



Total Eclipse

The AirPlay speaker system that's out of this world

Head master

Oppo's class-leading headphone amplifier



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 390

November 2014

Plug'n'play

Why VPI's all-in-one deck is the perfect package

WIN
CHORD
HUGO DAC
worth
£1,400!

32

PRODUCTS ON TEST:

AudioQuest,
Custom Design
Quad & Teac

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM

Heed Audio & PMC unite for the perfect combo

Come together

The Nottingham-based community Record shop putting locals first



Marantz SACD

The Super Audio SA8005 disc spinner with built-in DAC and DSD playback

GROUP TEST

Desktop amps

Six compact amps with wireless connectivity go head to head





“Get up and drive your funky soul!”

James Brown

The heart and soul of music

Precision; a new luxury loudspeaker range from Tannoy, built to deliver music as it was meant to be heard. With audiophile features such as double-magnet drivers, hand-built crossovers and mass-load cabinet tuning, Precision has music at its heart and soul. Across two stunning floorstanding models, a compact stand-mount and matching centre channel speaker, Precision delivers breath-taking detail and musical dynamics. Built around a brand new 6 inch (150 mm) version of Tannoy's world renowned Dual Concentric™ driver, the contemporary cabinets boast premium fit and finish in a choice of colours. Powerful, passionate and incredibly precise, Precision gets to the heart and soul of music like no other speaker in its class.

TANNOY®

tannoy.com



50
Monitor Audio
Silver 1



113
Pure
Pop Midi

Music reviews

99



Robert Plant *lullaby and The Ceaseless Roar*



It's show time! With Berlin's IFA 2014 show drawing to a close as we go to press, the National Audio Show at Whittlebury Hall running from September 20 to 21 and the return of Hi-Fi Show Live to the Beaumont House Estate, Old Windsor running from November 1 to 2 (see p15), there's plenty to see. We'll be

covering all these events in our *Show Report* over the next few issues, but in the meantime one of the headlines grabbing our attention at IFA is the announcement that Technics is set to return to the European market later this year. Under the slogan 'Rediscover Music' the much-loved brand announced it will initially launch two new series: the Reference Class R1 – with SE-R1 stereo power amplifier, SU-R1 network audio control player and SB-R1 speaker system – and the Premium Class C700 – with SU-C700 stereo integrated amplifier, ST-C700 network audio player, SL-C700 CD player and the SB-C700 speaker system. See page 87 for more on IFA.

Audio was high on the agenda at the German show this year with the announcement of a new lossless music streaming service to the UK and US called Tidal. Instead of serving up compressed MP3, AAC or OGG files, the Spotify rival claims to stream lossless files at CD quality (16/44.1). The service from Norway is set to launch here in the autumn and promises access to more than 25 million tracks for a monthly fee (yet to be set). Pay a visit to: www.tidalhifi.com to sign up and be among the first to experience the new service and tell us what you think.

Lee Dunkley Editor




Follow us:



twitter.com/HiFiChoiceMag facebook.com/hifichoice.co.uk

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!
--	---	---



ENTERPRISE HOUSE, ENTERPRISE WAY,
EDENBRIDGE, KENT TN8 6HF

Hi-Fi Choice Contents

hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. **390** November 2014

NEWS & OPINION

6 Audiofile

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

14 Webwatch

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

71 Letters

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

79 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

120 Reader Classifieds

Sell your unwanted hi-fi for FREE here

124 Next Issue

The sonic treats to look out for next month



FEATURES

64 Going live

We pay a visit to Britannia Row, which is responsible for setting up PAs at live gigs

90 Beautiful System

PMC and Heed Audio come together to form a formidable hi-fi power axis

94 Labelled With Love

Dust down the pork pie hat and get ready to skank with legendary ska label 2 Tone

116 Nottingham Music Exchange

We pay a visit to the community-minded record shop that's helping local people

GROUP TEST

24 Six compact and bijou amplifiers with wireless capabilities put to the test



WIN
Chord Hugo
DAC worth
£1,400!
p118



Audiofile: Pioneer's new P2DAB system



Music reviews: Tony Allen's *Film Of Life*



107
Teac
HA-P50 headphone amp/DAC

"If you're looking for something that's small but perfectly formed, you have just found it"

Monitor Audio Silver 1 p50

TESTED THIS MONTH



42
Oppo HA-1 headphone amp/DAC



52
Parasound Zcd, Zpre2 and Zamp



56
ATC SCM19 standmount loudspeaker



90
Heed Audio/PMC Beautiful System



18
VPI Nomad turntable package

REVIEWS

Kit testing

- 18 VPI**
Nomad turntable package
- 42 Oppo**
HA-1 headphone amp/DAC (Exotica)
- 46 Marantz**
SA8005 SACD player
- 50 Monitor Audio**
Silver 1 standmount loudspeaker
- 52 Parasound**
Zcd/Zpre2/Zamp CD player/preamp/power amplifier
- 56 ATC**
SCM19 standmount loudspeaker
- 60 Eclipse**
TD-M1 wireless loudspeaker
- 88 Sony**
TC-K60 cassette recorder (retro)

GROUP TEST

Compact amplifiers
£400-£700

- 27 Cambridge Audio**
Minx XI
- 29 Monitor Audio** A100
- 31 NAD** D 7050
- 33 Pro-Ject** MaiA
- 35 Quad** Vena
- 37 Teac** AI-301DA

MINI TEST

Speaker stands
£195-£695

- 102 Q Acoustics**
Concept 20 stand
- 103 Custom Design**
FS104 Signature
- 103 Russ Andrews**
Torlyte
- 104 Fostex**
SG600S

CHOICE EXTRAS

- 107 Teac**
HA-P50 headphone amplifier/DAC
- 108 Artisan Silver Cables**
Ultimate Silver Dream interconnects
- 111 AudioQuest**
NRG-X3 power cable
- 111 Lindy**
HF-20 Lightweight Stereo Headphones
- 113 Pure**
Pop Midi FM/DAB radio
- 114 Audio Suspension**
Isolation Plinth
- 114 ISOKinetik**
Graphite Cartridge Stabiliser

Never miss an issue – turn to p68 for our latest subs offer

System addict

Pioneer adds P2DAB system with network audio player to its compact hi-fi range

PRICE: £749 **AVAILABLE:** NOW

CONTACT: 0330 1231240 **WEB:** PIONEER.CO.UK

BOLSTERING ITS RANGE of petite hi-fi systems, Pioneer introduces the P2DAB. The new compact system consists of the SX-P01 stereo receiver with DAB radio and the all-new N-P01 network audio player plus a pair of two-way bass reflex bookshelf speakers fitted with a 120mm glass fibre mid/bass driver and 25mm soft dome tweeter.

As with its P1DAB CD-based system, the existing SX-P01 stereo receiver is the power house and control centre for the new P2DAB system. It claims 2x 75W power output utilising the company's Direct Energy HD amplification, and the preamp section is isolated from audio circuitry and has its own power supply to ensure sound quality is on a par with the company's full-size components.

The N-P01 network audio player forms a key part of the P2DAB system, but the sleek

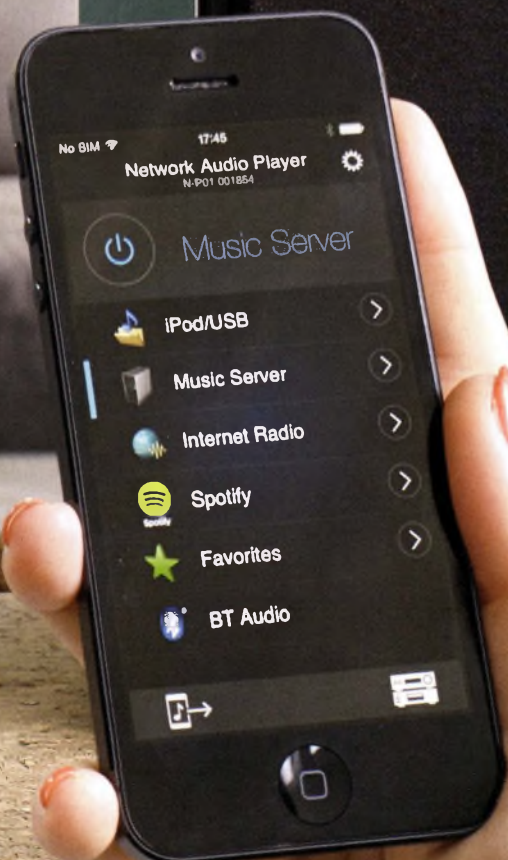
component fits just as well with Pioneer's existing P1DAB CD-based system and is available to buy separately, costing £349, for anyone wanting an add on or looking to partner the network player with any other hi-fi system for that matter. Pioneer says it streams networked music over Ethernet or wi-fi and access to the plentiful internet radio stations is supported by vTuner. Streaming from Bluetooth aptX and AirPlay smartphone and tablet devices is also supported.

The built-in 32-bit/192kHz DAC handles playback of music files including MP3, WMA, WAV, AAC, as well as hi-res FLAC, ALAC, AIFF and DSD (2.8MHz) formats. Music file browsing is via the 3.5in LCD colour display showing album art or using the free Pioneer ControlApp downloadable from Apple's App Store or the Google Play store.



It streams networked music over Ethernet or wi-fi and a wealth of internet radio stations

Browsing all your networked music via the Pioneer ControlApp



COMMENT

RIP ALBUMS?

There's no doubt about it, streaming is the direction that music consumption is heading in, and try as you might, there doesn't appear to be anything you can do about it. While it's generally agreed that the ease of use and the wealth of material that's available is a good thing, the question of streaming quality has always been very concerning – and something that has been discussed numerous times in the pages of *HFC*. But are we also overlooking another potential downside to the world of streaming music? Could it spell the end for the album?

Much has been made of the apparent resurgence of vinyl sales, the importance of events like Record Store Day and the growth in cool kudos of records over MP3s, but the facts make far from promising reading. In late August, first-time weekly album sales in the US fell below 4 million for the first time – the lowest point since the Nielsen SoundScan system (that's used for monitoring sales) began in 1991. CD sales in large retailers are down 19.2 percent year-on-year, while chains have suffered a 25.6 percent drop.

One anonymous music executive told *Billboard's* website: "I remember when album sales fell under 10 million units and the industry reacted like it was a tragedy", while another added: "This year the bottom fell out of digital sales to a degree that we never anticipated."

Arguably the most worrying thing about this trend is that with music buyers choosing to stream individual tracks, rather than listen to an album in its entirety, the writing could be on the wall for the 'long player'. What's the point of putting together a magnum opus that takes the listener on a journey, when all they're going to do is stream the big hit before moving on to another one-hit wonder? Maybe we're being overly concerned, but it's highly likely that works like *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*, *Tubular Bells*, *Nevermind* and *Blue Lines* (to handpick some classics at random) will one day be regarded as long-forgotten fads. Let's hope not... ▶



Bowers & Wilkins CM Series

The Decoupled Double Dome tweeter returns in B&W's new series

PRICE: £650-£3,000 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 01903 221500 **WEB:** BOWERS-WILKINS.COM

BACK IN 2010 B&W introduced its first speaker with a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter, and following rave reviews the same technology is being introduced to the new CM Series. The Double Dome tweeters have a thin aluminium dome surrounded by a thicker aluminium ring that's claimed to prevent distortion. The tweeter is also decoupled by a ring of gel to physically cushion the assembly from the cabinet to improve dispersion for a more natural, spacious treble, B&W tells us.

The Double Dome tweeter is employed throughout the range, which is topped by the CM10 S2 floorstander, which has the tweeter on the top. The new CM6 S2 (right) boasts a 165mm bass/mid driver and also has the tweeter up top. The rest of the range includes the CM9 S2 and CM8 S2 floorstanders (the CM8 has a slimmer profile), CM5 S2 and CM1 S2 standmounts, along with a choice of centres and subwoofers in a variety of finishes.



IN BRIEF

PORTABLE HEADPHONE AMP



High-end hi-fi specialist Lars & Ivan has unveiled details of a new portable headphone amp with vacuum tubes fitted under the hood. Designed and manufactured in Hong Kong, the THA-8 is claimed to be the ideal choice for fans of classical and vocal music that want to listen to their tunes on the move.

Lars & Ivan tells us that the amp is suitable for a wide range of headphones from 16 to 300ohms and that it is compatible with both iOS and Android devices. It weighs in at 148g, has two audio jacks and a professional Alps potentiometer for volume adjustment. It's available in October and expected to cost £240. LARS-IVAN.COM

Yamaha's network systems

PRICE: £260-£360 **AVAILABLE:** LATE AUTUMN
CONTACT: 0844 811116 **WEB:** UK.YAMAHA.COM

As we're going to press the Internationale Funkausstellung consumer electronics show (or IFA as it's more commonly known) is drawing to a close in Berlin and we understand that Yamaha has unveiled as many as 15 new products to an expectant audience. More about them in a future issue, but for now we can reveal some early tidbits on some other plans.

The R-N310 (below) is described as being a modern take on the traditional two-channel integrated amplifier, with features including A+B speaker configuration, quality

internal design and a built-in phono stage. It boasts a claimed maximum power of 115W per channel into 4ohms (or 140W into 8ohms) and connections include six analogue inputs, coaxial and optical digital ins and a subwoofer out for extra low-end rumble.

It's compatible with 24-bit/192kHz FLAC/WAV files and has AirPlay so that it can wirelessly connect with tablets, smartphones and PCs. Further network features include DLNA streaming, app control using a smartphone or tablet, Spotify, Pandora and vTuner internet radio.

Staying in the realm of network audio, the CD-N301 is Yamaha's entry-level compact disc spinner. It also offers DLNA streaming, app control using a smartphone or tablet, Spotify, Pandora and vTuner internet radio alongside AirPlay compatibility, DLNA and Compact Disc digital audio text.

Both products are expected to be available in "late Autumn" and come in either black or silver finishes. Tentative prices are expected to be around £260 for the RN-301 network amp and £360 for the CD-N301 CD player. ▶



“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

Fanthorpes, Hepworth Arcade, SilverSt, Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire HU1 1JU Tel: 01482 223096

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

The Audioworks, 14 Stockport Road, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 2AA Tel: 0161 428 7887

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

Mission unleashes Aero

British loudspeaker manufacturer unveils new wireless speaker system

PRICE: £500 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **WEB:** MISSION.CO.UK

MEET AERO, THE latest addition to the Mission family, this one-box solution has been designed to be positioned anywhere around the home to provide “room-filling sound”. With Bluetooth aptX and AirPlay compatibility it provides an ideal way to stream music wirelessly from smartphones and tablets (be they Android or Apple) along with PCs and laptops, while DLNA support means it can jump onto your home network. Alternatively you can utilise the USB port or optical digital input to play music at 24-bit/192kHz.

Underneath the aluminium shell are seven drive units, with each powered by their own dedicated amplifier. Six are broadband BMR drivers offering a claimed 20W RMS (four firing from the front and two from the side) and there's also a downward firing 120mm subwoofer ported through Aero's bass (40W RMS). Peak power is claimed to be 300W and Aero employs Sonic Emotion signal processing to create an immersive 3D sound.

IN BRIEF

DAMSON'S MINI SPEAKER

🔦 Damson has unveiled the latest addition to its portable speaker range in the shape of the Vulcan – a Bluetooth portable for music on the move. The result of two year's development, the Vulcan has four discrete drivers – two side-facing 1.5in Neodymium units (delivering a claimed 3W RMS) and two forward-firing 2in mid/treble drivers (5W RMS). There's also a 118mm passive radiator subwoofer at the back for added low-end rumble.

Offering Bluetooth aptX and NFC compatibility for wireless connection, the Vulcan has a claimed battery life of 12 hours music playback. It's available now for £100 with a choice of finishes and grille colours.

DAMSONAUDIO.COM



CAD's bespoke CAT

PRICE: £5,300 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 0203 3970334
WEB: COMPUTERAUDIODESIGN.COM



Designed for those that want a high-quality source component for ripping and storing Compact Discs and streaming from Windows platforms, comes Computer Audio Design's new CAT. CAD informs us that CAT has been manufactured specifically to complement its 1543 DAC – although it will work perfectly well with other digital-to-analogue converters. Hand built to your specific requirements, the CAT can be fitted with a choice of storage options (SSD, HDD or NAS) and further tailored as either a standalone two-channel system or as part of a home network.

It's compatible with AIFF, FLAC, WAV, and DSD over PCM files and offers a maximum bit-depth of

32-bits at a sampling rate of 352.8kHz. Connections include a pair of USB 3.0 ports, alongside four USB 2.0 ports, an HDMI for connection to a TV screen or monitor, DVD-D and D-Sub outputs, an Ethernet port and PS/2 inputs for connecting a keyboard and mouse for labelling your music.

CDs are automatically ripped to the CAT's memory when inserted into the slot and then promptly ejected. Playback then comes via the 'audiophile-grade' customised USB output, which is hooked up to the CAD 1543 or a DAC of your choosing. There's also integrated music streaming on hand so that you can enjoy services such as Spotify, Qobuz or BBC Radio.

Though, the CAT is designed for use with the Windows OS, there are iOS and Android apps available for tablets or smartphones for operation, so that you don't need a keyboard or mouse.

CAT designer Scott Berry told *HFC*: “The biggest problem in computer audio is the computer. Having worked hard to improve sound quality using software, I wanted also to implement the discoveries made during the development of the DAC in the CAD Audio Transport itself. The CAT combines exceptional sound quality with true ease of use. It is also a device that can adapt as the digital music world evolves with the renewed focus on sound quality”. ▶

oppo



PM-1

Planar Magnetic Headphones



Proprietary Planar Magnetic technology

Life-like, natural sound quality

High sensitivity & scalability

Plush padding & reduced weight for comfort

Comprehensive set of cables and accessories

HA-1

Headphone Amplifier



Class A balanced power amplifier

Toroidal power transformer

USB DAC with DSD support

ESS 9018 Sabre² Reference DAC

IR Remote & Bluetooth control included

BDP-103D

Universal player with Blu-ray



Dual-core fast loading

Darbee Visual Presence

Dual HDMI inputs/outputs

4K up-scaling

True 24p™ video

Network streaming

7.1-Channel analogue output



BDP-105D

Flagship universal player with Blu-ray



Darbee Visual Presence

Upgraded USB DAC supports DSD 64/128

Dual Sabre² Reference DACs

Toroidal linear PSU

Headphone amplifier

Coaxial and optical digital inputs

See us at
THE **hi-fi** SHOW

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

1-2 NOVEMBER

Beaumont House Estate
Old Windsor, West Berkshire

hifinews.co.uk/show

oppodigital.co.uk

“I’ve got a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore...”


A voyage of musical discovery: Nuance. Emotion. Artistry. Over the decades, MartinLogan has produced loudspeakers with the sole purpose of getting you back to the music.

Having mastered electrostatic technology with the CLS, a skill now embodied in the hybrid Summit X and the full-range CLX Art, MartinLogan has re-imagined speaker technology. MartinLogan speakers address systems from purist two-channel to multi-channel home theatre, with a range including BalancedForce™ Dynamo™ subwoofers, surround-sound and centre channel speakers,

It is no exaggeration to say that MartinLogan speakers are as beautiful as speakers can be and bear aesthetics worthy of the sound they reproduce. They enhance your musical pleasure and your living space.

Because, as Dorothy learned, there’s no place like home.



 **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


MARTIN LOGAN

Bluetooth for all

The Vamp delivers wireless connectivity to any speaker

PRICE: £50 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
WEB: THEVAMP.CO.UK

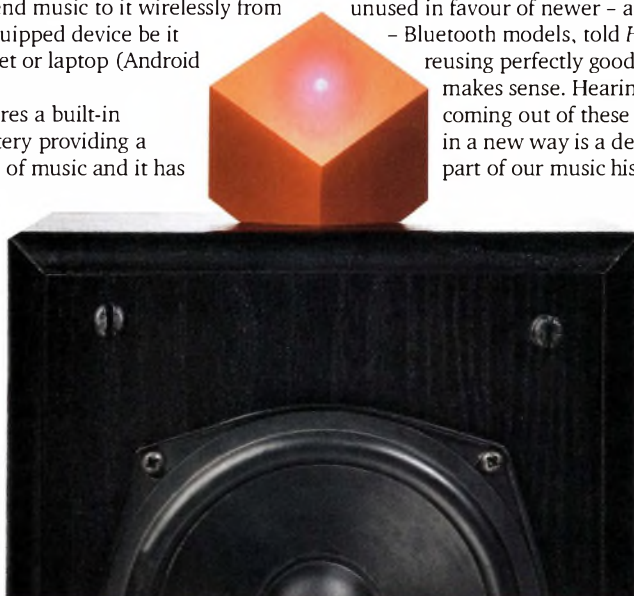
FOLLOWING A SUCCESSFUL Kickstarter crowd funding campaign, London-based designer Paul Cocksedge's dream for revitalising loudspeakers has finally become a reality as The Vamp enters into full production. Put simply, it's a small, palm-sized box that can be attached to any loudspeaker to make it Bluetooth compatible. The result is that no matter which make or how old your loudspeaker is, you'll now be able to send music to it wirelessly from any Bluetooth-equipped device be it smartphone, tablet or laptop (Android or Apple).

The Vamp features a built-in rechargeable battery providing a claimed 10 hours of music and it has

a wireless range of around 10m. It is compatible with internet radio stations and music streaming services like Spotify, Deezer and Rdio and, thanks to a small powerful magnet on the back, can be placed anywhere on your speaker. The Vamp can be ordered online and comes in a choice of red, white or black finishes.

Paul, who dreamt up the idea as a way of revitalising old analogue speakers that are left unused in favour of newer – and often inferior – Bluetooth models, told *HFC*: "For me, reusing perfectly good technology makes sense. Hearing the rich sound coming out of these older speakers in a new way is a delight. They are part of our music history".

Stick it on your speaker for Bluetooth goodness



Audio-Technica in-ears

PRICE: £170/£250 **AVAILABLE:** NOVEMBER **WEB:** EU.AUDIO-TECHNICA.COM

According to Audio-Technica, the new CKR headphone range has been designed for "music fans who demand audiophile quality on the go". These are the world's first in-ear headphones to feature a pair

of 13mm Dual Phase Push Pull drivers to reduce distortion and improve response times, while doubling power output and increasing sensitivity, so AT claims. The new earphone range

consists of the ATH-CKR9 and ATH-CK10 (the former has drivers enclosed in aluminium and the latter in titanium), which cost £170 and £250 respectively. They feature the same studded wire used by other high-end Audio-Technica earphones, combined with an aluminium sleeve plug claimed to help minimise cable vibration, which can impact on sound performance. Hiromichi Ozawa, Engineering Manager, Headphone Division told *HFC*: "With the CKR9 and CKR10, we believe we have managed to achieve audio that is similar to larger headphones and much better than a conventional in-ear headphone."



IN BRIEF



SYNCRO EVOLVES

● IsoTek's most advanced mains cable – the Syncro – has been given a facelift to make it even better than before. Dubbed as "so much more than just a cable", the Syncro EVO3 Special Edition effectively removes unwanted and damaging DC components from the mains supply, while allowing the maximum possible current to pass through. It features three 3mm² silver-plated ultra-pure OCC copper conductors arranged in a square-shaped configuration of 40 strands and claims to deliver outstanding electrical conductivity. It's available now for £1,195. ISOTEKSYSTEMS.COM

TALK TURNTABLE

● The TT3 is the latest addition to Talk's turntable family, and comes bundled with its TE202 tonearm. By bringing production in-house, the company has been able to reduce the price of its turntable without affecting the quality. And so the TT3 features a 22mm fully machined acrylic platter with 25mm billit, custom-made bearing housing with ceramic bearings and a fully machined inner hub with ground stainless shaft. The modified TE202 tonearm has a solid brass counterweight and spigot and the twin plinth design has been adopted to reduce coupling noise. The TT3 is available in black or white and costs £900 without cartridge. TALKELECTRONICS.COM



Webwatch

Andrew Simpson casts an expert eye over his pick of the best hi-fi websites and online content



#ChampagneListens
 Fancy listening to your favourite album on a world-class hi-fi while quaffing some bubbly? Then follow **@AudioLounge** on Twitter and RT its **#ChampagneListens** posts for a chance to do just that at its London store bit.ly/YfrVj6

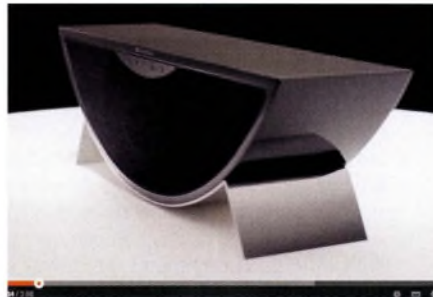


Band aid
 The Chord Company offered three unsigned bands or solo artists the chance to bag £260 of Chord Cream instrument cables by sending a Facebook message plus a few demos on CD, USB, LP, cassette or via Soundcloud. Winners will be announced this month: bit.ly/WhoiHF

Getting the most out of your hi-fi – Part 1
3rd September 2014 | Ian | Tech Tips | 0 Comments | Hi-Fi



Top Richer tips
 We've been enjoying Richer Sounds recent **#Richertips** series on Twitter and its blog, aimed at helping you to get the most out of your hi-fi. So far the series has explored and explained speaker placement, fine tuning your system setup and room acoustics. See the latest entries at: bit.ly/1qDCPzi



Martin Logan's Crescendo
 Electrostatic speaker expert
 Martin Logan took to YouTube to tell the world about its first wireless speaker system, which blends Bluetooth and AirPlay with its Folded Motion tweeters and a 5x7in mid/bass woofer. See it at: youtu.be/aa8AHKIWTOM



Summer lovin'
 Cambridge Audio kept the sun shining in September via its **#SoundsLikeSummer** crowdsourced Spotify playlist, which asked Facebook, Twitter and Instagram users to suggest their favourite summer tracks for a chance to win its Go Bluetooth speaker. Soak up the vibes at: bit.ly/1wb4uTp



Wire wonder
 The cable debate remains one of the most hotly contested areas in the hi-fi arena, and AudioQuest's latest 'tour' videos give a revealing insight into the work and tech that goes into its wires, as explained by company SVP of Marketing and Product Development Joe Harley: youtu.be/G8oFCAnXqYE

FOLLOW US: @HIFICHOICEMAG

CHOICE TWEETS

LINN (@LINNPRODUCTS)
 Hear **@JohnnyCash**'s iconic hits in the highest quality at a **#LinnLounge** event: lin.mn/LLCash

MIDLANDAUDIOX-CHANGE (@MIDLANDAUDIOX)
 We are now representing the Funk Firm in the midlands come and take a look at the new LSD! fb.me/619QFWJX6

GRADO HEADPHONES (@GRADO)
 We get asked weekly when we'll make in-ear headphones. Guess what?! We have been for years! t.co/eF5oIAGeB5

MCINTOSH LABORATORY (@MCINTOSHLABS)
 Feeling sluggish after your long weekend? Crank up **#McIntoshMusic** to help get through the day! mcintoshlabs.com/music

GEORGE HARRISON (@GEORGEHARRISON)
 Announcing The Apple Years 1968-75 Box set - out 22nd September. With rare tracks & DVD buff.ly/1qXjyJz

SHURE INCORPORATED (@SHUREINC)
 On the **#Shure** blog today: insight on the cross-over between IT & Audio! **#TechTuesday** shu.re/ipsW6H

NEW ORDER (@NEWORDER)
 Thrilled to announce that we have just signed to Mute! **#NewOrderMute** @MuteUK @MuteUSA @nmml

BARTLETTS HIFI (@BARTLETTSHIFI)
 Just received our first delivery of the new Quad Vena amplifier bit.ly/1uDQ5od Come and have a listen now

HARBETHAUDIO LTD (@HARBETHHQ)
 Searching for an image for this year's **#Harbeth** Christmas card - any suggestions?

DIVERSE VINYL (@DIVERSEVINYL)
 Metallica Reissue Back Catalogue On Their Own Label - Blackened Recordings bit.ly/1nzaBLX

RECORD STORE DAY UK (@RSDUK)
 We're already starting to think about our RSD 2015 releases. Which artists would you like to see release exclusive RSD vinyl? **#RSD15**

GLASGOW AUDIO (@GLASGOWAUDIO)
 Our new showroom is coming along nicely - join us soon across the road! glasgowaudio.com/we-are-moving

VDC TRADING (@VDC TRADING)
 Have you seen our VINES? Yeah, we totally made some for our Industry! Here are the ones so far buff.ly/1pFnNTd **#downwiththekids**

2014 THE hi-fi SHOW

The ultimate high-end hi-fi experience

Live

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!
See www.hifinews.co.uk/show for details

Returning for a second year, the hugely successful *Hi-Fi Show Live* will once again provide a thrilling showcase for the world's most spectacular hi-fi systems, presented by the industry's most respected professionals. Brought to you by the trusted audiophiles behind *Hi-Fi News & Record Review* and *Hi-Fi Choice* magazines, the *Hi-Fi Show Live* is now bigger than ever with ten additional demonstration suites.

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, demonstrations and workshops by a mix of famous designers and audio personalities. Our other suites will offer interactive demos of the best headphones and headphone amplifiers, hi-res digital media and audiophile accessories.

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



1-2 November • Beaumont House Estate • Old Windsor, West Berkshire

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 2014



Connect.
With the Future...



K2 BT

- aptX Bluetooth streaming input
- Increased output for greater power and clarity
- Improved circuitry for greater efficiency
- Even better sound performance

ROKSAN

The award-winning Roksan K2 series has now been expanded to include a new integrated amplifier. The K2 BT improves on the original K2 Integrated with brand new circuitry and a higher output than ever before. The inclusion of aptX® technology also adds a whole new source input to the amplifier. Now you can stream your favourite music from a Bluetooth-enabled device in original 16-bit CD quality.*

Available Nationwide Now



Distributed by Henley Designs Ltd.

T: +44 (0)1235 511 166 | E: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk | W: www.henleydesigns.co.uk

* On compliant devices.



SUBSCRIBE FOR £19.99
UK OFFER ONLY

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Sorted!

There's no denying it – Christmas is sneaking up on us once again! Why not get organised early this year and treat your loved one to their favourite magazine? You get to save money, and they get their magazine delivered direct to their door! You could even treat yourself... Don't miss out – **subscribe today!**

Home Cinema Choice

6 issues for £19.99
Saving 26%
Full price £27.00

Hi-Fi Choice

6 issues for £19.99
Saving 44%
Full price £36.00

Hi-Fi News

6 issues for £19.99
Saving 44%
Full price £36.00

Subscribe securely online: <http://mymagazineoffers.co.uk/X293>

Call: 0844 543 8200 and Quote X293 **By Post:** Please complete the form below and post it to the address provided. Quote Ref: X293

YOUR DETAILS: (This section must be completed)

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms Name
Surname
Address
.....
Postcode
Country
Tel/Mob
Email
D.O.B
(Complete if the subscription is for yourself)
Magazine Price

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION: (Complete 'YOUR DETAILS' first)

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms Name
Surname
Address
.....
Postcode
Country
Tel/Mob
Email
D.O.B
(Complete if gift recipient is under 18)
Magazine Price

PAYMENT DETAILS

Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code X293 and magazine title on the back.
 Postal Order/Cheque Visa/MasterCard Maestro
Cardholder's name
Card no:
(Maestro)
Valid from Expiry date Maestro issue no
Signature Date

SEND TO:

MYTIMEMEDIA SUBSCRIPTIONS, TowerHouse, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leics LE16 9EF

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 31st December 2014. UK offer only. Gift subscriptions will begin with the February 2015 issue and personal subscriptions with the next available issue when order is placed. For full terms & conditions visit <http://www.mytimemedia.co.uk/terms>. From time to time, your chosen magazine & MyTimeMedia Ltd may contact you regarding your subscription, or with details of its products and services. Your details will be processed in full accordance with all relevant UK and EU data protection legislation. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by MyTimeMedia Ltd & your magazine 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 DO wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here. Email

A free greetings card will be supplied with all gift subscriptions; Please note that this will be sent to the payer's address, separate to the order confirmation. Although we will strive to supply this card prior to December 25th 2014 we cannot guarantee this for any orders placed after December 5th 2014.

Wandering star

Boasting an in-built phono stage, headphone amp and cartridge for under £800, **Andrew Simpson** finds out how much VPI's new vinyl package has to offer



▶ **DETAILS****PRODUCT**
VPI Nomad**ORIGIN**
US**TYPE**
Turntable package
with built-in
headphone amp
and phono stage**WEIGHT**
5.9kg**DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
470 x 109 x 343mm**FEATURES**

- Belt-driven turntable with manual speed change
- 24V AC motor
- 10in tonearm
- Ortofon 2M Red cartridge supplied

DISTRIBUTOR
Renaissance Audio**TELEPHONE**
0131 5553922**WEBSITE**
renaissanceaudio.
co.uk; vpiindustries.
com

Choosing a turntable is never an easy business and often the more you spend the harder and more complex the choices become. After finding your preferred basic deck, you've then got to consider what cartridge to go for to complement your tonearm, and which phono stage will get the best out of your cartridge while allowing for upgrades further down the line, all of which makes choosing a CD player seem like child's play in comparison. That's why for many a plug-and-play vinyl solution makes a lot of sense, provided the components are carefully chosen and quality prevails over convenience.

Step forward New Jersey's VPI Industries, a company renowned for its high-end decks usually with four-figure price tags. Its new Nomad package, however, is firmly pitched at new vinylistas or those seeking a packaged solution that comes preinstalled with everything you need to listen to your LPs without busting the bank.

The Nomad takes over from the £1,650 Traveler as VPI's entry-level deck, and with more functionality to

Once unboxed, VPI proudly boasts a set-up time of four minutes

boot. It's the only model to include an onboard phono stage and headphone amp, both of which are built by local suppliers to VPI's spec before being tested and installed in its factory. Because the company has chosen to partner the Nomad with an Ortofon 2M Red pick-up, its internal phono stage is precision matched to the cartridge's output and loading requirements. So when the upgrade bug bites an obvious choice is a better stylus from further up the 2M range – given its styli are interchangeable, with similar outputs and loading figures to match.

The Nomad's headphone amp was originally designed with iGrado cans in mind, which VPI planned to include in the box with the Nomad. VPI rethought this approach, deciding to let customers choose their own cans and invested this saving in the Nomad's metal platter bearing instead, which gives better results than the early plastic prototypes.

As with all VPI turntables, the Nomad sports an in-house tonearm and for this deck it's a simplified version of the Traveler's arm, with a ▶



Hook up the Nomad directly to the line level input on any amp

stainless steel rod through the gimballed/yoke bearing. At 10in, it's longer than most 'standard' 9in arms in an effort to reduce tracking distortion. Unlike other VPI arms, the Nomad's doesn't rely on a loop of exposed arm wires for anti-skate, which adds to its simple lines and fuss-free user experience.

Textured black MDF is the order of the day for the deck's plinth and 26mm-thick platter. And while the felt mat that's supplied does the job, it feels a bit thin and flimsy in contrast to the rest of the deck, which is superbly finished with smoothly rounded corners and a brushed metal control panel that could shame decks at twice the price. UK-bound Nomads get the same 24V AC synchronous motor as US models, albeit with a different sized pulley and country-specific wall wart transformer that's sourced and tested in the UK. At 33rpm the motor runs silently, although with the belt on the larger 45rpm pulley there is some pulley noise, suggesting it still needs to bed in and ease a little.

Once unboxed, VPI proudly boasts a set-up time of four minutes, which lays down the gauntlet. Aside from levelling, fitting the round section rubber belt (which is a bit fiddly with

the platter's smooth edge), all that's left to do is set the arm's downforce for the preinstalled 2M Red. There's no printed scale on the steel counterweight, so VPI helpfully includes a piece of tape as a marker on the arm wand for where to slide the weight to for optimum downforce. Once set up, a quick glance at my stopwatch shows a little over eight minutes thanks to a slight struggle with the belt slipping and my insistence on using a proper tracking force gauge, adding a few necessary minutes.

Sound quality

With the Nomad feeding my Musical Fidelity preamp via line-level inputs, I get a sense of just how dynamic sounding this package is. Fleetwood Mac's *Isn't It Midnight* from *Tango In The Night* is an instant toe tapper, as the Nomad ensures the music is bristling with life. The track's opening drum beats burst from my Dynaudio loudspeakers and make their presence known across the soundstage with clarity and weight, before the accompanying instruments and Christine McVie's vocals kick in to fill the midrange and treble with lots of energy. With

this album, the Nomad lets you know how big a soundstage it's able to conjure, which is frankly on a scale I wasn't expecting given the deck's modest physical footprint and price. The Nomad highlights the marching percussion of *Caroline* as superbly mixed across the left and right channels, placing each beat well wide of my floorstanders' physical parameters, with the looping lead guitar hook voiced wider still.

While it may read like I'm stating the obvious by describing the Nomad's sonic signature as a very 'vinyl' sounding deck, what I mean by this is that it's not an overly clean or clinical machine. Instead this deck prefers to play to what many

Bass control and extension are notable weapons in the Nomad's arsenal

analogue fans love about vinyl, by presenting the music with a warmer quality that's easy on the ear for long term, fatigue-free listening.

Methane River from Bill Fay's self titled debut album sounds organic and true to the era it was originally recorded, with the music adopting a lush, rich tone, which can be heard in the soft acoustic guitar strokes and fulsome bass. That said, I've known this LP to sound more polished on decks that go for a more analytical presentation. The Nomad lets the horn and string sections sound effortless and unforced, although on some sub-£1k decks the instruments extend from the soundstage with finer degrees of detail.

Punching above its weight

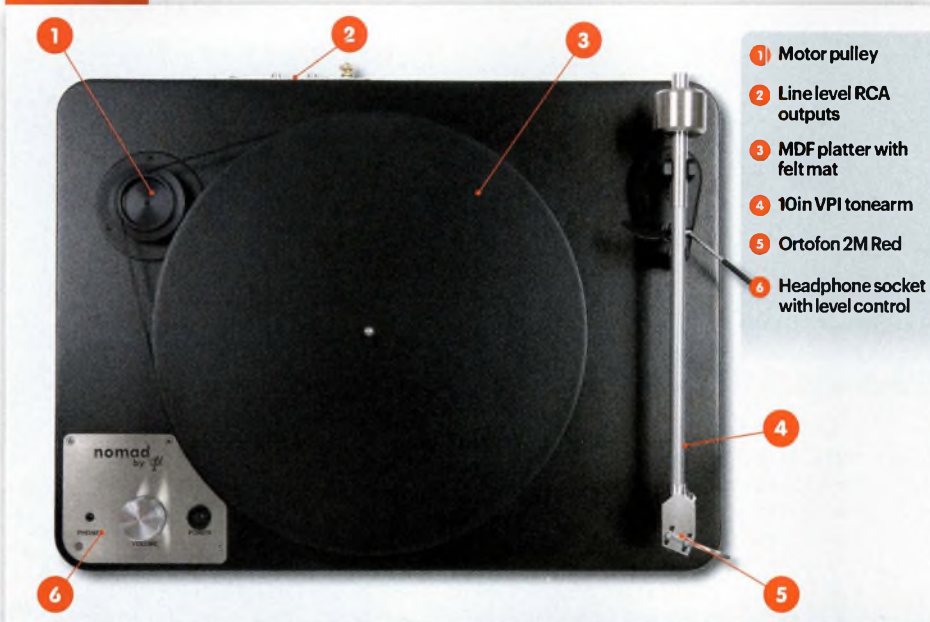
This is hardly surprising given that while doing a dandy job of punching above its weight in terms of separation and bass extension, the 2M Red cartridge is still an £85 pick-up nonetheless, and the quality of the Nomad's arm is certainly worthy of a better cartridge before you'll reach its performance ceiling. Swapping the 2M Red's stylus for the 2M Blue with its improved nude elliptical diamond at £130 (HFC 375) brings extra accuracy and clarity to the Bill Fay track, while retaining its rootsy natural sounding tone, revealing that the Nomad's sound welcomes extra fine tuning from a better sounding stylus, or cartridge when funds permit.

Bass control and extension are also notable weapons in the Nomad's



If it's a turntable package you're after then Pro-Ject's £285 Essential II Phono USB with supplied Ortofon OM5e pick-up is the deck to start with. It boast in-built phono stages but lacks a headphone amp, although you do get a USB output as the model name suggests. Alternatively £550 buys you Rega's RP3 and Elys 2 pick-up package with sonics of a similar pedigree to the Nomad's with lots of musical articulation but less bass, although you'll still need to budget for a phono stage and amp, perhaps from Rega's own budget stable.

INSIGHT



FAMILY MATTERS

Founded in 1978 by Harry and Sheila Weisfeld, VPI Industries burst on the scene with the HW-16 record cleaning machine. Then came a series of high-end decks and tonearms, including the JMW Memorial arm, in memory of their son Jonathan.

Since taking the company reigns in recent years, VPI President Mathew

Weisfeld has been on a mission to make quality vinyl replay more accessible, enticing new audiences back to the beloved LP.

First came the £1,650 Traveler deck in 2012, which was inspired by and served as a tribute to Mat's late mother Sheila. Perhaps fittingly, the Traveler started life as a rough sketch

by Mat on the back of an airplane bag on the way home from CES 2012 and signaled a step in a new direction for VPI as a move into high-end/entry-level territory. The Nomad is the next step in this journey and has caused a stir on VPI's native US soil since its launch, as this Bloomberg TV feature reveals: bloom.bg/1rV4wgu.

sonic arsenal. The overemphasised rumbling low end of Interpol's *Untitled* from their *Turn On The Bright Lights* LP can sound laborious on some lightweight vinyl spinners as it quickly blurs into a murky groan that swamps the soundstage, but with the Nomad in the driving seat, bass notes are kept in check and given the space to extend without becoming overwhelming. The Nomad's bass notes aren't lightning fast, but nor are they in any way sluggish, and the resulting start and stop of bass guitar strings and kick drums resonate with natural sustain.

Pitching the Nomad's headphone output against my dedicated Musical Fidelity M1 HEA headphone amp (HFC 339) reveals this is no mere add on feature and can hold its own against some very serious standalone headphone amplifier competition. Sticking with the Interpol album via the NYC track and armed with a pair of AKG K 242 HD over-ear headphones reveals that while the Nomad has ultimately less finesse and soundstage depth than the Musical Fidelity, it's well rounded across the board with plenty of bass presence and midrange/treble articulation that makes for an involving sound without being too forward.

Conclusion

With its built-in phono stage, headphone amp and supplied 2M Red cartridge, the VPI ticks plenty of boxes in offering a college-friendly complete package for vinyl newbies, or those wanting an analogue front end with minimum fuss. Thankfully at its heart lies a well built and strong performing turntable with a top-notch tonearm for the money. It has clearly been engineered for a warm and traditionally analogue sound to show those looking to take a first step on their vinyl journey why this format is still relevant and even more rewarding in today's digital age ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Rich analogue sound; quality build; features galore

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Basic platter mat; not as analytical as some sub-£1k decks

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Superb VFM from an established high-end brand with a sound and spec that belie its price

FEATURES



OVERALL



Q&A

Mathew Weisfeld

President of VPI Industries



AS: Given all the elements included in the Nomad package, what compromises have you made to keep its price competitive?

MW: To keep the price down we had to use more hard plastics and MDF materials on parts that would be made out of aluminium or stainless steel on a table like the VPI Scout. However, we didn't compromise on the parts that are most vital in creating the sound we have achieved with the Nomad, such as the platter bearing and the tonearm bearing, which both employ appropriate metals for sonic stability and quality. We also purchased supply components at a much greater quantity to help reduce prices. The Nomad isn't a money maker for VPI, it's a table that is important for furthering music in the industry.

Why have you specified an Ortofon 2M Red cartridge for the Nomad?

We decided on the 2M Red after demoing a lot of other quality entry-level cartridges and the Red won on price, sound quality and ease of set up. It really is a lot of cartridge for £85 and we love the consistent quality Ortofon offers in every unit.

What are you most proud of in what you've achieved with the Nomad?

In a word, its usability! I've always had an inclusive mindset about both the high-end music industry and life in general. Music is supposed to be fun and easy to join in with. There has long been the stereotype that you need to be an audio expert to handle a proper turntable. With the Nomad it is ready to play in less than four minutes after taking it out of the box. I'm proud of how the Nomad takes away the intimidation and lets the user focus on something important, like listening to music!

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

Our *Group Tests* are supported by rigorous and exhaustive listening tests carried out by experts

COMPACT AMPLIFIER GROUP TEST

LISTENING WAS DONE in three phases; first the amplifiers were compared using their analogue line inputs, then tried via their DACs, and finally via their wireless inputs. In most cases, the latter was Bluetooth, and this was sync'd to an aptX-equipped tablet running the latest software. Because some tested products offered DLNA and/or uPnP and/or AirPlay and others purely Bluetooth, it wasn't possible to do direct comparisons across the whole six amplifiers, but valid comparisons were made between amplifiers using the same system. For those products that offered media streaming via uPnP, a RipNAS Solid was used, with its own server software built in.

The listening session itself took place over a period of six days, with all amplifiers given a good time to run in and warm up. During the main comparative tests they were all kept powered up to eliminate sonic differences due to warm-up cycles. At the start of the test session, the six products were level matched with a pink noise test tone, which provided volume parity, ensuring that sonic differences would not be emphasised by level inconsistencies. Four songs were used for primary tests, but during the course of the test period a wide range of music was used in a number of differing formats including CD, MP3, AAC and hi-res PCM.



BLIND LISTENING TESTS

This crucial process is very carefully controlled so that we get reliable and consistent results in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Our listeners must not feel that they're being tested, despite being unaware of the brand or price of the products they are auditioning.

The session begins by setting the volume level to an agreed point, one that all three panellists feel comfortable with, yet that is

high enough to make differences easily discernible. Then the choice of music is agreed – it needs to be familiar, but also well recorded and of sufficient variety to give meaningful listening comparisons. The chosen selection of music is played, and the panellists are encouraged to discuss their impressions of the sound of the product. This is then repeated, and periodically the panel listens to earlier products for reference purposes. The

consensus, or otherwise then forms the basis of our sound quality section.

