



## Bronze star

Hart D&W's exotic Aural Pleasure loudspeakers show their mettle

## Retro

Forgotten classic: Well Tempered Lab's Amadeus turntable



# Hi-Fi Choice

**PASSION FOR SOUND**

Issue No. **361**

August 2012

**£3.99**

# Walk this way

Six top digital music machines tested from Apple, Cowon, Philips, Samsung and Sony!

## Bit player

Cyrus Audio's flagship XP Qx music streamer tested

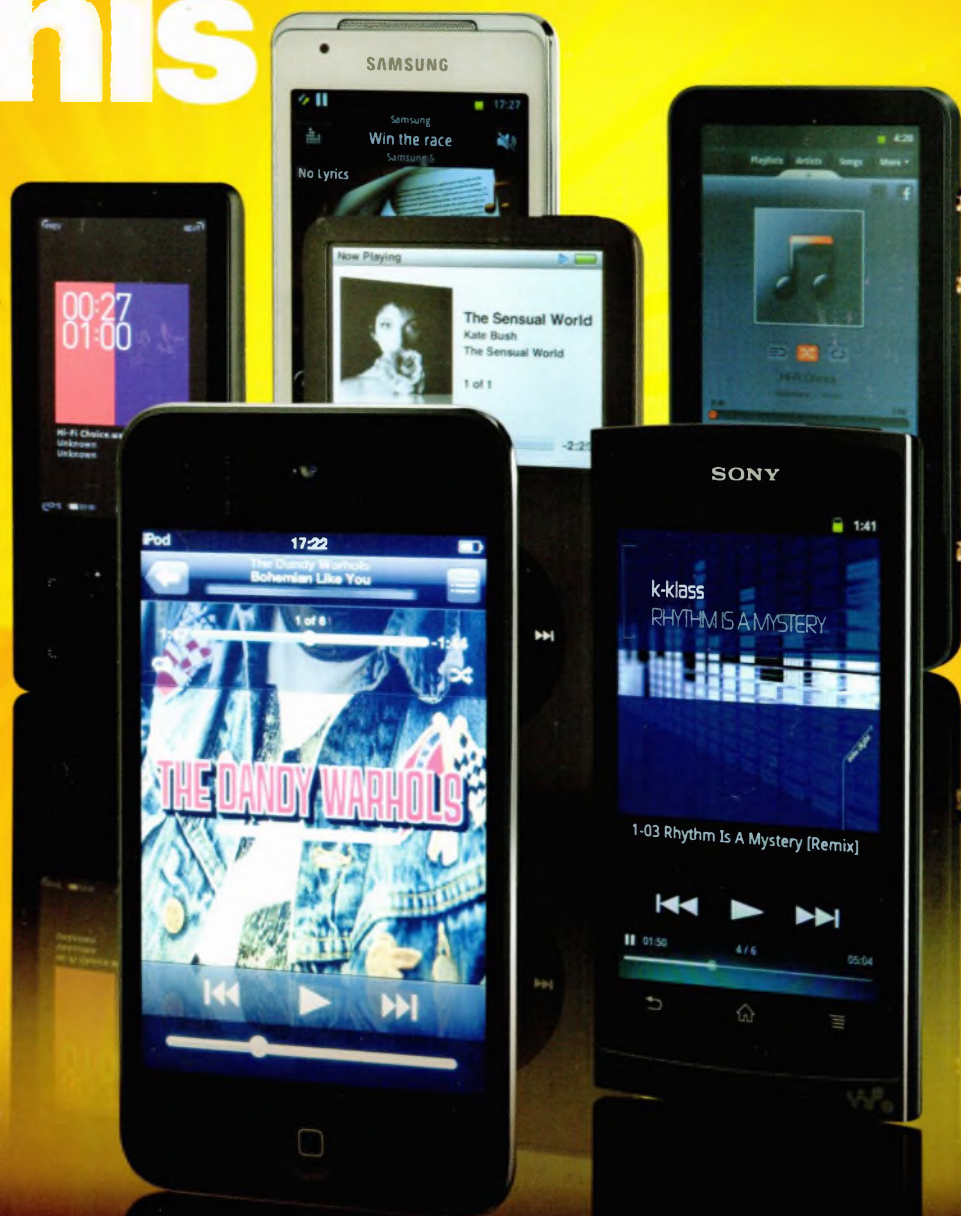


## Black Magic

Pro-ject's enchanting new Debut Carbon turntable

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## Thirty something

Triangle Comete 30th Anniversary loudspeaker

## Small wonder

TEAC's compact A-H01/DS-H01 integrated amp, iPod dock combo





# 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.



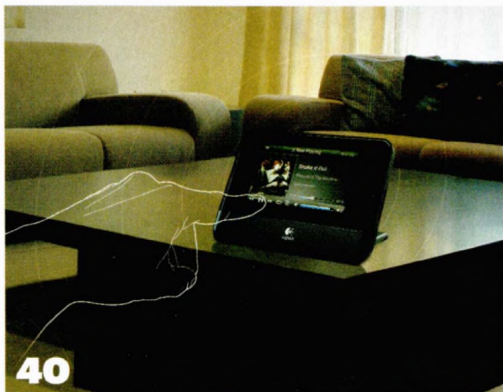
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**BADGES EXPLAINED**

**OUR AWARDS**

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

**RECOMMENDED:**  
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**GROUP TEST WINNER:**  
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Since the earliest moments of recorded sound, people have had a desire to make it better, more natural and authentic. The majesty of music – be it the full pomp of the Royal Philharmonic or a couple of kids with guitars and/or Garageband – warrants the best possible quality.

In the early years of hi-fi, the equipment used to achieve this end was, by necessity, big and bulky. It was at a time when valves were the only game in town, and their low power output required the use of large loudspeakers. Indeed, many early audio systems were handbuilt by hobbyists, with little regard for size or indeed style...

Sadly, for a while, this approach managed to seep into hi-fi's water supply, so to speak. Because when the technology permitted, designers didn't rush to make products more domestically friendly in the way I think they should have. Instead, for a long time we got big and bulky boxes, whether we liked it or not!

We have the Japanese to thank for downsizing things. 1979's Sony Walkman cassette player showed you could get hi-fi quality in something the size of a paperback book. In one go, it transformed the mass market and created a whole new sector – portable audio.

This month – as a prelude to the summer season – we test its descendant and its rivals on p22. And at the same time, we're trying out some compact separates. On p48 we have a superb micro integrated amplifier and matching digital iPod dock combo in the shape of TEAC's A-H01/DS-H01.

And here in the UK, Cyrus Audio is one of the foremost exponents of the 'less is more' approach, and its Stream XP Qx network music player shows that you can pack serious audio firepower into one small box, as we find on p16. Enjoy!

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



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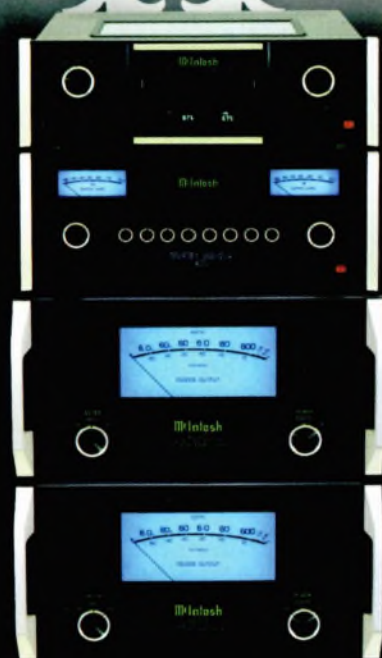
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"an extraordinary loudspeaker that does things that no other transducer can..."

Jason Kennedy: Hart D&W Aural Pleasure loudspeaker p66

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# M power

In the overcrowded British loudspeaker market, you've got to be serious to launch a new range and expect it to succeed. Boston Acoustics is, says **David Price**...

**PRICE:** £699-£2,199  
**AVAILABLE:** AUGUST  
**CONTACT:** 02990 279830  
**WEB:** BOSTONA.EU/EN

It was in the auspicious environs of May's Munich High End show that Boston Acoustics chose to announce its brand new range of loudspeakers, ranging in price from £699 to £2,199. The follow-up to the A-series launched last year, the M-series includes bookshelf, floorstanding, centre, subwoofer and surround models – all of which are the work of highly respected loudspeaker designer Karl-Heinz Fink and Marantz's Ken Ishiwata.

Claimed to offer distinctive design, intelligent use of materials, and the application of high

The M-series is the work of respected speaker designer Karl-Heinz Fink and Marantz's Ken Ishiwata...

technology to the drive units, cabinetry and crossovers, the new Boston line promises much.

The cabinets are finished in a choice of lacquer and real wood veneer, while a 'leatherette' surfacing to the front baffle was chosen to improve look and feel. Rounded edges to the cabinets are in evidence, for both the sonic benefits and to avoid a big, boxy look. Constrained layer damping is used, sandwiching a special damping material between two MDF layers.

The drive unit complement includes Boston's proprietary Extended Wide Bandwidth tweeter which works up to around 30kHz and doesn't show any break-up in the audible 10 to 20kHz region, the company says. The midrange driver used in M 340 and M 350 uses symmetrical mass loading; the four masses on the cone result in a very linear frequency response and reduce distortion significantly, it is claimed. The bass driver features improvements in the magnet system for lower distortion.

Boston's new loudspeaker range is also interesting for its lack of bi-wiring. The company believes that, whatever the sonic benefits may or may not be (and controversy still exists over that particular point), in the real world most consumers in this segment of the market use one pair of good speaker cables and not two. As such, the bridging in bi-wiring terminals will degrade the sound quality, and so should be avoided, the designers think. Look out for an exclusive review of this interesting new loudspeaker soon.





## Facing the music?

**MANY PRINT COLUMN INCHES HAVE RECENTLY BEEN EXPENDED ON LAST MONTH'S FACEBOOK FLOTATION.**

The difference between the initial launch price of the shares, and the market's subsequent verdict, shows just what an uphill struggle the iconic online operation has in front of it. With an immense customer-base that happily share its every interest, passion and proclivity with the world – it seems – the website has huge promise from a money making perspective. But so far this has not been fulfilled, so right now the great debate amongst money men and cultural commentators alike is around how to make it profitable on the scale of Google, for example...

To date, founder Mark Zuckerberg has apparently chased market share rather than money, the object being to create an unparalleled base of users which can then be monetised. With over 900 million members, the plan is working so far, although company revenue has still proved slightly out of kilter with its initial share flotation price. Google, by contrast, is making many times Facebook's yearly revenue.

So, speculation is growing in the media that one way to move the young company towards achieving the income of rival online giants, would be to extend Facebook's new App Center into a comprehensive store of digital media – including music, movies and apps. This would cater for the website's huge user base, and offer very customer-oriented products...

Although the company reportedly has no plans to turn Facebook into a giant digital media department store, speculation about this is nevertheless beginning to rise. Lest we forget, Apple's iTunes store is making billions of dollars each quarter now, and so it would appear a rich seam of income. Watch this space, as they say...

**Apple's iTunes Music Store (top) is making billions from music retailing, so will Facebook follow?**





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Diva IISP Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*, January 2011



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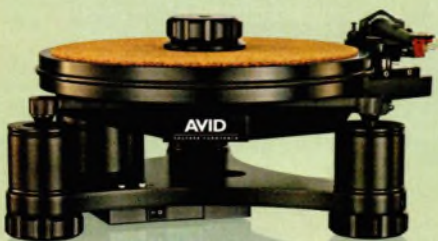
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# Stereo type

NAD's new two-channel amplifier promises digital functionality and power aplenty...

**N**AD's C 390DD Direct Digital DAC/amplifier "boosts musical performance with a pure digital path without damaging noise or distortion" says the company. With a healthy 150W per channel output, it's designed to power the most demanding of speakers. There are no analogue stages in the signal path, which keeps the music in the digital domain right up to the speaker outputs, for superior sound. The new NAD also offers plug-and-play compatibility with computer audio, and comes equipped with five S/PDIF digital inputs and a 24-bit/96kHz asynchronous USB input for connection to a Mac or PC, plus a MM/MC phono stage too.



**PRICE:** £2,200 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01279 501111 **WEB:** NADELECTRONICS.COM

# Tubular belles

Finely finished German high-end tube amps launched in the UK

**O**ctave, a long-established German company with a name in high end tube amplifier design, is now available in the UK through Air Audio Distribution. The range is, according to the manufacturer, "on a par with the finest transistor equipment, owing to (its) well thought-out electronic monitoring and protection circuitry", no less!

Most Octave amplifiers are designed to be simply upgraded with one of two plug-in power modules, and says the manufacturer, "offer two levels of greater stability and clarity". The entire range of amplifiers is handbuilt, with each model said to undergo a stringent quality-control process with a two-day durability test.



**PRICES:** £3,650-£56,740 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01491 629629 **WEB:** OCTAVE.DE

## Orange appeal

**RUARK AUDIO** is delighted to announce a long-term alliance with UK music charity Nordoff Robbins, which is dedicated to transforming the lives of vulnerable children and adults through music. To celebrate the collaboration, Ruark Audio is releasing a new limited edition of its R1 MkII radio in a bright orange gloss lacquer. £15 from every sale of this new DAB/FM model will be donated to charity.

The R1 MkII includes DAB, DAB+ and an FM tuner with RDS. There are ten station presets, a switchable auxiliary input for MP3 and other audio devices, 9W nominal power output, a 3.5 inch custom high-fidelity drive unit, Rotodial, high contrast display, stereo headphone socket and a choice of finishes (Rich Walnut veneer, Dream White and Midnight Black high gloss lacquers). Available now priced £179.99 (Orange). [info@ruark.co.uk](mailto:info@ruark.co.uk)



## Now ear this

**IHEADPHONES IS THE EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTOR** of the Cresyn range of headphones, and recently announced the new £29.99 Cresyn C501E dual chamber, semi-open back, half in-ear model. Output from the rear of the driver is channelled through the main chamber and a further sub-chamber, with extra output through a mesh panel behind each earpiece.

The half-ear design "fits snugly just outside the ear canal, ensuring high levels of comfort during even the lengthiest of listening sessions", says Cresyn. Aluminium housings are topped off with silicon ear tips in four different sizes, providing – says the manufacturer – "a spacious, full-scale sound that's enjoyable with a wide range of music".

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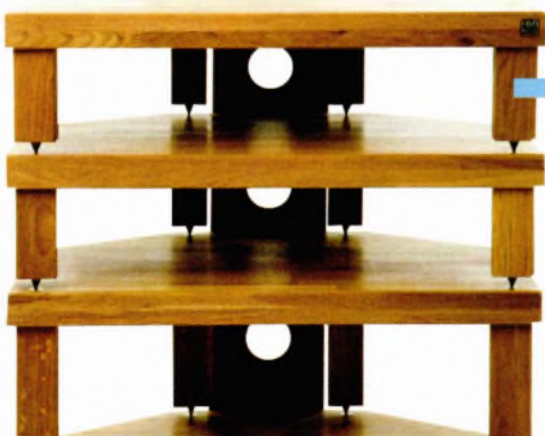
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# Power Chord

Chord Electronics' new network streamer is feature-laden

**C**hord Electronics' new DSX1000 is a digital network streamer that will handle MP3, WMA, WAV, AAC, ALAC and FLAC playback with 24-bit/192kHz support. It has a full-colour front-panel display showing album artwork and set up options. An inbuilt analogue volume control circuit (which is the same as those in Chord's Reference preamplifiers) offers, says Chord, "highly accurate volume adjustment without the problems and low-level distortions associated with digital volume controls normally found in streaming products".

Volume-controlled and line-level analogue outputs feature both balanced XLR and RCA phono connections, while the network connection is via a fixed wired Ethernet port. Conventional control is via a front-panel cursor button that illuminates depending on the button pressed, or by IR remote control. Users can also control the unit by any of the uPnP apps that are currently available for the iPhone/iPad, or Android smartphones.

The most important feature, the company claims, is that the streaming engine is coupled into Chord's own DAC technology, based on the QBD76HD design. This relocks all the data, removing, says Chord, "any of the jitter issues that can affect other products where the DAC is coupled into the main streaming chip".



**PRICE:** £6,500 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01622 721444 **WEB:** CHORDELECTRONICS.CO.UK

# Weighty

Tiger Paw gets heavy!

**A** new adjustable counterweight for Linn Ekos and Ittok series arms has just been announced by Tiger Paw. The key function of the sKale is to optimise the performance of the arm and cartridge, improving the ability of the stylus to retrieve more accurate information.

According to Tiger Paw, it's adjustable in weight to cater for a broad range of cartridges. Also, it features an offset centre hole which lowers the centre of gravity of the assembly further in line with the stylus and, says the company, particular attention has been paid to the interface between the counterweight and arm to ensure that resonances are not reflected back in to the entire tonearm assembly.

sKale comes complete with two additional discs allowing its mass to be adjusted to suit specific requirements, and a broad range of finishes, Satin Chrome to suit the Ekos SE and Ittok arms, and Satin Black to suit the Ekos 1 and 2.



**PRICE:** £195  
**AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 01737 362113  
**WEB:** TIGER-PAW.COM

# Allo allo...

Say hello to a new range of Gallic hi-fi, now available in the UK

**A**toll Electronics' well specified range of French-made amplifiers, CD players, DACs and associated products, is now available in the UK through Atoll-gb.

The IN30+CD30 retails for £999. The amplifier is a 50W MOSFET design, while the CD player includes Wolfson DACs, that can also play MP3 files. The IN100SE (£899) is a 100W integrated amplifier with MOSFET output devices and oversized dual 330VA transformers for each channel.

The CD100 SE2 (£999) includes 24-bit/96kHz upsampling Burr-Brown 1796 DACs and two power transformers for analogue and digital circuits. In addition to the above models, the range also includes dual monoblock preamps, power amps, DACs and phono preamplifiers.



**PRICES:** £899-£999 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 0208 429 7504 **WEB:** ATOLL-GB.COM



# Take the cube

Sonoro audio has something new for your iDevice

**S**onoro audio's new cuboDock is a Bluetooth-enabled, iPod/iPhone charging, stereo docking station with remote control. Featuring a two-way, four-driver speaker system with DSP (Digital Signal Processing) and rear cabinet porting for extra bass, the maker claims that German designed and engineered product sounds like a considerably larger speaker than its size would suggest, with a well-defined deep bass and remarkably clean treble.

Designed for both iOS or Android users, cuboDock features Bluetooth technology allowing users to wirelessly connect their compatible devices such as laptops, mobile phones and tablets. With this, users can receive an uninterrupted steady stream of music, news, podcasts and other information.

For iDevice users, Apple's proprietary 30-pin connector is located at the front of the cuboDock in front of the metal mesh grille, which hides the drive units out of sight. When docked, any iDevice can be easily seen and operated from the supplied remote control. Like cubo, sonoro's flagship product, the new cuboDock also comes encased in a handcrafted, curved-corner wood cabinet in black or white finish, or wrapped in a natural bamboo or walnut real wood veneer. Colour combinations available are white/white, black/black, white/blue, white/pink, white/green, bamboo/white and walnut/black. "We are really excited to have this new addition to our popular cubo family of products," says Marcell Faller, founder of sonoro audio.



**PRICE:** £199  
**AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** +49 0221 16 79 29  
**WEB:** SONORO-AUDIO.COM

## Ripping yarns.

**RUSS ANDREWS ACCESSORIES** is launching a CD ripping service to assist those wishing to make the transition to computer-based audio systems.

One of the biggest headaches for audiophiles is the need to rip an existing, and often extensive, CD collection onto a hard disk to make it accessible via the computer. Having made the transition itself, Russ Andrews Accessories understands, it says, how time consuming it can be, as well as the potential data loss pitfalls that come from using a standard computer CD reader. It's offering to rip customers' CD collections to an external hard drive, in the format of their choice...

The customer can specify what file type the discs are ripped to: WAV, AIFF, MP3, WMA, FLAC, AAC and whether multiple copies are needed in different formats, for example FLAC for the hi-fi system and MP3 for use on a portable music player. Data integrity is maintained automatically by the system, says Russ, which can make multiple rips if necessary to ensure the data is captured bit-perfect, while extensive metadata and album artwork for each disc is gathered from several online databases. To make the process even simpler, Russ Andrews can send you a secure packing case and empty spindles capable of holding up to 500 CDs. The original CDs are

## NEWS IN BRIEF

•**YAMAHA'S** new PDX-11 portable iPod/iPhone dock is designed to create the 'perfect blast' outdoors as well as indoors. Combining portability with a rugged design the PDX-11 is simple plug and play device, and uses batteries so you can take it anywhere you want to listen to your favourite sounds – from the bedroom to the beach or barbecue in the garden.

Available in white, black, dark blue and green, the iPod/iPhone dock is located on the top of the unit, and music is played back via a 4-inch woofer. *Hi-Fi Choice* got a brief listen and was impressed by its clarity, punch and ability to go fairly loud without clipping. It's also got a crisp top end, making it a nice little bit of kit. There's a remote control for hassle-free operation and it's compatible with PC, Mac or other digital audio players via a mini jack (3.5mm) on the back of the dock. The PDX-11 is available now for just £99. [uk.yamaha.com](http://uk.yamaha.com)



•**DFS**, the sofa specialist, has announced its first settee with built-in entertainment dock! The Trophy Cuddler features iPod/iPhone/MP3 dock, USB port, auxiliary port, SD card slot and Bluetooth connectivity, speakers and subwoofer. Pictured with metal feet, dark or light wood colour feet are also available at no extra cost. Free 10-year frame and springs guarantee, the sofa is priced at £1,398. [dfs.co.uk](http://dfs.co.uk)



returned to the customer in the secure case, along with the hard drive containing the ripped files. Prices are 50p per disc and £50 for the collection and delivery service. [russandrews.com](http://russandrews.com)





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What the critics say:

**twenty-22**

"Immensely open, dynamic and fast with massive musicality" - Hi-Fi Choice, June '12

"The PMC's stand alone in the winner's circle"

- What Hi-Fi?, Jan '12



**twenty-23**

"It does a remarkable job of delivering an essentially full bandwidth sound, with fine neutrality and excellent stereo imaging....clean crisp and agile" - Hi-Fi Choice, Jan '12



**twenty-24**

"...they captured everything perfectly and had me right on the edge of my seat with excitement"

- Hi-Fi World, June '12



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# X Factor

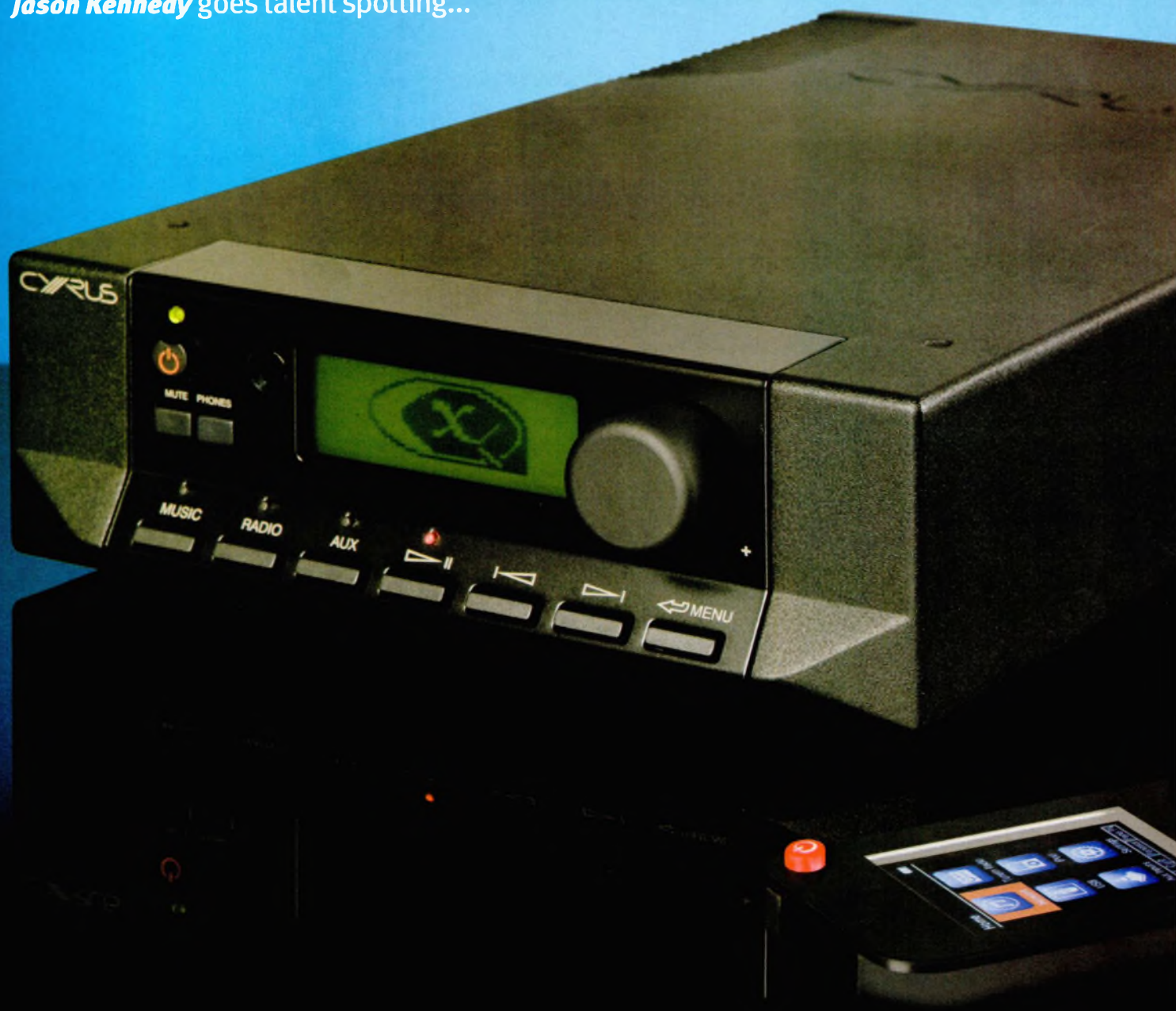
Cyrus Audio has packed a preamplifier, DAC and streamer into its latest and greatest Stream XP Qx.

*Jason Kennedy* goes talent spotting...



**C**yrus brought out a trio of streamers last year at prices that were almost across the board, so it's surprising to see another, higher priced variant appear at this stage. But the new Stream XP Qx is, as the parlance goes, the destination product that the Stream platform was developed for...

Cyrus devotees will know that there's already a Stream XP in the range, and a Qx DAC module. This therefore brings those two in to one single package – just as Cyrus always intended. One only wonders why it took so long?





The Huntingdon company got a head start with streaming when it worked with Imerge to create the Link server nine years ago, a product that taught that ease of control and access was of paramount importance with streaming technology. This is why Cyrus invested heavily in its swish N-Remote handset, because customers want a straightforward and reliable means of getting to their music. This seems pretty obvious, but is surprisingly rare in practice, most systems rely on third party app control of a media server on the NAS drive that pushes the data to the renderer (or streamer) – and these

can be less than gratifying pieces of software. By integrating control of the NAS into its system remote, Cyrus manages to make this a lot easier. For a start the N-Remote has an RF link to the Stream box, which ensures that you do not get dropout, and it can send information about the music you have in the library back from the data 'pulled' from the NAS.

This is the same approach that Naim uses in its streaming components and is based on the BridgeCo core and Audio interface software. Because of the immense complexity of the technology, no single hi-fi company has the resources to build a streaming system from the ground up, and most use the same intrinsic parts, the Airplay system is also BridgeCo-based for instance. Few hi-fi companies, however, have commissioned the software required for a bespoke remote handset rather than an app to run the system.

The Stream XP Qx may look like just another cast alloy, half-width component from Cyrus, but the incorporation of its penultimate DAC means that it's a better equipped streamer than any the company has previously made. The Qx is a 24-bit/192kHz upsampling convertor with inputs for TOSLINK and coaxial digital sources as well as a USB A input that is licensed to extract the ones and noughts from an iPod or material stored on a USB drive.

The Stream XP Qx also has quite a nice bit of software for the headphone output which ramps down the main output and fades up the headphone feed at the press of a button. As ever with Cyrus, there's the option to upgrade with a PSX-R external power supply, which takes over all preamp supply duties leaving the onboard power supply to run the DAC and streaming sections.

Cyrus has a number of recommendations for setting up a streaming system, for a start it prefers Western Digital NAS drives, because they are reasonably quiet and usually incorporate Twonkymedia server software that's, if not perfect, at least reliable and consistent. It also recommends placing an Ethernet switch between the NAS and the router, which is something that Naim also prefers. One new tip I picked up is that it's better to have a long lead between switch and router than it is between switch and renderer. This reduces the amount of CAT6 cable the data travels down before being converted into audio, and thus reduces the likelihood of it being corrupted in the process.

The manufacturer also recommends ripping your discs to WAV rather than the alternatives, because it sounds better. The drawback with WAV files, is of course that metadata is not sent

## The Qx is also a 24-bit/192kHz upsampling convertor with inputs for digital sources

by media servers, so you don't get much more than artist and track info, but Cyrus tell me it is planning a solution to this which will be of interest to the whole computer audio community, methinks...

As well as being able to stream pretty much any format that the self-respecting music lover would use, the Stream XP Qx can also work with Apple Lossless (ALAC) and has onboard net radio from TuneIn. The latter requires registration and device association with the TuneIn site if you want to add your own presets, but will play 'listen again' material with consummate ease. And if all your favourite shows are on

while you're on the mountain bike (for instance) that's a real bonus.

The N-Remote is worth expanding on a bit more as well, it's motion-sensitive so rests its batteries after a while, but comes to life when you pick it up and shows what's cued up on the player. It is also a learning remote that can be programmed to operate up to eight components via Cyrus' online database, it has an IR emitter for conventionally controlled components. It displays album

### ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Cyrus Stream XP Qx  
**ORIGIN:** UK  
**TYPE:** streamer, DAC, preamp  
**WEIGHT:** 3.4kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 215x75x385mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• digital inputs: 3x coaxial, 2x optical S/PDIF, USB  
• digital outputs: coaxial S/PDIF  
• analogue outputs: RCA phono fixed & variable  
• D/A converters: 24-bit/192kHz  
• 3.5mm headphone output  
• TuneIn net radio  
• UPnP & DLNA compatible  
• supported file formats: WAV, FLAC, AAC, MP3, WMA, AIFF  
• wireless operation via supplied antenna  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Cyrus Audio  
**TELEPHONE:** 01480 435577  
**WEBSITE:** cyrusaudio.com



## Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPOKE TO CYRUS AUDIO'S MD PETER BARTLETT ABOUT THE STREAM XP QX



**JK:** Where does the Qx DAC fit in the Cyrus product hierarchy?

**PB:** We have three DACs in our range, there is a lower priced one that we install in our digitally equipped integrated amplifiers, then you have the Qx DAC which is the high performance, 24-bit/192kHz, reclocking convertor that we use in the Stream XP Qx and at the high end, we have a dual differential DAC that we use in the XP preamp.

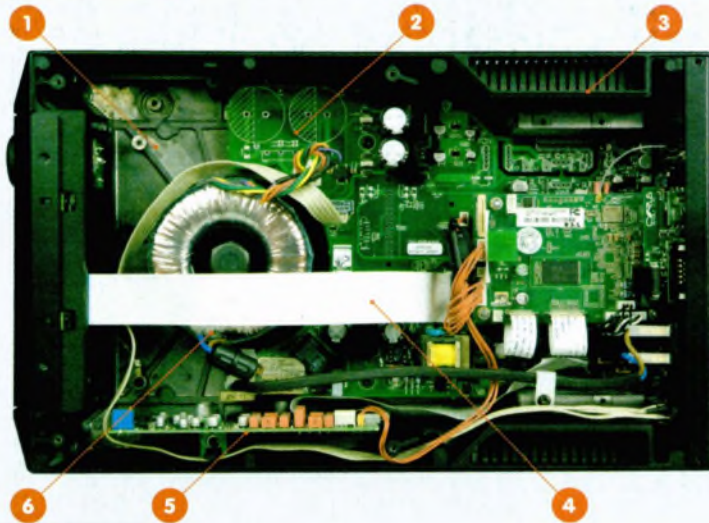
**Why wait for so long after the Link Server before you built the current Stream range?**

We realised that we needed somebody to allow a company like Cyrus to control the system without a computer. We had to wait for the maturity of the market to produce the BridgeCo chip, this is the heart of the majority of streaming units available. The next thing you need is the ability to talk to the Ethernet and a whole set of software stacks are needed to work between BridgeCo and the bits you see on the front panel of the streamer. The only company that had built a stable software platform that was going to continue to be developed was a German company called Audiov. And we worked with them to develop this platform.

**Why build a remote rather than a software app?**

The problem is to be able to present the technology in a way that's appealing to the consumer. If you have to run an app on an iPhone for instance, you are dependent on the quality of the network, the stability of the app and the limitations of what the app can actually do. Most will look at the media server and push data to the renderer. They let you select and play media, and in some instances they will give you volume control, but this is applied at the server before it's sent to the streamer, so it limits dynamic headroom. Pulling the data with full dynamic range to the renderer gives you the ability to have high quality and also means you can include Apple Lossless and 24/192 compatibility.

## LAB REPORT



- 1 diecast aluminium chassis
- 2 powersupply and preamp PCBs
- 3 monolithic chassis fins
- 4 flex foil to fascia LCD and logic systems
- 5 upsampling 24/192 decoder and PSU
- 6 toroidal power transformer

### ON TEST

In common with other network players based on the BridgeCo processor (Musical Fidelity's CLiC the other notable example), the Stream XP Qx is capable of handling data up to 24-bit/192kHz and 32-bit floating-point files over its wired network connection. This puts the XP Qx in the top-flight of network players.

The fixed analogue out offers a maximum 2.17V from a low 91ohm source impedance, equivalent to the

'-6dB' position on its variable output. Distortion, response and noise performance is consistent across all network, S/PDIF and USB inputs. Frequency response shows a mild +0.36dB/20kHz lift with 44.1kHz/48kHz media, increasing to +0.8dB/40kHz with 96kHz/192kHz files, the latter rolling gently away to -3dB/70kHz and finally -9.3dB/90kHz.

Spectral analysis quickly reveals a slightly 'noisy' environment (I've seen

players with a smoother floor) while distortion and noise demonstrate a greater difference between channels than input, the left typically poorer than the right over much of its dynamic range - the A-wtd S/N is 95dB vs. 100dB and THD 0.0015% vs. 0.0004% (L vs. R, 1kHz), for example.

Jitter is higher over the network interface than over S/PDIF, the latter reduced to 270psec with 48kHz data and 240psec at 96kHz. **PM**



**NEXT TO A CHORD INDEX**, which is a third the price of the Stream XP Qx and PSX-R combination it sounds rich, three dimensional and very sophisticated, but that price difference is not small. Naim is the more natural competitor in this field, but its Naim Uniti is an integrated amplifier rather than a preamp/streamer/DAC and, therefore, not a straightforward comparison.

I'd say that the Naim Uniti emphasises pace, rhythm and timing, while the Cyrus is very strong when it comes to imaging and fine detail resolution; it's none too shabby in the timing department either. It also has the N-remote, which makes accessing the music you want and controlling the system easy.

artwork where it is available from the library, and is designed to be as user-friendly as possible. However the word 'festooned' could be applied to the large array of shiny buttons it presents - very well made as it is, it takes a little practice to perfect. Interestingly, despite this there's still a demand for a dedicated app from Cyrus customers, so the company plans to offer one as an alternative to the N-Remote in the autumn.

After I had been using the N-Remote for a while, it became apparent which buttons are what and I pinned down the key ones like 'back' for going back a page in the library and 'i' for info which tells you bitrate. It's also possible to jump a page at a time on the screen with the next/previous track keys. I like the way that the remote's screen tells you volume level and shows album art, it feels a bit clunky using buttons rather than a touchscreen but also somehow rather reassuring.

One gripe is that the play and stop symbols are tiny, because they are on very slim keys. It would improve ease of use if they were more obvious, but familiarity would get you round this, of course. There are also quite a few keys that are not related to the streamer, but they presumably come in handy with the other bits of kit.

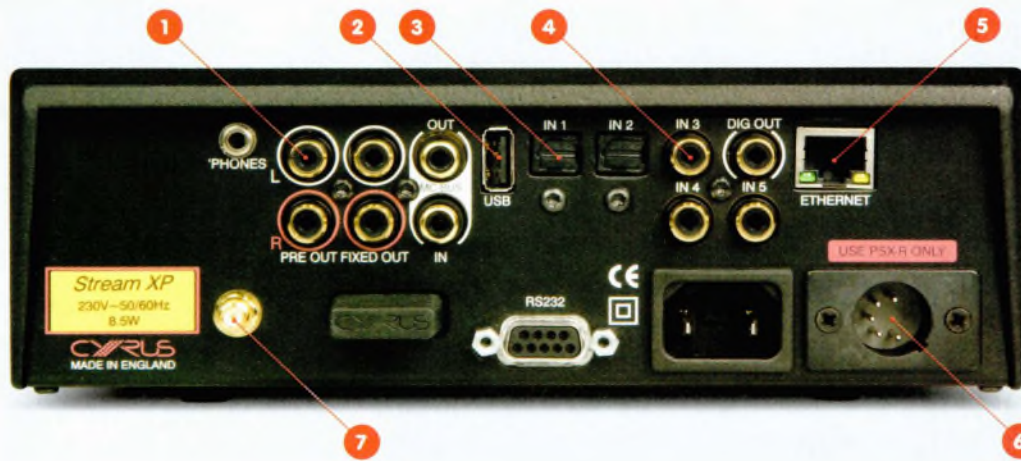
The XPD preamplifier section offers fixed and variable outputs and volume control via a front panel knob and the N-Remote, usefully all the important functions are available on the unit itself, which is not always the case with streamers. On the occasions when the remote is not to hand you can use the onboard display to scroll through and select tracks or Internet radio stations. Cyrus recommends that you stream material via Ethernet cable, but the unit is also able to work wirelessly and an antenna on a cable is supplied for this purpose.

### Sound quality

To get a handle on the core capabilities of the Stream XP Qx, I started out by using it as a digital source, connecting its digital output to the input of my Resolution Audio DAC. The reason being that I wanted to know how it compared to the best I could achieve with the Apple iMac computer I generally use to play my files. It's not possible to completely level the playing field because the computer has a USB connection and the Stream an S/PDIF coaxial one, but that aside it made an interesting comparison. Playing that old demonstration chestnut *Keith Don't Go* by Nils Lofgren, the Mac delivered



**CONNECTIONS**



- 1 RCA phono analogue outputs
- 2 type A USB digital input
- 3 optical TOSLINK digital input
- 4 electrical coaxial digital input
- 5 Ethernet socket for network connection
- 6 PSX-R external power socket
- 7 Wi-Fi antenna socket

an open, detailed and energetic rendition that seemed pretty impressive until the Cyrus showed just how much more detail there is in the mix, and how this information produces a far more focused and lifelike rendition of the musician sitting in the soundstage. It made the Mac sound positively vague in image terms and lacking in finesse, a split ends sound that blurred the picture and got in the way of the performance. Not a bad start at all for the streamer, then.

Bass is superb too – really deep and substantial with no shortage of timbral detail. A double bass should have texture as well as weight and this is readily apparent with the Cyrus. It also has a very engaging sense of immediacy, which brings out the timing cues in pretty much everything you play. In Antonio Forcione’s version of *Take 5*, for instance, the counterpoint between two guitars is precisely yet harmoniously delivered. You can hear right into the mix and make out the character of each element, what formally sounded like a vague clonking sound is in fact his boot tapping the floor, which isn’t so much a timing cue for the listener as a reference for the player, but it all adds to a highly coherent presentation.

Used as a full preamplifier, streamer and DAC, this unit concedes surprisingly little to more expensive separates. Detail levels remain very high and this brings real shape and depth to the instruments and voices in the soundstage. Joni Mitchell’s *Overture to Cotton Avenue* for instance, surprised me with the way that sounds shift in and out of phase, creating a very dynamic presence in the room. It’s also highly musical thanks to the way that you can hear how Joni and Jaco Pastorius weave their parts together so cleverly to produce a rhythmically dynamic and sinuous sound. The recording cramps up a little on the crescendos, but is

otherwise fabulously vital and difficult to tear yourself away from.

