

How many CDs do you own but never play? Comes with credit card size remote control

Store, browse and listen to your complete CD collection on the revolutionary Brennan

What's the point in owning hundreds of CDs worth thousands of pounds if you never listen to them? The problem with CDs is that it's quicker to make a cup of coffee than dip into a CD. Try timing how long it takes to pick a CD, load it in the CD player, play a snippet from a track or two, eject it and put it back where it came from. Then there is the problem of finding music. The print on a CD spine is tiny. What if the track is on a compilation CD? What if the CD is in the car? Then there is the clutter. You need to keep your CDs near the player or you won't play them. So you are forced to share your living space with literally hundreds of cheap plastic boxes.

CDs are a great way to listen to music but they are also inconvenient, inaccessible and a bit of a chore.

The Brennan JB7 is a CD player with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs - and that's not all

It saves space and clutter and delivers near immediate access to an entire music collection. JB7 owners rediscover then fall in love with their music again simply because the Brennan makes it so accessible.

The Brennan also records from vinyl and cassette so you can enjoy your entire music collection but keep the originals in another room or retire them to the attic.

Small enough to pick up with one hand yet big enough for a lifetime of music, the Brennan JB7 is one man's brilliant idea for everyone's forgotten music. Starting at just £366* it's only available direct from Brennan at www.brennan.co.uk.

Key features

- Browse albums by spinning the volume knob push to play
- Display track names as they play
- Delete tracks you don't like
- Seven rainbow colour coded playlists
- Segue function blends one track into the next
- One touch record from vinyl, cassette or radio
- One button plays the entire music collection at random
- Plays MP3 downloads future proof
- Clock with alarm
- 60 Watt, 4.8 x 16 x 22 cm steel and aluminium construction
- Backup music to external USB hard disk for safe keeping
- You can use it with your existing hi-fi or on its own

"I've suddenly re-discovered my love of music - it's amazing" "I feel like a teenager all over again – thank you Brennan"

The Brennan JB7 is available in Cobalt Blue or Titanium Metallic





Money back guarantee

If you're not suitably impressed with your Brennan JB7 we'll collect it free of charge and refund you in full. · Plus P&P

The face behind Brennan

world's first 64-bit games computer.

Martin is a physicist, computer engineer and track. After vinyl and cassette that was a real my music onto a computer - but I neverlistened to silicon chip designer. He co-designed the plus. My first CD player was a five CD multi- it - I needed something simpler, more immediate changer. I liked the idea of quick access to more. In the end the computer got a virus and the music "I always liked the promise of CDs. It wasn't so than one CD and music that didn't repeat after files were lost - I still had the originals thankfully.

much the quality but the quick access to a given 40 minutes. A few years ago I had a go at loading The JB7 is really my personal ideal music player





Hi-Fi Choice

YOUR EXPERTS



PAUL MESSENGER EXPERTISE: SPEAKERS

PAUL is the UK's foremost expert on loudspeakers. Having worked as a speaker designer and reviewer for over 30 years Paul is internationally recognised for his ability to assess loudspeaker performance, and report on developments in the field.



JIMMY HUGHES
EXPERTISE: SYSTEM OPTIMISATION

JIMMY has been involved in hi-fi for over 40 years. His knowledge of tweaking and optimising systems is unrivalled in the hi-fi industry and he brings enormous expertise to the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice*. If anyone can help you improve your set-up, it's him.



RICHARD BLACK EXPERTISE: TECHNOLOGY

RICHARD writes exclusively for HFC and brings his experience as a successful musician and recording engineer to the title. As Technical Consultant, he's our authority on tech testing, ensuring that our verdicts are beyond compare.



ED SELLEY EXPERTISE: TROUBLESHOOTING

ED has spent the best part of a decade selling, developing and supporting products from some of the biggest names in audio. As *HFC*'s troubleshooter, he is on hand to help you answer your questions and help you create that perfect system.



ALVIN GOLD EXPERTISE: PERFORMANCE AUDIO

ALVIN is an internationally respected audio reviewer who has contributed to a huge range of magazines over the years. He has a very full 30 years of reviewing under his belt and has a passion for both high-performance and high-end hi-fi.



JASON KENNEDY EXPERTISE: TURNTABLES

JASON edited Hi-FiChoice through the Brit-pop era and relinquished the helm after 17 years on the title. A hi-fi addict since his twenties, Jason fell for the beauty of vinyl and has never looked back. He's here to help you get the best from your LPs.



MALCOLM STEWARD
EXPERTISE: EMERGING TECH

MALCOLM is a legend in hi-fi magazine circles. A former editor of *Hi-Fi Review*, he was one of the best known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He now writes exclusively for *Hi-Fi Choice* and he loves being 'back'.

Welcome..

www.hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. 343 March 2011



When Linn announced it was stopping CD player manufacture in November 2009, audiophiles took notice. The magnitude of the announcement, from such a big player in hi-fi, sent shock waves

through our community as a huge nail was hammered into CD's coffin. Anxieties about a CD-less music-streaming future were rife. Debate about physical versus non-physical media was reignited and we began to mourn the format we've virtually all embraced for the last 25 years. But, as our world exclusive Linn Akurate streaming system review shows, the absence of a CD player needn't mean CD is entirely redundant. Rips comprise the majority of content for streaming systems and discs will prove to be the ultimate back up in time. And, as Jimmy Hughes discovers on p54, if like us you love music, streaming systems are a godsend. All it really takes is a (sometimes difficult) change of outlook.



Dan George Editor dan.george@futurenet.com

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OUR PROMISE TO YOU

HI-FI CHOICE is passionate about high fidelity. We're dedicated to the very highest standards of sound reproduction. Our commitment is to bring you the most reliable, in-depth hi-fi equipment tests anywhere and we're backed by the UK's biggest technology publisher. Our expert writers will help you get the most from your hi-fi and guide you towards the best-performing products for your budget. Our passion is your passion.



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Five NEW models from McIntosh







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Variable volume output, Dedicated headphone amp, Five digital input source switching



amp, USB Input, Integrated DAC



C48 Preamplifier Twin moving coil/moving magnet, Dedicated headphone amp, USB Input, Integrated DAC

Hi-fi Choice Choice Choice

www.hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. 343 March 2011

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WIN! 35 A Creek Destiny 2 integrated amp



COVER STORY





CES 2011: The hottest hi-fi from Las Vegas



Soundtracks: The best compilations out there



Beautiful Systems: Big Mac attack!

"The sort of detail that makes you realise just how good vinyl can be"

Jimmy Hughes, Linn Akurate system p60



Emillé Ara valve integrated amplifier



Audiovector Ki3 Signature speaker



Cayin SP-30S/SP-40S pre/power amplifier



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HFIChoice MARCH 2011 www.hifichoice.co.uk

Ribbons of gold

Monitor Audio's brand new GX range has more than a hint of Platinum about it

PRICE: £650-£3.000 AVAILABLE: APRIL **CONTACT:** 01268 740580 WEB: MONITORAUDIO.CO.UK

hen Monitor Audio released its Platinum range of high-end speakers, the feature that grabbed the most attention was the C-CAM ribbon tweeter. Ribbon tweeters are difficult and expensive to make, so when information about the new, more affordable GX series broke cover, we were impressed to hear that the range was to make use of a similar ribbon tweeter. In fact, the GX line-up has borrowed quite a bit of technology from the Platinum models including driver, cabinet and crossover technologies. Monitor Audio says the GX series is: "more redolent of Platinum than the GS speakers they replace."

The eight-strong range all feature the GX ribbon tweeter and ribbed RST C-CAM cones. The drivers are attached to the cabinet via single bolt-through driver fittings to improve cabinet rigidity and reduce vibration and inteference. Not only is this said to improve performance, but combined with the use of magnetic grille fixings, it makes for a very clean overall presentation. The drivers are controlled by a crossover that's said to be the result of testing hundreds of possible permutations. All models feature polypropylene film capacitors and air core and laminated steel core inductors with the crossover itself

mounted on a dedicated panel. The cabinet design has a curved enclosure formed of multiple layers of MDF, hot-pressed to form a plywood shell. The reflex port is rifled to help accelerate the flow of air out of the speakers and improve bass response. A dedicated support for the standmount designs and a cast alloy plinth for the floorstanding models ensures a solid foundation and superior acoustics.

The eight-model line-up consists of four stereo pairs: the £950 Gold GX50 and £1,250 GX100 standmounts and the £2,300 Gold GX200 and £3,000 GX300 floorstanders. The smaller standmount and floorstander are built around 5.5-inch versions of the C-CAM driver, whilst the larger models use a 6.5-inch version. Both floorstanding designs use a four-inch midrange driver to better hand over to the tweeter. For multichannel duties the range features two centre channel speakers, a dedicated rear surround (featuring no less than six drivers) and an active subwoofer which features intelligent room correction to avoid bass resonance.

The GX range is available in April in a choice of black and white piano lacquers and a choice of bubinga (a flowering tree used in guitar production), natural oak and dark

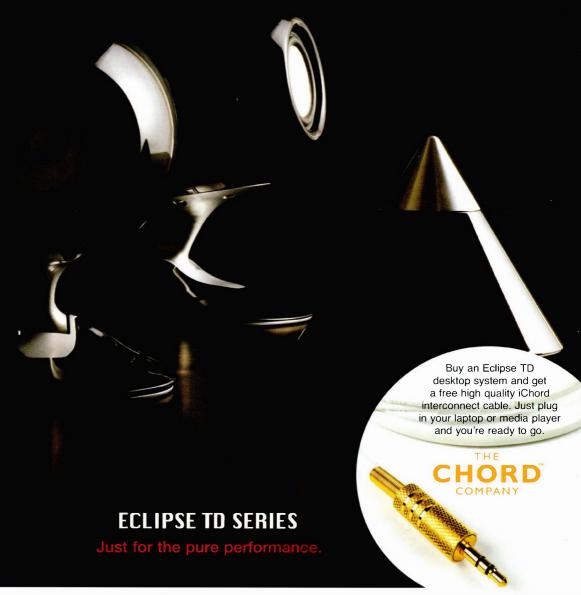






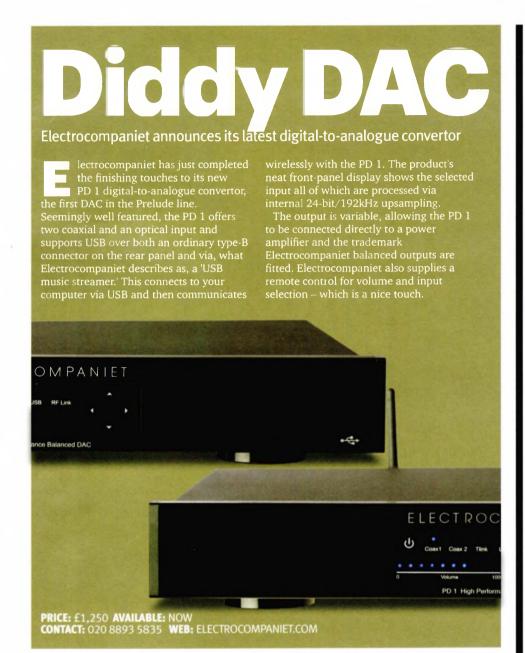
Altogether, Eclipse systems couldn't sound sweeter.

Made to match, each element of an Eclipse TD desktop system has been meticulously designed to perfectly complement the other.



Offer valid until 31 March 2011

Audiofile



Magic moments

British company promises optimal performance from new design

ass is a new UK-based company and the manufacturer of the Magic Rack MR1. A modular design, each product is assembled by a furniture craftsman and thoroughly tested before being dispatched to the customer. The MR1 uses a combination of highly inert MDF and an 'energy sink' of rubber straps that work together to provide total isolation for components it is claimed. Gloss black or wood finish is available.

PRICE: £600 AVAILABLE: NOW CONTACT: 07895 815636 WEB: MAGIC-RACKS.CO.UK



PURE temptation

PURE has announced the Contour, the seventh member of its internet-equipped Flow range. The £200 Contour is a stereo, internet-connected digital radio and media streamer with retractable iPod/iPhone dock.

The Contour can use its built-in Wi-Fi connection to access both internet radio and a digital music collection. This connection can also be used to access PURE's online portal, The Lounge, which features a selection of functionality. Internet connectivity also enables PURE's FlowSongs system, which can automatically tag songs on the radio to buy.

Additionally, the Contour features video outputs, so sites such as YouTube can be played through the Contour and displayed on a screen.

PRICE: £200 AVAILABLE: NOW CONTACT: 0845 1489001 WEB: PURE.COM



Never gonna give you up

BRICASTI is better known as a proaudio concern, but it's attempting to bridge the gap between home and studio with the new M1 DAC, which it says borrows technology from its M7 Reverb system, generally regarded as one of the finest devices of its type in the world.

The M1 is said to have low levels of jitter and distortion and uses no sampling rate conversion and boats superior digital filters. The design is completely dual-mono from front to back said to give extremely low distortion throughout its range.

The M1 also uses a selection of adjustable features to allow domestic users the option of adjusting the sound to better fit their listening preferences. The M1 has recently been trialled at the Abbey Road studios in London it's said.

PRICE: £6,600 AVAILABLE: NOW CONTACT: 020 8418 1470 WEB: BRICASTI.COM



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fact

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fact's feature precision controls that allow for fine adjustment of both high frequency and bass to create the perfect sound balance in every room and with all source equipment.

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"This is an excellent speaker with excellent imaging, good bass extension and beautiful styling"

Dec 2009



"Natural, dynamic with an exceptionally live sound and outstanding finish"

A truly great design

sempre-audio.at

"More than mere hi-fi, this was a musical perform nce. fact-8 is a great loudspeaker"



WHAT HI FI?

"These PMC's are exceptional, highly desirable in every way" April 2010



fact.3
HAS ARRIVED

The fact-8 in Tiger Ebony



Nagra's 60

Nagra celebrate with the announcement of two new valve amplifiers

agra doesn't announce new products very often, so the release of two 300B-based designs to celebrate its 60th anniversary is big news.

Both products use a quartet of 300B valves in push-pull configuration for an output of 20 watts. Military specification epoxy glass boards with gold-circuit tracks are used throughout and star earthing is employed.

The 300i integrated features four line inputs, including one balanced XLR and an ALPS blue velvet potentiometer with remote control. The 300p power amplifier is identical, but does without the preamp or controls.

Both models are fitted in the small form casework used on the CDC CD player and are supplied with the VFS absorbtion plates to further reduce noise.



PRICE: £TBC AVAILABLE: MAY 2011 CONTACT: 01235 810 455 WEB: NAGRAAUDIO.COM







CAMBRIDGE AUDIO has had a busy CES show, unveiling a new Blu-ray player and iPod transport, whilst firming-up the

details of its network streamer.

The £800 Azur 751BD picks up where the highly regarded 650BD left off. As well as 3D capability, audio playback is handled by no less than five Wolfson

DACs, making use of the company's

proprietary upsampling software.

The £150 iD100 iPod transport is due this spring and features an AES digital output and a flat mount to support fitting the iPad, as well as standard sized iPods.

Finally, the £400 NP30 music streamer picked up a CES Innovation Award and was also confirmed for a spring launch. UPnP device compatibility, internet radio and access to music streaming services, all feature on its impressive specification sheet.

PRICE: £150-800 AVAILABLE: SPRING CONTACT: 0870 900 1000 WEB: CAMBRIDGEAUDIO.COM

13

Little wonder

The smallest DSP active speaker yet

eridian has announced the launch of the DSP3200 active speaker and matching Audio Core 200 controller. The £3,750 DSP3200 features a 'perfect digital crossover system' and DSP-based loudness controls.

The Audio Core 200 acts a source controller for the speakers and offers single-wire connection to Sooloos, as well as compatibility with Meridian's i80 iPod dock.

PRICE: £1,500-£3,750 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01480 445678 **WEB:** MERIDIAN-AUDIO.COM





NEWS IN BRIEF

A selection of news-breaking stories on everything hi-fi



•BOWERS AND WILKINS has updated the Zeppelin to include improved amplification and Apple's AirPlay system, allowing wireless playback

bowers-wilkins.com



 LOGITECH'S new Spotify software is supported by the Squeezebox Touch and requires a premium account.

mysqueezebox.com/spotify



 MONSTER has launched the Daft Punk Edition TRON: Legacy-themed headphones, with a lightweight design and extra-large drivers.

monstercable.com



•**SOOLOOS** has added the MC200 to its range, offering 500Gb of storage that can be controlled by the various Sooloos interface options.

meridianaudio.com

•PSI AUDIO is a newcomer to the UK from Switzerland who has a new, laidback, slimline, active floorstander called the A215-M. More info from the UK distributor is at:

emerginguk.com



Ultima trio

12-year warranty Teufels from just £178!

eufel has continued its prodigious rate of expansion and announced three new models in its Ultima range.

The £178 Ultima 20 standmount is the smallest of the three and features a 25mm tweeter and 165mm mid bass

driver and rear port. The larger £258 Ultima 30 is the company's least expensive floorstander and uses the same tweeter and mid bass driver, but adds a second 165mm driver for bass duties.

three and features a 25mm The largest of the trio is the tweeter and 165mm mid bass \pounds 348 Ultima 40, which adds a twelve-year warranty.

second bass driver and increases power handling to 200 watts.

As before, all three speakers are sold under the Teufel direct sales programme, with an eight-week right of return if not satisfied after home trial and an impressive twelve-war warranty.



PRICE: £178-£348 AVAILABLE: NOW CONTACT: 00800 200 300 400 WEB: TEUFELAUDIO.CO.UK

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

Kevin Scott, of Living Voice, picks four classics





BEETHOVEN
32 PIANO SONATAS
ALFRED BRENDAL
For me, the 32 piano
sonatas contain
eventhing that music

For me, the 32 piano sonatas contain everything that music has to offer and, to a higher degree, more than any music written before or since.



BACH SIX PARTITAS,

The six Partitas occupy a world outside of human experience; an eternal, god-given world of relentlessly unfolding, perfect musical invention.



STRAUSS FOUR LAST SONGS

Music of haunting beauty. Reflecting on his life, Strauss looks forward with passive acceptance to his death. His harmonic language has a powerful eloquence.



CHRISTIANNE STOTIJN SCHUBERT/BERG/WOLF

The programme choice is very well judged. The ensemble playing is perfect and the vocals by Stotijn are phenomenal. It's music of the highest order. More please!

amphion

"The best nearfield speakers I have ever heard."

Günter Pauler, Stockfisch Records on Amphion Argon3.



Would you like to hear what Mr. Pauler from Stockfisch Records hears in his studio? Now you have access to the same speakers that are used in the recording process of some of the all time audiophile reference recordings.

Even if Mr. Pauler feels Argon3 are the best nearfield speakers he has ever heard, Argon3's were designed to work best in normal acoustically non-treated rooms, where most of the audiophiles enjoy their music.

More information on Amphion products on www.amphion.fi

SHOW REPORT

CES 2011









SHOW REPORT

CES 2011

It's the biggest electronics show on earth and as **Jason Kennedy** discovers, 2011 is going to be a great year for hi-fi...

he Consumer
Electronics Show
(CES) is the world's
biggest event of its
kind and is a place where the hi-fi
big guns come out to play. It's also
a place to spot trends, as the US is
often a technological step ahead of
everyone else. Being a trade-only
event, you couldn't attend even if
you wanted to, so we've brought
you the best new products for
2011 as seen in sunny Las Vegas.

The standard of sound quality at the show is something else, the larger rooms and the astronomical prices of the kit being used obviously has a bearing, but you don't often hear sonic holography of the kind we encountered in the Vivid loudspeakers suite.

The theme was Apple, however, with very few rooms devoid of a Mac laptop and almost as many had iPads to access material stored on them. Apple's Airstream Wi-Fi system is also making inroads into the high end, with several manufacturers basing new products around it.

DACs in and out of players are going to 32-bit with the Sabre chipset proving very popular across the board. There were also plenty of traditional players in action and for all its ease of use and lovely interfaces, the iTunesbased systems still lag behind proper audio sources.

O CAMBRIDGE AUDIO

Cambridge Audio has beaten the market in the race to bring a digital iPad dock to market. The ID100 at £150 is big enough to support Apple's tablet and has the full complement of digital outputs including AES/EBU.

Cambridge also showed its £800 751BD universal Blu-ray player, which plays SACDs and DVD-As as well as accommodating USB and eSATA drives. It has five Wolfson DACs and Anagram upsampling, coupled with video upscaling to bring DVD up to 1080p.

"Classe's Dave Nauber's claim is that an iPhone can beat a CD transport with its new pre."

2 KONDO OVERTURE

Kondo has built its first integrated amplifier. The company also known as Audio Note Japan is famous for its silver transformer triode valve amps, but the Overture uses EL34 pentodes in a classic ultra-linear push-pull configuration. It incorporates key components from the M7 preamp and delivers 32-class A watts. Construction details include silver foil capacitors and silver wiring.

Quality is assured thanks to 'tremendous hours of listening and comparisons [that] were spent for the selection of parts'. The price has yet to be confirmed, but it won't be cheap.

MERIDIAN AUDIO CORE 200

At around £2,000, the Media Core 200 music server is the least expensive Sooloos streamer yet. It can be used as a digital music player and only has one set of outputs, but its content can be accessed by any renderer or PC on the network.

HATChoice MARCH 2011 www.hifichoice.co.uk

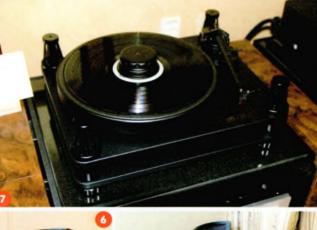
SHOW REPORT

CES 2011

















MERIDIAN DSP3200

The DSP3200 active digital loudspeaker replaces the conventionally shaped DSP3100 at £3,750 with a distinctly Meridian look. It combines an 85mm wideband mid/treble driver with a 165mm bass unit, each powered by a 75-watt amplifier.

The Audio Core 200 is a matching preamp for this speaker with only a digital output, but both varieties on input, an apodizing filter and full DSP for a very reasonable £1,500.

MAGICO Q3

The company that brought solid aluminium baffles to the speaker market has a new floorstander that, despite a £34,000 price tag, is not the range-topper.

At 90dB the Q3 has better sensitivity than its Q5 sibling, its substantial 113kg bulk houses three seven-inch Nano-Tec woofers, a six-inch midrange and a metal dome tweeter. All the cones are made by Magico in woven carbon fibre.

It sounded super-sweet, thanks in part to a Nagra T Audio TC pro reel-to-reel from the nineties that had been revamped by The Tape Project with a Bottlehead valve output stage.

O SONUS FABER AMATI FUTURA

Italy's most ambitious speaker maker Sonus faber, showed the first fruits of the project that produced its €150,000 Sonus faber show-stopper last summer.

The Amati Futura is a stunningly beautiful piece of cabinet work that reveals a metal support structure and aluminium end caps top and bottom. It replaces the current Amati at around £35,000 and has a silk-dome tweeter augmented by a pair of eight-inch bass drivers and a seven-inch paper cone mid.

2 SME MODEL 20/3

SME's US distributor had the first example of a mark 3 version of the Model 20 turntable that we've seen. It has thicker chassis plates than its predecessor at 9.5mm per slab and these look very much like those seen on the Model 30. In fact, it now looks more like a scaled down 30, rather than a distant cousin. Total weight is an alarming 18.9kg and the price is £8,560 – something else that's got bigger. It uses the same damped isolation system as its predecessor butthe platter is larger at 13 inches.

MARTINLOGAN ELECTROMOTION

American electrostatic specialist MartinLogan brought its most affordable panel speaker to date to Vegas.

The Electromotion will be around £2,000 and has a six-inch passive sub in a cabinet beneath the thin film transducer that covers mid and treble in a metal frame. Two dynamic box speakers dubbed 'Folded motion' are available to create a multichannel set-up.

Further up the scale, Martin Logan introduced the Summit XJR, which sits just below the Summit model at around £10,000. This has a 250-watt ICE (class D) powered sub with a DSP-based crossover.

O DYNAUDIO DM3/7

For a change from the high end exotica, Dynaudio delivered a loudspeaker aimed at the realistic end of the market. The Dynaudio 3/7 is the first floorstander in the DM range and at €1,400, is the most competitively priced example that the company can make within the constraints of its totally 'made in Denmark' ethos. It has two seven-inch drivers and a soft dome tweeter in a 960mm-high cabinet finished in vinyl wrap to keep costs at bay.

OPENORE FIDELITY ORANGUTAN

New York-based speaker-builder John Devore was having a lot of fun with the first model in a new range called Orangutan, which fits in with his enthusiasm for naming speakers after primates.

Described as 'highly sensitive speakers', the goal is maximum efficiency and if it achieves its specified 96dB it certainly hits the mark. An old-school wide baffle helps a lot in this respect as does the 10-inch paper cone mid/bass

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SHOW REPORT











a plethora of additions to its compact Box range for seemingly every application. The Dock Box will stream from your iPod or iPad, while the USB version of the DAC Box is designed to partner an Airport Express to give Apple Airplay functionality.

The extremely cute CD Box has a die-cast in-car slot drive and minimal features, but is a fully functioning disc player. Pro-Ject is assembling various combinations of these with Speaker Box 4 and 5 models to provide full systems, presumably in one box!

units and horn-loaded silk-dome tweeter. It sounded thrilling with Leben valve amplification and a Well Tempered turntable playing 22 Top at full chat.

monoblocks on demonstration. AUDIO RESEARCH Copper was chosen for its superior **PH8** heat-dissipating qualities, which

ESOTERIC K-01 Esoteric has replaced the X-01 and X-03 with two new rangetopping one-box disc spinners. The K-01 and K-03 add significantly to the feature count of their predecessors by offering digital volume control and the first USB inputs in the company's range.

American tube stalwart Audio Research, showed a replacement for the PH7 phono stage dubbed PH8. This features the 6H30 valve that the company has been bringing in across the range to replace 6992. The 6H30 is apparently more dynamic, open and detailed as well as being more stable.

rigid transport than the K-03 and separate power supplies for each section of the player.

Power is regulated by a beefy

The \$22,500 K-01 has eight 32bit AKM DACs per channel, a more

10 KRELL PHANTOM

The \$13,000 K-03 has four DACs

Krell is going against the prevailing grain at CES by introducing products at the sub-stratospheric price level. The Evolution 2250e is a 250-watt per channel power amp, with simpler casework and no CAST connection system and brings Krell's entry point down to £8,000. There is a matching three-

per channel. Both machines play SACD and have optical, coaxial and USB digital inputs.

6550 valve, gain is supplied by both solid-state and valves and parts include Teflon caps in the RIAA stage and some elements from the Reference Phono 2.

1 PRO-JECT CD BOX

O'AGOSTINO

Original Krellfounder Dan D'Agostino

had the finalised version of his

copper-flanked and relatively

compact Momentum 300-watt

allows for a smaller chassis and

has proved to have a far more

fluid sound than aluminium. It

doubles its output down to two

ohms and has the most beautiful

VU meter casing in the business,

Details of a forthcoming

Momentum preamp include

integral net radio, streaming

capability and digital inputs.

Keep watching this space.

the price: £42,000.

MOMENTUM

CLASSÉ CP-800 Classe has replaced its CP-700

Pro-lect has been celebrating its twentieth anniversary with preamp with the less expensive and yet significantly better featured CP-800 (\$5,000). According to Dave Nauber this 'anticipates a shift in system architecture' by providing what he claims is the best USB input yet. This is asynchronous and galvanically isolated but also uses an FPGA to isolate the clock.

The preamp has both digital and analogue inputs with a bypass mode for the latter to avoid the onboard DSP. It has a switchmode power supply that Nauber considers a strongpoint and has five channel output. His biggest claim, however, is that an iPhone can beat a CD transport with the CP-800 preamp.

channel 3250e at £10,000. The company has replaced its Evolution 202 preamplifier with

SHOW REPORT

CFS 2011



the two-box Phantom (£17,500). This has the option of an onboard crossover to use where smaller speakers are combined with dual subs. The single-box Phantom 2 doesn't have this option, but is more affordable at £12,000.

O SONY SS-AR1

One of the biggest surprises of CES 2011 was the launch of a high-end \$25,000 loudspeaker from Sony. The SS-AR1 is understated in the extreme, but its superbly piano-lacquered, metre-tall cabinet is very substantial at 57kg and built to the highest standards. It's made in laminated wood for a start: Finnish birch for the main body and Hokkaido maple for the 50mm-thick front baffle.

The 200mm metal cone bass units have titanium bobbins and the tweeter is an open-back design with six separate magnets and rear cabinet venting. European availability has yet to be confirmed.

WADIA 9

Digital specialist Wadia has been expanding its range at the top and bottom of the scale. The Wadia 9 transport is its premium offering at \$18,000, with a suspended Stream Unlimited transport mechanism, an 'amazing' patentpending power supply, plus it can also play WAV and FLAC alongside Red Book CD.

If that's a little rich for your blood, then the 121 Decoding Computer is a circa-\$1,500 DAC with 24-bit/1.4MHz Digimaster upsampling, digital volume control and a 32-bit chipset.

MICROMEGA AS-400

Micromega has stolen a march on the industry by being the first company to make an amplifier with Apple Airstream onboard. This technology allows you to press play on your Apple iPad/iPod/iPhone and have music streamed direct to the system without a wi-fi network.

The AS-400 is a £3,898 integrated amp with Hypex class

D output modules producing 400 watts per channel. It has a phono stage and is available sans Airstream as the IA-400 for £2,500.

20 AYRE VXR

Ayre caught our attention by playing the least audiophile tune encountered at the event, namely Southpark's Eric Cartman singing Sail Away! This raucous piece was amplified by the VXR power amplifier – a 17-inch wide stereo version of the MXR monoblock.

This dual mono amp has the same circuit as the MXR, but different transformers. It retails for circa £14,950 and produces 200 watts per channel. Ayre has also finalised its DX-5 universal Blu-ray player, which has a USB DAC onboard.

10 MSB UNIVERSAL MEDIA TRANSPORT

The Californian digimeisters at MSB have followed up their Data CD transport with an alternative Universal Media Transport that's

based on the Oppo BD83 engine. This plays CD, SACD and regular, as well as Blu-ray DVD, yet can also accept a streamed input. It's 'limited' to 24-bit/192kHz, a point that MSB makes because its Data drive will output twice that. It has a USB input that can accept the same data rate, but needs a monitor for full functionality.

The audio business in the states has clearly had a torrid time over the last year. Ironically, this prompted a big turn out at CES and a lot of optimism about the coming year. The Apple Mac and its associated touch-screens has given the industry a new format to play with that not only has the potential to sound good, but has mass appeal as well.

Peter McGrath of Wilson Audio told us that from the Firewire output of a Mac he is getting results that sound exactly like the original. The goal posts are clearly moving but the results are getting more real by the moment.

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DCT: Science or snake oil?

Freezing wires is part of the cable manufacturing process, but **Richard Black** questions whether it improves audio quality

he Furutech cable in this issue's Mini-Test (p102) boasts, among other things, cryogenically treated conductors. This is becoming quite a commonplace in audio, but I thought it would be worth having a look at what it's all about, because there's a lot of hand-waving about it, but not always very much hard fact.

Cryogenics is, in general, the science of very low temperatures. 'Very low' obviously depends on context, but for most purposes the temperature at which liquid nitrogen boils, about 196-centigrade. That's mostly for practical reasons, because nitrogen is in limitless supply (it's 60 per cent of the air we breathe) and is quite easy to liquify, so using it to cool things is relatively simple and cheap.

Lots of solid materials do funny things as their temperature changes. At very high temperatures they soften and melt, but at low temperatures their internal structure can change. It may not be visible to the naked eye, but crystalline structure can change, often quite significantly. This may seem bizarre why should a metal, which melts at something like 1,000-centigrade, undergo further changes as temperature is dropped from room temperature to 200 degrees below?

When a liquid solidifies, it tends to turn into crystals rather than a truly homogeneous mass. The crystals may be very securely locked together, giving the solid great strength and every appearance of homogeneity, but careful use of a microscope can easily show that there is a crystalling structure there. What's more, there may be mechanical stresses among the crystals, which cause minor defects to spread rapidly. This has been known since the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution, when railway bridges used to fall down because of it. Gradually, scientists came to understand the

Does Furutech's Alpha Line 1 interconnect performance benefit from cryogenic treatment? See MiniTest p102

problem and also ways of countering it. including careful heat treatment to avoid too much stress within a solid.

Relieving stress

Super-cooling a solid is another way of getting rid of stresses, by 'relieving' them. As the material is cooled its crystalline structure changes, but the changes are not reversed as the temperature is raised back to room temperature. This happens with most kinds of steel, aluminium, copper and many more metals and the biggest uses of cryogenic treatment are to do with increasing the strength and wear-resistance of steels. Cutting tools, highly stressed parts for applications like racing cars, as well as components such as bearings can all benefit from this.

At the same time, cryogenic treatment (or 'Deep Cryogenic Treatment', DCT, as it's most often known in audio) has some effect on the electrical conductivity of materials. Copper, the most common conductor in cables, can benefit from a reduction in resistance in the region of five per cent (references seem to differ somewhat), which sounds like a good thing. This is thought to happen because the stress relieving process also puts the crystals in better contact and allows electrons to flow more freely through the solid.

It's not clear who first thought of treating audio cables and components, but many people have tried it and a lot of them report positive results - certainly enough for plenty of manufacturers to have employed the process. Look up 'cryogenic treatment' on the internet and you'll find that most firms offering the service include audio customers. But even though the reduction in resistance is real enough, why would it make a difference? Typically, the resistance of an audio cable is very low compared with that of the device it feeds (especially in the case of interconnects) and reducing its value by five per cent is going to increase output level by tiny fractions of a dB and not do anything else.

It has been suggested that there will be less distortion due to the more homogeneous structure of the metal, but distortion due to crystal boundaries has never, to my knowledge, been unambiguously demonstrated. It's not often we get the chance to compare cryo- and non-crvo- treated cables side by side. On the couple of occasions I was able to, I was far from sure I could spot differences reliably. Your mileage may, as they say, vary.

Deep Cryogenic Treatment, DCT, as it's most often known in audio has some effect on the electrical conductivity of materials



A musician and recording engineer, Richard knows a thing or two about hi-fi - he's been writing about it for over two decades

Have you had a system-changing result with DCT cables. What do you use? Let us know Email us now: hifichoice@futurenet.com





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Run what you brung

The hi-fi show is reinventing itself with bring-yer-own kit replacing manufacturer demos. Ed Selley thinks he's seen the future

his column has generally focussed on hardware and software progression in hi-fi, but this month is a little different in that the development is more of a social one. The hi-fi show is seeing the start of something new.

On the 6th March, the third annual Scalford hi-fi show will be held at Scalford Hall near Melton Mowbray (thehifishow.com). There will be a variety of systems on display covering various budgets and design philosophies. And what sets Scalford apart from other hi-fi shows is that the systems on demonstration are not provided by a manufacturer, distributor or dealer. Every one of the systems is the personal property of the person exhibiting it.

Outside of hi-fi, this is not a new phenomenon. A classic car show, even a very upmarket one like the Festival of Speed is generally comprised of exhibits provided by their owners. Likewise, the Santa Pod raceway has made the 'run what you brung' concept, where people drag race their own cars into a very successful part of the business. The precedents are there, but can it be successfully applied to hi-fi?

