

# THE ULTIMATE HI-FI GUIDE

# HI-FI CHOICE

SPECIAL EDITION

SUMMER 2006 | £3.95 | WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK

## *The Collection*

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF THE WORLD'S FINEST HI-FI





# A different Classé

For more than 20 years Classé has been designing and manufacturing extraordinary audio equipment for enthusiasts who demand nothing less than the very best. Our engineers have a passion for what they create and it shows: engineering, style, user-interface, product reliability and performance are all second to none. The new Delta series is an inspired statement about the art of high performance design. Visit us at [www.classeaudio.com](http://www.classeaudio.com) or experience the product range at one of the following authorised retailers.

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+353 1283 4887

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London  
020 7487 3455

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Worthing  
01903 245577

**Glasgow Audio**  
Glasgow  
0141 332 4707

**Sound Academy**  
Bloxwich  
01922 493499

# CLASSE

## Welcome to the issue...

### HI-FI CHOICE SUMMER 2006 ISSUE 282

Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW ☎ +44 (0)20 7042 4000



I love this time of year – the time we throw caution to the wind and set our sights on the most gloriously extravagant hi-fi we can muster, sufficient to fill an audiophile's wildest dreams. We gather it up, we gaze in wonder, we listen in awe and we describe our

experiences in this annual special edition we call *The Collection*... it's a hard job, but someone's gotta do it!

Judging from the feedback, it seems you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoy putting it together. Whether you can afford the kit right now is irrelevant – just as a car enthusiast might wish to read about the latest Ferrari, so we hi-fi aficionados like to keep abreast of the best. It's partly about having a dream, something to strive for. But it's also about keeping in touch with developments. After all, many of the brands featured use these flagship products as a development ground for new technologies – technologies that then trickle down to more affordable components.

Which brings me to a pertinent question raised during the inaugural *Hi-Fi Choice Industry Forum* (see p30). As *The Collection* is our annual 'high-end special', what does high-end hi-fi actually mean? Ultimately, it's all about excellence – build quality, engineering, design, functionality, service... and above all, performance.

To return to the car analogy, a Ford Focus will get you from A to B. But it's much more fun in a Ferrari.

*Tim Bown*

Tim Bown Editor

## The Collection

### THE STORY OF THE COLLECTION

*The Collection* has a rich history that dates back to the 1980s, when *Hi-Fi Choice* first decided to assemble a special issue dedicated to the finest hi-fi in the world. Several annual editions ensued, creating a series much loved and fondly remembered by those with a penchant for the highest standards of music reproduction. But in publishing few things remain unchanged for long – while *Hi-Fi Choice* continued to evolve through the 1990s, *The Collection* did not, and the concept was quietly dropped in 1993.

And so this high-end special lay dormant, until woken from its slumber in 2004. Whispers of a comeback had grown to a clamour, and two years ago our wishes came true. This, then, is the third annual edition in a new era for *The Collection*, and we're proud to relight this torch for hi-fi's highest performers once more.



### INSIDE THE COLLECTION 2006

The 2006 edition of *The Collection* is brought to you as part of our 13-issue annual schedule – with a 'Summer' cover date, it nestles between our regular July and August issues. It opens with the usual *AudioFile* front section, packed with hi-fi news and views. But from p35 onwards, things get a little different... and *The Collection* begins.

From that point on, you'll find no fewer than 45 in-depth reviews of some of the finest hi-fi components on the market today, conducted by the most experienced set of reviewers ever assembled. Some of these components – those featured on single pages – are recent *Hi-Fi Choice* favourites, revisited here especially for *The Collection*. Others are reviewed for the very first time, including many UK and world 'exclusives'. It all adds up to a drool-worthy selection of state-of-the-art products from many of the world's top hi-fi designers, each one constructed in deliberate pursuit of the ultimate in sound production.

Of course, it was important to ensure that the magazine itself looks and feels as fantastic as the equipment that nestles within its pages. To that end, we've invested in a very special cover design, premium-quality paper, stunning photography and a clean, fresh layout for each and every review.

**The August edition of Hi-Fi Choice is out 29 June.  
Don't miss it!**

### THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT WRITERS AND REVIEWERS INCLUDE...



**PAUL MESSENGER**  
A former *HFC* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for nearly 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



**DAN GEORGE**  
Dan is a hi-fi nut whose dream came true when he became *HFC*'s reviews editor. Armed with a bristling contacts book and a pair of razor-sharp ears, he ensures that only interesting products make it into *HFC*.



**RICHARD BLACK**  
Richard is a professional musician, recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He has a knack for writing about complicated subjects in a readable way – and he only writes for *HFC*.



**ALAN SIRCOM**  
Alan began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. Now a successful freelancer, you too can benefit from his extensive hi-fi knowledge, from purist two-channel stereo to the latest multichannel gear... and beyond.



**ALVIN GOLD**  
Alvin has been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed his encyclopaedic knowledge to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides).



**JIMMY HUGHES**  
Jimmy got 'into' hi-fi in the 1960s and after ten years in retail, his first article was published in 1979. He's an avid tweaker and his 'firsts' include solid-core cables and, er, listening to your speakers back to front!

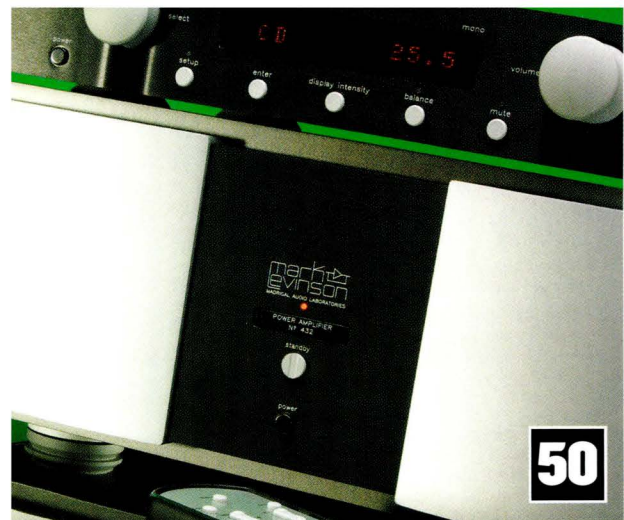


**JASON KENNEDY**  
Jason previously edited *HFC*, but can now be found in the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational and his love of music knows no bounds.



**MALCOLM STEWARD**  
Former editor of *Hi-Fi Review* magazine, Malcolm was one of the best known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently edits hi-fi industry bible *The British Audio Journal*.

To ensure you get the best information, opinion and advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most knowledgeable and experienced hi-fi writers in the business.



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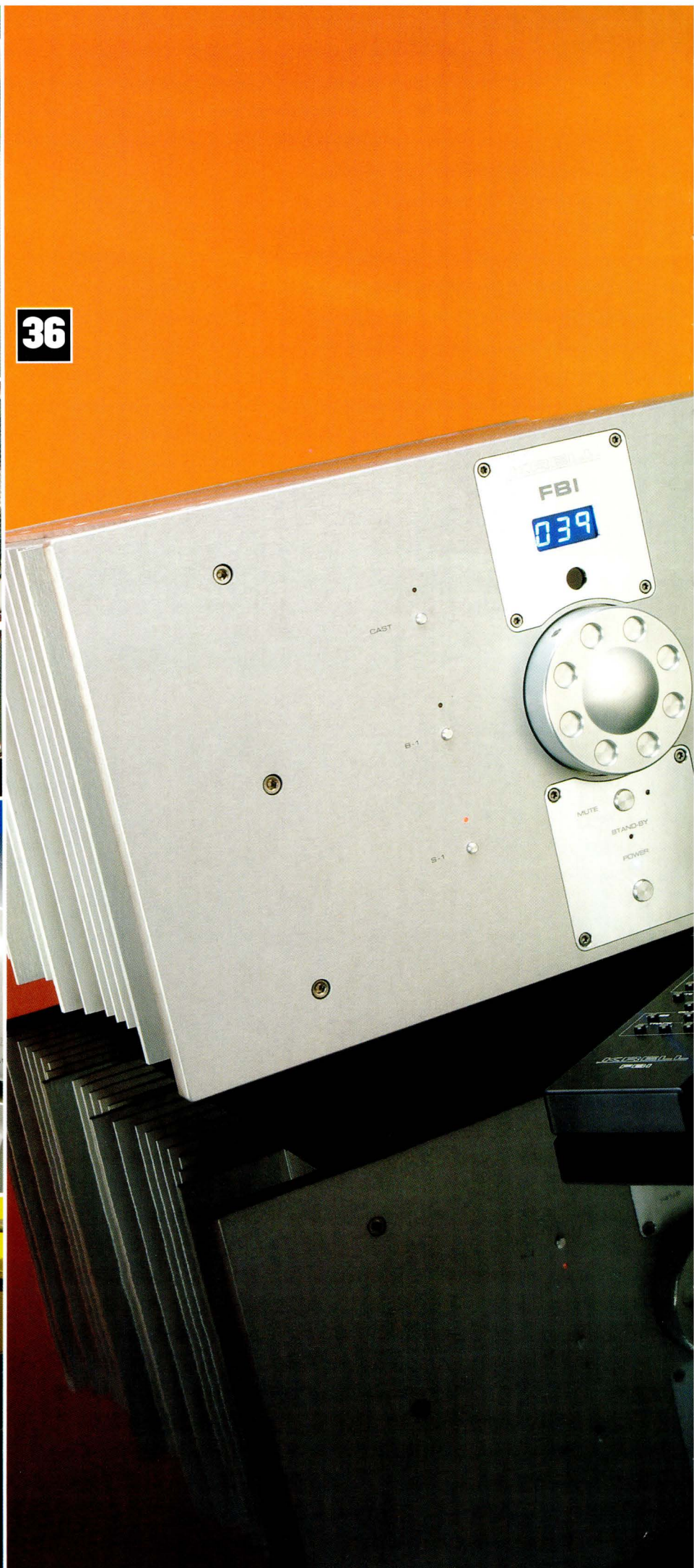
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# SUPER NATURAL EXPERIENCE



## NO VOODOO. JUST PHYSICS.

*"The speaker's fit, finish and attention to fine detail rival those of any speaker regardless of price, and they deliver first-rate overall system performance."*

Steve Stone | Stereophile | Guide to Home Theater

*"You can hear what this speaker is about with ease. There is nothing pushy or obvious about the MS4. Just the opposite. It is subtle, even relaxed in its demeanour, but it is astonishingly good at showing what is on your recordings, without unnecessarily pulling them to shreds."*

Alvin Gold | Hi-Fi News

*"Euphonia MS4 sets the standards in regard to low and high-frequency definition; it is outstanding for its beautiful workmanship and still keeps a favorable price."*

Udo Pipper | Stereo

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## FEATURES



Wide Dispersion



3D Audio



Low Resonance Cabinets



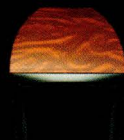
Time Coherence



Hand Crafted



Amplifier Optimised





Sound escaping !  
Captured by Crystal Cable

Crystal Cable

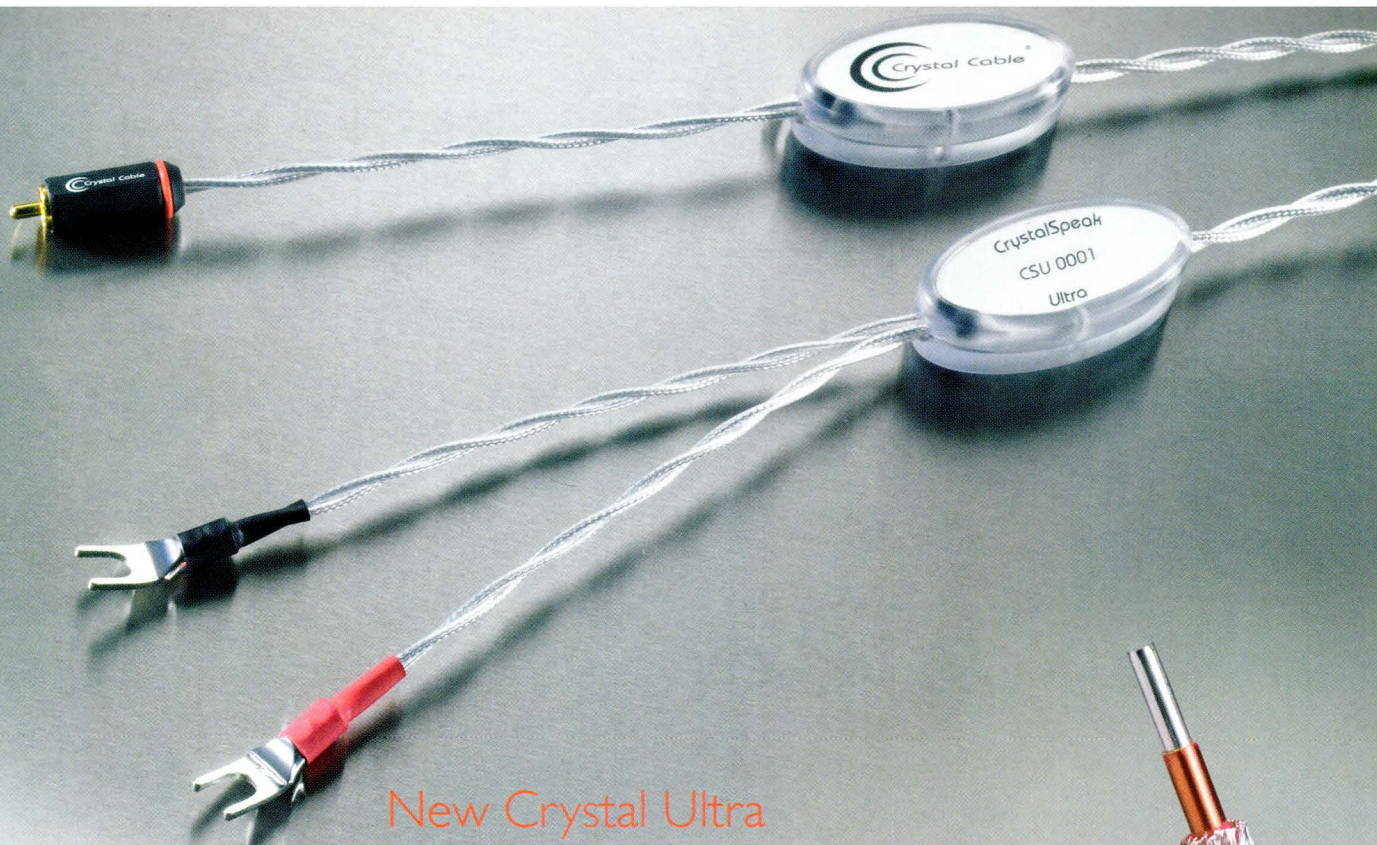
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## New Crystal Ultra

This means ultra-thin silver conductors with gold infusions to fill molecular gaps.

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This means advanced metallurgy perfected at famous German and Dutch laboratories using the most sophisticated test equipment in Europe.



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# KRELLS ANGELS

## THE EVOLUTION CHAPTER

Since launching the legendary **KSA-50** amplifier a quarter of a century ago, **Krell** have established themselves as the absolute world leaders in the design of high end audio electronics, rocking the establishment over the years with novel technologies that have redefined the way we listen to music.

In 2005, chief designer Dan D'Agostino took the audio community by storm with the introduction of the stunning eight-chassis **Evolution One** and **Evolution Two** amplification systems, a creation that represented his ultimate strike of genius on the high end, and received accolades all over the world.

What's more, it doesn't stop there: this year sees the launch of a complete new range of **Krell Evolution** pre- and power amplifiers - plus two exciting source components and an extraordinary unique integrated amplifier.

Out go the sharp heatsinks, in comes the most beautiful casework ever seen, housing technology that delivers totally lifelike music, with nothing added and nothing taken away. Included in the line-up are the **Evolution 505** CD/SACD player, the **Evolution 525** audio-video source, the Evolution 202 two-chassis preamplifier with the **Evolution 222** single case version, the **Evolution 402** stereo amplifier plus the incredibly powerful **Evolution 600** and **900** monoblocs.

For the home theatre, there is the powerful **Evolution 403** three-channel amplifier and the **Evolution 707** processor, a reference model that is without equal, and demonstrates Krells' passion for unparalleled performance and innovation.

Attracting huge interest and praise is the unique **FBI** Fully Balanced Integrated amplifier. Aimed at those who desire the superb performance of the long-established Class 'A' Krell **FPB** series in a single chassis, this is the true master of all integrated amplifiers.



the badge of prestige, passion and excellence. Call **Absolute Sounds** for full details.



EVOLUTION 402



EVOLUTION 505

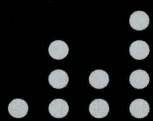


EVOLUTION 222

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## CANTON VENTO REFERENCE 5 DC LOUDSPEAKER

▶ Canton is Germany's largest loudspeaker manufacturer, occupying 25 per cent of the market in its native land. It's now making inroads into the UK, and we've been able to cherry-pick the most exciting models from the comprehensive line up for review. Pictured here is the Reference 5 DC floorstander from the Vento series, which is characterised by a boat-tailed cabinet design. This curvy three-way sings from 20Hz to 40kHz using aluminium drivers – one bass/mid, two woofer units and a 25mm aluminium-manganese tweeter.

The care and attention to detail bestowed upon this German engineered newcomer extends to high-quality internal cabling, an integrated base plinth with 'shock absorbers', plus a special curved surround for the drivers, said to reduce distortion and increase the output level. Will this German thoroughbred suit our UK ears? See next issue for the answer...

*To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the August issue of Hi-Fi Choice*

**PRODUCT** Canton Vento Reference 5 DC

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £3,500 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Three-way design ▶ Aluminium drive units ▶ Wide bandwidth tweeter ▶ Shock absorbing plinth ▶ 88.5dB sensitivity

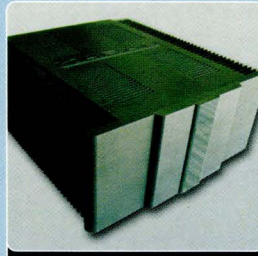
**CONTACT** ☎ 02392 501888 🌐 [www.canton.de](http://www.canton.de)



for the  
love of  
music...



Avalon Acoustics



Karan Acoustics



conrad-johnson



Esopower



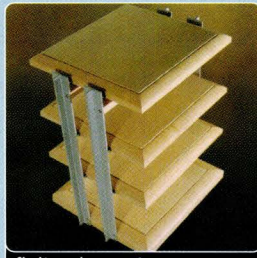
Tri-Planar



McCormack



Avalon Music Systems



finite elemente



Zanden Audio



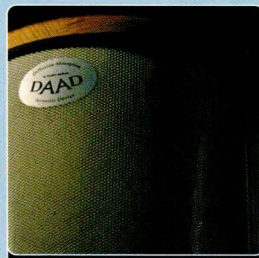
Kuzma



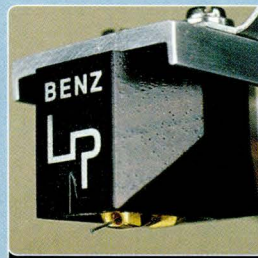
Cardas



Magnum Dynalab



Acustica Applicata (DAAD)



Benz-Micro

...visit our  
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or call us  
for more  
details

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# McINTOSH MCD201 CD/SACD PLAYER

▶ This player's so cool, we had to fight penguins to get one. It's from US-based brand McIntosh and is one of many exciting new products from the venerable marque. Not only does it look fabulous, it sports a clever mechanism that spins discs at up to four times normal speed (double speed for SACD), which is said to give less reading errors on discs in poor condition. Couple this with separate lasers for SACD and CD, plus

CD-R/RW compatibility and you've got the basis of a very fine hi-fi system. Another significant feature is the precision 214-step active volume control, which can be used to directly operate a power amp, for a truly minimalist CD/amp set-up. In fact, because it's so cool, our test unit will be warming up for twice as long, so don't miss it.

*To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the September issue of Hi-Fi Choice*

**PRODUCT** McIntosh MCD201

**TYPE** CD/SACD player

**PRICE** £3,400

**KEY FEATURES** 4x speed mechanism ▶ Separate lasers for CD and SACD ▶ 214-step active volume control ▶ Balanced and single-ended operation ▶ CD-R/RW and MP3 playback

**CONTACT** ▶ 0870 1993914

▶ www.mcintoshlabs.com



## NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



### ARCAM DiVA DV137

After months of speculation, Arcam has finally launched its first universal disc player, with a unique processing engine. Described by Arcam's managing director Charlie Brennan as the most intensive development project Arcam has ever undertaken, the new DV137 is the first player on the market to sport the new Zoran Vaddis 888S chipset for universal replay, allowing SACD and DVD-Audio playback.

Arcam assures "audiophile and videophile" quality from all aspects of the player, which concentrates on CD and DVD performance, with the added benefit of universal playback. The unit features Wolfson DACs for CD replay and also boasts HDMI connectivity with 1080p upscaling for video buffs. There's also an on-board video set-up wizard, new remote handset and advanced damping technology.

**Price** £1,250 **Due** now ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

### TW-ACUSTICS RAVEN AC

A radical new turntable from Germany's TW-Acustics – the Raven AC – is now available in the UK thanks to Bedfordshire-based distributor/dealer GT Audio.

Consisting of a machined high-density polymer base with a one-piece bearing and 10kg composite platter, the deck is said to boast "the ultimate in stability and control". Drive is provided by a microprocessor-controlled DC motor, which spins a 10kg platter via a maintenance-free belt. Weighing in at a whopping 50kg, the deck will accept up to four tonearms at once and is on permanent demo at GT Audio's shop.

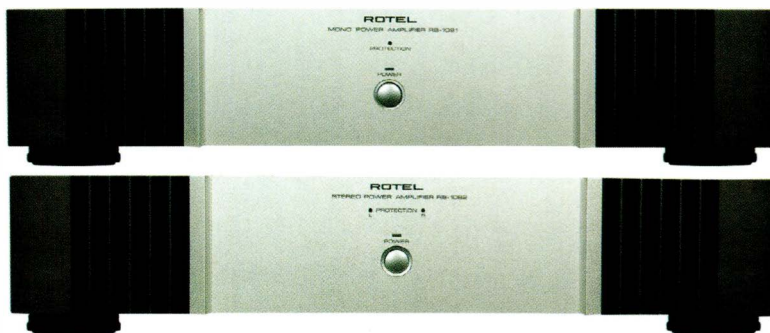
**Price** £4,995 **Due** now ☎ 01895 833099 🌐 www.gtaudio.com



### PARROT SOUND SYSTEM

Decent-quality sound from PCs and portable digital devices takes a step forward this month with the launch of the Parrot Sound system – a conventional-looking, wireless stereo speaker system that operates using Bluetooth wi-fi connectivity. The system works with all available Bluetooth sources: MP3 players, PCs, PDAs and even mobile phones. Each active standmount speaker contains a 60-watt, on-board Class D digital amplifier. The speakers also have a standard RCA input for connecting conventional hi-fi source components and there's even a digital seven-band equalizer to correct room-induced problems.

**Price** £245 per pair **Due** now ☎ 0121 250 3570 🌐 www.parrot.biz



### ROTEL RB-1091/RB-1092

Rotel's 10 Series is expanding to include two new Class D digital power amplifiers. There's a mono version called the RB-1091, capable of delivering 500 watts into an eight-ohm load, plus a stereo version called the RB-1092, which pumps out 500 watts per channel. Class D technology ensures the amps' power supply and output is rock solid, even under complex loads, according to Rotel. The amps can be utilised in both stereo and multichannel systems and join the recently released RMB-1077 seven-channel power amplifier as Rotel's only digital power amps in its burgeoning 10 Series.

**Price** RB-1091 £995; RB-1092 £1,595 **Due** now ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.rotel.com





## LEEMA CONSTELLATION

Leema Acoustics, best known for its high-quality loudspeakers, has expanded its electronics line-up to include the new Constellation range – an expandable system for both stereo and multichannel use. At its heart lies the dual-mono Tucana stereo amp (pictured above), which also acts as a system controller for additional Constellation products. Users can add a Hydra, which is described as an “intelligent stereo slave” and can be used to drive either multichannel speaker set-ups, or to bi-amp a two-channel system. Finally, there’s the Corvus – incorporating a one-channel amp for centre speakers, plus a subwoofer control system. Constellation components use Leema’s LIPS protocol to communicate with the Tucana controller/amp, which can automatically check its input and power up the rest of the system accordingly.

**Price** £2,995 each **Due** now ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.leema-acoustics.com

## MARANTZ IS201

Marantz is offering audiophile iPod owners a new docking station that it says is the most flexible and user friendly on the market. The IS201 will integrate with all hi-fi and home cinema systems and is completely backwards compatible with all iPods. It comprises a conventional docking unit with all connections housed in a separate off-board block with a single wire connecting it to the cradle. It can be remote operated with Marantz system remotes and connections include stereo phono, S-Video (for connection to displays), RC-5, IR-Flasher input and RS-232.

**Price** £100 **Due** now  
☎ 01753 680868  
🌐 www.marantz.com



## AVID VOLVERE

Avid has been busy redesigning its heavyweight turntable, the Volvere. Some of the key changes to the new deck include a thicker platter, new clamp and stainless steel bearing, as employed in the upmarket Acutus. Avid has also redesigned the suspension to improve performance and is said to be working on a black version complete with green LEDs, specifically to match Naim equipment.

**Price** £2,500 **Due** now  
☎ 01480 457300 🌐 www.avidhifi.co.uk



## McINTOSH MA6300

American hi-fi specialist McIntosh has launched a hearty 100-watt stereo integrated amplifier, complete with characteristic illuminated glass front panel and blue VU meters. Called the MA6300, the amp features many proprietary technologies including a Power Assurance system and Silent Electromagnetic Switching. The powerhouse boasts seven inputs including MM phono, preamp out and power amp in connections, plus a balanced input option for CD. A key point is the new thermal tracking transistors, said to instantly adjust to bias to operating conditions, meaning low distortion and heat output at all power levels. Expect a review soon.

**Price** £2,995 **Due** now  
☎ 0870 1993914 🌐 www.mcintoshlabs.com

## Soundbites

**IXOS** has a new high-end cable range called Ixotica. The range comprises four leads each using Ixos's Aptimus technology – where each conductor strand is coated with a special polymer said to maximise sound quality and enable a stranded cable to adopt the sonically advantageous properties. Prices start at £95.  
☎ 01844 219000



**ROBERTS** calls its new Wanderer wind-up radio a “sound investment” and at £35 for the small portable, it's hard to argue. The compact AM/FM portable radio has AC, battery and wind-up power options – a one-minute wind offers 30 minutes of listening time. Its bias toward outdoor use means there's also water resistance, a built in lamp and emergency buzzer.  
☎ 01709 571722



**BUSH's** latest DAB/FM radio, the TR2005DAB, is a classic-look portable, finished in pink faux leather. The feature-packed portable certainly has a girly edge and boasts features such as auto DAB tuning, 20 station presets and a two-line backlit display. There's also stereo sound, a sleep timer and battery or mains operation. The unit is on sale now in Asda stores priced at £50.  
☎ 0870 873 0079

**KIMBER KABLE's** latest wire is a dedicated MP3 interconnect cable called the GQ Mini Cu. The £49 cable uses a Teflon-coated braided copper conductor and is available with mini jack, or Ultraplute RCA phonos for conventional use. Russ Andrews claims the cable effectively filters out airborne RFI.  
☎ 0845 345 1550

**ERRATUM** In the June 2006 issue (*HFC* 280), we were given an incorrect price for the Goldring DR100 headphones by the distributor. The correct price should have been £40, and not the £55 listed in the review. We apologise for any inconvenience this error may have caused.

### The Insider

#### THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

##### RUSS ANDREWS

**Job Title:** Founder and Managing Director  
**Company:** Russ Andrews Accessories Ltd



#### What's your most exciting product in development at the moment?

We are launching several new products for our 20th anniversary, but products in development are always top secret.

#### What's the future of hi-fi?

It's as good as we in the industry make it – the future of hi-fi is in our hands.

#### What's the most innovative product you've encountered on the market recently?

Ray Kimber's IsoMike recording technique. It solves fundamental problems that have limited the performance of recorded music for decades

#### DVD-Audio or SACD and why?

That's like asking which is better: French food or Italian? It's the resulting performance that counts, not the system that delivers it.

#### What's a really great album that you've heard recently?

The Fry Street Quartet performances of Haydn's *String Quartets D Minor Op. 9 No. 4 and F Major Op. 77 No. 2*. A rare combination of gorgeous music, stunning performance and a recording that puts you right 'there'.

#### Is the universal disc player concept the future of CD playback?

Probably. Depressing isn't it?

### Hi-Fi Diary

#### SEPTEMBER

1-6 IFA 2006  
Messe Berlin, Germany  
*All manner of home tech at Europe's largest consumer electronics show*

22-24 The London Sound & Vision Show 2006  
Park Inn Hotel, Heathrow, London  
01829 740650  
www.chestergroup.org  
*The new, independent London show*

22-24 Hi-Fi News Show 2006  
Renaissance Hotel, Heathrow, London  
020 8726 8000  
*London's longest-running hi-fi show*

## Blue light fight

It looks like the battle for the blue laser powered high-definition video market will be a long one.

Sony/Philips' Blu-Ray has the likes of 20th Century Fox and Disney behind it, Warner and Viacom will likely back both formats, while Universal is behind Toshiba's HD DVD. In the US, the latter format is already on sale and is launching at around \$500 less than the projected price of the first Blu-ray player from Sony.

We will see the first HD DVD players in the UK in the autumn at the earliest. As yet though, Sony has no confirmed date for its first player on these shores. There are also signs that record companies will be getting in on the blue laser act. Sony BMG has over 30 projects in HD that are expected to be released, while Universal Music has joined the Blu-ray group and Eagle Records has also published a list of planned titles. Don't get too excited though – all of these are expected to be music videos rather than pure music releases.



## Total Eclipse of the musician

Loudspeaker company Eclipse is making waves in the music business, with two discerning musicians having chosen to use its distinctive single-driver designs. Both film score composer Michael Nyman (pictured below) and classical guitar player John Williams have adopted Eclipse speakers, selecting TD510s and TD712zs respectively. Williams is quoted as saying that the Eclipses are "The best solution for amplifying my guitar without losing its original quality and delicate tone". Meanwhile, Nyman considers them "an acoustic extension of my piano".



## LP12 redux?

Rumours are leaking out of Linn's Glasgow HQ that its celebrated turntable is undergoing a revamp of dramatic proportions. While there has been no official confirmation that a new LP12 is being developed, we have heard that if one were on the books it would have a one-piece subchassis and armboard, rather than the pressed steel and MDF combination of yore. Our spies also tell us that there could be two new tonearm designs on the way, an upgraded Ekos and a titanium design that will cost an arm and a leg (geddit?). The finished article is likely to be launched this autumn – unofficially, of course.

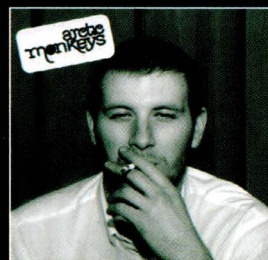
Somewhat closer to market is SME's 'beefed-up' version of the Model 20 turntable called 20/12, which will feature a Series 312S 12inch tonearm and newly designed power supply.



## Music sales boom

Following the first number one single on the strength of downloads alone (Gnarls Barkley's *Crazy*), the British Phonographic Industry has announced a rise of over 150 per cent in download sales year-on-year. The market for CDs has been enjoying a boom over the first quarter of 2006, too. According to BPI stats, the Arctic Monkeys' debut became the fastest selling album of all time and this – combined with material from acts including Corinne Bailey Rae, Hard Fi and Gorillaz – contributed to a total figure of 27.9 million units being sold, itself a record breaking (arf!) figure.

BPI Chairman Peter Jamieson said: "With the announcement of the first download-only number one single last week and the inclusion of downloads in the albums chart this week, the UK record industry can declare that the first part of its [digital distribution] mission is now complete".





## Connecting air

⊖ What sets the new Naim Air-Plug apart from all other audio connectors is the use of multiple sections, clipped together to form a flexible area between plug and cable. This has a decoupling effect, the theory being that energy is not only transmitted between components by the interconnect – the cable picks up airborne energy, too. The plug also uses the minimum of metal parts to reduce eddy current effects and has a clamping system that doesn't affect impedance.



## Speed of sound

⊖ KEF is the new "official technical partner" for Airwaves Ducati, the 2005 British Superbike champions. The Maidstone-based company is providing XQ-series loudspeakers for use in the Airwaves Ducati hospitality suite, rather than onboard the bikes, where the aerodynamics of the KHT 'egg' series might be marginally less incongruous!



## JIMMY'S TWEAKS #43

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES – HI-FI'S SUPER TWEAKER

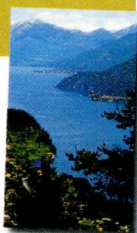


### Combinations and Situations

Trumpeter Harry James used to say he never compared bands – only nights. He was absolutely right; even the best band has the odd off-night. Equally, there will be nights when everything gels and the music flows like wine. And hi-fi systems? Similar criteria apply – except we'd say great sound is largely about combinations and situations. In other words, having the right *combination* of equipment optimally placed in the right *situation* – a sympathetic room. If you're lucky, you can achieve outstanding results from components that (while good) are far from being state of the art. Equally, it's possible to have a very expensive system that disappoints simply because it's ill-matched – either to the room, itself, or both. That's the trouble with hi-fi: there's too much luck involved. A system that sounds great in one room can sound terrible in another. Why? It's a total mystery. Even Harry James would have been baffled.

## TOP 10 TOP TEN THINGS TO SPEND £80,000 ON...

- 1 One... Krell Evolution One and Two amp system
- 2 One... Studio flat with a view of Lake Como, Italy
- 3 Eight... Patek Philippe Calatrava 3520D watches
- 4 596... Bottles of 'I Do' platinum-dusted nail polish
- 5 1,143... Apple iPod shuffles (1GB edition)
- 6 One... BMW 760i
- 7 8,000... Copies of *St. Elsewhere* by Gnarl Barkley on CD
- 8 c2.5kg... Italian white truffle
- 9 4.5... Glasses of Thomas Jefferson's Chateau Lafite 1789
- 10 88,889... Krispy Kreme doughnuts



## ➤ New Music

### IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY ABSENT FROM THE CUT AND THRUST OF SHOWBIZ HYPE DUE TO FINISHING THEIR LATEST ALBUMS



#### THE STOOGES

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** late 2006

Iggy Pop is back recording with the Stooges for the first time since 1973. "The same passions and problems are there. But the problems are in a more muted style," he says. "I'm still the show-off in the group that gets all the attention. It's pretty much the way it was in high school." Trying to keep some semblance of order is producer Steve Albini.

#### SMASHING PUMPKINS

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** autumn

The Smashing Pumpkins have reformed to record their first new album since 2000's *MACHINA/The Machines Of God*. Frontman Billy Corgan is definitely involved, although an official statement on the band's website fails to make clear which other members have signed on. "I naïvely tried to start a new band, but found that my heart wasn't in it," Corgan says. "My heart is still in the Smashing Pumpkins."

#### MICHAEL JACKSON

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** 2007

Michael Jackson has begun work on his first new album in five years. The follow-up to 2001's *Invincible* will be released on the Bahrain-based Two Seals label, owned by members of the Bahraini royal family. Jackson has been living in the Middle East since being acquitted of child abuse charges last year and claims to be "incredibly excited" about the new album.

#### DEPECHE MODE

**Title:** *Touring The Angel*

**Release date:** summer

Not so much in the studio as on the road with an overworked mobile recording unit, Depeche Mode are planning to release a limited edition live album of every concert



on their current 50-date world tour. They kicked off in California at the end of April and arrive in Europe later this summer. Both Pearl Jam and Tori Amos have already done something similar on recent tours.

#### SPARKLEHORSE

**Title:** tbc

**Release date:** Sept

Cult American band Sparklehorse are putting the finishing touches to the belated follow-up to 2001's *It's A Wonderful Life*. As usual, the band these days consists mainly of Mark Linkous, but he's also roped in some A-list guests, including Tom Waits, Danger Mouse and Stephen Drodz from everybody's favourite-band-of-the-moment, Flaming Lips.

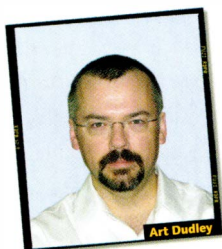
#### ALSO COMING SOON

##### JAZZ/CLASSICAL

**Curtis Stigers** *The Collection* (May); **Toots Thielemans** *One More For The Road* (Jun); **Plácido Domingo** *Best Of Domingo* (Jun); **Nicola Benedetti** *Mendelssohn Violin Concerto* (Jun)

##### SACD/DVD-AUDIO

**Annie Moses Band** *Eden* (SACD, May); **Porcupine Tree** *Stupid Dream* (DVD-A, May); **T-Bone Burnett** *True False Identity* (DVD-A, May); **Pat Martino** *East!* (SACD, Jul); **The Doors** *Erotic Politicians – 40th Anniversary Box Set* (DVD-A, Sep)



## Waxing lyrical

*New York's Finest means something different*

**W**hen I first moved there in 1978, audiophiles in New York City had a choice of two shopping experiences: Lyric HiFi... and everything else. Today, most of the latter are gone, while the former still stands its ground.

Founded in 1959 by a classical music enthusiast named Mike Kay, Lyric was the archetypal hi-fi *salon*. It offered the rarest and most expensive audio products in the world to a typically privileged clientele.

As such, it tended to polarize opinions: New York audio enthusiasts spoke with rapture of hearing their first Audio Research D-79 amplifier or Infinity IRS loudspeaker at Lyric HiFi, or complained bitterly of being shut out altogether. As with certain night clubs and clothiers, that touch of exclusivity didn't hurt sales at all.

## “In 1978, audiophiles in New York City had a choice of two shopping experiences: Lyric HiFi... and everything else.”

By the time I discovered Lyric HiFi, that element of mystique was just what we needed in a hobby that had all but turned its back on the art of listening and embraced a more corporate point of view. It was the perfect antidote to a nascent mass-market approach that stressed power and distortion specifications over everything else, and endorsed such utter crapophilia as graphic equalizers, turntables that automatically corrected for off-centre records, and other such nonsense.

By contrast, Lyric HiFi gave New Yorkers their first glimpse of individually crafted phono cartridges, huge electrostatic panels, high-power tube amplifiers, professional quality open-reel decks, and – yes – high-end interconnect and loudspeaker cables. Mike Kay, whose old-world charm came packaged with an old-world temper, could make or break a product line, and some of the most well known brands in perfectionist high-end audio got their start in Lyric's showroom: Koetsu, Mark Levinson, Magnepan, Goldmund, and literally scores of others.

On a fine Spring day just a few weeks ago, I visited Lyric HiFi for the first time in ten years. A lot of things had changed, of course, and I wasn't surprised to see an emphasis on high-quality video installations. But the main listening room – a huge, acoustically perfect space that was created during the store's mid-1980s remodeling – is still dedicated to two-channel audio. I listened to the latest version of the towering Nola Grand Reference loudspeakers, powered by a new solid-state integrated (!) amp from ASR – and was delighted to see Mike Kay, who sold the business to two of his veteran employees in 2004, was still on hand to greet customers and spin some of his favourite recordings. It was an afternoon to remember.

Lyric HiFi will pass the half-century mark in just a few years – but you should get a jump on the celebration: It's at 1221 Lexington Avenue, between 82nd and 83rd Streets on Manhattan's upper east side.

*Art Dudley has written for Hi-Fi Heretic, Sounds Like and Listener. He lives in the US and works as Stereophile's editor-at-large*



Jason Kennedy

## Refined vinyl

*Over 20 years on and vinyl still beats CD*

It's not surprising that few people know what a good turntable can do in pure sound quality terms – the things are very expensive and the media, while still being made, is not often found in a high-street store. What is surprisingly, though, is that many people in the hi-fi industry do not often get to hear a decent turntable or appreciate the potential the vinyl format has to offer. There have been a couple of occasions of late where a visiting company has brought along some new kit for me to review and ended up listening to both the CD and turntable source components in the system, then exclaiming that the difference between the two was shocking to say the least.

At this point they may have decided that the Townshend TA 565 CD is not all that good, but in fact it is the best disc player I have had in terms of pure sound quality. It is, of course, significantly less expensive than the complete vinyl playing system, an SME Model 20A with Series V arm, van den Hul Condor cartridge and Trichord Delphini phono stage, which would set you back in the region of ten grand if purchased in one go. Yet, ironically it is the analogue source that could be most easily upgraded if the funds were available; there are better turntables and arms on the market and decidedly more exotic phono stages. On the digital side, I'm prepared to accept that there may be a better player out there. I've heard a lot of them and, if one or two had the edge in one respect or another, none was clearly better.

Why the vinyl sounds so much better in this system seems to be down to the nature of both formats; it's a recording thing and the gap between sources really widens to dramatic scale when you put on a great analogue recording such as those made by ECM. On both recent occasions when my visitors sat up and exclaimed, I was playing ECM vinyl – Keith Jarrett's *Changes* (1984) had B&W's Steve Pearce taken aback while John Surman's *The Amazing Adventures of Simon Simon* (1981) stunned ECS's Reuben Klein. He was so impressed with the music that he bought the CD, only to report that the sound was completely flat by comparison. So, perhaps ▶

# R

## RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

### TRIANGLE OCTANT LOUDSPEAKER



When we reviewed the Jamo R909 dipolar moving coil loudspeaker recently (see p73), we could not think of a direct

precedent – a previous full-range dipole loudspeaker also based on moving coil drivers. But on a recent visit to France, we stumbled across one. It came from Triangle, the number one or two French loudspeaker producer (the other is Focal, and the two often switch places as the leading indigenous manufacturer). The full-range, moving coil dipole in question is the Octant, by reputation a well regarded design, which achieved some success, especially on the French market.

There are some interesting parallels with the R909, and some equally striking differences. The Octant was conceived as an alternative solution to existing flat-panel technologies, which at the time were mostly electrostatic or isodynamic. Four years of R&D were necessary to design and tweak the panel, the dimensions of which were 150cm tall, a svelte 42cm wide and just 9cm deep.

The Octant was first launched as long ago as March 1991, with a retail price of 19,990 francs per pair – around £2,000 – making it a very serious product. In October 1993 it was upgraded in with wooden sides to the front baffle cover, and there were some crossover changes too, with a final retail price of 26,000 francs per pair (about £2,600). Sadly, it seemed destined not to make its way through the Chunnel and no UK sales of the Octant have ever been recorded.

The design worked as a full-range, three-way, five-driver acoustic dipole, but there is a problem with any loudspeaker of this type, which is caused by air rushing around the sides of the panel to equalise air pressure on both sides. Unless special measures are taken, such a loudspeaker will lack bass extension and weight. In the case of the Jamo R909, which takes this aspect of performance very seriously, the solution was to use two massive 38cm drive units – had the drive units been mounted in a vented box, this would have been a gross over-provision.



**“The Octant was conceived as an alternative to existing flat-panel technologies.”**

Triangle didn't go quite to these extremes, but the Octant went some way in the same direction and was home to three 17cm diameter, low-resonance drivers – all with the same mechanical and electrical properties, operating in phase, and all mounted directly to the same flat, open baffle. The units were designed with a multi-pleated fabric suspension with very linear characteristics. The bass drivers are stitched to the wide dispersion tweeter using a second order (12dB/octave) crossover. The design boasted a bass extending to 50Hz at -3dB and a very high sensitivity of 94dB/W/m, which allows a maximum claimed output of 116dBA even from fairly low-power amplifiers.

The Triangle had a different set of compromises. Although the Octant lacked the depth and weight of the Jamo R909, sensitivity was significantly greater, and the panel was a much more slimline affair, which is an obvious benefit of the use of multiple, relatively small bass drivers.

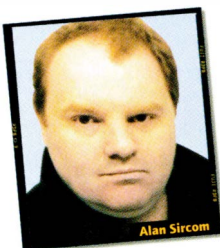
Unfortunately, like most British people, I never heard this speaker working in anger, so the maker's claims that it offers an unusual level of “micro-information” and a lifelike, unboxy sound with a resolution “close to big electrostatic systems” can only be taken at face value. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

it's to do with the origins of recordings; these are both probably analogue originals and that would be a nice solution to the problem if that is what it is. However, even vinyl versions of contemporary albums frequently sound more convincing than the polycarbonate pressings they were engineered for. Explaining this to Eric Kingdon of Sony made him chuckle and suggest that it was because I had grown up with vinyl that I had become attuned or accustomed to its character, the inference being that it's vinyl's distortions that I'm hearing and what sounds like higher fidelity is a euphonic artefact of the senior medium.

I could accept this if I was alone in this perception. After all, vinyl does seem to have an openness that CD rarely does and in technical terms it rolls off at high frequencies by comparison with digital formats. But that just brings me back to the original observation by my visitors – it's not just me, it's also people who are totally in tune with CD who are struck by the gulf between the formats. The hi-res digital formats (SACD and DVD-Audio) occasionally seem to narrow the gap, especially when the recording has been done well – the original information capture is still the most significant factor. If you can listen without the barrier that any format creates all the better, which is why live concerts on radio can sound better than any disc – black or silver – despite the limitations of the delivery system. But they're never going to get Led Zeppelin playing *Dazed and Confused* again, so a format must be used and for both my visitors and me, the format that is spun under a tiny precious stone at 33.3rpm is hard to beat.

*Jason Kennedy began working on Hi-Fi Choice over 15 years ago, eventually rising to the position of editor. He's currently indulging his passion as a freelance hi-fi writer*



Alan Sircom

### The luxury gap

*High-end hi-fi is about more than sound*

There's a point where the 'high end' gets left behind. High-end hi-fi is aspirational, what goes beyond is not. It's possible for someone with a £1,000 system to aspire to owning a £5,000 or even £50,000 system, but much beyond that, it moves into the territory of becoming an object of desire.

Real mortals – even real mortals who write about hi-fi in magazines – can only dream of owning a system costing in excess of £200,000. For most of us, this is the preserve of the Rich, Famous, Talented & Lucky – A-List film stars, Premiership footballers, the Duke of Westminster and Rollover lottery winners can afford to dish out this sort of money on electronics. The rest of us get to hear these products at one remove... or possibly, if we are really, really lucky, we get to spend a few short hours in their company. Then, it's back to the, erm, prosaic £10,000 systems.

There have always been products and systems that require the sort of spend normally allocated to the US defence budget. But there's never been such a wealth of exotica before. And a part of this is because manufacturers have finally started to cotton on to who actually buys the top end of the top end of high end. These manufacturers have realised that those prepared to drop the asking price for a Ferrari on home audio don't just want the best possible sound... that's almost a given. No, they want the full experience, from the satisfaction that comes from owning the best to the sense of pride that comes with showing off this equipment to their friends and business colleagues. None of which occurs if the equipment looks as if it was built by

three chimps armed with cold chisels and ball pein hammers, or designed by the committee that sanctioned the late and largely unlamented Plymouth Tricorn Centre.

Until a few years ago, the prevailing attitude among high-end manufacturers was one of side-lining elegant design in favour of workmanlike industrial build quality and the best possible sound. This attitude still exists in many manufacturers and among some buyers, although arguably not among those who are prepared to spend absolute top dollar. But that's okay, because there are still many utility-led products that deliver excellent sound for a fraction of the top-end price.

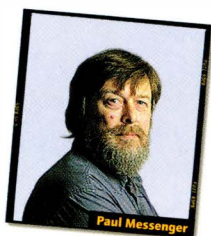
Those who do buy the good stuff, but not the good and expensive stuff are often scathing of those products and their buyers. This is patent nonsense – what claret drinker pours scorn on those able to afford Chateau Lafite-Rothschild, Chateau Latour or Chateau Petrus? Yes, part of the difference between good Bordeaux and Premier Cru Bordeaux is in part cachet, hype and good branding, but another part is that they are all bloody good wines. The scorn is just jealousy and envy.

It seems the really high-priced end of the market is leaving us mortals behind. And curiously, that's a good thing. Yes, I'm envious of those who can afford a Krell Evolution

**“None of which occurs if the equipment looks as if it were built by three chimps armed with cold chisels and ball pein hammers.”**



system, just as I'm envious of those who drive a Zonda not a Honda, who wear a Patek Phillipe watch and not an Oris and who write with an OMAS fountain pen, not a Biro. But the point is, if I could afford these things, I'd likely own them. All of them. And the hi-fi, too. When a product has the performance, the looks and that air of exclusivity, who wouldn't. And that's the way that high-end hi-fi is going. *Alan Sircom began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. He has since become one of the hi-fi and AV industry's most respected scribes*



Paul Messenger

## The unkindest cut

*You always miss the biggest and best toys!*

This annual *Collection* edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* is perhaps the most exciting and interesting, yet at the same time also the most stressful edition in our calendar. Sure, it's great to have the opportunity to play with all those expensive toys. But it's a bit of a struggle to cope with them when they all arrive at once.

But the unkindest cut of all is the "Miss You When You're Gone" (MYWYG) syndrome. It's lovely to get to play with the sort of kit one's income can't possibly afford, but it's hard to just about have time to get used to enjoying something absolutely delicious, only to lose it again after a few short weeks.

That's certainly the way I feel about the Magnum Dynalab MD108T FM tuner, after it had to go for photography and I had to revert to my regular MD102. While it's nice to have the latter's remote control to hand for switching between Radios Three and Four, which I often do several times a day, the lovely delicacy, sweetness and superior dynamic range of the new triode-equipped senior model is much missed, by one who probably spends around three hours a day listening to the radio. Although I suffered a similar bereavement with the MD106T, familiarity doesn't seem to ease the anguish.

My reviewing work requires me to be constantly changing speakers, so it's less of a wrench to lose the models that came in this time around. That said, I might have missed the JBL 1400 Array, were it not for the knowledge that a new K2 S9800 is likely to arrive shortly. And I would certainly have missed the Audio Acoustics Sapphire ▶

# M

## MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

SPIRIT  
POTATO LAND

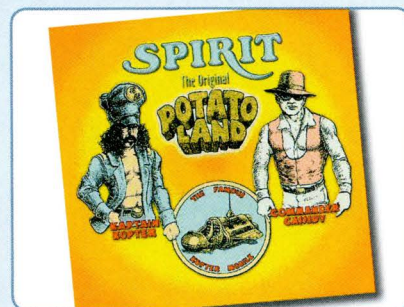


Spirit fans around the world will be rejoicing at Acadia's current CD release of the original *Potato Land* album, a record slated for release in 1973 until Epic got cold feet and cancelled it, dropping the group into limbo for years. When guitar legend/leader Randy California came to England in the early 1980s he was presented with a 5,000-word petition to release the album. Rhino/Beggars Banquet duly acquiesced and released the shoddy *The Adventures Of Kaptain Kopter & Commander Cassidy In Potatoland*, with only five heavily overdubbed and edited tracks from the original sessions. It still got to No. 40 in the UK!

So, let's go back to 1969 to get an idea of the genesis of one of the most legendary concept albums in rock history. Neil Young's producer, David Briggs, was drafted in to fashion Spirit's masterpiece, *The Twelve Dreams Of Dr Sardonicus*, a high-watermark of multi-track high-fidelity recording and one of the best deployments of Moog synthesizer in history. Unfortunately, during its traumatic six-month studio creation California fell off a horse and fractured his skull, tensions within the band mounted and the subsequent failure of *Sardonicus* led to disillusionment and breakup.

In 1972, California re-emerged into the music biz with Kapt Kopter and The (Fabulous) Twirly Birds, hitching a ride with Hendrix bass player Noel Redding. (Remember, California was taught how to play the Strat by Jimi Hendrix!) He then formed a trio with Ed Cassidy and bassist Larry 'Fuzzy' Knight. During the winter of 1972, California and Cassidy decided to go into the studio and make a duo album, *Back Together Again*. By the early weeks of 1973, the album (now called *Potato Land*) was nearly finished and would be ready for release in the spring, a period when California/Cassidy and Knight were ripping up the UK boards with the best post-Hendrix guitar rock of its era. Eyewitnesses attest to endless encores wherever they went. And now comes the fated twist in the tale!

In April 1973, California brought the *Potato Land* master tapes to the BBC for a Bob Harris interview. The Beeb, in its wisdom,



**"This news prompted California to leave his hotel and throw himself into the Thames."**

made a full acetate of the album! Harris played it on the radio but shortly afterwards Epic told California by phone that the album was too far-out to be released. Furthermore, he was dropped from the label. This news prompted California to leave his hotel and throw himself into the Thames in an attempted suicide bid. He was rescued but was diagnosed with a breakdown and went to Hawaii to recuperate, where he became a gardener. He continued to record, but tragically, in January 1997, Randy California was lost in the ocean trying to save his twelve-year-old son Quinn from a riptide.

In 1973, a young fan, Mick Skidmore, heard the Bob Harris *Potato Land* show. He taped it on cassette and it is he that assembled this final version with Ed Cassidy for release from the BBC acetate, still miraculously intact after 33 years. The CD features 18 album tracks and eight bonus songs. Hearing *Potato Land* now is a revelation (and perfect in this era of US militarism). As well as humorous dialogue and filmic narrations, it contains brilliant, cosmic rock music. The songs *Turn To The Right*, *Donut House*, *My Friend* and *Information Reprise* are all definitive Spirit and though it may not have the hi-fi production of *Sardonicus*, it's still an essential piece of the late 1960s early 1970s music scene. **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

❑ TiC SE if I was reviewing source components and amplifiers, as I know of no other speaker that is better able to cut through the confusion and lay bare the characteristics, for good or ill, of the driving system.

Then there's the darTZeel, a truly remarkable power amplifier sonically speaking, even though the preamp I tried was prototypical. I certainly miss its speed, transparency and dramatic dynamic range, though I miss idiosyncracies like a remote control that doesn't select inputs, and the need to switch off every time the speakers are disconnected far less. If I didn't change speakers so often and could site the preamp within easy reach, I could very easily fall in love with this amplifier, as I suspect many will, but it hasn't proved too difficult to go back to the Naim 552/500 combo that I regularly use.

*Paul Messenger is a former editor of Hi-Fi Choice and has been writing about his favourite hobby for nearly 30 years*



Alvin Gold

## Setting up subwoofers

*Don't write off the bass speaker, yet*

**W**hen it comes to high fidelity, subwoofers have always been the poor relation, the bastard son of the home cinema revolution. Never mind that subwoofers preceded home cinema and multichannel audio by at least a decade.

But there are different ways to set up subwoofers and this can have a big effect, a fact I have recently had reinforced thanks to a visit by REL's new chief designer. He pointed out what has always been blindingly obvious, but which I have not always applied rigorously enough to my own setting up.

I refuse to take the whole blame here, though. The one article of faith that is instilled in subwoofer users, and has been ever since (if not before) THX added some intellectual rigour to the business, was to roll the main speakers out around 80-85Hz, and bring in the subwoofer (or subwoofers) to cover the couple of octaves below. There are various reasons why this is a good idea, to do with power handling and the size of the main or satellite speakers, which can be allowed to shrink as the bandwidth covered is reduced. Active equalisation adds a further advantage, as it



## “Spin around with your eyes closed and a subwoofer playing. There is no frequency where directionality ceases to matter.”

means that good, deep bass can be achieved from small enclosures. But this well-meaning advice is probably responsible for more subwoofer problems than anything else.

No, the right way to add a subwoofer to an existing system, I am now more convinced than ever, is to run the main speakers full range, without any attenuation whatever, and to use the low-pass filter on the subwoofer to turn the subwoofer off where it would otherwise impinge on the main speaker coverage. It follows from this that with most speakers, the subwoofer should be rolled out of circuit around 30-35Hz. It also follows that the most suitable candidates for subwoofers are not small speakers, still less the matchbox speakers that are often preferred, but large floorstanders. It is this kind of speaker that with careful, sympathetic setting up produces a stereo image that is not pulled hither and thither by the subwoofer.

By the same token, preventing the subwoofer straying too far outside its sphere of competence – 80Hz is absolutely too high – is a major contributor to ensuring that the subwoofer remains inconspicuous. It is often said that bass frequencies cannot be located by ear, but this is a terminological inexactitude. Try spinning around with your eyes closed and a subwoofer playing if you don't believe this. There is no frequency at which directionality ceases to matter altogether. The sound simply

becomes progressively less directional as the frequency drops. But even with the very low crossover frequencies advocated here, the subwoofer should be in the same plane as the main speakers, and ideally as far as possible from the listening position, which will almost certainly mean close to a corner.

*Alvin Gold began writing about hi-fi more than 20 years ago and has since become one of the UK's most internationally renowned reviewers*



Malcolm Steward

## Ten years gone

*Malcolm's back. So what's changed?*

**I**t's been a decade or more since I last wrote a review or column for a hi-fi magazine such as this, so please forgive me if I'm a little rusty. For the last eight years I've been producing a hi-fi trade journal, which is a completely different discipline for a writer. But I have at least stayed in touch.

During that time, one might have expected to have seen significant advances in the art of reproducing music across all sectors of the industry. In truth, that hasn't been the case and I've witnessed a great deal of divergence, little of which I could have expected or predicted.

There used to be clearly defined roles for hi-fi companies. The high-end manufacturers produced equipment that tolerated little or no compromise in its pursuit of reproducing music with the utmost accuracy and fidelity. The middle-market and budget producers followed behind, trying to do the same job but more economically. Life was comfortably predictable.

Then, along came home cinema and multichannel sound, which completely upset the *status quo*. The middle market jumped eagerly on this bandwagon to create new business. The budget makers, naturally, dived in eagerly as well. The high end, meanwhile, dipped its toes gingerly in the water. I guess it was trying to stay in touch, in case this multi-everything malarkey ever took off.

Soon, high-resolution formats appeared with the promise of greater fidelity: DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD. Neither of these, however, really set the world on fire. Maybe it was because people had already had their expectations lowered. Good enough, it seemed, was good enough for most people.

Then, along came the nadir of recorded sound: the MP3, along with the iPod and its ilk. Why I'm even mentioning these in a magazine concerned with high fidelity, I do not know. But they have caught the attention of buyers and, not surprisingly, hi-fi manufacturers that are busily designing systems and docking stations to accommodate and propagate their dire sound. Don't tell me that that's not a commercial consideration: it certainly has nothing to do with audio quality.

While all this has been going on, and the standards of sound quality that most people will accept have been reduced to an all-time low, I sit listening to essentially the same system that I owned back in my reviewing days. Despite its dearth of channels – it only has two – it still pushes all the right buttons and never fails to excite, delight and inspire.

Without wishing to sound like a reactionary, or one of the BBC's *Grumpy Old Men*, I am tempted to ask "Progress: Who needs it?" Over the past decade or so, the most significant change to my system has been swapping the loudspeakers from Naim's SBLs to DBLs. Oh, and I changed the interconnect between my CD player and preamp.

And that is, perhaps, the biggest problem facing high-end gear: it simply lasts too long.

*Malcolm Steward was one of the UK's best-known and most outspoken hi-fi reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently publishes the hi-fi trade bible, the British Audio Journal*

# TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

## BAD VIBRATIONS



Vibration, we are often reminded by makers of hi-fi equipment supports, can be bad for you.

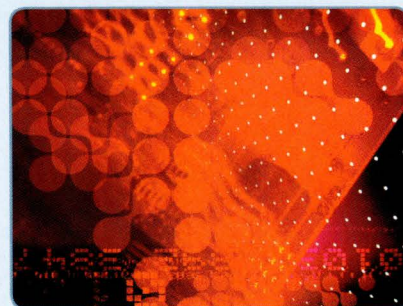
Well, bad for your sound at least.

In fact, there's precious little objective evidence that this is the case, beyond really obvious examples like valve phono stages which have been known to function as quite effective microphones. But transistor power amps? Are they really affected by vibrations, whether transmitted via solid bodies (floor and supports) or air?

In the conventional sense of turning vibration into voltages, frankly, no. One of the more alarming-looking tests carried out recently in the *Techno* labs involved measuring the output of various amplifiers, in the presence or absence of an audio signal, while they were methodically whacked with various implements. In most cases, it was hard to find any trace of a disturbance in the output however hard one looked. Ditto with CD players, short of making them skip.

There are, however, two other mechanisms involving mechanical vibration in audio equipment that can still influence the overall sound. One is direct conversion of electrical signals to sound within the equipment and the other is mechanical resonance in the equipment causing sound to 'hang around' after it should have gone. The first of these, we must stress, only involves power amplifiers. The audio power levels in all other equipment are so very much lower that it is quite inconceivable that audible levels could be generated, but with several amps flowing through output transistors it is common to find thermal and electromagnetic stresses within the semiconductors producing quiet, but distinctly audible, sound.

The level of this sound is typically around 70-80dB below that coming from the speakers at the same time, so it's not a massive problem. However, it can often contain high levels of second harmonic, often in fact exceeding that produced by the amplifier's intrinsic nonlinearity. In addition, it comes from a different place in the room from the main sound source, and its level depends strongly on



**“Vibration, we are often reminded by makers of hi-fi equipment supports, can be bad for you.”**

frequency, all of which can only increase the chance of it becoming audible.

Mechanical resonance is completely separate from the equipment's basic function and indeed will occur just the same whether the kit is turned on or not. Nor is it restricted to hi-fi components, and everyday objects like windows, radiators and cupboard doors are often far worse offenders. All the same, the beautifully tooled metal panels in quality hi-fi can function as very efficient resonators, prolonging the life of certain frequencies within the sound – the dreaded 'delayed resonance', which muddies the sound of live and reproduced music.

Again, as a result of our own researches, we're in a position to put some numbers on this. We've found resonances as little as 60dB down from the main sound, though again 70-80dB is more typical, but these can take as much as a second or so to decay to inaudibility. That's a longer duration than the (higher amplitude) resonances within loudspeakers normally achieve.

