

B&W's Z2 stuns

The remarkable AirPlay and iPhone dock that delivers. See Extras p109

Planet Rega

RETRO: celebrating the great British turntable maker



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 373

July 2013

Rockin' Rotel

Top-flight amp & CD duo for under £2k

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEMS:

Copland & Sonus faber create sonic perfection

**Tamla
Motown**

Relive soul's golden era p94

SOUND BYTES
Computer music made easy p40

30

products on test from Arcam and Pioneer through to Yamaha...

GROUP TEST

Power up

Six of the best sounding solid-state integrated amplifiers up to £1,750

Mini marvels

Paradigm's amazing next-gen monitors



CONVERT ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY



DAC-V1 Digital to Analogue Converter

Using our unique digital signal processing technology the DAC-V1 can transform your computer into a high-resolution music hub. It can also unleash the sound of digital sources like your TV, games console, and hard disk player/server too. Listen directly through headphones or add our matching NAP 100 power amplifier and speakers to create a compact, high-end hi-fi system.

If, like us, you really care about music, the new DAC-V1 is for you.

Discover more online: naimaudio.com/dac-v1





86
Munich High End Show 2013



64
Audio Research Reference DAC

Musicreviews



100
Country Joe and the Fish

BADGES EXPLAINED

OUR AWARDS

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

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

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



It's not so long ago that it was considered hi-fi heresy to even think of using a computer as your main music source. Any serious hi-fi enthusiast would scoff at the very idea of listening to the below-par audio quality of music downloads – even ripping a CD to a hard drive using a lossless format didn't

convince many of the virtues of using one as a convenient playback device owing to the riot of noise and interference that it is generally surrounded by.

Look at the market today and opinions have changed. In what seems a very short space of time we've gone from computer audio being seen as unacceptable to hi-fi makers and enthusiasts alike, to an abundance of steamers, DACs and USB cables being sold, allowing music fans to hook up to a computer to get the best quality audio from their music collections on hard drives.

Although CD is far from dead, the way we purchase and listen to music no longer relies on physical media, as more of us get comfortable obtaining downloads or subscribing to services like Spotify. It's a brave new world.

The shift is one of the biggest transitions both the music and hi-fi industries has seen. CD sales are falling and downloads rising, and the growth in network streaming products suggests that plenty have embraced the computer as the future of music playback.

In this issue, we tell you how to make your computer sing as part of your hi-fi system, and what you'll need to enjoy the growing high-res music downloads. Whether you're streaming from your hard drive or connecting via a USB to a DAC, we tell you how to set up a computer music system in our special guide, starting on page 40.

Lee Dunkley Editor



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

Hi-Fi Choice Contents

hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. **373** July 2013

NEWS & OPINION

6 **Audiofile**

The latest news from the world of hi-fi

69 **Letters**

Points of view on audiophile matters

79 **Opinion**

The *Hi-Fi Choice* team say it as they see it!

99 **Music reviews**

Essential new releases given a work out

130 **Back chat**

Assorted hi-fi hearsay!

READER SERVICES

104 **Reader classifieds**

Buy and sell your kit for FREE here

124 **Next issue**

Some of the treats to look out for next month

FEATURES

40 **Computer Music**

Our essential guide to computer audio

86 **Munich High End Show report**

Stunning kit to look out for in the future

90 **Beautiful System**

A gorgeous Copland/Sonus faber combo

94 **Sound Affects**

The cuts that made Tamla Motown sing

109 **Choice Extras**

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

GROUP TEST

22 **Six of the best integrated amplifiers slug it out in this month's group test**



6 **Audiofile:** PMC's fact speaker range



99 **Music reviews:** Scott Walker's *Collection*



59

Chord Electronics Chordette Dual phono preamp

“Music floods out of the speakers in a gloriously unselfconscious way.”

David Price: Creek Destiny 2 integrated amplifier **p27**

TESTED THIS MONTH



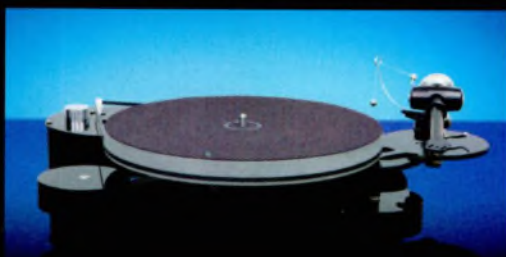
44

Heed Audio Obelisk da DAC



56

Pioneer X-PO1DAB compact hi-fi system



48

Origin Live Aurora Mk3



52

Paradigm Mini Monitor S7



16

In-depth test
Rotel RCD-1570/RA-1570
CD player and integrated amplifier

REVIEWS

Kit testing

16 Rotel

RCD-1570/RA-1570
CD player/integrated amplifier

44 Heed Audio

Obelisk da DAC

48 Origin Live

Aurora Mk3 turntable

52 Paradigm

Mini Monitor S7 standmount loudspeaker

56 Pioneer

X-PO1DAB compact hi-fi system

59 Chord Electronics

Chordette Dual phono preamp

61 AVA Media

Maestro 50 amplifier

64 Audio Research

Reference DAC media bridge (Exotica)

88 Rega

Planet and Planar turntables (Retro)

GROUP TEST

Integrated amplifiers
£1,200-£1,749

25 Cambridge Audio

Azur 851A

27 Creek

Destiny 2

29 Cyrus

8a/PSX-R

31 Exposure

3010S2

33 Onix

A-65

35 Yamaha

A-S2000

Never miss an issue – turn to p102 for our latest subs offer

Face the Facts

Luxury speaker range from PMC gets a substantial new addition. It's time to check the facts...

PRICE: £4,495-£11,995 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 0870 4441044 **WEB:** PMC-SPEAKERS.COM

AS YOU MAY already know, PMC stands for Professional Monitor Company. As the name suggests, the UK brand has extensive professional roots and a reputation for producing great-sounding studio speaker systems. Its Studio Use range of speaker models has earned considerable respect from the music industry, and a number of high-profile musicians and singers, from Brian May to Robbie Williams, can be seen endorsing the brand in its advertising campaigns, giving it serious kudos.

Thankfully for audiophiles, PMC's studio know-how has filtered down to a strong line-up of loudspeakers suitable for domestic conditions, and the fact speaker range is top of its Home Use category. The range began with the mid-sized fact.8 floorstander, which went on to become a 2010 *Hi-Fi Choice* Award Winner in the Best Loudspeaker over £2,000 category. The two-way standmounting fact.3 is the smallest of the range and joined shortly after.

The fact.12 is the latest member to join the luxury line up and received its official launch at the Munich Hi-Fi Show last month, (see our *Show Report* on pages 86-87). It joins the

two existing models as the flagship speaker of the range. Like the fact.8, the fact.12 is also a floorstander and follows in the same established style with a tall and slender speaker cabinet design sporting an exciting range of finishes that includes the exotic-sounding Tiger Ebony, Graphite Poplar plus the newly introduced White Silk finish. More traditional oak and walnut finishes are available on selected models.

The same 140mm precision bass drivers and 19mm high-res SONOMEX™ soft dome ferro-fluid cooled with 34mm wide surround are used in all three models, as well as PMC's Advanced Transmission Line bass tuning technology. The fact.12 adds a 50mm mid driver to its larger cabinet volume. Each element is selected, designed and fine-tuned specifically for use in the fact range, with no part being used in any other speaker model, claims PMC.

To get your hands on a pair you'll need to have deep pockets as prices start at £4,495 for the fact.3, £5,995 for the fact.8, and £11,995 for the fact.12. Look out for our fact.12 review coming to our *Choice Exotica* pages soon.

Each element is selected, designed and fine-tuned specifically for use in the fact range with no part used in other speaker models



COMMENT

THE HEADPHONE BANDWAGON

What have rappers Dr Dre, Ludacris, P-Diddy and the Wu-Tang Clan's RZA got in common with Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber and Bob Marley?

Any ideas? No? Okay, we'll tell you. They have all succumbed to the latest trend of endorsing - and in some cases tuning - headphones. Whether you're walking around with Lady Gaga's spiky black cans, Marley's Rastafarian flag-coloured 'phones or Lemmy's Motorheadphones (see what they've done there?) strapped to your head, plain old Sennheisers, Sony's or Pioneer's just don't cut it any more.

The latest celeb to jump onto the headphone bandwagon is rapper 50 Cent, who's SMS Audio company has just released 'Sync by 50', the first model from a new range of wireless on-ear headphones. The press release tells us that the new product "proves American rapper and entrepreneur 50 Cent's dedication to improving the way people experience music". Hmmmm... notice the word entrepreneur there?

Cynicism aside, Fiddy's (as we like to call him) new cans look the business and by packing apt-X encoding they do away with the pesky wires that get in the way when you're strutting your stuff in the hood.

Quite how much input 50 Cent, Justin Bieber and P-Diddy actually provide towards these products remains to be seen (when asked what set his headphones apart from rivals at CES earlier this year, Lemmy from Motorhead joked "They've got Motorhead written on them" before revealing that his offering is "mid-range, not bass orientated" as anything other than hip hop sounds terrible on Dr Dre's Beats headphones), but it can only be seen as a positive thing.

As you'll see when you read the report on page 86, one of the products that everyone seemed to be showing at the High End Show in Munich was headphones. And if a few celebs that many of us neither care about or for that matter have heard of are playing their part in this, it can only be a good thing. With the demand for cutting-edge technology headphones growing, they will continue to get better and better. We're just hoping that we don't have to wait too long for Cliff Richard to get in on the act...



New Azur combo

Cambridge Audio unveils new additions to the 851 Series

PRICE: TBC **AVAILABLE:** AUTUMN
WEB: CAMBRIDGEAUDIO.COM

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CHOSE the Munich High End show last month to preview two new models that will be joining its flagship 851 Series later this year. The new Azur 851W power amplifier and 851E pre-amplifier duo will join the 851A integrated amplifier and 851C upsampling DAC/CD player/pre-amplifier to boost the series.

As we went to press, prices were still to be confirmed, but Cambridge Audio's preliminary details claim the 851W power amplifier will utilise the most refined version of its proprietary Class XD system yet, combining the best of Class A and Class AB amplification. The all-metal chassis design gives a claimed 200W into 8ohms stereo or 500W RMS in mono-bridged configuration, and two separate toroidal



transformers – one for the power amplifier itself and one for input and other circuitry – ensure that performance is unaffected by audio output volume or dynamics, says Cambridge Audio.

The matching 851E pre-amplifier will feature eight inputs, including three selectable between XLR-balanced and RCA-unbalanced inputs, and claims an ultra-low distortion, and linear, volume control circuit. Flexible and configurable trigger outputs/IR and control bus make the 851E an ideal model to integrate with power amps.

As well as the new Azur components, Cambridge Audio also announced a collection of new speakers – see our Munich Show report for more info, starting on page 86.

IN BRIEF

BOSE 'PHONES GO BLUETOOTH

● Bose is the latest brand to utilise Bluetooth connectivity in its AE2w headphones. The new model claims to offer improved audio performance over conventional stereo wireless headphones and uses its exclusive TriPort technology and proprietary active equalisation to create deep lows and a more natural, lifelike sound.

Bose claims that the headphones are optimised for use with an iPad, yet are compatible with most mobile devices that support the Advanced Audio Distribution Profile (A2DP). The AE2w headphones are available now from Bose dealers for around £200 and join the Bose AE2 and AE2i wired models available for £130 and £150. **BOSE.CO.UK**



Spirit of a classic

PRICE: £2,000 **AVAILABLE:** AUTUMN
CONTACT: 01702 601410 **WEB:** RUARKAUDIO.COM

Ruark Audio looks set to prove that classic designs never go out of fashion. Clearly inspired by iconic sixties design, the R7 is crafted from real walnut, aluminium and glass. The central section of the R7 features a CD player, Bluetooth with lossless apt-X music replay for wirelessly streaming from smartphones and DLNA wi-fi for streaming. There are also DAB+ and FM tuners as well as internet radio.

Digital and analogue inputs enable external sources to be connected, and everyday functionality is provided by the new RotoDial radio link remote control,

which doesn't need to point directly at the R7, and can even control the music centre from an adjoining room.

Ruark claims the furniture cabinet has been tuned and chambered to provide a low-colouration housing for its newly developed dual-concentric drivers with the tweeter mounted centrally in the bass-mid unit. A long-throw subwoofer unit provides clean tuneful bass with remarkable depth and authority, it says.

The R7 is supplied with spindle legs for free-standing mode or puck feet for mounting on a sideboard or AV cabinet. ▶

LUXMAN

PURE CLASS A INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

L-550AX

L-590AX



L-550AX

L-590AX

Distributed by
Select Audio
Tel 01900 601954
www.selectaudio.co.uk
www.luxman.co.jp/global

Get set for Ultra sound

Subwoofer maker unveils speakers

PRICE: £2,200 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 01423 358846 **WEB:** KARMA-AV.CO.UK

SUBWOOFER BRAND SVSOUND is expanding its line-up by adding a range of loudspeakers called Ultra.

The Ultra Tower is a three point five-way floorstanding loudspeaker fitted with a 1in aluminium dome tweeter flanked by two 6.5in glass-fibre midrange drivers. Horizontally opposed 8in bass drivers are in the base of each of the cabinets. The company's SoundMatch crossover network utilises premium-grade components to supply each midrange driver with an optimised frequency band, says SVS. The unique

cabinet design utilises a 3.5in flared bass port at the back and come in piano gloss black or black oak veneer.

The matching Bookshelf model is a two-way standmount speaker utilising the same drives and crossover technology as found in the Towers. The Tower and Bookshelf models are joined by a sonically matched Centre and Surround speakers.

The Towers are priced at £2,200 and the Bookshelf models £1,099. Matching Centre and Surround speaker models cost £749 and £1,299 respectively.



Bluetooth on the move

PRICE: £70-£110 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **WEB:** HERCULES.COM

Computer peripherals maker, Hercules, has created a range of speaker systems called WAE (Wireless Audio Experience) that can be wirelessly connected to a computer, smartphone or tablet for music streaming via Bluetooth.

The BTPO3 and the BTPO3 Mini are the latest models to join the range. The BTPO3 is the larger of the two portable models and

claims to give 15 hours of streamed music playback from a mobile device. It has A2DP multipoint technology to enable switching between two paired mobile devices, and a WAE Remote app is downloadable for both iOS and Android devices. There's a built-in mic for hands-free calling, and a mini-jack output enables the BTPO3 to be

routed to a hi-fi system. The super-compact BTPO3 Mini offers similar functionality to its bigger brother, but weighs in at just 320g and is small and light enough to be tucked away inside a bag. It claims 14 hours of streamed music playback and is available in a choice of orange, red or pink finishes. The BTPO3 is priced at £110 and the BTPO3 Mini at £70



IN BRIEF

GARDEN OF SOUND

● Believe it or not, summer is here and we're looking forward to spending more time outdoors. Getting decent sound outdoors can be rather a challenge, but the SonArray package from Sonance claims that it's about to change our preconceptions. Its SR1 system, costing £2,500, utilises eight 4in satellite speakers connected to an 8in underground subwoofer that can easily be connected to any regular stereo amplifier. The weatherproof satellites can be easily positioned under plants or foliage and claim to distribute sound to an area of up to 185m². The satellite's horn-shaped enclosures direct sound to where it's wanted and not into neighbouring gardens, it says.

HABITECH.CO.UK



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



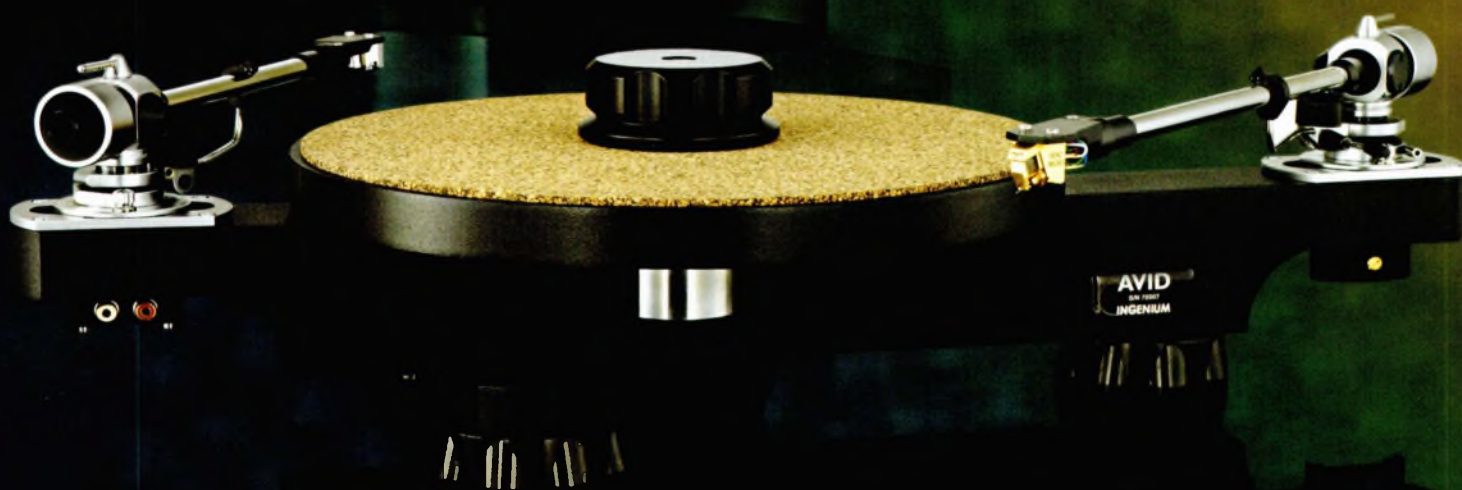
“This level of performance,
convenience and style makes for
an award winning product.”

Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio Magazine, January 2013



“Oozes quality in both
construction and sound”

Paul Rigby, Hi Fi World, March 2013



Ingenium offers the same obsessive design philosophy of our more expensive designs, a ground-up construction engineered for pure audiophile performance.

The unique skeletal design offers unparalleled versatility with a huge choice of single or double arm options. Our prized sapphire bearing and platter system has been retained from the DIVA II, as has the option of using our unique clamping system, which efficiently channels unwanted vibrations away from both the record and platter.

Call today to arrange your private audition.

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

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

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

www.avidhifi.co.uk

AVID HIFI LIMITED, Bicton Industrial Park, Kimbolton, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE28 0LW
Tel: +44(0)1480 869 900 Fax: +44(0)1480 869 909 E-mail info@avidhifi.co.uk

SET YOUR MUSIC FREE


MARTIN LOGAN

*'Seduces the listener with realism and a sense of scale...
The Summit X will own your heart from its first notes'*

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News (November 2009)

*'Reference-grade performance that you'd struggle to match
at double the price'*

Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi+ (Issue 66)

*'The Summit X is just too addictive to live without. I'm putting
my money where my mouth is and buying the review pair as
my new reference loudspeakers'*

Howard Kneller, SoundStage! (September 2009)

Nothing brings music to life like
MartinLogan speakers. Unique
technologies, seamlessly fused to
create a sound so spacious, so open, it
makes ordinary speakers seem hopelessly
constrained.

26 years of electrostatic evolution has led to
MartinLogan's latest creation: the mighty
Summit X. Key to the new speaker's extraordinary
performance are its advanced XStat™
electrostatic panel and perfectly integrated
Controlled Dispersion Powered Force™ woofer
section, effortlessly extending bass response to
subterranean depths.

Yet the Summit X never sounds heavy. On the
contrary, its performance is extraordinarily fast and
open, painting an image that dances boldly before
the listener, fully scaled and unconstrained,
a sound that's natural, effortless and startlingly real.

The pinnacle of MartinLogan's hybrid electrostatic
technology, the Summit X joins an extensive range
of speakers encompassing freestanding, on-wall
and in-wall models, from affordable hybrid designs
and standalone subwoofers to the awesome CLX
– the best full-range electrostatic speaker money
can buy.

Set your music free with MartinLogan speakers,
brought to you by Absolute Sounds – premier
importer of the world's finest hi-fi.



absolute sounds ltd
58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW
T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09 F: +44 (0)20 88 79 79 62
www.absolutesounds.com info@absolutesounds.com



GREAT GIFTS FOR FATHER'S DAY

Grab a bargain and become Dad's favourite child... or get a sneaky treat for yourself... **you know you want to!**

GREAT SAVINGS+ FREE GIFT*



Hi-Fi News

SPECIAL OFFER:

- 6 Month Cheque/Credit Card: **ONLY £20.75!**
- 1 yr Cheque/Credit Card: **£41.49 (Save 21%)**
- 1 yr Direct Debit: **£39.16 (Save 25%)**



Hi-Fi Choice

SPECIAL OFFER:

- 6 Month Cheque/Credit Card: **ONLY £20.75!**
- 1 yr Cheque/Credit Card: **£41.49 (Save 20%)**
- 1 yr Direct Debit: **£39.16 (Save 25%)**



Home Cinema Choice

SPECIAL OFFER:

- 6 Month Cheque/Credit Card: **ONLY £22.25!**
- 1 yr Cheque/Credit Card: **£44.49 (Save 20%)**
- 1 yr Direct Debit: **£41.96 (Save 25%)**



What Satellite

SPECIAL OFFER:

- 6 Month Cheque/Credit Card: **ONLY £22.25!**
- 1 yr Cheque/Credit Card: **£44.49 (Save 20%)**
- 1 yr Direct Debit: **£41.96 (Save 25%)**

HURRY OFFER CLOSSES 16TH JUNE 2013!

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 16th June 2013. *Gift for UK 1 year subscribers only, while stocks last. Subscriptions will begin with the first available issue. Please continue to buy your magazine until you receive your acknowledgement letter. Initial 12 month non-refundable contract applies except for 6 month special offer. Refund requests must be in writing to the Publisher and will not be given on accounts with less than £20 credit. A £5 admin charge will apply and will be deducted from any refund. Refunds will only be given at the Publisher's sole discretion. We will use the contact details supplied to communicate with you regarding your Home Cinema Choice subscription. Your details will be processed by MyTimeMedia Ltd & Home Cinema Choice in full accordance with all relevant UK and EU data protection legislation.

SUBSCRIBE NOW
SAVE UP TO 25%

Order online today

www.subscription.co.uk/FD13



Or call 08456 777 807
and quote reference **FD13**



Lines open weekdays 8am – 9:30pm & Saturday 8am–4pm
BT Landline calls to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 5p per minute. Calls from mobiles usually cost more.

OPPO®

THE NEXT STEP
IN UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER DESIGN AND ENGINEERING

BDP-103EU



- 4K VIDEO UP-SCALING (INCLUDING EXTERNAL SOURCES)
- DUAL HDMI INPUTS & MHL COMPATIBILITY
- 2D TO 3D CONVERSION
- NETFLIX & YOUTUBE LEANBACK STREAMING
- FAST START-UP & DISC LOADING
- GRACENOTE MUSIC & VIDEO DATABASE

BDP-105EU



In addition to the innovations above:

- COAXIAL & OPTICAL DIGITAL INPUTS
- ASYNCHRONOUS USB DAC INPUT
- HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER
- DUAL SABRE32 REFERENCE DACS
- BALANCED XLR OUTPUTS
- TOROIDAL LINEAR POWER SUPPLY



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

www.oppo-bluray.co.uk



Fifteen love

Rotel's 15 series has just got a revamp, and the result is a very classy sounding CD player and DAC/amplifier combination, finds **David Price**

DETAILS**PRODUCT**
Rotel RCD-1570**ORIGIN**
Japan/China**TYPE**
CD player**WEIGHT**
6.7kg**DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
431 x 93 x 320mm**FEATURES**

- Wolfson 8740 DAC
- 1x RCA phono line output
- 1x XLR balanced output
- Slot-loading CD drive
- Remote control

DISTRIBUTOR
B&W**TELEPHONE**
01903 221 500**WEBSITE**
rotel.co.uk**DETAILS****PRODUCT**
Rotel RA-1570**ORIGIN**
Japan/China**TYPE**
Integrated amplifier**WEIGHT**
13kg**DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
431 x 44 x 350mm**FEATURES**

- Quoted power output: 120W RMS per channel
- 4x RCA phono line inputs, 1x XLR balanced input, 1x MM phono input
- 1x USB A digital input, 1x USB B digital input
- 2 pairs of loudspeaker outputs

DISTRIBUTOR
B&W**TELEPHONE**
01903 221 500**WEBSITE**
rotel.co.uk

Ahh, Rotel – if ever there was an international hi-fi company, this is it!

Although production is based in Zhuhai, China, the 52-year old company has engineering offices in the UK, USA, Japan, Korea and China, and a 60-strong R&D team including design input from the UK.

Back in the seventies, it had a name for big, showy-looking electronics, but by the early eighties the brand was focusing on affordable audiophile kit epitomised by the RA-820BX, which was one of the best budget amplifiers of its era. It gave Rotel a reputation for fettling affordable audio equipment into something quite special that remains to this day.

With extensive digital connectivity, the new 15 series isn't exactly what you'd call an essay in minimalism, but Rotel still asserts strong purist credentials. It claims boldly to "strive to make products which offer astonishing build quality and performance at relevant price points", and that's the big idea behind the RCD-1570 silver disc spinner and RA-1570 amplifier before you here. Costing £700 and £1,200 respectively, they're both mainstream high-quality designs with the emphasis on flexibility as well as sonics.

The new CD player is something of a curio in these complicated times, being one of the few these days not to have built-in DAC functionality. Yes, it is really a traditional, old-fashioned, unreconstructed silver disc spinner! The choice of Wolfson WM8740 DAC chip isn't exactly radical either; it's a justifiably popular design that pops up in many modern machines. Rotel says it is one of the company's favourite DACs of the moment.

The RCD-1570's slot-loading CD drive is a little off the beaten track, and a very nice way to interface with a CD player – superior in my view to a wobbly, plasticky disc tray. The company says, "it was the best performing and most reliable mechanism that Rotel could source". That's as maybe, but the drive mechanism in the RCD-1570 is still slightly noisy – you can hear it whirring around conspicuously when playing a track.

Rotel says: "The case material is of a gauge sufficient enough to reduce the effect of resonances, and the build quality also ensures tight and consistent fit", but it could still do with extra damping in my view. The master clock is said to have had special attention paid to it, using techniques of careful supply decoupling combined with electrical

isolation and rugged construction Rotel says.

Curiously, the RCD-1570 CD player recognises HDCD discs (remember them?) when inserted, showing 'HDCD' on the display instead of the normal 'CD-DA' – but it still plays them as standard CDs. Could this be a ghostly reminder of Rotel's previous love of this format, perhaps?

If the 15 series CD player is 'old school', the new RA-1570 makes major concessions to modernity. Here we have a large, heavy, Class AB integrated amplifier, which has a litany of socketry, starting with the fascia-mounted USB Type A input for playing music from iDevices directly, or via the supplied Bluetooth Dongle. Round the back, there's a USB Type B input for connection to a computer, specified for digital music at up to 24-bit/192kHz resolution. The two coaxial electrical digital inputs will also do this, whereas the twin optical Toslinks go up to 24/96. You also get four RCA line-level inputs, a moving magnet phono, plus a pair of XLR-balanced inputs – I use these to connect the amp to the CD player, which also sports them. Preamp

A large, heavy, Class AB integrated amplifier, which has a litany of socketry

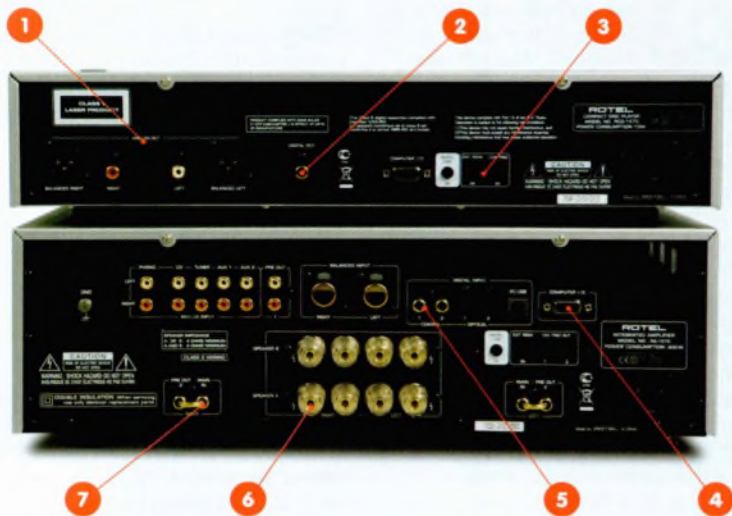
outputs are also fitted, as well as two sets of loudspeaker outputs.

Inside, Class AB circuitry is used because Rotel reckons that "for audiophiles this is currently the better option as it readily allows for tweaking of critical circuits in a way that other types do not".

Multiple discrete Sanken bi-polar output transistors are fitted "for their high power performance and reliability", and there's a Toroidal power transformer that is designed and built in-house by Rotel. This is selected, "because the external magnetic field is normally lower than that from a more conventional EI type of a similar size and specification", the company says.

Together, the 1570s make a pretty pair. The general standard of finish is very good, and the brushed aluminium and polished fascia edges look classy together. The front panel switchgear has a nice, positive gait, although the light blue fluorescent display disappoints slightly – it looks a little crude when compared with the latest generation of OLEDs seen everywhere from Audiolab to Naim ▶

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Analogue outputs
- 2 Digital output
- 3 Remote trigger outputs
- 4 RS232 port
- 5 Digital inputs
- 6 Loudspeaker outputs
- 7 Preamp out/power amp in

now. The RA-1570 has a good range of facilities, including bypassable tone controls – accessible via the menu – and it's easy to hook up to a computer, although you'll need to install the supplied driver if you have a PC, of course.

Sound quality

Taking the RCD-1570 CD player on its own, it offers a very animated, musical sound with a strong bottom end. Rather than being 'matter of fact' sounding like many other price rivals, it really gets into the nitty-gritty of the music's rhythms and dynamics. For example, the indie-rock sound of

A truly engaging listen, bristling with detail, yet subtle and composed too

Ultra Vivid Scene's *Special One* comes over as very bouncy and fluent, this player seemingly going out of its way to carry the emotion of the track, and deliver a really punchy, propulsive bass. The result is a truly engaging listen, bristling with detail, yet subtle and composed too.

With classical music, it shows itself to be an expansive performer, blessed with an unexpectedly deep soundstage. Slot in Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No.3* (Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Linn Records) and the player lets rip with a rich, vibrant rendition of this brilliant recording. String tone is as natural as you'll hear from 16-bit, and the rhythm of the music flows along like the widest part of the River Clyde. Moving back to a cooking CD

recording of Lou Donaldson's *Alligator Boogaloo*, and this Blue Note jazz classic comes across in a most enjoyable way. This player is a keen student of rhythm alright, and proves well able to get into the groove and keep the listener's attention – a most impressive party trick at the price.

Swapping to the RA-1570 amplifier all on its own, it proves to be quite open and lively, with plenty of power and an enthusiastically engaging nature. You wouldn't call it the last word in transparency though; compared with others, it's a little opaque across the midband and lacks something in the way of fine depth perspective. This Rotel amplifier focuses on the music's general direction, rather than obsessing on the detail.

Tonally, it proves a little more neutral than its disc-spinning partner, although it's got a fairly well-lit treble that isn't as smooth as some price rivals. Nevertheless, when you partner it with the ever-so-slightly warm matching CD player, the result is a great-sounding twosome. They're both up for diving into a song's rhythm, yet their respective tonalities flatter one another and the result is a big, smooth, punchy sound that's never less than a lot of fun to behold.

Given Rotel's talent for voicing products, I'm sure this is no happy accident – as a pair these two really sing across a wide variety of music.

The RA-1570 also sports a built-in DAC, of course, and this doesn't quite match the sound of the CD player via its analogue outputs, coming over a little opaque and less finessed. But via the USB input,

hi-res from a MacBook Pro running Audirvana Plus sounds great – a 24/96 rip of Metallica's *Enter Sandman* is breathtakingly powerful and grippy, with excellent dynamic range and a good deal more punch. The amp is well able to convey the menacing, muscular sound of the production, and makes for an edge-of-the-seat performance. Instruments snap into focus and the soundstage acquires a satisfying depth. As such, the hi-res capability of this amplifier is well worth having.

Conclusion

These components make a nice pair. Rotel's RCD-1570 CD player is great value – it sounds excellent and is very nicely made. Tonally it's a touch on the warm side, and conjures up a spacious recorded acoustic. The RA-1570 amplifier is a fine all-round package, but isn't unbeaten at its price for sound. Still, you get a strong, punchy, musical presentation that's always fun to listen to, and when combined with its matching CD player, really flies. Whether auditioned separately or together as a pair, these Rotels warrant consideration if you're in the market for serious-sounding electronics that won't break the bank.

HOW IT COMPARES

The new RCD-1570 is one of the best CD spinners around at the price, only the Audiolab 8200CD (£800) really worries it – with a more focused and detailed sound. Conversely, the Rotel is a little warmer and more organic sounding, so taste and system synergy play a big part here. The RA-1570 struggles more, as there are so many great amps around – the Creek Evolution 50A (£700) has a cleaner, more insightful and compelling sound, making the Rotel sound a little hazy and slow in comparison. However, it doesn't have a DAC or a phono stage built in, so you'll have to budget more for these. As a pair though, these new Rotels work brilliantly.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT - RCD-1570

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Enjoyably bouncy, natural musical sound
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Display isn't pretty, slightly noisy mechanism
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: Well built and handsome CD spinner with excellent sonics
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL
★★★★★

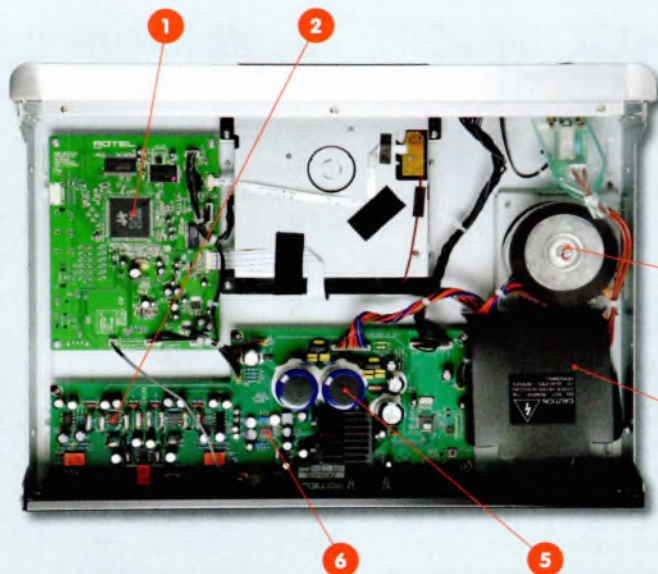
Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT - RA-1570

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Good looks, fine build, powerful sound
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Wot, no OLED display?
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: Capable, well specified and flexible mid-price amplifier with a musical and very satisfying sound
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL
★★★★★

ROTEL RCD-1570



- 1 Control CPU PCB assembly
- 2 Analogue filter stages
- 3 Toroidal power transformer
- 4 AC supply filters and stand-by circuits - on a separate PCB
- 5 Powersupplies and regulation - the large capacitors are slit-foil types
- 6 The WM8740 DAC

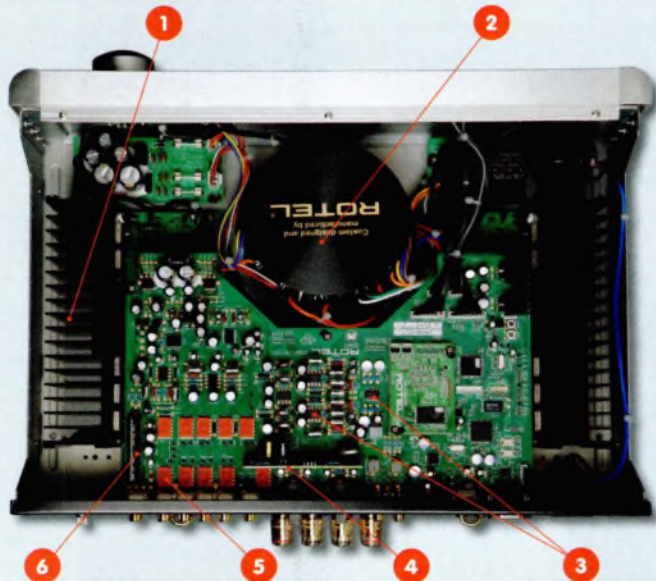
ON TEST

Both this CD player and the digital section of Rotel's partnering RA-1570 amplifier employ a Wolfson WM8740 DAC and while there are similarities in their performance, there are also key differences. The RCD-1570 is necessarily 'tuned' for 44.1kHz/16-bit operation, but it shares the same low frequency response roll-off (-0.45dB/

20Hz) with the RA-1570. It also shows the same increase in harmonic distortion at these low frequencies (0.0024% at 1kHz to 0.016% at 20Hz) - a feature that may not be unrelated. Again, the player offers a similarly wide 110dB A-wtd S/N ratio, once we compensate for the high 4.2V max. output from its balanced XLRs.

On the other hand jitter, both correlated and noise-like, is rather higher at over 1,000psec through the RCD-1570 than the 350psec incurred by the digital section of the RA-1570. But the player's low 96ohm output impedance is preferable to the amp's 430ohm RCA pre-out and stereo separation is better at 20kHz. PM

ROTEL RA-1570



- 1 Output stage heatsink (right ch)
- 2 Toroid power transformer
- 3 DAC and filter circuits
- 4 Vertically mounted balanced input stages
- 5 Relay input switching
- 6 Vertically mounted phono stages

ON TEST

Various of the RA-1570's digital S/PDIF characteristics are covered off in the report above, although its frequency response with higher sample rate inputs obviously exceeds that of the CD player (-0.35dB/45kHz with 96kHz and -4.7dB/90kHz with 192kHz digital audio). The USB input is inferior to the conventional S/PDIF option, not least

because the Windows PC drivers appear to truncate hi-res audio to a (16-bit) 95dB A-wtd S/N ratio. The analogue amplifier itself is much more impressive, beating its 120W rating to the tune of 2 x 150W/8ohm and a mighty 2 x 250W/4ohm and with sufficient headroom to accommodate 190W, 355W, 630W

and a full 970W into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads under dynamic conditions. It's a real powerhouse! Distortion is held in check at 0.0006-0.0014% over a full 1-120W range through the midband, increasing slightly with frequency to 0.007% at 20kHz (re. 10W/8ohm). The response is amazingly flat to within -0.2dB from 20Hz-100kHz. PM

Q&A

Shaun Marin

Brand Manager B&W Group Ltd



DP: What are the overall aims of the new Rotel 15 Series?

SM: Rotel strives to make products which offer astonishing build quality and performance at relevant price points - coupled with an extensive feature list, which these days includes digital connectivity. These new 15 Series models continue this theme. The competition varies from category to category: it's different when talking about integrated amplifiers as compared to AV processors; and in some cases it differs from country to country. We sincerely believe that the sonic performance of Rotel products is appreciated by audio enthusiasts and music lovers all over the world.

What interesting features does the RCD-1570 boast?

It has a slot-loading CD drive, used most importantly it is the best performing and most reliable mechanism that Rotel could source. Secondly we think that a slot-loader enhances the look of the CD player. Special attention has been paid to the master clock using well-known techniques of careful supply decoupling combined with electrical isolation and rugged construction. The use of Wolfson's 8740 DAC allows Rotel to carefully select the external filters and surrounding components. This iterative process of tuning is what gives Rotel the audio clarity required to wear the 'Rotel' logo.

Has special attention been paid to the RA-1570's circuitry?

It's an 'open secret' that Rotel spends many, many hours of development time ensuring that the electronic parts that are installed in every product are selected to enhance sonic performance. Inside, you will see selected conventional leaded electronic parts from a variety of manufacturers, plus others in the digital areas, where SMT components are often the norm. This aspect of Rotel design development is probably unique for a manufacture of its size, and Rotel is careful to make use of tried and tested in-house circuit architecture to provide a thoroughbred combination of performance and reliability.

How we test

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

Unique group tests

This month's group test is supported by rigorous listening tests, backed up with objective lab testing

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER GROUP TEST

THIS MONTH'S GROUP test took place over an extended period, with all six amplifiers put through their paces with two pairs of speakers. Subsequent to the lab testing, the amps were all set-up in our listening room, level matched and given a burn-in period of 24 hours, including running an IsoTek Full System Enhancer CD to ensure they had thoroughly settled down and warmed through. Review samples arrive with us in differing states of readiness; some manufacturers supply brand new, carton-fresh samples whereas others provide well campaigned products that have had time to run-in properly – so this process made for a more level playground.

All the amplifiers were auditioned first with a pair of Q Acoustics Concept 20s on factory stands. This is an excellent £350 standmount loudspeaker and typical of the sort of speakers that these amplifiers are likely to be used with. On the other hand, Spendor D7 floorstanding loudspeakers were also employed – a high-end design costing £3,495 which is well able to signpost the qualitative differences between the amps in absolute terms. The source was Audiolab's 8200CD DAC/CD player (£700) which is an excellent mid-price design; CDs were used for the main testing but hi-res files played via an Apple MacBook Pro were also employed to verify findings subsequently.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Dynamic power

+40

Speaker load tolerance

+30

Distortion vs. level and frequency

+20

Signal-to-noise ratio

-20

Frequency response

+30

KEY: ■ Group average

■ % below average ■ % above average

DYNAMIC POWER

In addition to measuring the amplifier's continuous power output, we also check on its delivery under dynamic, music-like conditions up to 1% distortion.

SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE

Not simply a measure of how much power is available into a standard 8ohm load but how the amplifier's output behaves into progressively lower and more difficult loads.

DISTORTION VS LEVEL AND FREQUENCY

This bar value represents a measure of distortion and its consistency across both the whole audio band and the amplifier's entire dynamic range.

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

This is a direct representation of the amplifier's A-weighted Signal-to-Noise (S/N) ratio at 1W output into an idealised 8ohm load.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

We measure the 'flatness' of the response from a subsonic 5Hz to an ultrasonic 100kHz, but we also determine how well it handles different speaker loads.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

SOURCE

Audiolab 8200CD DAC/CD player

LOUDSPEAKERS

Q Acoustics Concept 20 and Spendor D7

CABLES

Black Rhodium

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Quadraspire

TEST MUSIC

MOZART

Symphony No. 29,
Scottish Chamber Orchestra



THE JAM

News of the World, In The City
Snap



CENTRAL LINE

Walking Into Sunshine
The Collection



REM

Maps and Legends
Fables of the Reconstruction



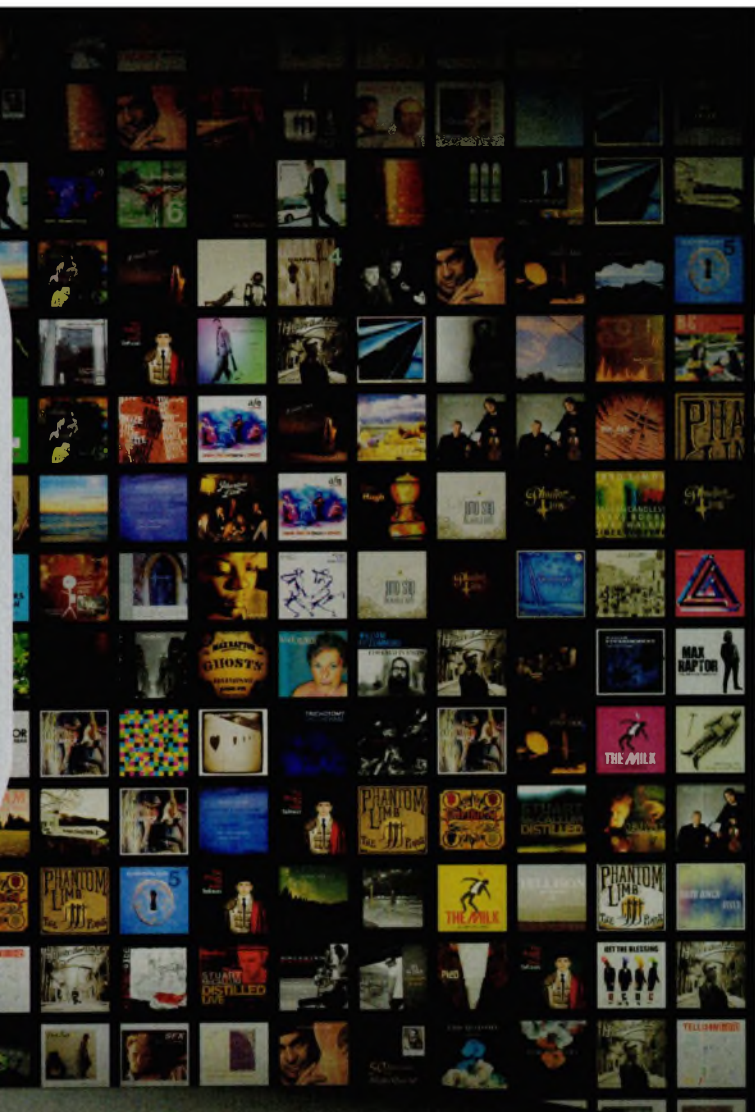
OUR GROUP TESTS

and In-depth Reviews 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



Discover the range of Hard Disk Players and Server solutions from Jordan Acoustics & Naim...

