance at low cost and the Azur 740A is no exception. Delivering a sound quality that is unheard of at the price, coupled to all the convenience and flexibility of a 21st century amplifier design, the Azur 740A rocks!

NAD C355BEE
Price £425 **Type** Integrated
 ☎ 01279 501111
www.nadelectronics.com



Marantz PM6002
Price £280 **Type** Integrated
 ☎ 01753 680868
www.marantz.com



Best stereo amp £500-£1,000



Cambridge Audio Azur 840A v2

Price £750 **Type** Integrated ☎ 0845 090 2288
www.cambridgeaudio.com

In its original guise, it was a winner. Last year, the Azur 840A's unique Class XD circuit was revised for even better performance... and the 'v2' version was a clear gold medallist. While the amp has faced some stiff competition this year, the Azur 840A v2 is still the one to beat for the money.

Naim Audio Nait5i
Price £750 **Type** Integrated
 ☎ 01722 426600
www.naim-audio.com



Creek Audio Evolution
Price £545 **Type** Integrated
 ☎ 01442 260146
www.creekaudio.com



Best stereo amp £1,000-£2,000



Arcam FMJ A38

Price £1,200 **Type** Integrated ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

A new Arcam range is an exciting event in the hi-fi calendar, but when the products are as good as the A38, an award seems almost inevitable. Top integrated in the newly minted FMJ range, this 105 watter charmed us with sublime detail and musicality and then shocked us with its unleashed power. Quite simply, one of the best amplifiers around!

Cambridge Audio

840E/840W

Price £2,800 **Type** Pre/power

☎ 0845 090 2288

🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com



Leema Pulse

Price £1,195 **Type** Integrated

☎ 01938 811900

🌐 www.leema-acoustics.com



Amplifiers

Best stereo amp £2,000-£5,000



Naim Audio SuperNait

Price £2,400 **Type** Integrated ☎ 01722 426600 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

Naim Audio's Nait integrated amp has been a popular choice for decades, but it's not exactly a powerhouse. With its built-in DAC, massive power supply and deceptively powerful sounding 80 watts per channel, the SuperNait reflects the changes in people's listening trends and brings Naim's extremely musical sound to a new generation of listeners.

Copland GTA405

Price £2,498 **Type** Integrated

☎ 020 8971 3909

🌐 www.copland.dk



Moon i5.3 RS

Price £3,150 **Type** Integrated

☎ 0131 555 3922

🌐 www.simaudio.com



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Sprezzatura

The dedication that has driven our adventure and innovation for over three decades has developed Platinum, a new range of loudspeakers hand-built by our small team of specialist technicians to achieve the epitome of performance and craftsmanship.

Blending luxurious piano lacquer, exotic wood veneers, Strathspey leather and cutting edge driver technologies, each pair of Platinum speakers is an original work of art that captures the rich harmonic texture and natural dynamic quality of music and film sound in a style which proves that great performance is always by design.

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Best stereo amp over £5,000

Amplifiers



Marantz SC-11S1/SM-11S1

Price £5,300 **Type** Pre/power ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

Kings of the Marantz Premium range, the two balanced/three single-ended input preamp and the 220-watt stereo power amp are heavyweights in every sense of the word; they make a smooth, polished and powerful sound with virtually any loudspeaker. Ideal for use with CD and SACD alike, these are also the perfect foil for the excellent SA-11S2 player.

Bryston BP26/3B-SST
Price £5,300 **Type** Pre/power
 ☎ 0870 444 1044
 🌐 www.bryston.ca

Krell FBI
Price £15,520 **Type** Integrated
 ☎ 020 8971 3909
 🌐 www.krellonline.com



Info Amplifiers

A few years ago, you could be forgiven for thinking the days of stereo were numbered and the two channel hi-fi amplifier might soon be entering the Twilight Home for Redundant Technology. The world was multichannel, we were told, and stereo was just yesterday's news.

Yeah... right!

Far from seeing the two-channel amp's demise, renewed interest in all things stereophonic has made this an exciting sector of the market once again. Japanese companies that had all but abandoned hi-fi got back to basics; we've seen serious stereo products from Denon, Onkyo, Pioneer, Sony and Yamaha recently, while Arcam has recently improved the differentiation between two channel and multichannel products, giving its stereo series over to the Full Metal Jacket line. And, with new or revised stereo amplifiers from Marantz, NAD and Naim Audio, it's clear stereo is here to stay.

There's more to come, too. We've already seen 'green' amplifiers like the Flying Mole, which use state-of-the-art chip-based amplifiers to deliver good

“Interest in all things stereo has made this an exciting sector of the market again.”

sound without the power demands of a Class A design. We fully expect more to follow. Also, with moves to bring hi-fi closer to the connected world, we can also expect more interaction with computer audio and custom installation systems at all prices.



Loudspeakers up to £500

Advance Acoustic UM20

Price £200 per pair

Type Standmount

☎ 01623 517000

🌐 www.advance-acoustic.com

A relatively new name on the hi-fi scene, Advance Acoustic's loudspeakers prove that any company – no matter how new or small – can take on the big guys... and win!

The Ultim UM20 standmounts are cutely-styled, with a surprisingly solid construction and smooth sound. In many ways, the speaker's performance is fairly typical of a small and well-conceived paper cone drive unit, with an enjoyable and lithe midrange, self-effacing bass, and thoroughly involving experience.



Focal 706V

Price £369 **Type** Standmount

☎ 0845 660 2680

🌐 www.focal-fr.com



Wharfedale Diamond 9.1

Price £180 **Type** Standmount

☎ 01480 447700

🌐 www.wharfedale.co.uk



Loudspeakers £500-£1,000

Spendor S3/5R

Price £725 per pair

Type Standmount

☎ 01323 843474

🌐 www.spendoraudio.com

A variation on a long-established and much admired BBC LS3/5a mini-monitor speaker design, Spendor has incorporated two decades of engineering technology into its S3/5R standmount. Smooth, even and unfailingly polite, this is not simply a loudspeaker for speech and classical music; the Spendor S3/5R can deliver most kinds of music at typical domestic levels with a clarity and coherence that set it ahead of the pack. A Best Buy both in a solo review and an *Ultimate Group Test*, the Spendor S3/5R might be tiny, but its honesty puts it right in the Spendor tradition.

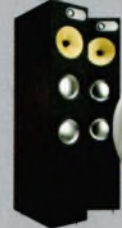


Bowers and Wilkins 683

Price £899 **Type** Floorstander

☎ 01903 221500

🌐 www.bowers-wilkins.com



Tannoy Revolution DC6

Price £900 **Type** Standmount

☎ 01236 420199

🌐 www.tannoy.com



••• Loudspeakers £1,000-£2,000

Triangle Genese Quartet

Price £1,995 per pair

Type Floorstander ☎ 01753 652669

www.triangle-fr.com

After a successful track record with the Esprit, French loudspeaker expert Triangle has introduced a brand new mid-market range. The middle speaker in that range is the Genese Quartet; it may not be cheap, but is certainly a whole lot of speaker for the money.

The floorstander delivers a fully competitive all round sound quality with a dry, overhang-free bass and a clean treble. The high sensitivity design benefits from the substantial power-handling advantage of its three-way multi-driver array.



Kudos Cardea C1

Price £1,450 **Type** Standmount

☎ 0845 458 6698

www.kudosaudio.com



PMC GB1i

Price £1,330 **Type** Floorstander

☎ 0870 444 1044

www.pmc-speakers.com



Loudspeakers

••• Loudspeakers £2,000-£5,000

Quad ESL 2805

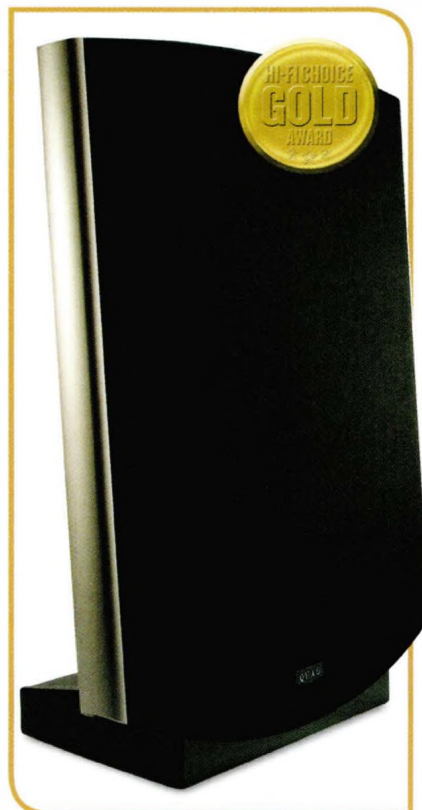
Price £5,000 per pair

Type Floorstander ☎ 01480 447700

www.quad-hifi.co.uk

There's something quintessentially right about a Quad electrostatic. Based upon a 51-year-old design that's been refined and improved substantially over the years, the ESL 2805 is now braced at the rear for extra stiffness and is mass-loaded for added rigidity. It retains four large Mylar panels and radiating ring electrostatic design for unparalleled midband clarity and neutrality.

Quad electrostatics are still the benchmark by which all other speakers are judged. No other design is such a paragon of musicality and neutrality combined. A clear winner!



PMC OB1i

Price £3,200 **Type** Floorstander

☎ 0870 444 1044

www.pmc-speakers.com



Sonus faber Minima Vintage

Price £2,150 **Type** Standmount

☎ 020 8971 3909

www.absolutesounds.com





SERIES



EB1*i* OBI*i* DB1*i* GB1*i* TB2*i* FB1*i* MB2XB*D**i*

"An expressive and involving experience." - DB1*i*
HiFi Choice - Sept 08

"It all adds up to a dynamite design" - DB1*i*
What HiFi? Sound & Vision - May 08

"Open, engaging and communicative" - GB1*i*
HiFi Choice - May 08

"A great example of professional sound accuracy"
"Exceptional tonal balance and outstanding resolution" - FB1*i*
AV-Magazin.de - Sept 08

"Detail was impeccable" - FB1*i*
HiFi World - Oct 08

"Extension and articulation to pin you to the sofa" - OBI*i*
HiFi World - April 08

"Makes for a highly revealing and damn enjoyable
loudspeaker" - EB1*i*
HiFi+ - June 08

"They sound vivid, dynamic and deliver
a thumping bassline" - GB1*i*
What HiFi? Sound & Vision - April 08



Ring your dealer

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Ashford	Soundcraft	01233 624441	London SW11	Oranges & Lemons	0207 924 2040
Bath	Paul Green Hifi	01225 316197	London W5	Audio Venue	0208 567 8703
Bristol	Sevenoaks S&V	0117 974 3727	Leeds	Audio Republic	0113 217 7294
Cambridge	Audiofile	01223 368305	Maidstone	Home Media	01622 676703
Chester	Adventures in Hifi	01244 345576	Maidenhead	Audio Venue	01628 633995
Edinburgh	Sevenoaks S&V	0131 229 7267	Market Harboro'	Divine Audio	01858 432999
Gateshead	Lifetone Audio	0191 477 4167	Norwich	Basically Sound & Vision	01362 820800
Glenrothes	Shadow Audio	0844 800 0073	New Maiden	Unilet Sound & Vision	0208 942 9567
Hatch End	Music Matters	0208 420 1925	Swansea	Audio Excellence	01792 474608

brennan JB7



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Stereovox
Townshend
True Colour Industries
van den Hul
Wyrewizard
IsoTek

CableSpike
STAX
The Rock V Turntable
Universal speaker cradles

Selected Hi-Fi equipment

Accessories
Acoustic resonators
Bel Canto
Leema Acoustics
STAX Headphones
Echo Busters
Moving Coil
Lyra-Ortofon-Sumiko

Component cables
Digital Cables
HDMI
Optical Cables
S video
SCART
Firewire
XLR cables
Sub woofer cables
Chord iPod cables
Nordost iPod cables
DIN cables
Chord cables for Naim
Mains & Power cables
Jumpers
Up to 25% Trade in

Previously owned cables. Reference cables include free Burn In.

••• Loudspeakers over £5,000

Kudos Cardea C30

Price £5,250 per pair

Type Floorstander ☎ 0845 458 6698

🌐 www.kudosaudio.com

The new Cardea C30 demonstrates wonderful communication skills with all types of music. It also boasts outstanding timing and an impressive ability to reveal the difference between system components. What really distinguishes the C30 from the common herd is the obsessive attention to detail during Kudos' extensive R&D process. Perhaps this is why the loudspeaker has become the new reference point for Paul Messenger, *Hi-Fi Choice's* very own loudspeaker guru.



Bowers and Wilkins 802D

Price £8,000 **Type** Floorstander

☎ 01903 221500

🌐 www.bowers-wilkins.com



Monitor Audio Platinum PL300

Price £5,500 **Type** Floorstander

☎ 01268 740580

🌐 www.platinumseries.co.uk



Loudspeakers

Info Loudspeakers

There are more manufacturers of speakers today than at any other time. There are several reasons for this: unless you design your own drivers, they're relatively easy to develop and bring to market – though much harder to perfect; multichannel means multiple sales; and speakers are the one component that almost everybody needs.

The result is a huge selection of designs of myriad shapes and sizes, as well as a wide-ranging quality of sound. Tonally, at least, no other component exerts such an influence on the sonic character of a system and, as with any component, some careful auditioning is called for to ensure you choose the right model to suit your tastes.



Some of the best results can be achieved by taking demo speakers home to experiment with. Leave a deposit with your dealer and take a pair (or two) home

“...no other component exerts such an influence on the sonic character of a system.”

to audition. It's well worth spending time on the phone to see if you can find a dealer that offers this valuable service.

There's no obvious answer to the 'does size matter' question. Larger floorstanders will usually plumb greater depths of bass and may offer superior dynamics, with a larger main drive unit (or units).

But for the speaker engineer, there can be inherent advantages in working with a smaller box and the best of the breed sound gloriously coherent – when used with an appropriate stand. Try before you buy and try not to let aesthetic considerations be the major ruling factor.

Best speaker cable up to £10 per metre



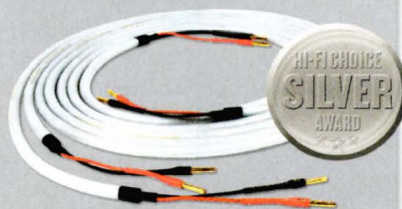
Kimber 8PR

Price £10 per metre ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com

No change for either Gold winner in the loudspeaker cable category. That's perhaps not wholly surprising given the products. Kimber's long-standing speaker cable remains excellent value, because it combines a lot of polythene-wrapped copper, all laid out in an interference-reducing weave. The result still sets the standard.