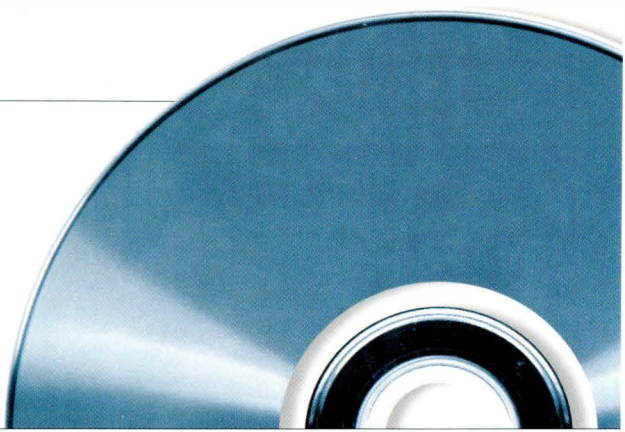
Equipment supports can help alleviate both these problems by the way they reflect, absorb and conduct vibration. They can also worsen them, and indeed bring their own resonances to the party. It's clear, though, that there's a real issue here. Are you feeling shaky? **HFC**

*Richard Black*

# ChoiceCuts

This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman and Nigel Williamson



## AUDIOPHILE VINYL

### MUDDY WATERS

#### The Best of Muddy Waters

Chess/Speakers Corner

180g vinyl

**Music:** It might seem audacious to call a debut album *The Best Of...* But it was a prescient title choice, because that is precisely what this 1957 LP contains,

although some argue his live *At Newport 1960* LP also fits the bill. This is raw, untrammelled country blues with enough energy to knock you sideways. Studs Terkel, the author who wrote the sleeve notes, called it "uninhibited blues" and it is notably short on any form of restraint or editing. The famous tracks are *I Just Want To Make Love To You*, *Rollin Stone* and *Hoochie Coochie Man* but all 12 tracks are killers. ★★★★★

**Sound:** A significant contribution to the power of this music is its recording, which is uncompressed mono, made on equipment that is struggling to cope with the energy being thrown its way via valve amplification. Only one track, *Rollin Stone*, shows its age. Otherwise, this is a fabulous transcription of raw blues power. ★★★★★ JK

### CAPTAIN BEEFHEART & HIS MAGIC BAND

#### Trout Mask Replica

Straight/Rhino

2x180g vinyl

**Music:** Beefheart's 1969 *tour de force* was for many years voted the greatest album ever by the likes of John Peel listeners and NME readers, but it's hard to

imagine that many of them listened to it all the way through more than once. It's a monster double album with 28 tracks and frequent flashes of brilliance from a composer of extraordinary inventiveness, but no formal musical education, and a group of musicians playing as if their very lives depended on it. As a consequence, it's not exactly easy listening. Persevere, though – it's a seminal work that, while rarely easy going, features blues rock pushed to the very edge. ★★★★★

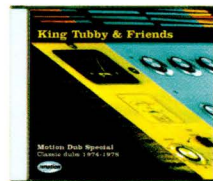
**Sound:** A better sounding album than many of its era, this Rhino pressing makes the music significantly more accessible than it is on CD. There's plenty of energy and reasonable bandwidth, too. ★★★★★ JK

LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure.

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## COMPACT DISC & VINYL



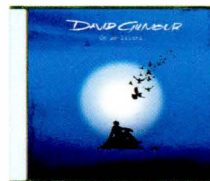
### KING TUBBY & FRIENDS

#### Motion Dub Special

Motion Records

**Music:** This is a dub reggae compilation with all the cuts lifted from producer King Tubby's 1974-1978 golden age. Among the gems are the Skatalites' rattling funk-fest *Fugitive Dub* and Dennis Brown's brassy *Travelling Version*. It evokes the hypnotic power of a music that can cut through today (and could cut through even in the manic heyday of punk and disco). Was this the first real ambient music? ★★★★★

**Sound:** Most of this was recorded at 7.5 IPS and so mastering engineer Mike Coe had an uphill task to give it all clarity – he's pretty much managed it, though. This might have done with a touch more on the vocal front, but it remains background that is foreground – a bass-friendly disc that should come with a pair of subwoofers and a packet of Rizlas. ★★★★★ PS



### DAVID GILMOUR

#### On An Island

EMI

**Music:** Listen to *Red Sky At Night* from David Gilmour's third solo record and you'd swear it was *Wish You Were Here Pt 2*. Inspired by idyllic family sojourns in Spain and Greece (and lyrically co-written by Polly Samson), Gilmour lays the ghost of Pink Floyd to rest by spreading his musical wings. Aided by a who's who of rock's elder statesmen (Crosby & Nash, Phil Manzanera, Robert Wyatt and old keyboard buddy Rick Wright) plus the haunting orchestrations of Zbigniew Preisner, Gilmour has fashioned a sublime mix of folk, jazz, rock and instrumental gold. A true masterpiece! ★★★★★

**Sound:** Initially you think it bland, but it will become an addictive hi-fi experience as Manzanera's and Chris Thomas's beguiling production wraps you in sonic heaven. ★★★★★ MP



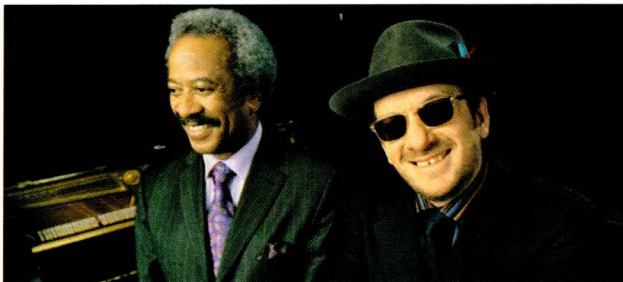
### LARRY LEVAN

#### Journey Into Paradise

Rhino

**Music:** By the time *Saturday Night Fever* shook the world in 1977, disco as it would have been recognized by its originators was already dead. But Larry Levan elevated what could be done with records, combining sounds, effects, rhythms and melodies to create moods, tell stories and move both the head and the feet. This selection of mixes of tracks (22 over two discs) by Chaka Khan, Patrice Rushen, Sister Sledge and other 1970s staples may not play like a continuous event, as Levan's nights at the Paradise Garage did, but they're a testament to his genius. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Famously ferocious about achieving the perfect sound, Levan's mixes never really sound like amalgams or pastiches, but instead suggest that they're what the originators intended. Superb. ★★★★★ DO



### ELVIS COSTELLO & ALLEN TOUSSAINT

#### The River In Reverse

Verve

**Music:** It's hard to keep up with Costello. One minute he's making a classical album. Then it's a jazz record. Now he's teamed up with New Orleans legend Allen Toussaint for a sizzling set of deep-fried southern funk. Featuring seven songs from Toussaint's prestigious back catalogue and half a dozen new co-compositions, it's a thrilling meeting of minds. The interplay between the New Orleans horn section and Costello's band *The Impostors* is so intuitive, you'd imagine they'd been playing together all their lives. Alongside standards such as *Freedom For The Stallion*, new songs like *Ascension Day* already sound like instant classics. Best of all, there's a delicious repartee between the two band leaders when they trade vocal lines. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Recorded mostly live in a whirlwind two weeks with producer Joe Henry, the results fizz with a spontaneous brio, driven by Toussaint's masterful piano and some of the punchiest horns you ever heard. ★★★★★ NW



### SEÑOR COCONUT

#### Yellow Fever

Newstate

**Music:** When German-born Chile resident and former techno DJ Uwe Schmidt released an album of Kraftwerk cover versions set to meringue and mambo beats, it seemed like a very clever, if pointless arthouse joke. His latest seems willfully obscure, utilizing the back catalogue of Japanese 1970s/1980s synth pioneers, *Yellow Magic Orchestra*. Few could be expected to be familiar with YMO's hits today but Sr Coconut did manage to persuade all three original members to contribute to his frilly shirred vision, including the now almost legendary figure of Ryuichi Sakamoto. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Rather than relying on samples and his trusty laptop, Schmidt has gathered a full Latin band and very good they sound too. ★★★★★ DO



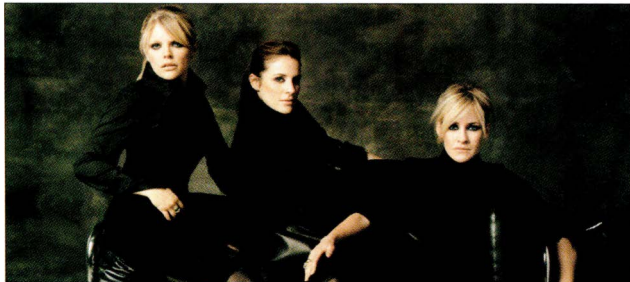


## THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "It is also delightfully open and nimble."

**YES** *Fragile* Atlantic

**Music:** Yes are considered the ultimate progressive rock band but their sound is an amalgam of jazz, folk and rock. On this outing – and the next – Yes did not indulge in the excesses that came to be associated with the genre. What it does have is cleverly composed tunes that are played with a combination of virtuosity and feel that is remarkable. The lyrics might be tosh but Jon Anderson's singing is fine – in fact, by prog standards it's spectacular, while the work put in

by Steve Howe on guitar, Chris Squire on bass, Bill Bruford on drums and the then Yes-newcomer Rick Wakeman on keyboards and satiny capes is among their best. ★★★★★ **Sound:** Recorded in 1971 by the band (and engineer Eddy Offord), *Fragile* captures the tonal qualities of the instruments and voices with great skill. It is also delightfully open and nimble; there's no bass emphasis or obvious compression. A great result for its time. ★★★★★ **JK**

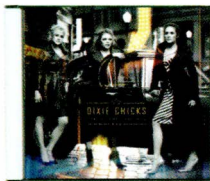


**DIXIE CHICKS**  
*Taking The Long Way*

Columbia

**Music:** Struggle has clearly been good for the biggest-selling female band in history. After falling out with America's conservative establishment following their criticisms of Bush's policies over the second Gulf War, the Dixie Chicks turned to maverick producer Rick Rubin, who brought in a top-flight rock band to give them a musical makeover. Yet, it remains on their songwriting skills that the impact of the backlash against them seems to have been most dramatic. For the first time, they've co-written all the songs themselves, including *Not Ready To Make Nice* which boldly yet angrily takes on their critics. Other songs deal with such difficult subjects as Alzheimer's and infertility while the soulful gospel-blues of *I Hope* takes them into previously uncharted waters. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Rubin manages to beef things up where necessary, but there are still plenty of pedal steels and fiddles alongside the rock guitars to retain a strong country flavour. ★★★★★ **NW**



**BRAHMS**  
*Piano Concerto No. 1*

Krystian Zimerman (piano), Simon Rattle (conductor), Berlin Philharmonic Naim CD089

**Music:** Krystian Zimerman is meticulous in his preparation of scores. He takes up to ten years on a single work and this, the second time he has recorded the work, shows the signs of this preparation with its symphonic, almost magisterial quality. This should be the definitive recording of this difficult and complex work, which was a far cry from contemporary equivalents. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The piano was prepared by Krystian Zimerman himself following a less than positive experience with the first recording, and it was recorded in the Scoring Stage, Berlin for similar reasons. The result is a recording every bit as stunning as the performance is powerful and deeply felt. ★★★★★ **AG**



**KAORI MURAJI**  
*Lumières*

Decca 475 7651

**Music:** This disc by the young Japanese guitarist Kaori Muraji is of an eclectic programme of short pieces, from Satie and Debussy, to some less familiar, sometimes more challenging music from Roland Dyans, Frances Kleynjans, Michael Legrand and Takashi Yoshimatsu. The result is a varied and interesting selection that allows Kaori's playing to suggest stillness as well as displaying her more virtuosic qualities, though never to excess. ★★★★★

**Sound:** This fine recording was made in the Concert Hall of the Nimbus Foundation, and miked close enough to show real texture and expressiveness in an instrument that can sound flat when recorded unsympathetically, but not so close as to sound excessively reverberant. ★★★★★ **AG**

## DVD-AUDIO & SACD

### JACO PASTORIUS BIG BAND

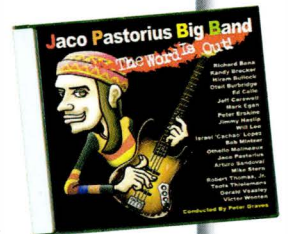
*The Word Is Out*

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Heads Up

**Music:** This is JPBB's second album and one that thankfully avoids the voice clips included in the earlier *Word Of Mouth Revisited*. Organiser Peter Graves is joined by an array of 'stellar guest players' including Randy Brecker, Hiram Bullock, Peter Erskine and Bob Mintzer among many others to play a range of Pastorius compositions. There is also a small army of bass players taking turns to emulate the master and their efforts are pretty impressive if never quite as musically beguiling as the man himself. But it's the quality of composition that carries this album; who'd have thought that a bassist could be this imaginative? ★★★★★

**Sound:** Heads Up is an out-and-out multichannel label and in that mode this album really expands and breathes. If you want to showcase your system with surround sound SACD, this is an ideal choice. In stereo, however, it seems a little shut in, albeit highly revealing. ★★★★★ **JK**



### BETHOVEN

*Symphonies No. 5 and 7*

Carlos Kleiber (conductor), Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

DGG 471 630-2

**Music:** These are among the greatest performances of two essential works. With the exception of some Klemperer recordings on EMI, they may be the finest on record – and it was on record rather than CD that these recordings were first heard. The *5th* is a blazing, incandescent performance, the opening *Allegro con brio* in particular, but there is wonderful ensemble and woodwind throughout. The marvellous *7th* receives an equally charged performance, with idiomatic playing from the Vienna Philharmonic, who are steeped in the Beethoven tradition. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The two works speak across the more than three decades since they were recorded with a freshness and vitality, combined with a rare concentration and intelligence that makes listening an unforgettable experience, but there is little advantage in the multichannel mix over the stereo in this remix of the original tapes. ★★★★★ **AG**



### THE MOODY BLUES

*Days Of Future Passed*

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Deram

**Music:** By 1967, this Brum-beat group was running out of steam. With little or no prospects after their early hits had deserted them, they agreed to produce a rock version of Dvorak's *New World Symphony* to showcase 'Deramic Stereo' – a new format designed to simulate a stereo sound picture from mono speakers – but instead used the sessions with the London Festival Orchestra to develop their own material. The result marked the beginning of the Moody Blues' psychedelic period and a further exploration of the path begun by *Sgt. Pepper*. Today, it's something of a period piece, the phenomenally pompous overture hinting at prog excesses yet to come. But some tracks, including *Nights In White Satin*, still show their class. ★★★★★

**Sound:** This and several other Moody Blues album have been released in Deluxe editions on SACD in 5.1, with a feast of out-takes and related sessions. The remastering for surround has benefited each, with crisply delineated detail nicely spread across an impressively broad soundstage. ★★★★★ **DO**



The word on the street....

what the experts are saying  
about some of our products!

DALI Loudspeakers



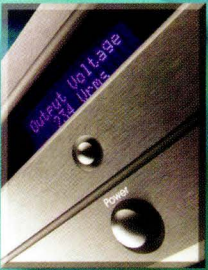
Stillpoints Isolation



Vertex AQ



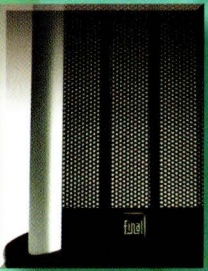
ExactPower Conditioners



JAS Audio



Final Electrostatics



Lyngdorf Audio



### Lyngdorf CD-1 player/transport

"You can drop this into a system with a price tag in excess of £50,000, and it will **not** let it down. If its reliability is as solid as its construction, the CD-1 will see most of you out in the way that Quad gear used to go to the grave with its first owners. The user-adjustability will keep 'enthusiasts' permanently amused, and the sound is, well, delicious. Good grief, what a debut!"

**Ken Kessler, HI-Fi News March 2006.**

**We say "what else do you expect from the leaders in digital amplification?"**

### Lyngdorf SDA2175 Power Amplifier

"This is one silky sounding amplifier, stable as hell in its delivery, detailed and dynamic across the midband, and with superb imaging and staging... Supremely smooth and well balanced in every respect, this amplifier starkly shows what other solid-state does wrong. Brilliantly engineered, it's nothing less than an epoch-making audio product."

**2005 Power Amplifier of the Year, Hi-Fi World**

**We say "at £845, this is ludicrous value and performance"**

### Lyngdorf SDA2175 Integrated Amplifier

"Build quality is equally brilliant for the asking price while the visual design is my favourite of the group as it expresses a buttoned-down discretion that can only come from first-class craftsmanship. In some respects, this product sounds like 'superfi'; its refinement, subtlety, unflappability and sheer control are remarkable."

**Hi-Fi World, November 2005**

**We say "200W of super-fi at £1245!"**

### Stillpoints Resonance Control

"Approaches that seek to combine isolation with the sinking of internal energy are becoming increasingly common, but the most sophisticated and universally applicable comes from Stillpoints. Underestimate them at your peril – or alternatively, invest in some serious support technology and finally realise the potential in the equipment you already own."

**2005 Product of the Year, Hi-Fi+**

### ExactPower Conditioners

"Remove the ExactPower from the supply chain and the soundstage collapses, the images shrink and congest, the sound goes edgy, thin and tinny. ... Whilst there are those that will find the regulated supply smoother and less exciting, I say listen a little longer, 'cos in reality there's plenty been added and nothing taken away. In fact, dynamics are quicker and wider, they're simply more natural."

**Roy Gregory, Hi-Fi+, 2005**

### AudioDeskSysteme CD Improver

"This is a 'must have' product for anyone really interested in maximizing the potential of their CD/SACD collection. The price is reasonable and the construction and presentation of the product is outstanding. The results are simply quite staggering."

**Richard S. Foster, Hi-Fi+, May 2006**

**Lyngdorf Audio UK distribute the ground-breaking Lyngdorf digital products, together with ExactPower conditioners, Stillpoints and AudioDeskSysteme CD enhancers.**

We also compliment these products by offering/dealing with a very few, select components such as the award winning DALI speakers, Vertex AQ accessories and the new range of JAS audio speakers and Final electrostatic panels.

**LYNGDORF**

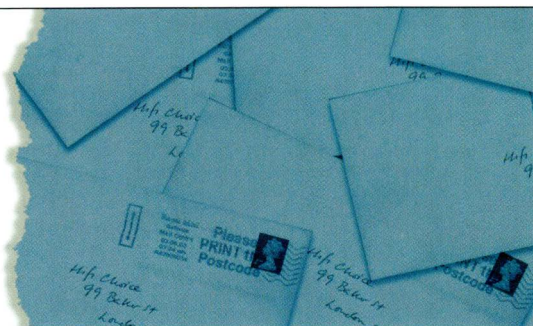
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The pick of this month's best letters

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## TWO BECOME ONE?

I have started to see two-box CD players emerging once again, an example being the Cyrus CD Xt/DAC X as reviewed in your May issue (HFC 279). I run a Musical Fidelity X-Ray CD player (as a transport) and a Chord DAC 64, but unfortunately, my beloved X-Ray has just given up the ghost, so what I should buy as a new CD transport? Chord's matching transport, the Blu, is way above my price range of £1,000-£2,000. Plus, I'm not sure whether it would be worth spending that much on just a transport, given the DAC 64's reputation for refreshing old players. My final dilemma is whether to go for a one-box CD player with the Chord or search for a standalone CD transport?

**Ciro Ahmad** via email



Above: Cyrus CD Xt and DAC X

**HFC** We think the answer might be hidden in your question. The Cyrus CD Xt transport is an ideal choice. Yes, it's designed to partner the DAC X, but there's no reason why it shouldn't work wonders with the DAC 64. We think this is a far better solution than spending a similar amount of money on a CD player, but then never using its own analogue output section. However, with the speed at which digital technology is evolving, you may be better off selling the DAC 64 (which still commands a premium) and committing completely to one the latest players. As well as models in the Cyrus range, try some of our recent *Ultimate Group Test* favourites from the June issue (HFC 280), such as Arcam's FMJ CD36 (£1,400), Copland's CDA823 (£1,750), Naim's CD5x (£1,525) and T+A's über-flexible CD 1230R (£1,700), any of which might be ideal for you. We'd be interested to know which solution you choose.

## WHAT THE FUNK?

What a positive review on the new Funk turntable (HFC 279)! Best news of all, it's really quite affordable for us ordinary people. I almost went online immediately to order one. That is until the reviewer, Jason Kennedy, decided

**"I have started to see two-box CD players emerging once again."**

it needed a £2,000+ cartridge to bring out the best performance. Perhaps Jason needs a reality check? Could you ask him why he wasted so much time writing the article in the first place? Thanks for a good magazine.

**Eddy Gartry** via email

**HFC** Jason replies: "I tried a number of affordable, real-world cartridges before coming to the conclusion that they were the limiting factor in the sound, so I ended up using my reference cartridge as this allowed me to ascertain the absolute potential of the turntable. The Funk will, of course, allow any cartridge to give its best and there is no need to put a high-end needle on it. My point was that it's good enough to warrant the finest cartridges, too."

## ON A MISSION

What's happened to Mission? It used to be a staple of your *Ultimate Group Tests* and a regular feature of your solo reviews. It was

# Letter of the month

## THE UPS OF DOWNS

There has never been a better time to buy CDs. Downloading has caused no end of 'two for £15' deals etc. in the big stores. Isn't this a great opportunity for audiophiles to snap up bargain discs – the very lifeblood of our hobby? Ten years ago, CDs were around £13 for new releases. Now £8 or so will bag you that disc and the web makes it even easier and cheaper. I for one am making the best of it and expanding my music collection like never before.

**Adam Pugh** via email

**HFC** You aren't the only person to have noticed the lower price of CDs. The British Phonographic Industry has revealed a distinct upturn in sales of discs in the past year (see *AudioFile: Happenings* on p16 for the full story). Although much of this is due to increased interest in new music from new acts like Arctic Monkeys, the bargain prices of CDs cannot have hindered the boosted sales figures. Or, perhaps there is an upside to downloading, after all!



## WIN CRYSTAL CABLE PICCOLO INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a one-metre pair of Crystal Cable Connect Piccolo interconnects worth £260, featuring a silver/gold conductor with Kapton insulation, plus a transparent Teflon jacket. So get writing! (150 words max please...)



Above: Yamaha CDR-HD1500 recorder

everywhere at one time, but now it's seemingly nowhere to be seen. I don't recall reading about Mission in *HFC* since the Volare range launched.

**Derek Harris** via email

**HFC** We reviewed Volare and m-Cube, but soon after these products appeared, Mission was sold to the IAG group, resulting in a period of stasis. Mission's new owners are currently reshaping the brand, which now sits alongside Audiolab, Quad and Wharfedale. As soon as we receive information on new developments, be sure we'll let you know. Like you, we can't wait for Mission to make a welcome return to the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

**BIBLE BASHER**

I acknowledge and support your contributor's comments regarding the Yamaha CDR-HD1500 CD/hard disk recorder in *HFC* 279 being an excellent piece of kit, if somewhat complicated in operation. However, readers attempting to take guidance from your *Buyer's Bible* on digital recorders will find your comments notably misleading. Virtually all the

CD-R/RW recorders that appear in your listing are no longer available. I'm sure that updating your listings is no mean task, but there's little point in *HFC* claiming to be the leading light in hi-fi magazines when publishing such erroneous data! Come on guys – are we getting an updated directory or not?

**Phil Udall** N. Yorkshire

**“Virtually all the CD-R/RW recorders in your listing are no longer available.”**

**HFC** You rightly point out that the digital recorders section of the *Buyer's Bible* is out of date. This is partly due to manufacturers phasing out CD-R recorders altogether and therefore not supplying us with replacement versions. But this means, if you want to buy a CD-R recorder today, chances are the only options you have left are these older models, sometimes found languishing in stockrooms.

As you suggest though, overhauling the *Buyer's Bible* is a mammoth task and although we have started planning its makeover, it won't be until later in the year. However, we have made an effort to specifically target the recorders section, reviewing three new hard disk-based recorders in recent months from Yamaha, Cambridge Audio and most recently, Hifidelio, all of which are praiseworthy and add a modern twist to this shrinking sector of the hi-fi separates market.

**NEXT MONTH, NEW YEAR**

I write this in April, but I'm reading the June issue of *HFC*! How did your magazine manage to get two months ahead of the rest of the world? And is this trend set to continue? For example, will I be able to read a review of 2007's gear in say August when my December issue arrives? Yours, confused. (Great magazine, by the way.)

**Peter De Campi** London

**HFC** Ah, the idiosyncrasies of publishing – but you could at least describe us as 'forward thinking'. Many publications have a similar problem because, like *Hi-Fi Choice*, they publish 13 times a year, which doesn't help matters. It's mid-May as we go to press, but already August's issue has been commissioned, and September is well into the planning stage. However, this issue – *The Collection* – doesn't have a cover month (it's designated 'Summer'), then the August issue (*HFC* 283) will be on sale throughout July, bringing us almost back on track. We are also proposing to introduce the month of September and a return to the Julian calendar, to keep our schedule in line, but those pen-pushers in Westminster aren't keen, damn them!

**Onlineforum**

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at [www.hifichoice.co.uk](http://www.hifichoice.co.uk)



I would love to own one of those fluid applying record cleaning machines I've seen advertised. Why is it that they hardly come on to the second-hand market? When they do they sell for as much as a new one...

**Cas**

...Most folk who buy one keep it, and there's so

little to go wrong. If you have lots of vinyl, then bite the bullet and get a KAB EV-1 machine as a minimum. It cleans as well as other machines, but automated machines are quicker and easier.

**Analoguekid**

I'm very interested in older hi-fi equipment that holds its own against the

modern stuff. Just wondered what other people would say are their personal classics? My two are Pioneer's A-400 amp and Monitor Audio's R852MD speakers...

**Chris**

...First and foremost Quad ESL57 electrostatics. Then all the great Quad classic amplifiers – the 33, 34

and 44 preamps, and the 303, 306 and 606 power amps. Plus the Rogers LS3/5a...

**Stilltones**

...Any Nakamichi cassette deck from the early 1990s would be a handy buy for the collector and the Denon TU260L tuner is a classic, too.

**Daglesj**

Many accessories can be had from mainstream suppliers at better prices. How about a mains socket tester? £3.95 at Maplin...

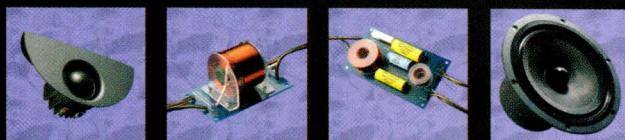
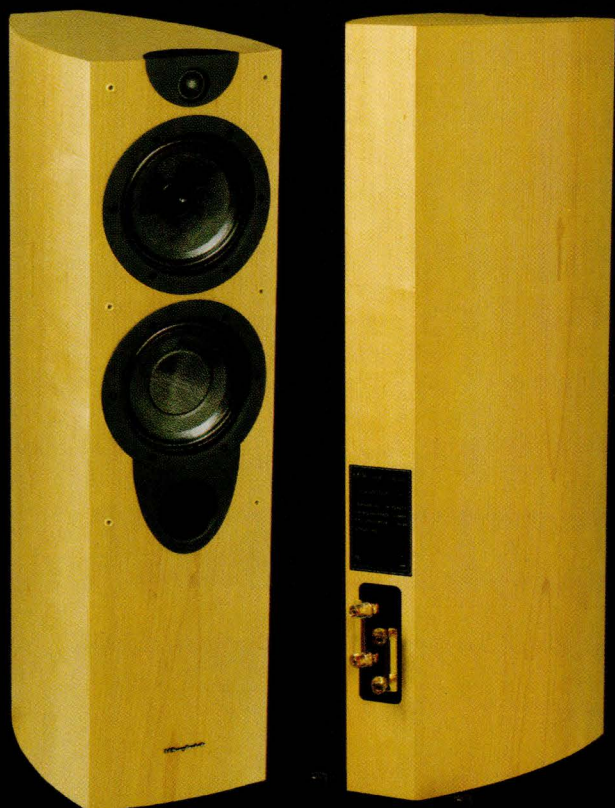
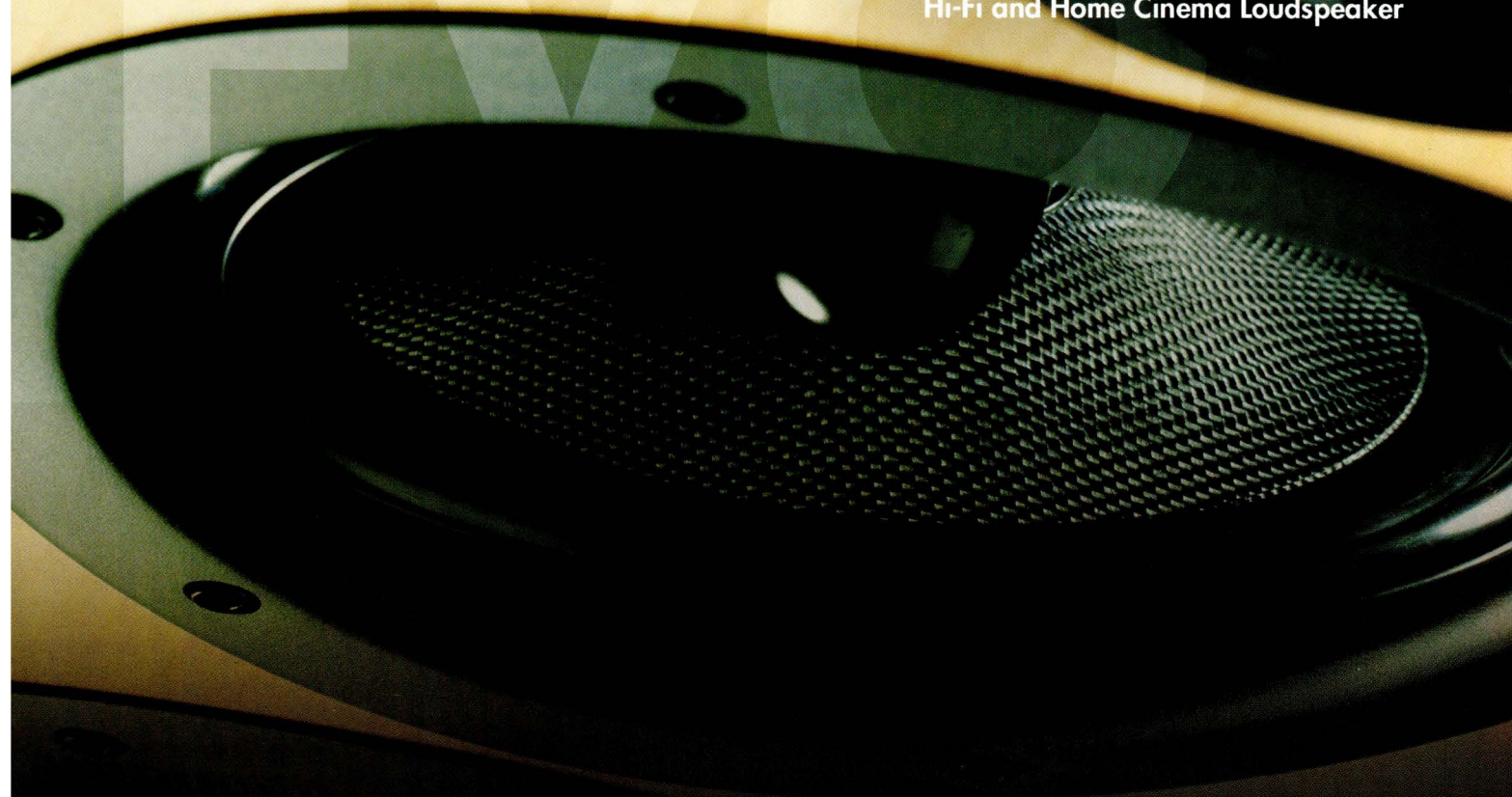
**Adb**

...Anyone looking for a dirt cheap interconnect, get B&Q's Masterplug Performance Series lead for six quid – bargain.

**Earl of Sodbury**

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# The future of high-end hi-fi

*Ever tried getting some of hi-fi's most influential movers and shakers around a table to discuss the future of high-end audio? We have...*

**A**s you'll have gathered, this special *The Collection* edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* is dedicated to the hi-fi's high-end – the finest components that money can buy. So, we thought this might be a good opportunity to have an in-depth discussion about the state of high-end hi-fi in the UK today.

To that end, we contacted the BFA (British Federation of Audio) and asked if we could host a forum session following its Annual General Meeting in April. We then set about inviting many of the industry's most influential and vocal representatives to take part. The result was a fascinating and often animated two-hour discussion, the (printable) highlights of which are outlined below...

*Tim Bownern (HFC's Editor) began by asking everyone how they viewed the current state of high-end hi-fi in Britain today.*

**Paul Stephenson:** I think that high-end hi-fi today is more about hi-fi for people with a passion for music than it was in the 1970s. Then it was for people with passion – you needed a stereo so that you could do something with a girlfriend. *(Laughter)*

Once you had this mass appeal to have music in your home, then people started to be discerning about it. The opportunities for that kind of acceptance and visibility of quality hi-fi are greatly reduced nowadays, because there are so many things that are just good enough.

## “We’ve now reached a point where we have high-end audio that can appeal to the lifestyle set and not just to the audiophile.”

**Tim Bownern:** Is it also that there's more in terms of general technology in the home competing for people's disposable income?

**John Dawson:** For sure! There are so many things. Today we see the flat screen television as a very obvious must-have status item with some performance attached to it. Twenty or thirty years ago that's what a decent hi-fi might have been for some people. I also observe that irrespective of performance there is a desire for aesthetics in living rooms...

**Andy Giles:** This isn't always applicable to high-end audio, because some of it looks bloody awful.

**Ricardo Franassovici:** I agree. Aesthetics are increasingly important now. It's part of a process of maturity as we move from the awfulness of some early high-end hi-fi to producing equipment that can compete alongside items in the luxury industry.

**Andy Napthine:** The traditional high-end buyer has changed as well, in that he used to be into his music and didn't care that much what the equipment looked like. We at B&W have seen a massive increase in consumers for whom the statement of what it is that they're buying is much more important...

**Michael Osborn:** It's about the brand. Whether it's high-end or low-end equipment, people want to know that the brand matters and means something.

**Tim Bownern:** Would anyone here envisage high-end hi-fi sitting alongside, for example, beautifully engineered watches and cars?

**Johan Coorg:** No. In the 1970s, hi-fi was something you could show off without being perceived as a geek. Nowadays, when many visitors to my home learn that my high-end system costs £40,000 they think I'm a lunatic. However, they'd think it perfectly normal if I had a similarly priced Porsche parked outside.

**Andy Giles:** Often when you meet someone who drives a Ferrari, wears a Rolex and could easily afford a high-end system, if you ask them what hi-fi they own, they tell you Bang & Olufsen. Everything in their homes and lives is high-end except for their hi-fi.

**Ricardo Franassovici:** That was a valid point years ago before we were hit by the AV train, but I think that many people have seen through that and now simply want a bloody good stereo system. We've now reached a point where we have high-end audio that can

AV and, particularly, flat screens have taken a lot of money out of the high-end hi-fi industry, but I believe that that is a bubble that is about to burst.

**Johan Coorg:** People are swayed by seeing a good picture, so I guess we have to hope that we can persuade them to buy great sound to accompany that great picture they've bought.

**Steve Harris:** You have to remember that many retailers have also spent all the money they had on plasma screens, probably funding that expenditure by de-stocking high-end audio.

**Neil Wilson:** If you look at the US market, where the flat screen bubble already seems to have burst, a lot of specialist dealers who jumped on the flat screen bandwagon are finding they no longer have that many people coming into their stores. Many of those businesses are now in jeopardy. NAD is finding that it's having to retrain dealers to sell audio. ▢



appeal to the lifestyle set and not just to the committed audiophile. Equally there are many well-off people who drive beaten-up cars but own a fantastic stereo...

**Neil Wilson:** In the UK, people traditionally grew up wanting to buy a hi-fi but that's not true of a lot of other markets. I grew up in the hi-fi business in a totally different market and the competition for discretionary spend was still there albeit for different things. In Australia, people were saving up for overseas travel and for other things that were more appropriate for that country's weather and the culture. I still believe, however, that as an industry we have failed to create aspirations that drive people to want to spend their disposable income on what we manufacture.

Having said that, over the past year and a half, NAD has seen a growth in interest and demand for quality two-channel equipment.



Collection, though, we tend to focus on flagship components that are the best that manufacturers can produce, where price isn't necessarily a concern.

*An animated discussion ensued, from which the consensus emerged that a high-end product not only had to offer exceptional performance but also had to satisfy many other criteria and customer needs. These include reliability, manufacturer support and pride of ownership. Price, it was agreed, was not necessarily a defining factor, being of far less consequence than the product's intent, philosophy and approach*

**Steve Harris:** I think one of the weaknesses of the high-end hi-fi business has been that many manufacturers deemed it an opportunity to sell expensive things that weren't any good – to add another drive unit or a bit of gold trim then double the price.

**Ricardo Franassovici:** I've now seen customers coming through who view high-end hi-fi as another way to embrace their love of fine engineering. This has perhaps already led them towards exquisite watches and motor cars. Years ago our customers were mainly tweaky audiophiles, who I don't think will play a big part in tomorrow's high-end market.

**Paul Stephenson:** I think that is true for a segment of the market, but it won't be enough to sustain Naim's business. If we don't target

**Neil Wilson:** The press has to write about this technology. We also have to realise that the customer has changed. Here we sit, a group of, shall I call us, mature people trying to sell stereos and our sensibilities are at odds with those of younger customers. They're not as interested in quality as they are in portability.

The iPod has done a wonderful job in attracting people back to listening to music. Now we need to capitalise on that interest and tell people that they can make their music sound even better.

**Paul Stephenson:** It's true that we have a job to do in respect of education, but when you talk about the press what we need is high-end editorial instead of tabloid journalism: in-depth, intelligent reporting.

**Ricardo Franassovici:** It would help the industry, though, if its press could emphasise the – and perhaps this is not the correct term – elitist quality of high-end gear and generate desire for high performance and high quality in the same way that the auto press does. I'm sure that most people who read car magazines could not afford to buy a new Lamborghini but that doesn't stop the title writing about such cars with great flair and genuine enthusiasm.

*Several interjections were again made, about high-end products reaching beyond the closed circle of hi-fi magazine readers to reach general interest magazines. One factor that was felt to suppress more widespread interest in hi-fi was*

**“If we don't target our products toward people who have a passion for music then we won't survive.”**

**Paul Stephenson:** Should we care? If those retailers have failed to sell people decent sound to go with their screens then the customers will just go to another retailer.

**John Dawson:** Thus far, nobody has defined 'high-end hi-fi'. From where I stand, 'high end' means high performance and doesn't automatically mean high price, though clearly a relationship between that and luxury exists.

**Andy Giles:** I think that view goes against that accepted definition of the term.

**John Dawson:** I just think that defining high-end hi-fi by price alone is wrong. Many products that I consider to be high-end components are well within the reach of most people – say, anyone who owns a modern car.

**Tim Bownen:** It is a matter of semantics, but I regard *Hi-Fi Choice* as a high-end magazine and in an average issue we'll have a number of components that cost, say, £500. In *The*

our products toward people who have a passion for music then we won't survive.

**Andy Naphthine:** What Naim has done very successfully, though, is to build a very tight community around its products.

**Paul Stephenson:** In the past that community was split between audiophiles, who were into product, and people who loved their music. Now we have a mix of audiophiles, music lovers and people who want aspirational engineering and/or things in their lives along with the whole high-end buying experience. But high-end audio, as far as Naim is concerned, is still all about the music.

**Malcolm Steward:** Do you feel that some elements within the press are encouraging people to buy low-budget multichannel and home cinema, ignoring what we believe to be far more relevant to home entertainment because it's not such a good story?

*the predominance of the 'uninteresting' black box in a world where many people base their buying decisions primarily on what they see.*

**Johan Coorg:** In the past few years, KEF has focused on making good looking products. Since we placed this emphasis on styling and design, while maintaining sound quality, the company has quintupled its turnover.

**Tim Bownen:** So how do we as an industry get the high-end message across to the new generation of music lovers?

**Andy Naphthine:** We need to embrace the iPod as a source... and convey our enthusiasm.

**John Dawson:** My experience is that a lot of my retailers don't find it particularly interesting to sell starter systems any more.

**Tim Bownen:** By that do you mean separate boxes or do you now define the Arcam Solo [one-box system] as a starter system?



**John Dawson:** The Solo has done a humungous amount of extra business for us on top of our separates sales... but I think that is mostly new, not traditional, hi-fi buyers.

**Andy Napthine:** I agree. Products like B&W's XT Series are bringing in new customers by mixing high performance with appealing aesthetics.

**John Dawson:** We need products that appeal to a wider audience to get the coverage in the general press that we were talking about.

**Michael Osborn:** Those products introduce the brands and, therefore, the category to a new type of consumer, to whom you can then introduce your high-end offerings.

**Paul Stephenson:** There's a danger that these products, which might better be called premium audio, might also be the death of high-end audio.

**Ricardo Franassovici:** 'High-end hi-fi' is a term for defining top quality stereos, not home cinema. Home cinema is no longer an issue for high-end hi-fi! It simply doesn't offer the same level of performance that the best stereo does.

**Tim Bower:** How would you convey to *Hi-Fi Choice* readers the assertion from the GfK presentation at the BFA AGM this morning that there seems to be something of a resurgence in interest in two-channel audio?

**Steve Harris:** Retailers around the world have decided that it's too difficult selling home cinema, that it's not their core competency, and have reverted to selling stereo. I think that many retailers are much happier and much more comfortable selling stereo.

**Tim Bower:** Is this perhaps the result of buyers being fed up with the state of flux in the technology and wanting to go back to the more stable world of straightforward stereo?

**Michael Osborn:** I have heard from retailers that people are coming back to stereo because they are dissatisfied with the two-channel performance of home cinema equipment. They're coming back to stereo simply because they want something better.

**John Dawson:** Despite growth in downloads, CD sales are holding up well, and I don't see why they shouldn't for the indefinite future.

*To continue that theme, Tim then directed the debate towards the forthcoming high-definition disc formats and direct distribution of music via the internet.*

**Tim Bower:** Will there be a music element in the new high-definition formats?

**John Dawson:** At the moment it's too early to tell. Both high-definition formats will support audio at as good a resolution as you could ever ask for under any normal circumstances, in the same way that DVD-Audio and SACD do at

their best. However, while the new formats support audio, I don't know whether any pure music material will be released.

**Tim Bower:** Is the seeming lack of interest in DVD-Audio and SACD because consumers don't really want higher quality?

**John Dawson:** I don't think it's so much that they may not want it but that it's not a compelling sell. I certainly don't think the surround sound version is a compelling sell because it is so badly executed – whether in its production or the execution in your home.

**Neil Wilson:** Manufacturers are under enormous pressure to provide every widget and feature that we can fit on our products. We're working on the next series of home cinema equipment, which has scary amounts of amazing technology in it. Ultimately, what's happening for companies like Arcam and NAD is that prices are being pushed up enormously because this technology simply isn't cheap. However, on the stereo side, we're under much less pressure yet that is where we're doing some of the most interesting work.

**Tim Bower:** CD looks set to stay around for some time, but do you think that the future for music lies with direct digital distribution?

**John Dawson:** No. It's a fragmented market... and as the market fragments the old formats – such as vinyl – don't just go away.

*This discussion inevitably meandered through the realms of the iPod and other portable devices then wound up considering the future of the hard-disk-based home music server.*

**Neil Wilson:** There's a problem with hard disks: to operate most reliably they either like to run all the time or to sit stationary. Hard-disk devices are never going to be wholly reliable until we overcome this basic limitation inherent to the technology.

**Tim Bower:** Do you envisage your companies producing music servers and internet-enabled devices in the not-too-distant future?

**Neil Wilson:** Yes, because I think we'll all be forced to do that.

**Tim Bower:** Finally, what would you say to one of our readers who is going out shopping at the weekend to persuade him to invest in hi-fi rather than, say, a new computer?

**Neil Wilson:** Music is still one of the best things with which you can entertain yourself. It can enhance and change your life. And any decent hi-fi will last you 25 years or more.

**Steve Harris:** Dig out some of the music you enjoyed when you were a student or at school and play it. Then ask yourself if you enjoy it as much now as you did then. If the answer is no, then you should probably buy a better hi-fi.

**Ricardo Franassovici:** It's a fact that the best music will always come from a simple stereo system. And that is what the high-end is all about: straightforward systems that just play music, without all the gadgetry.

*So, the message seems clear: high-end hi-fi is still alive and kicking, with music reproduction being the primary focus of the majority of manufacturers. Who knows – we might even see it start to become better looking... HFC*

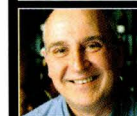
## The Forum Panel



**TIM BOWER**  
Job Title: **Editor, Hi-Fi Choice**



**JOHAN COORG**  
Job Title: **International Marketing Manager, KEF Audio**



**JOHN DAWSON**  
Job Title: **President, Arcam**



**ROBERT FOLLIS**  
Job Title: **Public Relations for Denon, Sennheiser, Arcam etc.**



**RICARDO FRANASSOVICI**  
Job Title: **Managing Director, Absolute Sounds**



**ANDY GILES**  
Job Title: **Public Relations for NAD, KEF, Meridian etc.**



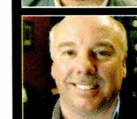
**STEVE HARRIS**  
Job Title: **BFA Chairman; Public Relations for Naim, Castle etc.**



**ANDY NAPTHINE**  
Job Title: **UK Marketing Manager, B&W Group**



**MICHAEL OSBORN**  
Job Title: **Managing Director, Astin Trew**



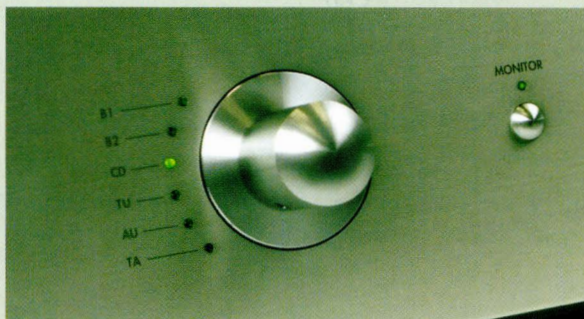
**PAUL STEPHENSON**  
Job Title: **Managing Director, Naim Audio**



**MALCOLM STEWARD**  
Job Title: **Editor, The British Audio Journal**



**NEIL WILSON**  
Job Title: **Managing Director, NAD Electronics**



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What Hi Fi? Sound & Vision Awards 2005



### I SPA21

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# welcome to *The Collection*

Sometimes it's good to dream...

**F**rom this point on, the remainder of this special edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* is devoted to just one thing: our quest to find the very best hi-fi the world has to offer. If you love music, you'll love this kit; and if you're very, very lucky, you may even feel able to buy some of it. But even if you can't afford the ticket today, we can help you plan your sonic journey for tomorrow – after all, we all need something to strive for...

This is something we do once a year, every year: we scour the world for the ultimate high-end components and present them to you as *The Collection*. And the concept is more valid now than ever before. As we sit on the cusp of something radically new, the doyens of hi-fi's

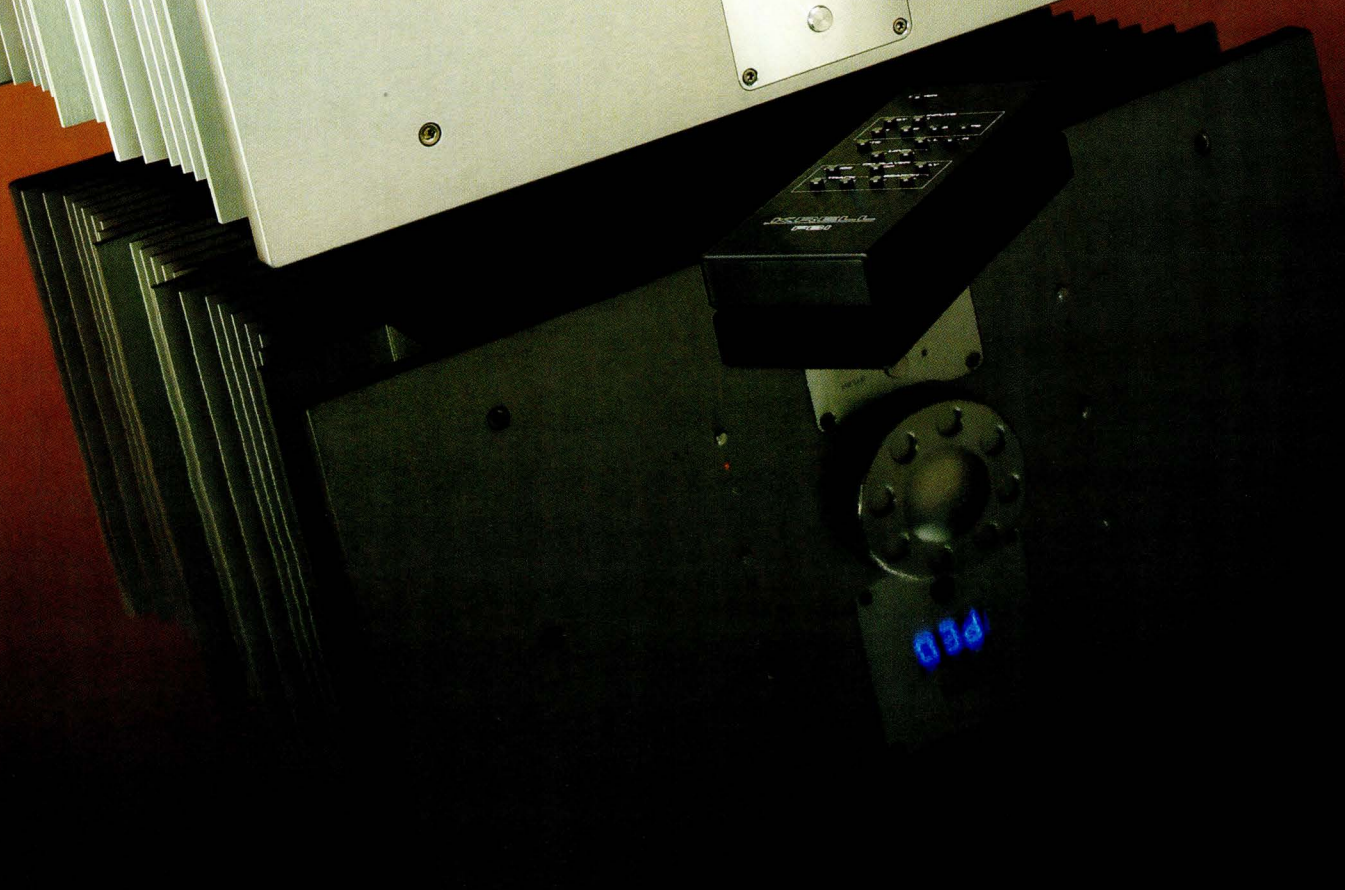
high-end are facing their greatest ever challenge. The way home entertainment programming is delivered, stored and played back is changing, and the concept of the 'media server' will come to affect us all. And yet, there will always be those who demand the highest levels of performance, and the high-end hi-fi community is responding by producing the most amazing range of dedicated components yet seen.

The results are fascinating. Original technologies like vinyl and valves remain in strong demand, with decades of refinement culminating in exquisite form and function. Then there are the digital dream machines, each one engineered to make the most of the format(s) it plays, from CD-only players to high-performance, multichannel audio/video *tours de force*. Each product is a triumph of the art – and science – of hi-fi.

We feel no need to apologise for the considerable price tags featured throughout this issue; excellence has never come cheap. Like the finest watches or the most expressive motor cars, these finely tuned, supremely engineered examples of audio art simply ooze desirability. It's always great to dream, but if these top-end exhibits seem too far out of reach, take solace: most of these manufacturers also produce more affordable gear, often featuring 'trickle-down' technologies derived from these flagship components. You'll find such products nestling within the pages of every other issue of *Hi-Fi Choice*...

As for us, there's only one problem with doing a special high-end issue like *The Collection* – giving all the fabulous kit back when we've finished.





# Krell FBI

*Krell's big-league integrated stereo amplifier offers plentiful power and poise*

PRICE £13,950 CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

**A**hh, the FBI. Elliot Ness. Mulder and Scully. Clarice Starling's cheap shoes. And now... Krell. According to Krell, the FBI (Fully Balanced Integrated) started life as separate pre and power amplifiers, but during the development programme, it became apparent that, in their words, "the synergy of the two components demanded that they reside in the same chassis".

It's basically a FPB-300cx power amplifier with a custom-designed preamplifier built in. The big integrated was introduced largely in response to European requirements, offering cost and space savings over a FPB-300cx and separate preamplifier.

Until now, Krell's forays into integrated amplifiers have culminated in the KAV-400xi. That model was a more or less all-purpose integrated amplifier, with a generous power output (a very solid 200 watts into eight ohms, increasing perfectly to 400 watts into four ohms) from a well-filled but slimline enclosure. This model takes the same formula one and a

The list of fixtures and fittings is not dissimilar to its less powerful sibling. Inputs are available in relative profusion, though there is no internal phono player provision. What you get are three line-level inputs, a tape circuit and a CAST (ultra wide bandwidth Current Audio Signal Transmission) input, which is Krell's proprietary current-mode, line-level interface – previous experience suggests that this is capable of delivering superior sound quality.

In addition, the Krell has a balanced-mode (XLR) input. This is entirely appropriate for an amplifier which is internally balanced from stem to stern, and a preamplifier output to drive an external power amplifier.

Two pairs of speaker terminals are available for bi-wiring, but you'll need to use spade terminations, or as we did for this test, 4mm spade adaptors. Other facilities include a 'Theatre' throughput, which allows any input or group of inputs to be volume or balance controlled by an external processor, a prerequisite in a multichannel system.

competing models from another brand), but whose discrimination in matters audio we have good reason to trust. For this, the Krell was set up against another high-quality integrated, but there was never any doubt about the outcome for him. Once again, it was overwhelmingly better, literally from the very first note.

This is not to say it sounds like other Krell amplifiers, although there seems to be an affinity with the sound of the Evolution One and Two, tested on page 106. Krell has been through a number of hardware generations, each of which has had its own distinctive voice, perhaps reflecting the evolving tastes of its designer. The current generation, exemplified by the entry-level KAV-400xi and developed prior to the FBI, has a particular quality, a leanness and precision that made it less than forgiving with some source material, and which meant it sometimes tended to lack body in some combinations. The FBI is not like this. From the outset, it was apparent that it offers a new level of neutrality. It has a strong sense of presence, and it is open and lean. The bass is deeply extended, but always unfailingly pitch accurate and musical, while the treble is a near perfect mirror at the far end of the audio frequency band, but without ever sounding intrusive. However, it is much less characterful than the KAV-400xi can sometimes be.

The FBI is a solid, muscular amplifier, clearly more so than the '400xi. Its power output is virtually without limit for all practical purposes. It thrives with difficult loudspeakers – the Sonus Faber Grand Piano Domus turned out to be one such – and it excels with very transparent speakers, which tend to throw a spotlight on what the amplifier is doing. There are few better examples of this than the MartinLogan Avant, which is reviewed on p78 of this issue. It's a transparent sounding amplifier, but perhaps above all else, it is unusually easy to listen to. The only sense of strain is the tension in the music, if it is that kind of music.

Yes, the price will take some swallowing. But this is without question a superb amplifier, one that easily matches or exceeds the performance of other pre/power amplifiers within its price category, and which in Krell's case significantly undercuts some of its own models on price. It delivers true power and stamina, a stable, layered and articulate midband and an unfailingly detailed, refined treble. In short, Krell's big boy integrated aptly lives up to the 'Fidelity, Bravery, Integrity' motto, used on occasion by that other FBI. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

**“It was apparent that the FBI offers a new level of neutrality. It has a strong sense of presence, and is open and lean.”**

half stages further. It is rated at 300 watts per channel into eight ohms, and it too doubles in output with each halving of load impedance, up to a massive 1,200 watts into two ohms.

Perhaps this power dissipation is responsible for the enormous form factor. Another issue is the massive 3kW custom-designed transformer – a completely separate isolated power supply and transformer are used for the preamplifier section – and yet another is the claim that it operates in full Class A. To help minimise heat, the FPB architecture allows the power supply to be ramped up in discrete steps as power demands ebb and swell. It still runs warm, despite large-area heatsinks that run from front to back on both sides of the amplifier, but not antisocially so – though it needs to be run at a moderate level at the start of a listening session before it hits its stride.

In common with most Krell designs, the FBI is beautifully screwed together, and immaculately detailed, though there is no attempt to conceal the devastating authority it is intended to bring to bear. Check out the case fixings, and volume control detailing and be your own judge. Electrically it is essentially free from hum and noise.

The mains input is a 20-amp socket, and there are various provisions for multiroom (but not multisource) operation, including 12V trigger in and outputs, and an RC5 (Philips command set) remote control input.

## SOUND QUALITY

It was not possible to test operation of the CAST mode interface, because of the lack of availability of a suitably equipped disc player during the period allotted for this review, but past experience suggests it should be safe to expect better performance than via the standard single-ended phono or even the balanced-mode XLR line-level inputs.

With the increasing resolution of high-end audiophile electronics, it is normal to expect that it will take some time for a new product to settle in and deliver. In this case, however, it was different. From the very moment the FBI was let loose on its first task, freshly decanted from its box, and within about a minute of being connected to the mains, it was obvious that it was simply an overwhelming and exceptional amplifier. We even second checked this by playing it to a visitor who has no special affinity for Krell (in fact, he distributes



# Sonus Faber Guarneri Memento

The latest and most diminutive speaker to join the top-end Homage range makes musical magic

PRICE £6,500 per pair CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com

The Sonus Faber Guarneri Memento is a two-way standmount speaker. But the stand is so integral to the design, it's more practical to think of it as a floorstander.

The Memento takes the already beautiful Guarneri Homage loudspeaker and simply knocks it into supermodel league. It's a root and branch change to the design, in line with last year's excellent Amati Anniversario. Facile inspection might not highlight many of the changes, as the lute shaped main cabinet looks very similar to the original speaker. But the cabinet already looked more stunning than practically every other speaker on the planet, and change for change's sake seems pointless here.

The quality of finish is staggering. That two-way cabinet is made up of 21 staves of solid maple, carefully sandwiched together to control resonance and the slight re-shapings you get when you build a speaker out of real tree. These 21 pieces of maple are shaped and dried for two years before being affixed using natural glues and hand presses. They are then dyed using natural colourings, just like the violin makers did half a millennia ago. This itself would make the speaker seem as heavy as lead, but don't forget the damping, which is made from copper and – you guessed it – lead.

The cabinet comes in a graphite or red violin finish. It has a black piano gloss rear panel for the single set of speaker terminals and rear port. The front baffle is leather finished, but you'll probably not want to put this on display, because of the attractive string grille that makes the speaker look like a musical instrument, not a speaker. The driver component is pretty much standard issue Homage: a single 25mm ring-radiator tweeter coupled with a 150mm doped paper bass/mid unit. This last features a CCAW/Kapton voice coil with Kellogg and Faraday rings, supposedly for greater linearity, and a vented speaker cone to minimise resonance in the driver itself. The two units cross over at 2.5kHz thanks to a minimalist 6dB/octave crossover network made with silver-palladium alloy conductors, specially chosen for their sound. Cleverly, Sonus Faber runs in each drive unit before inserting it into the speaker itself, making the initial listening stage less of a hurdle. All of which serves up a speaker with 88dB sensitivity, a fair four-ohm nominal impedance, a frequency response from 39Hz to 30kHz (including the port resonance) and capable of handling any amp from 30 watts to 200 watts. One small point to note, however:

these are not shielded speakers and those with CRT (non-LCD/plasma) tellies should keep them well away from the Guarneri Memento.

In the manner of Sonus Faber's Cremona speakers, the Memento has a distinct backwards tilt, which really works both sonically and visually. The stand comes in two parts, the tall black upright metal piece and the wedge-shaped slab of what feels like beige Corian. This is prettier than it sounds, especially when you add in the strings (which match the 'grille') that surround the pillar. Locked together, the speaker is rigidly bonded to the stand, although those after a set of carpet-piercing spikes may be disappointed – there's not even provision for spike holes.

**“These speakers are perfect for acoustic music, but don't mistakenly think they are limited for powerful, electric rock.”**

There's one last beautiful aspect of the Guarneri Memento... the box they come in. Inside the standard cardboard packaging is a rather beautiful wooden case, and inside the case are two lovely red silk drawstring bags, which gently caress the speakers. Better still, the case also contains a little cleaning kit (that glorious high-gloss finish is a dust and fingerprint magnet). Even the instruction manual is bound into a thick red binder. These may be trivial features (and ones that you are doubtless paying for), but little things mean a lot, especially when you are buying into the Sonus Faber dream.

## SOUND QUALITY

There's a paradox, here. Sonus Faber reputedly designs all speakers using its own 50-watt Musica amplifier. If so, Sonus Faber hasn't heard how good Sonus Faber's speakers really are. Because, although these speakers sound magical with 50 watts or so delivering the goods, they sound an awful lot more magical with 200 or more up the speaker terminals.

Using the word 'magical' twice in the same sentence would be overkill for any other speaker; with the Memento, it's almost understatement. This is a sensational speaker, possessed of a musical passion that's all too rare in hi-fi.

Once again, you can set aside all the usual hi-fi requirements (it does all that, perfectly) and become absorbed into the music, into its harmonic richness and texture. You feel a connection with the music that can happen

with other small speakers, but is fleeting. On the Guarneri Memento, you feel as if you are having a masterclass with Bach and Glenn Gould when playing the Goldberg Variations, or a lesson in abject funkiness when listening to Fred Wesley and the Horny Horns. And you get this on almost every disc played. If there is a downside to the Guarneri Memento, it's that it won't let you play music in the background – the sound (even at low levels) draws you in.

