

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO HIGH-PERFORMANCE STEREO

# HI-FI CHOICE

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## THE HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2009

HI-FI CHOICE

INSIDE

### Beautiful Systems

PMC and Bryston's knockout combo

# SUPER AUDIO CD!

Pioneer's studio-tuned SACD player is an audiophile dream



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Technic's SB-RX70 revisited in depth

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Palm-sized DAC/headamp wonder

**Monitor Audio**  
**AirStream 10**  
Futuristic radio rules the airwaves

**Wharfedale**  
**Diamond 10.5**  
Loudspeaker gem really sparkles

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**T+A is the 'brand of the year 2009' as awarded by Audio, Stereoplay & Vide Homevision magazine**

# WELCOME...

**HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2009 ISSUE 326**

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



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Awards 2009*. This very special edition is, perhaps, the most important issue of the year as it provides expert buying advice for discerning audiophiles.

Our exhaustive judging process, painstakingly carried out over a number of weeks, is the most thorough in the business, making this special issue essential for anybody considering buying

audio equipment in the coming 12 months.

We've simplified the categories this year, announcing a single 'winner' along with two finalists for each and we've added some new awards for innovation and achievement in the high-end.

Yet whether finalists or winners, all of the products featured in *The Awards* are the very best that you can buy. We trust you'll find our verdicts useful.

*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...

The Essential Guide To Audio Excellence In The Home



## 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 he 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 and 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 encyclopedic 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.



### JASON KENNEDY

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice* and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now he's back as a freelance writer and using his considerable hi-fi expertise to contribute to the UK's best hi-fi title.



### ED SELLEY

A highly knowledgeable audio expert, Ed has worked for a number of prestigious manufacturers including Cambridge Audio and Yamaha. Specialising in product support and development, he brings a wealth of professional and enthusiast knowledge to the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

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



Jordan Acoustics

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**0%\***

(NEW - HOT PRODUCT)

**Mystro Integrated Amp: £1,225**

10% Deposit: £122.50

Term: 12 months

Monthly Payment: £91.88

(NEW - HOT PRODUCT)

**Mystro CD Player: £1,319**

10% Deposit: £132.00

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Monthly Payment: £98.92

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\*written details on request  
\*buy now pay later 7.0% finance  
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## Hey Mystro...

**SUGDEN** have been drawing high praise in the world of high-end audio for four decades and the new MYSTRO models are sure to find many a new admirer...

The **Mystro Integrated Amplifier** delivers a fast, detailed, dynamic and open sound that will send the competition running for cover in its respective class. Dare we say it, the **Mystro** is underpriced... so be quick before **Sugden** realise!

The **Mystro CD Player** is not just a perfect match for the **Mystro Amplifier**, but its a very special disc spinner in its own right! Its astonishing the amount of information the **Mystro** pulls from CD and that's just scratching the surface when describing its abilities at playing all types of music with such gusto.

Like all **Sugden products**, the more you listen the more they pull you into the music.

**" Dizzily fast and musical sound allied to breathtaking detail and decent power make this Sugden's best value integrated amplifier ever. "**

David Price, Hi-Fi World - November 2009

**" Sober in appearance and unsullied by superfluties, the Mystro is nevertheless a compelling little integrated amplifier that should fast acquire a cult following... "**

David Price, Hi-Fi World - November 2009

# Sugden

Hi-Fi World  
**VERDICT** ●●●●●





## Limited Edition Pearl Components

When they are gone - they are gone forever...

When you first encounter the new **KI Pearls**, the first thing you notice are their unique **'Silk Pearl' finishing**. The first of its kind in fact for **Marantz**. But it's the magic that **Ken Ishiwata** has created inside the box that really gets the pulse racing. He has built-in everything possible to ensure that the music is reproduced exactly as the original artist and recording engineer intended.

**SA-KI:** "Fed all manner of SACDs from Mobile Fidelity, Linn, Telarc and other admirable die-hards, the SA-KI showed itself to be a thoroughbred player reminiscent of the far costlier Esoteric devices, though the voicing differs. Marantz itself used the adjective 'silky' to describe the Pearls' black finish."

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News Sept 09

**PM-KI:** "The phono stage was open, quiet and precise, especially the MM setting, and in every sense - from vinyl to CD to SACD - the bass was consistently quick. Decay or transient stops down below were as progressive or abrupt as required, nigh on perfect, while well-recorded bass drum kicks were reproduced with a vividly detailed sensation of pedal, hammer and skin in motion."

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News Sept 09



# 0%\*

(STRICTLY LIMITED EDITION)

**SA-KI CD/SACD Player: £2,500**

10% Deposit: £250.00

Term: 12 months

Monthly Payment: £187.50

(STRICTLY LIMITED EDITION)

**PM-KI Integrated Amp: £2,500**

10% Deposit: £250.00

Term: 12 months

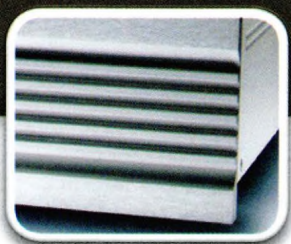
Monthly Payment: £187.50

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\*written details on request

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# marantz®



## 30-day money back on the NEW IsoTek Aquarius\*

IsoTek's® legendary, multi-award-winning Mini Sub has set the standard for power conditioning components since the original was launched in 2002. Now, in 2009, a new benchmark conditioner has arrived: the IsoTek® Aquarius.

**Aquarius** succeeds the **GII Mini Sub** in IsoTek's® range, incorporating the very latest innovations to deliver an exceptional performance, with an **exceptionally attractive price tag**. It improves upon the **GII Mini Sub's** current delivery, with a **full 16 amps** to its **two high-current outlets**, allowing for unlimited transients thanks to its **thermo-magnetic fusing** and **16A IEC C20 connector**. The four medium-current outlets are now fused using a high-quality, user-replaceable bayonet fuse holder. **Aquarius** also delivers greater **instantaneous protection (67,500 amps)**, and greatly improved independent filter stages throughout.

**Aquarius** will **auto-sense the load** of each component connected to it, thus tailoring the filtering process to suit the component. **It all adds up to a power conditioner with a performance that is unprecedented at its price point.** Call **Jordan Acoustics** to order yours today.

# 0%\*

(NEW - HOT PRODUCT)

**Aquarius: £795**

[Mains Conditioner]

20% Deposit: £159.00

Term: 12 months

Monthly Payment: £53.00

\*subject to status/conditions

\*written details on request

\*buy now pay later / 0% finance available on most products

# IsoTek®

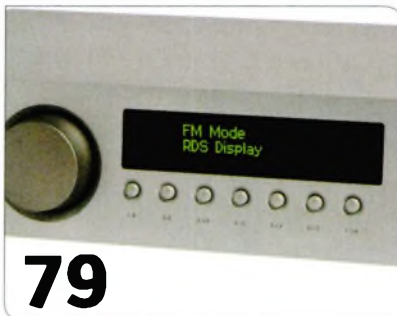
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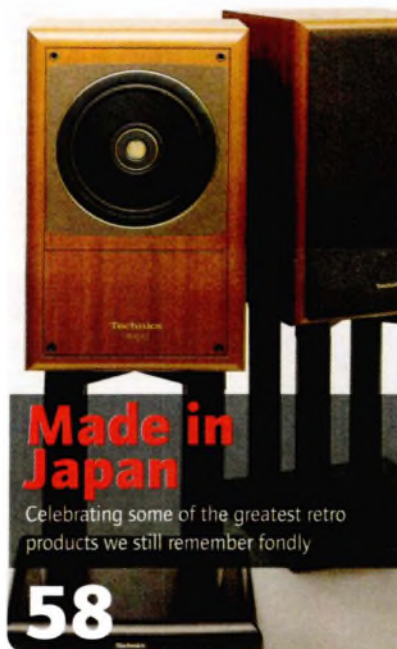
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# Tucana II



The Tucana was Leema Acoustics' first hi-fi electronics product. Within a short time it established itself as a true reference amplifier winning many prestigious awards. The new Tucana II extends both the performance and features, to set a new world-wide benchmark.

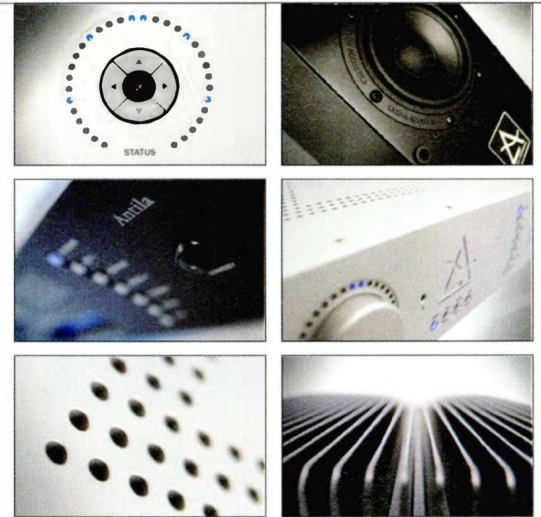
# Tucana II

Borrowing heavily from developments pioneered in the staggering Leema Reference Series Altair IV amplifier, the Tucana II is an even more accomplished performer than its multi-award winning predecessor. Improved dynamic range, resolution of fine detail, and remarkable clarity help the Tucana II present music with life-like verve into even the most fussy of today's audiophile speakers. This highly refined amplifier can deliver over fifty amps to each channel with a vice-like grip and precise control of the loudspeakers.

New features on the Tucana II include an MP3 input, balanced input, headphone output, direct input selection, adjustable input gain, and a balance control.

The Tucana II helps even the most complex music make complete sense.

## Leema Acoustics: Award winning hi-fi



Please visit  
[www.leema-acoustics.com](http://www.leema-acoustics.com)  
to find your nearest dealer



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Email: [info@leema-acoustics.com](mailto:info@leema-acoustics.com)



## MICROMEGA RANGE

*A decade on and a new range of Gallic amps, CD players and more*

After an absence of almost a decade, innovative audio manufacturer Micromega is set to return to the UK with a line-up of 11 new components, including CD players and amplifiers, brought in via famous high-end UK distributor Absolute Sounds.

The French company is back in Britain thanks to the passion for music and quality audio equipment of its new owner, Didier Hamdi. The move from former motorcycle world championship winner to owner and CEO of Micromega in 2007 may seem a strange one, but according to Didier: "I gain great satisfaction from combining my passion for music with the engineering skills required to perform at championship level. At Micromega, we've assembled a group of people dedicated to producing excellent hi-fi components that are designed to stir the emotions of all who hear them."

Micromega's founder, Daniel Schar, now leads the R&D department at the head of a team of other core personnel considered fundamental to Micromega's audio design philosophy. The fruits of its labours are three CD players, three integrated stereo amps, a stereo preamp, two digital power amps, an FM tuner and a surround sound preamp/processor, all designed and built at the company's factory in France.

Thanks to the use of class-D technology in the power amps, the entire range shares the same slimline chassis, available in either silver or black. The PW-250 boasts 250 watts per channel, while the PW-400 stereo power amplifier has an output of 400 watts per channel. Partnering these is the PA-20 stereo preamplifier, which has five inputs for line-level

sources, one for MM cartridge and another for the company's AVP-180 home cinema preamp/processor. Outputs include one for a sub and a headphone socket.

In order to optimise power supply noise and stability, Micromega has opted for separate transformers in its range of three integrated amps. The IA-60 (pictured below), IA-100 and IA-180 all feature a toroidal transformer for power stages and an R-core for preamplification circuitry. Inputs are as for the PA-20 preamp, but power ratings are 60 watts per channel for the IA-60 and 100 watts for both the IA-180 and IA-100, the latter using two pairs of the DIY builder's favourite chip amp, National Semi's LM3886T.

While DAB-only transmissions may not be that far off in the UK, Micromega is still committed to FM tuners. It's FM-10 has 50 presets and is an RDS design which again uses an R-core power transformer.

The final trio in the range is the CD-10, CD-20 and CD-30 CD players. The CD-10 is the entry-level model and is fitted with an Analog Devices AD1853 DAC and R-core power transformer said to be chosen for its excellent rejection of mains-borne interference. The CD-20 and CD-30 both benefit from dual mains transformers and Micromega's ACTS power supply, which is designed to keep noise to a minimum.

**Price:** £1,500 (PW-250), £2,000 (PW-400), £1,290 (PA-20), £1,680 (AVP-180), £888 (IA-60), £2,000 (IA-100), £1,700 (IA-180), £700 (FM-10), £800 (CD-10), £1,222 (CD-20), £1,600 (CD-30)

**Due:** now ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.micromega-hifi.com





## EMM LABS XDS1

➤ Canadian high-end audio specialist EMM Labs has just announced its latest CD/SACD player, the XDS1. Designed by the company's founder, Ed Meitner, at its Calgary headquarters, the XDS1 is a fresh design from the ground up. And in line with EMM Labs previous professional and domestic audio equipment, the mechanical and electronic design of the player is aimed at keeping jitter and power supply noise to an absolute minimum.

Inside the 17kg aluminium chassis is TEAC/Esoteric's latest all-metal mechanism. Keeping jitter levels right down in the MDAT DSP and new fourth-generation dual DSD DACs is the low-noise X-Power power supply, whose switching is totally synchronous with the masterclock, which reduces power supply-induced jitter. A first for EMM Labs are the PCM inputs (AES/SPDIF and TOSLink), which allow the player to be used as a standalone converter. While these inputs currently accept signals up to 24-bit/96kHz, a forthcoming software update will make the machine 24-bit/192kHz compatible.

In the analogue domain, all circuitry from DACs to outputs is constructed from discrete components in a dual-balanced, low-feedback, class A arrangement. Again, minimising supply noise was one of the main design goals. This has been implemented in triple-filtered, modular power supplies, including those for the custom line-drivers, which are able to handle tough loads like long runs of capacitive cabling (either XLR balanced or RCA unbalanced) and passive line stages. Supplied with a matching, machined remote control, the XDS1 will be made available in limited numbers in either silver or black finishes. See our next issue for an exclusive review.

**Price** £18,995 **Due now** ☎ 01273 700759 🌐 [www.emmlabs.com](http://www.emmlabs.com)

## ARCUS MEDIA SERVERS

➤ From autumn 2009, a range of three media servers will be coming to the UK from German manufacturer Arcus. The company, which started out 30 years ago as a two-channel audio company, has now added to its line-up the MusicStation (£1,295), AudioServer (£2,749) and MediaServer (£4,495).

For those looking for a one-box set-up, the MusicStation (pictured) is available with hard drives in a range of capacities, onto which CDs can be automatically ripped through the slot-loading mechanism. Compression ratios for MP3s vary from 128kbps through to 320kbps, while .wav is the lossless format supported by the hardware. The internal 60-watt stereo amps can also accept signals from a single external analogue input and there are both analogue and digital outputs.

Like the MusicStation, the AudioServer offers MP3 and .wav storage of CDs, but it swaps inbuilt amplification for ethernet connectivity to enable Internet media access. Most capable of the three is the audio/video MediaServer. This device possesses Blu-ray and DVD video support in addition to audio, in both 1080p HD and XQGA formats.

**Price:** from £1,295 - £4,495 **Due:** now ☎ 07850 063776

🌐 [www.arcus-highend.de](http://www.arcus-highend.de)



## BOWERS & WILKINS ZEPPELIN MINI

➤ For iPod users looking for a smaller alternative to Bowers and Wilkins' head-turning Zeppelin, there is now the Zeppelin Mini. One of the key updates in the Mini is its USB connectivity, which allows it to bypass the analogue output of any iPod, providing the best possible sound quality from a digital data stream, converted using the Mini's upgraded DSP and converter chips. The provision of a USB socket also means the dock is able to stream music direct from a PC or Mac.

Under the sleek exterior are additional changes in driver technology and docking arm, which can now be rotated through 90 degrees to accommodate wide-screen video viewing.

**Price:** £299 **Due:** now ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 [www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk](http://www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk)

## MARANTZ SA-15S2/PM-15S2 ❖❖

➤ Marantz has upgraded the £1,700 SA-15S2 SACD player and its matching integrated amplifier to new Series 2 status.

Although the casework of the former is virtually unchanged, the modifications under the lid are said to be based on engineering lessons learned from the construction of the company's flagship SA-7S1 player.

The SACDM-10 mechanism features an extruded aluminium chassis for precise disc-tracking by the laser head, whose signal is processed and then fed to a 24-bit/192kHz Cirrus Logic CS4398 DAC. The main alteration to the power supply has been a move from an EI mains transformer to a toroidal.

The heart of the PM-15S2 amplifier has also been updated; the original toroidal replaced by a larger unit, which has lower-impedance windings providing 90 watts per channel. In addition, the small-signal stages benefit from the new SA3 Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules, with slew rates and signal-to-noise ratios said to be higher than those usually found in audio op-amps.

**Price:** £1,700 each **Due:** now ☎ 02890 279830

🌐 [www.marantz.com](http://www.marantz.com)



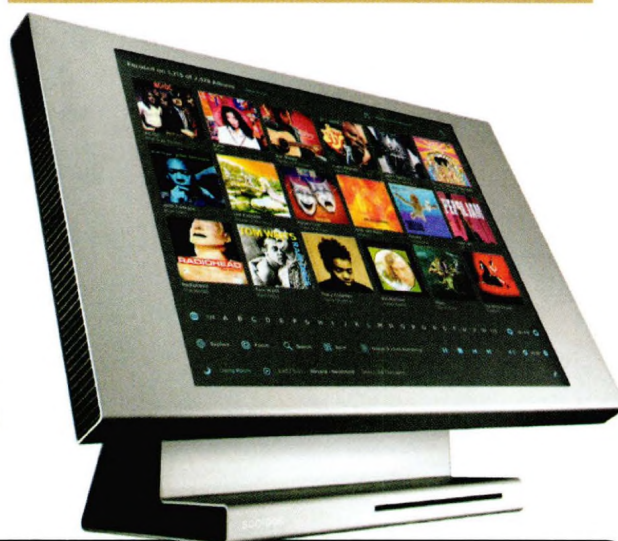
## MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.0 ❖❖

➤ After three years of closely scrutinising customer feedback, Meridian has released its updated Sooloos 2.0 media-management system, with changes ranging from simple interface enhancements to major improvements in system capabilities, zone playback and hardware options.

One of the more fundamental alterations is to the system architecture is its ability to handle hundreds of thousands of files with amazing speed and flexibility.

System simplification means a Sooloos system can now be built with just two components, a TwinStore (with its dual 1TB hard drives) and a Control Ten, the latter's SpeakerLink connectable directly to Meridian DSP loudspeakers. On the other hand, thanks to the addition of local streaming, the web browser (Firefox, Internet Explorer or Safari) on any Mac, Windows or Linux PC can access and control the system and the computer speakers used to play music.

**Price:** £3,995 (Control Ten); £1,995 (TwinStore) plus £293 (2 x 1TB HDDs) **Due:** now ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 [www.meridian-audio.com](http://www.meridian-audio.com)



## UNISON RESEARCH S9 ❖❖❖

➤ Professor Sacchetti of Italian firm Unison Research has been hard at work developing the company's latest single-ended triode amplifier, the S9 integrated. Eschewing stalwart transmitter valves such as the 845 and 811, the S9 instead features the directly heated Russian SV572 valve, produced by Svetlana.

Despite the glass envelope's relatively small size, the parallel single-ended output stage produces 35 watts per channel. With only 9dB of negative feedback, the S9 still has a power bandwidth of 30Hz to 50kHz. Optimising the bias of the output stage as the valves age is under manual control, with a precision analogue meter displaying bias current, although the titanium coating of the graphite anode also promises longevity thanks to its inherent gettering.

The power supply has come in for particular scrutiny in the S9, with the heaters having their own dedicated supplies, including Schottky diodes. On top of this, the anode voltage of over 1kV has no less than 8,000uF of filtering, which contributes to the amp's 47kg weight.

**Price:** £7,000 **Due:** now ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 [www.ukd.co.uk](http://www.ukd.co.uk)



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*"Never before have I experienced solid-state and digital components with the rich and lifelike tone colors I'm hearing here, or ones with the kind of transparency that allows you to imagine you're "seeing" into a recording and "around" the players and their instruments."*

**Wayne Garcia** Source: The Absolute Sound  
MBL 5011, MBL 1521, MBL 1511



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- Finance available on all products

\* terms & conditions apply

## GOLDRING LEGACY

Goldring, manufacturer of classic cartridges such as the 1042MM, has just released what it considers its statement cartridge. The Legacy is a moving-coil design, whose output signal is produced by hand-wound coils of high-purity copper, sitting within a field generated by rare earth, neodymium-iron-boron magnets. The assembly is housed within a magnesium body to ensure rigid coupling to the tonearm and minimal unwanted resonance, with mounting simplified thanks to threaded inserts. Attached to the end of the hard alloy cantilever is a Vital fine-line stylus, chosen for its low mass and low distortion.

**Price** £595 **Due now** ☎ 01279 501111

🌐 [www.goldring.co.uk](http://www.goldring.co.uk)



## YOUTUBE MUSIC IS BACK

After a six-month absence, music returns to YouTube in the UK following the resolution of a controversial copyright dispute. In March, YouTube blocked UK access to premium music clips posted by major record companies after failing to reach a new deal with the Performing Rights Society (PRS) on what royalties should be paid to songwriters and artists



whenever their videos were viewed. YouTube had claimed that the PRS wanted to set a much higher figure for royalties payable than had previously been in place, while the PRS stated that the opposite was true. The solution took the form of a single, undisclosed lump sum to be paid by YouTube to the PRS to cover the licensing of music video replay from now until 2012.

## JAMES THIEL 1947-2009

On Thursday the 18th September, Jim Thiel, co-founder of Thiel Audio Products of Lexington, Kentucky, sadly lost his battle with cancer at the age of just 63.



The respected loudspeaker designer traced his love of music and interest in electronics back to his childhood, when he first kindled his lifelong passion for the piano and began building and repairing radios and other electronic equipment. His interest in audio gear was reinforced by academic experience gained in the fields of physics and mathematics, with a particular focus on time and phase accuracy in loudspeaker design.

He established his company in 1976, his enthusiasm for his products meaning he was always happy to explain, concisely, patiently and comprehensively, the concepts behind his designs to dealers and reviewers alike. Jim was particularly well known amongst the American press. Anthony Cordesman of *The Absolute Sound* commented: "Anyone who dealt with Jim Thiel had to admire his firm dedication to real-world engineering and his equal concern that the end result sounded as much like live music as possible. He was truly dedicated to advancing the state of the art in loudspeakers. He exemplified all the best in the high end."

## BEATS SOLO

Monster, well known purveyor of cables and other audio items, is extending its collaboration with Beats by Dr Dre with the release of the new £150 Beats Solo supra-aural headphones. Described as a smaller version of the original Beats, the new design involved engineering a smaller, lighter driver and then adding ControlTalk capability, which allows users to manage their iPods from an in-cable controller.

**Price** £150 **Due now** ☎ 01923 693766

🌐 [www.monstercable.com](http://www.monstercable.com)



## Soundbites

**IXOS** has recently announced that its wide range of hi-fi accessories, including speaker and power cables as well as headphones, can now be bought online ([www.ixos.co.uk](http://www.ixos.co.uk)). Not only will the web site provide the online details of your nearest IXOS dealer if you prefer to buy on the spot, it will also offer its entire range of products regardless of where buyers are based.

☎ 01844 219000

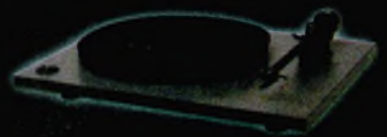
**PURE**, the UK-based manufacturer of DAB and Internet connected radios, has announced four new components. The Elan II and Siesta Flow both sell for £100, but the former is a fully featured DAB radio, while the Siesta Flow includes Internet connectivity. At the same price are the Chronos iDock Series II DAB/FM clock radio with iPod and iPhone dock, and the Chronos CD Series II DAB/FM clock radio with CD player.

☎ 08451 489001



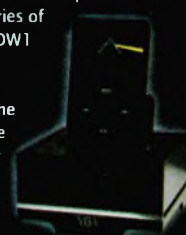
**NAD** has some good news for vinylphiles, having reduced the price of its C552 turntable. Complete with Ortofon OM5E cartridge, AC synchronous motor and solid MDF platter, this unsuspended belt-drive deck can now be had for £275 instead of £360.

☎ 01279 501111



**YBA** the Parisian high-end audio specialist has extended its Design series of AV products with the iDW1 iPod docking station. Constructed from non-magnetic aluminium, the dock features the Apple Universal connector for compatibility with the iPhone, iPhone 3G and Nano. Price £149

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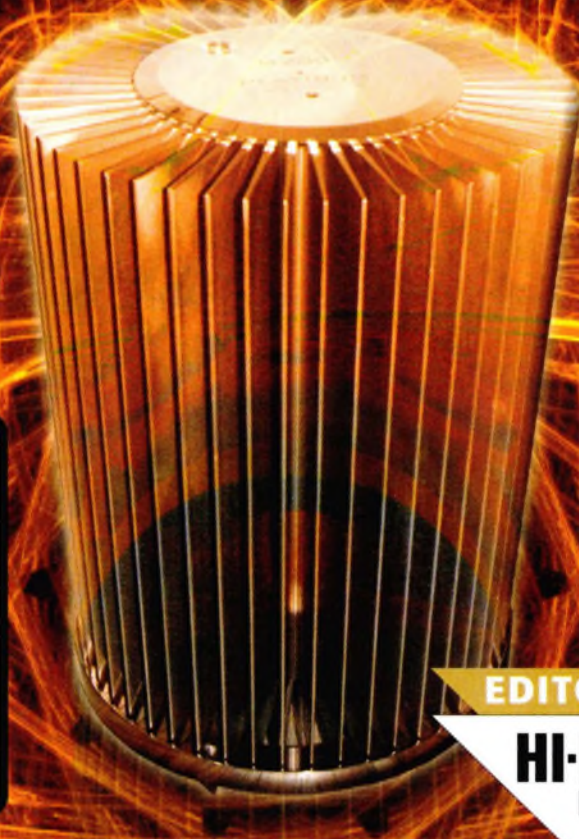


**ERRATUM** Last month (*HFC 325*), we reviewed Yamaha's MCS-1330 CD player and amplifier. Unfortunately, the price of £995 shown in the review was the price for the system including loudspeakers. The price for the CD player and amplifier alone (as reviewed) is £750. As a result, the verdict for Value rises from four to five stars and the Overall Score rises from three to four.

Also in last month's *Highlights* section (page 10), we incorrectly referred to the new Naim DAC as the Naim Zero S.

# msb TECHNOLOGY

Platinum Mono 200 Amplifier - the amplifier others try to beat..



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AWARDS  
2009  
FINALIST**

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**

**HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine**



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**CHRIS BRYANT, HIFI CRITIC ISSUE #12**

" I've listened to many of the world's best amplifiers over the last 25 years. Some have been brilliant when carefully partnered with ancillary equipment and loudspeakers that suited their capabilities, and it hasn't always been the most expensive that have shown greatness. But here is one from a little known brand that has delivered superior performance to all others I have heard so far, and which is also capable of driving difficult speaker loads to high levels. "

**PAUL MESSENGER, HI-FI CHOICE AUG 09**

**" It's quite difficult to discuss the sound of an amplifier that is, quite simply, the best that we've heard to date. "**

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## Richard Black

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

## Technology

### The importance of damping

A recent discussion on the *Hi-Fi Choice* forum ([forum.hifichoice.co.uk](http://forum.hifichoice.co.uk)) brought up the issue of damping material for filling speaker stands. Various contributors weighed in with suggestions for lead shot, proprietary fillers (Atacama's 'Atabytes' and so on), kiln-dried sand and, yes, cat litter – preferably unused, I gather. There's no doubt that all of these work in reducing the resonance to which metal stands are generally prone. But what is damping, why is it necessary and is there a downside?

Resonance is a wonderful thing, responsible for the functioning of all musical instruments, including the human voice. Important as it may be in making music, it can be a right bind in reproducing it. Resonance is the phenomenon where an object vibrates preferentially at one or more specific frequencies, excited by some outside source of vibrational energy and carrying on after the source has stopped. An obvious example would be plucking a guitar string. Damping is what stops resonance: any means of taking energy out of the resonating object and converting it to heat, in general.

Most musical instruments don't really benefit in obvious ways from damping, except when they are consciously stopped by the player at the end of the note. As a pianist, I spend half my life trying to get round the unavoidable fact that piano notes are to some extent damped and, therefore, decay. One of the most important factors that encourages piano buyers to spend tens of thousands on a high-grade instrument is that notes resonate for longer, giving much greater beauty of tone. But introduce resonance into a sound reproduction system and it will play merry hell with the sound,

prolonging the duration of notes that were deliberately damped by the performers.

Steel loudspeaker stands can resonate very efficiently, as you'll have noticed if you've ever handled one before it's filled. Just tap it and a note will sound and ring on for as much as several seconds. When the stand is filled with damping material, though, the note will die so quickly that you can hardly hear it. This happens because the damping filler contacts the metal of the stand at lots of points in a rather random sort of way, each particle conducting some vibrational energy away from the metal. Some of that energy is transferred to other particles, but it's all done in a very lossy way due to the irregular contact and friction between the particles, so very quickly the energy is converted to heat.

Similar things happen in the case of acoustic damping, for instance inside a loudspeaker cabinet, where long, irregular fibres fill the space. The sound waves in the air inside the cabinet make the fibres move, but the way they contact each other quickly dissipates their movement in heat, damping the sound waves rapidly.

Is there such a thing as 'too much damping'? Only if so much damping material is added that it defeats its own purpose. Jamming too much material in, especially under pressure, can make it behave more like a solid lump rather than lots of little bits and process of conversion becomes less efficient. Of course, some listeners like a bit of added resonance, hence the popularity in some circles of removing damping from speakers. In general, however, system damping is a thoroughly good thing. **HFC**

Is there any argument for cat litter? Unused, of course

"Resonance is a wonderful thing, responsible for the functioning of all musical instruments, including the human voice."



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# Kulwinder *Singh Rai*

**Kulwinder Singh Rai** had a 14-year career in consumer electronics and motoring journalism, before setting up his own hi-fi/AV PR consultancy in 2002

## Trainspotters unite

Are we audiophiles a privileged elitist group of sophisticates, or just a bunch of hi-fi anoraks?

**"...it's the music that enriches our existence, not the kit."**

**C**'mon, cards on the table... just between us, does your other half understand your obsession with hi-fi? And, assuming you've sired a few, how about your sprogs? What's the expression that crosses their face(s) when you announce that you're going to have 'a listening session'? Resigned boredom mixed with a slight but visible dash of horror, or beaming countenances, gilded with eager anticipation. Far be it from me to prejudge, but based on my personal experience (and having spent a lifetime in the company of other audiophiles) I'm betting it's more likely to be the former rather than the latter...

The truth is, our passion is generally a hobby traditionally indulged alone, circumstances in which one can better connect with it on a deeper, personal level. If one's taste in music is, shall we say, somewhat eclectic then solo participation is often an enforced pre-requisite as domestic harmony tends to suffer otherwise. But you already know this, don't you?

There comes a time, however, when we all need to ask an uncomfortable question of ourselves. Have we become pre-occupied with hardware for its own sake rather than for the richer musical experience that hi-fi reproduction allows us to access? Has our interest become too exclusive?

