



Smart moves

Minitest: in-ear headphones for music on the go **p84**

Hi-res portable

Astell&Kern AK120: 24/192 & DSD audio for your pocket



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. **375** September 2013

Terrific Tannoy

Luxury floorstanders with sensational sonics



Linn Sneaky

Petite all-in-one streamer and integrated amp with huge sound

33

products on test from Epos, Onkyo and Pure through to Teac...

CRYSTAL ACOUSTICS
Cut-price Bluetooth streaming DAC

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM

47 Lab: hi-fi for cubist art fans



GROUP TEST

Needle craft

Six affordable cartridges to upgrade your vinyl



Mini maestro

Stunning Panasonic micro system with streaming, iDock, CD & DAB tuner

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





56
Astell&Kern AK120



64
Bel Canto CD2

Music reviews



99
The Allman Brothers

BADGES EXPLAINED

OUR AWARDS



EDITOR'S CHOICE:
Awarded to those products that are judged to deliver outstanding 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!



Technology evolves at such a rapid rate that it can sometimes take a while for other areas of the industry to catch up and utilise all of the wonderful capabilities that are available. Take Bluetooth for example, there are increasingly more products being launched equipped with the latest generation of the short-range transmission technology featuring apt-X. A number of Bluetooth-capable DACs – like Crystal Acoustics BlueDAC – reviewed on page 113 – have already emerged incorporating apt-X technology, which turns distinctly lo-fi Bluetooth audio quality into something approaching hi-fi audio quality.

Despite the promise of higher-quality audio streaming for better-sounding music over Bluetooth, there is only a handful of apt-X playback devices out there. It seems difficult to know which smartphone or tablet device is apt-X enabled and at the last count there were just a few of the newest models from brands including HTC, Motorola, Samsung and Sharp. There are numerous receiver devices lining up to be partnered with the high-quality apt-X-enabled Bluetooth source and we hope they manage to get their apt-X together soon.

Speaking of technology advances, I'm pleased to say that we've just unveiled our plans to launch the new *Hi-Fi Choice* downloadable digital subscription, see Subscriptions on page 102. If you are a new or existing digital subscriber you can find out how to get high-quality digital versions of your favourite hi-fi magazine to download and keep on your mobile device or computer by visiting us at: www.hifichoice.co.uk/digitalaccess. Now that's an advancement we can all enjoy...

Lee Dunkley Editor



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

Hi-Fi Choice Contents

hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. **375** September 2013

NEWS & OPINION

6 Audiofile

The latest news on the hottest products from the world of hi-fi coming your way

69 Letters

Put your points of view and queries on audio matters to our team of experts

77 Opinion

The *Hi-Fi Choice* team say it as they see it as they discuss the issues of the day

99 Music Reviews

The month's essential new CD, vinyl and hi-res releases given a work out

130 Back Chat

A look back in time, news snippets and an industry insider picks their top albums

READER SERVICES

104 Reader Classifieds

Have you got a piece of hi-fi that you no longer want? Sell it for FREE here

124 Next Issue

Some of the sonic treats and hot kit you can expect to see in next month's mag



FEATURES

40 Avid Listening

Avid makes turntables like no other, we take an exclusive tour around its factory

90 Beautiful System

47 Laboratory has a refreshing take on design as this stunning system reveals

94 Sound Affects

The main groovers and shakers behind UK psychedelia and the records they made that shaped the movement

121 Webwatch

Essential websites to direct your browser towards for all your hi-fi requirements

GROUP TEST

22 Six affordable cartridges that will help bring the very best out of your vinyl



Audiofile: Onkyo's CS-255DAB system



Music reviews: ZZ Top



Linn Sneaky DSM

48

"A spacious soundstage that's more Albert Hall than Albert Square"

David Price: Tannoy Precision 6.2 floorstanding loudspeaker p16

TESTED THIS MONTH



44

Teac UD-501 DAC/headphone amplifier



52

Epos Elan 10 standmount loudspeaker



58

Icon Audio Stereo 40 Mk III KT88



62

Panasonic SC-PMX9DB micro system

16

In-depth Test
Tannoy Precision 6.2 floorstanding loudspeaker



REVIEWS

Kit testing

16 Tannoy
Precision 6.2 floorstanding loudspeaker

44 Teac
UD-501 DAC/headphone amplifier

46 Audience
Clairaudient The One loudspeaker

48 Linn
Sneaky DSM network player/integrated

52 Epos
Elan 10 standmount loudspeaker

56 Astell&Kern
AK120 digital audio portable

58 Icon Audio
Stereo 40 Mk III KT88 integrated amp

62 Panasonic
SC-PMX9DB CD micro system

64 Bel Canto
CD2 CD player (Exotica)

88 Naim
Nait amplifier (Retro)

MINITEST

In-ear headphones

84 JAYS
t-JAYS Three

84 Audio-Technica
ATH-CK55

85 Crystal Acoustics
I-40

85 HiFiMAN
RE-400

GROUP TEST

Cartridges £150-£235

25 Audio-Technica AT440MLa

27 Clearaudio Concept V2

29 Goldring 1012GX

31 Grado Prestige Gold 1

33 Nagaoka MP-150

35 Ortofon 2M Blue

CHOICE EXTRAS

107 Russ Andrews
The Silencer mains filter

107 Epiphany Acoustics
Atratus Audiophile RCA interconnects

109 Onkyo
ES-HF300 (S) headphones

111 Micromega
MyZic headphone amplifier

113 Crystal Acoustics
BluDAC Bluetooth DAC

115 Analogue Innovation
Blue Lube Turntable Bearing Oil

115 Mains Cables R Us
Blue Horizon Spike Shoes

117 ISOkinetik
ISOtone Silver Wire Tonearm Rewire Kit

119 Pure
Evoke F4 DAB radio

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

Sound harmony

This stylish Onkyo mini system plays CD and DAB, and claims to bring hi-fi sound to the iPhone 5

ALL-IN-ONE HI-FI SYSTEMS

are most definitely on the rise. Onkyo's CS-255DAB is the latest model to join the micro system ranks. It's aimed at listeners seeking an authentic stereo experience from a visually elegant package, says its Japanese maker. "Our goal is to turn casual listening into a high-fidelity experience, while making it easier to play and listen to a wide selection of audio entertainment from the latest mobile devices," they go on to say. And we certainly can't argue with the thinking behind that.

Finished in gloss white, the compact CS-255DAB features a traditional CD player and FM tuner, plus a DAB/DAB+ tuner, Apple-certified charging connections for new and legacy iPhone and iPod models, as well as playback support for tablets and



PRICE: £250 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 08712 001996 **WEB:** ONKYO.CO.UK

smartphones via a front USB port, making it compatible with all types of music media.

The sturdy main unit houses a traditional front-loading CD player with a smooth draw action, the maker claims. It also houses a low-rated but efficient Class AB digital amplifier, rated at a quoted 15W per channel to drive the system's purpose-built, compact loudspeakers. The distinctive two-way speaker cabinets are fitted with a 100mm mid/bass driver and a

“Our goal is to turn casual listening into a high fidelity experience, while making it easier to play and listen to the latest mobile devices”



20mm dome tweeter. Their rolled-edged design, with front-to-rear taper, is said to prevent standing waves for unwanted acoustical resonances that can degrade sound.

Connectivity begins with the top-loading Lightning connector dock compatible with iPhone 5, iPod touch (5G) and iPod nano (7G), which enables devices to be recharged while they're connected, and easily controlled and navigated via the system's partnering remote control. Owners of older iPhones and iPod devices can connect, charge and play via the front panel USB.

Radio listeners are well catered for with an FM tuner that has 30 memory presets and a DAB/DAB+ tuner (just in case DAB+ should arrive in the UK in the future) with up to 40 memory presets for all your favourite stations.

The CS-255DAB system looks to be an impressive package. It's one that Onkyo says will show you are serious about music and projects a spacious stereo sound across a wide soundstage, with punchy bass, lively dynamics and plenty of detail across the audio spectrum. We wait to see.

The Onkyo CS-255DAB is available now and costs £250.

COMMENT

AMAZON'S MP3 FREE-FOR-ALL

Music buyers tend to fall into one of two camps: those that buy physical media and those that go for digital downloads. While the former is clearly on the wane, it looks like the two groups might slowly merge into one, and Amazon appears to be doing its bit to make this happen with the introduction of AutoRip.

For the uninitiated, the service means that anyone buying CDs and vinyl from Amazon will also receive free MP3 versions of their purchase. But it doesn't stop there, any music you've ever bought from Amazon since 1999 will also now be available to you in digital form to stream or download completely free of charge.

There are, of course, some caveats. Firstly, this only applies to the 350,000 licensed albums that have come onboard and that the MP3s are only 256Kbps. However, Amazon's efforts must be applauded and we can't help feeling that the likes of Apple and Google will be quietly seething about the whole thing.

Why? Because Amazon is trying to convince music buyers to use its music service. Cloud Player is free to use in its basic form (with space for up to 250 songs) and costs £21.99 a year for the Premium package (250,000 songs). Both Apple and Google offer similar services (Apple's iTunes Match - £21.99 a year - and Google Play's Music Locker - free). By making its customers aware of its service by providing free MP3s, the plan is that Amazon will get a jump on its rivals.

While it's easy to suggest that it's a futile effort, evidence seems to suggest it might just be working. The service launched in the US in January and has been credited for a growth in CD sales - CDs that are licensed with AutoRip are selling much faster than those that aren't. As it stands, it's too early to tell how successful the plan is - particularly as neither Apple, Google or Amazon have published figures related to how their subscription services are doing. But if nothing else, it means you can see what embarrassing tunes you bought back in 1999 and relive the agony on your MP3 player without having to spend a penny. ▶

AutoRip ➤➤



Buy an
AutoRip CD

Get the
MP3 version for FREE



Naim celebrates 40th

Salisbury-based manufacturer launches a new trio of updated Naim amplifiers

PRICE: £925, £1,595, £2,750 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 01722 426600 **WEB:** NAIMAUDIO.COM

NAIM AUDIO IS 40 years old and has announced new versions of the three models in its integrated amplifier range as part of its birthday celebrations. The updated trio benefits from larger mains transformers and improved power supplies, the Salisbury company tells us.

The Naim 5si claims to improve its power output from 50W to 60W over its predecessor, while the Naim XS 2 has increased from 60W to 70W power output. Both of the integrated amplifiers benefit from an improved PCB layout

based on the development of previous products like the DAC-V1. Additionally, the Naim XS 2 incorporates a new Class A headphone amplifier that outputs to a 6.35mm jack that's located on its front panel.

Finally, the Supernait 2 fulfils the role of a pure analogue integrated amplifier, ditching the digital inputs of its predecessor. The new model is optimised for analogue stages and features a larger transformer, but remains rated at 80W power output.

IN BRIEF

ISOLATION PODS

● Townshend Audio has introduced a range of new isolation products called Seismic Isolation. The new range of vibration-reducing devices are based around a key component called the Townshend Seismic Load Cell, which the manufacturer tells us "consists of a high-quality alloy steel compression spring covered by a flexible synthetic rubber jacket with two end plates". Prices start from £100 each for a Seismic Isolation Pod and £500 for purpose-made isolation platforms designed to support speakers and individual components. A choice of three sizes of equipment stands are also available with prices starting from £1,500.

TOWNSHENDAUDIO.COM.



Generation X streamer

PRICE: £4,495 **AVAILABLE:** THIS MONTH
CONTACT: 01622 721444 **WEB:** CHORDELECTRONICS.CO.UK

Chord Electronics chose the Munich High End Show back in May to launch its CodeX music streamer to the petite Choral range of models. The latest addition to a rapidly expanding range employs much of the same technology found on Chord Electronics' £7,500 flagship streamer, the DSX1000, and includes the same front-end processor and support for the latest DSD 128 and DXD playback over USB up to 384kHz sampling

The CodeX claims to be a highly future-proof and flexible model and incorporates elements from the company's QuteHD DAC for the highest sound performance.

It has both USB and coaxial digital inputs and prefers a fixed-wired approach to networking due to the bandwidth limitations of audio signals over wi-fi.

Control of the streamer is handled by several means, including the jog-wheel control on

the front panel combined with the colour screen menu system beside it, uPnP control apps including Chord Electronics' own iPad/iPod Touch/iPhone app or simply via the more traditional supplied remote control handset.

Choral products fit neatly into dedicated support racks made from high-quality aluminium. Prices start from £1,600 and are available in both shelf and floorstanding configurations

OPPO®



"the greatest all-round appeal of any source I have tested. Period"



"You will not find a better Blu-ray player at any price..."



"...the most significant evolution of the Blu-ray player since the format was developed"

NOW AVAILABLE IN SILVER



BDP-105EU

- | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 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 |
| 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

Stream speaker system

Cabasse introduces new 2.1 wireless speakers

PRICE: £849 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
WEB: CABASSE.COM/EN



CONTINUING THE TREND for speaker systems offering wireless connectivity to a wide variety of music devices comes the Cabasse Stream 3. The 2.1 streaming speaker system was first unveiled at CES in January, and comes with two satellite speakers with swivel bases, which help to aid their positioning, says the French maker, and features the company's own point-source SCS technology. The subwoofer is a modified version of the company's Santorin 21 and accommodates amplification and streaming electronics. There are no details on power output claims at the time of writing.

Wireless connection options include DLNA using WPA (Wireless Protect Access) over a home network and Bluetooth. A wired LAN connection is also available as are traditional stereo analogue inputs and a digital optical input. It comes with a remote control, but the system can also be controlled using the free Cabasse Stream Audio Control app available to download on iOS and Android devices. It comes in high gloss black or white finishes. Look out for our review next month.

IN BRIEF

CHORD CABLES GET REVAMP

● The Chord Company has announced new versions to its entry-level interconnect cable range. The upgraded three-strong line-up features a number of shared modifications to cable shielding and conductors and come with new easy-grip textured plugs, that take their design cues from the flagship Sarum range of interconnects, and are fitted with a choice of either gold or silver-plated signal contacts. The all-new Crimson VEE 3 is a twisted pair configuration with copper conductors – prices start at £49 for a 0.5m pair. The Cobra VEE 3 is also a twisted pair configuration, but with silver-plated copper conductors – prices start at £84. The Chameleon VEE3 uses 26 AWG silver-plated copper conductors and starts at £120 for a 0.5m pair. Custom lengths and configurations are available to order. **CHORD.CO.UK**

One-box solutions

PRICE: £2,153 & £2,975 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 01285 760561 **WEB:** ATCLOUDSPEAKERS.CO.UK

UK loudspeaker manufacturer, ATC, has launched a pair of one-box solutions to bolster its range of electronics. The compact SIACD is the more expensive model of the duo at £2,975, and combines a fully integrated Class A/B amplifier rated at 100W per channel with onboard CD player. The preamp/DAC stage can handle up to 24/192 files when connected via one of the S/PDIF optical and digital inputs. Additionally there are two stereo analogue inputs and a 48kHz USB input. The front panel features a 3.5mm mini jack input and there's a 6.35mm headphone output from the in-built headphone amplifier. It comes in black or silver finishes.



The more affordable CDA2 is a one-box CD player and preamp designed to be partnered with your choice of separate power amplifier. All the connections are located at the rear of the unit, including a 6.3mm headphone jack. There are two stereo analogue inputs – one of which is shared by a 3.5mm mini jack – and two S/PDIF digital inputs

that support both optical and coaxial connections. You can choose from balanced XLRs or RCA outputs when connecting the CDA2 to your choice of power amplifier or active speakers. 24/192 USB files can be handled by the internal DAC via the S/PDIF inputs. The CDA2 costs £2,153 and is finished in silver. ▶



"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

YOU WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

"WILSON AUDIO ALEXIA IS QUITE SIMPLY AN OUTSTANDING EXAMPLE OF AUDIO EXCELLENCE"

- HI-FI CRITIC / MARTIN COLLOMS / ALEXIA REVIEW

"SAY 'HELLO' TO MY NEW REFERENCE"

- HI-FI NEWS / KEN KESSLER / ALEXIA REVIEW

"HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE FEELING OF TRANSCENDENCY, SOMETHING THAT GOES BEYOND CONSCIOUSNESS?"

- HI-FI CLUBS.NET / JOSE VITOR HENRIQUES / ALEXIA / CONSTELLATION SYSTEM REVIEW



Wilson Audio's Alexia is a compact and uncompromising design of extraordinary technical and material innovations, delivering new bass dimensions, dramatic midrange clarity, unyielding dynamics and unrestricted detail.

Taking sound into a new and rarefied plane, the Alexia joins

Wilson's other world-class designs such as the bookshelf Duetto 2, the floorstanding Sophia 3 and the peerless Alexandria XLF.

Speakers without compromise, brought to you by Absolute Sounds: premier importer of the world's finest hi-fi.

 absolute sounds ltd.

International Distributors & Consultants of Specialised Hi-End Audio & Video Systems

58 Durham Road, London, SW20 0TW T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09

W: www.absolutesounds.com E: info@absolutesounds.com

WILSON
AUDIO



Philips portable

Docking station with Lightning connector and Bluetooth

PRICE: £250 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 0844 3380489 **WEB:** PHILIPS.CO.UK

THE CURVY PHILIPS DS8400 speaker dock breaks the mould of traditional box-shaped docking stations to improve sound, says Philips. Its unique shape aids the unit's rigidity, which helps to minimise internal cabinet vibrations that can often affect and degrade the sound, the company explains.

Docking connectivity is taken care of via Apple's Lightning connector, making it compatible with iPhone 5 and the latest-gen iPod and iPad mini. Bluetooth is also available for wireless connectivity, although there's no mention of apt-X compatibility.

The shapely cabinet houses two 3in speaker drivers and a tuned bass port exits the rear of the cabinet. A 3.5mm stereo jack input on the side of the unit takes care of connectivity to wired external audio sources from alternative tablets and music players.

A free Philips SoundStudio app is available to customise performance via a standard five-bar equaliser and MySound personalisation feature. The internal battery pack is automatically charged whenever the DS800 is connected to mains power and claims to provide up to five hours of battery life for music on the move.

IN BRIEF



QED LAUNCHES NEW RUBY SPEAKER CABLE

● The Ruby Anniversary Evolution speaker cable is a conventional 'figure 8' configuration finished with each of the ten copper 'bunches' visible through a flexible 5.0mm diameter, clear polyethylene outer sheath. It utilises advanced cable geometry to reduce signal degradation, constructed from 99.999% pure oxygen-free copper strands into five individually isolated bunches around a low density polyethylene core. Performance is said to be further optimised by manufacturing three bunches from 0.203mm strands and the other two from 0.146mm strands. QED's brand manager, Jack Fox says: "The new Ruby Anniversary Evolution utilises technology from QED's renowned 'high-end' Genesis and X-Tube cables and celebrates our 40 years at the forefront of UK speaker cable design." It's available now at £5.95 per meter. **QED.CO.UK**

BACKCHAT CORRECTION

● In the August issue (374) we incorrectly stated that the long players selected for the *Desert Island Discs* feature had been chosen by Adam Shaw-Cotterill from Audio Partnership. Seemingly some pesky gremlins got to that section as we went to print and the credit should have gone to Steve Halsall from GP Acoustics. Steve's album choices were published correctly. To see what choices he made visit our website at: **HIFICHOICE.CO.UK**



Onkyo's stereo receiver

PRICE: £200 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 08712 001996 **WEB:** ONKYOCO.UK

Answering the desire for straightforward hi-fi solutions comes Onkyo's TX-8020 stereo integrated amplifier and radio receiver. With a claimed power output of 90W into 6ohms, the receiver incorporates an FM/AM RDS tuner with up to 40 presets for all your favourite radio stations. There's no in-built DAB tuner.

The yesteryear flavour of the TX-8020 is further demonstrated by the inclusion of a moving-magnet phono input stage for anyone wanting to hookup a turntable. Further inputs include five stereo RCA inputs for line-level sources as well as three digital (one optical

and two coaxial) inputs and a headphone socket on the front panel. There's also a subwoofer pre output for those looking to hookup a 2.1 speaker configuration, and the receiver can accommodate two sets of speakers for switchable multi-room setups. The TX-8020 carries traditional bass, treble and balance controls on its front panel with carefully designed circuitry that has no discernible impact on sound quality, the Japanese maker claims.

Constructed from an all-metal casing the TX-8020 is available in a choice of black and silver finishes.

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



Czech Republic – Stereo & Video
 Finland – Hifimaailma
 France – Stereo Prestige & Image
 Germany – Eins Null, HiFi Test TV Video, LP
 Greece – Hxos Eikova
 Hungary – Sztereo Sound & Vision
 Italy – AUDIOreview
 Norway – Watt
 Poland – Audio
 Portugal – Audio & Cinema em Casa
 Russia – Stereo & Video
 Serbia – Hi-Files
 Spain – AV Premium
 Sweden – HiFi & Musik
 Ukraine – Stereo & Video

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA SUPPORTERS OF THE HI-FI SHOW 2013



Belles

A10 Pre Amplifier, DAC and Phono



The three in one box option
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



IN-DEPTH TANNOY PRECISION 6.2
FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKER £1,699



Automatic focus

Tannoy's Precision 6.2 floorstander boasts a soundstage that its rivals just can't match, at least that's what **David Price** reckons...

It's not as if the world really needs another floorstanding loudspeaker. We've got plenty enough already, thanks very much. So, when looking at something like this new Tannoy, the first thing that springs to mind is, "does it bring anything new to the party?" In the case of a great many such products, the answer would be a deafening, "no" – but Tannoys being Tannoys, you can at least be sure of an interesting listening experience courtesy of its unique Dual Concentric drive units.

Let's not underestimate the effect that drivers have on loudspeakers. It's easy to assume that – because they're the obvious, big things that meet the eye – cabinets are the be all and end all of speaker sound, but of course they'll never be able to redeem the product from having bad drivers in the first place. Tannoy's drive units are always good, and always different to everyone else's – so the Precision 6.2s come with a good start in life.

Their key strength is the size of the soundstage – which is cathedral-like

The speaker you see here sports a new version of the famed Dual Concentric drive unit, so-called because it has a driver within a driver; basically the tweeter is set inside the cone of the larger mid/bass drive unit. It's a clever wheeze, which is why Tannoy patented it and therefore nobody else offers precisely the same arrangement, and brings excellent phase coherence. In human language, this means the high frequency sound emerges from the same 'point source' as the rest of the range, at very-close-to the same time. Contrast this to a conventional

tweeter and woofer, set some 10cm or so apart, and you can literally hear the difference – things seem more 'all of a piece', and the music images better in space.

Many may have been familiar with the Dual Concentric concept for a long period of time – the company has been making such speakers for longer than most, after all, and the original Monitor Black sported a Dual Concentric driver first developed and patented by Tannoy's Chief Engineer, Ronnie H Rackham in 1947. But this isn't to say that the drivers used in the Precision 6.2s are in any way vintage pieces. The company's speaker design supremo, Dr Paul Mills, is keen to stress that the technology has advanced considerably over the years, with new materials, new designs and the development of bespoke manufacturing processes. He also points out that these days, the designs benefit from advanced computer aided design and software modelling – traditional values in a modern setting if you like!

The actual tweeter fitted is what Tannoy calls its 'WideBand' design, a 25mm titanium dome affair with the company's Tulip WaveGuide that extends above a claimed 30kHz, way above human hearing. The company says that a high-frequency unit that's

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Tannoy Precision 6.2

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Floorstanding loudspeaker

WEIGHT
18.4kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
310 x 1,000 x 283mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power handling: 350W
- Quoted frequency response: 34Hz - 35kHz (-6dB)
- 1x Dual Concentric array with 25mm dome tweeter and 150mm midrange driver
- 1x 150mm bass driver

DISTRIBUTOR
Tannoy Ltd

TELEPHONE
01236 420199

WEBSITE
tannoy.com

built to reproduce extremely high frequencies is far less stressed by audio band reproduction than a tweeter that is near its limits at 20kHz. At 1.6kHz, this mates to the main 150mm midrange driver within the one Dual Concentric array, and the latter is made from a treated paper pulp material with a rubber surround, with a 44mm edge-wound voice coil. This then hooks up with an additional 150mm dedicated bass driver at 170Hz, which bolsters the lower bass. Low-loss laminated core inductors and audiophile-grade polypropylene capacitors are used, with components hard wired onto a rigid mounting board. Silver-plated, high-purity oxygen-free copper wiring is also featured – a sensible measure as this can have a big effect on sound.

The cabinet is, of course, mission-critical in getting a good sound, too. To wit, the Precision 6.2 gets some classily finished woodwork, with flat front and rear baffles hooking up to curved side panels. Tannoy claims this reduces internal reflections and braces the cabinet structure. This is an unusual take; although I've detected a move back to 'flat' sides, the speakers that have curved cabs usually don't have a flat back baffle. The good Dr Mills says this is because it eliminates the inherent instability of a 'three cornered' design when using "compact (for Tannoy at least)" 150mm drivers. All is made from heavy fibreboard, and there's a small Mass Loading Cavity (MLC) for fine tuning of the bass. By filling or part filling the sealed cavity with what Tannoy calls "dry mineral aggregates" (sand) you can balance the speaker up to your room better, which is a nice feature. A reflex port sits surreptitiously behind.

There's a choice of satin dark walnut, high gloss dark walnut and high gloss black cabinet finishes, ▶



The Tannoys sport high quality plinths with adjustable spikes, plus spike cups for those not wishing to make their wooden floors look like the lunar surface. This particular design is done very well and makes levelling easy, which – along with the correct toe-in – is important for getting the stereo image to snap into focus.

and they're done very nicely indeed. Dark-weave grilles are supplied sub-surface magnetic fixings, so there are no ugly mounting recesses, and the speaker drivers are tipped off with aluminium trim rings for the subtlest touch of bling. The speakers are supplied with custom plinths and floor spikes with easy thumbwheel locking. Thoughtfully, dedicated spike cups are supplied to protect floors.

Sound quality

There's nothing quite like the sound of a Tannoy Dual Concentric. I've reviewed ten or so over the past 20 years, at differing price points and widely varying shapes and sizes, and they all have that distinctive sound that – for better or for worse, depending on your point of view – marks them out from their price rivals. What you get is a wonderfully spacious soundstage, one that's more Albert Hall than Albert Square in its general scale!

Listening to the Precision 6.2s, you wonder how so many other loudspeakers manage to make it look so difficult. After all, punch 10W or so (which is all a listening room usually requires) into any £1,000+ speakers and surely your room should fill with music! It certainly does with these Tannoys, and tweaking them is a simple case of toeing them in so instruments in the mix lock into the right position, and getting their distance from the rear wall right. In my largish room, they work best some 40cm or so out.

This done, they're ready to sing. Sand-loading the cabinet recesses will tighten up the bass slightly and give

marginally superior focus, but the main choice is with or without grilles. I find the high treble just a touch too recessed with the grilles on, although there's no denying that the lower treble and upper mid is quite lively. I wouldn't call it harsh, but it certainly makes its presence felt in a way a more balanced floorstander such as the Spondor D7 doesn't. Freeez's *Mariposa* is a lovely summery-sounding track, and a relatively unprocessed one – this early Beggar's Banquet recording didn't have a ham-fisted producer fiddling with the faders, so it's pretty even – but the Tannoys certainly liven it up a bit, and make it bright and breezy fun.

A great addition to the swelling ranks of £2,000 floorstanders

These speakers image wide and tall, in the mode of a MartinLogan (although they don't quite scale their dizzy heights), and set up a clean and open soundstage across the midband. I love the way the music integrates so well, appearing to come from a single point source (for indeed that is what happens). It's so much easier on the ear, and the brain doesn't have to do any rebalancing or phase compensation on the fly. That's why – despite being a little bright – they're pretty easy to listen to. This holds for the rhythms as well, which come over in a wonderfully explicit way on Alex



The princely sum of £2,300 buys you a pair of Monitor Audio's GX200 loudspeakers – a bit pricier than the Tannoys, but you need to spend a bit more than their sticker price to find something that gives them a run for their money. And indeed the GX200s do; they're immaculately finished, better than the Tannoys, and sport some very high-quality drive units including a ribbon tweeter. This – along with the C-CAM drivers gives the GX200 a very open, detailed, clear and precise sound with a lovely spacious treble; much better than the Precision 6.2. By the same token, however, the Tannoys' Dual Concentric driver gives a wider and more spacious sound than the Monitor Audios. It's a little looser and less incisive, but way more expansive.

Tannoy Dual Concentric drive units have come a very long way since the first 1947 examples!

Reece's *Feel the Sunshine*. Even with the grilles off, and that high treble liberated just a touch, I still sense a slight lack of atmosphere to the decay on the hi-hat; not bad but others do better. Yet that doesn't stop the tweeter capturing the leading edges of the hi-hat strikes well, and powering them along nicely.

As well as sounding fast and lithe, these speakers seem really rather good at carrying the music's phrasing – it is as if they are trying especially hard to signpost the accenting every fourth phrase, and this makes for a very musically coherent rendition. Things seem to have a purpose and a trajectory; the music is busy and detailed yet doesn't come over as choppy or confused. Rather, the Tannoys communicate the overall musical picture in a well controlled and structured way – it is easy to listen to, yet exciting and enjoyable.

One thing that the Alex Reece track also reveals is the bass performance, which to my ears isn't quite so polished. The cabinets appear to advertise their presence ever so slightly with just the teensiest bit of overhang. The Precision 6.2s are fast and pacey, but there's definitely the sense that you can hear the cabinets in a way that you don't from Monitor Audio's (slightly pricier) GX200s. Mass loading and careful positioning helps to alleviate this somewhat, but unfortunately doesn't eliminate it completely. For this reason, a nice taut-sounding solid-state amplifier is an essential companion to the Precision 6.2s, and I certainly don't get the sense that they'd be naturally synergistic partners to tube amplifiers with their somewhat underdamped bass response.

Cueing up some classical music in the shape of my favourite Deutsche Grammophon/Karajan recording of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* shows the Tannoys to be a little tonally coloured, but in a nice, smooth, euphonic sort of way. As you might expect at the price, they don't give you an electrostatic-like 'clean window on the world', so one recording sounds a little closer texturally to another than perhaps it should. Classical music fans might tut-tut at this, but they'll certainly be enamoured by the world-class soundstaging and pin-point image location; instruments appear to hover in space effortlessly. The other plus-point about the Dual Concentrics with classical music is the good sense of integration between midband and treble, although the more intense parts of the Beethoven piece do show



IN SIGHT



- 1 Mid/treble Dual Concentric driver
- 2 Bass drive unit
- 3 Plinth with adjustable spikes
- 4 Rear bass reflex port
- 5 Biwireable binding posts with earthing point

ON TEST

Tannoy claims 89dB sensitivity for the Precision 6.2, confirmed by our pink noise figure of 89.6dB. An 8ohms nominal impedance should mean minimum impedance no lower than 6.4ohms, but the 6.2 dips to 3.1ohms at 114Hz, making a 4ohms rating more realistic. Impedance phase angles are high enough to reduce EPDR to a minimum of 1.7ohms at 102Hz, so the 6.2 is a moderately challenging load to drive. On-axis frequency response

shows a step-up in output of about 2dB above 700Hz and a narrow notch at 10kHz, the latter principally responsible for high-ish response errors. 200Hz to 20kHz, of ± 5.8 dB and ± 5.6 dB respectively. Pair matching error was high, too at ± 2.2 dB but the largest disparities occur above 10kHz. The cumulative spectra decay waterfall indicates well controlled resonance up to 3kHz, above which a series of high-Q breakup modes spoil the picture. **KH**

Q&A

Dr Paul Mills

Chief designer, Tannoy

**DP: Where does the Precision series sit in Tannoy's range?**

PM: It is a mid-market speaker marking the transition between our affordable Revolution range and the much larger and more affluent Definition series. The cosmetics are contemporary, with a small footprint, curves, plinths, seamless aluminium trim and luxury finishes. We are aiming at audiophiles looking for a modern take on the Tannoy Dual Concentric sound.

What's new about the Precision 6.2's Dual Concentric unit?

It is an evolution of the units designed for the outgoing Revolution Signature series. The driver uses a double magnet motor system for increased magnetic flux over the entire range of coil excursion, which results in tighter bass response and increased power handling. We have modified the paper pulp compound mix on the bass driver in tune with the dual magnet system and higher magnet charge and used a natural rubber roll surround. This gives a more natural presentation through the presence band and works extremely well on the ABRs used in the 6.4 model. The 1in titanium dome and Tulip Waveguide are essentially the same design as found in the Revolution Signature models although new manufacturing processes mean even higher tolerances.

Why is 'treated paper pulp' chosen for the mid/bass cone (s)?

We have always used paper on our flagship Prestige products, indeed since 1947 with the first Monitor Black Dual Concentric driver. In the eighties vacuum formed polypropylene was often used as being more cost-effective. In the late nineties, new manufacturing methods meant paper could be considered for more mass market products so we began to integrate paper construction cones in new evolutions of the DC driver lower down the Tannoy range. We find paper based cones have better self damping properties and sound more natural.

that the low bass isn't quite as linear, with the speakers sounding slightly lumpy in the low registers, and a little light in the very low ones.

Conclusion

The key strength of the Precision 6.2s is the size and height of the soundstage – which is cathedral-like in its expanse. They also romp along with a decent rhythm and make listening to any type of music enormous fun. Generally – that slight cabinet overhang notwithstanding – they're well integrated and the music just seems to pour out into the room in a remarkably easy way. All of this means you're less likely to notice their slight midband colouration, and the sense that the bass isn't quite as together as the midband and treble. Still, they go loud with little complaint, go down low and will never overwhelm you with the

visceral impact they can deliver from relatively small boxes of less than 30-litre cabinet volume. They're a great addition to the swelling ranks of £2,000 floorstanders then, offering a big sound that many will love. You get an awfully enjoyable loudspeaker for the money ●

Hi-Fi Choice**OUR VERDICT****SOUND QUALITY**

LIKE: Fantastic soundstaging; musically satisfying; rhythmically coherent

VALUE FOR MONEY

DISLIKE: Veiled upper treble; lumpy lower bass with slight cabinet overhang

BUILD QUALITY**EASE OF DRIVE**

WESAY: Great fun to hear, but not the most forensic around

OVERALL

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 cartridge group is supported by rigorous listening tests, backed up with objective lab testing

CARTRIDGE GROUP TEST

AS CHANGING A cartridge is not something that is easily done 'on the fly', this month's group test is carried out without our usual blind listening panel present. This allows the process to be extended somewhat and a slightly different procedure to be applied.

The listening cycle is carried out on two different record players in order to give a better handle on performance. The first of these is a Rega RP6 – a current *Hi-Fi Choice* favourite and a deck that all six cartridges might find themselves being used with. To get a more absolute idea of performance the same sequence is then carried out on an Avid Ingenium turntable with SME M2 tonearm, which

is more expensive than might be the case with cartridges of this nature, but is a neutral platform to judge the cartridges on.

In the event, the differences across the two decks does not really alter the ranking of the cartridges. Alignment is carried out with an Audio Origami protractor and tracking force via Shure stylus gauge. Once up and running, levels are matched with a Clearaudio test record that has various test tones for this purpose. All the cartridges are put through the same cycle of four tracks from four different records. These are deliberately taken from different genres and, just as importantly, different quality pressings.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Output level

+10

Tracking ability

+40

Frequency response

0

Distortion

+50

Generator symmetry

+10

KEY: ■ Group average

■ % below average ■ % above average

OUTPUT LEVEL

We measure the output level of a MM cartridge, loaded into 47kohm, using a 1kHz tone cut at a standard 5cm/sec. A healthy output will be around 5mV.

TRACKING ABILITY

Two tests are used here, one against the physical excursion of the groove (up to 80µm) the other looking at THD vs. level up to +18dB (re. 0dB/5cm/sec).

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Measured from 20Hz-20kHz (-8dB re. 5cm/sec) using both lateral and vertical cuts. Our calculations are derived from the former, in-phase L+R modulations.

DISTORTION

Not only do we check distortion at the standard 1kHz (5cm/sec) but also vs. frequency from 20Hz-20kHz. The best MMs will offer <5% THD through the audioband.

GENERATOR SYMMETRY

This unique evaluation compares the differences between response and distortion performance using lateral (L+R) and vertical (L-R) groove measurements.



OUR GROUP TESTS

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

We don't publish pages of graphs, but we do understand the importance of transparency. So, readers may view full QC Suite test reports for our key reviews by clicking on the red download button on our website.

www.hifichoice.co.uk

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Phono stage:
 - Avid Pellar
- Amplifier:
 - Naim Supernait
- Loudspeakers:
 - Neat Momentum 4i
- Cables:
 - Chord/Oelbach
- Equipment supports:
 - Soundstyle/Optimum

TEST MUSIC

- Little Feat
 - *Feats Don't Fall Me Now*
 - *Rock And Roll Doctor*



- Ray Charles
 - *Genius Loves Company*
 - *Sinner's Prayer*



- Cinematic Orchestra
 - *Live At The Albert Hall*
 - *All That You Give*



- Boards of Canada
 - *Tomorrow's Harvest*
 - *Reach For The Dead*



LIVE IT



'An extremely polished, well rounded and musically satisfying loudspeaker; fine value too!'

Hi-Fi Choice, July 2012

R SERIES

Some music you hear. The all-new R Series delivers a sound so pure you live each and every moment. Incorporating technologies from KEF's flagship Blade, stunningly fluent Uni-Q® driver arrays combine with potent bass drivers to deliver a rich, spacious sound image of startling accuracy. The R Series presents a new dimension in audiophile standards of entertainment, making flawless precision and superb dynamics more accessible than ever.

Live it. Feel it. Love it.

www.kef.com



KEF
INNOVATORS IN SOUND



@KEF Audio

KEF Audio UK

GP Acoustics (UK) Limited Eccleston Road Tovil Maidstone Kent ME15
Tel: +44 (0)1622 672261 Fax: +44 (0)1622 750653



Group**test**

CARTRIDGES £150-£235

Needle craft

They might be small, but phono cartridges can make or break your vinyl replay. **Ed Selley** looks at six moving magnet options

FOR SOMETHING BARELY larger than a glacier mint, a phono cartridge has a huge influence on your vinyl performance. Responsible for turning the groove of a record into an electrical signal it has a tremendous effect on the performance of the turntable as a whole. These little wonders are high on the list of components vinylistas look to in the pursuit of performance upgrades.

Many affordable turntables are supplied with cartridges in the £40-£80 range and it is logical enough to consider designs from £150 to replace them.

This £150-£230 price point is also key for anyone looking for a cartridge to go with the £500-£800 turntables that are a step up over the entry-level models and are less likely to be supplied with a cartridge from new. Here are six designs that sit within this price point that will be suitable for either group of turntables. All six are high output designs, which predominate at this price point, and should work well with the moving magnet phono stages more commonly encountered on similarly priced

amplifiers. Additionally, as moving magnet designs, most models can have their stylus replaced to increase the life of the cartridge.

Cartridges, like the rest of the component parts of turntables, are mechanical engineering rather than electronic and improvements in this field generally come at a higher cost. Improved materials and more

A cartridge has a tremendous effect on the performance of a turntable

sophisticated design practices can be employed at this level that should have a positive effect on performance. These six models should offer better frequency response, improved channel separation and less roll off at the frequency extremes. This should translate to a more vivid and visceral presentation than budget models can produce, which should start to show what vinyl is capable of. So, do our pint-sized superstars deliver? ▶

ON TEST



Audio-Technica AT-440MLa
£195 p25

The flagship moving magnet offering in the Audio-Technica range, the AT-440MLa is a dual-magnet design that's in a compact chassis shared with A-T's other MM designs, that have a stylus guard



Clearaudio Concept V2 MM
£150 p27

Clearaudio's entry-level cartridge shares many attributes with the company's more expensive offerings and like the other MM models has recently been upgraded to V2 status with a selection of improvements



Goldring 1012GX
£235 p29

The most expensive cartridge in this group test is also one of the oldest models. The Goldring remains a popular choice and is a very highly regarded design thanks to its Gyger 2 diamond stylus



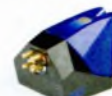
Grado Prestige Gold 1
£160 p31

The only moving iron cartridge in the round up, the Gold 1 is the flagship model in Grado's Prestige series and is taken from the top 5% measured performers of the identically specified Silver model



Nagaoka MP-150
£229 p33

Long-standing Japanese cartridge manufacturer Nagaoka specialises in moving magnet designs and the MP-150 is right in the middle of its range. It looks retro, but the spec is contemporary



Ortofon 2M Blue
£170 p35

A popular favourite, the 2M Blue is part of the premium Ortofon moving magnet range and features a number of design features developed for more expensive models, as well as a stylised industrial design

The Legacy Lives On



Sansui

Soundthinking.

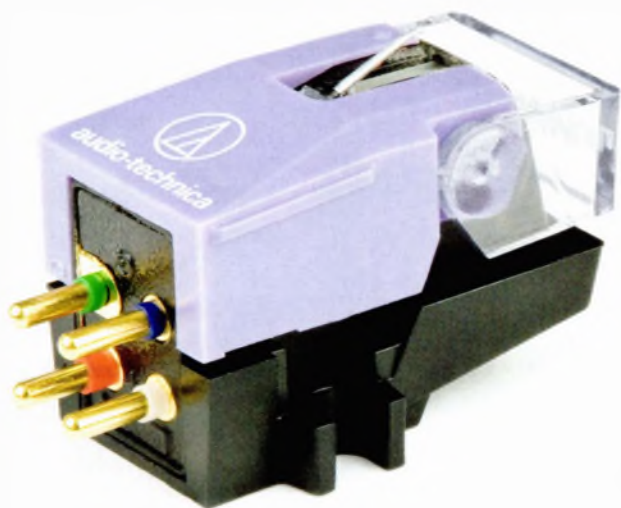
Stunning Hi-Fi from £199

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



Audio-Technica AT440MLa **£195**

This A-T cartridge is mighty fiddly to fit, but it's well worth the effort thanks to its very likeable sound

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Audio-Technica
AT440MLa

ORIGIN
Japan

TYPE
Moving magnet
cartridge

WEIGHT
6.5g

FEATURES

- Output voltage: 4.0mV
- Tracking weight: 1.75g
- Cartridge weight: 6.0g
- Stylus type: Microline
- Cantilever type: alloy

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Designs

TELEPHONE
01235 511166

WEBSITE
eu.audio-technica.com/

Audio-Technica has been making cartridges for decades and its moving magnet range has been around for many years without serious alterations. The AT440MLa is the company's flagship moving magnet design and only the colour distinguishes it from the less expensive models. Internally, the AT440MLa makes use of a signal generator that utilises dual magnets and a single run of copper for the entire assembly. This is intended to reduce loss through internal wiring. The Audio-Technica AT440MLa is the only design in the group of cartridges with a stylus guard attached to the body, which is potentially useful if you are the sort of person that routinely loses them.

The AT440MLa is a little fiddly to fit as the cartridge body is fairly small and the mounts are not threaded, which means that it needs both nuts and bolts to connect it. By the same token, the cartridge pins are well spaced and easy to attach the cabling to and the tracking force requirements should not be a problem for any turntable you are likely to connect it to. The accessories that come supplied are not especially generous, but the packaging is usefully substantial.

Sound quality

The AT440MLa manages to share some of the characteristics of other Audio-Technica items that have

passed through *Hi-Fi Choice* in recent years. The performance is well balanced from top to bottom and this gives Little Feats' *Rock and Roll Doctor* an impressive sense of drive and clarity and there is a pleasing sense of life and energy to the performance as well.

