



Valve amp super test: six compared

PrimaLuna, Tri, Consonance, Icon, Cayin and PureSound head-to-head



Musical Fidelity M1 system

Tested: new £1,000 CD player kick-starts the two-box renaissance

Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

www.hifichoice.co.uk

June 2011

£3.99

Music master



Rega leads DAC race

Why the new £500 convertor is 2011's hottest upgrade

20

New Cyrus Stream XP DAC/preamp offers much but does it deliver true audio excellence?

first-class products tested including: Tannoy, Lavardin, MartinLogan and EMM Labs



Future
techradar.com
JUNE 2011
9 770955 111090
06 E3

HD radio to replace FM

Special report: discover radio's bright future - HD broadcasting is here

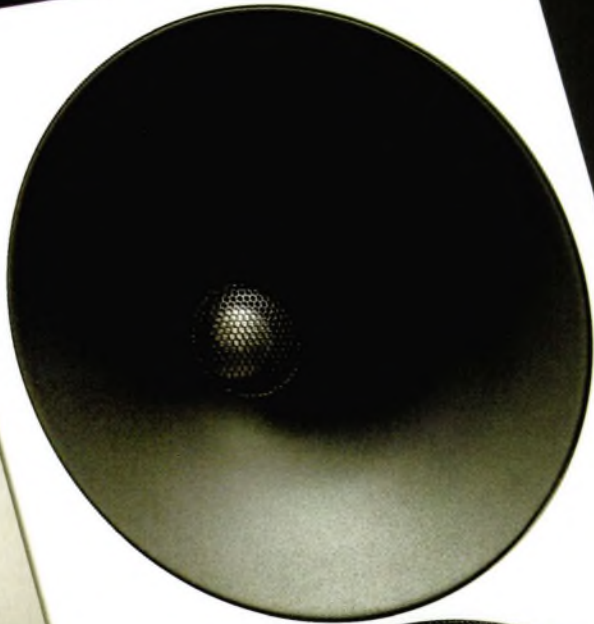


COMPETITION WIN!

A Marantz NA7004 network player worth **£720!**

"The best nearfield speakers I have ever heard."

Günter Pauler, Stockfisch Records on Amphion Argon3.



amphion

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

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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-Fi Choice* 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. **346** June 2011



So, Cyrus has finally joined the streaming age and *Hi-Fi Choice* is the first mag in the world to test the new technology. You'll need to turn to page 56 to get the full story, but suffice to say

the Cambridge stalwart has upped the ante when it comes to performance and value.

In addition to our usual formula of news and reviews and opinion, we've got a rather special feature on the future of radio on p34, plus an in-depth look at a new type of hi-fi event; the Wigwam owners' show, where enthusiasts, not manufacturers, er, run the show.

If you're in an analogue mood, then fast forward to our *Blind-Listening Group Test* on p40, where the best valve amps compete for the top spot, or if you're simply looking to boost your system's performance, then look no further than Rega's £500 wonder-DAC nestling on p65. Finally, there's big news from Universal on p27, as our US correspondent reports ...

Dan

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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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web site:
www.jordanacoustics.co.uk

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EDITOR'S
CHOICE

Jordan Acoustics



NEW - 3D Reference by Systemdek

For 2011, Systemdek have introduced the awe-inspiring Systemdek 3D Reference turntable. At 65kg, the 3D Reference will not only accommodate any tonearm between 9 - 12 inches in length, but the heaviest tonearms as well. It takes on the very best at any price because in our opinion, it is the finest turntable you can buy.



NEW - Reference Supports by Solidsteel

Beautiful Italian design and manufacture by ex-Ducati engineers. Now available in the UK! Since their introduction in 1991, Solidsteel audio tables have established a new level of technical and aesthetic refinement for audio and video component support and isolation.



JASON (CD Transport) & MEDEA (DAC) by Weiss

The JASON CD Transport was created to partner the already famous and multi-award winning MEDEA D/A Converter. For many, this is the ultimate CD Combination, bringing digital sound to life like very few others can. If there was ever a player that could challenge the finest turntables head-on, the Weiss will happily enter the ring and more than likely win! An audition is highly recommended.



NEW - MC601 by McIntosh

"There was an immediate sensation apparent upon hearing this McIntosh combination, even from ice cold: that of true greatness in every sense of the word." Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News, May 2011



NEW - Geometry Series by Wilson Benesch

The Geometry Series is the result of an holistic approach to loudspeaker design and manufacture: Cutting edge materials, purpose-built moulding technologies and next generation production technology deliver an unparalleled performance.

The Geometry Series is comprised of four amazing models:
Vertex, Vector, Fulcrum and Cardinal



NEW - Super Titan & Syncro by Isotek

No matter how powerful the amplifier, however current-hungry it may be, Super Titan delivers a super-clean, ultra-consistent supply of electricity without limitation, ensuring the world's best amplifiers perform to their full potential. Is Super Titan the ultimate high-current mains conditioner? **Unquestionably.**

"Syncro delivers serious improvements... It's really not a question of whether to purchase, but when."

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IsoTek
Marantz Legendary
McIntosh Laboratories
Systemdek
Wilson Benesch



Where it all began

The Glenrothes Store in Scotland is where it all began and in just a short space of time, Jordan Acoustics established itself as one of the UK's top premier specialists of high-end Hi-Fi systems.

BRANDS (NOTE: Selected brands may not be available from both stores. Please call to confirm before travelling.)

Adam Audio
Allnic Audio
Analysis Plus
ART Loudspeakers
Audio Note
Bel Canto
Bryston
Chord Electronics

Clearaudio
Denon
EAR/Yoshino
Isotek
Leben
Marantz
Mastersound
McIntosh Laboratories

Musical Fidelity
Nordost
PMC
Quadraspire
SME
Solidsteel
Sugden
Systemdek

Transfiguration
Usher
Weiss
Whest
Wilson Benesch
and many more...

Free Unbiased Advice
Free Parking
0% Finance*
Part Exchange*
Home Demonstrations*
*subject to conditions

Please see our forthcoming blog on our website for further details

The NEW Bournemouth Store is NOW open

Nestled in the luxurious grounds of Parley Manor in Bournemouth, our 18th Century Grade II listed showroom offers a high-end experience truly like no other. Launching with the exclusive accolade of 'Centre of Excellence' status for the brands **Wilson Benesch, IsoTek, Marantz Legendary, McIntosh, Adam Audio Tensor, ART Loudspeakers and Systemdek**, we hold an unprecedented level of choice for the purist for whom ordinary just won't do. All our other brands will, of course, be available too making for the most complete, independently chosen, specialist portfolio in the UK.



For the first time ever **Jordan Acoustics** has been recognised by a number of manufacturers as a true **Centre of Excellence** for their products. This coupled with our product knowledge and renowned aftersales support means it's not just our systems that are truly World Class.

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UPDATED MONTHLY



WIN!

31 A Marantz NA7004 network audio player

WORTH
£720



COVER STORY

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All-new streaming preamp/DAC is here and *HFC* has it first!



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"When I buy a CD or LP, I'm buying something *real* – something tangible."

Jimmy Hughes, Back Page p130

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NP-S2000 network audio player

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Integrated valve amps £1,350-£1,900

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Subscribe and get Sennheiser earphones worth £50! (p32)

Audiofile

All the latest news and views from the hi-fi industry

New Remix charts high

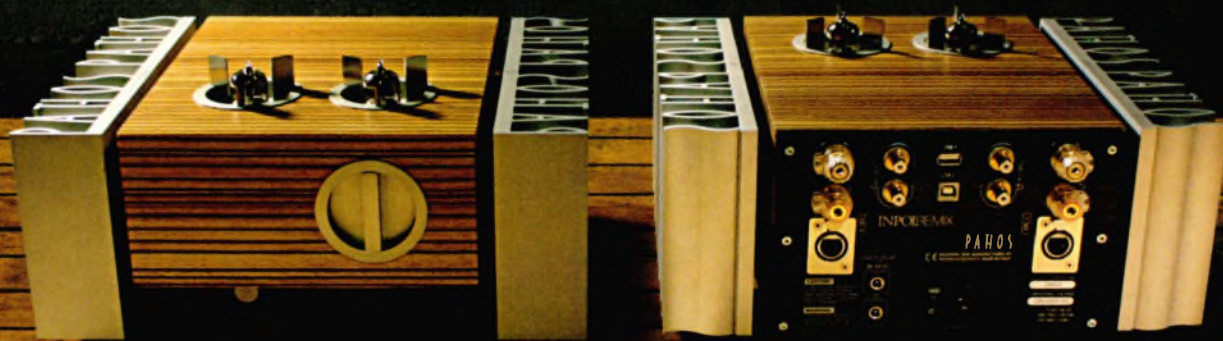
Pathos launches stunning new InpolRemix integrated: proprietary tech, zero-feedback, pure class A, 10 watts

PRICE: £3,795-£4,295

AVAILABLE: NOW

CONTACT: 01753 652669

WEB: PATHOSACOUSTICS.COM



INPOLISIVE

PATHOS HAS made considerable use of its Inpol system in its other amplifiers. Standing for, *Inseguitore a Pompa Lineare* or 'Linear Pump Tracker', the Inpol circuit pairs small valves at the front of the amp circuit with a fully balanced Class A solid-stage output. The circuit is entirely feedback-free and Pathos claims that the circuit adds so little of itself to the sonic performance of the amplifier, that all the listener essentially hears is the valves at the front of the circuit.

Pathos has announced the InpolRemix, a new 10-watt integrated amplifier combining the third generation of its proprietary Inpol technology with functionality not previously seen in Pathos amps.

A pair of 6922 pentodes are backed up with the Inpol technology (see *Inpolsive* below) and partnered with optional digital inputs, a first for the Italian marque. A fully balanced design, the InpolRemix features a

although the USB inputs are fitted to all models, whether the DAC board is fitted or not. The £500 board can either be fitted in the factory on assembly, or retrofitted at a later date for an additional fee. The InpolRemix is also equipped with preouts to allow it to function as a preamp for a more powerful Pathos power amplifier.

As is usually the case for Pathos equipment, this an amazingly good-looking product. The body of

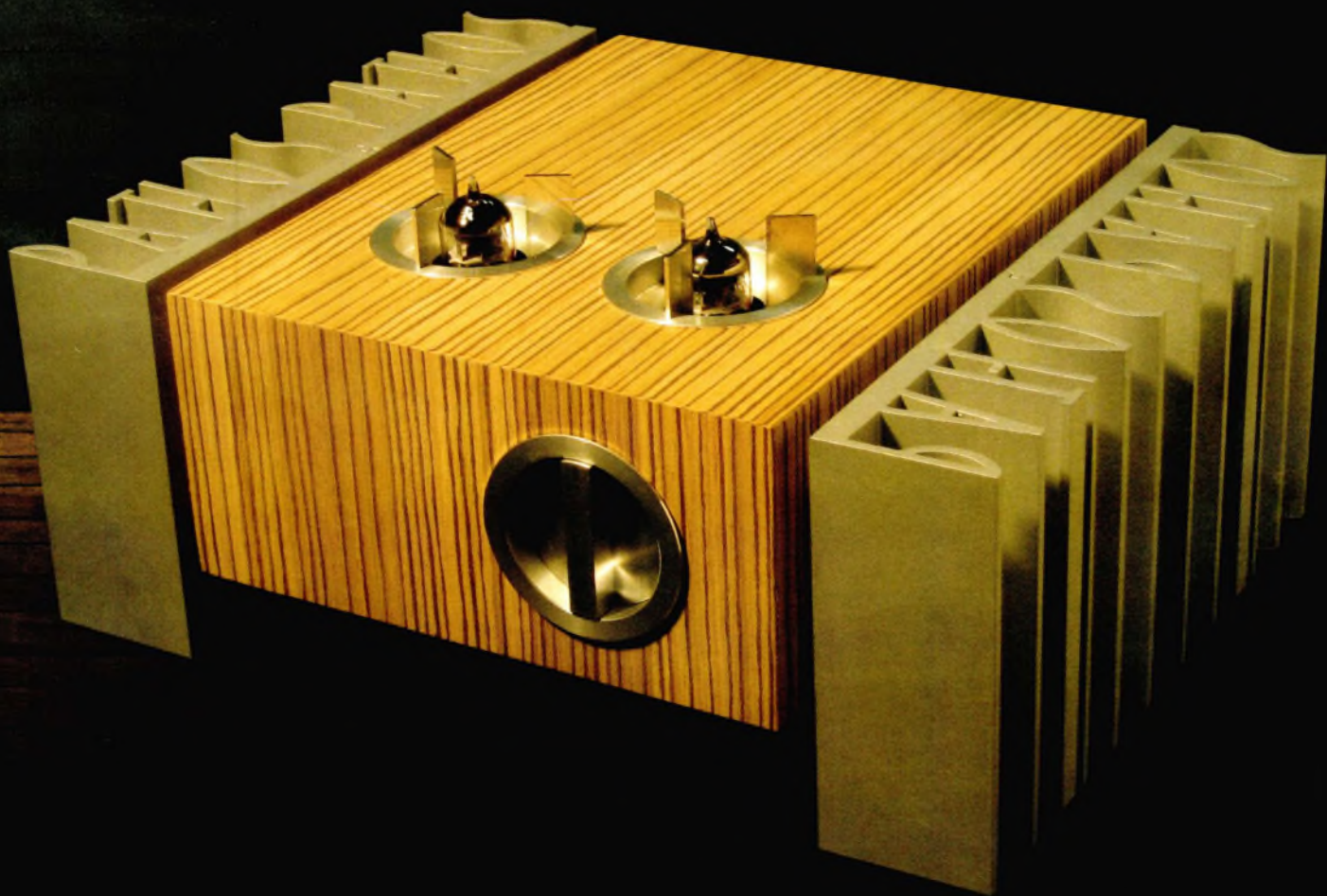
A DAC-equipped version adds a pair of USB inputs which are decoded via a 24-bit/192kHz-capable convertor

balanced XLR input as the 'main' feed, paired with a single set of RCA line inputs and a pair of speaker outputs supplied for each channel.

A more costly DAC-equipped version adds a pair of USB inputs which are decoded via a 24-bit/192kHz-capable convertor (a relation to the chipset used by the Digit CD player). The DAC board is an optional extra; as the Pathos will operate as a two-input analogue amplifier without the board,

the unit is covered in a wood, with the twin valves mounted semi-flush into the top-panel. Large heatsinks run down each sides of the chassis and spell out 'Pathos' in the cooling fins of the extrusion.

Full remote control is available with the standard Pathos 'wand' remote, offering volume control and input selection functions. The InpolRemix is hand-built in Italy at Pathos labs and is available in Britain through UKD.



BRYSTON

www.bryston.co.uk

BDP-1 DIGITAL MUSIC PLAYER

At last, easy access to high definition music files without compromise

The Bryston BDP-1 is a digital music player that enables you to easily play your music files (in virtually any format, including 192KHz/24-bit) directly from a USB storage device. And there are none of the performance shortfalls that can come from streaming music over wireless networks.

Controlled via a web interface on your Mac or PC or with an iPod/iPhone or iPad app, the BDP-1, partnered with the award winning BDA-1 DAC, is a state of the art high-resolution music playback system that integrates seamlessly into your existing hi-fi.

Request a demonstration at:

Holburn HiFi Ltd, Aberdeen • Jordan Acoustics, Fife • Hi-Fi Corner, Edinburgh • Lintone Audio, Gateshead • Audio T, Swansea
Basically Sound, Norfolk • Unilet Sound & Vision, New Malden • Nottingham HiFi Centre, Nottingham • Audio T, Portsmouth
Frank Harvey - HiFi Excellence, Coventry • Soundcraft HiFi, Ashford • Movement Audio, Poole • Zinc HT, Borehamwood
The Cornflake Shop, London • Paul Green Hi-Fi, Bath • Audio Venue, Maidenhead • Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Yeovil
Adventures in Hi-Fi, Chester • Divine Audio, Desborough • Audiofile, Cambridge • Audio Republic, Leeds

SOUND QUALITY



"Makes playing music files easier than streaming and gives access to hi-res files with ease"

Hi-Fi Choice, March 2011

"The BDP-1 and BDA-1 are capable of making fine music"
"The digital performance is first rate"

HiFi News, April 2011

"I regard the BDP-1 as the most innovative source component I have ever come across"

"All I can say is : I want one"

The Inner Ear Magazine

"...it rendered these beautiful pieces in a natural, most analog-sounding way, with the performing space perfectly recreated."

Blu-rayDefinition.com, Feb 2011



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Solid Gold

Goldmund pull out all the stops with its Telos 3500 power amp

Goldmund has been putting the finishing touches on its Telos 3500 mono power amplifier. Delivering a startling 3,500 watts RMS, the Telos is designed to drive any ultra-high-end loudspeaker it is likely to encounter and unsurprisingly, according to Goldmund, provides "an incredibly powerful sound." The circuit is an evolution of a design that the company has been using for over thirty years and the Telos 3500 features the latest refinements.

As well as the enormous power output, the amplifier is finished to a very high standard and features a hard-brass chassis with aluminium panels. This is finished in the traditional Goldmund metal style, giving an outward appearance that the company liken to, "a sculpture more than an amplifier".



PRICE: \$151,250 (EACH) **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: +377 93 50 66 05 **WEB:** GOLDMUND.COM

Groove rider

Clearaudio Magnify tonearm is the world's first 'hybrid' design

Clearaudio has released the Magnify tonearm. It uses the same magnetic bearings that the company has been using in its other products, but the Magnify takes things one stage further by pairing a conventional ball race bearing or vertical movement, with a brand new magnetic bearing for horizontal movement. The arm features a carbon fibre armtube and VIA can be adjusted even during playback.



PRICE: £2,375 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 01 252 702705 **WEB:** CLEARAUDIO.DE



Oppo tunities

OPPO has announced a new universal (Blu-ray) player with considerable care lavished on the audio side. The BDP-95EU features an ESS Sabre DAC for decoding audio and supports SACD, DVD-A, HDCD, WAV and FLAC, as well as the compressed audio formats.

The BDP-95EU is also fully equipped to stream audio over the ethernet via built-in 802.11n wireless. The chassis is considerably more rigid than less-expensive Oppo players and the casework is thicker and more heavily damped. Other unusual features include a toroidal transformer and balanced outputs for left and right channels. Qdeo processing and 3D support feature on the video side via dual HDMI outputs.

PRICE: £899 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 0845 060 9395
WEB: OPPODIGITAL.COM



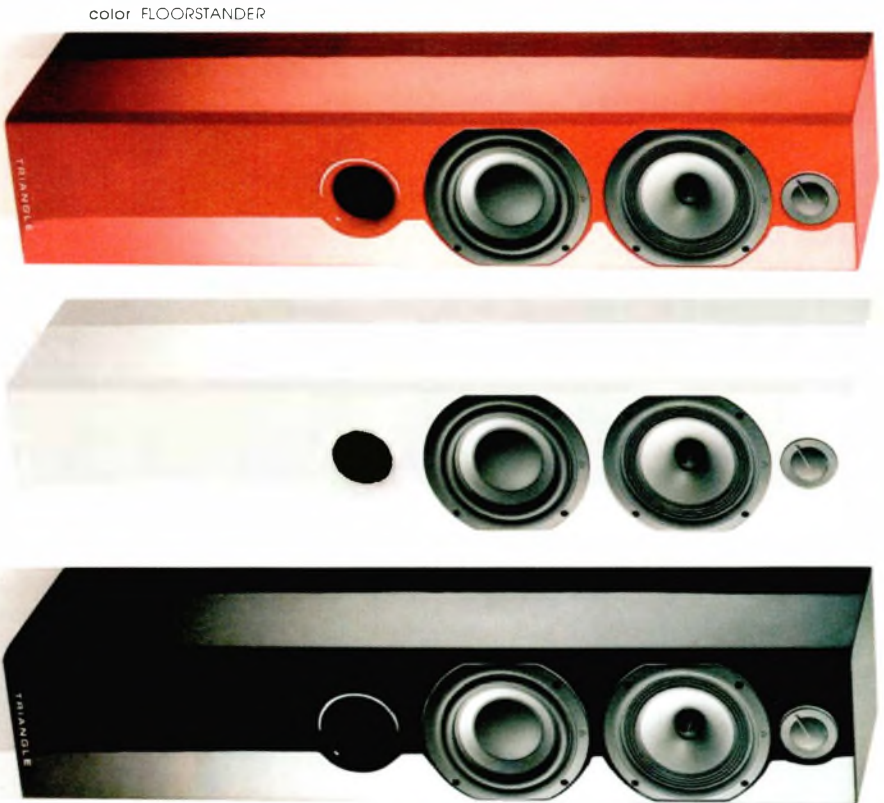
Shock and awe

ISOTEK has responded to the recent trend towards more powerful high-end amplifiers by developing the Super Titan conditioner. Able to supply an epic 7,360 watts with 35,500 watts of transient power available, the Super Titan is according to IsoTek, "the world's most powerful mains conditioner."

As well as the huge power supply, the Super Titan uses a two-parallel series of two seven-stage filters each to create one 'super filter' to clean up the power it supplies to audio components. The Super Titan also features no less than 35,000 amps of surge protection to safeguard equipment connected to it.

PRICE: £5,995 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
WEB: ISOTEKSYSTEMS.COM

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THE REAL TRIANGLE SOUND AT A REAL-WORLD PRICE

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*Recommended retail price per unit

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by TRIANGLE

Viva VISO

New NAD all-in-one system adds to the VISO range

NAD has announced a new addition to its VISO range. The VISO Three is an integrated stereo system that supports CD, MP3 and WMA over both the internal CD drive and from USB drives and sticks connected to the unit's USB port.

The NAD also has an FM and AM tuner and will support DAB broadcasts with the addition of the NAD DB-1 Adaptor.

It's also supplied with an iPod dock that supports both iPod and iPhone and connects to the main unit via an umbilical cable. The internal 50-watt amp should be able to drive most speakers the VISO Three is likely to be partnered with and NAD claims class-leading power consumption figures.

Look out for an in-depth review in the next issue.



PRICE: £750 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01279 501111
WEB: NADELECTRONICS.COM



Onkyo online

ONKYO is streaming ahead by launching three new hi-fi products, to include a £400 steaming receiver.

The TX-8050 network stereo receiver features DNLA-compatible network streaming and internet radio, as well as the option of iPhone control. This is paired to a 130-watt internal amplifier and FM/AM radio, and analogue and digital line inputs are also fitted.

The £300 TX-8030 is the same receiver, minus the streaming facilities, while the accompanying £200 C-7030 CD player features a custom-precision clock to reduce timing errors and a custom power supply arrangement.

PRICE: £200-400 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 01628 473350
WEB: ONKYO.CO.UK

Hi-Fi Choice on the iPad

HFC's high-end special now available on the iPad

The Collection, Hi-Fi Choice's annual celebration of high-end audio, is now available on the Apple iPad. Tablet owners can purchase the iPad version for just £4.99 from digital magazine specialist Zino: gb.zinio.com. The site also offers an iPad version of the regular mag (the one

you're holding now) as well as Mac, PC and iPhone versions of both titles.

Digital versions of the print magazine are identical, right down to the ads, and you can even subscribe to HFC for the year at a significant discount to the paper product. With *The Collection 2010* sold out in print form, it's hurrah for Zinio.

PRICE: £4.99 (COLLECTION) **AVAILABLE:** NOW **WEB:** GB.ZINIO.COM



NEWS IN BRIEF

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



•**BLACKBOX'S** new range of headphones and earphones are said to feature state-of-the-art noise-rejection technology. Prices from \$129-\$249. blackboxonline.com



•**GIANT-KILLER CABLES** has released the Quad-Core Silver interconnect in RCA and XLR versions, priced from £79. giantkillercables.com



•**CYRUS** begins its roadshow on May 4th, visiting fifteen dealers in order to demonstrate its new range of streaming products. cyrus.co.uk



•**SONY** has announced a new range of wireless and travel headphones. The wireless MDR-RF865RK has a 25-hour life from a three-hour charge. sony.co.uk



•**RADIOPLAYER**, which intends to be an 'iPlayer for radio', has launched. This combines 150 stations, including BBC services, on a not-for-profit site. radioplayer.co.uk

Trip to Glasto

Townshend unveils two new passive preamplifiers

Townshend Audio has revealed details on its new Glastonbury passive preamplifiers. Both models use a 30-tap 'Fractal Wire' auto-transformer to supply gain and, as such, do so without a mains feed. Townshend claims to have tested all preamp configurations before settling on this design.

Both models feature two XLR and six RCA inputs, as well as an XLR and RCA output. The key difference is that the Glastonbury 2 is fully balanced, achieving this with galvanic isolation and eight additional transformers. Full remote control is provided and both models feature casework made from 12mm and 6mm billeted aluminium.



PRICE: FROM £8,000 AVAILABLE: NOW CONTACT: 0208 979 2155 WEB: TOWNSHENDAUDIO.COM

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

Alan Porter, of Naphtine Porter kicks back with a cocktail of audio brilliance



JAMES LAID
On first listening I wasn't impressed, but persistence paid off. *Laid* has its place in my top four. It's produced by Brian Eno, who features heavily throughout my music collection.



MAXWELL UNPLUGGED
This amazingly seductive recording has never been far from my CD player. Most tracks are adapted from *Urban Hang Suite*, perfect third-date music.



ATHLETE TOURIST
Athlete's second album and a change of style from *Vehicles and Animals*, Joel Pott has such a cool voice and delivers the award-winning lyrics with such style.



ELBOW SELDOM SEEN KID
Bizarre lyrics, telling great stories, *Loneliness of a tower crane driver* is my top track. Fantastic Guitar riff on *Seldom seen Kid*, A Mercury winner and "Turn it up" CD.

KRELL'S ANGELS

THE NEW CHAPTER

**“A SUPERB CD PLAYER,
WHICH JUST MAKES YOU
GO ON LISTENING”**

KRELL EVOLUTION 525A CD PLAYER –
STEVE HARRIS, HI-FI NEWS, JANUARY 2011

**“ACCOMPLISHED
CD PLAYER WITH
REAL BREEDING
UNDERPINNING
ITS EXCELLENT
PERFORMANCE”**

KRELL S-350A CD PLAYER –
ALVIN GOLD, HI-FI CHOICE, JANUARY 2011



**“A VERY STRONG
RECOMMENDATION FOR
THIS DELIGHTFUL POWER
AMPLIFIER”**

KRELL 402E STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER –
MARTIN COLLOMS, HI-FI CRITIC, APRIL-JUNE 2010

**“DEEP AND IMMENSELY
POWERFUL MULTICHANNEL
SOUND THAT SETS THE
STANDARD FOR CINEMA
IN THE HOME”**

KRELL S-1200U AV PROCESSOR AND S-1500
MULTICHANNEL POWER AMP –
WINNER, EISA AWARDS 2010-2011

**“INCREDIBLE RICH, DETAILED AND NATURAL SOUND...
IT ENVELOPS YOU AND DRAGS YOU INTO THE MOVIE WITH ITS HYPNOTIC CHARMS”**

KRELL S-1200U AV PROCESSOR AND S-1500 MULTICHANNEL POWER AMP – RICHARD STEVENSON, HOME CINEMA CHOICE, AUGUST 2010

“HUGELY POWERFUL... ONE OF THE BEST INTEGRATED AMPS IN THE BUSINESS”

KRELL S300I INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER – ALAN SIRCOM, HI-FI+, ISSUE 65

“IT IS HANDS DOWN THE BEST AMPLIFIER I'VE EVER HEARD AND THE NEW BENCHMARK...”

EVOLUTION 402E STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER – ANDREW ROBINSON, HOMETHEATERREVIEW.COM

Since the early 1980s Krell has been acknowledged by hi-fi cognoscenti as the unchallenged leader of the pack. For many its beautifully built stereo amps are the best that money can buy, delivering the ideal blend of awesome power, intricate detail and iron-fisted control, yet the Connecticut-based company's wide-ranging portfolio also takes in CD and DVD players, home cinema processors, multichannel power amplifiers and a range of loudspeakers.

The company's envelope-pushing innovations throughout the past three decades have culminated in a cutting-edge product range. The entry-point for Krell ownership is the S-350a CD player and S-300i integrated amp, both delivering scintillating sound for surprisingly little outlay. Further up the range, in Krell's flagship Evolution line, the modular 525 disc player/transport combines exceptional flexibility with an extraordinary musical performance. It's available in four versions: player or transport for CD/DVD or CD only, with the ability to add DVD playback later if required.

The new Evolution 'e' range of amplifiers is equally spectacular. Every amp in the line-up has been upgraded to deliver massively impressive sound quality whilst conserving heat-wasting energy, thus earning a 'small e' suffix. From mono to multichannel there's an amp to suit every requirement, from the 2x300W 302e to the awesome 900W 900e monoblock, all boasting Krell's customary bombproof construction, seemingly limitless power and blissful sound. With Krell's sonic ascendancy once again reiterated, ownership remains a true privilege.



KRELL
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www.absolutesounds.com info@absolutesounds.com





SHOW REPORT

Wigwam Show 2011

A show where the exhibits belong to the public – how does that work? Rather well says *HFC's Ed Selley*

The premise of a hi-fi show where the systems on display are privately owned is a fascinating one and the increasingly popular Scalford event, now in its third year, has set out to make it a reality.

The child of the online hi-fi forums, principally Hi-Fi Wigwam, Scalford is an entirely volunteer-based event. 2011 is also the first year where the organising has been done in-house and there was a sense in the run up, that this was going to be the best show yet.

The big day actually exceeded the expectations of the organisers

with over 400 visitors to the remarkably labyrinthine Scalford Hall, near Melton Mowbray, to see the largest variety of systems yet.

Over fifty forum members brought a system to the show and the size and complexity of some of the equipment that made the journey was a testament to the dedication of the exhibitors. An eclectic mix was on display from low-output, single-ended systems to powerhouse solid-state efforts.

The show also showcased a variety of sources, from idler drive turntables through to iPad-controlled streaming systems.

1 THE JVS SYSTEM

Welcoming visitors to the show and placed in one of the largest rooms, this system – comprising Wilson Watt Puppy 7s, with Jeff Rowland amplification (using a Nagra CDC and Oracle Delphi V), Graham tonearm and Lyra cartridge – made a convincing case for itself.

The Wilson's showed no signs of struggling to fill the room and the system was capable of staggering realism with both CD and vinyl. As a demonstration of the potential ability of high-end equipment, this was as convincing as any we have seen at professional shows.

2 THE BIGDUR HORN

On the other side of the entrance hall, one of the more ambitious bits of DIY in attendance was strutting its stuff. Comprising a treble and midrange compression horn, paired with a fifteen-inch driver

for bass duties, it managed to sound involving and cohesive, while maintaining a room-filling sound on the end of an Audio Note system. The fit and finish of the cabinets was impressive and a considerable amount of time has been devoted to the crossover and alignment. The rather startling green of the midrange horn was apparently chosen by the owner.

3 LEGENDARY LENCO

One of the sources for the horns was this Lenco turntable in a custom plinth, supporting a pair of arms. Much of the demonstration work was done with a Shelter 501 cartridge and the results were hugely impressive. The sound was weighty and solid, with superb low-end drive and extension.

The absolute cost of the components that make up the deck are relatively low, but the time and attention to detail that has been spent on combining them has created a superb and very musical player.

4 AVANTGARDE HORNS

Upstairs from the DIY horns was a pair of Avantgarde Uno Nano

“The complexity of the equipment was a testament to the exhibitors.”



horns which are commercially available and – believe it or not – at the smaller end of the model range! They differed from the DIY designs downstairs, primarily in their use of an active bass module, allowing the ultra-sensitive horns to be powered by an amp of almost any output.

Connected to an Audio Note M7 preamp with Red Wine Audio monoblocks and listening to lossless files, the result was remarkable scale and authority, coupled with remarkable realism and detail across a wide variety of music genres.

5 MODWRIGHT TRANSPORTER

The source of the lossless files for the horns was a Logitech Transporter modified by Dan Wright of Modwright. The modifications are centred mainly around the output stage and include a rectified power supply featuring 5U4 valves that poke out through the top plate.

The result is a remarkably even-handed performer, that offers a considerable step

forward over the stock unit, while losing none of the flexibility. Controlled via an iPad, it was one of the most convincing digital sources of the show.

6 QUAD ESL57 SYSTEM

Next door, a pair of original Quad electrostatics was being demoed. Unusually, this pair had never been rebuilt or restored. Aided at the frequency extremes by supertweeters and an external sub, the Quads showed why they are still so highly regarded.

The sound was fabulously free of any sense of crossover or individual driver and the partnering electronics from Jadis, EAR, Musical Fidelity, Audiosector and Linn, made for an utterly beguiling listen that worked extremely well in the sizable room it was exhibited in. It attracted a huge amount of positive comment from visitors.

7 1980s AMERICANA

One of the more remarkable systems in a whole building of unusual electronics was the 1980s masterclass of Apogee

Caliber ribbon speakers, powered by an Audio Research SP8 preamp and Krell KSA50 power amp, generally considered to be one of the very few amplifier designs up to the job of powering the Apogees.

Using an Arcam Alpha 5+ CD as a source, the result was massively entertaining: the Apogees were able to produce a vast soundstage with phenomenal detail-retrieval and a real sense of pace and timing. The blue lighting is apparently also used at home.

8 FATHER/SON TEAM

Father and son forum goers 'Freefallrob' and 'RadicalDNA' used this show, as they have previous ones, to demonstrate a system comprising pieces from both their home set-ups.

This was combined to good effect and the results of the modified Technics and Numark decks, a choice of phono stage, NAD amplifier, and Bowers and Wilkins 705 was a strong, clear

and punchy performance that was greater than the sum of its parts and worked well in the room – never a given at any hi-fi show.

9 THE EQ'D ROOM

Some systems found a different way of dealing with unusual room effects. This system, which alternated through the day between Meridian and Genelec active speakers, measured the success of a sophisticated room-correction device in a challenging environment, such as a room in the hotel eaves.

The sound was clean and focussed and capable of going very loud indeed, without any real signs of compression.

Using a Squeezebox Touch as a source, the system was also being used to show the differences between standard 44.1kHz and high-resolution files – differences that were often surprisingly small when listened blind!

CYRUS

Explore your music

The new streaming platform from Cyrus provides the perfect solution for all music lovers. These new streaming music players provide you with immediate access to your entire network music library. Plus you can listen to literally thousands of different internet radio stations from across the world; all in true hi-fi quality.

With the **n-remote** you can quickly find specific albums, artists or tracks and it makes browsing your network music library a real pleasure. With its sleek body, full colour screen and two-way control, the **n-remote** is just one of the features that make the new Cyrus streaming music players very special.



Cyrus' Digital Music Tour

The Cyrus Digital Music Tour is an exciting series of events that will run across 15 locations in the UK. Come and join us to experience our latest digital streaming solutions and to explore how you can get the best from your digital music collection. Discover the possibilities of streamed audio with our experts who will be on hand to provide specialist advice on this impressive new product range, together with the opportunity to listen to our latest and ultimate systems.

Tuesday 3rd May

Audiovation
4 Cross Church St., Huddersfield, Yorkshire
Sevenoaks Bristol
92B White Ladies Rd., Bristol, Avon

Wednesday 4th May

Nottingham Hi-Fi
116-122 Alfreton Rd., Nottingham,
Nottinghamshire
Moorgate Acoustics
184 Fitzwilliam St, Sheffield, Yorkshire

Thursday 5th May

Frank Harvey Hi-Fi
163 Spon St., Coventry, West Midlands
Leicester Hi-Fi
6 Silver Walk, St Martins Square,
Leicestershire

Monday 9th May

Glasgow Audio
135 Great Western Rd., Glasgow, Strathclyde

Tuesday 10th May

Holburn Hi-Fi
441-5 Holburn St., Aberdeen, Grampian
Sevenoaks Yeovil
14 Silver St., Yeovil, Somerset

Wednesday 11th May

James-Morrow
1 Home St., Edinburgh, Lothian
Sevenoaks Southampton
33 London Rd., Southampton, Hampshire

Thursday 12th May

Lintone Audio
7-11 Park Lane, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear
Chew + Osborne
26 King Street, Saffron Waldon, Essex

Thursday 19th May

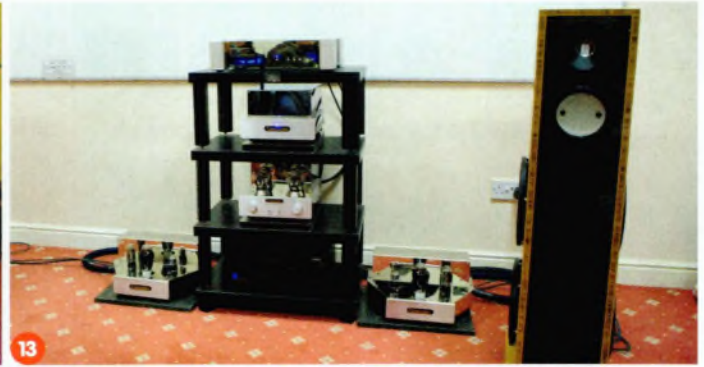
Sevenoaks Holborn
144 Grays Inn Rd., Holborn, London
Bartlett's Hi-Fi
175-177 Holloway Rd., London

For full details and to reserve your exclusive free ticket, visit www.cyrusaudio.com

Did You Know

The n-remote is packed full of features including backlit keys, motion sensing backlight and infra-red learning capability to name but a few.





10 SINGLE-ENDED BLISS
In rather better-behaved rooms, such room correction was unnecessary. This system, comprised of a hefty New Audio Frontiers valve amp, 845 triodes and an Audio Note M7 preamp, into Living Voice speakers. The source equipment included a CEC CD player (*HFC 333*), working with a very interesting new DAC design from M2 Tech, and a Voyd turntable.

The combination needed no digital help to produce a truly remarkable sound that had a world-class presence and immediacy, coupled with a slam and drive (with complex pieces of music) that belied the relatively low-power output.

11 GOOD KHARMA
Also making good use of valves – in this case a Unico DM pre/power combination, was this system featuring a pair of Kharma Ceramiques 2.3. These speakers use a ceramic mid-range driver in a massively

damped and braced enclosure. In conjunction with an Avid Acutus turntable, the SME V tonearm and Air Tight cartridge produced a truly remarkable performance with vocals and an assured, effortless presentation that shone through despite a heavy diet of eighties new romantic recordings throughout the day.

12 ART OF SOUND
Hi-fi forum The Art of Sound, presented a collaborative system fronted by a pair of vintage Celestion Ditton 66s. These were not the most beautiful speakers in attendance, but produced an impressively full-bodied and likeable sound that detailed without tipping over into ruthlessness.

They were driven by a custom valve power amplifier and sources that included a truly beautiful Nagra reel-to-reel cassette recorder and Jason Kennedy's old favourite, the

Eikos CD player, complete with correctly inflated feet.

13 A NICE CABERNET
The show also saw components that often don't make it to more mainstream events. These Vaughn Cabernet loudspeakers were partnered with a Doge CD player and Coincident line stage and valve monoblock power amps. The line stage uses a 101D valve, which is a type that we have not seen before.

The result was another stunningly cohesive (and stunningly attractive) system that was working well in the room, despite the almost cube-like dimensions.

14 THE VALUE AWARD
In one of the smaller upstairs rooms, one of the more remarkably cost-effective systems could be found: the retro partnership of an Audio

Innovations S500 valve amp with Voyd turntable and Helius arm into a pair of original Snell E loudspeakers.

The results were extremely listenable, but the truly amazing aspect of the system is that the owner had assembled it recently for the remarkably low price of £450 (with the amp and turntable at £75 each!). This definitely has to be considered an astonishing bargain in light of the performance.

15 TALENTED TRIANGLES
While the small rooms often proved a challenge for some large speakers, not all big speakers were struggling. These Triangle Stratos Naia floorstanders managed to retain an impressive sense of scale and weight without overdriving the room around them. Their partnership with a Unison Research CD player, C5P

SHOW REPORT

THE HI-FI WIGWAM SHOW 2011



preamp and a truly remarkable Beard P35-2 power amp was an exceptional one and showed the benefit of real system synergy to great effect.

The only downside of all of those valves in one place, was that the busy room became very hot indeed!