Chord Carnival Silver Screen

Price £6 per metre
☎ 08456 443537
🌐 www.chord.co.uk

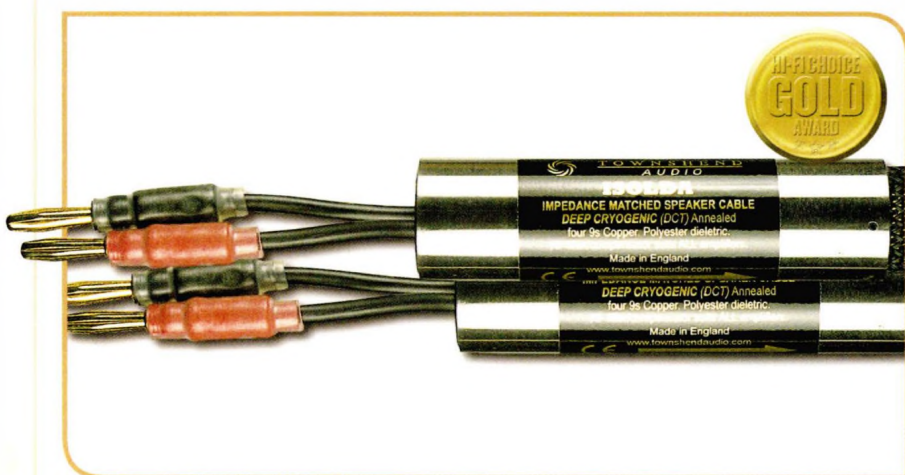


van den Hul The Bridge

Price £6 per metre
☎ 01235 511166
🌐 www.vandenhul.com



Best speaker cable over £10 per metre



Townshend Audio Isolda DCT

Price £50 per metre ☎ 020 8979 2155 🌐 www.townshendaudio.com

Townshend's Isolda cable – with its deep cryogenic treatment – is basically two strands of thin, flat copper, carefully insulated and terminated with a small pod of passive components. It sounds like you plugged your amp straight into the speakers. Even five years on, we don't think you'll be able to beat it, no matter how much you spend.

Wireworld Solstice 5²

Price £275 (three-metre terminated pair)
☎ 020 8991 9200
🌐 www.wireworldcable.com



Ixos XHS756

Price £150 (three-metre terminated pair)
☎ 08456 443537
🌐 www.ixos.co.uk



Best interconnect up to £100 per pair



van den Hul The Wave

Price £100 (0.8-metre pair) ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.vandenhul.com

Green coloured to recognise van den Hul's 25-year quest to deliver more environmentally friendly cables, The Wave is a coaxial design eschewing carbon fibre for good ol' silver-plated copper. It's a good all-rounder (for analogue, digital and video alike), with a full bass, a very tidy sense of rhythm, clean and extended treble and great imaging.

Supra EFF-1X

Price £77 (one-metre pair)
☎ 01223 441299
🌐 www.supracables.co.uk



TCI Tiger II

Price £30 (one-metre pair)
☎ 02892 673042
🌐 www.true-colours.com



Ancillaries

Best interconnect over £100



Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo

Price £260 (one-metre pair) ☎ 020 8971 3909
🌐 www.crystalcable.com

However you look at it, Crystal Cable's Connect Piccolo has all the right audiophile credentials. Designed by an ex-concert pianist – who is also the wife of Mr Siltech – the cable uses the best materials to deliver an articulate sound with a clean, taut bass.

Black Rhodium Coda

Price £150 (one-metre pair)
☎ 01332 342233
🌐 www.blackrhodium.co.uk



van den Hul Integration Hybrid

Price £135 (0.8-metre pair)
☎ 01235 511166
🌐 www.vandenhul.com



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Model 20/12A



Model 30/2A



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



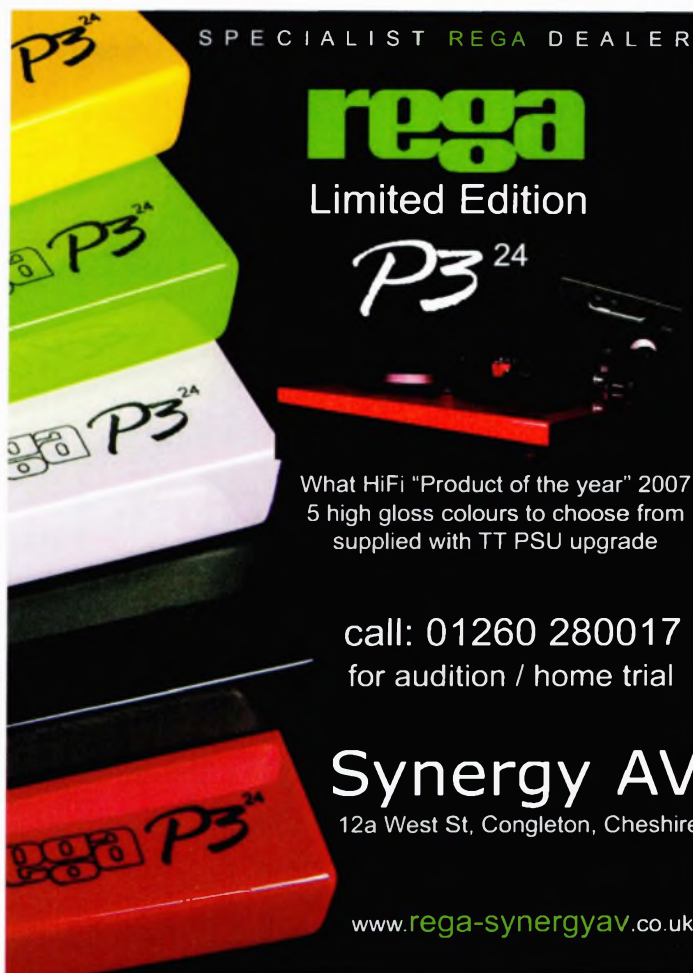
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"Splendid neutrality and freedom from boxiness gives a beautifully spacious image, with minimal coloration and fine intelligibility."
Hi-Fi Choice, April '07

"...I don't think I can think of any other £650 mini monitor I'd rather have right now."
Hi-Fi World, Aug '08

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Best digital interconnect



Kimber Select KS2020

Price £750 (one-metre) ☎ 08453 451550 🌐 www.kimber.com

Three-quarters of a grand for a single metre of wire might seem a trifle excessive, but this is no ordinary wire. With tiny capacitors built into those wooden phono plug sleeves – to eliminate stray earth currents – the Kimber KS2020 brings improvements to even the cheapest CD transport and DAC. When you use it on high-end digital audio, though... wow!

SupraAnCo

Price £80 (one-metre)
☎ 01223 441299
🌐 www.jenving.com



AtlasCompass

Price £75 (one-metre)
☎ 0800 731 1140
🌐 www.hifi.org.uk



Ancillaries

Best mains product



PS Audio Quintet Power Center

Price £395 **Type** Conditioner ☎ 020 8480 3333 🌐 www.psaudio.com

With every one of the Quintet's five power sockets independently switched and isolated, this mains block allows components to be powered up in any sequence you can think of. It can also provide surge protection for telephones and TV tuners, so your hi-fi will never get zapped in a thunderstorm. That it improves sound too is a handy bonus.

IsoTek Sirius

Price £250 **Type** Conditioner
☎ 01256 391210
🌐 www.isoteksystems.com

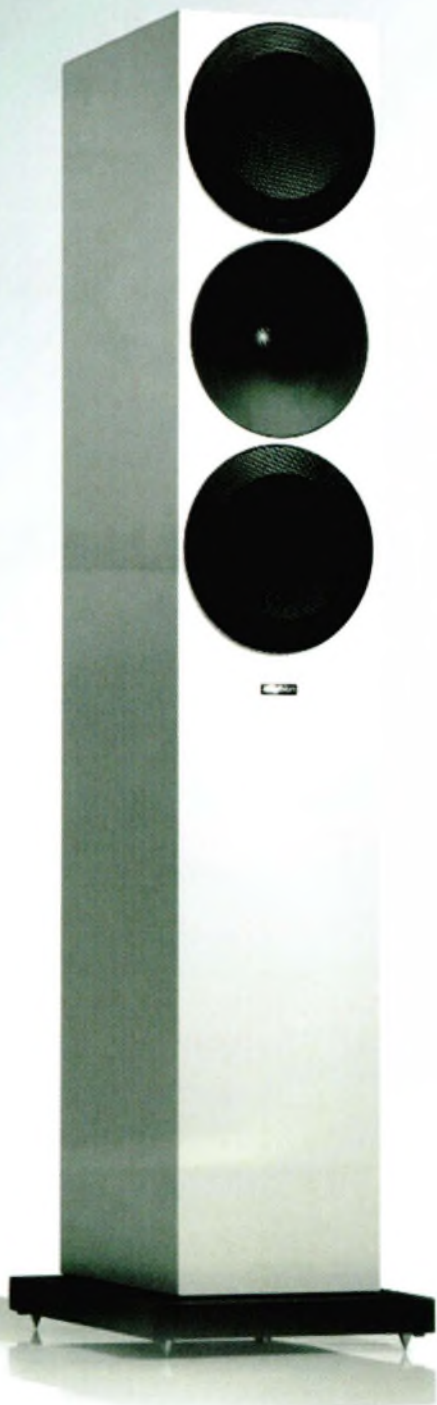


Wireworld Aurora 5²

Price £180 (two metres)
Type Mains cable
☎ 020 8991 9200
🌐 www.wireworldcable.co.uk



amphion



Review winner **PRIO 520**

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www.amphion.fi

Best headphones up to £200



Sennheiser HD595

Price £160 **Type** Headphones ☎ 01494 551551 🌐 www.sennheiser.com

A constant star in our headphone firmament, the Sennheiser HD595 has been an award winner for several years. And for good reason; the HD595 manages to combine great comfort – with velvety-soft cups that will happily cosset the largest ears – and top-notch sound quality that cannot be beaten at the price.

Grado SR80

Price £110 **Type** Headphones
☎ 01279 50111
🌐 www.gradolabs.com



Audio-Technica ATH-AD500

Price £70 **Type** Headphones
☎ 0113 277 1441
🌐 www.audio-technica.com



Ancillaries

Best headphones over £200



Grado GS1000

Price £995 **Type** Headphones ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.gradolabs.com

A year on and there's still nothing that comes close to the humbling performance of the Grado GS1000. They may not fit every head, but those who like the style will love the sound. If you want to hear what your music really sounds like, the GS1000 will prove irresistible. You owe it to your ears to give these a listen, but only if your wallet can stand it!

Sennheiser HD650

Price £330 **Type** Headphones
☎ 08456 443537
🌐 www.sennheiser.com



Beyerdynamic DT880

Price £230 **Type** Headphones
☎ 01444 258258
🌐 www.beyerdynamic.de





MULTITASKER

TEAC's DR-H300 DAB.

DVD/DAB Receiver - HDMI output with upscaling to 1080i and a USB input for MP3.

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Don't just take our word for it:



"...it sounds better than everything else. And we're not talking 'slightly' here: we're talking 'lots'." Sept 2007 ★★★★★



"Involving, weighty and detailed sound with CDs and radio; comprehensive specification." May 2007 ★★★★★



"Unbeatable value for money. Quality." Oct 2007 ★★★★★



Best equipment support

Audiophile Base

Standard support

Price (as tested) £900

☎ 01892 619319

🌐 www.audiophilebase.com

A completely modular system, the Audiophile Base equipment support concept divides between energy-dissipating vibration-control platforms and one of two modular stands that support and – in the case of the upmarket StarBase (not tested) – enhance the performance of the platforms. The Base is strong on neutrality, especially in the midrange, which appears to have less overhang. Good bass, too. A major upgrade path for any modern CD player or amp.

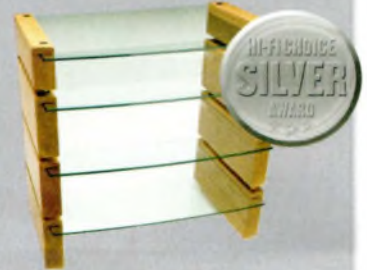


Custom Design Milan

Price £470 (four shelves)

☎ 0191 262 4646

🌐 www.customdesign.co.uk



Russ Andrews Torlyte Platform

Price £130 ☎ 0845 345 1550

🌐 www.russandrews.com



Ancillaries

Best speaker stands

Partington Dreadnought Broadside

Price £300 ☎ 01474 709299

🌐 www.partingtonandco.co.uk

Partington's large range of classic – and very heavy – speaker stands is topped off by this whopper. It is all laser-profiled panels and welded tubes, with the top and bottom plates pre-filled with a silicon and iron-in-resin damping system. The result is a stand as authoritative and revealing sounding as it is elegant. If you have good standmount speakers and need the best stand to eek out the most accurate performance and the deepest bass, look no further than the Dreadnought Broadside.



Kudos S50

Price £175 ☎ 0845 458 6698

🌐 www.kudosaudio.com



Quadraspire

QX-600L

Price £320 ☎ 0117 986 3228

🌐 www.quadraspire.co.uk





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

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- Low jitter clock and a large toroidal transformer with separate windings for the transport mechanism and audio stages.

Integrated Amplifier £1000

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

Power Amplifier £800

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

Best Digital-to-analogue convertors



Cambridge Audio DacMagic

Price £200 **Type** Digital-to-analogue convertor ☎ 08450 902286
 www.cambridgeaudio.co.uk

The DAC is back! Considered to be in terminal decline a few short years ago, this reprieve for hi-fi's missing link has manifested itself in products like the DACmagic. With its advanced upsampling technology, this box of tricks from Cambridge sounds great and is neat, too.

Russ Andrews DAC-1

Price £599 **Type** Digital-to-analogue convertor
 ☎ 08453 451550
 www.russandrews.com



PS Audio DLIII Digital Link

Price £799 **Type** Digital-to-analogue convertor
 ☎ 020 8480 3333
 www.psaudio.com



Unsung heroes



Logitech Squeezebox Duet

Price £279 **Type** Network music player ☎ 01753 870900
 www.logitech.com

Want room-wide access to your favourite sounds? £279 buys a receiver and controller for the first room, while additional Duet receivers cost a mere £99 each. Compatible with MP3, AAC and WMA files, it's certainly a match for more expensive custom install systems.

PureFlow

Price £150 **Type** DAB/FM/internet desktop radio
 ☎ 08451 489001
 www.pure-digital.com



Pathos Classic One Mk 3

Price £1,625 **Type** Integrated valve amp
 ☎ 01753 652669
 www.pathosacoustics.com



Product of the year



Cambridge Audio DacMagic



Townshend Audio
Rock V/Excalibur II



Logitech
Squeezebox Duet

2008 has really caught us by surprise. There have been some cracking products over the past few months at both ends of the price scale, showing that great hi-fi needn't cost the earth and that audio quality can always be improved over time. Products such as the Townshend Audio Rock V/Excalibur II turntable have set new standards for sound reproduction, whilst extraordinary kit such as the £279 Logitech Squeezebox have brought tangible benefits to forward-thinking music lovers at affordable price levels.

Also worth mentioning are the very special products that have remained in the Gold Award spot, unchanged from previous years. These are truly outstanding pieces of hi-fi and enable you, the reader, to buy with confidence. Of course a *Hi-Fi Choice* award badge of any colour on a product (Gold, Silver or Bronze) is in itself a indicator of the very best product on the market, so rather than agonise over your next upgrade, why not let our experts point you in the right direction?

This year, we've also included a couple of new awards categories. These include digital-to-analogue converters – which are enjoying a renaissance at present – 'Unsung Heros', for products that simply make us feel good and lastly, 'Product of the year'. Although this latter category has been an extremely difficult choice for the judging panel, there was one product that we all felt offered both significant performance gains and exceptional value for money. So we're delighted to announce that this year's Product of the year award goes to the Cambridge Audio DacMagic (see our review on page 76).

Our judges agreed that the combination of incredibly low pricing, combined with genuine performance gains for thousands of our readers, made this £200 newcomer an obvious choice for an accolade.

So that's it for another year. Although we've just taken delivery of some very special kit that should make it into the 2009 Awards! Read all about it in the coming months, right here in *Hi-Fi Choice*.

DEFINITIVE AUDIO



1.