The tonality of the Audio-Technica is also commendable. Ray Charles' piano in *Sinner's Prayer* sounds

The cartridge pins are well spaced and easy to attach the cabling to

convincing and impressively full bodied. The separation is also good and there is a useful sense of the placement of performers in an easy to follow soundstage. With the truly vast performance of *All That You Give* at the Albert Hall, the AT440MLa makes a very commendable effort at re-producing the scale of the venue and the large group of musicians is well represented.

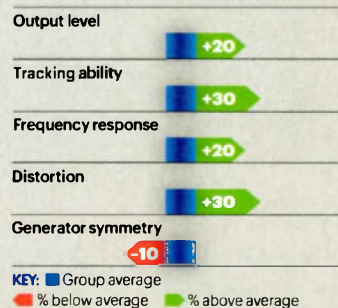
The news isn't all good, though. The AT440MLa seems more prone than most of the other cartridges in the test to picking up and emphasising surface noise on records, which can affect the performance. There is also a slight lack of fine detail to the way the Audio-Technica goes about making music, which means that this is more of a 'big picture' cartridge than one

ON TEST

While not quite the highest output MM in our group at 4.2mV, the AT440MLa is one of the best trackers and offers very low levels of distortion. With a mere 1.4g downforce it sailed through our top +18dB test groove suffering a mere 0.5% THD. Compliance is quite high at 35cu so this lightweight cartridge is also best suited to medium or light effective mass tonearms. Arm damping would be worthwhile (where available) to help quell the +15dB peak at resonance.

You might also tinker with your preamp's MM loading capacitance to tailor the A-T's bright upper treble (+4dB at 12kHz). This is also has the potential to make LP surface noise more obvious. Equalised distortion is the lowest here at <2% (-8dB re. 5cm/sec) right across the audio range, although the rolled-off extreme treble (-4dB/20kHz) also has the effect of suppressing ultrasonic distortion harmonics. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



that will tell you everything about the recording in minute detail. With the final Boards of Canada recording, there is also a sense that compared with the group leaders, the AT440MLa also trades off a small amount of depth, although the bass it does produce is clean, fast and well integrated with the rest of the frequency range.

The AT440MLa does more right than it does wrong and is an easy cartridge to listen to across a wide variety of music. As one of the more expensive options in the test, there is a sense that some of the same performance can be achieved for less while other designs offer more ● ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★☆ **LIKE:** Smooth, enjoyable sound; solid build and easy on tonearms

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★☆ **DISLIKE:** Some loss of fine detail; sensitive to surface noise

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★☆ **WE SAY:** A likeable cartridge with good performance, but not the complete package

FEATURES
★★★★☆

OVERALL





DAC 8 Digital to analogue converter



With uncompromising design featuring the finest components, our DAC 8 is equipped with the very latest digital technology combined with over 30 years of audiophile design:

“State of the Art” output stages of fully discrete and symmetrical construction with soft negative feedback Sophisticated (switchable) volume control
Selectable frequency range (60 kHz or 120 kHz) Complete galvanic isolation between analogue and digital sections Quadruple converter arrangement with eight Burr-Brown 32-bit converters in a double symmetrical circuit Four selectable oversampling algorithms Perfect jitter reduction and multistage clock generation Local master clock with two ultra-precise quartz oscillators Solid aluminium case System remote control.



Combined with a wealth of connection possibilities aimed at today's (and tomorrow's) audiophile, our DAC 8 is ideally suited to the uncompromising music lover, no matter how their digital music is stored.



Hand built in Germany, the DAC 8 from T+A is available in the UK now.

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

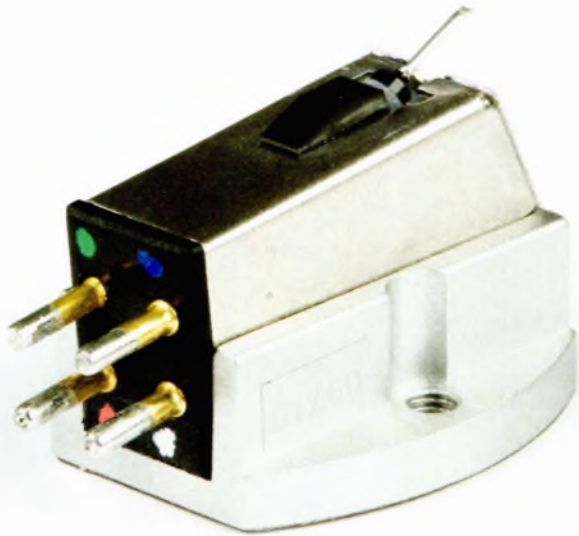
AVOKE

Avoke Limited

Tel - +44 (0)7876 246956

Email - info@avoke.co.uk

Web - www.avoke.co.uk



Clearaudio Concept V2 £150



A cost-effective solution from the German analogue maestro with a very likeable performance

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Clearaudio
Concept V2

ORIGIN
Germany

TYPE
Moving magnet
cartridge

WEIGHT
8.4g

FEATURES

- Output voltage: 3.3mV
- Tracking weight: 2.0g
- Cartridge weight: 8.0g
- Stylus type: Microline
- Cantilever type: aluminium

DISTRIBUTOR
Sound Foundations

TELEPHONE
01276 501392

WEBSITE
clearaudio.de

Clearaudio produces every aspect of the vinyl reproduction chain from cartridges to complete turntables and its range extends to the ultra high-end. The Concept V2 is the least expensive cartridge in the company's extensive moving magnet portfolio and as such is the least expensive one it produces. The moving magnet cartridges have recently been updated to V2 status and include less resonant bodies, more powerful magnets and boosted output voltage.

Although this is one of the cheapest cartridges in the group, this not is immediately clear when you first clap eyes on the Concept. The metal body is well finished and attractive. It is supplied in excellent packaging and comes complete with a useful set of tools to get it up and running. These include handy extras like a choice between screws and allen bolts depending on your tonearm. Clearaudio has fitted the Concept V2 with a threaded body, which means that fitting it is simple – something to bear in mind if you are a novice to these things. Less good news is that like the rest of the range, the cantilever is comparatively long so the cartridge works best on arms with VTA adjustment.

Sound quality

The Clearaudio has a distinctive presentation that for the most part is very appealing. The performance is

extremely clear and open and there is a sense of agility that gives the uptempo Little Feat a really appealing sense of life and energy. There is little sense of bloat or overhang even with complex material and the Concept V2 produces a very large and open soundstage that really comes into its own with the Cinematic Orchestra, which sounds absolutely vast.

Voices and instruments are well handled and the Clearaudio extracts

With a suitable tonearm this veritable bargain deserves an audition

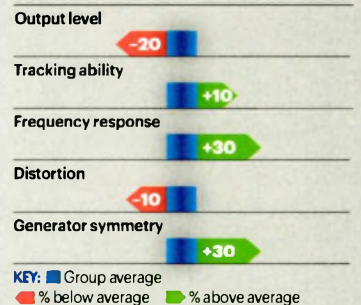
a huge amount of detail from recordings. This clarity means that with the Boards of Canada piece, the performance is possibly the best in the group. The calm, if ever so slightly clinical presentation of the Concept really gels with the sparse electronica and the effect is truly excellent. Surface noise is also commendably low.

The downsides are not too severe, but do need to be taken into account. With the Avid/SME combination, the VTA can be adjusted to the ideal and the Clearaudio puts in an excellent performance. With the Rega RP6, the fixed position of the arm gives a slightly 'stern down' attitude and this robs the Concept V2 of some of its bass extension. This is a particular

ON TEST

If you value a flat frequency response then Clearaudio's Concept V2 is as straight as a die out to 14kHz (± 1 dB) after which it rolls away to -6 dB/20kHz (lateral) and -11 dB/20kHz (vertical), suggesting that central performers in the soundstage will sound a little brighter than those at the edges. The 3.3mV output level (re. 1kHz at 5cm/sec) is bang-on specification and this sample's 0.7dB channel balance well within Clearaudio's 2dB target (>1 dB will be audible). Unequalised distortion is a little higher than average at 3.3% (1kHz/0dB), but the equalised curves show a gentle increase from 1% at 1kHz to a maximum of 6% at 7kHz, falling thereafter. Compliance is lower than you might expect from a MM at 14cu, suggesting that medium to high mass arms are better suited, but at the high 2.2g recommended downforce it tracks right through the top 80 μ m bands. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



problem because it doesn't have the most powerful bass extension even when the VTA is set correctly. The depth there is has speed and detail, but the result is that the Concept V2 can sound a little lean compared with some models tested.

This should not detract from what is a very fine cartridge, though. Considering that the Clearaudio is the cheapest cartridge in the test, the excellent build and supplied accessories are very welcome and the sound is fast, open and enjoyable, although some listeners may want more warmth. With a suitable tonearm, this is a veritable bargain and deserves an audition. ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Fast, detailed and open sound; excellent build

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Best in arms with VTA adjustment; can sound lean

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A keenly priced cartridge with likeable features, but results are dependent on the turntable

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL



Raidho acoustics

LESS IS **more**

The cutting edge Diamond Technology implemented in the new Raidho D-series reduces the amount of noise greatly, making your listening experience much more authentic.

Many experts have tried to describe the exceptional performance of the D-I speaker, but have had to admit that words are just not enough - you need to experience the sound for yourself.

So if you are in the market for something unique, please do not hesitate to visit our website and find your nearest dealer who will be more than pleased to arrange a personal demonstration of our new speakers.

Find a list of Raidho dealers at:

www.raidho.dk



C-1.1



C-1.1



C-1.1
C-4.1



C-1.1



D-1



C-1.1
D-1



D-1



Goldring 1012GX £235

Goldring's 1012GX is a long standing favourite that still has plenty to offer at the price point

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Goldring 1012GX

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Moving magnet
cartridge

WEIGHT
6.3g

FEATURES

- Output voltage: 6.5mV
- Tracking weight: 1.75g
- Cartridge weight: 6.3g
- Stylus type: Gyger 2
- Cantilever type: hard alloy

DISTRIBUTOR
Armour Home
Electronics

TELEPHONE
01279 501111

WEBSITE
goldring.co.uk

Goldring has been producing its 10xx range of cartridges for many years now and the 1012GX is the second cheapest of the four. The main difference between the models is their stylus assembly, which gets progressively better as you go up the range. The 1012GX ditches the elliptical stylus of the base model and substitutes a Gyger 2 diamond stylus instead. This is interchangeable with the more elaborate models as well, which offer an interesting potential upgrade possibility further down the line in the future.

The Goldring is supplied with very robust protective packaging and a useful selection of tools and fixings to attach it to the tonearm of your choice. However, connection is not as pain-free a process as it is with some of the other designs here. The body is unthreaded and the way that it slopes to meet the mounting plate means that installation can be a little tricky to say the least. The 1012GX also has a slightly different arrangement to the pins on the back as they are rather unevenly spaced, which complicates matters further. The tracking and anti-skate requirements are benign, however, and the build quality of the cartridge is actually very good.

Sound quality

The Goldring shows reasonably quickly why it has been such a popular choice for so many years.

This is a cartridge with a very even and unforced performance that sounds big and exciting with most types of music. There is also a sense of timing and musicality that gives Little Feat an engaging drive and energy that is very likeable and generally gets the head nodding. Part of this perceived musicality is the impressive bass response that underpins the rest of the performance

The Goldring has a sense of scale that is very near the top of the group

and gives the Goldring a great deal of low-end grunt.

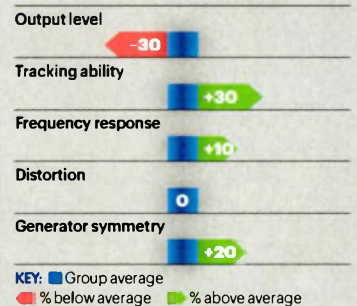
This is especially helpful with the Cinematic Orchestra piece and the 1012GX has a sense of scale that is very near the top of the group with a genuinely convincing portrayal of the Albert Hall and the audience arranged around the performers. The soundstage is intricate and there is impressive fine detail that aids the sense of realism.

The only real problem with the Goldring's performance is that when you want it to be a little bit more intimate – as you do with the Ray Charles piece – it still sounds rather big. There is a slight over emphasis to the piano and the effect is less subtle or nuanced than some of the other cartridges here. The effect is a bit

ON TEST

Despite being equipped with a line-contact FG2 diamond, this Goldring MM does not offer a super-extended frequency response. As with other Goldrings tested previously, the 1012GX has a boosted presence band (up to +4dB from 4-10kHz on the right channel here) which will give recordings plenty of 'zing' even though the extreme treble disappears to -6dB/20kHz. Distortion also peaks through the upper midrange, although a maximum of 5-6% here (vertical and lateral at -8dB) and 1-2% below 1kHz still ranks as very good. Puzzlingly, the 3.2mV output is well below Goldring's 6.5mV specification just as the compliance is closer to 30cu than 20cu. Nevertheless, the latter does aid its superb tracking performance – clearing 80µm lateral groove modulations and sailing through the +18dB/300Hz test track at just 0.5% THD at a mere 1.7g downforce. Medium to lightweight arms are preferred. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



more complex than merely having a high output (although this is healthy enough), but simply that the scale of the performance doesn't change quite as readily as some of the competition on test here.

And in the end, it is the strength of the competition rather than the weakness of the Goldring that costs it some points in the test. This is the most expensive cartridge here and although it is sonically capable, well built and comes with a good range of accessories, there are other cartridges that can match it for a little less money. The 1012GX still delivers a fine performance, but the competition is getting tougher ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Lively and energetic sound; good build
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Doesn't handle small scale music as well; fiddly
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WESAY: A capable cartridge that's engaging, but price and lack of small scale ability count against it
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL



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



RECOMMENDED

Hi-Fi Choice



RECOMMENDED

Hi-Fi Choice



"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



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.



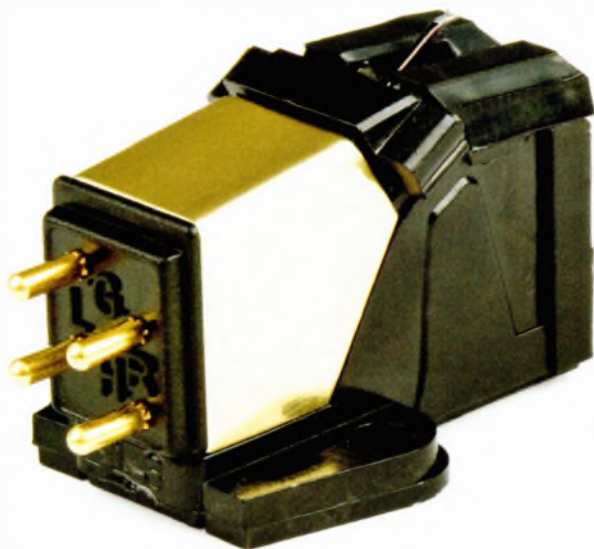
Discover IsoTek

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



Grado Prestige Gold 1 £160

If – as the old saying goes – simplicity is a virtue, the Grado Prestige Gold 1 is very virtuous indeed

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Grado Prestige Gold 1

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
Moving iron cartridge

WEIGHT
5.5g

FEATURES

- Output voltage: 4.0mV
- Tracking weight: 1.75g
- Cartridge weight: 5.5g
- Stylus type: elliptical
- Cantilever type: four-piece OTL

DISTRIBUTOR
Armour Home Electronics

TELEPHONE
01279 501111

WEBSITE
gradolabs.com

Not content with simply dominating the world of headphones, Grado has been producing a range of phono cartridges for decades. Unlike the other five designs here, the Grado is a moving iron cartridge. This means that instead of a magnet on the end of the cantilever to generate a current, a small piece of iron is used. This should reduce the tracking force at the same time that it increases the accuracy. The Gold 1 is the flagship cartridge in the Prestige series (just below the more expensive Reference range) and interestingly, the Golds are taken from the top performing 5% of the Silver models, which are otherwise identical.

Like the company's headphones, the Gold 1 has a slightly retro streak to its styling and is also a comparatively small cartridge. The build and materials used are very good, but the packaging is the very definition of minimalist, consisting as it does of an open-ended tube that uses the documentation to wedge the cartridge in place. The narrow body and unthreaded mounts makes fitting a little tricky. The fiddly stylus guard and lack of colour marking on the pins also serve to make the whole process more awkward than it should be. The tracking force requirements are easy to accommodate, though.

Sound quality

The most immediately noticeable feature of the Grado's performance is

that this is a cartridge with very low surface noise and a high tolerance of less than perfect vinyl. There is much to like about the actual audio performance as well.

The Gold 1 is extremely smooth and refined and the presentation of the Ray Charles piece is wonderfully beguiling with plenty of richness and detail to voices and instruments. The bass performance is slightly deceptive

Very low surface noise and a high tolerance of less than perfect vinyl

in that the Grado has a surprisingly deep and potent low end, but the result is still refined.

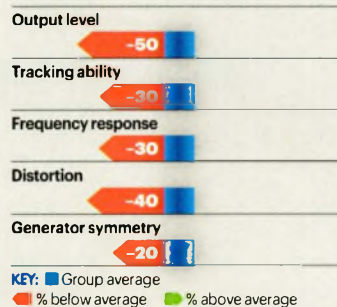
This means that the presentation with the Cinematic Orchestra is very convincing with plenty of space and incidental detail to it. For the most part the Gold 1 presents analogue music with a sense of effortlessness that is hard not to like.

However, the Grado is less assured when asked to pick up the pace with the Little Feat recording proving a bit more challenging. It remains extremely civilised and almost completely unflappable, but the performance never seems to have some of the excitement that the other cartridges are able to bring to the party. With the Boards of Canada recording, the Grado seems slightly ill

ON TEST

The technical performance of Grado's Prestige Gold has 'rock 'n roll' stamped all over it. In line with other Grados, this model shows a broadly raised midrange, depressed presence and stinging +3-4dB riposte at 14kHz, which is followed by a dip of -6dB at 20kHz. Grado specifies an output of 4mV but 2.7mV (re. 1kHz/5cm/sec) proved closer to the mark here. Tracking is good to the +15dB band at 1.5g and the -20cu compliance suggests most medium effective mass arms will suit. However, the Prestige Gold's LF resonance is vigorous at +20dB so if your arm offers some extra damping, you should employ it. Unequalised distortion is quite high at 4% (1kHz at 5cm/sec) just as the equalised trace hits 11% at 8kHz and 15%+ at 20kHz. While these ultrasonic harmonics are inaudible, they are a reflection of the extended output from the Prestige Gold 1 for which Grado claims a 55kHz bandwidth. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



at ease and the very deep bass notes are robbed of some of their impact and drive. The sense is that this cartridge is happier with slower and simpler recordings rather than being a true all-rounder.

The result is that it excels in some areas, but doesn't quite match the performance of the best in the group. While it is fair to point out that the Gold 1 is one of the least expensive cartridges here, the similarly priced Clearaudio and Ortofon offerings deliver more capable all-round performances and are better specified and easier to fit. The Grado is excellent at what it does, but there are better options available ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Detailed, smooth and very beguiling presentation
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Less capable with up-tempo material; tricky to install
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: A very civilised and capable cartridge with some music, but less happy with uptempo material
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL



SOUNDS *for* SALE

A GREAT PLACE TO SHOP FOR NEW AND USED AUDIO

QUALITY BRANDS



UNIQUE PRODUCTS

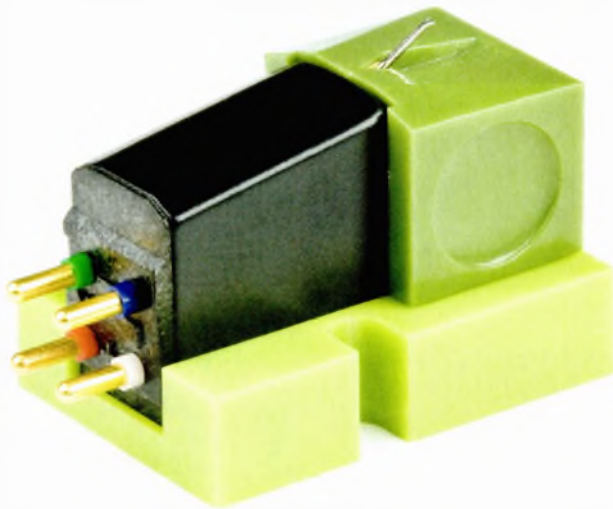


NEW AND USED



T: 020 3651 1194

www.soundsforsale.uk.com



Nagaoka MP-150 **£229**



The design of this cartridge might be from a bygone era, but the sound of the MP-150 is bang up to date

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Nagaoka MP-150

ORIGIN
Japan

TYPE
Magnetodynamic
Permalloy

WEIGHT
6.5g

FEATURES
● Output voltage:
4.5mV
● Tracking weight:
1.7g
● Cartridge weight:
6.5g

● Stylus type:
elliptical diamond
● Cantilever type:
aluminium alloy

DISTRIBUTOR
Analogue Seduction

TELEPHONE
01733 350878

WEBSITE
nagaoka.co.jp

Nagaoka has been in business for over 70 years and regards itself as a precision engineering company that makes phono cartridges among other pieces of specialist machining and matching processes rather than a dedicated audio brand.

The MP-150 is roughly halfway up the range and adds a tapering cantilever over the less expensive models. It is finished in a very particular shade of green that rather makes it look like it has dropped through a hole in time from 1976, but the specification including the carbon fibre reinforced body is right up to date. The MP-150 is also supplied with the best packaging of the group, which puts some rather more expensive designs to shame. Nagaoka also provides some useful tools to get the cartridge set up.

Installing the MP-150 is also relatively simple. The mounts are unthreaded, but the relatively big body is easy to mount and install and there is nothing especially tricky about the tracking and alignment.

Sound quality.

The Nagaoka has a number of characteristics that impress right from the outset and suggest that the company's recent absence from the market has been our loss. The other interesting aspect of the performance is that there is practically no variation in the traits that it demonstrates across the two

turntables. The MP-150 manages to combine a powerful and lively sound when required with impressive subtlety when it isn't. The performance with the Little Feat recording is genuinely entertaining with tremendous drive and excitement coupled with an exceptionally sweet top end that is completely free from both brightness and aggression.

A compelling cartridge that seems to be happy in a variety of setups

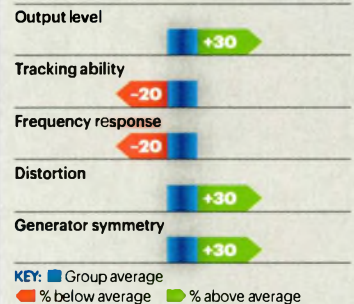
With the more refined Ray Charles and Cinematic Orchestra pieces, the Nagaoka retains a sense of agility and control, but doesn't force the slower pieces or bring unwanted scale to the performances. The soundstage is beautifully composed and very easy to follow. The handling of voices and instruments is rarely less than unflinchingly believable as well. The Nagaoka is commendably unaffected by surface noise and these features all combine to give a sense of considerable dynamic range.

With the more unconventional Boards of Canada recording, the MP-150 slightly softens some of the performance taking some of the intensity away, but equally it maintains the expansive soundstage and excellent panning that the piece

ON TEST

All Nagaoka's MMs are based around a similar 'moving Permalloy' generator, but as the stylus assembly refines up the range there are improvements in response, separation and distortion. This MP-150 model offers a healthy 4.5mV output (re. 1kHz at 5cm/sec) and a low 2.5% distortion (1kHz, unequaled), but boasts a more extended and 'vivid' presence band than the cheaper MP-100, up +2dB from 4kHz-14kHz before the extreme treble drops away to -9dB/20kHz. There's good symmetry between the L+R and L-R responses, so the MP-150 should deliver a broad and consistent soundstage with no one performer unrealistically dominant. Tracking is good too, on a par with the Ortofon 2M Blue if not quite in the league of the A-T or Goldring. Compliance is moderate but symmetrical again at 27cu, suggesting medium to low mass arms. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



requires to really shine. If I am being very picky, it is probably fair to say that the Nagaoka can't find some of the very fine detail that the Clearaudio can extract, but then the Concept V2 cannot match the incredibly engaging musicality that the MP-150 brings to such a wide variety of music.

Take a look at all of these attributes as a whole and the result is a very compelling cartridge that seems to be happy in a variety of setups. When you take into account the excellent build, straightforward fitment and the useful tools supplied to help you do the job, the Nagaoka makes a very persuasive case for itself ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Powerful and engaging sound; excellent build; very easy installation

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No threaded body; very slight softness to bass

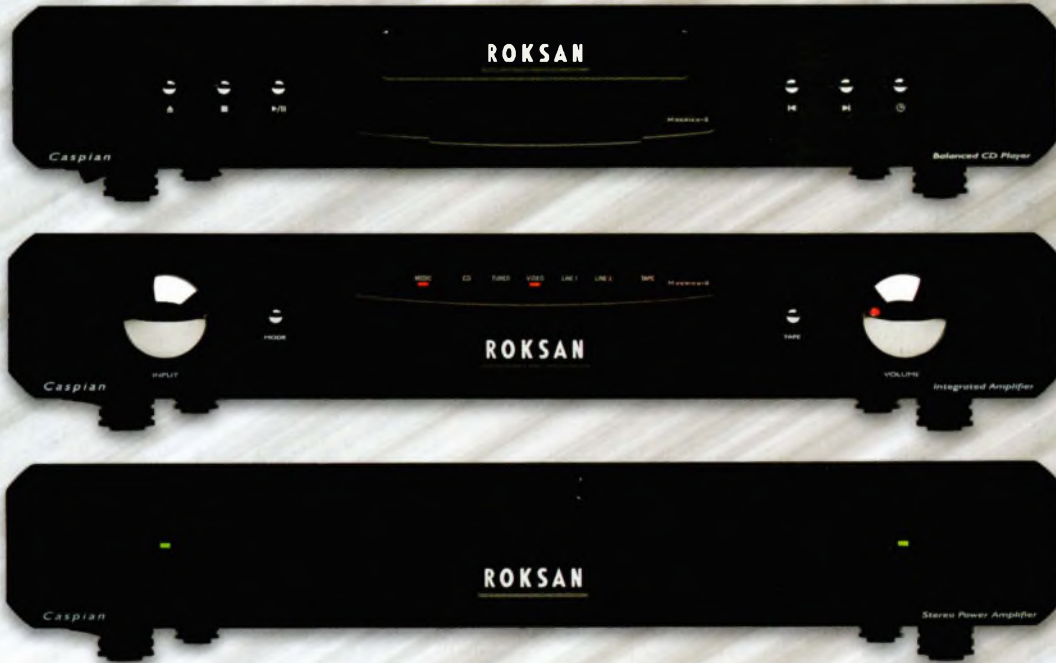
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A superbly capable and well-sorted cartridge with a fantastic performance

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL



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



Ortofon 2M Blue £170



With its distinctive colouring the 2M Blue remains superb value for money and a strong performer

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Ortofon 2M Blue
- ORIGIN**
Denmark
- TYPE**
Moving magnet cartridge
- WEIGHT**
7.2g
- FEATURES**
- Output voltage: 5.5mV
 - Tracking weight: 1.8g
 - Cartridge weight: 7.2g
 - Stylus type: nude elliptical
 - Cantilever type: aluminium
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Henley Designs
- TELEPHONE**
01235 511166
- WEBSITE**
ortofon.com/home

Ortofon is omnipresent at pretty much every price point and design category you can find cartridges for sale, and the size of the company means that it can bring some interesting resources to the party as well. The distinctive design of the 2M range comes courtesy of a partnership with Møller Jensen Design and is intended to mimic the cut diamond of the stylus.

The 2M Blue is the second up in a four-strong range of 2M cartridges and makes use of bespoke split pole pins, which Ortofon believes give the moving magnet offering a flat frequency response more in keeping with a moving coil design.

The 2M doesn't feel quite as substantial as the Clearaudio or Nagaoka, but the finish is more than acceptable for the price and the excellent packaging and supplied tools (the Ortofon is the only cartridge here to be supplied with a stylus gauge) are also extremely good. The body is threaded and extremely easy to fit and align (although the pin arrangement is different to most cartridges on test here) and the 2M Blue is not a difficult cartridge to accommodate.

Sound quality

The Ortofon immediately demonstrates that it has a seriously impressive output level that should allow all but the most feeble phono stages to deliver a healthy volume.

Even when equalised to the same level as the rest of the group, the Ortofon is more than simply usefully loud. The 2M Blue sits somewhere between the slightly cool Clearaudio and more involving Nagaoka and offers some of the benefits of both.

The performance is clear and open with an impressive sense of drive and attack to it. The 2M Blue powers through Little Feat and marries agility

The performance is clear and open with an impressive sense of drive

and speed with impressive tonality. Across all the recordings, the performance with voices in particular is among the very best in the group and the Ortofon goes about arranging everything in a clear and easy to follow soundstage.

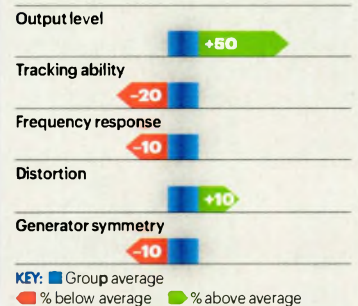
The 2M Blue also manages to adjust its scale between small and intimate and vast easily and convincingly. The handling of surface noise is commendably good, too and it is able to handle a wide variety of material without leaving you feeling short changed with any of it.

The limitations of the Ortofon are commendably slight by comparison. When listened to in competition with the Nagaoka, the Ortofon manages to keep pace with the more expensive cartridge over an impressive range of

ON TEST

Few MMs have quite the beef of Ortofon's 2M range and the Blue is no exception, offering a mighty 5.6mV output (re. 5cm/sec) and a very fine 0.25dB channel balance. Tracking is on a par with the Nagaoka with distortion as low as 0.45% up to +15dB at 300Hz before the cartridge 'lets go' on the right channel through the top +18dB groove. Compliance is very close to Ortofon's 20cu specification at 23cu (lateral), matching the 2M Blue to medium effective mass tonearms, even if the 20 degree VTA proved to be closer to 26 degrees in practice. Neither is the frequency response quite as extended as suggested (MMs rarely offer the HF extension of the best MCs) although the +2.3dB presence and mid-treble boost on lateral cuts will ensure there's plenty of energy and punch centre stage. Finally, and in line with all the 2M series, stereo separation is >20dB right across the audio range. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



material. When the going gets very complex though, the 2M Blue can lose some of the fine detail that the Nagaoka can dig out of the mix. In comparison with the MP 150, there can be a very slight lack of warmth and emotion – although this is something a suitable phono stage might sort out.

All things considered, as one of the cheaper cartridges in the test, there is a great deal to like about the Ortofon. This is a well built and – thanks to the supplied tools – easy to install cartridge that offers a very capable sonic performance and the high regard this cartridge is held in seems entirely justified. ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★
- FEATURES**
★★★★★
- LIKE:** Powerful and engaging sound; easy to install; excellent accessories
- DISLIKE:** Very slight lack of engagement and loss of fine detail
- WESAY:** An incredibly accomplished cartridge that's excellent value

OVERALL



Group test verdict


He's done his listening, checked his notes and got his thoughts into some semblance of order, so it's over to **Ed Selley** to reveal the final results

ALL SIX OF these models have something to offer the listener, but they can be divided on the scope of their abilities. As such, the Grado Prestige Gold 1 is the most limited of the cartridges. It offers a refined and detailed performance, but lacks a little excitement when the pace picks up. The Audio-Technica AT440MLa is a more rounded performer and offers impressive musicality with a variety of material, but – like the Grado – is a little difficult to fit.

The Goldring 1012GX is rather better and has a powerful and involving sound that makes the most

of exciting music. The slightly over-enthusiastic performance with smaller-scale material hinders its status as an all-rounder and it isn't easy to fit. As the most expensive cartridge, it suffers by comparison to some of the less expensive models. The Clearaudio Concept V2 is a stronger proposition. Despite being cheaper than the Goldring, it produces a fast, detailed and exciting sound that will win it many friends. It is simple to fit and comes with some useful tools. Only the slightly sterile sound and the need to ensure VTA is well set robs it of a higher place.

The Ortofon 2M Blue is less fazed in this regard and the shorter cantilever means that it is less affected. This is one of many attributes that combine to create a very capable cartridge indeed and one that is very competitively priced considering the level of performance that it offers. This is a superb all-rounder that does justice to a wide variety of musical styles and seems forgiving of less than perfectly recorded material. If you have less than £200 to spend on a cartridge, you would be hard pressed to find a better design.



WINNER

If you do have a little bit more cash, the Nagaoka MP-150 justifies the extra cost. This is an absolutely superb performer with all musical types and is beautifully built. Whether you are upgrading or equipping a new deck, the MP-150 is too good to ignore.



Make/model Audio-Technica AT440MLa



Clearaudio Concept V2



Goldring 1012GX



Grado Prestige Gold 1



Nagaoka MP-150



Ortofon 2M Blue

	Audio-Technica AT440MLa	Clearaudio Concept V2	Goldring 1012GX	Grado Prestige Gold 1	Nagaoka MP-150	Ortofon 2M Blue
Price	£195	£150	£235	£160	£229	£170
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Build	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Features	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
	Likeable with a good performance, but it's not quite the complete package	Keenly priced with likeable features, but results depend on the turntable	Capable and engaging, but lack of small scale ability count against it	A capable cartridge with some music, but less happy with uptempo material	A superbly capable and well-sorted cartridge with a great performance	An incredibly accomplished cartridge that's excellent value

Key features

	Audio-Technica AT440MLa	Clearaudio Concept V2	Goldring 1012GX	Grado Prestige Gold 1	Nagaoka MP-150	Ortofon 2M Blue
Output voltage	4.0mV	3.3mV	6.5mV	4.0mV	4.5mV	5.5mV
Tracking weight	1.75g	2.0g	1.75g	1.75g	1.7g	1.8g
Cartridge weight	6.0g	8.0g	6.3g	5.5g	6.5g	7.2g
Stylus type	Microline	Microline	Cyger 2	Elliptical	Elliptical diamond	Elliptical
Cantilever type	Alloy	Aluminium	Hard alloy	Four-piece OTL	Aluminium alloy	Aluminium

TRY WITH THESE

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER:
Audio Analogue Verdi Cento **£1,250**

The big Italian integrated is fitted with a better than average phono stage as part of the feature set and it will be able to do justice to any of the cartridges here



SPEAKERS:
Sonus faber Venere 1.5 **£950**

The latest offering from Sonus faber will complete an analogue system very nicely indeed with its punchy and clean performance



TURNTABLE:
Rega RP6 **£800**

The Rega proves an excellent partner with these cartridges and is still one of the very finest turntables available at the price with superb all-round performance



SALE

Great savings in-store and online. For the latest prices and offers visit www.ssav.com or contact your local store

PIONEER AV RECEIVERS

SC-LX56	£699 OR LESS SAVE £600
SC-LX76	£849 OR LESS SAVE £850
SC-LX86	£1199 OR LESS SAVE £1000



MONITOR AUDIO R90 HD10 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

£799 OR LESS
FREE STANDS
SAVE £560



ADDED VALUE!
Claim 2 Pairs of Radius Speaker Stands
Worth £300

YAMAHA YSP-5100 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

The Yamaha YSP-5100 Digital Sound Projector ensures that you hear the best possible 7.1-channel surround sound from Blu-Ray Players, as well as from all other digital sources.

£749 OR LESS
HALF PRICE
SAVE £750

"This is the best virtual surround solution by far that we've come across"

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • OCT 2010



NAD VISO 1 SPEAKER DOCK SYSTEM



Dock system with integrated Bluetooth. Ideal for wirelessly playing music from your iPod, iPhone, iPad or any Bluetooth-enabled smartphone, tablet or laptop.

£329 OR LESS
SAVE £170



ARCAM FMJ AVR360 AV RECEIVER

Developed from the acclaimed AVR600 as a more affordable way to access Arcam's legendary sound quality. It is designed to be the perfect home cinema receiver for a wide range of enthusiastic customers and custom designed home theatres.

£699 OR LESS
HALF PRICE
SAVE £700



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 31/08/2013. E&OE



NAD & MONITOR AUDIO SYSTEM PACKAGE C 546BEE • C 356BEE DAC • SILVER RX1*

Enjoy music from your computer via the DAC or listen to music from CD with the MP3 / WMA compatible CD player.



£1299 OR LESS
SAVE £324



NAD & WHARFEDALE SYSTEM PACKAGE C 516BEE • C 316BEE • DIAMOND 121

Combines NAD's C 316BEE amplifier and C 516BEE CD player with the highly-acclaimed Wharfedale Diamond 121 speakers.



£599 OR LESS
SAVE £128



WHAT HI-FI? AWARD FOR BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER 2012
Cyrus 2050i

CYRUS & Q ACOUSTICS SYSTEM PACKAGE CD6 SE2 • 6A • 2050i*

Includes Cyrus' 40 Watt per channel amp with six analogue inputs, CD6 SE2 CD player and 2050i floorstanding speakers.



£1499 OR LESS
SAVE £439



WHAT HI-FI? AWARD FOR BEST INTEGRATED STEREO REVOLUTION SYSTEM 2012
Roksan Kandy K2

ROKSAN & TANNOY SYSTEM PACKAGE KANDY K2 CD • KANDY K2 AMP • DC6TSE

System package comprising the award-winning Kandy K2 amplifier, floorstanding Tannoy speakers and Kandy CD player.



£1999 OR LESS
SAVE £590

NAD AV RECEIVERS

- T 748 £599
CLAIM FREE DB1 DAB MODULE WORTH £99
- T 757v2 £1099
CLAIM FREE DB1 DAB MODULE WORTH £99
- T 787 £2999
CLAIM FREE DB1 DAB MODULE WORTH £99



FREE DAB TUNER MODULE
WORTH £99



WHAT HI-FI? AWARD FOR BEST PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2012
Yamaha RX-V673

YAMAHA • RX-V673 • AV RECEIVER

Award-winning AV receiver including Apple AirPlay for wirelessly streaming music from any compatible device.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V373



PIONEER • BDP-450 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Brings Blu-ray, DVD, 3D playback and the most advanced networking features to home entertainment, this player even upgrades DVD video to near HD.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX55

£185 OR LESS
SAVE £64



SONY • BDP-S790 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Give your movie collection the red carpet treatment with this award-winning player with advanced networking features, superior audio performance and support for SACD.

CLAIM FREE QED PROFILE (1m) HDMI CABLE
WORTH £25

£199 OR LESS
SAVE £40
FREE CABLE

WHAT HI-FI? AWARD FOR BEST PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2012
Sony BDP-S790



PANASONIC • DMP-BDT230 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Stream movies, TV shows, music, videos, photos and more from your Android 4.2-or-higher-enabled mobile device directly to your TV with this new Smart Network player.

Also Available: PANASONIC DMP-BDT130

£129 OR LESS
SAVE £30



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



£599 OR LESS
SAVE £166

FREE BLINK BLUETOOTH DAC
WORTH £159

ARCAM • SOLO MINI • CD / DAB SYSTEM

Provides premium performance in a discrete and stylish unit. Features a CD player, FM/DAB radio tuner and front panel USB input allowing USB memory devices to be played

£249 OR LESS
SAVE £150



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.

AirPlay



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 31/08/2013. E&OE.

For the latest prices and offers visit www.ssav.com or contact your local store

SALE



NEW W9

LED TV

W6	32.42
W8	42.47.55
W9	40.46.55

SONY

Panasonic

PLASMA TV		LED TV	
GT60	42.50	E6	32.39.42.50
VT65	50.55.65	FT60	42.47
ZT65	60	WT65	47.55



NEW GT60

SMART TV



CASHBACK UP TO £300
On selected Samsung Smart 7 and 8 series TVs
Visit www.ssav.com for details
Offer ends 21st August 2013

NEW F7000

LED TV

F7000	40.46.55.60
F8000	40.46.55.65.75
F8500	46.55

Samsung SMART TV



WHARFEDALE DX-1 HCP SPEAKER PACKAGE

The DX-1 HCP delivers smart, space-saving contemporary style and exhilarating sound for both movies and music – fast, punchy and detailed, with a sense of scale that belies the diminutive size of the speakers.



YAMAHA YSP-3300 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

The 16 array speakers, controlled by Yamaha's YSP technology, plus two powerful woofer units in the large cabinet deliver excellent sound quality with clearly positioned dialogue and superb surround effects. The wireless subwoofer delivers clear and powerful bass.



£199 OR LESS
SAVE £150

PIONEER X-SMC5 CD / DVD / IPOD WIRELESS SYSTEM

Stylish and compact, the X-SMC5 is a great all-in-one solution. Features built-in WiFi, support for AirPlay, Bluetooth and DLNA v1.5 along with Internet radio, a CD/DVD player and iPod Dock.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
BEST CD PLAYER
BEST AMPLIFIER

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.



REL T-5 SUBWOOFER

Delivers the exceptional low-bass performance, rugged build quality and unique design of larger REL models at a more affordable price. T5 can be used to underpin both two-channel and multi-channel systems.

£399 OR LESS
SAVE £50



NAD C 446 MUSIC STREAMER

£399 OR LESS
SAVE £100

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.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2012
BEST HI-FI SYSTEM

ESSAV.COM

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.

Please Note: *Speakers in standard finishes only. 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

Avid

LISTENING

Avid has made a huge impact in turntable design, but as **Ed Selley** discovers, its ambition doesn't just stop there

British hi-fi companies are a disparate bunch with some lively back stories as to how they came to be but even within this circle, Avid (an acronym for 'A very interesting design') is rather unusual. Founded in 1995, the Cambridgeshire-based concern can trace its origins back at least 30 years prior to that point when owner and founder Conrad Mas purchased a Connoisseur BD-1 turntable from a friend and, generally dissatisfied with its performance, began to experiment on it with some of his own modifications and a great deal of Blu-tack.

This early tinkering began a 20-year development process on a design philosophy and turntable that would eventually become the Acutus (see *The Genesis Moment* boxout overleaf), the striking-looking turntable that Avid is still most closely associated with. Since then, the Acutus has sired a complete range of turntables and more recently these have been joined by a selection of supporting electronics. Behind this growth is

a methodology that is subtly different to many other audio companies and the period has also seen Avid adopt manufacturing practices and processes that contrast to how many companies in the UK now go about constructing their equipment.

Going against the grain

Of course, the very nature of an all analogue company setting up in the closing years of the last century seems rather unusual in itself but in some ways, the lengthy development that Mas put into the Acutus worked to the benefit of Avid. By the time that the Acutus went on sale in 1999, the market recognised that vinyl, far from being dead, was in fact a healthy area of the industry and a product as distinctive and capable as the Acutus stood to gain. Although clearly a huge fan of analogue, Conrad is far from dismissive of digital and recalls that his first experience of a Cambridge Audio CD1 in the eighties was sufficiently impressive for him to realise he

would have to further raise his game if he was going to be able to compete with it.

The fact that Avid's first product was its flagship (and indeed in Reference version remains so), has had a considerable effect on how the company develops its products. All subsequent Avid turntables have essentially taken the design principles of the Acutus as the reference and worked out what the minimum number of alterations and modifications are required to make it come in at a given price point. Conrad feels very strongly that a top-down process of development is absolutely vital in terms of developing a cohesive and consistent range of products. Taking a design at one price point and trying to stretch it to a higher one is not something he is a fan of. When Avid moved into the production of phono stages, exactly the same method was adopted (albeit one that was a good deal quicker than for the Acutus) and the flagship Pulsare was the first to be released. Since then, as well as being modified to the Pulsare II, it



SONIC FIREWORKS

Avid's listening room is on a completely different site to the main factory and serves the dual purpose of being both for demonstrations and as a test facility. Running at the time that I visited was an Acutus/SME V and Benz Ebony alongside the all new Avid preamplifier. These were partnered with a Hegel power amplifier that was used in Avid's room at the Munich High End Show and a pair of Escalante Fremont speakers.