The Memento has surprising bass for such a relatively small a cabinet. Sonus Faber hasn't gone for the enhanced bass option. Yes, there is a very mild lift at around the 50Hz point, but a subtle one that prevents the speaker sounding thin. Bass notes are not emphasised,

but – perhaps more significantly given the speaker's size – nor are they glossed over. Much of this only comes through in playing string quartets, or in reasonably contained be-bop, where the sublime bowing or plucking of the double bass notes can be defined just as easily as the other instruments in the small group. So, even dinner jazz comes to life in a way it never really did before!

The Guarneri Memento is among the world's most talented speakers for smaller listening rooms. They are forgiving of position (although the greater the care spent on placement, the better the end result), they don't need a room the size of Norfolk to come to life (although they make a surprisingly big sound in huge rooms) and they don't need a nuclear power station of an amplifier to drive them (although bigger is better, up to a point).

These speakers are perfect for acoustic music but don't mistakenly think they are limited for powerful, electric rock. Out came everything from Neil Young to the Kaiser Chiefs, *Bump* from Spank Rock's odd *YoYoYoYoYo* CD and in-between came the Gotan Project's cool Franco-Argentinean electro-tango. Nothing shook the Guarneri, at all.

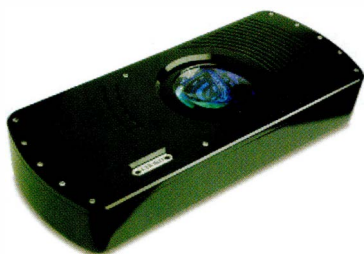
This isn't a product you simply listen to. It's a product you fall in love with. It's not simply a high-end sound; it's a magical sound, backed up by one of the best-looking cabinets money can buy. The Guarneri Memento will seduce you. Give in to its charms! **HFC**

Alan Sircom

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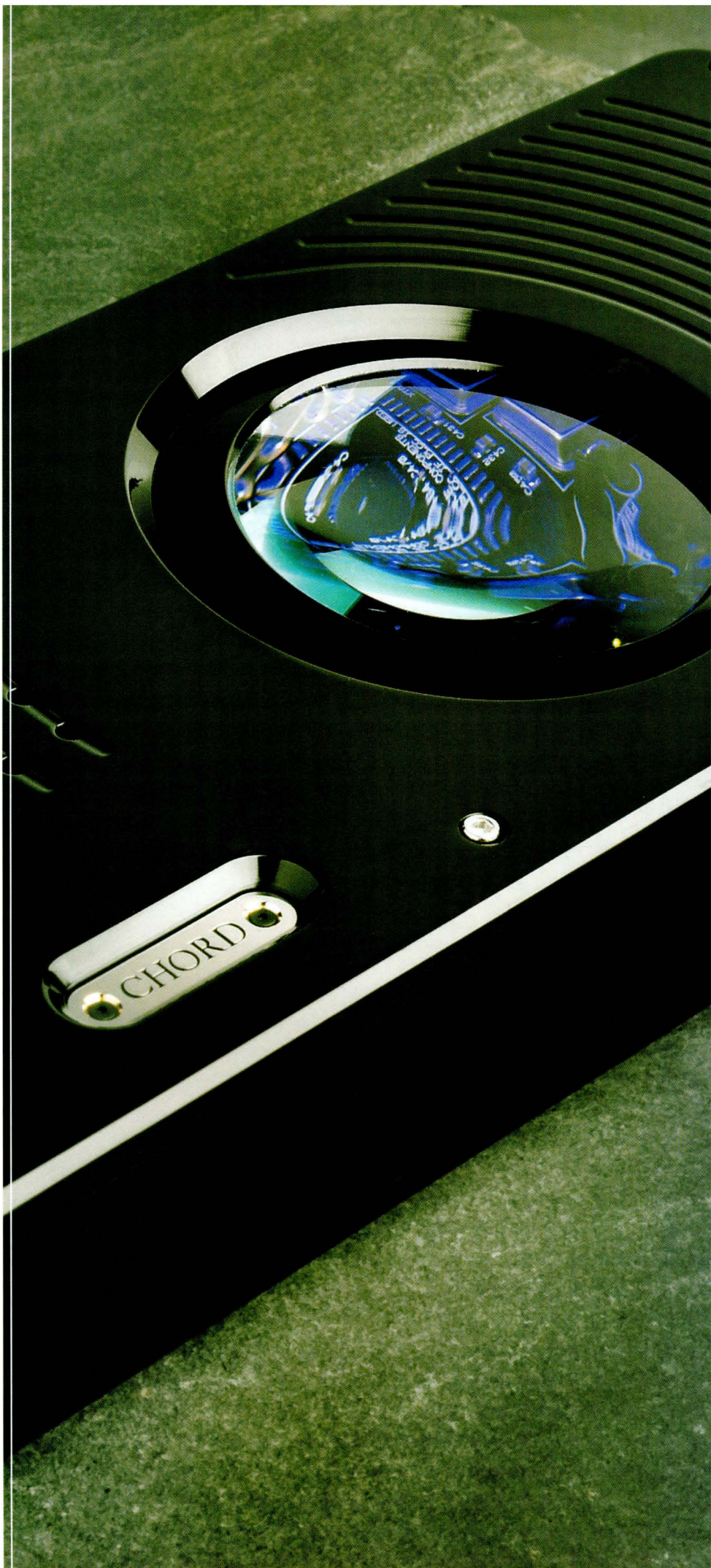
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# Audio Research Reference CD7

*Audio Research's first Reference-level CD player is a valve-using superstar*

PRICE £8,000 CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.audioresearch.com

**T**he Reference CD7 CD player is Audio Research's ninth Reference point and first-ever source component to carry the flag. It's a top-loader, with a manually operated draw and a milled black puck to hold the disc in place. Build quality is as solid as they come, with a thick alloy front panel, distinctive black grab handles, a simple green LED read-out, functional remote control and squidgy-feel buttons on the front panel. The player sits on five solid rubber feet and sports a combination of balanced and single-ended digital inputs and analogue outputs.

It's big and heavy, for a CD spinner. Its casework is deeper and higher than most CD players (it's the size of many pretty meaty power amps) and – because it's a top-loader – needs to be placed on the top shelf of a very solid, large equipment table. The cast Philips Pro 2 transport mechanism sits in a backbone in the case of the player. Resonance and negative vibration effects are effectively sunk into the high mass of the chassis and transport mechanism combined, making any minor rotational distortion effects notionally disappear in more or less the same manner as a heavyweight turntable platter eliminates wow and flutter by sheer mass.

The Reference CD7 uses a Crystal 24-bit DAC chipset, although this is not the sort of player that features upsampling, post-22kHz brick-wall signal reconstruction techniques or any other forms of audio space cadetry. It's just good, solid delta-sigma technology, correctly done.

The slats in the top and side of the case dissipate heat from the four 6H30 triode valves used in the output stage of the player, together with a further three 6H30s as high-voltage regulation for the power supply. This is a direct spin-off from the Reference 3 preamplifier (reviewed in last year's edition of *The Collection* – HFC 272).

This, of course, necessitates a revision in the power supply as the valves require higher than usual (for a CD player) power consumption. The player draws up to 120 watts, and even up to five watts when turned off but still connected to the juice.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Reference CD7 combines the sort of musical grace that is so rare in digital replay with the sort of detailed analysis that CD is so praised for. But it's not engineered to sound like an analogue player – it's fully, wholly digital in approach, just the best of digital as it stands today.

It excels at 'detail extraction' like all good CD players should. But if this sounds like dentistry, think again. Where many players would reduce this detail to something nasty and bright, this is just detailed, like vinyl... but not vinyl-like. Instead, whatever disc you place in the silo sounds fresh and new and extremely informative.

In truth, we struggled with this player. Struggled to find anything bad to say about it, that is. It doesn't 'pretty up' the CDs it plays, but neither does it make them sound 'too' anything to compensate. And, just to get this absolutely clear, it doesn't sound all warm and 'valve-y'. It's also a really quiet-sounding CD player; not low in gain, but there is an absence of digital hash that has to be (not) heard to be fully understood. This makes the noise floor of the whole system appear lower, with music rising out of this dark noise floor.

**“In short, it just sounds like you always hoped CD could sound, if CD was done right.”**

The valve aspect comes in with the depth of soundstage; a good valve soundstage is often not dramatically wide of the loudspeakers, but trades this stage width for sumptuous depth. The CD7 follows down that traditional path of valve-like image depth, but not to the extent of undermining the stage width. In short, it just sounds like you always hoped CD could sound, if CD was done right.

Eight grand for a CD player – when one can be picked up for thirty quid these days – may be a tough call to argue for bargain status. But if what's important to you is the replay of music, then this player must be compared to its musical peers, not in absolute terms against lesser products that produce a digital noise simulation of music. In that context, this player should be ranked alongside the best that Wadia, Zanden and the like can offer. And Wadia, Zanden and the like all deliver products that make eight grand seem like loose change. In that respect, this player really *is* a bargain after all. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*

*See HFC 279 (May 2006) for our original review of this product*



# dCS P8i

The first one-box CD/SACD player from dCS comes with full DSD upsampling and two digital inputs

PRICE £6,995 CONTACT dCS, Mull House, Great Chesterford Court, Great Chesterford, Saffron Walden CB10 1PF ☎ 01799 531999 🌐 www.dcsLtd.co.uk

**W**hile Far Eastern and US-based audiophile brands tend to support SACD over DVD-Audio, UK makers (who have expressed a preference) have remained largely locked into DVD-A. But the situation is now changing, with Arcam announcing its first universal player and Naim Audio effectively pulling the plug on new DVD-Audio developments on the very day it launched the new CD555 über-CD player. Now dCS is expanding its SACD coverage from the absolute bleeding edge, down towards (if not quite into) mainstream territory.

The P8i – like previous models – is an expensive beast. It's still firmly high end, but it is by some distance the most affordable player the company has produced to date. dCS has been a front-line protagonist for SACD in recent years with the Delius D-to-A converter, Verdi Encore transport/upsampler, Elgar and Purcell DSD upsamplers and the Verona master clock among others.

**“CD sounds thoroughly musical – the player is bold, dynamic, highly detailed and capable of a large, expansive image scale.”**

The company has a number of world firsts to its credit: the first 24/96 and 24/192 DACs, the first DSD digital converters (years ahead of Sony, as dCS points out), the first audiophile upsampler and the first DSD upsampler. For the P8i, which is a stereo-only SACD/CD player (not multichannel), dCS claims two additional firsts, namely “the first one-box CD/SACD player to include DSD upsampling” and “the world’s most affordable way to get true dCS performance” as the maker puts it. There is no true technical innovation for this last ‘first’, but previously the most affordable complete player to date from dCS has cost just shy of £16,000. The P8i is the first dCS single-box SACD player, and it costs a much more plausible £6,995. The internal P8i architecture includes the ‘Ring DAC’ as used in the Elgar off-board DAC, the audio processing board from the Delius DAC and the dCS upsampler from the La Scala transport. A transport and a separate upsampler/converter derived from the P8i will be available shortly.

The player is equipped with two auxiliary digital inputs for external digital sources. A chargeable software update will allow the internal DSD upsampler to be applied to the external inputs, which according to dCS should

provide sound quality from Red Book CD approaching that of high-resolution SACD and DVD-Audio. Using the front panel volume control, the P8i performs as a simple, high-quality digital preamplifier with 0.5B volume control resolution. The player can also be slaved to an external masterclock, the Verona, and although this was not supplied for this test, it did function happily alongside the similar Esoteric G-0s (reviewed on p82), but only using the base 44.1 kHz clock frequency.

The main bank of control buttons on the front panel glow blue when the player is powered up, and green when ready to play with no disc inserted. Red identifies CDs and lilac highlights SACD. It would be a shame to miss out on all this, but there is a sonic benefit if the various displays are turned off. The standby and eject buttons look identical and are positioned side by side, which leads to predictable finger-confusion problems. The volume control also acts as a selector for the

main menu system, though this doesn't need to be accessed often. If you do run into problems with the main control set, the player is supplied with a solid and well designed remote control.

The player can be run at a nominal two-volt or six-volt output, single-ended or balanced. This is a full 9.5dB difference, but it is best to use the setting which gives a near full volume output using the internal control, and this usually means the two volt setting for single-ended connections and six volts for balanced inputs. Absolute phase can also be set, and there are four selectable interpolation filters for CD replay. With the current firmware, the player will start playing the SACD layer of hybrid discs, but waits for ‘play’ when a CD has been inserted. Why we could not say.

## SOUND QUALITY

For much of the test period, the player was run alongside Ayre's C-5xe universal player (see p110), with the Ayre set to ‘Listen’ and the P8i switched to ‘Filter 4’. These filter settings give a relatively slow HF fall-off rate, resulting in a somewhat gentler, smoother sound than their brick wall counterparts (‘Measure’ and ‘Filter 1’ respectively). With the latter setting, the dCS

can sound a little aggressive at times; CD replay certainly mimics the balance of SACD better via ‘Filter 4’, with the output set to 2V.

The Ayre's ‘Listen’ algorithm could sound a little soft to some ears, but not so the dCS, which is an altogether harder hitting, more analytical animal. In fact, the P8i is closer in sound to the Esoteric X-01 CD/SACD player (which was pressed into service briefly, in addition to being reviewed in its own right on p82), no matter which filter was used for CD replay. The experience of listening to CD via the dCS is a thoroughly musical one – the player is bold, dynamic, highly detailed and capable of a large, expansive image scale.

In common with other high-grade disc players of this type, there is very little in the sound that points to its digital origin, and we have rarely heard better with CD. In the final analysis, the Krell KPS-25 CD player/preamp (once £25,000, now sadly defunct) certainly had the edge for its extraordinary separation and analysis. You felt that you could hear what was going on that little bit more easily. In the end, too, the state of the art Esoteric X-01 CD/SACD player is a superior tool for CD, though the advantage is subtle. This almost £10k player has an additional patina of warmth and grace, and yes, to a degree, separation too. But this places the P8i in with a very, very select list of players at the pinnacle of digital audio replay. The fact that the P8i undercuts its peers by no small amount of cash helps, too. And remember, this is only through good ol' CD replay.

It's with the newer and more fangled SACD format that the P8i really shines. Less costly SACD players sometimes just sound smoother and more euphonic than CD. Here, however, the benefits are altogether more fundamental. The sound is more detailed, but it also sounds consistently more powerful, without being any louder. Orchestral tonality is rich and variegated, yet the sound is always clear and highly detailed. Vocal material on SACD (Patricia Barber and Eric Bibb, for example) comes across with an exquisite sense of timing and subtlety that eludes the same material on CD.

Given the strength of the encoded catalogue in the SACD format, the dCS P8i is clearly a superb tool for classical music listeners, in particular. They will also reap the benefit of a CD player that comes closer than most comparably priced players to defining how CD can sound at its best, especially using the DSD upsampling facility. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



JBL  
PROJECT ARRAY

JBL  
PROJECT ARRAY

# JBL 1400 Array

*JBL is drawing on an illustrious heritage for the unusually styled Project Array models*

PRICE £7,000 per pair CONTACT Harman UK, The Dutch Barn, The Hyde, Woodcock Hill, St Albans, Herts AL4 9HJ ☎ 01707 278100 🌐 www.jbl.com

It's not easy coming up with a loudspeaker design that's genuinely original, but JBL has certainly managed to get close with its new Project Array series of models. Some precedents can be seen in earlier JBL speakers, both in the domestic and professional audio sectors, but the Project Array models still come as a surprise, for the sheer boldness of the styling they embody.

The Project Arrays use horn-loaded compression drivers to cover everything from 750Hz upwards. The main bi-radial horn is mounted so its longest dimension (and therefore widest dispersion) is vertical. This has a small super-tweeter built into its top edge. Stylistically, the end result is startling.

The Project Array line-up consists of three stereo pairs, plus centre channel and subwoofer models. The 1400 is the largest, and takes its type number from the 14-inch (355mm) bass driver that underpins the horn assembly. The smaller models have 250mm and 200mm bass drivers, and correspondingly smaller midrange drivers.

JBL's woofers are justly renowned, and the LE14H-3 used here has an Aquaplas-treated pulp-cone that's 280mm in diameter, with rubber surround, massive ferrite magnet and a 100mm copper edge-wound voice coil. This is housed in a generous and massively constructed bass enclosure with curved and tapered sides and a prism-like top surface. The enclosure's sides, back and front are covered in an attractive dark zebrawood veneer with a high-gloss finish, while the multi-faceted top surface is covered in a textured dark grey.

The irregularity of the enclosure shape has the double benefit of improving structural stiffness and avoiding the focusing effect that parallel surfaces have on internal standing waves. A large (100mm diameter) flared rear port reflex-loads the enclosure, cones are fitted for secure floor coupling, and some idea of the solidity of the build is seen in the 52kg weight.

The mid/treble horn assembly comes packed separately, but is reasonably easy to bolt into position (preferably with two people). The complete assembly is relatively compact, just 20cm wide and 44cm tall, with a tapering shape to a maximum depth of 27cm. Since it's mounted low and forward to overlap the top of the bass enclosure (in order to achieve best time alignment), it actually only protrudes 35cm above the top of the bass enclosure. This means the visual impact of the Array 1400 is quite modest. It's moulded from JBL's proprietary resin-based SonoGlass material, and covered in

the same dark grey texture as the top of the bass enclosure. The midrange unit has a 75mm aluminium dome with edge-wound aluminium voice coil and neodymium magnet; a visible heatsink around the motor promises massive power handling. The super-tweeter, which takes over above 8kHz and extends the bandwidth to 40kHz, uses a 25mm titanium diaphragm, again with edge-wound aluminium wire voice coil and neodymium magnet. Twin terminal pairs are used to feed crossover networks with 24dB/octave slopes mounted on separate boards.

**“We were soon playing the system close to the clipping point, enjoying the muscularity and sheer effortlessness of the speaker.”**

The sight of that large bi-radial horn and even larger bass driver immediately brought to mind JBL's magnificent K2 S9800 – probably the finest loudspeaker ever to grace my listening room. The 1400 is a fine speaker in a great many respects, though it lacks the subtle delicacy of the big alnico-magnet K2. But then, the K2 does cost £20,000 per pair...

## SOUND QUALITY

When it comes to bass, there's plenty on offer here, quantity-wise at least. This was obvious enough as soon as the speakers were connected up for audition, and was subsequently confirmed by our usual far-field in-room averaged response traces.

The frequency balance was held within impressively tight  $\pm 3.5$ dB limits from 60Hz upwards, albeit with some unevenness at 2-5kHz; at the same time, output from 25-55Hz averaged around 6dB too strong. However, because this excess is restricted to very low frequencies, it rarely proved subjectively unpleasant, even with music programming. It certainly added suitable authority and gravitas to movie themes and orchestral scores.

Once properly run in, the bottom end excess could still sound a little intrusive sometimes. However, that depended on the characteristics of the recording being played, and was slightly more obvious when using Naim rather than darTZeel amplification.

Given the normally high efficiency of horn-loaded speakers, it was slightly surprising to find the broad midband sensitivity here was a rather modest 87dB. However, since the load stays comfortably above six ohms throughout,

the speaker will be easy enough to drive, and the drive units have massive power handling, so plenty of loudness capability is available if the amplification is powerful.

If the low bass is a little strong, the sound across the rest of the band is beautifully open and neutral, with no hint of the 'shut in' presence that's all too prevalent among more conventional designs. There's also no evidence of aggression despite the presence openness. This is clearly a major benefit of using a single horn-loaded driver to cover the whole range from 750Hz up to 8kHz, giving unbroken

coverage through the broad midband where human ears are most sensitive. This is instead of placing a crossover point (with its attendant filters and resonances) right in the middle, as is usually the case with direct radiator designs.

One real joy of the 1400 Array is the way this speaker encourages one to wind up the volume. Even before the speakers had a decent chance to run themselves in, we were soon playing the system close to clipping point, enjoying the muscularity and sheer effortlessness of these speakers, at the sort of levels which can sound quite unpleasant with lesser designs.

Another major strength of this speaker is its exceptionally precise imaging, indicative of both its fine phase coherence, and also the fact that the horn-loaded upper mid and top is quite directional. The latter factor will tend to reduce the content of reflected sound in the mix of direct and reflected sound that reaches the listener, and this will sharpen up the focus and precision of the stereo image. This results in an exceptionally accurate representation of the recorded soundstage, rather than creating an illusion of the musicians occupying the listening room.

It took a bit of running in to get the 1400 Array up to speed, but once it got going, it showed its pedigree as a very fine performer indeed. The styling might be very unconventional, but this does help minimise perceived bulk, and if the sound doesn't quite have the poise and sweetness of the top K2 model, it still has that horn driver's superb midrange coherence and integrity. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

# The New Gold Standard



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or call free on: 0800 0352032

# McIntosh MA2275

Old-school valve amplifier protagonist gives a masterclass in how it should be done

PRICE £5,775 CONTACT 'A' Audio Marketing, Metro House Business Centre, 57 Pepper Road, Hunslet, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS10 2RU ☎ 01977 798844 🌐 www.a-audiosolutions.com

**M**cIntosh is under new ownership (D&M Holdings, the parent company of Denon and Marantz), but it continues to adhere to the old traditions to which it has stuck through thick and thin. The MA2275 was only recently introduced, but it is in essence a combination of one older component, and another which can only be described as venerable. The 'older' is the a C2200 preamplifier, albeit simplified in various respects, and the 'venerable' is the MC275. This is a valve power amp that has earned the status of a classic since its introduction in its original form in the Kennedy era – 1961, to be precise. Of course, there are some notable accommodations to the modern world, such as a printed circuit board instead of hard point-to-point wiring found in the mid-Cold War MC275.

**“The MA2275 inhabits its own distinctive territory, straddling the valve/solid-state divide.”**

The power amplifier section is a valve powered Class A/B design rated at 75 watts into load impedances from two to eight ohms, with output taps available for two, four and eight ohms. The main gain devices are two KT88 valves per channel, though 6550s can be used as alternatives. Air pipe cooling is used, and output biasing is automatic, which makes this an easy amplifier to live with. The most interesting aspect of the design is the use of a so-called unity coupled transformer using bifilar windings. The primary and secondary windings are wound together in an arrangement designed to give a wider frequency response and power bandwidth, and to reduce distortion.

The preamplifier section boasts five line-level inputs, one of which has a balanced (XLR) alternative, and there is also a moving magnet cartridge input for turntables, together with stereo/mono and tape monitor switching. The amp even has rudimentary support for multiroom (but not

multi-zone) operation, in a clear concession to US market requirements, though a spare line level output, a couple of 12V triggers and a IR input are not likely to get in anyone's way. It is also possible to operate the pre and power amp sections independently.

## SOUND QUALITY

Musically, the MA2275 could cause distinct culture shock to those whose idea of valve amplification comes from the soft and romantic school. But the McIntosh doesn't sound like any solid-state amplifier that we could name, either. We found it both bold and dynamic. There's plenty of power on tap, enough to cope quite happily with MartinLogan Summit electrostatic loudspeakers, and it has enough load tolerance to deal with what is by no means an easy loudspeaker to drive.

One of the qualities noted in our original review, without any obvious explanation, is that the McIntosh has a bold delivery with unusually explicit stereo imagery. It is not a more detailed amplifier than other good designs, but it is dynamic and consistent, with an open, expressive feel. As already noted, this is not an amplifier that has much in common with the soft and euphonic school of valve amplifier design, but it has a naturalness, poise and grace that does nothing to undermine the inherent drama in music when well reproduced.

The MA2275 essentially inhabits its own distinctive territory, straddling the valve/solid-state divide somehow. But it produces a style of music making that is unusually enjoyable and easy to accept. It is not a ruthlessly analytical amplifier, but you won't struggle to hear what's going on as it is more than detailed enough. In short, it allows the music to speak for itself without putting its own gloss on proceedings. However, at the end of a session, you know you have experienced something special, something that is not simply a clone of what you have heard from elsewhere in the past. Unless, of course, you were already a McIntosh owner... **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

See HFC 271 (September 2005) for our original review of this product







# Brinkmann LaGrange

*Is this no-compromise record player destined to become the ultimate analogue experience?*

PRICE £11,385 (turntable, arm and cartridge) CONTACT Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Herts AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.brinkmann-audio.com

**W**hile there are many ways of designing a top-quality turntable, there are perhaps two fundamental approaches. With the first, resonance and vibration are held to be impossible to defeat, so designers make sure all resonances fall in the right places and have as little lasting effect as possible. The second adopts what might best be called the 'Mass and Damping' approach, whereby heavy and solid construction aims to kill resonance stone dead.

Brinkmann's £6,895 LaGrange turntable (named after the 17th century mathematician, Joseph-Louis LaGrange) is heavy. The massive platter, made from an alloy of aluminium, lead and copper, weighs in at around 16kg; it is 33cm in diameter and about 9cm thick. Drop that baby on your big toe and – well, you won't have a big toe any more. Or a foot. Or even a floor, come to that...

The platter is driven by a large and powerful Pabst motor, via a rubber belt or thread. Start time is surprisingly fast – despite having to drive such a heavy platter, it's up to speed in about three revolutions – and there's a choice of 33 and 45 speeds at the touch of a button. A substantial main bearing is necessary to support such mass, and the engineering tolerances here are very tight. So tight, in fact, Brinkmann provides a heater for the bearing to keep it (and the lubricant used) at the optimum temperature! Without this, the turntable might encounter bearing seizure in cold temperatures. A simpler solution would have been to relax the close tolerances used for the bearing and shaft, but this was not a compromise that Brinkmann wanted to make.

The motor and heater are powered by a solid-state outboard supply. For the really well-heeled, an alternative valve-based power supply is available for an additional £1,795 (this simply drives the motor, while the original solid state supply powers the bearing heater). Checking platter speeds, the Brinkmann was spot on. As the motor housing is separate from the turntable itself, you're able to move the motor in relation to the platter, making it possible to increase or decrease belt tension. This alters the sound slightly, but has no effect on platter speed whatsoever.

Finish is exemplary. Despite its large size, the turntable looks cool and understated, and the platter is so accurately machined that it's hard to tell whether it's turning or stationary. There's virtually no surface undulation anywhere – it's perfectly flat and perfectly round. Tap the platter with your fingers and all you hear is a

dull, well-damped thud – there's no metallic ringing or resonance. The record sits on a glass surface and there's no mat, though a record clamp is provided.

Brinkmann's £2,695 Tonearm 10.5in is very similar to the Swiss Breuer Type 8. It has high-precision gimbal bearings with very little free-play, but unlike the Breuer (intended to be used with Breuer's own fairly weighty, modified EMT cartridge), the Brinkmann arm comes with different counterweights enabling it to be used with a wide range of pickups. So, those wanting to fit smaller and lighter cartridges can do so.

Although the individual items are available separately, this review considers the turntable, arm and cartridge as a complete package. We used the Brinkmann LaGrange with Ayre's superb P-5xe MM/MC phono stage; the turntable is also available in a two-arm version (for £7,995), but the review sample was the single arm variant.

**“The Brinkmann's sonic signature is hard to pin down. But, whatever you play, it is exceptionally accurate and very neutral.”**

As previously mentioned, the turntable came fitted with Brinkmann's own Tonearm 10.5. Into this was installed Brinkmann's £1,795 EMTti – a modified EMT moving coil cartridge. It's an open-bodied, low-output moving coil design, originally made for high-quality broadcast purposes. The EMTti proved to be the cherry on the top of the cake, making an excellent partner for the turntable and arm.

## SOUND QUALITY

There's a CD-like poise and stability with this record player. It's awesomely focused and stable, as though nothing short of an earthquake could interrupt it. For those with ears sensitive to pitch changes, this is the turntable you've dreamed of. Solo piano chords die away without a hint of waver; there's no suggestion of pitch wobble, unless it's there in the original recording.

The sound is stable in other ways, too. Voices and instruments stay put in the stereo soundstage and loud parts don't obliterate quiet parts. Opposing extremes – high and low, loud and quiet, sharp and soft – exist harmoniously together. There's no fighting for their right to be heard, no areas dominating others... the music is portrayed with poise, clarity, and effortless refinement.

The cartridge is very good at tracking difficult piano transients. The sound stays clean to side ends too, and doesn't grow edgy and congested. It has a very neutral 'open' tonality that is vivid yet natural and realistic, and the fine-line van den Hul stylus seems not to be affected by the build up of dust and fluff.

We keep our LPs spotlessly clean, but once or twice a distinct ball of fluff started to build up around the tip when playing this cartridge. Yet, this seemed to have little effect on sound – while it's not good to play dusty LPs, this pickup won't falter if you do. Output voltage is 0.21mV @ 1cm/s and suggested playing forces fall between 1.8g and 2g.

The Brinkmann is a very truthful turntable. It delivers clean, honest reproduction and is very revealing and analytical, extracting every last bit of fine detail. We'd not describe the sound as flattering or beguiling; rather, it is sharp and focused, without an ounce of spare flesh. Warm

and euphonic it isn't, yet neither is it cold and antiseptic. The Brinkmann's sonic signature is hard to pin down. But, whatever you play, it is exceptionally accurate and very neutral.

The bottom end is firm and powerful, while the treble is extended and very clean and the midband is exceptionally neutral. Overall, the sound has a seamless 'integrated' quality. There's no false lushness though, or overtly 'airy' or 'spacious' qualities. Instead, you get the music without embellishments and additives.

This lack of 'additives' enables the intrinsic beauty of the original recording to come through. Surface noise is very low, and this (coupled with the excellent tracking ability of the pickup) ensures that most LPs sound clean and sharply focused.

The Brinkmann record player is the best CD player you never heard. It combines the digital format's innate stability, poise and control with vinyl's tonality and naturalness. Presentation isn't airy and holographic, but dynamic, clean and very detailed. The whole aim of the Brinkmann, with its high-mass construction and precision engineering, is neutrality and control. It is not designed by ear to sound 'good'; the fact that it actually sounds great is simply a by-product of doing things right. **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*



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Remote control with numerous buttons and a red LED indicator.

# Mark Levinson No. 326S and No. 432

*The Mark Levinson name makes a welcome return to its pre/power amplifier roots with this pairing*

PRICE £13,490 (No. 326S £6,995; No. 432 £6,495) CONTACT Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Herts AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.marklevinson.com

It's a shame that we don't have space to show you the insides of these two components in *The Collection*, but take it from us – you won't find greater attention to detail and apparent robustness of build in hi-fi, or anywhere else for that matter. The No. 326S preamp, for instance, has totally enclosed mains transformers and power supplies. Even the mains cable between the inlet and the casing of the transformers is shielded from the signal handling PCBs.

The No. 326S is the middle model in a three-strong range of stereo preamps. The most notable difference between it and the less expensive No. 320S is in the material used to make the circuit boards, Arlon. This cream-coloured insulator has replaced Teflon as the company's substrate of choice because, it claims, Arlon sounds better and is easier to work with. Conveniently it also allows for four-layer boards, so that power supplies can be located as close as physically possible to the optimum position in the circuit.

**“The No. 432 adds extra gravitas to the musical proceedings and delivers a sense of sure-footedness that is hard to argue with.”**

It's based on Levinson's range topping No. 32 preamp and goes to many of the extreme lengths found in that model. It doesn't, however, inhabit more than one case, nor cost £12,000. What it does have is completely dual mono, fully balanced circuitry, with each channel getting its own independent power supplies, comms and audio circuits. Communications are a big thing in Mark Levinson preamps; look at the front panel and, aside from the weight of casework, you will see set-up and enter buttons. These lead you into a labyrinthine world... or a microprocessor control system of tremendous flexibility, depending on your inherent technophobia. Each input can be assigned one of a library of names, or you can write a nine-character one of your own. These inputs can also be gain adjusted in coarse and fine steps and each can be made available at the tape output.

This degree of control over input gain is there to facilitate a levelling of all the sources in volume terms. It also means you don't have to press the remote's level button for the three or

four seconds required to change volume. The preamp uses precise but slow 0.1dB volume steps, once the output is greater than 23dB.

Beside these main controls, there are a range of lesser-used adjustments such as phase or polarity, display brightness and mono. You can also set any input to SSP (surround sound processor) mode, whereby it passes a unity gain signal to the outputs.

The No. 326S has four single-ended and three balanced inputs per side, of which one single-ended pair is soaked up when the optional phono stage boards are installed (add £995 to the price quoted above). These boards offer two levels of impedance, capacitance and gain for your needle, plus terminals for your own choice of impedance resistor.

The companion No. 432 is Levinson's most powerful and expensive two-channel power amp with a rated output of 400 watts a side and a hernia inducing weight of 52kg. For the macho multichannel enthusiast, it is also available in three channel variety.

It incorporates a massive, independent linear power supply for each channel, one that is sufficient for the output to double into four ohms. Its circuit layout was designed by engineers and not computer and the substrate used is also Arlon. Connections include XLR and phono inputs plus the obligatory comms and 12v trigger ports. The speaker terminals are designed for spade connectors only.

#### SOUND QUALITY

The preamp delivers images that are genuinely striking in their depth and precision, with huge spaces being conjured up for the various instruments and voices within the mix to spread out in. The No. 326S doesn't have quite as open a balance as the ECS Pre (see p118), but it does cut out some highly convincing soundstages, with everything from Stevie Ray Vaughan to Arvo Pärt being rendered against a highly convincing acoustic backdrop.

The preamp has a slightly shut-in midrange. This makes it sound taut and sprightly, but not as three-dimensional or rich as some.

Importantly though, this does not seem to get in the way of the music. In fact, with something like Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*, it gets the message through loud and clear – the string tone of a solo violin is raw and powerful, reflecting the music and the transcendent nature of its inspiration. There seems to be a slight sparkle at the Levinson's top end, which gives it the capability to produce such real acoustic environments. The other critical imaging factor is at the opposite end of the band. The bass on offer has a substance and weight that is rare for a preamp at any price and its authority adds integrity to the sound in no small measure.

The No. 432 power amp reinforces that muscularity of the bottom end. It adds extra gravitas to the musical proceedings and delivers a sense of sure-footedness that is hard to argue with. The midrange is still recessed, but there's no denying the appeal of double bass when it's played with this much weight and resolution of texture. It's not all about power either – this amp times extremely well for such a big hitter on the watts front.

Arrangements of all varieties take on a cohesiveness in its grip that makes complete musical sense. Here, instruments and voices seem to fit together in a more convincing way, while complex rhythms seem to gel more effectively. As with the preamp, the No. 432 could have a more open balance and thus deliver a more lively midrange, but its take on all things musical is solid and convincing.

An onboard phono stage is a bit of luxury these days and when it sounds as good as this one it's a real treat. It has significantly lower hum levels than many an outboard unit and it delivers a glorious analogue sound. Or rather, one that's as glorious as the cartridge delivers, as it reveals huge differences in recordings. As befits the king of music formats, the phono stage has a transparency that's remarkable, and multi-instrument mixes are extremely well sorted. Unless you already have a top-dog phono stage, this option is worth serious consideration. You can't buy an outboard stage for less than would beat it.

This Mark Levinson duo delivers a revealing and powerful sound that majors on imaging and yet delivers timing that few can match. Its balance is neutral (in the North American sense) and its build quality is in the very top league. A class act and a fine pair. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

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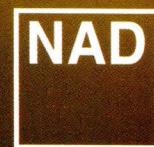
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# Townshend TA 565 CD

*A universal disc player designed specifically for CD replay – has Townshend lost the plot?*

PRICE £3,000 CONTACT Townshend Audio, 7 Bridge Road, East Molesey, Surrey KT8 9EU ☎ 020 8979 2155 🌐 www.townshendaudio.com

**T**ownshend Audio is fronted by one of the most inspired characters in the hi-fi industry, Max Townshend. When Townshend finds a way to make a better sound, the company will stop at nothing to turn that into a product, often a product that puts the competition in the sonic shade. Townshend puts sound quality before all else; what other company would have been crazy enough to try to make a turntable with a trough full of goo sitting over the vinyl? We refer, of course, to the legendary Rock that was designed by boffins, but built by Townshend.

Ever since the SACD and DVD-Audio high-resolution formats came along, Townshend has been doing its damndest to build a player that could do justice to them, and finally it achieved that goal by heavily modifying a modest Pioneer universal player. The end result didn't look very pretty thanks to some exotic outriggers, but it sounded fantastic. Then, Townshend refined the design, making it look and sound better in the process, so it changed. This happened about three times in fact, at least one of them mid-review, but things appear to have calmed recently, or maybe Townshend has just stopped telling us about the changes.

**“There’s an openness and lightness of touch that is found wanting in virtually all players.”**

Regardless, along the way it transpired that not only is the TA 565 a stonking universal player that's capable of giving dedicated SACD players at twice the price a run for their money, it's also an extraordinarily good sounding CD player in its own right. So much so that its sonic betters are significantly more expensive designs. If, indeed, it has any sonic betters... the jury is still out on this and some believe this is the best player money can buy. You may buy a player that is more substantially built with big, chunky front plates and the full gamut of high-end inputs and outputs, but often it's those niceties of finish and facility that you are paying for. If it's good CD and hi-res replay you are after without frippery, look here.

The TA 565 CD isn't short of socketry. Being a universal player it has full 5.1 channel capability and switchable digital output up to 96kHz, as well as dedicated stereo outputs and the occasionally useful video outputs. It also has a built in isolation system (built into the lower of the two

polished or crackle-finished units) that actually works; after all, the creator of the Seismic Sink range of stands could hardly make a standard box.

It divides into two boxes, the first being a skinned and heavily modified Pioneer DVD-565 (a relatively budget universal player from a couple of years ago), the second being a dedicated power supply for the player, as well as including the base for the isolation system. It includes its own stereo output stage and has a little toggle switch to defeat the video stages of the player for the best possible sound. The universal player the Townshend is based upon is no longer in production, but later Pioneer models don't come up to snuff. Fortunately, Townshend still has a warehouse full of players to convert.

## SOUND QUALITY

What makes this such a great player of all music disc types is its freedom from a sense of the electronic or digital. There's an openness and lightness of touch that is found wanting in virtually all disc players that sets the Townshend apart. What this translates to with music is simply more of it: more of the fine detail that makes up the patina of tone and more of the variety in level between notes and the full breadth of dynamic swings. It also extracts more of everything from all discs.

There are still big differences in recordings, but you get a result out of both the good and the bad. The good and great recordings distract you with a realism and energy that many would not credit digital discs being capable of. When you hear things like Randy Weston's *Blue Moses* (even on CD-R), it transports you to a musical event that happened 30 years ago. Who said you can't travel through time? With bad recordings, nothing will detract from the poor quality of the process, but the player does its level best to get past the obstacles and into the music.

The key to the Townshend's success is its neutrality. Put it next to any other player and you will like as not hear what that other player is imposing on the music. One reviewer (who uses the Townshend player on a daily basis) has found a rival in the Audio Research Reference CD7, but this costs nearly three times as much and doesn't support SACD or DVD discs. One day, we hope, someone will bring along a disc player that reveals the character of the TA 565 CD at something approaching a realistic, competitive price, but it's been a long time coming. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

See HFC 270 (Summer 2005) for our original review of this product



# Linn Artikulat 350A

*Linn's first fully integrated active speaker delivers stunning sonic insight*

PRICE £22,000 per pair CONTACT Linn Products, Glasgow Road, Waterfoot, Eaglesham, Glasgow G76 0EQ ☎ 0141 307 7777 🌐 www.linn.co.uk

**L**inn was for a long time *the* dominant force in British hi-fi, and its LP12 turntable was the ultimate source component for a generation of music enthusiasts (for many, it still is). The LP12 still exists – albeit in a highly evolved form – but the market has changed and with it Linn Products. Today, the company employs 200 people and makes the full gamut of home entertainment electronics and speakers. It is one of only three UK companies (alongside Naim and Meridian) to produce a complete chain of components that incorporates active loudspeakers. And, of that select trio, it's the only one that makes a turntable as well.

In the past, it was necessary to upgrade passive or partly active speakers with external crossovers and power amplification to have an active (or Aktiv, in Linn's own terminology) speaker. The Artikulat range breaks with that

**“The speakers reach right down into the mix and pull out the acoustic, or the reverb applied to each element, in uncanny fashion.”**

convention by being available in fully active form from the factory. The range is available in passive form as well, but here we're focusing on the big gun in the line-up – the 350A. This costs as much as the semi-active, range topping Komri, sports six drive units and soaks up no fewer than 1,750 watts per channel, which easily makes it the highest powered active speaker on the domestic market.

This power is split along the following lines: 500 watts per bass driver, 250 watts to upper bass and midrange and 125 watts apiece for the tweeter and super tweeter. The power amps all use Chakra hybrid output stages that combine MOSFET and bi-polar transistors and keep themselves cool by means of tall heatsinks on each speaker's rear corner.

The bass drivers have a servo system that compares the acceleration of the incoming signal with the acceleration of the cone and compensates for errors by differentiating the input and feeding a comparator prior to sending the signal to the drive unit. This servo system is simpler than earlier designs and avoids the problem of the feedback system always being out of sync with the signal that has hampered servos in the past.

The bass drivers are 200mm paper units. The midbass uses a sandwich of what is effectively polystyrene either side of a polythene core, an unusual design created by Peerless.

The remaining dome drivers are polyurethane and vary in size from 75mm to 13mm. They are mounted on a cast aluminium pod called the 3K array. This has precisely sculpted edges and sits over a hollow above the midbass unit, its shape having a significant effect on the dispersion characteristics of the speaker. Considerable effort has been made to keep dispersion as consistent as physically possible across the band, which is why the midrange dome is surface mounted rather than being loaded with a short horn to improve efficiency.

The boat-tail section cabinet used to house this 54kg bruiser is made of a formed 'natural' laminate that's finished in a range of standard finishes including maple, cherry, black ash and rosenut alongside high-gloss lacquered finishes. You can even specify custom veneers to match your interior.

This review concerns a stereo pair of Artikulat 350As, but if you have the inclination (and sufficiently deep pockets) you could build a quite extraordinary active multichannel system around them. For 5.1 sound, try this: a pair of 350As at the front, the smaller 320As at the rear, a 340A centre speaker and a 345 subwoofer. Total price... £48,000!

## SOUND QUALITY

The Artikulats ended up placed wider than usual, with a small amount of toe-in. This, combined with selecting the -40Hz roll-off setting for the bass, produced the most spectacular imaging we have encountered in this room. All the work that has gone into enhancing dispersion has clearly paid off.

The Artikulat is perhaps the most analytical loudspeaker we have had the pleasure of using; we've never encountered a greater degree of insight into the make up and character of recordings. Old favourites revealed precisely how each instrument and voice had been recorded and produced, the speakers reaching right down into the mix and pulling out the acoustic, or the reverb applied to each element, in uncanny fashion.

Previous experience with big Linn speakers had lead us to expect a slightly dry character to the sound, but this is not the case here. The Artikulat has an even and apparently smooth

balance that seems restrained across the band and yet lets everything through. It's not dissimilar to the big SME turntable/arm combinations in this respect; its character is so subtle as to be completely dominated by the music, which is the way all hi-fi kit should be.

You get a sense that the Artikulat is totally unflappable. Throw any kind of music at it and ask it to play it back at almost any volume level and you get a calm, consistent and totally revealing performance. This must be a result of having so much power on tap and probably relates to the nature of control applied to the bass drivers, but there simply seems to be no sense of distress whatever you play.

Another advantage that active operation seems to confer is a consistency of character with level. The sound doesn't change whether it's loud or quiet; it's just as revealing at low levels as it is at higher ones. This is a rare quality and one which suggests that Linn has done its homework very thoroughly.

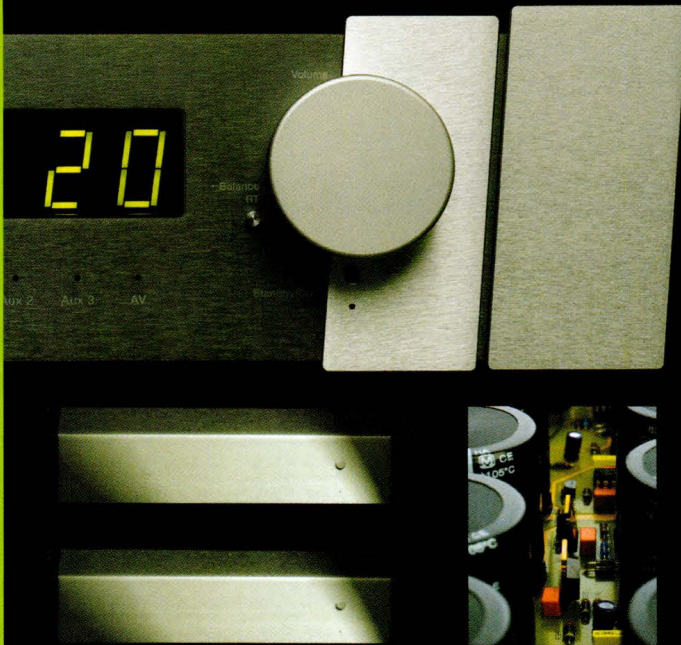
Another useful quality is the way the speaker makes lesser known and heavy going music more accessible. In many respects, we found ourselves enjoying the less well-played tracks as much if not more than the favourites. Which, from the point of view of musical exploration is a major bonus – some material is often hard to enjoy because it is so dense and challenging, but with this degree of control and reduction of distortion, it's possible to enjoy stuff that was hitherto impenetrable. Wannabe Wagner fans take note!

One does get the sense that the sheer levels of analysis can get in the way of thrill power, however. Even though the Artikulats have tremendous dynamic and timing skills they are a little short on that elusive speed. Just possibly, this is because of the low distortion (is the sense of speed just another euphonic coloration?) but it could be to do with the large array of drivers and high power.

Returning to passive speakers after a pair of Linn Artikulat 350As brings home just how remarkable and immensely capable they are. Suddenly, one needs to keep tweaking the volume in search of a sense of dynamic power, and the Linn's tremendous sense of order remains only in the memory. This is a very expensive speaker but it does things that virtually all other speakers can only dream about. How much you value this degree of quality is a personal thing, but it'll bring you a lot closer to nirvana than a twenty two grand motor car ever could! **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

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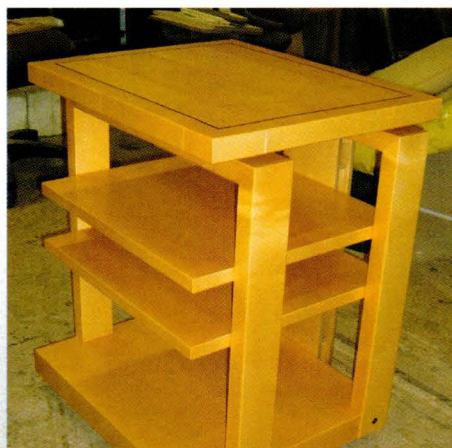
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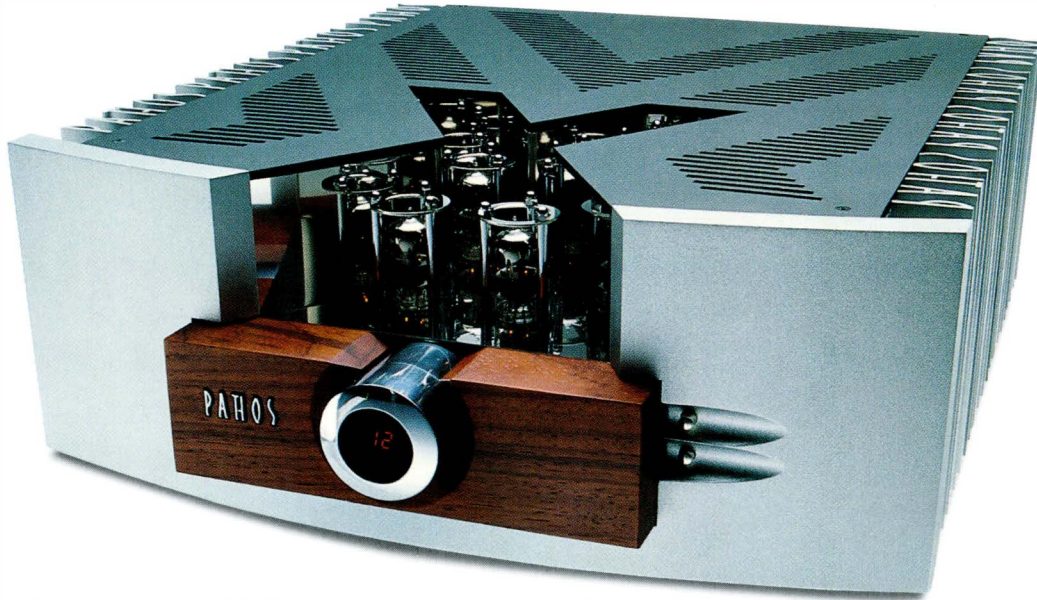
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# Pathos Cinema-X

*Multichannel amps need not be dominated by home cinema processing. Here's the audiophile option*

PRICE £4,750 CONTACT UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iver, Bucks SLO 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.pathosacoustics.com

**T**he Pathos Cinema-X is one of the least multichannel of multichannel products. There's no processing at all. Instead, you have five identical, 110-watts-per-channel, solid-state MOSFET power amplifier boards, fed by a valve preamplifier. This is, in turn, driven by whatever multichannel decoder you choose.

You have just the one six-channel input, ideally for a universal disc player. This is met by a single balanced stereo input with XLR connectors, two stereo sources with accompanying composite video inputs, three phono line-only, audio-only inputs, one audio tape input and output and outputs for composite video, subwoofer and five speakers. Many will likely by-pass the perfunctory video switching inside the Cinema-X, which will help improve the sound significantly. What's really clever, though, is that when the stereo sources are used, the power amplifier stages are grouped together automatically, to ramp up from a sensible 110 watts per channel an almost insane 450 watts per channel.

**“It's a big sound. Big in 110-watt mode, bigger still when there are 450 watts up your speakers.”**

You can set up individual channel levels, or remove channels if needed, watching the six LEDs inside the volume control. Then, when powering up after set-up is done, the centre LED block shows you a big red 'P' when warming up for the first 15 seconds, the volume level when raising or lowering the gain, the input when running through source selection and two little dashes when in muted mode.

Each channel of the preamplifier stage has its own ECC82 double triode tube, and this means the preamp operates in Class A, while the power amp stages are entirely solid-state. The six valves are entirely external, encased in chrome-plated guards. These are arranged in an X-shape – hence the name – and the walls of the otherwise black powder-coated top cover are chrome plated. From the front, the Cinema-X looks like it has dozens of valves, in sort of hall of mirrors effect. Add in the big centre volume control, the wooden front panel and the heatsinks that read 'PATHOS' and the whole package isn't one for shrinking violets.

The matching wood and metal remote control has just four press-studs with no markings, and the LED and pair of buttons on the front panel are just as incomprehensible – some writing on the product would be useful! Also, the sheer size and weight of the Cinema-X, and those almost impossible to hold heatsinks, means you should be very careful when installing the amplifier.

## SOUND QUALITY

It's a big sound. Big in 110-watt mode, bigger still when there are 450 watts up your speaker terminals. Orchestras are pulled wide of the speaker boxes, and the speakers themselves seem to have been given a size upgrade. Perhaps too much of an upgrade – an elfin solo voice can sound like Pavarotti after a week-long binge at the all-you-can-eat lard-o-mat.

It's not the most obviously dynamic amplifier ever made and the American desire for 'microdynamics' is largely underplayed. Instead, the Pathos concentrates on the whole sound, which gives a great feeling of an overall performance.

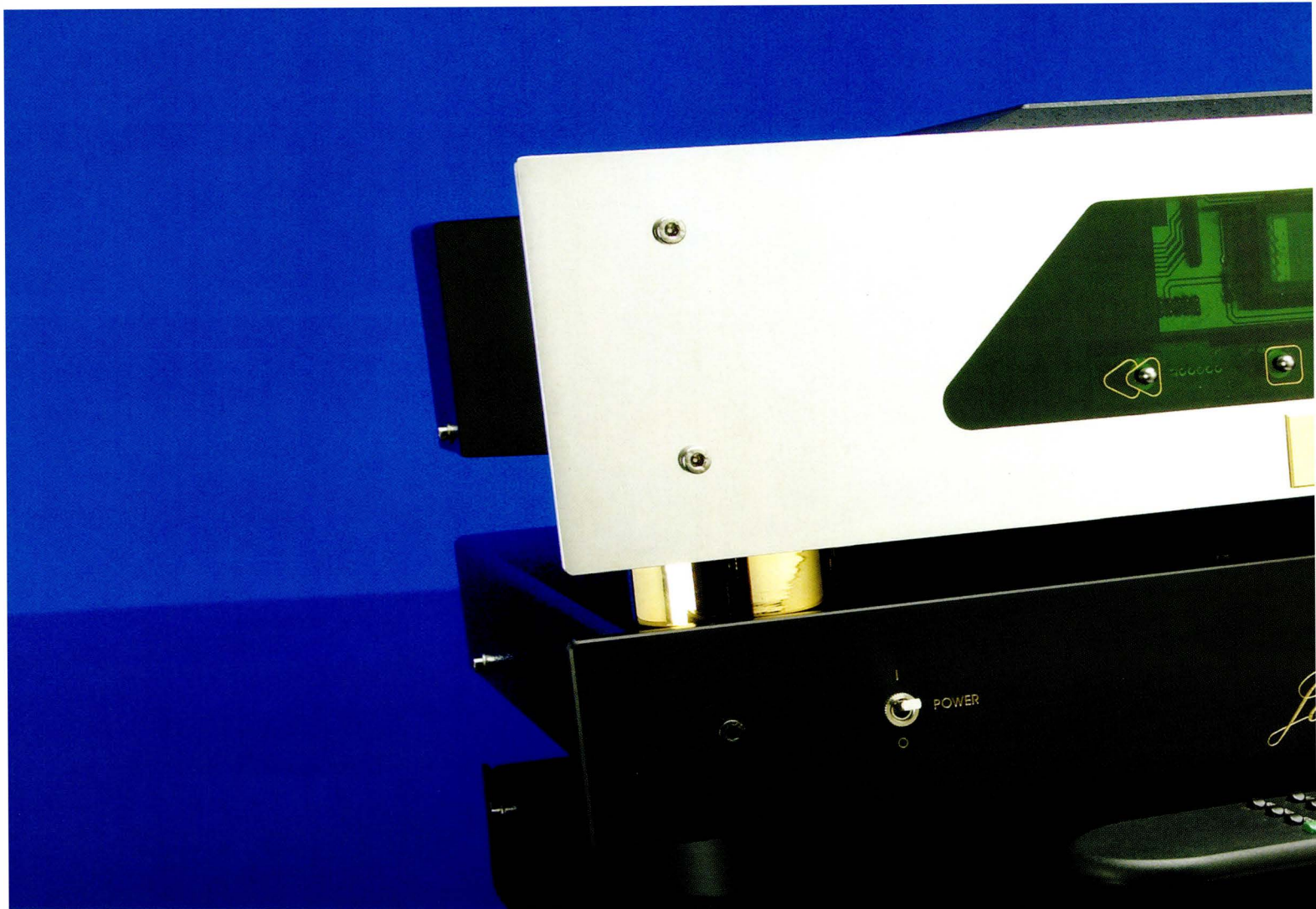
There is a bit of a lack in the rhythm department, but this depends on your perception of the importance of timing. Those who can hear the timing changes in an alarm clock will find the Cinema-X hard to stomach, but those who aren't so obsessed by the pace of the sound will find the amplifier's easy-going, dynamic sound perfectly acceptable.

Best of all, though, the Cinema-X has that ear-pleasing warmth that is common to many Italian hi-fi designs, but is almost unheard of in multichannel amplification. Multichannel audio is almost pathologically connected with detail retrieval and for many, this sound is simply too sterile. There's worse to come from out-and-out home cinema, as most amplifiers in this category sound far too brittle to those who like the classic sound of valves. The Cinema-X is the obvious alternative and this is the only integrated multichannel amplifier that is likely to find favour.

This, then, is an amp for those who want to move into multichannel sound, but who place musicality, warmth and body above visceral sonic impact and a plethora of processing modes, video switching and other such gizmos. In both stereo and surround, its sound is substantial and engrossing – a multichannel amp for people who hate 'home cinema'. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*

*See HFC 270 (Summer 2005) for our original review of this product*



# Jadis JD-3 Evolution Tube

*The expressive JD-3 CD player from French brand Jadis moves into the 21st Century... thanks to valves!*

PRICE £7,500 CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Rd, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.jadis-electronics.com

**C**D players come in all shapes and sizes – some big, others small. Putting it mildly, the Jadis JD-3 Evolution Tube belongs among the larger and heavier examples of the species. It's a top-loading, two-box player with a valve analogue output stage and outboard power supply. The CD transport section is based around the super-high-quality Philips CDM12 Pro 2 Version 6.1 mechanism – one of the last great dedicated CD-only transports – and is covered by a thick and heavy sliding door. The CD is held in place on the motor platform by a special user-removable magnetic weight that also acts as a clamp.

The player is essentially a scaled-down version of the mighty JD-1 transport mechanism, only without the profusion of bronze rods. The first JD-3 integrated player was introduced in the late 1990s, but subtle changes have been implemented throughout since then. The old JD-3 Delux sported a Bitstream chipset, but the Evolution version now comes with a 24-bit/96kHz converter. It's

available in three flavours, of which this is the uppermost model. The basic player is the one box, solid-state Evolution. Next up the Jadis food chain is the Evolution Drive Pro, which retains the one-box design and adds ST-optical and AES/EBU balanced digital outputs to the standard S/PDIF digital connection of the standard Evolution. Then, at the top of the tree comes the JD-3 Evolution Tube player (tested here), which features a separate power supply box and... you've guessed it, valves in the output stage. However, it lacks the extra digital connectivity of the Drive Pro. Of course, none of this information is easily gleaned from Jadis' own website, which has a quaint untouched look (it hasn't even been updated to include the wonderful DA-88 Signature amplifier, tested in last year's edition of *The Collection*).

Being officially one of the High End Cognoscenti, Jadis goes for sound over toys. So, facilities are fairly limited. No bells and whistles, here! The front of the unit carries a few press buttons – Stop, Play, Pause, and

Next/Previous track. Other features must be accessed from the remote handset. There's a single set of fixed analogue outputs, plus a digital output. It's all pretty simple really. The power supply is housed in a separate box, and the two connect together via a thick, shielded cable that's just over 1m long.

Build quality is of 'battleship' standard – very solid, very heavy. It's clearly built on the principle that precision engineering and proper attention to mechanical detail helps deal with some of the problems that occur in the digital domain – for example, jitter. It's actually almost square in shape, but the chamfered sides/edges help to dispel the impression of a squat, ugly box. Just by looking at this player, you sense it's going to be good...

## SOUND QUALITY

If you think the Jadis looks impressive, just wait till you hear it! Its analogue output level is unusually high – a massive 5V RMS at 0dB. That's more than double your average CD



player. Although this could overawe some amps, musically it helps give the player a big, powerful, strongly-projected sort of sound. There's no holding back; the music veritably leaps out of the loudspeakers with remarkable immediacy and presence.

While the presentation is certainly bold and assertive, it's not coarse or brash. There's a sparkling vibrancy that helps foster an impression of richness and weight. The treble has an attractive sweetness and silvery luminosity. It's not the player to choose if you want a smooth, comfortable sound, but it's ideal for those who find CD colourless.

**“This assertiveness is balanced by an equal degree of refinement. The JD-3 is engaging, but it's also clean and elegantly poised.”**

The bass is unusually deep and powerful. Having extended lows has the curious effect of helping the treble to shimmer and sparkle. It also creates a more three-dimensional soundstage, with a keener sense of transient attack and a subjectively wider dynamic range.

Soundstaging is wide and deep, with vivid, pin-point-accurate stereo placement. While it undoubtedly has a forward tonal balance, the sound is not without depth or spaciousness. Transient attack is outstanding – fast and sharp,

with a real sense of impact. You really notice this on drums and pitched percussion, which project out with real presence and attack. It's assertive and dynamic, crisp and immediate.

This assertiveness is balanced by an equal degree of refinement. The JD-3 is engaging, but it's also clean and elegantly poised. It's not a 'kind' forgiving sort of CD player, yet neither is it one that over-emphasises faults. If there are technical problems with a recording, the Jadis won't hide them. Yet neither will it exaggerate shortcomings and limitations. It plays to the strengths of each recording, rather than highlighting weaknesses.

A player like this will show its full potential on recordings of the highest technical quality. But trying lesser recordings – those that can sound washed-out on typical CD players – was something of an ear-opener. The sound had far more body and weight than expected.

The Jadis gives a very convincing portrayal of subtle dynamic inflections, while managing the larger picture superbly, too. Play a good recording of a solo acoustic guitar, say, and you'll definitely be able to tell if the guitar

strings were new – you'll hear that delicious twangy freshness and the feathery 'buzz' you get when fingers shift to a different chord. The sound simply has a luminous brilliance.

In this respect, the Jadis sounds very analogue. It's lively and vivid, with a musical presentation that's brisk and to the point. It's fast and at times almost furious, but never 'busy' or congested; clarity is truly excellent, so individual voices and instruments remain separate and uniquely themselves. In this respect it's among the best CD players we've ever heard – easily one of the most exciting and engaging available.

As a transport, the Jadis rates about average, so far as mundane things like track access speed and stuff like that go. There's a 'display off' facility, but once it's off, it's off. It doesn't briefly come on again if you press Pause or skip to the next track – you have to physically switch it back on again. Players back in the 1980s had this sorted, so why not 20 years later?

