

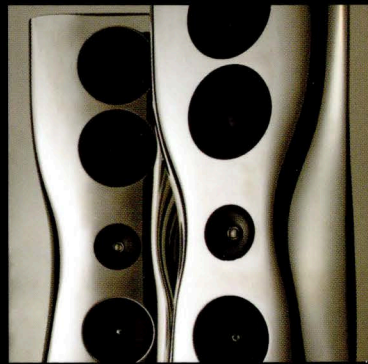
# HI-FI CHOICE

S P E C I A L E D I T I O N

AUTUMN/WINTER 2007 | £4.99

## *The Collection*

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



THE COLLECTION 2007 ISBN 1-858702-54-2

0 1 >

Future  
MEDIA WITH PASSION



£4.99 781858 702544



MEGALINE  
EUPHONIA  
- HELICON | 400 MK2  
MENTOR  
IKON  
CONCEPT  
SUBWOOFER





# THE NEW DALI HELIKON 400 MK2

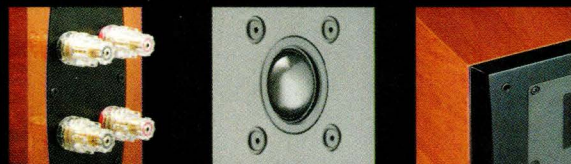
Hybrid tweeter module | 2 x 6.5" driver | Bi-wiring terminal  
42-30,000 Hz | H1026 x W267 x D501 mm | 32.0 kg

## FEATURES

- 2,5-way floor-stander with optional spikes included
- New terminals
- Matched real wood veneer in high-gloss Rosewood or Cherry finish
- Available as 7.1 system

*"While this speaker's alluring good looks might make even a super model green with envy, its sound is better still."*

| The Absolute Sound





# marantz®



The 15-series  
**PREMIUM**  
S E R I E S



# Partnership in audio *excellence*

The Premium Series is exclusively available through the following authorised dealers:

## Avon

Paul Green Hi Fi, Bath: 01225 316197

## Cambridgeshire

Audiovision, St. Neots: 01480 471202

## Co. Tyrone

Kronos AV Ltd, Dungannon: 02887 753606

## Cumbria

Peter Tyson, Carlisle: 01228 546756

## Devon

Sound Hi Fi, Dartmouth: 01803 833366

## East Sussex

Adams & Jarrett, St. Leonards-on-Sea: 01424 437165

## Guernsey

Teleskill A.V., St. Peters Port: 01481 722323

## Hampshire

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Southampton: 02380 337770

## Humberside

Manders Hi-Fi, Grimsby: 01472 351391

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Hull: 01482 587171

## Kent

Canterbury Hi-Fi, Canterbury: 01227 765315

Home Media, Maidstone: 01622 676703

## London

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Holborn: 020 7837 7540

## Manchester

Practical Hi Fi, Manchester, 0161 839 8869

## Middlesex

Harrow Audio, Harrow: 020 8930 9933

Musical Images, Edgware: 020 8952 5535

## Northamptonshire

Classic Hi Fi, Kettering: 01536 310855

## Scotland

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Glasgow: 0141 332 9655

Shadow Audio Consultants, Glenrothes: 01592 744779

## Surrey

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Epsom: 01372 720720

Unilet Sound & Vision, New Malden: 020 8942 9567

## Tyne & Wear

Global Hi-Fi, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: 0191 230 3600

## Yorkshire

Vickers Hi-Fi, York: 01904 629659

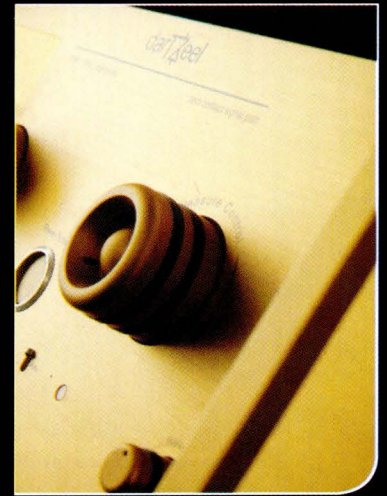


because music matters





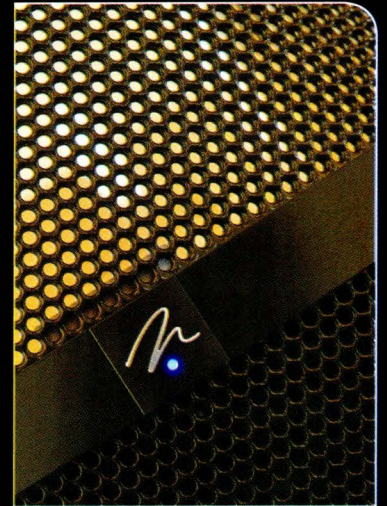
Wilson System 8 Loudspeaker



Dartzeel NHB 18NS Preamplifier



Krell Evolution 505 CD/SACD player



Martin Logan Vantage Loudspeaker



Sonus Faber Cremona Elipsa loudspeaker

Audio Research  
 Dartzeel  
 Koetsu  
 Krell  
 Martin Logan  
 Sonus Faber  
 Wilson Audio

darTzeel

Koetsu

KRELL  
 THE LEADER IN AUDIO ENGINEERING

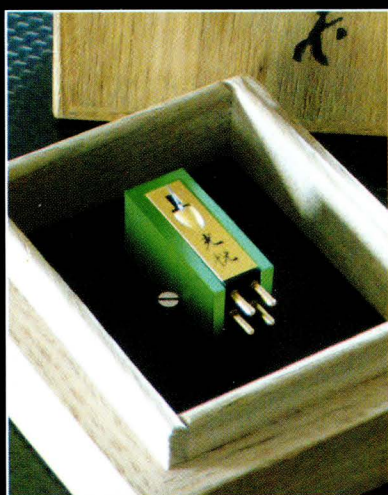
MARTIN LOGAN

Sonus faber.

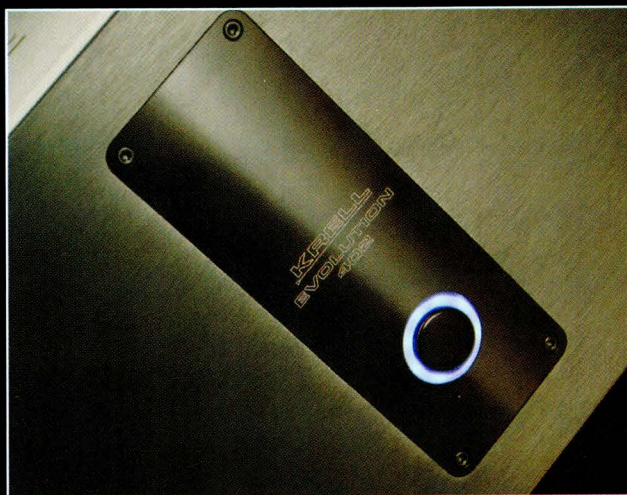
WILSON  
 AUDIO

audio research  
 HIGH DEFINITION™





Koetsu Jade Platinum Moving coil cartridge



Krell Evolution 402 Stereo power amplifier



Audio Research Ref 3 Valve preamplifier

Midland Audio X-Change have spent the last 25 years building a peerless reputation for supplying the worlds finest and revered audio equipment. Our portfolio is extensive, never contradictory nor confusing, only selecting products with the highest pedigree that guarantees you, the customer a life time of satisfaction. Add to that, purpose built facilities, a wealth of experience and product knowledge that will leave you with a better understanding, and a system that's tailored around your individual needs.

Book yourself a demonstration today and listen to some of the world's most mouth watering audio products.

[sales@midlandaudiox-change.co.uk](mailto:sales@midlandaudiox-change.co.uk)

Suppliers of premium luxury audio components

T. 01562 731100

Midland Audio X-Change is an authorised stockist of the complete Absolute Sounds portfolio.

[www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk](http://www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk)







## Muon

A KEF Concept  
designed by  
Ross Lovegrove

There can be few projects in this world where the central aim is to create an 'ultimate'. But this was precisely the goal when KEF combined their state-of-the-art acoustic technology with the sensual, organic forms of visionary designer Ross Lovegrove. The result was Muon® – perhaps the most extraordinary audio speaker ever conceived.

[kef.com/products/muon](http://kef.com/products/muon)







# The Collection 2007

Welcome to *The Collection*, a special annual edition from the makers of *Hi-Fi Choice* magazine, dedicated to the finest hi-fi components from around the globe – the very best that high-end audio has to offer.

So what defines a hi-fi component as 'high-end'? Is it price, or performance, or build quality? All of these play a part. The spirit of high-end audio is 'design without compromise', a burning desire to build the best without the constraints of budgets and price points, to capture both the essence of music and every sonic minutia within. The aim is to re-create reality, quite unlike the dull, grey approximation of lesser systems; because music has the power to move, soothe and engage the emotions like no other art form.

High-end audio is alive with ideas; where technologies old and new are fused with engineering of the highest quality; where freethinking and exhaustive research continue to push back the boundaries of sonic performance. *The Collection* reviews the fruits of these labours from the world's most prestigious hi-fi brands, nominated by the UK's most revered hi-fi critics to represent the zenith of audio reproduction in 2007. These are the Ferraris, Bentleys and Bugattis of the hi-fi world, purpose-built to the highest standards, a joy to own and use.

Like the finest cars, or the most distinguished watches, these beautifully executed examples of audio art simply ooze desirability. Their price tags reflect their quality and status, making them the stuff of dreamy aspiration for all but the most well-heeled music fans. Yet for those with lesser budgets their influence remains critical, as techniques and technologies trickle down to less costly products – many of which will feature in regular editions of *Hi-Fi Choice* in months to come.

*The Collection* is about the unequivocal, uncompromising best. And if you think the prices of components contained within its pages are unreasonable, remember this: a Ford will get you from A to B, but it's much more fun in a Ferrari.

*It's all about the experience...*



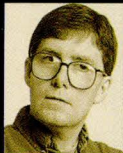
## CONTRIBUTORS



**Brad Francis**  
Ad Manager



**Alvin Gold**  
Hi-Fi Reviewer



**Jimmy Hughes**  
Hi-Fi Reviewer



**William Ireland**  
Photographer



**Jason Kennedy**  
Hi-Fi Reviewer



**Ken Kessler**  
Hi-Fi Columnist



**Adrian Lyon**  
Photographer



**Paul Messenger**  
Hi-Fi Reviewer



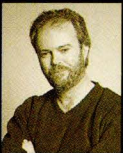
**Alan Sircom**  
Hi-Fi Reviewer



**Corin Skeggs**  
Art Editor



**Malcolm Steward**  
Hi-Fi Reviewer



**David Vivian**  
Hi-Fi Reviewer

PRODUCED BY

**hot radish**

media with bite

For more details about the media and publishing services that Hot Radish can provide, please call: 07854 966071

PUBLISHED BY



**HI-FI CHOICE**

Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW  
Tel: +44 020 7042 4000  
E-mail: hifi@mail@futurenet.co.uk

Editor – Hi-Fi Choice **Dan George** • Group Publisher **Andy Ford**  
Marketing Manager **Libby Latter** • Circulation Manager **Simon Nicoll** • Production Coordinator **Roberta Sanders** • Production Manager **Ralph Stringer** • Head of International Licensing **Tim Hudson** • Advertising Director **Malcolm Stoodley** • Chief Operations Officer **Simon Wear** • Managing Director **Robert Price**

UK newsstand distributor: Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT. Tel: 020 7429 4000

All contents © Future Publishing Ltd 2007

Future Publishing Ltd is part of Future plc. Future produces carefully targeted special-interest magazines for people who share a passion. We aim to satisfy that passion by creating titles offering value for money, reliable information, smart buying advice and which are a pleasure to read. Today we publish more than 150 magazines in the UK, US, France and Italy. Over 100 international editions of our magazines are also published in 30 other countries across the world.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR). Registered office: Future plc, Beauford Court, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

Group Finance Director: **John Bowman**  
Chief Executive: **Steve Spring**  
Non-Executive Chairman: **Roger Parry**



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.



32



34



64



68



74



112



# Contents

## FEATURES

### 13 HIGH-END HEROES

We put the questions to four big hitters from Britain's high-end hi-fi scene. What's their vision of hi-fi's future? Read this and find out...

### 20 KEN KESSLER'S ROOTS OF HIGH-END HI-FI

The UK's most outspoken audio journalist gives us his take on the history of high-end hi-fi

## REVIEWS

This section contains in-depth reviews of the world's finest hi-fi, as nominated by the UK's most revered audio critics. The two-page reviews are of fresh, new components, many of which are world-exclusives. The single-page reviews feature a selection of high-end favourites, all of which have been reviewed by *Hi-Fi Choice* in the past year and are revisited here, especially for *The Collection*.

### SOURCE COMPONENTS

- 38 AMR CD-77
- 43 CLASSÉ CDP-202
- 56 DCS SCARLATTI
- 112 DPS 2 & 250
- 74 ESOTERIC X-01D2
- 115 GAMUT CD3
- 88 KOETSU URUSHI VERMILLION
- 99 KRELL EVOLUTION 505
- 64 MAGNUM DYNALAB MD 109
- 95 MARANTZ SA-7S1
- 104 MOON ANDROMEDA REFERENCE
- 46 NAIM CD555
- 71 SME 20/12A

### AMPLIFIERS

- 58 AUDIO RESEARCH LS26 & REFERENCE 110
- 40 AYRE MX-R
- 123 CLASSÉ CP-700 & CA-M400
- 78 CONRAD-JOHNSON P140M
- 84 DARTZEEL NHB-18NS & NHB-108
- 68 JADIS JA200
- 50 KARAN ACOUSTICS KA S 180
- 32 KRELL EVOLUTION 222 & 302
- 103 LYNGDORF TDAI 220
- 83 MCINTOSH MCD-201
- 55 MOON EVOLUTION I-7

- 119 MUSICAL FIDELITY A1008
- 107 NAIM SUPERNAIT
- 92 PHONOSOPHIE BI-AMP 1-4
- 37 UNISON RESEARCH PERFORMANCE
- 108 UNISON RESEARCH REFERENCE PREAMPLIFIER & MONOBLOCK

### LOUDSPEAKERS

- 34 BOWERS & WILKINS SIGNATURE DIAMOND
- 62 FOCAL NOVA UTOPIA BE
- 72 KEF MUON
- 91 MARTINLOGAN VANTAGE
- 80 PIEGA TC70X
- 116 PIONEER S1-EX
- 67 PMC EB1
- 49 QUAD ESL 2805
- 44 SONUS FABER CREMONA ELIPSA
- 87 TANNOY GLENAIR 10
- 96 TRIANGLE MAGELLAN CELLO
- 77 WHARFEDALE AIREDALE NEO
- 52 WILSONAUDIO SYSTEM 8

### OTHERS

- 111 MERIDIAN F80
- 61 MERIDIAN G95
- 120 NORDOST ODIN
- 100 STAX SR-007 & SRM-007TII



# F80

BOOTHROYD STUART  
MERIDIAN®

## The Meridian F80. Simply beautiful sound.

In 2005, Meridian Audio began a unique collaboration with Ferrari to develop a range of products that would reflect the unique qualities of both companies: performance, innovation and bold product design.

The result is the Meridian F80 - a complete home entertainment system that combines Meridian's legendary expertise in digital audio with Ferrari's world-leading reputation in materials technology.

Featuring CD and DVD-Video playback, a AM/FM/DAB tuner and a 2.1 digital active loudspeaker system, the F80 is compact, complete and incredibly powerful. No wonder What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision recently referred to the F80 as "a work of genius".

For more information and to find your nearest retailer, visit [www.thef80.com](http://www.thef80.com)

**Meridian Audio Ltd.**  
Latham Road, Huntingdon  
Cambridgeshire PE29 6YE, UK  
+44 (0)1480 445678

**Ferrari**

OFFICIAL LICENSED PRODUCT

All trademark rights reserved. Produced under licence of Ferrari SpA. FERRARI, the PRANCING HORSE device, all associated logos and distinctive designs are trademarks of Ferrari SpA.





# High-End Heroes

more based on 'effects', and does not carry the same integrity as two-channel stereo. For pure, unadulterated, emotive entertainment, nothing beats music through a well-balanced, high-quality, two-channel hi-fi.

## What is it that makes a hi-fi component truly 'high-end'?

First, it is capable of reproducing the true sound and spirit of music. Second, it offers long-term reliability. Third, it comes from a serious manufacturer with a great track record. Fourth, all items from the manufacturer are built to the same exemplary standard, delivering genuine pride of ownership. Finally, the manufacturer needs to offer top-level customer support.

## What does the future hold for high-end hi-fi? What form will the hi-fi of the future take, and will there be a place for high-quality audio?

High-quality audio will continue to grow, as long as music is purchased in decent-quality formats. Any music lover will find that a high-quality system delivers great rewards; it is our job to ensure that as many people as possible experience true hi-fi performance.

## What would you say to someone in order to persuade them to spend their hard-earned cash on a great hi-fi system rather than, say, a new computer?

The pleasure to be obtained from a good audio system is far more lasting than any other sensorial thrills – a sound investment will soothe, stimulate and entertain for years.

## What does your own home hi-fi system consist of?

A turntable, Audio Research CD7 CD player, Krell Evolution Two and Evolution One amp system and Wilson Audio Alexandria speakers.

## What's your favourite piece of music to play on it?

A wide variety of music across multiple genres, from rock to classical; too many to pick one!

## From your portfolio, which new products are you most excited about and why?

There are lots of fantastic new components coming in the next few months. Martin Logan's new Purity, for example, is the world's first fully active electrostatic speaker at a very attractive price. There are some sensational new speakers from Sonus Faber too, replete with the build quality and performance you'd expect, while Mystère's valve amps offer exceptional pace and fluidity, and they're surprisingly affordable, too. On the multichannel front, both Krell and Theta have some stunning products coming... and that's just the tip of the iceberg! ■■

## Ricardo Franassovici

### Founder and Managing Director, Absolute Sounds

#### How would you describe your company?

Importers and distributors of the world's finest audio and video components. We carry many of the world's most famous brands; we also take time to source products with great synergy, enabling us to deliver peerless system solutions.

#### When was your company founded and what was the primary motivation?

Back in the late 1970s, the high-quality end of the UK market was dominated by home-grown brands like Linn and Naim; in fact, the concept of true 'high-end' sound didn't really exist here, as it did in the US. I had a burning desire to introduce the best products from around the world to the UK market, to enable music fans to experience sound at the highest level, so I set up Absolute Sounds in 1978.

#### What were the key hi-fi components that you distributed in the early days and what was their impact on the UK audio scene?

It's difficult to pick just a few, but here goes: Koetsu was a real discovery for UK listeners

who had never heard phono cartridges at that level before. And Beveridge speakers showed British hi-fi fans that there was an electrostatic world beyond Quad.