This is a bad thing. Music is woven into the fabric of our daily lives, whether one is consciously aware of it or not. But it's the music that enriches our existence, not the kit. Audiophile-grade hi-fi is an enabling tool that allows you to heighten the pleasure you gain from music, but ultimately it is just that... a tool. It's the music that ought, nay, needs, to matter. If you've forgotten that then it's time to make amends to yourself, your kith and, most important of all, your kin.

How? Well, first, choose a sunny day. Ignore all your audiophile sensibilities and position your

speakers near the windows. Next, ask your friends/family/neighbours what music they would like to hear...

If they've got the appropriate silver frisbees great. If not go online, assemble a few hours worth of music on a (free) Spotify playlist and hook up your PC/Mac to your painstakingly assembled replay system. OK, if you're going down the PC/Mac route you'll be insulting your amplifier with a low-flying 160 kbit/Ogg Vorbis q5 codec. But wait... you haven't heard stage two of the plan.

Now wheel out that dusty old barbie mouldering in the shed. Wheel the guests in and slide ice-cold beverages into their hands before the immolation process begins and then, and only then, press play.

Yup, there'll be artefacts (Spotify has an excellent paid-for, ad-free 320kbps option too), occasional drop-outs, a compressed dynamic range and you might want to mute things quick when the ads appear. But that's pretty much it for downsides. The sheer variety of music on offer will enervate you.

But the biggest upside is that you'll spend a few hours engaged in conversation with people who will suddenly appreciate your presence in their lives. You will all eat well, drink merrily and, partly thanks to your audiophile system, genuinely enjoy the soundtrack that accompanied one unforgettably glorious, sun-drenched moment in time.

That, dear reader, is what your hi-fi system could and rightfully should be doing for you. Wield it well and hi-fi can be truly life-affirming. And not just for you. Your kids might still think you're a bit of a saddo, but I bet they'll recall their 'choons sounded pretty spesh that day and maybe they'll listen to Dad's 'rig' again when they get a second. From small acorns... **HFC**



+



+



**Audiophile happiness is a barbie and a wide range of downloaded music**



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## Jimmy Hughes

*Jimmy Hughes has more than 40 years as an enthusiast under his belt with a knowledge of hi-fi tweaking and record collecting unmatched in the industry*

### Burning in...

Setting up your hi-fi kit can be a daunting task with so many variables to affect the outcome

**"It's difficult to separate what we actually hear, from what we think we hear and expect to hear."**

It's the moment of truth – that all-important first time you listen to a new component or system. You've spent shed loads of money; the stakes are high. But, what if that anticipated 'upgrade' turns out to be a terrible disappointment?

Every hi-fi dealer dreads installing hi-fi. Of course, it's fascinating to hear how stuff performs in people's homes. But it can be puzzling, not to say downright embarrassing, when things sound less-good than anticipated.

Often, there's no clear reason why the sound disappoints – it just does. What wasn't appreciated until comparatively recently is how much time it needs to 'burn-in' – it might not sound right for tens (or even hundreds) of hours.

When I first got into hi-fi, no one – retailers or reviewers realised this. We naively expected equipment to sound great from the off.

All this was thrown into sharp relief when I reviewed the PrimaLuna ProLogue Eight CD player, Krell S300i integrated amplifier and Sonus faber Luito Tower loudspeakers for last issue's *Beautiful Systems* feature (HFC 325).

I initially sampled the CD player and loudspeakers using my regular amplifier and found they 'settled' quite quickly. However, when I installed the Krell amp, the sound went from smooth and natural, to bright and steely sharp.

But then, over a period of four or five days, the sound gradually relaxed and lost its brightness as the amp burnt-in. After ten days, things became well-balanced, natural and nicely integrated – a sound I could happily live with.

However, in reality, what changed? Did the amplifier really burn-in? Or was it down to the various components getting used to each other? Alternatively, was it me that changed? Did I simply acclimatise to the sound of the new system?

There's a definite learning process here. We grow accustomed to the sound of our hi-fi systems – sometimes to the point of no longer perceiving fairly serious flaws.

Often, it's only when we eliminate a problem, that we realise something was wrong.

Prior to that, things had seemed fine. The brain does such a lot of 'processing', pure objective evaluation is almost impossible. It's like being in a room with a bad smell – after a while, you no longer notice. This creates a subjective minefield.

Truth is, we rarely hear things as they really are. Everything we 'hear' is filtered and interpreted via our brains. Reality is clouded by expectation, anticipation, and (sadly), reputation. We're all hugely prejudiced.

It's difficult to separate what we actually hear, from what we think we hear and expect to hear. That's why *Hi-Fi Choice's* 'blind' listening tests are so interesting – and potentially embarrassing. Unable to engage our prejudices, we're forced to focus on what's there.

This doesn't just apply to equipment. It covers music and the people playing it. Our response to music and its performance is also tainted by prejudice. Our enjoyment and acceptance is heavily influenced by whether or not we rate the composer and/or musician(s). With recordings, our response is even conditioned by the record label.

Alas, a Big Name doesn't automatically guarantee every performance (or every composition) is genuinely worthy of that particular individual's reputation or genius. But are you objective enough to tell the genuine from the counterfeit?

I like this story about Picasso. One day, the great man was looking through a bunch of pictures attributed to him. 'Fake; Fake; Fake; Genuine: Fake; Fake...' Suddenly, someone standing nearby stopped him.

'Hang on, the drawing you just dismissed as a fake, I actually saw you do that one myself'. To which the great artist replied 'I too can fake a Picasso!' **HFC**



**Beautiful Systems:** Last issue's Krell/Sonus faber/Prima Luna set-up

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- What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision November 2009

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
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## Malcolm Steward

Malcolm Steward was one of the country's best-known hi-fi reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. His intolerance to less than gripping sound systems is legendary.

# Doing the arithmetic

Naim's DAC has a language all of its own...

"At that point my brain shouted 'What on earth is this guy talking about? Arithmetic noise: what the heck is that?'"

I was feeling rather jaded and world-weary before I went to Naim for the launch of its first ever standalone DAC. There were not going to be review samples ready to take away at the event so as I drove down to Salisbury my thoughts started to become increasingly negative: why was I bothering to make this trip when the most I could expect was a pleasant lunch and a bit of amusing chat? Forgive me if that sounds cynical, but my morose disposition made me think that I should really begin regarding my time as a more precious commodity.

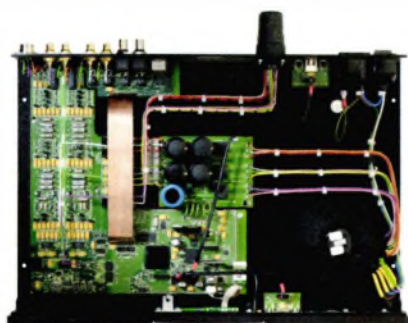
Nonetheless, and true to form, Naim delivered the goods: not in any physical format but in terms of mental stimulation. The assembled press were addressed by Principal Engineer, Hjalmar Nilsson, a ferociously intelligent, tall, young Swede who has come to work at Naim. This man is clever with a capital F. One of his party tricks was paring down the already minimalist code that drives the DAC's SHARC processor, which Naim uses as the digital filter to do all manner of mind-boggling stuff with the data passing through the typically prosaic-looking black box.

At one point he said "...of course, we could do no more because we started to run into problems with arithmetic noise..." Whoa! At that point my brain did a tyre-smoking handbrake turn and shouted: "What on earth is this guy talking about? Arithmetic noise: what the heck is that?" I have spoken to a great many manufacturers about DAC technology and none have ever mentioned 'arithmetic noise', so I had to find out what this phenomenon was. Nilsson then went on to talk of being able to measure the mechanical noise that one could introduce into DAC circuits merely by breathing upon the components... which prompted me to ask, tongue firmly in cheek, of course, if the Naim DAC had undergone wind-tunnel testing. Now, I can just about get my head around the concept of atomic changes in a resistor affecting the signal passing through it, but errors in

arithmetic introducing noise? This makes me even more certain that there are whole crate-loads of unknown considerations that still surround digital, no matter how much some 'experts' think they have the entire subject sorted and profess otherwise. Identical data-streams must sound the same because Bits is Bits? I don't think so.

In Janet and John language, it boils down to this: the Naim DAC's digital filtering has to output a very high-resolution data-stream to the actual DAC chips. As these are 24-bit, the signal coming from the SHARC DSP, that Naim uses to implement the digital filter, has to be able to resolve signal levels of -144dB, which is the value of a 24-bit system's Least Significant Bit. Any rounding errors in the filter's arithmetic need to be small enough to fall below this so as not to affect the eventual sound quality. With the recursive filtering that the system employs any errors can be fed back to the input and so introduce even more mistakes into subsequent computations, increasing the arithmetic inaccuracy or noise. So it is vital that one gets it right (The Naim processor can, in fact, resolve signals down to -156dB, and this additional headroom probably explains why it sounds so open and transparent).

That is, to me, a fascinating bit of science/mathematics even if it is about as easy for me to comprehend as anti-matter. So now, rather than feeling jaded I am feeling rejuvenated... intellectually, at least. It is refreshing to know that one can still learn something even as one approaches one's autumnal years. Mind you, the friend who was - 25 years ago - the Best Man at my wedding, and who is just approaching his sixty-fifth birthday, sports a magnificent Mohican haircut and drives a lightweight Mitsubishi Evo, which proves that there can be plenty of life left in us supposedly old dogs. Ennui be gone! **HFC**



Naim's new DAC naked



BRYSTON BCD-1 CD PLAYER | BRYSTON BP26 PREAMP | BRYSTON 4B SST2 POWER AMPLIFIER |  
PMC PB11 LOUDSPEAKERS | £15,670

# Colonial Ties

*A British loudspeaker meets Canadian electronics*

**W**hat links Stevie Wonder, Robbie Williams, Coldplay, Tony Bennet, Bryan Ferry, Robert Fripp, Peter Gabriel, Francis Rossi, Tori Amos, Brian May and John Rutter?

Avid readers of *Hi-Fi Choice*, perhaps, or maybe it's because they're all enthusiastic users of PMC loudspeakers? An appreciation shared by the likes of the BBC, Deutsche Grammophon, Decca, EMI, Warner Music, Harmonia Mundi, Teldexstudios, etc, etc.

It's an impressive roll-call of musos and recording industry movers and shakers, covering just about everything – from rock to classical, not to mention Hollywood film studios. Clearly, PMC loudspeakers are something rather special then?

The system reviewed here is no exception including, as it does, PMC's PB1i – a tall three-way floorstander featuring four drive units. It's an interesting design, with transmission line loading for the twin bass drivers and fourth-order Linkwitz Riley filters for the crossover.

PMC is also the UK distributor for Canada's Bryston electronics and the

For vinyl replay, there's the BP26P or BP26MC (both £4,945 each) featuring a phono stage for magnetic or moving coil cartridges. If you have extra digital sources, there's the BP26DA (£4,945) which handles two digital components via a built-in DAC.

The DAC has sampling rates between 16kHz to 108kHz, with word lengths of 16, 18, 20, or 24 bit. Data format is SPDIF. Incidentally, the preamp's DAC is for other digital sources – it's not meant to be used in place of the BCD-1's internal DAC.

## LAST THINGS FIRST

Although this is very much a system review, we always like to sample one or two components individually before putting them all together. We initially tried the PMC loudspeakers in our own system and first impressions were good.

The PB1i produces a very clean, neutral sort of tonal balance. The music sounds detailed and extremely clear, while at the same time absolutely homogenous.

The top-end is crisp and sharp, but completely integrated with the midrange. The fast attack of percussion

**“As a system, the combination gives excellent clarity and detail, while at the same time sounding tonally neutral and well-balanced.”**

firms enjoy a close relationship. In fact, PMC uses Bryston electronics in its active studio loudspeaker range.

Given this link between the brands, partnering the PB1i's with Bryston's BCD1 CD player and BP26 preamp/300-watt 4B SST2 power amp, was a no-brainer. But it's more than just a marriage of convenience – it's a combination that works.

The 4B SST2 power amp produces 300 watts into eight ohms and can be bridged to give a massive 900 watts into eight ohms. The BP26 preamp is available in three variants, with the basic BP26 offering just line level analogue inputs.

is hugely impressive. Transients seem to come from nowhere with amazing clarity and attack.

While listening to a piece of music, for example, with smooth vocals and strings, a sudden sharp cymbal crash surprises with its crisp immediacy – its focus and precision.

The quality of the individual speaker drivers is a factor here, but also the 31 element crossover, which uses fourth-order filters with a steep 24dB/octave roll-off. It means each driver covers a narrower portion of the frequency range with less overlap.

The 'downside' is that the crossover has to be more carefully designed to ▶



**Bryston BCD-1 CD player**  
£2,500

CD player featuring a 24bit/192kHz, 128 times oversampling DAC, plus digital and analogue power supplies



**Bryston BP26 preamp**  
£3,670

Has option of a phono stage or built-in DAC. Offers two balanced and four unbalanced line inputs.



**Bryston 4B SST2 power amp**  
£4,000

Offers 300 watts per channel into eight ohms. Has provision for unbalanced and balanced operation. 20-year warranty.



**PMC PB1i loudspeaker**  
£5,500

Floorstander with four drive units. Transmission line loading gives extended bass. Sensitivity: 87dB/1W



create the impression of a seamless flow from deep bass to high treble. But PMC seems to have managed that and claim that its complex crossover is not a difficult load to drive.

The PB1i sound is surprisingly good when played at low volume levels, but get even better when played loud. These speakers offer excellent control; things don't fall apart or get ragged as dynamic levels increase.

The bass is outstandingly full and deep for what is a relatively small cabinet. The bottom end is superbly tight and controlled – and remarkably clean, too. You only notice bass when it's there – and then the power and depth can be surprising.

Sensitivity is 87dB for one watt, which is reasonably efficient. With 300 watts output, the Bryston 4B SST2 has enough muscle to drive the speakers to quite high levels sufficient for most tastes.

The 4B SST2 can be bridged and two power amps used in a dual-mono arrangement – one for each channel. It's an option that offers greatly increased power (from 300 watts to 900 watts) and much better sound quality.

The CD player and pre/power amps can be connected via normal unbalanced cables using RCA-type phono plugs. However, provision is

also made for balanced working using XLR connectors.

Balanced gives superior sound quality, with greater dynamics and a noticeably bigger fuller sound. If you go down this route, cable costs will probably be higher, but the difference in sound quality should be worthwhile.

Using balanced cables between pre and power amp will enable you to situate the power amps close to the speakers (keeping speaker cables short), with no chance of noise or interference being picked up due to long cable runs.

The PB1i has three pairs of linked-connection terminals, thereby making provision for bi- or tri-wiring – and bi-/tri-amping. However, while bi- or tri-amping is an option, owners of two 4B SST2s will get better results using their amps bridged.

#### SAUCE FROM YOUR SOURCE

The source component of this system is Bryston's BCD-1 – a Red Book CD player featuring a Crystal CS4398 Delta-Sigma 24bit/192kHz DAC with 128 times oversampling. It also has discrete Class A, fully balanced analogue output circuits.

There are independent power supplies for analogue and digital, to ensure each is kept clean and noise-free and the

makers claim great care has been taken to reduce levels of digital jitter to extremely low levels.

Certainly, the BCD-1 delivers a strong clear sound that is extremely detailed and clean. Even used unbalanced, it impresses with a combination of presence and scale. Used balanced, you get an even bigger soundstage with added depth and space.

As a system, the combination gives excellent clarity and detail, while at the same time sounding tonally neutral and well-balanced. Recordings that can sound thick and dull are rendered with surprising transparency.

Musically, the Bryston/PMC combination produces a very engaging result that sounds lively and informative. The music has presence and good forward momentum, yet there is no sense of exaggeration or emphasis.

#### THE SECRET OF GOOD TIMING

The timing of the system is superb. Playing the Labeque sisters' two-piano arrangement of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, we were impressed by the way the system handled the tricky cross-rhythms.

Vocals sound full-bodied and smooth, while massed violins are silky and mellow. Yet, percussion has surprising impact and bite. It's this broad range of







**“Although having professional studios endorse your loudspeaker is an impressive accolade, what an engineer looks for is not necessarily what a home listener wants.”**

contrasts that impressed us the most, enabling the system to do justice to a wide range of music.

PMC claim the PB1i bottom-end goes down to about 24Hz – far deeper than most ported or sealed designs of similar size. Of greater importance is the quality of the bass – solid, firm and controlled, without seeming dry or over-damped.

The speakers are designed to give a wide dispersion – which eliminates the ‘sweet spot’ directionality you get with certain models. Imaging is nonetheless precise and detailed – not as laser-sharp as some, but very natural.

Because the bass is so clean and controlled and the dispersion so even and wide, the PB1i should be less sensitive to positioning – less affected by the constraints of ‘difficult’ rooms with awkward acoustics – compared to many other loudspeakers.

Although having professional studios use and endorse your loudspeaker is an impressive accolade, it’s as well to appreciate that what an engineer looks

for in a speaker is not necessarily what a home listener wants.

Some ‘monitor’-type speakers are used by studios because they reveal tiny flaws and blemishes. They hold a magnifying glass to the recording, exposing faults that might otherwise go unnoticed.

**REVEALING**

The PMC PB1i is certainly revealing, but not in a destructive, negative sense. It’s sharp and lucid – qualities that allow you to hear faults, if faults exist.

At the same time it doesn’t exaggerate limitations and shortcomings. It’s also good at reproducing what’s right with a recording – showing the positive rewarding aspects – rather than simply highlighting faults.

Here is a system that sounds natural and ‘right’ more or less from the off. It invites you to forget about hi-fi in order to concentrate on the music. And isn’t that what most of us want from a hi-fi system?

The system is very good as supplied, yet can be upgraded and improved by going from unbalanced to balanced operation. You could also add a second power amp for bridged operation and/or a PMC subwoofer for extra-deep low frequencies.

**20 YEARS HARD LABOUR**

Bryston is so confident about the quality and reliability of its electronics, it offers an amazing 20-year warranty against failure. Beat that!

This Bryston/PMC combination is, without doubt, a winner, delivering crisp clean sound with no coloration and complete naturalness.

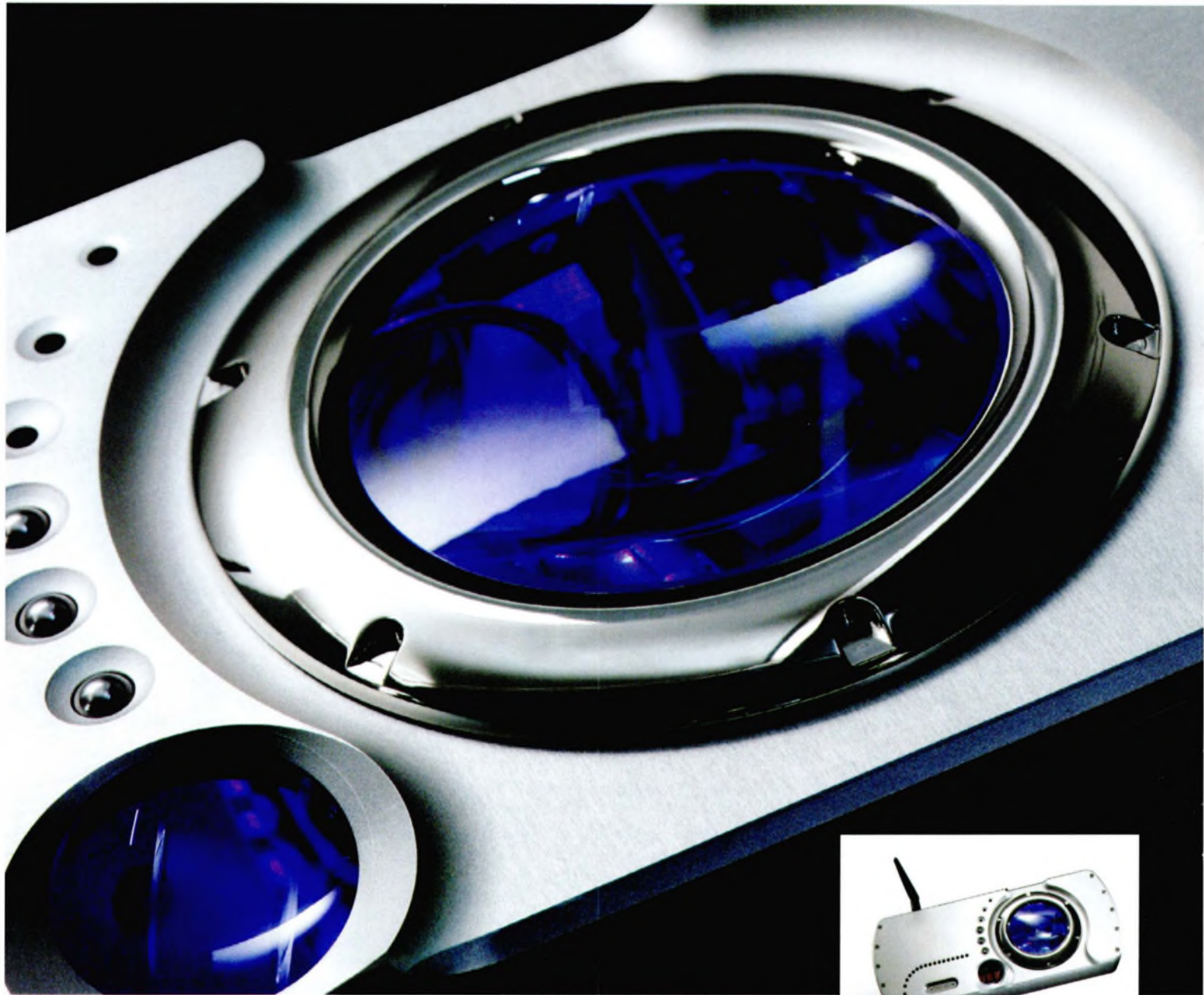
But maybe the last word should be left to one Francis Rossi of Status Quo, who described PMC loudspeakers as ‘F\*\*\*ing brilliant’.

We had similar thoughts about this amazing system. So, thank you Francis – we certainly couldn’t have put it better ourselves... **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*



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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

- 28** Pioneer PD-D9 Mk2 CD/SACD player
- 34** Wharfedale Diamond 10.5 floorstanding loudspeaker
- 39** Monitor Audio AirStream 10 Internet/DAB/FM radio
- 41** iBasso D10 Cobra DAC/headphone amplifier



## OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

...nor an... we liked point here is... to the job of... recommend you... after a listener... w tubes shone... through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable... fidence and ease. It even seems to be

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

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

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 four or more stars may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

## OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



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Editor's Choice

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

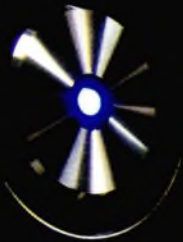
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Pioneer

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PURE AUDIO



SR

# Studio sound

The new and improved version of the Pioneer's D9 will offend few ears

**PRODUCT** Pioneer PD-D9 Mk2

**TYPE** CD/SACD player

**PRICE** £850

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 42x11.5x34cm  
 Ⓞ Weight: 11kg Ⓞ Outputs: Unbalanced audio (phono sockets), electrical and optical phono Ⓞ Compatibility: SACD, CD, MP3, WMA Ⓞ Options 'Pure Audio', Legato Link Pro, display dimmer

**CONTACT** ☎ 01753 789789 # www.pioneer.co.uk

Pioneer's relationship with high-quality hi-fi separates has been a little on-and-off over recent years. In the wake of the famous A-400 amp there have been plenty of models that many fondly remember and enthusiastically use including several CD player and recorder models. The company filled something of a hi-fi vacuum a couple of years ago with the 'G-clef' range of amps and SACD players, which were designed with considerable UK input, including fine-tuning at Air Studios in North London, the facility run by 'fifth Beatle' George Martin.

Those models have recently been revised and re-released in 'Mk 2' form, including the A-A9 Mk2 amplifier which features in next month's *Ultimate Group Test*. But here we're considering its obvious partner, the more upmarket of two SACD players (the other is the PD-D6 – watch this space for a review soon).

The PD-D9 is instantly recognisable to anyone who ever saw the original D9, not least from the unusual front-panel design, but also from the display (which has actually changed slightly, being a different colour and rather easier to read off-axis) and the unusually small number of front-panel controls.

Yes, you'll find just two buttons here. One opens and closes the tray, while the other

alternates between Play and Stop. We complained about this last time and we'll say it again. No means of selecting tracks from the front panel is horribly, damnably irritating. Having no search facility is annoying enough, but it's so common we've got used to it. But needing a remote to find a track is beyond the pale. As you have to walk up to the player to insert a disc, you are likely to use front-panel buttons to start play. But quite often, you'll want to start by playing a track other than Track 1, so you might as well do that from the front panel, too. Minimalism is all very well, but not when it impedes handling.

All right, enough whining. The player's build and specification is otherwise very good. It's a heavy unit, thanks in part to a reinforced base that should help reduce unwanted mechanical

**“This is a player that enjoys its music and isn't unduly fussy. It's not entirely devoid of opinions though...”**

vibration. The sides and top are also strong and non-resonant. The transport is brisk and responsive for an SACD-type and reads discs in about eight seconds. Internally, there is a well-specified power supply with two R-core transformers, one for analogue and one for digital circuits, plus a much smaller standby transformer. There's also plenty of screening around to keep digital signals and mains hum out of harm's way. The digital outputs are placed alone on copper-plated screen between them and the audio parts. If that's not enough, you can switch them and the display off entirely with the 'Pure Audio' function engaged.

The audio functions are achieved by an impressive array of recent integrated circuits, starting with a sample-rate converter chip, which upsamples CD audio to 176.4kHz. Conversion to analogue is carried out using a pair of Wolfson's latest and highest-performance parts, operating in parallel mode to give a small improvement in distortion and signal-to-noise ratio. Analogue filtering and output buffering is done by high-grade op-amps, for which Pioneer has selected through-hole parts. All the others are only available as surface-mounted. Passive component quality is good, too with through-hole resistors in key positions and the power supply has been fitted with low-noise Schottky rectifiers and unusually large reservoir capacitors. Pioneer's own slow roll-off digital filtering scheme, 'Legato Link Pro',

is included, but switchable. The alternative is a conventional near-brickwall filter.

## SOUND QUALITY

We had quite a long review period with this player, which gave us a chance to try it with tracks familiar and unfamiliar on both CD and SACD. By and large, we had a thoroughly enjoyable time with all of them. This is a player that enjoys its music and isn't unduly fussy about what kind it is asked to deal with. It's not entirely devoid of opinions, though...

It's at its best with recordings that could be described as 'civilised'. Classical, of course, is ▶



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the obvious example, but plenty of jazz, pop, country and even rock recordings have been made with an emphasis on clarity and cleanliness. With recordings that are more inclined towards blatant overload and sheer noise (think punk and anything in that direction), we found the D9 to be a shade timid, as if embarrassed to replay such an aural assault.

Since a replay device is meant to be neutral, this counts as a limitation, but given all the other things this player does so well, it's not a huge drawback. For a start, there's an excellent sense of involvement in the music, a feeling that the musicians are getting stuck in and, moreover, are right there in front of you. Not, we hasten to add, any closer than they should be. Imaging is natural in both width and depth and extends to a considerable distance.

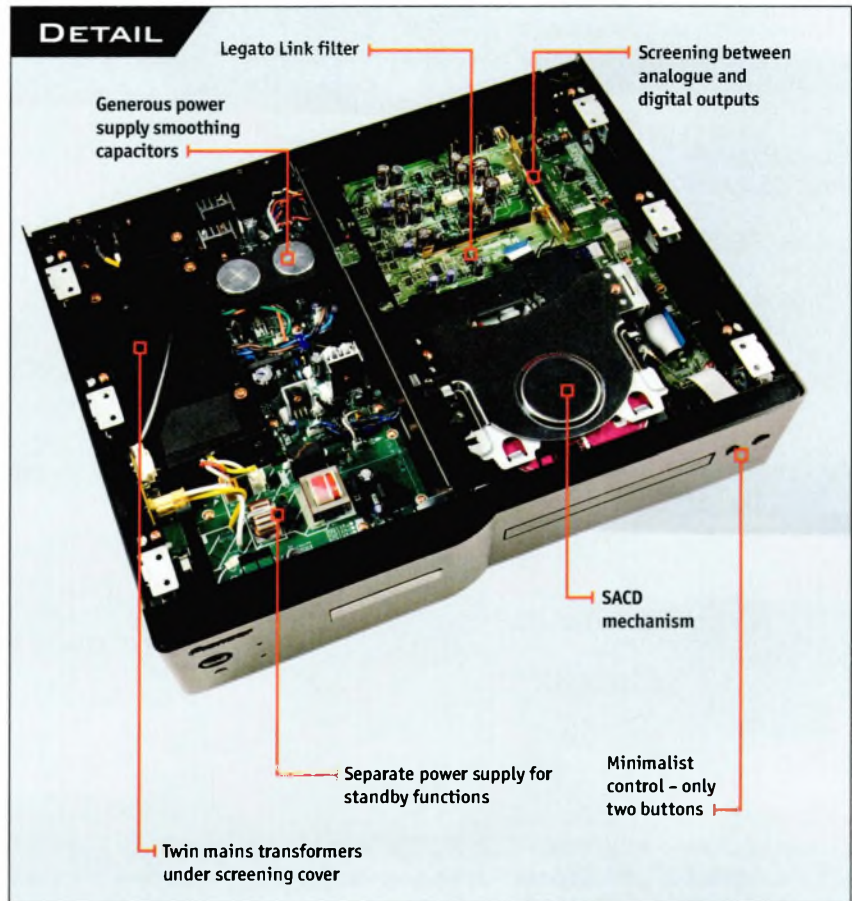
Tonally, the player is very close to neutral, though we felt the bass may be just a touch more present than the ideal. It's not so much that its level is lifted – rather that it isn't amazingly well controlled and can, thus, sometimes seem slightly overdone. Then again, most listeners will probably prefer that to lean and thin – we certainly would. Pitch definition is excellent at low frequencies and the upper bass has plenty of kick, so it's never less than enjoyable.

Midrange is lovely, with a beautifully even-handed approach to the tonal qualities of different instruments and voices. That said, the 'Legato Link' filter (see Legato Link Pro box below) seems to have some effect on this, slightly favouring the higher midrange so that bright instruments and female voices are a little more present. At the same time,

**LEGATO LINK PRO**

Pioneer's 'Legato Link' concept goes back some years, to a time when myriad voices in the audio world were questioning the standard wisdom that the ideal digital filter has a brickwall response at around half the sampling frequency. Various firms developed filters that had a much more gradual transition and, as a result, a much shorter impulse response – the 'ringing' that accompanies any transient. The typical duration of this ringing is one or two milliseconds and its frequency is over 20kHz. Since the audio on a CD has been filtered by a similar filter when it was recorded, there's actually no signal on a normal disc that will set it off.

As a result, its audibility is questionable to say the least, but Legato Link was heard to make a difference and many people liked it. Problematically, it causes aliasing, which can in turn result in audible distortion further down the line. Still, when it's a switchable option, one can hardly complain!



Legato Link brings with it a slight veiling of detail and also a subtle reduction in the scale of images. Overall, it may make the sound more immediate, but we were unconvinced and preferred the sound with the normal filter-in service.

As for treble, it is open and nicely balanced between sparkle and control. Funnily enough, given that the most obvious differences in technical performance between digital filters are found in the treble, we found it much the same with either normal or Legato Link selected. Perhaps the latter is ever so slightly more delicate, but it's a very close call.