16 SONUS FABULOUS

The hottest room of the lot, however, was one filled with a mighty combination of equipment. The speakers were Sonus faber Amati homage floorstanders, that looked as amazing as they sounded. They were powered by a McIntosh MC275 – a legend in audio circles that has been in production for over forty years, with an equally large Musical Fidelity Tri Vista acting as source. This combination was full bodied and genuinely involving to listen to.

17 GOOD THINGS IN SMALL PACKAGES

Using smaller speakers allowed exhibitors to bring more equipment with them and, if they were feeling really creative, they could even make use of the remains of the hotel furniture.

This medley of equipment featured another one of our favourites, the Aura Note all-in-one hi-fi system, with Tannoy Autograph Minis and Amphion Helium speakers (making use of the first Lego speaker stands we have ever seen). It was a riot to listen to and again, worked well in the smaller room.

18 ROCK-SOLID

The show also included a truly remarkable variety of vintage turntables. Forum user 'Non Smoking Man' had no less than three of them in one room, including a very rare Cranfield Rock. This was joined by a Townshend Elite Rock and idler drive Thorens TD124, making for some interesting comparisons between the designs.

The resulting vintage vinyl medley proved to be a fascinating demonstration that sounded very good indeed through a World Audio Designs power amp and Snell loudspeakers.

19 GERMAN HEAVYWEIGHT

An equally unusual sight at the show was this EMT turntable. Generally used in broadcast and radio stations, they were all built like



battleships and designed to live a hard life. Their audio performance is superb and this example, running into a pair of 300B amplifiers and on into a giant pair of Electro Voice loudspeakers, produced a massive and unforced soundstage with seismic bass and airy, extended treble. No wonder that EMTs are so highly sought after in the used market.

20 BUDGET BONANZA

Scalford featured a number of systems that thoughtfully combined second-hand equipment and often gave fantastic results. This system, comprising a TEAC VRDS CD player, Sony ES amp and Kord Tornado standmounts, generated an impressively lively and punchy performance with surprisingly generous low-end extension.

The performance of these three units – all of which can be had for relatively little outlay – is proof that a good system need not be expensive and that

a good hunt through the hi-fi classifieds can produce some remarkable bargains.

Scalford is not a replacement for more conventional hi-fi shows. Instead, it represents a fascinating alternative and one that should be celebrated by an industry that often spends a considerable amount of time feeling sorry for itself. The sheer variety of equipment on demonstration, including the amount of equipment that is out of production, and is otherwise almost impossible to hear anywhere else, gives it a unique place in the events calendar.

This year's record attendance was good news and Scalford Hall is a superb venue for such an event. The organisers have already voiced an intention to make next year's event better still, which is a positive sign that the enthusiast and fan-based hi-fi show is hopefully here to stay.

For more information contact thehifishow.com. ●



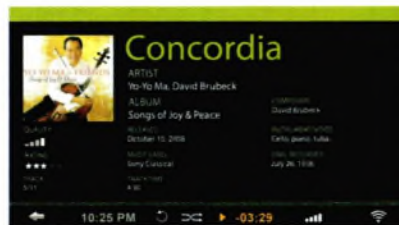
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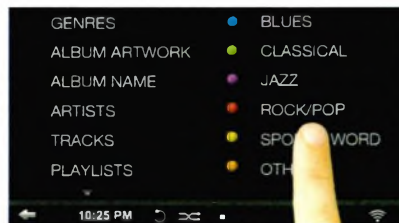
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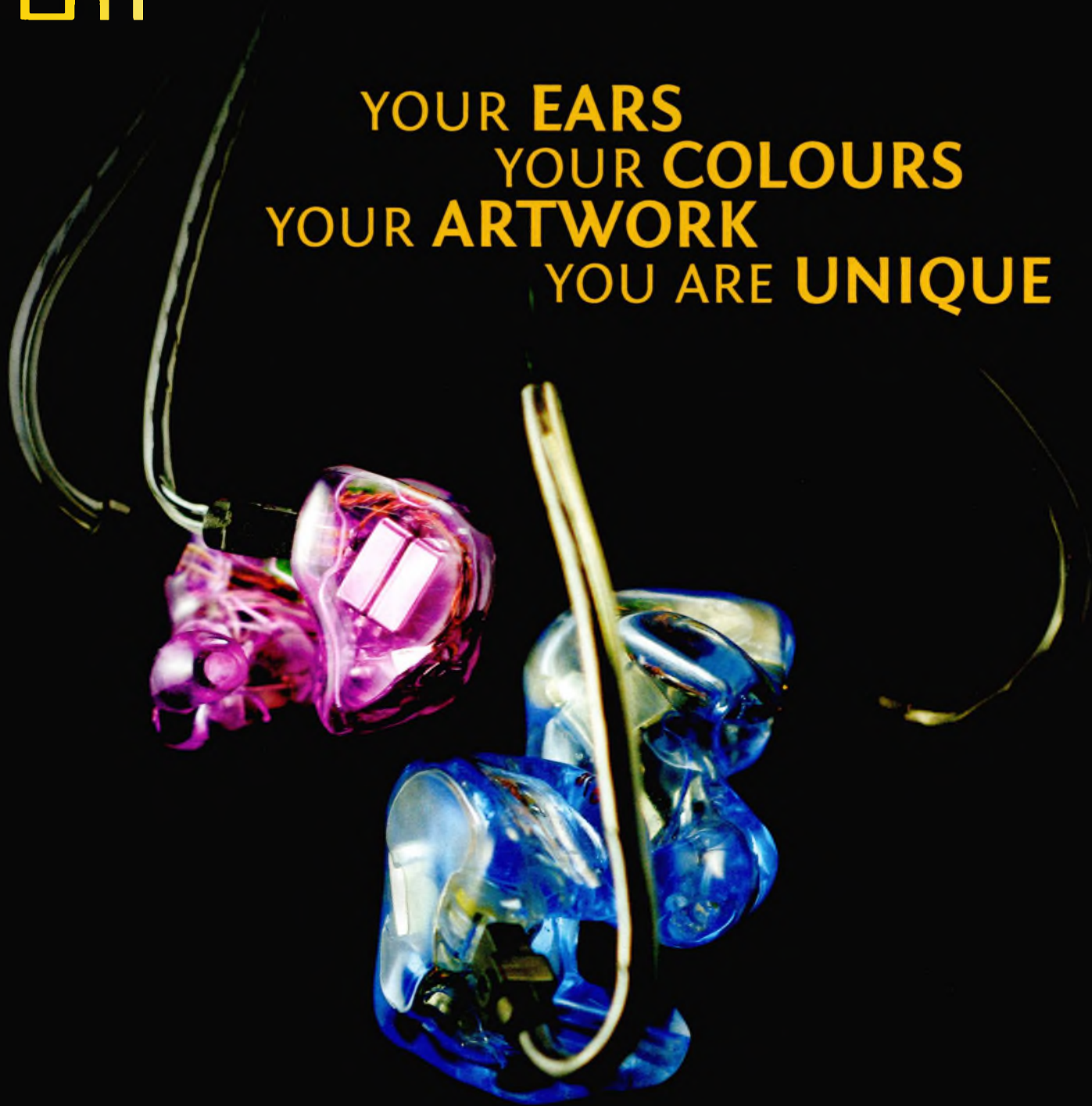
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HD music a step closer

Real music, in high resolution, is teasingly close following an announcement at Universal. **Kevin Gallucci**, our US spy reports ...

We've gone back now at Universal, and we're changing our pipes to 24-bit. Apple has been great and we're working with them and other digital services to change to 24-bit," said the chairman of Universal Music Group's record label, Jimmy Lovine. It is exciting to hear a music executive of Lovine's calibre talking about high-resolution downloads: his track record of working with the likes of John Lennon, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty and Eminem, means that when Lovine talks about 24-bit downloads, we should all listen. If for no other reason than because it could mean we are getting closer to seeing mainstream music offered in 24-bit studio-quality.

Actually, to put the record straight, 24-bit music downloads are not new: they have been available for several years by various online outlets. In the UK, companies such as Linn Records, and Bowers & Wilkins' Society of Sound offer a wide selection of high-resolution audio offered in 24-bit FLAC.

In the US, the high-resolution download leaders are HDtracks and iTrax. Both of these sites offer 24-bit studio-quality masters, but what they all lack is new music from mainstream artists. After all, there are a lot of great bands out there that deserve to be heard in 24-bit sound quality!

HDtracks is by far the leader in the field. It offers a wide selection of music – everything from obscure musicians to mainstream artists like Tom Petty and The Rolling Stones. The problem with HDtracks is that it is only currently available in the US: "Due to licensing, publishing and royalty restrictions, and issues that still need to be worked out with all of our partner labels, we are, unfortunately, unable to offer our services to international customers at this time," it said, "We are working hard to change this in the near future."

Another obstacle is the internet. UK download speeds are hardly fast. A 24-bit album can be several gigabytes and this can take a while to download. People do not want to wait forever to hear their music, they want to download it quickly and start listening. Luckily, this is changing and the infrastructure is improving all the time across the UK.

The secretary of state for culture, Jeremy Hunt, said in 2010 that "Our goal is simple: within this parliament we want Britain to have the best superfast broadband network in Europe." The current government wants to

achieve a minimum download speed of 2Mbps by the year 2015. This will go a long way to help reduce download times, but still isn't "superfast" internet.

Music you actually want in HD

If 24-bit music downloads are going to thrive and become the standard, the high-resolution music download sites need to get more mainstream artists. The majority of sites offer very obscure artists that most people haven't heard of. It's a practice that needs radical change or they will never attract younger customers or expand their business.

The big record companies aren't helping either; they are dragging their feet with 24-bit recordings because they are currently set up for putting out 16-bit CD-quality (or lower) music and have yet to make the switch to 24-bit. Download services cannot offer high-resolution music if it is not being put out by record companies. Hearing Jimmy Lovine talking about this is a big deal, because if his record label starts putting out 24-bit music to the general public through an outlet like Apple, this will completely change the music landscape.

Universal Music Group is a powerhouse with some of the world's biggest artists. This could finally open up the possibility of the general public hearing their favourite music in 24-bit. It could be similar to what happened when high-definition television launched; people saw an improvement in picture quality and loved it.

I believe a similar thing will happen if we start seeing download sites offering mainstream music in high-resolution. It could be a new age of high-definition audio. This might sound like a catchy marketing phrase, but the majority of music-lovers don't realise that 24-bit sound quality exists (or even what it means – Ed). My hope is that the more people are exposed to high-resolution sound; the more willing they will be to invest in a high-quality stereo. God knows the hi-fi world could use a fresh injection of new blood. Apple offering 24-bit downloads from major record labels will be the catalyst to high-resolution audio taking over the market.

Since its creation, digital music has been scrutinised and criticised for taking the life out of recordings. Once 24-bit audio is the industry standard, we will see a new age of digital music and this time around, the recordings will sound more like the artist intended.

Apple offering 24-bit downloads from major record labels will be the catalyst to high-resolution taking over the market



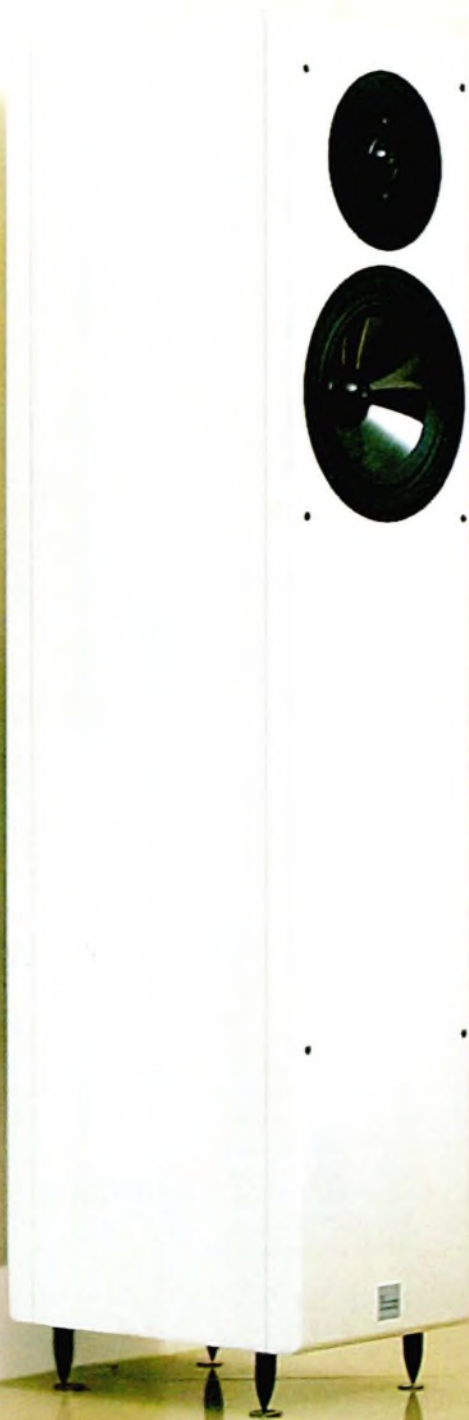
KEVIN GALLUCCI

Our US correspondent, Kevin (former HFC Tech Labs manager) is based stateside and is first on the scene when tech news breaks

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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Your new dream Pad

As Apple releases the new iPad 2, **Ed Selley** explains just what it can do for your hi-fi system

Unless you have been holidaying in a particularly remote patch of jungle, you will be aware that less than a year after launching the original iPad, Apple has (by the time you read this) launched a follow up. The new iPad 2 has all manner of additional bells and whistles, but the premise remains the same: more features than a smartphone but not quite a laptop, the iPad is intended to combine the best features of the two and judging from the sales of the original iPad and the increasingly large choice of competition, many people find it is just what they need. For audio use, however, does the iPad successfully replace either the MP3 player or laptop or does it find an additional role? The answer is both.

Like the preceding iPad and other members of the iPod and iPhone family, the iPad 2 is fitted with the standard 30-pin 'dock' connection. This allows the iPad to be docked as an audio source in any piece of equipment so equipped – in theory, at least. As most iPod ancillaries have their dock connection in a neat iPod-sized indent around their dock connector, the iPad won't fit. Happily, some docks coming onto the market, such as Cambridge Audio's iD100 iPod transport, have corrected this and feature a connection designed to be as amenable to the iPad as it is the iPod. As Cambridge Audio's Simon Hewitt notes, "Given the ability to draw digital audio from the iPad, it has the potential to sound very good as a docked source." As every function of the iPod Touch is replicated on the iPad, substituting one for the other will be problem free.

A Pad in the hand

Docking the iPad means that you lose out on the star attraction: the superb 'want one' tactility of the thing, that has even ardent sceptics contemplating a purchase after a while. The larger screen of the iPad 2 significantly improves the browsing experience and AirPlay, as discussed in our *Opinion* column in *HFC 344*, keeps the iPad 2 in your hands while you listen to the content. Products like the Marantz NA7004 network audio player (*HFC 344*) are so equipped – stroll into a room with an iPad2 and the NA7004 shows up as a point that the content will stream to at the touch of a button (or at least a button-shaped section of the touchscreen). AirPlay isn't capable of handling the latest and greatest high-resolution files, but as Hewitt notes, "it's still possible to attain pretty good audio performance using AirPlay."

Convenience plays a significant role in how often we use equipment. For every occasion that you might lament not being able to stream a

hi-res file via AirPlay, there are likely to be several more where you simply want to connect instantly and listen.

Those who are interested in high-resolution files may not want to use AirPlay, but may still be interested in the iPad 2. This is because, while it might not be ready as the source of such files, it is definitely ready for a new role in audio as the mother of all remote controls.

Most streamers that we have tested recently have an 'iPhone control' application. Any opportunity to use one of these applications ported for the iPad is a revelatory experience.

Now, as many stereo products feature ever more sophisticated interfaces, the iPad is the obvious solution to controlling them. The ability to effortlessly sift your way through your music collection, while simultaneously reading a book (or indeed the latest copy of *Hi-Fi Choice*, now available on the iPad) or discovering more about the music you're listening to using the internet, is an enticing one.

The tablet may not be a perfect fit to replace the more conventionally sized iPod as a docked music source (and AirPlay is convenient rather than cutting-edge), but the potential the iPad 2 and its competition has as a control mechanism is, perhaps, the area where we will see the most benefit as users of two-channel audio.

iPad 2: more than just a pretty (inter) face



Given the ability to draw digital audio from the iPad, it has the potential to sound very good as a docked source



ED SELLEY

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

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Is there room for a tablet in your system? Do you already use one? Let us know. Email us now: hifichoice@futurenet.com

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Beauty and the Beogram

It's said that the 1970s was the decade style forgot; the creators of the beautiful Beogram 4000 would beg to differ, argues *Jimmy Hughes*

If you were to ask the proverbial man in the street the age-old proverbial question; "who makes the best hi-fi?" chances are his reply would be – "B&O, guv'nor". To the Average Joe, Bang and Olufsen is the Dog's whatsits; the 'best a man could get'.

Naturally, audiophiles remained unconvinced; anything looking that pretty and stylish simply couldn't deliver the goods, sonically. Yet when B&O launched its Beogram 4000 turntable in 1972, even the most hair-shirt enthusiast was forced to take notice; those stylish Danes had clearly come up with something a bit special.

For the Beogram 4000 was the world's first turntable to feature an integrated linear-tracking tonearm. And, unlike the somewhat flimsy turntables B&O had offered previously, its new baby was solid and well-engineered, with a nice heavy platter and massive centre bearing.

Unusually for the time, an electronically governed servo motor was employed, which allowed fine-speed adjustment and drove the platter via a belt. But it was the linear-tracking tonearm that distinguished this turntable from its competitors. Quite simply, B&O had produced a world-first.

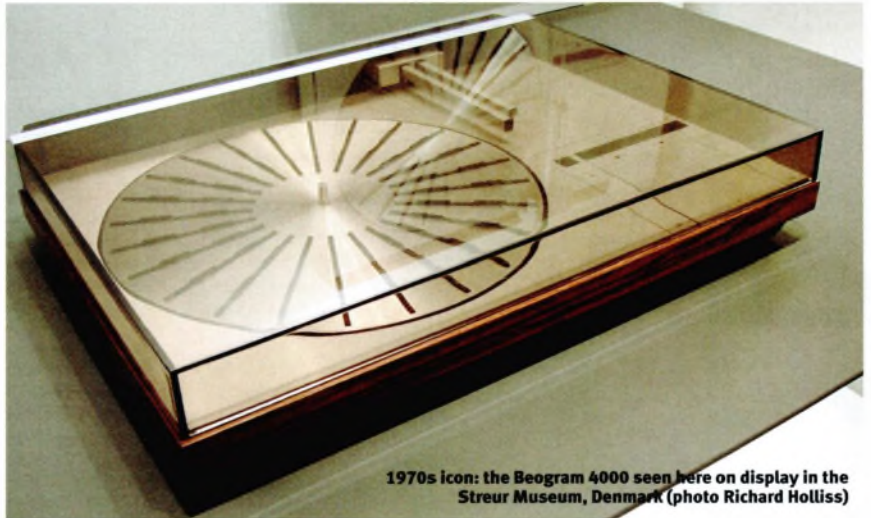
Tracing distortion (caused by the geometrical errors of conventional pivoted arms) was something of a hot topic at that time, especially as elliptical styli were becoming more and more common. Being a tangential tracker, the Beogram's unique tonearm eliminated tracing error.

Now, whether or not the cure was worse than the disease (and it was!) is not the issue here. The Beogram 4000 was ground-breaking. Add to this its beautiful styling and you had a product that literally had no rival. It was ultra-chic; elegance and stylishness personified, exuding a cool timeless beauty.

It's got Class

Owning a B&O sent out a clear message. It told everyone you had taste and money; an eye for the best. In a word: Class. B&O represented opulence and luxury and, as a result, the brand became hugely aspirational. Indeed, one West London B&O dealer actually ran a fleet of Rolls-Royce cars – using them to install the equipment! As actor Leslie Phillips might've purred – "Ding-Dong!"

For its time, the Beogram 4000 was remarkably clever. The radial lines on the platter informed a sensor on the arm as to whether or not there was a record in place. If no record was on the platter, the arm would sweep over the surface, and return to Rest. If you had a 7-inch single,



1970s icon: the Beogram 4000 seen here on display in the Streur Museum, Denmark (photo Richard Holliss)

the turntable would automatically switch-speed to 45rpm.

Okay, today we might scoff at such 'sophistication', but no turntable had ever been able to do that before, as countless damaged stylus assemblies could testify. And speaking of styli, the Beogram 4000 came fitted with B&O's highly regarded SP15 cartridge, which could also be used (via an adaptor) in conventional tonearms.

However, with the Beogram 4000, the cartridge press-fitted into the arm, eliminating ugly fixing bolts. This enabled legendary B&O designer Jacob Jensen to create an incredibly sleek, slender arm that made everything else look horribly fat and dunky by comparison. It was the world's first ultra-low-mass arm/cartridge assembly.

Like many turntables of that period, the Beogram 4000 sounded airy and spacious, with a light, somewhat ethereal tonality. This was largely down to the tonearm, which (inevitably) did not have a rigid bearing system. Indeed, the arm was actually designed to 'move' laterally and a servo motor would then shift the rear part to line things up again.

In other words, the Beogram 4000's arm went through a sort of sidewinding operation, with the back part playing catch-up to the stylus. Movement was sensed by a light that was blocked when the arm was straight. As the arm moved off-centre, the light would shine onto a sensor.

The more off-centre the arm became, the brighter the light shining on the sensor – and the more the motor turned to correct the error. It sounds crude, but it really worked. Don't laugh; only a few years prior to this, men had landed on the moon using similar technology. ●

One West London dealer ran a fleet of Rolls-Royce cars to install the B&O equipment!



JIMMY HUGHES

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

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Did you own a Beogram 4000? Maybe it was delivered by a Rolls! Get in touch. Email us now: hifichoice@futurenet.com

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Nothing to show

I have just returned from this year's Bristol show – a round trip of over 120 miles – and frankly I am not sure I'll be bothering again. This year's show brought almost nothing new to my attention and the funds I had saved, in case I saw something worth buying, remained unspent.

I realise that times are tough for the industry at the moment, but the spectacular lack of flair or imagination I saw at Bristol this year didn't fill me with any confidence that it is due a recovery any time soon. Where were the storming offers to encourage people to part with their cash? Why, with only a precious few exceptions, did manufacturers elect to bring along pricey set ups that virtually nobody is going to buy on impulse?

The impression I had this year was of an industry waiting for the same old formula to work again, while bringing nothing new that might win over some new converts or convince us to buy some new gear. The day was a bust for me and not worth the journey.

David Palmer, via email

HFC *We don't agree with everything you say in your letter, but we can see the argument. While we thought Bristol did have some interesting new products – many of which we will be doing our best to cover in upcoming issues – we do appreciate that there was not a huge amount of product at the entry-level price point.*

We also agree that really storming show bargains were thin on the ground (Sunday often has some great buys, especially towards the end of the day). That said, many exhibitors operate on the, "don't ask, don't get" principle, so if you are interested in seeing if a company will part with something for a reduction in price, you might need to ask them about it.



Admirers of the Bristol Marriot's superb architecture seen at the annual pilgrimage

We would certainly be interested to hear what you (or anybody else) has in mind to improve the hi-fi show experience for the future.

Steep streaming

Looking through the recent influx of streaming products to hit the market, I am confused at the pricing and positioning of many of them. If we assume that people who are likely to be well-versed in the mechanics of streaming audio are younger people who usually have a lower income, why is the only choice of separate streamer under £400, a Squeezebox?

As Naim and Linn do not serve the entry-level market, I did not expect their offerings to be anything other than the price they are (although, the Uniti Qute is pretty good value considering the facilities it has), but why is the Marantz NA7004 over £700 and the new Yamaha NPS-2000 over £1,000?

While I have no issue with them building units at this price point, where are the attempts to win some new customers over with an equivalent to entry-level CD players? The streamer market

seems to be back-to-front at the moment. I don't think that the market for products placed firmly at the aspirational end of pricing will develop correctly if there is nothing for people to buy before that point.

Luke Jenkins, via email

HFC *This is an interesting point and we are not sure what the answer is. There is an argument that like CD, DVD and Blu-ray before it, the initial players will be sold in relatively low volumes and as a result, manufacturers will 'play it safe' and build relatively high-end units that can be sold in low quantities. Equally, as you say, without the more entry-level products to work up from, the current crop of streamers will be 'orphans' in the range.*

Part of the reason for the lack of entry-level streaming products is the cost of the software and the interface. Something as slick as the Squeezebox Touch will not come cheap in development terms, so a manufacturer needs to be very sure that the product that requires that amount of development will recoup the



The Marantz NA7004 does more than you think for £720

www.hifichoice.co.uk

investment – or, at least, allow that software to be used across a few different products.

Furthermore, the value calculations attached to products like the Marantz are not as straightforward as they might seem at first. The Marantz offers streaming as a replacement for CD, but also has a built-in tuner, iPod functionality and can act as a DAC. We don't think this is a bad feature set for £700!

We are sure that there will be less expensive standalone products over the course of the year, but in the meantime the new arrivals on the market offer features that justify their price tag in our view.

The bare necessities

In response to Paul Towler's Letter of the Month (HFC 344), I am minded to quote Oscar Wilde and say, "Give me the luxuries and I can dispense with the necessities."

I know beyond reasonable doubt that my Audio Research pre and power combination is one of the least efficient devices in my house, but I am willing to make sacrifices in any number of other areas before I part with it. I would also point out that if he is a valve user, he is almost certainly turning his amps off when not using them (in contrast to the wasteful solid-state tradition of leaving them on all the time) and owns a product that is likely to be easy to repair and maintain.

This in turn means that the environmental cost of the equipment when measured 'dust-to-dust' (i.e. from the point it is assembled to the point it is scrapped) is often much lower than items that are supposedly much greener than a valve amp.

I would urge Mr Towler to keep his hi-fi intact, review his insulation and boiler and both the energy ratings of his domestic appliances and how he goes about using them!

If we do start seeing energy ratings on hi-fi, they will not be retroactively applied to his existing equipment and the costs of scrapping it and buying something else are far greater than making some small alterations to his life and keeping equipment that makes our quality of life better, day in, day out. Don't do anything rash you might later regret!

Stephen Heron, via email

HFC This is an interesting argument and you make some valid points. We do think that a balanced approach is always going to be best. We agree that there is no sense in replacing something that isn't worn out (not if the idea isn't for an improvement in sound quality anyway!), but equally we feel there is no harm taking power consumption into account when shopping for new equipment.

Up against the wall

I have a couple of observations to make on the reporting of speakers which is illustrated in the March edition (HFC 343). Paul Messenger, in his introduction to the luxury standmounts *Blind-listening Goup Test*, observes that the majority of us occupy properties that are of modest proportions and suggests the purchasing of high-quality standmounts is potentially more acceptable than floorstanders.

I realise that his comments may have been written largely with bass response in mind,



but there is another issue of interest to buyers too. In practice, the physical depth of decent standmounts is often identical, if not greater than that of similarly priced floorstanders. Therefore there is little difference in their overall footprint. Consequently, it is a speaker's ability to accommodate wall-reinforcement that is often an important factor in choosing speakers.

Which brings me to my main beef, setting aside the relatively brief comment in the *Talking Point* section, nowhere in the group test is preferred positioning of each model mentioned. The majority of the group possess rear ports that usually require a bit of space to achieve the best bass response, but it would be great to have this specifically reported.

Compare this with the review on p74 of the Audiovector KI 3 Signature, where close-wall positioning was actually preferred. I realise this model uses quarter-wave bass-loading, but would this speaker be equally, if not more suitable, to a similar room size than the standmounts or not?

It is not clear from the reviews, but would be of interest to readers in narrowing down selection. I would be interested to receive your views on this matter.

Incidentally, my current system includes Dynaudio Contour 1.3 Mk II speakers. Supplied bungs are used in the rear ports to allow close-wall positioning for the majority of the time. For serious listening sessions, i.e. when my wife is out, the bungs are removed and the speakers brought out into the room.

Rob Miller, via email



A9
"Amazingly clean transparent sound, agility and seamless integration"
What Hi-Fi



A6
"Outstanding true bass for its size"
What Hi-Fi

A5

"Endlessly enjoyable listening and accomplished beyond their price"
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HFC Paul Messenger replies: Mr Miller raises a number of worthwhile points. The question of optimum room placement is certainly a very complex one for the reviewer, partly because the end-user's specific room characteristics are necessarily an unknown factor, but also because the overwhelming majority of speakers today feature reflex port loading. Under my particular conditions, close-to-wall placement provides a boost of around 6dB across the 50-100Hz octave, compared to positioning a pair of speakers well clear of walls. Furthermore, the most prominent and troublesome mode in my listening room is at 50-55Hz. Such problems are most likely to arise when the port tuning frequency and room-mode are close together, under which circumstances close-to-wall siting is usually better avoided, or port-blocking bungs brought into play. With at least three variables involved, matters are inevitably complicated.

I shall in future try to be more specific in recommending the most likely best placement, but must emphasise that different rooms may well have different characteristics. I particularly like Mr Miller's suggestion that a standmount can be used close-to-wall with bungs, then moved out and the ports opened for serious listening.

Hi-fi kitty

I've just seen your picture of the cat amongst the hi-fi in the HFC 343 and thought you'd like the attached picture. Jasper has sadly passed away (through purely natural causes) and having him make the letters page would be a fitting memorial.

Phil Cowling, via email

Hi-fi kitties

With apologies to the perfectly adequate NAD613 cassette deck, for cutting it off at the bottom of the photo, here are our three cats taking advantage

of the nice warm amp on the top of my Meridian 551 integrated amp, 506 CD player, 504 FM tuner and NAD613. If they all tried to sit on the stack at the same time, there'd be fur flying so one at a time is all we ever see. There is Basil, the tabby; Sybil, the black one; and Tilly, the posh one (aka Quelazure Amontillado in full).

One way of keeping them off my Meridians and the accompanying Linn Sondek, is to whack up the Meridian A500s to a decent listening volume, then they all push off to the garden or duvet depending on the season.

Mike Locke, via email

HFC The link between cats and hi-fi is pretty clear now. As yet, however, nothing from the other species. Is it only cats that are drawn to a toasty amp? Keep sending in those pics!



Remembered: Jasper, the audiophile cat



LETTER OF THE MONTH

The right stuff



Gyromania lives

HOW REFRESHING to see the Michell Gyrodec take the honours in the turntable *Blind-listening Group Test (HFC 345)*. I remember seeing an original Gyrodec in a dealer in 1982 and being smitten with it, but being fresh into the world of work I had no means of affording one. The fact that thirty years later it's still winning group tests is a testament to the worth of the original design and Michell's continuous policy of refinement and improvement.

Like the Porsche 911, this is a great example of building something fundamentally 'right' and by evolving the design, ensuring that it stays so. This is something I prefer, as the business of a new design every two to three years leaves no scope for evolution. Perhaps, other manufacturers should take note? •

John Crompton, via email

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B: AirPlay

C: Air Supply

Please text your answer: Marantz A, B, or C to 87474 or visit futurecomps.co.uk/marantz and follow the instructions, leaving your selected answer and details where prompted



Marantz didn't do anything by half when designing the NA7004: this is a media streamer with DAB, FM and AM radio, digital inputs and iPod connectivity, the latter both over USB and via the new AirPlay system, which is entirely wireless. All this tech is contained in a handsome, full-width chassis.

The comprehensive functionality doesn't make the NA7004 hard to use, either; we described it as, "delightfully

easy to operate". And the Marantz doesn't disappoint sonically, showing itself to be a strong performer across the different inputs with a variety of media types.

We were so impressed with the performance and facilities of the NA7004, in fact, that we said that it, "virtually demands our recommendation." Thanks to our friends at Marantz, one lucky reader will be introduced to streamed audio and discover just how good the NA7004 is for themselves.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS To enter the Marantz competition, you can either (a) text your answer to 87474 at any time between 28.04.11 and 25.05.11, or (b) enter online at www.futurecomps.co.uk/marantz with your entry being received between 28.04.11 and 25.05.11. By sending your entry you agree to these competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and carefully selected third parties. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word STOP at the end of your text message or at the end of your postal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network tariff rate.

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The future of British radio

UK radio is changing. With technology driving new services and sound quality

Adam Hartley asks what's in store

Audiophiles have long decried the sound quality and limited bit-rates made available by broadcasters on DAB radio stations, with no sign of the UK upgrading to the far superior quality DAB+ system at any point soon. Indeed, the government is still very keen to push for a digital switchover from FM to DAB (currently mooted to happen around 2015) with many happy FM listeners already voicing concerns about what, to them, seems like a step backwards for quality.

The BBC was first to launch DAB radio back in 1995, and now some ten million digital radios have been sold over the last 15 years. Ironically, it is the UK's legacy with

the original tech which prevents British broadcasters making the move to DAB+, already in use across much of mainland Europe. But is DAB+ a red herring?

More interestingly, there are glimmers of hope for those radio listeners that value quality over affordability with the latest developments in internet radio, mobile apps, in-car listening and the BBC's own experiments with HD Sound on Radio 3 (received at a noticeably higher quality than DAB at 320kbps via the AAC codec) all pointing the way forward.

We spoke with a number of digital radio manufacturers and industry experts to find out more about what the future of radio has in store for the committed hi-fi fan.

BBC HD SOUND

"HD Sound kicked off last summer when Tim Davie [BBC Director of Audio & Music] asked me to come up with something exciting and innovative around technology for radio, that he could announce at last October's radio festival," says Rupert Brun, Head of Technology for BBC Audio & Music.

"We have a lossless broadcast from the Royal Albert Hall for the Proms, so the sound arrives in very good quality when it reaches Broadcasting House. We then set up a temporary experimental stream to deliver that audio at 320kbps AAC – and we got a lot of very strong and encouraging feedback from the audience.

"One of the most important things that I learned from that experiment was that, while the bit-rate is nice and the audio quality going into it has to be good, what is really crucial is getting the levels absolutely right. With this sort of codec, even at these very high bit-rates, if you don't get the level going into the codec absolutely spot-on, then you don't get the best out of it."

As for the commercial sector, Absolute Radio has also come out with its own HD offering online and there is a good chance we will see more of these types of offerings on commercial radio, when broadcasters gradually realise that the demand exists.





Listeners' disappointment

The BBC has taken a considerable amount of flak over the poor audio quality of most DAB stations, which most radio technicians and manufacturers will happily tell you (off-record) has been a travesty for anybody who cares about the accurate reproduction of sound via their radio. Yet Auntie cannot be accused of lacking vision for the future of radio, as anybody who heard last year's Proms broadcast at 320kbps AAC on Radio 3 is likely to agree.

Arcam founder John Dawson, whose company was the first to make DAB receivers, sums up listeners' disappointment at the reduction in audio quality via DAB, when the data rates continued to be turned down to accommodate more channels. "It negated quite a lot of what we stand for," says Dawson. "Even though I completely understand the broadcaster's commercial reasons for choosing quantity over quality. I remember listening to BBC Radio 2 and 3 at 192kbps on early samples of the first DAB tuners and the sound quality was fantastic."

A brighter future

Still, the future looks rosy with internet bandwidth becoming cheaper, Radio 3 setting a good standard and the possibility for lots of internet radio stations jumping up to this quality, "which, if treated well throughout the chain can sound really good

and at least as good as current FM," enthuses Naim Audio's PR Steve Harris.

Critics of the proposed FM-to-digital switchover often point to the fact that radio listeners are quite different beasts to TV viewers, with many hi-fi manufacturers publicly speaking out against the Government's current plans for radio.

Arcam's John Dawson, for one, is adamant that, "they are not going to switch FM off at any time soon; it is just too early in the replacement cycle and I suspect it will be retained for local stations and various other things."

For today's modern radio listener, the FM transistor in the greenhouse is jammed on Radio 4, the Wi-Fi radio in the kitchen streams tunes from the server as well as picking up internet

"Arcam's John Dawson: "they're not going to switch FM off at any time soon."

stations, the trusty old Roberts FM radio in the bathroom works for the news in the mornings and the DAB radio on the desk is useful for BBC 7 and 6 Music.

Internet, mobile and on-demand radio is also becoming increasingly popular amongst audiophiles, with the latest UK Radioplayer portal (ukradioplayer.info) launching this spring, an



16:00 - 17:00
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BBC Radio 3's HD Sound is a step forward



BBC iPlayer: listen live or listen again

initiative that is part-funded by the BBC in partnership with the commercial sector.

As far as mobile radio goes, the latest mobile radio app for Apple iPhone and Android mobiles from we7, described as a personal radio app that works anywhere, develops the trend towards personalised radio listening via your smartphone.

we7 hopes to make internet radio an accessible and personalised experience, offering the user the choice to listen to dynamically created stations by inputting their favourite artists or genre of music. In addition to this, the company also offers an on-demand Spotify-style streaming service to mobile users for a £9.99-a-month subscription fee.



HFC's 2010 Best Innovation award winner, PURE's Sensia touch-screen radio

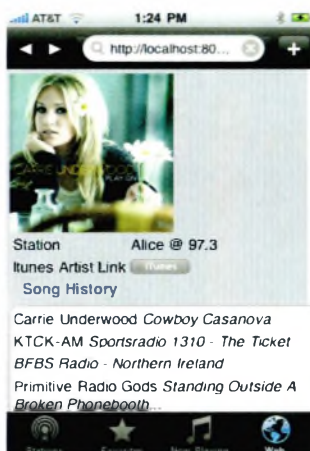
As mobile data packages become cheaper and, crucially, more reliable (meaning no more annoying drop-offs), streaming specialists such as we7 and Spotify clearly see mobile phones as the future-listening device for the typical radio user. Spotify recently announced that it has already hit one million paying subscribers, many of whom have been convinced to part with their subscription fees after using the company's iPhone app.

"Mobile signals are unreliable for radio streaming, but with the new we7 app you can still 'use it if you lose it' – continuing to listen to your favourite music radio stations, regardless of connection," explains Steve Purdham, CEO of we7.

Experimenting with HD

For manufacturers such as PURE, the main issue that now needs to be addressed is the fact that the BBC is only currently providing HD Sound in a Flash-wrapper and therefore, it can only be picked up on a PC. "The BBC needs to look at how this is delivered so that manufacturers can have access to HD Sound streams and deliver them directly to the listener from radio devices," says Colin Crawford, Marketing Manager of PURE. "One of the things that PURE did with The Lounge internet radio portal from the word go was to add an audio-quality filter, so if you want you can filter the 16,000 internet stations down to a much lower number of high-bit-rate streams."

While the BBC is not yet committing to provide a similar 'audio quality' search function



WunderRadio brings the airwaves to the iPhone

on the new UK Radioplayer, the corporation should be applauded for its experiments with HD Sound.

"Following last year's experiment, we decided that we would make it permanently available for Radio 3," explains the BBC's head of audio and music technology, Rupert Brun. "It is currently optimised for the iPlayer, so it is in a Flash-wrapper, which means it is difficult for anything other than a computer to handle it. We know that this is not ideal and we are experimenting with other streaming formats at the moment to find out what works best."

The limits of IP radio

While listening to radio on a PC via a decent set of headphones is far from the ideal way to enjoy the medium, tuning in from your smartphone or tablet PC via streaming services such as we7 and Spotify or internet radio apps (such as the rather marvellous WunderRadio on iPhone) is unarguably becoming increasingly popular.

PURE's Colin Crawford is still to be convinced that the emergence



When only FM (and DAB!) will do: Roberts' Revival DAB

of IP radio services software and apps is ever going to be a mass-market trend, noting; "As for the future of in-car radio, the next generation of mobile networks will still not be capable of handling the sort of traffic that is currently handled over broadcast for radio."

"IP software is a horribly inefficient way of delivering a load of data. This is why it is our very strong view that you have to have broadcast digital radio to cover the mainstream and IP radio to deliver niche stations."

Arcam's John Dawson agrees with the argument that mobile 3G and 4G networks are not going to pose a threat to the growth of DAB in-car. "They will work alongside, with DAB as the backbone broadcast radio," says Dawson. "Additionally, no matter how many claims for bandwidth are made, there isn't a chance in hell of the UK's twenty million-plus car users to simultaneously access radio via 4G. Broadcast is a very efficient system for basic radio stations and that is not going to change."