#### What are the key brands that you carry in your portfolio today?

Audio Research, Copland, DreamVision, Jadis, Koetsu, Krell, Martin Logan, Sonus Faber, Theta Digital, Wilson Audio, EAT, Prima Luna.

#### If you could add one more hi-fi or AV brand to your portfolio, what would it be and why?

I'd love to add a turntable brand that would match the sound and build quality criteria set by our other suppliers. Watch this space...

#### Two-channel hi-fi or multichannel home cinema: which is better a) for your ears and b) for your business?


High-end, two-channel hi-fi is a mature industry, with components that are capable of reproducing the true sound and spirit of music. Multichannel home cinema sound is





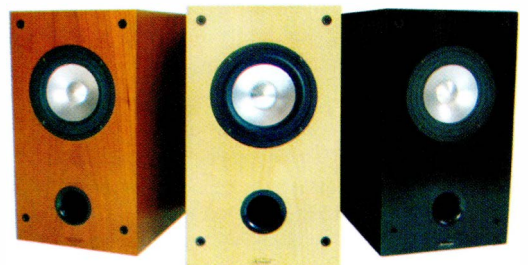
# Aurousal

turn on the music



unprecedented audio realism.  
unrivalled HD crystal clarity and  
holographic imaging. this is Aurousal.

acoustically optimised, full-range, flex-contoured  
light metal alloy technology. finely tailored flex  
affords an effectively infinitely-variable diaphragm  
diameter. frequencies are seamlessly integrated  
from 45Hz to 22KHz, with no crossover  
components to degrade the dynamics.



find out more at  
**[www.aurousal.com](http://www.aurousal.com)**  
or email [sales@aurousal.com](mailto:sales@aurousal.com)

Find us in room 1403 at the Heathrow High Fidelity Show 07,  
Park Inn, 31st March - 1st April.





# High-End Heroes

## Branko Bozic

Principal/Partner,  
Audiofreaks

### How would you describe your company?

Distributors of the finest audio and home theatre equipment.

### When was your company founded and what was the primary motivation?

November 1987. I wanted to demonstrate how easy it was to reproduce the live experience with recorded music, rather than bombard the listener with artificial sonic fireworks.

### What were the key hi-fi components that you distributed in the early days and what was their impact on the UK audio scene?

Our first brands were Kuzma and Empire (now Benz-Micro), followed by Conrad-Johnson. I remember we sold over 130 Kuzma tonearms and many MC cartridges in our first year.

### What are the key brands that you carry in your portfolio today?

I genuinely feel all our brands today are equally important and never like to select any particular ones. Historically, one could

mention Kuzma, Conrad-Johnson and Cardas Audio. In more recent years, brands such as Avalon Acoustics, Zanden Audio, Finite Elemente and Karan Acoustics have had a crucial influence to the overall balance and intrinsic quality of our portfolio.

### If you could add one more hi-fi or AV brand to your portfolio, what would it be and why?

While I am very pleased with our present brand collection, it is important to monitor the emergence of new names in order to consider potential additions in a timely fashion.

### Two-channel hi-fi or multichannel home cinema: which is better a) for your ears and b) for your business?

I am still waiting to experience a multichannel system that possesses all the relevant musical qualities of the best two-channel systems. Combined with a natural visual dimension, it should create a well balanced audio-visual experience and bring me as close as possible to any live experience of the kind. As I am only

interested in music, movies don't really qualify. Therefore, I presume my ideal goal would be to watch a recorded musical event at home and feel close to 'being there' in every possible way.

### What is it that makes a hi-fi component truly 'high-end'?

A true high-end component is a complex reflection of its creator's cultural, aesthetic and musical sensibility, taste and perception.

### What does the future hold for high-end hi-fi? What form will the hi-fi of the future take, and will there be a place for high-quality audio?

As a hopeless realist, I cannot answer this question in any 'politically correct' manner. I will, however, say that I believe there is no reason for current and futuristically preferred or chosen sound carrier formats to be limiting factors towards new, superior standards of sound and music reproduction.

### What would you say to someone in order to persuade them to spend their hard-earned cash on a great hi-fi system rather than, say, a new computer?

Nothing. Buying a computer today is like buying a newspaper or a loaf of bread. We all have computers, but, relatively few of us feel the need to enjoy our music through a genuinely good hi-fi system.

### What does your own home hi-fi system consist of?

Kuzma Stabi XL4 and SME Model 20/12 turntables, Zanden CD transport and DAC, Magnum Dynalab MD109 FM radio tuner, Conrad-Johnson ART Series 3 preamplifier, Zanden 1200Mk3 phono stage, Karan Acoustics KAM 1200 mono power amplifiers, Avalon Isis speakers... and more!

### What's your favourite piece of music to play on it?

My classical favourites are pretty fluid. Presently, I'm back to Chopin's Piano Concertos and Verdi's opera *La Forza del Destino*. On the jazz side of things, Oscar Peterson (piano) and Holly Cole (vocal) are almost a constant.

### From your portfolio, which new products are you most excited about and why?

As a brand, Karan Acoustics presented a huge challenge over the past five years. I wish I discovered it ten years earlier when it would have been much easier to show the world how musically pleasing solid-state electronics can be if conceived and executed correctly. Coming from a hard-core supporter of anything with valves – enough said, I think. ■







See the difference...

the new Chorus 700 V line

...now you need to hear the difference.

*You just have to look at our new Chorus 700 V loudspeakers to understand that the entry-level speaker will never be the same again: non-parallel inner walls, 25mm thick MDF panels, 100% made in France, 100% Focal technologies, with Aluminum/Magnesium inverted dome tweeter, Polyglass cones, DPC crossover, exceptional finish... Chorus 700 V: Why have ordinary...when you can have the extraordinary. For further information visit our website at [www.focal-fr.com](http://www.focal-fr.com)*

Focal-JMlab UK - P.O. Box 4287 - CV4 0BS Coventry - Tel. 0845 660 26 80 - [info@focal-uk.com](mailto:info@focal-uk.com) - [www.focal-uk.com](http://www.focal-uk.com)



  
**FOCAL**  
the Spirit of Sound



# High-End Heroes

## Nick Green

Founder and Managing Director, UKD

### How would you describe your company?

We're a small company distributing high-class audio equipment. The common theme of our products is: fine sound, attractive looks and good value.

### When was your company founded and what was the primary motivation?

UKD goes back a long way. It all started in Rome in 1979, when I set up a distribution company for Wharfedale. Gradually we added other British brands, and the company became known as UK Distribution.

Back then, the purpose was to distribute British hi-fi. But during the 1980s, the Italians began to make hi-fi equipment that was more attractive than the imported offerings. Handcrafted speaker cabinets in solid hardwood became the norm, as did stylish valve amplifiers, and affordable electronics with real musicality. UKD Italy began making Opera speakers in 1991, and that's when I returned to England and set up UKD Ltd. Our Italian connections remain strong today, but we carry products from other European countries, too.

### What were the key hi-fi components that you distributed in the early days and what was their impact on the UK audio scene?

In the early days back in the UK, it wasn't easy. The market was full of ugly boxes, valve amplifiers were regarded with disbelief by many dealers and stylish hi-fi was often viewed with suspicion. It took a while to make the breakthrough, but now nobody questions valves or believes that hi-fi should not be attractive. That was the impact of the products we distributed, to change old perceptions.

### What are the key brands that you carry in your portfolio today?

Our top brands in recent years have been Unison Research, Pathos, Triangle, Opera, Audio Analogue and Final.

### If you could add one more hi-fi or AV brand to your portfolio, what would it be and why?

If you had asked that a few weeks ago, I would have said we needed a good turntable

brand. Well, now we have one: Thorens, a glorious name from the past, and one with a very bright future.

### Two-channel hi-fi or multichannel home cinema: which is better a) for your ears and b) for your business?

Same answer for both: two-channel. That may change eventually, but two-channel stereo hi-fi is doing well for us right now.

### What is it that makes a hi-fi component truly 'high-end'?

The term 'high-end' has become associated with products that are just plain expensive. (And one component, however good, is nothing unless it works well with the rest of the system.) I prefer the word 'special'. A truly special product will let you hear and feel much more into the music. Special components give special musical enjoyment.

### What does the future hold for high-end hi-fi? What form will the hi-fi of the future take, and will there be a place for high-quality audio?

The future looks good for 'quality' hi-fi. The choice is vast, and growing. Hard disk systems give masses of storage and convenience. CD players, amplifiers and loudspeakers are getting better. Vinyl, too, is enjoying something of a resurgence.

There will always be people who want the best from recorded music. Playing your favourite music on a good system can be a moving and uplifting experience. And I'm sure that listening to music, playing music, being involved in music – actually does you good. For me, that's all very positive.

### What would you say to someone in order to persuade them to spend their hard-earned cash on a great hi-fi system rather than, say, a new computer?

A top-class audio system will give you great musical pleasure; it will transport you, soothe you and thrill you. As far as I know, a computer can't do that.

A hi-fi system can be really attractive, sometimes almost a work of art. That means pride of ownership. A computer doesn't give you much in the way of pride of ownership.

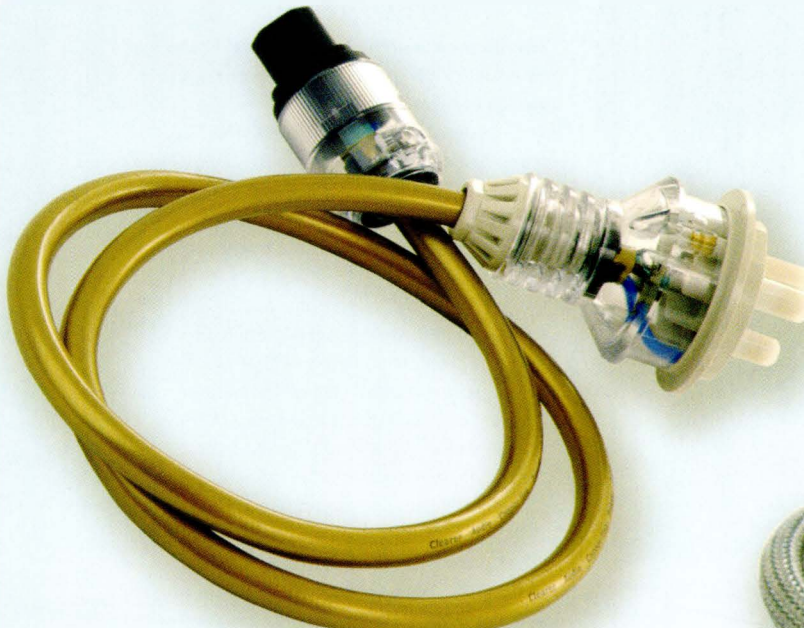
### From your portfolio, which new products are you most excited about and why?

It changes frequently, because new products are coming along all the time. Current favourites in my listening room are the Pathos Digit CD player, Unison Research Preludio amplifier and Triangle Magellan Cello loudspeakers. Beautiful sound, beautifully made products. That's my kind of hi-fi. ■■



# Clearer Audio

www.cleareraudio.com



" the best pound-for-pound upgrade we've heard all year "  
*What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, Awards 2005*



Silver-line Interconnect, May 2006

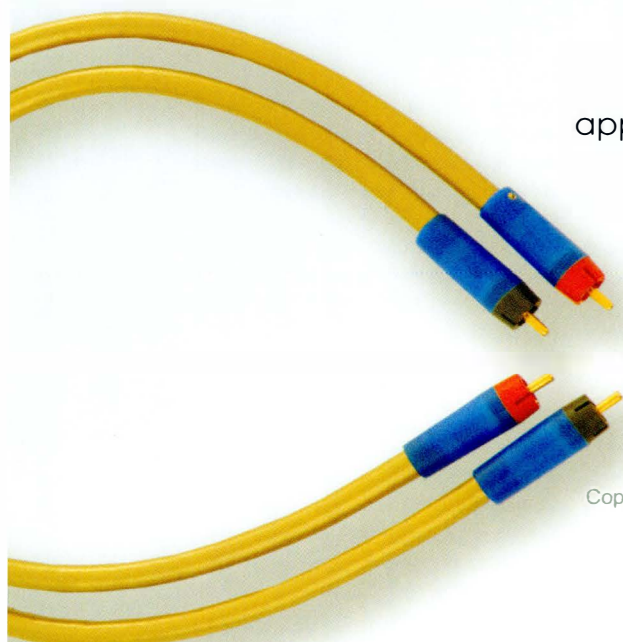


"...we were very taken by this cable. It seemed, in every application we tried, to give a quality of sound way out of its class... excellent treble, which is open and airy... detail across the audio band is very clear and beautifully etched... bass is extended, strong and tuneful. "

Copper-line Alpha Interconnect  
 Hi-Fi Choice, July 2007



Copper-line Alpha Interconnect, July 2007



Clearer Audio Ltd.

Phone : +44 (0) 1702 543981

Fax : +44 (0) 1702 541870

Email : enquiries@cleareraudio.com

60 Day Money Back Guarantee - Limited Lifetime Warranty



Copper-line Power  
 September 2005



Copper-line HDMI (1m)  
 February 2006



Copper-line HDMI (2m)  
 August 2007



Silver-line Power  
 June 2006



Silver-line 75 Digital  
 April 2007



Copper-line Interconnect  
 May 2007



Silver-line 75 Digital  
 April 2006





# High-End Heroes

## Antony Michaelson

Founder and Managing Director,  
Musical Fidelity

### How would you describe your company?

A highly directed and motivated organisation with a single, straightforward aim: to make the best-performing and best-value amplifiers in the world.

### When was your company founded and what was the primary motivation?

Musical Fidelity was founded on my kitchen table in 1981, funded by a £100 loan from my mother-in-law and my credit card. (We've come a long way...) My motivation was the same then as it is now – in other words, to make the best-performing and best-value amplifiers in the world.

### Which was the product that put your company on the map? What made it special and how would you describe its impact on the UK hi-fi scene?

The A1 integrated amplifier made Musical Fidelity famous in 1985. It was easily the best-performing and best-value hi-fi product of its time. As a customer recently posted on our website: "It was the original eye-opener."

### Which hi-fi components do you most admire from brands other than your own and why?

The Macintosh 275 amplifier, because it delivers that special combination of technical and sonic excellence, plus great value for money. It is simply one of the best amplifier designs of all time.

### Two-channel hi-fi or multichannel home cinema: which is better a) for your ears and b) for your business?

Two-channel. Full stop.

### What is it that makes a hi-fi component truly 'high end'?

In my mind, the term 'high end' is synonymous with bullshit. This situation has arisen because generations of magazines have refused to make proper technical evaluations of products and have instead taken the lazy, sloppy way out. As a result, too many high-end products offer little more than extremely expensive casework and the actual performance of what the customer buys is

mediocre to downright dreadful. For me, 'high end' is a thoroughly discredited term.

### What does the future hold for high-end hi-fi? What form will the hi-fi of the future take, and will there be a place for high-quality audio?

What I want to see is properly designed high-performance equipment that offers extraordinary value for money and genuine musical accuracy. Remember: 'high fidelity' should equal 'high truthfulness'.

### What would you say to someone in order to persuade them to spend their hard-earned cash on a great hi-fi system rather than, say, a new computer?

That's the whole problem isn't it? People gabbling about nonsense rather than simply putting somebody in front of a pair of loudspeakers and letting them experience the intensity of a real hi-fi system for themselves.

### What does your own home hi-fi system consist of?

Musical Fidelity X-RAYv8 CD player, X-DACv8 digital-to-analogue converter, kW preamplifier and kW750 power amplifier, with Sonus Faber Chrimona loudspeakers.

### What's your favourite piece of music to play on it?

That's a real audiophile question. Audiophiles have one or two discs that they listen to over and over again. I've got about 2000 discs of a wide variety of music. My favourites? Bach is the greatest ever and has never been surpassed (and probably never will be). Then there's Def Leppard, Mozart, White Snake, Brahms, Thelonious Monk, Beethoven, AC/DC and many others.

### From your portfolio, which new products are you most excited about and why?

The Musical Fidelity 550K Supercharger is a conceptual breakthrough for hi-fi. It allows what might, at first sight, appear to be very ordinary hi-fi systems to produce true high-fidelity sound. The point of the 550K Supercharger is that the vast majority of hi-fi systems have nowhere nearly enough power to deliver anything approaching a realistic dynamic range. The Supercharger, which can be inserted between the existing amplifier and speakers, increases the existing amp's power to somewhere in the 500 to 600-watt range. This improvement is arresting. When demonstrating it you don't have to describe it, talk about it or sell it in any way. All you have to do is put the Supercharger in circuit. At last, a hi-fi upgrade that doesn't have to be 'explained' – it just does it. Sounds good to me! ■■■





## ROOTS OF HIGH-END AUDIO

*The life and times of high-end hi-fi can be traced back to the 1940s, flourishing via a vibrant underground scene in the 1970s, before evolving into the stunning examples of audio art now strewn throughout this edition of The Collection. Ken Kessler, hi-fi journalism's most opinionated, subversive and eminently readable columnist, gives us his take on the origins of high-end audio – where it's come from, and ultimately where it's going*

**H**igh-end' has always been with us. A generic term that means anything more expensive than the norm, it has been applied to restaurants, watches, luggage and myriad other consumer goods and services, but hi-fi seems to have used it the most. And right from the outset, it spelled deep trouble.

Was high-end status determined solely by quality or simply by price? Sounds like a stupid

question, but there are plenty of products with sublime performance that aren't considered 'high-end' because the prices are too low. Conversely, a considerable number of components with obscene price tags offer performance that barely merits 'risible'. This curse has been with us for decades and isn't about to change. But it does bear remembering when one enters the world of extreme audio for the first time.

Naturally, the worst offenders, those who misuse the term 'high-end', are the manufacturers themselves, for no purveyor of expensive crap wants to be identified as anything other than a source for state-of-the-art hardware. I could name a few dozen of said miscreants but do not want to put another Porsche in the garage of *Hi-Fi Choice's* corporate lawyer. But such is human nature that we automatically assume that we get



what we pay for, and that a £20,000 amplifier just has to be better than a £2,000 amplifier.

Once you get past this never-ending pub debate, and the opposing audiophiles take their hands from each other's neck, there is a commonly accepted 'norm' for what roughly constitutes high-end audio. What few wish to recognise is that it's been around ever since 'specialty' or separates audio began, right after World War II, when huge consoles containing record players and radios were split into their constituent parts. More importantly, the arrival of the LP and of FM radio provided sources that demanded more than the bandwidth of then-available hardware.