There are certainly some clear positives to an 'owner' hi-fi event and having attended both previous Scalford shows, the single biggest attraction is the sheer variety of kit on display. Equipment that is next to impossible to hear anywhere else, such as the Apogee Scintilla loudspeaker, EMT turntables and Quad ESL57's have all been in attendance. Whereas in manufacturer-led shows, equipment that has ceased production (however well it performed) is usually conspicuous by its absence, no such rules apply to the product on display at Scalford And as it's not for sale, there's usually a wide variety of kit to enjoy.

But even when equipment is still in production, the bring-your-own hi-hi show still has advantages.

Instead of systems that are comprised of products from a single manufacturer or distributor, owner shows are free to present listeners with the rare opportunity of hearing equipment, custom-built from a wide variety of hi-fi sources. In effect, kit that might never have excited you before can demonstrate virtues that could influence your next purchasing decision.

More often than not, you will find yourself listening to a system that has been carefully honed to the tastes and requirements of the owner. And if you and they share the same tastes, the results can be very rewarding.

Hi-fi community

The other area to be celebrated, is the sense of community shows of this nature engender. Scalford is the result of activity on hi-fi forums and grew out of smaller get-togethers. This is not an attempt to sell you product or show you the latest and greatest (the UK already has shows dedicated to this task). Instead, it is an opportunity to meet and chat to people who share the same passions and interests and celebrate the highest quality of music reproduction. Hi-fi is often accused of being a somewhat solitary interest and it is good to see the balance being redressed.

Another interesting spin-off is that exhibitors learn the true compromises involved in setting up a system that behaves perfectly in their lounge rather than an unfamiliar hotel room. Many have admitted to a new found respect for what manufacturers and distributors have to contend with at many of the main audio shows.

I don't feel that there is any sense of competition between the owner-arranged shows and the mainstream events. They both fulfil different roles for the industry and equally deserve our support. As such, I will be at the Bristol Show on the 27th February (bristolshow.

> co.uk), checking out the hot products for the rest of this year, before attending Scalford nine days later for my third helping of end-user audio bliss. I have volunteered to assist a friend install and demonstrate his valve system, which while sonically fabulous weighs more than the cast of the Biggest Loser.

So if you are looking for a chance to see and hear some interesting systems, why not drop in for a demo?

Scalford is an opportunity to meet and chat to people who share the same passions and celebrate the highest quality of music







Ed worked in retail before joining some of the biggest names in the hi-fi industry creating and supporting audio products

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Quadeuphoric

Closest to the original sound was manufacturer Quad's proud claim, but for some, says *Jimmy Hughes*, it wasn't nearly close enough

he 1960s were a period of great change in the hi-fi world. Not least among the many revolutions, great and small, was the move away from tubes to transistors. Quad's first transistor amplifier - the 33/303 - came out in the late 1960s and was a significant milestone that led to the demise of tube equipment.

At that time, audio enthusiasts were very influenced by specifications. And with good reason; if something measured better, it nearly always sounded better. Given this, the siren call of solid-state was hard to resist. Measurement clearly showed Quad's 33/303 to be significantly better than the valve design it replaced.

It offered lower distortion, higher power output and less noise. At the same time it was quite a bit smaller and produced much less heat. Game Set and Match? Almost. Not everyone was convinced. Subjectively, some listeners preferred Quad's old tube design, feeling it to sound more natural and musical.

This opened up a fault-line that would grow wider and wider over the coming decades - a fault-line still with us today. It's the dichotomy between products that measure well and offer great accuracy (nothing added, nothing taken away), against those that measure less-well, but are subjectively judged to sound 'better'.

As one of the most expensive British amplifiers available, the Quad 33/303 was seen as a benchmark. Yet it elicited mixed opinions – lavishly praised, or rudely derided, depending on which side of the fault-line you were on. Quad was the audio establishment and the 33/303 became a focal point for dissent – a whipping boy.

For political reasons, numerous amplifiers were claimed to sound 'better' than the Quad. But few appreciated designer Peter Walker's rationale. His ideal amp was one that neither added nor subtracted from the original signal. Creating the proverbial 'straight wire with gain' was his goal.

To old-school engineers like Peter Walker, the concept of an amplifier being designed to sound 'good' or 'better' was an alien one. If scientific tests and measurements indicated that an amplifier was neither adding nor subtracting from the original source, then that amplifier was to all intents and purposes 'perfect'.

In the early '70s, I dearly wanted to own a Quad 33/303. But it was just that little bit too expensive. So I settled for something cheaper. By the mid '70s, I was on the wrong side of the fault-line - agreeing with those who felt the 33/303 was old hat. Young Turks like Naim Audio were the new god.





The Quad 33/303, while one of the UK's most expensive amps, was still considered a benchmark product

Fighting back

Faced with such shifts in opinion, Quad initially took a detached Olympian view. But by the late '70s they were starting to fight back. They created a special test box which allowed the dealer's demonstrator Quad amps to be compared to any amp of your choice. Only, it wasn't a side-by-side A/B comparison.

Instead, the box took the speaker output from the comparison amplifier into the Quad preamp's phono input - having been suitably attenuated and inverse-RIAA equalised! You'd switch and hear the amp of your choice connected directly to the loudspeakers and then through the

Amazing, huh? Even more amazing (and I heard this with my own ears), listening to the amp direct and then through the Quad pre/ power, there was virtually no audible difference! It was a most impressive demonstration - the more so, since the shop's demonstration Quad amp was used, rather than one brought along by the rep.

Quad's demonstration caused me sleepless nights. While I still felt Quad amps sounded underwhelming and a tad boring compared to Naim, I couldn't deny that - in terms of neither adding nor subtracting from the original - they seemed totally neutral. It's a conundrum that still rumbles on to this day.

The Quad was seen as a benchmark - lavishly praised, or rudely derided, depending on which side of the fault line you were on



A hi-fi enthusiast for four decades, Jimmy's knowledge of system-matching and recordcollecting are unmatched in the industry

WHAT DO YOU THIN

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Direct disappointment

The sight of the Denon DP-A100 in the recent *Beautiful Systems* feature (*HFC* 341) had me very excited. I have never been a fan of belt-drive turntables and as a result have been nursing an increasingly old Trio 405, as I much prefer it to anything driven by an elastic band.

The sight of the Denon cheered me up – I could buy a replacement direct-drive turntable with a brand new, made-in-2010 alternative. Alas, it is not to be. This limited edition is apparently so limited, that I am struggling to buy one!

I completely understand that Denon would not have the demand to make thousands of these units, but even so, the fact that the UK allocation seems to already be very thin on the ground has left me very disappointed and wondering what to do now.

Robert Houry, via email

HFC We had a quick look around online just before Christmas and there did appear to be DP-A100s on sale from a few retailers. Limited edition products will often be hard to find and conversely, manufacturers will often be criticised if they make too many of a 'limited' product! We would also advise talking to Denon who will be able to help you contact suitable dealers in your area. Good luck!

Remotely interesting?

I read Ed Selley's opinion piece on remote controls (*HFC* 341) and while I like the sentiment, the reality doesn't seem to be as encouraging. I have owned a great many (probably too many) pieces of equipment over the years and one common theme amongst the components that have been equipped with a remote, is that the more complicated the remote control, the less intuitive and satisfying it is to use.

A remote that sits in the palm of the hand with buttons you don't need to look at to know



their functions is the best control that there is. All of the glowing screens and touchpanels that Ed talks about don't sound like they pass this simple test. I will trade-off feedback for control that is completely intuitive and doesn't require a second thought. I don't think this is a luddite tendency either — why make something more complicated than it needs to be?

Gerald Smith, via email

AFC Ed Selley replies: I agree that unless the two-way remotes that my opinion column described are implemented correctly, the results will no better than a well thought out conventional remote. When the screens are done properly, such as the iPeng option for the Squeezebox, the results are absolutely superb and the easy equal of even the best conventional remotes.

Don't do it Jimmy!

After reading Jimmy's end column last month (*HFC* 342) I felt compelled to write and say, why rip? Jimmy doesn't say that he is unable to store his collection properly or is suffering for space, so why start hacking the collection up? I am nowhere

near the 40,000 disc point but I do have a substantial collection of vinyl and CD. One of the joys beyond having a collection of fantastic music to listen to is the visual effect that my shelves of music create.

Nobody is viewing the Amazon Kindle as a reason to junk a bookshelf. It is a device that will allow for you to take a slim e-reader to work or on holiday instead of a stack of books. I am interested in the digital storage of music for much the same reasons - it already allows me to have a substantial amount of my music collection with me all the time on an iPod and going forward, I can see it helping me to own material either unavailable on physical disc or of superior quality as a download. I feel there is a beauty to the collection in itself and I am sure that Jimmy will feel the same. Don't rip for rippings sake! David Robertson, via email

Do it Jimmy!

I was pleased to read that you are running a series on downloads and hard-drive storage. I have been contemplating setting-up a hard-drive-based system for a while and eagerly await updates with each edition of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

My main reason for contacting you is that I have recently



Naim UnitiQute: a small slice of DNLA

discovered DLNA, an interoperability standard for digital devices. It seems to me that hi-fi products need to be included in the standard and it may well be a way to encourage new hi-fi enthusiasts.

Looking at the website, I see little evidence of hi-fi manufacturers becoming involved with DLNA (dlna.org/products) and I haven't noticed it being mentioned in *Hi-Fi Choice* either, so I think it may be worth including in a separate article.

I am a chartered engineer working in broadcasting. Sound wise, I am a jack of all trades, from vinyl to cartridge and tape, to server-based audio playout and edit systems. My specialist area is live audio links over public IP networks.

For serious home listening I stay well clear of MP3 and other compressed files. My main home system comprises an ancient Technics SL-P477ACD player, the latest Cambridge Audio DacMagic, Harman-Kardon HK1400 amp and Spendor S8e speakers. Keep up the good work.

Tim Tierney, via email

HFC One of the reasons why Jimmy has undertaken the great ripping project, is because we wanted to see how someone who has views fairly similar to yours is able to get on with the process of ripping and storing media, as well as the processes and technology involved.

We suspect that Jimmy won't be throwing much media away, given his thoughts from the column itself. Of course, we might have unleashed a monster, but we will find out over the next few months!

DNLA has been making some inroads in the field of consumer audio, as devices such as the Naim Uniti Qute (HFC 339) are UPnP, which is part of the DNLA standard. Hopefully, manufacturers bringing product of this type to market will ensure that they pay attention to standards like DNLA going forward.

Chinese Krell concerns

I read with interest the test on the Krell S-350a CD player (*HFC* 341) and it got me thinking 'does it matter where it is made?' If this were a Harley Davidson made in China and sold under the Harley Davidson name, then it would harm the brand image and I see the same for Krell.

My recent experiences of anything made in China when it comes to back-up, say in a few years time, are pretty shocking. Long term usability and individual spares availability do not appear to be in the Chinese vocabulary. Manufacturers who use bought-in 'block components' from China are left with egg on their faces and reputations tarnished when simple things go wrong.

For instance, I have an Arcam DV137 that needs a new drawer mechanism rubber belt. The mechanism is a Chinese asiatech drive, which Arcam buy as complete units. If anything goes wrong, such as a belt, all they can offer is to fit a new unit, cost £200

plus. Arcam informed me they do not and never have stocked any rubber drives belts. So do you junk it for the sake of a rubber band or buy a new Blu-ray player (and as I feed it through a Naim DAC, there probably will be little difference sound-wise)? Will I buy another 'premium' Arcam player? Well, what's the point? The Krell player is still a premium product at £2,695, regardless of the fact it's a cheap Krell. If Krell wants to sell cheaper products then far better to have a separate sub brand name with the logo 'designed by Krell'.

When Chinese block-made products go wrong in five years' time and parts become unobtainable, established hi-fi names that use them will suffer. **Alan Pitchford, via email**

HFC We asked a Krell spokesperson for a response: "Krell's goal is to deliver the ultimate performance in every product category we offer. The Evolution One power amplifier, Evolution 707 surround processor and the soon to be released Evolution 555 Blu-ray player are great examples of this category of component. These flagship product design efforts directly lead to worldclass performance from Krell components designed for systems that are not in the reference level category.

With the S-300i integrated amplifier and S-350 CD player, the best combination for delivering the greatest performance-to-cost ratio was to have Krell-designed models built in China using a dedicated production line. Both of these components include classic Krell circuitry, power supply. and build quality features. From all accounts, both reviewers and consumers alike, they deliver Krell sound quality consistent with our heritage and listeners' expectations.

For our nearly thirty-year existence, we have sourced





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materials, parts, and sub-assemblies from around the world. Throughout our history, we have employed engineers from many countries as part of our engineering group in Connecticut. We use the best the world has to offer in all of our product designs.

Going forward, Krell will continue to deliver the best value to our customers from every component we sell using all the resources at our disposal."

Further to this, the Hi-Fi Choice position is that the country of origin is not the whole story, as a product built in Europe could still be constructed out of parts largely purchased from the same suppliers as one built in the Far East. As such, we have had examples over the years of certain European and American parts being less reliable than might be hoped for, while Far Eastern components have shown staggering durability.

Our internal shot of the Krell required us to remove the lid and the quality of components on the boards and the boards themselves, leave us fairly confident that the S-350 should live up to the Krell reputation.

Still feline good

As requested, here's another cat hi-fi picture: Milan clearly loves the warmth of Class-A... Well, he did, he has now grown too big to fit in that space!

Robert Leonard, via email

HFC Another high-quality cat picture, although we are not sure why he is named after an Italian city or an anti-tank missile. Once again, another Dutch hi-fi cat— is this a Low Countries phenomenon or are there UK moggies with an equal proclivity towards electronics?

In the interests of animal fairness, we will throw this open to all pets. Do you have a four- (or two·) legged friend with a fondness for your hi-fi? If so, please send them in.



Wings: the band the Beatles could have been

Clipped Wings

Normally, I approach your *Music Reviews* with a sense of enthusiasm. I will never have heard of all the material being discussed, but there is always something that fires up an interest and has me considering a purchase.

This has been cast in to doubt, however, by the fact that you gave a whole page of Album of the Month to Wings (HFC 341). I am not a Beatles fanatic, neither do I have it in for McCartney, but Wings were, are, and forever will be, dreadful. Unless the remastering process has fundamentally altered the sound of the album to something that doesn't sound like the very nadir of seventies 'rock', I'm not sure I see the point.

Edmund Fisher, via email

HFC Band on the Run was indisputably a massive selling album so a re-master was always going to be pretty big news. We are aware that Wings seem to provoke strong opinion from both those who see them as cruelly understated and indeed those who put them firmly in the 'crimes against music' camp. We think it's a generational and

We think it's a generational and cyclical thing – these days Macca is cool, again. An as Alan Partridge once said: "Wings are the band the Beatles could have been."





I WONDER how the UK's various hi-fi manufacturers, distributors and retailers are going to handle the VAT rise to 20 per cent? I will be interested to see if those who felt the drop to 15 per cent was 'too small to pass on' decide to be equally firm in not passing on the rise to 20 per cent. I also look forward to the various exciting variations in 'rounding up' for 'neatness' or otherwise finding innovative and determined ways to get a guick price rise into the process of complying with a government demand.

This is not intended to be entirely cynical, but we would ask those who set the prices to consider that disposable income is not that thick on the ground at the moment and those who pass on the minimum increase may see their restraint being rewarded in securing business.

Robert Medd, via email •





Explore your music

The sleek new Cyrus n-remote allows you to control all of the features of the forthcoming Cyrus streaming music players. Browse your network music library, select albums, artists, tracks or listen to a vast range of internet radio stations. It can even control your TV! You can choose all of this and much more from the touch of a few buttons.

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CD 8 SE CD player of the year









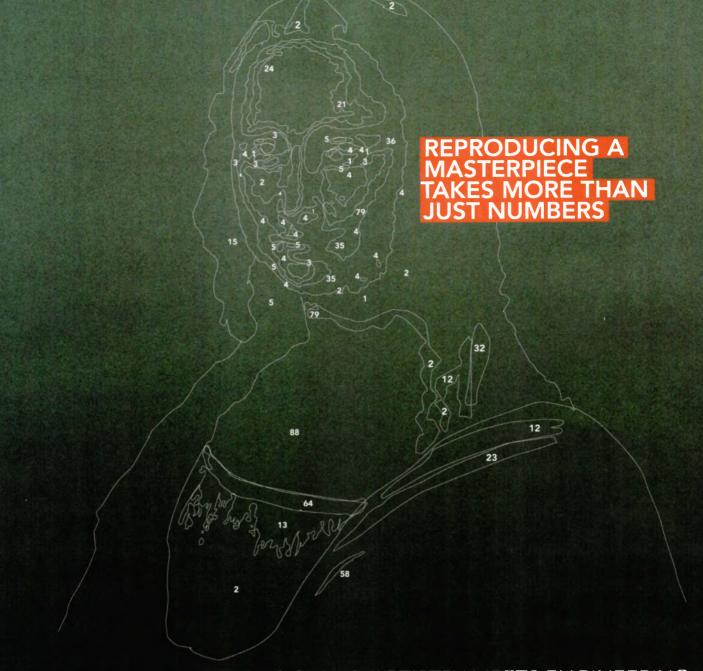






Did You Know

Over 118,000 hours has been invested in the research and development of the new Cyrus streaming music player!



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Dle llejoth

Ole Klifoth, CEO & Chief Engineer, Audiovector.

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(HFC 342) was a hard fought affair with some of the UK's best integrated amps squaring up to one another. The winner was always going to be something special and the Creek Audio Destiny 2 didn't disappoint.

We love the fact that the Destiny 2 manages to balance pace and dynamics with a wonderfully relaxed presentation that makes extended listening sessions a pleasure.

group (including a beefy 100-watt output), superb build quality and interesting features - such as the unique ability to run the preamp as a passive unit - and this is a remarkable amplifier, indeed.

Thanks to the generosity of Creek Audio, we are giving one lucky reader the chance to experience this audio masterclass for themselves by winning this month's competition.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS to enter the Creek competition, you can either (all text your answer to 87474 at any time between 03.02.11 and 02.0.3.11, or (b) enteronline at www.futureromps.co.uk/creek with your entry being received between 03.02.11 and 02.0.3.11. 8y sending your entry you agree to the two money and the end of your boxtal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network partial for the end of your boxtal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network partial for the end of your boxtal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network partial for the end of your boxtal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network partial for the end of your boxtal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network partial for the end of your boxtal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network partial for the end of your boxtal entry. Texts will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery; intries must be submitted by an individual flort via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless of the competition on the in boxesholds. We competition on the competition on their households. By entering a Competition on their households. By entering a Competition entry is entirely your entry your prize part in the competition on their households. On their households. We competition and for promotional purposes. All entires will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition and information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are awment, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are awment, you are awment, y

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Hi-fi reviews

No other magazine offers a more reliable standard of hi-fi testing. Technical Consultant *Richard Black* explains...

EXPERT TESTING

FOR OVER THREE decades, Hi-Fi Choice has been trusted for its combination of subjective and technical review expertise. The crucial consideration for any audio component is how it sounds, but it is important to back this up with laboratory measurements for many reasons – everything from the wish to check basic performance to the possibility of uncovering peculiar behaviour under conditions, perhaps slightly different from those of the subjective tests.

Listening

Subjective testing doesn't necessarily require the world's sharpest ears. What's more important is the experience to analyse the sound arriving from the hi-fi and this is where our subjective reviewers come in: they have been listening critically to audio equipment for aeons and have learned to identify the characteristics that make kit informative, involving or just plain dull.

Measurement

But even the most experienced listener, with a stack of familiar recordings heard in familiar surroundings, can't always know what is causing a particular characteristic in the sound. Brightness, for instance, may be a function of frequency response or distortion and this is where measurements come in. We analyse a range of parameters to see just where the correlation lies between sound and design. Our test equipment has been tried, tested and added to over the years and again our experience with it is unrivalled.

Straightforward presentation

We call on that experience to boil down the measurements to simple bar charts, which show at a glance how well a component behaves relative to others in its category. It's this combination of subjective and technical expertise that makes our reviews the most useful in the field.

"crucial consideration for any audio component is how it sounds, but it is important to back this up with laboratory measurements..."

OUR AWARDS



EDITOR'S CHOICE: Awarded to those products that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance



RECOMMENDED: The products we feel meet a certain high standard of performance



GROUP TEST WINNER: Comparative tests can only have one true winner, and this badge says it all

STATE-OF-THE-ART HI-FI TECH

HFC's test equipment is the most advanced kit available



AT HI-FI CHOICE, we have access to some of the most advanced test equipment currently available on the market, including the Audio Precision APx585, which you'll find in the labs of many top hi-fi manufacturers. The 585 can be configured to test a variety of key hi-fi products, such as amplifiers, CD players/DACs and — with the help of a specially-calibrated microphone — loudspeakers.

In conjunction with some conventional lab equipment at our disposal, the 585 will also be used to test analogue playback equipment including phono stages and turntables. These objective measurements – which conform to recognised industry standards – are designed to complement subjective evaluations such as the listening panels organised by our internationally respected reviewers.

The standard of our test facilities is unrivalled in the UK press. Quite simply, no other magazine offers this level of cutting-edge testing, making the verdicts in *Hi-Fi Choice* the only ones you can really trust.

Unrivalled group tests

Hi-Fi Choice is the only magazine to offer blind-listening group tests, fully backed up with objective data

BLIND-LISTENING TESTS

CARRYING OUT 'blind' listening tests removes any prejudices the listeners might have regarding either the brand or the specific model being auditioned. For loudspeakers, an acoustically transparent curtain is strung across the end of the listening room, while prior measurements and sighted listening helps determine the optimum locations for each model being tested.

A sighted operator installs the speakers in a random sequence prior to the test and, taking care to try and maintain consistent perceived loudness, a selection of short tracks covering a broad spectrum of music (compiled at full WAVE resolution onto a CD-R for convenient replay) is played for about 15 minutes per loudspeaker presentation.

SIGHTED LISTENING

WHILE 'BLIND' LISTENING tests provide useful information that's free from prejudices and obtained under formal and controlled conditions, they do have several significant limitations, which can be countered by hands-on work.

Their very formality can cause some stress in listeners, which may reduce the powers of discrimination. Another innate difficulty lies in the variations in tonal balance that are inevitably

found between one speaker and another (and indeed one listening seat and another), with the problem that there's a strong tendency to judge each speaker in the context of its predecessor.

Hands-on work gives each speaker a chance to strut its stuff over the longer haul, under more relaxed circumstances and a far wider variety of sources, including radio and vinyl discs.

TESTING EQUIPMENT USED

CD players: Naim CDS 3/555PS Rega Isis

Turntables: Linn Sondek LP12 (modified), Rega RB1000, Soundsmith Strain Gauge

Amps: Naim NAC552, NAP500 pre/power

Magnum Dynalab MD106T

Cables: Chord Company. VertexAQ, Phonosophie, TM Systems, Naim

TEST MUSIC USED

LAURIE ANDERSON: STRANGE ANGELS



CAMBRIDGE SINGERS, RUTTER: THERE IS SWEET

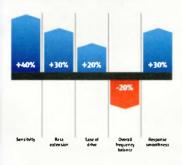


MARI BOINE:



TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



THE SOUND heard from a stereo system is actually a combination of the two loudspeakers, plus their interaction with the listening room. Our analogue approach provides information about the frequency response and tonal balance of a given pair. Running rapid sinewave sweeps, moving the microphone to different positions, establishes the 'real world' far field averaged frequency response and bass extension of a stereo pair.

By feeding all the speakers under test at the same predetermined

setting on the amplifier volume control, the sensitivity of the speaker may be derived. Impedance sweeps provide information about amplifier loading and the closeness with which the two examples of our pair match.

SENSITIVITY

Sensitivity represents the relative loudness of a speaker for a given amplifier voltage. It's scaled to 2.83V at 1m (corresponding to one watt of power into an eight ohm load).

BASS EXTENSION

Our figure is the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref. the broad midband, for a stereo pair in the far field of a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room

EASE OF DRIVE

Low impedance and sensitivity both make a loudspeaker theoretically harder to drive Low impedance is especially important at low and midband frequencies

OVERALL FREQUENCY BALANCE

True neutrality is an obvious goal, though some 'tailoring' is both acceptable and widely practised

RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS

Beyond the overall tonal balance, the detail smoothness has much to do with the delicacy of the sound and its ability to deliver subtle harmonic shading.

THIS ISSUE'S **BLIND PANEL**

This month's panel of experienced listeners from within the industry are:



MIKE BLACKMORE JOB: LAWYER (RETIRED)

ALTHOUGH NOW retired. Mike's passion for music led to helping found NAGfi (a hi-fi club in Kent). He's also partnering John Howes in his new manufacturing venture



JOHN HOWES JOB: VINTAGE **AUDIOPHILE**

A GLOBALLY respected expert in and collector of vintage hi-fi equipment, John is best known for his online Lowther/Voigt museum and the bi-annual Tonbridge Audiojumble



RICHARD STEVENSON JOB: PR CONSULTANT **RICHARD WAS** editor of ERT

magazine, prior to going freelance and working as a reviewer of home cinema equipment and as PR and marketing consultant to a number of hi-fi companies

DEFINITIVE VERDICTS

No other magazine offers an equivalent listening programme

Quite often a nervous manufacturer will get on the telephone to ask how things are going. The answer invariably has to be fundamentally noncommittal, albeit laced with cautious optimism, because any final judgements on the overall performance and value for money of an individual loudspeaker can only be arrived at once the whole test procedure has been completed and all the various strands can be pulled together.

Individual reviews have their place, especially when it comes to dealing with the more unusual and upmarket components. But the comparative Blind-listening Group Test is a much more effective means of evaluating a component, as each may be directly compared to a norm established by the group as a whole. Even though loudspeakers show rather greater variations in size of main drivers and enclosures than other components, this remains an exceedingly powerful tool.

TURN OVER NOW!

Grouptest Blind-listening

LUXURY STANDMOUNTS £2,200-£2,875

Luxury standmounts: the optimum solution?

In Britain's tiny rooms, are small high-performance speakers the best solution? *Paul Messenger* looks at six serious standmounts for discerning audiophiles

MOST OF US on this cramped island are stuck with fairly small rooms sizes. And with rooms having the greatest influence on a system's sound, shouldn't we all be looking for small, high-performance speakers? After all, without cumbersome multi-driver cabinets to build and finish, manufacturers can spend money where it counts, on drivers, mechanics and first-class build quality.

All six models in our group are beautifully finished and presented, as one would expect and on this occasion, half the complement comes from respected and well established British brands, while the other three represent Danish, French and Italian design expertise. Just where each model is actually made is, of course, much more difficult to say in these globalised times.

Five of our six are basically two-way designs, though the group is, perhaps, more naturally divided into three medium size and three significantly larger models: the former the Dynaudio, Monitor Audio and Opera; the latter the

Cabasse, the Spendor and the Tannoy. The main driver sizes seem to follow the enclosure sizes pretty closely, which

"Our six models each have their own approach to delivering high standards"

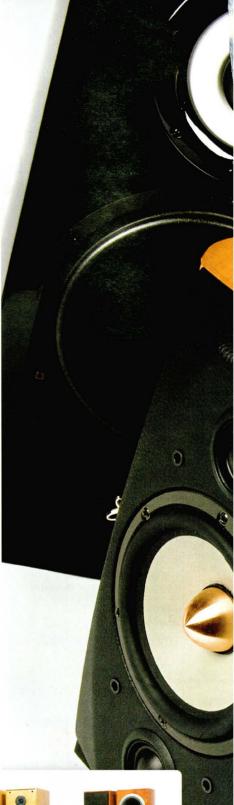
makes good sense, and all six have reflex loading ports, which is arguably less wise.

Some of the biggest variations are substantially cosmetic, in the way the enclosures are shaped and dressed. The Spendor is certainly the most traditional, but each of the others has succeeded in adding creative individuality, none of which have much in common with tradition or the others.

So just what will our Blind-listening panel think of our luxury boxes this month? Turn the page to see who rules the small speaker roost.



OUR GROUP of six luxury standmounts has some notable absences we're sure you'll agree. For many, Sonus faber springs to mind when thinking of luxury small speakers, but the UK agent declined our invitation to join in this rigorous comparative test. Other key brands Bowers and Wilkins, KEF and Triangle no longer operate in the price band set out in this test and at the time of assembly. Focal was unable to supply one of it's new Electra models. although it did try!



ON TEST



Cabasse Bora (£2,200) p41

Handsome, substantial and shapely, the Bora is the only three-way in the test. The French Cabasse brand has long favoured co-axial drive units in the interests of maintaining consistent off-axis dispersion and this speaker has an annular midrange driver surrounding the tweeter, covering the critical 800Hz-4,4kHz part of the band.



Dynaudio Contour S 1.4 (£2,499) p43

The standmount Contour model, in a range at the middle offer bynaudio hierarchy, is very slim and compact. It features a shield-shaped oversize metal baffle, carefully decoupled from the rectilinear enclosure proper, a substantial base with crossover network and Dynaudio's driver technology.



Monitor Audio Platinum 100 (£2,500) p45

The baby standmount amongst Monitor Audio's three prestige Platinum models, the 100, shares the same unusual and exceptionally solid multicurve shape. It also uses the same ribbon tweeter, above a solitary RDT (C-CAM/Nomex) 'sandwich' bass/mid drive unit, ported at the rear.



Opera Callas (£2,875) p47

Essentially a compact two-way in a very hunky and exquisitely sculpted enclosure, the key and decidedly unusual feature about this speaker is that it uses no fewer than five – yes that's right, five – tweeters; two on the front and three on the rear. The consequences are bound to be significant and interesting.



Spendor SP2/3R2 (£2,295) p48

Spendor's 'Classic' range of speakers look as though they could have been made any time over the last forty years. The SP2/3R2 makes no concessions to style or fashion, but it does incorporate the very latesttechnological



Tannoy DC8 (£2,500) p49

Tannoy first created its famous Dual-Concentric drive unit way back in 1948 and the principle is still applied to its upmarket models like this Definition DC8. Its 200mm DC driver is combined with deep cryogenically treated crossovers and high class curved cabinetwork in high gloss finish.





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Cabasse **Bora £2,200**

This substantial model is a genuine three-way, due to its special proprietary co-axial driver

DETAILS

Origin: France
Weight: 15kg
Dimensions:
(WxHxD)
270x500x330mm
FEATURES:

- Two-way co-axial mid/treble driver
- Curved enclosure sides
- High-gloss black lacquer or veneer finish
- Slot port at base front
- Full three-way design DISTRIBUTOR: Cabasse TELEPHONE: +332 98 05 88 70

WEBSITE: cabasse.com/en



rance's oldest hi-fi speaker brand, Cabasse is now owned by Japanese multi-national Canon,

though its Britanny heritage remains strong, with members of the Cabasse family still involved.

A major technology plank is its particular proprietary approach to co-axial driver design. Cabasse's BC13 co-axial drive unit is very much at the heart of this £2,200 per pair Bora, as well as the main reason why it's the only three-way design amongst our standmounts. This driver uses an annulus or ring-shaped midrange diaphragm, surrounding the tweeter proper and nominally operates from 800Hz to 4.4kHz (rather less than two-and-a-half octaves). One potential advantage is clearly to enable a single driver to handle the section of the audio band where human hearing is most sensitive, free from any crossover artefacts.

Another key advantage is that a design like this, which steadily reduces the diameter of the source with increasing frequency, will deliver a more even distribution right across the frequency range and hence a flatter power response. Power handling too will be enhanced by distributing the spectrum across three separate drive units.

The Bora is a quite substantial and hefty affair, weighing some 15kg. The solidly built

enclosure has gently curved sides, which should add extra strength and help to spread the effects of horizontal reflections and standing waves. A slot-shaped reflex port is incorporated low down on the front.

The bass-only unit, a 210mm driver with a straight sided 160mm paper cone,

actually operates up to 800Hz here. The midrange unit has a white convex annulus (ring-shaped) diaphragm, with 95mm and 50mm outside and inside diameters respectively. The tweeter sits inside the 50mm diameter and has a short flared horn, loading a transparent diaphragm roughly 21mm in diameter. A single pair of terminals is mounted through a solid metal plate.

SOUND QUALITY

Despite – or possibly because of – its sophisticated and relatively complex driver technology, the Bora wasn't well received by the listening panel. The measurements seem positive enough and the high sensitivity would appear to be a further bonus, but the panelists were nearly unanimous in placing the Bora behind the others.

It's not a bad loudspeaker by any means and in terms of headroom and loudness capabilities it's the obvious leader of the pack. Dynamics too have a welcome vigour and enthusiasm, but the sound as a whole seems a little too mid-dominant and lacking in basic transparency.

The bass end is a little light in weight, but shows good air, space and speed, while the limitations seem to lie in the rather exposed midband, which also lacks sweetness

and delicacy. Arguably the most serious failing is that it sounds a bit less coherent than the simpler two-way designs and is consequently less musically interesting and involving.

While the Bora would seem to offer the best material value for money amongst our test group, its sound quality didn't seem to measure up to the impressive engineering content. However, anyone who regularly likes to play their system at very high volumes might well find it fills the bill nicely.

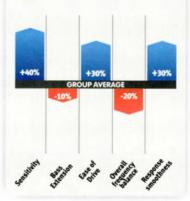
TECH LABS

Although Cabasse only claims a sensitivity of 90dB, our figure, based on far-field in-room traces, is more like 92dB or even 93dB, which are impressively high figures for any conventional direct-radiator loudspeaker. And although the impedance does fall to around 4.5 ohms in the lower midband, the load is not unduly demanding. While the impedance is comfortable enough elsewhere, it clearly shows the complexity of the three-way configuration.

The port is tuned to around 40Hz, so the output around our 50Hz room mode is a little too strong and the rolloff below 40Hz is quite abrupt.

Apart from the odd room reflection cancellation, the tonal balance is very well ordered above 100Hz, though there is a distinct dip at around 5kHz, while the mid-treble looks a shade strong. The pair match was close enough, if a little less than the best.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Mi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

VALUE FOR MONEY

BUILD QUALITY

PRACTICALITY

LIKE: Lots of headroom alongside considerable loudness potential

DISLIKE: Lacks transparency through the upper registers, and coherence is also suspect

WE SAY: Loads of loudness thanks to high sensitivity







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2004 What Hi-Fi?



Category Winner



2003 What Hi-Fi? Category Winner



2003 Hi-Fi Choice Category Winner

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2003 Hi-Fi News

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2003 Hi-Fi Choice

Dynaudio Contour S1.4 £2,495

Dynaudio is one of very few overseas brands to become properly established in the UK

DETAILS

ORIGIN:Denmark WEIGHT: 12kg DIMENSIONS:

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 188x400x340mm

- 5mm tapering metal alloy baffle
- Wide choice of veneer or paint finishes
- Dynaudio driver has large 75mm voice coil
- Magnetic grille fixing
 DISTRIBUTOR: Dynaudio UK
 TELEPHONE: 07970 074717
 WEBSITE: dynaudio.com



ased in Denmark and owned by a German, Dynaudio's particular approach to loudspeaker

design has been much more successful at achieving a significant presence on the UK market than most overseas brands. That probably owes much to the company's distinctive proprietary technology and a consistency in approach which has helped it become well accepted by both hi-fi consumers and ProAudio users alike.

Contour ranges have occupied Dynaudio's middle ground for many years. We previously reviewed ancestors of this Contour S 1.4: a Contour 1.3 way back in 1993 and its MkII successor in 2001. But the latest S-type variations with their shield-shaped metal front driver mounting panels look considerably different from those earlier Contours.