At the end of the session, there's a final debrief when panellists discuss their findings. It's an exhaustive process, but carried out in this way is free from prejudices based on brand, price or appearance, while the different sensitivities of the listeners help to round out the analysis in order to make it more widely applicable.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

CD TRANSPORT
Cyrus CD Xt Signature
DAC
Chord Electronics Hugo
LOUDSPEAKERS
Q Acoustics 2050i
EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS
Quadraspire

TEST MUSIC

DAFT PUNK
Random Access Memories
Get Lucky (MP3)



CARAVAN
In The Land of Grey and Pink
Nine Feet Under (CD)



MALCOLM MCLAREN
Waltz Darling
Waltz Darling (CD)



REM
Out of Time
Near Wild Heaven (hi-res 24/192)





Scala V2, A new Utopia

Scala V2 has retained all the qualities of the original: timeless design and extraordinary musicality.

The new Scala Utopia boasts a re-engineered bass unit with improved power handling, for stunning integrated bass and even greater control.

This has also further refined the midrange register with focus and clarity, resulting in a more precise and remarkable sound stage.

The Scala V2 takes you closer to the music with enhanced emotion and listening pleasure.

Discover the full Utopia family at www.focal.com or visit one of our partner retailers below.

See us at
THE hi-fi SHOW
The ultimate high-end hi-fi experience *Live*
1-2 NOVEMBER
Beaumont House Estate
Old Windsor, West Berkshire
hifinews.co.uk/show

 **FOCAL**[®]
THE SPIRIT OF SOUND

KJ WEST ONE
London
0207 486 8262

MIDLAND AUDIO XCHANGE
Belbroughton
01562 731100

THE MUSIC ROOM
Glasgow
0141 333 9700

MARTINS OF NORWICH
Norwich
01603 627010

JORDAN ACOUSTICS
Bournemouth
01202 911886

THE AUDIO WORKS
Cheadle
0161 428 7887

ACOUSTICA
Chester
01244 344227

LOUD AND CLEAR
Edinburgh
0131 555 3963

TOM TOM AUDIO
St Albans
01727 810047

FORTISSIMO
Hale
0161 941 1906

Group test

COMPACT AMPLIFIERS £400-£700

Space savers

David Price tries out six desktop amps equipped with wireless connectivity

BY COMBINING HI-FI sound quality with real-world convenience, the allure of the desktop integrated amplifier is appealing to both audiophiles and music lovers alike who simply want a fuss-free way to listen to music. In this modern age our music is stored on numerous formats and devices and is increasingly more likely to be stored on a smartphone, laptop or sophisticated network-attached drive.

The six compact integrated amplifier designs on test here represent quite a sea change in the hi-fi market. All models are from traditional hi-fi manufacturers, but are aimed at those that require just that bit more versatility over a conventional integrated amplifier at the heart of a hi-fi system. These smart solutions all sport a built-in DAC and are aimed at the growing number of consumers looking to unleash music that's become increasingly more centralised on either their home computer or cloud-based servers, but want to listen via a do-it-all mini hi-fi

amplifier that doesn't require a large separates-sized footprint.

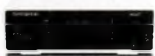
Ok computer

These innovative designs offer greater flexibility in component placement and indeed both the NAD and Monitor Audio models are more flexible than most and can be positioned upright just like a Sony PlayStation, making them ideally suited to placement next to a computer. They're an interesting design that makes the other four amplifiers look a little more outdated.

As well as a significantly smaller footprint, these desktop designs all have some form of wireless connectivity. From aptX Bluetooth and AirPlay from smartphones and tablet devices, to networking capabilities offered by the Cambridge Audio and NAD models, these amps will have you streaming music in no time. Each amplifier offers its own unique solution but to find out which models sound the best, read on.



ON TEST



Cambridge Audio Minx Xi £400 p27

The brand personifies the purist approach to integrated amplifiers, but this slender unit combines amplifier, DAC and streaming duties along with a healthy set of features cherry-picked from its affordable separates range.



Monitor Audio A100 £400 p29

The first amplifier from the famous British speaker manufacturer, the A100 is perhaps the quirkiest-looking model in the group. It can be positioned both horizontally and vertically, but how does this unique Class AB design sound?



NAD D 7050 £700 p31

Following hot on the heels of the D 3020 last year, the D 7050 shares the same lie down or stand up casework. It's the most costly here, but music streaming runs with wi-fi, AirPlay, Ethernet and aptX Bluetooth, offering great versatility.



Pro-Ject MaiA £400 p33

The smallest integrated amplifier in this group by some margin, the MaiA is stacked with inputs that include a useful MM phono stage as well as aptX Bluetooth. Can it deliver a sound befitting of the hi-fi brand from such tiny dimensions?



Quad Vena £600 p35

The most affordable integrated amplifier to come from the high-end hi-fi company, the Vena breaks new ground. Despite its retro styling, this is a thoroughly modern amp with aptX Bluetooth, but does it retain the brand's magic?



Teac AI-301DA £400 p37

This brand has plenty of experience in making mini hi-fi components, and the latest model in its 301 series looks set to tick all the right boxes with a sophisticated Class D amp that builds in a future proof DAC and aptX Bluetooth wireless.



-20_{dB}
AIRPLAY



Loving music

Concept MM



Now £995



The Clearaudio catalogue of high quality pressings inc. Deutsche Grammophon re-issues available now



For orders and information contact;
+44 (0)1276 501 392 info@soundfoundations.co.uk

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk



Cambridge Audio Minx Xi £400



This small box offers an exceptionally wide range of handy features, but can it deliver a sound to match?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Cambridge Audio MinxXi

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
Integrated amplifier with network music player

WEIGHT
5.8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
270 x 90 x 285mm

FEATURES
● Quoted power: 40W RMS per channel (8ohms)
● 3x USB; 1x optical digital input; 1x coaxial; 2x RCA line inputs
● Network music playback: aptX Bluetooth; wi-fi; Ethernet
● 3.5mm headphone output

DISTRIBUTOR
Richer Sounds

WEBSITE
cambridgeaudio.com

On features alone this is the winner. Indeed, it's rather difficult to understand quite how Cambridge Audio produces this unit for the money; it is so generously specified and has just about every feature under the sun. It could use a little more operational sophistication, though, as the front fascia reminds me of a late seventies microcomputer. The failings of the Minx are not any lack of facilities or – as we shall see – sound. Rather, those fiddly fascia buttons and long-winded navigation procedures mean it's not the easiest thing to get acquainted with; indeed if it was a computer it would be a top value PC rather than a fancy Mac.

Its feature count is amazing; it's a network music player, a USB DAC that also does coaxial and optical and it has aptX Bluetooth too, plus two analogue inputs for good measure. Annoyingly, its loudspeaker outputs don't permit the use of standard 6mm banana plugs meaning you'll have to hack your cables to bits to use it, or

make new ones. It comes supplied with a screw-in wi-fi antenna and BT100 Bluetooth dongle.

Sound quality

This has an unerringly honest sound that keeps things nice and tidy and within its comfort zone. It sounds bouncy, enjoyable and full of beans, and there's never a sense that it is bored with what it has been asked to do. Indeed, if it was a car it would be a classic Mini, offering as it does a lot more fun than you have a right to expect at either its size or price.

The analogue inputs are perfectly respectable. Of course, they don't come close to the high standards of Cambridge Audio's own full-size budget amplifiers, but then again they're always eminently listenable. You can feed the Minx with a half decent analogue source and have fun with it, saucy little thing that it is. Although not exactly overburdened with output power, its claimed 40W RMS into 8ohms spreads itself around fairly well and doesn't feel under

WIRELESS TECH

You get a lot of wireless connectivity as standard with the Minx Xi. First is a very good implementation of aptX Bluetooth, and then there's a highly capable network streamer that runs either wirelessly via a rear panel mounted plug-in aerial or wired Ethernet connection. The aptX input is, of course, only capable of 'near-CD' quality, but the streamer is capable of handling hi-res music files up to 24/96 PCM, and even sounds very impressive playing out CD rips from a RipNAS. It's a pain to use via the fiddly front panel menu system, but download the StreamMagic app and it unlocks the vast functionality of the unit and makes it easy and speedy to navigate. This is a good streamer, remarkably so at the price, and a great advert for wireless once you've spent some time getting to grips with its extensive capabilities.

resourced, unless you're playing some seriously powerful dub at neighbour baiting levels, that is. It has a surprisingly warm bass for such a small unit, which gives the sound more depth and body especially with smaller loudspeakers. Not strictly neutral, but welcome all the same.

The Caravan track shows decent timing and dynamic articulation; the music certainly doesn't sound flat or slow and instead gels well. Its USB inputs work well and I am surprised at how well it fares streaming music from my RipNAS music server; the sound is strong, clean and delivered totally glitch free, although sonically it is improved by using the wired Ethernet option. A genuinely capable all-rounder, with an enjoyable and affable character, but one that never exceeds the standards of the best of the rest in the group. The Minx Xi is exceptional value and shames some of the others here ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Fine sound; network streaming; versatility

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: No pre out; poor front panel ergonomics take some familiarisation

BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



WE SAY: Brilliant value, budget-priced, do-it-all wireless amplifier

OVERALL





Lars & Ivan



VACUUM TUBE
HI-FI IS NOW
PORTABLE!



THA-8

Headphone Amplifier with
Vacuum Tube



- Genuine Vacuum Tube hifi sound in the palm size
- High clarity sound quality, specially ideal for vocal music

Powerful headamp

Output power : 180mW
Headphone Impedance Range : 16Ω ~ 300Ω
Frequency Response : 10 Hz - 65kHz
Light weight : 148gm
Rechargeable battery : 8-10 hours continuous usage
Compatible with iOS and Android smartphone

✉ info@lars-ivan.com
☎ 852 2131 8319

www.lars-ivan.com





Monitor Audio **A100** £400



WIRELESS TECH

Despite the minimalist fascia the A100 actually offers a lot of functionality, although it doesn't tread the more favoured pathway here of USB input and aptX Bluetooth wireless. Instead this network-enabled amplifier can play out music via AirPlay and DLNA using its built-in wi-fi, so you can stream music from Apple iDevices (iPhone, iPod touch, iPad and Mac) as well as a PC that is equipped with iTunes. For those who find using a router cumbersome or even impossible, it also offers Airstream Direct for peer-to-peer connection with iOS devices. The A100 supports a wide range of lossy and lossless formats up to 24/192 resolution, and the amp's naturally open and detailed sound comes through; it performs far better than it has any right to at the price, with real refinement and grip.

Here's an amplifier with a difference; meet one of the quirkiest, yet most capable, in the group

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Monitor Audio A100

ORIGIN
China

TYPE
Integrated amplifier with network music player

WEIGHT
1.9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
359 x 55 x 204mm

FEATURES
● Quoted power: 50W RMS per channel (8ohms)
● 1x optical digital input; 1x RCA inputs
● Network music playback: AirPlay and wi-fi

DISTRIBUTOR
Monitor Audio Ltd

TELEPHONE
01268 740580

WEBSITE
monitoraudio.co.uk

This famous British speaker manufacturer has dared to do something different.

One look at its radically shaped casework and you'll see that it stands out from the crowd, but its key feature is that its power amplifier is a Class AB design. Many think this is superior to Class D and I would generally concur, although the latter is definitely improving fast. Also, surprisingly this is the one product that doesn't have Bluetooth. Up until recently that would be excusable, but now that aptX is capable of such decent sound it's not, I feel.

Still, there's plenty more wireless connectivity options to keep you busy – especially if you're an iOS device user. It offers DLNA streaming, AirPlay and Airstream Direct. There's also an optical digital input, but no coaxial or USB type-B. The slim front panel has a USB type-A port to play out an iDevice though, and this is joined by source selector and volume buttons. The unit is made from polymer and metal with glass end caps, and feels less swish than the metal Teac, for example. Setup is

fiddly, and the 'Quick Start' guide hinders more than it helps.

Sound quality

Via the analogue inputs the Monitor Audio soon proves to be one of the best sounding amplifiers in the group. It just presents the music in a more realistic, natural and convincing way than most others here, coming over as a grown-up hi-fi amplifier that has been shrunk down into a small box rather than a compact audio product with big ambitions. It is one of the few here able to drill down deep into the mix and throw out lots of detail.

The Caravan track shows how wide and clearly defined its soundstage is. Instruments and vocals are easy to discern and the recorded acoustic drops back just a little bit more than some others here. Things just seem to come over in a more natural way; the bass guitar work and drum kit flows and the interplay between the two is more convincing than some of the others on test. Unlike some budget Class AB amplifiers it avoids the temptation to sound harsh; even the cranked up saxophone solo at the end

of the track sounds smooth and silky yet raw and breathy too.

This amplifier obviously has a good digital converter, as Daft Punk's *Get Lucky* proves powerful and uplifting. Rather than just making a nice noise like the NAD and Teac models do, I begin to hear aspects of the recording that aren't always evident elsewhere. Via the optical digital input from the CD transport, the Malcolm McLaren track really punches out the music hard. Indeed, this amp sounds more powerful than the others on test, able to drive loudspeakers to surprisingly high sound levels for such a compact box – and puts some other rival designs to shame, too. Ultimately the Monitor Audio doesn't quite have the same amount of muscle as the Quad, and when pushed hard its protection circuitry trips in. Overall, it's an interesting, quirky product that's very capable, but won't be for everyone ● ▶



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Fine sound quality; lots of power; flexibility; versatile placement

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Poor user interface; fiddly setup; iOS preferred

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: Quirky, but great sounding versatile amp

FEATURES



OVERALL





THE CONCEPT 40 LOUDSPEAKER

Q Acoustics introduces 'Concept 40', an elegant new floorstanding loudspeaker which sets new standards of sonic performance at its price.

Award-winning pedigree

In common with the Concept 20, its award-winning little brother, the new Concept 40's unparalleled soundstage and sheer musicality is achieved by incorporating outstanding drive units into a lacquered, State-of-the-Art, 'Gelcore™ Construction', ultra-low resonance cabinet.

'Gelcore™ Construction, specially developed for acoustic enclosures, is in effect a 'cabinet within a cabinet', separated by a resonance absorbing compound. This enables the drive units to simply reproduce music, unencumbered by the level of cabinet induced distortions found in conventional designs.



"Superlative... brilliantly balanced package... excellent value"

Hi-Fi Choice Recommended,
June 2014



"Surprising sonic agility and composure... a wonderfully inviting sound"

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision,
May 2014



www.Qacoustics.com



NAD D 7050 £700

The latest in its range of do-it-all amps, can the D 7050 uphold NAD's reputation for value performance?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
NAD D 7050

ORIGIN
Canada/China

TYPE
Integrated amplifier with network music player

WEIGHT
2.2kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
236 x 70 x 270mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power: 50W RMS per channel (4ohms)
- 1x asynchronous USB; 2x coaxial/optical input
- Network music playback: aptX Bluetooth; AirPlay; wi-fi; Ethernet
- 3.5mm headphone socket

DISTRIBUTOR
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision

TELEPHONE
01732 459555

WEBSITE
nadelectronics.com

Is it really a year and a half since this amplifier's little brother – the D 3020 – came out? How time flies! The D 7050 shares its very attractive, modern-looking casework; which means you get a rubber-surfaced, oddly dimensioned, stand-up amplifier with a big, rubberised volume knob and smaller source selector. It's very easy to use, and is helped further still by the addition of a small but perfectly formed OLED display, which tells you input and volume level.

While its smaller brother has digital inputs and aptX Bluetooth, this more expensive variant adds Apple AirPlay, which effectively plays out music via a local network. The feature list continues with a decent quality headphone amplifier and a very cute little card remote control with basic functions like volume and source selection. The amp uses NAD's own Direct Digital technology, which was first seen on the Masters Series M2 amplifier; it performs all preamplifier functions in the digital domain,

making it a closed-loop digital amplifier, NAD says.

Sound quality

This is an interesting amplifier that sounds distinctly different to the rest of the group. At first it seems a little slow sounding; the bass doesn't have the sprightliness of the Quad. Yet the more you hear it the more it pulls you in and begins to beguile you – it turns out that it has many virtues. Tonally it's surprisingly rich and warm sounding for a Class D amplifier; indeed it simply does not sound like the majority of other Class D designs I've heard. It has a sumptuous and quite well padded bottom end, and this lends some welcome extra weight to tracks that might otherwise sound a little insubstantial. It's not strictly accurate, but it's still a very pleasing characteristic for a budget amp and doesn't complicate things further up the frequency range. Its treble response is sweet and silky, though it's not the most atmospheric around.

By the standards of the best of the group, the NAD can sound just a little

WIRELESS TECH

Being the most expensive amplifier here, you would expect this NAD to be packed with connectivity options and so it proves. It has an excellent implementation of aptX Bluetooth – it connects with my iPad in record time and proves to be faultless in operation. Moreover, the sound via this input is head and shoulders above most of the other amplifiers here; it certainly seems to suit the character of the amp being fulsome and mellifluous. The NAD also offers the ability to run AirPlay via an Apple iDevice or a DLNA server, and again this provides surprisingly fine sonics. More than most contenders here, the D 7050 seems particularly comfortable working in a digital, wireless environment. Operation via NAD's dedicated app is equally simple and gives access to all the D 7050's facilities.

bit shut in; the soundstage doesn't quite have the same freedom to breathe as the Quad, for example. The Caravan track sounds animated, punchy and engaging as the percussion shuffles along in a carefree way, and the band sounds strong and tight and most importantly, like they are enjoying themselves.

All well and good, but on dynamic crescendos, you begin to notice the NAD's lack of puff; it's not the most powerful amp here and struggles to go loud in my listening room. In its defence, it does remain composed working very near to its maximum output, and refuses to sound harsh or uncomfortable. Push it too hard, though, and its thermal shutdown will bring an abrupt pause to your swinging party. Overall, this is a highly distinctive amplifier that will win many friends for its form and functionality and its trademark rich, fulsome sound ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ | LIKE: Cool modern styling and clever packaging; rich sound |
| VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ | DISLIKE: Limited power is hard to excuse at this price |
| BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ | WE SAY: Neat, compact, flexible integrated, but it struggles here |
| FEATURES
★★★★★ | |

OVERALL



Bowers & Wilkins

Designed for listening

The new CM Series loudspeakers are undoubtedly beautiful, capable of gracing any room with their clean lines and high-quality finishes. But as with all Bowers & Wilkins loudspeakers form must follow function, and thanks to our Decoupled Double Domes and tweeter-on-top technology you won't believe how beautiful your music can sound.

bowers-wilkins.com



Decoupled Double Dome tweeter





Pro-Ject MaiA £400

If less is more then this amplifier is the most! It's tiny, but can it deliver a sound that befits a hi-fi brand?

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Pro-Ject MaiA
- ORIGIN**
Czech Republic
- TYPE**
Integrated amplifier with USB DAC and Bluetooth
- WEIGHT**
1.9kg
- DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**
206 x 36 x 200mm
- FEATURES**
 - Quoted power: 30W RMS per channel (4ohms)
 - MM phono input;
 - 3x RCA line inputs;
 - asynchronous USB;
 - 2x optical; 1x coaxial digital inputs
 - AptX Bluetooth
 - 6.3mm headphone output
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Henley Designs
- TELEPHONE**
01235 511166
- WEBSITE**
henleydesigns.co.uk

Catchily entitled My Audiophile Integrated Amplifier, this delightfully dinky device wins the prize for the smallest component of the group – it is tiny, almost like a toy. It's still pretty well made, though, with a nice alloy fascia and a pressed steel casing, although its finish is rather agricultural compared with the sublime smooth alloy surfacing of the Teac.

Its simplicity itself to use, with two buttons either side of a long line of small blue LEDs, which indicate the source selected. Factor in a full-size 6.3mm headphone socket, motorised volume knob when using the supplied remote control and the power button, and you're done. There's nothing in the way of fiddly networking options to set up here just aptX Bluetooth pairing, but the dinky amplifier furthers its flexibility by incorporating a MM phono stage.

As you would expect, under the hood the circuitry is packed as tight as commuters on the last train home on a Friday night. There are several sub-boards, including the MM phono stage one for the XMOS USB input. By comparison, the small Class D power modules with their tiny heat sink take up very little space. There is,

of course, absolutely no room for a transformer, which is why you sensibly get a separate, off-board switched mode power supply.

Sound quality

The most notable thing about the MaiA is, of course, its diminutive dimensions, and sadly this follows through to the listening session. Frankly it struggles to perform as well as other compact amplifiers in this group. Because it's so small and cute I'm minded to give it the benefit of the doubt, but the more I listen the harder it is to make allowances. Its biggest issue is the lack of power; the Pro-Ject quite simply can't compete with the others here when it comes to sheer grunt, with the exception perhaps of the NAD.

Sonically it proves fairly thin and grainy. Whereas the other Class D designs here sound surprisingly rich and warm in their own respective ways – or at least refined and polished – the MaiA is less charming. This is evident through both analogue and digital inputs; the Malcolm McLaren track is passable enough, but makes more sense as background music than as an enthralling hi-fi performance. Tonally it sounds rather unlovely; I find its bass to be a little

WIRELESS TECH

It may be small, but this amp is surprisingly well equipped with useful features. It doesn't have any fancy networking options, but the aptX Bluetooth input sounds decent enough with a smooth sound that doesn't offend. The small screw-on stub aerial has the worst range in the group. The moving magnet phono stage is a more solid performer and is fitted in the same box as the amplifier itself. That means one less power supply, one less wall socket taken up, and one less set of interconnects to buy. The Pro-Ject is practically in a gang of one by offering this facility; most full-size integrateds don't have a phono stage, let alone tiny ones like this – making it great for vinylistas.

lighter and less propulsive than some of the others on test here. Midband is disappointingly two-dimensional sounding and tonally thin, while the treble sounds fairly crude. This trait continues through to the upper midband, which seems a tad grainy especially with female vocals. Still, it's the MaiA's generally cold and grey tonality that lets the show down.

Again, this might be excusable if the amplifier were to reward sonically in other areas, but it just doesn't. Rhythmically its presentation is rather diffuse and opaque, failing to capture the dynamic accenting on the drums on the Caravan track, or indeed carry the guitar phrasing particularly well. This means that it is unlikely to keep the listener involved, and indeed Daft Punk's *Get Lucky* sounds rather dirge-like as a result.

Overall this very neat package is compromised by the more grown-up standards of the rest of the group. Its phono stage is what sets it apart from the crowd and will likely appeal to those seeking an array of connectivity options in a tiny box ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★☆ **LIKE:** Build; phono stage; lots of inputs; size
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★☆ **DISLIKE:** Bland sound
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★☆ **WE SAY:** Workmanlike mini amp with an impressive range of inputs including a phono stage for vinyl junkies
- FEATURES**
★★★★☆

OVERALL



THAT'S JUST WRONG.

And so is settling for mediocre sound. Visit a Clarity Alliance retailer and they'll show you how to feast on audio... the right way.

We all want more from our home entertainment. Standard TV sound is poor. Standard bundled headphones are rubbish. And that flimsy standard speaker cable? That's *really* rubbish.

You deserve better – and members of The Clarity Alliance can help you find the right answers. We're the only independent retailers who are trained to industry-agreed standards to give unparalleled levels of product advice and service. Take your time and relax in dedicated listening rooms, try a variety of equipment and music, audition and study each item, see how it makes you feel. Find the right one and it's like listening in colour...

WHAT WE OFFER...

- Free geek time, impartial and honest advice
- Transferrable warranty – the freedom to move
 - Listen in great demo facilities
 - Knowledgeable, enthusiastic staff
- Awful coffee – but we'll always make a cuppa



EAST

Basically Sound
Norwich
basicallysound.co.uk
01362 820 800

Martins Hi-Fi
Norwich
www.martinslifi.co.uk
01603 627 010

LONDON
Adair Acoustic Design
Clerkenwell
adairacousticdesign.co.uk
020 7253 2326

Bartletts Hi Fi
Islington
www.bartlettslifi.com
020 7607 2148

Billy Vee
Sound Systems
Lewisham
www.billyvee.co.uk
020 8318 5755

Grahams Hi-Fi
City of London
www.grahams.co.uk
020 7226 5500

Oranges & Lemons
Clapham
www.oandlhifi.co.uk
020 7924 2040

Unilet Sound & Vision
New Malden
www.unilet.net
020 8942 9567

MIDLANDS
Nottingham
Hi-Fi Centre
Nottingham
nottinghamhificentre.co.uk
0115 978 6919

NORTH EAST
Sound Organisation
York
www.soundorg.co.uk
01904 627 108

NORTH WEST
Acoustica
Thester
www.acoustica.co.uk
01244 344 227

SOUTH EAST
Home Media
Maidstone
www.thehomeofhifi.com
01622 676 703

Infidelity
Kingston-on-Thames
www.infidelity.co.uk
020 8943 3530

P J Hi-Fi
Guildford
www.pjhifi.co.uk
01483 504 801

Soundcraft Hi-Fi
Ashford
www.soundcraftlifi.com
01233 624 441

SCOTLAND
Glasgow Audio
Glasgow
www.glasgowaudio.com
0141 332 4707

Holburn Hi-Fi
Aberdeen
www.holburnhifi.co.uk
01224 585 713

SOUTH CENTRAL

Overture
Banbury
www.overture.co.uk
01295 272 158

Oxford Audio Consultants
Oxford
www.oxfordaudio.co.uk
01865 790 879

Phase 3
Worthing
www.phase3.co.uk
01903 245577

The Sound Gallery
High Wycombe
www.soundgallery.co.uk
01494 531682

SUPPORTED BY



/ClarityAlliance

@clarityalliance

clarityalliance.co.uk

clarity
clear advice



Quad Vena **£600**



Meet Quad's most affordable and user-friendly amp ever – but can it retain the company's high-end magic?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Quad Vena

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
Integrated amplifier with USB DAC and Bluetooth

WEIGHT
6.1kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
313 x 94 x 302mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power: 45W RMS per channel (8ohms)
- 2x RCA line inputs; asynchronous USB; USB for docking; 2x optical; 1x coaxial digital inputs,
- AptX Bluetooth
- 6.3mm headphone input

DISTRIBUTOR
IAG Group Ltd

TELEPHONE
01480 452561

WEBSITE
quad-hifi.co.uk

In its new Lancaster Grey finish, the Quad looks odd – but not in a bad way. The styling of the whole range is tastefully retro, but the grey paint job gives it a harder, more purposeful edge. Indeed, there's a touch of the Quad 33/303 about it to my eyes, which is a great thing, albeit possibly not the most universally appealing to your average buyer of this sort of product. Still, by the time you read this, you should be able to specify your Vena in more exotic gloss finishes for a £100 price premium.

It feels a real quality item; the slightly vague and cheap feeling volume knob lets it down a bit, but this aside it comes across as quite solid with some nice, crisp-acting switchgear. There are few features to speak off – certainly not fripperies, anyway – aside from the built-in DAC (the same Cirrus Logic CS4398 used in the Quad Platinum CD players) and, of course, the aptX Bluetooth. Otherwise, you're looking at a choice of two RCA line inputs. The Class AB power amp section is claimed to put

out 45W RMS per channel, and there is no reason for us to doubt it.

Sound quality

Via its analogue line inputs the Quad sounds clean, crisp and musical. Despite not using the same circuitry as more traditional, larger and more expensive Quad amplifiers there is still a lot of the house sound to be heard. It's musically informative and engaging, with a pleasingly detailed presentation. You would certainly never call it boring, but then again it is never harsh or searing; Quad has struck exactly the right balance meaning it's a civilised performer that you can listen to for long periods.

Switch to the built-in DAC section, and the same high standards continue; once again you hear a civilised but animated performance that really gets the speakers bouncing with Malcolm McLaren's *Waltz Darling*. Tonally the Quad is pretty even and neutral; never warm yet not hard, it sits in a well-judged position in the middle. There's a touch of dryness and a slightly well lit feel to

WIRELESS TECH

The Quad's only wireless interface is via aptX Bluetooth, and this works very well. It pairs easily with my tablet, proves robust in use with no drop outs and gives a very acceptable musical performance. For example, an MP3 of Daft Punk's *Get Lucky* sounds tonally fulsome and rhythmically believable, and a good bit less grainy than some other amps in the test when streaming over Bluetooth. Bass is surprisingly powerful, with a detailed, well etched midband and smoothish treble – although in absolute terms it does sound slightly splashy. Apart from sounding opaque, the main cost to sound quality using this input is an obvious thinning out and narrowing of the soundstage. Generally then, the Quad has a very good implementation of aptX Bluetooth and is reliable and stable.

the upper midband, but this never descends into something that has you wanting to switch off. Indeed the Vena proves one of the most able performers in the group across all inputs, because it doesn't obviously sound like a compact audio product.

Bass isn't particularly grippy, but is still lithe enough to make the Caravan track enjoyable to follow. The rhythms shuffle along with real conviction, and the Quad has me enjoying its musical gait. Dynamics are decent too, and the Vena puts its power out in a positive way with no obvious sense of strain. In absolute terms, its biggest issue is the slightly two-dimensional feel to the stereo mix, but again no other amp in the group does better. Indeed, the Quad Vena is completely relaxed in a normal hi-fi environment and doesn't require any concessions for its lowly price point (for the brand) or wireless functionality ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Styling and packaging; powerful, detailed, animated sound
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Plasticky volume knob
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WESAY: Excellent, versatile, modern integrated amplifier
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL



MUSICAL FIDELITY

MF-100

SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE HEAD PHONES



When music matters most

VERY HIGH QUALITY • MUSICAL FIDELITY DESIGNED
NEODYMIUM DRIVE UNITS



WIRELESS TECH

The Teac AI-301DA does aptX Bluetooth very well; with an unexpectedly clean and engaging sound and a full bass on Daft Punk's *Get Lucky*, with just a slight rounding off of dynamics to mark it out from the CD original. It's a little softer sounding than the S/PDIF digital inputs as you'd expect, but is still very pleasing and the Teac's innate sophistication adds a bit of polish. This does detract from hi-res slightly though, losing a little of the bite and incision that you'd expect from a 24/192 PCM FLAC file of REM's *Near Wild Heaven*, for example. You can't help but like it all the same, as this dinky Class D design has some characteristics of a valve amplifier – a relaxed but musical gait and a silky tonality that you would never normally expect from a product of this price.

Teac AI-301DA £400



Teac has made fine small components for several decades – can the 301 series keep up the good work?

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Teac AI-301DA
- ORIGIN**
Japan/China
- TYPE**
Integrated amplifier with USB DAC and Bluetooth
- WEIGHT**
21kg
- DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**
254 x 61 x 215mm
- FEATURES**
 - Quoted power: 40W RMS per channel (4ohms)
 - 2x RCA line inputs; asynchronous USB; 1x optical; 1x coaxial digital inputs
 - Network music playback: aptX Bluetooth; AirPlay; wi-fi; Ethernet
 - 6.3mm headphone output
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Onkyo Europe
- TELEPHONE**
+49 08142 4208141
- WEBSITE**
teac-audio.eu

A key component in the company's latest series of 'desktop' components, the '301 is a very nice package indeed. Simplicity is the key to the design of this Teac; it's the opposite to the Cambridge Audio inasmuch as it doesn't have lots of features, but nor does it have a fussy fascia full of confusing legends. It sports a high quality aluminium case that confers a solid feel compared even with the pricey NAD. It's simplicity itself to use, with a metal volume knob on the right and a source selector and power button to the left, plus a row of source indicator LEDs. As well as analogue line inputs it comes equipped with coaxial and optical digital inputs and USB, which plays out hi-res 32/192 PCM and DSD 5.6 (without converting it to PCM). It also offers ASIO2.1 and DoP (DSD over PCM) and aptX Bluetooth.

Inside is a Burr-Brown PCM1795 DAC and Danish-sourced ICEpower power amplifier modules; these are one of the more respected of the Class D chipsets in terms of sound quality.

The manufacturer claims 40W RMS per side (into 4ohms) of output power. One nice touch is that the amp automatically switches on when it senses a digital signal, so it's fuss-free to use – you can fit and forget.

Sound quality

It's surprising how different all the various amplifiers sound in this roundup; they each attempt to do pretty much the same thing at similar price points, yet the results vary greatly in sonic terms. Some like the NAD are thick and warm, others like the Quad are tight and lithe, but tonally thinner. The Teac, meanwhile, sits very cleverly in the middle, with a nice balanced sound. It's never boring yet nor will it startle you out of your seat; rather it comes over as a very happy marriage between Japanese precision and Scandinavian sophistication; it's an exceptionally mature performer at the price.

It's very able via the analogue line inputs, but interestingly the sound changes less than some of the others here when you move to digital. It

serves up a tonally sweet but not too sugary sound, balanced just right for the sort of ancillaries it's likely to be partnered with. Yet it's not bland; compared with the NAD it's rhythmically a good deal snappier, even if it loses a bit of that tonal 'fruitiness' that the D 7050 oozes. Malcolm McLaren's *Waltz Darling* gathers a fair turn of speed, making others sound less zesty. It images reasonably well, throwing snare drum and cymbal sounds well out into the room, but doesn't quite have the stage depth of the Quad, for example. Tonally, you never get the sense that this amp is harsh; instead it just plays songs in a satisfyingly musical way.

The AI-301DA stands out as highly attractive and compact package, one whose build and finish is superb at the price, and is consummately easy and fuss free to use. I am left wondering quite how Teac has managed to do this for the money ● ▶



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Svelte, musical sound; build; finish; ergonomics
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing at the price
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Gorgeous mini amplifier that's great value

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL
★★★★★

Group test verdict

The verdicts are all in and checked and it's down to **David Price** to reveal the final results of this month's compact integrated amplifiers test

CONSIDERING THESE SIX amplifiers are purposed to do very similar things, it is surprising how diverse they proved. First, it's important to point out that none of them, with the exception of the Quad, can step into the shoes of a high-quality conventional integrated amplifier. That said, considering their great functionality, connectivity and small size, none of these baby amps did badly. Use them for small spaces, study/bedrooms and kitchens, and you'll be delighted by what they do.


The Pro-Ject was least impressive; it's a nice little thing and some are

going to love the MM phono stage, but it just didn't sound grown up enough to really cut the mustard in what is a pretty competitive group. Next was the NAD; it has a fulsome tonality and is nice enough to listen to, but it just couldn't match some of the rival (and cheaper) designs here.

This is where the rankings get tough, because standards begin to get high. The Monitor Audio A100 is awarded fourth place; in sonic terms it would be higher, but as a package – taking into account build, style and ease of use it's just not as universally attractive as its three rivals.

The Cambridge Audio Minx Xi is ranked third. In every respect apart from ergonomics, it does superbly well at the price and provides really tough competition for the top two. I particularly liked its sound as a network music player, but it performed well across the board.

In second place is the Teac. This amp just shouldn't be this good at the price. Despite being a Class D model it sounds really good and is a whisker ahead of the excellent Cambridge Audio. The Teac's all-round packing is also better and performs brilliantly here.



WINNER

The Quad Vena takes the gong. True, it's not quite as small or even as sophisticated as some here, but it offers you real hi-fi sound in a small box, which sports a fine-sounding DAC built in, and implements aptX Bluetooth well. It's an innately enjoyable and detailed performer.

						
Make/model	Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	Monitor Audio A100	NAD D 7050	Pro-Ject MaiA	Quad Vena	Teac AI-301DA

Price	£400	£400	£700	£400	£600	£400
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	Fine sounding integrated that's highly versatile and great value	Serious performer with its own unique style and versatile placement options	Rich sound and lots of wireless options for playback from all your home devices	Versatile little amp, but sonically rather bland - MM input is a real plus, though	Powerful, detailed hi-fi sound via all inputs makes this a very worthy winner	Superbly packaged, wonderfully finished and nice natured sonic performance

Key features

Class AB	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Class D	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Phonostage	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
AirPlay	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
AptX Bluetooth	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

TRY WITH THESE

CD TRANSPORT: Cyrus CDt **£599 HFC 360**

If you want a good CD transport that's small and unimposing, you've just found it. The Cyrus outputs a very good digital audio stream to any of these DAC-equipped amps. Its diminutive design means that it will fit perfectly with your mini system.



FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKER: Monitor Audio Silver 8 **£1,295 HFC 387**

Expensive yes, but these speakers will get the best out of any of the amps, especially the Quad. With a quoted sensitivity of 90dB they're easier to drive for the lower powered members of this group than the smaller stand mounters, and have a clean, detailed sound with plenty of punch and polish.



STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKER: Q Acoustics Concept 20 **£350 HFC 372**

Anyone looking for a pair of small bookshelf (or stand mounting) speakers to partner these small amps will find much to love in the Concept 20s. They're very sweet sounding for a budget box, meaning they won't show up the amp or digital source. The lovely gloss finish should fit right in, too.



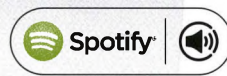
WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
WHATHIFI.COM



OCTOBER 2014
BLUESOUND POWERNODE



BLUESOUND
HiFi for a wireless generation



BLUESOUND IS A 24-BIT NATIVE, PURE DIGITAL WIRELESS STREAMING MUSIC SYSTEM.

Even 16-bit CDs have only about half of the audio spectrum that the master recording holds and that's a whole lot more than MP3s have left in them. With more than a decade of compressed audio piping through earbud headphones and cheap dock players, the time has come. The portable players we all love have created a new way of listening to music, but there hasn't really been much there to hear. Until now. Enter true 24-bit HD digital audio.

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

NEW

£229
OR LESS



Bluetooth

BLACK OR
WHITE

SAMSUNG • M5 • WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM

Introducing the new Samsung M5 Wireless Speaker that lets you integrate music around how you live. Its never been easier to immerse yourself in your favourite sounds.

NEW

£895



aptX
CSF Bluetooth
AirPlay

NAIM • MU-50 • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Combines Naim's expertise in streaming, amplification and loudspeaker technology. Mu-50 is the stage your music deserves, bringing you closer to the songs that inspire your life.

£169.99
OR LESS

SAVE
£160



AirPlay

BLACK OR
WHITE

B&W • Z2 • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM WITH DOCK

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

£799
OR LESS



Spotify aptX CSF Bluetooth AirPlay

NAD • D 7050 • NETWORK AMPLIFIER / DAC

Combines NAD's most advanced digital platform, Direct Digital technology with Apple AirPlay® Wi-Fi streaming to create the ultimate plug 'n play solution for wireless music.

£1999

SAVE
£484



Focal Aria 906 available in Gloss
Black for an additional £100

**NAIM • UNITILITE • ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK SYSTEM
FOCAL • ARIA 906 SPEAKERS (WALNUT)**

UnitiLite takes the feature set of the award-winning NaimUniti, including high-resolution music streaming (up to 32bit 192kHz), CD playback, internet radio and iPod / iPhone / MP3 playback and distils it into an elegant, sleek enclosure. Add a pair of Focal Aria 906 speakers and create an accessible all-in-one system that can put music at the centre of your life.



Naim UnitiLite
available excluding
speakers
£1725

NEW

£399
OR LESS



DLNA AirPlay

BLACK OR
WHITE

**MONITOR AUDIO • AIRSTREAM A100
NETWORK AMPLIFIER / DAC**

The AirStream A100 blends true audiophile sound quality with 21st century technology and style. Whatever source you choose, it will render the sound with astonishing scale, detail and drama.

ESSAV.COM



PIONEER • N-50 • MUSIC STREAMER

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



BLACK OR
SILVER

**SONY • HAP-S1
HI-RES AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM**

Take your music enjoyment to new heights with Sony's new HAP-S1 500GB Hi-Res audio system with 2x40W analogue amplifier, easy music file transfer and smartphone browsing.

NEW

£799
OR LESS

Hi-Res
AUDIO

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 17/10/2014. E&OE

www.SSAV.com

SEVENoaks

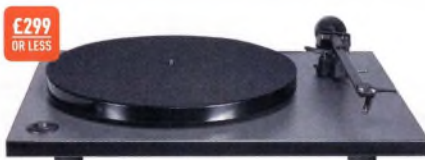


WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

£209
OR LESS

PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.



£299
OR LESS

NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE

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



NEW

£575
OR LESS

PRO-JECT • XPRESSION CARBON • TURNTABLE

With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, the 1 Xpression Carbon sets new standards in its price range.



NEW £799
OR LESS

NEW £1499
OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ CDS27 / FMJ A39 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Introducing Arcam's audiophile Class G integrated amplifier and SACD/CD player with Network streaming up to 192/24 for class leading sound quality.



£399
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

**NAD • D 3020
AMPLIFIER / DAC**

Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

£399
OR LESS

ARCAM • irDAC • DAC

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



£799
OR LESS

£749
OR LESS

AUDIOLAB • 8200CD / 8200A • CD / AMPLIFIER

The award-winning 8200CD features a wealth of digital inputs that will keep it playing all your music regardless of how it may be stored.



£249
OR LESS

£249
OR LESS

NAD • C 516BEE / C 316BEE • CD / AMPLIFIER

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



WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

£599
OR LESS

AUDIOLAB • M-DAC • DAC / PREAMP

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



WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

£1295

NAIM • DAC-V1 • DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

The DAC-V1 from Naim is an asynchronous USB digital to analogue converter with multiple digital S/PDIF inputs, precision volume control and a high-quality headphone amplifier. Only available from our stores in Holborn, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells.



ESSAV.COM

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

ESSAV.COM

MARANTZ • CD6005 / PM6005 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Replacing the 6004 models, the 6005 amp gains digital inputs using the same 24-bit/192kHz DAC as the CD player which now features enhanced USB playback and improved performance.



£1249
OR LESS

SAVE £501

ROKSAN • KANDY K2 • CD / AMPLIFIER

The K2 CD, sets a new standard for true hi-end entry level CD replay and is the perfect match for the K2 amplifier. Available in Silver or Black.



£599
OR LESS

£499
OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-12 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / DAC / CD

Amplifier with DAC that supports iPod USB and Bluetooth audio streaming. Includes four analogue line-level inputs and a phono input. The RCD-12 CD player is an ideal partner.



£1899
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

£1899
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

ROKSAN • CASPIAN M2 • CD / AMPLIFIER

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



£399
OR LESS

**NAD • D 1050
DAC / HEADPHONE AMP**

The best way to add Computer Audio and HD Digital to your hi-fi system. In fact, all digital sources will get a boost when the D 1050 takes over for the inferior digital circuitry found in everything from Blu-ray, DVD and CD players, to music streamers and set-top boxes.



£1499
OR LESS

NEW BLACK FINISH

NAD • M51 • DAC

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



NEW

£699
OR LESS

Hi-Res AUDIO

AirPlay
Bluetooth

SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.



ESSAV.COM

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

DENON • D-M39DAB • CD / DAB SYSTEM

This micro component system gives you clean dramatic sound, and more life to iPod and iPhone music libraries via its digital USB input. Includes DAB/DAB+/FM tuner.



ESSAV.COM

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
WHATSITUP.COM
AWARDS 2013

AirPlay

MARANTZ • M-CR610 • CD / DAB / NETWORK SYSTEM

Enjoy great sounding music from diverse sources, including Internet radio, music-streaming services, mobile devices, TV and other digital audio sources.



BOWERS & WILKINS • CM6 S2
The CM6 S2 is the first standmount in the CM Series to benefit from tweeter-on-top technology with its Decoupled Double Dome tweeter. The speaker also features a 165mm bass/midrange driver. The overall result is superb imaging and spaciousness not usually found in a standmount speaker.

NEW £1499 OR LESS

Price excludes stands

BOWERS & WILKINS 683 S2

The versatile 683 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre use. Its performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter along with new bass driver construction techniques and an FST Kevlar midrange driver.

NEW £1149 OR LESS



PMC • TWENTY:23
The first and overwhelming impression of the Twenty:23 is an open, engaging and communicative speaker. Its size defies both the depth of bass and scale of presentation by taking any music or film material in its stride. The sound is vivid and dynamic and delivered with authoritative bass.

£2300 OR LESS

MONITOR AUDIO SILVER 6

2.5 way speaker system combining excellent dynamics with a naturally rhythmic sonic character and tight, controlled bass. The Silver 6 is an outstanding communicator of music and film audio.

£999 OR LESS



Q ACOUSTICS • CONCEPT 40
The Q Acoustic Concept 40 floorstanding speakers are the latest addition to the award-winning Concept range and deliver unparalleled sonic performance at its price.

NEW £999.98 OR LESS

KEF • R500

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

£1499 OR LESS



Q ACOUSTICS 2020i

This award-winning bookshelf speaker exudes quality, delivering extended bass, an open mid-range, astonishing transient response and exceptional high frequency clarity.

£149.99 OR LESS

STANDARD FINISHES
GLOSS FINISHES £ 219.95

WHAT IS IT?
WHY BUY IT?
• 2014 IFA AWARD WINNER
• 2014 IFA AWARD WINNER
• 2014 IFA AWARD WINNER



PSB IMAGINE MINI (WALNUT)

Meet the newest and smallest member of the ultra-stylish Imagine Series. The deceptively small Imagine Mini makes a big impact on an already impressive range of award-winning speakers.

£399 OR LESS

SAVE £200

LIMITED STOCK

CLAIM FREE PSB PFS-27 SPEAKER STANDS WORTH £199



KEF • LS50

An innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.

£799 OR LESS

SONOS THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM

The Sonos Wireless Hi-Fi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound. Sonos is the only system that combines Hi-Fi sound with high-performance wireless. Plus it's simple to set-up, control and expand so you can easily fill your home with music.



ESSAV.COM

BOWERS & WILKINS P7 HEADPHONES

With P7, everything is designed to allow you to lose yourself in music. Bass is tight, vocals are precisely defined, and there's a wonderful sense of space, balance and clarity across the whole frequency range. P7's cable comes with a remote/microphone attachment, so it works seamlessly with your iPhone.