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1. CEC TLOX Belt Drive CD Transport
2. Living Voice OBX-RW Loudspeaker in Ebony
3. KSL Kondo DAC
4. KSL Kondo Neiro Integrated Amplifier

5. SME 2012A Turntable with KSL Kondo iOJ Cartridge
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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

- 72** Sony SCD-XA5400ES CD/SACD player
- 76** Cambridge Audio DacMagic digital-to-analogue convertor
- 79** Pure Flow DAB/FM/Internet desktop radio
- 80** Jadis Orchestra DiP integrated valve amplifier
- 82** Guru Audio QM10 standmount loudspeaker



OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

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 four stars may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

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

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★☆	PRO Good build and open, lively sound from a valve DAC with plenty of inputs. Transport is also great value for money.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	CON DAC doesn't engage as well as the transport with loss of weight and power through the bass unless you price/quality. Cables cost extra and competition from single chassis designs won't help.
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★☆	
CONCLUSION This DAC is being very ambitious producing a two-band player of this build quality and price. Something just has to give and it's the DAC, which can't quite justify its efforts.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★☆☆	

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...



HATS off to Sony

Thanks to new technologies, Sony's long-awaited new CD/SACD player has state-of-the-art potential

PRODUCT Sony SCD-XA5400ES

TYPE CD/SACD player

PRICE £1,199

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x12.4x39cm
 ◉ Weight: 12.5kg ◉ Digital outputs: 1x co-axial, 1x optical
 ◉ Analogue outputs: 1x XLR (balanced), 1x (unbalanced) RCA phono ◉ Stereo-only SACD using internal D/A converters ◉ Multichannel via HDMI output
 ◉ Frame and Beam (FB) chassis with aluminium front panel ◉ Twin R-Core power transformers

CONTACT ☎ 08705 111999 # www.sony.co.uk

After four years in the wilderness, Sony is back with an incredible new flagship CD/SACD player, the SCD-XA5400ES. It bristles with technology, much of which is new, or new at least, to Sony. At first glance, it's a dead ringer for Sony's previous SACD player, the SCD-XA9000ES. From the front they look practically identical, although the control functions have been shuffled around. The display is broadly similar, however, and the loading drawer and physical construction are closely related. The new model shares the 9000's superbly engineered smooth-running drawer mechanism, a headphone volume control and Sony's usual ratcheted track change rotary control that makes day to day operation so quick and so responsive. Viewed from the back the difference is more obvious.

The biggest obvious difference from the 9000 is that the new model is stereo-only in its baseline standard trim. The ability to run a multichannel set-up has been retained, but is only accessible via HDMI. This typically means using an HDMI-equipped multichannel amplifier such as the new Sony STR-DA2400ES, which has four HDMI inputs

(a sample of which was supplied by Sony for this test).

This is also a moderately affordable AV receiver and, for that reason, a less than optimal choice than the more high-end SCD-XA5400 in this application. More on this a bit later, which will also include something on what Sony's HDMI has to do with HATS (High-quality digital Audio Transfer System). In the meantime, optical and coaxial outputs

better focus and atmosphere and improved bass and power.

HATS addresses the problems of simultaneously communicating six channels of digital data at 2.8224MHz, which would otherwise result in timing (jitter) errors. HATS uses an algorithm that rejoices under the title of 'command-based rate control of isochronous data flow' and includes variable speed transmission from the player and a buffer

“This is the first Sony player with an uncompressed digital output from DSD and the first to include HATS technology...”

have been retained, but only for CD.

This is not the first Sony SACD player to boast a digital output, but the optical and coaxial output on previous models, including the 9000, were limited to 16-bit CD resolution and Sony's iLink did not deal directly with DSD, but a PCM (and inevitably degraded) representation of it. DSD is the native file format of SACD, though some SACD's take their DSD from PCM files.

This is also the first Sony player with an uncompressed digital output from DSD and the first Sony player to include HATS technology on its HDMI output. One of the claimed benefits in this application is that the HDMI interface doesn't mutilate the signal in pass-through mode, so the number of D/A and A/D conversions is reduced, the simpler circuit path translating into upgraded sound quality. Sony talk of enhancements to sonic purity and staging,

memory in the receiver, an arrangement mediated by a command signal which controls transmission speed, so that jitter performance defaults to the inherent accuracy of the receiver and player master clocks. No separate clock connection is required and HATS is unresponsive to the marginally different clock rates you can expect to find in the player and the receiver, which are typically a few tens of ppm (parts per million). An earlier version of HATS was available on the 9000, but using iLink rather than HDMI.

Even with HATS, the HDMI output is still compatible with the HDMI inputs on other equipment. But full-on DSD with HATS requires a compatible receiver/decoder, such as is fitted to the Sony STR-DA5400ES. The lower-end Sony STR-DA2400 decimates DSD to linear PCM which, if Sony's word is to be taken as read, must be at the cost of ultimate fidelity. ▶



Q&A

We spoke with Eric Kingdon, Sony's Senior European technical marketing Manager (Sony Home Audio and Video).



HFC: Why has it taken so long to launch this replacement for the SCD-XA9000ES?

EK: It has been a long time, much of the reason being development capacity, especially as the Blu-ray programme has been developed in parallel with the 5400 and some other SACD players. For this model we had to go back almost to a plain sheet of paper. We have also had to work hard to equal the success of Onkyo, who of all Sony's competitors, has lead the field in the last couple of years.

One of the specific reasons this model took a long time was the development work for the HDMI side – HATS and control protocol for data output, which can be variable from multi-bit PCM to DSD. The HATS protocol for the iLink interface on the SCD-XA9000ES was limited to a decimated PCM output. We spent a long time trying to deliver the best performance for this level of product and the design of the chassis. We wanted to also be able to implement this for other products, like the ES Blu-ray player which is due out shortly and which uses a similar platform.

What does this delay, however it was caused, say about Sony's commitment to the SACD format, which has been perceived as lacking by some, not least some other suppliers in the field?

Make no mistake, we are totally dedicated to supporting SACD, including introducing further high-end models (there's one available in Japan right now) and we recently announced green SACDs for superior playback quality in Japan. The XA5400ES is far from the end of the road.

Sony can't be faulted for the number of SACD models available, but in the early days we saw the format mainly as a straightforward replacement for compact disc, so there were always a lot of mainstream products. In the event, SACD has settled into a high-end niche, a true audiophile format. While DVD-Audio, which at one stage appeared to offer real competition, has essentially vanished without a trace.



When used in standard two-channel systems, the Sony will apply internal D/A conversion to the DSD, or Red Book data off SACD and CDs respectively, using an appropriate digital filter. This is chosen according to data type, a noise shaper for CD and a multi-level D/A converter, which is designed to marry the benefits (preserving dynamic range) and minimising the disadvantages (reducing granularity, edginess and loss of resolving ability) of 1-bit and multi-bit converters.

A 1-bit decoder LSI handles the table of contents, track number status, timing data and text. CDs are played using the same hardware chain. Output is available from single-ended or XLR balanced outputs, which, in turn, are driven by a balanced symmetrical source. This is achieved without introducing rounding-off errors – commonplace with normal SACD digital filters. This stage includes an eight-times oversampling digital filter, noise shaping and a multi-level 64fs DAC for SACD and CD alike, as well as a low

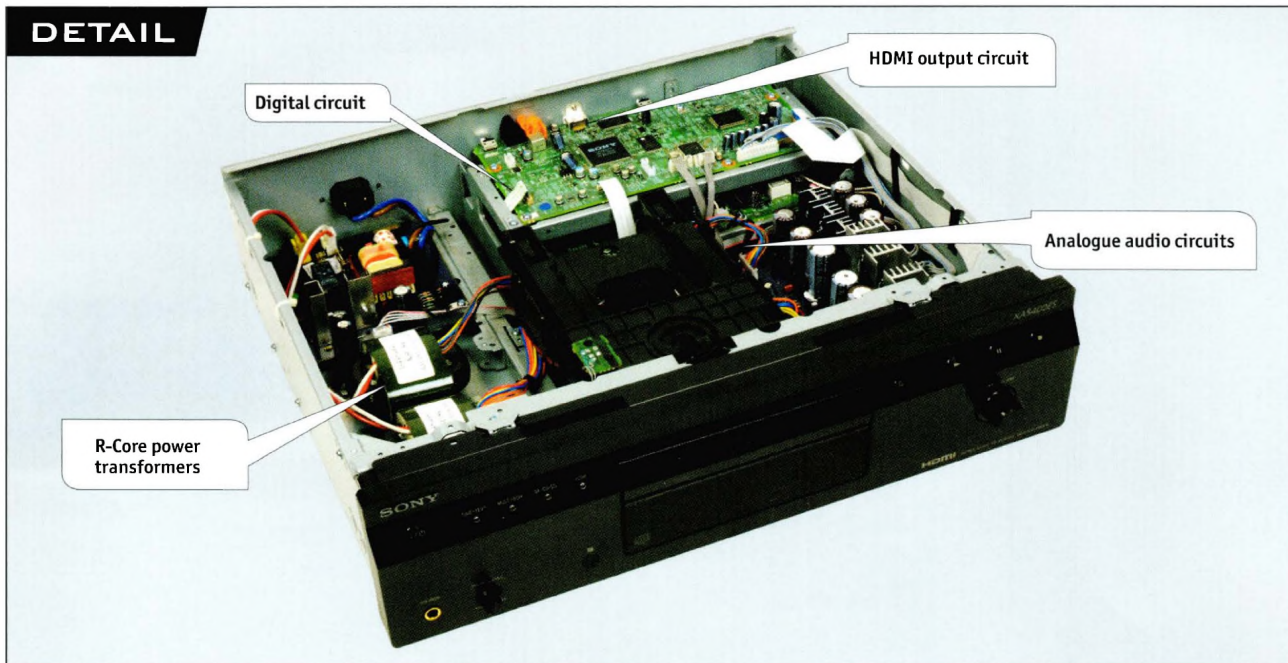
pass filter for SACD to reduce the burden on the analogue filters. Overall this is a sophisticated and promising package.

SOUND QUALITY

In many ways, the prospect of a completely new Sony SACD player, especially at the ambitious end of the market, carries particular weight. If for no other reason, than the fact that there's a perception in the industry that SACD is not being promoted proactively and with full vigour by its principal protagonist. Generally well-supported by the high-end community, confidence in SACD is also being undermined by other producers and consumers alike.

In fairness to Sony, the company actually has a good track record in bringing budget SACD models and players to market, but high-quality models have been few and far between and Sony's track record with its SACD release schedule (which has tended to concentrate on PCM transfers) has done little to help. Hopefully this model will do something to redress the balance.





On merit, it should, as this is a very good player providing the qualities that are required by its target audience. It also does its job with considerable subtlety and grace and, crucially, without costing a king's ransom. It could be described as a true high-end player without a high-end price and from this point of view it is probably comparable to the Yamaha CD-S2000 CD/SACD player, which we reviewed in *HFC* 309. But without a sample of the Yamaha to hand, we fancy that the Sony is the better CD player of the two.

We still have the Sony XA9000ES, however, so it was interesting to compare a recent SACD of Ravel piano works (on the Linn label). On the XA5400ES, the recording has a scintillating quality, a tactile, almost tangible feel as the fingers caress the notes and a palpable increase in tonal variety and colour compared to the 9000, which tended to sound warmer and slightly looser (and mildly defocused in direct comparisons, with flatter stereo imagery).

We had similar experiences with a range of discs, including Bruckner and Beethoven symphonies from Gunter Wand on SACD, but then it's sometimes worth noting that SACD doesn't necessarily perform better than CD. The critical factor appears to be how the raw data is handled at the production stage. When SACD is done right, there is no questioning the final ranking order, with the higher-resolution format sounding more expressive and three dimensional than CD, which opens up the colours and textures of the music.

But this favourable impression was from being limited exclusively to SACD. Take, as an

“In many ways, the prospect of a new Sony SACD player, especially at the ambitious end of the market, carries particular weight.”

example, the recording on CD of Leif Ove Andnes playing the late Schubert piano sonatas *D960* and *D850*, where the subtle inflections in the first movement of the former have a greater substance, a more physical quality and a slightly greater range on the middle sections where the music is neither loud nor quiet. But where the replay definitely benefits from the XA5400ES's more expressive and better differentiated quality, the 9000 still has the edge.

One of the best surprises during our time with this player was hearing the way that old, familiar recordings scrubbed up clean under the XA5400ES's electronic gaze. A particularly good example was the excellent Keb' Mo' recording of his *Just Like You* album, where we could hear the improvement even on its first play using the new player, despite not having played it for months – though this was quickly confirmed with the 9000. Via the new player, the sound was simply fresher, more vivid and alive. The 9000 by contrast, sounded slightly detached and more distant. Singer Luka Bloom also retained that more tactile, closer quality, with no hint of aggression or the kind of digital evils that often attend a closer musical presentation.

This is a very impressive player with SACD, yet in some respects an even more impressive one with CD. It somehow manages to better

the more elderly, but more expensively-engineered SCD-XA9000ES, from which it appears to have been derived. In its time the 9000 set new standards, that others have sometimes equalled, but that have only occasionally bettered. It's worth remembering at this point, though, that the old 9000 was no slouch in the same areas where the new model excels. All of which bodes well for the future of SACD and for anyone who cares about sound quality on 12cm optical disc. Excellent news indeed. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
SOUND (CD) ★★★★★	PRO Better than the previous high-end Sony SACD; the XA9000ES. Incumbent in more ways than one. It's also a lot cheaper in price.
SOUND (SACD) ★★★★★	
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Not MP3 compliant, its only access to multichannel operation is via an external HDMI equipped multichannel D/A converter.
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION Elegant, refined control system, very strong SACD performance and, in some ways, even more impressive as a CD player. In both cases, the sound is bold and well-defined, with high levels of detail resolution.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/465933	

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

The Modfather

£200 is all it takes to transform your old digital sources into cutting edge wonder machines

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio DacMagic

TYPE Digital-to-analogue converter

PRICE £200

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 21.5x5x19cm
 • Weight: 1.2kg • Digital inputs: 2x S/PDIF (both Toslink and electrical), 1x USB • Digital outputs: 1x (Toslink and electrical) • Analogue Outputs: 1x (unbalanced) phono, 2x XLR (balanced) • Upsampling rates: 32kHz-96kHz

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

The name of this little box of tricks may ring a bell: Cambridge Audio has had a DacMagic in its range before, but the last one disappeared a while ago when DACs appeared to be in terminal decline.

Now they are back and the name has been revived for what is, in fact, an all-new product.

A major reason for the resurgence of DACs in general, is the proliferation of digital audio sources, especially computers. Cambridge has catered for this by providing the DacMagic with three inputs, USB, 'traditional' phono and optical S/PDIF.

There are plenty more connectors on the back panel, because Cambridge has also

provided a digital output (both flavours), while analogue audio signals appear in both unbalanced and balanced form – a welcome surprise at this price. The last socket is for the external power supply, important in enabling the DacMagic to inhabit such a small case.

Plenty of manufacturers would doubtless be happy enough to be able to offer a completely basic DAC for £200, but Cambridge is on a bit of a roll with its enhanced feature sets. As a result, we are treated to a version of the deluxe upsampling technology first seen in the 840C and 740C CD players from the Azur range.

Devised by software specialist Anagram Technologies of Switzerland and licensed – exclusively, to date – to Cambridge, this uses high-power digital signal processing technology to perform the digital filtering function. In the 740/840 models it upsamples to 384kHz; here, a more modest version upsamples to 192kHz, but adds the flexibility of three filter types: 'linear phase', 'minimum phase' and 'steep'.

The differences between these filters are in some ways subtle, but may be significant in determining the DAC's sound.

Linear phase is the type of filter most commonly used in up/oversampling players, since the very first Philips' machines in the early 1980s. It gives no phase shift at all within the audio band and rolls off very sharply around half the sampling frequency. As most commonly implemented, it has rather limited attenuation at exactly half the sampling frequency and, as a result, allows a little bit of aliasing distortion to occur if there is any audio above 20kHz. There is also pre-ringing on transients, though this has never been shown to be a real problem.