Thus, the late 1940s rather than the more commonly accepted 1970s heralded the birth of the high-end. And, yes, both quality and price created the market sector, with early, pioneering brands like Marantz, Harman Kardon and McIntosh in the USA, and Quad and Radford in the UK, exhibiting a superior

that we do have to look to the early 1970s, when the sector was both identified and separated from the mass-market, or what we still tend to call (hopefully not disparagingly) 'mid-fi'. Every barrier was removed. No more self-inflicted limitations, in the way that Quad's Peter Walker limited the size of speaker he would design up to, as well as the prices he was willing to charge. Power output, speaker dimensions – there were no more boundaries.



Quad 11 power amp and 22 preamp



Classic Quad electrostatic

## “The arrival of the LP and of FM radio provided sources that demanded more than the bandwidth of then-available hardware”

performance that one paid for commensurately. While not as extreme as the top-priced models of today, such brands were still not aimed at middle-income groups.

If you do the conversions using GDP or inflation, you find that, for example, the Quad ESL electrostatic speaker of 1957 cost less than the current 2805 in 1957 real terms; the real cost of high-end hardware has gone up while budget gear has gone down. But even ignoring the industry's virtual elimination of a price 'ceiling' since the 1970s, still you had to be a well-paid professional in the 1950s to afford Quad or McIntosh. They didn't call it 'hi-fi for doctors and lawyers' for nothing.

But this is an overview of what current audiophiles consider to be 'high-end', and for

### HI-FI SEMANTICS

Credit for applying the term 'high-end' to extreme audio equipment usually goes by common consensus to the American journalist Harry Pearson, a music lover who founded a magazine called *The Absolute Sound* when he grew tired of waiting for J. Gordon Holt to produce another copy of his revered title, *Stereophile*. The latter was the unofficial mouthpiece of an ever-increasing audiophile underground, and Holt was prescient in recognising the need to present an alternative voice to that of the mainstream magazines.

It is worth noting here that the USA had a clear division between the underground audio titles and those that could be commonly found on newsstands. American mainstream

magazines were utterly non-critical and in the thrall of advertisers; magazines like *Stereophile* and *The Absolute Sound* offered genuine criticism, showing no fear of the multinationals. Conversely, the UK didn't have to spawn an underground press, because the newsstand titles were never controlled by the advertisers and were just as gutsy – from the early 1970s onward – as the American guerrilla press. This may sound naive and unlikely, but it's true: the British audio press always had teeth. ❖



Ad for McIntosh MC-60 amp

1946

The Scale Model Equipment Company Limited founded; will later be known as SME.

1949

RCA introduces the microgroove 45rpm, large-hole, 7-inch record and a dedicated record changer/adaptor. Ampex introduces its Model 300 professional studio recorder.

1952

Marantz founded. Emory Cook releases experimental two-channel 'binaural' discs. Ken Kessler born.

1954

G. A. Briggs stages the first in a series of live-vs-recorded demos in London's Royal Festival Hall. The first commercial 2-track stereo tapes are released.

### Ken's High-End Hi-Fi Timeline

1948

Columbia Records announces the 12-inch LP with 33 1/3 playing speed.

1951

Bell Laboratories develops the germanium transistor.

1953

Ampex provides a 4-track, 35mm magnetic film system for feature film *The Robe*, shown in CinemaScope with surround sound. Harman Kardon introduces its first product.

1955

Dyna Company (Dynaco) founded by David Hafler and Ed Laurent.





# 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.

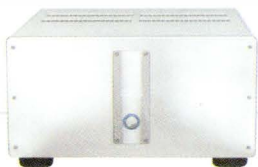
What's more, it doesn't stop there: this year sees the launch of a complete new range of **Krell Evolution** pre- and power amplifiers - plus two exciting source components and an extraordinary unique integrated amplifier.

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

**absolute sounds ltd**

58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW  
T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09 F: +44 (0)20 88 79 79 62  
[www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com) [info@absolutesounds.com](mailto:info@absolutesounds.com)





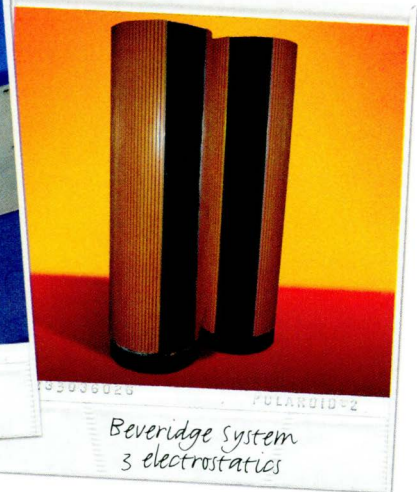
❖ By the 1970s, US newsstand magazines were obsessing over tenth-of-a-point distortion figures in accordance with the goals of the undistinguished Japanese brands that could afford their huge advertising rates. What was being ignored were the 'cult' specialist brands that eschewed features and chased the sort of power outputs we're still re-discovering with products like Musical Fidelity's Supercharger. Among them were makes like Phase Linear, SAE and Dunlap-Clarke; edgy brands that thought 250 watts per channel should be the norm in an era when a 60-watt amp was considered high-powered.

Something was definitely in the air, and it was clear that the mass-market brands were failing to serve the more discerning, more 'well-heeled' music lovers. With hindsight, we see that concurrent with the arrival of such massive amplifiers were new speaker brands, including Magneplanar, Dayton-Wright, Acoustat, Dahlquist, Beveridge and others. Some employed conventional drivers; many looked to radical alternatives, including electrostatics inspired by Quad and other dipoles or panels. Conventional box-type speakers were being relegated to the middle and lower sectors.

Pockets of rebellion were found everywhere. In Minnesota, William Z. Johnson was (almost



*Beveridge RM-1 preamp*



*Beveridge System 3 electrostatics*

single-handedly) reviving valve amplifiers. Well, at least outside of Japan, where they always marched to the beat of a different active device. In the UK, Ivor Tiefenbrun was pitching a single-speed turntable called the Linn LP12, while Naim was producing minimalist amplifiers – part of a UK-led movement that deemed tone controls as detrimental to the sound. But the seminal, defining product was being made in the USA by one Mark Levinson.

**LUST FOR POWER**

Designed by the genius John Curl, Levinson's JC-1 phono preamplifier of 1972 evolved into the ML-1 preamplifier, and then into an entire system, including the legendary HQD system based on Quad ESL speakers. Levinson issued a series of outstanding monoblock amplifiers at a time when two-channel amps were the norm, stressing the need for the isolation of the two channels for less cross-talk and better dynamics. More importantly, he demonstrated that sheer power, while important, was not everything: Levinson revived Class A amplification with a low-power amp which, while less efficient than Class B, sounded 'better' by virtue of the removal of crossover distortion. (Sugden, it should be pointed out, had long been carrying the torch for Class A in the UK.)

And people certainly noticed the superior performance – audibly superior performance. By 1979, Levinson was ready to unleash the ML-3, a 200-watt dual-mono design to satisfy those using low sensitivity speakers. Thus, the race for both sonic purity and vast reserves of power commenced. In its wake would follow dozens of brands that, to this day, constitute the high-end of the post-Levinson era, rather than that of the earlier SAE/Phase Linear decade. Where the latter boasted vast amounts of power, the post-Levinson amps could actually deliver the current into real-world loads rather than just into test equipment. ❖



*Linn LP12 turntable*



*Mark Levinson ML-2 power amp*

**1956**

Les Paul makes the first 8-track recordings using the 'Sel-Sync' method.

**1958**

The first commercial stereo discs start to appear.

**1960**

Japanese microphone specialist Stax introduces its first 'Earspeaker', an electrostatic headphone.

**1962**

McIntosh issues the MC275 75-watt power amplifier – the company's most beloved and enduring design – and the C22 preamplifier.

**Ken's High-End Hi-Fi Timeline**

**1957**

Westrex demonstrates the first commercial '45/45' stereo cutter head. Quad releases its first full-range electrostatic speaker.

**1959**

EMI fails to renew the Blumlein stereo patent, possibly the single stupidest move in the history of music or audio next to Decca failing to sign the Beatles.

**1961**

The FCC settles on an FM stereo broadcast format.

**1963**

Philips introduces the Compact Cassette tape format and offers licenses worldwide.



At last, visual sophistication meets high end audio performance.



Piega loudspeakers redefine the audio rule book when it comes to visual sophistication and sheer musical performance.

Piega's implementation of aluminum cabinets with the use of ribbon technology further elevate the listening experience of these stunning speakers.

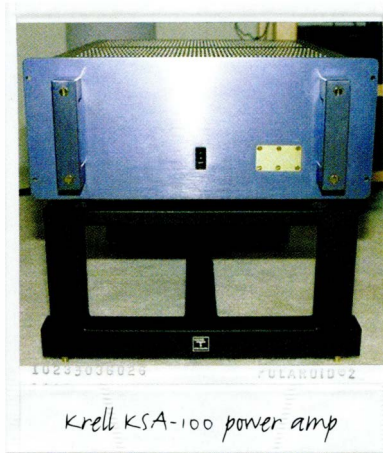
Whether your criteria be multi-channel for theatre, or 2 channel stereo, you can be sure that your time with Piega loudspeakers will be an unforgettable one.

For further information and your nearest Piega stockist contact us on the details below.



❖ Legion are those that either followed in Levinson's footsteps or benefited from Levinson's upping of the ante. Suddenly, prices were escalating with a force yet to be arrested nearly 40 years later, while power outputs reached as high as a kilowatt. Among the makers of 'super amps', mainly American or Canadian, were notables including Krell – who arguably surpassed Levinson's achievements – Classé, Threshold, GAS, Ayre, Boulder, Bryston, Sumo and countless others.

While almost every country could boast makers of super-amps, from Japan to Denmark, the UK was notably slow in joining the fray. Today, it can boast Musical Fidelity, Chord Electronics and a handful of others prepared to lock horns with the Yanks, but in the 1970s, a weak, malleable and jingoistic UK audio press defended the home-grown manufacturers' inability to deliver the goods by lambasting the Americans' perceived 'lust for power'. For many years, this fervent patriotism (bordering on xenophobia) resulted in UK manufacturers forever being 'also-rans' in the high-end amplifier game. Instead, they remained content to service the middle market, and even now there are precious few exceptions to the rule.



Krell KSA-100 power amp

**THINGS THAT GLOW IN THE DARK**

While Levinson and other manufacturers of that ilk were wresting as much power as possible from solid-state devices, a retailer in the American mid-west was quietly reviving the valve. The valve, or 'tube' to Americans, had never gone away entirely, and among those who kept up production of valve products well past the early 1960s were Marantz, McIntosh, Radford and Quad. By 1970, though, the vacuum tube was regarded generally as an antiquated device superseded in every parameter by transistors. Except, that is, for a certain breed of audiophile, and especially in Japan.

As cited earlier, William Zane Johnson began designing custom audio tube electronics in the 1950s, and had garnered a formidable reputation for 'hot-rodding' affordable amplifiers such as Dynacos. His tweaked amps eventually metamorphosed into his own circuits and his own amps, which he marketed under the Audio Research banner, and which quickly found favour with what was becoming known as the audiophile 'underground'. Early successes, which he demo'd on the road with Magnepan speakers, included the SP3 preamplifier and, by 1975, D-150 power amplifier – still breathtaking to listen to today.

**STREET OF SHAME**

In those days before the internet, it took the audio magazines to spread the word about small but brilliant brands such as Mark Levinson and Audio Research. Coverage in the mainstream audio titles was so banal, based so much on measurement, and therefore prone to rate a mediocre Japanese receiver over an amp with – Shock! Horror! – 0.2 per cent distortion, that reviews of specialist hi-fi products in the likes of *Stereo Review* or *High*



Audio Note Ongaku amp

*Fidelity* were at best backhanded compliments and at worst insulting or suspect.

Instead, titles like the aforementioned *Stereophile*, *IAR* and *The Absolute Sound*, along with dozens of other, smaller titles championed this new wave of product. With these magazines came the realisation that specifications have no useful function whatsoever in describing how an amplifier or speaker or source component actually sounds. The new wave of critics demonstrated with their ears that specifications were by and large useless for anything other than determining parts selection and defining the values in a circuit design. For end users, specs were useful only in matching amplifiers' outputs to the needs of the speakers, or cartridges' outputs to phono stages. ❖



Audio Research D-150 power amp

**Ken's High-End Hi-Fi Timeline**

<p><b>1964</b> The Beatles conquer the USA. Ken Kessler buys his first LP.</p>	<p><b>1968</b> SAE founded by Morris Kessler and Ted Winchester. Ken Kessler purchases first hi-fi system: Dual 1019 turntable, Scott 344C receiver, Scott speakers. Life changes forever.</p>	<p><b>1970</b> William Z. Johnson starts Audio Research.</p>	<p><b>1972</b> Electro-Voice and CBS are licensed by to produce quadrasonic decoders. Linn founded with launch of LP-12 turntable. Introduction of Mark Levinson's JC-1 preamplifier.</p>
<p><b>1965</b> The Dolby Type A noise reduction system is introduced.</p>	<p><b>1969</b> Dr. Thomas Stockham begins to experiment with digital tape recording.</p>	<p><b>1971</b> Denon demonstrates 18-bit PCM stereo recording using a helical-scan video recorder.</p>	<p><b>1974</b> DuPont introduces chromium dioxide (CrO2) cassette tape.</p>



❖ It caused a revolution that affected every single audio equipment manufacturer, however measurements-led, right down to entry-level hardware manufacturers, as aspirational audiophiles, who couldn't afford Levinson or Krell, demanded more from the entry-level. Here the British played a singular role, unmatched anywhere on earth, in redefining what budget gear could do. Given that few UK manufacturers had the balls to produce cost-no-object products because the home market was composed largely of bargain hunters who would drive 75 miles to save a fiver, the British specialists honed their products to extract the maximum from the minimum.



Oracle Delphi MkII turntable

It is a reputation still held globally by British brands. Due to a sick state of affairs where the British consumer is ripped off to a degree virtually unknown elsewhere, 'value for money' became the rallying call for British brands. And although it's not a British make *per se*, it's no fluke that the NAD 3020, which started countless audiophiles on their quest for sonic perfection, earned its reputation first in the UK. So, too, with the revived Rotel, with Marantz's 'Ken Ishiwata Signature' models and other affordable gems. Thus, in the late 1970s, while the majority of us were only dreaming

about the likes of Quad or Linn, let alone then-unobtainable American or Japanese kit, we were actually listening to Dual turntables through NAD 3020s, into KEFs or Celestions.

#### IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO

But back to the expensive stuff. By the mid- to late-1970s, the high-end – or 'specialty audio' as it's now referred to at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas – was well established and the UK was opening up to imported exotica from all over the world. Along the way, assorted tributaries helped to increase the flood, with various cults and forces creating distinct camps within the audio community. We still see it today, in analogue-vs-digital, stereo-vs-multichannel, solid-state-vs-valve and so many others. Back then, there were interesting manufacturer pairings that helped shape the high-end genre.

In the UK, the obvious one was a duo like the aforementioned Audio Research/Magnepan collaboration. Just as Audio Research and Magnepan shared rooms at shows, realising that their products were complementary, so did the late Julian Vereker of Naim appreciate that his amplifiers were well-served by Ivor Tiefenbrun's Linn LP12 front-end, and vice versa.

History shows that in the early days, Linn was the more flamboyant partner, Naim the steadier; today, both are slick, professional companies far removed from the geekiness of audio. But there's always a precedent, as nothing emerges out of thin air. Linn and Naim didn't just 'happen'. A weird series of events led up to the point where Linn could arrive from Scotland, hardly a hotbed of high-end audio design, with a single-speed deck and take over a large part of the market.

[Note to Scottish readers before you throw petrified haggises at me: Tannoy, Kerr-McCosh and the phalanx of now defunct Scottish turntable makers are not enough to deem Scotland as a major player in high-end audio. There are parts of Boston, Massachusetts, with



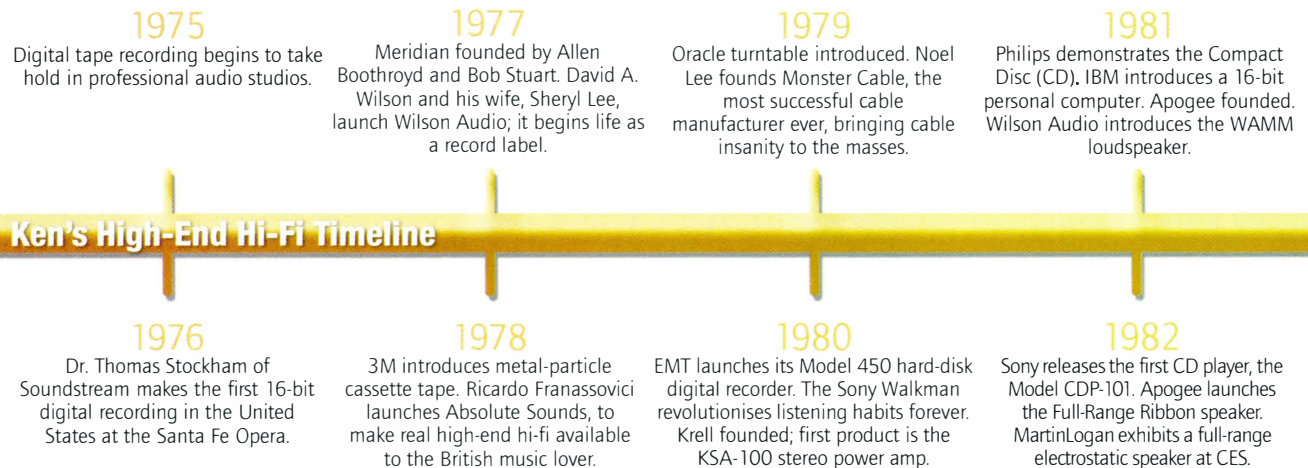
Wilson Audio Alexandria speakers

more manufacturers than Scotland ever could muster, even with all the Linn-wannabees that flourished in the 1970s.]

#### COILED TO STRIKE

While Ivor Tiefenbrun was still working on a kibbutz, and Julian Vereker was thrashing Minis, the moving-coil cartridge was enjoying a resurgence in Japan. Jean Hiraga in France would do more than anyone to popularise Japanese audio practices in the west, but a group of Californian audiophiles, including the great Dave Fletcher of SOTA fame, were importing Graces and Fidelity Researches and Supexes into the USA. Via Fletcher, a brilliant, Gandalfian physicist, a Grace/Supex combo made its way to Ivor, who found it to be a perfect match for his LP12, itself derived from the earlier Ariston RD11, which was inspired by the Thorens TD-150, which in turns owes its existence to the AR turntable of 1961. But that's another story.

