



# Easy listening

Why Onkyo's TX-8050 Network Stereo Receiver makes Spotify Premium pure pleasure...

# Retro

Aurex Microsystem: the original and best ever small system?



# Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 360

July 2012

£3.99

# Grand stand

Six super standmount speakers tested from Dynaudio, KEF, Monitor Audio, Mordaunt-Short, Q Acoustics and Quad

# Eighth wonder

Metrum Acoustics' new Octave non-oversampling DAC



# 3's company

Managing your music on Apple's new iPad 3

# 27

top products from 47 Lab, Audioquest, Block, HRT, Philips, Rega and more...



**NEW**  
7 pages of top tweaks!  
See p111



# Size matters

Leema Elements CD and amplifier prove less is more!



# Black art

Avid's super Sequel SP turntable tested

# QUE SERA, SERA

“Every particle of this speaker bespeaks the best of high-end.” *Alan Sircom - Hi-fi +*

“The most musical effortless loudspeaker we’ve heard in years.”

*Jason Kennedy - Hi-Fi Choice The Collection*



Long established as a range of high-performance loudspeakers worthy of the names of the famous luthiers of Cremona, Sonus faber's phenomenal Guarneri, Amati and Stradivari redefined in their time the way a speaker matches its sonic presence to its aesthetics.

The Family has now matured with the latest generation starting with the monumental changes born with Guarneri evolution, and now *Amati Futura* looks as much to impending developments as does to an illustrious past.

Both the aesthetic and technical values of Sonus faber have sired this speaker, starting with a restyling that respects the lute-shaped form of the series, while refining it for even better performance.

But Sonus faber learns as much from its own efforts as it does the great woodworkers of yore: *Amati Futura* is one of the first models to exploit the Herculean R&D effort that was invested in the company's monumental flagship model, 'The Sonus faber', and refined it even further with the ground breaking *Aida*.

Like its recently-introduced siblings, *Amati Futura* represents what is possible, while respecting what has mattered.



**absolute sounds ltd.**

58 Durham Road, London, SW20 0TW

T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09 F: +44(0)20 88 79 79 62

[www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com) [info@absolutesounds.com](mailto:info@absolutesounds.com)



PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE

**40**  
**3's company** Enjoying Apple's new tablet



**88**  
**Retro** Aurex's gorgeous 1970s Microsystem

**Music reviews**



**95**  
**Dr. Feelgood** *All Through the City*

**BADGES EXPLAINED**

**OUR AWARDS**



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



**RECOMMENDED:**  
Products that we feel meet a high standard of performance



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



What with the sum total of human engineering knowledge we've now amassed, plus the powerful computers and measuring instruments we possess – you'd think that in 2012 speakers should all sound pretty much the same. Fat chance! Two recent experiences of mine at the 'hi-fi coal face' have left

me in no doubt whatsoever that – unless a miracle happens by the time this magazine goes to print – we're still on a steep loudspeaker learning curve...

First, this month's group test showed pretty profound sonic differences across six similarly priced budget standmounters. With the same source, amplification and cables, I got surprisingly *dissimilar* results – far more so than with, say, our DAC supertest a few months back. Second, strolling the floors of the Munich High End show recently, I heard a large number of expensive floorstanders – from vast horn designs to bending wave radiators – none of which got any closer to any definitively 'correct' sound, impressive as they were.

Okay, I'll concede that this insight might not come as a *complete* surprise to anyone involved in making the things. I doubt jaws – or even beer glasses – are being dropped by design engineers as my grim pronouncement meets them. But given that we can get digital sources and amplifiers up to fairly uniformly high standards these days, why are the troublesome transducers left behind?

I suppose anything that converts one form of energy (i.e. electrical) to another (mechanical) has its job cut out. Factor in the physics (box volumes, panel widths, etc.) plus the electronics (drive unit impedance, reactance, etc.) and the number of variables is vast. That's why, as I always say, use the best measuring instruments known to humankind – your ears. Always try before you buy!

**David Price** Editor  
david.price@hifichoice.co.uk



HADLOW HOUSE, 9 HIGH STREET, GREEN STREET GREEN, ORPINGTON, KENT BR6 6BG

# MASTERSOUND



## Mastersound Evolution 845

When you see the award-winning Evolution 845 Integrated Amplifier from Italian manufacturer 'Mastersound' for the first time, you realise this is an amplifier on a truly magnificent scale.

Using four 845 valves, this parallel single-ended, dual mono class A design delivers 55wpc, ensuring it will drive a wide range of loudspeakers with complete ease.

Every Mastersound amplifier is handmade in Italy and they even make their own transformers, which accounts for a lot of the Evolution 845's weight (53kg!).

The Evolution 845 is for those who want only the very best in valve amplification.

**0% finance example: £253.20/month\***

**Whether you are a valve amplifier newcomer or aficionado, Jordan Acoustics has the right valve amplifier for you. Call us today to discuss your amplifier needs.**



### Bournemouth Showroom

telephone:

**01202 911 886**

e-mail: [bournemouth@jordanacoustics.co.uk](mailto:bournemouth@jordanacoustics.co.uk)

address: *Unit 2 - The Old Cart Building, Parley Court Barns, Parley Green Lane, Hurn, Bournemouth, BH23 6BB*  
Open: *Tuesday - Saturday. Closed Monday.*

website:

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

### Glenrothes Showroom

telephone:

**01592 744 779**

e-mail: [glenrothes@jordanacoustics.co.uk](mailto:glenrothes@jordanacoustics.co.uk)

address: *20-22 Cadham Centre, Glenrothes Fife, KY7 6RU*  
Open: *Monday - Friday. Closed Saturday.*

Follow JordanAcoustics on

**twitter**

large product range ▶ free parking ▶ 0% flexible finance\*



# NaimUniti 2

The NEW All-in-one Player from Naim is here

With a new 70W integrated amplifier (NaimUniti 50W) the NaimUniti 2 can accommodate a wider range of loudspeakers and fill even larger rooms with world class sound. It also boasts an entirely new CD player section, with improved tray, clamping mechanism and the new Burr Brown PCM1793 DAC. Several small improvements to the design and signal path, developed through intensive



listening tests, combine to raise the overall performance levels of NaimUniti 2 still further. It has also inherited the larger front panel display window of its big brother the SuperUniti.

0% finance example: £116.46/month\*

Exclusive 0% finance packages\* available on Naim products & systems. Please call the Bournemouth Store for more details.



## Jordan Acoustics are specialists in World Class Audio Systems

Focusing solely on the finest audio products available today, our portfolio has been chosen very carefully. We believe strongly in offering products that you want rather than just ones that we happen to have. Whether you prefer valve or solid-state, CD to vinyl, soft-dome or ribbon, Jordan Acoustics have 'cherry-picked' only the very best. Combine this with our vast experience and industry leading after-sales service and you've got yourself one of the finest high-end consultancies on the planet!

Building a true high-end system is not about collecting brands based on reviews. It is about finding a true synergy between components that sound magical together. That palpable reproduction, full of dynamics and realism just how the original artist intended. Fingers on frets, breathing of vocalists, the tautness of a drum skin... the devil is in the detail. **That's why we love great hi-fi and that's exactly why you should give us a call.**

part exchange\* ▶ large selection of used items ▶ home demonstrations\*

# Hi-Fi Choice Contents

hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. **360** July 2012

## NEWS & OPINION

### 8 Audiophile

The latest developments in the world of hi-fi

### 73 Hi-fi choices

Have your say on audiophile matters

### 80 Opinion

The team say it as they see it!

### 95 Music reviews

Essential new releases reviewed

### 130 Backchat

All the hot gossip from the Munich show...

## READER SERVICES

### 104 Reader classifieds

Buy and sell your kit for FREE here

### 124 Next issue

What we hope to bring you next month...

## FEATURES

### 40 Three's company

Hi-fi living with Apple's new iPad 3

### 88 Show report

What's new at the Munich High End show

### 90 Year in music

Remastering The Who from 1973

### 98 Dealer systems

Hi-Fi Choice goes to The Sound Gallery

## COVER STORY



## 22 Group test Standmount loudspeakers

## NEW!

### 111 Choice extras

7 pages of the latest gadgets, gizmos, cables, supports and accessories...



## 88 Show report Munich High End



## 98 Dealer systems The Sound Gallery



66

Avid Sequel SP turntable

"Those who want LPs to sound clean, will find the SP exceptional..."

Jimmy Hughes: Avid Sequel SP turntable p66

TESTED THIS MONTH



44

Onkyo TX-8050 network stereo receiver



48

Cyrus CD Transport



54

Block CVR-100 CD receiver



58

KEF R700 loudspeaker



64 Metrum  
Octave DAC

REVIEWS

Kit tested

16 Leema  
Elements CD/amplifier

44 Onkyo  
TX-8050 receiver

48 Cyrus  
CD Transport

54 Block  
CVR-100 CD receiver

58 KEF  
R700 loudspeaker

64 Metrum  
Octave DAC

66 Avid  
Sequel SP turntable

102 Aurex  
Microsystem (Retro)

GROUP TEST

Standmount  
loudspeakers  
£160-£495

25 Dynaudio  
DM 2/6

27 KEF  
Q100

29 Monitor Audio  
Silver RX1

31 Mordaunt-Short  
Aviano 1XR

33 Q Acoustics  
2020i

35 Quad  
11L Classic

Never miss an issue – turn to p39 for our latest subs offer

# Audio file

The latest hi-fi industry news...

# Forever changes

A brand new range of entry-level separates has just appeared in the UK bearing an esteemed name that's a blast from the past, says **David Price**...

**PRICE:** £149.95-£349.95  
**AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 0845 6445064  
**WEB:** SANSUI.CO.UK

It's nice to see the Sansui name return to these shores. Veteran audiophiles will remember this illustrious brand. Founded in Tokyo, Japan back in 1947, it earned a fine reputation for well made, sweet sounding kit. And now, the name is reappearing in Great Britain as Sansui UK Ltd., with a range of separates said 'to satisfy the original philosophy of best quality hi-fi for the lowest possible price'.

The most interesting new product is surely the £349 WLD-201 tuner/streamer, a stand-alone full size audio component with both Wi-Fi and Ethernet connectivity. Network connectivity gives access to over 15,000 internet radio stations, and there are DAB/DAB+ and FM tuners built-in. It streams music on computers or NAS drives in FLAC format up to 24-bit/48kHz, plus WAV, AAC/AAC+, MP3 and others. There's also a USB socket for music playback by memory sticks or other USB storage devices. Control is via the supplied remote, or by using the Sansui Libretto App for iPad/iPhone/iPod Touch. Round the back, there are stereo line outputs and optical and coaxial digital outs for connection to an external DAC.





There's a matching integrated amplifier, the £299 SAP-201V. It pushes out a claimed 40 watts per channel into eight ohms, or 55 watts into four. There are seven inputs including a phono stage and a digital input for use with the built in DAC.

It's nice to see the Sansui name return to these shores. Veteran audiophiles will remember this illustrious brand...

Sansui says that internally, 'direct access' circuitry is used to shorten the signal paths. There's a 'high quality' toroidal transformer, and audiophile-grade components are said to be fitted. Like the streamer, it comes in brushed silver or black finishes.

Finally, there's a new CD player in the shape of the £199 CDD-201, which is said to be compatible with all common CD formats including CD/CD-/+R/RW and MP3. Output is handled by analogue RCA connectors or digitally via the coaxial and optical

sockets. The supplied infrared remote controls both products, or for a small premium customers can specify an optional brushed aluminium finished Sansui remote, which controls all the products in the range. Watch for a review of these new separates soon.



## Windows shopping

**FOR A FEW MINUTES BACK IN THE MID-NINETIES**, the word 'multimedia' was on every computer geek's lips, but it's surely only now finding its true vocation – this time with British supermarket chains! These prolific retailers, once more closely associated with comestibles than consumer electronics, are now moving to pastures new with online music downloads...

News comes that online retail site Sainsbury's Entertainment ([sainsburySENTERTAINMENT.CO.UK](http://sainsburySENTERTAINMENT.CO.UK)) – which already is more Amazon than Asda in what it sells – is now offering access to nearly two and a half million songs online, both in single and album format. Individual tracks cost 89p, while most albums are £6.99. The site also promises to match the lowest prices on pre-order items as part of a price guarantee, with 'Deal of the Week' albums from just £3.99. Customers will also collect Nectar points when downloading tracks, and can build their own playlists.

This follows the precedent set by Tesco Entertainment ([tesco ENTERTAINMENT.COM](http://TESCOENTERTAINMENT.COM)) a couple of years back, which offers a similar service, and further consolidates the trend of British music buyers purchasing ever more of their content online...

At the same time, however, high street retailers selling physical products continue to struggle. For example, HMV is forecasting a pre-tax loss of £16 million for the year to April 28th, with a 12.9 percent decline in like-for-like sales in the seventeen weeks up to the end of that period. The ninety-one year old retailer recently blamed this on a weak new release schedule in CDs and DVDs, but has said that it forecasts improved results next year – good news as it's an important 'shop window' for physical media, especially with Woolworths and Zavvi no longer around.

**Sainsbury's Entertainment (top) now follows Tesco Entertainment (below) in offering downloads...**



“The Truth, nothing more,  
nothing less...”



“Ridiculously good in every  
aspect of vinyl playback”  
Diva IISP Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*, January 2011

 **AVIDHIFI**

Every AVID product is born of a thoroughbred passion for performance.

Like a window on the recording, ruthlessly honest yet totally engaging, each listening reveals a genuine insight in the artist and session.

All British-made, our full range of turntables, amplifiers and accessories can transform the way you think about music.

Before you decide - arrange an audition to experience the AVID difference.



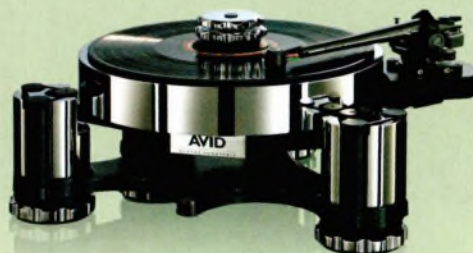
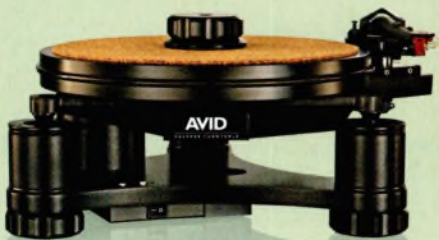
**Analogue Seduction**, 6 Manor View, Whittlesey, Peterborough Tel: 01733 350 878

**O'Brien Hi-fi**, 60 Durham Road, West Wimbledon, London Tel: 020 8946 1528

**Progressive Audio**, 2 Maryland Court, Rainham, Kent, Tel: 01634 389004

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

**AVID HIFI LIMITED**, Bicton Industrial Park, Kimbolton, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE28 0LW  
Tel: +44(0)1480 869 900 Fax: +44(0)1480 869 909



# Atomic smitten

Antelope Audio launch 'the world's first atomic digital preamp', apparently!

**T**he Rubicon is, according to Antelope Audio, not only a groundbreaking 384kHz digital audio preamplifier, but also the first to use a 10M Rubidium atomic clock. This is no less than 100,000 times more stable than a traditional crystal oscillator, and coupled with '64-bit Acoustically Focused clocking technology', it achieves unheard of improvements in jitter management, says the manufacturer.

Housed in a striking looking machined aluminium enclosure with vintage Art Deco design, it also features ultra low noise phono inputs, analogue-to-digital and digital-to-analogue converters, plus DLNA streaming.



**PRICE:** TBA **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 020 81 33 8355 **WEB:** ANTELOPEAUDIO.COM

# Control peek

Furutech's new Alpha Design Labs Esprit is a versatile little switching unit...

**T**he new Esprit is Furutech's latest take on its award-winning GT40 USB DAC. Designed around a 24-bit/192kHz Wolfson WM8716 DAC and the CIRRUS LOGIC CS5361 24/192 analogue-to-digital convertor, the Esprit features optical, coaxial, USB and two analogue inputs. The USB output can be used for recording to hard disk

and the S/PDIF output will support digital surround sound formats. A headphone amplifier, capable of driving any 'phones with an impedance of 16 to 600 ohms, completes the package.

No drivers are necessary with Mac and Linux computers, while a single standard driver is required for Windows computers.



**PRICE:** £835 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01276 501 392 **WEB:** FURUTECH.COM

## Crystal healing

### CRYSTAL CABLE'S ABSOLUTE DREAM

is the new series of cables positioned above the established Dreamline series. It is, according to the company, the first cable to use pure mono crystal technology in both the core and braided shielding. Four coaxes are twisted into one cable by a custom-built machine that ensures, says Crystal, perfect 45 degree twisting without stressing the metal. Two coaxes are used for the audio signal, which is said to improve signal-to-noise ratio and lower distortion to the bare minimum.

The cables are terminated using carbon Furutech connectors with laser-engraved serial numbers. The new Absolute Dream series includes an interlink, loudspeaker cable and power cord. Prices TBA. [crystalcable.com](http://crystalcable.com)



## Dock magic

**THE NEW ARCAM DRDOCK** boasts greater connectivity and compatibility than any previous docking station, the company says. Thanks to its new shape it can accommodate iPads as well as iPhones and iPods. An HDMI video output also allows you to play back your favourite films and TV programmes directly to your TV. The drDock is equipped with its own remote handset, but can also be controlled by both the Arcam Solo neo and mini music systems. Available now, it costs £200. [arcam.co.uk](http://arcam.co.uk)



•**AUDIO-TECHNICA** has found, after conducting a national study, that the average person in the UK will listen to more than 13 years' worth of music before they die. The research was to ascertain what effect technology is having on our daily use of music and media as part of its 'Music Reviewer Of 2012' campaign. The competition simply asks entrants to share an interesting picture of a gig they have attended and write an entertaining review. The winner will receive a goody bag packed with Audio-Technica's latest goodies and will also win tickets to the Reading Festival. For further details visit: [facebook.comAudioTechnicaUK](http://facebook.comAudioTechnicaUK)



ULTIMATE STUDIO EXPERIENCE

## LS50

50th Anniversary Model

Enjoy your music precisely the way it was first recorded. Unheard of in such a compact design, LS50 delivers a deeply rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size. Designed using KEF's cutting-edge acoustic modeling, LS50 is the ultimate mini monitor for the home.



@KEF Audio



KEF Audio UK

SCAN TO LEARN  
ABOUT LS50

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



# One for all

Bodnar Audio launches a striking speaker using a full-range driver...

**B**odnar Audio has announced a new loudspeaker designed around a single full-range drive unit. The striking looking Sandglass speaker is said to employ a unique cabinet design that strengthens and improves wave dispersion while boosting bass response.

Available in two versions, with either a 17cm or 20cm Sonido driver, the smaller of the two is housed in a narrower cabinet and is, says the company, better suited for moderate sized living rooms.

A wide range of finishes is available, including piano lacquer with custom leather front panels in a range of colours to suit any interior.

Considering the visually arresting styling and interesting engineering, prices seem very reasonable. They range from £3,299 to £3,499 for the standard finish and from £4,890 to £4,990 for the piano finish. They're available in the UK through Fidelity Art.



**PRICE:** £3,299-£4,990 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 07840 183485 **WEB:** BONARAUDIO.COM

## All things considered

**THE NEVER ENDING TORRENT** of Apple-compatible portable stereo systems continues unabated, with the news of Sony's new CMT-V75BTiP.

This little system offers, says the company, sophisticated style and refined sound in an all-in-one package. Boasting a built-in dock for iPhone, iPad and iPod, the new system also features an integral DAB/DAB+ tuner, Magnetic Fluid loudspeakers and streamer capabilities with Bluetooth connectivity.

The system's compact dimensions mean that it will fit seamlessly into

any part of the home, whether table top or wall-mounted, the company says. Apple device fans can attach their various iThings to the system's built-in dock for instant access to their digital library. There's also a CD player onboard for those audiophiles with silver discs to spin. According to the maker, this new system, "offers exceptional depth and clarity of sound".

**PRICE:** £230  
**AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 0845 6000124  
**WEB:** SONY.CO.UK



## NEWS IN BRIEF

•**JAGUAR** has chosen the 2012 Beijing Motor Show to unveil its new range-topping XJ Ultimate, fitted with a new Meridian Surround Sound System. Jaguar is the latest British premium car maker to partner with Meridian Audio. Specially designed and developed for the XJ Ultimate, the system has fifteen-channels of amplification and twenty speakers strategically positioned around the cabin.

[meridian-audio.com](http://meridian-audio.com)



•**CLARIFICATION:** Regarding the ONIX SACD-15A player reviewed in the May 2012 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice*, we wish to point out that ONIXDNA Ltd. says that it is the only brand with history of the original ONIX that existed in the UK until 1997, and has one of the original founders as its CEO. ONIXDNA Ltd. has nothing to do with the ONIX brand made in China today, in any part of its design or history, the company adds. It says that ONIX ELECTRONICS Ltd. is a subsidiary of ONIXDNA Ltd. For more information, click on [onixdna.com](http://onixdna.com)

•**INSPIRE HI-FI HAS MOVED** to larger premises, giving larger manufacturing facilities as well as a dedicated Demo Suite. The address has changed to: Units 3 & 4, Prospect House, Colliery Close, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S43 3QE. The new phone number is 01246 472222. [inspirehifi.co.uk](http://inspirehifi.co.uk)

# One for all

Bodnar Audio launches a striking speaker using a full-range driver...

**B**odnar Audio has announced a new loudspeaker designed around a single full-range drive unit. The striking looking Sandglass speaker is said to employ a unique cabinet design that strengthens and improves wave dispersion while boosting bass response.

Available in two versions, with either a 17cm or 20cm Sonido driver, the smaller of the two is housed in a narrower cabinet and is, says the company, better suited for moderate sized living rooms.

A wide range of finishes is available, including piano lacquer with custom leather front panels in a range of colours to suit any interior.

Considering the visually arresting styling and interesting engineering, prices seem very reasonable. They range from £3,299 to £3,499 for the standard finish and from £4,890 to £4,990 for the piano finish. They're available in the UK through Fidelity Art.



**PRICE:** £3,299-£4,990 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 07840 183485 **WEB:** BONARAUDIO.COM

## NEWS IN BRIEF

•**JAGUAR** has chosen the 2012 Beijing Motor Show to unveil its new range-topping XJ Ultimate, fitted with a new Meridian Surround Sound System. Jaguar is the latest British premium car maker to partner with Meridian Audio. Specially designed and developed for the XJ Ultimate, the system has fifteen-channels of amplification and twenty speakers strategically positioned around the cabin.

[meridian-audio.com](http://meridian-audio.com)



•**CLARIFICATION:** Regarding the ONIX SACD-15A player reviewed in the May 2012 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice*, we wish to point out that ONIXDNA Ltd. says that it is the only brand with history of the original ONIX that existed in the UK until 1997, and has one of the original founders as its CEO. ONIXDNA Ltd. has nothing to do with the ONIX brand made in China today, in any part of its design or history, the company adds. It says that ONIX ELECTRONICS Ltd. is a subsidiary of ONIXDNA Ltd. For more information, click on [onixdna.com](http://onixdna.com)

•**INSPIRE HI-FI HAS MOVED** to larger premises, giving larger manufacturing facilities as well as a dedicated Demo Suite. The address has changed to: Units 3 & 4, Prospect House, Colliery Close, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S43 3QE. The new phone number is 01246 472222. [inspirehifi.co.uk](http://inspirehifi.co.uk)

## All things considered

**THE NEVER ENDING TORRENT** of Apple-compatible portable stereo systems continues unabated, with the news of Sony's new CMT-V75BTIP.

This little system offers, says the company, sophisticated style and refined sound in an all-in-one package. Boasting a built-in dock for iPhone, iPad and iPod, the new system also features an integral DAB/DAB+ tuner, Magnetic Fluid loudspeakers and streamer capabilities with Bluetooth connectivity.

The system's compact dimensions mean that it will fit seamlessly into

any part of the home, whether table top or wall-mounted, the company says. Apple device fans can attach their various iThings to the system's built-in dock for instant access to their digital library. There's also a CD player onboard for those audiophiles with silver discs to spin. According to the maker, this new system, "offers exceptional depth and clarity of sound".

**PRICE:** £230  
**AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 0845 6000124  
**WEB:** SONY.CO.UK



**A  
performance  
of real  
distinction**

**D I S T I N C T I O N  
S E R I E S**



### **The Distinction Range from TEAC**

Real hi-fidelity sound achieves a new level in performance and musical ability.

#### **AI-3000 Integrated Amplifier**

Semi-toroidal power transformer exports an impressive 360 watts of clean power per channel (at 4ohms) - driving up to two pairs of demanding loudspeakers simultaneously.

Aluminium metal housing for the quality components and extra large cooling fans assure the amp runs at optimal operating temperature.

#### **CD-3000 CD Player**

Features an additional coaxial digital input and supplies each audio channel with its own separate high value Cirrus Logic® D/A converter!

Connect the CD-3000 player to the AI-3000 integrated stereo amplifier and stand well back. This is the performance audio dream team that you've been waiting for.

Also available in the range AI-1000 and CD-1000.

TEAC - high end music, always in our DNA.

For a retailer close to you, call 0845 130 2511 or visit [teac.co.uk](http://teac.co.uk)



**TEAC**  
the leaders in digital music  
[www.teac.co.uk](http://www.teac.co.uk)

# Size matters



Leema Acoustics has joined the small separates society. So how does its new Elements CD player and integrated amplifier measure up? **Richard Black** tries them for size...

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Leema Acoustics Elements  
**ORIGIN:** UK  
**TYPE:** CD player and amplifier  
**WEIGHT:** (CD) 3.5kg (Amp) 8kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 217x90x375mm each

**FEATURES:**

- CD: two each balanced and unbalanced outputs
- S/PDIF electrical and optical outputs
- LIPS remote control connection
- Amp: 3 unbalanced line inputs (phono sockets)
- 1 balanced line input (XLR)
- 3 optical digital inputs (96kHz max.)
- 1 electrical digital input (192kHz max.)
- 1 USB digital input (192kHz max.)
- 56W per channel (claimed)
- LIPS remote control connection

**DISTRIBUTOR:** Leema Audio  
**TELEPHONE:** 01938 559021  
**WEBSITE:** leema-acoustics.com

**L**eema appeared on the scene shortly before the millennium, introducing itself as a company backed by pro-audio expertise on behalf of both its founders, Lee Taylor and Mallory Nicholls. In the circumstances, they no doubt wanted to emphasise the waffle-free nature of the pro world, though I suspect if pushed they would have to admit that there is still snake oil to be found there, too. All the same, there are requirements and expectations of professional kit that hi-fi hasn't always espoused, not least hassle-free operation and reliability, and a bit of exposure to that is more than a little useful in developing domestic hi-fi...

Over the last dozen or so years we've seen plenty of Leema components, and they have tended to be visually rather striking. True, plenty of them came in cases of unremarkable dimensions, but they always managed to include some unusual detailing and also, often, unconventional controls. And so it is with the Elements series, which put Leema thinking into the currently popular 'shoebbox' format, half the standard width at 22cm. These are, by Leema standards, budget components, but they include a smart aluminium front panel with attractive profiling at the edges and an alphanumeric display.

## Atomic level

The amplifier is considerably more feature-packed than the CD player. For a start, it comes as standard with digital inputs, in all three flavours: electrical, optical and USB. Very handy, the more so as the USB input handles sample rates up to 192kHz. There are effectively five line inputs, three on regular phono sockets, one balanced on XLRs, and a front-panel input via a mini-jack socket. Add everything up and you've got ten inputs, which is a pretty good total by any standards!

Almost everything related to controlling the amplifier is handled by one control, the rotary knob on the front panel. Twist it and it's a perfectly conventional volume control: push it and it becomes a rotary input selector. The inputs are named, by default, 'Input 1' and so on, but can be named by the user to suit what's actually plugged in, which with so many of them to choose from is clearly going to be very useful.

Volume control is electronic, of course, adjusted in small steps by an integrated circuit that's controlled in turn via that front-panel knob. There are over two hundred steps, or at least there appear to be: quite a few of them seem to make no change from the last step below, which seems a little strange. Even so, the active steps are small (less than 1dB) and even the fussiest listener should have no problem setting the volume just so. Volume is, by default, set low when the unit is switched on and also when changing inputs, a smart bit of thinking which will be appreciated by anyone who has ever selected an input they thought was not being fed a signal... You can turn this feature off if you want to.

**There's no denying the sheer enthusiasm of these units is highly appealing...**

Despite the active volume control, there's no balance control, or individual level trims for different inputs. The latter would be rendered irrelevant by the volume reset on switching sources, anyway. You can, however, designate one of the analogue inputs as an AV input with fixed gain – effectively operating the unit as a power amp. A final couple of features are found at the front panel: a headphone output (mini-jack) and the option to switch off the

display. That, and other set-up features, must be done from the unit itself, but day-to-day stuff like volume and input selection can be controlled from the Leema system remote, which is a bit garish but nice to use. It is to some extent complemented by the Leema Intelligent Protocol System or LIPS, the firm's own wired remote system. Less relevant, perhaps, to the Elements units than to some of the more upmarket components, this enhances home automation set-up and ensures that each unit in a system operates in harmony with the others.

Internally, the Elements Integrated is dominated by a single large heatsink which sits right underneath the well-ventilated top cover. Fixed to the underside of this is a single large integrated circuit, which turns out to be a stereo power amp module. These devices have crept into the budget audiophile mainstream in recent years, but this one's a little different in that it's a Class D device – that is, a switching amplifier. The main advantage of switching amps is efficiency, which means they dissipate less heat than conventional Class AB amps. In turn, that means a single IC can handle quite a lot of power and this one is rated at up to 420W output. Leema has limited output in this case to much less, notionally 56W per channel for an 8 ohm load (we measured a little over 60W). The power supply is a conventional one using a large toroidal mains transformer.

Over at the CD player, the specification is absolutely basic, with a feature set such as you could find on players from twenty five years ago. The one notably deluxe addition is balanced outputs, not just one but two of them: there are also two unbalanced outputs so you can feed any number of amps and systems from this player. There are digital outputs, of course, too. Beyond that, not much to comment on.

The insides are similarly conventional, with a CD-Audio transport (a little slow thinking, but quiet), a regular linear power supply and good quality parts for digital-to-analogue conversion and





output signal filtering and buffering. One minor irritation is that the 'Previous track' button goes immediately to the previous track if pressed during play, rather than the start of the current one as is more common, which means extra faffing if you simply want to replay the track you're currently listening to. Despite the text capabilities of the display, there's no option to show CD-Text information – disappointing as even fifteen year old Sonys do this...

### Sound quality

An amp packing around 60W, with a low output impedance, shouldn't be unduly fussed over the speakers it's partnered with, and bearing the price of these units in mind I felt happy enough shackling them to a trusty pair of ATC SCM20s, as well as B&W 803s and some elderly Spondors. Perhaps, the best match was with the ATC model, but there was never any real sense of struggle

with any of these models, as expected (and certainly as one would hope).

Indeed the sound had from the outset plenty of drive and energy. I had plenty of fun with some Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd tracks, which are just the kind of thing these units seem to do best, but even in such refined music as Mozart string quartets you can hear that there's no shortage of rhythm, pace and excitement. Well, in the quick movements, anyway – I wouldn't want to give the impression Leema somehow speeds up a classical slow movement!

There's also very good 'body' to the sound. This isn't exactly the same thing as tonality, which I'll come to in a moment, although there's clearly a relationship. You need decent bass to give an impression of solidity, but there's more to it than that and one sometimes encounters audio equipment which seems extended across

the low frequencies and yet somehow hollow. Here though, a wall of sound is a proper brick wall, not plasterboard or a piece of painted hardboard from a stage set. You get the feeling the sound waves are so tightly packed that you couldn't walk between them!

This is all good stuff. But there's a downside, too, and it's to do with detail. As listening progressed, it became apparent that some little insights in well-known recordings just weren't making the impact they can do with the best kit. As so often happens, the extent to which detail seems lacking varies depending on how intently one listens. Concentrate hard, and one can pick out pretty much everything that's going on. When one relaxes and just lets the sound do its own thing, though, it's less readily apparent just where that guitar solo tails off, or where the middle voice in a bit of piano counterpoint is going, or which



## Q&A

RICHARD BLACK SPEAKS WITH LEE TAYLOR, CO-FOUNDER (WITH MALLORY NICHOLLS) OF LEEMA...



**RB: How does the Elements series fit in with the Leema range and its philosophy?**

**LT:** The Elements series provides us with a much needed entry level, still reflecting our uncompromising approach to design and quality, but maintaining our core sound, consistent throughout all Leema products.

**What are the advantages of the switching amplifier topology used?**

Historically, Mallory and I have not been fans of switching amplifier technology. However, we were offered the opportunity to become involved in the testing cycle of a new model from NXP, long before its official launch. This allowed us to help 'design out' the technology's unwanted artefacts, which have until now given switching amplifiers a bad reputation.

We wanted the Elements amplifier products to provide class-leading power, control and refinement and this could not be satisfactorily achieved in a half-size design using conventional topologies. There are simply too many compromises due to the heat produced which we were not prepared to make. Adopting the switching amplifier design we had helped develop was an obvious step.

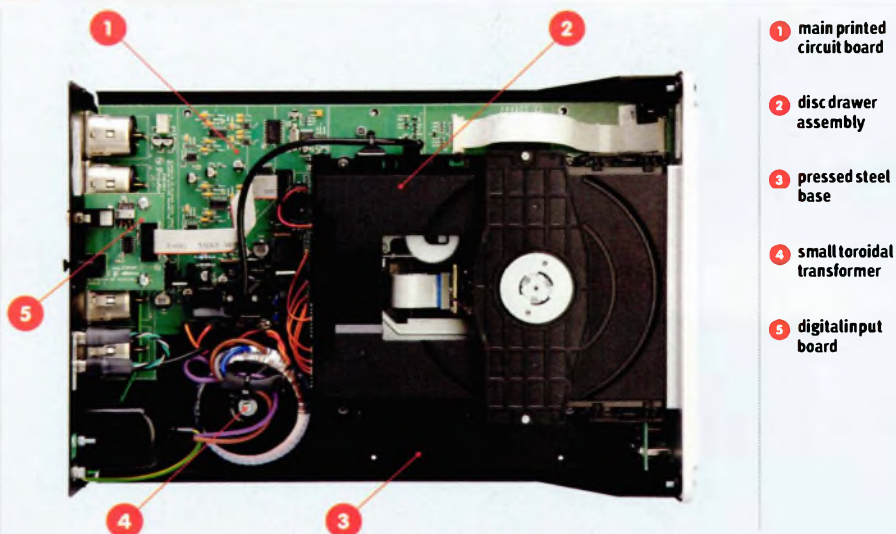
**Did you consider SACD or other hi-res capability for the CD player??**

Sadly, SACD is no longer a supported format. We believe the future of high resolution audio will be downloads, which is why we have invested heavily in our own asynchronous USB technologies to support this.

**How do you rate the amp's internal DAC against that in the CD player – and is it better to connect them via analogue or digital cable?**

The DAC in the amplifier is the same DAC chip used in the player but in a simpler single chip topology. The CD player uses multiple chips in a sophisticated noise cancelling arrangement which we call 'Quattro Infinity', so in this case connecting via good quality analogue cable such as Leema's own Linx interconnects will result in the best sound quality.

## LAB REPORT - CD



- 1 main printed circuit board
- 2 disc drawer assembly
- 3 pressed steel base
- 4 small toroidal transformer
- 5 digital input board

### ON TEST

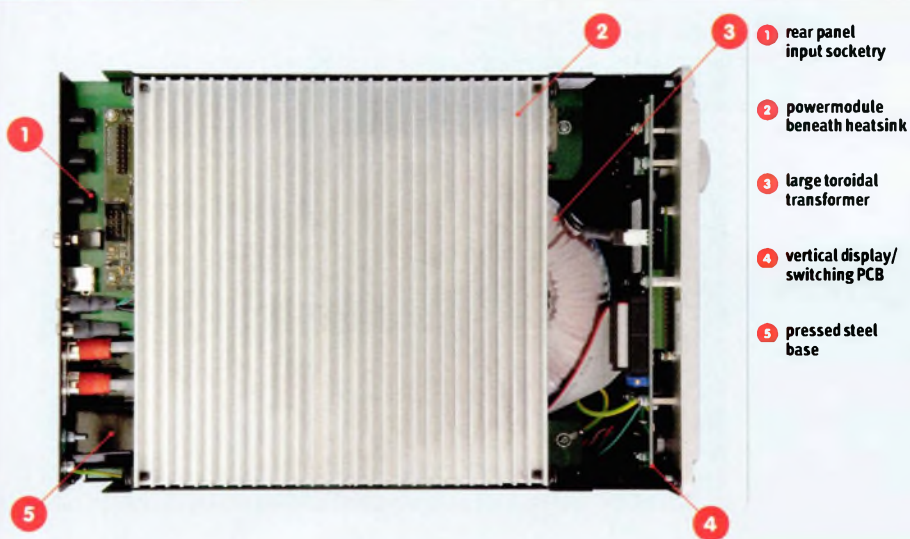
Leema's latest and most affordable CD player demonstrates the brand's experience and pedigree. All outputs deliver a maximum 2.4V, the balanced (XLR) connections offering a 104.5dB A-wtd S/N ratio from a low 53ohm source impedance. On the whole, its performance more than matches Leema's limited specification, with midrange distortion lower than the claimed 0.001% at 0.0005% and low-level resolution good to  $\pm 0.3$ dB over a

full 100dB dynamic range. Distortion remains impressively low at  $\sim 0.001\%$  right up to 20kHz while 19/20kHz intermodulation distortion is lower still at 0.00015%.

All this, of course, is at least partly achieved by Leema's differential DACs feeding a balanced analogue stage, helping to suppress even-order distortion mechanisms. The low 120psec jitter – at the measurable limit for 16-bit audio – comes courtesy

of the Wolfson interface receiver but it's the choice of *digital* filter that, arguably, makes the real subjective difference. Instead of opting for a standard 'brickwall' FIR filter, the maths employed here ensures there's rather less pre-ringing on transient material. There's a slight trade-off in the reduced 50dB suppression of digital aliases, but the improved time domain performance is often realised in a smoother sound. **PM**

## LAB REPORT - AMP



- 1 rear panel input socketry
- 2 power module beneath heatsink
- 3 large toroidal transformer
- 4 vertical display/switching PCB
- 5 pressed steel base

### ON TEST

At the heart of Leema's new Elements amplifier is the NXP Semiconductors TDA8954 Class D switching amplifier module. Leema is using a linear rather than switch mode PSU and the amplifier is bridged as standard – so don't go connecting a loudspeaker with an earthed treble terminal! Class D confers high efficiency, so this amp will deliver its rated 2x55W while drawing just 135W from the wall. This means in practice that it will

deliver just over 2x60W/8ohm, but does not make the rated 2x110W/40hm (2x103W/40hm is more realistic). Under dynamic, music-like conditions, there's a little extra headroom available to accommodate peaks of 72W, 135W and 180W into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads, so this small integrated amp will sound a little beefier than its basic specification might suggest, and should be able to drive most modern loudspeakers.

In common with some other balanced Class D amps, however, the Elements' frequency response is (speaker) load-dependent from +1dB/20kHz into 8ohm to  $-1$ dB/20kHz into 4ohm and  $-4.5$ dB/20kHz into 2ohm. Distortion, too, rises quickly with frequency from a low  $\sim 0.005\%$  through bass and midrange to 0.5% at HF. The A-wtd S/N ratio is also a little below average at 77.7dB (re. odBW). **PM**

**CONNECTIONS**



- 1 balanced XLR outputs
- 2 coaxial digital output
- 3 RCA line outputs
- 4 LIPS remote out
- 5 loudspeaker outputs
- 6 RCA line inputs
- 7 balanced XLR inputs
- 8 optical digital input

section is the orchestra is playing the tune. That kind of thing...

There's no mystery to that observation – hi-fi has to be really nasty to mask detail so badly one can't pick it out with careful listening, and these units are clearly a long way short of nasty. But they do nevertheless mask sounds to enough of an extent to make the brain work that little bit harder if one is to pick out everything that is in a good recording.

Naturally, results vary between recordings, with those that have the densest detail suffering most markedly while simpler tracks are basically unsullied. Solo guitar sounds particularly good, and I actually found myself enjoying a classical guitar track sent to me by a guitarist friend. Part of the reason for this is certainly the very attractive quality the Elements twins bring to the high treble, which is unusually airy and open with never a hint of grain, at least at modest levels. High notes on the piano benefitted from the same characteristic, but piano is by its nature quite a harmonically complex instrument and here again the detail seemed to take a bit of a nosedive as chords thickened up.

Voice is interesting, not least because it shows up just a trace of coloration in the upper midrange. Lower midrange seems just about blameless, though, so the actual singing quality of voices is rendered very honestly.

Since CD player and amp are sold separately it was interesting to try them individually with various familiar partnering components for reference. It seems that the detail

issue is almost entirely related to the amplifier, with the CD player scoring highly in this area. On the other hand, that vocal coloration seems to be attached to the CD player. Interestingly, it just about vanished when the CD player and amp were connected via a digital cable, using the amp's DAC function, but then the treble lost a shade of its purity.

Trying the amp with various digital sources suggested that the digital inputs are not entirely unaffected by the quality of the source. A cheap CD player with known jitter issues was clearly inferior to a more technically solid unit, but assuming one has the latter type the Elements amp's DAC is more than passable. It also extracts a very good sound from USB, making computer-stored recordings sound very nearly identical to the same from a good CD transport.

**Conclusion**

There's no denying that the sheer enthusiasm of these units is very appealing. At the same time, one can only acknowledge that enthusiasm is always better when backed up by a range of solid achievement. Leema confidently ticks boxes on tonality, with only the most minor blemishes here and there that don't really amount to much in isolation.

Imaging is good in most ways: it is certainly extended in both width and depth, and if it lacks a little precision now and then that is largely compensated for by a welcome stability. Instruments don't move around as the music ebbs and flows. But detail is an area of performance where expectations have risen in



**ONE OBVIOUS benchmark for CD performance would have to be the Audiolab 8200CDQ (HFC 355). At £950 it undercuts the Elements CD. A full-size unit, it justifies its width, not least in terms of inputs, of which it has five. These, and the CD source, can be volume-controlled and treated to user-selectable digital filters – it's a fully-featured piece of kit. It also sounds lovely, with excellent sound in all respects.**

For a 'shoebox' comparison, try the Cyrus CD8 SE2 – we liked the original SE a lot, despite a very slight lack of deep bass at times.

As for amps, Creek's 5350 Evolution (HFC 334) is a strong contender. At £1,000, it lacks a DAC, but is twice as powerful and, significantly, ticks all the same boxes as the Elements Integrated, while offering fine detail.

If the Leema wins in one area, it's high treble, where it offers, perhaps, better sweetness. Both amps enjoy good strong bass performance and both are as lively as you could wish for.

recent years, certainly as regards affordable hi-fi, and there are direct competitors to both of these units that simply do it better. The CD player is more successful than the amp, but it would have been nice to be able to wax lyrical about both units and recommend them as a visually and sonically matching pair. As it is, the recommendation has to be qualified.●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT - CD**

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Fuss-free in both appearance and sonics, with good detail and tonality
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Atraced of coloration in the upper midrange; limited feature set
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> Attractive and capable unit that offers great build and fine sonics
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

**OVERALL**



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT - AMP**

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Plenty of drive; vibrancy to the sound; lots of inputs
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Detail is a noticeable weakness, requiring more effort from the listener
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> Cute, versatile, well built little box with an energetic sound
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

**OVERALL**





851 Series hi-fi

# The quest for perfect music reproduction keeps our designers awake at night...

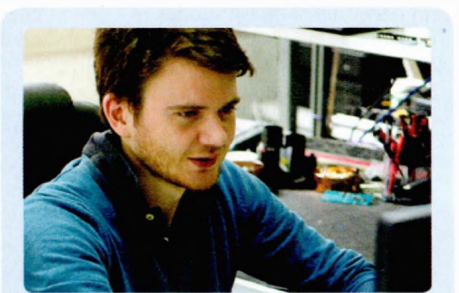
When we set-about developing our 851 Series the brief was simple. To make a hi-fi system that not only sounded better than anything else, but one that's capable of delivering stunning results from computer audio, connected home entertainment devices and of course, good old CD or vinyl.

Developed over a period of two years at Cambridge Audio's Research and Development Centre in the heart of London, the new 851 Series offers the perfect balance of powerful detailed performance and the ability to deliver exceptional results from music of all formats. Our flagship range also benefits from a raft of proprietary technologies developed for one reason only; to guarantee you a spine-tingling performance every time...

Music flexes the mind and stirs the soul and no amount of component design, scientific measurement or analysis can replicate the true judge of amazing sound; your ears. We call this our Sound First approach to hi-fi design and believe it's what sets Cambridge Audio apart from the crowd.

Available exclusively from  
**richerSOUNDS**  
[www.richersounds.com](http://www.richersounds.com)

We invite you to audition the 851 Series at your nearest Cambridge Audio specialist. To locate yours visit [www.cambridgeaudio.com/851](http://www.cambridgeaudio.com/851)



Sam Ellenby, one of our 851 Series designers

## Sound First comes as standard

"While some audio designers spend every waking moment on the test bench, we like to take time as our creations progress to listen to them and hear how they benefit our favourite music. We take them home, play them to our friends and throughout the development process, we make subtle changes to deliver the best results we possibly can."

# Cambridge Audio

Your music + our passion

Cambridge Audio and Cambridge Audio Azur are trademarks of Cambridge Audio Limited. Other product and company names are used for reference purposes only and are subject to the terms of their registration.

# How we test

Hi-Fi Choice employs the most rigorous test and measurement regime in the business. Here's how we do it...

## Unique group tests

This month's loudspeaker group test is backed up by a comprehensive set of lab tests, explains **Keith Howard**...

### GROUP TESTS

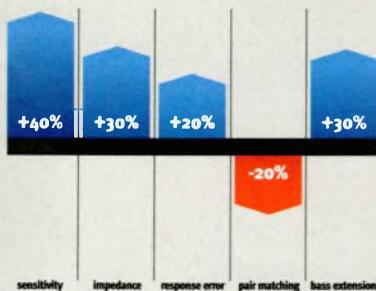
**IN THE 1980S**, you not only needed a bunch of expensive equipment to measure loudspeakers, you also needed a large anechoic chamber with thick sound absorbers covering the walls to remove reflections. That all changed when time-gated measurement techniques were introduced, allowing pseudo-anechoic measurements to be made in a normal room using a computer. Since then, the software has become so cheap that almost anyone, with an inexpensive measurement microphone and soundcard, can afford to measure speakers for themselves.

Still, to achieve the most accurate results you do need a costly, highly specified measurement microphone, and to analyse and interpret the results it helps to be able to write your own post-processing software – which is exactly what we do at *Hi-Fi Choice*!

The measurement microphone comprises a GRAS 40BE capsule, coupled with the same company's 26CB preamplifier and 12AL power supply. Together these achieve an extraordinary frequency response, much wider than that of most measurement microphones, specified as 4Hz-100kHz, 3dB. They feed a custom preamplifier built around the ultra-low distortion, ultra-low noise AD797 op-amp, and thereafter a carefully calibrated M-Audio Audiophile 192 soundcard.

ARTA software measures frequency responses using a periodic pink noise test signal, with dual-channel measurement removing the effects of the driving amplifier. An average of 10 consecutive measurements reduces any influence of environmental noise. LIMP software is used to measure impedance modulus and phase, via a connector box containing a high-precision series resistance.

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



#### SENSITIVITY

A speaker's sensitivity determines how loud the music is at a given volume control setting. We measure the sound pressure level achieved at a distance of 1m on axis for a pink noise input of 2.83Vrms over the frequency range 250Hz-20kHz, averaged for the review pair.

#### IMPEDANCE

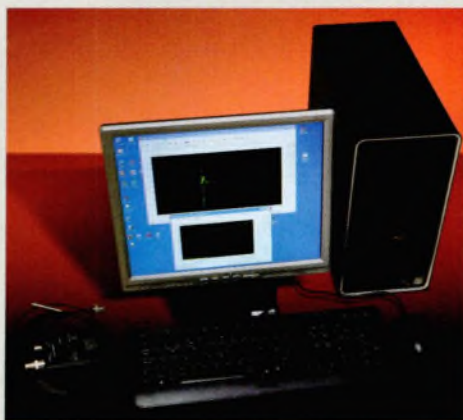
A speaker's impedance determines how easy it is for an amplifier to drive it – high impedance is easier, low impedance harder. We quantify this by measuring the minimum EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) – the load resistance that would cause the same peak power dissipation in a Class B amplifier's output stage as the speaker does, over the frequency range 20Hz-20kHz.

#### RESPONSE ERROR

To deliver a neutral tonal balance and low coloration, a speaker must give an almost flat sound pressure response versus frequency on the listening axis. We measure the difference between the highest and lowest output sound pressure level, in decibels, over the frequency range 250Hz-20kHz, using tenth-octave response smoothing.

#### PAIR MATCHING

In order to provide a stable stereo image and consistent tonal balance from both channels, a stereo pair of loudspeakers should have minimal disparity between their frequency responses. We measure the largest difference between the responses of the review pair, in decibels, over the frequency range 250Hz-20kHz, using tenth-octave response smoothing.



Measurement computer runs ARTA software for frequency response testing and LIMP software for impedance testing, plus custom-written code for post-processing of the results

#### BASS EXTENSION

Few speakers maintain their output down to the lowest audible frequency (nominally 20Hz), and bass extension has usually to be traded off against sensitivity and cabinet size. We measure bass extension using the near-field technique and then apply diffraction correction using the KHF tool in LspCAD. The quoted frequency is that at which the response has fallen by 6dB ref 200Hz.

## HOW WE TEST

### REFERENCE SYSTEM

Compact Disc player:

- Cyrus CD 8 SE2

integrated amplifier:

- Musical Fidelity AMS35i

loudspeaker cable:

- Tellurium Q Black

### TEST MUSIC

LFO

LFO



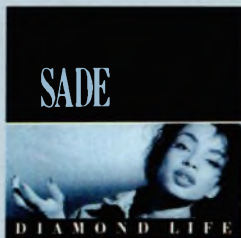
THE SPECIALS  
SINGLES



FELT  
IGNITE THE SEVEN CANNONS



SADE  
DIAMOND LIFE



# Group**test**

STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKERS £160-£495

## Grand stand

Don't be fooled by the diminutive dimensions – the latest budget standmounters give a surprisingly accomplished performance, says **David Price**...

### REMEMBER WHAT SMALL BUDGET SPEAKERS USED TO SOUND LIKE?

I do, as I reviewed a great many of them back in the day. They were often as nasty sonically as they were physically. Warp back twenty years and only a select few – such as Mission's long-lost 760 – ever turned in a decent sonic performance. Most looked like they'd been thrown together in the *Blue Peter* toolshed with a spare roll of sticky-back plastic...

Happily, 'tis no longer so. This month's range of inexpensive designs all come decently turned out; indeed some here such as the Quad 11L actually look rather exotic. And gone are the days of an agonising screeching and squawking noise, as those nasty cheap drive units and wobbly boxes murder your music. Indeed, at the risk of putting the cart before the horse, every single speaker in this test proved to be decently listenable at the very least – with a few being riotously good fun. I honestly came away more than a little surprised by some of them.

Of course, you've got to feel sorry for a small speaker. There's just no escaping the laws of physics, you can only squeeze a certain amount of bass from a baby box. And even if you're clever, it's always a trade-off between low end clout and the load put on an amplifier.