Minimum phase filters do without the pre-ringing, but do have some phase shift in the audio band. The actual frequency response is, to all intents and purposes, identical to that of the linear phase filter.

The 'steep' option, meanwhile, is another linear phase filter, but with faster roll-off above 20kHz so that, effectively, no aliasing occurs.

There is slightly more pre-ringing than with the linear phase filter. This needs a little more processing power than the other filter types, but it should theoretically be the best of the lot – except that this one adds a small, but not vanishing amount of passband ripple, something of poorly understood subjective significance.

Whatever the theory says, it's good to be able to choose. The same is true of absolute phase, which can be inverted digitally by the DacMagic. All this wizardry is achieved by a Texas Instruments digital signal processing chip, aided and abetted by DAC chips from Wolfson and some decent op-amps and passive components.

The unit is compatible with sample rates up to 96kHz at 16- or 24-bit resolution. Physical assembly is neat and tidy and practicality is

with a particularly well-controlled bass, but can sometimes seem a little clinical by comparison with minimum phase, which seems slightly warmer but perhaps a shade less precise. Meanwhile, steep is superlatively detailed in simple music – single voice/instrument, or just a few – but slightly loses out to linear in very dense textures.

All that said, we would probably live happily with any of them, but while the keen tweaker may want to experiment and perhaps adopt preferences based on musical style, we ended up listening mostly to linear. Apart from anything else, we just loved the clean but always extended and tuneful bass this setting gave, with an utterly convincing sense of timing that made the most of the rhythmic qualities of any musical style.

“It goes some distance beyond the norm and gives some well-respected DACs at higher prices a pretty good run for their money”

aided by the option of horizontal or vertical mounting for the unit – for the latter, a non-slip rubber base is provided. We were particularly impressed with the user manual, which goes into unusual detail in explaining what the DacMagic does – and how.

SOUND QUALITY

Still, you don't listen to a user manual. We did listen to the DacMagic, though, with interest and increasing admiration as time went on. We were hardly surprised to find it ticked all the boxes on basic tonality and detail: most digital components do, these days. Happily, it seems to go some distance beyond that and it gives some well-respected DACs at considerably higher prices a pretty good run for their money.

It's probably worth getting a word or three in at this point about the filters, because they do indeed have an important effect on the sound – nothing gross, but the way the sound registers on the ear over the course of a prolonged track varies between them.

To the extent that each can be succinctly summarised, the linear phase is clean and tidy

One tends to associate rhythm particularly with music for dancing or marching but, of course, it's no less important in a string quartet or ballad, just in a different way. Indeed, it was with such pieces that we were aware of the DacMagic's clear precision in presenting the timing of each instrumental part. But yes, before you ask, it can also make the most of a dance track.

Tonality is exceptionally neutral, with clean extension at both extremes and very well-balanced midrange. One often finds that certain instruments or voices seem slightly favoured, but we could detect no such effect here and were particularly struck by the way in which multiple voices coexisted without interfering with each other. That seems an obvious requirement, but it's surprising how often it's not quite met – one finds that the entrance of a male voice puts a female one slightly in the shade, or vice versa.

There have been concerns voiced that USB is intrinsically a more jittery interface than regular S/PDIF, so we tried our best to hear any differences between the various options. Frankly, we couldn't – certainly not consistently. Nor could we measure any, the DacMagic turning in



measured results which in every way qualify it being as state of the art.

Standards of CD replay being what they are, it probably won't lift many modern players beyond recognition, but it could give a new lease of life to some older models and for computer-based music replay it is an excellent choice. It is practical and good-looking too and we would rate it all-round as one of the best audio bargains we've come across in a while. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO User-selectable filters allow a degree of tuning to taste, but the basic sound is excellent, clear, highly detailed, remarkably neutral and energetically rhythmic.
FEATURES ★★★★★	CON About the only features lacking are a volume control and the audiophile credibility that comes with acres of 10mm-thick front panel.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION The performance of the DACMagic is so good it's almost embarrassing. Not only does it sound great, it locks to incoming signals almost instantly and takes up very little space. Balanced output too – what more could one want?	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/465743	

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AWARDS

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Go with the Flow

Pure's new table radio has the power to tame the Internet

PRODUCT Pure Evoke Flow**TYPE** DAB/FM/Internet desktop radio**PRICE** £150**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 277488 🌐 www.puredigital.com

It's no exaggeration to say that Pure's Evoke-1 set the standard for DAB and the new Evoke Flow does the same for Internet radio. It makes listening to stations around the world almost as simple as tuning into Radio Four.

The formula for success found in the Evoke has not been broken with the Flow; this time it's in piano gloss – with a single speaker to the left of the front panel and a yellow on black OLED display to the right. The handle doubles as a snooze button if you use it as a clock radio. DAB and FM are also included and it's possible to switch from one to the other using the multi-function knobs and a quartet of touch buttons.

There's also an optional ChargePak battery and a matching auxiliary speaker (both costing an additional £30) to bring stereo to the party.

If you have a wireless network at home (and can remember your WEP password), the Flow connects to your router in a matter of seconds and then offers you a sortable range of stations. The key word there is 'sortable'; you can filter by genre, location, language even sampling rate –

which is simplified into a star rating. There's even a keyword search.

You can extend this further by opening up a free account at Pure's Internet Radio hub (www.thelounge.com), either through your Flow or on your PC. This allows you to store podcasts on The Lounge to listen to at your leisure. There's even a line input for connecting up an iPod or similar. You can also browse music from a UPnP music server. A wired Ethernet connection would be handy, though.

SOUND QUALITY

The Evoke Flow demystifies Internet radio at a stroke. You have to navigate through menus, but it whittles down stations to find the perfect one, instead of leaving you thousands to browse. You pin down stations with that keyword search; if you really want to listen to Death Metal, that's what you search for.

Like the Evoke DAB radios, the sound has no deep bass, no extreme treble. This means it doesn't butt up against the limitations of DAB and neither does it challenge the performance of Internet radio. It's never going to compete with separates hi-fi, but that's not the point.

This is the radio where you can sit in your West London living room and switch from George Lamb's banal *Shabbas* to cerebral

Seattle talk radio without reaching for the laptop. It will change the way you view radio.

The Flow also allows Listen Again facilities without recourse to downloading from a PC. Later developments will include music 'tagging', whereby you can listen to a piece of music, click to buy and download the album to your PC. All of which means you have a table radio that performs brilliantly now and yet will keep at the top of the tree for some considerable time to come. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



PRO

A radio-changing product (you won't go back to 'mere' DAB/FM afterward), the sound is good, but the way it makes Internet radio integrate beautifully with conventional radio is remarkable. The Lounge's library of sounds is good, too.

CON

Lacks a wired Ethernet connection.

CONCLUSION

The table radio just grew up. If you have Wi-Fi, you now get seamless Internet radio alongside your DAB and FM broadcasts. Don't expect wide-bandwidth sound, but do expect the way you listen to radio to change forever.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

URL www.techradar.com/465944

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Shock of the new

An integrated valve amplifier that embraces new technology

PRODUCT Jadis Orchestra DiP

TYPE Integrated valve amplifier

PRICE £2,995

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 53x26x22cm

● Weight: 20kg ● Rated power: 40 watts per channel
● Inputs: 5x line level ● Outputs: 1x RMS output
(250mV sensitivity), 2x speakers ● Docking facility for iPod
● Four 6CA7EH output valves; two 12AX7 valves:
● Bandwidth (-3dB) 5Hz to 60kHz;

CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909 # www.absolutesounds.com

We've covered valve and iPod combis before, but it's still a fascinating mix of old and new technology. It's a bit like getting on a steam train and finding one of its Pullman coaches has been kitted out as an internet café. What's the world coming to – is nothing sacred?

Undoubtedly, some will see a marriage of incompatible opposites – akin to a high-performance sports car with an extra fuel tank enabling it to run on paraffin. But, with increasing numbers of people listening to music from iPods, iPhones, and suchlike, it's inevitable the two will combine.

The original Jadis Orchestra amplifier has been around for some years, but can now be had in an up-rated version with iPod docking facilities. Dubbed the Orchestra DiP, it's said to have some of the improvements found in the Orchestra Reference, minus the latter's tone controls.

Jadis is an enthusiast specialist French manufacturer of valve amplifiers and CD players. Its profile is perhaps a bit lower than some, but its products are highly regarded for smooth natural sound quality.

The Orchestra DiP is a valve amp featuring four 6CA7EHs (the US equivalent of the EL-34) and offers a 40-watt output. Facilities are limited to four line inputs and one set of loudspeaker outputs.

There's an input selector, plus volume and balance controls. Volume levels can be remotely controlled using a supplied handset. With a total of six valves, the amp runs fairly hot. Build quality is very good, with much of the circuitry hard-wired.

But, can you really use an iPod as a hi-fi music source? And would the sound exhibit all the subtlety and finesse of a Guy Ritchie guns 'n' geezers movie.

Not so. The music sounded okay; smooth, clear, and natural, with reasonably good dynamic range and fine detail. Of course,

much depends on the compression used for the original download – the lower the better.

The iPod plugs into a special dock on top and starts-up automatically when the amp is switched on. The amp powers the iPod and recharges its battery – albeit only with the amp switched on and the iPod switched off.

Playing the Beatles' *Free as a Bird*, the iPod sounded less forward and detailed than the CD. The bass seemed a touch compressed, while the soundstage had a 'flat' quality. The CD was more holographic with superior stereo performance.

The iPod sounded 'quieter' than CD – less dynamic and less strongly projected. However, some of this difference was undoubtedly due to the iPod track being compressed. With lossless it would've sounded better.



“The tonality of the Orchestra DiP also helps disguise sonic weaknesses in the iPod, minimising any lack of richness and warmth.”

The iPod reminded us of a typical entry-level CD player from the early 1980s; very acceptable, if not exactly inspiring. While we hugely favour the Arcam DV135 on CD – no surprises there – the iPod was okay once the ear adjusted to what was on offer.

SOUND QUALITY

Sonically, the Orchestra DiP is greater than the sum of the parts. It's one of those low-powered valve amps that punches well above its weight. It produces a big sound that's rich, warm, full-bodied and strongly profiled.

Jadis recommends using the Orchestra DiP with loudspeakers of at least 90dB sensitivity. Certainly, the higher the sensitivity, the less you risk pushing the amp into areas where absolute power limitations matter. But, the amp does not shriek when pushed hard.

Bass is very deep and full-sounding – those 6CA7EHs produce satisfying weight. The treble is smooth and clean, with a nice midband and the overall sound is clear and open, with an attractive rich tonal bloom – warm, detailed, and surprisingly powerful.

The Orchestra DiP doesn't hard-clip when pushed. Many amplifiers – especially transistor types – get very nasty and break-up completely if you reach or exceed maximum output. Even pushed hard, all you hear on this one is a mild coarsening. We tried heavy choral music with prominent female voices and loud synthesiser pop; even at difficult climactic moments the sound held together extremely well. Only a hint of congestion and a little compression gave the game away.

We mention this because, coming from a Musical Fidelity kW-750 power amp, a 40-watt valve amp like the Jadis might have seemed a touch under-powered. But this is one instance where the spec only tells part of the story.

But the Orchestra DiP hides its limitations remarkably well. Given efficient loudspeakers, the amplifier sounds like its coasting and handles difficult demanding music with impressive nonchalance.

The tonality of the Orchestra DiP also helps disguise sonic weaknesses in the iPod, minimising any lack of tonal richness and

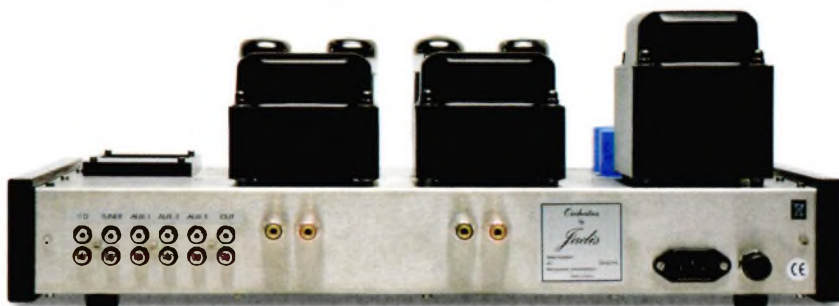
warmth. A brighter more lucid-sounding amplifier would highlight the lack of sonority.

There seems little doubt we'll see future amplifiers with iPod docking facilities. The additional cost is not easy to calculate, as the Orchestra DiP appears to share some of the build and circuit improvements in the £2,599 Orchestra Reference, minus the tone controls. So, it adds about £350.

We're not one for music on the move, but certainly welcome a source with long continuous playing times – as there are many times when this facility would be very useful. So, the answer has to be 'yes'.

Judged purely as an audio amplifier, the Orchestra DiP is a superb performer. The basic Orchestra offers excellent value at £2,000, and the Reference is worth considering for improved sound and tone controls. The Reference is probably the one to go for if you can live without iPod docking. But, being able to use your iPod as a music source is going to be a seductive option for many. **HFC**

Jimmy Hughes



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Very good sound quality – smooth, rich and powerful; Can also be used directly with an iPod. All-in-all, very solidly made and a pleasing, but funky design.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Limited absolute power output – though subjectively the performance is more powerful than the rating would suggest.
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION Anyone interested in a smooth, refined, yet dynamic-sounding tube amp should give the Jadis Orchestra DiP an audition. But if iPod docking is of no interest, check out the Orchestra Reference.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/465908	



BEST BUY

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magazine



Metal Guru

Although new to the UK, Guru speakers have quickly gained cult status

PRODUCT Guru QM10

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,595 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD) 30x25.2x23.2cm

• Weight: 6kg • Drivers: 16mm fabric dome tweeter, 102mm paper mid/bass driver • Sensitivity: 86dB
• Impedance: 5 ohms • 'Horizontal' styling • Special stand decoupling • Wide slot port • Single terminal socket pair • Matte black or piano laquer

CONTACT ☎ 01727 893928 # www.tomtomaudio.com

Most loudspeakers cling doggedly, even obsessively, to marketplace stereotypes, so it's always refreshing to find a model that dares to be different and ploughs its own furrow. When such a newcomer also quickly builds itself a cult reputation as something seriously interesting, it's definitely time to sit up and take notice.

The Guru QM10 originates from Sweden, where it was originally designed by one Ingvar Ohman. Ohman has had a passion for hi-fi and audio since his childhood, but has done his best to avoid getting into the business of manufacturing or marketing his loudspeaker designs. He has written some articles in English and has built a powerful reputation as something of a speaker design guru in his home country.

In order to give Ohman's designs wider distribution and a higher profile, a company called Guru Pro Audio has taken over the manufacturing side of things and worldwide distribution is now under way. Here in the UK this has been taken on by The Sound Practice, part of leading Naim dealer Tom Tom Audio and the diminutive QM10 made its debut at the Heathrow show last March.

The Pro connection is implied in the initials QM, which stand for Quality Manager, indicating a monitoring role.

Although it has a number of interesting and unusual features, in outline terms this is a very simple two-way standmount speaker, so its £1,595 price tag seems quite steep, especially since the whole thing is finished in dull-but-discreet matte black (a gloss black finish is also available for an extra £100).

Although the drive unit line-up looks typical of many miniature monitors, such as those reviewed in *HFC 310's Ultimate Group Test*, the QM10 is different in nearly every other respect.

The most obvious physical difference is the shape. Unusually, the speaker's largest dimension is its width and the smallest its height, so the result is stubby, chunky-looking little box, with an estimated volume of 12 litres.