The problem remains that, no matter how much bandwidth is

available to them, in Dawson's opinion, commercial broadcaster's will always opt for quantity of stations (therefore, more listeners and more ad revenue) over quality of sound. "There is always an imbalance between the listeners who appreciate higher quality audio and the broadcaster's imperative to get as many listeners as possible," he explains. ●

UK RADIOPLAYER

The BBC's latest radio innovation is UK Radioplayer – dubbed, slightly confusingly, as the "iPlayer for radio" – a new catch-up and on-demand service provided via the internet, which encompasses almost all of Britain's commercial and BBC stations, with around 200 stations available at launch.

So what does this new service offer that you cannot get from the many other internet radio apps already on the market?

Firstly, the service will offer a fully searchable network, with users being able to search for programmes via musical genre and offered the opportunity of creating a playlist of favourite stations.

"Choice is always increased on the internet and the huge range of UK stations on Radioplayer will be presented in a way in which it will be very easy to search across genre, station and the like," says Laurence Harrison, director of technology at Digital Radio UK (DRUK), the organisation charged with ensuring the growth of digital radio and, if and when a switch-over is announced, managing that process.

Harrison is adamant that UK Radioplayer could well bring about a "step-change in the ways in which people listen to radio over the internet."



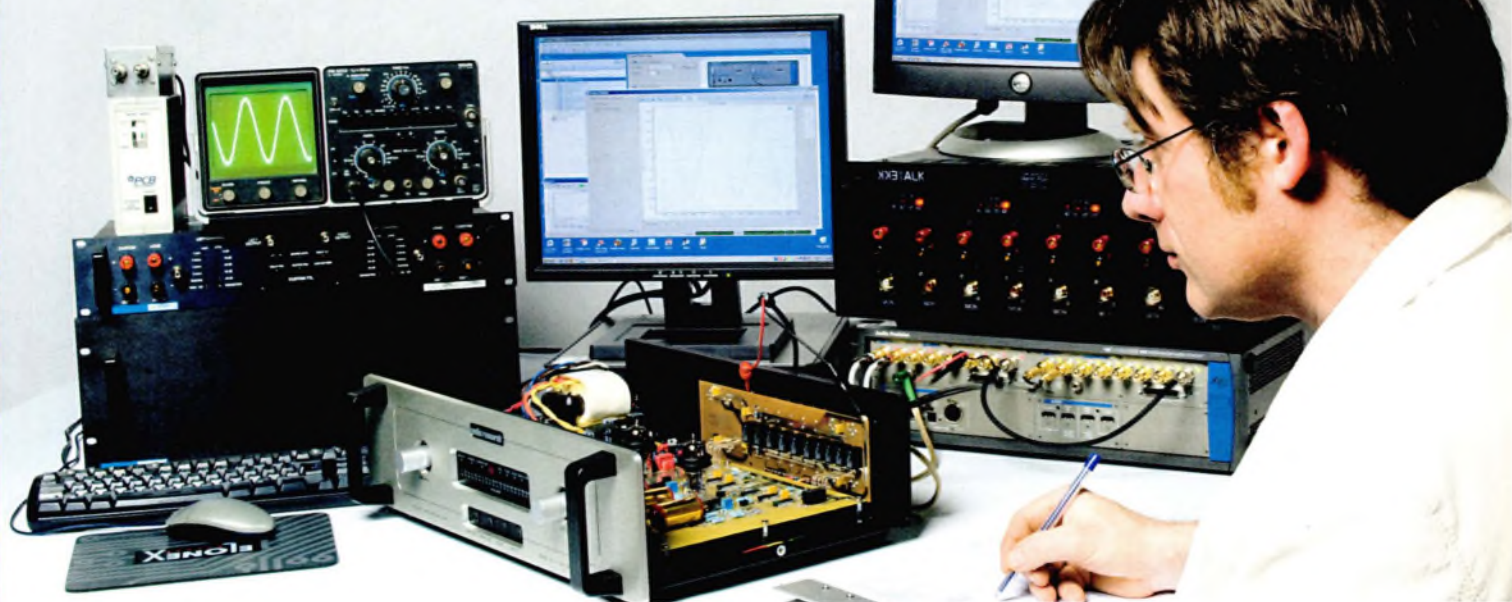
Wunderfull



PURE's latest: the £200 streaming Contour

How we test

Hi-Fi Choice employs the most rigorous test and measurement regime in the business and here we explain why our definitive verdicts count



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

THIS CRUCIAL test involves relatively rapid-fire comparisons of the test units for a panel of three listeners who are not aware of which product they are listening to. Levels are accurately matched and the test is conducted with the minimum of distractions, playing the same programme through each system while the listeners take notes of whatever pleases or bothers them.

In this way, an evaluation free of prejudices based on brand, price or appearance can be made, while the different tastes and sensitivities of each listener help round out the analysis and make it more widely applicable. Occasional repeats of kit give a 'sanity check', while years of experience help make the process efficient and reliable.

SIGHTED LISTENING

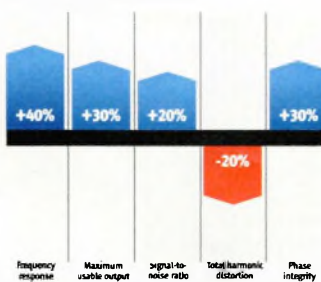
IN ADDITION to the 'blind' test, the author also spends a longer period listening to each system with various items of partnering equipment and a wider range of music. Apart from the obvious fact that this is how most people listen most of the time, this also has the advantage that interesting aspects of the sound can be investigated and different musical

styles tried out to see what works, not to mention experimenting with such variables as listening level.

Long-term reference pieces of equipment (some from past reviews) get substituted for the kit under test from time to time, in order to check on performance relative to the rest of the audio world, while recordings made by the author provide a live reference.

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



THE POINT OF LAB TESTS is twofold: first, to establish basic operating criteria for the equipment under likely conditions of load, input level, etc. And second, to find out what lies behind the subjective observations noted. To this end, all the units in this group were checked for maximum output power and response flatness using basic analogue test equipment, plus an oscilloscope to look for the onset of overload.

Other parameters were measured using an analogue-to-digital converter connected to a PC, with the data analysed digitally to show distortion, plus intermodulation and digital aliasing distortion. Finally, five basic parameters are summarised for each unit in our unique bar graphs.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Amplifiers should have a response that's flat within a small fraction of a dB. We test this by sweeping a signal across the band and noting the largest deviation.

MAXIMUM USABLE OUTPUT

The basic power measurement is continuous sine-wave power into eight ohms. We also take into account short term delivery into low-impedance loads as well.

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Ideally, amplifiers should have a better SNR than any source they are likely to be fed from. This means the target is about 100dB – noise should be at least 100dB below maximum output at typical volume settings.

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

Each amplifier is driven to produce 10 watts into an eight-ohm load. We measure the distortion levels present at this level. 10W is real world power and represents the average power output consumers will likely use to drive their loudspeakers.

PHASE INTEGRITY

Phase difference through the audio band between multiple channels is an essential parameter to be maintained through amplifying circuits. Valve amplifiers tend to offer more problems due to the large output transformers that are exclusive to this type of technology.

TESTING EQUIPMENT USED

- Source:**
- Cambridge Audio Azur 640C CD player
 - Colorfly portable hi-res player
 - Samsung NC10 laptop computer
 - Cambridge Audio DacMagic DAC
- Speakers:**
- ATC SCM20
 - Bowers and Wilkins 803s
- Cables:**
- Kimber, QED, Wireworld

TEST MUSIC USED

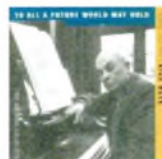
BETTE MIDLER: SLOW BOAT



STEELY DAN: BABYLON SISTER



ALAN BUSH: SONGS



GUZMÁN: AMBROSIA



THIS ISSUE'S BLIND PANEL

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



JAN LEVINSKI
JOB: PROPRIETOR, JSLFUNK

JAN HAS WORKED for several hi-fi manufacturers in design and production and is an expert on audiophile electronic upgrades.



ED SELLEY
JOB: HFC STAFF WRITER

ED HAS SPENT the best part of a decade selling, developing and supporting audio products. He now works full-time with HFC.



TAMRIKO SAKVARELIDZE
JOB: RECORDING PRODUCER AND PIANO TEACHER

TAMRIKO'S SHARP hearing is used daily in teaching piano and increasingly often in producing recordings.

DEFINITIVE VERDICTS

No other magazine offers an equivalent listening programme

Few, if any, magazines in the world can equal our dedication and thoroughness in combining blind and sighted listening with extensive lab tests and detailed internal examination of equipment passing through our hands. Each of these is equally important and it's not just that we do them – we also bring to the table decades of audio experience.

Our listeners in the *Blind-Listening Group Tests* for example, are experts from within the hi-fi industry. Each and everyone of them is used to listening critically during product development and initial product testing. In fact, many of them also get involved in making recordings and their own music.

One of these is HFC's Technical Consultant Richard Black, who has been involved with designing, testing and evaluating audio equipment for a quarter of a century.

It's the culmination of all the aspects mentioned on these pages that makes for the most reliable hi-fi verdicts in the business.

TESTED THIS MONTH: VALVE AMPS
TURN OVER NOW!

Blind-listening Group test

VALVE AMPS £1,395-£1,895

Can today's best valve amps rival solid-state?

Modern valve amps continue to charm, delight and lure us away from solid-state. **Richard Black** and the blind panel pick the best from a closely priced pack

TRANSISTOR AMPLIFIERS arrived on the scene in the mid-1960s rapidly rendering valves obsolete, or so we thought. In fact, a small hard core of valve enthusiasts kept the flag flying through the dark days of the 1970s and early '80s, until gradually the audiophile world realised that valves still had a lot to offer. The high profile of brands like Audio Research (USA) and EAR (UK) helped increase valve visibility and by the mid-1990s it was simply no longer remarkable to see a few valve amps on the shelves of a showroom, or powering a show demonstration.

We are now in something of a valve renaissance, with a multiplicity of makes and models available covering just about all bases from low-power single-ended triode designs to substantial multi-valve models kicking out a couple of hundred watts or more. Production of valves themselves continues apace in several countries and most of the classic types, made popular in audio amps of old, are now readily available.

One of those classic valves is the KT88, one of a group of valves called 'kinkless

tetrode' (hence the KT), designed at GEC in the 1950s. These were intended to be low-distortion audio valves with output duty in mind and the KT88 was the most powerful of them and, for many enthusiasts, was one of the finest audio

"We are now in a valve renaissance, with a multiplicity of makes and models."

output valves ever. It still has a strong following and when we realised that a whole group test of KT88-output amps was a possibility, we just couldn't resist!

If you're not (yet) a valve convert, there's really nothing special you need to take into account beyond the fact that valve amps are almost invariably a little bigger and hotter than similarly-rated transistor amps and have a very modest need for occasional servicing (new valves). They need no special pleading on any sonic or technical grounds; like any hi-fi, they play music and that's it!



PRICING

Valve amps are not the cheapest: that's inevitable because they require fundamentally expensive parts like output transformers. Specifically, they aren't the cheapest per output watt, but it's more than a touch ironic that their increasing popularity has brought their price down in recent years, even as solid-state amps have been forced up by less favourable market conditions worldwide. As a result these six models are far from frightening and are indeed quite closely matched.

ON TEST



Cayin Audio A-55T
£1,460 P42

Every inch a classic, this amp does include one feature we've never seen before: switching between triode and ultra-linear mode via remote control. It's one of the 'new wave' of Chinese amps, beautifully made to a standard that needs no apology by an all-Chinese operation; no European hand-me-downs!



Icon Audio Stereo 60 Mk 3
£1,700 P43

A bulky and particularly weighty amp, the Stereo 60 is another model that offers dual operating modes for the output valves. Its exceptionally robust chassis encloses a circuit that extracts a little more power than most from a pair of KT88s, though still well within the valves' safe operating limit.



Opera Consonance Cyber 100 Signature
£1,595 P47

Another model proudly produced in China, from the prolific Opera/Consonance stable. Like the Cayin, this one offers remote control of input selection and volume, though operating mode is fixed. With more inputs, it scores highly for flexibility, while output power is par for the course.



Prima Luna Prologue Two
£1,820 P49

Prima Luna has made quite a splash in the audioworld since its launch in 2002. The relatively modest Prologue Two keeps features to a minimum and instead, puts the money into parts and build quality, including a particularly smart paint job. The 'shoobox' format case saves space, too.



Pure A30 £1,395 P53

The cheapest amp in the group is in fact the most valve-y, as it uses valve rectifiers alongside the more familiar amplifying components. In other respects it is not dissimilar, however, and it offers a choice of triode and ultralinear output modes. Our review sample differs from current production, which includes a valve cage.



Triode Corporation TRV-88SE
£1,895 P53

Another beautifully finished amp, from Japan this time. Triode Corporation specialises in amplifiers using triodes, but the cheaper models, use more regular valves. Not that there's anything regular about the amp, which thoughtfully adds a front-mounted line input and headphone socket for flexibility.







Cayin Audio A-55T **£1,460**

The name may be new, but the build quality and technology show all the signs of experience

DETAILS

ORIGIN:
China

WEIGHT:
13kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
350x185x300mm

FEATURES:

- 4 line inputs
- Record output
- 8/4 ohm loudspeaker outputs
- Remote control
- Triode/ultralinear mode
- Notional output 40W/18W

DISTRIBUTOR:
Audio Sanctum

TELEPHONE:
07517 889738

WEBSITE:
cayin.com

Cayin is one brand name of Zuhai Spark, a Chinese hi-fi specialist operation. Its amps are all valve-based designs running the gamut from relatively pedestrian valves, like the KT88 and EL34, to the exotic-looking GU29. This is one of the most comfortably traditional models in the range, using a familiar line-up of four KT88 valves, plus two each of the ECC82 and ECC83.

Like many current pentode/tetrode amps, this one has a choice of operational modes: ultralinear or triode. Rather classily, these are selected via the remote control (a front-panel switch would have been useful). The choice of mode gives flexibility in the matter of output power, with 40 watts on offer in ultralinear mode, but only 18 watts in triode mode. But what may be of more significance to most listeners is that it invariably slightly alters the basic sound, due to the different impedances and distortion signatures involved.

The layout of this model is classic, with transformers behind and

valves neatly displayed in front. Inside the chassis, connection is a mixture of small printed-circuit boards and neatly executed wiring (with quite a few boutique components), plus generous power-supply capacitance and a smoothing choke. Inputs are switched by relays and the volume control is a motorised ALPS 'blue velvet' component.

Sound quality

Auditioning this amp in triode mode, our 'blind' listeners were generally very taken with its presentation. It's particularly good with voices and that, of course, is a big plus with any hi-fi kit. In similar vein, it communicates melodic lines well and one is always clearly aware of the tune when listening – as one listener succinctly put it, 'musical!'

But there's more to this amp than just sounding vaguely nice. It has good detail across the midrange and into the treble and presents very good images, too, with clearly defined lateral placement and stable, plausible depth; you could say this amp makes the direction and focus of a piece of music very clear.

There's something of a down side in the handling of frequency extremes, although it didn't greatly trouble our listeners. Bass is a little lacking in real extension and although it is reasonably tight and rhythmic, it doesn't pack quite the punch that one or two of the amps here managed.

Treble is just slightly on the dull side of sweet, but it's clear from our listeners' notes (and our own

subsequent sighted listening) that this is something one gets used to in a couple of minutes and not a serious distraction.

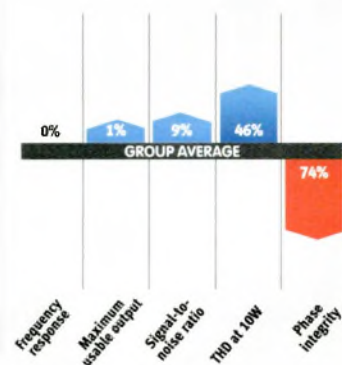
Dynamics are interesting, seeming somehow to make the shift from quiet to loud rather rapid, though the reverse direction is natural enough. This seemed less noticeable in ultralinear mode, which also gave rather more kick to the bass – but the mellifluous quality in the midband suffered slightly and, on the whole, we preferred triode mode.

TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

Crosstalk results were pretty bad in comparison to other tube amplifiers (the two channels were, at least similarly bad measuring -70dB @ 1kHz and -50dB @ 10kHz.). The maximum output into 8 ohms, allowing for 1% THD in ultralinear mode, was measured at around 25W. This is not consistent at all with the manufacturers claims of 40W per channel. However, we measured 22W at 1% THD in triode mode, which compared favourably with the specified claim of 20W. The frequency response showed a left-channel 0.5dB lift at the low-frequency end of the spectrum. In contrast the right channel performed remarkably well, plotting a smooth curve with more gentle roll-off at the extremes.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Good musical communication and detail

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Extreme bass and treble both a little lacking in extension and purity

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** Despite minor shortcomings, an amp that can be a very rewarding listen

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL





Icon Audio Stereo 60 Mk 3 **£1,700**

More powerful than most and built the old-fashioned way: no printed circuit boards here!

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:**
UK
- WEIGHT:**
27kg
- DIMENSIONS:**
(WxHxD)
440x230x400mm
- FEATURES:**
- 4 line inputs
 - Record output
 - High/low sensitivity
 - Triode/ultralinear mode
 - 8/4 ohm speaker outputs
 - Notional output 65W/35W
- DISTRIBUTOR:**
Icon Audio
- TELEPHONE:**
0116 244 0593
- WEBSITE:**
iconaudio.co.uk

Icon's exuberant literature makes many claims for this amp, including higher output power than most KT88 models can muster: 65-watt ultralinear or 35-watt triode. There's nothing outrageous about that, though, and indeed we've seen 100-watt amps using just a pair of KT88s.

The relatively high output power is partly responsible for the considerable weight of this amp, but the chassis is very substantially built too, complete with a solid copper top-plate around the valve area. Unusually, all the valves are octal-base types, including the small-signal valves and voltage regulator. These are relatively old designs, compared with the 'modern' (about 1960!) KT88.

We weren't surprised, given the valve complement, to find that internal electronic assembly is entirely point-to-point, with the only circuit board being a small one for the remote control decoder.

Passive components are good quality throughout, including one-watt-rated resistors almost everywhere, brand-name

polypropylene capacitors and a motorised volume control.

The input selector switch is manual (not remote-controllable) and connected to the input sockets with PTFE-insulated screened wire. The complement of inputs looks a bit stingy, but don't forget that the 'Source/tape' switch effectively gives you a fourth input.

Sound quality

In many ways, this more than any of the others in the group, upheld the classic stereotype of 'valve sound', with strong, very present vocals, good vitality and persuasive communication in all sorts of music.

If there is a quality to this amp that may cause dissatisfaction it's tonal coloration. This clearly isn't a function of frequency response which is fine, rather it's something about the distortion 'fingerprint' of the amp that is persistently audible and can be a little distracting.

One listener pointed to cymbals as being the main indicator of this and indeed it is the region where high midrange becomes treble that shows it up most.

We'd probably live with it happily enough, though, considering the Stereo 60's many admirable traits. Notably, and perhaps to some people's surprise from a valve amp, it has very good timing and gets feet tapping reliably across the widest range of musical styles. It's also very good at resolving detail and, for instance, our musically dense opera excerpt benefitted no end from the way this amp keeps

all the different parts clear and well-balanced. Bass is a little mixed, with good extension but sometimes a slightly soft attack, at least compared with the very tight leading edges this amp produces on high-frequency notes.

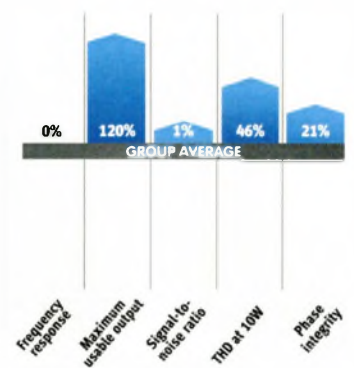
On the other hand; the bass is well integrated with the rest of the range. Dynamics are very good, swinging effortlessly from one extreme to the other and also making the most of finer gradations around the middle of the range.

TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

Although the manual claims 75W per channel output, no accompanying distortion figure was provided. However, in our tests we measured 1% THD at 70W (8 ohms), thereby lending credibility to Icon's claims. The left channel was much more sensitive to crosstalk – we measured 20dB at 1kHz and nearly 30dB at 10kHz. The frequency response test highlighted disparities of 0.3dB between the two channels, as well as a strange right-channel 'bump' at around 100Hz. With the Stereo 60 MkIII operating in its 'triode' mode, we achieved 30W with 1% distortion. The frequency-response curve was broadly similar to the ultralinear one, with a dip of approximately -1.5dB at 25Hz followed by a slight rise (about 0.2dB) at 100Hz.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Good timing, with lovely integration of instruments
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Slight lack of naturalness to treble-rich sounds
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** An energetic amp that offers high power and delivers it with confidence
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



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 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

THE TOP 20



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 and performance of their products against that of their competitors – 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 products and 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.

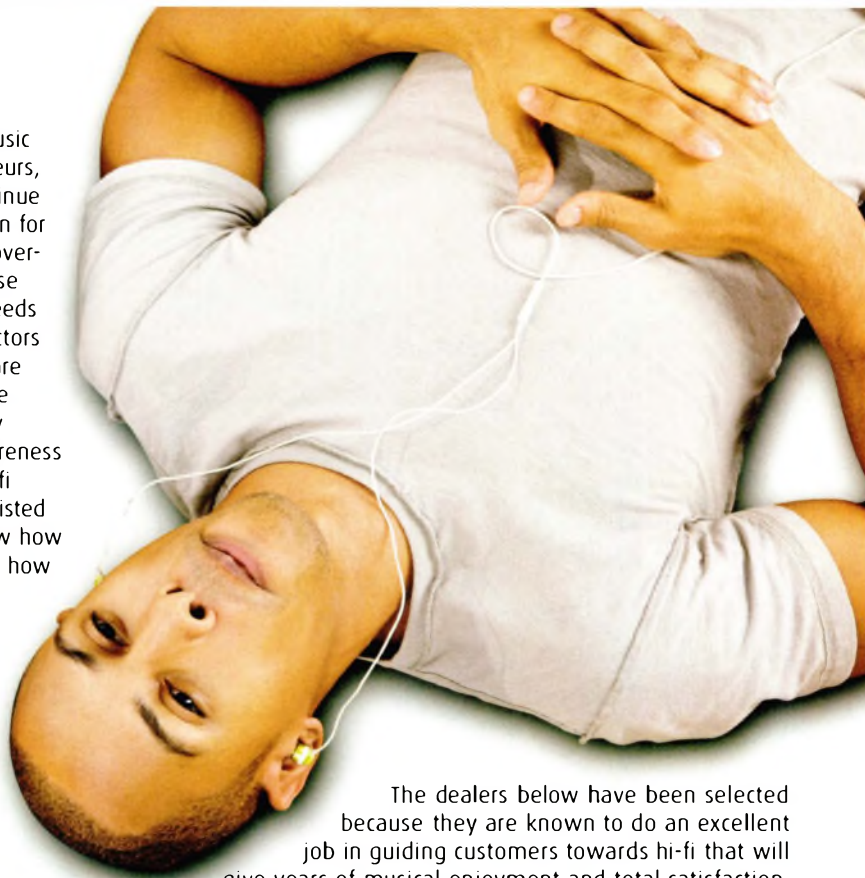
The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers are essential to each other.

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 overriding 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.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



The dealers below 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.

GUIDE

TO BUYING A HI-FI SYSTEM

OUR TOP 20 UK HI-FI DEALERS

SOUTH

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

Chelmsford
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

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY
9 High Street,
Hampton Wick.
t: 020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

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

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

Southeast-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
132/4 London Road.
t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

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

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

N1
GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road.
t: 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11
ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road.
t: 020 7924 2043
www.oandhifi.co.uk

SOUTH WEST

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

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

MIDLANDS
Banbury
OVERTURE
3 Church Lane.
t: 01295 272158
www.overture.co.uk

Birmingham
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

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

Nottingham
CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way.
t: 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

NORTH
Cheadle
THE AUDIO WORKS
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t: 01904 627108
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Alvin Gold, Hi-Fi Choice October 2009

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Cabasse



Opera Consonance Cyber 100 Signature £1,595

This classic amp is as mechanically elegant as it is electronically simple

DETAILS

ORIGIN:

China

WEIGHT:

22kg

DIMENSIONS:

(WxHxD)

430x190x380mm

FEATURES:

- 5 line inputs

- Line output

- Remote control

- 8/4 ohm speaker outputs

- Notional output

40W

DISTRIBUTOR:

Alium Audio

TELEPHONE:

01273 325901

WEBSITE:

opera-consonance.com

com

There seem to be quite a few similarly-named amps in the Consonance range and this one with KT88 output valves appears to be specific to the UK market. It's a classic design, both electronically and mechanically, and a very simple one in terms of its circuit.

The valve count is typical: two double-triodes per channel looking after phase-splitting and driving the output valves. In keeping with current trends, there are a couple of 6SN7 valves, an old type that pre-dates the ECC8x varieties so popular in audio.

Selection from among the generous five inputs is made by relays and the volume control is motorised and is, therefore, also remote-controllable. Component quality throughout the amp is good, if not outstanding. There are internal bias adjustment points, but these are not intended for use by the owner. Operating mode is fixed.

The look of this amp is considerably enhanced by the profiled wooden slats which cover the transformer enclosure. By contrast, the valves are covered by a rather

unprepossessing cover, easily removable and has an unusually high propensity to ring when struck. By the same token, it can 'sing-along' in harmony with the music and, although we prefer valve cages to be fitted from a safety point of view, we can see the attraction of going without, if the amp is sited safely out of the way.

Sound quality

Although our listeners quite liked this amp, and indeed found praise for almost every specific area of performance, they didn't quite seem to have been fired up to paeans of enthusiasm over it. Perhaps one comment from their notes sums up what seems to be the problem: 'The sound lacks natural beauty'. Everything is there: apparently - bass; mid and treble; detail; imaging; timing - but it just doesn't quite add up to beautiful music.

Well, saying everything is there is a little vague and needs some clarification. Bass is one of the Cyber 100's best points, present when needed with plenty of attack and precision, but never overwhelming or exaggerated.

Midrange is not obviously coloured, but lacks some insight and, at times, can seem to emphasise certain instruments a little at the expense of others. We never really established a clear pattern here; the emphasis benefitting higher-pitched instruments on one recording, lower ones on the next. Treble isn't entirely clean and rather

like the midrange, alternates between slight sibilance and a rather dull quality.

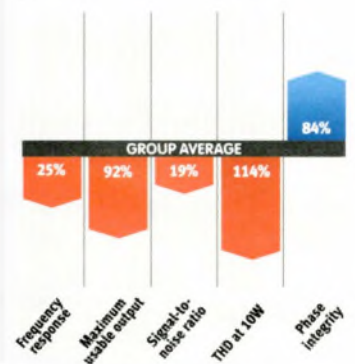
Such paradoxical results are often the result of a lack of purity in the sound. Distortion, in the most general sense, can have the oddest effects subjectively and we strongly suspect that that's the case here. Despite this, it is perfectly possible to enjoy this amp and we found it relaxing and inviting. We just would have liked a little more revelation - it's all a little safe and lacking in surprise.

TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

We achieved a maximum pre-clipping output of 37W with 3% THD. However, while advancing the volume control it became clear that it was mistracking the two channels as the right output was increasingly higher than the left. This, simply put, is unacceptable in any quality amplifier as the stereo image will be shifted depending on the listening volume. We were also disappointed with the measured S/N ratio, which was as low as 55dB. THD+N was also very high, even by the standards of valve amplifiers. We were impressed with the Cyber 100's low-level phase integrity, which proved to be the best of the group. While we measured -0.5dB at the extremities of the audio frequency spectrum, the roll-offs were remarkably smooth between channels.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★☆

LIKE: Good bass, well judged in level and with a generally relaxing sound

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

DISLIKE: Treble inconsistent; detail only so-so in the midrange

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

WE SAY: A pleasant amp, but not one that's likely to give new insights into familiar music

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★☆

Kudos Cardea C30: "The Perfect Floorstander"

Hi-Fi Choice, September 2008



"The small british firm has produced a pair of speakers with a level of musicality to rival the best that the big high-end manufacturers can offer."

**What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision,
July 2010**

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

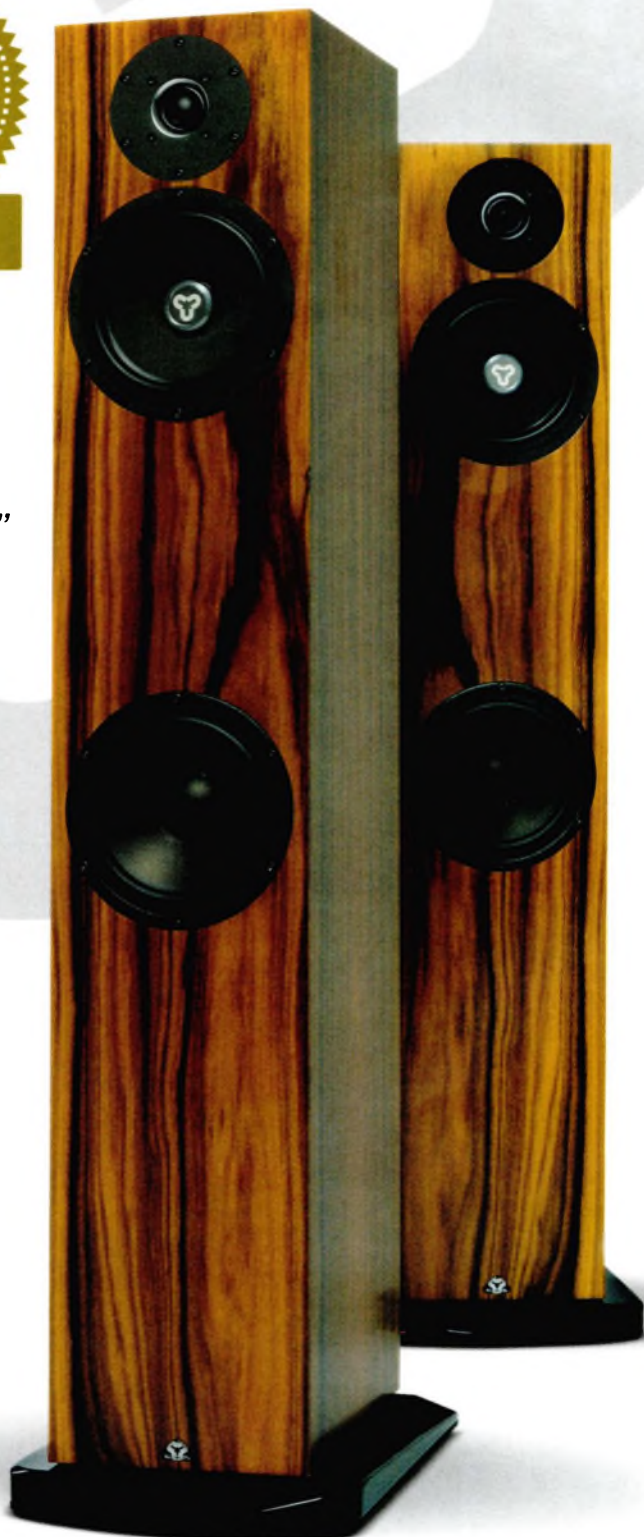


"Wonderful communication skills with all types of music. It also boasts outstanding timing and an impressive ability to reveal the differences between system components."

Hi-Fi Choice, September 2008



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PrimaLuna Prologue Two £1,820

Basic on the features front, but beautifully built and an excellent choice for lovers of human voice

DETAILS

ORIGIN:
Netherlands/China

WEIGHT:
17kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
280x190x395mm

FEATURES:

- 4 line inputs
- 8/4 ohm speaker outputs
- Notional output 40W

DISTRIBUTOR:
Absolute Sounds

TELEPHONE:
020 8971 3909

WEBSITE:
primaluana.nl

Designed in Holland and made in China, PrimaLuna's amps are essentially classic valve designs, but they bring distinctive aesthetics and a few modern design touches to the party. One such notable feature in this amp is 'Adaptive auto bias'. Bias is a long-standing pain in the neck of valve amps: quite simply it's the DC ('standing') current in the valves under conditions of no audio signal and it's critical.

Usually amps either have manually adjusted bias, which may even require test equipment to set, or auto-bias (also called 'self-bias'), which does what it says but, in the traditional implementation, reduces maximum output power. It's really surprising how few firms have done what PrimaLuna does and made solid-state monitoring circuits which control bias. It makes the amp far more tolerant of imbalance between output valves.

Input switching and volume control use good-quality mechanical components and behind them a good deal of the amp's circuitry is based on solid wiring and tag strips, with large resistors in most positions. Critical capacitors are brand-name plastic-film parts, while a couple of substantial electrolytic capacitors are joined by a smoothing choke in the power supply.

The valve complement, apart from the output KT88s, runs to two each of the ECC83 and ECC82. The cover over the transformers is so very resonant that we'd be tempted to remove it!

Sound quality

Definitely a qualified success, this amp made a very favourable impression on one of our listeners and a mostly favourable one on a second, but failed to inspire the third. It turns out that the unimpressed listener missed detail and insight more than anything and found it a struggle to hear details even in familiar recordings.

On the other hand, the best-pleased listener referred to 'sublime vocals' and clearly enormously enjoyed the overall musicality of the amp's presentation, which certainly has great charm across the midband.

Opinions were united on the subject of imaging, which is good laterally but tends to bring the performers a bit further forward than one is accustomed to hearing. Treble wasn't explicitly mentioned by our 'blind' listeners, but our

sighted experience suggests it is well-extended without sibilance or spit. That's probably a contribution to the amp's good handling of vocals and it scores highly for the ease with which lyrics can be understood.

There was also specific praise for the PrimaLuna's handling of dynamics, which are full but surprisingly subtle – you often don't notice the music is growing in volume until it's really loud.

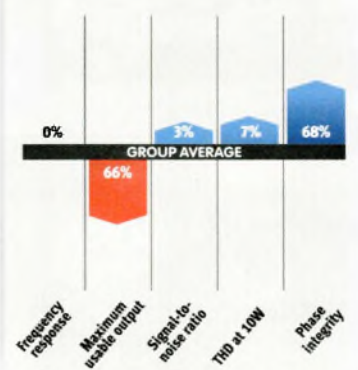
With an unusual balance of strengths, this amplifier certainly merits an audition.

TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

We were able to achieve a pre-clipping output of 30W, both channels being driven. At this point, the measured THD+N was 2%. Crosstalk is excellent at -73dB and -92dB (1kHz) for the left and right channels respectively. However, at 10kHz the measurements vary widely (-54dB left and -69dB right respectively). This marked difference may impact the listening experience. There's also a very slight difference between the two channels in terms of their low-frequency performance; we registered a slight drop from 70Hz to 20Hz (at which point we were down 0.2dB) for the left channel – the right channel, in contrast, was remarkably flat over this region. Overall, though, the stereo channels of the Prologue Two proved to be better-matched than some of the other amplifiers tested.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

LIKE: Good lateral imaging; good bass extension and timing

DISLIKE: Slightly forward presentation; bass definition not always the best

WE SAY: This amp has many fine qualities which will endear it to many

OVERALL

★★★★★



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Pure Sound A30 £1,395

Somewhat belying the name, we found this to be a very characterful amp – mostly for the better!

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:**
UK
- WEIGHT:**
22kg
- DIMENSIONS:**
(WxHxD)
435x210x380mm
- FEATURES:**
- 3 line inputs
 - Triode/ultralinear mode
 - 8/4 ohm speaker outputs
 - Valve rectifiers
 - Notional output 30W
- DISTRIBUTOR:**
Pure Sound
- TELEPHONE:**
01822 612449
- WEBSITE:**
puresound.info

There are degrees of valve purism. Pure Sound, appropriately enough, takes things a step further than most by using valve rectifiers in the A30, as well as valve-amplifying components. Is there sense in this? Valve rectifiers waste energy compared with solid-state diodes, they cost more and take up space and, like all valves, they have a finite useful life. Despite all that, they do have advantages in terms of turning AC into DC, with minimal high-frequency noise generation.

Pure Sound has mounted practically all the components in this amp on a printed circuit board, making it, in that respect, one of the more modern designs. Passive components are an interesting mix of the latest parts and old-fashioned specialities like the carbon-film resistors used in many positions.

This is another switchable-mode amp, using a separate switch for each channel. There is no adjustment for bias: self-bias is used, which among other things guarantees Class A operation. It's a little ironic that, for similar reasons to those that make valve

rectifiers so good, valves are in some ways better suited to Class B than transistors!

Sound quality

Definitely something of a characterful performer, this amp will appeal most to listeners who like their music up close and direct. If you prefer something a little more laid-back, the A30's presentation may very well strike you short of aggression and, as such, left one of our listeners nonplussed to the point of active dislike.

The others, however, were more inclined to see the positive side of things. Comments were particularly favourable in the classical music excerpts, which are both relatively ambient recordings. The A30 really dug deep into the detail in each and, although there was rather less sense of space around the performers than most of the amps brought out, there was also more insight into the small details.

This forward presentation is accompanied by a degree of tonal imbalance; a tilt in favour of the upper midrange and treble. Bass is fair, but not seismically extended, while the very highest treble is nicely open and quite sweet. Dynamics can sometimes seem a little abrupt, with climaxes appearing almost out of nowhere. Again, this is something that will probably appeal to some listeners as strongly as it repels others.



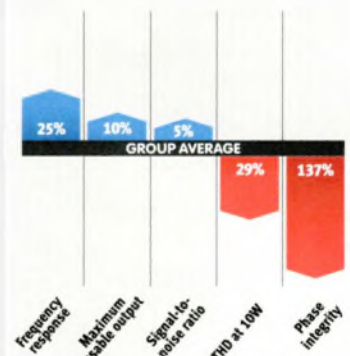
Then there's the question of pace. In some ways, not surprisingly given the forward presentation, this is quite a pacey amp. That said, though, its timing is not always entirely convincing. It can sometimes sound a little rushed and the lack of very deep bass reduces the conviction of a driving bass/percussion riff. Note that these comments all refer to triode mode: we tried ultralinear as well, but felt that it merely hardened the sound a little, without really adding anything constructive.

TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

The signal-to-noise measurements ranked highly among the group. Crosstalk was a pleasant surprise, considering that both channels share the same mains transformer. At 20kHz, the left channel was 0.2dB down – while the right was more than twice this. However, in terms of higher frequencies (above 10kHz) both channels perform similarly; indeed, in both cases the output was approximately 0.2dB down at 20kHz. The phase-response and distortion were alas disappointing. In ultralinear mode, we were able to achieve 30W, with 1% THD. This was accompanied by an improved frequency response at higher frequencies. Pure Sound's input-selector leaves much to be desired; having a separate tape-monitor switch would have been a sensible measure.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

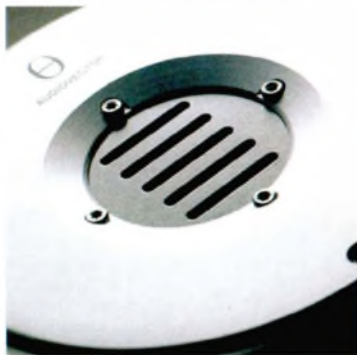
OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★☆
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★☆
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★☆
- FEATURES**
★★★☆☆
- LIKE:** Plenty of detail, with open quality in the high treble
- DISLIKE:** Bass lacks impact; soundstage is distinctly forward
- WE SAY:** This amp is worth an audition – it is individual and in many ways, likable

OVERALL



- ANTHONY GALLO
ACOUSTICS
- ARCAM
- ATLAS Cables
- audiolab
- AUDIOVECTOR
- audio
- B&W
- CHORD
- CHORD
- CRESTRON
- CYRUS
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- epos
- EXPOSURE
- GENELEC
- Goldring
- GRADO
- IMAGE
- isoTek
- JVC
- KEF
- KUDOS
- LINN
- Lumagen
- marantz
- MUSICAL FIDELITY
- NAD
- naim
- neat
- ONKYO
- Panasonic
- PMC
- ProAc
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- spendor
- Technique
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Triode Corporation TRV-88SE £1,895

Striking to behold, very agile – but doesn't quite knit everything together as one would like

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:** Japan
WEIGHT: 15kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 340x185x315mm
FEATURES:
- 3 line inputs (one on front)
 - Preamp input (fixed level)
 - Headphone output
 - 8/4 ohm speaker outputs
 - Notional power 45W
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Angelsound Audio
TELEPHONE: 01923 352479
WEBSITE: triode.co.jp

Triode Corporation makes a range of amps, which presumably all use triode connection of the output devices – this one certainly does. In many ways it's a fairly conventional push-pull design, though the external finish is certainly among the best, with and wooden side cheeks. The removable valve cover is exceptionally resonant, but the cover over the transformers appears to be filled with resin and is completely dead, acoustically.