That 5mm-thick metal alloy front baffle, which at its top stands slightly proud of the box, is certainly the S 1.4's most visually distinctive feature. Together with the inverted driver layout, this very much dominates the appearance, creating a uniquely interesting and individual aesthetic. Certainly it should ensure fine mechanical integrity. Furthermore, the varying width will reduce baffle-edge diffraction effects and the overlap will allow an enclosure that's less than 190mm wide

accommodate a 170mm bass/ mid driver.

Furthermore, the whole baffle/driver assembly is decoupled from the enclosure proper via a lossy gasket, while the optional grille is attached magnetically.

The unusually slim enclosure is beautifully finished in a wide range of alternatives, including four real-wood veneers, plus high-gloss black

or white, or satin silver. The rear panel has a large port and the whole speaker sits on a little plinth, which houses the crossover network and single terminal pair. A classy Esotec-type tweeter with a 28mm fabric dome diaphragm is mounted below a 170mm bass/mid driver, which uses a 115mm plastic diaphragm-driven from a large 75mm voice coil.

SOUND QUALITY

The Contour S 1.4 sounds rather different from the others in the group, with an overall character that one of our panelists found particularly appealing, but which was rather less to the tastes of the others. This speaker is certainly a little more laid back than the other speakers in the test group, yet its essential sweetness and good voicing is undeniable.

Stereo images are well presented and transients sound suitably coherent, though sibilants could sometimes be a touch obtrusive and the sound as a whole seems a little constrained and lacking in warmth.

Its most controversial sonic feature is a function of that rather too healthy mid-bass port output, especially in conjunction with the laid back upper mid and top end. With some material the combination can be very convincing, making the

speaker sound significantly larger than its physical dimensions would lead one to expect, bringing an impressive sense of scale to, for example, choral material. However, bass guitars and drums on rock tracks do have a significantly 'thumpy', resonant quality that's less welcome.

Although it has many good points, the success of this attractive loudspeaker may ultimately depend on how well its substantial port output interacts with the characteristics of the listening room.

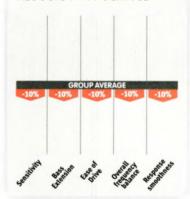
TECH LABS

Rated by Dynaudio at just 85dB sensitivity, our own estimate, based on the analysis of a stereo pair under in-room far-field conditions, comes out at a rather healthier 88dB, though as ever this measurement varies somewhat according to the chosen part of the spectrum.

Despite a very respectable overall in-room tonal balance, the \$1.4's output is significantly stronger (and rather less smooth) through the bottom half of the audio band than for frequencies above 750Hz and this might explain the discrepancy in the figures. The impedance doesn't make the amplifier's life unduly difficult, though it does fall to around 4.5 ohms in the lower midband region.

However, the weakness of this design lies in its excessive output over the 40-80Hz octave, partly due to the proximity of the 46Hz port tuning to a 50Hz room mode, but the sheer enthusiasm of the port output is also a factor.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

VALUE FOR MONEY

BUILD QUALITY

PRACTICALITY

LIKE: A big sound from a very compact speaker with finevoicing

DISLIKE: Bass can thump on some material

WE SAY: Laid back balance with fine midband voicing and stereo imaging, gives a big sound

OVERALL



www.hifichoice.co.uk

99 of a kind

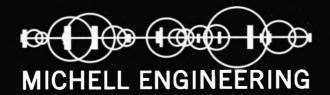


Following on from the success of the GyroDec Odyssey, we are delighted to be introducing the new limited edition Gyro SEduction

Finished in the unique 'blue steel' and black finish, the Gyro SEduction combines many of the upgrades offered to the standard Gyro SE such as HR Power Supply, matching record clamp and black TechnoArm.

With only 99 units available world-wide, be quick to secure your unique opportunity to own this Gyro SE Super Deck.

For further information or to find your nearest stockist, contact



Tel: 020 8953 0771 / E: info@michell-engineering.co.uk www.michell-engineering.co.uk

Monitor Audio Platinum 100 £2,500

This baby model in Monitor Audio's gorgeous Platinum 'flagship' range features a ribbon tweeter

ounded in 1972, Monitor

□ DETAILS

ORIGIN: UK
WEIGHT: 13kg
DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
225x370x285mm

FEATURES: • 55x7mm C-CAM ribbon tweeter

- ribbon tweeter
 Complex 'triple
- curve' enclosure
 High-gloss lacquer
- Advanced RDT composite main driver cone
- Tensioning bolt between enclosure front and back DISTRIBUTOR: Monitor Audio

TELEPHONE: 01268 740580 WERSITE:

monitoraudio.co.uk

Audio now qualifies as one of Britain's longest established speaker brands, especially amongst those still in UK ownership. Although it's best known for successful 'mainstream' models like the Bronze and Silver series, the company took a significant step towards the high end in 2007, with the introduction of Platinum

models like this £2,500 per pair

Platinum 100 two-way standmount.

A ribbon tweeter is the hallmark of all the Platinums and here it's combined with a 165mm bass/mid driver in an exceptionally solid and beautifully finished enclosure with a decidedly complex shape. The back and sides are formed as a continuous curve, with mildly convex sides, a slightly concave back and quite gently curved edges. (The unusual shape is created by laminating thin layers of MDF with the help of a jig/press.)

The outside is beautifully finished in high-gloss lacquer (allegedly no fewer than eleven layers thereof) over high-quality real-wood veneer – a lovely patterned ebony, Santos Rosewood or piano-black. The front panel is made from MA's ARC (anti-resonance composite), a mineral-loaded resin covered by charcoal grey leather. Metal trim adds further decoration and concealment around the front and a hefty bolt

tensions the back of the enclosure to the front.

The rear also accommodates a generous flared reflex port, plus twin platinum-plated terminals, allowing separate feeds to the drivers, for bi-wiring or bi-amping.

The driver line-up consists of a 165mm driver,

with a 120mm diameter cone, crossing over at 2.8kHz to a ribbon tweeter with a mesh-protected 7x55mm C-CAM (ceramic-coated aluminium/magnesium) diaphragm. The main cone is an RDT sandwich: thin, deep-anodised magnesium/aluminium alloy skins bonded to a Nomex honeycomb centre, create an exceptionally stiff, yet light diaphragm.

SOUND QUALITY

In an admittedly strong group of similar models, the Platinum 100 scored a little below average. This slightly disappointing overall result involved some disagreement between the listeners and probably came about because the Monitor Audio followed the presentation of two somewhat larger models, leaving this rather smaller model sounding just that.

It does have a rather bright and lightweight character. Bass authority is rather weak, though and there's some lack of generosity through the lower frequencies and some of the panelists consequently found it difficult to retain their interest.

Cabinet coloration is exceedingly low and the sound is unquestionably crisp, clean and open. It's all very evenhanded and the top end is smooth and fundamentally sweet. Stereo images are reasonably well

formed, but the rather bright and forward character does tend to reduce apparent depth somewhat.

Moving the speakers closer to a wall does help add some extra bass weight, but this also tends to make the port output rather too obvious, while still leaving the upper bass rather lean.

The Platinum 100 is a very pretty loudspeaker and a very capable one, too in a number of respects. But it's rather light, bright and forward balance leaves the bottom end sounding somewhat undernourished.

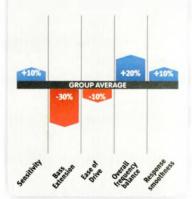
TECH LABS

Monitor Audio specifies a sensitivity of 88dB, which is quite close to the 89dB we measured using a far-field in-room technique and a thoroughly healthy figure by any standards. Furthermore, the load is five ohms or higher throughout, so this is a speaker that's unlikely to pose any problems for the partnering amplifier.

The pair match for our samples looked pretty good, but a relatively high port tuning frequency of around 57Hz will inevitably restrict the absolute bass extension: even with the reinforcement provided by stereo operation under in-room far-field conditions, we achieved a -6dB point at a relatively high 40Hz.

Ignoring the room interaction unevenness encountered below 125Hz, the overall tonal balance held within +/-3dB right up to 20kHz. This stayed within an even more impressive +/-2dB above 500Hz and was also remarkably smooth. too.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

A A A

VALUE FOR MONEY

A A A

BUILD QUALITY

A A A

LIKE: Very attractive styling and finish, plus an open, smooth and evenhanded sound

DISLIKE: Balance is a bit bright, lacking in bass warmth and authority

WE SAY: Gorgeous looking speaker with very lowcabinet coloration



PRACTICALITY





Sound - Innovation - Reliability - Service







5477

Distributed by Select Audio - Tel 01900 813064 - www.selectaudio.co.uk

www.passlabs.com

Opera Callas £2,875

This very compact and exquisitely presented standmount has a thoroughly unconventional multi-tweeter

DETAILS

ORIGIN: Italy WEIGHT: 12.5 kg DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 230x375x340mm

- FEATURES: Beautiful real wood and leather finish
- Multiple tweeters add spaciousness
- High gloss over veneer on four faces
- Solid copper phase plug DISTRIBUTOR: UKD

TELEPHONE: 01236420199 WEBSITE: operaloudspeakers.

pera and its associated electronics brand Unison Research both share premises near Treviso in

north east Italy. And in the best Italian tradition, this standmount looks absolutely gorgeous and is very substantially built too, though it's not exactly cheap at £2,875 per pair.

A solitary and rather small 135mm driver with a 100mm diameter magnesium alloy cone covers the bass and midrange. It has a large (38mm) fixed solid copper 'bullet' phase plug and is assisted by reflex loading from twin rear ports. Instead of just the usual single tweeter, there are no fewer than five in each speaker - two on the front and three on the rear (each a 25mm soft fabric dome). It's an arrangement that has implications for the way that high frequencies are distributed into the listening room.

The enclosure sides are crafted in subtle curves from substantial. MDF panels and finished in highgloss veneer. Presentation is exceptional, with a chamfered solid wood top and a front panel that's shaped to assist lateral dispersion and elegantly trimmed in hide.

The SEAS-sourced bass/mid driver has an advanced Excel-type motor, incorporating copper rings above a T-shaped polepiece. The tweeters (also from SEAS) have compact neodymium

motors so they can be mounted close to the main driver and each other.

Distributing the treble signal across five tweeters increases the treble powerhandling dramatically, though part of this extra headroom is used up by crossing over to the front tweeters at a relatively low 1.5kHz. In actuality the front two tweeters operate in parallel at the bottom end of their working range; the upper tweeter is slowly rolled off as the frequency rises, so that the overlap 'lobe' is progressively directed upwards. The rear tweeters are active above 2kHz and will tend to behave as a line source concentrating output in the horizontal plane, adding to the room-reflected sound and helping to flatten the overall far-field power response.

SOUND QUALITY

The Callas was pretty well received by the listening panel, achieving a solid though not quite unanimous third place in the overall ranking.

The impressive dynamic range is particularly noticeable and a testament to the solidity of the high-quality enclosure engineering. The bass has ample weight and while it might pack a bit too much midbass thump, the bottom end is, in anything, a little too well damped.

Stereo imaging is probably its strongest point. It attracted consistent praise for an impressive spaciousness that seemed to be achieved without significantly diluting the precision or focus, which would seem to go a long way towards validating the unusual multi-tweeter arrangement.

One listener felt that the overall sound might have been smoother and sweeter, but others praised its fine sense of rhythm, good dynamic expression and fine musical communication skills.

There will inevitably be some limitations in terms of ultimate loudness capability and an amplifier with decent power headroom is clearly preferable. But, despite its small size, this is a very capable little speaker, as well as a very attractive and stylish-looking physical package.

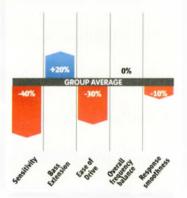
TECH LABS

Opera specifies a relatively modest 86dB for sensitivity, a figure which exactly corresponds with our own findings.
Furthermore, the impedance is a relatively low 4.5 ohms through the lower midband, a part of the spectrum with plenty of energy. Decent amplifier power availability is, therefore, indicated.

One consequence of both these factors, alongside our particular room modes and the contribution from a rather enthusiastic port (tuned 40-50Hz due to some variation between our two samples here), is a rather obvious 40-60Hz excess to around +10dB at 50Hz, though elsewhere the overall inroom far-field averaged tonal balance is very well ordered indeed, holding within +/-4dBalltheway up from 60Hz to above 15kHz.

Putthe mid-bass boost and the modest midband sensitivity together and the consequence is decent bass extension, with the -6dB point recorded at a low 23Hz under in-room conditions.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY \star \star \star VALUE FOR MONEY $\star\star\star\star$ BUILD QUALITY **** PRACTICALITY

LIKE: Notably spacious imaging with good dynamicrange

DISLIKE: Could be smoother with less damping;

WE SAY: A costly but exceedingly attractive little speaker with a wide dynamic range

*** OVERALL





www.hifichoice.co.uk

Spendor SP2/3R2 £2,295



This speaker might look old-fashioned, but that's really the whole point of Spendor's Classic range

DETAILS

ORIGIN: UK WEIGHT: 14.3kg DIMENSIONS: (MxHxD) 275x545x325mm **FEATURES:**

- 210mm bass/ mid driver with plastic cone
- Thin-wall enclosure construction
- Cherry wood veneer
- Rubberised cabinet damping pads
- Scandinavian widesurround tweeter DISTRIBUTOR: Spendor Audio Systems TELEPHONE:

01323843474 WEBSITE: spendoraudio.com

pendor arrived on the scene at the beginning of the 1970s, bringing a strong BBC heritage

along with a number of interesting innovations that its competitors arguably didn't fully appreciate.

One of the most significant among these was a radical approach to enclosure design. The theory goes as follows: building an exceptionally stiff structure might serve to reduce the amplitude (ie relative loudness) of cabinet vibrations, but it also increases the frequency at which they occur, so that the enclosure coloration tends to occur in the midband where human hearing is most sensitive.

The alternative Spendor approach, originally inspired by the BBC's desire for accurate speech monitoring, is the 'thin wall' cabinet approach, backed by heavy damping pads, which pushes the cabinet wall vibrations down into the bass region where they're considered less intrusive. Although that technique sounds simple enough, in fact these enclosures are rather harder to make than the thicker variety.

The Classics are just one of Spendor's ranges and make every attempt to recreate the physical characteristics of those 1970s' models, albeit using more modern materials and manufacturing techniques.

This /3R2 variation is the latest version of the SP2 and is the middle model among five Classics. The shape, size and presentation are all nostalgically similar to its 1970s ancestor, so it's a quite large two-way standmount. finished in cherry veneer on all six faces and with the baffle and

a 'picture frame' formed by extending the enclosure sides.

Set halfway up (or down) the front, in between a large port and the tweeter, the bass/mid driver has a 210mm frame and a transparent plastic cone 150mm in diameter. The tweeter is a relatively new and usual design, used in several recent Spendors. Described as a '22mm wide surround' type, in fact the central dome measures around 19mm in diameter, while dome-plussurround totals 34mm.

Twin high-quality socket/binder terminal pairs are mounted directly through the rear panel, feeding silver-plated copper wiring and a crossover network with highgrade components.

SOUND QUALITY

We weren't all that surprised when the SP2/3R2 comfortably and unanimously topped the listening test rankings. We'd already given the various models a quick listen while carrying out the measurements necessary to determine where best to site them and that had provided strong clues that the Spendor would do well.

The paeans of praise recorded by each panelist actually became a little repetitive, at least two individuals reckoning that this was a speaker they could happily live with, especially in the way it

handled all six very different tracks without fear or favour.

This is also a speaker that knows how to rock. The bass could perhaps be tauter, tighter and punchier, but the overall timing and coherence is excellent, which is what matters most.

Some potential purchasers may be put off by this speaker's old-fashioned presentation, but I daresay others will welcome the nostalgic appearance. And anyone who takes the trouble to listen will surely appreciate the sonic superiority that justifies the thin-wall enclosure approach.

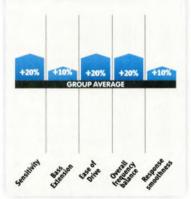
TECH LABS

The SP2/3R2 delivered a highly impressive in-room far-field 'power' response above 90Hz, holding within +/-4dB, in spite of the effects of room reflections and modes Indeed it looks particularly well-judged above 500Hz, with just a touch of presence restraint (2.2kHz-4.5kHz) and a smooth

Things are rather less even below 90Hz. due to room interactions and output from a rather enthusiastic port, but the overall average remains pretty good and the 38Hz port tuning ensures decent bass extension, giving useful in-room output down to helow 30Hz

Sensitivity is around 89-90dB, which is very healthy figure in view of an easy-todrive impedance that stays comfortably above 80hms throughout and is much higher than that above 700Hz. The shape of the impedance trace indicates that some subtle equalisation has been applied and a tiny resonance was visible around 700Hz.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY **** VALUE FOR MONEY **** **BUILD QUALITY** **** PRACTICALITY ***

LIKE: Lovely overall balance with fine voicing and transparency

DISLIKE: Ratherbulky speaker lacks subtle shaping and fine finish

WESAY: Not the prettiest speaker in its price class, but probably one of the best sounding





Tannoy **Definition DC8** £2,500



A very pretty and compact variation on Tannoy's timeless Dual Concentric theme

□ DETAILS

ORIGIN:

UK WEIGHT:

10kg DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 270x470x260mm

FEATURES:

- 200mm Dual Concentric drive unit
- Deep cryogenically treated crossover network
- High gloss lacquer over veneer or black on six faces
- Fifth terminal optionally to earth driver frame
- Heavily braced enclosure with DMT (differential material technology)

DISTRIBUTOR: Tannoy TELEPHONE:

01236 702503 WESITE: tannoy.com ne of the oldest names in British hi-fi, Tannoy is currently part of the Danish TC Group and is

probably best known for its unique Dual Concentric single-chassis two-way drive unit technology, which first appeared way back in 1948.

This £2,500 per pair DC8 is a simple two-way design and the smallest of three Definition models. As the name suggests, an eight-inch (200mm) Dual Concentric 'double drive unit' is at its heart, firing a 25mm titanium dome tweeter with 'tulip waveguide' horn-loading through the centre of a 145mm flared paper bass/mid cone with a conventional rubber roll surround. A bonus of the construction, of course, is that the tweeter is automatically well protected from prying fingers.

The crossover network components have received Deep Cryogenic Treatment (DCT), which involves cooling key components slowly to around -190 degrees Centigrade, then restoring them equally slowly to room temperature, a process believed to relieve micro-mechanical stresses created during manufacturing.

Twin terminal pairs are fitted for bi-wiring or bi-amping and internal wiring is silver-plated, high purity copper. A fifth terminal allows the driver chassis to be earthed to the amplifier, to reduce RF interference,

though in practice five-conductor speaker cables are very hard to find. A large port is also mounted on the narrow rear panel.

Although the shape is rather unconventional – significantly taller and shallower than usual – the enclosure has notably clean, contemporary lines and is beautifully finished in real wood veneer or black, all covered in

good-quality high-gloss lacquer. A wide silver trim ring around the driver and a shaped silver strip across the lower edge provide decoration and the grille is held in place by concealed magnets.

The carcase is actually made from birch plywood and extensively braced. The sides are strongly curved towards a much narrower back, so that reflections and internal horizontal standing waves should be pretty well dispersed.

SOUND QUALITY

While the DC8 didn't top the lists, it did settle unanimously into a solid and second place in the listening tests. Speed and timing were its particular strengths and the voice balance was also considered very natural.

Dynamics are lively and involving and music is reproduced with genuine passion, but also a measure of coloration in the lower registers. Above all, this is a fun loudspeaker, if not a strictly neutral one and the good size main driver undoubtedly helps bring fine expression to the party.

Tannoy's Dual Concentric approach has several significant consequences. One panelist correctly identified its 'point source' precision and it was abundantly clear that this speaker has unusually good coherence and a seamless crossover transition, with a lively and open presence band.

Furthermore, because the horn-loaded treble radiates as a 90-degree cone, with narrower treble dispersion compared to conventional direct radiating designs, the relative amount of room-reflected treble is somewhat reduced, so the stereo imaging is exceptionally precise, with good depth perspectives.

Not without character, this is nevertheless a fine loudspeaker, which looks great and does most things very well.

TECH LABS

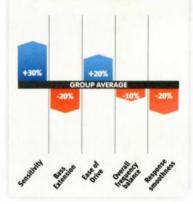
The port tuning showed a significant variation between our two samples, which is of some concern; samples measured eighteen moths previously were the same as each other and one of our pair, at a relatively high 55Hz.

relatively high 55Hz.

That is bound to restrict the DC8's bass extension somewhat, as indeed the far-field in-room averaged response traces confirm, with little serious bass output below 40Hz. Room modes and reflections create some inevitable unevenness below 400Hz and output is a little too strong between 450Hz and 1kHz, but is then smooth and flat right up to 9kHz. The final octave or so (above 9kHz) looks rather uneven, albeit still well maintained.

Sensitivity is a very useful 90-91dB (midband), the more so because the impedance is a relatively straightforward and easy to drive amplifier load, staying essentially at six ohms or higher throughout the band.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



M-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT



LIKE: Stylish, beautiful, and sounds clean, crisp and dynamic

DISLIKE: Arather unusual shape; some unwanted thickening, and limited bass grunt **WESAY:** It's a fine

communicatorin coherenceandtimingterms





Lab conclusions

The technical specs seem to suggest that these luxury standmounts are worthy of consideration for the audiophile with limited space

TECH LABS

The problem of bass alignment caused by port/room-mode interaction, which was revealed under in-room far-field averaged conditions, is discussed in more detail in the accompanying box.

Sensitivities varied between 86dB (Opera) and 92dB (Cabasse). though the other four are clustered between 88dB and 91dB. Generally speaking, the sensitivity ratings seem to be linked to main driver diameter in this group.

These ratings ought to be considered in the context of the impedance traces, which represent the relative current drawn from the

amplifier. One should also consider the bass extension, since reducing midrange sensitivity automatically increases bass extension, though this can be difficult to estimate accurately due to the influence of ports and room modes.

The impedance traces all look reasonably straightforward. This is usually the case with two-way designs, but even the three-way Cabasse's load looks easy to drive. The Dynaudio, Opera and Cabasse all have minima around 4.5 ohms in the lower midrange, which should prove an easy enough load for any normal amplifier, while the other three have even higher minima.

The impedance says a lot about a speaker design. In fairly simplistic terms it reveals the tuning point of a bass reflex port. It also gives clues about how much equalisation has been applied further up the audio band.

The pair-matching was pretty good, though the Tannoy showed significant differences in bass damping between our two examples and the Opera also demonstrated mild weaknesses here.

The reflex-tuning frequencies varied from the Spendor at 38Hz, up to the Monitor Audio at 58Hz, via the Cabasse at 41Hz, the Opera at 41/48Hz, the Dynaudio at 46Hz and the Tannoy 46/52Hz.



All these mediumsize models have port tuning frequencies between 38Hz and 60Hz and consequently tend to coincide with and significantly exaggerate a major c 50Hz mode in our room.

Only Tannoy supplies portblocking bungs and ironically needs them least! It seems a shame that none have followed Bowers & Wilkins' example by supplying two-piece bungs that allow the port re-tuning to avoid roommode interaction.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



+30%G

-10%A

-10%A

-10%A

Ease of Drive

Overall froncy balance

Response smoothness

50











	School				The state of the s	
Make/model	Cabasse Bora	Dynaudio Contour S 1.4	Monitor Audio Platinum 100	Opera Callas Diva	Spendor SP2/3R2	Tannoy Definition DC8
Price	£2,200	£2,495	£2,500	£2,875	£2,295	£2,500
Sound	***	***	****	****	****	****
Value	***	***	***	***	****	****
Build	***	****	****	****	****	****
Practicality	****	****	****	****	****	****
Conclusion Key features	Technically unusual and interesting, but the sound quality didn't really live up to the engineering promise	Very compact and supprisingly hefty, with clever styling, well judged voicing, but also a lendency to thump	Contemporary styling with classy drivers combines to deliver a smooth, open, if rather lightweight character	Exquisite cabinetwork and no fewer than five tweeters gives a spacious character with ample headroom	Fine sound quality with superior transparency and coherence fully vindicates the defiantly old fashioned styling	Lively coherence and fine voicing does much to compensate for a measure of midband coloration
Size (WxHxD) (cms)	27x50x33	19x41x36	22.5x37x28.5	23x37.5x34	27.5x54.5x32.5	27x47x26
Driver Config	3-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2-way
Main driver size(s)	1×210mm	1x170mm	1x165mm	1x125mm	1x210mm	1x200mm
Stand/floor?	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand
Cabinet finish	High-gloss black or veneer	Real-wood veneer	High-gloss veneer	High-gloss veneer	Real-wood veneer	High-gloss black or vene
Cabinet finish	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Lab conclusions	E = Excellent AA = Above	e average A = average	BA = average P = poor			
Sensitivity	92dB6	88dBA	89dB G	86dBP	90dB G	91dB G
Bass Extension	28HzA	26Hz A	40HzP	23Hz G	25Hz▲	38Hz P

HiriChoice MARCH 2011 www.hifichoice.co.uk

·10%A

+20%G

+10%A

30%₽

0%A

+20%6

+20%G

+10%A

+20%G

-10%A

Blind-listening verdicts Our unsighted panel found plenty to like with our luxury standmounts

and that's without being able to admire the excellent finishes on offer!

SMALL STANDMOUNT speakers are, for many Britons, the ideal solution for compact listening rooms. With their small dimensions they do have limitations, but on balance, their strengths easily offset any of the well documented handicaps. Certainly our Blind-listening panel found plenty to like amongst the six luxury models, and that's without even seeing them!

In each case, the speakers were driven from Naim electronics: (CDS3/ PS555, NAC552, NAP500), using TM Systems Pulse signal cables and Naim and Phonosophie mains cables. All six pairs were located in free space, well clear of walls and Blu-tack-coupled to Kudos S100 stands.

It should be pointed out that despite the 'rankings' all six of our luxury loudspeakers delivered the sort of high standard that is only to be expected of such costly models.

That said, there was no gainsaying the 'triumph of the traditional', exemplified by the Spendor SP2/3R2, which consistently received the highest marks and by a comfortable margin. While the bass end suffered the same

alignment weaknesses as all the group, its coherence, transparency and overall voicing set it ahead of the pack.

Second place went to Tannov's pretty Definition DC8, again with remarkable unanimity, with praise for its fine speed. good timing and voice reproduction, despite some lower-mid coloration.

These two were followed by the three smaller models in the group, from Dynaudio, Monitor Audio and Opera. All three attracted quite similar marks overall and it's fair to say that their smaller main drivers and enclosures did seem to impose something of a handicap, leading to a sound that lacked generosity and scale when compared to the larger three models.

The wide-dispersion, multi-tweeter Opera showed a slight overall advantage, though one listener did favour the Dynaudio's weight and neutrality and the Monitor Audio too, was well regarded. Though pleasant enough in isolation, the Cabasse somewhat disappointed the panelists under our unsighted comparative conditions – possibly a victim of its extra complexity?

THE WINNER IS...

IT'S OFTEN VERY DIFFICULT to pick out an overall winner from a group of similar size and price loudspeakers, but on this occasion there was no disagreement amongst the



the pick of the bunch, sonically speaking.
This was subsequently and very comfortably confirmed by the hands-on listening work and since the measurements are generally positive and the price is also below the group average, this is the obvious stand-out performer and, therefore, the overall 'group winner'.

It certainly won't win any prizes for stylish contemporary

appearance, but the core technologies are bang up to date, with a new widesurround tweeter and numerous audiophile elements amongst the crossover network and internal wiring.

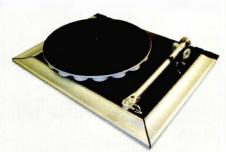




For a complete system solution based around our blind-listening test favourites, look no further than these recommendations...

TURNTABLE: Rega P7 £1,298

Rega is particularly good at ensuring that its turntables always get more refined as you move up the price ladder. The P7 isn't the top model in the range, but it incorporates many of the features found in the P9 at around half the price. A cartridge, such as Rega's own Exact or Apheta, plus the company's Fono phono stage completes the vinyl player. Placed on a solid-wall shelf, the P7 is nearly a fit and forget product and should satisfy for years to come.



CD PLAYER: Roksan Caspian M2 £1,600

Widely recognised as a major step forward from its predecessor, the Caspian M2 has nothing fancy in the way of features (so not for SACD fans), but simply delivers the sonic goods, with considerable verve, punchy dynamics and exceptionally fine timing. These virtues should bring out the best in any of our loudspeakers and allow them to shine. Add to that fine build, a useful set of balanced ouputs (both analogue and digital) and it's certainly one of the leaders in its price class.



AMPLIFIER: Naim SUPERNAIT £2,595

This splendidly muscular 80 watts per channel, 400VA integrated amp gives little away to the company's highly regarded pre-/power combos. It not only sounds very good, it also incorporates considerable input versatility (five digital inputs and six analogues, including a front jack socket for your iPod), as well as future upgrade flexibility via outboard power supplies and phono stages. 80 watts might not sound like a huge amount of power but the Naim has the authority to drive any of our Blind-Listening Group Test speakers with total authority.



Sound quality that'll blow your socks off?

Are widely accepted music formats undermining the quality of the music we listen to on a daily basis?

The Music Chain

Much is written about music and the musicians who entertain us, and we rightly exalt great musicians. But there is an interlinked chain of participants, two of which are I believe are crucial to our music scene in today's world. For centuries the music chain was a very short one – composers or songwriters, musicians and listeners, and the judgement on quality was immediate. Recording technologies have changed all this exponentially.

Today, we listen to most of our music from a recording and this gives recording engineers the opportunity to avoid poor acoustics, duff notes and off days. This, of course, means the chain has grown to include the recording engineers, the music distribution system (retailers or downloads), hi-fi manufacturers, hi-fi sellers and the hi-fi purchasers, the latter being the listeners. I should start by saying that hi-fi has become an adulterated term that no longer has its original meaning because it's applied to much equipment that certainly should not be termed high-fidelity.

It's said that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. However, I believe there are two particularly strong links that, if removed from the chain, would seriously damage the quality of recorded music. These are the audiophile, or hi-fi connoisseur, and the specialist hi-fi retailer, the latter in nearly all cases also being the former because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These are the people who most appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver an emotional experience.

Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

So why is the hi-fi connoisseur so important to the music industry? By their nature, audiophiles are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without the audiophile, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the chain. Let's be honest, over recent years

the majority of music listeners now settle for MP3 convenience and, therefore, mediocre sound quality. If the pendulum ever swings so far that all but a few listen to highly compressed formats such as MP3, music producers will not waste their resources on producing high quality recordings because it would be commercially unnecessary, even if their recording engineers wanted to achieve the best they could. After all, an MP3 or AAC file, the iTunes default format, downloaded at 128 kbps (the most popular download speed), is about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track, 1411 kbps, so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It's rubbish quality made louder. Fortunately, there is still significant demand from audiophiles committed to sound quality to sustain the production of

high quality recordings, but it would be a tragedy if there weren't. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing that they are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

Specialist Hi-Fi Retailers

Just as essential a link in the chain as the hi-fi connoisseur is the specialist hi-fi retailer and the two are rightly dependent on each other. Without the specialist retailer the hi-end hi-fi manufacturer would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits of different brands for their potential customers – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers are essential to each other.

Future of Recorded Music

What are the future prospects of maintaining high quality music recordings? We must hope that audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, will continue to drive the demand for quality. But another important reason for hope within the mass-market is that there is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Full resolution, CD quality, downloads are already available and should become the norm as long as the general public can be made aware of the tremendous quality benefit. This has happened with HD TV so we know this awareness can grow rapidly. In the meantime, we must highly value hi-fi connoisseurs and specialist hi-fi retailers, of which the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest. Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

OUR TOP 20 UK HI-FI DEALERS

These dealers 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.

Ashford, Kent SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI 40 High Street. t: 01233 624441

RAYLEIGH HI-FI 216 Moulsham Street. t: 01245 265245 www.rayleighhifi.com

Colchester

RAYLEIGH HI-FI 33 Sir Isaac's Walk. t: 01206 577682 www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingsten-upon Thames

INFIDELITY 9 High Street. Hampton Wick. t:020 8943 3530 www.infidelity.co.uk

AUDIO VENUE 36 Queen Street. t: 01628 633995 www.audiovenue.com

ESSEX

RAYLEIGH HI-FI 44a High Street. t:01268 779762 www.rayleighhifi.com

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road. t:01702 435255 www.rayleighhifi.com

www.soundcrafthifi.com PHASE 3 HI-FI 37 Bedford Place. t: 023 8022 8434 www.phase3southampton.co.uk

AUDIO VENUE 27 Bond Street. t: 020 8567 8703 www.audiovenue.com

GRAHAMS HI-FI 190a New North Road. t: 020 7226 5500 www.grahams.co.uk

ORANGES & LEMONS 61/63 Webbs Road. t:020 7924 2043 www.oandlhifi.co.uk

AUDIENCE 14 Broad Street. t:01225 333310 www.audience.org.uk

GULLIFORD HI-FI 97 Sidwell Street. t: 01392 491194 www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

Banbur **OVERTURE** 3 Church Lane. t: 01295 272158

www.overture.co.uk MUSIC MATTERS

363 Hagley Road, Edgbaston. t: 0121 429 2811 www.musicmatters.co.uk

Coventry

FRANK HARVEY 163 Spon Street. t: 024 7652 5200 www.frankharvey.co.uk

CYMBIOSIS 6 Hotel Street t: 0116 262 3754 www.cymbiosis.com

CASTLE SOUND & VISION 48/50 Maid Marian t: 0115 9584404

www.castlesoundvision.com

Chaadle THE AUDIO WORKS

14 Stockport Road t:0161 428 7887 www.theaudioworks.co.uk

ACOUSTICA 17 Hoole Road. t:01244 344227 www.acoustica.co.uk

THE AUDIO ROOM

2 George Street. t:01482 891375 www.theaudioroom.co.uk

SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. t:01904 627108 www.soundorg.co.uk

HOLBURN HI-FI 441 Holburn Street. t: 01224 585713/

www.holburnhifi.co.uk

LOUD & CLEAR Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Road t:0131 555 3963 www.loud-clear.co.uk

LOUD & CLEAR 520 St Vincent Street. t: 0141 221 0221 www.loud-clear.co.uk

GLASGOW AUDIO 135 Great Western Rd t:0141 3322200/4707 www.glasgowaudio.com













response, on being introduced to the delights of the compact disc in the early 1980s, was "All else is gaslight". It's a great one-liner, but was he right? Wasn't CD little more than a

stylus? If so, then Linn's Akurate DS system is far more radical.

It takes the whole process of listening to music in the home to another level, replacing physical sources like CD or SACD with music comfort of your armchair. Moreover, the resolution of source material – up to 24-bit/192kHz – is much higher than CD's 16-bit/44.1kHz.

Akurate is Linn's midway offering, sitting between its entry-level Majik "It takes the whole process of listening to music in the home to another level, replacing physical sources like CD with music stored on a hard drive."







and flagship Klimax ranges. It's a versatile system that can be upgraded by adding extra power amplifiers — or converted to full Aktiv operation with an electronic crossover. What's more, each of its impressive speaker units has its own dedicated power amp.

Deceptively simple

Outwardly, Linn's Akurate electronics look deceptively simple. The system comprises three boxes – the DS digital streaming device; Kontrol preamplifier and 2200 Power, 200-watt, two-channel power amp. Knobs and buttons have been kept to

an absolute minimum, creating clean simple-looking fascia plates.