We were immediately reminded of the classic Gale 401 from the 1970s – with the chrome end-caps – though it's much closer to Acoustic Energy's new AE22Pro near-field monitor. One obvious benefit is that the internal dimensions are nicely distributed to spread standing wave modes, though dispersion control is clearly another important factor.

The unusual shape could pose problems in finding a suitable stand, so a special version of the estimable 60cm Kudos S50 with a large MDF top plate matching the QM10's footprint is supplied for £175 per pair. The clever bit is that the speaker itself actually floats on four small, but quite stiff foam cylinders. These locate into indents in the stand top and the speaker base, helping to keep location secure, while also decoupling the speaker from the stand in a carefully controlled manner.

Reflex-loaded by a narrow slot-shaped port beneath the main driver, the enclosure is constructed as a horizontal wraparound inset base and top, with nicely post-formed verticals. It feels quite a lightweight affair, but is clearly

well-braced and stiff, as no vibration is detectable to the touch.

“Once listening to music the realisation dawns that the speakers are exceptionally communicative, expressive and entertaining.”

well-braced and stiff, as no vibration is detectable to the touch. The 102mm main driver, exclusively made for Guru by Tymphany, has a very slim roll surround and a 95mm flared paper cone. The tweeter, sourced from German company Visaton, appears to have a small 16mm polycarbonate diaphragm loaded by a short horn and phase plug and looks very much like an Audax design that was popular in the 1990s.

Signal is applied through a single pair of 4mm sockets (Naim style). Ohman says he believes: “Bi-wiring means buy more wiring!”

A particularly neat feature is a little blue LED that illuminates if the speaker is being driven into overload. Professional users and others

who like their music seriously loud and who, therefore, fear for the health of small loudspeakers, will doubtless welcome this. The final unusual feature is that the Guru is intended for close-to-wall siting, over-angled inwards so that one can just see the outside edges from the listening seat. During installation, the distributor fixed a couple of small panels of eggbox foam to the back wall, behind and inward of the speakers but, that apart, the speaker is exceptionally discreet and takes up little space in the room.

The QM10 is rated at 86dB (2.83V) sensitivity, which seems rather conservative. Our in-room far-field averaged measurements indicate a rating something closer to 88dB, but it's difficult to be precise here because the frequency balance is somewhat uneven.

That unevenness – rather midbass heavy (40–60Hz), lean through the upper bass and lower midband (80–300Hz) and then peaking up somewhat around 1kHz – might call into question its absolute neutrality and hence monitoring suitability and is bound to

introduce an element of sonic character.

However, helped by the port output (tuned to 47Hz), bass extension is quite remarkable for such a small loudspeaker, with decent in-room output down to 25Hz. Pair-matching is very good and the amplifier load looks pretty easy to drive too, staying above 4.5 ohms throughout.

With just a single terminal pair, the crossover is hard to analyse and the spec describes it as “2-7kHz; non-textbook function”. This and the impedance, perhaps imply that the main driver operates to a much higher frequency than usual, while the tweeter just extends the highest frequencies and improves dispersion.

That would also seem to tie in with the subjective experience, as this speaker has a good slice of the sort of character that invariably makes speakers with solitary full-range drivers so charming.

The QM10 might not have the most neutral tonality, but it more than makes up for that with utterly brilliant time coherence, which is essentially a much tougher thing to achieve, especially across a bandwidth that's impressively wide from something so small.

SOUND QUALITY

Crucially, the QM10's limitations pale into insignificance once one starts listening to music, whereupon the realisation dawns that these speakers are exceptionally communicative, expressive and entertaining, to the point where the whole experience quickly becomes seriously addictive.

There has been some comment in the hi-fi press that a couple of listeners were unhappy about the extreme treble and confirmed a minor problem with high-resolution measurements. While individuals should check this for themselves, it didn't trouble our ears, though some lack of ultimate transparency was just audible when using a bright pickup cartridge.

Speech reproduction is not the QM10's forte, as this seems to make its slightly 'cuppy' coloration and mildly 'shut in' character more obvious. But, with all but the heaviest and punchiest music, it really comes into its own, cutting straight to the heart of the musicians' intentions with rare subtlety and delicacy.

The texture of orchestral string sections is very convincing and the flow and emphases of a skilled guitar picker are easy to hear and follow.

One might, perhaps, wish for a little more bass authority, punch, grip and dynamic tension, but even here the Guru supplies surprising weight and good agility. Stereo imaging is very impressive too, especially for a close-to-wall model, with fine central focus and a decent attempt at depth reproduction on appropriate material.

Although it might superficially seem costly, the QM10 represents an excellent choice for anyone who wants to get into the music, while keeping the speakers physically well out of the way. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Physically very discreet and musically very communicative, this unusual standmount delivers surprising bass and marvellous time coherence.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Voices sound a bit coloured and shut in on speech, extreme top end could be more transparent and bass might have more grip and tension. Price is quite high.
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION A very clever close-to-wall standmount, has speed and time coherence like a single full-range driver system, yet also sounds much bigger than it looks, with fine imaging. Speech is a bit coloured and bass could have more grip.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
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Denon

MICRO SYSTEM
DM-37DAB



INFORMATION

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INFORMATION

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INFORMATION

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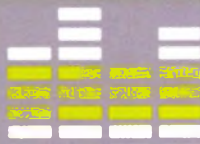
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TX-SR606

Onkyo



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TX-497

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INFORMATION

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Atacama

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SPEAKER STANDS
AURORA 6



INFORMATION

The design approach is certainly outside the box with the stand's column a clear glass cylinder and the base a clear glass teardrop with integrated spikes. The top plate is robust and the stand is held together with a central chrome tension tube which also doubles as a cable management system.

Alphason

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INFORMATION

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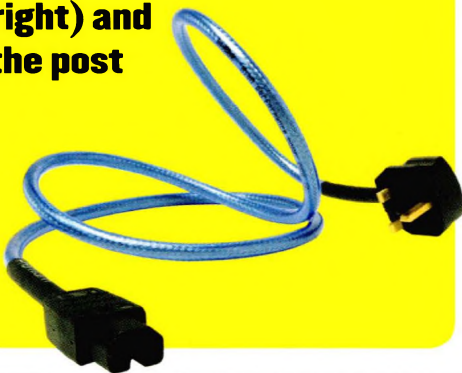
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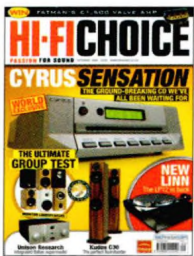
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Denon DVD-2500BT

For faithful transmission of Full HD video and HD audio signals bringing out the full quality of film.



Hi-Fi Separates

Pro-Ject Turntables

Pro-Ject's excellent range includes the multi award-winning Debut, versions include Debut USB - ideal for converting your favourite tracks to your iPod and Debut colour - available in finishes to suit any decor.



Genie 2

The new Genie 2 is an ideal choice for vinyl lovers on a budget.



Roksan Kandy K2

Roksan replaces its hugely successful Kandy series with the new Kandy K2 amplifier and matching CD player.



Roksan Caspian M Series-1

The Caspian integrated amplifier benefits from many superior quality components providing wider bandwidth, lower distortion and more dynamic range for enhanced performance.

Speakers

B&W 600 Series

The fourth generation of the 600 series features new drive units, crossovers and a whole new design.

B&W MiniTheatre MT30

Award-winning 5.1 speaker system available in silver, black or white.



Yamaha YSP400

Digital sound projector - surround sound from one speaker - ideal for 42" screens - just add a DVD player

KEF XQ Series

XQ series includes bookshelf and floorstanding models featuring KEF's unique Uni-Q technology.



KEF KHT2005.3

New 5.1 speaker package available in high gloss black or matt silver.



Cyrus

Representing a quality of sound that is rare at any price. Come and hear the remarkable 'Servo Evolution' CD players - CD6 SE, CD8 SE & CDX 1 SE



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.

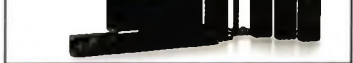
Monitor Audio

With a choice of sizes and finishes, there's a Monitor Audio speaker to complement any system. Ranges include Bronze BR, Silver RS, Gold Signature, new Radius HD and the flagship Platinum.



Radius HD

A new decor matching range of ultra-compact sub/sat speakers replacing the highly acclaimed Radius.



Spendor SA1

The most musical and revealing small loudspeaker ever created by Spendor. This tiny 2-way infinite baffle design presents sound in an uncluttered and cohesive manner that is incredibly captivating to listen to. Finished in gorgeous, Zebrano Piano Lacquer, Jet Black Piano Lacquer and Satin Wenge.

All-in-One Systems

Both 2-channel hi-fi and full multi-channel home cinema systems are available. Our comprehensive range has models to suit all your sound and vision needs.

Denon D-M37DAB

Denon's micro systems are back. This award-winning model, available in silver or black, features a CD player, capable of reading MP3 and WMA discs, a DAB tuner, 30W amplifier and optional SC-M37 speakers.



Arcam Solo Mini
Award-winning integrated CD, Radio and Amplifier with iPod control via optional iLead/rDock.

Vita Audio R4

This one box music system from Vita combines a DAB radio, CD and iPod dock. Delivering 80 watts per channel, the R4 produces sound quality that you wouldn't expect from such a compact design. The iPod dock is compatible with most iPod models.



Walnut or Ivory Gloss finish

NEW

B&W Zepplin

Hear just how good your iPod can sound.

This award-winning iPod docking station ticks all the boxes: it's beautiful, solid as a rock and sounds amazing!



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2008
BEST HI-FI IPOD DOCK
NEW ZEPPLIN

Multi-Room Audio

Logitech Squeezebox Duet

With Squeezebox™ Duet, you can listen to the music you love in any room of your home. This smart, wireless player delivers your entire music collection to your stereo. The controller then makes it easy to browse, select and play.



NEW

Sonos

This 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.



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2008
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
DIGITAL MUSIC PLAYER & ACCESSORIES
SONOS BUNDLE

NEW BU150 Bundle



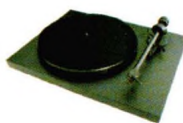
This is an excellent place to start if you're looking for a music system that delivers great sound and remarkable value for money.



Marantz CD6002 CD Player
Marantz PM6002 Amplifier
B&W 685 Speakers

System Option

Got a collection of records? Why not add the award-winning Pro-Ject Debut III Turntable.



Sevenoaks has put together this home cinema system for its outstanding surround sound and vision performance.



Pioneer PDP-LX5090 50" Plasma TV
Pioneer BDP-LX71 Blu-Ray Disc Player
Pioneer SC-LX81 AV Receiver
KEF KHT3005SE 5.1 Speaker Package



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2008
BEST HOME CINEMA SYSTEM
PIONEER LX LINE

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2008
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
BEST HOME CINEMA SYSTEM

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2008
BEST 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
PIONEER SC-LX81

Nationwide Stores

All Sevenoaks stores stock a wide range of products, have comfortable demonstration rooms, provide first-class customer service and can deliver and install your purchase. Stores with Cedia qualified staff can also provide a bespoke design and installation service. They have unrivalled expertise in all areas of home automation and can demonstrate a wide range of installation options.

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Bristol 0117 974 3727	Loughton 020 8532 0770	Swindon 01793 610992
Bromley 020 8290 1988	Maidstone 01622 686366	Swiss Cottage 020 7722 9777
Cambridge 01223 304770	Manchester 0161 831 7969	Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
Chelsea 020 7352 9466	Norwich 01603 767605	Watford 01923 213533
Cheltenham 01242 241171	Nottingham - Sherwood 0115 911 2121	Weybridge 01932 828525
Epsom 01372 720720	Oxford 01865 241773	Witham - Essex 01902 312225
Exeter 01392 218895	Peterborough 01733 897697	Wolverhampton 01902 312225
Glasgow 0141 332 9655	Plymouth 01752 226011	Yeovil 01935 700078
Guildford 01483 536666	Poole 01202 671677	
Holborn 020 7837 7540	Reading 0118 959 7768	
Kingston 020 8547 0717	Sevenoaks 01732 459555	

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- Project management

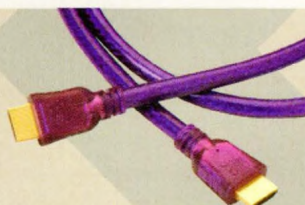


Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association
CEDIA

For inspirational ideas visit www.sevenoaksci.co.uk

Essential Accessories

At Sevenoaks, accessories are not an afterthought. Our staff can demonstrate the difference the right accessories can make to your listening and viewing experience.



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shanling
sme
sanus faber
stands unique
stax
sterling broadcast
stratton furniture
sugden
sunfire
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transparent
unison research
velodyne
wadia
wilson audio
yter & many more ...

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 four stars 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 75 ohms impedance are useful when connecting the player to a digital recorder or DAC.

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

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

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

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



Rega Apollo £498

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



Cambridge Audio Azur 840C £750

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

Our favourite [RB] BEST BUY [EC] EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000											
[RB]	Arcam DVA CD73	450	Neatly built and well-presented player that's especially good at bass and timing, with detail hardly less assured	●	●	●	●	●			301
[RB]	Arcam CD37	1,000	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution do honours to CD and SACD alike	●	●	●	●				310
[RB]	Cairn Tornado	850	The Tornado is a full-on experience that shuns compromise and delivers intensely real sound for its price		●	●					305
[RB]	Cambridge AudioAzur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative		●	●	●		●		293
[RB]	Cambridge AudioAzur 840C	750	Ultra-civilised sound is not to every taste: rhythm-lovers may find this player frustrating	●	●	●	●		●		306
[RB]	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift; otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value		●	●	●				285
[RB]	Denon DCD-500AE	160	Cheap, well built and good, if slightly soft-edged sound quality			●	●			●	295
[RB]	Marantz CD6002	280	A hint of treble unevenness is the only specific flaw; performance is class-leading in most areas		●	●	●	●		●	301
[RB]	Marantz SA8003	700	Classic Marantz sounds in a classy and attractive package, with intelligently thought-out features	●	●	●	●				312
[RB]	Naim CD5i	875	Its strikingly competent musical performance comfortably exceeds the expectations of an entry-level player				●				307
[RB]	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation; smaller-scale works can lack focus			●	●		●		291
[RB]	Rega Apollo	498	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out; musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer		●		●				285
[RB]	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A good, if not truly great, all-rounder with CD and fine multi-channel SACD performance	●	●	●	●		●		276
[RB]	Yamaha CD-S2000	999	Sophisticated, this is a beautifully controlled, high-resolution player, although SACD is stereo-only	●	●	●	●		●		309
ABOVE £1,000											
[EC]	Audio Research CD5	4,500	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – natural and refined, yet assertive and very dynamic	●	●				●		312
[RB]	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
[RB]	Cairn 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
[RB]	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced		●	●	●	●	●	●	286
[RB]	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,100	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music		●	●	●				310
[RB]	Cyrus Audio 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
[EC]	EMM Labs CDSA	6,995	Classy, stripped down to basics SACD/CD player with some excellent engineering below decks	●	●	●	●		●		302
[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]	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best		●	●	●		●		291
[RB]	Leema Stream	1,095	The most timely disc player at its price point has tactile imaging and good dynamics, but unusual control system		●	●	●				306
[RB]	Linn Akurate CD	3,985	This highly engaging multiformat non-video player doesn't have huge transparency, but is musically addictive	●	●	●	●		●		299
[EC]	Marantz SA-11S2	2,700	Superb value for money, this well-balanced player features various filter settings to customise performance	●	●	●	●		●		304
[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
[EC]	Meridian G08	2,250	Advanced digital processing with special apodising filter that gives a very clean sound		●	●	●		●	●	312
[EC]	Naim HDX	4,500	The HDX hard disk player represents an entirely new paradigm for high-fidelity replay. Who needs CD players?		●	●	●				311
[RB]	Rega Saturn	1,298	Good detail, lively natural bass, and good integration of musical strands without losing their individual character		●	●	●				295
[RB]	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,250	An exceptionally fine CD player that provides a high-end and musically rewarding performance		●	●					307
[RB]	Shanling CD-T1000SE	1,600	Commendably committed player which gets right to the heart of a wide variety of musical styles		●		●			●	306
[RB]	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.