**You've got to feel sorry for a small loudspeaker; there's just no escaping the laws of physics...**

As such, each model here represents the designer's very best 'working compromise', his attempt to minimise the limitations imposed by a small box, without creating any more trouble for himself – or indeed the listener!

As such, the results differ quite a lot, and it's not just a case of black versus white, good versus bad. In many cases the speakers have been voiced to do slightly different things. That's why it's worth using this test as a starting point, then going on to audition for yourself...



### ON TEST



**Dynaudio DM 2/6**  
£495 **p25**

Easily the most expensive standmounter in this group, the Danish designed and-built Dynaudio has earned itself an enviable reputation in its short life so far. It needs to be especially good to justify its price premium relative to some strong competition; it is!



**KEF Q100**  
£380 **p27**

With a neat implementation of the company's Uni-Q driver array, the wee KEF brings a slightly different design philosophy to the table; it's not a conventional two-driver speaker like the others here. We find this translates into quite a special sound.



**Monitor Audio Silver RX1**  
£425 **p29**

The baby in the company's Silver range, this isn't the company's cheapest mini monitor, but certainly seems to be the best value, with its fine build quality, including classy looking cabinetry and drive units. It promises much, and delivers...



**Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR**  
£200 **p31**

Originally famous for large, high end loudspeakers some forty years ago, Mordaunt-Short has more recently built a name for itself producing fine budget standmounting designs. As such, the new baby of the recently refreshed Aviano range has much to live up to.



**Q Acoustics 2020i**  
£160 **p33**

The cheapest here by a country mile, this little loudspeaker looks, feels and sounds quite different to all the others. Although construction quality isn't as good, this test reveals the Q Acoustics doesn't give much away in terms of sonics. It is splendid value.



**Quad 11L Classic**  
£350 **p35**

A name traditionally associated with high end electrostatic loudspeakers, Quad has recently produced a range of fine conventional designs – of which this is the cheapest. Its superb real-wood finish will win it many friends, as will the slick sound.





## M 10 Mono Power Amplifier



The M 10 mono power amplifier is the flagship model in the T+A V-series reference line, which itself set new standards all over the world in regards to materials, construction, mechanical refinement and workmanship.

The M 10 utilizes nothing but the finest components available in a sophisticated design that fully exploits the advantages of valve and transistor technologies, while negating the disadvantages: All voltage amplification is carried out via tubes, operating in Class A mode, yielding a beautifully harmonious sonic image. The stunning performance of the M 10 is highlighted by incredible control, superb detail resolution, with excellent bandwidth, linearity and speed - the result of the ingenious combination of state-of-the-art valve technology,

an extremely innovative circuit topology and the latest transistor developments. Twin output stages facilitate bi-amping or increasing the current delivery capability, while the ability to switch the M 10 output between High Current (60 W pure Class A and up to 250 W in Class AB)

and High Power (1,000 W into 4 Ohms; 1,600 W into 2 Ohms) modes is equally innovative and offers further system flexibility.

The musical and tonal quality of valve technology determine the audible character of the M 10, while the intelligent micro-processor control system and protection circuits and extreme construction offers incredible reliability and enduring performance.

Hand built in Germany, the M 10 from T+A is available in the UK now.

For more information or to arrange a demonstration, please contact:



acoustic brands ltd

Acoustic Brands Limited (ABL) Ltd.

Tel - 07917 431 280

Email - [sales@acousticbrandslimited.com](mailto:sales@acousticbrandslimited.com)

Web - [www.acousticbrandslimited.com](http://www.acousticbrandslimited.com)



# Dynaudio

## DM 2/6 **£495**

This expensive Danish standmounter has to be good to justify its high price, and so it goes...

### DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
Denmark

**TYPE:**  
two-way

**WEIGHT:**  
5.6kg

**FEATURES:**  
• 28mm dome tweeter  
• 140mm mid/bass driver  
• 170x292x240mm

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Chord Electronics

**TELEPHONE:**  
01622 721444

**WEBSITE:**  
dynaudio.com

**T**he most expensive loudspeaker in the group, this is also smallest offering in popular manufacturer Dynaudio's range.

It's a standard two-way design, sporting a 28mm coated soft dome tweeter allied to a 140mm mid/bass driver, using a magnesium silicate polymer cone. This is then wired to what the company calls a 'high quality' first order crossover.

As with all models in the group, and indeed almost all modern loudspeakers these days, its cabinet has reflex port loading; effectively an aperture purposed to allow the bass driver to move more freely. It allows the designer to eke out more or lower bass, or higher sensitivity, than they otherwise could from a box of such compact dimensions.

As you'd expect from the famous Skanderborg company, construction quality is very good; the box is rigid and solid, with little resonance when you knock it with your knuckles – which is a simple litmus test for cabinet construction. The speaker is designed and built in Denmark.

### Sound quality

This Dynaudio does bass surprisingly well; the best low frequency test track I know of is LFO's *Low*

*Frequency Oscillation* (which was actually sold in the US in long boxes in the early nineteen nineties with a warning that shouldn't be played loud because it could destroy your speakers!), and the 2/6 sailed through it. Able to thump out copious amounts at surprisingly high volumes, it nevertheless didn't overpower the rest of the mix and stayed in tune at all times. This was especially apparent with The Specials' *Gangsters*, whose walking bassline was a joy to experience.

Despite its mid-forward balance, Felt's *Elegance* was soaring; the Dynaudios seemed to even out those searing Rickenbackers to produce a far more polished sound than I'd expected. Bass was nicely full yet never overblown, starting and stopping decently well and filling out the listening room with no sense of stress. Indeed across the midband, the 2/6 is a real class act; throwing out large amounts of detail in a vast recorded acoustic. Instruments aren't especially well located, the Dynaudios instead serving up something of a Phil Spector-like wall of sound that was expansive and engrossing. Not even the gritty electric organ in *Gangsters* managed to knock the speaker off balance; it stayed crisp and even at all times.

Treble is a treat, too. Sade's *Smooth Operator* sounded surprisingly assured, with a sophisticated tonal balance, no sign of sibilance or spitch on hi-hat cymbals and vocals. Whereas some budget boxes can shout on the sax solo, causing you to lunge backwards in horror, the 2/6 remained utterly composed. At the same time, all backing instruments were nicely carried, those lovely keyboard glides very clearly communicated, along with some pleasingly percussive electric piano. The effect was really rather beguiling.

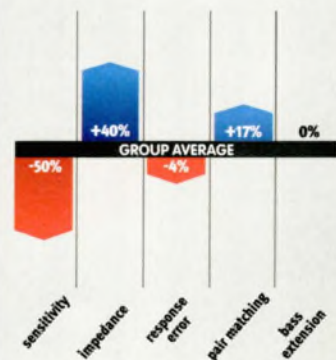


Overall, I found this an unexpectedly impressive small loudspeaker. In absolute terms, treble is a little imprecise (although never harsh), and there's a very slight sense of the cabinet playing a part in the upper bass. Rhythmically it's very good, yet never really manages more than this; one never gets that sense of transcendental timing that some small speakers can confer. Still, considering how rough and ready so many other baby boxes are, I was rather taken aback by the Dynaudio's all-round polish.

### ON TEST

Dynaudio claims 86dB sensitivity for the DM 2/6, but our measurements recorded a pink noise figure of 83.4dB – over 2.5dB less than spec and lowest of this group at over 2dB below the group average. This is partly explained by a higher than average minimum impedance modulus of 4.9 ohms – fully justifying Dynaudio's 6 ohms nominal figure – and a test-best minimum EPDR of 2.7 ohms, which together indicate a speaker that is easy to drive. The on-axis frequency response is slightly concave, but the frequency response error of 6.0dB ( $\pm 3.0$ dB) is a good result, as is the commendably tight pair matching error of 1.2dB ( $\pm 0.6$ dB). Bass extension is decent for a speaker of this size at 52Hz for -6dB ref 200Hz. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall shows fast initial decay across a wide frequency band but a resonant ridge is apparent at just below 5kHz. KH

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Lovely, large, wide, smooth and sumptuous sound; classy build

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks outright power and passion; needs powerful amp

**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **WESAY:** Highly refined standmounter that should win many friends

**EASE OF DRIVE**  
★★★★★

#### OVERALL



# OPPO®



BDP-93EU



BDP-95EU



BDP-95EU

"...OPPO should be congratulated for a remarkable achievement."



BDP-95EU

"...BDP-95EU can be considered reference grade kit."



BDP-93EU

"...one of the best universal players we've seen."



BDP-93EU

"OPPO are to be congratulated for raising the bar yet again."



BDP-95EU

"...you will love the OPPO BDP-95EU. Recommended!"



BDP-93EU

"The OPPO BDP-93EU becomes the Blu-ray 3D reference standard."

For movie enthusiasts, audiophiles and those who take their entertainment very seriously.

[www.oppo-bluray.co.uk](http://www.oppo-bluray.co.uk)

# KEF Q100 **£380**

A design with a difference, this sports KEF's trademark Uni-Q array. Can it rise above the opposition?

## DETAILS

ORIGIN:  
UK

TYPE:  
two-way

WEIGHT:  
5.9kg

FEATURES:  
• 25mm dome  
tweeter

• 130mm mid/bass  
driver

• 300x180x272mm

DISTRIBUTOR:  
KEF Audio

TELEPHONE:  
01622 672261

WEBSITE:  
kef.com

The latest in a very long line of little loudspeakers from the KEF brand, generations have grown up with the Q100's predecessors, such as the ubiquitous Coda.

Given the conservative nature of the budget market, KEF is to be applauded for its daring in offering its Uni-Q array in what's basically a budget box. Essentially this means setting the tweeter on the mid/bass driver directly, making – effectively – a single driver that gives a 'point source' where all the sound apparently comes from one place in space. This should make for pin-sharp stereo imaging within an expansive soundstage, and indeed so it proved...

The Q100 has a 25mm aluminium tweeter set into the 130mm mid/bass unit; the crossover point is 2.5Hz. The cabinet is a nicely done affair, offered in a choice of Black Oak, English Cherry and European Walnut real wood finishes. Round the back there's a clever rear panel board; offering a choice of mono and bi-wiring via a neat little link switch.

## Sound quality

Right from the off, the Q100 had a very appetising sound; immediate and full of life, it really caught the

energy behind The Specials' *Gangsters*, majoring on the hi-hat and snare work, and its interplay with the rhythmic guitar. The more explicit midband let the bright tones of the Farfisa electronic organ shine through in a way that the more demur and civilised Dynaudio had not. The theme continued with the midband, where the tom-tom and snare work on the Sade track came across with a sense of urgency that most other boxes here lacked, aside from the Monitor Audio and Q Acoustics. At the same time, bass guitar sounded tuneful and supple; the KEF made a nice noise.

It was stereo imaging that the KEF excelled at – all the various strands in the mix were beautifully projected and located across a believable acoustic. I really enjoyed the middle-eight in *Smooth Operator*, which had a powerful, rapturous sax solo, bubbling with percussive detail and a lovely bouncy upper bassline. At the same time, Sade Adu's vocals came over with convincing passion – being immediate and expressive. Still, sometimes it felt like she'd been singing all night, as her voice was slightly edgier compared to the creamy-smooth tones of its Quad and Dynaudio rivals...

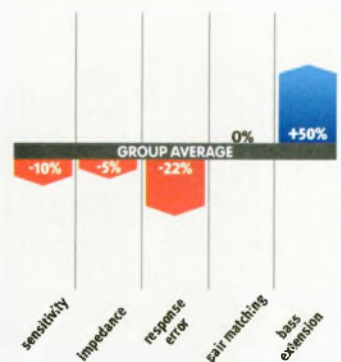
Moving to the intense, dense and very possibly degenerate strains of Felt's *Elegance*, and the KEF boxes punched out into the room with real commitment, majoring on the soaring melodies of the guitars, which were set somewhat closely against a backdrop of electric organ and drums. There was definitely less 'room to roam' inside the mix compared to some other boxes in this test, and a slightly narrower recorded acoustic which fell back less far. But still the KEFs proved great fun; only slight treble coarseness stemmed my enjoyment.

The relentless pounding of LFO wasn't enough to knock this KEF off course; it duly turned in a fast, grippy and engaging experience. In some ways the Q100 proved better at capturing the raw energy of the track, whereas most others here sounded more sedate. But the downside was that there a touch more boxy coloration than some. Ditto the treble; those looped Roland drum machine hi-hats sounded just a little less smooth than they should. Overall though, I found the Q100 an endearing and enjoyable performer.

## ON TEST

Our pink noise sensitivity figure of 85.0dB suggests that KEF's 86dB specification is slightly optimistic and puts the Q100 a little below the group average. This is despite a minimum impedance modulus of 3.9 ohms – which indicates a 4 ohms nominal rating, not the claimed 8 ohms – and a minimum EDPR of 2.0 ohms, slightly below the group average. Payback comes in the form of the most extended bass response in the group at 40Hz for -6dB ref 200Hz, but the roll-off is pretty abrupt which may impact on transient performance. The on-axis frequency response trend is essentially flat with the much reduced treble switchback of the new Uni-Q driver ensuring the tightest error figure here at 4.6dB (±2.3dB). Pair matching is less impressive at 3.2dB (±1.6dB) and the CSD waterfall indicates fast initial energy decay but has some upper-mid and treble 'hash'. KH

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY

★★★★☆

#### VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★☆

#### BUILD QUALITY

★★★★☆

#### EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★☆

**LIKE:** Musically engaging sound; stereo imaging; clean styling, very decent build

**DISLIKE:** A little midband coarseness; lacks refinement

**WE SAY:** An entertaining listen, but faces tough competition all the same

### OVERALL

★★★★☆



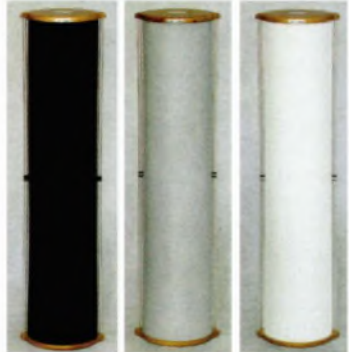
**Are you listening to your room or to your audio equipment?**

By controlling the unwanted room resonances and reflections you release the full potential of your audio system with improved imaging and create a larger sound-stage.

Acustica Applicata



Phero



DaaDs



Polifemo

- ACUSTICA APPLICATA
- ACCUPHASE
- AUDIO ANALOGUE
- AVALON ACOUSTICS
- BENZ-MICRO
- CARDAS
- CONRAD-JOHNSON
- DAVINCIAUDIO LABS
- FINITE ELEMENTE
- FURUTECH
- FUTUREGLASS
- HRS
- KARAN ACOUSTICS
- LEBEN
- LYRA
- MAGNUM DYNALAB
- MIT CABLES
- NAGRA
- NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE
- PEAK CONSULT
- SILTECH
- SME LIMITED
- SPECTRAL AUDIO
- STAX
- TRANSFIGURATION
- ZANDEN

**Are you listening to distortion created by acoustic feedback or to your audio equipment?**

By eliminating the structure-borne and air-borne resonances that feed back to the audio equipments' chassis, you remove distortion revealing the true sound intended by the designer.

Harmonic Resolution Systems (HRS)



Isolation Bases



Nimbus Couplers  
and Damping Plates



SXR Audio Stand

**Please call for advice on how to achieve the best results with these products**

For further info about any of our products please visit our website [www.audioconsultants.co.uk](http://www.audioconsultants.co.uk)

Demonstrations by appointment

Mondays to Saturdays 10am to 6pm. It is advisable to call us before visiting. Part exchange welcome. Ex-demonstration and previously owned equipment listed on our website.

# Monitor Audio Silver RX1 **£425**

Pricey, polished looking and immaculately presented, but will this speaker's sonics stand up?

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
UK  
**TYPE:**  
two-way  
**WEIGHT:**  
6.8kg  
**FEATURES:**  
• 25mm dome  
tweeter  
• 125mm mid/bass  
driver  
• 312x185x240mm  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Monitor Audio  
**TELEPHONE:**  
01268 740580  
**WEBSITE:**  
monitormedia.co.uk

**T**his company has gone from strength to strength of late, with some very attractively voiced models at a range of prices. The Silver RX1 is the smallest of the middle range of Monitor Audio speakers, and is the second most expensive in this group.

It sports a 25mm gold tweeter with damped rear chamber, paired to a 150mm mid/bass driver employing an aluminium cone in a cast polymer chassis; crossover point is 3kHz. 'HiVe II port technology' is the name given to that little hole in the box!

Being pricey (in relative terms), it's no surprise that the substantial 19mm MDF cabinet has a high quality real wood veneer in a choice of walnut or natural oak; high-gloss piano finishes are also available. Inside, the box has a 'single bolt through driver' system, for increased overall bracing and rigidity, with extensive cross-bracing. The Silver RX1 feels like a very high quality product indeed – as nice as the Quad – which is really saying something.

## Sound quality

Take the smoothness of the Dynaudio and alloy this to the KEF's energy, and you'd get something not

far from the RX1. Tonal balance is a little darker than the KEF, yet it has much of the spark. Indeed, Sade's *Diamond Life* was an interesting pointer to this speaker's inner self. It set up a warm, spacious groove, almost as if the music had slowed down and you could hear into the mix more (always a good sign, as it's not blurring the notes). I suddenly found myself able to lock on to individual strands better, and enjoy following the maracas and tom-tom work. Suddenly I wasn't just hearing notes either; they had differing amounts of dynamic articulation; things weren't all shouting at me. Sade Adu's silken tones calmed compared to the KEF, which made her sound closer to Kim Carnes!

Despite such refinement, The Specials track was positively riotous; massive power and punch allied to oodles of emotion made for a song that you just wanted to get up and dance to, even if you were half your age the last time you did... I loved the way it was such good fun, yet so couch and in control all the same. Bass was stronger perhaps than all the others here, yet tuneful and less prone to signposting the cabinet's boxiness. Treble was spacious, delicate and crisp, carrying all the harmonics from a trumpet, for example, where the Dynaudio sort-of

polished them out of the mix and the KEF had remodelled them into a slightly distracting sibilance.

This was just what the doctor ordered for the Felt track, whose guitars chimed like bells at a wedding. On lesser loudspeakers they could overpower, but the RX1 managed to capture their essential power, yet never had you running for your nearest packet of paracetamol. Instead, these speakers served up a spacious recorded

acoustic and got to work conveying everything inside it with painstaking

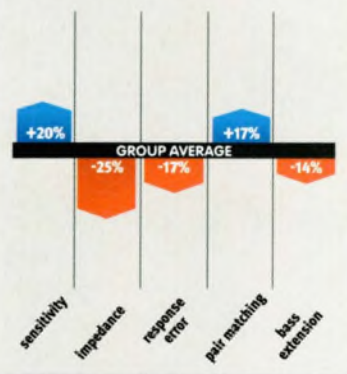
precision. Whereas *Elegance* had sounded like a morass of sound with the KEF, the RX1s sliced and diced every track up then knitted it back altogether again with consummate skill and musicality.

The Monitor Audio showed grace under pressure with LFO; that monster bassline didn't detract from a beautiful wash of synth sound further up the frequency range. It sparkled away, scything through the morass of thick bass. Overall then, a deeply impressive performer, on every possible level.

## ON TEST

Monitor Audio's claimed 89dB sensitivity is distinctly optimistic according to our measurements which recorded 86.3dB on pink noise, although that's still a little above the group average. The specified 6 ohms nominal impedance is also not justified by our measured minimum impedance modulus of 3.5 ohms, which suggests that a 4 ohms nominal figure is more appropriate. Minimum EPDR was only just below the group average at 2.1 ohms, though, so the RX1 is not a particularly difficult speaker to drive. On-axis frequency response shows a very large peak at about 25kHz due to the tweeter dome resonance, but the in-band response error is tightly controlled at 5.0dB ( $\pm 2.5$ dB), as is the pair matching error at an excellent 1.2dB ( $\pm 0.6$ dB). Bass extension is less exceptional at 57Hz for -6dB ref 200Hz but the CSD waterfall shows fast initial energy decay. KH

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Polished and classy sound yet extremely musical too; super build and finish

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing at all at the price...

**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Could easily cost twice the money and still impress; an excellent standmounter!

**EASE OF DRIVE**  
★★★★★

### OVERALL



## DALI Introduces FAZON F5

- Award Winning High Definition Loudspeaker

The Shape of Brilliance



FAZON F5 is the image of future loudspeaker design and performance, matching the varying moods and needs of your day. From sleepy radio listening in the morning and reflecting music enjoyment in the evening FAZON F5 gets shape into sound and sound into good shape.



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

# Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR £200

Latest in a long line of mini monitors from this well-established company, how does it compare?

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
UK/China

**TYPE:**  
two-way

**WEIGHT:**  
5.0kg

**FEATURES:**  
• 25mm dome tweeter

• 125mm mid/bass driver

• 275x179x267mm

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Audio Partnership

**TELEPHONE:**  
020 7960 2200

**WEBSITE:**  
mordaunt-short.co.uk

**H**ere's a brand that's always had a powerful presence in the budget standmounter market; yours truly cut his hi-fi teeth on a pair of much-loved MS10 bookshelf designs back in the mists of time!

Again, there's nothing remarkable about the Aviano 1XR in engineering terms; instead of attempting to reinvent the wheel it sticks to the tried and tested formula used elsewhere of two drive units and one reflex port. Specifically, there's a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter and a 130mm Continuous Profile Cone aluminium woofer. The latter is a little unusual to look at, and features in all the company's speakers right up to the top Performance series.

It's a well-made product, with – in my view – a particularly crisp, attractive modern appearance. Inside the cabinet there's substantial internal bracing, which is said to support the mid/bass unit. The company claims to have paid particular attention to driver matching. The high density MDF cabinet feels more solid than the similarly lightweight Q Acoustics, and is nicely finished.

## Sound quality

A dramatic contrast to the Monitor Audio, this little loudspeaker

sounded feisty and fun, but still a little overwhelmed and out of its depth by the proceedings. While I loved its tuneful and rhythmic midband, bass was allowed to dominate things just a touch too much. While this would be fine if the Aviano had a big and powerful low end, it didn't, and the result was that with the LFO track, the speaker sounded a little breathless.

Going back to my headphones group test a month ago (*HFC 359*), the Aviano reminded me very much of the Sennheiser HD650; it's strong from the upper bass through to the upper treble, but poor at frequency extremes. It makes for a very nice listen in some contexts and with some types of music. For example, Sade's voice on *Smooth Operator* was lovely; delicate and creamy. Furthermore, she took on an almost confessional tone; there was an emotional directness there that I liked. Even the accompanying saxophone seemed to be playing just for me, while the piano work was lovely and supple rhythmically speaking...

Yet listen further up the frequency range and the higher treble seemed rolled off; almost as if you'd turned the top level pad on your eighties graphic equaliser down! Cymbals lacked sparkle; especially ride cymbals in the middle eight, which almost disappeared. Ditto at the other end of the spectrum; bass guitars were big and strong further up the fretboard and yet didn't really want to know lower down. Unsurprising I know, considering the size, but still others did much better in the group...

This was noticeable on The Specials' *Gangsters*. It sounded too bassy up to a point; there was definitely a sweet spot where the cabinet was joining in the fun. At the same time, despite lots of apparent low end, the Aviano

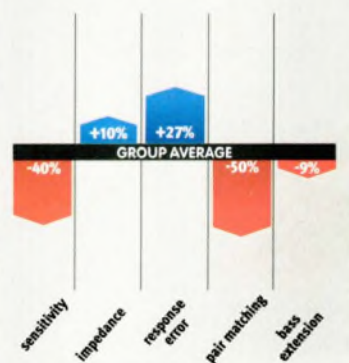
appeared to be huffing and puffing just a touch too much. It detracted from the nice, clean midband; Terry Hall's normally nasal vocals were carried skilfully and the off-the-beat organ work was satisfying. Again however, treble seemed a tad curtailed, knocking some bite from the drum kit and making this very 'Radio 1' band sound a touch too BBC Radio 2!

Overall, Mordaunt-Short's Aviano 1XR is a good little speaker that's fine value for money, but struggled a bit in this capable company.

## ON TEST

Mordaunt-Short's claimed 89dB sensitivity for the 1XR is almost 5dB higher than the pink noise figure of 84.1dB that we recorded – second lowest of the group. The specified '8 ohms compatible' impedance also doesn't square well with our measured impedance minimum of 4.3 ohms. Minimum EPDR is just under 2.0 ohms, but as this occurs at a high 6.1kHz the 1XR remains a fairly easy load to drive. Response error of 11.2dB (±5.6dB) is the worst in test, but largely accounted for by the tweeter dome resonance being only just above 20kHz. Elsewhere the response error is much lower, despite a clearly concave trend. Pair matching is poor at 5.2dB (±2.6dB), with a significant response disparity around crossover. Bass extension is about average at 54Hz, but the CSD waterfall is exceptionally clean with fast initial energy decay and little sign of resonance. KH

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY

★★★★☆

**LIKE:** Nicely musical, well able to carry a tune; classy styling

#### VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★☆

**DISLIKE:** Poor frequency extremes – treble lacks sparkle; lower bass light

#### BUILD QUALITY

★★★★☆

**WE SAY:** Fine value speaker voiced to give an enjoyable sound, but lacks transparency

#### EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★☆

#### OVERALL

★★★★☆



# twenty series

Platinum  
Twenty Year Warranty



"There's a purity to the sound which is simply astonishing - they're truly fabulous speakers"  
Jan '12



"There are very few standmounts which offer the degree of immediacy, openness and musicality that the twenty.22 can deliver" -  
June '12

twenty.22  
Diamond Black

Ask to hear the **twenty.22** at:

Audio T, Southampton  
Audio Venue, Maidenhead  
Bartlett's HiFi, London  
Basically Sound, Norfolk  
Billy Vee, London  
Divine Audio, Desborough  
Doug Brady HiFi, Warrington

Fanthorpes, Hull  
Frank Harvey, Coventry  
Home Media, Maidstone  
Lintone Audio, Gateshead  
Movement Audio, Poole  
Music Matters, Hatch End  
Nottingham HiFi, Nottingham

Oxford Audio Consultants, Oxford  
Salisbury HiFi, Salisbury  
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Yeovil  
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Bristol  
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Bromley  
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Leeds  
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Reading

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Sevenoaks  
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Witham  
Signals, Ipswich  
Soundcraft HiFi, Ashford  
The Home Cinema Centre, Edinburgh  
Unilef Sound & Vision, New Malden  
Zinc HT, Borehamwood



**PMC**<sup>®</sup>  
www.pmc-speakers.com

T +44 (0) 870 4441044  
sales@promonitor.co.uk





# Q Acoustics 2020i £160

Small, lightly built and inexpensive to buy – can these budget boxes possibly compete?

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
EU/China  
**TYPE:**  
two-way  
**WEIGHT:**  
5.0kg  
**FEATURES:**  
• 25mm dome tweeter  
• 125mm mid/bass driver  
• 265x278x170mm  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Q Acoustics  
**TELEPHONE:**  
01279 501111  
**WEBSITE:**  
qacoustics.co.uk

**T**his is the cheapest in the group, but I chose to include it because I know it to be exceptionally good at its price, and wanted to see how it would fare against more expensive rivals. It's designed in Germany, voiced with British input and built in China.

The two-way reflex loaded box holds a 25mm ferro-fluid cooled cloth dome tweeter and a 125mm mid/bass driver that crosses over at 2.9kHz. There's the option of both wall-mounting and standmounting, with a bespoke wall bracket available from Q Acoustics for the former application.

The cabinet is finished in gloss black; although to a highish standard you can see that the 2020i is built down to a price – something you can't see so much from the likes of the only slightly pricier Mordaunt-Short, for example. It's a little light and unsubstantial feeling, and I think the lettering around the tweeter is a little tacky, too. Still, thought has been put into the design; I loved the underside location of the cabling, which makes the speaker look tidy in use, especially in small spaces.

## Sound quality

From the opening bars of Sade's *Smooth Operator*, the 2020i showed

itself to be writhing with energy. Despite its diminutive dimensions, it was as if it had a glass and a half of Red Bull and was now up to take on the world. Indeed, so self-assured and full of beans was it that I half expected it to end up in a fight with a pair of JBL Control Monitors! This classy slice of eighties pop sounded less cafe bar and more mosh pit, such was this speaker's eagerness to cut to the musical jugular...

Interestingly, while it was tonally rather lively, you wouldn't call it particularly harsh. Instead, it achieved much of its intensity by sheer grip and transient speed; it seemed able to get right into the hi-hat work of the drummer, for example, and impart his slight looseness around the beat which is such a joy to hear compared to the clinical precision of a drum machine. At the same time, kick drum was so taut it felt like the Q Acoustics had moved your head right into it, and bass guitar was all speed and sinew, whereas the likes of the Monitor Audio had given it so much more warmth. It made for a super-tight rock sound, more akin to Eclipse TD speakers than almost anything else I've heard recently, for example.

LFO's *LFO* was *always* going to be interesting. The 2020i didn't have much in the cupboard in terms of bass weight; it's only a small box after all. Yet it still managed to make



the music sound amazingly urgent and dramatic, as if soundtracking a dramatic fast jet plane flight under the radar. Every nuance thundered, every slightest tonal shift resounded all around the room. Although it didn't give a massively widescreen presentation, the 2020i locked down stereo images like no other speaker

here; instruments in the mix seemed to be nailed to vast virtual concrete

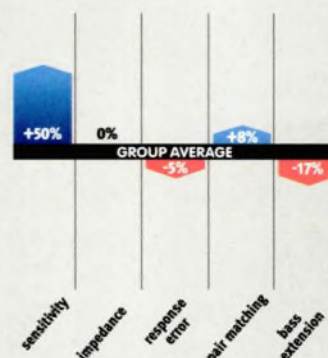
pillars in the middle of my listening room, leaving me in no doubt about where they were placed in the recording. Indeed, this was obvious even in the melange of sound that was Felt's *Elegance*; things took a slightly smaller, but closer scale. This little speaker brought the listener more upfront – just like you'd been jammed up against the stage, able to look up at the band and see the whites of their eyes!

This is a love-it-or-loathe-it sort of speaker; it's superb in my view, but you should make your own mind up.

## ON TEST

Q Acoustics' claimed 88dB sensitivity for the 2020i accords excellently with our pink noise figure of 88.2dB. The measured minimum impedance modulus of 4.0 ohms also amply justifies the specified 4 ohms nominal figure. Despite this the minimum EPDR is slightly above the group average at 2.2 ohms, so the 2020i does not present a particularly testing load to its partnering amplifier. While the on-axis response has slightly elevated high treble, the 5.8dB (±2.9dB) response error is below the group average, as is the fine 2.0dB (±1.0dB) pair matching. Bass extension is worst of the group at 58Hz for -6dB ref 200Hz but there's little between most of the group and initial roll-off is gentle, suggesting tight transient response. The CSD waterfall is characterised by fast initial energy decay, but resonant ridges are apparent at about 800Hz and 1.3kHz. KH

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Feisty, exuberant sound; involving presentation; superb value for money

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** limited frequency extremes

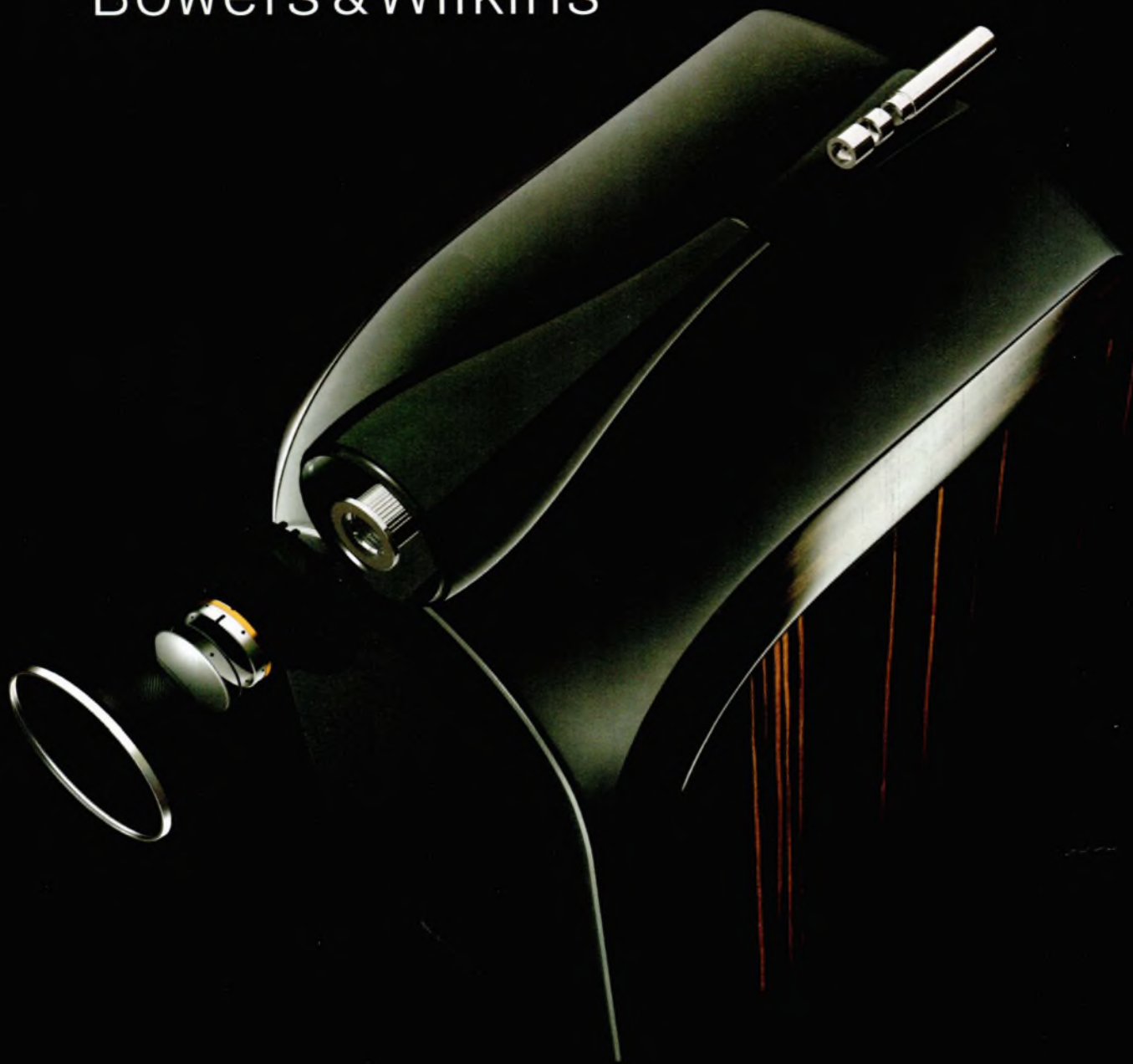
**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Excellent value budget box with a highly enjoyable sound

**EASE OF DRIVE**  
★★★★★

### OVERALL



# Bowers & Wilkins



## Engineered for the finest moments

**PM1** There are times when only music matters. When you want to forget the world and simply lose yourself in sound. The PM1 was designed for these moments. Its carbon-braced tweeter, Kevlar bass/midrange driver and Matrix™ braced cabinet combine to make everything else seem insignificant. It might just be the most refined small speaker we've ever built. **Listen and you'll see.**

[www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk/pm1](http://www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk/pm1)

# Quad 11L Classic **£350**

This box offers an amazing quality of finish at the price, but does it sound as good as it looks?

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
UK/China

**TYPE:**  
two-way

**WEIGHT:**  
6.3kg

**FEATURES:**  
• 25mm dome tweeter  
• 125mm mid/bass driver  
• 310x190x263mm

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
IAG

**TELEPHONE:**  
01480 447700

**WEBSITE:**  
quad-hifi.co.uk

**S**easoned audiophiles will associate Quad with large and expensive electrostatic panel speakers, but the 11L Classic is very different. In recent years the company has started making a range of compact, conventional box designs, and the 11L Classic is the smallest and most affordable.

It's (surprise surprise!) another two-way bass reflex product, with a 25mm fabric dome tweeter and a 125mm woven Kevlar cone mid/bass unit. The two cross over at 2.2kHz.

Construction quality is excellent; much purple prose has been lavished on the build of Quad's budget boxes, and I feel duty-bound to join in. The real wood finishes (Cherry, Piano Cherry, Deep Rose, Black) could almost belong to a £2,000 speaker. Furthermore, the cabinet feels very solid and 'all of a piece', and all the associated fixtures and fittings are excellent, from the speaker terminals to the grilles. The 11L even comes with gloves to avoid getting your greasy paw prints all over them!

## Sound quality

The likes of Q Acoustics' 2020i is very easy to review – bubbling with personality – but the Quad is not.

Indeed the 11L Classic's key distinguishing feature is, ermm, its lack of key distinguishing features! If you're a subscriber to the school of thought that says it's not for hi-fi to have a personality, but for its owner, then you'll love this small speaker.

Sade's *Smooth Operator* was carried in a most pleasant way. There was little of the sense of the interplay between the different percussive instruments, unlike the Q Acoustics or KEF; but instead an altogether larger, smoother and more widescreen presentation was preferred. You might call it subdued; others would call it civilised; whatever it was, it was satisfying and sumptuous. I was impressed with the evenness of the tonal balance; there was no sweet spot with this speaker, it didn't emphasise anything. Vocals were highly accomplished, lending Sade's voice a rich, velvety, dark tonality. Saxophone was raunchy, but never attempted to etch itself on your cranium. Hi-hats sounded soft but delicate, glistening like stars in the night sky. Maracas did their thing, violins glided behind and the electric piano deftly pushed the song along. All was well in the world with the 11L Classic...

Could such a smoothie make anything of The Specials' *Gangsters*? Surprisingly, yes. I wasn't expecting this, but it seemed to 'pick up its skirts and run', throwing off the high heels and donning a pair of Nike Air Jordans. The 11L's tweeter is a lovely smooth thing, but seems to airbrush things; certainly the track's percussive bite was lost, along with a touch of air and space up top. But lower down, across the midband, the song was bouncy and beguiling. I hadn't quite expected this; it rather caught me on the hop.

The ethereal strains of Felt's *Elegance* proved very enjoyable; the

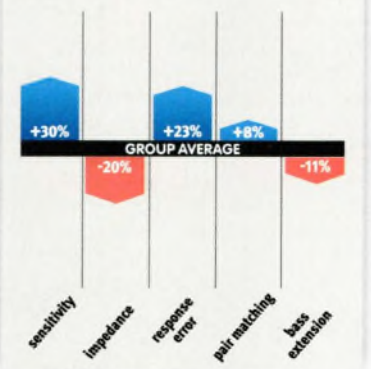
Quad again doing its thing of serving up a warm bass of no particular character, along with a soft and downy treble, between which a musically engaging and impressively detailed midband sat. Soundstaging was wide, depth perspective was particularly good.

The Quad 11L continued to impress with the electronic music of LFO, staying in control, clean and detailed – unafraid of that swingeing bassline. Ultimately, this loudspeaker just does everything decently, yet isn't outstanding in any respect.

## ON TEST

In the Quad tradition of conservative specification, the 11L is the only speaker in this group to have a specified sensitivity significantly less than that we measured. Quad says 86dB, we say 87.1dB. The 6 ohms nominal impedance is optimistic, though: we measured a minimum modulus of 3.6 ohms, indicating a 4 ohms rating, and the lowest EPDR here at a little over 1.7 ohms, making the Quad the toughest load in this group. Response error was above average at 10.0dB ( $\pm 5.0$ dB) because the output follows a downward trend from 1kHz to 10kHz, followed by a peak in the extreme treble. Pair matching was much better, though, at 2.0dB ( $\pm 1.0$ dB). Bass extension is a little short of the group average at 55Hz for -6dB ref 200Hz, but the cumulative spectral decay waterfall is exceptionally clean with fast initial energy decay and little indication of resonance. KH

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**EASE OF DRIVE**  
★★★★★

**LIKE:** Smooth, svelte sound; superb finish  
**DISLIKE:** Slightly curtailed treble; not especially musical  
**WE SAY:** Fine sensible shoes loudspeaker with superb woodwork

### OVERALL



**FURUTECH**  
PURE TRANSMISSION



WWW.FURUTECH.COM

sound foundations  
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

+44(0)1276-501-392  
info@soundfoundations.co.uk

# The ADL GT40 ...



**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
**AWARDS 2011**  
**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
CABLES & ACCESSORIES  
**FURUTECH ADL GT40**

**TONE**Audio  
Magazine  
**2010**  
Product of the Year  
Award

**PC ADVISOR**  
RECOMMENDED

**AEx**  
Audio Excellence Award 2011

**Hi-Fi**  
Choice  
RECOMMENDED

## a master of all trades.

phono stage • USB DAC • USB ADC • headphone amplifier

**ADL**  
ALPHA DESIGN LABS by **FURUTECH** Tokyo • Japan  
service@adl-av.com

sound foundations  
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

+44(0)1276-501-392  
info@soundfoundations.co.uk

# Listening test verdict

**David Price** puts this month's group testing into context. How do the contenders fare in the great scheme of things?

Unlike last month's group test, which had an astonishingly diverse range of performers, every speaker in this test did well – although some obviously better than others...

To my ears, least impressive was Mordaunt-Short's Aviano 1XR. It's not a bad design by any means, but I still think it struggled here to really get into the groove. It's a pretty warm and inoffensive sounding speaker with a nicely lucid midband, but was just a little muted up top for my tastes, and nor did it really ever make the music magic. This was especially apparent with bass-rich tracks, where it sounded a touch more stressed than it really should...

The KEF Q100 proved pretty close in ultimate ability, but managed to hide its tracks better; no small box is going to be perfect, but the KEF cheekily sidesteps its issues and stands there with a grin on its face for you. Again, frequency extremes are limited; its treble is a little lumpen and bass doesn't charm like others here.

The Quad 11L Classic is really rather good all round, presenting a very competent face to the world. Perhaps that's its problem though, as it's a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. Others will love it for this, but I personally couldn't help myself falling for some of the most characterful designs in the group...

One of which is the QAcoustics 2020i. No, scratch that – the *only* one of which is the QAcoustics. This is a 'Marmite' product, a speaker you'll not be able to live with, or without, depending on your proclivities. In some ways more flawed than the Quad (in its treble, for example), it just makes music so much fun that you can't say no. Well, I couldn't!

Dynaudio's DM 2/6 is the runner up. I found it an amazingly sophisticated speaker for the money, an ideal partner for cheaper ancillaries which it will flatter like a politician chatting up the voters. It's close to the Quad in many respects, but pips it with a wider, brighter and more expansive sound.



**Monitor Audio's Silver RX1 gets to crack open the jeroboam of champers up on the podium!** It has all the strengths of the super-svelte Dynaudio with most of the *joie de vivre* of the QAcoustics. Everything you play through it sounds vital and engaging, subtle and detailed, polished and poised. It simply didn't sound anything like a budget box.

## AT A GLANCE



Make/model	Dynaudio DM 2/6	KEF Q100	Monitor Audio Silver RX1	Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	Q Acoustics 2020i	Quad 11L Classic
<b>Price</b>	£495	£380	£425	£200	£160	£350
<b>Sound</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Value</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Build</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Ease of drive</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Conclusion</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Key features</b>	Highly polished all rounder with a sophisticated and musical nature	Crisp, punchy, engaging standmounter with fine stereo imaging; not so finessed though...	Brilliant mixture of power and polish; infectiously musical yet civilised and couth, too	Nice, sweet, lyrical midband makes vocals a joy but bass and treble extremes not so hot	Cheap but very cheerful. Riotously good fun to listen to on rock and dance, but lacks subtlety	Beautifully made with a classy sound that never offends, but neither does it excite
<b>real wood finish</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
<b>bi-wirable</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>wall bracket</b>	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
<b>grilles supplied</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>reflex port</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

## TRY WITH THESE

**CD PLAYER:**  
Cyrus CD 8 SE2 **£1,200**

The winner of *Hi-Fi Choice's* recent CD player group test (HFC 358), there's a lot to love about this svelte silver disc spinner. Aside from the fine build and aesthetics, its smooth, musical sound positively sparkles. Any of the above speakers would be a pleasure with the Cyrus as a source.



**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER:**  
Roksan Caspian M2 **£1,650**

Another recent *Hi-Fi Choice* winner (HFC 356), this integrated amplifier has a wonderfully musically expressive nature, allied to a lovely rich tonality. And it is powerful enough to drive any of the speakers here to high levels in a medium sized listening room – so it's a highly capable party animal, too!



**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER:**  
Rega Brio R **£480**

While all these boxes benefit from a big, punchy, amplifier such as the Roksan, if your budget doesn't reach, then try this. The baby Rega gives little away in terms of sonics, with its subtle, infectious musicality that always impresses. It's down on power slightly, but you can't have it all!



**£700**  
**TRADE-IN DISCOUNT**  
Roksan CD Exchange Offer



**M2**  
SERIES



**ROKSAN**

**ROKSAN**

**HENLEY**



Caspian



Attessa



DP-1

# ROKSAN

## £700 TRADE-IN SCHEME

Roksan Audio and Henley Designs are delighted to announce a product exchange program on a scale like no other. In 2009 we showed our commitment to our customers by increasing the warranty term on all products to 5 years. Now we're back with a CD Player exchange scheme that allows existing customers to dramatically elevate their systems in a more affordable way.

Any owners of the Caspian, Attessa or DP-1 CD Player - whether the unit works or not - can return their old model to an authorised M2 reseller in exchange for £700 off the value of a brand new M2 CD Player!\* In a market where trade-in values are falling sharply, we are continuing to support our loyal customers.

The Caspian M2 CD Player is a multi-award winning feat of engineering. The stylish and innovative design delights the eyes as well as the ears, and it represents the pinnacle of Roksan's technical prowess.

For more information on your nearest reseller, contact Henley Designs.

Web: [www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk) | Tel: 01235 511 166 | Email: [sales@henleydesigns.co.uk](mailto:sales@henleydesigns.co.uk)

\* Offer expires: 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2012



# Three's company

Apple's iPad 3 is the latest, greatest tablet computer – as well as being an object of consumer desire. But is it of any interest to the audiophile?

**Patrick Cleasby** tries it for hi-fi size...

**A**pple's sexy new tablet computer launched a few months back, promising faster processing, a better display and all number of other little extras that the last one couldn't. The result was an instant sell-out and the gadget has been breaking records (of the sales variety) ever since...

In its earlier incarnations, one popular criticism was that it was a product in search of a purpose – lots of people bought iPads without really knowing *why*, or just what they were going to do with them. Now, however, it has grown up into a powerful tool which can be purposed for a variety of tasks – including the storage, playback and/or general enjoyment of music...

What this new model brings to the iPad party is the lovely new 'Retina' display, which is essentially just a screen with high enough resolution to make actual pixel discernment very difficult. This – using the right applications – makes the new iPad a great window on your world of music.

Of course, the iPad is not in itself a purpose-dedicated music machine. It *can* play tunes, but has limited memory and being connected to Wi-Fi or a phone network most of the time it's not exactly a low noise source – computer audio purists use and/or choose wired Ethernet links for the best sound. Then there's the obvious extra weight and depth the new iPad has gained, thanks to the heavier duty batteries it needs – this doesn't make it a famously good mobile music machine either. All this doesn't bode terribly well you might think, so what can it actually do, and how well?

## Play away!

On a very straightforward level, the iPad can be used as a music player with the bundled Music app. It's pretty much the same as that on earlier iPads, which is to say it's a fancy version of iTunes, and so should be familiar to most people. The main benefit of the new unit is that

**If you love to fiddle, you can't beat the fun of trying to get the most out of this ingenious device!**

whereas operations using iTunes Match could on occasion feel a little slow on the iPad 2, the beefing up of the processor and the doubling up of the RAM to 1GB in the new iPad have made all that go away again, for now...

Disappointingly, there is no change to the lack of hi-res playback, however. When syncing



**iPad 3 will give direct hi-res file playback by dragging 24-bit/96kHz AIFF files straight from the Finder window to the iPad's icon in iTunes...**

to the iPad you can't move files of above 48kHz, which, of course, was impressive in the days of DAT, but doesn't pass audiophile muster now. Thankfully there's a workaround (which many used with the previous iPad) of dragging 24-bit/96kHz AIFF files straight from the Finder window to the iPad's icon in iTunes. This works, and the files play fine – unfortunately this trick does not work for Apple Lossless though. Another trick is to switch on home sharing from a host computer, and stream the greater-than-CD resolution stuff from there to the iPad.

This done, in terms of sound quality, direct comparison with the iPad 2 reveals a slight increase in subtlety. This is more apparent with 24-bit material like Rod Stewart HDtracks, so it's to be hoped this may be a sign of some development to the 24-bit audio internals. However, trying to use Apple gear for playing hi-res stuff still feels like you're swimming against the tide – while just about do-able, the Cupertino company still isn't exactly making life easy for you!

But don't forget that there are some bespoke FLAC playing applications for the iPad, such as Yamp. This has just been updated for improved performance on the iOS5 platform, while Dan Leehr's excellent FLAC Player has had a couple of updates to ensure everything is tickety-boo and Retina-friendly on the new iPad 3, too. Interesting recent additions to its functionality include a parametric equaliser and the decoding of ReplayGain tags – if you maintain them, and you require level balancing.

## Phat controllers

Some use iPads for simple music storage and replay, others use clever tweaks to coax





days includes many receivers). Its superb touchscreen gives a lovely 'front end' to your modern music system, making spinning through long file lists, selecting tracks and so on, an absolute breeze.

For UPnP servers (Twonky or Asset for example), I recommend using PlugPlayer as a start. Some manufacturer-specific apps may give you more bells and whistles, but PlugPlayer is a good generalist for a normal activities. At a price point of £2.99 you can try it and if it doesn't work in your particular configuration, it isn't going to break the bank, is it?

PlugPlayer has a elegantly simple interface, allowing selection of servers and players, and then browsing of your media by a variety of criteria which are configured in the server or by playlist. Simple playlisting in the app is also possible. Once playing, the track details and art take up the whole screen. PlugPlayer had a slow start in presenting album cover art decently, but is now up to speed and has just been updated for the iPad 3's new Retina display – so it's come a long way of late. In this case, art display is all you get – for amendments you need the LMS equivalent.

While Logitech has its own app, all sensible Squeezebox users use iPeng HD (£6.99) – the iPad version of iPeng for iPhone. This a richly functional Squeezebox control application, which makes the iPhone version feel a little cluttered with screens you swipe to on each side of the main one. This idea persists in iPeng HD, but most of the action happens on the main screen, and there is obviously much more space to work with.

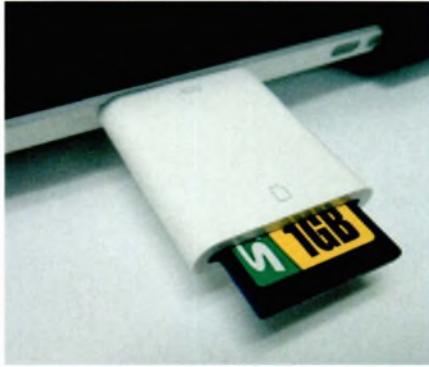
Where iPeng HD excels is in the ease of management of multiple players, whether playing in sync or not. Where LMS excels is the power of its third party 'Cover Art' application to pull rich artwork from Amazon Web Services (a free subscription is required). Combine the two, and while listening to your music you can check through superior choices of artwork from Amazon and write a new folder.jpg file to your album's folder seamlessly.

Both of these applications allow for 'throwing' to Apple TVs, or Airport Expresses

hi-res playback out of them – but why bother when the shiny new iPad is in its element as a system controller? In addition to ever more system-specific iPad apps (Linn's Kinsky Desktop and oRemote for Onkyo, to name but two), there are two particularly interesting new products on the market that make taking

control of your music a breeze, whether you use the Logitech Media Server approach (LMS, or Squeezeserver for the old folks) or more generic Universal Plug and Play (UPnP).