We've mentioned detail briefly, but that's perhaps the most appealing aspect of this player. With good recordings, it is unusually adept (within its price range) at finding detail and presenting it coherently as part of a bigger picture. As a result, there's more than a hint of that classic high-end trait, the ability to hear just as much or as little detail as one wants, without any effort on the part of the listener.

Detail can be something of a double-edged sword for some listeners, as in some cases it seems to come at the expense of overall integration. We didn't at all feel that to be the case here, though. On the contrary, the D9 always keeps detail in proportion to the musical whole.

We listened to a few opera tracks and were struck by the way this most complex

of musical forms was always homogenous and dramatic, but still clearly composed of individual voices and instruments. It's a bit like the ornate front of a cathedral – you can admire its outline from a distance or walk up close and appreciate the details of the stone-carvers' art.

We wouldn't suggest that the D9 is without peers in this regard, but for the sheer technical brilliance of its performance, it is one of the best we've encountered short of the expensive high-end. As such, it clearly makes a strong case for itself and we welcome it warmly. **HFC**

Richard Black

**VERDICT**

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> Very good detail without sacrificing musical commitment. Tonal balance is largely neutral and there is a lovely combination of kick and melody in the bass.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	<b>CON</b> Minimalism is frankly annoying. Deep bass occasionally leaves a lot to be desired, while some recordings are a little polite.
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	

**CONCLUSION**  
A mostly well-balanced player that combines a wide range of useful virtues with few compromises. It's arguably at its best with classical music and makes a strong case for any good, clean recording.

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE** ★★★★★

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# The Collection 2009

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# Recession Buster

*This affordable floorstander unusually features a dome midrange driver*

**PRODUCT** Wharfedale Diamond 10.5

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £480 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 22x88x30cm

⊖ Weight: 14kg ⊖ Drivers: 25mm soft dome tweeter, 50mm midrange dome, 165mm with 130mm woven Kevlar cone and 'diamond patterned' surround bass unit  
⊖ Sensitivity: 86dB ⊖ Impedance: 6 ohms (nominal)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 447700 # www.wharfedale.co.uk

**W**harfedale was well known as the loudspeaker brand name most often recognised by the apocryphal 'man on the Clapham omnibus'. Today, of course, he's more likely to be found in Tesco's car park, piling up the week's shopping and the odd item of consumer electronics into the back of a people carrier made somewhere in the Far East, and it's much less certain that he'll remember that 'Wharfedale' means 'hi-fi loudspeakers'.

Founded way back in the 1930s, Wharfedale has one of the longest histories in hi-fi, though 75 years has seen several changes in ownership and downs as well as ups. The company that ruled the UK market for the best part of half a century might no longer enjoy its earlier dominance, but IAG (the International Audio Group), its owner since 1997, is in for the long haul and has every intention of re-establishing its previous pre-eminence.

Three months ago, Peter Comeau took over as Director of Acoustic Design at IAG's Hi-Fi Division. Peter has taken his 30 years' experience in British hi-fi speaker design over to the IAG factory in Shenzhen, in southern China, where he and a team of 15 engineers have responsibility for no fewer than four well known British speaker brands that IAG has collected over the past 12 years. Alongside Wharfedale, IAG owns Quad, Mission and Castle Acoustics (plus Audiolab and Leak).

IAG itself is owned by two Taiwanese Chinese hi-fi enthusiast brothers, Bernard and Michael Chang. Their operation is based on a huge factory complex with around 2,000 workers. This operates a policy of 'vertical integration', which means that virtually everything needed to build a loudspeaker – drivers, cables, enclosures, crossovers etc. – is made in-house.

The first fruit of Comeau's involvement is a brand new Wharfedale Diamond 10 range, which includes no fewer than eight stereo pairs, plus numerous home cinema extras. Eight models does seem a trifle excessive –

most manufacturers make do with four or five, but we were told it was needed to cope with the wide variety of tastes across a global marketplace. Chinese consumers, for example, like speakers with a lot of drive units. There might be some Chinese influence in the styling

The bass and treble drivers are a little more conventional. The former is a 165mm device with a 130mm woven Kevlar cone and a 'diamond patterned' surround, while the tweeter has a 25mm soft dome diaphragm and short horn loading. Both mid and treble

**“Whatever one’s reaction to the bling, this three-way floorstander is a lot of loudspeaker for £480.”**

too: plenty of bling is visible when the grille is removed, with a glossy black front and super-shiny finish on the plastic driver frames. A much more demure black grille is available, which neatly fixes onto the hex sockets of the driver woodscrews.

The Diamonds have been Wharfedale's entry-level hi-fi models since the early 1980s, so high perceived value is an essential part of the agenda. Whatever one's reaction to the bling, this three-way floorstander is a lot of loudspeaker for £480. Probably inevitably, finish is vinyl woodprint, but the catalogue lists no fewer than seven options. Our samples came in 'Roswood Quilted', whatever that means: they certainly looks pretty good, even though touch betrays the synthetic origins.

Despite the low price, the Diamond 10.5 ticks many of the boxes. Curved sides should help stiffen the enclosure and distribute internal reflections and standing waves. A composite front panel provides a secure driver mounting platform. A separate plinth is fitted for secure spike accommodation, though regrettably this doesn't extend the stability footprint one iota and the spike lock-nut arrangements are very difficult to tighten properly. The rear panel has twin terminal pairs, linked by brass strips and fitted to a fairly tough-looking moulding and there's also room for a port.

The driver line-up is certainly distinctive. Dome-type midrange drivers are usually only found in much more upmarket speakers, so the 50mm dome used here is rather unusual. There are pluses and minuses: the main advantage is that its relatively small-diameter diaphragm helps maintain consistent dispersion as frequency rises. The disadvantage is relatively modest sensitivity, due again to the small diaphragm and large (hence heavy) voice coil.



# DEFINITIVE AUDIO



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



- 1. CEC TLOX Belt Drive CD Transport
- 2. Living Voice OBX-RW Loudspeaker in Ebony
- 3. New Audio Frontiers 845 SE Integrated Amplifier
- 4. KSL Kondo Neuro Integrated Amplifier

- 5. SME 2012A Turntable with KSL Kondo iOJ Cartridge
- 6. New Audio Frontiers KT66 Legend Integrated Amplifier
- 7. Kore-Eda LLA-1 Control Amplifier & PLA-1 Power Amplifier



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drivers are separately protected under metal mesh covers.

Auditioning was carried out in a heavily furnished and somewhat irregular 4.4x2.6x5.5m (WxHxD) room. In-room measurements make it quite clear that the Diamond 10.5, with its port tuned to 50Hz, is best kept well clear of walls – if anything there's some mid-bass excess on this occasion, though that will help balance out the lack of deep bass output. The speakers were, therefore, positioned 2.2m apart with their backs 0.8m from the nearest wall.

Most of the listening was done on a system with a Naim CD player; a hybrid Rega/Linn vinyl player and a Magnum Dynalab MD 106T tuner, all of which were amplified by a Naim NAC552/NAP500 combo.

The overall tonal balance here is progressively down-tilted from the bass to the treble, so that the overall character might well be a little too warm, rich, and laid back for some tastes and systems. Male voices consequently do have a touch of chestiness, and the high-level 20Hz sinewave signal used for response testing also showed audible harmonic distortion.

One consequence is that although the presence band is nicely open, it's also a little laid back. This might sound a bit of a contradiction in terms, but it's actually rather effective. Voices are very convincing, yet consonants and sibilants rarely, if ever, sound aggressive, even when played loud, though the volume may have to be turned up a little to maintain good intelligibility.

The restrained top end does somewhat restrict the impression of air and transparency, but it might also be regarded as a positive

## MEASUREMENTS

**Three-way designs usually have above average sensitivities, but that's not the case when dome midrange drivers are used: we can confirm Wharfedale's claims for just 86dB, close to the 87dB we measured in the midband. However, sensitivity (and hence tonal balance) tends to vary with frequency, and under in-room conditions, the 10.5 averages more like 89dB between 35Hz and 220Hz and we noted a dip (probably room-related) centred on 330Hz. Furthermore, although we can't verify the claim that the upper bandwidth reaches 44kHz at -10dB (our upper measurement limit is 20kHz), the in-room far-field output level does seem to drop quite significantly above 9kHz. The claim for a nominal impedance of 6 ohms looks accurate, though the fact that the impedance is down around 4 ohms between 100Hz and 200Hz means that an amplifier with decent current delivery is indicated. The pair-match of our samples was pretty good, with just minor variations at low frequencies.**



benefit when viewed in the context of an inexpensive system.

Over and beyond these tonal balance factors, and in fact much more important in the overall scheme of things, the voice band in particular is notably well projected and reveals a very good coherence. That in turn leads to believable and informative music making, albeit within certain limitations.

Although enclosure colorations as such seem very well controlled, there's also a lack of midrange transparency and some associated 'pinched' coloration that becomes progressively more intrusive as the volume level is increased. Lateral stereo images are well positioned and focused, but show little in the way of depth and while the midband is certainly impressively communicative, subtlety, delicacy and dynamic expression are a little weak.

Turning up the wick also tends to make that mild bass excess rather more obvious, both in terms of rather too much warmth and a slight tendency to thump, presumably when the music, the port tuning and a prominent room mode all coincide.

The Diamond 10.5 is a much less expensive loudspeaker than the overwhelming majority of models that come into HFC for review. Some performance compromises and consequent criticisms are therefore inevitable, but

shouldn't detract from the fine value for money and interesting engineering solutions.

In particular, the use of a 50mm midrange dome to cover the vital presence zone with one driver (roughly 800Hz-3.8kHz) is surely responsible for a voice-band integration that is clearly superior to the norm. And from a musical and communication point of view, that coherence is clearly more important than the minor balance anomalies. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

## VERDICT

### SOUND



### PRO

Superior voice band coherence, thanks to dome midrange driver. Advanced enclosure shape and construction ensures minimal boxiness and separate plinth gives solid spike-mounting.

### EASE OF DRIVE



### BUILD



### CON

Too much bling? Tonal balance a little too warm and laid back; lacks midband transparency.

### VALUE



### CONCLUSION

The unusual dome midrange driver seems well justified here for the superior coherence it brings to voice reproduction, both spoken and sung. The tonal balance might be a little too rich and laid back for some tastes.

## HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE



URL [www.techradar.com/636778](http://www.techradar.com/636778)

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# High flying

The new Monitor Audio AirStream 10's performance reaches the stratosphere

**PRODUCT** Monitor Audio AirStream 10  
**TYPE** DAB/FM/Internet radio  
**PRICE** £225  
**CONTACT** ☎ 01268 740580 # www.monitoraudio.co.uk

**Q**uestion: if you manufacture loudspeakers, what do you need to do to keep abreast of the latest technology? Well, given that speakers themselves are not exactly the fastest-moving examples of high-tech on the planet, an obvious answer seems to be to build something new and innovative that incorporates them, thereby 'leveraging' your loudspeaker expertise to gain a march on high-tech specialists who have to buy in (probably inferior) loudspeaker solutions.

And lo and behold, that's what Monitor Audio has done with the AirStream 10. This smart and compact piece of kit, at once futuristic and classic in appearance, is actually one of the most all-round capable audio devices we've come across in quite some time. It receives DAB and FM radio and thanks to the wonders of wi-fi (or, if you prefer, a wired Ethernet connection), it receives Internet radio and accesses music on your home network, via any suitable router – we used a BT Home Hub for review purposes. If that's all a bit too new-fangled for you, you can always plug in a portable music player or other source via the auxiliary input.

Some of this is easier to set up than other bits, but if your computer has at some point in its life been set up to belong to a network, then it should be pretty straightforward to

get the AirStream to connect and recognise music files.

Connecting to Internet radio is effortless, though the delay in 'tuning' in to a station can be a bit trying – this isn't a function of the AirStream though, it's caused by the need for buffering data which takes some time.

The AirStream 10 can sit on the long thin face opposite the control buttons, or on the largest face so that the speaker faces downwards, about 2cm from the supporting surface. In the case of the latter, treble is bound to suffer a bit, but the buttons are more

**“Under such conditions the sound is fairly clear, though not quite as neutral or punchy as the best Tivoli and Vita Audio radios.”**

accessible – certainly if you are using the unit as a bedside alarm or radio.

Operation is simple and, in fact, the automatic sorting of Internet radio stations by genre, location, and name, is just about the best way we've found yet of trawling through them. Some of them have a distinctly ropey quality and 24kbps MP3 is obviously nothing remotely to do with hi-fi, but we did find some perfectly sonically acceptable examples from Azerbaijan and The Philippines, to name but two. The fun is, pretty much literally, endless! Given the point already made about treble with the speaker facing downwards, we did most of our listening with it facing out, on or reasonably close to its axis.

## SOUND QUALITY

Under such conditions the sound is fairly clear, though not quite as neutral or punchy as the best Tivoli and Vita Audio radios can offer. On the other hand, there's a decent amount of power on hand and the lack of rattles within the unit makes it a good choice for playing loud. The mono loudspeaker is not such a huge drawback as the stereo of most one-box units is nothing to get excited about and headphone and auxiliary outputs are stereo.

With the speaker facing downwards, the

most obvious drawback is in the reduced comprehensibility of the spoken voice. Music is a little dulled, but one still gets the gist.

It's tempting to compare FM, DAB and Internet versions of the same station. FM performance is a bit so-so, tending to sound rather grainy, however meticulously one fiddles with the antenna, but Internet radio is catching up fast with DAB – in some cases sounding noticeably better. Interestingly, the AirStream's display tells you what bitrate and codec is in use for each station.

Internet radio is still in its infancy, but has taken off like a rocket. Dedicated hardware like this lags a little, but we look forward to more appearing. The attraction of Internet listening without needing a computer to be switched on is obvious and this product fills the need well. **HFC**

Richard Black

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



## VERDICT

### SOUND



### FEATURES



### BUILD



### VALUE



### CONCLUSION

One might perhaps wish for stereo speakers and an iPod dock. However, the range of features on offer is certainly impressive – a great way to listen to the world.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE



URL [www.techradar.com/636713](http://www.techradar.com/636713)



**Inspire Hi-Fi**

*eclipse*



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**HI-FI WORLD**



Review: September 2009

Superb build and finish allied to an effortlessly musical sound, makes the Inspire Eclipse a highly impressive debut.

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# Small wonder

Compact kit with big sound to suit the audiophile

**PRODUCT** iBasso D10 Cobra

**TYPE** DAC/headphone amplifier

**PRICE** £276

**CONTACT** ☎ 0800 756 9564 🌐 www.ibasso.com

**T**ime was when portable audio was the sole preserve of large companies – Sony, Sharp, Aiwa and the few others who had made the investment in miniature cassette and, later, MiniDisc mechanisms. But now, almost everyone has some kind of music player about their person and many more manufacturers have recognised a growth market when they see one. The good news for audiophiles is that some of these manufacturers are small specialists making things like high-quality headphone amplifiers, of which iBasso is one.

This is more than just a headphone amp, though, it's also a three-input DAC. Miniaturisation is a wonderful thing and despite this unit's diminutive dimensions of 55mm wide by 21mm high by 104mm deep, it includes both optical and electrical S/PDIF inputs and a USB socket for connection to most flavours of portable or desktop computer. Oh, and because it's portable there's a battery in there, plus enough circuitry to charge it from the USB connection (for those without a handy computer, iBasso provides a plug-in charger and USB-type lead). Too bad so few iThings have any kind of digital output.

That's already a decent feature list, but iBasso has really gone all the way for the

tweaker and made it possible to change the op-amps in the output circuit so as to personalise the sound to some extent. The fitted op-amp is a perfectly respectable type, but a couple of higher performance ones are provided – surface-mount devices, mounted on adaptors to allow them to be easily plugged in. A pair of blank adaptors are provided, too, and you could, in principle, use almost any through-hole mounting op-amp with an industry-standard pin-out.

Operation is simple, though it can seem a little confusing that the 'Aux' socket on the front is both an input (when using the D10

**“We found its quality admirably close to that of the Cambridge Audio DacMagic – no mean praise considering how capable that unit is.”**

as an amplifier) and an output (when using it as a DAC). The volume control includes the on/off switch and it seems pretty hard to turn on by accident. Battery life in DAC mode is about 20 hours or 30 in amp mode.

## SOUND QUALITY

We were not much taken with the sound using the originally fitted op-amps, and measurements confirmed that they were struggling with high levels. Swapping to the AD8656 option, however, picked things up no end and we soon started to see the point of this model. Working as an amp, its

advantages are twofold: first, it gives significantly more output than most portable music players, which tend to be limited for health and safety reasons. That's not such a daft idea, either, but the audiophile may choose to use less sensitive headphones, which simply won't be driven to satisfying levels by most portables. This one proved satisfactory with full-size Sennheiser and Grado models, with both requiring more volts than most in-ear types.

Second, levels apart, iBasso claims that the D10 offers higher quality sound than portable players can unaided. We'd tend to agree with

that, finding that with in-ear and full-size 'phones alike the sound took on greater confidence, more detail, better imaging and generally a more lifelike character with the D10 in circuit.

As a DAC, however, it really shines. We tested it with a borrowed iRiver portable player with a Toslink output and also with desktop computer and hi-fi CD player sources. We found its quality admirably close to that of the Cambridge Audio DacMagic – no mean praise considering how capable that unit is. The D10 gave a very significant improvement in quality to the iRiver device and while it wasn't necessarily better than a decent modern £300-ish CD player, it wasn't any worse either. Connected to a computer, it improves things in every area too, with a much better all round sense of musical insight. **HFC**

Richard Black



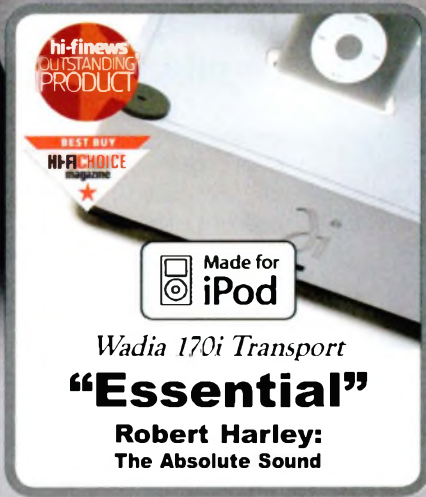
VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>CONCLUSION</b> As a DAC add-on for a computer-based system, this is a real audiophile blessing.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	As a headphone amp, its trump card is compatibility of headphones with portables.
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
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Wadia 381i CD Player

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**John Bamford:**  
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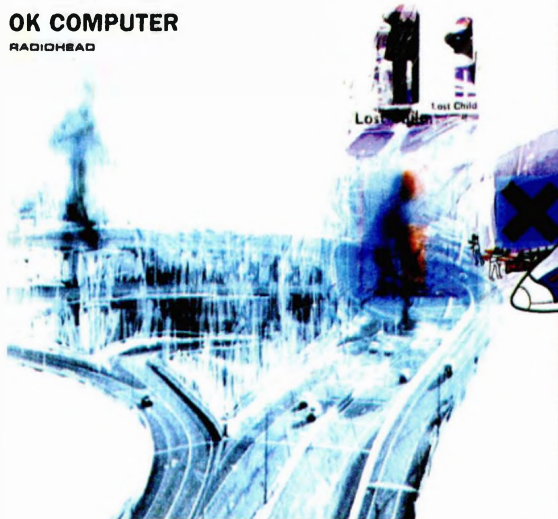
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# ChoiceCuts

New music reviewed and rated by our experts

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

OK COMPUTER  
RADIOHEAD



**OK COMPUTER**  
Radiohead  
EMI

"A cassette version of the album was welded inside a Walkman so that journalists would be forced to hear it all the way through"

Words by Jason Kennedy

## Classic Album

*Apple sheds and tudor mansions don't often make great recording studios; then again, it usually helps to rehearse, too*

**O**K Computer was the album that put Radiohead on the global music map. Had they been so inclined, it might have turned them into the next U2. The band had achieved already considerable success with 1995's *The Bends* but it wasn't until *OK Computer* was released, along with the singles it spawned, that its fanbase began to extend beyond the hardcore to a far wider audience.

Ostensibly a concept album, *OK Computer* was composed as one entity rather than a random collection of musical parts. This was emphasised by an early promotional stunt in which a cassette version of the album was welded inside a Walkman so that journalists would be forced to hear it all the way through. In retrospect, it's surprising that EMI produced a cassette let alone sent it out in a Walkman, but the past 12 years have brought many changes.

Whatever they did, it seemed to work. *Rolling Stone* magazine awarded it four stars and wrote a glowing review. It compared the band with REM, which was an early influence, and even suggested that Freddie Mercury had inspired Thom Yorke's vocals on *Paranoid Android* (which makes you wonder what the reviewer was on).

One of the most impressive things about *OK Computer* is that its influences are hard to trace. The material may not be completely original, but its sources of inspiration are so diverse that the end result sounds new, and to this day, remains fresh and inventive. It has been called a prog album and with its inventiveness and success in forging a new sound, that has proved to be an apt and accurate description.

In one interview, Yorke responds to the interviewer's query about the album not containing any three-minute pop songs by saying that the same thing happened in the seventies and that it wasn't a good thing then either. But he went on to say that he liked Peter Gabriel in the era when the Genesis frontman performed with a flower on his head. Genesis was one of the key bands on the progressive scene and precisely the

sort of group that would avoid making a three-minute pop song.

The material for the album's 11 tracks, or 12 if you include the computerised monologue *Fitter Happier*, were recorded by engineer Nigel Godrich, who had worked with the band on *The Bends* and produced the 1996 B-side *Talk Show Host*. The first four tracks were put down in Canned Applause, a tin apple shed near Didcot that the band had converted into a studio. For the remaining material, Radiohead used St Catherine's Court near Bath, a Tudor manor house where they made use of the characteristics of a variety of large and small rooms to create the sounds they wanted, recording some of the tracks completely live in the process. Radiohead worked and lived in the place for the duration of the recording, which according to Yorke "got out of hand," but it was clearly time worth spending.

*OK Computer* went to number one in the UK charts when it was released in June 1997, reaching number 21 in the US where it remained for 55 weeks, a period no doubt sustained by the success of the singles *Karma Police* and *Let Down*. On this side of the Atlantic, *Paranoid Android*, *Karma Police* and *No Surprises* were all top ten hits.

What differentiates *OK Computer* from *The Bends* and virtually all other mainstream rock albums that preceded it is the heavy use of electronics and noise. By adding these sounds to the grunge guitar style that they had honed on their previous albums, Radiohead carved out a new and intense sound that was in equal parts accessible and challenging.

Yorke sums up the popular reaction: "I'm amazed it got the reaction it did. None of us f'ing knew any more whether it was good or bad. What really blew my head off was the fact that people got all the things, all the textures and the sounds and the atmospheres we were trying to create." **HFC**



## MCALMONT & NYMAN

The Glare

MN Records

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

**Music:** Britain's leading contemporary composer and one of our most expressively soulful pop vocalists lower the barriers between classical and popular music as David McAlmont selects his favourite pieces from Michael Nyman's long career and adds lyrics based on news stories. Subjects include assisted suicide, illegal immigration, Berlusconi's antics, Joanna Lumley and the Gurkhas and in the title track, Susan Boyle. Despite the lack of hooks and choruses in Nyman's film scores and orchestral works, McAlmont's lyrics meld and chime with the sumptuous, memorable melodies.

**Sound:** The subtle, sophisticated arrangements for piano and other chamber instruments provide the perfect setting for McAlmont's extraordinary soaring voice. **NW**



The BEATLES

## THE BEATLES

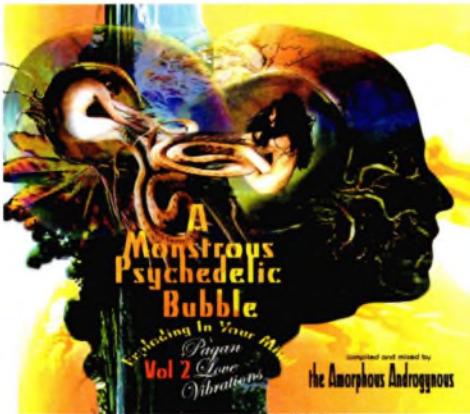
The Beatles (White Album)

Apple/EMI Deluxe Remaster

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

**Music:** Fame, drugs, Yoko, the Maharishi and the violent summer of '68 led to what many consider The Beatles' greatest album. The sprawling collage *Revolution 9*, the coruscating *Yer Blues* and heart-wrenching *Julia* revealed Lennon's soul-baring like never before. Add to those, the finger-picked delight of McCartney's *Blackbird* and the consummate brilliance of Harrison and Eric Clapton's *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, and you have a certified masterpiece.

**Sound:** It has taken four years and 11 Abbey Road technical staff to bring The Beatles' catalogue into the digital age. *The White Album* is by far the most rewarding remaster of the bunch, but it's closely followed by *Abbey Road* and *Let It Be* for clarity, definition and instrumental colour. **MP**



## MONSTROUS PSYCHEDELIC BUBBLE...VOLUME 2

Amorphous Androgynous

Platipus

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

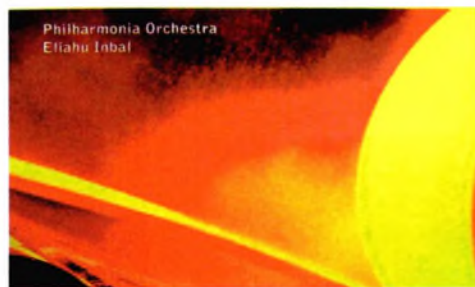
**Music:** *A Monstrous Psychedelic Bubble Exploding In Your Mind*, to give it its full title, is the latest double CD of psyched-out remix madness from the Amorphous Androgynous, aka Future Sound Of London's, Garry Cobain and Brian Dougans. Again they've trawled through record crates past and present, mixing spacey grooves from Faust, Pentangle, Hawkwind, Oasis, Bo Diddley and more to make a brilliantly eclectic head trip that sounds both vintage and modern.

**Sound:** The mix and match nature of the material isn't fully smoothed out and there's a lot of dynamic difference between some tracks but it's saved by the quality of the rare gems. Play loud. **DO**



## Stravinsky

Petrouchka · Le Sacre du printemps  
L'Oiseau de feu  
Feu d'artifice · Scherzo fantastique



## STRAVINSKY

Petroushka

Eliahu Inbal (cond), Philharmonia Orchestra

Apex (Two-disc set)

**Music:** Eliahu Inbal is principally associated with late romantic and contemporary repertoire and this two-disc set covers important highlights from Stravinsky's early output, including the three ballets composed for Diaghilev: *The Rite Of Spring*, *Petroushka* and *Firebird*, which in these performances have all the elemental and irresistibly rhythmic qualities for which they are renowned.

**Sound:** The label is hardly generous with information on these recordings. We think they were made at Abbey Road in the 1980s or early '90s. As usual with Inbal, they sound idiomatic and impassioned and have been prepared well. It's an excellent set of some landmark early 20th-century music at a reasonable price. **AG**





## SPEED CARAVAN

Kalashnik Love

Real World Records

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

**Music:** Mehdi Haddab plays the Arabic lute, but with a difference – he likes to play it LOUD. Not for nothing has he been called ‘the Hendrix of the oud’, as his snaking, distorted melodies burst forth from his amplified instrument in a weird Algerian echo of rock’s greatest twanger. His Paris-based quartet includes bass, percussion, electronics and voice, in a mash-up of Algerian rai, hip-hop, electro, and of course rock, lots of rock. There’s room

for a little sideways humour, too in a cover of The Cure’s *Killing An Arab*.

**Sound:** One-time metal musician turned producer David Husser goes for a clean yet muscular, radio-friendly sound, with plenty of bass thump though not much in the way of midrange dynamics. **DO**



## PREFAB SPROUT

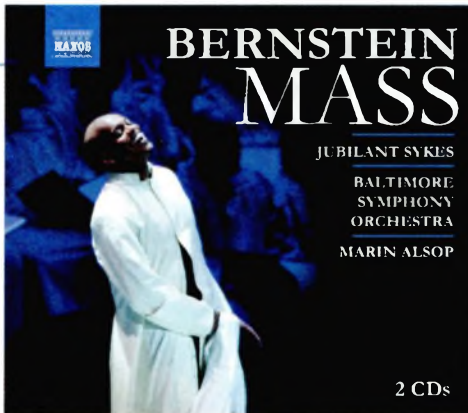
Let's Change The World With Music

Kitchenware

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

**Music:** During Prefab Sprout's brief rub with stardom in the '80s, it did seem as if Paddy McAloon might change the world with music. But ‘the last of the great romantics’ lost his nerve and sight (temporarily), grew a beard, and became a recluse. This is the first new album since 2001, if due in 1992. He's updated his original demos to create a concept album about the healing power of music.

**Sound:** Former producer Thomas Dolby is absent, but McAloon and The Blue Nile's Calum Malcolm seem to conjure his classic Sprout sound with ease – lush, string-tinged arrangements, wistful melodies and heart-on-sleeve lyrics. All you could want from a Prefab Sprout album really. **DO**



## BERNSTEIN

Mass

Marin Alsop (cond), Baltimore SO

Naxos (Two-disc set)

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

**Music:** Marin Alsop is not only one of the few prominent female conductors, but also a protégé of the late, great Leonard Bernstein. In a sense, this recording is payback. It is a superb performance of Bernstein's poly-religious *Mass*, which is a large, sprawling and slightly messy score that's always intriguing. It was written for the opening of the John F Kennedy Memorial Center in Washington DC.

**Sound:** Many Bernstein aficionados rate this recording higher than the maestro's seminal original. It is immaculately performed and recorded in the Joseph Mayerhoff Symphony Hall in Baltimore, with a rosette well earned by Jubilant Sykes as the celebrant. **AC**



## OS MUTANTES

Haih

Anti

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

**Music:** The legendary late '60s Brazilian psych band reunited for a series of gigs a few years back. Now comes an equally unexpected, and welcome, excursion into the studio. Only Sergio Dias Baptista survives from the original trio, but he's done splendidly in updating their unique combo of samba/bossa nova grooves with acid-rock and fuzz guitar. The trademark weirdness is still intact, but it's so playful and exuberant that you'll be smiling broadly while scratching your head and trying to work out what's going on.

**Sound:** Chaotic and subversive – but in a good way. Then there's *O Mensageiro*, a near-perfect piece of jangling guitar pop, floating sublimely amid the mayhem. **NW**





**ECLIPSE**



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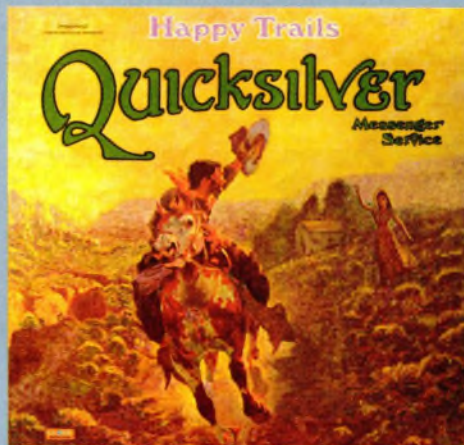
## JEFFERSON AIRPLANE



**Bless Its Pointed Little Head**  
RCA/Pure Pleasure 180g  
[www.purepleasurerecords.com](http://www.purepleasurerecords.com)

**Music:** Recorded live in 1969 this is a high-octane, warts-and-all show from the definitive psychedelic rock band. The combination of two vocalists with great guitar and bass playing makes for a highly evocative nostalgia trip. While the sound's dated, nine storming tunes, including big hit *Somebody To Love*, prove that the music hasn't lost its power.