Another classic from this era, Fleetwood Mac’s *Gold Dust Woman*, also offers up a degree of layering that’s remarkable. The way that Stevie Nicks’ voice is presented varies hugely between verse and chorus, it’s not alone for the latter of course but there’s more to it than that. The bassline on this is also delicious, those megabucks recording

### The Stream XP Qx corrals the data in the stream into a highly coherent and engaging presentation

studios in the mid-seventies produced a sumptuous, yet detailed and immersive sound. It was pretty well the peak of analogue recording and you can hear it very easily with this Cyrus.

Radiohead’s *In Rainbows* has rarely delivered such precisely sculpted sound-staging, yet this quality is soon overtaken by that of the emotional content in the songs and you are left in no doubt that the sound is supporting the music rather than the opposite. This holds with hi-res music too – the Stream XP Qx is an analytical and highly revealing component then, but not one that sacrifices musical engagement at the altar of transparency. Rather it corrals the data in the stream into a highly coherent and engaging musical event.

Cyrus supplied a PSX-R to try with this unit and was right so to do. It has a very positive effect across the board, the treble in particular gets cleaner and more solid. High piano notes have a body and depth that they struggle to achieve without the separate supply. Timing is also enhanced quite markedly, your feet notice this first which is a bit of a *cliché*, but rarely more

marked than on this occasion. The Stream XP Qx sounds good on its own, but the PSX-R makes it very special indeed.

### Conclusion

An extremely impressive piece of kit, this top Cyrus does so many jobs that you expect it to be compromised in at least one area, yet the whole proves greater even than the sum. If it had analogue inputs as well, few of us would need to spend more. Some might prefer a bit more romance but those seeking the truth within their music collections will be hard pressed to find a preamp, DAC and streamer combination that gets near it for the price.

Perhaps it doesn’t quite *look* like two and a half grand, because you get the same chassis on the least expensive units in the range, but that chassis is highly rigid and very carefully thought out. I don’t think you’ll find something that sounds better, even if there are plenty of more shiny alternatives. What’s important is the appearance of the sound it produces, which can be uncannily rich, detailed and musical – and worthy of ancillary components at dramatically higher prices. ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Highly open and revealing sound; well featured; packaging
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Remote is not as sexy as an appouse
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> Excellent do-it-all design that beautifully renders digital music and does so in an easy, fuss-free and stylish way
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

**OVERALL**  
★★★★★



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# 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

Hi-Fi Choice is the only magazine to offer *Blind-Listening Group Tests*, backed up with an objective lab testing procedure

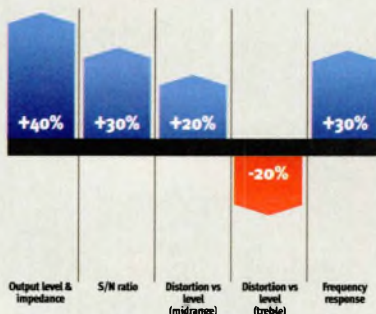
### BLIND-LISTENING TESTS

**THE LISTENING PROCESS** is very carefully controlled, yet sufficiently relaxed that our panelists do not feel that they're being tested. The three listeners on the panel aren't aware of the brand or price of the product they are listening to.

First, a comfortable initial listening level is agreed by everyone present, which is then accurately matched from product to product throughout subsequent sessions, so that subjective impressions aren't skewed by volume differences. After each product is auditioned, the panel is encouraged to discuss their respective impressions and the consensus, or otherwise, forms the basis of the Sound Quality section.

The portables tested here were all fully charged, with their volume levels set to maximum (to prevent digital volume controls affecting the sound). They were then connected via their 3.5mm audio outputs to our reference amplifier via high quality interconnects. This eliminated differences between players' load driving abilities from the test, by taking headphone impedance variability out of the equation. It also allowed group comparisons to be quickly made via loudspeakers. Five music files, ripped in Apple's iTunes 10.6.1 were uploaded to each, in 16-bit/44.1kHz uncompressed .WAV format (1411kbps), plus a test tone. Final checking was done via Sennheiser PX100 headphones.

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



#### OUTPUT LEVEL & IMPEDANCE

The typical output level of a portable player is 0.3V but its ability to deliver this level at all frequencies into lower impedance 'phones is indicated by its output impedance.

#### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

This is a direct representation of the player's A-weighted Signal-to-Noise (S/N) ratio, measured in 3rd-octave bands from 20Hz-20kHz relative to its maximum output.

#### DISTORTION VS LEVEL (MIDRANGE)

Rather than quote a single figure for distortion at one frequency and level, this value represents a measure of the distortion trend across the important midrange frequencies over a full 100dB dynamic range.

#### DISTORTION VS LEVEL (TREBLE)

This is the same measurement described above but targeted, instead, at the highest treble frequencies. This particular trend of THD vs. digital level also includes any ultrasonic noise ejected by the player's DAC.

#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

This is a measure the 'flatness' of the player's frequency response from 20Hz (low bass) to 20kHz (extreme treble) – the practical limits imposed by 44.1/48kHz media files.



#### OUR GROUP TESTS

and Lead Review are subject to exhaustive lab testing by Paul Miller using the QC Suite Functional Testing Station (left). Paul has tested more hi-fi equipment than any reviewer in the world, so you know you're in safe hands.

We don't publish pages of graphs, but we do understand the importance of transparency. So, readers may view full QC Suite test reports for our key reviews by clicking on the red download button on our website. [www.hifichoice.co.uk](http://www.hifichoice.co.uk)

## HOW WE TEST

### THIS MONTH'S LISTENING PANEL



**ROGER BACHELOR** (LEFT)  
**DENON MARKETING MAN** Roger has worked for the British wing of the Japanese marque for more years than he'd care to admit, and is a keen musician, too.

**PETER BARTLETT** (MIDDLE)  
**CYRUS AUDIO MD** Peter has been with the company since the nineties, growing it from a Mission offshoot to the burgeoning brand it is now.

**PATRICK CLEASBY** (RIGHT)  
**TECH WHIZZ** Patrick does clever things with IT at the BBC by day, but at night writes on matters of technology for this magazine. Has hundreds of iPods!

#### REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Amplification:**
- Musical Fidelity AMS35i
- Loudspeakers:**
- Quad 989
- Equipment supports:**
- Quadraspire
- Interconnect:**
- Missing Link

#### TEST MUSIC

**VIVALDI**  
**FOUR SEASONS**  
SPRING - op.8 no.1 pt.1



**NEIL RICHARDSON**  
**THE SOUND GALLERY**  
RIVIERA AFFAIR



**K-KLASS**  
**UNIVERSAL; RHYTHM**  
ISA A MYSTERY



**DANDY WARHOLS**  
**13 TALES**  
BOHEMIAN LIKE YOU



**KATE BUSH**  
**THE SENSUAL WORLD**





# Blind-listening Group test

PORTABLES £110-£299

## Walk this way

Music on the move is getting ever more sophisticated, with a vast array of features and functionality. But what of the sound quality, asks **David Price**?

### OPINIONS ARE DIVIDED, BUT MOST RECKON SONY STARTED IT

– the modern-day music portable, that is. The Stowaway, rapidly renamed the Walkman, appeared in 1979 to the bemusement of the general public, but the superb sound it offered, allied to the Compact Cassette boom, ensured it caught on fast.

The eighties went on to be dominated by the Walkie. While hi-fi hacks got hot under the collar about CD, the wider world fell in love with the wee tape deck, and all the possibilities it presented. From commuting and keep fit to countryside walks and long haul flights, suddenly we could all have the music in us – and we did!

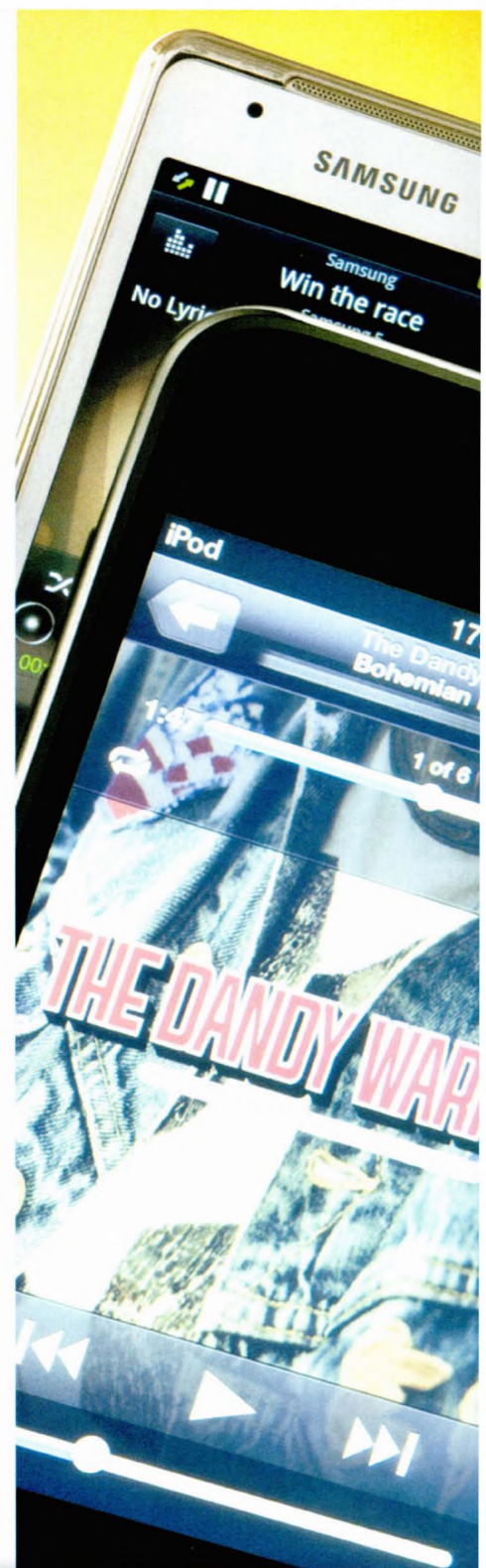
Amazingly, having owned the eighties portables market, fifteen years later Sony was virtually nowhere. Instead, an obscure computer company, famous for making some oddly coloured 'PCs', had moved its scooters onto Sony's lawn, so to speak. Apple went on to do *precisely* what Sony had, but with hard disk – rather than tape – drives...

The first iPod appeared in 2003, and contrary to what Apple fans would have you believe, wasn't particularly innovative – it, like various others, used a HDD to play MP3 files. The clever bit was that clickwheel, which was an

### Having owned the eighties portable market, fifteen years later Sony was virtually nowhere...

altogether nicer interface than that found on rival designs, and the neat software that sync'd up to the iPod from your Mac computer. It soon caught people's imagination, the rest is history.

Nowadays, iPods are a sideshow for Apple; phones and tablets are all the rage. But it still does a fine range of portable music players, competing against rival electronics specialists. Recently, Sony has been on a mission to get 'its' market back, and Samsung is joining in the fun, too. Read on to find which of these six portables prevails...



### ON TEST



**Apple iPod Classic 160GB**  
£199 **p25**

This is the answer to every audiophile's dream, circa 2009. These days the Classic looks positively geriatric, with its girth, 'tiny' screen and that quaint clickwheel (no touchscreens here, thanks very much)! Still, it packs serious amounts of storage, which lets you store lots of uncompressed music—a very good thing.



**Apple iPod Touch 8GB**  
£169 **p27**

It's been around for several years now, but has been totally overshadowed by its phone-equipped bigger brother. Shame, because the 'Touch' is sleeker, lighter, has much of its apps functionality and a whole charm of its own. Many audiophiles use it as a swish remote control for their streamers now, too!



**Cowon i20 8GB**  
£110 **p29**

This South Korean company has been around for nearly twenty years, during which time it's developed a good name for digital music portables in the UK, although hasn't exactly set the world on fire. Cowon is very individual and seems to resist the temptation to follow fashion – something reflected in the look and feel of this bit of kit.



**Philips GoGear Connect 3**  
£160 **p31**

It's always puzzled me why Philips hasn't garnered more respect for its portables, which have all been good, going right back to the days of MP3. This is the first of three Android designs, with a wide range of features, fine build and easy operation. Is it finally strong enough to compete with the 'big Apple'? Read on to see...



**Samsung Galaxy SWifi 8GB**  
£159 **p33**

It wasn't so long ago that Samsung was regarded rather patronisingly by us Western consumers, spoilt with Japanese consumer electronic design. But the company has come along leaps and bounds over the last decade, and this Android device shows how. It's good enough to be mentioned in the same breath as Sony.



**Sony NWZ-Z1060**  
£299 **p35**

From the company that once defined the breed, comes its latest mobile music machine. Android-based, it's a big, impressive looking design that reminds you that Sony still has some of its old magic. In terms of build and facilities, it's easily capable enough to be a real rival to Apple, which is saying something.









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in their musical ability’

WHAT HI-FI ★★★★★

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# Apple iPod Classic 160GB £199

The original 2003 iPod's DNA lives on in its spiritual successor, with its massive hard disk music store...

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:** US/China  
**SIZE:** 103.5x61.8x10.5mm  
**WEIGHT:** 140g  
**FEATURES:**  
• 160GB hard drive  
• photos and video playback  
• 3.5mm minijack  
• Mac OS 10.4.11 or later, Windows 7 or later  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Apple  
**TELEPHONE:** 0800 048 0408  
**WEBSITE:** apple.com

**T**he spiritual successor to the original iPod from 2003, the hard disk has grown a lot however – its 160GB gives up to 40,000 songs in low-res AAC, which still means thousands of albums in uncompressed WAV. This gives it – for serious musos – a massive advantage over all the other players here, which use flash memory in vastly smaller quantities. It can also function as a photo and video viewer of sorts, although it doesn't excel in this due to the 2.5 inch 320x240 pixel screen, which is nice, but not up to that of the other players here.

Unlike the acres of polycarbonate of the original, the Classic gets a very swish aluminium fronted, stainless steel-backed case. The scrollwheel is still there, showing its earlier Apple DNA. It's still a fiendishly clever way of navigating around the unit, easier in some ways than even the lovely touchscreen of the iPod Touch.



It sports Apple's 30-pin connector, plus the 3.5mm minijack analogue; the supplied phones sound poor. Playing time is around 35 hours. It does all major codecs except FLAC.

## Sound quality

"Hard to like" is how one panelist described the sound of the iPod Classic. In a way, it's an odd comment, because if you were to make a list of the key ingredients required to make a good sounding digital portable, then the big Apple would tick every box. Big bass, check. Lively treble, check. Lots of detail, check. But there's more to it than that, and that's where the Classic began to falter...

On Neil Richardson's *Riviera Affair*, the Apple set up an apparently impressive recorded acoustic. It was big and spacious and had lots going on. At first listen, it seemed really rather good. But the panel felt that some that pace came through harshness; the sound was a little edgy and that give a bit of a fillip to the proceedings, pushing things along in a way that was superficially exciting, yet not actually satisfying.

Bass was a case in point; at first listen there was lots of it, but it seemed thick and prone to making everything sound like it was the same note. Although the punchy midband moved the song along well enough, basslines were rather ploddy and laboured. Another panelist pointed out that it was a bit on the boomy side.

The Dandy Warhols' *Bohemian Like You* was again attractive at first; lots going on, plenty of bass, a biting treble. But it sounded tonally edgy, rhythmically mechanical and the low frequencies seemed semi-detached from the rhythmic content of the midband. In a way it was engaging to listen to, but didn't really satisfy all the same. Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* only confirmed this; tonally it was a little cold on the violins, wasn't particularly detailed and failed to convey a sense of air. Instead, things sounded rather opaque...

The positives of power and punch were always there, but still the

machine was felt to lack rhythmic acumen and general musical warmth and charm. Overall, via its analogue output, it sounded quite a lot like Japanese hi-fi of yesteryear; a touch too showy and not musical enough.

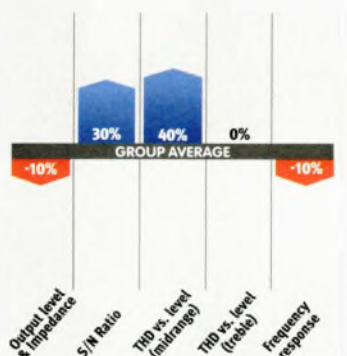
The Apple iPod Classic is of course still highly desirable for those who have vast amounts of music to store, and/or don't intend to use the analogue output for serious listening. There's a wealth of iDevices available to make the most of its fine digital output, which then make this a veritable mobile audiophile machine.

## ON TEST

Tested with uncompressed 16-bit WAVs, Apple's Classic player delivers a very solid performance, offering a full 330mV output from a moderate 60ohm source impedance (rising to 150ohm above 10kHz) – suitable for all but the lowest impedance phones. The godB A-wtd S/N ratio is only a dB behind the iPod Touch and Sony, while THD through bass and mid is just 0.002% at full output and 0.01% at –30dBfs.

At higher frequencies, THD and noise amounts to just 0.06% at peak output and 0.03% at –30dBfs. While there's a slight increase in ultrasonic quantisation noise from the DAC, it's well controlled. The frequency response shows a mild +0.2dB lift at 20kHz and artefacts caused by digital jitter are typically buried below the noise at 450psec. Importantly, low-rate or noise-like jitter is almost completely absent, typically benefitting sharp stereo imaging. **PM**

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

**LIKE:** Vast hard drive music storage; slick build; easy nav  
**DISLIKE:** No apps, no FLAC, no SD card slot; opaque analogue sound  
**WESAY:** Excellent for musos who need their tunes to hand, but sonics aren't so special

### OVERALL

★★★★★



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



# Apple iPod Touch 8GB **£169**

The first truly modern music portable, this raised the bar just as the original iPod had. How does it stack up now?

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:** US/China  
**SIZE:** 111x58.9x7.2mm  
**WEIGHT:** 101g  
**FEATURES:**  
• Wi-Fi, Bluetooth  
• camera, photos and video  
• 3.5mm minijack  
• Mac OS 10.5.8 or later, Windows 7 or later  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Apple  
**TELEPHONE:** 0800 048 0408  
**WEBSITE:** apple.com

**T**he original scrollwheel iPod made digital music portables genuinely easy to use, rather than being computer geek gadgets. The iPod Touch moved the game on into a whole new paradigm. The 3.5 inch, 960x640 full colour touchscreen provides a beautiful and compelling user interface, while the glass fronted, stainless steel-backed case is as delightful to hold as it is elegant.

The built-in rechargeable battery gives around 35 hours with audio (about a quarter of that with video), and there are front and rear facing cameras fitted. The accelerometer, gyro and light sensor make it super-slick to use. The standard 30-pin Apple dock connector is fitted, as is a 3.5mm minijack analogue audio output. The player handles a fair range of codecs, from MP3 to WAV, but disappointingly (and inevitably perhaps) no FLAC as standard.



The Touch can run a multitude of apps (many of which are also iPhone-compatible). Now, of course, many rivals – including the Android designs tested here – do this, too.

## Sound quality

Whereas its iPod Classic brother was slightly brash and lacked subtlety – it had a go at making a big, powerful hi-fi sound – the iPod Touch was an altogether less embracing and engaging performer. The upside of this was its slightly smoother nature, compared to the Classic. The listening panel felt that it didn't have the edgy bite of its sibling, which with some types of music was an altogether good thing, whereas with other tracks the panelists all felt that the Touch sounded bland, losing some sparkle from the hi-hats in K-Klass's *Rhythm is a Mystery*.

Down at the other frequency extreme, the Touch proved a little more subdued – or balanced – depending on your point of view. Whereas the Classic served up tracts of banging bass, the Touch didn't. This made for more of an all-of-a-piece presentation which was better integrated and less lumpy. But the *Riviera Affair* seemed to lose something from the musical event that the Classic had managed to convey. One listener added that the bassline on Kate Bush's *Sensual World* "just sort of disappeared", too. That said, everyone felt the low end performance of the Touch – although less animated perhaps – was certainly more even, balanced and indeed tuneful; one panelist said he could follow the basslines better.

This smoother, across-the-board presentation from the Touch meant that it wasn't a stand-out performer in the group. It lacked the euphonic colouration of some rivals, causing some panelists to find it a bit subdued, compressed even.

Relatively low-fi pop such as K-Klass sounded like it had been played on Radio One via a cheap DAB portable, one panelist opined; the basic building blocks were there but it was all mulched into one. Again, the lack of edge and incision

made for a rather forgettable listening experience. Everyone agreed it lost the impact of the kick drum on the Dandy Warhols track, and made the treble feel a little phasey. One panelist thought, "it sounded like there was some processing going on".

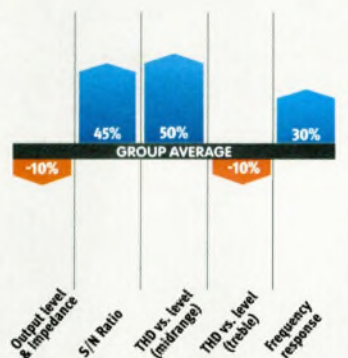
Overall then, everyone felt the Apple iPod Touch is a lovely thing to behold and to use, but just a bit underwhelming and innocuous via its analogue output. Once again, a brilliant product but best heard via one of the aftermarket iDevices.

## ON TEST

To all intents and purposes, the Touch behaves like a Classic with a slightly better Delta-Sigma DAC, offering a 70dB rejection of alias images vs. the Classic's 57dB. The 340mV maximum output level and 60hm source impedance are nigh-on identical, while distortion through bass and midrange is just a little lower at 0.007% (peak output). The A-wtd S/N ratio is fractionally better too at 91.4dB, the best in our test, just as its low-level resolution is within ±0.2dB over a full 90dB dynamic range.

Distortion at very high frequencies is comparable with the Classic at 0.07%, lower than the Samsung and Sony but higher than either the Cowon or Philips players. Ultrasonic noise and other digital spuriae are very low, however. The response is ruler-flat and jitter artefacts also largely masked by noise at ~120psec while crosstalk is better than ~100dB. PM

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

**LIKE:** A thing of beauty that is lovely to use, behold or covet!  
**DISLIKE:** Slightly bland sound via analogue out; no FLAC or memory card  
**WESAY:** A superb package in most respects, except sonics via headphone socket

### OVERALL

★★★★★



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IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC



# Cowon iAudio 10 8GB £110

Traditional, unreconstructed digital portable purposed for music on the move, at a very nice price...

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
South Korea  
**SIZE:**  
114x54x12.6mm  
**WEIGHT:**  
73g  
**FEATURES:**  
• FM radio, recorder  
• built in speaker, microphone  
• 3.5mm minijack  
• Mac OS 10, Windows 7 or later  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Cowon Global  
**WEBSITE:**  
cowonglobal.com

**T**ypical of the music portable breed just a few years ago, the Cowon is a 'pre-Android' era device. While it lacks of the bells and whistles of these fashionable gadgets, its diminutive dimensions mean it's actually great for music on the move. Small and light, if you want it easy to carry around then this is the best in the group.

A plasticky product, it's never going to feel as lovely in the hand as an Apple. Despite Cowon having made an effort with its bright little 3 inch, 400x240 screen and backlit touch controls, its navigation is still fiddly, lagging behind the iPods in the ease of use stakes, although it's less fussy than the Android designs – touch-screens can sometimes be too clever by half when you're on the road.

It has a decent smattering of features: FM radio, a handy recording facility and TV output. Battery life is around average for

this group, about 35 hours, although this falls off a cliff with video. Unlike the iPods, it plays WMA, FLAC and OGG codecs, important for some, although not AAC, annoyingly.

## Sound quality

"I could actually listen to that", admitted our most outspoken panelist. Not exactly a ringing endorsement but, at least, there wasn't a sense of us having to grit our teeth for the duration of the test! The Cowon proved a more open and sounding performer to the iPod Touch, and had some benefits over the Classic, too. Essentially it was slightly less artificial sounding. It wasn't big and warm and fruity like – for example – the Sony, instead it went the other way and tried to be spry, crisp and dry. The result was the sort of sound Linn DS owners will be familiar with – hardly euphonic, but still decently clear, musically interesting, and engaging.

The Vivaldi excerpt was nicely open, even and all-of-a-piece. There was no monkey business, with bits rolled off here or boosted there. The K-Klass track hardly sounded impressive, thanks to a slightly light bass, but somehow still rolled along quite enjoyably. Vocals were clearer and better separated than the iPods here. On the Dandy Warhols track, the guitars assumed a life of their own, instead of droning along, giving the song a bit of zip. "There's an openness to the mid and treble" that the others (so far) lacked", opined one listener.

Kate Bush's *Sensual World* also worked better. You'd never call it a great recording, but still the power of Kate's vocal performance is such that given the right replay equipment, it shines through. It didn't so much shine as 'peep through the clouds' on the Cowon, but still you began to get a sense of what the track was all about, which was lost on both Apples.

One panelist reported that it sounded pinched at the very top end, and everyone agreed. The bells ringing at the beginning of *Sensual World* are a great litmus test, and the

Cowon didn't quite pass – even if it was better than the Apples. Pleasant though the this player was, it was still a long way from perfect. Another listener noticed an aspect of its bass; low down it's almost as if things roll off too sharply. "There's no deep bass, like it's sucked out – in the Vivaldi there's a cello you can't hear".

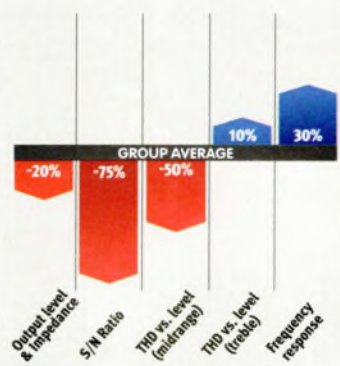
Hardly a barnstorming performer, the Cowon was still listenable, and generally ranked fractionally better than the Apple iPod Touch, and roughly on a par with the Classic. Considering its price, that's good.

## ON TEST

While the Cowon's volume control goes all the way up to '40', it's worth noting that there's no increase beyond 121mV at volume setting '32' – the real 'max'. The low 20hm output impedance will match most 'phones although the 50hm peak at 100Hz may only influence bass performance with the lowest impedance earbuds. The low output level inevitably affects the ultimate S/N that's achievable – 84dB A-wtd – but low-level resolution is still good to ±0.7dB over a 90dB range.

There's a single high-rate jitter component at 2.47kHz amounting to 250psec, but high frequency distortion is very low indeed at 0.005%. IM distortion is just 0.0008% and ultrasonic (requantisation) noise from the DAC is low, typically <-110dB. On a more 'analogue' note, the 0.11dB channel imbalance will not be audible but is still slightly below average. **PM**

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

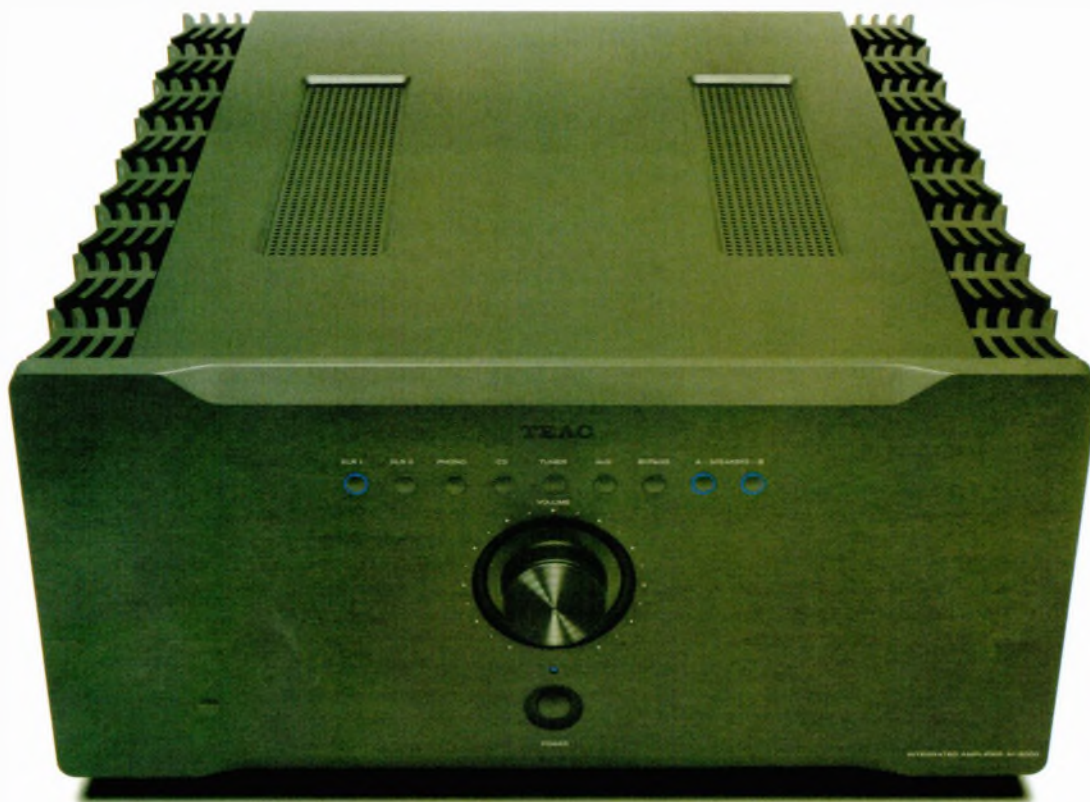
**LIKE:** Small size, neat design, nice display; FLAC playback; price  
**DISLIKE:** Fiddly touch controls; limited connectivity; no AAC  
**WE SAY:** Amenable, unassuming little music portable; nothing fancy but nicely priced!

### OVERALL

★★★★★

**A  
performance  
of real  
distinction**

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



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# Philips GoGear Connect 3 **£160**

One of the first of a new breed of Wi-Fi enabled, Android-based media players, this promises much...

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:** Netherlands/China  
**SIZE:** 113x58x11.2mm  
**WEIGHT:** 105g  
**FEATURES:**  
• Wi-Fi, Bluetooth  
• touchscreen, built-in speaker, recorder  
• 3.5mm minijack  
• Mac OS 10, Windows 7 or later  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Philips  
**TELEPHONE:** 0844 338 04 88  
**WEBSITE:** philips.co.uk

**T**he first of the three Android-based devices here, this is a direct rival to Apple's iPod Touch.

It's not a phone, but feels like it has a cousin that is! It's certainly bulkier than the Touch, being twice as thick, and wins no prizes for desirability being a fairly utilitarian looking (and feeling) device.

The front sports a so-so 3.2 inch touchscreen with 480-by-320 resolution. Then there are the usual Android navigation buttons which work in conjunction with the screen. Somehow, Apple's iPod Touch does the same thing better with less, and feels so much slicker, too. There's a micro USB port, plus a 3.5mm minijack analogue out. Like the Apples, there's no memory card slot, sadly. It plays handy formats including FLAC, AAC and WMA, while its 800MHz processor and 400MB RAM means your desktop computer isn't likely to become obsolete!



The battery lasts just over 20 hours on music, dramatically less for video. There's an RDS RM radio tuner, and a Philips-branded Songbird music player application bundled.

## Sound quality

Sometimes, when people lavish praise on things, you can just feel the 'but' coming. And so it was with the Philips, which was well received for its smoothish and amenable sound – but it had a lumpy bass that seemed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

Given the middling sound of what preceded it, the panelists were all happy for the Philips to do better. Indeed, it seemed to be pulling out a lead with the Vivaldi track – they heard a nice even sort of sound, with good amounts of midband detail, and no harshness. "It was quite purposeful", said one panelist. "Nicely expansive", opined another.

On K-Klass's *Rhythm is a Mystery*, the Philips gave the sort of sound that was reminiscent of an early nineties Philips Bitstream CD player. Clean and open and fairly low in distortion, there was little to really criticise. The opening bells were decently rendered on the Kate Bush track, and her voice didn't grate – even if it didn't charm, either. *The Riviera Affair* was pleasingly expansive, with lots of big, bold brushstrokes in comparison to the rather pinched Cowon or compressed iPod Touch. Percussive details were easy to pick out, observed one panelist, and Kate Bush's voiced sounded less opaque than with the Apples – you could really hear the delicacy of her unique vocal strains.

However, lower down, things weren't so rosy. Bass attracted criticism from all three panelists; this being the slightly overblown low end which appeared to slow things down a bit. Although not dramatically overdone, bass did sound a little tuneless, tending to turn everything on the fretboard into one homogenous note that simply served to reinforce the rest of the song, rather than harmonising with it.

The result was a rather patchy; Kate Bush, for example, was lovely until you got distracted by the actions of the bass guitar, which began to throw you off the rhythmic scent. It was subtle but blotted an otherwise blemish-free copybook. The Dandy Warhols track sounded nice and open, but was never going to raise the roof.

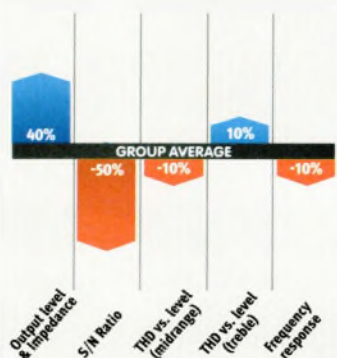
So the Philips is a decent, smooth, well-resolved performer, but nothing to write home about. It's a bit slow in use, and not as slick as Apple rivals. Agreeable then, but nothing special.

## ON TEST

While much about this Philips player is unremarkable, including the 196mV maximum output level, the low 1.8ohm source impedance is impressive for its sheer uniformity, true to within ±0.2ohm across the audio band. This is one player that will 'sound itself' regardless of your choice in 'phones. Separation is good to 90dB and the response flat to -0.13dB at 20Hz, though there's also an anomalous 25Hz bass drone at -60dBV (1mV).

The A-wtd S/N ratio is not assisted by the low output, so a figure of 85dB is not unexpected. Any jitter, or sidebands caused by jitter, are blanketed by its innocuous and generally 'white' noise floor, while distortion remains low at 0.001-0.003% through bass, mid and treble at full output. Low-level resolution is poorer than others in this test at -3dB re. -90dBfs but at least this means distorted quiet detail is less audible. **PM**

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Flexible Android platform; fairly pleasing sonics; smooth nature

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Not as slick as an iPod Touch; gloopy bass; plasticity build

**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Decent do-it-all device that should please many, but not all audiophiles....

**FEATURES** ★★★★★

### OVERALL

★★★★★



851 Series hi-fi

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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





# Samsung Galaxy S WiFi 8GB £159

This latest Android-powered iPod Touch rival comes fully loaded with features at a nice price...

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:** South Korea  
**SIZE:** 141.3x78.2x11.9mm  
**WEIGHT:** 182g  
**FEATURES:**  
• Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, GPS, microSD  
• touchscreen, built-in speaker, recorder  
• 3.5mm minijack  
• Mac OS 10, Windows 7 or later  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Samsung Electronics  
**TELEPHONE:** 01932 455 000  
**WEBSITE:** samsung.com/UK

Is it just me, or if you really squint your eyes, spin round several times and blink repeatedly, can you just about discern a visual resemblance here to the latest generation Apple iDevice? Perhaps the styling hints as to the Samsung's role in life – squared up so close to the iPod Touch that it can see the whites of its eyes! Visually similar it may be then, but it doesn't feel as fine in the hand, and the Android OS feels clunky by comparison to the Apple.

Still, it packs lots of kit inside its largish case, with a 5 inch 800x480 touchscreen. Here it kicks the Touch, ermm, into touch. A microSD card slot able to take up to 32GB is a good thing to have, as are the GPS, voice recorder and Wi-Fi. It even has a beefy battery, able to play music for a commendably lengthy 40 hours.

Navigation is – as expected – Androidy, which means okay but no

real pleasure. Still, it seems to work more seamlessly and responsively than the Philips – the 1GHz processor certainly isn't as shy and retiring. A solid, flexible portable.

## Sound quality

“Nice”, opined one panelist. This prompted all manner of *Fast Show* jazz club jokes, but the point was well made. The Samsung put smiles on faces and got toes tapping. Suddenly the panelists seemed to relax a bit as the Galaxy S made a real stab at something resembling real music...

“I had some enthusiasm for it; probably could live with it”, was one endorsement. Another concurred, “I liked that – the *Riviera Affair* sounded great, you could really track what the drummer was doing”. It wasn't just the drummer; whereas the other portable players in the test sounded a little processed in one way or another, the Samsung began to sound more like the stuff it was supposed to be playing – music. This it did by a little more grip at frequency extremes, “it's the only thing that's had the K-Klass bass under control, the only player that lets you hear the bass guitar picking on the *Riviera Affair*”, one panelist pointed out to me.

“It seems the least distorting of all, it had the least corruption”, said another, adding, “I think it had the best high frequency definition”. One giveaway was the hi-hat break on the K-Klass track, which sparkled and had a sense of dynamics that had been largely lost on its rivals. Another was the opening bell peel on Kate Bush's *Sensual World*, where the bells sounded like real bells, not electronic doorbells. Ditto the harpsichords in the *Four Seasons*, the Samsung giving a sense of real acoustic instruments – it just came over as less artificial.

Frequency extremes were also very good with the Galaxy S, and in-between it was none too shabby either. This transparency gave a great sense of the synth sounds in *Rhythm is a Mystery*, and the strings in *The Riviera Affair* soared.



In *Sensual World*, Kate sounded something of her true romantic and windswept self; the Samsung managed to capture the essential mood of a piece of music in a way that others didn't. Bass was fine too; slightly fuller than the Cowon, but not as boomy as the iPod Classic.

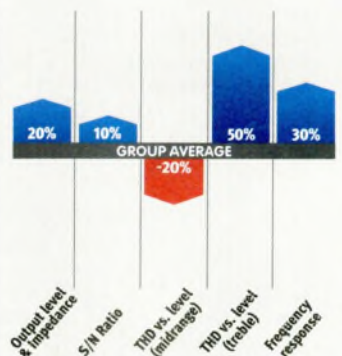
Overall then, it's an unexpectedly good result. If you can live with its somewhat over-familiar looks, the Samsung Galaxy S WiFi is a personable music maker, and of course offers a vast wealth of facilities at a low, low price.

## ON TEST

While not quite as 'characterful' as the Sony, Samsung's Galaxy does betray a few technical hallmarks of its own. Principal among these is the high uncorrelated (noise-like) jitter or phase noise evident on all high frequency spectra which, in a conventional hi-fi context, might ordinarily be linked to a softening of stereo images. Only at the maximum 280mV output level is THD higher than average at 0.015%, a mix of 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th harmonics. But, at -20dBfs where much of the rock/pop musical action takes place, THD is as low as 0.0035% through bass and midrange and ~0.01% at the highest frequencies.

The 89dB A-wtd S/N ratio is a couple of dB short of the best here, but low-level resolution is still good to ±0.5dB over a 90dB range. The response is flat to within ±0.04dB and the output impedance usefully low at 2.7ohm. PM

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Big spec; microSD memory card slot; enjoyable sound  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks visual delight; slightly clunky Android nav  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Fine sounding portable with a plethora of useful features  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

### OVERALL



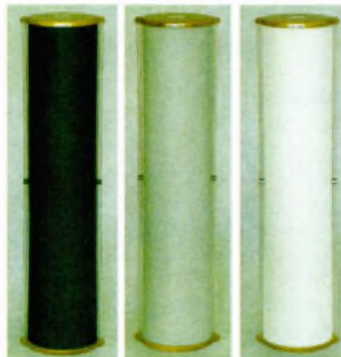
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# Sony NWZ-Z1060 £299

In comes the heavy artillery from a company that once owned the portable market in a way no one else since has...

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:** Japan/China  
**SIZE:** 134.4x70.9x11.1mm  
**WEIGHT:** 156g  
**FEATURES:**  
• Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, GPS, microHDMI  
• touchscreen, built-in speaker, recorder  
• 3.5mm minijack  
• Mac OS 10, Windows 7 or later  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Sony  
**TELEPHONE:** 0844 324 7129  
**WEBSITE:** sony.co.uk

**T**hirty or so years after the original Walkman comes this, and what a sleek beast it is, looking and feeling very different to the other Android devices – and even the Apples. Only Sony could make something as classy and sophisticated as this – all that heritage still counts for something.