...and with our range of flexible 0% finance packages**, purchasing your perfect Naim has never been easier. Call Jordan Acoustics to find out more. **subject to status



address: Unit 2 - The Old Cart Building,
Parley Court Barns, Parley Green Lane, Hurn,
Bournemouth, BH23 6BB

Open: 9:00-5:00 Tuesday - Friday
9.30-3.00 Saturday

e-mail: bournemouth@jordanacoustics.co.uk

bournemouth showroom
t. 01202 911 886



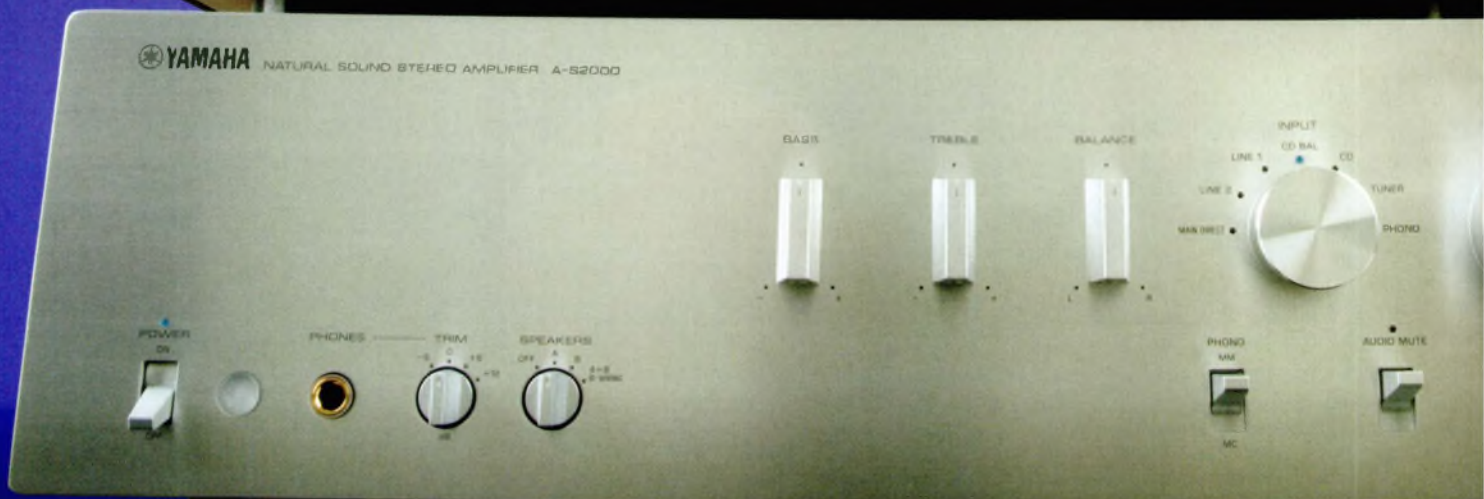
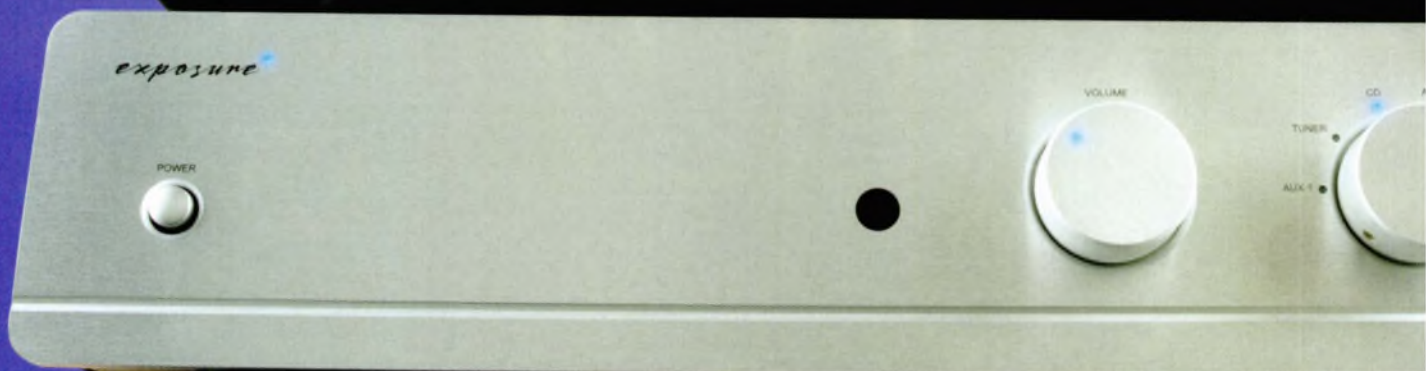
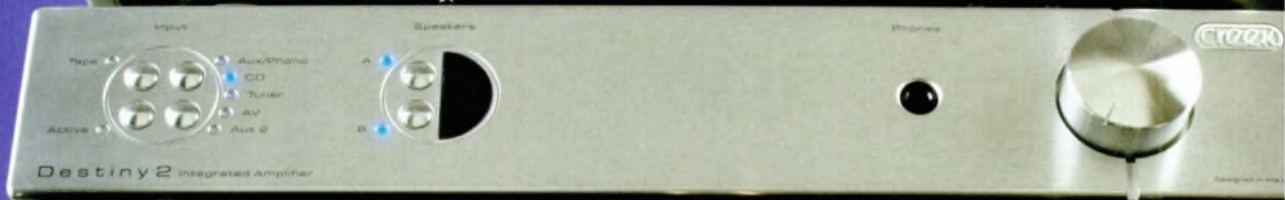
address: 20-22 Cadham Centre,
Glenrothes,
Fife, KY7 6RU

Open: 9:00-5:00 Monday - Friday
Closed Saturday

e-mail: glenrothes@jordanacoustics.co.uk

glenrothes showroom
t. 01592 744 779

www.jordanacoustics.co.uk



Group test

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS £1,200-£1,749

Power players

With hundreds of watts on tap, today's top integrations promise high-end punch without the high prices says **David Price**

BACK IN THE bad old days, if you wanted an amplifier capable of pushing out serious power, there was only one route open to you – to invest in a separate preamplifier and power amplifier combination. This involved spending large sums of money and having your listening room assaulted by two big boxes that reminded you of their presence whenever you looked in their general direction.

Nowadays however, with the rise of the 'super integrated', spending around £1,500 will get you over 100W per channel from an altogether smaller and more subtle box that won't dominate your listening room.

Does this mean that they deliver high-end sound without the tears? Well yes, the manufacturers of all the models here would doubtless claim this very thing.

But as ever with hi-fi, it ain't necessarily so. These six designs come at things from slightly differing angles. Some, such as the Cambridge Audio and Yamaha are dripping with facilities, with features such as tone controls, phono stages, fancy displays and so on. Others, meanwhile, such

as the Exposure and Onix integrations, are stripped-down minimalist machines of the sort that were more fashionable back in the eighties. The claim made for these amplifiers is that more money has been spent on the circuitry and components, rather than concentrating on filling up the fascia with fripperies – but this doesn't always hold water.

Spending around £1,500 will get over 100W per channel from a smaller box

Finally, the Cyrus and Creek offerings tread a third path somewhere between the other two.

Ultimately though, what counts is the basic quality of the circuit design and how well it is executed – claimed power outputs and fancy features don't necessarily translate into excellent real-world performance. That's why, as ever, there's no substitute for listening to them in carefully controlled conditions! ▶

ON TEST



Cambridge Audio Azur 851A
£1,200 p25

The baby of the group certainly doesn't look or feel like it – it is bristling with features, packs a huge power output and is built like the proverbial outhouse made from pre-constituted building materials!



Creek Destiny 2
£1,749 p27

Top of Creek's respected line of integrations, this treads a delicate path between 'less is more' minimalism and the feature-laden designs here. It's a gimmick-free design with the accent on sonics.



Cyrus 8a/PSX-R
£1,749 p29

A brand that made its name in the eighties, this is the latest Cyrus amplifier and comes with the optional £500 PSX-R power supply, that's claimed to improve current driving ability and clean up the sound.



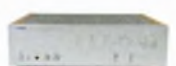
Exposure 3010S2
£1,350 p31

From another eighties superstar – famed for its big pre/power amplifier combos – comes this one-box super integrated that puts out a serious amount of power and sports a stripped-down feature set.



Onix A-65
£1,290 p33

This sparsely appointed, minimalist box has next to no facilities, with Onix claiming all the money has been spent on the high-quality components inside. It really looks the part, but does it deliver?



Yamaha A-S2000
£1,499 p35

This amplifier has been on sale for a good few years now, but still looks as appetising as ever, thanks to its gorgeous retro styling, build quality, vast features and massive power output. But what about its sonics?

THE hi-fi SHOW

The ultimate high-end hi-fi experience *Live*

Every enthusiast dreams of the chance to enjoy the sound of the world's best hi-fi systems, presented by the industry's most respected professionals. That dream will become a reality at the inaugural Hi-Fi Show, brought to you by the trusted audiophiles behind *Hi-Fi News & Record Review* and *Hi-Fi Choice* magazines.

In a refreshing departure from the conventional show format, visitors will be treated to a series of memorable high-end audio experiences. Each of our major suites will feature examples of the very

best that the high-end can offer with scheduled presentations and demonstrations by a mix of famous designers, recording engineers and audio personalities. Our other suites will offer interactive demonstrations of the best headphones and headphone amplifiers, heavyweight vinyl and hi-res digital media plus the very highest quality accessories available.

For up-to-the-minute information on exhibiting brands, advance ticketing and other announcements, please visit our website.



25 -26 October • Beaumont House Estate • Old Windsor, West Berkshire

www.hifinews.co.uk/show


AVTech
media Ltd

Finland – *Hitimaailma*
Germany – *Eins Null, Hifi Test TV Video*
Greece – *Hxos Eikova*
Hungary – *Sztereo Sound & Vision*
Italy – *AUDIOreview*
Norway – *Watt*
Poland – *Audio*
Portugal – *Audio & Cinema em Casa*
Russia – *Stereo & Video*
Serbia – *Hi-Files*
Sweden – *Hifi & Musik*

MEDIA SUPPORTERS OF THE HI-FI SHOW 2013





Cambridge Audio Azur 851A **£1,200**



The state-of-the-art modern integrated with every convenience aside from the kitchen sink

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Amplifier
- ORIGIN**
UK/China
- TYPE**
Integrated amplifier
- WEIGHT**
5.9kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
430 x 115 x 385mm
- FEATURES**
 - Quoted power output: 120W RMS per channel into 8ohms
 - Silver or black brushed aluminium finish
 - 6 inputs, inc XLR
 - 6.3mm headphone output
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Richer Sounds
- TELEPHONE**
n/a
- WEBSITE**
cambridgeaudio.co.uk

This is the latest evolution of the company's flagship integrated, the original 850, which was a do-it-all design that sported a wide range of facilities, from user-configurable inputs and a lavish LC display to Class XD operation and a serious 100W+ of power. The 851A has all this, but boasts refinements to every aspect of the amp from the (now) shiny brushed aluminium fascia and 'inverse video' display to a revised Class XD circuit and improved passive components. Class XD (crossover displacement) is the name Cambridge Audio gives to its unique amplifier circuit design said to combine the best of Class A and Class A/B amplifier operation. Coupled to this is a claimed 120W RMS per channel into 8ohms, with 200W into 4ohms.

Substantial extruded heatsinking is on hand to deal with all this power, and twin audiophile-grade toroidal power transformers are fitted, one for the preamp and one for the power amp section. Separate transformer taps are also taken for left and right channels. The metal chassis is acoustically damped and it feels extremely impressive considering its price. In use, the volume control has a nicely sleek action, and the rear sockets are built to a high standard. There is also extensive remote controllability, including compatibility with the company's own iPod docking unit. Overall, then this is a solid, strong and sophisticated package.

Sound quality

This is the least expensive of the group, but doesn't sound it. Indeed in terms of refinement it isn't far off the likes of the Creek and Cyrus, costing a good £500 more. The 851A has a lovely, lilting, spacious sort of nature that makes any music you play through it a pleasure. Tonally it is clean and smooth, without any obvious bias towards the treble or bass, and rhythmically it's nicely engaging too – albeit not quite one to give you a white knuckle ride. Factor in oodles of effortless power and it makes for a brilliant value performer, rather than something that advertises its low price.

Kicking off with Central Line's *Walking into Sunshine*, the Azur gets the chance to show off its vast power reserves, not blinking even at high levels with the song's flare-flapping bass line – instead staying clean, calm and poised. It gives more of a lean and taut sound than the tonally sumptuous Creek, but never feels artificially dry. It's pleasantly tuneful too, although it is a relaxed music maker; it strings the song together in a calm and conscientious way rather than spitting out masses of speed and detail. That's not to say it isn't precise. REM's *Maps and Legends* reveals rather impressive instrumental separation with the 851A letting all of the elements of the mix play separately, but together in a way that other less expensive designs in the group, like the Onix, don't.

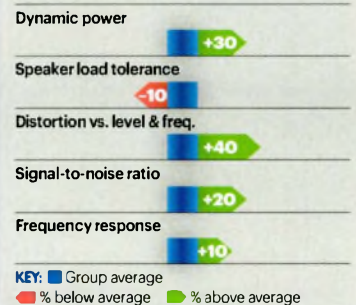


ON TEST

In terms of raw power, the 851A not only smashes its 2 x 125W rating, but also exceeds the continuous power output of the other models here by delivering 2 x 155W/8ohm and 2 x 260W/4ohm. The dynamic headroom is more measured at 185W/8ohm and 305W/4ohm while the 851A is 'limited' to 310W/2ohm. The wide 91dB A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW) is second in specmanship only to the Yamaha. Via its balanced inputs, the overall amplifier gain (amplification factor) is sensibly limited to +33dB, where +40dB might be more common.

Cambridge Audio's Class XD technology has always delivered low levels of distortion and this is especially true here as the 851A holds THD to within 0.0003-0.0005% from 1-100W/8ohm through the midrange. Distortion also increases rather less at higher frequencies than its peers as the 851A suffers a mere 0.0055% at 20kHz (10W/8ohm). **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



The only real downside of the Cambridge is its depth perspective, which can't quite match the likes of the pricier Creek; it tends to bunch things around the plane of the speakers, even though it's very wide from left to right. This is most apparent on classical music, such as the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's rendition of Mozart's *29th Symphony*. It is big and breezy, but lacks depth; also there's an ever so slightly well-lit quality to the upper midband, which gives violins extra bite but isn't quite accurate. Still, don't let that put you off – you could easily confuse this for a £2,000 product, such is its excellence at the price. ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Powerful, musical sound; lots of detail; build; features
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Not quite as organic sounding as some rivals
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A brilliant package with so many boxes ticked, at a fantastic price
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



WORLD CLASS CABLE
ECOSSE
REFERENCE CABLE

The name on the world's finest cables



Better, by design





Creek Destiny 2 **£1,749**



This range-topping amplifier from one of the UK's favourite electronics makers should be good

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Amplifier
- ORIGIN**
UK
- TYPE**
Integrated amplifier
- WEIGHT**
10kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
430 x 80 x 360mm
- FEATURES**
 - Quoted power output: 2 x 120W RMS into 8 ohms
 - Silver or black finish
 - ALPS Blue Velvet volume control
 - 4 RCA line inputs + optional Sequel MM/MC board
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Creek Audio
- TELEPHONE**
01442 260146
- WEBSITE**
creekaudio.com

Here's a company with a great pedigree for affordable integrated amplifiers. It all started with Creek's CAS4040 some three decades ago, which wowed the budget hi-fi scene with its heavenly sound quality.

Since then the British company has gone from strength to strength, but has continued resolutely making products with 'real world' prices; this latest Destiny 2 is the company's most expensive ever. It's a well specified, nicely made amplifier with four inputs, a tape loop and an AV loop – plus there's also the option of Creek's Sequel MM/MC phono input board; two pairs of speaker outlets are additional fitted as is a headphone socket.

The Destiny 2 sports a special Creek MOSFET power amplifier section, pushing out a claimed 120W per channel at 8ohms (180W into 4ohms). A magnetically shielded 300VA toroidal transformer with separate windings for high and low current analogue circuit requirements is fitted, with two separate low-loss Schottky diode bridge rectifiers to separate left and right channel power supplies. Multiple small, low impedance 2,200uF capacitors are paralleled together for superior smoothing and there are separate feeds for all low-voltage circuits. A 50VA auxiliary toroidal mains transformer powers the microcontroller circuitry when in

standby and all the digital circuitry for better sound.

Sound quality

There's something very right about the way that this amplifier makes music. It is of course a solid-state design, but doesn't sound like one. But then again, it doesn't sound like a valve amplifier either. Rather, the Destiny 2 resides in a wonderful world of its own, where music just floods out of the speakers in a gloriously unselfconscious way.

Tonally, it is neither light and bright like the Yamaha, or as syrupy as your average £1,500 tube amp – rather it's just a little on the warm side of neutral, preferring to stand back and not force itself on the proceedings. The Central Line track shows this to great effect, with a searching, insightful sound that seems to pull the listener right up to the quarter inch jack sockets coming out of the studio mixing desk!

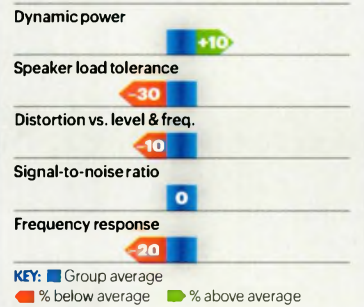
The contrast between this and the Jam track is staggering; suddenly I find myself being transported from that deliciously fat and fulsome Central Line studio sound to a scratchy sort of acoustic, which easily could have been the band rehearsing in a phone box. The Creek signposts this with complete clarity, while pogoing along to the beat and spitting out Weller's edgy vocals with gritty intent. Even though the recording is poor, it just doesn't seem to matter, so fine is its innate sense of rhythm.

ON TEST

Although this is an improved v2 model, the latest Destiny's power output is on a par with the original amp at 2 x 115W/8ohm and while its output is healthier into 4ohm at 2 x 180W, a tighter 10.5A current limit restricts dynamic power to 200/110W into 2/1ohm loads. The Destiny 2 may seem more powerful than Creek's new Evolution 50A (which has a 65W/100W 8/4ohm output) but the latter is more capable into lower impedances.

The Destiny 2 offers bass and midrange distortion that's uniformly low at -0.01% from 1-100W/8ohm, only increasing to 0.045% at very high frequencies (20kHz). The A-wtd S/N ratio is also wider than average at 87dB (re. OdBW) though it's not quite the 'wide open window' of the Cambridge or Yamaha. Output impedance is moderate at 0.055-0.075ohm (20Hz-20kHz) while its frequency response precisely matches Creek's ±1dB specification from 1Hz to 30kHz. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



The Mozart piece is amazing; suddenly the recorded acoustic seems to swell in size and I find myself pulled into a completely different environment, with a full orchestra heaving away in my midst. String tone is excellent, the Creek captures every last sinew of the violins, yet never gets edgy unlike the Yamaha or Onix. Spatially, instruments are superbly located and the Creek is exceptional in this group by being able to dissolve the loudspeakers out of the room – whereas many others make the sound cluster around them. Overall, a brilliant performance from this enduring integrated amplifier – overlook it at your peril! ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★
LIKE: Crisp, enjoyable sound; superb packaging; great facilities; style
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★
DISLIKE: Absolutely nothing even at the higher price
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★
WESAY: If you want a big sound in a small package, this is a great way to go
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



TAD

Evolution 1 Speakers



Probably one of the best speakers in the world

Hearing is believing

For your nearest dealer call 0203 5442338 (charged at local rate)

Another fantastic product from NuNu Distribution Limited

www.nunudistribution.co.uk

NuNu Distribution Ltd





Cyrus **8a/PSX-R** £1,749

This amplifier with add-on power supply package shows that less can sometimes be so much more

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Amplifier
- ORIGIN**
UK
- TYPE**
Integrated amplifier/power supply
- WEIGHT**
5.9kg
- DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**
8a/PSX-R 215 x 73 x 360mm
- FEATURES**
 - Quoted power output: 70W RMS per channel into 8ohms
 - Quartz silver or brushed black finish
 - 6 RCA line inputs
 - Headphone output
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Cyrus Audio
- TELEPHONE**
01480 410900
- WEBSITE**
cyrusaudio.com

Back in the mists of time, in the early eighties, Mission's Cyrus One and Two amplifiers were massively popular budget boxes. But then the famous speaker company's electronics brand split from its parent, and the result was the Cyrus 3. Impressively, it used the same elegant diecast casework that you see before you in this, the latest in a long line of Cyrus integrated amplifiers, some two decades later.

Of course, it has evolved quite considerably in the intervening years, with a plethora of upgrades and add-on card options now available. In its standard form it pumps out a claimed 70W RMS per channel at 8ohms, thanks to a revised power supply boasting a pair of transformers designed to separately feed 'digital' and 'analogue' sections – and there's also the option of a separate £500 PSX-R power supply (not shown), which is also used in this round up.

The Cyrus 8a can be fitted with a wide range of upgrade options, from a standard DAC card, which brings five additional inputs, to the high quality 24/192 DAC Qx card that offers reclocking and upsampling.

The amplifier's preamp section can be used with one of the wide range of Cyrus power amplifiers for more power to spare. In the standard spec that's tested here, the 8a offers six analogue line inputs, a tape-out, preamp out and headphone socket.

Sound quality

From the opening bars of the Mozart Symphony, the Cyrus marks itself out as an enjoyably fluid performer – even by the high standards of the group. There's an intrinsic rightness to the sound that lets you relax into the music, and enjoy what you find, without intellectualising it too much. Compared with the Creek, the Cyrus combo is just a little two dimensional spatially; the Scottish Chamber Orchestra spans out wide and tall, but doesn't quite have the depth of the best of the rest. Not to worry though, because images are very strongly rooted; there is a solidity to the sound that belies the small size of the boxes that are making it.

Tonally, the Cyrus combo treads a clever line between hard and soft; it's intrinsically on the warm side of neutral, but you'd never mistake it for a valve amplifier. Its lithe sound captures the leading edges of REM's heavily strummed guitars very well, making for an animated performance without lacerating your lugholes in the process. Treble proves clean and smooth, one of the best here in some respects, giving a lovely metallic sheen to the ringing ride cymbals on *Maps and Legends*.

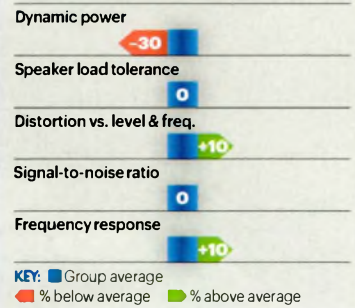
Good rhythmically, this pairing nevertheless has its own way of doing things, sounding positive and propulsive, but lacking the delicacy and subtlety of the Creek. Compared with the Exposure, it's not quite as

ON TEST

Don't be fooled by the 8a's compact form factor because it's a very beefy performer. Rated at 70W, it delivers closer to 2 x 90W/8ohm with 105W, 200W and 325W under dynamic conditions into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads, suggesting a very good tolerance of difficult speaker loads. Nevertheless, its limited heatsinking can get very hot indeed with 60°C being recorded at 10W output over 30 minutes.

The 87.5dB A-wtd S/N (re. 0dBW) is well judged, on a par with the Creek, and distortion is very low at 0.00015-0.01% (re. 20Hz-20kHz at 10W/8ohm). Importantly, the output impedance is low and consistent at -0.045ohm (20Hz-20kHz) which helps maintain a predictable system frequency response regardless of variations in speaker load. Into 8ohm, the Cyrus 8a offers a near-DC bass extension with a gentle treble roll-off (-0.2dB/20kHz to -3.2dB/100kHz). **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



fast sounding either. It's down on power compared with most others here, but you'd never know it unless you're ready to blow the roof off your house – what power the 8a/PSX-R has, it makes the most out of, and in practice shows little real handicap. Only if you're running especially inefficient speakers would you really want more.

Overall it's hard to see how anyone would be unhappy with this dinky duo – it performs really well across the board. Although not quite coming top in any particular respect, it still shows an accomplished face to the world – one that is stylish, flexible and fun to listen to ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Crisp, enjoyable sound; superb packaging; facilities; style
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks the subtlety and speed of rivals in this round up
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** If you want a big sound in a small package, this is a great way to go
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL





Apprentice MM
Phono stage



TALK

Introducing the Edwards Audio series

The Edwards Audio series is a range of UK designed and manufactured products which have been designed with the emphasis on performance and value for money.

We have not spent money on fancy casework or complex design, just on the best parts that we can. We think that this results in a range of unrivalled performance value products but don't just take our word for it, here are just some of the awards and accolades from around the world.

SP2 floor standing
Speakers - gloss



MC3 reference
Phono stage



Apprentice SP
Speakers - cherry

Turntables:- from £300 - £600

Phono Stages:- from £90 - £1500

Headphone amplifiers:- from £120

DAC's :- available in the Autumn

Integrated amplifiers :- from £400 - £650

Loudspeakers:- from £400 - £1100

Interconnect Cables from £65

Speaker Cables from £4 per metre

TALK Electronics Ltd
Farm Road
Henley on Thames
Oxfordshire
RG9 1EJ
01491 572523
www.talkelectronics.com
info@talkelectronics.com



HA1 headphone amplifier



Exposure **3010S2** £1,350



A great integrated from a great British amplifier brand, this sparsely appointed product promises much

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Amplifier
- ORIGIN**
UK
- TYPE**
Integrated amplifier
- WEIGHT**
12kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
440 x 115 x 300mm
- FEATURES**
 - Quoted power output: 2 x 110W RMS into 8ohms
 - Silver or black finish
 - Pre-amplifier output
 - 6 RCA line inputs + optional MM/MC board
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Exposure
- TELEPHONE**
01273 423877
- WEBSITE**
exposurehifi.com

Back in the heady hi-fi days of the eighties, Exposure made its name for cleverly designed, sweet-sounding high-end transistor amplifiers that were just a little bit more palatable than the rival big Naims of the day. The company is now focused more on the affordable end of solid-state amplification, which warrants the inclusion of the 3010S2 here. This is the second incarnation of Exposure's top integrated, and it comes with six line inputs, a MM or MC phono module option, and there's a separate preamplifier output for biamping via an Exposure power amplifier – this is an obvious and easy upgrade path to take when funds permit.

The claimed 110W RMS per channel (into 8ohms) power output is very healthy in this group, if not quite exceptional. The company says much attention has been paid to the circuit design. This includes high-quality capacitors used in the signal path, a printed circuit board that is "uniquely tuned" with short signal and power supply paths, and cascode circuitry for improved power supply immunity, plus a fast bipolar transistor output stage. This all slots into a very attractive aluminium casing with a clean-looking, extruded front panel. Overall fit and finish of the amplifier is excellent, extending to the cleanly laid-out back panel – although gadget fans should look elsewhere; this is about as minimalist as they come.

Sound quality

From almost the first bar of the Central Line track, it is clear that this is one of the best amplifiers here. The sound is big, bold and musical, but never harsh or uncouth, meaning the Exposure plugs right into what's going on in any recording and has a whale of a time – as indeed does the listener. Whereas some musical sounding designs achieve their speed and pace by forwardness of tone or even grit and naked aggression, the 3010S2 is a model of sophistication – showing you really can have it all!

REM's *Maps and Legends* is a thick, gloopy sort of recording, but the Exposure cuts through it like a knife through churned milk. It serves up a vast soundstage with guitars and vocals wide left and right, inside which large amounts of detail bristle out. Compared with the equally impressive Creek, there is less sense of space around the instruments, with images pushed a little closer to the plane of the speakers instead of hanging back, but the 3010S2 makes up for it with a slightly stronger and purposeful bass line, which hooks up with drum-kit work much better. Both are wonderfully expansive and vast in scale.

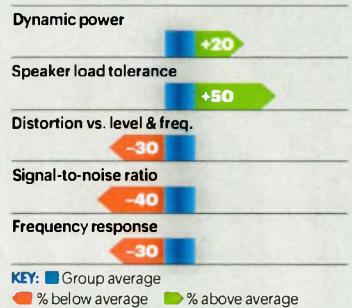
The rich Central Line track shows the Exposure to have a slightly less warm sound to the Creek, but it is nowhere near the Yamaha which errs too far in the opposite direction. Along with a marginally thinner upper midband, treble comes over

ON TEST

Distortion really does decrease as the 3010S2 is left to warm up – from 0.015% to 0.010% over 30 minutes at 10W/8ohm. Once toasty, the 3010S2 holds to -0.01% from 1-100W/8ohm although THD in our sample did increase more sharply through the treble via the right channel (0.020% vs. 0.10%, L/R).

As for power output, the 3010S2 beats its rated 110W at 2 x 135W and 2 x 225W into 8/4ohm with sufficient dynamic headroom to accommodate 175W, 325W and a huge 555W into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads. Output is short-circuit protected to 335W (18.3A/1ohm), but it's still the most tolerant here of difficult speakers. Output impedance is also lower than earlier Exposures at 0.015ohm and the frequency response consistent at 8Hz-23kHz (±1dB). The 80dB S/N ratio (re. OdBW) is lower than average, but this is white noise rather than hum and likely to have a flattering subjective influence. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



with a touch more sparkle via the 3010S2. This works particularly well with classical music, giving a slightly more breezy, atmospheric presentation than the Creek, even if the depth perspective isn't quite there. Dynamics are excellent, and the Jam track shows that the Exposure can go loud or quiet quicker than a blink. Overall, this is a slightly rockier, although less polished and nuanced version of the Creek, which itself is often the best here – making the 3010S2 an absolutely fabulous performer across the board.

A compulsory product for prospective purchasers to audition, don't let this pass you by! ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

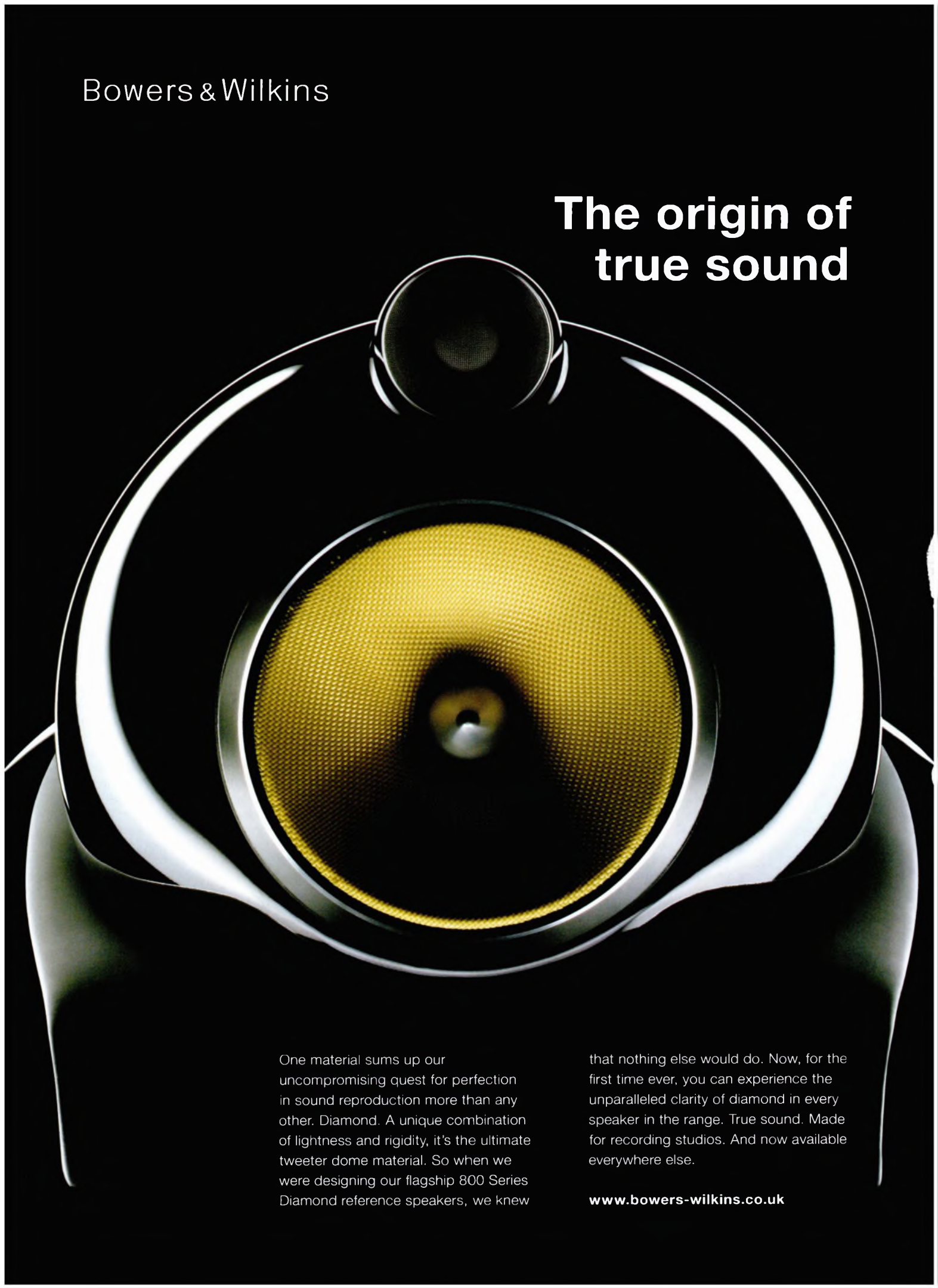
- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Delightfully open, expansive and enjoyable sound; super build and finish
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A wonderful sounding amplifier that makes listening to any kind of music a real pleasure
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



Bowers & Wilkins

The origin of true sound



One material sums up our uncompromising quest for perfection in sound reproduction more than any other. Diamond. A unique combination of lightness and rigidity, it's the ultimate tweeter dome material. So when we were designing our flagship 800 Series Diamond reference speakers, we knew

that nothing else would do. Now, for the first time ever, you can experience the unparalleled clarity of diamond in every speaker in the range. True sound. Made for recording studios. And now available everywhere else.

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk



Onix A-65 **£1,290**

With its clean, minimalist fascia this amplifier advertises its audiophile intentions, but does it deliver?

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Amplifier
- ORIGIN**
China
- TYPE**
Integrated amplifier
- WEIGHT**
10.5kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
430 x 109 x 401mm
- FEATURES**
 - Claimed power output: 66W RMS per channel into 8ohm
 - Black finish
 - 5 RCA line inputs + bypass
 - 6.3mm headphone output
- DISTRIBUTOR**
UKD
- TELEPHONE**
01753 652669
- WEBSITE**
ukd.co.uk

Despite having a name that dates back to the eighties, this amplifier has come a long way from the shoebox-shaped Onix amplifiers of yesteryear. Manufactured in China, the A-65 sports a glitzy fascia panel and gold knobs, which will delight some while others will find it all a bit gauche for their tastes. Whatever your take on this, there's no doubting the fact that it's well screwed together though, with a lavish gloss-black perspex fascia panel that makes using it a breeze compared with the complex Cambridge.

The main volume control sits in the centre beside the source selector, to the left of which is a row of input selection LEDs (there are five, plus a preamplifier bypass mode). Placed to the right is a gold-plated 6.3mm headphone socket output.

Under the hood, it's obvious the designer has taken care to use a good selection of components, often from well-known names. The high-quality ALPS Blue Velvet volume potentiometer is but one example, yet there are others too, from the 300VA toroidal transformer to the ultra-fast rectifier diodes and Nichicon capacitors. The Onix puts out a claimed 66W RMS per channel into 8ohms, and nearly twice that at 2 x 125W RMS into 4ohms – a healthy figure for sure. With little to fault at its price in terms of build and finish, how then does it fare when switched on?

Sound quality

Don't let the gold knobs fool you, there's nothing chintzy sounding about the Onix. Indeed, it's an honest and even performer, one that doesn't seem showy or particularly artificial.

Instead, it presents the music in an enjoyable, matter of fact way that doesn't draw attention to its own or the recording's failings. Considering its modest price tag for this test, it does very well. The Central Line track kicks off the proceedings with a bang, this amplifier serving up a fast and fulfilling sound that shows considerable refinement and a decent amount of rhythmic drive; I particularly like the way it picks out the accenting on hi-hat cymbals, which is better than most of the other offerings on test here.

Tonally though, when I move to the REM tracking, I'm surprised to hear it sounding just a little less different than I'd expect. The former is a warm and sumptuous recording, the latter a little dark and dour, and the A-65 doesn't contrast them as explicitly as it really should.

Having said that, it is an enjoyable listen, with decent smoothness and a fair amount of pace. Compared with the Creek and Exposure however, the A-65 doesn't quite capture the passion of the playing or the pathos of the vocals, instead giving a less poignant and moving delivery.

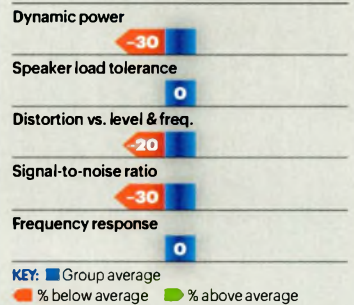
With Mozart's *Symphony No.29*, the opening Allegro Moderato is nicely carried, again this amplifier never

ON TEST

Glitzy though it looks, the Onix A-65 is the least powerful amplifier here, though it's not the least tolerant of tough loudspeakers. The 2 x 65W/8ohm and 2 x 120W/4ohm specification is sailing fairly close to the wind as it achieved 2 x 80W/8ohm and 2 x 118W/4ohm on our test bench, with headroom for 108W, 185W and 280W into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads. So the A-65 is hardly spineless!

Through the bass and midrange, distortion is low and consistent at -0.002% from 1W to 25W, but increases slightly thereafter to 0.003% at 40W and 0.006% at 65W. Versus frequency, THD increases as expected from 0.002% to 0.01% at 20kHz and a controlled 0.02% at an ultrasonic 40kHz. The response is very extended (-0.15dB/20kHz to -1.5dB/100kHz into 8ohm), but there's a greater roll-off into lower impedance loads. The A-wtd S/N ratio is not dissimilar to the Exposure, but there's more hum here. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



disgraces itself in more expensive company. String tone is good, with plenty of vibrancy to violins, although again it lacks the shimmer of some of the pricier products here. Indeed, tonally the Onix is on the brighter side of this round up, contrasting the rich fullness of the Creek, for example. Its bass reflects this, being just a touch light when called upon to push a song along, especially at high listening levels; The Jam's *News of the World* sounds anticlimactic for this very reason, the band thrashing around while the Onix fails to drive the point home. A decent sounding amplifier then, but others on test here do so much better. ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Smooth, pleasant sound; decent build and finish
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Not quite as powerful or as insightful as some others here
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A decent value, high-quality integrated amplifier
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



The Legacy Lives On



Sansui

Sound thinking.

Stunning Hi-Fi from £199

In December 1944, Mr Khosaku Kikuchi opened the original Sansui Electrical Plant. By 1965 the company were famed as one of the finest Hi-Fi companies worldwide, thanks in part to their phenomenal AU-111 valve-based integrated amplifier.

Now, in 2012, Sansui are back in the UK with a range of Hi-Fi separates that stay true to Mr Kikuchi's original principles of strength, simplicity, quality and affordability. The SAP-201V Integrated Amplifier, WLD-201 Network Audio Player and CDD-201V CD Player are available through a network of selected retailers across the UK. To find your local dealer, visit www.henleydesigns.co.uk.

Sansui is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

Telephone: 01235 511 166 | Email: info@henleydesigns.co.uk | Web: www.henleydesigns.co.uk



Yamaha

A-S2000 **£1,499**

How much will this veteran big bruiser give away to its younger, fresher upstart rivals here?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Amplifier
ORIGIN
Japan/China
TYPE
Integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
22.7kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
435 x 137 x 465mm
FEATURES
• Quoted power output: 100W RMS per channel into 8ohms
• Black or silver finish; wooden side cheeks
• 6 inputs inc. balanced XLR
• MM/MC phono stage
DISTRIBUTOR
Yamaha UK
TELEPHONE
0844 811116
WEBSITE
uk.yamaha.com

Despite having been on the market now for a good five years, this huge Japanese integrated has aged well. That's probably because it didn't look 'of its time' back then and so doesn't now – rather it has something of a 'post modern' seventies feel to it. You can stand it next to a classic Yamaha amp from nearly 40 years ago and there's amazingly little stylistic difference. The control layout is pure retro, from the knobs for balance, bass and treble and volume to the straight-bar source selectors for its four line inputs. It even boasts a phono stage with switchable MM and MC inputs, the latter through a proper discrete circuit. Wooden side cheeks, meanwhile, cement its clean but classic look.

The pre and power amplifiers are separable and the Yamaha uses fully floating and balanced pre and power amplifiers, which makes it much less sensitive to noise. The power amp section boasts 100W per channel into 8ohms and 160W into half that (claimed), aided and abetted by a massive power transformer and 24,000µF worth of capacitance. Unusually these days, two pairs of loudspeakers are independently switchable. The Yamaha is a joy to use; it's much nicer twiddling knobs than being all 'fingers and thumbs' trying to click through fiddly sub menus, as you have to on the likes of the Cambridge Audio offering.

Sound quality

There's no mistaking this veritable power station of an amplifier; it never misses an opportunity to grab the loudspeakers by the short and curlies to remind them just who's in control.

Central Line's *Walking into Sunshine* could have been written as a demonstration track for the Yamaha, with its thundering synth bass line that's hardly easy to miss. The A-S2000 sounds strong and taut too, showing the fine control it excerpts on loudspeakers. And up above this, the midband sparks with detail, while a well-lit treble fires out like lasers into the night.

You'd never confuse it with the wonderfully dextrous and delicate sounding Creek, however, and as I discover with the less sumptuous sound of the The Jam – which jars (if you'll excuse the pun)! This track isn't exactly flattered by the Yamaha, which seems to be hellbent on exposing it as a nasty recording rather than trying to bring out the great song inside. The big Japanese amp stumbles and falls at this hurdle, in marked contrast to the Creek and Exposure which tend to be far more forgiving. Additionally, I find a tendency for the A-S2000 to come over as slightly opaque and fuzzy on lesser recordings, whereas the bright light it shines on richer ones is highly enjoyable. As such, it will prove just a touch too music genre-sensitive for some people.

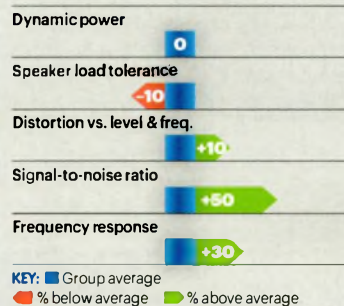


ON TEST

Yamaha's heavyweight A-S2000 more than meets its spec with a solid 120W/210W 8/4ohm power output and sufficient headroom to accommodate clean peaks of 155W and 290W under dynamic conditions. With a maximum current of 13.5A (<1% THD), it also delivers 350W into low 2ohm loads with little progressive increase in distortion. Into a gentler 8ohm load, distortion hovers around 0.01% over a full 100W range, increasing slightly to 0.025% at low bass and 0.05% at high treble frequencies.

Yamaha amplifiers and AV receivers typically have very wide S/N ratios and the A-S2000 is no exception at 97dB (re. 0dBW), a full 12dB 'wider' than the average amp. Throwing the window open this wide, however, may not prove so pleasing in all systems especially as the A-S2000 also offers a very extended 5Hz-85kHz (±1dB) frequency response. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Classical music from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra sounds good, but again the Yamaha seems a little lost without a big, crunching bass line to play with. The subtle orchestral playing exposes it as a little wriggly and fidgety, seemingly unable to settle into the subtle counterpoint of the music – it makes it perfectly clear it's happier down at the disco. And that's the problem with the Yamaha – point it at the right programme material and it's almost unassailable, but with others it simply lacks the delicacy of soundstaging, depth perspective and insight to capture the nuances of many musical genres. One for party people, then! ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

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

LIKE: Lots of power; great styling; fantastic feature count
DISLIKE: Slightly mechanical and analytical sound
WE SAY: A fine package if you want a good all rounder, but sonics are not the match of others here

OVERALL



Group test verdict

The verdicts are all in and it's down to an amped up **David Price** to reveal the final results of this month's impressive integrated sextet...

THE ONIX A-65 is a nice integrated amplifier that has been well made and will drive most loudspeakers well in an average listening room. If you like its looks audition it, as you can do a lot worse at the price.


Yamaha's A-S2000 is getting on a bit now, but still has a lot going for it. It's hard not to love the retro styling. It's also got enough power to fill the average village hall with sound and it's decent to listen to, too. Trouble is, it's a quite expensive design in a group where some rivals do it better, and that's why it hasn't come further up the rankings.

Now to the tricky bit – we have four excellent British-badged amplifiers, all with competing strengths. The Cyrus 8a/PSX-R comes next – it sounds great, has that iconic design and is built superbly. It's a bit expensive for what it does compared with the Cambridge Audio Azur 851A, which is why it comes fourth.

The 851A is amazing at the price, with a massive amount of facilities and convenience features, and it has a really nice sound, too – there's oodles of power and it is genuinely musically satisfying to listen to. It's only the ever-so-slightly mechanical

feel compared with the next two competitors that marks it down.

The Creek Destiny 2 is a gorgeous sounding device. It doesn't win prizes for finish or features, but you'll soon forget about such fripperies as it is the best music maker in a number of respects. It has sumptuous tonality that imbues everything with an uncanny realism – it is also the least processed-sounding amp in the group. Its soundstaging is sublime, wonderfully wide and unusually deep, making instruments float in space like nothing else here.



The Exposure 3010S2 is a worthy winner. At the expense of a tiny bit of depth and space compared with the Creek Destiny, it brings an increased impetus to the music, pushing things along with great energy. Factor in fine finish and build, and it's great value for money.



Make/model	Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	Creek Destiny 2	Cyrus 8a/PSX-R	Exposure 3010S2	Onix A-65	Yamaha A-S2000
Price	£1,200	£1,749	£1,749	£1,350	£1,290	£1,499
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	Fantastic value, do-it-all integrated amplifier with great sound and loads of power	Gorgeous-sounding premium priced integrated with a wonderfully rich, natural tone	Svelte, stylish integrated package that plays music in an unerringly satisfying way	Brilliant sounding integrated amplifier design that makes every kind of music you play a real joy	Neat looking well made integrated with a decently musical and nicely smooth sound	Big, powerful and highly flexible high-end integrated amplifier with a solid sound

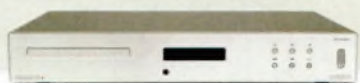
Key features

XLR inputs	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Headphone out	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 speaker outs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Remote control	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Phono stage	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

TRY WITH THESE

CD PLAYER:
Audiolab 8200CD **£700**

If you're in the market for an excellent mid-price disc spinner, look no further than this. Although a little cheaper than the amps here, it gives nothing away in performance and provides a powerful, detailed source. It's a high-quality DAC too, with a USB input for computer connectivity.



STANDMOUNT SPEAKER:
Audiosmile Kensai **£1,500**

One of the best small loudspeakers at or near its price, this little beauty has amazing transparency and stereo imaging, thanks to the excellent standards of engineering and build quality. Being so compact, however, it needs a good amount of clean power – happily the best of these amplifiers can deliver it.



FLOORSTAND SPEAKER:
Monitor Audio GX-200 **£2,300**

This medium-sized floorstanding speaker's high-quality C-CAM mid/bass drive units and ribbon tweeter, combined with a highly rigid (and beautifully finished for that matter) cabinet make for an extremely transparent sound – one that is ideally suited to the better-performing integrated amplifiers in this test.



A new concept in amplification

NAD C 390DD Direct Digital Powered DAC Amplifier



- Modular Design Construction
- Optional MM/MC Phono and HDMI modules available
- 2 x 150W into both 4 and 8 ohms
- USB, Optical, Coaxial and AES/EBU digital inputs

£2299

The **NAD C 390DD** is not only a new concept in amplification, but also in audio system architecture. First introduced in the now famous NAD M2 Direct Digital Amplifier, Direct Digital technology has been praised for its transparent, dynamic and detailed sound quality.

Like the M2, the C 390DD has no analogue stages in the signal path, keeping music in the digital domain right up to the speaker outputs. All preamp functions are executed in the digital domain without the phase shift, noise and distortion that plagues all analogue designs regardless of price or pedigree.

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE



REGA • RP1 • TURNTABLE
Excellent build quality, reliability and ease of use make the RP1 a product that will offer a lifetime of musical enjoyment.



NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE
Time to enjoy vinyl collections with extraordinary quality! With a minimalist design, the C 556 turntable offers accurate reproduction by using performance-focused parts and components that put music first.



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



CYRUS • STREAM X2 • MUSIC STREAMER
Capable of fully exploiting 24-bit/192 kHz files along with Apple's lossless format. Cyrus Cadence remote control app for iPad available free from the Apple App Store. Optional n-Remote available.



MARANTZ • NA7004 • MUSIC STREAMER
This AirPlay® compatible player lets you connect to all your favourite music, whether it's from your PC, external hard disc or as an FM / DAB radio station broadcast or even on the other side of the world via Internet Radio.



NAD • C 446 • MUSIC STREAMER
Powerful digital media player featuring Internet radio and a FM/AM/DAB+ tuner. The C 446 allows you to stream your music collection from multiple networked storage devices using DLNA and Universal Plug and Play (UPnP) standards.



NAIM • UNITILITE ALL-IN-ONE STREAMING SYSTEM
Comprises a CD player, MP3/iPod and USB memory stick playback, digital to analogue converter, high resolution 32bit/192kHz capable network stream player and integrated 50W amplifier in one sleek enclosure.