**Sound:** The recording is a little thin and struggles with the sheer level of energy, but manages to put you right there in the moment. *JK*



## QUICKSILVER MES ENGER SERVICE



**Happy Trails**  
EMI/Pure Pleasure 180g  
[www.purepleasurerecords.com](http://www.purepleasurerecords.com)

**Music:** Another 1969 album by a San Francisco psych rock band, this is partly live but of a rather more relaxed demeanour. It reveals a band with a greater inclination and ability to extend a tune than the Airplane. *Who Do You Love?* lasts for a whole side but has enough variety to keep you interested thanks to sterling guitar work. Side two is rather more focused, especially on the 47-second title track.

**Sound:** With a warm sound and relaxed atmosphere this is a revealing if less than dynamic slab of vinyl. *JK*

# HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

## JAMES CARNEY GROUP

**Ways & Means**  
SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)  
[www.songlines.com](http://www.songlines.com)

**Music:** Post-jazz keyboardist Carney's follow up to 2007's *Green-Wood* is a brass-powered, John Lurie-inspired hardcore album that ploughs a distinctive musical furrow. With two saxes, trumpet and trombone, alongside acoustic and electric pianos, contrabass and drums, this nine-track disc is packed full of

light and shade, but in general, errs on the dark side. It calms down in places but that's just to sucker you in before the next atonal twist in the tale. It owes plenty to Ornette Coleman but has a vibe all of its own thanks to the leader's chronic appetite for new sonic landscapes. There's plenty of variety but not necessarily something for everyone.

**Sound:** A solid, big-boned recording with decent amounts of space and excellent dynamics, good bandwidth and only subtle use of compression. *JK*



## HAYDN

**Die Schöpfung (The Creation)**  
Sir Colin Davis (cond), LSO and Chorus  
LSO Live (Two-disc set)  
SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)  
[www.lso.co.uk](http://www.lso.co.uk)

**Music:** A true masterpiece from a profoundly religious man, this epic oratorio is arguably Haydn's greatest work. The starting point for the libretto was the biblical account of the creation, the *Book of Psalms*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a poem called *The Creation of the World*. The oratorio lasts over 100 minutes and its composition took Haydn two years, the longest he spent on a single work.

**Sound:** Typically for this label, *The Creation* was recorded live in the Barbican hall and includes excellent contributions from soloists Sally Matthews (soprano), Ian Bostridge (tenor) and Dietrich Henschell (baritone), in a first-rate multichannel recording. *AG*



## MAEVE O'BOYLE

**All My Sins**  
Linn  
SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)  
[www.linnrecords.com](http://www.linnrecords.com)

**Music:** This 21-year-old Scot is already a veteran singer-songwriter so it's no surprise she wrote most of this debut set – nor that it was produced by Calum 'Blue Nile' Malcolm. The high points are *Old Greenwich Time*, a ballad U2 would proudly claim and the title track

which with its soaring, melodic choruses is reminiscent of Chrissie Hynde. All 10 'sins' are tunefully atmospheric, and Malcolm has perfectly captured O'Boyle's husky, yearning vocals and delicate guitar-picking. A hi-fi album that's nearly a masterpiece.

**Sound:** As you'd expect from Linn – and Malcolm – this has great yet sensible dynamics, superb separation and qualifies as a worthy addition to the SACD canon. *PS*



# Choice mail

*Russ Andrews*  
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The pick of this month's best letters

Write to: Letters, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email your letters to: [HiFiChoice@futurenet.com](mailto:HiFiChoice@futurenet.com)

## We're doomed, doomed I say!

I've been pondering the question of whether standalone CD players make much sense any more. I've certainly no intention of buying a new one and the two which I have I'll shortly be listing on eBay. I just can't see the need for a purely CD machine when any CDs I own go straight into my DVD player, which is connected to my DAC.

Since my DAC also connects to my Mac, then it'll be a new DAC that gets bought if there's going to be any upgrading.

For me, and presumably many others, the standalone CD player has no future. I get the best of both worlds using one less box, using my HDD most of the time and playing CDs when the computer is off. I don't think the CD format is doomed yet, but the players do have a problem.

**Malcolm Evans** via email

**HFC** From our own strictly audiophile perspective, we'd still be more than happy to opt for another integrated CD player with digital inputs, or a DAC and transport

**"I just can't see the need for a purely CD machine when all the CDs I own go straight into my DVD player."**



CD players such as Consonance's Mini Droplet are still a wise buy despite the popularity of PC-based audio systems

combo. This way, we could attach a streamer if we wanted and still play a CD without increasing the box count. That said, a

decent DVD player is a perfectly viable option as a transport, even if few scale the heights of a purpose-built CD transport.

While some audiophiles see their PCs as central to their hi-fi experience (with Exact Audio Copy, for example, providing a very useful service in its pre-ripping error-correction), others view transferring CDs to a hard drive as more of an interim solution. Not only does it involve the hassle of a fair amount of ripping if your collection is large, but also you must consider that not all PCs and soundcards are created equal. Of course, with a suitable low-jitter digital output you can play with outboard DACs to your heart's content.

The ultimate answer is likely to be the one envisioned by Ivor Jenson in these pages. We'll make more of an effort to move away

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Perpendicular power

Perusing some of the Internet-based hi-fi fora, I came across some information on 'vertical' bi-amping as opposed to what seems to be the more conventional 'horizontal' bi-amping. I had my amps (Roksan Caspian M series-1) set up so that one was driving both woofers on my PMC GB1s, the other both tweeters.

After a bit of time spent re-arranging my cabling, I ended up with one amp driving the left woofer and left tweeter, the other the right woofer and tweeter. I don't know the science behind it, but 'vertical' sounds better to me. Obviously, you can't go for this arrangement if your two power amps are

different, but if they're the same make and model, give it a go!

**Paul Davis** via email

**HFC** On the one hand, 'horizontal' keeps the amps driving woofers and tweeters separate, which should give the purest treble, as the demands imposed on the treble amp's power supply are very light. That said, the mid/bass amp has to handle the considerably greater power and can suffer inter-channel crosstalk as a result. Switching to 'vertical' would eliminate any possibility of this happening, but then some might argue that this would simply shift said problems.

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from CD players when an uncompressed and preferably high sampling frequency variant of the Spotify concept offers us access to a huge range of music for a flat fee. But, for as long as music is available on CD, we'll continue to use CD players.

### Your most important component

I'm always surprised that so many audiophiles and concert-goers seem to forget that their single most important component is their ears. I'm sure most of your readers would consider that they have pretty good hearing, but as we all know, our hearing becomes less acute as the years roll by. I am just wondering if there are any sensible precautions people can take to keep their hearing in decent shape whether they're in the listening room or the concert hall.

Ray Willis via email



**HFC** People probably put their hearing more at risk each day by cranking up the volume of MP3 players in noisy environments like underground trains than they do at the concert hall, or with their home hi-fi system.

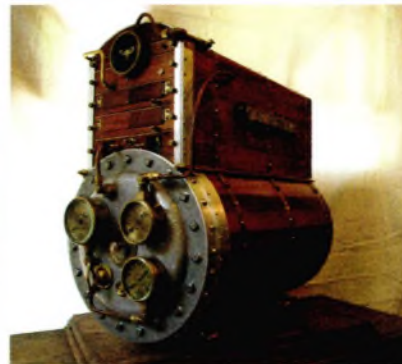
In the heyday of the Walkman, it was quite possible to damage hearing with excessive volume levels, but because the batteries ran flat fairly quickly it put some sort of brake on the process. MP3 players, on the other hand, can run for many hours on a single charge and prolonged exposure of this sort can and frequently does cause long-term, irreversible hearing loss.

You don't have to lug around a chunky SPL meter to check how safe your ears are. Instead, you could try something like the SoundCheck Noise Level Indicator (pictured above). Available for about £10 from sites such as [enhancedlistening.co.uk](http://enhancedlistening.co.uk) and [canford.co.uk](http://canford.co.uk), this key ring can indicate sound pressure levels from about 55dBA through 80dBA and on to 105dB and above. While it's only accurate to +/-3dB, it's cheap, light and unobtrusive and will let you know when things are starting to get too loud for comfort or healthy hearing. Another option for iPhone users is a handy little apps called Decibel, which uses the phone's mic to give an idea of sound pressure levels.

## “Imagine the new world order – no queues in music shops, no racks of CDs, no massive shelves groaning under five tonnes of DVDs.”

If you want to avoid hearing damage at concerts, you can opt for earplugs. The more you pay for these, the more likely you are to get attenuation that is constant with frequency. Cheaper earplugs can work well, but tend to provide attenuation that increases with frequency. Some people are still surprised by how much clearer music can become when it's not overloading their ears.

For more information on hearing health, visit [dontlosethemusic.com](http://dontlosethemusic.com)



The Steampunk PC3: a PC for the 'silver surfer' generation..?

### New world ordering

In future, the music and films we watch and listen to won't even be stored on our systems! Using a cursor or keyboard to call up an item, whatever we want will be streamed into our homes at the quality requested. Obviously, we won't get all this for free, nor should we expect to; perhaps there will be a pre-paid monthly fee, or a pay-to-play card system?

Imagine the new world order this would bring – no queues in music shops, no racks of CDs, no massive shelves groaning under the weight of five tonnes of DVDs. In fact, I doubt you'd even need a stand-alone PC, as a new-generation of electronics will be created which will simply stream music and video straight onto your screen or into your amplifiers. All this will make our lives easier and our homes less cluttered and the digitites will at last be satisfied that the world is perfect!

Until Christmas or a birthday comes along, that is... Ninety-nine per cent of presents are DVDs, CDs or records. What the heck are we going to buy Grandma when all this stuff is floating around in the ether instead?

Be warned: sometimes things change for the worse! As for me, I just buy a vinyl LP.

PS Mr George: if you don't award me *Letter of the month* some time soon, I will take my literary gems elsewhere!

Ivor Jebson via email

**HFC** Well, we suppose the simplest answer is to buy Granny a PC and a fast broadband connection, as there's an ever-growing band of silver surfers out there. Of course, she'll also need some dedicated shelving for her new media PC, so there will be plenty to fill her stocking. On a more serious note, if she still has her old turntable, you could try a Santa sack full of new LPs and a fresh cartridge on the basis that hers may have more miles on it than the space shuttle fleet.

Failing that, there's always the old stalwart of half a pint of perfume and a king-size box of mince pies...

### Upgrade Project

I have a Debut Phono SB that I really like, but I want to improve it, so was wondering what you reckon is my best upgrade path. On the one hand, I could buy a used Xpression II and change my existing Ortofon 5E to a 2M Red, on the other, I could go for a new Xpression III, which comes with a 2M Red anyway.

Another alternative would be to hang on to my Debut, swap the 5E for a 2M Red, then save up for, say, a Rega P3 to buy at a much later date.

Darren Stone via email

**HFC** The Xpression III is certainly better than its predecessor, but the upgrade it would offer over your Debut Phono SB isn't huge. On the other hand, the improvement offered by the 2M Red over the 5E is large, so we'd be tempted to take that route first. Then, consider upgrading your phono stage, and go for perhaps a used P3 or, if you're happy to save for longer, a Funk Firm Funk.



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*Music - quality or quantity?*

# MUSIC

# USIC ~

## Music Compression - friend or foe?

A remarkable thing has happened within a few short years. The music industry has become what must be one of the very few, alongside perhaps the food industry, to be driven downwards in relation to quality by consumer demand - and the majority of consumers are not even aware of it!

It is normal for an industry to try and improve on what has gone before. High definition TV's are an obvious upgrade from the previous standard. The computer industry constantly strives to provide faster processing speeds and larger memory capacity. However, it is the crossover of the computer industry with the music industry, the linking of the two, where things have started to go wrong. This is not to fault the computer industry, for speed and user convenience are the selling tools of its trade. Nor is the music industry inherently culpable, although it has largely acquiesced while complaining of lost revenues through illegal downloads. It is consumers that have driven quality down through a deepening, but blind, love affair with the MP3 and AAC formats and the ubiquitous iPod.

## Falling Music Sales

I do not believe it is any coincidence that world-wide music sales tumbled in 2007 to their lowest level since 1985 and this is despite an overall far more affluent population than all those years ago. So why put the finger on MP3 & AAC (iTunes default format) and the iPod? It is not that they exist, nor resentment at their undoubted success. It is more the lack of knowledge on the part of consumers in what they are embracing and the hi-fi industry must shoulder its share of the blame. Both of these formats are compressed mediums, with different levels of compression. There is information irretrievably lost and they lack the full dynamic range. In short, they are inferior mediums in comparison to the standard CD format, let alone even higher resolution formats

now available (such as studio quality 24 bit, 96kHz FLAC files). The sad part is that convenience and 'music on the move' has helped to create a demand for these inferior substitutes and, what is even sadder, is that most users are not even aware of what they are missing.

There are still discerning people around who know how exciting and involving music can be, how it can deliver an emotional experience. Twenty years ago there were many hi-fi enthusiasts who enjoyed pursuing quality. It mattered which speaker leads were used, or the quality of the interconnects, or the rigidity provided by speaker stands. These still make a very significant difference but relatively few realise it now. The performing artists, musicians and sound engineers who strive to make the recording quality as high as possible must despair at the current trend.

## Quality or Quantity?

When a friend's teenage son bought his first iPod, he was thrilled that it could store 2000 tracks. That this was at a low quality setting with a high degree of compression was not a relevant or indeed a cognitive factor. The maximum download quality for AAC is 320kbps. Most tracks are available at no better than 192kbps but many iPod users legally download at 128kbps, the most popular, or even 64kbps because either that's all that is available, or because they can store a greater number of tracks or, very often, because they're unaware of the difference. The cost is usually the same regardless. If you are jogging and using a cheap pair of in-ear headphones, you probably wouldn't greatly appreciate a high quality recording. But play back through a decent quality hi-fi and all you are doing is amplifying a very poor quality signal and the difference from, for example a full resolution CD (1,411kbps), is huge. The old maxim holds true - rubbish in, rubbish out.

The 80 Gigabyte iPod Classic is advertised as holding 20,000 songs (4MB per song). In comparison, a high quality music server will use approximately 500MB to store an average CD (with say 10 tracks) at full resolution, a ratio of 10

or 12:1. It's no wonder that the music server, also a flexible computer based product, can reproduce music far more faithfully and far more enjoyably and is, therefore, more suitable as a prime listening source. The reality is that a generation is now growing up without recognising the loss and appears to be indifferent to quality, almost as if it's an irrelevance. This may be because so many have not heard the difference. Earlier generations enjoyed listening to 78rpm records until LP's came along. A cheap hi-fi stack system could be enjoyed until CD's came along (although a high quality record deck could, and still does, compete). The point is, once you've heard better, it's difficult to downgrade again.

So where do we go from here when many hi-fi systems feature an iPod docking station as standard? The future of quality music in the home is certainly not MP3 & AAC recordings because they are not suitable as a prime listening source. That is not what the formats were designed for. Download speeds are now far faster and computer hard drive memories far larger than a few years ago when these formats came into mass usage. Discerning music lovers using downloads will be listening to studio quality FLAC files, or their equivalent, in the near future. The quality is so far removed from MP3 that the additional cost is easily outweighed. Even CD quality recordings are left behind.

Vinyl has staged a strong comeback recently because it's still immensely enjoyable to listen to. However, technology doesn't stand still and it's therefore more important than ever that you seek out a specialist hi-fi dealer to set you on the right path.

## Get Expert Advice

For anyone who has a good collection of vinyl or CD's, there are some wonderful hi-fi products available today that will extract a level of performance that is totally involving and tremendously enjoyable. Specialist hi-fi manufacturers continue to try to make their products perform to the highest standards in any given price range. Specialist dealers, of which the ones listed on this page are amongst the very best in the UK, know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it. However, it also needs the consumer to get listening again and to demand quality, to seek expert guidance on how to achieve the best performance at home and to have it expertly installed and set up.

If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by using a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one but it's unquestionably worth the difference.



# QUALITY OR QUANTITY?..

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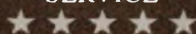
They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

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SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI  
40 High Street.  
01233 624441

#### Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
216 Moulsham Street.  
01245 265245

#### Colchester

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
33 Sir Isaac's Walk.  
01206 577682

#### Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY  
9 High Street,  
Hampton Wick.  
020 8943 3530

#### Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
44a High Street.  
01268 779762

#### Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
132/4 London Road.  
01702 435255

### Southampton

PHASE 3 HI-FI  
37 Bedford Place.  
023 8022 8434

#### Worthing

PHASE 3 HI-FI  
213-217 Tarring Road.  
01903 245577

### LONDON

#### N1

GRAHAMS HI-FI  
190a New North Road.  
020 7226 5500

#### SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS  
61/63 Webbs Road,  
Battersea.  
020 7924 2043

### SOUTH WEST

#### Bath

AUDIENCE  
14 Broad Street.  
01225 333310

#### Exeter

GULLIFORD HI-FI  
97 Sidwell Street.  
01392 491194

### MIDLANDS

#### Banbury

OVERTURE  
3 Church Lane.  
01295 272158

#### Birmingham

SOUND ACADEMY  
152a High Street,  
Bloxwich.  
01922 493499

#### Birmingham

MUSIC MATTERS  
363 Hagley Road,  
Edgbaston.  
0121 429 2811

#### Coventry

FRANK HARVEY  
163 Spon Street.  
024 7652 5200

#### Leicester

CYMBIOSIS  
6 Hotel Street.  
0116 262 3754

#### Nottingham

CASTLE SOUND &  
VISION  
48/50 Maid Marian  
Way.  
0115 9584404

### NORTH

#### Cheadle

THE AUDIO WORKS  
14 Stockport Road.  
0161 428 7887

#### Chester

ACOUSTICA  
17 Hoole Road.  
01244 344227

#### Gateshead

LINTONE AUDIO  
7-11 Park Lane,  
Gateshead.  
0191 477 4167

#### Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS  
184 Fitzwilliam Street.  
0114 275 6048

#### York

SOUND ORGANISATION  
2 Gillygate.  
01904 627108

### SCOTLAND

#### Edinburgh

LOUD & CLEAR  
Bonnington Mill,  
72 Newhaven Road.  
0131 555 3963

#### Glasgow

LOUD & CLEAR  
520 St Vincent St,  
Finnieston.  
0141 221 0221

# Ask Us

Got a burning hi-fi question? Find the answer here...

## Send your queries to:

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**PAUL MESSENGER**

Former Hi-Fi Choice editor Paul is widely regarded as the UK's foremost loudspeaker expert and is on hand to answer your speaker questions.



**JIMMY HUGHES**

With more than 40 years as an enthusiast under his belt, Jimmy is one of the UK's best-known hi-fi experts. He's also HFC's 'Mr. Tweaker'.



**RICHARD BLACK**

Richard is a professional musician and recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. If your question is technical, he's your man.



**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. Still going strong, he only writes for Hi-Fi Choice.



**ALVIN GOLD**

Alvin has been writing about his obsession for more than 25 years. He has expertise across all product types and despite the photo is 'happy to be of service'.



**JASON KENNEDY**

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of Hi-Fi Choice and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now he's back on the magazine as a freelance writer and hi-fi expert.

## Lovin' it Luddite

After years of wondering why some audiophiles still listen to that incredibly aged and obsolete format vinyl, I finally decided to take the plunge and find out. I ended up buying an old Technics SL-1500 turntable on an internet auction site and suddenly it all became clear! The clarity, fluidity and sheer musicality have got me hooked, but I could do without the hiss, crackle and pop that comes with pretty much every LP in my parents' collection.

I have only just started buying my own vinyl, mainly from charity shops and on the internet and was wondering if I can simply wash my LPs in warm water with a bit of washing-up liquid before giving them a good rinse and dry?

**Simon Dawes** Leicester

**HFC** The problem with tap water and washing-up liquid is that you can't remove every last trace of them, even after repeated rinsing and extended drying. The minerals in tap water tend to get left behind on the vinyl as the water evaporates, as do some of the ingredients in the washing-up liquid.

One of the best investments you can make is a record-cleaning machine like the Moth RCM/2, although this isn't cheap at around £400 (a kit is available for £250). This vacuums the cleaning solution off the vinyl, removing both it and any gunk. If all you need to remove is dust and light dirt, a record brush with carbon-fibre bristles will fit the bill, and there are plenty of these to be had for £10-£15.

## Studios selection

I'm writing to ask your advice on a shortlist of CD players and amps I've compiled. They would need to be compatible with my speakers (Monitor Audio Studio 20SE floorstanders), which I bought back in the 1990s for £2,500 and sound so good that I don't want to change them.

I'm thinking of opting for one-make systems, and I'm considering the Cyrus CD Xt SE transport (£975) and DAC X (£1,275) matched with the Pre vs2 (£700), 8 Power amplifier (£850), and PSX-R power supply (£500).

On the other hand, might Naim gear work better for me? I'm thinking about the CD5 XS CD player, NAC 152 XS pre (£895), NAP 155 XS power (£1,025) and Flatcap XS power supply (£675)? And what about the CDX2, NAC 122x and NAP 150x?

I listen to dance, jazz, and chill-out music, and enjoy deep, tight bass married to a balanced mid-range and treble, with as much detail as possible.

**Chris Leahy** via email

the bass and the CD Xt SE is a corker of a transport, too.

While the DAC X is a current product, Cyrus has discontinued the Pre vs2, although it can still be found for around £700 if you shop around. If your budget is flexible, you could try the current pre XP d though that would raise the cost of preamplification to £1,300, and the XP d's inbuilt DAC would be redundant thanks to the DAC X.

Another option, if you have only a couple of sources, would be the DAC XP at £2,000. Not only is it a superb synergetic match to the transport (see HFC 316), it marries an excellent DAC to an impressive preamp. The 8 Power and a PSX-R would both be fine choices as well, especially as the PSX-R offers an upgrade path for power amps as well as preamps.

Naim's new NAC 152 XS and NAP 155 XS represent a real improvement over their predecessors, especially in terms of an expansive soundstage. We've not yet had a chance to audition the CD5 XS, but given the



**HFC** The Studio 20SEs still have a loyal following amongst audiophiles despite their age thanks to their clarity, precision and speed. Yours is certainly a sensible shortlist given the sorts of music you're after, though the CDX2 would probably be a little source-heavy and the NAC122x and NAP150x have been superseded by the 152XS and 155XS.

In the past, while a lot of Cyrus amplification has demonstrated real strength with detail and transparency, it has not always offered a particularly meaty sound at the bottom end (although the PSX-R external power supply helped in this respect). The company's newer components, however, have real grip, pace and punch in

quality of the pre and power models, we suggest it should be right there at the top of your audition list. As with the PSX-R, which component you connect the Flatcap XS to is in your hands, but it certainly justifies inclusion in your budget.

As ever, the system that offers you the best bang for your buck depends on taste. We'd lean in the direction of the Cyrus setup for detail and transparency, but towards Naim for sheer, propulsive musicality.

## Whither wire?

I recently upgraded my CD player to a Cyrus 8SE and my speakers to Spendor S5es, which required a repositioning of my system. To cut a

## Ramp up the amp

I want to upgrade my CD player but I'm not to sure what products I should be looking at. My system currently consists of a Musical Fidelity A3 CD player, TAG McLaren PA10 preamp, two Rotel RB-971 power amps working in bridged mono-mode, and Monitor Audio Silver RS6 speakers bi-wired with QED Silver Anniversary and Clearer Audio cabling.

I was looking at a DAC because I notice in previous issues of *Hi-Fi Choice* you used a Pioneer PDR-609 recorder which I also have. Would it be a good idea to sell the MF player and, perhaps, get a Bryston converter, or the new Naim DAC?

I listen to most types of music but lean towards vocals and acoustics.

Great mag, and I will be a subscriber for many more years.

**Steve Cade** via email

**HFC** One fairly obvious imbalance in your system as it stands is the power amps.

Good though they are for the money, they are holding your system back. Rather than splashing too much on a DAC at the moment, we suspect replacing the Rotels would do more to boost your equipment's performance than a DAC at around £2,000. If you want to stick with a pair of stereo power amps (though we would recommend bi-amping over bridging and bi-wiring), consider a pair of Cyrus 6 Powers (£500 each).



The Musical Fidelity A3 CD is a sound machine with low levels of jitter, so would make a decent transport for a suitable DAC like the Lavry Engineering DA-10 at £763 or, if you like the sound of the Cyrus amps, the Cyrus DAC X at £1,200 (both reviewed in *HFC* 316).

long story short, the only way one run of my QED Silver Anniversary XT speaker cables can reach one of the Spondors, is by laying it across the carpet, which generates a Spouse Approval Factor (SPA) of zero!

I was thinking of Nordost Flatline Mk2, but at £15 per metre this is pushing my budget and seems to be quite system-dependent. The Chord Company's Odyssey would probably match my other gear well, but unfortunately, at £20 per metre, it's too expensive.

Should I use equal lengths? One of my speakers is placed within a metre of the amp, while the other would require a six-metre length.

**Andy Sayers** via email

**HFC** If the Odyssey 2 is a little too expensive, you could still consider The Chord Company's Rumour 2, which is marginally slimmer than the Odyssey 2 and

more affordable at £12 per metre. The Atlas Hyper 1.5 at £12.50 is also slim, but might sound bass-light in your system.

It's a shame one of your speakers is so far from your amp, but yes, you should certainly use equal lengths, otherwise imaging and soundstaging can suffer. In an ideal world, all amplifiers would be monoblocks situated close to the loudspeakers and connected to them with short runs of cable, as the cables' resistance and propensity to pick up RF interference can have an audible affect on sound quality. Kenwood and DPA are a couple of companies which attempted to produce an improved interface to deal with the problem of cable resistance by providing extra current-sensing cables (called Sigma Drive by Kenwood) from the amp's output terminals to the speakers' binding posts.

## Upgrade or renew?

My system was very good in its heyday 15 years ago, but I have a sneaking feeling my Marantz CD63MkII, Audiolab 8000S integrated and Mission 752 speakers with decent connects and cables may now be past their consumption date. I want a sparkling and livelier sound. Is there a weak link or should I start anew?

**Peter Connelly** via email

**HFC** Given the age of your components, we think upgrading your system is going to involve a complete rebuild. You don't mention a budget or the size of your room, but for modern components, which offer an excellent upgrade, we're assuming you have, say, £1,700 plus the proceeds from selling off your old gear, which should net you another £500 or so.

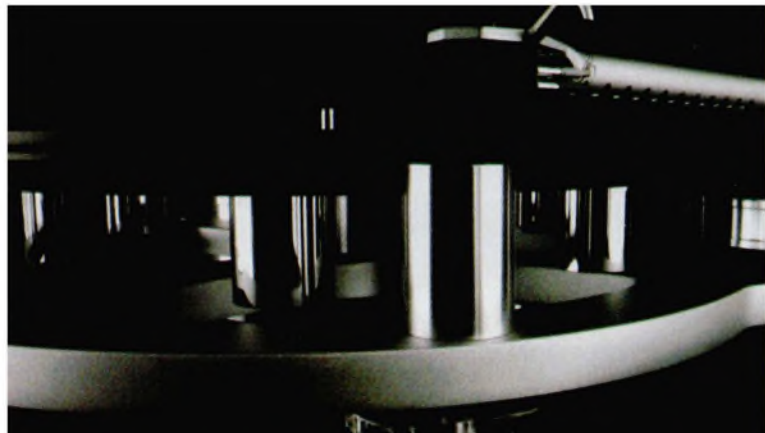
If your budget's slightly 'elastic', we'd suggest you audition the Monitor Audio Silver RS8 (£850) or Dali Ikon 6 (£900) floorstanders, along with Roksan's Kandy K2 integrated and matching Kandy K2 CD player (£750 each). All of these items offer terrific value for money. Given the current economic climate, you might be able to persuade your friendly local dealer to throw in some cables, too. If not, funds permitting, cabling and possibly a new equipment stand could follow at a later date.



## Axis of good

I've just managed to pick up a Linn Axis in mint condition for £125 on a popular auction site. I fitted it with an old Ortofon VMS-20E moving-magnet cartridge to give it a quick ▶





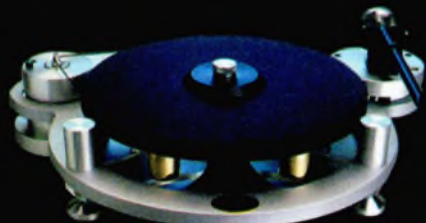
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test and am now confirmed as a very happy turntable owner – the Linn sounds excellent! Now I know the deck works fine, I need a proper cartridge to do it justice and have drawn up a shortlist of Denon DL160 (£160), Ortofon 2M Blue (£150) or Goldring G1042 (£224).

The rest of my set-up consists of a Naim Nait 5i and Bowers and Wilkins' CM2s. I am currently using the preamp and phono stage section of an old NAD AV receiver and the power amp section of the Naim. It goes without saying that I also need a decent phono stage and am considering the MF V-LPS, as I already have a V-DAC, which I like a lot.

**Steve Swift** via email

**HFC** There are currently some very impressive MM/MC phono stages to be had for up to £100. Given that your system is on the brighter side of neutral, you could indeed line up the £90 V-LPS alongside the £100 Cambridge Audio Azur 640P. A marginally cheaper alternative is the Pro-Ject Phono Box II at £80, although the extra cost of the other two yields smoother, more transparent LP replay.

Denon's high-output MCs like the DL-110 and DL-160 are moderately low-compliance cartridges, which can often work in relatively low-mass arms, but they tend to polarise opinion. The presentation tends to be less than neutral and not particularly crisp in timing. Grado's Prestige Gold at £110 may also be worth an audition, though you might find it a little too rich and warm. You'll get a sound with more speed and drive from the 2M Blue and G1042, although the Ortofon offers greater longevity through stylus upgrades.



### Flexible friend

My system is a bit of a mish-mash, consisting of a wonderfully stylish but slightly uninvolved Sony CDP-XE3000 CD player, a Dual CS505-3 turntable and Pro-Ject Tube Box phono stage, a Musical Fidelity A5 amplifier and Castle Harlech loudspeakers. The two areas which need addressing are, I feel, the cartridge (an old Shure M75) and the CD player. Would an Ortofon Salsa MC be a suitable replacement for the Shure and which CD/SACD player would you suggest given my £750 budget?

**Sam Coulson** via email

**HFC** Unfortunately, we'd have to say that the Ortofon would be a bad idea for a number of reasons. First, it's a low-compliance cartridge, out towards the opposite end of the compliance spectrum from the Shure. Combine this with the low-mass arm on the Dual and you have a recipe for some serious arm/cartridge resonance

problems. Second, the 505-3 might have been a decent, affordable deck in its day, but it is very much a budget machine and a £200 MC deserves something considerably better. If you want to stick with your Dual, have a look at some of Grado's impressive MM's, all of which are high-compliance. If you'd like to retire your turntable, have a look at Pro-Ject's range.

For both CD and SACD replay, Marantz's SA8003 is hard to beat, particularly in the bass, where its speed, control and extension can be very addictive.



### Canned heat

Having lived for a couple of years now in a fairly small flat with thin walls, I've finally reached the point where I simply can't see myself being able to assemble a decent system based around loudspeakers. Even with the volume at low levels, I suspect my current speakers (Bowers and Wilkins DM302s) aren't winning fans amongst my neighbours during my evening listening sessions.

I had a chance to listen to Sennheiser's Orpheus electrostatics at a hi-fi show, where they were the best piece of equipment by far to my ears. There's unlikely to be any way I could ever stretch to their five-figure price tag, but your reviews of the Sennheiser HD 800 (HFC 324) and Grado GS1000i (HFC 325) have tempted me to the point where I've decided to let my wallet do the talking.