Vital statistics are similar to the Samsung, with a 4.3 inch touchscreen with 800x480 resolution. It runs a 1GHz processor with 512MB, and there's a 32GB media storage onboard. Factor in an FM radio, GPS, micro HDMI and USB ports and it covers every base featurewise. Sony also boasts about its S-Master MX 'high quality digital amplifier'.

Despite being Android-based, its music player app is easily accessible and the processor speed makes the unit a lot more responsive than the Philips, for example. Overall build is top-notch, more scratch resistant

than the stainless steel-backed Apples. Battery life is so-so, at around 20 hours between charges playing music. All important music files are supported, including FLAC.

## Sound quality

"Very listenable, better than average", was how the first panelist described the Sony. That wasn't saying *that* much given the performance of some other designs. Certainly the Sony had a slightly warmer and fruitier balance than the Cowon, investing a sense of body into the proceedings, but like the iPod Classic, it wasn't quite what it seemed all the same...

"Nothing nasty about it", was what another said. On the *Riviera Affair*, the Sony set up a big, fulsome sound, with a decent amount of space between the loudspeakers. It seemed to have a degree of grip on things that the Apples lacked, and this was especially apparent on the rolling basslines of K-Klass's *Rhythm is a Mystery* – the Sony got a move on and served up a fairly enjoyable sound. There was no sense of it struggling to squeeze out of the speakers; it was more commanding.

However, listen harder and it suddenly didn't look so good; the female vocal line on K-Klass sounded rather clipped and anaemic. Kate Bush didn't do terribly well either; the track works on subtlety and the Sony didn't have much of it. It made the *Riviera Affair* sound slightly synthetic, despite it being a beautiful sixties analogue recording using all acoustic instruments. The panel agreed that it did well with the crunching Rolling Stones-style rock of the Dandy Warhols, giving a commanding rendition of that infectious lead guitar riff, but still it felt a tad plastic and cymbals sounded particularly processed.

Overall, the top layer of the Sony's performance was excellent; it's obviously been voiced for showroom appeal, but listen beyond that and like some others here, it disappoints. It sounded synthetic compared to the Samsung; the latter impressed with its tonal accuracy whereas the Sony delighted with its bombast. But after

a while you'll always end up wanting the former. All three panelists liked the drama the Sony had compared to the edgy iPod Classic, the innocuous Touch and the dry Cowon, but still it wasn't really right sonically.

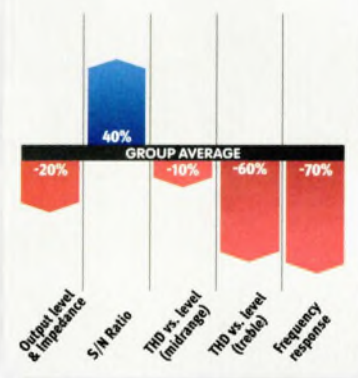
Overall then, we found this to be an interesting machine that sees Sony in a combative mood, trying to clean up in an area that it once owned. Still, it's not quite there yet, as the sonics don't comprehensively beat Apple or indeed Samsung. All the same, it's a lovely gadget, and state-of-the-art as Android goes.

## ON TEST

This little device has by far the highest output level of the group, though you'll need to back it down one notch from max to prevent premature clipping (and possibly premature deafness). Re. 460mV, the A-wtd S/N amounts to 91dB and distortion between 0.01-0.07% through bass and mid, falling to a vanishingly low 0.0007% at -10dBFS as the analogue stage is less 'stressed'. Treble distortion is very high at over 3% at max output and typically >1% (THD + noise) at lower levels as the swell of ultrasonic requantisation noise from Sony's DSP/DAC takes over.

This is also the only player to exhibit an obviously modified response – a gentle bass lift below 200Hz that reaches +1.3dB at 20Hz and a (less audible) rise in treble of +0.6dB/20kHz. Also, if you have low-ish impedance 'phones, the Sony's high 27ohm source impedance may cause it to sound less 'loud' than anticipated. **PM**

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

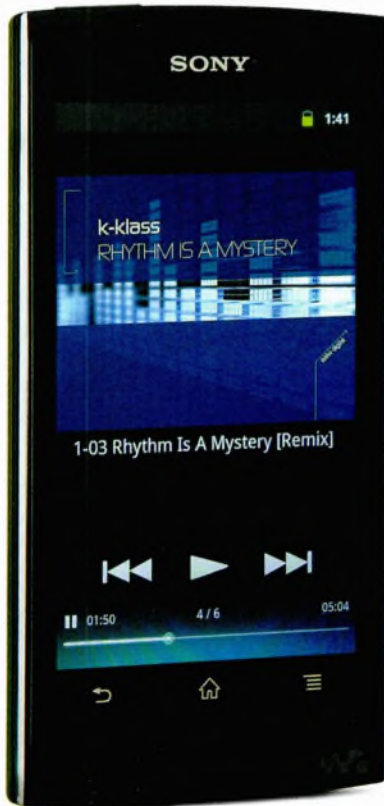
**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Cool, understated styling; superlative build; massive feature count and flexibility

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Sound is a little artificial and processed, albeit punchy and fun

**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Swish high end portable, let down only by middling sonics

**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

### OVERALL





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# Listening test verdict

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

Apple's iPod Touch is *surely* a modern classic. Lest we forget, it came out before the iPhone, and introduced a completely new paradigm to the portables market; a gorgeous screen, touch navigation and apps. Rival manufacturers must have been gnashing their teeth, Sony especially! All that still holds today; it's a lovely thing – except when you listen to music via its analogue output, when it's literally lacklustre. The sound isn't bad, just lacking any sort of *joie de vivre*, which is one thing a portable should have, surely? In this rather close-knit group, its so-so sonics via the headphone socket mark it down.

The Cowon is a cheap and cheerful little player that's quite nice to use, has a reasonable range of functions and is conveniently small. Its sound is quite alright; fairly tidy but tonally a tad thin and not exactly stirring stuff. We liked it, and many others will too – considering its low, low price.

The Philips does fractionally better overall. It's a solid, affordable product with a reasonably smooth and tidy sound – in some ways better than the Apple iPod Classic and the Sony. It offers a lot for the money and is cheaper than some rivals here. Yet it still feels too plasticky, and the Android OS is sluggish, which spoils the user experience slightly.

The Apple iPod Classic comes closer to the top of the group, on account of its huge storage, flexibility and punchy, solid sound – allied to that lovely Apple build and iTunes connectivity of course. Then there's the entire ecosystem of iDevices available. Still, its lack of sonic finesse via the analogue output holds it back, and keeps it from cleaning up.

Ah, Sony! Once again, it snatches defeat from the jaws of victory. The NWZ-Z1060 is a gorgeous thing – nicer in some ways than even the Apple iPod Touch, and certainly more versatile. Yet the sound isn't equal to the winner of the group, being a tad too synthetic to really make your music magic...



I used to sigh at the mediocrity of Samsung products, but in recent years the company has been pushing ahead trenchantly. The Galaxy S only goes to underline this point. I still think its styling is nothing special, and it doesn't make you feel like a rockstar when using it. But the sound is very pleasing. Who could really want more at its low price?

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Make/model	Apple iPod Classic 160GB	Apple iPod Touch 8GB	Cowon iAudio 10 8GB	Philips GoGear Connect 3	Samsung Galaxy S WiFi 8GB	Sony NWZ-Z1060
Price	£199	£169	£110	£160	£159	£299
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Conclusion	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Key features	Monster hard drive stores masses of uncompressed music, but sound is so-so	A thing of beauty and loveliness – until you listen to music via its headphone socket	Small, cheap, decent sounding, does the job without complaint – this will be enough for many	A solid performer with a decently smooth sound, but really needs a faster processor for ease of use	No, we didn't think it was going to win either, but it did! Great feature count, clean and open sonics	So near yet so far – seminal piece of tech sullied by a rather processed sound
Wi-Fi	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
apps	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
headphones	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
memory card slot	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Android	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

## TRY WITH THESE

### IPOD DOCK: Arcam drDock **£199**

Slotting this between an iPod and your system will pay sonic dividends. Apple's portables aren't the greatest sounding devices via their analogue outs, so why not squirt the digits out to a DAC? They're still not the world's greatest digital transports even then, but certainly sound very tidy driving a decent digital convertor. The drDock lets you do just this.



### SPEAKER SYSTEM: Harman Kardon Go and Play II **£299**

Consistently overlooked and underrated, this system sticks a resolute two fingers up at its pricier opposition from the likes of B&W. It sounds absolutely superb; oodles of power, a smooth tonal balance and none of the raucous naughtiness at high volumes you usually get from products at this price. It sports an iPod dock connector, but also a 3.5mm minijack input.



### HEADPHONES: JAYS v-JAYS **£49.95**

The great thing about hi-fi is that there are some products which come along to challenge the laws of audio physics. These headphones are a prime example; the question you have to ask yourself is how can something this inexpensive sound this good? Frankly, we don't know – but it does. Wonderfully clean, smooth and musical, the v-JAYS is a brilliant budget buy.





  
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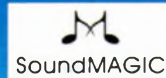
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# Invisible Touch

Logitech's Squeezebox Touch is the network music machine of the moment. **Malcolm Steward** shows how to make it disappear, to let the music's flavour flood out...

**A** recent visit to a hi-fi show convinced me that out there in the real world, the budget-priced Logitech Squeezebox Touch is clearly the nation's favourite network media player – by quite a margin. Surprisingly however, few of the great many players I saw appeared to be in any way modified. That was strange given the huge potential the Touch possesses and the wide variety of tweaks available for it. So we decided to try a few to see just how far the performance of the fairly self-effacing Squeezebox could be elevated.

There are obvious lines of attack here. First, the Squeezebox is constrained by its tupenny-ha'penny power supply, which seems to be little more than a parts-bin offering from the Far East. It's the sort of switched-mode device that one might expect to come with a mobile phone or a bedside clock-radio, and the type that's known to do precious little for sonic purity.

**Logitech's Squeezebox Touch network music player can almost be made to disappear from your hi-fi system, with some choice tweaking...**

You can also fine tune the Linux software that makes the Squeezebox function – remember the device is essentially nothing more than a single-function computer designed to grab and replay music from an external source. Hardware modifications are trickier of course, as they involve dismantling the Touch and working on its miniaturised

printed circuitboard. I don't think too many buyers will find that an appealing prospect, so that's for another discussion. It's worth noting that there are various steady-handed, soldering iron wielding companies that will carry out that sort of micro-tweaking for a price if you so wish.

## Electric shocks

When I wrote about the Touch two years ago, I remarked that CD and high-resolution FLAC files naturally sounded the best played through it – they were far superior to compressed, lossy MP3s. The files were understandably not as detailed as they were when played through the high-end Linn Klimax DS or the Naim NDX, but they nonetheless sounded vital and alive, and never sank to background or elevator music quality as one might expect.

Despite the Squeeze's bargain basement price then, its sound still offers an appreciable degree of subtlety. For example, it clearly

reveals deft brush work on a hi-hat cymbals by a drummer playing behind a female vocal. This really isn't the sort of polished performance one expects from a £200 streamer. Indeed, in some ways it's extraordinarily assured, enjoyable and authentic in musical terms. All in, the wee Touch punches well above its weight and

delivers a level of performance unexpected at this price. Even so, extended listening reveals that its stock switched-mode power supply isn't doing it any favours...

At its launch a couple of years ago, there wasn't the number of regulated, linear power supplies available to replace the Touch supply that there is today. For that reason, I briefly used a variable voltage linear supply purchased for around £20 from Maplin, which I set to feed the Touch with 5Volts DC. It was not perfect, but represented a worthwhile and clearly audible improvement over stock. Nowadays though, companies such as Mains Cables R Us and Russ Andrews offer linear regulated DC supplies dedicated to the Squeezebox. These vary, so it's best to see if you can negotiate a try-before-you-buy or a return-if-not-satisfied deal from the supplier.

This magazine has recently been very impressed by two such supplies from Mains Cables R Us, the standard at £195, and the

**Mains Cables R Us does bespoke aftermarket power supplies for the Touch, which offer a serious sonic improvement for modest money...**





'Ultimate' which retails for £450 and is Kimber-wired throughout. Both are built in Britain, not sourced from a Chinese manufacturer. They feature two boxes – the larger one contains the mains circuitry; the smaller one, which is fitted close to the plug, contains the final filtration circuit and can be positioned closer to the Touch. They also both offer the opportunity to experiment with mains cables, well worthwhile in sonic terms if you're thus inclined.

I found that both aftermarket power supplies yield real sonic dividends, with a reduction in glare and a general smoothing and easing of the sound. Things become more natural and

less artificial. Running just the stock power supply, the sound is far from ideally focused and can seem brittle and insubstantial at times. It rather depends upon what music is playing – I found bass could sound solid and meaty, while guitar and percussion seemed tinselly and fey. Voices seemed breathy and lacked body. Even playing through my Naim NAP 250 bi-amplified NEAT XL10 loudspeakers, the sound lacked genuine conviction.

When the Squeezebox Touch was powered by the 'basic' Mains Cables R Us supply, the difference was dramatic. Percussion had

vitality and sparkle, and the singer's voice had substance and body. Wobble's bass had more precision, weight and rhythmic bounce. It also gained texture and depth – it sounded more like a string vibrating in contrast to the smooth mush of the synths behind it. There was a real contrast between the western and middle-eastern instrumentation on the track – those different intonations stood out markedly.

The contrast between the supplies was most marked on *Om Namah Shiva*, with its intricate mix of female voice, Wobble's insistent bass, and the vivacious percussion.



## FEATURE

# SQUEEZEBOX TOUCH TWEAKING

Another important upgrade is how the Touch is linked your network; wireless is a no-no, and high quality Ethernet cabling can really make a difference...



It was apparent that with the basic power supply, one could play the system louder and more comfortably than with the supplied Logitech wall-wart. Dynamically it sounded more controlled and more revealing in terms of texture and instrumental detail, as evinced by Acoustic Alchemy's *Stealing Hearts*, where it revealed playing and instrumental noise and a vast range of dynamics on the acoustic guitar. In quieter passages it was clear that the basic upgrade power supply was generating much lower hash in the background. So overall, the sound was far more credible in musical terms, a great deal more detailed and informative.

Moving to the Ultimate supply, and the 24-bit/96kHz Acoustic Alchemy album sounded convincingly like a hi-res rip, as did the baroque guitar on the William Carter recording of Fernando Sor's early works, although being 24/192 there was appreciably more air and detail evident. Carter's guitar sounded richer and more harmonious, as though he'd had it restrung for the performance. Jah Wobble's *Om Namah Shiva* was more vivid; the percussion and voice in the opening bars had an instantly noticable and tangible presence, being distinctly positioned in the soundstage. David Sylvian's *Money for All* demonstrated just how well the bass was controlled with the Ultimate supply; it was extended and powerful, while being appropriately dry and tight.

### Net set

Any Squeezebox Touch owner who auditions a good aftermarket power supply will hear a real improvement then, but this isn't the only way to boost your sound. Running a nice, clean, efficient network naturally helps signal

transmission, too. In my own home system, my Network Attached Storage drives reside in my office and connect through a router to an Ethernet link to my music room, where a 1GBit switch directs the incoming signal to whichever renderer I happen to be auditioning. That switch, although redundant if you have only a single streamer connected to your hi-fi, also benefits from a linear, regulated mains power supply replacing its standard switched-mode power supply. That means less noise is injected into the mains and there is less interference around the hi-fi system.

The general consensus in the industry, amongst manufacturers of network music players, is that wired Ethernet connection between the router and network music player sounds considerably superior to when it's hooked up wirelessly. Indeed, I have Wi-Fi connected to the network solely so that I can control playback using an iPad or iPhone.

If you do decide to avoid Wi-Fi, then I'd also recommend the use of a good Ethernet cable, such as the Meicord Cat 6 (see *HFC 359*), to connect the streamer to the switch. Some will

## The general consensus amongst manufacturers of network music players is that wired Ethernet sounds superior to Wi-Fi...

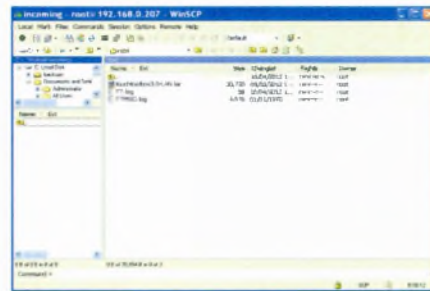
find this a controversial statement, but I'd suggest you try it out before crying foul. Just as with the switch to using wired instead of wireless connections, running better quality wire brings a general easing and smoothing of the sound. There's less of a sense that you're listening to digital audio, and you begin to hear far beyond the surface of the music.

### The toolbox

The final bit of fine-tuning, with which you can easily while away a day or more, comes courtesy of a renowned German blogger, Klaus, a.k.a a Soundcheck. You upload his Touch Toolbox 3.0 software into the root directory of the Squeezebox Touch's memory, and then control various settings and functions through a terminal session on a network attached computer.

All you need do to obtain the Toolbox if you're a Windows user is visit [soundcheck-audio.blogspot.co.uk](http://soundcheck-audio.blogspot.co.uk) and download the files WinSCP and PuTTY, and then the TT3.0 file. Read the instructions on the blog carefully, then load the toolbox and unpack the tar archive. Then open a terminal session and type 'tt -i' (without the quotes) and the toolbox will be initialised and the Squeezebox will reboot with various modifications engaged.

Before starting this procedure you will need to ensure that everything is connected to the network and running, particularly the Squeezebox Touch, the server running Squeezebox Server, and the laptop/computer holding all the files just mentioned. It is also useful to know the IP address of your server



Soundcheck's Touch Toolbox 3.0 is a great software gadget to fine-tune the operation of the Squeezebox; it lets you turn off the display, for example...

and your Squeezebox. Because the procedure can involve a number of reboots, you might find it best if you ensure that the Squeezebox has the same IP while you play with the toolbox. To avoid trouble when your computer tries to converse with the Touch, make certain that SSH is switched on in the unit. To do so go to 'Settings: Advanced: Remote Login: Enable SSH'. Fail to enable SSH, and as soon as you try to connect using WinSCP you will very quickly become very familiar with an annoying error message, one of the many that, unlike most, you cannot simply ignore!

Once you have the toolbox in full operation you will find a host of settings to play around with, and assess their effect on what you hear. For example 'tt -x' temporarily turns off the Touch's display, while 'tt -k' kills all unnecessary daemons, which is Linux-speak for what Windows users refer to as background processes and services. There is another to tweak the size of the ALSA buffer, if your sound breaks up because of over-runs. Note this is the Linux talking to the hardware buffer and has nothing to do with data flowing in from the network. One of the best tweaks is disabling the display, which you don't need if you are driving the Touch with an iPad – the sound improves markedly with that noisy screen off.

Before you close the 'Soundcheck' blog, it is worth having a good snoop around because there is a lot of useful information to be had there. You will find, for example, that Klaus is a fan of decent quality Ethernet cabling, and that he has no time for the 'bits is bits, it's all digital' brigade. You might even like to send Klaus a PayPal donation to thank him for all the effort he has put into writing the toolkit and to reward him for his continued support by way of various forums. ●

### TOUCH OF GENIUS

So there you have it – Logitech's wee Squeezebox Touch network music player can almost be made to disappear from your hi-fi system, with some choice tweaking. How much money you think is worth spending to elevate the performance of this £200 unit is up to you, but it's easy to do and highly enjoyable – and isn't that what this hobby is supposed to be all about? If your Touch ends up costing you £900, does that really matter if your music sounds fabulous?



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# Carbon mating

Add a carbon-fibre tonearm to a budget Pro-Ject turntable, and the stylish Debut Carbon is the result. **Channa Vithana** meets and greets it...

**I**t's hard to believe this now, but there was a time, around fifteen years ago, when it looked like vinyl was heading for that great format graveyard in the sky. It was surely going to rest in peace alongside such luminaries as Stereo 8 and Elcaset, or so it seemed! But that didn't happen. And in the UK, one small but significant reason was Pro-Ject...

Just as all the major turntable manufacturing names moved out of affordable vinyl, in came this little-known company. A series of

well-designed, low-cost turntables (including some very high-value packages with bundled high-quality Ortofon cartridges) appeared – and the funny thing was that people bought them. It was quite counter intuitive, given the prevailing tide, but the brand bucked the market in quite a remarkable way.

Nowadays, the range of Pro-Ject decks, tonearms, phono stages and now audio devices (see their Box designs for amplifiers, etc.) is huge, extending even to supplying Linn with a 9cc carbon arm for the Sondek

## ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Pro-Ject Debut Carbon  
**ORIGIN:** Czech Republic  
**TYPE:** belt-drive turntable  
**WEIGHT:** 5.6kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 415x118x320mm  
**FEATURES:**

- 33/45RPM manual speed change
- 300mm pressed steel platter and felt mat
- stainless steel main bearing
- carbon-fibre tonearm
- phono socket termination
- supplied Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge

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Majik LP12 package. Hailing from the Czech Republic, the company makes almost everything itself at its own factory.

This ethos of quality, low-cost designs continues with the new £300 Debut Carbon turntable which features, amongst other improvements in isolation, a rather well-designed carbon-fibre tonearm, a material that isn't normally seen anywhere near a budget-priced deck such as this. The arm fitted to the Debut Carbon is similar in looks to most other Pro-Ject carbon variants and is superbly styled and much easier and more pleasurable to operate than most by use of its sleek and angular headshell arm-lift lever near the cartridge mounting screws.

The plinth is made from MDF and is finished in a high mirror gloss of which there are various colours, including black – the review sample came in a fetching deep blue. The rear features sturdy phono sockets and grounding screw that enable different and/or better interconnects to connect to your phono stage or amplifier, while a switch box to the front left underside of the plinth





controls the new, improved AC power supply – this is where the power lead comes out, which is terminated in a moulded three-pin plug instead of a cheap ‘wall wart’ plug top power supply. I was able to use Chord Company Anthem 2 interconnects which cost about the same as the Debut Carbon, which shows how the Pro-Ject can be ‘tuned’ to the owner’s needs and also that it can take pricier interconnects if needed.

Speed change is manual, but Pro-Ject supplies a nifty little key to switch the belt around the subplatter onto the appropriately sized spindle connected to the motor so that any oil or ‘fingerprint grease’ doesn’t spoil the belt, which can degrade sound quality. The motor/spindle interface continues to use rubbery O-ring suspension, like previous Pro-Ject decks, but now also adds Sorbothane damping material to its mounts for better compliance and improved isolation.

The same damping material is also used within the counterweight at the back of the carbon tonearm, for similar gains in sound quality, says Pro-Ject. At the base of the plinth

## The Debut Carbon really surprised with its ability to reproduce voice and instruments

there are slightly compliant feet that also help to minimise vibration by keeping it away from the sensitive motor and belt components.

In use, the carbon tonearm was a joy due to its most fine ergonomic and aesthetic design, but I had to get used to the armrest being U-shaped (rather than a reverse C), which meant having to lift the tonearm up and down every time instead of across like most other designs when a record needed changing. Build quality is good, but feels delicate and lightweight in comparison to its rival Rega RP1, and I needed to readjust to this because I kept on accidentally using too much force when cueing a record – rather like going from a BMW with its cramp-inducing weight-training foot pedals to the more delicate types found in a modern Citroën...

Accepting this readjustment in operation, the Debut Carbon is

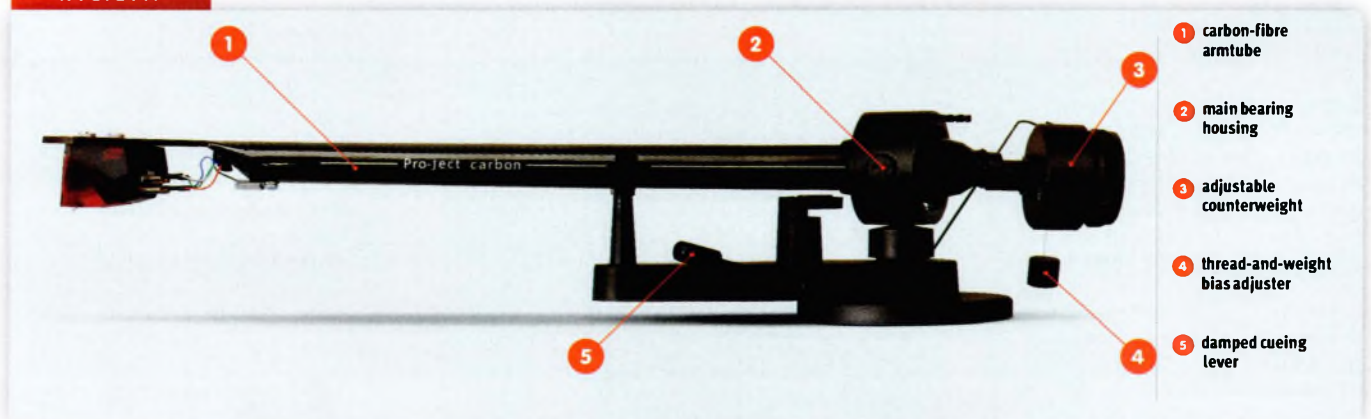
however, very well finished in all aspects from its mirror gloss paint to the arm lift lever and to the rear counterweight; all are smoothly finished and crafted. Along with its slick operating carbon-fibre tonearm then, it offers a lot of value for a budget-priced turntable.

### Sound quality

I set up the Debut Carbon with the recommended tracking force of 1.8g for the Ortofon 2M Red cartridge and removed the lid and its hinges from the plinth, and then placed the deck on a high-quality Audiophile BetaBase equipment rack for good isolation, making sure everything was level and run-in with a whole side of an LP played first, as cartridges always sound better this way.

Getting up and running is relatively easy to do, although if you are not sure about cartridge tracking weight adjustment then get the dealer to do this for you. In action, the Debut Carbon really surprised with its ability to reproduce the tone of voice and instruments in all the music I used. *The Colour of Spring* by Talk Talk revealed wonderful depth to the sound with good, soulful vocal and music playing throughout. The vocals by Mark Hollis were excellent for the price, with his trademark plaintive yet emotional delivery brought to the fore, while piano and percussion were also most enjoyable because I could follow the phrasing and crisp tones set out within the recording. This was especially so when I cued up the dynamic recording of *Life’s What You Make It*, where the Pro-Ject reproduced the hammering or ‘hard’ hit piano keys (played by Hollis) which drives the piece along, while the expansive soaring guitar melody lifted the harmonies to create an immersive, soulful experience.

### IN SIGHT



## Q&A

CHANNA WITHANA TALKS TO LAURENCE ARMSTRONG OF HENLEY DESIGNS...



**CV: Who is the Debut aimed at?**

**LA:** Those upgrading from budget decks and those returning to vinyl with medium sized collections.

**How is Pro-Ject able to include a carbon tonearm and Ortofon cartridge in a turntable in such a low-cost package?**

We have a superb supplier of carbon that is able to provide a quality material for a very sensible price. Only by manufacturing in quantity can we achieve this value. Henley used to be Ortofon UK and started making the Pro-Ject/Ortofon package many years ago. Because we distribute both products we were able to negotiate harder. Overtime, we introduced Ortofon to the Pro-Ject team and they now buy direct...and also use Ortofon in nearly all countries.

**What sound quality improvement does the carbon tonearm reveal in comparison to an aluminium/metal variant?**

The very low tube mass and high rigidity give us a very fast and agile arm, allowing superb stylus tracking. Resonance qualities are also excellent with the combined result being a far cleaner, more articulate sound with tighter bass.

**How does the new power supply improve sound quality compared to a standard version?**

...the change has been to a 240V A/C power supply. This gives us greater speed accuracy with lower resonance and also complies with the new 1 Watt standby regulations.

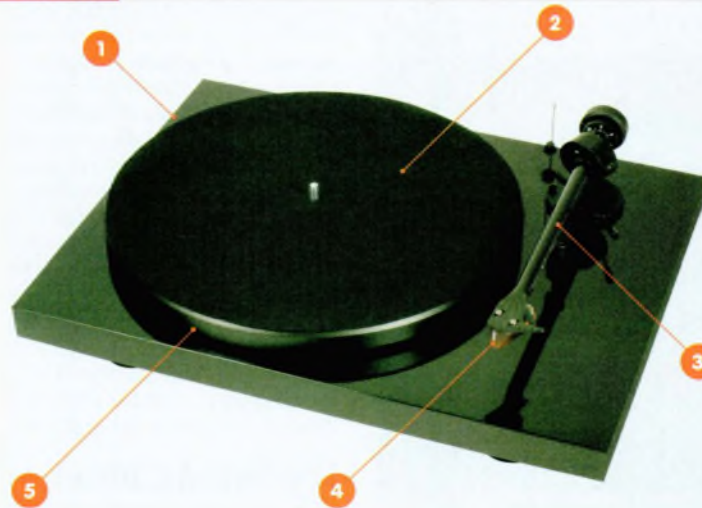
**Does Pro-Ject still manufacture and finish everything in-house in the factory (even down to individual screws, etc.), including the carbon for the tonearms?**

Almost, except the carbon. This is a particularly nasty material to handle so is done off site.

**How does Pro-Ject do its gloss/mirror finishes to the turntable?**

It's a spray paint. Many coats, reworked to a very high polish.

## IN SIGHT



- 1 gloss black MDF plinth well finished
- 2 felt platter mat damps vibrations
- 3 carbon-fibre tubed tonearm nice to use
- 4 Ortofon 2M Red cartridge supplied
- 5 300mm pressed steel platter



## HOW IT COMPARES

**THE MAIN RIVAL** to the Debut Carbon is, of course, Rega and the Pro-Ject sits in between Rega's RP1 and RP3 in terms of price. Both the RP1 and RP3 have the familiar Rega attributes of superb musical timing and well-oiled engineering build quality in operation that this Pro-Ject can't quite match.

Indeed, the RP1 (which also comes fitted with a cartridge) offers greater scale and body than the Pro-Ject with classical and rock music, but the Pro-Ject wins out on sheer, meticulous detail retrieval and delicacy. So specifically in this sense it is a winner on more cerebral grounds, whereas the Rega has less incisiveness or forensic qualities, preferring a more romantic feel to music by comparison.

Playing the almost completely different follow up, *Spirit of Eden* showcased the ability of the Debut Carbon to forensically retrieve detail and minute intonations in the music. This time there were crunching and searing electric guitars etched forth and then subdued back within long moments of quiet build up – so dynamically it had no problems.

Spinning a wonderful 1959 Brahms Piano Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Karajan revealed similar traits of intricacy, detail retrieval and meticulousness in the rendition of the piano played by Hans Richter-Haaser, and the sweeping orchestration. As a result, the Pro-Ject was able to convey delicacy in this recording surprisingly well for its budget price – the piano tinkled along beautifully. Everything was neatly placed within the context of the orchestration, and individual instruments present in the recording were clear and distinct. This is at odds with what's expected from a deck of this price, which normally paints in rather broad brush strokes – a piano could get lost or overly compressed on a lesser budget turntable.

The only thing lacking was a sense of body and scale within the classical piece, but there were no such shortcomings with *Mid Air*, the solo LP by Paul Buchanan. Here, his plaintive vocals were beautifully rendered and the deft piano playing was also tonally convincing.

Of course, the Debut Carbon isn't a universal panacea. By the standards of pricier decks from Rega, Michell and indeed Pro-Ject itself, you'll not get the sheer size, scale or dimensionality that the vinyl format is capable of.

Yet the little Pro-Ject skilfully avoids any of the many traps set by the LP format; budget decks can often sound speed-unstable or edgy and the Debut does not. Its worst sins are those of omission – things are just a little opaque and diffuse compared to higher priced designs.

## Conclusion

Approximately fourteen years ago I compared the then Pro-Ject 1 turntable (about £200) to a (then very well respected) Dual CS-505, and found that the Pro-Ject was superior at detail retrieval, and importantly could play rock music much better than the Dual. Here and now, I find the new Debut Carbon with much the same meticulousness and even-handedness in reproducing music, but with a better tonality to voices and instruments alike.

So, well priced and finely finished at £300, it offers excellent value with the Ortofon 2M Red (which costs £80 separately). For the money, it's an essential audition. ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Highly detailed and revealing sound; excellent finish; well-designed carbon-fibre tonearm

VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** Build is a little lightweight

BUILD QUALITY



**WE SAY:** Another high value turntable from Pro-Ject that majors on information retrieval

FEATURES



OVERALL







**“D&W Aural Pleasure”**

**Limited Edition**

**99 pairs in Phosphor Bronze (£40,000)**

**5 pairs in Stirling Silver (£200,000)**

**1 pair in 18ct Gold (£3,000,000)**



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



# Small wonders



TEAC's A-H01 and DS-H01 show that it is possible to make decent hi-fi separates in a dock-sized case, reckons **Jason Kennedy**...

**T**EAC didn't invent the concept of small, high-quality separates – that accolade arguably goes to Aurex. But it has done a better job than most at bringing the genre credibility, with its Reference Series components in the past. Now, it's downsized still further with its H01 range. The first fruit of this largely digital audio project was the UD-H01 DAC, that Ed Selley wrote about last year (*HFC* 354). This has a headphone amplifier onboard, but lacks preamp functionality.

The latest members of the clan are the A-H01 integrated amplifier and matching DS-H01 iPod dock. The former has a Tenor asynchronous, class 2 USB input, which is good for sample rates up to 192kHz, so long as you download the requisite driver for both Mac and PC. Being a Mac user with a rather lax attitude to RTFM (reading the flipping manual), it took me a while to figure out why the unit would only accept a USB signal for only a few seconds before wandering into distortion. Software drivers are not usually necessary to get signal

## ▣ DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** TEAC A-H01 and TEAC DS-H01  
**ORIGIN:** Japan/China  
**TYPE:** integrated amplifier and dock  
**WEIGHT:** 5.6kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 215x61x215mm each  
**FEATURES:**  
 • (A-H01) power output: 30w/8 ohms, 60w/4 ohms  
 • 32-bit/192kHz DAC  
 • digital inputs: asynchronous USB, coax, TOSLINK  
 • analogue inputs: 2x RCA phono  
 • (DS-H01) digital audio input from iPod/iPhone/iPad  
 • 24bit/192kHz D/A converter (Burr-Brown PCM11796)  
 • remote control RC-1269  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** TEAC  
**TELEPHONE:** 0845 130 2511  
**WEBSITE:** teac.co.uk

into a USB DAC, but this state of affairs is clearly on the move. The requisite download was found and easily installed for a rather more rewarding experience...

It accepts all the standard sample rates from 44.1kHz upwards, with no need for the computer to do anything but send the native PCM signal. The DAC onboard is a 32-bit/192kHz Burr-Brown and all signals are upsampled to this rate, including any analogue sources connected to the two RCA phono inputs. There are three digital inputs of the aforementioned USB, coaxial and optical varieties to choose from and you can select between them on the beautifully crafted front panel.

The power amplifier section itself uses B&O's ICEpower modules. Such Class D devices are the only game in town if you want even the A-H01's modest 30 watts from a case this size – thanks to its Class D's low power consumption and heat emission.

Another nod to contemporary living is the remote, this is a fairly small and flat handset with a style of button that will be familiar to those who struggled with Sinclair computers, but it works



and will control an iPod nestled in the matching DS-H01 dock. This is quite big as dedicated docks go, but there's no denying the appeal that a stack of compact separates of this build quality has. At just under £200 it's more expensive than most docks, but does have a decent array of connections on the back. These include analogue outputs, both flavours of digital output and video via composite or S-video. Those into video streaming from their Apple iDevices will note the absence of an HDMI output, but this dock is really designed for audio purposes.

The iPad, iPod or iPhone you place on the DS-H01's flip-covered plug can be remotely operated with the same small handset that runs the A-H01, but you get one in each box. As inexpensive remotes go this is one of the most appealing thanks to the use of AAA batteries, rather than button cells, which gives it some depth and weight. Whether you can actually read the display will, of course, depend on its proximity, only an iPad will remain legible if it's more than a metre or two away. The dock harbours another Burr-Brown DAC chip, but on this occasion a more conventional 24/192 variety, which itself is still impressive.

### Sound quality

I kicked things off by attaching the A-H01 to a pair of PMC twenty.24 floorstanders. These are particularly dynamic, revealing and coherent speakers, but not quite sensitive enough for the modest power of the amp, it transpired. This only becomes apparent at higher levels, but there is a lack of low end power most of the

time. The TEAC worked well enough with more refined and smooth material, and Fleetwood Mac's *Songbird* offers up plenty of soundstage depth and is both timely and detailed. Dynamics and timing are both good, too – not as strong as competitors like the Rega Brio-R perhaps, but what it lacks in the welly department is more than made up for with refinement.

Overall, this is actually a notably clean, open and resolute amp for the money, one that can easily reveal the differences between source

## The A-H01 delivers a whiff of the high end at a highly affordable price point...

components, as well as letting you appreciate the emotional message in the music. I was particularly beguiled by the lyrical clarinet at the end of *My Heart* by the Gaddabouts, a nice tune with an even nicer ending that the TEAC makes clear is well recorded. Meshell Ndegeocello's *Peace Beyond Passion* is a pretty heavyweight album that worked well with this amp/speaker pairing, the delivery revealed much of the funk, if not all of the power that's on the disc...

Still, I thought it time to substitute a more appropriate loudspeaker, in the fine form of the Q Acoustics Q2020i. Results weren't as good as hoped however, the sound showing why TEAC has fitted a subwoofer output. With smaller speakers the limited power means limited bass energy.

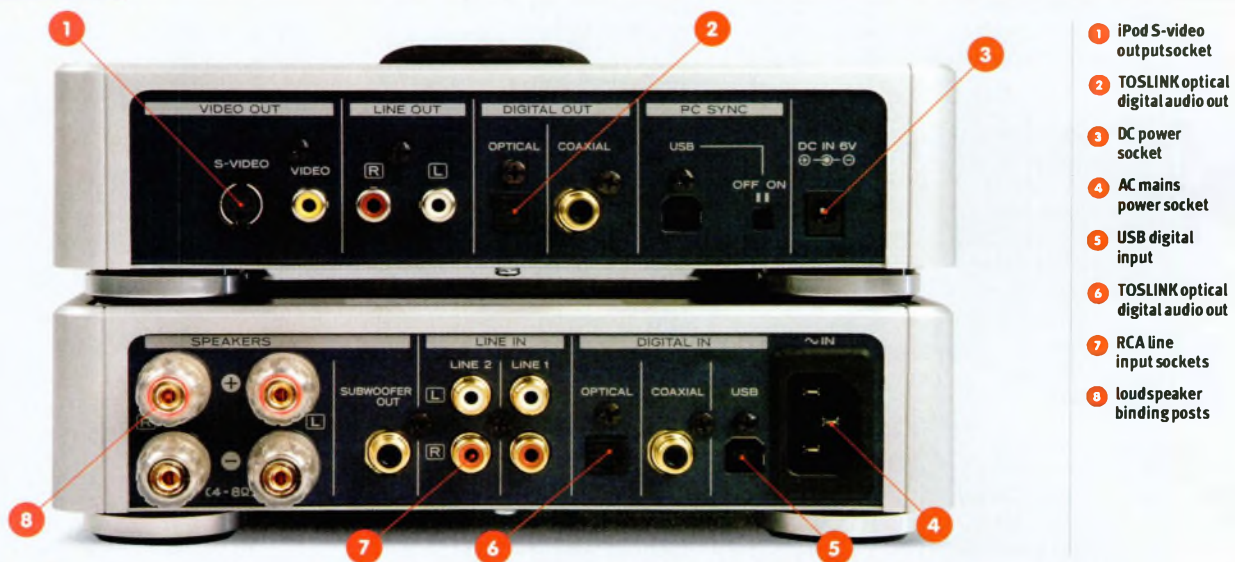
This doesn't stop it producing image scale, but it lacks low end impact. If it's a budget speaker you're using then, try a larger and more efficient one – such as Q Acoustics' own 2050i.

To find what the TEAC was really capable of, I next tried my reference Bowers & Wilkins 802 Diamond. Admittedly not a typical choice for a £300 amp but it proved a highly entertaining and well balanced combination! Images were precisely placed in a three dimensional soundstage, and there was a hear-through-quality to the presentation that belies the price of the amplifier. It prompted a comparison between the coaxial digital input and the analogue using a Leema Antila CD player as source, the DAC on the latter (a three grand player) made itself heard in a more relaxed, 'analogue sound', but the difference wasn't huge...