PIONEER • N-50 • MUSIC STREAMER
Award-winning audiophile Network player supporting AirPlay® and DLNA wireless technologies, allowing you to stream music wirelessly from your iTunes libraries or iOS devices. When connected to your home network, you can also enjoy a wide variety of online music services remotely.



ROTEL • RT-12 MUSIC STREAMER
The RT-12 is an FM and DAB+ preset radio tuner and much more besides. By incorporating network capabilities, the RT-12 can access thousands of internet radio broadcasts and play audio files stored on UPnP servers such as Windows computers.

PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 03/07/2013. E&OE



NEW **£649** OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ CD17 / A19 • CD / AMPLIFIER
 Arcam's A19 integrated amplifier delivers 50W per channel and includes 7 analogue inputs, a MM phono input and is the perfect partner for the CD17 CD player.

£649 OR LESS



£799 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

AUDIOLAB • 8200CD / 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.

£749 OR LESS



NEW **£399** OR LESS

ARCAM • irDAC
 Designed to be the heart of a digital system and connected to a host of different types of digital sources. Includes asynchronous USB and a direct iPod input to optimise sound quality. All inputs can be controlled through an IR remote that will also control iPods, iPhones, PC and Mac computers.



£1199 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 BEST CD PLAYER

£749 OR LESS

CYRUS • CD8 SE2 / 6A • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER
 With its impressive 40 Watts per channel and six analogue inputs, the 6a amplifier is a great partner for the award-winning CD8 SE2 CD player.



ESSAV.COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 BEST CD PLAYER

ESSAV.COM

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



£599 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 BEST DAC

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



£499 OR LESS

£699 OR LESS

NAD • C 546BEE / C 356BEE DAC • CD / AMP / DAC
 Enjoy music from your computer without musical compromise via the DAC or listen to music from CD with the MP3 / WMA compatible CD player.



£249 OR LESS

£249 OR LESS

NAD • C 516BEE / C 316BEE • CD / AMPLIFIER
 Received an outstanding product award from Hi-Fi News magazine who described the C 316BEE as an "absolute barn-stormer of an amplifier". The C 516BEE is the perfect partner.



£215 OR LESS

AUDIOQUEST DRAGONFLY USB DAC / HEADPHONE AMP
 Turn any computer into a true high-fidelity music source with the DragonFly - A sleek, flash drive sized Digital-Audio Converter that connects to a USB jack on a Mac or Windows PC.



NEW **£249** OR LESS

MERIDIAN • EXPLORER USB DAC / HEADPHONE AMP
 Meridian's Explorer is a portable, compact and rugged USB DAC designed to deliver best-in-class audio performance. Featuring premium audiophile-grade components throughout, a 6-layer circuit board, an elegant all-metal enclosure, the Explorer delivers the Meridian audio experience from virtually any computer.



£1695 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 BEST CD PLAYER

£1695 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 BEST CD PLAYER

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.



£349 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

£499 OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-10 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / CD
 Award-winning amplifier from Rotel. Delivers 40 Watts per channel and includes four line level inputs and a phono input. Ideal partner for the RCD-12 CD player.



£1499 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 BEST DAC

NAD • M51 • DAC
 This award-winning DAC / pre-amp features optical, coaxial, USB and HDMI inputs, all of which can handle files up to 24-bit/192kHz. The M51 will truly transform any system.



ESSAV.COM

DENON • CEOL PICCOLO • STREAMING SYSTEM
 Connect Apple devices via the iPod dock, front USB or by AirPlay®. Stream music on your PC, NAS or from the internet. Or listen to online services such as Spotify and last fm.



ESSAV.COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
 BEST CD PLAYER

ONKYO • CR-N755 • CD / NETWORK SYSTEM
 Streaming music system featuring built-in access to Spotify and Last FM along with Internet radio from AUPEO! Includes a CD player, 24-bit/192kHz DAC, FM/AM tuner and USB port.



£299 OR LESS

PIONEER • XC-HM81 • CD / NETWORK SYSTEM
 Play audio from your Apple device, smartphone or external storage device via a USB connection or stream directly via AirPlay® and DLNA when connected to your home network.

Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 26 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2013. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

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

Real People

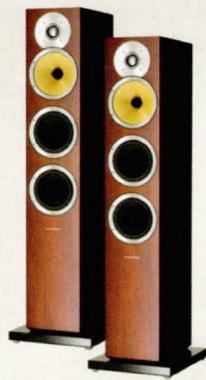
Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

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

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

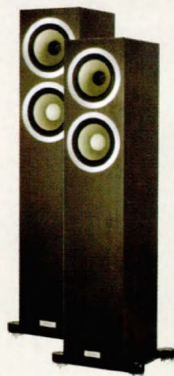




BOWERS & WILKINS • CM8

A true three-way loudspeaker that will appeal to discerning customers who demand the very best sound quality, but have limited space in which to achieve it.

£1249 OR LESS



TANNOY • REVOLUTION DC6T SE
Award-winning compact, floorstanding speakers featuring Tannoy's unique Dual Concentric™ drive unit along with trapezoidal cabinets. Exclusively finished in luxury Espresso colour real wood veneer.

£999 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI FIT AWARDS 2012



Q ACOUSTICS • CONCEPT 20

A truly remarkable new speaker which delivers a level of sonic performance previously only available to audiophiles able to invest in high-end models.

NEW

£350 OR LESS

PRICE EXCLUDES STANDS

KEF • R500

The smallest of the floorstanders in the R Series. Uses the latest generation Uni-Q driver array and two 5.25-inch aluminium bass drivers. Its slim proportions and sleek contemporary looks make it perfectly suited for any interior.

£1499 OR LESS



MONITOR AUDIO SILVER RX6

Elegant 2.5 way floorstander featuring separate chambers within the enclosure to provide differential tuning for the drivers, producing higher efficiency and exceptional low frequency extension.

£799 OR LESS



PMC • TWENTY-23

An open, engaging and communicative loudspeaker that defies its size both the depth of bass and scale of presentation by taking any music or film material in its stride. The sound is vivid and dynamic and delivered with authoritative bass.

£2300 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI FIT AWARDS 2012



PMC DB1 GOLD

Based on the famous DB1 model. The DB1 Gold uses Studio series HF and LF drive units for added robustness and reference monitor sound along with PMC's ATL bass loading technology.

NEW

£999 OR LESS



KEF • LS50

The KEF LS50 is an innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. 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.

£799 OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI FIT AWARDS 2012



WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 122

Stand/bookshelf speakers featuring a 25mm soft dome tweeter and 165mm woven Kevlar mid/bass driver. The Wharfedale Diamond 122 offer high-performance and great value for money.

NEW

£279 OR LESS



NEW

£299 OR LESS

Bluetooth

RUARK AUDIO • MRI • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER SYSTEM

Standing just 17cm tall, the MRI speakers feature 20W of Class A-B amplification, a 75mm mid/bass unit and 20mm tweeter in each enclosure. The handcrafted cabinets are finished in a choice of rich walnut veneer, soft white or soft black lacquer.

WHAT HI-FI FIT AWARDS 2012



SONOS • THE WIRELESS HI-FI SYSTEM

The award-winning Sonos lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house and control them from the palm of your hand. You can even play different songs in different rooms.

NEW PLAYBAR NOW AVAILABLE

NEW

ESSAV.COM

B&W • Z2 IPOD SPEAKER SYSTEM

The best of all worlds - amazing sound, effortless wireless streaming with AirPlay®, a lightning connector for docking the latest generation of iPhones and iPods and a design that fits almost anywhere.



With Lightning™ connector

AirPlay

NEW

£329 OR LESS

NEW

£499 OR LESS



AirPlay

Bluetooth

NAD • VISO 1AP • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Streaming system with both AirPlay® and Bluetooth. Ideal for wirelessly playing music from your iPod, iPhone, iPad or any Bluetooth or AirPlay enabled smartphone, tablet or laptop.

B&W • A5 & A7 WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEMS

Bringing together over 45-years of audio expertise with intuitive AirPlay® wireless streaming technology to create a system that gives all the convenience and freedom of wireless music, without compromising on sound quality.



AirPlay

£399 A5

£699 A7



Stores Nationwide

We have a national network of stores and a hard-won reputation for outstanding customer service.

Website

Visit our new website for a streamlined on-line experience with a more clearly defined product section, more product choices and an improved search engine.

Aberdeen • 01224 252797
Bishop's Stortford • 01279 506576
Bristol • 0117 974 3727
Bromley 020 8290 1988
Cambridge • 01223 304770
Chelsea • 020 7352 9466
Cheltenham • 01242 241171
Chorleywood • 0845 5046364
Epsom • 01372 720720
Exeter • 01392 218895

Guildford 01483 536666
Holborn • 020 7837 7540
Kingston • 020 8547 0717
Leeds (Wetherby) 01937 586886
Loughton • 020 8532 0770
Maidstone 01622 686366
Norwich • 01603 767605
Oxford 01865 241773
Reading • 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks 01732 459555

Sheffield • 0114 255 5861
Southampton • 023 8033 7770
Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
Weybridge 01932 840859
Witham (Essex) 01376 501733
Yeovil • 01935 700078

* THESE STORES ARE FRANCHISED AND OPERATE UNDER A LICENCE AGREEMENT TO SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 03/07/2013. E&OE.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWA00).

SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

Sound bytes

Whether we like it or not, computers are the future of music playback. **David Price** explains the best way to make computer audio sing for you

In life, one thing is for sure – times change. And the way we listen to music is no exception; we all have our favourite formats, but technology doesn't stand still and the music market follows closely on. Right now, the music industry is slap bang in the middle of its biggest transition since the move from live concerts to recorded music, some one hundred years ago.

The industry term is the shift from 'packaged' to 'non-packaged' media, meaning that people aren't going to shops to buy physical products any more, and are instead buying music online – either as a download or from of a subscription streaming service. This transition is happening right now, and there's a wealth of market research to prove it – in the US, the latest report (US Commercial Service) shows CD album sales dropping 15 percent year on year, and downloads up 20 percent, while network streaming products rose 37 percent in the last year.

Just because the tectonic plates of the mass music market are moving, it doesn't mean that hi-fi fans have to. But the good news is that, as part of this movement to what the record companies (slightly misleadingly) call 'digital music', high-resolution digital is finally taking off. The attempt to give hi-res music to the world a decade ago failed because shops didn't want to allocate precious shelf space to DVD-Audio discs and SACDs that most punters simply didn't want. Now in a world of 'non-packaged media', that doesn't matter anymore.

There are two ways to get into computer audio, either by streaming it off your hard drive or playing it out via your USB socket to a compatible DAC. Given that many of the latest streamers are also USB-equipped DACs, the two products are beginning to merge, but there are important differences. The USB approach is simple and cheap, requiring the purchase of a decent USB lead long enough to reach your hi-fi, and a DAC with a USB input. The

streaming approach is a little more involved, as you need a streamer, some UPnP software, a wireless router and ideally a NAS hard-disk drive. It is easier than it seems, especially if you structure it carefully from the start.

Get into the groove

The most important decision to make is how to store your digital music. We'd recommend Free Lossless Audio Codec as the best compromise, because unlike the computer file equivalent of CD music – called WAV – FLAC files allow the use of 'metadata'. Embedded inside every FLAC file along with the music is a little string of data containing information about the song, such as the artist, song name, genre and even the cover art for the album from which it has come. It

makes cataloguing and searching your digital music library so much easier.

Five years ago, when hard-disk storage was more expensive, FLAC also offered the benefit of being 'compacted'. Although none of the music data is discarded – unlike MP3 or AAC – FLAC is better at keeping its files 'tidy' and eliminates redundant space on the disk. Now you can buy a 1TB hard drive for less than a tank of petrol, this isn't as important, but the metadata remains vital. Arguments rage in computer audio circles about whether uncompact WAV files sound better than FLAC, and many think they do – just. But WAV doesn't carry metadata, and for that reason FLAC has become the format of choice for the computer audiophile.

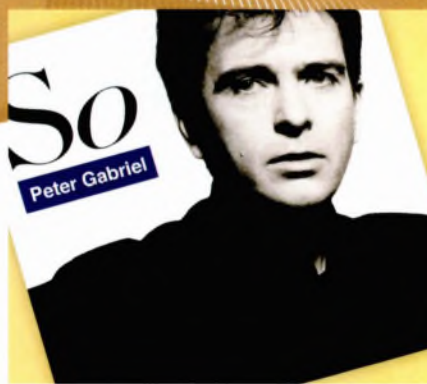
TOP FIVE HI-RES DOWNLOADS



JOHN MICHEL JARRE *Oxygène*

www.linrecords.com/recording-oxygene.aspx

One of the seminal electronic music albums, this 1976 recording showcases both the rich sounds of the analogue synthesisers of the period, and the brilliance of Jarre's compositional and playing skills. The all-analogue recording is to a very high standard, with a vast, cathedral-like acoustic with which this 24/96 hi-res download thrives.



PETER GABRIEL *So*

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk/Society_of_Sound/Society_of_Sound/Music/Peter-Gabriel-So.html

This multi-million selling eighties pop album was a fascinating departure for Peter Gabriel stylistically. The analogue recording was made in an old farmhouse near Bath, and featured the great man "singing like Otis Redding". Now remastered to 24/96 by Richard Chappell, it has crunching bass and sparkling highs.

RIP IT UP!

Okay, where to get these music files that you want to play? There are two ways – people rip (or ‘record’) their existing CD collections, or download new music. The first is easier said than done, not because it’s tricky to do, but because it’s a tedious task that takes weeks if you have a large music collection. If you

If it’s hi-res music files you want, you’ll have to rip DVD-Audio discs or download them online

own thousands of CDs, your easiest option is a ripping service such as Ripcaster, i-fi or Podserve to do it for you – a familiar name in audio, Russ Andrews (www.russandrews.com/product-CD-Ripping-Service-4300.htm), is an excellent option, too. For around 50p per disc, these services will rip your CD onto a hard-disc drive in the format you specify, using high-quality ripping software and tagging the file with all the metadata. It’s by far the fastest option, but some might find the prospect of sending their entire CD collection off via a courier to be a tad traumatic!

Ripping yarns

If you decide to rip your discs yourself, prepare to be bored, and make sure you use a good ripping program. Many audiophiles rate dBpoweramp (www.dbpoweramp.com/cd-ripper.htm) as the best sounding, although it is not available for the Mac, so OS X users should try Max (<http://sb00th.org/Max/>). Both will let you rip music to high-quality FLAC files, and add album art and metadata – normally they will do this automatically, but there is provision for manually adding it. Another option is a special ripping box, like Zoneripper, which automatically rips CDs, and stores them on its internal hard drive (see *Rip It Up!*, above).

A great gadget for those wanting a networked computer audio system, but don’t want to fiddle around installing ripping or server software on their computer – and who also want extra storage for their music – is the Zoneripper (www.zoneripper.com). Basically it’s an all-in-one box that forms the heart of a networked sound system – just add a streamer and you’re off.

It’s pretty expensive, with prices starting at around £800 for a 500GB Mini version. It’s a very smart looking little thing, with a black or silver anodised brushed aluminium case measuring 197mm x 197mm x 85mm. It’s just small enough to be inconspicuous, but big enough to take up to two 1TB hard-disk drives, which are used in RAID configuration, so one automatically backs up the other. Data loss due to hard-disk drive failure is an important issue for computer audiophiles, and it can prove immensely costly and/or inconvenient.

The Zoneripper Mini can also be specified with SSDs (Solid-State Drives) to minimise noise and vibration – the two enemies of digital audio. Ideally, in a cost-no-object system, SSDs should be used. They’re expensive at the moment, but the price is coming down steadily.

With UPnP Asset server software pre-installed, this little box of tricks simply needs to be connected to the network (via Ethernet to your router), whereupon it appears visible on your computer and is ready to start storing music.

The unit will work with all the popular streamers, such as Linns and Naims and also has serving software pre-installed for those using Squeezeboxes. Sonos compatibility is also excellent, too.

Using the Zoneripper is simply just a case of feeding CDs into its slot-loading drive, which it then rips automatically. As part of this process it goes on to grab cover art and metadata. It uses the very well respected



AccurateRip/DBPowerAmp ripping engine, which gives excellent sounding music files. It’s a little bit noisy while ripping, but when not spinning its internal CD drive (ie most of the time), it is silent thanks to a fanless design and high-quality aluminium casework. Its Intel Atom Processor makes for smooth, glitch-free operation with either PCs or Macs.

The only issue with the Zoneripper is the quality of its metadata on some classical CDs, although to be fair it’s the fault of the online databases used to look the metadata up – which aren’t always absolutely perfect. So those archiving extensive and/or obscure CD collections may need to come back and edit the metadata on their computer after the disc has been ripped. With my largely pop/rock, jazz and electronic digital disc collection, the metadata is near flawless.

Overall, the Zoneripper Mini is an excellent product, neatly killing several computer audio birds with one stone, and making the whole caboodle so much easier to use. Yes, it is expensive, but the convenience and sheer fuss-free user experience may well justify it in many people’s minds.

Of course, ripping your CDs will only give you CD-quality rips – if it’s high-resolution music files you want, you’ll have to either rip DVD-Audio discs (which all carry 24/96 or 24/192 music) or download them from the internet. Happily, there are more options available now, although hi-res downloads are still not exactly plentiful. Good places to start are Linn Records (www.linnrecords.com), Naim Label (www.naimlabel.com) and Society of Sound (www.bowers-willins.co.uk/Society_of_Sound/).

If you are in the United States, HD Tracks (www.hdtracks.com) is an excellent source of hi-res downloads, but due to international music licensing laws, it is unavailable outside the US. For the same reasons, qobuz (www.qobuz.com) isn’t accessible outside France until the end of this year, but is also a rich seam of downloadable high-quality music. The good news is that more artists are selling hi-res recordings via their own websites – from Kate Bush to The Beatles, hi-res music can now be found for UK hi-res fans.



KATE BUSH *Fifty Words for Snow*

www.katebush.com/shop/downloads/50-words-snow-high-resolution-24-bit-download

The tenth studio album by the one-time English teenage sensation, Kate Bush’s sublime songwriting, singing and production values remain a law unto her own. This 2011 release is breathtakingly well recorded, showcasing the best of modern 24/96 digital music; it’s distributed in WAV format as Kate believes it sounds better than FLAC.



HUEY AND THE NEW YORKERS *Say it to My Face*

www.naimlabel.com/recording-say-it-to-my-face-180gm-LP.aspx

Recorded last year and mastered by Ray Staff at Air Studios, London, this is a superlative recording by the charismatic ex-frontman of the Fun Lovin’ Criminals. It’s sold as an audiophile vinyl record with free hi-res download code. The music is good old-fashioned rock and roll, and fizzes with infectious energy.

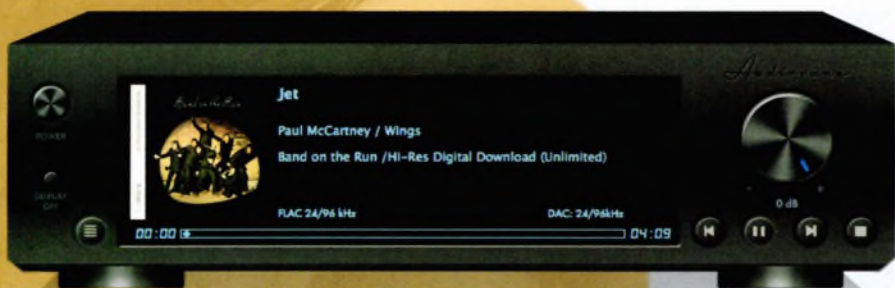


JAMES TAYLOR *Sweet Baby James*

www.highresaudio.com/artist.php?abid=94082

This 1970 release, recorded at Sunset Sound studios in Los Angeles, is an arrestingly gentle, tender and subtle acoustic rock affair with deep country music overtones. Taylor’s voice is sublime and this 24/96 release gives it the space and the richness that the CD simply cannot come close to conveying. It’s beautiful on so many levels.

FEATURE COMPUTER MUSIC



If you're using a Mac and a DAC to play hi-res, you'll need a high-quality software player like Audirvana Plus

The hard stuff

Okay, you've got your music files and are about to consign your CDs to the loft, but where to go from here? You have a simple choice between a USB-capable DAC or a streamer. The first option is the most straightforward, but to get the best out of it you do need to think carefully about the software you'll be playing your files with. Most people will be familiar with iTunes, which is an easy way to play music stored on computers, but it isn't ideal for audiophiles, not least because it doesn't play FLAC files by default and isn't set up to give the best possible sound. Instead, it's sensible to invest in a software player that turns off the extraneous processing that goes on in any computer, and bypasses any sort of internal sound mixing or signal processing.

Again, a number of options are available, but JRiver (www.jriver.com) for the PC or Audirvana Plus (<http://audirvana.com/>) for the Mac are excellent starting points. Both

Windows and OS X are set by default to up or downsample the audio output, and/or mix system sounds into it, whereas these applications will give you 'bit-perfect' playback where what comes out is exactly the same as what went in. They read the music into RAM memory, which doesn't require continuous and electrically noisy hard disk usage while playing, which is a major boon. All are free to trial, and cost around £70 to buy the full versions.

The harder they come

Next comes the hard disk. Of course, every computer has one and there's no need for you to buy additional storage to get a sound from your speakers. But if you have your whole music collection on computer, it's a very good idea to buy a bespoke hard drive to store it on. A simple portable hard drive will suffice for those playing their music out from their computer via USB, but ideally this should be a solid-state SSD type as conventional hard drives are electrically noisier and, of course, introduce mechanical vibration into the system, which is never a good thing as far as sound is concerned.

Those intending to stream their music via a network should seriously consider investing in a dedicated Network Attached Storage (NAS) drive. The beauty of this is that it's very easy to use with any networked music streamer, thanks to its built-in media server software. This means you don't have to download and run UPnP server software such as Twonky or Asset – which you'd otherwise have to do to make your streamer 'see' your computer as a music source on the network. Ideally, you should invest in a twin-disk NAS drive working in RAID mode, which will store your music files on both discs and then automatically back up one with the other. The need to backup your music cannot be overstated, which is why WD's My Book Live (£200 for 6TB) is a popular choice of computer audiophiles.

If you're using a PC and a USB DAC, you'll need to install the USB audio driver for the DAC. This is supplied by the manufacturer and will normally be downloadable from its website. Never connect the USB DAC to the PC before you've installed the driver. If you're using a Mac, there's no need to install a driver, unsurprisingly! Now it's time to set up the computer's sound system for best performance. In the PC environment,

PLAYER'S ASSOCIATION

If you want to turn the music up on your computer, don't use iTunes or Windows Media Centre. These are fine for chart pop and background music, but in sonic terms they send the music round the houses and back again, before reaching the outside world, going through all manner of strange and unnecessary processing before coming out of your speakers. Also, particularly in the case of iTunes, there's no default FLAC support, which in true Apple style cuts off the user from the main music format that the rest of the planet is using!

That's why it is essential to invest in serious music playback software, and the good news is that there are numerous such players available, all of which have a slightly different presentation, visually and sonically. Mac users should investigate Audirvana, PureMusic, Amarra, Cog, SongBird, Neutrino or Ayre Audio. PC users will want to check out Foobar2000, AIMP 2, MediaMonkey, Winamp Full, JetAudio, JRiver, MusicBee or Jaangle. It's a good idea to see which ones best suit your particular needs and then download the demo versions to try for yourself, then buy the one you like best of all.

JRiver has a tools/options sub-menu that lets you select 'Wasapi Event Style' (or 'Kernel Streaming' with Windows XP) that bypasses the internal audio mixer – this is the computer audio equivalent of pressing the 'source direct' button. Next, you must tell your PC to output the sound to the USB DAC, so click on the Output Mode Settings box and specify your USB DAC as the output device. With Macs, go to Preferences/Audio System in Audirvana and specify your USB DAC as the Preferred Audio Device. Make sure you've got Exclusive Access Mode and Integer Mode selected, and you're good to go.

Streamer users can relax, as there's no need to fiddle with USB audio device settings, although if you're using wi-fi rather than Ethernet to connect your streamer to your network (which sonically is less than ideal), you'll have to tell the streamer your network password. Then you'll have to run the set-up routine on the streamer, where it looks for and then joins your home network. Finally, you'll need to download and install a control interface. Generally, this is on the manufacturer's website as a free download, but there are good generic ones such as 8player (<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/8player/id375860275?mt=8>), which gives you a nice control environment for your iDevice for under £4.

All together now

Once all of this is done, you'll have the makings of a serious computer audiophile system. Both the USB DAC and the streamer-based approach will give you access to hi-res files of very high quality, and if you've only ever used CD before, you will be blown away by the improvement in sound quality. While the network-based streamer requires a little more work to get going, when it is up and running the luxury of having your entire music collection available from your iPad or tablet, iPhone or Android smartphone is amazing. It brings levels of convenience hitherto unimagined by CD users. Welcome to the future! ●



People running streamers will really benefit from running a NAS hard-disk drive such as WD's My BookLive Duo

DOUG BRADY HIFI

— SINCE 1960 —



VINYL REVIVAL

TURNTABLES | LOUD SPEAKERS | AMPLIFIERS | CD PLAYERS | STREAMING
DACs | HOME CINEMA | CABLES | iPHONE/PAD DOCKS | SERVICE & REPAIRS



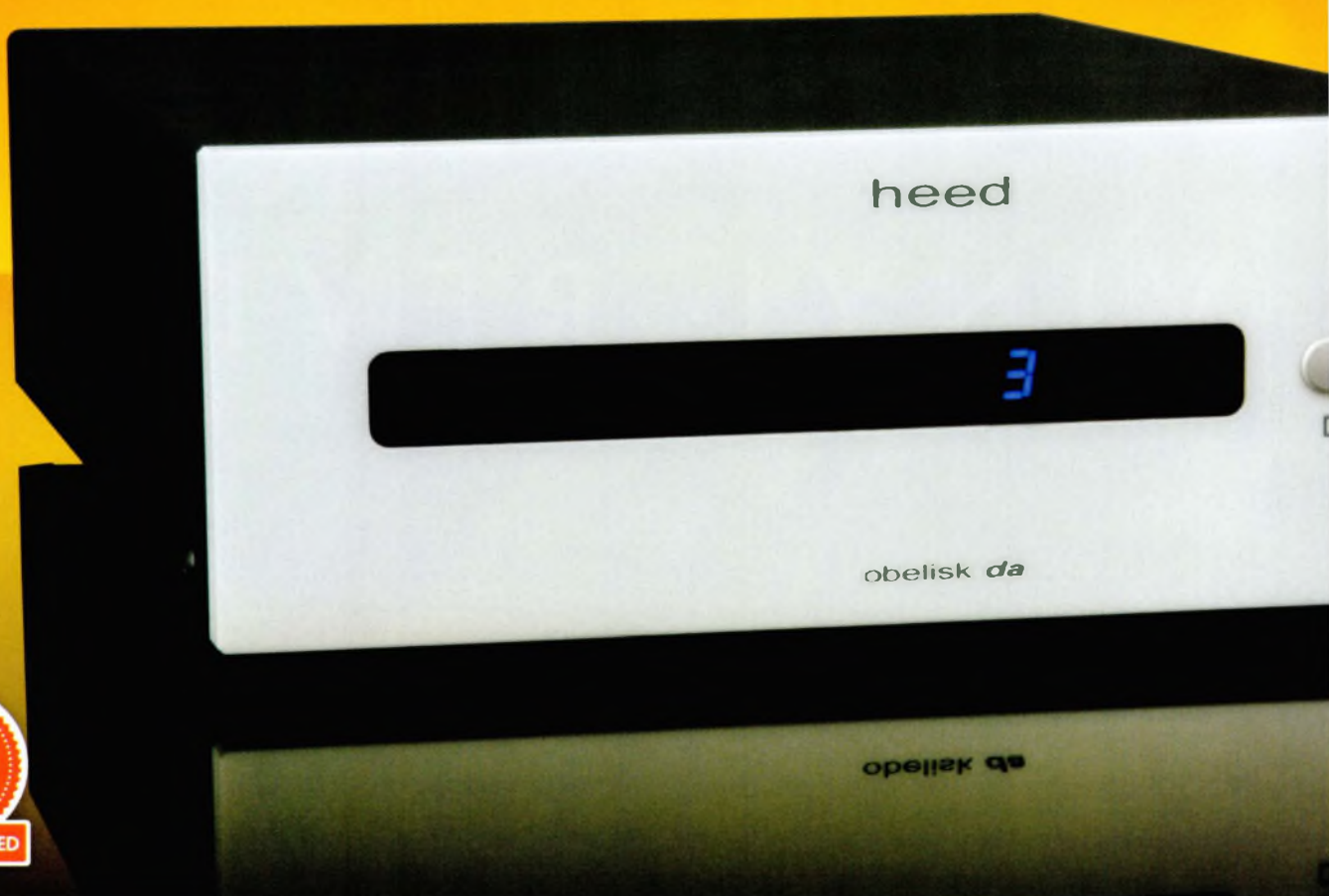
KEEPING TABLES TURNING 1960 - 2013...

HIDDEN TRACKS INCLUDE

B Impeccable Service **B** Outstanding Technical Expertise **B** Knowledge & Dexterity come as standard

ARCAM | B&W | BELLES | CHORD | DENON | EPOS | EXPOSURE | FUNK FIRM | HARBETH | KUDOS | LFD
MAGNEPLANAR | MICHELL ENGINEERING | MONITOR AUDIO | MUSICAL FIDELITY | NAIM | NEAT | ORTOFON | PMC | PRIMARE
PROAC | PROJECT | REGA | RENAISSANCE | ROTHWELL | RUARK | SME | SONNETEER | UNISON RESEARCH | WILSON BENESCH

www.dougbradyhifi.com | 01925 828009 (Mon-Sat) | Kingsway Studios, Kingsway North, Warrington WA1 3NU



DAC's the way to do it

One of the few USB DACs to give Naim's DAC-V1 a good run for its money, **Malcolm Steward** is excited by Heed's Obelisk da

The Obelisk da is Heed Audio's multiple input, remote-controllable digital-to-analogue converter, which is now available with the latest version – 2.1 – of the DACtil DAC card. The new V2.1 DAC card aims to provide “greater refinement and musical enjoyment” over its much-admired predecessor. It is available either fitted to the Obelisk da DAC at £1,500 – the standard da is £1,300, and will continue to be sold – or as a £450 upgrade for the Obelisk pre or existing owners of the da, and brings 192kHz/24-bit capability, including USB, to the range courtesy of Wolfson's WM8741 DAC and the

ubiquitous XMOS USB Audio Class 2.0 high speed chipset. A USB driver is freely available for download from Heed's website to install onto your Windows computer, which, unlike the Mac, requires a driver to be installed.

Outwardly the Heed is similarly proportioned to the new Naim DAC-V1, being housed in a 'shoebbox' case only about 1cm wider and longer. It also differs in having a perspex fascia: the review sample being an attractive off-white. The Heed, just like the Naim, also offers a choice of inputs including S/PDIF, a BNC, to offer an ideal impedance match to the cable connecting my Naim HDX-SSD digital source, which

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Heed Obelisk da

ORIGIN
Hungary

TYPE
Outboard DAC

WEIGHT
4kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
220 x 85 x 325mm

FEATURES

- Resolution: maximum 24-bit
- Sampling frequency: 32, 44.1, 48, 96, 192kHz
- S/PDIF – I²S convertor: Cirrus Logic CS8416
- Analogue filter: capacitor coupled passive band-pass network

DISTRIBUTOR
RPD Distribution

TELEPHONE
01242 547663

WEBSITE
heedaudio.hu/en

I use to stream music from my UPnP server through Ethernet.

I set up the Obelisk da being fed by my HDX, through a BNC-BNC Chord Sarum Tuned Array digital cable, with its direct output (rather than its buffered option, which offers higher voltage for use with passive preamps) feeding my Naim NAC52 pre-amplifier/SuperCap power supply through an Atlas Element III phono to DIN analogue interconnect. The speakers are my Neat Ultimatum XL10s driven by a pair of Naim NAP 250 power amplifiers. I decide to use filter setting 3 on the da, which Heed says provides the most natural sound.

Sound Quality

The first music to be auditioned is the title track from what Steve Earle describes as his “heavy metal meets Bluegrass” album, *Copperhead Road*. The Obelisk da impresses from the first bar with a presentation that manages to be rich and full-blooded yet simultaneously scrupulously agile, detailed and delicate. In particular it picks out the leading edges on guitars distinctly and so powers *Copperhead Road* along at a quite relentless pace. Both the music's timing and Earle's diction seem deliciously sharply etched and precise.

The more relaxed demeanour of Emile Sandé's *Clown* demonstrates just how capably the Obelisk casts

the listener's throat. Rather it gently highlights subtleties and nuances in the music of which one probably had previously been unaware. Suddenly I notice, say, the slight bend or choking of a guitar string and realise how relevant it is to the music being played. Such information becomes plentifully apparent on the Bill Frisell, so-called chamber jazz album, *Sign Of Life* where the guitarist plays alongside a group of orchestral string players. The da effortlessly delineates the guitar and violin when both are simultaneously playing an identical pizzicato melody. This seems to be a function of the DAC's precise dynamic expression and deft capability with note-shape definition that allows the da to step aside and let the performance pass unhindered. This probably also explains why the da has an inherently analogue quality to its sound. It should being a DAC, naturally, but it has an outstandingly easy-going naturalness and flow that is so very rare, especially in the digital equipment domain.

I am heartened to note that the Heed regularly displays its disarming precision, where quite without any effort it alerts the listener to some aspect of the music, which might not have been as apparent before. This is not the case of previously unheard instruments appearing in a track, but more likely a deft but unnoticed piece of phrasing or subtle dynamic contrast being brought to light and its musical relevance being made abundantly clear.

Crucial to the performance of the Obelisk da is its cogency and its musical coherence, its rightness if you will. This quality is perhaps most apparent in the way that the da handles subtle timing clues and inferences. Its agility throughout its bandwidth is laudable.

Frisell's *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* from the album *Further East*

where the timing is stated by his guitar melody rather than any true 'rhythm' instrument has such a persuasive surge and seems to flow seamlessly into the following tracks *Prelude – Body And Soul* and *Paradox* where Frisell's playing alongside the drummer, Kenny Wollesen, and bassist, Tony Scherr, simply demonstrates his mastery of timing and the fact that he barely needs any other instruments to set the rhythm, such is his confidence and ability to improvise and riff and still stay absolutely 'in the pocket'.

Lookout For Hope from his live, direct to two-track album *Further West* subsequently reaffirms these

It creates an intimate proximity between both the listener and the musicians

thoughts and reiterates my feelings about the muscular, agile sound of the da with its confident, big-boned presentation of this gloriously fulsome 16/44 FLAC rip – which sounds as good and as effortlessly musical as any hi-res recording I have heard to date. It creates a truly intimate proximity between both the listener and the musicians at the event bolstered by its dynamic veracity and the concentrated tonal colour of the instrumentation.

His guitar's tonal richness, enhanced by a careful choice of FX pedals, is both entralling and sumptuously splendid, and his timing when playing over loops on *Egg Radio* is brilliantly recreated. Equally as important, however, you can easily sense when the trio is building itself up to dig in hard and add more determination and brio to its playing.

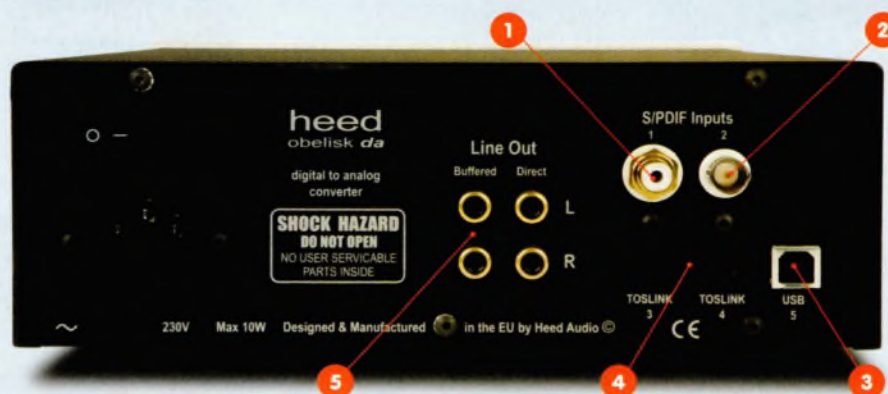
The Heed da also provides a noteworthy performance playing

a stereo image, according to both a good lateral spread and credible and consistent force to aft depth. Her piano is delightfully articulated, while her magnificent voice demonstrates fine chiaroscuro and a beguiling frailty at its extremes, which lends the music an engaging humanity, candour and conviction.

The Heed Obelisk da proves itself to be an exceptionally revealing device with eye-of-the-needle precision, yet not once does it ever sound forced or overbearing. Its revelatory powers are reassuringly subtle and never in-your-face like some supposedly high-end equipment can be. It doesn't uncover detail and then force it down

The Heed Obelisk da appears in an attractive off-white 'shoebox' case

CONNECTIONS



- 1 S/PDIF coaxial RCA input
- 2 S/PDIF coaxial BNC input
- 3 USB input
- 4 S/PDIF optical TOSLINK inputs
- 5 Buffered analogue line outputs

Q&A

Attila Olah

Heed designer



MS: Can you explain the three different filter settings available with the Obelisk da DAC?

AO: The filter rates are exactly the same so the sound difference is strictly caused by the different filter structures.

Can you give more detail on how this works in practice?

Sure. The F1 and F3 are slow roll-off filters. They still respect the Nyquist frequency so the usable upper frequency is limited at around 11-12kHz if you use 44.1kHz source (20k and 24k for 96 and 192kHz, -1dB). It is hardly noticeable in some 'darker' systems and can be helpful if something is wrong in the upper section. F1 has a quite good transient response with minimal ringing; F3 is a minimum phase filter with no pre-ringing at all (pre-echo is non-causal and cannot be found in nature) but somewhat larger post-ringing; F3 feels quieter but with less distortion and, personally, I prefer this one.

And what about the remaining filter (F2)?

F2 is a brick-wall filter – basically it is The Digital Filter from the ancient times. Full range (up to 19/40/50 kHz at 44.1/96/192 kHz) frequency response with slightly more ringing (which is almost perfectly symmetrical meaning that the distortion can be very low). It will be the factory default because of the great frequency span, and it still sounds good.

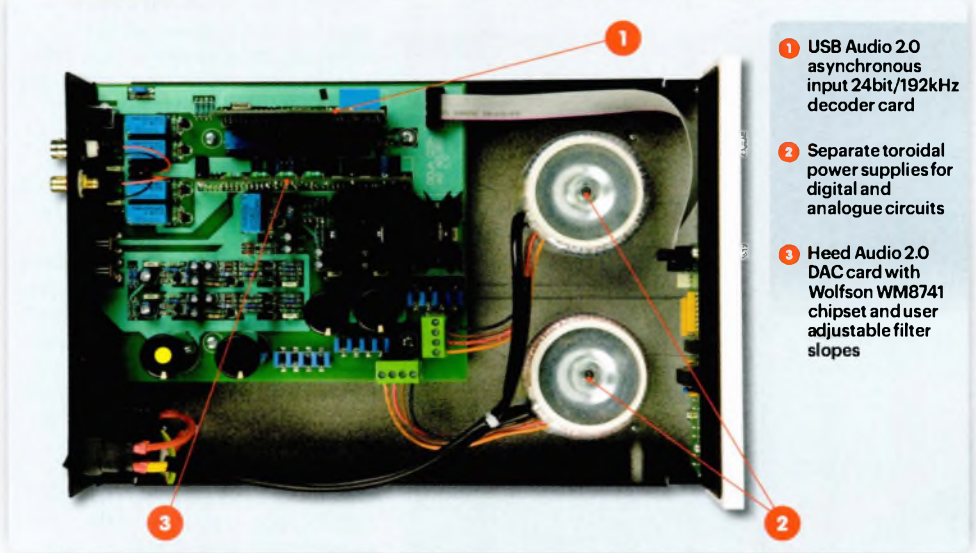
As the filter selection is not accessible from the outside, F2 is the best generic option and should be used as a default setup.

So which filters would you recommend that HFC readers use?

In a nutshell, use F2 for CD, F3 for the most natural sound ever and F1 if you like it.

If you choose F1 or F3 and are frustrated about the high-cut, you can drive the card with constant (up-sampled) 96 or 192 kHz signal from USB or an outer ASRC to reach the 20 kHz upper limit. But I do not recommend any up-sampling.

IN SIGHT



- 1 USB Audio 2.0 asynchronous input 24bit/192kHz decoder card
- 2 Separate toroidal power supplies for digital and analogue circuits
- 3 Heed Audio 2.0 DAC card with Wolfson WM8741 chipset and user adjustable filter slopes

through the USB connection on my laptop, which many hi-fi designers have told me ought to provide the best connection available.

Maybe that is true in theory but, for me, in reality that is all too often not the case and I find the USB ports on computers to be capricious and inconsistent at best.

Listening to larger scale music, selections from the classical repertoire in particular, reveal that the Heed has no bias either way and is able to handle all sorts of music in an even-handed manner. Using the 24/192kHz recording of The Scottish Chamber Orchestra playing *Beethoven Piano Concerto 3*, it becomes abundantly apparent that the Heed is able to exhibit its vivid, welcoming and thoroughly analogue character on this hi-resolution material. The sound of the ensemble highlights vivid tonal colour, depth and natural fullness – in particular the piano – along with plenty of fine detail resolution and focus. Dynamic scaling is dramatic and the unit resolves the acoustic signature of the recording venue convincingly. Equally convincing is the sense of music's ebb and flow that the Heed conveys. The timing interplay between the consort and the pianist in the *Rondo Allegro* is delicately portrayed and an absolute delight to savour.

Jose Carreras' *Misa Criolla* (Ariel Ramirez), meanwhile, demonstrates the Heed's stereo image placement dexterity by positioning instruments and voices precisely and consistently within the reverberant sound-field of the church in which the recording was made. The delicate treatment of the mid-band – especially the

dynamic candour – further emphasises the masterful natural quality of Carreras' superb voice.

The open quality about the Heed's midrange equally benefits less cultured recordings – Alicia Keys' *Girl on Fire*, for example, about which very little approaches natural. As a sonic spectacular, though, it has few peers. The percussion is alarmingly dynamic when piped through the da and the vocals are very obviously processed, though not to the extent of being disquieting.

Conclusion

All in all, there is a tiny number of USB DACs today that offer truly outstanding performance: the Heed Obelisk da is most definitely one of the leading contenders. It proves its capabilities with a highly diverse selection of music encompassing classical orchestral, choral, and chamber to rock, pop, country and a wide selection of jazz. Nothing proves too challenging and it consistently reveals great finesse ●



The most obvious contender for comparison here is the new £1,250 Naim DAC-V1, which offers broadly similar facilities to the da with the exception of the switchable filtration. The battle between the two designs is close-fought and I feel that there is no out-and-out winner. Both convey the expression and emotion in music with conviction, although the Naim exhibits a slightly darker tonal quality. Despite this it still has an appreciable edge in terms of timing – leading edge 'snap' and impetus. It usually seems to impart a tad more urgency to some tracks and to sound subjectively a little more assertive.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Dramatic, refined and sophisticated sound, plays more to music's considerations

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Outputs and filtration should not be user-selectable.

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: One of the finest USB-capable DACs available, probably at any price

FEATURES



OVERALL





ANALOGUE ACCESSORIES



Okki Nokki Record Cleaning Machine

One of the best value for money RCM's, 1000's sold

£399.95



Jelco Tone-Arm Cables

MCRU are agents for the full Jelco range including tone-arms

from £85



Regulated Linear Power Supplies

MCRU's award winning PSU's for Turntables

from £195



Oyaide MJ-12 + STB-MS

Simply the best value turntable mat/weight combination there is

£399.95



LDA MC Valve Phono Stage

To hear it is to want it

£1950



Benz Cartridges

MCRU are authorized dealers for the full range of Benz cartridges

from £265



Light fantastic

It's a tough job being a mid-price turntable, but Origin Live's new Aurora Mk3 has got what it takes to impress **David Price**

This new £999 deck is the baby in Origin Live's four-strong range of turntables, which goes all the way up to the £4,770 Sovereign. Being the third-generation model, it has come a long way from the original Aurora, which appeared back in 2003, but it remains a high-quality skeletal belt-drive design hewn from black acrylic with a low-resonance platter. It doesn't have conventional sprung suspension, relying on the user placing it on a well-isolated

subtable or wall shelf. The main chassis comes prefitted with an armboard that is drilled for both Origin Live/old-type Rega single-point and modern Rega three-point fixings, so between the two it covers a great many bases. Obviously, other armboard templates are available – you just need to specify the right one to your dealer before you hand over your hard-earned cash. On to this you will have to fit the arm yourself – even if you buy an Origin Live arm it won't come prefitted, Rega-style,

because of the design of the packaging. If you can get your dealer to do this all well and good, otherwise it's a little fiddly for vinyl virgins.

The rest of the deck comprises the platter and the motor. Before the former is fitted, the bearing hub has to be dropped down into the recess on the chassis – the former is said to be a new type designed for faster energy transmission and of lower friction than before. Before the bearing is left, six drops of the supplied 'special' oil have to be applied, then the dot on the spindle assembly must be lined up with the dot on the platter, presumably because the latter is balanced. The new, thicker platter is made of a visually attractive semi-translucent acrylic material, the exact constituents of which designer Mark Baker will not reveal for reasons of commercial confidentiality. On to this sits the company's excellent 'upgrade platter mat', that's a fine tweak for other decks, too.

Finally, the motor slots into the rear left chassis recess, and the belt is attached. Interestingly, this is a quite a substantial affair and not of the thin and/or thread type that is popular

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Origin Live Aurora Mk3

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Turntable

WEIGHT
10.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
450 x 380 x 130mm

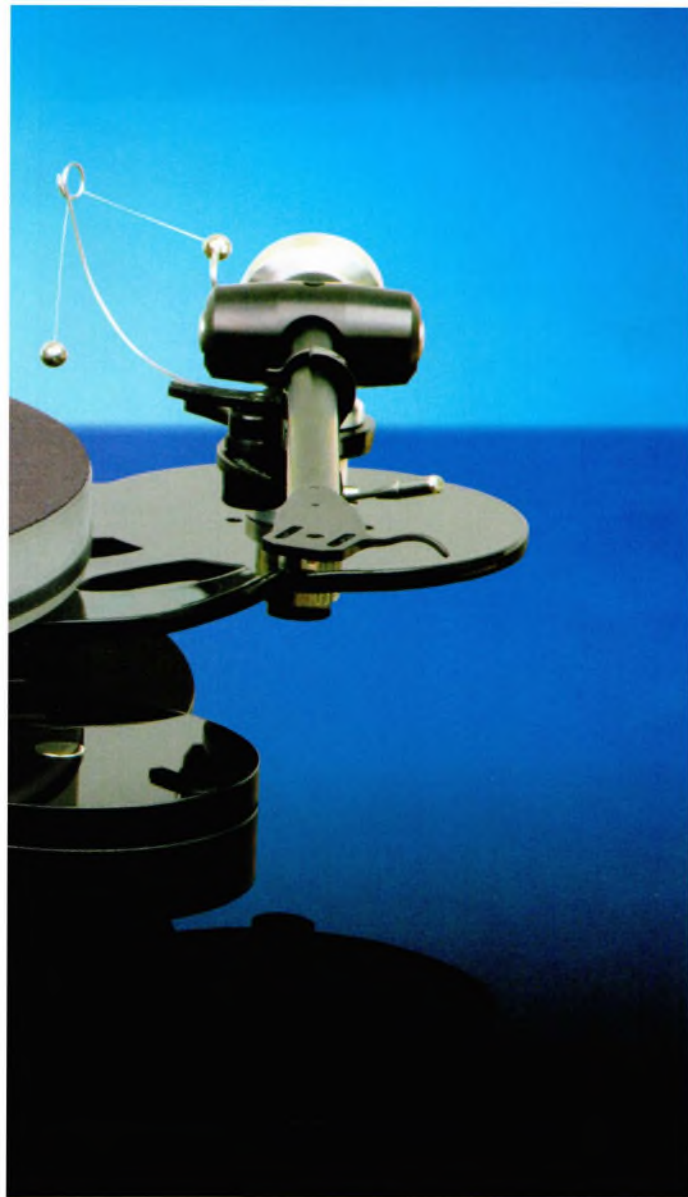
FEATURES

- Acrylic/metal chassis
- Belt drive
- External power supply
- Acrylic platter

DISTRIBUTOR
Origin Live

TELEPHONE
02380 578877

WEBSITE
originlive.com



go amiss. Still, in Origin Live's defence, Mark Baker would doubtless say that the money has been spent where it improves the sound most.