In either case your iPad becomes the interface between music stored on your networked hard drive and a network music player (which these



Apple's iPad Camera Connection Kit lets you output music files at up to 24-bit/96kHz resolution, if you're cunning!

or other AirPlay devices, which is nice if you're into that kind of thing, but no use if you use hi-res, as Airplay currently down samples and/or downconverts everything to CD resolution. Finally, it is supported out of the box for PlugPlayer and is a quite irritating 'in-app' additional purchase in iPeng HD (£2.99).

## Transport solutions

If you don't want to use your iPad as an iPod on steroids, or run as a sort of superannuated remote control, then there's a third option – with a little bit of cheating, the iPad 3 can be used as a digital music transport. Many now take advantage of the direct digital output from its USB socket, extracted via Apple's optional Camera Connection Kit (priced £25), which lets you output music files at up to 24/96. This is a cunning and clever way of pimping your 'Pad to make it do something it wasn't strictly designed to do, but the trouble is that the end result looks a bit Heath Robinson.

The sad fact is that this is not a nice, slick, integrated solution – instead you end up using, at a minimum, the iPad, one white USB widget sticking out of it and a USB DAC/headphone amp stuck into that! Worse still, certain DACs won't even work this way, and you're forced to throw a powered USB hub into the equation. Suddenly the idea of 24-bit headphone joy on the plane feels a bit far-fetched, and your home setup looks like it's been built out of Lego!

Still, if you're prepared for such an ergonomic nightmare, it *is* possible to do. I can't help feeling that as long as Apple don't kill it (and they are aware this is being done) this route will continue to be used for those wanting their choice of headphone amp, or even a main transport built like this – until Apple add support for the Camera Connection Kit to the iPhone 5, at least?

## End stop

Apple's new iPad 3 is *not* an essential purchase for the dyed-in-the-wool audio enthusiast. There are other ways of achieving most of the things people are trying to do with it as a transport. But still the joy of apps is there and there's always something new and interesting coming out, particularly in the field of control apps. If you love to fiddle, you can't beat the fun of trying to get the most out of this ingenious device.

## ANATOMY OF AN IPAD 3

At nearly a pound and a half in weight, the biggest bugbear for the portable music user of the new iPad is also an indicator of its greatest strength – it needs to be that heavy to run that magnificent screen. So while the benefit of the superbly rich and detailed Retina display for artwork and app screen space is evident to any who hold it side by side with the old iPad 2, you should really take it for a spin in your own hands (as it were) to make sure you're happy to use it as your control surface or portable player of choice. After all, the 16GB iPad 2 is still available at £70 less than the new equivalent (Wi-Fi models £329 vs. £399, 3G £429 vs. £499)...

For laptop video viewers, the unit remains the same size at 9.5inch by 7.3inch, and is a wee bit thicker at 0.37inches deep. Running any decently encoded HD video will rapidly convince you that the new iPad constitutes more than just a small change in functionality and performance from the iPad 2, and you soon forget the extra weight and depth. Much like the transition to HD in the home, it is not merely increased resolution that pleases the eye, but a much more rich handling of colour. The super-smooth kerning of fonts in iBooks and other correctly written textual apps makes iPad reading a much more enjoyable experience, too.

The two significant hardware changes aside from the screen are the improved Apple A5 processor, now tweaked up as A5X and the doubling of the device's RAM to 1GB. Both of these are partly necessary to drive all those extra pixels on the screen, but do give the machine a little more punch than its predecessor, in all-round performance, too.

An area of concern is the heat the high powered iPad can generate – scorched lap syndrome could be the result of concurrently running too many apps! Demo units in the Apple Store are inevitably found doing this (not necessarily canny marketing!) – not everyone knows that you can close redundant active apps by double-clicking the home button and holding any app so they all jiggle, revealing their 'Stop' buttons. People love an Apple scandal, but if you manage your app use sensibly, then overheating is not of any concern.

Minor hardware improvements include the front-facing inbuilt camera, which is visibly larger than the previous one, now rated at 5 megapixels. Photos taken are less rough than with the iPad 2, but the new iPad is still outpaced in the camera stakes by the iPhone 4S. There's a nifty new dictation feature, but full 'Siri' functionality has not reached the iPad yet.

Non-minor, but of little relevance in the UK is all the excitement over '4G', as we do not have any significant 4G presence in our airwaves yet, and when we do it may be on a different band. Just be safe in the knowledge that much of our 3G networking is faster than what passes for 4G in the United States!



## TOP TEN IPAD 3 APPS

- 1 iPeng HD – makes complicated network music playing seem simple; it does everything you need if you use Logitech Media Server, and if iPeng hasn't covered it, LMS plugins will have. ★★★★★
- 2 FLAC Player – Mr Leehr has done sterling work for the audiophile in enabling this hi-res workaround, and ensuring gapless playback. The audiophile iPad player of choice. ★★★★★
- 3 Spotify for iPad – just launched, and excellent straight out of the box, the social and playlist sharing aspects of Spotify are elegantly dealt with in the iPad version. ★★★★★
- 4 Tune-in Radio – the gold standard in internet radio has not been left behind by recent challengers, and has enabled 'playing now' purchases. Another rewarding iPad experience. ★★★★★
- 5 Kinsky – many folk use iPads to control their Linn DS systems, and the superbly swish Linn app shows why. One of the first, and still one of the best. ★★★★★
- 6 oRemote – another ingenious developer betters the manufacturer, à la iPeng. Anything

you can do on an Onkyo remote of the last few years can be done using this. ★★★★★

7 PlugPlayer – the generic uPnP control layer app, basic functionality and a nice low price. An OSX version is also available, but can be even more trulent than this one! ★★★



PlugPlayer is a fine all round uPnP control app, and now takes advantage of the iPad 3's new Retina display...

- 8 Reciva Remote – from the same family as PlugPlayer, it contains even more rudimentary uPnP control. Useful to control Reciva internet radios, though. ★★★
- 9 Garageband – if you want to make your own sounds you can't really be without Garageband – albums are currently being demoted, if not actually made, on this! ★★★★★
- 10 Music – and finally, if you should decide to use your iPad as a giant iPod, then Apple's Music app makes it into one. iTunes Match makes it all worthwhile. ★★★★★

# More than words



words  
that count . . .



'Amazingly clean and transparent sound, agility and seamless integration.'

**What Hi-Fi Jun 10 • What Hi-Fi Award Winner 2010**

'Excellently engineered and finished, the Spendor A9 is a fine loudspeaker with a thoroughly modern appearance and sound quality, with class leading bass power, extension, attack and speed. Representing good value and overall performance, the A9 deserves HIFICRITIC recommendation.' **Hi-Fi Critic Awards Recommended 2010**

'It presents music with a charm and poise that is rare in audio of any price. I would imagine that in 20 years time, when all the shiny 'must have' loudspeakers of 2010 are long forgotten, there will still be a lot of people happily playing music through their Spendor A9s. That's how good they are.' **Hi-Fi+ Issue 77 Mar 11 • Hi-Fi+ Best of the Best 2011**

'Spendor's new A9 is one impressive loudspeaker.'

**Hi-Fi World Mar 11**



A3



A5



A6



A9

## SPENDOR

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

The Spendor A-line



# Gain spotting

With Spotify Premium and slick build quality, Onkyo's new TX-8050 is a fine 21st century stereo receiver, finds **Patrick Cleasby**...

**M**any audiophiles' mobile listening habits have been transformed by Spotify Premium, thanks to the great choice of music it offers. Now though they're also capable of enjoying the same abundance of music at home, via this amazingly low-priced network receiver.

Onkyo's TX-8050 is a conscious diversion from the state-of-the-art HDMI/surround flagships, being pure stereo and only switching video at the lowly composite Standard Definition standard. As such it may appeal to those who run a secondary

TV or hi-fi room, and particularly to those looking to ditch their separate streaming boxes.

The list of supported network service providers is extensive, including last.fm, Napster and vTuner internet radio. All you have to do is ensure your firmware is fully up to date to gain the benefit of some of them, notably Spotify. That particular 'f' word might strike fear into the more technophobic, but if Onkyo's aim was to make all of these options as plug and play as possible, they have succeeded, and firmware updating via internet or USB is easily achieved.



## ▣ DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Onkyo TX-8050  
**ORIGIN:** Japan/Malaysia  
**TYPE:** Network Stereo Receiver  
**WEIGHT:** 8.6kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 435x149.5x328mm  
**FEATURES:**  
 • 2x 80W into 8 ohms (claimed)  
 • Windows 7 and DLNA 1.5 certified  
 • supported file types – MP3, WMA, WMA lossless, FLAC, WAV, Ogg Vorbis, AAC, and LPCM audio  
 • vTune Internet Radio, Spotify, Napster and last.fm support  
 • USB mass storage / iPod digital direct compatible USB port  
 • FM/AM Tuner  
 • MM phono input  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Onkyo UK  
**TELEPHONE:** 01628 473350  
**WEBSITE:** onkyo.co.uk

For a network receiver you need network connectivity and the TX-8050 bears an Ethernet socket, along with its audio connection options. If Ethernet cabling does not work for you there is the option of purchasing an unobtrusive USB Wi-fi dongle (Onkyo UFW-1, £50) to put in the slot on the right of the front panel. This does, of course, block it for the iDevice and Mass Storage USB connectivity some may be wishing to make use of. The TX-8050 is available (outside the US) in both black and silver, and has a pleasingly retro design feel with its lenticularly shining knobs [wot? Ed.]!

The most immediate way to do the basic set up on the receiver is via its own front panel buttons and display. Key items include setting the speaker impedance, and if your home network is using DHCP there is essentially nothing to do other than plug your Ethernet cable in. The supplied remote is an attractive enough lightweight silver unit, but you may soon skip its use in preference for a touch-based app.

The appropriate Onkyo remote app to download from the iTunes Store (an Android equivalent is available)



There's a third party iPad app called oRemote [see p123], which boasts a much more flexible set-up, plus more screen space.

If you're already running a DLNA-compatible server, you have to do nothing more than go to the NET option via your control mechanism of choice and select DLNA in the sub-menu, and you should be connecting to your server. I say *should* as with Twonky it sometimes takes a couple of attempts to achieve the connection...

It's a breeze to play back from USB devices attached via the front USB port. I did this using an iRiver H340 holding Red Book-quality FLAC material, and it was picked up with no problem at all. I listened to an original master of *Dark Side Of Moon* and, as expected, found that this USB FLAC mode does not achieve gapless playback, but the actual audio quality was very respectable.

Prior to this review, my contact with Spotify could have been measured in seconds, but as it is taken to be one of the major selling points of the TX-8050, I was obliged to refresh my membership and take it up to 'Premium' (free thirty day trial, card details required). It is relatively trivial to get it ready for 'device' use – you just need to attach a device to your numeric Spotify ID (not your email) via their web-based profile admin function, then give this authentication combination once to the Onkyo.

Then you're away – able to browse and play their latest releases, and if you use the computer client, you can 'star' a favourite track there and it almost instantaneously drops into the 'starred' sub-menu on the receiver, which is nice. Premium quality is streaming 320kbps Ogg Vorbis, and the results, while still sounding glacial and lossy, are quite impressive. The advantage is that you can hear a current track like Sweet Billy Pilgrim's *Joyful Reunion* on the radio and then play it to death from Spotify to decide if you really like it.

If you are going to use this machine in the classic receiver style, you'll most likely be watching TV through it as well as listening to music, and the digital inputs provided allow for convenient audio connection of Sky or Virgin boxes (or modern TVs). The results are very impressive – I installed the receiver in place of a vintage Marantz one and instantly felt that I was getting more punch from my stereo viewing of the likes of *Game Of Thrones* and *Homeland*. Since I wasn't making use of the composite video, I also tried the Pure Direct mode, bypassing the balance and tone controls, and while the audible results did seem to step up in sonic terms, the blue light around the Pure Direct button is a bit distracting if it's in your TV viewing eyeline. It feels more appropriate to dim the receiver display to the lowest level and run with that.

**It's a breeze to play back from USB devices, and the actual audio quality proves very respectable...**

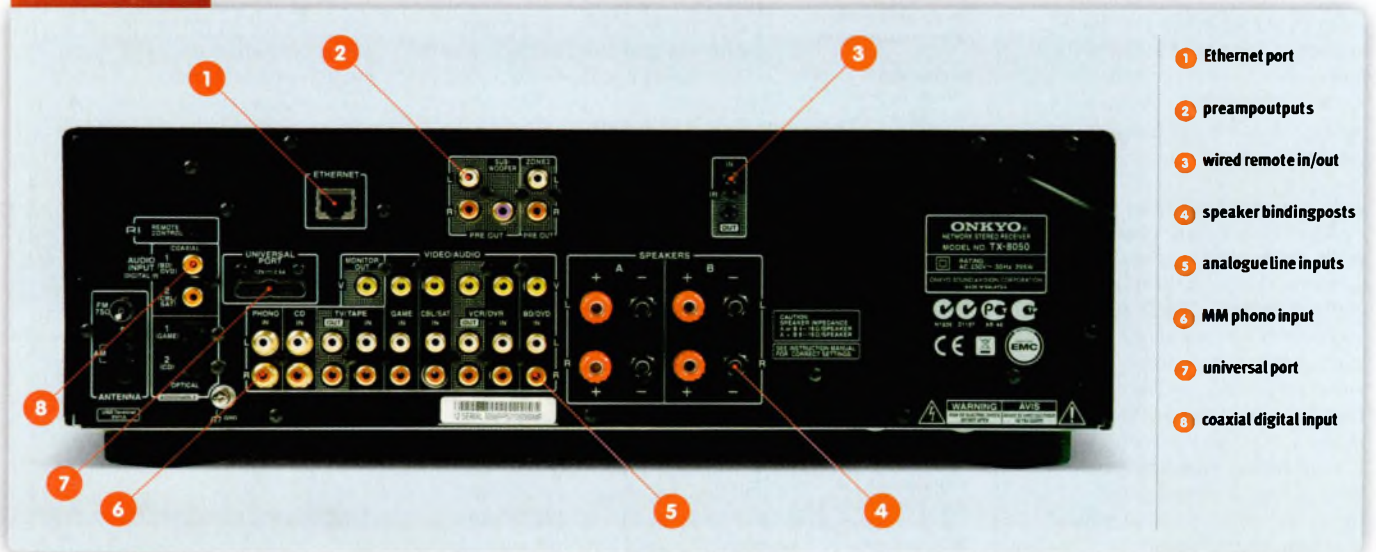
**Sound quality**

Auditioning for music listening was done using the DLNA functionality in Pure Direct mode using a variety of servers, but first it was necessary to assess the standard analogue and digital connections as a baseline using a mid-price CD player. The track chosen for this was the penultimate section of Sir Colin Davis' performance of Mahler's 8th Symphony (*Symphony of a Thousand*), for the combination of male and female solo voices with the choral, and the dynamic contrasts within.

The analogue performance, while superficially faithful to the voices, was slightly uninspiring overall, without the taut

is called 'Remote2' and it's free. It is not currently an iPad Universal app, but must have been skinned for the iPhone 4 'Retina' display as it blows up to 2x magnification quite tidily on the iPad 3. Unfortunately, as it is relatively unrefined, it can be sluggish or unable to contact the receiver if there have been any problems on the network.

**CONNECTIONS**



- 1 Ethernet port
- 2 preamp outputs
- 3 wired remote in/out
- 4 speaker binding posts
- 5 analogue line inputs
- 6 MM phono input
- 7 universal port
- 8 coaxial digital input

## Q&A

WE SPOKE TO NICK HAMADA, PRODUCT AND MARKETING MANAGER FOR ONKYO, EUROPE



**PC:** The consumer demand now seems to be there for networked audio. Do you have any figures for what proportion of Onkyo sales are being driven by the desire for streaming solutions?

**NH:** For Onkyo, Spotify and FLAC replay are two main market drivers for networked audio at the moment. Some people believe that Spotify is nothing more than a nice looking user-interface coupled with a great music collection, but that's just the half of it. If you listen to Spotify via a proper home audio system – as opposed to on a portable device or via a computer – you'll easily hear its sonic superiority. Its use of the Ogg Vorbis format, at a 320kbps bitrate, brings consumers a CD-comparable sound quality that most other music services still can't match.

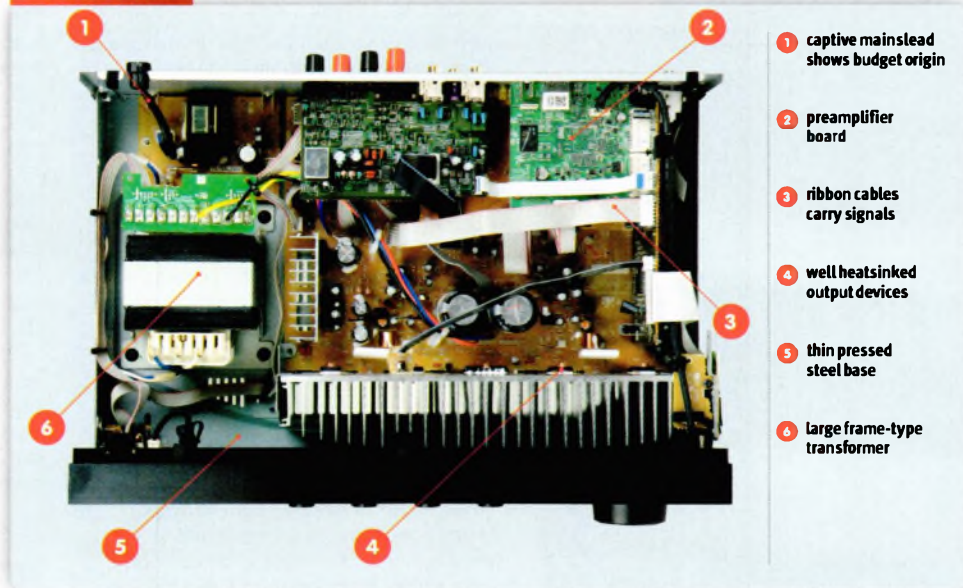
**Do you feel the TX-8050 firmware updates have reached maturity, or is there perhaps more functionality to come...?**

Since the launch we have upgraded the TX-8050's firmware via online updates to support Spotify, Onkyo remote Apps for both iOS and Android, and to fix software bugs. With regards to future functionality, well, the main factor is what our customers say to us via our Facebook (OnkyoEU) and Twitter (Onkyo\_EU) feeds. Of course, there are hardware limitations, so we can't do everything that's asked, but we're going to try! And we can confirm that the iPad version of the Onkyo Remote app is in development.

**Are customers demanding up to 24/192 HDtracks-type resolution? Is this the next step-up required?**

Consumer demand for hi-res is definitely on the up. The TX-8050 supports up to 24/96, but the next step forward will undoubtedly be native 24/192 decoding. We're seeing increasing demand for DSD as well as FLAC, particularly in Scandinavian countries and Japan. We think it will become a global trend... the truth is everybody wants to experience great sound.

## IN SIGHT



- 1 captive mainslead shows budget origin
- 2 preamplifier board
- 3 ribbon cables carry signals
- 4 well heatsinked output devices
- 5 thin pressed steel base
- 6 large frame-type transformer



**THE MOST NOTABLE and popular absentee from the capabilities of the TX-8050 is Apple's Airplay, but this is more than made up for by the straightforward implementation of Spotify, an area in which Onkyo is ahead of the competition.**

If you are happy to run a DLNA server, the client works as well on the TX-8050 as I have seen in a receiver-embedded version. It would be nice to see it working flawlessly as a media renderer for a generic controller.

The capping of the receiver's streaming and USB FLAC capabilities at 24/96 is in line with many older and lower-end devices. It is also on a par with many competitors in not rendering tracks gaplessly in these modes. A separate Squeezebox may still be the answer if gapless is required.

The results of listening to Logitech Media Server in DLNA mode were astoundingly good, showing the TX-8050's FLAC processing in the best light. Maybe we can ditch the actual Squeezeboxes!

tension supplied when the bass adds emphasis. Unsurprising for analogue circuits in a box packed with digital trickery, but the internal DACs acquitted themselves better when using the CD player as transport, delivering a more involving feel.

This is the benchmark against which the 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC stream decoding was measured, using Illustrate's Asset as a server. The result was surprisingly close to CD, with only a less convincing soundstage to mark it down.

Differences were more marked performing the same digital versus streaming test on ELO's *Shine A Little Love* from the original *Discovery* CD, with the streaming version coming across as a little abrasive in the higher frequencies. At this point it seemed the TX-8050 processing could be convincing in the lower end and with voices, but the top end might be a cause for fatigue concerns.

This could be made worse by more aggressively (i.e. recently) mastered material – indeed Ladyhawke's *My Delerium* proved a very steely listen, with the highly compressed modern pop sound coming across with great power but feeling a little brittle. For interest I checked back to a Spotify rendering of the same track and got the same thing, but with the data rate compression also evident, the punch was gone.

A more reasonable electronic pop mastering like Duran Duran's original version of *All She Wants Is...* was more reassuring of the TX-8050's abilities, sounding clean, dynamic and exciting. Once again Spotify couldn't match this, although it's

possible that we may have been dealing with a remaster there.

Finally a switch to the old Squeezebox server (7.6) in DLNA mode proved revelatory. This optimised the TX-8050's playback ability, its rendition of Leona Naess' *Ghosts In The Attic* blowing both Asset and a digitally connected Squeezebox Touch, out of the water. The abrasive highs were gone and the overall presentation was, dare I say it, analogue in feel! This result was backed up by returning to previously tested tracks. I'm a definite convert to the idea that no two servers sound the same – and this one proved the TX-8050 gives excellent fidelity.

## Conclusion

With fine build, great flexibility and a variety of control options – plus the potential for decent sound – if you're in the market for a simple streaming stereo receiver, Onkyo's TX-8050 really is an essential audition. ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

VALUE FOR MONEY



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BUILD QUALITY



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FEATURES



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

OVERALL



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**LUKE:** Wide variety of well-executed streaming options

**DISLIKE:** Sometimes takes a few attempts to get DLNA hooked up...

**WESAY:** A bargain, with most flavours of digital streaming; particularly with the fifty percent discounts available!

Kudos

[kudosaudio.com](http://kudosaudio.com)



# Last orders

In the brave new world of streamers and DACs, Cyrus' new CD Transport could be your final silver disc spinner. **Malcolm Steward** listens in...

**C**yrus manufactures streaming products, yet continues to strive to improve the sound of CD.

To this end, the Huntingdon-based company produces its own Servo Evolution CD mechanism, with bespoke software required to make optical disc players function at their fundamental, disc-reading level. That represents a considerable investment – financial and otherwise – when most competitors are content simply to buy mass-produced OEM devices off the shelf for a few dollars from China, and tweak their output.

This is Cyrus' newest and most affordable transport, and duly incorporates the latest servo 'engine', which the company claims is able to read more data 'right first time' from a Red Book silver disc than any other system, delivering 'higher resolution'.

Despite being based on the X series CD Xt SE 2, this new upgradeable CD transport costs under half as much, retailing at £599.

As such, it represents a logical partner to Cyrus' XPD range of DAC-enabled amplifiers, which allow you to connect up to five digital and six analogue devices to your system. It suggests partnering the CD Transport with its 6 XP d amplifier to 'create a truly special hi-fi system with many upgrade options for the future.' Hyperbole aside, this does make an awful lot of sense; if your amp has a DAC built in (and indeed many do these days), why replicate it by buying a full-blown CD player? Instead, it makes sense to purchase a transport by itself...

This new silver disc spinner includes all the controls and features found in the top-of-the-range CD Xt

## ► DETAILS

- PRODUCT:** Cyrus  
**ORIGIN:** UK  
**TYPE:** CD transport  
**WEIGHT:** 3.7kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 215x78x360mm  
**FEATURES:**
- 1 coaxial and 1 optical digital output
  - separate power supplies for drive and electronics
  - lightweight die-cast enclosure for improved electronic performance
  - MC-Bus connectivity for Cyrus system integration
  - Cyrus' Servo Evolution 2 mechanism
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Cyrus Audio  
**TELEPHONE:** 01480 410900  
**WEBSITE:** [cyrusaudio.com](http://cyrusaudio.com)

model, but without any provision for connecting a PSX-R power supply, the normal first upgrade for Cyrus components. Nonetheless, because of the physical similarities between the players, the Transport can be 'affordably' upgraded to top-of-the-line CD XT SE2 specification by the manufacturer at a later date, done via your friendly neighbourhood dealer, of course.

The Transport uses a slot-loading CD mechanism, which would not have been my own first choice because they do not encourage users to handle discs well. For my hands, the machine doesn't eject the disc sufficiently far out for me to get a reliable and safe grip on it. The result was that I invariably ended up touching the playing surface! In fairness though, other users seem to get along with this loading system better, I am told.

What's less subjective is the machine's disc handling. There were reports that some early adopters had problems with Servo Evolution mechanisms refusing to load and/or read certain CDs. Revised firmware was issued to address this situation; the review sample functioned flawlessly with a very wide range of discs – popular and obscure, old and new, well cared for and abused.

Overall, the Cyrus transport is a neat little package, both figuratively and literally, and its shoebox case makes it easy to accommodate on



**HOW IT COMPARES**

**I AM A CONVERT** to networked audio as it offers potential for far higher fidelity. During the review I was able to compare the output of the Transport/DAC with rips of the CDs playing through a streamer and the same DAC. Comparisons were made using 16-bit/44kHz files taken from the CD being auditioned. Without exception, I found the streamed music to be superior to CD via the Cyrus. Streamed music to my ears sounds entirely free of mechanical artifice, the impression of moving parts being involved in shunting those electrons down the speaker cables; even though most such systems store music on a hard disk revolving at 5,400 rpm, at least. Even so, I find streamed music sounds more natural and organic. It has truer timbre, and is more vibrant and believable. So I have to say that for the best sonics, streaming and not CD replay is surely the way to go... However, while the Cyrus Transport would not tempt me away from my streamers back to the CD format, if you have no desire to rip then stream your little silver discs, then this machine makes a great deal of sense. It's well made, classily engineered and gives fine results.

either a standard width or Cyrus-specific equipment rack. Build quality, considering its modest retail price, is excellent. I assessed the transport for this test using a multi-tier Quadraspire Sunoko Vent support system.

**Sound quality**

The Transport proved surprisingly system-dependent. I began testing it with an M2Tech Young DAC and a Naim DAC playing into NEAT XLS loudspeakers through a Naim SuperNait amplifier. The results weren't entirely satisfactory, with the system sounding bass-light and mid-forward, oddly lacking in timing precision. Strangely, the presentation improved in both respects when I reshuffled the system by switching to the SuperNait's integral DAC. The voicing of the music seemed better balanced and timing more precise.

With the aforementioned M2Tech and Naim DAC, the notes appeared in all the right places, but the music lacked impetus and drive. Musicians were not imparting real energy, vibrancy or dynamism into their playing. The London Chamber Orchestra performing David Heath's composition, *The Frontier*, sounded distinctly enervated, despite the nice sound of percussive bass strings thwacking on fretboards.

Switching between the track playing simultaneously on the CD Transport and on a streamer – both playing through the same DAC – showed that both renditions were perfectly synchronised, yet the streamed rendition sounded more enthusiastically paced.

However, things improved rather dramatically when the Transport was mated with the Arcam rDAC, of which it clearly approved. In fact, this partnership positively relished more challenging music and gave its best

performances with more thorny recordings. On that most stringent and acid of tests, Varèse' *Ameriques*, the Transport fared very well, portraying the massed percussion – from thundering timpani to tinkling triangles – exceptionally deftly, mixing power and delicacy with aplomb. Still, brass seemed a touch too explicit at times because of the Transport's tendency to encourage the midrange forward.

Stereo image placement seemed excellent with generous scaling and distribution of instruments as befits this hugely 'theatrical' composition. The percussion and voices that open the following selection, *Nocturnal*, were extraordinarily well portrayed and startlingly powerful, with dynamic contrast that threatened speaker drive units flying across the room. In absolute terms, however, some orchestral music sounded quite ascetic. There was insufficient weight to bass strings and less air at the top of the LCO playing John Adams' *Shaker Loops*. The music appeared a little closed-in, dark and murky.

I next played selections from German songstress Ulla Meinecke, tracks including *Die Tanzerin* from her 1980s euro-pop classic, *Wenn Schon Nicht Für Immer Dann Wenigstens Für Ewig*. The Cyrus/Arcam combination thoroughly enjoyed this krautpop extravaganza. The organ had authentic weight in its lower registers and there was a noticeable sizzle on the cymbals. Rhythmically the Cyrus was not in the same class as a pricier Naim or Roksan player, but was obviously trying hard in this respect.

On the Nils Lofgren' *Acoustic Live* CD, his Takamine guitar was presented in all its full-bandwidth glory with deep reverberant bass, a well projected midband and a sweet bite to its top strings. Its tonality was

life-like, as was the portrayal of his voice – which was convincing and had a persuasive character. The sound through the rDAC was not overtly transparent, but still managed to convey plenty of information. Finally, I thought this combination produced fine, stable, clear imagery.

**Sound is crisp and dry, and it gets the job done as well as you could expect at or near the price...**

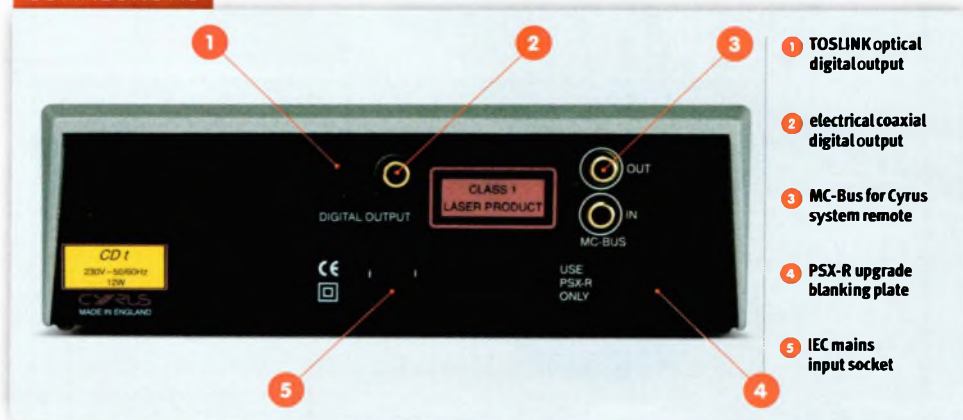
Returning to the fun this transport and DAC seemed to have with challenging music, I played the Janis Joplin-esque voice of Pat Mears and was pleased to find that it came across with its full quota of raw energy, power and passion, and this was matched by the portrayal of Gary Craft's heart-stopping guitar work on the track *There Goes the Rainbow* from the CD of the same name. I was especially impressed with the finesse demonstrated here by the Cyrus and rDAC combination.

**Conclusion**

The Cyrus CD transport does what it says on the tin – it's a high quality, affordable silver disc spinner, designed for a world where Compact Disc is as much a 'legacy' format as anything else. If you've got one of the many new amps on the market with DACs built in, or a DAC possibly running a variety of sources, then this fits absolutely perfectly.

Sound is crisp and dry, and it gets the job done as well as you could expect at or near the price. If this is what you're after, I'd audition it before it's too late to buy anything new that spins silver discs! ●

**CONNECTIONS**



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Fine build, midband detail, decent timing

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Variable results with differing DACs

**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Fine 'last' CD transport that delivers sonically, is affordable and well made

**FEATURES** ★★★★★

**OVERALL**



# Seventh heaven



The latest in a line of specialist tonearms to emerge from Audio Origami is the RB7.

**Neville Roberts** listens in...

**O** was excited when I heard that Audio Origami had just produced a new tonearm. In fact, I honestly couldn't wait to get my hands on this, the budget version of the company's superb PU7 tonearm. The latter incidentally, is designer John Nilsen's high-end design, based on the legendary Syrinx PU3, but re-engineered with more modern thinking and materials.

Indeed, according to John 'Johnnie 7' Nilsen, the RB7 perpetuates the PU7 design philosophy of using 'only the best' in its manufacture, but makes use of elements from a Rega RB251 tonearm to reduce the overall cost by about £1,000 compared to the PU7. The price of the new arm starts at a far more affordable £750...

## Design for life

The RB7 uses the Rega RB251 yoke and back section, but combines this with the PU7 arm tube, headshell, rear weight and stub. However, top of the range bearings are used in the yoke and the arm is fitted as standard with Cardas internal wires, Cardas gold-plated cartridge clips and Audio Origami's super OFC (Oxygen-Free Copper) external cable.

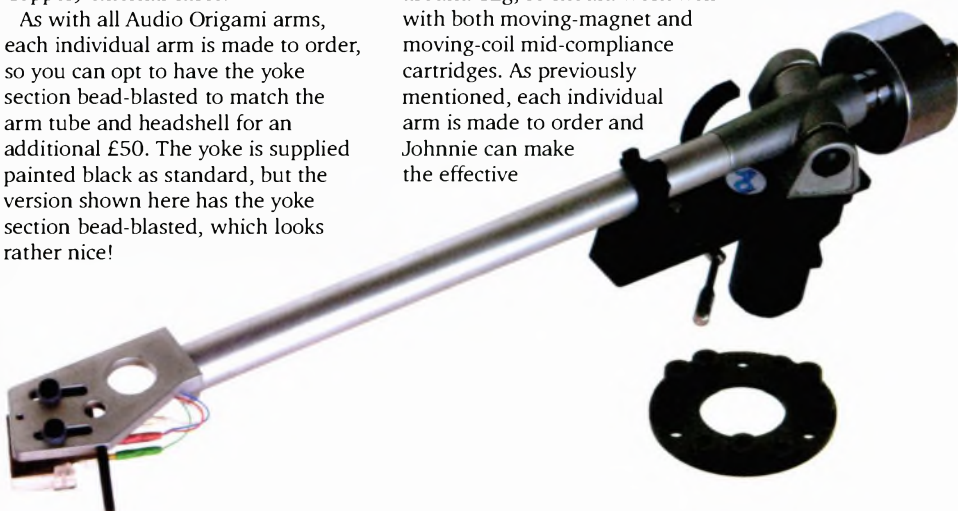
As with all Audio Origami arms, each individual arm is made to order, so you can opt to have the yoke section bead-blasted to match the arm tube and headshell for an additional £50. The yoke is supplied painted black as standard, but the version shown here has the yoke section bead-blasted, which looks rather nice!

Apart from the standard 9 inch arm tube, the tonearm can also be supplied with a 12 inch tube for an additional cost of £100. If your deck can accommodate it, the 12 inch model offers superior performance as tracking errors are considerably reduced with a longer arm. However, the model reviewed here is of the standard 9 inch design.

The headshell shows its PU7 pedigree and has the significant advantage of being able to adjust the azimuth of the cartridge from a single hexagonal screw located underneath the arm tube, about 3mm away from the headshell. Johnnie includes a nifty little spirit level with the arm for this purpose (also available separately for £9.99).

At the other end of the arm, the RB7 is fitted with a chrome-plated rear weight and stub. The weight is of the heavy PU7-type, which enables it to sit closer to the pivot point for a given cartridge than is possible with a lighter weight. This helps reduce the arm's effective mass and thus improve its compatibility with higher compliance cartridges.

While on the subject of effective mass, the RB7 is a mid-mass arm of around 12g, so should work well with both moving-magnet and moving-coil mid-compliance cartridges. As previously mentioned, each individual arm is made to order and Johnnie can make the effective



## ▣ DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
RB7  
**ORIGIN:**  
UK  
**TYPE:**  
Tonearm  
**WEIGHT:**  
385g (with counterbalance weight)  
**DIMENSIONS:**  
9" or 12" length  
**FEATURES:**  
• Rega 3-point fixing with integral headshell and interconnect cable  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Audio Origami  
**WEBSITE:**  
audioorigami.co.uk

mass higher if customers wish to use the arm with low compliance cartridges.

The Rega RB251 yoke does not have any provision for fine adjustment of the VTA (Vertical Tracking Angle). However, Audio Origami supply a variable spacer that sits between the Rega 3-point fixing and the deck, that allows one of four heights to be selected. Alternatively, a lower setting may be achieved by completely removing the spacer.

Once the arm had been set up, I checked the tonearm-cartridge resonance using a copy of the Vinyl Essentials test record. This showed that the resonance was exactly at 10Hz, which is pretty well ideal. If it is around 14Hz, this is too close to a real-world signal, such as a very low organ note. Below about 6Hz, the resonance will produce subsonic noise where the harmonics are likely to interfere with the audio frequencies. This bodes well for the bass control!

## Sounding out

The new arm is certainly beautifully finished, but does it sound as good as it looks? Fitted with my Lyra Clavis DC MC cartridge, the wee Audio Origami arm demonstrated all the fine detail and crispness that I am used to with this cartridge, as well as fantastic attack from the strings, and with no sign of harshness. Bass was well extended, but also had a tonal clarity in the lower registers which I have found missing with some other arms. In particular, drums had a splendidly clear and crisp attack, which indicated excellent bearings and precision build.

Overall then, the new Audio Origami RB7 manages to retain many of the qualities of its bigger brother PU7. As such, it's a truly superb little tonearm that really doesn't compromise on quality in order to achieve its extremely competitive price. I certainly didn't want to give it back! ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Excellent detail and crispness, controlled bass response; build quality; value for money

#### VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** Nothing at all, considering its cost...

#### BUILD QUALITY



**WE SAY:** Superb tonearm with many of the qualities of its high end brother at a far more affordable price

#### FEATURES



#### OVERALL





# Naim arrives at Sevenoaks



**Naim's Uniti range and Ovator S-400 loudspeakers are now available in selected Sevenoaks stores nationwide.**

Consisting of the UnitiQute, NaimUniti 2 and SuperUniti all-in-one players, and the UnitiServe hard disk player/server, Naim's Uniti range represents a new way to enjoy your music. Controlled via the n-Stream or n-Serve app for iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch, these innovative all-in-one solutions liberate your listening experience and put a world of music at your fingertips.

The Ovator S-400 loudspeaker is the perfect partner for the SuperUniti or NaimUniti 2. Its precision engineered design and innovative use of BMR technology create an immersive, room-filling sound.

**Visit your local Sevenoaks Naim dealer today for a demonstration.**



## STORES NATIONWIDE

**Aberdeen**\* 01224 252797  
**Brighton (Hove)**\* 01273 733338  
**Bristol**\* 0117 974 3727  
**Bromley** 020 8290 1988 ●  
**Cambridge**\* 01223 304770  
**Chelsea**\* 020 7352 9466  
**Cheltenham**\* 01242 241171

**Chorleywood (Watford)**\* 0845 5046364  
**Epsom**\* 01372 720720  
**Exeter**\* 01392 218895  
**Glasgow**\* 0141 332 9655  
**Guildford** 01483 536666  
**Holborn**\* 020 7837 7540  
**Kingston**\* 020 8547 0717  
**Leeds (Wetherby)** 01937 586886 ●  
**Loughton**\* 020 8532 0770  
**Maidstone**\* 01622 686366

**Norwich**\* 01603 767605  
**Poole**\* 01202 671677  
**Reading**\* 0118 959 7768  
**Sevenoaks** 01732 459555 ●  
**Sheffield**\* 0114 255 5861  
**Southampton**\* 023 8033 7770  
**TunbridgeWells** 01892 531543 ●  
**Weybridge** 01932 840859 ●  
**Witham (Essex)** 01376 501733  
**Yeovil**\* 01935 700078

## VISIT OUR WEBSITE



For more information on the Naim Uniti range and the Ovator S-400 loudspeakers along with the latest news, offers and a convenient option to order many products on-line or reserve before you travel go to [www.ssav.com](http://www.ssav.com)

● NAIM PRODUCTS ARE CURRENTLY ONLY AVAILABLE AT THESE STORES - WITH MORE STORES BEING ADDED SOON!

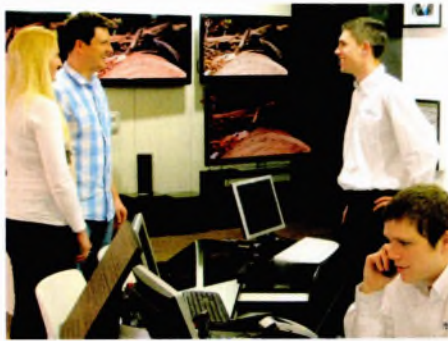
PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 29/06/2012. E.&O. \*THESE STORES ARE EITHER LICENSED OR FRANCHISED AND OPERATE UNDER A LICENCE AGREEMENT TO SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION.

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

**SEVENOAKS**  
SOUND & VISION

## REAL STORES

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have stores nationwide - each carries the very best in home cinema and hi-fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.



## REAL PEOPLE

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.



## REAL PRODUCTS

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.



## REAL VALUE

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you'll be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

FOR OUR LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT [WWW.SSAV.COM](http://WWW.SSAV.COM)



**CYRUS CD6 SE2 • 6A CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER**  
With its impressive 40 Watts per channel and six analogue inputs, the 6a amplifier is the perfect partner for the CD6 SE2 CD player.



**AUDIOLAB 8200CD OLED • 8200A CD / AMPLIFIER**  
The award-winning 8200CD features a wealth of digital inputs that will keep it playing all your music regardless of how it may be stored.



**LEEMA ELEMENTS CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER**  
The Elements Series is the latest in the line of Leema high-performance audio equipment.



**MARANTZ CD6004 • PM6004 CD / AMPLIFIER**  
This award-winning CD player and amplifier is the result of extensive research and development by Marantz's engineering team, under the direction of Brand Ambassador Ken Ishiwata.



**ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD / AMPLIFIER**  
The M2 amp boasts 85wpc and five line inputs while the matching CD features a 24-bit DAC plus dedicated power supplies for the outputs.



**ARCAM FMJ CD17 • FMJA18 CD / AMPLIFIER**  
Arcam's FMJ products combine sleek design, flexible connectivity and sound quality far beyond that of budget separates. Available in a black finish to seamlessly blend with any style of décor.



**DENON CEOL RCD-N7 CD NETWORK RECEIVER**  
This network CD / iPod receiver lets you set your iPod or iPhone in its dedicated dock and enjoy music with high-quality sound or listen to Internet radio.



**MARANTZ M-CR603 CD NETWORK RECEIVER**  
Features CD playback, a DAB/DAB+/FM/AM tuner along with a USB connection and network capability via its ethernet port.



**ARCAM SOLO MINI CD RECEIVER**  
The award-winning Solo Mini provides premium performance in a discrete and stylish unit.



**PROJECT DEBUT CARBON TURNTABLE**  
With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Red cartridge, the Debut Carbon sets new standards in its price range.



**REGA RPI TURNTABLE**  
Excellent build quality, reliability and ease of use combine to make the RPI a product that will offer a lifetime of musical enjoyment.



**PROJECT XPRESSION III TURNTABLE**  
Features an improved, carbon-fibre tonearm, superior isolation feet and comes supplied complete with a factory-fitted and aligned 'Ortofon 2M Red' cartridge.

**SPENDOR A-LINE**  
A3 • A5 • A6 • A9

These high performance, floorstanding speakers combine smart styling with natural veneer finishes. Each model benefits from important advances in Spendor's drive unit technology, cabinet design and crossover engineering.



**MONITOR AUDIO GOLD GX**

Monitor Audio's new Gold GX speakers use technology that has filtered down from their flagship Platinum PL range. The range comprises two standmounts, two floorstanders, two centre speakers, a pair of surround speakers and a single subwoofer.

**KEF AUDIO R SERIES**

Using trickle-down technology from the company's flagship Blade speakers, the R Series comprises standmount, floorstanding, centre, surround and subwoofer models.

**BOWERS & WILKINS PMI**

This luxury, compact loudspeaker is the latest in a long line of Bowers & Wilkins audiophile mini monitors. It offers an extremely high-quality audio performance and features several technological innovations including a new tweeter and groundbreaking cabinet design.

**TANNOY REVOLUTION DC6 T**

Award-winning compact, floorstanding speakers featuring Tannoy's unique Dual Concentric™ drive unit along with luxurious real wood finish trapezoidal cabinets.



**PMC TWENTY RANGE**

The twenty series is the next generation of elegant hand-crafted British loudspeakers that follow in the lineage of worldwide acclaimed PMC designs. The 4 models use PMC's innovative ATL™ technology, providing a supremely rich and detailed performance, ideally suited to all styles and sizes of interior.



£229 OR LESS



**PIONEER N-50 NETWORK AUDIO PLAYER**

Audiophile Network player supporting AirPlay® and DLNA wireless technologies, allowing you to stream music wirelessly from your iTunes libraries or iOS devices.

**DENON DNP-720AE NETWORK AUDIO PLAYER**

Enjoy a wide variety of internet radio and on-line digital content. The DNP-720AE also supports AirPlay® so that you can stream music from any compatible device.



ESSAV.COM



**MARANTZ NA7004 NETWORK AUDIO PLAYER**

This AirPlay® compatible player lets you connect to all your favourite music, whether it's from your PC, external hard disc or as an FM / DAB radio station broadcast or even on the other side of the world via Internet Radio.



**ARCAM SOLO NEO NETWORK MUSIC SYSTEM**

Combines superb music performance, network audio capabilities along with an internal CD player and radio tuner.



£1199 OR LESS

**NAIM SUPERUNITI MUSIC STREAMER**

Combines all Naim's experience in integrated amplification and audio streaming into a single casing, the SuperUniti is the reference all-in-one player in the Uniti range.

**CYRUS STREAMLINE MUSIC STREAMER**

This compact all-in-one music system is the perfect choice for any room. Based upon the Stream XP but complete with a high performance stereo power amplifier built-in. Includes the stylish and intuitive n-remote control.



**SONOS - THE WIRELESS HI-FI SYSTEM**

Play your digital music all over your house without a PC in every room. The award-winning Sonos lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house and control them from the palm of your hand. You can even play different songs in different rooms.

**KEF LS50 SPEAKERS**

Using KEF's latest driver technology along with numerous patent pending technological breakthroughs in cabinet construction, baffle shape and port design, the new KEF LS50 brings studio sound quality into the home.



**Sansui returns to UK with new hi-fi range**

The Sansui brand is relaunching in the UK with a wide range hi-fi components. The range includes a CD player, a 40W integrated amplifier with built-in DAC and a network audio player featuring a DAB/DAB+ tuner; internet radio and music streaming options supporting a wide variety of formats including FLAC (up to 24bit/48kHz) and WAV.

SAP201V	AMPLIFIER / DAC	£299
CDD201V	CD PLAYER	£199
WLD+201V	NETWORK PLAYER	£349



**AUDIOLAB M-DAC**

Award-winning DAC featuring a USB input with asynchronous data processing along with two coaxial and optical digital inputs. High-res 24-bit/192kHz music files can be played via its coaxial input.

**Please Note:** Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 29/06/2012. E&OE

**SEVENOAKS**  
SOUND & VISION



# Square deal

Block Audio's new CVR-100 CD receiver is a serious bit of kit for not very much money, says *Tim Jarman...*

**Y**ou only have to attend the Munich High End show in Germany to see that audio is big news over there. And assuming that you could make it through the crowds and get anywhere near the gear, you would realise how strong their domestic industry is, catering as it does for all price bands and ages.

Block is a quintessential modern German hi-fi company, offering a range of separates, all of which seem to be well designed, nicely made (in China) and competitively priced. The CVR-100 CD receiver reviewed here combines all the sources in one box along with a useful 40 watt amplifier, making it a sort of latter-day music centre. Now available in the UK for around £700, it makes an interesting addition to the range of integrated systems now available, which are once again becoming a fashionable alternative to component hi-fi.

Inside its solid-feeling metal enclosure, one finds that the Block offers a CD player, an FM/DAB tuner, a DAC with both coaxial and optical inputs and the possibility of internet radio and access to music tracks stored on a server via either a wired or a wireless network. Music can also be played from a USB memory device as well as from a host of traditional external sources, including S/PDIF digital, line level analogue or a turntable fitted with an MM cartridge. Line level outputs for recording from are also available.

The amplifier produces a claimed 40 watts into 8 ohm loudspeakers or 60 watts into 4 ohm ones, making it more than powerful enough for most small to medium sized rooms. It uses the well known National Semiconductor LM 3668 chip, a Class AB device which is at its sensible limit around these power levels, and has been the basis for a

number of successful amplifier designs. It's certainly a cut above the budget Class D offerings that one frequently encounters in this type of equipment. Also pleasing to see is a well specified linear power supply at whose heart is a large toroidal transformer, well hidden inside a black screening can in the centre of the chassis. Two pairs of speakers may be connected, but only one pair can be used at a time; the logic of the switching arrangement does not allow for A+B operation, so the second set of terminals cannot be used for biwiring, sadly.

## Getting going

The first impression one gets of the CVR-100 is how beautifully constructed it is. Even after a close inspection of the casework, it would be difficult to guess the selling price with *any* degree of accuracy – it really is that good. Only the bendy plastic CD drawer lets the side down, but of course you can only see that when it's open!

The best bit of the exterior is without doubt the feet, which are each made from three pieces of machined aluminium and can be locked at any height over a wide range to allow the chassis to be perfectly levelled – not that any of this is mentioned in the manual! The left hand cabinet flank forms the heatsink for the amplifier which is a nice touch; of course the other side matches but has no technical function.

## DETAILS

- PRODUCT:** Block CVR-100  
**ORIGIN:** Germany/China  
**TYPE:** tuner/amplifier/CD player combination  
**WEIGHT:** 10kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 400 x 120 x 330mm  
**FEATURES:**
- 40 watt amplifier
  - FM/DAB tuner
  - network audio interface
  - USB input
  - MM phono stage
  - remote control
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Air Audio  
**WEBSITE:** [airaudio.co.uk](http://airaudio.co.uk)

**HOW IT COMPARES**

A MERE £599 buys you Arcam's Solo Mini System. This has proved a great success on the high street, for a good few years now. Indeed the little Arcam is almost pensionable, born at a time when network music functionality was still the exclusive preserve of multi-thousand pound Linn systems!

Still, its design is timeless; ergonomics are superb, build is excellent and as a package, few boxes offer such a nicely integrated range of sources. There's DAB/FM (both sounding very good), a slick slot loading CD player (with even finer sonics) and a front panel USB socket that's great for computer audio files from a USB memory stick.

The 2x25W amplifier wins no prizes for knocking pot plants off shelves in your listening room, but is still willing and able to drive most modern loudspeakers. Pair it up to the Q Acoustics 2050i and you'll get a big, sumptuous sound able to fill most rooms, for example.

The Arcam can't compete with the Block on feature count, though; the latter's network capability will win it many sales.

Around the back, the various sockets and connectors are also of good quality and widely enough spaced to be able to take the more exotic types of cable. The front panel is dominated by a graphical LCD panel and a rotary control, with the supplementary functions being operated by small pushbuttons. It all looks pleasingly stark and focused, but the supplied remote control (also nicely made in aluminium) offers an extra level of functionality such as pre-tuned programmes, tone controls and various surround sound modes, as well as direct source and CD track selection. The headphone socket, a useful front-mounted line input and the USB terminal are all hidden under a flush-fitting removable cover that is secured by magnets; it's neat but perhaps too easily lost, as there's nowhere to put it while these connections are in use.

**Sound quality**

The line level inputs allowed me to try the Block as an amplifier alone to begin with. With a Cyrus CD8 SE2 CD player and Monitor Audio PL100 loudspeakers connected, the presentation was typical of a modern chip-based amp design; neat and tidy, commendably smooth and very safe but perhaps lacking in the final sparkle that separates a truly great amplifier from those which are merely good...