£329 OR LESS

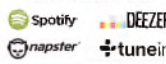
WHAT IS IT?
WHY BUY IT?
• 2014 IFA AWARD WINNER
• 2014 IFA AWARD WINNER

DENON • HEOS WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM MUSIC SYSTEM

HEOS by Denon is a Wireless Multi-Room Sound System comprising a family of great-sounding music players for your whole home. There is a free app to control them from your iOS or Android phone or tablet. You can enjoy your favourite streaming music services, internet radio or your own music collection and set-up is a breeze.



Stream from your favourite online music services



NEW

ESSAV.COM

NAD VISO HP50 HEADPHONES

Designed for long-wearing comfort and listening with ultra-soft noise-isolating earpads. The convenient three-button Apple remote offers full control of all Apple music and call functionality right at your fingertips, plus voice control with Siri-compatible devices.



£229 OR LESS

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



Best Independent Retailer (Large) Consumer Electronics Award Winner 2014

Stores Nationwide

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

Website

Visit our website for a streamlined on-line experience with an outstanding product selection plus the latest product news and store information.

Aberdeen • 01224 252797
Bishop's Stortford • 01279 506576
Bristol • 0117 974 3727
Brighton **NEW** 01273 733338
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

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

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 17/10/2014. E&OE

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



Head master

Ostensibly, Oppo's new HA-1 is designed to partner its superb PM-1 headphones, but it's so much more than this, says **David Price**

Who would have thought it? Obscure manufacturer of decent Chinese optical disc players starts spin-off company (Oppo Digital Inc.) in California to make high-quality hi-fi products. It's not a typical tale of hi-fi success, but the story is getting ever more believable with every product launch. Less than a year after the excellent PM-1 headphones were released, the company now has its own matching DAC/preamp/headphone amp too – in the rather pleasing shape of the HA-1.

Some readers may be familiar with the BDP-95EU (HFC 347) and BDP-105D Blu-ray players. Ten years

ago the likes of Sony and Pioneer were championing high-end optical disc spinners, but now that honour falls to Oppo, whose two most recent generations of BD players have been excellent. The HA-1 duly borrows a good deal of circuitry from the BDP-105D including the ESS 9018 Sabre32 DAC and digital filter chip. Although touted as a “high performance headphone amplifier”, it actually doubles as a USB DAC, stereo preamp with Bluetooth streaming. In short, it's packed with facilities.

The idea behind the HA-1 then, is to provide a multi-functional digital hub (that also has an analogue input) with an excellent headphone driver

DETAILS

PRODUCT

Oppo HA-1

ORIGIN

USA/China

TYPE

Class A headphone amplifier/preamp/DAC

WEIGHT

5.9kg

DIMENSIONS

(WxHxD)
254 x 80 x 333mm

FEATURES

- Coaxial, Toslink; USB; AES/EBU and Bluetooth digital inputs
- Support for PCM; DSD (DoP v1.1 or native); MP3; AAC
- 32-bit/384kHz ESS Sabre 9018 DAC
- 4.3in fine-pitch colour display

DISTRIBUTOR

Oppo BD UK Ltd

TELEPHONE

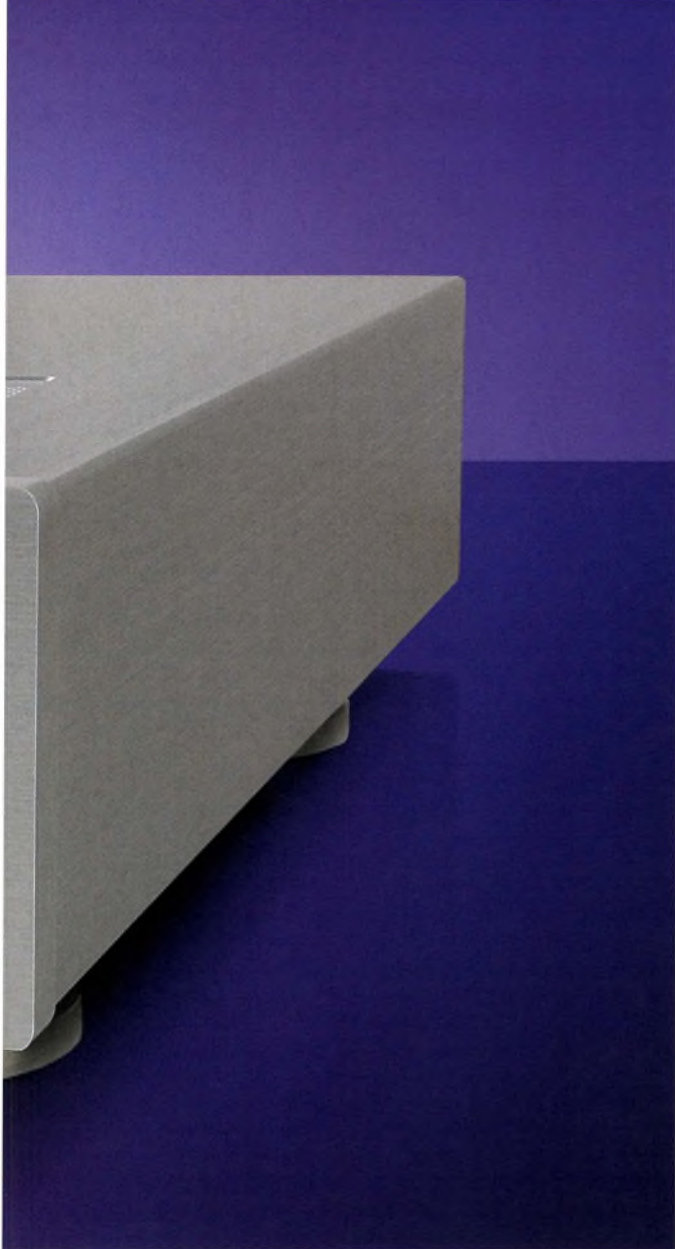
0845 0609395

WEBSITE

oppodigital.co.uk

stage built in, at a price that's still keen. My time with it suggests that the company has succeeded. Together with the unbalanced analogue input via RCA phono sockets and the balanced XLR audio input, you get coaxial and optical digital inputs, plus an AES/EBU balanced digital input via XLR and an asynchronous USB type-B input. Via this, instead of 'just' 24/192 you can play out 32-bit, 384kHz files, so the Oppo will handle the increasingly popular DXD (24/352.8) format without downsampling. There's also DoP (DSD over PCM), which runs at up to DSD at four times its normal data rate (DSD256 at 11.2896MHz/1-bit in 'native' mode). In short, this product covers a vast range of bases and I know of nothing else on the market that has the same combination of facilities and functionality at its price.

Considering its sub-£1,100 price, that huge range of connectivity options and its tremendous format compatibility, you'd hardly call the Oppo expensive. You could easily lavish £300 on a headphone amp, another £300 on a passive preamp, and a further £500 on a DAC and



motorised potentiometer) and a smaller rotary source selector on the left; centre stage is the 4.3in hi-res colour screen. As well as displaying source selection, settings and volume, it also has a choice of display modes from classic VU meters (for seventies hi-fi children), a bar graph spectrum display (for eighties kids) or an information summary (for nineties squares)! There's even a smartphone app, should you not wish to use the supplied remote control. Overall finish is superb, again justifying its price premium over the Audiolab M-DAC. One remark that has to be

It offers plenty of detail and insight, with a smooth, sophisticated sound

made, though, is that the Oppo runs very hot indeed, so remember not to put anything on it.

Sound quality

To those who have not yet heard the Oppo PM-1 planar magnetic headphones, you're in for a treat! These are one of the most clear, open and detailed sounding headphones at anywhere near their not inconsiderable price (see p44). The problem is that they aren't the world's most beguiling things to listen to; they have an unerringly forensic nature that sets out to tell you all about the recording and indeed the source you're using to reproduce it, warts and all. Given that most people's front ends are less than ideal, you can sometimes come away with the feeling that the PM-1s need a little more warmth. Well, unsurprisingly, the HA-1 gives just this – you'd never call it euphonic, but it's a generally neutral sounding device that leans ever so slightly to the warm side –

especially in the low and mid bass region – and is an excellent match for the Oppo headphones.

I first audition the HA-1 as an analogue preamplifier via its RCA line inputs, where I find it offers plenty of detail and insight, with a smooth, sophisticated and fairly neutral sound quality considering its price point. Sonically via line in you can do rather better with several all-analogue preamps at this price – the Oppo can sound a little mechanical and opaque by comparison – but then again, the HA-1 packs vastly more functionality in for the money, so it's not strictly a fair comparison.

When you switch in the DAC section, things begin to hot up. Fed by Cyrus CD Xt Signature transport via its coaxial in, the Oppo impresses. 808 State's *Pacific State* comes over with a surprising degree of bass weight, and oodles of detail. It's easy to hear that trademark ESS Sabre sound; you get a high precision render of the recording, with its many dense layers. It's an explicit rather than a romantic sound, and gives a seat-of-the-pants listening experience. Added to this is that solid bass, which punches things along. Certainly compared with my reference Chord Electronics Hugo DAC, there is more thump to the bass drums and Moog bass synthesiser work.

Moving from using the HA-1 as a hi-fi preamplifier driving a power amp, to using it as a headphone amplifier, and this suddenly makes sense. Plugging the PM-1 headphones in shows how well suited the unit is to the task of driving them. While they are both strong taken separately, together the combination easily surpasses the performance of the two individual component parts. They make a very nice noise with Malcolm McLaren's *Waltz Darling* – this classic eighties Trevor Horn production opens up and becomes a captivating ▶

you'd still struggle to match what the HA-1 provides. Yet the unit is built extremely well both inside and out. Everything gets juice from the generously specified main toroidal power transformer; from this linear power regulators and filters follow with custom-made capacitors.

The half-width casework is all aluminium and of very high quality at the price. It sports a large rotary volume control on the right (via a

The bar graph spectrum display will likely appeal to eighties kids

CONNECTIONS



- 1 RCA and XLR analogue inputs
- 2 Optical, coaxial USB and AES/EBU digital inputs
- 3 RCA and XLR analogue outputs

Q&A

James Soanes

Oppo Digital UK, Technical Officer



DP: Why did a successful Blu-ray maker move into headphones?

JS: Headphones are a very buoyant market sector and was the obvious opportunity for diversification of our product portfolio. Crucially, we did not want to create another 'me too' range of headphones. With the technology, design and attention to detail of the PM-1, we felt we could make a big impact.

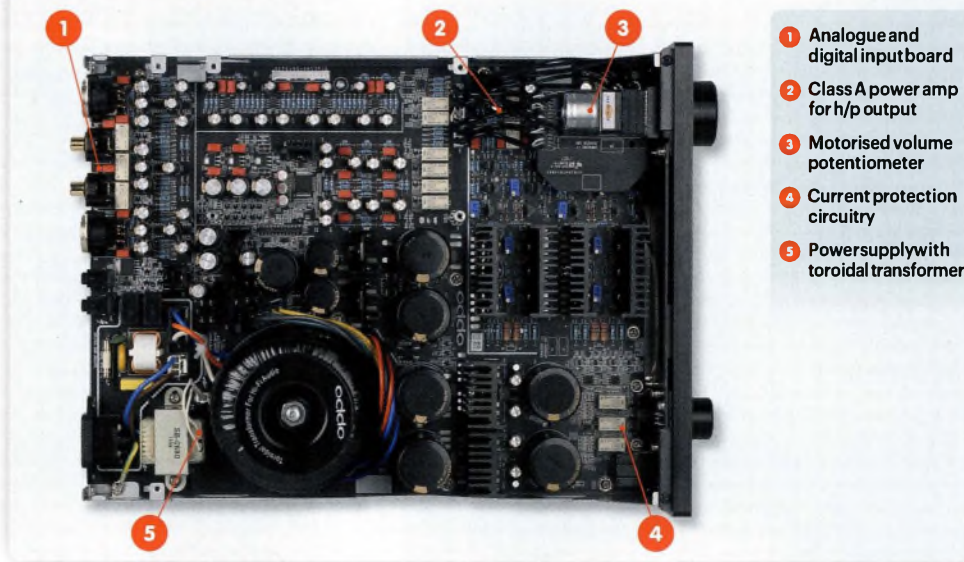
Why did you opt to make a headphone amp when there are so many good ones around?

We wanted to create a fully functional amplifier that could be used across a wide range of sources and with the latest DACs inside for the best performance. Once we started to develop the idea, we felt that we had something really special and, while the PM-1s work really well with whatever amplifier you use, the HA-1 shows them off to their true potential – especially when they're run using the balanced cable.

What's special about the PM-1's technology and design?

The obvious technology is the use of planar magnetic drivers, which we have developed to offer a very honest reproduction of the original signal across a very wide frequency bandwidth. Unusually for planar magnetic drivers, we have managed to get a significantly higher efficiency, allowing for greater sensitivity, meaning that users can use the PM-1 with mobile devices – a first for this type of headphone. Comfort was a major factor too. Industrial design was also key, which when combined with the high-quality materials such as polished steel and lambskin leather, makes for a product that looks as good as it sounds and that owners will be proud of and want to use and enjoy.

IN SIGHT



- 1 Analogue and digital input board
- 2 Class A power amp for h/p output
- 3 Motorised volume potentiometer
- 4 Current protection circuitry
- 5 Powersupply with toroidal transformer

OPPO PM-1

Priced at £1,099, these are seriously special cans. Instead of using conventional moving coil drive units, they use an ultra thin, seven-layer diaphragm with a spiralling pattern of conductors etched into both sides, which carry the electrical signals from the amplifier. They're suspended between magnets on both sides. This approach gives higher sensitivity and superior transparency, thanks to the driver being moved from many points across its surface rather than just one, as per standard moving coil phones. The Oppos sound ultra-clean and revealing as a result, perhaps a little too revealing for many sources! Fed by a top-class one, treble is beautifully pure, the midband open and seamless and the bass is tight and fluid – although not the most sumptuous around. They are comfortable and easily wearable at 395g, which is light compared with many other high-end phones. A brilliant design then, but not cheap!

listen when on some systems it can sound a little murky. The Oppo combination scythes through the mix brilliantly, with a blisteringly fast yet relatively refined rendition of the song. It carries the attack of the electronic percussion in all of its glory, and sounds wonderfully propulsive and fun.

Buoyed by my retro 16-bit experience, it's time to ramp up the resolution with a 24/192 REM track, via the USB input with my MacBook Pro running Audirvana. *Texarkana* is one of those songs that isn't quite as clean as it first appears, and only a really good hi-res DAC can unlock its full glory and open it up like a flower. The Oppo combination puts things together in an eminently believable and highly enjoyable way. Rhythmically it is very good, making for a powerful and arresting rendition of the song. It does well recreating the recorded acoustic of the studio, setting the band up just a little further back than some headphone amplifier/DAC combinations, making it less in your face but still very well detailed. Again, that solid, strong bass pushes things along with heady aplomb.

In absolute terms, the HA-1 is excellent, but not unassailable. That fulsome bottom end is fun, but it's not quite as lithe as the slightly lighter bass performance of the (touch more expensive) Chord Hugo. Nor does the DAC section have the Hugo's incredible resolution and insight, or indeed its superb rhythm and dynamic tracking ability. It's a very good digital converter, but not quite a great one. The Oppo is certainly better at driving headphones, though, and not just PM-1s – it has serious

grunt, and can be configured to drive a wide range of cans from 32 to 600ohms; it's a powerful performer.

Conclusion

Right now, the HA-1 is surely the best do-it-all DAC/preamplifier/headphone stage at the price. It's hard to fault, and makes a wonderful partner for Oppo's excellent PM-1 headphones – with which it works hand-in-glove. However, just as every multi-talented product, some of its talents are greater than others and I would class its ability as a headphone amplifier as outstanding. As a DAC it's good, but suffers strong competition from the £600 Audiolab M-DAC, notwithstanding the latter's lack of DSD functionality. As a preamp, it's good, but not exceptional. An excellent synergistic match to one of the best pairs of headphones on the market right now, if you own the Oppo PM-1 you would be foolish to overlook the HA-1 – and even if you don't, it's certainly something you should try to audition ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



OVERALL

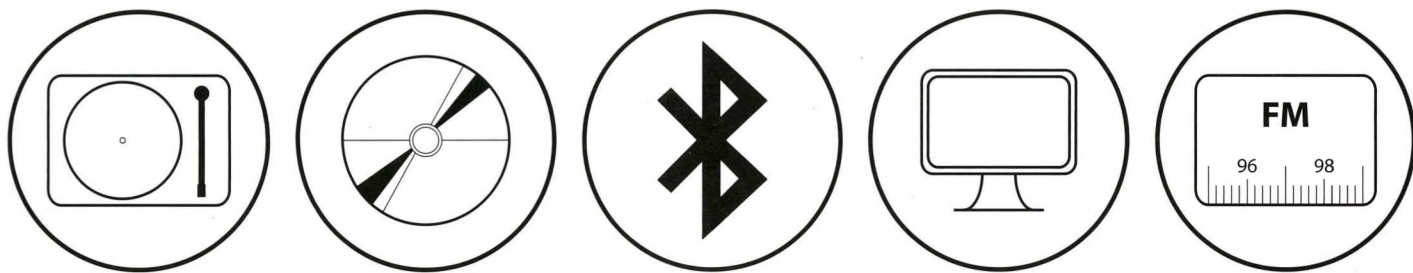


LIKE: Crisp, powerful, musical sound; superb build; display

DISLIKE: Runs very hot; DAC not quite as good as the headphone stage

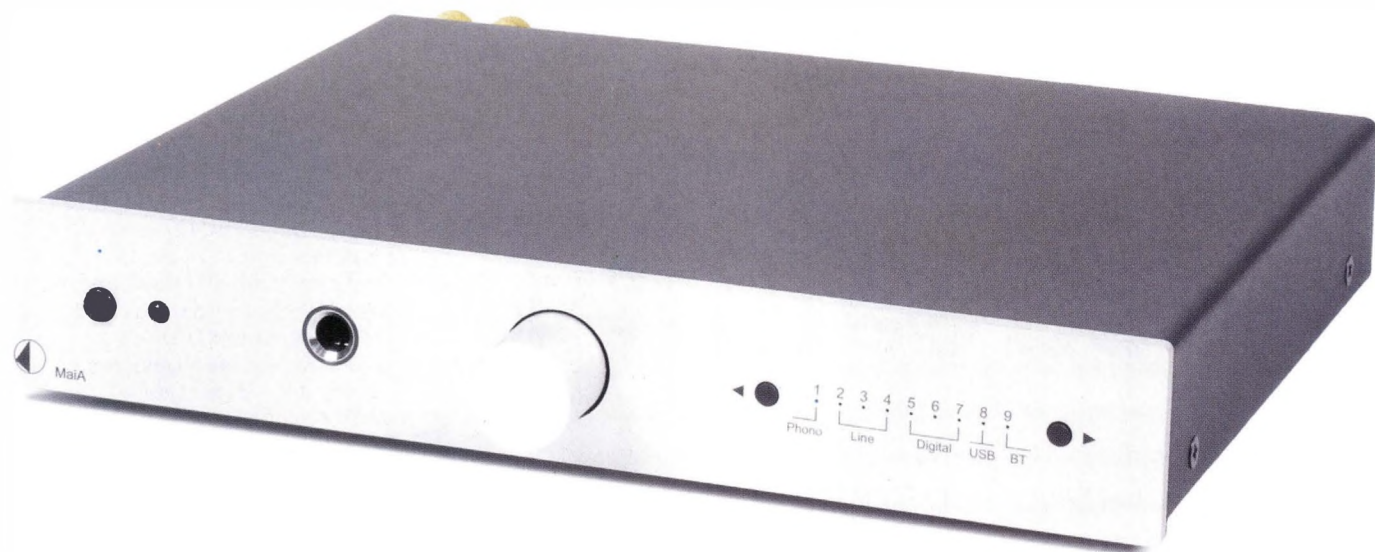
WE SAY: More than just a great partner for Oppo's PM-1 headphones

Any Source You Can Imagine.



One Integrated Amplifier.

MaiA



Boasting a massive 9 inputs, My Audiophile Integrated Amplifier, or MaiA, offers the most complete amplifier solution for audio fans on a budget in a stylish, compact chassis.

Incorporating a Moving-Magnet (MM) phono stage, a 24-bit/192kHz D/A Converter, XMOS® asynchronous USB streaming technology, aptX® Bluetooth and additional Line inputs for traditional sources such as radios, there's nothing you can't connect MaiA with.

In addition to boasting a powerful output for its size MaiA can also have a pair of headphones connected, and the compact IR remote makes operation effortlessly simple.

With an existing range of Box Design sources available in a size and price that perfectly complements this stunning amp, MaiA is a must-audition product for anyone interested in affordable hi-fi.

Available in the UK for **£399** (UK SRP)

- 2 x 30W power output (4Ω)
- 2 x RCA Line inputs
- 1 x Stereo Mini-Jack Line input
- 1 x Moving Magnet Phono input
- 1 x Bluetooth aptX® input
- 2 x Digital Optical inputs
- 1 x Digital Coaxial input
- 1 x USB Type B input
- 1 x Variable Mini-Jack output
- 1 x 6.3mm Headphone output
- 4 x 4mm ø Speaker terminals

Box-Design
by Pro-Ject



Distributed by Henley Designs Ltd.

T: +44 (0)1235 511 166 | E: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk | W: www.henleydesigns.co.uk



Cat that got the stream

With DSD5.6 playback, Marantz's new SA8005 SACD player appears to have a brighter future than most, says **David Price**

It's no longer a cakewalk being a £1,000 CD player. The rivals are better than ever, and the market is changing – indeed if you look at the sales figures, it's shrinking. Could the SA8005 be the last of the line? I don't think so, but it's certainly true to say that if you're a half-decent, fair-to-middling machine (or indeed brand) at this price your very survival is at threat. The SA8005 is better than this, and so I retain full confidence in its longevity – not least because it's so versatile and well made.

The SA8005 is that elusive thing, a Japanese product made in Japan. This is no bad thing, and will doubtless confer high levels of reliability on it for many years to come, along with, of course, that lovely, silky Japanese high-end finish.

This Marantz has the feel of a good camera; all the controls are crisp,

positive and delicate. The brushed metal fascia is superb, and is agreeably sculpted to avoid the generic aesthetic blandness that afflicts many Japanese products. The display is good, giving you just enough information without being fussy, and everything works seamlessly – including the disc drawer. Personally, I am a fan of slot-loaders, but the tray on this one works smoothly and doesn't feel cheap, unlike some rivals.

One major point of differentiation from its mainstream £1,000 rivals is that the SA8005 offers two-channel Super Audio Compact Disc playback. This is very much a legacy format now – but some people, especially Japanese audiophiles, have large SACD collections. The discs sound lovely and are becoming increasingly collectable, so why not? What will prove more useful for most UK

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Marantz SA8005

ORIGIN
Japan

TYPE
SACD player

WEIGHT
8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
440 x 106 x 341mm

FEATURES

- CD, SACD, CD-R/RW and DAC playback
- Support for WAV, MP3, AAC, WMA, DSD2.8 and DSD5.6
- 24-bit/192kHz Cirrus Logic CS4398DAC
- Discrete headphone amplifier

DISTRIBUTOR
Marantz UK

TELEPHONE
02890 279830

WEBSITE
marantz.co.uk

audiophiles is its USB, optical and coaxial input-equipped DAC, so the 8005 can play a far wider range of formats. As well as PCM computer music files at up to 24-bit, 192kHz resolution, it includes Direct Stream Digital (DSD), which is the native coding system for SACD – so the natural circle of life is complete!

Better still, it doesn't just do SACD-quality DSD (which has now been renamed DSD2.8), it does 'double speed' DSD (ie DSD5.6). This runs at twice the data rate, giving theoretically superior sound, and the SA8005 is currently one of the few machines on sale that is built for this. Don't all go and buy it for this reason, because until Sony (the format's inventor) makes all its Sony/CBS master tapes digitally downloadable at DSD5.6 resolution, there's not that much point in having it. I hear from a senior Sony source that this just might be happening, but of course it is much too early to say and the Marantz is ahead of its time. Until this happens, most people will be most interested in the machine's ability with CD and 24/96 via USB.

Marantz fans will know what to expect from the 8000-series machines. You get a generic steel chassis, albeit it strengthened with an extra metal plate to cut case resonance. This is bolted to the lovely brushed aluminium fascia, and the thin steel case fits over, to be secured in place by copper screws.

A Crystal Semiconductors CS4398 chip forms the heart of the electronics – it does DAC, digital filtering and



noise shaping duties all by itself, and was chosen because, according to Marantz's Ken Ishiwata, it was "the best sounding with DSD5.6". It feeds an analogue output stage using special HDAM op-amp modules. The USB DAC circuit has ground/signal isolation to get rid of the noise that computers send down USB cables. It works in asynchronous mode as per every other DAC around these days, clocking the computer's audio stream for lower jitter, but PC users will have to install a driver to get it to work; Mac users can relax!

The only real criticism I can make of the SA8005, is that I can never quite get used to having the disc transport controls split between either sides of the central disc tray and display area. Perhaps owners will get used to it, or perhaps it's because I am left handed and everything seems strange to me, but it just isn't as easy to use as some – even if it feels very swish. The other

observation to make, and it's not a criticism necessarily, is that it doesn't have aptX Bluetooth. This is an incredibly handy feature if you're an inveterate fiddler with a smartphone; I have 64GB of music on mine, and it would be nice to play it back via my digital source. I suspect the SA8006 in 2017 may well come thus equipped.

Sound quality

The job of a £1,000 CD player is to provide an obvious improvement to the rather two-dimensional sounding machines populating the sub-£500 price bracket. This is because anyone buying a machine such as this Marantz will likely have come from this sort of machine, and likely an ageing example too. However, the SA8005 is unlikely to be used with the very best ancillaries money can buy, so it does need to be reasonably easy going – a high intensity, full-on sound may well grate in a mid-price system, after all.

Sophistication such as this is really rather unexpected from a product of this price

With this in mind, the Marantz hits the spot perfectly; it is a powerful and confident sounding machine, far more so than any budget CD player or DAC, which will sound rather thin and veiled by comparison. It has a relatively full-bodied tonality, although you'd never call it 'fat' or 'euphonic', which always makes a nice noise whatever you care to plug it into. Via a really high-end amplifier and speakers, it still sounds musically rewarding, yet feed it into the sort of system it's more likely to be used with, and it still fits perfectly. There's lots of detail, a strong bass, a decently open and realistic midband and a smooth, warmish treble. Stereo

imaging is expansive and image location within it pretty good; it also takes a fair crack at dynamics – what's not to like?

Given the SA8005's highly agreeable personality, my first port of call is one of my favourite torture tracks. Musically, My Bloody Valentine's *When You Sleep* is a masterpiece (in my opinion), but you'd never put it on after dinner to relax with friends. It's a searing wall of feedback and assorted other studio effects overlaying cracked up, compressed guitars. This track is very good at forcing mistakes from front ends, but the Marantz copes manfully. It is uncomplaining and workmanlike – it just gets on with the job of playing the song without any fuss. Oh, and it is also without a searing, harsh treble or a forward upper midband, too. So we can say that this is a seriously couth CD spinner; it falls into no traps that give away its status as a relatively inexpensive product in the great scheme of hi-fi things.

Via SACD, and Simple Minds' *New Gold Dream* is superb; it proves to be a big, confident sounding silver disc player that gives a slightly warm and rose-tinted view of the world. It sets up a wide recorded acoustic, although it doesn't hang back as far as I'd have liked, and proceeds to make music in an enjoyably effervescent way. The player really catches the timing of the music, and gives a great sense of flow from verse to chorus to verse. It unravels the various layers of the mix in an easy, unaggressive way – making for an informative sound that seduces more than it thrills. The Marantz is never boring, but you couldn't say that it has the intensity and vitality of some of the better, more expensive machines. Certainly though, it proves most able considering its price; there's a sense that Marantz has carefully measured it up against its rivals and made it just a little better. ▶

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Coaxial & optical digital output
- 2 Coaxial, optical and USB input
- 3 Remote input & output
- 4 RCA line output

Q&A

Ken Ishiwata

Marantz brand ambassador



DP: What role in Marantz's range does the 8000 series play?

KI: It sits just under our Premium series (PM-11S3/SA-11S3/NA-11S1, PM-14S1/SA-14S1), and is for serious music lovers interested in both packaged and non-packaged media. The SA8005 was developed together with the PM8005 integrated amplifier and NA8005 network audio player. Actually, I like this combination very much since it represents the new Marantz direction. Whatever the musical source, packaged or non-packaged media, Marantz will bring highest possible music reproduction for the price.

Why no balanced outputs?

If we provided balanced outputs, then the cost would go up significantly, unless one designed low quality balanced outputs! On top of this, we'd also need to provide balanced inputs on the matching PM8005 amplifier, again very expensive! Personally, I don't believe in balanced configurations except for professional systems - are there any balanced loudspeaker systems? In other words, you have to convert somewhere into single ended...

Why does Marantz continue to persevere with SACD?

Although it has virtually disappeared from the UK market, SACD is still very strong in Japan and continues to do very well over there.

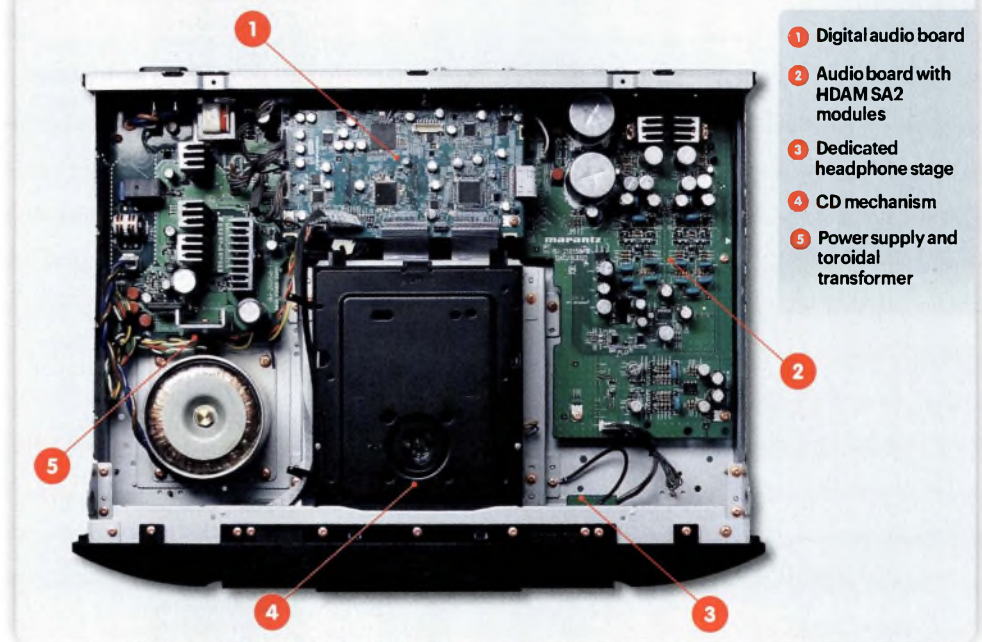
Why fit DSD2.8 and DSD5.6 to the DAC section of the player?

The numbers of services are increasing day by day and they are even talking about DSD 11.2 nowadays!

Why no aptX Bluetooth?

It's a very nice feature, but requires tremendous attention to maintain good sound quality, which means once again a huge cost increase.

IN SIGHT



- 1 Digital audio board
- 2 Audio board with HDAM SA2 modules
- 3 Dedicated headphone stage
- 4 CD mechanism
- 5 Power supply and toroidal transformer

Moving to the DAC, and a hi-res download of Kate Bush's *Snowflake* (24/96) via USB shows it to have a good strong upper bass, although way down low it is a little lacking. Again the music is nicely smooth and sophisticated, with a good detail of air and space across the midband and an intimate yet refined sound to Kate

of none; it's hard to think of anything that's such a good all rounder. And that's surely what it has been designed to be.

Conclusion

Marantz's SA8005 isn't an earth shattering product that upsets the natural order of the hi-fi world. Instead, it's one of those unerringly capable designs that gets on with the job in a most agreeable way. Right now it's an excellent, highly effective silver disc spinner with handy DAC functionality built in, but a few years into its life it may well spend much of its time playing hi-res DSD music - when DSD5.6 could be as common as 192kbps AAC is now. This is something that most of the Marantz's rivals currently cannot do, so shouldn't be dismissed lightly. Factor in its fine build quality, and what's not to like about this swish machine? ●

Whatever you feed it, its confident and musical nature comes through

Bush's vocals. Still, the machine doesn't quite catch the intensity of the occasion, and proves slightly more two dimensional in terms of soundstaging than you'd hope for. At the same time, the very high treble seems just a touch veiled, lacking the insight of its Audiolab 8200CD rival, for example. In ultimate terms then, its sins are those of omission, rather than of causing the listener any offence. Overall, the unit does an extremely good job at the price, and proves highly listenable.

Indeed, whatever you feed it, this essentially smooth, warmish, slightly soft but confident and musical nature comes through. Whether it's REM's *Texarkana* at 24/192 PCM, Alex de Grassi's *The Water Garden* via DSD2.8 or *Babylon Sisters* from Steely Dan's *Gaucho* SACD, the Marantz is unerringly competent. Indeed, it's a typical jack of all trades and master

HOW IT COMPARES

The SA8005 is pitched directly at Audiolab's 8200CD, which is a redoubtable performer. It's a good deal cheaper at £800, however, and gives practically nothing away in terms of features, aside from the lack of DSD playback, which may be an issue for some buyers. Sonically it's chalk and cheese when you compare the two; the Audiolab has a tonally dry sound. Still, its superb grip and insight makes everything a memorable experience and it has remarkable resolution; the soundstaging is amazing too. The Marantz has a warmer and more friendly sound, but lacks the propulsive rhythms of the Audiolab.

Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

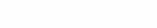
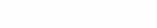


LIKE: Warm, smooth, sophisticated sound; facilities; build

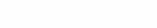
DISLIKE: Not quite as detailed as some rivals

WESAY: Super sounding, well made mid-price disc spinner

FEATURES



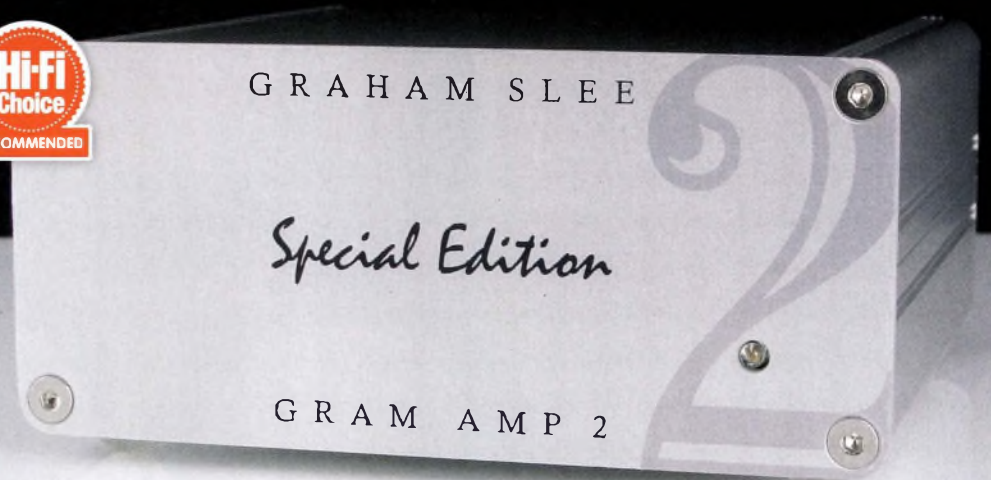
OVERALL



Two Head[amp]s Are Better Than One!

“A level of musical enjoyment beyond what its price tag suggests. Well engineered great sounding unit that brings music to life. Superbly musical... the best at its price.”

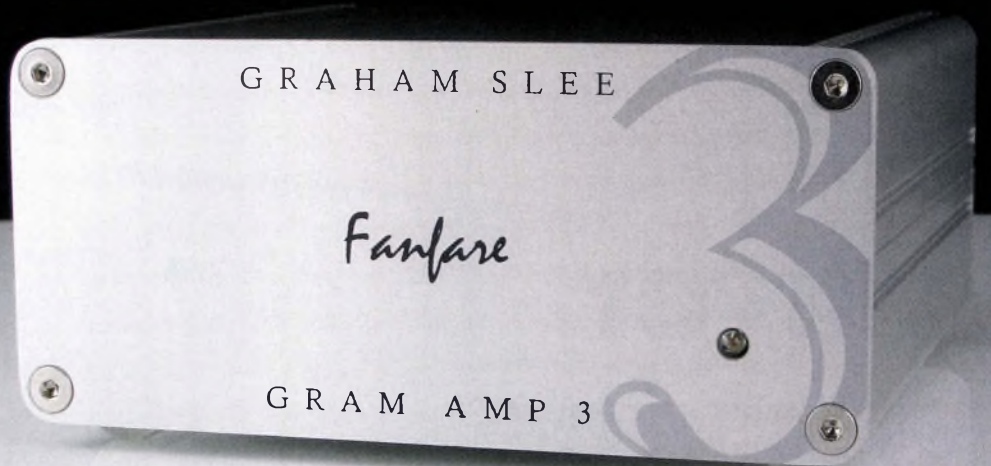
Hi-Fi Choice



Dedicated to MM and high output cartridges - the £260 Gram Amp 2 SE

“Extracting both the music and emotion with utter conviction. The midrange textures were almost tangible, the treble sweet and airy, the bass deep and authoritative.”

Audio Video



Dedicated to low output MC - the £280 Gram Amp 3 Fanfare

Upgrade - the £185 PSU1 power supply steps these legends up a gear!

High output MM cartridges and low output moving coils are as different as chalk and cheese. Each needs a different type of circuit to perform at its best, so why compromise by using a 'one box does all' phono stage?



“The optional bigger power supplies managed to lift the performance, particularly the sense of scale and openness.”

TNT Audio

Check us out at www.gspaudio.co.uk or phone +44 (0) 1909 568739





Silver service

Monitor Audio's assault on the small speaker market continues with the perfectly formed Silver 1, says **David Price**

Small is beautiful, and the world it seems wants less hi-fi, not more. That's why we're seeing more compact loudspeakers. It wasn't that long ago when such a thing was what you bought before you could afford a larger box. Now though – rather like luxury cars – people want really good things in small packages.

The Silver 1 seems something of a BMW 1-series; there's no sign that it is a budget design, or indeed a mid-price one. The quality of the finish is so good that those who know nothing about hi-fi could gaze into its immaculate veneer and think it was some sort of seriously expensive super speaker. Furthermore, the front baffle detailing is excellent, completely appropriate for

a higher-end design; it looks crisp, fresh and modern. It's small, but it doesn't look cheap.

The Silver 1 is a little fuller than many rivals, it's almost as if it has been working out at the gym and power eating at the same time – and that's because it has a larger mid/bass unit than you might expect, given its height. Instead of the usual 'small footprint, narrow baffle' design, Monitor Audio has gone for a 150mm driver, which forces the speaker to be wider.

There are sound engineering reasons for this; whatever some loudspeaker designers may say, there's no substitute for speaker unit size. That's why you don't see FA stacks with hundreds of small drivers, rather they have lots of large ones. The bigger the cone, the

more air can be moved and less energy is lost in the driver motor systems the fewer drivers there are. Fitting a 150mm driver where you'd normally expect something smaller confers a sense of ease and power to the Silver 1 that many of its rivals lack; it's not a dramatic difference, but any speaker of this smallish size needs all the help it can get. The driver's cone is Monitor Audio's standard C-CAM design featuring dimpled RST cone technology, it's stiff and light.

Matching this up is a new C-CAM gold anodised aluminium/magnesium alloy dome tweeter; this has a damped rear chamber and dome venting, and crosses over from the mid/bass driver at 3kHz. Both units are rigidly bolted to the cabinet, and split two ways via a crossover with polypropylene film capacitors and silver-plated OFC wiring. The cabinet itself is made of 20mm MDF, quite thick for the size of box, and extensive radial internal bracing is used, says Monitor Audio. Good lugging grilles are supplied with invisible magnetic fixings, which is a nice touch. There's a single bass port on the back, along with decent quality binding posts with biwiring.

Sound quality

Here's a small speaker that sounds rather bigger than you might expect. Mini monitors actually have a lot going for them, not least the fact that their cabinets are small and, therefore,

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Monitor Audio Silver 1

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
Two-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
6.95kg

DIMENSIONS
185 x 312 x 263mm (WxHxD)

FEATURES
• 1x 25mm C-CAM dome tweeter
• 1x 150mm C-CAM bass driver
• Quoted sensitivity: 87dB/1W/1m
• Quoted power handling: 100W

DISTRIBUTOR
Monitor Audio Ltd

TELEPHONE
01268 740580

WEBSITE
monitoraudio.co.uk

The Silver 1's finishes include Black Oak, Gloss Black, Gloss White, Natural Oak (shown), Rosenut and Walnut

easier to keep rigid, and you certainly hear how taut the Monitor Audio's box is when you push a bit of nineties techno through them. New Atlantic's *I Know* sounds wonderfully crisp and punchy; bass is tight and has very little sense of any overhang. The notes from the bass synthesiser start and stop extremely clearly, giving a powerful and pulsating feel. The midband sounds clean and detailed, the Silver 1s throwing out lots of information from the innards of the mix. You wouldn't call this speaker forward, but it is certainly explicit and well defined, and this extends to the treble. For example, the track's looped drum machine hi-hats sparkle and enjoy a fine sense of space for a loudspeaker of this price.

As well as giving a tighter, tauter bass than you might expect from a budget speaker, the other benefit of being small is the stereo imaging. The sound comes from something close to a single-point source, letting it fire out into the room very coherently to paint big, bold, three-dimensional stereo images. This is partly because the tweeter and mid/bass unit are located so close together on the front baffle; indeed this has been accentuated on the Silver 1 because the tweeter's trim ring is slightly clipped to let the tweeter sit slightly closer than it normally would. This makes for a wonderfully expansive rendition of Isaac Hayes *Shcft Original Sound Track*, which is an exceptionally spacious recording – and you can certainly hear this through these speakers. The recorded acoustic sounds positively cavernous, in all three dimensions. Inside this, instruments are located with great precision considering the price of the speaker; it doesn't give you electrostatic levels of image location admittedly, but it's not that far off.

One of the big problems with small speakers is dynamic compression – they're simply physically not able to shift enough air to track instrumental dynamic changes accurately. Happily though, this small box proves better than most. This is likely down to the larger drive unit, plus the very rigid cabinet. It certainly makes for a decent performance in this respect; for example, the frantic firecracker drum work on Rush's *Red Barchetta* is kept together brilliantly by the Silver 1. As the song builds to a crescendo, the speakers keep getting louder without compressing or distorting the music, and are very adroit at communicating

It sounds powerful yet polished, taut and transparent across a wide bandwidth

the small micro dynamics of the cymbals, for example. Ultimately at high levels there is a slight softening of dynamic peaks, but it is far less intrusive than some other similarly priced rivals.

Another really impressive aspect of this loudspeaker is its cohesive and balanced tonality. It is very good at doing a lot of things well and doesn't have any great weak links. The Silver 1 doesn't obviously excel at any one particular aspect of the musical performance, instead preferring to relax into the music and let the listener enjoy it without drawing attention to itself on the way. Indeed I find it surprisingly convincing with large-scale classical orchestral music, such as a Deutsche Grammophon pressing of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* (Berlin Philharmonic, Karajan) just as long as

you 'tune out' the lack of low bass. I really enjoy its wide soundstage, and how far it drops back way behind my listening room's real wall. I am also pleasantly surprised by its general clarity and transparency; it gives a surprisingly clear window on the musical world without ever sounding overly bright or forward.

Of course, the Silver cannot defy the laws of physics; like every good small loudspeaker it can only work its magic over a certain part of the frequency range, leaving the bottom octave to its fate. Still, it starts to give meaningful bass from surprisingly low down; LFO's *Low Frequency Oscillations*, which as the name suggests has vast tracts of synthesised sub-bass (the US version of this CD even had a sticker on it telling you not to play it loud), doesn't sound as anaemic as expected. It will never give the low frequency extension you would hope for from a floorstander, but people who buy this baby box will already know this and understand it. Indeed, they should love it for what it does so well, which is to sound powerful yet polished, taut and transparent across a surprisingly wide bandwidth considering its decidedly diminutive dimensions.

Conclusion

Monitor Audio has rather got into the groove of making excellent affordable small speakers of late. From the latest Radius 90 to the new Silver 1, there's the same fundamentally musically honest and enjoyable presentation. There are other, warmer and more euphonic designs around such as the Q Acoustics Concept 20 for example, but this £500 design delivers a bigger sound, less compression and more detail too.

Overall then, it's a super sounding little box and the beautiful wood and lacquer finishes merely add extra icing to the cake. If you're looking for something that's small but perfectly formed, you have just found it ●

CONNECTIONS



- 1 25mm C-CAM dome tweeter
- 2 Rear bass port
- 3 4mm biwiring binding posts
- 4 150mm C-CAM bass driver

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Big, punchy, detailed sound; superb finish; value

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Limited low bass; needs a reasonably powerful amplifier

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Highly sophisticated yet affordable standmount speaker

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL





Mighty Zee

Parasound has launched its new Z Custom Series audio units designed for the home.

Neville Roberts checks it out

For those that love music, there are going to be times where you want to hear it in other rooms apart from the listening room. One solution is to have extension speakers wired up to the main system, but that means running speaker cables everywhere. It also means having your system running full tilt when all you want is some background music in your kitchen. A better solution is a completely separate, standalone system that doesn't take up too much space and won't break the bank. Enter the Parasound Z Custom Series.

The series comprises a range of ultra-compact audio separates that

enables a complete system to be assembled to suit your requirements. The units reviewed here can form the basis of a good quality CD-playing separates system that can be added to if requirements change in the future. The units are the Zcd CD and MP3 player, the Zpre2 preamplifier and the Zamp stereo power amplifier.

The silver finish is for home use but black pro versions are also available. They have automatic control features that allow them to be left plugged in and run in standby mode when no audio signal is present, thus requiring a minimum of manual control.