Arcam CD37 £1,000

A welcome flagship newcomer, with sound that does honours to the venerable CD format, while also helping to prove the worth of SACD. Practical, unfussy and excellent value.



Marantz SA-7S1 £5,000

Stunning state of the art player aimed at the serious audiophile community, that offers remarkably transparent sound and CD quality on a par with SACD.

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 DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

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
	Pioneer DV-LX50	450	Nicely built universal player for those who value finesse over speed and energy. Decent picture too	●	●	●	●	●	306
	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
	Marantz DV9600	1,500	With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat	●	●	●	●	●	280
	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too	●	●	●	●	●	265
	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio	●	●	●	●	●	263
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity	●	●	●	●	●	279
	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo CD	●	●	●	●	●	270

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

TOP BUYS



Pioneer DV-LX50 £450

A universal player that does a good job across all formats and offers a great picture, too.



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.



Accoustic Arts Surround Player 1 £4,495

High-quality, high price Pioneer-based machine with excellent sound quality.

Billy Vee
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Linn Akurate DS - Also Klimax & Sneaky DS players on Demonstration

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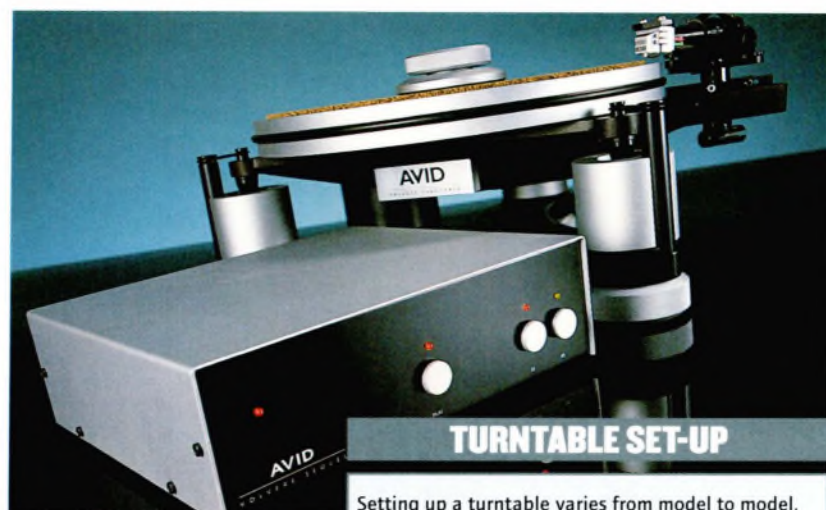
VINYL

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



TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, 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



Ortofon Rondo Red £325

Despite being the base model in the Rondo range the Red delivers detail, power and resolution and is very well priced to boot. A cut above its rivals.



Creek Audio OBH15 £220

Practical and highly compatible unit offering fine detail and a pleasing mellow balance. If you actually buy one, ask the supplying dealer what OBH stands for.



Funk Firm Saffire £1,900

Something of a gem the very individual Saffire is refined and pleasingly neutral with excellent dynamics and very strong timing ability.



Avid Volvere £2,750

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	
EC	Avid 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
MB	Clearaudio Emotion	985	Beautifully built with open and clean sound emphasising mid and top, but delivering nice timely bass	33/45			●	●	309
MB	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Small, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45			●	●	268
MB	Clearaudio Performance	1,940	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
MB	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
MB	The Funk Firm Funk V	750	Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer	33/45			●	opt	284
EC	The Funk Firm Saffire	1,900	Individual design and a sound that's refined and neutral with strong timing and dynamics	33/45			●	opt	309
MB	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			●	●	266
MB	Michell Technodec	886	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money	33/45			●	●	309
MB	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
MB	Pro-Ject RPM 5	450	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
MB	Pro-Ject RPM 6.1	600	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
MB	Pro-Ject X-Pack	800	Combines some very strong elements (Ortofon Rondo Red) into a killer package with top sound and value	33/45			●	●	309
MB	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,200	A gorgeous turntable that sounds as good as it looks – vital and transparent! Price includes carbon fibre arm	33/45			●	●	268
MB	Rega P3-24	398	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, much improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply	33/45			opt	●	298
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Roksan Radius S/Nima	895	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 W/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 V/Excalibur II	7,000	If you want to hear everything that's on a record then there's no better machine for the job (includes Excalibur II)	33/45	●	●	●		307

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS			REPLACEABLE STYLUS		ISSUE NUMBER
						MM	MC	
MB	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around				●	285
MB	Dynavector DV-10X5	250	A high-output MC with superb dynamics and fine timing that's difficult to mount, but well worth the effort				●	307
MB	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss		●		●	235
MB	Ortofon Rondo Red	325	Delivers detail, power and resolution and makes a good case for its price			●		307
MB	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound			●		290
MB	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High-output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound				●	270
MB	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				MM/PHONO IN/US	MC/PHONO IN/US	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	
MB	Cambridge Audio 640P	60	An outrageously good bargain that suits budget systems, but can confidently survive upgrades before and after in the chain	●	●			305
MB	Creek OBH15	220	Practical and highly compatible unit offering fine detail and pleasing, mellow balance	●	●			305
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

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

SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type.

REPLACEABLE STYLUS Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

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PANASONIC DMP-BD30
BLU-RAY PLAYER
£269

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ARCAM DIVA CD73
CD PLAYER
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ONKYO TX-SR506
KEF KHT2005.3
A/V RECEIVER & SPEAKER PACKAGE
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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. However, 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. Sound quality judgements are muddled by 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 Evolution £285
Classy tuner with a sound that's detailed, cohesive and extended tonally.



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



Onkyo T-4555DAB £350
A real radio bargain, this DAB/FM tuner is free from grain and tonal blemishes.

Our favourite TUNERS

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Creek Audio Evolution	285	Sound is detailed, cohesive and extended both tonally and spatially – very classy	FM,M	80					308
	Creek Audio 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	1,295	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!	FM	200					283
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30					250
	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

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.

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 trannies can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use trannies; 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 10-watt valve amp, but it takes a 200-watt 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.

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.

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.

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.



Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1 £1,198

If you don't need lots of inputs or vast output power, this Russ Andrews combo offers solid sound pictures and is highly capable in a number of areas.



Pathos Classic One Mk3 £1,535

Gorgeous valve amp that gets close to bonding all the strengths of classic valve amp sound with solid-state. Beautiful musical presentation, highly recommended.



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 DVA A70	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 DVA A90	850	Practical, affordable and impressively flexible amp with a laid-back approach but plenty of insight too	7	opt			100	303
	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	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp revels in loud music, but also offers detail and delicacy when required	8				120	311
	Creek Audio Evolution	545	Dynamics can seem understated, but energetic bass and fatigue-free treble make it an enjoyable listen	5	opt			85	311
	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
	Marantz PM7001KI	550	A self-effacing amplifier that 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
	Naim Audio Nait 5i	750	More versatile than previous Nait's, the 5i is a great all-round amplifier that offers vivid insights into all manner of music	4				50	305
	Onkyo 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 sparkle	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
	Ayon Spirit	1,745	Pentode or triode operation is available at the flick of a switch with this muscular integrated	4				50	303
	Boulder 865	7,750	Extremely transparent to detail but less revealing of energy, high power, superb build but only balanced inputs	4				150	303
	Copland CTA405	2,498	A musical and involving amplifier, which also has incredible insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards	5	MM			50	305
	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
	Leema Pulse	1,195	An organic and revealing sound alongside good power reserves and superb features, including a great MM/MC phono stage	5				80	306
	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 sparkle	7				180	285
	Naim Audio SuperNait	2,400	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6				80	294
	Pathos Classic One MK3	1,535	An attractive amp offering a beautiful musical presentation with good tonality and detail	5				70	305
	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 Research P70	3,495	Delightful valve amplifier with fine neutrality, sweet midband, impressive bandwidth and ample power	4				70	302
	Yamaha A-S2000	1,499	One of the few amplifiers to offer the benefit of true balanced operation at this price point	5	opt			160	309

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									
	Advance Acoustic MPP206/MAA406	900	This pair has good build and finish and a balance of qualities that's hard to beat for the price			4	opt	150	309
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W	2,800	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed, composed and controlled			8	opt	200	309
	Croft Precession V/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
	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
	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	Simply featured, but sounds appealingly realistic and solid. Highly capable in all areas design			2		50	303
ABOVE £2,000									
	Arcam C31/P38	2,050	Very civilised sound, in the best possible way. Well featured and smartly built			7	opt	100	308

STEREO 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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	SCALE NUMBER
	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●		5	opt		150	277
	Bryston BP26/3B-SST	5,300	The epitome of the iron fist in a velvet glove school of hi-fi. Dynamically superb and very detailed		●	8	opt	●	150	308
EC	Bryston BP26 DA/28 SST	5,500	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and serious grunt	●	●	6	opt	●	100	278
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269
EC	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
BB	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-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt		80	276
EC	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured	●	●	6		●	125	270
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection		●				180	253
EC	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	●		5	opt	●		265
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●				200	247
EC	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt		125	250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		●				700	234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scottish audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●		4				238
EC	Marantz SC11S1/SM-11S1	5,300	Preamp and power amp duo delivers high resolution and is consistent with different loudspeaker loads	●	●	6		●	220	304
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●				140	208
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	2,245	A well-matched, powerful and enjoyable sounding amplifier combo that brings out the strengths of its CD player	●	●	5		●	85	307

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are



compressed, limiting their high-fidelity potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 is where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have built-in amplification and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as their movie

DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo. There

are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
DSP-AX759SE £550
 If you're looking for an affordable multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is a top buy



Arcam
DiVA AVR350 £1,500
 Arcam's latest receiver offers a good helping of processing and connection options, with exceptionally musical sound.



Denon
AVC-A11XVA £2,500
 A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing formats without sacrificing sound quality.



Classé
SSP-600/CA-5200 £11,900
 Anyone seeking a high-end multichannel solution that's equally adept with music and movies should park their ears here.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				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
	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A1XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o		11		140	273
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6			230
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5		50	238
	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value - processor includes onboard screen		11		250	243
	Primare SP31.7/A30 5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high-fidelity to a multichannel world		5		120	238

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output. CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.



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

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

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

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Dino Phono Amplifier



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 6LE £4,000
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 HI-FI CHOICE 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	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Advance Acoustic UM20	200	Classy styling and finish, with solid build and fine overall balance when sited close to a wall	18,30,21		A	43			307
<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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,5,25,5		A-	45			283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Amphion Ion L	750	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence and a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment in test room	16,2,3,6,26,5		A	40			310
<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"/>	Bowers and Wilkins DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	30,33,23		A	23			226
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bowers and Wilkins 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"/>	Bowers and Wilkins 683	899	A fine all-round performer with high-class drivers at a very realistic price	20,99,34		P	20			304
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bowers and Wilkins 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 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 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 M12.2	449	A true classic standmount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25		A-	40			265
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal Chorus 706V	369	Advanced drivers deliver a smooth, even, overall balance with healthy dynamic expression and tension	22,39,25		A	30			307
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal Chorus 816V	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 standmount 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 élan e34	400	A return to form for Mission with a pacey, vibrant sound matched to good looks	35,96,34		A+	48			298
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25		A+	28			271
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio 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. High-quality stereo design which takes 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
<input type="checkbox"/>	PMC DB1i	825	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator with fine warmth and sweet treble	15,5,29,23,4		A+	30			310

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).

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	TYPE	DRIVE	FREQ. (Hz)	FREQ. SPACE	
BEST BUY	PMC TB2+	795	Classy transmission line standmount has superior midband, restrained presence and a bright clean top end	20,40,30	A	28	●	275	
	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	699	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its Signature brother costs £200 more and is even better!	15,27,23	A+	40	●	267	
	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21,5,19,5	A	48	●	286	
	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,9,7,5,30	A+	28	●	284	
	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26	A-	30	●	292	
	Rega R1	298	Cute baby sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a touch thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	15,32,24	A	50	●	269	
	Russ Andrews SP-1	399	This tweaked Focal 705V RA has a sound that is immediate, engaging and, most importantly, great fun	19,2,31,5,24,8	A+	65	●	309	
	Spendor S3/5R	725	Lacks dynamic muscle and loudness potential, but lovely smooth neutrality and good bass extension	16,5,30,5,190	P	25	●	310	
	Tannoy Mercury F4	350	Floorstander has an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm, restrained output	20,5,9,7,29	A+	24	●	294	
	Tannoy Revolution DC6	900	Pretty compact standmount likes wall loading, delivering a lively even bass and smooth coherent midband	23,36,5,2,3	A	40	●	307	
	Triangle Antal Esw	995	Smoother than its predecessors, with a beautifully balanced bass and midband, though the top end is uneven	20,10,8,34	A	20	●	288	
	Wharfedale Diamond 9.1	180	Superior shape and finish at an exceptionally sharp price. Sound is laid back, but free from boxiness	19,5,30,28	A-	45	●	307	
	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									
BEST BUY	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	
	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	
	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	
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,350	Costly but clever; adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount	24,5,37,31,5	A	26	●	288	
	ATC 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	
	ATC SCM16A	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	
	Audio Physic Spark 3	1,499	Classy and discreetly laid-back floorstander has delightfully neutral balance and surprising bass weight	15,98,22	A+	27	●	271	
	AVI ADM9	1,000	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic, and they give good iPod, too	20,30,26	ACT	60	●	301	
	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	
	Bowers and Wilkins 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	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Bowers and Wilkins 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	
	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	
	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up	28,104,37,5	A	45	●	287	
	Focal Chorus 816WSE	1,399	The W cone treatment makes some of the qualities associated with Focal's high-end models more competitive	99,8,28,2,37,5	A+	39	●	308	
	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	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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	
	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	
	Gamut Phi5	2,550	Lovely and discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches	17,100,24	P	20	●	305	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	KEF Reference Model 2012	3,500	Very classy but costly three-way standmount with much improved Uni-Q; could be more transparent	25,42,41	A	30	●	298	
	Kudos Cardea C1	1,450	A very pretty compact standmount with a delightfully subtle and delicate sound quality	20,35,27	A	40	●	304	
	Kudos Cardea C30	5,250	An absolute honey that fully justifies its hefty pricetag, lacking only a little dynamic tension	20,112,27	G	22	●	310	
EDITOR'S CHOICE	MartinLogan Source	1,599	Careful install needed, but capable of remarkable transparency at an extremely competitive price	24,120,37	A	42	●	303	
	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	
	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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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO SPEAKERS** *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM Hz	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
EC	Monitor Audio PL300	5,500	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 LE	4,000	Striking moulded enclosure minimises coloration, while overall balance is smooth, neutral and open	24,115,43	●	A	22	●	308
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Opera Callas	2,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	23x37.5x34		B	32	●	311
EC	Opera Seconda	1,295	Classy cabinetwork plus beautifully judged neutrality with crisp, clean and deep bass	24,1025,31.5	●	A-	20	●	297
EC	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
EC	PMC FB1i	1,950	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	20x100x30	●	G	20	●	311
EC	PMC GB1i	1,330	Pretty little floorstander has great class with fine delicacy and sweet detailing	15.5,87,23.4	●	A	30	●	306
EC	PMC OB1i	3,200	This floorstander delivers a smooth overall balance with wide bandwidth and dynamic range	20,1025,32.5	●	A	20	●	311
EC	Quad ESL 2805	5,000	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38.5	●	A-	45	●	294
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●	259
EC	Sonus Faber Cremona Audit.	2,690	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass... this is 'The Little Speaker That Could' (stands £575 extra)	20,35,37		A	50	●	305
EC	Sonus Faber Minima Vintage	2,150	Easy, graceful sounding compact is a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	20,33,27.5		A-	55	●	312
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
EC	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
EC	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23		A	35	●	277
EC	Triangle Genese Quartet	1,995	Great material value and a solid all round sonic performance with great loudness potential	23,117,37	●	A	25	●	302
EC	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
EC	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	Vivac 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
EC	Yamaha Soavo 2	1,200	Cunningly crafted standmount with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving	22,38,35		A	28	●	296

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **SUBWOOFERS**

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM Hz	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
EC	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
EC	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
EC	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multi-channel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
EC	MartinLogan Dynamo	449	Refined, compact sub brings established MartinLogan virtues to a new price and size point	29,35,32	200	25	301
EC	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

WHEN ONLY THE BEST WILL DO



SERVO EVOLUTION

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So, after 18 months development the 'Servo Evolution' (SE) CD players and dedicated CD transport have finally arrived.