Conrad describes the speakers as extremely matter of fact and not to everyone's liking, but it is easy to see why it is that they are used for test work as they are extremely revealing. The system has existed as a fixed point of reference for many years now and it is possible to ascertain the effect of any design changes within just a few minutes of listening rather than agonising for hours. Indeed, the testing methodology is not unlike the group test process that *Hi-Fi Choice* uses – short bursts of well-known recordings are played in a sequence to find out how the item under test does various things.

This isn't to suggest that the system isn't hugely entertaining to listen to though. It has phenomenal bass performance that is perfectly integrated with clean mids and detailed, but not explicit top end.

The Acutus showed in no uncertain terms why it is still a genuine superdeck with a performance that very few competitors can hope to keep up with. A spirited (for which, read loud) rendition of Cassius' *The Sound of Violence* was one of the best performances of this record I have ever had the pleasure of hearing.



All Avid turntables have essentially taken the design principles of the Acutus as the reference

has gone through the same process to become a range of phono stages.

The design procedure that Avid products go through, if not completely distinct to other companies, is also extremely consistent and entirely unsentimental. Conrad describes all Avid turntables as tools first and foremost. They are designed to carry out a specific job while minimising or negating outside influences that might affect how that job is done. To this end, the amount of listening that occurs during development is outweighed by careful measurement of both the designs and external factors on them. It is very important to stress that Conrad is a music lover – a spell in his listening room leaves you in no doubt of that – but for him, the job of the equipment is to deliver the musical message and not be the musical message.

There is a slight irony in that having followed this path of form over function with no deliberate styling added to them, Avid has ended up with one of the most visually distinctive and striking ranges of turntables on the market, but it really is all there to play records.

The elaborate 'twin screw' clamp on the Acutus, allows for the correct pressure between record and platter while the huge power supply of the Reference model genuinely moves performance on from the 'standard' Acutus. Conrad has further designs in this area, too.

This logical design process has been paralleled by an obsessive attention to detail that has led to Avid taking decisions on manufacturing that are different to many other hi-fi companies. Originally many of the parts that went into Avid products were sub contracted out to other firms – a method that many companies use and have actively

adopted in recent years. Avid, however, took the opposite approach. Conrad took the decision some years ago to invest in the machinery required to bring almost all metalwork back in house. This represented a considerable cost, but for a relatively small company – at present it does everything on a full-time staff of five with some sub-contracted engineering staff – this allows Avid to refine its designs more easily than would be the case with components coming in from the outside. Another bonus of this approach is that an appreciable part of the company's business is using this expertise to produce various components for other hi-fi companies that don't have the wherewithal themselves.

Keeping it in-house

This means that the Avid factory is rather more visually interesting than some other manufacturers and a reminder that turntables are mechanical rather than electrical engineering. A significant portion of the floor space is given over to the machine tools and the sight of aluminium sections being turned into the main beam of Avid's latest turntable – the Ingenium – is extremely impressive. As well as machining facilities, the company has all of the equipment needed to apply the desired level of finish to edges and contact points. The only areas of fabrication that are not done on site are painting and some curved metal sections – and pretty much the only reason that the former is still done offsite is that the current premises don't have the space to bring it in house.

With the bulk of work carried out in house, this has helped Avid adopt the policy of building for stock rather than to order, which means that as well as organising on site production, supplies ordered from other companies such as tonearms need to be held as stock items, too. With less time pressure on the equipment, this means the soak testing and quality control can be extended considerably. Pretty much everything – be it a turntable or electronics – runs for a week



As well as machining, all finishing to the metalwork is inhouse, too

THE GENESIS MOMENT

Avid began as a company with the Acutus – originally as a sketch on a blank piece of paper – but by the time the turntable went on sale back in 1999, it had been in development for the best part of 20 years. In that time, the basic premise of the Acutus – a suspended deck that dissipates energy away from the platter via the bearing – has been a constant, but the evolution to the current turntable has been considerable. Originally, the suspension of the deck was enclosed in a large plinth that would have given the Acutus a very different appearance. This was eventually dispensed with to give the current ‘skeletal’ design that the Acutus was launched with and retains.

Interestingly, the Acutus was not developed in a vacuum – Conrad sought the opinion and feedback of a number of key industry figures at various stages in the construction of the deck and has a fascinating collection of documents relating to this process.

Since entering production, the Acutus has seen considerable refinement to the basic design, with alterations to the suspension adjustment and power supply being the main changes, but such is Avid’s construction process, that an Acutus of any vintage can be brought up to latest specifications if returned to the factory.

During my visit to the factory, some prototypes in the Avid listening room showed that the basic design still has more to give as a result of feedback from owners and further testing, as well as changes to the manufacturing process.

The 30-year development process of the Acutus turntable remains ongoing and shows no real signs of stopping any time soon.

after construction and pre-sales testing extends to drop tests as well. During my visit, stacks of Pellar and Pulsus phono stages and various turntables were sat completing their lengthy soaks.

Once this has been satisfactorily completed, the product enters stock. This doesn’t simply cover the range items like Ingenium or Diva, either. If you want an Acutus (in chrome, black chrome or gold), that is in stock and ready to go, too. If a dealer or distributor places an order, the product is tested and can ship there and then. Conrad jokes that Avid isn’t a company for the indecisive dealer – if having placed an order they ring up to change it, the chances are it will have already shipped.

Top of the pops

Having taken the top-down approach to its logical conclusion with turntables and phono stages, Avid shows no signs of slowing down. At the recent Munich High End show, in what was a very impressive sounding room, the company unveiled an all new preamp that (naturally) includes extensive phono options and a seriously substantial off-board power supply. Like previous Avid development processes, this is the flagship product – the volume pot alone costs several hundred pounds – and more affordable models will be adapted from it over time to form a complete range of products.

Not content with this, other categories are set to receive Avid challengers before too long. The preamp will be joined by matching power amplifiers that make use of the

The logical design process is paralleled by an obsessive attention to detail

technology that derives from the turntable power supplies. Some prototype components were present during my visit and look extremely promising. Also in the works is a headphone amplifier that will follow the same top-down development as the rest of the range – a logical choice given the booming nature of the headphone market. Electronics are going to be a very substantial part of the Avid offering before long and the diligence of the design process suggests it will be a strong contender, too.

And digital? Conrad places less emphasis on this area, but isn’t ruling it out. While ‘conventional’ products like streamers are not on the cards, something like a high-quality analogue-to-digital convertor to turn

vinyl into high-resolution rips for people not in a position to have a turntable in use all the time is more of a possibility. From there a digital-to-analogue convertor wouldn’t be out of the question. With so many other products under development by what is still a small company, this isn’t an immediate priority, but represents an interesting line of development for the future.

Meeting challenges

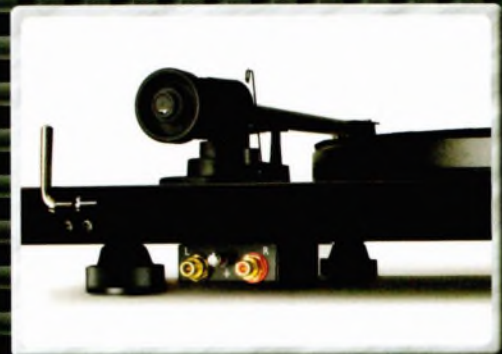
The challenge of expanding into new categories while maintaining its distinctive design and construction ethos is a considerable one, but Avid is a company determined to make it work. After a day with Conrad at the factory, it is clear that he is immensely proud of his existing products, but wants to expand Avid to include the vast majority of the replay chain. There is no shortage of quality competition vying for the same customers, but the way that Avid goes about developing and building its products means you wouldn’t want to bet against it ●



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





Is DSD really a USP?

Teac's UD-501 DAC, comes complete with DSD playback capability through its USB inputs. **Malcolm Steward** puts it to the test

The Dual-Mono UD-501 is the latest in an increasingly wide selection of compact Asynchronous USB DACs designed either for use in a regular hi-fi system or as part of a high-end desktop set-up. Unlike others of this breed that I've tested of late, the Teac is unique in being able to handle 2.8/5.6MHz DSD (Direct Stream Digital) data streams in native mode, without needing any PCM conversion. If you use an Apple Mac you can only obtain DSD over PCM (DoP) mode with a standard driver because ASIO 2.1 is not available for that platform. With the DoP protocol that DSD data is repackaged into a PCM-like stream to permit

transmission over a USB 2.0 link. With genuine PCM file formats the unit supports up to 32-bit/384kHz signals, and with any files it can provide up-sampling to 192kHz if desired. PC users have to download and install the Teac Windows drivers for playback of PCM rates over 24-bit/96kHz as well as for DSD.

The facility to handle DSD files seems outwardly attractive, but the availability of these ultra hi-res offerings – as downloads – is pretty poor at the moment and you will certainly have problems trying to accommodate or play the files on any portable device such as an iPad.

Even so, I like the purposeful look of the UD-501 with its dual, metal rotary

controls – volume and input selector – and its two-line Organic EL display panel. Its pro-style appearance matches its solid build and instills instant customer satisfaction in the user. It feels very much a solid, worthwhile purchase, and seems almost professional in its bulk and solidity. I've been told that the team behind it has also had some involvement with Teac's widely lauded high-end esoteric products.

Sound quality

Playing CD rips and commercial downloads through the coaxial inputs fed by my NAS and streamer, the 501 returns an outwardly plausible performance: the texture and tone of Lou Reed and his band sounds fine on cuts from *Live: Take No Prisoners*, but the band does not seem to be pushing temporally – not with the same verve and gusto – as it does on, say, Heed and Naim DACs. This is particularly noticeable on Michael Suchorsky's drumming: his playing sounds 'flat', uninspired and uninspiring when it is, in reality, quite the opposite. Notwithstanding, the detailing of the sound of the kit is beyond reproach – although it seems a little muted in terms of dynamic contrast – but it appears as if it is being played by a rank amateur. Similarly, the timing clues – and syncopation – coming from the gorgeously illuminated

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
Teac UD-501

ORIGIN
Japan

TYPE
DAC/headphone amplifier

WEIGHT
4kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
290 x 81 x 244mm

FEATURES

- BurrBrown PCM1795 in each channel
- Balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (RCA) outputs
- 2 MUSE S8920 op amps per channel
- Coaxial, optical and USB 2.0 digital inputs

DISTRIBUTOR
Onkyo UK

TELEPHONE
08142 4208141

WEBSITE
teac.eu/en/

rhythm guitar are not quite as distinct as before. In short, the music sounds far too polished – too shiny – and as though I'm looking at it through a microscope, but it's not delivering toe-tapping excitement.

To listen to DSD data you need to have the USB input enabled and a driver installed – assuming that you are using a Windows PC. You can then sit back, as I do with my old Windows 7 laptop and watch the processor occupancy rate soar skywards as the machine – on which I'm running JRiver media player, version 18 – manhandles the enormous files: believe me, I have entire PCM album rips that are smaller than single DSD tracks.

Most of the DSD tracks I manage to download are either classical or new-age tinkling, so there is little that I find truly inspiring immediately. However, the music displays a rare

Its representation of DSD-recorded female vocals is quite outstanding

vibrancy and immediacy in sonic terms. In fact, on some recordings it is almost as if there is a bit too much clarity: for example, solo acoustic guitar being played finger-style projects forcibly into my room as though it is being amplified by The Who's JBL FA system, which was engineered to produce 130dB without a trace of distortion when I last saw the band live and spoke to the rig's designer. The sound of the acoustic guitar here defies appearing in any way natural or realistic with its amazingly forceful presence and bold Technicolor hues.

I greatly prefer the sound of the UD-501 with lower-resolution material than these ultra hi-res files:

the single-bit DSD files sounds too brittle and 'obvious' with a far less natural flow than PCM sources to my ears. It certainly doesn't sound at all analogue, as I have seen it described many times by several other writers. I also prefer listening to the DAC – in PCM mode – when the up-converter is set to 'off' and the PCM digital filter settings are left at the factory default, which is easily achieved by holding down the Menu button while powering up the unit. All these controls seem to have fairly minor influence on the sound, but more crucially do not have any significant effect upon the musical performance or the DAC's communicative ability. As it happens, I have thus far not found settings on any DAC that improve upon the straight-out-of-the-box default adjustments.

After ten or more days of further warming-up, I don't find the UD-501 to have any distinct preferences for one type of music over another. In fact, using the selection of 2L Nordic recordings I have downloaded from www.2l.no, I'm unusually impressed with the classical works I hear. The perspective is not what I am used to: rather than listening from back in the auditorium I appear to be positioned alongside the conductor, which adds considerable vitality and vivacity to the presentation of the instruments and their dynamic impact. The additional warming-up certainly benefits the Teac's performance with PCM downloads, adding to their communicativeness and musicality. Its representation of DSD-recorded female vocals is quite outstanding, rivalling the best of American high-end gear in technical terms. Even so, the Teac still does not reach the Heed or Naim in terms of musical conviction, although it certainly draws much closer to them.

Ultimately, I do, however, still feel that the DSD recordings – which are,

after all part of the *raison d'être* for the UD-501 – are nothing to write home about. Nor do they justify picking this DAC over any other. Morten Lindberg (the man behind the 2L website) says: "I personally prefer extremely high-resolution PCM over the DSD and I would claim that DSD is not transparent." He also states that microphone positioning (among other facets) is probably far more important than the differences in file format and resolution, and I feel very strongly that he is absolutely correct in this respect. If you doubt such assertions, take a listen to a CD-rip of the Lambchop album *Is A Woman*, which sounds high resolution even though it is only 16-bit/44.1kHz.

Conclusion

The headphone amplifier section of the UD-501 is as effective as the line output stage and it drives my Focal Spirit Ones seemingly effortlessly with a wide spread of volume available to them. The levels of detail presented through the Spirits – with PCM sources – are certainly highly impressive. Indeed, if you are keen on hearing detail and fine dynamic gradation, either through headphones or the line output, the Teac UD-501 will certainly not disappoint you ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Elegantly styled and robustly built. Pride of ownership is virtually guaranteed

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: The sound can appear artificial with hi-res recordings

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: The DSD capability is a useful bonus rather than a genuine highlight

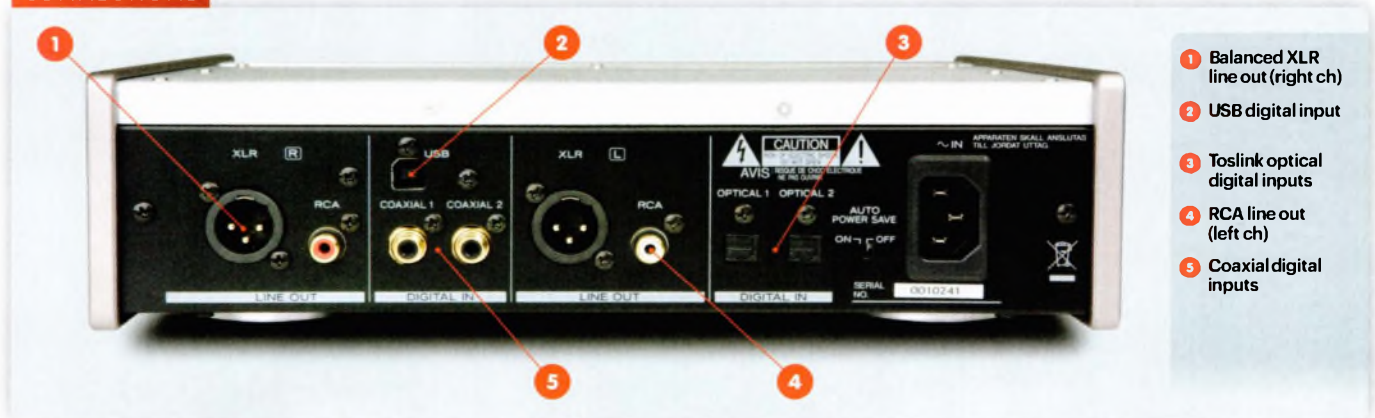
FEATURES



OVERALL



CONNECTIONS



- 1 Balanced XLR line out (right ch)
- 2 USB digital input
- 3 Toslink optical digital inputs
- 4 RCA line out (left ch)
- 5 Coaxial digital inputs

The One and only



With such a massive sound, **Neville Roberts** can't quite believe he's listening to these tiny bookshelf loudspeakers

Having limited space in your listening room doesn't mean you have to listen on headphones. There are a number of bookshelf loudspeakers available and recently released in the UK from Audience is The One, the smallest in its line of ClairAudient loudspeaker systems. The One loudspeaker has a single Audience A3S 3in full-range driver and a 3.5in passive radiator on the rear.

Audience is an American electronics company whose objective is to build the finest high-performance audio components. Businessman and music lover John McDonald and designer and audiophile Richard Smith first formed the company in 1972 and were later joined by design engineer Roger Sheker to form Audience with the objective of being a leader in product design and craftsmanship.

The One loudspeaker is designed for use on the desktop or bookshelf and is ideal for high-quality computer, surround sound or ambient music setups. It employs high-quality components in its construction and the front grille is held in place magnetically, so there are no fixing screws visible when it's removed – a nice touch. The proprietary Audience

A3S driver manages 12mm of usable excursion, which is quite something for a bookshelf speaker! The A3S also features a titanium alloy cone and has only 2.5g total moving mass. The manufacturer states that a subwoofer is recommended when mounting the speakers on stands to make them suitable for surround sound systems. They are also available with optional desktop stands (costing £50) and the units reviewed here are tested with these and without a subwoofer.

The single A3S driver delivers all frequencies in the audible range. However, if the entire cone is used to reproduce the high frequencies, the end result will exhibit severe beaming at frequencies over 10kHz. Audience solved this high-frequency beaming problem with the use of a small dust cap at the centre of the driver, which is decoupled from the rest of the cone in a controlled manner and acts as if it is a small concave dome tweeter with wide and uniform dispersion.

As there is only a single drive unit, The One eliminates potential phase anomalies due to the use of crossover networks. Audience points out that our hearing is most sensitive in the frequency region around 2.5kHz, which is where most mid/high

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Audience ClairAudient The One

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
Bookshelf loudspeaker

WEIGHT
1.8kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
140 x 178 x 178mm

FEATURES
• 3in full-range driver and 3.5in passive radiator
• 8ohm, but also available in 4ohm or 16ohm
• Standard banana plug/binding post connectors

DISTRIBUTOR
High End Cable

TELEPHONE
01775 761880

WEBSITE
highendcable.co.uk

crossovers function and thus affect what we hear. The One does not require a crossover network and Audience says that the frequency response extends to 22kHz.

Sound quality

I connect them to my valve Class A amplifier, which produces a comfortable 20W per channel. Audience suggests between 5-25W per channel to power The One. I place the speakers on a table and close to the rear wall, as recommended, to enable the auxiliary passive radiator on the rear to do its job. I start off with *Lincoln Mayorga & Distinguished Colleagues – Volume III* on the turntable. I set my volume control at my usual listening position and sit down to listen. Boy, am I impressed! *You Are The Sunshine Cf My Life* positively sparkles. Is that sound really coming from those diminutive speakers? I hear a full and expansive sound that doesn't gel with what my eyes are telling me!

Next up is an EMI recording of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* by the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Rudolf Kempe. Once again, I am surprised by the fullness and the detail of the performance. Of course, no loudspeaker is perfect and the bass drums don't have the power I am used to. Also, the very top end is a little recessed, evidenced by the triangle being further behind the other percussion instruments. These observations must be put into the context of a bookshelf loudspeaker being listened to in a large sitting room with no subwoofer to augment the bass, however.

Conclusion

Whether desktop or stand mounted, these little speakers provide a big sound. If space is at a premium The One should definitely be high up on your audition list ●

The massive sound of The One bellies the tiny size



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: A full and expansive sound from a tiny loudspeaker

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: High frequencies a little recessed and lower bass lacks punch

BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



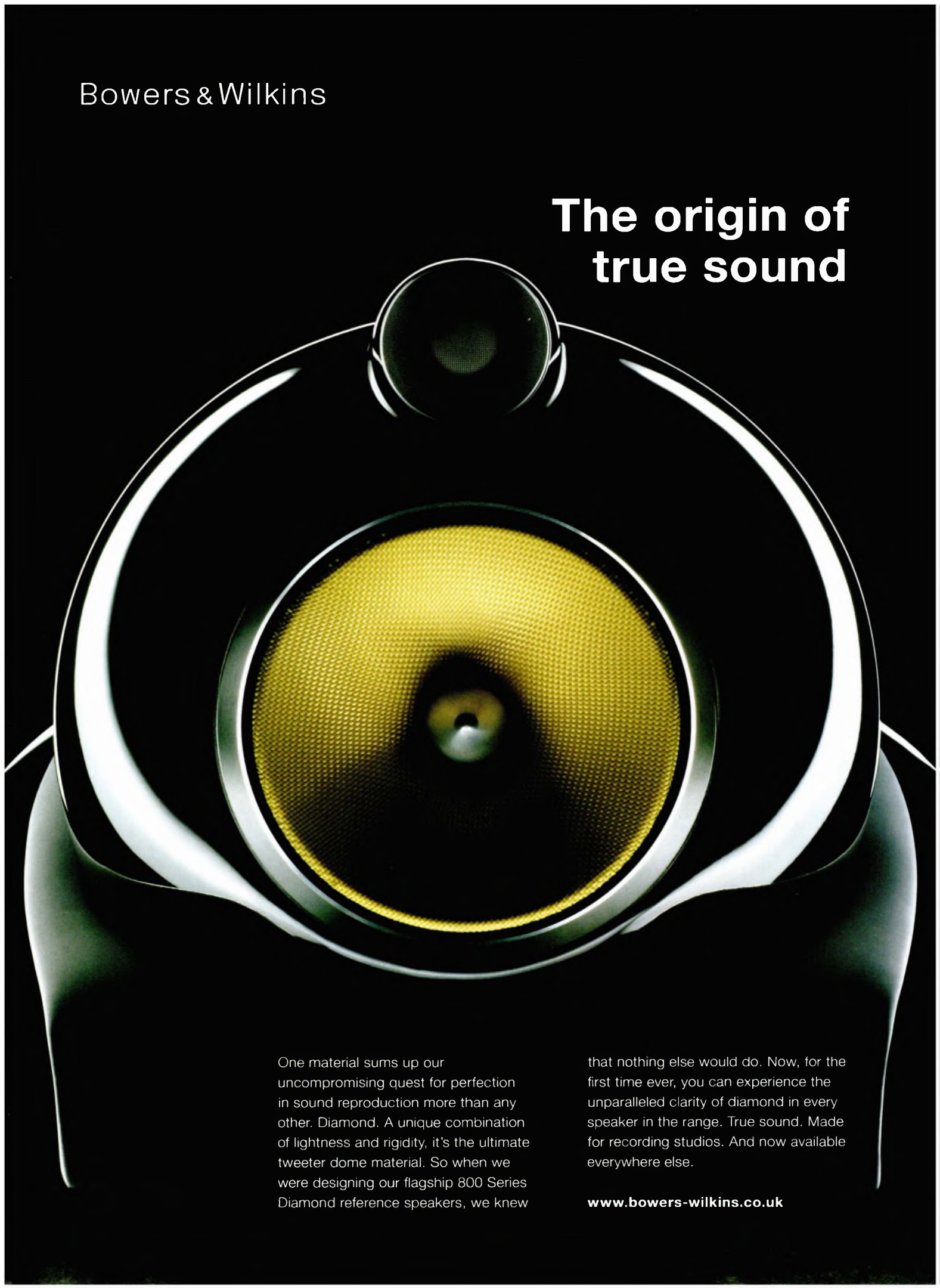
WE SAY: The One produces remarkable quality that belies its tiny size

OVERALL



Bowers & Wilkins

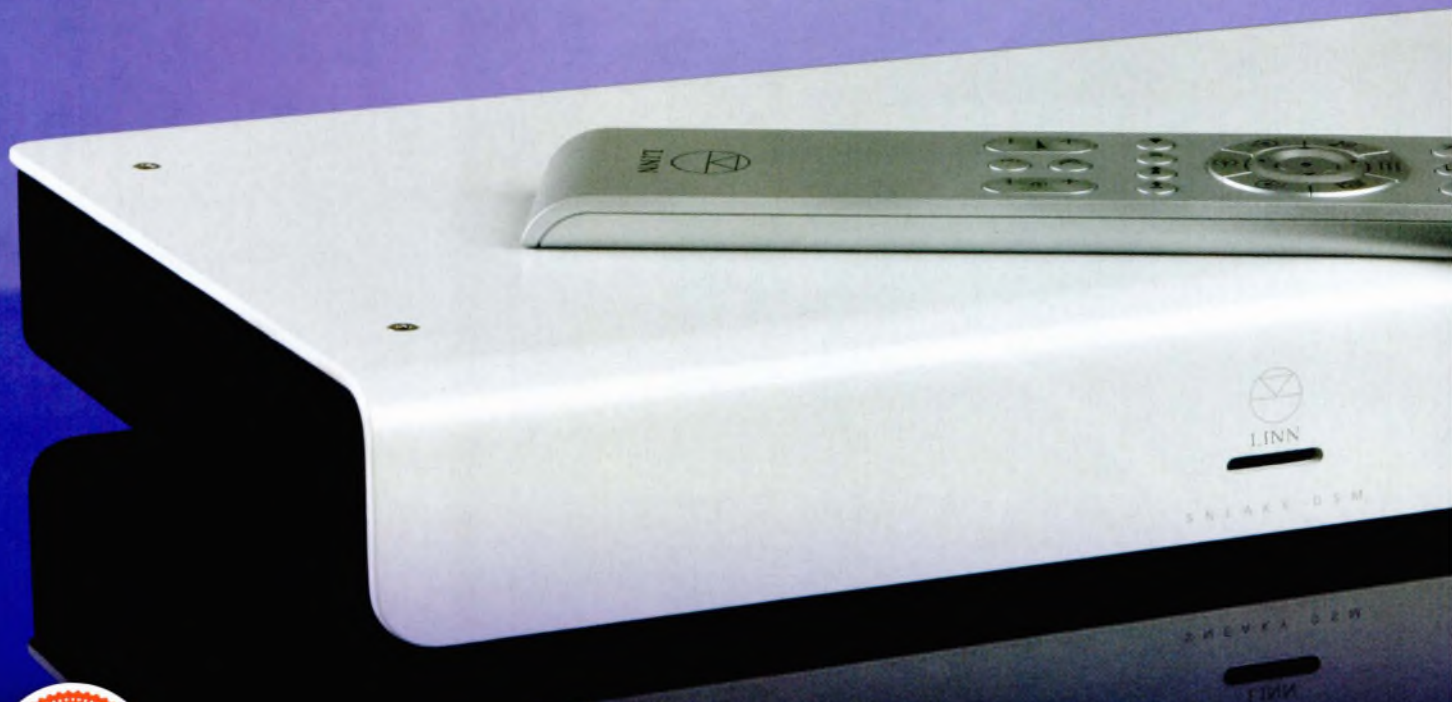
The origin of true sound



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



All white on the night

Want to stream music without the hassle of extra boxes? **Andrew Simpson** reckons Linn's Sneaky DSM might be the answer

Linn's Sneaky DSM is a neat single-box solution that caters for network steaming, combined with digital and analogue inputs. It sits in the lower echelons of Linn's streamer range and builds on the entry-level DS model, priced at £1,015. What the extra £700 and 'M' moniker buys you is a wider selection of connectivity via HDMI sockets, S/PDIF and analogue inputs. It also comes equipped with a more powerful Class D amplifier under its hood, with a claimed 33W per channel into 8ohms.

The unit is refreshingly compact at only 35cm wide, but to look at it doesn't shout 'hi-fi'. In fact, because its front panel is bereft of any buttons or a screen, it doesn't shout anything at all. Instead the DSM discretely blends (or should that be sneaks) into any domestic setting, which I'm sure will be part of its appeal.

The cherry on the Sneaky's cake is its Wolfson WM8580 DAC chip, which Linn has specified to upsample to either 176.4 or 192kHz, depending on the incoming sample rate, which is a principal of Linn's design philosophy

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Linn Sneaky DSM
ORIGIN
Scotland
TYPE
Network music player and integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
2.4kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
350 x 55 x 210mm
FEATURES
• Music streaming up to 24-bit/192kHz
• Supports multiple audio formats including FLAC, ALAC & WAV
• 33W Class D amplifier
• DAC functionality across HDMI and S/PDIF inputs
DISTRIBUTOR
Linn Products
TELEPHONE
0141 307777
WEBSITE
Linn.co.uk

says Sneaky's Electronics Design Ian Wilson: "We never change clock families". So when feeding it standard CD resolution content at 44.1kHz or higher-res material at 88.2kHz, you're listening to this at 176.4kHz, and 48/96kHz is output at 192kHz. It also upsamples incoming bit depth to 32-bit before downsampling to 24-bit.

The Sneaky DSM is powered by Linn's switched-mode Dynamik power supply, which claims to reduce mains borne emissions and noise through filtering. Linn also specifies its favoured Neutrik speakON speaker terminals for the DSM, which provide a reassuring locked connection. The Neutrik plugs allow for bi-wiring via their four-pole plugs, although users with cables resembling large snoozing anacondas may struggle connecting on to the limited size of the clamps within the plugs.

Hooking up the Sneaky's Ethernet port to a network's router gets to the heart of what the Sneaky is all about. The Linn will access all the digital music you have stored on the same network and getting it up and running is relatively straight forward. Once connected and powered up by the on/off switch on the DSM's side panel (the only button on the unit),



you then need to install Linn's Setup Wizard (for Mac or Windows), followed by the Konfig app to customise the Sneaky's settings. Konfig's options include activating and naming inputs, adjusting balance and tweaking how the volume operation works. It also lets you integrate TuneIn radio accounts.

The DSM works with a variety of software including UPnP, Twonky and iTunes, and caters for a plethora of files types up to 24-bit/192kHz, including FLAC, WAV, ALAC, Ogg,

The sleek white alloy case also comes in silver and black. Just add speakers

AAC and AIFF. Playing networked music is handled by the Kinsky app, which is Linn's playback and control interface and is available for PC, Mac and Android devices. Once installed, Kinsky will find any music stored on devices connected to your network and catalogue them in a library.

Kinsky essentially operates like an intelligent remote control with volume and track settings. Its interface is intuitive with features for creating playlists from your library (s) and accessing internet radio, podcasts and 'listen again' content, while usefully showing each track's incoming native resolution. For owners of more than one Linn network player, Kinsky allows users to name each device so that the app can control music in different rooms using different devices. The Sneaky does come with an 'old school' remote, but once I'd tested it worked, this went back in the box as it's frankly redundant when using Kinsky. Running Kinsky also means the Sneaky can be hidden from view entirely should you wish.

My preferred method for using Kinsky is through a tablet device. With its pop-out volume control and two-column layout, it just feels more instinctive to control via touch screen.

Computer audio can also be sent directly to the Sneaky without having to use Kinsky, via Linn's Songcast app, which runs in the background and caters for audio from the likes of Spotify, YouTube and Netflix.

Sound quality

Sonically, the Sneaky is certainly no wallflower and it's not afraid of getting on with the job of simply making music, rather than delivering a sound that's an analytical interpretation of the music it's being asked to recreate. With the DSM hooked up to a pair of Audiovector Mi 3 Signature speakers and playing a

16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC rip of Anna Ternheim's *Separation Road* via my laptop's library (running Asset UPnP), the sound boasts impressive amounts of energy. The drums in *Girl Laying Down* come in full force, while the strings sound full of life.

The Linn makes the crafted delicacy of *No Subtle Man* sound intentionally unforced, allowing the song to gently build as the piano notes grow. And the air and space the Sneaky affords

It can hold its own when compared with similarly priced separates

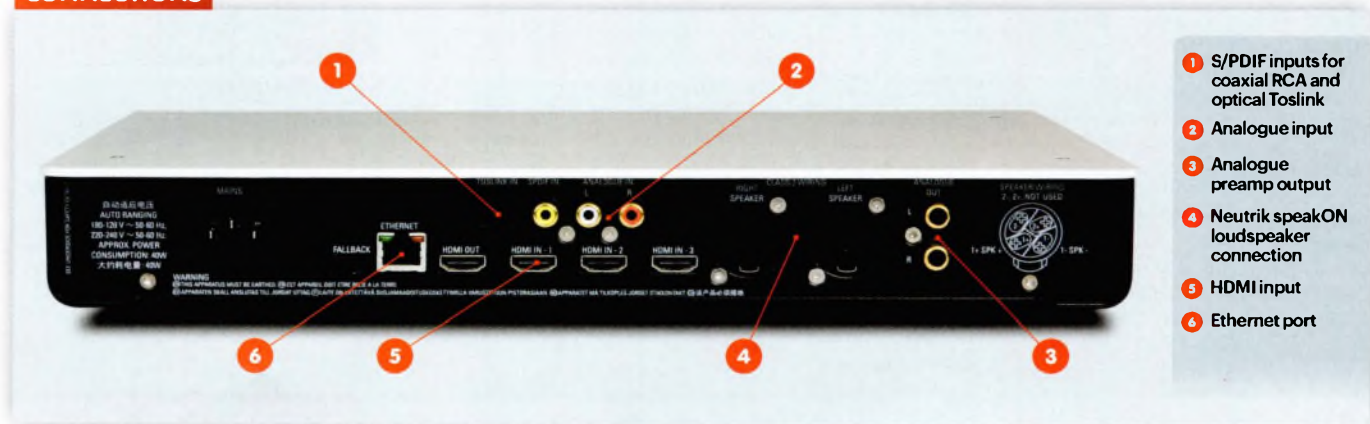
the plucked guitar strings' echo ensures the soundstage has real depth, adding to the atmospherics, drawing me in.

The Linn makes vocals sound a tad more forward than I'm used to and how it presents the timbre and detail of Anna's voice gives it real drama, while avoiding sibilant edges or any suggestion of harshness.

The Sneaky always seems prepared for upping the tempo and it will happily kick off its slippers to get down and bop when asked. Feeding it a 24/96kHz FLAC of Steely Dan's *Time Out Cf Mind*, the Sneaky takes control as though it's being powered by Red Bull. Notes start and stop with controlled electrostatic-like precision, which shines a light on the lengths band members Donald Fagen and Walter Becker went to to create such an accomplished sound.

The Sneaky's balanced midrange plays a key role in its overall sonic appeal. It has a smooth character that comes to the fore when delivering the relaxed sounds of Marconi Union's *Broken Colours* (24/44.1kHz FLAC), which tames the hard electronic edges of some of the effects within

CONNECTIONS



- 1 S/PDIF inputs for coaxial RCA and optical Toslink
- 2 Analogue input
- 3 Analogue preamp output
- 4 Neutrik speakON loudspeaker connection
- 5 HDMI input
- 6 Ethernet port

Q&A

Ian Wilson

Linn electronics design engineer



AS: Why haven't you included a USB input on the Sneaky DSM?

IW: We see Linn players as part of the network rather than standalone products. The network gives many opportunities to access USB content and by using this approach the content can be shared. You have better access to the music without adding unnecessary complexity to the DSM player, which can have a detrimental effect on its performance and usability.

Why did you specify a Wolfson WM8580 DAC for the Sneaky?

It's a cracking little part! As usual, we have disabled its internal digital volume control, preferring to perform these functions in our signal processing chain within our core field-programmable gate array (FPGA). The benefit is that we have greater resolution and flexibility than when we are tied down to the DAC's internal filter.

What were the biggest challenges you faced when developing the Sneaky DSM?

The major challenge was how to get Linn levels of audio performance from such a compact, elegant design. Class D amplification significantly increased the overall efficiency of the amplifier, which allows the use of smaller heatsinks. The amplifier stage itself is very small, taking up very little board acreage, and it is a very dense, functional block. The density brings a challenge in keeping the low-level input signals clear of the switched output, power rails and control signals. The amp switches at 400kHz, well out of the audio bandwidth. At these frequencies, capacitive coupling of noise from one circuit track to another is a very high risk. Managing the switching noise is also key to getting the best performance from the amp.

Having all schematic design, circuit board layout and population on site allows us to prototype various implementations and then make changes very quickly before selecting the best result.

Those petite proportions hide a big-hearted sound with plenty of gusto

the track. This trait gives it an easy to live with persona because it makes the music sound fulsome, yet not overly revealing to border on fatiguing. I'd suggest the Sneaky could make a good bedfellow for speakers that err towards a bright presentation, or standmount designs that major on midrange.

Getting to grips with Dusted's *Property Lines* (16/44.1), the Linn lets Brian Borcherdt's stripped-back lead guitar slice through the soundstage with real attack, with its leading edges hanging in the air before falling away with convincing realism. Comparing the Linn with a top flight separates system, I'd maybe welcome an extra degree of raucous behaviour on this track, to allow the guitars to sound a little more 'dangerous'. That's not to say that the Linn doesn't rock, because it does. This is more an observation of how the Sneaky balances its sound for long-term enjoyment, by being sympathetic to a wider range of partnering equipment and material.

A high-res 24/192 FLAC studio master of Claire Martin's track *You Turned The Tables On Me* shows how the Linn likes to be pushed to the limits of digital audio. The sheer class of this recording lets the Sneaky demonstrate its ability to dig deep in to the detail of the music and serve up a rich mix of natural-sounding instruments. Once again the Linn fills the soundstage with plenty of air and space, hinting at the size and quality of the recording environment and allowing me to enjoy each musician's unique contribution over and over, by revealing tantalising nuances of extra detail with each repeat listen.

Exploring how a system can be grown around the Linn by using the Sneaky as a preamp to drive my Musical Fidelity M6 power amp, reveals how some extra watts add more bass control and overall scale to proceedings. Revisiting Terheim's *No Subtle Man* with this combo generates more depth to the echoing plucked guitar, while Terheim's voice spreads further within the soundstage, adding to its ethereal

quality. This pairing highlights that while the Linn is a fine performer in its own right, the quality of its components are also up to driving more exotic equipment as and when budget permits, with the Sneaky as the centrepiece.

Conclusion

The Sneaky DSM is a well thought out and versatile product that's designed to be heard and not seen, which challenges the notion of more traditional hi-fi separates. What's more, when you consider the combined cost of buying a separate

The Sneaky will happily kick off its slippers to get down and bop when asked

amp, upsampling DAC and network music streamer, the Sneaky is very good value for money. Setup is refreshingly straight forward and thanks to its engaging and balanced sound, the Sneaky DSM is far more than just a lifestyle product and can hold its own when compared with similarly priced separates. It may not plunder the deepest depths of bass extension or offer the ultimate scale and weight of more exotic separates, but what the Sneaky does promise is lots of musical enjoyment in a fit and forget package that's very easy to live with, what's not to like? ●



HOW IT COMPARES

The most obvious rivals are Naim's UnitiLite (£1,650) and the soon-to-be-reviewed Cyrus Audio Stream Xa (£1,250). Neither model offers HDMI inputs, while the Naim adds a CD player, headphone socket, USB input and optional FM/DAB module to its S/PDIF and analogue inputs and will stream files up to 32-bit/192kHz. I expect the Naim to sound more dramatic compared to the Linn and personal taste will be the clincher. The Cyrus offers USB input alongside a range of S/PDIF connections and can be operated via Cyrus' new Cadence app. I would expect the Cyrus to deliver a refined sound with plenty of detail.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Excellent sound and features that belie its demure proportions
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Lack of USB input or front panel volume controls
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WESAY: Great sound and value all-in-one solution that's a hard act to beat
FEATURES ★★★★★	
OVERALL ★★★★★	

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



Your starter for ten

It's been over 20 years since **Malcom Steward** last heard an Epos speaker, will the Elan 10 make it worth the wait?

My last encounter with an Epos loudspeaker was in 1991 when I reviewed the ES11, the smaller brother to the legendary ES14, the demanding, but brilliant, standmount model with which the now famous brand established its fine reputation. If memory serves, the ES11 was about the same modest proportions as the

new Elan 10 and was similar in not being overly demanding about the partnering equipment with which it was used – unlike the extremely picky ES14, which was only suited for use with exemplary sources and amplification. The ES11 still responded enthusiastically to being partnered with top-notch ancillaries, but it did not sound dreadful like the

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Epos Elan 10

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Two-way, standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
8.8kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
185 x 320 x 245mm

FEATURES
 • Impedance: 4ohms nominal
 • Frequency range: 51Hz–25kHz
 • 25mm soft dome tweeter
 • 156mm Polypropylene cone bass midrange

DISTRIBUTOR
Epos

TELEPHONE
01442 260146

WEBSITE
epos-acoustics.com

ES14 could if you were not quite so generous with your choice of source and amplification.

Like the ES11, the Elan 10 enclosure looks exceptionally clean with its 18mm internally braced panels and an audiophile baffle upon which there are no visible fixing screws, grille-fixing holes or cloth. The baffle is machined around the woofer to create a gently contoured horn profile and, unlike a conventional grille frame; there are no obstructions or sharp edges to cause sound reflections and coloration. Similarly the HF unit integrates smoothly with the baffle with no fixings on display to disturb the aesthetics or the sound. Round the back of the cabinet there is the exit of the reflex port along with two pairs of 4mm binding posts for bi-wiring fans – even though I always ignore this facility and single-wire such speakers and replace the shorting plates with proprietary link cables, which typically deliver a more consistent, refined, and transparent sound. In this instance I'm using

Chord Company Sarum Tuned Array links, which at £295 for four wires come uncomfortably close to the price of the speaker itself.

The driver array consists of two units: a 25mm, soft dome tweeter and a polypropylene-coned, 156mm, mid-bass driver. These integrate through a second-order filter network that uses only metal oxide resistors and polypropylene film capacitors for the finest sound quality, says Epos. Again, to provide the best sound quality the tweeter section has an air-cored inductor, and the LF-mid section features a large-core, laminated iron inductor for low distortion and high power handling.

I partner the Elan 10 with its – I would say near compulsory – £200, ST15 dedicated stand, Chord Company Signature speaker cables and a Naim SuperNait integrated amplifier. Front-end components include my Well Tempered/ Dynavector vinyl source and my Naim HDX-SSD and DAC hard-disk player/ streamer. The turntable and all the electronics are placed on Quadraspire Sunoko Vent stands and wired predominantly with MCRU mains cables, Atlas Equator III, and Chord Company Sarum interconnects.

Sound quality

I have the speakers arranged in an equilateral triangle configuration about 3m apart from each other and the same distance from the side walls, and toed-in towards my seat very slightly – a barely discernible degree of toe-in is all I use. In this set-up the midband is splendid – very agile and

forthcoming – and the Elan is pleasingly open on voices and equally fluent on instrumentation.

The baby Epos truly shines playing *I Heard It Through The Grapevine* from Bill Frisell's *East/West* two-CD collection. It portrays his guitar tone in all its vivid Kodachrome hues and pungently contrasts its dynamics. It further gives a distinctly credible account of the bass guitar. Even though it can't physically generate the low fundamentals the bass line is consistent, tuneful and rhythmically

The Elan 10 proves to be a thoroughly enjoyable and plausible performer

persuasive. The drum kit is also represented plausibly even if the speakers can't manage the full weight of a floor-tom strike or the heft of the kick-drum. What is present, though, gets the message across effectively. Much of the Elan's ability to communicate fluently seems to be a result of its speed – its outstanding transient response – and its accurate portrayal of leading edges.