Although the new deck is not unrecognisable compared with the old one, Mark Baker says it isn't possible to upgrade your Mk1 or 2 Aurora to Mk3 spec, simply because so many parts have been changed. There's always the option of part-exchanging your old deck for the new one, should you wish, however – either via Origin Live direct or your supplying dealer. Finally, it's nice to know that the Aurora has a 12in tonearm mounting option (£260) should you wish to use geometrically correct pick-up arms, and also the option of running dual armboards (£323) instead of just the one. The arm fitted to the test sample is the company's £450 Onyx, which has been well reviewed in these pages.

Sound quality

Not entirely unexpectedly perhaps, the Aurora Mk3 is a fine-sounding turntable, one that very much has an Origin Live house sound – which means it balances the natural, warm and cossetting ambience of vinyl with a good deal of insight and grip. For this reason, it works nicely with a wide range of programme material, unlike some rival designs that can come 'on song' with certain types of music. For example, slip on some cool jazz from Herbie Mann, in the shape of his cover of *Summertime*, and all that's good about this deck shines through. The deck manages to scythe through the noise on my ageing LP, and dig deep into the music. The

soundstage is wide, proving this to be a spacious and enveloping performer.

The Origin Live deck lets the recording's rhythm ebb and flow naturally. Jazz is such a great test of this, achieving so much of its mesmeric effect from the way the musicians hover around the beat. Lesser turntables tend to lose this 'sixth sense' of the music's rhythm, but the Aurora does not. Instead, I can hear the beautiful phrasing of Mann's flute work, shuffling around and delicately accenting the music. It's this sort of subtlety that sorts out the vinyl spinning wheat from the chaff, and here this turntable does very well.

Another nice aspect to the Aurora is its tonality; it is just a little more

Natural, well-judged tonality allies to a very organic sense of rhythm

sumptuous and soft sounding than many rival decks – not massively so, but just enough to make it a better match for often hard-sounding budget tonearms. Together with the Alliance, it makes for an ideal partnership – *Snowflake* from Kate Bush is a stunning-sounding modern recording, contrasting Bush's icy cool voice with wonderfully rich and vibrant piano work. This deck captures the tonal balance very well and comes close to the 24/96 WAV file played through a high-end streamer, for example. It shows that the deck doesn't over egg the pudding, ▶

with many other manufacturers. Origin Live says the belt is made from a new material, hand finished for better quality. The motor unit itself is surprisingly large, and the latest Mk3 Aurora is said to benefit from additional damping.

Inside is a new ironless DC motor claimed to have no 'cogging' effect. This attaches to the offboard power box, again which is said to be improved. Speed control is easily electronically switched between 33rpm and 45rpm (78rpm is available on request); juice comes from a low-noise regulated power supply.

Being a non-suspended design, it is always going to be more susceptible to vibrations than a sprung subchassis deck, however, the Aurora proves less prone to the outside world than, say, a Rega. Overall, I am impressed with the build quality of the latest Aurora; the plinth, platter and bearing hub are all particularly well finished and everything slots together nicely. The only caveat is that the motor on-off switch doesn't feel as swish and modern as perhaps one might like – given this is the only interface point with the turntable aside from the arm, a slightly swisher one wouldn't

Set up of the arm will be difficult for vinyl virgins, so get the dealer to do it if unsure



Q&A

Mark Baker

Origin Live, designer



DP: What does the new Aurora Mk3 bring to the vinyl party?

MB: The purpose of the deck was to provide an entry-level price product with high-end performance. After making fresh discoveries over the past five years, the time came for these to be included in a new Mk3 model. These have brought particular improvements into imaging, and there's reduced colouration, a more refined presentation of low-level information and it is easier to follow separation of individual strands in the music and vocals.

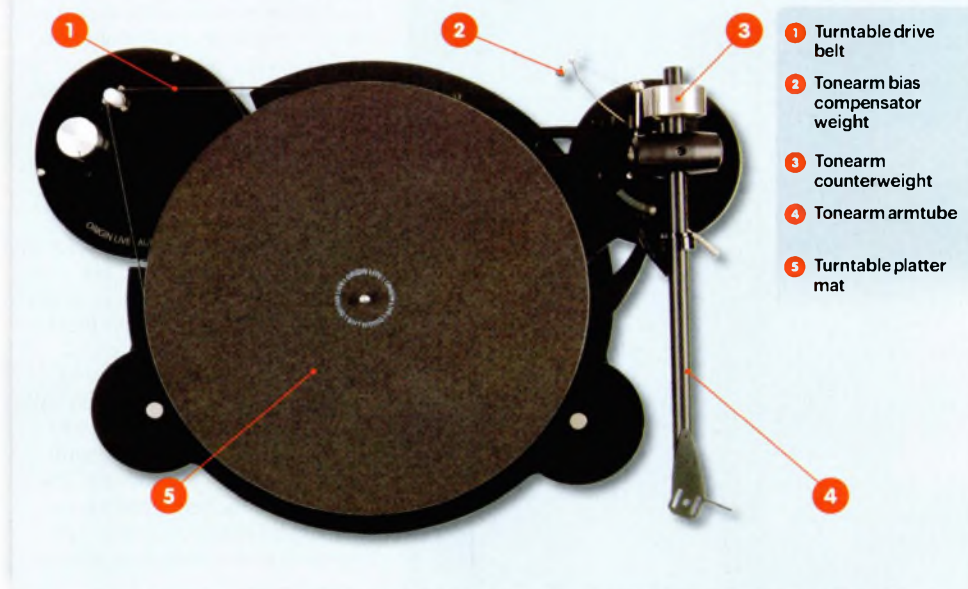
Why did you choose the materials you did for the Aurora?

The Aurora uses decoupling techniques and specific damping interfaces along with a metal subchassis to produce its fabulous tonal balance. This may sound simple, but is the culmination of over 20 years of experimentation. We tried countless different types of oil, and it became all too clear which was best. The platter mat is a similar story; it took over 18 years of testing before we discovered a material that worked on acrylic platters, and it happened to work amazingly well on glass, metal and MDF platters, too. The reason has to be down to its ability to damp vibration in vinyl records in an even handed way across the whole audio frequency band.

Why use a DC motor, when many opt for an AC synchronous type?

It sounds better, due to less vibration from a smooth DC current, rather than the violently oscillating AC current used to drive the AC motors of most decks. The belt was designed for the type of motor used; those with high levels of vibration favour maximum isolation from the platter, so round belts and very thin belts like cotton can seem better than conventional flat belts. This approach has negative side effects such as imperceptible slippage on the pulley and belt stretch, neither of which help dynamics. With DC motors, vibration is lower so you can use belts with grip and less stretch at high frequencies. The Origin Live belt takes a lot of work to make.

IN SIGHT



- 1 Turntable drive belt
- 2 Tonearm bias compensator weight
- 3 Tonearm counterweight
- 4 Tonearm armtube
- 5 Turntable platter mat

so to speak, making things coloured, but neither is it unduly bright.

This natural, well-judged tonality allies to a very organic sense of rhythm making this a deck that can take on anything. Feeling that I need to get some air moving around the room, I opt for an original seventies pressing of Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy*. *The Rain Song* has a lovely, long, slow burning build up, during which time the Aurora shows just how good its detail retrieval is; guitars have an almost tangible quality to them, while the grain of Robert Plant's voice is eerily realistic. But when the song gets into the groove and the levels go up, this deck holds on tight; it shows real composure during peaks and holds things together in terms of pitch, too – often highly modulated sections on an LP record can disturb both turntable and tonearm, but this deck shows grace under pressure.

Classical music is a pleasure, too. Normally it's not until you spend £500 or so more that turntables really sing with orchestra music, in my view, but the Aurora is fully able to eke out all the detail from the back of hall. This includes communicating an excellent sense of air and space to the recorded acoustic, which really gives a sense of being there.

Often, lesser vinyl spinners can sound just a little opaque and indistinct, but not so with my audiophile vinyl reissue of Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*. The turntable catches the natural flow of the music, without thrusting detail out at the listener as if it needs to

prove a point. Given the modest price of the tonearm I am very impressed, but a quick swap to a high-end Origin Live Illustrious reveals that the deck has even more to give, with lots more detail, depth and insight. Certainly the Aurora is able to make the most of arms costing as much as the turntable itself.

Conclusion

It's very hard to think what else you could ask of this £999 turntable; its build is excellent at the price, its sonic performance is simply superb, and there's certainly nothing wrong with its looks either.

The latest Mk3 version of the Aurora is a real asset to Origin Live's product portfolio then, and offers fierce competition to rival turntable designs from the likes of Michell and Funk Firm, who will doubtless be hoping the Mk4 version of the Aurora doesn't surface for at least another five years! ●



The closest rival to the Aurora is Michell's **TecnoDec HR (£880)**, which has been around for nearly a decade now. The Michell provides a slightly cleaner and more upfront presentation, that may suit more budget systems better than the Origin Live. But there's much more depth to the Aurora – it sounds a little more relaxed, natural and fluid compared with the crisp, spry TecnoDec, and lovers of jazz in particular will appreciate this. The soundstage is also more three dimensional, opening up and enveloping the listener more. The Michell is a great buy, but the Origin Live just about wins out when it comes to all round ability.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Natural, open and three-dimensional sound; organic rhythms; fine dynamics

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Fiddler to set up than Rega and Pro-Ject price rivals

BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



WESAY: Excellent value mid-price turntable with high-quality sound

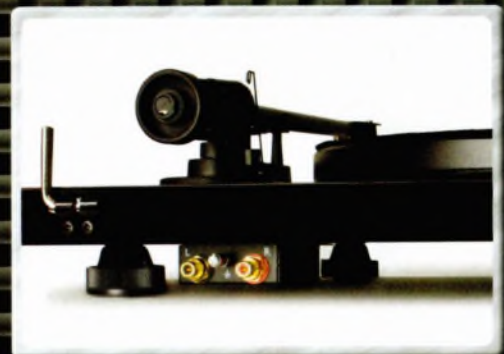
OVERALL



The Carbon Age



Introducing the multi-award winning Debut Carbon from Pro-Ject 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

Brand new one-piece 8.6" Carbon Fibre tonearm - New motor isolation set-up -
Upgraded 12" platter with higher mass - New mains supply method - Cable junction box -
Ortofon 2m Red Pre-Fitted - Available in 7 high-gloss colours

Pro-Ject Audio Systems is distributed in the UK by
Henley Designs Ltd.
Telephone : 01235 511 166
Email : info@henleydesigns.co.uk
Web : www.henleydesigns.co.uk





Survival of the fittest

Paradigm's Mini Monitors are now in their seventh generation – **Ed Selley** finds out if evolution improves the breed

Paradigm is best known for its multichannel products including subwoofers that double as earth-moving equipment, but it has been active in two channel as well, and evidence that it has been doing it for some time comes in the form of the naming of the speaker you see here. The full title of this speaker is the Mini Monitor S7 and the 7 denotes that this is the seventh generation of this model and one that makes an appearance a full 15 years after the original first generation.

The Mini Monitors sound spacious and refined with a large variety of music

The various generations of Mini Monitor have used a variety of materials in their construction and differ in appearance, but all of them have been two-way standmount speakers. The Mini monicker is probably an indicator of the difference in perception between North America and Europe as the Paradigm is a respectable 340mm tall (Paradigm also produces the smaller Atom Monitor for the very short on space) and is a reasonably large speaker for the £400 asking price.

The S7 makes use of a pair of drivers that are both constructed from Paradigm's proprietary S-PAL (Satin-Anodised Pure-Aluminum) material. The tweeter is a 25mm dome and replaces a titanium model from previous versions. This is set relatively deeply in a wave guide with integral protective grille.

This is partnered with a 165mm mid bass driver of the same material. The dish of the driver is interesting as it appears to have an actual inverted dust cap in the centre rather than

presenting a smooth dish to the outside world. The mid bass driver is encased in a GRIP (Glass Reinforced Polymer) chassis that partially (and in some models completely) seals the driver from the rest of the cabinet. This enclosure is then augmented by a relatively large rear port that means the Paradigm is best given a little space from rear walls to breathe. Around the back, the Paradigm sports a single pair of terminals so bi-wiring is out, but the connections feel solid and will accept plugs and spade connections if you need.

The aesthetic of the Paradigm is pleasant enough and shouldn't prove too hard to accommodate in most environments. The front panel is finished in a soft-touch rubber that feels very modern and contrasts with the bright drivers and if this all a bit much, a grille that uses magnetic trim tabs can be used to cover it all up. A choice of black or 'heritage cherry' finishes is available, the latter possibly taking its name from the fact it looks a little old fashioned in a market where ever more exotic 'wood' finishes are being offered.

The general fit and finish is good for the asking price, though. The absence of visible fastenings around the drivers and the use of magnetic grille tabs give the Paradigm a very clean appearance and the materials used feel of a fairly high standard for £400. Compared with the incredibly inert cabinet of the Q Acoustics Concept 20, the Mini Monitor feels slightly insubstantial, but against more normally constructed opponents it isn't going to disappoint and given the overall dimensions, it represents pretty good value for money.

Sound quality

Sonically the Paradigm shows some positive qualities right from the off. Connected to a relatively burly Naim Supernait, the Mini Monitor is a

competent and capable performer. Although speakers with a full complement of aluminium drivers have a slightly unfair reputation for sounding bright or forward, the Paradigm is free of any of these traits. In fact, the Mini Monitor is almost the complete opposite and even relatively forward and poor recordings don't provoke any trace of harshness or aggression. Sensitivity is reasonable if not exceptional and most amps you are likely to partner the Paradigms with shouldn't struggle.

This impressive control and civility hasn't come at the expense of detail. The dense, multi-layered and brash recording of The Kings of Leon's *Come Around Sundown* opens up into an impressively deep and nuanced performance with plenty of space around the performers. The effect is an impressively near balancing act between sounding relaxed and civilised without sounding dull.

The overall tonal balance of the Mini Monitor isn't quite so convincing, though. Voices are generally fairly believable, but piano and stringed instruments take on a slightly thin quality that robs them of a little realism and life. Exactly why this is the case is unclear, but it is still present when I switch to using a Cambridge Audio 851A and suggests that it is down to the Paradigm. The result is that with something as stripped back as Regina Spektor's *Consequence of Sounds*, her vocals are ▶

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Paradigm Mini Monitor

ORIGIN
Canada/China

TYPE
Standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
7.7kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
194 x 343 x 265mm

FEATURES
● HF drive unit:
aluminium tweeter
● Bass/mid drive unit: 165mm S-PAL mid bass driver
● Quoted sensitivity: 90dB
● Quoted nominal impedance: compatible with 8ohms

DISTRIBUTOR
Anthem AV

TELEPHONE
01825 750858

WEBSITE
anthemavs.co.uk

The absence of visible fastenings around the drivers give the Mini Monitors a very clean look



Q&A

Mark Aling

Senior marketing director



ES: What prompted the move from the titanium tweeters of the previous versions to the S-PAL aluminium design used in the S7?

MA: Paradigm has always designed products with trickle-down technology. The tweeter that is currently in the Monitor Series was also in the previous Studio Series and V.1 Signature. We find aluminium to be a far better-sounding material than titanium as aluminium has a different resonant signature that we are better able to design around for best sonic results.

Is the comparatively restrained styling of the Mini Monitor and the rest of the model range a conscious decision to try to appeal more to European customers?

Yes, the design of Monitor Series 7 follows the global trend of a smaller footprint and cleaner aesthetics by eliminating any visible fasteners and delivering a better means of attaching the grille.

Did Paradigm design the Mini Monitor primarily as a stereo speaker or with a view to it being used in a surround environment?

All Paradigm products are designed around music, as it is harder to recreate the accurate timbre of musical instruments. Once we know the sound is accurate, any source played through Paradigm speakers will be accurate.

In your experience with the Mini Monitor, is there any partnering equipment that you feel works especially well with it?

Because of the accuracy of Paradigm speakers, they are always best when paired with equipment that adds little or no flavouring of the signal before reaching the speakers.

Does the GRIP chassis completely encase the S7's mid bass driver or is there some form of interaction with the bass port?

The Mini Monitor bass/midrange driver does interact with the port. The only midrange driver in the Monitor Series 7 that is sealed from the port is the Monitor 11.

IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm S-PAL tweeter
- 2 Rear-mounted port
- 3 Single pair of three-way binding posts
- 4 165mm S-PAL mid bass driver

impressively compelling, but the single supporting piano feels robbed of some of its scale.

This undoes some of the good work the Paradigm carries out elsewhere, but not unduly so. Part of the reason why the Mini Monitor manages to sound enjoyable is that the relatively large cabinet results in low-end extension and scale that is often absent at this price point. With the deep electronic rumblings of *Visions* by Grimes, the Mini Monitor has a very welcome sense of shove. Bass is deep enough to be partly felt and this visceral ability gives the Paradigm a presence that is welcome when bass is needed.

The bass itself is well shaped and the same detail and space present in the upper registers means low notes are pleasingly three dimensional and where you have a bass line with multiple notes the Paradigm is effortlessly able to differentiate between them. When you have deep natural bass the effect is impressively convincing for a relatively small speaker. There is a fair amount of energy radiated from the bass port, but even when the speaker is driven relatively hard it doesn't become audible, provided it is positioned at least 30cm from a rear wall.

The civilised performance comes at the expense of a little up-tempo excitement. The Mini Monitor never feels ponderous or bloated, but when you give it something that should get the head nodding, it can feel slightly restrained and matter of fact. This seems to be the trade off that the generally forgiving nature demands and depending on your musical taste, it may not prove to be too much of an issue, but there are other speakers in the price bracket that can sound a

little more exciting if not quite as composed as the Paradigm does.

Conclusion

This is an interesting speaker with a number of likeable features. It manages to sound spacious and refined with a large variety of music and very little seems to provoke it into any form of misbehaviour, which would certainly benefit anyone with a music collection including more rough and ready material. For a relatively compact speaker, the impressive bass extension and detailed sound is good. The looks are inoffensive – even in the slightly pipe and slippers cherry finish – and the build is good, too. The Mini Monitor sits in a crowded market, but the attention that Paradigm has lavished on its baby and the technology that it has employed while doing so has resulted in a speaker that is subtly different from some of the competition and one with a set of abilities that is rather welcome. It isn't perfect, but the Paradigm gets more right than it does wrong and deserves a place on any shortlist at the price ●



The stiffest challenge to the Paradigm comes from the Q Acoustics Concept 20. It can't match the Paradigm for bass response, but over the rest of the frequency response it is a truly exceptional performer with a clarity and naturalness that is almost untouchable at the price. Throw in the of-the-moment looks and the Concept 20 takes some beating.

The Castle Richmond Anniversary is a more conventional challenge, which is smaller than the Paradigm and has to give some ground in terms of bass response, but retaliates with a livelier and more upbeat performance and the build and aesthetics make it one of the nicest-looking speakers at the price.

Ni-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Spacious and relaxed sound; solid build; clean looks

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Slightly thin midband; can lack a little excitement

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: A very capable all-rounder that should sit well in many systems, but not without competition

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL



FURUTECH
Pure Transmission



WWW.FURUTECH.COM

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

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

The ADL GT40 ...



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2011

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
FURUTECH ADLGT40

TONEAudio
Magazine
2010
Product of the Year
Award

PC ADVISOR
RECOMMENDED

AEx
Audio Excellence Award 2011

Hi-Fi
Choice
RECOMMENDED

a master of all trades.

phono stage • USB DAC • USB ADC • headphone amplifier

ADL
ALPHA DESIGN LABS

by **FURUTECH** Tokyo • Japan
service@adl-av.com

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

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



System addict

Pioneer's stereo charm offensive continues with the release of the rather delightful X-P01DAB system – **Ed Selley** listens in

Pioneer has been very active in the two-channel category of late and it is not showing any signs of slowing down. The latest arrival is the X-P01DAB system, which is intended to bridge the gap between full-size components and the all-in-one systems that the company also makes.

The system consists of a pair of 285mm wide units that are supplied in the same box. The PD-P01 CD player has the same 32-bit, 192kHz-capable DAC as some of Pioneer's full-size CD players. It has a front-mounted USB that supports the connection of thumb drives and iDevices, which can then be decoded by the internal chipset.

The matching SX-P01DAB receiver is the more interesting of the pair and supports DAB, DAB+ and FM via a built-in tuner section adding some useful functionality. The amplification section also borrows from the full-width components as it is a Class D affair in keeping with many of Pioneer's recent designs. Power is quoted as 75W, but as this figure is given at 4ohms with no mention of a distortion measurement, in reality the usable output will be lower than this.

As well as an analogue input for the PD-P01, the SX-P01DAB is fitted with another RCA input and a pair of digital inputs – one coaxial and one optical. Pioneer seems coy about what DAC is used for these inputs, but

it doesn't appear to be another example of the 32-bit design used in the CD player. Nonetheless, this leaves the SX-P01DAB with a reasonably flexible collection of inputs, which are in turn usefully complemented by a set of sturdy speaker terminals and a single pre-out for connecting a subwoofer.

The final part of the system is the SP01 speakers, which are optional but have been specifically designed to complement the electronics. These make use of a high-strength glass fibre mid bass driver that has seen use elsewhere in the Pioneer line up and a 25mm soft dome tweeter. A rear bass port is used to augment the low end and Pioneer claims that the maximum power handling is – conveniently enough – the maximum output of the amplifier. Finished in an attractive gloss black, the SP01 looks smart enough, although the effect is slightly undermined by Pioneer's decision to mount the grille lugs on the speaker front so although there are no holes, there are four very visible metal pins instead.

The build quality and design of the electronics is good, though. Pioneer's latest design aesthetic is not exactly the most striking around, but it is certainly handsome albeit in a slightly conventional way. It has additional advantages in that both units have separate buttons for most major

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Pioneer X-P01DAB System

ORIGIN
Japan/Malaysia

TYPE
CD player, stereo receiver and speakers

WEIGHT
Receiver: 4.1kg
CD player: 3.1kg
Speakers: 2 x 4.3kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
Receiver: 285 x 88 x 287mm
CD player: 285 x 88 x 257mm
Speakers: 156 x 266 x 258mm

FEATURES
• CD with 32/192kHz-capable DAC
• RCA output
• USB input
• 2 x 75W stereo receiver

DISTRIBUTOR
Pioneer UK

TELEPHONE
01753 789789

WEBSITE
pioneer.eu/uk

functions and this means that they are not only extremely easy to use, but don't require you to navigate through a few dozen menus to select different inputs. The casework is all metal and feels well assembled with negligible panel gaps and some solid-feeling controls.

The effect is slightly undermined by the remote control, however. The unit itself is a somewhat insubstantial plastic affair with dozens of very similar looking buttons that are identified only by a fairly small legend beneath each one. Stranger still is the decision by Pioneer to not fit an IR receiver to the CD player. Therefore, to control the PD-P01 you need to attach an umbilical cable between the rear panels of the two units. Frustratingly, this is sufficiently short that efforts to separate them by any distance will be very tricky indeed. As the two units are sold together, it is reasonable to assume they will be used together, but Pioneer has rather forced your hand in this regard.

Sound quality

Sonically there is more to like about this trio of components. The full-width relatives of the P1 electronics demonstrate some likeable performance traits and it should not be too surprising that this transfers to the smaller units. The most consistent impression the system gives is that it manages to sound involving and engaging across a wide variety of music. Pioneer is getting results out of Class D amplification that manages to go beyond you thinking "that's good for a Class D amp" to the rather more measured "that's a good amp full stop." The only slightly curious aspect of the Pioneer's performance is how pronounced the 'Direct' function is

when selected. The performance improves markedly and I'd recommend using it all the time.

With the Direct button selected, the Pioneer system manages to sound encouragingly natural and vivid without being overblown or forced and this makes it both easy and pleasurable to listen to for long periods. With Fink's *Perfect Darkness* the Pioneer holds vocals between the speakers and gives them a richness

The system manages to sound involving and engaging across a variety of music

and realism that is a cut above many competing lifestyle offerings. The partnering instruments are arranged in a believable soundstage and benefit from the same welcome sense of life and vitality the Pioneer demonstrates with vocals.

The timing is also impressive. With the faster and more aggressive *Delta Machine* by Depeche Mode, the Pioneer feels agile and on top of the rhythm. There is a speed to the way that it starts and stops that means it manages to sound fun in a way that much of the competition doesn't.

It isn't perfect, though. The SP01 speakers have surprisingly impressive low-end extension for such small designs, but this seems to have been partly bought at the expense of the lower midrange, which can seem a little recessed by comparison. Swapping them for a pair of Paradigm Mini Monitors highlights this lack of energy, although it also robs the electronics of some of their speed and agility in the process.

The tonal balance of the Pioneer is extremely consistent across the CD player and the digital inputs of the SX-P01DAB. With a Cambridge Audio iD100 dock connected via the coaxial input and some AAC lossless files provided by an iPhone 4, the digital inputs reveal themselves to be far more than a mere afterthought and should be a useful addition. The internal tuner proves effective enough, although the Pioneer can do little to disguise the rather grim sound of MPEG2 DAB in the UK, but at least it is ready to go if we ever upgrade to DAB+.

The performance with DAB does highlight that perhaps the biggest missed opportunity is that it uses CD as the partnering source rather than adapting one of the network audio players for the task, which would have given the option of internet radio and app control. Whether one will be made available at a later date in this smaller form factor is unclear at this point, but it would broaden the appeal of this capable receiver quite considerably.

As CD players go, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the PD-P01, but it does represent a format on the wane. Some customers would potentially benefit from being able to buy the receiver on its own as well.

Conclusion

As it is, the Pioneer manages to do an awful lot right and this is a very likeable addition to its stereo range. The smaller size does not seem to have affected the performance of the electronics and the speakers complement them extremely well. It represents a credible competitor to some full-size designs and this gives it considerable appeal. The speakers are slightly more of an acquired taste, but their speed and energy coupled with their handsome looks makes them worth considering as partners. If you're looking for a capable compact system, this is a definite contender ●

Hi-Fi Choice

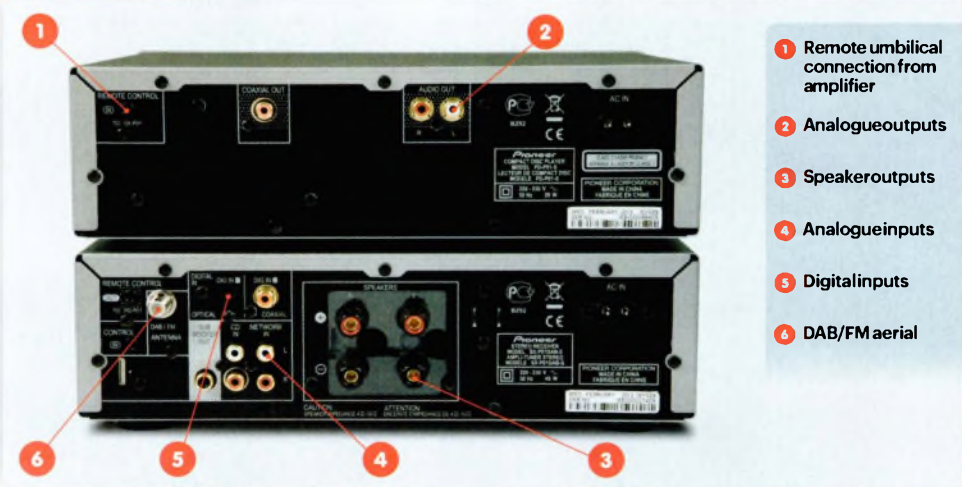
OUR VERDICT

<p>SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★</p> <p>VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★</p> <p>BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★</p> <p>FEATURES ★★★★★</p>	<p>LIKE: Natural lively sound; excellent build; useful range of inputs</p> <p>DISLIKE: Flimsy remote; curious control interface; lack of lower midband energy</p> <p>WE SAY: A lively and engrossing performance and a useful feature set</p>
--	--

OVERALL

★★★★★

CONNECTIONS



Solid build quality and good looks make this diddy system worth a look

Listen

EXCLUSIVE EVENING EVENT

Thurs 12 July 5-9pm

Join us

P.J

Hi-Fi • Home Cinema
Automated Solutions

3 Bridge Street, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 4RY
Tel: 01483 504801 or 01483 304756

- FIRST UK PLAY of the brand new Chord Electronics DSX1000 Digital Streamer
- Full Chord Sarum REFERENCE cable range on demonstration, including the NEW Sarum USB
- Demonstration of Chord Electronics TOP REFERENCE SYSTEM
- PRIZE DRAW and special offers EXCLUSIVELY available on the night
- FREE entry - limited space - register your attendance via:

chordevent@pjhifi.co.uk

THE
CHORD[™]
COMPANY

CHORD

Chord Electronics Ltd



www.pjhifi.co.uk

Dual in the crown

Chord's moving coil cartridge phono preamp is put under the microscope as **Neville Roberts** takes it for a spin

Bijou styling and quality finishes are just some of key elements of the expanding Chordette range of mini hi-fi components from Chord Electronics. The high-grade aluminium finish of its Dual phono stage fits perfectly with the brand's ethos, and the preamplifier has been designed to provide a high level of amplification and frequency shaping required to match the low-level output from moving coil cartridges. It features selectable input impedance and gain options that allow for the correct matching of the cartridge, which is something that is often overlooked with other designs. Moving coil cartridges are available in a wide range of output levels, so having the ability to adjust the gain of the phono stage is very important.

The internal circuitry, apart from applying the appropriate RIAA equalisation, also incorporates a Rausch slope filter to remove low-frequency rumble if required. Input loading and gain are selectable by a row of switches on the front of the unit and cover the range from 30ohms – 47,000ohms, 50pF – 200pF and gain from 60dB to 75dB.

A particular feature of the Dual is that it incorporates an onboard A/D

converter with a USB output to enable any vinyl recording to be archived to a PC or Mac, thus preserving a digital copy. The ADC supports 16-bit, 44/48kHz, which will offer CD-quality digital audio. The optical TOSLink output also provides a digital monitor facility to enable playback of any recorded material stored on the computer via an external digital-to-analogue converter. This allows monitoring of the recording without the limitations inherent in the onboard sound hardware within the computer system. This is a nice touch as the sound quality from most PC audio stages leaves a lot to be desired.

The Dual is hand-built in Kent. Its size allows it to be located behind the main amplifier and it's powered from a supplied 12V 0.6A 'wall-wart' switched-mode power supply.

Connection to your record deck is via the gold-plated RCA phono sockets and the essential earth binding post for the flying earth lead from the deck. From the unit, you connect to a suitable input of your amplifier via another pair of RCA sockets. Note that if your amplifier already has a phono input, this should not be used as it will route the signal through internal RIAA equalisation

and additional amplification stages. This would not be a good idea, as this is already carried out by the Dual phono stage and you'd be doing it twice! The output delivered by the Dual is a standard line-level output and should be connected to any spare amplifier input.

Sound quality

I experience no difficulty in setting up the Dual to match my Kiseki Blue moving coil cartridge in terms of impedance matching, capacitance loading and amplifier gain using the row of switches on the front panel. I then connect the output to a spare input on my amplifier. During a lengthy audition the Dual produces very lively and comfortable musical performances. My Decca recording of Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 5* played by Radu Lupu and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra offers a full and open performance.

Vocals come through well on my Sheffield Labs Direct to Disc recording of *I've Got The Music In Me* with Thelma Houston singing. Her voice sounds rich and clear, but it seems to be located among the other musicians, rather than being out in front as I am accustomed to with this particular recording.

Connecting the Dual to my PC via the USB interface (no additional drivers are required) supports the recording of records as 16/44 WAV files. I copy the resultant files onto my Squeezebox Touch and, although the result is not quite up to direct LP playback, it is nevertheless a very acceptable copy. This method of digitising LPs is certainly as good as any other method I have tried using.

All in all then, the Chordette Dual performs admirably well and provides an incredibly sophisticated performance. It is compatible with a wide range of cartridges and makes the process of digitising LPs an absolute breeze ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Moving coil cartridge preamplifier

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Phono preamp with A/D converter and USB output

WEIGHT
400g

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
160 x 70 x 40mm

FEATURES
● RCA Phono input and output
● USB (B type) output
● Optical TOSLink monitor output
● Switchable gain and cartridge loading

DISTRIBUTOR
Chord Electronics

TELEPHONE
01622 721444

WEBSITE
chordelectronics.co.uk



If the aluminium finish is not to your liking you can easily hide the Dual behind your amplifier



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

LIKE: Lively and comfortable musical performances

DISLIKE: Vocals are a little recessed; front panel appearance

WE SAY: A superb performer that is compatible with lots of cartridges and has excellent features

OVERALL



Billy Vee

SOUND • SYSTEMS

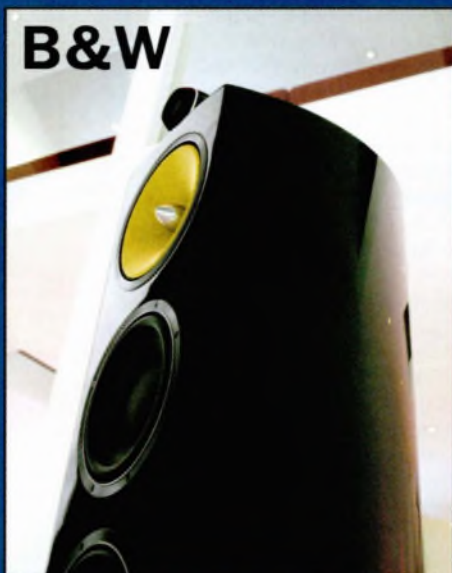
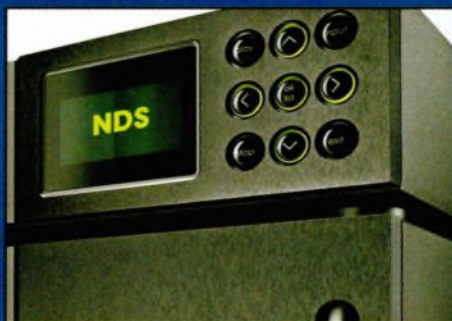
0208 318 5755

248 Lee High Road
Lewisham, London, SE13 5PL
billyvee.co.uk : info@billyvee.co.uk

Where technology & good music meet



LINN Akubarik



B&W



ProAc



Arcam A19



UnitiServe SSD



KANDID



PMC



SONOS



SENNHEISER
HD 800

Arcam, B&W, Denon, Linn, Naim, PMC, ProAc, Quad, Rega, Rotel, Sonos, Spendor, Sennheiser

Music Maestro?

The AVA Media Maestro 50 is more of a lifestyle amp than an audiophile choice, **Patrick Cleasby** sees how it fares

AVA Media's main line of business has been a range of ripping servers up to this point, but in an interesting diversion it has just launched a range of very small footprint digital stereo amplifiers. Its publicity material highlights the use it is going for, emphasising the intention for these devices to be paired with lifestyle-ish products from the likes of Apple and particularly Sonos. The example reviewed here is the Maestro 50, but there is also a 50S variant that squeezes (presumably) the same content into a conveniently small Sonos-shaped form factor, and more powerful alternatives with options for USB input.

It's an interesting single-use concept – AVA Media is basically saying that if you have a machine equipped with a digital output (anything from a computer to a PS3, from a streamer to an Airport Express), it can be hooked up to one of these and a pair of speakers and away you go.

And effectively that really means just the one machine. Although the Maestro 50 has two digital inputs (and that's all) it's an either/or deal between the coaxial phono and TOSLINK options – there is a little input selector at the rear of the tiny device which needs to be flipped, and

is rather awkwardly positioned if you want to dual-use it.

So while you get the ultimate in convenience and simplicity, there are some downsides. The Maestro is intended to be partnered with equipment that has variable digital output. While there is a small pop-in/pop-out volume control on the front of the box there is no remote control.

For AVA (and for me) the obvious application for this machine is under a (second) TV setup. So, I get it and its IEC cable out of the box, (the only other inclusions are some basic banana plugs and their screwdriver and a 3.5mm TOSLINK adapter to enable AVA's planned Airport Express usage with a standard TOSLINK connector), hook it up via TOSLINK to a YouView box in my second room and give it a go for TV usage first. I am opting to simply connect the Maestro to a pair of KEF XQ30's using The Chord Company's excellent Rumour 2 cable.

Sound quality

Happily, I am up and going straight away – the LED on the front of the attractive black anodised solid aluminium casing simply goes fixed on when it sees a digital signal and flashes (and times out after two minutes) if it doesn't. It has a

DETAILS

PRODUCT
AVA Media
Maestro 50

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Class D amplifier

WEIGHT
1.2kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
177 x 42 x 117mm

FEATURES
● Switchable
coaxial and optical
digital inputs
● Optional
subwoofer output

DISTRIBUTOR
AVA Media

TELEPHONE
0161 4023264

WEBSITE
pureaudiostream.
com

reportedly very low (1W) power draw when it is in standby mode, and returns to action as soon as a signal is detected again.

Regrettably the default mode for YouView PVR volume control is that the digital out is fixed, which means that I can't control volume via the player as AVA intends. With the physical volume control set on maximum, the TV sound is just (and only just, mind) beyond the level of comfortable listening – indicating that the claimed 50W rating of the amp is a touch over generous. There is enough oomph for an enjoyable TV watch however, as long as you're not a loud action fan. If you are, there is the option of using the mono phono subwoofer output to enable a 2.1 setup – ideal for the TV application.

The real revelation comes when I move to a high-quality music source. I attach a Squeezebox Touch with an upgraded power supply in place of the YouView box and run some 24-bit material from my collection and the result is a very clear and detailed (if a

The real revelation comes when I move to a high-quality music source

bit tame) presentation of the likes of the Rod Stewart HDTracks downloads and some Porcupine Tree DVD-Audio rips. The Maestro is good enough to make me wish the 24/44.1 of Johnny Marr's album was less compressed and of a higher resolution.

It is a very pleasant surprise just how pleasing the tonal characteristics of the Maestro 50 are – particularly with reasonably well-mastered 24-bit material. If you're at all interested in a minimal Squeezebox or Sonos playout setup, it's worth considering the comparable £229 spend (excluding speakers) to achieve it ●

Looking for an amplifier with a super small footprint? Look no further



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

LIKE: Clean and tidy sound, especially with high-resolution music

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

DISLIKE: A little underpowered, particularly with fixed output digital sources

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

WE SAY: There may be applications in which you could put this tiny amplifier to good use

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

Lets talk Hi-Fi!

Listening to Music – the Benefits

There have been many studies carried out over the years that have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. It is an activity that is intrinsic to all cultures and is one of the few that involves using the whole brain. Listening to music is now often used for various therapeutic purposes because it is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain. However, music can also be irritating if it's too loud or distorted, or if it distracts from other activities we are involved in. Most of the studies have been carried out using a reasonably good quality of musical reproduction. Quite remarkably, many people today and probably a majority of teens and late teens, are listening to a considerably lower quality level of music than their peers back in the 1970's. Back then a basic hi-fi system, often consisting of just a turntable, amplifier and a pair of speakers, was a 'must have'. Students going off to university would make it a priority to set themselves up with a decent hi-fi system – and the quality was, in retrospect, surprisingly good.

Quality vs Quantity

How different it is today where advances in technology have driven the desire for convenience and quantity at the considerable expense of quality.

For many young people especially, the iPod, MP3 player or mobile telephone, connected to a pair of in-ear headphones, is their primary source of listening to music. The problem with this is that low-grade reproduced music is not going to deliver any significant beneficial outcomes for the listener. Probably the opposite will be true.

Low-grade music in this context is the result of two main factors, a) the delivery system (the hardware) and b) the source material (the 'music'). Although the amplification section of the mobile device is a technological wonder, it's not hi-fi! Nor are in-ear headphones. They can't hold a candle to the stereo-typical system from the 1970's. As far as the source material is concerned, it's being over-generous to call it music if it's a typical MP3 or AAC (the iTunes default format) download. These are both highly compressed formats with the most popular download speed of 128 kbps being 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, for example, an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area.

It is very poor quality made louder and this even affects the type of music listened to. 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, all the complexities of the music are lost, and the recordings are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

Future of Recorded Music

If convenience has trumped quality for many people, we must ask what the future prospects are of maintaining high quality music recordings. Fortunately audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, continue to drive the demand for quality because there are some wonderful hi-end systems available and being sold today. 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 pre-broadband and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Even iPods, if loaded with full resolution tracks, can deliver acceptable results through a good system. The trade-off is a smaller selection of stored music. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will become the norm as the wider public becomes aware of the tremendous quality benefit.

Audiophiles and Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

Hi-fi connoisseurs and audiophiles are very important to the music industry.

By their nature, they 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 them, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry.

Specialist Dealers

Specialist hi-fi retailers also come into the above category because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These specialist retailers also perform another very important function because, without them, hi-fi manufacturers would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits of different brands for potential customers - a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs 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 (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

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.

They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience.

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



Listed below is our selection of THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK

They have been chosen 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.

SOUTH

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

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
 216 Moulsham Street.
 t: 01245 265245
 www.rayleighhifi.com

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

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

Norwich
MARTINS HI-FI
 85-91 Ber Street.
 t: 01603 627134
 www.martinshifi.co.uk

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NORTH
Cheadle
THE AUDIO WORKS
 14 Stockport Road.
 t: 0161 428 7887
 www.theaudioworks.co.uk

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

Hull
THE AUDIO ROOM
 Savile Street, Hull
 t: 01482 891375
 www.theaudiroom.co.uk

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

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



STAR QUALITIES

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



Reference standard

This Digital Media Bridge is a prime example of audiophile engineering, but how does it sound? **Malcolm Steward** investigates

The Audio Research Reference DAC is a veritable high-end archetype: it features overkill engineering, uses valves, weighs a ton and has grab handles. The DAC is also referred to as a Digital Media Bridge: that is a high-falutin' sobriquet that almost explains and justifies its price tag.

The Reference DAC truly deserves the moniker "Digital Media Bridge" and not just because it has a volume control and so can act as a pre-

amplifier. The DAC offers seven connections on the rear and one on the fascia for USB memory sticks. The seven rear connections are USB2.0 HS, S/PDIF through RCA and BNC, AES/EBU, Toslink, Ethernet, iPod, and USB. One would certainly be hard pushed to find a domestic digital connection that was not covered by the Reference DAC, which up-samples 44.1kHz (CD-quality) and 48kHz sources to 176.4kHz or 192kHz.

For the most part of this review I will use the Reference DAC in its

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Audio Research
Reference DAC

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
DAC/digital pre-amp/media bridge

WEIGHT
14.6kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
480 x 178 x 394mm

FEATURES
• UPnP streamer
• Wired and Wireless LAN connections
• Output impedance: 600ohms balanced
• Digital sample rates: 44.1kHz to 192kHz wired and 96kHz wireless

DISTRIBUTOR
Absolute Sounds

TELEPHONE
0208 971 3909

WEBSITE
absolutesounds.com

UPnP streamer and pre-amp capacity exploiting its compatibility with my Asset/Twoonky equipped NAS set-up and its ability to be controlled with an Apple iOS device – even though it comes with a perfectly usable remote and a 3.5in TFT fascia display. I am connecting it to the Reference 75 power amplifier with Transparent MusicLink Super XLR balanced interconnects.

Normally one has to fit the valves into any Audio Research equipment but the DAC and Reference 75 were shipped to me ready to play. Did I not mention the valves, or vacuum tubes as the former-colonials prefer to call them? Throughout its 40-year history, Audio Research has favoured both tubes and Class A amplifier configurations, neither of which are exactly environmentally-friendly, but the likelihood of anything from AR turning up in a landfill site is extremely remote.

I am using Neat loudspeakers throughout my testing of the Audio Research system: my reference Ultimatum XL10 and the much smaller Petite SX are also both being driven by the Reference 75.



Vinicius Cantuária, *Lgrimas Mexicanas* subtly but convincingly demonstrates the authority with which the system handles low frequencies. The sound is neither warm nor euphonic or overblown: it simply has credible substance and authority – a wholly desirable feature.

The next rip is also from Frisell's album, *East/West*. It's his take on the Marvin Gaye classic, *I Heard it Through the Grapevine*. There is no background noise whatsoever so low-level detail leaps out enthusiastically from this live recording. The supremely transparent replay of this track defines the terms detail and tonal colour: every instrument is gloriously etched and natural in its sound and presentation. There is also a beautifully crafted soundstage, with Frisell playing to the right in front of the drums and the bass guitar standing forward to the left. Each instrument is painstakingly detailed – dynamically as well as in terms of note shape and space – creating the overall sound of an entirely believable ensemble. The presentation is among the most plausible I have experienced: thoroughly involving, wholly believable, and musically inviting. Unlike some high-end set-ups I have come across, the music is completely coherent and cohesive: it does not suffer from exaggerated dynamics or detail – although genuine dynamics have authentic drama and impact. Perhaps what impresses the most is the vivid tonal colour of the guitar and the variety of sounds the instrument produces, along with the power and vibrant texture of the bass and drums. Equally impressive is the outstanding ability to convey timing nuances and the feel and groove the players inject into the performance.

William Carter playing early works of Fernando Sor shows that the Reference DAC can be equally as

scrupulous when rendering the sumptuous texture of a solo baroque guitar and the space around it, in Linn Records 24/192 recording of the piece. The instrument virtually comes alive in the space between the Neat XL10s in front of me. Many DACs have rendered the sound of this challenging instrument as rather flat, lifeless and devoid of character, but the AR brings out its full body resonance and the vibrant vitality of its strings.

The ability to reproduce female voices accurately is another benchmark at which all high-end equipment needs to excel and the Reference DAC certainly doesn't disappoint. Its ability to act as a USB player reminds me of the Bryston BDP-1, which offers the same facility... and absolutely nothing else. When this – minor as far as I am concerned – facility is integrated, as it is in the Audio Research, it makes far more sense to me and I use it to test a memory stick collection of tracks.