USB is probably the TEAC's strongest digital input if you have something decent to stick into it. I got some highly engaging results with a rip of Jeff Beck and Joss Stone's *I Put A Spell On You*. This was presented with plenty of body in the voice and growl from the guitar.

I also gave the amp a spin with the JBL Studio 530, which was a bit of a punt to be honest, but proved a positive pairing, the speaker's revealing midband working well with the amp's very clean, clear and detailed character. It even managed to extract some juicy bottom end from this relatively small and not unduly sensitive speaker, and I spent a good while simply enjoying the music and forgetting about the means of delivery.

### CONNECTIONS



- 1 iPod S-video output socket
- 2 TOSLINK optical digital audio out
- 3 DC power socket
- 4 AC mains power socket
- 5 USB digital input
- 6 TOSLINK optical digital audio out
- 7 RCA line input sockets
- 8 loudspeaker binding posts

## Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPOKE WITH TEAC REPRESENTATIVE ANDY NAPHTHINE ABOUT THE A/DS-H01...



**JK:** Who would want an amp like this when they could get something full sized for a similar price?

**AN:** It's designed for somebody who wants a second system or one to go with computer audio. It's very desk-friendly and the asynchronous USB input means that it's capable of getting the best out of a PC or Mac.

### How does the DS-H01 fit into this scenario?

The dock takes a pure digital output from an iPod, iPad or iPhone, which it can convert with its own Burr-Brown 24-bit/192 kHz D/A DAC or the A-H01 via one of the digital outputs. You might have music on your phone that you want to play without putting it on the computer, or you might not want to turn the computer on. The DS-H01 also has a switchable 'sync' USB interface, will charge the docked device and comes with a remote control that will operate the audio functions.

### Why use a Class D amplifier?

It runs in Class D because of its very small physical size; you can't get decent quality power out of a box this big with traditional power amp stages.

### Why ICEpower rather than alternative Class D technologies?

ICEpower was chosen because it is one of the best sounding modules available, which is the most important factor. It is also a very reliable.

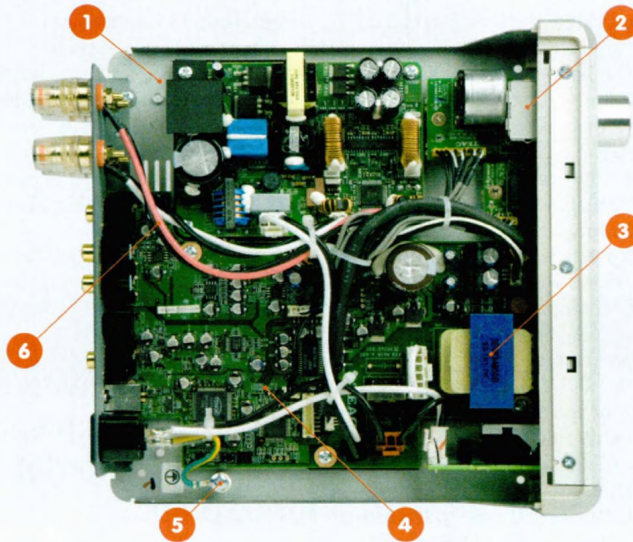
### I've found the A-H01 works better with more substantial/expensive speakers; why is this?

Probably because power doubles into four ohm impedances and some larger speakers are more efficient and thus easier to drive.

### What appropriately priced loudspeakers and sub would you recommend for the A-H01?

As all speakers sound different, it's a very personal choice. I would suggest going to a decent hi-fi shop and having an audition. Check out the BADA website for a list of stores that will offer a wide range of speakers and demonstrate the options available.

## IN SIGHT



- 1 thin pressed steel base
- 2 volume control potentiometer
- 3 frame type mains transformer
- 4 surface mount components used
- 5 casing ground terminal
- 6 internal speaker wiring

## HOW IT COMPARES

**ICEPOWER** is a Bang & Olufsen Class D amplification module that's found favour with a number of prestigious brands, including Bowers & Wilkins, MartinLogan and Pioneer. Its advantage is that ICEpower output stages (and indeed all Class D output devices) are very small and cool running. As such, many hi-fi companies use them in compact subwoofers, and it also suits amps like this, which is only eight inches square and two inches high in old money. It's impossible to get such power via Class AB from something of such diminutive dimensions.

There was a time when amps of this scale were unlikely to receive any attention because it wasn't possible to make a decent one, although a few tried with pre/power combos, but switching output stages have changed all that, as Micromega proved with its Hypex-powered AS-400 integrated. The TEAC has not got that sort of power, but this keeps things affordable without too significant a shortfall in fidelity.

The DS-H01 dock has a quirk whereby its on/off button doesn't elicit the circular blue light around it unless a device is put into the cradle. Once up and running it produces a pretty presentable sound when connected via the analogue outputs to a Leema Tucana amplifier, not quite as well timed nor clean a sound as an Arcam drDock, but a lively, well projected one that has plenty of space and an enthusiastic, if not terribly tight bass.

Switching over to its natural partner, the A-H01, the combo delivers a more snappy and taut sound that, while not totally neutral, makes enjoyable audio. The breakthrough came when taking the digital coaxial output of the dock and using the higher spec in the amp, now things started cookin' as jazz types like to say. The sound took on a degree of sophistication that you wouldn't expect from an iPod Touch, with an Alban Berg Beethoven quartet sounding positively inspiring. The scale and to an extent tonal rendering being close to CD, even if timing and image precision are a little lagging.

## Conclusion

The TEAC A-H01 is a remarkably revealing amplifier with a big feature count for the money. Rega's Brio-R and like as not several other budget integrations with more typical power stages can outgun it when it comes to the visceral side of things, but if your taste is for the finer things, or you have a speaker that's wideband and not too tough to drive, then it's a very capable partner.

The DS-H01 works extremely well with the amp's DAC, but is not such a strong contender as a standalone

dock. The A-H01, however, has what many others don't in its combination of digital and analogue inputs, full remote control and compact, yet classy casework. For the audiophile who is reluctant to attach his computer to the main system it's something of a Godsend. It delivers a whiff of the high end at a highly affordable price point – providing sympathetic speakers are attached to its output. ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT A-H01

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Clean and precise amplifier with a decent USB and headphone output

#### VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** Lacks power for smaller loudspeakers

#### BUILD QUALITY



**WESAY:** Properly partnered, this amplifier punches way above its weight and matches the fine iPod dock nicely

#### FEATURES



#### OVERALL



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT DS-H01

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Nicely built, good sound quality via coaxial digital output

#### VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** Not as timely nor revealing as it could be and lacks HDMI video output

#### BUILD QUALITY



**WESAY:** Works well with the partnering amp, but is less good value on its own terms, but does look good

#### FEATURES



#### OVERALL







# Naim arrives at Sevenoaks



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

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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.**



## KEF LS50 Speakers

Introducing the LS50 Mini Monitor speaker; an innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/Sa and designed to bring professional studio monitor concept into the home. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.



NEW

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

The Sansui brand is relaunching in the UK with a wide range of 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	WLD+201V	NETWORK PLAYER	£349
CDD201V	CD PLAYER	£199	WMH700L	NETWORK SYSTEM	£499

NEW

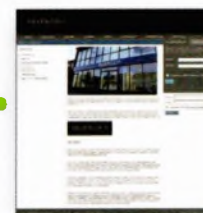
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**CYRUS CD6 SE2 • 6A CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER**  
With its impressive 40Watts per channel and six analogue inputs, the 6a amplifier is the perfect partner for the CD6 SE2 CD player.



**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.



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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 • FMJ A18 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.



**SANSUI WMH700L NETWORK SYSTEM**  
Two-box micro system comprising a CD player as well as a music streaming receiver and bookshelf speakers. Available in silver or black finishes.



**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**  
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**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 Spondor'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.



**BOWERS & WILKINS PM1**

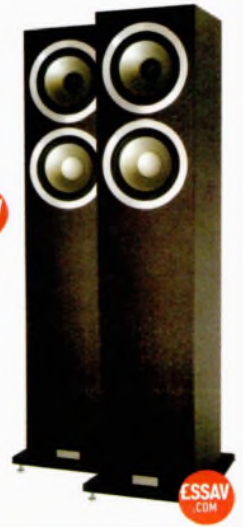
This luxury, compact loudspeaker is the latest in a long line of Bowers & Wilkins audiophile mini monitors. It offers an extremely high-quality audio performance and features several technological innovations including a new tweeter and ground-breaking cabinet design.



**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.

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NEW



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- rLINK OPTICAL / COAXIAL DAC ..... £149
- rBLINK BLUETOOTH DAC ..... £149

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**SEVENoaks**  
SOUND & VISION







# Three yourself



The Comete 30th Anniversary loudspeaker is a great advocate for the Triangle brand, says **Paul Messenger...**

**A**s part of the company's recent thirtieth birthday celebrations, Triangle introduced a couple of Anniversary models, which were effectively sonically tweaked versions of established favourites, dressed up in a 'real' black piano lacquer finish.

Through quite a number of iterations, the Comete has been a key model in Triangle's budget Esprit range for many years. It's a classic large standmount, of a size and shape that in truth used to be rather more popular than seems to be the case today.

This 30th Anniversary model is produced as a limited edition, and distinguished from the standard Esprit Ex version by featuring top class piano lacquer surface finish alongside superior quality cabling from the terminal block to the crossover PCB. The tweeter used here also has a machined-from-solid aluminium horn, similar to that used in the flagship Magellan range, in place of the moulding used by the standard model.

The £895 per pair price represents an increase of about thirty percent over the standard model, yet according to Triangle the production cost is actually some sixty percent higher, so it actually looks like a pretty good deal – provided of course, that you consider its classy surface finish to be a wholly worthwhile proposition.

Whatever one's personal opinion, black lacquer finish is the height of loudspeaker fashion right now, and the surface finish on this special Comete is exceptionally impressive and luxurious. This is apparently why Triangle has gone to Asia for its enclosures, because the lacquerwork available there is superior to examples it found in Europe. Exactly what is meant by 'real' (presumably as distinct from 'fake') piano lacquer is perhaps a matter for debate, but there's no denying the high quality of

the lacquerwork used here, probably because no fewer than six separate coats are used. Assembly is also done in Asia, as it's standard practice (at least amongst less costly speakers) for the cabinetmaker to put the speakers together from kits of ingredients, here supplied from France.

These include drive units that are characteristically Triangle in design and origin. The 160mm bass/mid driver has a cast chassis, a rubber half-roll surround, and a lightweight paper cone 120mm in diameter. A small fixed rubberised phase plug sits in the middle of the cone. The titanium dome tweeter diaphragm is set quite deep down a machined aluminium horn, finished in silver and brass brightwork.

The trend towards compact floorstanders would seem to be the main reason why larger standmounts have been dying out, but Triangle has never been a slave to the dictates of loudspeaker fashion. Certainly there's solid sonic engineering justification for the large standmount, because its dimensions are acoustically more



The Triangle's titanium dome tweeter is similar to the one used in the flagship Magellan range

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Triangle Comete  
30th Anniversary

**ORIGIN:** France/  
China

**TYPE:** 2-way  
standmount  
loudspeaker

**WEIGHT:**  
8.5kg

**DIMENSIONS:**  
(WxHxD)  
200x420x340mm

**FEATURES:**

- reflex bass-loading via twin front ports
- titanium dome tweeter loaded by machined alloy horn
- 160mm bass/mid driver with paper cone, rubber surround
- new and improved internal wiring
- 2 pairs of chunky multi-way terminals

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Triangle

**TELEPHONE:**  
00 33 3 23 75 38 20

**WEBSITE:**  
triangle-fr.com

favourable from the point of view of internal standing waves, and because it's also beneficial for the bass unit to operate in free space and well off the floor.

In all too many cases the execution of the large standmount has been hampered by ill-judged bass alignment, which might be another reason why so few examples still exist. Happily Triangle's Comete has long been the exception that proves the rule. When *HFC* last reviewed the Esprit ES version of the Comete some years ago, it was clear that this speaker managed to completely avoid the excessive mid-bass output that seems to plague so many large and medium size standmounts.

Indeed, the bass alignment of that Comete was sufficiently dry that some bass reinforcement by moving the speaker back away from the

## A fine musical communicator that does exactly what a standmount ought to do

anticipated free space location and towards the wall behind was found helpful and desirable. The same turned out to be true with this latest Anniversary version.

Notwithstanding the fact that its twin reflex ports are tuned to around 58Hz, which is very close to a major reinforcement mode in my listening room, the speaker's bass output remained quite dry when the speakers were sited well clear of walls. Moving them progressively closer to the wall behind provided the anticipated mid-bass boost, and best results were obtained with a gap of around 15cm between the back of the speakers and the wall.

## Sound quality

A major difficulty involved in describing the sound of a pair of loudspeakers is the dilemma of whether to use the very best system available irrespective of price, or to try and create a system that matches the price and status of the speakers. While the former might be unrealistic, it does at least give the speakers their best chance to strut their stuff, while results with the latter are likely to be altogether less predictable in practice.

Furthermore, it's all too easy to affect the sound by changing items further up the chain, so to some extent the review is therefore all about achieving a satisfactory state

## Q&A

PAUL MESSENGER SPEAKS TO TRIANGLE'S ERIC DUBOUAYS ABOUT THE COMETE...



**PM:** Can you tell me how much better – in your view – this special Anniversary version is over the 'standard' Comete model, which impressed me a while back?

**EB:** That's a tough question – quantifying is not easy when it comes to pleasure. I'd say it's fifty percent better. It's a different speaker altogether!

**I notice that this latest version of the Comete features three distinct improvements over the standard model – the internal wiring, the lacquer finish, and the cast alloy tweeter horn. Can you explain the relative impact these three factors have had on sound quality?**

The main improvement with the internal wiring comes from the cable we have used to connect the crossover to the terminals. That made a crucial change. Combined with a new bass/mid driver suspension, it accounts for a deeper bass with better tone. Lacquer looks good, that's a fact. But it also brings some more rigidity to the cabinet. The drivers thus benefit from a better mechanical reference and work in optimal conditions. The tweeter horn is solid aluminium, which is CNC machined and hand-polished. The horn shape is directly derived from the Magellan tweeter horn. The highs are sweeter, more refined, as you probably noticed. I think they also bring out more detail without any real form of harshness...

**I'm intrigued by the very real differences in sound that can be obtained by changing loudspeaker stands. Does Triangle have any particular views on this, and what sort of stand does the company recommend using?**

It's not so much the stand as what you do with it. If you already have stands, then I would strongly recommend that you fill them with sand or any other heavy and inert material. Here again, a better mechanical reference will push up the overall performance, especially in terms of soundstaging and bass response.

## HOW IT COMPARES

**THE SPARKLING** performance of Triangle's Comete 30th Anniversary model means that it's quite capable of providing stern competition for the standmount models included in group tests such as those in HFC 353. It maybe doesn't sound quite as smooth as models like the Amphion Argon 1 (£1,179-£1,269), as the Triangle's horn-loaded tweeter can draw a little too much attention to itself. But the good sized enclosure and bass/mid drive unit endow it with generous sensitivity and a dynamically lively sound, while the intelligent bass alignment permits some close-to-wall reinforcement. The Totem Rainmaker (£1,100-£1,325) provides a good tonal and quality match in a rather smaller enclosure, should this be what your room demands.

## IN SIGHT



- 1 front panel slightly convex to improve stiffness and dispersion
- 2 titanium dome tweeter loaded by a machined alloy horn
- 3 bi-wirable terminals feed crossover via good quality cables
- 4 twin front ports reflex load the mid/bass driver
- 5 165mm flared paper cone bass/mid driver, with fixed phase plug

of tune for the system as a whole. Moving the speakers around, especially in relation to the wall behind them, is often a useful way to achieve optimum bass balance, as described above. Changing amplifiers and cables can also make a substantial differences to the overall sound of a pair of speakers, especially towards the top end of the audio band.

After some experiments with siting, listening began by Blu-Tacking the Cometes onto a pair of 600mm Kudos S100 stands, and positioned about 15cm out from the wall. Connected to a top quality system, it was abundantly clear that the Cometes had loads going for them. They delivered a sound that was lively, dynamic and coherent, with little coloration and an attractively even-handed tonal balance. Stereo images probably suffered slightly from the wall proximity, but still achieved a good standard with an impressive ability to focus, while the freedom from mid-bass boom and thickening was very welcome.

Criticisms were minor. A bit more low bass weight would certainly have been welcome, while treble could become a little lively if the volume was turned up high. Changing the speaker cables from the costly silver ones to much less expensive examples with copper conductors proved highly effective in helping the top end sound a little less exposed. It effectively removed those aggressive tendencies, as well as demonstrating just how sensitive the Cometes could be to careful system set up.

It was suggested that the Cometes were very well suited to valve

amplifier drive, so the next stage was to change the solid-state Naim power amp, and replace it with the single-ended triode Howes monoblocks that were on hand. The delicacy of these ultra-simple PX4-based amplifiers was much appreciated, but it was back to the silver Vertex AQ cables to get the best overall match. One can experiment away with these and similar component substitutions until the curfew tolls the knell of parting day, or you simply get fed up messing around and just want to listen to some more music!

## Sound quality

This loudspeaker proved a fine musical communicator that does exactly what a good standmount ought to. The decision not to attempt to delve into the bottom octave is wise, and the avoidance of a thumpy or boomy bass a major plus. It looks pretty, is easy to place and has a pleasingly musical demeanour. A veritable three-pointed star, then. ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>SOUND QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>LIKE:</b> Lively performer with flexible bass alignment   |
| <b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b><br>★★★★★ | <b>DISLIKE:</b> Can sound forward at high levels   |
| <b>BUILD QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>WE SAY:</b> Its highly communicative sound is a pleasure for the ear – while the lovely black piano lacquer finish delights the eye |
| <b>EASE OF DRIVE</b><br>★★★★★   |  |

### OVERALL

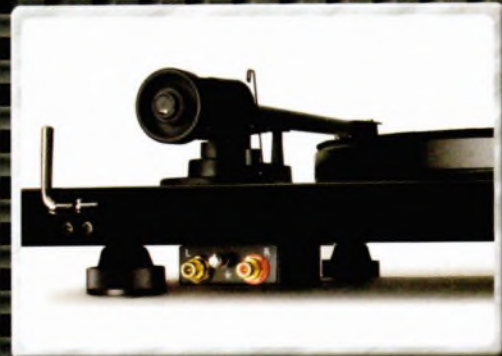




# The Carbon Age



Introducing the new Debut Carbon from Project Audio Systems. The Debut record player is an icon of the entry-level audiophile market, and this latest incarnation elevates the model to a new level of audio quality.



## Debut Carbon

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AUDIO SYSTEMS





# Radio gaga

Thirty years ago, owning a tuner was considered essential. Now it might be again, says *Jimmy Hughes*, thanks to Magnum Dynalab's MD 801...

**M**agnum Dynalab's MD 801 Internet Media Tuner is a versatile box of tricks that offers a broad range of functions. First and foremost it's an Internet radio tuner with access to over 15,000 radio stations worldwide. For those interested in radio as a medium, this is a fantastic way to explore the globe.

As if this wasn't enough, the MD 801 also incorporates a conventional FM tuner with RDS, plus DAB Digital Radio. The latter works in MP2 format, sampling at 48kHz, and is ambitiously claimed to offer 'near-CD quality' sound. Last but not least, the unit is also a music player, compatible with a wide range of digital files including AAC+, Real, MP3, and WMA, via USB or network-stored files. An adaptor is

needed to access iTunes. Of course, these are interesting, but it's the MD 801's abilities as an Internet radio tuner that will be of primary interest. The sheer choice of stations available is mind-boggling, but there's another big advantage; clean interference-free reception...

Frontier Silicon provides the digital tuner front-end, and Wolfson the DAC. The user-interface is via a touchscreen, and this makes access to the various options fast and straightforward. A remote handset is included in the package. Build quality is rugged, and the unit feels solid and well-made. The casework is part steel, part alloy, with a 6mm thick brushed aluminium front panel. There are no controls as such, everything being done via the central touchscreen or remote handset.

## ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Magnum Dynalab  
MD 801  
**ORIGIN:**  
Canada  
**TYPE:**  
Internet-connected  
DAB/FM tuner  
**DIMENSIONS:**  
(WxHxD)  
795x204x500mm  
**WEIGHT:**  
3.1kg  
**FEATURES:**  
• radio formats  
supported: FM, DAB,  
DAB+, Internet radio,  
Internet streaming  
• formats supported:  
Real Audio, AAC+,  
MP3, WMA and FLAC  
• frequency  
response (±1dB):  
15Hz-17kHz (claimed)  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Audiofreaks  
**TELEPHONE:**  
020 8948 4153  
**WEBSITE:**  
audiofreaks.co.uk

The rear of the unit carries a set of unbalanced analogue outputs; coaxial and optical digital inputs; a socket for the antenna; plus an Ethernet cable socket and a front-mounted USB. There is no rear-mounted USB, unfortunately. This limits the MD 801 as a digital hub, and means you can't access things like Spotify or Rhapsody with the unit as it stands. As a result, it's perhaps best to think of the MD 801 as a versatile radio that also includes some streaming options.

Speaking personally, I've never been a radio fan. Why? First off, living on the ground floor as I do, surrounded by tall buildings, my reception is poor. Signal strength is weak, and multipath interference a big problem. There's another more fundamental objection to radio, though. I prefer to select what I listen to, and choose when to listen. However, an Internet tuner like the MD 801 deals with both these issues. With radio being streamed over the Internet, there's no problem with poor reception. Podcasts let you listen to programmes at times that suit you. And (for a while) you can listen again and again, if need be.

## Sound quality

Having recently encountered Internet radio in Musical Fidelity's M1 CLiC digital preamp, I've become something of a fan. I find myself using it quite a bit. Sonically, the MD 801's Internet



**HOW IT COMPARES**

**ESSENCE** the MD 801 is a source component; a digital/analogue tuner that gives you access to Internet Radio and DAB, as well as FM. In addition, you can use it as a digital music streamer – albeit with certain limitations. It's not really a digital hub. A product like Musical Fidelity's M1 CLiC is basically an analogue and digital preamp/digital hub that includes Internet radio.

If you only intend to sample a limited number of IR stations, and have no interest in DAB or FM, a product like the CLiC may well be your best choice. But the MD 801 is clearly more specialised, and better for those really into radio.

You can, for example, create and organise a list of favourite stations via an Internet radio portal. This allows you to have a full list of stations on a single page, rather than having to search each time. Neat, just like its build, finish and sound quality!

radio sounds pretty good. There's something about the sound that's different – a relaxed flowing quality that is very likeable. Even when a CD is being broadcast, this 'relaxed' quality is still there. Okay, it isn't quite as good as conventional FM, and wasn't a match for the MD 801's fine FM tuner – which is admittedly a touch less capable in sonic terms than Magnum Dynalab's dedicated specialist FM tuners. But it was always listenable, and very enjoyable once the ear adjusted.

Tonally, Internet radio seems to sound a tad more forward in the upper midband, and also perhaps a touch closed-in. On the credit side, this can make things seem slightly clearer and more immediate. Speech is slightly sharper and more articulate on IR, though FM is less coloured.

FM typically delivers greater depth and space compared to streamed radio. The latter seems 'flatter' dynamically, with less tonal richness and sparkle, though the MD 801's Internet radio does depth and space better than usual. But while FM definitely wins out over IR, this is only part of the story. Listening to Internet radio, I always felt the sound communicated musically, even if there was a degree of dynamic compression and a lack of frequency extremes.

Sampling a selection of Radio 3's *Building a Library* Podcasts proved a fascinating experience. In these programmes, a reviewer compares various recordings of a piece of music in order to choose the best version. Hearing several performances of a piece of music compared, it was always easy to hear clear differences in both playing and sound quality.

In the survey of Dvorak's 8th symphony for example, one of the versions excepted was a late 1950s mono recording of Sir Thomas Beecham conducting – a live

performance taped by the BBC in London's Festival Hall. Alas, the live sound is mediocre – tonally coarse and lacking in warmth and refinement, with some tape hiss. It's not good even by late 1950s standards, let alone today. But, listening to the podcast via the MD 801, this hardly seemed to matter. You could make sense of Beecham's spur-of-the-moment exaggerations, and the limitations of the sound did not affect one's enjoyment.

However, when I listened to the CD, I felt more aware of technical limitations in the recorded sound, and this limited my enjoyment of the performance. Somehow, Internet radio via the Magnum Dynalab seemed to make absolute sound quality less of an issue. Indeed, one of the Dvorak 8s played – a version

**The MD 801 exploits the best of modern radio broadcasting technology...**

conducted by the legendary Vaclav Talich – was recorded in the 1930s. Yet in terms of letting you enjoy the music and performance, the vintage sound (taken from 78s) seemed perfectly okay – clear, detailed, and open.

I mention this because it touches on something about good Internet radio reproduction that I kept noticing. While it might not be the ultimate in hi-fi, it delivers the musical gist surprisingly well via this black box. Listening to any number of *Building a Library* Podcasts, the musical differences always came over clearly.

I briefly tried DAB, but alas wasn't able to get an especially strong or clean signal [who is? *Ed.*]. FM reception varied too, as the weather

changed. The Magnum Dynalab works well in the analogue domain, but don't expect it to replace your purpose-built high end analogue tuner – instead, think of it as a complement to it.

**Conclusion**

What's so impressive about this box of tricks is its all round ability – it's an easy access point to top quality streamed music. In doing this, it liberates you from all the *fcffing* around with poor signal reception, which is a make-or-break issue for some of us, serious enough to spoil our enjoyment of the medium!

The Magnum Dynalab MD801 was for me a godsend, since it always gave a good clean signal with low background noise. While in absolute terms, sound quality wasn't as *quite* good as FM via a top tuner, it was always far more than acceptable; I always found it enjoyable to listen to.

This clever little black box exploits the strengths and benefits of modern broadcasting technology, giving you access to a vast number of radio stations in an elegant way. For this alone it's worth the asking price. A classy and slightly quirky product then, well worth investigating. ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★

**LIKE:** Highly pleasing, musical sound; versatility

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★

**DISLIKE:** No rear USB input; not compatible with iTunes or Spotify...

**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★

**WE SAY:** Fine, flexible radio package that's cleverly conceived, well made and skilfully voiced

**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

**OVERALL**

★★★★★

**CONNECTIONS**



- 1 optical digital output
- 2 aerial input
- 3 RCA line output
- 4 coaxial digital output
- 5 Ethernet input

# High spirits

The ADL Esprit is Furutech's most ambitious DAC/preamplifier yet. **Jason Kennedy** has a very fine time with it...

**T**he ADL Esprit is the latest in a growing line of compact electronics products from this Japanese company, and the next step up from the GT40 launched last year. A preamplifier and digital-to-analogue convertor in a six inch-wide box, it sports some premium components inside and very high build quality overall.

The size is misleading – you don't expect Furutech's Teflon insulated RCA phono sockets and a beautifully machined stainless volume control on something that would fit in a coat pocket. The reasoning goes that, as Sun Ra put it, space is the place – or to be more precise space is in short supply for most of us, therefore having compact components is the way forward. The only thing missing on the Esprit is a remote control and this leads me to think that Furutech developed it as a serious preamp for computer audio systems with decent and preferably active loudspeakers.

Prime among the socketry is the Tenor-sourced 24-bit/96kHz USB B input/output, which means that not only can it work with the output of your PC, but can take the output of your phono stage, digitise it and send it into the computer where you can record it. This is an unusual feature, and will prove popular with anyone wishing to archive a vinyl record or tape collection.

It sports a Wolfson 24/192 DAC and an Asahi Kasei ADC that runs at the same rate, giving you 96kHz of bandwidth for your analogue recordings. It might seem excessive with formats that rarely get to 20kHz themselves, but keeping filtering as far away from the audioband as possible is consistently beneficial. Another useful feature is a toggle switch for recording gain offering 0, -6 or -12dB with a light that tells you whether the incoming digital signal is clipping.

There are S/PDIF inputs for digital sources and a pair of analogue inputs, a line up that should be sufficient for most systems. It also has a dedicated headphone amplifier which will work with a wide range of impedances; you rarely see a reference to this critical factor, but Furutech specifies that it will drive 32 to 600 ohm designs.

## Sound quality

If I had to sum this component up in one word, it would be *precise*. It is a master of definition with a taut and clean presentation that is strong on leading edges, yet manages to keep them pristine. The flipside is that it is not as rounded and richly detailed as it might be, you get all the edges but not the subtle colouring of the tonal range being portrayed.

The best balance for it would be a rich loudspeaker and/or amplifier, it



## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Furutech ADL Esprit  
**ORIGIN:** Japan/China  
**TYPE:** DAC/preamplifier  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 150x57x141mm  
**WEIGHT:** 900g  
**FEATURES:**  
• analogue inputs: 2x RCA phono  
• digital inputs: asynchronous USB, coax, TOSLINK  
• digital outputs: USB, TOSLINK  
• analogue inputs: 2x RCA phono  
• headphone amp with 6.3mm jack  
• DAC: 24-bit/192kHz  
• ADC: 24-bit/192kHz  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Furutech  
**TELEPHONE:** 01276 501 392  
**WEBSITE:** adl-av.com

might work a treat with valve amps for instance, especially those that are on the warm side. Given its price, however, it's a little harsh to expect it to excel across the board. The real bonus is speed. Not grainy, forward or edgy speed, but clean, controlled immediacy that brings the music alive whatever it might be.

It brings out the electric element in the music, the sense of a musician being in the room can be palpable with a good recording like Laura Marling's *A Creature I Don't Know*. This was achieved with the S/PDIF output of a Cyrus Stream XP Qx, which is a fine digital source and one that brings in a more fully figured sound if its own DAC and pre are employed, but that's a rather more expensive proposition.

With a USB source the sound is similar but not quite as detailed, but that's likely to be because of the computer source more than the input. On its own terms it's a very presentable USB DAC that delivers remarkable clarity and manages to deliver precise imaging from a good recording.

The Esprit delivers fine bass weight from all sources, you need a speaker like the Bowers & Wilkins 802 Diamond to let it through, but it was ever thus. But there's no hump in the upper bass to fill out a smaller speaker as can sometimes be heard with competitors.

## Conclusion

The ADL Esprit is far better than its diminutive stature would suggest, the build quality gives the game away, however. The key to its appeal is the precision of its sound, this produces clear-cut imaging and spot-on timing, it gets very close to the best in this latter respect which makes for a lot of musical thrill power. It could be tonally richer, but careful choice of ancillaries makes up for this and you get an awful lot of what counts in a very nicely made box. ●



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

<p><b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★</p> <p><b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★</p> <p><b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★</p> <p><b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★</p>	<p><b>LIKE:</b> High precision sound that majors on timing and imaging</p> <p><b>DISLIKE:</b> No remote volume control</p> <p><b>WE SAY:</b> Superb insight, forensic detailing and excellent spatial projection – plus brilliant build – justifies the premium price</p>
--	---

**OVERALL**  
★★★★★



## UK DISTRIBUTOR

Mark Manwaring-White Ming Da Valve Audio UK

Vision House 6 Davenham close Great Malvern Worcestershire WR14 2TY United Kingdom

The WEB site is: [www.mingda.co.uk](http://www.mingda.co.uk)

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Valves: Special KT90 x 4 6SN7(special) x 2 and 12AX7 x 2

The Mei Xing Electronics Factory was built in 1991 and specializes in valve audio amplifiers. We have our own CNC machining center with numerically controlled lathes and a professional technical team with many years of experience. Our products have won many prizes, including CHINA FAMOUS BRAND, INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS BRAND and are of course fully CE,CCC and ROHS certified. Our products are very popular amongst our customers are now being sold to more than 40 countries. We produce OEM for more than 10 International brands in Europe and in Asia.



# Headmaster



## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Beyerdynamic T 70  
**ORIGIN:** Germany  
**TYPE:** closed-back headphone  
**WEIGHT:** 330g  
**FEATURES:** • 3m single-sided cable with 3.5mm plug and adaptor  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Beyerdynamic  
**TELEPHONE:** 01444 258258  
**WEBSITE:** beyerdynamic.com

Beyerdynamic's latest T 70 headphone is all set for sales glory in the marketplace, thinks *Tim Jarman...*

**B**eyerdynamic has the distinction of producing the longest-lived product in audio history, the DT 48 headphone, which was introduced in 1937 and a variant of which is still in production today. A distant relative of the DT 48, the T 70 headphone reviewed here has the same high-quality feel that all the Beyerdynamic products which I have encountered possess, and even at £450 this alone makes it seem good value for money.

The T 70 is a closed-back design, meaning that as the listener you are effectively isolated from any external noises. The large and soft cloth ear pads make them reasonably comfortable to wear for something so large, and the headband is well padded, too, so long listening sessions are something that can be truly enjoyed rather than simply endured. They never quite 'disappear', but nevertheless after several albums' worth of music the Beyers were no less comfortable than when I first put them on.

The size and isolation properties of the T 70 makes it more suitable for home listening than for use with portables. The plug is of the 'unimatch' variety, a 3.5mm type with a screw-on outer to increase the size to ¼ inch, which covers most applications, but don't let this tempt you into thinking that these phones would be a good partner for an MP3 portable or a mobile 'phone. The 250 ohm impedance is too high for such devices and this, along with the now universal IEC output power limit, results in an annoying lack of available level. Even my Sony MZ-RH1 struggled to make itself heard through the T 70, although some older designs which I tried (WM-D6C Walkman Pro, early personal CD players, etc.) fared better since they provide much more signal.

If your existing amplifier has a headphone socket then you will

find that the high impedance of the T 70 has the opposite effect. Amplifiers with headphone sockets usually take the signal from the loudspeaker terminals, but pass it through a resistor first in order to limit the available power. The balance in values of this resistor and the headphone's own impedance determine the voltage available, and you get more the higher the impedance is, meaning that with most amplifiers it will go very loud.

## Sound quality

To level the playing field, I used a Musical Fidelity M1 HPA headphone amplifier connected to a Cyrus CD8 SE 2 CD player for my listening tests, this amplifier has a well-designed output stage which seems to match most headphone types well. The T 70 has an explicit sound which is exceptionally dynamic and agile, although at first I thought it

to be bass-light. After some more listening though I was able to resolve this as simply a lack of boom, in fact the T 70 has a fascinating low end which unlike many designs isn't disguised by excessive warmth in the band of frequencies just above it. For headphones this is an unconventional tonal balance, but it's a very good compromise for long term fatigue-free listening.

Speech programmes benefit, too; swapping the CD8 SE 2 for a Yamaha CT-7000 FM tuner showed that the T 70 was quite adept at turning BBC Radio 4 into a private pleasure. Again the voices sounded a little cold at first but once I tuned in (me, not the classic Yamaha), the level of detail present made the experience a very special one indeed.

All headphones produce an exaggerated sense of image and positioning (they are all 'binaural' rather than 'stereo'), but the tightly controlled low end of the T 70 did at least make this less disorientating than it can sometimes be.

Such is the quality of the T 70 that it is hard to find serious fault, although at £450 it is not at all unreasonable to expect perfection. Against this standard, the plastic cable is a bit stiff and sticky and the plug on the end could be nicer – it's perfectly functional and sensibly sized, but it does look a bit cheap compared to the headphones themselves. The supplied case is also a bit of a let down, it's little more than a block of foam inside a soft vinyl bag which adds greatly to the size of the T 70 without necessarily providing much in the way of protection.

## Conclusion

If you're buying headphones at this level then the Beyer T 70 simply is a 'must hear'. Many potential purchasers will love the great strengths of this unusual design. ●



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Clear, explicit sound, taut and detailed bass, German build quality
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★☆	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Cheap looking lead and plug, poor packaging at the price
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> Expensive, but the build, comfort and clarity justifies the lofty price tag
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

### OVERALL







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**Track Audio**

# Remaking the grade

What's a loudspeaker maker like Zu Audio doing reworking a classic Denon moving coil cartridge, asks **Jason Kennedy**?

**T**he Denon DL-103 is one of the best value moving-coil cartridges in the business. Around since the nineteen sixties, this little classic 'coil costs just £130 even today. Given its price however, its construction is inevitably *not* as solid as it could be. The standard DL-103 has a plastic bodyshell with slot mountings, an approach that doesn't have much potential to quell the high-frequency resonances induced by the stylus in a vinyl groove. There have been a number of DL-103 modifications over the years, but this aluminium body from Zu Audio is more professional than most...

Zu Audio is primarily a loudspeaker maker. Based in Ogden, Utah, it makes high-sensitivity designs that are well suited to valve amplification. Speakers might seem rather different to cartridges, but they are both transducers, they convert physical energy into electrical energy or vice versa, and every serious manufacturer needs a decent cartridge.

The approach Zu came up with is a two-stage process, the first thing they do is grade the cartridges according to accuracy of channel

matching. There are four levels starting with standard examples which give a 2 percent channel match and working through grade 1 (0.5 percent), grade 2 (0.2 percent) and grade 2 prime (0.1 percent). Every increase in accuracy costs another £100 and I had a £600 grade 1, the grade 2 prime is, therefore, £800.

The physical change is that Zu replaces the original plastic body with a machined 6061 aluminium body and pots the cartridge in an epoxy resin. The epoxy forms a strong bond that also damps the cartridge and the relatively heavy body acts as a sink for extraneous energy, this is converted into heat that can be dissipated by that largish metal body.

## Sound quality

The Zu DL-103 ends up being a heavy 14g cartridge, but given its low compliance this is not such a problem unless you have a standard counterweight on your Rega arm, for instance. In those situations you will need one of that company's heavier weights. A tell-tale of its age, it also has a lower than average 0.3mV

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Zu Audio DL-103  
**ORIGIN:**  
Japan/USA  
**TYPE:**  
MC cartridge  
**WEIGHT:**  
14g  
**FEATURES:**  
• output: 0.3mV  
• loading: 80-200 ohms  
• downforce range: 2.2-2.7g  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Zu Audio  
**TELEPHONE:**  
01273 700759  
**WEBSITE:**  
zuaudio.com

output, so you need a good MC stage or step-up transformer for best results. I tried it on a Rega RP6 directly into a Blue Horizon Profono MC stage and got an attractively swift and precise result that proved highly engaging and revealing. But it does need a little more gain than this stage can offer, so I borrowed a step-up from Tom Tom Audio who bring in the Auditorium 23 (£445) transformer, a design that comes in two variants, one of which is specifically for the DL-103.

This brings an effortless refinement to the sound and reveals considerably more tonal colour. As this is one of the areas where vinyl has the upper hand over polycarbonate, it's great to hear it in such depth – you really don't appreciate how good a record is if you can't hear the full tonal range it contains. Dynamics are likewise amped up to tremendous effect and the overall result is pretty damn sweet!

I also tried a Trilogy 907 phono stage, which has more gain than the Profono, and this brings forth even more power and glory from the vinyl. It also adds killer bottom end – tight, deep juicy bass that fleshes out drum kits, pianos and basses of all persuasions making the experience visceral as well as emotional.

## Conclusion

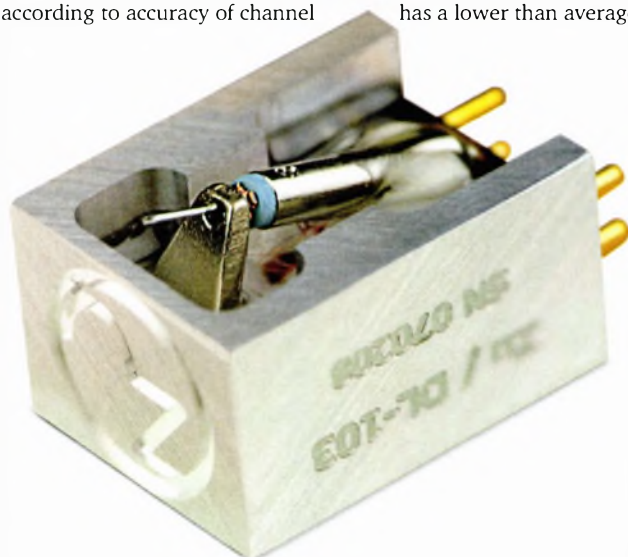
The price premium that Zu charges for its work is not small, but then again, a standard DL-103 never sounded as dynamic, revealing and substantial as this. It's not the easiest cartridge to accommodate, I had hum problems with it on an SME, and you need plenty of high-quality gain to appreciate its potential. But once sorted, the DL-103 combines bass extension and sophistication in a way that is hard to achieve with rivals in its price range. It might be old skool, but so is vinyl, and the combination is a cracker! ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Lively, vivacious, exciting, musical sound
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★☆	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Not the last word in refinement or detail; expensive; low output
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WESAY:</b> Lovingly modified moving coil with an enjoyable sound, but still struggles against price rivals in some respects
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

### OVERALL





## Would you run a hammer drill next to your hifi system? Actually, you already are – inside the components

Why do  
show visitors  
consistently say:  
"One of the best  
sounds at the  
show?"