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You don't need to be an experienced hi-fi buff to appreciate the differences, the new SE based CD players sound obviously better because it's unique new CD engine is made for high-end audio. To learn more and download the new SE brochure go to www.servo-evolution.co.uk

The new SE based players comprise:

CD Xt SE A high-end CD transport using the SE engine and several dedicated power supplies.

CD 8 SE Based on the same platform as the transport but with an advanced DAC section and twin low noise power supplies.

CD 6 SE Benefits from the same high performance SE platform but has simpler DAC and power supply sections.

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- Peterborough ● 01733 897697
- Plymouth ● 01752 226011
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- Reading ● 0118 959 7768
- Sevenoaks ● 01732 459555
- Sheffield ● 0114 255 5861
- Southampton ● 023 8033 7770
- Southgate ● 020 8886 2777
- Swindon ● 01793 610992
- Swiss Cottage ● 020 7722 9777
- Tunbridge Wells ● 01892 531543
- Watford ● 01923 213533
- Weybridge ● 01932 828525
- Witham - Essex ● 01376 501733
- Wolverhampton ● 01902 312225
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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

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270	230
	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270	244
	Audio Technica ATH-W1000	400	Superbly comfortable and very revealing. Long listening sessions are a pleasure with new musical insights						250	304
	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
	Beyerdynamic DT880	230	Combines musical involvement with a high degree of analytical virtues. Very comfortable						205	312
	Denon AH-D2000	250	Among the best closed-back headphones we've heard and very fine by any standards						350	309
	Denon AH-D5000	500	Sound is comparable with good open-back models, while isolation both inward and outward is useful						320	312
	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
	Sennheiser PX450	299	Noise-cancelling model: as good as it gets for making the most of listening in planes, trains and automobiles						240	302
	Sennheiser HD650	330	Clear and detailed, with very natural tonality through bass and midrange and just a little treble coloration						275	312
	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
	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. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.

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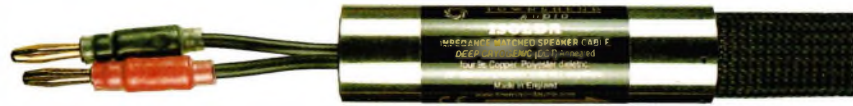
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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs

or can be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	
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 Concert	255	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
	Kimber Timbre	118	A very neutral cable that will complement even very upmarket systems	●	●			312
	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too	●	●			281
	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere	●	●			284
	Nordost Wyewizard Dream	95	Slight lack of precision in extreme treble, otherwise detailed and neutral with authoritative bass	●	●			303
	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
	Supra EFF-1X	77	Lively-sounding cable which maintains a high level of detail and neutrality. Musically, a great all-rounder	●	●			306
	Townshend Isolda DCT100	99	Sound has a particularly enjoyable cohesion and naturalness that makes for a great listener involvement	●	●			312
	vanden Hul Integrator Hybrid	125	Bass is nothing remarkable, but mid and treble are outstandingly open and clear: very transparent	●	●			306
	van den Hul The Wave	100	Generally neutral, with a hint of upper-bass richness: images seem to reside slightly further away than most	●	●			312
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
	Supra AnCo	80	This cable can give a useful fillip to a good transport/DAC combination, even in a high-end context	●	●		E	304
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 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 Silver Screen	14	Screened speaker cable with excellent treble, but just a little light in the bass at times	●	●			310
EC	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,480	A chip off the old block, this speaker cable has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound	●	●			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 coloration, 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 Solstice 5 ²	45	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity	●	●			310

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.

STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive

effect on sound because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50		4	Glass	217
	Audiophile Base 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 InertMatt	70	Isolation platform that can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit		40x25			Metal	311
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail, but is nicely lively		56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless		60,42		4	Glass	293
	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
	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
	Milly FoculPods	19.50	A set of four isolation pads that are amazingly useful for damping vibration and improving sound	2	5			Polymer	311
	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		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 Platform	130	This unassuming platform can be a godsend, cleaning away mid/treble muddle from the sound	8	48,36		1	Torlyte	302
	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
	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available – sound is clear and precise	50	20,17			1	293
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More a range than a model, capable of fine results especially with Acoustic Steel top plates	62	18,16.5			2	299
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack of coloration and ringing suits it to high-resolution systems	56	16,5,18			1	281
	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16.3			4	283
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15			4	232
	Partington Dreadnought BS	295	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer	62	17,23			5	309
	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies	53	31,22			6	287
	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.

Equipment Racks

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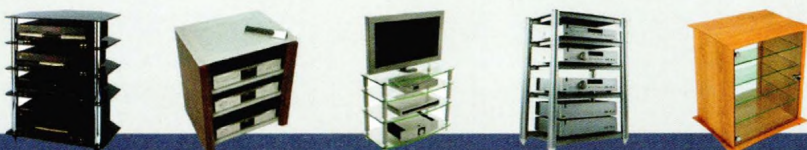


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Equipment Racks

GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz) and 'upper bass' the top octave (80-160Hz)

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp) Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire). Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting) Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD

DSP (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical, includes the balanced ('AES/EBU') interlace

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications

TRANSISTOR/MDSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz

TWEETER Treble driver

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output

WOOFER Bass driver

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass

GRUNT See grip

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass

THIN Bass light

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



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Delighted by the incomparable performance of its Reference Series, Marantz has put the same technologies at work in its Premium Range – into three new separates to be exact: a pre-amplifier, a power amplifier, and a newly upgraded SA-CD player. This means that, more than ever, the Premium Range enables you to immerse yourself in the original performance.

SA-11S2 SUPER AUDIO CD PLAYER

The SA-11S2 Super Audio CD player reaches new heights of audio excellence. Including many of the design features found in Marantz's flagship model, the SA-11S2 SA-CD player produces an unsurpassed quality of dynamics and pace that is more usually associated with the recording studio. Playback of SA-CD has never been so exhilarating – even Audio CD will sound as never heard before.

SC-11S1 PRE AMPLIFIER

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2nd-hand shootout

It's time to spin a turntable for £3,000

The first of our tempting £3,000 turntables is the Avid Volvere Sequel S2. The Sequel was launched in 2002, with the S2 following four years later. Improvements consisted of new suspension, improved bearing, thicker platter and some cosmetic alterations. It's important to note that, unlike some rivals, the S1 cannot be upgraded to the later spec.

New, the silver S2 retails for £4,600 with the special 'Naim black' version an additional £100. With the S2 having been around for a couple of years now, there are examples available within our price range. Most will come with an SME arm, although one sporting an IV or V arm will probably be out of our price range: something for a future upgrade.

Look out for models equipped with Naim's ARO arm and the special Avid Naim-Slide that enhances the arm's tracking abilities.

As you have probably guessed, the Sequel S2 does complement Naim equipment and has similar sonic characteristics. You can expect a punchy, authoritative sound with great stability and presence. Part of that authority is brought about by the fitting of the PSU and motor from the more expensive Acutus model.

Good news for second-hand buyers is that, provided the buyer registers with Avid, the five-year warranty is transferable. Reliability is excellent, although Avid advises potential buyers to check the sapphire bearing and belt.

As a hi-fi enthusiast you've probably heard of Nottingham Analogue Studios (NAS). Try to find a website or email address, though, and you'll draw a blank. Rather appropriately, this maker of fine analogue turntables has eschewed all forms of digital marketing.

Fortunately, NAS does have a phone, so we were able to call for a chat about the Dais. Dating from 2002, this typically sturdy deck is unrelated to a deck of the same name from the 1980s. Its current new price is £3,900, putting

a second-hand version with a decent quality arm and cartridge easily within our price range.

Although NAS will make armboards for any tonearm, it's worth seeking out one fitted with the Ace Space 12" arm (£780). Nottingham Analogue has long been a proponent of the 12" arm and, although slightly unwieldy, the improved tracking ability is clear to hear.

With regard to buying used, NAS warned us of the usual auction site perils. It said it had experienced many disappointed customers and was used to 'picking up pieces' of turntables that weren't what they appeared to be: for peace of mind, best to buy from a dealer.

NAS doesn't offer a specific warranty, but it did assure us it 'looks after' customers, provided the unit has not been abused. Apart from regularly cleaning the drive belt, it recommends nothing more bold than changing the bearing oil every 18 to 24 months.

Another company to offer something different from the norm is Oracle Audio. The

"NAS warned of the usual auction site perils: for peace of mind, best to buy from a dealer."

Canadian company's Delphi V has been surprisingly popular in the UK – a country usually known for sticking with, admittedly abundant, home-grown talent.

Back in 1979, the Delphi was considered by many to be superior to the LP12 and, like the Linn, it has been upgraded throughout its life. The V version was launched in 1996, although only actually imported to the UK from 2004.

The only upgrade during its lifetime has been improved circuit board electronics, but all UK imports should have this spec. When buying second-hand it's important to see proof of original purchase from a UK dealer to ensure that you're getting a proper UK model.

Oracle also told us that the warranty is not transferable, making a dealer purchase desirable. The upside is that the Delphi V is extremely well built and should prove reliable. Our budget should buy a one- or two-year-old example complete with Turbo PSU.

As with the others, if you want one complete with a range-topping SME arm then you'll have to look at older examples.



Above: Early models of Roksan's TMS2 are a great buy

That said, we found an early (2004) model complete with SME V at our budget – not bad for a turntable that's only just turned four.

If you're prepared to buy an older deck, then a very early Roksan TMS2 makes an excellent buy. Despite costing nearly £9,000 new, we have seen six-year-old examples going for £3,000–£3,500.

The good news, if you're buying an early model, is that the design has changed very little over the years. The plinth moulding has been updated to include extra bracing but, otherwise, it's just cosmetic.

In terms of future upgrading, this is undoubtedly the best deck of the bunch. Mat,

plinth, bearing, base and feet are all available to take a TMS2 all the way to TMS3 spec. Reliability is excellent, but there are specific points worth checking.

The TMS2 uses an epoxy-based resin material for its three main plinths. It is very important to set up these plinths so that they are level. The plinths will never be 'ruler flat' but they should be within a couple of millimetres of one another.

Roksan also advised carefully examining the pulley, platter and main bearing for signs of damage. The good news is that, should you buy a more recent model, the warranty is transferable. Roksan is also widely represented, so finding a dealer should be easier than with the others here.

These turntables make a pleasant change from the Linn/SME/Michell triumvirate. All delight in their own ways and each is well worth seeking out for a demonstration. Take a little care when buying and you'll be delighted with your choice. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month, £500 CD players



Above: Oracle's Delphi V. Classic Canadian Linn-challenger

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Spendor S3/5e, in ebony vgc	499
Spendor S5e, in maple nr mint boxed	749
Tannoy DC2000, vgc black	199
Usher Audio Dancer CP8571,	
the most beautiful speaker ever?	2999
SPECIAL SYSTEM DEALS	
Consonance Ping, superb one box system, ex demo	1199
Musical Fidelity A3.2 CD/Pre/Power	999
Quad 99CDP/99 Pre/909 Power	249
119	
Quad QC24 P/II Forty Valve Monos/ESL989 Electrostatics	1299
Roksan Caspian Full system with FR5 floorstanders	Call
99	
TEAC CRH257i in silver - Brand New - less than half price	159

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Speakers

Acoustic Zen surround system, new (£7845) only	£5875
B&W DM1800 speakers with stands	£195
B&W DM640 floor standers	£295
New Acoustic Zen Adagio speakers	£3125
New Alamarro M3 speakers	£2695
Hales Transcendence 5 speakers	£2895
Mordaunt Short MS5-40 speakers	£99
Acoustic Zen Adagio Junior speakers + stands, new	£2500
Acoustic Zen Adagio centre speaker + stand	£1625
Mission 753 speakers	£349
Ruark Templars, boxed	£245
Tannoy Westminster Royal SE (New version, ex demo)	POA

Pre-Amps

Wavac PR-T1 3 box pre amp as new. (£23500)	£10750
Proceed FAV pre-amp	£495
Gryphon Allegro Sonata Mint/Boxed (£9000)	£3500

Amplifiers

Almarro A50125A integrated amp (NEW)	£3140
Wavac MD- 805M monos (£16500) AS NEW only	£7950
Goldmund SRM-250 monos (£6590) new	£4995
Kora triode 100SB mono power amps (pair)	£3495
Roksan Caspian mono blocks superb/boxed	£1295
Yamaha DSP-E800 processor/3 ch amp	£175
Audio Note Zero pre-amp with monoblocks (ex demo)	£795
Cambridge Audio Azur 840 A-B XD integrated amp Mint	£395
Denon AVR-3802 surround receiver	£395
Mark Levinson ML 336 power amp	£2495

CD Players & DACs

Audio Note DAC 1X mint/boxed	£395
Tri CD Player balance outputs, (NEW, made in Japan)	£1495
Denon DVD A-11, DVD/DVD audio/SACD player mint/boxed	£695
Esoteric x-03 SE (NEW)	POA
Goldmund Eidos 18 CD/SACD player (£3195) NEW	£2495
Cambridge Audio Azur 840 C-B CD player Mint	£495
Accuphase DP-75 CD player, superb	£1495
Accuphase DP 65 CD player	£995

Miscellaneous

Isoclean Power 50A 111 US power block/filter, new	£850
Technics ST-610L tuner	£65
Sony ST-SE570 tuner	£60
Winds electronic stylus gauge	£425
Cambridge Audio Azur 640T V2 FM/DAB tuner Mint	£95
Selection NEW Madrigal CZ gel balanced interconnect@ discount	

Turntables and associated gear

Dynavector 507 Mk. 2 arm (new)	£1995
--------------------------------	-------

Main Dealer for:

Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, Bolzano Villettri speakers, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Michell.