On this stick, Mary Coughlan singing the Joy Division classic, *Love Will Tear Us Apart*, to the

Perhaps what impresses the most is the vivid tonal colour of the guitar

accompaniment of just an acoustic piano, is a performance I had witnessed intimately only a week or so before and been so moved that I bought a CD of another live Coughlan performance of the song there and then as a memento. The Reference DAC demonstrates all the communication and unforced fluidity I expected from the ripped CD and renders the performance with the same detail, drama, emotion and musicality that I had witnessed only a ▶

Sound quality

The sound of the Reference DAC/75 has a delightful warmth and harmonic completeness that is unlike the sound of most hi-fi, which seems painfully thin and artificial by comparison. It even renders jazz guitarist, Bill Frisell's guitar harmonics on *Pipe Down* (from the album *East/West*) with a genuinely rich and complex tonality. The track *Mi Declaracion* from his album with

The do-it-all Digital Media Bridge even comes with grab handles

CONNECTIONS



- 1 RCA digital input
- 2 XLR analogue output
- 3 RCA analogue output
- 4 12V remote control trigger output
- 5 Ethernet port
- 6 BNC digital input

Q&A

David Gordon

AR Corp managing director of sales



MS: Explain the guiding philosophy behind the Reference DAC?

DG: We wanted it to be a remarkably flexible digital device, acting as a true digital media bridge that will provide great connectivity and flexibility for the ever-growing formats. In addition to standard digital inputs, it had to work in a UPnP/DLNA network, acting as a wired or wireless streaming media renderer, with music servers and a vTuner for internet radio.

How would you characterise the sound of the Reference DAC?

It uses the same vacuum-tube analog section as our other Reference components, so it maintains the same sonic standards established by the Reference 5SE and Reference Phono 2SE. Some of those attributes include exceptional resolution of detail coupled with a very fine grain structure, great dynamic impact and a natural musical flow.

What sort of customer would you say that it is aimed at?

First and foremost, someone looking for the most accurate and involving musical reproduction from a digital source. That could be someone with a single source like a CD transport (or a PC), or a person using a media server who wants to stream his music, or someone who wants the flexibility to allow other members of the household to play their own music from a device like an iPhone. That person can now use an iPad or Android app to remotely select music and control the Reference DAC.

Which power amplifier and speakers would be a good match?

We designed the Reference DAC to work with virtually any power amplifier and speaker combination, not just our own. Many people will pair it with one of our Reference amplifiers, but in our facilities we also use it with our DS-series solid-state amplifiers and our marketing manager is using it with a DS225. We love the way the Reference DAC sounds with a variety of electronics and speakers, modest to extravagant, because the inherent quality is apparent with each one.

IN SIGHT



- 1 Proprietary coupling capacitors
- 2 USB board mounted to the digital board
- 3 High voltage power supply regulator tube
- 4 Toroid transformer for all low voltage and digital circuits
- 5 High voltage capacitor storage bank
- 6 Four 6H30 tubes in Class-A triode analogue section

week or so before in a packed 100-seater venue.

Quite surprisingly, Mary Coughlan's Live album, *The Whole Affair*, and the song *You Go to My Head*, recorded with a small band, sounds not unlike an audiophile demonstration disc. Each instrument is allocated its own distinct position and acoustic space within an impressively wide and deep soundstage. It is easy to listen to any of the instruments within the predominantly acoustic line-up on songs such as *A Thrill's A Thrill*, and to follow them in meticulous detail such as the levels of separation and dynamic gradation. You can, for example, follow the most subtle of quietly played cymbal patterns even while the saxophone player is dishing it out in front with near reckless abandon. The most important element, though, is Coughlan's soulful voice, which the AR combination effortlessly renders with phenomenal sensitivity and realism. Its sheer power and dynamic contrast matches that of the live performance I had recently witnessed in a venue compact enough for her, truthfully, not to require her PA system.

The Nils Lofgren Band Live album's *Girl In Motion*, meanwhile, shows that the AR's abilities with emotional content are not restricted solely to female artists nor just to vocals. It reveals the full measure of expression Lofgren appears to wrest from the strings and body of his Stratocaster.

The track *Bass & Drum Intro* on the album is genuine audiophile pleasure and its sole purpose appears to be that it demonstrates the sonic spectacularity of any equipment through which it is played.

Conclusion

The Reference DAC and 75 amplifier emerge triumphantly with no deficiencies in any respect; their abilities in terms of masterly handling of frequency extremes, tonal colour, leading edges, and dynamics are absolutely beyond reproach.

Ultimately the DAC emerges as a magnificent component in terms of its performance and great value in terms of what it offers for your money.

Its musical performance is little short of sublime and as a product it is not just a single unit: it is, and I will try not to miss a single category; a multiple input DAC, a network streamer, an internet radio, a memory stick player, a pre-amplifier and an iPod dock.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Reference DAC's display panel, provides me with all the functionality I need and its operation is, to me at least, entirely intuitive. All round then, the Audio Research Reference DAC is an absolute winner, no matter which angle you approach it from ●



To my knowledge, there's no component that compares to the AR, so I had to use a collection of units - predominantly a streamer and a DAC with volume control. I chose units from Naim Audio, acknowledged as scrupulously musical performers excelling at the emotional aspects of performances. The Reference DAC delivers extraordinarily close presentations, full of passion, but also offers qualities expected of high-end valve-hybrid equipment, in particular a delicate, refined purity of tone along with startling dynamics. It offers a winning presentation: close to Naim's musicality along with superb high-end poise and sonic finesse.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Performance and transparency is exemplary

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: No choice of interconnects other than XLR

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Fabulous components that might benefit by being separated into their constituent parts

FEATURES



OVERALL



Raidho acoustics

SMALL IS **more**

And more is what you get, when you listen to the new Raidho D-series.

Listening to the three new D speakers, you experience that each speaker adds to performance, giving more and more sound and feel for each step you go.

Many experts have tried to describe the D1 performance, but even they have to admit that words are not enough - you just have to have the experience.

So if you are in the market for something quite special, please go to our home page and find the nearest dealer who will be glad to arrange a demonstration.

Find a dealer list at www.raidho.dk



C-1.1



C-1.1



C-1.1
C-4.1



C-1.1



D-1

www.raidho.dk

Russ Andrews® SUMMER SALE

ON NOW!

Order online now at www.russandrews.com/sale
or call 01539 797300 to place your order

25% OFF Russ Andrews Signature PowerKord™

Our best PowerKord™ with 24 Hyper-pure copper conductors and our most advanced woven cable geometry. A perfect partner for mid-to-high-end systems and beyond.

1m Signature PowerKord™
with W350i-Ag IEC

Was £399 SAVE £99.75
Now ONLY £299.25

Other lengths available

Plus...
Deep Cryogenically
Treat this cable and
SAVE 25%



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



Aug '10
Ultimate Guide
to Systems

Plus...
Spend £150 or over
in the Sale and claim one set of 3
Half Price
Jumbo Cone Feet
Save £15.58!

Plus...
Spend £300 or over
in the Sale and claim one
Half Price
Clarity Mains
Save £57!



30% OFF

Kimber Silver Streak
interconnect

0.5m pair

Was £210 SAVE £63
Now ONLY £147

Other lengths available

AT LEAST
10% OFF
Russ Andrews
& KIMBER cables
& accessories



FREE
MegaClamp
Upgrade

FREE MegaClamp
fitted when you buy the MiniPurifier

Mini Purifier with MegaClamp mains filter

Was £271 Save £120
Now ONLY £151



Add
Kimber USB
cable for only
£10

2m Kimber USB cable for £10
when you buy the
Meridian Explorer (£249)

Pack price ONLY £259



upto
20% OFF

RINGMAT

LP Blue Statmat & Ringcap

Was £57.60 Save £11.52
Pack price ONLY £46.08



SAVE
£100

M2 Tech Young DAC

Was £950 Save £100
Now ONLY £850

Order NOW at www.russandrews.com/sale

or call UK Order Line 01539 797300

Terms & Conditions apply

Request a SALE
CATALOGUE...



- 60 Day Home Trial with Money Back Guarantee
- Free UK mainland Delivery (orders over £100)
- Upgrade Scheme
- Lifetime Guarantee



Russ Andrews Accessories Ltd, 2b Moreland Court,
Westmorland Business Park, Shap Road, Kendal, LA9 6NS, UK.
Tel: +44 (0)1539 797300 Email: info@russandrews.com

Exclusive UK Retailer for



SALE ENDS
10th July '13

Sponsored by


 Russ Andrew
Solutions for better music & movies

Hi-fi choices

Email us at letters@hifichoice.co.uk or write to:
**Hi-Fi Choice Letters, AVTech Media Ltd, Hadlow House,
9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG**

Your letters
may be edited before
publication and
we cannot enter
into personal
correspondence

THIS MONTH:



ED SELLEY
EXPERTISE: REVIEWER

FOR THE BEST part of 10 years, Ed was developing and supporting products from some of the biggest names in audio. He enjoys blogging about his favourite tunes too.



PATRICK CLEASBY
EXPERTISE: TECH GEEK

PATRICK WORKS IN a high level technical support role in the broadcast industry, when not fiddling with his networked music collection and a rapidly expanding shelf of vinyl LPs.



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: REVIEWER

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.



JIMMY HUGHES
EXPERTISE: REVIEWER

ANYONE WITH A record collection as large as Jimmy's can't be all bad. Oh, and he's reviewed a breathtaking number of products over the years and is still standing!

Computer love

I thought that Dave Houghton's letter in the May 2013 edition, regarding the possible demise of the Compact Disc, was well reasoned. I cannot see the CD disappearing in the near future either. But a CD is just another form of storage similar to a hard disk that holds digital files for conversion to actual music by a DAC. A DAC is in fact a computer in its own right. It inputs audio digital data, processes it and outputs it as an analogue electronic representation of the sound wave. 'Garbage In, Garbage Out' or 'GIGO' could not be more apt, but conversely 'Honey In, Honey Out' is possible, too.

It makes no difference what media the digital information is held on, so it was entirely predictable that CD sales would fall when the public has more access to computers and the internet. Sales of digital music remains buoyant, however.

I have converted all of my CDs to WAV files for playing via a laptop or streamer, but I am keeping my CD collection as the ultimate failsafe. I have downloaded umpteen albums from the likes of HDTracks and Spotify etc.

All of these downloads have been converted to CDs for playing in the car. Likewise, I have digitised some old LPs and audio cassettes that cannot easily be replaced and each of them was burnt onto a shiny disk. Any new

LP is given the same treatment. This means that all of my music is stored either on a manufactured CD or one that I have produced myself. Therefore, the official figures for the demise of the medium can be misleading if everybody else is doing the same.

Quite often I like to play a CD for its own sake and browse the

My household has got nine devices that can play a CD

album art and information, just like with an LP.

My household has got nine devices that can play a CD. We have only got two cassette players and one working turntable. Why not count yours? Perhaps, these figures reflect the real importance and versatility of our shiny friend. A well-mastered CD delivers genuine hi-fi quality music to all corners of a house or car. And now I can hear John Fahey's wonderful acoustic guitar playing anywhere – even from a 'cloud' – but derived

from the digits on a plastic disk or a hard drive. Isn't this really what hi-fi is all about?

So, Mr Houghton, I think that you have invested well in a new CD player, but why not try the extra versatility that a laptop or media player and their digits can offer as well?

Trevor Morgan

DP: A thoroughly well reasoned letter Trevor! I've just done a quick internal audit of my music playing devices and I've got three turntables, three CD players, one universal DVD/SACD/Blu-ray player, nine cassette players, three MiniDisc machines, two open reels and one NAS drive – a big mix of the old and new, then!

PC: Let's not count iDevices, otherwise I'd be here all day! My current score is two turntables, two CD players, two universal machines, four streamers, four MiniDisc, one DAT, one cassette deck and one DCC player – plus more NAS and hard drives than you could shake a stick at! Versatility is the word, but I burn things to CD as little as possible.

ES: A quick tour of my house reveals two UPnP clients, two Blu-ray universals, two turntables, four CD players, a Minidisc player and a laserdisc player (someone has to). I can also report that the total number of albums I've purchased on CD in 2013 is zero – I wonder if I can do the whole year?

TJ: I dare not put it into numbers in case my wife is reading, but cassette decks, Minidisc recorders and CD players are each easily into double figures, with turntables bubbling just under this threshold. Computer audio devices remain at zero, where they will forever stay!

JMH: While I own two or three cassette decks, several open reel tape recorders, three or four turntables, and at least one tuner, I only actually use a single turntable and CD player. My main source is CD, but I also have a laptop dedicated to audio, with music (ripped from my own CDs) stored in iTunes. I hardly ever download music from the internet, but I do stream it via Spotify Premium. I use the laptop



ATL™

Advanced Transmission Line

fact.12®

Strength, sophistication & the perfect image



The **fact.12** is a product of PMC's passion for absolute sonic transparency. It delivers emotion and power while preserving clarity and dynamics at all levels, from whisper-quiet to performances you can literally feel.

With **ATL™** bass loading technology and its audiophile level controls for precise adjustment of high and low frequencies, **fact.12** guarantees a flawless sound in any listening environment and with a vast range of source equipment.

If you want to get even closer to the magic captured in the recording, **fact.12** is what you need.



T +44 (0) 870 4441044
sales@pmc-speakers.com



PMC®
www.pmc-speakers.com

with Classe's CP800 preamp, which has a USB input, and find the quality excellent. Since getting Spotify, I've cut back on buying CDs, but I've also discovered new recordings via Spotify that have led me to purchase the CD in question.

➤ Changing rooms

My system comprises of a Krell SA-350A CD player, Sugden A21 SE integrated amplifier, Tellurium Q Graphite interconnect, Tellurium Q Black interconnect, Isotek EVO 3 Sirius Mains Block, 3 Isotek EVO3 Power cables, Tellurium Q Black speaker cable and PMC FB1i loudspeakers. Last time I wrote, I had problems with 'bass bloom', which the suggested PMCs addressed almost completely. Now the sound still is too bright with too little midrange. I have moved the speakers close to the wall, which enhanced the midrange, but of course I then get more bass and bass bloom again. I still want a lot of detail, but more clarity/ warmth/midband rather than the high treble and bass.

I think the issue is that my flat is sparsely furnished with no carpets. When I roll out some carpets it sounds a lot better (but does not look very good and is not approved by the other half). So the question is if there is any other device that could address this?

Also I will now buy a Michell GyroDec and a cartridge. I already have an ANT Kora 3T Limited Edition MC, and a Michell Tecnoarm A. The question is what cartridge to buy? Last time I wrote you recommended a Lyra Dorian (as I want detail, detail, detail). However, I think that for



Q Acoustics' 2050is have a large and immersive sound, but aren't exactly tiny

➤ Lite partners

I am planning to replace my ageing separates system for the Naim UnitiLite all-in-one system, and would like a pair of compact floorstanders to partner it. What would you recommend I audition?

Kevin Goringe

DP: My thoughts would centre around the Q Acoustics 2050is (£440), which are exceptionally good floorstanders in a number of ways. They are efficient, have a very large and immersive sound, and are tonally smooth, too. They're also enjoyably musical and will sing with your new Naim. The only issue is that they may be just a little too big for you – I am not completely clear what you mean by "compact". The 2050is are compact in the sense that they're not as big as MartinLogans, but they still might be a tad too tall for your purposes, standing as they do at over 1m.

If this is the case, Monitor Audio's BX5 may be a little more domestically acceptable, some 15cm shorter. This £500 speaker is also very fine, with a slightly less physical, bass-intensive sound and a lovely delicate, sparkly treble, which betters the Q fractionally here, in my opinion. If you're looking to spend a bit more money than this, then I would suggest you go up a range and audition the RX6 (£800), which is one of the best sub £1,000 floorstanders in my view – it will give you the solidity and scale of the Q Acoustics with more detail and finesse.

ES: I'd be tempted to push the budget a little further and if your room can handle them, I'd look to the peerless Epos Epic 5 as a possibility, too. Neat's Motive SE2 is more money still but very compact indeed and the announcement of the Motive SX range at Munich might see your way to a bargain.

the amount of listening I will do on the turntable that is overkill, as I do not have that many LPs. Also our cleaning lady seems to be able to dent everything in my flat so I am not too keen to spend a lot on a cartridge, that I then have to replace. So what is the cheapest MC you would recommend? Would an Audio Technica AT-F7 be an option, or are there other cheaper alternatives than the Lyra?

One last question. I have sold my Wadia 170 iTransport as it does not work with iPhone 5. The question is what to do now to connect my iPhone etc, as I do not want to use a computer just yet. Do you know if there will be any iPhone 5 docks with digital out connection to a DAC?

If not, are there any Bluetooth docks that can be connected to the DAC in the Krell that could be of interest?

Paul Ejernklo

My flat is sparsely furnished with no carpets, so sound is just too bright

ES: The first thing to consider might be to look at some form of isolation for the speakers. Auralex does a vast range of room treatment items and this would be a good place to start. Moving coil carts doesn't really allow for removable styli (I'm sure history will record that one was made somewhere, but I can't remember what it is!). Something with a good Stylus guard at sensible money like the Ortofon range would be my recommendation in this instance. Sonically, detail retrieval will be good, too. The change to the Lightning connector has meant that iPod transports have somewhat died a death of late, but Arcam has been eyeing up a

useful gap in the market with the excellent rBlink (Bluetooth) that will connect to the Krell, check out the review on page 113.

DP: Vicoustic also makes some great room treatment products; many were in use at the recent Munich show. We hope to review some soon. The Audio Technica ATF7 is indeed one of the best 'budget' low output moving coils (Dynavector's DV10X5 is my fave high output MC), and this will give you a detailed and incisive sound for around £270.

PC: While the upward creep of quality in the apt-X codec should in theory make Bluetooth connection a lot better than it used to be in quality terms, I would still debate the wisdom in plumping for this method of getting the iPhone 5 to talk to your system. You don't mention whether you actively want to make use of the 24/96 abilities



Arcam's rBlink provides the perfect solution for iPhone 5 users. See the review on page 113

Box Design by Pro-Ject



DAC Box DS

The DAC Box DS allows you to bring your digital music to life. Whether you have a network streaming device, a CD Player or a computer loaded with your downloaded music; this innovative DAC can take it all and transport it to your hi-fi system with optimum fidelity.

£349.00 SRP

- Top-Grade D/A converter chip
- USB, optical and coaxial inputs
- 24bit/192kHz asynchronous USB streaming
- Display readout shows incoming bit depth
- 8 times oversampling design
- 2 selectable filter settings
- Premium Components

Box Design

Whether you want to add an iPod or computer music library to your existing Hi-Fi setup, or you're starting a main or secondary system from scratch, Box Design by Pro-Ject Audio Systems is a fantastic way for all music lovers to bring more high-quality audio into their lives.

Every Box Design product combines premium build-quality and exceptional sound with a small size and an attractive price...

STREAMERS - DACS - AMPLIFIERS - IPOD DOCKS - HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS - CD PLAYERS

Box Design by Pro-Ject Audio Systems
is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

Web: henleydesigns.co.uk | Telephone: 01235 511 166 | Email: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk

of the Krell, and if not I might suggest a simple Airport Express with optical out route, using Airplay to stream from the phone, although this limits your horizons to 16/44.1 resolution. If the main thing you want to feed it is iDevice material, this should suffice.

➤ **Platter Matter**

I have been listening to/collecting hi-fi/music for over 40 years and I know (from first hand) the difference between a Linn/Naim system and a high-end American system. My letter concerns the Origin Live Turntable mat. In a moment of madness I ordered one without hearing it on the strength of a money back option. My turntable is a *Michell GyroDec*, upgraded to Orb spec and fitted with a *Rega RB300*, again upgraded many years ago with an Origin live rewire. I have stuck with

the theory that the vinyl-to-vinyl interface worked, as espoused by *John Michell*, but I am sat here listening to *Van Morrison's Moondance* with the mat fitted and the difference is remarkable.

Andy Andrews

DP: I agree that the Origin Live Upgrade mat is one of the best value tweaks for turntables – along with the *Funk Firm Achromat* and the *SoundDeadSteel Isoplatmat*. In each case, these mats stabilise the LP-to-platter interface, so there is less room for sound-degrading resonances to interfere with the replay chain. While – in your case – the *Orbe* platter might be vinyl and your vinyl LP is of course vinyl, that doesn't mean the two different-sized bits of vinyl behave as one and the same. Despite the intervention of the *Orbe's*



excellent screw-down clamp, there is still potential for the LP to resonate slightly on top of the platter. And given that resonating slightly is what the groove does to the stylus, and that the cartridge can't discriminate between good resonances and bad, this results in a degraded, impure signal coming from your speakers.

So it's useful to think of the work of a good platter mat as

effectively 'bonding' the light, wobbly, non-flat LP surface to the heavy, fixed, flat-top surface of the platter to ensure an 'all of a piece', homogenous, resonance-free 'fit'.

As well as damping the interface between vinyl and platter, they also damp both the vinyl and the platter itself slightly, absorbing noise and vibration from the motor and plinth that's sent up into the record, and also airborne noise from the speakers that's sent down the record into the turntable. This is one reason why there are so many types, as some materials work better with some sorts of platter. The Origin Live mat happens to be a fine across-the-board product, which makes a difference on a great many types of platter.

I just can't make my mind up what floorstanding speaker to buy

➤ **Stand and deliver**

Hi guys – I just can't decide which floorstanding speaker to buy. I listened to some of them in different shops, in different environments and hooked to different amps and CD players so it is very hard for me to decide and I need your help. I have got a choice between the *Q Acoustics 2050i*, *Tannoy DC6t*, *B&W 683* and the *Monitor Audio RX6*. I am going to buy a *Yamaha AS500* stereo amp and I listen to modern jazz, rock, acoustic and electric guitar type of music such as *Fourplay* etc. I would be so grateful if you could suggest the best-sounding floorstander among them for this price range or any other ones.

Richard

ES: My personal preference would be the *Tannoy* in this instance, but the *Q Acoustics* is also a seriously capable product, too. They are far

➤ **Vinyl strikes back**

I have a system that is in transition between the old (*Exposure* amp separates 11, 12 and super 8; *LP12* with *Lingo*, *Cirkus*, *Ittok LV3* and *Ortofon Rondo Bronze*) and the relatively new (*Squeezebox Touch*, *Naim DAC* and *Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand* loudspeakers).

Although I previously owned a *Naim CD 5X*, I am finding with the DAC that for the first time my digital source outperforms the turntable and is my 'go to' preference: it creates a broader soundstage, projects vocals with more realism and has superior bass weight and articulation.

However, I am attached to my extensive collection of vinyl and interested in improving the sound. The phono stage in the *Exposure* preamp was well regarded at the time of its release, but I am curious to know what if anything I might gain by adding a separate phono stage: there appear to be a plethora of models at varying price points and I would welcome your advice on ones to consider.

I also intend to upgrade my amplifiers soon and to achieve significant improvement I believe this will require substantial expenditure on, eg *Cyrus X300* monoblocks or a *Naim 282/250* combination.

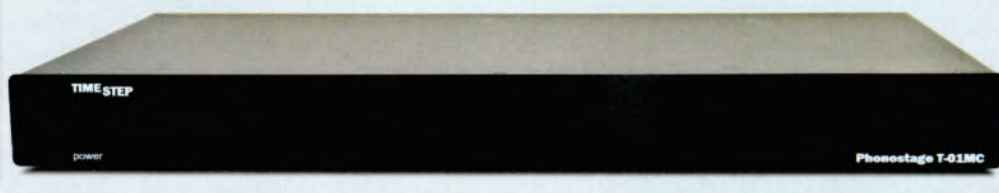
While the *VA* speakers were demoed with *Cyrus* amps, I can find little comment about their compatibility with *Naim* alternatives. Do you have any thoughts on this choice and what bearing might it have on phono stage selection?

Mark Howarth

The *Timestep T-01MC* costs around £1,000 and has a tight, lean sound to it

DP: Hi Mark, if you're in a position where your high-end vinyl is being upstaged by a mid-price digital source, then it is certainly time to start thinking about getting a new phono stage! Sadly however, you don't specify a budget, so I am going to assume it won't stretch to the sky, and that it's essentially about the least possible you can spend without getting a meaningful improvement to the good but ageing phono section inside your *Exposure* preamp. As such, I would be thinking in terms of the *ANT Audio Kora 3T Ltd* and *Timestep T-01MC*, both around £1,000. The former has a slightly richer, warmer, more three-dimensional sound, the latter is a little tighter and leaner. Both are excellent and the class of the field at this price. These phono stages should comfortably better the *Exposure's*, both in terms of noise (ie lower) and in giving greater focus and insight.

You might also like to upgrade your cartridge – to the likes of a *Lyra Delos* (£1,000) which is head and shoulders above most moving coils on sale, let alone the *Ortofon*. I realise it's a bit pricey, but after the phono stage the *Rondo* is what is holding your *LP12* back, I feel. I shouldn't think there would be any issues with the *Vienna Acoustics* speakers and *Naim* amplification, which is tonally smooth these days, but I would, of course, recommend an audition. If I were you, I'd sort my phono stage, then the cartridge, then the amps – proceed in this sequence and audition the changes at every stage at a good dealer.



M2 SERIES



Technology, Design & Emotion

The multi-award winning Caspian M2 Series of high-fidelity electronics from Roksan Audio are an engineering marvel. The Integrated Amplifier has been meticulously designed to ensure it uncovers even the most delicate detail and presents it majestically. The CD Player's decoupled laser mechanism, super precision master clock and multiple independent circuits create a seamless, harmonic musical experience that is second to none. The more recent addition of a two-channel stereo power amplifier completes the much-desired system by adding further control and musicality.

ROKSAN

Roksan Audio is exclusively distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.
Telephone: 01235 511 166 | Email: info@henleydesigns.co.uk | Web: www.henleydesigns.co.uk



Can the Tannoy DC6T sing with a Yamaha A-S500? A home demo is a good idea

from the most attractive speakers I have ever seen, but I would recommend trying the Mission MX series as well.

TJ: The answer here is to arrange a home demonstration; a good dealer should offer this service. The Yamaha AS500 is powerful and flexible so there should be no issues with sensitivity or matching, however it is impossible to nominate the 'best sounding' loudspeaker from your shortlist since room effects such as placement and your own preferences will always dominate.

➤ **Gratuitous plug**
I thought I would share my experience with HomePlug networking over mains with digital. My old system consisted of Linn LK separates and wanting to dip my toes into hard drive-stored music I got a Logitech Squeezebox and Spitfire Mk2 DAC with a QNAP network attached storage drive, kept in the spare bedroom and connected by HomePlugs.

I was quite happy with the sound produced, but then about 12 months ago I sold all these and bought a Linn Magic DS, keeping the QNAP upstairs. Last week my wife wanted to decorate the spare bedroom, so I moved the

QNAP downstairs and connected it to a Netgear switch, and the difference in sound for the better is amazing. Everything from voices to instruments is so much clearer with more depth and separation. I'm listening to my music now with more pleasure thanks to this accidental upgrade. So I would advise anyone to ditch HomePlugs as far music is concerned!

William Palmer

ES: I think this one will run and run to be honest. Given time and a better grasp of the science than I'm ever likely to have, I'm sure there is a matrix of distance to run, type of mains infrastructure and quality of the alternatives that would probably give us a much clearer idea of when HomePlugs, if not the 'best' are at least the 'least worst' option.

PC: Despite never having tried HomePlug technology I am not surprised by this finding – hi-fi network music guidelines should include 'ethernet connection only'. I have one room with direct connect ability and one with an Airport Express-based cheat, and I know which one sounds good enough for critical listening and which one doesn't. Brick walls, eh? Who'd have 'em?

➤ Heads up

I read with interest your recommendation of the Sennheiser RS 120 for David Carr in last month's *Letters*. As an employee of an overseas branch office of Sennheiser UK for the last six months, but a fan of Sennheiser headphones for over 20 years I feel I am in excellent position to offer my opinion. This is not as a PR exercise for my employer, but as a headphone fanatic and music lover who has access to the entire range of headphones that Sennheiser has to offer. So please don't take this email as 'Sennheiser' writing to you in an official capacity.

While I don't disagree with your recommendation of the RS 120, I do feel there are better options for someone who has been an audiophile for some time and for whom price is not important. My recommendation is the RS 220. In terms of connectivity it is unrivalled offering digital coax, digital optical and RCA inputs and outputs (thus enabling it to be looped). Its comfort is second to none in Sennheiser's wireless or wired range.

The stand-out factor is the sound quality. It delivers a quality that rivals many wired headphones at the same price. Wide sound stage, clear vocals, deep bass (not the deepest, but certainly very well extended), excellent separation, and all of this in a wireless package delivering uncompressed digital audio to your ears. Why do I tell you this? Simply because I urge you to listen to them. I have been a fan of Sennheiser for 20 years and these days as an employee I have access to all the range (frankly I am like a pig in 'brown stuff' as my mother would say), and my headphone of choice

at home, regardless of the source, is the RS 220.

Kevin Southam

DP: Thanks Kevin. I happen to concur with your advice that the RS 220 is a fine product, and one of the best wireless designs around.

In the interests of balance, I feel I must say that any wireless headphone has an uphill struggle in sonic terms compared with a wired design. The bad old days of hissy, chirping and buzzing are well and truly over (it's not much of an exaggeration to say that early wireless 'phones would pick up the cricket or the local taxi firm!), as these days a decent wireless

I feel there are better options for someone who is an audiophile

design like the Sennheiser is quiet and stable over a long range. But still the sound isn't equal to that possible from a top-notch conventional cabled design such as the HD650 – it's more 'processed' and less dynamic – so don't assume you can have your cake and eat it, so to speak! As ever, we'd suggest you try before you buy, so go and find a good dealer if you're thinking of buying headphones.

➤ Faded glory

My system was once the light of my life, but now it is sitting in the dark! Unlike me, it stopped working about a year and a half ago, but recent goings on in my personal life – not least large amounts of foreign travel – have meant that until very recently I hadn't had time to investigate

Though they have their uses, HomePlugs are arguably not ideal for music use



the fault. The result is that I am now using the iPod and my B&W Zeppelin that I bought for the kitchen as my main maker of music! The system comprises a Naim CD1 CD player, Michell Argo/Hera preamp, Michell Alecto monoblocks and KEF Reference 2 loudspeakers. Investigations suggest it's a fuse gone in the preamp, so it should be easy to fix.

Anyway, once I've got my system back on the planet, so to speak, where do I go from here? I am thinking along the lines of downsizing the loudspeakers to some leaner, more compact floorstanders and the KEFs do tend to overwhelm my room a bit and they're not quite as efficient as I'd have liked. I have up to £4,000 to spend – as you can see I've been saving up over a long period for this upgrade! Music tastes range from jazz to classical with a bit of light rock (Elton John etc) on the way. I like a spacious, open sort of sound that is light and smooth and musical; no head-banging needed thanks very much.

Anthony Verdeschi

DP: Wow, your system is a real blast from the past, and a popular one from the early nineties! Good to know you think you've identified the fault, Anthony, but as a matter of course, at this age it's a good idea to get all your electronics back to the factory for a service, as things like capacitors can begin to deteriorate as they age (I know the feeling). Not only will it help to improve reliability, it should also enhance the sound.

This done, it's time to start auditioning new speakers, and you'll find the breed has improved quite a lot in the last two decades. Generally, modern cone materials mean that they're more efficient and give a faster, more transparent sound. I'd suggest you hear the Spondor D7 (£3,495), which is an excellent mid-sized floorstander with a very open, easy and musical sound. Spend the balance on some top-quality cables; try auditioning Tellurium Q as a start point, as they're creamy and rich, which should complement your slightly dry digital source.



LETTER OF THE MONTH

MANTRA FOR A STATE OF MIND

The letters of Dave Houghton and Mike Beattie in your May issue strike a refreshing note of common sense when there appears to be more insanely expensive high-end equipment and "technological improvement" than at any time in the history of hi-fi. I have owned two-channel systems for over 40 years, but have no interest in hi-fi as such. The sole object of my investment has been in pursuit of listening at home, to sound that nearly approximates what I expect to hear at Covent Garden, Wigmore Hall and the Proms.

My present system consists of a Cyrus CD8se2, FM7 Tuner, Pre xpd, Mono x200, and B&W 704s. Voices and instruments hover effortlessly in the room, completely detached, or so it seems, from the speakers. There have been occasions when I have woken from sleep with music playing, and thought I was at a concert. I believe this tells me as much about my system as I need to know. In future I will concentrate my spending on well-recorded CDs and live performances, to hear sounds that no electronics can ever truly replicate.

Douglas Bateman

DP: Here is a prime example of a healthy, well-rounded human being! He has bought himself a high-quality hi-fi system and settled down to enjoy his music, which he does both live and in front of his home system. Douglas is a beacon of normality in our upgrade-obsessed world! Sadly, I know that I and others like me will never get to that fine place in which he resides, as we have been infected with the hi-fi virus, for which there is no known antidote – aside from sanity itself! Only a few people reading this magazine shall ever attain such a zen-like state, I fear!

ES: What he said! Look on the bright side – we get neurotic so you don't have too!

JMH: If you've spent a lot of money on hi-fi, it's only to be expected that you listen to the sound it makes. But, the very act of noticing the 'sound' distracts you from listening to the music. It's only when you 'forget' the medium that your mind is able to concentrate on the music, and nothing but the music. Ironically (and paradoxically), the better your hi-fi gets in terms of its ability to reproduce extremes of loud and soft, or high and low, the greater the risk of the sound distracting you from listening to the music. Floor shaking bass; vivid three-dimensional stereo; brilliant crystalline highs; such things may impress and amaze, but can become the main course, rather than a sauce that enhances the flavour of the dish itself. So, if you find yourself noticing sound quality, rather than the music or its performance, chances are your hi-fi system is failing on a musical level. The test of a great hi-fi system is when it reproduces the full range of dynamics and frequencies, yet doesn't advertise itself in the process.

Douglas Bateman's B&W 704s go some way towards providing him with his perfect sound



WIN A RUSS ANDREWS POWERMAX PLUS MAINS LEAD **WORTH £50!**

Letter of the Month winners receive a Russ Andrews PowerMax Plus mains lead worth £50. Write to us at letters@hifichoice.co.uk

AUDIOVISUAL

ONLINE

WWW.AUDIOVISUALONLINE.CO.UK

HOME CINEMA SPECIALISTS
HI-FI SPECIALISTS
LOUDSPEAKERS
AV RECEIVERS
CABLES & INTERCONNECTS
TV, AV & HI-FI FURNITURE
CUSTOM CABLE SERVICE
SPEAKER INSTALLATIONS
AUDIOVISUAL ADVICE

PRICE MATCH PROMISE!

Seen a product here but found it cheaper somewhere else? We pride ourselves not only for being most competitive on price but also for genuine technical advice too. Phone us on **01706 878444**.

PHONE US FOR EXPERT ADVICE OR ANY OF OUR LATEST DEALS:

01706 878444

EMAIL US ANY TIME:
ADMIN@AUDIOVISUALONLINE.CO.UK

OPENING HOURS
MON TO FRI: 9:00AM - 5:00PM
SATURDAY: 10:00AM - 5:00PM

FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS

ON DEMO



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICES FROM
£800.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

MONITOR AUDIO SILVER RX6
SIX FINISHES

ON DEMO



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£6,295

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL300
PIANO BLACK, EBONY OR ROSE

NEW



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£499.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 155
FOUR FINISHES



PRICE
£649.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

DALI ZENSOR 7
WALNUT, GLOSS WHITE AND BLACK ASH

STANDMOUNT SPEAKERS



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICES FROM
£425.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

MONITOR AUDIO SILVER RX1
SIX FINISHES

NEW



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE PER PAIR
£349.99

PRICE INC. STANDS
£549.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 20
GLOSS BLACK OR GLOSS WHITE

NEW



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£229.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 121
FOUR FINISHES



PRICE
£199.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

DALI ZENSOR 1
WALNUT, GLOSS WHITE AND BLACK ASH

TURNTABLES



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£299.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

PRO-JECT DEBUT CARBON
SEVEN DIFFERENT COLOURS!

BEST BUY



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

FOR BEST PRICE
£CALL

PRICES CHECKED EACH DAY

PRO-JECT ESSENTIAL
BLACK, WHITE OR RED



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£1,220

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

CLEARAUDIO CONCEPT
BLACK & ALUMINIUM

ON DEMO



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£1,449

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 WITH NIMA TONEARM
BLACK OR CLEAR

CD PLAYERS

SAVE



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

WAS: £919.90
£679.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

MARANTZ SI-KI PEARL
BLACK OR SILVER

BEST BUY



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£795.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

ROKSAN KANDY K2
BLACK OR SILVER



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£799.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

AUDIOLAB 8200CD
BLACK OR SILVER



PRICES FROM
£798.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

AVA MEDIA RIP-N-PLAY
BLACK 1GB OR 2GB

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

SAVE



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

WAS: £919.90
£679.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

MARANTZ PM-KI PEARL
BLACK OR SILVER

BEST BUY



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£795.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

ROKSAN KANDY K2
BLACK OR SILVER

NEW



WHAT HI-FI FIT
★★★★★
★★★★★

PRICE
£650.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

ARCAMA19
BLACK OR SILVER

NEW



FOR BEST PRICE
£CALL

PRICES CHECKED EACH DAY

YAMAHA A-S500
BLACK OR SILVER

WE ♥ VINYL!

NEW



PRICE
£39.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

PLAY & DISPLAY LP WALL FRAME
SINGLE BLACK OR WHITE

NEW



PRICE
£99.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

PLAY & DISPLAY LP WALL FRAME
PACK OF THREE BLACK OR WHITE



PRICE
£80.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

SPIN CLEAN MARK II
VINYL WASHING SYSTEM

TURNTABLE ACCESSORIES



PRICE
£170.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

ORTOFON 2M BLUE
MOVING MAGNET CARTRIDGE



PRICE
£292.45

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

GOLDRING EROICA LX
MOVING COIL CARTRIDGE



PRICE
£525.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

MUSICAL SURROUNDINGS PHENOMENA II
PHONO PREAMP

WIREWORLD HDMI CABLES



PRICES FROM
£31.95

CUSTOM LENGTHS AVAIL.



PRICES FROM
£35.95

CUSTOM LENGTHS AVAIL.



PRICES FROM
£41.95

CUSTOM LENGTHS AVAIL.



PRICES FROM
£24.95

CUSTOM LENGTHS AVAIL.



PRICES FROM
£30.95

CUSTOM LENGTHS MADE.



PRICES FROM
£34.95

CUSTOM LENGTHS MADE.

ACCESSORIES



PRICE
£99.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



WAS £12.49
£11.49

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



PRICE PER PACK OF 4
£14.99

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



PRICE
£9.99

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



PRICES FROM
£16.99

CUSTOM LENGTHS MADE.



PRICE
£5.98

MUST-HAVE ACCESSORY!

SPEAKER CABLE



PRICE PER METRE
£5.80

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



PRICE PER METRE
£3.45

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



PRICE PER METRE
£40.00

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



PRICE PER METRE
£6.50

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



PRICES FROM
80p PER/M

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US



WAS FROM £6.00 PER/M
£4.00 PER/M

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

GENUINE TECHNICAL ADVICE

HOME CINEMA OR HI-FI. GIVE US A CALL AND ASK AWAY!



FREE DELIVERY*

* ORDERS OVER £10. SELECTED ITEMS ARE COLLECTION ONLY. PLEASE CHECK FIRST.



THREE DEMO ROOMS

AUDITION YOUR FAVOURITE KIT. PAY US A VISIT AT: UNIT 5, THE SIDINGS, NEW LINE IND. ESTATE, BACUP, OL13 9RW



WEBSITE: WWW.AUDIOVISUALONLINE.CO.UK

FORUM: WWW.AVOFORUMS.CO.UK

TWITTER: @AVONLINE

FACEBOOK: AVONLINEUK

The Game Changer

Once in a while, a product comes along that 'redefines the meaning of excellence'. That time is now.

Q Acoustics is proud to introduce the Concept 20 loudspeaker.

The Concept 20 is a truly remarkable new loudspeaker which delivers a level of sonic performance previously only available to audiophiles able to invest in high-end models.

This exceptional performance has been achieved by using breakthrough technology and applying scientific methodology to overcome the fundamental problems of speaker design.

As well as class leading drive units and crossover, the beautifully lacquered Concept 20 cabinet utilises Gelcore™ construction, specifically developed for acoustic enclosures. In effect this is a 'cabinet within a cabinet'; separated by a special, resonance cancelling compound. This enables the drive units to simply reproduce music, completely unencumbered by cabinet induced colouration.

The result is nothing short of sensational.

For the very best results the Concept 20 should be used on its unique dedicated speaker stand, which uses the same Gelcore™ construction technique.



What Hi Fi? Sound and Vision, Group Test Winner, June 2013



Hi-Fi Choice, Editors Choice, June 2013



What Hi Fi? Sound and Vision, May 2013



AV Forums, April 2013



Visit www.Qacoustics.co.uk to find your nearest dealer.

Redefine the Possible.
www.Qacoustics.co.uk



2000i
Cinema Pack



2050i



2020i



7000i Series



2010i, 2020i,
& 2050i



7000i Series



Q-TV



2010i



armourHOME

Finding a perfect match

Fed up with the stunning images on your flatscreen TV being partnered by weak, insipid sound? Adding a soundbar could be the answer, reckons **Lee Dunkley**



Sonos' Playbar is just one of the many soundbars bringing life to your TV's sound

How many *Hi-Fi Choice* readers watch television? I know it's rather a silly question as I'm sure we all break away from our music systems from time to time to watch the box.

But if you are a proud owner of a new flatscreen TV, I wouldn't mind betting that the sound doesn't live up to the pictures and that it's not a very enjoyable listening experience when you come to do so.

This is a hi-fi magazine, so I'm not going to make any remarks pertaining to flatscreen pictures. I'm talking about the sonic assault, or dirge, that emanates from the built-in loudspeakers that will offend anyone with even the merest hint of audiophile sensibilities.

The way it used to be...

In the days of CRT, sound quality on TV sets was taken a lot more seriously. Models like flagship Sony Trinitrons came with dedicated speakers that could be unhooked from the TV cabinet and placed either side of the screen like a pair of bookshelf speakers to give a proper sense of stereo. They were full-sounding, with a very respectable frequency response. Today, flatscreens have become so much about wafer-thin dimensions and frameless design that sound quality is being seriously overlooked.

Designers are so focused on aesthetics and lightweight chassis that there's barely any room left to accommodate a decent-sized loudspeaker inside the ultra thin cabinets. All an audio engineer can do is to place the smallest and slimmest of speakers firing out the back or downwards and utilise digital signal processing to manipulate the signal and rely on reflections from behind or beneath the set to project the sound forwards and towards the listener. Forward-facing speakers in a flatscreen have become a rarity. Given the limitations the designer faces it's still a considerable achievement, but the sound is so heavily processed and manipulated that in some cases it no longer is true stereo and certainly doesn't match up to the 'hi-def sound' term often used on the packaging box and marketing stickers.

I've always been one of those annoying car passengers that adjusts the tone controls on a friend's car stereo (often without asking permission) in an attempt to achieve a better sonic balance on our ears for the journey ahead. I've even meddled with friends' home music systems – usually when they're out of the room to see if they detect an improvement to its performance – all in the name of

my own sonic harmony and in the hope that they'll hear an improvement and not take offence at the fact that I've effectively just dissed their own sonic judgement and preference. But no amount of fiddling, surreptitiously or otherwise, seems to rescue the sound of many flatscreen TVs. In fact, the sound from my own Samsung TV's speakers has become such a problem and so irritating that I've routed the audio output through my hi-fi system. I simply cannot tolerate the thin and scratchy sonics the set produces, and no amount of adjustment via the equaliser in the extensive sound options menu can rescue it. Speech quality is poor and at times unintelligible, and I've tried every audio adjustment the set has to offer. Even when heard from another room I find it unbearable, and am compelled to select the hi-fi-routed sound, even when it's others watching the set and not me.

As any audio fanatic knows, the simple solution is to hook up the screen's audio output to a hi-fi just as I have done with mine. But what about anyone that doesn't have the screen in the same room as their hi-fi system, or those with second TV sets? It's no coincidence that soundbars are on the rise, as flatscreen TV viewers come to realise

In the days of CRT, sound quality on TV sets was taken a lot more seriously

that there is indeed something missing from the big screen experience; usually around half the frequency range, thanks to the

amount of signal processing that's going on behind the scenes to help achieve anything like a saleable sound from the after-thought speakers.

You may think that a soundbar has no place in a hi-fi magazine, but as the number of models continue to grow it has become clear that it's not just audio enthusiasts that are finding TV sound to be so offensive. There is a smattering of models from hi-fi brands as viewers turn to soundbars to offer a simple upgrade solution to a TV's built-in sound. Models like the Sonos Playbar are extremely flexible and can be expanded into 5.1 and multi-room home systems with support for music streaming from a wi-fi-connected computer and access to music services from the likes of Spotify. Soundbars may not be a true hi-fi solution, but they're a massive step up to upgrade the sound from any flatscreen TV, and are finding a place in many a home audio installation ●



LEE DUNKLEY
Hi-Fi Choice editor

Xeo

Dynaudio Wireless High-End 



Xeo is new, Xeo is easy, Xeo is smart, Xeo is game-changing. Because Xeo is the very first wireless and remote controlled High-End loudspeaker system. Say goodbye to speaker cables, D/A converters, amplifiers and special software. Unplug them all. And simply plug in the Xeo compact or floor standing loudspeakers and the Xeo Transmitter. Unplug and play. www.xeo.dynaudio.com



All there is. **DYNAUDIO**

Can you tell what it is yet?

Tube and transistor amplifiers use very different technologies and have very different characteristics, but when done well can sound surprisingly similar says **David Price**

I showed my first glimmers of interest in audio back in 1977, when I was barely knee high to a loudspeaker, and slowly built up my enthusiasm so that by the early eighties I'd well and truly got the hi-fi bug. Like many people, I found this involved buying as many hi-fi magazines as possible, and then being in a state of permanent gloom about the fact that I couldn't afford what I thought I wanted to buy.

Years of upgrading followed, first closely based on magazine recommendations, and then I discovered the hitherto unknown pleasures of the hi-fi dealer. My local one in Oxford, the sadly now defunct Westwood and Mason, showed me a world of wonder, which I still haven't quite forgotten. Every few weeks, I'd make my pilgrimage (for that is what it felt like) to the shop, whereupon I'd wow and coo over all that was new in the hi-fi world.

Throughout all my formative hi-fi years, however, the one thing I never aspired to was owning a valve amplifier. I'd been told in the pages of my favourite hi-fi magazines that these things were dinosaurs – blasts from the past that no self-respecting eighties audiophile could possibly take seriously. "Warm and woolly" was the usual epithet used to abuse them. Unsurprisingly, Westwoods didn't sell them either, but my salesman and hi-fi guru Nigel Pearson obviously had a soft spot for them, as he'd wax lyrical

We're in the happy situation of a choice between both tube and solid-state

about classic Quad IIs whenever the boss was looking the other way! It wasn't until 1993 that I actually heard a modern valve amplifier – old sixties radiograms and tape recorders that my grandparents had lying around the house didn't really count as reliable comparators to the NADs, Arcams and Nytech solid-staters of the day. I was stunned – as the ones I heard were anything but soft, romantic and opaque sounding, contrary to what I'd always been led to believe. Now writing about hi-fi for a living, it became apparent that one just couldn't get too prescriptive about how something would sound depending on whether or not it had thermionic vacuum tubes or transistors. I discovered that it wasn't what was done, but how it was done, that determined the final sound of an amplifier.