### At circuit board level, handling delicate signals, power supplies are just like a drill.

Dirty alternating mains flowing through transformers and capacitors re-charging produce huge amounts of **VIBRATION** – not just vibration that we feel but energy over a wide spectrum right into the ultra-sonic.

Not surprisingly loudspeakers, designed to vibrate air, also generate unwanted energy.

Then, to share the damage around, we connect all these vibrating boxes together with expensive metal wiring! – an excellent conductor of both mechanical and electrical energy.

#### Why does this matter?

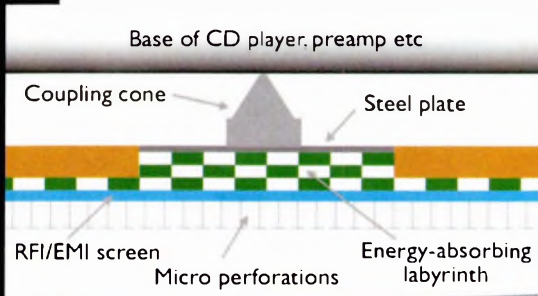
– simply because most electronic components are partially **MICROPHONIC**. Vibrate them and they generate small electrical signals. *Blend these signals from the whole system with the music and the damage is massive:*

- a hard, edgy treble
- muddled timing
- loose bass
- poor imaging
- limited soundstage
- distortion

How many systems sound worse when you turn up the volume – and sound flat when it's quiet? So the user is limited to a 'letterbox' of volume settings. These are all symptoms of a system **DEGRADED BY VIBRATION**.

#### What can I do about it?

The answer is to 'drain' the energy out of the system through platforms and block its transfer in the cables.



Cross-section of LeadingEdge platform. The steel cone 'drains' damaging acoustic energy into the labyrinth.

The improvements in performance can be dramatic.

### Dumping energy? – sounds like Black Magic!

Furniture-quality LeadingEdge platforms incorporate VertexAQ techniques developed over 12 years from aircraft industry technology. Some Vertex solutions are feeding back into current Defence equipment.

#### What changes can I expect?

As funds allow, adding Vertex cables and mains filters and LeadingEdge platforms will **TRANSFORM YOUR SYSTEM:**

- greater openness/separation
- smoother and sweeter treble
- increased dynamic range
- complex music times better
- tighter, deeper, faster bass

#### Is it expensive?

Proven: *money spent on Vertex/LE components brings greater improvements to the whole system than the same amount given to upgrade one major 'box'.*

**We worry.** Show visitors consistently praise the sound but do they think it's beyond their reach? Do they think it's just the superb equipment?

*Of course, it's the VertexAQ and LeadingEdge system-wide treatment, removing vibration and RFI and EMI pollution – with mains filters starting around £360.*

It's not the main components, they differ every time from modest to exotic but the sound remains 'one of the best'.

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**Just listen and you'll know**

CD: Accoustic Arts, Bel Canto, dCS, Gamut, Resolution Audio, Vertex AQ dac-1, Wadia. Vinyl: Aesthetix, Clearaudio, Graham, Lehmann, Transfiguration.

Tuners: Magnum Dynalab Amplifiers: Accoustic Arts, Aesthetix, Bel Canto, CAT, Gamut, Sonneteer, Storm Audio, VTL.

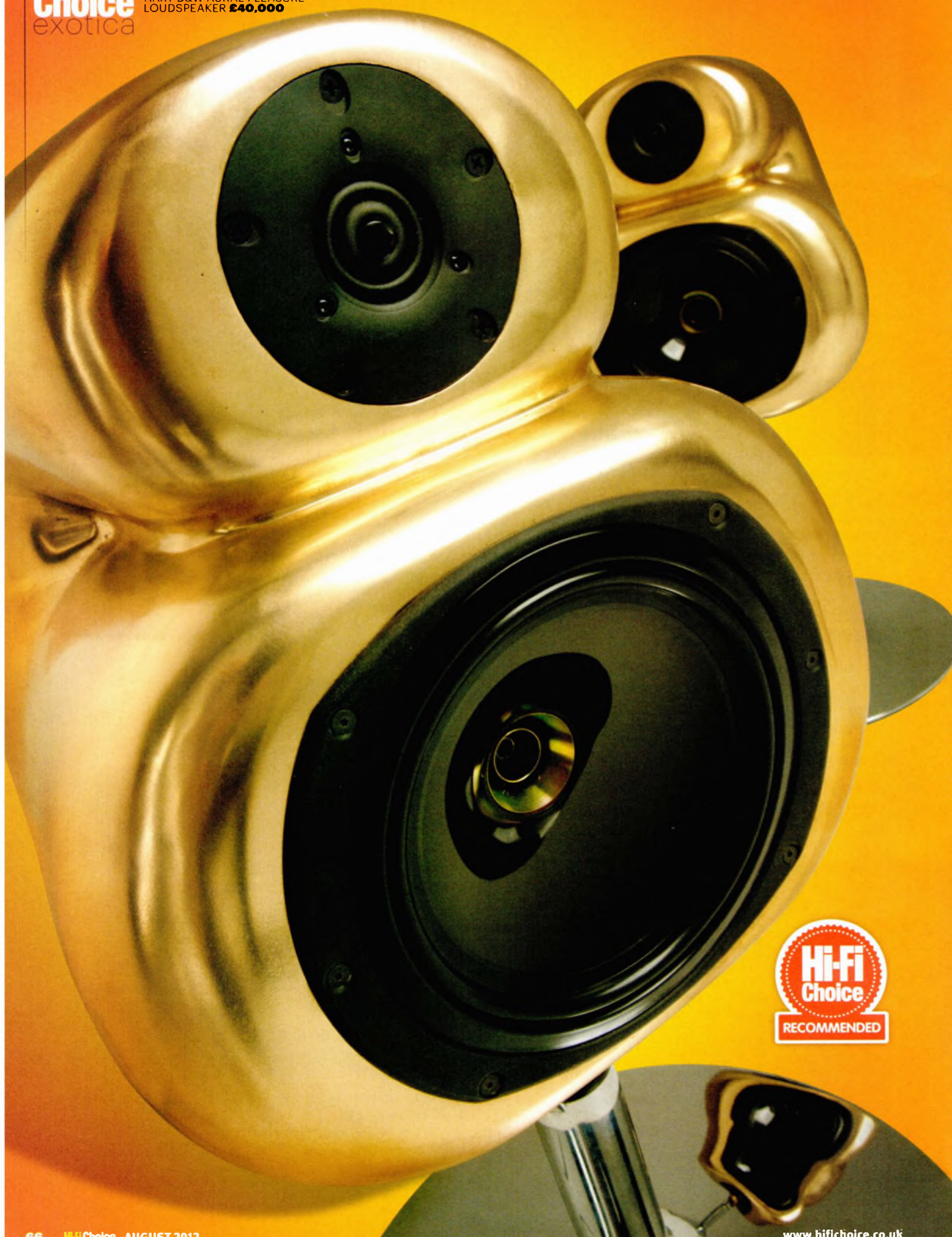
Loudspeakers: Audio Physic, Focal, Gamut, Kawero, NEAT, Totem. Cables: Chord Co., DNM, Nordost, Siltech, Tellurium, VertexAQ.

Mains: Vertex AQ. Supports: Arcici, Black Ravioli, Hi-Fi Racks, Stands Unique, Vertex AQ

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# Bronze age

Hewn from hard metal alloy, Hart D&W's new Aural Pleasure loudspeaker is where sculpture meets science, says **Jason Kennedy...**

**D**avid Hart is not your average loudspeaker builder, his creations are never conventional and usually very expensive, but that's because of the way they are made. The latest addition to the range takes that approach to another level altogether, the Aural Pleasure is a solid bronze casting that weighs 50 kilos yet it's only 400mm high without its stand!

Bronze is what bells are made of because, according to David Hart, it amplifies sound and, therefore, should be a good material to make a loudspeaker cabinet with. The other more obvious quality it has is very high stiffness, the only material that I have come across in speakers that begins to approach bronze is concrete, a variation on which was used for a short-lived loudspeaker in the nineties. You can see the appeal of the material to the dedicated audiophile, and when cast in the curvaceous shape chosen by Hart for the AP, you can see that it has not inconsiderable aesthetic appeal as well. The casting was made by a firm in Basingstoke that usually produces one-off sculptures.

It clearly presents practical difficulties however, not least how to support it. Hart has chosen a chrome base with a hydraulically isolated single post that's necessarily bolted to the bottom of the speaker. This support allows the speaker to be swivelled in order to fine tune set up, but does make it harder to move without the aforementioned hand-truck. This post support allows access to a single pair of terminals that are tucked under the speaker for minimal visual clutter. This is a sealed, infinite baffle design by the way, so don't try and find the port as it ain't there!

The drive units that Hart has chosen for this project include an example of the Tannoy Dual Concentric units that you see on the

slightly more manoeuvrable wooden cabinet designs in the Hart range, albeit a smaller eight-inch example of the breed. This has a polypropylene cone and aluminium/magnesium tweeter dome at the throat of a 'Tulip' waveguide, its response extends to 20kHz. Apparently the shape and material of the cabinet increases mid and low frequency output to a point where extra treble energy is required, so Hart has incorporated a ring radiator tweeter alongside the one in the middle of the Tannoy unit. I've seen supertweeters used atop Tannoy Duals in the past, but not drivers like *this*. It does, however, provide output up to 47kHz (on paper, at least) and thus is effectively a supertweeter...

The crossover floats inside the enclosure by virtue of the fact that it is densely packed with wadding, this is part of the effort that Hart has made to kill off any tendency to ring that bronze might have. As large bells are made of the same stuff this is probably a wise precaution, other

## ▣ DETAILS

### PRODUCT:

Hart D&W  
Aural Pleasure

### ORIGIN: UK

### TYPE:

3-way infinite baffle

### WEIGHT:

50kg

### DIMENSIONS:

(H x W x D): 760 x  
350 x 300mm inc  
base, base  
diameter 450mm

### FEATURES:

- quoted sensitivity: 97dB

- nominal impedance: 5 ohms

- bass/treble drivers: 200mm polypropylene 25mm aluminium-magnesium dual concentric

- treble driver: 40mm ring radiator

- finish: matt bronze

### DISTRIBUTOR:

Hart Audio

### TELEPHONE:

01983 612 924

### WEBSITE:

hartaudio.com

measures include coating the inside of the casting with glue and applying copious amounts of damping material. The internal shape of the casting should effectively kill off standing waves and the lack of flat surfaces means that it would be stiff even if it weren't made of such substantial metal, 22mm thick.

## Sound quality

As you might imagine the Aural Pleasure does not sound like most other speakers, for a start it doesn't produce low bass because the cabinet has a relatively small internal volume of around 35 to 40 litres and it's sealed so there is no assistance from a reflex port. It's recommended that they be placed in the corners of the room so that bass energy is reinforced by the boundaries. It is also a fairly short speaker that stands 760mm high on its base and this results in relatively low image height, at least where the speakers are. The phantom image between them rises to a

**This is an extraordinary loudspeaker that does things that no other transducer can...**

respectable height of the sort you'd expect from a more conventional design.

What makes the AP so interesting is the absence of cabinet colouration of the usual variety. This is a colouration that we hear with so many speakers that it's almost taken it for granted, we assume it's part of the record whereas it is, in fact, the sound of wooden panels resonating and adding to the sound, albeit in a fairly euphonic fashion...

One manufacturer, Kiso Acoustic, even takes the opposite approach by using guitar-making techniques in the cabinet, so that the sound is, at least, tuneful. The opposite approach is much more impressive, however. When you take cabinet vibration *out* of the picture, the sound hits the room with a speed and precision that is quite extraordinary, the deeper the notes the more incredible it sounds. I doubt that even Kraftwerk will have heard their music sound so tight, precisely defined and dynamic. It brings the speed of the midband to the bass and drives the room in a totally visceral yet clean and controlled fashion.

The phrase sonic boom comes to mind as being more apt than most to describe the way tracks by the German bass masters hit the





# Small yet perfectly formed...



With components chosen carefully for their precise performance characteristics, allied with astute electronic engineering and the fact that it is carefully hand built here in the UK, the Epiphany Acoustics EHP-O2 redefines the sound quality achievable at this price point.

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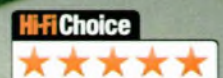
*"This remains one of the most enjoyable and engaging little loudspeakers on the market. It has a direct line to the melody, as well as the overall emotion of the musical event. It opens a window on the soul of the creator – which is something that only the best equipment can deliver."*

Jason Kennedy, Hi Fi Choice Feb 2012

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## Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPEAKS TO DAVID HART ABOUT THE AURAL PLEASURE LOUDSPEAKERS...



**JK:** Where did the shape of this speaker come from?

**DH:** The shape is simply to achieve no standing waves and have a 1.73m horn to time-align the rear output of the main driver to the front output, so that all energies are in phase. The actual shape evolved as a by-product of the shape needed to achieve the sonic signature.

**Why use such an inconveniently heavy material for the cabinet; would cast aluminium not work as well?**

The use of bronze over aluminium is clearly explained when thinking of a large bell such as Big Ben. If it was made of aluminium the amplification would be far less than that of bronze. This is mainly due to the high density of bronze and its musicality. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. The electrical conductive qualities of copper are renowned and equalled only by its conductivity of sound. Aluminium, although lighter and easier to work with, is in no way dense enough to amplify in the same way as bronze. Therefore, the use of aluminium is a strong compromise. The bronze cabinet amplifies five times that of the same cabinet in aluminium.

**The only shortcoming I have encountered is image height at the speaker position, is there any way to raise the speaker?**

The option of a solid wood circular 4, 6, or 8 inch high plinth is available for £1,200 per pair to increase the height of the speaker to suit the listener.

**Why so expensive?**

The R&D involved in bringing this speaker to market was extensive. The cabinets involve two weeks labour in each before casting costs and materials. There's 50kgs of bronze per cabinet. Each cabinet is cast, milled, chased, re-milled, polished and finished, all by hand in the UK. Crossover components are uncompromised audiophile quality. The Hart D&W Aural Pleasure is a speaker as uncompromised as can possibly be achieved with the science and materials available today!



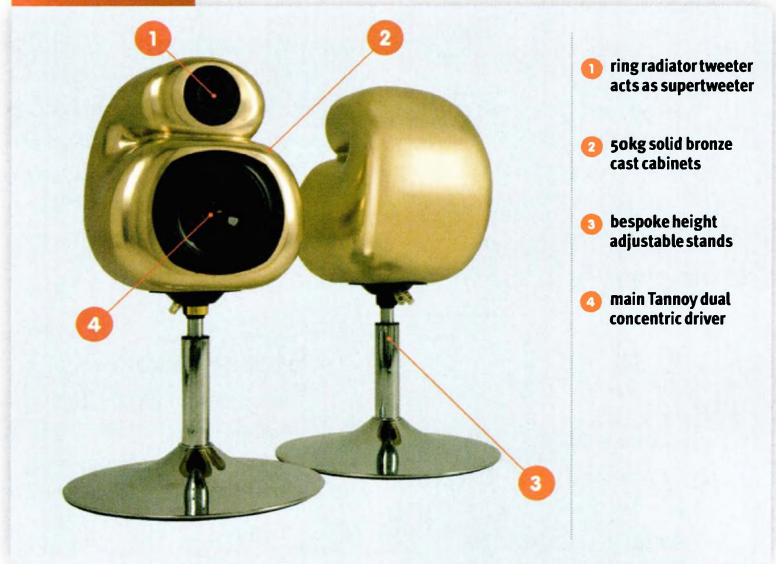
**OBVIOUS PRICE CONSIDERATIONS ASIDE**, this speaker is so distinctive that it's almost impossible to compare. Its essential strengths are speed and dynamics, along with low level resolution. Certain other high end speakers will surely give you a smoother ride, with greater bass extension and a more refined balance, but almost no others are as revealing through the mid and top as the Aural Pleasure.

It's not unlike the difference between the Decca/London cartridge and your average moving coil. The latter is a fine transcription tool, whereas the former casts a unique, magical and highly distinct light on the musical proceedings. As such, if you enjoy immediacy and the visceral thrill that good music can deliver then it's purely and simply in a gang of one...

Indeed, I'd have to say that the nearest competitor I have had comes from Vivid Audio, whose Giya G1 speaker has a highly inert GRP cabinet and five custom made aluminium drive units. This is also a very revealing and immediate design with an equally sculptural appeal, but of course it is better value for money on account of its superb build quality and sheer material content. It's also a fair bit more refined in absolute terms.

But then again, anyone with £40,000 to spend on a pair of extreme statement speakers such as this is unlikely to be troubled by the purchase cost. At this price point, it's all about buying something that plays music in exactly the way you like, almost a nihilistic act. Does anything else do what the Hart does, at any price?

## IN SIGHT



- 1 ring radiator tweeter acts as supertweeter
- 2 50kg solid bronze cast cabinets
- 3 bespoke height adjustable stands
- 4 main Tannoy dual concentric driver

listening seat. The fact that the bass is not that low must make this a bit easier to do, but it's not something I've encountered from a speaker of any size before. Dropping Speed Caravan into the mix had me grinning ear to ear, usually their stuff sounds impressive but disturbing because the sound is so compressed and the bass gets wooden cabinets so energised. But with all this power channelled from the drive unit alone you are presented with a clean, clear and immediate version of events that left me breathless and hungry for more.

This result was not achieved without a bit of experimentation with ancillaries. I kicked off with 50 watt Velvet Class A power amps, but they lacked sufficient grunt so the Leema Tucana was brought in, it has a lot of grip but is not smooth enough through the mid and top for this speaker. David Hart uses a valve power amp armed with mighty 211 output tubes, so I used the nearest thing I had to hand, a Quad II Classic integrated. This amp generally sounds a little too smooth and relaxed for my tastes, but actually proved a perfect match for the AP.

So perfect, in fact, that I was totally distracted by the system for way too long, this is primarily because this speaker is so fast and loves to be played at high levels. There is little or no compression with level, and you can hear right into the mix, whether it be Miles' *So What* or Gregorio Paniagua's *La Folia*. The tone of Coltrane's sax on the former is glorious, I guess the speaker's shape and material is not so different to a brass horn. That said you can also appreciate the timbre of the double

bass on the track to a far greater extent than usual.

It also differentiates recordings with alacrity, such as Peter Gabriel's version of *Boy in the Bubble*. With an old favourite, Steely Dan's *Gold Teeth*, I was drawn to the quality of Jeff Porcaro's drumming, the sound is nowhere near as lush as PG's, but replete with detail again. At this stage the Zappa came out and the evening, as well as my notebook, was lost.

## Conclusion

An extraordinary yet idiosyncratic speaker, its limited bass extension and exposed midband means that you need a powerful, yet super-clean amplifier to get the best out of it. But the fact that it can do things that no other speaker can – and in such a musically cohesive manner – makes it addictive. It's not unlike a Decca London cartridge, dynamic and at times astonishing, once you hear what it can do with your favourite records you forgive its foibles and are converted to the sound of bronze. ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY



**LIKE:** Remarkable sound the like of which is extremely rare, high power handling

#### VALUE FOR MONEY



**DISLIKE:** Limited when it comes to bass extension and image height; price!

#### BUILD QUALITY



#### EASE OF DRIVE



**WESAY:** If you are looking for maximum thrill power, then there are few speakers that come close...

#### OVERALL



# Box-Design by Pro-Ject

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- Solid, Vibration-Free Construction
- Apple Authenticated

## Play



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- Built-In 24-bit/192kHz DAC
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### Tuner Box S

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- 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

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- 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

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## THIS MONTH:



**MALCOLM STEWARD**  
**EXPERTISE:** REVIEWER

**MS HAS SEVERAL** decades of experience writing about hi-fi for a wealth of mags. Although a longstanding vinyl junkie, nowadays he's getting ever more into digital streaming.



**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.



**DAVID PRICE**  
**EXPERTISE:** EDITOR

**DP HAS SPENT** much longer than he'd care to admit buying and upgrading his own hi-fi system, not to mention reviewing thousands of separates over the years.

production capacity to make the things, but it soon became clear that the record companies were ripping people off by maintaining artificially high prices. In the mid to late eighties an LP may have cost £5, while the same CD would cost £12-£15. 'High production cost' was the mantra trotted out by the record companies, but by that time every second magazine in the newsagent had a free CD on its cover. That rip off lasted well into the nineties, and that is the thing that I most remember about the introduction of CDs.

Today, I have no sympathy for record companies at all. If they have lost control of the music market then I am delighted, because the cartel that was then, took millions (or billions) out of the pockets of the music buying public. I am willing to pay for my music (and every piece of music I have in my collection I have bought and paid for), but the behaviour of the record companies during and after the introduction of the CD left a very bad taste.

So for me, the legacy of CD was that it paved the way for a dramatic change in the way that music was sold and distributed. Record companies proved that they could not be trusted, and with the advent of the PC (which was coincident with the rise of the CD) and then, of course, with the web, people found their own way of distributing music.

## Rip-off Britain

There have been a few interesting articles recently in *Hi-Fi Choice* on the first generation CD players, and Tim Jarman's piece in the March edition (*HFC 356*) prompted me to write in.

I was an early adopter, having splashed out £300 for the Philips CD100 within a month or so of it being introduced in the UK. There were two models available at that time, the Philips and a Sony. The Sony being fitted with, what was then, an innovative drawer mechanism, but how reliable would that prove to be?

My recollection of things isn't as clear as it might be, but I do remember that I was delighted at how 'clean' CDs sounded, and you could listen to a whole album in 'real hi-fi' sound quality without having to get up and change sides (cassettes allowed you to listen to a whole album at a time, but the quality was never that good). Yes, I was keen to buy a CD player not only because of the technology and newness then on offer, but also because I simply got fed up of the foibles and variables associated with playing LPs.

The other components in my system at that time included a Technics SU3500 amplifier (the top model, with lots of knobs and blessed with a very sweet sound), and a Leak 2001 turntable, which was a wonderfully engineered English design, which sounded nearly as good as the various Scottish designs which dominated (Linn, Ariston and

a couple of others hailing from the North). My speakers were the absolutely fabulous Tannoy Cheviots (Made in Scotland – what does that tell you?), which use the 12 inch HPD dual concentric drive units. CD players, amplifiers (and a Linn turntable) have come and gone, but I still hold on to, and absolutely love my Tannoys. I've had them reconed, and this side of £5,000 you will not find better speakers (I bought them in 1979 for £300)...

However, the thing I most remember about the early days of CD was less to do with hi-fi, and more to do with the software; the actual CDs themselves. In the first few months of the release of CD players the number of titles available was very limited. If you were not into classical music (which dominated the small

amount of shelf space allocated to CDs at the time) then you could only buy Michael Jackson, Dire Straits, and a handful of other titles. Gradually, the catalogue increased, but it took quite a long time before CD established itself as the dominant medium.

At the time, CDs cost two to three times the price of an LP. The initial cost of buying a player, and more significantly, buying the CDs was very expensive. But hey, I could listen to a bunch of music I didn't really enjoy, without pops and clicks and scratches, and it was really, really good!

The high cost of CDs hung around for a long, long time and for more than ten years, they remained two to three times the cost of LPs and tapes. That was understandable in the early days of CD, when there wasn't the



**Philips CD100 – the silver disc spinner that started the digital revolution for so many, including reader Bob Harvie**



**Rok da house**

My system consists of a NAD 3020B amplifier (yes, it's that old) driving Mordaunt-Short MS10 loudspeakers, and a Roksan Xerxes turntable/Rega RB300 tonearm, with a Linn K9 cartridge feeding the MM input of the NAD amp direct.

I am finally – yes, I know, it's taken a while – looking to upgrade the rest of my system to match the obvious quality of my Roksan turntable front end. I generally prefer rock and dance music (although a spot of classical and jazz isn't out of the question) and have around £3,000 to spend. I wish to stay with a high-quality compact pair of speakers, so no floorstanders please. Might be interested in getting into streaming soon so maybe a digital amp might be worth considering.

**Justin Tunsoll**

**DP says:** I'm not surprised you've used your NAD for so long Justin, as even by today's standards they're rather fine little things. Still, there's a lot that can be improved on. Here's what I'd do. First, throw away your Linn K9 cartridge; it was never the company's finest hour. I'd suggest an Audio Technica AT-OC9ML (£400), which I know to work a treat in the Roksan. You might also like to send your Xerxes back to the factory to get it serviced, while you're at it. Then, consider a Cambridge Audio 851A integrated. This is big, smooth, powerful and creamy. It has oodles of power, lots of detail, and is nicely musical too.

You'd still have £950 for a pair of Monitor Audio GX50 speakers; these have a wonderfully open and clean sound, as our forthcoming review will reveal. For a phono stage, think in terms of a Musical Fidelity V LPS II (£120), – this sounds amazingly open and detailed at the price and will sing in your system.

**Ones and noughts**

Is streaming really as good as you say? I've noticed lots of Hi-Fi Choice writers are using

## Isn't using a network music player a rather precarious way to do it? Wouldn't a disc transport be better?

network music playback these days, but isn't that a rather precarious way to do it? Wouldn't a direct, wired, datastream from a high-quality, low-jitter disc transport, give a superior digital signal to beaming it all around the house, with all that possibility for interference and/or jitter?

**Peter Reynolds**

**DP says:** A high-quality, low-jitter disc transport is, of course, a good, known quantity, but purpose-designed top quality streaming devices also deliver the sonic goods. As ever, we shouldn't be doctrinaire about these things; it's as much about how well it's done as what's done in the first place. That's why it's always good to hear for yourself and audition any possible network system you're interested in buying against your existing CD transport/player.

**MS says:** You would be seriously shocked – even appalled – if you were to trace that datastream back further

and discover all the various stages, transformations and kludges through which it had passed after it left the mixing desk. For instance, producers use multiple and different DAC/ADC combinations to avoid the gross character introduced by using the same combinations throughout the chain: effectively they deliberately use one coloration to mask another coloration in order to make things sound 'more natural.'

And if you saw the miles of low-grade cabling used in a typical recording session you would never be concerned about sending a signal around the few feet of Cat 5 you find in most home networks. And this is before considering hair-curling nasties such as studio recorders running off cheapo mains distribution blocks...

**ES says:** I am a comparatively late arrival to streaming, but I can assure you that leaving aside sound quality for a second, the experience is revelatory. I can now access pretty much any far flung corner of my collection from a single point in seconds. There is no faffing through the rack looking for a particular disc and no irksome moment as you discover the disc you were looking for has slipped the surly bonds of the jewel case and gained a big scratch for the trouble.

I can listen to the work of an artist in any order and to any length that takes my fancy – concerts are full length, 'easter eggs' appear without skipping through extended periods of silence and if I wish to find the 'secret amazing album' by combining specific Radiohead albums I can. I am confident that modern jitter reduction is sufficient to handle the nasties and at the same time delighted at how much better than CD the user experience is.

**Rok da house:** Monitor Audio's GX50 standmount loudspeakers will sing on the end of a good modern integrated amplifier, says DP



Is it fair? Probably not, but then again nobody in this business has acted out of fairness. Does it work? Well, we're getting there. What we do need is a means of ensuring that artists get the money they deserve for their work. Perhaps downloads will allow that to happen (although the dominance of Apple makes me despair).

I am now a computer audiophile, having ripped my LPs to 24-bit/96kHz some five or six years ago (that was a major task), and ripped and tagged all of my CDs. Now it is DACs and asynchronous this and that, that feed my habit!

My Tannoys are still going strong, but my CD player has gone the way of my Linn turntable; consigned to the classifieds. But, and this is important, my music has never sounded better. My £300 investment in a classic British designed loudspeaker way back in 1979 has stood the test of time and has outlived the turntable, cassettes, CD players, and half of the record companies that spent twenty years royally ripping me off. I believe that my trusted Dual Concentrics will even see off the USB cable and any streaming device that may not have yet entered the foray. Three cheers for great British hi-fi!

**Bob Harvie, Perth, Australia**

**DP says:** Hi Bob – thanks for that long, and well-argued letter about software pricing. I can only say that I agree. I moved to Japan in 1990, when CDs cost around £12 in the UK, and was amazed that (in an otherwise far more expensive country to live than the UK, at the time), Japanese CDs cost the same. Moreover, import CDs at Tower Records in Tokyo – all US versions in those 'long boxes' (remember them?) – cost around £6-7. Suddenly the penny dropped that in some markets, silver discs were being considerably overpriced. Obviously, the record companies were charging what they could get away with, rather than what they actually needed to.

In one sense, that's fair enough. Like it or loathe it we live in a capitalist society with all its good and bad sides. My point is though that the music industry shouldn't have then been surprised when music fans looked for alternative ways of getting music – and this came a few years later with the meteoric



rise of Napster. I believe that, by overpricing its wares, the music industry created all sorts of problems for itself later on down the line. As such, it doesn't have my sympathy. While I in no way condone piracy – emphatically not, as you're killing the goose that lays the golden egg – I think it's certainly understandable that a large black market for music has now developed...

I hope, in future, the music industry can come to a more sensible accommodation with its customers. In an online world, in ten to fifteen years, I doubt that physical media will still be on sale. I suspect everything will be delivered in a Spotify-sort-of-way, and then notion of 'owning' physical copies will be considered unnecessary.

Vinyl, however, will continue, as the last physical format – unlike CD it has a future. And unlike CD, in its heyday, the

## In ten to fifteen years, I doubt that physical media will still be on sale...

record companies never really ripped customers off. Indeed, quite the opposite in the late sixties and early seventies, with all those lovely gatefold sleeves and inserts – it became an art form in itself.

**TJ says:** You were right to question the reliability of the Sony CDP-101's drawer, I've lost count of the number of these which I've un-seized over the years. In contrast, what could go wrong with the simple flip-up lid of the Philips CD100? Nothing – until the interlock switch falls apart that is... Overall, I think you made the right choice, the Sony is a rough old nail sonically compared to the CD100.

**ES says:** I completely agree that the record labels didn't handle CD hugely well, but compared to present state of legal downloads it was a masterpiece! The good news is as I see it, is that when good music has been placed for sale online in formats people want and at prices they can afford, it sells. The question is, can the dinosaurs grasp this and evolve before they are wiped out?

## Studio sound

About eighteen months ago I walked into Studio AV in Eton and asked whether they could provide me with a new cartridge for my Linn Sondek. That began a journey which has ultimately cost me a couple of grand and totally transformed my hi-fi experience.

First of all I was introduced to the wonderful Derek (sadly no longer working there), who totally renovated my Linn with all sorts of bits and pieces which he had acquired from upgrading other Sondeks. Finishing everything off with a new coat of varnish, my own Linn which I have owned for over thirty years, has never looked or sounded better. Then he installed a Dynavector 10X (his suggestion) and my first ever moving coil cartridge. I took the deck home, plugged it into my Cyrus 8 system via my Cambridge Azur 640P phono stage and that's where the fun began...

I live in an Edwardian semi (they weren't built for noise), but I do have a very tolerant neighbour. I was sitting back enjoying my new sound when suddenly 'bang, bang, bang'! I nearly jumped out of my skin. At first I thought my neighbour had finally flipped, then it dawned on me it was coming from my loudspeakers. A quick call to Derek suggested either a faulty cartridge or the 640P was to blame so back I went to Eton. After a couple of days of testing, Derek established the 640's MC input was the problem so off I went with a Dynavector P75 Mk11 to try. Suddenly I was listening to a completely different cartridge! I was knocked out but also not really planning to spending nearly six hundred quid on a phono stage, so, in the hope of saving a few

## Boom, shake the room!

My equipment is a NAD 370 amplifier, PMC FB1i speakers, Marantz CD63 MK KI Signature CD player and Black Rhodium S300 speaker cable, with Cable Talk Monitor 3 interconnects. My problem is that I don't seem to get the bass that you say the PMC is capable of delivering. Any ideas or tweaks that would give me a bit more bass?

### GF Best

**TJ says:** Try moving the loudspeakers closer to a solid wall and if this doesn't produce enough bass try pushing them into the corners of the room. Remember in your experiments to keep the tweeters near the 'ear level' of your listening position or you'll find that the treble will become dulled!



**ES says:** Visit your local discount furniture store and avail yourself of some sections of granite kitchen work surface. Placing these under the speakers can firm things up a little and give you a little positive reinforcement.

**DP says:** The Marantz CD63 MK KI Sig isn't the most prodigious in the low frequency department, but should still do the business if you place it on some good sorbothane feet, such as FoculPods. These are a great upgrade, for the price of a few bottles of wine. Also try tightening your speaker drive units to the front baffles (if exposea); the bolts or screws often work loose.

**How to get better bass out of a system driven by a Marantz CD63 MK KI CD player? The team helps out...**

bob, I auditioned a second-hand Linn Linto and a nearly new Trichord Dino.

After a lot of listening I decided I preferred the Linto, a very elegant sound, but it just couldn't quite hit the spot, so I borrowed the P75 again and decided I had to cut the food bill and pay the extra. (I'm overweight anyway, so a good move all round!) Incidentally, I was delighted to read your rave review after I'd made my choice. That, I thought, was that, until I paid a visit to my old hometown, Montrose in Scotland, and

dropped in on my old hi-fi dealer Robert Ritchie. What's this new Rega DAC like? I asked. "Brilliant", he replied. "You can borrow it if you want to. I'll bet you don't send it back though." Well, of course, he was right.

What can I say about the Rega that you haven't said already? Only that every time I read a request for advice on upgrading a CD player I want to say "buy the Rega instead. It will bring your hi-fi to life in a way you didn't think possible". I thought I knew my Dylan albums inside out, but I was wrong. I don't



**Rega DAC – just about the best thing in the known universe, apparently!**

know how the Rega does it, but there are intricacies on *Highway 61* and *Blonde* on *Blonde*, which I've never heard in all these years.

I thought I'd finished there, but another visit to Robert's shop and off I went with a Sonos system, which I rigged up through the DAC. Now I'm ripping away to a Vortexbox (you'll find it on Amazon), subscribed to Spotify Premium and listening to all manner of Radio courtesy of Sonos, plus, my wife is delighted because my CDs are all in storage boxes in the loft. Happiness all

## My wife is delighted because all my CDs are in storage boxes in the attic...

round! Incidentally, when the Beatles remasters first came out I complained to you because I didn't like the sharpness of the sound (you published a lengthy explanation). The Rega has tamed them, too. All-in-all I have a system now which is so markedly different from the original and sounds absolutely fantastic. Thank you Rega – I'm a happy man!

**Kenneth Vettese**

**DP says:** *And thank you Roy and Terry, erm, I mean "Kenneth"! But seriously, another top tale of audiophile derring do, in which our hero 'gets the girl' (in hi-fi terms, obviously) in the end! Nice to hear that chivalrous hi-fi salesmanship is not dead – leaving potential customers with excellent products to try often results in a sale. Suddenly all's well in the world, eh readers?*

**ES says:** *It is always good to hear that products we like are delivering the goods 'in the field'. It would be stupid to say that anything you have bought is 'cheap', but take into account inflation over the last twenty odd years and the Rega and Dynavector, in particular, are astonishing value for money. These are products that more often than not seem to be capable of delivering an unconditionally good sound, often in systems of substantially greater value than you might expect to find them in.*

## Rega residuals

Thanks for the Rega RP6 review. I am left with a couple of questions though. First, what is the difference between the RP6 and the RP3? Sure there is an external power source (available as an accessory), a different platter, different feet and a different paint job.

But the arm is identical, there is not much detail on the motor and the plinth looks remarkably similar. So are the differences cosmetic, or material? Also does the question of a carbon-fibre arm indicate that an upgrade is already envisaged?

Secondly, I would have thought competitors which you suggest are limited would have included the Clearaudio Concept and the Well Tempered Lab Simplex; you have already given both of these hero status, so how do they stack up? You suggest then, who could want for more as an analogue source but include the excellent article on three Walrus systems – this appears contradictory.

Finally, my observation on using PCs as a source for digital music. My turntable has lasted thirty years and although due for an upgrade, it still functions. I have owned two CD players, with fifteen years of service from a Luxman and my Primare is going strong after five years. However, when it comes to PCs, the average life span seems like only three years, hardly a ringing endorsement for investing in a long-term music solution!

**Nic Arthur**

**DP says:** *The pricier Rega RP6 adds a massier float glass platter and high tolerances aluminium sub-platter adaptor, and standardises the TT PSU power supply. Rega says that the high-gloss paint finish also adds extra rigidity to the plinth structure, too. Neither deck has a carbon-*

*fibre arm (both are aluminium), although the RP3 comes also supplied with a mild steel balance weight, whereas the RP6 uses a stainless steel balance weight. I have not heard the RP6 against the Clearaudio and Well Tempered, but experience teaches that they'll have quite different sounds, so it's best to audition them with your preferred choice of cartridge.*

*Obviously, we have different reviewers doing different reviews, and the subjective opinions expressed are their own, and not HFC's single unanimous view. I hope you'll understand that I think it's a little intellectually lazy to pretend otherwise....*

**ES says:** *If you are looking at streamed rather than computer audio, the reliability issue is spread and (to my mind anyway) reduced. A streamer contains no moving parts and I see no reason why most models arriving on the market shouldn't live as long as the CD players from the same manufacturer.*

## Down under

I picked up a copy of your magazine last week, the March 2012 issue (they arrive rather late down under) and was bemused and confused by the comments and verdict on the Creek Destiny 2 amplifier after your Blind-listening Group Test. Your poor rating and negativity of the Creek Destiny 2 came as a shock and was very vexing indeed.

The superb Creek integrated, with the right ancillaries, would normally eat the other amplifiers in the test at breakfast but not so if you, David Price, is at the breakfast table. This casts doubts on the integrity of that kind of review as

the components involved would never be given a fair chance of showing their real worth and brilliance if, in the first place, other different component/s of the ancillaries are not swapped around. To stringently stick to one set of ancillaries makes the global outcome of the test look 'biased'.

I know that you might talk about the integrity of the panel and past experience, etc., but we, the potential buyers, are not present when it all happens and wonder sceptically. For instance, who chose the ancillaries to accommodate such tests? Can we rest assured that there is no grafting concerning such choices?

You were editor of Hi-Fi World not long ago and, in that capacity, you condoned the magazine rave reviews of the Destiny 2 integrated, so much so that the Destiny 2 was awarded amplifier of the year in 2011. All happened under your nose at Hi-Fi World; where were you then, picking your nose? What is more contemptuous and contradictory is the fact that the very magazine, Hi-Fi Choice you are managing right now, has the Destiny 2 in the Buyers Guide a past group winner (p115), and the excellent accompanying comment.

So, where do you stand Mr Editor? We know blind-listening testing is a common feature in the culture of Hi-Fi Choice, but hey, you don't have to sell your soul to the devil because you've jumped ship. You don't necessarily have to concur with the erroneous impressions of your other two partners in crime because you pertinently know well that the result of the test had been vitiated by the facts relating to the ancillaries as already mentioned. To point out your sense of hypocrisy you wrote "while I thought this was harsh,

What strengths does the pricier Rega RP6 have over the RP3?





we all agreed"! Then on page 37 in the verdicts, you reciprocated as if with remorse, "but in the context of this review, with these ancillaries". Man, what were you up to? Given your antecedents, you should know the Destiny 2 much better after all?