Also, by this time, the SME 3009/Shure phono cartridge combination – which had been the arm/cartridge choice of connoisseurs for over a decade-and-a-half – was being challenged by this influx of moving-coils. And it took one Mark Levinson – yes, him again – to get the ball rolling beyond Fletcher's





groundwork. Levinson's MLC-1 cartridge of the early 1980s, though never a massive seller, cost more than \$500 at a time when \$75 was a lot for a cartridge. If nothing else, it opened the doors for expensive moving coils, and it was soon followed by Koetsu and other Japanese artisan designs – Miyabi, Mr Brier, Kiseki, Audio Note ... the list is endless. Equally, the trend was strong enough to inspire Denon to ramp up its moving-coil production, and

not align with the politics of every reader, but the golden years of UK audio correspond exactly with the Thatcher era. And its decline commenced with the arrival of one Tony Blair.)

Considering the diminutive size of Linn and Naim and the relative global insignificance of their products, Vereker and Tiefenbrun, by virtue of sheer Steve Jobs-like evangelism, personality and persistence, parlayed their products into the UK standard. With admirable

## “Oracle demonstrated that high-end audio needn't look like something fashioned in a basement by drug-addled ex-hippies”

Ortofon in Denmark looked to its past to become one of the most successful purveyors of MC cartridges in history.

Add all this together – a new take on the front-end, the return of the moving-coil, the need for step-up devices, the recognition of the source component as more important than the rest of the chain, the increases in amplifier power – and you can see that the time was ripe for high-end audio to explode onto the market. More importantly, and this is often overlooked, all of those students in the USA responsible for the growth of the separates market in the mid-to-late 1960s, with their AR or KLH systems purchased from companies such as Tech Hi-Fi, had graduated from university by the early- or mid-1970s and were now earning serious money. And they were ready to trade in their KLH music centres and Advent speakers for something considerably more substantial.

### RULE BRITANNIA

In the UK, it was still a struggle, as if the austerity of the 1950s would never end. But the Margaret Thatcher years brought increased prosperity to many sections of society and the UK growth in upscale audio coincided precisely with her years as Prime Minister. (This fact may

skill, they coaxed and cajoled the press into submission, such that for more than a decade, audiophiles in this country aspired to little else: you either owned a Linn/Naim system or you were dirt. Along the way, a cult of fellow travellers emerged, by accident or design, according to the benedictions of the UK press. Among these, seen as stepping-stones to full-on Linn/Naim paradise, was a Rega turntable if you couldn't afford an LP12, while brands like Nytech and Arcam supplied the sub-Naim amplification.



VPI HR-X turntable



Naim CDS CD player

Across the Pond, only the readers of UK magazines were aware of this cult, so the US was free to develop its own factions. And the Atlantic is a pretty big divide: both countries had hugely successful brands at home that made hardly any impact on the other side of the water, such as Spica speakers Stateside. SOTA and VPI turntables were an American alternative to Linn, while Canada's Oracle, more than any brand up to that point, demonstrated that high-end audio needn't look like something fashioned in a basement by drug-addled ex-hippies.

Anyone over 50 will tell you that the build quality and form of the Oracle turntable combined to create an elegance that many feel remains unsurpassed to this day. Yes, even those who realise that it was a pain in the arse to set up. Oracle's achievement would later be matched not by other turntables but by loudspeakers: Martin Logan with its 'see-through' electrostatics, and Sonus Faber speakers with woodwork worthy of the violins from which they take their names did more to sell high-end audio to house-proud non-enthusiasts than anything else. ❖

1983

Goldmund Reference turntable launched. Jadis launched by André Calmettes.

1985

Dolby introduces the 'SR' Spectral Recording system. Apogee introduces the Scintilla.

1989

Chord Electronics Ltd established.

1992

Philips DCC and Sony's MiniDisc, which uses digital audio data reduction, are offered to consumers as record/play hardware and software.

1984

The Apple Corporation markets the first Macintosh computer. Meridian launches what many regard as the world's first audiophile CD player.

1986

Wilson Audio introduces the WATT speaker; the Puppy subwoofer will follow two years later – will go on to be one of the best-selling high-end speakers of all time.

1990

Dolby proposes a five-channel surround-sound scheme for home theatre systems. The write-once CD-R becomes a commercial reality.

1993

Sonus Faber releases the Guarneri speaker.



# Home of the finest hi-fi

Don't forget to visit our new web site

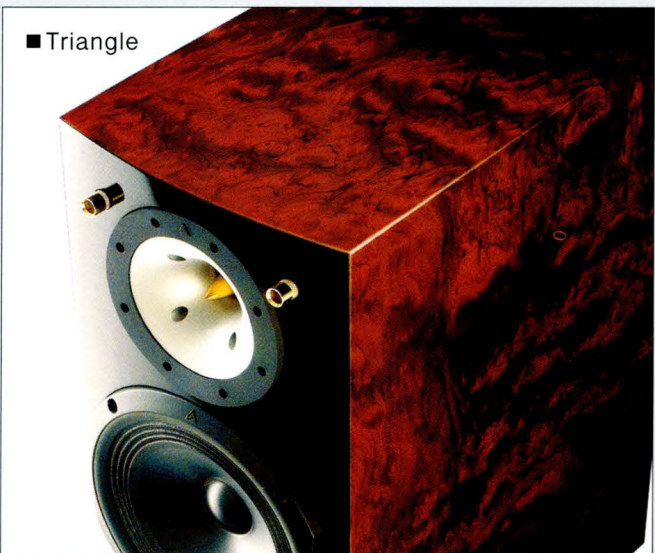
tel : 01753 652 669 | email : info@ukd.co.uk | web : www.ukd.co.uk



■ Unison Research



■ Pathos



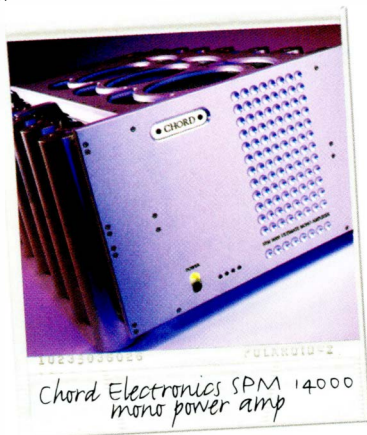
■ Audio Analogue



### ❖ HOW LOW CAN YOU GO

One pairing that's all but forgotten today had a more fundamental impact on the high-end than the Linn/Naim axis because it actually re-wrote the way we perceive amplifiers, as much as did Mark Levinson in the early 1970s. Linn and Naim taught the world about system building and synergy, but it was often tainted by dubious assertions about digital clocks and single-speaker demos. What the team of Krell and Apogee exposed us to was sheer majesty. It was never going to filter down to the masses: Apogee's first speaker was a full-range ribbon over 6ft tall, and the Class A Krells ran hot enough to singe flesh. And both were expensive. But it was Apogee's second product, the smaller Scintilla, that created another requirement of high-end amplifiers, which – while we later realised was a dead end – resulted in raising the bar for all amplifiers. For the better.

What happened was simple: the Scintilla's impedance dipped down to one ohm, meaning it ate amplifiers for breakfast. This became the litmus test for ballsy amplifiers in the 1980s. The only amps (or so it appeared) that could tickle the Scintilla without exploding were the Krells. So, like Linn and Naim, and before them Audio Research and Magnepan, Krell and Apogee shared rooms at shows and collaborated on systems that, for a goodly chunk of the decade, saw off every rival. To this day, manufacturers boast about the vicious



Chord Electronics SPM 14000 mono power amp

loads their amplifiers will drive, however rare are the speakers that actually present the one-ohm challenge.

All of which would be meaningless if the equipment didn't achieve new standards of sound reproduction. As one who still owns Scintillas, I've yet to hear them bettered by anything... provided the amps are up to it. And that's what the high-end should be all about: peerless sound quality that is simply not available from compromised equipment.

### AND THE HITS JUST KEEP ON COMIN'

In a brief overview like this, it's impossible even to name-check all the key players. But other stand-outs and survivors from high-end hi-fi's golden decade – 1975-1985, or around the time CD arrived – include Wilson, Meridian, Conrad-Johnson, VTL and so many others that their 'why'd you leave us out?' e-mails will clog a server. But some deserve special mention for their clear focus on the ultimate goal: faultless sound, regardless of price.

Dave Wilson, with terrific single-mindedness, used his uncompromising studio reference standards to create a line of speakers that deliver all the power and detail and clarity one could hope for, in systems that seem unbreakable. Meridian has spent over two decades teaching us that digital technology needn't suck; it's inevitable anyway, so why not make the most of it?

McIntosh evolved from 'establishment' to reviewers' darling, with a range of delightful valve products. And engineer-turned-president Charlie Randall's cost-no-object '2K' system showed that even large companies can deliver the kind of systems that must have had the accountants in a cold sweat. Nagra? Best-known for making professional recording equipment and satellite TV receptors, it has for a decade produced some of the most desirable valve and solid-state equipment on the market, though it waited over 20 years before relenting by giving us a CD player. SME embraced the need for tonearms to handle moving-coil phono



KEF Muon speakers

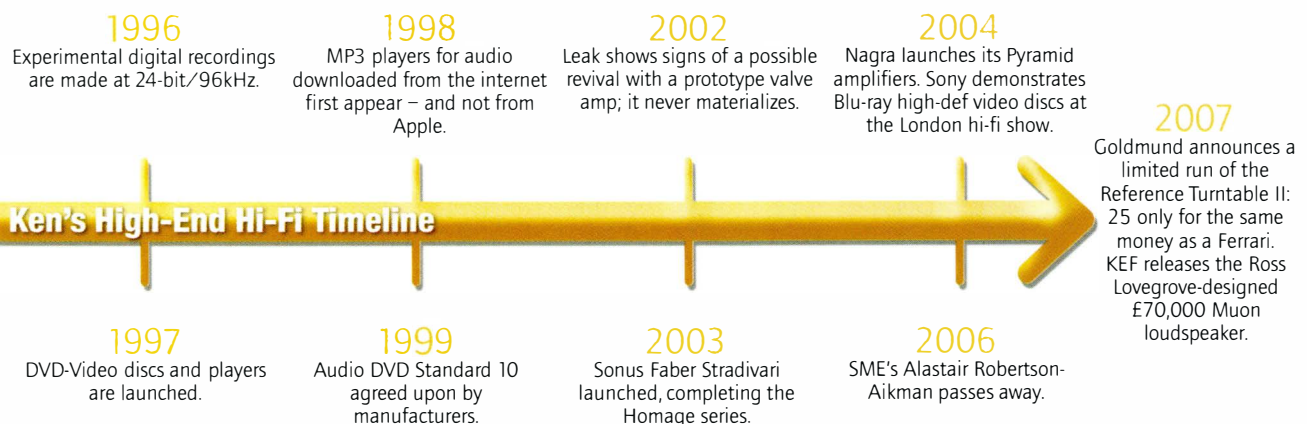
cartridges, launching its own spectacular and much-coveted turntable in the early 1990s.

And Mark Levinson? The company that bears his name still makes exceptional products, and I'm sure we haven't heard the last of Mark – the man, that is – who had other ventures, including Cello and Red Rose, after leaving his eponymous brand.

Which leads us to the future. The brands that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s that are still with us clearly understand survival. Those that managed either to embrace or ignore CD and other digitalia now enjoy their own niches, be it single-ended triode amps or phono stages or radical loudspeaker design. Some managed to include both phono stages and CD players in their catalogues, and even to address custom installation without losing audiophile credibility.

What's clear is that there's still room for everybody, however freaky the equipment. But what manufacturers soon learn is that audiophiles do eventually reach that moment of satori, when they understand what 'high-end audio' really means. And that's what separates the great from the merely expensive.

*Do you agree with Ken's hi-fi-related trip down Memory Lane, or is your version of high-end events somewhat different? Send us your views by e-mailing us at [hifimail@futurenet.co.uk](mailto:hifimail@futurenet.co.uk) or write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. ■■■*





A y r e

MX-R

**Stereophile, April 2007 — Wes Phillips**

"...its sole purpose appears to be to praise music and to glorify it."

"...full-bodied, liquid, and three-dimensional..."

"...one of the most remarkable performers at any price."

**Stereo Sound, Winter 2006 — Takahito Miura**

"...a radiant, supple musical quality, with incredibly spacious sound."

"The life-sized soundstage was so vivid it gave me goosebumps."

"...a magical transparency that illuminates the individuality of each performance from within."

**Hi-Fi+, June 2007 — Roy Gregory**

"...these amps rewrite the rulebook on power."

"...when it comes to musical enjoyment, the effect is smack you in the face obvious."

"...the Ayres establish a benchmark for all round excellence."

 symmetry

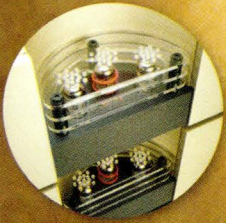
t: 01727 865488

e: [info@symmetry-systems.co.uk](mailto:info@symmetry-systems.co.uk)

w: [www.symmetry-systems.co.uk](http://www.symmetry-systems.co.uk)



# Reviews







PIONEER  
EVOLUTION  
222

MENU

ENTER

S-1

S-2

S-3

B-1

B-2

C-1

C-2

TAPE

PHASE

MUTE

PIONEER  
EVOLUTION  
302



# KRELL EVOLUTION 222 & 302

*Krell's top-end Evolution series continues to evolve with a new power amp, exclusively reviewed here with its matching preamp*

**PRICE** £17,448 (Evo 222: £8,498; Evo 302: £8,950) **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8597 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

The two components here are relatively junior models from a range that extends at its top end to include a mono preamp and separate (outboard) power supply, and a matching two-box monaural high power monoblock power amplifier.

Like other recent Krell designs, the Evolution 222 preamplifier is a Current Mode design, which when interconnected with a matching Current Mode power amplifier using the proprietary CAST (Current Audio Signal Transmission) interface, reduces the number of inherently lossy current-to-voltage conversion stages to the lowest number possible: one, including both preamp and power amp, and including also any CAST enabled source component. Zero overall negative feedback is claimed, though single digit levels of local feedback are used around individual stages, yet distortion is typically less than 50 parts per million. All gain is achieved using surface-mount topology through proprietary multiple-output current mirrors. The volume/balance control is a precision 16-bit resistive ladder. The design allows for single-ended and balanced operation, and a range of custom install features are included.

The new Evolution 302 power amp adds Active Cascode Technology, a massively parallel configuration which is said to minimize distortion by using two to three times as many active gain devices per gain stage. The power amp has an output rating of 300 watts into eight ohms from a 3kVA transformer, and the output doubles into four ohms and doubles again into two ohms, a sure sign of its near ideal behaviour as a current source. Extensive monitoring is employed to ensure safe operation across the entire performance envelope. The amplifier is well packaged, in typical Krell fashion, with semi-enclosed convection cooling. Inputs are single-ended, balanced and CAST 4-pin bayonet, and the unit tips the scales at 54.3kg.

We had some help installing the system and getting it up to speed, but when we declared a break after several hours work, and simply sat down to listen, there was almost a snap change that occurred about half an hour into a symphonic recording we were playing. At the beginning, the strings sounded raw and grainy, but quite suddenly and unmistakably they acquired their accustomed bloom and sweetness. The amplifier is also extremely cable sensitive, but this is no shock: any truly transparent system will naturally be open to

very subtle changes; not that cable differences are always particularly subtle. For most of the time, the pre and power amps were connected using CAST, but even Krell clearly doesn't consider the interface completely takes cable differences out of the equation as we understand the company has placed orders for CAST cables based on Nordost's Odin design (see p120). You wouldn't do that if cables didn't make a difference.

before. It is still wonderfully disciplined, but it wears a subtly more organic, human face. A hint of warmth and harmonic richness have crept into the proceedings. Sometimes you almost sense that the system is smiling while it is working, though there is rarely any obvious sense that it is working hard for its living. But it does breathe in a more obvious and relaxed way, which is a relatively novel finding with Krell. Certainly there is no obvious strain, and

**“For well-heeled music fans, few hi-fi components come close to the calm, controlled sonic potency on offer here”**

Much about the sound of these two mighty amps is quintessentially Krell: big and exceptionally disciplined, with bass that plumbs the depths yet keeps a vice-like grip on the music. By choosing a Krell amplifier, you know that you will rarely notice any change of temperament no matter what frequency range is involved or how high you set the volume. It is this change in character when tracking the envelope of a recording that defines the personality of an amplifier, more so than any other factor, but Krell products rarely suffer this kind of almost human frailty and, sure enough, that is the case here.

But the current Krell sound exemplified by this combination is slightly different from

equally certainly the combination is capable of awe-inspiring real-world power yields, especially in this test driving the big Focal Nova that is also reviewed in this issue.

Krell's ultra-heavyweight designs were always devastatingly powerful and authoritative. But where the predecessors of this pair were sometimes almost po-faced, here there is a lightness of touch, a grace and a sense of fluidity that was not always a prominent part of the Krell package in the past. For well-heeled music fans, few hi-fi components come close to the calm, controlled sonic potency on offer here – power, grace and not a hair out of place. ■■

*Alvin Gold*









# B&W SIGNATURE DIAMOND

*Bowers & Wilkins delivers the ultimate two-way designer speaker, sweet sounding and gloriously appointed*

PRICE £11,000 per stereo pair CONTACT B&W Group, Dale Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 2BH ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.bowers-wilkins.com

The world's leading specialist hi-fi speaker brand, Bowers & Wilkins – more commonly known as B&W, but now reverting to its original name to avoid confusion with motor manufacturer BMW – has a history of creating occasional limited edition luxury designer models.

The Signature Diamond model is one such, where the emphasis is as much on the radical presentation and luxury finish as on the performance and engineering. It is being produced in a limited edition of 1,000 numbered pairs, a good number of which have already been sold.

The substantial £11,000 per pair price reflects the use of costly, exotic materials and painstaking construction, in what must surely have a strong claim to being the ultimate two-way hi-fi loudspeaker. While it certainly looks expensive when compared to the much larger and more massive £13,000 800D, size is not everything in loudspeakerland, and the Signature Diamond has some clever tricks up its sleeve to rival its bigger brother.

While a big three-way like the 800D will always have more muscle at the bass end of things, as well as greater power handling and loudness potential, a two-way will have innate simplicity on its side, with superior coherence through the broad bass and midrange, as well as being an easier load for the amplifier to drive.

Surprisingly, the most costly item here from a manufacturing point of view is not the 25mm diamond dome tweeter – though that itself is far from cheap – but rather the elegantly shaped, carved-from-the-solid nacelle in which it is mounted, made from Italian Grigio Carmica or Belgian black marble. The tweeter is fed through a simple first-order network using a top-quality Mundorf Gold capacitor. The decoupled tweeter housing sits elegantly on top of a metre-tall bass/mid enclosure, made from curved plywood, fully Matrix-reinforced internally and finished in either white or Wakame veneer. Its oval section looks attractive, promotes good dispersion and inhibits internal reflections and standing waves.