Internal construction uses a mix of circuit boards. The parts themselves been generally of good quality, with key capacitors being paper-in-oil types.

A couple of features stand out as adding modern appeal to the traditional valve amp idea – the headphone output and a front-mounted pair of phono sockets.

One of the amp's inputs is a fixed-gain one, that allows the TRV-88SE to be used as a power amp. It's selected just like the other inputs and could give an unwary

user a nasty surprise if employed by accident, but it's a useful feature. Bias is adjustable but you need to get inside the amp to do it and it's a job for a qualified service bod.

Sound quality

This was considered the most 'solid-state' of the group. That has various connotations, not all of them necessarily complimentary, but it seems here to have been intended mostly in a good way. At least, this amp has less of an obvious character to it than many of the others, which can lead to its sound seeming, as one listener put it, a little 'colder' than some.

At the same time, the sound has plenty of snap and verve to it and without noticeably accentuating the treble, the TRV-88SE keeps things light and agile. Bass is reasonably extended, if perhaps a little dry on occasions and there's actually quite a decent kick in reserve for when things get really exciting. There's also some very good detail on offer, giving real insight into recordings.

The trouble is, though, that's all a little superficial and our 'blind' listening panel certainly didn't find themselves involved with the music emotionally – neither were we when listening later, sighted. Something about the sound just doesn't quite click and we can't think of a better way of explaining this, than by saying that there seems to be a lack of integration between the various objective qualities that go to make up good

sound. Yes, there's detail and tonality is pretty good, but it just doesn't quite come together to make up a convincing musical whole.

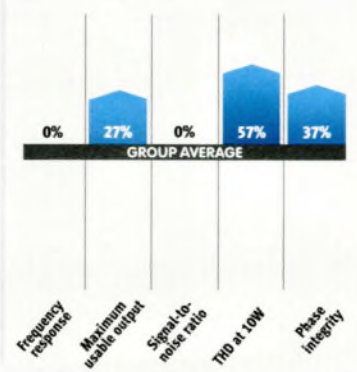
This is exemplified by the way the amp deals with multi-layered music. It seems everything is there, but the various melodic and harmonic strands don't seem to relate to each other. One listener commented that the accompaniment seemed unusually loud in relation to the vocals, another that the vocals lacked conviction. Overall, we respected this amp more than we loved it.

TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

We noticed that the right channel had lower output and higher distortion than the left. In addition, a phase-imbalance between the channels was discovered. In the frequency responses, a 0.5dB difference at 20Hz closes by 50Hz. These disparities were found within the power amplifier stage. The phase difference between left and right channels at lower frequencies could possibly affect listening. Distortion performance is admirable and sets the bar for what a reasonably-priced tube amplifier can achieve. Build quality is superb, while the front-mounted input and the headphone output are convenient. In addition, the choice of 6-ohm and 8-ohm output-transformer 'taps' should complement the vast majority of modern speakers.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Lively and agile presentation; good bass attack when required
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lack of integration means the sound never quite gels
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** We would really have liked some more musical communication
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL



Lab conclusions

The measurements exposed some startling shortcomings – certainly when compared to the supposedly inferior solid-state competition

TECH LABS

Most of the technology in these amps dates back to the 1950s (or earlier!) and it is amazing that they manage to hold their own in today's audio world. Subjectively these amplifiers still manage to excite their audience and it cannot be denied that valves hold a unique romantic charm. However, in some key respects, the measured performance is very disappointing by modern standards.

Even the best of these amplifiers (the Triode's TRV-88SE) offered a THD+N that would be considered poor, when judged by the rating system that HFC employs for transistor amplifiers.

The frequency response is also limited at the extremes of the audio band. Noise performance also fails to impress when compared to 'semi-specs', although some of the amplifiers – notably the Cayin and the PrimaLuna – achieved results that are excellent by tube standards. It may be interesting to consider that these employ printed-circuit boards as opposed to the expected point-to-point wiring. The traditional problem of 'hum' has largely been banished, thanks to refinements in this age-old technology.

The use of a single power-supply transformer has also impacted crosstalk results across the board and, although

the figures measure quite highly, chances are other components in the audio chain will also impact the channel separation, balance and stereo imaging.

Phase is an important consideration, due to the fundamental design characteristics which were found to affect the whole audio spectrum. As all six amplifiers offered outputs that varied slightly between each channel, we would have liked to have seen independent volume controls.







Although our distortion measurements fell short against other technologies, the even-harmonic nature of the distortion is subjectively warm and pleasant – and is likely the cause of our affection.



The Cayin, Pure Sound and Icon Audio can all be switched between 'triode' and 'ultralinear' modes of operation.

Essentially, the difference between the two is that while triode mode cannot drive a load as large, or deliver as much power as an amplifier supporting the ultralinear configuration, its distortion of the sound at lower levels is much less.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Make/model	 Cayin A-55T	 Icon Audio Stereo 60 Mk 3	 Opera Consonance Cyber 100 Signature	 PrimaLuna Prologue 2	 Pure Sounds A30	 Triode Corporation TRV-88SE
Price	£1,460	£1,700	£1,595	£1,820	£1,395	£1,895
Sound	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Conclusion,	Despite minor shortcomings, the A-55T offers a very rewarding listen with any kind of music	Energetic and enjoyable; offers relatively high power and delivers it with confident dynamics	Pleasant, but not highly likely to give startling new insights into familiar music	Smart and fuss-free, with many fine qualities which will endear it to many listeners	Strong on character and well worth an audition – it is individual and in many ways, likable	Attractive and practical, but we would really have liked some more musical communication

Key features

Line inputs	4	4	5	4	3	3
Preamp input	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Headphone output	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Remote control	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Switchable mode?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Notional output	40W/18W	65W/35W	40W	40W	30W	45W

Lab conclusions

E = Excellent | AA = Above average | A = Average | BA = Below average | P = Poor

Frequency response	+/- 0.4dB A	+/- 0.4dB BA	+/- 0.5dB BA	+/- 0.4dB BA	+/- 0.3dB EG	+/- 0.4dB BA
Max usable output	12W A	26W G	4W P	4W P	13W BA	15W G
Signal-to-noise ratio	81dB E	75dB G	76dB BA	81dB E	78dB BA	74dB G
THD at 10W	0.5% A	0.5% A	2% BA	1% BA	1.2% BA	0.4% AA
Phase integrity	+1.1° A	+0.37° E	0.10° E	+0.20° E	+1.5° BA	+2.8° P

Blind-listening verdicts

With so many different attitudes and talents to consider, picking a winner from this group was never going to be easy

IF NOTHING ELSE, this *Blind-listening Group Test* proves conclusively that there is no such thing as 'the KT88 sound'. It would be ridiculous, really, to expect such a thing but it's the kind of sloppy thinking we all fall prey to now and then and it's good to see it exposed as such. Maybe, if we compared six KT88-based amps with, say, six using the 2A3 triode, we would find some sort of common ground, but in general our results amply uphold the rule of thumb; that what you do with it is more important than what you have.

In fact, the sounds these amps made varied probably more than in any recent group test we can recall. If you want to be absolutist you can take the high ground and say that they can't all be right, so most of them are clearly wrong, but in a world where there is no such thing as an absolute recording; or loudspeaker; or indeed listening room; such poses get one nowhere.

Rather, we rejoice in the fact that varying tastes are catered for here.

On the other hand, considering the aural evidence as heard by our listening panel and ourselves, we ended up with both praise and blame, in varying measure, for each amp. As always, we've reported as simply and straightforwardly as we can the reasons for this, in the hope that it will help you match an amp to the way you personally hear and appreciate music.

Scores are close, but we feel we should, at least, justify the lower marks for sound given to the Opera and Triode amps. Quite simply, in both cases, we felt that the level of musical communication was below the group average. Never mind the niceties: that's what gets the blood flowing and neither amp really did it for us. For the rest there's plenty to choose in terms of specifics, but we felt the overall standard was largely comparable. ●

THE WINNER IS...

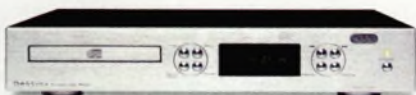
THE PRIMALUNA PROLOGUE 2 may not exactly romp home in simple numerical terms, but we feel that overall it leads by a nose. It's not the 'perfect' amp (well, why else would PrimaLuna make dearer models?), and it has a bit of a forward image, but as we gradually made acquaintance with this amp through the listening sessions, we felt its winning way with voices and the sheer sense of ease with which it plays any style of music, contributed strongly to our appreciation of the music we played through it. In feature terms it is as plain as plain can be and its looks are nice, though hardly astonishing; it's just that it plays music in a way that makes you want to hear more. Which is the point, really, isn't it?



Integrating a valve amp into your hi-fi system can be a challenge, but as the following examples demonstrate, compatibility is easier than you think

CD PLAYER: Creek Destiny, £1,400

It may seem a little perverse to recommend a solid-state CD player alongside valve amps, but there's logic in selecting a relatively 'characterless' source component alongside the more individual sonic traits of a valve amp. This is, not least because the mixing up of characteristics can be a very dodgy business! The Destiny is an excellent digital player all round, achieving a very high standard of tonal neutrality, alongside terrific detail and beautifully effortless pace and timing. As such, it stands to make a perfect counterfoil to the more individual sonority of a fine valve amp.



TURNTABLE: Michell Gyro SE, £1,450

You'll need to add a phono stage as none of the amps in this group features one, but an LP source is, let's face it, the perfect accompaniment to the beauty of valves. The outright winner in our recent turntable *Blind-listening Group Test*; the Gyro SE, offers a high degree of naturalness and an impressive disappearing act, which sees it vanish in favour of utterly believable musicians in front of you. In addition, its smart looks will in no way diminish the visual impact of a valve amp, while the reliability and longevity of Michell products are legendary.



LOUDSPEAKER: Spendor SP2/3R2, £2,295

Another recent *Blind-listening Group Test* winner, this model is particularly well-suited to the virtues of valves, on several scores. For a start, it's quite an easy load. If valve amps have a generic weakness, it's a lack of tolerance for awkward loudspeakers and this is one of the least troublesome around. Quite separate from that, it is also of above-average efficiency, making satisfying volume entirely possible from the modest output of any of the amps in this group. Finally, and crucially, it sounds superb, with great timing and coherence, good detail and a thoroughly delightful willingness to enjoy the music.



Game-changer

After 25 years in hi-fi, Cyrus has launched three new streaming-compatible products. **Jason Kennedy** examines the new technology

Streaming is the bandwagon to be on in 2011. Any electronics manufacturer worth its salt has realised as much and many are already fighting for a slice of what is considered to be the future of audio.

Cyrus has jumped in with three new streaming-compatible products that compete head-on with the leaders in the field, each contained

within the iconic half-width Cyrus case and bursting with features. The Streamline is the integrated solution with onboard amplification, the Stream X strips things right back to pure streaming functionality, while the Stream XP combines that with a high-quality preamp and DAC.

The X files

These three products are built around the Stream X core, which can

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Cyrus Stream XP

ORIGIN:
UK

TYPE:
DAC/preamp
(streaming)

WEIGHT:
3.35kg

DIMENSIONS:
WxHxD
215x78x360mm

FEATURES:
• Supported formats:
WAV, FLAC, AAC,
MP3, WMA, AIFF

• Digital inputs: 3x
coax, 2x optical, USB

• Digital output: coax

• TuneIn radio

• Burr-Brown
24-bit/192kHz
oversampling
DAC x2

• Finishes: silver or
black

DISTRIBUTOR:
Cyrus Audio

TELEPHONE:
01480 435577

WEBSITE:
cyrusaudio.com

stream wired or wirelessly, has USB and digital inputs, offers TuneIn net radio and is designed to be driven with the rather clever Cyrus n-remote (see picture). They will stream most of the worthwhile music formats, the only notable exception being Apple Lossless, which could be an issue for iTunes enthusiasts. iPod users, however, are catered for with a digital USB input. The same input will also stream from a USB drive and the maximum bit rate for streamed inputs is 24-bit/96kHz.

To this roster, the Stream XP adds twin Burr-Brown DACs, a preamplifier with fixed and variable outputs on RCA phonos and a headphone output on a mini-jack socket. It's also the only model in the range that will accept the worthwhile Cyrus PSX-R power supply upgrade. It's this latter feature that marks the XP out as the component with the greatest audiophile potential; without it you would be forgiven for thinking that the Stream X looks like the way to go for maximum



resolution. Cyrus chose to offer the Stream X for customers who already had a decent preamplifier and DAC, which is fair enough.

The key to all three units is the incredible n-remote. This not only drives any other component in a Cyrus system (and third-party components, to boot, as it's a learning device), but has two-way comms, so it can display all the pertinent information about the music in your 'library'.

The n-stream is a pretty ambitious remote for a medium-sized company: it's both IR and RF; has a colour screen and a motion sensor to turn it on; backlit keys and a charging base. So, in many respects, it's a universal remote that specialises in giving access to your digital music collection.

The company's preferred suggestion for music storage is a wired NAS drive, but rather than simply connecting the drive to your router and then wiring that to the Stream XP, Cyrus encourages the use of a switch in between.

“30,000 stations from around the world can be saved in presets using the n-remote.”

These inexpensive devices are usually used to expand the number of ports on a router, but Cyrus has found that they provide faster and more reliable streaming between the drive and player.

As well as streaming stored music, the device can also bring you any station or podcast on the TuneIn net radio service. This offers 30,000 stations from around the world that you can save in presets using the n-remote. Usefully, chosen stations can be synced across multiple devices, so that you can find them on your smart phone as well.

The total absence of analogue inputs on this product is unusual and rather undermines the unit's potential for vinyl users, for instance,



THE TWO MOST appealing ways of storing your music for the Stream XP to play, are USB and NAS drives and each has its pros and cons.

A portable USB drive is very straightforward to fill with your digital files and install on the player. It is also a cheaper starting point with 1TB examples starting at under £50, while a similar-size NAS is nearly three times that.

So why does Cyrus recommend the NAS approach? There are several reasons: you can sort your music by track, album or artist, rather than working with a fixed list on USB, while a NAS drive can stream content to multiple players in a multi-room set-up.

Equally important is, that as a NAS drive is on the network, it's easy to put new material on when you rip a CD or download new music. NAS drives are physically noisier than USBs (unless you go to the expense of an SSD) but can easily be located away from the system.



Q&A...

WE TALKED TO CYRUS MD PETER BARTLETT ABOUT THE STREAM XP



HFC: It looks like the Stream X would be a more audiophile model than the XP. Is there a reason why the XP is superior?

PB: The XP includes a very good preamp and DAC, so we know consumers will use this as the basis for new Cyrus systems. The X will be a source for existing consumers or folk who can stretch to the DAC XP, where the argument will be that the Stream X (as a source) will provide the same digital stream from your NAS, but you can get a higher-performance sound from our high-end DAC/preamp.

How does the preamp and DAC in the XP compare to their counterparts in your non-streaming range?

The streaming preamp/DAC benefits from a further two years' of incremental development. The components change, depending on the build type, so although the PCB is the same for all three models the components and software change the quality and function.

Cyrus does this across the model range and consumers benefit at the high-end from the amortisation on development across greater volume and at the low end from high-end design time. The Stream X and XP benefit from the investment we can afford to put into a bigger-selling line. It's a design for manufacturing model exploited by the VW car group to great success. Porsche get the doors/structure/paint/electronics/fabrication benefits of VW and VW gets a marketing and specialist engineering spin-off.

What's the deal with Tuneln?

It's the best-funded and most future-proofed net radio provider. You register with them and get your favourite stations sent to all your streaming devices like a Stream XP or your iPhone. It will shortly get more services and abilities, so we chose to go with them rather than the other providers.

Why no analogue inputs?

We decided not to use them any longer, so we saved cost and deleted the analogue inputs in this all digital product.

CONNECTIONS



- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| 1 Fixed and variable outputs | 2 USB port | 3 Digital inputs |
| 4 Ethernet connection for wired network connection | 5 Wi-Fi network aerial connector | 6 n-remote aerial |

but as it's a totally digital product up until the output stage, adding them would have increased cost.

Cyrus also thinks that analogue inputs would go largely unused by its customers and as the company doesn't currently make a standalone phono stage, it probably has a point.

Extensive options

This Stream XP is built as per all the company's product; in a die-cast case that, while not the shiniest in the land is, for audio purposes, extremely well thought-out. It provides high-resistance to vibration and more than adequate heat-sinking on a compact half-width footprint and, as Cyrus has pointed out in the past, because of the initial outlay die-cast chassis are pretty rare in this market.

The value equation is greatly enhanced by the n-remote. Look at the competition in this sector and you won't find a handset that comes near it in terms of breadth of application and ease of access to your music collection.

Having used the Naim UnitiQute with its basic IR remote, we can immediately appreciate the advantage of having a two-way link that puts all the information about the music in your hand. Competitors offer apps for smart phones and Apple touch screens, but these can't drive IR components and, in our experience, tend to drain batteries when used for this purpose. There is a growing array of competition for serious streamers and Linn's Majik DS at £1,880 has to be a key player. In spec terms, it lacks inputs of any flavour and has no facility for wireless operation. It does have volume control and accepts digital streams up to 24-bit/192kHz, so

undoubtedly competes in sound-quality terms, as would a Naim NDX (see HFC 345), but that is an extra £1,000 and has fewer digital inputs. But it does do wireless (though not advised) and can also be upgraded with a power supply.

Smooth operator

A product like the Stream XP is as much about ease of set up and use, as it is about sound quality and Cyrus appreciates this. The company provides a quick start-up guide for setting up the NAS drive with the player and pairing the n-remote. Both procedures are straightforward and we had the XP up and running in five minutes (wiring up the NAS drive and switch had been done beforehand).

It's when you come to search for

“Procedures are straightforward and we had the XP up and running in five minutes.”

the albums and tracks on the drive that issues can crop up; the most likely one is that files ripped as WAV and AIFF do not maintain their metadata. This makes them hard to find in the library, because album and artist info gets lost. Cyrus recommends ripping everything as uncompressed FLAC, because this format has the greatest portability. It's also the format that most hi-res downloads come in as well.

The n-remote's buttons are a little stiff and scrolling through the library is a bit jumpy, but it's significantly faster than using Apple's Remote interface for instance. The album

HIDDEN TECH



- 1** 24-bit/192kHz-capable DAC chips under networking board
- 2** PSX-R upgrade port
- 3** Network section, module under white sticker is for n-remote control
- 4** 2.4G n-remote antenna
- 5** LCD display and buttons for front panel operation
- 6** PSU for preamp section

artwork could also be bigger, but it's a clear display that is intuitive and easy to read.

We like TuneIn radio, and its online interface RadioTime, and this proved easy to set up and quick to find stations with. It would be useful to be able to store presets from the handset, as this is what you have when exploring stations, but in other respects it's a good system.

We used the XP in the prescribed fashion, with a Twonky Media-equipped NAS drive and network switch wired direct (wireless was tried, but even with the router in the next room there was drop-out). Few systems are reliable without a cable.

Class of its own

The sound quality produced is impressive for a streamer. It's not in

the front league, but there are few streamer/DAC/preamps in this price range for comparison and we found the results very good indeed. The bass is not the most weighty, but is never short on agility; sinuous bass guitar-playing is very easy to enjoy as are great voices, thanks to a little added richness which helps to flesh things out. It's not the most transparent midband in the business but voices do work well, revealing plenty of ambience and emotional intent.

If you are after a hard-hitting sound, then there are more expensive alternatives, but those who want to relax with their music will find much to enjoy here.

As a digital preamp using an S/PDIF input, the character is a little



JON BURCHAM (head of marketing at Cyrus), recommends putting your music on a NAS drive that has UPnP and DLNA onboard, so that it can run a media server such as Twonky Media.

Cyrus recommends using a RAID-protected NAS drive, which backs up your music to a second drive and cites the WD My Book World Edition II as a good example (1TB £142).

For amplification, the Cyrus X Power, at £1,150, is the most affordable option that will do the XP justice, while the Mono X 300 is the ultimate choice.

As for speakers, Cyrus distributes the Vienna Acoustics range and Jon sites the Beethoven Baby Grand (£3,300) as the place to start.

The XP can, of course, be augmented with a PSX-R power supply and the system above would undoubtedly benefit from this £500 upgrade.

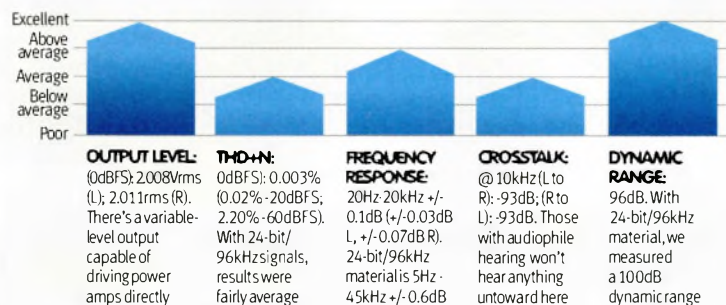
more open and clear-cut (than streaming), but not dramatically so. We recalled that Cyrus likes DNM single-core cables, so tried an interconnect with the XP. This tilts the balance upward and gives a bit more bite to leading edges, which helps with dynamics.

The Stream XP is a remarkably flexible and capable piece of kit that's allied to a very impressive remote handset. Not having to point the thing in the right direction is a luxury in itself! As an overall streaming package, the Cyrus approach is commendably straightforward to set up and use.

The standard of sound quality is high and, while not quite up with pricier rivals, there is no alternative that offers so many features and this puts it in a class of its own. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★
 - VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★
 - BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★
 - FEATURES** ★★★★★
- DISLIKE:** High feature count; easy to use thanks to the n-remote; easy to set up, too
- DISLIKE:** Could have a bit more leading-edge definition
- WE SAY:** An easy to use streaming preamp/DAC, with a great combination of sound quality and features

OVERALL





The art of sound

Jason Kennedy puts a £1,700 German-made newcomer from Acoustic Signature against rivals from Pro-Ject and Well Tempered

Just when you thought that you could relax with your record collection along comes another contender with a substantial range of serious-looking turntables.

What's surprising, however, is that despite having UK representation for some time, it's only in the last few months that we have discovered Acoustic Signature, of which the Manfred Mk II is one of the German company's more affordable offerings. It comes with an outboard power

supply and a free-standing motor and the diamond polished platter sets it apart from an increasingly large crowd of competitors at this level, as does switchable speed control. It can be supplied with any Rega tonearm, or a base to the arm of your choice.

The essentials

This is a superbly put together turntable; everything about it oozes quality, from the real wood veneer finish to the beautifully polished

► DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Acoustic Signature
Manfred Mk II

ORIGIN:
Germany

TYPE:
Turntable and arm

WEIGHT:
16kg

DIMENSIONS:
WxHxD:
430x170x340mm

FEATURES:

- Electronic speed change 33/45
- Separate S Alpha power supply
- Adjustable VTA for Rega arms
- Oil-free bearing
- Finishes: maple, cherry (shown), piano black or white

DISTRIBUTOR:
Air Audio

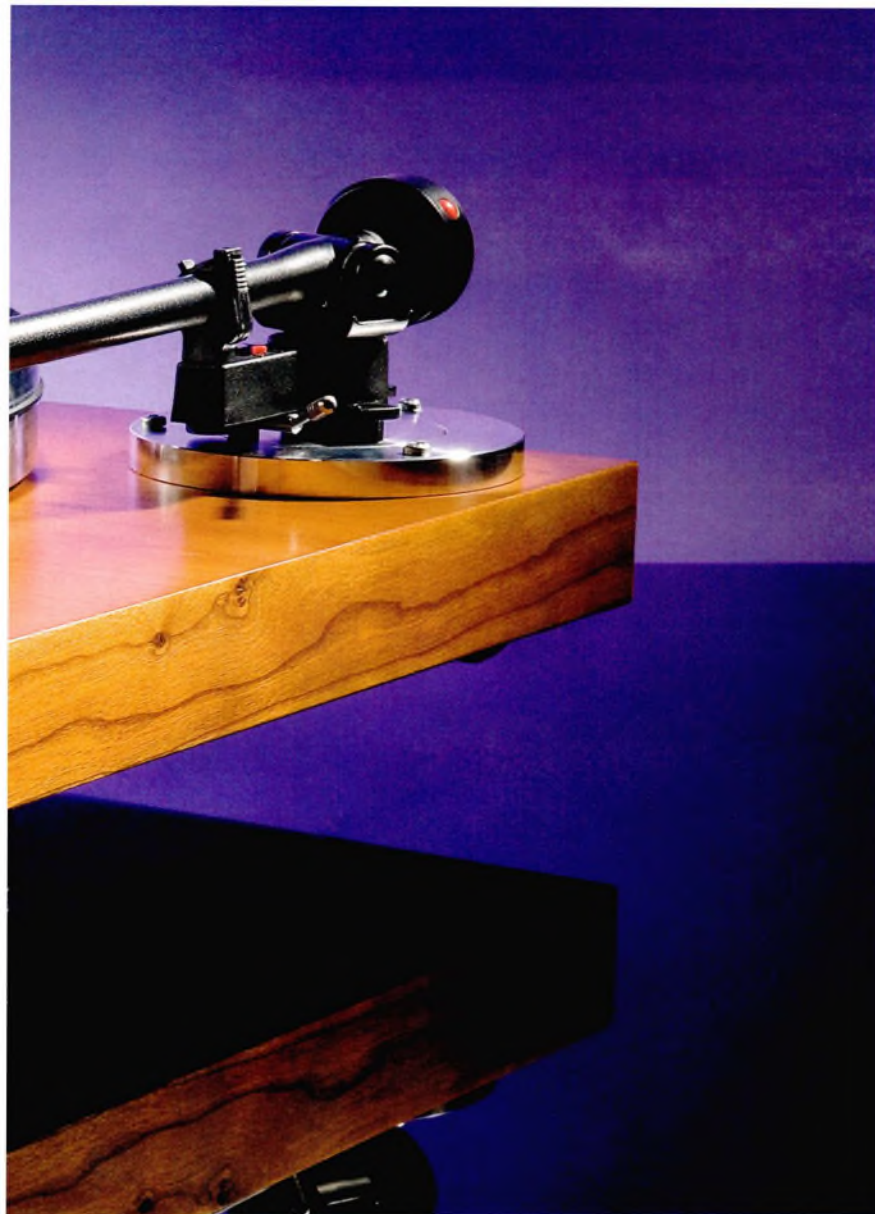
TELEPHONE:
01491 629629

WEBSITE:
acoustic-signature.com

platter. There are not many examples of solid aluminium platters in the sub-£2,000 arena anymore. Perhaps because it's an expensive material to finish well and requires some means of damping to stop ringing. The Acoustic Signature has a large damping pad on the underside of the platter for this very purpose.

The platter itself is 34mm thick and weighs six kilos. Acoustic Signature has used sintered bronze inserts that have been infused with lubricant in the bearing housing, so that you don't need to add oil which is a boon if you have to repack the deck at any time. The thrust pad that supports the spindle is made of Tidorfolon, a material that Acoustic Signature developed specifically for the purpose. An alloy of vanadium, ferrite, Teflon and titanium, Tidorfolon is a relatively soft material which mates with a hard tungsten carbide ball at the tip of the bearing shaft or axle. (see comments *Question Time* p62).

The plinth is 38mm thick and made of veneered MDF. It sits on three large aluminium feet, which



WE WERE ABLE to directly compare the Manfred with two other similarly priced turntables using the same Dynavector cartridge. These were the Pro-Ject RPM10.1 (£2,000) and the Well Tempered Simplex (£1,750). Both turntables are supplied with a tonearm.

The RPM10.1 is a more relaxed and substantial-sounding turntable than the Manfred and while not as taut, does have better bass extension and stronger imaging.

The Well Tempered on the other hand, has mercurial timing and is tremendously engaging in the context of a surprisingly solid and calm delivery.

Where the Manfred scores over most of these is in its finish, which is clearly ahead of the pack.

slower speed than usual. When it's started up, it appears to run anti-clockwise while it brings the platter up to speed via a square section rubber drive belt.

The standard arm mount for this turntable is an aluminium one for Rega tonearms, like the RB251 fitted here, but the company can supply alternative plates to suit any nine-inch arm.

Power is supplied by a separate S Alpha motor controller; this converts AC mains to DC current and has a precision oscillator to deliver a 12-volt AC sine wave to the motor. This supply is said to be impervious to fluctuations in the mains and to isolate the motor from any noise. The S Alpha also provides switchable speed change, but does not transform

“The Manfred has an honest, almost clinical sound that enthusiasts will appreciate.”

the mains onboard; instead there is a separate inline transformer with an IEC inlet. This means you have three elements connected together to produce a motor that spins at the desired speed. As it turns out, it spins very slightly faster than 33.3rpm (according to our strobe disc) probably to offset stylus drag.

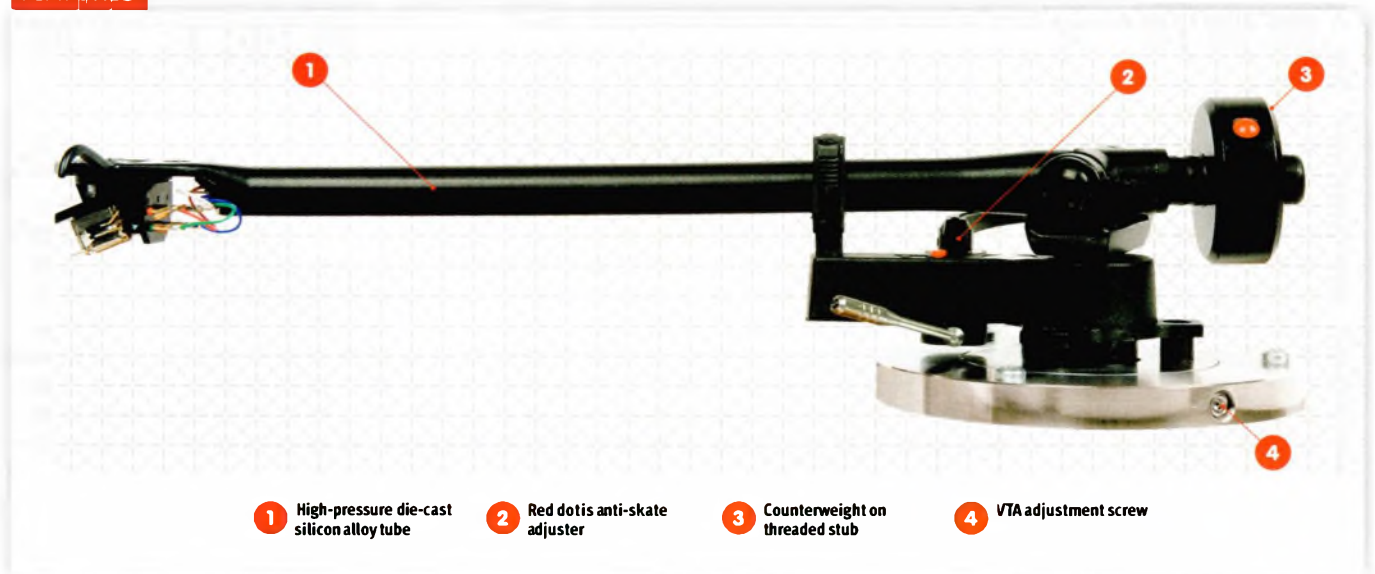
Long-time running

In terms of build and finish, the Manfred is in the premier league of turntables at its price point. Separate power supplies are not common at this level and, as already

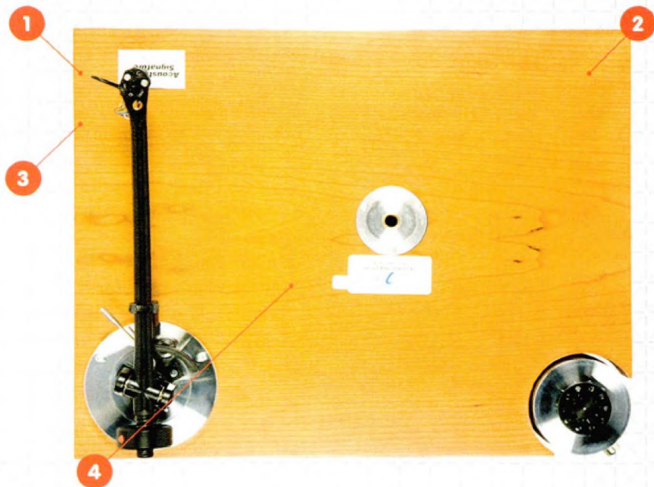
are adjustable for height using a metal button in the centre. The Manfred turntables shown on the Acoustic Signature website appear to have spikes in the feet which are no longer supplied, but are available on request.

We particularly like the way that the cleanly machined motor housing fits into a circular cut-out in the corner of the plinth. It looks as if it's integrated and contrasts rather well with the wood veneer. The motor has a large drilled-out pulley that runs at a

FEATURES



HIDDEN TECH



- 1** Large diameter aluminum pulley
- 2** Aluminum base for Rega tonearms incorporates VTA adjustment
- 3** Motor is free standing and run from a separate power supply
- 4** Tidorfolon thrust pad sits at base of sintered bronze bearing shaft

mentioned, metal platters are pretty rare, too.

Competitors such as Michell have fully suspended models for rather less, however, and the Manfred's apparent lack of methods to keep resonance at bay will be a concern for anyone with a wooden floor.

There is nothing in the way of tonearm damping, either (Townshend and Well Tempered both have features on turntables at this price which seek to quell resonance in the tonearm so that the cartridge can do a better job). The only resonances that the design addresses are those in the platter, where a damping pad below and felt mat above attempt to minimise any problems.

The bearing is clearly interesting as Michell has developed a self-lubricating inverted bearing, but few individual companies have created a

material like Tidorfolon specifically for a turntable. Thanks to this proprietary technology, the bearing design is said to reach optimum performance within 15 minutes and to operate flawlessly for at least ten years, the period for which it is guaranteed.

Another nice touch is that the inner part of the arm plate can be raised and thus used to adjust VTA (vertical tracking angle) with Rega arms that otherwise require spacers for this purpose.

Crank it up

The Manfred, combined with an RB251 arm and a Dynavector DV-20X2L moving coil, produces a clean and taut sound that digs deep into the mix for the fine details and responds well to better recordings. It might look a bit similar to an LP12, but it



WE SPOKE TO
Gunther Frohnhoefer
at Acoustic Signature
about the Manfred.

HFC: Why did you feel the need to develop Tidorfolon?

GF: *The classic approach is a steel axle against a steel or harder material thrust pad with oil lubrication. This results in very high pressure at the bearing point if its supporting a heavy platter. There's no way that oil can remain at that interface and as a result the axle runs more or less dry without lubrication which causes wear and noise.*

Teflon may work with light platters, but not with platters over 7kgs or more. Teflon is simply too soft. So we developed a product which combines the self-lubricating characteristics of Teflon with much more hardness and stability. The result is a self-healing bearing which can handle loads up to 25kg.

HFC: Why is there no attempt to isolate the turntable from external vibration?

GF: *I personally don't like isolation systems. They always lead to a loss of detail and dynamics. To achieve good isolation without negative effects a lot of technology and money needs to be spent and this is not possible in a reasonably priced product.*

has a rather more precise and grounded sound.

The RB251 also seems like a rather basic arm for such a well, put-together turntable and its relatively low mass counterweight is not perfect for cartridges like the Dynavector. Nonetheless, the results are pretty entertaining and revealing, thanks to its ability to resolve subtleties in the context of decent timing.

It's not as on-the-ball as some other turntables at this level, but it's no slouch either. When it comes to playing different types of music, it has the ability to distinguish between the instruments lower down in the mix, as well as those that take centre stage. Voices are clean and open, too, with good image solidity. But even if this clear-cut presentation is a little short on romance by vinyl standards, the Manfred Mk II still has an honest, almost clinical sound that detail enthusiasts will appreciate.

What most appeals is the stability of the sound; it might not be as thrilling as some other designs, but its imaging and pacing are extremely consistent, benefitting albums like Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert* with its repetitive motifs on solo piano.

Keeps you hooked

The Manfred Mk II has a lot going for it in terms of both detail and resolution. Its only shortcoming is a lack of spark and it doesn't always resolve the terra firma of recordings enough to convince you that they are happening right there in the room.

It's likely that a better tonearm would help in this respect, but we have not found the RB251 wanting in the past; it may lack refinement, but is not short on charm.

All-in-all, the Manfred looks great, but doesn't capture the imagination quite as well as the best in class. ●

The Manfred MkII has a lot going for it in terms of both detail and resolution



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Well built, with electronic speed change and plenty of detail
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Not the best at the price, despite obvious attention to detail
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** This turntable does a lot of things well, but doesn't always draw you into the music
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL



FURUTECH

Pure Transmission Technology

Refinement Has a New Name
Debuting Furutech's Top-of-the-Line Flux Cable series

Flux Cable Series



Speakerflux



Lineflux (XLR)



Lineflux (RCA)



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Furutech α (Alpha) OCC Pure Transmission conductors terminated with beautifully-engineered high performance rhodium-plated connectors. The substantially-built extremely nonresonant connector bodies are finished in layered carbon fiber and nonmagnetic stainless steel providing improved mechanical damping for greater resolution, clarity, and powerful dynamics.



Jumperflux-S



Jumperflux-B



Flux-50filter



FP-1363-S FP-1363-D

High End Performance BS-1363 wall sockets with Pure Copper conductors. Rhodium or Gold plated.



FI-UK1363(R) FI-UK1363(G)

High End Performance UK mains plug, straight or angled.

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ADL

ALPHA DESIGN LABS

Introducing Alpha Design Labs

Furutech is justifiably proud of its reputation for engineering, build quality and performance, and has won the loyal support of audio enthusiasts worldwide for their finely made and beautiful sounding cables and audio accessories. Now Furutech greatly expands its reach with a new entry-level line called ADL (Alpha Design Labs). ADL was created by Furutech to imbue its Pure Transmission Technology into carefully engineered innovative designs that everyone can afford. ADL components and cables are made with the same dedication to total resonance control and refinement as all of Furutech's many cables and accessories.



ADL GT40 USB DAC with Phono stage!



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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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



Classic PowerKord™

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?

Russ Andrews Classic PowerKord™

- ✓ Eight woven, hyper-pure copper conductors
- ✓ Teflon® insulation
- ✓ Flexible protective sheathing
- ✓ Fitted with Wattgate™ 320i IEC
- ✓ Fitted with a Russ Andrews Fuse

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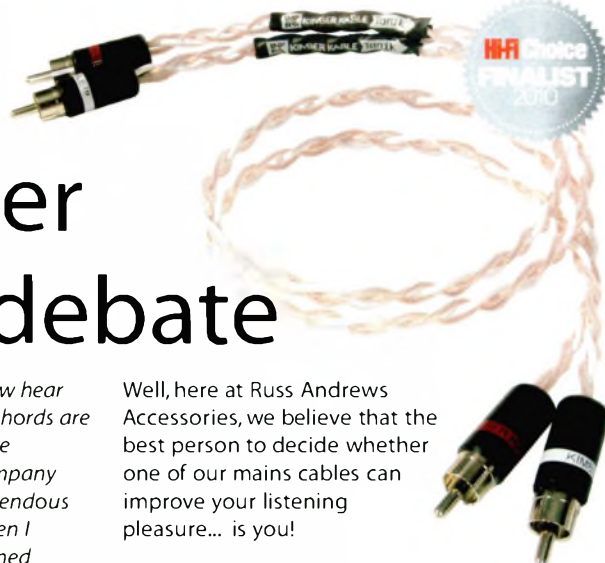
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Only way is Essex

Rega's first ever DAC, a £500 five-filter mini marvel, is here and Technical Consultant **Richard Black** has (five) stars in his eyes ...