And what about relevance of the graphs as you wrote about "the importance of transparency". I must admit I am a novice come the interpretation of scientific test results. But looking at the graphs, the machine with the best graph result was the Yamaha, which was awarded a four star rating. At the other end of the spectrum, the PrimaLuna with the worst graph result was awarded a four star rating. The Audio Analogue, not a so good graph result, the award is a four and a half star. But if one wants a farcical laugh, check the Destiny result; a fairly good graph and yet the rating is unbelievably three and a half star. Who wants to know?

It is unfair to Creek Audio, in its thirtieth anniversary, that such a good amplifier be subjected to an unwarranted head bashing. The potential buyers of this beauty of an amplifier, who unlike me, are unaware of other rave reviews elsewhere, would equivocally let their aspiration be curtailed down by simply reading through your test results. Agree that in this price bracket, not every audiophile would just drop an amplifier of that magnitude in their system without doing their homework. That is where independent reviewers of components come to the crease. Components are tested with different ancillaries before an unbiased decision is reached. For example, valve rolling with valve amplifiers; RCA/XLR interconnect trials between players and amps as well as cables with speakers and so on. This is, as you can imagine, a long and tedious task, quite afar, in a distant and different environment away from a panel of bozos with bandanas on their eyes listening inflexibly to some quality equipment at odds with an irresponsibly chosen set of ancillaries. Pity you!

**Louis, Melbourne, Australia**

**DP says:** Phew! For the readers' reference, this letter refers to my Blind-Listening Group Test review of the Creek Destiny 2 in the March 2012 issue of Hi-Fi Choice, where

*the amplifier received a poor overall verdict. Here's my reply: Hi Louis – you're absolutely correct to suggest that, in some circumstances, there could be 'synergy' issues where one review component just happens to complement the review system, and that will tend to 'weight' the results towards it. But that's life – synergy will always play a part in anything to do with hi-fi listening and/or reviewing to an extent. So what I need to do is to use equipment that I am familiar with, and that is consistent. Given that it is precisely this, I am not quite sure how you can argue that it's then deliberately chosen to flatter some products and not others?*

*You're right, I have previously happily "condoned" the rave reviews of the Creek Destiny 2, which is precisely why I wanted it in the Hi-Fi Choice integrated amp group test, as I thought it would be class of the field, providing a very high bar for the others to reach. Likewise, Hi-Fi Choice also rated the Creek very highly under the previous editorship. So it came as something as a shock to discover that it was indeed one of the worst performing amps in the test, when frankly I'd suspected it would win. As you correctly surmised, other panelists were a little harsher on the Destiny than me, but we all agreed it wasn't delivering the musical goods...*

*Past experience teaches me that when you get a result at odds with the one you expected (i.e. if you've heard the product before), then you go straight to look at the measured performance. Paul Miller and I did precisely this, but could find nothing specifically wrong, so I was all the more befuddled. Given that we couldn't find anything, we had to assume the sample was representative. I subsequently spoke to Mike Creek about this, and he duly*

### Sea of tranquility

I recently bought a Tranquility base from Synergistic Research – it's a base that goes under your equipment (CD, transport DAC, amp, etc.). It is \$2,000 in the USA and I have to say it's the best investment and upgrade I've ever made to my system.

What it does in short is to

eliminate all vibration, thus giving a clean pure sound. I hope you will have a review of this product in the near future?

**Kerem Talat**

**DP says:** thanks for that Kerem – we'll do our best to take a listen and possibly then run a review if we like it...



invited me to return the amplifier so he could take a closer look. Here's his (abridged) reply:

*"The only thing I found that could possibly explain the reason why you and your colleagues didn't like the amp, was the left channel bias current adjustment was set too low... The difference in measured performance was negligible, as proved by Paul's test, showing nothing untoward, so measurements alone do not necessarily offer the simple means of comparing products, as one would imagine... A lack of bias current will increase crossover distortion, but with the Creek Destiny design, it is not so obvious and in any case, we do not tune the bias for minimum crossover, but for the sonic sweet-spot. That equates*

*to a perfect blend of openness, clarity and space. Any more and it starts to get too rich and the soundstage closes in. Any less and it starts to get a little gritty and can sound 'transistory.*

*We have always set the bias for the Destiny 1 and 2 at 65mA, which is not as low as a bipolar amp would or could be, but not nearly as high as some MOSFET amps need to be linear. When I measured the amp, the left channel bias had dropped to about 30mA for some unknown reason, as I had personally checked it before sending the amp for review I was surprised. The difference in the adjustment was less than 0.1 Ohm over a 50 Ohm multi-turn preset pot.*

**Creek's Destiny 2 is a fine integrated amplifier, so why didn't it do well in our Blind Test? We've found out!**



Bias current is also affected by temperature changes in the output transistors, which we take into account when initially adjusting it, but that was not the reason for the imbalance. My feeling is that the preset pot may have been faulty, causing it to have a step change, as if the track was slightly damaged."

Mike has kindly offered to loan me the recalibrated review amp again, and I'm expecting it to be the same, glorious, performer that I knew it to be.

Meanwhile, I think there are a few lessons to take from this. First, don't impugn the motives of reviewers first and think later (better do it the other way round, perhaps)? Second, pity the manufacturers – they send their products out in good faith, but all it takes is a tiny component failure, dry solder joint or preset pot track, and eighteen months of development work isn't necessarily going to show itself. To paraphrase the great Murray Walker – in hi-fi, "anything can happen and it usually does"! Third, the blind-listening format is summary; there's no nostalgia for brands, pleasures and personal relationships. What the "bozos with bandanas" hear is what you read, even if it's apparently contradictory to previous reviews. It's something of a bear-pit then, albeit one done to studiously fair standards! Elsewhere in the magazine, there are in-depth reviews, where the product can be tried with a range of other ancillaries, interconnects, music, etc. – whereas in the panel test it's got to hit the ground running.

Blind-listening panel tests are unique to Hi-Fi Choice and take a lot of organising. The choice of panelists is key, too – not everyone in the hi-fi industry has golden ears. On the day of the event, the system, room and panelists are all carefully warmed up, the music is carefully selected, wireless networks, fridges and fluorescent lights turned off in the house, the lighting dimmed and then we crack on – then the chaos starts!

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### IN RESPONSE TO YOUR QUESTION ABOUT PHYSICAL MEDIA, NEVER EVER WILL I PURCHASE ENTERTAINMENT DIGITALLY!

My CD collection will continue to grow, my DVD/Blu-Ray collections will continue to grow. When artists want to give me nothing but data for my money, then I will stop giving them my money!

One CD, gives me a hard copy, with the ability to play it on any player I choose. Why on earth would I choose a medium, that has to be played on devices that must be 'data-compatible'? And even more so, the 'correct' data format for that device...

Digital media is nothing more than a compromise for convenience. I'd rather have quality and flexibility, and more importantly, something physical as a return for my money. I am more than happy to invest in the thirty-plus years of Compact Disc-based music, that exists worldwide. I don't need a digitally compressed, cost-cutting newcomer to enjoy my music listening. I have bought over 140 CDs in the last eight months, and there's no shortage of undiscovered artists for me to find.

**Lee Cawley**

**DPs says:** Hi Lee, thanks for that heartfelt missive. I'll not let on that it came from your iPad, as some readers who believe in the sanctity of physical media will doubtless feel a little let down after such rousing rhetoric! Let's just say it was written on a quality Parker fountain pen to good old Basildon Bond, shall we?

Okay, sorry for teasing. In all seriousness, I think you make some very valid points, and they rather echo what's going on in my own mind about streaming. I, like you, love physical media – so much so that in my younger days, when other lads of my own age were doing wholesome teenage things like smoking behind the bike sheds, chasing girls and decoking their two-stroke mopeds, yours truly devoted all his time (lots) and money (little) buying first-day-of-release first pressings of Smiths and Cocteau Twins 12" singles. Actually, they're worth a few bob now, so maybe they were the best investment I've ever made!

So, let's just say that no one loves records, tapes and CDs more than I, but (and yes, there was always going to be a 'but' coming), look around you. Few of us now keep physical copies of our photographs, but does that make them any less special? I was rooting around in my old photo albums recently and was struck by the poor quality of the prints, and the various almost-out-of-focus pics I'd kept because if I didn't, I'd have lost the memory. Nowadays, in my iPhoto library, they're all present and correct, looking great. This is a metaphor, I think, for where music storage is moving. Indeed, to continue it, just as Apple is currently trying to upload everything you own to a 'cloud', so our music will surely migrate there too?

This makes me think, what's the point in filling millions of server farms in the middle of nowhere with the data on the same CDs and movies? Surely, we're moving to a Spotify-type world where we don't even bother to store our own data – we just grab it on demand when needed. This in turn, is going to make NAS drives look like MiniDisc players do now, in fifteen or so years I suspect.

So, I admire your feisty, defiant stance. But rather like King Canute trying to hold back the tide, I fear it won't find universal approval, out there in the big, wide, consumer electronics and music buying world. That's why we're endeavouring to cover network products in detail. But don't worry, we won't forget good old silver disc. ●



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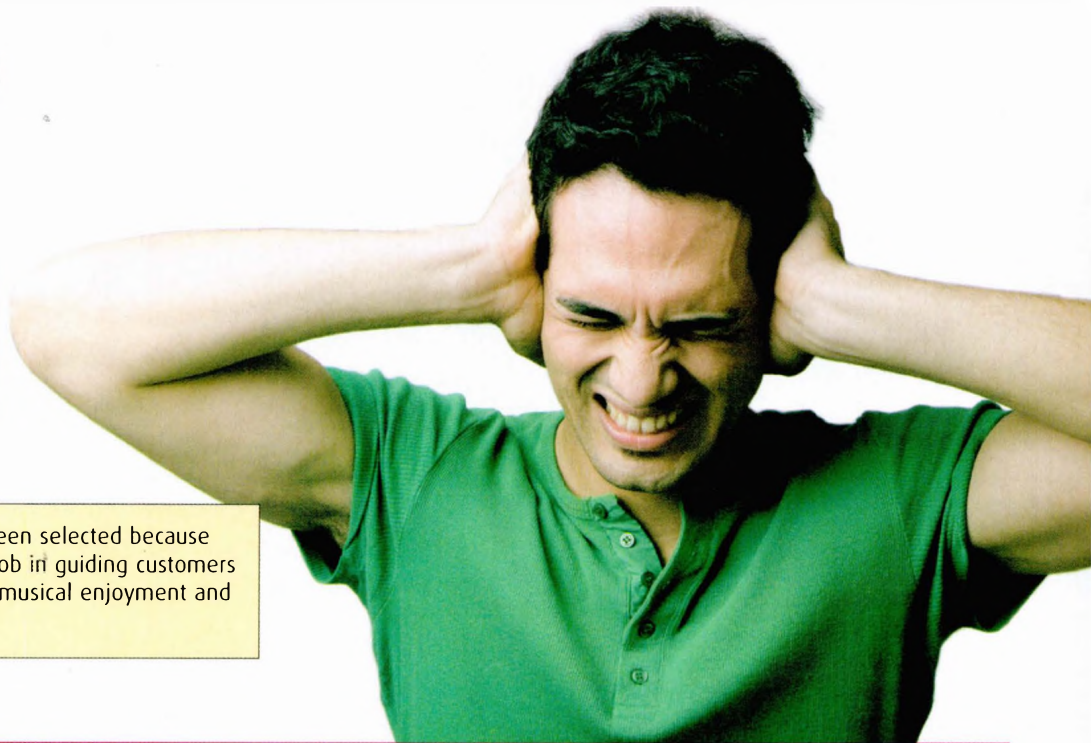


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# Music?



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.

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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

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t: 01702 435255  
www.rayleighhifi.com

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t: 020 8567 8703  
www.audiovenue.com

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GRAHAMS HI-FI  
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t: 020 7226 5500  
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ORANGES & LEMONS  
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t: 020 7924 2043  
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

#### SW20

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

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AUDIENCE  
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t: 01225 333310  
www.audience.org.uk

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

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www.overture.co.uk

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t: 0121 429 2811  
www.musicmatters.co.uk

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www.frankharvey.co.uk

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# 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 over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Full resolution, CD quality, downloads are already available and should become the norm as long as the general public can be made aware of the tremendous quality benefit. This has happened with HD TV so we know this awareness can grow rapidly. In the meantime, we must highly value hi-fi connoisseurs and specialist hi-fi retailers, of which the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest. Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

# All tomorrow's parties

Which of today's systems will achieve classic status, and which will simply be forgotten? **Tim Jarman** ponders hi-fi times passed...

**T**he classic car boys have a fun game they play; picking future classics from contemporary models. This can be particularly enjoyable, since in some cases the old ones are worth more than their replacements, so there's money to be made here...

Hi-fi is also currently enjoying an emergent vintage scene, so can the audiophile community play this game, too? While it can't be denied that decent classic hi-fi costs a great deal more today than it did ten years ago, when there were some staggering bargains to be had, we still aren't at the 'investment' stage yet. But who knows how things will look in twenty years' time?

The most important thing about picking tomorrow's audio classics is that they will still have to be relevant and usable well into the future. This instantly rules out anything that has to do with computers or that requires an external network which has to be maintained by someone else – remember the issues Sony had with its network operated 'Giga Juke' audio systems last year?

It is highly unlikely that anything that involves a PC or Mac will be usable two decades from now, computer life cycles are very short and standards change rapidly to audio's glacial time scales where formats remain current for decades. It amuses me that some people are reluctant to buy decent FM tuners just in case the BBC stops its broadcasts at some point in the distant future (which if it happens at all, is least a decade away), yet happily buy music servers which will probably end up as landfill in a few generations of operating systems time!

Need more proof? Consider the iPod, a staple of computer audio and utterly universal? Well, not quite. The original model is now just over ten years old, but because it was tied to the Apple hardware of the day and uses a FireWire connection instead of USB it's virtually useless (even if the internal battery hasn't leaked and dissolved the insides), unless you're also willing to preserve and maintain a suitable computer.

The second version was, at least, made in 'Mac' and 'PC' versions but these too are FireWire-based and not many modern computers support this. In fact, you have to get to the third version before USB connectivity and the standard dock connector are part of the package. As such, I think it's fair to say that pretty much all computer-based audio products are something to enjoy today, use up and wear out – because they surely won't make good 'attic finds' in 2032!

As well as being useful, our future audio classics also have to be well built so that they last the course. Hi-fi gear tends to get passed down the pecking order in its first life, going from the cossetting hands of the original purchaser to the audiophile on a budget, to the student squat to the shelf in the garage. To survive this and still be in a suitable state to interest a collector it needs to be tough, both mechanically and electronically. The dip in values that affects middle-aged consumer durables is a difficult time when even the slightest fault will likely get the machine scrapped, so reliability is paramount.

Finally, the particular model has to stay fondly remembered or well known throughout the passing years. Pick up any twenty year old hi-fi magazine and you'll see glowing reviews of things that are completely forgotten now, no-one today would think to look out for them.

This is very much a matter of luck, but widespread availability and distinctive styling both help, take the Nytech CTA-252XD FM receiver, for example. Nytech went bust shortly after this model was produced, but there's no doubt that it's a well-loved classic today. The same goes for the original NAD 3020 amplifier. Okay, so teenagers have blown most of them up by now, but to an audiophile of a certain age it's still a nice thing to have.

Now we are getting to the crux of the matter, sources come and go but every system still needs an amplifier and loudspeakers, so these represent the safest bets. Loudspeakers are a bit tricky because they are very subject to the whims of trends in furnishings and as we are finding out now, after a few decades some of the flexible materials that are used to make them can decompose and make the drivers useless. Turntables look like a good store of value too, LPs have had plenty of chances to be superseded and yet have remained on the scene so their total disappearance seems unlikely.

After all this, here's my guess; I can't see a tidy Quad QSP power amplifier being worthless in twenty years time; come back and laugh at me if I'm wrong!



Pick up any twenty year old hi-fi magazine and you'll see glowing reviews of things that are completely forgotten now; no-one today would think to look out for them!



**TIM JARMAN**  
Electronics engineer, vintage kit collector and classic B&O and Sony expert



# Number crunching

The quality of audio played off a computer is a common cause for concern. But what, asks **Richard Black**, happens in the recording world?

**W**e've devoted a lot of paper and ink recently here at *HFC*, to computer audio, for the very good reason that more and more people are choosing to store and play their recordings that way. But what about the making of recordings? I doubt many readers will be surprised to hear that the majority of modern recordings go through a computer at some stage. Indeed, apart from diehard all-analogue recording types (look up 'Toe Rag Studios' for a shining example), basically all recording engineers reckon to do at the very least their cut-and-paste editing on a computer.

I've been doing exactly that since the mid-nineteen nineties. Over that time things have changed a bit, not necessarily for the better in all ways. When I started, it wasn't trivial to get digital audio on and off a computer. I bought a specialised digital in/out card from Zefiro Acoustics, the kind of company where emails were answered by the same guy who designed and tested the card. Just as well, because I remember having a few issues getting it to work reliably at the start! But once it was stable, it got digits from an S/PDIF stream to the hard drive, and back, without any messing. It didn't have the computer power to do any messing, and neither did the processor (a 486 running at a dizzy 33MHz)!

These days, most computers have at least an optical digital output, but the chances are that a dedicated chip on the motherboard will resample the data without a by-your-leave, which means a loss of quality. Fortunately, most recording engineers are well aware of this and know the workarounds necessary on Windows, Mac or Linux platforms to ensure that the data coming out is identical to what's on the drive. Indeed, most engineers install hardware that makes it easier to ensure that – I, for instance, use a small box connected via FireWire that provides S/PDIF digital in and out, as well as analogue in and out, and I've done all kinds of tests to satisfy myself that my data chain is free from interference by the processor or OS.

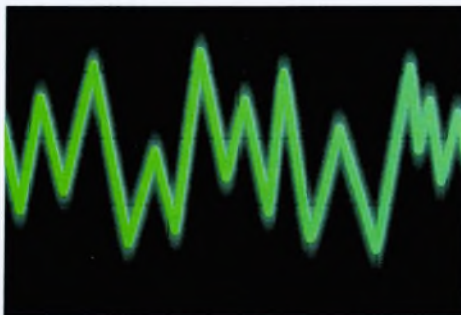
You may be comforted to know that most engineers seem to be similarly fussy. One of the most-read topics on any pro-audio discussion website is always the best way of making a computer squeaky clean in terms of data integrity. But what, you may be asking, about jitter, interference and other issues which are widely believed to affect the quality of audio played out by a computer? As long as the audio data is kept as data, and not converted to analogue, these things really don't matter.

For instance, because practically all of my recordings are of small-scale classical music and it's widely accepted that such recordings don't need fiddling with beyond cut-and-paste editing, I don't convert the data to analogue at all (apart from obviously needing to listen while I edit) during the editing or mastering phases. Indeed, I've issued many recordings where the data on the final CD are exactly what came off the A-D convertor in the recording venue, apart from cross-fades (themselves lasting tens of milliseconds) at edit points. Here, the quality of my computer as an audio playing machine is just not an issue.

Even when significant processing is carried out on the computer (what tends to be referred to as mixing, EQ etc., 'in the box'), if it's all digital and onboard the one machine there's no reason why effects like jitter should have any impact, unless they are so bad as to cause data errors – and in that case the sound is likely to be stuttery and very obviously distorted. Engineers will argue until the cows come home about the respective sonic merits of different bits of software to do these tasks, but each is what's technically called a 'state machine', where the output is mathematically derived from the input.

Where computer sound quality can be an issue is in a system which uses some outboard processing, even if it is digital. I for instance, use an outboard artificial reverberation unit for low-budget recordings made in sub-optimal venues, and this kind of device is quite common. Many such units include an asynchronous sample-rate converter and while these chips are clever they're not necessarily immune to jitter. If an analogue feed is taken, for instance to a vintage analogue EQ unit, great care needs to be taken with the D-A and A-D conversion to avoid computer jitter.

In principle, even fully 'in the box' signal processing can be affected by jitter if the feed the engineer is listening to is thus afflicted.



I doubt many readers will be surprised to hear that the majority of modern recordings go through a computer at some stage...



**RICHARD BLACK**  
Prolific musician, recording engineer and reviewer

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# Up the junction

A custom-built room in the basement or the dustbin? Streaming music has made **Jimmy Hughes** ponder the usefulness of his prized LPs...

**G**od moves in mysterious ways. For a while now, I've been aiming to convert a basement room into a storage place to house my LP collection. Work finally started towards the end of March, and was completed mid-April. Now the fun begins; transporting about 20,000 LPs to their new abode! They have to be moved very carefully – to keep everything in order, while avoiding physical damage to the sleeves. It's a mammoth task.

Amassing a big music collection requires huge amounts of time and effort. With me, it took about forty years. I used to think it all very worthwhile. A noble cause. Time (and money) well spent. Suddenly, I'm not so sure...

Around the time work started on building shelves in the new room, I signed up for something called Spotify. This (as most of you will know) is a website that allows you to stream music via the Internet. Spotify gives you access to a huge library of music. I chose its Premium option (£9.99 per month), which delivers the best quality. My main interest is Classical, and the breadth of what's available is surprising and impressive. At a stroke, Spotify makes big music collections like mine seem sooo last century. Agreed, with Spotify you don't physically possess the recordings you listen to. You don't have them sitting there on a shelf. But does that matter?

In the past, it certainly did. I wanted to 'own' LPs or CDs. Sometimes, I'd even buy discs I already had if it came in a different sleeve. Since every item was individually chosen, the time I spent building my collection was enormous.

Now, thanks to the likes of Spotify, you too can have a massive music collection. Instantly! Without leaving the house. Okay, the physical pleasure of fondling the discs and perusing over the sleeves isn't offered, but you do get the music. And not actually possessing discs does have its advantages – as I wearily lug box after box of Long Playing records down to the new room, the benefits of a 'virtual collection' in cyberspace grows more appealing.

With my LPs safely housed a separate room, there's a grave risk that out of sight means out of mind. Internet streamers like Spotify make music very accessible. Even playing CDs now seems a bit of a palaver – let alone LPs. After getting Spotify I hardly played any CDs or LPs for a few weeks – too busy exploring my new virtual collection. More significantly, I've not bought any new CDs for over a month now – amazing, given my voracious buying habits!

I still visit record shops out of sheer habit, but wonder what the hell I'm doing there, and end up walking out having bought nothing. I no longer need to own music to enjoy it; just being able to hear it whenever I want is enough. That's a profound change. Until very recently a CD or LP was the music. So, ownership was all-important. I got almost as much pleasure from looking through my collection, as listening to it. Still do, but it's not the same as it was...

Now faced with many days of hard labour as I move my LPs to their new location, I almost resent having so many. I resent the space they take up, and the fact that a room has been dedicated (wasted?) to house them. Truly, collecting on such a gargantuan scale is a disease; okay it's fun too, but also a kind of sickness. Pity the 'cure' came so late!

Trouble is, I couldn't just 'skip' my LPs – they cost me too much, and I still have an emotional attachment to them. Selling isn't really an option either; classical LPs just aren't worth much these days. You can't just give 'em away [oh yes, you can – to me! *Ed.*]. And so it's my assumption that I'm really up the junction...

I still visit record shops out of habit, but often wonder what the hell I'm doing there, and end up walking out having bought nothing!



**JIMMY HUGHES**  
Classical music buff, sage audiophile and hi-fi reviewer

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# End of line

Current computer technology is wasteful, and there's no sign of the situation improving, thinks **Channa Vithana**...

I think the potential for playing music through computers is exciting, and almost limitless. But the problem is that I can't readily think of a commercially available domestic hard-drive inside a computer that's still usefully functioning continuously after thirty plus years, unlike good examples of hi-fi hardware. Indeed, the closest I can think of is seeing our very own Tim Jarman's restored BBC Micro fed through a Sony Trinitron CRT TV (natch!) a few years ago. It was bizarre seeing this old relic powered up and reminded me of pixelated games that had to be loaded via portable cassette recorders, or a (literally) floppy disk somewhat larger than a CD jewel case. A friend had the BBC Micro; I on the other hand used a sleeker Sinclair ZX Spectrum 48K! This was, and I think still is, a superb piece of industrial design with its weird rubberised keys and for the time, very compact dimensions.

In many ways, the Spectrum (with excellent games like *Saboteur*), along with the BBC Micro revolutionised affordable home computing for many, and whether at school or home these machines provided many hours of fun, and occasionally some education, too. My Spectrum resides, now silently, entombed within in its polystyrene-lined cardboard box somewhere. When it was used it lasted for about five years from new without breakdown and still played all the original games before I stopped using it in 1987.

In 2005 I bought a new 64-bit laptop using Windows XP, after two previous desktops failed with just three years service each. These three computers, due to their materials, have had to be sent to be partially recycled after their hard-drives and motherboards failed – the laptop failed in 2009. I tried to repair each of these computers but was told that the data was lost, completely corrupted and/or it was not worth replacing cards, etc. Instead I had to get a new computer. Fortunately I had saved most of my important files on blank CD-ROMs.

What this maddening process highlights is the complete waste that arises from the march of computer technology. Not only is the software, hardware and/or operating system out of date as soon it is made, if the computer crashes then you've probably lost all your precious data as well...

As a result, the lure of ever-faster processors, software and simply 'the new' seems almost impossible to resist. This anxiety-driven technological drive and/or built-in obsolescence and/or cheap and poor build quality (step-

forward all those noisy and rattling CD-ROM drives), means that nothing you save in a computer can be trusted to last for decades, let alone a few years – unlike your treasured vinyl, CD or pre-recorded cassettes. Because of this, I try and save anything of value (music, family photos, work files, etc.) across separate external hard drives, USB memory sticks, servers and DVD-ROMs, which is ridiculous – but nowhere near as painful as losing something when, and I repeat *when*, my computer fails.

It's not just you or I who should be concerned, but also the pros that produce recorded music and latterly, digitally shot film, where these are normally recorded and stored on hard-drives. Just think of the patchy track-record of storing expensive legacy formats like analogue and digital magnetic audio master-tape, or 35mm film where the original has deteriorated. So unless you are extremely pedantic and keep all valuable recordings in atmosphere-controlled environments, then who knows what will happen to all these hard-drive-based creative works?

You could say that because it's digital you can make several identical copies and keep them, but what of this digital provenance – what is the original master? The data could also be stored on a server or other such externalised storage system – but these need space and maintenance against computer hackers/viruses and the need for new software, whereas older physical formats required primarily space, and if unusually well sorted, then a consistently controlled atmosphere to preserve the stock.

What's needed is the deletion of current computer manufacturing processes, which ironically are over thirty years old. They need to be replaced with a new paradigm, where far more efficient, longer-lasting technology is reliable and adaptable to change – if only to weather the tyranny of the *new*. To paraphrase Megadeth's album and title song, may our hard-drives all *Rust in Peace!*



What is needed is the deletion of current computer manufacturing processes. They need to be replaced with a new paradigm, where far more efficient, longer-lasting technology is reliable and adaptable to change...



CHANNA VITHANA  
Reviewer, design aficionado and music lover



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# Universal soldier

There's more to digital life than ones and noughts, says a combative **Malcolm Steward!**

**M**y current hi-fi set-up has network attached storage machines, holding my music and its back-ups in my office, connected to a Gigabit switch that then connects to a wireless router in the adjoining hallway. This has two Ethernet cables coming from it; one comes back into my office to connect to my 'work' domain so that the music network can connect to the Internet, while the second is wired to another Gigabit switch in my music room. That switch sits with my hi-fi equipment and connects to the network audio players available to me at any particular time.

This might sound like a complicated arrangement, but it is about the simplest, best sounding and safest I could come up with. For starters, having discrete networks for my work and my music set-up is eminently sensible because of security and for restricting access to those networks: any computer connected to the music network (a home-style workgroup with Wi-Fi but only for control) cannot mess with anything stored on the work network (a proper business-style domain with no wireless access).

As importantly, the only traffic on the music network is music – there is no interference from the office and its traffic, which is a real consideration if you are listening to 24-bit/192kHz FLAC, WAV or other high resolution files while performing file or disk management, say. Talking of interference, having my NAS boxes and computers all remote and distant from the hi-fi also helps ensure that the music room remains a 'clean' environment, with no electrically noisy computers polluting the mains or radiating nasties into the air.

That is probably why I always wonder why American audiophiles seem so keen on the laptop and DAC approach to playing music. My laptop will run for no more than a couple of hours on its battery, and I would never use it to play music when it was connected to the mains so it is not a huge amount of use to me. And many USB DACs can be troublesome – without mentioning their SMPS boxes – and can require special drivers installing to let them cope – after a fashion – with high sample rates. Finally, the computer USB port itself can be problematic: it is fine for plugging your mouse into but I prefer not to trust it with music.

There is also a surprising variability in the USB cables that are available, and note that I refer to USB audio cables and not the tu'penny ha'penny USB data cables one can buy in computer stores for

connecting a scanner, printer or suchlike to your computer. I contend that the latter are of no use whatsoever for transmitting music files (which involves a different protocol to transmitting photographs or documents). In fact, I recently tested half a dozen audiophile USB cables and even the worst sounding was significantly better than a computer store offering.

The trouble with the best was the perception people had of it – what do you mean it costs £250? It's only a USB cable! Then there were the digital cable deniers – those who have convinced themselves that all digital either works or it does not, there are no degrees of functionality, so that cable is the worst sort of snake oil!

This close-mindedness is typical of the 'digital is perfect' brigade who do not realise that 'digital' transmission is just very high-frequency analogue. Electrons are still electrons. They do not discriminate. It is all just electricity passing along a wire to them. Digital and analogue only differ in their frequencies.

Why should an audiophile USB cable cost any less than an audiophile interconnect? For some strange reason people expect computer cables like USB to cost peanuts. If they cost more, then they are obviously a rip-off. I am certain that some of them are, but equally there are many that appear genuinely worth the price asked.

It is no different from when someone witnesses a plainly audible difference then denies that it exists because his interpretation of whatever smattering of science he picked up in school tells him that difference *ought* not to exist...

Typically, most of these close-minded people are joyless penny-pinchers. They regularly come out with rubbish such as, 'why would anyone waste money on a Lamborghini Aventador LP 700-4 when a Ford Focus can transport you anywhere you want to go for far less money?' The concepts of enjoyment and pride of ownership appear to be completely lost on them. What sort of thrilling hi-fi do you imagine they own?



**MALCOLM STEWARD**  
Veteran hi-fi reviewer and music obsessive

Most close-minded people are joyless penny-pinchers who regularly come out with rubbish such as, 'why would anyone waste money on a Lamborghini Aventador LP 700-4, when a Ford Focus can transport you anywhere you want to go'...

# Well being

It takes a special turntable to upstage the Linn LP12 in **Malcolm Steward's** affections. Well Tempered's classic Amadeus GTA is just that...

I don't remember exactly when I first heard the Well Tempered turntable – as it was called back in the late nineteen eighties or early nineties when I first encountered it – but I do remember it looked as near as damn it identical to my current Well Tempered Amadeus GTA. Over the years the design has evolved almost imperceptibly and without any drama. As a design it is just as left-field now as it was when I first set eyes upon it.

I think that its creator, William Firebaugh, is probably the best example of a pragmatist since the days of the Bauhaus. There is *nothing* in the design of the GTA that could be described as superfluous: no decorative elements, no styling features. Everything on the table is there to perform a function. There is an elegant simplicity about every aspect of this record player and its *über-down-to-earth* unipivot tonearm in particular.

The turntable is, like most vinyl disc spinners of the modern age, belt-driven. But the belt connecting the acrylic platter to the DC motor pulley is fashioned from 0.004mm Polyester monofilament thread, alternatively known as a fishing line! Knotted fishing line actually, which makes replacing a failed belt a simple and inexpensive task, one that any Boy Scout should be able to do for you with locally sourced material on Bob-a-Job day (if such a thing still exists in these PC days of health and safety)! Interestingly, although this unusual belt design seems frugal in the extreme, Firebaugh measured its performance and found it produced the lowest wow and flutter he had ever measured, so the story goes.

The current iteration of the Amadeus, like the original and unlike most high-end turntables, does *not* have a suspended subchassis or any decoupling more sophisticated than compliant feet (squash balls) supporting the chassis. I once described this turntable as being the Heidi Klum version of the Rega Planar, and that is none-too-far from the truth. Overdressed is not a term that leaps to mind when searching for adjectives to describe this structure, although its construction uses no MDF – absolutely no disrespect is intended here to Rega or Ms Klum!

## Armed forces

The most outstanding feature of the package has to be its unipivot tonearm, which represents the deconstruction of tonearm design along with a flagrant destruction of hitherto sacrosanct rules. For example, the instruction manual boldly states, 'the Amadeus tonearm has an effective length of 10.5'. The headshell is fixed ex-factory in the optimum position. There is no provision for overhang adjustment.

**Minimalist, but capable of great sound, the Well Tempered Amadeus GTA is a classic...**

Some alignment protractors may well disagree. However, the Well Tempered Lab stands by its convictions. That fits in nicely with my feelings about cartridge alignment, encapsulated by 'make sure the cantilever points forwards – away from the tonearm counterweight – and down towards the record! Too many vinyl fans spend far too much time making largely inconsequential adjustments to their turntable set-up that I believe serve only to assuage their paranoia. In my book, the worst things you'll get from a slightly misaligned cartridge are second harmonic components, which the ear often perceives as sweetness.

The beauty of the Well Tempered arrangement is that the user simply mounts the cartridge to the tonearm and then starts playing music. This simplicity greatly appeals to me. The high-grade-sand-filled tonearm is attached to the dual layer, black anodised, aluminium/acrylic, sandwich construction plinth by a monofilament thread that suspends it from a gantry arrangement on the





plinth, which is, in effect, the arm's bearing. The arm has attached to it a golf ball, which sits partially submerged in a bath of viscous silicone fluid to provide a variable degree of damping and physical stability to the structure.

Research in 1977 by Bruel and Kjaer suggested that a high fidelity tonearm should have a low effective mass and be mechanically damped to a Q of 0.5 to eliminate the side-band distortion generated by mechanical instability that is particularly objectionable to human hearing. Firebaugh's string, sand and golf ball interpretation fulfils all those requirements, which can be graphically demonstrated by the simple act of lowering the cartridge onto a rotating LP and watching the way the stylus quickly – and quietly – settles securely into the groove.

My example of the Well Tempered Amadeus GTA came complete with a Dynavector XX-2 moving coil cartridge and a Pear Audio UK-sourced wall wart power supply. The PSU was changed near instantly for a modified Naim NAPSC, regulated, linear PSU, which still provides the juice for the turntable to this day..

Setting up the turntable was a painless procedure and took about thirty minutes, most of which were spent on unpacking it. Installing the platter was interesting because the round spindle fits into a triangular bearing aperture, which allows the platter to tilt to one side until you fit the drive belt. Oil for the spindle is not especially glamorous, 5-15W synthetic motor oil... though I am sure that some *über* tweak will insist that Castrol sounds infinitely better than Mobil [Redline actually – Ed.]!

Setting up the tonearm consumes most time, but is neither difficult nor obtuse: it could be described as intuitive for those of a mechanical bent or anyone with any mechanical sensitivity. Once you have the arm dangling from the gantry you simply need to raise or lower the silicone container until the golf ball is appropriately submerged and damped. I set my arm such that around one quarter of the ball is below the surface of the silicone; any more than that and I feel the vitality seemed to be sapped from the music. Making the adjustment involves little more than releasing



The fishing line-style drive belt is easy to replace should you happen to break it!

a retaining screw with an allen key and sliding the container up or down through the plinth, and then waiting for the fluid to settle.

### Sound quality

For many years prior to the arrival of the WT GTA I had lived with a Funk modified Linn Sondek LP12, a turntable to which I could return tomorrow... except there are one or two features of the GTA that are just too appealing. For example, if one listens to the solo soprano, Alison Stamp, singing Allegri's *Miserere*, her voice sounds noticeably more secure and rooted on the WT. She sounds far more convincing and real. On the Funked LP12 she sounds rather more tremulous and less positive, less assured. Less of a woman, more of a recording!

One of the Funk LP12's strong points has always been its ability to portray timing and 'the beat', and the GTA is certainly not wanting in this

The Amadeus GTA simplifies the whole process of playing vinyl...

respect either. The authority with which it portrays bass and drums alone ensure that it never sounds rhythmically challenged.

The beauty of the Amadeus is that you can adjust it to deliver precisely the performance you want to achieve, primarily through tweaking the set-up of the tonearm. The damping of the golf ball delivers the most dramatic adjustments, particularly in terms of rhythmic agility and dynamics.

When it all comes together, though, and you have the Amadeus tuned to perfection and installed on a suitable

### BUYING

**Well Tempered turntables have been in production now for over twenty years, so as with any vinyl spinner of advancing age, it's a very good idea to try before you buy. Buying from eBay might seem nice and easy, but you never know what you could receive when the postman knocks! So do view before you hit Buy it Now! Prices range from £500-£2,000 depending on age and condition; check deck and arm work noiselessly and smoothly and there are no nasty marks anywhere. If so, walk away.**

support – my not-too-heavily-laden Quadraspire Vent seems to be an ideal partner – the turntable will deliver a wonderfully fluid, natural and communicative performance. It seems able to put you and the musician in intimate contact. It will let you know exactly why he phrases the way he does, and why he picks those particular notes. It seems especially communicative on vocal works and seems particularly able to convey nuances and subtleties in singers' voices. This all happens to the accompaniment of virtually zero background noise – the GTA is astonishingly quiet, which helps focus your mind on what is happening within the music and not on the intrusive mechanics of the replay.

### Conclusion

The Well Tempered Labs turntable is exceptionally effective at putting a distance between the music and vinyl noise, which vastly improves the overall listening experience. I also love the way this classic deck simplifies the whole process of playing vinyl, and removes from it any suggestion of doubt or paranoia about set-up or adjustment. Fundamentally, if the platter is rotating in a clockwise direction, all is well with the world and you can relax and enjoy the music!

At around £2,800 at today's price, including the tonearm, the current Amadeus is relatively speaking bargain-priced when you compare it to rivals such as the arm-less Sondek LP12. The UK importer informs me that while the Amadeus GTA remains current, there's a cheaper variant available and a more expensive new model coming soon. ●



# 1965

This year in music is an embarrassment of riches. Pop heavyweights like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan are churning out classic records in their sleep – quite literally in some cases! **Simon Berkovitch** spins the dial to 1965...

**A**lthough the UK's first colour TV transmission was two years away – 1967's Wimbledon tennis coverage, to be exact – popular music lost its black and white pallor for good in 1965. Releases from this stellar year's key players – The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan – were more sophisticated than ever before, and drew from a more diverse, more colourful musical and lyrical palette. Ladies and gentlemen, the 60s are starting to swing in glorious Technicolor...

### String quartets and classical flutes

The previous year's Beatlemania is captured forever in grainy black and white – in the newsreels of hysterical ticker tape parades, screaming teenage girls and bemused adults as four famous mop-topped young musicians wave to adoring crowds on multitudinous aeroplane steps.

The Beatles exploded into colour both on record and in the cinema during this year in music. 1965 gave birth to the quartet's most ambitious long-playing recordings to date. August's partial soundtrack to *Help!* – the follow-up to the frenetic *A Hard Day's Night* movie – saw new textures added to the group's compositional arsenal.

The Beatles exploded into colour both on record and in the cinema. 1965 gave birth to the quartet's most ambitious long-playing recordings to date...

The major stylistic departure on *Help!* was *Yesterday*, a string quartet-driven song that now has the considerable reputation of the most covered song in popular music. This McCartney-penned ballad, which the composer claimed came to him in a dream, is a world away from the rough, uptempo crowd pleasers of the Cavern club years.

Its inclusion demonstrated that, as EMI's premier cash cow, every textural flight of fancy could now be indulged. This song in particular opened the floodgates for other British groups – like The Kinks and The Moody Blues to name but two – to travel beyond the confines of their American rock 'n' roll influences and mine a uniquely English seam in the years that followed. Indeed, popular music in the psychedelic era (1966-1968) would be awash with strings, flutes, marimbas, Mellotrons and all manner of exotic, non-rock n' roll instrumentation!

Elsewhere on *Help!*, songwriting partner Lennon's composition *You've Got To Hide Your Love Away* betrayed a strong lyrical whiff of Bob Dylan (more of this tousle-haired chap later) and also utilised classical flutes to great effect.