Starting off with the meaty end, the Zamp power 'Zone' amplifier claims

to deliver up to 60W RMS into a 4ohm load – more than enough for a domestic living room. If, however, only mono operation is required, such as in a public area, the Zamp can be switched to bridged mode enabling it to deliver 90W RMS into a single 8ohm loudspeaker. Note that the amplifier can only drive an 8ohm speaker or higher when bridged.

The Zamp can be turned on manually via a push-button switch on the front panel, or automatically either via a 12V trigger input or when the amplifier detects an audio signal on the left or right channel inputs. The 12V trigger signal can be supplied from the preamp, which allows for remote turn on via a remote control if required. The amplifier has a 3.5mm headphone socket on the front panel for personal listening without disturbing others.

There are also individual gain controls on the rear panel. This permits adjustment of the Zamp to suit a wide range of inputs from devices other than the Zpre2 in order to minimise background noise – a process known as 'gain staging'. This may be of use in a more commercial

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Parasound Zcd,
Zpre2, Zamp

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
CD player, preamp
and power amplifier

WEIGHT
Zcd: 2kg; Zpre2:
2.1kg; Zamp: 3kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD) All models:
241 x 40 x 254mm

FEATURES
• Digital and
analogue outputs
• MP3 file support
via CD-R and USB
memory stick
• Auto power
on/off feature
• Auto input select

DISTRIBUTOR
SAV Distribution
TELEPHONE
0843 289 7195

WEBSITE
sav-distribution.
co.uk

environment when the amplifier has to interface with other feeds, including public address systems.

The next box to consider is the Zpre2 Zone preamplifier, which forms the heart of the system. This unit is supplied with a remote control for controlling the preamp inputs, volume and various operating modes. It can also control other devices connected to it via the 12V trigger signal. The 'zone' feature allows the remote to be paired with one Z Series system without interfering with another system in the vicinity – useful if you have more than one system in a public environment. Four different zones are supported.

The front panel has all the usual array of manual controls, including bass, treble, volume, balance and a push-button input selector. The Zpre2 has four line-level inputs, with input 1 having an optional Priority Auto Select feature. This allows the Zpre2 to switch over to input 1 whenever it detects an audio signal on that input. It also selects the video 1 channel at the same time, allowing the preamp to automatically switch to a DVD player, tuner or satellite receiver in a bedroom, for example. The preamp also has a 3.5mm headphone socket on the front panel.

The rear panel has the four sets of gold-plated RCA phono sockets for the audio inputs, along with two video inputs and video output. Two audio outputs are provided – one at a fixed level (useful as a record output) and the other variable for connection to the Zamp. There is also an RS232 DB9 serial port connector to allow

computer control of the Zamp's power, input and volume – nice!

Completing the lineup is the Zcd player with MP3 playback. This is supplied with a similar remote control to the Zpre2 with the same array of features, including the trigger output, RS232 control and fixed/variable outputs. It also sports coax and optical digital outputs for connection to a DAC, such as the Parasound Zdac that is available separately. In addition, the Zcd has a USB socket that will accommodate a USB memory stick for playing MP3 files. Note that only the MP3 format is supported, so WAV, WMA, FLAC etc files will not work with this device. MP3 files can also be played from a

There are so many functions that have been crammed into these units

CD-R. A particularly useful feature is the ability to navigate MP3 files on the Zcd via a television screen connected to the video out. The front panel has the usual track display and basic CD controls. The CD mechanism is a neat slot at the top of the panel, rather than a slide-out tray.

The three components can be stacked elegantly to make a very smart domestic system, or can be configured to fill two 1U rack spacings (such as in a computer patch-panel cabinet). Suitable brackets and blanking panel are available separately.

Sound quality

After connecting up the three units to each other and to my loudspeakers, I post a CD of Vivaldi *Violin Concertos Op.6* into the Zcd, set the bass and treble controls to the mid position and press the play button. There is certainly plenty of volume available and I have no problems filling my listening room with sound from my floorstanding transmission line loudspeakers. The Parasound system delivers a full sound that is clear and easy on the ears. The strings do sound a little squeaky at times, particularly during crescendos, but on the whole, the system gives a very convincing performance across the spectrum.

Not wishing to give the Parasound an easy ride, I next insert a CD of Cecilia Bartoli (*The Vivaldi Album*) for some extreme vocal excursions. I must say that it performs surprisingly well and some of Cecilia's vocal gymnastics certainly have me sitting up and listening!

Moving to something a bit more modern, Gordon Giltrap's guitar playing on *Airwaves (La Cooca Ratcha)* produces a very open performance on the Parasound. However, the guitar is a little set back into the accompaniment making the sound a tad two-dimensional and there is evidence of bass roll off at the very low frequencies, but this is not out of keeping with any system at this price point.

For some jazz, I first listen to the Oscar Peterson Trio playing *You Look Good To Me*. The melancholic opening sequence on the solo piano is quite moving and captivating and when

The system can be upgraded with the Zdac or Zamp Quattro for multi-room audio

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Fixed and variable analogue outputs
- 2 Optical and Coaxial digital outs
- 3 USB input
- 4 Video inputs
- 5 Audio inputs
- 6 Power amplifier audio input and loop output

Q&A

Richard Schram
Parasound ceo and founder



NR: The Zcd player only supports MP3 file playback. Do you have any plans to add support for WMA and WAV or other format files?

RS: We did not want to over-complicate the Z series in terms of features and functionality as that would detract from its simplicity and ease of use. MP3 remains the most common transportable file format so we took the decision to focus on getting the very best from MP3 rather than implementing WMA or WAV. We're watching to see how the market develops so my prediction of which formats future Parasound products might support would be rather premature.

What type of loudspeakers would you suggest for use with the Zamp in the home?

Convenience and ease of integration are key features of the Z series so we developed the Zamp v.3 to work with the widest range of loudspeakers possible. They can drive almost any standmount monitors, floorstanding towers, in-ceiling, in-wall or even exterior loudspeakers. In the Parasound office we have a Zamp v.3 driving a pair of Quad ESL63 electrostatic speakers to demonstrate its wide-ranging capabilities. The superb sound of this unexpected pairing startles our visitors every time.

Who do you see as the typical Z-system customer?

While the Z series components in black are clearly custom install products, the silver models will appeal to anyone looking for the sound quality of a full-size hi-fi system in a compact, stylish and family-friendly format. Just like a full-size hi-fi component system, a Z series system can be upgraded with the likes of the 24bit/192kHz Zdac or Zamp Quattro for multi-room audio. The Z system silver is ideal as the family/second system for dedicated audiophiles or simply as a convenient mini-system for anyone who appreciates real hi-fi sound.

Z units are available in either black or silver finishes



The nearest system is the Pro-Ject Box Design Series. Also a compact separates system, the Box Design range includes a CD player, preamp and stereo power amplifier.

The Parasound Zpre2 uses a digital system of volume control whilst the Pro-Ject preamp remote control system makes use of a motorised volume control, which is superior. However the Pro-Ject, whilst having an integrated remote control of power etc, does not have the wide range of options that the Parasound offers, such as the RS232 serial port.

Sound-wise, the two systems are pretty comparable. The bass response of the Pro-Ject is more extended and offers a slightly fuller sound, but the top end on the Pro-Ject seems more rolled-off than with the Parasound.

things liven up later in the piece, I enjoy the musicality and excitement. I am left with a feeling that the Parasound seems more at home with this style of music. This is confirmed when I play a new recording of Nigel Kennedy's *Recital*. The Fats Waller track *I'm Crazy 'bout My Baby* has all the magic that is reminiscent of Nigel's past mentor Stéphane Grappelli playing with Django Reinhardt and The Hot Club of France. I find myself transported back to the atmosphere of a smoky French

The system gives a very convincing performance across the spectrum

café in the forties. Not bad for an ultra-compact system.

Michael Kaeshammer's rendition of *Sunny Side Cf The Street* from *Tell You How I Feel* is stylish and tuneful, although if I were to be hyper critical, it doesn't grab me quite in the way that I know it can. The bass line on *Wailing Wall* from *Runt: the Ballad of Todd Rundgren*, although extremely pronounced with this recording, is a bit tame all things considered. However, this bass never seems to interfere with the female vocal line, which is a definite plus point.

Conclusion

It can certainly be said that the Parasound is feature rich. There are so many functions and options that have been crammed into these units that have clearly drawn on the technology and experience from several decades of Parasound's

full-size Halo products. There are several upgrade path options that are not usually available with compact systems. These include the aforementioned Zdac, the Zphono phono stage and for those wanting a multi-room setup, there is the Zamp Quattro four-channel power amplifier.

The components of the Parasound Z Custom Series are really well made and have got the styling just right so they will fit in well in both domestic and business environments. The controls are simple and well laid out with all the more technical stuff consigned to the rear panels. The controls on the remotes are set out well and can easily be used by anyone who is familiar with such things.

Sound-wise, the quality is par for the course for a system of this type and will be very satisfactory as a second system, driving some bookshelf speakers in the dining room, kitchen or bedroom. Being a separate system, the configuration is extremely flexible and expandable, which is a real winner and sets it apart from much of the competition. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



OVERALL



LIKE: Feature-rich range of products

DISLIKE: Bass a little rolled-off in the lower registers; a slightly squeaky top end with some material

WE SAY: A flexible and adaptable compact separates system



PMC[®]

When you hear the new
twenty[®]·26
a want will become a need

The pinnacle of the **twenty[®]** series, the **twenty.26**, features the same traits as its siblings - finesse, delicacy and musicality - but with an added ability to convey huge dynamic impact and the sheer scale of a musical performance. This exceptionally transparent design excels with a vast array of amplifiers due to its ease of drive and well-tempered balance, and delivers the greatest level of overall clarity of any of the **twenty[®]** series, or indeed of any speaker in this class.



"It reproduces voices and instruments in a very natural way, always faithful to its pro monitor heritage and the joy of music."

- the-ear.net, June '14



"...all three drivers combine flawlessly to give a truly musically adept result."

- HiFi News, June '14



twenty.26
in Walnut



Book a demonstration

See our dealer listing online, or contact us

T +44 (0) 870 4441044

www.pmc-speakers.com



Sound of the studio

This standmount has so much pro heritage it could be used in Abbey Road, but asks **Jason Kennedy** how good is it at home?

As David Vivian discussed in his *Opinion* page in *HFC* 386, there is a school of thought among certain loudspeaker manufacturers that what's good for studios is also good for the home. One of those manufacturers is ATC, the Acoustic Transducer Company, which builds professional and domestic monitors and voices both in the same way. In studios monitors are used to reveal problems, to highlight sounds that shouldn't be there. Monitors are a fundamental tool of recording and

The SCM19 has superb bass, it goes low but is tight and fully textured

mastering, the window into the production. There's a school of thought that suggests you don't want that degree of analysis at home if you are looking for the essence of a performance rather than all its fine details and perhaps shortcomings. This monitor's pro antecedents go a long way to proving that wrong.

The SCM19 is the smallest speaker in the domestic range that has an equivalent in its professional monitor series called the SCM20ASL Pro. That is an active model with a different tweeter – they share the same mid/bass unit and physical volume, despite the numerical difference. The SCM19 monicker has been in the ATC range for some time, but it didn't used to look so curvy and attractive. The last version was a traditional box shape with a black front baffle that increased the thickness of that face and had peg inserts for the grille. The latest update has mesh steel grilles that magnetically attach to the box, leaving it looking more elegant when removed. Like other ATC two-ways its

a sealed, infinite baffle design because ports introduce a loss of driver control below resonance. The acoustic price you pay for this is reduced sensitivity and extension, but this is a trade off that ATC prefers, and power is relatively inexpensive these days.

The main driver is a 150mm SL (super linear) spec unit with an integral 75mm soft dome and 9kg short coil/long gap motor assembly or magnet. This is why the SCM19 weighs too much for a speaker of its size, if audio equipment was judged by its mass/price ratio this brand would win every time. Apart from the change in cabinet what differentiates this speaker from its predecessor is the tweeter, which is now made in house by ATC. The SH25-76 tweeter has what the company calls a unique dual suspension system that's designed to suppress rocking modes in the dome at high output levels. In practice that should mean cleaner high frequencies even when you are hammering out Metallica at full chat. This is where ATC's pro background comes in handy – it is used to working with engineers who play at high levels all day so they know how to make bomb-proof drive units. The tweeter's motor system has a short edge-wound coil in a long, narrow magnetic gap, which gives very low distortion and removes the need for ferrofluids which apparently dry out over time. The magnet itself is a neodymium type with a heat-treated top plate for maximum speed of heat dissipation, another factor in consistency in high power situations. Do we need speakers that can withstand that degree of abuse in the home? Most of the time we don't, but it gives confidence that this speaker will last.

This is true of the build quality overall, the cabinet is finished to a very high standard and the bi-wire terminals are solid and of appropriate

DETAILS

PRODUCT
ATC SCM19

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Two-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
17.8kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
265 x 438 x 300mm

FEATURES

- 25mm soft dome tweeter
- 150mm mid/LF driver with 75mm soft dome
- Quoted sensitivity: 85dB

DISTRIBUTOR
ATC Loudspeaker Technology Ltd

TELEPHONE
01285 760561

WEBSITE
atcloudspeakers.co.uk

quality for the price. The fact that both drive units and crossover are made in Gloucestershire is remarkable when you consider the price, very few companies make their own tweeters any more. ATC doesn't recommend a particular stand height for the SCM19, but suggests that the top-most part of the surround on the mid/bass unit be at ear height.

Sound quality

I reviewed SCM11 not so long ago, this is a smaller speaker with a different 6.5in driver that hits the ground running so to speak. Immediate, upbeat and highly entertaining in a youthful, spirited way. The SCM19 is a rather more mature loudspeaker, it has a much more pro audio sound inasmuch as it is very low on character and revealing in a calm, restrained manner. It takes a while to appreciate how much it lets through because colouration is so low. This is a very good thing for the music because you hear more of what the artist intended, more of what they heard in the control room at the studio. This is the true advantage of a monitor, in a world where there is no absolute sound – we rarely listen to purist audiophile recordings that attempt to capture a totally natural sound – the best we can aim for is the sound that was conjured up in the studio, a sound that was arrived at with studio monitors. And given the amount of studios that use ATCs you ▶

Bi-wiring is possible thanks to these robust binding posts



ortofon

accuracy in sound



Quintet

Since 1948 Ortofon have introduced nearly 100 different moving coil pick-up cartridges to the hi-fi market. Their latest models in this long and proud heritage are the Quintet Series.

All Quintet cartridges use the same ABS thermoplastic bodies and neodymium magnets, but each model in the range has its own sonic expression that reflects its status. From the well-rounded **Quintet Red**, through the smooth **Quintet Blue** and spacious yet dynamic **Quintet Bronze** up to the pure audio excellence of the **Quintet Black**, this series offers something for every discerning listener at a very attractive price.

The Quintet Series also includes a true-mono cartridge, for accurate reproduction of older mono recordings.



Distributed by **Henley Designs Ltd.**

T: +44 (0)1235 511 166 | E: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk | W: www.henleydesigns.co.uk



Desktop delight

The TD-M1 takes Eclipse's design principles and makes them accessible. **Ed Selley** waves the flag for single drivers

On occasions, a design idea that notionally offers the highest possible performance can fail to deliver on that promise in reality. In theory, a crossover is a considerable impediment to the performance of a speaker and far less effective than having a single driver reproduce the entire frequency range. In reality, the laws of physics ensure that the single driver speaker has as many issues as one with a crossover in terms of performance at frequency extremes.

This hasn't stopped Eclipse from becoming perhaps the best known manufacturer of single driver speakers. Its unique 'Time Domain' principle has created a range of distinctive and seriously impressive

products. The TD-M1 represents an attempt to marry this technology with a degree of convenience that should broaden the appeal to new customers. To this end, the TD-M1 is a completely self-contained system with amplification and inputs all built into the speaker housings themselves.

The choice of inputs is useful too. The TD-M1 is AirPlay enabled, but additionally features a USB type-B socket that is 24/192 capable for direct connection to a computer. These connections are decoded via a Wolfson WM8741 DAC, which has been adapted by Eclipse to work both in conventional upsampling mode – generally how Wolfson anticipates it will be used – but also in a custom non-oversampling mode as well.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Eclipse TD-M1

ORIGIN
Taiwan

TYPE
Wireless loudspeaker

WEIGHT
5.3kg

DIMENSIONS
155 x 242 x 219mm (WxHxD)

FEATURES

- Wireless-equipped AirPlay speaker
- 24/192kHz-capable USB input
- Single full bandwidth 8cm driver
- Black and white finishes available

DISTRIBUTOR
Eclipse

TELEPHONE
0207 3284499

WEBSITE
eclipse-td.net

This can be selected on the fly via a dedicated control app and Eclipse believes this mode offers a superior presentation with 16/44.1 material. Connectivity is completed by a USB type-A socket for direct connection of an Apple device and a 3.5mm analogue connection. Other than an absence of Bluetooth, the Eclipse is well set up as a desktop audio device.

In keeping with other Eclipse designs, the TD-M1 is not especially sensitive and neither does it offer particularly high power handling. Amplification is Class D, rated at 20W with nominal THD and 25W with a rather more alarming 10 percent. This along with the inputs is built into the base of the right-hand speaker and power and signal is sent across to the left-hand speaker via an umbilical cable. The length of this cable and the power on tap send a pretty strong clue that the Eclipse is designed to be used near field, although this is one of few self-contained AirPlay products that produces a genuine stereo image.

The rest of the TD-M1 adheres to the time domain principle. Each speaker boasts an 8cm driver that is mounted on an internal mass anchor that is decoupled from the cabinet itself. Thanks to low mass and custom magnet arrangement, the TD-M1 claims a frequency response of 70Hz-30kHz, albeit with no roll off quoted. Bass is augmented via a rear port, which helps to further the

These 'jet engines' require careful setup to get the very best performance

similarities shared by the speaker housing and a jet engine.

The appearance of the Eclipse is one of its trump cards. The shape is a function of the Time Domain principle, but the result is still a fabulous looking little speaker. The impression is somewhere between science fiction prop, organic growth and sculpture. There are few environments where I can't see them looking anything other than truly excellent. The fit and finish is top notch, too with minute panel gaps and very high quality materials used throughout. £1,000 is undoubtedly a significant amount to spend on something which all said and done is still an 'all-in-one' lifestyle type system, but the Eclipse manages to feel worth the asking price – an impression further aided by the slick setup and useful control app.

Sound quality

From the outset, the single most important point about the performance of the Eclipse is that the single driver experience the brand is renowned for is completely intact in the TD-M1. This means that if your music tastes stem from genres making use of the word 'dub' or you have a hangar to fill with sound levels that can boil the fluid in your inner ear, stop reading this and go and enjoy this month's *Beautiful System* (page 90) instead. Two 8cm drivers (and this measurement includes the surround too) simply aren't going to vibrate your eyeballs.

If your musical tastes are broader than this, though, and you can grant the Eclipse the nearfield listening position that they benefit from, the TD-M1 is not simply good for an all-in-one, but sensationally good judged by the standards of any £1,000 system. The whole purpose

behind the Time Domain principle is to create a speaker better able to follow the variation and nuance of a piece of music and this means that the TD-M1 delivers a performance that is at times almost supernaturally fast. Almost everything else at the price sounds processed and compromised in comparison.

The other trump card is the cohesion across the bulk of the audible frequency range. From 100Hz to the upper threshold of adult hearing, the TD-M1 sounds truly exceptional. The WAV download of Fink's *Hard Believer* has a presence and a realism that is incongruous coming from such small speakers, but serves as a reminder that truly convincing music reproduction lives or dies on the midrange performance. This is not to say that the Eclipse can't

There are aspects of the performance beyond anything else at the price

handle frequency extremes – the upper registers in particular are deeply impressive and there is plenty of low-end detail if not physical impact – but the aspects that make music come alive are handled in such a way as to make them the absolute focus of attention.

The non-oversampling mode is more than a gimmick too. With acoustic material in particular and also with compressed files, the NOS mode fills the performance slightly and makes it fractionally warmer and smoother. The 'standard' DAC mode can extract a little more detail and sometimes generate a little more front-to-back depth, but there is an engagement to the mode that is

wonderfully compelling. The ease of adjusting between the two modes makes experimenting simple enough and will allow you to choose to suit your tastes.

The more you listen to the TD-M1, the more the presentation can often be likened to listening to a decent pair of open-backed headphones. The music arrives at the ear with little sense of the enclosure and with a definite soundstage provided that you are within the very sweet spot that the Eclipse produces. If you are outside this sweet spot, the stereo presentation declines, which further emphasises how the TD-M1 is used to best effect. The wonderful speed, tonality and integration is retained, but each speaker becomes an individual unit rather than a stereo pair. This means that the Eclipse is not a plonk and play device and will require a little careful fettling to achieve its very best.

Conclusion

Whether you can bring yourself to meet the demands that the Eclipse makes of you for a speaker that even when perfectly set up, is no bass monster and decidedly unsuitable for larger rooms is a decision that only you can really make. There is no real argument that the Eclipse asks a high price both in monetary and setup terms, but what it delivers is both a cut above any integrated AirPlay system I've yet tested and there are aspects of the performance that are beyond anything else at a similar price point. The Eclipse is a little piece of sculpture that happens to produce one of the loveliest nearfield presentations I've had the pleasure of listening to. When you consider the useful selection of inputs, the excellent build and the wonderful aesthetics, the TD-M1 might be a demanding speaker, but it's also one of the finest pieces of desktop audio on sale today ●

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Bass port
- 2 Umbilical cord input
- 3 Enable volume control switch port
- 4 USB type A and type B ports

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Incredibly involving performance; excellent build
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Limited bass and outright volume; no Bluetooth; it's not cheap
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: A supremely talented system that might be the ultimate computer speaker
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL



HOME CINEMA

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND & VISION

Choice

FIRST FOR...
4K, Blu-ray,
projectors,
AV amplifiers,
subwoofers,
speakers, Dolby
Atmos & more



AudioGate

The Complete Path to Audio Purity.

AudioGate 3

HIGH DEFINITION AUDIO PLAYER SOFTWARE



DS-DAC-100

1BIT USB-DAC

DS-DAC-100m

MOBILE 1BIT USB-DAC

- AudioGate 3 and the DS-DAC interfaces provide the simplest, yet most comprehensive, high-quality playback system available
- DS-DAC components provide uncompromised D/A conversion; hear high-definition files at a quality that traditional computer and home component outputs simply cannot provide.
- Realtime DSD conversion delivers optimum sound; Native DSD playback of 2.8224 MHz or 5.6448 MHz DSD files
- In addition to DSD, AudioGate 3 (Mac/Win) supports a wide range of audio formats such as 24-bit and 16-bit WAV and even MP3/AAC files, quickly and easily converting these files up to DSD format so they can be heard with superb audio quality.

For available stockists go to www.korg.com/DSDAC100

KORG

Going LIVE

Setting up a live PA for an act like Pink Floyd is a little different to getting your home hi-fi to sound just right. **Jason Kennedy** speaks to the experts

The cassette did not 'kill music' and file sharing won't either, what it has done is reduce revenues from album sales and this in turn has forced musicians to go out and earn their living by playing live. This is a good thing for fans and a good thing for people working in live sound engineering.

The world of concert engineering is not what it once was. Pro sound company Britannia Row runs training courses for wannabe sound engineers who will end up working in a world that has changed so much from its beginnings 40 years ago that it's virtually unrecognisable. When The Beatles started out there were no onstage or in-ear monitors, no mixing desk and very little in the way of loudspeakers and amplifiers. Even at Shea Stadium they had to harmonise without being able to hear themselves because of the puny PA rig and an audience that could produce a lot more SPL.

In the early days, essentially the sixties, PA systems were very small and basic by today's standards. Tannoys were used in theatres

and Vox vocal columns (floorstanding line arrays) were used by clubs. In the late sixties WEM Columns had become the *de facto* standard for live events, by the time of the Rolling Stones Hyde Park concert these were augmented by horn-loaded piezo tweeters, (also used for Pink Floyd's Ummagumma shows). In a quest for the power demanded

Sonic integrity is key – if you see Eric Clapton you want his guitar to sound like his guitar

by the likes of Pete Townshend, manufacturers started to look back at the Voice of the Theatre horn systems. This resulted in RCA 'W' bin bass horns, Vitavox made S2 mid horns and JBL bullet tweeters. Not all that dissimilar to horn systems espoused by some of the more ambitious loudspeaker companies in our world.

Toward the mid seventies Martin LE200 wedge floor monitors started to appear so that singers and other front row musicians could hear what they were playing. The next breakthrough was introduced by Roy and Gene Clair from the US who made the S4 that was first used at the Montreal Olympics in 1976, this was a full-range 'composite box' that was initially stacked either side of a stage. Bruce Jackson, Elvis Presley's live engineer at the time, suggested flying them and thus was born a technique that has come to dominate big live sound events throughout the world today. Jackson proved to be a major influence on pro sound, starting Apogee Electronics and developing what became the Dolby Lake live sound control system.

In the early nineties Christian Heil developed the line-source array where cabinets are arrayed in a tower that is hung in a J shape for optimum dispersion control. This style of PA is made by the majority of companies in the sector and seen at the majority of large events. Modern PA systems have to balance cost,



A line array for a Robbie Williams gig



One of the training sessions in full swing



Bit different to your hi-fi's controls isn't it?

sound quality, reliability and ruggedness while remaining sensible in terms of weight. As systems get bigger there is a constant battle between keeping cabinets small and being able to maintain them.

Front row seat

Digital technology has revolutionised the once laborious process of setting up and optimising a sound system for a live event, prediction software allows engineers to figure out how to set up speaker arrays and model the way sound is dispersed in the venue so that maximum consistency is achieved and every member of the audience gets a 'front row' seat. A far cry from the days when the engineer would roam around the venue listening and then going back to the desk to tweak the balance. The digital mixing desk means that settings can be stored on a USB stick and instated in the desk at another venue, so touring bands no longer need to go to the expense of transporting equipment around the world. The most successful acts go

to this sort of length because it ensures consistency, but in an age when musicians make most of their income from touring it's a luxury that only top acts are willing to pay for.

FA rental company Britannia Row was formed by Pink Floyd in 1975 in the street of the same name in Islington, London. It was started to support the band's ambitious live shows and give them some control over the quality that they could deliver. It's now an independent company based in Twickenham with 35 staff and a roll of 100 or so freelance engineers on its books.

In 2012 Britannia Row's co-owner Mike Lowe decided to start a training academy for live sound engineering because of a shortage of skilled engineers. On the one hand the engineers that have been doing live sound for the last 40 years and who had grown up with the business were getting to retirement age, and on the other most of the courses provided in universities are not practical enough. The 12-week course that Britannia Row Training has created introduces students to the practical side of setting up and engineering live sound installations in sectors including corporate events, houses of worship – the majority of mixing desks are sold into this sector in the US – theatre sound for plays, musicals and the like and, of course, concerts.

While the most visible engineer at a concert is the front of house guy behind the desk in

the audience, there are several others working away who are less conspicuous. There is a system technician who sets up the loudspeaker system, it's important to note that the front of house desk only controls the source, that is the sound coming in from the mics and instruments on the stage, it does not affect what the loudspeakers are doing directly, hence the need for a separate control system and engineer. Then there's the monitor engineer who is usually on one side of the stage and has to work with the band or act directly, it's a job that requires a thick skin and both technical and social skills. At bigger events there will also be a radio technician to keep the mics and in-ear monitors working as they should. There are also usually assistants and a doubling up of key personnel in case of sickness or the like. When you take into

BRITANNIA ROW HIGHLIGHTS

- 1975..... Pink Floyd and Steve Miller at Knebworth
- 1976..... Queen, Hyde Park
- 1979..... Started working with Peter Gabriel and the Cure
- 1980..... Started working with Stevie Wonder
- 1987..... Pink Floyd's Momentary Lapse of Reason Tour
- 1989..... First Simply Red show, Dublin
- 1989..... Frank Sinatra, Liza Minelli and Sammy Davis Junior tour
- 1990..... Began providing sound for Glastonbury main stage
- 1990..... Roger Waters The Wall, Berlin
- 1991..... Last Dire Straits tour
- 1992..... Barcelona Olympics
- 1992..... Started working with Jamiroquai
- 1992..... Nirvana, San Sebastian, Spain
- 1993..... Started working with Oasis
- 1994..... Pink Floyd Division Bell tour – their highest grossing tour to date
- 1996..... Oasis, Knebworth
- 2000..... Millennium Dome show
- 2003..... Robbie Williams, Knebworth
- 2005..... Live 8 – the last Gilmour, Waters, Mason & Wright Pink Floyd performance
- 2007..... Live Earth
- 2007..... Led Zeppelin at O2 Arena
- 2009..... Oasis, Slane Castle
- 2010..... FIFA World Cup, South Africa
- 2012..... Opening and closing ceremonies of London Olympic and Paralympic games



Happy memories of Britannia Row's first gig in 1975





account the amount of live events going on this multiplicity of roles adds up to a lot of jobs for engineers with the requisite skills.

The big hi-fi

Britannia Row's course director is Barry Bartlett who has been a sound engineer all his working life. Barry got into the game in the early seventies in the days when WEM columns were almost all there was in the way of speaker systems. His first job was at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970, famously Jimi Hendrix's last performance. A hi-fi nut in his early teens he describes engineering a concert as "playing with the big hi-fi".

Today he uses flying line array speaker systems with digital crossovers that precisely control phase and dispersion to produce sound quality that can be directly compared with the sound going into the mics at the beginning of the chain. Today Bartlett leads the course, teaching students who are mostly in their twenties about the importance of fidelity to the source. Sonic integrity is key just as it is in our world – if you go and see Eric Clapton you want his guitar to sound like his guitar. Not all musicians are after fidelity, however, some want the sound that they got

on the record with all the same effects while others like to extemporise, to change the sound and make it different. The problem is that not many artists are able to convey what they want so the engineer has to interpret what they are saying and produce the desired result. Bartlett also points out that the quality of the initial 'capture' by the transducer, in this case a microphone, is critical so mic placement

Digital technology has revolutionised the once laborious process of setting up a system

is very important as is the quality of the preamp it feeds, which also needs to be appropriate EQ wise. Then there's the quality of the output transducers – the loudspeakers – these need to be correctly set up, calibrated, aligned and EQ'd. You can see why DSP is so useful in the live situations, and why all large installations use active DSP speaker systems.

Bartlett is keen to point out that the purpose of the FA system is to convey the performance to the audience, to enhance it for artistic

reasons. He describes it as a marriage of science and art; technicians aiding creatives by providing a means to an end, a shared experience. He feels that festivals are particularly popular because they give a sense of community, bringing like-minded people together. He doesn't strike me as being an average sound engineer!

The aim of the sound engineer is to provide a uniform experience for the whole audience, however when pressed Bartlett admits that the best place to be is still in front of the mixing desk. The other question I have to pose is who chooses the volume level of a concert, the answer it seems is the front of house engineer. He/she needs to take into account the requirements of the audience and the act, of course, but ultimately it's their hands on the controls. Given that soundchecks are done before the audience arrives the engineer also has to know how to account for the difference that a large body of people will make to the sound in the room. This it turns out is generally achieved with a 3dB increase in level, a perceived 50% increase in volume, so not too technical!

Hands on

At its training facility Britannia Row has a scaled down concert setup for students to practice with, bands come in to play and the nascent engineers have an opportunity to run the front of house and monitor desks. First, however, they have to connect up the system, all the mics, mic preamps, amplifiers and loudspeakers – digital technology has not removed the nitty gritty of the business. If anything, wireless technology has made it more complex and requires greater expertise. This combined with the fact that the time available to set up a large scale system is rarely longer than a day means that the pressure to get things right first time is extremely high.

Bartlett and his colleagues emphasise the practical hands-on nature of the job and the fact that in live sound there is no room for error. It's clearly a high pressure job, but the fact that its practitioners are paid to sit in the best seat in the house and listen to live music must compensate rather well ●

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LIVE SOUND SYSTEMS AND HI-FI

CROSSOVERS

Live: Active, 4th order achieved digitally with an external processor.

Hi-fi: Generally odd and even order internal passive. Some systems, ie Linn and Meridian have active systems with internal DSP crossovers.

PLACEMENT & DIRECTIVITY

Live: Speakers need to be rigged and phase aligned using DSP. Directivity is vital as multiple drive units can cause cancellation of output.

Hi-fi: Flexible positioning for best imaging and EQ.

ROBUSTNESS

Live: PA systems need to be rugged enough to be able to survive high temperatures and both physical and electrical abuse.

Hi-fi: Needs to look good, but hopefully doesn't have to tolerate serious abuse.

QUANTITY

Live: Often involves multiple enclosures and fill in systems.

Hi-fi: Stereo systems by their nature rarely involve more than two boxes, the exceptions being sat/sub setups and occasional two-box-per-channel designs.

POWER

Live: Need to be able to play at high SPLs for extended periods of time without overheating or clipping.

Hi-fi: Relatively low SPLs are required because of the size of the space involved and the proximity of the listener(s).

ANTHONY GALLO
ACOUSTICS

ARCAM

ATLAS Cables

audiolab

AUDIOVECTOR

Bardaudio

B&W

BOSS

THE CHORD COMPANY

CHORD

CREEK

CRESTRON

CYRUS

DALI

DENON

EPAS

EXPOSURE

GENELEC

GOLDRING

GRADO

IMAGE

ISO/TEK

JVC

LABIESCAPE

KEF

KUDOS

LINN

LUMÄGEN

MARANTZ

MICHELL ENGINEERING

MISSION

MUSICAL FIDELITY

NAD

NAIM

NEAT

ONKYO

PANASONIC

PMC

PROAC

PROJECT

Q

QUAD

REGA

ROTEL

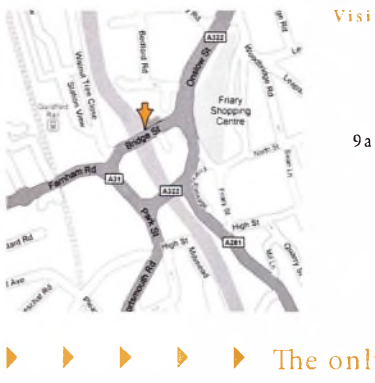
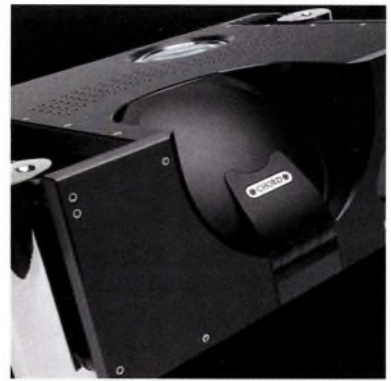
SIMA

SPENDOR

Techonid Research

VELODYNE

Wilson benesch



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

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 33% on shop price + SAVE 75% on Digital Download + FREE GIFT)
- Print:** £9.79 every 3 months **(SAVE 33% on shop price + FREE GIFT)**


YOUR DETAILS MUST BE COMPLETED

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
 Address.....
 Postcode..... Country.....
 Tel..... Mobile.....
 Email..... D.O.B.....

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
 Address.....
 Postcode..... Country.....

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 29% on shop price + SAVE 75% on Digital + FREE GIFT)
- Print:** £41.49 (SAVE 29% 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 V671 on the back

Cardholder's name.....
 Card no:..... (Maestro)
 Valid from..... Expiry date..... Maestro issue no.....
 Signature..... Date.....

Offer ends 23rd October 2014. 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 HARBOURGH, LEICS LE16 9EF.



PRINT + DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Free Audio-Technica headphones worth £37*

13 Issues **delivered to your door**

Save up to **33% 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 Audio-Technica headphones worth £37*

13 Issues **delivered to your door**

Save up to **33% off the shop price**

Exclusive discount on all orders at myhobbystore.co.uk

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTIONS
AVAILABLE ONLINE!

Receive a pair of **Audio-Technica SJ33 Headphones*** when you subscribe today

**WORTH
£37!***

**"If you're looking for
deep resonating bass
and vocal projection,
these are for you"**




Audio-Technica SJ33 DJ-style headphones are a great compact headphone design combined with long-wearing comfort and superb, reliable sound reproduction. These portable headphones are designed with swivel housing and one-ear monitoring – each ear piece is designed to turn 90° horizontal and 180° vertical.

Audio-Technica's SJ33s use sophisticated driver technology and superior components to give you high SPL capabilities while maintaining exceptional sound clarity. If you're looking for deep resonating bass and vocal projection, these are for you. Compact and portable, they come in black or white with a 1.2m cord. The SJ33s are suitable for any audio player with a headphone output


- Specifications
- Driver Diameter: 40mm, Neodymium magnet
 - Frequency Response: 10-23,000Hz
 - Maximum Input: 500mW
 - Impedance: 48ohms
 - Connector: 3.5mm gold-plated stereo mini plug
 - Weight: 110g

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 23rd October 2014. *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.subscription.co.uk/hificl/V671

CALL OUR ORDER LINE Quote ref: v671

 **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.

Promotions, Upgrades, Offers



naim Hi-line and Power-line Promotion

Upgrade or purchase a new Naim Uniti or Classic model & claim a FREE Power-line or Hi-line worth up to £615 - get even better performance

- as both the Hi-line or Power-line are fantastic upgrades in their own right. Please call or see our website for full details of this great offer.



Add a little more
Majik



Majik LP12 Upgrades This offer will allow you to: purchase a Linn Majik LP12 and apply upgrades to bring your LP12 to a better spec and we buy back the original bits. Simply - a better deck for less!!!



Naim NDX Network music player



Naim UnitiServe Network server



Linn Akurate DS music player

Trade in your source & claim up to £1000 against a new digital Streaming player - offering you easier access to your music and better sound quality

Please call in or see our website for full details of this great offer and find out how to get more from your existing music collection.

www.billyvee.co.uk

See our website for more Performance Promotions, Upgrades and Special Offers



New RP 3
Turntable - £100 off Upgrade offer.

Rega - Promotion Offers

Outstanding performance and value



Brio-R
Amp - System/Cable offer



Rega
DAC - Cable offer

Billy Vee
SOUND • SYSTEMS

020 8318 5755

020 8852 1321

email enquiry: info@billyvee.co.uk

248 Lee High Road, Lewisham, London SE13 5PL (Mon - Sat 10am - 6.30pm Closed Thursday)

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.



NEVILLE ROBERTS

EXPERTISE: ENGINEER

Retired NHS director, electronics engineer and physicist Neville is very much into valve technology. He's a classical music lover and serious vinyl junkie.



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 be usually found under the bonnet of his 1973 MG Midget.



CHRIS WARD

EXPERTISE: REVIEWER

When Chris isn't advising businesses on strategy, he's trying to squeeze more musical qualities out of exotic combinations of cutting-edge tech and vintage hi-fi classics.



More ways to get in touch:

You can also send your questions to us via social media: twitter.com/HiFiChoiceMag facebook.com/hifichoice.co.uk

Email us at letters@hifichoice.co.uk **or writeto:** *Hi-Fi Choice* Letters, AVTech Media Ltd, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF **Your letters** may be edited before publication and we cannot enter into personal correspondence

➤ Wax work

I wonder if you can help me with the recent disaster that I discovered on one of my prized records? It's been a while since I listened to it, but I recently dug out one of my favourite old pieces of vinyl to discover that it has a splurge of candle wax across its precious grooves. Is there a way I can remove it so that I can rediscover the pleasures of listening to it or is it a gonna?

Justin, by email

NR: Hello Justin, I recently attended a concert called Mozart By Candlelight and, while it was wonderful to experience it live, trying to recreate the experience at home has all sorts of risks – this being one! I would not advise trying to use heat as this will, at best, cause the wax to run further into the groove and at worst, melt the LP surface. Instead, put the LP in a refrigerator to make the wax solid and brittle. Paraffin wax contracts on cooling – solid paraffin wax has a density of about 0.9g/mL whereas in liquid form it has a density around 0.8g/mL. This means that it should tend to pull itself off the groove wall so you may then find it will lift off in one piece. Any residue should be cleaned using a lint-free cloth soaked in a mixture of isopropyl alcohol and distilled water, rubbing gently along the groove. Finally, following a good clean in a wet LP cleaning machine, all will be

well. Obviously, you do this at your own risk and I cannot guarantee success – especially if the wax was extremely hot when it fell onto the record as that may have irreparably damaged the playing surface. However, it is certainly worth a try.

CW: I endorse Neville's recommendation. If, however, this doesn't work and you are running out of options you could experiment with Xylene, which can be ordered online and I understand can dissolve candle wax a little more via a lint-free cloth. Any residue would then be best cleaned off immediately using Neville's recommendation of repeated 50/50 IPA and distilled water treatments along the grooves. Xylene is potent stuff and may harm your precious vinyl, so read any instructions carefully and experiment on an unloved disc

John has purchased an Arcam irDAC, but is still confused about which format is best to go for

first. You don't mention what the precious vinyl is (guessing Barry White or Al Green!), but this could be the moment to trawl ebay for a replacement that may cost less than the treatment.

➤ Land of confusion

I've just purchased the September, 2014 edition of Hi-Fi Choice, and thank you for publishing my letter on the subject of digitising LPs and cassettes, and incorporating my query as to which DAC I ought to consider. The purpose of this follow-up letter is to say that in the intervening period since I wrote to you I have purchased an Arcam irDAC from Nottingham HiFi – the manager, Martyn King is always most helpful, and informative about its range of products. The Arcam box is connected to my PC via a 3m Chord USB cable, and I

have to say that the sonic results are quite amazing. I use a Primare 132 integrated amplifier, Primare CD32 player and Sonus faber Cremona Auditor M standmount loudspeakers.

I'm now in the early stages of ripping my CD collection to the hard drive on my Acer

Help! I've got wax on one of my records. Can you help remove it?

M3400PC, utilising Windows MediaPlayer and the Windows Media Lossless format. And herein lies the second reason for my writing to you again. I've been reading up a lot on the internet about the various file formats currently in use for digital processing of music, but I have to confess



that I'm still more than a bit confused! I have tried out trial downloads of dbpoweramp for ripping, and also JRiver Media Centre for ripping and playback, and discarded them both because they produced so much immediate screen data in the 'My Music' folder. I reverted to Windows Media Player as I found its layered database structure much tidier to use, and I'm happy with the playback quality. However, Windows won't process FLAC files, so I downloaded and tried out VLC Media Player, but I have to say that I couldn't discern any appreciable sonic difference when compared with the WMA format.

My experimentation is causing me to wonder if perhaps there isn't a bit of the 'emperor's new clothes' syndrome surrounding all the current thinking about file formats, but I'm not sufficiently aware of the various arguments to be sure if this suspicion has any validity! Given that *Hi-Fi Choice* has been publishing

I can't spot the difference between FLAC and WMA files

such useful guides as that on the digitising process to which I referred earlier, it would be helpful, probably not only to puzzled individuals like me but also to your wider readership, if at some stage in the future someone could find time to compile an article outlining the most prominent of the file formats currently in use, with some explanation of their respective advantages/disadvantages. Just a thought. Many thanks for an excellent magazine!

John, by email

NR: Hello again John, you are certainly right to use a lossless format, whether it is Windows Media lossless or FLAC – you can always make a lossy compressed file from those if you need one, but not the other way around.



▶ All I want for Christmas

I am thinking that at Christmas I want to treat myself and upgrade the basic Rega 303 arm on my Avid Ingenium to the Roksan Tabriz. Is there anything else out there at around the same price or below that is just as good or sounds better?

Shane Dorrian via Twitter

NR: Hi Shane, I'd really consider putting the ISOKinetik Silver Melody 750 Tonearm at £649 on your letter to Santa this year – it was reviewed here in the June 2014 issue. It's a lovely damped

One of the issues with the different formats is one of licencing. The licence to use the Windows Media formats is covered by your licence to use the Windows operating system. However, FLAC is a free open-source format and there is plenty of software available for both coding and decoding, which makes it a great choice for maximum portability. I too can't detect audible differences between the lossless formats I've tried, but digital is not my primary source for music, so I will leave that for my colleagues to comment on.

ES: My personal experiences with the lossless codes suggests that there is very little performance differences between them. My reasons for choosing FLAC as my preferred format stem from the open-source nature of its development. No company

'owns' FLAC and there are no licenses involved to play it. As such, whatever might happen to Microsoft or Apple in the years to come, my FLAC files are likely to continue to work. We have already seen that WMA Lossless is not routinely supported by many streamers and some devices have an equal dislike for ALAC. FLAC on the other hand just works.

▶ Pick and mix

Having recently replaced my Linn Axis turntable with an LP12 Majik, Pro-Ject arm and Adikt cartridge, I am now looking to get a phono amp as at present the Linn is connected to the phono input of a Roksan K2, which bi-amps with a K2 power amplifier into PMC FB1 speakers. I have spoken to three different retailers and got three different recommendations – Avid

Pro-Ject's Phono Box RS might be ideal for Tim



ISOKinetik's Silver Melody 750 Tonearm is a winner for Neville

unipivot arm with silver wiring and you can upgrade it later with a rosewood headshell if you wish. It is beautifully made and, as you'd expect from a silicone-damped arm, it has a well-controlled bass and beautifully smooth and uncoloured treble.

ES: I would go for the Audio Note Arm 1 even though it might cost slightly more. I've used an Arm 3 on the Ingenium and was genuinely impressed. This being said, the Tabriz remains one of the most underrated arms on sale at the moment so you won't go far wrong with it.

Pellar, Lehmann Black Cube and Leema Elements. With it being extremely difficult to give these a try in my system before buying, I wondered if I could get your independent opinion on which would be the best match for my setup?

Tim Lewis

ES: When I reviewed the Pellar, I realised that realistically I couldn't easily see my system without it after the review ended, so I bought one. While I rate the Leema and Lehmann highly, this didn't happen for either of those when I used them. The Avid, therefore, would be my choice from that list although don't rule out the fearsomely capable Pro-Ject Phono Box RS too.

▶ Living with CD

Given that CD is (a) a legacy format, and (b) on the way ▶



reddot award 2014 winner
July 2014

...bass extension is particularly impressive, underpinning the mid-range and high notes of the synth to perfection.