It's always hard to resist a sense of humour. When we opened up this DAC the first thing we noticed was the large and clear text on the circuit board, saying, 'Best used with EL84 valves'. Given that Rega has never made a single valve product in its several decades in business, this is clearly tongue-in-cheek. But then the whole idea of a Rega DAC was something of a surprise at first; the company having previously been in favour of keeping CD transport and DAC all together as one product.

Bit buckets

Still, it's not just, or even principally, CD that's the intended source for the DAC. With digital audio increasingly coming from computer-type sources, often at higher resolution than CD's 16-bit/44kHz sampling, Rega sees this more as an adjunct to non-audiophile 'bit buckets' including computers, servers and so on.

Accordingly, it has a USB input alongside the usual electrical and optical S/PDIF and is fully compatible with high sample rates, up to and including 192kHz. At least it is via S/PDIF, as the USB input only handles sample rates up to 48kHz.

Five filter fun

Front-panel buttons select between the five inputs and also the five filters. User-selectable filters are a popular option these days, not least because many DAC chips offer this internally. The Wolfson part chosen by Rega is such a device and the company has opted to make all its offerings available. These are actually slightly different depending on sample frequency, but include as Option One the classic linear-phase filter typical of most CD players and also minimum-phase implementations.

Filters Four and Five are non-aliasing types, which we would recommend as other filter slopes allow some aliasing distortion to occur. We ended up using Filter Four for most of the listening. There's no 'upsampling' – except that there is, of course, because digital filtering in a DAC intrinsically involves upsampling and has done since the first Philips CD players in about 1983.

This is a well-made and efficiently assembled product. The back panel is neatly laid out and the insides contain few 'brand name' components. It locks almost instantly to an input and gave us no trouble at all in use.

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Rega DAC
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: DAC
WEIGHT:
4kg
DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
215x80x270mm
FEATURES:
• USB input
• 2 optical S/PDIF inputs
• 2 electrical S/PDIF inputs
• Electrical and optical S/PDIF outputs
• Unbalanced audio output
• 5 selectable filter responses
• Sample rates
32-192kHz
DISTRIBUTION:
Rega Research Ltd
TELEPHONE:
01702 333071
WEBSITE:
rega.co.uk

Life and subtlety

Rega is one of those brands strongly associated in the general hi-fi consciousness with a certain 'house sound': pretty much the sound of the Planar turntables, which was always lively and rhythmic, if not necessarily always the most subtle.

Based on our experience with the company's audio electronics, we'd urge caution over making assumptions like that and this DAC certainly doesn't do anything to support them. Not that rhythm is slack, nor is life missing from the sound – quite the opposite, both are admirable. It's just that they are very much in proportion with less 'Rega-ish' traits such as detail and finesse, silky-smooth upper midrange and treble and a generally delightful all-round confidence that we adored.

There's also a lack of hi-fi show-off tendencies; so no super-analytical detail or implausibly punchy bass. Instead, there's the kind of detail that's there when you want it, but not obtrusive when you don't. Plus bass which may not always seem dramatic, but packs a serious punch when required. Treble extension is similarly effortless and unforced.

Distant images

If there's a weakness in the DAC's performance, it's a minor one and concerns imaging. It seemed to us, using CD sources and also high-res ones (some of them made by us), that images are just a little further away than we're used to. That's preferable to having them too close, which can be quite unsettling, but deserves mention. We soon got used to it, though and came to ignore it.

That apart, it's hard to find anything to criticise. The technical performance is as assured as the subjective and for the very modest price, this seems to be very much the product to beat just now. ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Detailed, sweet, well featured and flexible
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Imaging often seems a touch distant; USB input only good to 48kHz; no remote control
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** A little stunner, combining genuinely high-end sound with a good feature set
FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL





Split the difference



DACs are all the rage (again), so we ask if two boxes can be better than one? **Ed Selley** seeks answers from Musical Fidelity's two-box M1

Musical Fidelity has returned from its latest period of reinvention on something of a roll and the rapid release of new products shows no signs of abating. Following on from the headphone and integrated amps, this is our first experience of the new range of digital products from the company.

The M1 DAC has been on sale for a few months now, but has recently been joined by the partnering M1 CDT. This is a brand

new product and is, perhaps, the more unusual one of the two. With the general consensus apparently being that all DACs being sold are for a future of computer and streamed audio, the release of a dedicated CD transport into the market might seem an unusual one. Together, the two products make a £1,000 CD player so naturally we elected to review them as a pair to see if the two-box approach still brings something to CD replay that one box players do not.

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Musical Fidelity M1 CDT and M1 DAC

ORIGIN: UK/Taiwan

TYPE: CD transport and DAC

WEIGHT: 3.5kg (each)

DIMENSIONS: WxHxD: 220x110x300mm (each)

FEATURES: • AES/EBU interface between units

• Coaxial and optical inputs and outputs

• USB input on the DAC

• Inhaler drive mechanism

DISTRIBUTOR: Musical Fidelity

TELEPHONE: 020 8900 2866

WEBSITE: musicalfidelity.com

Neat touches

The £400 M1 DAC is, at first glance, relatively conventional, but proves to contain some neat touches. The half-width chassis contains four inputs selectable from the front panel. The optical, coaxial and USB inputs are expected, but the fourth, an AES balanced input, is more unusual at the price. This, combined with the matching balanced analogue output, allows the M1 DAC to operate in a balanced mode which, if not an absolute guarantee of good performance, is usually a sign that the internals are of reasonable quality. The internals comprise a Burr-Brown DSD1796 DAC chip (supported by a SRC4392 chip) that allows all digital material the M1 DAC receives to be upsampled to 24-bit/192kHz.

Another positive feature is that the rear panel features a full-size IEC mains input, rather than relying on a wall wart power supply. While the internal PSU of the M1 isn't especially large (not that it needs to be), the result is neater for installation and the unit proves totally silent in use.

The £600 M1 CDT is an identical size to the DAC and together the units are the equivalent of a single full-width component. Its rear panel is conventional enough, but features the matching AES output to feed the DAC as well as more conventional optical and coaxial feeds for other DACs.

The mechanism is an inhaler-type drive and is the same specification to the M3 CD, although the mechanisms for the transport are apparently handpicked for the purpose. The result is an elegant-looking unit, although like all drives of this type the M1 CDT will 're-inhale' a CD partially ejected and left poking out of the front if you do not remove it relatively quickly – which can be an annoyance if you have mislaid the box.

Like the DAC, the CDT also features a full-size mains input on the rear panel. A remote handset borrowed from the M3i allows for track selection and volume control of Musical Fidelity amps.

Impressively solid

The fit and finish of both units is good. The front panels are attractive and well laid out, and they both feel impressively solid. They make an interesting comparison to the current crop of CD players fitted with digital inputs. Combining the DAC and CDT via their AES connection gives you a



WITH THE TREND for CD sales seemingly ever downwards, the decision to release a CD transport in 2011 makes more sense than it might at first appear.

The M1 CDT is competitively priced and, as well as making a perfect partner for the M1 DAC, it will also work equally well when connected directly to the digital inputs of the M6 preamp (HFC 340), or indeed the inputs of any similar amplifier – not least the AES input of the magnificent Onkyo M3000PRE preamp (HFC 345).

With digital inputs appearing on more and more products, the relatively cost-effective M1 CDT makes a considerable amount of sense for those who aren't quite finished with CD, but are buying products with digital inputs.

CD player that is fitted with optical, coaxial and USB inputs for additional sources. In addition, the two boxes can live side-by-side on a shelf, be stacked, or indeed be placed a considerable distance from one another. Come the need to upgrade, the two-box layout allows for one box to be upgraded at a time. The only downside to this is that two mains sockets will be required, but otherwise, the combination exhibits considerable flexibility as a pairing and has to be considered good value at £1,000.

Listening to the units connected via the AES connection and via the balanced output of the DAC show that the pairing is sonically competitive as well. The overall impression is one of even-

“This is a capable duo that stands comparison to any £1,000 CD player we have tested.”

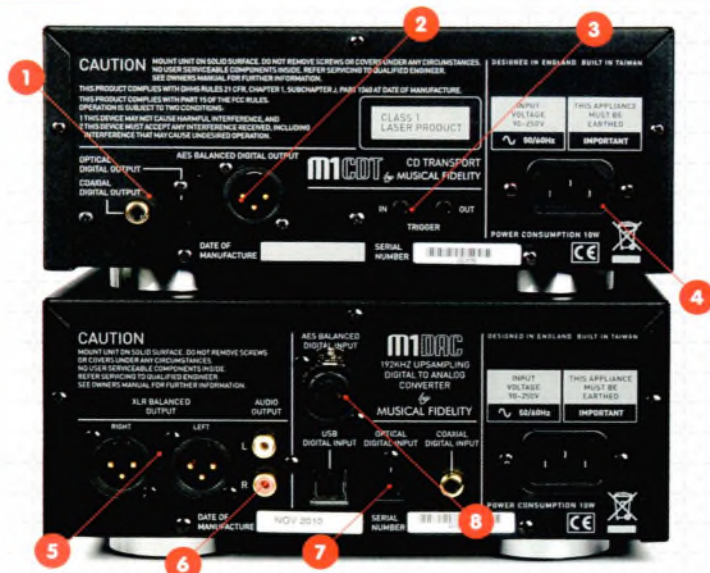
handedness and there is a sense that the M1's main ability is to get out of the way of the music and let the disc speak for itself. This seems to be largely down to a flat presentation with no discernable lift at any part in the frequency. This may not sound desperately exciting, but the ability of the duo to bring as little of themselves as possible is great for anyone seeking either a neutral system or wanting to introduce colouration via their amplification or speakers – in other words, at a point where all sources would benefit.

Low-end weight

The bass and mid bass reproduction is extremely adept. There is considerable low-end weight to proceedings, but the bass avoids any sense of being overblown or overbearing. Orchestral pieces, in particular, benefit from a fabulously natural low-end presence that greatly aids realism. Tonality with vocals and instruments is also very good with excellent decay to plucked strings and piano notes. This is further helped by an excellent and convincing soundstage that usually gives performers space to breathe. The unforced naturalness that results makes this a very easy source to listen to for long periods.

When compared to competitors such as Audiolab's extremely advanced 8200CD (HFC 340), the Musical Fidelity combination is less detailed and revealing, but in many

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Conventional unbalanced digital outputs
- 2 AES balanced output
- 3 IR in and out for system control
- 4 Full-size IEC mains socket
- 5 Balanced XLR output
- 6 Unbalanced RCA output
- 7 USB, optical and coaxial inputs
- 8 Matching AES input suitable for connecting the M1 CDT

HIDDEN TECH

M1 DAC



M1 CDT



- 1** Connections for front, panel lights and controls
- 2** Upsampler Burr-Brown
- 3** Burr-Brown DAC
- 4** Power supply arrangements
- 5** Inhaler type 1 mechanism
- 6** Servo board
- 7** Digital output functions
- 8** Power supply board



THE FIRST THOUGHT for partnering the M1 pair is the £1,000 Musical Fidelity M3i (HFC 337). The resulting £2,000 combination should have a likeable sound and excellent features.

We also feel that the Electrocompaniet EC13 (HFC 332) ought to be considered. This was the pairing we used in testing and the balanced output of the M1 DAC worked superbly with the matching input of the fully balanced Electrocompaniet. The result was an engaging and punchy duo with superb dynamics.

Speaker choice, as ever, will depend heavily on the size of the room, but the largest or smallest rooms.

ways more natural, as well as being more forgiving of poor recordings.

Timing is assured, but the pairing does not inject additional vitality into recordings; this is because Musical Fidelity amps need no help in this regard; but if you are partnering with another amp that is equally neutral, you may find the pairing lacks a sense of excitement. Others will appreciate the extremely even-handed nature of the performance.

Main influence

Listening to other inputs on the DAC, via other CD and DVD players, as well as USB from PC, reveals that the M1 DAC is the main influence of the sonic signature and has to be considered something of a star for

the £400 asking price. The same natural, unforced presentation comes through from all inputs and the DAC treads a fine line between being revealing enough to bring details to the forefront, while ensuring that compressed material stays listenable.

The unbalanced RCA output of the DAC – once you have adjusted the levels – has the same qualities as the XLR output; although, we preferred the balanced one, if only because both amplifiers we tried it with also work better over XLR.

The M1 pairing impressed us greatly. This is a well-thought-out and capable duo that stands comparison to any £1,000 CD player we have tested recently. The performance with CD via the

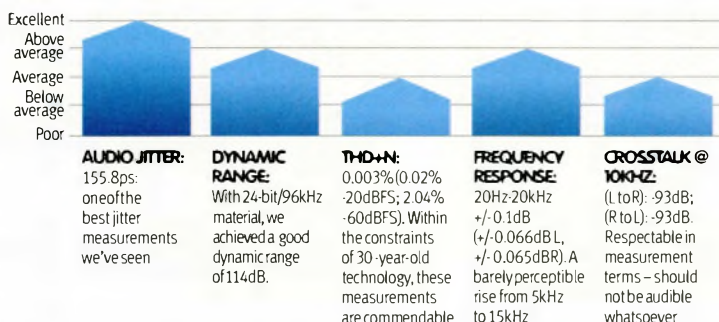
CDT is excellent and the performance of other equipment connected to the M1 DAC is equally strong.

The DAC is the more cost-effective component of the two takes some beating for £400. As a £1,000 CD player, the addition of the CDT makes for an engaging combination with considerable flexibility in performance.

There is no shortage of competition at or around the £1,000 price point and there will be people who prefer to buy a single box and be done with it, but if you are looking for a player which artfully combines a very natural presentation and brings very little of the character of the electronics to the performance, the M1 system demand an audition. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Ni-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Clean, open sound with impressive features and flexibility

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Inhaler drive tends to "eat" CDs that are not extracted

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Talented combination with excellent sound quality and useful additional features

FEATURES ★★★★★

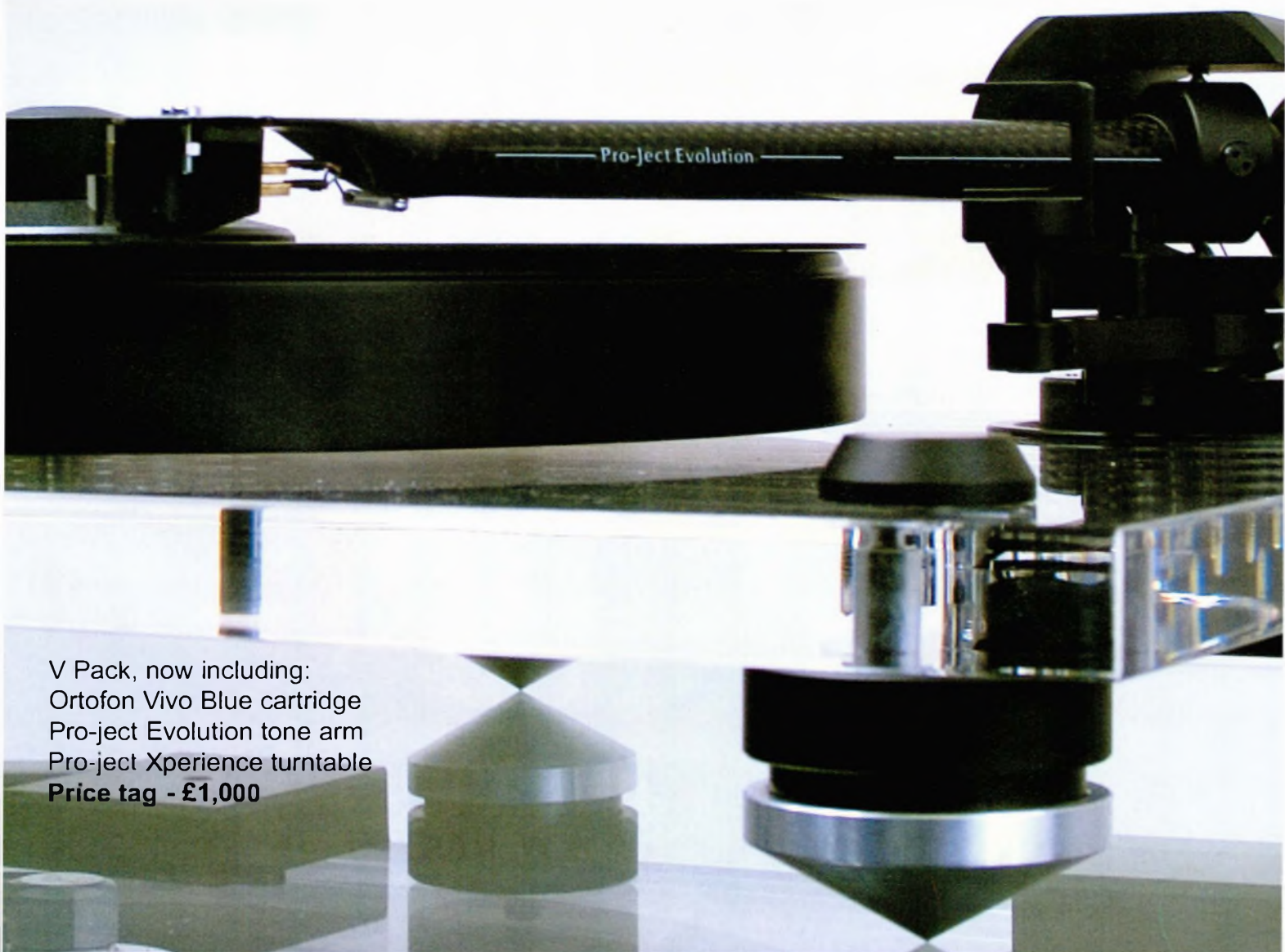
OVERALL ★★★★★



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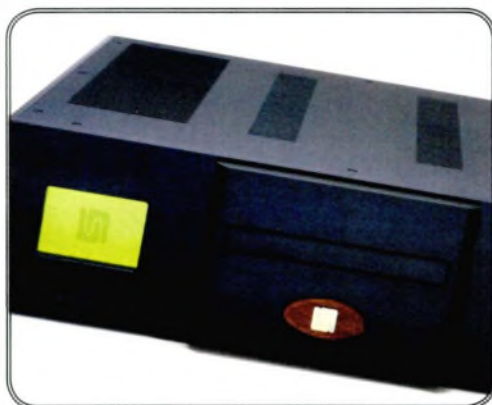
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Dyna might

Cable newcomer Dynamique specialises in carefully specified, handmade cables. **Richard Black** puts them up against the establishment

Dynamique is a new name in British cables. Handmade on the Sussex coast, the company caught our eye due to its insistence on carefully specifying its cables and constructing them all by hand. The range is sizeable and silver seems to be the favourite conductor material, with Teflon (PTFE) the dielectric (insulator) of choice.

If the budget doesn't stretch to silver, as in the case of the Cyclone speaker cable tested here, then silver-plated copper will suffice. Our other test subject, the Tempest interconnect, has an interesting feature: of its four conductors (two each 'hot' and 'cold'), two are pure silver and two silver-plated copper.

It's not obvious what this might achieve, but the use of four conductors is sensible enough, giving a 'star-quad' geometry which is notably immune to hum pickup and provides a degree of screening (there's no screen as such).

Banana plugs

Both cables feature a resonance damper, claimed to damp mechanical vibrations in the cable which could, says Dynamique, affect sound.

It has to be said that likely effects in practice would be many dB below normal signal level and we're unconvinced in principle. That doesn't mean, however, that it has no contribution to make!

Terminations on both cables are well done, with gold-plated Furukawa banana plugs on the speaker cable and Eichmann Bullet phono plugs on the interconnect.

Cable character

We tried these cables in various situations: running the Tempest between a phono stage and line preamp; downstream of a couple of CD players and then from preamp to power amp. The Cyclone drove our habitual ATC and Bowers & Wilkins speakers from various amps.

Despite this plethora of demanding partnering equipment, we didn't find much evidence of real character for either cable; they are both rather characterless; that is, they don't impose themselves on the music. Unless you are of the mindset that likes to regard cables as tuning devices, that's very much a point in their favour; neutrality being a hi-fi Holy Grail.

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Tempest interconnect/ Cyclone speaker cable

ORIGIN: UK

FEATURES:

- (Tempest) Solid silver and silver-plated copper conductors
- PTFE insulation
- Star-quad geometry
- Eichmann 'Bullet' phono plugs
- Neutrik XLR plugs optional

- 6mm diameter
- (Cyclone) Silver-plated copper conductors
- PTFE insulation
- Twisted figure-8 geometry
- Furukawa O-Z banana plugs
- Spade connectors optional

DISTRIBUTOR: Dynamique Audio

TELEPHONE: 01234 567890

WEBSITE: dynamiqueaudio.com

Near-faultless

There are certain observations which are legitimate to make about these cables. First, they are near-faultlessly neutral in the midband. We found the Tempest interconnect just a touch more assured in the bass than the Cyclone; the latter seeming ever-so-slightly self-effacing in the lowest octave and lacking a little impact and precision. In the treble, by contrast, the Cyclone seemed the more detailed, while the Tempest didn't quite give the sort of insight we've heard from favourite interconnects.

Dynamic Dynamique!

Both cables present precise and stable images, with very good depth definition, which is often a particular weakness of cables. And with the brand's name in mind, we were delighted to hear excellent dynamics on offer; swinging from loud to soft effortlessly without compression or exaggeration.

The only reservation we ended up with concerns value. Handmade cables aren't the cheapest and we can think of established models in each category which compete strongly at the price. All the same, they are both well worth an audition. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

VERDICT – TEMPEST

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Open and detailed sound with a very neutral midrange

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Treble can sometimes seem a little closed-in

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Good performance with a price that reflects the small-scale, UK-built production

COMPATIBILITY ★★★★★

OVERALL



Hi-Fi Choice

VERDICT – CYCLONE

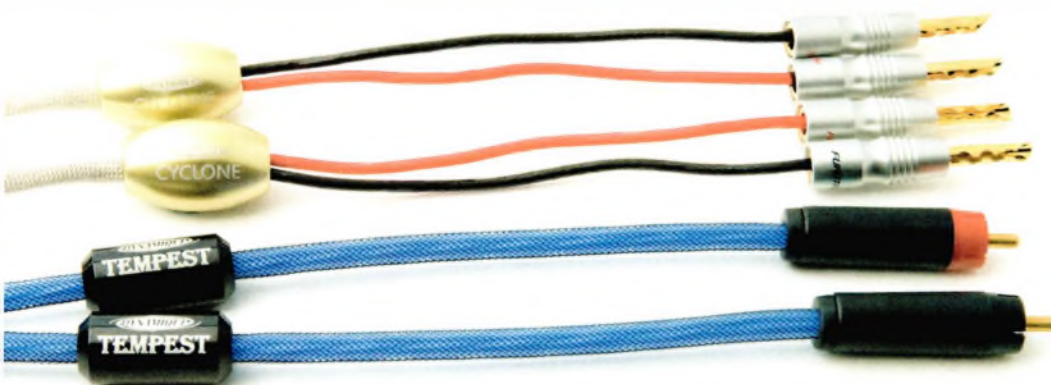
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Nicely detailed with neutral mid; treble has sparkle and clarity

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Bass not as weighty and defined as one might wish

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** An honest cable that achieves fine results, but struggles a little on value grounds

COMPATIBILITY ★★★★★

OVERALL





Norway knows best

A DAC that improves the sound from your CD player *and* offers wireless USB connection to a computer? **Jimmy Hughes** is all ears

A decade or more back, the rationale for buying an outboard DAC was to upgrade the performance of an older CD player or transport with the latest digital technology. However, now that many current CD players offer upsampling to 24-bit/196kHz as standard, such reasons no longer seem convincing.

But, wait; what about a DAC that has balanced analogue outputs, plus the ability to access and play music stored on a hard drive? Not only do you get the promise of improved sound, you can now link your ripped music to the hi-fi. The stylish Electrocompaniet PD 1 DAC delivers just such an upgrade. Interested?

High-precision

Like many recent digital products, the PD 1 is based around a 24-bit/192kHz digital-to-analogue convertor. The incoming digital signal (say, 16-bit/44.1kHz from Red Book CD) is converted to this higher specification

by something Electrocompaniet dubs ASRC (Asynchronous Sample Rate Convertor).

A high-precision master clock is used which it's claimed, virtually eliminates jitter at the output – so, even if your sources contain time-domain errors, they're quickly zapped. Prior to processing, the USB input is likewise converted into standard S/PDIF format by the sampling-rate convertor – so it's similar to the other inputs.

Audio information from the USB data stream is extracted using low-jitter PLLs (phase-locked loops) and output to S/PDIF. With the sample-rate convertor being 'clocked' by an ultra-accurate reference device any remaining timing errors are further reduced, resulting in an output that is accurate and jitter-free.

The analogue output stage employs discrete transistors running in a pure Class A configuration with no negative feedback. A carefully

► DETAILS

PRODUCT: Electrocompaniet PD 1

ORIGIN: Norway

TYPE: DAC

WEIGHT: 4.3kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD): 420x50x340mm

FEATURES:
• 24-bit/192kHz resolution (S/PDIF inputs)

• Low jitter

• Balanced analogue outputs

• Class A discrete analogue output stage – zero feedback

• Wireless USB connection via optional EMS 1.

DISTRIBUTOR: NSS Ltd

TELEPHONE: 020 8893 5835

WEBSITE: electrocompaniet.com

designed 2-pole linear-phase, anti-aliasing filter further removes any delta-sigma conversion artefacts. Analogue and digital sections feature individual power supplies for reduced interference.

The power supplies for the analogue output stage and DAC employ ultra-low-noise tight-shunt regulators, which the maker claims results in a more open and transparent sound, due to reductions in spurious noise. As a result of these measures, the PD 1 effectively 'cleanses' all digital signals that pass through it.

Digital inputs include: 2x S/PDIF (coax via an RCA phono plug); 1x S/PDIF TOSLink optical; 1x USB Type 2; and an RF wireless link for use with the optional EMS 1 music streamer (see *Talking Point* p73). The S/PDIF inputs support 24-bit/192kHz sampling, while the USB and RF options are 16-bit/48kHz.

There are two sets of analogue outputs: unbalanced (single-ended, RCA phono plugs) giving 1.7-volt output and balanced (XLR) giving 3.4-volt output. This output is variable. The maker claims distortion is less than 0.003 per cent from 20Hz to 20kHz, with noise levels 140dB below peak output over the same bandwidth.

The unit is supplied with an infra-red remote control handset that allows input switching and volume adjustment, plus mute and standby. There are additional Play, Pause, Stop and Fast Search buttons for those using their PD 1 with an Electrocompaniet CD player.

The illuminated front panel keeps you informed regarding the input

ELECTROCOMPANIET

Coax1 Coax2 Tlink USB RF Link

0 Volume 100

PD 1 High Performance Balanced DAC

PD 1 High Performance Balanced DAC

selected and the volume level set. You've a choice of two brightness settings and there's an 'off' position if the glare of blue LEDs becomes distracting. It might be imagination, but the sound seems a tad cleaner with the display off – though, the difference is very small!

Neat and tidy

The PD 1 is a solidly made unit that's nicely styled. The front panel is made from alloy, while the casework is steel. All the various controls are touch-sensitive types, so it's not really possible to talk about the 'feel' of the unit as such. Internal circuits look neat and tidy.

There's nothing here to make you gasp with astonishment, yet neither is there anything to cause concern or

“The PD 1 effectively ‘cleanses’ all digital signals that pass through it.”

disquiet. There's no undue emphasis on cosmetic appearance, or extravagant 'luxury' build; you'll choose this unit for its performance and features, not its facade!

Mechanically, the unit is virtually silent. Put your ear up close and there's a barely audible hint of transformer buzz, but you have to be right on top of the unit to hear anything. There are no switching thumps to worry about, either; when using the RF Link the unit mutes if no signal is detected.

Purposeful momentum

We connected our review sample to a Shanling SCD-T2000 SACD player. This features a 24-bit/192kHz Burr-Brown PCM 1738 DAC and should, therefore, be quite close to the PD 1 in digital terms. However, we heard an immediate difference: essentially, the Electrocompaniet delivers a cleaner, more detailed sound.

While the tonal balance hardly seems to alter, the PD 1 definitely produces a tauter, more focused sound that seems to project the music with greater presence and immediacy. On solo piano, for example, there's definitely an enhanced sense of space and separation, so subjectively the notes start and stop with increased alacrity.

**TALKING POINT**

FOR THOSE of us still dragging our heels when it comes to hooking up our computers to the hi-fi, one 'excuse' (admittedly, a pretty feeble one) might well be the lack of a suitably-long USB cable – always assuming, of course, that our CD player and/or DAC actually has a USB input.

Being wireless-enabled, the PD 1 can be used with Electrocompaniet's optional EMS 1 music streamer device (£250). This is a little black box with a Type B USB socket and an aerial. Plug the EMS 1 into a spare USB socket on your computer, switch the PD 1 to RF Link, and the two immediately start talking to one-another.

With the maximum length of USB cables limited to about five metres, the EMS 1 gives you freedom to have your computer and hi-fi in places that suit you and your living space.

Operationally, the EMS 1 seems glitch-free and we experienced no interference, drop-outs, or losses of signal while listening.

CONNECTIONS

1 Unbalanced analogue outputs

2 XLR balanced analogue outputs

3 USB

4 Optical

5 Coaxial

6 Aerial socket

Burj Khalifa Tower, Dubai
8,352 Tannoy CMS loudspeakers



Semi-detached, Durham
1 pair Revolution DC6 T loudspeakers



Same technology – same great performance

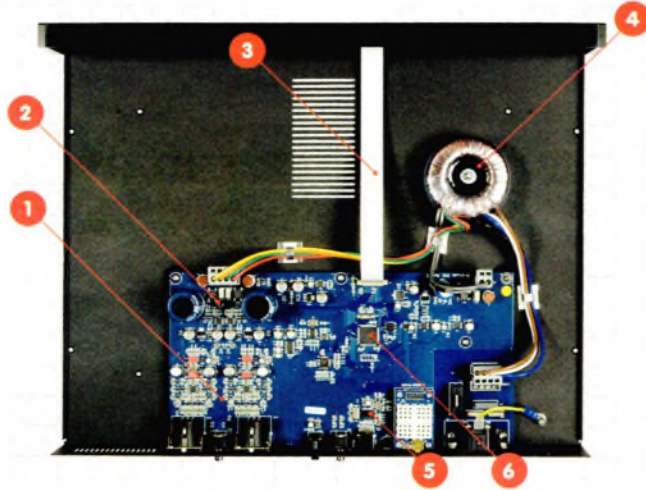
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HIDDEN TECH

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1 Analogue output stage | 2 Power supply | 3 Umbilical cable to display/control panel |
| 4 Power transformer | 5 Digital input stage | 6 DAC |

Although the PD 1's unbalanced analogue output is slightly lower than the Shanling's – around 1.7V compared to 2V – the PD 1 actually sounds bigger and better-able to project the music, thereby creating a more holographic 'out of the boxes' sort of result.

“To play music stored on your computer is as persuasive a reason as any to invest in a PD 1.”

The PD 1 focuses your attention on the music and performance. It enhances the impression of commitment – making it sound as though the players are involved and concentrating.

Used alone, the Shanling seems a tad less disciplined musically. With the PD 1, everything suddenly becomes

keener and more precisely focused; more alive and awake. Brass rasps; cymbals shimmer; voices sing out and rock bands *rock*.

All early comparisons were made using unbalanced analogue outputs, as the Shanling does not offer balanced. Via the PD 1's balanced outputs, the sound grows dimensionally. It's bigger; bolder; with increased separation; a palpably heightened sense of scale. Yet the end-result feels natural too; it's not pumped up or inflated.

Of course, with balanced, the output level increases by between 3dB to 6dB, which is significant in itself. But, even after you've reduced volume levels to bring things back to an equal footing, the sound is still bigger and bolder. It's definitely more assertive and displays increased depth and separation.

Essentially then, the PD 1 offers a two-pronged improvement. Its

HOW IT COMPARES

THE PD 1 is more than capable of delivering a worthwhile sonic improvement over the in-built DAC of a good modern CD player, even when the specifications might indicate no real technological benefit. You might be comparing two DACs with nominally similar 24-bit/192kHz specs, but that's only the start.

Things like jitter-reduction, the nature of the analogue output stage used and differences in power supplies, can all lead to audible improvements. Even so, with something as good as the PD 1, aren't we getting pretty close to technical perfection? Close, yes; but there's always further to travel – that's the nature of hi-fi!

With the PD 1 being part of Electrocompaniet's value-conscious Prelude range, its Classic Series products promise further refinement and improvements. However, whether these differences actually justify the extra cost remains to be seen. The PD 1 offers a lot of bang for your buck and won't be easy to improve on.

low-jitter digital conversion and high-performance DAC results in a cleaner more focused sound, while balanced analogue outputs deliver increased scale and dimensionality. The result is a very worthwhile sonic improvement – even over a good one-box player.

There's more. Add the EMS 1 music streamer (£250) and via iTunes you can access music stored on your computer hard drive. Connection is made wirelessly to the PD 1 and currently digital conversion is at 16-bit/48kHz – though it's possible that 24-bit/192kHz conversion may be offered at some future point.

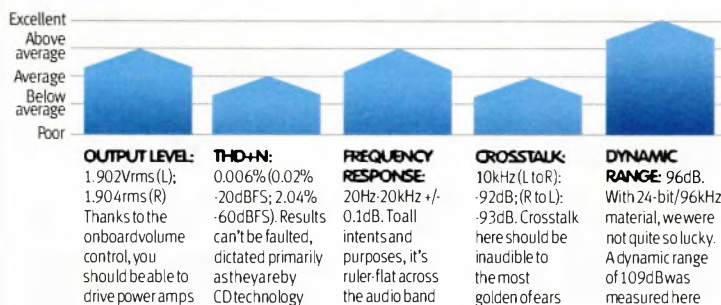
The quality of sound from CDs ripped to a hard drive and conveyed to the PD 1 via the EMS 1 is fine – clear, open, lively and detailed. However, you need to save the disc in a high-quality format like WAV for best results. Saved as AAC, the sound is still good, but seems thinner and slightly lacking in richness and refinement.

Without doubt, the facility to play music stored on your computer hard drive – with a lack of fuss and drama – is alone as persuasive a reason as any to invest in a PD 1.

Compelling package

The PD 1 is an excellent product, delivering worthwhile upgrades in sound quality and user-convenience that many users will appreciate. As a DAC, it should provide an audibly cleaner, more detailed sound over most one-box CD players. And, if you're able to utilise those balanced outputs, the improvement will be even greater.

Then there's the added benefit of being able to access music stored on hard-drives via the PD 1's USB socket – with the advantage of a wireless interface using the optional EMS 1 music streamer. It all adds up to a compelling package at a realistic price – indeed, we're sorely tempted to buy one; it's that good! ●

TECH LABS**RESULTS AT A GLANCE****Hi-Fi Choice****OUR VERDICT**

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ | LUKE: Great sound, good build and superb value |
| VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ | DISLIKE: No 24-bit/192kHz on RF and USB (yet) |
| BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ | WESAY: The PD 1 delivers sonically and lets you access music on your computer hard drive |
| FEATURES
★★★★★ | |

OVERALL

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Join the Revolution

This brand new member of the Revolution series looks like much better value than its Signature equivalent says **Paul Messenger**

The Revolution DC6T is an impressive newcomer dual-concentric full-range driver, with a 150mm bass-only unit (similar in specs to its sister product, the Signature DC6T, that we reviewed in *HFC* 314). All this is contained within a compact 30-litre, rear-ported enclosure and the detailing throughout is excellent.

The enclosure is tapered so that the back is significantly narrower than the front, helping to spread and distribute internal reflections and standing waves. All this is elegantly wrapped in an attractive dark 'espresso' real wood veneer and the overall stability of this model is substantially enhanced by the provision of a black plinth, which significantly increases the footprint.

Famous driver

Tannoy's famous dual concentric drive unit has been a cornerstone of the brand for more than 60 years. Its unique feature is that a horn-loaded tweeter fires through the centre of the bass/mid cone, so it's effectively a two-way full-range drive unit where the tweeter is well protected from small prying fingers. The 150mm DC driver has a silver-coloured, flared-profile paper cone 115mm in diameter, which crosses over to the 25mm tweeter at a lowish 1.7kHz. The bass-only unit matches the size of the DC driver and both are decorated by silver trim. The port is on the rear here, well above two pairs of socket/binder terminals set conveniently close to the floor.

Tight focus

One key characteristic of the DC driver's horn-loaded tweeter is that the treble is focused into a 90-degree cone, rather than the much wider dispersion shown by most speakers with conventional dome tweeters.

This is neither 'right' nor 'wrong', but it is 'different'; sharpening the image precision and focus, but diluting the illusion that musicians are in the listening room.

Tannoy claims a sensitivity of 89dB, which if anything seems a tad conservative: we'd happily award 90dB here, which is a very healthy figure, especially since the bass extension is an exceptional -3dB at 20Hz under in-room far-field conditions, helped by very low (sub-30Hz) port tuning. Some compromise is, perhaps, inevitably

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Tannoy Revolution DC6T

ORIGIN: UK/China

TYPE: 2.5-way floorstander

WEIGHT:
15.1kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
202x950x253mm

FEATURES:
• Twin terminal pairs for bi-wiring/bi-amping

• 150mm dual concentric driver

• 150mm bass driver

• Tapering enclosure to spread internal waves

• Separate plinth enhances stability footprint

DISTRIBUTION:
Tannoy

TELEPHONE:
01236 420199

WEBSITE:
tannoy.com

involved here and is seen in the load presented to the amplifier which is rather demanding at low frequencies

Clean and deep

This is a fine-sounding loudspeaker by any standards or price and actually represents a slight improvement over the Signature DC6T. It might not have the smoothest sound around, but it is exceptionally well balanced right across the audio band and also has impressive bass weight and extension. An important element in the bass reproduction is that it seems to be unusually free from the mid-bass boom or thickening that is so widespread amongst inexpensive commercial speakers.

Even with the speakers well clear of walls, the sub-60Hz bass is a little strong, but thereafter the frequency response holds within an impressive +/-3dB right across the band. There's no sign here of the upper-mid forwardness that afflicted the Revolution Signature DC6T, though again the top end (above 8kHz) looks a little untidy. The only serious criticism concerns the pair-matching, which the impedance traces showed to be poor.

Deep and authoritative

The two-and-half-way configuration inevitably compromises the time coherence a little, but this didn't prove unduly serious and all told this is a very fine loudspeaker indeed, especially since it's not unduly costly.

The speaker has numerous pluses, including sharp styling with elegant wood veneer, but its real strength lies in its fine all round performance. There's little evidence of boxiness or other midband coloration and the total balance is even, if not particularly smooth. Bass is deep and authoritative and overall the sound is exceptionally well judged. ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Beautiful overall tonal balance with fine, deep bass

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Could have been more time-coherent with a sweeter top end

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Good looking and compact floorstander has a beautifully judged overall balance

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL



Unique proposition

In-ear newcomer Unique Melody is breaking the (custom) mould with its six-driver tailor-made earphone. **Dan George** fills his ears

New to the UK, Unique Melody is an earphone specialist with an impressive range of feature-heavy products. The flagship model tested here, the Miracle, is unusual in boasting six drive units: twin treble; twin mid and twin bass drivers, with a passive three-way crossover all packed into a compact shell barely any bigger than rivals from Shure and ACS.

From a respectable line-up, the UK distributor AmpCity, suggested we dive straight in with the top model, aimed at audiophiles on the move. Like many high-end in-ears, the Miracles are offered with tailor-made moulds and if you take mobile music seriously, these are now a must. Not only do they offer all-day comfort, their superior noise-cancelling protects hearing by enabling lower volume levels.

Tech marvels

Of course, the Miracle's biggest feature is its driver count. The Miracle doubles-up on HFC favourite the £500 Shure SE535 (HFC 344), with pairs of drivers for treble, mid and bass. But, just like a multi-driver floorstander, more isn't necessarily better: it's all about the design and execution.