DEFINITIVE AUDIO

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

ITEM DESCRIPTION	SALE	NEW
Kondo KSL M77 preamplifier. Immaculate condition. Boxed with certificate.	£15k	--
B&W DM2 loudspeakers. 1970's. Good working order.	£100	--
Linn Kairn Pre-amplifier c. 15 years old with remote control, box, manual..	£400	--
Linn Karik CD player c. 15 years old with remote control, box, manual.	£300	--
Michell Gyro . Smoked perspex lid/ bronze. Approx 9 years old. Particularly nice cond.	£600	--
Horning Agathon Gold loudspeakers with Lowther PM4 Alnico drivers. Natural Oak.	£3000	c.£750
KSL-Kondo Gakuon 211 mono amplifiers. (Yr.2000). Big, ocean liner of an amplifier. Masculine and pout-inducing.	£21k	£6500
KSL-Kondo M100 DAC . Predecessor of KSL-DAC. Add a CEC transport and heaven is yours.	£7000	--
Western Electric Gotham type 39 mono amplifiers. 50 watts of 300B in Class A. Beefcake with manners.	£4000	£1000
Audio Innovations series 300 MKII integrated amplifier. 12 watt Class A ECL86 with phono. Nice with Lowther drivers.	£300	--
Pure Sound CD player, valve output stage, ex-demonstrator, as new.	£500	£900
Art Audio Quintet . Shiny EL34 Class 'A' integrated. As new, ex- dem.	£2000	£3850
Art Audio Concerto integrated. Shiny triode 6550 integrated. Beefy sound. As new.	£3000	£4400
Sugden CD 21 Just serviced by Sugden. Excellent condition.	£500	£1100
Pioneer Precision F504 RDS tuner. Beautiful sound for the Radio 3 addict.	£300	--
Teac P700 transport . Bit scruffy but will do the job. Give-away at this price.	£200	--
SJS Arcadia model 1 pre amplifier. AN Japan manque. Hard wired purist line pre-amp. Lots of serviceable quality, not much outlay.	£500	--
SJS Arcadia model 2 pre amplifier. As above but built in full copper chassis. Copper sub chassis. Hard wired with silver, Cerafine reservoir caps.		
Panasonic volume pot. Sophisticated and luxurious sound. Rare bird.	£1000	--
Croft Epoch preamplifier. Hard wired, inc' phono stage. Excellent sound.	£800	--
Border Patrol 300B SE 4 weeks use - as new.	£3000	£5750
Audio Innovations P2 phono stage with Border Patrol upgrade. Sought after pre-amp with big reputation.	£900	--
Lavardin PE Reference line pre-amplifier - 1 lady driver - as new.	£1000	£2400
Finite Elemente Pagode Master Reference turntable wall shelf. Brand new, boxed.	£600	£1400
Magnum Dynalab MD10 surround sound decoder.	£1000	£2400
Mactone 6550 Integrated amplifier. Ex dem.	£2000	£6500
Avid Diva T/T with Rega fitting kit. SME mount as standard. £1200+£60 for Rega arm kit April 2007. Hardly any use.	£600	£1260
ART Stilleto 6 Maple. Boxed. Excellent condition.	£800	£2000
Martin Logan Aeriis i with Oak sides. Lovely condition, boxed. Give-away.	£1000	£3500

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- Includes factory-fitted Ortofon Cartridge
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- Space saving design
- Standard black or £10 extra for gloss red



INGENIOUS
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WHAT IS IT? OCTOBER 2004
★★★★★

CD PLAYER NAD C515BEE

- Plays CD/R/RW, MP3 & WMA
- Graphite or titanium



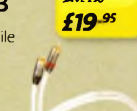
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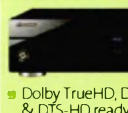


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BLU-RAY PLAYER PIONEER BDPLX71

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- High-end Wolfson Audio DACs for superior analogue audio output
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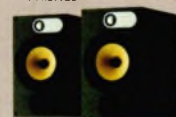
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WHAT IS IT? SEPTEMBER 2006
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"MAGICAL LITTLE BOXES"

BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS B&W 685

- On demonstration today
- Choice of four finishes



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WHAT IS IT? SEPTEMBER 2007
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SPEAKERS EPOS ELS303

- Elegant, floor-standing design
- Black or dark cherry finish

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HI-FI CHOICE

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SAVE: £100
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WHAT IS IT? NOVEMBER 2005
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MICRO HI-FI SYSTEM

ARCAM SOLO MINI



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WHAT IS IT? MARCH 2008
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AMPLIFIER

ROKSAN KANDY K2



- 125 Watts x 2 (8 ohms, RMS)
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- Pre-amp bypass enables easy use as a main speaker power amp for multi-channel setups
- Black or silver

EAR KANDY
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FOR SALE

ARCAM 170.3 CD transport. 1991 vintage, black, still reads discs, with remote control, booklet and interconnect. 01929 480181 (Dorset).

ARCAM DV137 DVD-Audio/video player. Excellent condition, (£1,300) £500 ono. 07772 333874 (Warks).

ARCAM FMJ CD23 CD player, good condition, £400. A32 integrated amplifier (very slight mark to front) £350. T21 AM/FM tuner, good condition, £150. 01626 368003 (Devon).

AUDIO RESEARCH VT200 with box, £2,000. Krell SACD 5.2 Standard, remote, manual and box, £2,000. Krell KSL and KST, offers. Quad ESL 989, including boxes £2,000. 07789 002614 (Sussex).

BLACK RHODIUM phono interconnects. Brand new, never used. 'Prelude' 0.5m, (£70) £45 plus £3 p&p. 01527 861014 (Worcs).

CASTLE HARLECH S2 speakers in maple finish. Absolutely pristine, spikes, packaging etc. Perfect condition (£1,000) £500. Collect (M5, J5), 01527 861014 (Worcs).

CHORD DSC 900 DAC, silver, boxed, perfect condition, (£1,900) £700. Teac T1 CD transport, VRDS mechanism, boxed including Stereovox HDXC digital cable, very good condition, £300. 01925 766200 (Cheshire)

CONRAD JOHNSON PV10A preamp, MV55 power amp (superb), new valves in pre, new set supplied for power, all boxed, manuals etc, £995, or PV10A £450, MV55 £600. 01706 345418 mail@rodtheobald.force9.co.uk (Lancs).

CREEK CD 50 MK 1 CD player.



Above: Marantz CD17 CD player (HFC 264 group)

Immaculate condition, 10 hours use. Offered with Russ Andrews DV 30 digital cable and PowerKord, £200 plus £10 p&p, or collect. Bargain. 01527 861014 (Worcs).

CYRUS CD7Q/ PSX-R, boxed, manuals, £550. Rotel RB991 power amp, boxed, £375. 01977 609839 (W Yorks).

CYRUS CD8X/ PSX-R, Cyrus 8 integrated amp. All manuals, remotes and boxes. £600 no offers. Buyer collects, will demo. 07900 024524 day/01483 892955 weekend (Surrey).

CYRUS PRE VS 2 X-Power (x2), Cyrus PSX-R, mint condition, boxed. All between one and two and a half years old. Offers between £1,850 and £2,000. Spondor S5E, mint condition, boxed, £625. Manuals for all products. Buyer collects. 01721 723 946 (Tweedale).

ELAC FS 207.2 speakers, Jet3 ribbons, cherry finish, with boxes and manual, mint condition, £395. 02920 419226 (S Glams).

EPOS ES22 speakers in light cherry, superb condition and performance, virtually as new with original packaging, spikes and user manual, £475. 07963 232638 sjross99@msn.com (Herts).

GAMUT DI 150 integrated amplifier, as new, manual and box, etc. £3,450 ono. 07814 717249 (Cornwall).

GARRARD 301 turntable, with Origin Live-upgraded

Rega arm and Goldring 1042 cartridge, £700. ATC integrated amp, £1,600. 01422 340639 or mchalep@yahoo.co.uk (W. Yorks).

KLIPSCH KG5.2 floorstanding speakers in oak, very rare, excellent all-round condition, grills included, stunning sound, £275. 07725 072878 (Leicester).

KRELL FPB 300CX power amp, one of the best in the world, new, 220v-50Hz, £4,500 ono. and shipping from Israel. The buyer who pays the asking price can also buy used Transparent Ultra XL speaker cables, excellent condition, (£2,300) £700 inc shipping. Serious applications only to ewadv@hotmail.com

LEEMA STREAM CD player and Leema Pulse amp. Boxed and like new. Complete with remote controls, manuals and original packaging. Three year

warranty card, £1,600. 07796 226641 or email.robdh@keme.co.uk (Leics).

LINN GENKI CD player, grey case, excellent condition with Linn interconnects and original packaging, £395 ono. Naim NAP 250 power amplifier, olive case in original packaging, excellent condition with Russ Andrews PowerKord, but no interconnects, £650 ono. 01142 507866 (Sheffield).

LINN LP12 (1996), Basik LXV, Elektra (new), serviced and reset, £449. 07891 700542 or 01352 714568 (Flintshire).

MARANTZ CD17 (£800) £400. Musical Fidelity X-A1 amp (50 watts per channel) £300. Musical Fidelity X-LP phono stage, £90. 07787 166713 (London).

MARANTZ SR 8001 AV receiver, HDMI, (£1,200) £395. Marantz DV6001 DVD/SACD player, black, £195. Sony

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 demo and judge the seller as well as the goods!

FOR SALE

XA1200ES SACD player. All as brand new with Marantz/Sony dealer warranty invoices. 020 8951 3178 (Middx)

MARIGO LABS 3-D Stabilizer, Stealth Mat Series 2, for CD and DVD, latest version, as new, £35 including shipping. 01268 415017 (Essex)

MIRAGE M-1SI front loudspeakers, £1,300. M-7si rears, £400. MC-si centre, £300. BBSS-210 subwoofer, £700. LFX-3 crossover, £200. Classé 150 and Threshold S300 amps. Two processors. 01344 841455 or 07774 493493 (Surrey).

MONITOR AUDIO BR5 floorstander speakers, factory-sealed in original box in sumptuous walnut wood veneer. Delivery in Edinburgh or surrounding area, £290 or picked up for £280. 07646 74717 or miller.andy@gmail.com (Edinburgh).

MOON I-3 amplifier £900, Totem Hawk Loudspeakers £1,500. Both mint condition and only six months old. Cost nearly £4,000 new. Will include Linn Karik 3 for breathtaking system at £2,550. 01738 629467 (Perthshire)

MORDAUNT-SHORT PAGEANT II speakers, 1981, classic silver-wired, with stands, £120. Pioneer PDS801 CD player, £130. Both mint, will accept £200 for both. Can demonstrate 07700 431963 (Cheshire).

MUSICAL FIDELITY MVT and P170 pre/power amplifiers, with power supply, £349 ono.

Celestion SL600 speakers, £299. All boxed, excellent condition. Carnival Silver Plus cables, 2.8m bi-wire pair, £79. 01984 640588 (Somerset)

MYRYAD MA240 power amplifier, boxed and in perfect condition, £400. 07736 280018 or e-mail davidp.warren@ntlworld.com (N Yorks).

NAIM 112 preamp, £299. Atacama R724 speaker stands, £79. All boxed. Chord Carnival+ speaker cables 2.8m, bi-wired, factory terminated, £69pr. Naim NAC04 speaker cables, 3m, offers. 01984 640588 (Somerset).

NAIM CDX2 with XPS2 power supply, immaculate condition, 15 months old, 21 months left on warranty, complete with boxes, manuals etc, £3,700. 01235 765986 (Oxon).

NAIM NAP250 power amp, old style, but recent full service and update by Naim, £750. NAC72 preamp, with MM, MC and spare boards, £325. 01453 750183 evenings (Glos).

NAIM SYSTEM NA CDX2 CD player, £1,450. NAC 282 preamp, £1,600. NAP 250-2 power amp, £1,300. Hi-Cap power supply, £500. Owned from new. In excellent condition and boxed. 01619 732583 (Manchester).

NORDOST SHIVA mains cable, £130, Nordost Pulsar Points (x4) aluminium, £35, Totem Beaks anti-resonance device, one pair, £50. All items mint with original boxes and packaging. 01792

464001 (S Wales)

PIONEER DV 656A DVD-A/SACD player, £70. Tannoy M15 with stands, Denon UPO-250 power amp, silver, £60 each. QED Digit, £30. NAD 4020a and Rotel RT-850AL tuners, £25 each. 01621 772884 (Essex).

QUAD 306 power amp, Quad 34 control unit and Quad FM4 stereo tuner, £360 the lot. 0208 977 6433 (Surrey).

ROKSAN CASPIAN five-channel power amp, excellent condition, £100. TAG McLaren AVR 20 processor, centre channel indicator light faulty, but unit works fine, excellent Condition, £85. Buyer Collects 01909 731413 (Notts)

ROTEL RA-05 amp, Rotel RCD-06 CD player, latest models, immaculate, boxed, £350. Half price! No offers. 01384 412234 (W Mids)

PRO-JECT DEBUT III, £60. Celestion SL6 loudspeakers, £130. Kenwood 3090 MiniDisc player, £60. Sugden C51/P51 amplifiers, £250. Sony Pro Walkman, needs attention 01708 457691 (Essex).

SWOTER OUTPUT transformers, 2x 9593, 2x 9066t, 2x 9508, 1x 9521 (mains). High spec, excellent bass extension, suitable for parallel push-pull amps. 07895 197571 or email saselec2000@yahoo.co.uk (Camps).

SUGDEN C51, P51 and T51, one channel needs attention. Cambridge Audio P100 (blk), P50 (Silver), T55 (silver). Neal 103, needs attention. Offers.

020 8650 6127 (Kent).

TDL RTL2 floorstanding speakers, matched pair in very good condition, black, £50 ono. Buyer collects. 01229 584509 (Cumbria)

TOWNSHEND DCT 100 interconnects, 2x 0.6m pairs, both XLR, £120 or £60 per pair. Ecosse Diva interconnect, 0.5m, single-ended (phono), £50. Chord Chameleon Silver Plus interconnect, 0.6m XLR, £60. Chord Chameleon Silver Plus interconnect, 1m XLR, £75. Pair of Townshend Isolda speaker cables, 2.5m, £150. Chord Chameleon Silver Plus interconnect, 0.6m, phono to DIN connector (for Quad), £70. Nordost Heimdall interconnect, 0.6m XLR, £200. 01872 870602 (Cornwall).

TRANSPARENT CABLE Transparent Opus MM, XLR, 1m, boxed with certificate, £8,000. Transparent power cable, Power Link MM, £650. 07501 797971 (London).

UNISON RESEARCH hybrid valve kit: Unico Secondo 120-watt per channel integrated amplifier with phono inputs, (£1,560) £925 ono. Unico CD player, (£1,450) £825 ono. Excellent reviews, mint. Two pairs Rothwell attenuators, £25 ono per pair. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

WANTED: Linn Sondek clear turntable lid. Must be in good condition. 01926 853106 (Warks)

WANTED Top-quality hi-fi separates and complete systems: Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc. Fast, friendly response and willing to travel/pay cash. 07815 892458 (Essex)

WILSON SYSTEM 8 floorstanding loudspeakers, obsidian black. UK purchased and installed. Immaculate condition and only 68 hours usage. Crates, manuals and all accessories. (£26,000) £16,500. Pictures on request. 01925 656990 or 07738 599051 for more info (Cheshire).

ZETA TONEARM, fitted with van den Hul tonearm cable, in great condition, £375. 07730 431380 (Berks)



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- ▶ Aurousal VS Virtual Source loudspeaker
- ▶ NAD Masters Series M4 tuner
- ▶ Roksan Kandy K2 CD player and integrated amplifier



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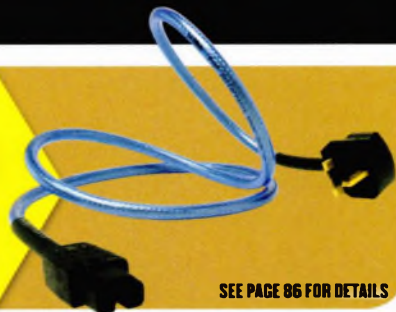
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