The Elan renders the guitars beautifully on Caitlin Rose's *Shanghai Cigarettes*, perfectly capturing the single pick-up, country twang of the dominant Fender Telecaster. The speaker also performs admirably conveying Rose's vocal dexterity and power. Furthermore, it appears very comfortably balanced on this rather mid-prominent mix, and resists

sounding markedly mid-forward – as some speakers can do – with its robust rendering of the near frequency extremes affording the track a pleasingly robust and substantial character.

The Elan has an inviting sound – one that encourages the listener to pay scrupulously close attention to the music. It draws you in – emotionally and in an academic sense: I appreciate what has been played and then replay it to hear exactly how the music has been performed and phrased. Frisell's guitar loops on *Pipe Down*, for example, prove mesmerising and the way he has arranged the track sees me listening repeatedly for ages, luxuriating in the near magical cocoon of sound he has constructed.

The Epos capably demonstrates its communicative prowess with rips on the exceptional Amy Winehouse *Lioness: Hidden Treasures* collection. Not only is its revealing nature and transparency rewarding in uncovering what is going on in the musical arrangements, but the insight it gives into Winehouse and her vocal performance is quite outstanding. The speaker is similarly forthcoming on Marianne Faithfull's *The Crane Wife #3* and other selections from her *Easy Come, Easy Go* album. It is fascinating to hear how skillfully she weaves her vocal line around those of the instruments backing her, perfectly adjusting her phrasing and dynamics to suit. The Elan, furthermore, gives a fine account of the variety of vibrant tonal colour and texture her musicians produced. ▶



The basic Elan costs £499, this is the gorgeous Rosewood finish, which is £549

Q&A

Mike Creek

Epos managing director



MS: The Elan 10 seems to me to be a descendant to the ES11, is it?

MC: Not really, although it is similar in size. The ES11 was based on a larger 6in pressed poly mid-woofer and third-party metal domed tweeter, mounted on an injection-moulded front baffle, which was bolted together to a moulded rear baffle. An unbraced cabinet shell was used as the meat in the sandwich. It used a first order filter to the tweeter only. That was ground-breaking stuff in 1989, but we've moved on since then.

What are the main differences between the Elan 10 and the ES11?

The Elan is a 4ohms speaker to pull more current output from lower powered amplifiers and it is about 5dB more sensitive and has much greater power handling, so it can play a lot louder. It uses a custom Epos 5in woofer and soft-domed tweeter, being crossed-over by two second order filters. The frequency response is remarkably similar, however. The heavily braced Elan 10 cabinet is unusual, in that it is designed to look similar to the ES11, but the wooden front baffle grille is removable and can be replaced by a silk-cloth covered version instead.

What would you recommend to partner the Elan 10 with?

Needless to say, my answer is biased but, due to the Elan 10's high sensitivity, literally any amplifier capable of producing 25W or more will drive it. Nonetheless, I would recommend it being a Creek. In fact, the latest (85W into 4ohm) Creek Evolution 50A is a perfect match.

The Elan 10 responds very well to the ST15 stands. Can you explain what is so special about them?

They are designed to optimise the bass performance and to provide a sound that is open, dynamic and solid in most settings. They use constrained layer damping technology to dispense with vibration within the stand by converting it to heat. This prevents the stand from 'ringing' and colouring the output of the speaker, so maintaining the purity of the original signals.

IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm soft dome tweeter
- 2 Reflex port exit
- 3 4mm binding posts
- 4 Polypropylene-coned 156mm mid-bass driver

To assure myself that the Epos is not only suited to rock and jazz music, I play Mercedes Sosa's *Misa Criolla* and began listening with *Kyrie*. It is hard for a speaker of this size to create the dramatic scale this music demands, but the Epos fares well, especially with its portrayal of the weight of choir and orchestral percussion. I then play the José Carreras version of this work, which I prefer to the others I own, and this confirms that while

Agnes Obel predominantly piano and voice recording *Philharmonics* it captures the beauty of her voice and reveals its subtle detail with scrupulous insight. This it achieves without distracting from the musical performance and turning the proceedings into a meaningless audiophile extravaganza, which less-capable equipment so frequently tends to do.

Conclusion

Similarly the speaker is just as informative about the guitar and piano, being effortlessly detailed and dynamic while managing to convey the music's flow and power quite fluently. The Elan does not exhibit the greatest weight or substance at the lower end of the frequency spectrum, but it dexterously avoids appearing lightweight or 'thin'. Ultimately, the Elan 10 proves to be a thoroughly enjoyable and plausible performer, especially if your tastes lean towards contemporary music ●

The Elan 10 looks exceptionally clean with its internally braced panels

the speaker makes a brave attempt at generating a credible soundstage it can't match the finest free-standing designs for front-to-back depth and image height/specificity. Nor is it as especially convincing in creating a sense of Carreras and the choir being in a clearly defined acoustic space. The image seems somewhat condensed and vague.

A 24-bit recording of the LSO playing Debussy comes across a little better in terms of staging, but the depth perspective is not a strong point of the Epos presentation. Musically it is more persuasive than it is in conveying hi-fi aspects of the performance. For this reason I consider the Elan better suited to rock and jazz music than it is to the classical selections I audition.

The Epos often demonstrates a presentation that is both animated and simultaneously civilised. On the



Similarly priced to the Elan, Q Acoustics 2050i floorstanders - in white lacquer finish - have an insightful presentation with superior low-frequency grunt and its communicative ability comes close. Carefully partnered and set-up this would provide a fascinating comparison to the Elan, because it also seems a tad constrained in terms of image depth. I suspect, however, that you will not compare these two very different speakers for use in the same listening room as the Elan likes to be close to a rear wall while the floor-standing 2050i likes plenty of air around it. It does not require any more sophisticated or powerful an amplifier than the Epos.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL



LIKE: Musically fluent and convincing

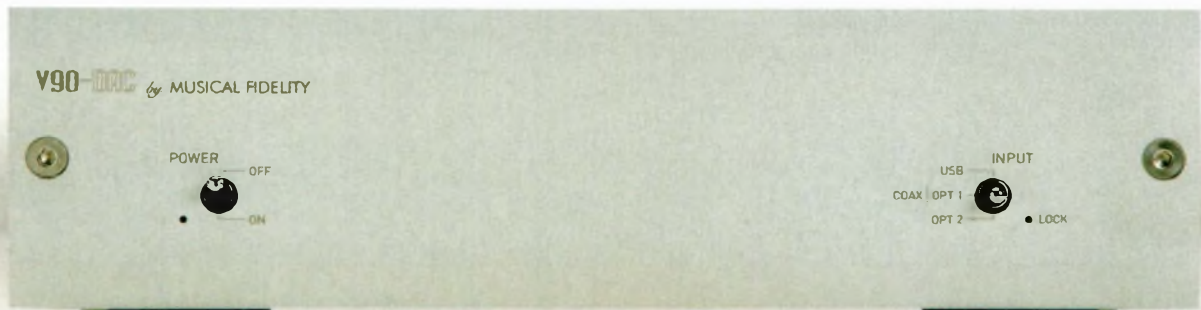
DISLIKE: There is little to dislike unless the shortage of stereo depth offends

WE SAY: Vital and animated, its musical character and agility suits contemporary music perfectly

MUSICAL FIDELITY

V90-DAC | DIGITAL ANALOGUE CONVERTER

"The V90-DAC is an upsampling DAC of outstanding quality"



High-end performance from real world sources

The V90-DAC is the perfect way to upgrade the performance of a wide range of equipment. Housed in a solid yet discreet case, it unites sleek design and technical excellence to offer unrivalled musical enjoyment.



<http://www.musicalfidelity.com/v90-dac>

+44 (0)20 8900 2866



Black to the future

Patrick Cleasby has just treated himself to an AK100, but how jealous will the new AK120 make him?

The last month or so has been an interesting time for the burgeoning hordes of Astell&Kern fanciers. From a standing start the new brand has attracted a lot of interest and devotion, with good reason.

I went to speak to a local retailer, and in the six months since release the AK100 shifted 20 units for him – it's a popular machine because it sounds great. But word of the AK120 slowed down demand.

One of the issues with the original firmware for the AK100 was that it didn't support gapless playback out of the box – essential for Floyd fans, devotees of live albums and dance

mix heads. One expected differentiator of the AK120 is the addition of this capability, but all kinds of interesting activity on the non-legitimate firmware side of AK100 life has brought it to the junior player already. It is reliable – at least for 16-bit/44.1kHz material. Third party developers demonstrating that this is possible meant that iRiver had to work up an improved v2.0 AK100 firmware of its own, which closely resembles the v1.0 of the AK120.

It is the hardware side on which the AK120 outstrips the AK100. The core memory is upped from 32GB to 64GB, and if you add two 64GB micro SD cards you get a tiny player with a

massive 192GB capacity, affording you more than a couple of thousand HD tracks-worth of space. The simplest way to format them to the required FAT32 is in Disk Utility on Mac – on a PC you will need a third-party formatting utility. It will be interesting to see if the AK120 copes with 128GB cards once they arrive and become affordable, as a 320GB player will be amazing.

The justification for the almost 100% increase in price from AK100 to AK120 (from £569 to £1,099) is the use of dual mono DACs in the new machine. The sober black packaging wears this proudly with a standout silver 'Dual DAC' flash. The rest of the package is almost identical to the AK100 – you also get a nice Italian leather case to protect your new baby. The machine itself is a centimetre or so taller than the AK100, marginally heavier, and the volume control has gained protective extensions from the casework and has a more luxe 'dampened' physical feel in operation.

The only other accessories are the Quick Start guide, the micro USB lead and self-adhesive glass protectors.

Once you get it out and start loading, it is apparent that the short gap between the end-2012 AK100 and the mid-2013 AK120 means that there is no huge leap forward in non-playback performance – ie the speed of internal solid state transfers.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Astell&Kern AK120

ORIGIN
Korea

TYPE
24-bit/192kHz-capable digital audio portable

WEIGHT
143g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
59 x 89 x 14mm

FEATURES
● 24/192 FLAC, AIFF, WAV, and ALAC
● APE, MP3, AAC, WMA and OGG playback
● 64GB internal memory
● 2 x microSD slots

DISTRIBUTOR
Advanced MP3 Players

TELEPHONE
0843 2896880

WEBSITE
advancedmp3players.co.uk

It still takes about an hour to load off or load on the 30GB or so I keep on the internal memory of the AK100. Battery performance estimates are also similar, ranging from 12 to 16 hours dependent upon the variables such as volume, screen and EQ use, and weight of the codec.

If you have been running the beta v2.0 of the AK100 firmware, the interface will be very familiar. Once again, the scanning process by which the Astell&Kern turns your FLAC tags into its internal library structure, has not particularly moved forward. The main frustration is still that occasionally it seems to miss some items, picked up in a subsequent rerun. Regrettably, embedded artwork is still required rather than using a Folder.jpg in the folder. Accordingly I am in the process of converting a very large collection to embed!

The major difference between the use of the two machines is likely to be the promised addition of DSD file playback capability to the AK120. In the recently released v1.21 firmware there is also the ability to use the AK120 as a 24-bit/96kHz USB DAC. This is expected to apply to the AK100 in the fullness of time too, although it does not feature in the just-released AK100 v 2.01 firmware. Firmware updating is a simple matter of putting a .HEX file in the root of the internal storage and rebooting.

Sound quality

To test out that vital extra DAC and its effect on the analogue output of the AK120 I elect initially to listen to it hooked up to my reference system via a 3.5mm-to-stereo phono iChord from The Chord Company. The material used is HDtracks 24-bit/192kHz versions unless otherwise specified.

As the analogue output stage is what you listen to on headphones, one would expect the refined but enjoyable presentation to be repeated

on loudspeakers, and indeed the opening of *Tres Hombres* by ZZ Top is a thrilling listen, that gapless mode ensuring the seamless (in audio terms at least) segue from *Waitin' For The Bus* into *Jesus Just Left Chicago*.

The sound signature reveals itself to be subtly different to the AK100, which is already a convincing component in this usage. As one might expect, the clearly identifiable enhancement of the dual mono converters gives a vast improvement in separation and detail. A listen to *Giorgio Ey Moroder* by Daft Punk reveals stereo synth placement that

It is impossible to deny the sound and the luxe appeal of the AK120

sounds three dimensional compared with the 'flat plane in front of you' rendition from the AK100.

The AK120 is able to extract the bassline from the maelstrom of Johnny Marr's *Upstarts* (24-bit/44.1kHz). It appears as if suspended in mid air in the stereo picture – quite a feat when even the deeper bitrate version is a sonic mess. The rendition of the track is even more enjoyable than on the AK100.

One of the joys of high resolution is the sense of real air and reverb around an acapella vocal. This makes the Yes-like *Interlude 1* from Alt J's *A Perfect Wave* (24-bit/96kHz) a great listen, the interlocking voices swooping around each other with a much greater sense of real space than the decidedly flat-sounding CD resolution version.

Convincing bass is something that both A&K players have in spades with their low frequency range extension, but Jackson Browne's *That Girl Could Sing* from the *Hold Out* album is once

again far superior on the AK120 with that thudding bassline and the gritty slide scudding over the top.

With its marginally louder output and 30ohm output impedance (compared with the 22ohm of the AK100), the AK120 should prove to be much better able to drive your headphones. A listening session with the Fostex TH900 'phones confirms this, and reinforces the superior musicality of this player, too.

Barangrill from Joni's *For The Roses* is as delicate and intricate as it should be, *Can't Slow Down* by Lionel Richie is as busy and as fizzy as it should be in its turn – the AK100 cannot match this! Even with 16-bit/44.1kHz material like *Baba O'Reilly* from *Who's Next* the same effect is noticeable.

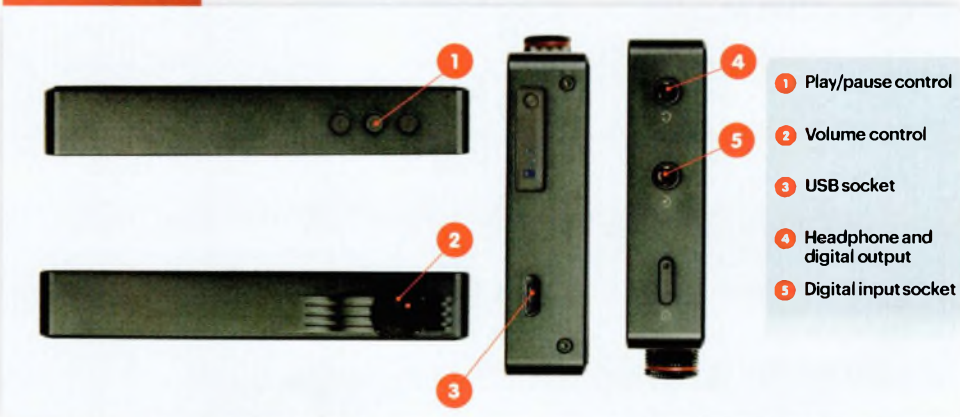
Finally, that new USB DAC functionality works unfussily with a Mac – in no time via the OSX Decibel player I am sampling the delights of two new 24-bit/96kHz FLAC collections – those of Scott Walker and The Smiths. The results are simply astonishing – possibly even shading native AK120 FLAC playback – in both cases I am met with a fantastic deep bass and the creamy tones of the two lugubrious singers, more lifelike than ever. A joy.

Conclusion

It's difficult to call whether the best advice is to stick to the more affordable AK100, or to stretch your budget to acquire the AK120. In both cases you are getting the neutral, subtle 'Astell&Kern' sound, so an audition in your intended setting (headphones or amplified) is essential to make sure it is a sound that appeals to you. It is, however, impossible to deny the sound and the luxe appeal of the AK120. If, like me, you have picked up an HDtracks 24-bit/192kHz buying habit, this is one of the best possible ways of playing that stuff back, either on the move or at home ●

Twice the price of the AK100, the AK120 is still highly desirable

IN SIGHT



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: The possibility of convenient DSD file handling
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: A lot of money for a minor performance bump-up
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WESAY: If you have the budget, it makes sense to skip the original and leap up to the dual DAC heights
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL





Life begins at 40...

Reached a point in your hi-fi existence where a change is as good as a rest? This amplifier could avert the crisis, says **David Price**

It's amazing if you think about it. In the second decade of the 21st-century, some 100 years or so since the technology was invented, the hi-fi world still wants valve amplifiers. That's no hollow rhetoric – all you have to do is to walk around a hi-fi show for proof. There's loads of the things, their little glass bottles glowing quietly under the lights, showing that consumer tastes aren't quite as linear as the big electronics giants would prefer.

This integrated amplifier is the latest in a line of mid-price designs from a British brand that sensed a gap in the market, a decade or so ago, and has gone from strength to strength since. The company's products are aimed precisely at the niche that's appeared in the market – affordable, high quality amps that don't quite make it into the realm of 'superfi', yet boast a sound that's rather hard not to like. The Stereo 40 Mk III is a David Shaw design that boasts all the latest trickery to give better sound.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Icon Audio Stereo 40 Mk III
ORIGIN
UK/China
TYPE
Valve integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
2.5kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
390 x 390 x 230mm
FEATURES
• Quoted power output: 2x 33W RMS
• Class A, push-pull, zero global feedback
• Triode front end and output stage
• 4x KT88 output valves, 1x 6SL7 first stage valve, 2x 6SN7 phase inverter, 274B valve rectifier
DISTRIBUTOR
Icon Audio
TELEPHONE
0116 2440593
WEBSITE
iconaudio.com

Power is delivered courtesy of something that harks back to the days when Cliff Richard was Britain's brightest boy about town – the KT88 beam tetrode, as introduced by GEC in 1956, which runs at a sensibly low voltage, yet gives out high current. Being a general purpose amp, the Stereo 40 runs these in full Class A push-pull mode, giving a claimed 33W per side. Four of these are fed by 6SN7 and 6SL7 tubes, which also appeared at roughly the same time. Valve rectification is used, courtesy of a 274B, which is the central valve set.

Although glowing bottles are the headline news in any tube amp, it's nothing without decent output transformers; they have a huge effect on the final sound. Icon Audio has fitted its own custom-designed, Japanese hand-wound (99.9999%) pure copper wound tertiary output trannies. The other central transformer is to supply power, and the Stereo 40 Mk III sports choke regulation and eight large capacitors in a traditional 'Pi' configuration.

All wiring is hand fitted and soldered, and laid out 'point to point' for the shortest signal paths; a printed

Set up isn't as simple as with a solid-state amp, but it isn't exactly tough, either. All eight valves need to be fitted into the right sockets; luckily they're all numbered so it's hard to screw up here! This latest Mk III version of the Stereo 40 sports a natty retro-look bias meter, which makes adjusting the output valve bias a breeze in conjunction with the bias setting control and the four trim pots on the top plate. But this shouldn't need to be done for a good long while, as it's properly set at the factory. Generously, Icon Audio has fitted a tape monitor loop (a classic

wonderfully carefree and insouciant way. Coming from the excellent Creek Destiny 2 solid-stater, the Icon Audio makes even this sound a little stilted and prone to standing on ceremony. It has an easy, mellifluous sort of nature that shuffles along and makes any music it plays a breeze to listen to. It won't deconstruct things, giving you lots to think about in a 'hi-fi' sense, rather it romps along in time with the music like a puppy that's just got past the garden gate. The Stereo 40 does nothing whatsoever to challenge that myth about valve amps being musical.

Still, with a damping factor of 5.0, don't expect it to grab onto your speakers' bass bins like the chancellor of the exchequer clutching your wallet. It doesn't have the same bottom-end tenacity as a good transistor amp, so although I find the bass lines on the Steely Dan track to be satisfyingly quick and supple, there is that tube trademark 'bloom'. It's less than the Ming Da MC368 we reviewed one summer ago, but still it advertises its thermionic origins just a touch too much for some tastes. Conversely, for many customers this will be precisely what they want it to do – and with a sweet and detailed upper midband and treble, you get a 'valve sound' – one you'd never confuse with a chrome bumper Naim!

The Police's *Everything She Does is Magic* is an interesting challenge for this amp, showcasing its strengths and weaknesses in equal measure. The soundstage is sublime, almost more vast than you'd expect from surround sound at its best. It is as if someone has pushed an almighty 'stereo wide' button and suddenly your listening room isn't quite the same any more. Inside this vast recorded acoustic, vocals come over softly and sweetly, and there is so much room between instruments that you can sit and languish in any one of the many tracks of the recording – ▶

It does nothing to challenge that myth about valve amps being musical

three-head open reel looks rather nice sat next to it), and there are four line inputs – something you wouldn't have got with your original fifties tube preamp! The other key control on the front is the triode/ultralinear mode selector, more of which later...

Sound quality

Good as the Stereo 40 Mk III is, it hasn't abolished the laws of physics, so you'll need to partner it with a sympathetic pair of loudspeakers; ones that are reasonably easy to drive with a good sensitivity figure (over 90dB/1W/1m is a good general guide). This done, you'll find the Icon Audio to be a big and ballsy performer, with – in ultralinear mode – an up-front and engaging sound that veritably leaps out of the speakers. The music is fluid, dynamic and vivid with an apparent openness that makes most solid-state amps seem rather grey and congealed.

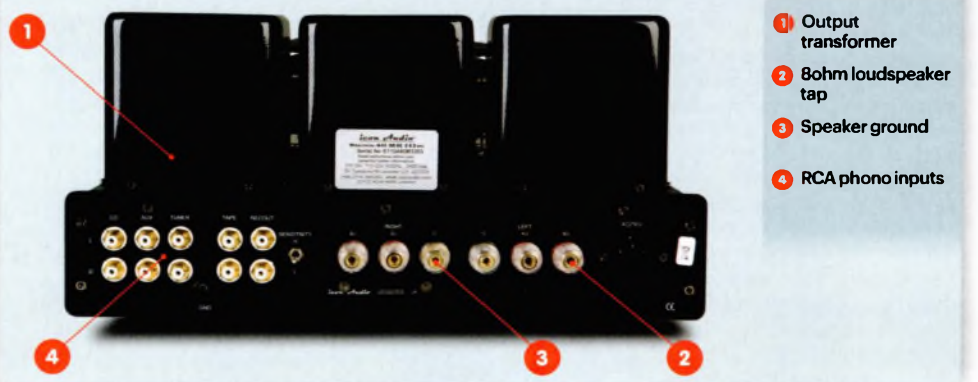
For example, Steely Dan's *Ricki Don't Lose That Number* comes over in

The Stereo 40 Mk III is extremely well made and finished given its modest retail price

circuit board isn't used, says Icon Audio, because it colours the sound. A Japanese-sourced ALPS Blue volume potentiometer is fitted, as are Taiwanese "audiophile quality" metal film resistors and Japanese Rubicon and Nichicon power capacitors and SCR and Solen polypropylene audio caps. The company offers the option of Jensen 'oil in paper' capacitors (£320), beloved by enthusiasts, plus a range of premium and "new old stock" valves (costing up to £500 extra). The tubes supplied do the job, but valve aficionados realise the sonic gains that can be had from fitting high-quality glassware.

The chassis itself is the usual Icon Audio fare, solid steel given a decent coat of black paint and the lavish copper top plate. The frontal 10mm aluminium alloy fascia plate sports polished dark chrome alloy knobs, and there's a somewhat prosaic valve cover, which should always be used if there is the faintest possibility that the movements of children, pets or indeed adults might strike the valves – they run at very high voltages and aren't anywhere near as domestically friendly as some folk expect.

CONNECTIONS



Q&A

David Shaw

Icon Audio chief designer



DP: Where does the Stereo 40 fit into Icon Audio's range of amps?

DS: The original Stereo 40 was born in 2000, and was at the heart of what we do, good-quality amplifiers at a reasonable price. I don't force more expensive upgrades into the price because as a British company we can either add them here or do them later for those with more challenged pockets. Our range is wide because it is fun and exciting!

Why was a push-pull design chosen for the Stereo 40?

We also make Single-Ended Triode amplifiers, but they are a bit left field, not easy to get right, low powered, can have poor bass, poor efficiency etc. So any mid-market product such as the ST40 III will have to work with a wide range of speakers, some with low efficiency and poor characteristics. Therefore, this amplifier will need a robust performance and good stability. Push-pull overcomes so many disadvantages and you get more than the sum of the two parts. An EL34 on its own will give about 12W, in push-pull you can easily get 36W – three times the power. Any common noise and distortion within the amplifier is cancelled out in the output transformer. As the output transformer does not get saturated like SET amplifiers, low-frequency bass is much better. A designer can choose either to use these advantages to make a really high-performance amplifier or to economise and make something that's mediocre. We naturally take the high road!

Is the amp based on a proprietary circuit, or is it a bespoke one designed for this exact model?

It's a mish-mash of ideas with several 'nods' to ideas the giants of the past like GEC, Blumlien, Williams, Philips, etc, worked on. This circuit has been refined over time to give the qualities that I like, especially with the transformers, which we have spent many hours comparing performance of subtle changes here and there to get what I think is the correct sonic signature.

This version features Chinese sourced KT88 output valves



my attention is drawn to the brilliance of Andy Summers' guitar work, for example. I also love the sugary cymbal sound of Stewart Copeland, but somehow he seems to have lost his manic energy. This amp is great with microdynamics, but doesn't quite have the guts to communicate one of his famed cymbal crashes as it should. At the same time, Sting's vocals are wonderfully sweet, but his bass lines aren't quite as taut and propulsive as they should be.

This epitomises the Stereo 40 Mk III. Whatever you throw at it, it obligingly serves up a lovely sound back at you – as opposed, of course, to an accurate one. It's never less than peachy to listen to, seemingly able to make even miserable music smile back at you. Even the dour strains of The Jam's *Going Underground* float along in a mellifluous, relaxing way. Switch to triode mode and things smooth and soften even more, the soundstage falling back, but narrowing slightly. The upper mid and treble sweetens, and the recording becomes more 'easy listening' than 'new wave'. All very nice, but it is powerful, sinewy source material such as this that shows how much this amplifier is compressing things, making the midband sound gloopy and opaque. So the truth is that this amplifier suits gentler music more than rockier stuff.

Conclusion

With decent amounts of power by tube standards, a rich tonality and a nice, bouncy sound there's practically nothing to object to about the Icon Audio Stereo 40 Mk III on its own terms – it's a great, affordable tube amplifier that does precisely what it says on the tin, so to speak. But if you want explosive dynamics, vast tracts of bass power and forensic detailing, then you'd more than likely never entertain the prospect of purchasing such a thing in the first place. This amplifier isn't a universal panacea then, and not everyone will like it, but if you are shopping for something with classic tubular traits then you'd do well to put it very high up on your shopping list ●



The Stereo 40 Mk III is in a gang of one at this price, but provides a marked contrast to one of the best sub £2,000 solid-staters around. The Exposure 3010S2 (£1,350) won a recent group test and has a wonderfully big and punchy sound; it doesn't have the 'hyper real', out-of-the-box soundstaging of the Icon, but it's not far off, and knits the music together in a tauter and more controlled way. Bass is tighter and more powerful, and it's better at driving speakers to high listening levels with its 110W per side. It captures the overall dynamics of recordings better, is more detailed and less music-dependent. Still, given undemanding material, the Icon sounds nicer.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Spacious sound; rich, warm tonality; fluid, musical, rhythmic nature; build, value

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Loose bass; limited power; it rather lacks incisiveness

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Fine affordable tube amplifier; an essential audition

FEATURES



OVERALL



ATL™

Advanced Transmission Line

fact[®]·12

Strength, sophistication & the perfect image



The **fact12** 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, **fact12** 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, **fact12** is what you need.



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



PMC[®]
www.pmc-speakers.com



One box to rule them all

Ten years ago a micro system meant mediocre hi-fi, but **Lee Dunkley** reckons Panasonic may change your thinking

Panasonic is better known for its flatscreen TV sets, Blu-ray players and PVRs and doesn't have a huge presence in the hi-fi world. The Japanese brand has long been a key player in the home cinema market, while its sister company, Technics, traditionally takes care of the two-channel hi-fi side of the business. Nevertheless there has been some crossover between the two over the years, and the AV manufacturer has long supported a range of two-channel mini and micro systems appealing to music fans looking for a complete one-box solution.

The SC-PMX9DB is the latest model to join its Hi-Fi Systems ranks, and is the flagship model aimed at the

enthusiast that wants to connect to their music stored on a smartphone or tablet devices.

Speakers are often the largest elements in a micro setup and the SC-PMX9DB comes with a pair of chunky 161mm-wide units finished in high gloss black. They look nice enough, but tend to show up sticky fingerprints and attract dust. The unusual three-way, bass reflex design features a 14cm bass driver accompanied by a 1.9cm tweeter and a 1.2cm super tweeter. Front grilles are also supplied.

The main unit is the powerhouse of the system with traditional front-loading CD player and extensive radio capabilities, and comes ready to connect to just about any portable

audio device you have to hand.

There's a front-mounted USB that supports MP3 and FLAC files, and the top-loading iDock is compatible with the iPhone 5 and latest-generation iPods to connect, charge and play. Older generation iDevices and alternative music players can be hooked up via the front USB.

There's support for DAB, DAB+ and FM radio broadcasts via the tuner section, adding some useful functionality with 30 FM presets and a further 20 each for your favourite DAB and future DAB+ stations.

Connectivity at the rear of the unit caters for a combined FM/DAB aerial input and a single RCA stereo input for hooking up an external audio wired source should you want to connect it to the stereo output from the back of your TV. Disappointingly, there are no optical or digital inputs.

The stubby antenna provides the system's wireless networking connectivity with support for Airplay, Bluetooth and wireless DLNA. There's a wired LAN input, too.

Connecting to your wireless network is straightforward and is accessed via the Setup button on the remote control. The SC-PMX9DB quickly locks on to your network if your router has WPS (Wi-fi Protected Setup) support and automatically establishes a secure link. Additionally, there are manual and advanced

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Panasonic
SC-PMX9DB

ORIGIN
Malaysia

TYPE
CD stereo system

WEIGHT
Main unit: 3.1kg
Speakers: 3kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
Main unit: 210 x 120
x 266mm
Speakers: 161 x 238
x 264mm

FEATURES
• CD with FM/DAB/+
• USB input
• Wi-fi compatibility
• Lightning connector dock

DISTRIBUTOR
Panasonic UK

TELEPHONE
0844 8443899

WEBSITE
panasonic.co.uk

options that allow you to adjust the security settings or change the name of the system displayed on your devices, for example. Pairing to a Bluetooth music playback device is similarly straightforward and follows the established select-to-pair routine.

Design-wise, the Panasonic looks the part and build quality is up to the brand's usually high standards. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, as they say, but the SC-PMX9DB isn't exactly what I would call a good looking system – despite the efforts made with the gloss black speakers and inoffensive silver main unit – and its boxy styling is perhaps a little on the bland side given its enormously flexible and rather funky range of connectivity features.

Considering the minimal number of controls adorning the main unit itself, it's rather disappointing that more thought hasn't gone into the styling of the system's remote control. You can't fully operate the Panasonic without it so I understand the need to make it easy to navigate, but it's rather a bland, dull-black, off-the-shelf model that could of easily have had a little more style injected into it. Okay, it's functional and very neatly laid out, making it easy to navigate, but it looks uninspiring on the coffee table.

Sound quality

Despite the lack of hi-fi credentials there's quite a bit to like about the sound of the SC-PMX9DB. It's consistently big with plenty of energy being directed towards the bass end of the frequency spectrum that drives the music along with gusto. The Class D amplification goes pretty loud too, although this can make the system feel less engaging and sacrifices a touch of clarity and definition at higher volumes.

Rotary bass and treble tone controls are provided on the front panel for effect adjustment. Access to preset

equalisation modes can be gained by reaching for the remote control, but my advice is to stick to the Flat setting and make any sound adjustments via the standard bass and treble tone controls. These can also be adjusted via the Sound options button and successive button pushes brings up a Surround mode for those wanting to listen to two-channel material with a pseudo surround effect. This gives some impression of widening the

The bass end of the frequency spectrum drives the music along with gusto

stereo soundstage, and it appears to extend beyond the sides of the speakers, but it does little to convince me that I am being immersed in sound or make a music or TV source any more enjoyable to listen to.

Selecting the D Bass mode (the D stands for dynamic) gives possibly the most marked improvement over the Panasonic's straight-from-the-box sound. It augments the bass on *Everyday I Love You Less and Less* by Kaiser Chiefs without over doing it. The track bounces along like a playful puppy and the Panasonic lets you know that you're in for an enjoyable ride. I have heard several all-in-one systems over the years that have not been that enjoyable an experience to listen too. Thankfully that's not the case with the SC-PMX9DB and there's no sense of disappointment while listening to its CD playback performance even with hard to master female vocalists, and Jocelyn Brown's *It's Alright, I Feel It* from *Nuyorican Soul* is rich and powerful and nicely handled by the Panasonic.

Connecting to the SC-PMX9DB via Airplay over a network from an iPhone or iPod is a doddle, once

you've set up an Ethernet link or wirelessly connected the system to your network router. Choose the tune you want to play on your device, select the Panasonic system as the output you want to hear it on and the system automatically switches to Airplay mode so that you can hear it. It's a bit of step down in quality terms when compared with CD playback, but the Panasonic puts in the same characteristically lively performance as it does with discs, and shows that it can also party when it comes to playing tracks from your iTunes library or cloud-based streaming services like Spotify.

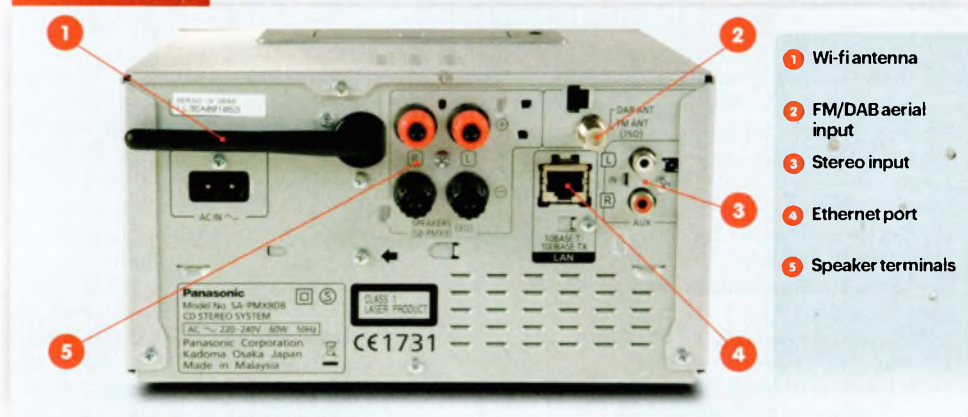
Bluetooth connection is similarly straightforward, once a link has been established between a device and the system during the setup process, the Panasonic sees the device and automatically selects the Bluetooth source mode. I'd say that sound quality is a further step down than tracks heard over Airplay. Sadly, there's no apt-X compatibility with the promise of high-quality Bluetooth streaming, but it puts in a respectable performance that is enjoyable to hear and handles Lana del Rey's *Young and Beautiful* with finesse.

Conclusion

The Panasonic packs a lot more into a micro system than when the first cheap and cheerful models appeared in the nineties, and it's an amazingly modern and versatile little hi-fi unit. Its compact size doesn't have a negative effect on its output, and while its a long way off of earning much in the way of admiration from hi-fi enthusiasts, its performance is nothing to be ashamed of, and in fact is very enjoyable indeed. If you're looking for a flexible system that will fit easily into the kitchen or a bedroom and with sound that doesn't disappoint, this micro system is certainly one to be proud of ●

Despite its rather bland looks, the SC-PMX9DB has plenty going for it sonically

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Wi-fi antenna
- 2 FM/DAB aerial input
- 3 Stereo input
- 4 Ethernet port
- 5 Speaker terminals

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

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

LIKE: Lively sound; flexible connectivity options; easy to setup
DISLIKE: High-gloss speakers are dust magnets; dull remote; no apt-X
WE SAY: A modern, versatile system that shows just what can be achieved from a micro

OVERALL





For whom the Bel tolls

Looking for a serious silver disc spinner that doesn't take up too much space? You'll love Bel Canto's CD2, says **David Price**

Stop press: people are still listening to digital audio discs. Anachronistic as the practice may seem, *Hi-Fi Choice's* crack field agents can confirm there is still life in the old format yet! So, it's nice to see this – a pure and simple, unreconstructed Compact Disc player. It doesn't have DAC functionality, streaming capability, USB connectivity or anything else except a place to put a lacquered 5in aluminium disc in. Press a button, and it spins up, reads the disc and

plays music via its line outputs around the back. So quaint. You know, this could just catch on...

The CD2 is the latest Compact Disc player from an American company which has traditionally taken digital audio discs very seriously. Don't be fooled by the rather lovely – and indeed fitting, as it transpires – Italian name (“beautifully sung”), this is as American as Beverley Hills or Big Macs. And this hand-built machine is a flexible thing, offering as it does a range of power supply options. We're

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Bel Canto CD2

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
CD player

WEIGHT
8.2kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
216 x 88 x 318mm

FEATURES

- LED numeric display
- Philips CD2Pro top loading mechanism
- Balanced XLR outputs
- Switchable fixed/variable output
- Upsampling DAC

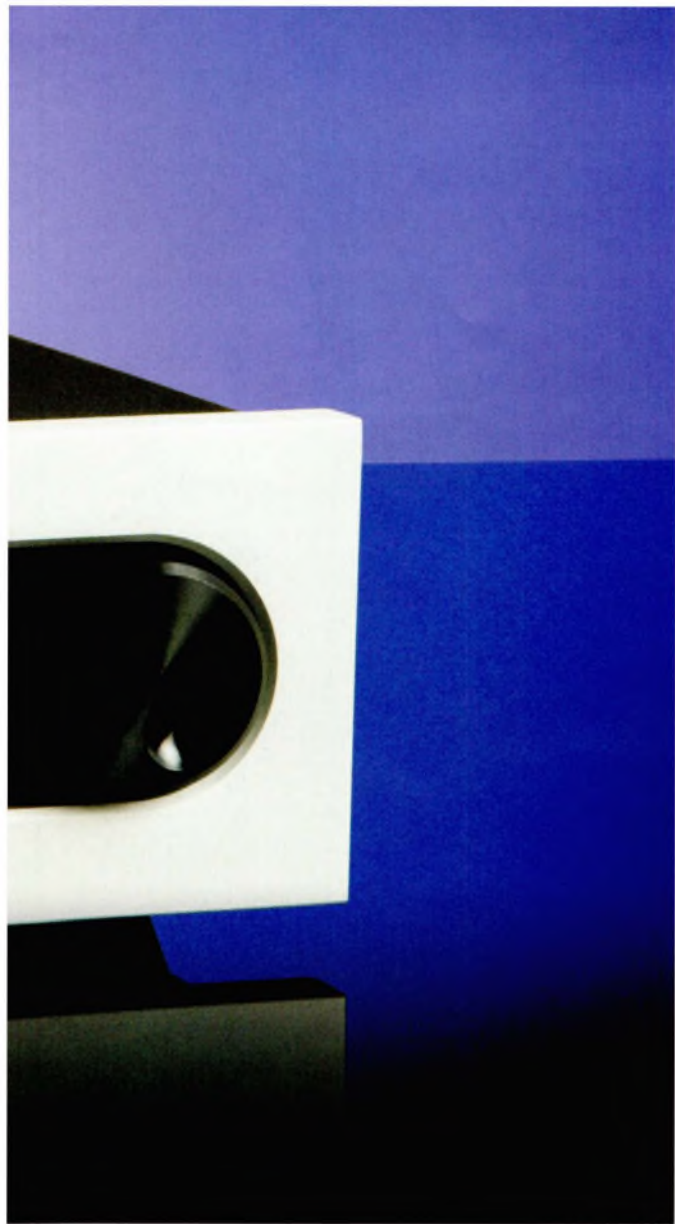
DISTRIBUTOR
Aanvil Audio

TELEPHONE
07721 926384

WEBSITE
aanvillaudio.com

testing the base model with a simple small external power supply, but more performance is possible from the LNS1 power supply (£399) or the VBS1 Virtual Battery Supply (£1,299). The LNS1 can supply one VB-enabled unit and the VBS1 can supply up to three VB-enabled units. Bel Canto also makes a range of DACs too, so the CD2 can work as a high-quality transport.

You would never mistake the casework of the CD2 for, say, a high end Marantz silver disc player. It isn't blessed with that sort of exuberant build and finish – don't expect oceans of copper inside, complex displays and shiny mood lighting on the fascia. Rather, the Bel Canto has the feel of something that is hand built, very well, on a relatively small scale. Its fascia is a thing of beauty – finely finished and with the company logo skillfully inset – while the display deserves joyous praise for being a warm green LED type rather than the cold blue vacuum fluorescent ones favoured by most of the hi-fi industry. The single knob on the right manages to combine all the basic transport functions, and feels nice to use.



The machine's foundation is a pressed steel base, which is damped to reduce vibration, and this also sports the digital and audio electronic circuitry, which is linked by ribbon cable to the fascia controls and the CD mech itself. The latter (the excellent Philips CDPro2LF) sits inside the top assembly, which fits on to the base, and is a top-loading type. Round the back, there's a choice of balanced XLR and RCA phono outputs, with a switch to toggle between fixed or variable outputs. There's also Toslink, S/PDIF and AES/EBU digital outputs, said to work at 24/96, and all are galvanically isolated to prevent the transmission of electrical noise. The reason for this is that the CD2 is an upsampling design, using a Burr Brown PCM1796 chipset and a slow roll-off linear phase digital filter. Bel Canto says that what goes into the DAC is exceptionally pure thanks to its Ultra-Clock circuit, which is claimed to virtually eliminate jitter.

Sound quality

This is one of the least expensive *Choice Exoticas* we've done, yet the Bel Canto CD2 gives nothing away to

any of the £10K loudspeakers we've reviewed in its ability to surprise and/or satisfy. Here is one of the very best CD players at or indeed anywhere near the price, one that has a beautifully mellifluous and natural sound that strips away so many of the 'issues' that rain on Compact Disc's parade. It makes an interesting academic point, too – that no matter how modest CD's digital specification is by modern standards, it can still be made to sound thoroughly enjoyable and completely musically satisfying.

Even the 'cooking' version of the CD2 with the stock power supply turns out to be the very epitome of audiophile good manners. The CD2 isn't hard, raucous or overpowering, and it has no strange facets to its performance, which mar the listening experience. Instead, it gets on with the process of playing music in the most unselfconscious way you can imagine. Somewhat reminiscent of one of those early, euphonic-sounding Linn Sondek turntables, this silver disc spinner is a little warm and fulsome tonally. But it isn't this that makes it so nice to hear – it's those swooping, flowing rhythms. Again, to use a vinyl metaphor, it has a unipivot tonearm-like ability to sail through a song, enjoying itself and sharing the fun with everyone else, too.