It made a very reasonable job of solo female vocal (I tried India Arie's *Strength, Courage and Wisdom*), but lacked the ultimate speed and pace to take on harder edged stuff like the solo works of Karl Bartos, which the Block tried to make rather easier to listen to than I know they really are. I got the impression that the bass end of things has been given a bit of extra warmth, but this comes at the cost of

limited presentation of those notes that verge on the subsonic.

Knowing the amplifier's basic character allowed me to assess the CD section with reasonable ease, and I soon found that it matches the amplifier well. The sound is modern and straightforward and is most importantly lacking the coarseness and grain that one sometimes encounters from the current generation of models. It works in harmony with the amplifier well and the two together give an easy-going tonal profile.

**The Block CVR-100 is a fine design which proved excellent value for money...**

With India Arie again I did notice that the CD imaging was somewhat more diffuse in absolute terms, but in general I felt that the disc section stacks up well against many budget players, some of which cost as much as the CVR-100 on their own!

After the consummate competence of the amplifier and CD player, the radio section proved less remarkable. Like many combined FM/DAB tuners, the two receiving circuits are combined so that the FM signal is decoded digitally by software rather than by traditional means. It makes FM broadcasts sound a bit like DAB, with an odd presence lift and a papery texture which isn't a great deal of fun to listen to. Since the tuners are combined, the antenna input is shared by both which is awkward, since two separate antennas are really needed to deal with both systems effectively.

I wasn't expecting a great deal from the phono stage, but actually it

proved really rather good considering the CVR-100's price. Using a Technics SL-1200 fitted with an Ortofon 2M Bronze cartridge, I found the sound to be well balanced and full of detail. It wasn't quite as rich or as dynamic as that which can be obtained from more specialised equipment, but as the basis for a starter vinyl system it is far more than acceptable, and an unexpected bonus for a combination unit in this price bracket.

**Conclusion**

Indeed, I enjoyed the Block CVR-100 very much across all sources, and can recommend it wholeheartedly. It is a fine design and excellent value for money. I have only two small quibbles; removing the tone control and surround processor circuits would purpose it better for audiophile use, I feel. As the unit has both the looks and the quality to cut it in the real hi-fi category, I'd contend that it has little need for such fripperies. Essentially though, the many various aspects of this machine which are good are absolutely first rate. It is worthy of the very best supporting cast – so catch a listen if you can. ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**LIKE:** Great build; feature count; confident, easy, relaxing sound

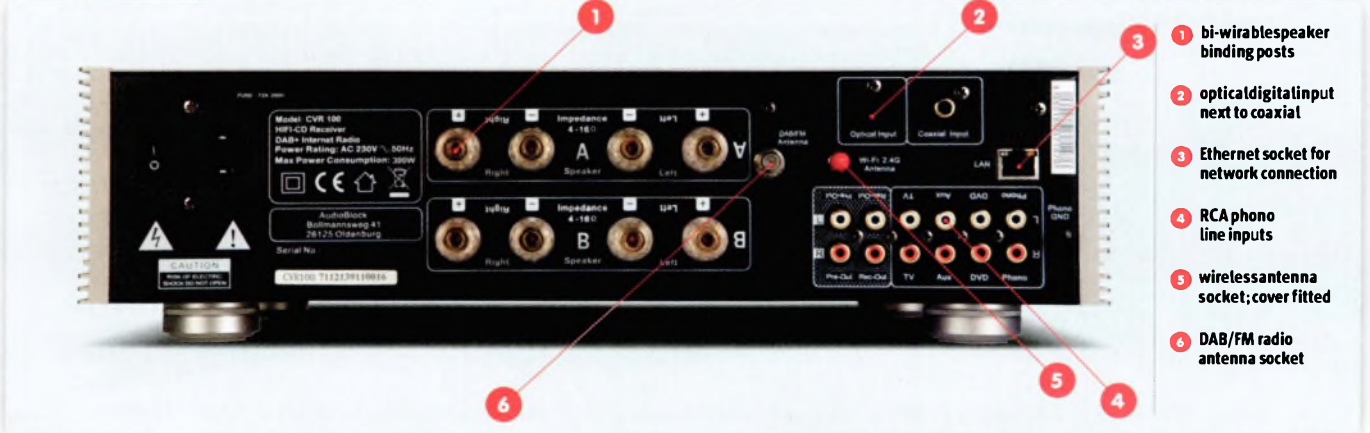
**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★  
**DISLIKE:** FM/DAB tuner a disappointment

**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**WE SAY:** Superb value for money one-box system; an impressive debut from this modern German marque

**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

**OVERALL**  
★★★★★

**CONNECTIONS**





**Our Four Cornerstones are: Quality – Performance – Value – Service You won't be disappointed!**

Feel free to ask which amplifier is right for your room and speakers? They all made for different situations, and all have different personalities! Designed in Leicester by David Shaw. Hand built in our factory in China. Finished and tested in Leicester. We design and wind our own transformers using the best 5N copper and LG iron. Using top worldwide parts from Rubicon, ALPS, Jensen, JJ, SCR, Full Music. Our commitment to quality and service means you are assured of advice, upgrades, and service for at least the 20 year expected life of our amplifiers. You're assured of good performance new or second hand!

## MB845 i mono blocks

Fabulous huge 845 triode mono block amplifiers. NEW improved version of the original. Now with "Low Distortion Tertiary" transformers 90+90w **5 Globes Hi Fi World**

From £3849.95

Low Distortion  
Tertiary Transformers

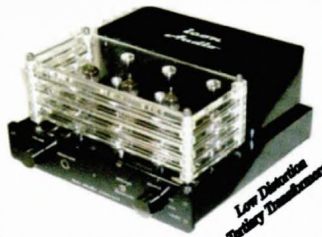


all designed by David Shaw

## ST20PP 15+15W Amp

Guaranteed to amaze and delight you Mullard's amazing EL84 makes this amplifier perform way beyond its modest size. Now with headphone socket. Not sure about valves? Try this with our money back guarantee.

Only  
£549.95



4+Globes  
Hi Fi World

## NEW Stereo 60 MK III 75+75w

Total redesign with new KT120s New Tertiary transformers New power supply, very low distortion. Huge power in 1 box! **"OUTSTANDING!" Hi Fi News group test April 2012**

5 Globes Hi Fi World  
Low Distortion  
Tertiary Transformers



From £2199.95

## KingSound Electrostatics



Compact, Efficient & Beautiful. 3 way design, smaller than a full range panel needing only 40 Watts to fill the average room with sublime sounds. Stunningly transparent. Excellent deep bass from hybrid ABR Only 121Hx28Wx31D (cm) **£1999.95 - Now Only £1399.99** (limited offer)

## The Icon CDX1 CD Player

Several unique features 3 power supplies. Valve rectifier, valve & choke regulated. Hard wired analogue output stage. With a top quality 192kHz 24bit player. Upgradeable.

From £1299.95 (upgradeable)

"Great for any mood or style of music"

Awarded 5 Globes Hi Fi World



## LA4 MK II Line Preamp

"...Major on musical flow and attention to detail, Distortion very low 0.0003% Enormous headroom, bandwidth very wide, very low noise..." NK Hi Fi World, **awarded 5 Globes**

From only £999.95 (upgradeable)



## MB150 150w Mono Blocks

150+150w of pure UL valve power (or 100 + 100w of pure triode). Using 4 KT90, KT88 or KT120. Based on our award winning MB90s. Unlike transistors, these giants retain the Icon warmth and texture at volumes, giving massive headroom and very low distortion. Various upgrades available. **Now available with the new KT120!**

Only £2999.00 Pair 4+ Globes Hi Fi World

Low Distortion  
Tertiary Transformers



## Our Best Ever Mid Range Amplifier!

Stereo 40 MK III our best ever value amplifier. It has everything! 40+40 watts, Triode mode, Valve rectifier. Remote control. Tape loop. Standby switch. KT66/KT88 EL34/6550 compatible. **Two rave reviews in HFW and HFN.**

From Only £1,499 *New 2A3 Model Now In Stock!*

"...Bristling with musical energy, smooth & sweet..."  
P Rigby Hi Fi World  
Awarded 5 Globes

Low Distortion  
Tertiary Transformers



## NEW ST40 III 6AS7 Pure Triode Amp

30+30w pure triode. No feedback. Created as an affordable alternative to the high cost of 300Bs All the attributes of vintage triodes only £60 for a new set of output valves. Warm creamy sound lots of detail. Astonishing sound stage.

All the other features of our Stereo 40 III inc remote control

From only £1,549.95 complete



## NEW MB805 SE Mono blocks

45+45 Watts of Single Ended Heaven  
From £5499.95 (upgradable)

Low Distortion  
Tertiary Transformers



## Stereo 25 MK II

NEW high quality headphone socket for private listening. NEW 6SN7/6SL7 valves for better definition. Upgraded output transformers for better bandwidth. 35+35w. Alps pot, 4/8 Ω outputs, Supplied transparent cover **FREE EL34 UPGRADE WORTH £100 (limited offer)**

Still Only £849.95



## PS 3 All Valve Phono Stage

"Our Fave Affordable High End Phono Stage"

N.K. Hi Fi World. Awarded 5 "Globes"

"Outstanding Product" Hi Fi News

All triode. Passive RIAA. Custom British MC TX option. Very quiet, high output. With the best possible Power supply. Valve rectified & regulated for definition and smoothness, 14kg.

From only £1759.95 complete (inc MC TX)



Common Features: Icon Designs by David Shaw. Hand built "Point to Point" wiring. Designed and finished in Leicester UK. No printed circuit board. ALPS Volume control. Gold plated terminals. Audiophile components.

Silver PTFE audio cable. Steel & alloy plate construction. Soft start. Comprehensive manual inc DIY valve change info Plexiglas valve cover included. "Proper" valve amplifiers are heavy because good transformers need lots of iron!

See our other models at [www.iconaudio.com](http://www.iconaudio.com) Buy through your dealer or direct from us. Export no problem! (EU £30 per box) Want to know more?

.....Or ring us on +44 (0)116 2440593 email [sales@iconaudio.com](mailto:sales@iconaudio.com) **icon Audio** 351 Aylestone Road Leicester LE2 8TA (U.K.)

\*Whilst stocks last, Conditions apply ask for details Prices correct with 20% UK VAT at time of going to press but subject to change 09.2011. E & O E UK Visa, MasterCard AMEX and debit cards accepted



# *icon Audio*



## *Our New Stereo 40 MK III KT88m*

### *Our best value amplifier just got a bit better*



*We have a passion for making well engineered Valve Amplifiers.*

*One of the advantages of being a private company is the ability to offer value and service without reference to accountants and shareholders. Whilst our flagship models rightly get superb praise from reviewers worldwide for their performance and value, we never lose focus on our more affordable products and regularly update them when the opportunity arises. Such is the case with our Stereo 40. Our original brief over 10 years ago to make the best possible EL34/KT88 valve amplifier for a reasonable price still holds true. Our latest Stereo 40 MK III m incorporates several improvements. Most importantly a meter which allows a very simple way to check that the output valves are operating at their optimum value and best performance, so easy anyone could do this. This will also tell you when a valve is due for replacement or when it is failing. Something other designs don't do. The Stereo 40 is almost unique in its ability to use a very wide range of valves including 6L6, 5881, EL34, 6CA7, KT66, KT77, 6550, KT88. Now made very easy to change if you like "tube rolling".*

*In our quest to make the best amplifier in its class we also include all the features we think a good amplifier should have including Triode or Ultralinear operation, remote control, a record loop, a warm up/standby facility, valve rectifier, Low Distortion Tertiary output transformers and many more.*

*There are also things we don't include like printed circuit boards and transistors both of which we feel degrade the performance of valve amplifiers.*

*Obviously the overriding priority is the sound quality which must come from good engineering which we believe to be far ahead of the Stereo 40's modest price.*

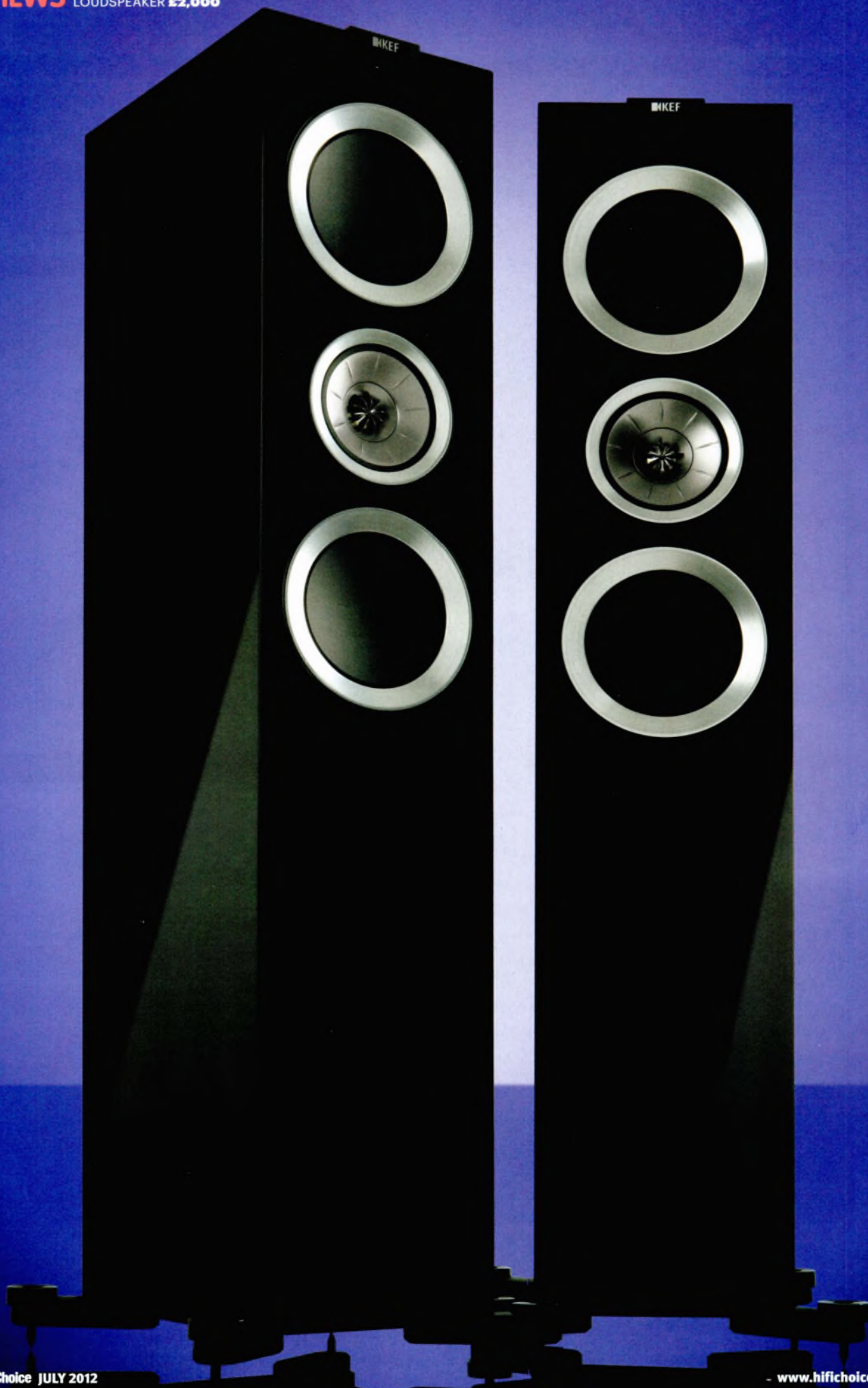
*We guarantee you will not be disappointed!*

*Our four cornerstones are **Quality Performance** and **Value**. And in the future, **Service** when you need it. In this age of "built in obsolescence" it may be unfashionable to talk about repairs and spares but our commitment to future service means you should be able to enjoy your amplifier for at least 20 years.*

*Our new series of "Low Distortion Tertiary" output transformers are the best we have ever made, enabling us to reduce global feedback by about 40%. All of our amplifiers are designed in Leicester: they are commissioned and serviced by the people that designed them so you can be sure of long term performance.*

*All of our amplifiers are hand made using "point to point" soldering without using printed circuit boards. We are convinced this sounds better. It allows for very easy servicing, upgrades and modifications. Remote controlled volume is useful for fine tuning your listening level to match your taste. High quality components are used throughout including an "ALPS" volume control, silver plated PTFE audio cable SCR capacitors audiophile resistors. Power Amplifier operation is possible by selecting a lower "gain" on the rear of the amplifier (this is not done with attenuation which would lose quality). Loudspeakers of nominal impedance between 3 ohms and 10 ohms may be used with virtually no reduction in power or quality. A choke regulated power supply adds a richness to the sound quality that silicon devices alone are unable to do. Tape and other methods of recording and playback are catered for by the "Tape Monitor". Also useful for Home Cinema applications. In short we have created an amplifier of excellent flexibility and quality which retains the qualities of traditional design and performance.*

*From £1,499.95 (Complete including VAT) Upgradeable See also our similar Stereo 40 2A3, Stereo 6AS7 and other award winning amplifiers on our website*



# Cutting edge



The new R700 loudspeaker benefits from advanced technology used in the flagship Blade, says KEF. **Jason Kennedy** listens in...

**C**ue fanfare! KEF is fifty years old, an achievement it has been celebrating with the £20,000 Blade, its most ambitious loudspeaker ever and a design that first appeared as a concept, but made it into full production last year. It incorporates the most advanced version of KEF's coaxial Uni-Q drive unit thus far produced, so it's only natural that the company should trickle down the technology into more affordable loudspeakers. The R series is the first to really take advantage of this, and features a Uni-Q mid/treble unit that shares parts with that found in its aforementioned flagship.

The R700 is an *exceptionally* well finished floorstanding loudspeaker; the piano black sample that took up residence in my listening room is one of the sleekest I've used in a long while. It sits on four precision cast aluminium outriggers for stability, and these have lockable spikes at each corner for a firm fixing. The chrome finished cable terminals have a simple but elegant linking system that consists of threaded caps; just unscrew them to unlink and bi-wire, no need to remove links.

Unlike previous KEF ranges, the R series floorstanders' (of which this is the middle model) drive units are arranged D'Appolito-style with bass units either side of the Uni-Q. The difference is that most D'Appolito arrays have a tweeter in the middle of two mid/bass units, and the quality of dispersion increases as the crossover frequency goes down. By using a mid/treble Uni-Q KEF is able to get this point down to 350Hz, far lower than any tweeter will go.

KEF's engineers have put a lot of energy into making the drive units on this speaker work well, for the Uni-Q they have taken the voice coil, copper-capped pole piece and 'tangerine' waveguide from the Uni-Q in the Blade. The waveguide came about as a result of the research and

development team that is shared by KEF and Celestion, a company that solely makes pro-audio loudspeakers and is part of the same group. The 'tangerine' is neither orange nor round, but does partially block the tweeter dome for the same reason, and this adds a useful 3dB of sensitivity at 20kHz as well as improving dispersion.

The tweeter dome beneath it has been reinforced around the edge with a second layer of aluminium that forms an ellipse-shaped void around the edge and emulates the way that many bridges are supported by a curved structure. The edge, being the weakest part of the dome, needs the most reinforcement, and like certain other tweeters on the market, this one has rearward ventilation via a damped tube.

The midrange driver that surrounds the tweeter is made of magnesium/aluminium, and has a very small surround because it has a very short throw. The bass drivers are a combination of a lightly dished aluminium exterior plate bonded to a

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
KEF R700  
**ORIGIN:** UK/China  
**TYPE:**  
floorstanding  
3-way bass reflex  
loudspeaker  
**WEIGHT:**  
25.9kg  
**DIMENSIONS:**  
(HxWxD)  
321x1,121 x 368mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• bass drivers: 2x  
165mm aluminium  
• mid/treble driver:  
125mm/25mm  
aluminium  
cone/dome  
• finishes: piano  
black, walnut,  
rosewood  
• magnetic grilles  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
GP Acoustics  
**TELEPHONE:**  
01622 672261  
**WEBSITE:**  
kef.com

paper cone of a variety that would be ineffectual as a drive unit, but provides a stiff link to the voice coil.

The R700 is not just about drive units. KEF's engineers have used finite element analysis (FEA) to figure out the best places to put bracing and constrained layer damping pads. There are four large examples of the latter inside the R700 and these help to turn cabinet vibration into heat. The two reflex ports on the rear have also been given the full computer modelling treatment, a process that has resulted in a very specific shape to either end of each port.

## Sound quality

The R700 has a considerably smoother sound than most of the speakers that I am familiar with, and early listening left me craving more definition and grip to the bottom end in particular. But after some positioning experiments and component as well as cable changes, the breakthrough came when I removed the heavy damping that hangs either side of my listening room to dampen first reflections in a long but not very wide room. This allowed the KEFs to show off their excellent lateral dispersion and deliver some bite along with the plentiful dose of detail that they produced beforehand. They image spectacularly well with voices and other acoustic sources, Nils Lofgren's acoustic guitar was revealed in all its bodacious tonality and the ambience of his live performance was projected most effectively into the listening room.

## The KEF R700s image spectacularly well with voices and other acoustic sources...

The R700 has impressive bass extension and needs a bit of space to breathe; it worked best when placed about a metre from the rear wall and a little less either side. KEF supplies port bungs for situations where closer to wall siting is a necessity, but you get the full benefit of the clever port design without them. The extended and substantial quality of bass is obvious with Kraftwerk's *Man Machine*, where synth notes drop down as the track progresses. This was fully apparent thanks to the speaker's ability to control and define the low end. This quality contributes to the realism of images as well, smaller speakers can produce a



The R700 sports KEF's distinct 'tangerine' waveguide

## Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPEAKS TO KEF RESEARCH ENGINEER JACK OCLEE-BROWN...



**JK: Why use almost flat aluminium bass cones rather than more conventionally shaped ones?**

**JO-B:** The midrange driver frequency response is affected by irregularity on the front baffle. Other drivers, the edges of the box and port openings can all cause secondary radiation and scattering of the signal. On the Blade we were able to go to the extreme of only having the Uni-Q alone on the front baffle. For the R-series we were not able to be quite so extreme with the design. However, one of the measures we are able to take to minimise the secondary scattering effect is to make the LF drivers as flat as possible without compromising their performance.

**Unlike some competitors you don't use exotic materials for the tweeter dome, why is this?**

The geometry has a dominant effect on the performance of a tweeter dome. If the geometry is not well designed then the performance can be extremely poor, even with the most exotic materials. For example, if you take a completely flat disc of aluminium of the same diameter and thickness as the R-series tweeter and tried to make this into a driver, you'd find that the dome break-up is only a few hundred Hertz. Because of this we have concentrated on working with relatively conventional materials but using very unconventional geometries, such as the stiffened dome structure, to optimise the overall performance.

**What hardware and cables do you use for R&D listening?**

We have a large Electrocompaniet system, which we use as a high-end, high-power reference. This consists of a pair of the Nemo monoblocks with a EC4.8 preamp. We use a server system as a source with a Squeezebox Touch feeding either a Prism Sound Orpheus, or an Arcam D33 DAC. We also use an Arcam system as a lower price reference consisting of a A38 integrated and a CD37 CD/SACD player. Cables are generally from the Chord Company.



**THE SMOOTH** clean nature of this big loudspeaker's presentation is quite different from the balance you find with competitors such as B&W and PMC. It's not as open as examples from either of these, nor does it have as much dynamic grip. Instead it has a fluid, relaxed sound that renders acoustic sources with considerable panache. It's not quite as dynamic or exhilarating as the PMC twenty.22, but has considerably greater bass extension thanks to two dedicated bass drivers in a substantial cabinet, factors which also give it obviously higher power handling.

B&W's nearest offering pricewise, the PM1, is also a standmount and thus lacks the bass extension and the ease of the R700, but can compete in terms of image precision if not tonal shading. Images from the KEF are more solid and real. **Once you get used to this KEF's balance it is extremely engaging, it really does focus your attention on the message, and not the medium!**

## IN SIGHT



- 1 heavily braced and damped cabinet is beautifully finished
- 2 KEF's Uni-Q mid/treble array sports 'tangerine' waveguide
- 3 one of two rear reflex ports, CAD modelled
- 4 elegantly designed biwirable speaker binding posts
- 5 one of two bass drivers, mounted D'Appolito style

spacious image, but only those that have good bass extension effectively produce the full size of a soundstage and give you such a strong sense of *terra firma* in the recording. It's an intense immersion experience when you use high quality ancillaries like the Aurender S10 digital transport and Resolution Audio Cantata DAC through Townshend's Allegri preamp and Valvet A3.5 class A power amps.

This is a revealing loudspeaker, but doesn't have an obviously transparent balance, rather it has a warmth to the mid and top which makes it very easy to close your eyes and forget about the system so that you can revel in the music.

It's not exceptionally strong in the timing department, yet still has an easy flow that's intrinsically musical. On more than one occasion I found myself being carried away by the melody or becoming engrossed in the way that pieces had been put together in the studio. It does this by presenting the recording in all three dimensions without any emphasis on leading edges, or other hi-fi characteristics, yet at the same time the work that KEF has done to control the cabinet means that it's notably quieter than is usually the case with MDF enclosures.

This KEF can also sort out complex or densely orchestrated music with relative ease; it's always possible to hear what's being contributed to the background of a piece even in the context of busy material. This was evident from Conjure's *Jes' Grew*, a system-tangler of a track with a lot of percussion and a very funky bassline. It's a piece that gets rather messy in the wrong hands and can lose much

of its appeal, but the KEF sailed through without batting an aluminium eyelid. It's this quality that's key to its easy sense of pace. It seems pretty relaxed until something genuinely lively comes along, and then you're swept up in the exhilaration of the music.

## Conclusion

This is the first KEF I personally have got *really* great results from. The ingredients add up to something extremely capable and entertaining. The apparent warmth of the mid/treble is basically a reflection of the very low levels of distortion it produces, and the effortless way the Uni-Q drives the room. Indeed, the R700 is a very revealing speaker that has a remarkably even perceived balance, and very low levels of colouration. It warrants top-notch ancillaries and its build quality is above what's usually encountered at this price. If you want a speaker that delivers the full shape and flow of the music, then hear this. ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Smooth and revealing midband and top allied to hefty bass extension
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Those seeking maximum dynamic grip may not find it to taste
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WESAY:** An extremely polished, well rounded and musically satisfying loudspeaker; fine value to boot!
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

### OVERALL



# Box-Design by Pro-Ject

*Where performance meets convenience*

Whether you want to add an iPod or computer music library to your existing Hi-Fi setup, or you're starting a main or secondary system from scratch, Box Design by Pro-Ject Audio Systems is a fantastic way for all music lovers to bring more high-quality audio into their lives. Every Box Design product combines premium build-quality and exceptional sound with a small size and an attractive price.

## Stream



### Stream Box DS

The Stream Box DS is one of the most affordable Streaming Clients available with high-end specifications.

- Stream 24-bit/192kHz HD Music
- Wi-Fi or Ethernet Connectivity
- Play from USB Hard-Drives
- Gold-Plated RCA Analogue Out
- S/PDIF Digital Out
- UPnP and DLNA Compliant
- Built-In Internet Radio Platform
- Play Digitally from Apple Devices
- Solid, Vibration-Free Construction
- Apple Authenticated

## Play



### Dock Box S Digital

- Take Pure Digital Feed from any Docked Device.
- Built-In 24-bit/192kHz DAC
- Gold-Plated RCA Analogue-Out
- S/PDIF Digital Output
- Apple Authenticated



### Tuner Box S

- Low-Noise FM Tuner
- Manual or Automatic Tuning
- High-Contrast Display



### DAC Box S USB

- High-Quality D/A Converter
- S/PDIF, Toslink & USB Inputs
- 24-bit/96kHz TI Chip

## Listen



### Speaker Box 5

- Two-Way Bookshelf Speaker
- Bass-Reflex System
- Three High-Gloss Finishes
- Magnetically Shielded
- Easy Placement Within a Room



### Stereo Box S

- Integrated Amplifier
- 30 Watts Per-Channel
- Great for Desktop Systems



### Head Box S

- One Headphone Socket
- Rotary Volume Control
- Low-Noise Semi-Conductors

## Expand

### NOW AVAILABLE

Box Design have just announced a new series of high-end power cables and distribution blocks at surprisingly affordable prices.

The Connect-It Power series is available now through most Pro-Ject dealers.



Box Design by Pro-Ject Audio Systems is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.  
[www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk) | Tel: 01235 511 166 | [sales@henleydesigns.co.uk](mailto:sales@henleydesigns.co.uk)

# Bespoke Award Winning Packages for Linn, Rega, Thorens, Systemdeks, Pink Triangle and many more Turntables...

**HI-FI WORLD**  


## Quest

for Rega Turntables

**For:** • excellent midband focus • super bass grip • fine speed stability • enhanced dynamics  
• fit and finish

**Against:** • nothing



**HI-FI WORLD**  


## vivid UPGRADES

for Linn LP12 Turntables

**For:** • silky, spacious midband • superior grip and focus • enhanced dynamics • fit and finish

**Against:** • nothing



**MONARCH**  
TURNTABLE

eclipse<sup>SE</sup>  
TURNTABLE V2

eclipse<sup>SE</sup>  
TURNTABLE V2 12

Apollo  
TURNTABLE 

**vivid**  
UPGRADES

**vivid**  
UPGRADES 12

**Quest**  
REGA  
UPGRADES

**Quest**  
CLEAR

**THORENS**  
UPGRADES

**Inspire Hi-Fi. For all your  
Turntable requirements**

Call our specialist rebuild **HOTLINE** for the above  
and more amazing options

**T: 01246 47 22 22**

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

M: 07932 367555 E: [robert@inspirehifi.co.uk](mailto:robert@inspirehifi.co.uk)

*While you wait rebuilds available.  
Visit our Demo Suite J29A M1.*



an award winning range of CD players, preamplifiers & amplifiers

## Introducing the NEW JAZZ Valve Pre-amplifier from NAGRA

Breaking with a tradition that has always seen its machines designated by a combination of three letters, Nagra presents its new preamplifier, which carries the evocative name 'JAZZ' and is destined to be a successor to the highly reputed Nagra PL-P and PL-L. It's a way of paying homage to the legendary Montreux Jazz Festival where Nagra has been an important partner for many years.

The Nagra JAZZ offers exceptional transparency. It also creates a sound image, which is deep, natural, highly defined and extremely rich in detail.

The first of an exciting new range, the Nagra JAZZ preamplifier is due to be followed by several new models designed by Audio Technology Switzerland. Watch this space!



Nagra ACPS II  
High performance power supply



Nagra JAZZ  
High performance valve pre-amplifier



**R.T.Services**  
AUDIO SALES DISTRIBUTION. ESTABLISHED IN 1986

Accuphase  
Leben  
Nagra  
Peak Consult

Tel: +44 (0) 1235 810 455  
E-mail: [info@rtsaudio.co.uk](mailto:info@rtsaudio.co.uk)  
Web: [www.rtsaudio.co.uk](http://www.rtsaudio.co.uk)



# Eighth wonder

Metrum Acoustics' Octave is a non-oversampling DAC that takes a distinctly different approach, says **Jason Kennedy**...

**T**his digital-to-analogue convertor is the creation of an offshoot of Dutch acoustic engineering company Acelec; chief engineer Cees Ruijtenberg has taken the principles laid out by Ryohei Kusunoki of cult Japanese brand 47 Laboratory and developed his own DAC without using standard off-the-shelf convertor chips. By contrast, the great majority of DACs are based on a small range of chipsets made by companies such

as Burr-Brown, Wolfson and Crystal. These of course make it easier for audio engineers to build complete convertors, but limit the degree to which they can customise their products. Often the differences in DACs come down to the choice of in- and output stages, and usually it's only the latter that are designed in-house. Metrum Acoustics took a different approach by building a non-oversampling (NOS) DAC using industrial chips that accept sample

## ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Metrum Acoustics Octave  
**ORIGIN:**  
Netherlands  
**TYPE:**  
DAC  
**DIMENSIONS:**  
(HxWxD)  
30x103x240mm each  
**FEATURES:**  
• max bit/sample rate:  
24-bit/176.4kHz  
• analogue outputs:  
RCA phono  
• DAC: 4 non oversampling DACs per channel  
• inputs: optical, coaxial  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
istereos  
**TELEPHONE:**  
01206 820 805  
**WEBSITE:**  
istereos.co.uk

rates up to an atypical 15MHz and are useable with both 16- and 24-bit audio signals.

There are two Metrum DACs; the Quad and the Octave; the name indicating the number of convertors on board. There are four per channel on a six layer circuit board and these are run in an R2R (resistor ladder) configuration to minimise noise and produce a signal that has minimal high frequency 'spike' energy on the output. As a result it doesn't need the usual oversampling and filtering seen on commercial chipsets to produce an output that's devoid of high frequency noise, the company says.

Most NOS DACs use old Philips chipsets from before the era of over/upsampling, the classic example being the TDA1541A that can be found in convertors from AMR, Audio Note and other companies, but usually ones that employ valve output stages rather than the solid-state used here.

The Metrum is an S/PDIF-only convertor with optical and coaxial inputs on its compact back panel



## HOW IT COMPARES

**EXISTING** non-oversampling DACs are based on old Philips 16-bit chipsets and have a cult following because of the appeal that removing a fundamental processing stage will always have to an audiophile. However, because they emit a lot of energy above the audio band that can cause instability in wide bandwidth solid-state amplifiers. This is why they tend to be made by companies that use valve output stages.

The Octave, while not oversampled or filtered in the conventional sense, has had its output bandwidth reduced in order to avoid slewing and instability problems in partnering amps.

Ryohei Kusunoki, who came up with the idea of running DACs without oversampling, is of the opinion that it's the removal of filtering that makes them sound different rather than the omission of oversampling. This is because all filters introduce some form of pre- or post ringing to the signal and this is what degrades high frequencies in digital audio.

alongside analogue out on RCA phono sockets. In the streaming age it seems a bit idiosyncratic to build a DAC which does not cater for USB sources, especially one that is 24-bit ready, albeit only specced to accept signals up to 176.4kHz. But Metrum was keen to keep the price affordable and adding a USB receiver isn't straightforward because of the unconventional convertor.

Given that Metrum is trying to keep the costs down, fit and finish is very good – the DAC and its power supply have separate matching aluminium cases linked with a short 30cm lead; a longer 60cm lead is available as an option. Front panel switching for power on/off and input, mean that only one light shows when all is dandy, the second light indicates that there is no signal lock.

### Sound quality

I was warned by the importer that the Octave required a decent burn-in before it would perform at its best, but I wasn't expecting to have to wait weeks for it to come on song.

Another factor is that it's a very subtle device; it doesn't jump about saying look what I can do, but quietly gets on with the job of slowly getting under your skin. The final restraining factor is that I have not been listening to CD a great deal over the last year, streaming from the Mac has pretty much taken over my digital listening and a DAC without a USB input seemed a bit pointless. Fortunately the distributor istereos brings in the Halide Designs Bridge USB to S/PDIF convertor, which when combined with the Octave meant that work went out the window and it became

difficult to tear myself out of the listening seat! Rarely have I heard bass of the quality that the Octave delivers; I have Led Zeppelin's *How the West Was Won* on DVD-A and not so long ago I ripped it to file, but somehow its awesomeness has not been apparent until now. I wasn't even using the mighty ATC SCM150 active speakers, this is with 50 watt Velvet A3.5 power amps and Bowers & Wilkins 802 Diamonds, a highly capable combination, but not one that's particularly strong on low frequency grip. With a source of this quality, that doesn't seem to matter; now I can hear that the quiet man in the band (Led Zeppelin), John Paul Jones, provided a thunderous backdrop to the drive of Bonzo's drums, the genius of JP's guitar and the caterwauling of that tousled fop in the tight trousers, or Percy as he's known!

### This convertor offers a direct line to the power, finesse, beauty and soul of the music

It's not about power though, it's about resolution of low-level detail, in the context of treble that is devoid of the fine grain that makes this convertor so engaging. High frequency harmonics, be they from bells or guitar strings, are truly extraordinary, bringing a vitality and acoustic envelope that makes the notes truly three dimensional. Material of both high and regular resolution is supremely vibrant and alive, and none of that energy sounds like it's coming from colourations in

the convertor – it's all there in the signal. This is why the bass is so good, because its harmonic structure is maintained and delivered on time, this defines the notes across the band and imbues the music with a directness that puts it right in the room. Some convertors manage this with hi-res material, but they usually add a halo to the sound that seems like the acoustic of the recording, but one suspects is an artefact of the hardware. Here you have a clean, clear and precise, yet totally 'for real' presentation of the music.

The most appealing quality that the Octave possesses is its unusually strong sense of pace. This is a fast convertor that delivers an immediate sound, the like of which is usually the domain of more expensive hardware. This is what makes the music appear so alive and dramatic – the fact that the convertor gets it across in such a clean fashion means that you can enjoy it to the full in a transparent system which is not always the case with fast-sounding components. It doesn't make the tempo seem greater, but avoids smearing notes so that their attack and decay is precisely defined, and this creates greater dynamic energy.

### Conclusion

I fear that my enthusiasm may make you think that I am on some mood enhancing substance, but this is the clear and sober light of day and I'm very keen to let you know just how *awesome* this DAC is. If you want to hear how good your music can be, then build a revealing system around the Octave. This convertor may not be obvious, but it offers a direct line to the power, finesse, beauty and soul of the music.

If it was in a big, heavily machined box and made in the US or Japan it would carry a price tag ten times that asked here, and it would still be good value. What are you waiting for? ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**LIKE:** Astonishingly revealing, you won't find better sound at the price

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★  
**DISLIKE:** No USB input, but plus the price of an S/PDIF bridge, it's a bargain

**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★

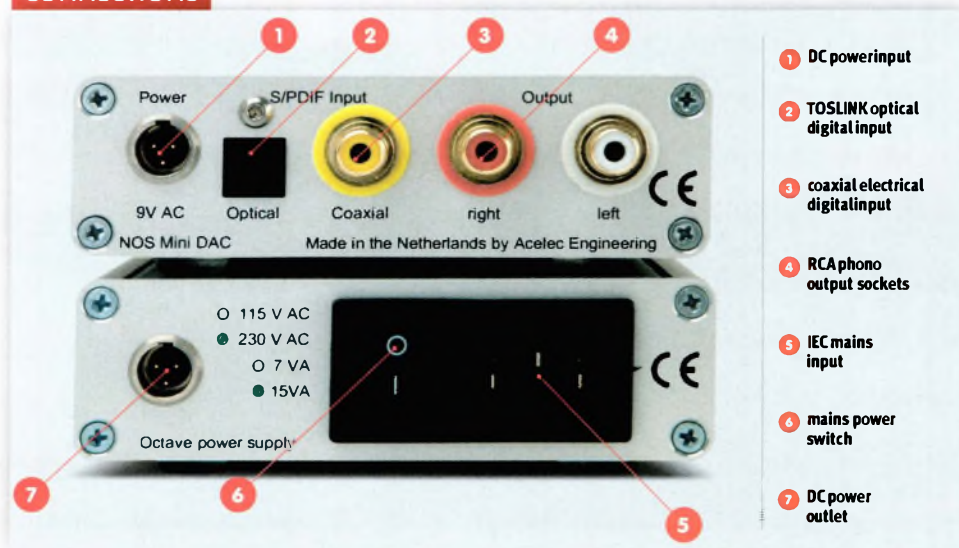
**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

**WESAY:** Products like this do not come along very often, get one while you still can!

### OVERALL



## CONNECTIONS



# Avid listening

Avid's latest Sequel SP turntable leaves us wondering if vinyl replay can get any better, says *Jimmy Hughes...*

**A**vid currently offers no fewer than six high-end turntables. Only Six? Actually it's seven if you include its hugely-expensive limited-edition Anniversary model. Now, just a mo; isn't that a wee bit excessive? Can there really be that much difference to justify such a

broad range? Happily, the answer appears to be yes. For while the less expensive Avid models perform extremely well, high-end vinyl replay is an almost bottomless pit...

You can always squeeze a bit more out of your records, or so it seems. And that's what makes LP such a fascinating medium. It's the gift



## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Avid Sequel SP  
**ORIGIN:** UK  
**TYPE:** 2-speed belt-drive turntable  
**WEIGHT:** 12.6kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 425x370x205mm  
**FEATURES:**

- 3.5cm thick alloy platter
- threaded record clamp
- variable speed control PSU
- suspended subchassis
- supplied with cut-out for SME arm, others are available

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Avid Hi-Fi  
**TELEPHONE:** 01480 869900  
**WEBSITE:** [avidhifi.co.uk](http://avidhifi.co.uk)

that just keeps giving – it keeps surprising you, getting better.

To be strictly accurate, there are just three basic models in Avid's turntable range, with standard and 'turbo-charged' versions, and upgrading possible. Thus, the £5,500 Sequel SP is the turbo version of the Volvere SP.



In the grand scheme of things, the Sequel SP sits below Avid's flagship Acutus SP and Reference SP models, and the maker claims it offers a real taste of these exceptional turntables at a far more affordable price.

I actually reviewed the original Sequel as long ago as 2002 (*HFC* 229) and was mightily impressed by its combination of crisp clean clarity, and outstanding solidity and precision. Those interested can still find this review on Avid's website.

Since then, Avid has improved the design in a number of important areas. Naturally, the basic qualities that made the original so good are retained. But now, added authority and subtlety bring performance levels closer to the Acutus.

The Sequel SP might not be Avid's finest turntable, but it's doubtful you'll notice anything lacking. Hearing it in isolation, you may well speculate on whether or not it could possibly be improved on.

I certainly felt that way about the original Sequel.

And while hearing the Acutus demonstrated that further improvements were indeed possible, sonically the Sequel more than held its own.

Now the Sequel has evolved into the Sequel SP, Avid has been compelled to improve the Acutus to, no

doubt, justify the higher price of its flagship model.

The Sequel SP features a rigid base that supports a suspended subchassis. It's very simple and straightforward. There's nothing fancy, nothing clever-for-its-own-sake, about the design.

Its outstanding performance is the result of solid engineering, allied to the careful choice of high-quality materials. There's no attempt to reinvent the wheel, or introduce flashy innovations for their own sake.

Build quality is very good and the finish superb. Everything feels solid and built to last. While not quite the heaviest deck around, the weight and construction are confidence-building and impressive.

The alloy platter weighs in at around 6.7kg, and runs on an inverted stainless steel bearing shaft with a tungsten carbide and sapphire bearing. The mat is fixed and made from cork. A screw-down record clamp is included.

The platter is driven via two short round belts from a modified 24-pole AC synchronous motor. The motor is quite powerful and produces plenty of torque; something that creates the musical impression of drive.

The Avid-designed outboard power supply unit provides variable speeds of 33 and 45rpm. It borrows technology developed for the Acutus' PSU, and the company claims the result is a significant improvement in sound quality.

## Those who want LP to sound like SACD in terms of neutrality, will find the SP exceptional

The three-point sprung suspension has a vertical resonance of around 3Hz. This provides excellent isolation from transmitted noise, while not leaving the subchassis too floppy and excessively decoupled.

Although quite free to move vertically, the subchassis is surprisingly well-controlled in terms of lateral movement. Three fairly stiff rubber O-rings help centre it, and damp excessive sideways motion.

Avid supplies its turntables with fixings for SME tonearms as standard, and our review Sequel SP came fitted with an SME IV. This matches the turntable sonically, as well as finish and build quality. The Sequel SP is definitely a form-follows-function design. Assembly and adjustment are simple and straightforward. Once set up, performance does not drift. It's definitely not a deck that needs constant tweaking.

### Sound quality

The Sequel SP offers *outstanding* stability. On a well-pressed LP it delivers rock-solid results that rival CD for pitch accuracy and security. There's no hint of waver; if there is, check the record! Individual listeners vary in their ability to identify pitch waver, some being more sensitive than others. But – even those not conscious of such things – register its absence subliminally. There's a sense of total security.

Voices and instruments retain greater separation and individuality. Not only is the stereo soundstage wider, broader, and deeper but the placement of images in space seems noticeably more solid and precise.

Musically, the Sequel SP sounds impressively integrated and cohesive, with lots of fine detail and a wide

dynamic range. Individual timbral qualities of specific voices and instruments are well preserved.

In other words, things don't sound the same all the time. Although the basic musical presentation is crisp and immediate, there's plenty of fine dynamic shading and subtle tonal colour to be heard.

Bass is super-solid and powerful. This was one area where the Acutus scored over the original Sequel.



Even from behind, the Avid is superlatively finished and looks striking...

Offboard DSP varispeed control unit and power supply...



...one of three beautifully hewn, height-adjustable support legs

# 6 Essential Questions To Ask Before Upgrading

## 1 Surely upgrading my cartridge is better than changing my arm?

Staggeringly, tests show that a £120 cartridge can outperform a £2500 one, just by virtue of being in a better arm. Not only this but in the long run it saves a fortune to run a good arm with a lesser cartridge. Arm installation is usually easier than cartridges, with help from adaptors and guidance - Visit our web site for help or phone us.

## 2 Is it worth changing my arm?

Users say they could never have imagined the level of improvement achieved by simply upgrading their arm. The below comment is typical.

*"I'm extremely impressed with the sound and happy I made the right choice with your tonearm. I feel there's no other tonearm that could come close to the dynamics it produces. The sound I'm getting now is pure perfection. I am in total analogue heaven and enjoying my vinyl investments for the first time. In the past I was not happy with the sound and not interested in playing any vinyl. Now I'm looking forward to an entirely new experience. I feel very fortunate in discovering your product." Craig Larson*

## 3 Do I need to invest more than the value of my current arm to get an upgrade?

You can actually invest less and still get a massive upgrade. This surprises many, but at Origin Live we think well outside the box - to create both awesome performance and higher value designs than normal. For example one editor stated in a review of the Silver arm "Price tag is laughably low ... could probably charge 5 times the amount ... words can't express how good this is ... one of the designs of the decade"

## 4 What about new innovations and materials – what do I believe?

The need for trusted high performance arms has never been greater. At Origin Live we have devoted over 25 years of continuous development to achieve ultimate sonic performance.

Origin Live arms consistently win awards around the world, year on year, testament to their leading performance. For example the Onyx arm won "Tonearm of the year 2011 award" in Hi Fi World. In addition to this, review endorsements from respected magazines could not be higher with comments such as;

*"So far ahead of the pack..looks about to lap them" STEREO TIMES,*

*"The best arm I've heard" HI FI WORLD*

## 5 Who has an arm to suite my budget and needs?

The range of Origin Live arms is probably the most extensive in the world. Designs range from £4500 down to £250 - including a 12" version for every model.

## 6 What if I am not happy that the arm lives up to the claims?

You may be apprehensive about an investment of this nature without first hearing it in your system. Every arm ordered through Origin Live comes with a one month, money back guarantee if you are not absolutely delighted (dealers can offer this at their own discretion).

## Why not start enjoying an entirely new level of performance?

To find out more, please visit our web site. You can order the arm of your choice either directly or through one of our dealers.



WHAT HI-FI?  
SOUND AND VISION



ORIGIN LIVE LTD  
Tel: +44 02380 578877  
originlive@originlive.com  
[www.originlive.com](http://www.originlive.com)



*Reproducing the original sound*

## Q&A

JIMMY HUGHES SPEAKS WITH  
AVID'S CONRAD MAS



### JMH: How has the Sequel changed since I reviewed it back in 2003?

**CM:** There have been quite a few changes. We made the platter thicker, and went over to a stainless steel main bearing. We've also made some improvements to the suspension system. Apart from better sound and isolation, we wanted to make adjustment easier, so we put larger O-rings around the suspension housings, which made it operate much more smoothly.

Next came the big SP upgrade. SP signifies variable fine-speed (SP-peed) control. We achieved this using DSP (Digital Signal Processing) to create a near-perfect sinewave. Varying the frequency of the sine wave alters the speed of the motor. In terms of consistency, it's super-accurate; far more so than any of the various DC options out there. In addition, the PSU noise floor is greatly reduced, and motor torque increased.

Using twin drive belts helps transfer all the torque from the motor, so it really controls the platter. Start-up time is now very fast, and belt life considerably increased. But more importantly, sound quality has taken a huge leap forward. And it's not just me saying this. Our customers are telling us, too. Bass dynamics are much better defined, and the deep bass goes lower. At the same time, the top and middle seem to have grown more holographic and three-dimensional; getting that bit closer to our state-of-the-art Acutus.

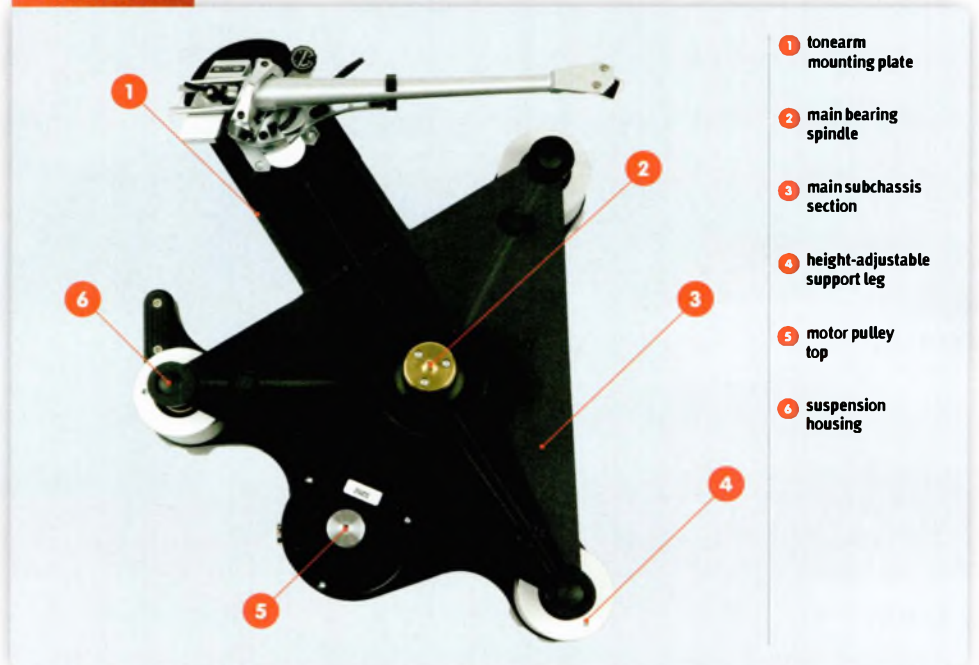
### Your various designs almost seem to feed off one another?

Yes. Just recently we gave our Volvere model a totally separate PSU with larger transformer. We also made the main chassis solid.

### Lastly, which of your turntables represents the 'best buy' of the current Avid range?

I've said for years that the Sequel gives the biggest bang for your buck. However, our best-sellers are the cheaper Diva and Volvere models. After that, people seem to jump to the Acutus. While I'm not complaining, this puzzles me, as the Sequel SP is in the same price range as an SME 20, which is their best-seller.

## IN SIGHT



### HOW IT COMPARES

**PERHAPS THE MOST significant design aspect of the Sequel SP, compared to most rivals, is the fact that it has a sprung subchassis. Many similar decks favour a 'solid' type construction. Thus the Avid is better isolated from external shock than most competitors. However, this does not come at the expense of stability; the Sequel SP is as good as vinyl gets in terms of outright pitch stability.**

Some rival designs, like the Claro Clarity Dual, offer users the opportunity to use two tonearms – very handy if you're comparing pickups! But for most of us, this is not really a deal-breaker.

Once you reach this sort of price level, choice is very subjective, and performance differences are a matter of swings and roundabouts. If you can't happily live with a deck of Sequel SP quality you're exceptionally fussy, and probably a lost cause! Still, do try to get a nice long audition if you can.