By the same token, the nineties saw something of a transistor backlash – it became fashionable opinion in some quarters that only valve amps could sound good, and that any solid-stater was dammed by its very output devices. This, I began to think, was as daft as all that determinism about tubes being soft and dull sounding a

decade or two earlier. There are transistor amps and transistor amps; some good, some bad, some ugly – just like tubes...

This 'great debate' has reared its head again with me recently, because over the past few months I've reviewed a whole swathe of great sounding, affordable solid-staters – from Creek's Evolution 50A and Arcam's FMJ-A19 a few months back, to Exposure's 3010S2 and Creek's Destiny 2 in this very issue. Between this, I've had Canor's TP134 doing daily duties, and it has proved a brilliant valve integrated with oodles of smoothness, depth and power to spare.

Breaking with tradition

There's no denying the 'valviness' of the Canor – it is a little opaque across the midband and doesn't quite have the speed and grip in the bass you get from Exposure's 3010S2 for example – but it still shows few signs of other traditional issues with tube amplification. You get great tracts of power and a lack of willingness to be intimidated by difficult speaker loads. Also, it performed party duties without any complaint – punching out lots of watts for long periods with no problems. It got hot, but there wasn't a hint of instability or complaint – unlike many solid-state amplifiers I've used to do the same job in the past.

If a fine valve amp like the Canor shows many of the better traits of its opponents, then so do great transistor designs such as the Exposure and Creek. Of course, both are a little more brightly lit than the Canor across the midband, but not dramatically more so, and they have a lovely lilting musicality that the TP134 also shares – unlike many of their solid-state brethren. The soundstage is a touch less capacious, and the treble a teensy bit more brittle, but in many other respects they sound closer to a well-designed valve amplifier than your average badly designed valve amp! In design terms, such is the importance of getting the fine details right, the big picture is often less of a determining factor than you'd think.

So, in 2013 we're in the happy situation that we have a choice between fine amplifiers of both types – tube and solid-state – and no one's telling you what to buy anymore. That task can now come down to your very own ears! ●



Valve amplifiers like the Canor TP134 can reveal similar characteristics to solid staters



The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the attitudes or opinions of Hi-Fi Choice or AVTech Media Ltd



THE WORLD'S BEST HI-FI



 **FOCAL**
UTOPIA COLLECTION

COME FIND UTOPIA AT KJ WEST ONE

KJ WEST ONE | 26 NEW CAVENDISH STREET | LONDON | UK | W1G 8TY
T: 020 7486 8262 | INFO@KJWESTONE.CO.UK | WWW.KJWESTONE.CO.UK

Til death us do part

As formats or pieces of equipment slip out of use by the mainstream they are often referred to as dying, but does anything ever really die wonders **Tim Jarman**

One doesn't really see hi-fi mentioned in the mainstream news all that often. Events that have revolutionised 'our' world, like the invention of the dome tweeter or the quartz-locked turntable, barely raise a whisper outside the pages of the hi-fi press. One audio-related event that is likely to attract wider attention, however, is the arbitrary point where a once popular piece of equipment or music format ceases to be either manufactured or widely distributed, or in the popular parlance, "dies".

Whole generations of equipment do not instantaneously cease to exist just because one of the large stores in the UK no longer stocks them or because the lights have been turned out in a factory for the last time. For a format to truly die, I would suggest that it would have to be universally forgotten to the point where it was for all practical purposes impossible to re-enact the process of using it. Look below the surface and you will soon discover that this is a very rare event, the likes of Betamax and 8-Track are still nowhere near this stage (in certain circles both are still relatively common), and although I've never actually met one, it would not surprise me if there were even a few Grundig DC (an early competitor to the Philips Compact Cassette) and Sanyo V-Cord (an obscure early

The radiogram solves the problem of choosing furniture to house your kit

seventies industrial video cassette – monochrome only) users out there, who knows? It's not just formats that go underground, styles of equipment that were once popular can fade away very quickly when tastes change; this was brought home to me recently when a radiogram appeared on my repair bench for the first time in ages.

Step back in time

For those readers too young to remember, this is in simple terms a radio tuner, amplifier and record player, along with the necessary loudspeakers all mounted together in a large and impressive cabinet. Radiograms first appeared in the late twenties but by the late sixties, just before their replacement by what was then called "unit audio" (eg hi-fi as we now know and love it), they had evolved into sophisticated units that sometimes offered facilities such as stereo, FM, belt-driven turntables and magnetic cartridges.

By the early seventies they had become desperately unfashionable, as they remain today, but this should not blind one from the fact that such a layout does solve many of the problems that plague hi-fi today.



Trivial matters such as loudspeaker placement, choice of interconnecting cables and the matching of the various sources are all done for you by the manufacturer, who should know best and have the facilities to technically validate its choices (some hope I know!). A few designs even offer a solution to the problem of where to keep your records – so often a root of domestic friction! Above all, the radiogram solves the problem of choosing suitable furniture to house your equipment, because both are inseparably combined. This is not as simple to get right as it sounds, as building furniture and electronics together can easily go disastrously awry; witness the settee with the iPod dock set into the armrest or the bed from whose footboard a plasma television can be made to elevate as two abominations that should be burned in the streets.

Compact desk

By way of contrast, the late sixties stereo radiogram (in my case a B&O 900RG 'Compact', don't be fooled by that last bit, its huge!), low, wide and shimmering with freshly oiled teak veneer, just look 'right' to me, so elegant compared with industrial-looking metal racking, housing what might as well be laboratory instruments connected together by endless intertwining wires.

Will we see their like again? I doubt it; houses are now on the whole far too small for these bulky, indivisible units and the shortened product cycles of today are too obviously at odds with quality furniture built to endure for decades for the two to be successfully integrated at this level. Chin up though, there are still a few left for those who fancy a bit of mid 20th century opulence; 40-odd years of bonfire nights still haven't quite managed to claim them all... ●

The Beomaster 900RG: quality hi-fi meets the best in beautiful furniture design



TIM JARMAN
Electronics engineer

TAD

C600 Pre Amplifier



Probably one of the best Pre Amps in the world

Hearing is believing

For your nearest dealer call 0203 5442338 (charged at local rate)

Another fantastic product from NuNu Distribution Limited

www.nunudistribution.co.uk

NuNu Distribution Ltd



A certain *je ne sais quoi*...

What is it about some tunes that make you want to listen to them over and over again? For **Patrick Cleasby** Daft Punk's new album is currently top of the pops...

We've all had them. A tune – quite often the lead track from an album – that is so compelling we are impelled to return the needle to the start of the record and listen again, or more mundanely, press repeat. It's a mark of the magic that the artist has put into creating something truly remarkable that one is forced to immediately revisit it. A friend of mine experienced this effect with *Woman in Chains* from Tears For Fears' *The Seeds Cf Love*, I spent most of 1989 getting up every day to the Pet Shop Boys' *Left To My Own Devices* (single version). In 1997 I had a car commute that was exactly three plays of *Paranoid Android* long, and in 2005 I had Bloc Party's *Tulips* on my iPod every day walking to work.

So it seems they come along about every eight years or so. My current one is *Giorgio By Moroder* from Daft Punk's brilliant *Random Access Memories* album. Yes, the influence of Chic is heavy on the album, with Nile Rogers all over it, and *Get Lucky* might be more eminently danceable, but *GBM* has something special. It has Giorgio Moroder!

It may be as simple as the fact that in place of the customary Vocoded voices the track bears the calm, reflective tones of the legendary Italian (who did so much to lay the foundations of electronic music) intoning snippets of his history over a nine minute epic that zooms

Moroder's *From Here to Eternity* was one of my formative hi-fi experiences

from lounge to freakout. Apart from the charm of Giorgio there are also the elements that thread throughout the whole record – an unfashionable adherence to real musicianship and an insistence on impeccable standards of audio quality, which makes the whole record a hi-fi dream.

Je t'aime la musique!

It is at this point I should mention that listening to Giorgio Moroder's *From Here to Eternity* on vinyl and on headphones was one of my formative hi-fi experiences. In 1978 I was 12 (the Daft Punks would have been infants then) and at a friend's house in France, seeing a proper turntable for the first time and listening to an incredibly otherworldly suite of music. 35 years later I am listening to another on expensive headphones – *Random Access Memories* as a 24-bit, 88,200 KHz sampling download, available exclusively on the day of release from French site Qobuz, (although HDTracks will no doubt follow on).

This is a big deal because the robot duo have taken pains, not only in perfectly executing the futuristic retro

that is their musical hallmark, but also in the similarly retro methods used to record and master the result of their tasteful eclecticism. Qobuz has thankfully posted a 22-minute filmed interview with the Parisian mastering engineer who completed the process, Antoine Chabert or 'Chab', which does much to reassure how carefully this album was made and how sure we can be that the high-resolution download is the version to go for.

For the benefit of those who do not speak French I can summarise the interesting findings. It is already apparent from other interviews that the duo were trailing across America from collaborator to collaborator, multiple reels of analogue tape in tow. The reason for the bizarre joint Bob Ludwig/Chab mastering credit is that the venerable Bob was employed to make a high-resolution digital transfer of the tapes. They didn't want to fly them back to Paris, suspicious of the negative effects of X-rays.

The resolution of 24/88.2 was arrived at since that was what Ludwig said sounded best in his transfer chain, and he did very little except execute the conversion – three tracks had minor equalisation changes applied via adjustments to the tape machine only.

What happened in France was the minute processes by which the legendarily persnickety Parisians adjusted the sound, track by track, with small amounts of compression – to add 'punch' – felt to be lacking from the transfer. There is an obvious awareness that the wonderful dynamics of the record didn't want to get lost – the mastering engineer's job isn't to make things sound worse!

Most remarkably Chab avows that in an uncommon turn of events for a mastering engineer he was moved to take his work home with him to listen again, and dance – exactly the phenomenon that so many have observed of their favourite RAM tracks. (Well, just *Get Lucky* up to this point...)

He says that the 24/88.2 version is the one they slaved over and from which all the others (CD, Mastered for iTunes, MP3, Vinyl) were derived. So, it makes sense to make the effort and procure RAM from France or the US and listen to it on the best playback platform you can find. Get to it! ●



Giorgio Moroder: a look that every 12-year old should aspire to



PATRICK CLEASBY
Technology boffin



MUNICH 2013 High End Show

Forget CES – if it's real high-end hi-fi you want to bask in, it's got to be the Munich High End Show, says **David Price**

There's only one Munich show every year, and frankly one is enough. If you were ever worried that the global hi-fi industry is in a rush to the bottom, a few days treading the boards of the gleamingly clean MOC building where the show is held every May will allay your fears. Pretty much every form of hi-fi is visible to the human eye, from cheap and cheerful wannabe Taiwanese headphone brands to bonkers high-end horn loudspeakers for which you'd need a successful career in Premiership football to afford.

This show is notorious for high-end turntables, tube amps and horn loudspeakers ("stupidly expensive valves 'n' vinyl – it must be Munich and May!"), but interestingly things have moved on a little compared with the past few shows. While there is no shortage of classic vinyl systems, hot bottles glowing and Dalek-like transducers scattered around, there are a good few more streamers and computer-based sound sources used this year, and also portables and headphones are on the ascent. Everyone and his dog seems to be debuting the latter – manufacturers call them 'crossover' products, which also sell to civilian non-audiophile types too! Here's some of the show's magic...

1 ASTELL & KERN AK120

Hot on the heels of the AK100 reviewed in the April issue of *HFC* comes this, the turbo-charged, on steroids high-end digital music portable that will soon go on sale for over £1,000. It sounds superb at its maximum 24/192 resolution.

2 CAMBRIDGE AUDIO SX SERIES

The CA boys have a new range of Dominic Baker-designed loudspeakers out, to complement their impressive affordable electronics. Standing beside them is the company's proud Business Development Manager Adam Shaw-Cotterill.

3 CHORD ELECTRONICS

Another fine-sounding room was Chord's. Running the new DSX1000 network player, Red Reference CD spinner, CPA 8000 preamp and SPM

14000/II monoblocks with Dynaudio loudspeakers, it practically raises the roof and sure looks the part, too!

4 LADY-TAXI

As is the tradition at Munich, assorted musicians – elaborately or scantily dressed – can be seen playing all manner of cheesy and/or traditional music. Lady-Taxi drew big crowds this year – check them out on YouTube!

5 DEVIALET

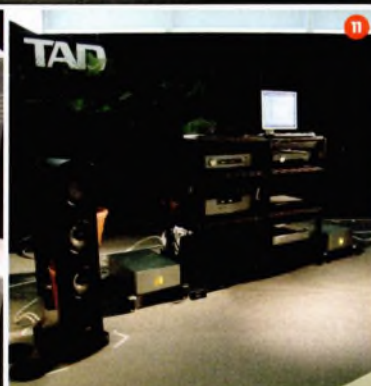
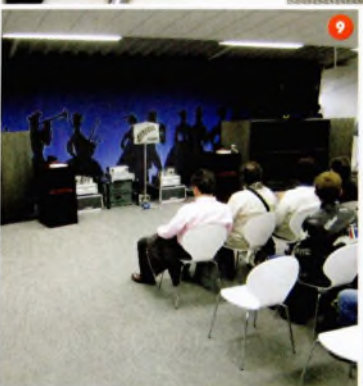
One of the most beautifully presented rooms, this French company shows its gorgeous-looking, innovative network enabled 110, 170, 240 and 500 amplifiers, spanning €4,990 to €22,900. Needless to say the demo was packed.

6 FURUTECH ADL X1

Alpha Design Labs' portable USB DAC and headphone amplifier drew crowds, showing just how much people are interested in 24/192 digital music on the move. Also on demo are its H118 closed-back headphones, which make a very nice noise.

7 SONY SS-AR1

It is something of a welcome surprise to see Sony re-entering the high-end



speaker market. This new 4-driver 3-way stands 1.05m tall and weighs a massive 57kg apiece. Build quality is excellent and it sounds crisp and open with powerful bass.

8 PRO-JECT SIGNATURE 10

Well, it wouldn't be Munich without a humungously large high-end turntable, would it? Pro-Ject duly obliges with this beautiful flagship behemoth, which costs €9,500 and at 34.3kg isn't something you'd want to drop on your little toe!

9 SILBATONE ACOUSTICS

No Munich show would be complete without the guys from Silbatone Acoustics, whose demonstration is always breathtaking. Demonstrating 'classic theater sound', they are running a massive 1936 Western Electric M3 system - said to be loud enough for 1,500 people, no less!

10 ISOTEK MOSAIC

Munich saw the debut of Isotek's striking new Mosaic range of power cleaning systems, said to offer performance of the company's top products at a more affordable price. The Mosaic Genesis offers full mains sine wave generation.

11 TAD E-1

Best sound of the show award for this correspondent goes to the Technical Audio Devices room. With Beryllium midrange and treble drivers, the TAD speakers on demo prove amazingly open and fast - and the supporting electronics are super, too.

12 YBA PASSION

Another interesting sighting is the YBA Passion range on static demo, comprising the 450 CD transport, 350 integrated amplifier (bottom), 550 preamp (top) and 650 power. Styling and build are superlative, and they promise fine sound.

13 MUSICAL FIDELITY

From his briefcase in a quiet cafe at the show, Antony Michaelson produced these - his first proper hi-fi headphones. Quality seems excellent, and he also has a range of V-90 electronics coming soon to replace the V-series.

14 DENON DBT-3313UD

Proof that the Japanese hasn't given up on optical disc just yet is this new Universal Disc Transporter, offering Blu-ray, DVD and SACD playback. Oh, and there's network and USB functionality too - phew! It drew big crowds in the D&M room ●



Planet of SOUND

Welcome to Britain's best and longest running budget turntables!
David Price tells the Rega Planet and Planar story

Formed by Tony Relph and Roy Gandy in 1973, Rega Research has gone from strength to strength.

Although it makes a fine line of electronics these days, its heartland is surely turntables – something it has excelled at. If you had to sum up the company's approach in a few words, "less is more" would do the job nicely. In design terms, Rega does minimalism – like Lotus it doesn't believe in a big, heavy engine when a smaller, more highly tuned one will do. That's why its turntables have never been complex affairs.

The current P3-24 model is the supreme expression of Rega's philosophy, but before this its Planet and Planar predecessors sold like hot tea on a cold night for three decades, with almost no modification in the intervening time period. And when Rega did come to replace them, the new P3 was only slightly reworked.

The Rega story starts back in the early seventies, with Roy Gandy deciding to dedicate his life to making turntables rather than selling and repairing them. He'd been in hi-fi retail for a while, and before this

worked for the Ford Motor Company, when he'd built his own loudspeakers in his spare time. The Planet was born during this period, as Roy realised how bad so many other decks were.

A change of platter

The Planet was an amazing-looking deck, thanks in no small part to its diecast alloy 'podule' platter, which made it look more like something out of *2001: A Space Odyssey* than an object purposed for a domestic living room. Sadly, it was also the turntable's greatest design fault, as it didn't support the record terribly well, and nor did it assist speed stability. Rega soon decided to re-engineer the Planet into the Planar, with an expanse of thick glass taking over platter duties – complete with a chunky felt mat on the higher end Planar 3 to damp down the vibes from the glass and support the record better. On the cheaper Planar 2, the glass platter got a thin rubber mat.

In most other respects, the Planars were the same as the Planet, which means they retained the MDF plinth, complete with recesses in it drilled for the bearing housing, motor and



The Planet launched Rega and was a striking-looking design, but that 'podule' platter didn't sound so good



The Planar 2 followed, keeping the chassis and tonearm, but adding a glass platter and wood sleeved plinth

tonearm. This was quite unconventional at the time; almost every other deck came in a boxy, hollow plinth. They came with a multi-pole AC synchronous motor, as per many other belt drives of the day, which drove a small plastic inner 'sub platter' via a thin rubber belt. A high-quality smoked Perspex dust cover was fitted, far superior to that of most price rivals, but as with all turntables, the deck sounded better with it removed altogether. The Planar 3's bearing was decently quiet, with tests at the time showing it gave a very respectable 65dB rumble figure.

The first Planars came with a Japanese-made, Acos-derived S-shaped aluminium tubed tonearm (of 237mm effective length, overhang 15mm), as previously fitted to the Planet. It was a fine sounding design, especially the more highly tolerated

tighter and more neutral, more detailed and incisive. The downside was that the old S-shaped arm was a little softer and vaguer, and flattered to deceive on the Planar 3; it was a slightly better-balanced package where both arm and turntable were fairly well matched in outright ability.

Sounding out

As a package – with a new price of £188 compared with the £149 of the S-shaped arm-equipped predecessor – the new 1983 Rega Planar 3 was pretty fearsome. With its new black tonearm, careful set-up could eke out just a bit more performance from the old chassis than before, and for the money this was amazingly impressive. Because of the Planar 3's total lack of suspension, placement was critical, and if mounted on a rigid, light coffee table as far away from the

It has been around since the early seventies, and always offered far better sound than you had a right to expect

'selected' versions supplied with the Planar 3, whereas the cheaper Planar 2 came with standard production versions – along with a host of other cost cutting measures, from thinner plinths to inferior platters.

In summer 1983 though, all this changed. The new RB300 tonearm was launched, sporting a straight, one-piece, aluminium cast arm tube with no joins between the headshell and pivot for better rigidity. The bearing gimbal was a substantial casting employing a threaded stem and locknut, and the bearings were excellent quality. The counterweight was machined from dense tungsten alloy for the smallest possible diameter for its size, making it sit close to the bearing housing for the lowest moment of inertia.

Selling separately for £90, the RB300 made a massive impact on the hi-fi scene of the day. Magazines reviewed it against their (then) favourite arm – the £253 Linn Ittok IVII – pronouncing the latter wanting in many respects; certainly the Rega had a tighter, more transparent sound in some ways. The general press consensus was that the new RB300 was too good for the poor old Planar 3 deck, but that didn't stop waiting lists for the newly equipped 3 running up to three or four months. Certainly the new Planar 3 sounded different;

loudspeakers as possible, the deck was capable of a very clean and open – yet smooth and musical – sound. With the belt and inner platter cleaned and the dustcover removed, and a decent cartridge fitted (even a moving coil the quality of Audio Technica's AT-OC9 was worth using), the Rega really rocked.

The Planar never had the bass punch of the Linn LP12, or the sheer emotional expressiveness, but a well set-up 3 was always even, smooth and subtly musical – giving you just enough of what was in the groove to not want for more. This was the genius of this deck – it was just about good enough to be something you never felt the need to replace. In absolute terms, its speed stability wasn't spectacular, but this could be helped by making sure it was 100 percent level, and that the drive path was clean. Well fettled, the Planar 3 never draws attention to its shortcomings, covering its tracks brilliantly – which is why Rega sold so many of the things.

Indeed, the RP3 that replaced it some 10 years ago, is only slightly better, with just a few subtle modifications and corporate facelift. Most useful is the option of Rega's high-performance TT PSU motor power supply upgrade kit, which makes the RP3 sound a good deal

BUYING SECONDHAND

The good news is that while the Planet is a bit of a rarity, there is no shortage of used Rega Planars on the market. As with any piece of used hi-fi equipment, condition is everything, so choose your example as you would a used car. Ideally you want one with a careful owner that has been garaged (ie boxed) when not in use! There should be as few scratches on the deck as possible, and it should have been disassembled for transportation – you can't cart them round in your car as you would a Technics SL1200. Rega offered the Planar 3 in several finishes; the earlier ones were black painted, but eighties ones got a brushed finish with black Rega badging, then it reverted back to standard. Meanwhile, a number of special edition colours were offered, with 1985's mauve/pink being a particularly exotic beast. Check the tonearm and main bearings are sound, and that the motor's quiet. If there are any other problems like speed instability, there's a good chance a new belt and a clean will fix them. Spares are cheap and plentiful. Expect to pay from £50 to £200.

more speed-stable, something that's sadly not available for the Planar. However, the company does make a bespoke motor upgrade kit for the original Planar 2 and 3, which includes a new motor and a new way of mounting it – this brings an appreciable improvement to its speed stability and, consequently, sound.

Evergreen

If ever there was an analogue evergreen, the Rega turntable is it. It has been around – in different guises – since the early seventies, and always offered far better sound and build quality than you had a right to expect at the price. Better still, Regas are reliable, unlike so many other decks of their day, continuing to soldier on with almost no maintenance either given or needed. And yet should you ever wish to modify a Planar, you just know it will respond well to the process. Great sounding, amazingly affordable, and with a style all of its very own, what's not to like? ●



Practically perfect?

Looks to die for, performance to enthral and not a single bad habit – **Ed Selley** might have found an ideal trio that doesn't cost the earth

As the sort of cultured and intelligent type to read *Beautiful Systems*, I know that you know that behind the fulsome praise of many systems lie one or two drawbacks. Some previous subjects have been very large and heavy, others have a price tag you might usually see in a car showroom while others perform the way they do thanks to engineering decisions that make them tricky to live with. The name of the piece is *Beautiful Systems*, not *Practical Systems*, so this is hardly surprising.

What you see here, though, is a system that balances beauty with impressive practicality and barnstorming performance with manageable dimensions. I won't insult your intelligence by calling it cheap, but if you bear with me I think we could definitely stretch to bargain. This is a combination of Danish design flair and Italian artistry that walks an almost perfect line between appealing to heart and head.

The Danish contribution comes from Copland in the form of the CDA825 CD player and CTA405 amplifier. The

CDA825 is sufficiently lovely to have featured in a *Beautiful System* before and any time spent with it makes it easy to understand why. Internally, the CDA825 is bang up to date; twin 192kHz-capable DAC's, custom digital filters and a tremendously sophisticated power supply arrangement are all present and correct on the spec sheet and internal shots show just how much of that substantial footprint is given over to electronics rather than air.

What makes the CDA825 special, though, is the way it looks and feels



COMPONENTS

1 SONUS FABER VENERE 2.5 £1,998

The newest member of the Sonus Faber range is also its 'affordable' offering, but you'd be hard pressed to tell looking at the gorgeous styling and high-quality driver compliment. Usefully high sensitivity allows them to compliment the Copland nicely.

2 COPLAND CDA825 £4,298

The only piece of source equipment in the Copland range, the CDA825 combines state-of-the-art decoding with gorgeous casework and an extraordinary top-loading mechanism that manages to add a real sense of ceremony to putting a CD on.

3 COPLAND CTA405 £2,998

Copland's take on an integrated amplifier is a design based around a quartet of 6550 valves for a useful 50W output, all wrapped in lovely minimalist styling. Not enough? How about an all-valve phono stage and full remote control to boot?



while being state of the art. I am sure that there is a sound engineering reason why the lid to the top loading mechanism is a rotating platter the size of a side plate, but back in the real world what it does beyond reasonable doubt is create a bit of ceremony to the business of changing CDs – usually a process so anodyne as to slip the mind in seconds. The illuminated legends positioned above the buttons and crisp red on black display give the CDA825 an aesthetic appeal that puts it ahead of more conventional competition.

One step beyond

The partnering CIA405 integrated amp arguably goes a step further. The only integrated in the Copland range, the CIA405 is a valve amp but one apparently designed by people without the slightest interest in compromising modern life to use them. The chassis encloses every hot and high voltage component, every aspect of its functionality can be performed from the (lovely all metal and system-driving) remote control and the quartet of 6550 valves give an output of 50W – perhaps not enough for a festival, but certainly enough to give you a wide choice of partnering speakers. Around the back, three line inputs and a tape loop should allow for most systems to be accommodated. The final flourish is the presence of an all-valve internal



phono stage that is capable of showing standalone designs a thing or two if you are a vinyl user.

It is also gorgeous. The CIA405 is not exactly small, but the simplicity of the styling hides this amazingly well. The symmetrical arrangement of the controls, the half circle of input lights and the control knobs that move with the assurance of a high-class bank safe all combine to make the CIA405 feel very, very special. £2,998 is no small amount of money, but I can't think of much that does more than the Copland for less.

To find a suitable match for these dynamic Danes, we turn to fellow Absolute Sounds portfolio member Sonus faber. In this instance, the speaker selected is the newest member of the range, the Venere 2.5. In some regards, the Venere has the hardest job of any Sonus faber, because while customers are confident that a Sonus faber will have excellent performance, they also expect that it will be beautiful. With the more expensive products, this is





achieved by Sonus faber doing what it does best and using exquisite materials in striking designs. At the relatively terrestrial price of the Venere, this is a much tougher proposition. Aesthetics are a subjective area, but I think it has succeeded admirably with the Venere. The styling is clean, understated and modern, but at the same time undoubtedly a Sonus faber. Like the Copland's they partner, the fit and finish is absolutely top notch.

It's oh so quiet

The resulting system is visually elegant, built like a piece of research equipment and impressively specified, but more importantly than any of that, one that sounds absolutely fantastic. Pick a CD – literally anything – take the time to enjoy the digital equivalent of cueing it up in the CDA825 and pausing only to notice that the CIA405 is astonishingly quiet for a valve amp, and I almost guarantee that this system will impress.

The main reason for this all round ability is that the electronics and speakers are completely free of emphasis in any particular area of the frequency spectrum. This means that they go about music reproduction in a way that is incredibly unforced, but at the same time means that nothing is lost from the performance. I jump from the Cinematic Orchestra's sparse

but beautiful *In Motion #1* to the barely contained fury of Underworld's *Everything Everything* in one sitting and at no stage do I feel that the system is ever out of its depth. The assurance, agility and integration it has is at home with a tiny circle of performers playing softly as it is with an electronics act on the rampage.

At first it is slightly hard to work out if the valves in the CIA405 bring

Partnered with the Veneres, the headroom on offer is effectively unlimited for most domestic environments

anything to the performance, but the more time you listen the more you realise that some of this apparent effortless comes from the wonderful air and space around vocals and the very faithful tonality accuracy that the system possesses. What makes this rewarding is that partnered with the Veneres, the headroom on offer is effectively unlimited for most domestic environments and the system will go impressively loud without any signs of hardening or strain.

Listening to components in isolation, you begin to realise just how well they complement each other in practice. The CDA825 extracts incredible detail from discs

ABOVE LEFT:
The top-loading mechanism makes loading a CD more of a ceremony

ABOVE CENTRE:
Typically of Sonus Faber, the Venere is a stunning speaker

and has a soundstage to die for. This is preserved intact by the CIA405 that adds that wonderful tonal sweetness and some unusually assured timing for a valve design before the Sonus fabers carry the sonic ball over the line by keeping everything intact and adding a scale and airiness to the final performance that is larger than even their relatively substantial dimensions suggest is possible. Nothing cancels out the positive attributes of the other components, instead they collectively augment one another. This sounds simple, but I've rarely seen it happen as effectively as it does here.

The price is right

The end result is a system that is greater than the sum of great parts. It has an audio performance that stands comparison with any system at the same price – beautiful or otherwise – and combines this with fabulous styling, sensible dimensions and the sort of build that is not commonly encountered anywhere near the price. What's more, going right back to the beginning, there are no obvious downsides. The amplifier has plenty of extra inputs if you need them and control and operation of the entire system is marginally more taxing than using a knife and fork. This piece might not be called practical systems, but as a collection of electronics to live with and enjoy every single day, this system will take some beating ●



DISTRIBUTOR:
Absolute Sounds
TELEPHONE:
020 89713909

WEBSITES:
absolutesounds.com
sonusfaber.com
copland.dk

Tamla Motown



I WANT TO GO BACK THERE AGAIN
(Berry Gordy, Jr.)

V.I.P.

© 1967 Jobete Music Co., Inc. (BMI) - 2:39 BOB-301M12 Produced By Berry Gordy, J

CHRIS CLARK
V.I.P. 25041

Motown's first golden era enjoys immense popularity around the world – especially in the UK. **Simon Berkovitch** and **JT Rathbone** explore the inspiration for a very British love affair

If ever a record label epitomised the possibilities inherent in the American dream it was Detroit's Motown Record Corporation.

Started with an \$800 loan by ambitious songwriter Berry Gordy Jr in 1959, first Tamla, then Motown swiftly became major players in the independent market. The company enjoyed its first million-seller with The Miracles' *Shop Around* the following year.

Berry used his experience to control every aspect of the process. He brought together some of the finest writers, arrangers and musicians in Detroit under the roof of 2648 West Grand Boulevard and emblazoned it with the legend 'Hitsville USA'. It would prove to be no idle boast. The building housed the original Motown studio, and practically all the early classics were recorded there.

The label's story is the stuff of legend: Gordy overcame the prejudices of both white and black radio to produce literally hundreds of crossover hits. In the process, Motown's unique and well-drilled sound changed the face of popular music in the US – and eventually around the world – making household names of artists including The Supremes, The Miracles, Mary Wells and many others in the process.

That these vibrant and infectious sounds should capture the imaginations of so many young Americans was little surprise, but that they also inspired a generation of teenagers across the Atlantic in England (and eventually UK-wide) was astounding. And long after the company's sound had matured and diversified into smoother or more political areas, its original spirit was alive on the

dance floors of British clubs, eventually igniting the phenomenon that became known as Northern Soul.

Many of the label's artists who had enjoyed only moderate Stateside success were overwhelmed by the level of appreciation they received when touring the UK – in some cases decades after their last Motown recordings had been waxed – and occasionally enjoying belated chart action with some long-forgotten tracks that had been all but ignored in the US.

With this in mind, we take a look at four artists of differing fortunes, all of whose best records have withstood the test of time, still sounding effervescent to 21st century ears; artists whose music will undoubtedly continue to inspire new generations with their world-conquering beat.

Martha & The Vandellas

The quintessential Motown girl group

The Supremes may have been Mr Gordy's favourites and clocked up the most hits, but for many – particularly in the UK – Martha & the Vandellas were Motown's quintessential female group. Even some of their poppier tracks display a rawness and energy often missing from their rivals.

Alabama-born Martha Reeves paid her dues as a Hitsville secretary before she and the Vandellas sang back-up vocals on some of the company's early releases, most notably Marvin Gaye's classic *Stubborn Kind Of Fellow* in 1962. When Mary Wells dropped out of a recording session later that year, they cut their first disc, signing with Motown imprint Gordy shortly after, and soon tasting success with their second single *Come And Get These Memories*.

More big hits followed, including *Heatwave*, *Quicksand* and perhaps their best-known song, the timeless *Dancing In The Streets*. Martha's versatility as a vocalist meant she could operate effortlessly in a variety of styles, handling the soulful and strident *Nowhere To Run*, the jazzy *My Baby Loves Me* and the straight-ahead girl group pop of *Jimmy Mack* with equal aplomb.

Personnel changes ushered in a period of declining fortunes in the late sixties, but the group enjoyed popularity in the UK as a live



Martha's versatility as a vocalist meant she could operate effortlessly in a variety of styles

act, and the early hits struck a new chord with mod revivalists a decade later.

You'll need a comprehensive compilation to enjoy all the essential 45s (try *The*

Ultimate Collection) but their two best LPs, *Dance Party* and *Watchout!*, were also coupled together on a CD that's well worth tracking down.

The Temptations

An immaculate harmonic blend

Simultaneously one of the most successful, yet critically underrated groups to emerge from the Motown stable, The Temptations had an immeasurable influence on pop, rock and rhythm & blues – as well as being pioneers of the emerging sound that would be dubbed 'soul' music.

Tall, handsome and immaculately suited and booted, The Temptations often employed slick and tightly executed choreography to accompany their impeccable harmonic blend, and from 1964-68, possessed in Eddie Kendricks and David Ruffin two of the most dynamic and powerful singers of the era.

This may have been a formidable package, but their first seven releases sold poorly, and it took the Smokey Robinson written and produced *The Way You Do The Things You Do* to give them their chart breakthrough.

This song kick started an astounding run of hit singles – *My Girl*, *Get Ready*, *Ain't Too Proud To Beg* and *(I Know) I'm Losing You* among them. As production duties moved from Smokey to Norman Whitfield, and Ruffin's gruff tenor traded with Kendricks' high, sweet voice, their records always sounded different enough from each other to remain interesting, while still retaining that astonishing trademark vocal sound.



Their records sounded different enough from one another to remain interesting

Ruffin's departure in 1968 coincided with Whitfield unveiling a new psychedelic-funk approach to their recordings, now often sporting more socially – and politically-aware lyrics. The rest of their long,

impressive career falls outside of our timeline, but sole surviving founder member Otis Williams has been in it for the long haul, and continues to front the latest incarnation of the band to this day.

The Marvelettes

A long and varied series of classy 45s

Blessed with two quite distinct lead vocalists, The Marvelettes experienced different fortunes to The Temptations. Despite scoring Motown's first number one in late 1961 and releasing some of the most sublime and much-loved records in the label's history, they were eventually eclipsed by both The Vandellas and – arguably more importantly – The Supremes (with whom they shared a not entirely friendly rivalry) and fell somewhat out of favour with the company's top brass.

Nevertheless, this female vocal group who originally formed during high school, released a long and varied series of 45s, many of them enjoying some chart action. And despite only making the British hit parade once, many of their songs have exerted an influence on the UK soul scene far in excess of what those modest sales may suggest.

From that first smash hit, *Please Mr Postman* (famously covered by The Beatles) through the smooth soul of *Don't Mess With Bill* and *The Hunter Gets Captured By The Game* and onto their last great singles, *Here I*



Am Baby and *Destination: Anywhere*, The Marvelettes' records oozed class.

Unfortunately, poor promotion coupled with a slew of internal problems, eventually ended their once-promising career, but you can enjoy all the aforementioned tracks – along with the Northern Soul stormer *I'll Keep Holding On* – and many other classic 45s on *The Ultimate Collection* CD.

Chris Clark

A Northern Soul queen

Six-foot tall, with white-blond hair and a striking figure, Santa Cruz native Christine Elizabeth Clark turned more than a few heads when she first entered the Hitsville building in 1963. But Motown carried no passengers, and luckily she had a belting voice to match her physical stature.

Following strong debut *Do Right, Baby Do Right* and its aborted follow-up *Do I Love You* – a UK soul club staple that took 30 years to be released – she had her only hit with *Love's Gone Bad* in July 1966.

Gordy produced her next 45 and co-wrote it with the singer. *I Want To Go Back There Again* epitomises the growing sophistication of Motown productions from this period – some tasteful harpsichord on the verses emphasises the song's theme of longing for a lost past, and Clark deftly executes the bridge's tongue-twisting lyric, which reaches release in a powerful and rousing chorus.

Arguably one of the best records cut by the company in 1967, it undeservedly bombed



on release, but became the lead off track on her debut LP *Soul Sounds* later in the year. Sadly, there would be no more hits.

The double CD set *Chris Clark – The Motown Collection* features that fine album along with her second, the more uneven *CC Rides Again* and adds a whole disc of often excellent unreleased material.

TAMLA MOTOWN SHOPPING LIST

Motown was always about singles in its first 10 incendiary years. Here are eight of the best and where to find them. All are available to buy from online stores at the time of writing.



Barrett Strong

Money
(*That's What I Want*)
This powerful gem was Tamla's first big hit. Strong later co-wrote hits for The Temptations.
Barrett Strong *The Complete Motown Collection*



The Contours

First I Look At The Purse
One of many infectious dance records cut by this underrated five-piece, best known for the timeless *Do You Love Me*.
The Contours *The Essential Collection*



Kim Weston

A Little More Love
As versatile vocally as any one of her label mates, Weston was the one that got away, as this ballad ably demonstrates.
Kim Weston *Greatest Hits And Rarities*



The Velvettes

Lonely, Lonely Girl *Am I*
This masterpiece flopped after two hits from the group. Another lost nugget saved from obscurity by UK soul fans.
The Velvettes *The Motown Anthology*



Marvin Gaye

Ain't That Peculiar
A change of style at the time for one of Motown's most gifted and consistent artists, this unstoppable, hypnotic dancer is one of his best.
Marvin Gaye *Gold*



The Elgins

Heaven Must Have Sent You
This superb track was one of many such delights from this vocal group, and a big US and UK hit.
The Elgins *The Motown Anthology*



Gladys Knight & The Pips

I Heard It Through The Grapevine
One of Motown's most overtly gospel-influenced singles – and an amazing smash hit to boot.
Gladys Knight & The Pips *The Ultimate Collection*



R Dean Taylor

There's A Ghost In My House
One of Motown's most memorable guitar riffs drives this perennial UK club classic; a hit in 1974.
R Dean Taylor *The Essential Collection*

Presenting high class, award winning UK built, belt drive, direct drive & Idler drive turntables & turntable upgrades



Enigma Idler Drive Turntable



Vivid Upgrades for Linn LP12 Turntables



Quest Rega Upgrade



Monarch Direct Drive Turntable



Eclipse Turntable



Apollo Turntable



See and hear all of our turntables and turntable upgrades at our superb demonstration facility just off J29a M1. Home demonstrations can also be arranged.

Superb Part Exchange Deals given against your current turntable. Call us for an instant quote...

www.inspirehifi.co.uk



Units 2 & 3 / Prospect House / Colliery Close / Staveley / Chesterfield S43 3QE
T: 01246 472222 M: 07932 367555 E: robert@inspirehifi.co.uk

Information & Sales Hotline 01246 472222

WELCOME TO THE NORTH EAST

ANATEK RESEARCH
 APOLLO
 ATACAMA
 AV INTERNATIONAL
 CHORD COMPANY
 CHORD ELECTRONICS
 CLEARAUDIO
 DYNAVECTOR
 EAR YOSHINO
 GOLDRING
 GRAHAM ENGINEERING
 GRAHAM SLEE
 G F HADCOCK
 ISOTEK
 KOETSU
 KUDOS AUDIO
 MARTIN LOGAN
 LYRA
 MAGNEPLANAR
 MELODY
 MICHELL ENGINEERING
 MONITOR AUDIO



NAD
 NAIM AUDIO
 NORDOST
 NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE
 OPERA
 ORTOFON
 PATHOS ACOUSTICS
 PROJECT
 PS AUDIO
 PURESOUND
 REGA
 REVOLVER
 ROKSAN
 SME
 STAX
 SUGDEN AUDIO
 TEAC ESOTERIC
 TRANSFIGURATION
 TRICHORD RESEARCH
 UNISON RESEARCH
 USHER AUDIO
 VAN DEN HUL

HIFISOUND, Castlegate mill, Quayside, Stockton on Tees. 01642 267012

2NDHANDHIFI.CO.UK

Guaranteed used and ex-demo audio equipment from HiFiSound - the UK's premier source

Call: 0845 6019390 Email: choice@2ndhandhifi.co.uk

MASSIVE EX DEMO SALE NOW ON & NEW USED STOCK IN RED

Rega RP1 ex demo	174	Audio Analogue Crescendo ex demo	494	NAD CS15, S45 & 50CD Players ex demo	Call	Kudos C2 ex demo	999
Nottingham Analogue Air Studio ex demo	244	Rosen Khanly K2 & Cation M2 High Res ex demo	Call	AMR CD77 ex demo	2499	Avant 800 Turntable ex demo	Call
Revox Radius 5 ex demo	541	Esoteric CD3/CD3 Pro Power ex demo	999	Rosen Khanly K2 & Cation M2 CD Players ex demo	Call	Monitor Audio GR, RR and Platinum ranges ex demo	Call
EAR R 10P Deluxe ex demo	1244	NAIM NAC192, 202 and 202 Pre-amp ex demo	999	NAIM DAC CD5S, CDX2, NDX ex demo	Call	Martin Logan Summit X ex demo	Call
Thyssen TD170 ex demo	244	NAIM X5 and Summit Amps ex demo	Call	TEAC Distinction CD1000 A, CD3000 ex demo	Call	Usher Audio S520, X718 & Be718 ex demo	Call
Zofit HiVA Phono Stage ex demo	399	Unison Research Unioc Series ex demo	1244	AudioLab MDC, 2000CD and CD3 ex demo	Call	Magneplanar MC3.6 ex demo	2999
Project Everest and Octave ex demo	Call	UPAC Design Zone A, 200 and A2000 High Res ex demo	Call	Rega R4 and DAC ex demo	Call	Ortofon 2B ex demo	Call
Quad 24P Phono Stage ex demo	744	AudioLab 8200 Integrated, Pro Power ex demo	Call	Chert BL, Qube HD and LBD/6HD ex demo	Call	Riva Sport One Headphones ex demo	Call
Phonon P10 Phono stage ex demo	444	Chord Prima Muzo 140, CPA400, RPM1050 ex demo	Call	Esoteric R21, K14 ex demo	Call	Riva Headphones ex demo	Call
Also in stock ex demo cartridge set	Call	Orayc LXN16 16AV Amplifier ex demo	244	Sonos various pieces ex demo	Call	Grade Headphones various ex demo	Call
<h3>Analogue</h3>							
Audio Technica AT1100 lonearm, excellent	199	<h3>Amplifiers</h3>					
Anston RD11 Superior and Anston arm	299	Arcam P90 Power amplifier	349	<h3>Digital</h3>			
Anston RD11S, OL QC Kit	199	Audio Note OTO PP Phono, excellent	999	Accuphase DP800/DC801 Transport DAC	9499	<h3>Loudspeakers</h3>	
Boulder MS11/MS10 Phono Stage vgc	1299	Audio Research Ref 610 Monoblocks, vgc boxed	16999	AMR CD77 ex demo	Call	Amphion Xenon, excellent	899
Clearaudio innovation Compact, good condition	2499	Audio Research Ref 210 Monoblocks, as new boxed	9749	Arcam CD73	179	ATC SCM35, excellent	799
EAR 834P Deluxe ex demo	1299	AV1 S200(M), fair condition	349	Arcam CD192, excellent	399	B&W P5, Rosenut floorstander, good condition	199
Garrard 401 SME 3009 excellent	799	AYE Acoustics AX7e Integrated amplifier, ex boxed	1299	Audiolab 8000CDE vgc	149	B&W CM1, excellent boxed	299
Garrard 301, vgc	799	Ayre Acoustics AX7e integrated amplifier, ex boxed	1299	Audiolab 8000CDM Transport and 8000DAC	399	B&W CDM1se, excellent	299
Graaf GM70 Phono, excellent boxed	1399	Ayre Acoustics Vixie Power boxed mint	1999	AV1 S2000MC, fair condition	199	B&W 805 Signature, Tiger eye finish	1499
nsorbe Monarch Jnr, original 1210 Platter, 12" arm	Call	Beard P35mk2 Power Amplifier vgc	699	Ayre CX7e, excellent, remote	1199	Castle Inversion Subwoofer, near mint boxed	349
Koetsu Black, good condition	499	Border Patrol SE300B, PSU and Western Electric valves 2649	699	BAT VKD5 Cd Player, excellent boxed	899	Dynaudio Contour 1 8mk2, excellent boxed	849
Kuzma Stogi, excellent	449	Copland CSA28, excellent boxed in rare black	699	Cyrus CD8X boxed, excellent	379	Ethos Acoustics LS12/5b, excellent in gloss black	799
Linn Itok LV11, in rare black, excellent	799	CR Developments Romulus Integrated, boxed vgc	799	Esoteric K03, as new boxed	7499	Focal 806V, excellent boxed	349
Linn Soudok LP12, Aktio arm, AT cartridge	649	CR Developments Kalyoson Integrated, boxed vgc	549	Etracoremanet EMC IUP near mint boxed	1899	Linn AV140 Aktiv, with x-overs, vgc boxed	399
Michell Gyro SE, DC motor	699	CYRUS ACA7.5 Power combo	449	Goldenote Koala, near mint boxed	799	Linn Ninka, boxed in Maple	599
Michell Gyro export model AC motor QC Supply	699	Graaf GM100 Power, boxed	2499	Lector 0 6, excellent boxed, due in	699	Linn Logan Cinema centre speaker	399
Mission 774C Linn arm, excellent	149	Karan KAS180 Power, crated	1499	Linn Majk CD, excellent boxed	799	Martin Logan Quest, excellent, BIG bargain!	999
NAIM Suge line S, excellent	199	Krell KRC HR Preamplifier & PSU, excellent	1499	Linn Kank 3, excellent boxed	499	Magneplanar MG1.6, superb	999
Onofon TA100, excellent boxed	449	Krell FPB 600 Power Amplifier, vgc	3499	Leema Stream 3, in mint boxed	649	Meridian M1 Active speakers, boxed	1199
Project Tutu+ Box Phono Stage	Call	Krell S300 Integrated, excellent	1499	Mark Levinson 380 DAC, excellent boxed	1199	Monitor Audio PL300, mint crated	3999
Project RPM5, cw arm, speedbox 2 & Onofon 2M true	349	Krell FPB 650M Monoblocks	5499	Mendian G08.2, excellent boxed in black	999	Monitor Audio RXW12, gloss black, ex demo	599
Project RPM4, with arm and cover	229	Linn Kaim, excellent, on board phono	399	Mendian G08.2, excellent boxed in black	299	Monitor Audio RX8, Gloss black, boxed	749
Rega Pono MM, boxed as new	99	Linn Klout, excellent very late model	1199	Moon CD1, excellent boxed, top rated player	749	NAIM Audio Intro, excellent boxed	299
Rega RP5, chem, excellent boxed	599	Linn LK100, vgc boxed	229	Musica Fidelity Xray CD player, vgc	399	Quad ESL57s, good working order boxed	499
Rega RB250	99	McIntosh MAZ275, excellent boxed	3599	NAIM CD5i, excellent boxed remote	449	Quad 11L/2, excellent boxed	199
SME 202a Series V arm, excellent	3249	Musica Fidelity A370 mk2, excellent	999	NAIM CD5i2, excellent boxed remote	699	REL Storm vgc	149
SME 3012, early	1199	NAIM Supermail, excellent boxed	2199	NAIM CD5i2, excellent boxed remote	549	REL Q400e, excellent	399
Thorens TD124, excellent	799	NAIM AV2, excellent boxed	Call	North star Design Model 3 DAC, excellent boxed	199	Ruark Prologue One, yew finish, excellent boxed	299
Tom Evans Groove, excellent	899	NAIM NAP250, excellent boxed	Call	Puresound A8100, remote	399	Ruark Dialogue, excellent boxed	99
Townshend Elite Rock cw Excalibur arm vgc	799	NAIM NAP145, excellent boxed	249	Quad 66, excellent remote	299	Sonos Faber Cremona, vgc	2199
Wilson Besenach Act 1 Tonearm, nr mint superb	799	NAIM NAIT 3, excellent boxed	299	Quad 66, excellent remote	299	Sonos Faber Grand Piano Home, excellent boxed	899
<h3>Radios/Recorders</h3>							
Arcam Alpha B, excellent	119	NAIM NAC122XNAP150X, boxed excellent	799	Rega Saturn, excellent boxed	549	Thiel CS7.2 vgc, just refurbished	2999
Arcam T51, vgc	79	NAIM NAP135e, fair, good cond in boxed REDUCED	1599	Sony XA5400ES, excellent remote	699	Triangle Curmete ES, excellent	249
Cyrus FM7.5 excellent	199	NAIM NAP145, excellent boxed	249	Sony DTC-60ES DAT Recorder, superb	299	Usher S520 and matching Subwoofers	699
Quad FM4, excellent	199	NAIM NAIT 3, excellent boxed	299	Unison Research Unioc CDE, excellent boxed	999	Usher S520 in birch, excellent boxed	279
Rega Radio R, excellent	199	NAIM NAC122XNAP150X, boxed excellent	799	Yamaha CD5150 vintage, terrific boxed	299	Usher X616 centre speaker, excellent	399
<h3>AV/Accessories/Cables</h3>							
				Chord Cables various ex demo	Call	<h3>Special System Deals</h3>	
				Naip Flatcap original, excellent REDUCED	179	Audio Analogue Crescendo Amp & CD, ex demo	799
				Isotek Aquanus ex demo	Call	Esoteric RZ1 System - sealed box	2499
				V0H Cables various ex demo	Call	NAIM Unifile and Usher Speaker Bundle	Call
						TEAC DISTINCTION SERIES - Special deals - ON DEMO	Call

Telephone 01642 267012, Tuesday to Saturday 10 'til 5 or email choice@2ndhandhifi.co.uk

T U R N T A B L E W O R L D

Special offers to celebrate our new website

www.turntableworld.co.uk - the analogue specialists - 01642 267012



100 Country Joe and The Fish
Electric Music For The Mind And Body



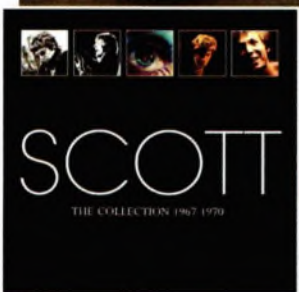
100 Nina Simone
Little Girl Blue



101 Turina
Danzas Fantasticas

Musicreviews

ALBUM
OF THE
MONTH



Scott Walker: an enigma wrapped up in a paradox or MOR teen idol... you decide

Scott Walker The Collection 1967-1970

★★★★☆

Four CD box set **Universal**

SCOTT WALKER IS an enigma. That, of course, is how he wants us to think of him and it's an image he's carefully cultivated via a studied reclusiveness, a refusal to give interviews and some gnomic and at times breathtakingly pretentious utterances. Great art is enigmatic, he seems to be saying, and great artists are not like ordinary people. But the Walker enigma is also wrapped in a paradox. He wants to be regarded as an avant-garde experimentalist, a post-modern innovator pushing at the boundaries of creativity. And yet his career was built upon success as a light entertainer, singing MOR pop ballads.