Minor operational quibbles aside, this is a truly fabulous player, one that gets you pretty close to the limits of what's possible from CD. It's not cheap, but hardly excessive if you've got a substantial CD collection and want to hear your music at its best. We've rarely heard CD sound so vivid and engaging – the Jadis JD-3 Evolution Tube is a remarkable piece of kit, that's for sure! **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*

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# Gamut L5

*Electronics specialist gets the sound very right with its first loudspeaker*

PRICE £5,850 per pair CONTACT Audio Reference, Unit 8 Enterprise Park, Slyfield Industrial Estate, Guildford, Surrey GU1 1RB ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

Ever since we came across the original D200 power amplifier, then called Sirius, Gamut has been one of those brands with a range of products we try to seek out as soon as they are announced. So, when the company created its first range of loudspeakers last year, we were queuing all night to get to them first (well, sort of) and yes, it was worth the effort.

The L5 is the middle model in a small, but elegantly formed, range. It's Gamut's least expensive floorstander, but that hardly sums up a speaker that's over 1,200mm high, weighs 39kgs and sits on some of the most fearsome-looking spikes outside of the London Dungeon.

The L5 was designed by Gamut's director Lars Goller, who bought into the company after spending an extended time designing drive units for some of Denmark's best known speaker brands. It's not surprising, then, that there are some custom-made units in this two-and-a-half way speaker – the 32mm tweeter is a ring-radiator version of the ScanSpeak Revelator, while the suspension system on the 180mm bass/mid and bass drivers has been designed to offer a progressive yet constant spring rate. Another feature are the lines that look like they've been embossed on the paper cones. These are, in fact, sealed cuts put there to break the driver into segments. This is claimed to minimise coloration, albeit at the expense of stiffness.

**“The Gamut L5 is a tremendous loudspeaker in both sound and build-quality terms.”**

As well as having one of the best finishes we've seen on a speaker for some time, the L5 features exceptionally hardcore metalwork. This extends to the outriggers bolted to the base, which extend the footprint and the backplate, the latter with its single pair of WBT terminals. Then there are the 12mm threaded spikes with their 65mm pointy bits – clearly not for the casual listener.

## SOUND QUALITY

With these spikes adjusted so that the L5's top was level, the sound produced is attractively open and delivers a full-scale soundstage, into which the speaker itself seems to vanish when the right recording is played. Another of Lars' theories is that symmetrical diffraction effects – the sounds that come off the edge of a speaker cabinet – produce the greatest distortion. This occurs with speakers pointed straight at you and he recommends the L5s be aligned so that their baffles are parallel with the rear wall. This means that you only hear asymmetrical diffraction. The manual also suggests tilting the speaker forward so that the tweeter is aimed at ear height but not at the ears.

Doing this allows the L5 to reveal explicit detail, so much so that even the extremely low-level information on familiar records becomes clear in its origins and meaning. Image depth is also stunning, with all manner of recordings revealing the scale and nature of the venue to a remarkable degree. This set up arrangement also helps the speakers to disappear into the mix; maybe there's something in the symmetry of diffraction after all.

Controversially, bass performance seemed to improve when the spikes were removed. This also smoothed the midrange so that one could push the level further without any discomfort. Like this, the L5 could tell you exactly how kick drums were recorded and how much reverb had been added. What's more, the imaging remained full scale and full depth, even

under such dynamic strain. At all times, it revels in the nuances of the music and has a great sense of timing thanks to its considerable precision.

This is a tremendous loudspeaker in both sound and build-quality terms, a fact brought home by the way it can rejuvenate overplayed albums. Some speakers do this with an odd balance, but the L5 does it by getting out of the way and letting the music shine. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 271 (September 2005) for our original review of this product*





# Magnum Dynalab MD 108T

Used with a decent roof aerial, this gorgeous FM tuner will blow any digital equivalent into the weeds

PRICE £5,800 (remote control £350 extra) CONTACT Audiofreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7QT ☎ 0208 948 4153 🌐 www.magnumdynalab.com

Usually, the Canadian brand Magnum Dynalab almost exclusively specialises in tuners. More to the point, in an environment that's constantly discussing digital radio, Magnum Dynalab focuses specifically and successfully on tuners that operate in analogue mode on the FM band.

With all the hype surrounding DAB, one can be forgiven for wondering whether it makes any sense to invest a large sum of money in something intended to receive a source threatened with obsolescence. Speaking personally, I faced the same quandary when I fell for an MD 102 back in 2002. I took the plunge then and have had no regrets – and have already enjoyed four years of high-quality radio listening. Indeed, I'm now contemplating the Triode upgrade.

So, what is the future for FM? In fact, talk of an analogue FM radio switch-off seems to have faded from the agenda. Time will tell.

**“Genuinely live broadcasts, such as *Choral Evensong* on BBC Radio Three, become a totally magical experience.”**

Magnum Dynalab makes an extended hierarchy of different models, most of which stay in the range for many years, and several of which have been reviewed previously by *Hi-Fi Choice*. The MD 108 was the company's flagship for the best part of a decade, only recently supplanted in this role by the touch screen-equipped MD 109. The 108 continued in the range, and has only just now been replaced by this new MD 108T (for triode) model, which includes many of the technical features of the 109, but is packaged in the 108's much more traditional – some would probably say rather more attractive – styling.

Indeed, there's a lovely logic and symmetry about the fascia, which sets the four key display elements back behind a central window, flanked by two large knobs and underlined by a row of eight toggle switches, each with its own discreet status LED. While the fascia is an attractively chunky, shaped slab of aluminium – black comes as standard, while silver or gold are optional extras – the rest of the unit has much more prosaic wrapped steel casework. Unfortunately, this didn't quite sit properly on all four feet, which is a touch disappointing at this price level.

Magnum Dynalab not only rates analogue FM radio highly, it also reckons that continuous

analogue tuning simply sounds better than its digital synthesis equivalent, even though it's much more difficult and costly to implement. The only visible digital bit here is the central numeric readout of the tuned frequency, which is large and very legible, although some form of microprocessor is clearly taking care of the electronic housekeeping inside.

A row of toggle switches cover power on/off, muting, stereo/mono, three degrees of selectivity, display dimming and stereo blend. The large knob on the left selects between two aerial inputs and two other settings enigmatically labelled D1 and D2 and described as 'for future use' (a DAB module maybe?). The one on the right naturally does the tuning, with a beautifully weighted flywheel effect making it easy to scan rapidly up and down the band.

Although not available on our 'hands on' sample, the MD 108T can also be ordered with

full remote control, for an extra £350. The control codes are different from those normally used in Europe, and strange results can occur with components from different brands. My remote control MD 102 always selects preset number five whenever I push the mute button on my Naim preamp remote handset!

No attempt has been made to cater for modern fripperies like RDS, but the features that are included are quite elaborate and mostly oriented towards achieving the best possible sound quality. The choice of three selectivities will be particularly welcome for those in 'difficult' urban areas, as will the multipath meter. The two large meters are large, subtly lit and easy to read, but the real *piece de resistance* is the magic eye – effectively a turquoise glowing valve – which is very sensitive indeed and gives a most precise indication of accurate tuning. Besides the two F-type aerial sockets and IEC mains input, the rear panel has both balanced XLR and unbalanced phono output sockets.

## SOUND QUALITY

Under the bonnet, the MD 108T incorporates the triode valve circuitry that the company has been gradually introducing over the last few years. The latest version of this is dubbed

TRACC technology (for Triode Reference Audio Control Center), was first introduced with the MD 109, and is now incorporated in this MD 108T. Other features include a new software control centre that is isolated from the RF signals and gives a very low noise floor; an ultra-stable power supply; a new and more sensitive RF front end; closer tolerances for the critical components; and a thicker printed circuit board with gold plated solder pads.

That reduced noise floor is probably a factor in this tuner's excellent ability to capture and convey ambience and acoustic background information with thoroughly convincing coherence, whether it comes from the tight confines of a broadcast continuity studio, or the wide open spaces of a gothic cathedral.

When reviewing the MD 106T two years ago, the sound was noteworthy for a brilliant top end sweetness and clarity, which seemed to be that tuner's key characteristic. This was nowhere near as obvious with this MD 108T, which didn't have the same sort of 'grab you' quality, but turned out to have an altogether subtler and more even-handed appeal. It's a little more understated perhaps, but actually all the better for that. String textures proved particularly convincing, and stereo depth was very impressive, too.

The real strength of this tuner lies simply in its lack of any significant sonic fingerprint. It just seems to get itself out of the way and allow the full quality (or not!) of the broadcast through. It's all too easy to hear the fundamental superiority of BBC Radios Three and Four over the commercial stations, and also just how exceptional the quality of the very best FM transmissions can be. Genuinely live broadcasts, such as Wednesday afternoons' *Choral Evensong* on Radio Three, become a totally magical experience, irrespective of one's interest in religious matters, because of the sheer realism of placing a choir in a large live cathedral acoustic, and capturing this with sensitive miking.

As far as it's possible to tell (given that every location has its own unique RF environment), the radio reception performance was up there with the sound quality. The selectivity, blend and the three visual aids were genuinely useful in digging out weak stations, and I had no problem in getting good reception from London transmitters more than 60 miles away. The MD 108T might be a costly proposition, but it looks lovely and sounds very special indeed. It will be sorely missed! **HFC**

Paul Messenger

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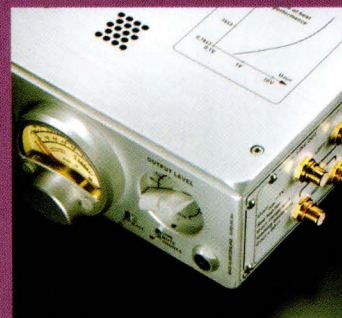
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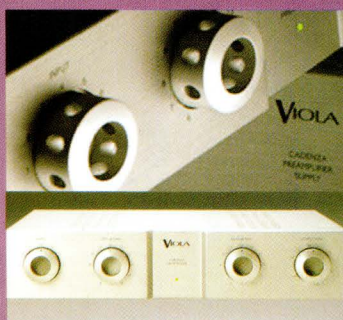
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# Chord Electronics

## Prima and Mezzo 140

Who says 'big is beautiful'? Certainly not Chord and its cool, alloyed combo

PRICE £7,135 (Prima £3,335; Mezzo 140 £3,800) CONTACT Chord Electronics, The Pumphouse, Farleigh Bridge, Farleigh Lane, East Farleigh, Kent ME16 9NB ☎ 01622 721444 🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk

Specialist hi-fi usually consists of huge, ugly boxes. The sound might be great, but in terms of aesthetics – forget it! In fact, some consider the uglier the product, the better the sound. Chord's Prima line-level preamp and Mezzo 140 stereo power amp challenge that old slice of audio folklore: they look great and sound fantastic, too.

With a superbly finished casework machined from solid billets of aluminium, first impressions are of understated class and solidity. Chord's design signature also dictates that each of their components is lit from within. The Mezzo 140 has an attractive magenta glow that emanates from the heat sinks. It looks gorgeous, though to our eyes it clashes slightly with the saturated turquoise blue of the Prima's display and its deep Royal blue internal illumination.

Controls are minimal, ensuring clean uncluttered lines, although this 'uncluttered' ethos extends too far as there are no markings to identify what the sockets and buttons actually relate to. But there aren't that many buttons to mix up. There are no tone controls or filters, and both mains on/off switches are situated at the rear. Only volume, left-right stereo balance and input selection are accessible from the preamp. These functions can also be accessed via a remote handset.

Each of the preamp's five line inputs (one balanced and four unbalanced) is individually adjustable for gain, and an illuminated display indicates input selected and volume level. While the Mezzo has balanced or unbalanced inputs, the Prima has balanced outputs only. So you need balanced interconnect cables terminated in XLRs to connect them.

Despite its compact dimensions, the Mezzo 140 is extremely powerful, delivering 120 watts RMS into eight ohms. Into four ohms, power output increases to 200 watts. For those wanting more, it's possible to buy a second Mezzo 140 and use the amps 'bridged'. This increases output power to 220 watts and improves sound quality.

The Mezzo 140 has a built-in cooling fan to lower the temperature should it be pushed hard. This runs at a whisper during normal use – close to the amplifier, a faint fan-whirr can just be detected. But move a few feet away and you hear nothing.

### SOUND QUALITY

The Chord combo has exceptional control; the way it makes music, you feel every note has been precisely shaped and weighted. The tonal balance is cool but open, giving the music a taut, honed and 'straight' quality.

Yet don't infer from this that the sound is cold, dry and sterile – far from it. The presentation isn't especially rich or voluminous, but it quickly becomes apparent just how refined and clean the Chord amps sound. Clarity is excellent, and definition – even in complex music – never falters. It's as though the amp has a vice-like grip on the speakers.

The Chord pairing seem able to control the slightest nuance and most delicate of finedetail, yet the overall effect remains surprisingly fluid and relaxed. The musical presentation has an

excitingly brisk, no-nonsense feel, without seeming over-damped or excessively regimented. It's direct and honest in a nothing-to-hide, upfront sort of way, very crisp and sharply defined. Yet its sheer 'cleanness' and purity avoids thinness; the sound is bright and airy, rather than brash and edgy. It sounds lucid and truthful, rather than mellow or euphonic.

The fact that it's so exceptionally clean and neutral means that faults are much less exaggerated than one might have predicted. We found it very interesting to hear the way the Chord combo was able to reveal detail and dynamics without emphasising tape noise or tonal hardness/thinness in a recording. For some, the presentation will perhaps seem a touch forward and stark, but there's no doubt it's a thoroughly high-quality sound.

**“One can't help but notice the way the amplifier presents things very honestly.”**

Bass quality is taut and very controlled. It's just a shade dry and lean, but very tight and defined. It's pure muscle – not an ounce of excess flesh anywhere. Power output is considerable, both on paper and subjectively. Put simply, this is an amplifier that doesn't flinch when you turn it up.

Playing simply-recorded acoustic music – natural unamplified voices and instruments – one can't help but notice the way the amplifier presents things very honestly; nothing added, nothing taken away. It's not 'understated', but there is nevertheless a neutral, unexaggerated truthfulness that is very refreshing.

For all its positive attributes – crisp attack, keen dynamics, lucid and detailed presentation – the Prima/Mezzo 140 combination is a surprisingly easy amplifier to listen to. The musical presentation remains wonderfully relaxed and effortless despite the exceptional clarity and detail. And it looks the business, too! **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*

*See HFC 269 (August 2005) for our original review of this product*





# Opera Callas Tebaldi

*This monumental multi-driver model from Opera has a big, generous voice*

PRICE £9,995 per pair CONTACT UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iwer, Bucks SL0 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.operaloudspeakers.com

**O**pera is an Italian speaker brand that has particularly close links to UK distributor UKD, as the latter is a major business partner in the Opera, er, operation. *Hi-Fi Choice's* previous experience of Opera models has been limited to two very small Prima standmounts, but this £9,995 per pair Tebaldi is one of the largest, heaviest and most complex speakers ever to come into the magazine for scrutiny. It stands nearly a metre and a half tall, and its depth is nearly half of that considerable height, so while the front view remains a fashionably slim 25cm, the total weight here amounts to a daunting 90kg – and that's not including the wooden packing crate in which it travels.

Though unquestionably enormous, this enclosure is also unquestionably exquisitely made, showing that Italian flair for craftsmanship that has played an important role in putting that country firmly on the international hi-fi speaker map. Real solid or veneered wood covers the overwhelming majority of a very complex enclosure. The top is hewn from solid wood, and shaped to chamfer and smooth the edges. The veneered sides are curved and bowed, just 25cm wide at the front, reaching a maximum of 30cm about a third of the way down the sides, and then tapering to a narrow 15cm at the rear.

The veneer is laid on as a series of wide horizontal strips which supplies attractive patterning. The front is a chunky slab of MDF, covered in leather and heavily chamfered at prismatic angles to promote good lateral distribution. Not that there's any risk of instability here, but the aesthetics benefit considerably from a generous flared plinth. This is fitted with castors rather than spikes, as the designers believe the mass alone is sufficient to ensure solid support. Three separate optional grilles are supplied to cover the various drivers, if desired.

The Tebaldi uses an extraordinary total of nine drive units, and that doesn't include a pair of auxiliary bass radiators (or ABRs) – these are devices which look entirely like regular drivers but behave like ports. That's a whole lot of drive units to try and get working together harmoniously, so how does it work?

Despite more drivers than the start of Le Mans, this is essentially a three-way design. Twin midrange drivers and a solitary tweeter are visible on the slim front baffle. Two bass units, each in its own sub-enclosure and loaded by an associated ABR, are situated on the inside faces. And a vertical row of four extra

tweeters adorn the slim rear panel. The bass drivers are both 200mm units with 155mm aluminium cones; the midrange is supplied by two 140mm drivers with 90mm magnesium cones; all five tweeters have 25mm doped fabric domes. Phew!

Both the bass and midrange pairs are described as operating in 'semi-parallel', presumably meaning that each driver of each pair uses slightly different filter points, which should improve the crossover transitions. Nominal crossover points are 160-200Hz (depending on the setting of a 'mid-bass' selector switch) and 2kHz. The most unusual feature is that rearward facing row of tweeters, which are configured as a cross-linked dipole, combining in- and out-of-phase units. This is in order to enhance the reflected treble soundfield without causing interference with the front tweeter.

The rear panel accommodates three terminal pairs plus a couple of toggle switches. The latter may be used either to reduce the rear tweeter output by 4dB, or to reduce the midbass level by 2dB. The three pairs of terminals don't address the three separate 'ways', as one might expect, but in practice the uppermost pair just feeds the rear tweeter array, allowing this to be simply disconnected if preferred. The other two pairs separately feed the solitary front tweeter and the bass/mid combination. Although the two ABR units look

**“Big, generous, but above all spacious are the adjectives that spring to mind when describing the sound of the Tebaldi.”**

just like drive units, they actually have no motors behind their cones and they are free to move in just the same way as an air column within a port. The advantage of the ABR is that it offers greater control over the various design parameters.

Sensitivity here is a quite modest 88dB, just as stated in the specification, and although the load falls to around four ohms through the lower midband, the Tebaldi is not particularly difficult to drive. The switch labelled 'mid-bass level' has most impact at 100Hz-250Hz.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Tebaldi and its pair of 200mm units sounded too bass-heavy under our room conditions. In our 4.3x2.6x5.5m room, the far-field averaged measurements confirmed the

bass sector from 30Hz to 80Hz is some 10dB stronger than the broad midband. This is obvious because the 100-250Hz region is 2-3dB too shy – despite using the higher midbass output setting on the network. Above 500Hz, though, it's beautifully flat and smooth.

Potential bass/room size issues aside, this speaker delivers a very fine performance through the upper registers. The sound here is beautifully neutral and open, with no hint of harshness, a fine dynamic range and impressive headroom. The unusual 'cross-linked dipole' rear tweeter arrangements turned out to be particularly effective, adding worthwhile spaciousness without in any way detracting from the precision of the stereo image. Big, generous, but above all spacious are the adjectives that immediately spring to mind in describing the sound of the Tebaldi.

This is a speaker that is sensitive not only to room size, but to music type, too. What could prove a little too heavy when playing relatively percussive music, such as rock or dance genre material where the kick drum and bass guitar tend to be well up in the mix, was much less of a problem with classical (and of course operatic) material. Here, the balance helped to give the whole soundstage a very engaging generosity, by giving extra emphasis to the reverberation and ambience that is present when a recording or broadcast is made in a large auditorium.

This was particularly noticeable when listening to Radio Three's *Choral Evensong*, broadcast live and with invariably sensitive mike techniques from one or other of our medieval cathedrals. Few venues can match the atmosphere of an environment which is arguably better served by surround sound than most music sources, but the spaciousness and weight of the Tebaldi's performance certainly made the most of a very fine quality FM stereo transmission.

The Tebaldi proved a less than ideal match for our particular room size and type, but it can deliver a more even balance in a larger space with more low frequency absorption. Its sheer bulk is also clearly best suited to very large rooms, where the sheer beauty of its cabinetwork will be properly appreciated. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

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# EAR Disc Master

*EAR's stunning turntable re-writes the rules of platter spinning*

**PRICE** £7,695 (excluding arm/cartridge) **CONTACT** Yoshino, Coombe Grove Farm, Arrington, Nr. Royston, Cambs SG8 0AL ☎ 01223 208877 🌐 www.ear-yoshino.com

**W**ith its first turntable, EAR (Esoteric Audio Research) set out from first principles to prove that there is more than one way to read the modulations in a vinyl groove. The result is a design that is as radical as anything you're likely to see under an LP this millennia.

The Disc Master's most ingenious feature is what designer Tim de Paravicini calls the 'no contact' drive system. This uses opposing magnets to isolate the drive from the bearing, platter and tonearm. Most turntables decouple the motor with a rubber belt to minimise energy transfer to the stylus/groove interface, but rubber belts are inclined to slip very slightly and this induces small fluctuations in speed. EAR uses a system of opposing magnets in the driven sub-platter and underneath the bearing to engineer a drive system with enough compliance to iron out motor vibration, but stiff enough to drive the platter.

The Disc Master avoids the potential for belt slip by using a toothed belt between motor and sub-platter. This also ensures that any resonances produced are isolated by springs inside the three aluminium feet that support the platter and arm. The bearing is also unusual. It uses an angular contact system, because this approach is said to give considerably longer life than the conventional point contact approach.

The gorgeous black platter is made from Corian synthetic stone that's topped with cork, which is very good at turning energy into heat. In use, the Disc Master starts and stops within one revolution so changing LPs is quick and, as you can see, not inconvenienced by a record clamp.

The V shaped armboard allows two arms to be supported. The arm supplied with this deck was a standard Helius Omega (from £1,485) rather than the EAR-specific Omega, which includes some functional modifications alongside a silver finish to match the deck.

## SOUND QUALITY

Initially, the Disc Master sounds very neutral, not dissimilar in fact to the SME Model 20 we use as a reference. However, the more music we played, the more it became apparent that the grooves were giving up an unusually large amount of information.

With the Helius arm and a van den Hul Condor cartridge, it turns in a powerful, fleet-of-foot performance with great three-dimensional solidity and a precise rendition of acoustic space. It also has an addictive sense of speed as a result of the total absence of overhang in the bass. On the one hand, this means the bass doesn't have the girth that can be produced on other systems, but on the other you get more nimble and musical bass lines. It's this quality rather than quantity approach that serves double bass extremely well and delivers the energy of music in full effect. The flip side is a slight over-exposure at high frequencies that was not apparent when we swapped over to an SME V arm with the same cartridge. The Helius produces speed and dynamics with considerable gusto, though, and for many this quality will outweigh its slightly upward-tilting balance.

**“It became apparent that the grooves were giving unusually large amounts of information.”**

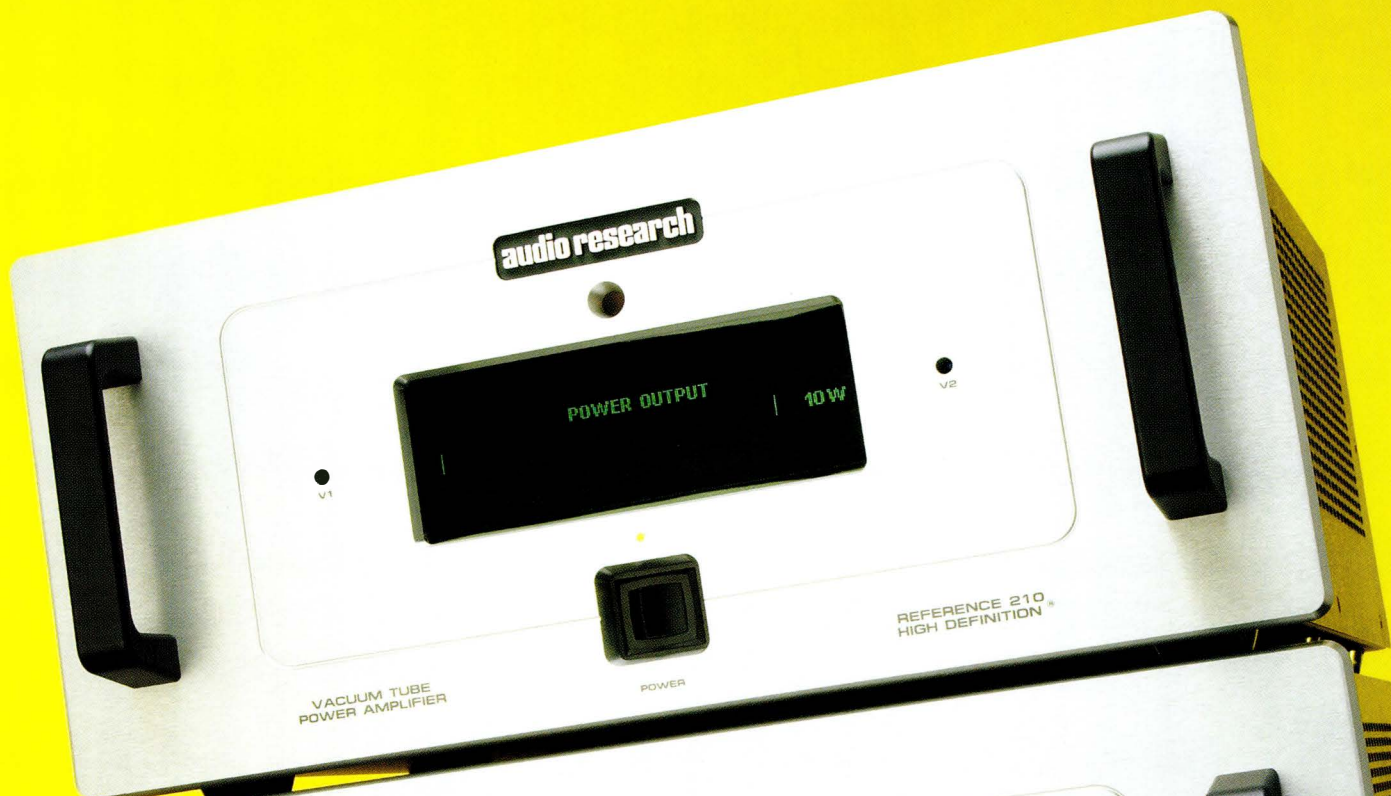
We felt the SME V brought a calm to the sound that is rather more agreeable than the Helius sound, because it allows more fine detail to emerge. In addition, the control at low frequencies means that the bass has all the power and weight you could desire.

Timing is another strong point. One's feet or fingers rarely sit still; whether you're playing Bob Dylan or Charles Mingus, the rhythmic qualities of the material are obvious.

The Disc Master carried on getting better after the original review had been submitted, the combination of a Hadcock 242 unipivot arm and a Music Maker 3 cartridge delivering a sound that was so smooth and clean that we could turn the wick up significantly higher. The EAR is a truly world-class turntable, 'nuff said. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 276 (February 2006) for our original review of this product*



# Audio Research Reference 210

Forget the stereotypes – this 210-watt monoblock sounds unlike any other valve amp you've heard

PRICE £8,950 each (£17,900 per stereo pair) CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Rd, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.audioresearch.com

To say the Audio Research Reference 210 mono power amps are big is something of an understatement. Each one is 48.3cm wide, 22.2cm tall and 49.5cm deep, and weighs 33.6kg. In fact, they are smaller, more affordable versions of an even bigger amplifier – the 600-watt Reference 610T, a tower of power with a little forest of valves along its top surface.

Not that the Reference 210 is light on valves. Each chassis has three matched pairs of 6550Cs in the power output stage, another matched pair of 6550Cs in the driver stage, a 6N1P in the gain stage, plus a 6N1P and yet another 6550C in the regulator section. That's eleven valves in total, only two of which (the 6N1Ps) are miniature double triodes.

With so many tubes, the Reference 210 inevitably runs warm. To keep temperatures down, there's a built in cooling fan that runs all the time and produces a bit of noise – a gentle whirring/swishing. So, it's best to position the amps well away from your listening seat – but you aren't going to use amplifiers of this size, power and heat in a broom cupboard! There's a two-minute gap while the amps settle down and warm up after switch-on, during which time the signal is muted.

Each chassis has a single balanced input via a three-pin XLR socket, but no single-ended phono connection. There are three outputs for loudspeakers of four, eight and 16-ohm impedance. The 'correct' one for your loudspeakers gives the highest volume, but do experiment – we favoured the four-ohm setting for its extra tightness and control, though eight ohms sounded louder.

**“Even played quietly, the Reference 210 sound has a commanding presence that's both uncanny and remarkable.”**

But perhaps the most obvious and fascinating aspect of this valve-based monoblock is its cool front panel display, like a scaled down version of the Audio Research Reference 3 preamplifier. Functions displayed on the panel include the choice of six levels of illumination, plus display off; bias measurements for each output tube; mains voltage; logarithmic, scalable power output (0-10, 0-50, 0-100, 0-200 watts); and total hours of tube use. The vacuum-fluorescent display is addressable only through the remote control, which is actually a handy diagnostic

tool that's used for trimming the levels, shutting down the amps and operating the display. With this much flexibility, it's little wonder the amplifier also comes with a 12V trigger for remote power on. It's also little wonder that the amplifier has a 20A IEC connector – at full tilt, each amp draws nearly a kilowatt and pulls 380 watts even at idle and 680 watts at the rated output. In amplifier terms, this is as environmentally-chummy as a Range Rover having a tug-of-war with a Hummer in a rainforest.

## SOUND QUALITY

Why do you need something this meaty? Because a pair of Reference 210s make the best stereo power amp this reviewer has ever heard. By a country mile. And they get better over time – while the sound is extremely good from cold, things improve steadily as the various components reach their proper operating temperature. After about an hour to an hour and a half, the sound is even smoother and more effortlessly transparent, with a fantastic sense of rightness that you simply have to hear to appreciate.

The Reference 210 produces a big sound, notable for its massive scale and spellbinding immediacy. Even played quietly, it has a commanding presence that's both uncanny and remarkable. The musical presentation is at once relaxed and effortless, yet sharp and focused.

Tonally, the 210 is supremely open and natural sounding. The music is crisply focused and tactile, with firm and plentiful bass and clean, transparent highs. Pitch definition is quite simply outstanding.

At the other end of the spectrum, the bass sounded firm and very powerful, with clear definition and impressive clarity. Although subwoofers were not connected, the Reference 210s made it sound like they were – the bass was that powerful, that deep. Yet, despite the very full bottom end, bass lines sounded clear and well-defined. Remarkable!

This is a very refined-sounding amplifier, but not in the usual smooth/rich/warm sense. One of the first CDs tried was George Michael's *Jesus to a Child* from the album *Older*. This track is exceptionally difficult to reproduce

cleanly; the treble is a touch edgy and splashy, while the bass sounds thick and somewhat lumpy. There's an artificial reverberation added to prolong the vocal sound. Every time there's an 'S' it comes out as an 'SSSSS'.

Sonically, this track often disappoints, but not this time. Although the Reference 210s sounded super sharp and very bright and immediate, the treble was surprisingly clean and free from 'edge'. Not only that, you could really follow the decay on the emphasised sibilants. Rather than sounding smeared and splashy, each sibilant was crisp and clear.

The Reference 210s also made it easier to hear the words of songs. They seemed to project the vocals, and in doing so made the words clearer. The amps really gave the music its head – let it flourish and expand – without seeming to impose limitations or control. The result was a dynamic sound of effortless clarity.

For a big amp, the Reference 210 sounds surprisingly agile and articulate. Some big amps only come fully into their own when pushed hard, but this one sounds good even when played at a whisper. Mind you, the sound is so clean and effortless, you're positively encouraged to play things loudly. With over 200 watts on tap, each amp has power to spare, but they don't need to be played at excessive levels to fill the room with music.

We have already commented on how outstanding the extreme treble and bass are, but perhaps what's more remarkable is how integrated the overall sound is. The flow from deep bass to high treble is absolutely seamless. Transient attack is super fast, and very clean, with no hint of detail being smeared. Separation of individual strands is outstanding, creating superlative clarity and definition.

Finally, we did some listening in single speaker mono, often an instant failing of even high-end monoblocks. Not here – the Audio Research sounded fine. The extra quality of the sound somehow compensates for the lack of stereo. In musical terms, the reproduction was sharp, clean, and open – with all the necessary information seemingly intact.

The Audio Research Reference 210 trashes all the usual stereotypes. It has all the sharpness, clarity, attack, dynamics, detail and bandwidth you'd expect from a transistor amplifier, yet it's valve-based throughout. We've never heard anything quite like it – and that's the truth. Which makes us wonder... how much better could the Reference 610T monoblock power amp be?! **HFC**

Jimmy Hughes

# Meridian's G06. Higher Fidelity.

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—Richard Black, *Hi-Fi Choice*, July 2006

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14 69:26

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# Jamo R909

*Just this once, it's not a cliché – Jamo really does think outside the box*

PRICE £7,500 per pair CONTACT BBG Distribution, Colonial Way, Watford, Hertfordshire WD24 4WP ☎ 01923 205600 🌐 www.jamo.com

**N**ot long ago, Jamo was taken over by the US company Klipsch, a firm producing speakers that are, not to put too fine a point on it, out of kilter with European tastes. Perhaps that's why Jamo, as Klipsch's nominated representative in Europe, decided to launch the more Euro-friendly R909 – the brand's first convincingly high-end model since the similarly extravagant Oriel from the early 1990s.

The R909 is a dipole, but unlike almost all other dipoles, this one features moving coil drive units and works across the full frequency range. To achieve a respectable low frequency bandwidth (in the face of the severe baffle losses incurred as air currents around the edges of the baffle do their best to equalise air pressure on each side), Jamo has had to radically increase the bass radiating area. This is why each speaker includes two outside 380mm drivers, with ultra-lightweight but stiff air-cured pulp cones. The opposite end of the audio frequency band is handled by a ScanSpeak Revelator tweeter in a custom face plate, which takes over above 2kHz. Below this point, and above 250Hz where the bass driver is cut off, the midband is handled by an open back (or dipolar, as it is mounted on an open baffle) SEAS driver with a 135mm magnesium cone and a fixed pole piece. The crossover, which has relatively gentle second order slopes, is housed below the pedestal base.

A great deal of development work has gone into the baffle, which stands 1,276mm high and 488mm wide, on a base that extends 541mm fore and aft. The baffle is a thick multilayer construction with curved edges to increase stiffness. There's also a stainless steel and polymer damper and reinforcing member coupling the plinth to the top of the baffle. The whole assembly is quite extraordinarily stiff, even by normal box speaker standards. It is also superbly finished in a choice of black, red or yellow high-gloss lacquers.

**“The whole assembly is quite extraordinarily stiff, even by normal box speaker standards.”**

The R909 is quoted as having a four-ohm nominal impedance, a very respectable 89dB sensitivity and the ability to cope with up to 800 watts of programme material. So, you don't need a massively powerful amplifier, but there is good reason to have one if you have a large room, and you like giving your system some serious stick.

## SOUND QUALITY

The R909 is easy to use in any room that is on the larger size of average. Being a dipole, it doesn't interact excessively with side walls, but it does so with some beneficial effects near corners as the rear reflections are then delayed, adding space and reverberation without muddle.

Sonically, the new Jamo flagship is something of a marvel. It delivers a big sound, which is consistent in balance across a wide volume range. The R909 is clearly 'voiced' with a touch of 'left hand down a bit' on the tone control. So, the bass is a little fuller than you might expect, and the treble slightly restrained. But the character of the bass is hard to knock. There is no bass boom, and it starts and stops on the head of a pin, more or less. The level of detail is not compromised by the marginal loss of treble presence and the whole effect is very open and natural. There's plenty of stereo width and (especially) depth, much of it behind the speaker plane, and the balance helps to produce a large and very deep image scale.

Naturally, with no cabinet to speak of, Jamo claims there's no cabinet coloration to the R909's sound. Perhaps not, but that doesn't make the speaker 'uncolored' and its character is one not altogether at odds with traditional enclosure colorations. It's a relaxed and easy-going sound quality, but never the sort of easy-going that can be re-written as 'blowsy' or out of control.

The R909 is not quite as analytical as some similarly priced high-end speakers, but it has a very 'touchie-feelie' style of presentation – it just sounds very open and natural. In a world of clones, near clones and semi-demi clones, this one is a true individual. To many listeners, that alone makes it worth every last penny. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 280 (June 2006) for our original review of this product*





UDP-1  
conrad-johnson edition

McCORMACK  
DELUXE

STANDBY

conrad-johnson edition  
UDP-1

DELUXE  
McCORMACK

# McCormack UDP-1 Conrad-Johnson Edition

*The already hot UDP-1 gets breathed upon to make Conrad-Johnson's first disc player in years*

PRICE £3,995 CONTACT Audiofreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7QT ☎ 0208 948 4153 🌐 www.mccormackaudio.com

Universal players may not be the force they once were, but they are still the top choice for those who want to cover all the bases. And one of the more attractive prospects in this category is the £3,495 McCormack UDP-1 universal player. Based on the near-ubiquitous Pioneer chassis, this heavily modified player is one of the big favourites Stateside. But, there's a back-story.

Conrad-Johnson owns McCormack. And Conrad-Johnson – best known for its valve amplifiers – hasn't got a digital source component right now. So McCormack changed key components in the audio chain, slapped a gold panel on the front and called it the 'UDP-1 Conrad-Johnson Edition'. It's an honest solution at £500 over the regular version.

The move to a gold front panel and little round buttons (in the manner of current Conrad-Johnson amplifiers) will make a big difference to those who use the company's amps and are after something matching. Anyone who has already succumbed to the UDP-1's charms will be please to hear the updates made to the Conrad-Johnson Edition are also available as the UDP-1 Deluxe, if you prefer the more silvery finish of the McCormack front panel. Better yet, these 'Deluxe' modifications will be available as an upgrade kit in the near future.

**“This is a subtle and effective upgrade, snapping an already focused-sounding player into even sharper repose.”**

A quick recap. The standard UDP-1 is a breathed-on, rebuilt-from-the-ground-up player, based on common OEM Pioneer parts. This is nothing new – Muse, Theta, Townshend and others follow the same path. But, unlike these other brands, McCormack has been built upon a long-standing culture of producing breathed-on, rebuilt-from-the-ground-up products. The company started as an off-shoot of The Mod Squad, a maverick 1980s outfit that produced heavily hot-rodded versions of existing amps. So, if anyone can produce a stunning, high-end, custom-engineered player from basic Pioneer DNA, you'd put your money on McCormack.

The player is very hi-fi oriented, with high-quality phono connections on all analogue audio channels, but it lacks HDMI or DVI digital

video connectivity. There are composite, S-Video and component video outs, with the option of progressive or interlaced output. But that's three-year-old technology in video, which is measured in dog years.

McCormack deploys custom parts throughout the UDP-1's audio and video chain and adds its own custom software, allowing little things like automatically defaulting to stereo replay. These mark this one out for audiophile, especially stereo audiophile, approval. And it's received that approval, for its stunning sound through all sources. But this wasn't enough for the Conrad-Johnson Edition.

The upgrades may not seem that substantial. The strategic use of metal-foil resistors in place of standard issue ones, upgrading key capacitors to Conrad-Johnson electrolytics and using polystyrene bypass caps merely add the finishing touches to an already striking UDP-1. But these things can be deceptive.

Functionality is also a key issue, and the McCormack UDP-1 (both flavours) scores reasonably well. The rebadged Pioneer remote with jog/shuttle dial works wonders for general use, which is a good thing because the player is a bit tough to navigate – especially with DVD-Audio – without a screen attached. Set-up is quick and intuitive, and readily passed the accidental 'install while hung over' test. If

the player is being slotted into a multichannel system, install gets a little more complex, requiring bass management adjustments (well, 'Small' or 'Large' bass options) and possibly distance measurements to the speakers dotted round the room. But it all goes together easily, and simple on-screen set-up menus mean the manual can largely stay in its wrapper.

## SOUND QUALITY

The UDP-1 is already one of the better universal players around. It's got a reputation for being a no-nonsense audiophile bargain, with the sort of subtle shading and dynamic control that marks out the high-end territory. It's keenly dynamic and detailed, in a relaxed kind of way. Best of all, it applies that same good audiophile

sound to all sources almost equally (with slight weighting towards DVD-A). It's one of those players that could happily slot into a six-figure system without drawing attention to itself, which makes it one of a rare breed.

The Conrad-Johnson Edition/Deluxe upgrades improve matters subtly – there's a distinct tautness to the delivery that isn't in the standard model. That's not to say the standard version sounds overly soft, or the upgraded model sounds uber-sharp; both players have an appealing sweetness and lightness of touch, but the C-J Edition is just that little bit more... agile.

This is a subtle, effective upgrade, snapping an already focused-sounding player into even sharper repose. It also further levels the playing field, raising the quality of CD several notches and making SACD and DVD-Audio just about evens in performance terms. Timing and solidity are improved across the board and the player just makes music more, er, musical than before. Which is quite an achievement, as this was already a sublimely musical player.

Ultimately, it all adds to the length of time you end up sitting in front of the system. The standard UDP-1 had hours of comfort zone on tap, but the upgrade should come with a caution sticker regarding Deep Vein Thrombosis. You could happily spend half your life sitting in front of this player and still come back for more. Don't think it 'comfortable' in that sort of too soft, too nice manner, though – stick The Stooges in the tray and the sound is as amphetamine-fuelled as ever.

There's also picture performance to consider. The lack of the video scalers and HDMI links paraded by cutting-edge video players keeps it off the top slot, but it's not as limited as it might seem on paper. Colours are vibrant and there is a cinematic depth to the picture that's often lacking. The development budget may have gone on the audio performance, but video is not just an afterthought.

If you already own a UDP-1, you're in luck. You already own a fine universal disc player and the move to the Deluxe version lofts it into the Premier Cru league. If you don't own a McCormack but use Conrad-Johnson amps, what are you waiting for? This is all the digital audio you need. The rest of us can pick between the Deluxe and C-J Edition, knowing both are among the finest multi-format disc players on the market today. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

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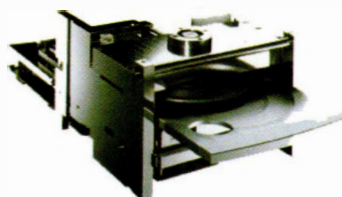
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# Unison Research Unico 200

*This innovative Italian dual-mode amplifier can trade output power for quality*

PRICE £3,250 CONTACT UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iwer, Bucks SL0 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.unisonresearch.com

**T**he vital statistics just about say it all. The Unico 200 costs £3,250, weighs 55kg, stands some 43cm wide, 26.5cm tall and 55cm deep. It has five line inputs, almost no toys apart from the obligatory remote control – and an output rating of 350 watts per channel. All of which means the Unico 200 is a big brute of an integrated stereo amplifier. But this isn't the whole story.

The Unico 200 is as much brains as brawn. It is a dual-mode amplifier, one that has two output configurations. This is based on a power supply that changes itself on the fly to give 200 watts per channel rated, or 350 watts in practice, according to Unison. But then, there's the alternative high-current mode, which is limited to 50 watts per channel nominally, or 85 watts per channel in practice, again as the makers claim. It is the lower power mode that is said to offer the best available sound quality.

Unison is best known for its valve or hybrid valve/solid-state designs. No change here: the Unico 200 is a hybrid amplifier, with the tried and trusted arrangement of a valve front-end and a MOSFET output to do the heavy lifting. The input is a triode cascade in a common cathode arrangement with a triode cathode follower. This is followed by a current-feedback Class A solid-state driver stage, and finally, there's the MOSFET output with a sliding bias arrangement to prevent crossover distortion. This seems a particular favourite configuration of many of the leading Italian amplifier marques.

In lower power mode, a reduced voltage power rail is used. There's also a series or parallel arrangement of the power supply bridge rectifiers, according to mode. It is safe to switch between low and high power modes as the amplifier is playing, not least because there is a lot of circuitry dedicated to guaranteeing the amplifier's stability

under all conditions of use. According to Unison, this is achieved without intruding on sound quality. The amplifier is DC coupled, and has a massive output reservoir bank.

## SOUND QUALITY

Perhaps the valve based front-end is responsible for this, but there is an attractive valve-like quality to this amplifier, a smoothness and euphony that you would not expect from a solid-state design. The difference between the two operating modes can be surprisingly subtle, but in the end the lower power mode is preferred when the extra headroom is not required. Conversely, the amplifier acquires an almost tangible sense of stature and scale at higher volume levels in the higher power mode. The effect is not dissimilar to the Class A and Class B amplifier output configurations that were once popular when power was more at a premium than it is now, but the differences here are more subtle.

**“It is easier on the ear and has massively more power on tap when the occasion demands.”**

In our original test, we compared the Unico 200 to another large amplifier, the even more costly Denon PMA-SA1 (see p122), which is roughly comparable in output power to the Unico 200 in low-power mode. In fact, they are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of sound. The Unison's almost blowsy grace and euphony contrasts with the Denon's smaller image scale but razor-sharp reflexes,

up-front presence and remarkable transparency. If it is a clear picture of the source that you want, the Denon is undeniably the better tool for the job, while the Unico 200 is a little more selective and lossy in nature, but arguably smoother and easier on the ear – and it has massively more power on tap when the occasion demands.

An excellent amplifier then, with few gimmicks, but plenty of raw grunt when required. The Unico 200 is capable of an easy yet enjoyable style

of music making that appears to work with virtually any kind of music, and with almost any loudspeaker, regardless of sensitivity and power handling ability. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

See HFC 269 (August 2005) for our original review of this product





# MartinLogan Vantage

*New electrostatic speaker proves hi-fi exotica needn't cost the Earth*

PRICE £3,998 per pair CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Rd, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.martinlogan.com

**A**bout a year ago (in *The Collection* 2005), we reviewed the MartinLogan Summit, which represented a new direction for MartinLogan at the time. Now, here's the follow-up. After reaping excellent reviews on both sides of the Atlantic, the company has climbed down from the Summit and released a down-sized Vantage version.

This new speaker retains most of the virtues of the original, in a somewhat smaller enclosure, at a much lower price. It sacrifices nothing but a few Hertz from the bass end and perhaps a few dB off the maximum SPL. What the Vantage is not, however, is in any meaningful sense inferior to the Summit. It does slightly less, but it does it almost as well, and moreover there is a way the differences can be bridged (see later). I have heard the Vantage described as 80 per cent of a Summit for 50 per cent of the price. There's an element of bravura here (and it costs less than half the price!), but this characterisation is not too far from the literal truth. Some might even prefer the new model on a straight comparison, even taking no account of price or size.

Visually, if you didn't have the two side by side, you might not realise that they're different models. At 144.7cm, the Vantage stands 5cm shorter than the Summit, while the groundplan is 27.3x41.3cm for the Vantage, 32x52cm in the case of the Summit. They're both rated at an impressive 92dB/W/m sensitivity, but the frequency response extends down to only 34Hz in the case of the Vantage, and a more impressive 24Hz for the Summit, both -3dB, though the difference on audition appears less than the numbers imply. But perhaps the important difference is that the Vantage's crossover is set to 400Hz (against 270Hz for the Summit), which implies a key difference in the ELS panel design.

Even the Summit's bad habits are carried over. The four ohm nominal impedance is not an issue in itself, but the impedance rating dips to around one ohm near 20kHz, which is very reminiscent of the Summit. This single fact underscores the importance of choosing an amplifier that can cope, and to choose a loudspeaker cable that doesn't add too much loop impedance, as this will result in audible modifications in frequency response, in addition to other changes. All of which will be apparent through a loudspeaker as transparent as the Vantage.

Under the skin, the designs are clearly related. The electrostatic panel is very similar, and features all the now familiar technologies,

including the laterally curved (by 30 degrees) panel which is housed in what MartinLogan describes as an 'Ultra-Rigid Air frame', which features very finely and closely perforated stators, front and rear, and a diaphragm which is said to have almost twice the radiating area of MartinLogan's earlier ELS panels. The new Airframe construction, the structural element of the ELS panel, which includes polymer billet horizontals (aluminium for the Summit), and internally tensioned extruded aluminium tube verticals, anchors the stators and the enclosed diaphragm around the edges.

The transparent ClearSpar spacers (you'll only see them from close quarters) maintain the spacing between the working elements, and helps control the compliance and tensioning of the diaphragm. The diaphragm fabrication, and the way it is fixed in place, have also been improved, but those improvements were ushered in with the Summit.

**“By the time you get up into the midband, the Vantage’s electrostatic panel is in full swing, sounding gloriously open and vivid.”**

The bass section should also be familiar to MartinLogan watchers. The active element is a single 200mm aluminium cone bass driver driven by a 200-watt (at four ohms) internal amplifier – the Summit has two 250mm drivers, a significant difference – and can be fine tuned by a level tone control on the back panel. This pivots the response around 35Hz.

## SOUND QUALITY

As MartinLogan points out, true dipole speakers send very little sound to the sides of the room, minimising early side-wall reflections with short arrival times that tend to interfere with and muddle perception of the direct sound. Their strong rear radiation, however, produces later-arriving, ambience-enriching reflections off the back wall. It is worth noting that the Vantage is only dipolar above 400Hz.

It turns out that the Vantage is quicker to run-in than previous MartinLogans, and this may be because the panel design is less stressed because it is not required to handle the frequency band between 270-400Hz.

Using a very low crossover frequency has been something of an article of faith for MartinLogan over the years, so what are the trade-offs? Less than you might think. On the whole, the crossover has been handled with

considerable aplomb. Contradicting the lean and occasionally brittle presentation of some electrostatics, this one has a surprising warmth and grace. The Vantage bass is moderately deep and full in character, but it's a well designed bass (it has the benefit of being inherently tweakable, too). Best of all, the handover to the panel is almost inaudible. It's not quite as spacious as the Summit, or as full in the upper bass, but if anything the low end of the panel's coverage has real poise. On the whole, you won't hear the two drive units in their own right, which is a remarkable tribute to the designer's craft.

By the time you get up into the midband, the Vantage's electrostatic panel is in full swing, sounding gloriously open and vivid. The slightly smaller size of the Vantage panel may perhaps explain why it sounds, if anything, even more balanced and at ease than in the Summit, but the higher crossover frequency

does nothing to determine why the speaker sounds so homogenous. It's certainly in tune with previous MartinLogan speakers, quintessentially, of course, the Summit.

The Vantage delivers vivid, colourful tonality, an expressive mid and top, and a bass that is essentially simply an extension of the midband in a downwards direction. Imagery is not as 'in your lap' as with some previous electrostatics, but there is plenty of presence, and good differentiation by depth, while a carefully positioned pair will provide a large image scale. It's all down to creative and sympathetic use of room reflections.

We briefly experimented with the use of a small external subwoofer (from REL), augmenting the bass, but running it out of circuit just where the Vantage is beginning to hit its stride – around 30-35Hz. This worked extremely well, adding stature, depth and power, without distorting the image as a single subwoofer usually does if it crosses over at a higher frequency. The REL R-305 is barely larger than the bass section of the Vantage itself, so the combination remains quite user friendly. But subwoofer or no subwoofer, the Vantage is something of a gift at the price – and one that keeps on giving. **HFC**

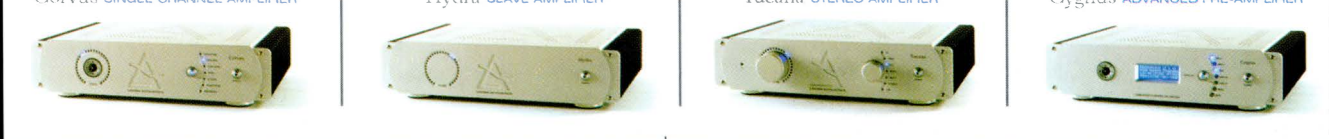
*Alvin Gold*

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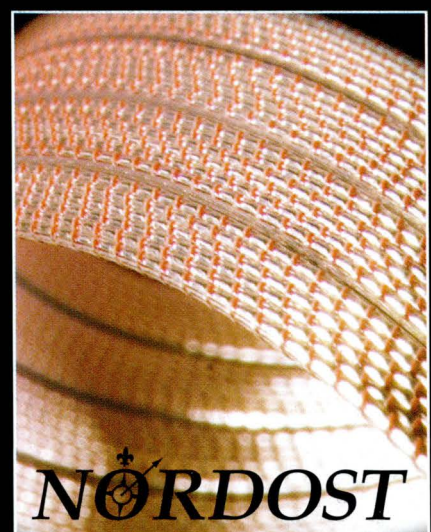
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# Classé Delta SSP-600 and CA-5200

Classé's Delta range redefines high-end multichannel sound for music and movies

PRICE £11,900 (SP-600 £5,450; CA-5200 £6,450) CONTACT B&W Loudspeakers, Dale Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 2BH ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.classeaudio.com

The strategy that B&W-owned subsidiary Classé is adopting for the multichannel world is finally becoming apparent. There are three elements to it: the SSP-600 preamplifier-cum-processor and CA-5200 power amplifier reviewed here, and the CDP-300 DVD player, which is due imminently.

This is how it works. The CA-5200 is a high-grade processor, with a plethora of audio and video inputs up to and including component video, and the ability to transcode video up or down through the different standards. This helps to simplify the wiring between processor and display screen. The CA-5200 five-channel power amplifier is rated at 200 watts per channel, and has a circuit architecture directly derived from the CA-2200, Classé's superb, audiophile-quality power monoblock.

**“These are distinguished by more than just flexibility, power and an integral TFT screen.”**

Both components use Classé's uniquely sophisticated user interface, which includes a set of nested graphic menus that are displayed on the processor's own TFT screen. This saves using a TV screen, for example when navigating a DVD-Audio disc, and it will also show any video programme material if required. But what's missing here is any digital video output capable of driving an HDTV screen.

The third and final element in the story is the forthcoming CDP-300 DVD player. This will be able to display to a HDTV screen, because (unlike the processor) it will sport an HDMI output that can be channelled straight to the display. This by itself doesn't allow the use of multiple HDMI sources, likely a common requirement among adopters of HD DVD or Blu-ray players and Sky HD+ set-top boxes. But there is an upgrade in preparation that will allow two HDMI sources to be connected through the player, turning the player into an enhanced model, the CDP-30V. This will also be available separately in its own right.

#### SOUND QUALITY

These components are distinguished by more than just flexibility, power and an integral TFT screen. They are also superbly built. In each case, the wrap-around front and side panel member was conceived as a kind of mechanical earth, but a strong anti-resonance and microphony story lies behind the whole of the mechanical design. The firmware of each component is also used to monitor its status, and if necessary to report its condition, including faults, to the dealer using a laptop computer with appropriate Classé-supplied software.

This is a system that will soon be able to cope with digital video, albeit in a slightly clumsy way. In every other respect, the Classé equipment is superbly equipped and readily upgradeable. More to the point, no excuses need be made for its performance. The power amplifier is massively powerful, with a low-frequency delivery that has a bold, open musculature, and a vivid, expressive yet disciplined midband and treble. It

is broadly comparable to the best stereo power amps available from elsewhere, in some cases from models that – channel for channel – cost considerably more than the CA-5200.

And what of the SSP-600 processor? It's almost in the same class, and that's a remarkable achievement for a product so inherently complex, and whose roles in life involve so much more than just dealing with sound-quality issues. If listening in stereo, using the processor as a preamplifier, it pays real musical dividends to switch the internal TFT display off and use all the relevant bypasses. Also, use the balanced outputs if possible. The power amp has balanced mode inputs and is configured internally as a balanced design.

The SP-600 is an excellent tool for reproducing stereo or multichannel SACD from heavyweight players, like those reviewed elsewhere in this issue. But switch to films and you have a superb Dolby and DTS-equipped processor, with a heavy duty, high-speed DSP section capable of generating a genuinely three-dimensional soundfield. If you're looking for top-class multichannel amplification – here it is! **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

*See HFC 278 (April 2006) for our original review of this product*





# Esoteric X-01 Limited and G-0s

*Esoteric by name, esoteric by nature. This ultra-specialist pairing takes digital audio to new levels*

PRICE £18,490 (X-01 Limited £9,495; Esoteric G-0s £8,995) CONTACT Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Herts AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.teac.com/esoteric

The Esoteric X-01 SACD player was reviewed in the last year's edition of *The Collection* (HFC 272), but here we take the story a couple of stages further. One change is that that we are looking at the new Limited edition version of the player. The other, much more radical difference is that this time we've included one of the most extraordinary accessories for a disc player ever devised – the G-0s master clock, which practically doubles the price of the player at a stroke.

A brief recap is in order, as few will have even seen an X-01, let alone heard one in a system of appropriate quality. The X-01 is a multichannel SACD player that will also play CDs (or course) and CD-R/RW discs. It has a text display, and because it is a multichannel player, it will output audio from six phono sockets (5.1 channels), with a balanced XLR alternative for the front stereo pair. Optical and

of 6N cable, which in addition to its purity, is also responsible for a reduced impedance power supply feed. The changes also include a switch to WBT NextGen connectors, and a number of passive component substitutions on the audio boards. The upgrades can be retrofitted to existing players, and it is worth noting that the Limited player commands a relatively small premium – up to £9,495 from £8,995, a 5.5% price hike.

The G-0s is a much more elaborate addition. This is a full size component that weighs in at 18.5kg – the X-01 weighs 25kg to give some perspective – and is described as a Master Clock Generator. It uses a rubidium core oscillator, which is specified accurate to 0.5 parts per billion. This corresponds to being one million times more accurate than a standard crystal controlled oscillator (rubidium is the resonant element within atomic clocks).

The X-01 is superb as a CD player. It has stability and poise, a way of anchoring the music and of elucidating instrumental and vocal strands that puts it practically in a class of its own. But it really comes alive with SACD, which adds weight, colour and expressiveness, and perhaps most of all a superior sense of drive and dynamics. CD can't quite provide this, and you might not even know what was missing if you hadn't heard the two formats alongside each other.

Now, the Limited version of the player has the grace and malleability to add real depth to the illusion of reality. This is more obvious with SACD than CD, perhaps because the parent format doesn't have the internal transparency to show the difference as clearly.

But it is there all the same. The Limited version of the player costs relatively little more than the standard player, and we wouldn't hesitate coming up with the five and a bit percent surcharge for a minute (perhaps this is why as the review went to press, the importer decided that henceforth only the Limited version of the player will be imported).

We are slightly more equivocal about the G-0s clock. Not that it doesn't make a difference, because it clearly does. In a system with sufficient resolution (Krell FBI, MartinLogan Vantage, Nordost Valhalla), and especially with high-quality SACD recordings, the clock helps to extend the advantage of SACD over CD. The latter are also improved to a lesser degree. We heard extra resolution, superior articulation of complex compositions, and a bolder, less electronic sound character. In general, although the differences can be quite subtle, the highest available clock speed gives a slightly sharper and cleaner sound. We tried the G-0s clock with the dCS P8i CD/SACD player with some success (see p42) as this player also has a word clock input, but it would only run at the base frequency (44.1kHz).

The problem here, of course, is not what the clock does, but what it costs. It doubles the price of the player for an improvement that would be difficult to justify in terms of doubling sound quality. On the whole, the differences are worthwhile and not generally too subtle, but it's a high price to pay. The chances are that a multicomponent Esoteric system, one in which the Master Clock can be used to synchronise the internal clocks of two or more components, represents the real target market for the G-0s, but assessing this will have to wait for another day. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

## “The new Limited version of the X-01 player has the grace and malleability to add real depth to the illusion of reality.”

coaxial digital outputs are available for 16-bit/44.1kHz CD data, and a Word Sync input is available, of which more shortly.

What really makes this player tick is the VRDS-Neo mechanism, which is built to a standard that few aspire to. Rigidity, accurate geometry and the non-cogging nature of the three-phase brushless spindle motor are paramount here, and the key moving parts are made from magnesium. It really is a masterpiece of its kind. But the X-01 is nothing if not an all-out assault on the high end, and in the previous test it acquitted itself as perhaps the finest digital audio player we had used up to that point, though it is by no means top of the Esoteric model line-up. Nothing that has come along since has seriously threatened to dislodge it, though some of the other players in this issue come close, depending on how you want your ideal player to sound, and how many channels you would like it to have.

But Esoteric (the prestige audiophile arm of TEAC) has not let the grass grow under its feet. The Limited version of the player reviewed here was co-developed with Acrolink, a specialist in the use of high-purity 6N (which means the copper process has less than 0.00001% impurities) cables from Mitsubishi Mining, and you'll not be surprised that the Limited edition is largely a rewiring exercise based on the use

The unit is designed for managing the clocks for one to six separate digital devices – players, transports, DACs and so on – with the aim of reducing the jitter (an insidious form of distortion specific to digital audio) that can arise with unsynchronised clocks. There are three groups of paired outputs, each of which can deliver one, two or four times multiples of the base clock frequency – 44.1, 48 or 48kHz. The G-0s can also be used with DVD players, with a special PAL film mode which overcomes the usual error that arises from the way that material is formatted. Each group of two outputs can be turned off if required, and a standby circuit is used to keep the clock core running at optimum accuracy. It takes an hour or so for the rubidium to settle down.

### SOUND QUALITY

Not having spent any time with the old and new versions of the X-01 side by side, it would be foolish to be too definitive about the differences between the two. Nevertheless, from memory (and in looking back at last year's listening notes) there's little doubt that there is a real, identifiable difference that favours the Limited version of the player. All the old qualities are there, notably a pristine, pellucid purity of tone, an exquisite transparency and a level of information retrieval in a class of its own.