The 180mm main driver has a 140mm Kevlar cone, with a new acoustically inert metal bullet phase plug, and is mounted on a short section of aluminium tube, which is swaged into the wood enclosure. Port-loading is achieved through the base, into a mouth formed between the enclosure and an alloy plinth. Twin terminal pairs are hidden underneath,

within the plinth, and side-entry plug adaptors are supplied. In-room measurement, using our normal far-field averaged technique, shows a good overall balance, albeit with some minor variations from genuine neutrality. The port is tuned to a low 33Hz, and this gives generous output from 35Hz to 60Hz. Output is just a little shy through the two octaves from 60Hz

## “‘Sweet’ is the single adjective that perhaps most appropriately sums up the Signature Diamond”

up to 250Hz, and peaks up slightly around 1.3kHz before dropping away to a presence dip at around 2.2kHz, prior to a mild recovery through the treble proper.

Sensitivity comes out to 89dB/W, a decibel higher than that claimed, and the amplifier load looks very easy too, only dipping marginally below 6 ohms above 10kHz. However, the impedance does reveal an obvious resonance around 170Hz, and a much smaller one at 700Hz. On an entirely positive note, the pair matching between the two samples is exceptionally close.

As if to prove that measurements can only provide clues, not definitive answers, the Signature Diamond delivered definitively superb sound quality. It took the place of a pair of 800Ds in the listening room, and while the SD obviously lacked the weight, muscularity and bottom end of its larger brother, it compensated very effectively through coherence, sweetness, delicacy and sheer charm. Male voices have a delightful continuity, free from chestiness, though bass guitars do lack a little punch, and the low bass could be tauter and tighter.

It was, in short, a delight to listen to, and a fine musical communicator, while the top end detail supplied by the tweeter seemed marginally superior to that delivered by its bigger brother – perhaps that chunk of marble has a beneficial mass-loading effect.

‘Sweet’ is the single adjective that perhaps most appropriately sums up the Signature Diamond. But it's highly revealing, too: few other speakers can highlight as clearly or as obviously the sound quality differences between the smooth Magnum Dynalab MD-109 FM tuner (see p64) and the slightly coarser sound of the less costly MD-106T.

Imaging is first class, with fine lateral positioning and good depth perspectives, the

more so because there's no audible boxiness, and no tendency for the sound to cluster close to the enclosures. The very effective enclosure stiffening provided by the curved sides and B&W's Matrix reinforcement ensures that very little is added to the contributions of the drivers and ports, delivering a fine dynamic range with excellent recovery of subtle

low-level detail. As ever with a wide-dispersion design such as this, the speaker's focus is slightly diluted by contributions from listening room reflections. This might reduce the monitoring precision slightly, but at the same time it creates a more convincing illusion of bringing the musicians into the listening room, a trade-off and a matter of taste, which many listeners will undoubtedly favour. 📊

*Paul Messenger*





# Performance



## Fire your imagination.

Performance is the result of a three-year research and development programme culminating in a number of major technological advancements. Recreating each and every musical nuance with incredible emotion, Mordaunt-Short's state-of-the-art loudspeaker range brings you as close as possible to the wonder of the original performance.



"Tuneful, agile sound sets new standards in transparency... a truly ground-breaking speaker."

*Hi-Fi Choice*, December 2005



"Truly redefines the standard at this class... superb value for money; a modern classic."

*Hi-Fi World*, April 2005



"The Performance 6s are sensational speakers."

*What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*, December 2005



# MORDAUNT-SHORT

www.mordaunt-short.com



# UNISON RESEARCH PERFORMANCE

*This bulky valve amp incorporates some delightful styling embellishments alongside a gloriously musical sound*

PRICE £5,995 CONTACT UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iwer SLO 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.unisonresearch.com

Unison's Performance uses sculpted hardwood and stainless steel to add both elegance and a certain zaniness to what is definitely one of the largest and heaviest integrated amps around. Much too big for the typical hi-fi shelf, it weighs 50kg, and the six large KT88 output valves chuck out plenty of heat. The £6k price tag is not unduly high in view of all that hefty engineering.

Construction is strictly dual-mono, even down to the mains transformers. All four metal-cased transformers, four large smoothing capacitors and the ten valves stand defiantly exposed, while the rest of the circuitry is mounted within this hollowed out wood and a steel tray/base.

The feature count is rather limited, though it does include remote control over the two essentials, volume and input selection. The elegant handset is primarily intended to partner a Unison CD player, but two buttons adjust volume, and a third cycles through the inputs, which is very convenient. A neat touch is that it's shaped and weighted to stand upright on its foot.

Four line input pairs along with a tape in/out loop are included, but mono switching, muting, tone controls and balance are all omitted. Twin (unswitched) speaker outputs facilitate bi-wiring, and matching for eight- or four-ohm speakers.

Unison designs and manufactures all its own output transformers – arguably the most critical

components in any valve amp – enabling the unusual output stage, which operates three parallel KT88 as triodes in single-ended ultralinear configuration. Because operation is single-ended (as distinct from push-pull), power output is 40 watts per channel – modest by absolute standards but adequate for most purposes, nonetheless, and rather good for a single-ended design. Preamp and driver stages, using ECC83 and ECC82 valves, also operate as triodes.

The power supply transformers are similar to the output transformers, with numerous secondary windings. Much care goes into the selection of individual components, and the matching of the Russian-made valves.

This is an amplifier that sounds as good as it looks, which in this case is high praise indeed.

**“The amp supplied a nightly opportunity to enjoy the silky skills of some of the world’s great orchestras performing”**

The spectacular midrange transparency and dynamic literacy that is the stock in trade of valve amplifiers comes as no surprise, but what really distinguishes it from most other valve amps is that it also seems immune from stereotypical ‘valve character’ and doesn't lose the plot as it moves towards the frequency extremes.

It's also exceptionally fast, doesn't hum or hiss, and gave an excellent account of itself when driving a pair of B&W 800Ds – a far from easy load, though reasonably sensitive and well enough suited to the amp's four-ohm taps. The Performance does show a little looseness deep down in the low bass, and there was an occasional hint of hardness up around the presence zone – possibly as much to do with the recordings as the amplifier.

But those are minor criticisms indeed in the context of a lovely midband tonality, transparency and dynamic expressiveness, and unusually fine neutrality, especially for a single-ended design.

It coped very well with all sorts of material – rock, dance, or acoustic – but it was natural acoustic instruments that showed its true

excellence. During the Proms season, it supplied a nightly opportunity to enjoy the silky skills of some of the world's great orchestras performing in a genuinely spacious acoustic, and proved an ideal partner for this feast of classical music. The most startling experience was the sheer realism of audience applause. Instead of the usual rather amorphous mush, it was as if you were actually sitting there in the audience, and could have counted the number of people expressing their admiration.

The 40-watt output power proved ample for most purposes, but the temptation to wind the volume right up to clipping point is always present, so a little restraint is sometimes needed here. The fact that it chucks out nearly half a kilowatt of heat can also be a trifle irritating, especially during summer months, but ignore that and instead enjoy this amplifier's rich and gloriously musical sound. 🍷

Paul Messenger

See the Awards

2006 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product









# AMR CD-77

*A radical approach to the use of new-old-stock lies at the heart of this substantial CD player*

PRICE £4,400 CONTACT Real Hi-Fi, 35 Water Drive, Standish WN6 0EH ☎ 0870 909 6777 🌐 www.amr-audio.co.uk

**A**MR's products look extremely professional: the detailing is superb and the features are very much of the moment, yet this company has been producing manufactured hardware for less than a year. Not many companies emerge fully formed in the high end quite so smoothly, but not many have the luxury of spending six years doing their R&D and design work without having to launch any hardware.

AMR stands for Abingdon Music Research, Abingdon being the town in Oxfordshire where BMC took the humble Mini and turned it into a world beating rally car. AMR's thinking is that it has the same approach to the design and manufacture of 'ultra-fidelity' components as BMC's engineers did when getting the best

**“The CD-77 also has that all-important quality known as speed: the tempo is right on the money”**

out of the Mini. AMR is based in London but has its assembly facility in China and sources components from around the globe.

The CD-77 is a heavyweight single-box CD player that has an all-valve output stage using new-old-stock valves, and is based around a vintage DAC chip, the Philips TDA1541A, another new-old-stock component. Using valves in this way is not unusual in high-end hi-fi, but sourcing a DAC that went out of production ten years ago is pretty radical. The two engineers behind AMR, Pat Wayne and Thorsten Loesch, are both big fans of this classic multibit device and feel that no-one has built a better digital-to-analogue converter since. That suggests they have a pretty low opinion of the current over/up-sampling mania.

Having said that, the CD-77 offers a range of over and upsampling rates all the way from none to 192kHz, so AMR has not allowed its preference for old school converters to get in the way of commercial reality. The CD-77's default setting is what it calls Digital Master II, which uses no oversampling but has an analogue filter to compensate for the slight roll-off in the treble that occurs with the pure, filter-free, non-oversampling setting dubbed Digital Master I. The user has the option of choosing from those or either two-times or four-times oversampling, as well as 96kHz or 192kHz upsampling. These changes can be done on-the-fly with the remote.

We had to ask AMR why the CD-77 weighs 39 hernia-inducing kilos. Apparently the reason is that it's built on a copper chassis that is then encased in 10mm thick aluminium. Then the separate digital and analogue transformers alongside fully dual-mono output stages, choke input filtering (more transformers) and a suspended disc drive all add up.

Discs are changed by manually sliding back the lid, removing and then replacing a large puck once you've inserted a disc. Closing the lid again causes the machine to start playing whatever you put inside. The remote is an amalgamation of regular buttons and a touch screen; you can guess which are easiest to use but all of them work fine. The touch sensitive buttons on the player are a nicer touch, so to

speak. Generously AMR supplies not only a fancy power lead but interconnects that use the same silver-plated copper wire that features inside the player.

Does this idiosyncratic approach add up to great CD sound? The answer has to be a resounding 'yes'. The CD-77 is one of the most dynamic and engaging players we have come across regardless of price. We stuck to the frequency balanced, non-oversampling DMII setting and were thrilled by the speed and poise that it brought to our music. Although valves have been used you'd have to be a knowledgeable tube-head to spot it, but the dynamics and timbral resolve give the game away if you know what you're listening for. Thankfully there's none of the colour or unnaturally emphasised 'naturalness' that is

associated with romantic-sounding valve amps. There's just good, plain, warts-and-all transparency that makes for music that is almost impossible to switch off – unless you have a deadline to meet!

It is not quite as refined or densely detailed as more expensive competitors and those looking for a super-smooth sound might be better off elsewhere. Those looking to hear right into the music and to enjoy the harmonics of instruments and voices, on the other hand, will be very happy. I'm not saying it's crude; it has considerable poise and finesse for its price but it makes a lot of the competition sound bland. It also has that all-important quality known as 'speed': the tempo is right on the money and there's plenty of time for notes to attack and decay, as well as the musical thrill power that this quality creates.

Next to our reference Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player it sounds surprisingly similar, but adds to that player's similarly revealing and dynamic sound the qualities one associates with great valve equipment. Notably, that's a greater sense of body and life to each instrument and voice, along with an extra ease that means you can play louder without risking ear ache. The only area where the Opus 21 takes the lead is the bass, where its solid-state output stage has a more, well, solid feel. Overall, however, the AMR makes the more beguiling sound and, despite its ungainly weight, we'd certainly hang on to it if we could.

Another thing that appeals to vinyl heads like me is the way you can use it almost like a turntable. If you want to change a disc, just open the lid and swap it. Closing the lid initiates play again. Sometimes you don't want the first track but that's what the remote is for, and it's a worthwhile concession for the ergonomic benefit. ■■■

*Jason Kennedy*









# AYRE MX-R

*Power meets practicality and a compact form in this monocoque-clad monoblock*

PRICE £10,990 per stereo pair CONTACT Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Herts AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.ayre.com

**A**yre may not be among the better known names in high-end American amplification but this probably has more to do with the company's marketing skills than anything else. Charlie Hansen has been building very high quality solid state amplifiers in Boulder, Colorado for over 14 years and his K-1xe preamplifier is regarded as one of the finest in the business. That design and its partnering power amp, the V-1xe, are fully balanced, symmetrical designs that use FET and bi-polar transistors in highly refined circuits that feature no negative feedback. However, that design is now 11 years old and Hansen has clearly been thinking about ways to push the envelope that little bit harder.

His starting point for the change in course that has led to the MX-R monoblock power amplifier was the introduction of a new bi-polar output device called Thermaltrak by ON Semiconductor, which has built-in temperature sensing that makes it unusually stable.

He used the device to develop what he calls Equilock circuitry. This locks the operating point of each input transistor, which he considers to be the key to getting these devices to sound right. He then looked at other aspects of the design: the most obvious being the casework, which is made from a single lump of aircraft grade aluminium that has been meticulously machined into one of the densest blocks of amplifier we have come across. Each MX-R weighs 23 kilos, which might not sound extreme but when you consider that they are only 47.6cm long it equates to a very hard to manoeuvre lump. A significant part of this weight is down to the twin E-I transformers, which were chosen for sound quality reasons over the popular toroidal variety. These sit at the front behind the LED, which acts as the 'on' switch, and the output devices and circuit boards are under the heavy heatsink section of the chassis.

In terms of power, Ayre specifies the MX-R as delivering 300 watts into eight ohms and double that into four, but makes it clear that the amp is not designed to drive nominal loads of two ohms or less – just in case anyone was thinking of powering their Apogee Scintillas with a pair. Connectors are pared down to a balanced input and a very attractive variant on Ayre's spade connector clamp for speaker cables. The other sockets are for mains and an AyreLink connection, which brings the sort of ease of use taken for granted by owners of micro systems. Well, almost. You cannot

completely switch off the MX-Rs unless you remove the power cable; the LED simply toggles between standby and on.

This is an exceptionally clean and relaxed power amplifier by any standards. Even with the toughest load we had available – KEF's Muon speakers (see p72) – it never lost its sense of equilibrium and delivered a liquidity that even valve enthusiasts might envy. It also does things that that no valve amp can compete with in the bass. In fact, only a few transistor amps come close and dig down deep and deliver grip without adding the edginess that often accompanies it further up the range. The MX-Rs got the Pioneer S-1EX to do gravitas, something that hadn't really been

the MX-R was delivering and problems that this exposed with the speaker set-up and positioning, because it didn't occur with other set ups. Listening to more 'classic'-flavoured jazz, instruments like the double bass sounded superb: tight, precise yet fully textured and open, letting the groove flow in a magnificent, vibrant fashion. These observations relate to the amps with B&W 802D speakers; when the KEF Muons arrived, the listening continued to reveal just how far down and how articulate the bass that the MX-R produces can be. In some respects we preferred the more open and dynamic sound of our Gamut D200 reference power amp through these speakers, but the bass from the Ayre monoblocks was superior.

**“This combination provided a degree of transparency across the band that put the amps in the ultra-fi league”**

apparent before their arrival. Although, to be fair, the fact that Symmetry brought along an Ayre K-1xe preamp to go with the MX-Rs did plenty to help. This combination provided a degree of transparency across the band that put the amps in the ultra-fi league; voices were so real that they could have been coming from someone in the room – if that someone happened to be José Gonzalez, of course.

The bass on occasion seemed a bit too much, specifically on Missy Elliott's *Busa Rhyme* track (from the *Da Real World* album), where it thickened in quite an odd fashion. We suspect that this was due to the extra depth and power

Despite the high power rating, these Ayre monoblocks are not all about bombast. They can deliver powerful and solid bass with ease, but what they are more about is subtlety and resolve. If you are after welly, pure and simple, it can be found in less expensive and larger alternatives. If, on the other hand, you appreciate the finer aspects of music as well as its power and energy, this is an outstanding power amp pairing. This, combined with the fabulous build and practicality of compactness, makes the MX-R one of the most desirable blocks of power on the planet. ❄️

Jason Kennedy





# Lyngdorf Audio

Denmark



## Tired of listening to your room?

No matter how great your hifi, your room will dramatically compromise the way it sounds. Nearly half of what you hear comes not from your speakers but from reflections in your room, "high fidelity" music reproduction has simply been impossible in most rooms, until now.

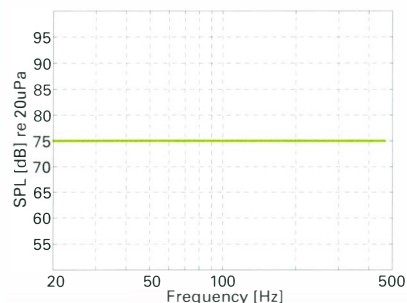
Lyngdorf audio systems herald a new era in sound reproduction, removing the negative effects of your listening room so finally you can enjoy your music as it was intended, nothing added and nothing taken away.



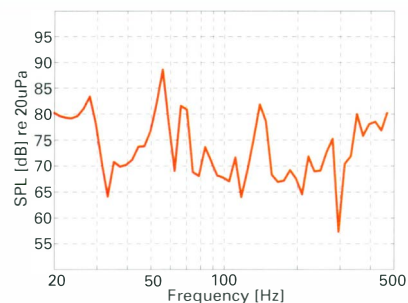
»Ingenious method of removing the room from the 'good sound' equation«  
»RoomPerfect lives up to the name«



UK Distributor · Gecko Inc Ltd. · Ph: 0845 262 2882



This graph shows the output of a loudspeaker equalized to a flat response in a test environment.



This graph shows the measured response of the same loudspeaker in an average living room.

### Conclusion:

**The room is the single most influential factor in sound reproduction – a factor eliminated by the RoomPerfect™ technology.**

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



# CLASSÉ CDP-202

*A CD player that also plays DVDs, this Classé is very much in a class of its own*

PRICE £4,750 CONTACT B&W Group, Dale Road, Worthing BN11 2BH ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.classaudio.com

One of two Classé players of its type, the CDP-202 is that strange beast, a CD player that also provides basic DVD capabilities. This unusual state of affairs is given away by a front panel monitor/touch sensitive screen that lets you navigate a DVD or DVD-Audio disc, as well as offering a comprehensive array of features.

Other indications that things aren't straightforward include the DVD-ROM drive that hides behind the slot mechanism and the basic range of video as well as audio outputs on the back. Basic inasmuch as there's no component or HDMI output. What there are will serve for a CRT television but will not give the best results with a projector or flat screen. Classé's thinking here is that it wanted to concentrate on sound rather than picture quality with the CDP-202 and this basic video capability could be included at negligible extra cost. It already makes two more video-oriented DVD players with all the bells and whistles.

The company has gone to great lengths to "kill jitter", as it puts it, mainly by taking measures to ensure that jitter is controlled at each stage of the circuit. The theory is that the more jitter you get at the digital to analogue conversion stage the worse the sound, a notion with which few would disagree. Classé also uses programmable logic to buffer and re-synchronise the signal with the internal clock prior to upsampling to 24-bit/192kHz and thence re-clocking and conversion.