By 1969, only two years after he had left the Walker Brothers, he was improbably asking critics to judge his music alongside the great works of Beethoven, Brahms and Shostakovich. The enigma and the paradox are abundantly in evidence on this four-disc collection of the five career-defining solo albums he recorded between 1967-70. Collected together for the first time, it's the body of work on which his reputation was built as he sought to make the transition

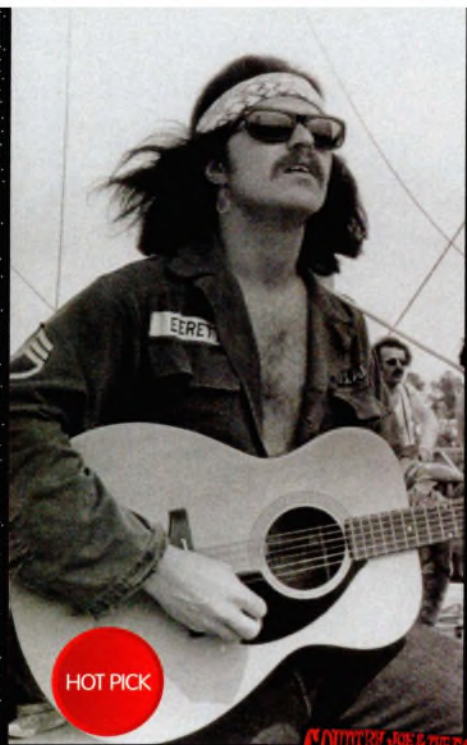
from teen idol to serious artist. His moody interpretations of composers such as Jacques Brel sit alongside challenging self-compositions and middle of the road radio-friendly balladry. It's a unsettling marriage as the competing dictates of art and commerce battle for ownership of his voice and the weird chemistry that ensues is what makes these recordings so fascinating.

The enigma and the paradox are in evidence on this four-disc collection of the career-defining solo albums

Walker's peerless baritone enabled him to sing almost anything with conviction, an ability that is immediately evident on his 1967 solo debut, *Scott*. It opens with the big band schmaltz of *Mathilde* and closes with a dramatic arrangement of Brel's leftfield *Amsterdam*. You could call it eclectic, although schizophrenic might also

apply. *Scott 2* (1968) opens with a swaggering take on Brel's *Jackie* as Walker sings with evident relish of "opium dens, authentic queers and phoney virgins", followed by a banal, string-laden cover of Tim Hardin's *Black Sheep Boy*, quirky self-compositions such as *The Amorous Humphrey Plugg* and cloyingly sentimental covers of Mancini and Bacharach. *Scott 3* (1969) – the album that found him citing Shostakovich as a kindred spirit – is full of some of his finest self-compositions and striking string arrangements. But by the time of *Scott 4* (1969), his audience had given up trying to guess which Scott Walker they were going to get. In characteristically paradoxical fashion, the entirely self-composed set was his most inventive and coherent to date. But commercial failure led to an inevitable retreat and the follow-up, 1970's *Til The Band Comes In*, was split between original compositions and sentimental string-laden covers. After listening to all 62 tracks, we're still no closer to identifying the real Scott Walker. Which the man himself would regard as mission accomplished. **NW**

PHOTO BY: JIM MARSHALL



Country Joe and The Fish



Electric Music For The Mind and Body

★★★★★

Two CDs

Ace

RELEASED JUST AS 1967's 'summer of love' was about to dawn, this debut was a game changer that defined the sound of acid rock as thrillingly as anything else emerging from San Francisco at the time. McDonald's absurdly drug-laced

Defined the sound of acid rock as thrillingly as anything else from San Francisco at the time

lyrics, Barry Melton's glissando guitar and the spacey keyboards of David Cohen set out to expand our minds by creating an aural acid trip.

Improvised free jazz, baroque classical influences, bucolic folk, weird time signatures and blues-rock coalesce to create a swirling psych kaleidoscope of intricacy assembled in movements like an acid symphony. Reissued as a two-disc set in both the original stereo and mono mixes, the latter is somewhat pointless as experiencing psychedelia in mono is like listening in black and white. **NW**



Ian Dury Lord Upminster

★★★★☆

CD

Salvo

DURY'S FOURTH ALBUM was a commercial flop on its 1981 release and has long been unavailable on CD. He'd left the punk label Stiff and signed to Polydor, which sent him to the Bahamas to record with legendary reggae rhythm section Sly and Robbie.

Without his long-time collaborators (the Blockheads), the punk energy of earlier releases was replaced with a funkier, more mainstream sound. Now remastered with five bonus tracks, the wicked wit of his early work seems oddly diluted on *Lord Upminster*, although the ever controversial *Spastitus* (*Autisticus*) remains as potent as anything he ever wrote. **NW**



Mavis Staples with Jeff Tweedy One True Vine

★★★★★

CD

Anti Records

MAVIS STAPLES' PLACE in the pantheon of soul greats is assured, but she's still producing quality work. For her second album with Wilco's roots guru Jeff Tweedy she weaves her powerfully insistent, but never overwrought vocal pipes around tunes by Nick Lowe (*Far Celestial Shores*), Funkadelic (*Can You Get To That* done country style) and Tweedy himself. The results combine country, gospel, soul and just a little bit of rock in a beautifully understated collection of gems that, while not reaching the heights of her very best, at least come within touching distance. **DO**



The Fall

Re-Mit

CD

Cherry Red

IT'S TESTAMENT TO the force of his will that Mark E Smith's output through 30 studio albums and more than 35 years of The Fall has remained remarkably consistent, despite multiple line ups and labels. His latest won't convince you if you're not smitten by his shouted paranoid diatribes and hook-laden, ramshackle music. But if you were ever a fan, you'll find enough here to make it worth your while. It's a hit (mostly) and miss affair that's magnificently inappropriate for a northern gentleman of his vintage. **DO**

★★★★★

AUDIOFILE VINYL

★★★★★

Nina Simone Little Girl Blue

180g vinyl

Bethlehem/Pure Pleasure



HOT PICK

NINA SIMONE MADE this album at the age of just 25, it was an auspicious and fully formed debut for arguably the greatest

jazz singer of the post war era. It contains her two 'greatest hits' *Love Me Or Leave Me* and *My Baby Just Cares For Me*, which are the more upbeat numbers in a broad range that reveal her conspicuous talent as a pianist and arranger, not to mention her ability to touch the audience. At once

consummately professional and yet able to put real feeling into a performance.

Simone is extremely versatile with other people's work, yet her full potential is revealed on the only original track, *Central Park Blues*. In this she uses dynamic range and subtleties of timing and mood to produce a masterpiece. Credit should be given to Jimmy Bond on bass and Albert 'Tootie' Heath on drums who provide a snap and verve that drives the likes of *Mood Indigo*. The fact that this is a mono recording does nothing to undermine its power to communicate and Pure Pleasure's remastering brings out surprising extension at the low end for a 1957 recording. **JK**

↓ HIGH RESOLUTION **DOWNLOADS**



Eric Whitacre Water Night



ALAC 16-bit **Bowers & Wilkins Society of Sound**

TANNED AND HANDSOME, Nevada's Eric Whitacre has become a bit of a classical pin-up. Fortunately, his music lives up to the hype, whether he's harnessing the latest technology for his 'virtual choir' of sampled voices, writing film scores or producing more traditional works. *Water Night* pulls together various commissions old and new, choral and orchestral in a lush, delicately nuanced suite evoking early church music as well as a much more modern sense of wonder. **DO**



Emily Barker & the Red Clay Halo Dear River



ALAC 24-bit **Linn Records**

ORIGINALLY FROM WESTERN Australia but now based in the UK, Barker's voice may already be familiar from the BBC's *Wallander* TV series. Her fourth album, produced by the Blue Nile's Calum Malcolm, is an Americana-themed hymn of strummed guitars, violin and vocal harmonies held together by a delicately balanced acoustic ambience. It's a warm, welcoming sound that entices your ears with a surfeit of gorgeous tunes. **DO**

Turina

Danzas Fantasticas
Clara Mouriz - mezzo-soprano,
BBC Philharmonic, Juanjo Mena

CD **Chandos CHAN-10753**

THIS STUNNING CD contains some of Turina's best-known works, and the performances under Juanjo Mena sound fresh, lively, and idiomatic, with plenty of sultry atmosphere and Spanish temperament thrown in for good measure. The Chandos/BBC recording offers lots of bright-edged brilliance and immediacy, yet sounds refined and clean, with a wide dynamic range and crisp attack. There's a nice balance between clarity/immediacy and ambience - the orchestra being set slightly back in a spacious, but clear acoustic. **JH**



Rachmaninov Symphony No 3 Symphonic Dances

Detroit Symphony orchestra
Leonard Slatkin



CD **Naxos 8573051**

SLATKIN GIVES CLEAN straightforward performances of these richly burnished scores. He takes a cool, slightly distanced view of both works, and does not exaggerate their sad reflective melancholy. Those expecting ripe romantic performances may be disappointed, but Slatkin keeps the music moving and refuses to wallow in sentimentality.

The recordings sound smooth and natural, with good dynamic range, although they are a little dry and lacking in spaciousness. Balances vary; the brief piano part in the *Symphonic Dances* is pretty much inaudible, although there's a nice powerful tam-tam stroke at the end! **JH**

BLU-RAY DVD **★★★★★**

Alanis Morissette

Live at Montreux 2012 eagle-rock.com



THIS PERFORMANCE

WAS part of a world tour to promote the *Havoc and Bright Lights* album last year and sees Morissette striding manfully back and forth across

a large stage with a very slick five piece band. She reels out the hits alongside new pieces and clearly enjoys the latter rather more; *Ironic* is sung through gritted teeth, but perhaps that's the point! The sound is big and wideband with plenty of controlled energy; polished, but with just enough edge to let the angst shine through. **JJK**

Nature's Dragonfly



Our DRAGONFLY



Both shown actual size ... in their natural habitat.

audioquest

audioquest.com/DragonFly

Hi-Fi Choice SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

DIRECT DEBIT SUBSCRIPTIONS (UK ONLY):

Yes, I would like to subscribe to *Hi-Fi Choice*, paying £9.79 every 3 months by Direct Debit. **SAVING 25% PLUS FREE GIFT (UK ONLY)** Please complete form below

YOUR DETAILS (MUST BE COMPLETED)

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address
.....
Postcode Country
Tel Mobile.....
Email D.O.B

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address
.....
Postcode Country
Tel Mobile.....
Email D.O.B

INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUR BANK/BUILDING SOCIETY

Originator's reference 422562 
Name of bank.....
Address of bank.....
..... Postcode.....
Account holder.....
Signature..... Date

Sort code Account number

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay MyTimeMedia Ltd. Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with MyTimeMedia Ltd and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Reference Number (official use only)

Please note that banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of account.

OTHER PAYMENTS & OVERSEAS

Yes, I would like to subscribe to *Hi-Fi Choice* for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment:
 UK £41.49 SAVE 20% PLUS FREE GIFT
 Europe (incl Eire) £61.26 **ROW Airmail £65.00**

For all Canadian, North and South American subscriptions please call 001877 363 1310 or go to www.expressmag.com

PAYMENT DETAILS

Postal Order/Cheque Visa/Mastercard Maestro
Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code V440 on the back
Cardholder's name.....
Card no: (Maestro)
Valid from..... Expiry date..... Maestro issue no.....
Signature..... Date.....

Offer ends 4th July 2013. MyTimeMedia Ltd & *Hi-Fi Choice* may contact you with information about our other products and services. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by MyTimeMedia Ltd & *Hi-Fi Choice* please tick here: Email Post Phone. If you wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: Email Post Phone. Please see opposite page for full terms & conditions **CODE V440**

POST THIS FORM TO: HI-FI CHOICE SUBSCRIPTIONS, TOWER HOUSE, SOVEREIGN PARK, MARKET HARBOROUGH, LEICS LE16 9EF.



GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE

- 13 print edition issues delivered to your door
- Receive free 2m Atlas Element USB 2.0 cable*
- Exclusive discount on orders at www.myhobbystore.co.uk
- PLUS! SAVE UP TO 25% OFF THE SHOP PRICE

**HURRY
OFFER
CLOSES
4TH JULY
2013**

**DIGITAL ONLY
SUBSCRIPTIONS
ALSO AVAILABLE
PLEASE VISIT:**

www.hifichoice.co.uk/subscribe



SUBSCRIBE TODAY

Subscribe today

& RECEIVE A FREE 2M ATLAS ELEMENT USB CABLE WORTH £47.50*



"THE ATLAS ELEMENT SETS THE STANDARD AMONG PREMIUM USB CABLES"



SAVE UP TO 25% OFF THE SHOP PRICE


TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 4th July 2013. *Gift for UK subscribers only, while stocks last. Subscriptions will begin with the first available issue. Please continue to buy your magazine until you receive your acknowledgement letter. Initial 12 month non-refundable contract applies. Refund requests must be in writing to the Publisher and will not be given on accounts with less than £20 credit. A £5 admin charge will apply and will be deducted from any refund. Refunds will only be given at the Publisher's sole discretion. We will use the contact details supplied to communicate with you regarding your Hi-Fi Choice subscription. Your details will be processed by MyTimeMedia Ltd & Hi-Fi Choice in full accordance with all relevant UK and EU data protection legislation.

With its thin profile (just 5.5mm) and pliable construction, the Atlas Element USB cable can be easily installed and hidden away out of sight. Constructed from parallel lay twisted-pair silver-plated high-purity OFC copper conductors encased in a high-quality foamed Polyethylene dielectric, the Element has been designed to keep the characteristic impedance of the cable as stable as possible to ensure jitter is kept to a minimum. The result is a class-leading cable that's perfect for delivering hi-res audio from your computer to your hi-fi setup.

SUBSCRIBE SECURELY ONLINE

 www.subscription.co.uk/hific/V440

CALL OUR ORDER LINE Quote ref. V440

 08456 777 807

Lines open weekdays 8am - 9.30pm & Saturday 8am - 4pm

BT landline calls to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 5p per minute. Calls from mobiles usually cost more.

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 or mail: **Reader Classified, Hi-Fi Choice, AVTech Media 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

SONUS FABER Musica amplifier. Boxed, very good condition £1,000 ono: **07753 271 812 (Notts).**

SPENDOR 58E £300 ono. No boxes, buyer collects. Will demo: email: moss8rg@btinternet.com (Northampton).

DPA 200 preamp and DPA 200 power amp £300 each. E.A.R. 834L Delux preamp £700. All boxed, in good condition: **07890 896 819 (Cumbria).**

GRACE M902 headphone amp £995 (£1,500), Arcam BB3 £85 (£360), Musical Fidelity X10 V3 tube buffer £200 (£300), Michi preamp by Rotel, fabulous, £800 (£1,250): **07811 613 140 (Bristol).**

PAIR of custom-built speaker stands. 5kg each, finish black hammered. Height: 35.5cm; base: 25 x 22cm; top: 20 x 17cm. Excellent condition. £45 ono, buyer collects: **01258 454 084 or email: gandjboutelle@talktalk.net (Dorset).**

PRIMARE CD31 CD player and 130 integrated amplifier (Balanced or RCA interconnects). As new, high-quality system bought ex-demo as second system, but never set up £1,500 (£3,000 new): **07712 875 316 or email: jeff.wilding@tiscali.co.uk (Manchester).**

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS351 pure class A integrated amplifier (silver) boxed, superb, mint condition. Only 18 months old. Can Demo. Reluctant sale (£6,000) £4,000: **01282 421 866 or email: jeff21@btinternet.com.**

LINN Sneaky Digital Streamer £500 (£1,015); Townshend Audio Maximum Super Tweeters £400 (£800); Chord Signature Plus 1m RCA interconnect £350 (£765). All items are in excellent condition and come with manufacturer-supplied boxes, packaging and manuals. Excludes postage: **01305 263 069.**

USHER S520 standmount speakers, black gloss finish,

immaculate condition, boxed, £250 incl delivery. Kudos S50 speaker stands, black, 20 x 15cm top plate, 60cm high, VGC, £60 (£170 new): **01706 345 418 or email: mail@rodtheobald.force9.co.uk (Rochdale).**

CREEK OBH-8SE with OBH2 power supply MM, original boxes and instructions VGC £135. Project Phono Box SE 2 blk MM/MC, original box and instructions VGC £135. Turntable record disc stabiliser weight alloy 370g, original box VGC £20. Lejonklou phono amp. Suitable for MM only. Bought new May 2011 for £425. Bargain at £280. All prices exclude p&p: **01772 715 862 or email: cpsquire@yahoo.co.uk**

CYRUS 6DAC amplifier and DAC combined. Unwanted prize and absolutely immaculate. Used for three weeks only and just 'run in'. £580 – almost half price! Post or collect: **01575 572 603 or email: russell@sayers.myzen.co.uk (Angus).**



Some lucky bargain hunter could bag a stunning Rega turntable

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DAC

Magic £100. Pair EB1 Speakers £250. Pair Sounds Style Z2 stands £35. Pair Mordaunt Short Avant 902.1 speakers £75. Rega Headphone Ear amp with RCA output £100. Cambridge Audio Azur 340SE amp £90. Buyer to collect: **02920 568 165 (Cardiff).**

200+ vinyl LP records: opera, orchestral, classical, jazz, pop etc. Buyers collect: **01246 865 640 or email: johnm_holmes@talktalk.net (Chesterfield).**

ARCAM CD17 in black, 3 months old £450. Linn Majik Sondek, 3 months old in walnut, with trampoline base and clear lid £2,200. Monitor Audio GX50 in gloss white, 10 hours use only £650. All boxed, prefer collection: email: igreenelectrical@aol.com (Edinburgh).

ATC SCM12 speakers, cherry finish with matching stands, in excellent condition £500 ono. Audiolab 800P power amp, original black version, good condition £180 ono. Quad 44/405-1 pre/power amps, good condition £275 ono: **07547 413 390 (Wiltshire).**

REGA P3 turntable. Grado prestige gold cartridge, Michell tecnocounterweight, Rega bias 2. Boxed, owned from new, excellent condition. Open to reasonable offers: **01614459 770 or email: dan.overton1@btinternet.com**

btinternet.com (Manchester).

WANTED late Van Den Hul Frog gold cartridge. One in need of repair: **01505 346 791 (Renfrewshire).**

PARASOUND ZDAC DAC Silver as new £359.99. Acoustic Energy AE1 speakers, black £499. Parasound A21 power amp £699: **07975 151 445 (West Sussex) or email: patwack@aol.com.**

MORDOST cables: White Lightning 2.5m RCA stereo pair interconnects (brand new, boxed) £100. Also: 2.5m and 3.5m SolarWind speaker cables. mint condition £150: **01457 871 622 (Lancs).**

JAMO D830 speakers, VGC (£1,250) £699 ono. Korg Karma music workstation, excellent condition, includes EXB-MOSS board and stand (£1,500) £699 ono. Can negotiate on collection: **07798 607 225 or email: simon.corcos@btft.nhs.uk (West Yorkshire).**

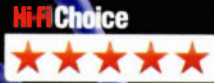
MARANTZ (SP4320) receiver £110 Dual 505/2 turntable £40. Shure SGF2 stylus balance boxed £25. Pioneer (DVL909) Laser Disc DVD Player £250. Sonotone (9TA1HC) cartridge, spare stylus (new) £15: **01708 457 691 (Essex).**

SOMETHING SOLID speaker stands. Fully welded construction, black, 63cm height, mass filled, spiked feet, photo available. Ring for other dimensions. Quality stands. VGC. £50:

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!

IsoTek® Discover the IsoTek Effect

Mains electricity is distorted by numerous factors as it travels from power stations to our homes, eroding your systems performance. The **New Discovery Range** from IsoTek delivers highly effective yet eminently affordable solutions to enhance sound and picture quality, whilst also protecting your valuable equipment from power surges and voltage spikes.*



“A distinct cleaning up of the sound...
“A marked benefit for dynamic range, a consequence of lowering the noise floor, as well as a refinement and a general opening up of the soundstage”

IsoTek EV03 Premier, Hi-Fi Choice, March 2013

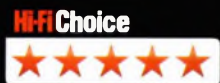
EV03 Premier

IsoTek's most affordable power cable has at its core three 2sqmm conductors made from 99.9999% OFC (oxygen-free copper) and coated in silver to aid conductivity, with a Teflon FEP dielectric extruded over each conductor. A cotton filler is used to give the cable internal strength and reduce microphony whilst maintaining dielectric performance. The cable is terminated with high-quality 24ct gold connectors, designed and manufactured by IsoTek rather than bought off the shelf. No similarly priced power cable is constructed to such a high specification, with correspondingly impressive benefits to sound and picture quality.

- 24ct gold connectors
- Silver plated OFC conductors
- Teflon FEP dielectric
- 16A current capability
- C15, C19 and C7 IEC options
- 1.5m standard length

EV03 Polaris

Cost effective high-performance power distribution strip that cleans Common and Differential Mode noise from the mains as well as offering surge and spike protection.



“More space, lower noise and greater resolution... An increase in timing precision, depth of bass and a much greater sense of musical flow”

IsoTek EV03 Polaris, Hi-Fi Choice, March 2013



Discover IsoTek

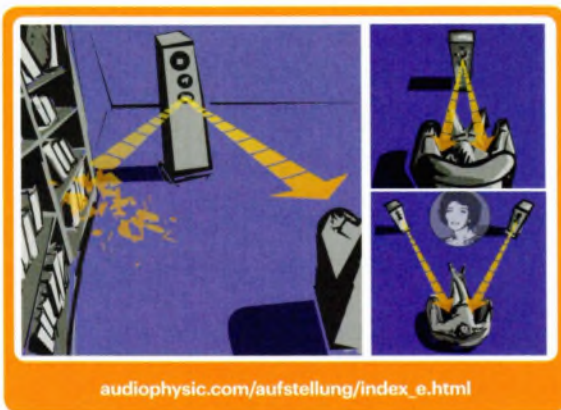
For your free brochure:

IsoTek products are distributed by Sound Foundations.
+44 (0)1276 501 392 info@soundfoundations.co.uk

www.isoteksystems.com | www.shop.isoteksystems.com
www.facebook.com/isoteksystems

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

Andrew Simpson casts his expert eye over his pick of the best hi-fi websites and online content



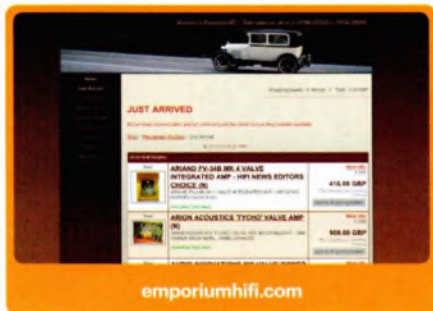
audiophysic.com/aufstellung/index_e.html

AUDIO PHYSIC'S SPEAKER SET-UP GUIDE

Positioning speakers correctly to get the best out of your beloved transducers of choice is almost as important as the actual speakers you use. What's more it costs nothing and the rewards garnered from little effort can be remarkable. But where to begin? Help is at hand via Audio Physic's online guide to the principals and steps you should take to

get the best sound from your chosen pair of stereo speakers. The first section kicks off with some useful theory and simple illustrations, explaining how the brain interprets sound from various directional sources. Following this are nine rules on adjusting your speakers and room to influence high and low frequencies, flutter echoes, reflections and the like. Finally, while 'position example' might sound like part of the *Karma Sutra*, this section takes you through steps to minimising room effects, with interactive illustrations allowing you to move speakers around onscreen to illustrate each point.

As with all generalisations, there are some caveats you should remember. Optimal positioning varies from speaker model to model and unlike the diagrams, real-life listening rooms usually come with compromises. That said, this is still a helpful starting point that could lead to hours of fun and hair pulling in equal measures.



emporiumhifi.com

EMPORIUM HIFI

If you love scouring the web for used hi-fi bargains, Emporium HiFi should be in your favourites list. Founded in 1986 by Nick Besley, Emporium has branches across the UK with outlets in Norfolk, Wales and Kent.

Although Emporium is also a dealer for new products from audiophile brands, its reputation for providing quality used kit is well respected. The site boasts six pages of used hi-fi, ranging from Arcam amps for a couple of hundred quid, to Avalon speakers at £15K, so there's something for everyone, and valve and vinyl junkies are particularly well catered for.

Home demos are all part of the service, used kit comes with a three-month warranty and trade-ins are also welcome. If you're after a pre-loved treasure without the worry of buying blind, check it out.



bowers-wilkins.co.uk/Society_of_Sound

BOWERS & WILKINS' SOCIETY OF SOUND

It's good to see hi-fi company websites displaying more than just lists of products and prices, and the Society of Sound area of Bowers and Wilkins' site is a good example of what else can be offered to keep the end user interested. There's a commentable blog, featuring videos and thought pieces from producers, musicians and DJs discussing topics ranging from classic albums to digital and analogue recording techniques.

The site also offers members 24-bit music via an annual subscription of £34, which gives you two hand-picked studio-quality album downloads per month, plus a selection of catalogue albums. You can sign up for a free three-month members' music trial, which gives access to a limited selection of 16-bit FLAC/ALAC tracks.

CHOICE TWEETS

MF HEADPHONES (@MFHPHONES)
30 years ago @johnnymarnet & the Smiths altered British pop culture with debut single Hand in Glove. What's your favourite Smiths song?

KRELL AV (@KRELLAV)
Do you know that you can control Krell Connect through an #app? Download it for free: ow.ly/kUFxR

NAIM AUDIO (@NAIMAUDIO)
Another classic ad for you this #throwbackfriday featuring founder Julian Vereker announcing the launch of Naim Audio pic. twitter.com/ixUPRozXya

DEVIALET (@DEVIALET)
One day, everyone will own a Devialet. We are very excited about this. devialet.com

OXFORD AUDIO (@OXFORDAUDIO)
On the way to Munich for #HighEnd Show - lots of new product launches - can't wait to get there! News to follow

DALI A/S (@DALISPEAKERS)
We will be showcasing the KUBIK FREE at High End 2013 in Munich. Here you will be able to try it with your own device instagram.com/p/ZC_JypPL7s/

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS (@KIPPER248)
Today we are giving a cup of tea or coffee away with each order above £10,000. Limited to the first 30 customers. fb.me/2uR0utDA0

CHATTER

Cyrus audio fans were given the opportunity to take part in an exclusive twitter chat on 14 May and put their product questions to its Service and Support Manager. See the discussion: [#askcyrus](https://twitter.com/askcyrus)

Linn's Lounge events continue throughout the summer, allowing you to hear studio masters of classic music releases from The

Beatles, REM and Led Zeppelin at selected hi-fi venues across the UK and Europe. Check out: linn.co.uk/events#list or follow the action on twitter: [#LinnLounge](https://twitter.com/LinnLounge)

Wilson Audio's Facebook wall was all about the new Duetto 2 standmount last month. You can see plenty of pics and video to whet your appetite at facebook.com/WilsonAudio

Audiodesksysteme vinyl cleaner



- Ultrasonic technology for the most efficient cleaning of LPs
- Contactless cleaning that removes more dirt from the vinyl grooves than conventional suction methods
- Ultra clean LPs give a more correct tonal balance, more detail, and less stylus wear
- Superb results with both older, cherished LPs and brand new audiophile pressings
- High quality German engineering – simple to use

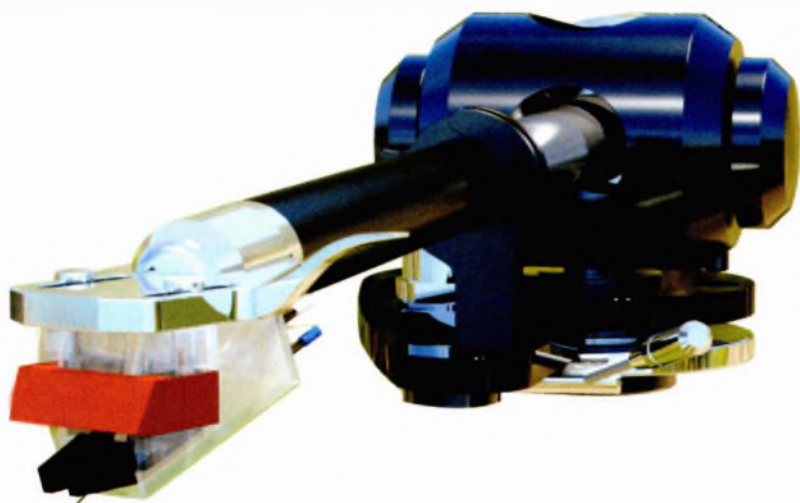
For further info about any of our products please visit our website: www.audioconsultants.co.uk

info@audioconsultants.co.uk

4 Zephyr House Calleva Park Aldermaston Berkshire RG7 8JN UK

AC/HFN/70

Raise your cartridge performance to that of one up to 40 times the price



A Tonearm is probably the most overlooked yet rewarding component to dramatically improve system performance.

The results obtained are indeed extraordinary, as testified by Origin Live users, who find their cartridges performing at hitherto, undreamt of levels.

Such claims seem unlikely, but the truth is that improvements over established reference arms are so great, that delighted owners let us know how pleased they are on constant basis.

To find out why these arms can transform systems in a way that no others can, please read www.tonearm.co.uk

"The biggest improvement I've made in 25 years of listening to music and lots of exchanges of hi-fi stuff!!breathtaking, big new level! It's like coming to Nirvana". OWNER COMMENT- FERDINAND ROEHRIG



2012 Tonearm of the Year award - The Absolute Sound Magazine



2012 Tonearm of the Year award

Email: originlive@originlive.com

Website: www.originlive.com

Phone: +44(0)2380 578877



B&W

Z2 speaker

THE RISE OF the Android mobile operating system, and Samsung in particular, means nothing to B&W, which remains firmly committed to the Apple ecosystem. With AirPlay rather than Bluetooth, and an Apple Lightning connector rather than USB, the Z2 is a portable speaker aimed firmly at owners of an iPhone 5 or the latest generations of iPods.

Some manufacturers eschew AirPlay because of its relative complexity to set up, yet Cambridge Audio's Minx 100 for example, which is the same price offers both AirPlay and apt-X Bluetooth, which is compatible with FLAC recordings, although it doesn't have a dock. Still, as B&W's iconic Zeppelin and junior stablemate the Zeppelin Mini, prove, the dedicated AirPlay/iPhone dock market can be a lucrative one.

Docking the issue

One problem for designers of speaker docks is that multi-pin connectors are ugly. Even the Lightning connector is visually distracting on the Z2's elegantly sculpted top surface. Cunningly though, it is recessed so that when viewed directly from the front, it disappears. The recessing means that iPads won't fit on the dock.

The Z2 is sturdily built and a minimalist delight. Next to the dock section is a barely visible touch-sensitive volume control, and round the back are a 3.5mm line input, Ethernet socket, power input (there is no battery), reset button and power standby button. Above them is the bass outlet, distinctively and deliberately dimpled like the surface of a golf ball to reduce air turbulence and deliver cleaner bass, especially at high volumes.

Inside lurks a 40W Class D amplifier that feeds two 3.5in full range drive units.

Setting up AirPlay is a relatively convoluted process, although the B&W Control app does its best to take the pain out of the process, guiding you through step-by-step. The Ethernet port provides a fail-safe option for launching the Z2 on to your home network. Once



set-up the Control app can be discarded as it offers none of the playback control or EQ settings found on apps such as Cambridge Audio's. This is only an issue really when using the dock rather than streaming as you can access iTunes' equalizer on a computer or use the iPod's own.

Operation is pretty straightforward with the Z2 able to automatically switch from its other inputs to AirPlay when a signal is received.

Using the dock rather than AirPlay allows the Z2 to use its own superior DAC rather than the iPod's own. This results in discernibly superior sound quality, however even its AirPlay performance is remarkably good and has the edge over the Minx 100. The overall sound is warmer and tonally better balanced than the Minx, especially once it's been used for a good few hours and the upper register response has settled down. Bass performance is substantial from the off, blending nicely with the full-range drivers although, depending on the source, some may find it needs reining in a tad. True to form, the Flowport technology means you can crank up the volume without fear of the bass becoming detached from the mid-range or of it losing any of its control or agility.

When streaming Britten's *Young Person's Guide To The Orchestra* delicate sounds like the xylophone are

a bit lost in the ensemble part and the piccolo lacks detail. Switch to dock playback and everything feels distinctly balanced, even during the crazy climatic overlaying of Purcell's brass melody. Overall, it's a sterling effort. The piano and choir boys' vocals in another Britten piece, *Old Abram Brown*, shine superbly, never sounding cramped. Nor is the Z2 fazed by either Tina Turner's manic screaming in *Private Dancer* or her lower range murmuring. Whatever register you throw at it, the speaker seems up to the challenge.

Home run

Depeche Mode's *Home* streamed over AirPlay is another example of a track that needs bass adjustment to yield rich dividends. Switching to the dock delivers a more open, engaging sound with incredible deftness and excellent bass.

Overall, for such a compact speaker the Z2 delivers a remarkable sound and is equally adept with classical music as rock, pop, R'n'B or whatever genre you prefer. Although its bass provision is over generous for its size, it has a terrifically rewarding sound that stacks up to prolonged listening sessions, especially when used with its dock. The Z2 is also proof, if ever it were needed, that wireless audio is no match for a physical connection. **AJ**

DETAILS

PRICE
£330
WEBSITE
bowers-wilkins.
co.uk

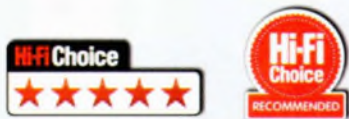
OUR VERDICT





"The Guru is is an extremely lively and involving two way speaker with sensational bass performance, explicit timing and superb detail retrieval. It is attractive, well built and considering it is built in Europe, reasonably priced."

Ed Selley - Av Forums



"The Junior excels at putting the music ahead of the sound."

Jason Kennedy - Hi-Fi Choice

The incredible new Junior from Guru Audio

www.guruaudio.co.uk **GURU**
Made in Sweden



swedes have more fun

The New Guru

"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

**CALL 01727 810047 NOW
TO ARRANGE YOUR
DEMONSTRATION**

GURU
www.guruproaudio.co.uk



Mains Cables R Us

No. 85 mains lead

OVER THE PAST year I have been steadily working my way through the Mains Cables R Us mains lead hierarchy, starting with the outstanding £65 Audio Asylum mains power cord, the £95 MCRU No. 27 power cable, and the £155 MCRU No. 38 power lead. All of these, along with my Naim Audio Cable/Hydra plug four-in-one combos connect to the De-Oxi-treated, MCRU Super Switch 13A wall socket via a modified, 12-way, Brennenstuhl distribution block wired with heavy duty Lapp cable.

Although I've witnessed some improvements in the performance of my own system with these cables, I am often rather cautious when it comes to sonic performance enhancement claims made for mains leads. My scepticism comes from my dealings with Naim Audio's founder, Julian Vereker, who acknowledged the importance of the mains supply to any piece of electronics, but found that many hi-fi cable solutions adversely affected the impedance of the supply. Naim components did not usually respond favourably to after-market mains leads. All too often these cables were found to enhance some aspect of the sonic performance of the equipment while restricting its ability to convey the music and emotion of the performer.

Keeping it real

My experience with MCRU cables suggests that its leads are musically persuasive and communicative performers that provide worthwhile advances in the way a system articulates musical performances. Even the relatively inexpensive Crump Asylum and No. 27 cables enable my reference system to deliver more of its usual musical coherence and communication, along with a super quiet background, and greater definition of micro-dynamics and nuances from the back of the sound-stage.

The No. 85 mains lead uses Furutech cable and silver-plated connectors. It comes particularly recommended for use with Naim



equipment, and is 1.2m long as standard. The cable is silver plated copper and its construction features shielding and screening to reject RFI/EMI as well as "a built-in Faraday cage to prevent the cable acting as an aerial." The terminations are a heavily silver-plated 13A MK mains plug with a silver-plated fuse, and an IeGo silver-plated over pure copper IEC connector, which has been cryo treated. This makes for what MCRU calls "an exceptionally good mains lead, which will give your system an instant sound quality upgrade, proven by existing customer feedback."

I did most of my listening to the No. 85 with the 24-bit/88.2KHz rip of *GRRR!*, the Rolling Stones celebration of their 50th anniversary. This proved fortuitous because given sufficient control this rip sounds vibrant and effusive, like the Stones of the seventies. If the system is 'letting go' the sound becomes raucous as though someone has cranked up the mix to over-emphasise the frequencies around the typical two-way crossover point, which I find particularly infuriating.

This is not the case with the No. 85 as it has an aural effect similar to gently tweaking the contrast setting on a video monitor and making subtle dynamic contrasts a degree more obvious where they might have scarcely been apparent before.

Ultimately, the No. 85 is an exciting proposition, and most certainly one of the finest mains cables I have heard to date in my system. It produces its exceptional musically coherent performance with seemingly nothing more hi-tech than some judicious plating on its charmingly plain connectors and some cryo treatment, which is commonplace nowadays.

Do the right thing

In the context of my Naim-based system what the No. 85 does not do is almost as vital as what it does: it does nothing to harm the dynamic contrast, particularly on low-level dynamics, and it does no damage to the system's ability to portray timing information. Both the problems mentioned are typical of the many after-market mains leads that I have tried with Naim components.

In short, the MCRU No. 85, at £225 costs less than half the price of the Naim Powerline mains lead, but can offer a truly competitive level of performance. In any Naim system, of course, it goes without saying that scrupulous cable dressing – to ensure the mains leads are relaxed and suffering no undue mechanical strain or interference, and are not intertwined with signal-carrying leads – helps to consolidate the performance no end. **MS**

DETAILS

PRICE
£225

CONTACT
07908 056978

WEBSITE
mains-cables-r-us.
co.uk

OUR VERDICT




NORDOST
MAKING THE CONNECTION



VALHALLA 2

Reference Redefined.

Distributed by Atacama Audio T. 01455 283251 E. post@atacama-audio.co.uk www.nordost-cables.co.uk Made in USA 



AUDION

A light in the darkness

"It could take me to the venue *and* reveal the moods therein"

6moons.com 09/12, Audion Silver Night 300B Anniversary

"Music Lovers' Delight" and
"highly recommended"

The Absolute Sound 04/12, Audion Sterling EL34 Anniversary

"proof that you don't have to spend five figures to attain lovely analog sound"

Tone Audio 01/12, Audion Premier Phono Stage

Available in the UK exclusively from:

Audio Counsel
29 Sam Road, Diggle, Oldham,
OL3 5PU
01457 875 555
www.audio-counsel.co.uk

Deco Audio
36 Buckingham Street, Aylesbury, Bucks
HP20 2LH
01296 422 224
www.decoaudio.com



Distributed in the UK by Note Audio Distribution

www.noteaudio.com

Arcam

rBlink Bluetooth DAC

MANY HI-FI ENTHUSIASTS will think it's a bit of a contradiction to claim high-quality audio streaming is capable from a Bluetooth device. Audio quality via the short-range wireless connectivity has a poor reputation and has been languishing at the bottom of the sound quality chain when it comes to its hi-fi credentials. But with more speaker systems using wireless connectivity to link to Bluetooth-enabled mobile devices, it seems that the latest generation of wireless technology is set to challenge preconceptions.

The rBlink is the latest member to join Arcam's respected rSeries, and is the third accessory in the line up to bring an easy add-on digital-to-analogue convertor solution to boost audio quality and upgrade music sources. Its Bluetooth connectivity will raise some eyebrows, but rBlink provides one of the neatest solutions to anyone looking to listen to music through their hi-fi system from a Bluetooth-enabled laptop, smartphone or tablet. It streams AAC music files at 256kbps from devices running iOS6, and apt-X provides streaming for up to 380kbps with compatible sources such as MacBooks and selected smartphones. Older Bluetooth devices are streamed at 128kbps.

Hey good looking

It looks like being one of the neatest solutions yet. Its styling and finish matches other rSeries models in the range and has a build and finish that feels surprisingly well turned out for something designed to be hidden away. The sturdy black chassis is made from brushed aluminium and exudes the high-quality finish we've come to expect from the Cambridge-based manufacturer.

Connections are conveniently laid out, with stereo analogue outputs and coaxial digital output sockets neatly lined up along the front. Around the back there's a power input socket, antenna connection point and a recessed pairing button. It's the recessed pairing button that gives some cause to grumble. It's fiddly to access when pairing with



new Bluetooth devices, and those with larger fingers may struggle. A larger, more accessible pairing button would be a nice touch as the rBlink doesn't remember previous devices or allow you to switch between them. It sees only one Bluetooth device at a time, meaning you'll need to pair a device every time you switch.

The rBlink utilises the same Burr-Brown DAC found in its rPAC and rLink siblings, while the Bluetooth technology is the latest generation CSR Blue Core 7 chipset. The new Bluetooth technology steps things up, with an impressive specification that significantly improves audio quality capabilities and edges the short-range wireless technology closer to what's expected of high-quality audio.

Every audiophile knows that wired connections are best, but the rBlink is almost indistinguishable from hard-wired sources when streaming from my apt-X enabled devices. Bluetooth range is pretty good and it's possible to get a stable link from devices in the room next door, but it's a little less reliable when moving between floors and results in the occasional audible dropout. My advice is not to stray too far from the rLink with your device to ensure uninterrupted connectivity.

The rLink provides an insight and high level of involvement into recordings. It's perhaps not quite as involving as when listening via a wired output direct from the source,

but only those with keen ears will be able to tell. Streaming Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories* from a MacBook reveals improved bass timing and an openness and space that makes the French duo's latest musical adventure extremely engaging. Treble details are smooth and detailed, and the high-quality audio performance proves that the DAC is doing its thing.

Bluetooth sound via an iPhone 4 is pretty respectable, despite a noticeable downward shift in the audio quality. It's still impressive, but the degradation is evident and the frequency range seems less expansive with bass a little muddled and less well-defined treble.

Summing up

The rBlink single handedly manages to bring Bluetooth connectivity into the hi-fi realm. The combination of the built-in DAC and the latest Bluetooth technology demonstrates just how respectable sound quality can now be when listening to music from wirelessly connected devices.

The lack of audio inputs to enable you to enhance hard-wired sources through the DAC is one of the few downsides to the rBlink at the £160 asking price, but Arcam has the rLink for that. Nevertheless, the combination of the wired connectivity of the rLink and wireless Bluetooth connectivity looks like the obvious next step for an rSeries component. **LD**

DETAILS

PRICE
£160

WEBSITE
arcam.co.uk

OUR VERDICT



Tellurium Q[®]

Audio products designed to combat phase distortion

Cable group test winner 2012

Cables, amplifiers and the unexpected!

"In my system, the TelluriumQ's simply turned out to be in a class of their own"
Kai Ekholm, Inner-magazines.com 2012

"Whatever you do, don't audition the Ultra Black. As I said before, once you do, there's no going back."
Steve Dickenson, Hi Fi Plus 2010

"The Iridium mines details other amplifiers only dream about"
Noel Keywood, Editor, HiFi World 2012

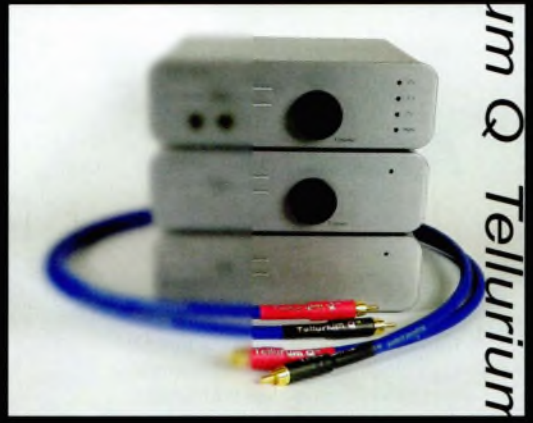
"A certain magic when it comes to absolute sound quality"
Jimmy Hughes, Hi Fi Choice 2012

Find out why more and more people are talking about Tellurium Q[®] products.