I have a Sony TA-F500ES integrated and a Kenwood DP-5090 CD player. Which headphone amp should I go for as a partner to either of these headphones?

**carlitosway** via email

**HFC** German manufacturer Lehmann makes some very impressive headphone amps. If your wallet will still be feeling the strain after the purchase of the Grados or Sennheisers, you might want to try the Rhinelander at £400. For £350 more, there's the excellent Black Cube Linear. It may not be the absolute last word in amps for cans, but it is very good indeed and should stave off the need for another upgrade for years to come.



### Retro requisites

As many a thrifty audiophile knows, buying second-hand equipment can get you superb performance for your budget. Not all oldies are golden, however, and there's more to weeding out the lemons than carrying out the audio equivalent of a spot of tyre-kicking. Some simple guidelines should ensure you're unlikely to get burned financially or literally.

The best way to buy is in person. If you have no option but to have the item posted to you after you've bought it, quiz the seller about the performance of the equipment. Clearly, more recent components are likely to work properly and still have spares and service support. That said, laser diodes in CD and DVD mechanisms don't last forever; lifespans tend to vary between six and ten years. The more esoteric the laser block, the harder it is to replace. Try to find out if the player reads heavily scratched discs, or high-resolution, re-recordable audio and video discs that might have been recorded at high speed. Also, ensure it plays all the formats it's been designed to handle.

Do a bit of research on the innards of the item. Do they use specialist logic or drive circuits (as is often the case in direct-drive turntables), which are now 'unobtainium'. Just as important for turntables is bearing wear – is there any play in the arm or platter bearings? Has the platter bearing been serviced? Has the belt been replaced, and does the arm lift work correctly?

Classic speaker problems are perished foam surrounds, voice coils which rub due to sagging surrounds; blown tweeters; and shifted crossover points due to leaking or dried-out electrolytic capacitors. In fact, electrolytics are probably the Achilles heel of most hi-fi gear. Duff electrolytics, coupling caps and carbon resistors whose values have drifted wildly are common in valve amps, especially as they typically run hot. If the mains transformer has been overstressed – it may have leaked the wax with which many were impregnated.

There are some superb FM tuners out there, but their RF sections drift with age. Unless you can get hold of a service manual, re-alignment by a qualified technician will be impossible. At least amps are generally simpler to repair, as many will have crackly volume controls and relays (which can be sorted with switch cleaner). Watch for rare output devices though, especially V-FETs, which can be eye-wateringly difficult to obtain.

# Made in Japan – Honeycomb sweetspot

*Jon Marks salutes the innovative technology that went into the SB-RX70 loudspeaker from Technics*

**A**round 30 years ago, some sections of the British audio industry, the press and their followers espoused a 'flat-earth' approach to audio. Simpler was better, it went and complex technology for technology's sake was simply an expensive blind alley. On the other side of the globe, a rather different quest for flatness, combined with pockets deep enough to fund research and development into cutting-edge technology, led to some truly mould-breaking loudspeaker designs. One of the finest exemplars was the Technics SB-RX70.

Back in the 1970s, firms like Matsushita (owner of Panasonic and Technics), Sony and Pioneer, were all seeking ways of improving on the traditional cone diaphragms used in so many loudspeakers, to reduce distortion and increase bandwidth. While ultimately following different paths, each began by taking a leaf from that classic British manufacturer Leak, and its Sandwich driver.

In 1958, while working at the Banbury Aluminium Development Laboratory, the metallurgist Donald A Barlow found that a 'foil-stressed' diaphragm could improve the performance of a typical cone driver. Having read of Barlow's idea in *Wireless World*, Harold Leak contracted him to lead the development of a 'piston-action' speaker and in 1962 unveiled the 'Sandwich cone' loudspeaker, with

its core of expanded polystyrene foam sandwiched between thin skins of aluminium.

#### **HIP TO BE SQUARE**

Fast-forward 25 years and the steady march of technology had produced advanced honeycomb materials for use in the aerospace industry, where low-mass and high-rigidity are

**“The Technics tweeter is truly intriguing; it’s perfect, except it’s wrong” Arthur Khoubesserian, The Funk Firm.**

two critical requirements, just as they are in the construction of loudspeaker diaphragms. At this point, the paths taken by Sony and Pioneer diverge from that chosen by Technics, as the first two companies opted for square honeycomb designs. Naraji Sakamoto, the head of Matsushita's Acoustic Research Laboratory since its inception in 1967 (and the creator of the Technics brand) decided instead to concentrate on the circular form as a result of research conducted with colleagues Katsuki Satoh, Kazue Satoh and Nobuhisa Atoji and presented at the 64th Convention of the Audio Engineering Society in New York in 1979.

The team's investigations into piston motion had led them to dismiss square honeycomb

diaphragms, as they suffered complex break-up modes when driven from a single, cylindrical voice coil. Sony went on to wrangle with this problem in its imposing APM series, leaving Pioneer to choose its investigations to include the composition of the honeycomb itself. Rather than forming the 'filling' of the sandwich from hexagonal cells of the same size,

Sakamoto and team found that using cells which expanded the closer they were to the periphery had several advantages. The light and rigid diaphragm benefited from an unusually flat, wide response, and the simple and controllable break-up modes reduced distortion.

In 1979 and 1980, all three companies announced flat-driver loudspeakers. Sony's flagship APM-8 set a heavyweight tone at 102kg per speaker, while Pioneer countered with its amazing S-F1, a four-way quadradial design with square diaphragms that preceded Technics' SB-RX70 by eight years. At 108kg and with a price tag to match, the S-F1 sold in minuscule numbers; according to Axel Dahl of



N. Sakamoto



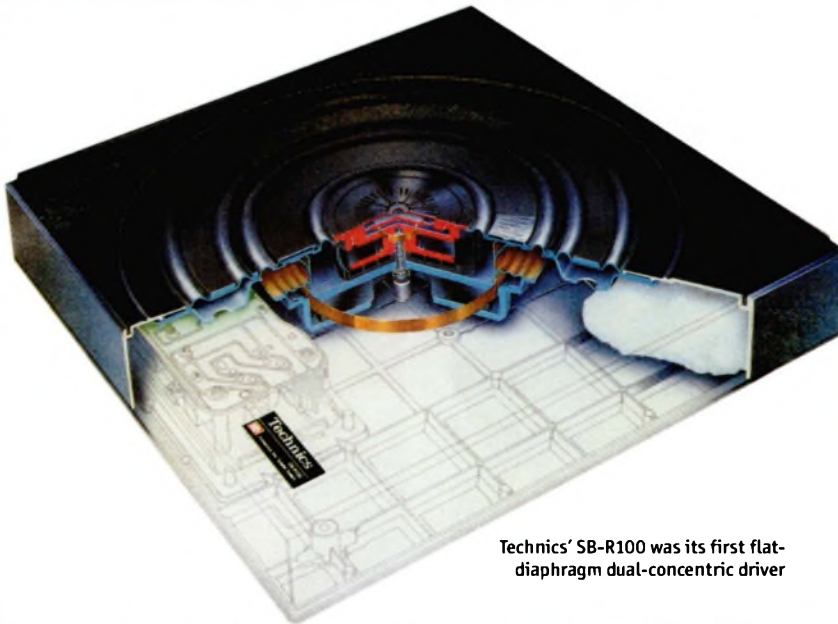
K. Satoh



K. Satoh



N. Atoji



Technics' SB-R100 was its first flat-diaphragm dual-concentric driver



(Top) Sony's stunning APM-6s with oval cabinets (Above) The SB-RX70s on their matching stands



Arthur Khoubessierian's SB-RX70s, with their superbly designed diamond-coated mica tweeters

being soldered to a circuit board. Unusually for a speaker of this vintage, the crossover is bi-wirable, though bi-amping may be more what Technics had in mind for them.

#### TURNING THEORY INTO FACT

One owner of a pair of both the RX70 and the cheaper RX50 is Arthur Khoubessierian ▣

www.thevintageknob.org, an ex-Pioneer Italy employee who revealed that only four pairs were ever made. Technics produced the SB-M1, again with a heavyweight price tag and hernia-inducing 85kg mass and the more affordable SB-10 with its 'leaf' planar tweeter.

It's all very well producing proof-of-concept loudspeakers which cost as much as a small house, but taking that technology and trying to distil it into an affordable, yet technically effective form is a much tougher task. It was one to which Technics rose, first with its low-profile SB-R100 in 1984 and then with the SB-RX70 in 1988.

The aim of Technics in producing the SB-RX70 was to create a loudspeaker that addressed a range of issues. By using its flat, honeycomb technology for the mid/bass unit, it could produce a standmount, which yielded wide bandwidth from just two drivers, an even response and low distortion. In fact, the mid/

bass unit, with its inner and outer-circumference surrounds, is reminiscent of the ring-radiator in Sennheiser's HD 800 headphone (see review in *HFC* 324). By fitting a highly pistonic, diamond-coated mica tweeter to the centre of this driver and linking the two with a suitable crossover, Technics was able to realise a loudspeaker that was not just phase-linear without the need for a stepped baffle, but also effectively a point-source.

Quality of construction extended to other areas of the RX70. The cabinet walls may have been made of 20mm chipboard, but they were fitted with a figure-of-eight brace, after Finite Element Analysis revealed the bending modes of cabinet panels in use. The removable rear panel screws to this brace, as well as the cabinet walls and the end result is a very solidly built 20kg speaker.

The crossover components are all glued to a wooden panel and then hard-wired, rather than

## LARGER THAN LIFE

Although the SB-RX range ended with the RX70 (apart from a high-gloss cabinet 're-issue' in the form of the SB looking to synthesise planar and dynamic loudspeakers, it manufactured the absolutely mammoth SB-AFP1000. Rated with power handling of 600 watts RMS, this speaker stood 2.2m tall, 2.2m wide, and was almost a metre deep. Filling the bulk of the baffle were eight mica and chitin bass panels, each driven from behind by four voice coils. The four lower mid-range drivers were smaller panels, each topped by a flat mica midrange and the diamond-coated mica tweeter. Given their size and that each weighed 320kg, it's no surprise that they didn't sell like hot cakes. Even their smaller siblings, the SB-AFP100 and SB-AFP10, sold in very limited numbers. As a range, apparently their sound wasn't quite as grand as their appearance.

Like the driver in Sennheiser's HD800 headphones, the Technics' mid-bass is a ring radiator



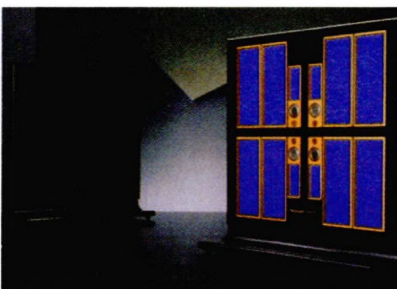
Like Sony's high-end APM drive units, those from the RX50 and RX70 are very well engineered



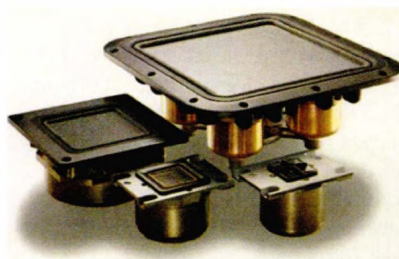
Technics' plain but effective SB-M1



Few will ever hear Pioneer's rare S-F1



The SB-AFP1000 was a truly imposing loudspeaker, standing 2.2m tall and 2.2m wide



Sony's smaller APM drivers featured a single, relatively large circular voice coil

## SQUARE DANCE

Sony's foray into the world of honeycomb drivers resulted in its Accurate Pistonic Motion series. Sony had pressed ahead in attempting to control the complex break-up modes of square diaphragms, using four voice coils per driver for the flagship lower-frequency units. With its honeycomb sandwich of constant-size cells, this is hardly a simple device. In the high-end APMs, flat honeycombs were used in all the drivers, including the tweeters. In the original APM-8, the drivers were fitted to a rectangular cabinet with unchamfered edges. In later incarnations, such as the beautiful APM-6s, oval cabinets were used to reduce diffraction.

Although the SB-RX can suffer blown tweeters (as do many older loudspeakers), the chief problem with the APMs is that those with foam surrounds suffer rot over time, the surrounds being virtually irreplaceable without a cunning bit of DIY (<http://homepage2.nifty.com/k-ooki/apm/edge1a.htm>).

of The Funk Firm. "The Technics tweeter is truly intriguing," he told us. "It's perfect, except it's wrong. You listen to it and you can't fault it. It sounds very accurate without sounding sterile, but at the same time it has a slightly muted quality, a sort of lack of sparkle. One of my favourite dynamic speakers is the LS3/6, and I keep going back to it for its musicality. The SB-RX70 does sound very good, but it doesn't have that ethereal quality, that midband fluidity that the LS3/6 has and yet the Technics is definitely less coloured. The concept of a speaker like the SB-RX70 is a fascinating idea I would love to see developed further and produced in a real-world loudspeaker."

There's no doubt that the RX70 is impressive, both in terms of engineering and sound quality. Imaging is well-defined and soundstaging stable, although it has to be said that it's probably no better than very good loudspeakers of more standard configuration. Despite the relatively small mid/bass unit, the bottom end has good extension, resolution and control, while the midband is clean and sweet. One puzzling aspect of the driver's design is that Mr Sakamoto and his team didn't decide to fit a 'leaf' planar tweeter. After all, they presented a paper in 1977 describing, 'A dynamic tweeter reproducing a frequency range from 4kHz -150kHz. This leaf tweeter has a planar voice coil printed on a very thin diaphragm, making possible a frequency response far past the range of human hearing.' Tantalisingly, the SB-RX70 packs into one diminutive package many intelligent solutions to a myriad loudspeaker problems, but perhaps demonstrates more the promise of Technics' research than its full fruition. **HFC**

Jon Marks

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#### Marantz SA/PM-KI PEARL

To celebrate 30 years with Marantz, its Brand Ambassador, Ken Ishiwata, launches the KI Pearl SACD player and integrated amplifier. These products, limited to just 500 units each, are already receiving glowing reviews and has been awarded 'Editor's Choice' by Hi-Fi News magazine (09/2009).

### TURNTABLES



#### Michell Gyro SE

Based entirely on the GyroDec, but without the costly acrylic plinth and dustcover, the Gyro SE brings the same qualities in a more affordable and compact package. A Gyro SE can always be converted into a GyroDec by purchasing a plinth and dustcover.

#### Pro-Ject Genie MKIII

This MKIII version includes a new motor, more stable motor base and a new tone arm with traditional anti-skate. Supplied with an OM3e Ortofon cartridge fitted, the Genie MKIII is available in Standard Black with White, Piano Black and Red finish options available at extra cost.



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### HI-FI SPEAKERS

#### Monitor Audio

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#### B&W 685 Theatre

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07/1008



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Onkyo raises the bar once again in the competitive world of home cinema with its TX-SR607 which features Dolby ProLogic IIz support.



**Sony STR-DA2400ES**

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BLU-RAY

**Panasonic DMP-BD60 & 80**

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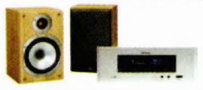


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# *Awards* *2009*



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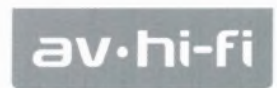


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# Awards 2009

**W**elcome to the 2009 Hi-Fi Choice Awards issue – the most reliable guide to high-quality hi-fi anywhere. Spread across the next 38 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 of our favourite products to come up with a final list of award-winning components to suit a variety of pockets. And this year we've made a few

improvements, too: we've simplified the categories and created one overall winner, with two further finalists. Plus we've also added some new categories, including an award for innovation in audio and a section for products operating in the high end.

#### THE JUDGING...

The process we undertake in judging which products make it into our *Awards* issue is exhaustive. All of the equipment is listened to and carefully considered and then we embark

on an extensive consultation with a judging panel of exceptional experience: the *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewing team!

We've also checked the availability and pricing of each product, to ensure that you can still get hold of it in the coming months and that you know what to pay.

The result is an *Awards* edition for those who really care about quality – hi-fi awards you can really trust – enabling you to buy in complete confidence. So grab some quiet time and turn the page as we reveal all...



**DAN GEORGE**  
*Hi-Fi Choice's* editor and  
judging coordinator



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



**ALVIN GOLD**  
Top hi-fi journalist and  
*Hi-Fi Choice* lifer



**JASON KENNEDY**  
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and vinyl fan



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editor, audio expert



**JIMMY HUGHES**  
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40 years' experience



**RICHARD HOLLISS**  
*Hi-Fi Choice's* current  
production editor

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**NEW**

# Q-TV2 The HD Sound upgrade for your TV

100w Amplified 2.1 Stereo System

**Plug and Play**

No Messy Wires

**Ultra Discreet**



**"the improvement over your flatscreen's own audio performance is huge."**  
What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision,  
November 2009



## Q-TV2 Features

100w 2.1 Stereo system

'Plug and Play' set-up

Normally uses existing TV remote

## Simply Great HD Sound

Everyone wants wonderful sound from their television, but until now, the only way to enjoy it has been to invest in a full 5.1 system, with all the speakers, cables and let's face it, inconvenience that entails – not to mention the cost!

Now there's a brilliant new, hassle free, affordable alternative: 'Q-TV2' from Q Acoustics.

Q-TV2 has got 100 watts of amplification, yet is so slim you hardly see it. That's because it's width adjustable and simply attaches to the VESA sockets found on the back of all good 30" to 42" flatscreen televisions.

**"the neatest home cinema system ever conceived"**

**"you have to hear Q-TV2"**

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision November 2009

## Movies, Games And More

The sound is fantastic, not only on 'Coronation Street' and 'EastEnders' but on everything you can enjoy via your TV; including DVD, CD, Blu-ray, digital radio, video games and even your iPod or other mp3 player.

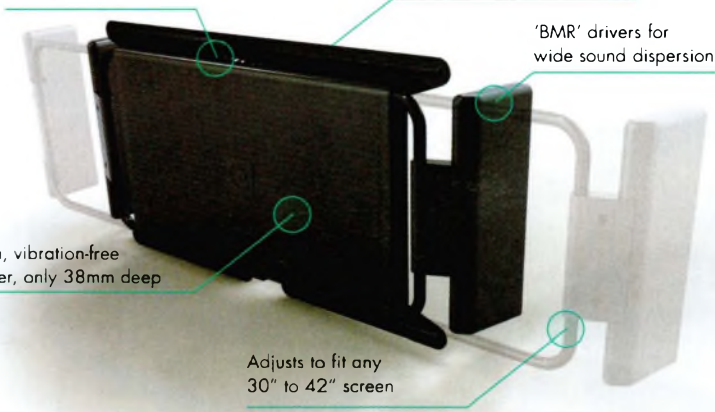
Input from TV, plus iPod or other personal audio player

Attaches to the VESA mounting sockets on flatscreen TVs

'BMR' drivers for wide sound dispersion

Ultra-slim, vibration-free subwoofer, only 38mm deep

Adjusts to fit any 30" to 42" screen



see the video at

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# Roksan Kandy K2

**Price** £750 **Type** CD **Tel** 020 8900 6801 **URL** [www.kandyline.co.uk](http://www.kandyline.co.uk)

The K2 CD player utilises a newer generation of the Sanyo-manufactured dedicated CD mechanism, which connects to a cracking new Burr-Brown DAC, the PMC 1798.

The result is a delightfully balanced performance from a component that oozes high-end class. In tandem with its partnering K2 amplifier, this is one player that will suit both aficionado and hi-fi enthusiast.

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**FINALIST**

## Marantz SA8003

**Price** £800 **Type** CD/SACD **Tel** 02890 279830  
**URL** [www.marantz.com](http://www.marantz.com)

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## Yamaha CD-S700

**Price** £400 **Type** CD **Tel** 01908 366700  
**URL** [www.yamaha-uk.com](http://www.yamaha-uk.com)



## XT Evolution The Natural Selection.

The **new** XT Evolution successfully combines technology from QED's signature 'Genesis' and 'X-Tube™' speaker cables.

It boasts significantly lower impedance than a traditional speaker cable with copper cores of the same cross-sectional area. In addition, the individual parallel conductor geometry, combined with the hollow central spacer, means the cable has a very low inductance and therefore minimal effect on an amplifier's damping factor.

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"Striking stereo focus"  
"Lavishly detailed"

"this fine, keenly priced speaker  
cable works very well indeed"



What Hi-Fi? October 2009

For more information about XT Evolution visit our website - [www.qed.co.uk](http://www.qed.co.uk)

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**BEST** CD PLAYER OVER £1,000

# Leema Antila II

**Price** £2,735 **Type** CD **Tel** 01938 811900 **URL** [www.leema-acoustics.com](http://www.leema-acoustics.com)

The Antila II is a fast and accomplished performer that is among the most revealing at its price. Build and finish are excellent, with no fewer than 20 DACs, a parallel arrangement of

converters that naturally lends itself to a fully balanced output. Combine these qualities with its partnering Tucana II amplifier and you have a very welcome addition to the ranks of the British high end.

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## Esoteric X-05

**Price** £3,995 **Type** CD/SACD **Tel** 01727 865488  
**URL** [www.teac.com/esoteric](http://www.teac.com/esoteric)

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## Meridian G08.2

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**Price** £699 (ex. arm/cartridge) **Type** Turntable **Tel** 01767 313691**URL** [www.srm-tech.co.uk](http://www.srm-tech.co.uk)

The basic Arezzo is a great turntable producing superb results at a realistic price. It's not only excellent as supplied, but offers a clear upgrade path for those wanting something even better.

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## Michell Tecnodec

**Price** £608 (ex. arm/cartridge) **Type** Turntable**Tel** 020 8953 0771**URL** [www.michell-engineering.co.uk](http://www.michell-engineering.co.uk)

## Pro-Ject X-Pack

**Price** £1,000 (inc. arm/cartridge) **Type** Turntable**Tel** 01235 511166 **URL** [www.project-audio.com](http://www.project-audio.com)

# EISA AWARD



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Best European Audio Amplifier 2009-2010.

#### Citation of the EISA jury on Harman Kardon® HK 990

This is no mere "new amplifier" from Harman Kardon, for the HK 990 represents a root-and-branch evolution of all previous HK-integrated models. Marketed as a "2.2-channel" amplifier, this heavyweight performer also includes on-board DSP for bass management and a synchronising clock feed to optimise the flow of digital data from its partnering HD 990 CD player. With its own sophisticated DAC stage, the HK 990 further enhances its flexibility as the hub of a modern digital audio system. Moreover, its rated 2x150W specification is very conservative, as this amplifier is capable of delivering over 200W/8ohms in practice and up to 1.5kW under dynamic conditions. Its sound is equally powerful, compelling and uncommonly detailed, creating a deep and broad soundstage populated with believable musical instruments. In short, the HK 990 is an audiophile bargain for enthusiasts, offering a lucid and highly detailed window into all recordings.



Available at selected Harman Kardon distributors. Call 01707 278100 for more information.

**BEST** TURNTABLE OVER £1,000

# Townshend Rock 7

**Price** £2,155 (inc. arm/cartridge) **Type** Turntable **Tel** 020 8979 2155  
**URL** [www.townshendaudio.com](http://www.townshendaudio.com)

This turntable impresses with its solidity of imaging and high levels of detail. It clearly has an integrity to it that is rare in turntables at this price point. The 39mm-thick white platter is made

from high-density polyethylene and sits on a steel bearing in a brass journal. All this combines to give a robust and resolute sound performance that has the consistency of a digital source.

**HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
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## Funk V2

**Price** £1,390 (inc. arm) **Type** Turntable  
**Tel** 01273 585042 **URL** [www.thefunkfirm.co.uk](http://www.thefunkfirm.co.uk)

**HI-FI CHOICE  
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FINALIST**



## Michell Gyro SE/RB250

**Price** £1,565 (inc. arm substitute) **Type** Turntable  
**Tel** 020 8953 0771  
**URL** [www.michell-engineering.co.uk](http://www.michell-engineering.co.uk)

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# Cambridge Audio DacMagic

**Price** £230 **Type** DAC **Tel** 0870 900 1000 **URL** [www.cambridgeaudio.com](http://www.cambridgeaudio.com)

An astonishingly capable piece of kit that does all the right things, with out-of-class achievements in all tonal areas and with excellent detail. Not only does it present a very life-like version

of musical events, it seems equally adept at reproducing all manner of music styles, yet maintains its composure in the face of very tricky textures and close-knit melodic lines. And at the price it's a steal.

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## Bryston BDA-1

**Price** £2,150 **Type** DAC **Tel** 08704 441044  
**URL** [www.bryston.com](http://www.bryston.com)



## Lavry Engineering DA10

**Price** £830 **Type** DAC **Tel** 08452 573508  
**URL** [www.lavryengineering.com](http://www.lavryengineering.com)



# B1

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w: [www.vividaudio.com](http://www.vividaudio.com)



VIVID audio



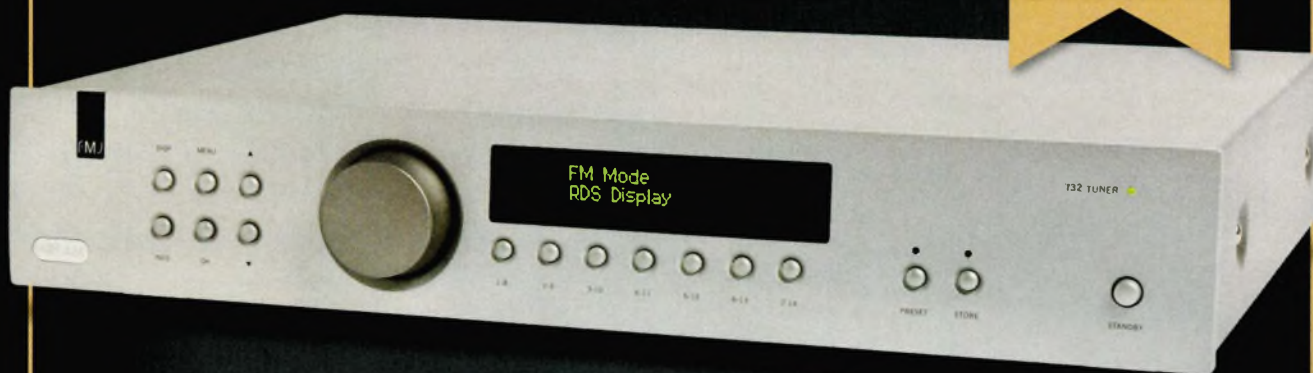
**BEST** DAB/FM RADIO TUNER

# Arcam FMJ T32

**Price** £600 **Type** DAB/FM **Tel** 01223 203200 **URL** www.arcam.co.uk

**W**ith a clear and confident bass and excellent sound on FM, this tuner is without doubt, a highly cost-effective way of optimising the airwaves. It produces a lively

energetic sound with impressive discrimination between instruments and accomplished stereo imaging. An equally rewarding DAB and iPod performance are the icing on the cake.



## Pure Evoke Flow

**Price** £150 **Type** DAB/FM/Internet  
**Tel** 01923 277488 **URL** www.puredigital.com

## Vita Audio R2i

**Price** £300 **Type** DAB/FM  
**Tel** 01702 601410 **URL** www.vitaudio.com



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\*At participating dealers only

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**DAC1 PRE**  
Stereo Pre-Amplifier / DAC / Headphone Amp



**DAC1 USB**  
2 Channel 24-bit 192KHz D/A Converter



[www.scvlondon.co.uk](http://www.scvlondon.co.uk)

Distributed by SCV London: [benchmark@scvlondon.co.uk](mailto:benchmark@scvlondon.co.uk)

**BEST** AMPLIFIER UP TO £1,000

# Yamaha A-S700

**Price** £500 **Type** Integrated **Tel** 01908 366700 **URL** [www.yamaha-uk.com](http://www.yamaha-uk.com)

This 90-watt model includes a handy MM input, as well as a wealth of Yamaha proprietary audio features, such as Total Purity Audio Reproduction Technology. It treats all musical styles with the

utmost respect and partnered with the CD-S700 makes up one-half of a dynamic duo. An excellent amplifier for the money, it's also neutral – as any good musical instrument should be.



YAMAHA NATURAL SOUND STEREO AMPLIFIER A-S700

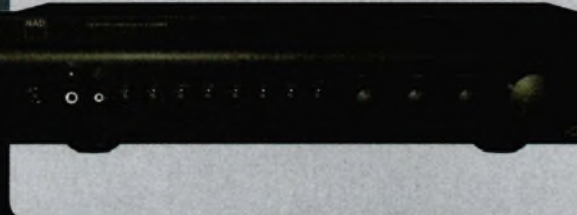


A gold ribbon-style badge with the text "HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2009 FINALIST" in bold, black and gold lettering.

## Cambridge Audio Azur 840A V2

**Price** £700 (silver) **Type** Integrated **Tel** 08709 001000  
**URL** [www.cambridgeaudio.com](http://www.cambridgeaudio.com)

## NAD C326BEE

**Price** £325 **Type** Integrated **Tel** 01279 501111  
**URL** [www.nadelectronics.com](http://www.nadelectronics.com)

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Radiance 1 - "5 Globes" Hi-Fi World, July '09  
Radiance 3 - "Best Buy" Hi-Fi Choice, June '09  
Radiance 5.1 - "Top Pick" Home Theatre, August '09

[www.acoustic-energy.co.uk](http://www.acoustic-energy.co.uk)

**BEST** AMPLIFIER OVER £1,000

# Trilogy 909/990

**Price** £4,495 (pre); £5,895 (power) **Type** Pre/power **Tel** 020 8856 8856**URL** [www.trilogyaudio.com](http://www.trilogyaudio.com)

**H**ere's a double act with exceptional musicality, combined with superb build quality. The 990 is a hybrid design with a solid-state output stage and is the most sophisticated

of its type in the glass-audio world. There are more features than you can shake a stick at and the pairing boasts superb style and finish quality. It's a performance that marks them out as class-leaders.