Congo Ashanti's *Days Chasing Days* is joyful. On many price rivals, this track plods along innocuously, but switching to the Bel Canto, the experience is transformed. Suddenly I find myself immersed in the mix, enjoying the lovely, easy groove and the freedom with which the lead vocalist moves on and off the beat. The CD2 provides an immensely stable rhythmic foundation to the song, meaning it's able to relax into the music and party. To be honest, this isn't something CD is famous for doing, and indeed I've heard DACs at ten times the price unable to pull this

trick off. CD can so very often sound musically frigid, but not when it's played by this Bel Canto.

Trying the Audiolab 8200CD I have to hand is a fascinating comparison. This is a far cheaper player but still excellent, yet the Bel Canto makes it seem rather humble. Via the CD2, the spaces between the notes widens dramatically, and the music seems to open up and let the listener in, in a way that the other machine can't quite manage. It also shines with a

It taps right into the emotion of the performance captured on disc

lovely treble performance that gives hi-hats a sweet yet convincingly metallic ring. This extends all the way down to the midband, making vocals – especially the more challenging female variety – sound delightfully creamy and smooth. Yet this comes from the player's apparent lack of distortion, rather than any unnatural tampering with the tone. This sort of sound is what really distinguishes a great CD player from one that's merely good.

But there are downsides, too. For example, the bass sounds slightly loose; it doesn't quite start and stop as fast as a flickering neon light. Yet somehow it doesn't detract from the player's innate musicality, as every bass line the CD2 plays comes across in a most engaging and tuneful way. One might also comment about the slight 'thickness' in the midband – it lacks the super-fine transparency you hear in some other more expensive silver disc spinners, and the soundstage isn't quite as deep as it perhaps could be, either. Yet this machine's sheer musical cohesion completely distracts you from such

Forget the trend of blue displays, the Bel Canto goes with green

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Balanced XLR output
- 2 S/PDIF output
- 3 AES/EBU output
- 4 Toslink output
- 5 Output level switch
- 6 Stereo analogue output

Q&A

John Stronczer

Bel Canto founder and ceo



DP: Has Bel Canto done a number of Compact Disc players before?

JS: Previously we've produced the PL1 multi-format player and, of course, the CD1 CD player that preceded the current CD2.

Why did Bel Canto choose to use the Philips CD2 Pro mechanism inside the CD2?

The key reasons were down to the reliability of the mech, its overall longevity and, of course, the sonic performance.

Is the digital jitter reduction circuitry unique to Bel Canto, and if so in what way?

The quality of the clock and details of the implementation are critical to the results.

What DAC and digital filter chips were chosen, and why?

The latest CD2 player uses the high-end Texas Instruments Burr Brown PCM1796 chip for its low-distortion and wide dynamic range. It is run using the slow roll-off filter and running at 96k or 192k sampling frequencies.

Why was upsampling chosen; what benefits does it confer? In your opinion, are there any downsides to upsampling?

We have found that the Asynchronous Sampling Rate Converter is absolutely critical to controlling jitter here. As long as the ASRC has sufficient dynamic range and distortion in its algorithm, I do not believe that there is any downside to its use.

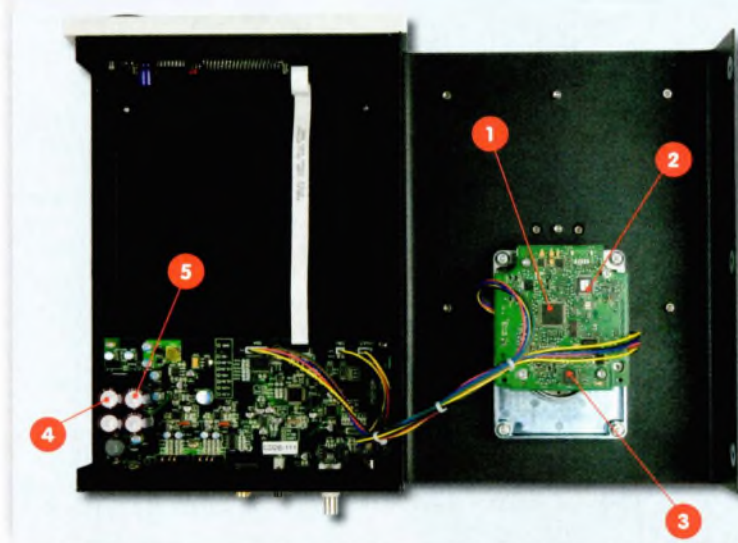
It's unusual to use a green LED display these days, so why did you choose to fit one to the CD2?

Firstly for aesthetic reasons, it matches the rest of our product line. Secondly, it's easy to read as this is where the eye is most sensitive.

How would you describe the overall sound of the player?

I find it sounds fundamentally incisive and honest, and of course these properties increase with the addition of LNS1 or VBS1 power supplies.

IN SIGHT



- 1 MMC phono stage
- 2 Network Processor and Precision Upsampler (under HDMI board)
- 3 Ultra-low jitter clock
- 4 Class A headphone amplifier
- 5 DAC with hybrid volume control

minor audiophile indiscretions. Its tunefulness makes such criticism seem like pedantry.

This quality dominates its performance, no matter how demanding the music you try with it. Hit the CD2 with the hard, edgy, raucous wash of noise and distortion that is My Bloody Valentine's *When You Sleep*, and the player sails through it like it was a Bob Hope ditty. It cuts to the emotional chase, so to speak, and suddenly you feel like you're listening to a soft, lilting, romantic ballad. The Bel Canto doesn't pull off this rather audacious trick by lavishing gallons of syrup all over the recording – sweetening and softening its sound – but instead seems to be able to tap right into the emotion of the performance captured on disc. It works with the emotive power of the music, going for the music's melody and rhythm like a laser-guided missile. As such, the CD2 makes everything incredibly easy to listen to, without ever sounding in the least bit boring.

As all reviewers and readers know all too well, promising starters often turn to disappointment, but the Bel Canto never betrays its good nature. I run the gamut of my music discs – from the new electronica of Nu Era to the sinuous, teasing rhythms of Donald Byrd's *Street Lady*, and the wee thing just keeps getting into the swing of things. Quite why becomes more apparent when I try it as a transport only; driving an Astin Trew Concorde DAC 1 digital convertor it is quite superb, again showing those trademark traits of rhythmic assuredness, a big and strong bass and an easy, lilting flow. This

experiment reveals just what the onboard DAC does, which is to give a fine, open and enjoyable sound without getting too forensic; there's more low-level detail and a few percent more dynamics to be gleaned by hooking the Bel Canto up to an expensive digital convertor.

Conclusion

This is a most fine digital disc spinner then, and if you're still committed to this format the Bel Canto CD2 will surely prolong your interest in it. The great thing about it is its ability to distract you from the format's lack of fine detail and scale, by sounding immensely, musically enjoyable. It's also an excellent transport, so will make a top-notch silver disc playing source to feed into a high-res capable digital-to-analogue converter. Very high marks also go to the build, finish and general ergonomics of the unit, and its pricing is surprisingly keen for an imported machine. If all CD players were this good, then digital downloads might still be struggling! ●



Leema's Antilla II (£3,295) is an arresting looking device that is very attractive in its way. Build quality is excellent, and it contains some clever engineering. But so does the Bel Canto, albeit in a slightly different way. Whereas the DAC section of the Antilla is a real tour de force, the Bel Canto's speciality is its transport. If you're looking to upgrade later, and use either machine as a transport, the CD2 would make a lot of sense. In stock form, the Bel Canto has a stronger, more fluid bass whereas the Leema is an altogether more detailed and three dimensional affair. Either one is excellent at the price, and both are worth auditioning.

Mi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Gentle, musical sound; fulsome tonality; excellent transport

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Limited features compared with some rivals

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Charming, quirky, characterful disc spinner that cuts to the musical chase

FEATURES



OVERALL



ANTHONY GALLO
ACOUSTICS

ARCAM

ATLAS Cables

audiolab

AUDIOVECTOR

Bard audio

B&W

Bluesound

CHORD

CHORD

CREAK

CRESTRON

CYRUS

DALI

DENON

epos

exposure

GENELEC

Goldring

GRADO

IMAGE media

Isotek

JVC DINA

kaleidescape

KEF

kudos

LINN

Lumogon

marantz

MICHELL ENGINEERING

MISSION

MUSICAL FIDELITY

NAD

naim

neat

ONKYO

Panasonic

PMC

ProAc

Project

Q

QUAD

REGA

ROTEL

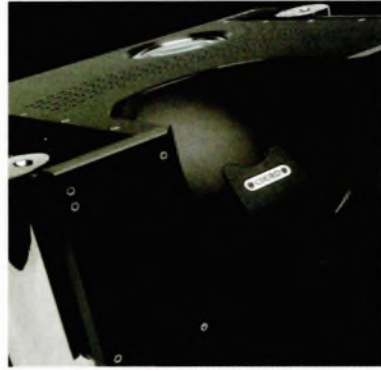
RYMOS

spendor

Trichord Research

Velodyne

Wileyton banesch



Visit our dedicated demonstration rooms at:
3 Bridge Street
Guildford
Surrey
GU1 4RY

Opening Hours:
9am-6pm Mon to Sat (later by appointment)

Tel:
01483 504801 or 01483 304756

Email:
info@pjhifi.co.uk

Web:
www.pjhifi.co.uk

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ The only real hi-fi shop in Guildford

icon Audio

The Unique Stereo 40 MK III KT88m

Our best ever mid range amplifier!



designed by David Shaw

Shown with upgraded Treasure CV181s and Full Music TJ 6SL7, Jensen copper foil in paper and oil capacitors

*Low Distortion Tertiary
wound transformers*

Superbly engineered. Very versatile 40w+40w UL or 20w+20w Triode

Whilst our flagship models rightly get superb praise from reviewers worldwide for their performance and value, we never lose focus on our more affordable products and regularly update them when the opportunity arises. Such is the case with our Stereo 40. Our original brief over 10 years ago to make the best possible EL34/KT88 valve amplifier for a reasonable price still holds true. Our latest Stereo 40 MK IIIm incorporates several improvements. Now with a meter which allows a very simple way to check that the output valves are operating at their optimum value and best performance. This will also tell you when a valve is due for replacement or when it is failing. Something other designs don't do. The Stereo 40 is almost unique in its ability to use a very wide range of valves including 6L6, 5881, EL34, 6CA7, KT66, KT77, 6550, KT88. Now made very easy to change if you like "tube rolling".

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

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

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

We guarantee you will not be disappointed!

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

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

All our amplifiers are hand made using "point to point" soldering without using printed circuit boards. We are convinced this sounds better. It also allows for easy servicing, upgrades and modifications and long life. Remote controlled volume is useful for fine tuning your listening level to match your taste. High quality components are used throughout including an "ALPS" volume control, silver plated PTFE audio cable SGR capacitors audiophile resistors. Power Amplifier operation is possible by selecting a lower "gain" on the rear of the amplifier (this is done without attenuation which would lose quality). Loudspeakers of nominal impedance between 3 ohms and 10 ohms may be used with virtually no reduction in power or quality. A valve rectifier with choke regulated power supply adds a richness to the sound quality that silicon devices alone are unable to do. Tape and other methods of recording and playback are catered for by the "Tape Monitor". Also useful for Home Cinema applications.

In short we have created an amplifier of excellent flexibility and quality which retains the qualities of traditional design and performance.

All our amplifiers are made in kit form in our own factory and hand finished in Leicester UK. No one else makes amplifiers for us. We do not make amplifiers for anyone else.

From £1,599 EL34, £1,699.95 KT88 (inc 20% VAT) Upgradeable. See also Stereo 10 6AS7 only £1399, Stereo 10 2A3 £1999, plus many more products on our website

From £1,599 EL34, £1,699.95 KT88 (inc 20% VAT) Upgradeable. See also Stereo 10 6AS7 only £1399, Stereo 10 2A3 £1999, plus many more products on our website

All our amplifiers are made in kit form in our own factory and hand finished in Leicester UK. No one else makes amplifiers for us. We do not make amplifiers for anyone else.

From £1,599 EL34, £1,699.95 KT88 (inc 20% VAT) Upgradeable. See also Stereo 10 6AS7 only £1399, Stereo 10 2A3 £1999, plus many more products on our website

www.iconaudio.com sales@iconaudio.com

icon Audio

Leicester UK



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.



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.



LEE DUNKLEY

EXPERTISE: EDITOR

Lee first cut his teeth on these pages back in 1999 as a humble staff writer. Now as editor, he sits atop a golden throne and is enjoying getting reacquainted with his music collection.



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.



ANDREW SIMPSON

EXPERTISE: REVIEWER

Andrew's been passionate about hi-fi since he was a wee nipper. When not obsessing over his next upgrade, he can usually be found under the bonnet of his '73 MG Midget.

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

➤ **Vinyl vanquished!** Over the past four years I have gradually built up a Naim system with which I am very pleased. It consists of an Naim Nait XS amplifier, Naim CD5XS CD player together with a Flatcap XS power supply. At the end of last year I was lucky enough to acquire a secondhand Naim DAC. Leads are an Audioquest Hawkeye digital lead and a Tellurium Q Black DIN lead. Speakers are floorstanding Kudos C2 connected with Naim A5 cable and fire down the length of a room 23 feet by 12 feet. The speakers are a recent purchase and give better bass – more body without losing the detail of my former standmounted Dynaudio Contour 1.3 mk 2s. Mains cables are Naim connected to an Isotek EVO3 Polaris mains block. Vinyl is supplied by a Michell GyroDec SE with upgrade mat, Michell clamp and Ortofon 2M Blue cartridge mounted in a Tecnoarm A tonearm. Preamps are a choice between a Cambridge 640P and a Naim, the former being preferred due to the lower noise level.

My problem is that with the DAC and interconnects, CDs now outperform vinyl – which clearly is not how it should be. My thoughts are to change the preamp and then possibly the cartridge. I am reluctant to go down the moving coil road with less than perfect eyesight. A last thought is should I change the loudspeaker cable? I know that Naim equipment can be fussy with mains leads but does this extend to speaker cable?

John Belcher

ES: The phono stage would be the main target of my attention in this instance. The 640P is capable enough, but it can be bettered by some slightly pricier models. As a Nait XS owner, Naim's own Stageline would be a very logical choice as it can be powered from the XS. If you have a little more to spend, Avid's Pellar remains a storming phono stage at the asking price.

AS: Your GyroDec package is a very capable performer and certainly worthy of a more insightful phono stage and cartridge pairing to get the best out of it. While great value, Cambridge Audio's 640P is an

entry-level standalone phono stage and this could be what's holding your vinyl back. If you want something equally discrete in size but with a more sophisticated sound I'd be looking towards models from Graham Slee's range of phono amps (starting with the Gram Amp 2SE at £234 or Trichord Research's Dino, which works

My problem is CD is outperforming my vinyl, which it shouldn't be...

well with Michell decks and will also accept MC as well as MM inputs. Cartridge-wise, there are plenty of MM designs that will challenge your 2M Blue, but unless it's worn I'd focus on the phono stage first and then decide if and where you feel the sound is lacking, before upgrading your cartridge to suit your taste. Set up properly and with the right phono amp and cartridge at either end of its replay chain, your GyroDec will give your Naim digital front end a very serious run for its money!

DP: Agreed. You need to get a decent phono stage (as per ES

and AS' recommendations, although go for an ANT Kora 3T Ltd if you've got the money); also make sure your Gyro is level and the suspension is bouncing correctly, and the arm lead is properly dressed. The cartridge isn't the best ever, either – an Audio-Technica AT-OC9ML will work wonders, although you should work towards a Lyra Delos if you can possibly afford it. Get your supplying dealer to fit the moving coil for you, spending ten minutes on this won't put it out of business! The speaker cables are fine, and you'd best invest your loot on things closer to the source.

➤ **I need everything!** I wrote to you some time ago for advice on replacing my amp which, after several home demos, proved spot on and am now the happy owner of a Creek Destiny 2, which sounds great – so much fuller and more natural than my previous amp (thanks Darren at Elevation Audio). I also purchased your other recommendation, the ANT Kora phono stage – excellent too. Recently though, I have become aware when listening at high volumes ▶

Excellent though it is, a Naim CD5 XS CD player shouldn't beat a properly set-up Michell GyroDec in the sonic stakes!



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

AVO SERVICE PROMISE!



We pride ourselves not only for being most competitive on price. We'll match or beat any genuine online price for an authorised retailer.

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

PRICE
£6,295

SEEN IT CHEAPER? CALL US

MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL300
PIANO BLACK, EBONY OR ROSE

NEW

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

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

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

ARCAM A19
BLACK OR SILVER

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 PHOMENA II
PHONO PREAMP

WIREWORLD INTERCONNECTS

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

TRADE IN YOUR OLD KIT

TRADE-IN DEALS WELCOME. CONTACT US TODAY.
*MUST HAVE ORIGINAL MANUFACTURERS PACKAGING.

WEBSITE: WWW.AUDIOVISUALONLINE.CO.UK

FREE DELIVERY*

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

FORUM: WWW.AVOFORUMS.CO.UK

THREE DEMO ROOMS

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

TWITTER: @AVONLINE

FACEBOOK: AVONLINEUK

that the upper midrange can be very hard and shouty, painfully so. Mostly on vocals and some higher frequency guitar solos. I know the effect isn't source related as I get the same thing with vinyl (Michell Orbe/Rega/1042) and CD (Ayre). I don't think the problem is with the amp but maybe with the B&W CM9 speakers, which is odd because I particularly liked them for their warm, almost dull, sound that kind of suits my taste.

I have read reports of these speakers taking well over 100 hours to become fully run in. Could it be that I am only now hearing what these speakers really should sound like? And that the demo pair I loaned were not run in either? Could be I'm driving them harder now with the more powerful amp, too. Or maybe a mismatch between amp and speakers? I do have a vague memory of reading a review of the CM9s and it being negative about the midrange driver, too. So, the question is, do I look to upgrade the speakers, which is what I'm leaning toward

now? I have been reading good things about the Tannoy DC8T, Spendor D7, Sonus faber Cremona also the KEF R900 and KEF R203/2 sound as if they may fit the bill, or Vienna Acoustics Beethoven Baby Grand or... well, the list just keeps growing.

Whatever I end up with needs to be kind to old sixties recordings as well as bringing out the best in the latest high-def, must have good controlled, but deep bass, good punch and above

The question is: do I really need to upgrade the speakers?

all be a non-fatiguing listen. Detail and imagery would be nice too, but not at the expense of brightness. Don't want much do I? Musical tastes are mainly old/newer rock and some acoustic and vocal – Emmy Lou Harris, Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen, Van Morrison etc. I would value your suggestions and advice once again.

Roger

DP: Hi Roger – this sounds like a classic case of a hi-fi 'clash of personalities'. In your previous system, with your old amplifier (whatever that was, you don't say), your B&W CM9 loudspeakers' innate characteristics didn't come out quite as obviously as now, with your new Creek amp. That's not to say the CM9s are bad speakers, they aren't, it's just when cranked up you do become aware of the particular tonal characteristics of the Kevlar midrange drive unit. While Kevlar has some attractive qualities – it's rigid and strong, giving a crisp and detailed sound – I find it can seem 'forced', particularly across the upper midband and when extended. All loudspeakers have got 'issues' and it's just that one particular characteristic of this speaker is no longer being masked or flattered by the Creek. It's a classic case of poor synergy.

What to do? This is one area where interconnects can help,



Marantz's Ken Ishiwata is handy with a soldering iron, but doesn't do general electrical repair work! But we know a man who can...

Signature service?

Hello, I am a 55 year-old chap who has a permanent disability and have become increasingly housebound. Being an audiophile for many years, I have put together a very nice system, and I now own many other pieces of quality hi-fi. I have owned a Marantz PM94 amplifier for many years now, and have always loved its sound quality, but the amp is now getting long in the tooth, and it needs a thorough service.

The amp is now over 20 years hold, and it's now impossible to get the original parts. So recently I had an interesting thought, I remember Ken Ishiwata upgrading a Marantz CD63 for you, and this turned out to be a great success. So in view of Mr Ishiwata doing this type of original upgrade, I would like to make contact with Mr Ishiwata, to ask him if he would consider upgrading/repairing my Marantz PM94 amplifier. Would it be possible for you to help me with this endeavour?

Anthony

DP: Hello Anthony – and first what good taste you have in integrated amplifiers! The PM94 is indeed a very fine sounding product and I am not surprised it has given you good

service. However, the project you talk about that Ken did for me a good few years back was very much a one-off, and he doesn't do general servicing and upgrades of Marantz or indeed any other brand of hi-fi himself. I think I can speak for him in this instance by pointing out that he doesn't have much in the way of spare time!

The first port of call is, of course, Marantz. Obviously, if you had some obscure amplifier whose maker had long since quit this mortal coil then you'd naturally need a good specialist, but if your manufacturer is still going – and Marantz is very much alive and kicking – then ask them first. However, in this particular case – knowing you might be interested in subtle modifications as well as straightforward repair, there just happens to be an extremely gifted guy who should be able to help.

His name is Arthur Bildzruk of Audio Technology Workshops in London (020 87462600), I can vouch for the excellent quality of his work and he was recommended to me personally by Ken when my CD63 KI DP developed a small fault. Arthur doesn't turn things around especially quickly (he's a very busy man, understandably in demand), but if you're not in too much of a hurry give him a ring and see how you get along. Good luck!



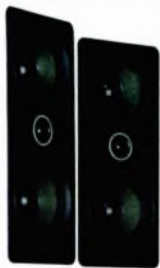
Need a premium priced speaker that's a natural smoothie yet not in the least bit boring? Step forward Spendor's D7!



It looks like just about everyone here at *Hi-Fi Choice* still has a Denon TU-260L tuner giving faithful service

and you might like to try some Mark Grant G2000HD or Tellurium Q Blue interconnects in your system; both take the 'sting' out of the midband and smooth and 'balm' the overall sound, as opposed to harden it up like others can. You might also like to mount your Creek amp and Ayre CD player on Foculpods – little Sorbothane feet – which have a great smoothing effect, as well as making the sound fuller and more musical. If this basic tweakery doesn't get rid of the basic problem, it's time to start auditioning loudspeakers. My choice would be the Spendor D7s, with which I've lived for a good few months and used with the Creek Destiny 2; this is a very even, balanced design that's not in the least shouty, yet still capable of great musicality – much more so than many might expect from this marque.

ES: David's suggestions make perfect sense, but I'd add that Sonus faber's Venere 2.5 should be on the shortlist as well – it balances some classic Sonus faber civility with a bit of drive and excitement.



Q Acoustics' 2050i should be a good match for Asher's Marantz amplifier



➤ Speak easy

I own Rega R3 floorstanding speakers, and would like to upgrade them. My amplifier is a Marantz PM7001 KI Signature. I live overseas and will be visiting France soon. I was thinking about purchasing from the following (my budget is up to £1,000): Focal Chorus 816V (£1,000), Focal Chorus 726V (£680), Triangle Color (£830), Q Acoustics 2050i

I think Denon's TU-800L tuner deserves more recognition

(£480). Given my amplifier, could you please advise on the quality of these loudspeakers?

Asher

ES: All of these speakers are capable performers, but the model that stands out for me on that list is the Triangle Color, which should partner well with the Marantz and offers musicality in spades.

DP: They're all good, Asher. The Focals have the most explicit sound, the Q Acoustics the biggest and warmest, and the Triangles are a happy medium.

➤ Tuner fishing

I see that you have a couple of tuner reviews. If you do another vintage tuner round up have you ever considered the Denon TU-800L from the end of the eighties? I bought one a few months ago and I was very, very surprised at how good it is, especially considering how little I paid for it. I looked up the specs and they are much better than the most commonly written about Denon tuner, the TU-260L/260L MkII. It has superb sound quality, is

very sensitive and has three IF bandwidths, the third of which is superb at digging out weak signals in a crowded band.

I have tried quite a few tuners and in my opinion it is the best combination of RF performance and audio quality I have come across. Given that it can be bought cheap second hand on eBay I think that it deserves more recognition than it gets.

Nick

DP: Thanks for that Nick. Denon is a proud Japanese company with a long history of doing very high quality hi-fi – it is only relatively recently it has dipped its finger into the faster-moving waters of more affordable kit. Indeed, I remember back in the seventies its cheapest amplifier cost about a quarter more than the price of a brand new Linn Sondek! One of the company's strengths has been tuners, and it is very well respected for turning out consistently good, affordable designs. The TU-260L series is excellent at the price, and has a remarkably natural sound, despite costing under £200 when new. So the 800 that you mention sounds a real bargain – I am personally not familiar with it, but will do my best to liberate one from an unappreciative owner sometime soon! Thanks for the tip.

TJ: Eighties Japanese tuners offer amazing value for money because most of them sound pretty good and they very rarely seem to go wrong – the chances of picking out a properly working example is higher with these than it is with any other class of equipment that I can think of. Some say that the later digitally tuned ones have a 'harder' sound than the earlier 'analogue' sort, but there is no specific technical reason for this, just a change in taste perhaps? There's no need to

➤ Happy together

A few months ago you published my comments regarding the Martin Logan Montis with a Devialet amp. I can only now reply as I've finally taken delivery of a new pair of ATC 50 SCM passive speakers (with custom single-wire terminals) and again using Transparent Reference XL speaker cable. I am afraid I was right about the Montis' weakness below 400Hz – the ATCs and Devialet are absolutely stunning with piano and you can't really refer to the ATCs as "relaxed and luxurious"!

Hans Glockner

DP: Good to hear you've got your system singing, Hans! This just underlines the importance of synergy – and the need to try out all the permutations before you buy, if you possibly can. That's why an excellent dealer is so precious. Rock on!



ATC's SCM50 speakers are a perfect match for Hans' Devialet amplifier

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



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

go to the lengths of a Yamaha CT7000 to get good results, if it says FM on the front and Made in Japan on the back the chances are you'll be alright!

ES: I recall that one of these beasts was traded in for a pittance against a new DAB tuner at a dealer I was working in at the time. It didn't get sold on, but went straight into someone's personal system as it was an absolutely superb performer.

AS: I still own a TU-260L, which is occasionally called into service in my 'other' listening room. You're right though, in that the

The Hi-Fi Choice downloadable digital edition is now available

260 models became such doyens of decent hi-fi on a budget that Denon's higher-end tuners often get over looked, even though they offer more features and a better quality sound for little extra outlay on the used market.

➤ All clear

In today's digital age of retina-quality screens on PCs, Macs, iPads, etc most content is now delivered with high-quality digital images and text.

When will Hi-Fi Choice move into the digital age and produce a high-quality digital edition rather than the low-resolution quality that's currently distributed?

Phil

LD: Hello Phil, your letter is rather timely as you'll have read that we've just unveiled our plans to launch the new Hi-Fi Choice downloadable digital subscription – see *Welcome* on page 3 explaining this exciting development. If you are a new or existing digital subscriber you can find out how to get high-quality digital versions to download and keep at: hifichoice.co.uk/digitalaccess

Reader Jeremy Villanueva approves of the new wave of valve amps, but TJ reckons they're causing speakers to be designed rather differently



Letter of the month

PRIZE WINNER

➤ Tubular sells

I agree with Tim Jarman's comments in his article *Level the Playing Field* in issue 374 and think it's true that 'watts' are cheap and can be harnessed for efficient improvements in even the most modest systems. However, I think that his comment that "the prominence of valves in the market... tends to undermine the progress made in the solid-state arena" is a bit out. Those that are into true high fidelity will be drawn to this argument logically. But, the audio hobby is more complex than that and the reality is 'hi-fi' as a term is near meaningless. People make audio and components decisions based on a lot of other things, not just fidelity.

Valves' measurements can show them to be 'inferior' to other amps and yet they have a loyal fan base. This may be due to a lot of reasons ranging from liking the sound to liking the glowing valves, etc. There will always be proponents plugging their angle until the market is ready for a new trend and their approach comes to prominence. I've read your magazine for many years and if the different manufacturers and components coming out that I've read about are anything to go by, this will always be the case.

Jeremy Villanueva

TJ: My point was that low-powered amplifiers whose output impedance is of a significant value and varies with frequency (eg valves) require speakers designed with different parameters optimised than those which are intended for amps that have power to spare, and an output impedance which is sensibly close to zero at all audio frequencies. Sadly, many modern speakers are designed for the former, which prevents the benefits of solid-state technology being fully exploited in the areas of smoothness of response, consistency of impedance, phase integrity and accurate reproduction at the frequency extremes. Such things are often sacrificed in the interests of efficiency (dB/1W etc), I fear!

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



Available exclusively from
Russ Andrews Accessories in the UK.



Speaker Cable of the Year
Awards 2011



April '13

*"removed a large swathe of distortion to
reveal new detail"* Hi-Fi World, April 2013

Kimber Kable 4PR Speaker Cable

2.5m pair pre-cut & stripped **£67**

2.5m pair terminated with bananas **£118**

Discover Kimber Kable

Enjoying your music - that's what it's all about.

Not Hi-Fi, but music. Kimber Kable was born out of an enthusiasm for music. Right from the launch of 4PR speaker cable (see above right) back in 1979, that dedication to the music has been the prime motivator for Kimber. And that's how it has become one of the biggest names in audiophile cables in the world – gathering an enviable collection of international awards along the way.

Russ Andrews insists on exclusively using Kimber. It's the inherent musicality of Kimber Kable that makes it sound unique. No matter what genre you listen to, each cable in the range will get to the heart of your music, truly immersing you in the performance.

In fact, we're so convinced that you'll be won over by the unique ability of Kimber Kable, that all our standard length cables come with a 60 day money back guarantee. Invest in Kimber Kable today and if you don't find that you're enjoying your music more by the end of the 60 days, simply return it and we'll give you your money back.



So what are you waiting for?

Join the thousands of customers who have already discovered the improvements that Kimber can bring to their listening enjoyment. Just imagine what you could be missing...

Order now on **01539 797300** or visit **www.russandrews.com**

Request your **FREE** catalogue



92 pages packed with Kimber cables and accessories designed to give you the best from your Hi-Fi & Home Cinema. Request your copy now.



Like us on Facebook and you could
**win a £50 Russ Andrews
Gift Voucher**

www.facebook.com/russandrews.accessories



Speaker Cable of the Year
Awards 2010



Feb '10

*"The Kimber really stood out with a wonderfully natural
and relaxed performance. It did a fine job of making itself
unobtrusive and letting the music take centre stage."*

Hi-Fi Choice Magazine, Feb 2010

Kimber Kable 4VS Speaker Cable

2.5m pair pre-cut & stripped **£89**

2.5m pair terminated with bananas **£140**



Jan '13



Awards '12



Feb 09

"displays awesome sense of timing..."

The energetic, enthusiastic delivery is highly addictive"

What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision, Feb 09

Kimber Kable 4TC Speaker Cable

2.5m pair pre-cut & stripped **£184**

2.5m pair terminated with bananas **£235**

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



Mail Order Direct • 60 Day Cable Home Trial • Cable Upgrade Scheme • Free Delivery (orders over £100 within UK Mainland)

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.



Apprentice MM
Phono stage



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

Thank you for the music

We all love it, but how do you consume yours? With more ways to listen than ever before, it's never been easier and for **Lee Dunkley** it's a mixture of the old and the new

We may all be spending a lot more time listening to our favourite music, but it's unlikely that we're listening to it on purchased CD, as sales continue to take a battering. According to figures recently published by the BPI/Official Charts Company 19.5million CD albums have been sold during the past three months, which is down some 7.7 percent year on year for artist albums, with a fall of 5.8 percent for compilations. Digital download album sales continue to rise though, and are up 10.2 percent to 7.2million, but they don't quite do enough to bridge the gap of the continuing CD sales downturn.

Encouragingly it is vinyl that is showing the most promising increase in sales, having more than doubled in the last year. I'll admit that it's rather a long time since I purchased any albums on vinyl – although I am actually considering doing exactly that since I have just taken ownership of a turntable – but I do very regularly purchase copies of the same album as both download and CD.

I'm quite sure my music purchasing habits aren't typical of the majority of music buying fans. Is it usual for music fans to buy the same album several times on different formats? Years ago I would buy an album (vinyl or CD) and make a cassette copy for my own personal use. Today my download purchases are for playing on my laptop in

What I enjoy most about Spotify is that it throws up long forgotten music

the office as background listening and for my iPod when on the move. The CD version I buy is for occasionally playing on the main hi-fi system, but mostly to slot into my multi-disc player in the car. For me, my double purchase is about convenience and ownership and the pleasure of continuing to grow a physical music collection. There's something satisfying about holding a CD in your hand and flicking through cover notes rather than a file name or the album artwork on the screen of your music device.

My musical sources are varied and I am also a paid up subscriber to Spotify Premium, and mostly stream tracks for background listening. What I enjoy most about it is that it regularly throws up long-forgotten artists and tracks, and is a superb way to discover new music as well as rediscovering the old stuff. I'm a relative newbie to the service, but already I am a convert. I can honestly say that it is costing me a fortune – not just the monthly fee that I pay out for the Premium subscription, but the increased spending on new and old music as a direct consequence of hearing it first on Spotify.

Some time spent with the Radio app – where it streams successive titles based around your selected track – can often turn into a buying frenzy where I purchase tunes or entire albums of new material, and occasionally older stuff that I've long forgotten and don't already own as part of my music collection.

For me, the Spotify service is a way of discovering music I don't already own. My purchases can be a little nostalgic at times, but mostly it's new music from artists I wouldn't otherwise have heard of. So it's with some surprise that I read that Radiohead's Thom Yorke has removed his solo songs and those of his group, Atoms for Peace, from Spotify and then blasted the streaming service on Twitter. The rant is over the miniscule fees artists are being paid for tracks streamed on Spotify, and the suggestion that consumers are being misled into thinking that their subscription fee is going towards supporting the artists. The royalty fees artists seem to get genuinely do appear to be pretty outrageous I'll grant you, but when Pink Floyd's back catalogue was released on Spotify, *Wish You Were Here* quickly notched up over 1million streams. Surely some of those listens were converted into genuine album sales elsewhere, or maybe it's just me that listens and buys in this way?

Try before you buy

With the growing awareness of poor sound quality from compressed audio formats and a gaining popularity for good quality hi-fi components from younger audiences keen to discover vinyl, while audiophiles seek the studio master quality of hi-resolution formats, couldn't it be argued that Spotify is nothing more than a try-before-you-buy music service? And without material being available to stream, potential purchasers are actually being lost.

Incidentally, Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories* is among the best selling CD and downloads since its release in May, and I own it on both formats. The first single to be released from the album, *Get Lucky*, has become one of the most streamed songs ever on Spotify, which is where I first heard the track and subsequently purchased the album, as a download and on CD! ●



Atoms for Peace's album is no longer on Spotify, so if Lee wants to listen to it he'll have to buy it on CD



LEE DUNKLEY
Hi-Fi Choice editor

FURUTECH
PURE TRANSMISSION



WWW.FURUTECH.COM

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

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

The ADL GT40 ...



a master of all trades.

phono stage • USB DAC • USB ADC • headphone amplifier

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

TONE Audio
Magazine
2010
Product of the Year
Award

PC ADVISOR
RECOMMENDED

AEx
オーディオ技術賞
Audio Excellence Award 2011

Hi-Fi
Choice
RECOMMENDED

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

Sound matters

David Price wonders whether the search for transparency and accuracy that is so often lauded as being vital is actually leading audiophiles up the garden path?

Practically since hi-fi's last ice age, we audiophiles have lived with a strong set of assumptions about what constitutes sonic greatness and what does not. Do you recall Peter Walker from Quad's famous byline about his products offering "the closest approach to the original sound"? Concepts such as this set the scene for defining all that is good (and bad) about reference-quality audio.

I've never really got this completely clear in my own mind. In my formative hi-fi years I not only read the magazines, but spent a good deal of time playing around with electric guitars and noodling on early eighties analogue synthesisers. I also attended all manner of classical concerts (still do when I get the chance), as well as visiting numerous live rock venues.

Despite all this exposure to 'real' music, my ears never completely got to grips with the wide variance of audio quality. The Oxford Apollo sounded vastly different to the Hammersmith Odeon, and an outdoor classical concert wasn't exactly the same as London's Albert Hall. Even playing around with guitars in my bedroom would yield a widely differing sound depending on what guitar amp I was using. I took all these sonic contrasts onboard unquestioningly, only to pick up my monthly hi-fi

Highway To Hell would emerge from the NAD as sweet as cotton candy

studio kit added so much to the audio picture I mused, what harm would it do for the hi-fi to join in as well?

Indeed, all my early systems did precisely this – to great effect. The original Rega Planar 3 turntable was a clean, but generally warm-sounding device and equipped with the Supex-sourced Rega R100 cartridge I used, it sounded sweet enough to turn cyanide into syrup. Back in this pre-CD age, the rock recordings of the time weren't exactly hard and gritty in the first place, and once they'd got past my Rega front end they were certainly anything but. It was a sort of analogue sound-effects processor, making everything it touched sound vast, fat and fulsome – and that was before it got to my amplifier.

The particular device I used for the application of gain was the famous NAD 3020. From this, everything flowed sweetly out – regardless of what went into it in the first place. A dog-eared copy of AC/DC's *Highway To Hell*, complete with end-of-side groove damage and an extensive collection of surface noises, would emerge from

the NAD as smoothly as The Kings Singers on Radio 2. As sweet and fluffy as cotton candy, this amplifier seemed to be the aural equivalent of breakfasting on marshmallows dusted with baking sugar.

Then there were the loudspeakers. I got through a number of models, but all had paper dome tweeters and paper mid/bass units, allied to a largish (for a small speaker) cabinet with what is now a terminally unfashionable wide baffle. Construction quality was generally poor, with cheap and cheerful chipboard in abundance, and not much in the way of cabinet bracing. Despite following every piece of modern loudspeaker design bad practice, however, they all turned in quite a nice noise. Not that they'd have much chance not to, with the warmest source and amplifier imaginable driving them. I remember my early system sound in a happy way – in a 'never mind the quality, feel the width' sense. It was large, exuberant and fun – and just about the furthest away from the original sound, not that I cared one jot!

Blast from the past

This all came back to me when hearing the new Astin Trew Concord DAC 1 recently. It struck me as being rather different to a great deal of what's around these days. I've heard a vast number of digital to analogue convertors over the past year, including some very good ones. And the funny thing is that – despite costing a cool £4,000 – the Astin Trew DAC isn't that much better than the likes of the Audiolab M-DAC in absolute terms, except in one respect – it is unashamedly not neutral. Astin Trew's supremo Michael Osborne described it as producing "the sound we like", which rather struck a chord with me.

Having spent decades wading through press releases telling me how this or that feature makes a product variously "more realistic", "better detailed", "more transparent" and "neutral", I was taken aback to hear a manufacturer talking in such decadent, anarchic terms. Producing a sound you like – whatever next? The Concord DAC is a fine bit of kit, and does indeed make a very 'nice' noise. This was, of course, the sound I liked in my formative hi-fi years – so maybe then I should go back to seeking it now? ●



AC/DC's Highway To Hell: as fluffy as cotton candy according to DP



PRESTIGIOUS
AUDIOPHILE BRAND
CLEARAUDIO
NOW IN STOCK

mcrw
WWW.MCRU.CO.UK



Loving music



SPECIAL LAUNCH OFFER

Concept MM Turntable



with arm and cartridge fitted
+ 50 free MoFi record sleeves
+ Free UK Shipping

£995

VIEW THE FULL RANGE ON OUR
WEBSITE **WWW.MCRU.CO.UK**

FROM MAINS TO MUSIC - Tel: 07908 056978

● @Mainscablesrus

● /mcrultd



Good vibrations

In hi-fi, vibration affects everything whether it has moving parts or not, so wonders **Jason Kennedy**, what difference will Guru's foam rubber feet make to performance?

A few issues ago I reviewed a little speaker from Sweden called the Guru Junior. One of the unusual things about this and other Guru stand mounts is that they are supplied with a set of foam rubber feet that can be stuck on the speaker or stand. I stuck them on the speaker and got the highly entertaining results you can read about in issue 370. I had the speakers back recently for a system review and started out with the Junior Blu-tacked to the stand. The results were not quite the same, however, and I eventually thought I'd better try the foam pucks, these made a significant difference. The soundstage opened up and the dynamics were in another league, it was not a subtle change. According to Guru they are made of a proprietary material that acts like a liquid at certain frequencies.

What they do is decouple the speaker from the stand, not entirely, of course, some frequencies will get through, but many won't. This contrasts dramatically with Blu-tacking or spiking a speaker, where cabinet energy is drained into the stand and then to the floor beneath it. By decoupling the speaker you're doing two things that will change the result, perhaps the most significant is that you are leaving the cabinet to deal with its own resonance to a greater degree than usual, which means you'll probably hear the cabinet more easily. On the other hand, the speaker is not

The interesting thing about the Guru pucks is they are not expensive

Townshend Audio demonstrated this some time ago with its Seismic speaker supports, I tried its Stella stand under Bowers & Wilkins 802s and got a superb result, but those are expensive things, more expensive than quite a lot of loudspeakers. The interesting thing about the Guru pucks is they are not expensive and could probably be put on the market for less than £20 for a set of eight.

I decided to see what the effect would be on another loudspeaker. The model that came most readily to hand was the PMC twenty.22, a larger than average bookshelf design that weighs twice as much as the Junior. So assuming the foam pucks had been specified with the 4kg of the smaller speaker in mind the degree of isolation that could be provided would be significantly reduced. The change when moving from Blu-tack proved surprising and positive. The PMC delivering a lot more of the shape and depth of notes in the soundstage and that image itself getting larger and more three dimensional. The other



Pucker up: The Guru Junior's sound is vastly improved thanks to the foam feet

major change was with output level, which perceptibly increased. I'm not sure whether this is due to a change in balance, but it proved possible to repeat, both with this speaker and another. The twenty.22 is a pretty low-noise speaker, its cabinet contributes little to the overall output by the standards of other speakers at its price so it seems unlikely I was hearing more of the box.

Stuff happens

I asked around about this and eventually came across Jack Dinsdale's (creator of the Cranfield Rock turntable) theory of more stuff, which says when you put anything between a speaker and the floor there are three possible outcomes: you get more vibration out of the speaker, which infers that you have got something for nothing and doesn't tally with the laws of physics; nothing happens, which is the least likely outcome – in audio everything makes a difference; or third, vibration is reduced. It's this last point that seems most likely when output seems to increase and distortion reduces, as the vibrations being reduced are noise. Dinsdale advocate Max Townshend has been working on products that achieve this effect for a long time, the aforementioned Stella stand being one example. Recently he produced a Seismic Isolation Pod that works much like the foam feet, but with the advantage that it comes in different spring strengths to suit different loads.