One interesting aspect of the Miracle is the option for customers to 'tweak' the frequency response curve at a factory level. AmpCity says it's possible to add or subtract a couple of dB as you see fit, if required. Each set comes with a factory-generated frequency response graph; our pair's chart, for example, showed off an incredibly linear response from 10Hz to 500Hz (see Melody-makers, right).

Customers can choose any colour and any artwork for the shells and usefully, the cable is detachable; which is handy for those rush-hour snags and, more importantly, upgrade experimentation.

Ear-jewels

The Miracles are impressively well built. The shell uses a German-made hard plastic which appears flawless on close inspection. The only real grumble is that the cable feels cheap and insubstantial (even if it isn't), tangles easily and lacks the elegance of the Shure system; but it is replaceable.

We mentioned the tough plastic and the jury is still out on this one.

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Unique Melody, Miracle
ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Ear-canal earphone (custom fit)
DIMENSIONS: n/a
FEATURES:
• Six balanced armature drivers
• Passive three-way crossover
• Impedance: 15.9 ohms
• Sensitivity: 114dB
• Custom-moulded earpiece
DISTRIBUTOR: AmpCity
TELEPHONE: 020 3384 6392
WEBSITE: uniquemelody.org/English/ [sic]

It's used for longevity as the silicone used in some rivals doesn't last nearly as well (trust us!). But, it's more uncomfortable to insert and remove, although importantly it's fine once it's in, and doesn't interface with the inner ear as well as silicone. Still, points added for finish, quality and lifespan.

Value is harder to summarise, however. Build is first-class, custom moulds are included and there's a lot of tech inside, but £800 is considerable for an earphone, but this is the high end.

Melody-makers

Remember that linear trace on the graph? Well, you can hear it! The Miracle's have phenomenal bass ability: simply the best we've heard. There's depth, extension, dynamics and musicality to the low stuff you simply won't get anywhere else. Electronica and rock fans will be rewarded. The midband is good and, although we would have preferred a little more presence and neutrality, there's plenty of rhythm and musicality.

Things are less rosy in the treble band: a steep roll-off from 7kHz robs the presentation of sparkle in the high frequencies; we found ourselves pointlessly upping the volume to try and compensate. Here's a good example of how the 'tweaking' service could help. Things did, however, improve a little as we progressed through the 150-hour run-in and beyond.

Uniquely appealing

The Miracle is a very good product. It's not without criticism, though, but there are sound arguments against some of our grumbles (the hard plastic) and solutions for others (such as the adaptable frequency response). It deserves to be auditioned, along with the non-moulded Shure SE535 and moulded models from ACS.



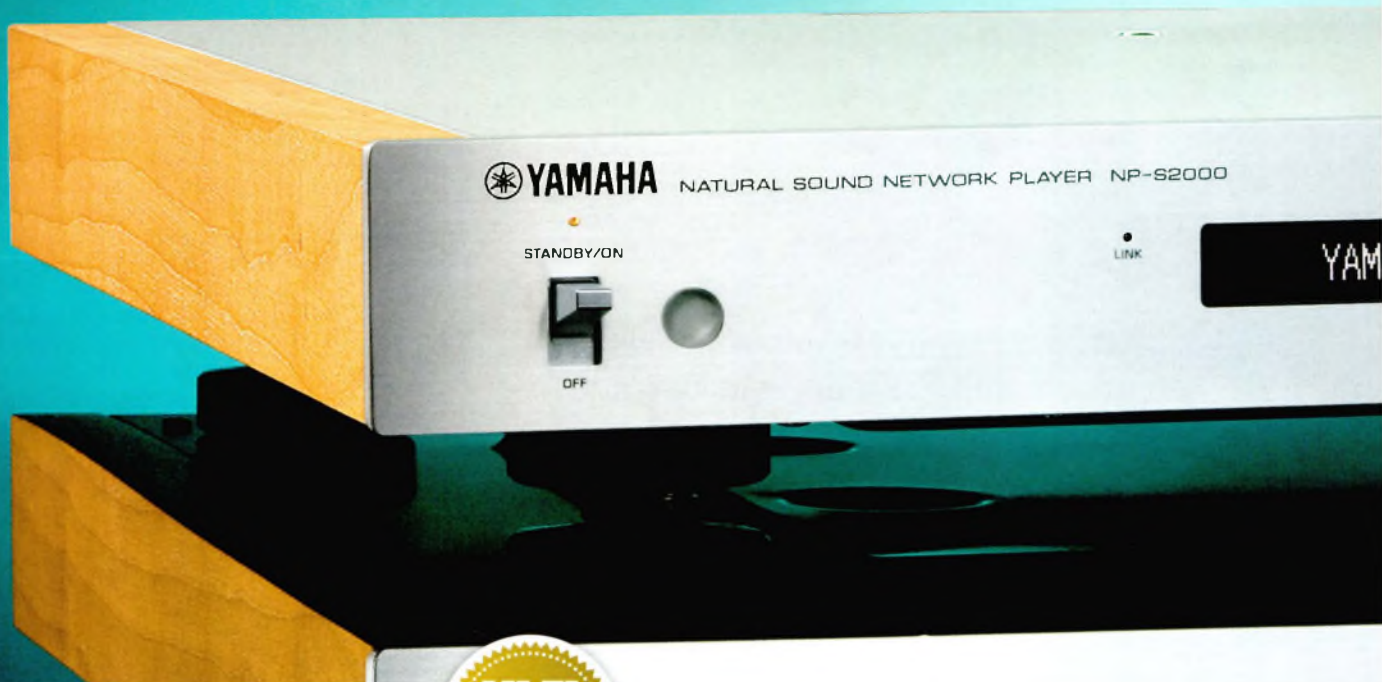
Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Six driver performance; build quality; after-sales support
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Costly; disappointing cable; lack of separation in the treble
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Great build and sound, with class-leading bass, the Miracles are one of our favourite in ears
FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL





Super natural

The NP-S2000 is Yamaha's first-ever network player and a technically brilliant contender in the audio stakes says **Malcolm Steward**

You can tell that Yamaha means business with its first-ever network player the moment you lift the new NPS2000 out of its box: its overall appearance being one of slimness and sophistication, which is probably why its considerable weight comes as a real surprise. And it's only then that you spot other audiophile touches like the adjustable spiked feet and magnetic spike protectors.

These and the balanced XLR connections on the rear panel suggest that someone truly wanted to make this a leading contender in the world of high-end network audio players. A world in which it will be competing with the likes of the Marantz NA7004 (HFC 344), the Arcam Solo Neo (HFC 336) and digital streamers from both Linn and Naim.

The NP-S2000 is a particularly fine-looking beast – with its minimalist slim-line fascia disguising the complexity and capabilities

that lie within the casework. Like the Marantz, but unlike the Arcam, the Yamaha does not (despite its weight) provide an integral amplifier; there are just line-level connections to hook it up to a pre or integrated amplifier and a digital output for connection to a DAC. We used the latter, because while the analogue stages sounded fine, as they ought with an individual Burr-Brown PCM-1792A DAC in each channel, we thought that the digital connection through a Naim DAC sounded particularly enjoyable and refined.

Music formats

The Yamaha will play ripped/downloaded music from a media server or PC on the network, as well as from a NAS (Network Attached Storage) device that is DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) compatible. This is why Yamaha thoughtfully provides a licensed copy of TwonkyMedia

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Yamaha NP-S2000

ORIGIN: Malaysia

TYPE: Network audio player

WEIGHT: 12 kg

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 440x70x430mm

FEATURES:

- Licence for Twonky DLNA server
- No wi-fi provision
- Internet radio

• Dual-mono architecture

DISTRIBUTOR: Yamaha Music UK

TELEPHONE: 08448 11116

WEBSITE: uk.yamaha.com

(see *Talking Point*) to be installed on your media server or NAS, from the software bundle on its download site. This also includes a network-search utility and a link to the iPhone/iPod Touch app. The graphical interface of the latter is definitely the best way to control the player and is, in our opinion, far superior to the remote control or using the fascia buttons, which are somewhat restrictive (especially if you have many thousands of tracks stored on your server) two-line display. You can also have a similar interface surface on a web browser on your PC or Mac, provided it has access to the same network.

The NP-S2000 will handle all the usual music formats at rates up to 96kHz and bit depths of 16-bit and 24-bit: – WAV; FLAC; MP3; AAC and WMA files are all supported, but Yamaha wisely recommends using WAV and FLAC for optimum quality sound. While WAV might be preferable to some, it does have 'issues' with not supporting tags, so we stuck with FLAC files, which support Vorbis Comment-style tags.

The player will handle all, but the highest resolution files currently available. There really are not that many 24-bit/192kHz files in circulation at the moment; 24-bit/96kHz currently seems to be the most popular high-resolution format.

When you have heard all the networked recordings you wish to hear, the player will also connect to internet radio and use the vTuner database. The player can also



provide access to your iTunes library if you have TwonkyMedia installed alongside it.

Like the less expensive Marantz NA7004, the NP-S2000 offers balanced audio outputs. Many feel that such connections are redundant in a domestic audio environment, but at least they offer a consistent balanced connection throughput to the Yamaha high-end A-S2000 amp or a similarly equipped amplifier for people who value it.

Bullet-proof build

The seemingly bullet-proof build quality, along with the stylish appearance, inspires great pride of ownership and confidence in the NP-S2000. Under the lid, dual transformers feed discrete power supplies that run the analogue and

“It digs in deeply to reveal a wealth of detail that brings the music to life.”

digital circuitry independently, so minimising the transfer of noise between the two stages. There is a toroidal transformer powering the analogue circuits and an IE core device supplying the digital components. The transformers occupy the middle third of the triptych-style internal layout, so optimising the distribution of weight in the player.

The audio stages are symmetrical and balanced throughout. Together with the power supply arrangements and features, such as an ultra-

low-jitter clock, the unit strives to deliver music against a notably silent background. Keeping extraneous noise and interference away from the audio doubtless influenced Yamaha’s decision not to include any storage or optical devices in the NP-S2000, such as hard disks or CD/DVD drives.

Our listening test used a raft of LPs ripped to 24-bit/96kHz on a NAS, and, in this instance, a super-quiet background seems not quite as important as Yamaha imagines, not unless one is swayed more by the cosmetics of the presentation than by the music.

Live sound

This is a highly capable player with a sound that is delicate and room-filling at the same time.

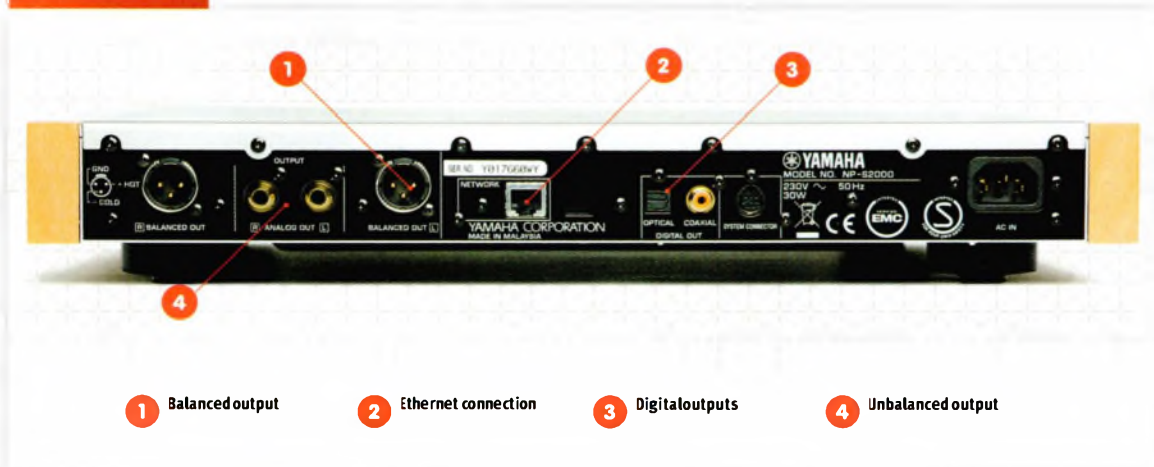


TWONKY MEDIA is a suite of DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) and UPnP (Universal Plug and Play) server software that allows media players to access music – and other media types – stored on a networked computer (PC, Mac, or Linux box) or NAS (Network Attached Storage) device upon which it is installed.

It will also provide aggregation of the content stored elsewhere on other servers, presenting the media with duplicate elements suppressed in the combined navigation tree.

Twonky can operate in push or pull mode. Users can scroll through the library of music on the player display, or sit at a computer and drag and drop music from the library onto an icon representing the player. As with all things nowadays, there are apps that allow you to control your networked music by way of Twonky from an iPhone or Android device.

CONNECTIONS



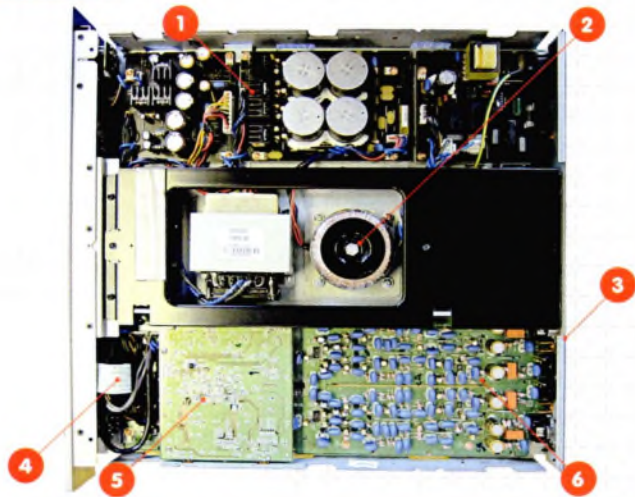
1 Balanced output

2 Ethernet connection

3 Digital outputs

4 Unbalanced output

HIDDEN TECH



- 1** Powersupply regulators
- 2** Separatepower supplies for digital and analogue sections
- 3** Electronics mountedto internal chassis
- 4** Input and display board
- 5** DAC board over processing board
- 6** Output stage packed with discrete components

It really impresses with straight ahead, live-in-the-studio jazz recordings, such as *Art Pepper meets the Rhythm Section* – a 24-bit/96kHz rip of the fantastic 1957 analogue session. It digs in deeply to reveal a wealth of instrumental detail, nuances and resonances that vividly bring the music to life. And it positively revels in albums, such as the Richard Thompson's acoustic demo version of *Dream Attic*.

We found the NP-S2000 better suited to jazz and classical than the more contemporary likes of Eminem and Dr Dre. It still plays these with gusto and enthusiasm, but nonetheless sounds a little too polished and refined for some listeners' tastes with music that benefits from a few rougher edges. Despite this 'politeness' it still articulates Eminem's vocals and

demonstrates remarkable bass weight and punch.

In fact, that LF heft also helps the player to create convincingly expansive sound stages with all types of music. However, it saves its most convincing portrayals for the likes of the Kirov Orchestra performing Stravinsky's *Firebird*, where the player dexterously and convincingly balances conveying the delicacy of a triangle strike with the thunderous might of the percussion section and the blare of the massed horns in full flight.

Contrary to what we intimated earlier, the NP-S2000 manages splendidly when replaying high-resolution rips of well-cared-for vinyl albums. Despite the occasional bit of surface noise, which passes virtually unnoticed, the player focuses the listener's attention

HOW IT COMPARES

THE NP-S2000 seems expensive for what it is: over £1,400 seems extravagant for a network player when half that amount will buy you the highly competitive Marantz NA7004. The same money would also buy you an Arcam Solo Neo and about £500 more would buy a Naim Uniti.

Both the Arcam and Naim have integral power amplifiers, while the Yamaha does not. And while the Naim sounds alluringly natural and musically involving it does not diminish our respect for the Yamaha.

You may not entirely agree with every aspect of its design philosophy, but one cannot argue about its aesthetics and performance. It looks fabulous and sounds first-rate.

squarely on the music and the performances. Its low noise floor exploits the dynamic range available and brings out an abundance of detail. It keeps this all firmly in perspective and does not allow it to dominate or interrupt the ebb and flow of the performance.

A collection of Graham Parker albums benefit particularly from their transfer to NAS by increasing the ease with which they can be auditioned, yet losing none of their musical integrity or vitality. The album *Live! Alone in America* is a special case here: the Yamaha allows the full artistry of Parker and his recording crew to come across in an entirely convincing and persuasive manner.

Listening to a favourite internet radio station, Radio Paradise, the NPS2000 makes the most of the relatively limited amount of data available and produces a dynamic, well-articulated, full-bodied presentation that delivers the smooth, rich, enjoyable listening experience that we've come to appreciate over the last year or two. Its performance on Radio 4 with live voices is also thoroughly satisfactory and very pleasing.

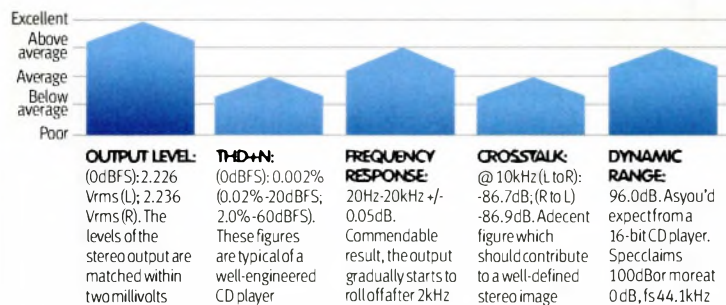
Premier league

The NP-S2000 is a fine example of a network player from a 'big name' manufacturer. Its appearance is exemplary and its construction is superb. Its audio performance is fittingly premier league as well.

It performs well with all types of music, but it truly excels with classical, jazz and acoustic recordings. And, as with so many similar products today, the best way to control it is through an app for those ubiquitous iGadgets: the iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad, or through a web browser. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Drop-dead gorgeous and it sounds appropriately sophisticated
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** The display is too fussy with big music collections; use an iPhone for efficient control
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★
- FEATURES** ★★★★★ **WESAY:** it performs very capably and, in short, seems a definite winner

OVERALL



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1969



SIMON BERKOVITCH

A music historian, ex-record shop guru and Production Editor on *HFC's* annual high-end celebration, *The Collection*, Simon not only knows music, he lives it though his love of vinyl and high-class hi-fi

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What were you listening to when the LEM touched down on the moon? Email us now: hi-fichoice@futurenet.com

The musical cartography of 1969 – complete with its musical cul-de-sacs and dead ends – begins to map out the major musical genres of the next decade, from Prog to Punk and all points in between. It's one small step back in time for music doctor *Simon Berkovitch*, but one giant leap forward for popular music as we flashback to 1969



an walks on the moon and his tentative steps are watched live across the void by millions of families hunched in front of flickering black and white TVs – the finest, most optimistic image of the year. In 1969, the potential of man seemed limitless – and none more so than in the field of popular music.

The genre had grown up and was now viewed as a valid form of artistic communication by some of its previous detractors. Two years before, the release of The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* LP – complete with sleeve by artist Peter Blake – enjoyed the gravitas of a cultural event rather than a pop record hitting the shops. Ever the cultural barometer, the Fab Four had evolved from wanting to hold our hands to urging us to *Come Together*, imploring us to turn off our minds, relax and float downstream along the way.

Innocent pop was morphing into serious rock music in 1969: the mature broadsides from the decade's musical figureheads – The Beatles' *Abbey Road* and The Rolling Stones' *Let it Bleed* – are a case in point among the year's many musical highlights. Great change is afoot.

Psychedelia's legacy

It's significant that the key event of 1969 was a triumph of scientific achievement, as the musical events of 1969 could be laid out as a complicated Venn diagram to illustrate all the genre-blending going on. There are so many mutant strains and so much cross-pollination that you have to spare a thought for the late-60s record shop owner. It must have been oh-so-simple just a few years

earlier, to follow the 'File under' instruction printed neatly on the rear of the LP sleeve. Besuited, clean-cut pop stars were filed under pop; finger-in-the-ear folkies were filed under folk; gnarly blues musicians were... well, you get the picture. Placing middle-of-the-road fodder like The Hollies, The Carpenters and Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass in the 'Pop' section next to Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa and Amon Duul II – all bedfellows in 1969 – is borderline insanity; they scarcely belong in the same universe. Blame psychedelia if you must.

Psychedelia – 1967 vintage – had, to paraphrase a from one of the most fondly remembered films of 1969, *The Italian Job*, blown 'the bloody doors off' the three-minute seven-inch single and redefined the LP – look at Pink Floyd's *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*... half toytown psychedelia; half acid-rock improvisation.

Two years down the line, this particular musical movement may now have been chip-wrapping to the press, but it's arguable that without it, the multiplicity of musical options to explore in 1969 simply would not have existed (or at least been less diverse). The evidence is there if you wish to join the dots: psychedelia's unorthodox time signatures, exotic instrumentation, louder amplification, studio experimentation, folk leanings and extended, electric improvisation are all present and correct in this year's musical landscape – sometimes on the same album. Like the first outing from Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Paul-Jones and John Bonham...

Very heavy, not so humble

It's fitting that the first LP release of 1969 – Led Zeppelin's debut – is literally the

hardest-hitting. The superhuman force of John Bonham's drumming throws the 'clatter of biscuit tins recorded through a paper bag' approach of mid-60s studio engineers onto the scrapheap: Led Zeppelin arrives fully formed on album opener *Good Times, Bad Times* and hard rock – the genre that takes firm hold in the 70s – is born. Of course the axe hero was nothing new – from Sister Rosetta Tharpe to Small Face Steve Marriott – but it was ex-Yarbird Jimmy Page that elevated this act of electric guitar onanism to new, stadium-filling proportions. Embryonic hard rock was a more experimental proposition – think Page attacking his guitar with a violin bow (*Dazed and Confused*) or coaxing unholy sounds out of a Theramin (*Whole Lotta Love*) – rather than bands like Aerosmith who claimed it as their own in the mid-1970s.

Two major-league hard rock players of the 1970s were still dipping their toes in more pretentious waters in 1969. The Who's double LP *Tommy* – the first rock opera, if you discount The Pretty Things' 1968 magnum opus *S.F. Sorrow* – still came with shiny pop credentials. Pub-rock covers band staple Deep Purple delivered an LP that sounded as pretentious as its title suggests – *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* – released in December in the US and January 1970 in the UK.

Groups signed to Harvest – EMI's progressive, underground subsidiary label, were seemingly encouraged to stretch out musically: an experimental release like Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma*, a release that ushers in the 70s' Progressive rock era – another mutant strain of psychedelia – is a case in point.

EARTHBOUND CHART TOPPERS

Back on planet earth, the singles chart largely remained a prisoner to the mainstream, as the UK's number one singles of 1969 reveal, although some stone classics lurk within...

Rolf Harris – *Two Little Boys*
The Archies – *Sugar Sugar*
Bobbie Gentry – *I'll Never Fall in Love Again*
Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg – *Je T'aime Moi Non Plus*
Creedence Clearwater Revival – *Bad Moon Rising*
Zager and Evans – *In the Year 2525*
The Rolling Stones – *Honky Tonk Women*
Thunderclap Newman – *Something in the Air*
The Beatles – *The Ballad of John and Yoko and Get Back*
Tommy Roe – *Dizzy*
Desmond Dekker and The Aces – *The Israelites*
Marvin Gaye – *I Heard it Through the Grapevine*
Peter Sarstedt – *Where Do You Go To My Lovely*
Amen Corner – *Half As Nice*
The Move – *Blackberry Way*
Fleetwood Mac – *Albatross*
Marmalade – *Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da*
The Scaffold – *Lily the Pink*



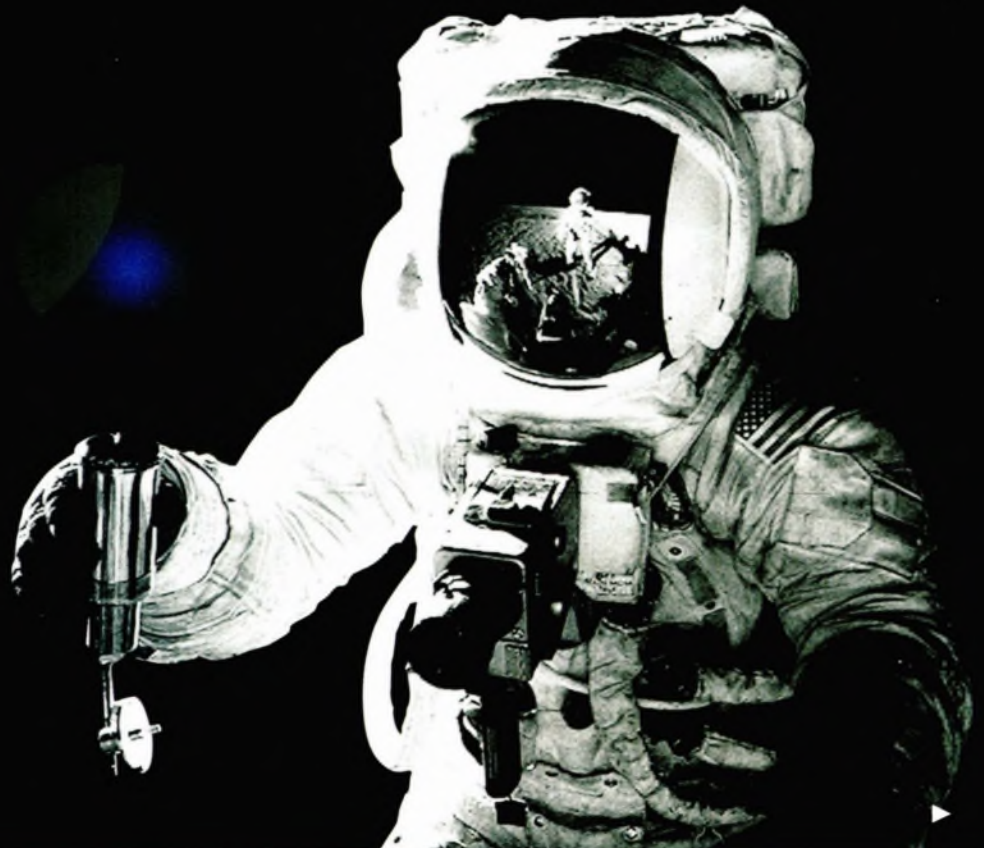
Ultimately, harder roads lay ahead for both The Who and Deep Purple in the 1970s with the albums on which their subsequent careers rested – *Who's Next* (1971) and the not-so-subtly signposted *Deep Purple in Rock* (1970) respectively.

It's a testament to the band's creativity that Led Zep managed to deliver a second long-player – the imaginatively monikered *Led Zeppelin II* – the self same year. A similar template of compositional light and shade was adhered to on this follow up, as (relatively) softer cuts like *Living Loving Maid* and *What is and What Never Should Be* offset the explosive charge of *Whole Lotta Love*. But this opening track, one of the group's most memorable riffs, was much more than sheer bombast – the Theramin-drenched middle section owes more to psychedelia than the dull thud of Zep copyists that followed. How do we define this music? Post-psychedelia? Proto-prog? Embryonic metal? Boundaries were blurring and something even heavier was stirring in Detroit.

Glam rock rising and proto-punk

Seeping into the future from the nascent hard-rock roots are two other movements that define the decade to come – Glam and Punk – both with their origins in the musical melting pot of 1969. Hard rock fans would see little common ground with the Punk movement of the late 1970s, but with a 21st-century perspective – and the luxury of a time machine at our disposal – Detroit bands The Stooges and the politically charged MC5, are the clear missing links. Both The Stooges' self-titled album and the

“Placing middle-of-the-road fodder like The Hollies, The Carpenters and Herb Alpert in the ‘Pop’ section next to Captain Beefheart and Frank Zappa is borderline insanity.”





From folk into rock and back again

The singer-songwriter took many shapes and forms in 1969. At one end of the spectrum you had the super-mainstream likes of Elton John and Al Stewart. In the shadowy, post-acid hinterland you could just about glimpse the likes of Kevin Ayers (ex-Soft Machine), Syd Barrett (ex-Pink Floyd) and Alexander 'Skip' Spence (ex-Moby Grape) if you looked hard enough. It's stretching the definition of the Singer-Songwriter genre to include this trio of mavericks, but why not? Each of these three artists delivered stripped back, semi-acoustic material – albeit with a post-psychedelic twist. Although Ayers's *Joy of a Toy* and Spence's fractured masterpiece *Oar* sold practically nothing on release in 1969, they have more artistic merit than the 21st century music enthusiast than the combined discographies of Stewart and John combined.

Between these bookends – alongside the finest exponents of the expansive genre, Leonard Cohen *Songs From a Room* and Joni Mitchell *Clouds* – the significant presence of Nick Drake can be felt, whose debut *Five Leaves Left* was released this year. Drake's musical legacy is a satisfying crossroads: in one direction leads to singer-songwriters experimenting with folk music and in the opposite leads folk musicians experimenting with pop – and in Pentangle's case, on the fabulous *Basket of Light* dragging pop, blues, jazz and beyond into its eclectic orbit.

If you find it hard to get your head around the notion that Led Zeppelin could fire its first two musical broadsides in the same year, then you'll be staggered by the musical trajectory of Pentangle's kindred spirits (Fairport Convention) during 1969 – perhaps the greatest illustration of the endless musical possibilities and effortless innovation of this golden year in music.

The esteemed folk-rock ensemble started the year with the release of *What We Did On Our Holidays*, very much a progressive-pop affair, recruited the UK's premier folk fiddle player, Dave Swarbrick, for *Unhalfbricking*, beginning their experimentation with traditional English music on the masterful *A Sailor's Life* (complete with acidic guitar from Richard Thompson) and ended the year with the folk-rock fountainhead *Liege and Lief*, playing traditional English folk songs on electric instrumentation.

Three classic albums released in a single year is an incredible achievement by anybody's standards. With the sheer level of creativity fighting to burst out of this look back at 1969 – and we haven't even had time to reflect on the incredible developments in Jazz and modern Classical composition – we're almost tempted to leave the time machine parked right here, stack a few choice 45s of the year onto the Dansette – like Fleetwood Mac's *Albatross* and The Rolling Stones' *Honky Tonk Women* and savour music's giant leap once more. ●

MC5's *Kick Out The Jams* (both debut releases) sound years removed from their contemporaries' music; their succinct songs with simple chord structures executed with raw power, owing more to The Troggs than the complexity of Led Zeppelin. Don't be fooled by the illusion of simplicity, however: The Stooges and the MC5 are about total energy and are now reconstituted as 'classic rock' acts.

Both bands had to wait until the tail end of the next decade to receive more appreciative audiences, long after both groups' implosions. But despite their raw, organised chaos, the ghost of psychedelia again makes its presence felt on both long players in the shape of The Stooges' atmospheric mantra *We Will Fall* and the MC5's tribute to free-jazz maverick Sun Ra on *Kick Out The Jams*' zero-gravity finale *Starship* (see *But what if it's made out of green cheese?*). Both tracks would have made fine contributions to an alternative soundtrack of the previous year's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

At least one branch of the glam-rock tree can be traced back to Detroit. Alice Cooper's band of proto-metal Detroit loons unleashed, the hard-as-nails debut *Pretties For You* album on Frank Zappa's Straight Records imprint. Glam classic *I'm eighteen* was a few years away, but its blueprint was forged in the cauldron of the late '60s. Other famous names synonymous with Glam all kick-started their careers in 1969: David Bowie (*David Bowie*, re-released as *Space Oddity*); Slade (*Beginnings* as Ambrose Slade); T-Rex (*Unicorn* as Tyrannosaurus Rex) and even future *Rocket Man* Elton John (*Empty Sky*) were all children of the late '60s.

Although the flavour of *Empty Sky* is watered-down psychedelic rock, its inclusion here is significant: one of the guises open to the lone wolf musician in 1969 was that of the singer-songwriter, another crashing wave on 1969's sea of possibility.

BUT WHAT IF IT'S MADE OUT OF GREEN CHEESE?

In the same year that Neil Armstrong had that moonwalk nailed, was this selection of spaced-out musical moments



PINK FLOYD MOONHEAD
The Floyd were invited to perform an improvised piece – the unreleased, but heavily bootlegged, *Moonhead* – on a BBC TV programme on the night of the first moon landing entitled *But what if it's made of green cheese?*

Imagine that happening now; – the UK's premier underground rock band being asked to play live over a major historical event! Only in the 60s.



LOTHAR AND THE HAND PEOPLE SPACE HYMN
This American experimental ensemble's music – a hybrid of psychedelia and electronics – was always out there, but not as much as on the final track of their second album. Sitar sounds accompany a droning voice surrounded by bubbling electronics, before giving way to simple acoustic guitar and a fragile song: "Standing on the moon/filled with thoughts of home/Earth so slowly turning..."

Imagine that happening now; – the UK's premier underground rock band being asked to play live over a major historical event! Only in the 60s.



MC5 STARSHIP
The Motor City Five head into deep space with the weightless closer to their classic debut live LP. Based on a poem by Sun Ra, the band nails their anything-goes improvisational credentials to the most on

Starship – a free-rock workout that achieves zero gravity after an orgasmic, high-energy lift off. As Brother Rob Tyrner cries: "Leaving! The solar system!"



JUDY HENSKÉ AND JERRY YESTER FAREWELL ALDEBARAN
The final cut of the acid-tinged LP of the same title on Zappa's Straight imprint gets all sci-fi, thanks to creepy, electronically treated vocals and synthesiser

gurgles. As if Judy Henske's vocal range wasn't otherworldly enough, a Dalek-voiced Yester yelps: "The comets cling to her, the fiery bride/She is the mother of the mark and the prize," closing this cult LP in fine style.



THE BYRDS ARMSTRONG, ALDRIN AND COLLINS
Continuing The Byrds' tradition of jokey album closers, 1969's *Ballad of Easy Rider* concludes with this tribute to Apollo XI's crew. Starting with a rocket countdown and lift

off, when the rumble subsides, a plaintive 12-string strum ushers a nasal Roger McGuinn vocal that sits atop washes of Moog synth, before the song gently fades away into space, over before it begins...

audio T

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90 Thin Lizzy
Jailbreak
(Deluxe Edition)



91 Rimsky-Korsakov
Scheherazade



91 Trichometry
The Gentle War

Music reviews

Hi-Fi Choice's pick of the latest high-quality music releases

ALBUM OF THE MONTH



THE ROLLING STONES

45x45s

FROM THE GREATEST ROCK 'N' ROLL BAND IN THE WORLD!

- 45 CD singles packed with rarities, re-mixes and live versions
- 173 tracks, all taken from the original UK and US singles
- Over 80 tracks not currently available
- Replicating the original sleeves and labels
- Includes 32-page hardback book with memorabilia, period photos and an exclusive interview

HOT PICK

The Rolling Stones

The Rolling Stones Singles (1971-2006)

polydor.co.uk

★★★★

Polydor

45 CD singles in presentation box

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN said that The Rolling Stones' career can be broken down into three distinct phases. In the first, running approximately from 1963-67, they were essentially a pop group, turning out prolific and memorable jukebox hits such as *The Last Time*, *Satisfaction* and *Paint It Black*.

In the second phase, from 1968-72, they became a swaggeringly brilliant rock band, producing an incredible run of decadent, but inspired albums that included *Beggars' Banquet*, *Let It Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers* and *Exile On Main Street*.

And in the third and final period, from 1973 to the present day, they became the greatest live rock 'n' roll act in the world; a spectacular behemoth of a

road show, which has largely eclipsed their patchy later achievements in the studio.

There are already three box sets compiling their early hit singles (1963-65, 1965-67 and 1968-71) and the fact that after this frenetic, early chart domination the fourth box of singles in the series covers 35 years, illustrates both changes in the band and in the marketplace.

For a collection of singles, it has to be admitted that there are not that many genuine chart hits. *Brown Sugar*, *Angie* and *Miss You*, all topped the American charts, but there's not a UK Number One single here – indeed, their last British Top Ten hit came as long ago as 1981 with *Start Me Up*. That said,

“Sound was a dark, murky stew which rated more important than hi-fi clarity.”

there is still plenty of compelling music: 45 individual CD singles in miniature picture sleeves, containing B-sides and remixes to make up a total of 173 tracks, many of which are not currently available elsewhere.

The trademark sound the Stones had developed by the early 1970s was a dark, murky stew in which a kind of druggy, voodoo mystery was rated more important than hi-fi clarity. Modern mastering has improved the murkiness without lessening the raunch and its benefit is obvious here on tracks such as *Tumbling Dice* and *Happy*.

If you listen to these 45 singles the sound undergoes subtle changes. *Hot Stuff*, *Miss You* and *Emotional Rescue* from the late 1970s today sound more than ever like

the band's response to disco – although Keith Richards would no doubt prefer the word 'funk'.

By the 1980s, producer Steve Lillywhite (U2/Simple Minds) had tweaked the band's sound again, adding a stadium muscularity to the likes of *One Hit (To The Body)*. Yet somehow, the Stones and slickness made uneasy bedfellows and by the late 1980s, the production was getting syrupy; even on tough-edged tunes like *Rock And A Hard Place* and *Mixed Emotions*.

The biggest surprise, perhaps, is how much more convincing later singles such as *You Got Me Rocking* (1994) and *Streets of Love* (2005) are, even though by that time the Stones had not so much reached maturity, as turned into a parody of themselves.

Overall, it's an intriguing journey that covers three-and-a-half decades of the band's career – one that leaves you feeling that by 1972 most of their best work had already been done. **NW**
Standout tracks: All



The Rolling Stones in happier days



Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds

Murder Ballads

emimusic.com

★★★★★

EMI

CD

THE TITLE SAYS IT ALL: every song on Cave's ninth album from 1996 dealt with folks meeting their end in gruesome, bloody fashion. The subject matter perfectly suited his dolorous vocals and graveyard demeanour. Some of the ten songs were originals, others covers, but Cave masterfully wove them into a morbid, spooky concept, touched with flashes of gallows humour, in which the souls of the deceased he was singing about thrillingly seemed to haunt the record's grooves

Part of a series of Cave reissues that also includes *Let Love In* (1994), *The Boatman's Call* (1997) and *No More Shall We Part* (2001), each is presented in the original version, plus a 5.1 remix. On the original album, Cave's gothic vocals were so commanding that you hardly noticed The Bad Seeds. Surround sound makes their skewed, vaguely disturbed accompaniment boldly evident and the duets with Kylie Minogue and PJ Harvey are given truly melodramatic enhancement.

NW

Standout tracks: Song Of Joy; Henry Lee; Where The Wild Roses Grow; O'Malley's Bar



Gustav Mahler

Symphony No 7 'Song Of The Night'

chandos.net/

★★★★★

Chandos

SACD/CD Hybrid

ONCE UPON A TIME, with a bit of luck and a strong tail wind, it was just possible to get Mahler's 7th Symphony within a CD's 80-minute time frame. So all hail Neeme Jarvi for breaking the land-speed record and performing the work in just over 69 minutes! To put things into perspective, that's a full five minutes faster than Boulez (no slouch) and almost 13 minutes ahead of Bernstein.

For a symphony subtitled *Song Of The Night*, Jarvi's account is very much a daylight affair, but while his fast-moving, unsentimental account isn't strong on atmosphere, it certainly emphasises the music's stark modernity. The sound is spacious and rich, especially in SACD form. **JH**
Standout tracks: 4 Nachtmusik II Andante Amoroso



Scritti Politti

Absolute

virginmusic.com

★★★★

Virgin

CD

REPUTEDLY TAKING an integral part of the post-punk scene in the UK, Scritti Politti were formed at Leeds College of Art after Cardiff-born leader Green Gartside saw The Sex Pistols in 1975. Fusing a strong political message with an interest in Marxist philosophy, the band moved to London to release their 1978 debut single *Skank Bloc Bologna*, an assured mixture of wordplay and post-punk instrumentation.

Absolute is like a series of musical clichés from the 1980s: gated drums; vocodered vocals; drum pads and those awful electronic climaxes. There are some sonic highlights, but that early promise was never truly fulfilled. **MP**

Standout tracks: Skank Bloc Bologna; The Sweetest Girl



Thin Lizzy

Jailbreak (Deluxe Ed)

universalmusic.com

★★★★★

Universal/Mercury

2-CD

THE THIN LIZZY that entered London's Rampart Studios in early 1976 were seasoned veterans of American and European tours and a veritable rainbow of talent and nationality. Two guitarists, one American, one Scot, augmented Manchester-born Irishman Lynott's presence, while the only native Irishman, Brian Downey anchored everything with his precise polyrhythmic drumming on the album that would produce their biggest ever hit, *The Boys Are Back In Town*.