This latest Sequel SP now seems to offer greater weight and overall authority than before, rivalling its bigger brother.

Although it's important to audition turntables using LPs that are well cut and well-recorded, sometimes it's more instructive to play something average. Thus, I sampled the Sequel SP on the Walker Brothers' *Greatest Hits*. Hi-fi it ain't. Yet played on the Sequel SP, the sound was amazingly full and rich, with excellent depth and space.

The bass line was surprisingly firm and full, and did not seem lacking in any way. The sound proved remarkably holographic, and an impressively three-dimensional soundstage was created. Thus, a very 'ordinary' LP was utterly transformed.

### Conclusion

Such exceptional clarity and stability soon makes you forget you're listening to flawed, fallible vinyl records. Surface noise is very low, and (given a suitable cartridge), tracking is extremely secure.

Many listeners today seem unfazed by surface noise. A bit of crackle and pop is almost welcome; if anything it reminds you you're listening to vinyl, and not 'pure perfect' CD. It's akin to having film grain in a photographic image...

But is it? For audiophiles of a certain age, ultra-clean quiet vinyl reproduction was very much the Holy Grail. We dreamed of a turntable that made our LPs sound like master

tapes. If that's still your ideal, then check out the Sequel SP.

Those who want LPs to sound like CD and/or SACD in terms of neutrality and clarity will find the Sequel SP exceptional. It allows you to experience the best vinyl has to offer, while minimising most of the downsides. LPs on the Sequel SP exhibit a free, airy, spacious clarity you never get from silver disc. The precision and focus of CD is there, but without that dry and clinical quality you also get.

Suitably partnered, it promises a winning combination of focus and immediacy, coupled with delicacy and finesse that's very beguiling. So much so, it can be difficult to listen to the Sequel SP. It sounds so natural and truthful, your attention is immediately grabbed by the music and performance – indeed you almost forget it's there. ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Powerful, solid, stable sound; build, finish

#### VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** Not cheap (but worth every penny)

#### BUILD QUALITY



**WE SAY:** A worthy upgrade – and one of the best turntables around. It's not inexpensive, but you can buy the cheaper Volvere SP and upgrade later...

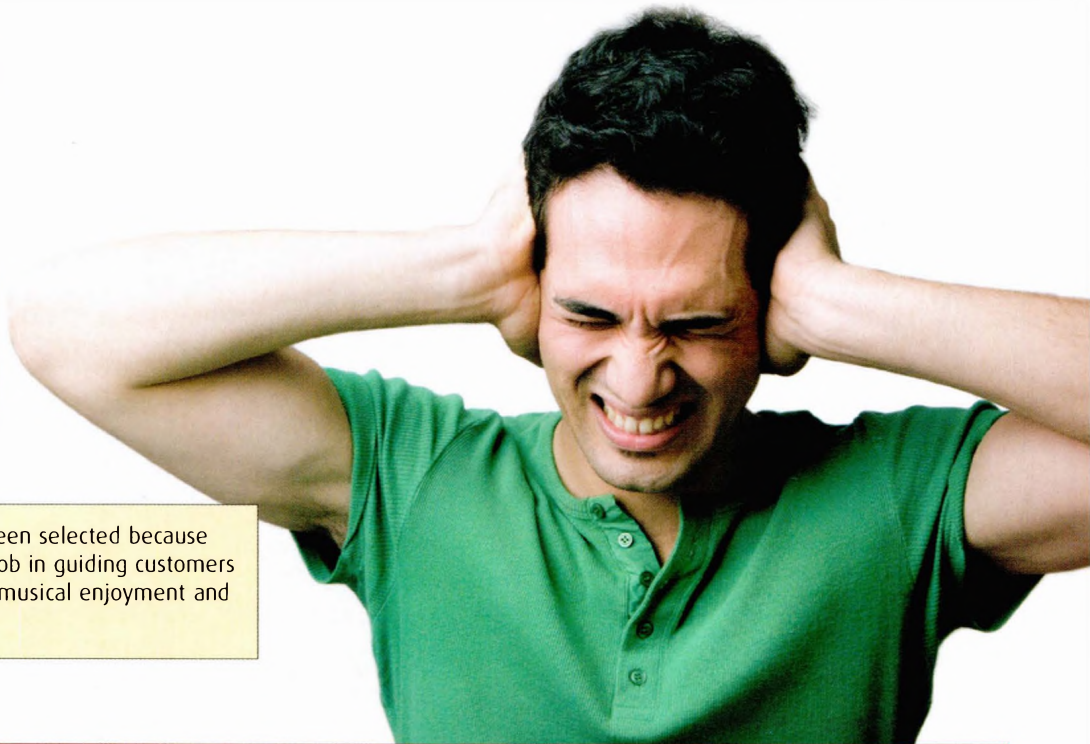
#### FEATURES



### OVERALL



# Music?



The specialist 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.

## OUR TOP 20 UK HI-FI DEALERS

### SOUTH

#### Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI  
40 High Street.  
t: 01233 624441  
www.soundcrafthifi.com

#### Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION  
216 Moulsham Street.  
t: 01245 265245  
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

### Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION  
132/4 London Road.  
t: 01702 435255  
www.rayleighhifi.com

### 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.oandlhifi.co.uk

#### SW20

O'BRIEN HI-FI  
60 Durham Road.  
t: 020 8946 1528  
www.obrienhifi.com

### 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

### Leicester

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

#### Chester

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

#### Hull

THE AUDIO ROOM  
2 George Street, Hedon  
t: 01482 891375  
www.theaudiroom.co.uk

#### York

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

## STAR QUALITIES

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



# Are You Buying Pre-Ruined

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

## Specialist Hi-Fi Retailers

Just as essential a link in the chain as the hi-fi connoisseur is the specialist hi-fi retailer and the two are rightly dependent on each other. Without the specialist retailer the hi-end hi-fi manufacturer would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits 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.

# A class of its own.

The AMR Premier Class DP-777 Digital Processor  
Leading-edge Dual-DAC converter and advanced analogue preamplifier





Sponsored by


 Russ Anderson  
Solutions for better music & movies

# Hi-fi choices

Email us at [letters@hifichoice.co.uk](mailto:letters@hifichoice.co.uk) or write to:  
**Hi-Fi Choice Letters, My Hobby Store Ltd, Hadlow House,  
 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG**

## THIS MONTH:



**JIMMY HUGHES**  
**EXPERTISE:** REVIEWER

**ANYONE WITH A** record collection as large as Jimmy's can't be all bad. Oh, and he's reviewed a breathtaking number of products over the years, and is still standing!



**ED SELLEY**  
**EXPERTISE:** REVIEWER

**FOR THE BEST PART** of ten years, Ed was developing and supporting products from some of the biggest names in audio. Enjoys blogging about his favourite tunes, too.



**TIM JARMAN**  
**EXPERTISE:** ENGINEER

**ELECTRONICS BOFFIN** Tim drives a 1959 Beetle and maintains the best B&O resource on the internet. When he's not rebuilding faulty review kit, he enjoys scouring audiojumbles.



**PATRICK CLEASBY**  
**EXPERTISE:** TECH GEEK

**PATRICK WORKS** in a high-level technical support role in the broadcast industry, when not fiddling with his new iPad and his rapidly expanding eighties LP record collection.

## Off piste

It was fascinating to read your two-page article about the Yamaha TC800GL (HFC 355) ski-slope cassette deck. I had one myself and have fond memories of it. It seems almost a miracle of physics that a medium with such humble beginnings could have aspired so successfully to what we were happy to regard as hi-fi in the 1970s. But before we get all dew-eyed about tape as a recording medium, especially with pre-recorded tapes, we might remind ourselves of its many limitations.

First of all there was the wow and flutter. Admittedly, my TC800GL was free of disturbing wow for most of its working life, which was quite remarkable given my predilection for classical piano music. It did exhibit some flutter on occasion with some tapes however, and that could result in noticeable roughness on clarinet and flute recordings. This is hardly surprising when we consider that the smoothness of the tape path could be dependent on components costing mere pence or fractions of a penny.

Other portable cassette decks fared no better. My Sony TC-D5M was a delightful jewel of a cassette recorder, but wow was audible on piano, as indeed it was on the highly regarded recording Walkman, of which a friend brought me a sample to evaluate.

The legendary Uher portable reel-to-reel recorder could yield an acceptable piano recording only if the tape were replayed

on a machine with much more stable transport, such as the justly revered ReVox A77.

The most expensive wow I ever heard though, was on £5,000-worth of a new Studer mastering machine – the type which incorporates a loop between two replay heads, so that a disc cutting machine can properly set the pitch of the groove based on the recorded level. My 7.5 ips recording of a school choir with piano accompaniment was audibly wowing in the cutting room, and it took all the courage of a rank amateur to persuade the professional engineer that there was a problem. When he eventually transferred the tape to a standard Studer, all was well again, and he could proceed with cutting the lacquer. If the advent of digital

sound achieved nothing else, it would still have been wholly justified on its ability to banish wow and flutter forever!

Cassette tape's problems didn't end there, of course. In the beginning there was great hiss, and then along came Dolby B and its increasingly sophisticated successors to deliver a near-silent background. But Dolby B was very dependent on the accurate setting of recording levels, as well as the frequency response of the recorder and tape combination.

The mismatch was greatly exacerbated by the differences between tape types. A cassette deck would work well only if the recording bias, the record equalisation and the recording level were accurately set for one specific brand of tape. This

alignment was far more important than whether you chose a cheap or a premium brand of cassette.

The TC800GL's controls were buried in the circuit boards, and access required that you remove the two parts of the casing. This was a tedious and fiddly job, partly because of the ski-slope design, but it was not nearly as time-consuming as making an adjustment, recording something and replaying to check what the latest tweak had achieved – and then repeating that step as many times as required, until some pre-determined frequency response criterion had been achieved, or (better still) that the difference between source and off-tape suited the engineer's ears.

## If digital achieved nothing else, it was to banish wow and flutter forever!

The slow speed used for cassettes meant that tape saturation at high frequencies kicked in really early, and frequency response measurements were rendered meaningless at levels above -20dB relative to the Dolby reference level. This was one reason why recordings with Dolby could sound so dull on playback: tape saturation during record compromised the

**Yamaha's TC800GL 'ski-slope' cassette deck – a future museum piece, says Mike Thomson!**



### Lost in music

Help! I have a recently acquired a Marantz SA8003 CD/SACD player and a Naim Nait 3 amp, still the strong beating heart of my system a decade on!

Mordaunt-Short 815s perform speaker duties. I run these via a Belkin Isolator surge protector. I aim to upgrade all except the source. A sample of my one thousand-strong CD collection is Chopin, Mozart, Scarlatti, The Beatles, Lennon, Steely Dan, Pink Floyd, Bowie, Dylan, Robert Cray, Leo Kottke, John Fahey, Ella, Sinatra, techno, ambient, folk, jazz and eighties reggae.

Extensive research, including my subscription to *Hi-Fi Choice*, has focused me on a Naim Nait XS amp or a Roksan Caspian M2, which powered to the top of your circa £1,500 integrated amp group test (HFC 356). Floorstanders that appeal are either the B&W CM9 or Monitor Audio GX200.

One day I might get a streamer and have my head in the cloud or run hi-res files from a hard drive, so I'll need a DAC. I'm convinced it's only worth buying a future-proofed, high-spec unit in terms of both file capabilities

and range of digital inputs (I'll feed in my Pure DAB tuner and Sony MiniDisc, too). Maybe a Naim DAC, Simaudio Moon 380D, Antelope Zodiac Gold+ Voltikus, or a NAD M51. Some of these new DAC dazzlers are, no doubt, headed for your review pages!

Finally, I'm persuaded by the need for a conditioned and protected power supply and have bookmarked the IsoTek EVO 3 Solus (HFC 352). I'd appreciate some views.

**Kevin Saldanha**

**ES says:** *There is a lot of ground to cover here and some upgrades will in turn influence what other decisions you make. If the Nait 3 was pushing the right buttons it would be logical to look at the Nait XS as a successor. This is a potent and incredibly talented amplifier that should work well across a variety of sources.*

*Another great candidate at this price level is the superb Creek Destiny 2, which has similar levels of grip and grunt but slightly greater delicacy. The Roksan is another fine amp but were it my choice, I'd be shortlisting those two.*

*If you are looking at network audio, it is worth deciding whether you want to pursue the computer and DAC route or a dedicated streamer. I am increasingly sold on the dedicated streamer route. It feels more like a 'hi-fi' to me and means you don't get suckered in to trying to work at the same time!*

*The market is expanding all the time, but there are some excellent candidates ranging from the Marantz NA7004 to Naim's phenomenal ND5 XS. Many of these devices are still equipped with digital inputs giving you some useful DAC functionality.*

*As the most subjective area of listening you will really need to have a damn good listen to anything you choose to buy. I would suggest adding ProAc's fabulous Studio 140 MkII to any shortlist. This is a hugely talented all rounder that has the same air shifting ability as the speakers you mention with truly wonderful tonality. Finally, you'll see no argument from me budgeting for the IsoTek – a fine purchase.*

**CV says:** *Hi Kevin, I would hold off for the moment on replacing your Nait 3 until you have made a useful and direct comparison against the Nait 5 XS and Roksan. I really like the Nait 3 and along with the later version of the Nait 2 I found these Naim Audio integrateds gave a more musically engaging and fluid delivery in comparison to the later Naim Nait 5i, which seemed to structure and order the music into blocks rather than communicating a musically well-timed whole.*

*I haven't heard the Nait 5XS, so it is worth doing a comparison and ideally you should test the amplifiers with the new loudspeaker you're after for ease of drive and synergy. I would also suggest that you send the Nait 3 for a check-up to Naim's excellent service department, if you haven't done so already.*

**DP says:** *Amp wise, I'd plump for the Roksan Caspian M2, due to its creamy yet highly musical sound. Still, Channa's words about the Naims are sage; try to [a] dem your Nait 3 against the Nait 5XS, and then when you've established which you prefer, hear that against the Roksan and Creek. While the Creek Destiny 2 didn't fare well in our recent integrated amplifier group test (to my amazement), Creek has just discovered that our review sample was slightly out of calibration. With this in mind, be aware that I'll be reassessing the Destiny 2 over the coming months, as I know it to be an excellent amp from previous experience.*

*Loudspeaker choice depends very much on your amplifier; Monitor Audio's GX200 is superb but has a searching and rather unromantic sound; it would work wonders with the Roksan and Creek, although the Naim might just be a touch too incisive sounding. So come back to us about this when you've decided on an amp. As for DACs, my recommendation now would be the Rega DAC for romance or the Audiolab M-DAC for sheer all round insight and versatility.*

record/replay response at high frequencies. Dolby B boosted high frequencies in record mode in order to be able to reduce them during replay, along with much of the hiss. Another reason could be attributed to the variances in sensitivity between different brands of tapes.

However, it was possible with some effort to set up the TC800GL so that when you replayed a recording made on the machine in synch with the original source, you really could hear very little difference indeed. Overall, it was quite impressive in its day, and it certainly served me well. But you did need to stick to the brand of tape for which you had aligned the machine.

Many of the limitations of the humble cassette – wow and flutter, high-frequency saturation, hiss – were a direct result of the narrow track width and low speed set as the standard many years before it became a hi-fi medium. But even open reel machines at four or eight times the speed and four times the track width gave best results only when they were set up for one specific choice of tape. That choice had to take into account the various, and sometimes conflicting, attributes of sensitivity, print-through, modulation noise, spooling neatness (for domestic machines) and, of course, cost.

Ampex Grand Master, for example, was able to accept incredible levels when I recorded myself playing the honky-tonk Steinway at EMI's Abbey Road, but the subsequent print-through was appalling, and I was glad I had persuaded a friend with a digital recorder to take an immediate back-up copy!

When DAT eventually became a reality for the domestic user, its sound quality trounced that of open reel recorders, and moreover it did so with a tape format whose cost and bulk were a fraction of the equivalent playing time in open reel format.

The death knell for the TC800GL was eventually sounded by the new generation of cassette decks with off-tape monitoring, dual-capstan drive for better speed stability, multi-motor mechanics, user-adjustable bias, EQ and level controls, solenoid-operated tape transports, and crucially, much quieter electronics. But it will always be remembered as innovative in styling, performance



Monitor Audio's GX200 is a superlative speaker, but its incisive sound may not suit all amps, says DP...

and functionality. And it will assuredly find its way into the museums of the future.

**Mike Thomson**

**DP says:** Hi Mike – thanks for your detailed and erudite summary of magnetic tape's many problems. Frankly, I can't disagree with a single word of it. Yet, for reasons of my own, I still warm to ye olde magnetic tape, in both open reel and cassette form. Indeed, I use the latter every day. It's fair to say that, by the late eighties, the Japanese (who specialised in this format), had got building fine quality, reliable cassette decks down to an art. And no, I don't just mean Nakamichi (worthy as these were, many were over rated and all are now overpriced).

There's something really rather lovely about using Compact Cassettes – setting recording levels, adjusting the bias, calibrating the record equalisation, etc. But before you phone up the funny farm and try

## Cassette is a triumph of humankind's will over the laws of physics!

to get me committed, I should point out that it's the sound I like best. A well set up deck adjusted for TDK-SA (still around £1 a pop for a new C90 if you look carefully online) produces musical results that iPods will never know; if you use vinyl as your main source as I do then it makes great sense, keeping everything in the analogue domain.

Most of all, I love cassette because it's a triumph of humankind's will over the laws of physics. Okay, that's laying it on a bit thick, but the point is that nothing in Compact Cassette's design ever suggested itself for hi-fi usage; it was made to work.

As you say, snail-like tape speed and painfully narrow tape width hardly got it off to a good start. Yet by careful honing and development over twenty or so years, the format ended up capable of really quite spectacular sound. Sadly that's something that could never be said about CD, as its 'sonic ceiling' was in its digital specification, rather than the

vagaries of precision engineering and tape formulations...

**TJ says:** I recently encountered the same transport that the TC-800GL has in a Garrard music centre (of all things)! After the usual mechanical problems had been resolved I found the measured speed instability to be amazingly low, it must have been at just the right point in its 'wear cycle'. If only such performance could be produced 'on demand' rather than as a mixture of production tolerances and good luck!

The TC-D5M was an excellent recorder, but this was the 'domestic' version with a Sendust head, made necessary to allow Metal tapes to be used. The professional 'Pro II' variant was the choice for ultimate performance; these used a highly polished ferrite head which may have helped with the very fine speed stability issues that you encountered, although critical piano music is always a tricky subject for all types of tape recorders. Setting the machine up for BASF CRII Super cassettes with SM mechanics also helped, but sadly these have been unavailable for some years now.

**CV says:** Hi Mike, my favourite cassette deck isn't a Nakamichi or a Sony Walkman Pro, but a Delta 100 by Arcam. This model is an esoteric choice in comparison to the aforementioned (and oft mentioned) Japanese decks, but I really liked the fact that a British company would come up with it, and for its cool, restrained buttoned-down design. Indeed, when I mentioned that it was my favourite Arcam product to former company boss John Dawson, he confessed that it was also one of his favourites, too.

### Wayne's world

Please oh please can you review the Audiolab M-DAC? It's been

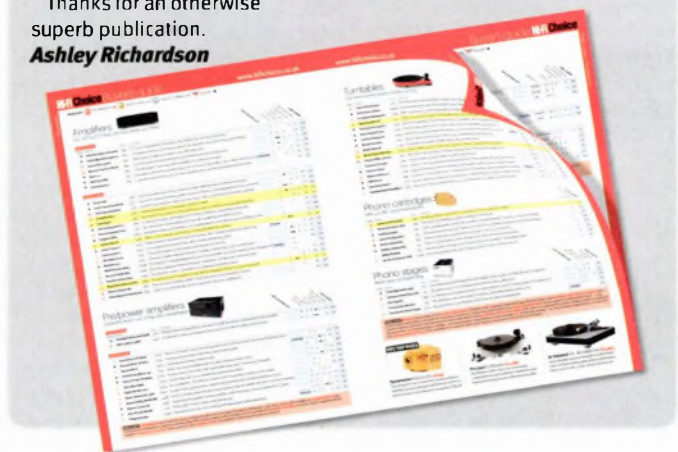
### Wot no buyer's guide!

I am writing simply to let you know that I think ditching the buyer's guide section of the magazine is a bad move. I'm a bit of a sucker for buyer's guides and feel that the Choice Extras section is simply an unnecessary extension of the review section.

I'd like to see a return of the buyer's guide, and hopefully not see a £7 annual Buyer's Guide supplement on the shelves of my local magazine emporium (unless it is really good)!

Thanks for an otherwise superb publication.

**Ashley Richardson**



five months since its release and still no reviews! This is a highly desirable unit and I'm sure that your readers would welcome some expert opinion.

**Wayne Carson**

**DP says:** Hi Wayne, by the time you read this you should have read our June issue (HFC 359), which features a review of the very same.

Since Richard's review, I've had time to do further listening and I must say that, if anything, he understated its excellence. It is surely 'DAC of the year', just as the Rega DAC was last year. The latter, by the way, is still superb and just about pips the Audiolab in terms of lyrical flow, but in

**Audiolab's M-DAC – what the world is waiting for, if your name's Wayne!**

**DP says:** Oh, what a cynic you are, Ashley! The Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Guide is most emphatically not going to reappear with a whopping great price tag at a newsagent near you sometime soon. It is, however, going to reappear online – free, gratis and for nothing, in a more comprehensive form. We're working on this now, and hope to bring it to you soon. Thanks for an otherwise superb letter!

terms of grip, depth, incision, speed, detail and atmosphere the Audiolab is very special indeed. Then there's the superb configurability and flexibility. At the time of writing I am told there's a shortage of units; demand exceeds supply. When this situation passes, if I were you I'd try to audition it against the Rega, and then make up your own mind. Either way, you'll end up with a great bit of kit.

### Back to reality

Dear Dave, I did read the latest edition of Hi-Fi Choice. Well ahem, plenty I could go through, but you've got enough on your plate!

I recall there is yet another Rega belt-drive slab of Medite on the market and priced at 700 quid. Yeah, right! And it was reviewed



by Jason Kennedy. The first thing to state is that I really do love that bloke, I always have. If I remember correctly I did note that he failed to mention what system or phono stage he used for the review, in which he gave glory to the latest overpriced offering in the high end vinyl game!

It's not going to sell out here in the cash-strapped iPod-dominated world of Apple crap. Anyone who was thinking of getting into record playing, well if they have a record collection then they will already have a player. If not, then all that's on offer in LPs and singles are pre-owned and the vast majority in poor condition. Also there are people like me who will advise that eBay, Gumtree and Cash Converters are the places to look.

## The Rega's not going to sell out in the cash-strapped iPod-dominated world of Apple crap!

For example, a three-point suspended deck by the likes of Thorens or SystemDek can be picked up in excellent condition including arm for less than £250. Even better bargains are the classic good-looking Japanese direct drives of the nineteen seventies. In the pre-owned market the common issue is missing, cracked or damaged Perspex covers, but that is an excellent bargaining stand for further price reduction. Out here it is so easy to get a boxed pristine Technics SL1200 Perspex cover for less than thirty quid, as long as it is same dimension as the deck it is to put on; it really adds a look of class to any deck, with that design-genius bubble over the tonearm. And out here we can put together a pre-owned deck for three hundred quid that would put a slab of Medite to shame...

The all-important aspect to playing records is the cartridge and phono stage. I have a Stan Curtis-designed Moth phono and power supply, and I still have my attractive SystemDek, but I haven't listened to records in years...

I do still have faith in you Dave, but you need to inject controversy and brutality into this mag review malarky. And a good place to start is the DIY arena, and there is so

much that covers and would grab the readership's attention. Maybe there are strict rules laid down somewhere that nineteen eighties Naim multibit CD players must not be tweaked to make them sound good? Good luck!

**John Slevin**

**DP says:** *Errm, thanks John! As you may know, I am as into classic and/or grunge hi-fi as the next man – indeed very probably more, as I collect 'previously owned' kit of all ages. But I think we shouldn't confuse apples with pears; many people lack either the time or the inclination to delve too deeply into classic hi-fi. It invariably needs servicing/fixing/aligning, and that counts many people out...*

*So yes, you're spot on when you say one can get all number of great used bargains – and indeed some amazing ones – but many folk simply want the comfort of a warranty card and a shiny new bit of kit in their listening rooms, one that's not going to go bang just when they least expect. As such, that's why people will (and indeed do) pay money for your aforementioned slice of Medite; to those sort of people the Rega is a bargain, as it offers more sound per pound relative to, say, the rival Pro-Ject.*

*Funnily enough, I do agree with you in your last paragraph, which is why in the coming months we'll be running a lot more coverage of modifications and tweaks of existing kit. Look out next month for our review of the Tiger Paw Linn LP12 kit!*

**ES says:** *There is no shortage of very high quality used*

*equipment for the taking in the UK, but equally there is a large quantity of worn out tat being sold in the same listings. Those that know what they are doing can still grab a bargain, but in the same way I don't dispatch my mother to a trade auction when she wants a new car, we need to accept that this is not a silver bullet for everybody. Equally, when significant outside interest is directed at a particular used product, watch values harden significantly. The quantity of good used product is finite. Increase the interest and the price has to go up.*

*I also disagree with the sentiment that all used vinyl is in poor condition. With the rise of sites like Discogs, I'm buying cheap vinyl that is exactly as described. Equally, if nobody is buying new product now, where are tomorrow's bargains? In ten year's time, are we going to be pointing people at the same products?*

*There is a balance to be struck here. I'm confident that we will see some great articles on used products and modification, but we continue to balance this with the best new arrivals on the market.*

**TJ says:** *On the subject of tweaking, the developing market in classic and vintage hi-fi does seem to prefer originality and correctness over home-made 'improvements', therefore it makes most sense to enjoy this sort of equipment as the manufacturer intended. Having said that, the best modifications are usually both invisible and reversible so no permanent*

*damage is done, so long as you stop short of mass component 'upgrades' and drilling holes in the cabinet.*

## Reelin' in the years

Gentlemen, all my hi-fi tackle is on average thirty years old! I used to be a vinyljunkie and still possess the following kit: Rega Planar 3 with its original S-shaped tonearm coupled with an Audio Technica AT30E cartridge, Nytech CTA 252XD Series II tuner/amp and Mission 770 speakers.

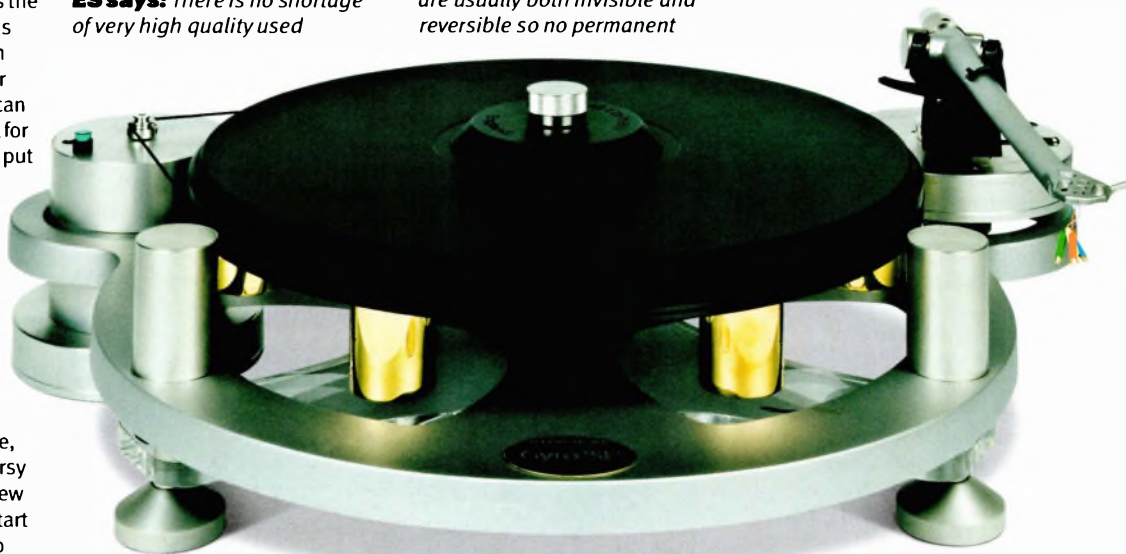
Following my addiction to the polycarbonate peril, I exchanged a Philips CD100 for a Meridian MCD Pro; I became hooked and still am. With a later interest in music DVDs, I purchased a Meridian 596 along with Atlas Explorer cables.

Where, oh where do I start in upgrading my equipment? Although I've become increasingly more interested in playing vinyl again, the CDs still deliver on occasion sufficient quality to suit my predominant rock and rockabilly tastes. Can you help an OAP with limited funds, therefore, in his quest for acceptable audio perfection?

**Malcolm Twigg**

**CV says:** *Hi Malcolm, I would suggest as a first step, getting your Rega serviced (by Rega, through one of their dealerships) and then acquiring a Rega wall-mounting turntable bracket which isn't too expensive. After siting the Planar 3 properly, then you can think about upgrades*

**What's the cheapest significant upgrade to a thirty year old Rega? A Michell GyroDec, thinks DP...**



which can be more accurately assessed one step at a time – such as a new/tuned RB301/300 tonearm followed by a cartridge then onto a good amplifier afterwards and so forth...

**TJ says:** This is almost a dream system for the vintage enthusiast and a beautiful period piece! As a former CTA 252XD user myself I can vouch for the strengths of this design, but while it is a very good performer some overhaul work may be needed to maintain the original performance. Nothing too drastic mind you, but the two power amp modules do run hot so drifting adjustments and dried up capacitors may now both need attention. The same goes for the loudspeakers, whose roll edges may now be beginning to disintegrate.

Upgrading any one piece of a set-up like this is likely to spoil its balance, so my advice would be either to opt for sympathetic restoration of what you have or a complete new system. In the case of the latter, try Rega's latest offerings, a Cyrus amp and whichever sources you require (seeing as you obviously like small and neat equipment) and loudspeakers of your choice selected by careful auditioning.

**DP says:** As Tim effectively implies, you've got a very nice classic system, and [a] it's a shame to spoil it, and [b] you'd have to spend quite a lot of money to really improve on it.

But here goes, my suggestion for the most cost-effective upgrade path... Your old S-shaped Rega Planar 3 is off-the-pace these days, so you'd need to think in terms of Michell's GyroDec SE turntable. Factor in a Michell TecnoArm tonearm and you're looking at around £1,500, plus cartridge (I'd suggest an Audio Technica AT-F3 II for an additional £150 here). This would give you a far more 'widescreen' presentation, with loads more detail and grip. The Nytech already has a good moving coil phono stage (easily capable of getting the best from a budget MC), so next would be a speaker upgrade. Given that your Mission 770s are actually rather good (still) in their way, you should reap the rewards of the source upgrade without having to change your loudspeakers – yet.

When you're ready to upgrade them, come back to us and we'll suggest your next step.

### Tied up

Can you help me overcome what I hope will be my final hurdle with my current system – the loudspeaker cable? My current set up includes a Cambridge 840C CD player (heavily modified circuits/clock, etc.), Cyrus Pre X, PSX-R power supply, Rotel RB1092 power amp (what a truly amazing unsung hero!) and my trusty Linn Kabers. Interconnects are all Chord Company Anthem 2 and Signet. My speaker cable is a Linn K400 bi-wire. The equipment stand is a Sound Organisation glass and steel affair, but with MDF shelves replacing the glass ones; what a huge difference MDF made (two 18mm MDF layers under the CD really lifted clarity, smoothness and resolution).

### Cable suppliers remarked that the Linn k400 cable was past its best...

At the Bristol show I had a number of conversations with cable suppliers, who all remarked that the Linn K400 cable was past its best and that alternatives would yield tangible results. So my question is where do I start? At what sort of budget will it be a real upgrade? Should I continue to bi-wire, should I go second-hand or do cables degrade over time?

My only recent cable experience was with the Chord interconnects which really did make a big difference. Budget is between £35-£40 per metre for bi-wire, £20 for single if I will have to double up to bi-wire. Music taste is mainly rock, especially the light variety. I typically like a dynamic, detailed, slightly analytical sound.

Hopefully you can help me sort this last part out and I can then just relax, kick back and (don't tell the wife!) start saving for the next upgrade!

**Dave Mayer**

**DP says:** Hmm... that's an interesting system, obviously voiced to deliver a specific sound – drier than a desert during a drought! I expect after a long listening session you feel the



Leema's Stream CD spinner, an impressive product backed up by excellent customer service...

### Respect due

I feel I need to write to you regarding customer satisfaction. Approximately three years ago I purchased a Leema Stream CD player which is very impressive... well, at least it was! It suddenly developed a driver error and wouldn't allow the drawer to open, so I contacted Leema via its website to explain the situation. Leema responded within minutes asking me which day would suit me as they wanted to collect the machine and take a look at it for me, promising a seven working day turnaround.

Leema resolved the problem, but not only that, it uploaded the latest software and upgraded it to the Leema Stream 2 free of charge. Leema's services are out

of this world and, I must admit, so now is my CD player! Thank you all at Leema.

**Phil Dilley**

**DP says:** Thanks Lee and Mallory – sorry, I mean 'Phil'! But seriously, it's great to hear stories such as this; we have a number of excellent manufacturers here in the UK and it's always nice to know that customer service is not dead! More please, folks...

**ES says:** Heartening to hear that service above and beyond can still be found in these troubled times. Kudos to the Welsh wizards!

need to gasp down a sports drink to replenish those lost electrolytes? The Cyrus Pre and Rotel power give a super spry, clean and analytical result, which your Linn speakers do absolutely nothing to change. And as for your choice of Linn speaker cable, pass the saline solution!

The good news is, of course, that a nice new pair of modern speaker cables might just grab back a little warmth and tonal richness, although don't worry, this is never going to sound like it's got Quad II valve amps in circuit! So, my recommendation would be the Tellurium Q Blue speaker cables (£16.50 per metre, mono-wire). As well as adding (or rather, not subtracting) the full flavour of the

recording's original 'tone', this will give you precisely the sort of live and direct sound that you originally sought when buying the Linn cables. The music will sound larger, bolder and more vivid than your ageing Linn cables – with the bonus that there's a fuller and more realistic tonality too. Write back and let us know how you get on, then we'll suggest your next step.

As for your more general questions, cables don't degrade over time as such; although the contacts on them degrade faster than you might expect. They oxidise, and/or get covered in an invisible layer of crud which has a deleterious effect on the sound. That's why I can't recommend highly enough that you go over all your system's



Tellurium Q Blue speaker cable – a great upgrade for ageing Linn LK400!

connectors and plugs with Kontak, or similar. This relatively inexpensive (£15 a pop) tweak is a revelation in older systems. As for bi-wiring versus mono wiring, that is something that would require more of a philosophical treatise, rather than an answer in these crowded pages. Suffice to say that some loudspeaker manufacturers don't believe in it, others do. I myself generally notice improvements when bi-wiring, but it is speaker-dependent. More pertinent is the cost/benefit aspect of bi-wiring; it's often better to get better speaker cable and mono wire it, than to bi-wire with cheap, nasty stuff. In your case though, I'd suggest you go ahead and bi-wire with Tellurium Q Blue.

### Cool for cats

Guys - following Stu's missive last month, I thought I'd better let you all in on my top tip for room tuning. 'Active dynamic resonance filters', as I call them, can be found all over my listening room. Their furry construction is excellent at breaking up sonically destructive standing waves, both damping down the sound and diffracting it away in an irregular fashion, so as to control reverberations. They have the added benefit that they - from time to time - reposition themselves. This means that my listening room never sounds quite the same, although their position can be periodically 'preset' by the use of Whiskers 'Crunch Cat Treats' (£1 from your local supermarket). I attach a picture of Marley bravely resisting the resonant modes!

**Mike Irwin**

**Stand up for your listening room rights! Well, maybe not, says a sleepy Marley Irwin...**



## LETTER OF THE MONTH

PRIZE  
WINNER!

### IT WOULD'VE BEEN REMARKABLE TO SEE AN ISSUE OF HI-FI CHOICE TEN YEARS BACK LEADING WITH A VALVE AMPLIFIER!

But now your magazine seems to have embraced the breed wholesale.

Indeed, it's not just *Hi-Fi Choice* that's

been doing it, as it almost seems normal these days to run reviews of these things alongside conventional solid-state transistor amplifiers. No longer are they the preserve of the weird and whacky hobbyist. Indeed, it's fair to say that there's something of a valve amplifier revival going on, even if you can't call it a revolution!

What fascinates me are the sonics. I have run a Naim 32.5/NAP250 pre-power amplifier for the best part of thirty years, and still really like it. But I recently heard the PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium that you tested in a dealer, and was quite amazed how different it sounded. I'd expected a syrupy, soupy sort of sound but nothing of the sort! I wouldn't say it was as powerful and punchy as my Naim, but in some respects it wasn't far off; indeed it actually sounded more musical - which is always what Naims were famous for. All this is causing me to reassess my hi-fi system and I am now wondering whether to invest in a serious valve amplifier instead. What do you think?

**Richard Verdeschi**

**DP says:** *When I first got into hi-fi, it was the heyday of high end solid-state in the early eighties. At that time, my experience of tubes was confined to an old Cossor reel-to-reel recorder I'd inherited from an uncle who'd passed away. And yes, it sounded syrupy and soupy, as you describe. I later heard a friend's father's Quad-based system, and again it was super-soft and sugary, but about as a dynamic as an asthmatic ant!*

*I suspect many audiophiles of a certain age have had similar experiences to myself, having early recollections of aged valve equipment that (likely) hadn't been serviced for decades, and/or set-up to play 'Sing Something Simple' by the Kings' Singers rather than Motorhead's 'Killed by Death'! This, however, is very misleading; those venerable old valve systems of yesteryear have very little in common with modern tube amp designs, which use modern components/tubes/wiring. Indeed, even many classic valve amps - such as the Leak Stereo 20 for example - can sound surprisingly modern, fast, clean, open and punchy when given a sympathetic rebuild and/or new valves. Whilst little is new in valve amp circuit design, modern audiophile 'best practice' is being applied with great results.*

*However, remember that valve amplifiers are invariably limited in power compared to solid-state designs, and as such need the right loudspeakers. That's the biggest issue a tube amp owner faces; if you have a pair of sensitive speakers (with a quoted sensitivity of over 90dB, say), you'll be able to run your tube amp in its comfortzone. If it's asked to drive power-hungry designs, prepare yourself for the sound of the amp struggling; no tube amp is much fun at or near full volume; at this point the output transformers have a habit of saturating. So make sure that you try any possible purchase with your existing speakers before you buy!*



**WIN A RUSS ANDREWS POWERMAX PLUS MAINS LEAD WORTH £50!**

Letter of the Month winners receive a Russ Andrews PowerMax Plus mains lead worth £50. Write to us at [letters@hifichoice.co.uk](mailto:letters@hifichoice.co.uk)



ANTHONY GALLO  
ACOUSTICS

ARCAM

ATLAS Cables

audiolab

AUDIOVECTOR

Bardaudio

B&W

BOSS

THE  
CHORD  
COMPANY

CHORD  
Cables & Accessories Limited

CREST

CRESTRON

CYRUS

DALI

DENON

EPSON

EXPOSURE

GENELEC

GOLDRING

GRADO

IMAGE

ISOTEK

JVC

KALEIDESCOP

KEF

KUDOS

LINN

LUMINEN

MARANTZ

SHELL ENGINEERING

MUSON

MUSICAL FIDELITY

NAD

NAIM

NEAT

ONKYO

PANASONIC

PMC

PROAC

PRO-JECT

Q

QUAD

RASA

ROTEL

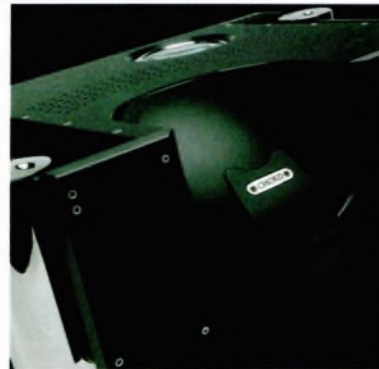
SOUND

SPENDOR

THE CHORD RESEARCH

VELODYNE

WILSON BENEFICIAL



Visit our dedicated demonstration rooms at:  
3 Bridge Street  
Guildford  
Surrey  
GU1 4RY

Opening Hours:  
9am-6pm Mon to Sat (later by appointment)

Tel:  
01483 504801 or 01483 304756

Email:  
info@pjhifi.co.uk

Web:  
www.pjhifi.co.uk

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ The only real hi-fi shop in Guildford

# Future love paradise?

Apple has a serious vision for the future of digital music, and it's brave new one, says **Patrick Cleasby**...

Isn't the internet brilliant? No matter how insignificant or bizarre your special interest, you can find a like-minded community in a matter of seconds. Now I'm old enough to still not quite get Twitter (@cleasby), but it recently proved immensely useful to me as a gauge of just how important our petty audiophile concerns over the Loudness Wars are...

For any special interest group, the crowning moment is when your *cause célèbre* gains the spotlight of a piece of national voice radio exposure. Now everyone will be able to understand what we have been wittering on about for years!

Well, we had our moment a couple of months ago on Radio 4's *PM* programme, and it was utterly wasted. As ever this was all prompted by Neil Young's blatherings about hating the sound of modern music. Avuncular Eddie Mair (@eddiemair) had that nice Bob Stanley (@rocking\_bob) from Saint Etienne on to assess the compression on two versions of Neil's *Old Man*. "Ah!", I hear you say, "data rate or dynamic range?" And so you should!

And so should the participants – there is enough Loudness Wars information out there for any researcher worth their salt to be able to brief their presenter properly, and one might expect a musician of twenty years standing to know the territory, too. But no, we got a confused lack of clarity from all parties. The very nice Bob always was a bit more of a 'theoretical' musician – bloody ex-writers!

The convenience of Twitter is that even at this later stage we can check back and assess the weight of the audiophile backlash. Er, no we can't, there wasn't one! There was me – I emailed in immediately offering to set the record straight the next day (no response) – and there was a "doh, aren't I stupid?" tweet from Rocking Bob. That was it. All of Radio 4's reach and gravitas afforded to us, and no significant reaction generated and certainly no wisdom imparted...

So does anyone in the real world really care about the digital mashing up of our audio? Well, moving from the small and insignificant angle to the corporate behemoth angle, Apple does (dons helmet)...

Let me explain. Once again, a couple of months ago one of iTunes' under-noticed advances was launched (Ping anyone? Thought not...). This time we had a slight push for a new category called 'Mastered For iTunes'. This appellation is supposed to denote that special care and attention has been paid to the

mastering of these digital versions – effectively optimising them for iPlayback. Hilariously the most recent offerings from Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers were featured – possibly the two acts at the head of the 'egregiously compressed and/or clipped' list!

So the Apple-sceptic would be bound to condemn this as Apple's latest piece of marketing hype. But unusually for Apple, perhaps, it has been incredibly open about what it is doing here, and the intentions are very good indeed. It has even published a PDF of guidelines for 'Mastered For iTunes' and opened up the audio analysis and encoding tools to all and sundry.

Although the guidelines are intended for record companies and mastering engineers, they are publicly available. I heartily recommend that you download the PDF and give it a thorough read – it is an excellent introduction level primer to how we should be treating our digital audio, and gives some insight into Apple's (hopeful) future plans...

Reading between the lines you can see where the company is going with this – the only mandatory aspect of the whole scheme is that to get the badge the source must be true 24-bit, ideally at 96kHz. But it does advise testing for clipping, not over-compressing, leaving 1dB digital headroom. All good stuff! It is not difficult to imagine that once Apple has a head of steam built up in this format it could actually start selling it. The company even alludes to this directly, and also puts itself in the frame as curators of our future digital cultural archive! (Certainly beats searching around for tapes stored in libraries). Ironically, the main blockage to this would be that Apple's own playback pipeline is hobbled to 16-bit in several key areas, notably AirPlay. Who's going to bet against the Mountain Lion (Mac OSX 10.8) launch containing a big 24-bit reveal?

Radio 4's audience might not give a monkey's about compression, but the company which appears to be aiming to maintain a gigantic digital locker of all our master recordings forever, seems to care about both...

I suspect how you view this will align strongly with your views on the iEmpire. I'm aware that some folk have a long list of oft-repeated grievances with the Cupertino company, but why don't you put those aside momentarily and consider what it's doing here? Imagine how happy we would all be if lossy compression was made a thing of the past, and a more sensible approach to dynamic range compression was employed as part of the process...

Imagine how happy we would all be if lossy compression was made a thing of the past... Apple puts itself in the frame as curators of our future digital cultural archive!



**PATRICK CLEASBY**  
Tech go-to-guy, digital music obsessive  
and budding record collector



# Special operations

Op-amps. Love 'em or hate 'em, they're a fact of modern audio life, says a discrete **Richard Black...**

One of the staples of audio electronics since the 1970s has been the 'op-amp'. The name is short for 'operational amplifier', which has always struck me as silly (would you want a non-operational one?) [I can think of a few in my spare room – *Ed.*] but has been used since the late 1940s to denote a multi-purpose building block, with a certain configuration of inputs and output and high gain.

Very high gain is not necessarily what one wants, but op-amps are intended to be used in circuits with feedback. Feedback is a means of reducing circuit gain to more practical levels, while at the same time improving linearity, both in the sense of frequency response (flatter) and distortion (lower). There's an audiophile argument to be had over the whole subject of feedback, but let's save that for another day!

The great attraction of op-amps is that they are so versatile and easy to use. Want to amplify a small signal? Op-amp and a very small number of passive components – design it on a cigarette paper. Frequency-response shaping (LP equalisation curve, for instance)? Ditto, plus three or four more passive components. Buffer? Op-amp and even fewer passive components, and design it in your head!

In theory – and by that I really mean at the very simplest level of theory – an op-amp has infinite gain, infinite bandwidth, infinite input impedance, infinitesimal output impedance and unlimited output current. You surely won't be surprised to hear that in practice *none* of those is true. When designers choose one particular op-amp over the others that are available (and there are hundreds of 'em) it's because of various real-world limitations, or departures from ideal behaviour...

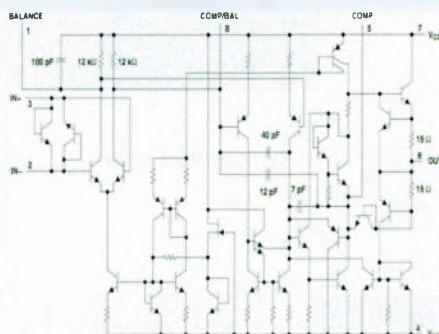
The funny thing is that one of the most popular op-amps in audio designs today is truly a veteran design, going back to the mid-1970s – the NE5534 and its dual variant, the NE5532. Almost every time I open up a new bit of digital audio kit I find a couple of these. It's funny, not least because a couple of decades ago the component had no audiophile credibility at all. On the contrary, lots of us would take great delight in removing them (sometimes in the dozens) from bits of hi-fi and professional recording equipment and putting in their place various 'fashionable' replacements. This kind of 'op-amp rolling' is made possible by the fact that most of them have very similar pin-outs and in many applications can be swapped around, though it was much easier in the old days of components with leads sticking out

which were fitted in sockets; replacing surface-mounted parts is a LOT less fun.

The 5534 was designed specifically for audio. It has quite low noise, not stunning and certainly not good enough for a good moving-coil phono stage for instance, but plenty adequate for the most demanding line-level applications. It also has very low distortion, and in typical circuits with feedback the overall result is distortion in the 0.001 percent (-100dB) region. Its bandwidth is more than adequate for normal audio applications, as is its 'slew rate' – the maximum speed at which it can change the voltage at its output up or down. It can drive quite heavy loads by op-amp standards, and in general it's easy to use, being free of the troublesome 'parasitic oscillations' which particularly plagued some early ultra-fast op-amps.

It's not the ultimate in any one parameter, but more than that, some audio commentators felt that alternative parts in some way sounded better in various applications. Some tweekers spent not only considerable time, but quite a lot of money replacing 5534s, and yet now it passes signals that are commended by magazines and owners as 'top-notch', 'ground-breaking' and lots of other superlatives, in products from some of the very best-received names in audio.

If this little history proves anything, it's the danger of making unsupported, snap subjective judgements. Many of us have experienced that feeling that comes when, after many 'upgrade' component swaps, we're told that the very first item we listened to is back in the chain. Frequent use of a reference is invaluable in assessing audio gear and, in hindsight, that's where we fell down in op-amp comparisons. But it's not all bad; the 5534 is now as cheap as fifteen pence each in quantity. Nice to know that you don't always have to pay over the odds for quality!



The 5534 op-amp is now as cheap as fifteen pence each in quantity. Nice to know that you don't always have to pay over the odds for quality!



**RICHARD BLACK**  
Prolific musician, recording engineer and reviewer

YOUR MUSIC NEEDS  
**YOU!**



BUY A **LINN DS** TODAY AND GET A  
**iPod or iPad FREE!**

QUALITY AUDIO AND AV SINCE 1985

**A SOUND GALLERY EXCLUSIVE!**

Buy a Linn Majik DS or Linn Majik DSM and we will put you in control with a brand new Apple iPod touch for **FREE!** Purchase a Linn Akurate DS or Linn Akurate DSM and enjoy building your ultimate playlist with a **FREE Apple iPad** on us!



RP6 record player by REGA.

ARCAM cinema systems



SUPERUNIT1 music streamer by Naim.



PMI speakers from B&W.

# Quality control

When it comes to digital volume controls, the old rules don't necessarily apply in the filestreaming age, says **Jason Kennedy...**

**T**his business is not short of wannabes who spend a bit too long in the shed tinkering in the hope that they can create the next Holy Grail of high fidelity. Usually they dream up loudspeakers or cables, but occasionally something more ambitious is attempted. All too often they end up reinventing the wheel...

Sometimes, however, they choose a niche that proves fruitful, and create a product that just *might* be a game changer. One such character is Scott Berry, an American living in London who has managed to put together something that works extremely well and looks like it could put the cat among the digital audio pigeons! Scott works under the guise of CAD or Computer Audio Design, and unsurprisingly he has spent more time than most eking the most out of music files in his quest to create the best USB DAC (in the world ever)!

He has ended up with a highly dedicated convertor, one that eschews inputs other than USB, and only has one of those on a back panel that is empty save a pair of high-quality RCA phono sockets and a captive mains lead. How commercial such an approach will be remains to be seen, but it sounded extremely good with a Mac mini computer.

The case is all acrylic in a chunky matt black form that's both unusual and attractive, and it contains Scott's NOS (non-oversampling) DAC, which he built out of 16 TDA1543 chips, a classic 16-bit converter from the nineties that has something of a cult following. It's the first example to my knowledge of a USB DAC using such a basic, in bit-depth terms, converter chip yet it sounds better than any 24-bit example I've come across in the streaming era.

In the process of building the DAC, Scott discovered a few interesting things about getting the best from your computer, and one of the more controversial ones is that the replay gain option on software like Audirvana Plus and Decibel among others can sound as good if not better than the volume control on a serious preamp.

This is pretty controversial stuff, because this system of volume control is based on reducing resolution in the digital domain, an approach which did not prove terribly successful in the early days when such devices could be found on a few DACs

and CD players. Times have changed however and the dithered system of attenuation that modern software uses is arguably less detrimental to sound quality than the volume pots found in many amplifiers. Scott has been to a number of dealers and managed to gobsmack them by bypassing their classy preamps and delivering higher sound quality. When he tried the same in my system the change was not huge, in fact it was damn close, but given that I use the Townshend Allegri autotransformer passive preamp, this is no mean feat!