But this outward simplicity is misleading. A fairly comprehensive range of features and facilities are offered – all accessed by remote handset. Now here's where the Akurate system starts to get

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Akurate D5, Akurate Kontrol. Akurate 2200 Power, Akurate 242

ORIGIN: Scotland

TYPE:
Digital streaming
device; preamplifier;
stereo power
amp; Five-way
floorstanding

PRICE: £4,500; £4,200; £3,350; £7,300 (£800 extra for high-gloss finish

WEIGHT: 5.6kg; 5.8kg; 6.4kg; 32kg

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) (All) 380x75x380mm, 210x1000x380mm

FEATURES:
• Akurate DS:
Ethernet Network
enabled

• Streams Internet Radio, Podcasts, and 'Listen Again' broadcasts

• Decodes FLAC, ALAC, MP3, WMA, AIFF and OGG

• Compatible with UPnPim Media Servers and UPnPim AV 1.0 control points

 Balanced (XLR) and Unbalanced (RCA) and digital (BNC) SPDIF Outputs

• Akurate Kontrol: line inputs, plus Phono MM/MC

 XLR balanced/ unbalanced inputs and outputs

• 3.5mm headphone socket

• Ethernet Network enabled

Switch-Mode power supply

Akurate 2200
 Power: two, three, or four channel

Balanced XLR
inputs

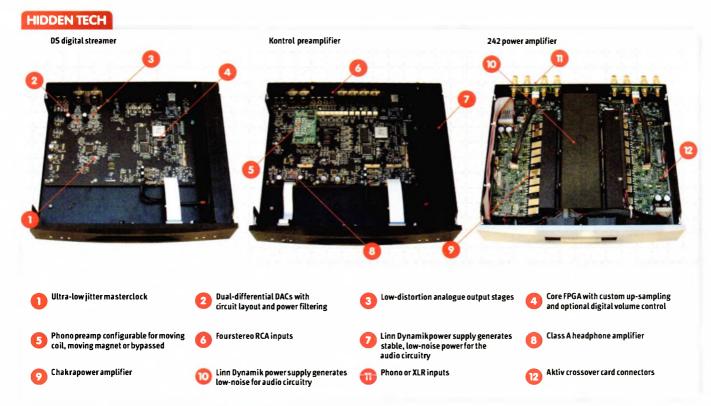
 Special Linn Chakra circuit design

 Akurate 242: twin ported cabinet

 Special Array tweeter arrangement for better dispersion

 Bass boost input (with additional power amp)

DISTRIBUTOR: Linn Products Ltd TELEPHONE: 0141 307 7777 WEBSITE: linn.co.uk



interesting. You can control it from your computer, or via devices like an Apple iPad.

The latter allows you to create playlists of favourite tracks without leaving your armchair. You can select/repeat/delete tracks as you listen, making the Akurate perfect for those who prefer to listen to a wide variety of hand-picked tracks (rather than specific albums) and like to flit from track to track.

But the Akurate is also great for those who want to listen to long continuous works. If you had the stamina, you could play to an entire four-act opera – or even Wagner's complete Ring cycle – without having to leave your chair. Say goodbye to awkward breaks in continuous works that exceed CD's 80-minute playing time, pop-pickers.

Listening intensively to a long work and having to get up and change discs, risks breaking the spell. And, there's no doubt that having long continuous playing times, enables you to get though a lot more music.

The way an Akurate system is configured and the kind of remote access it offers, is something you'd discuss with your Linn dealer prior to purchase. But having the whole system controlled from an iPad is undoubtedly the

56



elegance and simplicity of each Linn component, it's a pity that a plethora of routing boxes, cables and computer peripherals is needed to get things up and running. You'll probably require an extra three or four mains sockets to power all the various devices.

Linn (rightly in our view) insist on not putting a hard drive into its DS components, believing that it's better to have this component as a separate add-on device. They're concerned about hard-drive failure, and also the limits of today's hard drives in terms of storage space and since the cost of hard-drives keeps falling and capacity keeps increasing, Linn feel it makes sense to treat this as a separate item.

coolest most flexible option, but it's not the only one.

Radio GaGa

In addition to music downloaded from the internet and stored on a hard-drive, the Akurate DS gives you access to digital radio stations. You can also add a device that allows you to rip your existing CD collection to a hard-drive – and accessed that way, rather than playing the disc in a conventional CD player.

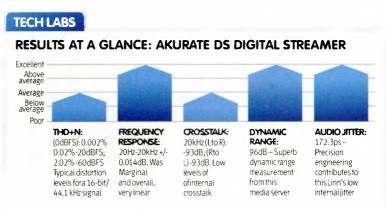
Although it's perfectly possible to have a separate CD player with a system like this, it's likely you'd want to rip your CD collection to a hard drive so as to enjoy the benefits of remote access and (with long works spread over two or more CDs) no breaks between discs.

The Akurate 242 loudspeakers also offer some interesting options. You can use them with a single set of cables – or up to five sets – either from a single amplifier, or five amplifiers. If that's not enough, they can be used in fully 'active' mode with electronic crossover and five power amps. All it takes is money!

There's a further option to increase bass output/depth by means of an extra set of terminals for use with an additional power amp. This makes the Akurate 242 unusually versatile and upgradeable.

Pièce de résistance

The electronics have a very simple understated look. The casework is made from brushed aluminium and looks quietly classy. The finish



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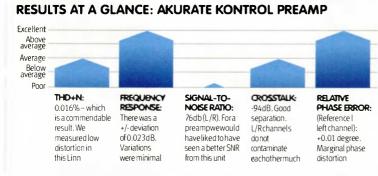


is impressive without being the least bit ostentatious or flashy. Our review samples came in silver finish, but black is available, too. Each item is fairly light in weight.

Some audiophile components are massively constructed, but not Linn Akurate components. While weight and high rigidity are beneficial, having relatively light casework also brings advantages. If resonance does occur, there's less stored energy with something light. Linn also claims that its casework improves sonic performance.

The loudspeaker cabinets are beautifully finished and solidly braced for low resonance. There are two rear-facing ports and six-way binding posts allow active and multi-amp/multi cable operation. The piéce de resistance, though, is the assembly that holds the three high-frequency drivers. Dubbed The Array, this creates a wider dispersion at higher frequencies, giving better integration and less 'beaming' due to excessive directionality. Co-incidentally, it looks great and creates an attractive focal point.

TECH LABS



CYSTEM-BUILDING

IT'S NICE TO KNOW that the Akurate can be upgraded. The first option is to use more than one set of loudspeaker cables – commonly known as bi, or tri wiring. The Akurate 242s can run to five pairs.

And you needn't stop there. You can add extra power amps, so that each drive unit is being powered by its own dedicated electronics, or convert the speakers for active operation and buy an electronic crossover. The principle benefit is that each speaker drive unit is being powered directly by its own power amp and only working over a small part of the frequency range.

An electronic crossover can be made to operate with greater precision and the result should be a smoother more natural tonal balance, and increased transparency.

Krisp and Artikulate

Sonically, the Akurate Electronics sound broadly similar to Linn's Majik – as featured in our review in *HFC* 332. There's a comparable sort of openness and transparency; the same kind of crisp, lean, detailed presentation. It's not an especially warm or 'romantic' kind of sound, though neither is it cold or antiseptic.

However, the Akurate seems a stage or two further on from the Majik. While recognisably cut from the same cloth, it seems noticeably more detailed and articulate, sounding even sharper and better focused. Individual voices and instruments are more separate, each one having more its own unique timbre and dynamic shading.

Those looking for electronics that ooze 'personality' and add their own unique concoction of finger-lickin' herbs and spices may

"To create a whole evening's uninterrupted listening has its own rewards."

be disappointed by the Akurate. As the name implies, it's about accuracy and truthfulness, rather than sounding impressive or pleasant – though the Akurate can impress and please.

The sonic gulf between hi-res music from downloads, compared to ripped stuff from conventional CDs, is very apparent – the improvement over the latter being more marked than we experienced with the Majik. Having such clean source material invites you to raise volume levels, so the Akurate's extra power comes in useful here.

Initial listening took place with the Akurate electronics driving our Impulse H1/Klipsch Heresy III hybrid full-range horn speakers and results are impressive, albeit with a tonal balance tipped slightly towards the upper frequencies. Bass is good, but less voluminous than it is with our Musical Fidelity kW-750 combo.

Changing over to the Akurate 242 loudspeakers underlines these qualities. They're very crisp immediate-sounding boxes that produce a sharp, articulate sort of presentation. Bass is quite deep, but it's the sort of bass that isn't there until it's there – and then (when it does come) it can surprise

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ALPHA Line - Plus

ALPHALINE-1

ALPHALINE - 2

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The GT40 records vinyl and other analog sources at 16/44.1 or 24/96 using its bidirectional USB connection and switchable Line, Phono MM/MC analog inputs, plus it features L/R analog outputs, a separate headphone amplifier, gold-plated Teflon-insulated RCA jacks in a high-quality aluminum chassis with a beautifully machined volume knob. CD Redbook 16/44.1 and especially 24/96 files reveal a vivid, captivating sound unheard of at this price.



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SPOKE WITH MURRAY SMITH (SENIOR DESIGN ENGINEER) AND DAN EMERY (ELECTRONIC DESIGN ENGINEER) ABOUT THE AKURATE SYSTEM



HFC: Linn offers three DS player lines - Majik, Akurate and Klimax. How do they differ?

MS: The main difference between the players is audio performance and how the hardware used in the players differs across the range. For example, different DACs are used across the range with Majik DS sharing a DAC for both audio channels, whereas Akurate DS and Klimax DS use one DAC per channel. In addition, each player has different local power supply arrangements for key analogue components on the audio board.

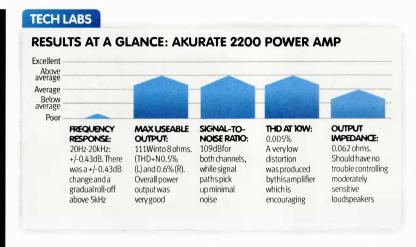
DE: There are some hardware differences relating to connectivity, e.g. the Klimax and Akurate models offer balanced outputs, while the Akurate and Majik models also include a digital output. MS: All Linn DS players share the same core processing platform which means that processes such as upsampling, volume control and dithering are identical and all players offer the same codecs.

What's the main difference between Majik, Akurate and Klimax amplification?

MS: Again, the main difference between the players is audio performance. This is largely due to differing signal circuitry design, output power and the way that power is supplied to the audio board. The enclosure varies across each range which also affects performance. DE: All three ranges share Chakra technology which offers greater responsiveness, efficiency and reliability, while producing less heat and lower distortion than traditional designs. The Klimax Solo is the only exception to this, which uses Linn's high-performance mono block design, instead of Chakra technology.

What does converting to Aktiv involve? MS: All Linn loudspeakers can be upgraded easily to Aktiv configuration. It is a dealer upgrade, but a very

straightforward change - link plates are removed, the passive crossover bypassed inside the loudspeaker, and Aktiv cards (the Aktiv crossover networks) are installed inside the power amplifiers.



you with its power and weight. Of course, loudspeakers can produce vastly different results depending on the room they're used in. With this in mind, Linn provides a couple of foam bungs to block either (or both) ports to give a tighter, leaner bass.

The high frequencies sound very airy and open, yet blisteringly detailed. The drive units are employed in special formation called the Array – which creates a very integrated mid-band and treble, with wide/smooth dispersion.

This acts in much the same way a reflector behaves when placed behind a light source. It makes the apparent width of the source wider, ensures a smoother more even frequency response and avoids the 'sweet spot' effect, thus enabling decent stereo to be enjoyed, even when sat well off axis.

The Akurate 242s are reasonably efficient, so the amplifier's 200 watt output should be entirely adequate for most situations. However, if a bit more wellie is required, it's possible to add power amps (indeed, the Akurate power amp can be had in a three- or fourchannel versions) for multi-amp operation or fully active.

People sometimes talk about a hi-fi system changing your life and buying a Linn Akurate may well prove to be a life-changing experience. Why? Because it enables you to access and enjoy music that simply isn't possible with conventional disc-sourced hi-fi systems.

And while for many of us, fiddling about with LPs and CDs is all part of the fun, being able to select your music from an iPad and create a whole evening's uninterrupted listening, has its own special rewards. Rewards that you may never want to be without. Now where did I put that shellac '78?



YOU CAN STORE material on the hard drive of your main computer, or laptop, or on a separate NAS box. A NAS device with built-in CD ripper (or a separate ripper) is a useful extra

Once you're in the swing of things – you probably won't want to play CDs anymore – you'll prefer to rip your existing CD collection to a hard drive. Linn strongly recommends backing up your music collection on an extra hard drive and warn against keeping everything unbacked-up on a laptop which might get stolen.

If you decide to buy a Linn DS system, you won't be given a pile of boxes and left to get on with it. Your dealer will come and install the equipment, and make sure everything's working okay. Once it's up and running, there's a very simple and intuitive user interface to navigate. You just need to get used to it.

Fi Choice

AKURATE DS

SOUND QUALITY **** VALUE FOR MONEY $\star\star\star\star$

LIKE: Versatile high-quality digital source component DISLIKE: Great when

BUILD QUALITY ****

working, but can be frustrating if/when the music stops

WE SAY: Fast album/track access and the extended **FEATURES** playing times makes this ****

OVERALL



Choice

KONTROL AND 2200

SOUND QUALITY **** VALUE FOR MONEY **** BUILD QUALITY

LIKE: . Virtually no heat produced, Balanced inputs/outputs.Built-in MM/MC phonostage

DISLIKE: No serious grumbles, but may sound a tad 'lean' for some tastes

WE SAY: Impressive. compact design and very crisp, open sound

OVERALL

FFATURES



Choice

AKURATE 242 (SPEAKER)

SOUND QUALITY **** VALUE FOR MONEY $\star\star\star\star$ BUILD OUALITY

 $\star\star\star\star\star$

LIKE: Wide, smooth high-frequencydispersion. with excellent sound

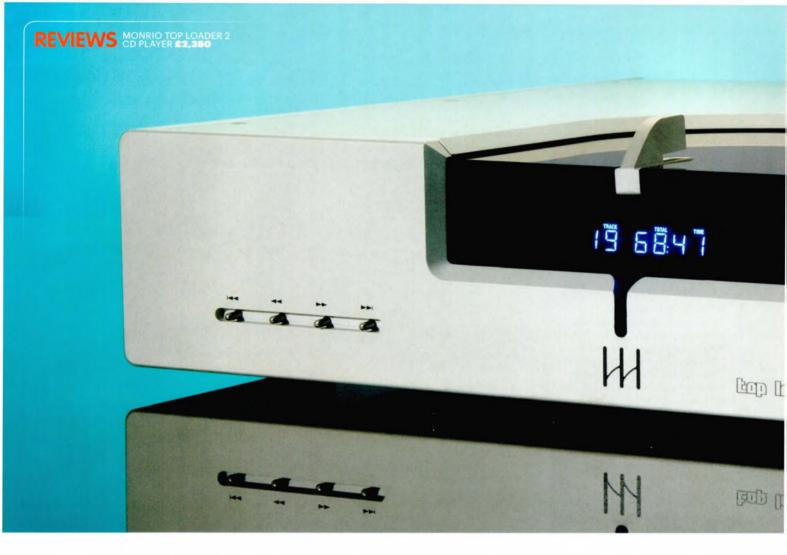
DISLIKE: Lower mid-band/ bass slightly constrained

WESAY: Speakers have a stylish appearance thatcomplements the electronics. Can also be Aktiv upgraded

 $\star\star\star\star$ **OVERALL**

EASE OF DRIVE





Emotional rescue

Italian stalwart Monrio has a refreshingly honest design philosophy when it comes to hi-fi. *Jason Kennedy* gets passionate about the stylish TL 2

onrio is an Italian company with a refreshingly honest aim, "Our pretension is neither to bring a real listening experience to your house it is not possible to do it - nor to imitate the reality but to represent it in the best possible way." Few companies have the strength of character to be this open about their approach. It does, of course, grant Monrio founder Giovanni Gadzola licence to make highly personal products, but the fact that he has been selling them for over three decades suggests that his tastes are not unique.

The Top Loader 2 is Monrio's penultimate CD player and quite a stylish conglomeration of aluminium

and acrylic it is too, the question is does it sound as good as it looks?

More substance

Gadzola started out in the seventies making amplifiers and has subsequently grown the range to include phono stages, DACs, pre and power amplifiers and four CD players. Most of the low-power circuits that Monrio builds incorporate valves and this is true of the penultimate disc player that we have here. And as is the Italian way, the styling is very strong on this machine. But this does not always tally with great ergonomics, a situation that was slightly exacerbated by the non-arrival of the remote handset.

The Top Loader 2 was built for customers who want the qualities of

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Monrio Top Loader 2 ORIGIN: Italy TYPE: CD player WEIGHT: 10.5kg DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 940x438x380mm FEATURES: Analogue outputs: RCA phono, XLR

• Drive mechanism: Philips CD-Pro2M

Philips CD-Pro2M

DAC: 2x24/192
delta sigma

DISTRIBUTOR:

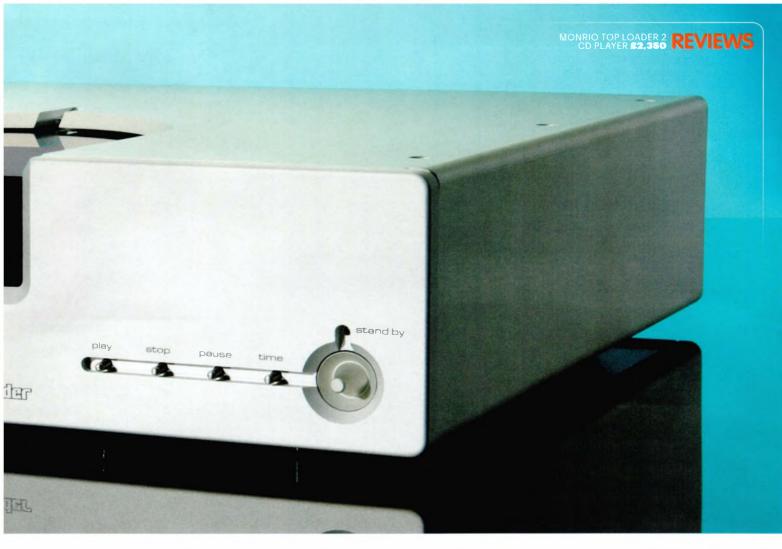
UKD
TELEPHONE:
01753652669
WEBSITE:
monrio.it

the company's best player, the Top Loader 3, but without the cost, so the casework is more traditionally shaped and the electronics simplified. The case is still pretty substantial and beautifully finished – Monrio is keen to keep resonance at bay and so builds heavy and strong using aluminium extrusions for maximum rigidity.

The TL 3 has two valves protruding from its flank and these same valves can be found inside the more affordable player. They are 12AU7 triodes with high-voltage transistor regulation fed by a 'generously rated' toroidal transformer with separate windings for the various sections of the player. It has twin Sigma/ Delta DACs and uses an I2S bus to keep audio signal and clock data separate prior to conversion. Analogue output is via single-ended or balanced connections and a digital signal can be output from the single coaxial connection.

The unusually slim control buttons look good, but are rather short on tactile response, there is little or no give when you press them. Doing so elicits a response, however, and after a while you learn not to press too hard. The larger control on the right of the facia looks like it might revolve to select tracks but only seems to be a standby switch.

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It's a solidly built machine in all respects, except for the acrylic cover that slides over the disc bay. It looks good with its blue tint, but doesn't operate all that smoothly. Discs needs to be held in place with a magnetic puck and the player spins up when you close the cover, a system that does mean you can stop playback by merely sliding the lid back, which makes for button free disc changes.

"If you aren't listening enough it could have the power to put music back in your life."

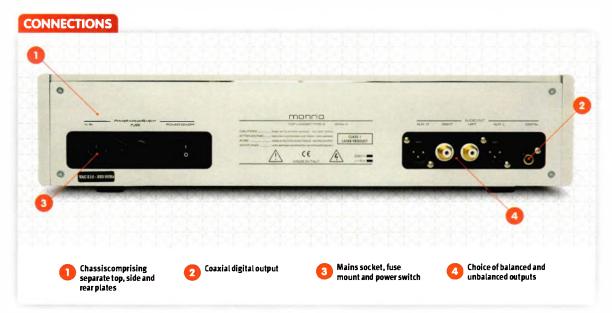
On the tin

This is a great-looking machine with strong design and a lot of flair for the money. Its appearance is slightly

undermined by the ergonomics, but disc cover aside, most of these are less of an issue if you have the remote. It's not big on features, there's no digital input as is the prevailing fashion, so you can't attach a streamer or PC and there's certainly no USB input for maximum flexibility. This is a CD player pure and simple, albeit one with a pair of valves inside, not many glasspowered players are all that feature-

THE QUESTION of what a hi-fi component should be aiming to achieve is not one that gets a great deal of analysis, but Monrio's statements on the subject bring some much-needed perspective. Its site states that "[we wish to] convey our passion and our experience to the listeners, fully aware that listening to a live concert is a musical event, while listening to the same concert through a CD or LP reproduction is not."

suggest that a good recording of a musical event can transport the listener back in time and if a system manages to reproduce enough of the sound with the minimum of colouration/ distortion it can bring a past musical event into the present.



www.hifichoice.co.uk MARCH 2011 Hill Choice





David Price Hi Fi World

"The Orbit...a brilliant sounding £65 Mains Cable ..over any other £100 + mains cable"

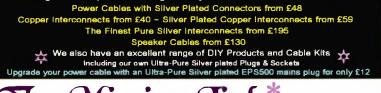
Janine Elliot HI FI News - The Missing Link Family of Cables.... "The most beautiful looking and extremely musical cables money can buy"



HI FI World 'World Standards' Award June 2009 The Link Cryo Reference Interconnect "Our favourite affordable high-end interconnect out performing designs at three times its cost"

'Wired For Sound' - Adam Smith HI FI World - The Link Interconnect
"distinctly out of the ordinary offering a very detailed and crisp sonic picture - leading edges of notes were beautifully precise and forthright with no sense of hesitancy or blur...the bass end of the spectrum was lithe, tight and focused





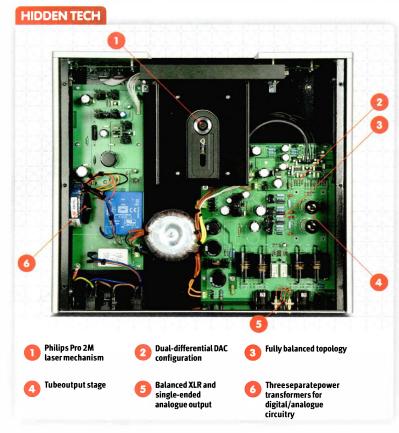
he Missing Link are Specialists in High Quality British Hi Fi Cables at Affordable Prices



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rich. Build is generally good with decent casework alignment and an encouraging solidity. The feet look fairly mundane but are, in fact, spiked with a padded foot to avoid damage to the supporting surface.

At this price there is quite a lot of competition for Monrio. For example, we very much liked Denon's DCD-2010AE, a £1,700 machine that may not have the style on offer here, but it plays SACD and has plenty of support for your iPod. Naim's CD5 XS (£1,825) offers openness, as well as fine quality timing on top of the marque's strong reputation for musicality. The only machine we've seen in recent times that competes in terms of style is the

Consonance Droplet CDP3.1 (£1,995), which is even more extravagant in appearance and also has valves under the skin.

Open and shut

In the listening room we hooked the TL2 up to Townshend's new Glastonbury Pre, a pair of Mark Levinson No.53 monoblocks and PMC's fact 8 loudspeakers. If it doesn't sound good through this lot it never will. Fortunately it does, but with a distinctly relaxed demeanour that tallies with Monrio's musical experience rather than attempted realism philosophy. It does this very well, thanks to a good sense of timing, calm presentation and high



WE ASKED MONRIO distributor and Italian audio connoisseur Nick Green at UKD, to recommend a system that would do the Toploader Type 2 justice. He took the logical route and selected amplification from the Monrio stable specifically the Asty Line MkIII Tube stereo preamplifier at £1,600 partnered with a pair of MP11 MkII monoblock power amplifiers at £1,500 each.

The preamp has the same styling as the TL2 and very similar hybrid valve and FET amplification, so it's definitely going to be singing from the same book as the CD player. The MP11 monoblocks are also hybrid designs, this time combining a 12AU7-powered input stage with an ICEpower class D output stage to deliver 250 watts.

Nick selected Opera loudspeakers to go with these and gave us two options, according to whether floorstanding or standmount speakers are required. If the latter then the Callas at £2,880, but if you want the full experience then the Grand Callas at £4,995 would be just the ticket.

musicality – once a good track is playing there is no inclination to turn it off and move onto the next and even with high-end players this isn't always the case. While the valves make it a little too relaxed to be considered a pace, rhythm and timing style player, its strong sense of involvement puts in contention with that type of machine.

Next to a Leema Antila you can hear that it is distinctly lacking in spatial resolution; the Leema sounds extremely open, has a lot of depth and a greater sense of realism. The Antila is a more expensive machine, but there are more closely priced players that deliver a similarly open sound. Leading-edge definition can be enhanced with the right choice of interconnect - we tried some TMS Pulse B in place of the usual Townshend Isolda DCT100 and this enhanced the sense of speed, but undermined the Monrio's ease at high levels. There aren't to our knowledge, any cables that can make this player sound really open but if you can live with that this is a very engaging disc-spinner with its heart in the right place.

Centre stage

Very easy to live with from a sonic point of view, the Top Loader 2 is a good-looking player that is also very strong on charm. It doesn't have the transparency or urgency of the best at this price but it does make you want to listen to your music and that's a fundamental quality of good hi-fi. It gets very close to offsetting its limitations with its ability to focus the listener on all that's transcendant in the music, but whether you will feel it gets the balance right is a matter of taste and for that matter system-matching. But if you aren't listening enough it could well have the power to put music back in your life.

TECH LABS **RESULTS AT A GLANCE** Excellent Above average Average Below THD+N: FREQUENCY CROSSTALK: DYNAMIC AUDIO JITTER: (0dBFS): 0.14% RESPONSE: @20kHz RANGE: 414.1ps -(0.3%-20dBFS; 20Hz-20kHz +/-(Lto R): -60dB; 75dB - Dynamic Higherlevels 27 5%-60dBFS) 0.12dB, Variation (RtoL)-68dB. range was well of internal jitter were present in Wemeasured was minor and Verypoor helow CD's a lotof internal shouldn't create crosstalk levels theoretical limit this Monrio distortion in this any noticeable CD player sound irregularities

Choice **OUR VERDICT** SOUND QUALITY LIKE: Very engaging and $\star\star\star\star$ musical player that goes loud with ease VALUE FOR MONEY **DISLIKE:** The sliding $\star\star\star\star$ disc cover undermines the aesthetics **BUILD QUALITY** **** WE SAY: Anengaging player with minimal **FEATURES** features that's slightly let $\star\star\star$ down by poor ergonomics **OVERALL**



Islandin thestream

A music file player that doesn't stream, what's going on? Jason Kennedy examines the first in a new breed of transports

he engineers at Brystson have made the radical decision to build a digital music player that doesn't stream music from a computer. Their angle is that streaming is bad, but digital music files are not. Is this then a brief diversion from the tidal onslaught of streamed music over solid software, or it could signal a new angle that brings us music files without the complications of streaming.

Bryston's approach is to let you access music files stored on USB drives, be they thumb drives or hard drives which you stock up with music on the computer and then plug into the player.

Drive on

64

This approach is already available on a number of the streaming devices

we have seen and does mean you can avoid the occasional glitches of wireless streaming, but it also makes getting new music a bit more cumbersome, albeit not significantly more than the traditional disc in a draw system that we have enjoyed/ endured for so long.

The BDP-1 has four USB inputs, the two on the front being for flash drives or powered hard drives, while the two on the back can power any attached drives. The idea is that you hook up larger terabyte drives to the back panel for a full collection of music and play new pieces with thumb drives through the front sockets. You can't transfer data from one drive to another and each time you connect one it has to be scanned by the player so that it can update itself and show you what's on there.

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Bryston BDP-1 ORIGIN: Canada

TYPE: Digital music

transport WEIGHT:

6.9kg

DIMENSIONS: (HxWxD) 70x432x282mm

- FEATURES: Digital outputs:
- AES/EBU, BNC • Inputs: 4x USB
- Formats: AIFF, FLAC, WAV, MP4, MP3, OGG
- mPod touch screen software control
- BR2 optional remote control DISTRIBUTOR:

TELEPHONE: 0870 4441044 WEBSITE: bryston.com

PMC

There are a number of ways to find what you want to play, out of the box you can navigate via the front panel display (this is not a large thing so you need to be close to it in order to read it) and you have to be close to it to scroll through it with buttons on the facia. The BDP-1 does not come with a remote control, that's an optional extra, but there are other control options. One is to drive it from a computer using an add-in for Firefox called Minion and the other is to download an app called mPod onto your Apple touchscreen device be it a Pod, Pad or Phone. Both these latter routes require an Ethernet connection between the player and your router, a connection that one would have thought could easily be used to stream through.

We used the mPod app on an iPod Touch and found that it was easy to install and intuitive to use if a little slow to respond, but that's something you get used to. What takes a bit of familiarisation is the operating style of mPod, which is clearly geared toward playlist style use. If you have a track playing, for instance, and then choose another one, the system will let the first track finish before starting the next unless you press the next key.

You can choose to play all the tracks on an album in sequential or random order, or do the same with a whole directory - that is the contents of a given drive. It's not up to usual iPod

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usability but comes close enough and you can show album art or a track listing but not change volume, the BDP-1 doesn't have an analogue output let alone level control. Signal is output via one of two electrical digital outputs that don't include a RCA phono socket, but rather opt for the technically better but less common BNC connection – the BDP-1 is more a digital transport than a player.

Data delivery

Bryston is renowned for the build quality of its products and offers a

"Bryston has taken a brave step by producing such a niche product but the results are pretty impressive."

five year warranty on digital products. The BDP-1 is built much like one of its preamplifiers with a solid aluminium front panel, clear two-line display and steel casework. It has pretty minimal socketry for four USB devices, Ethernet, digital outputs, RS232 connection and

voltage triggers. The controls are much like those on a CD player except for the addition of the four navigation buttons which let you find your way around the attached drive(s).

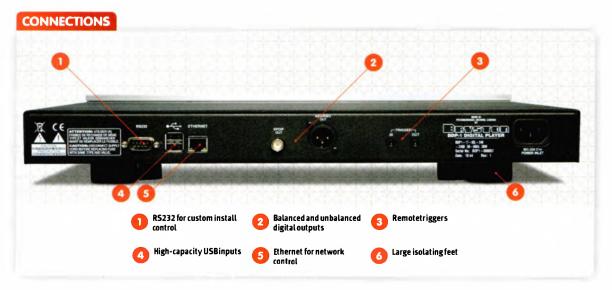
In technical terms, it's ability to play files up to 24-bit/192kHz puts it among the leaders in the music file game, but this is something that can be achieved with a computer via USB and, in both instances, you require a DAC that can accept this density of information. Bryston says the system's advantage is that it accepts raw data from a USB drive which means jitter is not an issue,



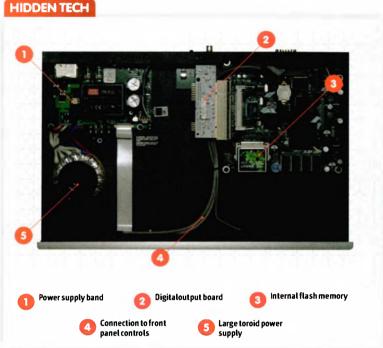
THE ADVANTAGE
that the USB drive
approach has over
simply connecting
a laptop to a DAC,
is that with a
laptop the data is
converted into a
digital music signal
prior to transfer to
the converter. It's
a process that can
see the signal being
corrupted with jitter.

Taking files straight from a USB drive, on the other hand, only involves the transfer of data which is then turned into a digital music file within the BDP-1.

within the BDP-1.
Streamers work
in the same way,
however and the
only potential
advantage that
the USB drive
route may have is
that an attached
drive is probably a
quieter electrical
environment than
a computer and so
will require less
stringent isolation
to keep noise at bay.



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but it's hard to see how the data sent from an attached drive differs from that streamed from a remote PC or hard disk, in both cases jitter only becomes an issue when the signal is converted to SPDIF or AES/EBU and sent to a separate DAC. This is why streamers from Naim and Linn have onboard converters and these are the products that the BDP-1 has to beat.

Naim's Uniti is an all in one streamer/CD player/DAC and amp for £2,100, while Linn's Majik DS is £1,840 and doesn't have USB, but does include a DAC and volume control.

Engaging results

66

The BDP-1 does sound good when paired with Bryston's £1,950 (HFC 316) BDA-1 DAC, but then that's a pretty good DAC in its own right, nonetheless the 'player' is capable of pretty engaging results with all manner of music and we could easily have whiled away far more time than was available listening to familiar pieces and a selection that distributor PMC had supplied on a terabyte drive. Once you have familiarised yourself with mPod, it's quite a pleasurable driving experience as well, the software's playlist mentality means that the latest selection will be added to the list of tracks to play rather than take over from what's currently on, but you can jump to the desired piece with ease.

It lags slightly when compared to a CD in a regular player via the same DAC, with the disc having a lighter touch and less 'glare' around treble sounds, cymbals for instance have a slightly unnatural brilliance with the BDP-1. But taken on its own the BDP-1 is quite convincing, it can deliver the dynamics, atmosphere and scale of a full-on orchestral piece, as



WE SPOKE to Bryston's James Tanner about the

HFC: Why do you think this approach is better than streaming?

IT: USB audio streams data in a manner that allows a digital-to -analogconversion process to happen in realtime(orcloseto it) so the listener can hear music

Ethernet needs essentially a computer or at least a microprocessor with storage to function, USB can function with just a straightforward timingand translation of bits to bits. Computers processing chunks of data are not under the same requirement when retrieving music files for processing from a hard drive

HFC: Can you avoid connecting to your PC's router and still use mPod?

JT: Yes, if you use a dedicated router with the set-up where the player has its own router. Luse this approach in areas where the customer can not get an Ethernet connection from their main router. It provides a system that is totally independent from the home network system and all the sharing issues that involves.

well as the finesse and delicacy of more subtle music.

It reveals the advantages of hi-res files quite well too with Rachmaninoff's Symphonic Dances revealing a lot of its soundstage depth and huge dynamic swings. There is an appealing fluidity to the result that's uncommon with digital sources and while you wouldn't mistake it for a turntable (it's basically too quiet for that) there is something of the analogue in its sound that keeps you listening.

Next to a Macbook laptop playing via USB into the DAC, the BDP-1 put in a richer and more substantial performance, but we get the impression that the Bryston DAC's AES/EBU is a rather better input than its USB, so the playing field was not completely level. Late in the day another tasty DAC turned up in the form of the Antelope Zodiac + and this proved to be rather more revealing than the Bryston - now we could hear right into the mix and enjoy nuances that have rarely been encountered previously. Essentially it showed that the BDP-1 is a more capable device than its partnering DAC suggests.

Brave step

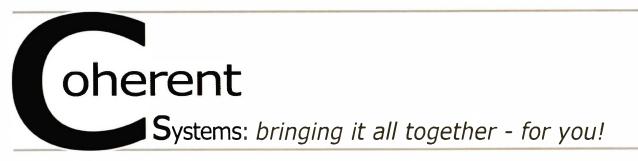
Bryston has taken a brave step by producing such a niche product and while the results are really impressive they do not strike us as being that much better than units that add streaming and usually iPod playback to those offered here.