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## ATC SIA 2-150

**Price** £2,376 **Type** Integrated **Tel** 01285 760561**URL** [www.atc.gb.net](http://www.atc.gb.net)

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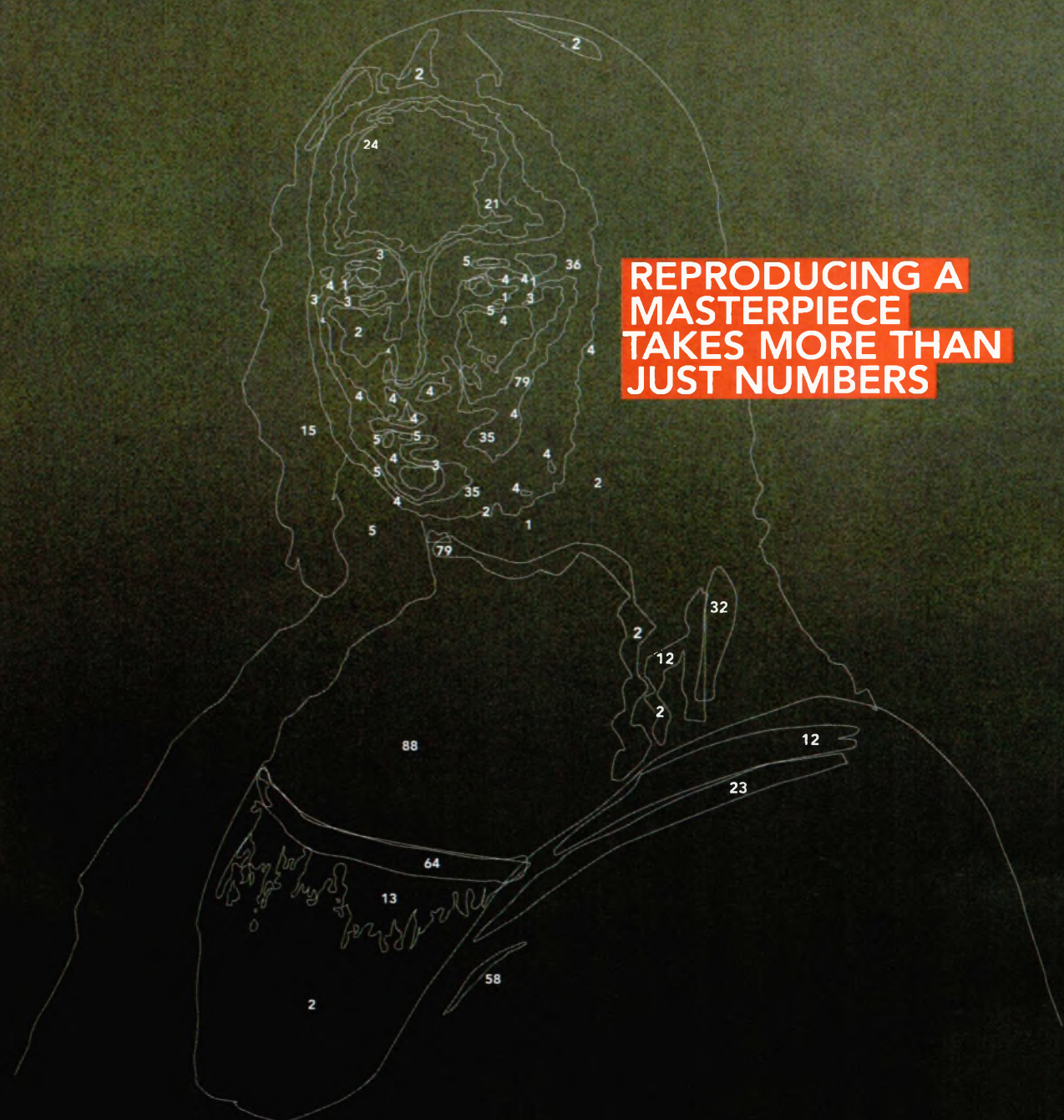


## Naim NAIT XS

**Price** £1,350 **Type** Integrated **Tel** 01722 426600**URL** [www.naimaudio.com](http://www.naimaudio.com)

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**BEST** LOUDSPEAKER UP TO £1,000

# Rega RS1

**Price** £400 **Type** Standmount **Tel** 01702 333071 **URL** www.rega.co.uk

A direct descendant of Rega's earlier Kyte and Ara models, the RS1 has undergone some subtle changes including the addition of the company's radical new tweeter. This unusually slim loudspeaker also combines a strong output through the upper mid and treble, resulting in a beautifully coherent and exceptional performance. It also sounds much bigger than it looks.



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## Q Acoustics 1020i

**Price** £140 **Type** Standmount **Tel** 01279 501111  
**URL** www.qacoustics.com

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## Tannoy Revolution DC4T

**Price** £690 **Type** Floorstander **Tel** 01236 420199  
**URL** www.tannoy.com

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**BEST** LOUDSPEAKER OVER £1,000

# PMCI B2i

**Price** £8,900 **Type** Standmount **Tel** 01582 405694 **URL** [www.pmc-speakers.com](http://www.pmc-speakers.com)

**T**his large standmount's Pro-style midrange dome delivers superb grip and dynamic expression. Supplied with a tubular steel frame base, this three-way design gives an exceptional performance with a clean and easy bass delivery. With solid overall neutrality and stereo imaging that sets it well above its peers, the B2i is a top-class loudspeaker at a not unreasonable price.



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## Kudos Cardea C2

**Price** £1,950 **Type** Floorstander  
**Tel** 0845 601 9390 **URL** [www.kudosaudio.com](http://www.kudosaudio.com)

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## PSB Synchrony One

**Price** £3,500 **Type** Floorstander  
**Tel** 01279 501111 **URL** [www.psbSpeakers.com](http://www.psbSpeakers.com)

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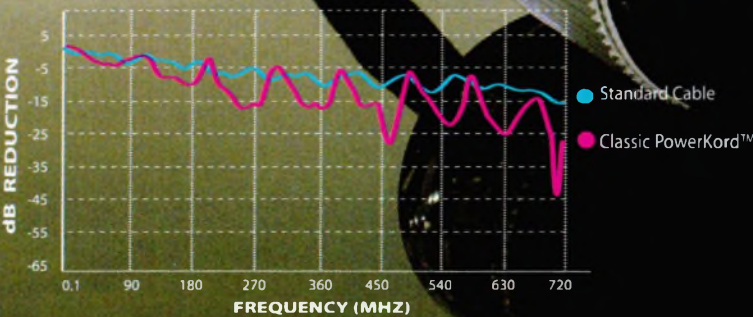
## 'One of the best value for money mains leads we've heard.'

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Use it to boost the performance of your CD player or amplifier and help your music sound more dynamic, detailed and musical.

**Russ Andrews Classic PowerKord™**  
1m with Wattgate 320i IEC  
**£110**  
With standard IEC £85



Measurements showing reduction in RFI (due to TV and radio broadcasts) with our Classic PowerKord™ compared with a standard 3 core mains cable.



*'Impressively detailed and crisp, improving imaging and reducing high-frequency hash. Rhythmic portrayal was excellent, and so too was clarity.'*  
HiFi Choice magazine

*'I've just attached a Classic PowerKord™ to my Marantz CD6000 and rather than bore you with superlatives about the improvements, I would simply like to say that I won't be upgrading to a newer CD player for some time. Well done nice product.'*  
Mr C Donnelly, London

**\* NEW CATALOGUE OUT NOW! \* PACKED FULL WITH OVER 300 PRODUCTS \***

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The PowerMax Plus™, our best selling mains cable...

*"The improvement over a standard giveaway cord is clear - you get improved clarity, smoother highs and weightier bass. Stereo imaging becomes more expansive, and the equipment's presentation sounds cleaner and more precise"*

What HiFi? Sound & Vision Ultimate Guide to High End Entertainment, Sept. 08



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**BEST** HEADPHONE

# Sennheiser HD800

**Price** £1,000 **Type** Open back **Tel** 01494 551551  
**URL** [www.sennheiser.co.uk](http://www.sennheiser.co.uk)

Very few loudspeaker designs can come even close to the level of detail resolution offered by the HD800 headphones. Voices and instruments all have exactly the timbre that they do in real life. Sound is simply superb in every way, beautifully balanced across the range, thanks to the combination of sturdy, but lightweight construction, high-purity copper cabling and all-new diaphragms.



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## Beyerdynamic DT880

**Price** £270 **Type** Open back **Tel** 01444 258258  
**URL** [www.beyerdynamic.com](http://www.beyerdynamic.com)



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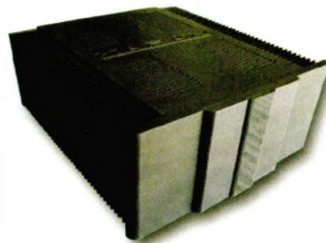
## Grado GS1000i

**Price** £1,100 **Type** Open back **Tel** 01279 501111  
**URL** [www.gradolabs.com](http://www.gradolabs.com)



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**BEST** ONE-BOX HI-FI SYSTEM

# LinnClassik Music

**Price** £1,350 **Type** One-box system **Tel** 01413 077777 **URL** www.linn.co.uk

**H**ere is a CD player, FM/AM tuner, DAC, preamp and power amp all in one. It boasts a 75-watt output and 'green' credentials in the form of a high-efficiency, switch-mode supply. Well-

featured, its big attraction is sound which really involves the listener, giving a sense of scale and immediacy which few budget systems can rival. Multi-room options are the icing on the cake.

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## Arcam Solo Mini

**Price** £750 **Type** One-box system  
**Tel** 01223 203200 **URL** www.arcam.co.uk

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## NAD Viso Two

**Price** £800 **Type** One-box system  
**Tel** 01279 501111 **URL** www.nadelectronics.com

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# STOCK CLEARANCE

Save £s in the Sevenoaks Stock Clearance. There are massive reductions on these end-of-line\* hi-fi and home cinema separates, speakers and accessories. Stock is limited and when it's gone, it's gone so don't miss a chance to pick up a bargain! The list below shows just a small selection of our clearance items with many more to be found at [WWW.SSAV.COM](http://WWW.SSAV.COM)

## BRIGHTON 01273 733338

Arcam FMJ P7 AV Power Amplifier	£1,599
Dali Suite 2.8 Speakers	£499
Loewe Spheros R37 LCD TV	£2,499
Spendor C5e Centre Speaker	£399
Spendor S3e Speakers	£599
Spendor S5e Speakers	£899
Spendor S6e Speakers	£1,199
Spendor S8e Speakers	£1,549
Spendor S9e Speakers	£2,499
Spendor SR5 Surround Speakers	£699

## BROMLEY 020 8290 1988

Dali Lektor 1 Speakers (Black)	£179
Dali Lektor 2 Speakers (Walnut)	£229
Loewe Connect 37 Media DR+ LCD TV	£1,895
Loewe Xelos A32 HD+ DR+ LCD TV	£1,499
Monitor Audio Bronze BR5 Speakers (Cherry)	£325
Monitor Audio Silver RS1 Speakers (Rosenut)	£279
Monitor Audio Silver RS8 Speakers (Oak)	£649
Monitor Audio Silver RSFX Surround Speakers (Oak)	£279
Q Acoustics 1000i Sub Woofer	£349
Teac Reference 600 CD / DAB System	£749

## EXETER 01392 218895

Isotek Sigmas Mains Conditioner (Black)	£719
KEF KHT6001 Satellite Speakers (Black)	£519
Loewe 5MU Motorised Stand	£299
Loewe individual 26" LCD TV (Black)	£1,099
Loewe individual 32" DR+ LCD TV (Black)	£1,849
Naim CDX2 CD Player (Black)	£2,399
Naim Hicap Power Supply (Black)	£799
Naim NAC282 Pre Amplifier (Black)	£2,499
Naim Supercap Power Supply (Black)	£2,499
Wilson Benesch Arc Speakers (Maple)	£1,999

## GUILDFORD 01483 536666

B&W FPM2 Wall Mount Loudspeakers (Pair) (Black)	£400
Denon AVR4308 AV Receiver	£1,499
In Focus IN80 DLP Projector	£1,379
Linn Klassik Movie Single Box DVD Surround System	£299
Loewe Spheros 37 Full HD LCD (Basalt)	£2,529
Loewe System Cube 2 Motorised Cabinet For Spheros	£979
Meridian G01 Pre-amplifier (Silver)	£1,299
Meridian G55 5 Channel Power Amplifier (Silver)	£1,849
Pioneer BDP-LX71 Blu-Ray Player	£499
Spendor S8 Loudspeakers (Pair) (Cherry)	£1,549

## HOLBORN 020 7837 7540

Audia Flight 2 CD Player	£1,624
Audia Flight 2 Amplifier	£1,949
Denon DVD1800BD Blu-Ray Player	£275
Marantz BD7003 Blu-Ray Player	£399
Marantz PM11S1 Amplifier	£1,625
Marantz RC3001 Universal Remote Control	£195
Pioneer DCS370 DVD System	£199
QED HDMI 4x4 Matrix Switcher	£845
Roksan FR5 Speakers	£1,625
Spectral CL1552 Equipment Stand	£999

## KINGSTON 020 8547 0717

Denon DVD1800BD Blu-Ray Player (Black)	£299
Denon DVD1800BD Blu-Ray Player (Premium Silver)	£299
KEF HTS6001 Satellite Speakers	£149
KEFHTC6001 Centre Speaker	£149
KEF KHT3005SE AV Speaker Package (Gloss Black)	£799
KEF XQ10 Speakers (Black)	£399
Monitor Audio Silver RS8 Speakers (Walnut)	£449
Monitor Audio Silver RS8 Speakers (Rosenut)	£599
Marantz BD7003 Blu-Ray Player (Black)	£499
Monitor Audio GSLCR Centre Speaker (Piano Silver)	£349

## LOUGHTON 020 8532 0770

Arcam Logo Sub Woofer	£375
In Focus IN82 DLP Projector	£2,199
KEF XQ10 Speakers (Black Gloss)	£475
Living Control Music Box 3NT HDD Audio Server	£1,925
Living Control Room Box 6 HDD Audio Server	£2,875
Loewe Xelos A32 HD+100 LCD TV (Silver)	£1,275
Marantz BD7003 Blu-Ray Player (Black)	£399
Marantz MM8003 AV Power Amplifier	£995
Musical Fidelity A5.5 CD Player / Amplifier	£2,599
Yamaha DVDS2700 DVD Player	£249

## MANCHESTER 0161 831 7969

B&W DS3 Surround Speakers (Black)	£475
Denon DVD2500BT Blu-Ray Transport (Silver)	£499
Draper Luma 92" Diagonal 16:9 Projection Screen	£199
In Focus IN82 DLP Projector	£2,199
M&K SB8 Sub Woofer (Satin Black)	£349
Monitor Audio Apex AW12 Sub Woofer (White)	£749
Monitor Audio PL350C Centre Speaker (Gloss Black)	£1,949
Pioneer BDP51FD Blu-Ray Player	£289
REL T3 Sub Woofer (White)	£225
Vita Audio R1 DAB Radio (Gloss Red)	£99

## NORWICH 01603 767605

Atacama Nexus 5 Speaker Stands	£45
Audica CS-C1 Centre Speaker	£69
Audica CS-S1 Satellite Speakers	£99
Creek Destiny Amplifier	£779
Lexicon RT10 Universal Disc Player	£1,375
Musical Fidelity 550K Power Amplifier	£799
ProAc D15 Speakers	£1,199
ProAc Response 1sc Surround Speaker	£902
Roth Alfie iPhone Valve Amplifier	£259
Yamaha DVDS2500 DVD Player	£289

## PLYMOUTH 01752 226011

Def Tech Pro Cinema 600 AV Speaker Package (Black)	£309
Denon AVR2809 AV Receiver (Black)	£799
Denon DVD2500BT Blu-Ray Transport (Silver)	£499
Loewe Blu-Tech Blu-Ray Player (Alu / Silver)	£499
Loewe Connect 37 LCD TV (White)	£1,895
Loewe Individual Composite 46 LCD TV (Alu Silver)	£2,999
Sonos CR100 Controller	£189
Spectral ST905 Equipment Stand (Alu / Frosted Glass)	£549
Spectral CL1252 Equipment Stand (Wenge / Snow Glass)	£1,999
Spectral HE164 Equipment Stand (Black Glass)	£849

## POOLE 01202 671677

Cyrus Mark Equipment Rack	£449
Cyrus Pre VS2 Pre A plifier (Silver)	£399
Denon AVR2809 AV Receiver (Silver)	£649
In Focus IN82 DLP Projector	£2,199
Loewe Spheros 37 LCD TV (Basalt)	£2,699
Monitor Audio Silver RSFX Surround Speakers (Rosenut)	£259
Monitor Audio Silver RS8 Speakers (Walnut)	£637
Philips Pronto Neo Universal Remote Control	£75
Spectral CL1552 AV Cabinet (Black)	£1,499
Yamaha BDS2900 Blu-Ray Player (Black)	£379

## SEVENOAKS 01732 459555

Arcam FMJ AV9 AV Processor	£2,149
Denon AVR1909 AV Receiver	£2,199
In Focus IN81 DLP Projector	£1,999
Marantz BD7003 Blu-Ray Player	£399
Monitor Audio AV90 R12 AV Speaker Package (Black)	£899
Panasonic DMP-BD35 Blu-Ray Player	£169
Samsung LE32A457 LCD TV (HD Ready)	£329
Yamaha BDS2900 Blu-Ray Player	£349
Yamaha CDS2000 CD Player	£749
Yamaha TX761 DAB Tuner	£249

## SOUTHAMPTON 023 8033 7770

Cyrus 8 vs2 Amplifier	£549
Denon DVD1800BD Blu-Ray Player	£499
Marantz ST7001 DAB Tuner	£199
Mission 790 Speakers	£249
Mission 794 Speakers	£749
Monitor Audio Silver RS1 Speakers	£249
Monitor Audio Silver RSLCR Centre Speaker	£179
Monitor Audio Silver RSW12 Sub Woofer	£499
Quad Lite 5.1 / II AV Speaker Package	£689
Rotel RA05 Amplifier	£229

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS 01892 531543

Arcam DVA DV137 DVD Player	£599
Arcam FMJ P7 Power Amplifier	£1,839
Denon AVR4308A AV Receiver	£1,499
Denon AVR3808A AV Receiver	£799
DVDO i-Scan VP50 Video Scaler	£1,559
KEF KIT200 DVD System	£649
Living Control Music Box 3 Server	£1,999
Living Control Music Box 6 Server	£2,699
Panasonic DMR-EX78 HDD/DVD Recorder	£219
Partington Dreadnought Broadside	£199

## YEovil 01935 700078

Dali Lektor 2 Speakers	£194
Onkyo CR525 CD / DAB System	£162
REL R205 Sub Woofer (Cherry)	£487
REL R505 Sub Woofer (Oak)	£747
Roksan Caspian M Series Mono A plifier (pair)	£1,949
Roksan Caspian M Series Pre Amplifier	£1,071
Roksan Caspian M Series Power Amplifier	£746
Roksan Caspian M-Series Phono Stage SE	£909
Roksan Caspian Reference DS1.5 / XPS5 Turntable	£779
Roksan Xerxes 20 (Artemis / Shiraz) Turntable	£4,282

\*Some items are ex-display but all are sold with full warranty. These products are only available from the stores listed and are subject to availability - please confirm before travelling. All prices were correct at time of going to press. End-of-line and clearance offers are not available in conjunction with any other offer or promotion. Advert valid until 24/10/2009, E&OE.

**BEST** LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

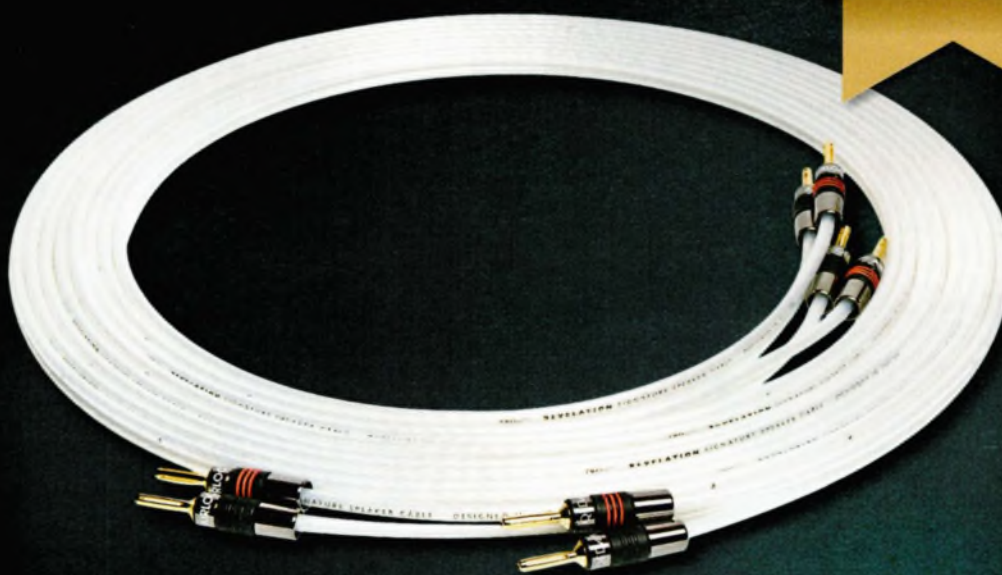
# QED Revelation

**Price** £15 per metre pair **Type** Bi-wire **Tel** 01279 501111 **URL** www.qed.co.uk

This cable integrates developments from QED's 'Genesis' cables and 'X-Tube' models. Conductor material is silver-plated copper and the insulation is hard, transparent polythene.

Giving a consistent result with a wide range of amplifiers and speakers, the Revelation boasts a good performance in all areas. Sensibly priced, this cable also offers excellent compatibility.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
**AWARDS**  
**2009**  
**WINNER**



## Atlas Hyper Bi-Wire

**Price** £245 (1m set) **Type** Bi-wire  
**Tel** 0800 731 1140 **URL** www.atlascables.com

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
**AWARDS**  
**2009**  
**FINALIST**

## Wireworld Oasis 6

**Price** £40 per metre pair **Type** Single-wire  
**Tel** 020 8991 9200 **URL** www.wireworldcable.com

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
**AWARDS**  
**2009**  
**FINALIST**

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remind you of why you care about HiFi.*

*There was something special about  
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costing five times as much had a hard  
time trumpeting.'*

**Wes Phillips, Stereophile June 2009**

**Klipsch**

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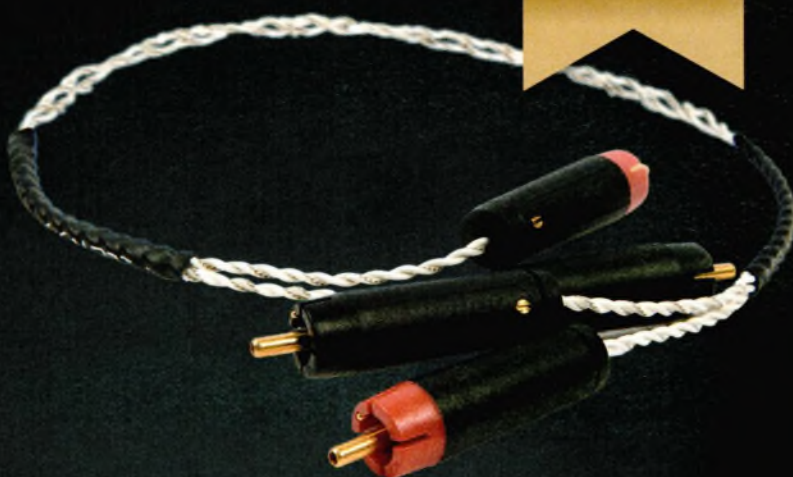
**BEST** INTERCONNECT

# Black Rhodium Polar Illusion

**Price** £250 per metre pair **Type** Interconnect **Tel** 01332 342233

**URL** [www.blackrhodium.co.uk](http://www.blackrhodium.co.uk)

**W**hile making the most of low frequencies, this super-cooled, unshielded interconnect with solid, silver-plated copper insulation, delivers a treble performance that's admirably clear and crisp. With delicate percussion and harmonic-rich sounds like violin, there is a beautiful airiness to the sound. Detail positively shines through and imaging is good, depth excellent and tonality very neutral.



**HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
WINNER**

## Kimber Timbre

**Price** £145 (1m terminated pair)  
**Type** Interconnect **Tel** 08453 451550  
**URL** [www.kimber.com](http://www.kimber.com)



**HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
FINALIST**

## van den Hul The Wave

**Price** £125 (0.8m terminated pair)  
**Type** Interconnect **Tel** 01235 511166  
**URL** [www.vandenhul.com](http://www.vandenhul.com)



**HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
FINALIST**

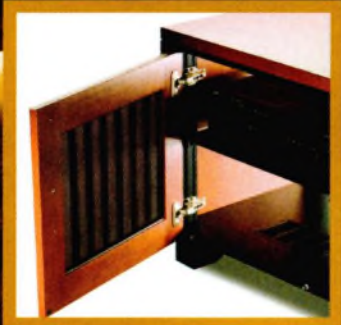


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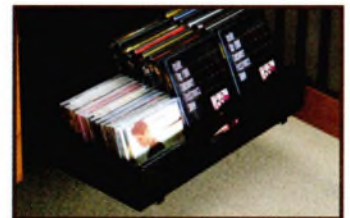
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**tv mount**  
(optional accessories)



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**BEST SUPPORT**

# Hi-Fi Racks

## Podium

**Price** £500 (£125 per tier) **Type** Equipment rack **Tel** 01572 756447

**URL** [www.hifiracks.co.uk](http://www.hifiracks.co.uk)

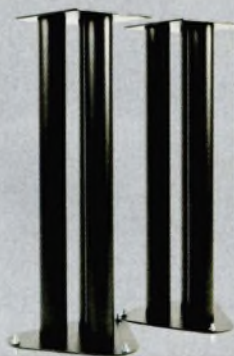
**H**i-Fi Racks offers a simple, but adaptable range of products, all made from solid wood. The Podium rack is a series of stacking tables with various leg lengths, which makes it suitable for almost any piece of hi-fi kit available. The Podium also enhances any equipment you place on it, creating a great sense of frequency solidity and considerable clarity of sound.



**HI-FI CHOICE**  
**AWARDS**  
**2009**  
**WINNER**

### Custom Design RS203

**Price** £150 **Type** Loudspeaker stand  
**Tel** 0191 262 4646 **URL** [www.customdesign.co.uk](http://www.customdesign.co.uk)



**HI-FI CHOICE**  
**AWARDS**  
**2009**  
**FINALIST**

### Stands Unique

Carbon Fibre Support

**Price** £684 **Type** Equipment rack  
**Tel** 01933 412227 **URL** [www.standsunique.com](http://www.standsunique.com)



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**AWARDS**  
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eton  
Exposure  
Fatman  
Freeplay  
Goldring  
Grado  
Griffin  
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iLuv  
Imerge  
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InFocus  
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IsoTek Systems  
IXOS  
Jamo  
JBL  
Jmlab  
just-racks  
JVC  
KEF  
Kicker  
La-Z-boy

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LG  
Logitech  
Magic Box  
Marantz  
Mission  
MJ Acoustics  
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Monster  
Mordaunt Short  
Musical Fidelity  
NAD  
Nakamichi  
Niles  
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**BEST** ACCESSORY

# Funk Firm Achromat

**Price** £55 **Type** Turntable mat **Tel** 01273 585042

**URL** [www.thefunkfirm.co.uk](http://www.thefunkfirm.co.uk)

**M**anufactured from a foamed-plastic material which rapidly turns vibrational energy into heat, the Achromat is the ideal choice for combatting unwanted resonance. Suitable with both metal and plastic turntable platters, the mat creates a sound that is less coloured and distinctly more detailed. Voices seem natural and large ensembles of instruments are well defined.



Achromat by Funk • Achromat by Funk • Achromat by Funk • Achromat by Funk • Achromat by Funk

## Aurios Classic Feet

**Price** £230 (pack of three) **Type** Isolation feet  
**Tel** 020 8958 1004 **URL** [www.aurios.net](http://www.aurios.net)



Reviewed in HFC 327

## Isonoe Isolation feet

**Price** £98 (pack of four) **Type** Isolation feet  
**Tel** 020 8300 7563 **URL** [www.isonoe.com](http://www.isonoe.com)



Reviewed in HFC 327

to obtain the best  
sound normally  
means sacrificing  
functionality...

to obtain the  
best functionality  
normally means  
sacrificing the  
sound...

have you ever noticed?



TrilogY 909/990



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combined with huge flexibility  
and superb build quality mark  
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Jason Kennedy  
Hi-Fi Choice November 2009

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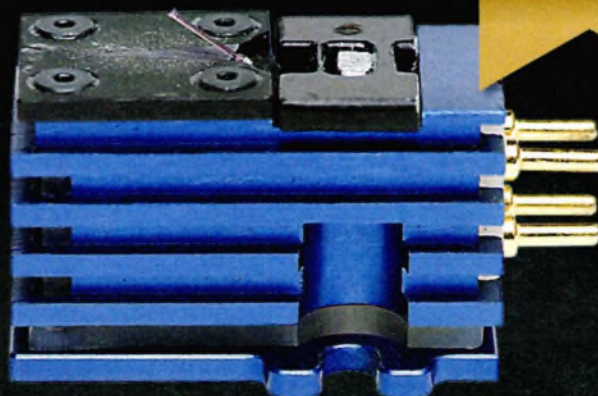
**BEST** INNOVATION

# Soundsmith Strain Gauge

**Price** £6,100 **Type** Cartridge/phono stage **Tel** 01494 858471

**URL** [www.sound-smith.com](http://www.sound-smith.com)

**H**ere's a phono cartridge that changes the rules completely when it comes to vinyl replay. Measuring the motion of the stylus in the record groove, via means of a special preamplifier, the Strain Gauge produces a sound that's simply astonishing. With a wide range of feature options also available, the Soundsmith is definitely this year's most innovative hi-fi attraction.



**HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
WINNER**

## Harman Kardon

### HK 990

**Price** £1,000 **Type** Integrated amplifier  
**Tel** 01707 278100 **URL** [www.harmankardon.com](http://www.harmankardon.com)

**HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
FINALIST**



## MSB iLink

**Price** £1,900 **Type** Digital music server system  
**Tel** 020 8462 1379 **URL** [www.msbtech.com](http://www.msbtech.com)

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AWARDS  
2009  
FINALIST**



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**BEST** OF THE HIGH END

# MSB Platinum M200

**Price** £13,656 per pair **Type** Power amplifier **Tel** 020 8462 1379

**URL** [www.msbtech.com](http://www.msbtech.com)

AMP ❖

This striking looking monoblock power amplifier boasts superb reference standard sound quality along with its state-of-the-art aesthetics. It has exceptional dynamic range,

considerable speed and expert timing. What better to make up one of our triumvirate of high-end hi-fi wonders than a amplifier with one of the best sounds we've ever heard.

HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
WINNER



# Continuum Caliburn

**Price** £125,000 **Type** Turntable system **Tel** 020 8971 3909

**URL** [www.continuumaudiolabs.com](http://www.continuumaudiolabs.com)

SOURCE ❖

The Caliburn is undoubtedly a *tour de force* – a labour of love. Not only is it one of the heaviest, one of the most solidly engineered and one of the most functionally attractive turntables

ever, it also represents the absolute ultimate in vinyl replay. Supplied complete with its Cobra tonearm and Castellon stand, the Caliburn's performance is quite simply in a class of its own.

HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
WINNER



# Vivid Audio K1

**Price** £14,495 **Type** Integral standmount loudspeaker

**Tel** 01903 530005 **URL** [www.vividaudio.com](http://www.vividaudio.com)

SPEAKERS ❖

Our reviewer called the uniquely shaped K1 from South African manufacturer Vivid, "one of the finest speakers on the planet." It has an uncannily revealing and

neutral performance. It's subtle, fast and has a wide bandwidth with great timing. And, thanks to the engineering and inspiration that went into its creation, the K1 is a high-end winner.

HI-FI CHOICE  
AWARDS  
2009  
WINNER



**BEST** PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

# Cambridge Audio DacMagic

**Price** £230 **Type** Digital-to-analogue convertor **Tel** 08709 001000  
**URL** www.cambridgeaudio.com

After winning our *Product of the Year* award last year, the Cambridge DacMagic once again captured the judges' imagination. Not content with walking off with the top prize in this year's DAC category, it has muscled-in as a worthy runner-up for *Product of the Year 2009*, too. And why? Well, it's because the DacMagic's various talents still mark it out as an exceptional piece of kit.



# Leema Antilla II

**Price** £2,735 **Type** CD player  
**Tel** 01938 811900 **URL** www.leema-acoustics.com

There have been some impressive CD players throughout 2009 to excite the senses and we've some marvellous examples of the best available in this year's awards, but

Leema's Antilla II player, which is hand-built in Welshpool, really impressed our judging panel, to the extent that it stole the thunder as a *Product of the Year* finalist over its esteemed disc-spinning peers.