Very little gets close to the sound of the Allegri, very little except the software in the Mac that I have been using for the last year or so it would seem! In most cases, of course, you need a preamp or that section of your amp to be able to switch inputs if nothing else, but if you are a dedicated computer audiophile this is an astonishing discovery.

I went back and did some further A/B comparisons with the Allegri and came to the conclusion that its timing is clearly better than the software, but in other respects the two are surprisingly close. I tried the same thing with a Cambridge Audio Azur 851A integrated and got a dramatically better result when bypassing the onboard volume control, again it was timing that improved but this time the software controller clearly had the upper hand. The 851A has a better power amp section than I'd realised.

All of which goes to show that the pace of change within digital audio is too fast to be taken for granted, what was once a very poor substitute for a proper preamplifier now gives good examples of the genre a real run for their money.



Scott Berry has managed to put together a product that works well and looks like it could put the cat among the digital audio pigeons!



**JASON KENNEDY**  
Former *Hi-Fi Choice* editor and veteran hi-fi scribbler

# K2 Series by Roksan Audio

"In short, the K2 system delivers musical delicacy and drama in flawlessly balanced proportion... That it looks so polished and presentable is an added bonus."

- Hi-Fi Choice, January 2009



# M2 Series by Roksan Audio

"The Roksan has solid stereo imagery and helps the ear interpret delicate ambient information."

- Hi-Fi Choice, November 2010 (Integrated Amplifier and CD Player)



# ROKSAN

*Technology Driven by Emotions*

The M2 Stereo Power Amplifier is available in most Roksan M2 Stockists now!

Roksan Audio is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

Web: [www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk) - Tel: 01235 511 166 - Email: [sales@henleydesigns.co.uk](mailto:sales@henleydesigns.co.uk)

# Music non-stop?

**Channa Vithana** celebrates his classic Sony MiniDisc spinner, and wonders if today's music machines will still work in fifteen years...

I think that something really well designed and crafted is sustainable, even if it may contain materials that are not inherently so. A case in point is my Sony MDS-JA3000ES MiniDisc player, which I recently exhumed from its cared-for packaging after not using it for about seven years. When I bought it about eleven to twelve years back, the Sony was new old stock – i.e. it had been superseded and replaced but was on sale price at a hi-fi dealership. I really liked the compact form and design of it – and being a light champagne gold colour (which for some reason didn't make me nauseous, as I have an aversion to bling), it somehow looked really good in that colour and size.

When warmed up and fed through good analogue or digital cable, the Sony was a rather fine sounding little player as well as being a real pleasure to use. I loved its slick controls and effortless mechanical action of the load/eject function for MDs. When I opened up the carefully sealed inner foil packaging, years of storage in a cold garage hadn't caused any visible mould or damage and the casework still looked great. After leaving it to attain room temperature I inserted a MiniDisc, and it slid into the Sony's innards with a reassuringly silky slickness that I miss from today's generally poorly made and noisy CD-ROM mechanisms and disc load drawers/slots found in some CD players, even those costing over £1,000. After sixty minutes the Sony was warmed up and playing good music through an equally old recorded MiniDisc...

This little Sony machine is just one very small example at the tip of an iceberg of good, sustainable design floating in a sea of badly made electronics that didn't last. I am sure you can substitute the Sony for another example of good hi-fi design that has lasted and keeps playing for decades longer. When we look at how music is being produced and listened to now, can computer and hard drive-based audio last thirty-plus years like a well maintained amplifier or record deck, or (just) a CD player from the early eighties?

This is not a tirade against online and/or digital music, or indeed the sound quality of it. Rather, I would like you to stop your busy, socially networked lives for a nanosecond and think

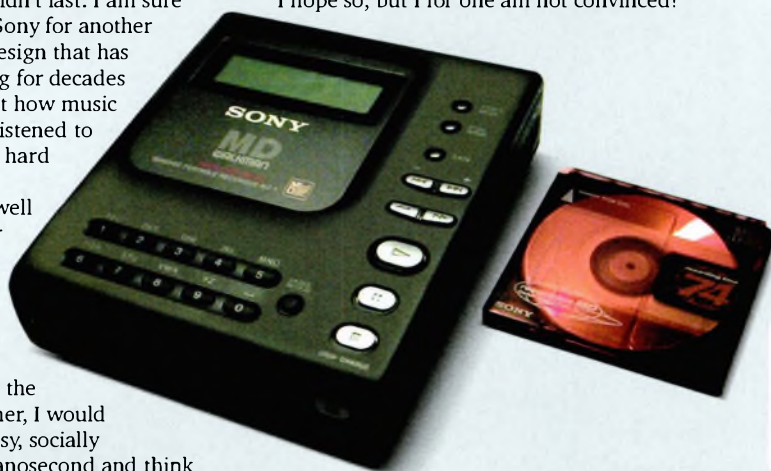
about your precious music for a moment. You might think that downloading music is more sustainable than buying plastic/vinyl packaged and printed physical formats that will become obsolete like MiniDisc – but what of the internet itself?

Recently an environmental services engineer told me that the internet uses a lot of energy. Huge amounts of electricity are being taken up by ever-growing numbers of users with any number of computer and online connection types – times this by a billion for the newly strongly economic performing countries like Brazil, India and, of course, China, and you should be able to see that there is going to be ever more demand for electricity. The growing online services cannot really be offset by replacing physical media with electronic varieties.

The problem with downloading music is that like the Coriolis effect, it is hard to pin down and sustain a format in the future because unlike Compact Discs or vinyl, we are faced with very frequently changing data, resolution and speed of technological change in software and hard drives. These all need to be replaced and updated/backed-up regularly – but after thirty years?

My little Sony MDS-JA3000ES MiniDisc is still working, just as nature intended, over fifteen years after it was made. It's had no firmware updates and/or no factory recalls since its birth. And even the software is still available, albeit not exactly commonplace these days! I really wonder about today's technology though. Will the iPod Mini – for example – which was launched around a decade ago, still be supported or even useable in five years' time? I hope so, but I for one am not convinced!

I'd like you to stop your busy, socially networked lives for a nanosecond and think about your precious music for a moment...



**CHANNA VITHANA**  
Reviewer, design aficionado and music fan



ELECTROCOMPANIET

If music *really* matters™



## Electrocompaniet EMP 2 Multiplayer

Blu-ray, DVD, CD, SACD, DVD Audio

Electrocompaniet EMP 2 is a fully fledged and versatile player with support for all modern audio and video formats and media. Included Blu-ray in 2D and 3D, CD, SACD, DVD and DVD Audio. Modern video- and audio processing in both two- and multichannel gives excellent picture quality and HighEnd sonic quality.

Lots of connections give great flexibility both for use in a surround or stereo set-up, or a combination of the above. The EMP 2 is a real multiplayer that works perfectly as a Blu-ray player in a multichannel set-up and as a two-channel CD/SACD player. For connection to your surround system you can choose HDMI or 7.1 RCA connectors.

We have equipped the EMP 2 with our newest DAC and analogue output section. The connection to your stereo system is by balanced XLR connectors, they way you would expect from Electrocompaniet.

In addition to playback of all available disk format the player also works as a streamer for music and pictures that are stored on you computer, USB memory stick or E-SATA disk.

Made in Norway

[www.electrocompaniet.no](http://www.electrocompaniet.no)

# A design for life

There's more to designing hi-fi than getting the transistors to talk to the capacitors, inductors and resistors, argues **Tim Jarman...**

**W**hen you read the reviews in every new issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* magazine, there's plenty of information about how each piece of equipment sounds, but very little comment on how it looks. Now this may seem unimportant; after all, don't we buy things for their sonic performance first and foremost; but consider this – you have to look at your system even when you aren't using it. Indeed, most of the time it sits *in situ*, static and unagitated. All it does is look, rather than sound...

Don't you think modern hi-fi is ugly? It should be so easy, as electronics can now be made to almost any size and packaged however one wishes. So how have we got to this? Is it *really* necessary to allow a random stack of aesthetically mismatched units into your living space if you want to enjoy good music at home?

Working through a typical system, one first meets the turntable. Once a slick and swish wafer-thin piece of consumer desirability, these days it's now more likely to resemble the back of a washing machine which has been tipped on its front. Although they look striking in the shop, they're not easy to find shelf space for, and indeed to dust, because they don't come with lids any more! As ever there are a few glimmers of hope amongst the latest designs (the Inspire Monarch being one good example), but only time will tell if these become the established pattern.

Move on to the amplifier and things only get worse. For a start, valve amps with their open chassis (with big valves proudly on display) were impressive once, but here's a secret: electrons weigh virtually nothing so valves still work when you tip them on their side! Using this arrangement, the whole amplifier can be made neat and tidy again – check out the excellent nineteen sixties Pye Mozart if you don't believe me! How exposed, fragile, red hot glassware was ever considered acceptable for a mass-market product beats me, at a time when even a paper cup of coffee has silly warnings plastered all over it. But there you go, audio is as ever a rule unto itself...

Finally we get to the loudspeakers, where things really do get out of hand. They seem to get bigger and more garishly styled every year even when living space (at least the affordable kind) is shrinking. Visit any hi-fi show if you don't believe me, but for extra fun take along a non-audiophile guest who is able to offer a 'domestic acceptance factor' assessment of the various kit on show – the results may well and truly shock you!

All this may seem like petty nitpicking, but if hi-fi is to regain the popularity it enjoyed in its golden age, then designing the equipment so that it fits in nicely with the lives of everyone in the household really is a must. A large market and a healthy industry are a benefit to everyone involved, so the sooner the designers recognise that stark loft apartments with industrial furnishings doesn't represent the typical home, the better...

It should come as no surprise that companies like Arcam, Naim and Cyrus do consistently well when you look at their ranges of equipment. They are compact, neat, well finished and easy to use – even when combined into quite complex systems. Gear like this looks good in any interior and its visual impact is modest. What's not to like?

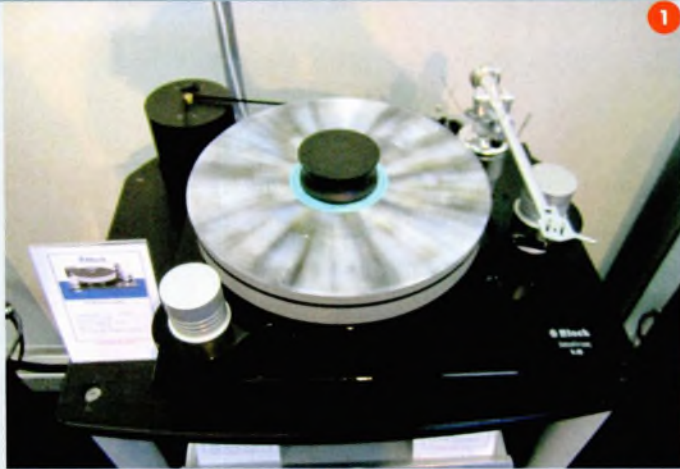
Perhaps there is an opening for a young and upcoming industrial designer to really make a name for him or herself by giving much of today's hi-fi the new look that it so desperately needs. If Mario Bellini could make even a Japanese cassette deck into a thing of beauty way back in the nineteen seventies, then it really can't be that hard – can it?

If hi-fi is to regain the popularity it enjoyed in its golden age, then designing the equipment so that it fits in nicely with the lives of everyone in the household really is a must...



TIM JARMAN

Electronics engineer, classic kit collector and author of **Beocentral.com** and **Walkmancentral.com**



1



3



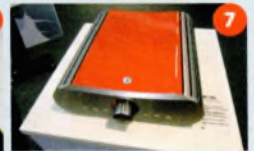
2



4



6



7



5



8

SHOW REPORT

# Living the high life

Munich's HIGH END show is the highlight of the hi-fi year, especially if you like quirky new products, says **David Price...**

**L**ike hi-fi in all its various weird and wonderful guises? Then you'd love the HIGH END 2012 show run by Germany's High End Society, held at Munich's M.O.C. from May 3rd to 6th. I did!

If you're the sort of person who hates trogging around cramped hotel rooms in claustrophobic corridors, then you'll relish this event. It's vast, open and spacious – suddenly it's as if the audio industry is let off the leash, and can now do something creative. A surprising number actually rise to the challenge...

The thirty-first show in a row this year had over 360 exhibitors and 900 brands; an impressive figure but it's the quality not quantity that beguiles. There were plenty of serious global players, but also quirky little ones too. The result was a wide diversity of things to look at and listen to...

**1 BLOCK**

The chunky PS-100 turntable made an appearance at Munich; an impressively finished, solidly built deck for around £1,000. It is available in the UK now, via Air Audio Distribution... [audioblock.de](http://audioblock.de)

**2 DENON**

Denon's DMP-720AE heads up the Japanese company's new range of entry-level separates; and very tidy they looked, too. [denon.co.uk](http://denon.co.uk)

**3 ATELIER DU TRIODE**

Quirky looking tube amps at Munich – what are the chances of that happening? This sizeable push pull 300B integrated raised eyebrows with its quirky Italian modernist styling! [hifi-atelier-koeln.de](http://hifi-atelier-koeln.de)

**TECHNICAL AUDIO**

Technical Audio Devices Labs showcased a superb sounding high end system driving a vast room. The mighty Evolution One floorstander was one of my favourite big boxes at the show. [technicalaudio.com](http://technicalaudio.com)

**5 PIONEER ELECTRONICS**

Watch out Cambridge Audio! Pioneer has a new range of budget separates to complement the N-50 network streamer that we reviewed last month; build and finish seem really super. [pioneerelectronics.com](http://pioneerelectronics.com)

**6 SILBATONE ACOUSTICS**

Silliest speaker award went to this vast Silbatone horn. Despite being as large as an average Japanese apartment, I thought the sound was still shrill. Most disagreed however, as the room was packed! [silbatoneacoustics.com](http://silbatoneacoustics.com)

**7 GATO AUDIO**

The very lovely looking Amp-100 integrated was on static display only, but caught my eye for its Danish style and sublime surfacing. Expect it at the end of this year, for around €3,500. [gato-audio.com](http://gato-audio.com)

**8 BOHNE AUDIO**

Some may think Bohne Audio's System 12.10 looks like the back end of a bendy bus. Sad, because its huge ribbon allied to massive moving coil woofer should work superbly together. [bohne-audio.de](http://bohne-audio.de)

**9 TEAC**

Ten years ago, the Japanese had all but given up on two-channel, but now they're back. TEAC's new CD-1000 CD spinner and AI-1000 amp are budget beauties. [teac.co.uk](http://teac.co.uk)





9



13



14



15



16



10



12



17



18



11



19



20

Design's new Julian Lloyd Webber (the loudspeaker, not the great musician himself!)  
[madengland.com](http://madengland.com)

**18 TUNEAUDIO**

Its name might sound a tad too close to a certain medical procedure, but TuneAudio's Anima sure made me sit down and listen! This beautifully crafted 3-way horn loudspeaker, proved a real show-stopper.  
[tuneaudio.com](http://tuneaudio.com)

**19 T+A**

This respected German brand showed some lovely new kit, including the Cala streaming media system. Build was as you'd expect from this company, and the styling was sublime.  
[taelektroakustik.de](http://taelektroakustik.de)

**20 PMC**

Forget the usual Norwegian piccolo-based folk quartet recorded at 32/384 resolution that passes for hi-fi show dem music – PMC played Kraftwerk. Maximum cool points, then.  
[pmc-speakers.com](http://pmc-speakers.com)

**10 CANTON**

This German speaker brand's latest Reference 2.2 DC proved an exceptionally well screwed together high end floorstander with sonics to match.  
[canton.de](http://canton.de)

**11 CHORD ELECTRONICS**

These Brits put on a fantastic dem, with striking sound, unique styling and flawless build. Star attraction was the new £6,500 DSX1000 streamer.  
[chordelectronics.co.uk](http://chordelectronics.co.uk)

**12 ASCENDO**

A lavish, gold finished loudspeaker? It must be

Germany, then! Ascendo's System ZF3 Limited Gold edition is guaranteed to match your bathroom taps and handrail!  
[ascendo.de](http://ascendo.de)

**13 CAV**

Chinese CAV demonstrated its neat-looking tube amps by, erm, sticking them on the floor! Obviously they haven't read the system set-up guide in last month's *Hi-Fi Choice!*  
[cav-audio.se](http://cav-audio.se)

**14 CESSARO**

These lovely horn speakers sounded far superior to the Silbatones, although they had some help from the excellent Tron tube amps partnering...  
[cessaro-horn-acoustics.com](http://cessaro-horn-acoustics.com)

**15 CREEK**

A happy looking Mike Creek, and so he should be, as his new

Evolution 50D CD/DAC/preamp promises a great deal for around £500, along with the matching Evolution 50A integrated amp.  
[creekaudio.com](http://creekaudio.com)

**16 TEAC**

My 'sexiest mini separates of the show' award goes to TEAC's new 501s; the headphone amp [top] and USB DAC are pictured.  
[teac.co.uk](http://teac.co.uk)

**17 MY AUDIO DESIGN**

Confirming German suspicions that British hi-fi manufacturers are bonkers, was My Audio

# Completely surrounded

When The Who decided to remaster 1973's seminal *Quadrophenia* album, they put together a luxury package that included an 180g pressing on top quality vinyl. **Jason Kennedy** tracked down Miles Showell, the man who mastered the new pressing at the Power House to get the whole story...

**T**he Who released the album *Quadrophenia* in 1973, some six years before the film of the same name jumped on the mod revival bandwagon of the late seventies. And while that album was not the soundtrack to the film, it was clearly the inspiration for the story. *Quadrophenia* has now been remastered and released on double vinyl in a gatefold sleeve that replicates the original, including a black and white photo album depicting the life of a mod called Jimmy whose story is told in accompanying text.

Pressed on 180g vinyl, the discs even have black track labels as found on the original release. For those wanting the full experience there is a deluxe 'director's cut' box set with four CDs, a 7 inch single and a multichannel DVD-A among other goodies. The Who fan has never had it so good!

The tapes remained unused about 25 years or so before being returned to The Who's archive here in the UK. They'd hardly been touched since the original session...

*Quadrophenia* followed two soundtracks by the Who, the relatively successful *Tommy* and a film called *Lifehouse* which remains a cult, if not totally obscure, production. The brains behind both productions was guitarist Pete Townshend, who dismayed by the poor reception for *Lifehouse*, was disinclined to write another rock opera. Instead he looked back to his youth and the early days of the band when it had a mod following. The story follows the 'rebel without a cause' lifestyle of a mod called Jimmy and his dreams of escaping his humdrum life, finding a path that leads to despair, attempted suicide and finally redemption. It includes mocked up newscasts about mods fighting rockers on the beaches

and reflects Townshend's concerns about the torments of youth. It is clearly a more down-to-earth, kitchen sink drama than preceding works. It was the first album to be entirely penned by Townshend, who said at the time, "I suppose what I'm really trying to do is... *Clockwork Orange* musically".

The album was recorded in a disused church in Battersea dubbed The Kitchen, using Ronnie Lane's mobile studio; the building was later to become Rampart Studios. By the time the album was ready for mixing, Townshend had finished his Eel Pie studios, so this final stage was carried out there. These mixes have been resurrected for this new pressing, but not before it was remastered by Miles Showell at Metropolis Studios. I tracked down Miles at the Power House in Chiswick to talk about the new vinyl cut...

**JK:** Were you able to use the original analogue masters for this project?

**MS:** Yes I did. I was mastering from the original 1/4inch analogue stereo masters.

**JK:** What condition were they in?

**MS:** Fortunately, they were in superb condition. The original lacquers were cut at The Mastering Lab in Los Angeles. From what we can gather, the tapes remained unused in a vault in LA for about twenty five years or so before being returned to The Who's archive here in the UK. The tapes looked to me as if they had hardly been touched since the original session.

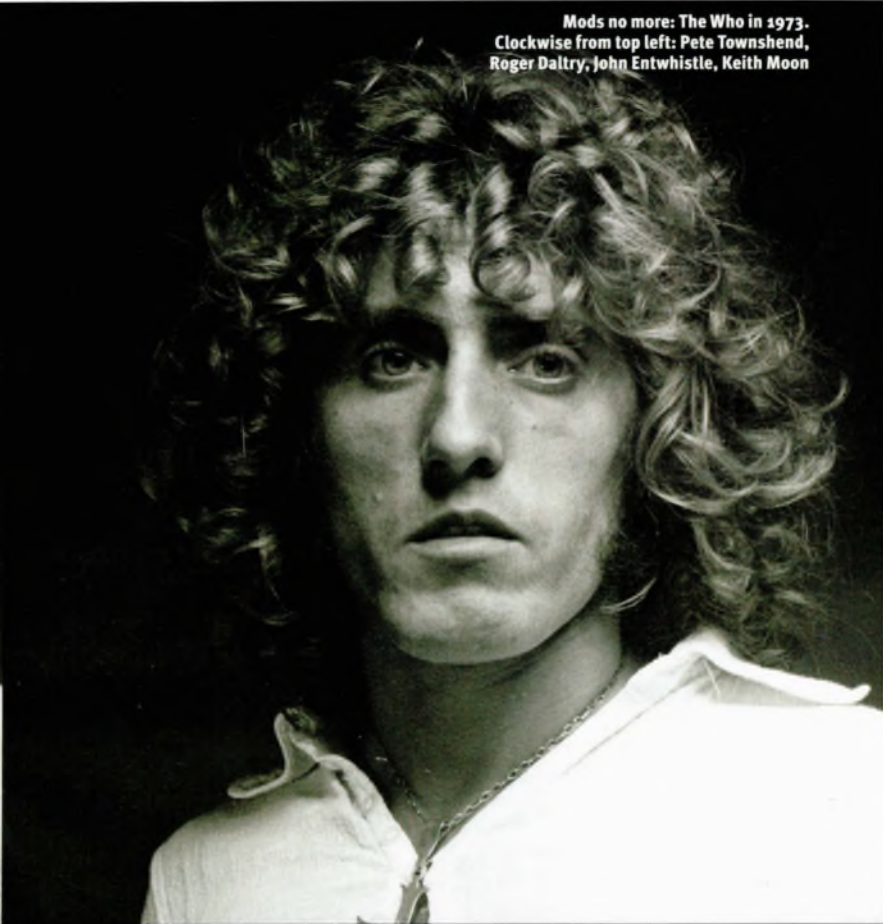


**JK:** What would you say are the differences between the way this album was originally mastered and what you did nearly forty years later?

**MS:** I kept it as authentic as I could. Jon was able to lend me an original pressing from 1973 and I had access to the (now very worn) analogue production copy tapes which contained all the EQ and compression from the original session done at The Mastering Lab in 1973.

The big problem with the album was that Roger's vocal was mixed too low in the mix on many of the songs. The original mastering engineer (George Jones) used all the tools at his disposal to lift Roger out of the mix. Over the years the album has been remixed a couple of times, but there are a lot of Who fans who prefer the original mix. Seeing as I was working from the original tapes it made sense to try to emulate what George Jones did all those years ago, but with the benefit of more modern equipment and a cleaner signal path. As I said already, I had an original LP to use as a guide. My goal was to make it sound

Mods no more: The Who in 1973.  
Clockwise from top left: Pete Townshend,  
Roger Daltry, John Entwistle, Keith Moon





Miles uses DB15-A monitors from PMC, and a desk where he can tweak EQ and dynamic range

pretty similar to the 1973 pressing, which was the one the fans liked, but to make it a bit more open with nicer high and low frequency response. As this was an all-analogue cut (directly from the analogue tape machine to the cutter head, no digital processing involved), I was using pretty much the same type of equipment as George Jones had in 1973, but probably slightly cleaner sounding (more modern amplifiers in the tape machine, nicer and more flexible equalisers in my console and better disc cutting amplifiers, for example).

The principal equaliser I used on this release was my Sontec parametric which is a really lovely and very musical sounding unit, but there were a few tracks that needed a bit more oomph to match the sonic quality of the original cut, and for these I also added the in-house built Metropolis EQs. The output of these was daisy-chained to the input of the Sontec EQ. Whenever any compression was needed, I inserted my modified Manley Variable-Mu valve compressor, which as part of its modification has 6386 triode limiting tubes (as were used in the legendary Fairchild compressor) inserted in it.

**JK:** Which amps and monitors do you use for vinyl mastering?

**MS:** I use the PMC BB5 XBD system powered by 4,000 watts of Bryston amplification.

**JK:** What's the difference between mastering for vinyl and for CD or download?

**MS:** Not that much these days. Sometimes I might need to add a little high frequency limiting for a vinyl cut, but my overriding aim is to make it sound good regardless of the delivery medium. The Neumann VMS 80 lathe I use at Metropolis is one of the best maintained examples in the world, and like much of our equipment it has been modified to improve performance. There is not much it cannot cut. If there is anything really tricky, I can also offer half-speed vinyl mastering.

**JK:** Did the project present any particular difficulties for the vinyl master?

**MS:** None really, Glyn Johns' mixes were great (Roger's vocal levels aside) and the tapes were in fantastic condition given that they are thirty eight years old...



**JK:** The amount of vinyl released appears to have increased over the last few years, is this just fashion or is there more to it?

**MS:** I cannot be certain why vinyl releases and sales are up. I can only assume that real music lovers appreciate vinyl. Let's be honest here, playing a record and getting it to sound good requires a lot more effort not just from people like me and the pressing plants, but also from the music fan at home. A casual listener would not want the bother of a vinyl record, they want to slam it in or dial it up and hit go. Thankfully, there is what seems to be a small but growing band of music and hi-fi fans at home who are happy to make the effort to listen to music properly on good equipment. The prospect of handling and playing a vinyl record holds no fear for them and they are aware just how amazing vinyl can sound when everything is done right.

**JK:** I understand that Pete Townshend was involved with the project, what input did he provide?

**MS:** Not much, I did a set of acetates for Jon Astley to listen to which he compared to the original LP. Jon came back to me with a couple of minor suggestions which I implemented and then cut a new set of acetates which were then sent on to Pete. After a few days I had the following message forwarded to me from Pete via Jon:

"Dear Jon, Once I started I couldn't stop. All four discs sound great. Please thank Miles at Metropolis for his input. And thank you Pete. Reading this put a big smile on my face!"

**JK:** Was there a requirement to compress or limit these remasters from the record company itself?

**MS:** Thankfully, as far as the vinyl cut goes, none whatsoever. Any compression applied was to achieve a desired effect and not to artificially 'pump it up'! ●



The SAL rack of electronics provides 600 watts of amplification and RIAA EQ for the cutting head on the Neumann lathe



Miles with the Neumann VMS80 cutting lathe that can cut lacquers in real-time or at half speed

# THE Si 3 RANGE BEAUTY BORN OF PERFORMANCE



[WWW.AUDIOVECTOR.COM](http://WWW.AUDIOVECTOR.COM)

Audiovector speakers are available through a knowledgeable dealer network with superlative demonstration facilities:

**Acoustica** (Chester, Cheshire) 01244 344227

**Analogue Seduction** (Peterborough) 01733 350878

**Audio Destination** (Tiverton, Devon) 01884 243584

**Audio Emotion** (Banbeath, Fife) 01333 425999

**PJ Hi-Fi** (Guildford, Surrey) 01483 504801

**Sevenoaks Sound & Vision** (Holborn, London) 0207 8377540

**Tavistock Audio** (Tavistock, Devon) 01822 618940

Audiovector is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

[henleydesigns.co.uk](http://henleydesigns.co.uk) · 01235 511 166 · [sales@henleydesigns.co.uk](mailto:sales@henleydesigns.co.uk)

# WELCOME TO THE NORTH EAST

ANATEK RESEARCH  
APOLLO  
ATACAMA  
AV INTERNATIONAL  
CHORD COMPANY  
CHORD ELECTRONICS  
CLEARAUDIO  
DYNVECTOR  
EAR YOSHINO  
GOLDRING  
GRAHAM ENGINEERING  
GRAHAM SLEE  
G F HADCOCK  
ISOTEK  
KOETSU  
KUDOS AUDIO  
MARTIN LOGAN  
LYRA  
MAGNEPLANAR  
MELODY  
MICHELL ENGINEERING  
MONITOR AUDIO



NAD  
NAIM AUDIO  
NORDOST  
NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE  
OPERA  
ORTOFON  
PATHOS ACOUSTICS  
PROJECT  
PS AUDIO  
PURESOUND  
REGA  
REVOLVER  
ROKSAN  
SME  
STAX  
SUGDEN AUDIO  
TEAC ESOTERIC  
TRANSFIGURATION  
TRICHORD RESEARCH  
UNISON RESEARCH  
USHER AUDIO  
VAN DEN HUL

**HIFISOUND, Castlegate mill, Quayside, Stockton on Tees. 01642 267012**

# 2NDHANDHIFI.CO.UK

Guaranteed used and ex-demo audio equipment from HiFiSound - the UK's premier source

Call : 0845 6019390 Email : News@2ndhandhifi.co.uk

## Analogue

Audio Technica AT1100 tonearm, excellent.....	199
Benz Micro Glider, little use, due in.....	Call
Clearaudio Unify tonearm, brand new.....	999
Clearaudio Concept, mint boxed ex demo.....	875
Croft RIAA mm valve phono ex demo.....	379
EAR 834P Deluxe ex demo.....	1399
Garrard 301, good cosmetics, full working order.....	799
Grado Cartridges, various ex display.....	299
Graham Slee Era Gold V and PSU 1, nr mint.....	Call
Hadcock Z28 tonearm, excellent boxed.....	349
Linn LP12, Vahalla.....	399
Linn LP12 with Vahalla & Basik Plus tonearm.....	499
Linn Ittok LVII, vgc.....	399
Linn Ittok LVII, in rare black, excellent.....	799
Linn LP12/Atiko K18, excellent boxed.....	699
Linn LP12/Ittok LV11, excellent boxed.....	899
Michell Focus One, excellent.....	299
Michell Hydraulic Reference, SME 3009, new lid.....	749
Michell Gyro SE, RB250, Goldring cart excellent boxed.....	849
Musical Fidelity XLP, vgc.....	99
NAD PP2 and PP3 phono stages ex demo.....	Call
Notls Analogue Spacedeck and Hadcock Z28.....	949
Ortofon TA1000 Tonearm, brand new unused.....	499
Project Essential/Genie/Debut all ex demo.....	Call
PS Audio GCPM Phono Stage ex demo.....	Call
Rega RP1 ex demo.....	179
Rega Planar 3 Green boxed.....	249
Rega P3, St Georges flag, excellent boxed.....	299
Rega Planar 3, boxed.....	199
Roksan TMS1 & DSU, superb, boxed.....	1749
Roksan Xenex, Kuzma Stogi, new PSU, boxed.....	749
Roksan Tabrz Z, latest version.....	399
Roksan Radius 5.2 ex demo.....	299
Roksan Nima, unipivot tonearm vgc.....	399
SME Series IV, Kondo wiring, excellent boxed.....	999
SME Model 10, ex demo.....	249
SME 3009/2, excellent boxed.....	249
SME 3009/2, excellent.....	179
The Source, offboard p/s vgc & new Ortofon TA1000.....	899
Sumiko Cartridges, various ex display.....	Call
Systemdek IIX, vgc boxed.....	Call
Technics SL110/SME3009, excellent.....	349
Thorens TD309, ex display bargain.....	799
Thorens TD124 mk2, excellent.....	799
Thorens TD125, SME 3009, SME plinth, excellent.....	399
Tom Evans The Groove, excellent.....	1099
Townsend Rock 2, Rega tonearm vgc boxed.....	499
Townsend Rock 7, Tough, Rega tonearm vgc boxed.....	1499
Trichord Dino Mk1, excellent boxed.....	199
Well Tempered Reference, superb!.....	1999
Wilson Benesch Act 1 Tonearm, nr mint superb.....	799

## Amplifiers

AMR A77, excellent flightcased, REDUCED.....	2999
Amber Series 70 US Power amp, good condition.....	199
Arcam A90, excellent remote.....	449
Arcam Alpha 8R and 8P combo, excellent.....	379
Arcam P1 Monoblocks, excellent.....	1299
Arcam P38 Power Amplifier, excellent boxed.....	599
Aslin Trew 2000 Plus integrated, as new.....	799
Audiolab 8000A, vgc boxed.....	179
Audiolab 8000Q, excellent.....	299
Audiolab 8000S, excellent silver.....	229
Audiolab Innovations Series 1000 Preamp/Power.....	Call
Audio Research VS115, vgc boxed, due in.....	2999
Beard P35mk2, vgc, 2 of.....	799
Bryston B60 Integrated with E500 remote, boxed nr mint.....	1199
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A Integrated, nr mint boxed.....	119
Chord CPA5000 preamp, excellent remote boxed.....	4599
Chord CPA2200 Preamp, excellent BARGAIN.....	Call
Chord CPM3300 Integrated, excellent boxed.....	3499
Copland CTA405, near mint boxed.....	1249
Denon DAP2500Pre/POA4400 Monos, good condition.....	799
EAR 890 Power Amplifier ex demo mint boxed.....	3999
EAR 859, excellent boxed, recent service and revalve.....	1199
Esoteric C03/A03 Pre/Power ex demo mint.....	Call
Esoteric A110, with DAC, excellent boxed.....	1199
Exposure 28 Power, nr mint boxed.....	4599
Icon Audio Stereo 40 mk2, excellent boxed.....	549
Karan KAS180 Power, crated.....	1799
Krell Evolution 600 Monoblocks £31,000 new! TO CLEAR.....	Call
Krell KAV250, preamp, remote, excellent.....	699
Krell KSA200S, excellent.....	1749
Krell KAV400i, excellent boxed, just serviced.....	1599
Linn Kaim, excellent boxed.....	399
Linn Majik integrated with remote.....	299
Linn Majik 2100 Power.....	899
Luxman LV105u, rare integrated, excellent boxed.....	Call
Mastersound 300B pse Integrated, lovely!.....	2499
Melody PM845 Monoblock amps ex demo, save £4000.....	3999
Melody 101 Preamp/Power, world renowned ex demo.....	2499
Mendian 201 Preamp/Power, vgc with 209 remote.....	199
Micromega IA60, near mint boxed.....	500
Musical Fidelity 3a preamp & power amp, nr mint.....	399
Musical Fidelity XT110 Integrated with P/S, nr mint.....	599
NAD C32BEE ex demo nr mint.....	219
NAD C31BEE ex demo nr mint.....	159
NAIM NAC72/NAP160, excellent, due in.....	799
NAIM NAC152/202/282 ex demo.....	Call
NAIM NAP155/250/NAP300, ex demo.....	Call
NAIM NAC112/NAP150 excellent boxed.....	599
NAIM NAC322/NAP90 Pre Power, nr mint boxed.....	399
NVA PROMC/PS/A40, Pre/PSU/Power excellent boxed.....	599
Puresound 2A3 Integrated, ex demo.....	1299
Roksan Kandy K2 and Caspian M2 ex demo.....	Call
Quad 33/44/303/405 all vgc.....	Call
Raysonic SP100mk2, excellent boxed.....	999
Rega Brio R, mint boxed weeks old.....	399
Rotel RC972 Preamp, remote.....	199
Sugden A21SE, ex demo.....	1899
Unison Research S6, ex demo.....	Call
Unison Research Unico, various models ex demo.....	Call
World Audio Design Kit 34, Due in.....	399

## Digital

AMR CD77, excellent flightcased.....	3499
AMR CD777 exdemo.....	Call
Arcam Alpha DV139, excellent boxed.....	799
Arcam Alpha CD8se, excellent with remote.....	199
Arcam CD73, excellent remote, boxed.....	199
Arcam CD72, boxed, excellent, remote.....	149
Arcam Delta 170/Black box DAC combo boxed.....	199
Arcam Alpha 8 SE, excellent.....	149
Arcam Alpha 9, excellent DCS Ringdac player.....	299
Audiolab 8000CDM Transport and 8000DAC.....	599
Call QBD76HD, exdemo.....	2249
Copland CD823, due in.....	799
Cyrus DAD 7, excellent boxed.....	249
Cyrus DCS, excellent boxed REDUCED.....	279
Esoteric DV50S, excellent boxed.....	1499
Esoteric K-03, ex demo.....	Call
Linn Mimik, excellent.....	249
Linn Akurate DS, excellent boxed.....	2249
Leema Pulse 3, nr mint boxed.....	799
Marantz SA7-S1, excellent, remote etc.....	2599
Meridian DR6000 recorder, remote and manual.....	99
Meridian 207 CD/Preamp, good condition.....	249
Meridian 206 CD, excellent boxed condition.....	249
Micromega CD10, nr mint boxed new model.....	599
Micromega CD30, nr mint boxed new model.....	1199
Musical Fidelity A108.2, excellent boxed.....	1199
Musical Fidelity CDT/Early CD player with valves, vgc.....	299
NAIM DAC, as new, weeks old.....	1699
NAD CS45Bee, excellent boxed.....	179
NAIM CDX2mk2, excellent boxed.....	Call
NAIM CD3.5, excellent boxed.....	349
NAIM CD5 original, excellent with remote.....	499
NAIM CD5/2, excellent with remote.....	549
NAIM CD5X, vgc boxed.....	699
NAIM HDX SSD, as new.....	Call
Philips SACD1000, vgc+ boxed.....	199
PS Audio Perfectwawe Transport/DAC/Bridge, ex demo.....	3999
Puresound A8000, excellent boxed.....	499
Rega DAC ex demo.....	379
Rega Apollo, excellent with remote.....	399
Rega Saturn, ex demo.....	Call
Rega Planet 2000, excellent boxed.....	279
Roksan Kandy K2, excellent boxed.....	549
Roksan Kandy K1, excellent boxed.....	199
Rotel CRD965BEX excellent boxed.....	99
Sony SCD XB940, reasonable condition.....	119
TEAC D1 DAC, excellent.....	249
Theta DS Pro Gen 5 DAC, excellent boxed.....	799
Unison Research Unico CD exdemo.....	Call
Unison Research Unico Primo ex demo.....	Call
Wadia 861b, excellent.....	2499
Wadia iPod dock, nr mint ex demo.....	Call

## Loudspeakers

Acoustic Energy AE1 c/w matching stands, boxed.....	599
AVI Neutron 5, ex demo mint.....	349
AVI ADM9.1, ex demo nr mint.....	849
Audiovector M3 Signature Actives, nr mint boxed.....	1249
B&W 802s2, vgc.....	149
B&W DW70 Continental, fair cosmetics, fully working. Offers.....	299
Epos ES14, excellent boxed with dedicated stands.....	299
FFocal Diablo Utopia III c/w stands, nr mint.....	Call
Geoclin LOUDSPEAKERS WANTED.....	Call
Indigo Model One, with matching Sub1 units boxed.....	249
Kudos C1, excellent boxed in Walnut.....	799
Kudos C20, due in.....	Call
Linn Kani, in teak, excellent.....	349
Linn Nimka, boxed in Maple.....	599
Linn Keilidh, Kuzma stands in cherry.....	299
Magneplanar MG3.6, Ex demo, superb.....	Call
Martin Logan Odyssey, excellent boxed.....	2999
Martin Logan Summit X, excellent!.....	Call
Meridian M20 Active speakers.....	399
Meridian M3 Active speakers.....	399
Meridian M1 Active speakers, boxed due in.....	Call
Meridian DM6 diploles, excellent sound for peanuts.....	449
Meridian 750LE, excellent.....	79
Monitor Audio Radius HD, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio Bonze Ref, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio Silver RX, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio Platinum PL300 ex demo as new BAR-GAIN.....	Call
Monitor Audio Platinum PL100s with stands.....	1199
Monitor Audio Platinum, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio BX2, ex demo mint.....	179
Opera Mezza in Cherry, nr mint boxed ex demo.....	499
PMC DB1, excellent boxed.....	499
PSB Alpha B1 Stereophile Product of the year BAR-GAIN!!!!.....	99
Q Acoustics 2000 series, various ex demo.....	Call
Quad ESL57s, good working order.....	499
Rogers LS3a, in rosewood, excellent boxed.....	299
Rogers LS71, superb condition with target stands.....	299
Ruark Swordsman, good condition.....	49
Sonus Faber Concertino boxed, excellent.....	599
Sonus Faber Concertino Home, boxed with stands.....	749
Thiel CS7.2, vgc, just refurbished.....	2999
Townshend Glastonbury 2, good condition.....	749
Usher S520 and matching Subwoofers.....	999
Usher Be10 DMD Diamond ex demo SUPERB save!!!.....	Call
Usher Mini 2 Diamonds, ex demo, call for details.....	2499
Usher 718 Diamonds, excellent boxed, ex demo.....	1399
Wharfedale Diamond Home cinema pack, ex demo.....	Call
Wharfedale 10.3 ex demo, nr mint boxed.....	149
Wharfedale 10.3 ex demo, excellent boxed.....	199
Wharfedale Active Diamond 7.1s - rare boxed!.....	119
Wilson Benesch Curve, excellent boxed, due in.....	Call
Wilson Watt/Puppy 3/2, vgc+, crated due in.....	2249

## AV/Accessories/Cables

Chord cables, various ex demo.....	Call
Chord cables, various ex demo.....	Call
Chord DSP8000r/SPM3005 excellent boxed BARGAIN.....	7499
Naïm NAP.SC, Flatcap, Hicap, XPS2, Supercap 2 etc.....	Call
Townshend Seismic rack, 4 tier mint.....	1099
Trichord Research Powerblock.....	Call

## Special System Deals

Audio Analogue Crescendo Amp & CD, ex demo.....	799
Micromega CD10 & IA60, both as new.....	999
Krell Showcase Cinema 7.1 system (HDMI), mint boxed.....	4599
NAIM Unico & Kudos X2s, ex demo.....	Call
TEAC Mini systems brand new - call for details!.....	Call

**Telephone 01642 267012, Tuesday to Saturday 10 'til 5  
or email choice@2ndhandhifi.co.uk**

T U R N T A B L E W O R L D

Special offers to celebrate our new website

www.turntableworld.co.uk - the analogue specialists - 01642 267012



**96 Dexys**  
One Day I'm  
Going To Soar



**96 Damon Albarn**  
Dr Dee

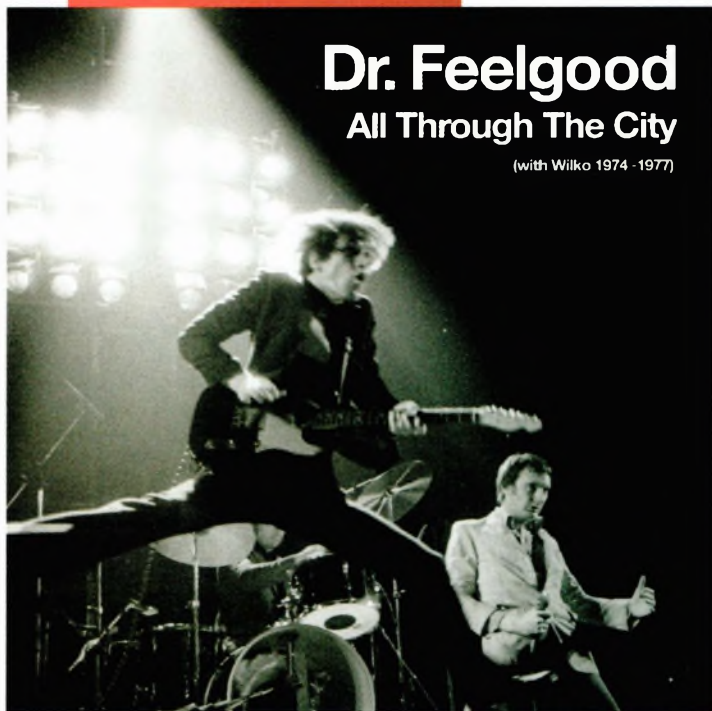


**97 Rachmaninov**  
Rhapsody On a  
Theme of Paganini/  
Symphony No 3

# Music reviews

The latest music releases...

## ALBUM OF THE MONTH



### Dr Feelgood All Through The City

(with Wilko 1974 -1977)

**Dr Feelgood**  
All Through The City

emimusic.com

★★★★★

4-CD box set

EMI

**THE FEELGOODS** came roaring out of the badlands of Essex and Canvey Island circa 1974 like a breath of fresh air – but they got their timing all wrong. Their raw and gritty RnB songs, none of which lasted much more than three minutes, didn't fit the grandiose ambitions of prog rock and – given that they looked like a bunch of nightclub bouncers suitably dressed in grubby suits – they were never going to fulfil anyone's glam-rock fantasy.

On the other hand, punk rock – which the Feelgoods' back-to-basics approach, blistering energy and manic attitude signposted – was still a couple of years away. Fitting nowhere, they were dumped in with the 'pub-rock' scene, an amiable if lumpen movement best remembered for its lack of drive. The Feelgoods, though, were

anything but amiable. They played with a glorious ferocity that was at times intimidating. They enjoyed a brief moment of commercial success, when their 1976 live album *Stupidity* briefly went to number one. But the Sex Pistols, the Clash and the Jam would soon pogo them out of the way, and although the likes of Joe Strummer and Paul Weller subsequently acknowledged the Feelgoods' influence, they were already too well established to be fully accepted by the newly-emerging hardcore punk audience.

Worse, by 1977 the combustible relationship between singer Lee Brilleaux and guitarist (and main songwriter) Wilko Johnson had resulted in the latter's departure. Although a different line-up struggled on and had a hit single in 1979 with the Nick Lowe-produced

The Feelgoods were anything but amiable. They played with a glorious ferocity that was at times intimidating

*Milk and Alcohol*, with Johnson went much of the Feelgoods' coruscating drive, belatedly celebrated on this long-overdue box set.

A total of 93 tracks comprising the four albums by the original line-up released between 1975 and 1977, unheard out-takes, demos and live cuts plus a DVD of TV and concert appearances is almost all muscle, with no flab or padding. Thanks to some intelligent remastering, the Feelgoods' driving rhythm section, Wilko's ferociously slashing guitar chords with barely a solo to be heard and Brilleaux's take-no-prisoners vocals have never sounded better.

And surely more than most, the Feelgoods needed remastering!

The first album, *Down By The Jetty*, was famously released in mono to capture the sound of a band playing live in a room. The original mono mix has been expertly refurbished to sharpen the rawness and energy, but avoids sounding crude.

Their fourth and final album with Johnson, 1977's *Sneakin' Suspicion*, was more glossily produced at the time – and frankly doesn't sound as exhilarating. The strength of Wilko's songwriting is evident as the original compositions bristle with the same bluesy conviction as the band's covers of RnB classics such as John Lee Hooker's *Boom Boom* and Chuck Berry's *Talkin' About You*.

The DVD is a treat too, brilliantly capturing the band's venom on stage. It has taken 35 years for the Feelgoods to receive the box set treatment. Few bands from the mid-1970s deserve it more. **NW**  
**Standout tracks:** She Does It Right; Roxette; All Through The City



Obviously feeling good about themselves, The Feelgoods in the early seventies



## Dexys

One Day I'm Going To Soar

bmg.com

★★★★★

**BMG**

CD

**HARD TO BELIEVE** that this is only Dexys' (they've dropped the Midnight Runners) fourth album, and their first in 26 years. Leader Kevin Rowland got the old gang back together along with a few new faces because he felt it was time and it's certainly much, much better than his various solo efforts, closer in tone to *Don't Stand Me Down* than the previous hits-laden albums. But that's no bad thing. Focusing generally on relationships and Rowland's apparent inability to handle them in particular, it combines highly personal lyrics and spoken word passages with some terrific music ranging from brass-powered soul to strings-led folky ballads.

Trombonist 'Big' Jimmy Paterson, organist Mick Talbot and bassist Pete Williams are among the old guard recalled to duty and they provide a rock-solid framework with some inspired flourishes as backing for Rowland's voice, now a slightly mellower instrument but no less affecting for that. **DO**



## Neil Young

Americana

warnerbrosrecords.com

★★★★★

**Reprise/Warners**

CD

### PREDICTING WHAT YOUNG

will do next has kept his fans intrigued, thrilled and exasperated over more than 40 years. In his sixties, he's grown more quixotic than ever and he takes another lurching, dirt-track detour away from the main highway on a ramshackle collection of classic American songs. It's unclear whether he's mining tradition to make a statement about contemporary America – but that hardly matters when he's clearly having so much fun.

*Americana* sounds like a bunch of mates jamming in a barn, but the spontaneous, under-rehearsed quality is entirely endearing. When they hit a groove, as on *High Flying Bird* and *Clementine*, there's a palpable joy that has you joining the studio laughter heard at the end of many of the tracks. Ragged glory, indeed. **NW**



## Damon Albarn

Dr Dee

parlophone.co.uk

★★★★★

**Parlophone**

CD

### AFTER HIS EXTRAORDINARY

Chinese opera *Monkey: Journey To The West*, the prolific Albarn has turned to an intrinsically English subject for his second full-length staged musical work – the life of the 16th century scientist and occultist John Dee.

Pastoral folk elements, classical orchestration and Albarn's innate ability to write memorable pop melodies combine seamlessly, as Elizabethan crumhorns and lutes and the BBC Philharmonic buttress Albarn's guitar, harmonium and occasional vocals.

Influences from Purcell, Byrd, Tallis, Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Walton feed into a sumptuous, bucolic celebration that marks out Albarn as the most surprising, innovative and audacious pop genius of his generation. **NW**



## Erik Chisholm

Piano Concerto 1 and 2  
Danny Driver (piano)

hyperion-records.co.uk

★★★★★

**Hyperion**

CD

### THIS MARVELLOUS CD

brings together two strongly contrasted piano concertos from twentieth century Scottish composer Erik Chisholm (1904-1965). The first concerto, known as *Piobaireachd*, dates from the 1930s, and is perhaps the more accessible of the two. The second concerto, subtitled *Hindustani*, was completed in 1949, and reflects Chisholm's keen interest and enthusiasm for Hindustani music.

The recordings sound smooth, open, and very natural, with plenty of fine detail, but no obvious microphone spotlighting. The balance is spacious rather than close, but clarity is excellent, and the balance between piano and orchestra coming extremely close to faultless. **JMH**

## AUDIOPHILE VINYL

**Nina Simone** Nina at the Village Gate [purepleasurerecords.com](http://purepleasurerecords.com)



★★★★★ Colpix/Pure Pleasure

180g vinyl

**NINA SIMONE** was at her best when playing intimate venues like New York's Village Gate and her finest moments are the times when she takes

the tempo down and reaches out to the audience. So it is with *He Was Good To Me*, a beautifully understated standard that contrasts well with the tune that precedes it on this 1961 recording. It's followed by a particularly fine version of *House Of The Rising Sun*, she takes it slower and imbues it with more soul than Eric Burdon would have done.

The sound is a little crude, even by the standards of the time, with bandwidth limited pretty much to the midrange and minimal use

of stereo even though it's a two-channel cut. Dynamics are likewise restricted but this, of course, does little or nothing to get in the way of the beauty and depth of feeling that Simone exudes. The instrumental *Bye Bye Blackbird* affords an all too rare insight into her playing chops and lets the rhythmic skills of Al Schackman (guitar), Chris White (bass) and Bob Hamilton (drums) shine through. Pure Pleasure is to be applauded for bringing back this delightful album. **JK**





HOT PICK

### Rachmaninov

Rhapsody On a Theme of Paganini/Symphony No. 3. Yevgeny Sudbin (piano), Lan Shui (cond.) bis.se

★★★★★ **BIS**  
CD (hybrid SACD)

**COUPLING THESE** two late pieces by Rachmaninov seems like a completely obvious move, yet it is very rarely encountered. The brilliant *Rhapsody On A Theme Of Paganini* is kaleidoscopic in its moods and colours. The Symphony No.3 which follows it goes even better. Lan Shui finds any number of rhythmic felicities in a work that can sometimes suffocate under its own sumptuousness.