I have long been a fan of isolating hardware, being a turntable user, the fact is that vibration affects everything whether it has moving parts or not. Why else would Naim put its PCBs on suspension systems and even decouple the mains inlets on electronics? It's a problem that's been identified across the board and yet the spike remains popular on speakers, stands and supports. The Guru feet prove you can get more out of a speaker if it is not 'nailed' or glued to a stand. Vibration transmission is a major barrier to fidelity, if you don't believe me put something compliant under your speakers and hear for yourself ●



JASON KENNEDY
Hi-Fi Choice writer

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

Nottingham Analogue Ace Spikes, ex demo	759	Roksan Naimly HQ & Caspian M2 Integrated, ex demo	Call	AMR CD777 ex demo	2499	Focal Baxenda range, ex demo	Call
Rolsen Sarcus 5, ex demo	349	Esoteric CD3ACD Pre Power, ex demo	799	Wilson Master HQ 3, Caspian M2 CD Player, ex demo	Call	Monitor Audio CX, CX and Platinum ranges ex demo	Call
EAR 834P Deluxe ex demo	1099	NAIM NAC152 and 2 82 Preamps, ex demo	Call	TEAL, Unison CD1000, & CD3000 ex demo	Call	Martin Logan Summit X, ex demo	Call
Clearaudio Master HCM, ex demo	Call	NAIM XS Amps, ex demo	Call	AVI, Unison CD1000, & CD3000 ex demo	Call	John Audio Sarcus, K718 & 96118 ex demo	Call
Diff HiAudi/Phono Stage, ex demo	388	Unison Research Unico Secondo, ex demo	1299	AVI, Unison CD1000, & CD3000 ex demo	Call	Magnephanar MG3, ex demo	2999
Project Cassava and Decou, ex demo	Call	TEAC Destination A1000 and A3000 Integrated, ex demo	Call	Rega Apollo and DAC, ex demo	Call	O Acoustic, various ex demo	Call
Rega HPI, ex demo	179	Audiobac 8200 Integrated, Pre and Power, ex demo	Call	Chord Qute HD and QBD HD, ex demo	Call	Focal Sont 1100 Headphones, ex demo	Call
HiFiSound F110 Phono Stage, ex demo	449	Chord Mezzo 140, CPA3000, SPM1050, ex demo	Call	Esoteric RZ1, R03, ex demo	Call	Sara Headphones, ex demo	Call
Also, huge ex demo cartridge sale	Call	Ortofon TONAR16 AV Amplifier, ex demo	299	Stax, various series, ex demo	Call	Grado Headphones, various ex demo	Call

Analogue	
Boulder MS11MS01 Phono Stage, vgc	1299
Cartrivage Audio 640P, excellent	99
Clearaudio Innovation Compact, good condition	2499
EAR 834P Deluxe, ex demo	1099
Ganard 401, SME 3009, excellent	799
Graaf GM7U Phono, excellent boxed	1199
Graham Steel Elevator, excellent boxed	399
Inspire Muzram Jnr original 1210 Platter, 12" arm	1749
Kozma B back good condition	499
Kuzma Slogi, excellent	449
Linn Ittak LVII, in rare black, excellent	799
Michell Orbe Se, silver, boxed	1199
Mission 774LC tonearm, excellent	149
MoM OEMRB250	119
NAIM Stagneline N, excellent	179
NAIM Stagneline S, excellent	179
Origin Live SLUB modified RB250	149
Ortofon 1A 100, excellent boxed	449
Project Tube Box Phono Stage	Call
Project RPM5, o/w arm, speedbox 2 & Ortofon 2M blue	349
Project RPM4, with arm and cover	229
Rega Planar 3, vgc	199
Rega Pono MM boxed as new	99
SME V, complete, nr mint and less than a year old	1749
SME 3009i Improved, superb boxed example	249
SME S3, superb boxed example	249
SME 202a Series V arm, excellent	3249
SME 3012, rarely	1199
Suzuki MDX300 The Arm, excellent	799
Thomas ID170, fully Autmag, excellent	249
Tom Evans Groove, excellent	899
Unison Dina Dina 4HP5U cable	199
Unison 906 Valve phono stage	999
Voyd 'The Voyd' black as no lid	799
CJ Walker CJ55, Linn Bask LVX, Ortofon MC10	199
Wilson Benesch Act 1, tonearm, nr mint superb	799
Radios/Recorders	
Atcam T51, vgc	799
Cyrus FM7 S, excellent	199
Quad FM3, excellent	199
Quad FM4, excellent	199
Rega Radio R, excellent	199

Amplifiers	
Audiobac 8200 preamp	249
Audio Research LS26 Preamp, excellent boxed	2749
Audio Research Ref 610 Monoblocks, vgc boxed	16999
Audio Research Ref 210T Monoblocks, as new boxed	9749
AVI S2000MI, fair condition	349
Ayre Acoustics AX7e Integrated amplifier, ex boxed	1299
Ayre Acoustics V5ix Power boxed mint	1999
Bearc P31mk2 Power Amplifier, vgc	699
Chord Electronics Mezzo 140, excellent boxed	1999
Cyria Electronics Cyan, excellent boxed	1999
CR Developments Romulus Integrated, boxed vgc	799
CR Developments Kalyos Integrated, boxed vgc	599
Cyrus aCA7.5 Power combo	449
ED Finestra grammo, great anono stage	349
Graaf GM10U Power, boxed	2499
Ico Audio Stereo 20, excellent boxed	249
Karan KAS 180 Power, crated	1499
Krell FPB600 Power Amplifier, vgc	3499
Krell S300U Integrated, excellent	1499
Krell FPB650M Monoblocks	5499
Linn LK100, vgc boxed	229
Lyngdorf SDA1 2175, excellent boxed	799
Mention GS7 Power Amplifier, excellent boxed	1199
Mention MA2275, excellent boxed	3599
Musical Fidelity A370 mk2, excellent	999
Musical Fidelity XA50 Monoblocks, excellent boxed	249
Musical Fidelity XA1 Integrated amplifier	199
Musical Fidelity A308 Integrated, excellent boxed	799
NAIM NAC102, excellent	199
NAIM NAP132, excellent condition	399
NAIM NAP180, excellent boxed	499
NAIM NAP2002, excellent boxed	1599
NAIM NAC82, MC boards fitted, excellent boxed	899
NAIM NAP11.3, excellent boxed	299
NAIM NAP135s pair, good condition boxed REDUCED	1599
Pass Labs X2 Preamp, excellent	899
Pathos Logos, excellent boxed	1699
Pioneer Spec 1 Pre and Spec 4 Power, excellent	999
Primare I21 Integrated, mint boxed	499
Restek Extract Monoblocks, cool 70s look E4 5k new	1499
Quad QC24 Preamp, excellent boxed	649
Quad S19, excellent boxed	999
Quad 344/45 pre-amp combo	499
Unison Research P7U, excellent boxed	1999

Digital	
Acuphase DP800/DC801 Transport/DAC	9499
AMR CD777, ex demo	Call
Arcam CD192, excellent	399
Audiobac 8200CD, excellent boxed	499
Audiobac MDAC, excellent boxed in pack	399
Audiobac 8000CDM Transport and 8000DAC	399
Audio Analogue Crescendo CD, as new	499
AVI S2100MK, fair condition	199
Brylston BCD1, excellent boxed	1249
Chord Inex Streamer	999
Cyrus CD6S, vgc	299
Cyrus CDBX, boxed, excellent	379
Esoteric X133SE, excellent boxed	2499
Esoteric K03, as new boxed	7499
Electrocompaniet EMC LUP, near mint boxed	1899
Goldenote Koala, near mint boxed	799
Leacr U BT, excellent boxed, dup in	999
Linn Majik CD (last version), excellent boxed	799
Linn Kank 3, excellent boxed	499
Loema Stream 3, nr mint boxed	649
Mark Levinson 360 DAC, excellent boxed	1199
Marantz CD6002, excellent	99
Mendian 588, excellent boxed	Call
Mendian G182, excellent boxed in black	999
Moon CD1, excellent boxed, too tall player	749
Musical Fidelity Xray CD player, vgc	399
NAD M55 Masters SACD Player, vgc boxed	499
NAIM CD5, excellent boxed remote	449
NAIM CD5XS, excellent boxed	1199
NAIM CD5x2, excellent boxed remote	549
Project Streambox DS, ex demo	Call
Rega Planet, as new boxed	229
Rega Apollo R, as new boxed	399
Rega DAC, as new boxed	379
Roksan Caspian M2, excellent boxed	Call
Unison Research Unico CDE, excellent boxed	999
Yamaha CD605U vintage classic boxed	299
AV/Accessories/Cables	
Chord Cables various ex demo	Call
Naim Flatcap original, excellent REDUCED	179
Naim HiCap 'Olive', recently serviced	399
Isotek Aquarius ex demo	Call

Loudspeakers	
B&W CM1, excellent boxed	299
B&W 805 Signature, tiger eye finish	1499
Castle Inversion Subwoofer, near mint boxed	349
Castle Inversion 3, vgc	249
Dynaudio Contour 1 8mk2, excellent boxed	849
Dynaudio Aolence 40, excellent boxed	199
Focal Elektra range, ex demo	Call
Focal 806V, excellent boxed	399
Kudos C2, ex-demo boxed	999
Kudos C10, excellent boxed	Call
Martin Logan Aerials 1, excellent boxed	999
Martin Logan Cinema centre speaker	399
Martin Logan Quest, excellent, BIG bargain!	999
Magneplanar MG1.6, superb	1999
Meridian M1 Active speakers, boxed	1199
Mission M185 Subwoofer, excellent	199
Monitor Audio GR60, vgc boxed	799
Monitor Audio PL300, mint crated	1999
Monitor Audio RX12, gloss black, ex demo	3999
Monitor Audio RX8, Gloss black, boxed	749
Monitor Audio Radius 90HD Cinema Pack, new sealed	899
Monitor Audio B2, excellent boxed	169
Opera Seconda, excellent boxed	799
Quad ESL97s, good working order boxed	499
RE Storm vgc	149
Revel Ultima Studio vgc	Call
Revel Ultima Centre Channel	Call
Revel Ultima Subwoofer with matching amp	Call
Ruark Prologue One, yew finish, excellent boxed	299
Sonus Faber Cremona M, excellent maple	Call
Sonus Faber Cremona A, excellent maple	Call
Sonor BC1, excellent	399
Tmini CS7.2, vgc, just refurbished	2999
Triangle Comelet ES, excellent	249
Usner Be10DMD, ex demo boxed superb	8499
Usner S520 in birch, excellent boxed	279
Usner X616 centre speaker, excellent	399
Special System Deals	
Audio Analogue Crescendo Amp & CD, ex demo	799
Esoteric RZ1 System - sealed box	2499
NAIM Unilite and Usner 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

Music is my first love...

It always strikes me as being extraordinary, the sort of music that people expect me to listen to, especially when I am reviewing hi-fi equipment says **Malcolm Steward**

Years ago, back in the day of the Penta Hi-Fi Show, KEF invited me to meet with the company's Russian distributor and retailers to play a selection of my music to them and explain its benefits as review material. This I duly agreed to do and, with the system set to the sort of SPL that I used regularly, I began by playing Rage Against The Machine's *Bullet In The Head*.

"Why do you listen to such noise?" asked one of the audience. I admonished him – and not entirely because I was hopelessly enamoured with Tom Morello's dextrous manipulation of tone and timbre on his famous "Arm the Homeless" guitar: "I think you are being overly judgmental by discriminating between what you think of as music and what you consider noise. Surely one man's noise can be another man's music? Where, for example, do you place the work of modernist classical composer Edgard Varese? Are works such as *Ameriques* and *Nocturnal* to be regarded as noise merely because they break with convention and do not have any recognisable melody?" "At least he uses proper acoustic instruments!" came the reply. "So, if one writes for 32 percussion instruments including microtonal horns and whips, that makes it okay to call it 'proper' music, does it?" I enquired, "But plug in an amplified guitar and suddenly it shifts from being music to noise?"

Any piece of electronics can make Diana Krall sound polished

There was no reply forthcoming, which was unfortunate because one can have such wonderful fights and arguments about Varese and the relevance of music with no melody.

I find it peculiar that the majority of hi-fi demonstrators always select such insipid music to show off their wares. For certain, any no-hope equipment on the planet should handle Diana Krall's *S Wonderful* because it is a fundamentally lame song devoid of any passion or excitement. There are no dynamics to speak of and her voice would hardly stretch the capabilities of a transistor radio. And do not get me started on her sub-Liberace piano tinkling. Nor her bass player and drummer who impart rhythm with all the enthusiasm of men going to have vasectomies without any anaesthesia. The sounds might be 'nice', but they are hardly inspiring, unless you are thrilled by the plink of Fisher-Price pianos.

Compare this horror to my current favourite rip *Live: Take No Prisoners*, the 1978 Lou Reed double album from his gigs at New York's Bottom Line. From his introductory dialogue with the audience it is clear that he is in no mood

to suffer fools – and the audience appears to be full of them: Introducing *Sweet Jane* he quotes Yeats and says: "The best lack all conviction and the worst are filled with passion and intensity. Now you figure out where I am." Four or five bars into the song and one is already in no mistake about Reed or his band – in particular his drummer, Michael Suchorsky whose playing defines chiaroscuro and injects so much tension into what could otherwise be a rather pedestrian song.

Sweet Jane is not a song to sit down and relax to, nor is it a showcase to relish for its sound – unless you appreciate tastefully distorted guitar – but listening to the groove of Suchorsky's drumming tells me within a couple of bars whether the hi-fi system is working as it should. Similarly the tone of Reed's voice as he puts down his audience is also a strong indicator of whether the system can successfully convey nuance and emotion.

Welcome to the pleasuredome

And that is just what I want to hear from a system. Any piece of electronics can make Diana Krall's piano sound polished and silky smooth: there is nothing especially meritorious in that. The skill lies in being able to tell the listener whether the drummer is enjoying the gig and involved in the song he's playing. Or is he just going through the motions so he can collect his cheque at the end of the night?

That tends to be the way I judge live music. I am not unduly concerned with hearing reflections off the walls of the venue so much as I am interested in whether the singer is enjoying performing and has anything of merit to convey to the audience. And are the drummer and bass guitarist working together successfully to generate an inspiring groove for the rest of the band to lock into?

There's no need for soul-less 'audiophile' albums to assess hi-fi: believe me, the Velvets or Varese will tell you all you ever need to know about your hi-fi. Similarly, jazz and rock music can tell you more than any classical disc ever will, so don't fall for the "classical is the only 'pure' music to judge hi-fi" diatribe: it can often be as contrived and artificial as the worst multi-tracked pop recordings ●



It's safe to say Malcolm won't be rushing out to buy Diana Krall anytime soon



MALCOLM STEWARD
Hi-Fi Choice writer

Minitest

IN-EAR HEADPHONES £25-£99

Looking for some in-ear headphones that won't break the bank? **Neville Roberts** does the hard work so you don't have to

JAYS t-JAYS Three

PRICE: £79 CONTACT: 020 83972222 WEBSITE: jays.se

WHILE THERE'S NO inline microphone or remote, the t-JAYS are not light on accessories. Apart from the earphones, there are five pairs of different-sized silicone earpieces, a cable extender, an airline adapter, a stereo splitter and a cute travel case.

The 10mm dynamic driver packs a wallop on deep bass tracks. As the earpiece design incorporates bass ports, the drivers are able to deliver some serious punch and reasonable definition and detail at low frequencies. Sound is crisp, with a nice amount of focus on the high-mids, allowing a nice treble edge with superb clarity and realism with no discernible harshness. These in-ears produce the most believable and realistic sound of the four tested.

Vocals are delivered in a believable way and the overall sound is similar in many respects to a pair of over-ear headphones. Imaging is precise and extended to the extremes of the left and right positions. Listening to some baroque music is very enjoyable with melodic strings and crisp detail.

The Threes are great performers and seem to be at home with a wide variety of music. They perform well above their price point and are a very worthwhile upgrade.



VERDICT

A most believable and realistic sound with super clarity and crisp top end and they also pack a punch on deep bass tracks



Audio-Technica ATH-CKS55

PRICE: £49 CONTACT: 01235 511166 WEBSITE: henleydesigns.co.uk



THE FLEXIBLE ELASTOMER sheathed 1.2m cord and L-type plug makes these earphones ideal for use with a wide range of portable devices. They are available in a choice of black, white and black & red and come with a pouch and four different sizes of silicone earpieces.

A particular feature of these headphones is the inclusion of a sub-chamber and the fitting of an internal 'acoustic resistor', which is intended to allow a good bass reproduction that is both extended and well controlled. Despite the presence of this sub-chamber, the headphones are very comfortable.

I really like the ATH-CKS55s. The top end is lovely – really clear and open without being over-analytical. There is surprisingly good imaging as well, with instruments spread out evenly without any tendency to sound

constrained between your ears. The midrange is warm and articulate and vocals are very clear indeed. Overall, the sweet treble and finessed midrange deliver all the emotion and detail you could hope for within this price range.

The bass is extended and generally well controlled. However, its performance isn't 'up there' with over-ear headphones, as you would expect. Some of the lower registers are not as tight as they could be, but considering that these are in-ear devices, the bass is enjoyable and gives a well balanced sound.

VERDICT

An open and airy top end and an articulate midrange with a surprisingly extended bass for in-ear headphones





There's no doubt that over-ear headphones are for serious hi-fi listening, but there is often a time and a place for smaller, in-ear headphones. The models that come supplied with an iPhone, MP3 player or smartphone, for example, are generally poor quality and replacement models can make a big improvement to sound quality. If you are playing files that have been downloaded in a high-quality format or CDs that have been ripped, you will

notice a difference in richer bass and more detailed sound overall simply by upgrading the supplied earphones. This *Minitest* looks at four different models that all cost below £100 to demonstrate that improvements can be had without breaking the bank. These headphones are tested with a Sony Walkman Digital Media Player and a Samsung Galaxy S3 Android smartphone using a variety of higher-quality audio formats.

Crystal Acoustics

I-40

PRICE: £25 CONTACT: 020 81337066 WEBSITE: crystalaudiovideo.com

THE I-40S COME packed with no less than five different sizes of soft silicon ear tips and a sturdy zip-up portable case for storage.

They feature a high-quality aluminium construction, a hands-free microphone and a triple-button remote control. These headphones are fitted with an elegant and sturdy 1.2m flat cable to avoid kinks and annoying tangles that often plague earphone cables. More often than not, I find that the first thing you have to do when taking a set of earphones out of your pocket is to spend some time carefully untangling them before use! This flat cable works really well and all you need to do is give it a simple shake and the cable is untangled and ready for use.

The eartips include some with double and triple-stage isolation, which does help to reduce interference from extraneous external

sounds. The choice of size will affect the bass response in particular, as well as comfort, so a little trial and error testing will be required.

In use, the 7mm drivers produce an open and detailed sound that is not harsh or unpleasant. As with most in-ear headphones, the bass is not very extended, but is nevertheless enjoyable. I find that the centre button on the remote can be used to pause and play the music on my Android smartphone, which is a nice touch! Additionally, the other two buttons will control the volume remotely on iPhones, so you can leave your player safely in your pocket.

VERDICT

These earphones produce a clear and open sound that is not overly strident or harsh. Great value in-ear headphones



HiFiMAN

RE-400

PRICE: £99 CONTACT: 07908 056978 WEBSITE: mains-cables-r-us.co.uk

THE RE-400S HAVE an aluminium housing, and employ a new 8.5mm titanium-coated diaphragm driver fitted with neodymium magnets. Oxygen-free copper is used in the cable conductors.

They are supplied with four different sizes of earpiece and a cable organiser, but no case. The sound-tube is covered with a protective fabric-filter, which is rather unusual as typically a metal or a plastic piece is used for this purpose. There are also five sets of replacement self-adhesive filters supplied.

The RE-400s have an understated, clean design, and their small, machined-aluminium earpieces are a big part of the reason that they are so comfortable. The 1.25m long, oxygen-free copper cable is cloth covered up to the point where it divides into separate left and right plastic-covered

cables. The wires can either hang straight down or loop back over your ears. At the other end, the cord is terminated in an L-shaped plug.

The sound is much extended at the top end, but strings can sound a little harsh to my ears. The midrange is full and open and vocals are well proportioned and balanced. The bass is somewhat recessed and careful positioning in the ears is required to get a good overall balance.

The RE-400s will appeal to people who are looking for a more analytical and crisp performance but they fall short of the best of the bunch here.

VERDICT

These in-ear headphones will appeal to those who are looking for a really analytical and crisp reproduction



van den Hul®

Flamingo Audio Dealer Network

Pamper
your ears

ADAMS & JARRETT, East Sussex, TN37 6NH
Tel:0142 443 2398, www.adamsandjarrett.com

ANALOGUE SEDUCTION, Cambridgeshire, PE 1TF
Tel:0173 335 0878, www.analogueseduction.net

AUDIO REPUBLIC LTD, West Yorkshire, LS6 4BA
Tel:0113 217 7294, www.audio-republic.co.uk

BD AUDIO LTD, Worcestershire, WR14 1UG
Tel:0168 456 0853, www.bd-audio.co.uk

CHESHIRE AUDIO, Cheshire, CW1 5AL
Tel:0127 058 0734, www.cheshireaudio.co.uk

CRAIG HI-FI LTD, Herts., AL9 7NT
Tel:0170 726 7188, www.spatialonline.co.uk

CUSTOM CABLE SERVICE, Surrey, KT3 4BY
Tel:0208 942 9124, www.custom-cable.co.uk

DIVINE AUDIO LTD, Northamptonshire, NN14 2SU
Tel: 0153 676 2211, www.divineaudio.co.uk

EMPORIUM HI-FI, Wales, SA14 9NF
Tel:0155 475 0262, www.emporiumhifi.com

ERIC WILEY, West Yorkshire, WF10 5BS
Tel:0197 755 6774, www.ericwiley.co.uk

FUTURESHOP LTD, Herts., WD6 2BW
Tel:020 8905 1555, www.futureshop.co.uk

HIFI SOUND LTD, Stockton on Tees, TS18 1BZ
Tel:0845 601 9390, www.hifisound.co.uk

HIFI CABLES, West Sussex, BN14 8PQ
Tel:0190 321 0212, www.hificables.co.uk

HI-FI GUY, East Sussex, TN35 4HU
Tel:07734436180, www.hifiguy.co.uk

HUDDERSFIELD HI-FI, West Yorkshire, HD1 2PT
Tel:0148 442 4000, www.audlovation.co.uk

INSPIRE HI-FI, Derbyshire, S43 3QE
Tel:0124 647 2222, www.inspirhifi.co.uk

MOTH GROUP, Bedfordshire, MK45 3HT
Tel:01234 741152, www.britishaudio.co.uk

PAUL GREEN HI-FI LTD, Bath, BA1 3JN
Tel:0122 531 6197, www.paulgreenhifi.co.uk

PEAK HI FI, Sheffield, S36 7JY
Tel:0122 676 1832, www.peakhifi.co.uk

PROGRESSIVE AUDIO LTD, Kent, ME8 8QY
Tel:01634 389004, www.progressiveaudio.co.uk

RAYLEIGH HI-FI, Essex, SS6 7EA
Tel:01268 779762, www.rayleighhifi.com

SENSO SYSTEMS, Cornwall, TR1 2LS
Tel:0187 227 3215, www.senso-systems.co.uk

SOUND CINERGY, West Midlands, WS9 8NL
Tel:0192 245 7926, www.soundcinergy.co.uk

TAVISTOCK AUDIO, Devon, PL19 0DE
Tel:0182 261 8940, www.tavistockaudio.co.uk

THE MUSIC ROOM OF GLASGOW LTD, Glasgow, G3 6AX
Tel:0141 333 9700, www.music-room.com

ZOUCH AUDIO LTD, Leicestershire, LE65 1BQ
Tel:01530 414128, www.zouchaudio.co.uk

FLAMINGO
audio
moving sounds

Official van den Hul UK distributor

Unit 15 Kenyon Forge, Kenyon Street
Birmingham B18 6AR
phone: 0121 212 9288
email: info@flamingoaudio.co.uk
web: www.flamingoaudio.co.uk



Van den Hul The Wave/ CS-122 Hybrid £310

From Holland comes this long-established cable specialist, with an impressive pairing



DETAILS

PRODUCT

Cable loom

ORIGIN

Netherlands

TYPE

Interconnect/
speaker cable

FEATURES

- Interconnect: silver-plated copper with Hulliflex jacket
- Speaker cable: silver-plated copper and carbon hybrid speaker cable with Hulliflex jacket
- Prices: interconnect £130/1m, speaker cable £20 per metre untermated

DISTRIBUTOR

Flamingo Audio

TELEPHONE

07833 955014

WEBSITE

vanden Hul.com

From a company that has made itself a great name for the fine moving coil cartridges it makes, comes a vast range of interconnects and speaker cables. The Wave is towards the more affordable end of this, and is another silver-plated, copper cable featuring a "massive" 0.9mm central conductor of oxygen-free copper. A specially foamed dielectric insulation material is said to minimise high frequency signal attenuation. The outer and inner layer are made of the same material as the central conductor, which is described as a "triple shield" that is said to aid interference suppression. As with all van den Hul cables, it is covered in the company's own 'Hulliflex' cable jacket, which is claimed to be both environmentally friendly and contain no halogens.

The CS-122 Hybrid is an updated version of one of vdH's classic speaker cables, and sports two conductors made of 147 strands of 0.16mm diameter, high-purity, matched-crystal oxygen-free copper with a very dense pure-silver coating, alongside a carbon saturated layer that is said to

improve the sound. The cable jacket is also made of Hulliflex and is described as "a very attractive matt cream colour". During the debrief one of our panelists counters: "it looks like something you see in a hospital!"

Sound quality

From the opening bars of the Beethoven piece, it is obvious that what we are dealing with here is special. For the first time in the test, the sound hangs back from the speakers and dissolves into the room, rather than appearing to come from two points in space – which is what happens to a greater or lesser extent with the other looms. Indeed, the transparency of these cables is superb, but it isn't transparency at the expense of musicality, as the vdH loom also has a wonderfully mellifluous quality to it that sees the music ebbing and flowing in a seductive and arresting manner.

The Paul Simon track is proof positive of the way these cables are able to let the singer's real intentions flood out – every vocal inflection is carried beautifully, giving a mesmeric quality to the music. Sure, all the detail is there, but the bigger picture isn't lost in the process of rendering it.

The first track is startlingly different to most of the other cable looms, in the way the decay on the voice seems to hang on, rather than 'falling off a cliff' with most of the others. The vocals are expressive and dynamic, and this is set over a backing that suddenly takes on an urgent, snappy quality to it – when previously the musicians seem to just be going through the motions. It is amazing how the same beats sound so different, as if they've been set free.

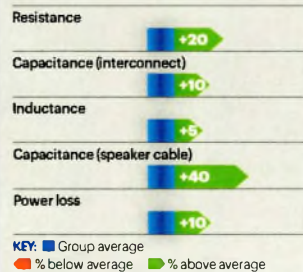
Soundstage width isn't as good as some here though; this is where the

ON TEST

In common with the Atlas Asymmetric interconnect, vdH's The Wave is also a 75ohm coaxial type and so lends itself to both 'analogue' and 'digital' (S/PDIF) duties. This common geometry is reflected in the similarly low inductance and capacitance of the two interconnects although vdH's greater conductor area lends it a very slightly lower 45mohm/m loop resistance.

vdH's partnering CS-122 speaker cable, now in 'Hybrid' guise with mixed metal and carbon conductors is a very different beast from the original CS-122 that I tested for *Hi-Fi Choice* over 21 years ago. The spaced, figure-of-eight geometry means the 10µm/m series inductance is unchanged, but the improved dielectric means capacitance is half what it was at just 17pF/m. Resistance has also been cut by a factor of nearly 3x at 11.4mohm/m, further improving the achievable amp/speaker damping factor. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



vdH falls slightly short; it isn't constrained or shut in, just not quite as expansive as – say – the Tellurium Q. That said, depth perspective is brilliant, "The first cable I'm hearing with front-to-back dimensionality," says one panelist. Tonally it is pretty even – maybe just a touch on the dark and velvety side, but certainly not as sepia-tinged as the Tellurium Q.

The overall effect is of an absolutely stellar cable combination and one that's an essential audition for anyone that's in the market for such a thing. The great thing is that it's not really all that characterful, it's just very unobtrusive and lets the music's true flavour come flooding out. ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Very musical, engaging sound; open and detailed

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Slightly constrained stage width

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Superb value cable loom, one that's an essential audition

FEATURES



OVERALL



In the Naim of love

Want a charismatic, cult amplifier designed back in the dark days of the Cold War? Naim's original Nait is just that, says **David Price**

Do you remember the eighties? They were certainly rather turbulent times, and a little extreme. In a way, the products that came from that decade reflect this, and the original Naim Nait is a prime example. Small, quirkily styled and unusually engineered, you'd never call it mainstream. Yet the concept appealed to purist audiophiles who wanted to spend a fair whack (£253 in 1983) on a small box that looked about as cool as a microcomputer power supply unit, but sounded really special in its own unique way.

"We wanted, with Linn, to offer an entry-level system to set the reference and help expose source-first expenditure philosophy within system hierarchy", Naim Audio explained to *Hi-Fi Choice*.

Design-wise, the original Nait was an essay in studied minimalism. It was a Julian Vereker design, along with the Naim production team, and basically took stock bits used in the

company's pricier products, but substituted a low-cost volume and balance pot and a special toroidal transformer. Unintentionally perhaps, it turned into a powerful anti-fashion statement. Lest we forget, practically every Japanese amplifier of the day was huge and festooned with power meters, knobs and switches, while even the Brit competition wasn't exactly stripped to the bone. The Nait's closest price rival was the A&R Cambridge (Arcam) A60, and this was a full-length affair that came in a wooden sleeve and had tone controls and even a treble filter at one stage!

Against the grain

By contrast, the Naim didn't have one single superfluity – indeed its balance control was a crude trim pot that worked on just one channel and gave 3dB of attenuation. It appeared as a plastic stalk jutting out of the front fascia panel, but Vereker didn't seem to mind – it was his idea after all! Another stand-out feature was its

paltry power output. At a time when manufacturers were falling over themselves to deliver products that churned out more watts per channel, here was something that produced less! Naim never published power output figures for the Nait, but it was close to 6W RMS per side. Back then, that was tantamount to sticking your underpants on your head, pencils in your nose and shouting, "wibble".

Sonically, the Nait sounded very distinct, in a good and a bad way. Rather like a single-ended tube amplifier, they were very upfront, direct and lucid. Music seemed to flood forth out of your system, almost as if you were right in front of the musicians' monitor FA on stage. What you got was a slightly narrow bandwidth sound that seemed to focus all of its attention into the midband, which was riveting to listen to. Whatever you put on, the wee Naim seemed to get under the skin of the recording and into the musicians' very souls. In this respect, it was



Unlike hi-fi in the eighties, the Nait was small and simple

sublime, and even today the Salisbury company is proud of it.

In some other senses it was altogether less amazing. Admittedly, it did have excellent load-driving ability for a six watter (it could drive relatively inefficient Linn Kans – albeit in smallish rooms – after all), but this still wasn't – and isn't – any substitute for the 60W-plus you get from a

Naim's original Nait amplifier is still peerless in its own crazy way

modern entry-level amplifier. A consequence of this was that bass power of the original Nait was pretty middling. Although always a tuneful and supple-sounding design, it was definitely easier to hear what the bass guitar player was playing towards the top of the instrument's range. And as for low notes on church organs, they came over with the power and impact of a feather striking lambswool. Once again, the Nait was great within its comfort zone, but this was a lot narrower than many other designs of the day – and even more so now.

Not so smooth

There were other downsides, too. Even when not challenged with insensitive loudspeakers or driving basslines, the baby Naim could never be described as 'an old smoothie'. Forget sumptuous and silky, the Nait was hard work with some less forgiving recordings, having a distinctly bright upper midband. This gave it an attractive, upfront directness, but also made early Compact Disc players nigh on unbearable, and wasn't terribly kind with most turntables either. Its supporters said the silky old Linn Sondek turntable – preferably with an Ittok tonearm and Supex SD900 moving coil was a blessing for the Nait, making it a lot easier to listen to. But why would you partner an £800 source with an amplifier costing less than one third of this, replied its critics – and they had a point!

Factor in a rather two-dimensional soundstage and a slightly coarse treble to go with that weak bass and shiny midband, and it was clear the Nait had a lot of 'issues', especially for such an expensive integrated amplifier. Yet just when you began to think it was all a big con, suddenly the sound of the original Nait would

seduce. It was fast, fluid and mightily dynamic for something with such little on-paper power, and had a wonderful talent for presenting music in an important, dramatic way. The baby Naim was truly a funky, feisty affair.

For all its strangeness, the Nait was very well built. The aluminium casework was shared by Naim preamplifiers, which was no bad thing, and the chassis was solid. The single main circuitboard was a quality item, and better laid out than many amplifiers of its day – with much of it taken up by a large custom-made 100VA toroidal power transformer. Also present was an excellent moving magnet phono stage, which was the only part of the preamplifier section to sport RCA phono sockets. It wasn't until fairly recently that the Salisbury company got relaxed about RCAs, and certainly when the early Nait was made they were *non grata*. The remaining tuner line inputs and tape loop were via DIN sockets only; even the loudspeaker outputs were a little different in their day, being banana sockets as opposed to binding posts.

Disappointingly but somewhat inevitably perhaps, the volume control was plastic – straight out of the Tandy catalogue, or so it felt. And you'd be using it all the time, whether it was to turn the unit down to minimise the switch-on thump or to try to coax it round to '11' in a bid to get some more power out! One thing you'd want to be sure of when wringing the bejesus out of the Naim is that you're using the right speaker cables – the amp is very sensitive to these and for best results use Naim NAC 05, or NAC 04 (its cheaper, older and inferior predecessor) if you want to party like it's 1984!

Naim replaced the first Nait at the end of the eighties, and sure enough



Naim's Julian Vereker in a promotional 1986 diary

BUYING SECONDHAND

The great thing about the Naim Nait – and indeed all Naim products – is that the manufacturer still services them. If yours develops a fault, begins to sound a touch lacklustre or just needs a general cosmetic clean up, you can send it back to Salisbury for refurbishment at a surprisingly affordable price. This is one of the reasons why the market for used Naim gear is so high – the excellent aftercare. When buying a used Nait, go for a low owner (preferably one), boxed (not essential, but it tends to indicate the sort of life it's had) example. Ideally it should be excellent cosmetically, too – underlining that it hasn't ended up under umpteen other hi-fi boxes.

The vintage isn't that important – small revisions to the mainboard were made throughout its production life, and the colour of the power LED was changed from red to green. "We just tried to align LED colours for amps and preamps", Naim told us – which flies in the face of the myths of the different coloured LED versions having dramatically different sound quality! Finding out the serial number is helpful too, as a record is kept at the factory of any servicing; you can then see if your prospective unit has been refurbished in any way. Remember that sellers may justifiably be reticent to reveal serial numbers to prospective purchasers, given the strange sorts of things going on in the secondhand market.

the new one had a good deal more power, a proper balance control and the (then) new illuminated Naim logo. It addressed all the weaknesses of the original, and Naim told me it was an obvious sonic improvement – as indeed were all the subsequent Nait (3, 5, 5i, etc) that followed. Still, I do know some Nait aficionados who swear the original was the best – it certainly was the most focused and seemed to distill down 'the Naim sound' better than any that followed, which were far better all-round 'real-world' designs.

The stuff of legend

Here's one of hi-fi's legendary designs, of which there were a lot in the eighties. It was a crazy decade, and the fashions, music and products of the time reflect this. Few – if any – integrated amplifiers have even been as extreme, offering a wonderfully captivating and musical sound, yet one that's so riddled with compromises. If you like upbeat rock music, don't care too much for the delicate tonality of the instruments and just want to get into the groove, then Naim's original Nait integrated amplifier is still pretty much peerless in its own crazy way ●

Here's to **Blue**

47 Laboratory goes about design in rather a different way to the norm, but as **Ed Selley** discovers, the results can be quite spectacular

4 7 Laboratory's mission statement is "Only the simplest can accommodate the most complex" and everything this small Japanese company builds is built around this philosophy. It insists that nothing it builds is wilfully odd, but it's a stretch to describe anything it makes as normal. The range includes components encased in traditional 'Shigaraki' ceramic, a CD transport

that works on a principle completely different to any other optical drive and an amplifier rather splendidly called a Power Dumpty. Pictures of 47 Laboratory systems can leave the uninitiated wondering if they are looking at a hi-fi system or a surrealist art installation. In truth, the systems could happily be regarded as both.

This system is made from the latest range of components from 47 Lab, the Midnight Blue Series. This

five-strong range is an effort to take the distinctive engineering philosophies of the brand and put them into casework that looks a little more conventional – they are at least made of metal – if not exactly run of the mill. They also bring additional functionality that hasn't previously been seen on 47 Laboratory equipment. As well as the expected CD player, preamp and power amp (and an integrated amp



COMPONENTS

**1 MODEL 4730
TUNER £1,200**

The original member of the 47 Lab range, the 4730 is a fully manual FM tuner with a large aircraft-type tuning dial on the front panel tuned by small knob. No digital bands here – just a simple analogue tuner in true 47 Laboratory style.

**2 MODEL 4735 CD
PLAYER £2,599**

The 4735 can be used as a standalone CD player and is equipped with analogue outputs for this purpose, but in this system feeds the DAC input of the 4733 via the coaxial output. The lid only partially covers the CD during playback.

**3 MODEL 4734 POWER
AMP £1,500**

For those not in possession of speakers that sensitive, the 4734 offers a usefully robust 60 watts from its minimalist amplifier circuit incorporating extremely short signal paths throughout. It is the same width as the CD player.

**4 MODEL 4733
PREAMP/DAC £1,500**

The 4733 is an intriguingly flexible take on a preamp with a pair of line inputs supplanted by a coaxial digital and a USB input. The 4733 also has enough power in its own right to be used an amplifier with ultra high sensitivity speakers.

**5 MODEL 4721LENS II
SPEAKERS £2,199**

This diminutive single driver standmount speaker is designed to work with a range of 47 Laboratory components, but is an excellent match for the Midnight Blue range and continues the theme of absolute simplicity.

**The way this little
quartet interacts
is greater than the
sum of its parts**





not featured in this system), the range includes the Model 4730 FM tuner – a 47 Laboratory first – and the preamp features a USB input, which is also something not previously seen on the company's offerings.

Role play

This being 47 Laboratory (what happened to the preceding 46 Laboratories has never been revealed), the breakdown of roles for these little boxes isn't exactly what you might expect them to be. The Model 4735 CD Player is equipped with its own DAC and has an analogue output, but 47 Labs also describes the player as a transport and it comes supplied with a coaxial digital cable as the preferred method of connecting it to the Model 4733 preamp. This is because the preamp is fitted with its own DAC – which in 47 Laboratory tradition is not fitted with any form of upsampling or filtering. The eccentricity of the Model 4733 doesn't end there. It is equipped with preouts as you might expect, but is also capable of delivering a mighty 2W of output power to speakers via a line of spring clip connections.

Rather more power – 60W of it – is available from the Model 4737 power amplifier, which is built in the 47 Laboratory tradition of short signal paths and minimalist circuitry. This power is then offered up to the last piece of the puzzle and a final flourish

or eccentricity in the form of the Lens II mini monitor speakers. These small standmounts make use of a single 4in driver aided by a large front port. Single driver speakers trade off loss of performance at frequency extremes to forgo having a crossover and this simplicity helps keep the frequencies in the middle as cohesive as possible – or at least that is the idea.

The resulting system is an intriguing balance of the normal and the peculiar. The controls are logical enough and should be easy to understand for all concerned, but to

There is an almost valve-like sweetness to the midrange and treble

balance this you have curiosities like the CD player lid that only partially covers the disc and has a slightly skeletal feel. The lower chassis that curves around to form the back panel and terminates on the top panel is also pleasingly minimalist. Equally unique is the 'Kishermon' speaker cable that is supplied for the system, which is a flat copper ribbon partially visible though the jacket that terminates in an ultra simple spade connection. The two different chassis widths and the utterly functional layouts do actually bring to mind a

ABOVE LEFT: Pre/Power gives 60W plus analogue and digital inputs

ABOVE CENTRE: The chassis plates curve around to become the rear panels

ABOVE RIGHT: Single drivers and exposed mechanisms are classic 47 Lab

suite of lab equipment and the system is curiously satisfying to use. I say curiously, because there isn't actually anything intrinsically wacky or unexpected about the way the Midnight Blue units operate, but the manner in which this little quartet interacts to form a system is greater than the sum of its parts.

But does it work?

All of this pales next to the more important question of whether this single-minded attempt to solve a complex problem actually works. The answer is emphatically that it does – and how. The way this system goes about delivering the musical message at the heart of a recording is exceptional and quite unlike anything else I've listened to recently. There is an almost valve-like sweetness to the midrange and treble, but this is coupled to a rather less valve-like speed and detail that can be almost unnerving in its incisiveness.

Part of this speed is down to the Lens II speakers. I have been a fan of single-driver speakers for some time, but spend as much time talking about the provisos as I do the benefits. In this case, this unlikely looking little box on the end of these electronics is incredibly vice free. There is far more bass than you'd expect from something so small and the top end is also well extended. This means that the bit that single drivers excel at –

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM 47 LAB MIDNIGHT BLUE



the bit in the middle – is delivered with a finesse that leaves everything else sounding slow and unruly.

Listening to Nick Drake's immortal *Pink Moon* on the Midnight Blue is a wonderfully and unforgettably memorable experience. The paired-back recording is opened up to become something incredibly involving and intimate. The soundstage is sensationally detailed and extends in a perfect arc across the listening position. Drake's vocals are given all the space that they need to put their hook into you and the effect is truly mesmerising.

Rocking all over the world

Neither is it a one-trick pony, limited to the world of music that exists only in midrange. Massive Attack's mighty *Pray For Rain* has a presence and impact that is utterly and wonderfully improbable given the raw materials on offer. There is still an uncanny ability with voices and an air and space that is incredibly beguiling, but these little boxes can time and rock in a way that you'd never give credit for. There are many brands with a reputation for great timing and all of them would do well to listen to how this ensemble goes about its business because it is right up there among the best of the best.

What is especially great about the Midnight Blue range is that in designing a range of components that



CONTACT:
Midland Audio
Exchange
TELEPHONE:
01562 731100
WEBSITE:
midlandaudiox-
change.co.uk

are intended to be more 'normal', 47 Laboratory has made a system that is no harder to live with day to day than a Japanese 'house brand' system.

Halfway through listening, I move from the CD player to my laptop, which has access to my rips and downloads and attach it via USB. All of the incisiveness, speed and tonal colour this system has with CD remain, but with the flexibility of a well-sorted computer audio system.

An often heard remark about many specialised items – be they hi-fi, cars or even clothes – is that character is a function of something being wrong, but in a way that is sufficiently charming to win you over. This system is packed with character – it is in fact quite unlike anything else I can think of on the market, but is almost completely free of vices and equipped with sufficient power and useful features to be able to function in any number of real-world situations.

And when you are in one of these situations, you can put on your favourite track (and after some extensive genre swapping with the 47 Labs, it really could be almost anything) and you will be taken somewhere very special. The Midnight Blue components are 47 Laboratory at its most sensible – none of it is baked in an oven and nothing is called Dumpty – but the extraordinary way its electronics go about making music is unharmed by the application of normality. I thought I might need to make allowances and provisos for this little system – filling this piece with little excuses to justify foibles that would infuriate in real life. What is especially beautiful about this system is that I don't have to do that at all. This is a system that is capable of a truly spellbinding performance and it can do so in a 21st-century setting with whatever sources come to hand ●





UK psychedelia: 1965-1968

In the second of our paisley-hued primers, **Simon Berkovitch** and **JT Rathbone** revisit the years when the UK charts had turned dayglo

For a glorious period between late 1965 and early 1968, adventurous British musicians painted the airwaves in rainbows of sound. It was psychedelic mods The Creation who described their music as “red – with purple flashes” and it’s a description worth applying to the whole kaleidoscope of tripped-out sounds – from The Animals to Zoot Money – that represented the blossoming of British psychedelia.