You do not have to believe all the incredible reviews, just test our products for yourself against anything else in the same price range and hear for yourself the tangible difference.

Find out how your music can **really** sound and talk to Tellurium Q[®] or your nearest dealer now.

"I've talked a lot about Tellurium Q of late. I've also sung its praises constantly. To be honest, I wish I had something to grump about, it would make a change but when a company gets a series of products "this right" it is difficult to say anything negative."
Paul Rigby, HiFi World 2012



Power amp Product of the Year 2012
Power cable Product of the Year 2012

hi-fi+ Products of the Year 2010



Hi Fi World
Cable of the Year 2010

Hi Fi Choice 2012 ★★★★★

Jan 2011



telluriumq.com +44 (0)1458 251997



Introducing Tempo
the cable that reveals
the inner details in the music

TEMPO

incorporating the best technology

The interconnect that beautifully communicates the artistry of the musicians through your own speakers.

"The Tempo is a top flight interconnect that provides a wealth of upper mid detail..."

HI-FI WORLD

"You can hear the scale of the venue in the reverb characteristics and there's no shortage of air."

HI-FI+

Black Rhodium

+44 (0)1332 342 233
www.blackrhodium.co.uk

GPoint-Audio

Albedo Monolith loudspeaker cable

THIS POLISH CABLE

manufacturer is distributed by GPoint-Audio. Albedo has been manufacturing its own cables for over 16 years and the company prides itself in offering high-quality interconnects and loudspeaker cables that are excellent value for money.

Not prepared to simply repackage and rebrand products from other manufacturers, Albedo takes control of all stages of the manufacturing process, from the smelting of its own silver to placing the cables in boxes ready for delivery. As a company, it focuses on attention to detail and prioritises high-quality research and development activity. It has also put in place intensive quality control processes to ensure that every product that leaves its factory is of the highest quality.

Despite the small scale and artisan manufacturing processes involved in the manufacture of the cables, over 10,000 metres of Monolith cables have already been sold throughout the world!

Silver service

Monolith is one of the premium cables of Albedo's range and is available as both interconnect and loudspeaker cables. The Monolith loudspeaker cable that is reviewed here is constructed from wide, very thin silver ribbons similar to those used in its interconnect cables. However, the silver ribbons in the speaker cable are run separately in antistatic air-filled insulation and enveloped in a silver-coloured outer coating. The cables are terminated

DETAILS

PRICE
£700 per 1.5m pair
£1,200 per 3.5m pair

CONTACT
01435 865540

WEBSITE
gpoint-audio.com

OUR VERDICT



with Albedo's high-quality silver spades or BFA beryllium-copper gold-plated banana plugs.

Out of the box, the cables look very well made, with good attention to detail. The pair of cables are clamped together with a neat plastic clamp at the end, embossed with the Monolith logo, to ensure they remain tidy when connected to the loudspeaker. The cable directionality is also marked by an arrow on the right of the Monolith logo – a nice touch! In my experience, cables do actually have a preferred direction and, of course, need to be run in before they start sounding their best. I'm a great fan of silver cables and find that they suit my all-valve system extremely well, so I am expecting great things from these speaker cables.

I'm not a fan of cables lying around the room on the carpet or behind equipment, so I am very pleased to note that another benefit of these cables is their flat construction, which makes it very easy to hide them around the edge of, or underneath a carpet. Being flat also helps with navigating them around corners in the quest for inconspicuousness.

3D sound

First impressions are extremely good. There is no trace of any 'silvery' harshness or awkwardness that can often plague silver cables. Instead, there is just an easy, open sound with lashings of detail and a wonderful sense of spaciousness. The cables convey music in a truly three-dimensional way in height, depth and width – wonderful! Instruments are located around the

soundstage with pinpoint accuracy. The crystal-clear top end is balanced by a splendidly full and uninhibited bass and pushing the music out to the loudspeakers seems an effortless task for the amplifier. The sound of a full orchestra is one of refinement with an engaging musicality. The richness of the music is enhanced by very expressive crescendos – almost as though there is more headroom for the louder passages to fully express themselves.

Moving on to some baroque music, solo instruments have superb realism and presence. Detail and presence are beautifully conveyed with delicate-sounding instruments such as the harpsichord, which harmonises well with the *continuo*.

Vocals are, once again, perfectly located in the sound stage giving clarity and a real sense of being there in the room. With my recording of Bach's *B Minor Mass* all the members of the choir are clearly heard as individuals rather than a bland choral noise. Somehow, there appears to be more information and quality relayed to the loudspeakers – a little extra timbre to male vocals, or a breath between notes as the performer inhales a little wisp of air.

These silver cables represent excellent value for money and are certainly up there among some of the best I've ever heard. They are very well made and good attention has been paid to detail in design. If you are in the market for a set of new, high-end speaker cables, then these should most definitely be placed towards the top of your 'must audition' list! **NR**



TAD

D600 CD Player



Probably one of the best CD Players in the world

Hearing is believing

For your nearest dealer call 0203 5442338 (charged at local rate)

Another fantastic product from NuNu Distribution Limited

www.nunudistribution.co.uk

NuNu Distribution Ltd



Thinksound ms01 headphones

WE'VE ALL BECOME much more aware of our responsibility to lessen our environmental impact and to reduce our ecological footprint on the world. US headphone brand, Thinksound, takes eco friendliness as seriously as it does sound quality of its audio products, and claims that you can at last feel good about great sound when purchasing a pair of its headphones.

The ms01 Monitor Series in-ear headphones cost £115, and are the latest addition to the range. There are three existing models in the line-up, each designed for specific needs. As with the maker's other headphones, the ms01s don't use over-designed packaging or supply a luxury carrying case. Instead they are packaged in a small carton made from recycled materials and there's a cotton carrying pouch – eco friendliness is the order of the day.

The use of natural materials extends to the build of ms01s themselves, with handcrafted wooden housings made from renewable sources and aluminium baffles. The so called Gunmetal Chocolate finished ms01s are lightweight and comfortable to wear, and four sets of different-sized silicon ear fittings are supplied to get the best fit and coupling to your ears. Ear hooks are provided to help secure the headphones in place on the move.

Eco warrior

The ms01s are easy to drive, and lower volume levels are required from all sources to achieve typical listening levels. The 8mm drivers provide a wide and nicely balanced frequency response with impressive bass levels and relaxed and open treble details. Bass is tight without any hint of boom across a broad range of classical and pop musical styles from Rachmaninov



to Rudimental. Vocals featuring Emeli Sandé on Rudimental's *Home* album sound perfectly placed in the mix, with a richness in the performance that's more usually a characteristic of full-size, on-ear headphones.

If there's a down side to the ms01s it's that the tangle-resistant cable is very microphonic, meaning that any cable movements are amplified in the earphones. Unfortunately, this makes them pretty frustrating when listening on the move or in the gym, and sound quality is seriously compromised. Sadly, there isn't an alternative, less sensitive cable on offer, meaning that the impressive sound quality from the ms01s can only truly be appreciated while perfectly still. **LD**

DETAILS

PRICE
£115
WEBSITE
thinksound.com

OUR VERDICT



Blue Horizon Prolevel turntable tool

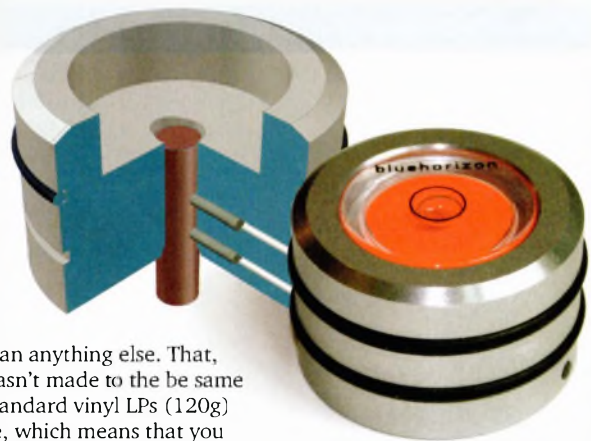
LEVELLING IS THE first step in turntable set up. It should be easy, just put a spirit level on the fore/aft axis, get it right and do the same the other way. This is the way a lot of turntables are set up, but if you have a suspended subchassis turntable the spirit level needs to be short, light and accurate and even then you can never put it in the one place where it won't be influencing the result. That place is the centre of the platter where the spindle gets in the way of regular spirit levels. If it's not in that position the weight of the level itself will tilt the platter. That's why a level like this, that sits on top of the spindle, is the only satisfactory tool for the job.

Balancing act

I have used a Mana Acoustics (remember them?) example for many years because it makes setting up turntables quickly and accurately a

lot easier than anything else. That, however, wasn't made to be the same weight as standard vinyl LPs (120g) like this one, which means that you are balancing the turntable for the weight it's most likely to support, unless you have a lot of 180g vinyl. The other problem with the Mana was that its centre hole wasn't big enough for all spindles, I had to ream it out a little so that it was.

The Blue Horizon has a clever and apparently patent pending spindle hole design that uses sprung balls to ensure that it grips the centre spindle, which should be upright when the platter is level. This avoids problems with felt mats for instance where the surface isn't necessarily even, and with extra long centre spindles.



This type of level becomes very intuitive to use once you remember that the bubble goes to the highest part of its enclosure, in other words if you lower the support surface on the side where the bubble is, it goes toward the centre.

I like the Blue Horizon Prolevel, it's easy to use and well designed, the only gripe I have with it is the rather high price, you can get all but the spindle gripping technology for rather less, so it loses a star for that, but in all other respects it's a lovely piece of kit. **JK**

DETAILS

PRICE
£95
WEBSITE
bluehorizonideas.com

OUR VERDICT








Hi Fi - Home Cinema - Custom Install

TELEPHONE
01865 790 879

E-MAIL
info@oxfordaudio.co.uk

WEB SITE
www.oxfordaudio.co.uk

ADDRESS
Cantay House
Park End Street
Oxford
OX1 1JD

Follow us on:
  

BUSINESS HOURS
10am to 6pm Mon-Fri
10am to 5pm Sat
Closed Sunday & Bank Holidays

FINANCE
Ask about our Buy Now
Pay Later 0% Finance
with No Deposit

Come to our launch event and be the first in the UK to hear the NEW Devialet amplifiers

Date: **Wednesday 19th June**. Time: **1pm to 8pm**.

Place: **Our shop in central Oxford**.

There will be 'ticketed' demonstrations plus plenty of time for an informal chat over drinks & nibbles.



Meet Devialet R&D Engineer

Mathieu Pernot, chief R&D Engineer at Devialet, is flying over specially & will be joined by Pedro Jorge-Luis, Sales Director at Absolute Sounds, the importers.



Three Models

The Devialet 110 & 170 are two completely new amplifiers starting at £4,490, brilliant value! They are joined by the 240, which is a radically updated version of the D-Premier.



Save £1000*

For a limited time only, receive a free AIR wireless upgrade worth £1,000 - when you purchase a Devialet 110 or 170 model.
*valid until 30th September 2013



The all NEW Devialet comes in three sizes



Model 110

All of the promises of a Devialet, its ADH, upgradability, ultra-simple use, magnificent look, and all so easy to fit in your home. £4,490 or £5,490 with AIR wireless* (*free limited time introductory offer). 110W per channel.



Model 170

The preferred unit of audiophiles for professional analogue and digital inputs/outputs, power and the wealth of customisation and setting options. £6,290 or £7,290 with AIR wireless* (*free limited time introductory offer). 170W per channel.



Model 240/500

The Devialet without compromise for enthusiasts. Equipped with complete options, powerful, configurable as a 500W mono-block, and totally upgradable. Exclusive solid aluminium hand-polished case. £11,850 or £20,950 for dual mono package. 240W per channel or 500W in dual mono.

Call Jon Harker on **01865 790 879** to find out more.

Root Classic Transport S1 headphones

ROOT CLASSIC IS another new arrival in the current headphone gold rush and comes sporting a range of over-ear models of which the Transport S1 is the second most expensive in the range. The slightly curious name derives from the idea that the Transport has been designed with a view to being used out and about on public transport.

To this end, the enclosures are designed as a variation on an open-backed type that allows for a degree of ventilation to reach the ear without letting a huge amount of noise back out.

The S1 uses a pair of 50mm dynamic drivers and is a full-size design that covers the ears completely. The looks are fairly subdued in comparison with some of the competition, which makes it less conspicuous and the overall build quality is impressively solid,

too. The only downside of this solid construction is that it is fairly heavy and this does mean that the Transport isn't as comfortable to wear for long periods as some other models. The cord is also a little on the long side for true portability and it can't be changed for a shorter one.

Music and movement

Sonically, the Transport S1 is smooth and impressively neutral. The frequency response doesn't have any particular points of emphasis and integrates well from top to bottom. This means that it is easy to listen to for long periods and avoids the over-emphasised bass that can be a problem with some lifestyle headphones. The performance lacks some of the detail and sparkle that the slightly more expensive Harman Kardon BT can produce and the semi-open design does tend to leak



more sound than a completely closed design does and doesn't always manage to generate the air and space that a good open design can.

The Root Classic is a capable and extremely solidly constructed headphone that manages to sound neutral and impressively even handed with most types of music. It gets a great deal right, but in a very keenly contested market there are designs that are better adapted for use on the move and can offer equally capable performance. As a home headphone for occasional outside use it is worth considering, though. **ES**

DETAILS

PRICE
£150
WEBSITE
rootclassic.com

OUR VERDICT



Stager Sound Stager Silver Solids interconnects

MARC STAGER OF Stager Sound in New York, USA, has been making pure silver interconnect cables and selling them via the internet for the last 16 years. His original mission was to source the best interconnect cables available for less than \$500 per metre for a pair, but he very quickly discovered that he could make his own that would be good enough to compete in quality with well-known makes, but cost far less.

Stager's research found 99.9% soft-temper fine solid-core silver to be the best wire to use in his interconnects. Silver wire is slightly more conductive than copper, but unlike copper does not lose conductivity when it tarnishes with age. Additionally, PTFE insulation was chosen because it is second only to air in its dielectric properties.

The Stager Silver Solids are very well made. The silver wire is



connected to the beautifully made gold-plated Canare F-10 RCA phono plugs using tight solder joints that solidly bond the silver wire to the gold connectors. The connections inside the phono plugs are well insulated with heatshrink insulation that extends beyond the plugs and their spring cable restraints. The interconnects are a symmetrical, unshielded, unbalanced pair, which Stager Sound considers to be the best configuration for maximum bandwidth and musical transparency.

Delivering the goods

The Stager Silver Solids deliver all that you would expect from silver interconnects – excellent image placement, together with a clear and open top end, with a well-controlled bass. In common with other cables, the Silver Solids benefit from running in for a minimum of 10 hours, after

which time the top end loses the slight edginess that was evident at first. For ready-made high-quality interconnects, these cables represent fantastic value for money and are well worth an audition. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE
from £68 per pair
CONTACT
(00 1) 2125954065
WEBSITE
stagersound.com/
silver

OUR VERDICT



SOLO

"...elicited a performance that combined the best of high-end and the finest musicality..."

- Hi-Fi Choice, April 2013



Light Oak pictured (Walnut and Black Oak available)

The new stand-mount loudspeaker from

OPHIDIANTM

WWW.OPHIDIANAUDIO.CO.UK | (+44) 0151 632 5180

Songkick for iOS and Android

For the gig-going music fan, one of the joys (or to look at it another way, one of the perils) of the apps revolution is how easy it has become to track the upcoming concert appearances of your favourite artists. If you live in a major metropolis and have reasonably catholic tastes it is quite possible to catch somebody who is on your radar every day of the week. Two caveats; this can be extremely damaging to your wallet and it's important to look after your hearing hi-fi fans – proper audiologist earplugs are recommended!

The earliest manifestations of tools to enable such artist tracking was the iTunes plugin iConcertCal, which appeared over five years ago now. Its public profile has since been supplanted by the fairly ubiquitous Songkick – first through its built-in integration with Songbird and more recently through mobile apps, although you can also take the old-school route and just set up your tracking from the Songkick webpage.

The real advantage of device integration is that the app can hook into your local music collection to drive a first draft list of your favourite artists and then provide you with info about any upcoming tour dates.

Songkick then puts together an attractive list, which can then be added to or edited and further embellishes it with photo icons of various qualities and a useful 'on tour' corner flash as appropriate.

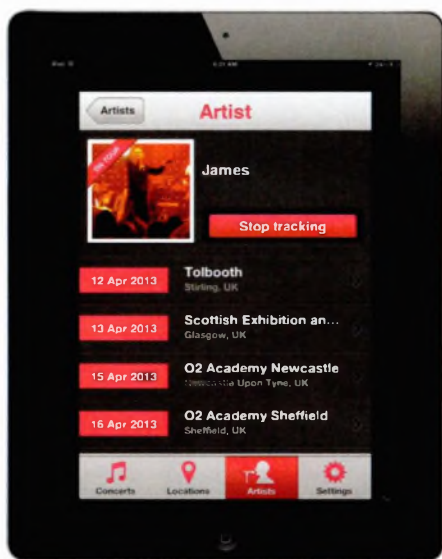
The app has recently been updated to version 2.0 level and now works correctly with iOS 6 and the iPhone 5. It has also added ticket purchases, which I guess is how the free app is monetised. This works so well you can't begrudge the app makers taking their cut. **PC**

► **DETAILS**
PRICE: FREE
WEBSITE:
SONGKICK.COM

OUR VERDICT



DOWNLOAD



Bandsintown for iOS and Android

Just like iConcertCal before it, Songkick needs a challenger to keep it on its toes and that's where Bandsintown comes in. Bandsintown has recently risen to some prominence. I came across it through the London listing of a Bruce Cockburn date on his website, and from there I was thrown into Bandsintown's web-based Facebook integration, which works quite nicely if you actually want to publicise gigs that you're planning on going to among your friends.

Of course, Bandsintown also offers a mobile client, and much like the Songkick offering, this is initially an iPhone scale app rather than an iPad one, which feels appropriate for the intended usage.

Like Songkick it uses available location technology (GPS or wi-fi triangulation) to work out where you are and therefore what gigs you may be interested in. Equally useful as Songkick, regrettably it is a bit more dependent on the usual Facebook tie-in for logging into the app, although you can authenticate with an email address.

Unfortunately, it's all a bit more cumbersome than Songkick's more open approach and I found the Facebook option wont to hang on an iPad. Even the email method gets a bit stuck when it can't contact the Bandsintown servers to confirm my location.

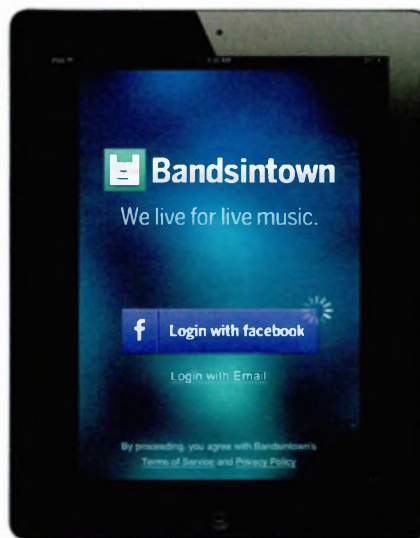
In addition to this app, and in keeping with its slightly cheesy stylised 'devil's horns' icon, Bandsintown inc. is also the purveyor of a single joke app like that old beer drinking one – you can avail yourself of a free virtual Zippo lighter app for those hands in the air Bon Jovi concert moments. I think I'll give that a miss... **PC**

► **DETAILS**
PRICE: FREE
WEBSITE:
BANDSINTOWN.COM

OUR VERDICT



DOWNLOAD



IPAD PICTURES COURTESY OF APPLE

Missed an Issue?

Have you missed a copy of *Hi-Fi Choice*? You can now order these online, over the phone or by post!

**JUST
£3.99**
Per copy
(plus p&p)



358 April 2012



359 May 2012



360 June 2012



361 July 2012



362 Sept 2012



363 Oct 2012



364 Nov 2012



365 Dec 2012



366 Awards 2012



367 Jan 2013



368 Feb 2013



369 March 2013



370 April 2013



371 May 2013



372 June 2013

Phone: 0844 848 8822

(Phone lines open: Mon-Fri 10am – 4pm)

Order Online:
www.myhobbystore.co.uk/hfc

AVTech
media ltd

TAD

C200 DAC Pre



Probably one of the best DAC's in the world

Hearing is believing

For your nearest dealer call 0203 5442338 (charged at local rate)

Another fantastic product from NuNu Distribution Limited

www.nunudistribution.co.uk

NuNu Distribution Ltd



Next month

AUDIOLAB Q-DAC & M-PWR

THE LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE COMPACT LAB SERIES
get their first review here. We put them through their paces.

ALSO:

12 interconnect
& speaker cables that
promise to upgrade
the sound of your
hi-fi, but how do
they perform?



PLUS:

SENSIBLY PRICED SYSTEM – Naim's revamped
UnitiQute gets partnered with Neat's IOTA
speakers for the first of our systems under £2k

ALSO SVS Ultra Towers, Teac UD-501, Onkyo
ES-HF300, Set up records Mini Test, Dealer Visit
and all your hi-fi woes answered

AUGUST ISSUE ON SALE THURSDAY 4 JULY 2013

HIFI CHOICE ADVERTISERS INDEX

ABSOLUTE SOUNDS	12
ARMOUR HOME	78
ATACAMA	112
AUDIO CONSULTANTS	308
AV DISTRIBUTION	77
AVID HIFI	11
BILLY VEE	60
BLACK RHODIUM	114
BOWERS & WILKINS	32
CARBON AGE	51
DECO AUDIO	112
DOUG BRADY HIFI	43
DYNAUDIO	80
ECOSSE CABLES	26
FURUTECH	55
GURU	110
HIFI SOUND	98
INSPIRE HIFI	97
ISOTEK	106
JORDAN ACOUSTICS	21
KJ WEST ONE	82
M2	74
MAINS CABLES R US	47
NAIM	2
NUNU DISTRIBUTION	84
NUNU DISTRIBUTION	116
NUNU DISTRIBUTION	28,
OPHIDIAN AUDIO	120
OPPO	15
ORIGIN LIVE	108
OXFORD AUDIO	118
PJ HIFI	58
PMC	70
PRO-JECT	72
RAIDHO	67
RAYLEIGH HIFI	62,63
RUSS ANDREWS	68
SELECT AUDIO	9
SENSUI	34
SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION	37,38,39
SIGNALS	122
T & A	12
TALK ELECTRONICS	30
TANNOY	112
TELLURIUM Q	80
TELLURIUM Q	114
THE RIGHT NOTE	34
VERTERE	86,87
VICKERS HI-FI	120

TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CALL
TIM LEES
01689 869853
tim.lees@hifichoice.co.uk

AUDIO DESTINATION

The Finest Audio Products



Owned by husband and wife team: Mike & Caroline - Audio Destination is not your typical Hi-Fi specialist

Audio Destination brings together a range of only the finest audio products and places them in comfortable and relaxed surroundings.

- Tuesday - Friday 9am - 5pm
- Saturday 9am - 4pm
- Demonstration Rooms
- Long-term customer support and care
- Large selection of famous brands

We look forward to seeing you

Call +44 (0)1884 243 584

www.audiodestination.co.uk
email: info@audiodestination.co.uk
Audio Destination, Suite 7a Market Walk,
Tiverton, Devon EX16 6BL

DRIVERS:

- ▶ ATC
- ▶ AUDAX
- ▶ ETON
- ▶ FOSTEX
- ▶ LPG ▶ MAX FIDELITY
- ▶ MOREL ▶ PEERLESS
- ▶ SCAN-SPEAK ▶ SEAS
- ▶ SILVER FLUTE
- ▶ VIFA ▶ VISATON
- ▶ VOLT

SOLEN CAPACITORS AND INDUCTORS - USED BY THE MOST DISCRIMINATING LOUDSPEAKER MANUFACTURERS.

HARDWARE

HOW TO BOOKS

Contact us for the free Solen CDROM Catalog.

FREE!



SOLEN
4470 Avenue Thibault
St-Hubert, QC, J3Y 7T9 Canada
Tel: 450.656.2759
Fax: 450.443.4949
Email: solen@solen.ca
Web: www.solen.ca

award-winning high performance analogue, digital & video cables

www.atlascables.com

ATLAS[®]

Equator
Asymmetrical Integra



Atlas understands the meaning of uncompromising performance. Is the Atlas Equator asymmetrical the best interconnect on the market? It sure is at its price! A consistent winner, the Equator Integra is obviously the entry level audio interconnect for discerning music lovers.

Need some advice on choosing the best cables?
Call us free on

0800 731 1140

ATLAS Cables

e: J.Carrick@atlascables.com

www.atlascables.com

Analogue Seduction *where music is our passion*



Analogue Seduction are dedicated towards two channel Hi-Fi, specialising in vinyl replay.

As well as our on-line shop we have dedicated demonstration retail facilities based in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire and we can offer our customers home demonstrations.

We stock the finest in amplification, analogue, digital replay and speakers. We also specialise in a cable termination and cable burn in service.

Please visit our website www.analogueseduction.net to browse or purchase products that are not easily available elsewhere.

New vinyl records now stocked

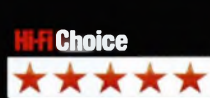
Tel: +44 (0)1733 344768

Epiphany Acoustics

Headphone Amplifiers . DACs . Interconnects



EHP-02 Portable Headphone Amplifier

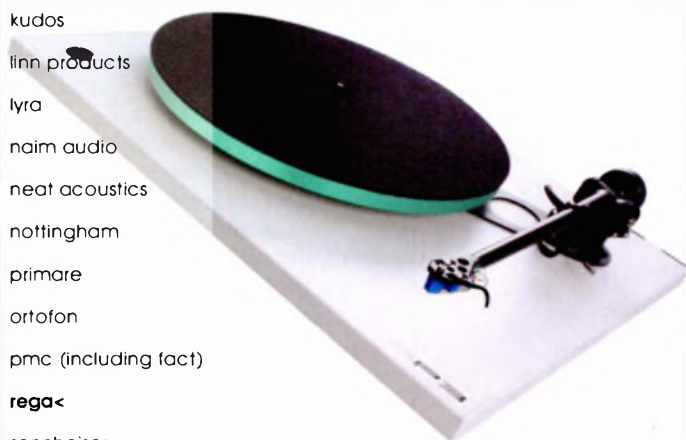


Find out why Epiphany Acoustics are rapidly becoming the name in affordable high end audio online at:

www.epiphany-acoustics.co.uk

arcam
dynavector
epson
focal
grado
isoblu
hutter
kudos
linn products
lyra
naim audio
neat acoustics
nottingham
primare
ortofon
pmc (including fact)
rega
sennheiser
stax
sumiko

new toys for black stuff: rega RP3



signals

hi-fi for grown-ups

ipswich (01473) 655171

www.signals.uk.com

prestigious & exclusive



a sennheiser club orpheus member

Calveley Court, Reymerton, Norfolk. NR9 4QD

01362 820800

enquiries@basicallysound.co.uk
www.basicallysound.co.uk



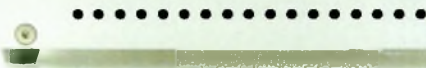
Respecting The Past, Embracing The Future

Audio
Cinema
Multi-Room
Network
Installation

Bryston
Chord Co.
Dynavector
Guru Audio
Heed
HiFi Racks
Isoblu
Lehmann
Linn
Naim
Neat
Okki Nokki
PMC
Rega
REL
Sennheiser
Wilson Benesch
Wireworld

**BASICALLY
SOUND**





"...Graham Slee's tiny mono power amps were also on show, which made a very interesting comparison. Despite the EC amps being several times more powerful, the Sles lost no sense of energy and dynamism."

[Hi-Fi+ Dublin High-End 2012]

Big sound from small boxes...

PROPRIUS

mono-block power amplifiers

www.gspaudio.co.uk 

Tel: 01909 568739



Did you know that many of the adverts you see in the 'UK Hi-Fi magazines' are created by us? We arguably design more Hi-Fi adverts in the UK than any other design agency and have done so for over five years. Why not see how we can help you?

audiography

email. design@audiography.co.uk web. www.audiography.co.uk
mobile. 07590 900 320

- Audiolab
- Audioquest
- Chord Electronics
- Cyrus
- Dali
- Marantz
- Michell
- Mission
- Monitor Audio
- NAD
- Olive
- Opera
- Origin-Live
- Pathos
- Pioneer
- Primare
- Pro-Ac
- Project
- Quad
- Ruarq-Audio
- Roksan
- Shanling
- SME
- Sonos
- Sugden
- Tannoy
- Teac
- Trichord
- Unison Research
- Wharfedale
- & more...

VICKERS HI-FI

High Fidelity Specialists

Since 1967



New... 7,500 sq ft. Store...

8 Concorde Park, Amy Johnson Way, Clifton Moor, York YO30 4WT Tel : 01904 - 691600

" One of the Best Hi-Fi shops in the Country is right here in York "

- ▶ Quality Hi-Fi Separates from £100 to £10,000
- ▶ Over 45 years Experience ▶ Widest Choice in the Area
- ▶ Superb Air Conditioned Demonstration Rooms
- ▶ Free Customer Car Park ▶ Wheelchair Friendly
- ▶ Independent Advice from Experienced & Qualified Staff
- ▶ Open 10:30am - 5:30pm 6 days: Mon. to Sat.
- ▶ Up to 3 years Interest Free Credit* just 20% deposit *Subject to Status



www.Vickers-HiFi.co.uk



... The Award Winning North of England Hi-Fi Specialists

Dealer Directory

HIFI LOUNGE

SE

4 The Granary Buildings, Millow Hall Farm
Millow, Near Dunton, Bedfordshire
SG18 8RH

☎ 01767 448 121

☐ www.hifilounge.co.uk

BASICALLY SOUND

E

Calveley Court, Southburgh Rd, Reymerston
Norfolk NR9 4QD

☎ 01362 820800

☐ www.basicallsound.co.uk

ACOUSTICA

NW

17 Hoole Road, Chester, Cheshire
CH2 3NH

☎ 01244 344227

☐ www.acoustica.co.uk

GRAHAMS HI-FI

GL

Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road,
London N1

☎ 020 7226 5500

☐ www.grahams.co.uk

NOTTINGHAM HI-FI CENTRE

EM

120-122 Alfreton Road, Nottingham,
Nottinghamshire NG7 3NR

☎ 0115 9786919

☐ www.nottinghamhifi.co.uk

AUDIO COUNSEL

NW

26 High Street, Cheadle, Cheshire
SK8 1AL

☎ 0161 491 6090

☐ www.audio-counsel.co.uk

BADA

INFIDELITY

GL

9 High Street, Hampton Wick
Surrey, KT1 4DA.

☎ 020 8943 3530

☐ www.infidelity.co.uk

BADA

STUDIO AV

WM

44 High Street, Eton, Berkshire.
SL4 6BL

☎ 01753 631000

☐ www.studioav.co.uk

SYNERGY AV HI-FI

NW

12a West St, Congleton, Cheshire
CW12 3JB

☎ 01260 280017

☐ www.synergyav.co.uk

AUDIOBOFFS

GL

338 Shenley Road, Borehamwood,
Herts WD 1TP

☎ 020 8177 4095

☐ www.audioboffs.co.uk

SOUND CINERGY

WM

37 High Street, Aldridge, Walsall, West
Midlands, WS9 8NL

☎ 01922 457 926

☐ www.soundcinergy.co.uk

DOUG BRADY HIFI

NW

Kingsway North, Warrington,
Cheshire, WA1 3NU

☎ 01925 828009 (Mon-Sat 9am-5.30pm)

☐ www.dougbradyhifi.com

SONATA

GL

West Hampstead, London NW6
Appointment only

☎ 0330 111 5653

☐ www.sonatahifi.com

VICKERS HIFI

NE

8 Concorde Park, Amy Johnson Way,
Clifton Moor, York YO30 4WT

☎ 01904 691600

☐ www.vickers-hifi.co.uk

TAVISTOCK AUDIO

SW

18 Market Street, Devon, PL19 0DE

☎ 01822 618940

☐ www.tavistockaudio.co.uk

SE - South East,
GL - Greater London,
SW - South West,
E - East,
EM - East Midlands,
WM - West Midlands,
NE - North East,
NW - North West,
W - Wales.

HI-FI CHOICE

To advertise in the dealer directory,
Please contact

Tim Lees 01689 869 853
tim.lees@hifichoice.co.uk

020 7226 5500

www.grahams.co.uk

GRAHAMS

"One of the five best hi-fi
shops in the world"

ARENA Magazine

Grahams Hi-Fi
Canonbury Yard
190a New North Road
London N1 7BS

Is this your problem? Here's your answer



loud



too loud



way too loud

It's a common problem. The usable range on the volume control is all down at the bottom end and fine control at low listening levels is either difficult or impossible. The noise floor may be audible too. There is a simple and effective solution - the **Rothwell In-Line Attenuators**. They can be used with pre/power or integrated amps to cure the problems of excess gain and bring sonic benefits with even the most expensive equipment.

£39/pair - post free

01204 366133 www.rothwellaudioproducts.co.uk



"this accessory
is heartily
recommended"
Gramophone

REVOX SERVICE

THE MANUFACTURERS' APPOINTED SERVICE COMPANY

REVOX SERVICE

Correct Revox Spare Parts Pricing
24 Hour Estimation procedure
Manufacturer Upgrades and Advice
Delivery and Collection Service
Comprehensive Guarantees

Factory Trained Engineers
Rapid Response Turnaround
Full Revox range serviced
Written Technical Reports
Late Evening Opening

THE ART TECHNOLOGY LIMITED

TTL House, Sheeptick End, Near Lidlington, Bedfordshire, MK43 0SF
Telephone 01525 841999 Facsimile 01525 841009

Oranges & Lemons

of Battersea

Hi-Fi & Streaming
Home Cinema
Multi-Room



020 7924 2040

61-63 Webbs Road London SW11 6RX
www.oandlhifi.co.uk



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER FOR ALL THE LATEST HIFI LOUNGE NEWS

A NEW NAME IN QUALITY HIFI FOR THE HOME

Here to listen to your needs, selling only brands we are passionate about.

At HiFi Lounge we have created a listening environment for our discerning customers to relax and take their time away from the busy high street.

Set in a beautiful country setting yet only minutes from main routes. You will always be guaranteed a warm welcome.

01767 448121
www.hifilounge.co.uk

4 The Granary Buildings,
Millow Hall Farm,
Millow, Nr Dunton,
Bedfordshire,
SG18 8RH



IAN HARRISON HIFI

SALE! UP TO 40% OFF!!

TEL: 01283 702875 ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk

SPECIALIST SUPPLIER OF TURNTABLES, TONEARMS, CARTRIDGES AND PHONO STAGES

INCLUDING: AMATEK, AUDIO TECHNICA, BENZ MICRO, CARTRIDGE MAN, CLEARAUDIO, DENON, GOLDRING, GRADO, GRAHAM SLEE, HADCOCK, HEED, ICON, KOETSU, LEHMANN AUDIO, MICHELL, MOTH, ORTOFON, PRO-JEKT, REGA, SME, SUMIKO, THORENS, TOM EVANS, TRANSFIGURATION, TRICHORD, WHEST AUDIO, ZYX.

SPECIAL OFFER!!
SPEND £2,000 OR MORE ON ANY TURNTABLE, TONEARM OR TURNTABLE AND ARM AND GET A CARTRIDGE WORTH £500 FREE!!

PLEASE PHONE TO CONFIRM PRICE & AVAILABILITY PRIOR TO ORDERING. ALL GOODS ARE BRAND NEW & BOXED WITH FULL UK GUARANTEES. NO EX-DEM OR EX-DISPLAY GOODS. NO GREY IMPORTS. GOODS ARE NOT SUPPLIED ON APPROVAL. SORRY NO GENERAL CATALOGUES. PLEASE PHONE OR WRITE FOR SPECIFIC REVIEWS, BROCHURES OR PRICES.

ESTABLISHED 1986.

MAIL ORDER ONLY FROM: IAN HARRISON, 7 MILL HILL, REPTON, DERBY, DE65 4GQ
TEL: 01283 702875 9am-9pm INCLUDING SUNDAYS.

Front End Problems?

contact:

The Cartridge Man

It doesn't have to cost an arm and leg to get the best
- listen to my Koetsu - and - Decca - eater.
Also agents for Croft, Moth, Hadcock & Mitchell & E.A.R. Graham Slee projects.
Valve equipment re-build service available.
- Plus cartridge re-tipping service

020 8688 6565

Website: www.thecartridgeman.com

Bringing Your Sound to Life!



GIK Acoustics manufactures acoustic panels, bass traps and diffusers and sells direct worldwide. We provide superior customer service and acoustic advice from start to finish.

Recording studios, listening rooms, live auditoriums, churches and home theatres. GIK Acoustics is the #1 choice.



GIK Acoustics
gikacoustics.co.uk

heed

obelisk si

Audio Destination	Tiverton	01884 243584
Basically Sound	Norwich	01362 820800
Chns Brooks Audio	Warrington	01925 261212
Faithful Audio	Birmingham	0121 224 7300
Home Cinema Centre	Edinburgh	0131 229 9350
Phase 3	Worthing	01903 245577
Uniet	New Malden	0208 942 9567

www.heedaudio.co.uk



37 High Street, Aldridge
01922 457926

Exposure
Lehmann Linn Marantz
Michell Monitor Audio Neat
Nordost Okki Nokki Ortofon
Project Roksan VDH

Ample Parking Tue-Sat 10 - 5.30pm
www.soundcinergy.co.uk

WE HEAR...

THERE'S NEVER A DULL MOMENT AT THE MUNICH SHOW, and one of the nice surprises was news of a new Naim UnitiQute 2. One of Backchat's fave small streaming systems, the Salisbury company has gone round it, studiously filling in the 'gaps' of the original's already extensive spec. That means it now has multiroom functionality, full 32/192 streaming capability and a DAB/DAB+ tuner. Naim also says the sound quality is better, not that the original was bad!

ANTONY MICHAELSON IS STILL A MAN ON A MISSION, all these years later! Sat cheerily at a cafe at the Munich Show, he enigmatically opened his briefcase to reveal prototypes for a whole range of new V90 series mini-components. So called because "they're the V-series turned through ninety degrees", he showed us a new V90 HPA headphone amp and V90 LPS phono stage, plus an early prototype of the PHA portable headphone amplifier - which is obviously going after the Arcam rSeries of portable audiophile gizmos. There's also a range of Musical Fidelity hi-fi and in-ear headphones coming soon...

MIKE CREEK IS ANOTHER VETERAN CAMPAIGNER on the international hi-fi scene, and seemed to be enjoying himself on his Munich show stand. This had a little booth with Creek Audio's latest and greatest kit on dem, such as the Evolution 50A amplifier which we recently raved about. There was a surprise though, in the shape of its new bigger brother - the Evolution 100A. This is visually very similar but sports a higher power output and Class D circuitry, and should be on sale by the autumn. Mike's still working on the matching Evolution 50 CD player too, although this might be a longer wait.

THROUGH THE PAST, SMARTLY...



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 60

JULY 1988

Back in 1988 if you wanted to know what innovations lie ahead you visited the Brown Goods Trade Show in Central London. The highlights for HFC included the growth of digital amps, Teac's 'World's most expensive' two-box CD player (a snip at just £4,500), the incorporation of 3in tray indents in CD players and combined video and audio surround sound receivers. Gimmick of the show was Sharp's 'talking handset', which was a remote control that told the user how to operate their product in the event they forgot. Elsewhere, the House of Lords threw out an action by three record companies against Amstrad plc claiming that the fast dubbing facility on its twin cassette decks was illegal. In his summing up, Lord Templeman suggested that the current law rendering home taping illegal should be repealed.

Meanwhile, in the music world, *Now That's What I Call Music 12* was released to antipathy across the nation. Derek B's *Bad Young Brother* rubbed shoulders with James Brown's *The Payback Mix (Part One)*, Tiffany's *I Think We're Alone Now* and Morrissey's floor filler *Everyday is Like Sunday*.



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 192

JULY 1999

"Vinyl Revolution" screamed the headline as editor Jason Kennedy made a turntable the cover star. As he pointed out in his intro; "This is the first one in too many years. Years when the medium appeared to be commercially dead, but it was in fact merely resting. Now that even the big high street stores are stocking vinyl, we felt justified in reviewing a selection of gorgeous turntables." For the record (ahem), Wilson Benesch's the Circle, Michell's Orbe SE and Pink Triangle's Tarantella II were the models that most impressed reviewer Tim Bowern. Meanwhile, our news pages revealed Panasonic's plan to launch DVD-A players to rival Sony's SACD. A spokesperson claimed that the format would take over from CD by 2007.

Outside of the world of hi-fi, the former drummer of rock monsters Megadeth (Gar Samuelson), staggered off this mortal coil, closely followed by John F Kennedy Jr who tragically died when he crashed his plane. Meanwhile, an upstart by the name of Lance Armstrong won his first Tour De France, proving once and for all that the sport of cycling was finally free from drug cheats.



DESERT ISLAND DISCS

This month **Adam Shaw-Cotterill**, from Audio Partnership chooses four of his favourite long players...



EDGAR BROUGHTON BAND OUT DEMONS OUT

I love the sheer insanity of this. A group of wild-eyed men with beards and crazy hair stand in a muddy field and shout at one other.



NIRVANA NEVERMIND

This epitomises the whole grunge scene: rage and rebellion. Cobain believed in music first, lyrics second. The result is a classic album, you can hardly understand!



LEFTFIELD LEFTISM

Often music is more about the memories than the tune. For me this will always be about shady clubs in Bristol. A seamless blend of techno, dub and chillout.



THE KINKS SOMETHING ELSE

This stands the test of time. So many people know the lyrics to *Waterloo Sunset* and *Autumn Almanac*, even if they were born well after the album was originally released.

Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor Lee Dunkley
Production Editor Jake Day-Williams
Art Editors Emily Hammond & Carl Fleischer

CONTRIBUTORS

Simon Berkovitch, Patrick Cleasby, James Hughes, Tim Jarman, Adrian Justins, Jason Kennedy, Paul Miller, Dave Oliver, Neville Roberts, Ed Selley, Andrew Simpson, Malcolm Steward, Nigel Williamson

ADVERTISING

Senior Advertising Executive Tim Lees
Tel: 01689 869853
Email: tim.lees@hifichoice.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions Sarah Pradhan & Kate Scott
UK - New, Renewals & Enquiries
Tel: 08456 777 867
Email: mytime@subscriptions.co.uk
USA & CANADA - New, Renewals & Enquiries
Tel: (001) 877 363 1310
Email: expressmag@expressmag.com
REST OF WORLD - New, Renewals & Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1689 869896

BACK ISSUES & BINDERS

Tel: 0844 848 8822
From outside the UK: +44 (0) 2476 322234
Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com
Website: www.myhobbystore.co.uk

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Group Editor Paul Miller
Group Art Editor John Rook
Group Sales Manager Joanna Holmes
Chief Executive Owen Davies
Chairman Peter Harkness

Published by MyTimeMedia Ltd
Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green,
Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BB

Phone: 0844 4122262
From outside the UK: +44 (0)1689 869840
www.hifichoice.co.uk

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd.



If you don't want to miss an issue



Please reserve/deliver my copy of on a regular basis, starting with issue

Title _____ First name _____
Surname _____
Address _____
Postcode _____
Telephone number _____



Published by MyTimeMedia Ltd. All rights reserved, 2011 ISSN 0951-1515. The Publisher's written consent must be obtained before any part of this publication may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, including photocopying, and all information remains the property of the Publisher. All reasonable care is taken in the preparation of the magazine contents, but the publishers cannot be held legally responsible for errors or the contents of this magazine or for any loss however arising from such errors, including loss resulting from negligence of our staff. Readers please check the contents of this magazine is on their own risk.

HI-FI CHOICE, ISSN 0951-1515, is published 13 times per year (twice in August) by AVTech Media Ltd a division of MYTIME MEDIA LTD, c/o USACAN Media Dist, 3m Corp, at 26 Power Dam Way Suite 51-53, Parsippany, NJ 07054. Periodicals postage paid at Parsippany, NJ. POSTMASTER: send address changes to HI-FI CHOICE, c/o USACAN Media, Ltd, Box 1759, Parsippany, NJ, U.S.A. 07054-0179



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand it at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask!

LINDEMANN.

Lindemann audiotechnik is committed to the goal of lifelike music reproduction in the tradition of the high fidelity pioneers of the 1960s. The vision has always been to deliver a natural musical performance that conveys the emotion and intimacy of the recording by remaining as faithful as possible to the original. Only in this way can listening to music at home evolve into a genuine experience of the live event.

LINDEMANN 885 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

only £8950



- Symmetrical signal processing
- 250 W / 4 ohm (per channel)
- Fully balanced stereo integrated amplifier, dual mono supplies
- Intelligent quiescent current adjustment
- "Single Ended Push Pull"- design principle

"Lindemann's new integrated amplifier simply plays sensationally well. It sounds extremely detailed, emotional, substantial and involved. Definitely one of the best in its class!" - *"LP" magazine*

audioemotion



www.audioemotion.co.uk

e: info@audioemotion.co.uk
f: [facebook.com/audioemotion](https://www.facebook.com/audioemotion)
t: 01333 425 999



"Lindemann's 825 is one of those rare components which rouses an immediate sensation of assurance - the assurance of having done things right.... In short, its acoustic performance cannot be considered anything other than the ultimate statement in matters of precision." - *image-hifi.com*

- Fully balanced CD Player
- USB HD-Audio 24/192 Asynchronous mode
- State-of-the-art digital signal processing and D/A conversion
- Sophisticated analog output stage
- Intelligent signal conditioning and input data standardization



LINDEMANN 825 HIGH DEFINITION DISC PLAYER

only £6950

musicbook: Streaming & beyond. Music in a new dimension.

After a development period of several years, Lindemann proudly presents a new cutting-edge product series – one that shows just how much musical satisfaction today's engineering can deliver: musicbook: Smart looks, top features, state-of-the-art technology, Lindemann sound, attractive pricing.

- **musicbook:10** USB audio music player with DSD playback
- **musicbook:15** USB audio music player with DSD playback & CD drive
- **musicbook:20** Network music player with CD drive
- **musicbook:50** Balanced class D power amplifier



LINDEMANN MUSICBOOK
SERIES prices start at only £1690

Music is our Passion

DIAMOND 100 SERIES

"These speakers wowed us"

"The Diamond 121s are
worthy winners."



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

TEST WINNER

Diamond 121 - March 2013

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



Diamond 121 - March 2013

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



Diamond 121 - January 2013

The classic entry point to true high-fidelity sound, Wharfedale's legendary Diamond speakers have been delivering sonic excellence to music fans since 1982. Now, 30 years on, Diamond is evolving again as Britain's most famous loudspeaker brand unveils the Diamond 100 Series: an all-new range that takes Diamond's high performance, low cost concept to an extraordinary new level. Advanced drive units and superior cabinet design deliver a sound that is crisp, focused and spacious, effortlessly dynamic yet firmly in control, thus maintaining Diamond's long-held position as the sparkling jewel in Wharfedale's crown.