The BIS hybrid SACD recording (stereo and multichannel, plus CD layer) sounds beautifully open and transparent, with natural balances and a wide dynamic range. Detail tells effortlessly, and there's some nice deep bass to revel in, too. **JMH**



### Dr John

Locked Down  
nonesuch.com

★★★★★ **Nonesuch**  
CD

#### ONE-TIME SESSION MUSICIAN

Mac Rebbenack became a New Orleans icon when he adopted the role of the shamanistic Dr John in the early seventies. Now 71, his latest eschews some of the more easy listening elements of his recent work in lieu of a return to the looser feel of his earlier work. His trademark growl erupts from the title track which simmers with swamp-like menace.

At least part of the great man's return to form is surely due to producer Dan Auerbach of lo-fi blues rockers the Black Keys. Recorded at Auerbach's Nashville studio, it delivers a raw, guys-in-the-room feel, and the gumbo blending jazz, boogie-woogie, dirty funk, RnB and blues finds a new sense of urgency and vitality that lifts it out of the Jools Holland easy-listening swamp and into the stratosphere. **DO**



### Morrissey

Viva Hate  
emimusic.com

★★★★★ **Liberty/EMI**  
CD

#### IN THE MESSY AFTERMATH

of The Smiths' break-up in 1987, there were serious doubts if Morrissey could cut it as a solo artist. Many feared he'd fail without Johnny Marr as his foil, but Moz's response was emphatic. His solo debut remains his strongest post-Smiths work, the songs full of an urgent vitality as the trauma of the split inspired a set of songs filled with an extraordinary emotional mix of fury, resignation, venom and nostalgia.

In Marr's absence, guitarist Vini Reilly made a superb understudy and producer Stephen Street stepped up to the plate with a series of deft touches, including the brilliant string arrangement on *Everyday Is Like Sunday*. But it is undeniably the brooding presence of Morrissey that looms large. **NW**

## HIGH RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS

### The Wilderness of Manitoba

When You Left The Fire

bowers-wilkins.co.uk

★★★★★ **B&W Society of Sound**

24-bit/48kHz



**B&W DESCRIBES** the music of this Canadian five-piece as "Chamber Folk". I do not have a

clue what that means, but the album opens with a wistful tune that reminds me of the Cowboy Junkies doing an *Unplugged* set. The genteel nature of this music comes as a marked contrast to much contemporary material: if you like music with an edge, look elsewhere.

The 24-bit /48kHz recording is totally appropriate for this genre: it's replete with texture and detail, along with the sound of an old furnace humming in the background – a reason not to record in your basement during a Canadian winter. The vocal harmonies, in particular, as well as the subtle dynamics, are beautifully captured. **MS**

### Neil Cowley Trio

The Face of Mount Molehill

naimlabel.com

★★★★★

**Naim**

24-bit/88.2kHz



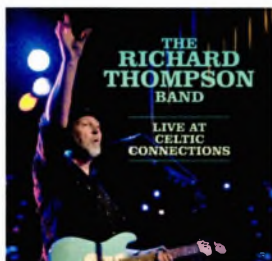
**THIS ISN'T** really what is defined as pure jazz. Cowley and his trio take a brave, maybe questionable

step on this album and introduce a small string section. The result is surprisingly accessible and, given Cowley's rousing piano playing, makes for entertaining and exciting listening.

The recording reveals all the myriad textures available and conveys a dynamic, realistic timbre on the drums, in particular. It furthermore contrasts the piano and strings, which assists the harmonic beauty of the compositions. Throughout though, it's Cowley's dextrous playing that takes centre-stage. He has a wonderful feeling for the instrument, which this recording makes abundantly obvious. **MS**

## BLU-RAY DVD

### The Richard Thompson Band Live at Celtic Connections eagle-rock.com



★★★★★ **Eagle Vision**

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1, LPCM 2.0, Dolby Digital 5.1 **FILMED IN GLASGOW** early last year, this appearance at the Celtic Connections festival finds the strat-toting folk rocker in fine fettle. He's

backed by the four-piece band that includes Joel Zifkin on violin and mandolin alongside multi-instrumentalist Pete Zorn who can also whip out a mean mandolin. They play the aforementioned release and then bring out the old favourites. RT remains a very persuasive guitar player and the numbers where he lets loose are the best for my money, but the songs make their mark thanks to canny lyrics about subjects as varied as bankers and Geordies.

It sounds notably better than most examples of the ilk, with a controlled energy that reflects both the band's prowess and the atmosphere of the live event. It's good enough to listen to without the HD visuals, but there's no denying that they bring the event to your room very effectively. Taras Produniak's fine bass underpins the accompanying sax, flute, fiddle and the electric guitar makes this a tonally rich concert and one that runs to a full 20 tunes - stamina clearly comes with practice. **JK**

# Playing to the gallery

The Sound Gallery has taken streaming to heart but, as **Ed Selley** discovers, still has a soft spot for vinyl, too...

Occupying a former hotel built to serve the nearby High Wycombe railway station, The Sound Gallery is at first glance a relatively conventional dealer, but appearances can be deceptive. Not only are the premises far more spacious than the small frontal area suggests, but the systems are possessed of hidden depths as well...

The reason for this is the enthusiasm that the staff have for systems built around network audio streamers. Never huge fans of CD from the company's founding in 1985, the early years of this century saw owner Glyn Nichols and store manager Ronnie Handkammer experimenting with computer and DAC-based solutions. The arrival of network streamers from Linn and more recently Naim – both brands that have been long-standing members of the store portfolio – has seen them leave CD behind almost completely.

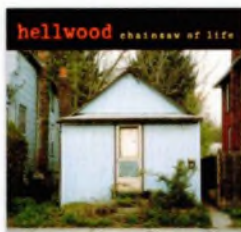
The portfolio includes a number of classic British brands, and Ronnie and Glyn feel that these best achieve their desire to make systems that combine long-term listening satisfaction with an equally long life. The Sound Gallery ethos is to create systems that might trade a fraction of initial excitement in return for hours of listening pleasure. To this end I asked them to demonstrate three systems that combined this enthusiasm for streaming with these sonic qualities.

## THE EXPERTS



**THE SOUND GALLERY**  
68 Castle Street, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 6RN  
01494 531682, [soundgallery.co.uk](http://soundgallery.co.uk)

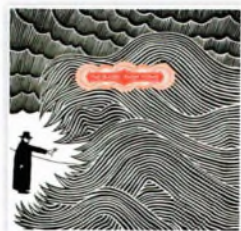
[linn.co.uk](http://linn.co.uk)  
[naimaudio.com](http://naimaudio.com)  
[rega.co.uk](http://rega.co.uk)  
[bowers-wilkins.co.uk](http://bowers-wilkins.co.uk)  
[usheraudiousa.com](http://usheraudiousa.com)  
[ortofon.com/home](http://ortofon.com/home)



**HELLWOOD**  
CHAINSAW  
OF LIFE  
[DOWNLOAD](#)



**KATE BUSH**  
FIFTY WORDS  
FOR SNOW  
HI-RES  
[DOWNLOAD](#)



**THOM YORKE**  
THE ERASER  
VINYL

## SYSTEM 1 – RED LETTER DAY

The first of these three systems includes components that *Hi-Fi Choice* has rated very highly in the past. Combining them results in a very flexible system at the asking price, as well as one that is more visually colourful than most offerings. Neither is this an abstract exercise. Ronnie, for example, has seen this combination find many happy buyers.

### Compact form

Core of this system is the £1,425 Naim UnitiQute all-in-one streamer. Salisbury's smallest offering combines a 24-bit/96kHz (upgradeable to 24/192kHz) media streamer with digital and analogue inputs, internet radio, FM and DAB receivers, USB connectivity and a 30W internal amplifier. The result is a huge amount of functionality in a very compact form and a product that is hard to match with conventional separates at the price.

This is a promising system in itself, but joined by the £798 Rega RP6 and matching Fono A2D, it becomes a complete all rounder. Building on the success of the RP3, the RP6 is another seriously talented disc spinner. Partnered with the Phono A2D it offers sparkling performance and the ability to digitally archive vinyl should you feel the urge. Finished in fire engine red, the perfect match is Ortofon's 2M red moving magnet cartridge – a fine choice for the Rega even if it wasn't in quite such a suitable colour.

The red theme doesn't end with the turntable either. The speaker for this ensemble is the Usher S-520 finished in an equally eye-catching hue. The Usher has been on sale for a few years now and has a well-earned reputation as one of the biggest bargains on the market. Putting it with the Naim is not such a common combination however, so I couldn't wait to hear how it sounded.

### Fine combination

Ninety seconds of Hellwood's *Chainsaw of Life* streamed through the UnitiQute was enough to tell me that this is a very fine combination indeed. The Usher handles the big natural bass of Fireworks Factory with a depth and



impact that is totally out of keeping with its relatively small dimensions. In fact, the whole system sounds bigger and more expensive than it is. It has a tonal balance and soundstage that gives music a real sense of life and vitality.

The Rega doesn't let the side down either. The effortless sense of timing that seems to be part of the band DNA gives Ray Charles' *Genius Loves Company* a wonderful flow that is hard not to love. The talented cast assembled to work with Charles, are granted the space and soundstage to show their phenomenal musical talent. Switching to the unlikely genius of Run-DMC's *Raising Hell*

doesn't wrong-foot it either. The frenzied collection of loops and samples gets heads nodding and toes tapping and leaves me pretty sure there isn't much you can throw at an RP6 that is going to be a problem.

What really sets this system apart is the control method. Sat in one of the sublimely comfortable armchairs in the listening room controlling the UnitiQute via iPad, it is hard not to see the appeal in a well-implemented streaming system. Scanning through hundreds of albums is a breeze and the cover art and feedback you receive is superior to CD. Throw in the RP6 for when only vinyl will do, and you have a winner.



- 1 NAIM UNITIQUTE ALL-IN-ONE PLAYER £1,425
- 2 REGA RP6 TURNTABLE £798
- 3 REGA PHONO MINI 2AD £85
- 4 ORTOFON 2M RED CARTRIDGE £80
- 5 USHER S-520 LOUDSPEAKER £375

TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:  
£2,763

## SYSTEM 2 – COULD IT BE MAJIK?

Normally a dealer visit features one system with an all-in-one unit, so it's most unusual to have two of them. For Ronnie though, this set of components offers the best bang for your buck at the price and still retains a commendably small footprint. It also features one of the most enduring audio products in history and is a firm Sound Gallery favourite.

### Industry icon

Now in its 40th year of production, the Linn LP12 is instantly recognisable and an industry icon. The £2,350 Majik variant seen here makes use of a Pro-Ject carbon fibre tonearm to restore the price of LP12 ownership to more terrestrial levels. Otherwise it is business as usual, with the attractive wooden plinth and stainless steel platter and the tweakable suspension.

Partnering the LP12 is another part of the Majik range, the £2,600 DSM. Like the UnitiQute, this is a combined high-resolution media streamer, internet radio, digital and analogue inputs (including a phono stage suitable for use with the Majik LP12) and 100W of amplification. Backing this up is a £1,575 Majik 2100 power amp with another 100 watts on tap.

This extra power is useful as the 805D loudspeaker from Bowers & Wilkins benefits from a reasonable amount of amplification. The baby of the 800 series, the £3,950 standmount is still a very serious speaker indeed. It makes use of the same diamond tweeter as the rest of the range and looks stunning in gloss black. Even with the extra power amp, these speakers represent a stiff challenge for an all-in-one system. Can the DSM really get the best from them?

### Entirely convincing

As it turns out, the results are entirely convincing. The biggest improvement from the opening system is the scale of the performance. The 805D is still a relatively small speaker (certainly by the standards of some of its larger brothers), but even in the relatively substantial Sound Gallery listening room, close your eyes and the performance in front of you has a truly believable sense of scale. Kate Bush's *Fifty Words for Snow* luxuriates in the space and is conveyed with an incredible realism and presence. The balancing act between detail and long term listening satisfaction is perfectly managed and this is a system that you could happily listen to for hours and be as engrossed at the end as you were at the start.

The LP12 is equally adept. As Ronnie is as big a fan of Radiohead frontman Thom Yorke as I am, we spent some time with *The Eraser*. The Majik LP12 is something of a delight. The sheer life and energy it has could only be an LP12, but at the same time it feels tighter and more accurate than Sondeks of old. Yorke's vocals are rich, full and lifelike and underpinned by bass that is tight and textured. For a basic design that is forty years old, there's still much to like.

Once again, what completes the system is the control interface. Linn's Kinsky app on the iPad is absolutely superb. As well as allowing you to browse the list of albums available, you can arrange the music in a queue or browse the radio stations available. The experience that Sound Gallery has with streamers really comes to the fore here. All of the 'value added' aspects of streaming are on display and work perfectly. So, what happens when you take this expertise to its ultimate conclusion?

- 1 LINN MAJIK DSM STREAMER £2,600
- 2 LINN MAJIK 2100 POWER AMP £1,575
- 3 LINN MAJIK LP12 TURNTABLE £2,350
- 4 BOWERS & WILKINS 805D SPEAKER £3,950

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:  
£10,475**



## SYSTEM 3 – A FITTING KLIMAX

**T**he final system takes the same Sound Gallery ethos and applies it to the high end. This is another Linn streaming system partnered with another LP12 but the similarities end there. By the standards of some of the systems I see on my dealer visits, this is a relatively compact and simple final system. But be under no illusions though that it is high end through and through!

### Hidden features

The £16,825 LP12SE lined up as part of system three looks almost entirely identical to the Majik version from the previous system. I could, however, have seven Majik LP12s for the price of this LP12SE! Linn's flagship comes packed with hidden features from the Keel subchassis to the all-new Urika phono stage that results in a turntable that is an order of magnitude more sophisticated than its baby brother.

It needs to be, because the Klimax DS and 500 Solos that comprise the rest of the system are equally uncompromising designs that represent the logical extreme of the Linn philosophy. Each slender aluminium chassis is sumptuously finished and amazingly compact; these pricey Linn separates exude high end appeal.

Overall, this is a very flexible, high-end system that could be added to most UK lounges without undue fuss. At least the electronics could. The Klimax 350P floorstander is an altogether more imposing proposition and benefits from a little space to breathe. A six-way design featuring – amongst others – a pair of eight-inch bass drivers, there is little doubt that it should have the measure of most spaces you place it in. It's a handsome brute though, and its fit and finish is to all intents and purposes perfect.

### Nailed it

As this was the first time I'd been given the opportunity to listen to the LP12SE outside of a relatively unforgiving show environment, I made a beeline for it and plonked *Au Reve* by Cassius on. *The Sound of Violence* is not a great hi-fi recording, but it is still a fine piece of music that I've listened to hundreds of times. The big Linn nailed it. The LP12SE is more matter of fact in its presentation and, perhaps, lacks the 'boppiness' of the cheaper model, but the trade-off is incredible drive and solidarity. Returning to Thom Yorke confirms this is an effortless system that can reproduce any music scale without strain or harshness.

It is equally accomplished with digital, too. With the iPad to hand, I spent a happy afternoon picking through the extensive server of music that Sound Gallery has on hand. Not once could I wrongfoot the Klimax system or even find any discernible weakness. The most satisfying aspect of the entire performance is how the system can effortlessly reveal the smallest nuance in great recordings, without at the same time tearing poorer pieces to shreds. In keeping with the promise of long term listening satisfaction, it was only an increasingly pressing need to go home that tore me away from it.

The result is high-end with almost none of the compromises that it usually asks of rooms and owners. Control is as slick as the smaller systems, the space it takes up is – by the standards of the competition – relatively small, and it has all the scale and impact that a system at this price should have. Welcome to the future!

- 1 LINN KLIMAX DS £15,500
- 2 LINN LP12 SE TURNTABLE £16,825
- 3 LINN KLIMAX 500 SOLO POWER AMP £16,300
- 4 LINN KLIMAX 350P LOUDSPEAKER £19,900

TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:  
£68,525



A streaming system lives or dies on the quality of the set-up. Performance is only part of the package, and where The Sound Gallery excels is putting the infrastructure in place that enables the guys to demonstrate the hardware at its best. Ronnie's enthusiasm for

the concept is infectious and this is reflected in how slick he has made the demo experience. Using the iPad as a two-way remote is an experience that puts another nail in CD's coffin.

The good news is that this techno wizardry isn't at the expense of vinyl.

The three systems were equally adept with analogue as they were with digital. This is also the first time I have heard the newest additions to either end of the LP12 range and the results suggest that the old girl probably has another forty years in her yet!

# Big time

Before the Aurex microsystem, serious hi-fi only came in large packages – but Toshiba's premium brand changed all that, says **Tim Jarman...**

**A**urex is to Toshiba as Lexus is to Toyota. Take a Japanese brand whose products are known for being reliable but dull, add a made-up name that sounds sort of European, apply it to a few products that are a cut above the usual grey porridge and there you go, instant credibility and entry to the high-end club! Thankfully Toshiba's legendary record for reliability was fully maintained by the Aurex brand, which gave it an excellent selling proposition – great sound and trouble-free ownership.

Aurex products first appeared in the UK in the late nineteen seventies, and despite having a name and a logo that was very similar to that of a leading brand of birth control product, sold well! An early success was made with a line of cassette decks that included a proprietary noise-reduction system, ADRES, which was said to be capable of outperforming the then standard Dolby B. Lack of industry support in the form of pre-recorded material and suitable car and personal players finished off ADRES (along with JVC's 'Super ANRS', which was essentially similar) but there was another line in which Aurex specialised; the microsystem.

Aurex was the first to come up with the concept of the hi-fi microsystem or 'mini compo' (short for mini components, in Japanese-English) – it brought this idea to a world obsessed with full size separates. Before Aurex, what prevailed was the notion that the bigger the hi-fi was, the better and more expensive it would surely be. Aurex made the first credible small hi-fi systems with no corners cut and no concessions made.

## Box set go!

Each component used standard RCA-type connectors at the usual signal levels, and was powered directly from the mains by its own

built-in transformer, just like full-sized units. Forget the horrible cheap plastic microsystems of the nineteen nineties and beyond, these were the real deal. Thanks to the clever shape of the feet and the matching indentations on the top of each unit it is really easy to stack the system up neatly. As all the units are truly self-contained, you can do it in any order you like, the power amp and the cassette deck are also the same height so a cool-looking 'two by two' arrangement is also possible. The only drawback is the mass of cables

around the back which is difficult to hide behind such small equipment. This is one area where the later, more integrated microsystems, such as the Sony FH-7 and FH-9, had a real advantage.

The main Aurex range consisted of three groups of models; the 10, 12 and 15 series. Price and complexity went up with each step, but they were all broadly compatible so the buyer could choose whatever suited their priorities. There was no Aurex micro turntable and even though miniature

**Pure gold:**  
Aurex's top of the range 15-series microsystem was a redoubtable performer...



loudspeakers bearing the Aurex name were sold in the UK, some of the models were sourced locally and are not particularly exciting, so mixing and matching is on the cards for these essential extra items. As with many micro systems, the cassette deck was considered to be the main source, and the Aurex offerings are all pretty good.

Surprisingly, none of them offered ADRES (although you could buy an external ADRES processor if you really wanted it)! 'Direct Loading' was a fashionable feature though, where the user locks the cassette straight onto the transport rather than relying on a hinged door to position it correctly. A downside of this is that with no tape in place it leaves the heads exposed to dust, so keep those head cleaning sticks on standby...

### Sounding out

I started my listening tests with a CD player in order to get a measure of what the little pre and power amplifiers can do. Two things became instantly obvious, the first being how energetic the SY-C15/SC-M15 combo is. Quite small angular movements of the volume control unleash more sound than you would expect from something so small, and then there's the bass, which rumbles along with the presence and impact of a tank coming through the back wall of the listening room.

The Aurex is obviously touchy about being small, and so acts big! But countering this, bringing me on to the second surprise, it proved actually pretty refined, too. Forget the zingy, searing treble that you may believe comes from every Japanese muscle amp; this one has a neat and tidy top end that if partnered well with the loudspeakers can be really quite pleasant. It's preferable to many of the miniature hi-fi designs which came later, especially those which used basic Class D amplification to save power and space.

Pop in a cassette and it's the same story. The PC-D12 is a good deck that gives the impression of being mechanically stable and well equalised. Big bass lines and cassettes are not something that normally go together, but that's what the Aurex system delivers. It records well too, once set up for modern TDK SA tape (IEC II), what results is bright and tidy – this would have been a good tool for making cassettes for the car or a personal stereo, another field in which Toshiba excelled. It is a mechanically

simple machine which uses solenoids rather than cams driven off the capstan shaft to engage the various modes, just like some professional models do.

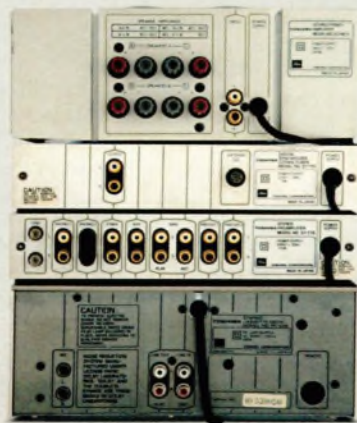
After all the low stuff it comes as a surprise that the ST-T10 tuner is actually quite dry sounding and very matter of fact. Unlike many Japanese tuners it takes a lot of signal to get all five segments of the tuning meter to light up, but the reward is a decent stereo spread and layer upon layer of emerging detail that opens out the more you listen.

Also commendable is the AM stage, after dark the MW band is full of interesting material and even though you can hardly call the quality 'hi-fi', it is in its own way no worse than many

These systems are usually well balanced and extremely reliable, making them a very fine vintage buy

of the alternatives.

Aurex may not be the most fashionable name in vintage hi-fi at the moment, but having sampled this one I feel that maybe it should be. Classic Japanese microsystems are beginning to become collectable, but values are currently lagging behind those of the Aiwa and Sony alternatives. These systems are well balanced, pleasant to use and by all accounts extremely reliable, making them an excellent vintage buy for



### COMPONENT CHOICES

**You can assemble a complete Aurex system from the 10, 12 or 15 series components. They are all the same width and all fit together, but note that not all the colours and finishes are a perfect match for each other.**

**Tuners:** Normally the ST-T10 or the ST-F15 [pictured]. The ST-T10 is a mechanically-tuned model that covers FM and MW (and also LW for the UK-specific ST-T10L), where as the ST-15F offers digital tuning and preset stations, but covers the FM band only.

**Integrated amplifier:** The SB-A10 is the basic offering; it is very compact and offers 20 watts per channel.

**Preamplifiers:** The 12 and 15 series systems have separate pre and power amplifiers. The SY-C12 offers two tape loops, an auxiliary input for your CD player and a very acceptable MM phono stage. The SY-C15 [pictured] dispenses with one of the tape loops, but gives you a 'source direct' function for the phono input instead.

**Power amplifiers:** To go with the preamps there are two power amplifiers, both of which produce around 45W. The SC-M12 is hybrid chip-based, whereas the SC-M15 [pictured] uses discrete transistors. The latter is more heavily built, but has a reputation for running hot.

**Cassette decks:** The PD-C10 is a sturdy piece of kit and has big mechanical keys. Prettier looking is the PD-C12, which has the best mixture of features of all the models and includes logic control, LED VU meters, Dolby NR and compatibility with all tape types. The PD-C15 [pictured] is also a fine machine but it can't record on Metal tapes.

**Accessories:** For those wanting ADRES noise reduction, the AD-15 ADRES processor was available. It works with all three cassette deck models. The AT-12 quartz timer was also an option; this allowed the system to be programmed to come on or to make a recording at any time.

For sale / Wanted

# Hi-Fi Choice Reader Classified

Welcome to *Hi-Fi Choice* Reader Classified, a free private ads service for buying and selling second-hand hi-fi components.

These pages are a must-read if you're thinking about buying used kit, or if you have hi-fi you want to sell. It's free to place an advertisement – simply submit your ad of up to 30 words, remembering to include your email, phone number and county.

The simplest way to send your ad is via email to: [letters@hi-fichoice.co.uk](mailto:letters@hi-fichoice.co.uk) or mail: **Reader Classified, Hi-Fi Choice, My Hobby Store Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent BR6 6BG.**

Please note that this service is open to private advertisers only.

## FOR SALE

**ARCAM** system: A90 pre-power (2 x 90w); Pro90 power, 192 CD player (all black), Chord Co. Chameleon silver interconnects, 3 pairs, Odyssey speaker cables for B1 amping, 4 pairs, Monitor Audio gold GS20 speakers (walnut), new and boxed, (£5,000) £1,500: **0121 602 8349 (W Midlands).**

**TECHNICS** SL1210 Mk2 £249, Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200. Both in very good condition: **0207 499 8729 (London).**

**AUDIO-TECHNICA** AT-OC9 MK3, less than 10 hours use. Bought in Japan. No mounting kit, just cartridge and box. £300 ono: **07517 147056 or email: jameshollis@mac.com (London).**

**LYNGDORF** Millennium Mk4 reference amplifier, Excellent condition £3,950: **01743 344 136 or email: denis\_james@yahoo.com (Shropshire).**

**SPENDOR** SP2/3 speakers (rosewood), together with very heavy castAE stands. Superb condition,

all boxes included £650 ono: **0115 87550700 or email: rolfyjordan@gmail.com (Nottingham).**

**RUSS ANDREWS** Super purifier filter with hubble port plug for use with power purifier, super ultra purifier blocks (£386) £195 (including p&p), Yellow 6-way extension lead (3m) superclamp £85, Kimber KGAG 14dB CD interconnect (£515) £385: **01902 884694 (W Midlands).**

**ARCAM** Solo Neo amp/CD/FM/DAB (16 months guarantee) £775, Arcam Solo £450, Quad L-Series subwoofer £250. All mint with boxes: **023 8073 8935 or email: golg3385@hotmail.co.uk (Southampton).**

**WANTED** Maxell or TDK metal cassette tapes (new or little used): **01395 576644 or email: jmichealbrittain@yahoo.com (Devon).**

**NAIM** Uniti, 3 months old, can demo. Buyer collects £2,000: **07971 920 347 (Glasgow).**

**MONITOR AUDIO** RS1 speakers, hardly used, mint condition, boxed £160: **01943 467859 (W Yorkshire).**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** AI CD Pro, immaculate condition with original box, manual, receipt and remote (£1,500) £650: **07814468747 (London).**

**MERIDIAN** 501 preamp (MC), 557 power amp, great condition. Will demo £1,000 the pair. Will split (501 - £225, 557 - £850). Buyer collects: **07868480165 (N. Somerset).**

**ESL** 57 audio speakers with dedicated stands, excellent condition (£1,800) £1,050: **01453 544242 (Glos.).**

**KRELL** FBI integrated amp, 2006, box, manual, remote (black) 300/600 watts (£15,000) £6,000. Buyer collects: **07411 388152 (Herts).**

**NORDOST** Valhalla XLR interconnect 0.6m (£1,965) £650, Kimber Select 3038, silver speaker cable 2.5, pair (£5,700) £1,700: **07411 388152 (Herts).**



Arcam Solo Neo all-in-one system

**JOHN SHEARNE** Phase 6 reference preamp (with MM phono board), plus 2x Phase 3 reference stereo power amps, excellent condition with boxes £595: **01202 515474 or email: johnlangley17@talktalk.net (Dorset).**

**NAIM** NAP 500 power amp, Naim preamp NAC 552, Naim power supply NAPs 555, Naim CD X2, stageline – SMC phono stage, plus 6-way distribution lead, 2 Naim Frain shelf units (black), B&W speakers Nautilus 802D (rosenut). (£40,000) £18,000. Pro-Ject turntable RPM10 with Ortofon Kontrapunkt B cartridge and Perspex turntable (£2,000) £750, Naim Audio amp NAP 110, Naim HiCap 110, NAC 42 (all £300): **07515 862222 or email: edge@badedge.com (Sunbury on Thames).**

**CYRUS** Pre VS2 preamp (brushed black), excellent condition, boxed. £350: **02476 440058 (Coventry).**

**TRICHORD** Dino 2+ NCP5U + top Trichord power cord, pristine, £525. Abbingdon Music Research IC-777 high-quality interconnect, brand new, £130. Funk Achromat turntable mat, 5mm, unmarked, £35. Orbis Blues Collection, complete, including magazines and binders £100. Negotiate on p+p. **01582867139 or email**

**mikethompson48@hotmail.com (Bedfordshire).**

**TECHNICS** SL1210 Mk2 £249, Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200. Very good condition: **0207 499 8729 (London).**

**NAIM** NAIT 5i integrated amp perfect sound and condition, plus remote with box £430. Collection preferred: **07792241875 or 0117 909 0033 or email yyy777yyyb@hotmail.fr (Bristol).**

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY** Linear One speakers (piano black), easy amp load, mint, boxed, manual, £75, Pure DAX-701 ES digital tuner (silver), mint, boxed, manual £50: **07941174804 (Slough, Berks).**

**PRO-JECT** Debut 111 turntable (black) with Ortofon OM 5E cartridge, little used, very good condition, £120. Sony TC-K611S stereo cassette deck with 3 headed, Dolby S, excellent condition £50: **01303 863 424 (Kent).**

**NORDOST** Blue Heaven interconnects, 1 metre, RCA connectors, 2 pairs, boxed (£125 per pair). £60 per pair or £100 for both. Chord Prodigal, 1 metre, boxed (£85) £40. QED reference HDMI, 1 metre (£80) £40: **07870 159725 or email johnsidibottom@hotmail.co.uk (Somerset).**

**NORDOST** Flatline Blue Heaven speaker cables – banana plugs one end, other unterminated. Stereo pairs

**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!



1 x 4.5m (cost £1,030) and 1 x 2.5m (cost £630). Unused/new. Bargain at £550 ono. **01945 463077 or email: deregles1@aol.com (Wisbech).**

**SOMETHING SOLID** speaker stands. Fully welded construction (black). 63cm high, mass filled, spiked feet. Photo available. Ring for other dimensions. VGC £50: **01582 423791 (Beds).**

**NAD** C315BEE amplifier, 40W, 6 line inputs, plus matching C515BEE CD player, Titanium, remotes, boxed, £100 each. Both for £200 and free NAD 4225 tuner. Gale silver monitor bookshelf speakers, (black ash), boxed, mint £40: **01706 345418 or email: hfc@rodtheobald.force9.co.uk (London).**

**AUDIOLAB** 8000P power amp (silver) and 8000C preamp (black), perfect sound and condition. £495 the pair: **07816758688 (NE London).**

**MARANTZ** PM6004 integrated amp, 2 months old, (£310) £175; Quad 11L (Birdseye maple), excellent condition £150: **07733428736 or email gill@gillbrears.plus.com (West Yorkshire).**

**NAD** 5320 CD Players x2; NAD Amplifier 302; NAD tuner C422; Heco bookshelf speakers. £100 or will separate: **01491 628000 or email: brian@bspmedia.com (Oxon).**

**QED** Signature Audio XT, 1 metre, new, boxed £95; Signature Silver Spiral 1metre £75: **01639774144 or email: alwyn.mackie@ntlworld.com (London).**

**TIVOLI** Model One radio, designed by Henry Kloss, (maple/Hunter Green), with original box and instructions, brand new £65: **07970 142144 or 01745 833183 (Denbighshire).**

**NAIM** CDX2 CD player, exceptional condition, complete with all packaging, £1,650; Naim NAC 282 preamp, complete with Naim NAPSC, exceptional condition, complete with all packaging £2,395; Naim NAP 200 power amp, exceptional condition, complete with all packaging £1,150; Focal Electra 1027 Be

speakers, superb sound in exceptional condition, complete with all packaging £2,200: **07866 423572 or email: adrian.ford@btinternet.com (Devon).**

**ICON AUDIO** Stereo 60 Mk3, KT120 valves, Jensen capacitors. Up to 85W, virtually mint condition, original box, packaging, manual, valve cover, meter for checking valves bias. Buyer collects. £1,400 ono. **01889 575655 or email: derrick@forsters2.plus.com (Staffordshire).**

**AUDIOLAB** 8000P power amp (silver) and 8000C preamp (black), perfect sound and condition £495 the pair: **07816 758688 (NE London).**

**SUMIKO** Blue Point No 2 cartridge, approximately 100 hours use, boxed £85: **07800 606892 or email: schandler@dopag.co.uk (Worcestershire).**

**BEL CANTO** CD2 (silver), psu, box, manual, excellent condition, £1,195; Avondale Monoblocs, psu (ncc200 boards), built into 3 slim Italian cases, excellent condition £495. **07733174990 or email: paul.g7@fsmail.net (London).**

**MARANTZ** CD17KI CD player, Jamo Concert 8 loudspeakers, Arcam Alpha 8R, 8P amplifiers, rack, stands and cables. Mint condition, offers: **01706 622608 (Lancashire).**

**ASTIN TREW** AT8000 phono stage, 6 months old, 2 year guarantee, (£880) £500: **07729 600847 (West Sussex).**

**MARANTZ** SA11S1 SACD player, 1 year old, (£2,000) £400, Yamaha TK781 DAB/FM tuner (£130) £40. Buyer must collect: **01302 538027 (Yorkshire).**

**DENON** D-100 system (tuner, CD tape), with remote and Mission speakers, manual and brochures £225. Buyer collects: **01268 772403 (Essex).**

**ROKSAN** Radius 5 turntable, with Rega RB600 tonearm and Goldring GX1022 cartridge, superb condition, clear acrylic version £700: **01484 427426 (West Yorkshire).**

**RUSS ANDREWS** HP1/PA1 preamp/power amp, excellent sound, all VGC,

interconnect included £500. Will demo, buyer collects: **01483 891925 (Surrey).**

**KRELL** 350m mono amps for sale, £3,500. Drive anything, VGC (black), Including brand new 13-amp audiophile power leads. Collection only: **01926 653421 (West Midlands).**

**PRO-JECT** Xpression II turntable, boxed with instructions. Excellent condition £75 inc p/p; Marantz CD-65II SE boxed c/w manual and remote, VG condition, still sounds great! £25 inc p/p: **07514443626 (Cumbria).**

**MICHELL** Syncro turntable with arm and Ortofon VMS 30, £340. Tannoy Cheviot speakers £650. Audiolab 8000a amplifier £160. All in excellent condition: **01708 522788 (Essex).**

**TECHNICS** SL1210 Mk2, very good condition £249. Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200: **0207 499 8729 (London).**

**KENWOOD** HD-600 HD compact component system, includes amplifier, tuner, cassette deck and CD player. KEF Coda speakers and IXOS Deadrock stands. Will accept best offer: **07747 864305 or email: behjat.reza@yahoo.co.uk (Surrey).**

**REGA** 3 full ISOKINETIK upgrades without arm £200, with RB250 Cardas wired Michell weight upgrades £400; arm alone £200: **01606784767 or email:**

**peterscott341@tiscali.co.uk (Cheshire).**

**KUDOS** R23in speaker stands £55. Target speaker wall stands, spiked £30. Bang & Olufsen Beocord 2400 cassette £50. Technics 8020 24-band graphic equaliser £60: **01708 457691 (Essex).**

**QUAD** II classic integrated amp, light use, 2 months only, boxed, excellent phono MM/MC tape loop (£4,500) £2,900. Buyer collects: **01277 841493 (Essex).**

**AUDION** Premier2-box valve preamp, mint condition, (£2,500) £900. Audio Research D130 transistor power amp, mint condition, (£2,000) £500: **07767 444488 (Bucks).**

**KRELL** RFBP 250 watt monoblocks, Audio Research Reference 3 preamp. Gamut L3 speakers with stands, Transparent interconnects and speaker cables. For photos, details, prices: **07899 721899 or email: yatestherapy@googlemail.com (London).**

**CYRUS** CD XTSE transport (black), with remote £750. DAC X (black) £750. Both in excellent condition: **01883 741843 (Surrey/Kent).**

**ROKSAN** Xerxes (black ash finish) with XPS7 power supply. All

excellent condition, new belt, TMS3 bearing, RMAT £450: **07972 533063 or email: g200@gmx.com (Cumbria).**

**WANTED** Complete fluid damper kit for SME series 111s tonearm: **01382 644815 (Dundee).**

**LEAK** Trough Line stereo valve tuner in steel case, with Stereo 30 Plus transistor amp in wooden case £80. Also Goldring Lenco turntable £50: **01474 872863 (London).**

**TECHNICS** SL1210 Mk2, very good condition, £249. Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200. Can post items if needed. **0207 499 8729 (London).**

**BOSE/DORFER** AC1 loudspeakers (black/ivory). Good condition, boxed £600: **01926259022 or email: davidhardy18@talktalk.net (Warwickshire).**

**GRAHAM SLEE** Novo headphone amplifier, hardly used, boxed with manual £130, Pioneer 505 precision CD player, boxed. **07818 658722 (Warwickshire).**

**BRINKMANN FEIN** phono amp 2006, RCA outputs, volume control, separate power supply (black). Superb finish and build (£1,050) £275. **07411 388152 (Herts).**

**WANTED** Marantz DR-17 Compact Disc digital recorder. **01395 576644 or email: jmichaelbrittain@yahoo.com (Devon).**

## HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR FREE AD

### YOUR DETAILS

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Daytime telephone number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

### YOUR ADVERTISEMENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### SEND YOUR ADVERT TO

Hi-Fi Choice, My Hobby Store Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent BR6 6BG

To submit your advert to us, please email **letters@hifichoice.co.uk** or alternatively, use the postal form below. Please limit ads to a maximum of 30 words, ensuring all details, model names, etc., are correctly stated. Kindly also include your email, telephone number and home county. We regret that we cannot take adverts over the telephone.



NEW PRODUCT



**Opera  
Seconda & Quinta  
Loudspeakers**

Beautiful curved cabinets in luxurious real wood and leather. Finish options include cherry, mahogany, black high gloss & white high gloss.



**Thorens  
TD-2035  
Turntable**

Award-winning turntable, available in a variety of beautiful colour acrylics.



**THORENS**

NEW PRODUCT



**Hi-Fi  
Choice**  
EDITOR'S  
CHOICE

**Unison Research  
S6 Integrated Amplifier**

"This Unison Research Amplifier is a terrific buy. We defy anyone not to fall for its charms." - What Hi-Fi



**Hi-Fi  
Choice**  
RECOMMENDED



**Unison Research  
Simply Italy Integrated  
Amplifier**

"Excellent sound and attractive retro looks from a compact, affordable design."  
Hi-Fi Choice / April 2012



ONIX  
IS BACK



**Onix  
XIA-160 Integrated  
Amplifier**

Reference Dual Mono, Class A Integrated Amplifier. Exceptional performance, exceptional value. Check out the range.



**Pathos Acoustics  
InPol Remix  
Amplifier**

10 Watts of pure Musical Pleasure.

"A truly brilliant performer" - What Hi-Fi

(note: iPod Touch not included)

**ONIX**

**PATHOS**

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

t. **01753 652 669**

e. mail@ukd.co.uk

**www.ukd.co.uk**



Please check out the UKD web site for information on all of our products and special offers/promotions.

Ed Selley brings you our pick of this month's top hi-fi websites...



## HEAD-FI

### head-fi.org

If you do a significant amount of listening via headphones, Head-Fi is an essential resource. The world's largest community of headphone users, the site is slick, easy to navigate and breaks down into three distinct sections. A front page shows new content such as show reports, interviews and the latest reviews. The review section proper contains a vast archive of product, including headphones, earphones, headphone amps and other pieces of audio equipment – including some items where you would otherwise be importing them essentially untested. Finally there is a busy and impressively comprehensive forum.



Where Head-Fi scores over more diverse websites is in the thoroughness that it covers specific areas. If you are considering buying a laptop, for example, from which you plan to use the headphone output or if you're wondering whether a pair of custom moulds for your in-ears are worthwhile, Head-Fi has it covered. As an added bonus the 'Wiki' section of frequently asked questions has the answer to pretty much every headphone-related query you've been too afraid to ask.

## FIRST WATT

### firstwatt.com

First Watt is the brainchild of Nelson Pass of Pass Labs fame. The company's mission statement is to design and produce amplifier types that are more specialised than those used by Pass Labs proper. The designs are solid-state and relatively low output designs.

What makes this site worthy of note is that the First Watt ethos is slightly different to most manufacturers. Each model has an extensive write up from Nelson Pass explaining the decision process behind the components used and the intended performance of the products, as well as a circuit diagram for each product (albeit in simplified form). As a result, the First Watt

site is a great resource for anybody handy with a soldering iron, as Pass knows his onions and his experience is invaluable and essentially being made available to you at no cost. What this website provides is some credible designs and considerable know-how that can help you create a very fine amplifier, if you have the DIY skills to do so.

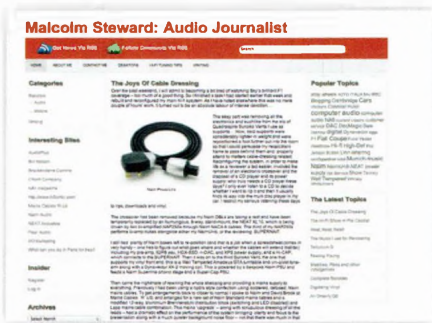


## MALCOLM STEWARD

### malcolmsteward.co.uk

When he isn't writing for *Hi-Fi Choice*, Malcolm maintains his own website which covers a wider scope of interests and pursuits than he can write about in the magazine. The site features some useful information on system tweaks and tuning. The tweaks themselves might be thought of as unusual – slightly pulling out DIN cables from their sockets was a new one on me – but they are generally free or low cost so what have you got to lose?

Elsewhere Malcolm revisits some review products in greater detail and passes comments on other pieces of kit that pass through his listening room. There are also some of his favourite columns from his time as a journalist. Special mention must go to Malcolm's critique of the unique writing style that is the hi-fi manufacturer press release, which he rather ornately describes as "vainglorious bollocks". As someone who was responsible for these press releases for a while, I'd try and defend the accusations were they not broadly correct – certainly in relation to my own creations! ●

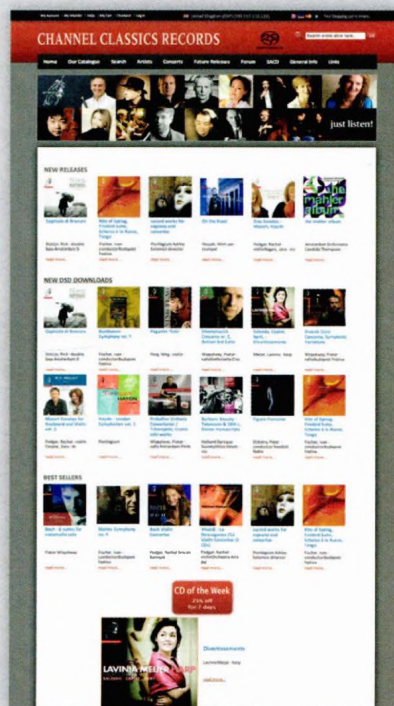


## CHANNEL CLASSICS

### channelclassics.com

Last month, I covered some rather fabulous Chord Electronics Chordette components in *Beautiful Systems*. The Qute HD DAC was equipped with a USB input that as well as being 24-bit/192kHz capable, was also designed to process DSD – the native coding of the SACD format. This seemed impressive, but I had no idea where you might buy such material. Happily Channel Classics has been hard at work and has amassed quite a collection...

Even if you don't have quite such a sophisticated device at your disposal, classical fans would do well to give this site a visit. Along with a considerable catalogue on CD and SACD (which is likely where the DSD recordings came from), Channel has been working on expanding its library of high resolution downloads as well. Interestingly, most of these are available in both 24/192 and 24/96, which allows for meaningful comparisons. Prices are fair and the download experience is well managed and slick. The 24/192 download of Frommerman's *Holland-American Line* is a seriously impressive recording and a joy to listen to.



E M O T I O N **VA** E N G I N E

# 2012 IS OFF TO A GREAT START

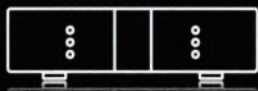
Introducing the more affordable Reference Series from Vitus Audio



RS-100  
stereo amplifier (new)



RI-100  
integrated amplifier (new)



RCD-100  
cd player (new)  
192/24 bit, usb/spdif



RL-101  
line stage (new)



RP-101  
phono stage (new)



scan me with your mobile  
device qr code reader



UK DISTRIBUTOR  
Kog Audio  
024 7722 0650  
[www.kogaudio.com](http://www.kogaudio.com)



MANUFACTURER  
Vitus Audio, Denmark  
+45 9626 8046  
[www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)



# Precision Engineered Stands

Designed and manufactured in Great Britain, our speaker stands have been produced without compromise. All stands are CNC machined from the finest materials by skilled craftsmen. Your speaker stands will be hand built to your requirements and are fitted with our uniquely designed isolation spikes, allowing the clear sound of the speakers to be enjoyed.



Track Audio's product ranges includes, Floorstands, Stand Mounts, Monitor Stands, Sub Woofer Stands and pictured right our Isolation Adaptor kits.



We are a family run engineering company with 30 years experience producing precision parts for the Automotive, Aerospace and Medical industries amongst others. We are enthusiastic people that take pride in the products we design and manufacture, everything we build is CNC machined and is crafted from the finest materials to give you lasting service at a fair price. Treat your speakers to Track Audio quality today!

Floorstands are available in 4 different sizes. Accessories include Isolation Foot Adaptor kits and Isolation Cone products available in black or silver. All products have a 10 year Manufacturers guarantee



TRACK AUDIO

Track Audio Unit 3, Corinium Industrial Estate, Raans Road, Amersham, Bucks HP6 6JQ  
Telephone: 01494 723755 [www.trackaudio.co.uk](http://www.trackaudio.co.uk)

# Digital Audio streaming

hi-fi and networked audio specialists from single systems to whole house solutions



New Akurate DS

LINN



New Klimax DS

- Networked audio - simple access with a huge performance increase
- Audition & compare various products or brands in our listening rooms
- Arcam, B&W, Denon, Linn, Naim, PMC, Rega, Quad, Spendor, Sonos

Whether you wish to add to or replace your existing source a networked audio player will provide easy access to your entire music collection and give a huge increase in performance. Our expert and friendly team can help plan, install, configure your network, and help migrate your music collection. Come and get hands on with the future and experience the latest digital streaming technology has to offer.

**0% APR or deferred payment options available to suit your own budget**

Example: Cash Price £1425. 20% Deposit required £285 plus 12 equal payments of £95. Total £1425 0% APR



**Audition the Naim Uniti family - the complete home network music solution**  
Enjoy an audition in our comfortable listening rooms - Free on site parking

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

See our website for current range of ex-demonstration and special offers

## Rega - New product range

Outstanding performance and value



New RP 3  
Turntable

Brio-R  
amplifier



Rega  
DAC



*Billy Vee*  
SOUND • SYSTEMS

020 8318 5755

020 8852 1321

email enquiry: [info@billyvee.co.uk](mailto:info@billyvee.co.uk)

248 Lee High Road, Lewisham, London SE13 5PL (Mon - Sat 10am - 6.30pm Closed Thursday)

## HRT HeadStreamer

**H**igh Resolution Technologies has made a great name for itself selling USB headphone amps. The idea is that plugging your 'phones into a device like this yields superior sound to the stock analogue headphone output on your Mac or PC. It works, and the company has been going from strength to strength for the past few years as a result. The HeadStreamer is its latest such gizmo, offering true 24-bit/96kHz playback. Combine this with a high-quality music software package, such as BitPerfect or Audirvana, and you've your very own computer music delivery system.

Hooking up is simplicity itself; I plugged it into a USB port on my Apple MacBook Pro and within seconds it had been recognised as an output device; I then told Audirvana to use it to output my sound, and we were away. It sports native Audio Class 1.0 drivers present in all modern PCs, Macs and Linux computers, so there shouldn't be any compatibility issues. A nice long USB connection cable is supplied. Usefully, it sports LED indicators for sampling frequency (32, 44.1, 48, 88.2 and 96kHz), along with a mute tell-tale.

The company says it has an asynchronous USB transceiver and digitally controlled analogue attenuator coupled to an OCL amplifier; it claims its master clock is 'jitter-free'. HRT provides a single 3.5mm mini-jack output for headphones, claimed to have an output of 1.4V RMS; not quite CD line level. Output power is said to be 130mW; I found it drove my superb Jays v-Jays headphones effortlessly and made a great partner sonically, too.

### Sound quality

Indeed, the HeadStreamer sounds impressive; it's never less than clean and detailed with iTunes fare, yet decent hi res (24bit/96kHz) is better still. The open and musical sound, with a strong, tuneful bass and smooth, crisp highs, easily justifies its price if you're a music fan on the move. **DP**



**DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £145  
**WEBSITE:**  
AUDIOFREAKS  
.COM

**OUR VERDICT**  
★★★★★

## 47 Laboratory 4727 4728 record mats

**T**his Japanese company is better known for its range of minimalist electronic components, but also produces a range of cables and system tuning accessories of which these mats are part. If you combine a deep-seated love of hi-fi with strong feelings on animal-based products, these are probably *not* the upgrades for you though. The £72 black 4728 is made of pigskin, while the £144 cream coloured 4727 is deerskin!

The mats are finished to a very high standard and feel very different from one another. The 4727 is extremely thin – it required no VTA adjustment to use and is intended to impart the speed of a musical performance. The 4728 is a little thicker and needed fractional adjustments to VTA to keep settings identical. This gives a higher level of mechanical isolation and is intended to give a slightly warmer sound.

### Sound quality

Tested on a Michell GyroDec, the 4727 did give a slight sense of speed to the overall performance of the deck. The 4728 was even more impressive in this regard and combined this background noise drop with a very likeable focus on voices and instruments. Switching to a Voyd turntable suggested that the deerskin 4727 once again helps lower noise, while the 4728 is a superb isolator and adds considerable midrange definition.

Neither of these mats is cheap, but both have a sonic signature and in the case of the 4728 especially, a welcome effect on the noise floor of recordings. If you have an acrylic platter deck, they are well worth auditioning. **ES**



**DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £72-£144  
**CONTACT:**  
01562 731100  
**WEBSITE:**  
MIDLANDAUDIOPX-  
CHANGE.CO.UK

**OUR VERDICT**  
★★★★★

# Summer Sale on NOW!

# 10% OFF

Order online now at [www.russandrews.com/sale](http://www.russandrews.com/sale)  
or call **01539 797300** to place your order

Russ Andrews and Kimber  
cables and accessories.

**10% OFF**  
REFERENCE POWERKORD™  
+  
FREE UPGRADE TO  
W350I-AG IEC  
+  
FREE DCT

1m Reference PowerKord™  
with W350i-Ag IEC and free DCT  
**Was £264.50 SAVE £94.40**  
**Now ONLY £170.10**



**FREE**  
DCT & IEC  
Upgrade

*Plus!*

Claim your  
**FREE SILENCER**  
mains filter  
worth **£52**  
when you spend  
over **£350** in our  
Summer Sale



**FREE**  
Silencer  
worth  
£52

**25% OFF**  
KIMBER 8VS SPEAKER CABLE



2.5m pair terminated with bananas or spades

**Was £209 SAVE £52.25**  
**Now ONLY £156.75** Other lengths available

**10% OFF**  
Russ Andrews  
& KIMBER cables  
& accessories



**FREE**  
PowerMax  
Plus mains  
cable

**FREE 1m PowerMax Plus™**  
with Russ Andrews upgraded set-top-boxes

Sky, Freeview, Freesat boxes **£611**  
includes 1m PowerMax Plus worth **£49.95**



**25% OFF**

The AbZorber mains filter  
**Was £528 Save £132**  
**Now ONLY £396**

**BMU 1000**



**OVER 1/3 OFF**

Balanced Mains Unit 1000  
**Was £1588 Save £588**  
**Now ONLY £1000**



**20% OFF**

Speaker Zapperators  
**Was £148 Save £29.60**  
**Now ONLY £118.40**

To order go to [www.russandrews.com/sale](http://www.russandrews.com/sale)

or call UK Order Line **01539 797300**

Terms & Conditions apply

or request a **SALE CATALOGUE...**



**60 Day Home Trial • Free Delivery • Upgrade Scheme • Lifetime Guarantee**

Exclusive UK Retailer for



Russ Andrews Accessories Ltd, 2b Moreland Court,  
Westmorland Business Park, Shap Road,  
Kendal, LA9 6NS, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)1539 797300

Email: [info@russandrews.com](mailto:info@russandrews.com)

*Russ Andrews*®

**SALE ENDS**  
3rd July '12



## Fidelity Art PAB Feet

**F**idelity Art has recently launched a range of ball-bearing anti-vibration feet manufactured by the Polish manufacturer of dedicated audiophile-grade products, Pro Audio Bono. With bearings placed precisely between two brass bushes, contact between surfaces is significantly reduced and offers excellent anti-resonance properties to a variety of hi-fi equipment. Each FAB foot can support a weight of up to 60kg, so they will easily accommodate heavier, valve-based equipment without any problems – an essential feature in my book!