On the outside, the touch screen contains a number of menus that allow you to adjust

virtually everything, including digital output, lip sync for video, format preference, 'teach IR', which sends a signal from the player to a third-party remote, and programming for the four F keys on the remote handset. Space does not permit listing everything here but, take it from us, this is a very feature-rich machine. There's even volume control for use without a preamp. Connections include analogue outputs in balanced and single-ended form and all three varieties of digital output.

**“Given a suitably transparent system the results can be stunning. If sophistication is your bag, this is a very hard player to beat”**

The CDP-202 produces a smooth and luxurious sound that reflects its build quality, but it needs good-quality amplification and balanced connection to be at its best. Under such circumstances it offers a degree of finesse that delivers music in a relaxed and natural fashion. We like the way that it doesn't just give you the beginnings of notes but fills them out, delivering the full colour and timbre. Some will prefer a more emphatic and distinctly defined soundstage, but in a high-resolution system the extra detail it provides makes a strong case for the more refined approach.

It is extremely good at tracking level, which brings out differences between tracks that other players make less of. This is a result, no doubt, of the noise-reducing abilities of its

balanced operation. We could also play louder than average without discomfort thanks to very low distortion in the signal, something that helps at the other end of the volume scale where it tracks the level of different notes and voices within the music with ease.

DVD-Audio builds on the confidence that this player inspires, the format producing a sonic image that is uncanny in its precision, delivering a genuinely three-dimensional soundstage. The sound clearly extends further than usual at high

frequencies and has a naturalness through the midband that is totally seamless.

The CDP-202 is one of the most refined CD players available. Its clean and relaxed sound may not appeal to the rhythm and timing brigade, but those seeking seriously high levels of detail will struggle to find better. It is comprehensively equipped, too, and that touch screen gives it a degree of flexibility that is hard to beat. Its sound is remarkably fine and resolute, so much so that some may find it too smooth; but given a suitably transparent system the results can be stunning. If sophistication is your bag, this a very hard player to beat. 📺

*Jason Kennedy*

*See the September 2006 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# SONUS FABER CREMONA ELIPSA

*The shapely new Elipsa sits at the top of Sonus Faber's prestigious Cremona range*

**PRICE** £9,500 per stereo pair **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com

**S**onus Faber loudspeakers seem to engender in some people an excessive passion amounting to the kind of adoration that others reserve for, say, fine watches or cars. One can't really quarrel with this. The Sonus Faber house sound – although, in reality, its speakers are too diverse to have a truly homogenous house sound – is distinctive and speaks of a certain passion that many probably believe the Italians reserve for the finest fruits of their labours, from Ferrari cars to Stradivarius or Guarneri violins.

**“There is a real ‘wow factor’ with this speaker in the right system, because its balance is so well judged”**

Some might feel that Sonus Faber loudspeaker designs lack a certain discipline, transparency and freedom from overt character that allows them to work properly with all kinds of music. But that ignores one possibility: that perhaps the speakers were intended to complement only the kind of music that their designers considered truly worth reproducing well.

Until recently, the finest expression of the art of loudspeaker design, according to Sonus Faber, was the Stradivari Homage, the company's tribute to the most famous and revered of all Italian stringed instrument makers.

During our first encounter, at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, we initially thought we were listening to the Homage, but it soon transpired that it was a smaller speaker that looked superficially Homage-like. The mistaken identity was understandable: the Elipsa looked very similar, albeit scaled down slightly in overall dimensions, weight and internal engineering. There was no confusion or uncertainty about the performance, however: the Cremona Elipsa sounded nothing less than superb.

The Elipsa is a three-way, floor-standing speaker, rear vented with three reflex ports as part of its elaborate enclosure control measures. The enclosure has an elliptical cross section, and leans back a little to ensure that the ScanSpeak Revelator silk-dome/ring-radiator tweeter, in its very impressive penultimate iteration, is directed towards seated ear level. The enclosure is a sandwich construction using 30 pieces of solid maple, which are hand selected and glued in position on the main chassis, the glue providing some cabinet damping, and each piece oriented

to optimise resonance control. The finish is applied using ecologically sound varnish with leather panels covering the centre front and rear. The enclosure itself is painstakingly – for which read expensively – constructed by any standards. Internal ribbing is used to increase stiffness and to help control internal standing waves. The rest of the driver complement consists of a 150mm midrange driver and a 260mm aluminium/magnesium-coned bass unit, with second order (12dB/octave) crossover slopes at 250Hz and 2.3kHz. The Cremona

Elipsa is nominally a four-ohm load, with a 91dB/watt sensitivity, and the frequency response is given as 35Hz to 20kHz. You're looking at a loudspeaker that stands 124.5cm tall, 55cm wide and 46.5cm deep, and the system is supplied with steel outrigger feet and fearsome looking spikes, which can be adjusted to vary vertical orientation.

The overall shape is very similar to the Stradivari Homage, betraying the common thinking in the designs: the standout feature being the unusually wide and gently curved baffle, and the shallow enclosure construction – like a cello or a lute, depending on who you listen to. The resemblance to the generic ground plan of most string instruments is too obvious to need highlighting, but so is the mirroring of the general plan of a flat baffle loudspeaker, though the enclosure has some depth to load the bass/mid drivers. Certainly the enclosure shape helps dominate room coupling. In fact, it provides the primary acoustic loading for the tweeter and midrange unit in particular. The wide baffle means restricted mid and treble dispersion, and the profiling of the baffle in the lateral plane has the effect of gently boosting low and high frequency output, with a mildly dished output in the mid and upper midrange, especially when the speakers are positioned well clear of the rear wall. The rear panel reflex ports help 'shape' the bass and add some midband presence, while the enclosure shape limits off-axis dispersion and the side-wall reflections that are common with dipole speakers.

This is hard loudspeaker to sum up sonically, not least because it really is more characterful than many high-quality speakers. There is a

concentration of energy in the mid-bass, a warmth, plus some prominences higher up that gently shape the music in a way that the design team clearly intended – it all sounds too well planned to have been a mistake and Sonus Faber's design skills don't lend themselves to this kind of error. But musically, the Cremona Elipsa is a different matter. Used with Krell and Pass Labs amplification and various SACD players, it demonstrates a high degree of synergy with symphonic and chamber music, solo piano, acoustic guitar and also with female voice. Jennifer Warnes and Madeleine Peyroux, to give just two examples from a long list, sound unusually expressive and human, the unusual part being the warmth and grace of their voices, and the virtual complete absence of the usual box artefacts.

There is a real 'wow factor' with this speaker in the right system; not because it does anything dramatically better than others, but because its balance is so well judged, so meticulously shaped and so thoroughly musical that it makes one feel that almost any other speaker will be a disappointment. A spell with a model such as the Focal Nova (see p62) will soon disabuse you of this idea, yet there is an undeniable passion and 'rightness' that is delivered by this gorgeous Italian thoroughbred. 🍷

*Alvin Gold*









# NAIM CD555

*Naim says the CD555 delivers "the ultimate musical performance from a CD". It might just be right...*

**PRICE** £15,045 **CONTACT** Naim Audio, Southampton Road, Salisbury SP1 2LN ☎ 01722 426600 🌐 www.naimaudio.com

The CD555 represents Naim's progress, thus far, in its attempts to turn the CD format into as musically satisfying an entity as the LP – a process it began way back in 1991 when it introduced the ground-breaking CDS, its first CD player, which also came in an unusual two-box format with the second case housing a discrete power supply, rather than a separate DAC as was the norm in those days.

The substantial CD555 communicates with its supply, the 555PS, through two, rather than one, heavy-duty, multi-core Burndy cables carrying the digital and analogue voltages discretely from the sophisticated, unfeasibly weighty 555PS. Inside the player, along with

veritable beast in seconds given the appropriate stimulus. We should explain that by 'smooth' we don't mean it has a 'pipe and slippers' style of presentation but rather one that sounds totally unforced and shows no trace of the mechanical elements that intrude into the performance of some high-end machinery. Devoid of such distractions, the CD555 simply sounds flowing, lucid and cogent, and takes you closer to the musicianship rather than the technology.

Its gradation of dynamics acts as a fine example of this player's musical veracity. When instruments are added incrementally to a mix, the CD555 reflects the often subtle increases

that casework there's a rabid hound poised and ready to chase down the merest hint of a groove trying to sneak past unnoticed. If your musical tastes lean towards funk, reggae or any genre that features syncopated or polyrhythmic beats, you will be especially delighted by the '555.

Quite frankly, though, the type of music you prefer seems wholly irrelevant to the CD555. It doesn't favour any particular genre over any other; it simply extracts the most from whatever you feed it with. Perhaps that's because the transport mechanism assesses every disc individually and aligns itself to read it optimally. Maybe it's the post-digital filter de-jitter circuitry. Who knows or who cares? Whatever the reason may be, the CD555 manages to turn in an unmatched performance, the sheer solidity and conviction of which we've yet to hear from any other player. Voices and instruments possess a weight and scale that is overwhelming: listen to a track such as *D Scott Parsley* from the Lambchop CD *Is A Woman* for a graphic demonstration of how alarmingly tangible intimately recorded music can be. Similarly, we were astonished by the performance of familiar discs that are regularly pressed into service on virtually every review. The wealth and depth of information coming from even the most skeletal of recordings was amazing and truly created the impression that the musicians were in the room with us.

After hearing the CD555 you might well begin wondering why anybody would be concerned with SACD or DVD-A. 🎵

*Malcolm Steward*

**"It doesn't favour any particular genre over any other; it simply extracts the most from whatever you feed it"**

its suspended central transport mechanism with motorised top-loading door, you'll find advanced discrete electronics and a DAC unit mounted inside a 'quiet room' to isolate it from internal and external interference.

Unusually for a Naim product, the '555 worked like a charm straight out of the box without any warm-up. Then its sound drifted off and it needed a couple of weeks' constant use and being powered-up to reach the level at which it had started. Thereafter it soared: once fully warmed through, burnt-in, shaken down, or whatever you choose to call the process, the CD555 truly sang. The fully matured performance is magical.

The first thing we noticed when firing up the 555 was that it has an unbelievable authority in its lower registers, which is especially – and instantly – recognisable on piano. A pianist's left hand work has that absolute pitch stability, definition and command that you expect to hear from a real instrument, not the gelatinous facsimile that most CD players produce. The sturdiness of the portrayal is enhanced by the clearly etched note-shape the 555 constructs, with the leading edges and decays of notes being plainly and realistically defined. There's no undue emphasis or highlighting to over-egg the presentation. Pianos just sound like pianos. Bass guitar, too, is delightfully fulsome and rich, blessed with abundant harmonic information adding true meat to its bones.

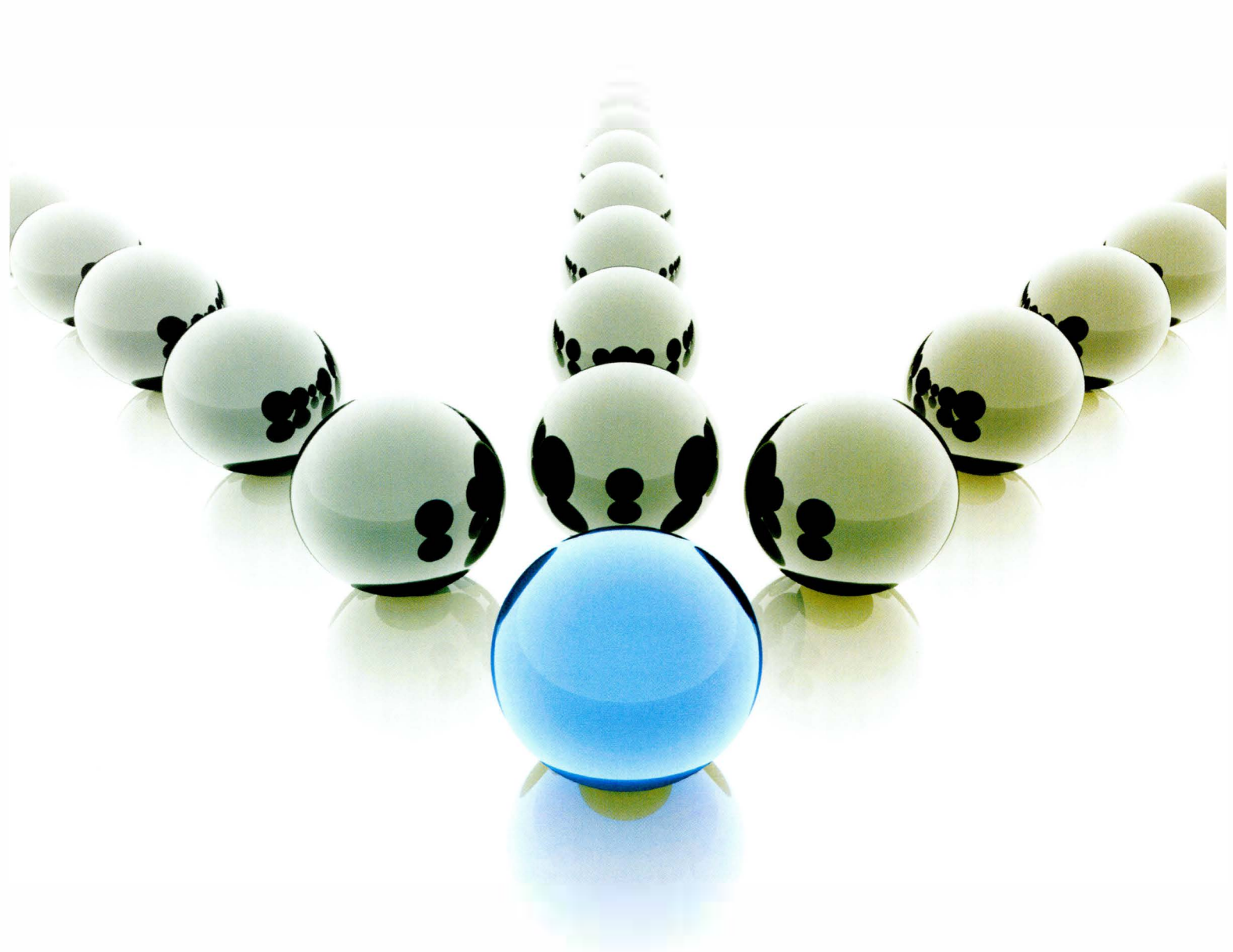
Overall the 555 has a 'smooth' – some might even say relaxed – sound but it can turn into a

in level with an equally appropriate measure of subtlety. This natural approach also appears in the '555's portrayal of instrumental character, whose fluency will surely delight timbre-fans. The player paints a vivid picture of the instruments it is portraying such that anyone familiar with the tone of a Gibson ES335, say, will detect one in the mix rather than just hearing a generic guitar sound.

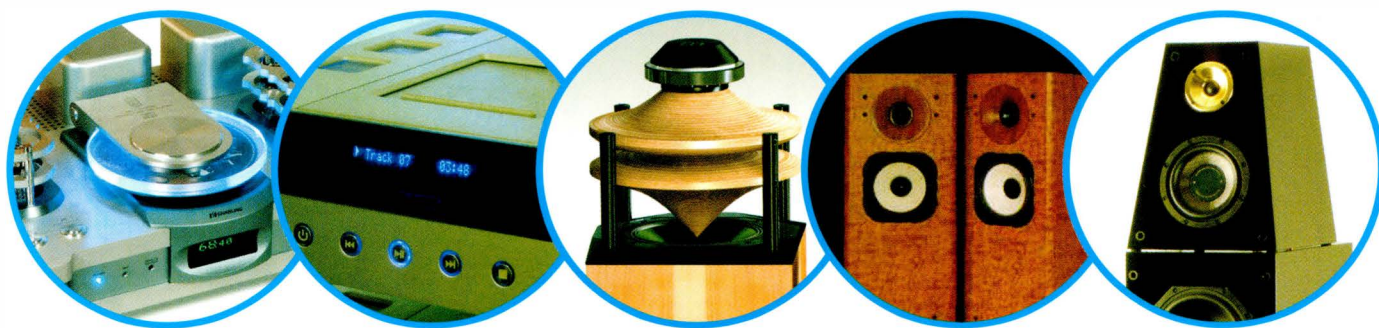
Of more importance to most potential owners, though, will be whether the triple-five does Naim's customary 'pace, rhythm and timing' thing. The short answer is a resounding yes: despite its outwardly refined nature, within





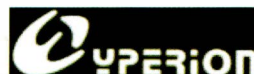


not everything is created equal



Duevel

HØRNING  
*The Musical Truth*



*Real* **hi-fi**

Tel: 0870 909 6777 · [info@realhi-fi.com](mailto:info@realhi-fi.com) · [www.realhi-fi.com](http://www.realhi-fi.com)

To find your nearest 'Real hi-fi' Dealer visit [www.realhi-fi.com](http://www.realhi-fi.com) or call us today.



# QUAD ESL 2805

*Beefing up Quad's classic electrostatic speaker has considerably boosted its performance*

PRICE £4,500 per stereo pair CONTACT Quad, IAG House, Sovereign Court, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon PE29 6XU ☎ 01480 447700 🌐 www.quad-hifi.co.uk

In 1957, Quad stunned the hi-fi world by introducing the first full-range electrostatic speaker. Coloration was so low and neutrality so high, many felt it made conventional speakers redundant, and it took the competition at least a decade to start catching up. Its replacement, the ESL-63, appeared in 1981 and remains the basis for this new £4,500 ESL 2805.

'Remains the basis' is very much the phrase here, as the 2805 follows a similar principle of operation to the ESL-63, but has been substantially modified in a number of respects, both to conform with changes in safety standards, as well as to improve the sound quality.

Exceptionally slim from the side, like any panel speaker, it's also very bulky from the front, standing just over a metre tall and more than two thirds of a metre wide. Apart from the silver sides and a curved, gloss-black top, most of what you see is black grille cloth, creating a rather sombre effect.

An old advertisement stressed that the electrostatic's thin film diaphragm was lighter than a feather. However, the mass of the

diaphragm matters less than the much heavier mass of air in intimate contact with it. That is why beefing up the structure substantially improves the sound, and the 2805 now has a substantial steel and alloy frame, steel bases fitted with 8kg mass-loading, and a hefty strut bracing the top of the frame against the back of the base.

Electrostatic loudspeakers generate sound from a large panel of plastic film stretched between high voltage charged plates. This panel radiates sound equally forwards and backwards, but the radiation towards the sides

**“It has the most stunningly gorgeous midband, combining remarkable neutrality with great expression and delicacy”**

is cancelled out, and bass extension is determined by the width of the panel. A clever technique developed by Quad avoids the 'beaming' often found with large panel diaphragms: the stator has eight concentric rings connected through delay lines that progressively delay the feed to the larger, outer rings, so the relatively small central portion gives adequate treble dispersion.

Because it operates on an entirely different principle, this unique speaker changes all the usual sonic rules, giving a totally different set of compromises. In some respects it sets a new performance benchmark that even the most costly regular speakers don't approach.