# PMC IB2i

**Price** £8,900 **Type** Standmount loudspeaker **Tel** 01582 405694

**URL** [www.pmc-speakers.com](http://www.pmc-speakers.com)

It was close to the wire with so much excellent kit to choose from, but after much deliberation, cogitation and careful consideration, the judges finally selected the PMC IB2i loudspeaker as the most outstanding hi-fi asset. There's no doubt in the mind of the editorial team that the IB2i is the latest in a succession of illustrious reference speakers by which all future rivals will be judged.



## Awards 2009

And so we come the end of the *Hi-Fi Choice Awards 2009*. This year has been one of the most difficult to judge for our expert *Awards* panel, who have all painstakingly poured over the nominations for each category before coming to their collective conclusions. One thing that really struck the judges this year was the high standard set by many of the products

under consideration. 2009 has produced a bumper crop for audiophiles and it's pleasing to report that buying a 'lemon' is getting much harder these days. It's also true to say that system-matching is getting easier, too. There's still an art to it – something that *Hi-Fi Choice* endeavors to guide you through – but equipment really does 'sync' much better than it used to.

Choosing your next purchase, based on our recommendations, is clearly a smart move. We would always advise auditioning equipment before purchase, if possible, or taking advantage of the free home trial schemes offered by many retailers. If our *Awards* tips help improve your system, don't forget to write in and tell us!

ANTHONY GALLO  
ACOUSTICS

ARCAM

ATLAS Cables

audiolab

AUDIOVECTOR

Bard audio

B&W

Bluesound

CHORD

CHORD

CREZEK

CRESTRON

CYRUS

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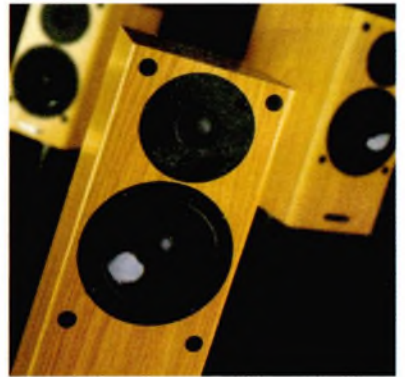
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Introducing the new 'XS' series from Naim Audio. Following on from the ever popular 'X' series, the 'XS' series, with their all new brushed aluminium fascias, have benefited from a complete engineering overhaul from the ground up. The resulting series of components, comprised of CD player, FM tuner, integrated amplifier, pre-amplifier, power amplifier and power supply, have once again raised the bar at what can be expected at this level.

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# HFC BUYER'S GUIDE

Welcome to the new-look *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Guide* – the ultimate directory to the very best high-performance hi-fi gear that you can buy. Here, you'll find our favourite current products listed under easy-to-use categories, with up-to-date pricing and trustworthy verdicts.

## Reviews you can trust

*Hi-Fi Choice* test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the UK's most respected hi-fi journalists 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 disc players, amplifiers, tuners and loudspeakers.

## Reviews online

We've also included *techradar* listings where our reviews appear online with our sister site *techradar.com*. To access selected *Hi-Fi Choice* reviews online, simply type: *techradar.com/* into your browser (remembering the forward slash), followed by the six-digit number printed in the first column of our *Buyer's Guide*.

## How to use this guide

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

**THIS MONTH'S  
HI-FI HIGHLIGHT**

A *Hi-Fi Choice* favourite, the Cambridge Audio Azur 840C CD player is one part of a fascinating and accomplished duo when partnered with the 840A V2 amp (see Awards page 69). On its own, however, the 840C has a great deal to offer including a unique filtering system, a sample rate of 384kHz and disc loading in 2.5 seconds!



108  
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## Source components

CD PLAYERS

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PHONO CARTRIDGES

RADIO TUNERS

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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# CD PLAYERS

Any one of these fine players will make sweet music for years to come

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
	Arcam CD17	700	Civilised sound, with a positively deluxe treble. Bass is clear, if not the weightiest ever		●	●	●	●			315
	Cairn Tornado	950	The Tornado is a full-on experience that delivers intensely real sound for its price			●				●	305
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	550	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative		●	●	●			●	293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	700	Superbly capable with a resolution and tonal evenness that's well worth hearing (silver finish)		●	●	●		●		315
	Cyrus CD6 SE	900	A combination of detail and sheer musical energy with a hint of high end to the performance			●	●				318
	Harman/Kardon HD990	550	Highly detailed with excellent extension at both extremes and impressive resolution	/594818	●	●	●	●	●		323
	Marantz SA7003	600	Highly civilised sound may not be to all tastes, but there's plenty of detail to be heard		●	●	●	●		●	323
	Marantz SA8003	830	Classic Marantz sound in a classy and attractive package. Our favourite sub-£1,000 player	/456022	●	●	●	●			315
	Moon CD.5	999	Admirably energetic music-making from this very well-built player		●	●	●				323
	NAD C545BEE	350	Apart from slight lack of bass control, sound is very fine indeed – treble is beautifully detailed		●		●				322
	Naim CD5i	895	Its competent musical performance comfortably exceeds the expectations of an entry-level player				●				307
	Roksan Kandy K2	895	State-of-the-art technology and precision-engineering produces a fine CD performance	/483697	●	●	●		●		315
	Rotel RCD-1520	695	Lacks optical digital output, but feature-count is fine and sound quality is expressive and open	/608305	●		●		●		323
	Yamaha CD-S2000	979	Sophisticated, this is a beautifully controlled, high-resolution player, although SACD is stereo-only	/488867	●	●	●	●	●	●	309
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
	Arcam CD37	1,300	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution	/395096	●	●	●	●			318
	Audio Research CD5	5,055	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – assertive and very dynamic	/455309		●	●		●		312
	Bryston BCD-1	2,500	Not as open as some but more timely than most, it also sounds a lot more gripping than it looks			●	●		●		300
	Cairn Fog 3	2,200	Ergonomically challenged, high-energy player with Gallic charm and digital preamp on board			●	●		●	●	302
	Classé CDP-102	2,950	Its sound is rich and dynamic with a full bottom end and impressive power for such a smooth player			●	●	●	●	●	286
	Consonance Droplet CDP3.1	1,995	A CD player which gets to the nub of what music is about. Engages the listener every time			●		●			322
	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,200	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music	/399370		●	●	●			323
	EMM Labs CDSA	9,995	Classy, stripped down to basics SACD/CD player with some excellent engineering below decks		●	●	●	●	●		302
	Esoteric X-05	3,995	Superb resolve of fine detail with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you in	/478365	●	●	●	●	●		314
	Leema Stream	1,170	The most timely disc player at its price point has tactile imaging and good dynamics			●		●			306
	Leema Antlia II	2,735	Great build and multiple DACs give this a fast, revealing and totally engaging sound	/612396		●	●		●		323
	Linn Akurate CD	4,750	This multi-format non-video player doesn't have huge transparency, but is musically addictive		●	●	●	●	●		299
	Marantz SA-11S2	3,300	Superb value, this well-balanced player features various filter settings to customise performance		●	●	●	●	●		304
	Marantz SA-7S1	5,900	A bargain even at this price, the SA-7S1 sets the benchmark for CD/SACD players of its ilk		●	●	●	●	●		297
	Meridian G08	2,400	Advanced digital processing with special apodising filter that gives a very clean sound	/455040		●	●		●	●	312
	Moon CD3.3	2,200	Another revealing and refined player which warrants inclusion on anyone's must-hear shortlist	/594609		●		●	●		321
	Naim HDX	4,500	The HDX hard disk player represents an entirely new paradigm for high-fidelity replay		●	●	●				311
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,450	An exceptionally fine CD player that provides a high-end and musically rewarding performance			●	●				307
	Shanling CD-T1000SE	1,700	Commendably committed player which gets right to the heart of a wide variety of musical styles			●		●		●	306
	Sony SCD-XA5400ES	1,199	Elegant, refined control system and very strong CD/SACD performance	/465933	●	●	●	●	●	●	313
	Unison Research CDE	2,495	Valve CD player with interchangeable DACs that doubles as a standalone DAC that oozes musicality	/483759		●		●		●	318

**SPECS KEY** **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in 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.

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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# TURNTABLES

The best record players you can buy

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	SPEEDS	SUSP. SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Emotion	1,185	Beautifully built with open and clean sound emphasising mid and top, but delivering nice timely bass		33/45				309
	Clearaudio Performance	2,300	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncoloured performance		33/45				295
	Continuum Caliburn	125,000	Luxury turntable with state-of-the-art design includes Cobra tonearm and Castellon stanc	/587169	33/45/78				320
	EAR Disc Master	8,800	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high-quality materials to bring state-of-the-art resolution		33/45/78			opt	276
	The Funk Firm Funk V2	1,390	Not only as beguiling as those that preceded it, this turntable is also more substantial to boot		33/45				324
	The Funk Firm Saffire	2,450	Individual design and a sound that's refined and neutral with strong timing and dynamics		33/45			opt	opt
	Lumley Heliosphere	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a unique sound and a performance that reflects your vinyl	/560765	33/45			opt	opt
	Michell Technodec	579	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money		33/45			opt	309
	Michell Gyro SE/RB250	1,565	A marriage of shot-putter-strength, build quality and robust audio (including arm substitute)		33/45				324
	Pro-Ject RPM 5	550	Great looks plus engaging sound puts it in the serious league, but needs good isolation for best results		33/45				279
	Pro-Ject RPM 6.1	750	With its huge platter this is a steady design that's capable of fine results with a decent cartridge		33/45/78				294
	Pro-Ject X-Pack	1,000	Combines some very strong elements (Ortofon Rondo Red) into a killer package with top sound and value		33/45				309
	Rega P3-24	390	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, much improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply		33/45			opt	
	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	1,375	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation		33/45				248
	SRM Arezzo	699	The Arezzo is an excellent source component for those wanting a superb turntable for vinyl replay	/625025	33/45				325
	Townshend Rock 7	1,720	Has the ability to pull detail out of a vinyl groove, making it the most resolute turntable at its price		33/45				324
	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		33/45				307

# PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC recommendations

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Denon DL-103R	290	Adds refinement to the basic DL-103. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around					285
	Dynavector DV-10X5	295	A high-output MC with superb dynamics and fine timing that's difficult to mount, but well worth the effort					307
	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss					235
	Ortofon Salsa	280	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean sound					290
	Ortofon Rondo Red	375	Delivers detail, power and resolution and makes a good case for its price					307
	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High-output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound					270
	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light					235
	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and resolution to die for					265

# PHONO STAGES

Get the best performance from your turntable

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL INTERFERENCE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Cambridge Audio 640P	100	An outrageously good bargain that suits budget systems, but can confidently survive upgrades						305
	Creek OBH15	240	Practical and highly compatible unit offering fine detail and a pleasing, mellow balance						305
	Soundsmith Strain Gauge	6,100	Revolutionary kit assembly that rewrites the rules about vinyl playback	/618387					324
	Tom Evans Microgroove	480	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat						234
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	563	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility						234

**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. **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 stylus for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.



**Cambridge Audio 640P £100**  
If you need a low-cost way to get your turntable talking to your amplifier, this is by far the best option



**Dynavector DV-10X5 £295**  
Fiddly to set up, but dynamics are superb from this high-output MC cartridge, making it a firm HFC favourite



**Townshend Rock 7 £1,720**  
A great turntable for those upgrading from an entry-level deck. Sound engineering at a bargain price

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Boulder 1021 Hard Disk Player



Ayon CD5 CD Player



Vitus Audio SCD-010 CD Player



Canor CD2 VR CD Player



Ayon Skylla DAC (inc preamp)

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*John Jeffries*

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## DINO PHONO Amplifier



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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

## RADIO TUNERS

Surf the waves with these carefully selected tuners

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>FM TUNERS</b>											
	Creek Audio Evolution	350	Sound is detailed, cohesive and extended both tonally and spatially – very classy		FM,M	80					308
	Rega Radio 3	390	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor makes this an appealing FM performer		FM,M	20					283
	T+A T1210R	1,200	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated		FM	100					283
<b>DAB/FM TUNERS</b>											
	Arcam FMJ T32	600	A highly cost-effective way of optimising the airwaves. iPod functionality is definitely a bonus	/559242	DAB,FM	100					319
	NAO C445	350	FM is laid-back despite a bright balance, but detail is good. DAB is slightly livelier than most		DAB,FM	30					299
	Onkyo T-4555DAB	400	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard		DAB	40					298
<b>DAB/FM PORTABLES</b>											
	Pure Move	80	A feature-packed, beautifully built DAB/FM radio that is a pleasure to use	/608367	DAB,FM	20					323
	Pure Evoke Flow	150	It makes internet radio integrate beautifully with conventional radio	/465944	DAB,FM,Web	40					313
	Pure Evoke 2S (portable)	170	Attractive and well thought-out. Many useful features and very enjoyable with classical music	/516285	DAB,FM	100					318
	Pure Avanti Flow	280	One of the best standalone solutions for internet radio with a tonality that's good for voices		DAB,FM,Web	40					322
	Vita Audio R2i	300	Very smartly built with a sound that's full-bodied, neutral and detailed	/611865	DAB,FM	30					323

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

## HEADPHONES

Audiophile solutions for home and travel use

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
	ACS T2	500	Ear-canal earphones display an impressive midband intelligibility and a knack for digging out the detail	/479584						28		315
	Audio Technica ATH-CK10	279	In-ear headphones offer unforced detail, natural dynamics and excellent clarity							15		319
	Beyerdynamic DT880	230	Combines musical involvement with a high degree of analytical virtues. Also very comfortable							205		312
	Denon AH-D2000	300	Among the best closed-back headphones we've heard and very fine by any standards							350		309
	Denon AH-D5000	600	Sound is comparable with good open-back models, while isolation both inward and outward is useful							320		312
	Denon AH-D7000	900	One of the best closed-back designs, bearing comparison with the finest open-back models	/478417						295		314
	Etymotic ER-4P	195	Fiddle with in-ear earpieces and angles of approach and you'll be repaid with super-detailed sound							20		319
	Grado SR60i	100	A strong contender with out-of-class sound in most areas: a brilliant budget all-rounder	/603478						210		322
	Grado GS1000i	1,100	A superb transducer, capable of astonishingly high performance standards	/624782								325
	Sennheiser IE8	260	With its combination of neutral midrange and treble, this is arguably the best for in-ear, all-round sound							20		319
	Sennheiser HD650	388	Clear and detailed, with very natural tonality through bass and midrange with just a little treble coloration							275		312
	Sennheiser HD800	1,000	These headphones will convert loudspeaker listeners to the delights of personal stereo performance	/619269						350		324

**SPECS KEY** **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUM-AURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



### T+A T1210R £1,200

There aren't many similarly priced rivals to the Magnum Dynalab MD 90T for FM fans, but Germany's T+A has really hit the spot with the T1210R



### Sennheiser HD 650 £388

An easy recommendation – Sennheiser's HD 650 should really cost more than this – it's simply fabulous and is a genuine bargain in the world of hi-fi



### ACS T2 £500

For regular travellers, the ACS T2 with its custom-moulded earpieces is an obvious choice, thanks to natural noise-cancelling, all-day comfort and great sound



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hesitancy or blur...the bass end of the spectrum was lit e, tight and focused ....



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 Conrad Johnson act2 mk2 preamp .....£7000  
 Jadis JA50 monoblock power amps musical joy mint .....£3500  
 Jadis Defy 7 mk4 mower amp brand new kt90 valves .....£2295  
 Jadis JP80mc mk2 preamp boxed mint .....£8000  
 Jadis JA800 power amps latest spec version .....Phone  
 Jadis JPP200 pre pre moving coil valve head amp .....£3000  
 Koetsu red signature cartridge 500 hours use .....£1250  
 Koetsu tiger eye brand new .....£4500  
 Krell evolution 400 monoblock power amps .....£10000  
 Kuzma Airline arm boxed mint .....£2700  
 Graham Phantom tonearm gold finish .....£1700  
 Lfd mc2 phono stage silver wired two box phono stage superb £850  
 Lfd mct phono stage exdemo .....£2600  
 Lfd cables lots and lots in stock .....Phone  
 Magnum Dynalab md109 valve tuner unused silver finish list £9000 .....£5000  
 Moon Audio super nova cd player boxed mint .....£2250

SME model 20/2a turntable 18 months old compleate with atest 2009 power supply and unused latest spec 2009 series v tonearm .....£5000  
 SME model 30/mk2 november 2007 compleate with latest 2009 version power supply and unused 2009 series v vdh mcs 150 wired tonearm ex demo/display unit fully crated rrp £15800 .....£10800  
 SME series V tonearm 2009 unused gold print detailed tonearm cancelled order latest version .....£1900  
 SME series V special order silver finish boxed 2008 .....£1750  
 SME series V 2006 tonearm white lettering boxed .....£1450  
 SME series V 1999 tonearm .....£1100  
 SME series IV tonearm 2001 .....£700  
 SME 2009 spec power supplies in stock for model 10,20 and 30 upgrade your turntable massive leap in performance .....Phone  
 SME series IV 2009 tonearm with fluid damper mint boxed 5 hours use .....£1300  
 Sonus Faber stadavari loudspeakers absolutely mint graphite grey .....£17000  
 Rockport Merak loudspeakers .....£9500  
 Rockport Antares loudspeakers titanium finish .....£40000  
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 BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE














## INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

Our pick of the best one-box amps

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	SSR NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740A	550	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	700	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp offers detail and delicacy (silver finish)		8	●	●	●	120	315
	Marantz PM8003	750	Detail isn't the utmost, but great vitality makes this amplifier quite thrilling		5	MM	●	●	95	315
	Moon 1.5	999	A likeable amp in many ways, with admirable bass, treble and imaging		5	●	●	●	60	321
	NAD C3226BEE	320	Unusually confident into awkward loads and very assured especially in bass. Treble a touch recessed	/603281	7	●	●	●	50	322
	Naim Audio NAIT 5i	765	More versatile than previous Nait's, the 5i is a superb amplifier that offers vivid insights into all manner of music		4	●	●	●	50	305
	Roksan Kandy K2	895	Superior design and high-performance credentials makes this amplifier a must-have bargain	/483722	5	MM	●	●	125	315
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>										
	ATC SIA 2-150	2,376	Revealing, dynamic and powerful amplifier that works with a wide range of speakers, has superb build quality	/478483	4	●	●	●	150	314
	Arcam A38	1,450	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality		7	opt	●	●	100	321
	Astin Trew AT2000	1,349	If you prefer the timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, then this is a serious contender	/498574	4	●	●	●	65	317
	Audio Analogue Puccini Signature	1,450	Detailed and lively, particularly in the upper octaves, but lacks a little bass extension		5	MC	●	●	160	320
	Copland CTA405	2,998	A musical and involving amplifier, which also has incredible insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards		5	●	●	●	50	305
	Cyrus 8 XP d	1,500	High on features with a revealing upbeat sound and impressive five input onboard DAC	/608669	6	●	●	●	70	323
	Electrocompaniet ECI-3	1,650	This is an impressively resolute and powerful integrated amplifier for the money	/618304	5	●	●	●	70	324
	Harman/Kardon HK 990	1,000	Very clever, with built-in DSP room correction and more – but most importantly a powerful and revealing amplifier	/594820	7	MC	●	●	160	321
	Jadis Orchestra DIP	3,450	A smooth, refined, yet dynamic-sounding tube amplifier with the added 'novelty' of an iPod dock	/465908	5	●	●	●	40	313
	Leema Tucana II	3,425	Highly featured, well-built and not short of power, this is a highly resolute and organic amp	/612396	7	●	●	●	148	323
	Lyngdorf Millennium Mk IV	10,995	State-of-the-art digital amplifier successfully transcends virtually all the problems that afflicts others of its type	/603231	5	●	●	●	150	322
	MSB Platinum M200	13,656	This amplifier's devastatingly good all-round sound quality sets a benchmark that few will approach	/603452	●	●	●	●	322	
	Myriad MX12080	1,200	Sound is more assured at the top of the frequency range than the bottom, though bass is melodious and detailed		8	●	●	●	80	321
	Mystère ia11	1,450	Small, deceptively powerful integrated valve amp with a crisp, pacy sound		4	●	●	●	40	302
	NAD 375BEE	1,000	A good, solid amplifier that is fundamentally musical and gives a great bang for your buck	/625323	7	●	●	●	150	325
	Naim Audio NAIT XS	1,250	Its spellbinding, refined musical performance is a challenge to all integrated amplifiers	/498536	6	●	●	●	60	317
	Pure Sound A30	1,400	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though		3	●	●	●	30	298
	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,399	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor		5	opt	●	●	21	296
	Unison Res. Unicc Primo	1,395	Line input can be converted to phono (at extra cost), plus an excellent mix of valve and solid-state virtues	/499279	5	●	●	●	85	317
	Unison Research P70	4,995	Delightful valve amplifier with fine neutrality, sweet midband, impressive bandwidth and ample power		4	●	●	●	70	302

## PRE/POWER AMPS

Separate boxes can bring clear advantages

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	SSR NUMBER		
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>												
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W	2,000	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed and controlled		●	●	●	●	8	opt	200	309
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>												
	Arcam C31/P38	2,450	Very civilised sound in the best possible way. Well featured and smartly built		●	●	●	●	7	opt	100	308
	Border Patrol Control Unit	3,995	Bluff-looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around		●	●	●	●	5	opt	277	
	Bryston BP16/2B SST <sup>2</sup>	5,700	Preamp and power amp combo offers superb sound quality	/608649	●	●	●	●	6	opt	100	323
	Bryston BP26	3,670	Cracking preamp brings detailed results		●	●	●	●	8	opt	308	
	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	7,135	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled, and sounds like a dream		●	●	●	●	5	opt	120	269
	Classe CP-700/CA-M400	9,200	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility.		●	●	●	●	6	opt	400	293
	Cyrus DAC XP (preamp/DAC)	2,275	A DAC/pre with naturality and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz		●	●	●	●	2	opt	266	
	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,400	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings		●	●	●	●	8	opt	80	276
	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	18,900	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers		●	●	●	●	9	opt	125	250
	Naim NAC 152 XS/NAP 155 XS	1,920	Preamp and power amp duo offers excellent performance and classic Naim virtues		●	●	●	●	6	opt	60	324
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	2,800	A powerful and enjoyable-sounding amplifier combo that brings out the strengths of its CD player		●	●	●	●	5	opt	85	307
	Trilogy 909/990	10,390	Extremely musical valve-based pairing with hybrid power and beautiful finish	/625226	●	●	●	●	6	opt	100	325

**SPECS KEY** **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and on-board 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.

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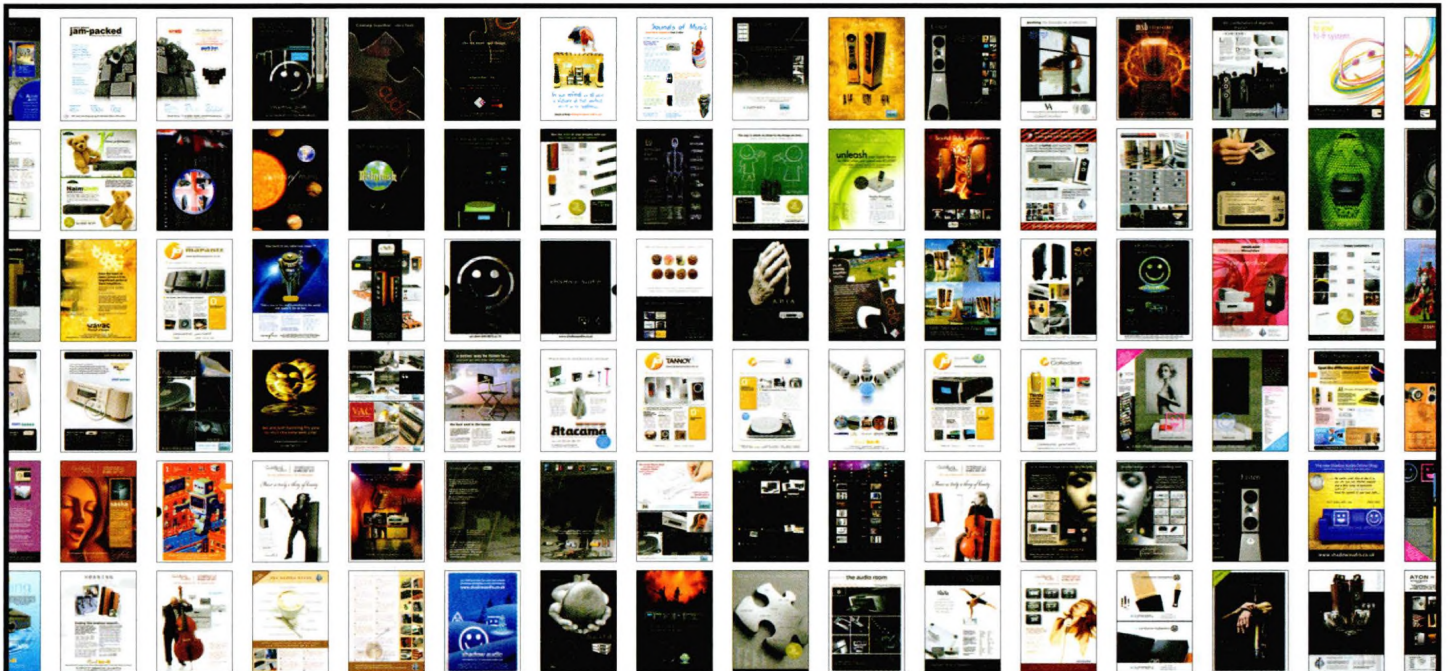
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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

## CABLES

Cables really can make a difference, especially our top recommendations

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECHNOUR.COM	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>									
	Audioquest Sidewinder	45	A detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm – slight upper-bass warmth does little to detract		●	●			297
	Black Rhodium Prelude	90	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit		●	●			293
	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass with neutral and detailed midrange, treble generally sweet with occasional slight constriction		●	●			299
	Black Rhodium Polar Illusion	250	A good all-rounder, with clear and purposeful bass and particularly fine treble		●	●			321
	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	88	Sounding like something a good deal dearer, this cable offers near high-end detail and seems highly compatible too		●	●			295
	Clearer Audio Silver-line	283	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass		●	●			279
	CrystalCable Piccolo	348	Thin, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid-core type – notably resolution, focus and articulation		●	●			294
	Kimber Timbre	145	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.		●	●			281
	Monster M1000i	230	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere		●	●			284
	Nordost Wyewizard Dream	110	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 with good mid and treble		●	●			281
	Profigo PGA3000	80	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good		●	●			299
	QED Signature Audio S	190	Mellifluous and rounded, this cable is a great choice for lovers of the human voice		●	●			321
	Supra EFF-IX	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 great listener involvement		●	●			312
	van den Hul The Wave	125	Generally neutral, with a hint of upper-bass richness: images seem to reside slightly further away than most		●	●			312
	van den Hul Integration Hybrid	170	Bass is nothing remarkable, but mid and treble are outstandingly open and clear		●	●			306
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>									
	Chord Co. Indigo Plus	995	Costly, and high-class cable needs running in, but this is a finely detailed design overall	/608313	●	●			323
	Kimber DV-30	98	A superb performer that lacks very little, even when compared to Kimber's high-end models		●	●		E	317
	Merlin Scorpion Digital	130	Reduces distortion, making sound clear with unusually revealing low frequencies		●	●		E	317
	Supra AnCo	30	This cable can give a useful fillip to a good transport/DAC combination, even in a high-end context		●	●		E	304
<b>SPEAKER CABLES (PRICE PER METRE)</b>									
	Atlas Hyper 1.5	12.5	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	60	A highly analytical cable, with more bass extension than at first appears and very fine detail across the board		●	●			294
	Chord Co. Silver Screen	6	Screened speaker cable with excellent treble, but just a little light in the bass at times		●	●			310
	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,395	A chip off the old block, this speaker cable has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound (price reflects 3 metre pair)		●	●			302
	Kimber 8PR	21	A cable that really enjoys the music, also admirable for the levels of analytical detail it allows through		●	●			299
	Monster MCX-1s	5	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers		●	●			280
	Nordost Heimdall	185	Alternative to Valhalla, silver-plated, micro-monofilament construction, suitable for exacting systems		●	●			278
	QED X-Tube XT300	12.5	A natural and controlled-sounding cable that's cost-effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			310
	QED Revelation	15	Sensibly priced, this cable offers a performance which is a step-up from budget types		●	●			318
	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance-matched' cable with stabilising components added		●	●			241
	van den Hul The Wind	50	Separate conductors provide plenty of room for experimentation and the conductor quantity keeps resistance low		●	●			318
	Wireworld Solstice 5 <sup>2</sup>	25	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity	/617560	●	●			310
	Wireworld Oasis 6	40	Excellent bass with tunefulness and extension all first-rate. Awkward to handle, though	/617560	●	●			324

**STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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Linn Linto Phono preamp Blk S/H (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1180.00)	<b>£599.00</b>
Linn C 4100 PowerAmp Sil New (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1980.00)	<b>£1295.00</b>
Naim CDX 2 CD Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(3250.00)	<b>£2595.00</b>
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Naim DVD 5 DVD Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(2600.00)	<b>£1495.00</b>
Naim SuperNait Amplifier E/D (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(2475.00)	<b>£2495.00</b>
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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