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" The way the Hyperions marry the openness, resolution, speed and transparency more usually associated with a panel to the weight, extension and dynamics of a top-class box borders on the uncanny. "

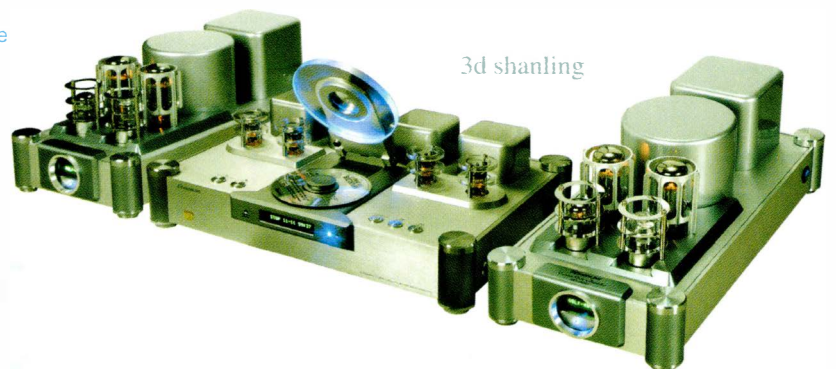
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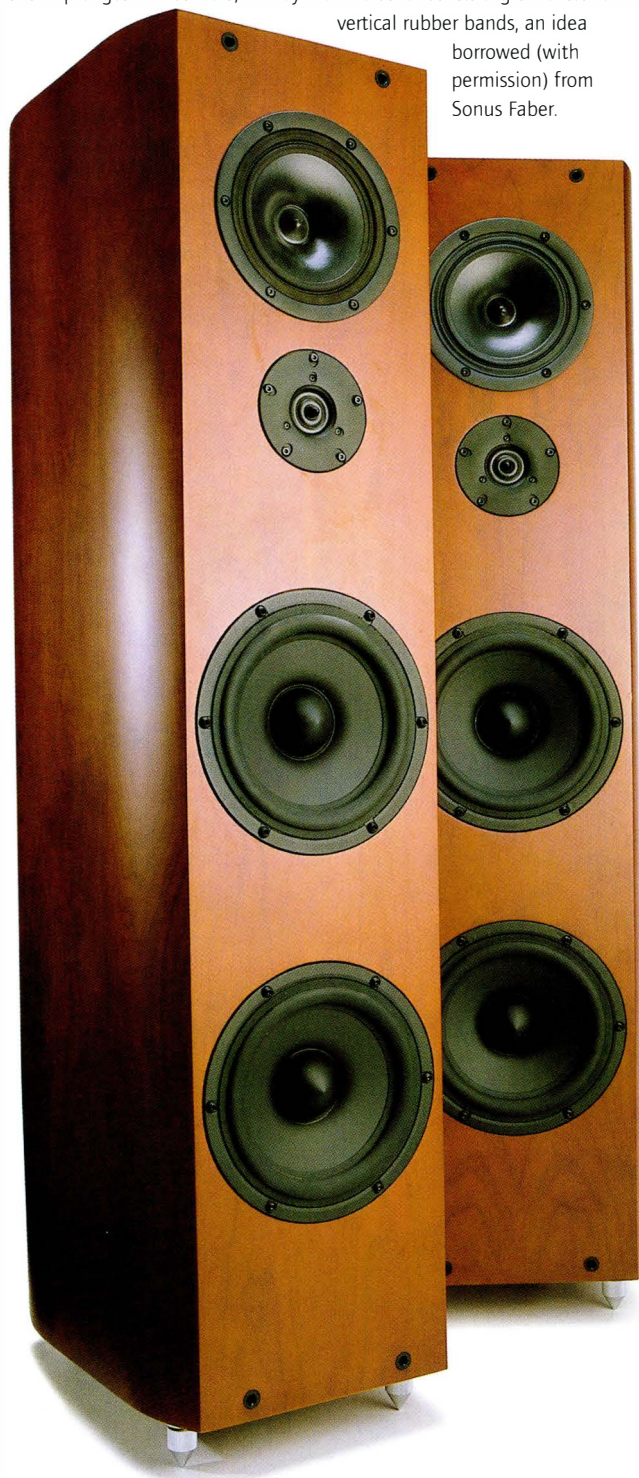
# Krell Resolution 2

The Resolution range brings LAT-derived technology to a more 'affordable' price level

PRICE £7,333 per pair CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

**R**esolution is Krell's not very original name for its first 'real world' derivatives of the extraordinary and extremely expensive LAT series loudspeakers. The LATs, with their aluminium fabricated enclosures, were the first loudspeakers to bear the Krell name. The Resolution models employ more conventional – but still heavyweight – MDF enclosures, and are extensively braced internally. The otherwise uncompromisingly rectilinear enclosures are relieved by some skilfully executed rounding off of sharp edges and corners, and by a baffle cover consisting of tensioned

vertical rubber bands, an idea borrowed (with permission) from Sonus Faber.



The moving parts incorporated into this 29.5x122x61 cm (WxHxD), 63 kg monolith are two 200mm bass units, a 160mm midrange driver and a 25mm ring radiator tweeter, the last two inverted, all in a 3.5-way configuration. The crossover is meticulously specified, its design derived from the ultra-high-spec LAT designs that still represent the top of the Krell speaker tree. The relevant numbers include a nominal impedance of three ohms (a little stiffer to cope with than the makers figure, but we stick by this), power handling of 300 watts, a totally unproblematic 89dB sensitivity and a bass response extending to a healthy 28Hz. However, the Resolution 2 is hard work if you use an amplifier that is not up to the job. We used Krell's own KAV-280p and KAV-2250 in the main, but the Krell FBI (tested on p36) would be a superb match. Sadly, it wasn't possible to get both amp and speakers in the same place at the same time, but it's a safe bet that the results would be spectacular.

**“It is a speaker with the ability to reproduce difficult material as it should be heard.”**

Apart from amplifier requirements, the Resolution 2 is not hard to please, with one caveat. You'll need to take some care over set-up to avoid the prodigious bass becoming a little heavy handed. Keep them away from room boundaries – a little further than suggested in Krell's book of words – and use an amplifier which knows how to exert proper control over the bottom end, and you should be fine. The speakers also demand a listening room that is reasonably large and not excessively prone to room resonances. In particular, the R2 should not be in a room with largely plain reflective surfaces, especially if you go in for tiled floors, unless you take special care over acoustic treatments from someone who knows what they're doing.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Resolution 2 is an enormously capable instrument, one whose musical horizons will expand with the music you use to drive it. I would judge it as a speaker for all music types. It has a clear affinity for large-scale orchestral, organ and choral music, but it also works well with smaller scale material, such as solo piano (which can be enormously challenging). In fact, it only really stumbles with the kind of material that is designed for 128kbps MP3 files – I am tempted to say the Arctic Monkeys, which to these ears sounds amazingly like it was recorded on a 128kbps MP3 recorder (see Andy Giles' *Dispatches* column in HFC 279).

This is a speaker that will expand the user's musical horizons. Moreover, it is a speaker with the ability to reproduce difficult material as it should be heard. Dynamics are reproduced without crushing the range, yet without any of the harshness that can make so many lesser speakers hard work. There's a natural, easy poise about the Resolution 2. Detail levels are high; not pointedly so, but more than able to paint the enormous tonal range of a work like Vaughan Williams *Sinfonia Antartica*. This piece has a bleak magisterial coldness that is too challenging for most speakers to really get to grips with, but through the Krells it's enough to cause the hairs on the back of the neck to raise in sympathy.

This is one of the great full-bandwidth, wide-dynamic-range speakers. In that context, it is a brilliant and completely persuasive proposition. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

See HFC 273 (November 2005) for our original review of this product



# darTZeel NHB-108 Model One

*This striking power amp has already made an impact, even before the preamp gets into production*

PRICE £11,490 CONTACT Absolute Sounds Studio, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.dartzeel.com

Switzerland is not a country normally associated with a sense of humour, but perhaps our image of stolid conservatism is misplaced. Consider then the cuckoo clock, triangular chocolate bars – or the darTZeel amplifier for that matter. The engineer behind darTZeel is one Herve Deletraz, who not only has a fondness for anagrams, but injects rare wit into his instruction manuals and his products.

First news of darTZeel's debut product, the NHB-108 Model One power amplifier, arrived way back in 2001, and examples appeared at a US hi-fi show the following year. But it took until the Autumn 2005 Heathrow show to find its way to the UK, where it's being distributed by a new Studio subsidiary of importer Absolute Sounds. And it is just about to be joined by a matching NHB-18NS preamplifier.

Apparently, Herve took sixteen years to bring the £11,490 NHB-108 – the initials stands for 'Never Heard Before' – to market, but if looks are any guide it was well worth the wait. The standard of finish is everything you'd expect from top-class Swiss engineering, with beautiful surfaces and outstanding panel fit. The top surface is a sheet of transparent glass, giving a fine view of the top quality components and beautiful build – prominently visible are two very large toroidal transformers and a series of hefty brass bus-bar links.

The styling is original – some might say controversial – but to our eyes it's strikingly daring and effective. There are echoes of the

does increase significantly to 160 watts into six ohms, that's still not particularly generous. The reason is that the designer insists on using just a single pair of bi-polar power transistors for each channel, as he believes the multiple-parallel arrays used to generate high powers compromise quality.

The amp is constructed in double-mono form, with no global negative feedback, relays or fuses in the signal path. The circuitry has a significant Class A bias, so the unit gets quite warm even when idling. And it's a sensitive flower judging by the stern notices not to power it up without first attaching speakers and source, for fear of taking out fuses. By following these instructions to the letter, no mishaps occurred. A handy toolkit is supplied, possibly for those that carelessly blow fuses.

This review is only intended to cover the NHB-108 power amp, but a prototype of the £15,700 NHB-18NS preamplifier was also made available to assist with the analysis. Naturally, it matches the gold-and-red combination of the power amp, and the front panel has the same power 'nose' but has two good size knobs in place of the 'eyes' – one for input selection (Enjoyment Source), the other for volume (Pleasure Control). Only the volume setting is accessible via a compact three-button remote handset.

Both these components are massively built, so it's just as well the front and back panels both incorporate hunky grab handles. Having lugged the NHB-108's 30kg out of its carton

One consequence of that super-tight time coherence and freedom from overhang is to deliver particularly clean and clear bass lines, unencumbered by the low end warmth and colour that usually clouds the issue. First impressions are that the amp sounds slightly dry, but it soon became obvious with acoustic material that it was actually delivering the sound that real instruments make, unencumbered by the artefacts of electronic processing and speaker enclosures.

The darTZeel is not only stunningly fast, it's also beautifully precise and delicate, especially in the way it handles cymbals and similar percussion work. This is all the more obvious because the stereo image is tightly focused with exceptionally good positioning in width and depth. The manufacturer's claim for superior phase accuracy would seem to be well supported by this observation.

In a very real sense, it sounds quite unlike the stereotype solid-state amplifier – but then it doesn't sound like a valve amplifier either. There's nothing obviously romantic about its character; it just sounds brutally accurate and honest, letting the music rather than the sound grab one's attention. A sweet recording will come across sweetly, and a crude and over-processed one will sound crude and over-processed. No prisoners taken, no quarter given. During the review programme, a number of different line-level sources were tried, including top class CD players from Weiss, Burmester and Naim, plus the fine Magnum Dynalab MD 108T FM tuner, and the NHB-108 – especially with its partnering NHB-18NS preamp – made it particularly easy to distinguish between the characters of these different source components and media.

One might question whether 100 watts per channel is really enough at this end of the market, and the sparkling clarity of this amp does encourage one to wind the wick up, no question. But for most of the time, there seemed to be ample power, given reasonably sensitive speakers, the more so because the background is very quiet and low-level resolution is excellent.

The bottom line is that this is unquestionably one of the finest sounding hi-fi amplifiers available today, with extraordinary poise and transparency that is immensely involving and seductive. In which context the £11,490 asking price is by no means unreasonable – in the world of high-end audio, it's all too easy to pay much more for much less. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

**“This is unquestionably one of the finest sounding hi-fi amplifiers available today, with extraordinary poise and transparency.”**

1950s in the gold coloured front and back, and the shiny red heatsinks running down both sides. Then there's the anthropomorphic front panel, with a central on/off button labelled 'power nose', flanked by a pair of large glowing power status 'eyes'. It's all rather friendly in a refreshingly droll way. The back panel accommodates the usual speaker output socket/binder pairs, and a choice of three types of input – phonos, transformer-balanced XLRs and a special, low-impedance (50-ohm) BNC pair, deliberately configured for use with the matching preamp.

A power rating of just 100 watts per channel (into eight ohms) might seem a trifle churlish in view of the high price-tag, and while this

and up onto a convenient shelf – not a task undertaken lightly, it must be said – the first step was to connect it up in place of the Naim NAP500 power amp in our reference system.

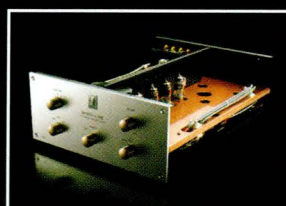
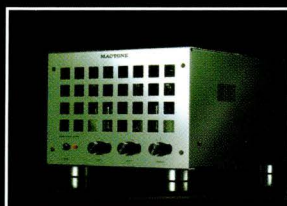
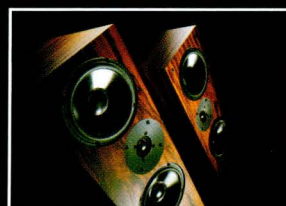
## SOUND QUALITY

The sonic change was quite obvious and dramatic. The combination actually worked very well indeed, and the NHB-108 immediately showed its remarkable strengths. It is, quite simply, the 'fastest' amplifier this listener has ever heard, with brilliant transient definition and dramatic dynamic expression, thanks in no small part to a freedom from time-smear that must surely beat the best available elsewhere.

# DEFINITIVE AUDIO



**Main image:** Limited Edition KSL Kondo 'Shinden' 211 Mono Valve amplifiers. £76,000.00 per pair.



**Left to right:** 1. Living Voice OBX R2 Loudspeaker System 2. Art Audio Concerto Stereo Amplifier (GE) 3. SME 10A Turntable 4. KSL Kondo Neiro Integrated Amplifier 5. KSL Kondo Gakuoh Valve Mono amplifiers 6. Mactone 300B Valve Stereo Power Amplifier 7. Magnum Dynalab 106T FM Valve Tuner 8. KSL Kondo 'Shinden' 211 Mono Valve Amplifiers 9. Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD Player 10. KSL Kondo M1000 Ultimate Valve Preamplifier



# Audia Flight CD One

*This great-looking CD spinner from Italy has rhythmic panache in abundance*

PRICE £3,500 CONTACT Henley Designs, Unit 11, Moorbrook, Southmead Industrial Park, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7HP ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.audia.it

Italian-based Audia is run by electronics engineers Massimiliano Marzi and Andrea Nardini. The CD One is their first source component, the rest of their work consisting of amplifiers of various types. They clearly have an eye for detail as build quality is exemplary; the finish, the top-loading disc bay and the cut-out, tri-star emblem all ooze class. The tri-star oozes blue light too, which is pretty sexy.

This player is just one product in an exotic line-up of Flight Pre preamplifier, Flight 50 and Flight 100 power amps, plus the Flight One integrated amp. The Flight CD One is an upsampling player that winds the signal up to 24-bit/192kHz directly as it comes off the laser, prior to sending it to a Crystal CS43122 digital-to-analogue converter. The Philips Pro 2 transport, with its die-cast body, is one of the few dedicated CD mechanisms still in production. Audia has gone to great lengths to facilitate the laser's job, mounting the transport on a high-mass machined base to maximise rigidity and reduce reading errors. The case as a whole features extensive use of damping materials for the purpose of keeping resonance under control.

At the output a fully balanced, Class A analogue stage using current rather than voltage feedback in its initial stage does the business in the style of Audia's amplifiers. You can tell this player comes from an amplification specialist by looking at the power supply, which has separate toroidal mains transformers for analogue, digital and transport mechanism sections. Most CD players – and most integrated amplifiers for that matter – will be content in taking taps off a single transformer to cover power delivery for all sections. That Audia refuses to compromise here demonstrates the company's commitment to good sound and good, sound engineering. Both varieties of analogue output are available alongside electrical digital outputs and inputs.

If you think the player's casework is nice, you should check out the remote handset. It's a work of art and a even greater indication of the player's aspirations. Milled out of a solid aluminium lump it inspires confidence, even if the markings are tiny.

## SOUND QUALITY

The high-class expectations that this player's looks inspire are not undermined when you clamp down a disc with the magnetic puck. It responds to a great recording in suitably full effect, projecting voices with precision, and giving them a strong sense of solidity and presence in the

room. The CD One gets under the skin of the performance, bringing the energy of the event into the listening room with great enthusiasm.

There seems to be due to a tendency to emphasise aspects of the sound. You can hear an awful lot through this player, but its tonal and dynamic proclivities introduce a degree of masking, too. With an orchestral piece, you hear the shine of bells but you don't hear the full body of the instrument, and while a spinet sounds like a keyboard instrument, it's not clear exactly which type.

Yet it's easy to admire the way the Flight CD One plays tunes with gusto. Bass lines, in particular, are picked out very cleanly. This is because it is keen on leading edges, adding definition to the sonic picture and producing incisive and clear images.

**“It gets under the skin of the performance, bringing the energy of the event into the room.”**

This might suggest that there is a forwardness to the sound, but in fact this is a smooth and relaxed sounding player, albeit not an overly romantic or lazy one. In other respects though, the CD One is extremely agile and responsive – give it a high-energy recording and the slam it can deliver is little short of awesome. The player's transient abilities ensure that attack is taken full advantage of, with truly arresting results.

It's also a robust sounding player, but not in the muscular style of a Wadia. Instead, it seems possible that the CD One was inspired by those American power houses, but its style is all its own. The bass is lighter and possibly more nimble as a result; in fact, it's pretty hot on timing across the band. It really appreciates the swing of a good tune, which will win the CD One friends in the rhythm and timing brigade.

In fact, when you combine this with the strong sense of transient response, it becomes clear that snappy timing is the angle that Audia has gone for. It emphasises the energy and excitement of lively material as ably as most of the competition, combining energy and impact with a smooth overall presentation. And that, in itself, is quite an achievement. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 269 (August 2005) for our original review of this product*





# DALI Megaline

Genuine line-sources are bulky and costly, but DALI's Megaline demonstrates very real advantages

PRICE £29,999 per pair CONTACT DALI UK, Lyde House, Greywell Road, Up Nately, Hook, Hampshire, RG27 9PJ ☎ 0845 644 35 37 🌐 www.dali-uk.co.uk

One of the largest – certainly among the tallest – speakers on the planet, the Megaline is DALI's flagship 'statement' product. It stands nearly two and a half metres tall, and uses no fewer than thirteen drive units. For all that, it's actually a two-way speaker and benefits from that simplicity. A very substantial and beautifully finished piece of kit that will dominate any listening room, it costs an intimidating £30,000 for a pair, and also requires to be driven by four matching channels of power amplification, because the supplied crossover is an active device that's inserted between pre- and power amps.

DALI has been steadily refining the Megaline since 1996, and it's currently in MkIII form, though its roots can actually be traced back to a Skyline model that *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewed way back in 1991. The factor that distinguishes these models from practically everything else on the market is the use of an unusually tall ribbon tweeter that runs almost floor-to-ceiling. Unlike the overwhelming majority of speakers which operate as one (or more) point sources, the Megaline is a genuine line-source radiator, of which more later.

Megaline's tweeter is a (nearly) continuous ribbon, roughly 226cm long – equivalent to 80 (!) 25mm domes, it is claimed. It sits alongside a vertical row of twelve 165mm cone drivers. To ease the transportation and installation of this 110kg beast, it comes in three modules, each containing four bass/mid drivers plus a 75mm ribbon. These are firmly clamped together and mounted on a neat plinth with retractable captive spikes.

The module construction is quite complex, the hefty hexagonal-plan enclosures having two-piece non-parallel sides almost half a metre deep, giving a generous 80-litre volume. Internal partitions stiffen and divide, loading each pair of bass/mid drivers by a rear port. The open-backed ribbon sits between two shaped wooden strips attached to the inside edge. This operates as a dipole.

A large slot, covered by a metal strip, accommodates the very humble linking cables that were supplied. The active crossover unit, which draws its power from a couple of outboard transformers, also looks decidedly cheap and flimsy to partner a £30,000 speaker system. Note that the speakers cannot be placed close to a conventional colour CRT television, because the ribbon has a very powerful unshielded magnetic field that will deflect the output of the tube's electron guns and cause nasty colour staining.

The main difference between a line- and a point-source is that a line creates a cylindrical rather than a spherical sound wave, and this has important implications. First, the sound pressure of a cylindrical wave decays according to a square law, whereas a spherical wave follows a cube law. The practical implication is that there will be noticeably less variation in loudness as one moves towards or away from line-source speakers, and therefore a more consistent volume level throughout the room.

Because the line-source delivers a cylindrical sound wave, there's virtually no output upwards or downwards, restricting ceiling and

smooth and even, but below that point a larger room and greater spacing from the wall behind would probably give a better result.

If the room could have been better, it didn't prevent the enjoyment of a remarkable speaker system that goes a long way towards proving the advantages of the line-source approach. Its strength lies in its sheer consistency. Stand up and nothing changes – changing position causes no phasiness, volume changes or balance shifts. Massive headroom and freedom from strain, even when the speaker is playing at high levels, along with exceptional weight and scale, is another major strength.

**“Voices are clear and explicit, the Megalines rendering the lead vocals on Arcade Fire's *Funeral* truly intelligible for the first time.”**

floor reflections. The total sound reaching the listeners will have a smaller proportion of room-reflected content compared to a point source, and this will sharpen the stereo image precision. The influence of room standing wave modes is likely to be reduced, but the most intriguing consequence is that the sound balance remains consistent and image stays at ear height, whether you're standing, sitting or lying on the floor. A final point is that because a line-source speaker necessarily has a much larger driver area than a point-source design, the speaker has massive reserves of power handling, loudness capability and headroom, and also couples well to the air volume in the listening room.

## SOUND QUALITY

The bass/mid drivers are in three groups of four. The quartets are wired in parallel, and then the three modules are wired in series, to give an acceptable net DC load of 4.8 ohms. Meanwhile, the ribbon section is free from inductance and never strays below six ohms. The reason for adopting active drive is clearly the massive discrepancy between the innate sensitivities of the two sections – the ribbon is some 12dB less than the bass/mid array. The crossover point occurs at 1.2kHz, which is significantly lower than most two-ways.

In our 4.3x2.6x5.5m room, far-field measurement showed some sub-60Hz bass excess, even with the drivers positioned more than 1m from the rearward wall, alongside some leanness through the upper bass and lower midband. Above 500Hz things are quite

The sound is open and neutral through the broad midrange and treble, while the transition between cones and ribbon is seamless. Poor recordings can sound uncomfortable at high levels, but voices are clear and explicit, the Megalines rendering the lead vocals on Arcade Fire's *Funeral* truly intelligible for the first time.

Imaging is a major strength, with much of the delicacy and transparency associated with electrostatic panel speakers. Perspectives sound supremely natural, providing proper depth, but not disguising the 'multi-mono' techniques of most recording studios.

It also proved very effective at revealing changes made further up towards the front end of the system, which is an acid test for any loudspeaker with serious pretensions. And the sound cleaned up significantly when a granite slab was placed on top of the active filter unit.

The Megalines almost disappear acoustically, and seem entirely free from boxiness. Prettily discreet it's not, and the bass alignment is certainly better suited to a larger room than the one we had available, but it's abundantly clear that this is a truly great loudspeaker system. The line-source operation is a definite plus in terms of all round consistency, room-independence and stereo imaging, and the combination of two-way simplicity with massive headroom and loudness capability is very persuasive. While the active filter unit might compromise performance to a degree, this is still one of the finest speakers available, with unique strengths that are probably unavailable with any other approach. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

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# Densen Beat B-150

*A smart unit that proves there's no contradiction in 'upmarket integrated'*

PRICE £3,000 CONTACT Densen Audio Technologies A/S, Randersvej 32, DK-6700 Esbjerg, Denmark ☎ 01732 451938 🌐 www.densen.dk

**D**ensen's range includes separate preamps and power amps, housed in remarkably similar cases to this unit, which combine to form less expensive amplifier solutions than the B-150. That may sound perverse (generally pre/power combos trump integrated amps), but the Danish style-meister has reserved some clever electronic tricks for this modestly understated integrated.

One of the key features of the B-150 is its volume control. Not the usual mechanical potentiometer or electronic attenuator, Densen uses a complex and expensive array of relays, switching the signal through precision discrete resistors. 200 volume steps are offered, with low noise and distortion and near-perfect channel matching.

The rest of the amp has been built with as much care and attention to detail. Resistors throughout are precision types, while all actual amplification is carried out by discrete, mostly surface mounted transistors. Densen is a great believer in the virtues of zero-feedback circuits, and has done something quite remarkable in combining this philosophy with Class AB operation – trust us, this is no mean feat!

The B-150 can be fitted with one of the company's phono boards (MM or MC) or an active crossover tailored to your loudspeakers – this will, of course, require at least one additional power amp. An external power supply is available, and the unit can also be upgraded to surround (again in conjunction with extra amps) thanks to another plug-in board. Finally there's 'DenLink', Densen's multiroom control connection, should you wish to wire your house for sound in the future.

There's just one downside to that relay-based volume control: mechanical relay noises. We did find ourselves wishing they could have been absent (or quieter, at least) but apart from that enjoyed using the unit, especially with the smart Gizmo remote (an optional extra)

But that's our only real beef – okay, that and the cost of the Gizmo and the very sharp edges on the case. Technical performance is good and provision of inputs and outputs is pretty typical: six line ins, two tape outs, a processor loop and two preamp outs, with single speaker terminals.

## SOUND QUALITY

Once the clattering of the relays has subsided, the sound that this smart box produces is really most appealing. It shares what seems to be the essential Densen family trait of lively, energetic rhythms. At the same time, it has an essentially neutral tonal balance and admirable powers of musical analysis.

Its real glory is the deep bass. It showed an admirable ability to control the speakers – especially the bottom end of speakers – in such a way that low-frequency sounds are clear, tuneful and satisfyingly visceral. This is more than just a party trick, it's a rare talent, and one of the true marks of good high-end kit. Getting a bass drum or some sound effect to flap the listener's trouser legs is one thing, but making subtle plucked bass or quiet timpani sound both deep and well tuned is a much harder proposition. This amp manages it convincingly.

**“This is more than a party trick, it's a rare talent, and one of the true marks of good high-end kit.”**

As for analysis... can equipment sound both analytical and musical? Densen makes a pretty good case for the answer being 'yes'. Given Densen has often touted its 'air guitar' approach to audio, perhaps inherent musicality are expected. To some people, analysis has come to mean dry, soulless separation of music into its constituent parts. What the B-150 achieves instead is a full-scale representation of the sound, in which the details are perfectly apparent if you choose to listen out for them, but where they are still very much part of the overall picture.

We admit to a couple of small reservations, possibly related. First, there is a hint of coloration in the 'presence' region, which very slightly colours sounds like female voice, saxophone and cymbal. And then there's very slightly less 'air' around high-frequency sounds than we'd ideally like to hear. Ironically, this is most noticeable in some of the same recordings that most markedly benefited from the B-150's excellent bass, for example a well-recorded jazz trio where the drum kit can sound slightly shut in compared with the bass.

All the same, this amplifier does things integrated models very seldom do. Its combination of authority, musicality and insight makes it an appealing and elegant alternative to the more obvious pre/power route in this price range. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

*See HFC 277 (March 2006) for our original review of this product*





# Meridian 800DAX Version 4

*Continual improvement and modular design keeps Meridian's multi-format player at the top of the tree*

PRICE £12,735 CONTACT Meridian Audio, Latham Road, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 6YE ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

In one respect, Meridian's 800 'reference optical disc player' is far from new. In another, it's always new, always one jump ahead of the rest. This is because Meridian's 800 DVD-Audio/DVD-Video/CD player is wholly modular in its construction.

The 800 player, like the £8,190 861 multichannel processor (and the £8,250 808i CD player), is built on a PC-like arrangement, with modular components slotted into a main motherboard. This means the player stands taller than most and comes with a DVD-ROM transport mechanism. It also means there's no one 'standard' version of the 800 player, although there are two common variants – the £11,855 800D with digital outputs only and the £12,735 800DAX, which includes balanced and single-ended analogue outputs.

Two new boards single out the just-released Version 4 player: the V100 video input card and the VE12 HDMI/progressive component video output card. Owners of Version 3 players need both to update their machines to support a host of video inputs, output-converted to

work with the latest HDTV displays. Composite, S-Video and progressive-scanned component video are also supported.

There are many products that cling to a notional concept of upgradeability. But few take the concept truly on board like the Meridian 800. As such, it's entirely possible that future decoder cards, video boards and even transport mechanisms will appear to bring the player into line with Blu-ray or HD-DVD replay, should the need arise.

Naturally, with so much configurability on tap, the back panel is dauntingly complex. The 800DAX tested here has 41 different connections on the back panel, including two RS232 ports: one for multiroom, one for updates and configuration.

That said, Meridian has a reputation for deconstructing the complex and this player is a joy to use, especially via the meaty MSR+ remote. Part of the deconstruction process comes in the guise of the new MConfig software, which allows you to tailor your system graphically from your PC screen. This means

immense flexibility at your fingertips, though you may still want a Meridian-trained installer to configure the 800... or at least someone with a black belt in home cinema wire-fu.

However you set up the player and whatever you play on it, it operates in the same manner. The disc is read at high speed, loaded into a buffer and processed (the same schema used in the more affordable G Series players). This helps drastically reduce disc reading errors.

One of the very clever bits (in among a wealth of very clever bits in the Meridian 800) comes in the shape of the DSP section. It not only works with DVD-Audio and DVD-Video in multichannel and stereo, it also works on the PCM stereo of CD, effectively upsampling it to become an 88kHz, 24-bit source. You can even input two-channel AV sources and use the 800 as a preamp, of sorts.

## SOUND QUALITY

On CD and especially DVD-Audio, the sound quality is unbelievably precise and preternaturally detailed. There is a sense of



precision to the soundstage that leaves other players sounding soggy and ill-defined. It becomes all the more easy to recognise when a recording is made with a natural ambience and when the reverb comes from out of a digital – or an analogue spring – effect. Good recordings with natural decay sound architectural in their imagery. The sound of the venue is holographically projected into your listening room, while every instrument and every voice in the recording has its own perfect three-dimensional space, rooted to the floor – living, breathing and visceral.

*The Vagabond*, a collection of English song, sung by Bryn Terfel and accompanied by Malcolm Martineau on the piano, is a perfect demonstration of what the Meridian does so well. Terfel's bass-baritone voice is at once mightily powerful and delicate, as it should be – in comparison, lesser players seem to make his voice sound like Brian Blessed trying to win a shouting competition. The spacious dimensionality of the recording is profound, too. The disc has good image width and depth on any player, but here the soundstage is room-expanding and there's none of the sense of Terfel sitting in the piano that lesser soundstages seem apt to deliver.

The sound is ear-pleasingly up-beat, too. The sense of musicality is not artificially created, but the player does manage to bring out the natural rhythms of even the spoken word. This is no mean feat; players are often good at

digging out a simple musical beat, and good at finding the meter in spoken-word poetry, but to define the cadence in an actor's voice when speaking prose takes a player of rare rhythmic abilities. Naturally, when this is applied to music, the precision of the rhythm is perfectly preserved. It joins the solidity and focus of the imagery and the accuracy of the detail to present a united front of profoundly musically-correct sounds.

**“The sound of the venue is holographically projected into your listening room, every instrument has its own perfect space.”**

All this might be misconstrued as being a purely cerebral approach to sound. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, the 800 is able to supply all the cerebral aspects one needs for intellectual analysis of the music, but it delivers all the passion in tow, too. The end result is composed, yet thoroughly engaging.

Music doesn't get achingly beautiful that often these days, despite the continuous use of cliché in the music press. Worse, 'achingly beautiful' recordings are usually the first to pall with time, but this made me reach for the *Dos Gardenias*, sung by the late Ibrahim Ferrer. All the cynicism was washed away and the 'achingly beautiful' term was entirely justifiable, thanks to the combination of music and player.

And this was just with CD. On DVD-Audio, the performance took a leap forward. In surround or plain stereo, the resolution is such that you feel that bit more emotionally connected to the music. Once again, *Riders on the Storm* by the Doors was rolled out, and the rolling thunder and rain across the surround channels took on real physical menace.

If the 800 delivers sound to please the most discerning audiophile, its DVD picture

performance will have videophiles salivating into their popcorn. Via HDMI output especially, the picture simply represents the best you can get from the DVD-Video format. Colour is sharp and bit-for-bit accurate, the picture depth is deeply cinematic and black levels are so deep, you feel your screen has been improved. Top-notch, in every respect.

That's the thing about the 800. Right now, this is one of the best CD players, and absolutely the best DVD-Audio and DVD-Video player, money can buy. What's more, that fundamentally upgradable architecture means it will stay at the top of those trees for years to come. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

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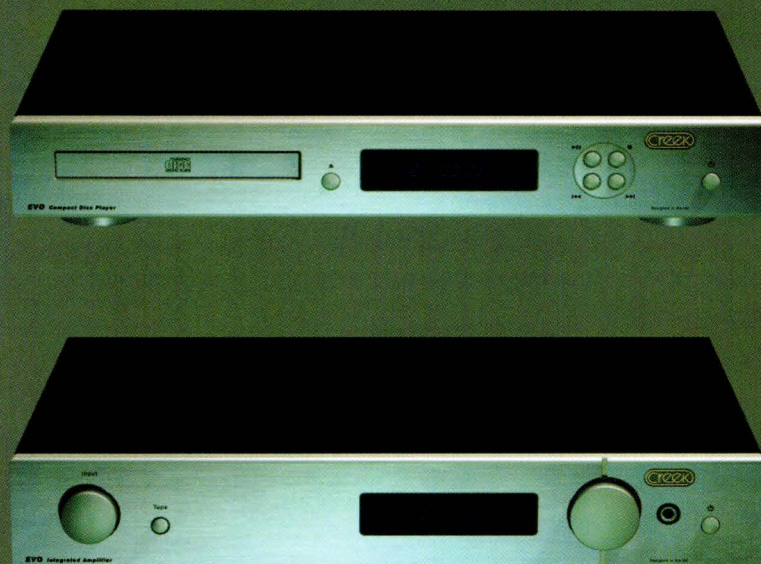
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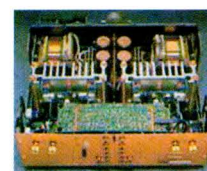
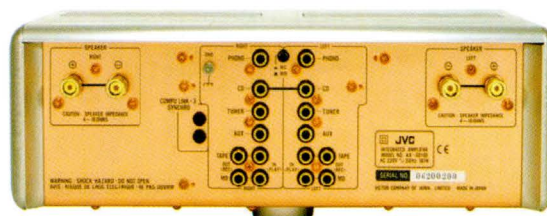
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# Focal Electra 1027 Be

Focal's stylish Electra Be models bring down the entry price for speakers with beryllium tweeters

PRICE £4,000 per pair CONTACT Focal-JMLab UK, PO Box 4287, Coventry CV4 0BS ☎ 0845 660 2680 🌐 www.focal-uk.com

**F**ocal has used its latest 1000-series generation of upmarket Electras as a vehicle for a new and less costly type IAL (short for Infinite Acoustic Loading) beryllium dome tweeter. At the same time, the company has introduced a striking and original new style and presentation. Focal's Electra 1027 Be looks altogether more assertive than its predecessors, emphasising the engineering content by highlighting the shiny, full-width, cast-alloy tweeter front plate.

Launched alongside a two-way 1007 Be standmount, this 1027 Be is a three-way floorstander, priced at £4,000 per pair, and featuring a continuously vertical front panel with a strongly convex horizontal profile. Front, top, back and plinth are all finished in high gloss black – the top actually incorporates a piece of glass – while the shaped sides are real wood veneered, in either deep red finish Signature or a much lighter Classic alternative.

The ultra-thick and heavy front baffle is as much as 50mm thick. It's shaped internally to avoid reflections and cavities, and externally to create smooth and wide lateral distribution. The enclosure is heavily braced internally and tapered front-to-rear to spread out internal standing waves. This very solid build is confirmed by a total weight of 33kg.

The drivers comprise twin 165mm bass units, port loaded. These operate in parallel with a somewhat different single 165mm midrange unit. All three cone drivers use Focal's proprietary W-sandwich diaphragms, combining woven glassfibre and a structural foam, but the two use different formulas to suit bass or midrange duties.

Lastly, there's a 25mm inverted beryllium dome tweeter, mounted at seated head height between the upper bass unit and the midrange driver. Beryllium is an exceptionally stiff and light metal that extends the response and break-up points well into the ultrasonic region, above the limits of human hearing, and a major investment in tooling has helped Focal bring down the production cost of this tweeter. The speaker feels reassuringly stable on its substantial spikes, and comes with just a single pair of high-quality WBT terminals.

## SOUND QUALITY

The in-room far-field measurements indicate that the Electra 1027 Be works best when located well clear of walls. The measured performance looks generally satisfactory here, with a good overall frequency balance, decent sensitivity (albeit 2-3dB shy of the claimed 91dB), and solid extension well

down into the deep bass. However, under far field conditions, there's some loss of output around both crossover points, and the impedance stays quite low throughout the bass region. All of which means this isn't an easy load for the driving amplifier.

**“Stereo imaging is excellent and it's virtually impossible to pin-point the two speakers.”**

First impression was that the Electra 1027 Be has a noticeably bright and light sonic character, with a beautifully sweet and sparkling top end, suffused with the finest and most delicate detail. The top end here is entirely seductive, showing that the new IAL tweeter development is very successful, but it does also tend to draw attention to itself, rendering background FM radio a little more audible than usual, for example.

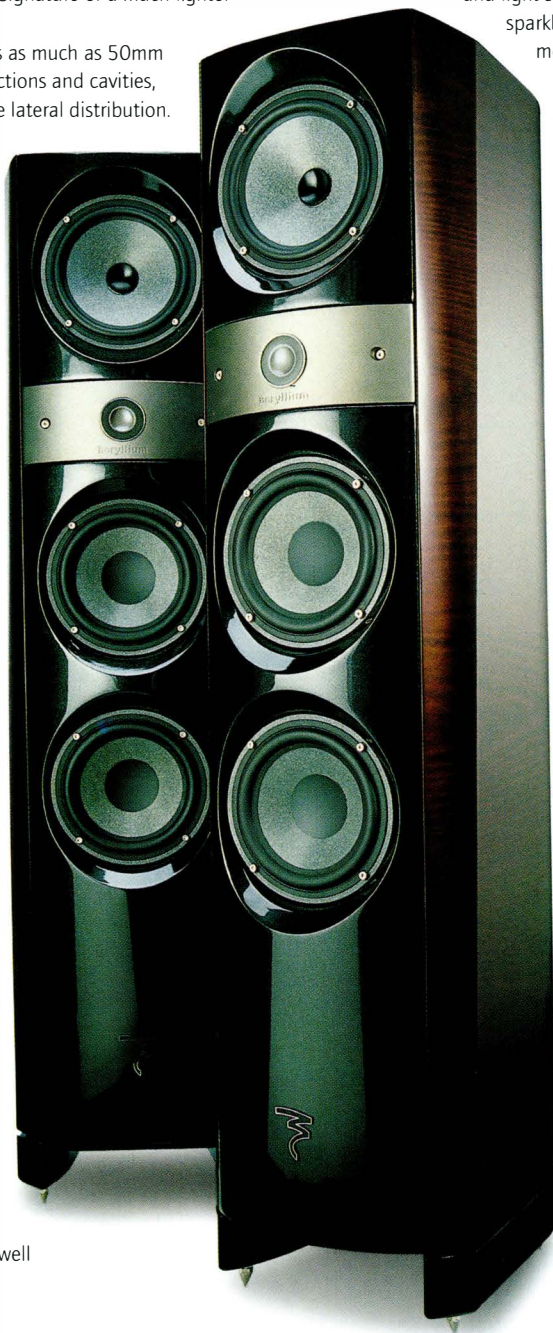
This slightly bright character is that much more obvious because the bass end is rather dry. While the bottom end as a whole is both even and fairly well extended, it also sounds a little understated, with a slight lack of ultimate grip, authority and punch. Tonally speaking, a little more warmth and richness would have been appreciated, rather than the slightly cool overall effect that is evident when playing the sort of discs where the bass end is the prime mover. But this is a mild criticism.

One reason for the dry bass is that box coloration is exceptionally well controlled, and the fine cabinet control confers an impressive freedom from midband coloration and boxiness. It's also refreshingly free from nasality. Stereo imaging is excellent and it's virtually impossible to pin-point the precise locations of the two speakers, partly because the central image is so well focused.

In the presence zone, the upper midband and lower treble where human hearing is most sensitive, there's usually a compromise between maintaining vocal openness and avoiding aggressiveness. The Focal Electra 1027 Be handles this particularly well, with just sufficient restraint to allow the system to be played loudly without unpleasantness, yet it also proved well able to maintain good voice diction when playing the system at whisper quiet levels. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

*See HFC 276 (February 2006) for our original review of this product*





# Koetsu Blue Onyx

*The Koetsu legend continues with this refined jewel of a cartridge*

PRICE £4,999 (boron cantilever) CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Rd, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.absolutesounds.com

**K**oetsu is an enigmatic company. Its founder, Yosiaki Sugano (1907-2002) took inspiration from the 17th century Japanese artist, Honami Koetsu (1558-1637). So, it was only natural that Sugano adopted the name of his guiding spirit when he decided to manufacture high-quality pickup cartridges in the late 1970s.

The company appears never to have promoted or advertised its products, nor produced any sales literature. The reputation of Koetsu grew by word of mouth alone.

Whether he intended it or not, Yosiaki Sugano's minimalist approach quickly earned him mythical status in hi-fi circles. He used to joke that his 'death' had been erroneously reported no less than three times! It became part of the Sugano legend; the quiet infinitely patient little old man, steeped in ancient wisdom, slowly and painstakingly creating magical-sounding pickup cartridges by hand – and raising himself from the dead.

No doubt the truth was somewhat less fanciful. But, sadly in 2002, the reports of his death were not so greatly exaggerated. His son, Fumihiko Sugano has taken up the Koetsu mantle, having spent most of the 1990s learning the craft from his father.

The higher priced Koetsu cartridges are a delight to behold, with bodies made from exotic materials – from the lacquered Urushi finish, to the use of natural Gemstones including Jade and Onyx. Each one is packaged in a simple but beautifully made wooden box that has the sweet, pungent odour of sandalwood.

While many of the Koetsu pickups use 99.9999 purity copper wire for their coil windings with a special silver cladding that consists of a silver sheath slowly drawn over the copper conductor, the Blue Onyx is said to be platinum coiled. No details were available – presumably the copper is platinum sheathed? The magnetic assembly employs samarium cobalt for its concentrated power.

The cantilever is made from boron, but perfectionists with deep pockets can specify an optional one-piece cantilever and tip fashioned from a single solid piece of diamond. This avoids the interface between stylus tip and cantilever, but costs an extra £2,200 or so.

The body is made from a gorgeous powder blue onyx, and each cartridge has a unique and beautiful appearance – like a piece of exotic jewellery. It's a big cartridge, incidentally (23mm long and 14mm deep) and also quite heavy at 14.8g. You'll need a good tonearm

with an extra-heavy counter weight. Optimum playing weight falls between 1.8g to 2g. At 1.8g there's slightly greater transparency and fine detail, but our preference was for 2g, which reduces surface ticks and improves tracking slightly.

From experience, these pickups have an extraordinarily long working life. Given clean LPs, there's very little tip wear, even with extensive use. Koetsu also provides a retipping service for its cartridges, so the cartridge could stay in your system for decades, potentially.

The Blue Onyx has a lower output than some Koetsu cartridges – around 0.2mV to be precise. This results in a more subtle, less forwardly balanced and assertive musical presentation than higher output Koetsus.

## SOUND QUALITY

Listening to the Blue Onyx is at once thrilling and sobering. The thrill comes from hearing your LPs sound better than you ever thought possible. The sobering part comes when you realise just how far most digital forms of audio still have to go in terms of realism and relaxed naturalness. Such is the price of perfection.

**“It is an open and transparent window on the music, sounding sweet and beguiling one moment, tactile and crisp the next.”**

The Blue Onyx has a beautifully refined, almost velvety smoothness. It's detailed and dynamic, yet wonderfully poised and relaxed sounding, with a musical delivery that's effortless and natural. The music just seems to 'happen' between the speakers. Voices and instruments materialise without effort or strain, sounding realistically integrated and 'right' in terms of tonal balance and timbre.

Tonally, it's a curious mix of opposites; mellow warmth and silky smoothness, allied to immediacy and crisp attack. The sound is vivid, yet natural and unexaggerated, with a full and solid bottom end, liquid midband and brilliant highs. It's pin-point sharp on transient detail, yet velvety smooth and totally homogenous.

Musically, the Blue Onyx is engaging and positive-sounding, yet also relaxed and refined. This mix of qualities is evident on all sorts of music, particularly human voice. Whether it's an unaccompanied solo singer, massed choral forces, or the lead vocals in a rock or pop track, the Blue Onyx recreates a natural, believable and articulate result.

Clarity is superb. The way this cartridge allows individual vocal lines, or subtle instrumental passages to cut through, must be heard to be appreciated. The Blue Onyx is good at revealing subtleties of aural space – the natural hall ambience behind individual voices or instruments – so that each retains more of its identity and separation.

By virtue of its refinement and naturalness, the Blue Onyx is easy to listen to. Because your brain has less 'processing' to do, it's better able to take in the entire picture and make sense of the whole. Although refinement is one of the Blue Onyx's glories, it's not something false that's grafted on to each recording regardless. A curious by-product of all this is that, somehow, you're given more time to listen – more time to explore the music and the separate individual strands that go to make up the whole. The more you listen, the more you realise that the pickup faithfully reflects the individual qualities of each recording. It really is an open and transparent window on the music, sounding sweet and beguiling one moment, tactile and crisp the next – often during the same track.

Stereo soundstaging is wide and (on the right LP) vivid and holographic. As previously indicated, the music 'materialises' between the loudspeakers. It kind of hangs in free space between and around the enclosures, almost as though the speakers themselves no longer exist.

Best of all, the Blue Onyx doesn't need special 'audiophile' LPs to create the sort of results outlined. Often, the magic's there on quite ordinary pressings. The best LPs sound great, but 'average' LPs gain a new lease of life, too. Surface noise is very low, and the cartridge tracks cleanly and securely given a good tonearm and turntable.

A magnificent cartridge, then – one of the finest money can buy. When it comes to turning those squiggly grooves on your records into living breathing music, there's little better. Result? You listen to your hi-fi with rapt attention – much as you'd listen to real musicians playing live in front of you. Each Blue Onyx is made to order – the wait will be worth it, do not doubt! **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*

# Classic in every sense of the word

In recent years there have been three exceptional Creek products which have time and again been the recipients of awards for excellence.

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# Chapter Précis

*How can something so cute take on twin-box amps with such ease?*

PRICE £4,495 CONTACT Chapter Audio, 11 Melrose Ave, Kingshill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4SJ ☎ 01392 686797 🌐 www.chapteraudio.com

**W**hen Chapter's designer Duncan Shrimpton delivered the Précis earlier in the year, he also brought along an iPod – the product that, to paraphrase Meridian's Bob Stuart, won the war of the high-resolution formats with its super accessible low-resolution sound.

This is not the sort of thing you expect to see in the hands of a high-end amplification company. But these guys are on the ball. They realise that you've got to accept the sort of changes that products like the iPod bring about and work with them as best you can. Hence the placement of the brand's first minijack input socket on the lovely matt finished fascia of its first integrated design, a facility for playing back your iTunes through a proper system. Sensible idea one might think, but won't the quality limitations be painfully obvious with so much transparency? Not, it seems, if you use Apple's lossless compression system. Something the Précis proved rather easily when playing a CD-R against the iPod and delivering a different but remarkably good result.

The Précis is rated at 130 watts into eight ohms and 260 watts into four ohms, which is an awful lot of power for something so compact and smoothly formed. But where's all the heat sinking? What there is can be found inside the case, but there's not much because this amp has a Class D output stage and the small amount of heat generated escapes via the circular grilles in the top. Another uncommon element is the differential volume control that uses resistors and relays to achieve high resolution and repeatability.

As the display reveals, the volume steps are an unduly fine 0.1dB, which can be rather small if you're using the remote but are nothing if not precise. This display can be adjusted from low to arc-weldingly bright in four steps, although the low setting could be a bit dimmer for those who are very sensitive to light. Non-vampires will forget the display and focus on the useful twin Audiophile Base beams the amp rests upon instead.

On the 'hewn from solid' back panel are single ended (four) and balanced (one) inputs alongside balanced preamp outs and a processor output/tape loop.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is an uncannily quiet amplifier, something we've noticed with Chapters in the past. Presumably, this is a Class D characteristic, but whatever its roots, the extra transparency it brings, especially at low levels,

is most gratifying. Whether this is directly related to the slightly sparse sound of the amp in tonal terms is hard to say, but that has to be a possibility. The sound is also highly articulate and immediate and, if on the tonally lean side, it's never short of bass grunt. The bass is tighter than usual, so doesn't seem to have the expansiveness of hotter, heavier designs, but there is a strong sense of grip and this makes for fast and tactile bass lines, which keep things ticking over in highly entertaining fashion.

As the opportunity arose, we tried the preamp and power amp sections of the Précis separately and discovered that they share a distinctly lively quality that injects music with energy and vivacity. The preamp alone worked well with Meridian's M3100 active speakers, delivering a more pristine and clear-cut result than a standalone preamp, albeit not as relaxed a sound overall.

**“The sound is highly articulate and immediate and, if on the lean side, never short of bass grunt.”**

It's a balance that works very nicely with vinyl, bringing a high level of resolution to the king of audio formats and revelling in high-quality musicianship. Using the amp as a whole with both B&W and Living Voice speakers proved an engrossing experience, the former showing off their bandwidth and agility, while the latter let one into the heart of the music, revelling in its dynamic characteristics.

In imaging terms, you get a powerful sense of an instrument's shape. There is a shortfall in absolute soundstage depth, but width and height are well served. Whether it's a function of the Class D design is unclear, but the Chapter's slant on imaging gives the listener a profound sense of being 'right' sounding and precise. Perhaps the alternatives simply add a bloom of their own that the Précis is too honest to deliver.

All in all, this is the sort of integrated that could give pre/power combos a bad name. It does speed and power with ease and will keep you up way past bedtime with its thrilling musical abilities. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 281 (July 2006) for our original review of this product*





# Audio Acoustics Sapphire Ti-C SE

*This 'ultimate' two-way has a beautifully finished and massively over-engineered enclosure*

PRICE £46,700 per pair CONTACT Audio Acoustics, 30 Grassmere, Sawyers Close, Windsor, Berks SL4 5HJ ☎ 01753 842173 🌐 www.audioacoustics.co.uk

**O**f all the speakers that have come in for review, none have involved quite as much fanatical obsession as Shabir Bhatti's Audio Acoustics Sapphires. Since these two-ways cost more than £45,000 per pair, there's some justification in taking the quest for perfection to its logical conclusion.

We would never have noticed that the top corner of one speaker was out by half a millimetre, but Shabir apologised that he hadn't had time to rectify this invisible blemish within the review schedule, but would do so as soon as the speakers had found their way back to him. This level of dedication is reflected in the Sapphire Ti-C SE speakers themselves. They are beautifully finished and styled, and a lot more compact than many high-end speakers to boot. This new SE is actually the most costly of three models with the same basic shape and configuration; the 'standard' Sapphire Ti-C has similar drivers and a less elaborate enclosure, while the Fundamental K2 has a simpler enclosure still and less costly drivers.

The Sapphire Ti-C SE is actually a simple two-way design, featuring twin bass/mid drivers mounted above and below a central tweeter, in what is sometimes described as a d'Appolito configuration. The surface finish is a gorgeous high-gloss, deep-lacquer gel suspension paint job, available in a selection of standard colours, including our Mirabelle Maroon samples, plus Carbon Black, Titanium Metallic, Krystal Metallic, Carbon Metallic and Ferrari Red (though any alternative may also be specified).

The shape is fundamentally rectilinear, with vertical sides and (most of the) back, but the front panel consists of four separately angled sections. The tweeter, on its own sub-baffle, is vertical and located at seated head height, while the matching bass/mid drivers are on tilted sections above and below, so that all three are equidistant from, and point towards the listener. The lower section has a large and elegantly flared port. All edges are chamfered, giving an attractive multi-faceted appearance.

If the external appearance is quite beautiful, the real heart of this design lies in the complex enclosure construction. Shabir's contention – not without justification – is that enclosure engineering is both harder to do and more important than the drive units. He reckons the enclosure contribution is around 80 per cent of the total, so the majority of the cost and effort has gone towards maximising enclosure performance. Should you submerge a Sapphire Ti-C SE in a bath, it would displace something

like 100 litres, but the internal enclosure volume is apparently only 30 litres, such is the elaborate complexity of a construction that uses multiple layers of MDF, steel and damping membranes in order to absorb the energy from the back of the bass/mid diaphragms and avoid any cabinet vibration. The space inside is left largely unfilled, yet the total weight is around 90kg.

**“All that enclosure engineering pays off in a wonderfully clean and clear bass register, revealing tonal subtleties on familiar discs.”**

Of course, the drive units are hardly cheap. In fact, they are top quality devices from Germany's Accuton, and all three use ultra-stiff deep-anodised aluminium oxide 'Sapphire' diaphragms. The two bass/mid units have 120mm diaphragms in 170mm cast alloy chassis, driven by titanium wire voice coils. The tweeter has a 30mm diameter diaphragm, equipped with little damping 'ears' to control the out-of-band break-up resonance. Floor coupling is accomplished by a tripod of large hardened-steel, nickel-plated cones, used on top of Nano Pucks. Twin pairs of top class WBT terminals feed the drivers via a simple network with ultra-tight tolerated silver capacitors, air-cored inductors and individually wrapped Wow Resonance multi-strand silver cables.

#### SOUND QUALITY

Carrying out our usual measurements proved interesting. Sensitivity is bang on the claimed 89.5dB, and although the impedance falls to around four ohms through the bass region, this looks perfectly acceptable in the light of very respectable bass extension, which registered -6.5dB at 20Hz under in-room, far-field conditions. The port here is tuned to around 43Hz, and resonances are visible at 140Hz and the 470-600Hz region.

The far-field in-room averaged frequency responses indicate that the speakers should be kept well clear of walls. The tonal balance is reasonably even overall, if a little strong through the bass and lower midband, but it's not particularly smooth through the lower registers, and there's a slight treble peak at around 6-7kHz. This appears to be as much the responsibility of the bass/mid drivers as the tweeter, as the former show a sharp break-up peak at 4.5kHz, which is only partly suppressed by the gentle slope crossover.

However, those were the measured characteristics when the speakers were driven from a typical solid-state power amp. Substituting a loaned SET valve amp resulted in a smoother balance, which compensated for some of the speaker's characteristics – including smoothing that treble peak. Further investigation of the amp/speaker combinations revealed the valve amp showed

variations of +/-2.5dB corresponding to the peaks and dips of the speaker's impedance.

The fundamental sound quality of this speaker is hard to fault. All that extraordinary enclosure engineering pays off in a wonderfully clean and clear bass register, repeatedly revealing previously unsuspected tonal subtleties on long familiar discs. And while the combination with the valve power amp did supply superior sweetness and smoothness over my normal Naim NAP500 solid-state power amp, as the measurements indicated, the speakers still worked very well on the end of my regular system, and seemed to relish its firmer and more solid bottom end.

If the sound could have been smoother, the music was communicative and entertaining, with prodigious dynamic range and precise, delicate detailing. In a very real sense, the Ti-C SE manages to combine the effortless dynamic drama of a horn speaker with the transparency of a panel design and the sheer practicality of a regular direct radiator.

One might question whether any speaker can really justify such a price tag, and quibble over certain aspects of its technical performance, but there's no disputing the delightful way this speaker communicates the essential musical content of even the most difficult examples from the rock repertoire. A fascinating evening was spent exploring late-1960s vinyl from bands like the Velvet Underground and the Mothers of Invention: these groups were poorly served by the recording studios of the day, but this speaker's exceptional clarity and freedom from overhang through the bass region, plus superb timing and wide dynamic range, made it easy to overlook the grunge and appreciate the remarkably original music that had been hiding in those grooves. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

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# Cyrus CD Xt and DAC X

*Cyrus stretches its range into true high-end territory with this two-box CD player*

PRICE £1,900 (CD Xt £800; DAC X £1,100) CONTACT Cyrus Audio, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 6XY ☎ 01480 435577 🌐 www.cyrusaudio.com

**C**yrus has a history of audio excellence that dates back to the original Cyrus One amp from the early 1980s, but the brand's line-up has never been better than today. The recently introduced 'X' series of components aims to be the best the company has ever produced, with this two-box CD transport and DAC combo sitting at the top of the tree.

This combo comes in two forms. There's the CD Xt transport and DAC X converter or, alternatively, the DAC XP, with its onboard preamplifier. The DAC X is a hardcore convertor and uses the best digital technology that the company can conjure (also used in the XP), so it warrants a dedicated transport. The CD Xt has a number of tricks up its sleeve to give it an advantage. Among these is a remote re-clocking circuit, which is designed to minimise jitter on the output and a toroidal mains transformer with entirely separate secondary windings for the electronics and motors.

**“Even discs that can sound slightly hard are delivered in a relaxed and detailed fashion.”**

The CD Xt has both coaxial and optical outputs, and the DAC has matching inputs alongside balanced and single-ended analogue outputs. In fact, the DAC X has six inputs and will accommodate any PCM digital source with a sampling rate of up to 96kHz. It also upsamples to 192kHz before conversion via paralleled DACs operating in a dual-mono configuration. Power regulation and isolation is used to produce a noise-free supply and control signals to the convertor are optically isolated. The display scrolls to let you name inputs, select fast or slow digital filtering and change absolute phase and display size. Both transport and DAC can be used with Cyrus's optional PSX-R power supply to upgrade performance, potentially becoming a four-box player in the process. Still, at least the boxes are small, and the four fit snugly on two standard-size hi-fi support shelves.

## SOUND QUALITY

Even two-box mode pays off handsomely when it comes to the important bit – how it sounds. This Cyrus pair delivers digital audio gratification with ease. Its tonal balance may be on the soft side but its resolution of detail is extremely fine.

It has an uncommon ability to resolve the individual tones of the instruments. There is an earthiness and presence to the performance in the room that makes for intense listening. Detail resolve is also right on the mark and allows one to follow even

the most mumbled of lyrics or dense of arrangements. The body and warmth it finds in voices is particularly good and not something that many players are capable of producing effectively.

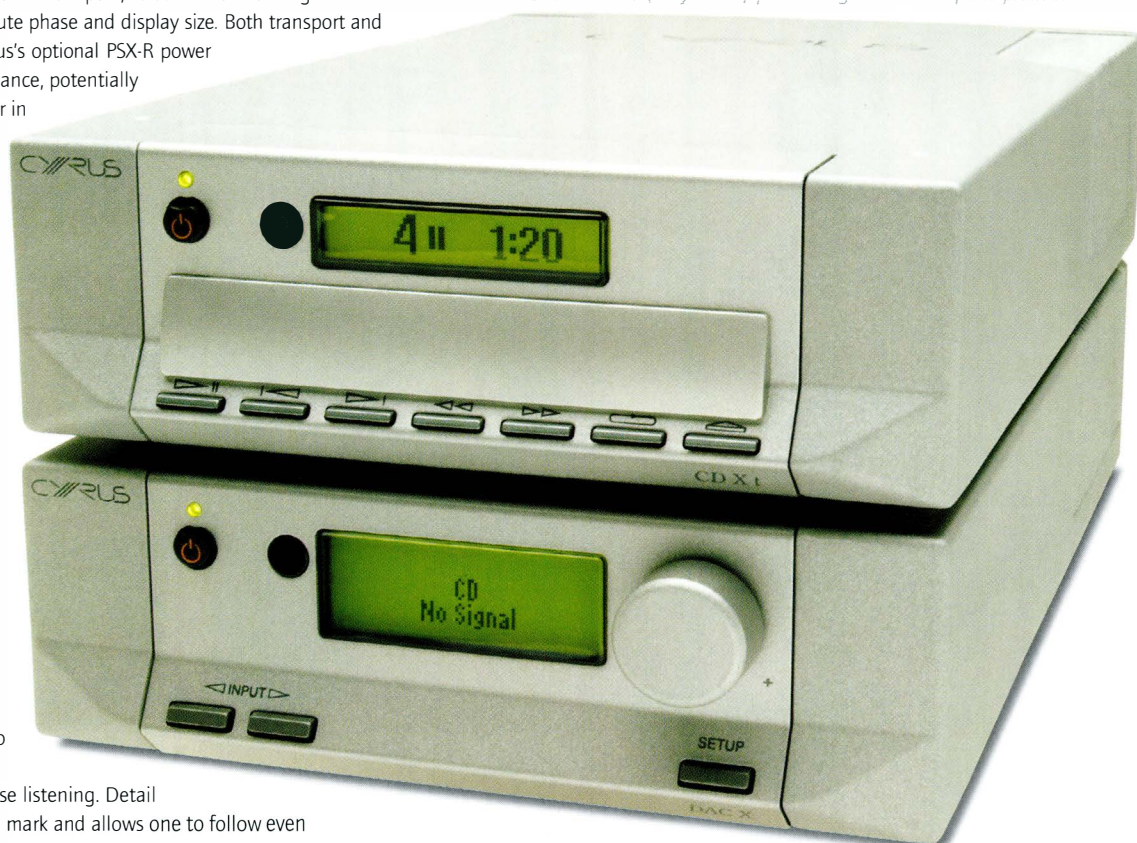
There is also a strong sense of musical coherence. It's surprisingly easy to hear what the different musicians in a band are contributing, but there's no sense of grain or edginess. Even discs that can sound slightly hard through many systems are delivered in a relaxed and finely detailed fashion, with strong imaging and plenty of space. This is not a softening of the sound's leading edges, though. It just seems to find the relaxed, yet detailed heart of pretty much every disc that gets put through the duo.