It has the most stunningly gorgeous midband you're ever likely to hear, combining remarkable neutrality with great expression

and delicacy. There's also an inherent sweetness here that results from a splendid freedom from any exaggeration or hype, and a wonderful coherence that brings remarkable realism to human voices. Piano and woodwind reproduction stand out as startlingly realistic, though brass can sometimes get a little edgy.

Because there's no box, the sound is free from any midband boxiness, and because the diaphragm is large, and therefore makes only tiny movements, linearity is high and distortion very low.

However, it also has obvious limitations in both loudness capability and low bass reproduction. Loudness is restricted by both low sensitivity, of around 84dB, and relatively modest power handling, although sophisticated electronic protection ensures that accidental overload won't cause any damage. Bass extension, which is defined by the width of the speaker, is limited to around 50Hz, and while it's crisp and clean, with no overhang, it could be more even.

The sheer transparency of this speaker makes it very sensitive to components further up the chain. Valve amps proved a good match, and experimenting with different speaker cables is well worthwhile.

Stereo imaging is exceptionally precise, partly because of the fine transparency and superior phase accuracy, but also because it has a much higher direct-to-reflected sound ratio than box loudspeakers. In other words, you hear more of the actual recording, and less of your listening room. There's still some high frequency beaming, so you'll obtain the best results when seated directly on the forward axes.

While this is clearly not the ideal speaker for those who like their rock music loud and dirty, its performance is utterly entrancing on acoustic material and, as such, it represents exceptional value for money, albeit within acknowledged loudness constraints. With the right kind of music in the right kind of system, there's little to touch it. 🍷

*Paul Messenger*

*See the May 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# KARAN ACOUSTICS KA S 180

*A slimline, dual-mono power amp that's built like a tank. Who could ask for more?*

PRICE £3,850 CONTACT AudiOfreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7QT ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.karan-acoustics.com

**K**aran Acoustics is the big secret in high-end hi-fi. Based in Serbia and Montenegro – it says Yugoslavia on the back of the amplifier, although technically that country no longer exists – the company makes an 11-strong range of products spanning from a small integrated amp right up to a whopping great set of 1,200-watt monoblocks and everything else in-between. But this, Karan's entry-level power amp, is perhaps the most interesting.

It's a fully dual-mono design, sharing only a plug and a transformer between the channels. (As you rise up the Karan ranks, the degree of channel separation becomes greater and greater: the next model up doesn't even share transformers; the one after that has two mains leads; and then it's separate chassis.) That's no small issue though, because that mighty transformer is more than enough to help the KA S 180 turn out a healthy 180 watts per channel into eight ohms.

Karan's secret reputation is built upon a throw-it-downstairs-and-break-the-stairs build quality. The thick black anodised case is desperately heavy for a relatively small amplifier design. Not that you'd consider such barbarity with an expensive amplifier, but you'd have to key the amp to scratch it and you'd probably break the key in the process.

Under the hood, it's just as solidly put together. The amplifier modules are beautifully constructed, with a brace of Karan-sourced polystyrene reservoir capacitors on each side driving the over-specified Sanken bi-polar output devices. Internal wiring is Cardas throughout. Connectors – both XLR and phono, along with beefy speaker terminals – are from WBT. The whole shebang reads like an audiophile's wish list of the best possible components.

In common with all Karan products, it's ultra minimalist in its approach. Power it up from the switch at the back and you get a glowing red logo in the centre of the amplifier front panel. That's it. That's the whole extent of user interface technologies. On the other hand, it's a power amp, so what more do you need?

Look, it's time to stop thinking of the KA S 180 as a stereo amp. Yes, it has two channels and yes, it's in one box, but it's a pair of monoblocks that just happen to share the same chassis and power supply. Thinking of this as a stereo amplifier will not do, because it has the stereo separation of monoblocks, the freedom of power delivery of a pair of

monoblocks and the dynamic scale of monoblocks... but built into a single chassis.

And, like any decent, self-respecting pair of monoblocks, the Karan demands to be well fed. It needs to be driven from an extremely good preamp and source components; ideally (but not exclusively) Karan's own two-box preamp. Fortunately, the choice of speakers and speaker cables is far easier. The amplifier is one of the least speaker cable fussy around – although the better the cable, the better the sound – and it presents such a clean, excellent load, that you can use it with almost any loudspeaker on the market today. Naturally, those speakers designed to work with one-watt triode amps or those needing a small power station to drive them will not be so comfortable with the KA S 180's power

potent, cavernous bass without sounding ponderous in the process.

It's not a product to hit you in the face with its performance. Like a fine Anderson & Shepherd suit, it bespeaks quality quietly, never garishly. So, it's polite, refined and controlled, yet can deliver a healthy thwack from its tightly furled Swain Adeney Brigg umbrella. In other words, the KA S 180 is the power amp that never draws attention to itself and instead just does the job, brilliantly.

Like its bigger brother, imagery is first-rate, although the KA S 270 betters it. It's a very tough image to describe, because it's how it comes out of the preamp with little detectable additions or subtractions. It's not wide of the boxes, deep or tall; it merely responds to the music. Similarly, the KA S 180 gets inside the

## “The perfect power amp, it manages to combine a chocolate-smooth delivery without sounding ‘dark’ or laid back”

delivery envelope, but the other 99 per cent of speakers on the market will lap up a powerful, no-nonsense amp like the Karan.

Those who have past copies of *The Collection* will find the test of the Karan KA S 270 to be remarkably similar to this one. There's a fraction less dynamic headroom here, and the microdynamics and stereo separation are ever so slightly less impressive, but otherwise everything that applied to the KA S 270 applies to the KA S 180, too. In fact, unless you had the two side by side or chose to use loudspeakers of 85dB or lower efficiency, you'd be hard pressed to tell one from the other.

Those without a library of previous editions of *The Collection* may not know what they are in for, but the Karan is the perfect power amp. It manages to combine a chocolate-smooth delivery without sounding artificially 'dark' or laid back. It delivers a fine, extended treble without shouting high frequencies and a

music wonderfully, presenting a sense of both coherence and insight into the tiny changes of dynamic scale that make a recording seem like the real thing.

Curiously, there is so much information on tap here, you tend to turn the music down, not up. Or, perhaps more accurately, you turn the music to the right level for that particular piece of music. You can only do this with an amplifier with near infinite headroom, though, and that's another bonus of the KA S 180.

Ask yourself a simple question – what do you want a power amp to do? Do you want it to impress your friends with big VU meters or LED displays? Do you want it to shape and colour the sound? Or, do you want it to sit there understated and deliver music as accurately as possible? If the last is your goal, you'll keep coming back to the Karan KA S 180. It's a tough act to follow. ■

Alan Sircom









# WILSON AUDIO SYSTEM 8

*The main event in audiophile loudspeaker systems just got even better*

PRICE £24,950 per stereo pair CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.wilsonaudio.com

**M**ore perhaps than any speaker in history, the Wilson Audio System 8 and its forbears, defines high-end audio. The original Wilson Audio Tiny Tot broke new ground as a cost-no-object, two-way, standmount design, which was radically improved by the addition of the Puppy bass unit. Although substantially modified in the intervening decades, what worked in the original WATT/Puppy still works today.

The head unit is still a ported two-way, and still features a 25mm inverted aluminium dome tweeter partnered with a 165mm midrange unit. The bass cabinet also features the same driver configuration: a pair of front-firing 200mm bass units. As ever, the two sections are carefully decoupled from one another and only a single-wired cable connects the two.

So, what's changed? Put simply, everything else. Like the Linn LP12 turntable, the Wilson speakers may look very similar to the early models, but that resemblance is superficial. Most of the differences between the System 8 and the previous System 7 are in the treble/mid cabinet. The WATT gets a new tweeter, from a new source, and an enclosure made from Wilson's own 'M' material for its midrange clarity and 'X' material for its non-resonant mass-loading. This makes the cabinet lighter than before but behave as if it were much heavier... a double bonus! The tweeter comes from Wilson's MAXX 2 speaker, and this has meant adapting the crossover to make it more, well, MAXX-y. The midrange and bass units remain unchanged from the previous model, tested in 2004's edition of *The Collection*.

The bass cabinet remains much as it was in the previous incarnation of this speaker, the System 7. That version's Puppy saw the introduction of 'X' material and 'M' material and brought a first rate method of delineating bass from mid-treble cabinets.

One advantage to the use of these clever new materials is that it opens up the finish options. There are four standard and a dozen optional colours, and even a colour-matching service that works with almost any car paint finish you can imagine. Add in four colours of grille along with either silver or black trim and the permutations become truly endless.

With the new system in place, sensitivity remains very high at a claimed 92dB. Wilson suggests the System 8 can be driven by as little as seven watts per channel, but they had better be the best watts money can buy. Except in 'WilsonWorld' (where Alexandrias stand taller

than most men), the System 8 remains a big and heavy speaker, standing just over a metre tall and weighing in at an impressive 77.1 kg per speaker. Perhaps this weight goes some way to explaining how any speaker can deliver bass down to 21 Hz, even if the treble is a remarkably SACD-unaware 22.5kHz.

The two units are notionally available separately, but really should be thought of as a team. If you want a standmount speaker with a Wilson label, arguably the Duette is a more complete option today. Years of symbiosis have made the two parts of the System 8 behave as one.

Wilson WATT/Puppy systems are often thought of as being remarkably adept at analysing what's good and bad in a system, but that used to be at the expense of a touch

**“You will most probably spend your first weeks with the System 8 re-evaluating every disc you own”**

of grace and subtlety. Because they could go very loud indeed and had a clean, open treble, they were considered 'The PA That God Uses' by knowledgeable journalists. Those days are numbered because, although the System 8 can still play very loud indeed, it's a far more refined beast than before. It's not that previous models were 'shouty' and graceless – far from it – it's just that the System 8 seems to sound more like the smooth-sounding Duette, but with the awe-inspiring scale that WATT/Puppy owners have always craved.

The System 8 has a gloriously open and honest-sounding midrange. It has the dynamic range to hide an orchestra in each speaker, yet it also has a subtle touch. It retains the analytical nature of Wilsons that went before – capable of analysing both discs and systems – but is not so analytical that it renders your music or your hi-fi a work in progress. The System 8 is smoother and more fluid than previous WATT/Puppy iterations, and that means you can hear the changes in the system or the disc, but – unless disc or system is really, really minging – you remain comfortable with the resulting sound. The Will To Improve is still there, but it's not an overarching demand.

The level of detail is truly incredible. Instruments that were formerly hard to define within a mix are easy to follow and identify. You will most probably spend your first weeks

with the System 8 re-evaluating every disc you own, gaining in many cases greater respect for the recording engineers' art.

Then, there's the timing. Usually, smaller speakers would out-time a WATT/Puppy design, because of their less than full-range presentation. However, the System 8 redefines timing in high-end loudspeaker systems. It is entirely neutral when it comes to timing; it merely plays the beat that's in the music. This sounds trivial, but a surprising number of speakers fail to deliver this fundamental aspect of musical performance. Couple this with all that detail and articulation and this becomes a powerful high-end performer.

There are few speaker designs that celebrate their tenth birthday and remain a force to be reckoned with. The WATT/Puppy is a notable

exception. But it's not preserved in aspic; this is a vibrant, modern design that keeps improving as materials change for the better. You might not notice the changes from the outside, but this speaker sounds better than ever. If only the rest of us could find anti-aging treatments that could work as well. ■■

*Alan Sircom*



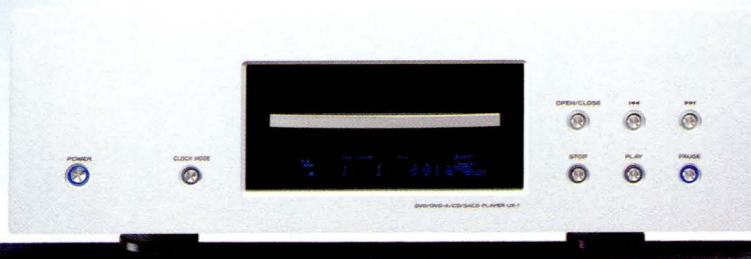


# Esoteric: serious hi-fi for the initiated

Born of an obsession with perfect reproduction of the finest detail, these components are precision instruments, finely engineered and beautifully designed.

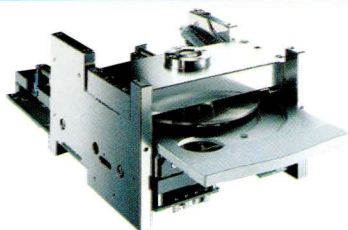
This range of components is, quite simply, peerless. Listen once and you'll remember it for ever.

# ESOTERIC



For further information contact  
Symmetry on 01727 865488 or  
[info@symmetry-systems.co.uk](mailto:info@symmetry-systems.co.uk)

[www.teac.co.uk](http://www.teac.co.uk)



TEAC's unique VRDS-NEO clamping mechanism, precision machined from ultra-dense materials



by **TEAC**



# MOON EVOLUTION I-7

*No fuss, no frills – this beefy Canadian amplifier simply revels in the music*

**PRICE** £4,750 **CONTACT** Redline Distribution, Unit 11b, 72 Newhaven Road, Edinburgh EH6 5QG ☎ 0131 555 3922 🌐 www.red-line.co.uk

**T**he subject of this test hails from Simaudio – a company from the surprisingly rich vein of Canadian high-end producers, which also gave us such respected brands as Bryston and Classé. The Moon range embraces premium-quality components that are superbly built and very highly specified. Indeed, general construction standards are well up there with brands like Mark Levinson, and the finishes of the various fabricated body panels and other parts including the fully engineered corner pieces add interest. Even the colour of the Moon logo on the fascia can be specified by the user. The review sample of the i-7 ended up looking remarkably Mark Levinson-esque, which is unlikely to deter most people.

By the standards of the Moon marque, the oddly named Evolution i-7 is a relatively affordable model, even though it forms a great foundation for a wide range of systems up to and including high-performance combinations. An undeniably muscular design, on paper as well as in practice, it offers the ability to play at relatively high sound pressure levels with even low sensitivity speakers.

Notably bereft of bells and whistles, it is a line-level only with a power rating of 150 watts into eight ohms and an impressive 250 watts into four ohms. Peak current is claimed to be around 40 amps, and all this is backed by an elaborate power supply with three mains transformers, the largest of which is a toroidal rated at 0.5kVA. The internal architecture is fully balanced and differential, and the maker claims to use no overall negative feedback, though as always – whatever the maker's

claims may be – we think you'll find local feedback around individual stages.

The i-7 amplifier includes a single balanced input to accompany the four single-ended inputs, and a single-ended tape circuit. Volume control can be assigned to an external multichannel amplifier or processor if required. The user interface includes an impressive diecast remote control, a massive red LED display to tell you what it's thinking, and a multifunction rotary encoder that

**“The frequency extremes are free from obvious highlighting, and the midband has presence and depth, with a hint of warmth”**

accesses a similar feature set to most recent Arcam models – volume normalisation between inputs, a programmable maximum gain setting, the ability to disable any unconnected inputs and so on. There are also some basic features aimed at custom installation applications.

Simaudio calls for an extended running in period – 400 hours no less – which was treated in good faith. With this hurdle successfully negotiated, what you are left with is a rock-solid leviathan measured by any standards short of the Krell FBI amplifier. As it turns out, there is a degree of similarity between these two designs. At the very least, the Krell has a touch of the warmth and smoothness displayed by the i-7. But the Moon is overtly muscular, with a very obvious feel for recorded dynamics. It all happens in a

natural, unforced way. The frequency extremes are free from obvious highlighting, and the midband has presence and depth, along with a hint of natural warmth, which in this case doesn't spring from the bass behaviour. Indeed, the bass could even be described as being on the dry side, though not excessively so.

This is also a design of real transparency. It is adept at illuminating subtleties of vocal and instrumental expression, and it works well with percussive sounds. Piano, for example,

sounds clear and transparent, and the note sequences just flow organically. It's also worth noting that the amplifier feels solid enough sonically to cope with every musical eventuality, across multiple genres.

There are just a few less impressive features: the feet can mark surfaces if the amplifier is not treated with care, and there is no balance control. This surely could have been easily accommodated in the amp's software with no further sound quality degradation given the ability to normalise levels between inputs. But these are mere details for an amplifier that is bold, muscular and has both genuine authority and the ability to cosset the ears. Around the £5,000 mark, it's a leading contender. 🍷

Alvin Gold

See the December 2006 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* for the original review of this product







Scarlatti

POWER DISPLAY DITHER

BNC  
00/44.1  
-26.0dB

FREQUENCY MENU

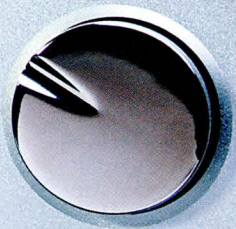
Scarlatti

POWER DISPLAY SYNC FILTER INPUT

44.1kHz

MUTE MENU

01 00:04:02  
CD Track Elapsed



dCS

PWR STOP EJECT PLAY PAUSE REW FWD MENU

dCS



# DCS SCARLATTI

*How many boxes does it take to make the ultimate digital audio disc player?*

**PRICE** £33,000 (Transport: £16,000; DAC: £12,000; Master Clock: £5,000) **CONTACT** dCS, Mull House, Great Chesterford Court, Great Chesterford, Saffron Walden CB10 1PF ☎ 01799 531999 🌐 www.dcsld.co.uk

**B**ritish firm dCS started out making high-precision digital-to-analogue converters in the 'pro' audio world in the 1980s. In the nineties it then went on to launch its Elgar DAC to an unsuspecting audiophile public. Subsequently it has gone on to carve itself a niche as one of the best makers of digital components in the business. The Scarlatti is its latest range-topping CD and SACD player and consists of a transport, DAC and master clock. The clock is the icing on the cake and is not essential to the system; Scarlatti can be run using the clock in the DAC as the master if needs be.

The Scarlatti system replaces dCS's existing range-topping combo of Verdi Encore transport, Elgar Plus DAC and Verona clock, which came in at £10k less and was considered to be The Business in the business, if you know what we mean. While Scarlatti is

**“If you have a revealing system, you need a player of this capability to make the most of your discs”**

an evolution of that system the only parts it shares with it are the power transformers. Everything else has been refined, upgraded and generally bigged up. The converter is still dCS' Ring DAC but it is an enhanced version that's surrounded by higher processing power, faster FPGAs (Field Programmable Gate Arrays) and redesigned power supplies. On the outside what you see is a new chassis design with cast alloy end cheeks and a large, easy-to-read display. It's the insides that have really changed.