But who tuned in, turned on and dropped out first? The Beatles’ *Rain* – the B-side of 1966’s *Paperback Writer* – was arguably the first 45 to

psych-out and where The Beatles led, others followed. Fast forward to the summer of 1967 and the charts were awash with inventive sounds from home-grown talent such as Cream, The Who, The Rolling Stones, The Move, The Small Faces and Procol Harum – and, of course, the Fab Four themselves.

Most UK psych records share distinctive features – phasing, spiky guitars, cavernous echo, off-kilter harmonies and, often, ludicrous lyricism – with their US counterparts, but, lacking the endless sunshine enjoyed by their fellow explorers on America’s West Coast, the good old British weather seems to

have made its presence felt in many of our own recordings. The British strain of psych (on record, at least) was often more introverted and melancholy – think of it as a wet day indoors travelling inner space as opposed to the feeling of the heat haze of the San Franciscan sound on your skin.

British bands looked to the whimsical worlds of quintessentially English writers such as Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and Kenneth Grahame (a favourite of Syd Barrett, then the chief songwriter for Pink Floyd) for lyrical inspiration, giving their compositions a wide-eyed and child-like feel.

The UK’s psychedelic scene was centred at London’s UFO club, where Pink Floyd and The Soft Machine played lengthy, improvised sets amid wild performance art, weird dancing and retina-bleaching light shows. Further experimentation took place in the recording studios, where independent producers like Joe Boyd and Shel Talmy tried to capture the essence of the era on vinyl.

Over at EMI’s studios on Abbey Road, Glyn Johns and Norman Smith were busy rewriting the rulebook with hugely creative productions for artists such as The Beatles and The Pretty Things, to name but two.

Pink Floyd

The road to the *Dark Side* begins with prime English psychedelia

Although *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* would have been one of the most astonishing and influential albums in any era, Pink Floyd's stunning debut LP could only have been made in early 1967 when experimental pop music was at its apex.

But barely a few months after it had peaked at number six in the UK charts that autumn, Pink Floyd's singer, guitarist and principle writer – Roger 'Syd' Barrett – had been effectively ousted from proceedings. It's an unusual career move, ditching the golden goose, but ultimately the gamble had paid off by 1973's mega-successful *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

Barrett's LSD-drenched crack-up has been retold so often that as yet undiscovered tribes in the Amazon could probably regurgitate it verbatim. It had all looked so promising at the start of 1967. Pink Floyd were poster boys of the UK underground music scene and

were in EMI's studios on the back of a successful debut 45 – *Arnold Layne* – to record their first LP. Newly promoted staff producer Norman Smith was at the helm looking to recreate Joe Boyd's pioneering sound on that first release.

Smith and the band achieved this in fine style and some of the most imaginative recording

Piper could only have been made in early 1967

techniques of the time help *Piper* to shine brightly. Reverberating, spacey electric guitars, Roger Waters's hypnotic basslines and Rick Wright's distinctive eerie organ sounds all weave around Barrett's diverse songs.

The often very different mono and stereo mixes are essential listening for students of the era, the former (also available on CD) being definitive.

Piper was the only Floyd album with Syd Barrett truly at the helm



The Pretty Things

Forget *Tommy*, these long-hairs birthed the first concept album

The Pretty Things metamorphosed from long-haired, ferocious R&B caterpillars into even-longer-haired psychedelic butterflies for 1967's incarnation of the band. Phil May's mob blazed the tripped-out musical trail with two fiendishly inventive releases: brain-blending single *Defecting Grey* and *SF Sorrow* – the first 'rock opera'.

Defecting Grey was a stop-start romp through psych-pop and proto-hard rock, linked by a whimsical waltz refrain. It may have failed to chart, but it is now rightly regarded as one of the definitive UK psych 45s.

Album sessions were underway soon after, with Norman Smith at the helm. Considering EMI's meagre £3,000 budget for the session and various personnel upheavals, it's all the more mindblowing that The Pretty Things managed to deliver such a highly original LP.

Widely acknowledged as one of the first rock concept albums and a major influence on The Who's *Tommy*, *SF Sorrow* takes us through Sebastian F Sorrow's life – from birth (the strident, scene-setting title track) to death (the plaintive *Loneliest Person*). Throughout, the expertly

A romp through psych-pop and proto-hard rock

arranged songs are embellished by dazzling effects. Trippy sounds abound and tracks blend into each other, but it's the strength of the songs within the grooves – stormers such as the epic title track, spiky *She Says Good Morning*, macabre *Balloon Burning* and Mellotron-driven epic *Baron Saturday* – that ensures that *SF Sorrow*'s stock remains sky high nearly half a century later.

SF Sorrow paved the way for rock operas like Tommy



Traffic

Boy-genius Steve Winwood gets it together in the country

Traffic bridged the gap between the last gasp of innocent pop 45s in 1967 – with their superb debut single *Paper Sun*, featuring a soaring Steve Winwood vocal, and Dave Mason's *Hole In My Shoe* – and the burgeoning rock scene they helped create on self-titled second album *Traffic*, leaving many of the psychedelic trappings behind.

Debut album *Mr Fantasy* sits somewhere between the two – and is all the better for it. The seriousness of many of the group's folk and jazz influenced compositions on this great LP sets them apart from many of their more whimsical contemporaries.

Created in a communal atmosphere far from the distractions of London, immortalised in the track *House for Everyone*, *Mr Fantasy* displays a soulful maturity only hinted at in most popular releases of the time. Indeed,

The Small Faces, who se equally big-voiced Steve Marriott makes an unannounced guest appearance on the twisted

Cockney knees-up *Berkshire Poppies*, would go on to explore similar terrain on *Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake*, released the following year.



July

Low on budget, but brimming with invention

Recorded in a rudimentary London studio, apparently on equipment that had been recently relinquished by EMI's Abbey Road studios, this LP boasts a variety of styles and some bold experimental arrangements in spite of its low-budget production. But it's the second track from this former R&B outfit reborn – the epic *Dandelion Seeds* – on which this album's reputation as a Brit-psych monster resides.

Dandelion Seeds is a one-of-a-kind gem, a lolloping, loose slab of wah-wah guitar, deservedly gaining a new lease of life each time it appears on period compilations. The lo-fi production only adds to the track's mystery, as it shifts from queasy guitar groove to a disembodied, eerie middle section – complete with off-kilter vocals – and back again, signing off with a stinging guitar solo. By the end

you're compelled to play it again, as you can't quite put your finger on its oddness.

Only ever available in mono, this charismatic LP has recently

been reissued on vinyl and CD and can now be enjoyed by psych fans of more humble means – an original pressing went for £3,000 back in 2012.



► SHOPPING LIST

In addition to the four artists and albums profiled, your record collection will benefit from the following eight UK psych classics.



Donovan
Sunshine Superman
Issued in the US in its original form, this deftly blurs the boundaries between folk and rock.



Tomorrow
Tomorrow
Without doubt one of the era's most consistent albums, with killer guitar work from future Yes axe man Steve Howe.



The Soft Machine
Volume One
The Soft Machine's jazzy psych keeps a poppy tongue in its cheek thanks to Kevin Ayers' and Robert Wyatt's rather odd ditties.



The Crazy World of Arthur Brown
The Crazy World of Arthur Brown
One of the few guitarless LPs from the psych era with tight organ-led R&B.



Blossom Toes
We Are Ever So Clean
An ambitiously over-produced album, courtesy of former Yardbirds manager Giorgio Gomelsky.



The Dukes of Stratosphere
Chips from the Chocolate Fireball
This eighties zinger from XTC (for it is they) is a fantastic love letter to UK psychedelia.



Various Artists
The Psychedelic Scene
This comp is a fine introduction to key cuts from the likes of Tintern Abbey, The Accent and The Poets.



Kaleidoscope
Further Reflections: The Complete Recordings
The *Tangerine Dream* and *Faintly Blowing* albums in their entirety.

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



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

See us at the
Whittlebury Hall
show 21-22 Sept
"One of the best
sounds at the
show?"

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

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

Then there are the loudspeakers, designed to vibrate air, they also generate unwanted energy.

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

Why does this matter?

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

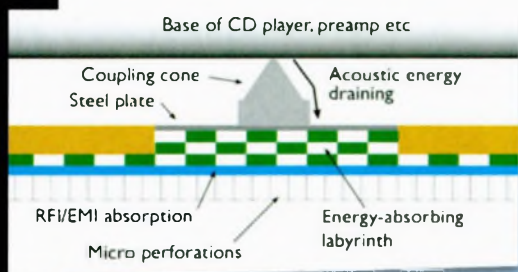
- a hard, edgy treble
- muddled timing
- loose bass
- poor imaging
- limited soundstage
- distortion

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

What can I do about it?

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

The improvements in performance can be dramatic. Everyone who tries it is astonished – read their comments on our web site: *What others say.*



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

Dumping energy? – sounds like Black Magic!

Once the system vibration is drained and blocked the music is no longer modulated by the spurious internally-generated signals. Fine detail and emotion are liberated.

What can I expect to hear?

As funds allow, adding Vertex cables and mains filters and LeadingEdge platforms will

TRANSFORM YOUR SYSTEM:

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

Is it expensive?

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



LeadingEdge platform and Vertex Taga block, both absorb vibration



We worry – over the years show visitors have praised our demonstrations but do they think it's the sound of expensive main components they can't afford?

No, it's not. Our show systems have varied hugely, from modest to mouth-watering. What visitors are hearing is the clarity, speed, excitement and involvement of the recording, with electronic pollution and debris removed by Vertex AQ and LeadingEdge components.

Read more on our web site under **Essentials**.

Customers say we make some of the best sounds at shows and in our studio they have ever heard, so you know we can do the same in your home. Our advice takes account of your best components and guides you where change is needed, in stages you can afford.

You avoid expensive mistakes, enjoy music and save money in the long run.

Just listen and you'll know

CD: Accustic Arts, Aletheia dac-1, Bel Canto, dCS, Gamut, Resolution Audio. Vinyl: Aesthetix, Clearaudio, Graham, Spiral Groove, Transfiguration. Tuners: Magnum Dynalab. Amplifiers: Accustic Arts, Aesthetix, Bel Canto, CAT, Gamut, Sonneteer, Storm Audio, VTL. Loudspeakers: Avalon, Gamut, Kawero!, NEAT, Totem. Cables: Chord Co., DNM, Nordost, Siltech, Tellurium, Vertex AQ. Mains: Aletheia, Vertex AQ. Supports: Arcici, LeadingEdge, Stands Unique, Vertex AQ. Room treatment: LeadingEdge





100 ZZ Top
The Complete Studio
Albums 1970-1990



100 Laura Viers
Warp & Weft



101 Schumann
Symphony No.2;
Overtures; Manfred;
Genoveva; Orchestra
Mozart; Claudio Abbado

Musicreviews



**ALBUM
OF THE
MONTH**

The Allman Brothers Brothers and Sisters

★★★★★

Two CDs and four CD deluxe editions **Universal /Mercury**

A LESS DETERMINED, resilient and downright stubborn band than the Allman Brothers would surely never have made *Brothers and Sisters*, the fifth and most successful studio album of their career, now expanded and remastered on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of its original release in 1973. The early seventies found the sprawling, multi-racial band from Macon, Georgia approaching its creative and commercial zenith. The elongated blues-rock jams of their live shows, featuring the thrilling dual guitar attack of Duane Allman and Dickey Betts, were already becoming legendary and were captured for posterity on the double LP, *At Fillmore East* (1971) still regarded to this day as one of the finest live albums of all time.

Duane Allman had just played the memorable lead guitar part on Eric Clapton's classic *Layla* and had declined an invitation to join his band full time in order to stay with his 'brothers'. But Allman's death in a motorcycle accident in 1971 left his band mates devastated. The band voted to continue; but a year later they lost bassist Berry Oakley in another

tragic motorcycle accident - incredibly just three blocks from where Allman had died.

Once again the remaining members of the band dug deep to find the will to carry on - and out of tragedy fashioned an album that stands as both as a tribute to their fallen comrades and a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity

In a contradiction of their reputation as a jam band, the songs are tightly crafted

Their tenacity was rewarded when *Brothers and Sisters* went to number one in America and became the Allmans' biggest selling album in Britain and Europe, too. In the absence of Duane's blues-driven guitar heroics, the more country-influenced playing of Dickey Betts came to the fore,

particularly on the album's two finest tracks, the joyously life-affirming instrumental *Jessica* and the hit single *Ramble, Man*. *Jessica* is now best known as the theme tune of the BBC TV series *Top Gear*, but don't hold that against it as it transcends such associations here in a glorious seven minute version, featuring Les Dudek guesting on second guitar to recreate the band's famous dual guitar attack. Elsewhere, the haunting, blues-drenched voice of Greg Allman is heard to fine effect on *Wasted Words*, *Southbound* and *Come and Go Blues*, while the plangent piano playing of new recruit Chuck Leavell fills the gaps created by Duane's absence with contrastingly different textures. In a pleasing contradiction of their reputation as a jam band, the songs are tightly crafted and honed, most clock in at no more than four or five minutes. Crisp remastering enhances the precision, while fans of the band's more freeform jamming proclivities will appreciate the expanded edition, which includes a storming live set recorded in San Francisco in 1973. **NW**



ZZ Top

The Complete Studio Albums
1970-1990

★★★★★

Ten CDs

Warners/Rhino

TAKING THE POWER trio approach of Hendrix/Cream and simplifying it to a starkly primitive blues-rock throb, ZZ Top thundered their way out of the Texas badlands in 1970 with a debut album that made few concessions to subtlety. With song titles such as *Beer Drinkers and Hell Raisers* summing up the neanderthal aesthetic, they took the gritty, grinding boogie of a dusty roadhouse bar and turned it into strutting stadium rock via classic albums such as *Tres Hombres* (1973) and *Fandango* (1975).

It's easy to dismiss ZZ Top's amped-up John Lee Hooker boogie rhythms, blues

They took the gritty boogie of a roadhouse bar and turned it into strutting stadium rock

raunch and frantic guitar freak-outs as derivative – but nobody has ever done it with such a single-minded sense of stomping, thumping purpose. Yet there's a genuine development, too. Although the basic structure never strayed far from the wall-shaking template, by the 1980s, albums such as *Eliminator* (1983) and *Afterburner* (1985) boasted a slicker, high-tech sound that made them MTV heroes. **NW**



Chas and Dave
The EMI Years
Anthology

★★★★☆

Three CDs and one DVD

EMI

YOU EITHER LOVE or hate Chas Hodges and Dave Peacock and their 'rockney' mix of boogie-woogie, rock 'n' roll and boozy wit. Anyone who uses humour in music is invariably dubbed a novelty act. But what emerges from this collection, which includes three best-selling albums released between 1977-81 and two discs of rarities and live performances, is their musicianship. Respected sessioners long before hits such as *Gertcha* and *Rabbit* made them a household name, the cockney rhyming slang and pub knees-up larking disguises an ability to play the socks off most so-called serious rock bands. **NW**



Laura Viers
Warp & Weft

★★★★★

CD

Bella Union

PORTLAND, OREGON'S MOST famous daughter may look like she needs to get out more, but she's notched up nine albums packed with impeccable examples of the songwriter's craft. She doesn't stray too far from her winning template of sensitive arrangements, wistful (but not too wistful) vocals, intriguing harmonies and simply gorgeous tunes. As well as her usual band she's also assembled an all-star team of collaborators including Jim James, KD Lang, Neko Case, Brian Blade and various Decemberists. Standouts include the layered vocal harmonies of *America* and the haunting guitar and vocal textures of *Sadako Folding Cranes*. **DO**



Rokia Traoré

Beautiful Africa

★★★★★

CD

Nonesuch

THE FIRST ACT to be announced for this year's Glastonbury, the elegant Malian chanteuse-compositeur made her name with delicate folk tunes based on the traditional music of her homeland. But for her fifth album she's joined forces with producer John Parish of PJ Harvey fame and she rocks!

There are traditional instruments and arrangements, and her singing in French, English and Bambara can often be breathy and intimate. But then her electric guitar cranks up and the voice takes flight in ascending spirals of intensity. When she cuts loose with both on the title track it's a stand-up-and-shout joy. **DO**

 Do you agree with our reviewers? Decide for yourself and listen to some of this month's tunes at www.hifichoice.co.uk

AUDIOFILE VINYL ★★★★★

Mary Black
Stories from the Steeples
180g vinyl Pure Pleasure

 **RELEASED IN 2011** on CD, Black's most recent album finds her in the company of very polished musicians and three fellow singers; Imelda May, Finbar Furey and Janis Ian. The title doesn't indicate an ecumenical bent, but refers to the Steeples studio, Dublin where this dark, luxurious recording was made. On some tracks Black's gentle voice can get lost in the mix of guitars, bass, fiddle and accordion and as a result it's the simpler numbers and duets that stand out, but the tonal richness is appealing nonetheless. The harmonies with May are superb, they work well despite rather different styles and it's the younger woman who makes the greatest leap in this respect. Furey has a great voice and some fine skills on the banjo that raise *Walking With My Love* to a higher musical plane. But it's Black alone who raises the spiritual stakes on *Wizard of Oz*, she is a great balladeer and this is a simple song that works very well in this setting. The Janis Ian duet *Lighthouse Light* is also fine, Ian's voice is strong and blends well with that of her host, the pairing bringing extra emotional depth to the tune. Populated by songs from around the world, this album has a Celtic heart and a westward view. **JK**

HIGH RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS



Kairos 4tet Everything We Hold



24-bit/48kHz

Naim Label

KAIROS 4TET ARE described as “a British jazz band, spearheading a new breed of ensembles.” That seems a fairly accurate summation of this talented four-piece. The band’s leader, saxophonist and composer Adam Waldmann, has performed with a wide range of leading figures including Alicia Keys, Mark Ronson and Tinie Tempah, hence the music’s contemporary leaning, which ties in easily with the improvisational groove. **MS**



Trichotomy Fact Finding Mission



24-bit/48kHz

Naim Label

THE TRIO HAVE been augmented by collaborators on this third album for the Naim Label. It opens with the upbeat, and infectiously melodic, *Strom*, which sets the mood. The catchy second tune, *The Blank Canvas Part 1*, introduces guitarist James Muller, whose dexterous playing enhances the album’s sense of journey and progress. Jazz constantly moves and evolves: *Trichotomy* could well be the 21st century’s version of Bill Evans’ band. **MS**

RISTO-MATTI MARIN PIANO

HOT PICK

MAGIC FIRE and other Wagner transcriptions

A gripping intensity, which at times could be more measured

Wagner

Magic Fire
Risto-Matti Marin, Piano



Hybrid SACD

Alba ABCD 353

WAGNER WROTE LITTLE for piano, none of it important. These pieces are transcriptions of music from his operas, including Liszt’s arrangement of the *Tannhauser* overture, and the spinning song from *Flying Dutchman*. Among other highlights, Tausig’s hair-raising arrangement of the *Ride of the Valkyries* stands out. Perhaps best of all is Louis Brassin’s *Magic Fire* music from *The Ring*. This receives a very atmospheric performance of real power, one hardly misses the orchestra such is the effect produced. The recording sets the piano in a clear, but reverberant acoustic and the instrument has plenty of air and space around it without the sound becoming diffuse. **JH**



Schumann
Symphony No 2
Overtures; Manfred;
Genoveva, Orchestra
Mozart, Claudio Abbado



CD

DG 0289 479 1061 9

CLAUDIO ABBADO’S FIRST recording of a Schumann symphony turns out to be a curious mix of opposites. While the playing is sensitive and supple, there’s a lack of drive and rhythmic bite – especially in the outer movements. The Second is Schumann’s most dramatic symphony, and the music represents a struggle between darkness and light. Alas, at key moments, the playing lacks tension and Schumann’s dotted rhythms sound flaccid rather than crisp. The overtures go better though Manfred lacks drama and pathos. DG’s live recordings (Musikverein, Vienna) sound smooth, natural, and well balanced. **JH**

BLU-RAY/DVD



Various Artists
Experience Montreux

Eagle Vision

HOT PICK



THIS TWO DISC 2D/3D is a showcase for the Swiss festival as it approaches its 50th anniversary. Disc one gathers performances from artists including Massive Attack, Elvis Costello, Mumford & Sons and even a jazz musician, Leznek Mozner. The drive however is that, though Montreux is ostensibly a jazz festival, it goes out of its way to attract musicians of all types. The second disc contains performances by Herbie Hancock and producer Quincy Jones, both aided by some very fine musicians indeed. **JK**

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**

- Print + Digital:** £11.87 every 3 months (SAVE 25% on shop price + SAVE 75% on Digital Download + FREE GIFT)
- Print:** £9.79 every 3 months (SAVE 25% on shop price + FREE GIFT)


YOUR DETAILS MUST BE COMPLETED

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address.....
Postcode..... Country.....
Tel..... Mobile.....
Email..... DOB.....

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address.....
Postcode..... Country.....

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.

CARD PAYMENTS & OVERSEAS

Yes, I would like to subscribe to **Hi-Fi Choice**, for one year (13 issues) with a one-off payment

UK ONLY:

- Print + Digital:** £49.79 (SAVE 20% on shop price + SAVE 75% on Digital + FREE GIFT)
- Print:** £41.49 (SAVE 20% on shop price + FREE GIFT)

EUROPE & ROW:

- EU Print + Digital:** £69.56
- EU Print:** £61.26
- ROW Print + Digital:** £73.30
- ROW Print:** £65.00

PAYMENT DETAILS

Postal Order/Cheque visa/MasterCard Maestro
Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code V480 on the back
Cardholder's name.....
Card no:..... (Maestro)
Valid from..... Expiry date..... Maestro issue no.....
Signature..... Date.....

Offer ends 29th August 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 DO NOT wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: Post Phone. If you wish to be contacted by email by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: Email

POST THIS FORM TO: **HI-FI CHOICE SUBSCRIPTIONS, TOWER HOUSE, SOVEREIGN PARK, MARKET HARBOUROUGH, LEICS LE16 9EF.**



PRINT + DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Free Solaris MJ2 Cable and a Surprise Gift!*

13 Issues **delivered to your door**

Save up to **25% off the shop price**

Download each new issue to your device

A **75% discount** on your Digital subscription

Access your subscription on **multiple devices**

Access to the **Online Archive** dating back to September 2011

Exclusive discount on all orders at myhobbystore.co.uk



PRINT SUBSCRIPTION

Free Solaris MJ2 Cable and a Surprise Gift!*

13 Issues **delivered to your door**

Save up to **25% off the shop price**

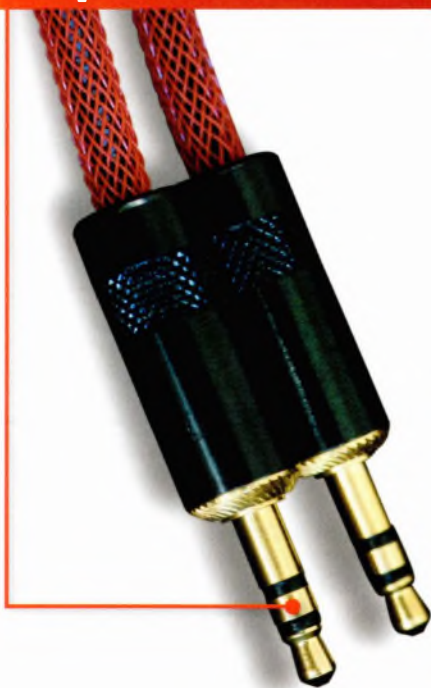
Exclusive discount on all orders at myhobbystore.co.uk

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTIONS
AVAILABLE ONLINE!

Receive a **Solaris MJ2 Cable*** when you subscribe today

**"The Solaris MJ2 is
the perfect interconnect
for portable audio"**



The Solaris MJ2 (1m) from Epiphany Acoustics is a very versatile mini jack-to-mini jack cable used extensively in portable audio. It uses high-quality silver-plated, oxygen-free copper conductors and is fully shielded. A low-loss polyethylene dielectric is employed to further increase performance. The terminations are well-engineered gold-plated jacks with quality strain relief incorporated to ensure longevity in the toughest of portable, and even home, set ups. The MJ2 offers an unparalleled level of performance and is finished in a stylish red jacket.

Features:

- Gold-plated 3.5mm jack plugs
- Shielded, silver-plated, ultra-pure, oxygen-free copper wire
- Finished with a red woven jacket

Other similarly well-specified mini jack-based cables and interconnects are available in the Solaris Collection from Epiphany Acoustics.

Smart moves
Minitest: in-ear headphones for music on the go p84

Hi-res portable
Astell&Kern AK120: 24/192 & DSD audio for your pocket

Hi-Fi Choice
PASSION FOR SOUND
Issue No. 375 September 2013

Terrific Tannoy
Luxury floorstanders with sensational sonics

Linn Sneaky
Petite all-in-one streamer and integrated amp with huge sound

33
products on test from Epos, Onkyo and Pure through to Teac...

CRYSTAL ACOUSTICS
Cut-price Bluetooth streaming DAC

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM
47 Lab: hi-fi for cubist art fans

SAVE 25% ON THE SHOP PRICE & 75% ON DIGITAL**

PLUS A SURPRISE GIFT WORTH £40*

Needle craft
Six affordable cartridges to upgrade your vinyl

mini maestro
Panasonic micro system including iDock, CD & DAB tuner

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 29th August 2013. *Gift for UK subscribers only, while stocks last. **When you subscribe by Direct Debit. Please see www.hifichoice.co.uk/terms for full terms & conditions

SUBSCRIBE SECURELY ONLINE

www.hifichoice.co.uk/subscribe

CALL OUR ORDER LINE Quote ref: V480

0844 543 8200

Lines open weekdays 8am - 9.30pm & Saturday 8am - 4pm

BT landline calls to 0844 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

ATLAS Elektra 1m XLR balanced interconnects. Boxed. Fantastic sound and condition. Can be heard before purchase. £185 ovno: **0115 9288006** or email: Rolfyjordan@gmail.com (Nottingham).

PIONEER CS-301 speakers in black finish £45, Mordaunt-Short MS235 speakers in wood finish £45, Bang & Olufsen P30 speakers in wood finish £75: **01302 772495** or email: adrian.petch@btinternet.com (Lincolnshire).

MARANTZ PM6003 integrated amplifier, well reviewed, in mint condition, boxed with manual, light use, bargain, £100. Buyer to collect: **01253 856422** (Lancashire).

MISSION 792 speakeres, matching stands, gloss, excellent condition £350. 4 Russ Andrews 1m Power Max IEC cables £25 each. Kimber 4VS speaker cables 2.5m terminated £60. Will post. Prices exclude p&p: **01772 468116** (Lancashire).

RUSS ANDREWS Yellow mains cable, 2m length £40. Also Yellow six-way extension with 4m cable, super clamp spike filter £90. Buy both for £125. Items are mint condition and cheaper if collected: **01902 884694** or email: jukey39@yahoo.co.uk (West Midlands).

SUGDEN Mystro amp with free Sugden CD 21 (£3,000) £500. As new, one owner. Celestion A3 top of the range speakers (£2,750) £500. Amp three years old, guaranteed until October 2014: **01246 224144** (Derbyshire).

WANTED late van den Hul Frog gold cartridge. One in need of repair. Also Marantz DR-17 CD recorder in mint condition and perfect working order: **01505 346791** (Renfrewshire).

SPENDOR A6 floorstanding speakers. Oak finish, excellent condition. £1,100 ono. Can demo. Buyer collects: **01798 475319** (Essex).

DENON DVD-A1 DVD player

(not Blu-ray) champagne colour with Denon D Link and remote/manuals. £300. Denon AVC-A1SR amp, champagne colour. With remote and manuals. £350: **07767 270242**.

QUAD FM4 late model with grey/bronze buttons and phono outputs. Mint condition. £140. Radford STA 25 'Series 3' valve amplifier silver wired. Cherished for 15 years. £1095 ovno: **024 76679165** or **07968769595** (Coventry).

ISOTEK Titan mains conditioner in excellent condition, bought from new, complete with manual and original box. £975 ono: **01303 863424** (Kent).

KEF Q100 black ash, brand new boxed, magazine prize. I have documents to prove. Highly rated standmounter £230 (£150 below retail): **07884 430988** or **01782 397204**.

TELLURIUM Q Black 1m digital cable. Locking RCA phono each end. As new, only a few weeks old. £195.



Sugden's Mystro integrated amplifier is a snip at just £500!

(new price £390). Pictures available: **01403 711778** or **07813 367409** or email: lyndon.taylor@tiscali.co.uk (West Sussex).

NAIM Supercap 2 in mint condition Serial no: 243xxx. 6 years old, original box. £1,820: email: hh@hhaps.dk (Denmark).

REGA Planar 3 turntable. Acos S-shaped arm. VGC. £125 ono. Kudosspeaker stands, 60cm, silver. Excellent condition. £90 ono. Buyer collects: **07801 231963** (Lancs).

KIMBER Select KS3038 speaker cable, 2.4m, £4,500. Kimber Select KS1136 XLR interconnect, 1m, £1,150. Kimber Select KS1036 interconnect, 3/4m, £950. Kimber Select 9033 Jumper set, £200. All with cases: **01772 314151** or email: jamesmckendrick@btinternet.com.

POWER supply for Class A amplifiers, ideal for John Linsley Hood's 1996/1969 or any other low-power Class A amplifier. Fully built, ready to use, in self contained enclosure, £279: **0207 4998729**.

KEF X300A speakers, only 4 months old, in like new condition, original documents and packaging are intact, asking for £500 (RRP £600), prefer buyer collection: **07741 485209** or email: budtsui@gmail.com.

SONUS FABER Musica amplifier. Boxed, very good

condition £1,000 ono: **07753 271812** (Notts).

SPENDOR 58E £300 ono. No boxes, buyer collects. Will demo: email: moss8rg@btinternet.com (Northampton).

DPA 200 preamp and power amp £300 each. E.A.R. 834L Delux preamp £700. All boxed, in good condition: **07890 896819** (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 613140** (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 454084** 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 875316** 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 421866** or

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!

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 263069**.

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 345418** 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 SE2 blk MM/MC, original box and instructions VGC £135. Turntable record disc stabiliser weight alloy 370g, original box VGC £20. **01684 290581** (Tewks)

LEJONKLOU phono amp. Suitable for MM only. Bought new May 2011 for £425. Bargain at £280. All prices exclude p&p: **01772 715862** 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 572603** or email: russell@sayers.myzen.co.uk (Angus).

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 AudioAzur 340SE amp £90. Buyer to collect: **02920 568165** (Cardiff).

200+ vinyl LP records: opera, orchestral, classical, jazz, pop etc. Buyers collect: **01246 865640** 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 43390** (Wiltshire).

REGA P3 turntable. Grado prestige gold cartridge, Michell tecno counterweight, Rega bias 2. Boxed, owned from new, excellent condition. Open to reasonable offers: **01614459770** or email: dan.overtone@btinternet.com (Manchester).

PARASOUND ZDAC DAC Silver as new £359.99. Acoustic Energy AE1 speakers, black £499. Parasound A21 power amp £699: **07975 151445** (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 607225** or email: simon.corcos@bthft.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 457691** (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: **01582 423791** (Beds).

NAIM Fraim 1x Cherry Base VGC. Only faint marks at back of shelf. Bought from a used Naim dealer, but never used. Instructions and boxed. £399 (RRP £745). Russ Andrews 1 x 1m DCT Signature Powerkord £285 (RRP £421.50). 3 x 1m Signature Powerkords £275 (RRP £399) All cables in near mint condition and fitted with Clipsal in-line UK Mains Plug with RA fuse and with Wattgate 350i Ag IEC Plug. Cable will be bubble wrapped and sent in box. Buyer to pay postage or collect. Photos available: **0208 3728376** or email: adelyn@live.co.uk (North London).

METRUM ACOUSTICS Octave DAC, silver, one-year old, mint condition with original packaging £500. Naim NaitXS amp, Naim Flatcap XS power supply. Mint condition with original packaging cables etc £1,250: **07933 109234**.

CARDAS Quadlink speaker cable 5m pair with spades at both ends £245 (£650). Quadlink jumper/links spades both ends £25. Russ Andrews KCGAG silver interconnects 0.5m pair £245 (£489): **01202 515474** or email johnlangley17@talktalk.net (Bournemouth).

DYNAUDIO DM 2/6 black ash, mint condition, used for max 20 hours. No box, but have port bungs and instructions. Only mark is on bottom due

to spiked stands. £350 ono: **07517 147056** or email: jameshollis@mac.com (Surrey).

QED Revelation award winning speaker cable, 2 x 5m lengths, (unterminated). £80, a saving of around £80 if buying new: **01614 323852** (Stockport, Cheshire).

AUDIOQUEST 'Sky' 72V DBS interconnect 1m/RCA. Little used, fantastic cable, surplus to requirements, must sell. Offers or swap for hi-end power cords (2m min) or mains regenerator/filter block etc. Ecosse ref 'the Baton' RCA 0.8m brand new £59 (RRP £85). Musical Fidelity A5 DAB/FM tuner, as new, box, remote etc. Radio 2 on this (DAB) blows 'FM' into next year! £495 ono: **01766 781211**.

ICON AUDIO stereo 40 MkIII with Jensen caps £1,000. Icon Audio MFV3 floorstanders with Chord speaker cable £500. Pair of Linn SARAS and Naim cable £150: **07531 835575** (Glos).

THREE pairs of missing link cryo reference interconnects, 1 x 1m RCA (£320), 1 x 30cm RCA (£220), 1 x 0.8m RCA to XLR (£240). All with certificates. One pair of Linn black I/CS (£20). Two pairs of Linn silver I/CS 0.5m (£90 each). Russ Andrews 2m headphone

lead for Sennheiser 600, 650, etc (£50) and 2m headphone extension lead as new (£40): **07720 837194**, or email: biggsy1a@sky.com

DCS PUCINI XCD/SACD player in silver 2.5 years old. Original box, remote. Unit is in mint condition. Collection from TN14 or can ship. Cost £11,995, asking £7,500 ono: email: katherinenewman74@gmail.com

WADIA 1701 iPod dock/transport. Excellent condition, black with original box, instructions, power lead and Wadia supplied digital interconnect. Remote control does not work. Get CD quality from your iPod. £125 ono (RRP £400): **07500 767281** (Bucks).

REGA P3-24 turntable with Ortofon 2M Bronze cartridge, external PS £375; Arcam Alpha 9&9P amplifiers £250; Castle Eden speakers £150. All for £700. Buyer collects: **07500 992269** or email: chorc2001-2@yahoo.co.uk (Bristol).

EB ACOUSTICS XEB2 standmount speakers – Oak finish. Used but in excellent condition. You do not have to wait to get your hands on a new pair of these sealed-box speakers, get these now! Excellent 87dB sealed-box design, ATM SC11 beaters! Collection only. £480: **07725 525001** or email: alan.strudwick@googlemail.com (South Wales).

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR FREE AD

YOUR DETAILS

Name

Address

Email address

Daytime telephone number

Date

YOUR ADVERTISEMENT

SEND YOUR ADVERT TO

Hi-Fi Choice, AVTech Media Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent BR6 6BG

To submit your advert to us, please email letters@hifichoice.co.uk or alternatively, use the postal form below. Please limit ads to a maximum of 30 words, ensuring all details, model names, etc, are correctly stated. Kindly also include your email, telephone number and home county. We regret that we cannot take adverts over the telephone.

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



Russ Andrews

The Silencer mains filter

IT IS AMAZING just how much mains-born noise can find its way into the audio chain. We are all aware of the clicks and pops caused by the switching on and off of electrical equipment, especially those that have electric motors, such as refrigerators and washing machines. However, there is also a noise 'mush' that comes from other devices that can inject a more sophisticated type of noise into your precious sound system. Switched-mode power supplies can generate high-frequency noise that is injected back into your ring main. Some computer networking products actually work by injecting a digital signal into your house mains wiring to transmit computer data from one room to another.

The Russ Andrews Silencer is a plug that is inserted into standard, unused mains sockets close to your

audio system to create a 'quiet area' around it. It can also be used elsewhere within a house next to potential sources of noise, such as a refrigerator, to quieten the noise that comes from the device at source.

Silence is golden

Russ Andrews states that the Silencer works in two ways. Firstly, it protects your equipment from the performance-degrading effects of mains spikes and surges. Secondly, it filters out mains noise that comes from sources such as household electronic equipment and even your hi-fi or home cinema system.

I have personally been using a Silencer for several years. After a little research into the cause of occasional clicks coming through my loudspeakers, I found that my refrigerator was the culprit! As a result, I fitted a Silencer in a spare

mains socket next to my audio system and the problem has gone away completely. These devices really do work as described. Granted it is not a black and white improvement, but there is a subtle drop in background noise and there is slightly improved detail as a result of its installation. This is a great product that won't break the bank. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE
£52

CONTACT
01539 797300

WEBSITE
russandrews.com

OUR VERDICT



Epiphany Acoustics

Atratus Audiophile RCA Interconnects

THE DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

behind Atratus cables is to offer excellent value while maintaining superlative performance and these interconnects from Epiphany Acoustics are a good example of this. The cables incorporate heavy-gauge oxygen-free copper twin signal conductors and have a dual-shield construction, which utilises both a copper braid and foil to protect the internal heavy gauge signal conductor from noise pick-up and interference.

The Atratus are terminated with solid heavy-duty RCA plugs, which have been gold plated to ensure no degradation of sound quality and finished with a stylish black jacket. The cables themselves are covered in a black jacket with white tracer. The Atratus interconnects are available in 0.5m, 1m and 2m lengths.

After a suitable period of running the cables in, I compared them with others that cost more and have to say the Atratus cables really hold their own. There is a great realism with these interconnects: large, full orchestras sound exactly what they are – large and full! Small trios or quartets, meanwhile, sound intimate and involving.

Showing off

A fantastic recording of Nicola Benedetti's *The Silver Violin* on Decca 478 3529, really shows what these cables can do. Her breathtaking performance of John Williams' *Schindler's List* is totally captivating and inspiring and the final movement of Korngold's *Violin Concerto* is exciting. Her Stradivarius is as clear

and distinct in the crescendos as it is in the quieter sections.

There is nothing quite like Laurent Garnier's *Tales of a Kleptomaniac* to test out bass reproduction and the Atratus cables shine through with a tight and punchy bass line, showing that they are very much at home across a wide range of genres.

These cables certainly live up to their claims of being audiophile interconnects and represent amazing value for money. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE
£38 for 0.5m, £42 for 1m and £48 for 2m cables

WEBSITE
epiphany-acoustics.co.uk

OUR VERDICT



DOUG BRADY HIFI

— SINCE 1960 —



PERFECTION SELECTION

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



RELAX AND MAKE AN INFORMED CHOICE

B Over 50 years of experience

B Extraordinary levels of knowledge & expertise

B Vast range of HiFi & Home Cinema Equipment

B 2 Fabulous demonstration rooms

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

Onkyo

ES-HF300(S) headphones

WITH THE HUGE growth in headphone sales showing no signs of abating, it should come as no surprise that the number of big names joining the party keeps growing. The latest to enter the fray is Onkyo, which has released two pairs of in-ear and two pairs of over-ear headphones of which the ES-HF300 seen here is the flagship.

The good news is that this isn't a cynical rebadging of an off-the-shelf product and incorporates a considerable amount of technology designed specifically for them. Chief among these is the 40mm titanium driver. This is a usefully sized driver for a semi-portable design and Onkyo has combined it with a custom sub-chamber behind the driver mount to augment bass, but at the same time provide a degree of control and cohesion to it. And because titanium is so very light, it should allow for the generation of high frequencies without incident.

A design for life

The other unusual feature is a superior custom cable designed specifically for these models. This is a high quality 6N copper design with a rugged PTFC jacket and a bespoke connection to the headphones themselves. This connection is a potentially frustrating introduction to life with the Onkyo. One side of the cable mates instantly with the headphones, but despite repeating exactly the same process on the other side, it takes a number of attempts to make the cable attach. The fact that the Onkyo has a cable that attaches to each earpad takes a little getting used to, but does at least spread the load evenly across the head. As the earpads can move over both axis, they are impressively comfortable as well.

More of an annoyance is that there's no microphone or inline remote. Onkyo makes the valid point that this reduces extraneous interference on the cable, but it also means that the ES-HF300 isn't as adapted to use on the move as some of the key competition. Equally, if



you aren't one of the Apple faithful you will at least be buying a pair of headphones without a completely superfluous set of buttons on it.

Better news comes in the form of the aesthetics and build. The Onkyo eschews styling frivolity and manages to look clean and uncluttered. The build quality is excellent. Everything feels extremely solid and impressively substantial. Hinges move smoothly and feel rugged and Onkyo supplies a bag to keep them looking shiny.

Sonically, there is a great deal to like about the ES-HF300 and it shares some of the traits of Onkyo's stereo products. The performance is extremely fast and open – those titanium drivers really do have a speed and agility that is unusual at the price and means that the Onkyo is almost completely unfazed by complex and high-tempo material. Even slower music benefits from a very clean and accurate portrayal that has impressive detail retrieval. The performance is compellingly civilised, too. The Onkyo can be pushed to high levels without any sign of harshness. The sound is also impressively spacious and gives a reasonable impression of a soundstage.

The chambered arrangement in the earpads results in usefully deep and clean bass as well. The bass has the agility and impact required to keep up with the speed and transparency of

the upper registers and the effect is extremely cohesive. There is a fractional lull in output as the chambers reach their upper register and before the driver produces all of it, but this is small and reasonably unobtrusive. What is a slightly more serious issue for an 'all rounder' pair of headphones is that the clarity and transparency of the ES-HF300 does tend to show up the limitations of compressed audio a little more readily than some of the competition, although reasonably benign material like Spotify is reproduced without too many limitations being shown up. Equally, the Onkyo is a very capable performer indeed when given lossless and high-resolution material so if you are using good-quality material for the most part, the ES-HF300 is a logical contender.

Reasons to be cheerful

As a first effort, there is a great deal to like about the ES-HF300. Onkyo has managed to design a pair of headphones that are different in terms of technology and appearance to the competition. The slightly unforgiving nature with compressed audio and lack of inline remote means that it isn't a true all-rounder, but it does a great deal right and as a home headphone with a degree of portability, it's worth an audition. **ES**

DETAILS

PRICE
£180

WEBSITE
uk.onkyo.com

OUR VERDICT





Loving music

Concept MM



Now £995

The Clearaudio catalogue of high quality pressings inc. Deutsche Grammophon re-issues available now



Hear for yourself!
The Clearaudio product
range on demonstration,
visit us in room 104

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

Micromega

MyZic headphone amplifier

ONE OF THE problems with headphones is that different models have widely differing impedances, these make some almost impossible to drive with the basic amp you get on a laptop or even an integrated amplifier if it doesn't have a dedicated amp for the headphone output. So a market has emerged for decent headphone amplifiers and it is steadily growing. There are two varieties; portable types that are clearly aimed at laptop and tablet users and examples like MyZic for those who listen at home.

Me, myself and My

I reviewed the first Micromega My series component last year, that was the MyDAC which had an identical moulded ABS case to the MyZic headphone amp here. In that model the sideways mounted knob changed inputs, on this one it changes volume, it's a clever bit of design application.

MyZic is a mains-powered amp with a single 6.3mm jack and pairs of input and output RCA phons on the rear. The outputs mean you can loop the signal through the amp back to your main amplifier if you want the MyZic to get the cleanest possible signal. Alternatively it could be attached directly to the tape out of your amplifier, which means the main system gets the cleanest signal, probably the way to go unless you are a dedicated headphone enthusiast in which case you may not have a main amp at all.