This may be related to its ability to act like a tin opener with seemingly compressed albums, delivering them in an open and well-contrasted fashion – even dense multi-instrumental mixes sound impressively coherent. Dynamics are also well served, the Cyruses (Cyril?) revealing changes in level both small and large with a calmness that serves the music before the sound, as all good kit should. Fortunately, this doesn't mean that this is a polite or lightweight machine – put on a disc with energy in its pits and you'll know all about it, the slam of the bass coming through in full effect.

One good reason for building the CD Xt is that there are no transports in the sub-£1,000 arena to match the DAC X with any more. Obviously, the competition from one-box CD players is strong, but such devices rarely offer the level of flexibility served up by the DAC X and none of our favourites at around this price have multiple inputs. Cyrus is offering an awful lot of sound quality for your money and an upgrade path to improve things further if you feel the need. What more can you ask? **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

See HFC 279 (May 2006) for our original review of this product





# Krell Evolution Two and One

*Krell's new eight-box 'statement' stereo amplifier is a snip at ten grand... per box!*

PRICE £80,000 (approx.) CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

**T**hat's right, *around* eighty grand! The price of the Evolution Two preamp and Evolution One power amp system fluctuates in price in accord with the ups and downs of the dollar and pound.

Both the preamp and power amp sections are magnificent-looking four-box affairs. Both supply a separate chassis for signal handling and another for power supply duties for each channel – that's four boxes per channel, eight in total... just to amplify a stereo system! This makes for a potentially huge amp footprint, but in reality the preamp can stack four-high and the amps can sit atop their power supplies.

Cleverly though, cleaving the preamplifier in twain doesn't mean you have to endlessly tinker with left and right channels. Unless you don't want 'em to, the separate volume controls move as one. It's all seamless, whether you physically operate the preamp or use the paratrooper-hard remote handset.

The Evolution Two preamplifier quartet is a zero-feedback, line-only affair, with an open loop bandwidth that stretches up into the megahertz region. All signal gain in the Evolution Two is in the current, not voltage, domain – this is the key to Krell's CAST ethos (see p36 for more on CAST). The switching of the four single-ended or XLR inputs are handled with optically coupled switches, thereby limiting noise and potential damage to the precious audio signal. Even the volume control differs from the norm; it's a digitally controlled analogue circuit, with 216-step resolution.

The Evolution Two power supplies are extensively electrically and magnetically shielded. Internal line conditioning circuitry filters RF noise on the AC power, and compensates for asymmetric power waveforms and DC on the mains. Power for the analogue stages comes from a large 170VA toroidal transformer, driving four bridge rectifiers and 39,600 microfarads of filter capacitance per channel, the sort of power supply that wouldn't look out of place in a 200-watt power amp. The driver and output stages in the main analogue regulators use five pairs of power transistors, again the sort of delivery often seen in power amplifiers. A second dedicated 90VA toroidal transformer with three independent secondary windings powers the Evolution Two digital control circuitry. This isn't just overkill in a preamplifier – it's positively thermonuclear-grade overkill.

The Evolution One is the power amp section of the eight box, er, duo. It delivers 450 watts per channel in Class A and features all the

latest Krell developments, including its own Current Mode layout, Sustained Plateau Bias drive and CAST 2 connections to the Evolution Two preamp. Where the Evolution Two is over-engineered for a preamplifier, the Evolution One has the subtle touch of a preamp designer applied to every circuit. The output impedance of the final gain stages is one hundredth that of most power amplifiers. It also shuns global negative feedback, with only 8dB of local, nested negative feedback in the final gain stages. Everything is twice engineered, such as the regulation on the power rails. This means the power amp effectively receives power from the nearest you can get to battery operation when dealing with 450 watts.

**“What marks this amp out as being better than *all* the others is not easy to pin down, but when you hear it, you know it.”**

Once again, those separate Evolution One power supplies are shielded. The overall design of the PSU is similar to the preamp power section, only on a massive scale, so the low-level stages feature a 165VA transformer and the gain stages sport a mighty 2,500VA transformer, delivering the juice to eight 35-amp bridge rectifiers and 120,000 microfarads of filter capacitance and on to 14 pairs of high performance power transistors.

## SOUND QUALITY

It can be summed up in just six words: “This is the best amplifier ever”. But why?

Well, for a start, it sounds endless. There's so much power and so much control on offer here, your ears will run out of steam long before the amps or speakers do. Especially the speakers: we need to redefine those maximum SPL and power handling ratings in the light of the Krell Evolution. Of course, turning these amplifiers to the max will reduce the drivers of a 50-watt power handling speaker to a smoking ruin in seconds, but more realistic high-end designs will be positively transformed.

The Krell's huge, exquisitely detailed sound will bring the best from the most demanding of speakers, hoisting their sound up several more notches. We auditioned these amps through the Wilson Sophia 2 speakers; no small potatoes, but far down the Wilson food chain. Yet, with these amplifiers, the Sophia 2 suddenly became the best speaker Wilson Audio makes.

A part of this comes from the Evolution's prodigious bass, adding octaves of depth and ambience-defining solidity to the sound. This manifests itself by taking a grip over the music at all points on the frequency compass with hitherto unheard honesty.

There's almost no point running out the usual descriptors about soundstaging, intelligibility, detail, dynamics or neutrality; this amp system eclipses all former reference points by a substantial margin. The Krell Evolution is fundamentally honest in approach, but not to the point of sounding stark or etched. It lacks the warmth of many valve-based systems, but this seems like an artificial injection to the sound by comparison.

Krell of old sounded very detailed, very big,

but with a steely top end. Krell products of the last 10 years or so have done much to overcome this, but there was a worry... if this is the best of Krell, will it mark a return to the big, steely sound? There was no need for worry – this lays the ghost of old Krell sound so thoroughly, the steel's all melted down now.

It's a very hard call, running out of defining terms. They've all been used up, applied to all that went before. But they've been applied erroneously. There's something not going on here that goes on in every other amplifier that will mark out the Krell Evolution as something truly spectacular. And it's something not intangible but not easily describable. We can now sympathise with the judge who, when asked to define pornography said: “I can't, but I know it when I see it”. What marks this amplifier out as being better than *all* the others is not something easy to pin down, but when you hear it, you know it. And everything else sounds just a little dull afterwards.

But there has to be a way to sum up the Evolution system. Imagine a power amplifier that is as reactive as a five-watt, single-ended triode amp and as powerful as a kilowatt design. Now imagine a preamplifier that manages to combine the best elements of the best preamps around with none of the downsides. Now put these masterworks in eight boxes and stick an eighty grand price tag on them. Go on – dare to dream! **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*



## *Callas Tebaldi*

**Opera launch a new reference in loudspeaker design, technology and engineering.**

Tebaldi is not only a beautiful work of art, but a true reference standard in sound reproduction.

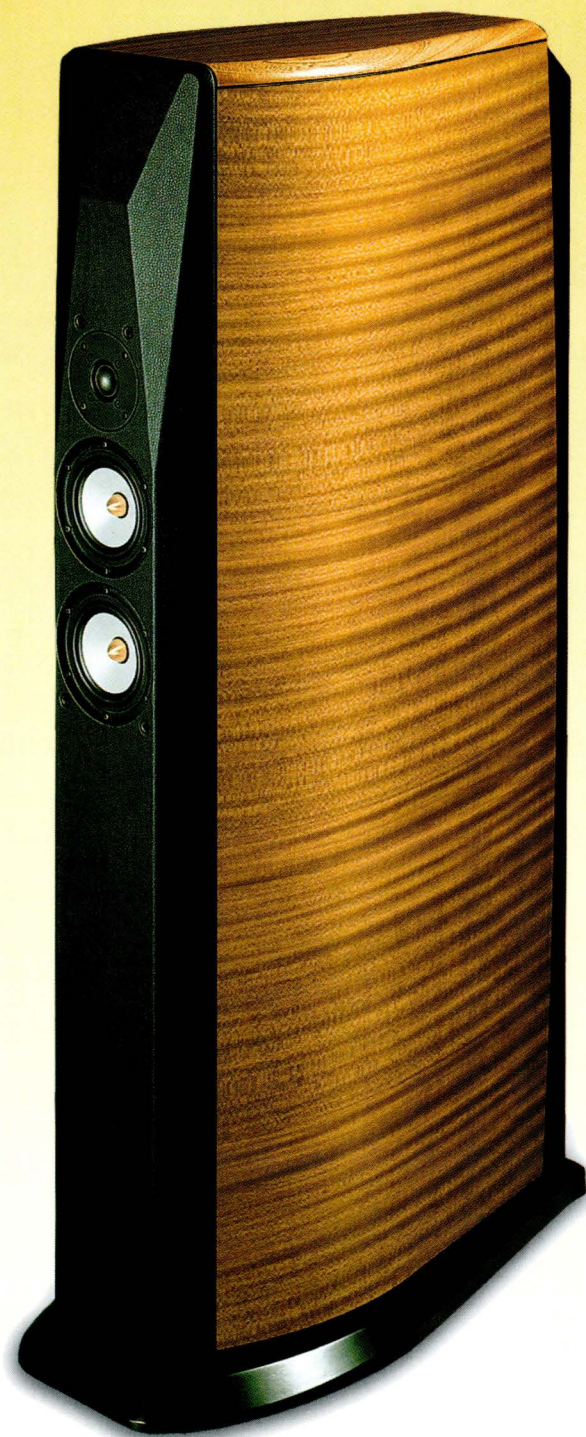
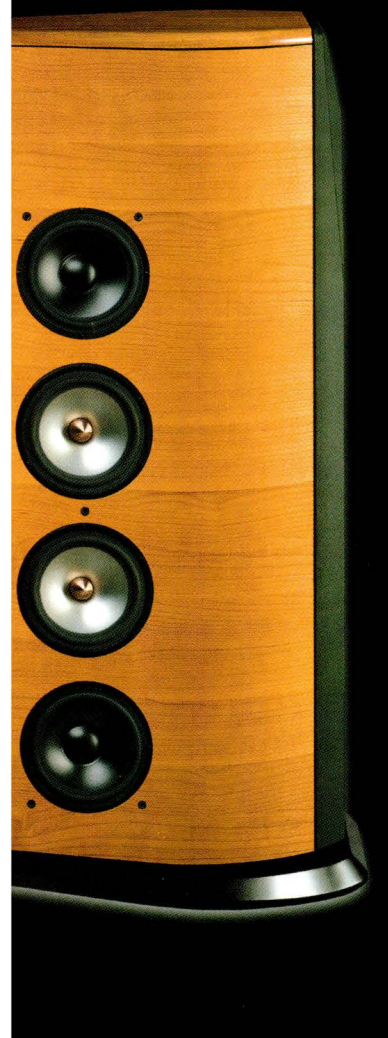
Music lives and breathes through the Tebaldi. Realistic dynamics, frequency range and detail all combine to communicate in a way seldom found in domestic audio. The gorgeous Italian design in the finest quality materials results in a tactile, almost organic sculpture that is the epitome of a luxury loudspeaker. Specifically designed drive units and highest quality components are used throughout.

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# Clearaudio Ambient

*Clearaudio has turned to laminated wood and metal to get the most out of the Ambient turntable*

**PRICE** £4,210 (turntable, arm and cartridge) **CONTACT** Audio Reference, Unit 8 Enterprise Park, Slyfield Industrial Estate, Guilford, Surrey GU1 1RB ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.audioreference.co.uk

**W**ith the £2,630 Ambient turntable, Clearaudio replaced its trademark acrylic with a so-called AMG plinth. This is a sandwich of precision machined aluminium around a wooden laminate which Clearaudio dubs Panzerholz. It is a 70-layer, high-density engineering plywood that is apparently bulletproof. But it wasn't chosen as protection for gangsta rap records; it's used because it is extremely stiff and dense and remains inert up to quite high frequencies, so should offer good self damping.

It is also extremely attractive when sandwiched between matt finished aluminium sheets and fully deserves the AMG moniker, although there's no relation to the tweaked Mercedes cars. The Ambient's main bearing consists of a hardened steel shaft running in a polished sintered bronze precision cap, the combination requiring only a small amount of oil to run freely. This supports a 40mm-thick acrylic platter, which is driven by a silicon belt from a motor mounted in a separate AMG plinth. The combination makes the deck unusually wide, but it just about fits on a standard equipment rack. The motor unit incorporates a 'custom' version of Clearaudio's Syncro power regenerator, and houses the on/off and speed change switches and an LCD speed read-out.

**“Lean in this instance also means fast – the transient response is lightning quick.”**

The arm supplied for this review was the £570 carbon fibre tubed version of Clearaudio's Satisfy. This is a fairly simple gimbal-bearing type with chunky aluminium parts and an almost magical magnetic anti-skate system. The vertical bearing runs on sapphire watch jewels, while the horizontal runs on ceramic, offering long life and high precision. The unusual headshell fixes the cartridge to a platform that cleverly can be adjusted with just one bolt. This helps to make a tricky job a whole lot easier.

On the cartridge front, Clearaudio supplied its £1,230 Concerto to match the Satisfy. This is the base model in the company's latest range of

moving coils, all of which all feature a flower-shaped top plate. The idea behind the twelve 'fingers', as they are called, is that because each is a slightly different shape, they will disperse resonance produced by the stylus/groove interface. The Concerto has a satinee hardwood body, 24ct gold coil wire, boron cantilever and a miniscule stylus profile. If you buy the whole system as a package, you get a five per cent discount, too (see above for the package price).

## SOUND QUALITY

The hardwood and metal AMG sandwich undoubtedly makes a stiffer plinth than acrylic and the Ambient has a lean balance as a result. Lean in this instance also means fast – the transient response is lightning quick, which makes for highly engaging listening and an ability to cut to the musical chase. We have yet to come across another essentially 'off the shelf' turntable, arm and cartridge combination that better the Ambient in this respect. Fortunately, it doesn't mean that the bass is light, rather that the upper bass isn't as full as one finds with other designs. It's also a balance that suits lower level listening as it reveals plenty of detail without having to be cranked.

The Ambient revels in the drive and energy in a recording thanks to an ability to extract dynamics, even if they are well hidden in the mix. It also differentiates recordings with ease – sometimes the mix on two adjacent tracks can be so different that it's hard to believe they came from the same studio. It's also not unusual for successful artists to use multiple studios... this is not unlikely, but you rarely hear the evidence so clearly as through the Ambient.

The Ambient's bass is particularly nice. The articulation and speed that results from the excellent definition of leading edges means that bass instruments are always tuneful and notes are well differentiated.

This remains one of the most entertaining and exciting turntable, arm and cartridge combinations available for less than £5,000. With its high quality of build and great looks, you'll be hard pressed to find a stronger sonic and visual aesthetic. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 271 (September 2005) for our original review of this product*



# Ayre C-5xe

*It had to happen one day – meet the world's first two-channel, audio-only universal disc player*

PRICE £4,495 CONTACT Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Herts AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.ayre.com

One of the big hi-fi surprises of the last two or three years has been the increasing emergence of stereo-only SACD players. This effectively fulfilled the early promise that SACD would be exactly what the acronym said it would be – a 'super' version of the familiar compact disc. Now here's the first 'U2' player that does the same for DVD-Audio (no, it's not a player that only deals with Bono's Messianic aspirations – U2 is Ayre's designation for a universal, stereo-only player). In fact, the Ayre C-5xe plays all the audio formats, namely CD, SACD and DVD-Audio, but purely in stereo in each case. It plays DVD-Video discs too, but there is no video output, so only their audio component may be accessed.

This, then, is an audiophile-grade, two-channel audio player for those wishing to make the most of their music across various formats. Some multichannel discs include a two-channel mix as part of the package, but the C-5xe has a solution for those that don't. It performs a stereo downmix of the multichannel soundtrack on DVD-Video and DVD-Audio discs, and automatically defaults to the mandatory stereo mix on multichannel SACDs. It will also play 24/96 stereo DAD discs from Classic Records and similar without trouble. For the record, it plays MP3 CDs too – but don't expect the Ayre be kind to their sonic limitations!

**“This is an audiophile-grade, two-channel audio player for those wishing to make the most of their music across various formats.”**

All formats are available from analogue outputs, single-ended and balanced, but Ayre warns against using both at once. A digital audio output is also available from a balanced AES/EBU (regular coaxial S/PDIF adaptors are available), although this is subject to the standard restrictions on feeding digital outputs from high-resolution (SACD and DVD-A) discs.

A port allows the player to be run from a Crestron or AMX controller. The user interface consists of a simple control cluster on the front panel, a fluorescent display with adjustable brightness levels which is informative but does not extend to text displays, and a nifty enough aluminium remote control.

CD and SACD navigation is a simple matter and follows the usual pattern. DVD-Audio navigation is more complicated, as it normally relies on a video status display that is not available here. Instead, the procedure involves

using the 'next', 'previous' and the number keys in 'stop' mode to select which title set offers the best sound quality (the highest sample rate, and without data-reduced audio). This is identified by sample rate identification and other LEDs. With DVD-Audio, all that is usually necessary is to press 'play'.

DVD-Video discs will normally autoplay on insertion too; otherwise press stop on the first track then use the normal track navigation keys to start play, or change tracks if necessary, waiting until the FBI warning has finished (you'll have to judge this by ear) and paying attention to the sample rate indicators.

It sounds good on paper and usually works, but some DVD-Videos have data-reduced Dolby Digital (or DTS) soundtracks and linear PCM tracks that both trigger the 96kHz LED. The Ayre is less than transparent operationally with discs that require on-screen navigation, but this does not hobble the player greatly.

Some firmware settings can be changed using the rear panel toggle switches. The digital output can be defeated, for example, and downsampling from 96/88.2kHz to 48/44.1kHz can be controlled. There are also two digital filter settings, one optimised for the frequency domain, the other for the time domain – 'Measure' and 'Listen' respectively. 'Listen' is the default.

The player's audiophile credentials are confirmed by its solid carcass, balanced outputs and heavy-duty power supply, built around two powerful transformers. The audio circuitry features low-feedback circuitry, home rolled master clocks and discrete audio circuits, rather than chip-based op-amps. The mechanism is from Pioneer, and the D-to-A processor is a Burr-Brown DSD1792 DAC, a hybrid design that processes DVD and PCM natively. The SACD decoder is the Sony CXD2753R, with the audio output taken from an Ayre-designed discrete IV converter.

## SOUND QUALITY

In every conceivable respect this is an audiophile's disc spinner par excellence. Ayre recommends a break in period of 100-500 hours, and we can attest that the player takes forever and a day before it finally comes on

song. During the interminable wait, the player sounds tight and constrained. It fails to open up dynamically, and tonal colour is not properly expressed – there's a touch of grey about it.

But it does eventually come on song, and at that point, the C-5xe is revealed as a first rate player. It reproduces a wealth of detail across all three disc formats, but in a distinctive way. It is not as hard a hitter as some, and this applies to SACD and DVD-Audio as well as CD, using the gentler of the two digital filters.

At the same time, the Ayre has a gentle, organic demeanour, full of subtlety and expressiveness. The 'Measure' filter gives more punch from CD, but there is a loss of euphony and refinement, and timing cues appear to be handled better using 'Listen'. With CD, the player was able to reproduce concert hall ambience and vocal timbre unusually well with this filter, though the slight loss of impact may lead to some upward volume-tweaking to compensate. There was no hint of the usual residual sterility that is part of the package with relatively low-bit-rate digital audio.

However, the real rewards are delivered by the two high-resolution music formats, but it isn't easy to choose between them. There are identifiable differences, and on the whole they favoured SACD, which offered superior image depth and scale. If anything, DVD-Audio offered even higher levels of detail, but generally it was just a little harder sounding, a little more aggressive and less euphonic. In fairness, this could be accounted for by the greater and apparently better sounding selection of SACDs at our disposal. Regardless, the Ayre is capable of sound quality not far short of the Esoteric and dCS CD/SACD players tested elsewhere in this issue, with the added bonus of DVD-Audio replay and a much lower price tag.

This is a great two-channel player with high sonic standards from CD and SACD, and equally high (in some respects better) DVD-Audio delivery. Of course, full-spec stereo 24-bit/192kHz DVD-A discs are very thin on the ground, and while the Ayre can be used with standard multichannel DVD-A recordings (thanks to the player's two-channel mixdown algorithm), even this more popular disc type is hardly riding the crest of a wave at the moment. But Ayre has the potential pratfall of disc navigation without a video display more or less sorted, and this is arguably the only player currently available that is designed for the best possible stereo replay of all three disc-based music formats – CD, SACD and DVD-A. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

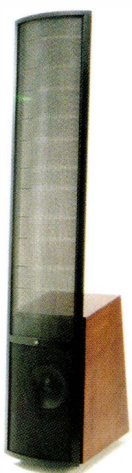


## Oxford Audio Consultants Ltd

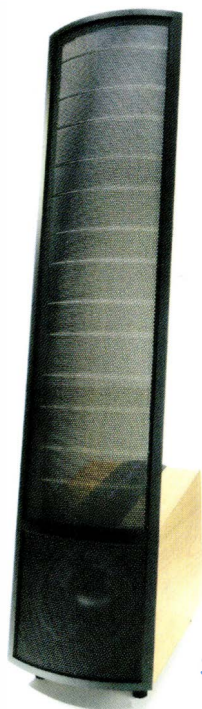
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# Sugden A21SE

Take one classic British integrated amp, add power and some bling and the result is a cook's delight

PRICE £1,995 CONTACT J E Sugden & Co, Valley Works, Station Lane, Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire WF16 0NF ☎ 01924 404088 🌐 www.sugdenaudio.com

Yorkshire-based Sugden's £1,100 A21 is one of the best amplifiers people overlook in their droves. Why? Because at only 25 watts, it isn't that powerful and – perhaps more importantly – in this age of style-led hi-fi, it looks 18 years out of date. So, the canny Northerners boosted the juice and tuned up the bling thing... and the £1,995 A21SE that resulted has become one of the company's most successful hi-fi products in a generation.

Sugden's popular Bijou and Masterclass lines gave the impetus for the cosmetic updates, but there's something more Scandinavian about the A21SE that makes it even more attractive than its predecessors. It's the simple style with two big, unnamed knobs and blue LEDs that give it that neo-Nordic chic. The thick shiny ('platinum') or gunmetal ('titanium') finish is big and bold too, while the similarly-solid black rear panel sports high-quality WBT-style speaker terminals, and good-but-standard quality gold-plated phono sockets for the four line inputs and tape and preamp line outputs. There's no headphone socket or built-in phono stage, but a separate A21SE Stage Two phono amp has been launched, to run alongside the amplifier and the CD21SE CD player (tested in *HFC* 271).

Under the fancy casework, Sugden gave the original design a wholly new preamplifier stage and also a power boost to 30 watts for an eight-ohm load, 40 watts for a four-ohm speaker. It also got a remote control, albeit a pretty standard one. The amplifier delivers an extremely wide frequency response (12Hz-141 kHz) and even wider bandwidth (6Hz-280kHz), according to Sugden.

What it happily retains from the original A21 is Class A current delivery. Alongside the four solidly constructed PCBs and a massive transformer are a brace of heatsinks and circular top and bottom vents to dissipate heat. Power the A21SE up for half an hour (to get it to optimum operating temperature) and the heatsinks are very hot to the touch. But that's only to be expected; delivering 30 watts in pure Class A means the heatsinks could double up as a toaster.

## SOUND QUALITY

Grain, brightness, any form of etched quality and colorations all disappear in the Class A heatwave, leaving a sound that is remarkably clean and open. The soundstage is exceptionally three-dimensional and natural-sounding, too. Not too small, not too big, just a soundstage at

precisely the right scale and size, making the boundaries of room and speaker disappear at a stroke.

The A21SE is also remarkably coherent – perhaps its strongest suit, and the reason why it deserves to be included among the high-end's great and good. Starting with one of the best midbands around, the Sugden manages to keep every sound coherent and tonally accurate into the highest treble and well into the regions where most speakers give up the ghost. The dynamic capabilities of this amplifier are impressive, shifting from quiet to loud with no sense of artifice. Also, the detailing is first-rate, with plenty of information peeled from the source. But good dynamics and detail are not that uncommon, especially at this kind of price level; good coherence is another matter and is usually only a factor at far higher price points than this.

**“The coherent sound is why it deserves to be included among the high-end's great and good.”**

It might not deliver half a kilowatt into the speakers, but partnered with the right speakers, every watt makes a lot of sense. If there is a mild short-coming to the Sugden's performance, it's in the timing. The thorny subject of whether a product 'times' is difficult; many find this an unimportant, or even undetectable feature of a product; others choose their hi-fi on the basis of this and this alone. The Sugden is about average in its ability to keep a beat, which will make the 'Pace, Rhythm And Timing' brigade pass up on its charms. But if the trade-off is between a perfect sense of rhythm and the spacious and clean sound of the A21SE, many non-PRATs will choose the latter.

It's hard not to be impressed by the Sugden A21SE, especially in the light of high-end amplifiers elsewhere in this edition of *The Collection*. It sounds like a bargain in isolation. Compared with the best of the best, it may falter slightly in terms of power, ultimate transparency and temporal integrity, but its bargain status shines through all the more. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

See *HFC* 268 (July 2005) for our original review of this product





# Wilson Sophia 2

Wilson's 'entry-level' floorstander combines tremendous sonic scale with a more user-friendly approach

PRICE £11,998 per pair CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.wilsonaudio.com

For most companies, a £12,000 loudspeaker would be the pinnacle of development and the top of the range. But for Wilson Audio, it's entry level. The Sophia 2 is the company's cheapest floorstander.

Wilson usually likes to separate the bass box from the tweeter and midrange cabinet in its floorstanders. This means less interaction between bass and midrange/treble, but also more complexity, more cabinetry and more cost. The Sophia 2, with its single-box design, is far more cost effective and arguably more elegant in the process – it looks like a Wilson WATT/Puppy, given a smooth and streamlined Pininfarina touch.

The original Sophia, launched in 2001, was a three-way design, with twin rear ports and single-wire terminations. Five years on, not a lot's changed. From the outside, the difference between Version One and Version Two of the speaker is minimal to say the least – the new, pinned grilles are the only observable difference. In fact, all manner of changes have been made, many of which trickled down from the developments made to the higher priced models... and some innovations have 'trickled up' from the new Duette 'bookshelf' speaker. Fortunately, those with original Sophia speakers can upgrade.

The driver configuration remains: the single 250mm aluminium cone ScanSpeak-derived bass driver, the single paper cone 175mm midrange (also from ScanSpeak breeding stock) and Focal 25mm inverted titanium dome tweeter are effectively the same models used in 2001, designed specifically for the Sophia. The integrated cabinet with backswept, time-aligned tweeter and midrange section appears unchanged, too. And it's still available in almost any colour you can think of, given Wilson's custom painting studio. So, the move from Sophia 1 to Sophia 2 is principally in the crossover network, but this should not be thought of as a trivial upgrade.

The technologies used in the change affect the bass alignment, a crossover redesign to make the speaker deeper, faster and more articulate in the bottom end. There is also what Wilson calls 'Anti-Diffraction Technology', which appears to be an adjustment to the tweeter and its port to eliminate back wave interference, and 'Anti-Jitter Technology', that minimises the interaction of drivers on one another and thereby lowers the noise floor of the speaker. Yes, the term 'jitter' is usually used in relation to digital audio, not loudspeakers, but give the company some creative credit. We

hi-fi types know what jitter is (it's bad!) and that's more meaningful than 'driver interactivity reduction programme'.

The Sophia 2 stands almost 105cm tall, is nearly 33cm across (at its widest point) and is practically 46cm deep. Each speaker weighs a healthy 72kg and in typical Wilson fashion, the speaker's sensitivity is claimed to be an undemanding 89dB. Nominal impedance is around three ohms and there's a seven-watt minimum amplifier specification. Frequency response is rated at 29Hz-22.5kHz (within -3dB limits). As ever with a Wilson design, that 89dB sensitivity is not permission to use budget amplification; while the Sophia is reasonably amp-friendly, it remains a demanding speaker, in terms of load and sonics.

## SOUND QUALITY

Any £1,000 integrated amplifier worth the price tag will deliver the physical drive capabilities to run the Sophia 2 to decent levels, but you'll get to hear just what restrictions a £1,000 price tag does to an amplifier design. Turn that instead into a £10,000 amplification system and suddenly the speaker takes off. Like all Wilson speakers, this needs a fair chunk of breathing space to the sides and back of the room to spring to life.

**“It's the awesome sense of sonic scale that really hits home with the Sophia 2. Most loudspeakers sound tiny by comparison.”**

In many respects, this is the best Wilson speaker for day-to-day use. A £40,000 pair of MAXX 2 speakers are brilliantly analytical and staggeringly dynamic, but there are times when you just want to chill out. The days of Wilson speakers being 'too good' for any amplifier are long gone and the Sophia 2 has a symmetry of sound – where the music holds together exceptionally well – that's truly alluring.

How this manifests itself is through a soundstage that is wide, deep and natural, in the manner of real-world musical instruments. This is perhaps where it differs the most from other Wilson speakers: while the soundstage is ultra-precise by most standards, the Sophia 2 doesn't go for the micrometer imagery found in the System 7 or the MAXX 2. This is ideal for those who want to simply listen to their music instead of analysing where every last violin is placed. Of course, the likes of the MAXX 2 manage to combine stunning imagery

and detail levels with a fine sense of musicality, but when you aren't in the market for a £40k, two metre tall speaker, the compromise made by the Sophia 2 seems no compromise at all.

It's the awesome sense of sonic scale that really hits home with the Sophia 2. It's not big sounding, it's right sounding, making most loudspeakers sound tiny by comparison. There's that remarkable sense of bass depth and sheer force that is a Wilson trademark (although slightly curtailed compared to the company's big guns), which comes across as every bass guitarist's dream. It doesn't overstate the lower regions of the musical spectrum, it merely plays them as they should be played – with bite and snap when needed, soft and flowing when that's what's required. Don't expect an enforced rhythm, either. The pace of the speaker is absolutely tight and precise, but you won't find a beat where there isn't one in the recording. The Sophia 2 simply gives you the music – all of the music – just as it appears on the disc.

There's also the extended yet never bright treble that has become a Wilson trademark. And in between the crisp highs and deep lows is a midrange that absolutely fails to make its presence felt, in all the right ways. All of which makes a lucid speaker that doesn't draw

attention to itself, despite the 'wow' factor of that big sound. It's quite something.

Wilson's System 7, MAXX 2 and Alexandria are all better speakers than the Sophia 2 in some fundamental ways. They give the listener more bass depth, more grunt. They also give the system they're connected to a much tougher time. Finally, they give the listener a bit more of a work-out, too. The Sophia 2 is not an undemanding speaker. It will show up limitations in your system and your discs, but it keeps the music close at hand, too. And that makes it a more 'real-world' speaker and perhaps a better all-rounder than those above it in Wilson's range.

Don't think of this as a 'System 7 Lite'. It's much more than that. It brings that big, engaging Wilson sound to a more attainable price level, with a more user-friendly design that will suit a wider range of systems. Brilliant! **HFC**

Alan Sircom



For all things analogue...

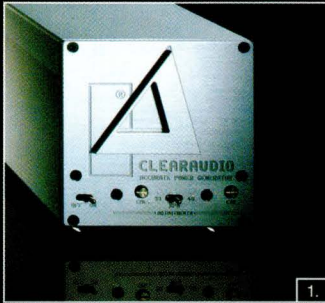


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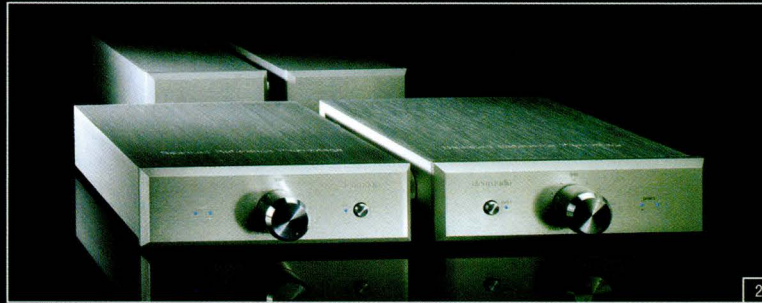
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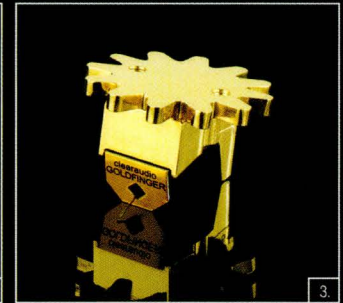
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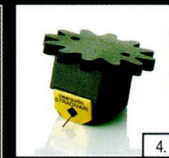
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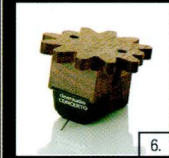
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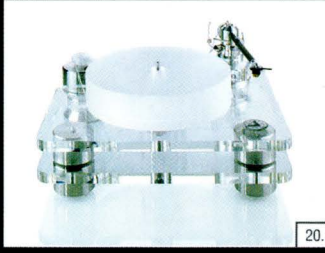
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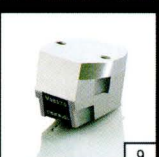
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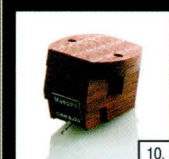
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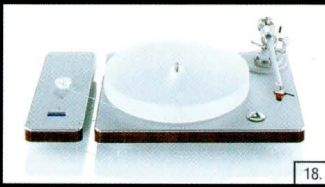
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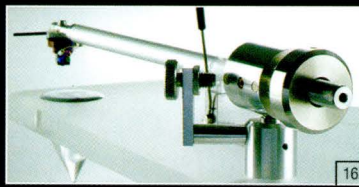
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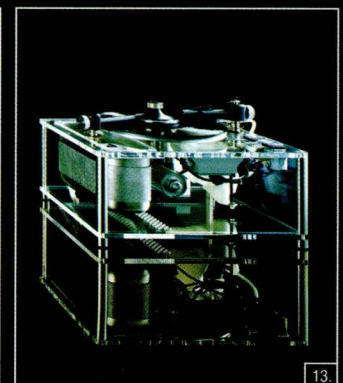
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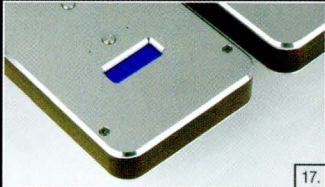
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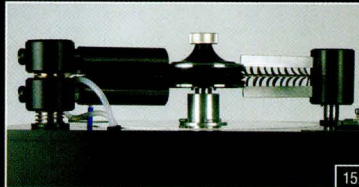
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1). APG Accurate Power Generator 2). Balanced Reference Phono-stage 3). New Generation 24k Goldfinger MC Cartridge 4). Stradavari MC Cartridge 5). Titanium MC Cartridge 6). Concerto MC Cartridge 7). Symphony MC Cartridge 8). Melody MC Cartridge 9). Maestro Steel MC Cartridge 10). Maestro Wood MC Cartridge 11). Aurum Alpha Wood MM Cartridge 12). Syncro PSU 13&15). Matrix Record Cleaning Apparatus 14). Master T-QI Parallel Tracking Tonearm 16). Clear Emotion Turntable Package 17&18). Ambient Turntable 19). Avantgarde Magnum Turntable 20). Champion Level 2 Turntable 21). Maximum Solution Turntable 22). AMG Master Reference Turntable 23 to 25). Clearaudio accessories. For further products visit: [www.audioreference.co.uk](http://www.audioreference.co.uk)



23.



24.



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*Border Patrol's finalised preamplifier was well worth the wait... and the weight!*

PRICE £2,995 CONTACT Border Patrol, 10340 Whittier Court, White Plains, Maryland 20695, USA ☎ (001) 301 705 7460 🌐 www.borderpatrol.co.uk

The final version of Border Patrol's only production preamplifier took a long time coming. So long, in fact, that the company suffered Continental Drift, and moved from Hove on the South coast of England to Maryland on the East coast of the United States of America. But the resulting Control Unit has been worth the wait... and the transatlantic relocation. The few prototypes of the original were snapped up, but patience proved fruitful for those who waited. The prototype was no slouch, though – it just didn't weigh so much.

When the Control Unit was originally launched, it was offered in 'CU1' and 'CU2' varieties, the former being encased in aluminium and featuring some reduction in component quality, for a 30 per cent cost saving. But as things turned out, the market was far more interested in the Full Monty Control Unit, so the more affordable variant has been dropped from the range. So, the one and only current Control Unit preamp benefits from a 2mm thick copper plate chassis. With its low ferrous metal content, it produces a richer sound than aluminium, which Border Patrol describes as grainy, bleached and wispy by comparison.

Other advantages of copper are that it is less magnetic and considerably heavier than aluminium alloys, which means that it will resonate at lower frequencies and harbour fewer extraneous currents. Aluminium is not magnetic in and of itself, but slide a magnet along an alloy sheet and then a copper one, and you'll note it moves more quickly along the copper. The copper chassis is also twice the weight of the aluminium and this makes it harder to resonate. It's also more malleable, which is said to be a benefit.

Inside the Control Unit, you'll find a hardwired, negative-feedback-free circuit populated with high-quality parts and – at its heart – a power supply with choke input filtering and valve rectification, the key constituents of transparent tube amplification.

Power is provided by a single valve used in anode follower configuration because of the simplicity that this route offers. The trade-off is high output impedance, which means limited cable driving power – avoid interconnects longer than three metres.

Our control unit came with a moving magnet phono stage (which makes up £700 of the unit's cost). As with the line stage, it's fully hardwired. Five line-level inputs on the line version are reduced to four when phono amplification is included.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is a remarkably neutral preamplifier by valve standards. Border Patrol's creations tend to be exceptions to the rule that states that valves are warm-sounding, so much so that some in the 'romance of valves' camp describe the kit as being rather too 'hi-fi'. We are of the opinion that

whatever technology you use to create an audio component, the end result is what counts; if it is resolute in all the right areas and it draws you into the music, then it does what is intended. The Control Unit doesn't have the bandwidth of solid-state alternatives, but neither does it obviously roll-off towards the extremes – instead, it produces bass and treble in a natural and relaxed fashion. It ain't no rose-tinted romanticiser, but the midrange is as transparent and vivid as you could want and the sense of timing is right on the money.

The bass, while not bone crunching, has plenty of weight and depth, scoring highly on articulation, texture and tonal resolve – this is arguably where the advantages of using valves in a preamp is pressed home. If you want to hear the full character of instruments of any pitch it's hard to beat. It extracts plenty of shape and tone colour from bass instruments,

**“It lets you hear right into the music and savour the nuances of playing and singing.”**

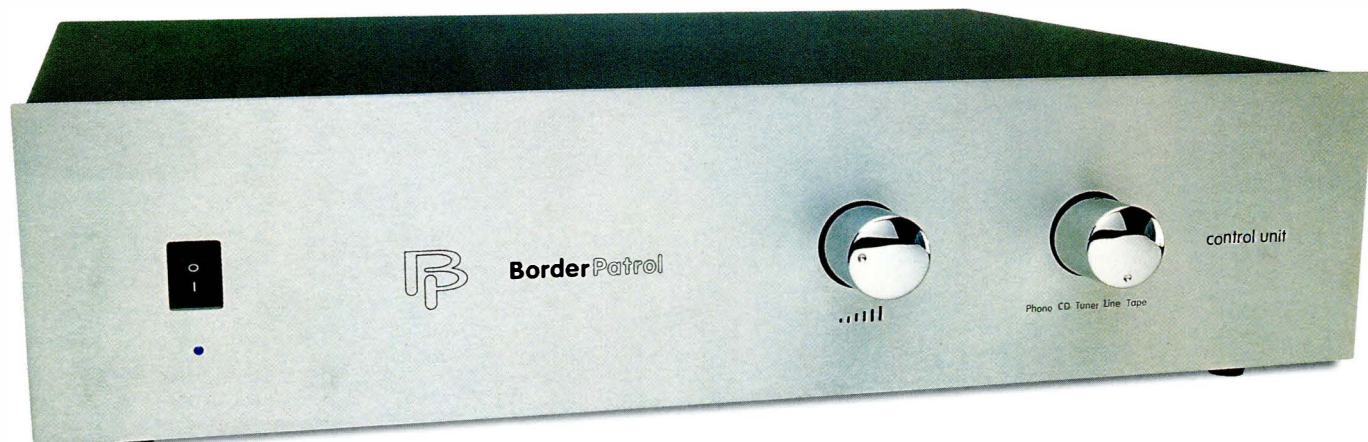
some sounding positively lush and vibrant without foregoing the solidity that makes for a convincing sense of presence in the room. The electric bass on Neil Ardley's *Kaleidoscope of Rainbows* is vibrant and each note has a solidity that makes for a convincing sense of presence in the room.

The all-important midrange is delivered with transparency and resolve that competes with alternatives of all technological shades at significantly higher prices. It lets you hear right into the music and savour the nuances of playing and singing that communicate the feelings and emotions that no other art can. Voices are of course extremely powerful in this respect and the Control Unit's ability to delve so deep into each recording pulls out subtleties that you wouldn't know were there.

The vdH Condor moving coil cartridge on our reference SME turntable needed a step-up transformer to boost its output to a level that the Border Patrol's phono stage can deal with, but once there the result shows just how dynamic vinyl records can be. The preamp unearths the organic aspects of vinyl in decidedly engaging and solid style. Returning to the Border Patrol after a short season of seriously expensive transistor-based preamps, we were concerned that it would sound lacklustre. Not a bit of it – within a track, it charms you into believing its version of events, and you forget the hi-fi and engross yourself in the music. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

See HFC 277 (March 2006) for our original review of this product





# ECS Pre and EA-1

Finally, ECS has developed a preamplifier to match its power amps, with spectacular results

PRICE £9,495 (Pre £5,500; EA-1 £3,995 per stereo pair) CONTACT ECS, Impress House, Mansell Road, London W3 7QH ☎ 020 8743 8880 🌐 www.ecsamplifiers.co.uk

**W**hile there are a lot of very good power amplifiers on the market, really fine preamplifiers are surprisingly thin on the ground. You'd have thought it would be easy; there's no nasty loudspeakers to deal with and you don't even need to include a phono stage any more. But, there's more to a preamp – you have to deal with low signal levels. It's well known (in amp designer circles, at least) that the smaller the incoming voltage, the easier it is to corrupt... or rather, the more the corruption is apparent after it has been amplified.

This in part explains why fine preamps are rare and expensive things, and why it often takes so long for a small company to develop one. ECS, despite serious expertise in PCB design and manufacture, took nigh on three years to produce a preamp to match its brace of power amplifiers, the stereo EA-2 and the monoblock EA-1 (included in this review). The company went to considerable lengths to design and build this line-level preamp, taking a cost no object approach to making it sound as good as they could.

The technological keys to its design are few but significant. First, the fully-balanced signal path is extremely short and uses just one single-ended, zero feedback, bi-polar transistor to achieve the desired degree of amplification. Secondly, the output is an air-gap, earth-isolating transformer, which is used to create a truly balanced output alongside two single ended options. Then, the transformer also makes the preamp flexible when it comes to partnering long cables and power amplifiers – although ECS makes its own power amps, the aim is for the preamp to have a life beyond ECS-only systems.

The last and perhaps most significant part of this design is the power supply chain, which starts with a Never-Connected virtual battery, from PSU specialist Fenson. This is a means of totally isolating the power supply and thence the signal from noise on mains and has been used by Trichord Research in its phono stages and Michell Engineering for its turntable power supplies, but this is the first time it's been used in a fully-fledged preamplifier. You will also find isolating regulation and carefully selected passive components in the Pre, especially the decoupling caps. Everything is relay operated including the volume control, which clicks as you adjust it and shows the relative output level in huge LED numerals.

In terms of integrating with the outside world, there are five single-ended inputs

alongside a tape or processor output, all on phono sockets. There's also one balanced input and both phono and XLR main outputs.

Compared to the level indicators, the input lamps are unduly subtle unless you are near eye level with the thing and changing input with the chunky selector knob requires a light and precise touch, but the remote is somewhat easier. This handset is a chunky device and a universal learning one at that. ECS has avoided the expense of making a handset that matches the preamp's hardcore metalwork and gone for something that will operate your whole hi-fi or home cinema system. This means lots of

**“Image solidity is very strong. Notes are delivered with a degree of presence that makes them seem uncannily real.”**

buttons, but it's easy to use and programme. It's also so big that you won't lose it. Other features include independent balance adjustment, absolute phase switching and unity gain volume bypassing for home cinema systems.

We reviewed the EA-1 monoblocks back in HFC 253 but to re-cap, these compact 22kg beasts have a rated output of 200 watts per channel, they use zero inductance components in the signal path and muster their power with a 1,500VA mains transformer.

## SOUND QUALITY

If God is in the details, then this ECS pre/power system should provide more than a few religious experiences, thanks to the major league transparency it offers and the light that this shines on the darkest recesses of your favourite recordings. Stepping over from a Border Patrol Control Unit valve preamp, we were not surprised to experience an increase in bass power. However, the level of improvement in detail resolution was truly unexpected. One example is the low, low bass on John Surman's masterful *Adventures of Simon Simon* on vinyl. These notes simply had not previously been encountered, despite the presence of several capable loudspeakers in the system over the years. The resolve of the amplifiers let the bass clarinet reveal its lovely woody tone, while the synth notes expand the scale of the piece underneath. And that's only scratching the surface, telling you a little about the visceral experience, but nothing about the emotional power that this combination bestows upon the music played through its circuits.

With the subtle intonations of voice and guitar, the transparency of the system is brought to bear with equal panache, the level of detail is frightening. From the intake of breath to the acoustic of the room, all is laid bare. The fundamentals of the sound, the timbre of the notes and the style of their delivery, are painted in the most realistic colours. It becomes all too apparent that many more affordable and highly laudable preamps bring their own ideas and interpretations to the result, and even when they are euphonic, they are still colourations and as such stand between you and the musical experience.

Image solidity is very strong. Notes are delivered with a degree of presence that makes them seem uncannily real. This is true right across the range with voices being carved out of thin air between the speakers, while bass notes enjoy a resonance and clarity that can only be described as 'chewy'. This can be achieved because the images produced are as high, wide and deep as the speakers and room will allow. But you'd be surprised what can be achieved with a modest space and the sort of stage-mapping capabilities on offer here. The sound penetrates the wall behind the speakers with the right recording and there are plenty of albums that produce surprising width.

Timing is tight and precise, but not emphatically so. It doesn't seem to be possible to create amplification with tonal neutrality that notably emphasises timing and the ECS approach is in line with the majority on this score. There will be some who seek a little bit more bite to leading edges, but we'd suggest they provide this with the source because there's nothing here to slow things down, and pace is handled evenly across the band. It seems that bass rhythms are the nemesis of many an amplifier, but you've only to listen to a bass player such as Jaco Pastorius or a left hand driven pianist through the ECS combination to hear that the low frequencies are bang on the money.

The competition is strong at this price point, but make no mistake, this is a killer combination. The fact that it's British is the icing on a rich and tasty cake. **HFC**

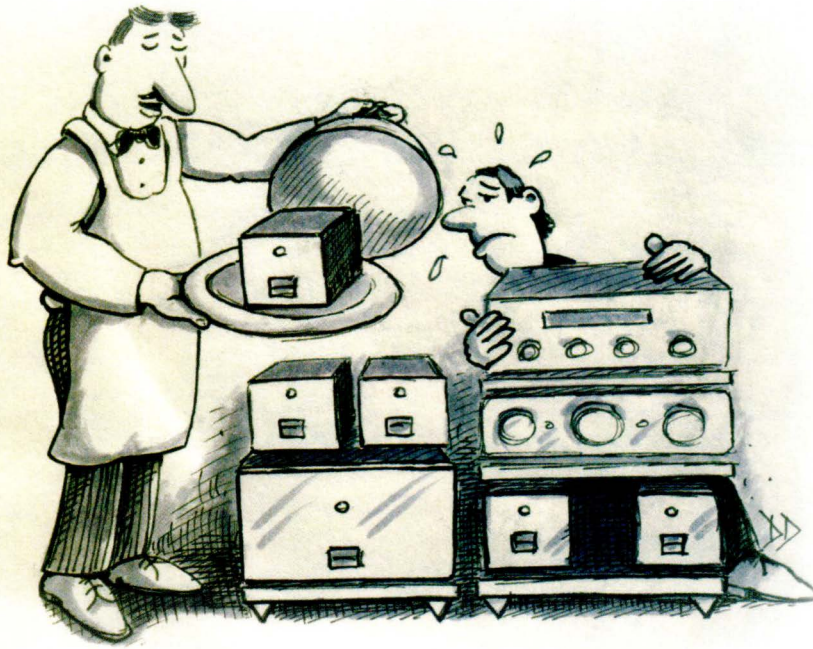
Jason Kennedy

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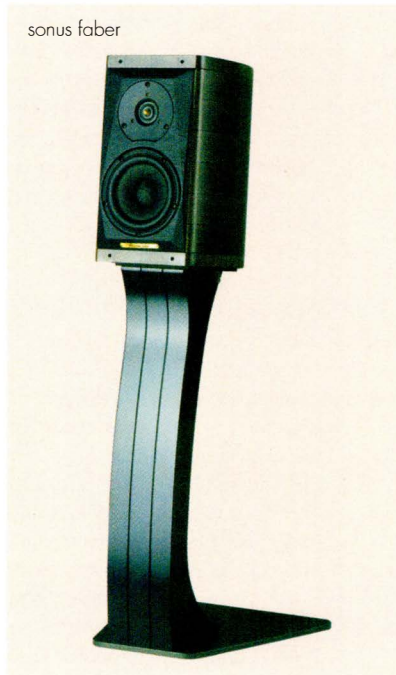
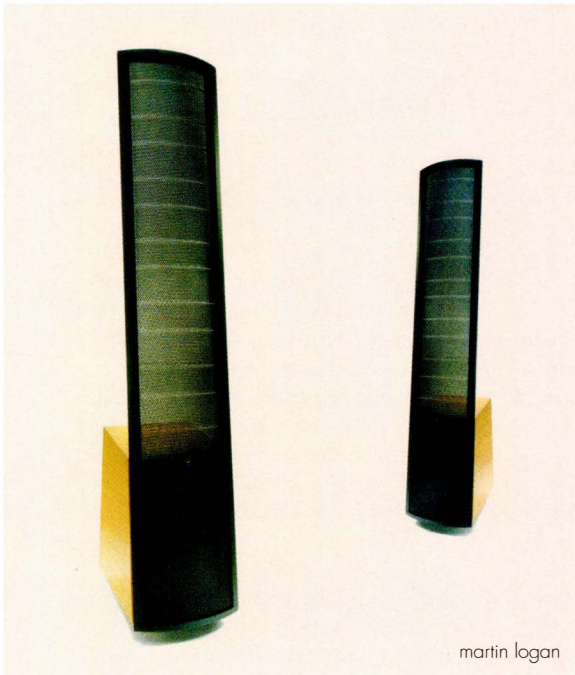
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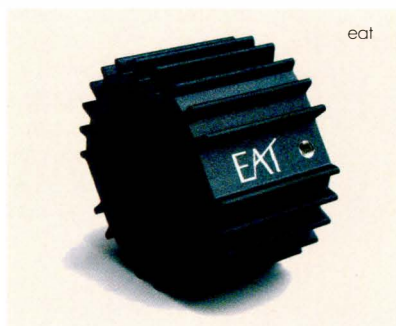


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# Gamut DI 150

*Gamut has integrated two of its finest products in one hefty box*

PRICE £5,650 CONTACT Audio Reference, Unit 8 Enterprise Park, Slyfield Industrial Estate, Guildford, Surrey GU1 1RB ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

There is something afoot in the world of high-end amplification... some unseen force is creating the need for serious, very serious, single-box amplifiers. It started with the likes of Krell and Mark Levinson a while back, but in the last couple of years the number of high-end brands joining the throng has increased exponentially. Gamut is unusual in offering one of the most ambitious integrated amplifiers yet (see expensive) in its DI 150. At least, that was the case until the launch of the Krell FBI (see p36).

The reason why this Gamut amplifier got so gnarly is that instead of building an integrated from the ground up, Gamut decided to combine its D3 preamplifier with a D200 MkIII power amplifier – a pairing that will set you back rather more than this 'little' unit. So, in fact you get high value for your outlay, because you're not paying for an extra lump of casework. This is something that contributes significantly to the cost of any audio component.

**“This is a high-resolution amp; you only have to play something familiar to hear as much.”**

The DI 150 isn't exactly the same as the pre/power pairing it's based on. There is a 10 per cent reduction in power to 180 watts per channel, for instance. But the DI 150 still doubles output into a four-ohm load, which is pretty rare among integrations at any price. It also still uses the single pair of MOSFET output devices per channel that seems to be the key to the Gamut sound. The theory is that output transistors of the same type rarely have precisely the same characteristics so when you parallel couple devices you also introduce differences in the way each channel works.

With its mirrored front panel and volume indication by blue LED, this is a funky looking amp. The illuminated display names are fixed and not replicated on the remote, but can be extinguished for a cleaner, calmer

look. Input selection extends to four single-ended and two balanced XLR sources, with one pair of RCA phono sockets being designed for use with a home cinema system. As these deliver unity gain to the outputs, they should be used with caution.

## SOUND QUALITY

We got a particularly gratifying result when pairing the DI 150 with B&W 802Ds, this despite the fact that Gamut's notion of a midrange drive unit (see p61 for a review of Gamut's L5 loudspeaker) is at odds with B&W's ethos. Nonetheless, the sound of this combination is truly luxurious, with a lustrous shine that just oozes quality but isn't short on grit and grunt when the material demands it. There is a snap to the sound that makes it totally engaging with everything from Tom Waits to Richard Thompson, the latter providing a truly holographic soundstage that transports you to the recording studio, only without the cab fare!

This is a high-resolution amplifier; you only have to play something familiar to hear as much. It seems positively insightful with a good slab of vinyl, digging out the subtleties of level and tone right down to the quietest sounds. The 802Ds always do a good job in the bass if the amp is up to it – and this hefty integrated is clearly more than ready for the task. The way bass lines lock down the groove on everything from heavy dub to jazz rock is almost mesmeric in its juiciness.

This Gamut DI 150 is a truly gorgeous amplifier. Its ergonomics may not be traditional, but they can be forgiven because of the sound quality you get from such an attractive bit of casework. It costs a lot for an integrated, but when you realise that it's essentially a dual-mono preamp with comprehensive musical ability, coupled with a 180-watt power amp that is of equally stunning transparency to timing, imaging, timbre and all-round detail, it doesn't seem so expensive after all. In fact, it begins to look like a pretty impressive deal and one that's very hard to better if you're looking for a top-notch one-box amp. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 275 (January 2006) for our original review of this product*



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TAPES 1 & 2

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DUAL MONO

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER PMA-CSA1

# Denon DCD-SA1 and PMA-SA1

Denon marks its return to high-end hi-fi with an ambitious stereo SACD player and integrated amp

PRICE £10,500 (DCD-SA1 £5,000; PMA-SA1 £5,500) CONTACT Denon UK, Moorbridge House, Padbury Oaks, 579 Bath Road, Longford, Middlesex UB7 0EH ☎ 01234 741200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

The player and amp tested here are the flagship components of a new family within the Denon range, one that is stretching the coverage of the brand back into full-on audiophile territory. In the red corner is the DVD-SA1, a stereo-only SACD player that will, of course, support CDs too, weighing in at a meaty 22kg. In the blue corner, for your delectation and delight, is the matching PMA-SA1 amplifier – stereo, of course, and tipping the scales at a mighty 30kg.

Both Denon components lay great stress on minimising microphony and mutual interference between different parts of the circuit. The battleship build of both products extends to a multilayer anti-resonance base construction, while the main power supply transformers and reservoir capacitors are encased in sandcast housings.

The SACD player is the more straightforward of the two. That said, at least it comes with a remote control, unlike the amplifier. The stereo-only player features single-ended and balanced-mode analogue outputs, and the usual optical and coaxial digital outputs – CD only, of course, and defeatable in common with the display. Digital inputs (coaxial and optical) can be used with external sources, the player then operating as a D-to-A converter.

SACD Text is part of the spec, but unaccountably this does not apply to CD Text, one of a number of minor inconsistencies (let's not forget about the amplifier's lack of remote control). The player goes to elaborate extremes to minimise jitter-related problems and employs Denon's proprietary 'Advanced AL24' waveform-smoothing technology.

The PMA-SA1 amplifier delivers 50 watts per channel into eight ohms, and doubles its load perfectly to 100 watts per channel into four ohms, always a sure sign of quality. The amplifier is internally divided into six 'cells', each enclosed in 1.6mm copper plated screens, and the internal heatsinks are designed to suppress resonances. The amp is configured in balanced mode internally, single-ended inputs being fed through an inverter. The output stage uses Ultra High Current UHC-MOS output devices, which are said to have a valve-like signature, and a relatively simple circuit architecture, but better than transistor-class high-current, low-impedance output.

Both player and amp are extremely heavy and finished with the precision and quality of a fine Swiss watch (and we don't mean Swatch). If any hi-fi components can be said to embody the worthiness of fine engineering,

these are they. But despite the considerable technology employed, it's hard to escape the fact that both units look superficially like refugees from the 1970s. There is no real attempt at styling, apart from the 'Sony wave' built into the thick alloy front panel. Indeed, the amplifier is notable for including features that are currently deeply unfashionable in audiophile territory, such as separate analogue, rotary-pot volume and balance controls, alongside that aforementioned lack of remote control – highly unusual in this day and age.

**“It majors on the subtleties of musical expression: delicately shaded tonality, fine detail, imaging and articulation.”**

The retro feel extends to the inside as well as the exterior, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. The amplifier's audio circuitry is a microprocessor-free zone, despite including comprehensive protection circuitry.

The amp has six inputs at line level, two of which are tape circuits. There's an MM-only phono input (that can be turned off from the front panel) and a balanced mode (XLR) line input, enabled by a front panel switch that bypasses the main input selector. The only outputs – other than the tape feeds – are two pairs of speaker terminals, which carry a phase inverted output on the negative terminals, so make sure not to use any accessory boxes (such as headphone adaptors) which 'common' the two earths together.

## SOUND QUALITY

The DCD-SA1 is an excellent CD player, as you're entitled to expect at the price. But it's an even better SACD player, one capable of showing unequivocally why this is a better format. With both disc types, the Denon has an unusual quality of refinement and poise, but its performance palpably blossoms with SACD. The sound is more expressive and colourful, and it is also more progressive – succeeding notes blend into each other with a fluidity reminiscent of a real musical performance, and without loss of detail.

The player offers discipline and refinement, extracting fine detail from recordings and layering it realistically. Orchestral timbre is light and agile from CD, but the player offers the kind of subtle differentiation that allows instruments often lost in the mix – second violins, violas, woodwind, for example – to

shine through. Even more impressive is the way that vocal inflection and timbre is handled. Try, for example, the George Szell/Berlin RSO/Elisabeth Schwarzkopf recording of Strauss' *Four Last Songs* – by no means a recent or even a technically good recording by current standards, but one which reproduces with a heart-stopping quality and passion, and a surprising freshness. SACD in this context is the icing on the cake, producing at its best a bigger, bolder and more architectural quality, with even greater refinement.

One way of describing the sound of the PMA-SA1 is to say that it is closer to being a small amplifier writ large than a compact version of a traditional exotic amplifier. It majors more on the subtleties of musical expression: delicately shaded tonality, fine detail, imaging and articulation. It's powerful, more powerful than you are entitled to expect from an amplifier rated at only 50 watts per channel, and it will work with surprisingly tough speakers.

The Denon is an amplifier of exquisite refinement and detail. It has a firm grip on musical structures, and it retains the individual threads in complex recordings. But most of all, it is transparent. Although the output devices may have some of the technical attributes of thermionic valve stages, the amplifier shows no signs of it on audition.

The DCD-SA1 and PMA-SA1 don't really fit into any of the usual stereotypes. This is unmistakably a combination that was meant to appeal principally to the Japanese home market, and proof that the Japanese have a real taste for audiophilia. Don't forget that Denon is primarily a mainstream, commercial outfit. Nevertheless, the two components tested here reveal the extent of Denon's commitment to purist high-fidelity sound reproduction. These flagship components will work in a broad raft of high-end systems with moderate power demands. They are perfect for systems where something a little more exacting than the usual soft-core valve type sound is required – neutrality, three-dimensional imaging, refinement and fine detail are what this duo is all about. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

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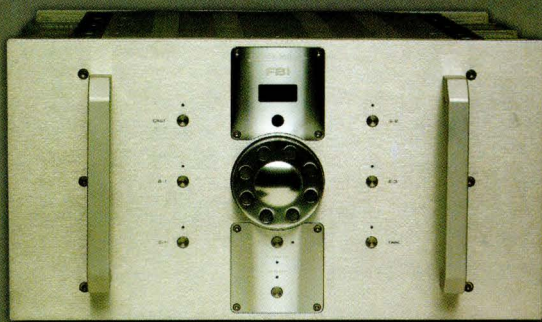
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# Bryston BP26 DA

*Bryston proves it knows how to turn a good preamp into a great one*

PRICE £3,600 CONTACT PMC, 43-45 Crawley Green Road, Luton LU2 0AA ☎ 0870 4441044 🌐 www.bryston.ca

Earlier in the year, we took delivery of Canadian amp powerbroker Bryston's latest example of its range-topping preamplifier alongside its 2B SST power amp. The BP26 preamp replaced the long-running BP25 and added to it in all respects in the process. So impressive are the results of this comprehensive revision that we decided to revisit this solidly built preamp on its own for *The Collection*.