Hi-Fi Choice - July 2014



Airstream A100

2 x 50W • CLASS A/B AMPLIFIERS • HIGH RESOLUTION DAC • AIRPLAY® • AIRSTREAM DIRECT • DLNA®

THE BRIDGE BETWEEN HIFI & WIFI

The AirPlay® enabled A100 is a next generation network-ready amplifier built for the way we play music today. It combines the latest wireless streaming technologies with finest audio system design, to bridge the divide between a world of digital music and you: hi-fi speakers.



Neat's Momentum loudspeakers would be the first part of Ed's system if he had to live with CD...

out (so people say), there are still some top-notch CD players being made. Could the team come up with a CD-only (no hi-res downloads, but ripping to a HDD or SSD is acceptable) system that they could totally live with *instead* of their beloved vinyl? My budget is around £10,000 all in. Not for me, as I couldn't afford such kit, but purely as an intellectual exercise. Can CD overcome its flaws (too low sample rate, not enough bits, not needing a mystic ritual to play an album, the inconvenience of being able to play longer than 22

minutes without having to get up and turn the disc over, the strong dislike of the format by the hi-fi press in general, etc) or will it be condemned to the waste bin of history? Okay, so I jest. But the premise is valid – can a hardened hi-fi journalist actually live with CD?

John Malcolm

CW: I will rise to your challenge John. CD does get vilified just a little too much these days. It's probably true that at this time it is neither fish nor foul with high-resolution downloads and vinyl both having a superior ability to reproduce more musical information, and often in a way that feels more natural and organic to our ears. But who can forget the moment when they first pressed play on the svelte silver disc and didn't hear any tape hiss or vinyl static? History is written by winners and CD was a big winner for a long time and continues to be all over the world. The real issue for me was that the birth of CD coincided with a low point in digital mastering. So for many years we got plenty of tracks poorly encoded to the format. I still gain great satisfaction from

Can a hardened hi-fi journalist actually live with Compact Disc?

playing well-recorded CDs on a Shanling CD-T100, albeit it has been heavily modified with a new clock, op amps, quality capacitors and power regulation. Furthermore, you could just

view CD as a transport medium as we are now swimming in a vast array of quality DACs such as Chord's Hugo, an original Chord DAC 64 if you can find one, or maybe the richly talented Audiolab M-DAC with the addition of a superior power supply. As for £10k budget. Spend £2k-£3k of it now, focus on well-recorded music, maybe dabble with upsampling and feel confident that any DACs you may love the sound of, may become highly future-proof!

ES: As I have said in my recent *Opinion* pages, I don't have a problem with CDs, I just don't like the physical format. Were I compelled to use them, though, you would find me using an almost identical combo to what I use now of Naim SuperNait 2 and Neat Momentum 4, but instead of the fabulous Naim ND5 XS and XP5XS, I would probably substitute a Naim CD5XS with external PSU. While I'd miss the iPad control, I'm sure I'd cope soundwise.



Classic combo

After reading the September issue of *HFC*, I think Danny Thompson might be slightly miffed at being mistaken for Dave Pegg on John Martyn's *Solid Air* (pictured overleaf) in your *Analogue Works Turntable One* review (September issue). The two of them were a truly classic combination.

Ian Laker

AS: Good spot! Despite owning three vinyl pressings of Martyn's cult classic and listening to the

HINTS & TIPS

UPGRADING INTERCONNECTS AND MAINS LEADS

You've been thinking about upgrading your interconnects, speaker cables and mains leads, but is it really worth doing and is it just hype? Well, that is really going to depend on your system. If you have a cheap audio system that you bought from your local supermarket, then you are unlikely to be able to hear any difference whatsoever if you then decide to invest in an upgrade to a mains lead or interconnect.

If, however, you have even a mid-priced system, then there are genuine improvements to be had. Upgrading a mains lead can reduce the noise floor and give noticeable improvements to the sound stage, particularly in bass tightness and fullness of sound. High-quality interconnects can have a surprising effect across the whole audio range, giving clearer top end, cleaner midranges and a punchy and extended bass response. Instrument focus and placement can also be significantly improved. Similarly, a good speaker cable can improve all these factors. Apart from the cable, good quality connectors on these upgraded leads results in audible sonic improvements.

In the end, it is always worth trying before you buy, if you have a chance to do so, as only you can decide if the improvements are worth the cost.



REDUCING ACOUSTIC FEEDBACK ON TURNTABLES

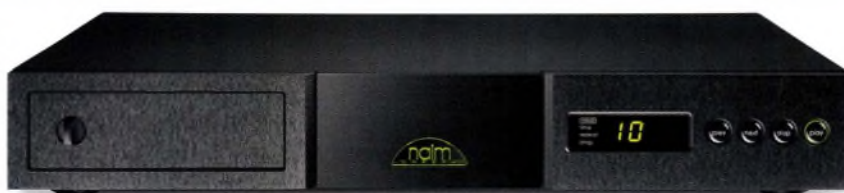
One of the problems with having a record deck in the same room as your loudspeakers is that of acoustic feedback. A cartridge is designed to convert the oscillations of the cantilever into an electrical signal and, unfortunately, it has no way of knowing if the vibrations are coming from the stylus or the cartridge and arm. The components of a record deck and the cartridge can act as a microphone to sounds in the room, including those emanating from your loudspeakers. All this can result in a boomy bass and poor imaging

The best solution is to have your listening area in a different room to your hi-fi. If this is not practical, then place your deck as far away as possible from your speakers.

Another solution to the problem is to fit an acoustic plinth underneath your record deck to isolate it and absorb unwanted vibrations. Also, most turntables have removable covers and, if this is the case, always remove the cover completely from the deck when in use – it can act as a very effective sound pick-up device.



... accompanied by Naim's SuperNait 2 and CD5XS



SERIE S

HEAR WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING



Featuring the Serie S flagship S/5 with 12" Continuous Cast™ cone bass engine.

Visit rel.net to learn more about REL and find an authorized dealer near you.

“ THE REL S/2 **MERGES BEAUTIFULLY** INTO MY SYSTEM, ADDING A **GREATER SENSE** OF SCALE AND DEPTH TO TRACKS I THOUGHT I ALREADY KNEW. IT SHOWS OFF HIGH-RES AUDIO TO **TREMENDOUS EFFECT** AND WILL COMPLIMENT ANY HI-FI SYSTEM. ” | *LEE DUNKLEY, HI-FI CHOICE, JULY 2014*

www.rel.net REL. Accept No Substitutes.

xeo

the next revolution will
change everything. again.

Multi-room, multi-source. Totally lossless. With advanced high end amplification. For awesome sound. Our famous engineers have just raised the benchmark for wireless loudspeakers. Xeo 4 minimizes your system to the essentials: The signal and the speakers. For anything that plays music: computer, mobile phone, personal player, video system, docking station, network player, streaming client, TV, hifi. Bringing digitally native audiophiles the best two-way single-source musical instrument on the planet. Xeo 4. The next revolution.





album on an almost weekly basis, I still get the two bassists confused. Both feature on Martyn's masterpiece and as you note, it was Danny Thompson on his trademark double bass duties for *Solid Air*. It wasn't just John Martyn's albums of the era that benefit from each bassist's unique talents. Island label mate Nick Drake's 1969 LP *Five Leaves Left* and his 1970 follow up *Bryter Layter* both feature Thompson and Pegg, with Thompson on the former album and Pegg on the latter. Just don't ask me to pick which of these timeless works I like the best.

➤ **Great expectations** I used to regularly buy *Hi-Fi Choice* 30 years ago when it was a nice glossy A5 sized publication. It was my hi-fi bible and I would only buy what you rated as a best buy! But things are much harder these days for buyers of higher-end kit. What *Hi-Fi* only tests hi-fi under £5k. *Hi-Fi Choice* goes up to the next price level, but *Hi-Fi News* is probably the nearest magazine to testing high-end kit. Despite reading all these magazines recently, I have still not got a shortlist for my proposed loudspeaker purchase.

I have just tested at home a pair of PMC Fact 12s and then KEF Reference 5s. I preferred the brighter sound of the KEFs, but missed the better bass detail of the

PMCs. But neither hit the spot so I am trying to look for something better. My amps are Musical Fidelity M8s pre and power. I use Chord signature tuned array leads and have a top-end mains conditioner. The speakers that I currently have are my beloved 10-year-old KEF Reference 205s.

Is there any chance you could do a Group Test on speakers in the £10k to £20k price range and come up with a definitive verdict? I would reject the KEF Blades due to their whacky appearance! Thank you for your time and I look forward to your views.

Graham Bastin, Devon

LD: Hi Graham, thank you for your email. It is always good to hear from someone that remembers the booklets before

What speakers would you suggest in the £10k price range?

the mag got started, and I hope we can assist you with your request for help in recommending some suitable speakers for your system. To be completely honest the price point you're looking at is a little outside of the usual range these days for our own *Group Tests*, but we do cover loudspeakers of this kind of calibre as standalone reviews in our *Exotica* pages as well as our *Beautiful System* and *Dealer Visit* features. As you correctly identify our sister title *Hi-Fi News* regularly covers models at the kind of level you're after in its own *Group Tests*, but in the meantime I am sure our contributors will jump at the chance to provide you

with a few suitable loudspeaker suggestions from their own personal experiences for your consideration. Over to them...

NR: Hello Graham, just to add my two pennyworth – have a listen to the Martin Logan Montis ESLs, available in the UK from places like Absolute Sounds. A good friend of mine in the States has a pair and says they are incredibly smooth. He can't detect any discontinuities in the sound in the way he can with most speakers and the Montis are certainly a step above his previous electrostatics – the Quad ESL63. They are also

surprisingly small and light when compared with other ESLs. Well worth an audition.

ES: You can have a pair of Neat Ultimatum XL6s in this price bracket. While they are unlikely to ever be called pretty, nothing delivers the musical fulfilment that they do as far as I'm concerned. I prefer the isobaric bass that they have to the transmission line bass of the PMC speakers and the many tweeters combine to produce fabulous top end.

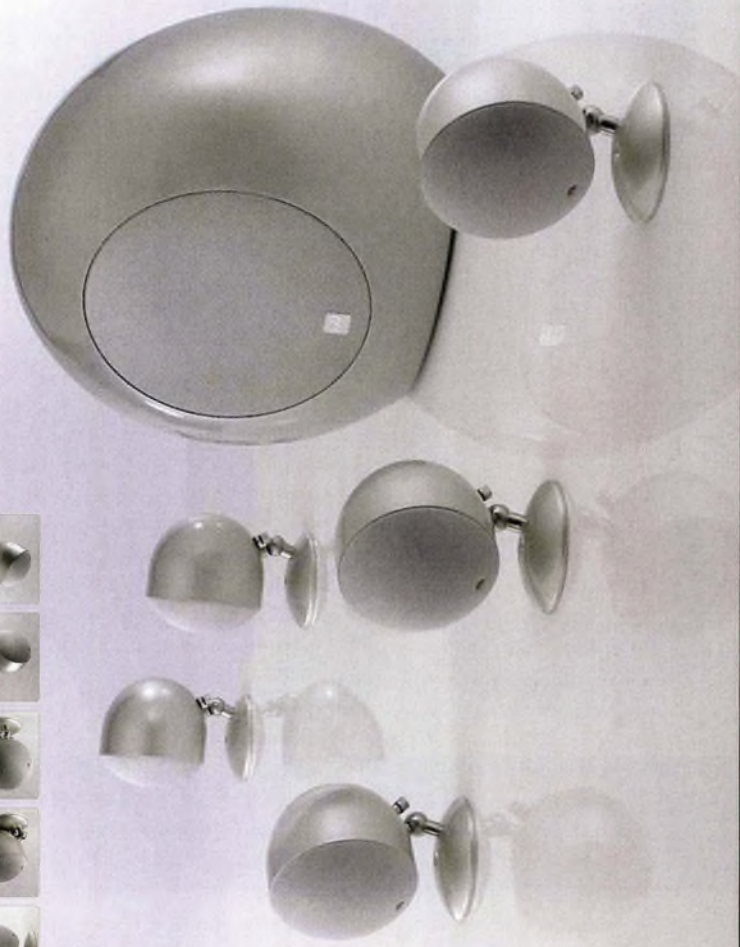
Neat's Ultimatum XL6 speakers would be Ed's pick for Graham



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





high fidelity for the 21st century

from £299 to £29,995...

www.morelspeakers.co.uk

+44 (0)208 420 4234





Octave 6

**Hi-Fi
Choice**
RECOMMENDED



SoundSpot
2.1 Ultra

**Hi-Fi
Choice**
RECOMMENDED

Golden ears

Is it really possible that some of us are born cloth-eared or can we teach ourselves to hear things just like a hi-fi reviewer? **Lee Dunkley** adjusts his ear trumpet and investigates

As fellow hi-fi enthusiasts, I'm sure we've all been in situations where the person sitting next to us hears something differently than we do. We've all been there as our listening session buddy wanders the room in search of a low-level hum they've detected that's possibly coming from a transformer in a piece of equipment, or an annoying room resonance that you haven't even noticed. It can be a disconcerting moment where you begin to wonder if your hearing ability is actually in more of a rapid state of decline than you're willing to admit, or whether you truly are in the presence of a golden-eared individual.

I have always believed that we all have similar levels of hearing ability, and that we hear pretty much the same things whether we are aware of it or not. Differences in human hearing do occur of course, but usually when there is a large gap between fellow listeners – for example, teenagers have almost bat-like hearing capabilities that can pick out high frequency tones more easily than anyone over the age of 20. In fact, their super-hearing abilities have been demonstrated in recent years with the introduction and effective installation of the mosquito device that sends out a high-frequency signal (around 17kHz) to prevent groups of them from loitering around shops. Even mobile phone ringtones and music tracks have been developed to be audible only to youngsters, but these are seemingly more about getting one over the adults in

What we hear on our hi-fi is a million miles away from any live performance

to hear high frequencies as we get older – male hearing has a tendency to fall off more rapidly in our thirties and forties than female hearing. I have no reason to doubt these biological trends, but I believe that what we hear is as much to do with training our ears as it is with the ageing process.

Hear me now

As with wine tasting, art or literature appreciation, experience is everything. The more you have, the greater your ability at being able to evaluate what's in front of you. Without really realising it we are already attuned to the subtleties of sound, and in particular the human voice and picking up on nuances and interpreting the person making them. It's an impressive skill that comes very naturally to us, even with very poor sound quality over a

telephone. As with all audio devices over the last 10 years, the rise of the smartphone has meant an appalling drop in audio quality, but still we manage to pick up on these sonic cues. I for one believe that we can use the same ability to detect these audio cues when listening to hi-fi to understand the character of music and the recording, it's just that it requires a bit of practise.

More years ago than I care to remember I was a regular panellist on

listening tests for the Consumers' Association, where we auditioned everything from CD players and loudspeakers to TV sets to assess their sound quality. Admittedly when I first embarked on this role I was a young 20-something and my hearing was perhaps a little better than it is now, but with no prior ability other than an enjoyment for listening to music and a passion for sound. The skill of being able to discern differences was honed over years of critical listening to different kinds of products and types of music. My hearing has always been normal, it's just that over time I have developed the skills to know what to look (or should that be listen?) out for.

I've always loved live sound at concerts and gigs, and I want to relive or create the same spine-tingling experience on my system at home. Of course, anyone that's ever been to a live music event knows that what we hear on our hi-fi system is a million miles away from the scale of any live performance, but its aim is to try to get close to, bridge the gap and tap into what the artist is trying to communicate.

It's been said in these pages many times before, but music was made to be heard, not played in the background while you're doing something else. It deserves to be felt and enjoyed on a system that allows the artist to engage with the listener. Isn't that what it is all about?

So yes, I believe our ears can be trained to hear more, and anyone can discover what I mean by simply taking the time to sit and listen on a decent hi-fi setup. With a wealth of high-resolution music downloads providing greater insight into recordings we thought we already knew and the continuing growth of vinyl and turntables, there's never been a better time to sit back and listen. The more you hear, the more you will want to hear ●



It is possible to train your ears to hear hi-fi better



FURUTECH
PURE TRANSMISSION



See us at
THE hi-fi SHOW
The ultimate high-end hi-fi experience *Live*
1-2 NOVEMBER
Beaumont House Estate
Old Windsor, West Berkshire
hifinews.co.uk/show

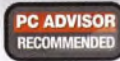
WWW.FURUTECH.COM

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

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

GT40 α a master of all trades.

phono stage • 24/192 USB DAC • 24/192 USB ADC • headphone amplifier



ADL
ALPHA DESIGN LABS

Tokyo • Japan
service@adl-av.com

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

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

Search for the holy grail

It might be easier than ever to buy music now, but finding a decent independent record store is much more of a challenge. Thankfully **Simon Berkovitch** is up to the job

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the attitudes or opinions of Hi-Fi Choice or AVTech Media Ltd. Pic credit: Shutterstock/John Pesina

It takes seconds. You hear some great, unfamiliar music; use your smartphone's Shazam app; go online; Google; point your browser to an online retail giant; click Buy Now and listen for the rattle of the letterbox a couple of days later. You may have even dispensed with the physical carrier of sound – CD; vinyl; even cassette – altogether, having embraced the possibilities of the lossless age and clicked Download...

The way in which many of us shop for music now is quick and convenient – but it's a clinical experience, too. If you're a dedicated collector, like I expect many of you are, you'll know all about getting elbow-deep in vinyl racks packed with obscurities that don't figure on Amazon's database, whether it's second-hand gold or new-release gems. I'm confident you'll all have your favourite ports of call.

At its best, a trip to a record store is a lavish three-course meal as opposed to a trip to Burger King: the experience should be savoured, not rushed through as quickly as possible. But in the post-HMV, Virgin and Our Price high street the record shop has ceased to exist for casual buyers; those who ask, incredulously "Really, do they still make vinyl?" when the subject of our shared enthusiasm comes up in conversation. But we aren't dilettantes now are we? Humility be damned – we're enthusiasts. We demand the

The best record shops have the community they serve at their heart

best possible kit our budgets can afford and the best possible music to play it on across all media. I'm happy to report that there are still many specialist shops up and down the UK ready to supply you with that musical fix – just take a peek at work-in-progress website VinylHub.com (Discogs for record stores) and its mission to "document every physical record shop on the planet" – and over the coming months I'm going to bring the most important of them to your deserving attention. See me as Jack Kerouac with a Network Railcard eating up miles of track in a quest to find the country's best independent record shops. They will be specialists and, in some cases, just plain special.

But how does one define "greatest"? I'd argue the best record shops in the country represent much more than dusty, windowless, claustrophobic spaces in which proprietors have let obsessive collecting spiral out of control – the very best have the community they serve at the heart of operations.

For starters, Nottingham is an excellent port of call to uncover such well-intentioned places. The Music Exchange is part record shop, part community hub, all gold. The superb, friendly shop was set up as part of the Framework Housing



Association – a homeless charity based in Nottingham. And across town in an artist's studio, you'll find Cell 14, a mini-treasure trove for those with more experimental tastes.

From community-minded enterprises to borderline-art installations, the humble record shop has indeed evolved, in many (but not all) cases transcending the cluttered, cigarette smoke-tainted hoarders' refuges of yesteryear. And a younger generation is discovering – just like many of us are rediscovering – the joy of LPs, and many of the enterprises springing up in the wake of the vinyl revival are well worth your time and money.

Alive and kicking

As my recent features on the state of the independent record store (*HFC 378*) and the main event in many vinyl enthusiast's diaries, Record Store Day (*HFC 386*), have revealed record stores around the UK are alive and well – but in diminished numbers. Although not quite disappearing to the extent of the humble pub, the fact remains that there are less around in 2014 than many of you will remember from your youth.

Over the course of this occasional series, we'll be scouring the UK to seek out the finest independent and bespoke stores, leaving no stone unturned, no rack unflicked. And here's where you can help. Join our collective quest by letting us know your favourites. If there's an undiscovered gem sitting on your doorstep, we want to know about it – and we're sure that our other readers do, too.

The local record shop needs all our support, so whether you're a classical enthusiast, a beatnik jazzier, a soul man, soul woman, Saxondale rocker or grown-up indie kid, let's join forces in celebration of one of the UK's great institutions. The quest begins in Nottingham on page 116 ●

If you've got a store near you, we need to know about it, if only so Simon can stock up on death metal cuts





Performance is everything...



+44 (0)1572 756447 hifiracks.co.uk

Meet your maker

As a fan of the work of loudspeaker manufacturer Monitor Audio, **David Vivian** takes a trip to Essex to learn about its models and the differences between them

Here's a dilemma most of us have faced. You've allocated a budget to buy new speakers with the goal of improving your listening pleasure. I'll assume you've found a brand you like and intend to stick with it. Speaker manufacturers go to great lengths to keep customers 'in the family', so it's a fair bet that the upgrading gateways will be open and bathed in seductive lighting. Trouble is, there's a split in the road before your journey's even begun.

Do you roll with the idea that bigger is better and get a larger box from the same range or keep the same size, but from the next performance level up and build on the strengths and weaknesses of the smaller box with gains derived from superior construction and components?

For quite a few years, there's always been at least one pair of Monitor Audios at home – I like the way they sound. Clarity, detail and a well-tuned bass are core qualities and I'm a sucker for those. Helpful to our cause here, though, is MA's clearly delineated upgrade path. From Bronze to Platinum via Silver and Gold, the structure of the mainstream ranges could hardly be more graphic. I thought it'd be interesting to pay MA designer Dean Hartley a visit to explore the sonic differences with like-sized models as you progress through the 'metals' and discuss whether my money would be best spent upgrading

It's us and not the speakers that questions are being asked of

from a smaller to bigger model in the same range or sticking with the same size, but from the next level up. I wanted to know what designers do to justify the cost of a more expensive speaker – how design and material quality target sonic gains, and what those gains should be. Plus there's the thorny question of bass and its relationship with size.

Spot the difference

Dean begins by pointing out that there are fewer differences between Bronze and Silver than there were a decade ago. "We've tried to put as much money as possible into the performance and the drive units for a given spend, which is why the Bronze series has a vinyl wrap rather than the real wood veneer we use on Silver."

I wonder how, from a design standpoint, MA's classic budget standmount box, the £250 Bronze BX2, stacks up against the slightly smaller – but twice as expensive – Silver 1 (see review on page 50). "In a small, high quality box like the Silver 1, the main driver can be slightly less efficient," he explains. "With a suitably good power amp,



So, how does the Silver 1 compare with the Bronze BX2?

it's going to have more bass extension for a given size of box. Typically, a Silver 1 will go lower than a Bronze BX2. But it's likely the Bronze will be on the end of a relatively modest amp, maybe 30 or 40W. People do want to party, though, they want it to play loud. And the BX2 will oblige.

"Its higher efficiency is the result of slightly lighter cone assemblies, smaller voice coils, more modest magnets. It gives you a more efficient system, which is easier to drive. The problem when designing a budget speaker is you haven't got the money to spend on a meatier magnet, larger voice coils, cones with greater rigidity and heavier surrounds. It's the same with the crossover, you have to skimp on components."

Dean concedes that even though there are diminishing returns as you climb the quality ladder, there are very big cumulative benefits to be had by spending more. And that, to an extent, it mitigates against the size of the enclosure.

"If you were to compare a Silver 1 against a Bronze BX5 (both £500), what you'd find is that the B6 is a lot more efficient, and it's got a lot more bass output" says Dean. "But what you would also find is that the refinement through the mid-range and the clarity aren't the same. The Silver 1 is far superior in that respect."

Dean reckons that very few people will actually sit down and audition a Silver 1 against a Bronze BX5. When we later work through the price overlap points, what emerges is perhaps the most valuable thing a prolonged auditioning session can bestow: the sense that it's us and not the speakers that questions are being asked of. What is it we really want from the music we love? Truth is, a big multi-driver design can do things a small, higher quality two-way can't. And vice versa. It can lead to a wholesale re-evaluation of priorities. Once you've been through that, choosing is easy. The moral of the story? Size matters, but beware of assumptions ●



DAVID VIVIAN
Hi-Fi Choice writer

IsoTek® Discover the IsoTek Effect

Mains electricity is distorted by numerous factors as it travels from power stations to our homes, eroding your systems performance. The **New Discovery Range** from IsoTek delivers highly effective yet eminently affordable solutions to enhance sound and picture quality, whilst also protecting your valuable equipment from power surges and voltage spikes.*



“A distinct cleaning up of the sound...
“A marked benefit for dynamic range, a consequence of lowering the noise floor, as well as a refinement and a general opening up of the soundstage”

IsoTek EV03 Premier, Hi-Fi Choice, March 2013

EV03 Premier

IsoTek's most affordable power cable has at its core three 2sqmm conductors made from 99.9999% OFC (oxygen-free copper) and coated in silver to aid conductivity, with a Teflon FEP dielectric extruded over each conductor. A cotton filler is used to give the cable internal strength and reduce microphony whilst maintaining dielectric performance. The cable is terminated with high-quality 24ct gold connectors, designed and manufactured by IsoTek rather than bought off the shelf. No similarly priced power cable is constructed to such a high specification, with correspondingly impressive benefits to sound and picture quality.

- 24ct gold connectors
- Silver plated OFC conductors
- Teflon FEP dielectric
- 16A current capability
- C15, C19 and C7 IEC options
- 1.5m standard length

EV03 Polaris

Cost effective high-performance power distribution strip that cleans Common and Differential Mode noise from the mains as well as offering surge and spike protection.



“More space, lower noise and greater resolution... An increase in timing precision, depth of bass and a much greater sense of musical flow”

IsoTek EV03 Polaris, Hi-Fi Choice, March 2013



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

This could be the last time

There's a vowel in the month, which can mean only one thing, the Rolling Stones are off on tour again. Though he loves them, **Nigel Williamson** ain't getting no satisfaction

I caught an amusing video on YouTube the other day. "Are they still going?" asks a familiar-looking, shaggy-headed figure. "Who wants to see that again?" An aide tells him that tickets for the first of 10 gigs at London's O2 arena have sold out in 40 seconds. "Wow. That's pretty amazing. But they're a bunch of wrinkly old men trying to relive their youth and make a load of money. Maybe back in the seventies it was fantastic... but we've seen it all before."

Someone dissing the Rolling Stones, as they prepare to start the final leg of their 2014 'On Fire' tour? Not quite. To his credit, it's Sir Mick Jagger talking about *Monty Python's Flying Circus* reunion and gamely sending up himself and his band in a promo for the comeback of John Cleese, Eric Idle, Michael Palin, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones. In case we haven't quite got the joke, the next sequence in the video finds Jagger dictating the running order for a Rolling Stones concert to his aide, reeling off a familiar list of hits from more than 40 years ago.

Yet a few weeks later the delicious, knowing irony of Jagger's *Monty Python* sketch has been conveniently set aside as his inner spin doctor takes over and he talks up his "excitement" over the juggernaut that is the Rolling Stones taking to the road again. "It's a very energising thing. You never get bored," he enthused to the *Daily*

Can you name one memorable Rolling Stones song since 1981's *Start Me Up*?

to the death of his partner Iwren Scott).

"I get very emotionally involved with the whole thing. I'm very passionate about touring," he gushed. "Every time you go onstage it's a very exciting moment, because you never know what's going to happen. It's always different. Each show is a new event."

Deja vu

Well, Jagger might claim not to know what's going to happen, but I can tell him. The set will open with *Jumpin' Jack Flash* and end with *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* and in between will be sandwiched a further dozen back catalogue favourites from the sixties and seventies – in fact, pretty much the same routine as every other Stones concert for the past 40 years (although the running order might fluctuate a bit).

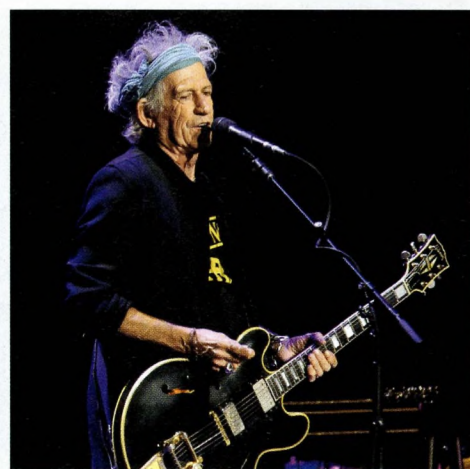
The simple truth is that the Stones haven't recorded an album of new songs since 2005's *A Bigger Bang*, which in

turn was their first since 1997's *Bridges To Babylon*. The 'greatest rock'n'roll band in the world' has made two studio albums in the last 20 years and there is zero prospect of them ever making another one. What's more damning is that nobody cares. Even the band's most ardent fans – and I'd count myself one of them – know they peaked with 1972's *Exile On Main Street* and it has been steadily downhill with every album since. Can you name one memorable Rolling Stones song since 1981's *Start Me Up*? The Rolling Stones have become a heritage industry, a human jukebox that is surely ripe for takeover by the National Trust.

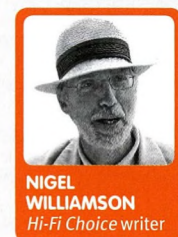
And yet their shows continue to sell out around the world as soon as they're announced. Perhaps it is because at their age every gig might genuinely be the last time. Logic says that the spectacle of a bunch of old men in their seventies jumping around the stage and trying to recreate the spirit of the Marquee Club circa 1964 should be grotesque. Instead it is regarded as irresistible.

Does it matter that a band that hasn't made any memorable new music in several decades is still the biggest-grossing ticket in the world? Probably not. I don't know how many *HFC* readers prefer the rough and tumble of live music to the pristinely recorded studio versions, but it would clearly be churlish to want to deny to those who weren't born when the Stones were in their prime a last chance to catch a fading glimmer of how magnificent they once were.

Neither is there anything intrinsically wrong with nostalgia in itself. But forgive me if I don't share Sir Mick's "excitement" at the Stones hitting the rock'n'roll highway again or his belief that the shows will be "new" and different". Good luck to those paying inflated prices to see them; I hope they enjoy the show and that everybody makes it through to the encore. But I was privileged to see them in their pomp and I have no desire for cherished souvenirs of youth to be tarnished. So would you excuse me while I settle back in my armchair with some top-of-the-range headphones, my copies of *Beggars Banquet*, *Let It Bleed* and *Sticky Fingers* and a head full of unforgettable memories that can never be erased? ●



Sanatogen, comfy slippers and walking frames are just a part of the Stones' rider...



The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the attitudes or opinions of Hi-Fi Choice or AVTech Media Ltd. Picture credit: J.Stone/Shutterstock



Apprentice MM
Phono stage



TALK

Introducing the *Edwards Audio series*

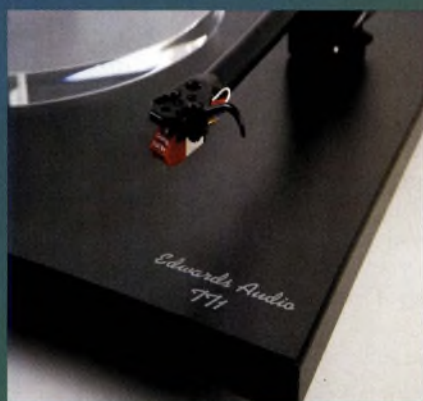
The Edwards Audio series is a range of UK designed and manufactured products which have been designed with the emphasis on performance and value for money.

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

SP2 floor standing
Speakers - gloss



MC3 reference
Phono stage



Apprentice TT

Turntables:- from £300 - £600

Phono Stages:- from £90 - £1500

Headphone amplifiers:- from £120

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@talkelectroncs.com



HA1 headphone amplifier

Back for good?

After years of disappointment, this year's IFA technology expo in Berlin finally gave **Richard Stevenson** reason for cheer and a serious case of high-fidelity nostalgia

Sound quality has spent more than a decade on the back burner of the mainstream technology industry. Actually, given the appalling sound of most flatpanel TVs and mass-market music streaming systems, one could argue it has moved off of the back burner into an unlabelled Tupperware dish at the back of the fridge.

Having bemoaned this situation for the last 10 years, the IFA 2014 exhibition in Berlin came as a revelation. Sound quality and audio performance were highlighted in main presentations by big brands, live music was the press conference entertainment of choice and there was more streaming than a hay fever convention in June. It seems we're in for a hi-fi renaissance.

Sony shouted about its hi-res hi-fi products including phones and tablets and Samsung declared that music was in its DNA while we listened to a stunningly entertaining accordion player. Every major tech brand unveiled a multi-room audio system, and portable music players look set for a comeback on the strength of hi-res audio, with or without the backing of crusty old rockers. But you could have knocked me down with a Michell dusting brush

It was like being back in the eighties hi-fi hey days all over again

Technics' brand ambassador Michiko Ogawa, Panasonic declared that its mission for Technics was to help listeners rediscover music. I was so overtaken by the emotion of the moment, I completely forgot to stand up and shout that the only reason listeners needed to rediscover music was that the industry had forgotten about it for the last decade. Still, as that would have involved being lynched by the 300 journalists that applauded at the unveiling of the Technics logo, it was probably no bad thing.

Technics holds a special place in the heart of many audiophiles. The brand's amplifiers led the revolution against British-built designs back in the seventies and eighties, and the company's turntables remained a staple of the dance industry long after the brand was shut down by Panasonic around 2007. For anyone of a younger generation that has ever held a headphone to one ear while air-miming scratching vinyl back and forth (and you know you have...), Technics is truly iconic.



Technics' new C700 Series has got Richard all giddy with excitement

And so it was with a tear in my eye that I braced myself to be let down by the new products. I was expecting some half-baked, plastic-cased components that looked like an eighties mini-system yet offered some form of compressed audio streaming. Any brand that had ever played with a transistor managed to launch streaming products at IFA, so it seemed logical. Not so. So, not so in fact.

Technics first reveal was the new Reference series. This comprised an all-black set of floorstanding loudspeakers that looked like they'd eat small children, a well-equipped network player/pre-amp and a monster power amplifier with VU meters straight out of Sizewell B. It was a retro-looking setup, but utterly gorgeous in its chunky brushed aluminium and gloss black livery. Details were scant, but as Panasonic is making this a statement piece for the new Technics brand, you can bet that the technology and engineering are money-no-object throughout.

The more affordable C700 series components were no less impressive in design and intention if not offering the sheer menace of the R-series. The CD player, network streamer, integrated and standmount speakers with single coaxial driver certainly looked the part in their aluminium casework and white gloss speaker finish even if we didn't get to hear them in anything like a suitable environment. Pricing is still to be confirmed, but I would hazard a guess at about a grand per component.

Hair's to you Technics!

On the plane back from Berlin, trying to quell the obligatory hangover with an Easyjet cardboard-flavoured muffin, I couldn't help but smile. Not just at the relaunch of Technics, but at the amazing groundswell of IFA expo-space this year given over to music players, sound quality and hi-res audio. It was like being back in the eighties hi-fi hey days all over again, which works especially well for me as I have had a Def Leppard haircut since 1984. In your face Rick Astley! Let's just hope mass market consumer's embrace this new era of better sound, with or without shaggy perms ●



The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the attitudes or opinions of Hi-Fi Choice or AVTech Media Ltd



Tale of the tape

Cassette boy **Tim Jarman** turns back the clock to when tape ruled the soundwaves and remembers how Sony's TC-K60 led the way

The late seventies were an interesting time in the field of cassette decks. Since the sector was dominated by Japanese brands, cassette technology and the amount of cost that could be built into each machine was to some extent set by the value of the Yen against the currencies of Japan's export markets. This situation was extremely favourable up until 1979, after which re-valuation considerably reduced the amount that the manufacturers could spend on the content of each design. This is why this period is often referred to as the golden age of Japanese hi-fi. Furthermore, the cassette was on the brink of two major changes, the first being the introduction of standardised tapes designed to meet newly defined IEC norms and second the appearance of Metal (IEC IV) cassettes. Previously to this, top-end Japanese decks tended to be optimised for a particular brand and specific type of cassette, some of which, such as TDK's original SA-X, were pretty exotic. Metal tape turned out to be a commercial failure, but it did cause changes to the design of cassette decks, most notably the removing of tape heads made from

highly durable ferrite materials. A good ferrite head is almost wear proof (Sony claimed a life 20 times greater than that of standard Permalloy for its first one), but cannot create enough field to record on Metals properly, the brave efforts of Akai (a major user of ferrites in its GX series) not withstanding.

Sony's dabbling with its own ultimately doomed cassette system, the Elcaset, caused it to re-style its conventional cassette decks to match,

Recordings are smooth with a pleasing amount of treble sparkle

starting with the TC-229SD of 1977. A key feature was the use of electronic 'logic' tape transport controls in place of the mechanical levers that had been the default choice before; at a stroke the new soft-touch buttons made the decks look sleek and modern. With only minor alterations, the TC-229SD became the TC-K7 in the following year, the K series being Sony's top

cassette deck line. A more expensive variant was also offered, the TC-K8, that added a new recording level meter, which was based on Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) technology. The LCD meters could have easily been dismissed as a gimmick, but in a deck with ferrite heads they perform a really useful function. One problem with these heads is that they don't offer as much 'headroom' as Permalloy and Sendust types so it is very important to set the recording levels carefully if clearly audible distortion is to be avoided.

Conventional needle-type meters do a good job of showing average levels, but they move too slowly to show sudden musical peaks due to the small but significant weight of the moving parts inside. The LCD meter is purely electronic and so in theory can show very brief events as clearly as it does the average signal. Sony claimed a response time of a thousandth of a second for its new meter and programmed in three quarters of a second of decay time to make transient sounds clearly visible. Other sorts of electronic meter were beginning to appear around this time, notably types based around strings of

coloured LEDs. Here again though the LCD meter offered an advantage, many more segments could be shown since the main parts were printed onto the glass rather than being constructed from separate components. The TC-K8's meters had 64 segments per channel, something that would not have been practical with standard LEDs.

Not everyone needed electronic tape transport controls, but traditional marketing practice meant that desirable extras were often grouped together so to get any one of the top features you had to buy a top machine that had them all. In 1979 a quirky model appeared in the Sony range, the TC-K60. This retained the big 'piano keys' of old but packaged them with LCD VU meters and a BSL (Brushless and SlotLess) electronic motor, effectively a miniature replica of what was used in Sony's direct drive turntables. This motor was highly stable and gave consistent and accurate speed control, not only from one end of the tape to the other, but also over decades of use. With no brushes to wear, the new motor was very durable, just like the new design of ferrite head that the machine also had.

Head master

This new head was in retrospect one of the finest ever to be fitted to a cassette recorder, but it wasn't used much in domestic decks since the coming of metal cassettes soon rendered it obsolete from a marketing point of view – if you were buying a cassette deck in the early eighties it simply had to have a metal position on the tape selector, whether you intended to buy any metal cassettes or not. The new head did live on in the famous TC-D5 Pro II professional portable, a top quality model that was still in production over 20 years later. Its last purely domestic application was in the TC-K45, an unassuming recorder whose basic looks make it a serious bargain these days.

The LCD meters of the TC-K60 were a bit less ambitious than those of the TC-K8 and 'only' offered 33 segments per channel, but in practice this didn't seem to matter, they still looked the absolute business.

The final dollop of high-tech garnish on the TC-K60 was the Automatic Music Sensor system, which allowed the user to skip or repeat tracks in either direction. Simple versions of this system had been around for some time, but the

Sony design featured a refinement whereby a predetermined number of tracks could be searched through rather than just the adjacent ones. The number was shown by an LED read out in a large black window, but despite the size of this only a single digit could ever be displayed. Such systems rely on leaving the head slightly in contact with the tape during winding and looking for the gaps between the recordings. Obviously this can be ruinous to the head, wearing it out at a greatly increased rate. This is not an issue with ferrite heads, though, so the TC-K60 is one of the few decks where this feature can usefully be exploited without worry.

Sound-wise the TC-K60 is a peach. Originally they came set up for Sony's own 'Ferri-Chrome' (IEC III) tapes which have been unavailable for many years. IEC I (normal/ferric) and IEC II (chrome/pseudo-chrome) can also be used, normally the latter would be preferable, but all decks with ferrite heads seem to do better with 'normal' (IEC I) tapes since greater recording levels can be used before distortion causing overloads set in.

Tapes of the calibre of TDK AD or AR, or perhaps BASF LH-E1, suit the TC-K60 perfectly if the recording current and bias controls inside are set up carefully to suit them, this isn't an easy task, but it is well worth having it done when the machine is overhauled prior to putting it to use in your system. This being said, high sensitivity modern pseudo-chromes like TDK SA will also give good results if you are careful with setting the recording level.

On the subject of adjustments, the playback level should also be checked before the machine is put to critical use. This is easy if you have a Dolby level reference tape (suitable ones available from ANT Audio for

Originally the TC-K60 came set up for Sony's Ferri-Chrome cassettes, which are no longer available to buy



MOT YOUR TC-K60

The mechanical keys may look dated, but they do result in a simple mechanism that is straightforward to service. There are only three belts, all of which are easy to change, and no complicated deck control electronics to worry about. Likewise the single capstan transport may cause a few to turn up their noses, but dual capstan drives are a pain to keep in line and often become troublesome tape-munchers in old age. Having a head that is virtually wear proof means that with skill and care it should always be possible to restore the machine's original performance without having to make compromises in the setup, as sadly is so often the case with vintage cassette decks that have seen a lot of use (for example most of the early Nakamichis and the otherwise excellent Yamaha TC-800GL). Other problems often have simple cures, notably hum and noise during playback, which normally resolves with careful cleaning of the record/playback switch and a check on the tightness of the screws that ground the main PCB.

example) since the correct output is shown on the highly accurate LCD meters by the position of a tiny Dolby logo. The meters have two coloured sections, white for normal recording and orange for overload. If you keep out of the orange part you will find that the recordings that result are smooth and highly detailed with a pleasing amount of treble sparkle and well suppressed background noise if the Dolby B NR circuit is used.

This features a 15kHz 'notch' filter for recording from FM stereo radio, make sure that it is switched off if you are recording from other sources (eg CDs or LPs). Excellent pitch stability is another fine attribute of this recorder, if the belts and other mechanical parts are in good condition you should find that the annoying waver around sustained notes that cassette decks often introduce is subjectively absent.

Treble without a cause

Playback of pre-recorded material is a bit dull with the Dolby system engaged but perfectly acceptable without it, which is a workable compromise. Likewise, recordings made on the TC-K60 can sound bright if played back on a more modern deck, although the effect is slight and given that cassette decks of all types traditionally struggle with treble this isn't something that is worth making a big fuss about.

The Sony TC-K60 isn't particularly fashionable or sought after at the moment but it is a highly practical and sensible machine, which should tick all the vintage buyer's boxes if they are after a sturdy top quality deck from this fascinating period ●

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM
HEED AUDIO/PMC

A BOLD THESIS

What happens when Heed Audio's latest electronics meet PMC's newest loudspeaker?
Ed Selley has fun finding out





s locations go, Budapest and Bedfordshire don't have a lot in common. Aside from both being a nice spot for a weekend away, it's easier to cite the differences between the twin cities on the Danube and the quiet corner of the Home Counties. While they may not share much in the way of culture, what you see here is the result of a shared expertise and appreciation of great hi-fi.

Heed Audio's output has been deeply influenced by the designs and expertise of the late and much-missed Richard Hay whose Ion Audio Obelisk was the basis for Heed's original product and who continued to consult and represent the brand until his untimely death in 2012. Heed hasn't sat around feeling sorry for itself, though. The Thesis range is the latest to bear the Heed name and represents a move into uncharted territory.

The Thesis range comprises Alpha preamplifier with Pi external power supply and a pair of Omega monoblock power amplifiers – a phono stage is also available. Heed has never been a company to divide the responsibilities of components up in the 'normal' way and the Thesis models haven't seen a sudden nod to tradition. To this end, the Alpha

COMPONENTS

HEED ALPHA PREAMP **£2,850**

The Alpha combines digital and analogue inputs in a single chassis and can be used with and without an external power supply, which can provide a separate power source for the analogue section.

HEED PI POWER SUPPLY **£1,600**

The Pi is designed to provide a clean source of power for the Alpha and the Phi phono stage at the same time.

HEED OMEGA MONOBLOCK POWER AMP **£1,750**

The Omega monoblock takes Heed's trademark AC-coupled design principle to new levels and claims up to 160W of output with impedance handling down to an impressive 1.6ohms.

PMC TWENTY.26 **£5,750**

The largest member of the twenty series, the 26 keeps the tweeter and 6.5in midbass from the twenty.24, but increases the size of the cabinet and adds a 50mm soft dome midrange.

BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM HEED AUDIO/PMC



is fitted with analogue inputs as you might expect, but also has a quartet of digital inputs including the all-important 24/192kHz-capable asynchronous USB connection. This allows the Alpha to front a computer audio system with no conventional source beyond a Mac or PC.

The Pi power supply uses a heady combination of over specified components from the major brands in the business like Mundorf and Airlink to deliver an entirely stable and massively over specified supply of electricity to the Alpha and the Phi phono stage. Adding the Pi and Phi not only adds to your Greek alphabet, but also gives your system the coolest upgrade it can possibly have – sleek little boxes with no discernible function to the uninitiated.

Take the strain

The Omega power amps almost add to the 'mystery box' count, but the cutouts and visible heat sinks are fairly obvious clues that these are amplifiers and furthermore amplifiers that takes Heed into new areas and power delivery levels, although they retain: the AC-coupled design that Heed is famous for. Each Omega claims up to 160Ws and is stable to 1.6ohms, which should allow the Thesis equipment to be used in a

variety of setups without any obvious signs of strain.

The Bedfordshire connection arrives in the form of PMC's twenty.26, the largest member of the 20 Series. As well as gaining a few inches on its smaller stablemates, the single biggest change to the 26 is the fitment of the 50mm dome midrange – a driver that I associate almost wholly with PMC. This is a difficult driver to produce and integrating it requires an

The PMC has an innate grasp of deep, fast and completely believable bass

intimate rather than passing understanding of crossover construction. The 26 also benefits from PMC's work in the National Physics Laboratory, which involved both serious science and for the rest of us the unbridled joy at the idea of firing lasers at loudspeakers.