Micromega's MyZic is a lightweight unit, but not so much so that cables will drag it off the shelf. It has a light on the front panel that glows red in standby mode, which is its default state unless you plug in a headphone jack that turns it fully on, the light then goes white. This is a nice touch, which means that no on/off switch is required. The unit will also switch off with cans attached if you turn the volume to minimum. This has the useful side effect of letting you know which way is up with regard to volume as it's the opposite of what might be expected. The other point to make is



the energy efficiency of this amp, it uses less than 150mW in standby.

Micromega has given MyZic a 1Mohm input impedance for easy driving by any source and claims that it matches every headphone impedance and sensitivity, later quoting a minimum impedance of 16ohm, but few headphones drop much below 30ohms.

I use a few different headphones with the MyZic, in the first instance Focal Spirit One and latterly Bowers & Wilkins P3 as well as MartinLogan Mikros 90. Of these the MartinLogan design is the best match in tonal terms, the balance being quite a lot warmer in the treble with the Spirit One and P3. In each case, however, it delivers good detail levels, decent timing and reasonable dynamics. It's not the most punchy headphone amp I've encountered, nor the most open, but as the Mikros 90 proves, it's capable of delivering plenty of space in the right circumstances. That headphone exposes a good extent of the reverb on decent acoustic recordings such as *La Folia* (Gregorio Paniagua) alongside good bass extension; there is clearly adequate driving power on tap.

Contrasting the MyZic with the headphone output on a Macbook Air, with an AudioQuest Big Sur interconnect, makes a good case for adding the Apple style amp. It delivers a significantly smoother,

cleaner and more timely sound with greatly enhanced spaciousness. In practise this makes for a far more engaging listening experience, a situation that is true with all three headphones. One is more open than the others, but all three produce a spacious sound that enhances the headphone experience.

The only alternative headphone amp I have available is a Russ Andrews HP-1. It delivers a more open and solid sound with better timing. The other alternative is the Cambridge DACMagic Plus converter (£349), which allows headphones to produce a vibrant sound that is more reminiscent of decent speakers with a USB connection – clearly an advantage with a laptop source.

Back to business

Getting back to the MyZic and especially with the MartinLogan cans the result is pretty beguiling, put on a dynamic recording like Kairos 4tet and you get a powerful and expansive sound that is very easy to enjoy. It works well with a CD player, network streamer and the laptop and its small footprint means it's easy to accommodate on the rack. This combined with its ease of use and energy efficiency makes it an easy product to recommend for those looking to enhance their headphone experience. **JK**

DETAILS

PRICE
£210

WEBSITE
micromega-hifi.com

OUR VERDICT



THE EQUALISER

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO HEAR YOUR RECORDS
CALL 01822 612449 TO ARRANGE AN AUDITION
WWW.PURESOUND.INFO



A truly engaging USB DAC!

The Bitzie USB DAC will play all your CD and DAT quality music and accepts up to 24 bits...

...but what's really amazing about the Bitzie USB DAC is its engaging musicality – the fatigue-free analogue sound Graham Slee does so well!

- ✓ Plug & Play (not plug and pray) - no messy downloads!
- ✓ Outputs: Line, Headphone, Coaxial S/PDIF, Optical S/PDIF
- ✓ Included stereo jack to phono adapter
- ✓ Cute palm size design
- ✓ OTG: Samsung Galaxy S3/Android Jellybean compatible
- ✓ USB powered USB compliant 0.5W consumption
- ✓ Designed and manufactured in Great Britain!

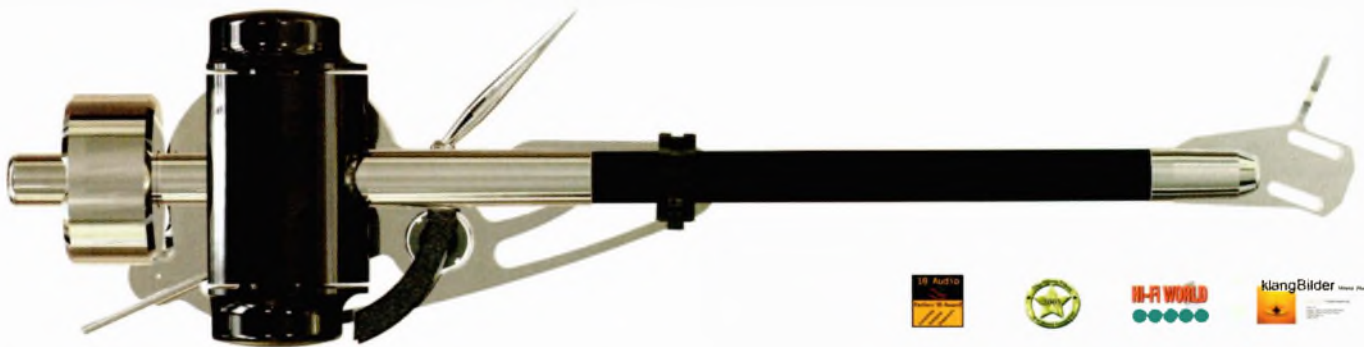


Read more about the Bitzie *plus our Lautus USB cable at...*

www.gspaudio.co.uk 

Phone: +44 (0) 1909 568739

If you want a serious upgrade...



Conqueror MK3C Tonearm by Origin Live

Tonearm of the Year Award HI FI WORLD

Most wanted component award STEREO TIMES (USA)

Best sound at the show award KLANGBILDER (Vienna)

Perfect 10 award "The most addictive product I've heard"
AUDIO 10 (USA)

"For me Origin Live in the analogue sector is the discovery of the year! ..."
IMAGE HI FI (Germany)

"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



....have you considered the benefits of changing the tonearm in your system?

Changing an arm can be easy and much more influential on performance than changing a cartridge. Not to mention being more cost effective.

Origin Live arms are not just "good" or even "better" - they embody a refusal to be satisfied with anything but the best. For this reason they astonish users with breathtaking performance over market references.

Email: originlive@originlive.com

Website: www.originlive.com

Phone: +44(0)2380 578877



Crystal Acoustics

BluDAC Bluetooth DAC



IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a simple way to connect a Bluetooth music device to an existing hi-fi system, then look no further than the new BluDAC from Crystal Acoustics. It's the latest product to respond to the growing demand to stream music from portable devices such as a smartphone or tablet, and quickly follows Arcam's recently launched rBlink Bluetooth DAC (reviewed in issue 373), but manages to cut the price by £100.

The BluDAC is a considerably more affordable way of adding Bluetooth connectivity to a music system, and at first glance looks like it will do the same job as Arcam's more costly rBlink. Closer inspection reveals a somewhat lightweight plastic unit measuring just 75 x 20 x 65mm (WxHxD) with two output connectors on the back and a mains power adapter inlet. It's a neat looking compact device, but it's not nearly as well turned out as the rBlink, with its sturdy brushed aluminium casing, and it ends up feeling rather cheap and cheerful by comparison.

Get yourself connected

Optical Toslink output is provided as well as stereo analogue in the form of a 3.5mm jack output – a 3.5mm jack to stereo RCA adapter is supplied to enable the unit to be hooked up to a spare stereo analogue input on your amplifier. Interestingly there's no external antenna connection point, which could point to the reception range being limited in some domestic situations. Crystal Acoustics claims a range of up to 10m, but in reality this is a bit optimistic – particularly if your home has thick brick walls – and the Bluetooth signal breaks up just a few feet into the next room or where there's no clear line of sight.

Unlike the rBlink there's no pairing button on the BluDAC. Connecting to devices equipped with Near Field Communication (NFC) functionality – like on newer Android devices using operating system 4.1 or above – is automatic and simply requires it be placed within a few centimetres



of the unit. Pairing to non-NFC devices is less straightforward, but still very easy.

My Apple devices quickly pop up with a new Bluetooth device identified as Music Receiver on the search list and hook up to the BluDAC in the usual select-to-pair way, and without any PIN.

The BluDAC utilises a Wolfson digital-to-analogue converter, and Bluetooth apt-X technology streams high-quality audio from compatible portable devices. Rather usefully it can remember up to eight previously connected Bluetooth devices, but you can only have one device connected at any one time, of course.

Streaming tracks from an apt-X Bluetooth device is impressive and works very smoothly, with the extra definition from a compatible source clearly in evidence. Sadly the BluDAC's sound quality isn't quite as slick in its performance with streams from non apt-X devices, like an iPhone 4.

Tracks streamed from Bastille's *Bad Blood* album from a MacBook Pro clearly show up their lower data rate and compression. Despite incorporating a high-end digital-to-analogue converter, the BluDAC doesn't sound quite as adept in its ability to handle lower bitrate tracks, and the downward shift in quality over a wired connection from the

laptop (via a £100 miniature digital-to-analogue converter) hooked up to a stereo amplifier is very clear. Bass lacks some of the extension and definition that's otherwise evident on *Pompeii* – the band's signature track – and cymbals are noticeably processed and *shashy*, lacking the definition they deserve. In the same way, Alison Moyet's vocal on *Right as Rain*, from her album *The Minutes*, shows some minor edginess, and word endings sound just a bit over sibilant.

Stop interfering

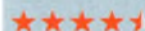
The BluDAC also seems prone to external interference, and audible clicks can occasionally be heard during music streaming. I've heard this before on other Bluetooth devices, but it's much more apparent here and can overshadow the enjoyment of the streamed music even more than the low-res quality of the audio.

The BluDAC's practical uses are very appealing as an affordable way of unleashing music from cloud-based services like iTunes or Spotify and hearing it played through a hi-fi system, seamlessly controlled by a smartphone or tablet device. Even with the slight sound quality reservations, it's difficult not to enjoy the Crystal Acoustics BluDAC at its very competitive price. **LD**

DETAILS

PRICE
£60
CONTACT
020 81337066
WEBSITE
crystalaudiovideo.com

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

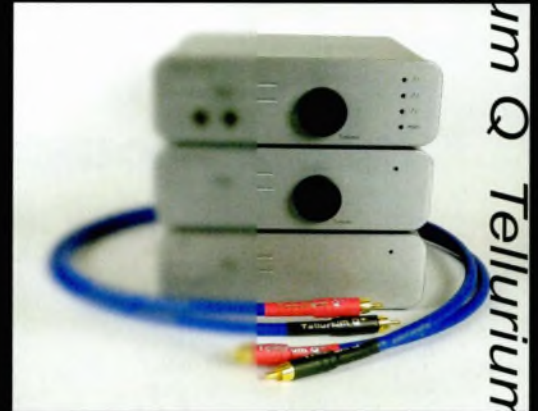
Find out why more and more people are talking about Tellurium Q[®] products.

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 news
HIGHLY
COMMENDED
Jan 2010

Hi Fi Choice
2012 ★★★★★

Jan 2011

2010
2011
2012
HI-FI WORLD
VERDICT ●●●●●

telluriumq.com +44 (0)1458 251997



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+

Introducing Tempo
the cable that reveals
the inner details in the music

Black Rhodium
+44 (0)1332 342 233
www.blackrhodium.co.uk

Analogue Innovation

Blue Lube Turntable Bearing Oil

TURNABLE CENTRAL

BEARINGS are precision-made items designed to minimise noise generation during use and have very low friction. It is essential that the bearing is maintained regularly to ensure that it keeps performing at its best and to prolong its life. To this end, it must be well-lubricated with a high-quality oil that has the correct properties for the conditions that are found in the environment of a record deck.

Analogue Innovation has developed a special oil for this purpose called Blue Lube. This oil is an extremely slippery lubricant, which the company claims beat all others in the industry during wear tests that were carried out while conducting research for a quality main bearing oil. The oil is a semi-synthetic mix and is suitable for all bearings, including Linn,

Thorens, Rega and Ariston, to name but a few. It contains no molybdenum disulphide or PTFE additives, which can create problems with some types of bearing. In particular, some early Linn bearings are adversely affected by Linn's Black Oil causing them to seize up over time. Happily, Analogue Innovation's Blue Lube does not have any such issue.

Slippery customer

The oil in any bearing becomes contaminated with dirt over time and it is, therefore, important to change it regularly. However, as only a few drops of oil are usually required to fill a bearing, the 5ml quantity supplied will last a long time. The oil itself is quite thin so it should also suit modern close-tolerance, high-precision bearings. If you use your turntable regularly, it is worth changing the oil every few months.



This can be accomplished by first removing the old oil using a cotton bud, being careful, of course, not to allow any stray pieces of cotton to fall into the bearing.

The use of this excellent oil will improve the life of your bearing and can be very easily applied using the supplied pipette. **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£9.50
CONTACT
01554 890414
WEBSITE
analogueinnovation.com

OUR VERDICT



Mains Cables R Us

Blue Horizon Spike Shoes



HOW DOES ONE achieve all the sonic benefits associated with using loudspeaker spikes without the risk of damage to polished wooden floors, carpets or other forms of flooring? One solution to this problem is to use a set of Blue Horizon Spike Shoes that are available from Mains Cables R Us of Huddersfield. In fact, it is claimed that these shoes provide additional benefits in terms of controlling resonances. Most other spike protection devices that are available have been designed to protect surfaces without giving any consideration to the sonic effect of their inclusion in the audio system.

The Blue Horizon Spike Shoes sit beneath the spikes that support floorstanding speakers and speaker stands and are designed to improve coupling. Of course, they can also be used under any equipment support that employs spikes at the bottom of

the legs or feet. As well as protecting the floor, they are intended to enhance sound quality by suppressing resonance that leads to sonically damaging microphony in audio components. This is achieved by filling the aluminium outer casing of each spike shoe with a combination of specially chosen materials.

Soft shoe shuffle

There is an extremely dense and firm material located beneath the indentation in which the spike sits, allowing loading of up to 100kg. This is surrounded by a proprietary mixture of materials that is much more elastic. The differing resonant frequencies of these materials ensure

resonance is damped equally across the audio band, rather than simply delivering a tonal shift.

These shoes are great value and very discrete devices and, in my opinion, they are far superior to the copper coins of the realm that I have often seen used as floor protectors beneath spikes! They are great value for money and, in any case, it is a small price to pay for protection of your floors and for gaining some sonic benefits as well. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE
£25
CONTACT
07908 056978
WEBSITE
mains-cables-r-us.co.uk

OUR VERDICT





Harrow Audio has been providing quality advice, demonstrations, sales and installation of Hi-Fi and Home Cinema equipment for over 40 years. We personally choose every single item we sell, so we can recommend with confidence.

We understand that every customer is unique, therefore we take great pride in providing individual solutions to meet every need, requirement and budget. Most of our items are backed by a free comprehensive 2-year guarantee and many items are available to purchase post free by Mail Order.

HARROW AUDIO

Our contact details are:

- 🏠 www.harrowaudiohifi.co.uk
- ☎ 020 8930 9933
- ✉ Harrow Audio, 27 Springfield Road, Harrow, HA1 1QF

ASTIntrew.

BASE

Belles

creaktiv

ORACLE AUDIO

*Renaissance
Amplification*

SSC

TAD



SSC isolation products uses technology that simply improves your system so that all you will hear is the music

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



ISOkinetik

ISOtone Silver Wire in Silk Tonearm Rewire Kit

IF YOU ARE contemplating an upgrade to your tonearm, but don't feel like forking the cash on a new one, why not replace the copper conductors with something better?

The ISOtone Silver Wire in Silk Tonearm Rewire Kit is the latest tonearm upgrade from ISOkinetik. It includes all you need to replace the wires in your tonearm.

In my opinion, silver is the best way to go for the ultimate in quality and this kit includes a sufficient length of 99.99% pure silver wire in silk sleeving. Not only should this sound good, it is also extremely flexible – an essential requirement for tone arm wire. Furthermore, silk has excellent dielectric properties and this, combined with its inherent flexibility, makes it an excellent choice as an insulator for tonearm wire. Also included with the kit is a length of a flexible black wire for replacing the earth lead if necessary, a length of Cardas Quad Eutectic silver solder, a set of four gold-plated cartridge clips and colour-coded heatshrink sleeving.

A fiddly business

In order to rewire my Rega RB1000 tonearm, I first cut the silver wire into four equal lengths and strip a few millimetres of the silk sleeving from one end of each wire. This is best done by squeezing the end between your thumbnail and forefinger and pulling the wire through your fingers. The first layer of silk unwinds from the wire and it can be snipped off with scissors, while viewing the wire using a jeweller's eyeglass. Repeat the process on the same end and remove the second layer and snip it off to reveal a clean length of silver wire ready for soldering.

Having disconnected the existing tonearm wires from the plug in the base of the tonearm, the next job is to twist the four ends of the new silver wire together and solder them to one of the existing wires in the base of the tonearm, using it as a



draw wire to pull the new wires through. Then pull out the old wires from the headshell end and guide the new ones in from the base. You should end up with the new wires threaded through and ready to be attached to the arm plug in the base and to the cartridge clips at the headshell end. If you have difficulty pulling the wires through, you may need to dismantle the bearing to gain access to the holes in the arm.

Now solder the four silver wires and earth lead to the plug in the arm base (incorrectly known as a 5-pin tonearm DIN plug), remembering to first slide a short length of the appropriate colour heatshrink sleeving on each wire, prior to soldering. Incidentally, the connections and colours when viewed upwards from the base of the arm going clockwise from the wide gap are right+ (red), right earth (green), ground (black), left earth (blue) and left+ (white).

Having reassembled the base plug, all that is left is to cut off the excess wire and solder on the cartridge clips at the headshell end, again remembering to slide a length of the appropriate colour heatshrink sleeving on each wire before soldering. Finally, refit and properly calibrate the arm and cartridge.

In my experience, it is important to run new wires in for at least ten hours

before any listening tests. This is true of silver wire, which sounds a little thin and brittle at first.

Worth the effort?

I am hoping for an improvement in clarity and precision of instruments within the stereo image and am not disappointed! However, I never expected the huge improvement at the lower end of the frequency.

The stereo imaging has improved and there is a greater sense of space and openness, coupled with a sharpening of instrument placement between the loudspeakers. But the most noticeable improvement is in the tightness of bass notes. Kettle drums in particular have a much cleaner punch. Tested with Stravinsky's *The Firebird Suite* performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the deep and extended drum roll during the opening sequence is noticeably cleaner and more controlled. Further into the recording, the 'twittering' of the strings is clear and crisp and you can almost identify the individual violins of that section of the orchestra!

The ISOtone re-wiring kit is great value for money and I can't recommend it highly enough. I do, however, recommend having a large gin and tonic to hand during the process, especially when soldering the fine silver wire! **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£70

CONTACT
0208 2418890

WEBSITE
isokinetik.co.uk

OUR VERDICT





L U X U R I E

Specialists in Luxurious Lifestyle Products



Brighton : 01273 590 716

sound@luxurie.me | picture@luxurie.me

www.luxurie.me

Pure Evoke F4 DAB radio

ASIDE FROM ITS auto-dimming OLED display window, the Pure Evoke F4 is none too dissimilar to the humble transistor radio of yesteryear. But while its appearance may satisfy nostalgic yearnings for simpler times, the only residual technology from the heyday of analogue radio is an FM tuner. In terms of features the Evoke F4 is light years ahead: as well as the obvious DAB tuner it allows you to pull in all manner of audio sources – or push them to the radio from playback devices such as smartphones. This belt and braces approach applies to the company's online subscription music streaming service Pure Connect, with options to use the text-driven operating system on the F4 or the much slicker method of swiping and tapping on a phone or tablet when using the Pure Connect app.

And there's more. The F4 can act as a transmitter, streaming incoming networked music over your network to other components in Pure's Jongo ecosystem such as the S3 portable speaker. The caveat is that DAB and FM can't be streamed, but internet radio and USB recordings can.

Blue in the tooth

As well as the ability to receive uPnP audio over a wireless home network the F4 is now Bluetooth ready (but sadly not apt-X compatible), a connection that can only be made with the use of a dongle. This is supplied, but with only one USB slot you may find yourself swapping the dongle out whenever you wish to record radio shows or access compressed music files stored on a flash drive. Bring on the versions of the F4 with built-in Bluetooth.

The Evoke F4's design and build are first rate. Fashioned from durable, piano black resin with an arched handle on top, its aesthetics would suit any contemporary kitchen or living area.

To the rear are a 2in bass port, a 3.5mm aux input, output for hooking up to a Pure S1 stereo speaker, a headphone socket and the USB port. There's also a 5.5V DC



input (the power supply is built into the plug) or you can use a Pure ChargePak E1 (£35 extra).

The full-range 3.5in driver delivers very good sound for a radio of this size

Switching on engages whatever mode the Evoke F4 was in when last powered down. Press the Home button and you're presented with a menu of six options: Digital radio; Pure Connect; Network/USB Media; FM; Aux and Settings.

Hooking up to a home network is simply a case of plodding through the menu and entering your router's password. Entering letters and numbers can be a chore using the combined display and select button, especially when searching for internet radio stations and artists, song titles, etc on a computer or the Pure Connect feature on the radio and it's a lot easier to use the Pure Connect app on a smartphone or tablet and stream from there to the F4.

The DAB tuner is quick to tune in and lets you save up to 30 presets. For those that like to switch between favourite stations accessing presets is convoluted, which is where a remote control and presets would help.

Networked features are never as reliable as radio waves or physical connections. Even when adjacent to

the router, the Pure FlowServer (in actual fact a poorly disguised Twonky), which allows the F4 to access music on a PC or Mac, trips up several times when attempting to play MP3 files stored on a Mac. Streaming from a drive connected to my Netgear router is more consistent, with no MP3 or WMA problems and playing lower bitrate (16-bit) FLAC files up to 88kHz.

Music on tap

If you subscribe for £4.99 a month to Pure's online music service you have access to a wealth of album tracks, live radio, podcasts and the library of sound recordings including birdsong, machinery and weather. Unfortunately, you can't shuffle sounds or songs, which would make an excellent addition. At least the F4 will automatically switch to playing an incoming source, be it from Pure Connect or Bluetooth.

The full-range 3.5in driver delivers very good sound for a radio of this size, and is comparable with the benchmark-setting Tivoli Audio Pal+. The FM tuner gives a notably warmer and fuller sound than DAB, but both radio sources are pleasing to listen to.

The quality of sound is certainly acceptable in a kitchen or as a bedroom alarm, but as streaming to the Jongo S3 clearly shows, for living room listening more power is needed and upgrading to a second speaker would do that. **AJ**

DETAILS

PRICE
£180
CONTACT
0845 1489001
WEBSITE
pure.com

OUR VERDICT





Element High Speed USB

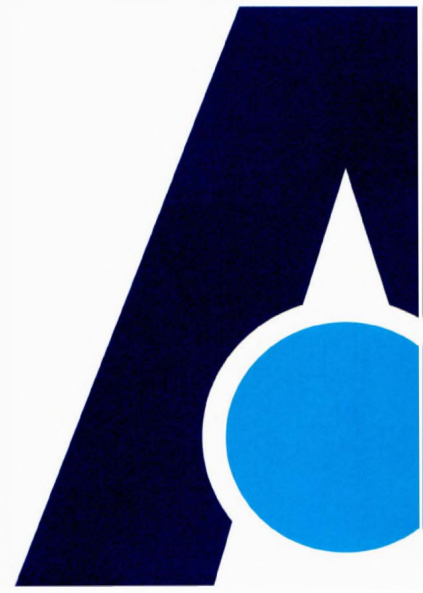


“ In short, the Atlas Element USB is a spectacular performer at a beer-budget price. As such, it comes heartily recommended. ”

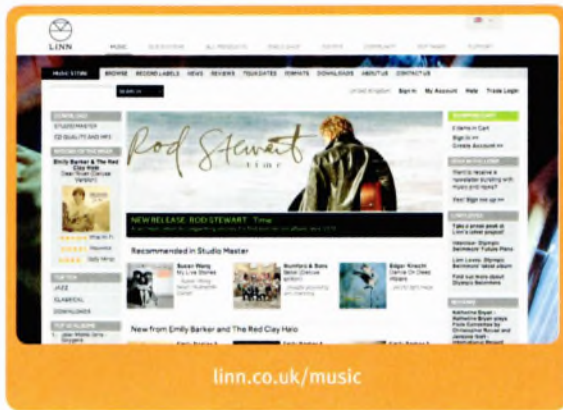
*HiFi Choice,
May 2013*

ATLAS[®]
the performance connection

atascables.com



Andrew Simpson casts his expert eye over his pick of the best hi-fi websites and online content



linn.co.uk/music

LINN RECORDS ROCK

Reviewing Linn's Sneaky DSM this month reminded me of how good music can sound when the same passion is applied to recording it as it is to playing it back. Linn Records has been a pioneer and producer of audiophile recordings since 1982 and its website is a great place to visit if you're interested in experiencing some new music that will make your system sing.



audioelevation.co.uk

ELEVATED AUDIO

Based in Doncaster since 2007, Audio Elevation is a family business run by Darren and Ian Moore. Brothers Moore recognise that progress in digital audio quality and the way we now consume music has led to a change in what customers want from a hi-fi system, which Audio Elevation's new site reflects.

The site boasts traditional features with products from brands including Audioquest, Peachtree Audio and the lesser known iFi. A dedicated system builder will launch soon and you can subscribe to Audio Elevation's newsletter, or take part in some lively debate via the soon-to-be-launched blog. "Our business is all about good customer service and providing more than just a sales outlet, through home demos and an engaging online experience," says Darren.

There's a handy beginners guide to downloading, including a plain English explanation of different file formats. You can download test files to ensure the formats you're looking to buy will work with your software.

Once you're ready, head to the music store to find album prices and taster tracks along with in-depth reviews and album notes, to help you decide what to choose. Prices start at around £1.50 for a single track, through to around £10 for MP3/CD quality and up to £20 for hi-res FLAC/ALAC Studio Masters.

Linn's catalogue boasts over 800 titles with artists ranging from Louis Armstrong to Mumford & Sons. The catalogue can be searched via artist, genre, release date and format (which includes vinyl), so finding what you're after is made easy. Linn's Studio Master recordings claim to offer the ultimate audio quality and signing up to Linn's e-newsletter, will help you stay up to date with its latest news, reviews and releases.



vinylengine.com/turntable_forum/viewforum.php?f=45

PERK UP YOUR TRIANGLE

Launched in the early eighties, Pink Triangle's turntable challenged what was commonly held as good practice for turntable design. The PT's DC motor and acrylic platter that lacked a mat seemed radical, yet these features are now common on many of today's high-end turntables, showing how ahead of its time the PT was.

Sadly PT decks had a reputation for unreliability and the company folded in 2003, with The Funk Firm rising from its ashes. Fortunately, support and info is still at hand via the Pink Triangle & Funk Firm sub forum of the Vinyl Engine, which is packed with discussion around model history, DIY improvements and upgrades. If you're considering buying a used PT, or your deck needs a little TLC, this is an excellent user-driven resource.

FOLLOW US: @HIFICHOICEMAG

CHOICE TWEETS



MISTRAL AUDIO
@MISTRALAUDIO

Systemdek II, Linn arm playing Queen 'A night at the Opera' through our Mistral MT34 - Prophet Song sounds smashing



CLASSICALBUMSUNDAYS
@CLASSICALBUMSUNDAYS

My old vinyl promo of #CocteauTwins Blue Bell Knoll sounded so good this morning! Can't wait to celebrate 25 years w/sessions in September.



LOUD & CLEAR EDINBURGH
@LOUDANDCLEAREDJ

Get ready for Music at the Mill 2013! A series of events at Loud & Clear Edinburgh, 16-17-18 August. Read on... fb.me/2tJ77hDCV



OXFORD AUDIO
@OXFORDAUDIO

#Graceland by Paul Simon sounded great last night at our #vinyl Music Club event. Watch out for the next one and book early



NAIM LABEL
@NAIMLABEL

Boom! Proud to announce new signing @grigorisounds new 'Sinas' EP & new video now exclusively on noisy.vice.com/en_uk/read/youneedtohearthis-grigori-sinas



AUDIO LOUNGE
@AUDIOLOUNGE

@YoungPaul43 @jazzfm Sounds sweet! Listening to The Dave Brubeck Quartet via our @DEVIALET 26 degree London. All we need is the beach :)



FANTHORPES HI-FI
@FANTHORPESHIFI

More images of our Demonstration room refurb goo.gl/bCZG5, keep your eyes peeled for more information on how we are doing #Hull

CHATTER



How does Bang & Olufson go about creating a new product? This short video takes a look at what makes the BeoLab 14 so special: 5x5m.com/lp/16414/creation_of_a.html

60% of voters were in the 'showing off' camp: linkedin.com/groups/Do-you-hide-proudly-show-78816.5.255670564



Italian audio specialist Vacuum Lab was tweeting about a LinkedIn poll in July, asking if we prefer to proudly show off our audio kit or hide it from view. At the last count

Cyrus Audio launched its album of the month feature last month. First up was Caro Emerald's *The Shocking Miss Emerald* (cyrusaudio.com/album-of-the-week). Join the debate using #cyrusmusicchat

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)



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



373 July 2013



374 August 2013

Phone: 0844 848 8822

(Phone lines open: Mon-Fri 10am – 4pm)

Order Online:

www.myhobbystore.co.uk/hfc





String Suspension Concept

Mini Base Platforms



Helping you achieve the perfect sound



Next month

DYNAUDIO XEO 5 SPEAKERS

THE WIRE-FREE SYSTEM
that could revolutionise the
way we connect to music

ALSO:
Six FM radio
tuners are given
our exhaustive
group test
treatment

PLUS:

CYRUSSTREAM XA: First review
of the new multi-input streamer
with built-in 24/192 DAC and internet
radio costing £1,250

CHOICE EXOTICA: T+A Criterion
TCD 210 loudspeaker, Mytek Stereo
192-DSD DAC, Bluetooth speakers,
Dealer Visit and all your hi-fi queries
and concerns answered



OCTOBER ISSUE ON SALE 29 AUGUST 2013

HIFI CHOICE ADVERTISERS INDEX

ABSOLUTE SOUNDS	12
ATLAS CABLES	120
AUDIO EMOTION	131
AUDIOLAB	132
AV DISTRIBUTION	70
AVID HIFI	11
BILLY VEE	73
BLACK RHODIUM	114
BOWERS & WILKINS	47
CARBON AGE	43
CLEAR AUDIO	110
DOUG BRADY	108
FLAMINGO AUDIO	86,87
FURUTECH	78
GSP AUDIO	112
HIFI SOUND	82
ICON AUDIO	68
INSPIRE HIFI	97
ISOTEK	30
KEF	21
LUXURIE	118
M2	34
MAINS CABLES R US	80
MUSICAL FIDELITY	55
NAIM AUDIO	2
NUNU DISTRIBUTION	15
NUNU HARROW AUDIO	116
NUNU SOUNDS FOR SALE	32
NUNU SSC	123
NUNU TAD	106
OPPO	9
ORIGIN LIVE	112
PJ HIFI	67
PMC	61
PRO-JECT	51
PURE SOUND	112
RAIDHO	28
RUSS ANDREWS	75
SANSUI	24
SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION	37,38,39
T+A	26
TALK ELECTRONICS	76
TELLURIUM Q	114
THE RIGHT NOTE	98

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 it's 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

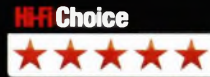
Tel: +44 (0)1733 344768

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

- audeze
- audioplan
- chord
- dynavector
- grado
- isoblu
- hutter
- kudos
- lehmann
- linn
- lyra
- naim
- neat
- nottingham
- primare
- pmc
- rega
- sennheiser
- stax
- trilogy
- sumiko

signals
 hi-fi
 show

Trinity Park
 Ipswich 30 & 31st
 August 2013

signals

hi-fi for grown-ups

free entry
 register online to enter
 free draw (good prizes)
 phone or see our
 website for
 more details

it's our 20th
 birthday, so
 there should be
 cake

ipswich (01473) 655171
 www.signals.uk.com

prestigious
 & exclusive



a sennheiser club orpheus member

Calveley Court, Reymerston, 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**



Emporiumhifi

www.emporiumhifi.com

AUTHORISED DEALERS

A.M.R - AUDION - AUDIO NOTE - AIR TIGHT - CARDAS - CONRAD JOHNSON - BENZ - KUZMA - SUGDEN - PASS LABS - SME - FUNK FIRM - ORIGIN LIVE - LUXMAN - MICHELL - NIGHTINGALE - VIVA AUDIO - LECTOR - PURESOUND - LYRA - ORTOFON - USHER - STERLING BROADCAST - NVO - PROMITHEUS.
PLUS MANY MORE.

We are actively seeking to purchase all used quality HiFi NOW!
 From complete systems to individual items.

WE BUY

AUDIO NOTE - AUDIO RESEARCH - KRELL - CONRAD JOHNSON - SONUS FABER - COPLAND - MARTIN LOGAN - APOGEE - MICHELL - SME - MERIDIAN - LINN - NAIM - AUDIO INNOVATIONS - AUDION - PINK TRIANGLE - PROAC - TUBE TECHNOLOGY - DIAPASON - UNISON RESEARCH - CHARIO - CLASSE - BRYSTON - REGA - LFD
 & MANY OTHER BRANDS.

We offer a Part-Exchange facility on all stock items

CONTACT US NOW FOR INSTANT QUOTES

HEAD OFFICE KENT WALES MIDLANDS
 01986 895929 - 01304 239419 - 01554 750262 - 01213 466043

Audiolab
 Audioquest
 Chord Electronics
 Cyrus
 Dali
 Marantz
 Michell
 Mission
 Monitor Audio
 NAD
 Olive
 Opera
 Origin-Live
 Pathos
 Pioneer
 Primare
 Pro-Ac
 Project
 Quad
 Ruark-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

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.basicallysound.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

ACTON GATE AUDIO

W

4 Ruabon Rd, Wrexham,
Clwyd LL13 7PB

☎ 01978 364500
☐ www.acton-gate-audio.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



“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.

*"this accessory
is heartily
recommended"*
Gramophone



£39/pair - post free

01204 366133 www.rothwellaudioproducts.co.uk

REVOX SERVICE

THE MANUFACTURERS' APPOINTED SERVICE COMPANY

REVOX SERVICE

Correct Revox Spare Parts Pricing
24 Hour Estimation procedure
Manufacturer Upgrades and Advice
Delivery and Collection Service
Comprehensive Guarantees

Factory Trained Engineers
Rapid Response Turnaround
Full Revox range serviced
Written Technical Reports
Late Evening Opening

THE AR TECHNOLOGY LIMITED

TTL House, Sheeptick End, Near Lidlington, Bedfordshire, MK43 0SF
Telephone 01525 841999 Facsimile 01525 841009

Oranges & Lemons

of Battersea

Hi-Fi & Streaming
Home Cinema
Multi-Room



020 7924 2040

61-63 Webbs Road London SW11 6RX
www.oandhifi.co.uk



hifi lounge here to listen...

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 U.K. GUARANTEES. NO EX-DEM OR EX-DISPLAY GOODS. NO GREY IMPORTS. GOODS ARE NOT SUPPLIED ON APPROVAL. SORRY NO GENERAL CATALOGUES. PLEASE PHONE OR WRITE FOR SPECIFIC REVIEWS, BROCHURES OR PRICES.

ESTABLISHED 1986.

MAIL ORDER ONLY FROM: IAN HARRISON, 7 MILL HILL, REPTON, DERBY, DE65 6GQ
TEL: 01283 702875 9am-9pm INCLUDING SUNDAYS.

Front End Problems?

contact:

The Cartridge Man

It doesn't have to cost an arm and leg to get the best

- listen to my Koetsu - and - Decca - eater.

Also agents for Croft, Moth, Hadcock & Mitchell & E.A.R. Graham Slee projects.

Valve equipment re-build service available.

- Plus cartridge re-tipping service

020 8688 6565

Website: www.thecartridgeman.com

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



heed



obelisk s/

Audio Destination	Tiverton	01884 243584
Basically Sound	Norwich	01362 820800
Chris Brooks Audio	Warrington	01925 261212
Faithful Audio	Birmingham	0121 224 7300
Home Cinema Centre	Edinburgh	0131 229 9350
Phase 3	Worthing	01903 245577
Unitel	New Malden	0208 942 9567

www.heedaudio.co.uk

sound cinergy

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...

REMEMBER THE NAD 3020? Many readers will have had one in the eighties, and enjoyed its super sound as much as its low price. Now, NAD has reinvented it – the new NAD D 3020 will be in shops by the end of the summer and marks a radical reworking of the amplifier by its original designer Bjørn Erik Edvardson (BEE), who still works as NAD chief designer. It is a Class D design, using – our spies tell us – a licensed and redesigned version of the Netherlands-based Hypex technology. It boasts 30W per channel, and a range of inputs including apt-X Bluetooth and asynchronous USB. It looks nothing like the original amp, and can be stood vertically or horizontally. No UK price yet, but expect £300 to £400.

FANS OF CHORD ELECTRONICS WILL BE HAPPY TO KNOW that it's not been resting on its laurels. The company will be introducing its DXD (Digital eXtreme Definition) technology into some of its product line in the coming months, meaning up to DSD 128 and 384kHz PCM over USB and DSD over Ethernet. "Exciting times", says our little bird...

VALVE AUDIO DEVICES IS A NEW BRITISH BRAND whose first product will be a UK-designed and manufactured tube-aspirated digital-to-audio convertor. Our spy tell us it combines the latest digital technology with valve circuitry operating in pure Class A, and is also rumoured to feature a DSD upgrade. The price should be in the region of £6,500.

STOP PRESS: NAD TO LAUNCH NEW HEADPHONES. The VISO HP-50 (£230) combines a luxurious finish with NAD's unique 'Room Feel' audio technology, said to simulate a loudspeaker listening experience.

THROUGH THE PAST, SMARTLY...



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 146
SEPTEMBER 1995
It was a busy time for then editor Stan Vincent who had just spent a number of weeks over seeing the "new-look, value-added Hi-Fi Choice" with glossier pictures, fancier nineties design and more tests than ever before.

Of course, it wasn't all good news as the cover price was put up for the first time in ten years to a whopping £2.99 (which puts into perspective what good value the mag still is some 18 years later). The main attraction in the issue was a group test of cassette decks – "the most cost-effective and versatile home recording system one can buy". Of the 12 models put through their paces, offerings from Aiwa, Denon, JVC, Kenwood, Onkyo, Sony, Technics and Yamaha were all recommended, but top dog was Pioneer's £500 CT-SB30S, which was described as "a deck that pushes against the edge of the envelope (!) of the cassette medium".

Elsewhere, the DVD format was launched in Japan as an optical disc computer storage medium and a company called eBay were formed. Both sank without trace and were never heard of again.



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 218
SEPTEMBER 2001
Jump forward a mere six years and the humble cassette is no longer held in such high regard. Instead our cover points to the CD as the "state-of-the-art recording technology" of choice and so nine models – all costing £500

or under – were put through their paces. Alvin Gold reported: "On the evidence of this test, it is not necessary to spend a great deal to get a decent disc burner". Highlights included Denon's CDR-1000, Marantz's DR6000, Philips' CDR785, Pioneer's PDR-W839 and the £250 Pioneer PDR-60, all of which received Best Buy or Recommended awards. Elsewhere, Paul Messenger got to grips with three-box speaker systems, made up of satellites and subwoofers. The disappointing group test had no Best Buy and came to the conclusion that: "You pay a pretty hefty premium for style and packaging compared to a regular stereo pair."

Meanwhile, the world watched in horror as terrorists brought new meaning to the word terror by flying two planes into the World Trade Centre in New York. The date September 11 and the number 911 would never be looked at in the same way.



DESERT ISLAND DISCS

This month **Jake Day-Williams**, our production editor chooses four of his favourite long players...



PIXIES DOOLITTLE
I love Black Francis and Kim Deal's harmonies and this is without doubt the best example of the 'loud shouty bit, quiet bit, loud shouty bit' school or rock.



BEASTIE BOYS CHECK YOUR HEAD
A stunning mix of hip hop, funk and hardcore guitar. For me this is Yauch, Mike D and Adrock at their very best. When I grow up I want to be a Beastie Boy.



PLAID NOT FOR THREES
If I'm on a desert island I've got to have something to dance to and they don't come much better than this squelchy, banging electronica from Warp's finest.



SCROOBIUS PIP DISTRACTION PIECES
Probably my favourite album at the moment. Pip is a spoken-word artist with an ear for beats. The result is thought-provoking and funny hip hop with a British flavour.

Hi-Fi Choice
PASSION FOR SOUND

EDITORIAL TEAM
Editor Lee Dunkley
Production Editor Jake Day-Williams
Art Editor Emily Hammond

CONTRIBUTORS
Simon Berkovitch, Patrick Cleasby, James Hughes, Tim Jarman, Adrian Justins, Jason Kennedy, Paul Miller, Dave Oliver, David Price, 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 777 807
Email: mytimemedia@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 6BG
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 Hi-Fi Choice on a regular basis, starting with issue:

Title _____ First name _____
Surname _____
Address _____
Postcode _____
Telephone number _____

If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask!



Published by MyTimeMedia Ltd. All rights reserved. 2011. ISSN 0955-1115. The Publisher's written consent must be obtained before any part of this publication may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, including photocopying, and information retrieval systems. All reasonable care is taken in the production of the magazine content, but the publishers cannot be held legally responsible for errors in the contents of this magazine or for any loss however arising from such errors, including loss of retailing from negligence of our staff. Reprints placed upon the contents of this magazine is at reader's own risk.
HI-FI CHOICE (ISSN 0955-1115) is published 13 times per year (three in August) by AVTech Media Ltd a division of MYTIMEMEDIA LTD, c/o USACOM Media (UK) Ltd, Corporate Power Drive, Watlington, Oxon, OX12 9JF, HITCHBOURGH, N.Y. 10951. Periodicals postage paid at HITCHBOURGH, N.Y. POSTMASTER: send address changes to HI-FI CHOICE, c/o EXPRESS MAG, PO BOX 9969, HITCHBOURGH, N.Y. 10951-0999.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.



audioemotion



www.audioemotion.co.uk

e: info@audioemotion.co.uk

f: facebook.com/audioemotion

t: 01333 425 999



£500
MIN
P/X*

AUDIO PHYSIC

VIRGO 25+

only £9250

"A real stunner! It delivers a sound that is substantially more balanced and mature than that of its predecessor, setting a new benchmark in excellence. Its midrange is sheer poetry; this loudspeaker is simply superb!"

STEREO MAGAZINE 2012



£1000
MIN
P/X*

AUDIO PHYSIC

SCORPIO 25

only £4500

"A graceful-looking, well proportioned, solidly built, and meticulously finished. And if you like 'seeing' your music, this speaker will not disappoint, presenting recorded events as if they're actually in your room."

STEREOPHILE

NEW FOR 2013

AUDIO PHYSIC CARDEAS plus+

only £22100

£500
MIN
P/X*

A unique blend of the highest standard in loudspeaker aesthetics and design that will emotionally sweep you off your feet with its physical beauty and graceful sonic performance.



AUDIO PHYSIC

VIRGO 25

only £6600



*conditions apply. Please ask for details.

Bred from perfection

From the brand that has brought you some of the most highly regarded Hi-Fi electronics in recent years, Q-DAC and M-PWR are the latest entries in Audiolab's stable of class leading audio products.



"Q-DAC/M-PWR is a cracking little combination... gives nothing away to anything else at the price and betters many costing more."

Hi-Fi Choice, August 2013



August 2013
Q-DAC/M-PWR



August 2013
Q-DAC/M-PWR

audiolab

LAB SERIES