### Raga rock and the killer of filler

December's *Rubber Soul* was even more confident and its instrumentation more eclectic. Harrison had now fallen under the spell of Indian classical music, and Lennon's confessional *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)* features the first use of the sitar in pop, the instrument of choice in the raga rock boom, reaching its apex on 1966's

classic singles *Eight Miles High* by American quintet The Byrds and *Paint It Black* by The Rolling Stones.

This was less an LP more an artistic statement. The Beach Boys' resident troubled genius Brian Wilson certainly thought so. The Beach Boys were also evolving, evidenced by the compelling departure of *California Girls*,



released as a single that July. On hearing *Rubber Soul*, he vowed to meet the new artistic challenge head-on, his hard graft resulting in critics' favourite *Pet Sounds* the following year. The days of albums as cynical product, with singles padded out with filler tracks, appeared numbered.







The Rolling Stones came alive in '65 – Satisfaction put them on the map, based on a riff Keith Richards came by in his sleep!



▶ **SATISFACTION GUARANTEED**

The UK's number one singles in 1965 largely read like the ultimate 60s Spotify playlist, with The Beatles and The Stones leading the pop production line...

- Georgie Fame & the Blue Flames *Yeh Yeh*
- The Moody Blues *Go Now*
- The Righteous Brothers *You've Lost That Loving Feeling*
- The Kinks *Tired of Waiting For You*
- The Seekers *I'll Never Find Another You*
- Tom Jones *It's Not Unusual*
- The Rolling Stones *The Last Time*
- Unit Four Plus Two *Concrete & Clay*
- Cliff Richard *The Minute You're Gone*
- The Beatles *Ticket to Ride*
- Roger Miller *King of the Road*
- Jackie Trent *Where Are You Now (My Love)*
- Sandie Shaw *Long Live Love*
- Elvis Presley *Crying in the Chapel*
- The Hollies *I'm Alive*
- The Byrds *Mr Tambourine Man*
- The Beatles *Help!*
- Sonny & Cher *I Got You Babe*
- The Rolling Stones *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*
- The Walker Brothers *Make It Easy On Yourself*
- Ken Dodd *Tears*
- The Rolling Stones *Get Off Of My Cloud*
- The Seekers *The Carnival Is Over*
- The Beatles *Day Tripper/ We Can Work It Out*

▶ **RAGA ROCK**

The sounds of the Indian sitar and tabla permeated mid-60s pop, as evidenced on a brace of classic 45s and album tracks.

The Beatles may get the credit for being the first combo to use the sitar on record – *Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)* on *Rubber Soul* – and George Harrison is undeniably the instrument's pop poster boy, but other beat groups were mining an Indian seam before the Fab Four. For example, The Yardbirds' June single *Heart Full of Soul* features a suitably sitar-esque electric guitar riff courtesy of Jeff Beck. The Kinks' July 45 *See My Friends* also has a mesmeric, drone-like quality.

Raga rock reached its apex early the following year, with both The Beatles' experiments in drone rock and Indian music on *Revolver (Tomorrow Never Knows and Love You To)* and The Byrds' masterful double A-side *Eight Miles High/ Why*. At the time, The Byrds were at pains to point out that *Eight Miles High* had its roots in the free jazz of John Coltrane rather than the Indian classical music of Ravi Shankar, but, either way, rock and roll had decisively left Tin Pan Alley and skiffle for dust.





## From beyond the wall of sleep

Yesterday wasn't the only deathless composition to have mysteriously materialised from beyond the wall of sleep. Luckily for pop music fans, The Rolling Stones' guitarist and songwriter Keith Richards kept a cassette recorder by his bedside for just those moments of nocturnal inspiration. As chronicled in his wildly entertaining autobiography, *Life*, he had no knowledge that he'd written the crucial riff for *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* until, one morning, emerging from his slumber, he rewound the tape to hear a crude, but undeniably propulsive riff clattering back from an acoustic guitar... promptly followed by the sound of loud snoring. The release of this particular song as a US single in June (their first American number one) and in the UK later that year (again, hitting the top spot) confirmed The Rolling Stones as The Beatles' major rivals.

After *Satisfaction*, the group's profile understandably soared, scoring three number one singles in the UK alone, and, thanks to the skill of resident multi-instrumentalist Brian Jones, their albums (starting with that

year's *Out of Our Heads*) became increasingly accomplished. The blues purist years were abandoned in favour of timeless sixties pop anthems, before the group mutated into a formidable rock act at the turn of the decade.

## Pop spreads its wings

That pop music had learned to say much more than "She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah" was evident with the touchdown of 'America's Answer to The Beatles' – The Byrds – and their debut single *Mr Tambourine Man*. Exuding Californian cool – super-long hair, eccentric sunglasses and trendy threads – and deploying a distinctive 12-string electric Rickenbacker sound with perfect harmonies, the quintet were the first *credible* group

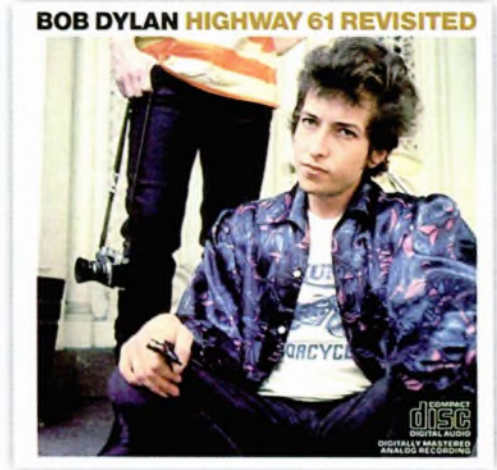
## Pop music's detractors now had to rethink their arguments that its lyrical content was barren, after the imagery that sprung out of *Mr Tambourine Man*

(forget Peter, Paul and Mary and *Blowin' in the Wind*) to successfully infiltrate the pop charts with the muse of Bob Dylan – and get his message to the top of the charts.

This marriage of Beat Generation-inspired poetry and Beat group jangle was not only inspired but irrepressible, dominating the airwaves throughout the year. Pop music's detractors now had to rethink their arguments that its lyrical content was intellectually barren after the dense, stimulating thickets of imagery that sprung out of *Mr Tambourine Man*.

## Dylan raises the bar

Not that Bob Dylan needed much assistance to carve out a formidable niche in the new pop landscape. Here was an artist rapidly



outgrowing the confines of the American folk music revival from which he had sprung. March saw the release of a taste of the future; the album *Bringing It All Back Home*, with one side acoustic and the other – shock horror – electric!

The so-called reincarnation of Woody Guthrie was clearly stretching out, and his full band performance at the Newport Folk Festival that year – featuring guitarist Mike Bloomfield and organist Al Kooper, both players on Dylan's genius single *Like a Rolling Stone* that July – enraged as many audience members as it delighted. Whether it was the shock of Dylan 'going electric', the truncated set or folk purism that provoked the audience catcalls, one thing was clear – Dylan was leaving the folksy backroads for the electric highway. Indeed his sixth studio album, the legendary *Highway 61 Revisited* released that August, was full of killer, full-tilt full-band compositions – apart from the eleven-minute epic acoustic closer *Desolation Row*.

The kaleidoscopic imagery of unforgettable songs like *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, *Ballad of a Thin Man* and aforementioned single *Like a Rolling Stone* was matched by suitably inventive, exciting and propulsive electric rock and roll. One can only imagine that The Beatles, Stones and Beach Boys first listened to this work slack-jawed, realising that the bar for excellence had just been set even higher in the pop hierarchy. ●

Electric blues: Bob Dylan plugged in to the grid with 1965's *Bringing it All Back Home*...





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- Hi-Fi Choice, January 2009



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- Hi-Fi News, June 2011 (Integrated Amplifier)



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**96 Bartok, Holst, Ravel, Prokofiev, Schulhoff**  
Music From The Machine Age



**97 Terry Riley**  
A Rainbow In Curved Air



**97 My Bloody Valentine**  
Loveless

# Music reviews

The latest music releases...

## ALBUM OF THE MONTH



### David Bowie

The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars

emimusic.com

★★★★★

EMI

CD/180 gram Vinyl/DVD with 5.1 mixes

**THE NUMBER ONE ALBUM** that changed the face of 1970s music – or so most of us probably thought. The latter part of the statement is true enough; but forty years on it's funny how the memory plays tricks. Researching the history of Bowie's step-changing album reveals that *Ziggy Stardust* managed to rise no higher than number five in the British charts during the summer of 1972, kept from greater eminence by the likes of Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Alice Cooper.

In America, its chart impact was almost non-existent and it could only limp to number 75. But no matter, for it is *Ziggy Stardust* rather than ELP's *Trilogy* or AC's *School's Out* that is remembered today as defining the zeitgeist, an iconic record that is regularly listed in the

top ten of almost every 'best album of all time' poll.

Part of the revolution effected by *Ziggy Stardust* was that it enabled Bowie to redefine the rock 'n' roll template, subverting the grim earnestness of the scruffy, long-haired hordes in leather-and-denim and introducing a sense of camp glamour. To John Lennon, the *Ziggy/Bowie* phenomenon was "just great rock 'n' roll with lipstick on" – and in a sense he was right. *Ziggy Stardust* put the art into the glam rock fad, which much further down the food chain gave us Sweet and Gary Glitter.

But the album also launched Bowie on a series of brilliant, chameleon-like changes, helped to liberate us from notions of rock 'n' roll 'authenticity' and put a sense of

The new 2012 remastering pushes Bowie's vocals to the fore, emphasising his every mannerism

theatre at the heart of pop. "I felt like an actor", he sang on the opening track. And for good or bad, pop has never been the same since.

Despite the sci-fi elements of its subject matter and Bowie's uniquely maverick vision, on its release *Ziggy Stardust* also seemed to channel the whole of rock 'n' roll history (which, of course, was still in its teenage adolescence at the time) and point it at the future. The opener *Five Years* harks back to 1950s rock 'n' roll, while *Soul Love* tips its hat to US black music. *Moonage Daydream* is a psychedelic freak-out and *Suffragette City* is unbridled garage rock mayhem. *Starman* is high calibre saccharine pop, while *Rock 'n' roll Suicide*, the album's

final scene, is a kitsch melodrama that fuses Jacques Brel balladry with Spector's wall of sound. It's all bundled up with self-referential messages about the redemptive power of music and topped with a rock 'n' roll messiah complex which, if you were 16, seemed to offer a manifesto for the new world.

'Cinematic' has since become one of the clichés of modern music criticism, but *Ziggy Stardust* was arguably the first album to merit the description. The 2012 remastering pushes Bowie's vocals to the fore, emphasising his every mannerism. The result is that his already stylised voice sounds over the top in places.

For that reason, the broader palette of the 5.1 mixes included on the audio DVD disc provides a better balance to this reviewer's ears and gives fuller expression to his band, the *Spiders From Mars* – who, after all, are important enough to earn a namecheck in the album's title. **NW**

**Standout tracks:** Five Years; Ziggy Stardust; Suffragette City; Rock 'n' roll Suicide



Invasion from Mars: David Bowie as Ziggy Stardust





**Richard Hawley**  
*Standing At The Sky's Edge*  
 parlophone.co.uk  
 ★★★★★ Parlophone  
 CD

**RICHARD HAWLEY** has established himself as a musical diamond in the British pop rough with five albums filled with tales of love lost or never found, classically melodic songwriting, and a rich, expressive baritone that often echoes Scott Walker, but can turn on a hair to evoke shades of Roy Orbison. His sixth is very much Hawley's 'rock' album, and the dense, guitar-heavy soundscape of feedback and wah-wah that often threatens to subsume it is a world away from the heartbreak ballads of *Coles Corner*. Later Oasis albums should really have sounded more like this.

The psychedelic washes of guitar and doomily intoned vocals benefit from a cranking of the volume and a decent system will cut through the curtains of reverb to reveal some gorgeous string arrangements and piano moments within the mix. Overall, it's an album best enjoyed with a few tots of your favourite tipple, in a darkened room, on your own - classic hi-fi really. **DO**



**Bartok, Holst, Ravel, Prokofiev, Schulhoff**  
*Music From The Machine Age*  
 onyxclassics.com  
 ★★★★★ Onyx  
 CD

**THIS DISC FEATURES** an interesting cross-section of 20th century orchestral works that have in common a certain mechanised barbarity. Things get off to a suitably aggressive start with Prokofiev's primitive *Scythian Suite*, and this is followed by the suite from Schulhoff's rarely-heard *Ogelala ballet*. The pace intensifies with the suite from Bartok's grisly *Miraculous Mandarin*, and Holst's ballet *The Perfect Fool* follows. The disc ends with Ravel's *La Valse* - that curious mix of smooth beguiling suavity and catastrophic disintegration.

The playing of the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic orchestra is feisty and spirited. Just make sure your neighbours are out before you wind up the volume... **JMH**

## AUDIOPHILE VINYL

**BB King** Singin' The Blues purepleasurerecords.com



★★★★★ Crown/Pure Pleasure  
 180g vinyl

**THIS 1956 DEBUT** from the legend in waiting showcases the spare style that was to influence pretty much everyone who made their name in the sixties



**Rachmaninov, Scriabin**  
*Piano Concerto No 4 and Prometheus*  
 analekta.com  
 ★★★★★ Analekta  
 CD

**RACHMANINOV'S** 4th Piano Concerto is usually heard in the revised final version of 1941, which was quite a bit shorter than the original. The version from 1927 has been recorded on several occasions, but this seems to be the first recording of the 1926 original and so you'll hear quite a few extra notes in this recording.

The performance is thoughtful and sensitive, yet forward-moving and dynamic, with plenty of detail. Alain Lefevre is an excellent pianist, and conductor Kent Nagano supports him every step of the way. Scriabin's *Prometheus* is the coupling, and the recorded sound is clean, open and clear, with excellent clarity and lots of fine detail. Balances sound natural, and sound is wholly truthful and very believable. **JMH**



**Joan Armatrading**  
*Starlight*  
 hypertension-music.de  
 ★★★★★ Hypertension  
 CD

**JOAN ARMATRADING'S** had the hits, the Grammys and the respect, but perhaps there's something in that famous reserve that prevents her becoming a national treasure like Sirs Elton and Tom. Following the blues and rock moods of her last couple of albums, *Starlight* turns towards jazz, but among the 'fusion' tropes it also has some of the best tunes of her career. *The Way I Think Of You* a deliciously suspicious hurts-so-good love song and the title track offers a heartfelt warning to bright-eyed fame wannabes from someone who's always donethingsher own sweet way.

The production is typically smooth, but her deceptively delicate voice wraps itself around some highly poignant lyrics with a surety of tone that reveals new intimacies each time you listen to it. **DO**

and can be heard clearly in the early work of Jeff Beck, Clapton and Page. The album contains many of the hits that King had in the fifties, and is for the most part playing with some sharp upbeat and swinging horn backing over a solid backbeat from a pretty slick band. The style varies from the blasting *Woke Up This Morning* to the ballad *You Know I Love You*, but it's the playing that cuts through every time.

The mid-strong and relatively crude nature of the recording does little to

undermine the power and quality of the playing - there's no bass as such and limited highs, but plenty of energy as is often the case with mono albums. The original recording was made with valve equipment and no overdubs, so it is live and direct, qualities that makes the limitations of bandwidth and dynamic range unimportant. That and the quality of King's playing mean this is something that more recent releases have never really delivered as effectively as this. **JK**







HOT PICK

**Terry Riley**A Rainbow In Curved Air  
cherryred.co.uk

★★★★

Esoteric

CD



HOT PICK

**My Bloody Valentine**Loveless  
sonymusic.com

★★★★

Sony

CD

**Lenny Kravitz**Mama Said  
virgin.com/music

★★★★

Virgin

CD

**CLASSICALLY-TRAINED**

minimalist composer Terry Riley became an unlikely hippie hero in 1969 with this cultish masterpiece. The psychedelic splashing and hypnotic drones of the side-long title track, played on various keyboards and then looped and layered into a sparkling electronic raga, made it a favourite soundtrack to a million LSD trips and inspired several notable rock compositions, including Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*.

The keyboards bubble forth in torrents that flow from speaker to speaker, while the mesmerising drone of the title piece is like a tidal river: the surface looks the same, but the currents and eddies mean that it's constantly changing. Never has electronic music sounded so warm, human and elevating. **NW**

**MBV'S SECOND ALBUM**

appeared in 1991, a dense storm of noise, but softened by a hazy quality that made the record seem as if it was floating in space. The 'songs' were almost buried beneath main man Kevin Shields' gliding guitar overdubs, creating a delicious hallucinatory nebulosity. MBV never made another album and the chirpy cheerfulness of Britpop was just around the corner.

The album now comes in two versions. The digital master sounds much as it always did, a seething maelstrom with a dislocated quality. The new version is taken from analogue sources and has a warmer sound. According to Shields, neither is definitive, although the analogue recording's greater clarity means you can now almost make out some of the words... **NW**

**IN 1992**, just as Nirvana were burying their songs in thick, claustrophobic layers of sludgy noise, Kravitz was crafting an epically pristine sound that resembled an almost perfect synthesis of all your favourite rock and soul records from 20 years earlier. His second album defied the grunge tide to sell three million copies, although at the time his amalgam of Hendrix, Curtis Mayfield, Lennon and Prince was criticised as blatant plagiarism.

Clean, sharp guitars played through valve amps, strident Fender Rhodes keyboards, rubbery bass and tasteful horns and strings – was this really released in the year of grunge? *Stand By My Woman* even manages to sound like an Eagles ballad. The bonus disc (live performances) adds little of note, but the original 14 tracks are essential. **NW**

**HIGH RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS****Portico Quartet**

Portico Quartet

bowers-wilkins.co.uk

★★★★

B&amp;W Society of Sound

24-bit/44.1kHz



**PORTICO'S MUSIC** certainly is jazz-ish, but not like much music with jazz tendencies you might have

previously encountered. It almost touches on contemporary jazz but also references experimental elements, electronica, dance, classical and film scores.

The 24-bit recording is just what's needed to bring out the diversity and range of colour and texture in this music. It's a shame the sample-rate wasn't upped a little but the sound remains rich, varied and, at times, glorious. Keyboards, sampling and loops give a more contemporary, edgy feel than past albums, but the tracks retain a tranquil, calming, almost ambient quality. **MS**

**Dub Colossus**

Dub Me Tender

bowers-wilkins.co.uk

★★★★

B&amp;W Society of Sound

24-bit/48kHz



**BACK IN THE 1970s** and 1980s, dub had a very special place in my life. It brought a magical added

dimension to the reggae coming out of Jamaica, and the UK variant thanks to inventive producers like Adrian Sherwood. On this album, producer Nick Page conjoins the dub-plate and the fusion music of Ethiopia, with commendable skill and subtlety.

The 24-bit/48kHz recording isn't swamped with dub effects, but clear and articulate. The bass guitar, for example, is allowed to manoeuvre freely, its weight and sonorous tone contrasting deftly with the delicacy of the percussion. It's wonderful to hear audiophile treatment given to such joyous and relevant music rather than to tedious, tinkly jazz. **MS**

**BLU-RAY DVD****Slash Live: Made in Stoke** eagle-rock.com

★★★★

Eagle Vision

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1, LPCM 2.0 **ALONG WITH SINGER** Myles Kennedy (on loan from Alter Bridge) and his band Saul 'Slash' Hudson covers a good number of the G'n'R

favorites on this return to his hometown. There are also numbers from his time with Velvet Revolver and Snake Pit, but it's the old numbers that the crowd enjoys the most. Mr Kennedy isn't quite Axl Rose, but the ensemble does a pretty tolerable job of classics like *Nightrain*, *Sweet Child O' Mine* and *Mr Brownstone*.

The performance is short on solos, although their number if not quality increases as the gig proceeds, Slash is more of a riff man at heart, but with a hat like that he can get away with it.

Made in July last year at Stoke's Victoria Hall, this is pretty straight ahead stuff in the expected mould, but executed with sufficient gusto to keep things interesting, even if the sound could do with some thickener. At least it has energy even if dynamic range could be wider, and some of the best live rock albums have sounded thin: AC/DC's *If You Want Blood* and Deep Purple's *Made in Japan*. Extras include an interview with Uncle Ian who remembers Slash's little peccadillos. **JK**



# Paw man's Sondek

Tiger Paw's Khan package for Linn's ubiquitous LP12 enhances the performance of a hi-fi classic, says *Jason Kennedy*...

**T**he Linn Sondek LP12 turntable probably has more aftermarket modifications than any other turntable. It's not surprising really, as the Sondek is a top selling high-end design, so a lot of people have got them and a percentage of those people can't help tinkering! It's also renowned for being difficult to set-up, although not for Derek Jenkins who is an LP12 guru and knows more about setting them up than anyone this side of Glasgow. He has set up more LP12s than Euros loaned to Greece, and so is in a better position than most to know its various weaknesses.

The standard LP12 top plate is a sheet of stainless steel with bolts protruding from its underside which fix it to the wooden surround of the

**The Tiger Paw Khan is machined from aluminium with grooves top and bottom that are designed to maximise rigidity and control resonance**

plinth, and support the subchassis on springs. It's a simple but effective component which also holds the motor in place, and has holes for the bearing in the centre and the on/off button in its bottom left hand corner.

The Tiger Paw Khan top-plate is machined from aluminium with grooves top and bottom designed to maximise rigidity and control resonance produced by the motor. It's a beautiful and substantial part, with an unusual ring pattern on top to break up standing waves.

Underneath, it has specially machined studs to support the spring grommets which look considerably stiffer than the standard items. In its particle-blasted and anodised finish it compares favourably with Linn's

Keel integrated subchassis and armboard, yet costs considerably less.

There is a second element to the Khan – a cross brace which bridges the bottom of the plinth. This supports the circuit board between the motor and the mains lead, the P-clip that holds the tonearm cable and an earthing point for the subchassis. It's a structural element of the plinth where Tiger Paw replaces Linn's pressed steel channel with a machined aluminium brace that brings further rigidity to the plinth without adding weight.

Like the Keel, or any other LP12 upgrade the Khan needs to be fitted to the turntable, and as this involves a full rebuild it can add to the cost. Derek Jenkins charges £200 for the job but this includes any new 'consumables' such as

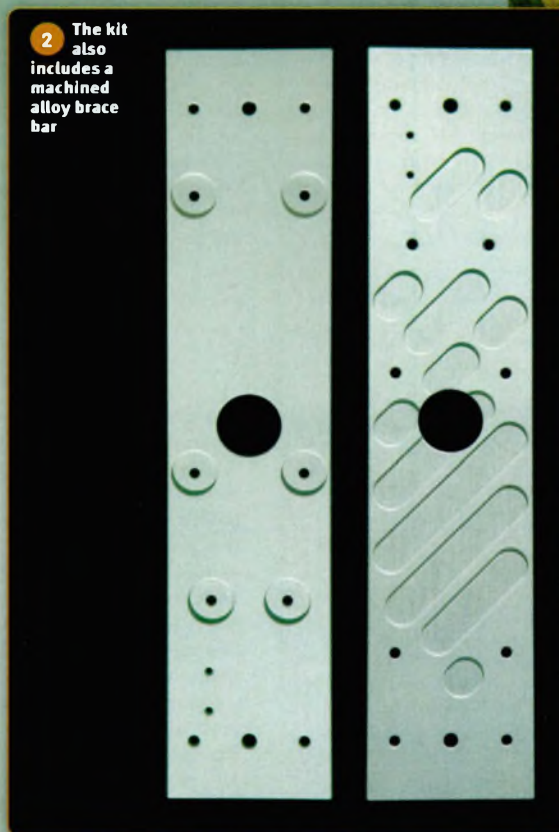
grommets and fixings. The company has seven dealers around the country who have their own prices for the service.

## Sound quality

I went to visit Infidelity in south west London to hear a demonstration of the Tiger Paw Khan modified Sondek against the standard-issue Linn LP12. I auditioned an otherwise current specification LP12 with a Linn Akito arm and Dynavector DV17D3 moving coil cartridge, fitted with the Khan upgrades, this via a system consisting of a Naim NAC 252 preamp with Supercap power supply, Naim NAP 250 power amp and Bowers & Wilkins 805 Diamond speakers. The modified turntable delivered a



1 Cast aluminium top-plate is finished to exacting tolerances

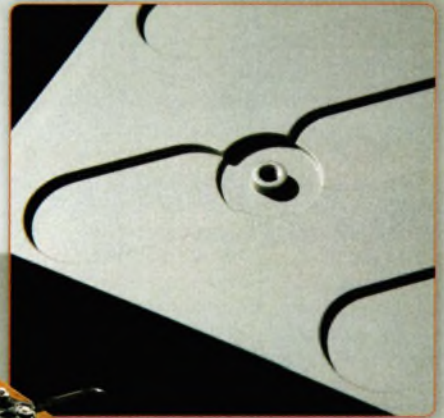
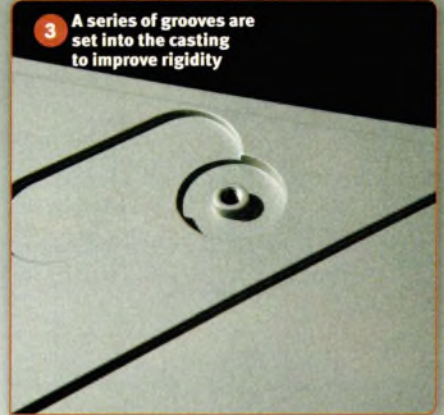


2 The kit also includes a machined alloy brace bar

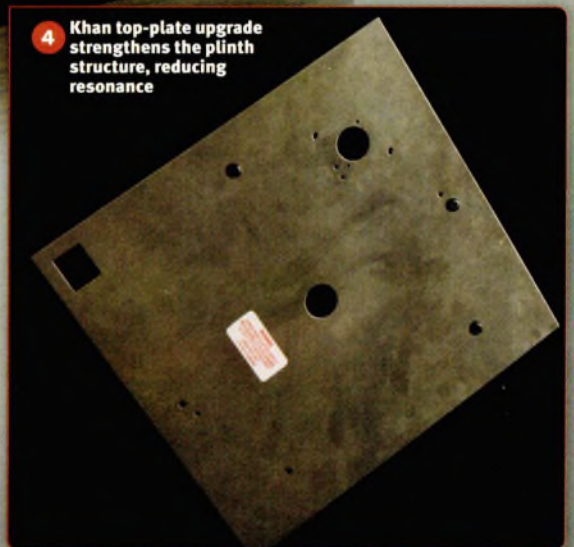




3 A series of grooves are set into the casting to improve rigidity



4 Khan top-plate upgrade strengthens the plinth structure, reducing resonance



If you want to discover the thrill and power of the music, then this is an impressive modification for the LP12 owner looking to bring his turntable into the 21st century



The finished product only looks distinctively different with the platter off!



powerful, well defined and dynamic sound that has oodles of detail. It's a considerably more contemporary sound than this turntable produces in standard form, which seems rather vague and loosely defined by way of comparison. Most surprisingly perhaps, the timing improves. It resolves considerably more of the music's attack and decay, especially in the bass – an area where the standard LP12 is fluid but not particularly well defined. I played a Leo Kottke piece called *Nothing Works* which is dense and energetic, and both qualities were apparent on the modified deck, which revealed the small scale temple bells and the punch of the kick drum in a highly controlled yet musical fashion.

Rickie Lee Jones' *Ghetto of My Mind* has a rhythmic line that sits just behind the beat, something that you get a hint of with a regular LP12, but it's pretty obvious with the Khan. As is the snap of the snare and the power of the bass drum, the lows being taut and extended to gravity-enhancing effect. The other interesting quality that this mod brings is enhanced coherence, you get a better sense of the interplay that the musicians brew up in the studio, this probably because it's possible to hear what they're doing with greater ease.

A simpler piece, *Sweet Home Chicago* by Taj Mahal, with backing by the Pointer Sisters, reveals the extent to which this turntable can put the players in the room, shut your eyes and the speakers can't be picked out, but the sense of live music is palpable. The quality of backing is

## If you want your Sondek to sound like a well-worn pair of slippers, this is not for you...

also entirely apparent with the different voices being easy to appreciate. This is also down to the partnering electronics and speakers, of course, but if it's not being produced by the source it won't manifest however good the system.

If you want your system to sound like a well worn pair of slippers the Tiger Paw may not be for you. But if on the other hand you want to rediscover the power and thrill of the music then this is an impressive modification that looks like great value for the LP12 owner looking to bring his turntable into the 21st century.

### On the record

Jason Kennedy speaks to Tiger Paw's Derek Jenkins...

#### JK: What's your background?

**DJ:** *I've always kept quite a low profile really. I started in 1975 when I got a Saturday job in a shop in Hounslow that had a Linn account, it was one of the very first ones. Then after the guy sold the business I moved to New Sound in Holborn where Chris Thomas used to work and they sold Aristons. In 1979 I went to Grahams and worked with Jimmy Hughes setting up turntables which was an unusual experience! I was the youngest person at Grahams in those days, just 21...*

*Then I moved on to the Sound Organisation and worked with Roger*

*and Hamish, and did all the Sondeks for them in the eighties at London Bridge. I briefly had a shop called Auditorium in the City then came to work for Simon Byles (Infidelity) about seven or eight years ago.*

*I've gone freelance now and work on the more challenging turntables; I've worked on Roksans, Thorens and have a Nottingham Analogue currently. There are very few turntables that I haven't done!*

#### What got you into turntables?

*My brother had a Thorens TD160 with an SME arm in the sixties that was the first turntable I set up, but I also had a go with the original AR, but couldn't get on with the arm. It didn't have a bias system and the whole thing turned!*

#### What's the key to LP12 set-up?

*The devil is in the detail, you have to have a feel for it and plenty of practice because no two are the same. I always rebuild the player, clean all the parts and examine them, replacing worn parts and upgrading others. Earlier models before the mid-eighties are the worst, but they got more consistent after that. It can take me five or six hours to strip down and rebuild an LP12, then it needs to settle overnight as it sinks into new grommets.*

#### What do you find people get wrong with turntable set-up?

*You get quite a lot of poorly matched cartridge and arm combinations. A lot of people don't pay attention to what the compliances are. If you've got an Ittok which is quite a massy tonearm then you don't want to use a cartridge with too high a compliance. People put nice Denon cartridges on arms like that and after a while they collapse!*

#### What were you trying to achieve with the Khan?

*To improve the player and to complement the Keel. Linn has never changed the top-plate. We thought that Linn had got that part of it right, but what it was hanging from was the top-plate and the plinth. We've taken to using the Chris Harben plinths that are distributed by Symbiosis. They couple up perfectly with our top-plate, he's incredibly passionate about it and does a superb job. Linn has come up with a brilliant product which is the Keel and they've got the Radikal motor which is excellent. This is by no means to take away from what it's done, it's really to complement what Linn has achieved with the player. ●*



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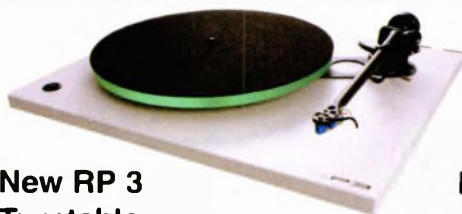
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# Minitest

In-ear headphones make the experience up front and personal, says **Richard Black...**

## Beyerdynamic DTX101

PRICE: £59 CONTACT: 01444 258258  
WEBSITE: BEYERDYNAMIC.COM

**ONE OF THE MOST UBIQUITOUS NAMES IN HEADPHONES,** Beyerdynamic makes plenty of models in just about every category, going way beyond hi-fi. This is currently the company's top in-ear model, unless you count the MMX101 which is in fact the same thing but with a microphone (but no remote control) included for mobile phone use. Three different sizes of eartips, all of the soft rubber variety, are supplied: unusually, I found it fairly easy to get decent bass response with all of them, the deciding factor being the security with which they kept the transducers lodged in place.

In a world where far too many headphones (in-ear and on-head) are hideously sibilant, a model that offers the opposite should be welcome, but this one arguably takes it too far. Actually the very high treble is generally quite honest, the problem being the region where upper midrange merges into treble, which is suppressed to a degree that it's hard to imagine many listeners enjoying. It's tempting, with this kind of sound, to turn up the volume to compensate, but then all that happens is that the already strong bass dominates everything. Tonal character is not too bad a foil for the unnatural brightness of many current recordings, especially in MP3 format, but it seems a bit of a sacrifice to make when decent recordings are so clearly compromised. Mechanical noise transmitted by the cable is at an even higher level than usual.

**VERDICT** THESE BEAUTIFULLY BUILT EARPHONES can sound a tad tiring and undynamic – a rare stumble from Beyerdynamic.



## Etymotic MC3

PRICE: £80 CONTACT: 0845 055 0005  
WEBSITE: ETYMOTIC.COM

**ETYMOTIC CLAIMS TO BE** the progenitor of quality in-ear transducers, and remains uniquely committed to the genre, with a related line in hearing protection. As well as good sound, Etymotic models are specifically intended to give very high attenuation of outside sound, which is great for listening on busy underground trains and the like. This model, including a microphone and iPod (etc.) remote control, comes with a code to unlock the 'Awareness!' iPhone app which uses the microphone to monitor and respond to (possibly important) ambient noise, a very clever and thoughtful bit of software. The MC2 model is basically the same, but set up for non-Apple mobiles and, therefore, doesn't include 'Awareness!'.

The main thing with Etymotic is how far down the ear canal that pointy end needs to go. Not far enough, and it's just horrible, all top half and no bass at all. But get the insertion right and you are rewarded with sound that has a very convincing combination of treble, midrange and bass. By some standards the bass can seem a little understated and if you're comparing this model with some competitors you'll think Etymotic has cut the bottom couple of octaves off altogether. Compare the MC3 with good on-head 'phones, though, and you'll realise that bass is, at most, just very slightly on the shy side. External noise reduction stops short of 'sensory deprivation' levels and cable noise, while hardly vanishing, is lower than in many cases.

**VERDICT** NOT AN EXACTLY A FASHION MODEL, but the Etymotic delivers a fine, well-balanced sound with wayabove-average resolution.





## Sennheiser CX880i

PRICE: £95 CONTACT: 01491 551551  
WEBSITE: SENNHEISER.CO.UK

**SENNHEISER'S** range of in-ear phones is simply bewildering, and it takes more than a little reading between the lines to work out where most of the models are aimed. The mere fact that the publicity for this model doesn't mention bass is probably an indicator that its sound is balanced for listeners who look for more than head-banging potential, while in hard practical terms it's one of the many current models to include iPhone control (though it refused to control an iPod Nano, which had responded happily enough to other remote-control models). You get a choice of eartips and a rather bulky protective case: the one aspect of presentation that could definitely be improved is identification of left and right earpieces, which is exceptionally hard to make out. The remote sits in the left-ear lead – you read it here first!

The balance of this model is not bad, but it's not quite flat either, with just a little lift in the bass and something of a dip in the upper midrange, which seems most audible in classical music – it's also more obvious with a typical portable player driving the 'phones than a dedicated hi-fi amp. Detail is also quite good, coming across much more favourably in tracks that aren't too complex. In large-scale orchestral music, one might wish for a little more insight at times. Stereo imaging is noticeably better than most in-ears can contrive, with a very decent semblance of depth in the best recordings. Cable noise and external noise reduction are about average.

**VERDICT** DOES MOST THINGS WELL but not outstanding in any area.  
Nicely packaged but not a stand-out performer.



## Sony XBA-1iP

PRICE: £79 CONTACT: 0844 846 6555  
WEBSITE: SONY.CO.UK

**THIS MODEL IS ONE OF FOUR** in the 'Prestige' range from Sony, available for £20 less without the iPod microphone and remote. Its description as having 'crystal clear vocals' is promising, unlike one of its stablemates which offers 'double the treble and bass', something it's hard to imagine any true audiophile fancying. Unusually in this price bracket, it comes with both regular silicone rubber eartips and noise isolating ones, each in a range of sizes. Something about the design seems to make it unusually unfussy about eartip size and the fit is secure.

Sound is generally well balanced tonally, with perhaps just a touch of accentuation in the high treble which can make bright tracks a little strident and brings up tape hiss on older recordings. That's something one can quickly learn to live with, but the slight sense of confusion that pervades all kinds of recordings can be more offputting. As textures thicken up, the discrimination between the different strands lessens and as a result multi-layered recordings are less clear than one would like. That's a shame, because many aspects are very likeable, especially the lively approaches to rhythm and pace. Dynamics also depend to a considerable extent on the material: simple voice and guitar tracks, for instance, can fairly make you jump out of your seat, but a favourite opera track seemed really rather undramatic. It's worth noting the unusually low leakage of sound out of the back of these 'phones. ●

**VERDICT** TONALLY WELL BALANCED with plenty of life and energy, this is good value for money, but competition is stiff...



Obviously, all these models are intended principally for use with portable audio devices. There's absolutely no reason why you couldn't use them at home, though probably with the addition of an extension cable, and one significant

finding of this review is that the extras don't seem to impact on quality. Indeed, the general sound here seems significantly ahead of what in-ear phones offered five or so years ago, when most were devoid of any such frills. The remote

doesn't attenuate audio in the lead, by the way, but controls the setting of the source device. Take care to select correct eartips and find the position in the ear that balances frequency response without sacrificing comfort or security of fit.

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

**SUGDEN** Mystro integrated amp, lightly used, boxed. Can be posted. £650: **01782 785734 (Staffordshire).**

**VAN DEN HUL** The Waterfall RCA interconnect 0.8m £60, Chord Company Carnival Silver Screen speaker cable, 2x4m lengths, terminated £30, Chord Company Chorus 2 RCA 1m £50, Chameleon Silver plus 1m and 0.5m, all boxed £40 each: **0121 602 8349 (W Midlands).**

**REGA** couple and Linn black high-quality interconnect cables, both as new £30: **0121 602 8349 (W Midlands).**

**ARCAM** RDACKw and wireless dongle, hardly used. Superb sound, either via USB, S/PDIF, optical or wirelessly. £380. Also battery psu and charger £30 for amazing sound upgrade: **07793749178 or email: david@veniceinfosite.com (London).**

**KIMBER** Select ks1030 1m pair £600, Kimber Monocle-xl 8ft pair speaker cable £500, original

packaging: **01772 314151 or email: jamesmckendrick@btinternet.com (Preston).**

**ACOUSTIC REALITY** AR1001 Mono Blocks, Class D power amps, 1,000w. Silver, excellent condition £825 (pair), Cyrus Pre Vs2 preamp (brushed black), excellent condition, boxed and original accessories. £350: **01223 890607 or email: m.overall@btinternet.com (Cambridge).**

**TECHNICS** SL7 parallel tracker classic turntable with sounds to shame many a modern deck. Pristine condition, hardly used and full working order £225: **07793749178 or email: david@veniceinfosite.com (London).**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** AMS35i, pure class A integrated amplifier (black), boxed and mint, only 18 months old with 5 year guarantee, reluctant sale (£6,000) £4,500: **01303 863424 (Kent).**

**CYRUS** 1 m and 50cm interconnects, RCA, used but like new and boxed. £70

and £55 Resp. delivered: **0115 9288006 or email: Rolfjordan@gmail.com (Notts).**

**ORIGIN LIVE** Conqueror Mk3c tonearm, one year old, latest version, boxed, immaculate, genuine reason for sale, might p/ex for less expensive model, £2,000: **01323 728118 or email: alanchamberlain1@hotmail.com (East Sussex).**

**JUNGSON** JA 88 D amplifier Class A, new, excellent condition £900, but any reasonable offer considered: **07986124147 (Suffolk).**

**MISSION** Cyrus 2 amp (grey), Mission Cyrus PSX (black), Mission DAC 5 convertor. All in good condition, all leads and connections. Sensible offers please to: **01555 759124 or email: embt80@gmail.com (South Lanarkshire).**

**ARCAM** CD 36 boxed, immaculate, as new with unused remote, audition welcome, buyer collects £550: **01329 668149 (Hants).**



Sugden Mystro – cracking little integrated, Grommit!