The BP26 DA version has full digital input capability and is partnered by an external power supply in full-width casework for maximum separation of signal and power.

BP26 is available in a variety of guises. The base model, including the big MPS-2 power supply, costs £2,600. Adding a phono stage (the BP26 P) adds £450 for moving magnet or £900 for MM and MC (this is known as the BP26 MC), while the DAC board adds a grand to the base price. This makes it a highly flexible if not inexpensive preamp, but – as the 20 year guarantee would suggest – build quality is exemplary. Many of the improvements that the BP26 boasts over its predecessor are brought about by the MPS-2 high-current power supply, which has four outputs for use with other Bryston components and can be purchased separately to upgrade a BP25 preamp. The MPS-2 costs £1,000 in its own right, but this brings the previous BP25 preamp considerably closer to the performance of the latest BP26.

An analogue BP26 offers seven line-level inputs, two balanced and five single-ended pairs, but adding the DAC or phono options takes up one of these pairs – you cannot specify a BP26 with both a phono stage and a DAC onboard. If you want both, the separate BP1.5 phono stage also runs off the MPS-2 power supply (the MPS-2 can handle up to four products). The onboard DAC has two S/PDIF coaxial inputs and will accept sampling/bit rates up to 108kHz/24-bit, which in practice means that you can plug in anything from a DAB tuner to a DVD-Audio player.

There's even a headphone jack on the preamp – a rare thing today. The preamp is available in black or silver finish, both of which live up to the exemplary build quality of the preamp, and Bryston products in general. The remote follows suit: it's a classic Bryston brick of CNC honed aluminium that offers volume, mute and absolute phase controls.

## SOUND QUALITY

That the BP26/MPS-2 combination represents a significant upgrade over its BP25 predecessor is clear from the off. It delivers cleaner high frequencies and a greater sense of openness, which in practical terms means a more relaxed and enjoyable sound.

This is not a subtle change. The BP25 was a good, solid and consistent preamp, but it had an electronic edge which has now been removed from the sound, leaving it far more natural and organic. Timing has likewise improved to the extent that you can follow the nuances of playing with greater ease and enjoy the ebb and flow of the music in all its subtlety. Even though it can be upgraded thanks to the MPS-2, the BP26 is clearly a worthwhile upgrade in performance in all respects.

Imaging is particularly good, the sense of scale varying quite dramatically from one recording to the next with some doing a remarkable job of breaking the boundaries of speaker placement. There is a slight restraint in terms of image depth but none when it comes to height and width. Dynamics are likewise available in full effect, with all the energy and vitality that the music deserves.

**“The resulting sound is more relaxed and better resolved, with a greater sense of space.”**

Using the onboard digital to analogue convertor does remarkable things to even a good mid-priced CD player. It is certainly more impressive than the very similar one fitted to Bryston's B100 integrated amplifier... and that was already pushing the performance envelope. The way the BP26 DA's DAC drops the noise floor is quite uncanny, the resulting sound being more relaxed and better resolved, with a greater sense of acoustic space and clearer low-level detail. There are low frequency tunes on our oft-used Jaga Jazzists album that had not previously been apparent, even with active speakers.

The BP26's transparency is easily among the best at this price and without the DAC onboard it becomes all the more competitive. But unless you own a damn fine CD player, one that costs in the region of two grand or more, this option is well worth the asking price. If you have a DAB tuner or digibox with a digital output, the advantage is doubled. The best way to find out is to take your player along to a demonstration – if you don't hear a big improvement, we'll eat our collective hats. But even if you decide your digital player doesn't need a good DAC-ing, the standard BP26 preamplifier is a wonder in its own right. **HFC**

*Jason Kennedy*

*See HFC 278 (April 2006) for our original review of this product*

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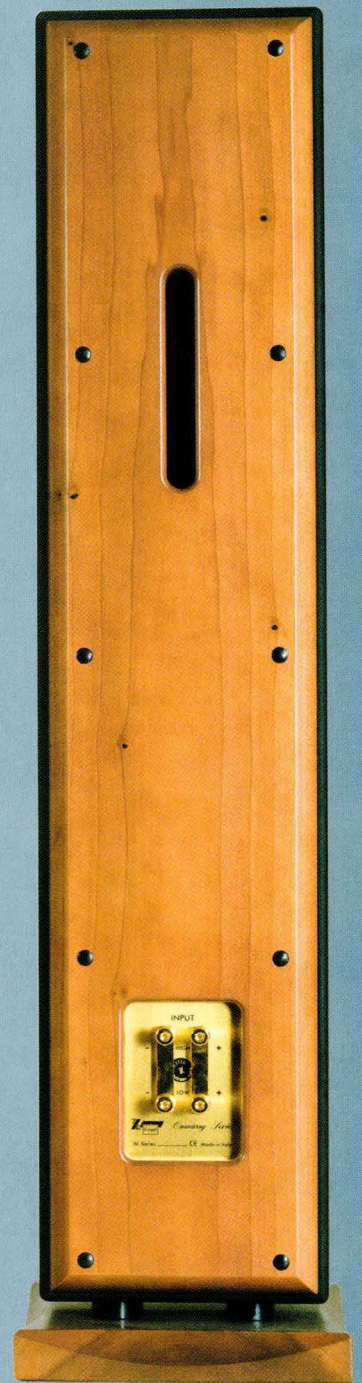
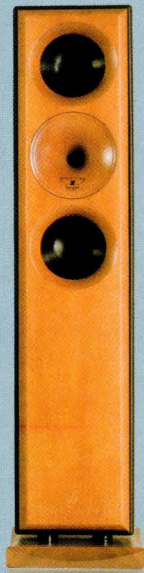
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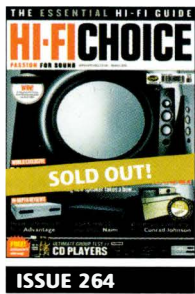
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See page 127 for more details...

# No comparison No compromise



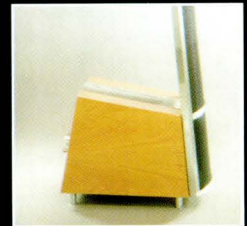
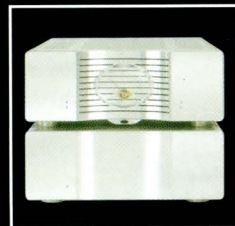
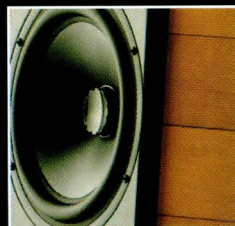
## Make no mistake!

Today we have access to music quite literally everywhere, its influence seems to be all pervading. Music excites us, it relaxes us, we can enjoy it live, we buy recording and 'downloads' by the million. Music underpins every conceivable aspect of our lives. Music is our second language and 'without it life would be a mistake' Yes, philosophical we know - but true.

At KJ West One we are all exposed and privileged to indulge our senses in the absolute finest audio equipment available today. From time to time we are introduced to certain new products whose performance pushes back the boundaries to provide new higher levels of sound reproduction, which exceeds all our expectations. Recently we've seen the release of several new ground breaking products. The most significant ones are **'previewed'** for you here.

Once again we invite you to share the experience with us, so call in soon or better still make an appointment for a personal demonstration at your convenience.

**Make no mistake - Visit KJ West One**



# Preview - take five

## **audio research** 1. Audio Research Reference 7 CD player... *HIGH DEFINITION* "a record player for the digital age"

This press comment aptly sums up our thoughts on this wonderful CD player. For years now we have witnessed steady progress being made in improving digital recording techniques, we have also enjoyed the benefits achieved technologically in the replay. Sadly, however, there has still existed a sense that fundamentally the CD format would never be able to replace the analogue masters of old. Audio Research are rightly proud to award the CD 7 their 9th official 'reference' product, this being given for the very 1st time to a source component. The Ref. 7 is without doubt an authority in reproducing 'High Definition' in a unique & distinctly analogue way.



## **KRELL** 2. Krell Evolution 505 SACD/CD player.... "a synthesis of almost impossible contradictions.."

This is an extract from a Message written by Dan D'Agostino, the founder of Krell. It refers to the latest range of electronics called the Evolution Series. These represent the culmination of 26 years of dedication & are considered to be the best sounding products ever built. The eagerly awaited 505 player claims to be the 1st player to preserve the 'perfect' analogue of any original recording. This inspired achievement in design ensures that the finest musical subtleties and textural shading remain undisturbed. This player will astound us all 'that's for sure' and there is no contradiction there!



## **Sonus faber** 3. Sonus Faber Guarneri Memento... "Magnifico"

1993 heralded the revolutionary debut of a whole generation of Sonus Faber loudspeakers. The original Guarneri was defined by the audio critics as "a musical instrument". Subsequently the very 1st hand-crafted pair were later chosen by the museum of Cremona to voice the famous 'Sala dei Violini'. After 13 extremely successful years of production came the 'transition'. The renewal matured with the rediscovering of the core values of the Sonus Faber sound... enter the Guarneri Memento, the ultimate tribute to "del Gesu" - truly magnifico!



## **MARTIN LOGAN** 4. Martin Logan Summit "In search of the holy grail"

For over 50 years now, manufacturers have been trying to exploit fully the virtues of the electrostatic speaker principle. It started commercially with Quad, followed by many others, KLH, Dayton Wright, Beveridge, Acoustat, Stax, just to name a few. Martin Logan are now unequivocally the leaders in the field. The new technology applied to the Summit successfully overcomes and perfects the electrostatic virtues. With the breakthrough 'X-stat' electrostatic panel coupled to the 'powerforce' active base chamber the Summit really is able to elevate you to a new and thoroughly convincing level of musical satisfaction, all with effortless ease. Search no more, the Summit has it all!



## **WILSON AUDIO** 5. Wilson Audio Duette... "when size really matters"

Pioneering to the extreme, has been the commitment David Wilson has dedicated himself to. Building loudspeakers truly capable of transmitting the full force and intricate dynamics of live performances. The engineering team at Wilson Audio have always claimed that the 'size' is irrelevant in their approach to design. However, when given the challenge to create a speaker able to 'work acceptably' in so called compromising environments, they were forced to brainstorm the best way to the characteristic 'big' sound from a small enclosure. Ultimately the solution 'the Duette' stunned and shocked them all. When size really matters, this is the only one... Awesome achievement!



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## Bryston B100 SST

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This new amplifier from Bryston is only their second integrated amplifier in 32 years. Not only will this 100wpc Amplifier bring your speakers to life but your CD Player and any other digital sources as well with its stunning optional onboard D/A Converter (4 inputs).

Was it worth the wait? You bet! Don't just take our word for it - come and listen for yourself!



## NEW - KW250S SUPER ALL-IN-ONE

The new kW250S super all-in-one incorporates a pair of 250 watt monoblock amps, a tube hybrid preamp, phono stage mc/mm, 24-bit 192k upsampling CD player, 24-bit 192k upsampling FM and DAB tuner, digital input on the back panel and ipod input on the front panel. Whew!

## NEW - KW DM25 Transport & DAC

Here's the problem... In general people believe that more expensive a product is the better it must be. The kW DM25 system proves this not to be the case. This system delivers dramatically more of that per pound than any other system available.

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## Super Scoutmaster Signature

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A direct development of both the state of the art VPI TNT HR-X and the Scout entry level turntable.

The standard Scout uses an all acrylic platter, this one uses a composite platter manufactured from two slabs of acrylic, sandwiching a steel plate.

The bearing is the same design as used throughout the VPI range and is very much at the heart of the Scout's design. Harry Weisfeld has taken the drive system already used in the awesome HR-X.

Ships with a JMW - 9 Signature Tone Arm, critically acclaimed Worldwide and is wired with Nordost Valhalla Micro Monofilament tonearm cable.

The performance of the VPI Super Scoutmaster truly challenges the very best available.



## Hyperion 938

The beautiful piano high gloss finish and attention to detail can hardly fail to impress but it's the noise this speaker makes that will leave most speechless. Listen to other speakers and in most cases you'll find one aspect, one area that you wish you could change to create that perfect loudspeaker. Listen to the Hyperion 938 and the first thing you'll hear will tell you is just how balanced the 938 is. You really cannot fault its performance in any area.



When a product wins this many awards in a single year, you know to expect something pretty special!



£ D

## Marantz Premium Series

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In the long search for the perfect hi-fi, the Marantz philosophy is simple: to maintain the purity and integrity of the original signal at all times. This, they believe, is the only route to achieving true hi-fi sound quality.

Premium-series are built to respond to the steepest signal attacks with incredible speed and accuracy, so none of the subtleties in the ebb and flow of the music are lost. Neither is the scale of music or truly massive sound stage.

Marantz has one of the finest design teams in the world delivering premium quality at far less than premium prices!



## Acoustic Energy AE1

Return of the ultimate mini-monitor.

It's 18 years since the AE1 Reference first wowed reviewers and became the audio-industry benchmark for compact loudspeaker design. To celebrate the AE1 is back for 2005/6 in its completely original form. Designed from the outset as a semi-professional monitor, painstaking attention to detail in the design and construction of cabinets, crossovers and baffles ensure the new AE1 Classic reproduces complex, dynamic material as faithful as the award winning original.



We also have the incredible AE1 Mk III on demonstration as well !!

D

## EAR/Yoshino

Shadow Audio are very excited and pleased to represent EAR/Yoshino in Scotland.



All EAR amplifiers are truly original, including the custom transformers, metal work, printed circuit board. All the work of Tim de Paravicini.

Tim works by a simple premise: If he designs it, it must be a better design than anything else, or he will not manufacture it. His sole goal is taking audio to the furthest possible point of development. Current research is taking him further along this path than any single competitor.

We have the full-range of products on demonstration and the following will be arriving shortly:

**Master Disk Turntable.  
Primary Drive Loudspeaker.**

D

## Pass X.5 series power amplifiers

Select refinements from the balanced single-ended Class A circuits of the XA series amplifiers have been incorporated into several new X.5 series models, significantly improving their subjective performance while keeping the high power and reliability.

D

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The new and sensational Pass Labs X350.5 and equally sensational X1 two box pre-amp have just arrived at Shadow Audio.

The entire natural colour and dynamics; from the thunder of a Bosendorfer piano to the subtle whisperings of a Stradivarius are delivered with startling precision. The air, space and emotional content of the recording come to life. The actual air and physical presence of the performing artists are thus recreated with uncanny palpable realism.



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VERDICT

### JungSon JA-88D

"tune your system around this amplifier and you'll get startling results..."

"...you have here before one of the best budget audiophile buys in a long time. Power, pace, punch, clarity and insight - it has them all - and for just £899. Enough said."

David Price, Hi-Fi World, May 2006  
JungSon JA-88D Amplifier

### QinPu A8000 MK II

"So to the price; i would have thought between £2k and £3k to be about right, so at just £1295, then, this is one exceptional value amplifier, in material terms."

"The balance between a raw earthy sound and refinement is extremely well judged, and there can be few that could fail to warm to the Qinpu's emotional and powerful response."

Dominic Todd, Hi-Fi World, April 2006



VERDICT



### JAS Audio ORSA

The 2-way Orsa speaker (£1,399 pair) has a distinct twin cabinet design. This vertically vented speaker has venting ports between the upper and lower cabinets, which produces a 360 degree sound field that give rise to excellent 3-D soundstage.

Handcrafted with quality and details that are seldom found in speakers at any price. For instance, inside the cabinet, pure natural wool is used for efficient damping/tonal signature and top grade heavy gauge silver interconnecting wire is used for signal fidelity. The authentic wood veneer and 14 coats of piano lacquer finish simply gives a JAS speaker the elegant look to match its exquisite timbre.

Most of all, its price/performance ratio is without peer hence our no risk 30-day money back guarantee.

#### Quotes from recent press reviews include:

"In some ways it always feels more rewarding to review a product that punches above its weight and this is a special little speaker that sets a price/performance yardstick that is hard to beat."

Chris Thomas  
Hi-Fi+ Issue 42

"Impressive sophistication considering the £1,399 per pair asking price, but the build quality and finish are, well bananas."

David Vivian  
Hi-Fi Choice March 2006



### MiniMax Valve CD Player

"For what it costs, this player is no less than brilliant; it's a fantastic 'do-it-all' package that delivers swingeing body blows to all other machines here in the midband."

VERDICT

### IsoTek / Nordost Special Offers

On the following IsoTek/Nordost mains filtration systems:

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FREE delivery, FREE Iso8/IsoTek mains cable worth £49 and a 30-day money back guarantee\*.

### Nordost THOR

The Nordost Thor is an upgradeable solution to AC mains power distribution. By systematically improving the quality of the input and output power cords the performance of the unit increases dramatically. Upgrading through the range of Nordost cables, utilising Shiva, Vishnu and Valhalla, prioritising the input cable first will offer major performance enhancements. The THOR is a stunning achievement.



### Eastern Electric M520

"In action, it's a terrifically musical amp, painting a solid, authoritative sonic picture, finessed by a high level of detail."



WHAT HI-FI, March 2006  
Eastern Electric M520



Gii Minisub



Titan



Sigmus (NEW)



Nova

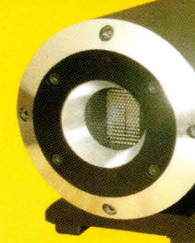
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Housed in a beautiful aluminium cylindrical shape cabinet, each speaker weighs less than 2lb. Using a very special twin-ribbon tweeter with 100kHz frequency response it dramatically improves soundstaging, clarity, layering, openness, airiness and resolution. Get ready to discover and restore what up until now has been missing from your music!



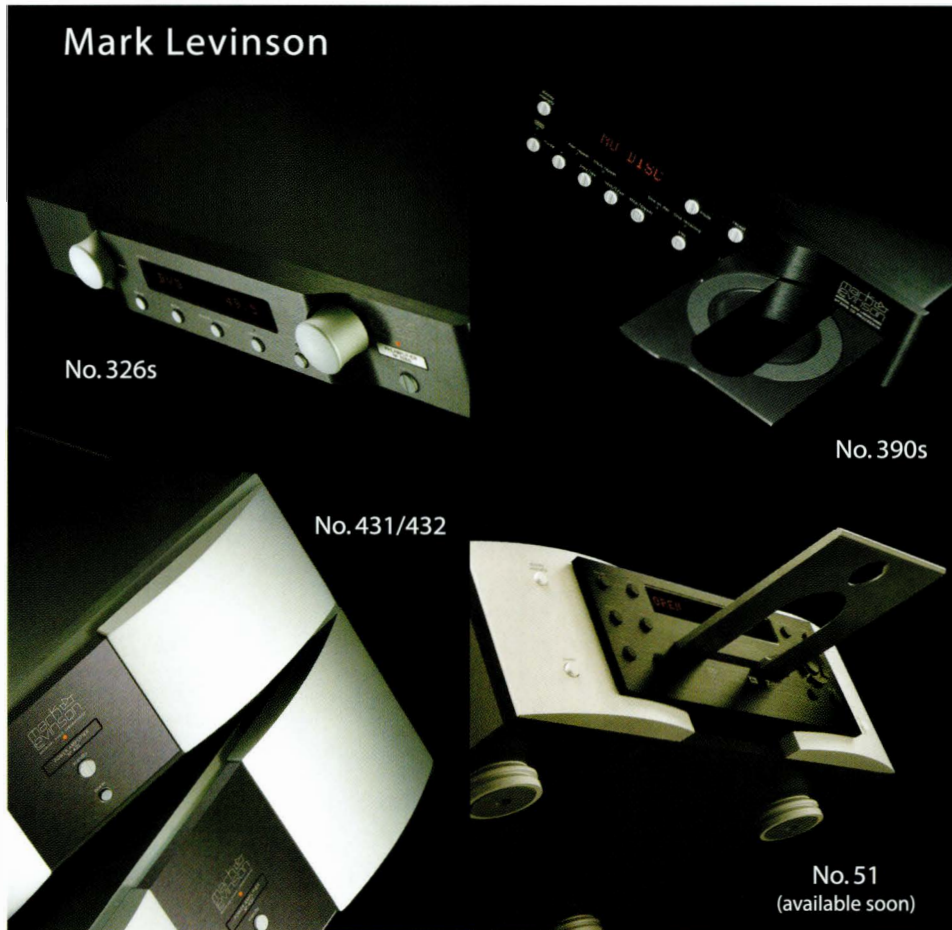
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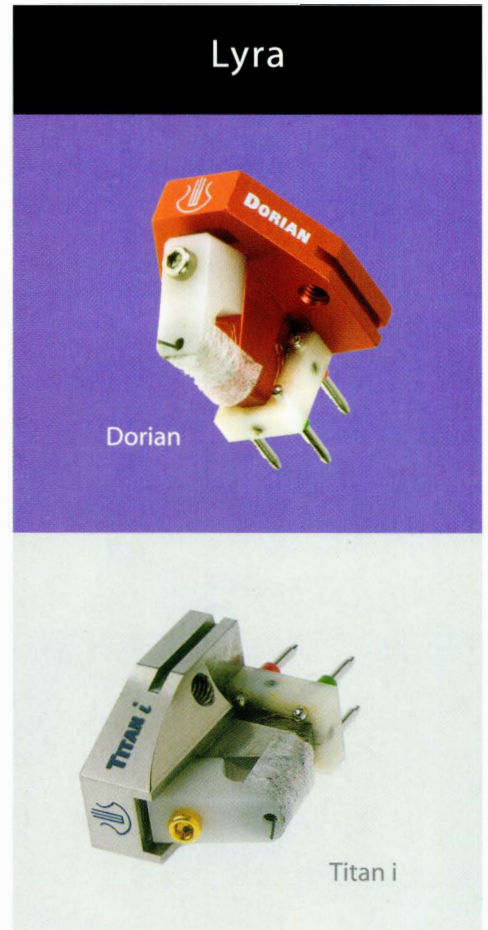
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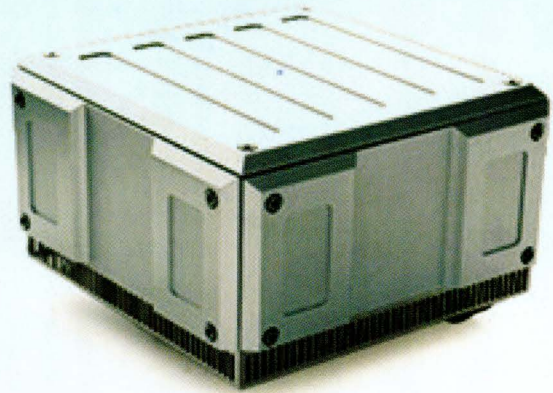
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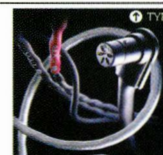
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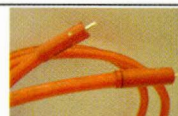
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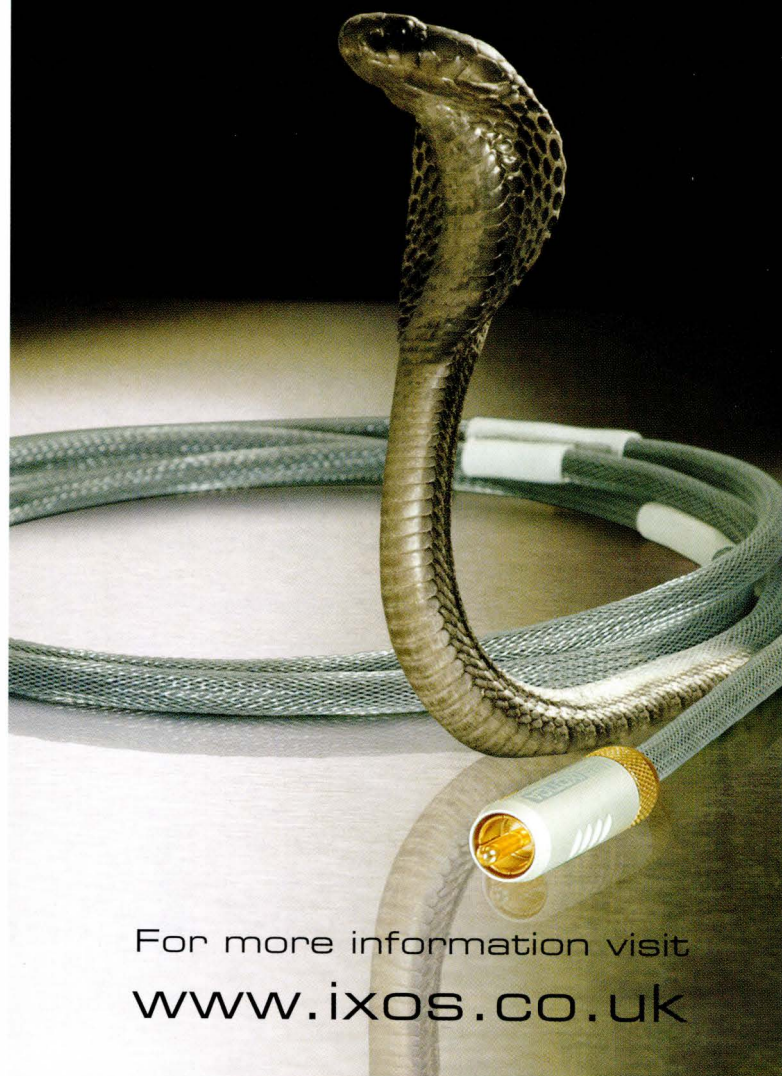
## IXOS IXOTICA

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"...an extremely transparent, almost 'glass clear' cable that scythes through the mix with tremendous alacrity...Overall, an absolutely super product that's ideal for those with smooth systems, and want to get to the heart of musical matters."

HI-FI WORLD  
IXOTICA IX1 REVIEW

MAY 2006



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# Listen Carefully

Calm and intelligent equipment demonstrations for lovers of all types of music

## Well, hello - and welcome to my world

I represent a handful of suppliers in my deliberately small specialist showroom in North London. Through choice I have no staff - and I probably never will.

This means that the ultimate size of my twin businesses (I own simply-STAX) is limited by the care I can offer my customers. If there's a danger that I'm spreading myself too thin, then I'll put the brake on expansion. I may even contract back until it becomes relaxed again. Fine. I'm happy with that possibility.

Every aspect of the demonstration & installation is taken care of by me. I am inescapably accountable for your total satisfaction. I wouldn't have it any other way - and neither would my customers

## I represent the following:

- **Ayre** - amplification and digital source
- **Brinkmann** - vinyl replay system
- **Cassiel** - power cords
- **Esoteric** - digital source
- **Grand Prix** - isolation
- **LAT** - XLR interconnect & power distribution
- **Mark Levinson** - amplification & digital source.
- **Lyra** - analogue.
- **Stereovox** - interconnects
- **Sumiko** - analogue
- **Thiel** - loudspeakers

## I don't have ...

Anything to do with plasmas, home cinemas, cable bandits, dynamics-crushing mains filters or anything else I'm not passionate about.

## At heart ...

I'm a systems man. This means that while I'm happy to suggest and demonstrate various items that should and probably will make an immediate and worthwhile improvement in your current set-up, my specialisation is getting components to work together - *as a properly integrated system*. The benefits are clear.

## Putting an end to costly and desperate upgrades

It's true that going the system route is a bigger initial investment in the short-term, but you save overall in the long-term by avoiding *unnecessary* upgrades.

## Trade-ins?

I'm happy to discuss this.

## System 1

**Ayre** CX-7e CD & AX-7e integrated. **Thiel** CS1.6 loudspeakers. **LAT** power distribution, XLR connections & speaker leads. **Cassiel** CAS4 power

cords. This is by far the most musically satisfying system I've heard up to £10k - yet it costs *far* less. Add the Brinkmann **Oasis** and you have a magnificent vinyl replay facility too.

## System 2

**Ayre** C-5xe digital multi-format. The **Ayre** K-1xe preamp & V-5xe power amp. The **Thiel** CS2.4 loudspeakers. **LAT** power distribution, XLR connections & speaker leads. **Cassiel** CAS4 power cords. And as an option, the incomparable Brinkmann **VRS**

It's very hard to get more musically satisfying than this. Hard, but not impossible - *at a price*. That's system 3.

## System 3

No words of mine can do this justice. Just come and listen. Then you'll understand.

## Substitutions

Depending on taste and budget, Esoteric digital can be substituted for Ayre. Mark Levinson digital & amplification can be substituted for either Ayre or Esoteric.

## THE BRINKMANN VRS (Vinyl replay system)

Quite simply the most musically satisfying vinyl system I have ever heard anywhere at any price.

Probably because I have the world's first Brinkmann 10.5 tone arm which is both electrically balanced and with XLR outputs. The reduction in background noise and increase in dynamics over the standard 10.5 is mouth-watering. Of course, bearing in mind that few preamps have XLR-equipped phono stages, you'll need a state-of-the-art phono stage. That's the Ayre P-5xe. Incidentally, the 10.5 is in effect a Breuer 8 Dynamic, but 10.5" in length. Naturally, it sits on the magnificent LaGrange turntable.

For Listen Carefully, Mr. Brinkmann personally sets up the 10.5, his EMT Titanium cartridge and LaGrange and fine tunes it through his Lumen White loudspeakers. The arm with the cartridge is packed in one heavy duty wooden case while the base and platter sit in another. It arrives in the U.K. personally tuned by the master. You're up and running in 7 minutes. Nothing is left to chance. Literally nothing.

The price is not for the squeemish - but it puts an end to upgrading your front end - and it sounds consistently wonderful, day after day, year after year. No gurus required.

There are no intelligent substitutions here for Brinkmann nor Thiel. Currently they stand head and shoulders above *anything* else in their price band!

## Demonstrations in London

You'll be surprised I think by the relaxed atmosphere here. It's a marked contrast to traditional demonstrations in conventional (dull, unimaginative, sales-hungry?) dealers.

That's because I offer just one demonstration slot in the morning, one in the afternoon and occasionally one in the evening. No fuss, no hurry, no interruptions, no other visitors, no parking wardens - and no coercion.

I've been known to conduct a demonstration on a Sunday too! Spend time with me and I guarantee

you'll benefit from my years of experience and you will receive *my undivided attention*.

## Home demonstrations

I offer these in London (within the M25), Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire too.

## Human contact ...

If you feel you'd like a bit of human interaction, then feel free to pick up the phone right now. You can get me, if I'm not in a demonstration or installation by phoning me on 0208 447 8485. I'm happy to discuss anything re audio with you. I might not have the answer, but I assure you that your opinion - even if I don't agree with it - is important to me. Really!

## But what about the music?

No problem. Until May 30th - if you buy any new equipment from me you get a unique personal ID number that gives you 20% (yes, twenty percent) off all new recordings from Vivante mail order.

<http://www.vivante.co.uk/>

## The UK Mark Levinson owners club:

It's free to join - if you are a Mark Levinson owner. Terrific, relevant and interesting benefits. To much to list here. Just phone 0208 447 8485.

## An unsolicited customer comment:

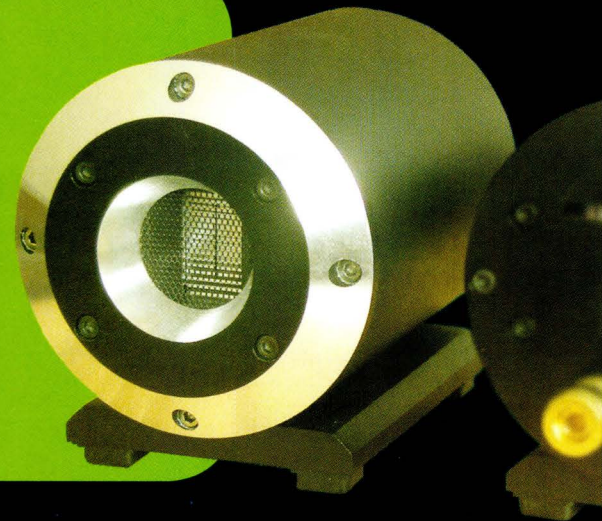
*"The system I heard, Brinkmann LaGrange + their arm, EMT, Ayre amps, all balanced with approp cables into Lumen White Silver Flame speakers was (this is painful), head and shoulders above my Roksan/Naim/Sonus system at around similar or less cost. I'm giving serious thought to having a total clear out and buying that very system lock stock."*

Interested? Fine. I offer you a calm and intelligent demonstration of magnificent audio equipment for of all types of music. Prepare to be amazed.

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

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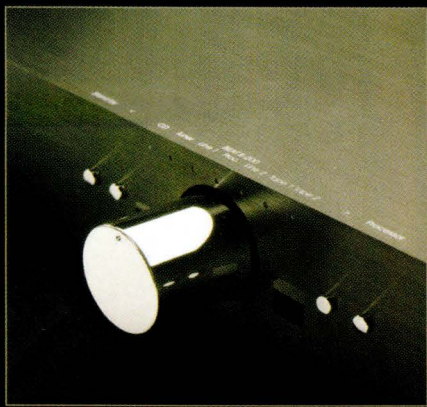


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Acoustic Arts has moved to a residential demonstration facility. Now you can park, relax and enjoy your demonstration.

You will now need to book demonstrations in advance. Please phone for further information.

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**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
CYRUS CDA

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
BEST CD PLAYER  
CYRUS CDA



## Primare

Primare has built a worldwide reputation for producing innovative audio and video products that challenge convention. With a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design, class-leading build quality, and proprietary state-of-the-art technological advance, they build into elegant, reliable, easy-to-use systems that promise years of high quality performance.

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
BEST CD PLAYER  
PRIMARE CD31

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
STEREO AMPLIFIER  
PRIMARE L31



## Project

Project, one of the world's leading suppliers of turntables, range includes the Award-winning Debut, Xpression II, Perspective and RPM Series.

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005**  
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BEST TURNTABLE UNDER £1000  
PROJECT DEBUT II

**"The Debut is a superb value-for-money package."**

## Monitor Audio

### NEW GOLD SIGNATURE

Thirty years of experience at raising the bar for the world's most demanding consumers, has inspired Monitor Audio to introduce Gold Signature, a new flagship range that reaches unprecedented standards of design, innovation, performance, technical excellence, build quality and value in its class.



**GOLD SIGNATURE RANGE** The new six model line-up comprises a stand-mounting speaker, the **GS10**; two floor standing speakers, the **GS20** and **GS60**; a dual-mode surround speaker, the **GS-FX**; a dedicated centre-channel speaker, the **GS-LCR**; and a 1000W (RMS) active subwoofer, the **GSW-12**.

## B&W CM1

Behind its exterior of real wood veneer and familiar two-way arrangement of tweeter and bass/midrange lie innovations, engineering and a sound that are far from conventional.



- Kevlar® Drive Unit
- Tube Loaded Aluminium Tweeter
- Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy

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## Yamaha CRX-M170

- Micro System
- DAB/FM/AM Tuner and CD Player
- Complete with Speakers



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**iQ5 SPEAKERS**

- Uni-Q technology
- Finish options
- Floorstanding
- What Hi-Fi award-winner

**"The iQ5s are little stars, providing stunning scale and authority from discreetly sized towers... The iQ5s are fully deserving Products of the Year."**



## New Rotel 06 SERIES

Rotel's New 06 Series will give you years of enjoyment and offers excellent value for money. This range of separates creates a sound that, the more you hear it, the better it gets.

- Integrated, Pre and Power Amplifiers
- CD Player and DAB Tuner
- Silver or Black Finish



## Arcam Solo

*For great sounding music*

- Amazing sound from an integrated system
- With exceptional quality CD, FM and DAB digital radio
- Integrated iPod connection - hear how good your iPod can sound
- From Arcam, a great British company



## New Marantz

Marantz brings new levels of sound quality to mid-price separates with the introduction of the **SA7001** SA-CD player and **PM7001** integrated amplifier. Great with CDs, they have the added benefit of SACD playback for even better sound quality.



# MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

MAKE THE INFORMED CHOICE TO ENHANCE YOUR LISTENING PLEASURE

## Denon **New** AV Receiver

Denon has established an enviable reputation for the performance of both its hi-fi and home cinema products, winning numerous awards and accolades over the years. Its stylish systems have succeeded in becoming the benchmark by which all other are judged.



Denon's range includes the award-winning DVD-3910 DVD player and the New AVR-2807 AV receiver.



**SMART LIFE S-301 AV SYSTEM**

"For many people this could be the future of home cinema."

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2005

## Arcam

Arcam offers the movie and music lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions.



## New DiVA

- The new **DV137** universal player from Arcam is their first to feature SACD as well as DVD-Video and audio playback.
- The **AVR350** takes the traditional Arcam virtue of great sound and adds HDMI switching, important for anyone thinking of the move to an HDTV surround system.



## KEF KHT2005.2 SPEAKER PACKAGE

- 5.1 Speaker Package
  - Uni-Q Technology
  - **What Hi-Fi Award-Winner**
- "An exciting listen; stylish and compact."



## New REL R SERIES

The R-Series is designed to augment the performance of "full range" speaker systems and to provide linear response down to below 20Hz.

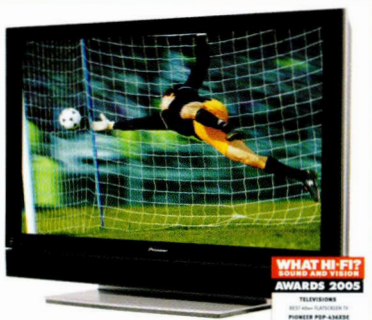
- R-205, R-305 and R-505
- Class D Amplification
- Piano Black Lacquer Finish



## Pioneer PLASMA TVS

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- **What Hi-Fi Award-Winner**

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"Brilliant - marks a big step forwards for budget projectors."

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How much difference can cables make to your system? With QED's range of audio and video cables the answer is probably much more than you think.



**See and Hear the difference**





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## Who are Sevenoaks?

Established as Sevenoaks Hi-Fi in 1972, we have grown steadily into one of the leading independent home entertainment specialists in the UK

We have 49 stores and are specialists in:-

- Hi-Fi
- Home Cinema
- Custom Design and Installation

## Exceptional Product Range

We have one of the most comprehensive ranges of the best products from leading brands.

To find out more:-

- Call in to one of our stores
- Call us on 0800 587 9909
- Log on to [www.ssav.com](http://www.ssav.com)

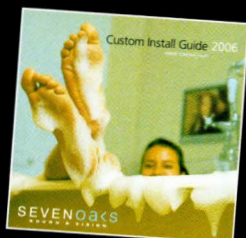
## Custom Design and Install

Our custom design and install service ensures that you achieve the best results effortlessly.

- We discuss your vision for your Home Cinema or Multi-Room system
- We visit your home to review the best options
- Agree a system specification and cost
- We manage the Installation
- You have years of enjoyment

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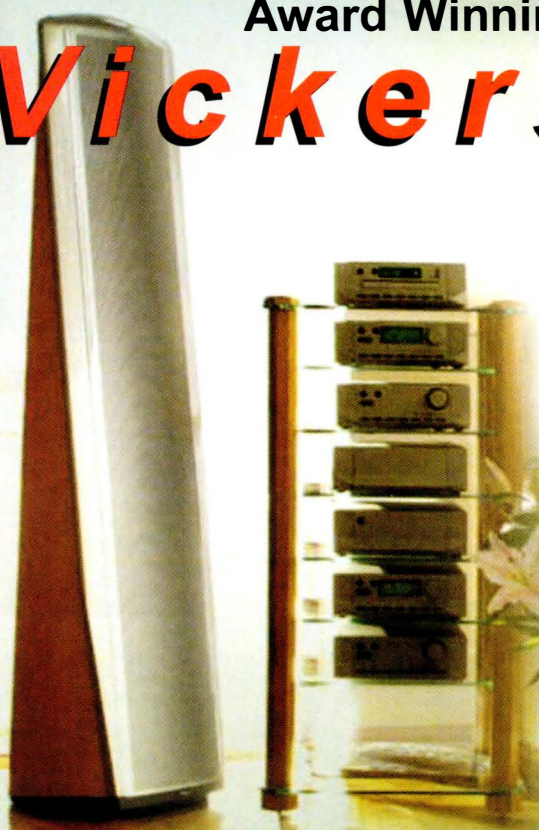
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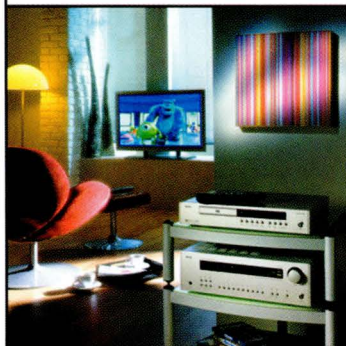
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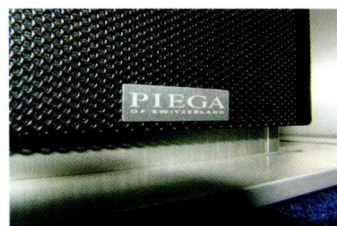
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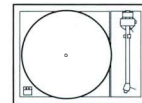
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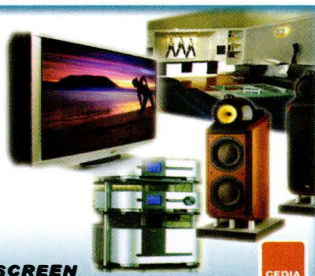
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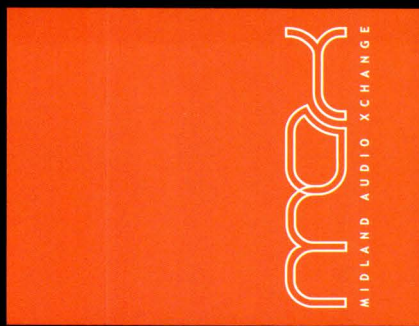
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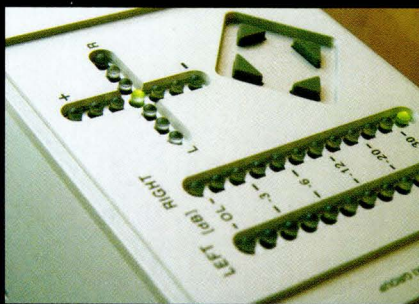
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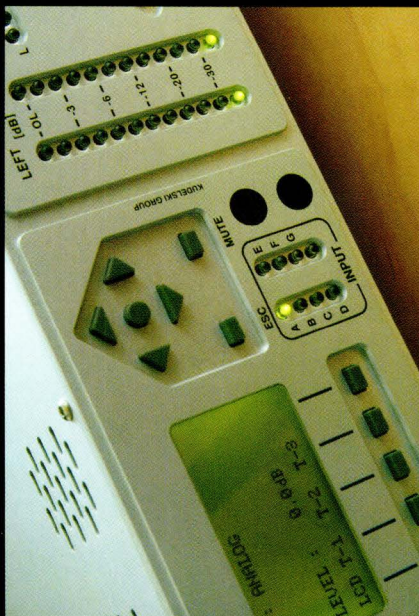
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Prices (13 issues): UK £35.49 (or £8.87 quarterly  
Direct Debit), Europe £49.23, rest of the world £69.31

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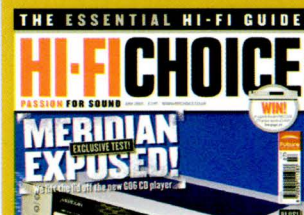
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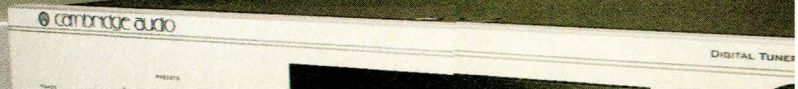


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# A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT

## #24 TANNOY

Perhaps one of the best known loudspeaker manufacturers in the world, Tannoy is revered by audiophiles the world over for its dual-concentric drive units. By placing the tweeter within the throat of the woofer and piggybacking the magnets, Tannoy has delivered speakers with exceptional imaging and integration qualities.

It's not the famous 'Gold' series that we're going to look at here, but two models that are rather more affordable. Back in 1989, Tannoy was on a bit of a roll with its Mercury range. Yet, as competition hotted up from the likes of Mission, it was clear Tannoy needed something new. This came in the form of the company's first 'affordable' dual-concentric range. The DC range encompassed three models, with perhaps the best all-rounder being the

8579 7755) told us that cabinet condition is critical, as this part is no longer available. Sadly, the woofer is no longer current either, although a tweeter unit can be had for a pricey £60. With a sensitivity of 93dB, they suit valve and Class A amps especially well and, although a little sharp in the treble, the DC2000s sound remarkably spacious. Bass isn't as deep as you might expect, but they always sound involving and upbeat. Not surprisingly, many owners are keen to hold onto their DC2000s, so there aren't that many on the second-hand market. Get lucky though and you should be able to pick up a pair for between £60 and £100.

Of a similar theme, but rather more upmarket are the D700s. Launched a few years later and costing around £2,000, these hefty floorstanders use twin 250mm cones and a



Above: Tannoy's DC2000 loudspeaker

**"This is another Tannoy speaker with a cult following and it's hard to find a bargain."**

DC2000. Still something of an icon today, this £300 floorstander not only predated the compact floorstander boom, but also showed that a modestly-priced floorstander could be solidly built.

Using thick MDF cabinets, the DC2000s not only benefit sonically from the rigidity, but also tend to last well. Second-hand, you're far more likely to find a pair in good condition than many rivaling speakers of the same period. Nevertheless, spares supplier Lockwood (020

real wood veneered cabinet with tapered sides. Like the DC2000s, they offer exceptionally high sensitivity and so work well with low-powered amps. Also like the DC2000, they're great fun to listen to. This time, however, there are no concerns over bass response – the D700s have plenty, and it's well controlled. As the D700s were only recently discontinued, parts aren't an issue. An expensive speaker usually means expensive parts, and the D700 is no exception. A bass

re-cone can cost around £100, while half that figure again is needed for the high frequency unit. That said, although these speakers have often been worked exceptionally hard they, like the DC2000s, are very hard-wearing. For any drive unit to have blown, it's more likely to have been an amp fault than anything else. This is another Tannoy speaker with a cult following and you'd be hard pushed to find a used bargain. But, for between £800-£1,200 you should be able to pick up an example of these fine speakers in excellent condition.

Two great floorstanders then at opposite ends of the price spectrum, but both with one purpose – listener involvement. Both make a great second-hand buy too. **HFC**

*Dominic Todd  
Next month: Thorens*

## DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 24 Enclosure Subtleties (part 5)

An asymmetric enclosure for a loudspeaker avoids the parallel sides that create specific and tightly-focused internal standing waves. These are a major cause of 'boxy' coloration.

The asymmetry doesn't need to be great. However, cutting at anything other than a right angle does require precision and is very difficult to achieve without costly machinery.

There's an alternative strategy better suited to DIY construction that can achieve similar aims. The crucial point is that it's the inside, not the outside, that benefits from some irregularity. Having built a rectangular box, it's not too hard to modify its inside surfaces to

make them irregular, and it doesn't matter a jot if you're clumsy at getting a good finish here.

A couple of shallow wooden wedges glued to the inside of one of the side panels and the rear panel is maybe the most obvious solution. If making wooden wedges sounds too tricky, other materials or techniques can be used. Though I haven't tried it, expanded polystyrene would seem to be one likely candidate, or a wedge effect could be built up by gluing together pieces of thin hardboard, each slightly smaller than the one before.

Another useful technique for distributing the internal standing waves as well as stiffening the enclosure is to use a brace that divides the



enclosure horizontally, but which is set at an angle to the top and base. Such a brace must be perforated by a series of holes, so as not to prevent airflow within the enclosure. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

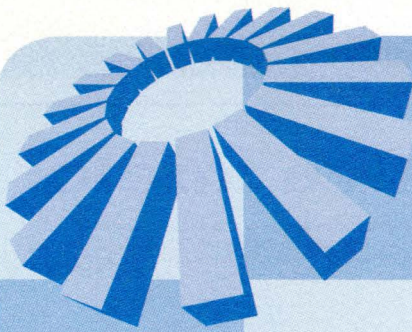
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**NEXT MONTH:** More on Enclosure Subtleties



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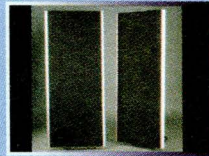
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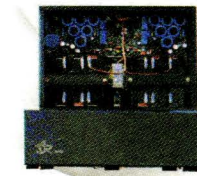


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## manger audio speakers

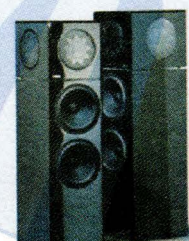
**swing :** The idea of developing a loudspeaker exclusively tailored to the Manger sound transducer has fascinated us for a long time. A design that would successfully celebrate this broadband transducer's longstanding reputation for excellence was both challenging and overwhelming, to say the least.

Throughout development our design engineers were often reminded of their self-imposed challenge to create an architectural structure that would reflect the innermost qualities of the Manger transducer - an irresistibly simple form, yet uncannily musical in performance.



**109 zerobox :** The Zerobox 109 is a precise monitoring system for recording studios, broadcasting, home recording - small cabinet dimensions for an excellent integration in living areas with little space.

**107 zerobox :** The Zerobox 107 is a passive sound transducer system with extended woofer expansion. The acoustical quality of the MANGER Sound Transducer is enlarged through two efficient 8" woofers from Vifa.



**103 zerobox :** Our sound system, aptly called "Zerobox", lives up to its name and does not draw attention to itself but rather steps back to allow the more important task of propagation medium to come forward: - The reproduction of music maintaining the dynamics and spatial imaging with which the microphone recorded it, without any technical interference. In other words, as a music lover experiences a live concert.  
Active Bass version available soon.

# shadow audio :

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digital

- Audio Analogue Maestro MkII, 3.5yrs old, excellent cond, boxed (£1500) £695
- Consonance 2.2 Linear, brand new, boxed, remote, a real giant killer! (£1400) £995
- Musical Fidelity A308 CD, immaculate, boxed (£2000) £995
- Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC + Transport, stunning, mint (£4000) £2995
- Audio Analogue Paganini 24/192, boxed as new. (£950) £695
- Musical Fidelity kW SACD player, boxed as new, unmarked (£4000) £2395
- Unison Research Unico Valve output CD, latest spec 24/192 model (£1250) £795
- DCS Delius 24/192 DAC, newer firewire model, boxed (£5995) £2495
- Shanling CDT-100 (3D acoustics UK model), boxed as new (£1600) £995
- Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd player, boxed, unmarked (£2950) £2150
- Tom Evans Eikos CD Player, 2 box + ext power supply (3483) £1295
- Musical Fidelity A3.5 CD player, boxed, one owner (£995) £695
- Unison Research Unico CD, latest spec 24/192. Ex-d (£995) £995
- Marantz SA-11S1 Flagship SACD player (£2000) £1595
- Wadia 302 CD player, boxed as new, (£4000) £2795
- Advantage CD15 in black, just fully serviced (£4595) £1395
- Bel Canto PL-1, boxed as new, ex-dem. (£6990) £POA

amplifiers

- AVI Lab Series amplifier, boxed as new, multi award winning (£1500) £995
- Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta, 6 months old, mint (£995) £595
- Pathos Inpol2 Integrated, only 6 mnths old, as new, boxed (£5650) £4395
- McIntosh MC252 Power Amp, boxed as new, only 6 mnths old (£3812) £2795
- Qinpu A1.0x, ex What HiFi review model, boxed, mint (£300) £230
- Croft TS1 with Epoch Pre, ex-dem, both boxed as new, (£3000) £1795
- Qinpu A-8000 MK II, ex HiFi World review model, boxed as new (£1295) £895
- Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista Integrated, boxed, mint (£4000) £1995
- Canary 301 Valve Power Amp, superb condition, 300b (£3200) £1495
- Quad II Forty Mono Blocks and QC24 Pre, 2yrs old, boxed (£4000) £2495
- JVC AXU1 Int Amp, Pure Class A, varey rare amp, mint, 1 yr old (£2000) £1295
- Eastern Electric M520 Int Amp, ex What HiFi 5star review model £1199
- McIntosh MA6500 integrated, boxed, excellent condition, (£3317) £POA
- Audion Silver Night 300B Valve Int Amp, 7wpc, excellent, boxed. £795
- McIntosh MA6900 int amp, boxed as new (£4549) £2895
- Audio Research SP14 pre-amplifier, boxed, excellent condition. £1195
- McIntosh C2200 Valve pre amplifier, boxed as new, ex-dem (£4318) £POA
- Audio Note Meishu integrated amplifier with internal phono stage + £1000 Border Patrol Upgrade. (£4300) sensational £2295
- Krell KAV500i integrated, very very rare, boxed, excellent (£5000) £1695
- Hovland Radia Power amp - boxed as new, ex-dem Cost new £7995 £4995
- EAR 864 valve pre amp, as new, balanced/se inputs (£2000) £1095
- Bryton 4BS5T-C series, power amp, black, unmarked condition (£2750) £1995
- Musical Fidelity kW (6112) Tube Pre, as new, simply sensational. (£3000) £1995
- Musical Fidelity kW750 power amplifier (£5999) £3795
- McIntosh MC501 Monoblocks(pair), ex-d (£7800) £POA
- Graaf GM50 Integrated Valve Amp (£4000) £2795
- EAR 834L de-luxe line stage valve pre (£1123) £695
- Croft TS1 hybrid power amp, ex-d, unmarked (£2000) £995
- Pass Labs X350.5, supplied by us new (£7600) £4995
- McIntosh MA2275 valve int (£5773) as new, ex-dem £POA
- McIntosh MHT200 8x140 watts, ex-dem (£6503) £3950
- Audio Innovations 2nd Audio Monoblocks (£3000) £995
- Bel Canto Pre2, boxed as new, ex-dem (£2999) £POA
- Bel Canto EVO 2i, boxed as new (£2750) £POA
- Hovland HP100 pre+built in phstage (£5350) £3595
- Hovland HP200 + phono stage (£7325) £4995

loudspeakers

- Living Voice Avatar II, maple, new in Jan 06, mint, be quick! (£3000) £1995
- Kef Reference 1.2, black, 2yrs old, superb condition (£1350) £495
- Gershman Acoustics Avantgarde speakers, finished in Piano Black Laquer, only few weeks old, (£7900) £2995
- Merlin VSM MM in exc condition 10/10 (£8000) £2595
- Living Voice OBXR2 speakers, boxed as new, ex-dem. (£4400) £2495
- JAS Audio Supertweeters, this is the actual HiFi World Review pair from the current issue (May 06) a superb speaker upgrade. (£649) £549
- ATC SCM-35, one owner, cherry, boxed as new (£1999) £1395
- Wilson Benesch Discovery, 5 months old, boxed as new (£5700) £3695
- PMC FB1+ (recently upraded to full + spec) in cherry, (£1695) £895
- PMC OB1 speakers, cherry, latest spec, 5 months old. (£2700) £1695
- ATC SCM-20A S Tower speakers, walnut (£5177) £1995
- Ref 3a Dacapo i, boxed as new in maple, only 2 months old. £2700 £1650
- REL Q400E subwoofer in premium maple (£1200) £695
- Wilson Benesch ARC's with stands, silver finish (£2.5k) £1699
- Living Voice Auditorium II in Cherry (£2195) £1495
- ATC SCM-50ASL, in Cherry, 4mnths old (£7947) £4895
- Gamut L3, in Rosewood, boxed as new. (£3750) £2750
- Wilson Benesch Curve speakers, 4 mnths old (£5000) £3495
- Dali Helicon 400, boxed as new (£3300) £1995
- Triangle Heliade, Champagne finish (£595) £395
- Quad 989 ESL Vintage, new £5000 £3600
- Quad 988 ESL in Nouveau, cost new £3750 £2999
- Audio Physic Virgo III, Cherry £2895

analogue

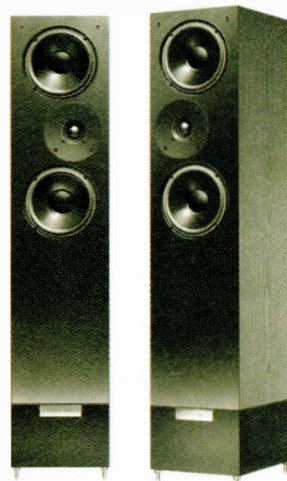
- Lehmann Silver Cube SE Phono Stage, quite simply one of the very best you can currently buy, ex-dem as new (£2250) £1399
- Wilson Benesch Full Circle, boxed as new, inc new Ply Cartridge. (£2100) £1495
- Roksan Xerxes, brand new Tabriz Zi arm, compl service 2 years, as new Trichord Dino with the never connected power supply, boxed as new, one owner, latest spec, sensational performance. (£749) £795
- Bluenote Bellaria Reference Tonearm, one owner, 3 months old (£1500) £1495
- Mark Levinson JC-1 phono stage, very very rare £1495
- Michelle Gyrodeck, Origin Live Tonearm, Trichord Never Connected PSU+DC motor, boxed, manuals, one owner, excellent. (£2000+) £995
- Krell KPE Reference Phono Stage £1395
- SME 10, boxed AS NEW (£2800) £1895
- SME 20/2a + SMEV tonearm (£5695) £3695
- Nottingham Analogue Spacedec £695

misc

- Isotek GII Vision mains conditioner, 2 months old, silver faceplate (£595) £495
- Townshend Super Tweeters in Titanium matt. (£800) £650
- Nordost Valhalla 0.6m interconnect, as new condition, (£1995) £849
- Isotek 2K Qube2, boxed, one owner. (£1595) in silver, sensational £695
- JAS Audio Supertweeters, actual HiFi World Review pair (£649) £549
- Nordost Vishnu 2m mains lead, one owner as new £349
- PS Audio P500 power plant + latest Multiwave 2 plus module fitted £1695
- Musical Fidelity X-Cans v2, upgraded to v3 £149
- Musical Fidelity X-10v3 Tube buffer stage £195
- Nordost THOR mains conditioner. (£1799) £995
- Vertex AQ Roraima Plus, mains lead + filter (£490) £395

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Living Voice IBX-R2

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

	Sale	New
Nordost Valhalla speaker cable - 7ft single set	£3000	£6000
Nordost Valhalla 1m interconnect - 2 sets	£2000	£4000
Hovland HP100 line/phono pre-amp	£3000	£6500
Wilson System 6 loudspeakers	£9000	£18000
McIntosh 2000 power-amp	£7000	£13500
Musical Fidelity 3D Nu Vista CD player	£1400	£2750
Van den Hul Colibri (new)	£1800	£3000
Voyd Reference turntable. Unique example of this benchmark design. Offered for sale on behalf of the designer - never previously sold. This turntable has a huge specification including, 30mm Lexan platter; massive Papst motor system; extreme power supply; beautiful satin rosewood plinth. Sale includes AudioNote wired Helius Cyalene tonearm and ANUK IO-limited field coil cartridge with PSU (15 hours use). Comes with manufacturers warranty on turntable.	£12000	£25000
Conrad Johnson Premier 140 - power amp - 2003 - very good condition	£4500	£7500
Conrad Johnson Premier 16LS - remote control pre-amp - 3 years old	£4000	£8000
Living Voice OBX-R2 loudspeaker - Ebony	£3800	£5000
Pathos 2 box pre-amp with remote control - spotless	£1500	
Audion Golden Night 300B monos - very good condition	£1750	£4500
Unison Simply 845 beefcake integrated amp	£1800	£3750
Cardas Neutral Reference speaker cable - 2 metres - very nearly new	£500	£780
Cardas Neutral Reference interconnect - 1 metre - very nearly new	£350	£500
Vertex Moncayo speaker cable - 15' pair - one month old	£1000	£2000
Border Patrol Control Unit 1 - line pre-amp	£1000	£1700
Canary Audio 608LV integrated amp - serviced - warranty - hovland caps	£1500	£3000
Art Audio PX25 - 5watts - Single ended flea power for the sensitive type	£2750	£4500
Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck with RB300 & Living Voice Mystic Mat	£700	£1100
Tube Technology Prophet pre-amp - 30hrs use	£1500	£2500
Tube Technology Unisis Signature integrated - 30 hours use	£1500	£2500
Rogue Audio Metis pre-amp and Atlas power amp combo - ex dem	£1750	£2250
Oracle Delphi turntable with Linn Ittok tonearm	£475	
Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista M3 CD player (2001) - as new condition - boxed	£1400	£3000
Audio Innovations First Audio - fully serviced - delightful	£850	
AVI S.2000 M1 integrated amp	£300	£1000
Border Patrol S.20 power amp - mahogany - nearly new	£5000	£7000
Audio Mecca Mephisto CD transport	£1000	£2500
Sugden Optima mm/mc phono stage - excellent little thing	£199	
Canary Audio 301 300B stereo push-pull power amp - lovely	£3400	£5400
Canary Audio 303 [110v] - new - lovelier	£3800	£7200
Audio Innovations Series 1000 monos - fully serviced - class A classic	£800	
Revolver 33 loudspeakers - grey and maple	£300	£600
B&W CDM loudspeakers	£199	
Audio Innovations Series 500 integrated - classic - fully serviced	£800	
Aloia pre-amp - very new - very good condition - beautifully made	£900	£2800

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But be prepared, the 'shock of the real' is likely to overturn all your preconceptions, causing you to re-evaluate everything you've been led to believe about today's hype-fi.



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The KR Audio Antares VA340 is the most naturally musical integrated amplifier we've heard. Featuring the powerful KR300BXL variant of the 300B output valve, it recreates music with effortless authority and realism restoring that vital emotional connection between recordings and listeners. £4995.