As a partnership, the Bedfordshire/Budapest axis begins to make sense even before it plays a note. In both cases, the equipment used is undoubtedly the product of their respective concerns, but there is an additional layer of civility that makes

Above left: Unmistakably a Heed product, the Thesis range manages to feel more grown up than some compact models

Above: Extensive and useful connectivity is divided up in a slightly unorthodox but effective fashion

Above far right: The twenty.26 plays almost perfectly to the strengths of the Thesis components

them happier objects to place in any room remotely concerned with aesthetics. The Thesis boxes are unmistakably Heed; they are the unique Heed size and the mix of digital and analogue connections on the preamp and use of external power supplies is completely in-keeping with the brand philosophy. At the same time, they feel weighty and very special to use and the new styling is really rather lovely. The twenty series has been around a little longer and we've grown more familiar with their appearance, but if you consider them with a fresh eye the way that PMC has ensured they are unmistakably its handiwork while at the same time producing a speaker with some of the best proportions and styling out there is really rather clever.

Crank it up

Mute appreciation will only get you so far, though. In the rather lovely surroundings of the main demo room at HiFi Lounge – strengthening the Bedfordshire connection – which kindly accommodated the system and me, the overwhelming urge is to sit back and listen, and with my laptop connected and the Heed USB driver installed, a quick blast of Richard Thompson's *Stoney Ground* reveals a system that is highly distinctive, but

harnesses the attributes of both speakers and electronics to produce something that is deeply impressive.

The most tangible way that this manifests itself is the way that an impressive scale and effortlessness is combined with enough drive and attack to make music sound right. Thompson's backing musicians have a tremendous presence because, like him, they're unambiguously full sized and arranged in an endlessly believable way behind him. Indeed 'presence' features time and time again in my notes with this system and the reason for this is the manner of how the electronics and speakers work with one another.

Liquid refreshment

I shall avoid the cliché of saying that the Heeds sound 'valve like' because they don't. What they have is an almost liquid quality to their presentation that can take any piece of music and add a veneer of civility that aids listening without affecting the overall drive and attack let alone robbing the piece of any detail. The decision to place the DAC inside the Alpha preamp is significant in that you stop listening for the digital and listen to the Heed as a complete stack – almost like a little neurosis is knocked out of the equation.



**CONTACT
DETAILS**

PMC
TELEPHONE:
0870 4441044
WEBSITE:
pmc-speakers.com
HEED AUDIO
TELEPHONE:
01242 547663
WEBSITE:
heedaudio.co.uk

When you send this to the PMC – a speaker that has an almost innate grasp of deep, fast and completely believable bass as well as the sort of soundstage that creates spaces of whatever size you need utterly unconstrained by the actual size of the room they are in, the effect is nigh on perfect. The combination is endlessly appealing and able to handle almost anything you could possibly want to listen to with a

Thesis takes Heed Audio into new areas and power delivery levels

presentation that is incredibly easy to enjoy, but immensely rewarding at the same time.

This means that over the course of a listening session where everything from the delicacy of Abi Tapia to the sheer brutality of The Prodigy finds its way onto the playlist, the Heed/PMC is utterly unfazed by any of it. This is a system that has tremendous reserves of headroom, but deploys it so subtly that it is only when you realise that you are largely communicating with other people in the room using sign language that

there is a considerable amount of horsepower on tap. The moment you need it to put the bludgeon away and give you subtlety, it can do so instantly and with almost unsettling ease.

United we stand

The result of all this is a system that achieves the single most important benchmark that any collection of electronics can, in that it sounds better as a system than it does when the undoubtedly talented collection of electronics that go into it are listened to on their own. The Thesis range is a step up for Heed, but by evolving its design practices rather than feeling the urge to do anything radically different, they perform with an assurance that should see them in good stead. Above all, the way that the digital and analogue sides of the Thesis are combined in a single entity means that you listen to and appreciate the Thesis as a single unit rather than different components. When combined with a speaker as effortlessly capable as the PMC you have a system that will deliver truly outstanding musical enjoyment. The Bedfordshire/Budapest axis is not currently one of the 'power couples' of modern hi-fi, but a few more setups like this and it soon will be ●



2 Tone

It's 35 years since the monochromatic label exploded into colour. **Simon Berkovitch** and **JT Rathbone** raise their pork pie hats in celebration

On the immediate aftermath of the original punk rock movement, myriad new musical styles and scenes emerged. One of the most exciting, and certainly one of the most popular, was spearheaded by the 2 Tone label, launched in the unlikely setting of Coventry by organist Jerry Dammers.

Its acts – and others inspired by them – revived and celebrated the ska and rocksteady sounds of the sixties, adding a distinctly English punky edge. Although it lasted just five years (with the first two of those being 2 Tone's true heyday) it launched the careers

of Dammers' band The Specials, along with Madness, The Beat, the Selecter and others.

Importantly, 2 Tone also raised the profile of Jamaican music in the UK, and, ever politically aware and staunchly anti-racist (virtually all the key acts associated with the movement were multi-racial), it eventually delivered a genuine political anthem with The Special AKA's irrepressible *Nelson Mandela* single in 1984.

Despite 2 Tone's familiar monochromatic image, the label's sound was a much more colourful hybrid than the 'ska meets punk' tag suggested, drawing from many different

Jamaican and American styles while remaining resolutely British – Terry Hall and Madness' Suggs stubbornly eschewing fake accents, for example.

These were all ingredients in a musical stew that was fresh, exciting and very tasty; a blend that proved irresistible to the UK's young record buyers, being more inclusive, accessible and danceable than punk.

Originally an independent label created to release debut *Gangsters* by The Special AKA (as they were often billed), an unrefusable offer from major Chrysalis allowed Dammers to sign, produce and release other bands under the 2 Tone imprint.

Once that first great single got its hooks into radio playlists in the summer of 1979, 2 Tone as a sound and visual style began its meteoric rise, notching up top 10 hits with five of its first six 45s, culminating in a top slot placing for The Specials' live EP in February 1980. In the process, it helped shift a warehouse full of tonic suits, and got thousands of teenagers up on their feet.

Here we look at four of the most important acts associated with the label as well as taking a peek at some of its rarest and most desirable records. So, as the late, great Dandy Livingstone said: "People get ready, and let's do the rocksteady!"

The Specials

From obscure Coventry Automatics to legendary *Ghost Town* gangsters

Although their classic lineup lasted barely three years, the nine records The Specials released from 1979 to 1981 had a major impact on the post-punk era and are much revered today.

The definitive group clicked into place in early 1979 when ace drummer John Bradbury joined founder members Jerry Dammers, Lynval Golding and Horace Panter who had added vocalists Terry Hall and Neville Staples as well as guitarist Roddy Radiation and changed their name from The Coventry Automatics the previous year.

After invaluable exposure touring with The Clash, their debut *45 Gangsters* became a massive hit. A follow-up single and definitive first LP appeared a few months later, but after scoring their first chart-topper in early 1980, the group made a concerted effort to escape the 'ska revival' pigeonhole.

Second album *More Specials* (see page 100) was a more

diverse affair, containing the dark reggae overtones of *Man At C&A* as well as both sides of their most ambitious single to date, *Stereotypes* and *International Jet Set*, the latter recounting an uneasy and ultimately fatal plane trip, incorporating jazz and MOR elements into its spooky skank.

This ambience and ambition continued on The Specials' swan

The definitive group clicked into place in early 1979

song, *Ghost Town*, which soundtracked the UK riots of 1981 and is for many the pinnacle of the group's recorded work. By the time it was issued, the original collective had splintered. Dammers then released the controversial and harrowing *The Boiler* single with vocalist Rhoda Dakar and soldiered on with a new Special AKA lineup until 1984.

Ghost Town remains arguably the band's most popular tune



The Beat

Twist and Crawl to the hypnotic sound of Birmingham's best

Even though they only cut one *45* (*Tears Cf A Clown/Ranking Full Stop*) for the label, Birmingham sextet The Beat embodied the spirit of 2 Tone. An interracial, socialist outfit from the Handsworth district, they adhered to the label's ethos long after they had left to launch their own Go-Feet imprint.

Distilling the same mix of ska, reggae and punk as their former bosses, The Specials, The Beat added elements of soca and even touches of the African highlife style to provide a bright, fluid backing to a songbook that was often dark and paranoid in subject matter.

With a sterling, and quite unmistakable, rhythm section comprised of dynamic drummer Everett Morton, David Steele on bass and guitarist Andy Cox, The Beat's best records shimmer with a hypnotic, neurotic energy, typified by the flipside of their sophomore single, *Twist And*

Crawl and its creepy follow up *Mirror In The Bathroom*.

But the group were equally at home with more upbeat, albeit slightly offbeat, material and had hits with the laidback reggae of *Doors Cf Your Heart* and the breezy pop of *Save It For Later*. They also differed from

The Beat added elements of soca and African style

The Specials in their extensive use of saxophone, provided by Lionel Augustus Martin, better known as Saxa, a veteran Jamaican musician with a pedigree as long as Rico's (see overleaf).

Despite this distinctive sound and a wealth of original material, the group folded after three albums when Dave Wakeling and Ranking Roger departed to form General Public.

An altered lineup of The Beat is currently touring the UK



Rico

That man is forward! Rico Rodriguez MBE, master of the trombone

One man legitimised 2 Tone beyond all doubt, and passed the baton from originator to emulator. Rico Rodriguez was born in Cuba, raised in Jamaica, and was a master of the trombone. A list of the records he played on during the formative years of ska and rocksteady would fill several pages.

As well as discs issued under his own name (often credited to Reco) he played alongside Laurel Aitken, Owen Gray, Derrick Morgan, Don Drummond (and The Skatalites) and Lee Perry. He also had a long association with Prince Buster, who was covered by The Specials, The Beat and Madness.

Rico relocated to England in the sixties and released the excellent *Man From Wareika* on Island records in 1977, before guesting on The Specials' second single, *A Message To You Rudy* and

becoming an honorary member. The group returned the compliment on his *Sea Cruise* single and he recorded two albums for the label:

1981's *That Man Is Forward* (with Sly & Robbie) and the ambitious *Jama Rico*, reuniting him with fellow Special AKA alumni Dick Cuthell.



The Selecter

The mighty Pauline Black and her *Three Minute Heroes*

Women-fronted bands were still something of a rarity in 1979, despite the likes of Patti Smith and X-Ray Spex's Poly Styrene.

But the frontwoman of The Selecter, the sharp and charismatic Pauline Black, would have stood out in any era. Powerful of voice and sharp of wardrobe, she was the focal point of a tight seven-piece outfit, and was very much at home in that role.

The group's origins predate 2 Tone by two years, when Neol Davis, John Bradbury and Barry Jones recorded an instrumental entitled *The Kingston Affair*. Bradbury used the track for his next outfit, The Specials, where renamed – and credited to – The Selecter, it graced the flip side of *Gangsters*.

Davis subsequently formed a 'real' Selecter with the nucleus of local reggae outfit Hard Top

22. There was an inevitable reggae feel to this new group, though their three biggest hits were peppy and punky ska-pop, with Desmond

Brown's distinctive organ to the fore. Brown had left by the time of second LP *Celebrate The Bullet* and the group split shortly after its release.



SHOPPING LIST

Despite 2 Tone's huge sellers, there's still plenty to whet collectors' appetites. Here are eight cuts worth hunting down for starters.



Madness
The Prince
A double-sided tribute to the legendary Prince Buster forms the Nutty Boys' debut, their only 2 Tone release.



The Bodysnatchers
Easy Life
The rarer of two 45s issued by the label's only all-girl band, seen here in the rare German picture sleeve.



Elvis Costello & The Attractions
I Can't Stand Up For Falling Down
Pressed up and then withdrawn, it got to number two in the charts on the F-Beat label.



Various artists
Dance Craze
Capturing the 2 Tone tour in full swing, early copies of the LP boasted a rather handsome fold-out poster.



The Swinging Cats
Mantovani
An intriguing mix of ska and easy listening, the group's lone 45 sadly failed to chart.



Rhoda with The Special AKA
The Boiler
Ex-Bodysnatcher Rhoda Dakar's tale of sexual assault is a bold and innovative record that still chills.



The Appollinaires / The Higsons
Enjoy The Love / Tear The Whole Thing Down
The promo-only white label 12in of the 7in single is super rare.



The Friday Club
Window Shopping
One of the last ever releases for the label, this remains very collectable (and so) pricey in the scarcer 12in format.

Dealers of Distinction

At **15audio** listening to music we love is personal to us and that 'personality' is different for each and every one of us - as is the diversity of the music itself. Be that a live recording of a Proms concert in the Albert Hall, listening to the smoothest jazz trio in a smokey Paris nightclub or even the mosh-pit of a Hyde Park rock concert. We all are different and all hear different - but in the quest of the ultimate listening experience we all want the best we can afford. And that's what we are exactly here for; to cater for that diversity and personally deliver a HiFi to suit you - and only you.

Situated across two sites in the Sussex countryside, serving the whole of the South East of England - covering all the major towns/cities including London, Tunbridge Wells, Hastings, Eastbourne and along to Brighton and even Portsmouth on the south coast - offering a personal service is what it is all about. Like having a made-to-measure suit, we can personally find the right HiFi for you. And unlike the normal on-line or high st. retailers we will guide you through the intimate process of finding the right system or high-end HiFi component for you. This will include personal advice on not only the best equipment but the room you are putting it in - using our 'home trial' scheme as we firmly believe this is the only way to really know what works for you.

www.15audio.co.uk

info@15audio.co.uk

08448 221115

01580 200772

ARDHOWEN HIFI was set up by a long term audio enthusiast who wants to share with you, both his passion for music and the way in which quality audio equipment can unlock so much more. You will find what we consider to be the very best analogue and digital two channel audio components available at their respective price points as well as the best computer audio products. As we see changes coming in how some audio enthusiasts want to listen to music, we have sought out the best current products to help you unlock the quality sound that can be obtained from your computer. However as many wish to maintain their physical music collections we have selected a range of excellent CD players and vinyl playback equipment to help you scale the heights of what is possible from traditional physical music formats. All of the products have been chosen to offer the very highest sound quality for the least amount of money. Each item had to justify its cost by being the very best value it could be. You will only find products here that can justify their selling price low or high by offering the greatest sound quality for the money.

A major advantage of our unique approach is the peaceful, friendly environment we can provide you with to explore your potential equipment system choices, and if you would like a home demonstration we would be very glad to organise that for you, distance permitting.

www.ardhowenhifi.com

tom@ardhowenhifi.com

07581 119913

07581 1431218

Analogue Seduction was established in 2005 and is dedicated towards two channel Hi-Fi. The business has been built on a reputation for supplying the latest products with excellent pre and after sales service. Our aim is to provide our customers with the ultimate enjoyment from their music collection, because music is our passion. Whether you're buying your first system or just looking to improve your listening experience with better equipment, we can help.

We are located in a beautiful late 15th century manor house in the historic market town of Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire (5 miles east of Peterborough) where we offer our customers a friendly, relaxed personal service, with the finest demonstration facilities. Come and enjoy a tea or coffee in our beautiful relaxing demonstration room while debating the next step in your hi-fi. Our experienced sales staff always give honest professional advice and a no pressure approach to demonstrations means you will not feel obliged to buy anything. We want you to be happy with what you buy and we want it to fit your system perfectly.

Simply go to our web site, fill in the that can be found under the contact us tab, and we will get back to you by your preferred method to arrange any details and confirm. We will strive to fit you in when you request, though please be aware that on occasion this will not always be possible.

www.analogueseduction.net

info@analogueseduction.net

01733 350878

AUDIO DESTINATION brings together a range of only the finest audio products and places them in comfortable and relaxed surroundings where customers can take their time to audition and find the right product or system to suit their requirements.

No one understands that 'choosing Hi-Fi is a very personal thing' more than us, which is why we stock some of the widest range of high-end components from some of the leading manufacturers in the world; for the full list check our web site. We cater for all tastes and budgets and can even help spread the cost of any purchases with the various 0% interest free and finance options we can offer.

We think customer satisfaction is the "first and only rule" and we offer a very personal service with no "techno babble" as we just love listening to music and want customers to do the same. You will not experience the 'hard sell' that you may have already suffered elsewhere. Think of us as your Hi-Fi Doctors as we digest, dissect and reconstruct components or systems to your requirements NOT ours.

We can cure any Hi-Fi ailments you may be suffering from, whether it's just the 'upgrade bug' or your system just needs a 'tonic' to give it some energy and drive, we can have you on the road to full Hi-Fi recovery!

www.audiodestination.co.uk

info@audiodestination.co.uk

01884 243584





mcrw

FROM MAINS TO MUSIC

NEW ARRIVALS



HIFIMAN HE-560
HEADPHONES
£650.00



LINEAR POWER SUPPLY
FOR NAIM UNITISERVE
£995.00



SLIC INNOVATIONS
ECLIPSE C INTERCONNECT
CABLE
£492.00



IFI MICRO I-DSD
24/192 | DSD | DAC
HEADPHONE AMP
£435.00

GET IN TOUCH
WWW.MCRU.CO.UK
DAVID@MCRU.CO.UK

07908 056978
 mcrultd
 mcrultd



100 Mamas Gun
Cheap Hotel



101 Esbjörn
Svensson Trio
301



101 Prokofiev
Violin Sonatas;
Five Melodies

Musicreviews



**ALBUM
OF THE
MONTH**

Robert Plant

lullaby and...The Ceaseless Roar

★★★★★

CD **Nonesuch**

IT'S NO SECRET that Robert Plant is the immovable obstacle to a full-scale Led Zeppelin reunion and Jimmy Page has made little attempt to conceal his frustration with his former colleague. In turn, Plant has revealed his own irritation at the continual pressure to reform a band that broke up more than 30 years ago.

The contrast between the chosen paths of the two former rock gods could hardly be greater. Page has made no new music since 1998 and has spent his time curating an endless succession of Led Zep reissues and remasters. Meanwhile Plant has refreshingly (or stubbornly, according to Page) refused to be defined by his past, forging a restlessly creative solo career and making consistently rewarding new music, including the acclaimed collaboration with Alison Krauss on *Raising Sand*, which won a Grammy award as album of the year in 2009.

In a recent interview he spoke about the "tedium of repetition" and his need to "go to some new places" musically. The search for fresh destinations has found him exploring blues, Celtic folk, bluegrass, country, West coast psychedelia, dub, trance and African rhythms. Backed by his band the Sensational Space Shifters, *lullaby and...The Ceaseless Roar* continues the journey, crystallising his on-going musical curiosity into a thrillingly expansive new sonic adventure.

Anyone still longing for the leonine roar of the younger Plant would be advised to stick to Page's Led Zep reissues. The blood-curdling, heavy metal screech and wail he perfected in his pomp has given way to a more reflective and nuanced style; in places, as on *Rainbow* and the moody ballad *A Stolen Kiss* he almost croons. You can either dismiss this subtle and more subdued approach as "Arkle pulling a milk cart" (the description of his former manager) or you can celebrate the ripe maturity of a singer who has learnt a new vocal vocabulary with a richer emotional expression and who accepts that at 66 there is little point in trying to sound as virile as he did 40 years ago.

And in a very real sense, *lullaby and...The Ceaseless Roar* is a genuine band album, too. Particularly notable are the contributions of guitarist Justin Adams, an axeman with an enviable track record in world music projects, including producing the first album by African desert rockers Tinariwen, and Juldeh Camara, who plays the ritti, a one string fiddle from West Africa with an eerie, haunting sound, which adds an exotic flavour to many of the tracks. The production - by Plant himself - favours raw and earthy over gloss and artifice and perfectly suits the rootsy potency of the music. Why waste time reliving the past when the present sounds as good as this? **NW**



Picture credit: Ed Miles

MUSIC REVIEWS



Picture credit: Susan Titelman

Ry Cooder

Soundtracks

★★★★★

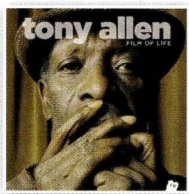
Seven CD boxset

Rhino

COODER'S SOLO ALBUMS over a 40 year time span offer a compelling trawl through almost every facet of American vernacular music, while his world music collaborations with the likes of Ali Farka Toure and Buena Vista Social Club have earned him a slew of Grammys. Yet much of his most adventurous and atmospheric music has been reserved for his work as a soundtrack composer for movie directors such as Wim Wenders, Louis Malle and Walter Hill.

The pick of the seven soundtracks included here is Wim Wenders' 1984 movie *Paris Texas*

The pick of the seven soundtracks included here is probably 1984's *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders), on which his slide guitar improvisations, loosely built around Blind Willie Johnson's twenties blues classic *Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground*, inspired the mood of U2's *Joshua Tree*. But the soundtracks to *The Long Riders*, *Alamo Bay*, *Blue City*, *Crossroads*, *Johnny Handsome* and *Trespass* are not far behind in their vivid cinematic evocation. **NW**



Tony Allen

Film Of Life

★★★★★

CD

Jazz Village

MORE THAN 40 years ago Tony Allen helped the legendary Fela Kuti invent the thrilling fusion of Nigerian rhythms and James Brown-influenced funk riffs that the world later came to know as Afrobeat. Now aged 74, the drummer/composer is still seeking fresh challenges on a set that turns the ostensibly simple, fixed pulse of Afrobeat into a seething mass of polyrhythms.

He's ably abetted by Damon Albarn on several tracks as he curates a thrilling global mélange of tribal grooves, bebop, avant jazz and funk that expands Afrobeat far and wide beyond its well-defined parameters. **NW**



Dr John

Ske-Dat-De-Dat
- The Spirit
Of Satch

★★★★★

CD

Concord

THE PATRON SAINT of New Orleans goes way back for his latest piano-led boogie meltdowns. This time he focuses on fellow Crescent City native Louis Armstrong with a selection of tunes made famous by one of jazz's founding fathers. Don't expect any departure from the man's trademark sound, though, this is N'Awlins blues soul gumbo all the way. *What A Wonderful World* gets a brand new suit of gospel choir clothes and *Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child* gets a reflective revisit. Add a very funky take on *Mack The Knife* and a marching band groove on *When You're Smiling* and you've got an album that does Satch proud. **DO**



Mamas Gun

Cheap Hotel

★★★★★

CD

Candelions

THE THIRD ALBUM from the London-based five-piece sees them develop their seventies-style pop soul sound after stints touring with Beverley Knight, Raphael Saadiq and De La Soul. Band leader Andy Platt's voice is in fine shape, shifting from soulful growl to keening falsetto in a heartbeat without ever overdoing the melisma.

At its best, *Cheap Hotel* recalls Stevie Wonder channelled by Prince, though it does slide into self-indulgence and meandering a *la* Jamiroquai on a few tracks. The album's highlight is *Red Cassette*, a hook-laden stomper that adds West Coast harmonies to a Motown beat to create an infectiously uplifting summer groove. **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

★★★★★

Specials

More Specials

180g vinyl + 7in single

2 Tone



THE SECOND AND

last album made by the original Specials lineup opens with the ironically upbeat *Enjoy Yourself*, a song that first saw chart success in 1950, but which was covered by Prince Buster in 1963. Like many of the tunes on here it includes some superb brass work. Unlike the Specials debut this is the only track with any ska heritage, the sound while having a Jamaican influence is clearly of a different origin and very political with it. Produced by band leader Jerry Dammers and Dave Jordan in the summer of

1980 it's not as strong as the debut, but has some fine moments. And as per the UK original it doesn't include *Rat Race*, but does contain the hit *Stereotype*, which segues into a reggae-style inversion of the drinking theme of the main song *Stereotypes PT.2*. I also like the atypical *Sock It To 'Em JB*, a James Brown style tune from 1966 that has lyrics about James Bond movies, complete with horn stabs. This release includes a 7in with Roddy Radiaton's rockabilly *Braggin' & Tryin' Not To Lie* and the strangely up tempo *Rude Boys Outa Jail (version)* by Neville Staple AKA Judge Roughneck. Trivia tip: the Go-Gos (Belinda Carlisle et al) provided the backing vocals on *Enjoy Yourself* (Reprise). **JK**

HIGH RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS

Society of Sound Music 73
Edwyn Collins
Studio Live Session Liechtenstein



FLAC 24/48

Edwyn Collins
Studio Live Session
– Liechtenstein



B&W Society of Sound

THE ONE-TIME ORANGE Juice frontman has been making a steady comeback to health since his severe stroke in 2005. This live in the studio performance for B&W finds him revisiting his catalogue of hits and near misses in acoustic style, Collins' voice augmented only by acoustic guitars and backing vocals. Stripped of production sheen these are poignant interpretations of some classic songs by one of our best songwriters. **DO**



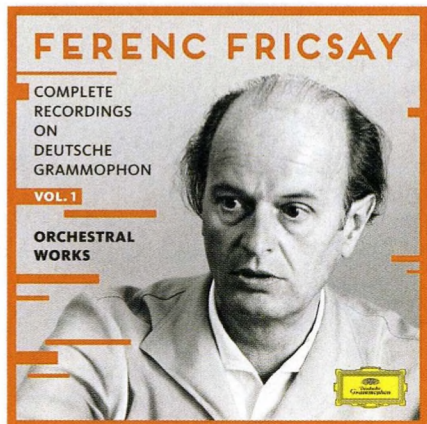
ALAC/FLAC 24/48

Esbjörn Svensson Trio
301



highresaudio.com

ESBJÖRN SVENSSON DIED in a diving accident in 2008, but the group recorded some nine hours of material 18 months previously. The first fruits of this surfaced as their final album, *Leucocyte*, and *301* features the best of the rest. It captures much of EST's appeal, with extended jams augmented by electronics sitting back to back with quietly introspective piano pieces, balancing the trio's blend of jazz, classical, rock and experimental elements. **DO**



If therest of the series is as good as this, it should be one to watch out for

HOT PICK

Ferenc Fricsay

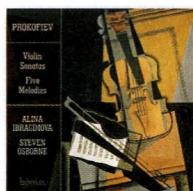
Complete Orchestral recordings for Deutsche Grammophon



45 CDs

Deutsche Grammophon

HUNGARIAN FERENC FRICSAY was one of the conductors who made his name and reputation in the fifties and 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of his birth. The vast bulk of his recordings were on DG, and to mark the occasion it plans to issue his output complete. The first box is devoted to orchestra recordings, and is being issued as an Original Jackets edition of mini LPs. The sound is invariably good for the period – bright, open, detailed, and clear – while many of the early stereo recordings sound brilliant and vivid. Many of the performances contained in this set were among the jewels of the early LP era, and are still worth hearing today. I can't wait for more in this series! **JH**



CD

Prokofiev
Violin Sonatas;
Five Melodies
Alina Ibragimova
(violin) Steven
Osborne (piano)



Hyperion

PROKOFIEV'S TWO VIOLIN sonatas have received a number of fine recordings over the years, but this new coupling goes straight to the top of the list. Ibragimova's technique is remarkable; all the more so, because she plays with little or no vibrato, yet hits every note absolutely perfectly in terms of intonation. Like all great artists, she makes everything sound easy and natural. The Hyperion recording is superlative, being natural and unexaggerated, yet crisply focused and very detailed. You feel you can count the hairs on the bow, yet somehow the sonic perspective is not claustrophobic; despite a fairly close balance. **JH**

BLU-RAY DVD



Black Sabbath
Live... Gathered In Their Masses

Blu-ray/CD

Universal

HOT PICK

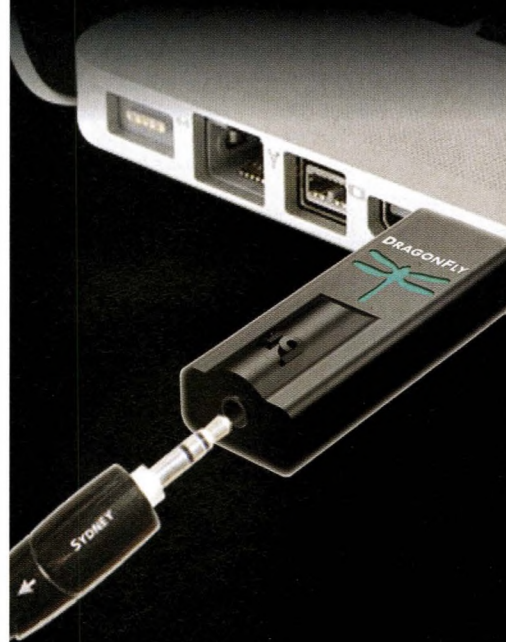


When Sabbath's original front line reformed in 2012 the weight of history was with them and as luck would have it so was the hair. The next year they kicked off a world tour in Melbourne in front of several thousand ozzies who had been waiting 40 years to hear them. Ozzy knows how to work a crowd, and with a back catalogue like their's this is a remarkable performance. Sound on both BD and CD is heavily compressed as you'd expect but very clean for a live event, they know how to set up a big rig down under. **JK**

Nature's Dragonfly



Our DRAGONFLY



Both shown actual size ... in their natural habitat.

audioquest.

audioquest.com/DragonFly

Minitest

SPEAKER STANDS £195-£695

Making a stand

Speaker stands can make all the difference to how your music sounds. **Neville Roberts** puts four through their paces

Standmount loudspeakers, which used to be incorrectly referred to as bookshelf speakers, have never sounded so good. It is quite amazing how much bass you can get from a well-designed compact enclosure. However, what you stand them on has a colossal impact on sound quality. One thing is for certain, bookshelf speakers should never be placed on a shelf!

The first job of a stand is to position the loudspeaker at the correct height

so that the tweeter is at the same level as your ears. With small speakers, that is easy to work out and all the stands reviewed here have taken this into account. Next, the stand needs to provide a sturdy support for the speaker as well as a way of both isolating it from unwanted vibrations and preventing vibrations from being transmitted through the floor to your other equipment. Given that a speaker's purpose is to generate vibrations, that is quite a tall order. This is achieved

either by a high-mass stand that dissipates energy or by a low-mass support that effectively isolates the loudspeaker. Stands that cover both approaches are included and both types work extremely well, if the stands are properly designed.

Finally, the stands need to fit in well with the domestic environment, or in other words, look good. All four stands reviewed here certainly meet this requirement in one way or another and at least one should suit the décor of your listening room.

Q Acoustics

Concept 20 stands

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Q Acoustics
Concept 20

PRICE
£200

ORIGIN
China

TYPE
Speaker stand

WEIGHT
12kg each

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
386 x 655 x 240mm

FEATURES
• Outrigger stabilised
• Gelcore isolation layer in speaker platform

DISTRIBUTOR
Armour Home

TELEPHONE
01279 501111

WEBSITE
qacoustics.co.uk

I AM IMMEDIATELY impressed with the quality of the materials and construction here. The heavy lacquered central columns have a superb finish and, available in either white or black, should suit most homes. The stands are designed to complement the Q Acoustics Concept 20 loudspeaker, but will work equally well with other standmounts.

Assembly is quite straightforward following the supplied instructions. All of the hardware is bundled, along with an appropriately sized Allen key for tightening the bolts. The main central column is given additional stability by having a beautifully made glass and metal outrigger bolted to it at the base. A spike is fitted to each end of the outrigger, plus a third spike on the column itself, which makes for a sturdy tripod support arrangement. The spikes are suitable for use on their own where floors are carpeted. A set of domed feet over-protectors is also supplied for use on wood or tiled

exposed floors. Each stand weighs 12kg, putting these supports firmly in the high-mass category.

I'm sticking with you

The top plate that supports the speaker consists of a metal sandwich containing a 'Gelcore' layer for additional isolation. Three metal lugs are supplied with each stand for screwing directly into sockets on the bottom of the Concept 20 speaker. For other makes the application of four small peas of adhesive putty is recommended to properly couple the top plate to the speaker. The cable can be neatly threaded behind a bar at the top and the outrigger at the bottom to be effectively concealed within a wide groove running down the rear of the central column.

As anticipated, the stands work admirably at controlling vibrations and allowing the speakers to perform at their best. In particular, I find the imaging to be excellent ●



VERDICT

Built to a high standard these will aid speaker imaging and are excellent value for money



Custom Design

FS104 Signature

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Custom Design
FS104 Signature

PRICE
£200 + £5 per bag
of inert filler (four
recommended) +
£40 for floor
protectors

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Speaker stand

WEIGHT
9kg each stand
with inert filler

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
165 x 510 x 180mm

FEATURES

- Inert filler option for increasing mass of central column
- All-metal construction

DISTRIBUTOR
Custom Design

TELEPHONE
0191 2624646

WEBSITE
customdesign.co.uk

THESE STANDS HAVE been designed and manufactured in Newcastle and are shipped in two cartons – a large one containing the stand itself and a smaller, but surprisingly heavy (6.5kg) box containing four bags of inert filler. Opening the box containing the stands, I am struck by the well-engineered design of the FS104 Signatures. Each support consists of four chrome support 'satellite' tubes (with brushed chrome available as an extra) surrounding a central black metal column. The height of each stand is either 510mm or 610mm with custom-built models also available. The acoustic top plate that supports the loudspeaker is made and finished by hand and has been laser cut. The plate can be ordered in two different sizes (165mm x 180mm or 190mm x 240mm) to suit the size of your speaker. Each stand weighs 5.5kg initial mass.

Putting together the stand is a case of bolting the five tubes to the top and bottom plates using the supplied bolts

and Allen key. After assembly, four spikes are screwed into the base plate and secured into position using the locking domed top nuts. This allows for height adjustment of each spike to prevent any possibility of rocking the stand when in place. For solid floors, a set of floor protectors is available for an additional cost.

Filler up

Uniquely with these stands, the 76mm diameter centre column can be mass loaded for optimal control of the bass performance. Filling requires the use of a funnel to introduce the filler into the top of the column. Custom Designs recommends using two bags of the inert filler per column, which adds about 3.3kg to the mass. This is certainly worthwhile as the all-metal construction can otherwise make the stand add a little colour to the bass performance of some speakers. The filler certainly tames this effectively.

The resultant stands are very smart and effective and will perform well with a wide range of loudspeakers ●



VERDICT

Beautifully engineered metal stands that will suit a wide range of loudspeakers



Russ Andrews

Torlyte

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Russ Andrews
Torlyte

PRICE
£695

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Speaker stand

WEIGHT
2.8kg each

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
160 x 650 x 182mm

FEATURES

- Torlyte support platforms
- All-wood construction

DISTRIBUTOR
Russ Andrews

TELEPHONE
01494 462246

WEBSITE
russandrews.com

THESE STANDS ADOPT a different approach to eliminating unwanted vibrations from the others here. Instead of being a high mass support, the Torlyte makes use of Russ Andrews' proprietary material to construct a pair of lightweight supports.

Torlyte, the primary material used in the construction of these stands, is a honeycomb-like structure made from individually fabricated grids and skins. The result is a product that is more air than wood. It's, therefore, a very lightweight, yet sturdy material that should have superb sonic qualities.

As with the other stands, the Torlytes are supplied flat-packed with all the necessary tools and hardware for assembly. They are also bundled with two sets of three oak cone feet for supporting the loudspeaker on the top platform if desired. These are fixed upside down with the tips facing upwards to support the speaker. Their use is entirely optional and some experimentation will determine if they

work well with your speakers. Three spike feet are supplied for the base platform and some jumbo oak cone feet are also available at extra cost. The latter will be preferred if using the stands on a solid floor. The feet are fully adjustable so the stands can be easily levelled using a spirit level.

You gotta slow it down

According to Russ Andrews, acoustic energy is slowed and stored as it passes through the speakers and stands. High mass stands have the potential to store more energy, so these stands adopt a low mass design in order to diffuse or 'dump' the energy with the intention of improving rhythm and timing.

They certainly don't disappoint. I have no sense of colouration or an over lively bass. Appearance-wise, they may not fit in with everyone's colour scheme, but they do what they are supposed to really well and are definitely worthy of consideration ●



VERDICT

These stands offer a clean, uncoloured sound but are rather costly



Fostex SG600S

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Fostex SG600S

PRICE
£195

ORIGIN
China

TYPE
Speaker stand

WEIGHT
5.9kg each

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
238 x 602 x 288mm

FEATURES
• Multi-wood CE plywood material
• All-wood construction with dark brown finish

DISTRIBUTOR
Fostex

TELEPHONE
03301222500

WEBSITE
scvdistribution.co.uk

AS WITH THE Concept 20 stands, the SG600S speaker floorstands have been designed to complement Fostex's own brand of standmount speakers, in this case, the G and GX series. For this reason, the SG600S stands are supplied with a bolt that is passed through a single hole on the top platform for screwing into the threaded speaker base. However, the stands can, of course, be used for alternative brands of compact speaker – in which case the bolt will be surplus to requirements.

The stands are supplied ready built in two cartons. They are made of CE (European Standard) plywood by bonding two different woods (camphor and eucalyptus) of different stiffness and density. The use of two different materials helps to dissipate unwanted vibrations and enhance rigidity. Each stand has specially shaped weights fitted into the underside of the base to lower the centre of gravity of the stand, making it inherently stable.

Four rubber pads are fitted to the top of the upper platform to support the speaker and on the underside of the base for resting on the floor. There is no spike option available. Rather than relying on the rubber pads on the top platform, I personally prefer to secure the speaker with four small pieces of adhesive putty placed between the speaker and the pads, in order to couple the speaker to the platform more securely.

Brace yourself

Apart from standing your speakers on the stands, all that remains to be done is to fit the neat, triangular piece that is located in felt-lined slots to brace the three wooden pillars (just as well since the supplied instruction leaflet is entirely written in Chinese).

Appearance-wise, the dark wood finish is really rather smart and exudes an air of quality. In use, these stands help to control bass resonances and will make a great support to any compact loudspeaker ●



VERDICT

A decent value for money pair of floorstands that look fantastic and perform just as well



Mini test verdict

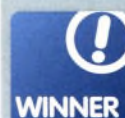
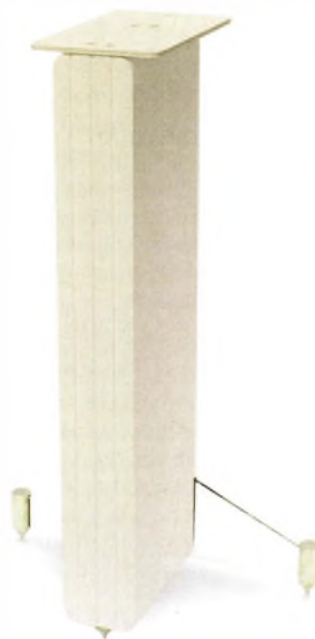
THIS MINITEST HAS certainly proved that there is more than one way to skin a cat, or in this case, support a standmount speaker. While there are clearly lots of options available one thing's for certain, any stand is better than nothing at all.

It was quite a challenge to come up with a winner in the end as all the stands reviewed are worthy of serious consideration. With these four stands it really boils down to the look that best suits your particular environment and which one will make your speakers sing.

Both the Custom Designs FS104 Signature stands and the Fostex SG600S wooden floorstands performed very well. The FS104s have a modern look with their all-metallic construction whereas the SG600S stands will be more at home

with more traditional furniture. In the case of the FS104s, I consider the extra investment in the filler to be worthwhile in order to achieve that extra bit of control in the bass region – something you should try to budget for. Furthermore, the floor protectors are a must for anyone with a wooden floor. The multi-wood construction of the plywood in the SG600S stands also helps to control bass resonances.

Certainly, the lightweight stand approach of the Russ Andrews' stands works extremely well in practice and I really could not fault the design in terms of functionality. However, clever design must come at a price and inevitably, this makes the stands expensive in comparison with the other models on test here, hence it was just pipped to the post by this month's winner ●



In the end it's the Q Acoustics Concept 20 stands that take the gold medal. By combining high-quality materials with upmarket styling, impressive functionality and incredibly good value for money, these stands make for a winning combination with Concept 20s and any other loudspeakers.



It is important to position the speakers and stands correctly. If you put a speaker too close to a wall, it will tend to reinforce the bass at particular frequencies, which is clearly very undesirable. Try to aim for at least 30cm if you can.

Also try and have a different distance from the back wall to the speaker compared with from the side wall to the speaker. If the distances are exactly the same, reflections from the side walls will tend to either cancel each other out or

reinforce the reflections from the rear wall. This will cause a peaky response and will in turn colour the sound.

It is also important that you arrange to have your listening position such that you are equidistant from both loudspeakers for best stereo imaging. Aim to form an isosceles triangle with the speakers and have them pointing slightly inwards so that they both face your listening position.

6 Essential Questions To Ask Before Upgrading

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

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

2 Is it worth changing my arm?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why not start enjoying an entirely new level of performance?