**MICHELL** GyroDec SE, with RB300 arm in excellent condition, £800 ono. Might consider part exchange: **01482 651963 or email: jazzevan@hotmail.com (Hull).**

**SONY** Walkman Pro WM-6DC, a real classic, VGC £200, Firestone Audio Fubar USB DAC, plus Power Supply as new £100, HRT Streamer II USB DAC 24-bit/96kHz, brand new £100: **Email: reisivictor25@gmail.com. (London).**

**PMC** SCM 7 standmount speakers. 6 months old, excellent sound, little use, mint boxed (£610) £475: **07733428736 or email: gill@gillbrears.plus.com (West Yorkshire).**

**TECHNICS** SL1210 Mk2 £249, Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200. Both in very good condition: **0207 499 8729 (London).**

**ARCAM** system: A90 pre-power (2x90w); Pro 90 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).**

**AUDIO-TECHNICA** AT-OC9 MK 3, moving coil cartridge, less than 10 hours use. Bought in Japan. No mounting kit, just cartridge and box £300 ono: **07517 147056 or email: jamesthollis@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 cast AE stands. Superb condition, all boxes included £650 ono: **0115 8755070 or email: rolfjordan@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. **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 loudspeakers, hardly used, mint condition, boxed £160: **01943 467859 (W Yorkshire).**

**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!



**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, 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)**.

**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 Fraim 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 NAP110, Naim HiCap 110, NAC 42 (all £300): **07515 862222 or email: edge@badege.com (Sunbury on Thames)**.

**CYRUS** Pre VS2 preamp (brushed black), excellent condition, boxed £350: **02476 440058 (Coventry)**.

**TRICHORD** Dino 2+ NCPSU + top Trichord power cord, pristine, £525. Abbingdon Music Research IC-777 high-quality interconnect, brand new, £130. FunkAchromat 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)**.

**NAIM** NAIT 5j 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 heads, 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 Prodac Pro Digital, 1 metre, boxed (£85) £40. QED reference HDMI, 1 metre (£80) £40: **07870 159725 or email johnsidebottom@hotmail.co.uk (Somerset)**.

**NORDOST** Flatline Blue Heaven speaker cables – banana plugs one end, other unterminated. Stereo pairs 1 x 4.5m (cost £1,030) and 1 x 2.5m (cost £630). Unused/new. Bargain at £550 ono. **01945 463077 or email: deregle1@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: **07816 758688 (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: **07866423572**

or email: **adrian.ford@btinternet.com (Devon)**.

**ICON AUDIO** Stereo 60 Mk3, KT120 valves, Jensen capacitors. Up to 85W, 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)**.

**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, £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, 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, £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)**.

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Ed Selley brings you our pick of this month's top hi-fi websites...



## HI-FI HUNTER

### hifihunter.com

If you're looking for a specific piece of used hi-fi, there are now many websites where they can now be listed for sale. This makes for a great deal of choice, but can also translate into a large amount of time-consuming searching on all of the various places looking for a suitable unit. Hi-Fi Hunter allows you to enter one search term and see results from multiple sites.

The site allows you to search for adverts placed by both members of the public and dealers or filter between the two (although there is still no substitute for checking yourself if the 'private seller' might not be as private as they first appear).



The search results include postings on sites like Craigslist and Gumtree which can be a genuine pain to search through directly. The update time (that is the time between the ad going live on the posted site and being passed through to Hi-Fi Hunter) seems commendably fast as well. As well as the main search filter, the site features some useful tips on buying and selling equipment that might be worth a read.

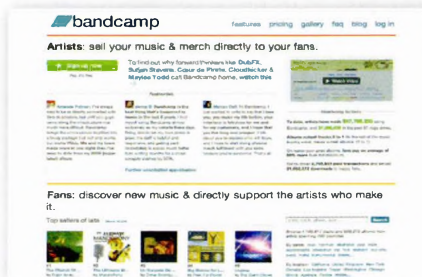
## BANDCAMP

### bandcamp.com

One of the big concerns raised in recent years is how new artists will find audiences, as record labels contract their efforts and become more risk-averse. With only the latest winner of *Britain's Got The Voice-Idol-On Ice* receiving the marketing effort, what of the smaller bands trying to break through? Bandcamp is one possible solution to this dilemma and at the same time a great way of finding interesting new music – often in lossless format.

Bandcamp essentially acts as a digital marketplace for bands and acts to sell their albums directly to the public. As the easiest way of doing this is by download, this is the most common way tracks and albums are sold, although some acts have physical

releases, too. The vast majority of albums are available in FLAC and the download system is painless and well thought out. As these are often relatively unknown albums, there are also extensive facilities to listen before purchase. Prices are reasonable and the choice of material is impressive. If this is the future, count me in!



## DIY AUDIO PROJECTS

### diyaudioprojects.com

I am too hamfisted an individual to consider DIY audio as anything other than a quick and easy route to the hospital, but I never ceased to be impressed by the calibre of products that more gifted individuals than I can produce on their own. Many of these products are featured together with information about their build on DIY audio projects, which is an essential resource for anybody interested in a bit of home brew.

The breadth of material the site features is considerable and covers everything from interconnects through to turntables. As well as detailed build information for most of the items featured, many other designs are available as kits which can be ordered directly from the site. While many of the designs are sufficiently complex that only seasoned hands need apply, others are much more suitable for people starting out in DIY, such as the very appealing looking low-voltage headphone amp with a choice of either solid-state or valve-based operation. Anyone seeking further advice would benefit from looking at the attached forums where many projects are explained further!

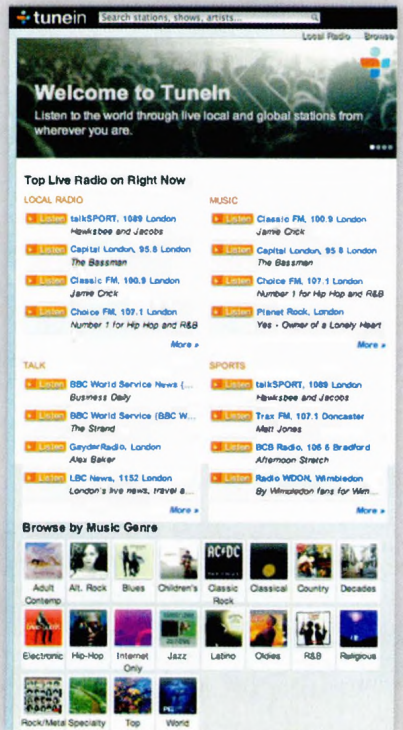


## TUNEIN RADIO

### tunein.com

One of the reasons I prefer network audio players over the computer and DAC-based system is that most streamers combine audio playback with an excellent integrated Internet radio service that allows for genre and country searches. By contrast, when using a computer the same stations are scattered all over the Internet and a great deal harder to search for. TuneIn acts as a collator for the world's radio stations and adds search functionality by key criteria that streamers possess.

The site is free to use and features an attractive and self explanatory interface. Stations play from within the site and many stations will also display information about the track playing and the presenter. Some of the higher quality streams are capable of excellent results. You can create a user that in turn allows you to store favourite stations in a single menu. There is also a very well thought out iPhone app that is similarly easy to use and allows for very effective radio services on the move. The app also gives bitrate information that curiously the main site does not. ●







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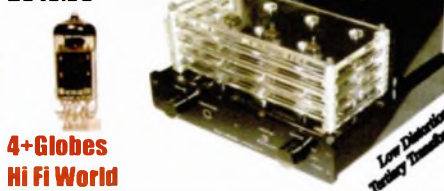
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*icon Audio*



## Our NEW Stereo 60 MK III m KT120

80+80 Watts pure valve power



### *It even looks beautiful with its cover on!*

Most valve amplifier covers look as though they were done as a cost saving after thought, and don't exactly enhance the look of the amplifier. They are rarely seen in advertisements. We think that that something you will use every day should look attractive. Our Designer, David Shaw goes to a great deal of trouble to get our products technically and sonically "Outstanding" (Hi Fi news), so it follows we should have outstanding looks. The Stereo 60 III m has 18 pieces high quality Perspex laser cut and polished. Assembled with a further 20 precision components. Of course its expensive, but we think you're worth it!

This is our biggest integrated amplifier. It is ideal for someone wanting a very dynamic fast sound. It has a big power supply, big output transformers, and uses the excellent new KT120, and comes many features. The new super strong KT120 has caused a storm in the hi fi world, with 50% more power than the KT88. It enabled us improve the sonics, power, distortion and reliability. An excellent alternative to fast modern transistor amplifier, the ST60III m will deliver the finest detail of modern recordings in a graceful way or present jazz and rock music without harshness or tizz.

### **Two Amplifiers in One. The importance of Triode**

The triode sound is preferred by many hi fi fans, but the power is always lower. Ignored or neglected in the past we gave equal priority to the triode function so the full quality is maintained. With our UL/Triode switch you can change from 80 watts to 40 watts of pure triode sound at the flick of a switch. You can use the Stereo 60 either as an integrated remote control amplifier, or as a power amplifier fed from a separate pre-amplifier. Also available as a pure power amplifier.

One of our most successful models gaining excellent reviews in Hi Fi World, Hi Fi Plus and voted "Outstanding Product" in Hi Fi News group test, beating much more expensive competition. Not only is this amplifier technically excellent in all the usual parameters but sonically praised by leading reviewers. As the loading of the KT120s is relatively low this should give long life and good reliability. The design is relatively simple using only four valves per channel based on GEC/Mullard design. After all we are making a musical instrument not a piece of Lab equipment. We prefer to let our amplifiers sing their own song by means of using quality components, traditional "point to point" wiring and our own David Shaw designs. That way we are able to guarantee our four cornerstones of **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 and in Leicester: they are commissioned and serviced by the people that designed them so you can be sure of long term performance. We incorporate a "standby" switch in order to protect those precious cathodes from ion bombardment until they have warmed up.

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 SER capacitors audiophile resistors. 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 traditional of traditional design and performance.

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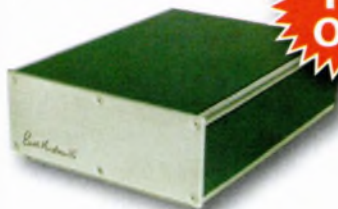
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## Atlas Element Integra

**T**he first upgrade you make with cables is often the biggest, especially if you are moving from the basic freebie-type included in the box. Element Integra is Atlas Cables' offering for those looking for their first upgrade hit. It's a coaxial type with stranded OFC conductors in a pearly white PVC outer covering. The plugs are what makes this interconnect interesting, however, as they use a crimped connection that avoids solder, which is generally a good idea, and have an ABS outer casing which is also considered to be a worthwhile move. The metalwork that forms the plug also maintains shielding of the signal cables.

### In use

In the system this interconnect produces an appealingly wide, expansive soundstage that's detailed and capable of delivering a decent sense of timing. It's not the most focused of cables however and DNM's Solid Core interconnect does a better job of delivering precise imaging and timing for a similar price. But the gulf is not huge and it's easy to hear that in smaller systems the extra scale that the Atlas brings to the party will sound rather attractive. It has no anomalies in terms of tonal balance and will not hold budget components back when it comes to timing and soundstaging. Qualities that are useful if you have smaller speakers and digital sources.

It also holds up in more ambitious systems, especially in the PRT (pace, rhythm and timing) department, bass could be more extended and dynamics are constrained but for the price this is a tidy cable. **JK**



### DETAILS

PRICE: £45

CONTACT:  
01563 572666

WEBSITE:  
ATLASCABLES.  
COM

### OUR VERDICT



## Auditorium23 transformer

**F**or the valve amplifier aficionado who wants keep things pure throughout the analogue signal chain, there is only one accepted way to raise the output of a moving-coil cartridge up to a level where a valve phono stage can work with it, that's with a step-up transformer. These are compact passive devices that contain a transformer for each channel and connect to the end of the tonearm cable, stepping-up the signal from an MC so that it works into an MM phono stage. Some step-ups offer more than one input impedance in order to accommodate a variety of cartridges and others are built with a specific cartridge in mind.

Auditorium 23 is a German company that is all about valves and horns, and took the trouble to build step-up transformers for two classic cartridges, the Denon DL-103 and the Ortofon SPU.

### Sound quality

I got an example of the former to use with Zu Audio's version of the DL-103 (p64) and found it to be a highly effective partner for both solid-state and valve phono stages. With the Blue Horizon Profono stage it brought a distinct increase in dynamics, the extra power making the sound more alive and vital. It does this in an effortless and tonally rich fashion that is hard to achieve with transistor electronics alone. Used with a Valvet P2c phono stage-equipped valve preamp, its dedicated nature means that it can deliver a more effortless, open and again dynamic result than the onboard transformers. Care needs to be taken with associated interconnects and placement (away from magnetic fields), but that done it turns a good cartridge into a truly great one. **JK**



### DETAILS

PRICE: £445

CONTACT:  
01727 810047

WEBSITE:  
THESOUND  
PRACTICE.COM

### OUR VERDICT





# TWIST

*"One of the Best Hi-Fi Bargains Around" - Robert Hoyle, Audiovation*



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*"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



HI-FI WORLD  
July 2012



## 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)

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*"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)

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## Vertere D-Fi USB

**V**ertere's D-Fi range of entry level products contains a number of cable types, including analogue interconnects such as the minijack to RCA phono sample I got great results with earlier in the year. There is also a USB connector which uses the same slimline cable, but arranges its conductors to suit the application. It is made up of a tin-plated copper outer shield, with a secondary shield beneath it that protects two silver-plated voltage conductors and plus and minus digital conductors for the signal in the same material. The ground is carried by a tin-plated copper conductor with a larger area. All the key conductors use high purity copper.

### Sound quality

I have been using D-Fi USB for some time now and have had a chance to compare it with a number of alternatives, and in every case it has delivered a faster, more dynamic sound. It's unusually open as well and you can hear an awful lot of detail as a result. It can sound lean with some material, but put on a decent recording and the power and authority of the bottom end is a glory to behold. What really takes it into the front league is the snap, the way each note is there and gone in an instant. This lack of overhang gives the sound an immediacy that's addictive.

Its only limitation is that some DACs won't work with it at five metres, which is pretty well the maximum that you can run a USB cable over anyhow. In all other respects it delivers high end results at a great price. **JK**



► **DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £65 (1M)  
**CONTACT:**  
0203 176 4888  
**WEBSITE:**  
VETEREACOUSTICS.COM

#### OUR VERDICT



## Philips Fidelio DS9010 iPod dock

**I**Pod speaker docks are not exactly thin on the ground just now. Seriously upmarket ones are a bit sparser, of course, but we found four to review in our *Mini-Test* recently (*HFC 357*). Now here's another, from good ol' Philips. A fair-sized beast, 56cm across the front, it's minimalist in terms of features: docking connector, mini-jack line input, mains connector and volume up/down buttons are the whole list.

Ingeniously, Philips has made the top part of the case support the back of any inserted iThing, and all kinds of iPod, iPhone and, yes, iPad can be accommodated without any adaptors. Control is via the source's own controls or the remote, a very nice metal-bodied device. A free app for iPhones and iPads gives access to an extended feature set, including equalisation.



### Sound quality

By 'real hi-fi' standards £350 is not a lot for a stereo power amp (rated at 50W) and a pair of speakers. Despite that, sound is actually rather extraordinary. It has the kind of resolution to it that you just don't expect from a single-box system, and a very even tonal balance. There are limits, and in the densest tracks one does notice that the sound isn't coming from a £10,000 system! Inner voices and lines are a little submerged and a degree of stress creeps in as the volume is turned up. Even so, loudness is surprisingly satisfying in a 20 square metre room and potentially uncomfortable in a 7m study. Bass is full but well controlled, and treble is extended, but never exaggerated and remains exceptionally consistent, perhaps more so than with any competing dock we've seen. Overall, with a surprisingly informative and tonally neutral sound, this is a top class bit of kit. **RB**



► **DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £350  
**CONTACT:**  
0844 338 0489  
**WEBSITE:**  
PHILIPS.CO.UK

#### OUR VERDICT





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 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

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 Chord ipod cables  
 iPod cables

### Getting dedicated

When times are tough sometimes its the little tweaks and system upgrades that can lift the gloom. Did you know for the cost of some tweaks you could upgrade your power supply? I recently installed a dedicated supply to my Hi-fi system. I had moved house just over a year ago and it was a job on my list. I decided to use the products I sell, and practicing what I preach has worked out even better than I could have imagined. It is an ideal that every enthusiast should consider. Costs can depend where your distribution board is, and before I go any further if in any doubt consult a qualified electrician, better still get him to do the install.

I decided to use the Furutech FP-3TS762 which is a 20amp cable designed for the job. A dedicated circuit was run from the Distribution Board into a double socket which I have fitted two QRT Qv2 line harmonisers. The Qv2 need to be on the same circuit as your Hi-fi normally plugged into the distribution block or conditioner, but the idea appealed, so I indulged myself.



The FP-TS762 was continued to my listening room ending at a Furutech double socket from the FP-1363 range.

My electrician was so careful with the actual preparation of the Furutech wire, even cutting back of the insulation on the conductors so not to lose a strand. Correct earthing was of prime importance including earthing the cable shielding.

From the wall socket my system I use my best power cord.



To complete the story I will tell what happens from the wall. My best power cord supplies a QRT QBase6 distribution block and from the primary earth position I feed my Audience aR8 adeptResponse Teflon power conditioner, via a QRT Qx4 purifier, a must for any system. Note the Qv2 in the Qbase6. I have since added more. The Audience aR8 provides the ideal distribution method for my components as well as being the finest product of its type on the market. Please visit my website as I

have put together a few packages to use on a dedicated supply.

Now I can sit back and enjoy my system....Dave



**Pricing guide**  
 Furutech FP-3TS762 cable £76.90 per m, cut to length  
 Furutech FP-1363 double socket from £137.95

Quantum QRT Qv2 from £299.00  
 Quantum QRT Qbase6 from £949.00  
 Quantum QRT Qx from £1,199.00  
 Audience adeptResponse power conditioners from £2,799.00  
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## Raidho Acoustics



### The Raidho C1.1

While the pound is so good against the euro we have passed on the savings\* to you so you could own one of the World's most respected stand-mounts.

Prices for the C1.1 starts at £8,000.00

\*Mind you If the pound goes the other way this price offer may not last.

Call for great trade in deals



## Avid HiFi Rega Arm Alignment Protractor

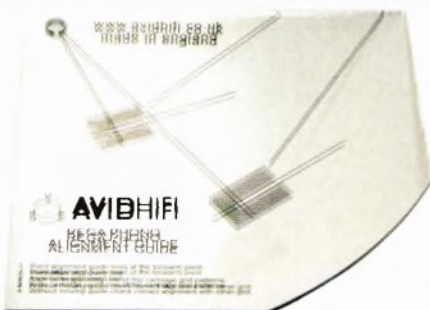
**A**s with any tonearm, correct alignment and adjustment of overhang length is essential for ensuring that your cartridge is performing at its best. Correct alignment is also vital for avoiding unnecessary record and stylus wear. This is one of the many essential adjustments required for optimum performance and it cannot be done by eye or guess work alone. Avid has specific gauges for SME, Linn and Rega arms and the protractor on test is the Rega gauge.

Avid has a computer program developed with Cranfield University to help with its tonearm design. As part of the development work, Avid looked at all the various techniques for determining the correct alignment. The program demonstrated that it is basic tracking error distortion that needs to be minimised and it became clear that the Stevenson calculations offered the best solution in practice.

The two points of cartridge set up are performed at the null points of the arc described by the stylus as it moves across the record when playing. The mirrored surface of the protractor makes all measurements easy and more accurate.

### In use

Full instructions are printed on the gauge itself, and by following these, I was able to align my cartridge very quickly. I had previously used one of the printed paper protractors for alignment, but after readjusting my cartridge using the Avid gauge, there was a marked improvement. My cartridge sounded great before, but now it sounds amazing. In particular, the bass response has improved and the music seems more involving. Result! **NR**



### DETAILS

**PRICE:** £30 FOR SME/LINN/REGA GAUGES (£26 UNIVERSAL)

**CONTACT:** 01480 869 900

**WEBSITE:** AVIDHIFI.CO.UK

### OUR VERDICT



## HiFiCollective Glasshouse Interconnect Kit 6

**T**his intriguingly named kit contains all you need to build a pair of premium quality interconnects at a very modest cost. For anyone who is happy to wield a soldering iron, they are very easy to construct and can be completed in a couple of hours. Each cable uses three strands of wire – one strand of Jupiter 99.999 percent pure silver wire AWG 28 (0.32mm dia.) in silk sleeving as the main signal carrier and two strands of Jupiter AWG 28 copper 6N cotton insulated wire (0.32mm) for the earth connection. The finished cables are terminated with beautiful CHK silver-plated phono plugs.

The Hi-Fi Collective bundle includes all you need to build the cables. In addition to the wires and four CHK phono plugs, the kit also includes some Mundorf 3.5 percent silver solder, black expandable braid sleeving to contain the strands of wire, together with assorted sizes of heatshrink sleeving for use at the cable ends.

As with all interconnects, the cables should be burnt in for between 70 and 100 hours before attempting any comparative listening tests. Initially, the cables sounded a little harsh, but after running for only 10 hours, the top end became clearer and less harsh and then the cables continued to improve in a more gradual fashion. You can burn in the cables by feeding them from a radio source with the power amplifiers switched off, but Hi-Fi Collective can provide a cable burning service if desired.

### Sound quality

After burning in, the end result was a superb sounding set of interconnects that are up there with others costing many hundreds of pounds. Fantastic value. **NR**



### DETAILS

**PRICE:** £48.25 (0.75M), £55.60 (1M), £68.30 (1.5M), £81 (2M)

**CONTACT:** 01908 217202

**WEBSITE:** HIFICOLLECTIVE.CO.UK

### OUR VERDICT

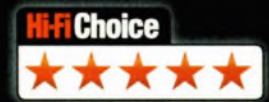


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# Epiphany Acoustics EHP-O2 portable headphone amplifier

**E**piphany seems a rather grandiose name for an inexpensive, portable headphone amplifier. According to dictionaries, it can be the revelatory manifestation of a divine being, or it can mean the sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something! I guess, given the improbability of divinities materialising, the manufacturer intended the latter: i.e. the Epiphany EHP-O2 should provide a revelatory exposure to the essence of music [er, right! *Ed.*].

The unit is based upon a DIY design by Internet blogger NwAvguy, who set out to make something superior to the popular, but considered flawed by many, CMoy design. The goal of NwAvguy with his Objective 2 was to demonstrate how much performance is possible on a limited budget. The Epiphany, therefore, which is based closely on his Objective 2 design, is a dual-NiMH-cell, rechargeable battery powered device that is supplied with a wall-wart that acts as a charger and operates as a power supply for listening at home when required. The specifications quote eight hours of battery life, which ought to cater for the requirements of most people (note: changing – as oppose to charging – batteries is not a two-minute job here because it requires removing both front and rear panels from the case and then sliding the PCB out of the casework).

If you wanted to replace the wall-wart you would need an AC supply capable of delivering 16V and 700mA (11.2VA). Many such are available at a variety of prices from suppliers such as Mains Cables R Us, Item Audio and Russ Andrews, or you might even listen to a cheaper linear analogue supply from the likes of Maplins.

I tested the Epiphany using an iPhone on the move, and with the preamp output of a Naim UnitiQute at home, with a pair of 32Ω Focal Spirit Ones, a set of popular (non-audiophile) earbuds and, a pair of audiologist-fitted, made-to-measure Etymotic Research (decidedly audiophile) in-ear monitoring headphones. The home connection was made with a Chord Company iChord interconnect.

## Sound quality

In all situations, the Epiphany turned out to be a delight to use, even though I might question its 'portability'. It is not unduly large, being about the size of two packs of cigarettes placed side by side, but it certainly was not portable for me without using a messenger bag. I could not persuade it to squeeze into the pockets of my shirts or trousers. I guess it would fit into most casual jackets or coats, though. It worked well with all the headphones tested, giving the best match with my aged, original and scrupulously revealing, Etymotic IEMs.

It certainly seemed a delight in operation. It was, as any transparent headphone amplifier needs to be, exceedingly quiet. There was no background noise evident even with the most subdued acoustic music. The sound was detailed and mixes were very well and congruently layered, and appeared to extend over the full-bandwidth, even if the extremes could seem a tad gentle with some headphones initially. Acoustic bass, for example, had impressive body and weight, but its leading edges did not exhibit sufficient bite at first. The same was true of instruments at the opposite end of the spectrum, the likes of tambourines sounding a tad too polite and soft. This situation appeared to right itself after some energetic warming up with a few albums including John McLaughlin's lively *My Goal's Beyond*.

The midrange, from the beginning, seemed brilliantly judged and open, exposing the detail of a range of vocal techniques, explicitly differentiating one singer from another – even within vocal harmonies. The voice of Marianne Faithfull, for example, was expressive and wonderfully communicative on *The Crane Wife 3* from the album *Easy Come Easy Go*.

The EHP-O2 was equally convincing with vocal and instrumental dynamic shadings on this album, distinctly unfolding the harmony vocal lines on the tracks *Children of Stone* and *How Many Worlds* and giving a compelling account of the backing accompaniment and Faithfull's idiosyncratic vocals. Meanwhile, Greg Cohen's bass on the dirge, *Sing Me Back Home*, best approximated the loudspeaker experience on suitable headphones, sounding vividly sonorous.

A genuinely fast headphone could reveal individual strikes in a drum-roll through this headphone amp, so its recreation of both timbre and timing seemed close to spot on, and it truly lent itself to a far wider selection of music than I have mentioned.

The only question about this amplifier is whether you should buy the £99 Epiphany EHP-O2 or spend possibly half as much by buying the Objective 2 DIY kit off the Internet and assembling the project yourself, provided you have the skills, tools and enthusiasm required. At this low price however, I would simply pay the chaps at Epiphany to do all the hard work. **MS**



## DETAILS

**PRICE:** £99

**WEBSITE:**  
EPIPHANY-  
ACOUSTICS.  
CO.UK

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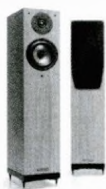
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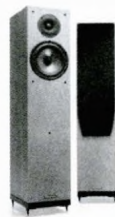
**Hi-Fi World Mar 11**



A3



A5



A6



A9

## SPENDOR

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



## Decibel software player

**A**t the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas last January, I listened to a few of AudioQuest's new computer cables with a MacBook providing the source. I noticed that they had a player on it that was new to me and discovered Decibel, this player was developed with input from two luminaries of the computer audio scene, Charlie Hanson of Ayre and Gordon Rankin of Wavelength. Names that inspired me to request a copy from Stephen Booth.

Decibel has many of the features that I associate with good software players such as memory play, exclusive hog mode and 64-bit floating point precision. It can play all the key formats including some that I'd not heard of and can be set to upsample to the maximum the DAC is capable of receiving or to send data at its native sample rate. The only omissions seem to be that it doesn't operate entirely in integer mode and does not support the iTunes interface that makes other players so appealing.

### Sound quality

It does, however, sound dramatically better than the alternatives when you spin uncompressed WAV and AIFF files, the sheer level of detail produces images that reach out and grab it real. Every instrument in the mix has tangible depth and this makes for extremely vibrant and solid soundstages that are extended in all planes to the limits of the recording. Initially, it seems a little soft, but this is because there is so little glare, it's digital Jim but a lot better than we know it! The only drawback is the loss of Apple Remote operation and an interface that reveals how little metadata there is on WAV files, but if its sound quality you want it can't be beat. **JK**



#### ► DETAILS

**PRICE:** \$33  
**WEBSITE:**  
SBOOTH.ORG/  
DECIBEL

#### OUR VERDICT



## Russ Andrews Ultrasocket

**A**s all the power that a sound system uses is ultimately derived from one or more mains sockets there is a lot to be said for making this first and arguably most critical power connection the best one. Luckily we are blessed with substantial 13amp plugs and sockets in the UK, but it's not impossible to see that standard mains outlets could be improved. One thing that Russ Andrews has identified as a limitation is the connecting bars within double sockets. As a result the Ultrasocket is only available in single outlet form on either a single or double back plate. The idea being that you connect a multi-gang extension block to the socket in the wall. The Ultrasocket is made from high-impact plastics with all contacts deep cryogenically and Deoxit treated for maximum conductivity.



### In use

Replacing a fairly ancient and conventional switched double socket with the Ultrasocket proved reasonably quick and straightforward. However, anyone not qualified should get an electrician in – 240 Volts can be unforgiving to say the least! It's worth the effort, instruments sound distinctly more real because the acoustic around them is much clearer and this allows more of the characteristic sound to get through.

Timing is the other area that clearly benefits from the greater ease with which energy flows out of the grid. The music is clearly more engaging, the rhythmic integrity that much more gelled so that the band appears to be a tighter unit. Not bad for a wall socket really! **JK**



#### ► DETAILS

**PRICE:** £79  
**CONTACT:**  
0845 354 1550  
**WEBSITE:**  
RUSSANDREWS.  
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## Elipson Planet M/Planet subwoofer

**T**he Elipson Planet L I reviewed in *HFC 350* was one of my surprises of 2011, combining a unique appearance with genuinely excellent sound. The spherical design reduces cabinet coloration to a minimum and the coaxial driver arrangement made for a focused and effortless sound.

Hot on the heels of Planet L comes Planet M which is in almost every respect a shrunken version of the same. Each sphere is 15 centimetres across and mounts another coaxial driver pairing – in this case a 10cm paper unit and a 2cm silk dome tweeter. The only feature not replicated is the rear bass port, the Planet M instead being an infinite baffle design. Around the back a single pair of speaker terminals is fitted. A choice of black, white and red finishes are available.

These smaller dimensions mean that the M needs the assistance of a subwoofer to produce a full range sound. To this end, Elipson has produced the Planet Subwoofer to partner the M. This is a cylindrical downward firing unit with a 20cm driver with a 200W amplifier. Rear panel controls are limited to a crossover and volume control and a phase switch. Both high and low level inputs are supported. The Planet sub is finished in the same choice of lacquers as the satellites and shouldn't be too hard to accommodate. Fit and finish of both components is excellent – the paint quality in particular is superb.

In fact, the entire system is very positioning-friendly. Each Planet M is supplied with a 'mounting ring' that prevents them from rolling around on a flat surface, but optional wall and floor mounts are available. The decision to make the Planet M an infinite baffle design pays dividends here as they seem unfazed by shelves or window sills and feed commendably little energy back through the rings. Best results from the subwoofer were gained from keeping it on the same axis and between the satellites.

### Sound quality

I suspect that most Planet Ms will find their way into multichannel systems where I have no doubt that they will do a fine job. People that use them this way will be missing out on what is a very fine stereo performer indeed though. Like the larger Planet L, the Planet M is incredibly cohesive. The coaxial driver arrangement gives a very focused and coherent performance that is largely free of coloration and is tonally excellent. They have an innate timing which helps them sound fully in control even with fast and complex material.

The shape of the Planet M is beneficial in that the 10cm driver is a larger unit than might be expected in a satellite speaker. While you wouldn't really want to use them without the subwoofer,

they have sufficient bandwidth to handle the bulk of the material they receive meaning that the subwoofer is being asked to do just that – sub bass.

The good news is that the subwoofer is able to keep pace with the satellites. It is largely free of bloat or overhang and produces bass that has a commendable level of detail and texture to it rather than the deep, but rather monotonal bass that can result from subwoofers.

Compared with some similarly sized designs there is a limit to the absolute low end heft that it can produce, but for me this is an acceptable trade off to ensure that it can keep up with the very fast satellites. The system neatly avoids the most problematic area of sub/sat performance – the crossover between satellite and subwoofer. Thanks to the relatively low reach of the satellite and the speed of the subwoofer this is smooth and unobtrusive. It allows you to concentrate on the music rather than thinking about which speaker is doing what.

This is a very convincing system. It can perform well in some challenging spaces and possesses most of the attributes that I found so appealing about the larger Planet L. It faces no shortage of competition at the price and the looks will still not appeal to everybody, but this is a fine sounding system that is genuinely satisfying to listen to. **ES**



### ► DETAILS

**PRICE:** £899

**CONTACT:**  
01923 205 605

**WEBSITE:**  
ELIPSON.COM

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## Grab Radio World for iPhone, Android

One of the few joys of DAB radio is being able to get real time metadata on tracks as they are broadcast, and down-shifting to Internet radio can sometimes lead to frustration as it's not as easy to 'tag' that earworm for later investigation or purchase.

A number of Internet radio apps are now trying to plug that gap, but with Grab Radio the clue is in the title – its *raison d'être* is to enable this – as long as the radio station is putting out the metadata they need...

Grab Radio now exists for all the major phone platforms at similarly low price points. For the Apple crowd this means that there is no iPad-specific version, although the phone app blows up to the 2x display resolution quite nicely.

The biggest revelation to me was that beyond its own Grab functionality, the app is essentially just a front end for two of the longest extant iApps – Tunein Radio and the ingenious track identifier Shazam. But while Tunein appears to be integral to the installation, Grab Radio works co-operatively with a separate free Shazam install. On the iPhone this works fine, but frustratingly on the iPad it won't play ball with the iPad version of Shazam, saying Shazam isn't found. So you need to install the iPhone version on the iPad as well, which just feels clumsy!

Although the Shazam link gives you many useful links to track or band associated info, it remains to be seen if Grab Radio will hold its own when Tunein are adding grab features and Shazam is attempting to extend into full player apps. **PC**



**DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £FREE  
**WEBSITE:**  
GRABRADIO  
WORLD.COM

OUR VERDICT



DOWNLOAD

## Shazam for iPhone, Android, iPad

I always felt that Shazam was one of those gimmicky iPhone apps which the early adopters would use to show off with, and little more. The central premise is brilliant (powerful server-side intelligence to identify the imprint of music captured by the device's microphone), but once done (and I only ever did it once!) even the Shazam company itself moved on and to America, pursuing lucrative video-based applications.

Looking into Grab Radio prompted me to reassess Shazam in this more iPad- and social-oriented world, and the iPad application in particular is a well-conceived and useful add-on to the original functionality. The pleasingly sober interface allows a thorough investigation of the featured act through discographies, biogs and YouTube, and social sharing if you're into that kind of thing...

Shazam is also getting a free Shazam Player going which makes use of further metadata tricks, such as lyric viewing when Shazam's server has lyric-tagged versions in its database. (It had over a third of a 200-strong party playlist of mine). Inevitably there is the ability to throw this to Apple TV via Airplay, so *karaoke* freaks will no doubt find much to enjoy here...

If Apple is indeed about to roll its tanks onto the TV set makers' lawn, there will be a battle for well-integrated Airplay-capable enablers like the Shazam Player, but at present we can only imagine how fierce this area of competition is going to be. Shazam is a good bet to be a key player, though. **PC**



**DETAILS**  
**PRICE:** £FREE  
**WEBSITE:**  
SHAZAM.COM

OUR VERDICT



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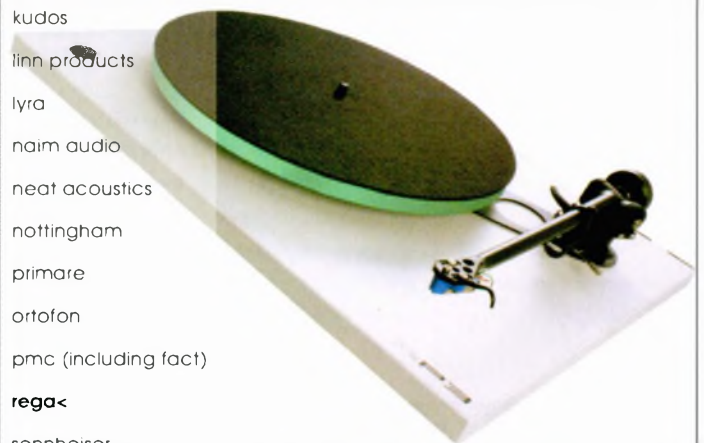
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WE HEAR...

ARCAM HAS SPENT MUCH OF THE PAST FEW YEARS working on an impressive range of high quality portable audio products, such as the rCube, and versatile gadgets designed to make the most of your Apple iPod's audio capabilities. So fans of the brand's more traditional hi-fi fare might be happy to hear whispers from a company insider that there's "interesting serious entry level hi-fi stuff" coming in November.

DESPITE THE ECONOMIC GLOOM, IT'S heartening to hear that a British brand is pushing ahead. PMC loudspeakers is expanding its production capacity in the UK and worldwide distribution as a result of demand for its recent twenty series speakers, which is growing by ten percent a month. In addition, many new dealers were signed up at May's High End Show in Munich – including fourteen in Germany, fifteen in Italy, eight in Canada and the Netherlands, and ten in Switzerland.

"TEARS OF JOY", IS HOW PRINCESS CHARLENE OF MONACO reportedly described her feelings when listening to the new Monster Diamond Tears – Edge headphones! The emotional event was part of the festivities for the 70th Anniversary Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix, where Monster showed its new headphone range. She's pictured here with hubby Prince Albert...



THROUGH THE PAST, SMARTLY...



**HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 230**  
AUGUST 2002  
The science fiction series *Quantum Leap* was wowing audiences on TV in 2002 and seemed a useful headline for this month's HFC cover, with a review of Meridian's new £20,000 800/861 V3 AV player and digital processor combo. Radio tuners were the subject of the group test with HFC asking whether FM still rules the airwaves or "is it time to dip our toes in the digital pool?" It's a question we're still pondering ten years on! A pool of a different type was making headlines around the world with floods covering much of the Czech Republic, China, India and Europe. Sadly, 2002 also saw the first series of Reality TV rubbish: *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*



**HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 109**  
AUGUST 1992  
An audio bazaar in Tokyo had HFC's Dan Houston very excited. An "electronic Canterbury for DIY pilgrims", is how he described it. Professor Chuyu Morikawa vouched for the DIY philosophy when he said, "It not only cuts costs, but allows someone to learn and understand about how electronic signal turns into music." Elsewhere that month, CD-I was 'rocking' editor Andy Benham's boat, when he opined that the Philips CDI 205 player was also an able performer of ordinary CDs. There were a lot of boats rocking in South Florida thanks to 'Category 5' Hurricane Andrew, while a storm of a different kind was brewing after the UK banned the Ulster Defence Association...



**HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 61**  
AUGUST 1988  
Choosing in-car entertainment featured highly with Jason Kennedy confessing (rather worryingly, perhaps) that listening to music alters moods "affecting the way one drives" he said. Ten cassette players with a built-in FM/AM tuner and amp were given the first degree, and a Best Buy recommendation for the Goodmans GCE 229. Having progressed from the all-in-one music centre (remember those), one-brand systems were still the rage. HFC suggested that their popularity was down to "consumers fear of the superficial complexity of a separates hi-fi system", so there! Elsewhere earthquakes rocked Nepal and the Iran/Iraq war finally ended.

TELLURIUM Q IS A HIVE OF ACTIVITY RIGHT NOW.

Having launched an impressive range of speaker cables and interconnects a couple of years back, the company then recently gave us an interesting single-ended Class A power amplifier, and now the word is that a DAC is on the way. Said to be a Colin Wonfor design, it sports stabilised power supplies, special digital filters and "a piece of technology called the Hydra", a mole told us. Quite what this is remains to be seen, but what we do know is that the UK retail price is £1,380. Click on: [www.telluriumq.com](http://www.telluriumq.com).

AH, THAT OLD TRICK...

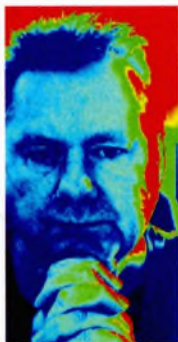
What with there being a Diamond Jubilee, the Euro 2012 football, Wimbledon and the Olympics this summer, there was always going to be a radio with a Union flag on it, wasn't there? And very cute this Pure One Mi looks, too.



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DESERT ISLAND DISCS

This month it's the turn of Tiger Paw's **Mark Digma** to choose four of his favourite albums...



**BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS**  
UPRISING

On the island clearly what we need is some Reggae. Bob Marley brought this to people like me and this album is my favourite of his.



**GRAM PARSONS & EMMYLOU HARRIS**  
GREVIOUS ANGEL

This is a beautiful album and personal to me. Gram and Emmylou touch the soul and have the best duets. Shivers and tears...



**ISOBEL CAMPBELL & MARK LANEGAN**  
HAWK

We need a new album like this. More superb duets, sultry girly vocals contrasted with gravel. Fantastic!



**LED ZEPPELIN II**

Finally, it's back to my roots; this album is seriously such a good piece of Rock 'n' Roll, I just love it. Zep does this stuff best, like no others.





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