Then there is the issue of control, with the remote as a not inexpensive extra and other options requiring a link to a router, you are left with a small screen on the unit to scroll through a lot of music. While the sound is clearly impressive and build quality high, we feel that the limited functionality undermines the BPD-1's ability to compete with the best in this fast moving sector. •





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"Voices in general and speech, in particular, sound very clear and articulate, even when the speakers are playing very quietly."

"Image focus and lateral positioning is exceptionally precise."

Hi-Fi Choice

"The Chrono SL580 DC delivers an exceptionally clean overall sound"



Can't knock Okki Nokki

Cleanliness is next to fidelity when it comes to vinyl, but where on earth did this device get its name? Jason Kennedy scrubs his grooves

kki Nokki distributor Ken White has been selling second-hand records since the nineties, so he knows a thing or two about filth, enough it would seem to have sought out this strangely named machine and decided to bring it to the UK. It's certainly priced right at £395 we don't know of a cheaper alternative that has built-in vacuuming capabilities and the ability to spin in both directions. Not only that, but it comes complete with concentrated cleaning fluid and a goat's-hair brush. The name, incidentally, is Dutch for 'thumbs-up'.

Float on

The true test of a record cleaner is how well it achieves its aim and how much effort is required to do so. But that's not all, there is also the question of reliability. A lot of cleaning machines need to have their reservoirs drained quite frequently - as often as every eight to ten records - this is because excess fluid will eventually work its way into the vacuum motor and damage it if not removed.

One very useful feature of the Okki Nokki is that it has a float mechanism, that stops it operating when the fluid needs to be drained, so there's never any danger of water getting into the motor. Which given its electrical nature, has got to be a good thing.

Operation is via two switches: one for forward/reverse and the other for suction, but first you need to dilute the cleaning fluid in a litre of condensed water and then pour a little back into the bottle which has small spout for ease of use. Inconveniently, this bottle has no lid so needs taping-up. The fluid itself is soap rather than alcohol-based and doesn't require rinsing.

Sucking-up to vinyl

The Okki Nokki is rather attractive in its white finish and it's not too big. More importantly, the vacuum motor isn't excessively noisy and does the job quickly. It's not as well finished as the Hanns Acoustics machine we looked at last year (HFC 336) and doesn't look or feel quite as solid, but it's substantial enough for the job, even if the clamp is a little basic.



DETAILS

PRODUCT: Okki Nokki JB1 ORIGIN: TYPE: Record-cleaning machine WEIGHT: 7kg DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 190x335x335mm FEATURES:

- Forward and reverse motor
- Goat-hair brush
- Concentrated cleaning fluid
- Vacuum drving DISTRIBUTOR: Okki Nokki UK TELEPHONE:

01579 363603 WEBSITE: okkinokki.co.uk

The supplied brush is good quality and parts like the suction arm are very nicely executed, alternative length arms for seven- and ten-inch discs are available, as are replacement velvet strips which stop the tube damaging the vinyl. Another useful option is a dust cover at £49.95 - the last thing you want is dust on the foam-faced platter.

Scrubber

The cleaning process is pretty straightforward and once you've done it a couple of times, it's not too slow either; you can do what it suggests in the manual in about a minute per side. With dirty records, this process needs to be repeated up to three times and it's necessary to scrub for a bit longer than the indicated two revolutions. The result is that vinyl sounds relatively 'fresh' because the highs are clearer, which not only adds sparkle to the treble but brings greater definition across the range.

Both an ancient Nina Simone album and a more recent Joni Mitchell one benefited quite obviously and curiously, a second clean proved worthwhile, even if the law of diminishing returns had started to kick in. It also gets rid of some sources of noise such as pops and clicks, not the ones caused by actual damage of course, but by larger deposits of detritus.

Keep it clean

There is no such thing as a recordcleaning machine where you put a dirty record in at one end and get a clean one out at the other, they all require a fair amount of elbow grease. The Okki Nokki works as well as any we have tried, but costs less and has a safety feature that should stop users from inadvertently damaging it.

Record-cleaning is not the most fun you can have with your clothes on, so an affordable machine that makes it painless is very welcome indeed. •



The new romantic

Emillé brings modern, digital inputs to oldfashioned valves in its most affordable amplifier ever as **Ed Selley** finds his top pick of 2011 so far

millé takes its name from a giant, ornate bell that is considered a national treasure in its native

Korea. Its range of well thought-out integrated, pre/power amplifiers and phono stages is entirely valve-based and has worn commensurately high-end price tags up until now.

The £2,450 Ara is not exactly cheap, but is comfortably Emillé's least expensive integrated amp ever and targets a rather more accessible and competitive price point.

The good news is that there is little sign of cost-cutting. The Ara is built in the same factory as the larger amplifiers and there is little sense at

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Emillé Ara

ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Integrated

valve amp
WEIGHT:
24kg

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 420x166x430mm

- FEATURES:
 7591a valve-based power stage
- 4 and 8 ohm
- speaker outputs
- 2-line inputs
- S/PDIF and USB inputs
- Remote control and headphone socket
 DISTRIBUTOR: Angelsound Audio

TELEPHONE: 01923352479 WEBSITE: emillelabs.com any stage that this is a 'poverty spec' product. The valve complement differs from the rest of the range and, in fact, differs from most other valve amplifiers on the market. Alongside a relatively normal choice of 6922 valves for the preamp section, the Ara makes use of four 7591a valves (see below) for the power section instead of

"The Ara should generate all but the most ballistic of listening levels from sensitive speakers."

the more usual choices of EL34 or KT88. These endow the Ara with an output of 22 watts at credible distortion levels.



While not a huge amount of power, the 20-watt boundary is an important one in terms of system-building (see p73) and gives the Ara the ability to work with speakers with sensitivity in the high 80s, as well as more specialised 90dB/w plus designs.

Input innovation

The other very interesting feature can be found nestling unobtrusively on the rear panel. As well as a pair of RCA line inputs, the Ara is fitted with an SP/Dif and a USB input. This is not something we have ever seen before on a valve amp and makes the Ara rather more flexible in connectivity terms than might otherwise be expected. The digital board is entirely solid-state and makes no use of any additional valves.

The feature set is rounded-off with a headphone socket and remote control for the volume. Slightly limited number of analogue inputs aside, this is a well-specified product with considerable flexibility in how you might go about using it.

Aesthetically, the Ara is designed in the Emillé house style. Two large knobs serve as the power switch and input selector, while the central knob is the volume control. A full-sized covering cage is supplied to protect the valves which does make the Ara respectably child-proof. We tested without the cage in situ, as we preferred the appearance, but given the cage is included in the asking price, it is a useful thing to have. Fit and finish is also very good.

Controls move with a precise and solid feel, the panel gaps are minute and the connections on the back are high-quality and rock-solid. If the Ara was a 'normal' valve amplifier with only analogue inputs, it would be

good value. With the unique options afforded by the digital inputs, it looks more like a bargain – depending, of course, on how good those digital inputs are, more of which later.

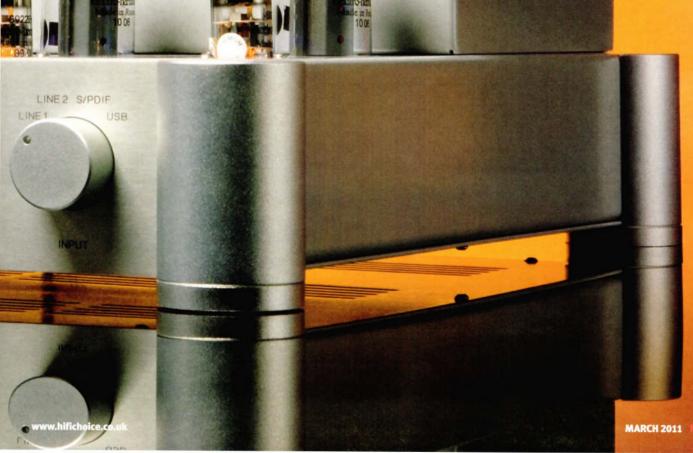
No stereotype

Starting by listening to the standard analogue inputs, the Ara makes a convincing case for itself. There is no sense of excessive warmth or bloom to performance or any other stereotypical 'valve sound' traits. The Ara has an incisive, detailed and fabulously real presentation. There is no softening of frequency extremes or flabbiness in the bass which allows the Emillé to demonstrate superb timing that is better than many solid-state amplifiers. The Ara makes good use of the 22-watt output and should generate all but the most ballistic of listening levels from speakers of reasonable sensitivity.



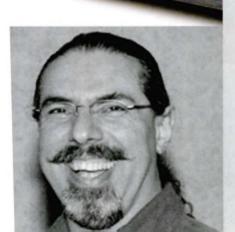
THE CHOICE of the 7591a valve in the Ara is an unusual one – a quick check online failed to find another integrated amp currently using them. The pin out –the connections on the bottom of the valve- are different to other power pentodes, which means that the Ara is 'locked in' to

using them. Having listened to the Ara and liked what we hear, we don't think this is a bad thing though. The Ara's combination of exceptional detail, coupled with excellent timing are unlike most other valve amps at the price. And if this is partly down to the 7591a, then we certainly welcome more designs using the same.





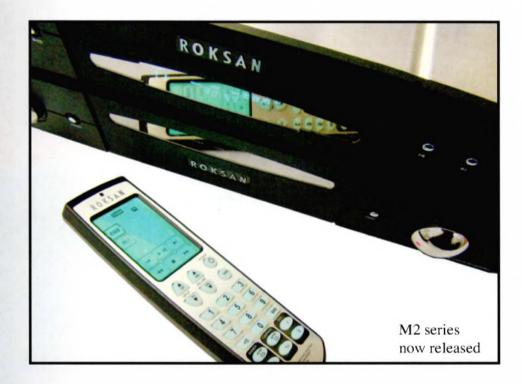






Year warranty

All Roksan electronics and turntables sold through authorised dealers are covered by a free 5 year parts and labour warranty.

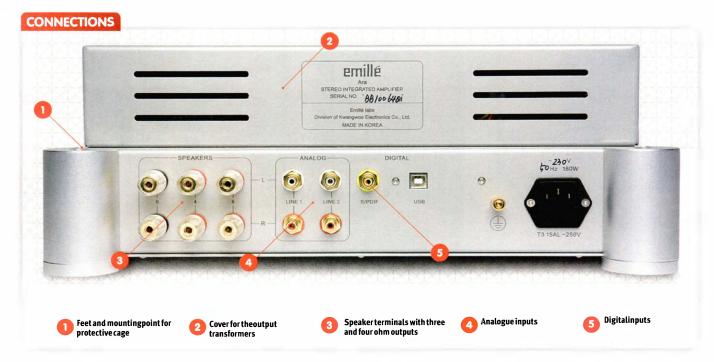


Roksan

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At the same time, there is a sense of space, air and presence to vocals and instruments that is hard to realise with anything other than a well-designed valve amplifier. Vocals, in particular, are staggeringly well presented, never separated from instruments or their surroundings, but completely attention-grabbing and placed perfectly in a wide and believable soundstage.

Given that the digital input board on the Ara represents the company's first attempt in the field of digital reproduction, we were not entirely sure what to expect. The USB is not an asynchronous type and neither will it handle hi-res formats, but it connects correctly to both PCs and Macs and proves silent and stable in use. More importantly, the performance is excellent.

The overall sonic balance of the Ara is unchanged by the digital inputs which is superb achievement.

There is something surreal and yet strangely satisfying about seeing the Ara turn in the same superb performance it does from the analogue inputs, from a laptop playing your iTunes collection. There is always a sense that performance of this nature ought to be something that entails more fiddling around or sacrifices in convenience. The Ara rejects this thinking entirely.

Lossless files

The electrical digital input is if anything, even better. A fair amount of listening was conducted with the unlikely partnership of an £80 PURE i-20 (reviewed in *HFC* 342) connected digitally to the Ara. This duo proved a very happy one. Fed on a diet of AAC lossless files, the Ara loses none of the captivating detail and timing from this compact source and the 21st-century slickness of the iPod interface sits brilliantly with the

CYSTEM BUILDING

22 WATTS is not a massive amount of power, but the Ara does not feel underpowered. As such, speaker choice can include designs with sensitivity in the high 80s.

Some of the designs in this month's Blind-Listening Group Test, such as the Tannoy DC8 and Spendor SP2/3R would offer an easy load and take full advantage of the Emillé's superb performance.

Options for source equipment are made more flexible by the presence of the digital inputs. With an iTunes collection of AAC lossless tracks, the Ara will turn a laptop into a credible source. while products like the Squeezebox Touch will benefit from the SP/Dif input, while offering a superb interface.

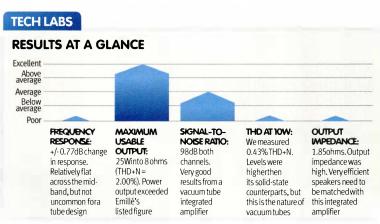
retro tech of the Ara. CD proved equally satisfying.

Superb value

The digital inputs are an interesting feature. If you are using a high-quality standalone CD player, the Ara will have to be considered as a two-input amplifier with a digital board that might prove useful going forward.

If you are considering a more wholesale upgrade to your system, the Ara is superb value for money. If the performance over the analogue inputs is to your liking, the digital inputs offer sound quality comparable to most £1,000 sources and allow the connection of streamers, iPod docks, or a CD player with a digital output.

The Ara is a superb amplifier and the combination of well implemented 'old' technology and latest thinking is one that we like very much and highly recommend. ●



Choice **OUR VERDICT** SOUND QUALITY LIKE: Excellent and engrossing sound coupled **** with a useful set of features VALUE FOR MONEY **DISLIKE:** Limited number **** of analogue inputs, slightly limited poweroutput BUILD QUALITY WESAY: An extremely good $\star\star\star\star$ valve amp in its own right **FEATURES** with unique flexibility of $\star\star\star\star$ digital inputs **OVERALL**

Life partner



Audiovector's 'upgradable' speakers can be improved when funds allow. *Paul Messenger* investigates a unique proposition from Denmark

he Ki-series is relatively new and also relatively inexpensive by Audiovector's standards. The Ki 3s are the sole floorstanding models in a range that also includes a standmount and home cinema oriented variations. But each Ki-series model comes in three versions – Standard, Super and Signature – with superior engineering features as one moves up the ladder.

We've chosen for this review the £1,890 per pair top-of-the-ladder Signature, but a key Audiovector feature is the option to upgrade from the base model to those higher up the hierarchy.

Unconventional performer

All three Ki 3 variations share the same basics, which are themselves somewhat unconventional. The unique upgradeability has already been mentioned, but no less interesting (if a little more common)

is the quarter-wave bass loading this model uses. It's a relatively unusual technique that has something in common with tuned-column and transmission-line loadings, but in this case the shape of the tapered column behind the drivers leans significantly towards horn-loading. A handful of speaker companies have adopted this approach in recent years, the most prominent being Castle Acoustics with its 'twin pipe' models.

The Ki 3s have just the one internal quarter-wave column, which forms a V at the bottom front edge and is created by a partition set at a narrow angle so that it stops well short of the top and roughly bisects the depth. The partition, therefore, creates a rather narrow horn behind the two bass/mid drivers, with a very small 'slot mouth' created between the enclosure base and the plinth.

Three driver two-way

The two identical main drivers are 130mm units, allowing the enclosure

The layout of the tweeter on the Ki 3 Signature is exclusive to this particular model in that it utilises rubber grommets to isolate it mechanically from the cabinet

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Audiovector Ki 3 Signature ORIGIN: Danish

TYPE: Floorstanding 2-way loudspeaker WEIGHT: 15kg DIMENSIONS:

(WxHxD) 140x980x270mm

Features:

- Quarter wave column bass loading
- 1x25mm transparent doped fabric dome tweeter
- 2x130mm woven/ matrix diaphragm bass/mid drivers
- Two pairs socket/ binder terminals

DISTRIBUTION: Henley Designs TELEPHONE: 01235 511166 WEBSITE: audiovector.com to have an exceptionally slim front view. They operate in tandem right up to the 3.2kHz crossover point and feature 90mm diaphragms made from a woven mix of glass and carbon fibres, impregnated, sealed (and damped) within a polymer matrix.

The tweeter has a transparent 25mm woven fabric done, driven from a neodymium magnet with high-viscosity ferro-fluid damping. This Signature version exclusively uses rubber grommets in the mounting to isolate it mechanically from the cabinet above 2.5kHz.

The crossover network is a deliberately simple, minimalist affair, as care is taken to optimise the drivers to make this possible. It's fed

"This is a speaker that does a very good job of dissappearing, sonically speaking... the tight bass is a joy"

from twin terminal pairs, permitting bi-wiring connection or bi-amp drive. The enclosures are nicely finished in a choice of four real-wood veneers (cherry, black ash, rosewood and maple) – a silk white paint finish is available at extra cost.

Besides the decoupling tweeter mounting, the other feature exclusive to the Signature Ki 3 is a so-called Superstand – a neat, if rather small plinth. Nicely shaped and finished in silver, it does extend the stability footprint a little. Crucially, however, it incorporates a leaf spring in the fixing for the front spikes, so mechanically decoupling the speaker from the floor.

Another feature, this time shared with the Super version, is extra reinforcement for the front and back panels. The top half of the front panel, where the drivers are mounted, is laminated with an extra silver-painted panel 8mm thick; the back is laminated by a shaped and much thicker (up to 24mm maximum) panel, again painted silver but extending the full height of the enclosure.

Needing some space

The Ki 3 came with the confident recommendation that it should be used fairly close to a wall, in order to provide some midbass reinforcement. This didn't entirely correlate with our far-field in-room averaged response measurements, which indicated that free space actually gave a marginally



UPGRADEABILITY is the unique feature that characterises all of Audiovector's ranges. In fact, this £1,890 Signature version of the Ki 3 is already fully 'upgraded', as it sits above the £1,400 Super and the £1,090 Standard versions of the Ki 3. The differences between the three stages seem to be concentrated on the mechanicals of the enclosure and the plinth, which makes good sense as these are usually the weakest link in any relatively inexpensive speaker. Both the Super and

Both the Super and Signature models have extra panels that reinforce the front and the back of the enclosure.



flatter overall response. However, wall reinforcement only showed a mild excess and was actually preferred subjectively.

That's probably because the quarter-wave loading seems to be inherently less resonant than the more common reflex ported approach – it certainly sounds that way. Best subjective results under our conditions were obtained with the backs of the speakers about 30mm out from the wall.

The main driving system comprised a Naim NAC552 preamp with NAP500 and NAP135 power amplifiers, driven from Naim CDS3/555PS and Rega Valve Isis CD players, as well as a Magnum Dynalab MD106T FM tuner. Vinyl

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record players included a Linn/Rega hybrid using a Soundsmith Strain Gauge cartridge. Cables were from Naim, Phonosophie, The Chord Company, TM Systems and Vertex AQ.

Smooth operator

First impressions did reveal some limitations, in both bass weight and dynamic expression. But this speaker also shows a smooth and even overall balance, a wide dynamic range and good basic coherence. Stereo imaging is particularly good, with very little evidence of boxy effects, and very fine central focus. Furthermore, while the bass might lack some ultimate weight and scale, it does possess the liveliness and clean, crisp character associated with

THREE OBVIOUS near price floorstanding competitors to Audiovector's Ki 3 are the small two way Totem Sttaf, the rather bigger Spendor A6 and the substantially larger three-way Bowers and Wlkins CM9. All three offer quite distinct sonic characters and to some extent are best suited to different size rooms.

The Audiovector is arguably the most elegant of the four, and like the ultracompact Totem, is probably best suited to relatively small rooms. Both offer smooth and neutral tonal balance, but of the two, the Totem is significantly more laid back.

The Spendor is rather more muscular and delivers a balance that's even more forward than the Audiovector, though again it's quite a smooth operator.

The Bowers & Wilkins CM9 is a real powerhouse and is well capable of filling large spaces, with high sound levels across the full bandwidth. It's clearly the most speaker for the money amongst the four.

Surprisingly perhaps, the closest speaker to the Ki 3 in overall configuration terms is the PMC fact 8 (HFC 327). Both are slim two-way floorstanders with twin small drivers, but different bass loading (quarterwave and transmission line respectively). The PMC is certainly the better speaker, but regrettably it's also more than twice the price!

quarter-wave loading, which is musically more useful.

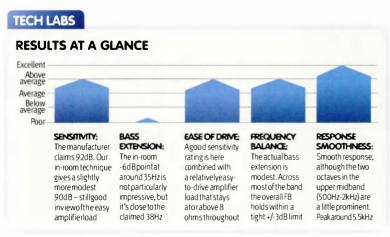
According to the designer, the Ki 3s were designed: "to be used as both traditional hi-fi speakers and as party speakers," and they were equally at home with heavy electronic stuff and more familiar material from English-speaking bands like Tool, System of a Down and Audioslave.

While the Ki 3 shows good loudness capability and handles plenty of power without distress, its mild upper-mid forwardness is happier operating at low and medium volume levels than playing appropriately heavy material at 'party' levels. It can certainly do the latter, but the consequences tend to be an aggressive rather than a comfortable experience.

This is a speaker that does a very good job of disappearing, sonically speaking. It might have certain limitations in terms of dynamic vigour, and doesn't really offer the grip and tension one might find with a larger speaker. It could also do with a little more sweetness and transparency at the top end of the band, but the good enclosure control means that the actual dynamic range and coloration levels are both low.

On balance, Audiovector's Ki 3 is rather impressive. Its super-slim front and suggested near-to-wall location certainly makes it a very attractive and discreet package. The taut, tight and clean bass is a particular joy, underpinning a generally smooth, if somewhat forward tonal balance. The sound is basically free from coloration, with fine stereo imaging.

The only significant criticisms are that the sound is a little small in terms of weight and dynamic expression and can become aggressive when playing at high levels. And a somewhat larger plinth would certainly improve the overall physical stability.



Choice OUR VERDICT SOUND QUALITY LIKE: Has a smooth, forward balance and clean, $\star\star\star\star$ taut bass VALUE FOR MONEY DISLIKE: Lacks some **** weight and dynamic expression. Can become **BUILD QUALITY** aggressive at high levels **** WE SAY: Very attractive and EASE OF DRIVE discreet, with fine stereo **** imagingand low coloration

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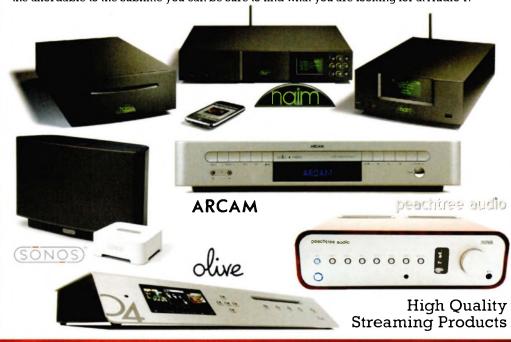
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Cube is no square

Arcam has distilled its audio expertise into a compact iPod system – the rCube. Richard Black asks if this is the ideal office/kitchen set-up?

ll sorts of 'iPod solutions' have popped up in the last few years, responding to the quite astounding popularity of Apple's little devices. Arcam has had docks in its catalogue for a while, but this is something altogether more comprehensive, basically making up a full music system when an iPod is plugged in.

Inside the compact, but quite heavy housing (and yes, it is indeed a cube, 200mm each way) are stereo speakers, amps to drive them and the full iPod dock shenanigans.

bundle. The thought of playing tracks off your iPod or computer anywhere in the house, or the garden, or the garage, is tempting not to mention the opportunities the rCube affords for running an office/kitchen/spare room system. One thing you won't be tempted

All that adds up to a very attractive

to do is carry it very far, as it's surprisingly heavy for its weight, thanks not least to the cast metal frame on which it is based Operation is not always amazingly intuitive either, but one soon gets used to it.

DETAILS

Product: Arcam rCube Origin: UK/China iPod system Weight: 5kg Dimensions:

Features:

- Analogue input

200mm cubed

- Bass boost switch
- Video output (composite or component)
- Wireless input (requires Arcam USB dongle or iPod adaptor)

Distributor: Arcam Telephone: 01223203200

Website. arcam.co.uk

Easy living

Arcam suggests that the rCube will benefit from corner placement, something that's unusual for hi-fi most speakers sound quite horrid if they're too close to a corner. But for a unit like this, with left and right speakers only a hand-span apart and with (deliberately) curtailed bass response, it's a suitable enough position. And having found a corner we enjoyed the results, but we were just as happy with placement against a wall. The only thing here is that bass is just a shade light with bass enhancement (a rear panel switch) off and sometimes rather heavy with it on.

Get-up-and-go

You're unlikely to fret too much about the bass, though, because it's the midrange that makes the best impression here. It is clear, detailed, punchy and very communicative and it makes the rCube instantly likeable. If it has a weakness, it's an unsurprising one in favouring smaller-scale music over glam rock or a symphony orchestra – the largest groups of performers lack some insight and definition, but even here there's lots to like and a degree of get-up-and-go that keeps everything alive.

Convincing performance

Perhaps surprisingly, there's quite good stereo, at least in the near vicinity of the rCube. Further away, even with wall or corner placement, there's less spread to the image, but still a reasonable impression that sound is coming from more than just one spot. Loudness is satisfying in small and medium-size rooms and decent, if a little limited, in larger spaces. Sonically, this is a very convincing bit of convenience audio kit. Only time will tell, though, whether an iPod-based system like this is the perfect luggable source. •

Coola cube

It's a nice concept, if hardly new - the Bowers and Wilkins' Zeppelin is probably the best known example of the breed. But Arcam has come up with some nice features for the rCube which help to single it out. For a start, it includes a battery which can run it for several hours, up to 10

hours of not-too-loud music and six-to-eight hours of quite loud sounds.

There is an external power supply, of course, which charges the internal battery as well as running the unit itself. For portable applications, there's a handy recess behind the dock connector which functions as a carry handle. The cover of the dock connector, when open, doubles as a support for the iPod so it doesn't risk snapping off the connector. And with an optional wireless dongle you can connect the rCube to a media server and play tracks stored on it. If you're really old-fashioned you can even plug an analogue source into the mini-jack at the rear.



Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY $\star\star\star\star$ VALUE FOR MONEY $\star\star\star\star$ **BUILD QUALITY** **** **FEATURES**

LIKE: Impressively capable sonically, with good, clear sound

DISLIKE: Wi-fi connectivity is an optional extra and it could do with a radio tuner

WESAY: If you have a music library on an iPod. this is a great way to enjoy it (almost) anywhere





Cayin and able

Jimmy Hughes auditions newcomer Cayin and its retro-inspired pre/power that's giving the highend establishment a run for its money

ayin is the brand name of Zuhai Spark Electronic Equipment Co. – a Chinese company making good-value, high-end electronic products. The unashamedly retrolooking SP-30S and SP-40M tube pre/power amp is one of its tastier offerings, with the promise of excellent performance at a realistic price.

But, what should one expect from an amplifier like this? It used to be oh-so simple; tube amps sounded rich, warm and friendly, while

80

solid-state types were lean, mean, and bitingly sharp. But can you still rely on the old stereotypical categorisations? Will the Cayin conform to type, or is it a wolf disguised in sheep's clothing?

No hum

The SP-30S is a nice simple preamp built around three tubes -2x 12AU7 and 1x 12AX7. It offers three unbalanced line inputs plus a phono stage. There's a fixed output for recording and two variable outputs.

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Cayin SP-30S and SP-40M

TYPE: Preamp and power amp

WEIGHT: SP-30S 10kg; SP-40M 20kg

DIMENSIONS: SP-30S (WxHxD) 440x125x329mm SP-40M (WxHxD) 400x180x329MM

FEATURES: • (Preamp) Inputs:

- CD, tuner, tape
- Outputs: pre-out, record
- Tubes: 2x12AU7, 1x12AX7
- (Power amp)
- Inputs: 2x A/B, RCA

 Outputs: 4 and 8
- ohm speaker
 Tubes: 4x KT88 EH,
 1x 12AX7, 2x 12AU7
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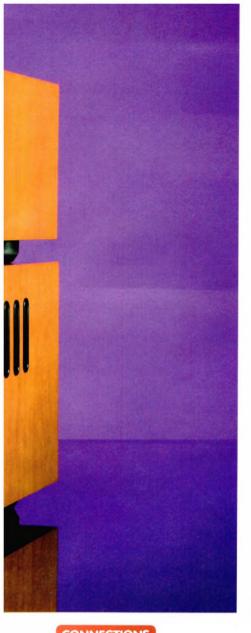
Facilities are minimal; just a volume knob and dual-lever input selector.

It's encouraging to see a phono stage as part of the package – though this is for MM pickups only, with an input sensitivity of 3mV. If you want to use the SP-30S with a low-output MC pickup, you'll need an MC step-up transformer or pre-preamplifier. Noise is pretty low (-68dB) and there's no hum to speak of.

The SP-40M is a stereo power amp based around 4x KT-88 output tubes, producing 40 watts per channel with one per cent distortion at 1kHz. It has a single pair of inputs and a single set of loudspeaker outputs with transformer taps for four ohms and eight ohms. Additional tubes include 2x 12AU7s and 1x 12AX7.

The choice of different loudspeaker output taps is fairly common with transformer-coupled tube amps. It enables you to match the amplifier to your loudspeakers. The 'correct' impedance is the one that gives the loudest volume level. So, if the eight-ohm tap sounds louder than the four-ohm one, that's what you should use – in theory.

Hit Choice MARCH 2011 www.hifichoice.co.uk



However, even with eight-ohm speakers, it's worth trying the four-ohm tap. You'll lose a bit of power, but the sound may have a bit more control – a slightly firmer quality that makes voices and instruments seem better-focused. Used on the four-ohm setting, we noticed precisely this difference with the Impulse H1 horns used for this review.

Fairly beefy

Both pre and power amp are built on a steel chassis/case with a wooden sleeve surround. The preamp circuit features a single mother board, with normal printed circuit tracks. The power amp is hard-wired, which helps improve sound quality.

The brushed aluminium front panels are well-finished and the volume knob is made from solid aluminium giving a classy feel. The wooden case is around 175mm thick and has an attractive semi-gloss lacquer that reminds us of a Japanese Urushi finish.

Internal build quality is good, with minimum amounts of wiring and the use of high- quality components, including an Alps potentiometer. Admittedly, there's nothing to make you gasp with amazement, but neither is there anything to cause disquiet or disappointment. The transformers used seem fairly beefy – the SP-40M weighs in at a



IN THE 1960s when transistors started to replace tubes, the advantages of solid-state seemed overwhelming and decisive.

Claimed benefits included - smaller size, cooler running. longer life, greater reliability, higher output power lower hiss and hum, reduced microphony, and (for power amps) the elimination of the output transformer. Transistor amplifiers also measured better than tube designs - so they had to be 'superior'.

Tube amps had virtually disappeared by the mid 1970s. but slowly made their way back from extinction. Why? Because many discerning listeners preferred their sound. A good tube amp offers a combination of smoothness and bass/treble integration that many solid-state designs struggle to match. They glow in the dark, too.

hefty 20kg – and decent transformers are the key to excellent performance with tube amps. The Cayin is basically a safe tried-and-trusted sort of design. There's nothing fancy or clever about it – the company hasn't attempted to reinvent the wheel here.

Both instruction books contain full schematic diagrams of the amplifier's circuits – a nice 'retro' touch.

Schematics were common in the 1950s and 1960s, when many of those buying hi-fi were electronics engineers who wanted to see what was under the bonnet. It also meant they could service the amplifier themselves, should something fail.

For those into 'retro' looks and styling, Cayin also offers a matching CD player – the SP-CD300 costing around £1,450 – that goes with the SP-30S/SP-40M combination. Cayin

"It doesn't wow you with an arsenal of tricks and effects. It just gives you the music in an intelligible form."

also offers products with more modern styling at price points above and below those occupied by the items reviewed here.

More bite

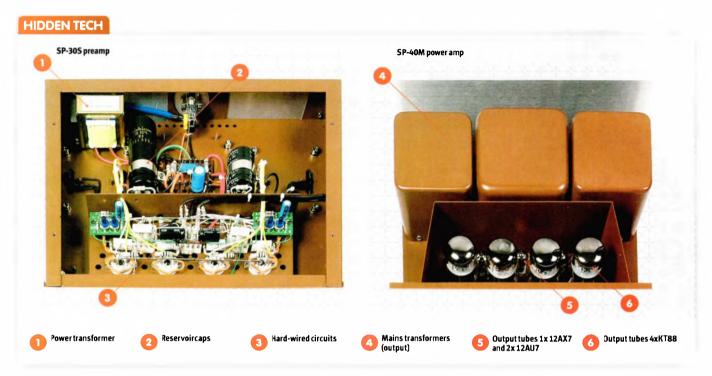
We began by listening to the SP-30S preamp on its own – using it in place of our regular Musical Fidelity kW Pre tube/transistor hybrid. The MF combines valves with solid-state to (hopefully!) deliver the best of both worlds. The Cayin sounds smoother and a mite less bright than the MF, though it isn't soft or unfocused.

While the MF has a bit more bite and attack, the smoothness of the Cayin is both beguiling and deceptive. It's just as detailed and dynamic, albeit with a rounder, more relaxed quality. The musical presentation is wide-ranging and articulate, but not in a manner that draws attention to itself – a 'classic' tube sort of sound.

Some tube preamps produce a very rich euphonic tonality that creates an impression of ambience and space. Unfortunately, this sometimes results in a loss of focus and drive. Although the SP-30S is tonally smooth and open, it has a taut crisp immediacy that keeps the music on its toes – sounding direct and purposeful.

Having established the preamp's sonic signature, we then connected the SP-40M power amp, substituting





it for a Musical Fidelity kW tube/ transistor power amp. The Cayin is less powerful than the MF (40 watts against 750 watts), but subjectively the all-tube design more than held its own at 'normal' volume levels.

The power amp delivers a similar quality of sound to the preamp. It offers comparable smoothness and integration, being slightly less sharp and immediate than the big MF, but nonetheless focused and articulate.

Natural and unexaggerated sums up the sound of the Cayin SP-30S and SP-40M. It's not, perhaps, an immediately impressive amplifier – it doesn't wow you with an arsenal of tricks and effects. It just gives you the music in a balanced and intelligible form. The more we listened to this amplifier, the more we liked it.

With the SP-30S/SP-40M, Cayin

has created something that's very inviting and comfortable to listen to. It's precise, tidy and controlled, yet at the same time doesn't sound bland or boring. It gives you the music cleanly, without adding false spices and colours of its own, while bringing out the natural timbres and tonal subtleties.

The presentation is detailed and informative, yet easy-on-the-ear and very unfatiguing. Being a tube amp, a certain amount of heat is produced – but not excessive amounts. The preamp barely gets warm at all, while the power amp runs surprisingly cool given the use of four KT-88s in a fairly confined space.

At 40 watts, power output is limited, but subjectively the SP-40M punches above its weight and sounds more powerful than its paper specifications might indicate. This is



GOOD TUBE amps. like this Cavin. almost always deliver a smoother more integrated bass/treble balance than comparable solid-state amplifiers. As a generalisation, the latter usually sound sharper, producing crisper transients and more top-end detail. But tube designs tend to have a more integrated bass/treble balance

Transistorised power amps invariably feature a directly coupled output. But tube amps are nearly always transformercoupled. Being direct-coupled improves tightness and control, giving a sharper, leaner sound, Transformer coupling tends to fatten the bass slightly and produce a rounder. . smoother treble.

In the short-term, solid state might be judged more impressive. But over the longer term, tubes seem to grow on you. You're not, perhaps, immediately bowled over, but the more you listen, the more you listen, the more you're entranced.

partly due to the bass, which is firm and solid; full and nicely voluminous. Tonally, there's a smooth natural warmth that creates an impression of fullness and power.