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



ORIGIN LIVE LTD
Tel: +44 02380 578877
originlive@originlive.com
www.originlive.com



Reproducing the original sound

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

£1 million event with 400 new items

Analogue		Amplifiers		Digital		Loudspeakers	
Anston RD11s c/w Grace 707, vgc+ boxed	used 399	AMR 777 Integrated	dem 1999	Arcam Alpha 8, excellent	used 149	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	new 799
Audiolab phono stage and line preamp	dem 999	Anatek CM0.5/ME500 Class A Monos	dem 1199	Arcam Alpha 7, remote, excellent	used 119	Acoustic Energy AE1 Mk3 Reference standmount	new 1249
Audio Synthesis AFG2 phono stage excellent	used 475	Arthem Integrated 2 Valve Integrated	used 459	Arcam Alpha 8se, excellent boxed	used 199	Acoustic Energy AE 1 Mk11 in Gloss black	dem 799
Avid Acutus Ref power supply	dem 2499	Arcam A38 Integrated amplifier	used 799	Arcam CD23, excellent	used 399	Alacritty Audio Caterhurn Classic, lightcased, £2k new	dem 499
Avid Pellar phono stage	dem 399	Arcam P38 Power amplifier	used 729	Arcam CD73, excellent boxed	used 199	Arcadyis LS35A look & soundlikes, £800 new	dem 499
Avid Valere SP Lutable	new 2749	Atoll IN 200 amplifier	new 800	Arcam CD37, excellent	used 799	Art Audio Siletto in Maple	dem 599
BATVXP10 Phono stage, vgc+ and superb sound	used 1999	Audio Fight Pre and Flight 50 Class A power	dem 3999	Arcam Alpha 9 DCS ring cad chipset, lovely!	used 279	Aspara Acoustics H16 in Oak	new 1999
BenZ Micro LP, boxed plenty of life left	used 1199	Audio Analogue Puccini, remote, excellent	used 349	Arcam CD72, excellent remote boxed	used 99	Asura Physics Tempo in Cherry, fair	dem 699
BenZ Micro Ruby, Wood H, boxed plenty of life left	used 599	Audio Analogue Bellini V6/Donizetti Cento,	dem 2249	Astin Trew AT3000 CD	dem 349	Aurum Cantus Music Goddess in Gloss black	dem 699
BenZ Micro L04, boxed plenty of life left	used 499	Audio Analogue Spissimo Integrated	dem 599	Atoll ST200 streamer	new 899	B&W DM60153, vgc+	used 249
Cartridge Man Conductor Air Bearing Tonearm	new 499	Audio Research Ref 610 Monoblocks, vgc+ new	dem 599	Atoll 1005E DAC	new 299	B&W DM60253, vgc+	used 349
Cartridge Man Music Maker	dem 599	Audio Analogue Maestro Ref SE Integrated	dem 379	Audio Alchemy digital transmission interface/psu	used 99	B&W 804s, excellent boxed in cherry	used 1999
Cartridge Man Classic £1250 new	dem 599	Audio Analogue Puccini SE amp, Black	dem 599	Audio Analogue Maestro SE CD	dem 399	B&W 804D, excellent in Piano black boxed	used 3999
Clearaudio Concept MM package, nr mint boxed	used 699	Audio Analogue Bellini/Donizetti Pre/Power	dem 599	Audio Analogue Paganini (later model)	dem 399	B&W 800D, nr mint, boxed	used 6999
Clearaudio Concept MC package	new 999	Audio Analogue Maestro Integrated	dem 399	Audio Synthesis Transcend CDT (Modified SONY)	dem 399	B&W N805 with matching stands, excellent!	used 1299
Clearaudio Performance DC package	dem 1999	Audio Project ap60 integrated	dem 99	Audio Lab 8000DAC, excellent boxed	used 199	B&W DM60253, vgc+	used 349
Clearaudio Innovation Compact, good condition	dem 1999	Audio Research SP14 Preamp/Amplifier, excellent	used 349	Ayre Evolution DVD	dem 1999	B&W DM60153, excellent boxed	used 549
Clearaudio Unity Tonearm excellent boxed	used 699	Audio Research D240 Power Amplifier, vgc+	used 1499	Castle Harlech, good condition in Cherry	used 549	Diason Arts	dem 999
Conrad Johnson Premier Six phono preamplifier	used 1999	Audio Research Ref 610 Monoblocks, vgc+ boxed	used 1799	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	dem 99	EB Acoustics ER1	new 199
Consonance T988 Univolet Tonearm	dem 399	Audio Research LS25mk2, excellent boxed	used 1299	Cambridge Audio Dacmagic (newer model)	used 99	Eminent Technology LFT8, some marks	used 499
Consonance Cyber 40 phono stage	dem 599	Audio Research Ref 210T Monoblocks, excellent	used 899	Chapter Audio Sonnet CD & Nevo remote	used 699	Epos M22 in Cherry	dem 549
Consonance Cyber 40 phono stage	dem 599	Audio Synthesis PAS-02 Passive, excellent	used 599	Chord Qute EX DAC, excellent boxed	dem 399	Final 400 electrostatics	dem 749
Dual CS505s, various from	used 79	Audiolab 8000Q/MS, silver, excellent boxed	used 899	Chord Qute EX DAC, excellent boxed	dem 399	Final 400 sub (for the ES200 electrostatics)	dem 250
Garrard 401, Slate Audio plinth	used 799	Audiolab 8000MX, excellent	used 899	Consonance Cur2 2 Linear MK11	new 799	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Haddock 242 Export,	dem 599	Audiolab 8000C and P, excellent boxed	used 399	Consonance CD2	dem 299	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Leema Agena phono preamp	dem 1749	Audiolab 8000C vgc boxed	used 199	Consonance Droplet, vgc+	dem 899	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Leema Elements phono stage	dem 299	Audiolab 8000P Pre/Power	dem 799	Consonance Mini Droplet	dem 699	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Lehmann Black Cube phono stage	dem 299	Audio Sterling Integrated	dem 499	Consonance Ref SACD 2.0 cd player,	dem 699	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Lehmann Black Cube SE phono stage	dem 299	Audion Slinger Integrated	dem 499	Cyrus DACXP, excellent boxed	used 949	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Linn Sondek, Ekos, Lingo, boxed	used 2249	Audion Slinger Knight PSE valve monoblocks	dem 1999	Cyrus DX1Tse, excellent, boxed	used 449	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Linn Sondek, Ittok, Valhalla, vgc+	used 899	Avalanche Z502 (Luxman), great bargain preamp	used 199	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Linn Sondek, Cirkus, Valhalla, front mount motor	used 599	AM Lab series Integrated Amplifier, with remote	used 849	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Linn Sondek, Lingo, Nam Aro, superb	used 2499	BATVX50se preamp/ifer, vgc+	used 2499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Linn Sondek, Basic plus, Valhalla, G1042, VGC+	used 699	Carm MEA monoblocks	used 399	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Linn Sondek, Grace 707, task psu, VGC+	used 599	Chapter Audio Couplet Power Amplifier	dem 1999	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Linn Basic Plus, vgc+	used 499	Chord Electronics Mezzo 140, excellent	used 1499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Luxman PD264, excellent	used 499	Conrad Johnson Premier 18, boxed with remote	dem 1799	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Lyra Erosion Step up	used 1499	Consonance Cyber 10 Integrated	dem 799	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Mana Reference wall shelf	used 299	Consonance Cyber 222 valve preamp	dem 699	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Mania Reference table	used 299	Consonance Ref 8.8 integrated valve amp	dem 999	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Michell Gyrococ Export, Origin Live Silver, boxed	used 1199	Consonance Cyber 211 monos c/w Pavane valves	dem 2999	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Michell Orbe Platter kit complete	used 299	Consonance r50 preamplifier	dem 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Michell QC Power supply, excellent	used 299	Dopand CCA28, excellent	used 699	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Michell ISO, vgc+ renowned phono stage	used 199	Creek OS2 Integrated, vgc+	dem 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Michell Technorm A in black as new mint/boxed	used 899	Creek Destiny Integrated	dem 279	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Michell Gyro SE Lutable	used 899	Cyrus SmartPower, excellent	dem 699	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Michell Focus One, Focus Arm, excellent, new lrd	used 899	Densen B200300 Pre/Power, excellent	used 879	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Moth phono stage	dem 249	Densen Beat B340 power amp	used 699	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Musical Fidelity XLP5V3 phono stage	dem 99	Devialet Integrated, mint boxed	dem 1499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Musical Fidelity XLP5V8 phono stage	dem 199	EAR B34T Integrated amplifier	dem 1499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Naim Aro, excellent boxed	used 1499	Esoteric CCA28, excellent	dem 7799	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Nottingham Analogue Spacearm	used 299	Exposure X111 Monoblocks, excellent boxed	dem 2999	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Pioneer PL530 Direct Drive, good condition	used 299	GraaGM 50B Mk11 Integrated	dem 2999	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Project RPM 9 Lutable with arm and platform	used 59	Graff GM 100 valve power amp	used 1999	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Project PhonoBox 2, ex boxed	used 59	Krell KAV300, remote, excellent	used 799	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Project Debut 2, vgc+	used 99	Krell KAV400x excellent boxed with remote	used 1199	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega TTPSU, excellent	used 119	Leema Tucana 2 integrated amp in black	new 1999	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega Planar 2, RB250, excellent boxed	used 179	Leema Pyxis/Altair Reference Pre & Monos	dem 10499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega RP40	new 649	LFD Integrated amp LE MK11H	dem 1499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega RP8, Alpha Cartridge, excellent boxed	dem 1249	LFD Integrated, detail:is TBC	used 299	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega Planar 3, RB300 excellent	used 249	Linn Koektor Preamp/ifier	used 299	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega RP3 Elys, cartridge, excellent boxed	used 399	Magnum MF125 Monoblocks vgc	used 299	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega RP6, excellent boxed	used 599	Meridian 501V preamp, excellent	used 299	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rega EOS phono stage	used 199	Meridian 501 PE/555 power	used 699	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Revolver Replay, c/w Jeltco arm	dem 749	Microgram IA100, great integrated, boxed	dem 599	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Roksan Xenex, XPS2, Linn Fit	used 349	Musical Fidelity M6, excellent boxed	used 1399	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Roksan Xenex, XPS, SME Fit	used 349	Musical Fidelity A1 FB1 Preamp & PSU	new 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Rotel RP3000 Direct Drive TT with matching arm	used 249	Musical Fidelity M3, excellent boxed, REDUCED	used 649	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Graham Slee Era Gold V MM phono stage	dem 299	Musical Fidelity M1PWR, excellent boxed	used 349	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Graham Slee Elevator EXP step up	dem 179	Musical Fidelity X150, excellent boxed	used 349	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Graham Slee Fidelity Arb3	dem 119	Musical Fidelity X-T100 Integrated	dem 249	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Graham Slee Gram Amo2	dem 349	Naim NAIT X52, excellent boxed	used 899	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Graham Slee Elevator EXP Step up	used 299	Naim NAIT X5, excellent boxed	used 799	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
SME 3009, excellent boxed	used 249	Naim NAP25, excellent late boxed olive	used 1199	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
SME 3009.3, excellent boxed	used 249	Naim NAP150, excellent boxed	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
SME 3012, excellent	used 799	Naim NAC1252, ex demo, mint boxed	used 1199	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Sumiko Blackbird high output mvc cartridge	dem 299	Naim NAC202, vgc+ boxed just Naim serviced	used 1199	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Sumiko Virutose mvc, details tsc	dem 299	Naim NAIT 5 mk2, excellent boxed	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Systemdek 11x Linn Basic Plus & K9	used 199	Naim NAP180, excellent boxed	used 599	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Systemdek 11s, Linn Basic LVX, rare superior S' build	used 299	Naim NAC102, excellent boxed	used 249	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Technics SL120, SME3300s excellent	used 399	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Technics SL160 HD Lutable	new 1199	Naim NAC112X/NAP155X, boxed remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Thorens TD160 Fully Automatic, excellent	used 249	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Thorens TD160 Audio Technica arm, boxed	used 249	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Thorens TD209 Lutable package	dem 699	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Thorens TD203 Blue Lutable	dem 699	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Tom Evans Grove, 0.85mv/100 ohm, excellent	used 849	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Townshend Elite Rock, Merlin, Excalibur	used 999	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Trichord Dino MC PSU	dem 399	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
VDH Color MC cartridge	new 3499	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
VDH Concor MC cartridge	new 1999	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
VDH MC One Special Edition M/C cartridge	new 749	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
VTL TP2 S phono stage (new)	new 1749	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199
Wilson Benesch Act 1 Tonearm, nr mint superb	used 799	Naim NAC112/NAP150, remote	used 499	Cyrus DCS6E2, excellent, boxed	used 399	Focal XE Book Active Mini Monitors, mint	dem 199

Radio/Recorders

Arcam Alpha, vgc+	used 29
Arcam T61, vgc+	used 79
Audiolab 8000T, tuner	used 199
Creek T43 FM tuner	new 99
Creek Evolution Tuner, excellent	used 199
Cyrus FM7.5, excellent boxed	used 149
Denon TU-S10	used 199
Denon DRM703 3 head	used 49
Marantz DR4050 CD Recorder, REDUCED	used 149
Marantz DR6000 CD Recorder, REDUCED	used 149
Musical Fidelity Xplora Tuner	new 149
Naim NAT05, excellent	used 299
Naim NAT01 & NAPST, excellent boxed	used 899
Nakamichi BZ, excellent	used 149
Nakamichi CR, excellent	used 99
Pure T01ES DAB Tuner	used 89
Quad FM4, later grey version, vgc+	used 149
Quad FM3, vgc+	used 99
Revox B250 Tuner in black/gold finish	used 349
Rotel RT1080, excellent	used 149
Rotel RT650 Tuner	dem 29
Yamaha HR1300 Professional Recorder	dem 199

AV/Accessories/Cables

Acoustic Energy Reference speaker stand	new 199
BCD glass rack	new 499
Elemental Audio Equipment Rack	dem 499
Elemental Audio speaker stands	dem 499
ErgoAMT phones with Amp 2 (£2.5k new)	dem 1499
Experience Filtration mains filter	dem 399
Experience Filtration 5 way block with 3m cable	dem 399
HiFi Racks 3 tier rack in Oak	dem 399
Isotek Nova power conditioner	dem 1199
Isotek 6 way distribution block	dem 399
Kotek 6 way distribution block	dem 399
Lehmann Rhineland	used 199
Musical Fidelity M1 HPAB	used 999
Musical Fidelity TripleX power supply	new 199
Naim XPS DR, ex demo	dem 2999
Naim HiCap 2, excellent boxed	used 599
Naim HiCap 2002, Serviced	used 449
ProAudio Bono Reference Platform	dem 399
Townshend Isoida speaker cable, 3m pr canned	used 299
Townshend 4 ter Seismic rack	dem 499
Track Audio 4 speaker stands	dem 200

Special system deals

AMR 777 Amp and CD Player	dem Call
Audio Analogue Primo CD/Amp combo	dem 499
Consonance Pmg CD/Amp	dem 599
Cyrus Amp and CD package	dem 499
Diason Elements Amp & CD	dem 1499
Linn Klassik Movie 05, excellent boxed	used 699
Linn Klassik and Keosa speaker package	used Call
Naim Unit 2	dem 1999
Orelle EVO Cd and amp was £2700	used 799
Paragon Millennia One 5.0 AV Speaker system	used 399
QUAD 77 CD and Integrated Amp	used 399

Tel: 01642 267012 or 0845 6019390 Email: choice@2ndhandhifi.co.uk

Teac

HA-P50 headphone amplifier/DAC

IF YOU'VE INVESTED in a decent pair of headphones and hooked them up to your phone or tablet only to be underwhelmed by the sound quality, then the Teac HA-P50 headphone amplifier could be the answer. On its own, the audio output stage of most portable devices will struggle to drive a reasonable set of headphones, but with the help of a good DAC/headphone amp like this the improvement is apparent.

The HA-P50 is designed for use on the move, but it's equally at home as a desktop amp for listening to music on your PC. It can handle audio formats up to 24-bit/96kHz, though you'll need to download the Teac HR Audio Player app to use it with Apple devices.

It weighs in at 210g and measures 64 x 22 x 125mm (WxHxD) including the two fin-like protrusions that run along its sides and which are designed to protect the controls from accidental knocks. It's not the smallest or lightest headphone amp on the market, but the aluminium body feels reassuringly solid and it's clearly a well engineered piece of kit.

Well connected

The HA-P50 is supremely simple to set up and use and connectivity is impressive with both USB and micro USB inputs, plus an optical digital input for a CD, DVD or Blu-ray player. It will interface with both iOS and Android portable devices using their standard link cables, but also comes with a micro USB cable for connecting to a laptop. Power comes from a 2100mAh lithium-ion battery that's charged via USB and which Teac claims will give you eight hours of use.

While overall it's a beautifully crafted device, I do have some minor niggles. Firstly, I find the USB power cable has a tendency to work itself loose when connected to my laptop, which sometimes prevents charging. My second gripe concerns the two rubber bands supplied for strapping it to the back of your phone for use on the move. I'm not



convinced – it feels like a rather inelegant solution that makes the combined package very unwieldy and tricky to fit in your pocket.

Sonically, the HA-P50 provides a significant enhancement over the standard audio output of a smartphone, tablet or computer. I use it with iPhone, iPad and laptop and the improvement is palpable. On their own you can feel the devices running out of steam, but with the DAC it's as though an audio veil is lifted – the soundstage opens up providing greater clarity and detail plus the bass becomes tauter with more punch.

A lossless CD rip of Coldplay's *Princess of China* is a tough ask for any audio system and it sounds pretty dreadful when played directly from my iPhone – flat, dull and lifeless. But I'm mightily impressed with the Teac's ability to transform the experience – the chorus soars and when Rihanna's vocals kick in it regains that ability to send shivers down my spine.

U2's *Achtung Baby* is also capable of giving any audio system a workout and the Teac doesn't come up short. The hi-tempo guitar riffs on *Even Better Than The Real Thing* sound harsh and distorted without it, but are smoother and more refined with its help. Bass is also much improved, less flabby and more controlled.

Its abilities with high-resolution 24-bit/96kHz classical and jazz downloads are equally impressive. Vivaldi's *Four Seasons – Spring* sounds tinny and scratchy when the headphones are driven directly from my laptop, but it loses this abrasive edge with the Teac in the audio chain. Brahms' *Clarinet Quintet in B Minor* reveals an extended bass and much greater texture.

Jazz tracks such as Alexis Cole's *Ain't We Got Fun* sound more real and the ambient quality improves; switch back to the unaided audio output and the sax and double bass lines get more muddled and constrained. It's quite a striking comparison that cruelly exposes my computer's audio limitations.

Music and movement

If you're serious about listening to music on the move, the HA-P50 is an ideal companion device for your phone, iPod or tablet that will clearly enhance your audio experience. It has the added benefit of doubling as a desktop headphone amp when back home. At £299 it can't exactly be described as cheap, but it's a well-designed device that's a doddle to get to grips with and if you're looking for a headphone amp then this is a strong contender. **DH**

DETAILS

PRICE
£299

CONTACT
08712 001996

WEBSITE
teac-audio.eu

OUR VERDICT



Artisan Silver Cables

Ultimate Silver Dream interconnects



IF YOU'RE YET to be convinced that interconnects can make a significant difference to your system's performance, these silver cables could leave you in no doubt that your equipment has more to give. No compromise silver cables used to be the preserve of the wealthy, but Isle of Wight-based Artisan Silver Cables is aiming to change all that.

Audio designers have long understood that silver has the lowest electrical resistance of all conductive metals, but often silver cables are stratospherically priced or they're stereotyped as producing a brighter rendition of music, with a kind of one-trick-pony emphasis on new sparkling treble detail. Certainly this can be the case, but from extensive experimentation I have determined that an overly lean sound is probably a side effect of not using enough silver. Increase the amount of silver in the connections and I believe you gain all the benefits that this precious material has to offer.

Silver sounds

In this cable design there are eight pure solid silver conductors of 26AWG thickness (about 0.4mm) – twice as many as Artisan's highly accomplished entry-level cables. Each conductor is individually wrapped in over-sized Teflon tubing.

The 8-way braided configuration is claimed to reject unwanted radio frequency interference present in our homes. Many cables use shielding to reject RFI, but Artisan Silver Cables believes that any shielding interacts with the signal that the cable is carrying, potentially interfering with signal purity and smearing vital micro-detail.

The RCA connectors also use silver-plating in preference to the more commonly seen gold. This is done to maximise electrical conductivity. Alister Staniland of Artisan Cables claims "Gold actually conducts less well than copper and is only really used because it doesn't oxidise or tarnish. Silver can oxidise, but oxidised silver does not lose



conductivity and will remain the superior connection."

Playing a high-resolution version of Jen Chapin's *You Haven't Done Nothin'*, the immediate impression is I'm hearing more of everything I like about my reference system. Bass stands out as particularly strong with extra depth matched with an extra tautness. Deep notes feel fuller, but without any of the flab or overhang that can be created by some fulsome copper designs. Leading edges of bass

Mid and upper mid-band frequencies are delivered with a natural ease

notes have real detail. It also takes cables like these to remind us how much higher frequency detail is necessary to deliver fully convincing drum sounds. The legendary drum improvisation test track on *Sheffield Drive* is revealed to have extra depth and huge slam, but also loads of higher harmonic detail.

Mid and upper mid-band frequencies are delivered with a completely natural ease that makes vocals and piano notes particularly free flowing and communicative. Gillian Welch's voice on *Look At Miss Ohio* just hangs in the air, beguiling me that I'm getting my own personal performance. Partnering these cables with transistor components or valve amps in particular you can achieve a

silky vocal delivery that is utterly effortless and intimate.

As anticipated, high frequencies feel extended and highly defined, but not in a dry, etched way that some esoteric cables can deliver extra treble energy. Instead, these cables keep this vital detail feeling liquid and highly joined up to lower frequencies. The fine rendition of high frequency micro-dynamic sounds gives an extra level of insight around the positioning of instruments and the nature of the recording space and imaging is also extremely precise. The combination of fast bass, sumptuous mid-band delicacy and extended treble energy also seem to add up to greater front-to-back depth to my soundstage, with lead vocals coming a touch forward and better separated from other similar frequencies.

Grease lightning

These cables sound lightning fast and come across as having excellent timing and musicality. High-end cables can deliver new insight in a slightly forensic way, where you know you've been told more, but the music can feel poorer for it. Not here, the Ultimate Silver Dreams strike a perfect balance between conveying information and emotion. It's as though their only job is to get out of the way of delivering the message to my ears, getting me closer to the music. I'm just getting more of everything I value. **CW**

DETAILS

PRICE
£259 for 1m

CONTACT
07551 230272

WEBSITE
artisansilvercables.com

OUR VERDICT



icon Audio

Stereo 60 MkIII M KT150 Integrated Amplifier



"It knows few equals and in these value conscious days makes it a pearl almost beyond price" Roy Gregory

hi-fi+

ICON AUDIO
STEREO 60 MKIII
KT150 £2599.95



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

A lovely sound with plenty of power and adjustability. A well developed design.



designed by David Shaw

In 1958 GEC introduced the KT88 probably the best ever Hi Fi valve. For 52 years it reigned supreme. Then came the Tung Sol KT120. Bigger and better, with more power to suit the demanding loudspeakers of today. Now we are announcing the arrival of the KT150 bigger still, but more refined. In recent months we have been working to get the best out of this fabulous new tube and we think it is simply astonishing! Single Ended, Ultralinear and Triode.

As a company run by Hi Fi enthusiasts we regularly evaluate our amplifiers to ensure they are the best of their kind. Whilst we do not make changes for change sake, if we can make a significant improvement to the sound quality and reliability we will do so. The new MK III version of the Stereo 60 now comes with several improvements in sound and performance, and build quality. This is our biggest integrated amplifier. It is ideal for someone wanting a very dynamic fast sound. It has a big power supply, big output transformers, and uses the excellent new KT120/KT150, and comes with many features. An excellent alternative to a transistor amplifier, the ST60III will deliver the finest detail of modern recordings in a more vivid way and present jazz and rock music without harshness.

Two Amplifiers in One. The importance of Triode The triode sound is preferred by many hi fi fans, although the power is lower in the ST60 is still ample for all but the most demanding levels. Ignored or neglected in the past we gave equal priority to the triode function so the full quality is maintained. With our UL/Triode switch you can change from 80 watts to 40 watts of pure triode sound at the flick of a switch.

Now with "Easy Bias" Meter We think of our amplifiers as musical instruments. Like a piano needs occasional tuning, big amplifiers need the bias checking. This way you can be sure of 100% performance all of the time. Simple with our "easy bias" meter. If the pointer is in the "black" it's correct! Also useful to check if your valves are worn or faulty. Long term performance is important to us and this useful aid will take the guesswork out of maintaining your amplifier.

Attractive Valve cover Most valve amplifier covers look as though they were done as a cost saving after thought, and don't exactly enhance the look of the amplifier. They are rarely seen in advertisements. We think that something you will use every day should look attractive. That's why we use 18 pieces of laser cut Perspex assembled with a further 20 precision components. See picture on our website.

Our new series of "Low Distortion Tertiary" output transformers are the best we have ever made, enabling us to reduce global feedback by about 40%. All our amplifiers are designed and finished in Leicester. Warranty and service is done by the engineers that designed them so you can be sure of long term performance. We incorporate a "standby" switch in order to protect those precious cathodes from damage until they have warmed up. All of our amplifiers are hand made using "point to point" soldering without using printed circuit boards. We are convinced this sounds better. It allows for very easy servicing, upgrades and modifications. Remote controlled volume included for fine tuning your listening. High quality components are used throughout including an "ALPS" volume control, silver plated PTFE audio cable SCR capacitors audiophile resistors. A choke regulated power supply adds a richness to the sound quality that silicon devices alone cannot do. Recording loop included. In short we have created an amplifier of excellent flexibility and quality which retains the qualities traditional of traditional design and performance. Bespoke upgrades available including silver/copper capacitors, valves and design. (*Excluding EL34)

Buy through your dealer or direct from us, free delivery, 30 home trial, part exchange welcome. Choosing any Hi Fi component never easy. As long established company you can trust our advice and service. Icon Audio have one of the biggest and most respected ranges of amplifiers from our 1w HP8 to our 150w MB150. See our website for more.

Ring or email for sales and service. We sell and fit a wide range of valves and upgrades. Dealers throughout the UK and the World.



Mavros Interconnects & Speaker Cables

“ **MAVROS SPEAKER CABLE** : One of the truly great cables currently on the market. This is the best set of speaker cables that I've ever heard. ”
Truly genre defining.

“ **MAVROS INTERCONNECT** : These are not cables that try too hard to impress. They just allow the music to flow naturally. ”

HiFi World, July 2013

ATLAS[®]
the performance connection

atlascables.com



AudioQuest NRG-X3 power cable

FORMED BACK IN the eighties in California by audio enthusiast Bill Low, AudioQuest products are now sold in over 60 countries worldwide. The company believes that no matter how good an AC power source is, distortion can be added from within, especially stranded cables, and this cannot be completely eliminated by mains filters and power supplies. The NRG-X3 cable makes use of semi-solid concentric-packed conductors as a cost-effective, flexible alternative to typical stranded conductors. Its conductors use fewer and larger-diameter strands that do not change position down the length of the cable. Of course, solid conductors are the complete solution to strand distortion, but the semi-solid conductors avoid many of the distortion mechanisms of stranded

conductors and yet retain flexibility. The conductors themselves are made from long-grained copper (LGC), which AudioQuest considers to be vastly superior in performance to the more widely used oxygen-free high-conductivity (OFHC) copper. LGC has fewer oxides, fewer impurities and fewer grain boundaries within the conducting material than OFHC and so is considered a better performer.

Let's twist again

The NRG-X3 employs a helical-array geometry (circular-spiral), designed to offer better dynamic contrast and clarity than with a parallel or multiple twisted pairs configuration.

Both the IEC connector and the UK 13A mains plug are moulded onto the cable and internally connected to the cables using AudioQuest's cold-weld system in order to ensure that the

structural integrity of the conductor is kept completely intact. This method uses a combination of high pressure at the point of contact and the use of copper or silver-impregnated paste. The UK plug is fitted with a standard 13A mains fuse.

When I compare the NRG-X3 with a standard 'kettle' lead on a CD player, I can perceive a subtle improvement in instrument focus. I also consider the silences to be somehow quieter, making it a good value upgrade to any hi-fi component. **NR**



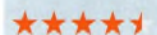
DETAILS

PRICE
£65 for a 0.9m cable,
£85 for a 1.8m cable,
£115 for a 3m cable

CONTACT
01249 848873

WEBSITE
audioquest.co.uk

OUR VERDICT



Lindy HF-20 Lightweight Stereo Headphones

IF YOU ARE in the market for a pair of low-cost, on-ear headphones, then you'll want to take a look at this extremely affordable offering from Lindy Electronics.

The ultra lightweight (only 70g) design makes the HF-20 well suited to music on the go, and will appeal to people who, like me, prefer on- or over-ear headphones rather than earphones. I must admit to having problems with earphones falling out of my ears, but I imagine I'm in the minority with this.

The lightweight headphones are fitted with 30mm neodymium drivers that are designed to provide a clear, high output in the midrange and treble frequencies backed up by a strong bass performance. The drivers have a claimed impedance of 32ohms and are high output devices fitted with neodymium magnets. The headband is fully adjustable and the

HF-20s have a lightweight 1.2m cable terminated with a gold-plated 3.5mm stereo jack. The earpieces are able to swivel offering comfortable coupling to the ear and help with portability.

Head of the class

First of all, I connect the HF-20s to my valve headphone amp to see how they perform in a high-end system. I find them surprisingly good, considering they are very much a budget offering. The sound stage is open and expansive, but a little lacking in the top end in absolute terms. After careful positioning on the ears (a necessary requirement of any on-ear headphones), the bass performance is very acceptable.

As these headphones are more likely to be used with a portable player, I next connect them to a Samsung Galaxy S3 smartphone and again the full and well-balanced sound is so



much more than I expect from such an affordable set of headphones. Listening to a wide range of musical genres shows that the HF-20s are versatile performers. For the money, it is difficult to find fault with them, and they are highly recommended for an audition. **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£15
CONTACT
01642 754000
WEBSITE
lindy.co.uk

OUR VERDICT



Imagine Being Much Closer to the Musicians with **DUET DCT++ CS** - The Low Distortion Cable




Duet DCT++ CS Single Wire



Duet DCT++ CS BiWire

Duet DCT++ CS Reduces Many Layers of Distortion in your Music Including:

- *Graham Wallis* LEGACY RANGE Anti-Vibration stabilisers to reduce distortion caused by vibrations travelling through conductor wires. 
- Reduced Transient Phase Distortion due to increased spacing between conductors for a more open sound.
- Anti RFI filtering applied directly to each conductor wire for cleaner, clearer sounds.
- Low noise and reduced distortion through careful monitoring of conductor wire direction.
- Advanced Deep Cryogenic Treatment and Crystal Sound Processes for improved timing, depth and bass response applied to both the cable and the plugs.
- Award Winning **Hi-Fi Choice Recommended ******* Rhodium Plated Black Rhodium Universal Banana Plugs.



Contact Us Today!

and discover how to remove more layers of distortion from your music

www.blackrhodium.co.uk
sales@blackrhodium.co.uk
+44 (0)1332 342233



Black Rhodium

futureshop

connecting you with AV excellence | .co.uk

Hi-Fi Cable, Home Cinema Cable & AV Connectivity Specialists

Expert Advice & Sales

0208 905 1555

+44 20 8905 1555



Wireworld Platinum Starlight USB



AudioQuest Diamond Ethernet



Atlas EOS 4sq Rhodium Power



Nordost Heimdall 2 Audio Cable



Chord Signature Reference Cable



Monster ISF 2000 HDMI Cable



Van Den Hul The Rock 3T Cable



Tellurium Q Black Speaker Cable

Hi-Fi Cable & Home Cinema Cable Specialists

Bring your hi-fi to life with our high performance award winning cables

www.futureshop.co.uk - call 0208 905 1555

FutureShop.co.uk, Unit 5 MODA Centre, Stirling Way, Borehamwood, Herts, WD6 2BW, England, UK

Pure

Pop Midi FM/DAB radio

GIVEN THE CHANCE to design your own digital radio what features would you prioritise? I only ask because that is what Pure did with a bunch of consumers when it sat down to design the Pop range. In addition to the obvious – good sound quality – the most asked for feature was a small footprint, so the Pop takes a vertical shape, much like Pure's Evoke D2 range, with the Midi measuring 17cm high, 9cm wide and 10cm deep. For 'good' sound we have FM and DAB.

There are three models in the range, namely the Mini, Midi and Maxi, with the latter featuring stereo drivers. The Mini and the Midi (on test here) are mono models and the Midi has a full-range 3in drive unit served by a claimed nominal 1.6W RMS.

It turns out radio listeners want the controls on top rather than on the front and they also want instant access to radio content. Hence, what we have here is five preset buttons and a large circular one on the top that pops up and down to switch the radio on or off. Powering on always returns the radio to the last listened to source and volume setting. This button also acts as the volume control where it wobbles when rotated, which is not especially reassuring. Otherwise, build quality is very good.

Automatic for the People

Tuning in DAB stations is automatic and rapid, but with FM you have to repeatedly and labouriously press buttons to move through the frequency band, 0.5Mhz at a time. If I'd been asked by Pure for my priorities I would have said a mute button was essential, but there is none, and I'm a tad worried about how durable the on/off button is. I guess options to adjust treble and bass weren't requested either as these can only be accessed by using the menu system.

Another key consumer demand was a display that constantly shows the time, and this is provided in 12mm-high letters. The white on black display is highly legible.



If you opt for the Bluetooth version, you'll find altering the volume cannot be done using the radio's dial. Nor does the radio show any text info such as song titles when using Bluetooth. I'd expect Bluetooth to appear as an option (alongside DAB and FM) whenever I press the source button, but since the feature has been shoehorned in as an after thought you have to press the menu button and scroll/press several buttons.

Pure has provided an additional option for battery power as the Pop can accommodate Pure's ChargePak D1 unit or, for the first time on a Pure radio, four AA batteries.

When assessing the Pop Midi's performance it's important not to forget it is a bedside/kitchen radio with a meagre power output. It's also priced at well under £100, while similarly equipped rivals from the likes of Ruark, Tivoli Audio and Roberts cost between £140 and £200.

Popping the button, tuning into DAB and heading straight to Classic FM for a dose of Schumann's *Romance Opus 28 No2*, I'm impressed by the small speaker's overall clarity and the driver seems highly adept with higher frequencies. The brass section of Elgar's *Pomp And Circumstance March No 4* are polished and lively with the strings rendered smoothly in the background. The soundstage is fairly broad for a mono speaker, but low

power means the sound won't go loud without becoming tiring even if it remains free of distortion. Free, except that is, with dialogue. Jamie Crick's voice on Classic FM is notably lispy. Switching to Bluetooth throws up another area of distortion that's evident on the lower registers of Chris Isaak's voice in *Wicked Game* (an AAC download, streamed from an iPhone). By contrast, his higher notes are scintillatingly vivid. And everything sounds rosy with *Driving Away from Home (Jim's Tune)* by It's Immaterial, which has plenty of edginess and a nice sense of dynamic balance from the ensemble of instruments.

No ace of bass

Reproducing meaningful bass is a massive challenge to such a small and low powered speaker and despite a certain adeptness at keeping lower frequencies nice and tight, mids and highs feel unanchored with bass notes almost sounding as if its coming from a separate source in the background.

The new Pure is not the perfect DAB radio by any means, but the Pop Midi is certainly more user friendly than some of Pure's Evoke range and its lack of acoustic refinement isn't enough to stop it from being a useful DAB/Bluetooth radio in a kitchen or bedroom. **AJ**

DETAILS

PRICE
£80
CONTACT
0845 1489001
WEBSITE
pure.com

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

Audio Suspension Isolation Plinth

IT'S GOOD WHEN people who clearly have an interest in music get involved with the design of audio equipment and accessories. Audio Suspension, which was formed by a long-serving professional DJ/audio engineer, has been working with graduates of Imperial University and the Royal College of Art to come up with designs of audio equipment supports that combine design flair with good functionality. To complement its ASU-100 wall shelf, Audio Suspension has recently launched an isolation plinth that is made from the same high-grade 20mm acrylic sheet as the ASU-100.

Hand-made in Sussex, the isolation plinth has an in-built spirit level and aluminium feet. Each foot uses a high quality 5/8in Chrome Grade 100 steel bearing sandwiched between two aluminium disks containing nitrile rubber rings. In

the top disk, the rubber cushions the acrylic plinth and in the lower disk, it provides a scratch-free contact with either your shelf or rack support.

Good vibrations

Each ball bearing fits in a recess within the upper and lower disks, which means they have no more than a hairline width contact area. This combination of chrome steel, aluminium, and nitrile rubber within the feet is designed to act as a barrier against unwanted vibrations and also helps to absorb a wide variety of unwanted sound frequencies. The plinth measures 550 x 57 x 450mm (WxHxD) overall, including the feet.

The isolation plinth shelf is made from thick acrylic, which partly accounts for its high cost.



It is hand flame polished giving a hazy finish to the edges that complement the mirror top and bottom surface. It is very sturdy and will support loads of up to 40kg, so more than enough for any turntable or power amplifier.

Placing the isolation plinth underneath my record deck results in an improvement in the midrange frequencies. The music flows more easily and I also find that there is a discernible tightening up of the bass, with more attack and punch. Only the high price scores against it. **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£350

CONTACT
01273 270613

WEBSITE
audiosuspension.com

OUR VERDICT



ISOkinetik Graphite Cartridge Stabiliser

IN THE SAME way that a hum loop is caused by multiple earths in an audio system, a mechanical feedback loop can occur when playing a record on a turntable. Physical vibrations of the phono cartridge in the headshell can be conveyed down the tonearm, then through the turntable and platter and back to the stylus via the record. The purpose of the ISOkinetik Graphite Cartridge Stabiliser is to break this loop and significantly reduce the mechanical vibrations transmitted from the cartridge to the headshell and *vice versa*.

The graphite material used in the Stabiliser is HDG (High Density Graphite) carbon, which is formed of microscopic spheres that have a high capacity for dissipating vibrations. Unwanted vibrations have a deleterious effect within the music reproduction chain and this graphite material dissipates these mechanical

vibrations and stops them from entering the audio system.

The Stabiliser is available in two versions; a universal model that is suitable for almost all headshells and another specially made for Rega tonearms, which is the one reviewed here. Both versions weigh 1.8g and are 3mm thick. They may seem expensive for what they are, but HDG is a costly raw material and these stabilisers are actually cheaper than some other makes available.

Easy does it

Installation is simply a case of removing the two screws holding the cartridge in the headshell, inserting the Stabiliser between the cartridge and headshell, and then re-fitting the cartridge. Apart from checking the tracking force and the alignment of the cartridge in the headshell, the tonearm will need to be raised by

3mm in order to maintain the correct VTA (vertical tracking angle) of the stylus when the record is playing on the turntable.

When I play my copy of Stravinsky's *The Firebird Suite* performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, I find that the Stabiliser has improved the overall sound. In particular, the bass response appears fuller in character and at the same time remains well controlled and tight. The Stabiliser really does make a difference! **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE
£50
CONTACT
0208 2418890
WEBSITE
isokinetik.co.uk

OUR VERDICT



"a discernible improvement in overall clarity... The PowerBar™ is an excellent quality product"

Hi-Fi Choice, May 2014



✓ Enhanced with Super Burn-in Lite process

60 Day Money Back Guarantee

To claim your PowerBar with FREE integrated SuperClamp surge protection

go to the web address below, select your choice of PowerBar and tick the SuperClamp option. Then enter offer code HFCPOWERBAR at checkout. Or simply phone us on 01539 797300 quoting code HFCPOWERBAR. Offer ends 24th Sept'14.

From just £89!

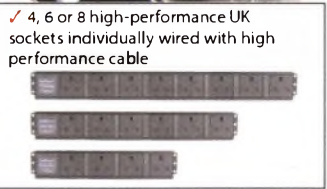


✓ Robust extruded aluminium casework

✓ Optional PowerMax Plus™ - our great value custom made mains cable

Order before 24th Sept '14 for FREE SuperClamp surge protection - saving you £10.50

SAVE 10% on a PowerMax Plus™ mains cable when you buy both together



✓ 4, 6 or 8 high-performance UK sockets individually wired with high performance cable

POWERBAR™ mains extension only
Code 1168

4 way	£89.00
6 way	£114.00
8 way	£139.00

POWERBAR™ with 1m PowerMax Plus™ Code 1168

4 way	£139.35
6 way	£164.35
8 way	£189.35

Price includes 10% discount

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

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



Russ Andrews®
Exclusive UK distributor

Cables, amplifiers and the unexpected!

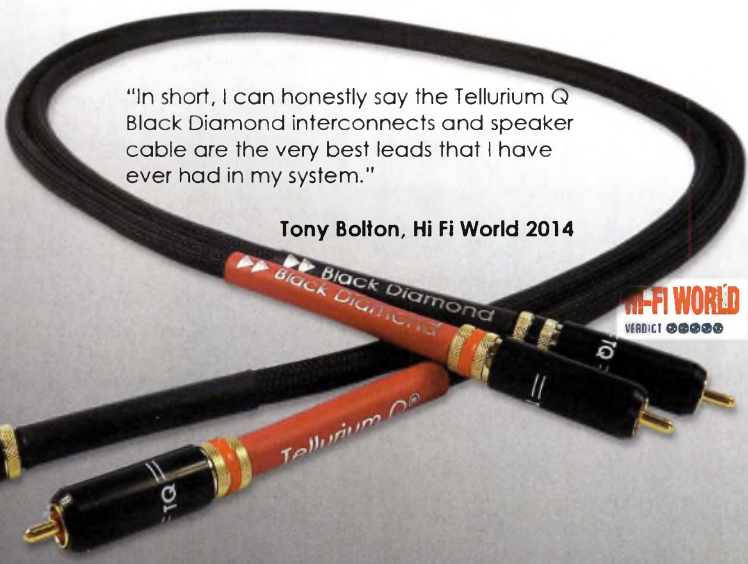


Tellurium Q®

Audio products designed to combat phase distortion

"In short, I can honestly say the Tellurium Q Black Diamond interconnects and speaker cable are the very best leads that I have ever had in my system."

Tony Bolton, Hi Fi World 2014



Please contact TQ or your nearest dealer to find out why there is so much excitement about these new cables
www.telluriumq.com

+44 (0)1458 251997

THE MUSIC EXCHANGE

ELECTRONIC

SYNTH

60's

EINSTURZENDE NEUBAUTEN

SOUNDTRACKS

TECHNO / HOUSE

TELL ME I BELONG

PSYCH / GARAGE

Destination:

NOTTINGHAM

The Music Exchange, the city's finest independent record shop, is a community-minded enterprise with international appeal, counting Sir Paul Smith among its fans. **Simon Berkovitch** goes digging

We are so proud to be part of Nottingham's community," says manager Joey Bell. "We offer something truly different with music retail."

No empty words, these. Welcome to The Music Exchange, a unique record store a short stroll from the city centre in the heart of the Creative Quarter – also home to textile workshops, a comic store and a writers' studio. Scratch the surface and there's plenty going on here: there's a vinyl pressing plant, a nearby bistro and performance space, a clutch of used vinyl stores, a thriving band scene and even a boutique record shop (see opposite). But the Exchange is arguably the glue that binds Nottingham's musical community together.

Joey has been with the shop since it opened in 2009, but became more heavily involved around three years ago. During that time "the

shop has changed so much", he says. "We first started run on donations from the public, stocking second-hand CDs, DVDs and vinyl. It was soon apparent there was a need for new vinyl in Nottingham. We moved premises two years ago. We needed a bigger shop."

Now in its Stoney Street home, the shop specialises in new vinyl, stocking a broad spectrum of records – from classic albums to contemporary releases – across a wide range of genres. A flick through the racks indicates that

It was important for our volunteers to have a shop that they could feel proud of and passionate about

there's good taste at work here, confirmed by the strains of Lee Hazelwood tumbling out of the speakers. "We try and offer all styles of music and are proud of our hand-picked selection," says Joey.

Unfamiliar musicians are equally – if not more – important to the Exchange's selection. Over 100 local artists are represented. "It's important for anybody to have an opportunity to have their work heard regardless of genre," says shop supervisor Tara Hill. "Promoting artists is important to the shop's ethos. It's good to support the local scene."

Tara has worked in the Exchange for two years. She started as a volunteer while working as a TEFL teacher, helping Joey out in the shop

on a part-time basis, eventually taking on her current full-time role as shop supervisor. And it's the volunteer programme that's integral to what makes the Exchange so special.

"We first set up The Music Exchange as part of Framework Housing Association – a homeless charity based in Nottingham," Joey explains. "We provide a safe platform for people to gain employment skills and rebuild social networks. We started out with volunteers from a day centre that provided support to Nottingham's homeless community. Many of our volunteers have fairly chaotic, unstable lives, so it was important for them to have a shop that they could feel proud of and passionate about."

The initiative was an instant hit. "The shop's programme was so popular that we opened it up to anyone," he continues. "We now have around 30 volunteers, ranging from students, the currently unemployed, those in full-time jobs who are giving their spare time to help, and people with health problems that limit the kind of work they do."

Do the right thing

"We also have managed to provide of our volunteer team with full-time employment. We are now part of Eve Trades, a social enterprise offering a fantastic selection of volunteering opportunities in Nottingham. It feels great to be part of something so big that's helping so many people."

Eve Trades Community Interest Company (CIC) incorporates eight social enterprises – of



Behind the counter culture: Tara Hill



which The Music Exchange is one – and a training venue. It operates like a business, producing goods and services, but manages its operations and redirects its surpluses in pursuit of social and environmental goals. As a social enterprise, Eve Trades reinvests any profits to support vulnerable and unemployed people by providing training, volunteering, work placement and employment opportunities within its social enterprises.

Among the 30 volunteers is Ant, who has Asperger's. Tara works with him once a week. "Ant's said to me that when he's in the shop, he feels like an adult," she says. "His loud vocal tics can be alarming for people when they first meet him, but he's yearning for independence – and hopefully we help with that."

One recent volunteer, Alex Walker, is a freelance graphic designer who lent skills to the Exchange's eponymous newspaper. Featuring editorial and photography contributions from staff, volunteers, customers and bands alike, it made its debut in April. The free quarterly is distributed to record shops around the country.

Haute couture

It's not just in print that The Music Exchange is raising the profile of the shop and the work of Eve Trades. A striking T-shirt based on the shop's window display (as are badges, DJ bags and mugs) with a naggingly familiar colour scheme hangs behind the counter. Closer inspection reveals a famous signature: sartorial guru Paul Smith. One of Nottingham's most famous sons, Sir Paul is a patron of the shop, whose postcards of encouragement are proudly tacked up behind the counter.

For the T-shirt, Sir Paul took the logo, added his signature colours and sold the limited edition in his flagship Covent Garden store. All profits went back to the Exchange. The association between Paul Smith and the shop doesn't end there: Joey and Tara DJed in the Covent Garden store and were also involved in a pop-up shop in Paul Smith Tokyo.



The Music Exchange proudly supports the local music scene



Shop manager Joey Bell with Sir Paul Smith

For the Exchange, Record Store Day (RSD) is "the best day of the year, in spite of the stress it brings", enthuses Tara. Queues formed outside from 8pm the day before, generating plenty of press. "Our fourth RSD was easily our biggest yet," confirms Joey. "We had customers camping overnight and there was a fantastic atmosphere. We wouldn't be the shop that we are without RSD. It put us on the map and has helped fuel a resurgence in vinyl's popularity."

The Exchange will also be involved with this year's Cassette Store Day (27 September). For last year's event, the staff hand-picked and duplicated a tape of local artists, limited to 50 copies, which sold out in a heartbeat.

Thinking about the future, Tara and Joey explain that the main thing is to develop and promote the website, a relatively new undertaking, and keep putting on local gigs. Forthcoming shows include eagerly anticipated gigs from Sleaford Mods and sludgy space-metallers Nadir. "It's important to support the local scene," Tara reiterates.

"We've just launched our online service, which has taken a long time to develop," explains Joey. "We always knew that this would be the best way to build the business," says Joey. "It's like having two shops at the moment, but we're starting to get the balance right – and it's proving to be a success."

Hopefully this success will continue in the face of impending competition: Rough Trade is opening a branch nearby. Tara's not fazed: she feels there's room for both businesses. "Rough Trade is so well known that it will bring more record tourists to Nottingham," she ventures. "I hope that they might employ some of our experienced volunteers, some of whom have worked here for three to four years."

Saying my goodbyes, I'm in no doubt as to where music enthusiasts should spend their cash in Nottingham and where Rough Trade should start its recruitment drive. "People can feel good about spending money with us," says Joey. "It benefits the community and they can see the good they are doing. Our staff love what they do, and that shines through." ●

BUY! CELL! TRADE!

"It's the logical outcome of making DIY art," says sound artist Benjamin Howett about Cell 14, the boutique record shop in his studio

"I'm into anything old and analogue," says former graffiti artist, cultural sociology graduate, electronic musician and now boutique record shop proprietor Benjamin Howett (pictured below). The 36-year-old has been involved in music making since 2005: "I use reel-to-reel tapes and old synths. Most digital stuff leaves me cold. I'm making music that's ambient without the ambience."

Ben's music is an eclectic, adventurous mix – one defiantly reflected in his boutique record shop, Cell 14, named after the number on the door of his small studio. You'll find Cell 14 in an old lace mill shared with about 20 other artists in the Carlton area of Nottingham; 15 minutes walk from the town centre. It's by appointment only, up a couple of flights, navigating a maze of corridors groaning under the weight of creativity within the building along the way. It's well worth making the effort.

Inside, a gorgeously presented display of limited runs of cassettes, CDRs and bespoke vinyl from local and international experimental musicians awaits. Cell 14 occupies a corner of the studio space where Ben makes his own music, released on his own micro-label, Kiks/Girlfriend, up and running since 2011. It's a space where art meets the record shop, best illustrated by one of the most limited runs in the store – a carved vinyl (good for 1,000+ plays, with a greater life-span than a lathe cut) edition of just three. Expensive to produce and a labour of love, the price tag is £30. Most of the shop's handpicked cassettes and CDRs cost about a fiver each.

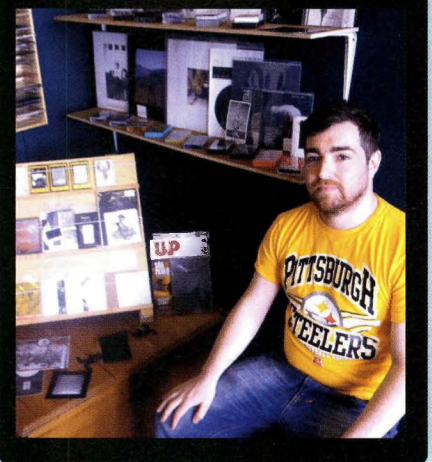
Cell 14 sprang into life in July and has proved for Ben to be "the lubrication to put a gig on" and feed back into the local scene. The launch party saw experimental acts Modulator ESP and Maurice Hotel Death blowing the collective minds of a capacity audience in the diminutive studio.

Ben's immediate ambitions are to touch base with more UK artists, distribute more vinyl, and have a pop-up shop at local gigs. "I'm thinking about putting more gigs on every three months," he says.