Lynott's kaleidoscope of soft/hard songs is still a delight and included with the original album, is a bonus disc of remixed singles and two previously unissued songs. **MP**
Standout tracks: Jailbreak; The Boys Are Back In Town; The Cowboy Song

AUDIOPHILE VINYL

Quicksilver Messenger Service Quicksilver Messenger Service

purepleasurerecords.com



★★★ Capitol/Pure Pleasure

180g

QMS WAS PART OF the San Francisco psychedelic scene that spawned The Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane, and their sound

has a strong folk influence which comes from Dino Valenti who formed the band.

Both of the band's two guitarists and bass players were singers, so there is a fair amount of harmony alongside the fine, twangy guitar work.

The album doesn't sound particularly psychedelic, rather it's more like great pop for the most part, with a fabulous guitar work-out. What holds it up is strong song-writing and one suspects that in a less star-studded era it would have made a bigger impression.

The sound is a bit on the thin side, even by the standards of the time and the guitars lack impact, but Pure Pleasure has done a good job of bringing out the detail.

The bass is strong, but not flabby. You can always hear what's going on, even when the final extended instrumental throws violin and tubular bells into the mix. All this, alongside a pair of guitars that laid part of the foundations for heavy rock. **JK**
Standout tracks: Light of Your Windows; The Fool





Mercury Rev
Deserter's Songs
cooperativemusic.com
★★★★ V2/Cooperative Music
CD

MERCURY REV'S sumptuous fourth release was voted *album of the year* by Mojo and NME on its 1998 release. It stands as an Everest in the American band's career, surrounded by mere foothills; nothing in their early life hinted at its baroque grandeur and they've not matched it since.

Woozy psychedelia and shimmering orchestrations on a set of romantic, heart-tugging songs create something akin to aural nirvana. The only band who come close to this kind of cosmic ornateness is Flaming Lips – and it's no coincidence their finest albums have been produced by Mercury Rev's Dave Fridmann. A bonus disc of demos doesn't add much – but then the original album is near-perfect, anyway. **NW**
Standout tracks: Opus 40; Holes; Goddess On A Highway; Delta Sun



The Kinks
The Kink Kontroversy
universalmusic.com
★★★★ Universal Music
CD

RECORDED AND RELEASED over little more than a 12 month period of frenzied activity in 1964-65, the first three Kinks albums can be taken as a single entity – and yet even within that short space of time, they illustrate the rapid development of Ray Davies as one of the great English songwriters.

Remastering adds an extra dynamism to the band's savage early fuzz-tone-riffing by correcting the poor tracking that marred some of the original releases. The narrative is fascinatingly fleshed-out by the three bonus discs, containing non-album hits, rarities and interview snippets to create, in its modest way, The Kinks equivalent of the Beatles' *Anthology* series. **NW**
Standout tracks: You Really Got Me; Tired Of Waiting For You



Rimsky-Korsakov
Scheherazade
The Tale of Tsar Sultan (Suite)
Maria Larionoff, Violin
Seattle Symphony • Gerard Schwarz
Naxos.com
★★★★ Naxos
CD

SCHWARZ CONDUCTS a hugely enjoyable performance of the composer's colourful showpiece – by turns vivid, heroic, sensual and exciting. Violinist Maria Larionoff is a superb soloist, comparing favourably with the best and she plays with a bright yet perfect intonation.

The recording sounds smooth and open, with good detail and a wide dynamic range. Balances are natural, without undue emphasis on the brass. However, *The Tale of Tsar Sultan* sounds even better, with some impressive deep bass and greater overall transparency.

The famous *Flight Of The Bumble Bee* completes the disc and makes a welcome bonus as this movement is not part of the suite and often omitted. **JH**
Standout track: Tsar's Farewell

HIGH-RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS

Jazz 'n' Spirit
Continuum

linnrecords.com
★★★★ BERTHOLD Records
24-bit/96kHz



AN INTRIGUING mix of repertoire: spiritual and secular music of the baroque and renaissance periods,

combined with elements of jazz and pop, and played by an acoustic trio of saxophone, guitar and double bass. It's fascinating to hear three musicians deconstruct a choral melody from the 17th century and reproduce it in a contemporary setting.

This 24-bit recording was made in the concert hall of Marienmünster Abbey. The performers say, "Like a good wine, music needs air to breathe," and it receives every opportunity on this superbly spacious recording.

In every respect this is a refreshing alternative to boilerplate jazz. **MS**
Standout tracks: Wer Nur Den lieben Gott Lässt walten; Nun Ruhen Alle Wälder

Trichometry
The Gentle War

naimlabel.com
★★★★ The Naim Label
24-bit/88.2kHz



IT'S ALMOST as if this Australian trio realised its first album could be difficult for some people to get into and fully

absorb, so it threw open the garage doors and assembled a selection of more readily accessible compositions: *Cute* (which celebrates the drummer's newborn son) and *Shut Up* (inspired by reality TV), are prime examples of music that, while remaining intelligent, seems easier to appreciate and better exposes the personalities, and humour, of the composers and players.

The self-produced recording brings out all the vitality, control, subtlety, dynamism and channelled aggression that this band exhibits in its live performances. It makes thoroughly compelling listening. **MS**
Standout tracks: Chase; Shut Up

BLU-RAY DVD

Gary Moore & Friends One Night In Dublin: A Tribute To Phil Lynott

eagle-rock.com



★★★★ Eagle Vision
Blu-ray LPCM stereo, Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS HD Master Audio

THIS TRIBUTE to Thin Lizzy's late frontman Phil Lynott, took place the day after his statue was unveiled in Dublin

back in 2005. Fronted by the Gary Moore, it brings together the band's former guitar players Brian Robertson, Scott Gorham and Eric Bell, who are backed by Lizzy drummer Brian Downey and Jethro Tull's Jonathan Noyce on bass.

It's a short set, in front of an enthusiastic audience, that's strong on atmosphere and musicianship. Robertson makes the strongest impression, but all three guitar pairings make an excellent job of the material and Moore's voice, while not quite Lynott's,

does not intrude. It's only the relatively tight bass-playing that tells you that this isn't the Thin Lizzy of yore.

The sound is open and dynamic with plenty of detail from the buzzing of the amps and lovely juicy bass lines from Noyce. The guitars sound superb, either alone or more appealingly when played together – *Emerald* is particularly fine in this respect. *Live and Dangerous* was a great album, but it never sounded this good. **JK**

Standout tracks: Still in Love with You; Emerald

Middle England

Considerately positioned in the middle of the UK, Midland Audio Exchange (MAX), is said to be skilled in the art of system-building. So **Ed Selley** paid them a visit ...

Celebrating its 16th year of trading, Midland Audio Exchange (MAX); the brainchild of John Roberts, is not your typical hi-fi dealer. Eschewing a conventional metropolitan location, MAX is instead based in the bucolic Worcestershire village of Belbroughton, conveniently placed for mobile audiophiles up and down the country.

The store premises are rather unconventional: instead of a typical shop or industrial warehouse, visitors find themselves in a converted chapel. The building might not be the normal choice for a hi-fi dealer, but the upper floor is an open and airy, with two large listening areas and plentiful product on display.

What attracted us to Midland Audio Exchange in the first place was its central philosophy, something that John calls a "comfortable" sound; one that avoids bright, superficial sound that can be thrilling in short doses, but wearing to live with. Like John, *Hi-Fi Choice* does its best to steer folks towards honest, natural-sounding systems that add as little as possible, so we challenged him to impress our ears.

John's big names, such as Rega and Neat, rub shoulders with lesser-known brands like Shahinian and the MAX-distributed Lavardin and complete systems range from between £2,000 and £50,000, although the average price of a MAX system is in the region of £7-£8,000.

With this in mind, we asked John to demonstrate a typical entry-level system, contrasted with more two expensive solutions from different ends of the MAX portfolio.

THE EXPERTS



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FORGE LANE, BELBROUGHTON, 01562 731100
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REGA.CO.UK, NEAT.CO.UK, LAVARDIN.COM,
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**IMOGEN
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ELLIPSE
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**DAFT PUNK
TRON LEGACY
SOUNDTRACK
CD**



**FONTANA
WINTERHWILA
LP**

SYSTEM 1 – ENTENTE CORDIALE

The first system John showed us was the least expensive of the three. Here was a system designed to provide long-term satisfaction with a wide variety of music and a combination of two relatively well-known British brands with a less familiar French outsider.

Gallic Charm

The French outsider is the £2,699 Lavardin IS Reference, a 45-watt solid-state integrated amp. With four line inputs, no remote and an absence of any other frilleries, the IS Reference is very much a minimalist design that can look superficially uninspiring against more well-endowed competition.

Don't be fooled, however. The key design feature is the circuitry which is designed to eliminate memory distortion; a condition identified by Lavardin as the reason why some solid-state designs can sound unnatural and something that they have gone to great lengths to eliminate.

This is partnered with the Rega Saturn CD player (HFC 345). This twin-DAC-equipped toploader is a long-standing favourite of ours and great value at its £898 price point.

The speakers are the smallest floorstanders from Neat; the diminutive £1,076 Motive 2s. These are just 76cm-tall and feature a downward-firing bass port that makes positioning in a relatively tight spot a simple business. The Motives are a two-way design partnering a 134mm mid bass driver with a 25mm metal tweeter, with an unusual leaning cabinet to help phase arrangements. Lavardin cabling was used throughout in this instance.

The three units are well finished and handsome enough, but equally they are sufficiently small and unobtrusive to ensure that your lounge doesn't resemble a full-blown listening room. That is, of course, until you switch them on and spin some discs.

Richness and realism

Starting initially with *Little Bird* from Imogen Heap's recent *Ellipse* album, the trio produces a sound considerably larger than the Neat's small stature and Lavardin's



limited power output suggests is possible. Heap's vocals are held beautifully in the space between the speakers and have a richness and realism that is absolutely convincing and extremely addictive. More surprising still, is the bass response. This is fast and agile as might be expected, but possesses considerable low-end extension that suggests a far larger speaker has been employed.

As might be expected, a system that includes Rega and Neat components has no difficulty with timing. *Blue Ridge Mountains* by the Fleet Foxes sets feet tapping and heads nodding within seconds.

The contribution of the Lavardin is subtler than the Brit bits, but it is there nonetheless. The wonderfully natural tonality and effortless soundstage are the trademarks of the brand and the resulting combination manages the singular feat of combining perfect timing and drive with a smoothness that makes extended listening sessions inevitable.

Despite the relatively modest price tag, this system is a class act. The three components are a perfect match for each other and the resulting performance is top-notch and considerably greater than the sum of its parts.

1 REGA SATURN
£898

rega.co.uk

2 LAVARDIN IS REFERENCE
£2,699

lavardin.com

3 NEAT MOTIVE 2
£1,076

neat.co.uk

TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £4,673



SYSTEM 2 – A RIGHT PEAR

The next system marks a considerable jump in price, but a jump that we felt was worthwhile to demonstrate the scope of the MAX product range. Supplied from a single distributor, Pear Audio, here are four products that really complement each other and John opines, are the perfect system combination.

Silicone fluid

The source in this instance is the Well Tempered Labs Amadeus GTA turntable with matching arm. This is a striking-looking device, but every aspect of the design is functional, from the low-clearance platter to the motor which is entirely isolated from the chassis. It uses silicone fluid instead of a bearing to damp and pivot the arm with a fixed hoist-style arrangement to keep it upright. The result looks curious, but works remarkably well. A £999 Dynavector XXII moving coil cartridge was also fitted. This is apt because the amplification is also from Dynavector. The £5,800 L300 preamp and matching £5,000 HX100 power amp are brand new and only recently arrived in the UK.

Like the Well Tempered deck, the Dynavectors conceal a considerable amount of clever thinking internally. The preamp uses ultra-linear amplifier stages that automatically adapt to the volume level to maximise linearity and minimise noise and distortion. This means there isn't a single moving part in the signal path. The 125-watt HX100 is a true balanced design with large current reserves and the ability to operate in mono if you need even more power.

The speakers carry on with the distinctive appearance theme and, if anything, turns it up a notch. The £6,000 Shahnian Obelisks look like no other speaker on the market. The pyramidal structure on the top of each cabinet contains two 38mm titanium ultralight exposed dome midranges and four W-shaped titanium/polyimide dome supertweeters backed up by an eight-inch bass driver with passive radiator on the back.

The result is a genuine polydirectional speaker that produces an amazingly even

output regardless of your position in the room. This is certainly a distinctive system to look at, but do the sonics match up?

Effortless work

From the moment that the silicone damped arm lowers itself onto the record, this is a remarkable listen. It's a combination that makes effortless work of anything you throw at it. Listening to the eclectic *Winterhyla* by Fontan is a massively rewarding experience. Bass is taught, deep and tuneful, but it is the unbelievable soundstage of the Shahnians that grabs the attention. Placed in the same space as the Neats from our first system demo, the Obelisks present an immense, three-dimensional wall of sound with pin-point placement of singers and instruments within it.

Even though the equipment in this system is radically different to the Rega/Lavardin/Neat system, the same sense of the "comfortable" sound is apparent. This combination wants for nothing in terms of dynamics and slam, but it is so unforced and natural it is incredibly easy to listen to for hours at a time. The whole effect is entirely gimmick-free. The electronics that make up this system might look curious, but they are also remarkably transparent. They leave the smallest possible impression of themselves between the record and the listener.

John feels that the synergy of this trio is particularly strong, but for those who prefer small silver discs to big vinyl ones, substituting the Copland CEA825 for the Well Tempered means that it keeps most of the magic in place. We could have spent the rest of the day spinning records on this singular system but it was time to move on to the final offering.

- 1 WELL TEMPERED GT WITH DYNAVECTOR XXII

£3,854

welltemperedlab.com

- 2 DYNAVECTOR L300 PREAMP WITH PHONO

£5,800

- 3 DYNAVECTOR HX100 POWER AMP

£5,000

dynavector.com

- 4 SHANIANIAN OBELISK 2

£6,000

shahnianacoustics.com

TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £16,154



SYSTEM 3 – DIGITAL DYNAMITE

As it transpired, moving on to the final system was hardly an onerous task, especially when the components it features are this interesting. From the all-analogue construction of system two we go right to the other end of the spectrum – the final system for our consideration is entirely digital.

Beautifully built

The key component of this system is the Devialet D-Premier. Within the beautifully built, slender chassis lurks a hybrid class A input and class D output, 240-watt internal amplifier and 192kHz-capable DAC. The only control on the chassis itself is the power button: all other control is via a separate remote control that features its own volume knob. This is such a wonderful thing to use, we found ourselves adjusting the volume for just the hell of it.

The D-Premier acts as both amp and DAC in this system and the use of the £18,500 EMM Labs XDS-1 purely as a transport is probably overkill, but the EMM also acted as a digital hub for a Macbook with lossless files and can spin the odd SACD (remember those?) if required.

The speakers in this case are the £6,500 MartinLogan Ethos which although only fractionally more expensive than the Shahinians, could not be more different. While the Obelisk uses an array of upward-firing tweeters to achieve their omni directionality, the Ethos is the classic MartinLogan pairing of an electrostatic membrane for the tweeter and midrange, underpinned by an active bass module with a conventional driver. The approach might be different, but the attention is the same; a speaker with a massive soundstage and very wide imaging.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this combination is that this remarkable performance is not

achieved by an especially large system. The D-Premier is minute by the standards of high-end amps and the MartinLogans are slender and possessed of a small footprint. Even the EMM Lab is hardly a behemoth. This is a system that dominates any room it's playing in but is relatively unobtrusive when powered down.

Given the differences between this all-digital powerhouse and the altogether more conventional systems that preceded it, the chances of the "comfortable" sound making the journey across, seemed rather hard to credit. And yet, within seconds of a CD being selected, the 'house sound' is back in the room. This is a system that, even more so than the others, has a scale and weight that is little short of sensational – Daft Punk's *Adagio for Tron* carries the full heft of the electronically supported orchestra

and allows every monstrous transient all the space it possibly needs.

Limitless power

Often with such dynamic electronics, there can be a sense of relentlessness that becomes wearing after a while; but once again this is a system that manages to combine incredible dynamics and perfect timing with a naturalness that makes you want to spend hours in front of it.

Switching over to some high-resolution digital files on the Mac managed to extract even more performance from the system. The D-Premier can hardly be described as artificial with ordinary Red Book CD but the larger files are more natural and more realistic still. John had ended the day with another winner.

1 EMM LABS XDS-1

£18,500

emmlabs.com

2 DEVIALET D-PREMIER

£10,700

devialet.com

3 MARTINLOGAN ETHOS

£6,498

martinlogan.com

TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:

£35,698



With such a consistent philosophy being so clearly demonstrated across three very different systems, it's easy to see why Midland Audio Exchange has the reputation that it does. For starters, its amazing premises are a world away from the stereotypical 'dingy dealer' and John has assembled a remarkable

portfolio of brands (of which we only scratched the surface) that – despite their markedly different pricing, design and specification – hold true to the wider intention of the store.

All three systems fulfill the essential requirement of what makes great hi-fi, in that they make you want to keep

on listening. If an entry-level system purchased from MAX meets your hi-fi requirements – and it certainly did for us – then you can rest assured that they also have you covered for numerous upgrades to come and that, surely, must be the sole purpose of any first-class hi-fi dealer. ●

Help & advice

We've got the answers to everything you've ever wanted to know about hi-fi and weren't afraid to ask. Email us now at hifichoice@futurenet.com or write to: **Hi-Fi Choice Q&A, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW**

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 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 never looked back.

ASK US A QUESTION TODAY!

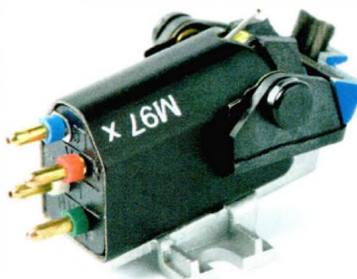
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QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Q I have been given a Rega P2 turntable, but it seems that the cartridge is worn out. I have an MM phono stage in my amp and a budget of up to £100 for a replacement. Can you help?

Ben White, via email

A Curiously, your question arrived just before issue 345, featuring our cartridge Mini-Test, hit the newsstands. Of the four cartridges we tested, here are two possibilities: the Shure M97xE (£82) and the Rega Bias 2 (£65). The former is a fantastic design and one that has been on sale for many years, while the latter is fully compatible with a Rega P2 and RB250 tonearm. In fact, the synergy that can result from going 'all Rega'



might, in this case, be more effective than the Shure.

Doing more with less

Q I currently use a Rega Saturn with an Exposure 3010 pre/power amplifier. I have also recently purchased (in part on the recommendation of *Hi-Fi Choice*) a pair of PMC fact.8 loudspeakers (HFC 327). These are fantastic and represent a massive step forward over my previous speakers.

They are part of a wider upgrade plan and I feel that they are showing up the limitations of the Exposures more than the Rega. I also don't know whether I will replace the Rega with another CD player or take the streaming plunge, so I am looking to change the amp first.

I can spend up to £5,000 on an amplifier to replace the pre/power and ideally I would like it to be a big step forward, but contained within a

single chassis. As I like the overall sonic balance of the Exposures, I guess I'm looking for an amp that does 'more' in the same way. What are my options?

James Shane, via email

A The PMCs are not an especially difficult load, but will show up the limitations in equipment placed in front of them. We would suggest starting with the *Electrocompaniet ECI 5 Mk II* (HFC 340). This is good value at £2,750 and has the power output and control to make the PMCs work well. Further up the price ladder, the *Moon i5.3 RS* (HFC 307) is another strong product with superb sonics, interesting features and excellent build.

Finally, if you like the performance of the Saturn, don't rule out Rega's



Well-equipped for the money and pleasingly compact: the Moon i5.3 RS integrated amp

mighty Osiris (HFC 325). This is £1,000 over budget if bought new, but as we went to press, we saw one for sale online at just under £4,000, which makes it a lot of amplifier for the money and one that was, we noticed, working well with the fact.8s in Bristol earlier this year.

Grand vinyl

Q I have been using a Rega P3 for several years now and I am looking to upgrade it. I have between £1,000 and £2,000 to spend on a replacement, which does not need to include arm or cartridge, as the modified RB300 and Dynavector cartridge on the P3 will be transplanted.

Before you recommend a Gyrodec to me, I need to throw a spanner in the works and say that I don't really like the Michell very much!

As I have a wall shelf I would prefer to stick with an unsuspended deck that can mount the RB300 without issue. If the deck can support upgrades to the arm in the future, that would also be ideal.

Stuart Hurst, via email

A Keeping the RB300 will make for a cost-effective upgrade, but coupled with looking for an unsuspended deck your options are more limited than we thought. All of the larger Rega decks are not only sold with arms in situ, they use the revised three-point mount, as opposed to the single hole that the RB300 uses.

Many of the decks that will accept the RB300 and work well with it are suspended; although their suspension is different to the coil arrangement of the Gyrodec. The Scheu Analogue Cello (HFC 345), for example, is unsuspended, beautifully built and can be fitted with the

RB300 instead of the Jelco that we reviewed it with. So if the deck must be unsuspended, then this would be our choice.

If you are prepared to have a look at models that have less complex suspension than the Gyrodec, then we would suggest checking out the Townshend Rock 7 (HFC 345). This is an immensely assured turntable that will work extremely well with an RB300 (once fitted for the silicone trough that the Rock 7 uses), but will see further improvements if you were to upgrade to the Excalibur tonearm.

Garage fan

Q My long-awaited garage conversion is nearing completion and I have a little bit of cash left over for some upgrades to the system, that will be occupying part of the new room. I currently use a Squeezebox Touch, Arcam A85 and Dynaudio Audience 70 speakers.

With £2,000 to spend, would I see the most benefit from a new amp – possibly including digital inputs for the Squeezebox or a new pair of speakers? I'm a rocker, by the way, with occasional patches of blues and funk.

Michael Gough, via email

A You don't specify how large your new room is going to be, but we'll assume that it is going to be typically garage-y. We think that the biggest single improvement that you are likely to see for £2,000 would be directed towards upgrading the speakers. In time, the Arcam will benefit from an update as well, but initially, something like the Audiovector KI 3 Signature (HFC 343) is as good place to start the search. This is a well-



The Aura Note Premier: 2010 award winner

thought-out design with quarter-wave bass-loading that gives fast and tuneful lowend from a slim cabinet.

If you want more clout for rock (although, not without a degree of subtlety), the transmission-loaded PMC GB 1i (HFC 30€) remains a firm favourite of ours. The PMCs should be well up to the task of filling a garage-sized space and neither recommendation should be beyond the capacity of the Arcam to drive.

Of course, choosing the slightly less expensive PMCs would leave some money in the bank to have a look at the very clever Arcam rDAC (HFC 338), or the Musical Fidelity M1 DAC (p6€), as an interesting boost to the Squeezebox.

One box to rule them all

Q Like so many people, my all-separates hi-fi was swept away with house purchases, children and the like. Things are settling down now and I would like to get another audio system, but suspect that separates are still beyond the space and means I have available. Perhaps, an all-in-one solution would be the answer?

The Aura Note Premier won your 2010 Award for this category (HFC 339) and looks to be a fine bit of kit, but the Rotel RCX-1500 has been strongly reviewed recently (HFC 342), so I was wondering which of these two units would be better for me.

I listen to rock and soul music mainly and intend to partner the electronics, at least initially, with a pair of Quad 11Ls (that I have on loan from a friend) before buying another pair of stand mount loudspeakers in the £800-£1,000 price point.

Any suggestions that you can give me in this regard would be much appreciated.

Adrian Bell, via email

A The Aura Note Premier and the Rotel RCX-1500 are both excellent

products and we think that either of them would work well with the Quads. Which product you go for will depend partly on how you see yourself listening to music going forward.

The Aura is essentially CD-based and if you see yourself using the silver disc as your main format for the foreseeable future, we think that it is still the best sounding of the all-in-ones.

The Rotel is a more sophisticated proposition. Although it has a CD drive, the main attraction over the Aura Note Premier is the ability to stream audio over the network. The Aura can have a computer connected over USB, but this is not as slick a solution as the Rotel. The Rotel also features a DAB and internet radio functionality.

If sound quality over CD is the main requirement, we would still choose the Aura Note, but were we looking for a solution for streaming audio, we'd pick the Rotel. As we've already said, both units will work fine with the Quads, but something like the Bowers & Wilkins' CM5 (HFC 335), could be worth a look as a long term replacement. They are sensitive enough to present little challenge to either unit in the course of normal listening.

Full Moon

Q I have recently upgraded my electronics from a Cyrus CD6 SE CD player and Cyrus 6 XP amp to the Moon i5 integrated amplifier and 100D DAC. Even through my old Mission 773e loudspeakers, the results are spectacular.

But it's now time to upgrade from the Missions and I have a budget of up to £1,300 for a pair of floorstanders. They need to be less than a metre tall and relatively compact, as the



A new contender on the UK turntable scene, the Scheu Analog Cello has stunning looks and a performance to match



Dynaudio DM3/7: deep bass and a sweet top end

available space is the same size as before.

I read your review of the Bowers & Wilkins CM8 (HFC 344) and will be considering these, but I was also wondering what else might be worth shortlisting?

I am an acoustic and blues fan for the most part, with occasional forays into soul and rock. I also live in a flat, so absolute listening levels are not very high and I need a speaker that can still sound full-bodied at lower volume levels.

Pete Webb, via email

A There is no shortage of choice at this price point and our recent experience of the CM8s suggest that they definitely have to be top of your list. They are extremely talented loudspeakers with a wide range of abilities, handsome appearance and excellent build – and they nip in under the required height restriction by four centimetres!

Another speaker that's worthy of consideration is the Dynaudio

DM3/7 (HFC 345). These are also fantastic-sounding speakers which, while not as handsome as the CM8s, might be better-suited to lower level listening. This is because their relatively insensitive design would mean that your amp would be working proportionately harder at any given volume level (unlike the CM8s) and this can often result in better sound quality.

Stack a DAC

Q I am looking to upgrade my Arcam CD192 and, as an interim solution, before I make the bold switch to streaming audio, I would like to use the Arcam as a transport into a DAC. As I do not have a huge amount of space for equipment, I find that I need to stack some units together to fit.

To this end, I am interested in full-width models to make this task easier. But even at the top of my budget (£2,000 or so), my choices are rather limited, as most DAC designs are now every shape going, except that of 'normal' hi-fi.

Are there any designs, other than the Naim DAC and Bryston BDA-1 that are full-width for less than £2,200 or so?

Paul Bunyan, via email

A Even very complex DACs generally have less inside them than amplifiers and the like, so manufacturers are making them smaller as a result. If you must have a full-width design within the budget you specify, your choices are more limited. However, aside from the Naim and the Bryston, it is well worth checking out the Electrocompaniet PD 1 (see p7C) as this is also a very capable performer.

Your size requirement would sadly rule out a number of other models we reviewed recently, the Benchmark DAC 1 and Lavry DA 10 (Blind-listening Group Test, HFC 341) are also excellent choices and competitively priced.

THE HI-FI CHOICE GUIDE TO: HEADPHONES



MOST OF US will generally prefer listening to our systems via conventional loudspeakers, but headphones offer the opportunity to keep listening when the former might be considered somewhat antisocial.

Headphones (as distinct from earphones) generally fall into open back (supra-aural) or closed back (circumaural) designs. Closed-back models fully enclose the ear. Open-backed designs are – as the name implies – not fully sealed and will let more of the outside world in and, in turn, more of what you are listening to back out again. The earpads are usually (but not always) smaller as a result and open backed designs are usually lighter.

Both have their advantages. Closed-back designs are better in noisy environments, where the isolation is effective at keeping the noise out. However, many people find that in a quieter environment – such as a listening room, late at night – open-backed designs can sound more natural and unforced. This is because they suffer from less coloration and influence from the ear-piece design. If you have the luxury of a quiet listening room, they can often be a superior choice, but which is better will be down to personal preference. ●



The Lavry DA10 achieves everything that's expected of it and a little bit more

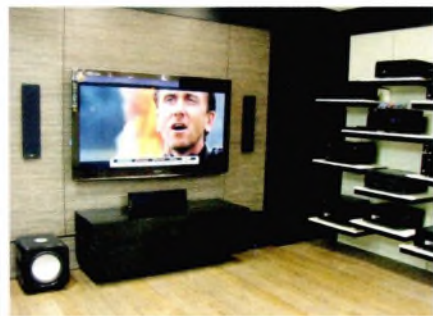


News

COMING SOON

▶ Audiolab are introducing a new tuner as part of its highly acclaimed 8200 series this Spring. Available in either silver or black finishes, it features both DAB and DAB+ along with FM and AM and is a perfect partner for the award-winning 8200 CD player and 8200 amplifier.

▶ Spendor adds two models to its range. The ultra-compact A3 floorstanding loudspeaker features advanced drive unit technology and cabinet engineering from the SA1 and A5 models. The two-way infinite baffle S3/SR2 is a standmount design and is said to deliver significant improvements over the original S3/5. Both models incorporate insulated gold plated terminals along with high linearity audio grade capacitors.



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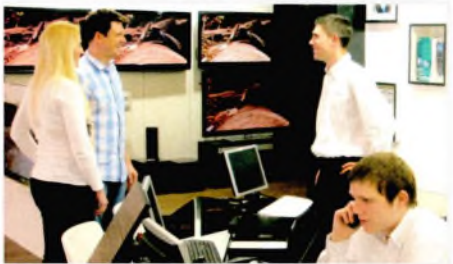
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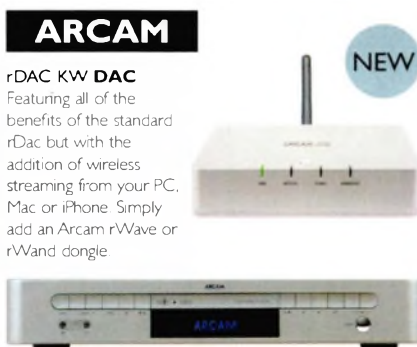
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Connect to your favourite music whether it's from your PC, external hard disc, radio broadcast or via Internet Radio or music service.



OLIVE MUSIC SERVERS
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CYRUS MUSIC STREAMERS

The new streaming platform from Cyrus provides the perfect solution for all music lovers. These new streaming music players provide you with immediate access to your entire network music library. Plus you can listen to literally thousands of different internet radio stations from across the

world; all in true hi-fi quality. With the n-remote you can quickly find specific albums, artists or tracks and it makes browsing your network music library a real pleasure. With its sleek body, full colour screen and two-way control, the n-remote is just one of the features that make the new Cyrus streaming music players very special.



CYRUS STREAMLINE • STREAM X • STREAM XP

Minitest

Richard Black group tests six of the latest speaker stands that are big on sound *and* value

Atacama Duo 6

PRICE: £65 CONTACT: 01455 283251
WEBSITE: ATACAMA-AUDIO.CO.UK

A BRAND NEW DESIGN from Atacama, the Duo is so-called because of its support pillars. The front one, 50mm in diameter, does most of the mechanical work, while the 25mm rear is principally there as a cable conduit. To that end, large holes have been made in its rear so that even quite large speaker cables can be easily threaded inside and fished out again at the other end, making a substantial contribution to the listening-room tidiness. 50mm may not sound very large for a main support, but the assembly is quite rigid overall, aided by the braced base (quite large at some 300 x 250mm) and the rather small top-plate, at 170 x 130mm, evidently targeted at some of the smaller loudspeakers around. It also works well enough with large models, as long as one is careful with positioning. Filling up the main pillar with damping material is both possible and recommended, but filling the rear one with anything that could spill out is impossible because of the holes.

We enjoyed using this stand, although, if we're brutally honest it's probably not the least resonant we've ever encountered, but its character is slight and by no means destructive. It adds a hint of vibrancy to the sound of all the speakers we tried on it and although there is a very minor reduction in the precision of inner detail and image depth, it's easy to overlook these. What might bother some listeners a little is a small degree of inconsistency in the bass, which can sound full but occasionally a little indistinct. Still, the life and energy in the midrange and treble will provide ample compensation for most listeners and we were particularly struck by the neutrality and homogeneity of the tonal balance, from upper bass upwards.

VERDICT DESPITE A TOUCH OF UNCERTAINTY in the bass, this stand maintains high standards in mid and treble, with excellent tonality, good detail and loads of life for a great price

★★★★★



Custom Design FS104 Signature

PRICE: £190 CONTACT: 01912 624646
WEBSITE: CUSTOMDESIGN.CO.UK

THE BASIC IDEA behind the Signature is pretty much the same as for all metal stands, but Custom Design has managed, with typical ingenuity, to find a new take on this by choosing both the pillar sizes and the exact design of the top and base plates. These are both skeletal, comprising just enough metal (4mm-thick steel plate, painted in textured black) to link everything together. Of the five pillars, the central one does most of the supporting work and its 75mm diameter is judged sufficient by many manufacturers to function unaided in many speaker stands. In this case, however, it is assisted by the four 25mm 'satellite' pillars, very smart in the brushed chrome of our review sample, which add both bending and torsional rigidity to the assembly.

Custom Design recommends filling the central pillar with 'inert' filler (£20-worth will do two stands), which we certainly endorse as the undamped pillar rings like anything. It would be difficult to get inert into the satellite pillars, but some kind of damping is no bad thing; we tried improvised methods in our tests with useful results.

Without any such damping the sound is certainly solid, but it can be a little lively too, with some smearing of detail. However, even the simplest attempts to damp the stainless pillars can work wonders and at best this stand is a great choice for its combination of solid bass and neutral, uncoloured midrange. It really gets good results out of speakers, small and large, and excels in encouraging fine detail and precise imaging.

VERDICT WITH DAMPING of just the central pillar results are good, but find some way (sand?) of damping the outer ones and this is a superb support for high-resolution speakers

★★★★★

Quadraspire QV60

PRICE: £250 CONTACT: 01179 863228
WEBSITE: QUADRASPIRE.CO.UK

THE LAST TIME we reviewed a speaker stand from Quadraspire it was the unique-looking, all-acrylic QX600 (HFC 334). Now the company has done it again with the QV60: a wonderfully simple and elegant design in veneered MDF, which looks like no other speaker stand, but at the same time contrives to seem somehow familiar because of its similarity with some contemporary sculpture and architecture – not to mention Quadraspire's established range of equipment racks.

It is a simple stand to assemble, requiring simply that the two slab pieces be fitted together with pre-inserted dowels, then fastened with a couple of screws, making a reasonably tough assembly. Spikes can be screwed in both top and bottom, making a trapezoidal shape; frankly the front spikes are so close together, one can quite safely omit one and opt for triangular support.

The sound of this stand was always bound to be different, both because of its intrinsic resonant signature and because its large surfaces will have some effect on sound diffraction. We found that, compared with metal stands, it can seem a bit dull. With longer listening it has much less characteristic signature in the high midrange than most metal stands, but it does nothing to hide the tonal qualities of the speaker on top of it. Indeed, it gave what we felt was the most precise sound of any of the speaker stands in this group. Its one downside is imaging, which we found rather inconsistent, yet despite that, it is a highly attractive stand sonically, as well as visually.

VERDICT MORE THAN JUST attractive furniture, this stand does very little to colour the sound of good loudspeakers and helps maximise detail and tonal resolution.

★★★★★



Soundstyle Z2

PRICE: £70 CONTACT: 01279 501111
WEBSITE: SOUNDSTYLE.CO.UK

THIS REALLY IS QUITE a lot of stand for the money and it's not by any means obvious where corners have been cut. The very efficient packaging opens to reveal four 25mm pillars and two 50mm ones, plus two large base plates (300 x 230mm) and two small top plates (170 x 130mm), plus enough screws to fit it all together and spikes for top and bottom.

The smaller pillars, which are intended to be at the rear, are undamped, but Soundstyle has taken a novel approach to damping the large one: it is filled with expanded polystyrene. This weighs next to nothing and also doesn't fall out all over the floor, which is all to the good and it does actually damp the pillar reasonably effectively. Not as thoroughly as, for example, Custom Design's inert filler or good old-fashioned sand, but pretty well. Overall, once the stand is assembled and loaded with a typical speaker, it is moderately well damped. We liked the locknuts provided for the bottom spikes, which serve a decorative, as well as practical function (a special spanner is provided to tighten them).

While this stand doesn't quite have the solidity we achieved with the Custom Design model, it does offer quite a close approach to that standard. It is more than passably solid in the bass – just a touch vague at times, most notably when deep-toned percussion gets excitable – and its midrange and treble are generally neutral and once again, quite lively. Imaging is stable, but lacks a little depth and precision. Given its price, it is likely to partner less-exalted speakers and it will certainly help most of these achieve clear, detailed and tonally uncoloured sound. ●

VERDICT Bass can be a little imprecise and treble shows the occasional sign of mild coloration, but there's plenty of detail on offer

★★★★★



Speaker stands offer scope for tweaking. Indeed, a humble stand can often show much more benefit from a little care and attention than most amps or CD players. Specifically, we refer to adjusting spikes

and filling pillars. A stand on three spikes is fundamentally stable, but most use four and if they are not carefully adjusted the load will sit on three of them, making the stand unstable. Adjusting spikes is

not hard to do and only needs checking if the stand has to be moved. Filling pillars can give considerable benefit in terms of reducing sympathetic vibration and associated coloration.

For sale / Wanted

Hi-Fi Choice Reader Classified

Welcome to *Hi-Fi Choice* Reader Classified, the UK's first and best free private ads service for buying and selling second-hand hi-fi components.

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Or mail to: **Reader Classified, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.**
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FOR SALE

BOWERS & WILKINS 703 (cherry) 90s model, £2,900, Primare SPA21 surround amp £950. Other items also available, please call. Offers welcome. **01707 392743 or email scotk421@hotmail.co.uk (Herts).**

SONY BDP-S5000ES Blu-ray player, 3 week's old with UK dealer invoice, £495. **0208951 3178 (London).**

CREEK 4140 integrated amp; Linn Index speakers plus stands (black ash); Arcam Alpha Plus CD player. £50 each item or £130 for all. **07900 273612 (West London).**

ARCAM FMJ CD17 (black) with user guide/remote, light use from new, can demonstrate, (£600) £350. Cash, no offers. **01606 79032 Tues-Fri, (Cheshire).**

ROTEL RA-05 amplifier (black), with remote, hardly used (£495) £200. Acoustic Energy Radiance 2, £625 as new, could deliver by arrangement. TCI Viper interconnect 1-metre long, £27. **07979 151445 (West Sussex).**

MARTINLOGAN SL3 electrostatics, (black), mint condition (£3,400) £1,150. Living Voice speaker cable 4.2m pair (£1,000) £300. Audio Synthesis Silverblue interconnects from £50. New and s/h vinyl from £3. **01453 519700. (Gloucs).**

WANTED: Revox 260S tuner, in very good cosmetic condition and fully functional. Would wish to have working demo in West Midlands/ Warwickshire. Please contact with details and price. **01789842336 (W Midlands).**

BOWERS & WILKINS 803D (rosenut). 4 year's old, still under 5-year warranty. Excellent condition. Boxed and complete with all accessories, £3,700, no offers. Any trial welcome, prefer buyer to collect. **077255 78792, or email sme1203@tiscali.co.uk (W Midlands).**

GRADO PS-1000 professional headphones. 1-year old, original packaging, inclusive 5-m

Grado extension, plus 3.5 mm to 6.3 mm mini-jack adaptor cable. (£1,795) £1,495. **01179688543 (Bristol).**

NAD T585 universal player in titanium, plays DVD, CD/SACD. In very good condition with remote and box £130. **0121 7774318 (West Midlands).**

ARCAM FMJ integrated amplifier A32 £560. Arcam DT81 digital radio tuner £350. Arcam T61 AM/FM tuner £130. All items purchased in 2003 and in excellent condition. **01752 340727 (Devon).**

NAKAMICHI LX5 cassette deck, fully documented with box. Offers invited. **01258 450928 (Dorset).**

ARCAM DIVA A85 amp (black), with fitted phono card. Complete with remote and handbook, £250. Audio Alchemy DE-V1-0 DAC convertor with Chord Company analogue and digital cables. Boxed with manual in excellent



Arcam CD17 – storming performance for £350

condition, £125. Linn Helix LS150 speakers (black ash), with matching spiked stands, £150, Linn K20 speaker cable, 4x4-metre, terminated, £90. All in very good condition, can demo, buyer collects. **07941 015908 (Dorset).**

VAN DEN HUL TeaTrack speaker cable, 11-metre pair £175, plus carriage. **01825 722936 (E. Sussex).**

BOWERS & WILKINS 686 speakers, award-winners. Not used since run in (£278) £95. **07716 139026 (N Ireland).**

LINN Majik CD player (black), 2.5 years old in superb condition. Boxed with manual, remote and power lead, £995. **01924 478157 or email rockhill-steve@zen.co.uk (W Yorks).**

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1000 Class A amp (black), beautiful condition with MM/MC phono stage and separate power supply. Buyer collects. **07941 174804 (Berkshire).**

MARANTZ PM66SE amp and CD50SE CD player, £140 the pair. Pro-Ject Debut II turntable with speed box and phono box £95. Aiwa A30 amp and R30 tuner, £50 pair. Technics 8022 Graphic £60. **01708457691 (Essex).**

SONY XA333ES CD/SACD player (black). Boxed with manual and remote. Can Demo £275. **01394 274350 (Suffolk).**

TOWNSHEND Mk1 stand, four shelves, black with chrome columns. Seismic sink isolation built-in (£1,500) £350. **01772 315723 (Lancs).**

ECA AUDIO Vistra pre and Lectern power amp. Previous award-winners, (£1,650) a bargain at £500, Rega Planar 3, RB300 with AT cart £190. **07729 600847 (W Sussex).**

NAIM NAIT Si amplifier £395. Rega Apollo CD player £250. Both boxed in excellent condition. Very little use **07754 507519 (Derbyshire).**

KEF speakers, 05/3 Reference (mahogany), 104/2 £340. Reference (walnut) £200, 100 centre speaker £70. REL Storm Active Sub £150. All good condition with boxes. **07545 141104 (Devon).**

WANTED Naim NAT 02 tuner. Good price paid, must be in very good condition. **01246 232085 (Derbyshire).**

PRO-JECT Debut/phono SB (silver) turntable. £40. Buyer collects. **0208655 3539 or email adelesluce@hotmail.co.uk (Surrey).**

QUAD ELS 2805 new, unmarked, £2,950. Michell Synchro, Linn Basik arm, with cartridge £300, Audiolab 8000 C and P pre and power amp £350. **01952 728 773 (Shropshire).**

QUAD ESL63 speaker, excellent condition, with stands, total Quad rebuild 2002, cost £1,400+ (receipt).