Hot and sexy

The amps represent very good value and make an excellent choice for anyone seeking a good affordable tube amp that offers something special, without costing silly money. Of course, there are dearer, more glamorous alternatives to entice you. But don't overlook what's on offer here.

If certain other brands offer you the sonic equivalent of a seductive femme-fatale, this Cayin represents a loving faithful wife who provides companionship, comfort, support and also (when necessary) a bit of excitement, too! It's an amplifier we could very happily live with. 'Nuff said! ●

TECH LABS RESULTS AT A GLANCE Excellent Above average Average Below Poor MUMIXAM SIGNAL-TO-THD AT 10W: FREQUENCY OUTPUT RESPONSE: USABLE NOISE RATIO: IMPEDANCE: We measured OUTPUT: We measured a (20Hz-20kHz) 0.44% THD+N 2.98 ohms +/-0.2dB variation 46Winto 8 ohms 107dB both Internal distortion Efficient in response from (THD+N=1.0%)channels, which washigherthen speakers Exceed Cavin's the SP-30S areexcellent normal, butwas are a must Wedidnot measurement by results from actually quite to achieve 15%. Verygood noteanyspecific thisstyle good for a vacuum loud SPL's anomalies results! of amplifier tube amplifier



HITChoice MARCH 2011

82



Concert for one

P5 Mobile Hi-Fi Headphones What's it to be? The rush-hour commute, the stuffy office, the queue at the local supermarket? Or the control room at Abbey Road Studios, a box at the Met, the front

row at CBGB in 1976? The noise-isolating P5. It's not a set of headphones. It's a transportation device. **Listen and you'll see.**

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk/p5

The reel deal

A great movie is a lesser one without a killer soundtrack. Many deserve pride of place in your record and CD libraries — and there are plenty of classics out there vying for your hard-earned cash. Disc Doctor **Simon Berkovitch** reveals how to give your music collection Hollywood A-list status. Lights, camera, action!

ince Christmas, if you've popped down your local in a tuxedo and ordered a vodka martini – shaken not stirred, – instead of your usual pint or developed an irrational fear of a psychotic, knife-wielding transvestite interrupting your morning shower, you've probably been bitten by the soundtrack bug.

Cracking movies are all part of the recent festive season and it's the memorable, rousing music of Christmas evergreens that add to their classic status. Think James Bond or *Psych*o and you'll instantly have the classic John Barry and Bernard Herrmann scores running through your head. But, are superb pieces of music like these conspicuous in your LP and CD collections?

The festive season might be a distant memory, but now is the time to update your collection with some of the fantastic music you may have heard while slumped in front of your flatscreen, stuffed like a turkey, last December. If you're a classical buff, for example, the composers gathered together by Stanley Kubrick for his inspirational score to 2001: A Space Odyssey (see A Fistful of Soundtracks top 10) may already be adequately served by your archive, but what about the music from less well-known movies you've enjoyed and are dying to relive on your lovingly assembled hi-fi system?

Readily available

Well, the good news is that soundtrack collectors have never been better served. Many prohibitively expensive vinyl scores – like UK jazz legend Roy Budd's seminal soundtrack to Brit-gangster classic *Get Carter*, for years only available on a rare

Japanese LP before the first reissue on Cinefile in the 90s – are now a click away on CD from Amazon. But, the path of least resistance isn't entirely for us dedicated enthusiasts, is it? Dig a little deeper and you'll discover that the cult of the soundtrack is thriving – from independent labels issuing scores for the first time on CD to reissue labels making classics available once more on gorgeous, heavyweight vinyl. It's not just films, either: the music of some of our favourite TV shows is also waiting to be rediscovered.

This feature aims to point you in the right direction as where to find the cream of the crop of what's currently available. But what about what's unavailable? We can point you in the right direction of how to track down those deleted CDs and LPs, too. And, if you live in the south of England, there's no better place to start than Brighton, spiritual home to the soundtrack of The Who's mod epic, *Quadrophenia*.

The Record Album

Hop off the London train, hustle through the barriers of Brighton's railway station and turn right onto Terminus Road to discover the most comprehensive collection of soundtrack vinyl in the south of England, possibly the UK. Incredibly, the Record Album (therecordalbum. com, tel 01273 323853) has been in business since 1948, proving that record-collecting is anything but a young man's game. The shop is a

treasure trove for enthusiasts of film soundtracks, stage shows, musicals and high-quality classical recordings, lovingly selected by owner George Ginn. He takes pride in stocking only either mint or new, unplayed vinyl – yes, you read that correctly audiophiles. If it's Gil Mellé's brilliant electronic score to 70s sci-fi classic *The Andromeda Strain* – in its super-cool fold-out, hexagonal first-pressing packaging – or the now-deleted vinyl editions of the soundtrack to cult



MUSIC IN-DEPTH: SOUNDTRACKS



"The cult of the soundtrack is thriving – from labels issuing scores for the first time on CD to making classics available on heavyweight vinyl."



A FISTFUL OF SOUNDTRACKS

An unashamedly personal CD selection. All prices stated are from Amazon.co.uk.



PERFORMANCE £3.99

Donald Cammell's 1970 masterpiece, starring Mick Jagger and James Fox, perfectly captures the seedier flip-side of Swinging London. The music (and the film) from the Stones to the The Last Poets to Jack Nietzche's Moog is a dark trip from start to finish.



THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE £14.50

Ennio Morricone lent his deft touch to countless movies and this is one of his best. The soundtrack to a tense Dario Argento thriller, it's one of Morricone's more psychedelic outings.



WITHNAIL AND 1 £5.99

Included in the 20th anniversary DVC)

The real meat on this album comes courtesy of Jimi Hendrix and King Curtis. Hendrix's *All Along The Watchtower* is a musical powerhouse, but it's Curtis' version of Procol Harum's *A Whiter Shade of Pale* that stirs the emotions.



IN THE SHADOW OF THE SUN £10

Cult filmmaker Derek Jarman's pairing with Throbbing Gristle, pioneers of Industrial music, results in his most satisfying project. TG's improvised score is challenging, haunting and meditative.



SUPERFLY £16.62

(Deluxe double disc edition)

Superfly (composer Curtis Mayfield) is chock-full of killer grooves and weighty social commentary, with classics Freddie's Dead, Pusherman and the eponymous title track deserving legendary status.



THE WICKER MAN £9.73

(Silva Screen edition)

The holy grail of acid folk soundtracks is now readily available on CD. Relive those memories of a naked, dancing Britt Ekland from the movie's infamous bedroom scene to warm those cold, winter evenings.



2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY £4.99

From Ligeti's eerie Almospheres and Khatchaturian's melancholy Gayaneh Ballet Suite to the opening strains of Also Sprach Zarathustra, op. 30, this album is best viewed as a taster for hitherto unexplored worlds of classical music.



GET CARTER £6.93

The best British gangster movie also has the finest soundtrack, courtesy of Mr Roy Budd. The fast cut title sequence of Michael Caine travelling north to revenge his murdered brother, is a perfect union of sound and vision.



BLOW-UP £4.99

A Swinging London movie given the arthouse treatment by Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni, with a soundtrack written by jazz musician Herbie Hancock may sound a mish-mash on paper, but both film and soundtrack deliver the goods.



TRON LEGACY £8.99

The reboot of Disney's SF movie *Tron* brings us bang up to date. The new version has received mixed reviews, but Daft Punk's electronic score is rightly hailed as another superb contribution to their groundbreaking catalogue.

MUSIC IN-DEPTH: SOUNDTRACKS



chiller The Wicker Man, George is definitely the man to go to. The website is divided into categories - from Major Film Composers to Westerns and plenty in between - with both prices and availability. Have your chequebook at the ready, mind George is old school, so no PayPal here.

Widen the net

Naturally, surfing the net makes tracking down vinyl - and CD - obscurities so much easier. As previous features have outlined, auction sites like eBay (ebay.co.uk) and set sale sites like Discogs (discogs.com) and Eil. com, open up the sellers and buyers' market to a global audience. All you need is a PayPal account and, in some cases, a healthy bank balance. Ultimately, it's all about the music, not the format, so if CD or virgin vinyl reissues suit you fine, high street stores like HMV and independent record retailers generally have dedicated, well-stocked sections for film and TV soundtracks.

Largely forgettable Hollywood blockbusters inevitably have a soundtrack CD as part of the promotional machine and you'll find plenty of these cluttering the high street racks, too. In these cases, the phrase 'original soundtrack' rarely means that, although groups like Air and Daft Punk buck the trend (See A Fistful of Soundtracks, p85).

To see what else is out there? Well, soundtrackcollector.com is a useful port of

call. Like Discogs, the HMEHIND KING CURTE

website, searchable by title, label or composer, provides you with a list of all the issues and variants of a particular soundtrack. Similarly, IMDb, The Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) tells you if a soundtrack is currently available. Also worthy of mention is American website buysoundtrax.com, with its detailed search capabilities and links to relevant retailers.

Passionate labels

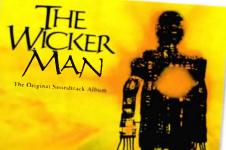
Ultimately, the future - and past - of the soundtrack is secure, thanks to the dedicated digging of passionate labels - run first and foremost by music obsessives. More obscure soundtracks - often containing the more adventurous, desirable scores - are being made available again and some even seeing the light of day for the first time. It's arguable that Trunk (trunkrecords.com) opened the floodgates. The indie label, run by Jonny Trunk, has an enviable roster, having put out buried treasure like The Wicker Man, Kes, Deep Throat and Blood on Satan's Claw, as well as soundtracks to cult UK TV, such as The Tomorrow People (featuring the work of Delia Derbyshire,

"The phrase 'original soundtrack' rarely means that, although groups like Daft Punk buck the trend."

responsible for the electronic realisation of Ron Grainer's theme to Doctor Who), UFO and even the Clangers. A doff of the trilby also goes to labels Finders Keepers (finderskeepersrecords.com) and Moscovitch Music (myspace.com/ moscovitchmusic) for equally inspired underground selections.

More into downloads these days? Silva Screen (silvascreen.co.uk) caters to your taste. From classic series like The Prisoner and Space 1999, to contemporary TV such as the reboot of Doctor Who and its spin-off series Torchwood, the label not only has music CDs up for grabs, but also downloads - either in the form of individual, high bitrate MP3s or entire albums. Naturally, Apple's iTunes store, Boomkat and Amazon MP3 also cater to the needs of the resolutely 21st century soundtrack collector.

But whatever your format of choice, there's plenty out there to discover and enhance your collection with, so drop the needle or press play, settle back and remind yourself that a classic soundtrack's for life, not just for Christmas. •



"NO, MR BOND, I EXPECT YOU TO BUY"

Five of 007's most sought-after vinyl outings. Expect to pay the following prices for records in mint or near-mint condition



DR. NO £50 - £60

lapanese double EP, United Artists LSS-505-6 (1962)

The first official Bond outing spawned this unusual format issue from the Far East. Featuring eight tracks (two thirds of the entire soundtrack LP), it was

housed in a gatefold sleeve featuring an alternative film image to the UK and US releases and rarely surfaces for sale in any condition.



FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

LIK stereo LP United Artists SULP 1052 (1963)

Stereo was a specialist market in the UK until the late 60s. Consequently, stereo issues of LPs (and not all were issued thus) cost more than their

mono counterparts as most people didn't have the expensive equipment needed to play them on, hence the scarcity of the first few Bond soundtracks in this format.



GOLDFINGER

£30 - £35 UK stereo LP, United Artists SULP 1076 (1963)

Perhaps the definitive Bond film and certainly the most dynamic John Barry Bond score, Again, it's the UK stereo edition that proves elusive, with US stereo copies being

easier to find. The US release also differs somewhat omitting three tracks in favour of a beat instrumental version of the title track missing from the UK version



CASINO ROYALE

UK LP, RCA Victor RD/SF 7874

This unofficial 007 movie, dismissed by many aficionados, was plagued by production and cast problems and featured several Bonds – Peter Sellers (who quit midway)

and Woody Allen among them. In the absence of Barry, Burt Bacharach took the reins for an enjoyable soundtrack, the highlight of which is Dusty Springfield's majestic reading of The Look Of Love.



AL SERVICO **SECRETO DE SU MAJESTAD**

Spanish EP, Spain Hispayox/ UA, Hu 067-153 (1965)

EPs were virtually extinct in the UK by the late 60s, so this rare Spanish issue had no domestic equivalent. Sporting an

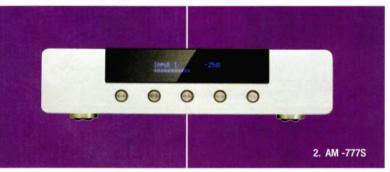
illustration of one-off Bond George Lazenby skiing, it featured four tracks from On Her Majesty's Secret Service, including Louis Armstrong's unforgettable We Have All



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(over 65) £6.00. **Two Day Ticket** Adults £15; Students and Senior Citizens £10. Accompanied children under 16 free.

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NEWS

The Show is known as THE place to see and hear all the latest products. Keep checking the website as news will be added on a weekly basis.



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B&W - UK launch of the new Zeppelin Air.

AUDIOLAB - showing the 8200 series.

ELECTROCOMPANIET - launch of the Prelude PD1 Dac.

NAIM - showing the full Ovator line up for the first time with the Ovator S-600 and S-400 on demonstration.

PMC - see and hear the beautifully proportioned fact.3



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- UK debut of the MCR-550 micro component system.

For the very latest information please visit www.bristolshow.co.uk

There are also many new brands making their first appearance at the Show!

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90 ₋ Fela Kuti Complete Works



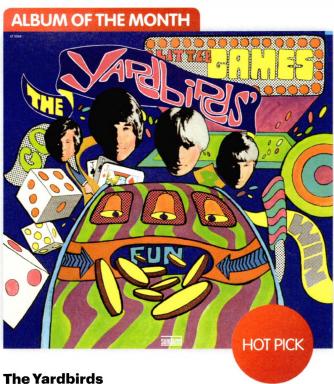
91_Dub Colossus Dub Will Tear Us Apart



91_Gustav Mahler Symphony No 3

Musicreviews

Hi-Fi Choice's pick of the latest high-quality music releases



Little Games

sundazed.com

Remastered CD/LP from original UK mono masters

JIMMY PAGE'S one and only album as a Yardbird was produced by Mickie Most in London's De Lane Lea studios in 1967and is one of pop psychedelia's great curiosities. Only granted a UK release in the 1970s on EMI's budget label Starline, it contains some great rock music which blueprinted the entire Led Zeppelin canon and more besides.

Page's tenure with the mighty Yardbirds was short, but eventful. Having provided a revolving door for both Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck, the Yardbirds' Page period produced some of their best blues and some of the greatest highs and lows of their career.

In June of 1966, Page joined on bass to replace departing Paul Samwell-Smith. By October both he and Jeff Beck produced the best single of their 1960s career Happenings Ten Years Time Ago, with its scintillating twin Fender guitar interplay scored as one of psychedelia's greatest moments. This period also saw The Yardbirds joining legendary director Michelangelo Antonioni as he filmed Swinging London for his box-office 1967 smash Blow Up. First choice, The Who, had turned down Antonioni's offer and The Velvet Underground were denied entry visas because of their reputation. So it fell to Page and Beck to burn up the film stage with an explosive 'Stroll On'.

On a subsequent American tour things came to a head with Beck who was sacked after several noshows at gigs.

This left Page, vocalist Keith Relf, rhythm guitarist Chris Dreja and

"The Yardbird's Page period produced some of their best blues."

drummer Jim McCarty to cook up something in the studio with producer Mickie Most. Immediately there was a schism between Most's pop sensibilities and the band's more experimental leanings.

Page, now experimenting with wah-wah pedal and violin bow wanted to extend the blues while Relf and McCarty wanted more psychedelia and weirdness. Most excluded both Dreja and McCarty from the title track and first single from the album. McCarty was in fact absent for most of the twomonth sessions due to ill health. The line-up was augmented by Clem Cattini (drums), John Paul Jones (bass, cello and string arrangements) and the illustrious Nicky Hopkins on keyboards.

The album emerged as a mixed bag of acoustic folk with *White*

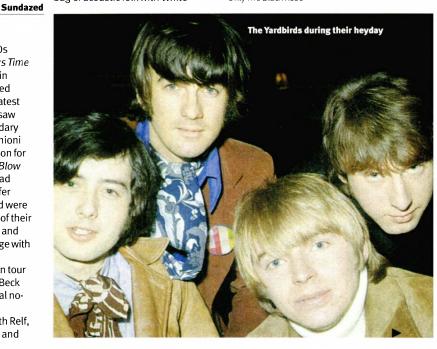
Summer (Page's superb version of the Irish folk classic She Moved Through The Fair, destined to become a live Zeppelin favourite); Relf's medieval balladic drone Only The Black Rose, the psychedelia of Glimpses and out and out rockers like Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, plus plenty of bluesier numbers.

Perhaps, because of its eclecticism, the album sank like a stone on its US release in July 1967. Page then hired Peter Grant to break the group in America but to no avail. Tour after tour followed until by July 1968 in Luton the band's spring had finally uncoiled. By Sept 1968, Page had formed Led Zeppelin and the rest, as, they say, is history.

Little Games was re-issued on CD and vinyl several times, a 1991 EMI version showcases lots of extra tracks on both records and CD, but this is the first time we get the superior mono mix remastered with only two quality bonus tracks and it's all the better for it. MP

Standout tracks: White Summer;
Glimpses; Tinker Tailor Soldier Sailor;
Only The Black Rose

89



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Musicreviews



Fela Kuti

The Complete Works

wrasserecords.com

Wrasse

26 CD plus DVD box set

THE SHEER NUMBER of Fela Kuti's records, their generally high consistency and the relatively small stylistic variation once he'd settled into his simmering trademark Afrobeat groove, have always made it hard to nominate the best starting point to his music.

Well here's one solution – you don't have to choose at all in this collection that encompasses a staggering 46 original LP releases over a 20-year period from the late 1960s onwards

From the recordings with his early band Koola Lobitos, through the 1969 funk-influenced Los Angeles sessions and on through the majestic Nigerian output recorded with his bands Africa 70 and Egypt 80, there's a vibrant energy that makes this vast collection function as a cohesive body of work.

Just as you'd want all nine Beethoven symphonies and every Beatles album rather than edited highlights, there's a compelling logic that says yes, you really do need it all. **NW Standout tracks:** Zombie; Lady; Shakara



90



Suede

The Best Of Suede

suede.co.uk

★★★★ Ministry Of Sound

2-CDs

AT THEIR BEST, Suede encapsulated everything that was most vital about Britpop. This 35-track compilation of singles and album tracks might have been better as a single disc, for all the later material confirms that Brett Anderson's song-writing was neverthe same after guitarist Bernard Butler left in 1996. But if any of today's indie guitar bands released anything a fraction as good as Animal Nitrate or Trash, they'd be hailed as the future of rock 'n' roll.

There's a frenzied, wild glory to early Suede that may well have been drug-fuelled, but almost 20 years on still sounds well-nigh irresistible. Anderson created something fresh and unique, even if it was all too short-lived. **NW Standout tracks:** Animal Nitrate; Metal Mickey; The Wild Ones



Jayhawks

Hollywood Town Hall

sonymusic.co.uk

★★★★ American/Sony

CD

ORIGINALLY RELEASED in

1992, the career-defining third album by the Minneapolis country-rockers cut through the noise of grunge hanging heavy in the ether at the time with its crisp, crafted songs to lay the groundwork for the alt.country/Americana revival which followed. The ten remastered songs are bolstered by five unreleased bonus tracks from the same sessions.

Country, folk and heartland roots-rock combine in perfect calibration. The chiming guitars and exquisite harmonies make the Jayhawks sound like the natural heirs to the Eagles, but George Drakoulias's smooth production never tends to blandness by retaining a rougherhewn, honky-tonk edge. **NW**Standout tracks: Waiting for The Sun; Take Me with You (When You Go); Settled Down Like Rain

Franz Schubert Winterreise Peter Harvey darifone Gary Copper plane



Franz Schubert

Winterreise Opus 89

★★★★ Linn Records

CD/SACD multichannel hybrid

THESE 24 SONGS form the second setting of poems by Wilhelm Muller, the first being Die schöne Müllerin. These are love songs, but express the emotions of poignancy and loss and require the highest level of interpretive power to work properly. They are almost unbearably sad and there is no point in pretending they qualify as easy listening.

This is a work that has been widely recorded, but this performance can hold its head up with the best of the competition. It is simply flawlessly and powerfully expressive. And the slightly softer sound of the fortepiano seems a perfect fit for the dynamics of the music. Another great recording from the consistently excellent Linn stable. **AG**

Standout track: Der Linhdenboum

AUDIOPHILE VINYL

Eric Bibb Friends purepleasurerecords.com



* * Telarc/Pure Pleasure

180g

THE 'FRIENDS' referred to in this gatefold double album's title are musicians who accompany Bibb on the 15 assembled tracks. Some are well known like Taj Mahal, while others are respected artists with less mainstream profiles. It's an interesting selection of talented people, including two exceptional Malian players in Djelimady Tounkara on guitar and the fabulous Mamadou Diabate on kora, as well as blues harp king Charlie Musselwhite and Odetta, the folk singer who died a year after this recording.

Bibb himself provides a warm, relaxed blues vibe that seems to work well with the quite diverse contributions of his partners. Highlights include Harry Manx's mohan

veena playing, Taj Mahal's singing and Byron Myhre's fiddle. It's all wholesome and often rootsy stuff that'll make your system purr.

The recording, made originally by Telarc, is clearly modern and high quality, because it has plenty of space and a luxurious feel, but it also has enough grit to keep it natural. It's a slightly thick, warm sound, but is very rich, so it can make a system sound a lot more expensive than it is – which can't be a bad thing for the asking price. JK Standout tracks: For You; Kulanjan/Sebastian's Tune

HFF Chaice MARCH 2011 www.hifichoice.co.uk



Ravel

Complete Piano Solo Works

prestoclassical.co.uk

Triton

2-CD/SACD multichannel hybrid

ALTHOUGH PRIMARILY

impressionistic, with clear parallels to Debussy, there is also an obvious link to the music of Satie, with which Ravel shares many rhythmic ideas and idiosyncrasies. The playing on this set is assured, the multichannel recording is sensitive and unusually three-dimensional in feel.

This is a valuable set, not just because it has all Ravel's solo piano pieces in chronological order, but for its interpretive strengths. Abdel El Rahmann's performances are fully up to the frequently strenuous demands of the scores. There is no false brilliance here, none of the flashiness and false exuberance that mars some Ravel interpretations. **AG**Standout track: Pavanne pour une infant defunte



The Soft Boys

Underwater Moonlight

veproc.com

Yep Roc

CD

OF ALL THE LATE 1970s'

post-punk rush inspired by vintage English psychedelia, its greatest flowering was *Underwater Moonlight* from 1980. From the arresting luminous cover, to a form of minimal, still punky, rock music bedecked with sitars, strings and piercing guitar solos inside, it was all apiece.

Moreover, the band hailed from Cambridge and was led by the charismatic Robyn Hitchcock, whose way with a surrealistic lyric was apt to root youtothespot. The Seligman/ Windsor rhythm section never disappoints and Kimberly Rew's crazy frenetic guitar chops are a perfect foil to Hitchcock's manic intensity. MP

Standout tracks: Positive Vibrations; Insanely Jealous; You'll Have To Go Sideways; Underwater Moonlight



Solomon Burke & De Dijk

Hold On Tight

universal music.com

±±±±

One/Universal

CD

THE LATE, GREAT soul singer Solomon Burke's last album was with long-standing Dutch soul band De Dijk. There's no hint of impending mortality in these life-filled tunes however and it's not everyone who can imbue a song called Text Me, with all the warmth and longing of a heart-wrenched confession.

Recorded in Brussels in 2009, the sound is clean and airy, but there's enough dirt in the cracks to keep it more than just interesting. Packed with slinky Hammond grooves and country-rock stompers, with just a smattering of the sort of honky tonk filigree familiar from his many appearances on Jools Holland's TV show, it's a worthy last effort by the self-styled 'king of rock and soul'. **DO**

Standout tracks: Text me

HOT PICK

HIGH-RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS

Dub Colossus

Dub Will Tear Us Apart

bowers-wilkins.co.uk

Real World/B&W

24-bit/48kHz stereo



THIS EXUBERANT combination of traditional Ethiopian music andreggae rhythms is underpinned by

weighty, dub-style drum and bass lines, interspersed with dynamic piano interjections, courtesy of Samuel Yirga. Much of the music has a subliminal familiarity, though the cover of Althea & Donna's 1977 hit *Uptown Top Ranking*, will jog a few memories.

The 24-bit recording reveals glorious detailing on the instrumentation and particularly on the vocals. And, despite the quantity of information in the mix, it never overwhelms or detracts from the flow of the music and does not interfere with its all-important groove. MS

Standout tracks: Dub Will Tear Us Apart; Wev Fikir

Digitonal

Save Your Light For Darker Days

linnrecords.com

Linn Records

24-bit/44.1kHz stereo



EVEN IF THE thought of ambient electronic music conjures visions of a lift interior, there is no need to shy

away from this album. Digitonal's music combines gently persuasive melodies, minimalist scale and neo-classical structural elements with contemporary instrumentation and is anything but bland or tedious.

The 24-bit recording does a fine job of revealing what is happening in the outwardly minimalist mixes and shows that, contrary to what one might expect, there are many subtle strands bolstering the lead instrument. Listen to the Durutti Column-esque After The First Death, to hear how ingeniously this music is structured and savour the way in which it progresses. MS

Standout tracks: 93 Years On; After The First Death

BLU-RAY DVD

Gustav Mahler Symphony No3 in D minor mediciarts.co.uk



★★★★ Medici Arts

Full HD 1080i 16:9 video, PCM 2.1 and PCM 5.1 channel audio

THE THIRD SYMPHONY is one of the longest in Mahler's canon and manages to exquisitely combine both very large scale and intimate

chamber-like moments into its structure.

This concert from the Lucerne Festival in 2007 is distinguished by the exquisite song Sehr Langsam and the uniquely quirky following movement Lustig im Tempo Und Keck im Ausdruck, which includes both boy's and women's choirs.

If this performance can be said to belong to any one party, it is the conductor Claudio Abbado. The ad-hoc Lucerne Festival Orchestra is made from players handpicked by Abbado and reflects his vision of a performing

group with the sensibilities of a chamber group. Indeed a number of the players are orchestral leaders from other orchestras or are chamber players themselves - which helps explain the litheness and vitality of the performance. Or maybe it is Abbado's noble, Romanesque visage and his unqualified affinity with the music of Mahler, which has made him arguably the leading modern Mahler interpreter. This disc is an unqualified success. We're only sorry we weren't there. AG

Standout track: Sehr Langsam

Poshand bucks

It's the best-looking hi-fi in the world and as **Jimmy Hughes** discovers, the luxurious big Macs sound every bit as good as they look

hat determines our hi-fi purchases? Brand? Sound quality? Price? Actually, for many men, it's something else. WAF stands for Wife Acceptance Factor – and sadly, it's more influential than great sound or rave reviews. Like falling foul of Sepp Blatter, a poor rating on the old WAFometer is absolutely deadly...

Well, maybe. McIntosh's distinctive science-lab styling kinda sticks two fingers up at all that. Its kit goes beyond taste or fashion – even the dreaded WAF. A McIntosh bellows hi-fidelity at you. It's a stark uncompromising macho statement, like a big Harley Davidson. There's nothing 'girly' about it.

McIntosh is, perhaps, the ultimate in retro. Though describing McIntosh as 'retro', is a bit like calling Lady Gaga outrageous, or Bill Gates rich; while true, it verges on understatement. McIntosh looked 'vintage' forty years ago! A living legend from the mythic days of hi-fi's Golden Age, it's something you either love or hate.

Us? We absolutely adore the McIntosh ethos. An MA6600 integrated makes any red-blooded audiophile feel alive; makes you want to divorce the wife and start listening to music – loud. Those big, sexy VU meters and the illuminated glass display are pure audio pornography. This is high-end hi-fi as it ought to be; big, bold and sassy.

Big Mac

It's heavy, too. The amp weighs in at a massive 34kg (75Ilbs) – an amazing figure for an integrated amplifier. Likewise, the Deco 8 speakers tip the scales at a herniainducing 40kg (88lbs). The dense Decolam cabinet explains the weight of the loudspeakers, but what makes the amplifier so heavy? In a word; transformers – big ones!

transformers – big ones!

Not only has McIntosh used a massive power transformer, the loudspeaker outputs are transformer-coupled. While transformer-coupling is common with tube amps, it's highly unusual in a transistor design. Indeed, historically, a principle justification for solid-state over valves was the elimination of the output transformer. This enabled direct coupling to the speakers. Yet, there's no doubt that some of the sonic charm of tube amps derives from them being transformer-coupled.

"Those sexy VU meters and the illuminated glass display are pure audio pornography."

With the MA6600, McIntosh use auto-transformers (autoformers), which have single (rather than split primary and secondary) windings and, therefore, do not provide isolation

So, strictly speaking, the MA6600 is not transformer-coupled the way a tube amp is. The MA6600 has speaker output terminals for two-ohm, four-ohm and eight-ohm speakers and for best results, you need the right match. Like transformer-coupled tube amps, the correct match is the one that gives the greatest loudness.

But, why does the MA6600 use autoformers? Doing so protects the output stage from the vicissitudes of the loudspeaker crossover and prevents excessive current being drawn where the impedance drops to

COMPONENTS



MCINTOSH MCD301
INTEGRATED SACD/CD
PLAYER £4,709

Two-channel solid-state SACD/ CD player with fixed and variable balanced and unbalanced outputs



2 MCINTOSH MA6600 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £6,657

Solid-state design with 200W output, and autoformer-coupled loudspeaker outputs. Inputs for phono (MM only) and five line inputs, plus one set of balanced inputs via XLRs. Optional tuner module available. Bass and treble tone controls; adjustable input sensitivity; stereo balance adjustment



ART LOUDSPEAKERS
DECO 8 SIGNATURE
LOUDSPEAKER £10,762

Two-way reflex floorstanders with rear-facing port. Decolam cabinet – available in a wide choice of colours. 220mm SEAS treated paper bass/mid driver and 27mm SEAS Crescendo tweeter. WBT Platinum binding posts







LEFT: An artful companion from Scotland RIGHT: 34kgs and 200 watts. Say no more BELOW: The MCD301 is a very fine way to enjoy CD While the MA6600 might look like something from the 1950s, under the bonnet it's quite high-tech. The front panel is deceptively simple; multi-task knobs hide functions like bass and treble tone controls, plus the option of altering the gain of individual inputs by +/-6dB for level matching between different source components.

There's a phono stage for turntable (MM only), a headphone socket, plus a pair of balanced inputs via XLRs. There's also an optional tuner module that fits into a space on the back, making the MA6600 the first receiver to be made by McIntosh since the mid 1990s. So we're looking at a highly adaptable versatile unit here.

The MCD301 offers playback of standard Red Book CDs – or SACDs in twin-channel stereo only. It's a slightly simpler cheaper alternative to McIntosh's £7,169 flagship MCD500, that we recently drooled over in *The Collection 2010* and offers maybe 70 per cent of the more expensive player's performance for about £2,000 less.

It offers separate fixed and variable single-ended outputs, via RCA phono sockets, or balanced outputs via XLRs, but there's no USB port. Unexpectedly, the variable outputs have about 6dB extra output over the fixed ones and while the latter sounds a shade cleaner, the former produce a slightly bigger more projected sound.

very low values. As a result, McIntosh claims the MA6600 gives you all the power you paid for.

The effects on sound quality are difficult to gauge, but (typically) transformer-coupling creates a more evenly balanced bass and treble extremes, as well as subjectively improving inner clarity and focus. Certainly, we felt the MA6600 displayed such qualities.

Holographic quality

The MA6600 delivers an unusually firm and solidly focused musical presentation. It sounds very open and clean, with better-than-average depth and dynamic separation.

Tonally, the sound is refined, smooth and well balanced – definitely not over-bright, yet at the same time crisp, detailed, and incisive.

There's also a 3D holographic quality, creating an impression of width and depth. The amp offers a meaty 200-watt output and sounds solid and powerful. Even at moderate volume levels, the music feels weighty and full bodied, with strong room-filling presence – a consequence, perhaps, of those autoformers.

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Comparing balanced with singleended, we noticed no sonic difference to speak of and no change in output level. Usually, balanced is +3dB to +6dB louder, but not here. Balanced operation sounds a tad more open than unbalanced, but the difference is very slight and probably down to the cables used.

Compared to many CD/SACD players, the MCD301 is quite rapid when it comes to disc-reading and track access. If you go from CD to SACD (or vice-versa) the player takes a few seconds to work out what sort of disc it has, but operationally, the MCD301 is (relatively) fast and responsive.

Mechanically, it's extremely quiet too. A gentle whirr can just be heard with an ear close to the disc drawer, but this sound becomes virtually inaudible once you're a metre or so back. The whirr is about the same, regardless of whether you're playing CDs or SACDs and there are no irksome scraping or ticking noises.

Build quality is very good – not quite as lavish as the MCD500, but certainly well made with a classy metal disc drawer. Both amp and player come with remote control handsets, but disappointingly, you can't operate both pieces of equipment from the same handset, despite their outward similarity.

Art Loudspeakers' Deco 8 Signature is a high-quality, two-way reflex design with a sensitivity of 89dB/W. While the 200-watt output MA6600 should be more than sufficient, these are power-hungry speakers that invite you to play music at realistic levels. For those with extra cash, the 250-watt MA7000 should also be considered.

The art of noise for speakers

The cabinets are made from a proprietary material called Decolam. It's a hard, dense substance that offers exceptional rigidity and very low resonance – constructed from separate 'ribs' and internally braced for extra strength. There are three versions; Standard, Signature and Silver, plus a huge range of colour options.

The differences relate to crossover components and internal wiring. Our review model was the Signature (also called Level 2), which feature Jensen copper foil caps and inductors and Kondo KSL Spc copper wiring and it's possible to have existing Deco 8s factory-upgraded to the next level.

Detailed and immediate, yet well balanced and integrated, these speakers sound clean and controlled – smooth, open, and neutral. The use of dense rigid Decolam ensures a sound free from unwanted resonance and false cabinet warmth. The result isn't always beguiling, but it's certainly truthful and engaging.

Sensitivity is 89dB/1W/1m and clarity is unusually good; the ability to keep all the disparate strands separate and distinctive at high-volume levels is exceptional. You can follow individual voices and instruments in complex pieces with great ease. At the same time, the Deco 8 Signature sounds very cohesive and coherent.

Bass goes fairly deep, but it's the sort of bass that isn't-there-till-it's-there; the sound isn't obviously 'bassy'. Overall, the impression is of a crisp, forward, nimble presentation that's detailed and immediate, rather than warm, laidback and full. The bottom-end is lean and articulate –



DISTRIBUTOR: Jordan Acoustics TELEPHONE: 0800 121 4771/2 WEBSITES: mcintoshlabs.com Joudspeaker-art.com though low organ pedals have surprising heft.

It's a man thing

Unsurprisingly, SACD sources give the best results, yielding a sound that oozes clean clarity and subtle fine detail. The Deco 8 speakers are impressively free from overhang and you really get a sense of this when listening to a good SACD. At the same time, the best CDs weren't too far behind.

The MA6600 amplifier is rather special. Sonically, it has a definite extra 'something' you don't often encounter – certainly not from solid-state amplifiers; clarity and separation, plus a firm, solid, focussed quality.