The bespoke record shop was "the logical outcome of making DIY art," he explains. "I had stuff lying around. I wanted to be more active locally than just going online. I'm driven by more than wanting this to be a record shop for the sake of it." It doesn't get more hands on than this. Cell 14 is undeniably a niche concern – but one all the better for it.

kiksbooks.blogspot.co.uk

Visits by appointment only

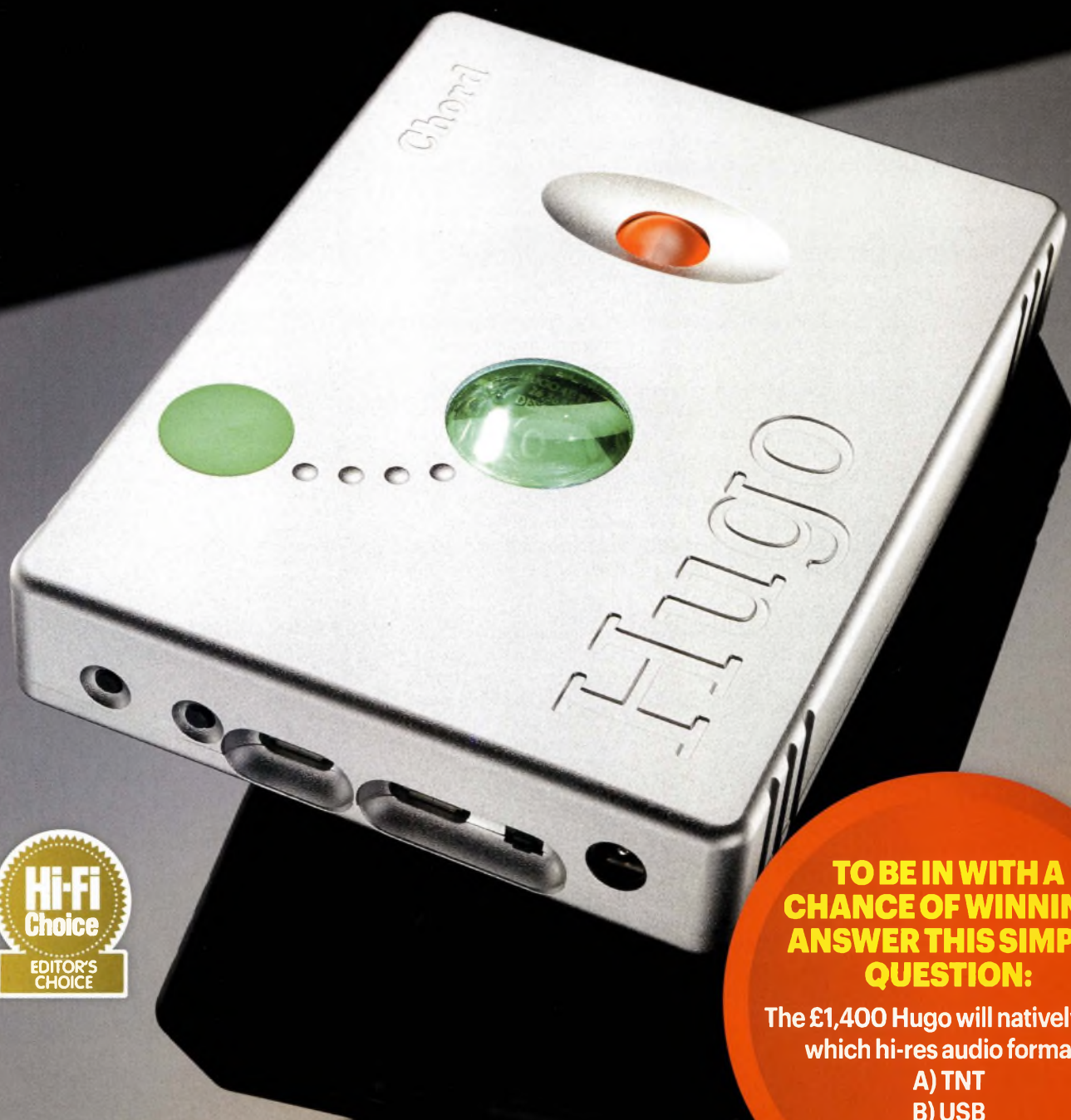


CONTACT DETAILS
 The Music Exchange 2 Stoney Street, Nottingham, NG1 1LG
 TELEPHONE: 0115 9583274
 WEBSITE: themusicexchange.org.uk
 OPENING HOURS: Tuesday to Sunday

WIN:

Chord Electronics' Hugo DAC/headphone amplifier

Sounding like no other digital converter, prepare to meet a game changer



**TO BE IN WITH A
CHANCE OF WINNING,
ANSWER THIS SIMPLE
QUESTION:**

The £1,400 Hugo will natively play
which hi-res audio format?

- A) TNT
- B) USB
- C) DSD

Perhaps one of the most disappointing things about digital audio is that it doesn't quite seem to reproduce all those nuances that you hear in music when listening in real time. Listening to a CD compared with listening to the artist perform live lacks the natural ebb and flow of the performance. And this is one area in which vinyl seems to be able to out-perform the silver disc. Speak to Chord Electronics' legendary designer Rob Watts and he'll explain that the reason for this is that digital audio is constrained by its frame rate (for want of a better term). Because it has a limited number of samples (or frames) it can't completely accurately resolve the 'inter-aural' timing of the music, and the lower the resolution the digital signal is, the worse the problem becomes. It's this problem that the Hugo addresses – and more importantly solves.

A portable DAC and headphone amplifier in one hell of a gorgeous shell, the Hugo can go wherever you do to ensure your music never sounds less than top notch. It supports PCM formats up to 384kHz (including DXD) and will natively play DSD64 and DSD128 in DoP format. Socketry includes headphone and RCA outputs, alongside optical, coaxial

Bass is powerful yet wonderfully supple, bouncing up and down like a giant rubber ball

and USB inputs, and there's also aptX Bluetooth on hand for wireless connection. Throw in bullet-proof build quality and a stunning light show to indicate its status and you've got one of the best-looking hi-fi components around.

However, good looks count for nothing if you can't come up with the goods sonically and the Hugo doesn't disappoint. In our review in the July 2014 issue it won a coveted Editor's Choice badge and had us gushing: "There's something about these designs that goes beyond what's normally expected of digital. The Hugo goes further still, and the difference is centred around the way the music flows. It simply doesn't time like others, it presents the music in an organic way that you don't equate with digital. Bass is powerful yet wonderfully supple, bouncing up and down like a giant rubber ball. The midband is startlingly open and detailed, and soundstaging is sublime." Why not find out for yourself why we think this is one of the finest DACs in the world by trying to win one? The details are opposite.



HOW TO ENTER

Complete this form to win:

This coupon should arrive by 5.30pm on 22th October 2014 addressed to: Hugo Competition **Hi-Fi Choice**, c/o Data Europe Limited, 12 Regent Street, Haslingden, Rossendale, BB4 5HQ

Answer:.....

Initial..... Surname.....

Address

Postcode County

Email

Tel I am 18 yrs old or over

If you do NOT wish to be contacted by Hi-Fi Choice and My Time Media Ltd please tick here: email , post , phone . If you wish to be contacted by carefully chosen third parties please tick here: email , post , phone . For full privacy policy and terms and conditions, visit www.hifichoice.co.uk/terms

TERMS & CONDITIONS

1. Entrants must be over 18 years old and resident in the United Kingdom. 2. Employees of My Time Media and companies supplying competition prizes are not eligible to enter. 3. Proof of posting will not be accepted by the magazine as proof of delivery. 4. No responsibility will be accepted for entries lost, damaged or delayed in the post. 5. No alternatives, cash or otherwise, will be offered to the winners as prizes. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. The closing date is 22nd October 2014.

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 – simply submit your ad of up to **50 words** (we will edit them if not), remembering to include your email, phone number and county.

The simplest way to send your ad is via email to: **letters@hifichoice.co.uk** or mail: **Reader Classified, Hi-Fi Choice, AVTech Media Ltd, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF.**

This service is open to private advertisers only. Just one ad per household. Images are for illustration only and do not represent what is for sale

FOR SALE

DYNAUDIO DM 2/7 stand-mount speakers, 12 months old, black ash, boxed as new, £350: **07956959032** or email: **waynebtully@gmail.com (Redhill, Surrey).**

BROADSWORD speakers. Biwire terminals with Target stands £90: **01825722936 (Lewes, East Sussex).**

ACOUSTIC PRECISION EIKOS CD player fully upgraded by Tom Evans two years ago to his very latest specification including external power supply for both digital and analogue sections at a cost of £3,600, asking £985. Little used since

upgrade: **01202515474** or email: **johnlangley17@talktalk.net**

POWER supply for Class A amplifiers, self contained, suits John Linsley Hood's 1969/1996 designs £299. SEAS 10in drivers for Dynaco A25/26 repair? £100. Prices include posting: **0207 4998729.**

RUSS ANDREWS signature powerkords x2, 1m each, fitted with 350i ag iec. Cost £365, will accept £30 each or both for £50. Buyer collects: **01724853357 stuartwoodstu@hotmail.com (Scunthorpe).**

SONUS FABER Concertino speakers with Sfpiano black stands in excellent condition, with boxes, £575. Musical Fidelity X-Dac v3 £225. Pair 3m bespoke Silver High Breed Quintessence speaker cables, banana termination, £85: **02476679165** or email: **davidhirst244@o2.co.uk (Coventry).**

ART EXPRESSION loudspeakers. Black finish; virtually new condition. Superb sound! Complete with matching stands, boxes and paperwork. Will demonstrate. £895: **07736339194** or email: **j.boswell@rbht.nhs.uk (Bromley).**

LINN Basik turntable, includes Akito arm and instruction book, in very good condition £250. Collection only: **07958739227** or email: **sharp@interalpha.co.uk (West Sussex).**

COPLAND integrated amplifier CSA-14 £475 ono: **01424773404** or **07999 828283 (Hastings, East Sussex).**



MUSICAL FIDELITY M1 HPA headphone amplifier mint condition boxed £200. Pro-Ject phono SE MM/MC excellent condition £45. 2x 3m QED Anniversary XT cable terminated QED Airloc plugs unused £35: **01371850665** or email: **garyrobinson20@btinternet.com (Essex).**

BOSTON ACOUSTIC Xa26 cherry, £120 Wharfedale Diamond 9.1 walnut, £70, Wharfedale Diamond 10.1 black, £100 all boxed and in good condition, any trial, buyer collects: **01933 626185** or email: **royrolfe@hotmail.co.uk (Northants).**

REGA Apollo 35th Anniversary Limited Edition black £375. Rega Mira 3 integrated amplifier in silver £300. Both boxed with remotes. Focal Profile 908 standmount speakers in Classic finish with matching Focal S908 stands £395: **07772711432** or email: **richard.schofield@kcl.ac.uk (Bucks).**

B&W DM601 S2 speakers, ash black, mint condition with box and manual. Collection only, happy to demo (RRP £200) £100: **01902884694** or email: **jukey39@yahoo.co.uk (West Midlands).**

JPS Superconductor FX. 1m, locking RCA plugs £100. Clearer Audio Silverline Optimus 75 coax 0.5m £100. JPS Ultra Conductor bi-wire speaker cable, 4.7m, two connectors at amp end, four connectors at speaker end £230. Two-box DNM Series 2A preamp. Two RCA line level inputs and moving coil input £350 ono: **01296 437314** or email: **jez35@btinternet.com (Bucks).**

RUSS ANDREWS Kimber Kable Hero HB ultraplate Phono Analogue interconnect 0.5m. Boxed as new £200 (save £199): **07800606892** or email: **schandler@dopag.co.uk**

(Worcestershire).

FURUTECH Reference Series Three 2m power cable. New £1,230, sell for £700 ono: **07899721899** or email: **yatestherapy@googlemail.com.**

RUSS ANDREWS HP1/PA1 preamp/headphone amp/Poweramp combo. 50Wpc, all VGC, interconnect included. Excellent neutral sound, will demo. £390 Buyer collects: **01483 891925 (Surrey).**

TECHNICS Hi-Fi 360 Series (X840) complete 12-piece system inc turntable, d/ cassette deck and CD player. Brochures/instructions, genuinely hardly used, offers and full list of system: **01708 471149** or **07973439730 (Essex).**

CYRUS Pre VS2 Preamp, PXX-R Power supply and DAC X, Silver, original Boxes. VGC 4/5 years old. Will ship by post if required. £650, will split if required: **01946 862815** or email: **paul.derrington@outlook.com (Cumbria).**

WANTED Chord Signature speaker cable, 4-5m or over: **01475 529216** or email: **Lporsche997@aol.com.**

EPOS M5 speakers. Stunning cherry finish, boxed, never used, free stands £195: **07747 390307 (Wiltshire).**

MARANTZ CD17 KI Signature - CD player, black, excellent condition (no marks), remote, manual, original box. Digital/analogue out. Internal volume control. £325: **07920101740** or email: **SiloPeRi@gmail.com (Hornchurch).**



VPI Scout2/JPM9 arm/Linn Klyde. £1,400 ono: **02084649055 billmilla@virginmedia.com (Bromley).**

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!

MOON CD5.3RS CD player. Boxed and in excellent condition £750 ono. Collection only: **07913 236601** or email: **farrow_jim@hotmail.co.uk (Barking).**

AMITY HPA4X headphone amp with L&R volume controls (cost £350) £140. Two pairs of SoundStream 99.99% pure copper speaker cable terminated, 7ft pairs, never used, half price at £25 a pair. Will post: **01772468116 (Leyland, Lancashire).**

LEAK 2075 speakers, excellent condition, no scratches, can demo. Collection only due to size and weight £650: **01472885413** or email: **bilton1234@virginmedia.com (Grimsby).**

ROKSAN Kandy K2 int. amplifier, black, 17 months old, as new and boxed. £595. Would prefer demo and collection to posting: **0113 2188797 (Leeds).**

SPENDOR S3/5R² black speakers £400. REL T3 Sub, black £200. Linn Pekin tuner, black £150. All unmarked and perfect working order: **01952 728773 (Shropshire).**

ATACAMA Eris Eco 5.0 rack, brand new, unused. Silver with dark oak shelves (bamboo) £300. Base 225mm, mid and top 175mm. Collection only: **079388 35982 (Middlesex).**

MORROW AUDIO MA1 one metre pair stereo



TALON Khorus Xmk2 reference quality, full range floorstanders, in tiger's eye maple. Deep, powerful and tuneful bass, rich transparent mids and detailed highs from supertweeter. Non fatiguing. Rarely seen for sale. £16k when new. £2,950 ovno: **07766 510612** or email: **jcm131@hotmail.co.uk (Glasgow).**

interconnects, rave internet reviews £35: **01243528010 (West Sussex).**

ART Stiletto speakers (pair), slim floorstanders in maple finish, wonderful sound and in excellent condition with original packaging, grilles etc. £475 ono: **01925572936** or email: **whites96@virginmedia.com (Cheshire).**

Q ACOUSTICS 2050i speakers for sale, white gloss finish, immaculate condition, £400. Buyer to collect: **07940659384 (Brighton).**

ORTOFON MCA10 battery-operated preamp, excellent condition comes with new batteries. 1x Ortofon MC10 Super cartridge, boxed, plays well, but may need a re-tip (no way of checking), £50 including postage. 1x BTE passive preamp, 3inputs, American Walnut, excellent condition, very little use, £50 including postage: **01382 644815 (Dundee).**

NAIM Nait 5i integrated amp in excellent condition original box, still under warranty receipt provided, £499: **07967122765.**

YAMAHA YSP2200 sound bar and subwoofer, all cables and leads and instructions, only 18 months old (RRP £750) £390: **01294822562 (North Ayrshire).**

VPI Scout 2/JMW 9T/Linn Klyde. £1,750 ono: **02084649044.**

GALE 401 speakers with chrome ends, fully reconditioned, original paperwork and boxes, first reasonable offer secures: **01825722936** or email: **spartridge37@btinternet.com (Sussex).**

MICHELL Gyro SE with Origin Live Rega RB600, Goldring 1642. Mint condition £875. Audiolab 8000 Q (British) £280. Audiolab 3000P £180. Acoustic Energy AE1 Classics £575. All mint condition: **01484427426 (West Yorkshire).**

ARCAM irDAC £195, mint condition and boxed: **02392453382 (Havant).**

WANTED Technics DVD stereo system SC-DV-150 or later version. Good condition essential. Quadrophonic amplifier also desired: Sansui

QRX 9000 or 999 or Pioneer equivalent: **01985213952 (Wiltshire).**

ATACAMA Equinox hi-fi rack in piano black with glass shelves. Five shelves and not four in mint condition (RRP £430) £150: **07905348812 (Watford).**

WANTED Quad 50E mono amplifier, must be in good working order: **07946522644 (Sheffield).**

REGA Brio amplifier. Two years old, moderate usage £300. Monitor Audio BX5 floorstanders, two years old, perfect condition £250: **07908945608 (Battersea).**

ATC integrated SIA2 150 mint condition, superb sound, just £1,250: **01225706783 (Wiltshire).**

AKG VQ701 Quincy Jones Signature Line Headphones in white, one and a half years old, mint condition, boxed (£340 new) £170: **07905348812 (Watford).**

AERIAL ACOUSTICS 10T speakers in Rosewood (£8,000 new), asking £2,200. Lexicon processor DC2 (£4,000) VGC £950: **0152614055 (Fleet, Hants).**

NORDOST Red Dawn RCA interconnects. Superbly transparent sound, mint condition, were £300 will take £100: **01484427426 (West Yorkshire).**

WANTED four track tape deck or recorder for up to 7in spools: **01535 661278 (West Yorks).**

PINKTRIANGLE LPT Rega £300. Musical Fidelity E100 Electa amp, E600 CD, E50 tuner £550. Linn Index speakers £70. Sony Sports Walkman £25: **01708 457691 (Essex)**

CHORD Signature links x4, brand new, unused (cost £90) £60. Chord cobra Plus sub lead, 10m (cost £147) + 3m (cost £70) £100 for both + p&p. Russ Andrews RGB Scart (cost £200) £60: **01772812992 (Preston Lancs).**

ARCAM CD37/SACD player (black) £699. Roksan Kandy K2 amplifier (silver) £550 and K2 CD player (silver) £550. Both only months old with latest r/c RMX-111. Denon TU1800 DAB/FM tuner (silver) £175. All in immaculate condition with original boxes: **023 80738935** or email: **golf3385@hotmail.co.uk.**

EAR 509, Mk2. Pair of mono valve amps, 100W per channel. Very good condition. Can demo. Buyer to pay postage or collect, £2,000: **07527567829** or email: **abaird2011@btinternet.com (Berkshire).**

QUAD 99 System consisting of amp, preamp, CD and tuner in original boxes, mint condition, complete with leads and remote control. Prefer buyer collects. £800 ono: **02088576346** or email: **pp.marden31@ntlworld.com (Bromley).**

NAKAMICHI DR-3 cassette deck (only 6 tapes ever played/rec) including 10x TDK SA90-2xTDK MA90 blank tapes unopened and 2x 1m pairs of QED silver spiral interconnects (for play/rec). Includes original box and manual, £165: **01202515474** or email: **johnlangley17@talktalk.net.**



SPENDOR S3E speakers in Rosenut finish, excellent condition £470: **01794514916 (Hants).**

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, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 8HF

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 50 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. One ad per household please.

Missed an Issue?

Have you missed a copy of *Hi-Fi Choice*? You can now order these online, over the phone or by post!



375 Sept 2013



376 Oct 2013



377 Nov 2013



378 Dec 2013



379 Jan 2014



380 Yearbook



381 Feb 2014



382 March 2014



383 April 2014



384 May 2014



385 June 2014



386 July 2014



387 Aug 2014



388 Sept 2014



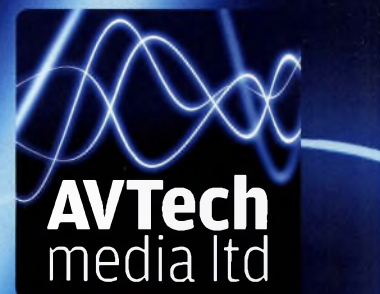
389 Oct 2014

Phone: 0844 848 8822

(Phone lines open: Mon-Fri 10am - 4pm)

Order Online:

www.myhobbystore.co.uk/hfc



Music in its most beautiful form

High-Resolution Music-Downloads

Classical, Jazz, Pop, Blues, Rock and much more

Discover it at: www.hiresaudio.com



studio



We offer some of the finest music reproduction systems available on the market today, from entry level to elite brands. Our range of products has been carefully chosen to ensure exceptional performance, reliability and value for money.

See the excellent review of **studioAV** in the October edition of **Hi-Fi Choice Magazine.**

44 High Street, Eton,
Berkshire, SL4 6BL
Tel: 01753 863300



Stockists of: Avalon, Aurender, dCS, Densen, Dynavector, Estelon, Focal, Golden Ear, Mark Levinson, Naim Audio, Vitus Audio, VTL, Wilson Benesch and many more...

www.studioav.co.uk

Next month

STANDING TALL

Six sub-£1,000 floorstanding speakers go head to head in next month's *Group Test*

ALSO:
Naim's eagerly awaited Muso wireless speaker system gets the *In-depth* test treatment

PLUS:

NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES

Four top headphone models designed to cut out background noise and put you in a hi-fi hot spot

⋮ **ALSO** The Funk Firm Flamenca turntable, Yamaha CD/network player, plus our pick of all the latest CD, vinyl and hi-res downloads and all your hi-fi queries answered

DECEMBER ISSUE ON SALE 23 OCTOBER 2014

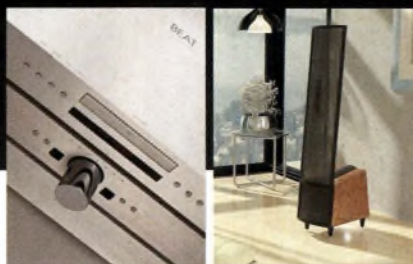
HIFI CHOICE ADVERTISERS INDEX

ATLAS CABLES	110
AUDIO EMOTION	131
AVID HIFI	9
BILLY VEE	70
BLACK RHODIUM	112
BOWERS & WILKINS	32
CLARITY ALLIANCE	34
CLEAR AUDIO	26
DYNAUDIO	76
FOCAL	23
FURUTECH	80
FUTURESHOP	112
GSP AUDIO	49
HIFI RACKS	82
HIFI SOUND	106
HIGH RES AUDIO	123
IAG INTERNATIONAL	132
ICON AUDIO	109
ISOTEK	84
KORG	63
MAIA	45
MARTIN LOGAN	12
MCRU	98
MONITOR AUDIO	73
MOREL	78
MUSICAL FIDELITY	36
NUNU DISTRIBUTION	97
OPPO	11
ORIGIN LIVE	105
ORTOFON	59
PJ HIFI	67
PMC	55
Q ACOUSTICS	30
REL ACOUSTICS	86
ROKSAN	16
RUSS ANDREWS	115
SEVENOAKS SOUND AND VISION	39,40,41
STI TECHNOLOGY	28
STUDIO AV	123
TALK ELECTRONICS	75
TANNOY	2
TELLURIUM Q	115

TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CALL
TIM LEES
01689 869853
tim.lees@hifichoice.co.uk

AUDIO DESTINATION

The Finest Audio Products



Owned by husband and wife team: Mike & Caroline - Audio Destination is not your typical Hi-Fi specialist

Audio Destination brings together a range of only the finest audio products and places them in comfortable and relaxed surroundings.

- Tuesday - Friday 9am - 5pm
- Saturday 9am - 4pm
- Demonstration Rooms
- Long-term customer support and care
- Large selection of famous brands

We look forward to seeing you

Call +44 (0)1884 243 584

www.audiodestination.co.uk
email: info@audiodestination.co.uk
Audio Destination, Suite 7a Market Walk,
Tiverton, Devon EX16 6BL

DRIVERS:

- ATC
- AUDAX
- ETON
- FOSTEX
- LPG ➤ MAX FIDELITY
- MOREL ➤ PEERLESS
- SCAN-SPEAK ➤ SEAS
- SILVER FLUTE
- VIFA ➤ VISATON
- VOLT

SOLEN CAPACITORS AND INDUCTORS - USED BY THE MOST DISCRIMINATING LOUDSPEAKER MANUFACTURERS.

HARDWARE

HOW TO BOOKS

Contact us for the free Solen CDROM Catalog.

FREE!



SOLEN

4470 Avenue Thibault
St-Hubert, QC, J3Y 7T9 Canada

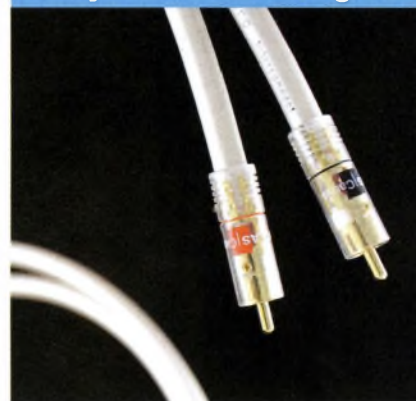
Tel: 450.656.2759
Fax: 450.443.4949
Email: solen@solen.ca
Web: www.solen.ca

award-winning high performance analogue, digital & video cables

www.atlascables.com

ATLAS[®]

Equator
Asymmetrical Integra



Atlas understands the meaning of uncompromising performance. Is the Atlas Equator asymmetrical the best interconnect on the market? It sure is at its price! A consistent winner, the Equator Integra is obviously the entry level audio interconnect for discerning music lovers.

Need some advice on choosing the best cables?
Call us free on
0800 731 1140

ATLAS Cables

e: J.Carrick@atlascables.com

www.atlascables.com

Analogue Seduction
where music is our passion



Analogue Seduction are dedicated towards two channel Hi-Fi, specialising in vinyl replay.

As well as our on-line shop we have dedicated demonstration retail facilities based in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire and we can offer our customers home demonstrations.

We stock the finest in amplification, analogue, digital replay and speakers. We also specialise in a cable termination and cable burn in service.

Please visit our website www.analogueseduction.net to browse or purchase products that are not easily available elsewhere.

New vinyl records now stocked

Tel: +44 (0)1733 344768

Epiphany
Acoustics

Headphone Amplifiers . DACs . Interconnects



Atratus RCA Interconnects



"Great realism... Tight and punchy bass...
 Amazing value for money."

- Hi-Fi Choice

Find out what all the fuss is about at our online shop and use discount code **MAG10** for your exclusive 10% discount.

Prices start at under £40/pair

www.epiphany-acoustics.co.uk

anthem

audioplan

dynavector

chord cables

>chord electronics

kudos

lehmann

linn products

lyra

naim audio

neat acoustics

nottingham

primare

pmc (including fact)

rega

sennheiser

stax

sumiko

trilogy

tiger paw

opening
 chord



hi-fi for grown-ups

ipswich (01473) 655171

www.signals.uk.com

All About the Music

BASICALLY
 SOUND

Digital & Analogue Audio Specialists

01362 820800

enquiries@basicallysound.co.uk

www.basicallysound.co.uk



The Wand 12in....
...even more musical magic!



"The Wand certainly pulled something wonderful out of the hi-fi hat.... It sounds completely out of its price class, letting you get lost in music."
HiFi Choice # 363



"What The Wand brings to the party is excitement. a sense of speed and energy and zest to the LP."
HiFi Plus #112



"...the low end is a real strength of The Wand as it captures bass lines expertly and never seems to run out of puff or feel it was lacking authority. I would say that it is almost impossible not to fall for The Wand's charms."
HiFi World January 2012

www.thewandtonearm.com



info@designbuildlisten.com
Retail and OEM enquires now welcome.

VICKERS HI-FI

High Fidelity Specialists Since 1967



- ▶ Visit our Stylish, New... 7,500 sq ft. Store at... ▶ **Unit 8 Concorde Park,**
Amy Johnson Way, Kettlestring Lane,
Clifton Moor, York
SatNav: YO30 4WT
Tel: 01904 - 691600
- ▶ Free Customer Car Park ▶ Wheelchair Friendly
- ▶ Superb Air Conditioned Demonstration Rooms
- ▶ Loaded with Quality Hi-Fi Equipment at all price levels
- ▶ Awesome amplifiers, Gorgeous speakers, Classy furniture
- ▶ Independent Advice, Qualified Staff, Great Offers
- ▶ Easy Online Ordering from... www.VickersHiFi.com
- ▶ Up to 3 YEARS INTEREST FREE CREDIT subject to status
- ▶ Open 10:30am - 5:30pm 6 days: Mon. to Sat.



... The Award Winning North of England Hi-Fi Specialists



audiolab CHORD CYRUS DALI ROKSAN MONITOR AUDIO
QUAD ProAc TANOY Pioneer Project marantz

Dealer Directory

HIFI LOUNGE

SE

4 The Granary Buildings, Millow Hall Farm
Millow, Near Dunton, Bedfordshire
SG18 8RH

☎ 01767 448 121

☐ www.hifilounge.co.uk

BASICALLY SOUND

E

Calveley Court, Southburgh Rd, Reymerston
Norfolk NR9 4QD

☎ 01362 820800

☐ www.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

GRAHAMS

“One of the five best hi-fi
shops in the world”

ARENA Magazine

Grahams Hi-Fi
Canonbury Yard
190a New North Road
London N1 7BS

Is this your problem? Here's your answer



loud



too loud



way too loud

It's a common problem. The usable range on the volume control is all down at the bottom end and fine control at low listening levels is either difficult or impossible. The noise floor may be audible, too. There is a simple and effective solution - the Rothwell In-Line Attenuators. They can be used with pre/power or integrated amps to cure the problems of excess gain and bring sonic benefits with even the most expensive equipment.

£39/pair - post free

01204 366133 www.rothwellaudioproducts.co.uk



"this accessory
is heartily
recommended"
Gramophone

REVOX SERVICE

THE MANUFACTURERS' APPOINTED SERVICE COMPANY

REVOX SERVICE

Correct Revox Spare Parts Pricing
24 Hour Estimation procedure
Manufacturer Upgrades and Advice
Delivery and Collection Service
Comprehensive Guarantees

Factory Trained Engineers
Rapid Response Turnaround
Full Revox range serviced
Written Technical Reports
Late Evening Opening

THE 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.oandlhifi.co.uk



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER FOR ALL THE LATEST HIFI LOUNGE NEWS

A NEW NAME IN QUALITY HIFI FOR THE HOME



Here to listen to your needs, selling only brands we are passionate about. At Hifi Lounge we have created a listening environment for our discerning customers to relax and take their time away from the busy high street. Set in a beautiful country setting yet only minutes from main routes. You will always be guaranteed a warm welcome.

01767 448121
www.hifilounge.co.uk
4 The Granary Buildings,
Millow Hall Farm,
Millow, Nr Dunton,
Bedfordshire,
SG18 8RH



IAN HARRISON HIFI

SALE! UP TO 40% OFF!

TEL: 01283 702875 ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk

PHONOSTAGES	CARTRIDGES	TURNTABLES	TONEARMS
TRICHORD	ORTOFON	MICHELL	MICHELL
TOM EVANS	DENON	PRO-JECT	REGA
GRAHAM SLEE	AIR TIGHT	THORENS	SME*
LEHMANN	TRANSFIGURATION	SRM TECH	GRAHAM
WHEST AUDIO	KOETSU	EAR	MOTH
ANATEK	GRADO	AMAZON AUDIO	ORTOFON
QUAD	GOLDRING	AUDIO TECHNICA	PRO-JECT
CLEARAUDIO	BENZ MICRO	DENON	ROKSAN
ICON AUDIO	ROKSAN	INSPIRE	CARTRIDGE MAN
PURE SOUND	ZYX	MUSIC HALL	HELIUS
PRO-JECT	CARTRIDGE MAN		REED
EAR YOSHINO	DECCA LONDON		AMG
ROTHWELL			MOERCH

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.

*CALL FOR DETAILS ESTABLISHED 1986.

MAIL ORDER ONLY FROM: IAN HARRISON, 7 MILL HILL, REPTON, DERBY, DE65 6GQ
TEL: 01283 702875 9am-9pm INCLUDING SUNDAYS.

Bringing Your Sound to Life!



GIK Acoustics manufactures acoustic panels, bass traps and diffusers and sells direct worldwide. We provide superior customer service and acoustic advice from start to finish.

Recording studios, listening rooms, live auditoriums, churches and home theatres. GIK Acoustics is the #1 choice.

GIK Acoustics
gikacoustics.co.uk

IAN HARRISON HIFI

MICHELL ENGINEERING

ORBE
ORBE SE
GYRODEC
BRONZE GYRODEC
BLACK GYRO SE
TECNODEC
TECNO ARM A

HR POWER SUPPLY
ORBE PLATTER KIT
ORBE CLAMP KIT
SECURE COVER
UNI COVER
TECHNOWEIGHT
GYRO BEARING

PLEASE PHONE FOR PRICES

ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk
TEL: 01283 702875

IAN HARRISON HIFI

HARBETH LOUDSPEAKERS

P3 ESR MONITOR 30.1
HL COMPACT 7ES3 MONITOR 40.1
Super HL5+

Supplier Of Harbeth Since 2003

PLEASE PHONE FOR PRICES

ian.harrison@mercian.myzen.co.uk
TEL: 01283 702875



Rock Solid Sound Systems

T: 01403 782221
M: 07950 274224

E: info@rocksolidsounds.co.uk
W: www.rocksolidsounds.co.uk
Billingshurst, Sussex



37 High Street, Aldridge
01922 457926

Exposure • Heed • Kudos
Lehmann • Linn • Marantz
Michell • Monitor Audio • Neat
Nordost • Okki Nokki • Ortofon
Project • REL • Roksan

Ample Parking Tue-Sat 10 - 5.30pm
www.soundcinergy.co.uk

WE HEAR...

KUDOS IS ONE OF THOSE BRANDS THAT people should really know better. It does a range of very musical sounding loudspeakers, and we hear that it is just about to be bolstered by the arrival of the new X3. Our spies tell us that it has the same, very able SEAS tweeter as the X2, but marries it with a new 180mm main driver. All internal wiring is courtesy of The Chord Company (Sarsen), and the cabinet comes in a range of beautifully finished real wood veneers.

ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING players currently operating in the gadget field is Alpha Design Labs. This Japanese company – the electronics wing of Furutech – has made some very capable small DACs of late, and we hear there's a new £435 model coming up designed to be used with Android devices. The A1 is a high-resolution portable digital converter and headphone amplifier that's said to also be DSD-capable when used with either a Mac or PC; it supports DSD at up to 5.6MHz.

YET FURTHER PROOF, AS IF WE NEEDED IT, that the world has gone mad – or at least has been turned upside down – comes in the shape of the new Sonos VinylPlay turntable. Looking eerily similar to a white Rega RP1, it is said by its manufacturer to be "a quality turntable for the digital age". Described as a "digital turntable", it is of course an analogue one with a built-in analogue-to-digital converter that outputs to the Sonos' digital input. At £329, what better deck to introduce the new generation of smartphone wielding screen strokers to the pleasures of vinyl?

THROUGH THE PAST, SMARTLY...



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 136
NOVEMBER 1994
"This may be the last time we gather in a crop of new turntables for review," wrote Alan Sircom somewhat pessimistically back in 1994, before adding: "While most of the world has moved on to CD, the anacrophile still treasures

his or her vinyl and wants to get the most out of it". The fact that 20 years later vinyl is still going strong suggests he might have been a touch early in sounding the death knell for the humble record player, but let's not punish him for not being able to see into the future, eh? The lineup consisted of three British offerings: the Michell Gyrodec, Townshend Rock and The Voyd, and one from the US of A in the shape of Well-Tempered's Record Player (good name that). And it was the latter that took the spoils thanks to it being "the most up-tempo, boppy and alive-sounding".

Meanwhile, the Criminal Justice Act made it illegal for people to gather and listen to music with "repetitive beats" (pretty much all music then), the world's first internet radio station broadcast from the university of North Carolina and an idiot called George W Bush became governor of Texas.



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 147
NOVEMBER 2004
Just 10 years ago the hi-fi landscape wasn't too different to the one we currently enjoy – although admittedly streaming services like Spotify were still yet to be realised. One thing that was as popular then as it is now

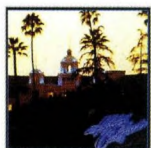
was the loudspeaker. Consequently, reviewer Paul Messenger was given the unenviable task of evaluating six "fairly upmarket" models: Audiovector's Mi 3 Signature, B&W's 703, Dali's Helicon 300, Dynaudio's Contour S 1.4, PMC's FB1+ and Totem's Hawk. All different shapes, sizes and prices, but the one thing they all had in common was their use of his conventional moving-coil drivers (except the Dali). In the end, the Audiovector, B&W and PMC took the spoils in a three-way photo finish.

Meanwhile, voting began in the US of A as John Kerry prepared to lose to George W Bush (him again) in what was later revealed to be a bit of a farcical cock up of an election involving hanging, swinging and pregnant chads – something that we were all quite familiar with back then, but can't really remember any more now...



DESERT ISLAND DISCS

This month **Eugene Howe** from SLIC Innovations picks four of his all-time favourite long players...



EAGLES
HOTEL CALIFORNIA
The Eagles at their best, this album contains classic song after classic song. This is an album I never seem to tire of however much I play it.



FLEETWOOD MAC
RUMOURS
A variety of classic tunes supremely executed. The synergy between McVies' bass and Fleetwood's drumming keeps me transfixed.



CHET ATKINS AND MARK KNOPFLER
NECK AND NECK
A remarkable blend of fun, easy listening and great guitar works. It's easy to appreciate the quality and skill involved.



EVA CASSIDY
SONGBIRD
This would be my chill-out album. Eva's voice is so sweet, enchanting and effortless. I'd listen to the cover of *Over The Rainbow* when I wanted to reminisce.

Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

EDITORIAL TEAM

Simon Berkovitch, James Hughes, David Holes, Tim Jarman, Adrian Justins, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, David Price, Neville Roberts, Ed Selley, Andrew Simpson, Richard Stevenson, Chris Ward, Nigel Williamson

CONTRIBUTORS

Senior Advertising Executive Tim Lees
Tel: 01689 869853
Email: tim.lees@hifichoice.co.uk

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: 0844 543 8200
Email: mytimemedia@subscription.co.uk
USA & CANADA - New, Renewals & Enquiries
Tel: (001) 866 647 9191

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
Enterprise House, Enterprise Way,
Ebenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF

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 _____



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 preparation of the magazine contents, but the publishers cannot be held legally responsible for errors in the contents of this magazine or for any loss however arising from such errors, including loss resulting from negligence or our staff. Reliance placed upon the contents of this magazine is at reader's own risk.

Hi-Fi Choice, ISSN 0955-1115, is published monthly with an additional issue in July by AVTech Media Ltd, a division of MYTIMEDIA Ltd, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Ebenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, UK. The US annual subscription price is \$50 (equivalent to approximately 108 US\$). Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11434, USA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Hi-Fi Choice, Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at CDS GLOBAL Ltd, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9EF. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask!



music is our passion

Scorpio 25 plus+

The 25plus+ Features

1. In the woofer chamber a high-strength, open-cell Ceramic foam with a pore proportion of more than 85% replaces the previous damping material = more control, more precision and more deep bass
2. Optimised frequency dependent damping in the midrange driver chamber = higher resolution, better spatial imaging and increased homogeneity
3. Revised crossovers with selective measures against micro-vibrations = much higher resolution, better spatial imaging and increased homogeneity
4. New internal wiring, integrated in the refined adjustment = improved tonal balance
5. Terminal with plus+ signature

price from £5100

audio physic

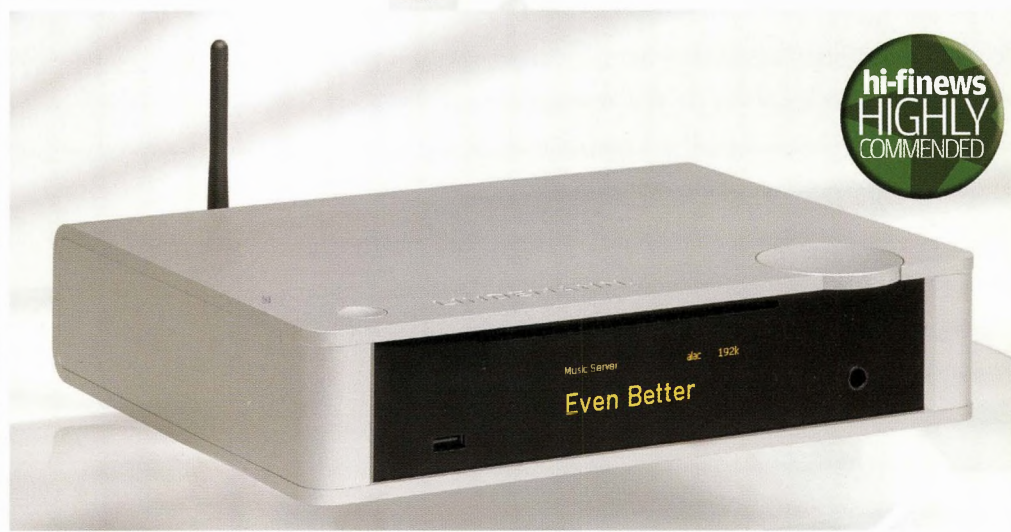
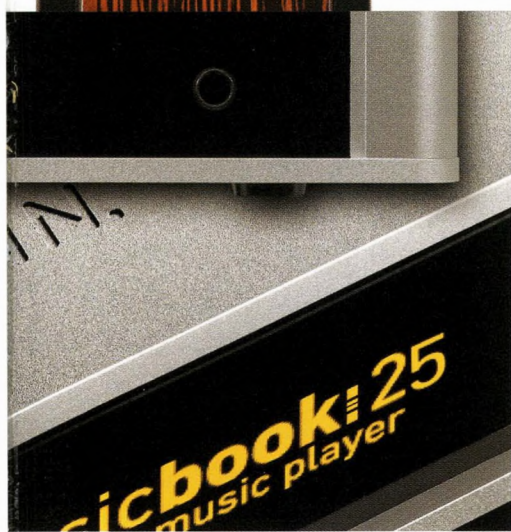
"No loss of fine detail"

Avantera plus+

It's really the minute details that make the task a challenge. In attempting to improve a recognised first-class product, AUDIO PHYSIC looks at all the elements that come together in a loudspeaker. Thus AUDIO PHYSIC managed to develop loudspeakers that do not display a cosy (wooden) cabinet sound and, conversely, as a result, once again brought the performance of the drivers and crossover technology to the fore. This laid the groundwork for the worldwide unique HHC midrange driver and tweeter that are already successfully deployed in AVANTERA and other AUDIO PHYSIC loudspeakers.



price from £13700



LINDEMANN. musicbook:25 network music player & CD Drive £3890



Streaming & beyond listen. relax. enjoy.

The musicbook 25 is a network music player that perfectly handles not only high-definition music playback on a home network, but CD playback as well. All functions—even on the CD player—can be remotely controlled using an app (iOS and Android).

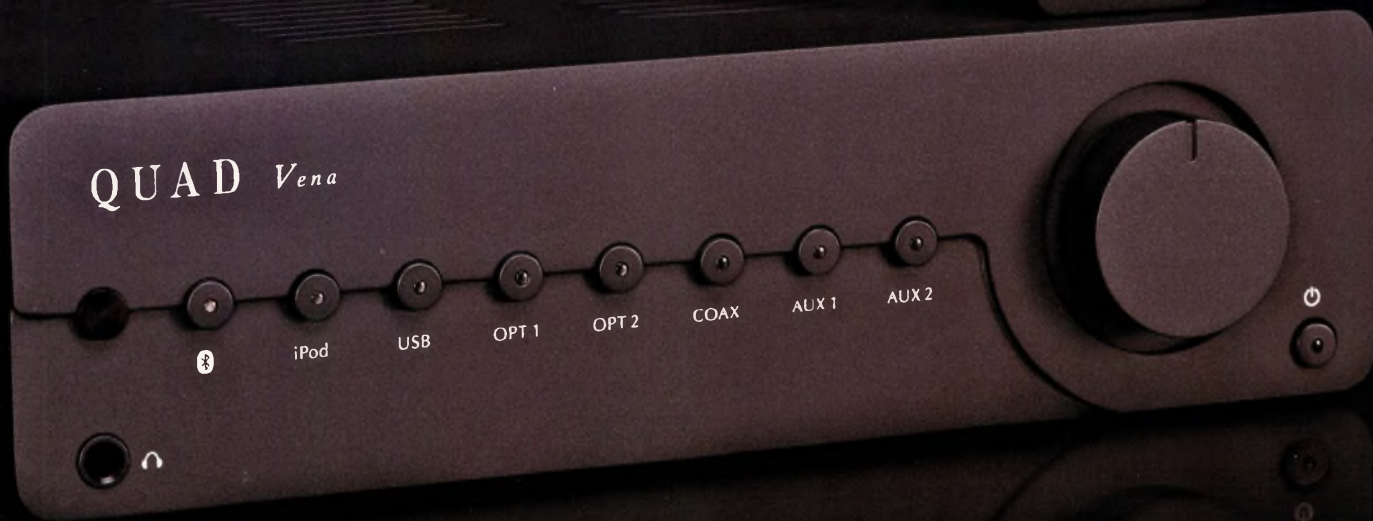
audioemotion

www.audioemotion.co.uk

tel: 01333 425999

Vena

Compact Digital Amplifier



Quad celebrates 77 years of audio innovation with the launch of Vena: a compact integrated amplifier sporting a wide range of digital and analogue inputs, plus superior-quality wireless streaming over Bluetooth with aptX support. D/A conversion is handled by the same high-performance 24-bit/192kHz chipset used in the company's acclaimed Platinum CD players and, as one expects of Quad, the Class AB power amp section is of the highest quality. With a range of finish options to suit any setting, Vena is an exceptionally neat solution for superb sound from any source: from smartphones, tablets, PCs and Macs to traditional hi-fi separates.