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ACOUSTIC ZEN Hologram Mk2 Single wire (6ft)	Mint	£595
ART ST1 Floorstand (Black/slate top & bases)	Mint	£895
AUDIO INNOVATIONS 500 Integrated amp	New valves	£475
AUDIOSTATIC DCI Wing Loudspeakers (£5,000)	Mint, boxed	£2795
AUDIO RESEARCH D130 Power Amplifier	Nr mint, boxed	£895
BAT VK-51 Pre-amp (£3,495)	Mint, boxed	£1595
BAT VK-150SE Monoblocks (£15,500)	Mint, flight cases	£7995
BOW Wazoo XLSS Integrated	Mint, boxed	£1695
CARDAS Golden Reference 1mtr RCA	Superb	£595
CARDAS Quad Link 12" bi-wire, spades	Superb	£795
C.A.T. SLI Ultimate Pre-amp + phono stage (£7000)	Mint, boxed	£3995
CONRAD JOHNSON PL14LS pre-amp	Mint, boxed	£895
CUSTOM DESIGN Icon hi-fi rack (£599)	Ex-dem, mint	£350
CYRUS CD6 CD Player	Mint	£495
DENON CD6000 OSE CD Player	Mint, boxed	£125
DIAPASON KARIS Bookshelf Speakers. Beautiful walnut,	boxed	£595
EPOS M12 Loudspeakers (Cherry)	Mint, boxed	£295
KUZMA Strabi S (Brass)	Mint, boxed	£750
LINN SONDEK LP12 c/w New Origin Live Ultra DC motor	Mint/new	£1,195
MF1 Passive Pre-amp (Our own demonstrator)	Mint, boxed	£1295
ORIGIN LIVE Aurora t/t with Silver Mk2 arm (£1595)	New	£1295
ORTOFON MCA76 MC transformer - 2 Gain Levels	Superb	£125
PRECIOUS METALS SS202B (Balanced)	Excellent	£249
REFERENCE 3A Veena (Floor standing) (£3000)	Ex-dem, boxed	£2295
SHANLING CD-T100 CD Player	Ex-dem, boxed	£1295
SME IV Tonearm (Less than 12 hrs use)	Mint, boxed	£895
SUMO Gold Valve Pre & 300B Push/Pull monoblocks	Serviced	£1995
THE HEAD Phono-stage	Excellent	£349
TRANSFIGURATION Esprit (Very few hours only)	Mint, boxed	£450
UNISON RESEARCH Mystery Pre-amp	Excellent	£799

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THE ALCHEMIST POWER AMP, EXCLT.....	£2750
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BLACK RHODIUM S-130 X2 BI WIRE BRAND NEW (£20 METRE), PER METRE.....	£9
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Arcam CD23T, nr mint boxed	549 Arcam Alpha 9 Preamp and Power amp, nr mint, boxed	479 Acoustic Energy AE1 Mk2 vgc new bass drivers	119 Audio Technica AT1100 tonearm, call for details, bargain
Arcam DV79	779 Arcam Alpha FM J C30 Preamp ex boxed	279 Acoustic Energy AE1mk3 ex dem	399 Chord Phono stage, ex boxed
Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 ex dem	999 Arcam AVR200, ex boxed	649 Acoustic Energy AE2, ex black	499 Clearaudio Emotion package, ex dem
AVI Laboratory Series, ex boxed	999 Audio Innovations, 200/500 pre and power, ex, boxed	399 Acoustic Energy AE2, ex piano black, c/w stands	399 Electrocompaniet Phono stage, mm/lmc, Lynwood p/s
AVI 2000 Reference CD player	479 Audiobac 8000A Integrated in black	1699 Audiocvector M3 Sig, active crossovers, new £4k+, amazing	399 Goldring GR2
AVI 2000 DAC very rare off board unit	349 AudioNote OT0, nr mint a steal at	249 AVI Neutron, cherry, ex	379 Graham Slee Era Gold, as new
Consonance CD120, ex dem	599 Audio Research D70 Power, ex	299 B&W CDM7NT, ex, boxed	349 JBE StateSeries 3Mission774 rare as...
Cyrus CD6, ex, boxed	1999 Audio Research SP12 Pre, as new boxed	399 Epos ES22, ex in cherry	479 Linn LP12, early, RB300
Cyrus Quattra, c/w tuner module, NR HALF PRICE!	999 AVI S2000 Pre/Monoblocks, fantastic combination	699 JM Lab Elektra 936, ex signature finish, superb	379 Linn LP12, early model, fair condition
Cyrus CD30, ex, boxed	749 Cairn Mesa Monoblocks, mint in black	799 JM Lab Micro Utopia Be, ex sig finish, c/w stands & boxes	379 Linn LP12, Lingo
Cyrus PSXR, ex, boxed	499 Cairn Ezo Nanda pre and K1 monos new £4000, now	999 KEF Reference 2 nr mint boxed	149 Linn Ittok 12"
ESOTERIC DV50S new, full warranty, LAST ONE!	629 Conrad Johnson Sonographe SA250	1999 LEAK2075	379 Logic Datum tonearm, ex boxed
Hamon Kardon DV22, New	199 EAR 509 Mk2 Monoblocks, fantastic combination	599 Mirage FR99, boxed in beech c/w active subs, megal	149 Michell Odyssey limited edition - last one!!!
Linn Genki, nr mint boxed	279 Exposure XIX Preamp, nr mint boxed superb	129 Monitor Audio B2 new boxed - 5 star buy at £200 only	879 Michell Gyrodec Export/RB300/Goldring 1042
Marantz CD63KI Signature, ex remote	129 Exposure XI Pre, VIII Power and XII P/S, good condition	449 Nben NX6 Standmount, ex, boxed	649 Michell Transcriptors Reference Hydraulic/Fluid arm
Marantz CD17 KI nr mint boxed	149 Graaf WB12 and 50/50 Pre/Power combo, ex boxed	449 Neat Acoustics Motive 3 Cherry, as new boxed	879 Michell Orbe SE, NC power supply ex dem
Marantz SA400, nr mint boxed	249 ITL M80/MA100/MA100 Pre/Power x2 lovely combo	549 Neat Acoustics Petite 3 SE c/w Ultimatum bass drivers	679 Michell Orbe, full version, RB300
Meridian 200 Transport, ex remote	379 Krell KAV300, ex boxed	299 Proac Studio 125	149 Mission 774 original arm
Micromega T-drive and T-dac nr mint boxed	279 Linn MK100 power, ex boxed	349 QUAD 11L Standmount, boxed - REDUCED	499 MFM Source heavyweight suspended deck
Micromega Optic bargain intro to Micromega	2099 Linn Majik, ex, c/w remote, bargain Linn introduction	349 QUAD 12L Standmount as new	599 Nottingham Analogue The Foot Tonearm
Monarchy DIP vgc	349 Lumley Reference 120 Monoblocks mega bargain at	299 REL Stadium 3 Sub, ex	279 Oracle Delphi V, full version, turbo ps, as new
Musical Fidelity X24K	1749 Meridian 557, ex, one of their best	799 Revolver R33 ex dem, well reviewed bargain	349 Origin Live Ultra deck with off board p/s SME cut
Musical Fidelity XDACv3 as new boxed	699 Meridian 518, as new boxed	299 Revolver RW16, as new	999 Origin Live Aurora Gold ex dem
Musical Fidelity Kw SADC as new REDUCED	549 Meridian 501/555 ex, boxed with MSR system remote	1499 Sonus Faber Concertino, stands available	629 Origin Live Silver as new
NAIM CDX2 nr mint boxed s/n 219xxx	799 Musical Fidelity X-80, as new boxed	799 Tandberg Studio Monitor Large!	499 Origin Live Encounter ex dem
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Proceed PDT2, nr mint boxed	299 Musical Fidelity 3a Preamp/P150 Power, ex	199 WAD KLS9 kit, professional CNC cabs	379 Project Debut 2 in yellow/marked
Rega Jupiter, as new boxed	399 Musical Fidelity A3 Integrated, ex boxed	449 Wharfedale Diamond series, various from just	69 Project Debut 3 in green! As new
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Rotel RCD971, ex remote	299 NAIM 92/90 pre./power combo, ex boxed	229 Chord Signature RICA 1m	249 Rega Planar 3/RB300, late silver model
Shanling CDT300UK rare ltd edition! as new	249 Nuance preamp c/w off board p/s, beautiful	299 Cyrus - PSXR, ex boxed from	179 Rega Planar 3/RB300, vgc
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	Call Unison Research Mystery One Preamp - BARGAIN!	499 TEAC A11/D1/T1 - Amp/CD/Tuner	599 Trichord Diatlo, ex
	189 Unison Research S6 Integrated, mint boxed in cherry	999 TEAC DV200 DVD player and AG7D 6.1 amp x/d save £150	229 Trichord Dino, as new black version
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## FOR SALE

**ACCUPHASE DP65V** CD player, mint condition, all documents, boxed, £2,000. 0161 928 2889 (Cheshire)

**ARCAM CD192** boxed, mint, (£850) £500. Marantz PM17MkII Kl Sig, platinum, boxed, mint, (£1,500) £800. Quad 11L light maple, mint, (£380) £260. Partington Super Dreadnought speaker stands, (£180) £85. 07840 756855 (Bolton).

**ARCAM FMJ CD33** black, two years old, mint, remote, instructions, packaging, remainder of five-year warranty, £690. 07976 261576 (Surrey).

**AUDIOQUEST EMERALD** one metre RCA interconnects, boxed, (£260) £110. Two metre silver power cable, £45. Both in excellent condition. 01278 782622 (Somerset).

**AVI PRO NINE PLUS** loudspeakers in cherry, boxed, excellent, (£799) £470. Denon 260L Mk1 tuner, £30. 01502 518938 (Suffolk).

**B&W M1** silver 7.1 speakers (7) unused and B&W AS2 silver sub. Complete system with warranty, (£1,200) £1,000. 0191 427 0590 (Tyne and Wear).

**BRYSTON 4BST** 250W power amplifier, black, rack handles, 15 years warranty remaining. Absolutely perfect, original packaging, manual and test sheet, £950. Can demo. 01223 204934 days 01487 840659 eves (Cambs).

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640H** music server, two months old, save a bundle, £300. 07725 313129 (Devon).

**CHORD CHAMELEON** silver plus interconnect, (£100) £45. Free postage. 01905 423021 (Worcester).

**CHORD 1200E** in superb condition. Fitted with integra legs, lead, instructions and Chord packaging, £3,250. 01903 242837 or 07738 113670 (W.Sussex).

**CHORD SPM 1400E** x 2 mono power amplifiers, black, £6500. Arcam FMJ DV29 DVD player, 6 months old, £850. Nordost Valhalla 1m XLR analogue interconnects, £1,100 all mint and boxed. Ian 07941 424322 or 01789 261585 or email: [idbrunt@f2s.com](mailto:idbrunt@f2s.com) (Warwickshire).

**CYRUS PRE X VS** preamp and PSX-R power supply. Six months old, boxed with guarantee, (£1,500) £600ono. 07766 415325 or 02476 667877 (Coventry).

**DALI SUITE 7.1** AV speakers – 2.8 fronts, C0.8 centre, R0.8 and R0.7 rears/surround, S1.2 sub, brand new, (£2,800) will accept £1,400ono. 07764 600546 (North East).

**DENON DVD-2900** universal player, gold finish, manuals and remote (not boxed) mint condition, great performer, £330ono. 07967 025990 (Norfolk).

**DENON DVD-3910** just a few weeks old, £600. Lyngdorf SDA2175 amp, 200 wpc, £650. Meridian G08, £1,600. Magnum Dynalab receiver 100wpc. Bargain at £1,600. 01803 523910 (Devon).

**DYNAVECTOR DV10X5** MC cartridge. A superb, real-world, moving coil cartridge, absolutely unused, (£250) £200. Thierry, evenings 07905 303718 (London).

**EAR YOSHINO 869** 15W single-ended integrated amp. As new with original packaging,

(£2,700) £1,350. Border Patrol prototype preamp, £750 ono. Excellent condition, boxed. 0141 339 7387 (Glasgow).

**EPOS M5** loudspeakers in light cherry real wood. Absolutely pristine with original box, packaging and instructions. Six months old, (£350) £220. ST35 stands in black, purpose made for M5, (£99) £60. Nick 07802 202469 (Warwickshire).

**EPOS M5** speakers, £260. ELS3, £130. Both light cherry, excellent as new condition, pair of dedicated Epos ST35 stands, £60. Arcam Alpha 7SE CDP, £95. Arcam T61 Tuner, £110. 01323 486216 (E. Sussex).

**EXPOSURE XXV RC** integrated amp, £300. Excellent condition plus original packaging (can demo). Four metres Audio Quest bi-wire and plugs, £50. Steve 01482 887409 (Beverly).

**HI-FI CABLES** Chord Carnival Silver Plus 2m pair, (£31). Chord Cobra 3 (£30). QED Qunex 2 (£15). Kimber Tonik (£22). All in original boxes, £80 the lot. Rotel RCD-02 and RA-01 amplifier in silver (£630) £399. Two years old, original boxes/packaging. Lee 01384 412234 (West Midlands). ☐

## WANTED

**ATLAS OR NORDOST** Red Dawn interconnect. 07810 1039008 (Yorks).

**ARCAM ALPHA 10** tuner must be in good condition. Karl 01942 234927 or email [karl138ufft@msn.com](mailto:karl138ufft@msn.com) (Wigan).

**B&W NAUTILUS HTM1** centre speaker, any finish considered, discontinued model required 01782 256087 (Stoke-on-Trent).

**GOODMANS MAGISTER** Will pay good price, but must be working. 01280 860221 (Bucks).

**LEAK STEREO 70** amplifier working or needing attention. 01938 553559 (Welshpool).

**LOWTHER ACOUSTA** twins 1960s and scrap PM7A 0208 220 0380 (Essex).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** amp to bi-amp A3. Also, Tri-Vista 21 or Chord DAC 64. 01305 260634 after 6pm (Dorset).

**MARANTZ CD94** remote control. Also Quad 66 preamp 01277 219639 (Essex).

**TOWNSEND ISOLDA DCT** interconnects. Andy 0115 912 6424 (Notts).

**YAMAHA CA1000** or CA400 amp. Also early Sugden Class A amp Mike 01772 632082 (Lancs).

## 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 dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

**FOR SALE**

**JAMO CONCERT 115**

Roksan integrated amp. Pure 701ES tuner. Pioneer DV 565A with upgrade. Welded metal stand, Genesis cable and other ofcs, mains conditioner, £2,750. 07623 928984 (Gwent).

**KEF 105MKI** £250. Tannoy Cheviot MKI, £250. Oracle Paris turntable, £200. Meridian 602/606 CD, £400. Quad ESL 57 boxed with literature, £250. 01843 221664 (Kent).

**KENWOOD DP-7090** CD player 32fs fine drive. Gold terminals, copper encased electronics, aluminium top plate. Excellent condition, boxed, remote and instructions, £145ono. 01270 765933 (Cheshire).

**KIMBER SELECT 1030** (£1,100) £650. 1020, (£500) £300. Monocle XL 8ft pair, (£852) £530. Orchid digital interconnect, £120. Isotek Mainline x3, £160 each 01772 314151 (Lancs).

**KIMBER SELECT 1030** £800. Russ Andrews Silver Reference PowerKord wattgate 350i (4ft), £750. Silver Powerblock plus silver Reference Powerchord (3ft), £1,100. 01475 676287 (Greenock).

**LINN KLOUT** amplifiers (x3) will split. Excellent condition, £900 each, or consider offers for 2/3. 0151 641 3915 (Wirral).

**LYNGDORF SDA2175** black power amp 200 wpc, £650. One metre balanced Blue Heaven, £60. One metre RCA Blue Heaven, £50. Two metres Blue Heaven speaker cable, £100. Primare PRE30, £500. Power 30.2, £500. 01803 523553 (Devon).

**MARANTZ CD63MKII KI** £180. Linn Basik/Akito/K9, £180. Cyrus 2 with PSX and mains leads, £180 01253 866007 (Blackpool).

**MARANTZ CD7300** in gold, 12 months old, £200. 07903 613418 (London).

**MARTIN LOGAN AERIUS I**, oak trim £650. REL Stadium II, rosewood £350. 01743 289240 (Shrewsbury).

**MERIDIAN 507** 24-bit CD with MSR £675. 501 preamp, £395. 556 Amp (100w), £425 all in superb, mint condition with original manuals, leads and boxes. Steve 07963 232638 (Herts)

**MONITOR AUDIO RS8** floorstanders, as new, cherry veneer, reviewed *HFC* 276. Selling to upgrade, £495. 01462 680262 (Herts).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A1001** amplifier, Class A integrated, 200W/8ohms, 400W/4ohms per channel, mint condition,

£850. Madrigal/Microsoft IRIO universal remote, new condition, £35. Mick 01252 870861 (Hampshire).

**NAD C660** compact disc recorder (twin deck) as new with remote, manual, original box, £150ono. 01257 266010 (Preston, Lancs).

**NAIM NAC 82** (£1,999) with latest style NAPSC, excellent condition, with leads, instructions and box, £1,195 ono 07970 785360 (Sussex).

**NAIM CDS** as new condition, boxed with remote, interconnect etc. Made in 2000. Happy to demonstrate, £595 ono. Adrian 07973 358220 (London).

**NAIM NAIT01** superlative FM tuner. Early model, excellent condition, reluctant sale – elderly owner needs remote control, £820 including postage +00 3531 459 1432 (Dublin).

**NEAT ACOUSTICS** Ultimatum MF5 black, (£5,000) £2,800 and MFC Centre Figured Birch, (£2,700) £1,600 ono. Rod on 0800 672493 (work) or 020 8689 8750 (home) (London)

**PROAC TABLETTE REF 8** Mahogany, £400. Castle Isis speakers also in Mahogany, perfect, £100. Atacama stands, black, £25. 01977 618403 (Pontefract).

**PMC MB2** in oak plus stands, (£8,750) £4,750 pair. Pair Bryston 4BST and pair 7BST, (£3,000) £1,250 each. Pair PMC XBD2A in black finish, (£3,250) £1,600 each. email: nmfrancis@btinternet.com (London).

**QUAD 33** preamp, serviced by quad, with paperwork. Adapter board updated by Quad for CD input, £120 e-mail jery@dircon.co.uk (Devon).

**REGA APOLLO CD** player, £295. Prima Luna Prologue 4 power amp, £375. Both less than six months old, boxes, manuals, mint condition. 07941 174804 (Berks).

**REL Q50** subwoofer owned from new, good condition, no box. 01642 280994 (Middlesbrough).

**ROKSAN M-SERIES** preamp and power, mint, black, boxed, four months old, (£2,000) £1,200. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

**SENNHEISER HD650** headphones, immaculate, used once, (£300) £200. Chord cobra interconnects (2) 0.5 metre, (£60) £30. Audioquest Ruby interconnect 1.0 metre, (£125) £50. Cyrus CD7Q CD player, black, can demo, (£1,150) £700. Paul 01189 834838 (Surrey).

**SONY SCD777ES** CD/SACD player, Champagne color, new condition, with box and packaging and all accessories, £720. SCD777ES DAB/FM tuner, new condition, with box and accessories, £260. Michael 01252 870861 (Hampshire).

**SUGDEN A21** Class A line amp complete with Creek OBH-1 MM phono preamp, £475. Micromega T Drive and T DAC, £300. 01256 461453 or 07745 565190 (Basingstoke).

**TEAC X1000** open reel recorder. Twin speed, quarter track, fully serviced. Lovely condition, warm analogue sound. Manual and schematics, tapes and reels, £195 Call for more info 01642 711566 after 6pm (N Yorks).

**TRANSPARENT MUSIC** Link Ultra XL single ended interconnect cable. Two metres £475, one metre, £375. Cardas Cross interconnect phono 1.5 metres, £175. Steve 07800 606892 or 01527 577725 (Worcestershire).

**VALVE** preamp with phono, £300. Linn LP12, Afrosomia, SMEIISs, Ortofon VMS20EII, £320. Pioneer PDS801 CD player, £150. Technics RSAZ7 cassette deck, mint, boxed, £160. Ray 07708 431963 (Cheshire).



Above: Rega Apollo CD player



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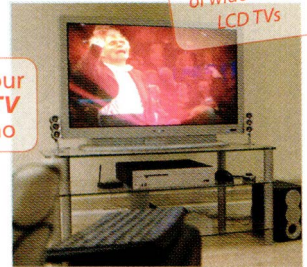
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## Evesham *experience*

For over 20 years Evesham have been at the forefront of providing the latest technology for the home at the best value.

## Evesham *innovation*

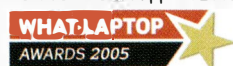
Through strategic partnerships with the world's largest IT companies Evesham are at the cutting edge of the digital home revolution. Whether it's the latest entertainment PC, gaming notebook, TV or satellite navigation system Evesham are your one stop shop for the latest, award winning, technology.



## Evesham *service*

We design, build, sell and support our own systems so we know our products inside out. Evesham PCs and notebooks are manufactured and supported in Evesham, Worcestershire to the highest standards and backed up by our own engineers, Evesham's service continues to win industry awards.

Best Service & Support 2005



Best Laptop Performance Award 2003 & 2004



Brand of the Year 2003 & 2004



Best PC Firm 2004

## Shop Online

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

Get detailed information on our entire range

Configure a system to meet your specific requirements.

Browse our unique range of technology products for the home and on the move.



## Order Direct

0870 160 4323

For friendly help and advice call today.

Weekdays 9am-7pm

Sat 9am-5.30pm Sun 10am-4pm



## Buy now, pay 2007\*

\*Pay just 5% deposit\* then nothing for 9 months.

Available on all products over £350.

Flexible finance also available.

## Evesham *value*

We are committed to providing the best all-round deals available instore and online. From PCs and networking to home electronics Evesham delivers outstanding value for money.

## Business

0870 160 9700

[www.evesham.com/business](http://www.evesham.com/business)

## Education

0870 160 9100

[www.evesham.com/education](http://www.evesham.com/education)

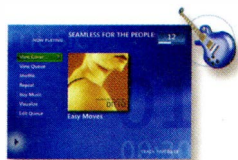
# ebox The PC that lives under the TV

One box. Truly staggering entertainment possibilities.



ultra quiet • small footprint 430 x 288 x 98mm

Evesham Technology recommends Windows® XP Media Center Edition



Combines a PC, Digital TV receiver, Personal Video Recorder, DVD recorder/player and Hi-fi into one stylish system

e-CODE: EB0009

**£699** (£594.89 ex VAT)

- AMD Athlon 64 processor 3000+ with HyperTransport technology
- Genuine Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 160GB hard drive
- Media Center Remote control
- Microsoft cordless keyboard & cordless optical tilt mouse
- Single TV Tuner - Hybrid digital/analogue



e-CODE: EB0010

**e box PLUS** As above with



**£799** (£680 ex VAT)

- 250GB hard drive
- Genuine Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005
- Dual TV Tuner - digital or analogue. Watch one channel while recording another. Watch a pre-recorded programme and record 2 channels.

**PC designed for the living room**  
Hi-fi style brushed aluminium case

**Digital TV receiver or analogue tuner**  
Up to 30 free digital free to air channels

**Personal Video Recorder (PVR)**  
Watch, record, pause, rewind live TV. Schedule recordings.

**Multi format DVD recorder/player**  
Record TV, video, music, data files on to dvd or a cd

**Download station**  
Easily download and share digital photos and video from your camera

**Picture-in-Picture (PIP)**  
Watch TV and check your emails



# Evesham HD Ready LCD TVs

No extra charges. All Evesham Widescreen HD LCD TVs  
**INCLUDE 3 YEAR SWAP OUT WARRANTY, VAT AND DELIVERY**

Amazing 42" LCD TV offer  
plasma beating low price



## Evesham 42" Widescreen HD Ready

Now with Digital tuner along side the analogue tuner giving you the free to air Freeview TV channels. Supports 720p/1080i high-definition video signals via either component or DVI. Ideal partner to the Evesham e-box complete home entertainment centre.

- It offers high performance and wide screen 16:9 aspect ratio image
- HD Ready with both DVI and Component
- 8ms response
- Supports up to 1366 x 768 resolution
- Contrast 1000:1 Brightness 500cd/m<sup>2</sup> (Typical)
- Built in speakers
- Super Wide viewing Angle 170°
- Built in Digital & Analogue TV tuners
- 2 Scart
- Teletext
- PIP (Picture in Picture)
- 3 year swap out warranty

was £1699  
**now £1399**



## Evesham 37" Widescreen HD Ready

**£1099**

Now with Digital tuner along side the analogue tuner giving you the free to air Freeview TV channels. Supports 720p/1080i high-definition video signals via either component or DVI. Ideal partner to the Evesham e-box complete home entertainment centre.

- It offers high performance and wide screen 16:9 aspect ratio image
- HD Ready with both DVI and Component (720p/1080i)
- 8ms response time
- Supports up to 1366 x 768 resolution
- Contrast 1000:1 Brightness 550cd/m<sup>2</sup> (Typical)
- Built in speakers
- Super Wide viewing Angle 170°
- Built in Digital & Analogue TV tuners
- 2 Scart
- Teletext
- PIP (Picture in Picture)
- 3 year swap out warranty

**£100 off**  
was £1199



## Evesham 27" Widescreen HD compatible

**£499**

Superb value 27". Supports 720p/1080i high-definition video signals. With the PIP (Picture in Picture) under PC mode feature, you can enjoy using your PC while catching your favourite television shows!

- HD-TV Compatible (Compatibility with high-definition video sources up to 720p/1080i via D-sub connector)
- 16ms response time
- Supports up to 1280 x 720 resolution
- Contrast 600:1 Brightness 550cd/m<sup>2</sup> (Typical)
- Built in speakers
- Super Wide viewing Angle 170°
- 2 Scart
- Teletext
- PIP (Picture in Picture)
- 3 year swap out warranty



## Evesham 20" Widescreen HD Ready

**£349**

Versatile 20". This slim and stylish screen supports 720p/1080i high-definition video signals.

- HD ready with both DVI and Component (720p-1080i)
- 8ms response time
- Supports up to 1680 x 1050
- Teletext
- Contrast 600:1 Brightness 300cd/m<sup>2</sup> (Typical)
- Under set speakers
- Viewing angle 140
- Built in speakers
- Single scart
- 3 year swap out warranty





# Are you High Definition (HD) ready?

HD TV is the biggest change in TV picture quality in decades. Up to 4 x more picture detail than conventional TV signals



More detail,  
vibrant colours,  
true widescreen,  
greater depth of field.

NEW  
Low price

**£50 off**  
was £699

## Evesham Glass TV tables

Evesham GT-3  
Supports upto  
32" display ONLY **£79**

Evesham GT-5  
Supports upto  
50" display ONLY **£99**



## Evesham 32" Widescreen HD Ready **£649**

Amazing low price 32". Supports 720p/1080i high-definition video signals by the component input and DVI+HDCP from an external set-top-box. Offers a high quality experience with wide viewing angles, great contrast and brilliant brightness, by using the advanced techniques including Motion Adaptive De-interlacer, digital brightness, contrast control, and noise reduction technologies.

- HD Ready with both DVI and Component (720p/1080i)
- 10ms response time
- Supports up to 1366 x 768 (WXGA) resolution
- Contrast 1000:1 Brightness 550cd/m<sup>2</sup> (Typical)
- Built in speakers
- Super Wide viewing Angle 170°
- 2 Scart
- Teletext
- PIP (Picture in Picture)
- **3 year swap out warranty**



## Evesham 32" Widescreen HD Ready with side speakers and HDMI

**£749**

Evesham's flagship 32" model incorporates the very latest state of the art technology. The LCD panel has superb brightness and contrast along with the fastest response time (8 milliseconds) we have seen for a screen of this size. With an eye to the future it includes the new HDMI (High Definition Media Interface) connector, which is set to be the standard for the HD future.

- HDMI interface
- HD Ready
- Dynamic sound system for improved audio performance
- 8ms response time
- Supports up to 1366 x 768 (WXGA) resolution
- Contrast 1000:1 Brightness 550cd/m<sup>2</sup> (Typical)
- Built in speakers
- Super wide viewing Angle 176°
- 2 Scart
- Teletext
- PIP (Picture in Picture)
- **3 year swap out warranty**

"Something of a steal"  
STUFF online



## Evesham 32" Widescreen HD Ready with under set speakers and HDMI

**£749**

The HDMI interface guarantees true digital connectivity for improved uncompressed digital video and audio quality that lets you see more and hear more. Featuring the latest generation ultra fast response time panel, it will provide for a thrilling viewing experience when watching fast moving and high-speed images.

- HDMI interface
- HD Ready
- 8ms response time
- Supports up to 1366 x 768 (WXGA) resolution
- Contrast 800:1 Brightness 500cd/m<sup>2</sup> (Typical)
- Under set speakers
- Super wide viewing Angle 170°
- 2 Scart
- Teletext
- PIP (Picture in Picture)
- **3 year swap out warranty**



INSTALLATION & SETUP SERVICE AVAILABLE ON ALL MODELS

## Portable LCD TVs

Perfect for the kitchen, caravan, bedroom or on the move.



### Evesham 8" Portable LCD TV

Evesham T807

- 4:3 aspect
- Brightness 380cd/m2
- Contrast ratio 250: 1
- Response time 25ms
- Wide viewing angle 110 deg
- Resolution 640 x 480
- Table top stand
- Built in speaker
- Remote control
- 2 x Composite video socket, 1 x VGA connector, 1 x RF Aerial connector
- Car power adaptor
- Mains power adaptor
- 1 year warranty
- Dimensions 195\*170\*33mm

**£99.99**



### Evesham 7" Portable LCD TV

EVE7PORDT

**DVB** Digital Video Broadcasting  
Up to 30  
**FREE channels**

- 16:9 aspects
- DVB-T tuner
- Battery or mains powered
- Battery life ~3h
- High brightness and contrast
- Resolution 480 x 234
- Stand included
- Speakers x 2 (1w)
- Remote control
- Av input CVBS + audio left /right
- AV output CVBS + audio left /right
- Car power adaptor
- Mains adaptor
- 1 year warranty
- Size 200mm(W) x 129mm(W) x 22mm(H)

**£149.99**



### Evesham 15.2" Widescreen Portable LCD TV

Evesham T1505

- 16:9 aspect ratio
- Brightness 450 cd/M2
- Contrast ratio 450.1
- Response time 16ms
- Wide viewing angle 1500
- Resolution 1024 x 768
- Table top stand
- Built in speakers
- Remote control
- 1 x AV
- Car power adapter
- Mains power adapter
- 1 year warranty
- Dimensions 374 x 256 x 41mm

**£229.99**

# Digital hard disk drive recorders with built-in

Up to 30 FREE channels with no contract



Store & Record  
up to 80 hours

## Recording TV has never been easier

### Fusion FVRT200 80GB DVR

Super Compression Technology (SCT) is Digifusion's new technology that enables a DVR to deliver the maximum record time - comparable products with similar hard disk sizes can only achieve a fraction of the recording time available on the FVRT200.

- Dual Tuners
- Watch one digital channel whilst recording another
- Watch a pre-recorded programme and record 2 channels
- Pause and Rewind live TV
- FREE 14 day TV guide
- 1 year warranty

**£174.99**

### Fusion FVRT90 FREEVIEW single tuner 80GB

**£99.99**



### Fusion FVRT150 FREEVIEW twin tuner 80GB

**£149.99**



## Watch all your DVDs in high definition

Hi Def Conversion DVD Players with HDMI and DivX playback



### Evesham HDDVD

**£69.99**

- DivX Playback
- HDMI connections
- 4:3 | 16:9
- Scart
- DOLBY DIGITAL OUTPUT
- PAL | NTSC
- Integrated MP3 & Picture JPEG player
- Region Free

Transforms your DVD collection and takes the picture quality to another level. Converts your existing DVDs into High Definition digital video streams. It is like swapping from VHS to DVD all over again! If you want the best picture from your new HD screen then these DVD players are a must.

### Relisys Hi Def Conversion DVD Player

**£99.99**



## Changing the way you experience entertainment anywhere !!

Watch movies, videos and your recorded favourite TV shows anywhere. Browse your memories with photo slideshows.

- 20GB capacity.
- 25+ movies, 10,000+ mp3 files, 20,000+ digital photos.
- Portable video player supporting MPEG-1, MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DivX, and XviD video files
- Portable audio jukebox supporting MP3, WMA, and WAV music files
- Digital Photo Viewer supporting JPEG image file up to 12 mega pixels with slideshow, image zoom, and image rotate functions.
- Instant storage Hold digital photos, music, and data files. Just plug into USB 2.0 port and immediately get additional storage.
- AV output port to TV - Watch video playback or photos.

**£199.99** Includes Remote Control and handy bag

Large 3.6inch screen. (iPod 2.5inch)  
Massive 5 hours of continuous video playback.  
8 hours of music.



Great on holiday.  
Entertainment in the car, train, plane.

# Access all your digital files without having to turn your PC on

Wireless music streaming around the home and real time back-up



## Set your music free

The Evesham M-box solution incorporating the M-bridge network music player is the ultimate in multi room wireless audio streaming. Browse your entire music library via the M-bridge without even switching on your PC. Enjoy the peace of mind of secure storage for all your digital information.

## It's easy

Download music to your PC. Copy to your M-box. Access it in any room remotely via the M-bridge connected to your hi-fi or amplified speakers.

## Choose how you manage your music

The Evesham M-box solution is the most compatible system around. Supports iTunes\*\* and the majority of MP3 formats. Simply drag files from your PC to the M-box to store and distribute.

## Freedom and security

The M-box is unique. Unlike other music streaming systems the M-box gives you the freedom to choose your output device and offers the added benefit of secure storage.

- Connects to your hi-fi/amplified speakers (analogue or digital connection)
- Control your music from across the room using the large, bright display
- Fast browsing of your music collection via song, album, artist genre or composer
- Internet Radio (if connected to the internet)
- Play back of your favourite play lists
- Connect up to four additional M-bridge players

## Evesham M-box & M-bridge package

160GB (2 x 160GB drives)	£599
250GB (2 x 250GB drives)	£699
320GB (2 x 320GB drives)	£799
400GB (2 x 400GB drives)	£899



Complete wireless music solution

## Keep your precious memories safe.

### Storage, BackUp & Data Transfer

#### Easy-to-use digital data archive

Designed for hassle-free installation, the M-box can be setup and running in a matter of minutes. You can manage your personal storage server from anywhere on the network using an Internet browser. Simply drag and drop files from your PC straight on to the M-box.

#### Photo Web Server

This handy application turns your M-box into a fully-fledged photo bank, enabling you to create your very own digital photo albums that can be shared with every PC on the network!

#### Always on, wireless connection

The M-box comes fully equipped with dual Gigabit Ethernet ports to enable lightning-fast file transfers and wireless capability so your digital media can be made available throughout your entire home or office network quickly and easily.



#### What is RAID 1 ?

#### Complete peace of mind

The M-box uses two hard drives that have the same information on. If a drive fails you can simply remove the failed drive and replace with a new drive. The information will then be automatically copied over so you have the same information on both drives again for complete peace of mind.

#### Evesham M-bridge

M-bridge	£149.99
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#### Evesham M-box

160GB (2 x 160GB drives)	£469.99
250GB (2 x 250GB drives)	£569.99
320GB (2 x 320GB drives)	£669.99
400GB (2 x 400GB drives)	£769.99

BUY NOW, PAY 2007\*

# Next generation Satellite Navigation

- Alerts of all six speed camera types (Visual and audible)



GATSO



MOBILE



SPECS



TEMPORARY



TRUVELO



RED LIGHT

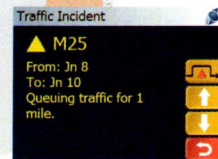
- Full 7 Digit UK Post Code Search
- Easy installation, no activation of software or maps required
- Full screen 2D and 3D maps with precise voice guidance
- Optimal routing for any distance
- Intuitive menus and touch screen buttons for easy finger input
- Instant address retrieval from History, Favourites or Points Of Interests
- Fast re-routing to handle any driver mistakes and wrong turns

## What is TMC ?

### Traffic Message Channel

Four types of message: Accidents, Information (such as slow moving traffic), Traffic Jams, Road works.

TMC (Traffic Message Channel) uses the FM Radio Data System (RDS) to broadcast real-time traffic information. Data messages are received and decoded by the 'in line FM receiver'. Using this data the TMC SatNav is able to automatically adjust your route to avoid traffic congestion. The TMC Sat-Navs include a lifetime licence for the Trafficmaster™ RDS service.



### NavCam 7000 UK maps £249.99

- Visual and audible Directional Speed Camera Alerts (UK) with speed limit indication
- Precise Male or Female voice guidance including road numbers "turn left on to A414"
- 3D Navigation display offers a fantastic overview of the roads including road names
- Uses latest Navteq Q1-2006 Maps (UK + Ireland)
- MP3 Playback & Photo Slide Shows
- 256MB SD Card



### NavCam 7000 TMC UK maps £299.99

- As above with added TMC capability

"Small, powerful and excellent value for money"

"Re-routing is devilishly fast"

Pocket-lint.co.uk

### BM-6300 UK maps £299.99

- Car, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian navigation
- One touch navigation to home address
- Destinator ND 5.5 Software

### BM-6300 euro Euro maps £349.99

- As above with European road level maps

### BM-6300 TMC UK maps £399.99

- As BM-6300 with added TMC capability

### BM-6300 TMC euro Euro maps £449.99

- As above with European road level maps



\*Subscribe to continue receiving updates for just £30 per year

\*Free Speed Camera updates for six months (PC and Internet connection required)

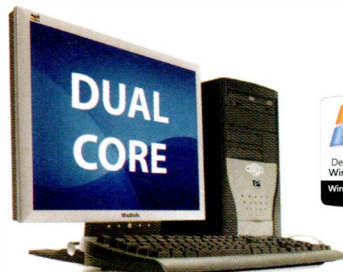
# Outstanding Value PCs, quality service & support



## Windows Vista Capable

Buying a new PC that is Windows Vista Capable enables you to upgrade to the next version of Microsoft® Windows® and the future of computing.

With an upgrade, your PC will provide great new features and functionality to work with the next generation of applications, devices, and peripherals. And, since a Windows Vista Capable PC comes preinstalled with Windows XP, it will give you endless opportunities to broaden your PC horizons using Windows XP and related technologies right now. A Windows Vista Capable PC ensures the best experience possible transitioning from Windows XP to the future of computing using Windows Vista.



### Axis STR e-CODE: AX1227

The STR is a great starting point

**£499** (£424.68 ex VAT)



- AMD Sempron processor 3000+ 64 bit
- Genuine Windows® XP Home Edition
- Direct 2D/3D graphics (on-board)
- 17" flat panel TFT display
- 512MB DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x256MB)
- 160GB Serial ATA 7200rpm hard drive with 8MB buffer
- Multi Format Dual Layer DVD Writer (16x)/CD-RW (40x) drive
- On-board audio
- Mini tower case (411x175x365mm) 4xUSB2.0 & 10/100 LAN
- Internet keyboard & optical wheel mouse
- Optional floppy drive & modem
- Bronze 1 year warranty

Home Installation service add £99.99

### Axis XTR e-CODE: AX1528

A superb family PC - pure and simple

**£699** (£594.89 ex VAT)



- AMD Athlon 64 X2 processor 3800+
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- ATI Radeon XPRESS 200 series graphics (on-board)
- 17" flat panel TFT display
- ATI Radeon XPRESS 200 chipset motherboard
- 512MB dual channel DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x256MB)
- 200GB Serial ATA II hard drive with 8MB buffer
- Multi Format Dual Layer DVD Writer (16x)/CD-RW (40x) drive
- On-board audio
- Mini tower case (352x180x365mm) 4xUSB2.0 & 10/100 LAN
- Logitech keyboard & optical wheel mouse
- Optional floppy drive & modem
- Silver 3 year warranty

### Axis MKR e-CODE: AX1173

Packed with quality features

**£1199** (£1020.43 ex VAT)



- AMD Athlon 64 X2 processor 4200+
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB NVIDIA 7900GT PCI Express graphics with TV-out & DVI
- 19" VA1912W Widescreen multimedia monitor
- NVIDIA nForce 4 SLI motherboard
- 1GB Dual channel DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x512MB)
- 250GB Serial ATA hard drive with 8MB buffer
- DVD-ROM (16x) drive
- Multi Format Dual Layer DVD Writer (16x) / CD-RW (40x) drive
- On-board audio
- Creative Inspire T6060 5.1
- Xpider or Sleek midi tower case (453x222x495mm) 350w PSU, 6xUSB2.0 & 10/100 LAN
- Logitech Internet Pro cordless keyboard & mouse
- Optional floppy drive & modem
- Gold 3 year warranty

### Go Plus ONLY £100

Axis STR Plus upgrades

- AMD Athlon 64 processor 3000+
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- ATI Radeon XPRESS 200 chipset motherboard

### Go Plus ONLY £100

Axis XTR Plus upgrades

- 1GB Dual channel DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x512MB)
- 250GB Serial ATA hard drive with 8MB buffer
- 19" VA1912W Widescreen multimedia monitor

### Go Plus ONLY £100

Axis MKR Plus upgrades

- AMD Athlon 64 X2 processor 4400+
- 320GB Ultra Fast 7200rpm hard drive with 8MB buffer
- Platinum 3 year warranty

**FREE Software Included on all PCs**

**Microsoft Works 8**  
Word processor, spreadsheet and database applications

**BullGuard Internet Security**  
Anti-virus with FREE 30 day updates - plus firewall & online backup

**Roxio Easy Media Creator 7**  
CD/DVD creation, video editing and DVD playback software

**BUY NOW, PAY 2007\***

Evesham Technology recommends Windows® XP Media Center Edition

## Axis RD A-List e-CODE: AX1251

ATI Crossfire ready

£938.83 (€799.00 ex VAT)



- AMD Athlon 64 X2 processor 3800+
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 1x 256MB ATI Radeon X800GTO CrossFire graphics
- 17" Viewsonic VX712 flat panel TFT display (8ms response)
- ATI Radeon Xpress 200 Crossfire motherboard
- 512MB dual channel DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x256MB)
- 250GB Serial ATA hard drive with 8MB buffer
- 16x DVD-ROM
- Multi Format Dual Layer DVD Writer (16x)/CD-RW(40x) drive
- On-board audio
- Creative I-Trigue 3220 2.1 speakers
- Midi tower case (453x222x495mm) 6xUSB2.0 & 10/100 LAN
- Logitech internet Pro cordless keyboard & mouse
- Optional floppy drive & modem
- Gold 3 year warranty



## "Quality components throughout"



**Free Hard drive Upgrade**  
Was 200GB Now 250GB

### Go Plus ONLY £100

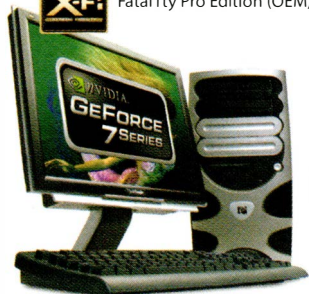
Axis RD A Plus upgrades

- 1GB Dual channel DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x512MB)
- 256MB ATI Radeon X1600 XT graphics
- 19" VA1912W Widescreen multimedia monitor

Upgrade to 2nd ATI  
X1600 XT CrossFire graphics £99.99



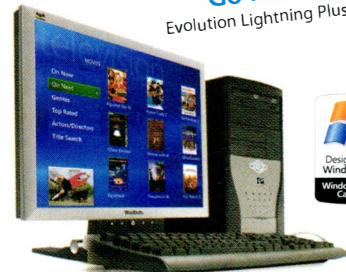
## NEW Sound Blaster X-Fi Xtreme Gamer Fatal1ty Pro Edition (OEM)



## Sound Blaster X-Fi Fatal1ty FPS (OEM) includes I/O console



## Go Plus Evolution Lightning Plus



## Axis Dominator e-CODE: AX1183

Full throttle SLI Ready graphics

£1499 (€1275.74 ex VAT)



- AMD Athlon 64 X2 processor 4400+
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB NVIDIA 7900GT PCI Express graphics with TV-out & DVI
- 19" Viewsonic VX922 TFT display (2ms response)
- NVIDIA nForce 4 SLI motherboard
- 1GB dual channel DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x512MB)
- 500GB Serial ATA hard drive with 8MB buffer
- DVD-ROM (16x) drive
- Multi Format Dual Layer DVD Writer (16x) / CD-RW (40x) drive
- Sound Blaster X-Fi Xtreme Gamer Fatal1ty Pro Edition (OEM)
- Creative Inspire T6060 5.1
- Xpider or Sleek midi tower case (453x222x495mm) 420w PSU, 6xUSB2.0 & 10/100 LAN
- Logitech keyboard & optical wheel mouse
- Optional floppy drive & modem
- Platinum 3 year warranty

### Go Plus ONLY £300

Axis Dominator Plus upgrades

- AMD Athlon 64 X2 processor 4800+
- Sound Blaster X-Fi Fatal1ty FPS (OEM) includes I/O console
- 256MB NVIDIA 7900GTX PCI Express graphics with TV-out & DVI

## Axis Decimator e-CODE: AX1235

Gaming monster. Mind blowing graphics & audio.

£1999 (€1701.28 ex VAT)



- AMD Athlon 64 X2 processor 4800+
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB NVIDIA 7900GT PCI Express graphics with TV-out & DVI
- 19" Viewsonic VX922 flat panel TFT display (2ms response)
- NVIDIA nForce 4 SLI motherboard
- 1GB dual channel DDR RAM (PC3200) 400MHz (2x512MB)
- 640GB Serial ATA 7200rpm hard drive with 16MB buffer
- DVD-ROM (16x) drive
- Multi Format Dual Layer DVD Writer (16x) / CD-RW (40x) drive
- Sound Blaster X-Fi Fatal1ty FPS (OEM) includes I/O console
- Creative Inspire T7900 7.1
- Brushed Aluminium case (485x205x570mm) 420w Tagan PSU, 6xUSB2.0 & 10/100/1000 LAN
- Logitech Internet Pro cordless keyboard & mouse
- Optional floppy drive & modem
- Platinum 3 year warranty

### Go Plus ONLY £600

Axis Decimator Plus upgrades

- AMD Athlon 64 FX-60 processor
- 2 x 256MB NVIDIA 7900GTX PCI Express graphics with TV-out & DVI
- 20" Viewsonic VA2012w widescreen flat panel TFT display

## Evolution Lightning e-CODE: EV1127

Perfectly formed Intel all-rounder

£599 (€509.79 ex VAT)



- Intel Pentium D processor 805 (2.66GHz, 2x1MB cache, 533MHz)
- Genuine Windows XP Home Edition
- Direct 2D/3D graphics (on board)
- 17" flat panel TFT display
- 512MB DDR 2 RAM 533MHz
- 80GB Serial ATA 7200rpm hard drive with 8MB buffer
- Multi Format Dual Layer DVD Writer (16x) / CD-RW (40x) drive
- Sound Blaster compatible 6 channel audio
- Mini tower case (352x180x365mm) 4xUSB2.0 & 10/100 LAN
- Logitech keyboard & optical wheel mouse
- Optional floppy drive & modem
- Bronze 1 year warranty

### Go Plus ONLY £100

Evolution Lightning Plus upgrades

- Intel Pentium D processor 930 (3GHz, 2x2MB cache, 800MHz)
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 19" flat panel TFT display
- 160GB Serial ATA 7200rpm hard drive with 8MB buffer

### Bronze 1 YEAR WARRANTY

1 year return-to-base service (parts & labour). National rate telephone support

### Silver 3 YEAR WARRANTY

1 year in-home service (parts & labour). 2nd & 3rd year return-to-base (labour). National rate telephone support & BigFix pre-emptive support

### Gold 3 YEAR WARRANTY

1st & 2nd year in-home service (parts & labour). 3rd year return-to-base (parts & labour). National rate telephone support & BigFix pre-emptive support

### Platinum 3 YEAR WARRANTY

3 years in-home service (parts & labour). National rate telephone support & BigFix pre-emptive support

# Award winning notebook PCs

Best Service & Support 2005

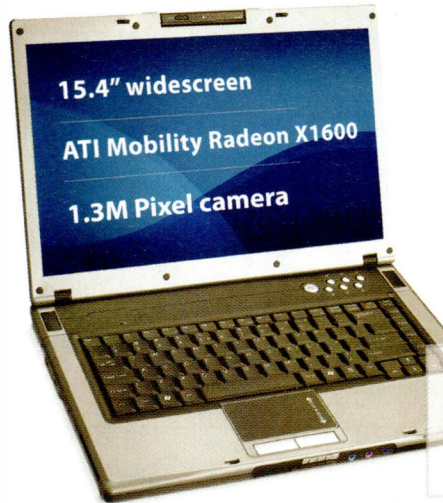


## Quest A420 PLUS e-CODE: QU1106

Stunning mobility graphics

**£999** (£850.21 ex VAT)

- AMD Turion 64 Mobile Technology MT-40
- Genuine Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB ATI Mobility Radeon X1600 graphics
- 15.4" WXGA X-Bright widescreen display (1280x800)
- 1GB DDR RAM 333MHz (2 x 512MB)
- 80GB 5400rpm hard drive
- DVD/CD-RW/Dual Layer DVD-RW drive
- Wireless Mini PCI 802.11bg (54Mbps) LAN & Bluetooth
- 1.3M Pixel camera
- Built-in audio and speakers
- 6 in 1 card reader (SD, MMC, MS/Pro, XD, SM)
- 9 cell Li-Ion battery (life up to 3 hrs approx)
- 4xUSB2.0, Firewire, VGA, TV-out, DVI, PCMCIA, Express Card, IR, 10/100/1000 LAN
- Weight - 2.9kg Dimensions - 358x259x33mm
- Gold 3 year warranty



### Popular Upgrades

- from 80GB to 100GB hard drive **£39.99**
- Tucano messenger carry case **£39.99**
- from 512MB to 1GB DDR RAM **£59.99**

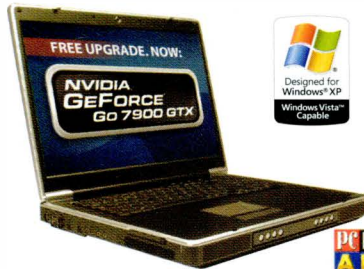


## Quest A225 e-CODE: QU1116

A great price, with a rich set of features

**£599** (£509.79 ex VAT)

- Mobile AMD Sempron processor 3000+
- Genuine Windows XP Home Edition
- Integrated graphics
- 15" XGA display (1024x768)
- 512MB DDR RAM 333MHz
- 60GB 5400rpm hard drive
- DVD/CD-RW drive
- Wireless Mini PCI 802.11bg (54Mbps) LAN
- Built-in audio and speakers
- 6 cell Li-Ion battery (life up to 3hrs approx)
- 4xUSB2.0, VGA, PCMCIA & 10/100 LAN
- Weight - 2.9kg Dimensions - 326x277x36.7mm
- Bronze 1 year warranty



## Quest A620 e-CODE: QU1101

17" gaming powerhouse

**£1699** (£1445.96 ex VAT)

- AMD Athlon 64 X2 3800+ processor
- Genuine Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB NVIDIA GeForce Go 7900 GTX graphics
- 17" WSXGA X-Bright wide screen display (1680x1050)
- 1GB DDR RAM, 333MHz (2 x 512MB)
- 100GB 5400rpm S-ATA hard drive
- DVD/CD-RW/Dual Layer DVD-RW drive
- Wireless Mini PCI 802.11bg (54Mbps) LAN & Bluetooth
- Virtual 7.1 channel audio and 4.1 speakers
- 1.3M Pixel Camera
- Built-in 10-in-one media card reader (MS/Pro, SD, MMC/CF/SM/MICRODRIVE/MS DUO/MINI SD/RSMC)
- 12 cell Li-Ion battery (life up to 2 hrs approx)
- 4xUSB2.0, 2xFirewire, Serial, DVI, PCMCIA, SPDIF out, parallel, TV-out, PS/2 & 10/100/1000 LAN
- Weight - 5.8kg Dimensions - 397x298x49.5mm
- Gold 3 year warranty



## Quest A630 PLUS e-CODE: QU1115

Dual GeForce Go 7800 GTX with NVIDIA SLI technology

**£2299** (£1956.60 ex VAT)

- AMD Turion 64 Mobile Technology ML-44
- Genuine Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 2x 256MB NVIDIA GeForce Go 7800 GTX SLI graphics
- 19" WSXGA wide screen display (1680x1050)
- 1GB DDR RAM, 333MHz (2 x 512MB)
- 100GB, 7200rpm S-ATA hard drive with 8MB buffer
- DVD/CD-RW/Dual Layer DVD-RW drive
- Wireless Mini PCI 802.11bg (54Mbps) LAN & Bluetooth
- 1.3M Pixel Camera
- Built-in media card reader (MS/Pro, SD, MMC)
- 12 cell Li-Ion battery (life up to 2 hrs approx)
- 5xUSB2.0, Firewire, Serial, DVI, PCMCIA, SPDIF out, TV-out & 10/100/1000 LAN
- Weight - 6.6kg Dimensions - 476x343x47.8mm
- Gold 3 year warranty



### Popular Upgrades

- Microsoft Windows XP Professional **£46.99**
- from Bronze to Silver warranty **£29.99**
- from 60GB to 60GB 7,200 hard drive **£69.99**

### Popular Upgrades

- from X2 3800+ to Athlon X2 4400+ **£169.99**
- 2nd 100GB 7,200 hard drive **£124.99**
- from 1GB to 2GB RAM **£124.99**

### Popular Upgrades

- Gold to Platinum warranty **£29.99**
- 2nd 100GB 7,200 hard drive **£124.99**
- from 1GB to 2GB RAM **£124.99**



Evesham Technology recommends Windows® XP Media Center Edition

## Enjoy high-definition digital entertainment

Intel® Centrino® Duo Mobile Technology in your **Voyager C720DC** delivers exciting visual experiences for gaming, videos, digital photography and more



Multi award winner just got better.

now with **NVIDIA 7900 GTX graphics.**

**Voyager C720DC** e- CODE: VY1554

17" widescreen viewing pleasure

**£1199** (£1020.43 ex VAT)



*"The fastest notebook we've ever seen"*  
PC Pro

- Intel® Centrino™ Duo Mobile Technology
- Intel® Core™ Duo processor T2400 (1.83GHz, 2MB cache, 667MHz)
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB ATI Mobility Radeon X1600 graphics
- 17" WXGA X-Bright widescreen display (1440x900)
- 1GB DDR2 RAM 667MHz (2x512MB)
- 80GB S-ATA 5400rpm hard drive
- DVD/CD-RW/Dual Layer DVD-RW drive
- Wireless Mini PCI 802.11abg (54Mbps) LAN
- Virtual 8 channel audio and speakers
- Built-in media card reader (MS/Pro, MS Duo, MMC, RSMCMC, SD, Mini SD)
- 8 cell Li-Ion battery (life up to 2hrs approx)
- 4xUSB2.0, Firewire, Serial, VGA, DVI, S/PDIF out, parallel, TV-out, Express Card & 10/100/1000 LAN
- Bluetooth
- Weight - 3.8kg Dimensions - 397x293x44.9mm
- Gold 3 year warranty



**Voyager C720DC PLUS** e- CODE: VY1552

As Voyager C720DC with:

**£1499** (£1276.59 ex VAT)



- Intel® Core™ Duo processor T2500 (2GHz, 2MB cache, 667MHz)
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 17" WSXGA X-Bright widescreen display (1680x1050)
- 256MB NVIDIA GeForce Go 7900 GTX graphics
- 100GB S-ATA 5400rpm hard drive
- 1.3M Pixel camera

## Mobile Entertainment Nirvana

**Voyager C545** e- CODE: VY1555

**£699** (£594.89 ex VAT)

- Intel® Celeron® M processor 410 (1.46GHz, 1MB cache, 533MHz)
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- Intel® Graphics Media Accelerator (GMA) 950
- 14.1" WXGA wide screen display (1280x800)
- 512MB DDR II RAM, 667MHz
- 60GB S-ATA 5400rpm hard drive
- DVD/CD-RW/Dual Layer DVD-RW drive
- Wireless Mini PCIe 802.11abg (54Mbps) LAN
- Built-in audio and 2.1 speakers
- Built-in media card reader (MS/Pro, SD, MMC)
- 6 cell Li-Ion battery (life up to 3hrs approx)
- 4xUSB2.0, Firewire, DVI-D, TV-out, Express Card & 10/100/1000 LAN
- Weight - 2.2kg Dimensions - 338x247x23/36mm
- Silver 3 year warranty

**TV**  
through Windows®  
XP Media Center  
Edition 2005

Ultra portable  
**2.2kg**



**Voyager C545 PLUS** e- CODE: VY1556

As Voyager C545 with:

**£999** (£850.21 ex VAT)



- Intel® Centrino™ Duo Mobile Technology
- Intel® Core™ Duo processor T2300 (1.66GHz, 2MB cache, 667MHz)
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB ATI Radeon Mobility Radeon X1600 graphics
- 1GB DDR II RAM, 667MHz (2x512MB)
- 80GB S-ATA 5400rpm hard drive
- Internal digital TV tuner

optional remote control



**AKARA and CHOROKA ranges**

Unique style combined with a common sense approach to durability.

Features unique COCOON™ SYSTEM that protects notebooks better.



**Akara Back Pack K1  
Black Brown Green**

**£64.98**

• 23 litres



- Akara Back Pack K2 Black Green Brown, 18 litres £49.98
- Akara Back Pack K3 Black Brown Green, 36 litres £84.98



**Choroka Messenger  
K1 Green/Black/Red**

**£79.99**

• 24 litres



- Choroka Messenger K2 Black and Green, 18 litres £49.98



external hard drives

**Evesham Bluemedia External 250GB**

**£84.99**

- USB 2.0 connectivity
- Complete with backup software
- Lightweight aluminum case



wireless audio

**Terratec Noxon 2 Audio Player**

**£149.99**

- Access your entire MP3 archive wirelessly
- Designed for 54mbps wireless networks
- Complete with remote control

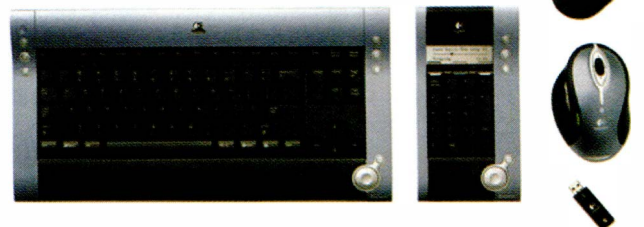


keyboard desktop set

**Logitech diNovo Media Desktop Laser**

**£110.32**

- Award-winning visual styling
- Ultra-flat keyboard increases comfort
- rapid-charging base keeps the mouse fresh and ready to go



components

**Sony Dual Layer DVD rewriter OEM**

**£24.98**

- Faster minus and plus dual layer recording
- Supports all DVD/CD formats
- Available in black



**XFX GeForce 7900GT**

**£199.00**

- 256mb GDDR3 memory
- 450 MHz Clock rate
- PCI interface



MP3 player

**Creative Zen MicroPhoto 8GB**

**£139.99**

4000 songs  
1000 + photos  
compatible with WMA files

- works with Napster to go & Yahoo! music unlimited
- removable rechargeable battery
- High-def organic colour screen
- Built in FM radio and Mic

choose from dark blue, white, black, platinum grey



Includes Headphones,  
headphone adapter,  
USB cable



MP3 player

**CNM MUSE 2GB MP3 Player**

**£89.99**

- Play MP3/WMA music
- Browse JPEG photos
- Read E-Book text files
- Digital Voice Recording
- ID3 support, lyric display
- 65k full-colour display
- Lithium rechargeable battery
- Dimensions: 90mm 41.1mm 7.65mm



TFTs

**Viewsonic 19in VA1912W**

**£199.99**

- 1440 x 900 optimum resolution
- 8m/s response time
- Built in stereo speakers
- Philips 20in 200W6Cs widescreen £299.00
- Viewsonic 20in VX2025 widescreen £327.99
- NEC 17in MultiSync 1770GX £219.00



all-in-one wireless printer, fax ,scanner, copier

**Hewlett Packard Photosmart 3310**

**£258.93**

- scans at 4800 x 4800 dpi resolution
- Built-in 9.1 cm colour LCD screen
- Borderless print up to large panorama size (215 x 610 mm)

speakers

**Logitech Z-5500 5.1**

**£199.99**

- THX® Certified
- 505 Watts RMS
- Connect to multiple sources

speakers

**Acoustic Energy Aego M BLACK 2.1 Speakers**

**£99.99**

- Hi-fidelity, high volume sound
- Plug and play simplicity for MP3 players, multi-media phones, hand held game devices
- Big hi-fi sound from the smallest devices



Evesham Technology recommends Windows® XP Media Center Edition

# "should be at the top of your list"

PC Pro. June 06

## Intel Centrino Duo group test winner

The Evesham Voyager C550RD triumphed over 11 rival manufacturers such as Sony, Dell, Toshiba, Samsung, Fujitsu and Asus to be named the PC Pro Intel® Centrino™ Duo labs group test winner.



"The screen is fantastic"

"Incredible performance"

PC Pro A-List



£1056.33  
(£999.00 ex VAT)

### Evesham Voyager C550 RD

- Intel® Centrino™ Duo Mobile Technology: Intel® Core™ Duo processor T2400 (1.83GHz, 2MB L2 cache, 667MHz)
- Genuine Windows® XP Media Center Edition 2005
- 256MB ATI Mobility Radeon X1600 graphics
- 15.4" WXGA X-Bright wide screen display (1280x800)
- 1GB DDR2 RAM 533MHz (2x512MB)
- 80GB, S-ATA 5400rpm hard drive
- DVD/CD-RW/Dual Layer DVD-RW drive

"Great value for money"

PC Advisor

3 year Silver warranty

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- High-end stereo with deep bass. Can fill any room in the home with unbelievably clear audio.
- Unique tabletop design integrates a powerful subwoofer.
- Compatible with MW and FM radio, CDs and MP3 music on CDR/CDRW.
- Two-line display shows data from stations using RDS in their broadcasts. Radio Display System (RDS) is a radio broadcast technology for displaying the artist, album, and track title information on FM radio receivers.



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