The MCD301 is capable of delivering excellent results from conventional CDs and SACDs and remains a very fine player in its own right – one that more than holds its own here.

The Art Loudspeakers' Deco 8 Signature delivers a very lucid, open and refined sound, notable for their exceptional control and outstanding clarity. Bass capability is very good down to about 40Hz. Imaging is crisp and precise, with excellent projection of fine detail.

Summing up, it would be a crime against humanity if the dreaded WAF stopped you owning a hi-fi system like this. You're only old once, so dive-in; bite the bullet; throw caution to the wind. Recession? What Recession? C'mon; haven't you always wanted a Big Mac with illuminated VU meters?

If your wife complains, just tell her it's a Man thing; something blokes have to do and much safer and less embarrassing, than buying a Harley.

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Help&advice

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YOUR EXPERTS



PAUL MESSENGER **EXPERTISE:** LOUDSPEAKERS

HAVING WORKED on both sides of the audio industry for over 30 years, as loudspeaker designer and reviewer, Paul is ideally placed to offer thorough, in-depth analysis of every speaker reviewed, as well as cutting-edge developments in the field.



JIMMY HUGHES

EXPERTISE: SYSTEM OPTIMISATION

AS EVERY audiophile knows, there's so much more to getting a system to sing than $% \left(t\right) =\left(t\right) \left(t\right)$ merely throwing components together. Jimmy Hughes has spent 40 years tweaking and optimising systems, as well as voraciously collecting records.



RICHARD BLACK EXPERTISE: TECHNOLOGY

WRITING EXCLUSIVELY for HFC, Richard brings his experience as a successful musician and recording engineer to bear in our rigorous Blind-Listening Group Test. As our technical consultant. Richard is the authority on HFC's test and measurement.



ED SELLEY EXPERTISE: DIGITAL AUDIO

RESIDENT IN the audio industry for over a decade. Ed has considerable experience of both CD and SACD formats on disc, as well as an increasing personal interest in streamed high-resolution audio and network based systems.



ALVIN GOLD EXPERTISE: HIGH-END

HAVING WRITTEN for a huge range of magazines, both internationally and in Britain, Alvin has a very full 30 years of reviewing under his belt. A guru of all component types, he's now extending his expertise by building PCs for audio too.



JASON KENNEDY **EXPERTISE: TURNTABLES**

ANOTHER EDITOR, Jason opted to become a freelance contributor when he relinquished the helm of HFC after 17 years on the magazine. A hi-fi addict since his twenties. Jason fell for the beauty of vinyl and has

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QUESTION OF THE MONTH

After purchasing a pair of Grado SR325is, the headphone socket on my Cambridge 840A is being shown up a little. What are my options up to £500 for a headphone amp?

Edward Parsons, via email



fans of the £115 Creek OBH-11 and £235 Graham Slee Novo (both tested in HFC 314) that are less expensive, but would still offer increased performance. The Pro-Ject Headbox SE could also be worth a look, as we have liked the smaller Pro-Ject incredible detail retrieval. We are also headphone amplifiers in the past.



Constant craving

I have been a keen user of Arcam over the years. My system consists of an Arcam FMJ CD37, C31, P35 (a pair set in Mono, HF) P1s (pair LF). I am using Atlas Elektra/ Ichor cabling throughout the system. I have an IsoTek Titan GII and a Isol-8 Powerline Axis for mains conditioning.

The speakers I'm currently using are Usher Mini Dancer Two floorstanders, in a room 16x14x11 feet. As delighted as I am with this set-up, I am craving more resolution and detail for my predominately jazz-based CD collection.

As good as the CD37 is, I am toying with the idea of replacing it with the likes of Krell's new S-350A or Moon's CD3.3, which I feel may give me these qualities as well as a tighter and deeper bass, and more defined treble for the Usher's Beryllium tweeters. I could spend up to £3,000 to achieve this.

David Walsh, via email

Your system seems to be a well-balanced collection of equipment and we agree that the CD might be the best place to start looking for improvement. The Krell (HFC 341) impressed us with the trademark low end being entirely in place and there is no question it will offer more insight into recordings than



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the Arcam. The Moon (HFC 321) is less propulsive, but will extract incredible detail from recordings. Both players offer digital inputs which give you a useful level of

future-proofing as well.

Another consideration would be to retain the Arcam and look at an external DAC. Something like the Bryston BDA-1 (HFC 316) will offer similar levels of insight and detail, but at a saving over the all-in-one players. You may even find that one of our triumvirate of American DAC's tested in HFC 341 at the £800-£1,000 price point could offer the performance that you are looking for, albeit with less inputs and outputs.

Cyrus upgrades

I would appreciate some guidance please. I have been thinking for sometime of updating my Cyrus 8X to the Cyrus XTSE+. However, I was bought an iPod Classic recently and I was wondering whether I should go for the Wadia 171i dock? I have a Cyrus system with Mono X (2x), DAC XP, PXR, PV1 (sub) and Bowers and Wilkins' 805 speakers with a Chord Company indigo (digital) interconnect joining CD and DAC.

Will I notice a difference in sound quality between the two devices or simply a difference to my wallet? All advice welcome.

Tony Glew, via email

In a measurement sense. there is little audible difference between the digital output of a CD playing a normal Red Book CD and an iPod transport playing an AAC Lossless file of the same music. Given an identical piece of music and a digital input, the results should be fairly close. As such, the reasons for buying one over the other come down to preference

and use. The Cyrus will continue to replay CDs as before, while the Wadia will need them to be ripped in iTunes to AAC Lossless. Depending on how many CDs you are looking to rip, this could be time-consuming and exceed the capacity of the iPod, so that at any one time the entirety of your music collection is not available to you. The iPod can, of course, let you keep listening on the move, which is a big advantage.

An interesting option would be to purchase the Cyrus and retain CD replay for now, while looking at a less expensive iPod transport to experiment with the iPod. Our review of the PURE i-20, at a measly £80 (HFC 342), was extremely positive and one of these could be used into another digital input of the Cyrus.

If you chose to move into a more computer-based system over time, most of the streaming systems that we have looked at recently would support AAC Lossless playback, so your hard work ripping would not need to be junked.

15-incher too big

I am currently looking for a replacement pair of loudspeakers for a pair of Tannoy Berkeleys, which are a little too large for my new lounge. I love the effortless low end that the Berkeleys have, thanks to their big drivers and I am a little disappointed that most of my choices are fitted with drivers that are no more than six-and-a-half inches across. I'm prepared to go

smaller than the current 15-inch driver of the Berkeleys, but what are my choices for speakers up to £5,000 that are fitted with eight inch or larger drivers for a bit of low- end grunt?

Ian Muldrew, via email

While we understand the sentiment that there is no substitute for (in this case square) inches, we would urge you not to rule out some of the 'narrow profile' designs on sale. Manufacturers such as PMC (with its use of transmission lines) and Neat, with its isobaric designs, manage to achieve superb low end from comparatively small drivers.

The £4,600 PMC fact.8 (HFC 327) was one of our Products of the Year, 2010. It has excellent bass, thanks to a clever crossover and transmission line amongst many other positive qualities. That said, if you have been happy with the Berkeleys, the £5,000 Tannoy Definition DC 10 (HFC 323) is just within budget, packs a pair of ten-inch drivers and is a more elegant proposition than its ancestor.

Space-saver

I've been 'out' of hi-fi for a few years, while kids and other distractions have ensued. I am now in a position to look at buying myself a new system. The only catch is that I do not have any real space to put it, other than on or around the desktop of my computer.

I was interested, therefore, in the 'try it with these' suggestion in your DAC Blind-listening Group Test (HFC 341) of combining the ATC SCM16A with the Benchmark. Regrettably, I do not have the required £3,000 to spend. Is there a DAC with volume control and active speaker combination I could look at for £1,000 or so?

Mark Hazell, via email

We don't test many pairs of active speakers, so our recommendations are more of an indicator of what is out there. If the contents of the desktop audio Mini-Test (HFC 342) don't interest you, there are some possibilities available for making a DAC and active speaker combination for less than £1,000.

The Beresford Caiman that we recommended in HFC 331 (£235), is fitted with a volume control and a variable output, so would function when connected to a pair of active speakers.

Active speaker choices in the sub- £1,000 category are limited, but Quad lists active versions of its 9, 11 and 121 loudspeakers. while Dynaudio has its BM range of active speakers. There are also more studio-oriented offerings from Mackie and Genelec, which could also be worth demonstrating.

DAC in a box

I have been considering the purchase of a new amp and a DAC to initially partner and ultimately replace my CD player. I had been intending to buy an integrated amplifier and separate DAC, but some of the products you have reviewed lately have got me wondering about the exact products that I need.

With a budget of £1,500, would I be better off choosing a £1,100/ £1,200 integrated and a £300/ £400 DAC, or going 'all in' and looking at an integrated amplifier with digital inputs such as the Cyrus 8 XP d or Leema Pulse III?

Histen mainly to rock and industrial and have a pair of Monitor Audio RX8s.

Luke Ponsonby, via email

The Beresford Caiman combines digital inputs and volume control



Help&advice



The Creek Evolution 5350: no digital inputs but great performance

The recent rise of integrated amplifiers with digital inputs does offer an interesting and more compact solution to two separate boxes. There are some pros and cons to both methods. The amp and separate DAC gives greater fine tuning, as you can choose the perfect combination to match your loudspeakers. You don't mention exactly how you intend to replace your CD player, but if it involves a USB connection there is no integrated amplifier in this price bracket that is fitted with asynchronous USB.

As such, our recommendations come in two phases. The Leema Pulse III impressed us with an excellent blend of tonality and timing and the digital inputs are capable of excellent performance. This would be our one box recommendation. If you needed a very high-quality USB connection and were able to accommodate two boxes, we would look towards the Creek Evolution 5350 amplifier (£1,075) that we tested in HFC 334. Partnered with the £300 Arcam rDAC (HFC 338). it would offer excellent sonic performance, particularly if you wish to use USB.

Arm in arm

I am the very happy owner of a Michell Gyrodec with DC motor and Never Connected power supply upgrade. I purchased the Gyrodec with a Rega RB300 arm and I have been using this ever since. I am now looking at a further upgrade to the deck and have been looking at arms, I have three options as I see it.

The first is to upgrade the RB300 on the turntable. I can re-wire and fit a Michell Counterweight to it in the pursuit of further performance. Or I can sell the RB300 and look at choosing a replacement arm that uses the same mount as the armboard currently fitted. There are

no shortage of choices including the Michell TecnoArm, which presumably is designed to work with the Gyrodec?

Finally, I can remove the RB300 and the armboard and fit a new arm and board combination which gives me the choice of virtually any nine-inch arm? I have so much to choose from that any advice would be appreciated. I could spend up to £1,000 in total and would like to keep my Ortofon Kontrapunkt.

Barry Mille, via email

Both the Michell
Gyrodec and Orbe can
accept a huge range
of arms which makes choosing
one a tricky business. We feel
that while arm re-wiring and
aftermarket modifications to your
Rega can have a very positive
effect on performance, the gains
are not as big as some new arms.

That said, some of our recommendations were originally Regas! The standard Tecnoarm impressed us on the Gyro SEduction we tested in HFC 342 and still represents excellent value for money at £420.

An even more extreme Rega upgrade, the Audiomods Series III, that we tested in HFC 335, would also fit the existing armboard and offers exceptional performance for £695. The Rega fit seems to be something of a default for many manufacturers and you have a wide choice of arms. We are less convinced that changing arm and armboard will offer value for money. The SME M2 can be had with suitable armboard from Michell (within budget). but we are not sure that it offers any advantage over the AudioMods arm. The 309 series arm is better, but this would take you well over budget, even before you purchased the replacement armboard.



THE HI-FI CHOICE GUIDE TO: SPEAKER STANDS



WHILE AGREAT many standmounts are often described as 'bookshelf' designs, they are not going to achieve their full potential unless mounted on good speaker stands. Stands need not cost a fortune, but do need to fulfil some basic requirements to work correctly.

Firstly, the stands must be of a height sufficient to have the tweeter level with your ears when seated. Although a great many designs are of a size approximate that a standard 700mm stand will be adequate, some larger models such as those in this month's *Blind-listening Group Test* (p38) might need you to look at shorter stands.

Secondly, a stand should offer suitable isolation from the floor and surrounding interference. Spikes on the bottom are desirable and spikes on the top plate to further isolate the speakers can also help, as in some cases can foam matting.

Thirdly, the stand should suit the requirements of the loudspeaker. Some manufacturers advocate an open cage-style stand that can decouple the speakers without totally isolating them. Others prefer massloaded monsters that offer almost complete isolation. Neither is wrong, so consult the manufacturer to choose what works best.









Sevenoaks Sound & Vision and Audio T are in the process

of merging their respective businesses and will become one of

the largest independent hi-fi and home cinema chains in the UK

Until the merger is complete, which will take a few months, Sevenoaks

Sound & Vision and Audio T will remain separate legal entities

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MARANTZ

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CYRUS AUDIO

With three ranges - the high performance X series, the prolific 8 series and entry level 6 series -Cvrus' award-winning hi-fi systems are a wonderfully rewarding way to bring music into your home





CASPIAN M2 CD / AMPLIFIER The award-winning M2 amp boasts 85wpc, ultra low noise trans-

formers and five line inputs while the matching CD features a 24-bit DAC along with dedicated power supplies for the outputs.

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AHAMAY

CD-S300 · A-S500 CD / AMPLIFIER

With its high quality sound and features such as iPod and MP3/ WMA compatibility, the CD-S300 is an ideal partner for the awardwinning A-S500 integrated amplifier:



YAMAHA

3D / UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER

This new BD-S1067 3D Blu-ray player has been designed for high performance and for optimum matching with Yamaha AV receivers and is SA-CD and DVD-Audio compatible.



3D / UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER

Enjoy Super Audio CD, DVD-Audio and network content in exceptional sound and picture quality with the Denon DBP-1611UD 3D Blu-ray disc player:



AUDIOLAB

8200CD • 8200A CD / AMPLIFIER

The 8200 range includes the award-winning 8200CD which features a wealth of digital inputs that will keep it playing all your music regardless of how it may be stored.



PEACHTREE AUDIO

NOVA DAC / AMPLIFIER

Make your computer sound like a high-end CD player with this USB equipped 80wpc integrated amplifier and 24/96 upsampling D/A converter.



ARCAM SOLO NEO NETWORK MUSIC SYSTEM

Combines superb music performance and network audio capabilities allowing it to play stored music in a multitude of formats, along with its internal CD player and radio tuner:



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MULTIROOM PRODUCTS

Play your digital music all over your house without a PC in every room. Just add a ZonePlayer, speakers in the rooms of your choice and a Sonos Controller in hand to access all your digital music.



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Access your digitized music from one centralized library. Everything from 16-bit converted CDs to 24-bit HD files will be at your fingertips along with the ability to play it all in any room of your home.



Minites

Richard Black pitches 2011's latest interconnects head-to-head with a surprising American winner...

Black Rhodium Rhythm

PRICE: £50 (1M PAIR) CONTACT: 01332 342233 WEBSITE: BLACKRHODIUM.CO.UK

ONE OF BLACK RHODIUM'S most affordable cables, this is a relatively thin and very flexible cable which, with its short-bodied plugs, is clearly a good choice for use in confined spaces. It uses good-quality materials, including a fairly substantial inner core of silver-plated copper, with PTFE insulation and a silver-plated copper screen. It's not marked for directionality and is connected identically at both ends. The PTFE is quite thin and a good bit of the cable's bulk is the soft outer jacket. Thin insulation gives it a relatively high capacitance, about three times that of the other cables in this group, but there's no obvious reason why that should upset any modern equipment in the slightest. BR claims that the PTFE has been processed in some way that, among other things, improves the 'beat' of the sound - a remarkably specific claim but, well, we assume they've tried it and that's what they heard!

What we heard was certainly rhythmic sound and it was also sound with a detectable tonal character of its own. We've commented on a 'dark' balance in BR cables in the past, but that's mostly the company's silicone-rubber-insulated models. In this case, the sound seems to be just a fraction on the bright side, but in a good way, bringing a quite delightful sparkle to music of all kinds. There's good detail, not quite the kind one might find in cables in the £200-upwards range, but very good for one at this price and imaging is good, too. The very lowest bass is just a little lacking in impact, we felt.



A GOOD BUDGET cable that seems most effective in the upper half of the spectrum, with good detail, sparkle and energy





Furutech Alpha Line 1

PRICE: £80 (1M PAIR) CONTACT: 01276 501392 WEBSITE: FURUTECH.COM

THIS IS ANOTHER simple coaxial cable, in this case using a fairly heavy-duty multi-stranded core of plain copper, a fairly thick polythene insulation, braided copper screen and soft PVC jacket, with an overall diameter of seven millimetres. That basic description could apply to any number of cables on the market, but Furutech applies its own unique feature in the shape of 'Alpha U-OFC' copper. This is particularly pure copper that has been treated in a two-stage cryogenic process and also demagnetised using a specific process which is claimed to give more complete demagnetisation than normal treatments. Both the cryo and demag stages allegedly improve conductivity, although not by all that much and indeed the whole business of demagnetising non-magnetic materials (including copper) is still controversial. The phono plugs are locking types, a nice touch at this price.

There's no denying the superb detail that can be heard through this cable, a characteristic plainly preserved in various applications. But we couldn't help feeling that this was occasionally achieved at the expense of the bigger picture, the sound seeming a little dissected now and then. Unusually, given the frequent correlation between detail and imaging, spatial information is not remarkably well presented: there's a decent sense of instruments' location but no really solid picture presented of them, or of the space around them. Tonally, this cable is generally neutral, with just a touch less bass than some might like but no serious lack, while treble is very clear. Rhythmically it is precise, though again there seem to be more trees than wood.

VERDICT DETAIL IS BOTH the strength and the weakness of this cable – it's great, but seems to be presented somewhat at the expense of the bigger picture

102 Hi Choice MARCH 2011 www.hifichoice.co.uk

INTERCONNECT CABLE

Peerless Sigma

PRICE: £70 (1M PAIR) CONTACT: 01923 200100

WEBSITE: PEERLESS-AV.CO.UK

PEERLESS IS AN AMERICAN company that majors in stands and mounting systems for AV components, but it includes a moderately wide range of cables in its lineup. The Sigma products are the current top of the range. This particular model is a straightforward coaxial design, along the lines of good-quality industrial RF cables: it has a stranded core of silver-plated copper, foamed polythene insulation and a notably robust screening assembly with four layers – aluminium foil, braided copper, more foil, more braid. That should help keep interference to a minimum, at least, though the inevitable compromises of phono plugs will slightly spoil the effect at high radio frequencies. The jacket is fairly soft and a fabric braid is applied over the cable for mechanical strength, completing an assembly eight millimetres in diameter and moderately flexible.

We found the Sigma an excellent interconnect, producing finely detailed images when hooked up between various sources and amps. It has a very even tonal balance, too, with perhaps just a touch of excess in the bass at times, but despite that there is very good control in the lowest octaves and low instruments are very well defined. The treble is open and clear, with very good, natural decay of sounds into ambience, something that can easily be 'dried out' by poor interconnects and there's a real sparkle on intrinsically bright sounds like cymbals and violins. Perhaps image depth isn't always the best defined, but by the normal standards of sub-£100 interconnects this is something of a star performer.

VERDICT BELIES ITS MODEST price with sound that's detailed, neutral and full-bodied. Plenty of rhythmic impetus complete's an admirable all-round ability





QED

Reference Audio Evolution

PRICE: £63 (1M PAIR) CONTACT: 01279 501111 WEBSITE: WWW.QED.CO.UK

UNLIKE THE OTHER CABLES in this group, the Reference Audio Evolution uses multiple conductors beneath the screen – four, to be exact. Connected as two pairs, they are twisted together to make a highly symmetrical assembly which has excellent rejection of interference from magnetic fields, something that normal screening can do nothing about. There is a screen as well, of course, connected at one end only and, therefore, not carrying signal current. It's made up of silver-plated copper and aluminised plastic tape, while the inner conductors are also silver-plated and insulated in foamed polythene. The floating screen can be expected to make the cable slightly directional and it is marked for direction - don't be afraid to try it reversed, though, as in some installations this can be beneficial. It's eight millimetres in diameter, but a little on the stiff side.

There's a slightly bassy quality to this cable's sound, something we rather enjoyed especially through smallish speakers. It's not exactly a huge lift to the bass or anything like that, just a subtle increase in the 'presence' of low notes. And it's mostly notes that are affected, not percussion, which is kept taut and energetic but not overemphasised. Male voices also seem to benefit a little, with just a little more ring and resonance. It may not be strictly accurate, but it's fun! Midrange and treble are certainly highly neutral and accurate, with very fine detail and excellent imaging, though the highest treble can sometimes seem ever so slightly dry.

TONALLY SLIGHTLY favours the bass, though in a most appealing way. Treble can be a touch dry, but detail and imaging are good



Interconnects are often somewhat variable depending on application, and may not always sound quite the same in systems with different major components. As a result, some audiophiles end up with different models, or even makes, of interconnect feeding from CD player and tuner, say. Other ways of getting the best from cables include taking care routing them. Keeping them close together does not, as you might guess, increase crosstalk by any remotely significant degree, but can be most beneficial in reducing pickup of hum or other interference.

Hi-Fi Choice

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MARANTZ SA-7S1 CD player. Immaculate. Owned from new. Still regarded the reference CD player. Cost new £5,199 asking £3,200. Email iez35@btinternet.com Tel 01296 437314 (Bucks).

AUDIOLAB 80000 preamp. £220. Audiolab 8000P 100-watt power amp, Black, £240. Both boxed mint, 7 months old. 07876 197 188 (Nottingham)

REGA P3/24.TT PSU. Funk Firm 5m Achromat, Isokinetik GT2s subplatter (120), Dynavector DV-20x2 moving coil cartridge (£500). Three month's old, as new. selling for £600. 07930 878582 (North London).

HITACHI FT-5500 FM/AM digital tuner £20. Cambridge Audio A1 v2.0 amplifier some marks on case £35. Pioneer DV-636D DVD player some marks on case £50. 01932 856971 (Surrey).

NAIM CDX2 £1,350.72, HiCAP, 140amp £700, NAIT 3 tuner £150 or £2,000 the lot with Soundstyle Tripod stand. Bowers and Wilkins

805S speakers in cherry £875 including Heybrook stands. 01691 610589 (Shropshire).

VPI Scoutmaster turntable/ JW memorial 9-inch arm/SDS controller/VPI heavyweight clamp. Immaculate. Boxed with manuals. (£3,500) sell for £1.500. Ortofon Jubilee MC less than 50 hours use. (£1,500.) Sell for £600. Get both for £2,000.07973 892901 or patmarcus172@ googlemail.com (Solihull).

BEAM Echo Avantic 1950s integrated stereo amp. Requires attention. Offers. Email: hughpenfold@yahoo. com 07866 364770 (Oxford)

QUAD 22L2 speaker (£900) £600. Quad 606 amp and preamp £250 each. Luxman DP300 turntable £300. Sony 557 ESD CD player £100. Also sensible offers please for a Nakamichi BX300E tape deck and Luxman T102L digital synthesiser. 01935 412 949 or email: albhuie@ hotmail.com (Scotland).

BOWERS & WILKINS 801D (Rosenut). Four years old,

as new condition. Complete with all original packing. £6,500, no offers. Very heavy, buyer to collect.

Tel/Text: 07929721714 or email: b.revill@hotmail.co.uk (Nottingham).

FINITE ELEMENT HD02 maple three-shelf equipment rack, mint, (£3,450) £2,450. Ayre Acoustics Signature 1.5m power cables with Furutech plugs, boxed. £350 (two for £600). **01797 253073** majba13@yahoo.co.uk (East Sussex).

ARCAM Solo CD/FM/DAB immaculate condition. used as second system, boxed £680. Monitor Audio Silver RS6 in Natural Oak, immaculate, light use, boxed £380. Sennheiser HD650 Reference headphones, immaculate, boxed, less than 10 hours use, £220.

07786 962373 or email: nick.j.dee@hotmail.com (Warwickshire).

ROKSAN Radius 5 turntable, in maple, extremely good condition, upgraded with a Tabriz tonearm, £950 or

will separate: turntable £550 and tonearm £400. 07725525001 oremail: alan. strudwick@googlemail.com (South Wales).

RUSS ANDREWS Crystal Ag. hi-end interconnect (£850)£299. Same spec as Hero Ag and fitted with WBT Ag Phonos. 07981 025698 (Bristol).

ROTEL RA-05 amplifier, mint, £220. Rega R200 arm with new spare bias belt, £65. Pair of Rothwell attenuators £25.07850775814 or email: Mike.eady@royalmail.com (Midlands).

ASR Emitter1, version blue, three-box amp, £4,750. Marantz SA7-S1 SACD player £2,950. Both good condition and 2.5 years old. 07831 500338 (Worthing).

GRADO SR25i headphones, boxed and mint. Will accept £75ono. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

SENNHEISER HD650 headphones £175. Creek OBH21SE headphone amp £125. Russ Andrews 4m speaker cables, £75. Alternatively £350 the lot. All good condition and boxed. 07729 600847 (West Sussex).

REVEL F32 speakers (Maple veneer), unmarked, original packaging, £1,350 01243 582411 (West Sussex).

EASTERN ELECTRIC M 520 valve amp, as new, 12 months old. 25 watts. (£2,000) £1,050,02920 628861 or 07971 296699 (Cardiff).

SHANLING CDT 100 CD player. Valve or solid-state output, valve headphone output. Onboard preamp if required. Mint condition, boxed with manual. New (£1,650) £550. Can email photos if required. 01424 446282 (Sussex).

GARRARD 401 £1,000ono. Turntable power supply £300 ono. Technics Equaliser £150. Class A amplifier power supply £300ono. Arcam 9 power amplifier £250ono. Maplin 50-watt board £25. 020 7499 8729 (Cambridgeshire).

SME Model 10 precision turntable with Series V tonearm (£5,700) £3,200. One owner, superb condition, will demonstrate, photos available. Original packaging. Buyer collects. 01604 410726 or 07711

702836 (Northants).

DENON CD player DCD1500mk11, immaculate, hardly used since new, very good sound and build quality, £125 or £200 with my TDL RTL 3 transmission line speakers.

07751 537148 (Oxon).

DYNAUDIO Master Evidence (Cherrywood and Gloss Black). Very rare opportunity to own a pair of superb speakers. Excellent condition (£78,400) £28,000 ono. Photos available. 07970028771 or email: white-a64@sky.com

QUAD II Forty Monoblocks in

(South Bucks).

EUYING 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 brandnew 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!

unmarked, as new condition. Svetlana Cryogenically treated KT88 valve upgrade. Absolutely fantastic condition. Boxed with manuals (£4,000) £1,850. 02380 224003 (Southampton).

AYRE CX7 silver CD player. very lightly used, mint condition, boxed, looks and sounds wonderful, genuine sale. Latest version costs over £2,400, bargain at £1,200. 07851 715446 (Watford).

SONY 7.1 AV amp/receiver STR-DN1000, black, 7x 85 watts per channel, 4-in-1 out HDMI, auto calibration, tuner, DTS-HD, True HD, DTS-Es etc, purchased Dec 09, hardly used £190.

01843 586261 (Kent).

DYNAUDIO Contour S3.4, (Piano Black) excellent condition (£5,060) £2,250 ovno. Bower and Wilkins' SCMS surround speakers (Black Ash), perfect condition £850 ovno. Primare amp 30.1, very good condition £500 ovno. Arcam FMJ CD36 silver, excellent condition £575 ovno. 07970 028771 or email: white-a64@ sky.com or (South Bucks).

MERIDIAN 504 FM tuner lightly used, in pristine condition. Complete with user guide. (£660) £350 ono. 07841 011397 (Leeds).

ARTAUDIO Maestro Valve monoblocs x2.50 watts each and ART valve preamp VP1, vgc, serviced recently by ArtAudio (with new valves). Original around £9,500, only £2,500. Can demo. 01476 579201 (Grantham).

T+A Pulsar 1230R CD player (silver) immaculate condition, recently serviced includes remote, (£1,800) £700. Can demonstrate. Also, Exposure 3010 integrated and power amplifiers, condition as above£400each.**01482** 887409 (East Yorkshire).

BOWERS AND WILKINS

CM1, eight months old, mint, original packaging including stands £250.

01757 289375 or email: gregory@469btinternet.co.uk (Selby).

MERIDIAN 508.24 CD player, £400. Primare A30.1 100watt amp, £400. Sennheiser HD595 headphones, £50.

Sony MDS-JE780 Minidisc, £50. Videologic DRX-601E DAB tuner, £40. Cash only, buver collects.

01428 605002 (S.W. Surrey).

PROAC Tablette EBT loudspeakers with matching sand-filled stands, teak finish. Good clean sound. Excellent value £200. 01923855359 or email: wombat.jr@ tiscali.co.uk (Herts).

ARTAUDIO 'Diavolo' 300B SE amp (11+11w), polished stainless-steel chassis with gold anodised trims £1,600. Sony SACD 555ES SACDplayer (champagne finish) £350. Can demo. 01454 414361 or email

beedeel@yahoo.co.uk

(Bristol).

ROTEL CD930AX CD player. Rotel RA930AXamp. NAD533 turntable. Infinity REF11speakers.Excellent condition. Complete set £250 or will split. 0151

OPPO DV-980H DVD/SACD player, excellent condition £75. HDMI cable 5m £10 0208951 3178 (London).

3427860 (Merseyside).

SPENDOR S3 in maple £325. Chord DAC 64 mint, boxed £800. Naim NAC 82 plus NAP SC (2001) K boards, mint, boxed, £800. Naim HI-Cap (chrome bumper) mint £300. 07729 620621 (Worcs).

RINGMAT 330 MK11 XLR 3mm record support £20. 01202 515474 (Bournemouth).

FERRANTI Type A1016. EKCO Model U363. Phillips Type 151U. Pye Ref 069009, Cossor Melody Maker. All valve radios, £40 each. Sharp GF555 twin-tape. radio, speakers, internal amp, battery and mains (silver)£75 ono. Panasonic RXDS45, CD, tape, radio, mains and battery, £35ono.

01684 290581 (West Midlands).

NAKAMICHI CR 7E. Hardly used, cosmetically excellent. No remote. £600 ono.

020 7485 5077 (daytime) or email: peter@ccmusic.co.uk (London).

WANTED Cyrus CD 6s and Cyrus 6vs 2, in mint condition and at a reasonable price

01753 523350or email: jamesdjd@yahoo.co.uk (Berkshire).

NAIM NaitXS amplifier (£1,380) £880. CD5i CD player (£915) £600, or both

£1,450. PMC DB1i (walnut) speakers £600. Equipment purchased March 2010. All mint condition, boxed.

01233 713250 (Kent).

BLACK RHODIUM Polar Illusion 1m pair stereo interconnect, deep cryogenenic version. Hi-Fi Choice award winner (£250) £125.01243 528010 (West Sussex).

SIMON YORKE S7 record player and Koetsu coral £8,500. Finite Elemente MR HD07 four-shelves £3,250. MR HD09 amp stand £600. 01237 473057 (North Devon).

RUSS ANDREWS mains cables, filters, Kimber and digital interconnects. Other items including active studio monitors, too many to list, all mint condition.

01902884694 (Dudley).

AUDIO SYNTHESIS Passion 8m passive preamp. Excellent condition, boxed with remote control, manual and transformer p.s. £595.

01628 626085 (Berkshire). **AUDIOPHILE BASE**

hi-fi support system, incorporatingvibration control technology. Four platforms (£800) £200.

01270 624008 or email: janhud16@talktalk.net (Cheshire)

NAIM DVD 5 CD/DVD player, hardly used £695. 112x preamp £229.150x power amplifier 2008, £479, or £649 for the pair. All mint/ boxed. 01984 640588. (Somerset).

ATC 50a active speakers (rosewood), good condition (£9,500) £2,500. Stax 3050 Mk2 headphones and stand (silver) immaculate (£850) £500. New vinyl at 40 per cent of RRP. For list, 01453 519700. (Gloucester).

REGA P3 turntable and RB300 arm, Elys cartridge, boxed, excellent condition. Recent motor upgrade. Arm new and cartridge light use,£375. 07843 762212 or email: ati. harding@googlemail.com (Hants).

PRO-IECT record deck and Pro-ject phono amp. Musical Fidelity XA-1 preamp. Arcam Alpha 9 CD player. Arcam P60 power amp. Rogers Studio 5speakers.Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/ speaker stands and equipment stand. (£3,700) £1,400 ono. 0035387637 6623 (Co Wicklow, Ireland).

MUSICAL FIDELITY Tri-

Vista 21 DAC, less than 200 hours use. Excellent condition, boxed with manual. £540 07905 312191 (Cheshire).

ROGUE AUDIO 88

valve poweramp, fully overhauled and modified by Definitive Audio two years ago, absolute stunner! £1,000.07905 312191(Cheshire).

VARIOUS COMPONENTS:

Arcam alpha 9 power

amplifier 9P, £250. Maplin amplifier boards, 50w/8R, 70w/4R,fouravailable,£25 each. Avon Music prototype powersupply for Class A power amplifiers, £225. AvonMusic prototype power supply for Garrard 4/301. Thorens TD124, £225. Garrard 401 chassis and plinth, £700, Technics SL1210 Mk2 £250.

020 749 98729 (London).

PRIMARE SPA21 amplifier, recommended almost as good in stereo as the I30. Mint, remote and manual, two years old £1.100 plus shipping.

00353868127103 or email: michael.ogrady@gmx.co.uk (Ireland).

NAKAMICHI CR3E£150. NakamichiCR4E£195. Dunlop Systemdeck 2£185. Audiolab8000A£90.All good condition. No offers please. 07513039966. (Dorset).

MONITOR AUDIO Silver RS6 (oak) for sale £300. Just runin. Tannoy DC6t speakers (oak), excellent £500. **01501** 820875 (Scotland).

MJ ACOUSTICS Pro 50 Mk11 subwoofer £175ono,

excellent condition. 01562638119 or email: mike222@blueyonder.co.uk (Worcestershire).

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Hi-Fi Choice



Welcome to the Hi-Fi Choice Buver's Guide – the ultimate directory to the very best high-performance hi-fi gear that you can buy. Here, you'll find our

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BADGES EXPLAINED



EDITOR'S CHOICE: Awarded to those udged to deliver



RECOMMENDED: The products we feel meet a certain high standard of



GROUP TEST

NEW ENTRIES... Every month, our buying bible is updated to include our latest reviews. These new entries are highlighted in yellow and reflect the very best reviews from the previous issue.