BUYING TIPS **BUYING SECOND-HAND** can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right. **DO SOME RESEARCH** on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy. **USUALLY**, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper demo and judge the seller as well as the goods!

Quad enthusiast upgraded to 2805s. No crackles/distortion etc. £1,095. **01296 770632 or 07881 658689 (Bucks).**

GRADO Professional Series PS1000 headphones in mint condition, brilliant-sounding headphones with deep bass. £850 including delivery. **003 5318 373490 (Eire).**

AUDIO INNOVATIONS S700 valve amp, 25w, boxed, vgc. £300. Marantz CD10 CD player, boxed with remote. Datasheet available as PDF. £300. **07771 776877 (Herts).**

KEF Reference 4 monitor speakers. Superb bass and near-electrostatic soundstaging make these involving speakers a bargain. New and pristine (£3,200) £1,700. **07841 011397 or 01132 843770 (Leeds).**

MARTIN LOGAN Source electrostatic speakers in mint condition, as new £1,250. **02380 224003 (Southampton).**

GRADO SR125 Prestige Series headphones in mint condition with original box, purchased January 2010. Sale due to upgrade, £75. Also Grado storage case to protect your valuable cans £10. **01233 713250 (Kent).**

AVI pre/power amplifier, 215w, class A. Super sound (black). Almost new, perfect, original boxes only £1,500. **003902 2150930 or email fedepenzo@hotmail.com; (Italy).**

BANG & OLUFSEN Beocenter 2600, two Beovox speakers £90. **01723 375222 (N Yorks).**

ARCAM T61 tuner (silver), boxed with remote. Rega Planet CD (black), boxed with remote. Bowers and Wilkins DM602S3, boxed. KEF Q3 speakers. Open to offers, buyer collects. **01977 695385 (W Yorks).**

PMC DB1i speakers. Purchased March 2010. Mint condition, book-matched walnut veneer, fabulous sound. Genuine reason for sale, £600. **01233 713250 (Kent).**

SUGDEN Mystro integrated amplifier. Purchased Feb 2011, lightly used. With box and can be posted. £895. **01782 785734 (Staffordshire).**

QUAD 44/405 amplifier. Serviced by Quad with little use since. All leads and manuals. Marantz 63KI Sig CD player £75. **01162 833959 (Leics).**

ATLAS Hyper 2 speaker cable. 2x8 metre runs. (£240) £120. Chord Carnival 4.5 metre runs (£54) £27. **07749 424206 (Ipswich).**

MONITOR AUDIO RX8 speakers (black). Boxed as new condition with 20 months warranty, £450. Cambridge 840A and 740C (silver). 840A £430 and 740C £320. **07765 275482 (Leeds).**

A.R.T speakers. Immaculate condition with boxes. (£1,000) £450. **07789 464739 (Warwickshire).**

LEAK stereo 30w amp. Connoisseur BD1 deck. Wharfedale Super Linton W30D speakers. Sensible offers for the lot or will split. Buyer collects. **07949 545560 (W Yorks).**

COUNTERPOINT SA-12 dual-channel hybrid power amplifier, 85 watts per channel into 8 ohms. Excellent sound with good clarity and drive ability. Great value £275. **01923 855359 or email: wombat.jr@talktalk.net (Hertfordshire).**

LECTOR CDP 7TL, Italian valve player with separate PSU. Latest current spec model, mint. (£2,400) £1,100. **0208473 9890 or email: Johnvarcoe@sky.com (London).**

NAD C355 BEE integrated amp, titanium, nine months old, excellent condition. (£250) £200. No offers, buyer collects, genuine reason for sale. **01933 626185 (Northamptonshire).**

SONY SCD1 SACD/CD player. £2,000 of Audiocom modifications including Ultraclock £1,850. Now £5,000. Musical Fidelity V-DAC, as new £100. **01462 670786 or email: jr812@hotmail.com (North Herts).**

EUPHYA Alliance 270 40-watt, high-end amplifier. Remote control, five inputs, inc M/M. Silver casing, mixture of non-magnetic metal and perspex (£1,745) £750. **01243528010 (West Sussex).**

MARANTZ PM66-KI signature amp £90. SA67-SE CD player £50, or £130 the pair. Both boxed with remotes, manuals etc (black), excellent condition. **01529 307976 (Lincolnshire).**

MURPHY A674SR, early stereo radiogram, 1962. MW, LW, VHF, magic eye tuning. Garrard turntable plays 16, 33, 45, 78. In working order, wood cabinet in good condition. Buyer collects £60. **Email: zen135838@zen.co.uk (Surrey).**

WANTED: Yamaha CDR-H1500 digital audio recorder in black. Must have original box and accessories and be pristine. **07941 842605 (West Sussex).**

MARANTZ CD6002 and PM6002 CD and amplifier (silver), £135 each, £250 the pair. Cambridge Audio Azur 740A amplifier in silver. As new condition £260. **07970 115378 (Bristol).**

NAIM CDX2 CD player £1,350. Soundstyle tripod four-shelf equipment rack £45. Heybrook S1 speaker stands £40. Aiwa ADF700 cassette deck, boxed £35, or last three items £100. **01691 610589 (Shropshire).**

MARANTZ SA-7S1 CD player. Owned from new. Still regarded the reference CD player. (£5,199) £3,200. **01296 437314 or email: jez35@btinternet.com (Bucks).**

AUDIOLAB 8000Q preamp, £220. Audiolab 8000P

100-watt power amp (black), £240. Both boxed mint, seven months old. **07876 197 188 (Nottingham).**

REGA P3/24, TT PSU, Funk Firm 5m Achromat, Isokinetic 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).**

VPI Scoutmaster turntable/JW memorial nine-inch arm/SDS controller/VPI heavyweight clamp. Immaculate. Boxed with manuals. (£3,500) £1,500. Ortofon Jubilee MC less than 50 hours use. (£1,500) £600. Get both for £2,000. **07973 892901 or email: patmarcus172@googlemail.com (Solihull).**

BEAM Echo Avantic 1950s integrated stereo amp. Requires attention. Offers. **07866 364770 or email: hughpenfold@yahoo.com (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: albhuae@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. **07929 721714 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 majbai13@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 or email: alan.strudwick@googlemail.com (South Wales).**

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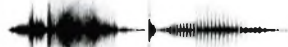
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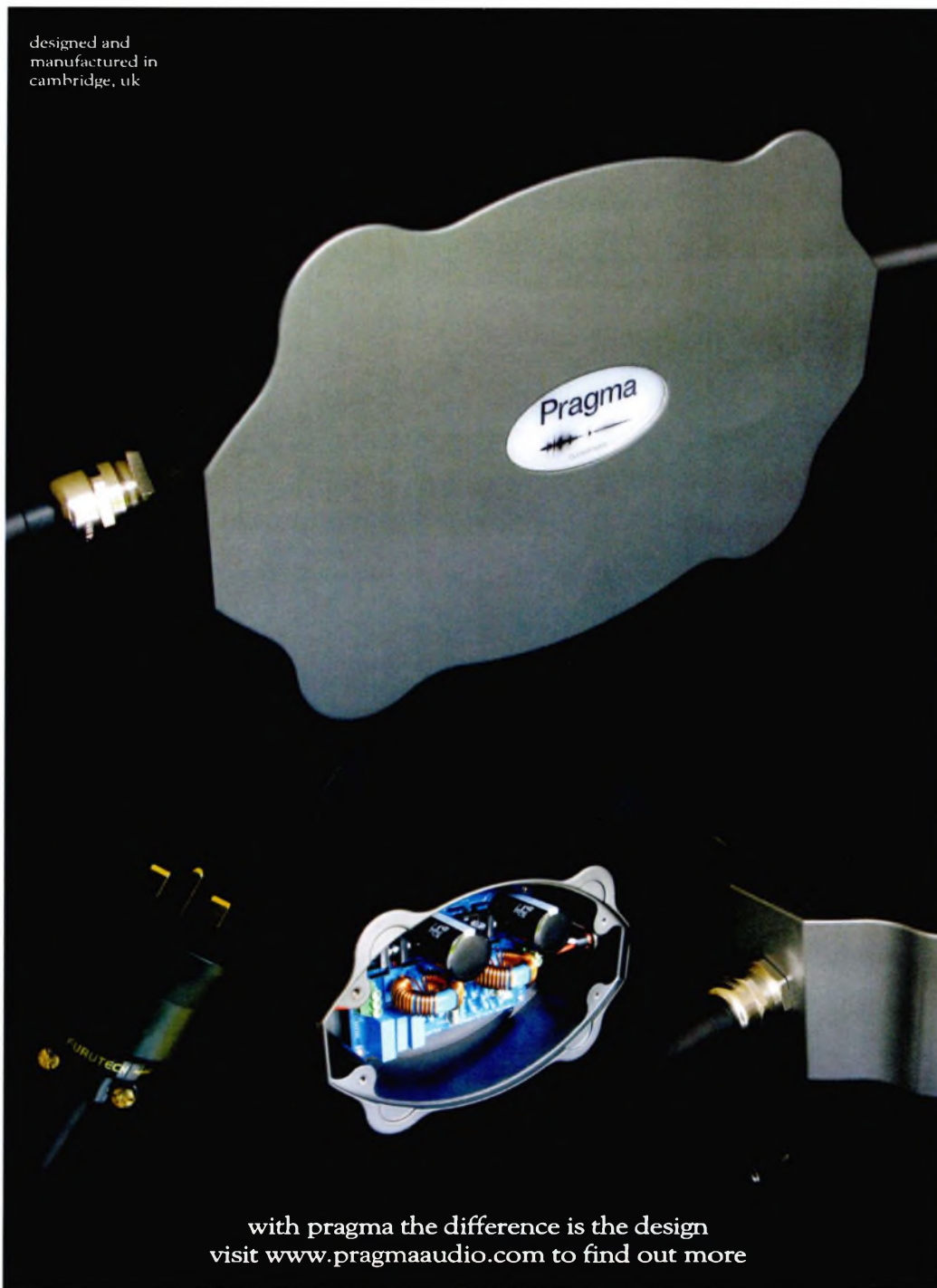
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Hi-Fi Choice

Buyer's Guide



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We've also included *techradar* listings where our reviews appear online.

To access selected *Hi-Fi Choice* reviews, simply type: techradar.com/ into your browser, followed by the six-digit number printed in the first column of our *Buyer's Guide*.

How to use this guide

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

BADGES EXPLAINED

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

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.

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For all your hi-fi wants, check our index of independent hi-fi dealerships



BADGES KEY: RECOMMENDED = ● EDITOR'S CHOICE = ● GROUP TEST WINNER = ● BEST BUY = ●



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●	Advance Acoustic MCD-204	795	CD player with warm valve sound. Harmonically rich and inviting performance										342
●	Audiolab 8200CD	700	No SACD support, but excellent detail, neutrality and communication										340
●	Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD	400	Musical, precise, involving and with great energy at a superb price										340
●	Denon DCD-1510AE	900	If the SACD format is what you're into, then this player is capable of some impressive sounds										335
●	Exposure 2010S2	710	Paired with the 2010S2 amp, this CD player is a fine performer with plenty of detail										344
●	Harman/Kardon HD990	550	Highly detailed with excellent extension at both extremes and impressive resolution	/594818									323
●	Marantz SA7003	600	Highly civilised sound may not be to all tastes, but there's plenty of detail to be heard										323
●	Marantz Pearl Lite SA-KI	899	A key CD/SACD player at an attractive price, with support for digital										338
●	Marantz KI Pearl Lite	750	Excellent sound, this CD player has also dropped in price from £920 to £750 since our review										344
●	Micromega CD-10	799	The cheapest in the range, the CD-10 has been fine-tuned to please the audiophile										328
●	Moon CD.5	999	Admirably energetic music-maker from this very well-built player										335
●	Pro-ject CD Box	300	This player belies both its size and its price with sounds worthy of a decent mid-range system										338
●	Rega Saturn	898	Strikingly full-voiced, the Saturn offers a sound that feels remarkably real										344
●	Roksan Kandy K2	899	State-of-the-art technology and precision engineering produces a fine CD performance										335

Above £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 CDP 3.1	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										328
●	Cyrus Audio CD B SE	1,200	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music	/399370									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										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										332
●	Mimetism 20.1	5,107	An impressive player that produces a very convincing and musical sound										330
●	Moon CD 3.3	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
●	Primare CD32	2,200	Smart, slick and with balanced outputs, this CD player looks every bit the high-end part										344
●	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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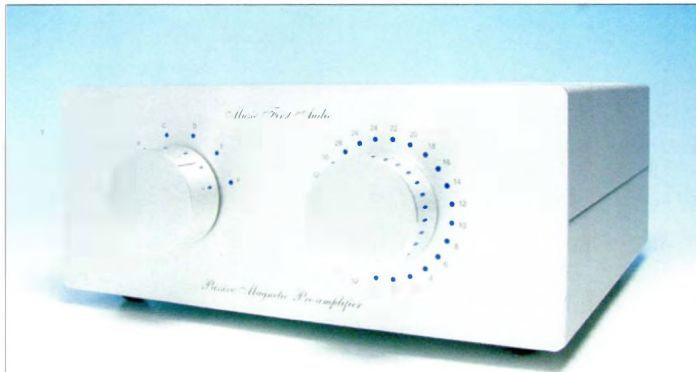
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Turntables

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Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Speeds	Switchable speed change Suspension subchassis	Supplied with arm	Issue number
●	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	●	●	342
●	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	331
●	Lumley Heliosphere	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a unique sound and a performance that reflects your vinyl	/560765	33/45	●	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	1,150	Excellent timing really propels a very good performance. Plenty of detail and insight, too		33/45	●	●	345
●	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
●	Pro-Ject Xperience 2 Pack	775	Holds its own against all competition (arm included)		33/45	●	●	345
●	Pro-Ject 6 Perspex	1,280	Plenty of detail and good rhythmic qualities (arm included)		33/45/78	●	●	338
●	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	1,750	Very well-defined bass; good detail; welljudged rhythm and pace (reviewed with Excalibur arm)		33/45	●	●	345
●	Townshend Rock V/Excalibur II	7,000	If you want to hear everything that's on a record then there's no better machine for the job		33/45	●	●	307

Phono cartridges

MM and MC recommendations



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Replaceable stylus	Issue number
				MM	MC
●	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 assured 'presence' region is the basis of a beautifully musical and involving presentation	●	338
●	Ortofon 2M Red	80	A little fussy about set up, but sound is admirably balanced and full of unforced detail	●	345
●	Ortofon Vivo Red	200	Never less than musically convincing, this all-in-one cartridge is remarkably capable	●	338
●	Ortofon Cadenza Red	750	There's much to admire in this cartridge's fine detail and unfussy presentation	●	330
●	Shure M97xE	82	A budget cartridge, but bass and midrange are to high-end standards and treble is just as assured	●	345

Phono stages

Make your turntable sing



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	MM phono inputs	MC phono inputs	Adj impedance	Adj gain	Issue number
●	Dynavector P-75 MkII	595	A stage that will put spring in the step of any decent cartridge you can throw at it	●	●	●	●	344
●	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 Uphorik could easily win over the next generation of LP enthusiasts	●	●	●	●	334
●	Primare R32	850	If you are into vinyl for the music, then this is one of the most revealing examples on the market	●	●	●	●	345
●	Pro-Ject Tube Box SE II	435	The big picture is the most evident thing here, but the finer details are there, too	●	●	●	●	335

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.

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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



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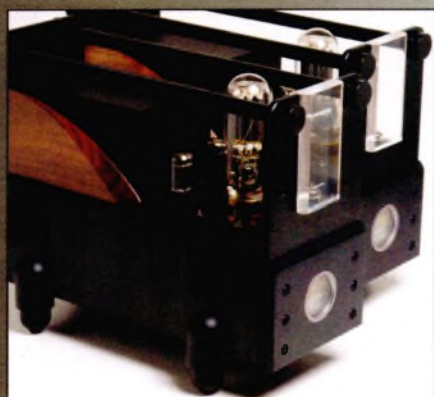


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Amplifiers



Our pick of the best one-box amps out there

Up to £1,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Line inputs	Phono input	Remote control	Headphone socket	Power output (watts)	Issue number
●	Audio Analogue Crescendo	599	In a room of appropriate dimensions, this amplifier has real musical presence	5				50	329
●	Cambridge Audio 840A v2	800	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp offers detail and delicacy (silver finish)	8	●	●		120	327
●	Denon DCD-1510AE	900	Offers a taste of high-end excellence at an affordable price	5	MM/MC	●	●	70	335
●	Exposure 2010S2	752	Impressive amplifier with preamp output, the 2010S2 was a blind group test winner	6		●		75	344
●	Marantz KI Pearl Lite	750	Impressive performer with a well-filled phono-amp board and now down to £750 from £920	5	●	●	●	90	344
●	NAD C3226BEE	320	Unusually confident into awkward loads and very assured especially in bass. Treble a touch recessed	/603281	7		●	50	322
●	Rega Mira 3	460	Competent performer that makes an excellent system with the matching Saturn CD player	5	●			60	344

Above £1,000

●	Consonance Cyber 10 Sig	1,595	Gorgeous tube amp delivering high-end performance at a realistic price	5				11	345
●	Creek 5350 Evolution	1,075	One of the most attractive amps in its price range, with a sound that's immediately satisfying	5	MM/MC	●		120	334
●	Creek Destiny 2	1,600	Excellent tonal balance and gorgeous, effortless detail	6	opt	●	●	116	342
●	Cyrus8xp d	1,550	Best heard in the context of a Cyrus system, this amp nevertheless has some great qualities	6		●	●	80	342
●	Electrocompaniet PI-2	1,600	A superb all-rounder, with insight on one hand and effortless musical flow on the other	6		●		100	327
●	Electrocompaniet EC15	2,750	Big, characterful and beautifully built amp, with equally big and unforced sound	6				120	340
●	Emillé Ara	2,450	An extremely competent valve amp in its own right with a useful set of features	2			●	22	343
●	Leema Pulse III	1,495	Offers a clean, smooth sound and has an unusually wide array of inputs	6	MM/MC			70	342
●	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
●	Musical Fidelity M31	1,000	Extremely engaging performer, this power amp boasts excellent sonics and solid build	6	●			70	337
●	Peachtree Audio iDecco	1,000	A well-equipped amp/DAC one-stop solution for iPod and digital audio users	2			●	40	344
●	Peachtree Audio Nova	1,099	This amp/DAC combi is a fine heart for a computerised desktop system	3		●	●	80	341
●	Primare I32	2,200	Gorgeous sound, while the prospect of future upgrades is truly mouth-watering	3				120	344
●	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				100	339

Pre/power amplifiers



Separate boxes can bring clear advantages

Up to £2,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Line inputs	Phono input	Remote control	Power amplifier	Power output (watts)	Issue number
●	Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W	2,000	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed and controlled	●	●	●	opt	200	309
●	NAD C165BEE/C275BEE	1,550	An alternative to the usual integrated route and one that offers flexibility and fine sound	●	●	●	MM/MC	130	336

Above £2,000

●	Audio Research DS450	7,000	Power amp features a very neutral transparent sound with lots of power and low-running temperature	●	2			450	337
●	Bryston BP16/ 2B SST2	5,700	Preamp and power amp combo offers superb sound quality	/608649	●	6	opt	100	323
●	Bryston BP26	3,670	Cracking preamp brings detailed results	●	8	opt		308	
●	Cayin SP-30S/SP-40M	3,346	Smooth clean sound quality, this combo is well-balanced and natural-sounding	●	4	MM		40	343
●	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
●	Linn Akurate Kontrol/2200	7,550	Reviewed as part of an entire system (streamer and speakers), this combo offers a crisp, open sound	●	2			200	343
●	Mark Levinson No. 326S	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
●	Onkyo P-3000R/M-5000R	4,200	Superb-sounding combination with excellent build, flexibility and connection options	●	6	MM		80	345
●	Rotel RC158/RB1582	2,100	It looks high-end and it really sounds the part, too	●	5	MM/MC		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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Streamers/music servers

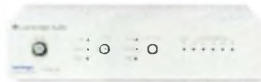


Streaming and music servers are opening up a new dimension in listening pleasure

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Internal drive Wireless	iPod compatible USB	Balanced output Apple Airplay	Digital output	Issue number
●	Linn Akurate	4,500	Fast album/track access and the extended playing times make this a winner		●	●	●	●	343
●	Logitech Squeezebox Touch	260	Player has excellent sound and performs well, even with high-end partnering equipment		●	●	●	●	338
●	Marantz NA7004	720	Easy to use, the NA7004 makes getting into streaming simple and all for a great price, too			●	●	●	344
●	Naim Unitiqute	1,350	All-in-one streamer/player has excellent features and is easy to set up with strong performance		●	●	●	●	339
●	Naim NDX	2,995	The ideal combination of vivid performance and understated styling		●	●	●	●	345

SPECS KEY **WIRELESS** Able to receive files wirelessly **INTERNAL DRIVE** Fitted with its own hard drive **USB** USB Sockets fitted **INTERNET RADIO** Able to receive web radio **IPOD COMPATIBLE** Able to connect directly to an iPod **APPLE AIRPLAY** Able to function as an AirPlay receiver **BALANCED OUTPUT** Fitted with a balanced out **DIGITAL OUTPUT** Fitted with a digital output

DACs



Digital-to-analogue converters are back and the price has come right down

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Coaxial input	Optical input	Sampling rate (kHz) USB	Headphone socket	Balanced outputs	Volume control	Issue number
●	Antelope Audio Zodiac Plus	1,895	Remarkable resolving capabilities and more inputs than the majority of DACs		●	●	●	●	●	●	345
●	Benchmark DAC1	950	Very clean sound with plenty of detail and also good rhythmic drive			●	●	●	●	●	341
●	CambridgeAudio DacMagic	230	Detail and imaging are very good and a decent feature count only adds to the appeal			●	●	●	●	●	331
●	Furutech GT40	395	The perfect 'missing link' between analogue and the home computer				●	●	●	●	342
●	Lavry DA10	1,028	Can be ruthlessly revealing of deficiencies in once-admired recordings			●	●	●	●	●	341
●	Musical Fidelity V-DAC	155	Boasts good pace, impressive detail and sound per pound it's hard to beat			●	●	●	●	●	331
●	Naim Audio DAC	1,950	Sounds meticulously detailed without detracting from the cogency and flow of the music			●	●	●	●	●	328
●	Pro-Ject DAC Box FL	205	This is a very appealing product in many ways and opens new windows on recordings			●	●	●	●	●	331
●	PS Audio Digital Link III	899	A simple no-fuss product that just sounds great and at its price is something of a bargain			●	●	●	●	●	341
●	iBasso D4 Mamba	225	Connected to a computer, this DAC/headphone amp brings sound into the audiophile league			●	●	●	●	●	330

SPECS KEY **COAXIAL INPUTS** Fitted with a coaxial input **OPTICAL INPUTS** Fitted with an optical input **USB** Fitted with a USB input **WIRELESS** Able to receive material wirelessly **SAMPLING RATES** Maximum sampling rate of the DAC **BALANCED OUTPUTS** Fitted with a balanced output **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Can operate as a headphone amp **VOLUME CONTROL** Can be connected directly to an active speaker or power amp.

Cables



Cables really can make a difference, especially our top recommendations

Analogue interconnects

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Stranded	Solid core	Copper	Silver	Digital cable type	Issue number
●	BlackRhodium Polar Illusion	250	A good all-rounder, with clear and purposeful bass and particularly fine treble		●	●	●	●		321
●	Chord Co. Indigo Plus	995	Costly, and high-class cable needs running in, but this is a finely detailed design overall	/608313	●	●	●	●		323
●	Peerless Sigma	70	A cable that belies its modest price with sound that's detailed, neutral and full bodied		●	●	●	●		343
●	QED Ref Audio Evolution	63	Tonally favours the bass, but overall detail and imaging are very good		●	●	●	●		343
●	QED Signature Audio S	190	Mellifluous and rounded, this cable is a great choice for lovers of the human voice			●	●	●		332

Digital interconnects

●	Atlas Mavros	285	By any reckoning this is a very revealing wire			●	●	●	E	336
●	van den Hul The Wave	65	The results this cable achieves are excellent and it scores highly for value			●	●	●	E	336

Speaker cables (price per metre)

●	Black Rhodium Jive Bi-Wire	14	Bi-wire cable which is full of sonic virtues. It's highly practical, too			●	●	●		339
●	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
●	van den Hul The TeatracK	35	A bi-wire cable with a sound that's impeccably timed, neutral and full of detail			●	●	●		339
●	Wireworld Oasis 6	40	Excellent bass with tunefulness and extension all first-rate. Awkward to handle, though	/617560	●	●	●	●		324

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

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Stereo speakers

The most influential link in the chain



Up to £1,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Size: width, height, depth (cm)	Weight (kg)	Power (W)	Frequency range (Hz)	Impedance (ohms)	Issue number
●	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	363	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24	●	A	24	●	294
●	Acoustic Energy Radiance 1	600	Limited bass, power handling and dynamics, but exceptional mid-to-treble voicing	18,5,32,25	●	A	33	●	325
●	Amphion Ion L	900	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence 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	●	A	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 BX5	500	Attractive and compact design with a fast and engaging sound	21,5,86,8,24,8	●	A-		●	345
●	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 easy to drive	20,36,27	●	A-	40	●	284
●	PMCD B1i	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 handling, 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	●	A	25	●	310
●	Tannoy Revolution DC4T	599	Ultra-compact, lacks bass weight and dynamic tension, but sounds open and coherent	488857 15,85,16	●	A	40	●	316
●	Tannoy Revolution DC6	900	Pretty compact standmount, delivering a lively bass and smooth, coherent midband	23,36,5,23	●	A	40	●	307
●	Teufel T500	568	Good value, solid build and an extended warranty	19,5x105x32,5	●	A-		●	340
●	Wharfedale Diamond 10.5	480	Despite the price, the 10.5 ticks many of the boxes, with superior voice band coherence	/636778 22,88,30	●	A-	50	●	326

Above £1,000

●	Adam Audio Tensor Della	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	●	A	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	●	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	●	A		●	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 Ki3 Signature	1,890	Very attractive and discreet, with fine stereo imaging and low coloration	14,98,27	●	A		●	343
●	Audiovector S3 Super	2,600	Useful ability to upgrade, offers good musical communication and stereo imaging	19,103,31	●	A	50	●	328
●	AVI ADM9	1,125	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic sounding	20,30,26	●	ACT	60	●	301
●	Bowers and Wilkins CM8	1,250	Exceptional looking speaker with a fine midrange and superior imaging	16,5x96x28	●	A	60	●	344
●	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	A real 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	●	A+		●	342
●	Dynaudio DM3/7	1,299	Sound has a fine overall balance and impressive bass weight	20,4,96,27,5	●	A		●	345
●	Focal Chorus 816WSE	1,499	The W cone makes some qualities associated with Focal's high-end models more competitive	99,8,28,23,75	●	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		●	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	●	A	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

Stereo speakers (continued)

Shapes and sizes for every budget

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Size - width, height, depth (cm)	Floorstander	Ease of drive	Bass from (Hz)	Free space	Close to wall	Issue number
●	Guru QM10	1,595	A very clever close-to-wall standmount with fine imaging, that sounds a lot bigger than it looks	/465869	30,252,23.2		A	26	●	●	317
●	Jamo R 907	6,600	Arguably the more 'chummy' of Jamo's dipole flagships, powerful bass and open midrange	/498515	44,118,9.7		A	30	●	●	317
★	JBL Everest DD66000	44,000	Awesome performance in the true meaning of the word & exceptional musical communication		111,96,5.47		A	50	●	●	331
●	Kudos X2	1,350	Attractive presentation alongside a lively sound makes for an involving experience		16.6,78,20.6			27	●	●	337
●	Linn Akurate 242	7,300	Wide, smooth high-frequency dispersion, with excellent sound		21,100,38				●	●	343
●	Magico V2	18,000	High pricing derives this speaker's superb painstaking engineering & impressive performance	/624700	25.5,115,30		A	32	●	●	325
★	Magneplan Magneplanar 1.6	2,500	Great with acoustic and classical material, this dipole panel speaker has superb sound quality		48,165,5		A	43	●	●	329
●	Mission 796	1,300	Clean, open and detailed, smooth, relaxed loudspeaker does exactly what it says on the box	/594834	206,99,831.8		A	25	●	●	321
●	Monopulse 42A	1,995	Oddball styling, fine bass-to-mid balance and dynamics and superb voice coherence		26,110,25		A	25	●	●	302
●	Monitor Audio PL200	4,750	A costly, but beautifully presented loudspeaker with outstanding voicing and character		25.5,100,28.5		A-		●	●	330
★	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6 LE	4,799	Striking moulded enclosure minimises coloration, overall balance is smooth, neutral and open		24,115,43		A	22	●	●	308
★	Neat Momentum 3i	1,790	Sounds bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range		22,38,27		A-	23	●	●	302
●	Opera Callas	3,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	/429144	23,375,34			32	●	●	311
●	Opera Seconda	1,995	Fine styling and finish, plus very superior voicing, if a shade lacking in warmth		24,102,5,31.5		A	20	●	●	314
●	Pioneer S-2EX-W	5,200	This speaker offers superb midband neutrality and exceptional clarity	/587272	291,56,5,42.5		A	37	●	●	320
●	PMC GB1i	1,525	Fine voice reproduction, overall agility and well-judged balance		15.5,87,23.4		A	40	●	●	337
●	PMC FB1i	2,100	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	/429594	20,100,30		A	20	●	●	329
●	PMCFact .8	5,250	Beautiful styling, alongside a superb all-round sound with a notably wide dynamic range		15.5,105,38		A	55	●	●	327
●	PMC IB2i	8,900	Delivers a top-class sound quality, fine imaging and exceptional dynamic grip	/617595	33,74,46.5		A	25	●	●	324
●	PSB Synchrony One	3,500	Slim and discreet floorstander that delivers superb sound quality and flexible bass	/516267	22,109,32.5		A	45	●	●	318
●	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound		22,105,39		A	20	●	●	256
●	Revolver Screen 3	2,799	Visually dramatic and very successful in delivering genuine high-quality hi-fi sound		50,140,11		A	35	●	●	329
●	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,475	Sharp-looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression		20,100,25		A	22	●	●	290
●	Sonus faber Luito Monitor	1,690	Subtly designed, elegant-sounding package, especially with good recordings	/603221	18.5,35,33.5		A-	55	●	●	322
●	Sonus faber Minima Vintage	2,490	Easy, graceful-sounding compact, a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	/455417	20,33,27.5		A-	55	●	●	312
●	Sonus faber Cremona Audit.	3,350	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass, this is 'The Little Speaker That Could'		20,35,37		A	50	●	●	305
★	Spendor SA1	1,295	Very high-quality sub-miniature with notably superior sound		16.5,30,5,19		A	30	●	●	334
●	Spendor SP3/3R2	2,295	Lovely overall balance with fine voicing and transparency		27,54,5,32.5		A		●	●	343
●	Tannoy Definition DC8	2,500	Stylish-looking, this speaker is a fine communicator with clean, crisp and dynamic sound		27,47,26			55	●	●	343
●	Totem Sttaf	1,695	This speaker delivers good scale with a fine midband		16x85x24.2		A		●	●	340
●	Triangle Genese Lyrr	3,300	A well-balanced speaker with generous sensitivity, fine imaging and good expressiveness		23,30,3,113.3		A	30	●	●	338
●	Teufel Ultima 800	2,498	Exceptional value for money due to direct sales and easy system-matching		22,98,37		A	42	●	●	335
●	Vivid Audio K1	14,495	With a subtle, fast and wide bandwidth, this speaker is one of the finest on the planet	/625361	28,130,45		A	35	●	●	325
●	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,383	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package		23,91,37		A	28	●	●	254
●	Wharfedale Opus	1,500	Great material value and a solid, if bright and forward sound. Has great loudness potential		26,100,5,41		A	23	●	●	314
●	Yamaha Soavo 2	1,200	Cunningly crafted with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving		22,38,35		A	28	●	●	296
●	Zu Essence	3,750	Realism and communication skills are more than compensation for balance shortcomings		30.5,12.5,30.5		A	25	●	●	327

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

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, well-thought out room-tuning features and superb sonic performance. A 2010 Product of the Year nominee

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Equipment supports

Hi-fi equipment supports come in all shapes and sizes



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Top plate size (cm) Height (cm)	Number of shelves Welded	Shelf type	Issue number
●	Audiophile Base Std Supp't	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57	46,35	3	MDF 302
●	Blok Stax 300	180	A simple and effective design that gives some useful isolation across most of the audio band		40,46	3	MDF 334
●	Custom Design Inert Matt	70	Isolation platform can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit		40x25		Metal 311
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal		60,42	4	Glass 293
	Custom Design Milan	509	Good-looking stand with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57	48,39	4	Glass 302
●	Hi-Fi Racks Podium	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great		59.5		Wood 320
●	Isonoe Isolation feet	98	A set of four isolation feet that are ideally suited to microphonic kit like turntables				Alloy 327
●	Magic Racks MR1	600	At its best it's very effective and gives real isolation across the audio band	59			Rubber 344
	Partington Minim	470	Adds its own character to rock, but to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78	45,37	● 5	Glass 302
●	Quadraspire QX25 Support	25	Beautifully simple design, cheap and easy to use. Excellent with CD players				Acrylic 327
●	Quadraspire Sunoko-Vent T	800	The sound is detailed and largely uncoloured, while the design is rigid and beautifully veneered		59,47	4	MDF 334
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49	4	Torlyte 240
●	Townshend VSSS	1,380	This attractive Seismic Sink retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50	4	Glass 273

Speaker stands

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



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Top plate size (cm) Height (cm)	Number of shelves Welded	Shelf type	Issue number
	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 that shelves are made of.

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
A clever 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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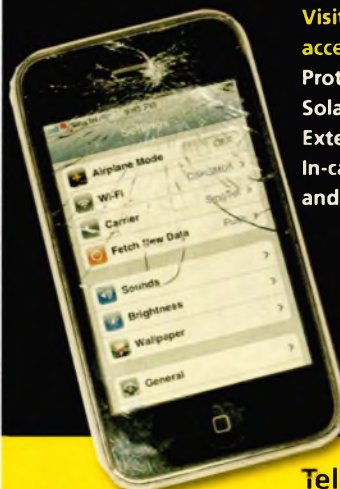
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Cold storage

In the final installment of his six-part series, *Jimmy Hughes* reflects on how rips, streams and downloads leave him cold

The past six months have seen me exploring the twilight world of ripping, streaming and downloading from the standpoint of a keen music collector. It's been an interesting and instructive experience and one that's left me impressed. But, however, alluring downloads are, I still don't intend to forsake CD and LP for digitised music.

And who said you had to? Being pragmatic, shouldn't you buy music in whatever format best-suits your needs? Well, yes. But for this listener, having music stored on a hard-drive feels vastly different to having it on a disc – it's a whole new paradigm, no less – a completely different means of access.

No question, storing music on a hard-drive offers many benefits. Assuming you have something like a touch-controller iPad, you can enjoy fast access to your collection from the comfort of your armchair. You can listen to long works lasting hours, without interruption, while being able to 'track-hop' with unprecedented flexibility.

There's also potentially higher technical quality, with 24-bit/192kHz delivering hi-res studio-master-tape-quality that greatly exceeds CD's 16-bit/44.1kHz specification. Being on a hard-drive, your music collection occupies a small space and is easily transported. All in all, the array of benefits seems pretty formidable.

The horse still refuses to drink

So – why do I not feel like jumping in with both feet? We all know the saying about leading horses to water, but not being able to make them drink. That kinda sums up my position regarding non-physical music: although the benefits are hugely worthwhile and very seductive, they somehow don't compel me to change.

Dipping a toe into the world of downloads has made me realise that collecting recordings of music is more than just – well, collecting music. It's also about the thing itself – the artwork, packaging, sleeve notes. Of course you can reproduce these things in a virtual form, but somehow it's not the same. It's not real.

When we buy recordings on CD or LP, our primary interest is the music. But, if we're honest, things like packaging and presentation also play an extremely important part. In the past, I've bought recordings simply because the artwork was so attractive. Holding the disc in a shop prior to purchase, it's been something I *wanted* to own.

If you're a real collector, this desire to own often extends to buying second (third, fourth, fifth) copies of albums you already have. Maybe you chance upon an original mono LP pressing, or

one with a different sleeve picture; while you know you don't 'need' another copy, it's so attractive, you simply *have* to buy.

That's what's missing for me with streamed music and stuff stored on hard drives. It's faceless; without substance. When I buy a CD or LP I'm buying something real – something tangible. With downloads, because the solid physical aspect is absent, this aspect is missing. Consequently, one feels little or no desire to 'collect'.

As a lover of classical music, I often buy new recordings of favourite works I already have in other versions. In some cases, maybe the new recording is not as good as the ones made earlier – versions I already own. But I'm still happy to buy the new disc to add to my growing collection.

However, with music stored on a hard drive, I don't feel like this. Indeed, quite the opposite; I find myself questioning the sanity of buying a new version of something that isn't as good as the one I already have. Quite rightly, I ask myself: what's the point? It's as though different standards apply.

Sadly, none of this seems particularly logical. Collecting is a highly personal and emotive thing – an activity beyond the realms of normal everyday common sense. Don't ask me to explain why, but without the CD booklet or LP sleeve, somehow the music doesn't seem to sound as good.

While I appreciate the many benefits and advantages of storing music on a hard drive, and/or streaming it over the internet, it simply doesn't excite me as a collector. I realise this view is most probably a minority one and accept that streamed music represents the future. But, maybe not for me. Not yet, anyway. ●

Collecting is a highly personal and emotive thing – an activity beyond the realms of normal everyday common sense



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