These feet are beautifully made and very sturdy. The design allows the bottom part of each foot to move completely freely (like an ankle joint) within a certain range, while still providing a sturdy vertical support. The design makes use of a self-aligning bearing, which means that the bottom part of the feet adapt to the table on which the feet are placed so that the upper part of the feet are always parallel to the table. Installing the feet is simply a job of unscrewing the old ones from the base of the equipment and fitting the new feet in their place.

### Sound quality

After replacing a standard set of plastic feet fitted to a CD player, there was a noticeable improvement in sound quality. Top end seemed cleaner and clearer, and this was especially noticeable with vocals. Bass response seemed tighter and far better controlled. There was also an improvement in the imaging. Brilliantly engineered, this is a top-class product that will enhance the sound quality of a wide variety of audio equipment, especially turntables and CD and/or DVD players. **NR**



#### DETAILS

**PRICE:** £249  
**CONTACT:**  
01840 183485  
**WEBSITE:**  
FIDELITYART.  
CO.UK

#### OUR VERDICT



## Origin Live Turntable Bearing Oil

**F**unnily enough, it often comes as a surprise to people to learn of the importance of using quality oil in your record deck's main bearing. Precision-made to minimise noise and guarantee very low friction during playback, just as with a high performance car engine, the use of decent oil is absolutely essential for the effective and optimal functioning of this critical part. However, Origin Live argues that there is a considerable investment in oil research for the automotive industry, but the requirements of an engine are quite different from those of a turntable bearing. And so this is where the Origin Live's new specialist oil comes in...

Oil wears out after a period of use and becomes contaminated with dirt that further degrades its performance. It is therefore important to remove the old oil first. To do this, remove the spindle and clean off the oil using a piece of lint-free tissue. To remove the remainder of oil from the bearing, use some more tissue wrapped round a thin stick to soak up the residue.

It's important to fill the bearing with oil completely. Origin Live suggest using ten drops and then re-inserting the bearing to check that oil overflows. I prefer to let the spindle descend into the bearing under gravity, rather than forcing it, to allow trapped air to escape. Add another two drops if the oil does not overflow and then try again. I found a definite improvement in sonics after using this, with both low level detail and musicality improving noticeably – the sound just seemed smoother and more natural. Highly commended, then! **NR**



#### DETAILS

**PRICE:** £9.99 FOR  
1.7ML, £19.99  
FOR 5ML  
**CONTACT:**  
02380 578877  
**WEBSITE:**  
ORIGINLIVE.COM

#### OUR VERDICT



# TWIST

*TWIST cuts the cost of enjoying your music at only £3.50 per metre*



**Hi-Fi Choice**



*"Twist delivers voice and guitars in a fluid and effortless style... A well thought out cable that delivers a touch of class to budget systems at a very reasonable price"*

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
June 2012

## Different by Design

We have taken the design of our very best cable, the highly acclaimed Ninja DCT++, and cut out everything that costs. What we have left is a simple, basic good design that takes you much closer to the musicians

## Natural and Comfortable To Listen To

*"The overall effect provided a sound that was more natural and comfortable to listen to, without compromising and openness or soundstaging."*

Robert Hoyle, Audiovation - Huddersfield. [www.audiovation.co.uk](http://www.audiovation.co.uk)

## Punches Well Above its Weight

*"This is a good quality cable which punches well above its weight for its price and delivers a good quality sound. The high frequencies are crisp and the low level frequencies are delivered on a strong level"*

Steve, Rayleigh Hi-Fi - Chelmsford. [www.rayleighhifi.com](http://www.rayleighhifi.com)

## Very Popular with Customers

*"We will now use this on our install and budget system as it is proving very popular with customers we have auditioned it to. An excellent cable at an affordable price"*

Derek Rapkin, H.G. Rapkin - Northampton - [www.hgrapkin.co.uk](http://www.hgrapkin.co.uk)

**READ THE FULL REVIEWS AND FIND OUT MORE ABOUT TWIST ON OUR WEBSITE**

CLAIM YOUR **FREE** 1m SAMPLE FROM US TODAY AND ENJOY THE SMOOTH NATURAL SOUND OF TWIST IN YOUR MUSIC

**Black Rhodium**

[www.blackrhodium.co.uk](http://www.blackrhodium.co.uk)  
[sales@blackrhodium.co.uk](mailto:sales@blackrhodium.co.uk)  
+44 (0)1332 342233

## Audioquest Cinnamon USB

**A**udioquest is clearly into USB and computer audio in general; it has five USB cables in its extensive catalogue and will be adding a very compact USB DAC for headphones in the near future. Cinnamon is the next stage up from the entry level Forest and has solid core conductors with 1.25 percent silver content. This factor increases as you go up to the range and peaks at 100 percent in the inappropriately named Diamond – surely Silver would have been more appropriate! The silver is plated onto copper strands because high frequencies travel in the skin of a conductor – the so-called skin effect. Which makes one wonder why pure silver would be beneficial, but its superior conductivity is likely the key factor.

### Sound quality

In use between a MacBook Air and a Resolution Audio Cantata DAC, Cinnamon delivers a tidy result. It's not the most revealing USB at the price, but it's among the best of the half dozen I've tried. It can unravel a dense piece of music and deliver a coherent and well-timed result in the context of a soundstage that has good depth of image. It has a smoothing effect that benefits less than pristine recordings and with the better ones reveals decent dynamics, plenty of reverb and a good deal of detail. A combination of qualities that lets you get a lot of highly engaging entertainment out of your virtual record collection. **JK**



#### ► DETAILS

**PRICE:** £59  
(1.5M)  
**CONTACT:**  
01249 848873  
**WEBSITE:**  
AUDIOQUEST.  
COM

#### OUR VERDICT



## Rega Fono Mini A2D



**I**t's ironic that now we are in the downloading and streaming age vinyl is making a small, but notable comeback. It's welcome too, but now that we've got used to selecting and playing our music with a touchscreen, it seems rather a *laff* to put a slab of vinyl on a turntable for a spot of casual listening [really? *Ed.*].

Turning vinyl albums into music files is the way to do this and Rega's budget A2D – or analogue-to-digital – convertor is about the least expensive decent quality example of its ilk. It's not just an ADC, but an MM phono stage as well; combine it with software such as Pure Vinyl or Audacity and you have the potential to 'rip' your vinyl to the format of choice. It's limited to 16-bit/48kHz, which seems reasonable given the price. Pro-Ject's Phono Box USB is also 16/48, but accepts MCs as well for £129. If you already have a decent phono stage then a 24/192 USB ADC would be better, but more costly.

### Sound quality

The little Rega has RCA phono outputs as well as the USB B socket, so it can be used as a regular stage and, more importantly for the digital audio recorder, it has level adjustment. I used the A2D with a Rega RP3 running an Exact cartridge to record Rickie Lee Jones' *Flying Cowboys*; the result with Pure Vinyl is much as one expects of a budget phono stage. Not overly refined but with plenty of energy and musicality, classic Rega virtues in fact – and of course rather a lot better than can be found with most online downloads. **JK**



#### ► DETAILS

**PRICE:** £85  
**CONTACT:**  
01702 333071  
**WEBSITE:**  
REGA.CO.UK

#### OUR VERDICT





# High End Cable

www.highendcable.co.uk

Call Dave Jackson on 01775 761880

### Top Brands

Acoustic ART  
 Acoustic Systems  
 Analysis Plus  
 Argento Audio  
 Audience  
 Chord Company  
 Dynamique Audio  
 Ecosse  
 Furutech  
 Leif Series  
 Michael Green Audio  
 Nordost Corporation  
 Leif | Norse2 | Reference  
 Olive HD Servers  
 Quantum QRT  
 Raidho Acoustics  
 Revelation Audio Labs  
 Purist Audio Design  
 StereoLab  
 Synergistic Research  
 STAX  
 Telos  
 Townshend Audio  
 van den Hul

### Power Conditioning

Audience  
 adeptResponse  
 Isotek  
 Quantum QRT  
 QBase

Power supply upgrade  
 Fuses

Telos

Enhancement CDs

### Treatment

Room treatment  
 Acoustic Art  
 Room Tuning Resonators  
 DecoTune  
 RoomTune RoomPak  
 RoomTune Squares  
 MiG's  
 Sort Kones  
 Pulsar points  
 Quasar points

### Equipment

Raidho Acoustics  
 Bel Canto  
 STAX headphones  
 Olive HD Servers

### ACCESSORIES

DIN cables  
 Jumpers  
 Firewire

Cables for dCS systems  
 Chord cables for Naim

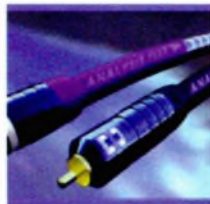
Sub woofer cables  
 HDMI  
 Digital cables  
 Optical cables  
 S video  
 Component cables  
 Chord ipod cables  
 iPod cables



Audience Power Conditioners, cables & Accessories



by ARGENTO AUDIO



Stereolab Silverstar 75 digital



MAKING THE CONNECTION

LEIF



Norse Series 2



# VALHALLA

Purist Audio Design  
music through the science of sound



Every picture tells a story in Hi-fi advancement

## Geneva Sound System Model XS

**T**he XS is the smallest product from Geneva Labs, and is intended to be a portable audio system that can also be used as a bedroom or kitchen system. Unlike the larger products that feature an iPod dock, the XS is equipped with Bluetooth to reduce the size of the unit. This has the added bonus that the XS will replay music from any Bluetooth-equipped source rather than just Apple products. A line input and FM radio are also fitted.

Internally, the XS is unusual. The 2.25inch woofer and twin 1 inch tweeters are driven by a Class D amp when Bluetooth or the line in is selected, but by a Class A/B one when the radio is selected! Battery life is quoted at five hours and seems believable. Fit and finish is excellent – external casework is solid enough to protect the unit without looking too utilitarian and the touch-sensitive controls that light up when the unit is powered on are very pleasant to use.

### Sound quality

Sonically it's pretty impressive. The Geneva has definite limits to how loud it will go and the amount of air it can move, but used within its limits, it has a pleasingly refined and detailed sound with surprising warmth. Voices are well handled and the XS works equally well in normal sized rooms as it does outdoors.

In a perfect world, it might have been nice to have DAB rather than FM (although for reasons of international sales and battery life I can see why it doesn't) and it isn't cheap, but otherwise the XS has much recommend it. If you were looking for a well thought out portable audio system it is certainly one of the nicer units out there. **ES**



#### ► DETAILS

**PRICE:** £75  
**CONTACT:**  
0843 289 7195  
**WEBSITE:**  
UK.GENEVALAB.  
CH

#### OUR VERDICT



## Philips Fidelio L1 headphone

**T**he Fidelio range aims to boost Philips' standing in the audiophile world, and a £230 headphone is by most reckoning a pretty upmarket device. There's some interesting background to it, not least of which is Philips' entirely in-house design, from the ground up, including rather funky transducers with ingenious internal anti-resonance features. They're mounted in aluminium housings which are topped out with memory foam earpads covered in very soft leather, making for very comfortable wearing despite the rather tight headband. The headphone has a semi-open back which aims to cut down on external noise, while avoiding some of the cavity resonance which plagues fully closed designs.

### Sound quality

The semi-open construction works well as intended, providing useful attenuation of external sound, while keeping coloration to a very low level. That's the negative side. The positive side is actually rather shocking: for what is, in audiophile terms, a modest sum of money, you get detail resolution which stands comparison with the best available, including the Grado GS1000 and Sennheiser HD800. Bass is exemplary, full-bodied and clear without overwhelming the mid or the extended but unfussy treble. With every source, from iPod to fancy custom headphone amps, sound was utterly delightful.

Notwithstanding a small degree of upper-midrange coloration, this is a rather special headphone, with some of the best detail on offer at any price. **RB**



#### ► DETAILS

**PRICE:** £230  
**CONTACT:**  
0844 338 0489  
**WEBSITE:**  
PHILIPS.CO.UK

#### OUR VERDICT



# THE Missing Link

AUDIOPHILE CABLES HANDMADE IN BRITAIN

**Cables Based on Science ... Not Mythology**  
*Custom Built at Realistic Prices*



**Genuine  
 Custom Built  
 Cables  
 from only £40**



**POWER CABLES**

\*

**INTERCONNECTS**

\*

**SPEAKER CABLES**

\*

**Full Range of  
 DIY PRODUCTS  
 &**

**Hi Fi Accessories**

\*

**Ex-Demo Cables  
 & Equipment**



**THE Missing Link**  
 Vinyl Passion **DUST BUSTER** Stylus Cleaner

Simply the Best Choice for Preserving your Stylus & Cherished Vinyl  
 Reviewed in Record Collector & Hi Fi World  
**Three BEST BUY Awards**  
 Available From All Good Accessory Stockists including  
**DIVINE AUDIO - RUSSELL ANDREWS - ORION LIVE**  
**STAMFORD AUDIO - VINYL BUTIKEN OF SWEDEN**  
**AMAZON - EBAY - MISSING LINK**  
**FOR JUST £19**

www.the-missing-link.net  
 01623 844478 or 07967 859333



FOR MORE INFORMATION PHONE JAN or MARK - 01623 844478 or 07967 859333

**www.the-missing-link.net**

## Mark Grant Cables SBooster Squeezebox Power

It's well-known that a 'wall-wart' switched-mode power supply is *not* suitable for high-end audio. However, many pieces of audio equipment are supplied with these types of power supply, including the Squeezebox Duet and Touch. A low cost switched-mode power supply will negatively affect the performance of your audio device due to the ripple and noise that it generates as a result of its inherent design. Indeed, such deficiencies are what prompted me to design my own linear supply for use with my Squeezebox Duet!

However, there is now a low-cost answer to this problem for people who prefer a simple 'plug and play' solution – the SBooster upgrade from Mark Grant Cables. This little device sits between the standard switched-mode power supply and the Squeezebox and it contains components to reduce the noise on the DC output.

### In use

With this device *in situ*, the music sounds far cleaner and more musical; I found it made a very useful improvement. However, if you crave more, the solution is to do away with the supplied switched-mode altogether and replace it with a linear PSU. To this end, Mark Grant Cables supplies precisely this, a PSU that also incorporates the SBooster, for £110. Fitted with this device, the Squeezebox was definitely smoother and had better imaging; any residual harshness with the strings had vanished and bass felt effortless. The SBooster is certainly worth having, although the full Squeezebox PSU elevates the humble Squeezebox to the next level, for a quite modest outlay. **NR**



▶ **DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £27.50  
**CONTACT:**  
01482 887717  
**WEBSITE:**  
MARKGRANT  
CABLES.CO.UK

**OUR VERDICT**  
★★★★★

## Sennheiser RS120 II cordless headphone

The RS120 is one of a range of cordless dynamic headphones from Sennheiser and is the big brother of the RS110. The base station is powered from an external mains adapter and transmits the signal from the headphone socket of your audio equipment to the headphones. The headset is powered by rechargeable batteries contained within one of the earpieces. When not in use, the headset sits on the base station, which automatically recharges the headset batteries.

The headset has an adjustable headband with an open-backed, circumaural design (i.e. it sits around the ears). This means that they do not isolate you from external sound sources, so you will still be able to hear the telephone! The earpieces are flat on the RS120, so they sit on top of the ears, rather than cupping around them, as with other models.

There are two controls on the right earpiece: a volume control and a tuning control that is used to tune the headset into the base station. The base station will automatically switch off after a while if no audio signal is received, and if you are still wearing the headset, you will suddenly hear a hiss (like an FM radio that is off tune), which can be a little disconcerting!

### Sound quality

In use, they certainly give a solid sound and clear bass response, which will suit a broad range of musical styles. They are reasonably comfortable to wear and the range of the wireless is good enough to give a clear reception in a room adjacent to the base station. All-in-all, good value cordless headphones. **NR**



▶ **DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £89.99  
**CONTACT:**  
01494 551551  
**WEBSITE:**  
SENNHEISER.  
CO.UK

**OUR VERDICT**  
★★★★★

# Mains Cables R Us

Home of The Ultimate Cables



Power Cables



RCA Interconnects



Jumper Cables



Speaker Cables



XLR Cables

*Mains Cables R Us are proud to welcome Tellurium Q to our product range. If you would like to hear what the cables are capable of, please contact us for a no obligation home demo or make an appointment to listen in our new purpose built listening room in the heart of Yorkshire.*

*Be warned, listening to these cables can cause extreme excitement!*

07908 056978

[www.mains-cables-r-us.co.uk](http://www.mains-cables-r-us.co.uk)

Because the Mains Matters...



## Bayan Audio 7 iPod dock

**T**he market for iDevice sound docks is an almost ludicrously congested one. Hence it takes something very distinctive to stand out from the pack. At the top end we have B&W and its Zeppelins, and the low end is crowded with plastic possibilities, but a recent debut from a new UK-led mid-range competitor has turned a few heads. Bayan Audio has spent two years developing a range of distinctive-looking docks (numbered 1, 3, 5 and 7). With British conception and design, and the customary Chinese manufacture, the flagship model, the Bayan Audio 7 (£299 from [www.bayanaudio.com](http://www.bayanaudio.com)) is the most notable of all, bringing as it does not one but *two* charge and play iDevice docks.

While you can mount earlier models, the actual Apple certification only extends back as far as the iPhone 3GS, the third generation iPod Touch and the more recent Nanos, although the venerable iPod Classic is also catered for, hi-fi folk will be pleased to know...

Once out of its recycled card box and stylish cloth bag, the Bayan reveals itself to be a solid piece of kit. The 1.2cm wood bass unit casing gives it a heaviness, and also a depth which means it will need a solid piece of furniture to accommodate it. The solid acrylic slab the speaker drivers and the docks are mounted through supplies some of the visual distinctiveness, along with the Bayan icon-bearing 8cm bass driver.

Finish is decent, and the physical design idiosyncratic but pleasing, with a few nice touches (adjustable thumb screws to make different profile iPhones sit up right) and a few odd ones (the only physical control, for volume, is stuck behind with the auxiliary inputs and outputs). The power switch on top shines white when in Voice programming mode and blue for music, and is the only indicator of where one is in the bass and treble scales when adjusting from the remote. This is a satisfactory unit, slightly cheaper in feel than the Bayan itself, but it has large buttons essential for controlling the two iDevices, with a layout ergonomic enough to navigate those menus.

Bayan has obviously put some considerable effort into its branding design and marketing proposition, too. While the looks and the styling suggest very 'lifestyle' positioning, it's keen to emphasise the thought that has gone into the acoustic design of the product, highlighting its flat frequency response graphs and the wooden and acrylic materials chosen for rigidity. Thankfully attention has also been paid to Apple-approved radio device screening, so pleasingly absent are those phone burbles breaking into your music, although regrettably the Classic does seem to transmit some faint disk activity noise through the system.

### Sound quality

As a result of the care paid to pure audio, one of the most refreshing things about the Bayan is that it is a simple and straightforward device. While many in the iCentric world might actually want AirPlay/An Alarm Clock/teasmade, etc., here you get the family-friendly two-up dock approach, a 3.5mm stereo input and a USB output for charging and connecting an iPad (or non-Apple device) and that's about it. Of course, if you're into network music the rear-mounted analogue port is ideal for do-it-yourself AirPlay by connecting an Airport Express, as long as you don't mind controlling it from your computer or device. In this usage you get a great sound – the expansive electronics and soaring guitar of Steve Hillage's *And Not Or* highlights the tonally-balanced sound the Bayan is capable of. It's a more musical experience than you might expect out of a device of this size...

**The system has a neutral, colour-free approach to most material; it feels like a hi-fi experience...**

For the audiophile, something of this nature suggests itself as a kitchen-type system, and while installed in mine this one certainly gained attention for its looks and sound. It is always a compliment when the musicality of a system forces you to listen to entire albums rather than skip around searching for more testing material, and mellifluous presentations of Imogen Heap's *Speak For Yourself* and Michael Penn's *Beatle-y MP4* album had the desired result. The system has a neutral, colour-free approach to most material, which makes it pleasant to listen to, and feel like a hi-fi experience. It will be interesting to see what the company does next. **PC**



#### ▶ DETAILS

**PRICE:** £300  
**CONTACT:**  
0844 880 1010  
**WEBSITE:**  
BAYANAUDIO.COM

#### OUR VERDICT



# INTERNATIONAL AUDIO & AV SHOW ORGANISERS

WE LISTEN. WE ACT. WE PERFORM

## PAST SHOWS '12



## COMING SOON...



...AND MUCH MORE  
TO COME IN 2013

[www.chestergroup.org](http://www.chestergroup.org)



Justin Bird +44 (0) 1244 559033

Justin@chestergroup.org

Show organisers. Intellectual rights reserved.



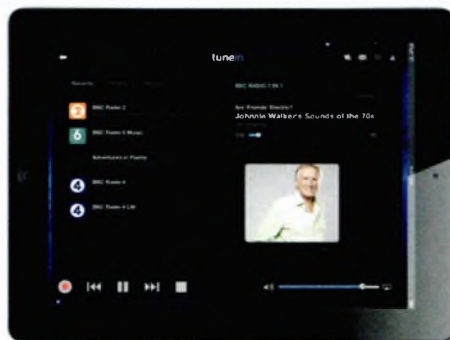
## Radio Pro TuneIn

**T**uneIn was extremely fast out of the gate of app development in the early days of the iPhone, and thus rapidly became the gold standard of iDevice radio listening. TuneIn Radio smoothly transitioned from a phone app to a universal app for the iPad when the big brother appeared. Healthy development has continued, and the company has just released a version to take advantage of the iPad 3 'retina' display.

The interface is simple and intuitive, and a slide to the right extra panel for suggested listening has been added, along with the possibility of purchasing 'now playing' tracks. Listening to the 128kbps AAC Radio 2 stream gives adequate results for speech radio, but music still sounds rather 'lossy'.

The best part is that there's a free version (TuneIn Radio) which will allow you to assess whether it's for you or not. Essentially all the 'Pro' version adds for your very reasonable sixty-nine pence is the ability to record the streams. 'Pro' is available for Apple, Blackberry and Android – the free version is additionally available for Windows Phone, Samsung and Palm OSes.

Signing up for a free TuneIn profile (or connecting through Facebook, hipsters...) enables your presets to follow you no matter what device you are listening on. Beyond the phone and tablet world, this includes in-car and partnerships with hardware manufacturers such as Sonos, Squeeze, Linn and Meridian among others. So TuneIn appears to be a safe bet for the ubiquitous internet radio plugin of the future... **PC**



**DETAILS**  
PRICE: £0.69P  
WEBSITE:  
TUNEIN.COM

OUR VERDICT



DOWNLOAD

## oRemote oRemote

**A**s a by-product of reviewing the Onkyo TX-8050 in this month's magazine, I found this brilliant app for Onkyo AV receiver users. Until such time as Onkyo release an iPad control app rather than just an iPhone one, this is the app you *should* be using. It works with just about any Onkyo or Integra unit of a 2010 vintage or younger...

The one thing you want to avoid with third-party control apps is complicated set-up and oRemote doesn't disappoint in this regard – indeed the receiver is auto-detected and you're ready to go. These amps are complicated beasts and it is on the iPad that oRemote really pays – affording lots of screen space for the virtual versions of all those buttons. Depending on the particular receiver you're on, some of these will be redundant, but even the relatively humble TX-8050 makes use of most of it, not including the surround sound aspects.

Onkyo's recently produced Spotify-enabled receivers are certainly made easier to operate through use of an app with a textual keyboard input option. From logging in to searching, the pain of navigating the front panel of a complex receiver via the front panel, and/or conventional fiddly remote operation, is removed.

It would be nice to see developer Robert Worne provide this flexibility to Android users, as Onkyo do at phone-level. If the Onkyo protocol permits, it would also be great to see the navigation of long media lists becoming touch-based. These are the only reasons not to give a five star review. Overall, this is a great gift to Onkyo users. **PC**



**DETAILS**  
PRICE: £2.99  
WEBSITE:  
OREMOTE.  
ORIOLE.NET

OUR VERDICT



DOWNLOAD

COMING SOON

# Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

**EDITORIAL TEAM**  
Editor David Price, david.price@hifichoice.co.uk  
Art Editor Corin Skeggs, corin.skeggs@hifichoice.co.uk  
Production Editor Richard Holliss, richard.holliss@hifichoice.co.uk

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
Simon Berkovitch, Richard Black, Patrick Cleasby, James Michael Hughes, Tim Jarman, Jason Kennedy, Paul Miller, Dave Oliver, Neville Roberts, Ed Selley, Malcolm Stewart, Channa Vithana, Nigel Williamson

**ADVERTISING**  
Senior Advertising Executive Jack O'Sullivan  
Tel: 0844 848 5245  
Email: jack.o'sullivan@myhobbystore.com  
Advertising Manager Sonia Lawrence  
Tel: 01689 869 899  
Email: sonia.lawrence@myhobbystore.com

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**  
Subscriptions Manager Paul Molyneux  
UK - New, Renewals & Enquiries  
Tel: 08456 777 807 Email: hifichoice@subscription.co.uk  
USA & CANADA - New, Renewals & Enquiries  
Tel: (001) 877 363 1310 Email: expsmag@expressmag.com  
REST OF WORLD - New, Renewals & Enquiries  
Tel: +44 (0) 8456 777 807

**BACK ISSUES**  
Tel: 0844 848 8822  
From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869896  
Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com

**MANAGEMENT TEAM**  
Group Editor Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk  
Group Sales Manager Duncan Armstrong  
Head of Design & Production Julie Miller  
Ecommerce Manager Amanda Lee  
Chief Executive Owen Davies  
Chairman Peter Harkness  
Published by MyHobbyStore Ltd.  
Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG  
Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com  
Tel: 0844 412 2262  
From outside the UK: +44 (0)1689 869896  
www.myhobbystore.com

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd.



Published by MyHobbyStore Ltd. All rights reserved. 2011. ISSN 0955-1115. Periodicals paid at Green Brook, NJ. The Publisher's written consent must be obtained before any part of this publication may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, including photocopies, and information retrieval systems. All reasonable care is taken in the preparation of the magazine's contents, but the publishers cannot be held legally responsible for errors in the contents of this magazine or for any loss however arising from such errors, including loss resulting from negligence of our staff. Reliance placed upon the contents of this magazine is at reader's own risk.

Hi-Fi Choice, ISSN 0955-1115, is published monthly 12 times per year by MyHobbyStore Ltd. c/o US Mail Media Dist. Inc. Corp. at 24 River Dam Way Suite 51-53, Plattsburgh, NY 12901. Periodicals Postage paid at Plattsburgh, NY. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Hi-Fi Choice c/o Express Mag, P.O. Box 2709, Plattsburgh, NY 12901-0279.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask! *Subject to availability*



Please reserve/deliver my copy of on a regular basis, starting with issue

Title \_\_\_\_\_ First name \_\_\_\_\_

Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

If you don't want to miss an issue



# Next month

## PORTABLES SUPERTEST

SIX OF THE LATEST AND GREATEST iPod rivals get Hi-Fi Choice's Blind Listening treatment!

## MING DA MC368-BS-E TUBE AMPLIFIER

THIS BIG BEAST from one of China's top valve brands promises super value for money



## MAGNUM DYNALAB MD 801

A PURPOSE-DESIGNED INTERNET RADIO TUNER, this swish black box also plays FM, DAB and streams networked music

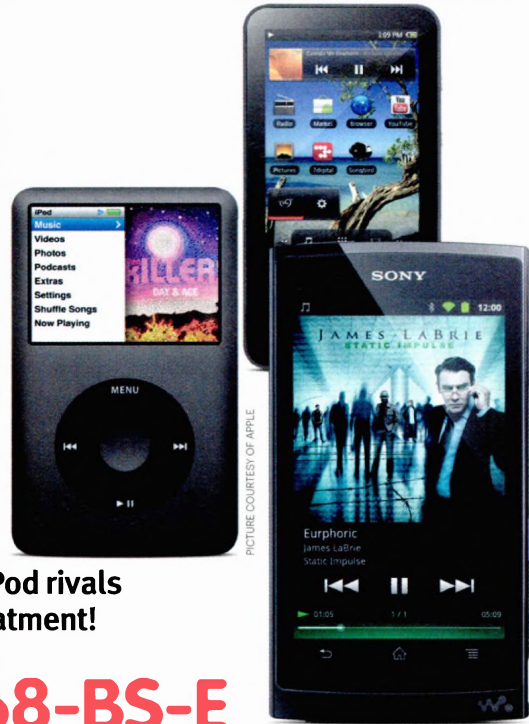


### ALSO:

Tiger-Paw Linn Sondek LP12 mods, Monrio Asty Digital amplifier, Zu Audio DL-103 MC & your regular Choice Extras accessories section

**PLUS:** your system buying and upgrading queries answered, all the latest hi-fi industry news, views and comment and the month's finest new audiophile music releases...

**AUGUST ISSUE ON SALE THURSDAY 21 JUNE 2012**



PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE

# i believe

That high-grade system enhancements bring out the true capabilities of your system. Often for lower cost than an equipment upgrade.

Make the best of what you have and talk to the only UK business dedicated to cabling, room tuning and vibration control.

soundlocation [www.soundlocation.co.uk](http://www.soundlocation.co.uk) t. Paul on 07973-253136

Siltech MIT Bertram Vovox Oyaide ASI and others

# Tellurium Q<sup>tm</sup>

Audio designed to combat phase distortion



Find out why more and more people are talking about Tellurium Q<sup>tm</sup> products.

Don't just believe all the incredible reviews, test our products for yourself against any thing else in the same price range.

Find out how your music can **really** sound and talk to your nearest Tellurium Q<sup>tm</sup> dealer now.

Cables, amplifiers and the unexpected!

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



hi-fi+

Products of the Year 2010



Jan 2011

Hi Fi World

Cable of the Year 2010

01458 251997

# Analogue Seduction

where music is our passion



Analogue Seduction are dedicated towards two channel Hi-Fi, specialising in vinyl replay.

As well as our on-line shop we have dedicated demonstration retail facilities based in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire and we can offer our customers home demonstrations.

We stock the finest in amplification, analogue, digital replay and speakers. We also specialise in a cable termination and cable burn in service.

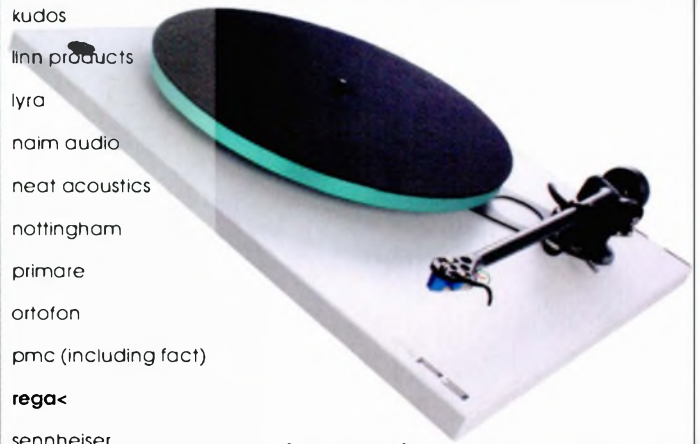
Please visit our website [www.analogueseduction.net](http://www.analogueseduction.net) to browse or purchase products that are not easily available elsewhere.

New vinyl records now stocked

Tel: +44 (0)1733 344768

- arcam
- dynavector
- epson
- focal
- grado
- isoblu
- huffer
- kudos
- linn products
- lyra
- naim audio
- neat acoustics
- nottingham
- primare
- ortofon
- pmc (including fact)
- rega**
- sennheiser
- stax
- sumiko

## new toys for black stuff: rega RP3



signals

hi-fi for grown-ups

ipswich (01473) 655171  
www.signals.uk.com



Outstanding music and video systems from a retail shop established for over 40 years.

Come and enjoy your favourite discs and a cup of coffee with our relaxed team.

Every brand we sell is chosen for its spectacular quality, performance and reliability.

## O'Brien Hi-Fi

60 Durham Road - London - SW20 0TW  
020 8946 1528 or [shop@obriehifi.com](mailto:shop@obriehifi.com)  
Tuesday to Saturday from 9am until 6pm  
[www.obriehifi.com](http://www.obriehifi.com)



020 7226 5500  
[www.grahams.co.uk](http://www.grahams.co.uk)



"One of the five best hi-fi shops in the world"

ARENA Magazine

Grahams Hi-Fi  
Canonbury Yard  
190a New North Road  
London N1 7BS

Is this your problem? Here's your answer



It's a common problem. The usable range on the volume control is all down at the bottom end and fine control at low listening levels is either difficult or impossible. The noise floor may be audible, too. There is a simple and effective solution - the **Rothwell In-Line Attenuators**. They can be used with pre/power or integrated amps to cure the problems of excess gain and bring sonic benefits with even the most expensive equipment.



"this accessory is heartily recommended"  
Gramophone

£39/pair - post free

01204 366133 [www.rothwellaudioproducts.co.uk](http://www.rothwellaudioproducts.co.uk)

**REVOX SERVICE**

**THE MANUFACTURERS' APPOINTED SERVICE COMPANY**

**REVOX SERVICE**

Correct Revox Spare Parts Pricing  
24 Hour Estimation procedure  
Manufacturer Upgrades and Advice  
Delivery and Collection Service  
Comprehensive Guarantees

Factory Trained Engineers  
Rapid Response Turnaround  
Full Revox range serviced  
Written Technical Reports  
Late Evening Opening

**THE AR TECHNOLOGY LIMITED**

TTL House, Sheeptick End, Near Lidlington, Bedfordshire, MK43 0SF  
Telephone 01525 841999 Facsimile 01525 841009

- THE AUDIO BARN FROM ROCK SOLID SOUNDS -



VIVID AUDIO  
ELECTROCOMPANET  
AUDIO PHYSIC  
BLADELIUS  
AYON  
CODA  
MUSIC TOOLS  
BOULDER

ASTINTREW  
BLACK RHODIUM  
BELLES  
ORACLE  
AURA  
STELLO  
HI FI RACKS  
VITUS



Rock Solid Sound Systems

The Old Barn, Rosier Business Park, Coneyhurst Road, Billingshurst West Sussex, RH14 9DE. **tel. 01403 782221 or 07950 274224**  
info@rocksolidsounds.co.uk - www.rocksolidsounds.co.uk

- Please telephone for an appointment -

**IAN HARRISON HIFI**

**SALE! UP TO 40% OFF!!**

TEL: 01283 702875 ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk

**SPECIALIST SUPPLIER OF TURNTABLES, TONEARMS, CARTRIDGES AND PHONO STAGES**

INCLUDING: AMATEK, AUDIO TECHNICA, BENZ MICRO, CARTRIDGE MAN, CLEARAUDIO, DENON, GOLDRING, GRADO, GRAHAM SLEE, HADCOCK, HEED, ICON, KOETSU, LEHMANN AUDIO, MICHELL, MOTH, ORTOFON, PRO-JEKT, REGA, SME, SUMIKO, THORENS, TOM EVANS, TRANSFIGURATION, TRICHORD, WHEST AUDIO, ZYX.

**SPECIAL OFFER!!**

**SPEND £2,000 OR MORE ON ANY TURNTABLE, TONEARM OR TURNTABLE AND ARM AND GET A CARTRIDGE WORTH £500 FREE!!**

PLEASE PHONE TO CONFIRM PRICE & AVAILABILITY PRIOR TO ORDERING. ALL GOODS ARE BRAND NEW & BOXED WITH FULL UK GUARANTEES. NO EX-DEM OR EX-DISPLAY GOODS. NO GREY IMPORTS. GOODS ARE NOT SUPPLIED ON APPROVAL. SORRY NO GENERAL CATALOGUES. PLEASE PHONE OR WRITE FOR SPECIFIC REVIEWS, BROCHURES OR PRICES.

ESTABLISHED 1986.

MAIL ORDER ONLY FROM: IAN HARRISON, 7 MILL HILL, REPTON, DERBY, DE65 6GQ TEL: 01283 702875 9am-9pm INCLUDING SUNDAYS.

Front End Problems?

contact:

**The Cartridge Man**

It doesn't have to cost an arm and leg to get the best  
- listen to my Koetsu - and - Decca - eater.

Also agents for Croft, Moth, Hadcock & Mitchell & E.A.R. Graham Slee projects.

Valve equipment re-build service available.

- Plus cartridge re-tipping service

**020 8688 6565**

Website: www.thecartridgeman.com

**Oranges & Lemons**

www.orangesandlemons.info

Audio-Visual  
Hi-Fi  
Multi-Room



**020 7924 2040**

61-63 Webbs Road London SW11  
shop@orangesandlemons.info



**HiFi, Home Cinema & Multi-room AV**

**Ceritech AUDIO**

...where music stirs the soul

www.ceritech-audio.com

Tel: 0844 7365719

Email: info@ceritech.co.uk

Monmouthshire & Gloucestershire



37 High Street, Aldridge  
01922 457926

exposure  
focal linn marantz michell  
monitor audio okki nokki  
onkyo optoma ortofon  
project rel roksan trichord

Ample Parking Tue-Sat 10 - 5.30pm  
www.soundcinergy.co.uk

# Emporiumhifi

## We Sell

Audion, Audio Note, Croft, Carbridgeman, Dr Feickart, Funk Firm, Full Music, Graham Slee, Hadcock, Lector, London (Deca), Lyra, Michell, Moth, Nightingale, Okki Nokki, Origin Live, Ortofon, Pure Sound, Raysonic, Shanling, Sme, Stax, Stereoknight, Sterling Broadcast, Ukd, Usher, Van Den Hull, Vincent, Viva



## We Buy

Acoustical, Arcam, Alphason, Audiolab, Audion, Audio Innovations, Audio Research, Avi, B&W, Beard, Conrad Johnson, Creek, Croft, Cyrus, Densen, Dpa, Dynaudio, Ear, Electrocompaniet, Exposure Garrard, Hadcock, Jadis, Jvc, Kef, Krell, Lfd, Linn, Lowther, Luxman, Marc Levinson, Marantz, Meridian, Michell, Musical Fidelity, Nad, Naim, Nakamichi, Nordost, Oracle, Pass, Pink Triangle, Pioneer, Proac, Pmc, Quad, Radford, Rega, Rel, Revox, Roksan, Rogers, Rotel, Sme, Sonus Faber, Sony, Spendor, Sugden, Stax, Tannoy, Technics, Thorens, Townshend, Transcriptors, Vitavox, Voyd And Other Brands

## We Part Exchange

We Are Actively Looking To Buy Used Hifi Equipment From Anywhere In The Uk, We Can Visit Or Arrange Collection

## Branches Across The UK

Head Office 01986 895929 Based In Suffolk, But Covering Whole Of UK  
nick@emporiumhifi.demon.co.uk

London And The South East  
Hughie on 01304 239419  
emporiumsouth@yahoo.co.uk

Covering The Wales And Bristol/ Bath Area's  
Justin On 01554 750262  
emporiumhifiwales@yahoo.co.uk

Covering The Midlands And The North  
Anthony On 0121 346 6043  
emporium-midlands@hotmail.co.uk

# VICKERS HI-FI

High Fidelity Specialists

Since 1967



8 Concorde Park, Clifton Moor, York. YO30 4WT. Tel: 01904-691600

Audiolab  
Chord  
Cyrus  
Dali  
Marantz  
Michell  
Monitor Audio  
Mordaunt Short  
Pathos  
Pioneer  
ProAc  
Project  
Q-Acoustics  
Quad  
Sonos  
Sugden  
TEAC  
Wharfedale  
& Many More...

- ▶ York HiFi Specialist for over 40 Years
- ▶ New Store with Free Customer Parking
- ▶ Qualified Staff - Independent Advice
- ▶ Quality HiFi Separates from £100 to £10,000
- ▶ Widest Choice in the Area - Most items from Stock
- ▶ Open 10:30am - 5:30pm Monday to Saturday
- ▶ Visit our Website or Call for latest offers & promotions

**0%**  
Up To 36 Months  
0% Finance  
Available\*

\*Subject to status

[www.Vickers-HiFi.co.uk](http://www.Vickers-HiFi.co.uk)

E-mail: [VickersHiFi@Hotmail.com](mailto:VickersHiFi@Hotmail.com)





## 15 AUDIO

SE

Churchward Court, 15 Western Road,  
Lewes BN7 1RL

☎ 08448 221115  
☐ www.15audio.co.uk

## NOTTINGHAM HI-FI CENTRE EM

120-122 Alfreton Road, Nottingham,  
Nottinghamshire NG7 3NR

☎ 0115 9786919  
☐ www.nottinghamhifi.co.uk

## AUDIO COUNSEL

NW

26 High Street, Cheadle, Cheshire  
SK8 1AL

☎ 0161 491 6090  
☐ www.audio-counsel.co.uk

BADA

## GRAHAMS HI-FI

GL

Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road,  
London N1

☎ 020 7226 5500  
☐ www.grahams.co.uk

## STUDIO AV

WM

44 High Street, Eton, Berkshire,  
SL4 6BL

☎ 01753 631000  
☐ www.studioav.co.uk

## SYNERGY AV HI-FI

NW

12a West St, Congleton, Cheshire  
CW12 3JB

☎ 01260 280017  
☐ www.synergyav.co.uk

## INFIDELITY

GL

9 High Street, Hampton Wick  
Surrey, KT1 4DA.

☎ 020 8943 3530  
☐ www.infidelity.co.uk

BADA

## SOUND CINERGY

WM

37 High Street, Aldridge, Walsall, West  
Midlands, WS9 8NL

☎ 01922 457 926  
☐ www.soundcinergy.co.uk

## DOUG BRADY HIFI

NW

Kingsway North, Warrington,  
Cheshire, WA1 3NU

☎ 01925 828009 (Mon-Sat 9am-5.30pm)  
☐ www.dougbradyhifi.com

## AUDIOBOFFS

GL

338 Shenley Road, Borehamwood,  
Herts WD 1TP

☎ 020 8177 4095  
☐ www.audioboffs.co.uk

## VICKERS HIFI

NE

8 Concorde Park, Amy Johnson Way,  
Clifton Moor, York YO30 4WT

☎ 01904 691600  
☐ www.vickers-hifi.co.uk

## ACTION GATE AUDIO

W

4 Ruabon Rd, Wrexham,  
Clwyd LL13 7PB

☎ 01978 364500  
☐ www.action-gate-audio.co.uk

## SONATA

GL

West Hampstead, London NW6  
**Appointment only**

☎ 0330 111 5653  
☐ www.sonatahifi.com

## ACOUSTICA LTD

NW

17 Hoole Road, Chester, Cheshire  
CH2 3NH

☎ 01244 344227  
☐ www.acoustica.co.uk

SE - South East,  
GL - Greater London,  
SW - South West,  
E - East,  
EM - East Midlands,  
WM - West Midlands,  
NE - North East,  
NW - North West,  
W - Wales.

## SENSO SYSTEMS

SW

Norfolk House, 16-17 Lemon Street,  
Truro, Cornwall TR1 2LS

☎ 01872 273215  
☐ www.audio-cinema.co.uk

## THE RIGHT NOTE

SW

56 High Street, Saltford, Bristol  
BS31 3EJ

☎ 01225 874728  
☐ www.rightnote.co.uk

## AUDIO IMAGES

E

128 London Road North, Lowestoft, Suffolk  
NR32 1HB

☎ 01502 582853  
☐ www.audioimages-hifi.com

## BASICALLY SOUND

E

Calveley Court, Southburgh Rd, Reymerton  
Norfolk NR9 4QD

☎ 01362 820800  
☐ www.basicallysound.co.uk

# HI-FI CHOICE

To advertise in the dealer directory,  
Please contact  
**Sonia Lawrence 01689 869 899**  
sonia.lawrence@myhobbystore.com



WE HEAR...

JOHN WESTLAKE IS A MAN ON A MISSION. Having brought us some of the best digital convertors of the past twenty years, he's consolidating his success by launching new separates to support his recently penned Audiolab M-DAC. Readers will know how much we enthused about this (see HFC 359), but may not have anticipated a bespoke power supply for it so soon, from his very own, relatively unknown, brand.

Well, Lakewest Audio gave Backchat a sneaky peak in a shady corner of the Munich show. So secret was it that John pulled it out of a cupboard and stuck it on a sofa while no one else was looking! No sooner had Backchat got its camera out of its pocket, and out popped a matching power amplifier! As the M-DAC has preamp functionality, it makes up a full system – just add your Squeezebox Touch...



Later, whispers were heard to the effect that a high quality analogue-to-digital convertor is planned; this will be a boon for those wanting to digitise their vinyl. John confessed to not currently owning any LPs or indeed a turntable to play them on, but promised to rectify the situation, describing vinyl as, "the only proper hi-res format around". Westlake has also been busy with another brand; he describes Creek's new Evolution 50D CD/DAC/pre as the spiritual heir to all his work on Audiolab's 8200CDQ.

THROUGH THE PAST, SMARTLY...



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 229  
JULY 2002

David Vivian's six 'system solutions' had editor Tim Bowers green with envy. "I'd have killed to play with all that lovely gear", he said in his introduction. No surprise really when you look at the impressive kit on offer; gorgeous-looking amps from Audio Note and Naim, speakers from Eclipse and B&W, and CD players from Arcam and Cyrus. The original Avid Volvere Sequel turntable review certainly won the award though, for being the July issue's talking point (see p66). A piece of 'precision engineering' and £3,500 (in 2002!). Outside the cosy world of high-end hi-fi, the city of Glasgow was flooded and England beat India in the first Test Match of the new cricket season.



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 108  
JULY 1992

In the same month that Spain hosted the summer Olympics and the Iraq disarmament crisis reached boiling point, loudspeaker maker Mordaunt-Short celebrated its 25th birthday and the event was captured in a special behind-the-scenes feature in Hi-Fi Choice entitled *The Craftsman*, in which the company's head of design, Robin Marshall opined on 'rectangular hi-fi speaker boxes' and the importance of 'transparency' (today's politicians take note)! Curiously, in the same issue, goggle-eyed editor Andy Benham must have forgotten he was helming a hi-fi magazine, with the publication of a two-page feature on upcoming widescreen televisions!



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 60  
JULY 1988

Another bumper 160-page issue kicks off with a visit to the Earl of Chichester's country pile, when he threw open his 18th century manor house for HFC's Dan (audiophile) Houston. Delicious kit like the Oracle Delphi III turntable was found nestled amongst the leather-bound first editions, while the Squire's chandeliers rattled to the sound of his Apogee Caliper loudspeakers! Elsewhere in the issue, 100 pages were devoted to an overview of high-end audio. "Who buys it?" asked Houston. "Yuppies" came the reply. In the news that month, tragedy struck the Piper Alpha oil rig platform in the North Sea, which was completely destroyed in a series of explosions.

Boston Acoustics is back, again!

This time, however, the brand is part of the D&M group and has some serious firepower behind it, design-wise. Renowned speaker boffin Karl-Heinz Fink has just teamed up with his old pal Ken Ishiwata to produce a range of boxes spanning £699 to £2,199, including bookshelf, floorstanding, centre, subwoofer and surround models.

Here, the guys are pictured beside the flagship M350, which sounded gloriously clean, open and musical to our ears during a sneak preview at the Munich show. The range hits the UK in a couple of months' time – watch out for an exclusive first review! See [www.bostona.eu/en](http://www.bostona.eu/en).



BACKCHAT NEEDS YOU!  
Got any hi-fi hearsay? Do your audiophile duty by emailing [news@hifichoice.co.uk](mailto:news@hifichoice.co.uk)

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

This month it's the turn of IOS Company's Neil Truckell to choose four of his favourite albums...



**SEAL**  
**SEAL**  
The great man's first album from the early nineties, and produced by Trevor Horn, it really shows off his unique voice and vocal talent. *Killer* and *Crazy* are timeless tracks.



**THE EAGLES**  
**HELL FREEZES OVER**  
With its impeccable recording in either two or multi-channel systems, it never fails to impress with its clarity and emotion. Enjoy *New York Minute* late evening.



**NATALIE COLE**  
**ASK A WOMAN WHO KNOWS**  
Immaculate best describes Natalie Cole's voice on this album, with two further track treats when partnered with Diana Krall.



**LADY ANTEBELLUM**  
**NEED YOU NOW**  
This award winning album is country music at its best, with clever lyrics and a quality recording. You don't have to be a country fan to enjoy this magnum opus.

audioemotion

Music is our Passion

www.audioemotion.co.uk

t 01333 425 999

**NEW Audient DP32 DAC / Pre**

The Audient DP32 DAC Preamp is simply captivating; from its sleek, modern appearance to its transparent, extended, and engaging sonic presentation.

- ➔ Reference ESS Sabre32 32 bit DAC
- ➔ Asynchronous 24-bit/192kHz USB Input
- ➔ Fully Balanced Signal Path
- ➔ Buffered Passive Volume Control with high dynamic range
- ➔ £1995

**NEW Audient 100P Power Amp**

A no compromise 100 Watt stereo power amp, combining form and function to create a hugely immersive sound stage.

- ➔ Huge toroidal custom-built transformer
- ➔ Mosfet Output Transistors
- ➔ Fully balanced input
- ➔ Ultra low distortion
- ➔ £1795

**YOUR MUSIC REINVENTED.**

IMMENSELY MOVING. The Perreaux integrated amplifiers include all the hallmarks of Perreaux engineering design:

- ➔ High power
- ➔ Authoritative speaker control
- ➔ Seamless digital integration
- ➔ MOSFET output devices
- ➔ Low distortion
- ➔ Solid build-quality

**Eloquence 150i Integrated Amp**

The effortless power delivery and ultra-low distortion and noise levels result in a naturally clean and open presentation with the airy space, seamless depth and precise imaging.

➔ £4595



PERREAUX

**Eloquence 250i Integrated Amp**

➔ £5897

*"The 250i is a thriller in every respect. It has a huge reserve of power to play with, and does so with restraint, never sounding overbearing or dictatorial, but using its authority to the most benign, most musical of effects. Add the admirable build quality, the versatility on offer, and the general commitment to enjoyable audio, and this deserves to be on any discerning audio buyer's shopping list."*

Deon Schoeman

*"If you are missing an amplifier that can tame your woofers, then look no further. It's right here!"*

Mikkel Gige Hifi4All Online Magazine

*"Very impressive. Technical performance is practically indistinguishable from perfection. Its noise floor and distortion levels are among the best I have ever measured."*

David Plummer Audio Specialty Co.



# SX

## Series

Mission loudspeakers have always been known for their elegance and stunning performance, both in critical listening tests and for the Mission iconic style. Aiming for perfection in musical communication and in the design aesthetic, the new SX Series speakers achieve a level of sonic accuracy and realism that completely fulfills their Mission heritage.