SOURCE COMPONENTS

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Whether CD or SACD, we list the very best players for the job

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Hi-fi Choice Buyer's guide



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BEST BUY = BUY





CD players



Jp to	£1,000			adar.com	C 00 00	Ole Out	CORDOR	8.00	84	one soci	Se Carto	TUR	26
idge	Product	Price	Comments	3	- do	4	4	70	4	47	97	Sp.	-63
•	Advance Acoustic MCD-204	795	CD player with warm valve sound. Harmonically rich and inviting performance					•	•	•			34
	Audiolab 8200CD	700	No SACD support, but excellent detail, neutrality and communication			•	•	•				1	34
	Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD	400	Musical, precise, involving and with great energy at a superb price			•		•					34
•	Denon DCD-1510AE	900	If the SACD format is what you're into, then this player is capable of some impressive sounds		•			0				-	33
•	Harman/Kardon HD990	550	Highly detailed with excellent extension at both extremes and impressive resolution	/594818		•	•	•	•	•			32
•	Marantz SA7003	60 0	Highly civilised sound may not be to all tastes, but there's plenty of detail to be heard			•		•			•		32
•	Marantz Pearl Lite SA-KI	899	A key CD/SACD player at an attractive price, with support for digital			•	•	•					33
,	Micromega CD-10	799	The cheapest in the range, the CD-10 has been fine-tuned to please the audiophile			•		•			T		32
	Moon CD.5	999	Admirably energetic music-maker from this very well-built player			•	•	•				•	33
	NAD C545BEE	350	Apart from slight lack of bass control, sound is very fine indeed – treble is beautifully detailed			•	•	•				•	32
,	Naim CD5i	895	Its competent musical performance exceeds the expectations of an entry-level player					•					30
	Pro-Ject CD Box	300	This player belies both its size and its price with sounds worthy of a decent mid-range system			•	•	•	•				33
	Roksan Kandy K2	899	State-of-the-art technology and precision engineering produces a fine CD performance			•	•	•			1		335
,	Rotel RCD-1520	695	Lacks optical digital output, but feature-count is fine and sound quality is expressive and open	/608305				•		1	1		323

Abov	ve £1,000										
Badge	Product	Price	Comments								
•	Arcam CD37	1,300	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution	/395096	•	•	•	•			340
•	Audio Research CD5	5,055	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – assertive and very dynamic	/455309		•				•	312
•	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
•	Copland CDA 825	3,985	This a highly revealing player that delivers music in a realistically engaging form			•				•	332
•	Creek Destiny	1,400	This player presents the music and nothing but the music and is thoroughly recommended				۰				328
•	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,200	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music	/399370		0		0			323
•	Icon Audio CDX1 Signature	1,350	Has an open, vinyl sound with a very high listenability factor							•	341
•	Krell S-350A	2,695	Accomplished CD player with real breeding underpinning its excellent performance				۰	۰		•	341
•	Leema Stream III	1,495	This is a superb CD player that improves on the performance of its predecessor, the Stream								339
•	Marantz UD 8004	2,450	Sophisticated and highly capable universal player that just about does it all		•				•		336
•	Meridian 808.3 Signature	10,000	Extraordinarily revealing and open CD player with a first-class performance level			•	•		-	•	339
•	Micromega CD-20	1,249	No SACD, unfortunately, but without doubt one of the better mainstream players			•		•	1000		332
•	Mimetism 20.1	5,107	An impressive player that produces a very convincing and musical sound			•	•		-		330
•	Moon CD3.3	2,200	Excellent detail and a fine choice for those who like their music straight from source	/594609		•		•			328
•	Moon 750D	7,950	Very few CD players can extract as much information off the disc as the 750D								331
•	Naim CD5 XS	1,790	Its composure and openness results in a musical performance that is extremely seductive								334
•	Rega Isis	5,998	A magnificently musical CD player at a realistic price. USB input is a useful addition			•	•	•			329
•	Resolution Audio Cantata	5,995	CD player/streamer that's revealing enough to set it far apart from the competition			•	•			•	336
•	Roksan Caspian M2	1,600	This impressively engineered CD player is punchy and dynamic, with excellent timing			•	•	•		•	338
•	Theta Compli Blu	2,998	A very accomplished universal player with support for Blu-ray and HDMI		•	•	•	•	•		337

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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Finally...

our definitive answer to the audio cable debate

How can a mains cable make any difference?

How can one metre or so of cable between the socket and your Hi-Fi possibly make any difference to its sound? Well, in our opinion, based on years of detailed research and listening, it can make a huge difference – indeed, in many cases, we believe it can bring about a greater improvement than actually upgrading the piece of hardware itself.

Numerous customers have commented that their enjoyment of music has been dramatically enhanced after upgrading their mains cables. Here's just one example:

"I don't often provide feedback. The fact that I have done so is an indication of how good I think this cable is... it is difficult to describe just how fantastic the system is now beginning

to sound... There is a clarity and focus to such a degree that I can now hear individual strings on guitars when chords are played. Where musicians were in the background before, they now accompany vocals in sharp focus and with tremendous subtlety. Absolutely beautiful ... When I bought my CD player, I also auditioned other players that were considerably more expensive. In my opinion, the improvement gained with the SuperKord is greater than I could have achieved by spending the money upgrading my player." Mr Waghorn, Kent

How do you decide?

There's a lot been said about mains cables over the years. We have pioneered research into this area since the 1970s. Russ launched the very first high-fidelity mains cable back in 1985. At the time they were considered with suspicion; as outside the mainstream of accepted Hi-Fi wisdom.

Even today mains cables still remain controversial. Those who have listened to them, and used them, swear by them. The Hi-Fi press give them five star reviews. But there are still sceptics, and that's good.

No-one should ever just take what we say for granted.

But, when you have these conflicting opinions, who do you

believe? How do you decide who to trust?

Well, here at Russ Andrews Accessories, we believe that the best person to decide whether one of our mains cables can improve your listening pleasure... is you!

Kimber Tonik analogue interconnect

Simply put, you are the expert on your system. Not us. Not the reviewers. Not the sceptics. YOU. That's why all standard-length Russ Andrews and Kimber cables and accessories come with a no quibble, 60 day money back quarantee.

The Definitive Test

Order your cables from us and you get a full 60 days to listen and decide for yourself. If, after that time, you are not convinced that the product you have bought significantly improves your listening or viewing pleasure, send it back to us and we'll give you your money back. Simple as that. No argument. No quibble. Just a full refund and a thank you from us for giving them a try.

Here are a couple of our Award-winning cables that make an excellent starting point for upgrading your system:



✓ Eight woven, hyper-pure copper conductors

✓ Teflon® insulation

✓ Flexible protective sheathing

✓ Fitted with Wattgate[™] 320i IEC

✓ Fitted with a Russ Andrews Fuse

1m cable £114.95

Kimber Tonik analogue interconnect

✓ Three Ultra-pure copper conductors

✓ Polyethylene insulation

✓ Kimber UltraTike[™] phonos

0.5m pair £57.00

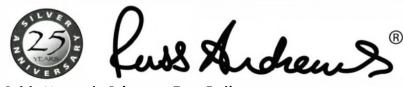
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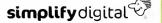




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Turntables



The best record players money can buy

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	On	ceds	325.0	ange .	drin (Carr	"ber
•	Clearaudio Concept	1,100	One of the easiest ways of getting into analogue, with excellent results for the price		33/45		•	•	•	338
•	Continuum Caliburn	125,000	Luxury turntable with state-of-the-art design includes Cobra tonearm and Castellon stand	/587169	33/45/78		•	•	•	320
•	Dr Feickert Woodpecker	2,995	Offers superb bass, excellent build quality and range of arm choices		33/45		•			335
•	Edwards Audio TT1	325	Classic, no-nonsense design, with exemplary performance at the price		33/45		•	•	•	34:
•	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
•	Hanss Acoustic T-30	3,600	The only multi-armbase deck in its price range, it boasts image stability and precise bass		33/45		•	opt	opt	331
•	Lumley Heliosphere	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a unique sound and a performance that reflects your vinyl	/560765	33/45			opt	opt	319
•	Michell Tecnodec	608	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money		33/45			opt	-	309
•	Michell Gyro SE	1,140	A marriage of shot-putter-strength, build quality and robust audio		33/45			•	•	338
•	Michell Gyro SEduction	2,245	Limited edition version of above with TecnoArm, HR power supply and blue-steel finish		33/45			•	•	342
•	Pro-Ject RPM-1 Genie 3	190	The Genie is that rare thing of a product with good looks, fine build and excellent sound		33/45			•	•	332
0	Pro-Ject 6 Perspex	1,280	Plenty of detail and good rhythmic qualities (arm included)		33/45/78		•	•		338
•	Pro-Ject X-Pack	1,000	Combines very strong elements (Ortofon Rondo Red) a killer package with top sound and value		33/45		•	•	•	309
•	Roksan Radius 5.2	1,399	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation		33/45	•	•			338
•	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:



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	'A	7 70	C .02	-62
	Dynavector DV-20X2L	499	Revealing and open sound from a well-built and easy-to-align MC cartridge		(342
•	Dynavector Karat 17D3	699	One of the most thrilling-sounding cartridges on the market		-	•	334
•	Goldring Legacy	595	An MC cartridge better suited to the smoother-sounding turntable, it unearths a mountain of detail		(•	328
•	Grado Prestige Gold 1	150	Unusually assurred 'presence' region is the basis of a beautifully musical and involving presentation	•			338
•	Ortofon Rondo Red	385	Delivers detail, power and resolution and makes a good case for its price		•		307
•	Ortofon Cadenza Red	750	There's much to admire in this cartridge's fine detail and unfussy presentation		-		330
	Ortofon Vivo Red	200	Never less than musically convincing, this all-in-one cartridge is remarkably capable		4	•	338
•	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and resolution to die for				265

Phono stages





NA SA	16	my.	Mc.	4			
	Chrag	MAN PA	Mc Phone	in 1	di inpe	dence dence	un.
		On	DU	5 41	Sain	nce	10
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Badge	Product	Price	Comments	7	.2	3	"	-6	~
•	Cambridge Audio 640P	100	An outrageously good bargain that suits budget systems, but can confidently survive upgrades				•		305
•	Lehmann Audio Black Cube	335	This phono amp is a very distinguished performer with an MM source			•	•		335
	Linn Uphorik	1,850	Exceptional sound quality, the Uphorikcould easily win over the next generation of LP enthusiasts		•	•		•	334
	Pro-Ject Tube Box SE II	435	The big picture is the most evident thing here, but the finer details are there, too		•	•			335
•	Soundsmith Strain Gauge	6,100	Revolutionary kit assembly that rewrites the rules about vinyl playback /e	18387					324

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 styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

HFC TOP PICKS



Dynavector Karat 17D3 £699

The 17D3 gets very close to the results achieved with MCs at twice the price and few can touch it in terms of sheer musicality and resolution of detail



Pro-Ject 6 Perspex £1,280

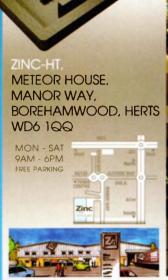
Our Product of the Year 2010. A winning combination of open and even-handed sound, handsome design and excellent build quality



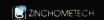
Dr Feickert An. Woodpecker £2,995

Avery flexible and well-thought-out deck that offers brilliant build quality and excellent bass. Able to work with a wide variety of arms, too

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BADGES KEY: BEST BUY = ● BEST BUY = ●



S tuners

Radio tu	ners			
Surf the airwaves	with these	carefully	selected	(

FM	tuners			Ar. CO.	eban.	Teso.	Pa	ne Me	Sty	Ins
Badge	Product	Price	Comments	3	3	3	2	10,	2 %	-6x
•	Creek Audio Evolution	350	Sound is detailed, cohesive and extended both tonally and spatially – very classy		FM,AM	80				308
•	NAD C426	220	If you aren't already wedded to DAB, then this is a very attractive purchase		FM,AM	80	•		•	339
•	T+A T1210R	1,200	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated		FM	100	•			283

•	Arcam FMJ T32	600	A highly cost-effective way of optimising the airwaves. iPod functionality is a bonus	/559242	DAB,FM	100	• •	•	319
•	Onkyo T-4555DAB	400	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard		DAB	40		•	298

DAB/FM portables

•	Monitor Audio Airstream 10	225	The range of features on this DAB/FM/Internet radio is certainly impressive	/636713	DAB,FM,Web	4	•		337
•	Pure Move	80	A feature-packed, beautifully built DAB/FM radio that is a pleasure to use	/608367	DAB,FM	20	•		323
•	Pure Sensia	250	One of the smartest table radios around, offering wireless computer-sourced music		DAB,FM,Web	40	•	•	331
•	Tivoli Networks+	495	FM reception is excellent and a cut above everything else this radio has to offer		DAB,FM,Web	5		•	337
9	Vita Audio R1 MkII	160	Limited to DAB/FM and line inputs, but the sound quality is very good		DAB,FM,Web	10	•	•	337
•	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.



Audiophile solutions for home and travel use

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	7)	ac .	9/ 1	19/ 0	4	35	10	Se'
•	AKG Q701	500	A welcome addition to the ranks of the world's finest transducers						235		341
•	Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	649	Fine advert for the virtues of closed-back headphones, with great bass and background noise reduction					•	350		334
•	Beyerdynamic DT770	179	One of the most tonally satisfying closed-back headphones around with excellent detail				•	•	270	•	333
•	Beyerdynamic T1	880	A characterful, enjoyable music-maker with a detailed, weighty sound				•				331
•	Bowers and Wilkins P5	250	A superb headphone with B&W's sound and build quality sealing the deal				•	•	195	•	333
•	Grado SR60i	100	A strong contender with out-of-class sound in most areas: a brilliant budget all-rounder	/603478			•		210	•	322
•	Grado SR80i	120	A beautifully neutral and open-sounding headphone that's lively and energetic too			•					322
•	Grado GS1000i	1,100	A superb transducer, capable of astonishingly high performance standards	/624782							325
•	Grado PS1000	1,795	Offer excellent detail and effortless dynamics, but they can be heavy to wear after a while			•			500		329
•	Klipsch Image X10i	229	Natural sound and fit; lightweight and unobtrusive in ear headphones						10	•	342
•	Sennheiser HD380	140	This model offers good sound and is a worthy alternative to in-ear monitors			•		•		•	327
	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. CIRCUMAURAL Earpads rest on the head around the ears. OPEN BACK Vented capsules let sound in and out. CLOSED BACK (*) Sealed capsules. WEIGHT In grams. 3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.

HFC TOP PICKS



The P5 is a no-brainer for iPhone users but this well built and attractive design should be able to win friends from outside the Apple camp as well



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Electrocompaniet EC15

Gryphon Atilla

Leema Pulse III



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adge P	Product	Price	Comments			_	1	_		
•	Audio Analogue Crescendo	599	In a room of appropriate dimensions, this amplifier has real musical presence		5			•	50	32
•	Cambridge Audio 840Av2	800	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp offers detail and delicacy (silver finish)		8		•		120	32
•	Denon DCD-1510AE	900	Offers a taste of high-end excellence at an affordable price		5	MMMC	•	•	70	33
•	Marantz Pearl Lite PM-KI	899	Great all-rounder and attractively priced, the PM-KI transcends its £899 price		5	мм			70	33
•	Moon 1.5	999	A likeable amp in many ways, with admirable bass, treble and imaging		5	•		•	60	32
•	NAD C3226BEE	320	Unusually confident into awkward loads and very assured especially in bass. Treble a touch recessed	/603281	7		•	•	50	32
•	Puresound A10	685	A superbly involving valve amp at a very competitive price and with genuinely excellent results		2				10	33
	£1,000 Arcam A38	1,480	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality		7	opt			100	33
	4-4'- T 472000DUIG				-					, ,,
• ,	Astin Trew AT2000PLUS	1,740	If you prefer timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, this is a contender		4			•	65	33
	Creek 5350 Evolution	1,740 1,075	If you prefer timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, this is a contender One of the most attractive amps in its price range, with a sound that's immediately satisfying			мијис	•	•	65 120	33
•			One of the most attractive amps in its price range, with a sound that's immediately satisfying			мијис opt	-		-	33 33
•	Creek 5350 Evolution	1,075	One of the most attractive amps in its price range, with a sound that's immediately satisfying Excellent tonal balance and gorgeous, effortless detail		5		-		120	33 33

•	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
•	Luxman L550A-II	3,000	An accomplished all-rounder that's able to handle virtually any system		4	MC	•	•	20	335
•	Micromega IA-100	1,125	Fast and fluid performer that brings a touch of panache to its role		5	MM		•	100	332
•	Mimetism 15.2	5,415	A powerful amplifier with great dynamics and high resolution that's rare even at this price		6				180	330
6	MSB Platinum M200	13,656	This amplifier's devastatingly good all-round sound quality sets a benchmark that few will approach	/603452						322
•	Musical Fidelity M31	1,000	Extremely engaging performer, this power amp boasts excellent sonics and solid build		6	•			70	337
•	Peachtree Audio Nova	1,099	This amp/DAC combi is a fine heart for a computerised desktop system		3		•	•	80	341
•	Resolution Audio Cantata	3,995	This perfectly formed amplifier reveals that the language of music is easy to understand		4	opt	•		50	342
•	Roksan Caspian M2	1,600	This muscular-sounding amplifier is load tolerant and more powerful in practice		6		•		85	338
•	Unison Research Unico Nuovo	1,650	A truly successful marriage between tubes and solid-state amplification		7	1			100	339

Pre/power amplifiers Separate boxes can bring clear advantages



2,750 Big, characterful and beautifully built amp, with equally big and unforced sound

1,495 Offers a clean, smooth sound and has an unusually wide array of inputs

6,995 Exceptional subtlety and definition, has enough power to cope with just about anything musical



•	NAD C165BEE/C275BEE	1,550	An alternative to the usual integrated route and one that offers flexibility and fine sound		6 mmm	130	336
•	Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W	2,000	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed and controlled	•	8 opt	• 200	309
Badge	Product	Price	Comments				

A	ho	Vο	F7	Off	n

•	Audio Research DS450	7,000	Power amp features a very neutral transparent sound with lots of power and low-running temperature			0	2		-	450	337
•	Bryston BP16/ 2B SST2	5,700	Preamp and power amp combo offers superb sound quality	/608649	•	•	6	орі		100	323
•	Bryston BP26	3,670	Cracking preamp brings detailed results		0		8	орі			308
•	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	7,135	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled, and sounds like a dream				5			120	269
•	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	9,200	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility				6	opt		400	293
•	Cyrus Mono X300	2,495	A power amp with a rare combination of speed and resolution				2			300	341
•	Digital Do Main Ba-1	6,495	By recreating the V-FET, DDM has built one of the most thrilling ampifiers on the market				4		-	300	327
•	Mark Levinson No. 3265	8,000	Excellent USB implementation, natural sound and solid build. Excellent performance levels				7				338
•	Musical Fidelity M6PRE/PRX	4,998	For those wanting a powerful high-end pre/power combo at a realistic price, this is a fantastic package			•	9	•	•	260	340
•	Roksan Caspian M1	2,800	A powerful and enjoyable-sounding amplifier combo that brings out the strengths of its CD player		•		5		•	85	307
•	Rotel RC158/RB1582	2,100	It looks high-end and it really sounds the part, too		•	•	5	MMMC		200	336
•	Trilogy 909/990	10,390	Extremely musical valve-based pairing with hybrid power and beautiful finish	/625226			6			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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BADGES KEY: BEST BUY = ● BEST BUY = ■





Cables really can make a difference, especially our top recommendations

Ana	ogue interconnects			Mar.com	anded Sol	o core	Opper 5	Silver Da	R AUTIDE
Badge	Product	Price	Comments		-1		-		1
•	Audioquest Sidewinder	45	A detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm		•	<u>. </u>	•		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 sweet with occasional slight constriction		•		•		298
•	Black Rhodium Polar Illusion	250	A good all-rounder, with clear and purposeful bass and particularly fine treble		٠		•		321
•	Cambridge Azur Reference	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price: especially adept in the treble		•		•		296
•	Chord Co. Indigo Plus	995	Costly, and high-class cable needs running in, but this is a finely detailed design overall	/608313	•				323
•	Clearer Audio Silver-line	283	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass		•		•		279
•	CrystalCable Piccolo	348	Thin, tougher than it looks, has some qualities of a solid-core type – 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 Wyrewizard 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
•	QED Signature Audio S	190	Mellifluous and rounded, this cable is a great choice for lovers of the human voice			•		•	332
•	Supra EFF-IX	77	Lively sounding which maintains a high level of detail and neutrality, musically, a great all-rounder		•		•		306
•	Townshend Isolda DCT100	99	Particularly enjoyable cohesion and naturalness that makes for great listener involvement			•	•		312
•	van den Hul The Wave	125	Neutral, with a hint of upper-bass richness: images seem to reside slightly further away than most		•		•		312

•	Atlas Mavros	285	By any reckoning this is a very revealing wire			•	Ε	336
•	Kimber DV-30	59	A superb performer that lacks very little, even when compared to Kimber's high-end models	•		•	Ε	317
	van den Hul The Wave	65	The results this cable achieves are excellent and it scores highly for value		•	•	Е	336

•	Atlas Hyper 1.5	12.5	Don't look to this cable to beef up the bass, but at higher frequencies is revelatory at the price		•		•		299
•	Atlas Ascent 2.0	60	A highly analytical cable and very fine detail across the board		•		•		294
•	Black Rhodium Jive	14	Bi-wire cable which is full of sonic virtues. It's highly practical, too				•		339
	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,395	A chip off the old block, has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound (price -3 metre pair)			•		•	302
•	Kimber 4VS	155	In the right system, this cable is a good choice (price reflects 2.5 metre terminated pair)		•		•		329
•	Monster MCX-1s	5	Notable for its bass, 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 Teatrack	35	A bi-wire cable with a sound that's impeccably timed, neutral and full of detail			٠	•		339
•	Wireworld Solstice 52	25	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity		•		•		310
•	Wireworld Oasis 6	40	Excellent bass with tunefulness and extension all first-rate. Awkward to handle, though	/617560	•				324

STEANDED 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 CO – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated. PER Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. SILVER Altemative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. DIGITAL CABLE TYPE E – electrical,



van den Hul The Teatrack £33 per metre Curious name aside, this bi-wire cable has assured bass and a postive sense of rhythm whilst extracting an impressive amount of detail



Kimber 4VS £133 (2.5 metre pair) A wonderfully natural performer that makes itself unobtrusive and lets music take centre stage. The fit and finish is extremely high as well



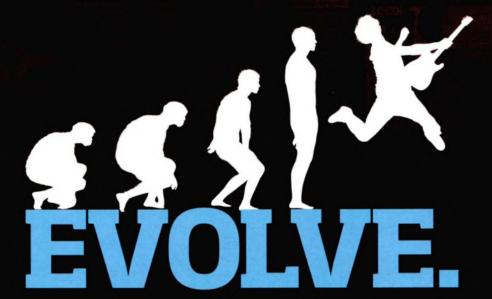
QED Signature Audio S £190 (1 metre) The Signature Audio S has the rare ability to impart no sonic signature of its own to the equipment it connnects to, getting you even closer to the music

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Buyer's guide Hi-Fi Choice

Badge Product



Monitor Audio BR5

Tannoy Revolution DC6

Wharfedale Diamond 10.5

Teufel T500

900

568

480



Price Comments







Stereo speakers The most influential link in the chain



20 90 5 24

23,36,5,23

22,88,30

19.5x105x32.5 •

A-

Stereo speakers

293

307

340

•	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	363	Pretty, neutral hoorstander 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 a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment		16.2,32.6,26.5		A	40	=	310
•	ATC SCM11	867	A very fine little speaker t-at its best with natural recordings where it adds little		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, 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, has a smooth, even and nicely open balance	/483503	20,91,30	•		22	•	315
•	Castle Knight 2	400	A true resurgence for the Castle brand, the Knight 2 has a beguiling sound quality		20,38,33.5		A+	42	•	338
•	DALI Ikon 6	999	Needs care with setup, impressively transparent and obsessively detailed sound		19,100,33	•	A	37		271
•	EB Acoustics EB2	669	Excellent value speaker, its composite enclosure gives a very clean and neutral sound		22.5,45,30		A	64		341
•	Focal Chorus 706V	389	Advanced drivers deliver an even, 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
•	Mission MX5	600	An engaging listen and worth an audition, if you have the room		25,99.5,39	•	A-			341

•	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	850	Bold, dynamic sound, 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 is easy to drive		20,36,27		A-	40	•		284
•	PMC DB1i	985	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator		15.5,29,23.4		A+	30	•	•	334
•	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	704	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its brother is even better!		15,27,23		A+	40	•		267
•	Q Acoustics 1010	110	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power nandling, fine midband voicing		15,21.5,19.5		A	48		•	286
•	Q Acoustics 1020i	140	Outstanding value, t smooth well-balanced and lively sound makes a fine communicator	/516273	17.5 , 25 ,26 .5		A+	60	•	•	318
•	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, and great fun		19.2,31.5,24.8		A+	65			309
•	Spendor S3/5R	750	Lacks dynamic muscle and loudness potential, smooth neutrality and g bass extension		16.5,30.5,190			25	•	•	310
•	Tannoy Revolution DC4T	599	Ultra-compact, lacks bass weight and dynamic tension, but sounds open and coherent	488857	15,85,16	•		40		•	316

Pretty compact standmount, delivering a lively bass and smooth, coherent midband

Despite the price, the 10.5 ticks many of the boxes, with superior voice band coherence

Good value, solid build and an extended warranty

Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold-sounding and good value

A	harra.	24	000	
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•	Adam Audio Tensor Delta	8,400	This active loudspeaker brings a powerful range of capabilities to its performance		33,56,34		A	50	•		329
•	AE Energy Radiance 2	1,000	This speaker boasts fine neutrality, sweet top, fine imaging and wide dynamic range		18.5,92,25	•	Α	30	•		334
•	AE Energy Radiance 3	1,500	This speaker's effective enclosure ensures a wide dynamic range and a very clean sound	/587236	23,92,29.7	•	A	27			320
©	AE AE1 MkIII	2,000	This speaker has a lovely midband smoothness and superior image focus		18.5,31,25		A	24	0		337
•	Amphion Argon 3L	2,300	Solid build ensures an impressively clean sound with loads of bass and fine neutrality		19,92.5,30.5	•	A	44			322
	Aspara HL6	4,300	Acoustic material sounds great and there are many strengths in design and performance		18.5,93,34.5	•	Α		•		332
•	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
•	Audioplan Kontrapunkt IVB	2,898	Boasts exceptional stereo imaging and mid-through-treble coherence		16,35,26	•	A	45	•		329
•	Audiovector S3 Super	2,600	Useful ability to upgrade, offers good musical communication and stereo imaging		19,103,31	•	A	50	•		328
•	Aurousal VS	1,650	Fine coherence and imaging of a single driver system, 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	10	A	60	•		321
•	Bowers and Wilkins 802	11,500	This high-end speaker has an airy, spacious midband, with clean bass reproduction		36.8,138,56.3	•	A	27	•		337
•	Cabasse Bora	2,200	Areal enthusiast's choice with high sensitivity, strong bass and powerful dynamics	/618354	33,27,50		A	52	•		324
•	Canton Vento 820	1,200	Really emphasises the benefits of the standmount, with great freedom from boxiness		22,36,31.5	(0)	A+		•		342
•	Focal Chorus 826 V	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 qualities associated with Focal's high-end models more competitive		99.8,28.2,37.5	•	A+	39	•		308
•	Focal Chorus 826W LE	1,879	Focal has turbo charged the 826 resulting in lots of energy, excitement and fine detail		28.2,103.8,37.5	•	A		•	1011	330
•	Focal Electra 1027 Be	4,399	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy, low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive		26.5,111,35	•	A-	25	•		276
	Free FS1	3,500	An elegant design with the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express		16,87,27	•	ACT	35	•	-	301
•	Gamut Phi5	3,040	Lovely discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches		17,100,24	•		20	•		305
•	Green Mountain Audio Rio	2,000	Fabulously tight timing and coherence makes for a very expressive and musical performer		20.8.40.6.34.9	-	A	80			332

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Stereo speakers (continued)

Shapes and sizes for every budget



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- 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).

HFC TOP PICKS



Castle Knight 2 £400

The Knight 2 continues in the great Castle tradition of excellent finish and solid build and climbs to the top of the pile with excellent sonic performance



Focal Chorus 826W LE £1,879

Focal has taken the 826 and turbocharged it, keeping the virtues of the stock model but with increased energy, excitement and detail



PMC fact.8 £4,600

A fantastic combination of elegant design, wellthought out room-tuning features and superb sonic performance. A 2010 Product of the Year nominee

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Fauinment supports

adge	Product	Price	Comments			of shell	Shelf D.	Soue nul	
	Atacama Equinox	409	Stable, modular design with style and excellent bass transients	81	50,50	•	4 G	Glass	21
•	Audiophile Base Std Supp't	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57	46,35		3	MDF	30
•	Blok Stax 300	180	A simple and effective design that gives some useful isolation across most of the audio band		40,46		3 1	MDF	33
•	Custom Design Inert Matt	70	Isolation platform can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit		40x25		N	Metal	31
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal		60,42		4 G	Glass	29
	Custom Design Milan	509	Good-looking stand with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57	48,39		4 G	Glass	30
•	Hi-Fi Racks Podium	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great		59.5		V	Wood	32
•	Isonoe Isolation feet	98	A set of four isolation feet that are ideally suited to microphonic kit like turntables				A	Alloy	32
	Partington Minim	470	Adds its own character to rock, but to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78	45,37	•	5 G	Glass	30
•	Quadraspire QX25 Support	25	Beautifully simple design, cheap and easy to use. Excellent with CD players				A	crylic	32
0	Quadraspire Sunoko-Vent T	800	The sound is detailed and largely uncoloured, while the design is rigid and beautifully veneered		59,47		4	MDF	33
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4 To	ortyte	24
•	Townshend VSSS	1.380	This attractive Seismic Sink retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4 G	Glass	27

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

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	(CM)	(CM)	able elded	Ches	'mber
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	229	A variety of smart looks available – sound is clear and precise	50	20,17	•	1	293
•	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack of coloration suits it to high-resolution systems	56	16,5,18	•	1	281
•	Custom Design SQ404	220	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance	61	18,16.3	•	4	283
•	Partington Ansa 60	119	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	•	4	232
•	Partington Dreadnought BS	299	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer	62	17,23	•	5	309
•	Partington Heavi II	499	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very precise bass and upper frequencies	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

HFC TOP PICKS



Partington Dreadnought BS £300 Probably the best speaker stand for the money - heavily engineered and backed up with sound theory, the Dreadnought is real class



Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T£800 Aclever solution to the twin problems of equipment cooling and resonance, thanks to a unique shelf design, makes this a worthy 2010 award winner



Townshend VSSS £1,380 Although not cheap, Max Townshend's skillfully engineered rack nears the ideal in terms of isolation and spending more doesn't really bring big gains

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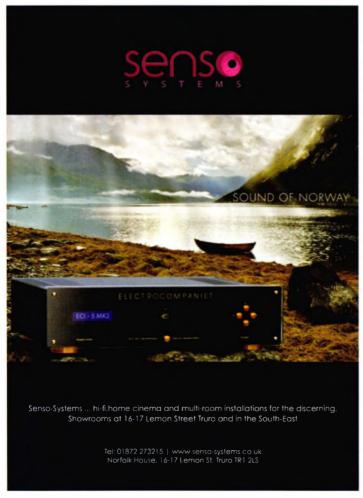
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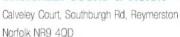
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Physical attraction

Jimmy Hughes continues his struggle to accept downloads and rips over CD and LP, especially with CD prices at an all-time low

hat's most important for audiophiles?
Basically it boils down to three things: sound quality, sound quality and er, sound quality.
Everyone knows that. But is it actually true?
Don't things like cost and convenience have a bearing, too? Or is sound quality really the dominant factor?

When CD first came out, many audiophiles – perhaps the great majority – felt it did not sound anywhere near as impressive as a good LP played on a first-class turntable. Yet, within a few years, these same audiophiles had more or less abandoned LP for CD. Why? Because CD was very reliable and made listening simple and easy. Just like downloads are today for the masses, it was convenient.

It's probably the case that many audiophiles bought a CD player with the intention of it being a convenient second source – a hightech version of the compact cassette. Serious listening would be to LP, with CD used for those times when something less critical was needed. Warning! – Cuckoo in the nest!

CD proved to be a usurper rather than a collaborator. While many audiophiles may have intended to run LP and CD side-byside, in practice it did not work out like that. After a year or so, many found they weren't playing LPs anymore. Even if CD wasn't quite as good as vinyl, it was good enough. Convenience won the day.

Downloads are the new CD

Now we have more potential usurpers in the shape of downloads (legal and illegal – the latter comprising 75 per cent of 2010's one billion downloads), streamed music and CDs ripped to hard-drives. Again, some audiophiles may try this new technology, intending to run it alongside their existing CD collection.

But it's doubtful whether the two will co-exist in the long-term. Why? Well, once you start building a virtual music collection with material stored on a hard drive, its ease of access and convenience will almost certainly cause you to play CD less and less. It seems inevitable that, at some point, you'll want to rip your entire CD collection to a hard-drive and access it that way.

Furthermore, when you consider that downloads can offer higher resolution than standard CD, the justification for sticking with CD starts to look very shaky. Of course, many record collectors like having albums

130

in a physical format, with nice sleeve art and liner notes. But even the appeal of this may fade given time.

As a collector myself, I feel torn between the obvious benefits/advantages of downloads and liking/enjoying what I know. However, my biggest stumbling block is simple; price. When I see a download costing more or less the same as a physical album, I can't see why I should be paying so much for something that isn't real

Downloads are a record company's dream; a quick, simple, low-cost way of getting music into the hands of buyers, bypassing physical manufacturing/distribution costs and retailer margins. That being the case, a download should cost a tiny fraction of the 'real' physical album. Only it doesn't. Leastways, not yet.

Doubtless, given time, this will change. When CD was launched, it cost roughly twice as much as a full-price LP. It reached the market during a time of deep recession and was considered very, very expensive. 25 or more years on, a full-price CD costs roughly a third more than it did it 1983. So, in real terms, it's much cheaper now.

Moreover, there are deals and offers on boxed sets and sale overstocks that see CDs working out at under £2 a disc. Given that LPs cost around £2 in the 1950s, that's dirt cheap! While there's parity with full-price CDs, I feel reluctant to invest. \bullet

Downloads are a record company's dream: quick, simple and low cost



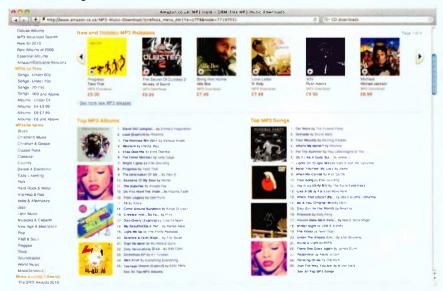
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A hi-fi enthusiast for four decades, Jimmy's knowledge of system-matching and record-collecting are unmatched in the industry

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Costa lot: is it any wonder 75 per cent of UK downloads are illegal?



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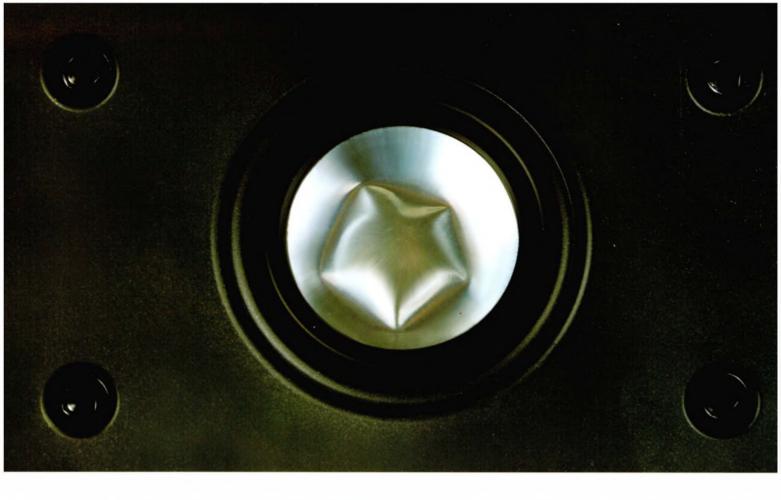
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