## STEREO SPEAKERS

Perhaps the most influential link in the chain

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	363	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight		20,90,5,24	●	A	24	●	294
	Acoustic Energy Radiance 1	600	Limited bass, power handling and dynamics, but exceptional mid-to-treble voicing		18,5,32,25		A	33	●	325
	Amphion Ion L	900	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence and a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment in test room		16,2,32,26,5		A	40	●	310
	ATC SCM11	867	A very fine little speaker that's at its best with natural recordings where it adds little and reveals much		21,38,25		A-	55	●	293
	AudioPro Avanti A.10	350	A tough and effective little speaker – overall balance is quite smooth and even		19,29,26		A+	38	●	319
	Bowers and Wilkins CM1	488	Luxury miniature has laid-back sound, with low coloration and fine imaging, but weak dynamics		16,5,28,28		A-	40	●	279
	Bowers and Wilkins 684	699	A fine all-rounder at a realistic price, this floorstander has a smooth, even and nicely open balance	/483503	20,91,30	●		22	●	315
	Bowers and Wilkins 683	879	High-class drivers and a great price makes for a warmly recommended speaker		20,99,34	●		20	●	304
	DALI Ikon 6	999	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and obsessively detailed sound		19,100,33	●	A	37	●	271
	Dynaudio DM 2/10	880	Unfashionably bulky standmount has fine dynamics, grip, bass and headroom and is well mannered		27,5,45,35		A	22	●	299
	Focal Chorus 706V	389	Advanced drivers deliver an even, overall balance with healthy dynamic expression and tension		22,39,25		A	27	●	319
	Focal Chorus 726V	950	Compact and realistically priced, the Chorus 726V is a good all-round performer		22,99,37,5	●	A	25	●	325
	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch		22,99,37	●	A	25	●	275
	KEF iQ50	599	Looks cute and very discreet, with spacious imaging, good balance and a sweet treble	/483527	17,5,81,5,26	●	A	23	●	315
	Monitor Audio BR2	230	Good-looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence		18,5,35,25		A-	30	●	294
	Monitor Audio BR5	450	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold-sounding and good value		17,85,25	●	A-	36	●	293
	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	850	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
	Monitor Audio GS10	900	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs, the GS10 is a high-quality stereo design which is easy to drive		20,36,27		A-	40	●	284
	PMC DB11	895	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator with fine warmth and sweet treble		15,5,29,23,4		A+	30	●	310
	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	704	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its brother costs £200 more and is even better!		15,27,23		A+	40	●	267
	Q Acoustics 1010	110	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling, but fine midband voicing for the price		15,21,5,19,5		A	48	●	286
	Q Acoustics 1020i	140	Outstanding value, the smooth, well-balanced and lively sound makes for a fine communicator	/516273	17,5,25,26,5		A+	60	●	318
	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration		19,34,26		A-	30	●	292
	Rega RS1	390	Clever close-to-wall speaker has a fine coherence and good communication skills		15,32,23,6		A	23	●	319
	Russ Andrews SP-1	352	This tweaked Focal 705V RA has a sound that is immediate, engaging and, most importantly, great fun		19,231,5,24,8		A+	65	●	309
	Spendor S3/5R	750	Lacks dynamic muscle and loudness potential, but lovely smooth neutrality and good bass extension		16,5,30,5,190			25	●	310
	Tannoy Revolution DC4T	599	Ultra-compact floorstander that lacks bass weight and dynamic tension, but sounds open and coherent	/488857	15,85,16	●		40	●	316
	Tannoy Revolution DC6	900	Pretty compact standmount likes wall loading, delivering a lively bass and smooth, coherent midband		23,36,5,23		A	40	●	307
	Wharfedale Diamond 9.1	150	Superior shape and finish at an exceptionally sharp price. Sound is laid back, but free from boxiness		19,5,30,28		A-	45	●	307
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>										
	AE Energy Radiance 3	1,500	This speaker's very effective enclosure ensures a wide dynamic range and a very clean sound	/587236	23,92,29,7	●	A	27	●	320
	Amphion Argon2 Anniversary	1,200	Notably superior coherence and focus, fine neutrality and dynamic range with low coloration		19,38,31		A-	24	●	317
	Amphion Helium 520	1,000	Sharp styling and fine value for money with excellent voice-band coherence		16,104,22	●		28	●	314
	Amphion Argon 3L	2,300	Very solid build ensures an impressively clean sound with loads of bass and fine neutrality		19,92,5,30,5	●		26	●	322
	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,550	Slim, laid-back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range		17,99,26	●	A	28	●	275
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,950	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	1,534	Super-linear motor system and heavy-weight construction makes the ATC a pro favourite		22,44,31,5		A-	54	●	285
	ATC SCM16A	2,376	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Includes built-in amps and is good value		27,45,33		ACT	42	●	300
	Aurousal VS	1,650	The fine coherence and imaging of a single driver system, plus extra help at the frequency extremes	/479149	21,5,107,5,26,8	●		20	●	314
	AVI ADM9	1,125	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic sounding		20,30,26		ACT	60	●	301
	Bowers and Wilkins CM9	1,760	Tall, elegant, expressive midband and expansive, but well-controlled bass	/597244	20,102,5,32	●	A	60	●	321
	Bowers and Wilkins 805S	1,950	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back, but a real delight		24,39,33		A	25	●	271
	Cabasse MC40 Java	1,360	This large and handsome speaker has a notably smooth and evenhanded neutrality		25,110,35	●	A	20	●	325
	Cabasse Bora	2,200	A real enthusiast's choice with high sensitivity, strong bass and powerful dynamics	/618354	33,27,50		A	52	●	324
	Dynaudio Focus 220	2,630	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble		20,5,98,29,5	●	A-	20	●	281
	Focal Chorus 816V	1,099	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics and a sweet top end, but could be smoother		28,100,37,5	●	A+	20	●	288
	Focal Chorus 826V	1,349	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	1,499	The W cone 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	1,699	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier, but has good bass with genuine grip		28,115,38	●	A	28	●	290
	Focal Electra 1027 Be	4,399	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	3,500	An elegant design for anyone after the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express		16,87,27	●	ACT	35	●	301
	Gamut Phi5	3,040	Lovely and discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches		17,100,24	●		20	●	305

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

## STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

### ABOVE £1,000

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	SPECIFICATIONS						
					SIZE W,H,D (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Guru QM10	1,595	A very clever close-to-wall standmount with fine imaging, that sounds a lot bigger than it looks	/465869	30,25.2,23.2		A	26		●	317
	Jamo R 907	6,600	Arguably the more 'chummy' of Jamo's dipole flagships, it offers a powerful bass and open midrange	/498515	44,118.9,7	●	A	30	●		317
	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 C2	1,950	This floorstander is a fine all-round performer with fine voicing and neutrality		20,92.5,27	●		23	●		322
	Kudos Cardea C30	5,250	An absolute honey that fully justifies its hefty pricetag, lacking only a little dynamic tension	/394973	20,112,27	●		22	●		310
	Magico V2	18,000	High pricing derives from this speaker's superb, painstaking engineering and impressive performance	/624700	25.5,115,30	●	A	32	●		325
	Mission 796	1,300	Clean, open and detailed, this smooth, relaxed loudspeaker does exactly what it says on the box	/594834	20.6,99.8,31.8	●	A	25	●		321
	Monopulse 42A	1,995	Oddball styling, fine bass-to-mid balance and dynamics and superb voice coherence		26,110,25	●	A	25	●		302
	Monopulse 82	2,495	Could be more neutral, but excellent coherence, lively dynamics and fine imaging		27,110,25	●	A-	20	●		281
	Monitor Audio PL300	6,000	New level of sophistication from a manufacturer best known for mainstream, cost-effective designs		41,111,47	●	A-	28	●		301
	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6 LE	4,799	Striking moulded enclosure minimises coloration, while overall balance is smooth, neutral and open		24,115,43	●	A	22	●		308
	Neat Momentum 3i	1,790	Sounds a lot bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range		22,38,27		A-	23	●		302
	Opera Callas	3,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	/429144	23,37.5,34			32	●		311
	Opera Seconda	1,995	Fine styling and finish, plus very superior voicing, if a shade lacking in warmth		24,102.5,31.5	●	A	20	●		314
	Pioneer S-2EX-W	5,200	This speaker offers superb midband neutrality and exceptional clarity	/587272	29.1,56.5,42.5	●	A	37	●		320
	PMC GB1i	1,425	Good-looking floorstander has great class with fine delicacy and sweet detailing		15.5,87,23.4	●	A	30	●		306
	PMC FB1i	2,100	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	/429594	20,100,30	●		20	●		322
	PMC OB1i	3,600	This floorstander delivers a smooth overall balance with wide bandwidth and dynamic range	/429697	20,102.5,32.5	●	A	20	●		311
	PMC IB2i	8,900	Delivers a top-class sound quality, fine imaging and exceptional dynamic grip	/617595	33,74,46.5	●	A	25	●		324
	PSB Synchrony One	3,500	Slim and discreet floorstander that delivers superb sound quality and flexible bass	/516267	22,109,32.5	●	A	45	●		318
	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities		22,37,30		A-	48	●	●	274
	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound		22,105,39	●	A	20	●		256
	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,475	Sharp-looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression		20,100,25	●	A	22	●		290
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals		22,84,31	●	A	22	●		259
	Sonus faber Luito Monitor	1,690	A subtly designed, elegant-sounding package that's hard to beat, especially with good recordings	/603221	18.5,35,33.5	A-	55	●			322
	Sonus faber Minima Vintage	2,490	Easy, graceful-sounding compact is a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	/455417	20,33,27.5	A-	55	●			312
	Sonus faber Cremona Audit.	3,350	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass... this is 'The Little Speaker That Could'		20,35,37		A	50	●		305
	Spendor SP3/1R2	1,600	Conservative styling, superb neutrality and coherence with unusually low coloration		22,40,28		A	37	●		317
	Tannoy Definition DC10T	5,000	Classy speaker has massive base, high sensitivity and precise image focus	/608326	34,112.5,32	●	A+	35	●		323
	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,975	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband		17,31,23		A	35	●		277
	Triangle Genese Quartet	2,775	Great material value and a solid all-round sonic performance with great loudness potential		23,117,37	●	A	25	●		302
	Triangle Magellan Concerto	16,250	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it remains highly entertaining		60,160,45	●	A-	32	●		290
	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build		35,127,65		A	20	●		270
	Vivid Audio K1	14,495	With a subtle, fast and wide bandwidth, this speaker is one of the finest on the planet	/625361	28,130,45		A	35	●		325
	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,383	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package		23,91,37	●	A	28	●		254
	Wilson Benesch ACT	9,100	Enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well-balanced, but top end might be sweeter		23,108,36	●	A	20	●		252
	Wharfedale Opus	1,500	Great material value and a solid, if bright and forward sound. Has great loudness potential		26,100.5,41	●	A	23	●		314
	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

**SPECS KEY** **SIZE W,H,D (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).



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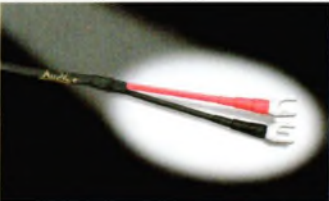
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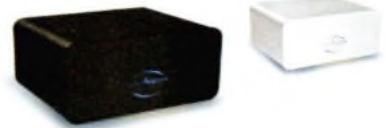
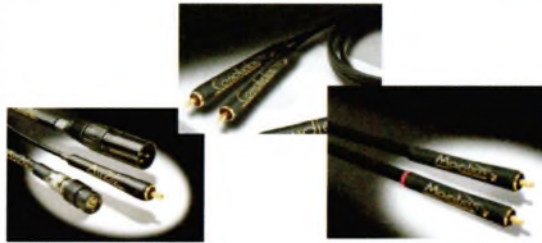
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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

# EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

A decent hi-fi rack makes a sound investment

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Atacama Equinox	409	Stable, modular design with style and excellent bass transients
	Audiophile Base Std Supp't	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free
	Custom Design Inert Matt	70	Isolation platform can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail, but is nice and lively
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal
	Custom Design Milan	509	Good-looking stand with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail
	Hi-Fi Racks Podium	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great
	Milty Foculpods	22.5	A set of isolation pads that are amazingly useful for damping vibration and improving sound
	Partington Minim	470	Adds its own character to rock, but to the detriment of acoustic sounds
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	680	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural-sounding and plenty of detail
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Platform	146	This unassuming platform can be a godsend, cleaning away mid/treble muddle from the sound
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice
	Townshend VSSS	1,380	This attractive Seismic Sink retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
57	46,35	●	3	MDF	302
	40x25			Metal	311
	56,37		4	Glass	286
	60,42		4	Glass	293
57	48,39		4	Glass	302
	59,5			Wood	320
2	5			Polymer	311
78	45,37	●	5	Glass	302
51.5	49,39.5	●	4	MDF	217
8	48,36		1	Torlyte	302
68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
76	35,50		4	Glass	273

# SPEAKER STANDS

Not all stands are made equal – try one of our top buys

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	229	A variety of smart looks available – sound is clear and precise
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More of a range than a model. Capable of fine results, especially with Acoustic Steel top plates
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack of coloration suits it to high-resolution systems
	Custom Design SQ404	220	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance
	Partington Ansa 60	119	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent
	Partington Dreadnought BS	299	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer
	Partington Heavil II	499	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very precise bass and upper frequencies

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
50	20,17	●	●	1	293
62	18,16.5	●	●	2	299
56	16,5,18	●	●	1	281
61	18,16.3	●	●	4	283
62	18,15	●	●	4	232
62	17,23	●	●	5	309
53	31,22	●	●	6	287

**SPECS KEY** **HEIGHT (CM)** Height of equipment support and speaker stand (not including spikes) in centimetres. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). 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 SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand. **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.



**Milty Foculpods £22.50**  
Cheap as chips way to bring real sonic benefits to both electronics and loudspeakers - these rubbery wonders help destroy vibration and come in handy packs of four



**Partington Dreadnought BS £300**  
Probably the best speaker stand you can buy for the money – heavily engineered and backed up with sound theory, this mass-fillable stand is a top recommendation



**Townshend VSSS £1,380**  
Although not cheap, Max Townshend's skillfully engineered rack nears perfection in terms of equipment isolation, diminishing returns kicks in if spending more

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Graham Phantom, ex demo, excellent boxed	1749	Cairn 4808A integrated, mint boxed TO CLEAR	699
Koetsu Black, mint	999	Creek Evolution integrated, nr mint boxed	349
Linn Ekos 2, excellent boxed	899	Croft Appanition Elite & Epoch Elite Pre/Power, lovely	1199
Linn Lingo, excellent boxed	549	Cyrus BVS2, excellent boxed	499
Linn LP12, vaihalla/nirvana	399	Cyrus 6VS2, excellent boxed	399
Linn LP12 early with Mission 774 tonearm	549	EAR 834L, decent little valve line preamp	449
Linn LP12, Rega Incognito, Vaihalla	599	Linn LK100, excellent boxed	249
Michell Electronic Reference (no arm, SME cut)	699	Linn Wakonda and Kolektor, nr mint boxed, FROM	299
Michell Technoarm, nr mint	CALL	Linn LK280/Spark, boxed	749
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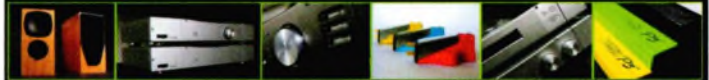
Also get the chance to see the latest products from Rega including the new DAC, hi-end Osiris amp and Isis CD player.

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# Second-hand guide

*Time to spin some vinyl on one of four £500 second-hand turntables*

**B**ack in the 1980s, if you wanted a first-rate turntable to match your Guards Red Porsche 911 and Barbour trench coat then you'd probably turn to the likes of the Linn LP12, Pink Triangle PT, Roksan Xerxes or the Townshend Rock.

The latter began as the development of an academic rather than purely commercial exercise. Developed by Jack Dinsdale and John Bugge of The Cranfield Technological Institute and commercially realised by Max Townshend, the first Rock was known as the Cranfield Rock. By 1983 we had the Elite Rock MkII and it's still a confident, punchy-sounding turntable and one that's fully serviceable. We contacted Max Townsend, who still produces the Rock 7 and were told older units could be serviced, even if it meant fabricating new parts. It's also a very reliable deck with few problems reported.

The choice tonearm would be an Excalibur, although most of the Elite Rocks come with a modified Rega RB300 – still a decent arm to this day. Although a Townshend Rock Reference would always be the Rock of choice, our budget is ample for a decent Elite Rock.

Three years after the Elite Rock, Roksan launched their Xerxes turntable. It was an instant hit with a precise, well-defined sound quality that left many contemporary rivals struggling. Like all the decks here, the Xerxes can still be an excellent-sounding turntable, although care is required when buying second-hand. Mention its Xerxes to any seasoned expert and they'll warn you of plinth sag. The grooved plinth can sag and, in extreme cases, fowl the platter. Finding a fix is not impossible and the Internet is awash with effective solutions. Our advice is to seek one with little or no sag in the first place and then

remove the platter when not in use. That way most of the weight is removed from the tender plinth most of the time. The bearing is hard-wearing but does need regular lubricating. The ideal matching tonearm would be the Artemiz, although both the Roksan Tabriz and Rega RB300 are worthy partners. Look for a well-cared for example and you'll have a still 'modern' sounding turntable.

Trying to summarise the Linn LP12 in a couple of hundred words is not easy. Whereas £500 would have once only bought a Valhalla-powered deck, we've now seen Lingo-equipped models around our price point. These models use an outboard PSU for a cleaner, tighter sound. We'd also recommend trying to find a model with a serial number above 70,000. This indicates a model made after 1987 and featuring some important suspension upgrades – many would say in response to the recently launched Xerxes, which caught Linn on the back foot. Try and buy as late a model as possible or, at least, a model that's been substantially updated, even if it means starting with a very basic arm and cartridge. In addition to the Lingo power supply, it's worth seeking out a model with Cirkus updates. This was

**“Try and buy as late a model as possible or, at least, a model that's been substantially updated with a basic arm and cartridge.”**

introduced around 1993 and consists of a new subchassis, bearing housing, bearing, inner platter and suspension. Finding these additions on £500 is very rare, however.

Finally we have the Pink Triangle PT. Launched in 1979, the PT featured an acrylic platter and lightweight aerolam sub-chassis. Although often overshadowed by the LP12 and Xerxes, it's a delicate and detailed-sounding deck featuring technology that, in the case of the platter, became mainstream decades later. Sadly, the PT has a very poor reputation for reliability. There are two approaches you can take to this. The first is simply to avoid it; the second is to remember there are really only a few components that make up a turntable and to search out a well cared for bargain and



**Top:** The Cranfield Rock was eventually replaced by the Elite Rock Mk II (**below**) in 1983

simply enjoy it. Problems range from over heating power supplies to blown motors and cracked lids. We've gone for the DC-motored PT, rather than the later AC-motored version, as it tends to be more reliable.



Linn LP12s made after 1987 include some important suspension upgrades

Although Pink Triangle no longer exists, the man behind it has gone on to form The Funk Firm. Whilst it won't repair PT turntables it does offer a range of upgrades from a V1 power supply and motor at £290 to a full K-Drive overhaul at £1,600. These prices rather miss the point of a bargain priced, high-end old-timer, so far better to buy as cheap as possible and seek out a well-loved model. Open the power supply and check for signs of over-heating and listen carefully for any motor noise or excessive transformer hum.

For complete peace of mind a brand new £500 Pro-Ject would probably make a better bet than any of these. But all four of these decks represent excellent buys. Each can be tweaked and each will reward with sound quality that's still impressive today. **HFC**

*Dominic Todd*

*Next month £1,500 CD players*

# READER CLASSIFIED

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## FOR SALE

**YAMAHA** DSP-A5 AV amp, 5x 70 watts, Dolby Digital DTS. Boxed with remote. Excellent condition. £40. 07846 675141, (Northants).

**COPLAND** CSA14 valve/solid-state integrated amplifier (Harma vintage valves fitted). Excellent, unmarked condition. Supplied in original box. £500. 07949 910455

[paul@redboxav.com](mailto:paul@redboxav.com) (Essex).  
**PS AUDIO** Power Plant Premier mains regenerator. Award-winning patented product, converts poor AC to pure AC with huge gains in performance to audio/video equipment. Long warranty (£2,000) £1,250 Bargain! 07859 388167 (London)

**MICHELL** Argo preamp, boxed, £200. M&K V125 12" sub, £200. Hi-fi mags: *What Hi-Fi* (1985-92), *Hi-Fi World* (1993-2008), £2 each. 01722 334694 or 07979 705644. [small1954@btinternet.com](mailto:small1954@btinternet.com) (Salisbury).

**ART** Stiletto loudspeaker pair. Gloss black premium finish (very small mark on one side of panel). Superb slim hi-fi speakers, boxed. Next day insured UK courier (£1,350) £699. 07970 692689. (Edinburgh).

**THE CHORD COMPANY** Odyssey 2 installation speaker cable, both terminated with gold-plated banana plugs. 1x 8m £120 and 2x 2m £95. The Chord Company Silencer mains conditioner. Boxed with instructions. £100. 07973 767212. (West Mids).

**AUDIOLAB 8000** Q power amplifier. Boxed with instructions, mint condition,

£200. Arcam Alpha One CD player MK2, with remote and instructions. £70. 07973 767212 (West Mids).

**CAMBRIDGE** 640C v2 CD player. Black, boxed, with remote. Superb condition. Comes with refundable extended five-year guarantee. £200. 07973 767212. (West Mids).

**AUDIOLAB** 8000A amplifier, boxed, £150. Marantz CD63 Mk11 K1 Signature CD player, boxed, £150. Both perfect working order. Monitor Audio Monitor 3 speakers, £80 (slight damage) Ecosse MS2.3 speaker cable, £60. 01482 887409 (East Yorkshire).

**WILKINSON** Mk.II loudspeakers, KEF B200A, Audax HD13D34H, 24 element 4th order crossovers, black, 19"x13.5"x13.5", £99.50. Focal tweeters TC90Tdx, 30mm tioxid dome and phase cone, £31.50. 01749 676174 (Somerset)

**QUAD** 11L2, Audiolab 8000S, Cambridge Audio DacMagic (new £199 version) and a Tangent DAB tuner. Original boxes. Cables: QED Silver Anniversary XT 3m(pair), Atlas Equator MK2 RCA 1m (pair) £450-500. 07752 400776 or email phoenix.[blue@hotmail.com](mailto:blue@hotmail.com) (Sheffield)

**MANA** Sound Stages, two for sale £100 each. Mana five-tier amplifier stand £300. All black and in excellent condition. Collection preferred. [angeldescending@hotmail.com](mailto:angeldescending@hotmail.com). (Powys).

**AVI** pre/power amplifier 215 watts S 21 MA V 2.0. Brand new line from AVI, almost new

perfect, with original boxes and remote control. £1,500. 0039 02 2150930 [fedepenzo@gmail.com](mailto:fedepenzo@gmail.com) (Milan, Italy).

### BANG AND OLUFSEN

9300 Beocenter, all touch control CD/tape/radio recorder, two speakers. Black and chrome £1,800 ono. 01554 754133 (Llanelli).

**AUDIOLAB** 8000M mono power amps (five). Excellent condition in original boxes with manuals. 125 watts per channel £650 collected. 01452 614515 (Gloucs).

**AURUM** Cantus Leisure Hybrid standmount loudspeaker. Ribbon tweeter, rosewood, gloss finish plus stands. Ten weeks old. Will accept £500. 01945 463856 (Cambs).

**ARCAM** A65+ integrated amp. Excellent condition, superb phono stage (MM) 40 watts, silver. Speaker terminals x2, manual. CR224 remote £125 inc postage. 07768 081615. (Sheffield)

**BENCHMARK** DAC1 preamp. Ten months old. As new, all original packaging £900. 01237 479922 (Devon).



### Cambridge Audio DacMagic

**MICHELL** Argo preamp £200, M&K V125 sub 12 inch £200, Pro-Ject Debut III, black £85, Cambridge Audio 640P, silver £60, MS Pageant Series II £60 NAD 3020 preamp £20. All good condition, Some boxed 01722 334694 (Wiltshire).

**ROKSAN** Kandy LIII integrated amplifier, 120 watts RMS, six months old, mint, 12 months unused warranty remaining, can demonstrate. £450. NAD C352 integrated amplifier, 80 watts RMS, two years old, mint, less than 50 hours use, can demonstrate. £185 01479 870261 (Inverness).

**ARCAM** A90, P90, CD 192, Monitor GS20 floorstanders, Chord Co. Chamelion, Chord Co. Odyssey, six-socket conditioner. Beautiful sound, mint condition. Manufacturers guarantees. Boxed £2,500. 0121 602 8349 (Midlands).

## 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**

**PIONEER** RT707 reel-to-reel tape recorder. Carefully stored, recently checked and all working. Comes with 20x seven-inch reeled tapes, little used. Buyer collects from North Hampshire, GU14. £250 or swap for a Audiolab power amp. Further details 01252 513048 (Farnborough).

**THE CHORD COMPANY**

Chameleon silver plus interconnect, one metre (£125) £60. Chord Co. Cobra 3, one metre (£60) £30. All boxed, as new. 01384 412234 or email leet2009@hotmail.co.uk (West Midlands)

**PLINIUS** Koru phono preamp. Silver, six months old, mint condition. RCA/XLR balanced outputs. Fully adjustable loading via external dip switches £1,100. 020 8898 3383 (S London).

**ARCAM** CD73T CD player. Silver, original box with manual, remote, immaculate. (£450) £180 posted. 01384 412234 or email leet2009@hotmail.co.uk (West Midlands).

**ARCAM** FMJ A32 amplifier (£1,200) £700. Arcam CD93T CD player (£900) £375. Both mint and boxed with all original accessories. 07966 057648, (Dorset)

**NAIM** CD5x CD player, 122x preamp, 150x power amp, Stageline MM phono stage, A5 2.7m speaker cable, Rega P3 turntable, Neat Motive 2 speakers (Rosenut). As new £2,100 the lot. 07725 199 071 (Cheshire).

**ELAC** fs207.2 speakers, cherry finish, mint condition

(£995) £425. Boxes and manuals. Could deliver, within reason. 02920 419226, frank8ush@ntlworld.com (South Glamorgan).

**ARCAM** AVR 250 receiver, (silver), Monitor Audio BR2 speakers (cherry), Monitor Audio (bronze), Atacama Nexus 5 speaker stands (graphite). All in excellent condition £300. 01924 365942 (West Yorks)

**MICHELL** Hera power supply for Iso/Agro amplifiers. Gyrodec platter upgrades and rare Gyro Blue base, LFD Spirolink 2 interconnects and LFD power cables. 07870 912 963 or stuardarshan67@googlemail.com. (Bedfordshire)

**MARANTZ** PM7200, Marantz CD7300 (gold), Marantz PM 7001 (silver), Arcam CD72 (black), all boxed with manuals. Reasonable offers considered 01933 626185 (Northants).

**MORDAUNT-SHORT** Performance 860 floorstanding speakers (piano black). Can email reviews and photos. (£1,900) £550. Excellent condition. 01424 446282. (Sussex).

**BOWERS AND WILKINS** CDM 1NT, standmount speakers in Cherrywood finish. In good condition with original packing and manual. £300. 07775 540362 (Cambridgeshire).

**ONIX** BWD-1, very rare FM tuner with Onix SOAP power supply. Collector's classic, first-class condition, working perfectly, great performer. £350. 01707 657801 (Hertfordshire).

**LINN** Komponent 110 floorstanders in silver, two years old. Also Komponent 120 subwoofer. (£1,600) £400. 01777 711386. (Notts)

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** E100 amplifier. E600 CD player E500, FM tuner. Owned from new. All in perfect working order and excellent condition (one small nick on CD). Gloss black, well reviewed. Plus vdH leads, system and individual remotes. Boxed. (£1,800) £599. 07961 023253 (North Kent)

**MARANTZ** SA11-S2 CD/SACD player with warranty, box and manual, £2,300. Shunyata Hydra 2 mains conditioner £275. Shunyata Diamondback mains cable £100. 07810 434589 (Surrey).

**ROKSAN** Caspian M-Series 1 CD player. Little used, excellent condition £499. Chord Co chameleon silver plus cables, 2x one metre pair £45 each. 07729 600847 (Sussex).

**CLEARAUDIO** Emotion, in pristine condition, with original box. Includes Satisfy tonearm and Aurum Alpha cartridge in need of retipping. £400. 07905 307131 (London).

**ISOTEK** NeoPlug mains cleaner, new: £15. Cambridge Audio Pacific, one metre interconnect in packaging: £10. Sony STS3il FM/AM, boxed, £20. 01766 781211 (Gwynedd).

**NAD** cassette player 6240, immaculate condition, hardly used: £50, plus postage. 01269 595271 (Carmarthenshire).

**REGA** R5 loudspeaker, piano black, good condition: £440. 2x Cambridge P500 power amps, 50 watts: £150. Ixos bi-wire speaker cable 2x three metres £25. 0161902 0719 (Manchester).

**STAX** SR-202 Lambda basic headphones, including SRM-252 driver unit, mint and boxed, £200. Creek OBH-21SE headphone amplifier, hardly used, some warranty: £100. 07818 658722 (Warks).

**QUAD** ESL-2805 electrostatic loudspeakers, brand new, factory-sealed boxes, £3,250. 07745 995179 (Milton Keynes).

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO** 640C CD player, 3.5-year guarantee (£230) £120. Monitor Audio Bronze 2 loudspeaker (£200) £90. Pro-Ject Debut turntable: £40. Buyer collects. Email richardjsugg@yahoo.co.uk. (Cardiff)

**OPERA** Seconda loudspeaker, cherry/black leather £875. Unison Research FM/AM Unico R valve tuner £575. Mint and boxed. 02380 738935 (Hants)

**PIONEER** PD 6700 CD player, black, £50. Nakamichi 680 ZX 3 Head twin-speed cassette deck, £150. SME 3009 Mk2 ten-inch detachable headshell tonearm: £20. SME armboard for Linn Sondek LP 12 turntable, £5. 01228 544376 (Cumbria).

**NYTECH** CTA252XD Mk 2 receiver, mint and boxed, £85. Acoustic Energy Aegis One loudspeaker, immaculate, £50. 01922 453931 (Walsall).

**ROKSAN** Artemiz tonearm cable upgrades, Linn/SME, £110. New Sound Dead steel turntable mat, £59. Benz Micro MC20SL, £90. Rega Elys MM, £45. 01243 863371 (West Sussex).

**ARCAM** Solo amp/CD/DAB/FM, silver, £450. Bowers and Wilkins 685, black, loudspeaker, £220. Pro-Ject Phono Box SE MC/MM: £60. 020 8464 9055 (Bromley, SE London)

**REGA** Planar 3 RB300 arm £160. Cyrus DAD 1.5 CD with remote: £125. Ion Obelisk 3 35-watt amplifier, £85. 01925 470619 (Cheshire).



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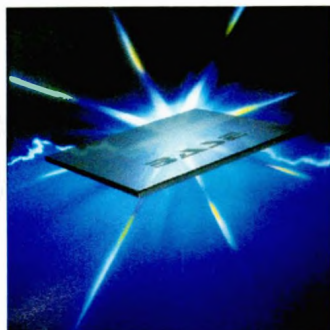
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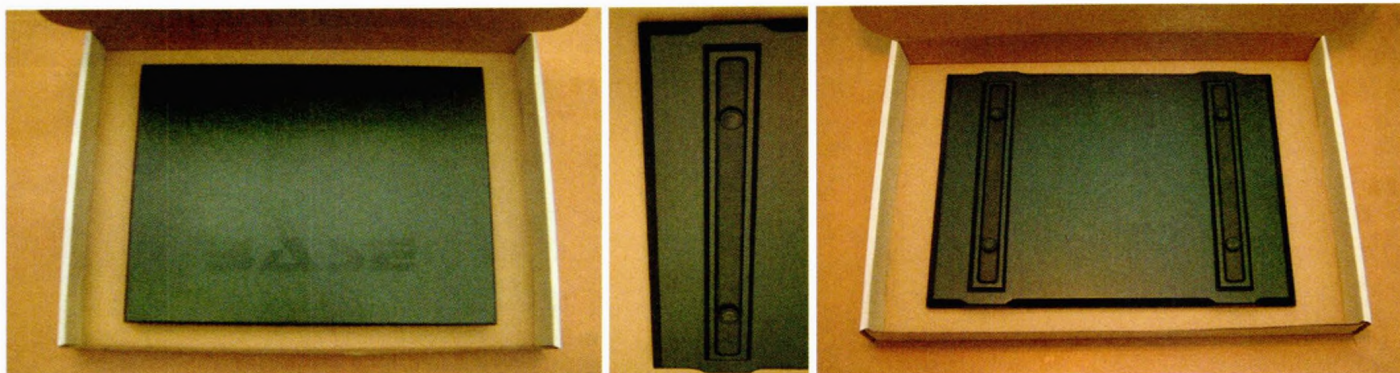
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AWARDS 2009 ISSUE 326

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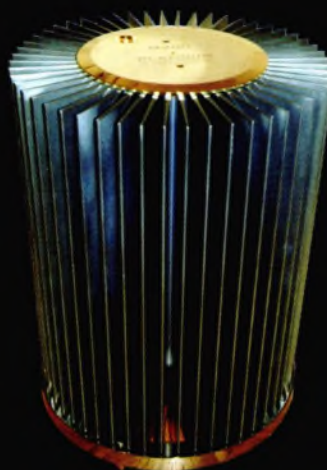
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