The Scarlatti transport is a substantial beast that uses a VRDS Neo transport mechanism and driver (the circuit that opens and closes it) from TEAC, but all the laser control processing is done by dCS. One thing that distinguishes the Scarlatti is the way it oversamples CD's 16-bit/44.1kHz data rate to the DSD rate of 1-bit/2.822MHz and sends it through a 1394 Firewire connection to the DAC. There are no alternative upsampling options, such as the popular 24-bit/96kHz, but a separate upsampler is expected in the future. dCS chose to go the DSD route because it sounds the best to them when used with the Ring DAC, which runs at 5-bit/2.822MHz. Also, when used with CD sources this means that the quantization noise associated with DSD does

not need to be filtered with the aggressive noise shaping that is necessary with SACD.

The Scarlatti DAC has inputs for all variants of digital signal through its variety of connections. A digital volume control drives its analogue output so the DAC can be connected directly to a power amp for the best results. Maximum output can be either two or six volts to suit different power amp/speaker combinations, but given that you lose bits if the volume is set much below -25, most systems will work best in the 2V setting. If a preamp is used, volume is best set to maximum. Volume level as well as each element of the Scarlatti system can be controlled with the supplied Philips Pronto handset.

To be honest, the Scarlatti makes all other CD spinners sound positively crude. The treble is extraordinarily clean and smooth yet possesses sparkle and air while the bass

seems to add an extra octave to the results from other high-quality players. The critical midrange, meanwhile, is detailed to an extent that's rarely encountered in reproduced sound, which means that stereo images are rock-solid and soundstages go way back behind the loudspeakers.

Then there's the transparency. You can really hear the differences between discs, and while

some of them merely sound big and powerful others can produce a crystalline realism that beggars belief.

We did some further analysis by swapping over between the 1394 Firewire link, with its DSD feed, and a high-quality Chord Signature RCA phono lead from the standard 44.1kHz output. The Firewire connection brought a clear increase in subtlety, extracting a lot more fine detail and delivering a more relaxed sound compared to the 44.1kHz S/PDIF connection. This gives the Scarlatti transport an advantage over nearly all the competition. However, using the S/PDIF connection with a Townshend Audio player as a transport revealed that it got pretty close to the Scarlatti via the same link.

As the system can be used with the DAC in Master mode providing the clock we also compared this with the stand-alone clock. Here the improvement wrought by the separate unit was audible but quite subtle, consisting mainly of a reduction in low-level hash that brought an increased relaxation to the sound. That would be worthwhile in a very transparent system but a luxury elsewhere.

Scarlatti is an outstanding CD player and a superb SACD player. To be honest, the two formats are actually brought closer together and the differences come down to the recording itself rather than the format. This is an unusual but welcome result given the poor support that the finer format (SACD) gets from record companies. If you have a revealing system, you need a player of this capability to make the most of your discs. Even if you don't, you could always start building one around it. 🍷

Jason Kennedy







audio research

CD MUTE BAL LO 20

POWER MENT BAL SE PROC MONITOR MUTE

MODEL LS26 HIGH DEFINITION

audio research

VACUUM TUBE POWER AMPLIFIER

REFERENCE 110 HIGH DEFINITION

POWER

ADAPTOR



# AUDIO RESEARCH LS26 & REF 110

*A serious preamp and power amp combination from the acknowledged kings of valve amplification*

**PRICE** £13,790 (LS26: £5,300; Reference 110: £8,490) **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.audioresearch.com

**B**ack in the early 1970s, valves seemed to have been firmly consigned to the amplification history books. Audio Research was the only amplifier brand – to the best of my knowledge – still making what it called ‘tube’ amps, and its products weren’t even available in Britain back then. Valves have been in and out of fashion several times since then, but Audio Research has stuck to its principles throughout – give or take the odd hybrid – and is also widely regarded as a founding member of the High End club.

This review is examining the £5,300 LS26 preamplifier and the £8,490 Reference 110 power amplifier, both of which are all-valve devices. Although the Reference 110 might more usually be partnered with the Reference 3 preamplifier, the LS26 is a ‘trickle down’ variation on the Reference 3 theme, at a saving of nearly £4,000. The measured performance specification is very similar, but the unit is smaller and not much more than half the weight – presumably evidence of a smaller power supply. Audio Research says: “The LR26 sounds like a REF 3 on a slightly smaller scale.”

Valve amps often lack the convenience and flexibility of solid state components, but that’s not the case here. A full panoply of useful features are all under microprocessor – and hence remote – control. The styling is classic Audio Research: a thick, silver-coloured alloy fascia, ahead of ventilated, pressed-metal casework. The front panel is attractively and symmetrically laid out. A generous and informative green-illuminated central display has status information large enough to be read at a distance. A row of pushbuttons select power, mono, mute, monitor, processor bypass and balanced/single-ended selection. Two large rocker knobs select volume and input.

In practice, of course, most of the control functions will be handled by the remote control, a delightful little device that’s an object lesson in handset design. Compact, lightweight and unpretentious, it duplicates the fascia controls and adds balance and phase inversion – both of which are better adjusted from the listening position.

Comprehensive socketry includes six ‘normal’ inputs, plus monitor and processor; each is duplicated in single-ended phono pairs and balanced XLR pairs. Record output and two main output single-ended and balanced sockets sets complete the line-up. Each regular input has three alternative gain

options, effectively extending the range of the 104-step volume control. The latter’s operation is delightfully smooth and silent, but it would have been helpful to have had still lower gain settings available for late night listening, while the upper end of the range seems somewhat superfluous.

The smallest of three Reference power amps, the Reference 110 is still a massive beast, in both bulk and weight. Power output is rated at 110 watts per channel through output transformer taps matched to 4, 8 or 16 ohms, and terminals intended for spade connectors only. Mains comes through an oversized 20A connector lead, and inputs are exclusively balanced XLRs.

**“This is one of the finest, sweetest, most musically literate and downright satisfying amplifier combos around”**

Both the power amp and preamp have clever systems that count the elapsed hours of use, to help work out when the valves ought to be changed to maintain optimum performance. In order to help extend valve life, the Reference 110 also has two-speed cooling fans that are permanently active. These might be a little too intrusive for some people, as they are just audible in a quiet room even at the low setting.

Listening tests involved a variety of sources, both balanced and single-ended, and it quickly became clear that this Audio Research combo is very sensitive to the interconnect cables that were used, and comfortably gives its best performance when fed in balanced mode. The difference isn’t huge, but it sounds just that bit more confident and solid. At the power amp end, the Reference 110 is clearly happier working into a relatively straightforward loudspeaker load: it was significantly more comfortable driving Bowers & Wilkins’ two-way Signature Diamond speakers than the same company’s more demanding, three-way 800Ds.

There’s ample power available for all normal purposes, and the pre/power combo has a warm overall sound, with lovely vocal clarity and intelligibility, along with great midband sweetness, delicacy and transparency, though the bottom end could have a bit more authority, grip and punch.

The review period involved a number of changeovers between the Audio Research

valve duo and my regular, and much more costly, Naim NAC552/NAP500 solid-state amplifier combo. The comparison is fascinating, as the two have quite distinct ‘flavours’, and each is utterly engrossing in its own particular way.

Spend some time with the Naims, and you miss something of their grunt and authority when going over to the Audio Research. Spend some time with the Audio Research and you miss the fluidity and liquidity of its midrange, the delicate natural tonality and sweetness, and the vivid realism of its dynamic and micro-dynamic contrasts when returning to the Naim. Ultimately one would like to combine the best characteristics of each, though such

audio nirvana seems destined to remain out of reach, and it’s unrealistic to state that one is necessarily superior to the other.

This exceptional Audio Research combo’s natural tonality is particularly appreciated when reproducing acoustic instruments and human voices. However, there’s no shortage of pace and drive when it comes to handling rock or hip-hop, and the dynamic range is exceptionally wide, revealing even the finest detail deep down in the mix.

Best used with balanced connections and relatively simple loudspeaker loads, this is one of the finest, sweetest, most musically literate and downright satisfying amplifier combos around, though at no time does one suspect that it is over-sugaring the repast. In short, the LS26/Reference 110 combo represents truly excellent value at this highly realistic price. 🍷

*Paul Messenger*







LINN

What's remarkable about the new series of LP12 SE upgrades is not that it's taken 35 years to develop them, or that they can be retro-fitted to any Sondek LP12 turntable, but the fact that they retrieve even more music from your vinyl collection than ever before.



**Experience a revelation in turntable performance.**

For more information and details of demonstration events in your area visit [www.linn.co.uk](http://www.linn.co.uk), or call 08000 277 181.



# MERIDIAN G95

*A high-performance multichannel system for music and movies, packaged in a single box*

**PRICE** £4,250 **CONTACT** Meridian Audio, Latham Road, Huntingdon PE29 6YE ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

**L**et's face it: we'd all like to have an easy to use, one-box solution to cater for all our audio and video requirements.

Separates have their uses but they do take up a lot of space and they don't always make life easy. Meridian recognizes that most people want quality *and* practicality, and that's why it came up with this music and movie source that is not only compact but also claims to offer high quality to boot.

It plays both CDs and DVDs and offers FM and/or DAB tuners, along with multichannel processing and five channels of amplification. Such products can sometimes be found in the ranges of mass market-brands but rarely offer any pretence of genuinely high quality. Meridian has sought to achieve this by using digital amplification modules whose advantages include high power for small size and, theoretically at least, low operating temperature. In practice, the G95 runs pretty warm but there is an awful lot happening inside the box.

Discs are swallowed up by a ROM drive fronted by a slot mechanism, a combination that offers good data reading capabilities along with robustness. It will read most discs except for SACD. However, DVD-Audio is covered should you be lucky enough to find any software you actually want. It upsamples CD to 88.2kHz and can use onboard processing to create a multichannel experience from a stereo signal. Its video credentials are even more impressive thanks to a scaler that can deliver a 1080p signal through HDMI from plain DVD should your screen or projector be able to use it.

In standard form, the G95 combines DAB and FM tuner modules but, for a £100 saving, you can ditch the DAB and have FM/AM RDS radio instead. Conveniently, you can mix bands on the presets: so preset one can be Radio 7 on DAB while preset two can be, say, Radio 4 on FM.

Meridian's G series remote handset might be large but it does make things easier when it comes to set-up and general navigation. It can also be programmed to run other components, which is handy. While digital amps have their

qualities, you can usually spot one quite easily. That wasn't the case here, however, the sound being as smooth and luxurious as we've come to expect from this brand – a sound that matched our B&W 802D speakers remarkably well. Being a jack of all trades, it would be optimistic to expect the G95 to excel in every respect. This proved to be the case with CD, where the onboard amps reveal that dedicated CD players can produce a livelier sound, albeit without the aforementioned smoothness. The G95's DVD-Audio replay was enhanced by the option of going directly to a particular track, which is a very rare skill for some reason. It also delivers a wider band sound with obviously greater treble extension and lovely, tactile bass.

**“It provides the fundamentals of home entertainment at a level that has rarely, if ever, been possible with a one-box system”**

the picture being several leagues ahead of all but the best dedicated DVD players. The G95 delivers a smooth, seamless picture with excellent skin tone and tremendous detail resolution. A lot of us are waiting for the high-def video formats that are battling it out, but when you can get regular discs to look this good it makes you wonder why. On test, these impressive results were apparent using both HDMI and component feeds through an LCD screen and a high-end projector.

As a digital radio tuner, the G95 is on a par with standalone alternatives and, as is always the case, fully dependent on transmission quality. It keeps things smooth and it's also good and quiet, which is always a bonus. Meridian has done an excellent job with the G95. It is beautifully executed and provides the fundamentals of home entertainment at a level that has rarely, if ever, been possible with one-box systems in the past. Exemplary picture quality from DVDs is its most impressive attribute, but no aspect of its performance is less than capable, even in high-end terms, making this probably the best one box audio/video system in the world. ■■

*Jason Kennedy*

*See the April 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# FOCAL NOVA UTOPIA BE

*An alternative to the Grande Utopia for those who don't live in les maisons très spacieuses*

PRICE £22,799 per stereo pair CONTACT Focal UK, PO Box 4287, Coventry CV4 0BS ☎ 0845 6602680 🌐 www.focal-uk.com

**F**ocal has successfully and progressively built its position in recent years. From being the leading French brand of medium-to-high-end speakers – and it was not even that a few years earlier – it has become one of the major international players. Several factors have worked in the company's favour. Although some of its production is subcontracted elsewhere, the company has a spacious factory in Saint Etienne in the south-east of France, from where it controls everything including the in-house manufacture of its drivers and crossovers, final assembly, warehousing, and even some of its cabinet work.

**“The Nova’s ability to conjure up the awe-inspiring power of a big orchestra can only be readily bettered by the real thing”**

The design labs are based at the same site, and there the company has developed a powerful raft of technologies, which most famously includes the beryllium dome tweeter, which has a counterpart in the Bowers & Wilkins diamond tweeter project. Other important technologies include: the Focus Ring, rare earth magnet structure used in the same tweeter; Flower Power, the multiferrite magnet geometry from the larger units; W-cone, the composite multi-layer diaphragm also used in the larger drivers; Focus Time, which provides time alignment; and more besides. All of these make the models in the Utopia range, the primary range in which they're used, some of the most sophisticated in their class, with build quality to die for. You can argue about whether beryllium is better than diamond or vice versa, and the same with the other key technologies, but there are few other contenders in the frame.

The Nova Utopia Be is the penultimate Utopia series loudspeaker, down market from and smaller than the Grande Utopia. It includes all the Grande Utopia highlights in a speaker system that, while still massive by any normal standards, is only about half the price and much more manageable than the flagship. Manageable in this context means a system whose deadweight is 124kg – for each speaker – and that stands 134cm tall, 44cm wide and 62cm at its deepest point, near the base. This is considerably smaller and lighter than the Grande Utopia.

To flesh out the numbers, the Nova is nominally an eight-ohm design, with a relatively benign 3.6-ohm minimum impedance, and a frequency response within 3dB limits from 25Hz to 40kHz. 20Hz is achieved at -6dB, which, with room boundary reinforcement, is perfectly feasible.

The picture shows the basic arrangement of the enclosure, which is divided into four entirely separate sub-enclosures. These are strapped together with the wood veneered sections at the sides. There's one enclosure for the 33cm primary bass driver; one for each of the two 16.5cm midrange drivers, which take over above 250Hz; and one for the beryllium dome

tweeter. The tweeter takes the reins at 2.5kHz and continues through to 40kHz. A benefit of its design is that it not only handles a prodigious amount of power but its diaphragm is inherently stiff, quick and well damped.

All this, with a sensitivity of 91.5dB, means you don't strictly need an enormous power amplifier. However, given the system's power handling capabilities, you'll be missing out if you don't feed it properly.

Having once spent an extended spell with the Grande Utopia, the chance to do something similar with the Nova was particularly welcome. The flagship was always a thoroughly enjoyable and compelling listening experience, but it wasn't particularly easy to get along with. It rewarded meticulous set-up, and it definitely needed large spaces to work into: larger than we had available if the truth be known. In the real world, many people will not be able to achieve anything like what the Grande Utopia can deliver: the bass especially can overpower many rooms. And let's not forget its enormous visual footprint.

The Nova is much easier to get along with. Being smaller, bass extension is much closer to what many rooms are capable of supporting. In practice it will live happily, and its bass and midrange will breathe naturally, in rooms larger than, say, 4x5m – especially if the ceiling is reasonably tall. This is not just a matter of size: it seems the Nova has been deliberately designed for smaller rooms, perhaps because there is some room

compensation built into its low frequency response – though one cannot say for certain without examining its anechoic behaviour.

Regardless of whether this is the case, the Nova Utopia Be makes an electric listening experience. Of course, with an enclosure this big, the bass is tremendous in every respect. It is deep and powerful beyond the capabilities of normal loudspeakers, but more than this it has tunefulness and an ability to convey power and texture, which is all but in a class of its own. There are moments with large-scale orchestral material where the Nova's ability to conjure up the awe-inspiring power of a big orchestra in full flood can only be readily bettered by the real thing. Even the Grande Utopia struggled to do the same, because of the limitations of the listening room.

But the Nova's strengths apply throughout the entire audio band. The treble is clean, extended and finely detailed. The beryllium tweeter is among the best of its type, and there is no discontinuity or overt narrowing of directivity at the very top end of the audio band. Its behaviour is always smooth and progressive. Similarly, the midband completely avoids the charge of sounding too obviously 'French' – that is, too forward and explicit. In fact, the Nova Utopia Be is tonally neutral and correct. This is a world class high-end. 🍷

*Alvin Gold*







MAGNUM  
dynalab



STEREO WIDE

MUTE

▲

93.2

MHz

▼

POWER SEEKING BAND BLEND MUTE DIM



*World Source Platform*

MD 109



# MAGNUM DYNALAB MD 109

*This top Magnum Dynalab tuner combines traditional valves and FM reception with a modern display and ergonomics*

**PRICE** £7,900 (in black, silver or gold £300 extra) **CONTACT** Audiofreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond TW10 7QT ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.magnumdynalab.com

**C**anadian brand Magnum Dynalab is probably the only hi-fi company in the world that specialises in radio tuners. These are mostly of the analogue FM variety, though the company has recently introduced models to receive North America's subscription XM Satellite Radio service. There's surely some significance in its decision not to support the DAB digital radio format, which is broadcast in Canada as well as the UK.

After so much DAB hype in recent years, it is fair to question whether good old fashioned FM has any real future, and therefore whether it makes sense to spend £7,900 on a component designed to receive a format whose continued existence is threatened, theoretically at least. While it would be foolhardy to pretend that a future for FM is absolutely guaranteed, all the current talk is of the imminent change over from analogue to digital TV, while proposals to switch off analogue FM in favour of DAB seem to have been moved onto the back burner. Maybe our political masters have finally realised how extraordinarily inconvenient such an act would be for millions of existing in-car and domestic radio users: would any political party really want to risk the unpopularity?

Add in the fact that the BBC's main network radio services must rank amongst the finest in the world, both in creative content and sound quality, and the case for buying a top-quality FM tuner starts to make good sense. It's probably not strictly necessary to go quite as far upmarket as this MD 109 to get top-class results – this tuner apparently has a great deal in common with the MD 108T, which costs £2,000 less and was reviewed in last year's edition of *The Collection*. The two factors that distinguish the 109 from the 108T are its luxury styling, including a magnificently sculpted alloy front panel and delightful touch-screen display; more significantly, Magnum Dynalab doesn't actually call this an FM tuner: rather it's described as a World Source Platform because its flexible future-proof modular architecture is designed to accommodate whatever formats become necessary in the future, through two replaceable rear ports. The tuner itself is a rather bulky affair, more than 15cms tall, and the large blue touch-screen display inevitably gives a rather flashy impression. But it's functional, not unduly bright, and the fascia is attractively symmetrical and beautifully sculpted with the touch-screen flanked by two

large 'swinging needle' meters, representing signal strength and centre-tune.

The touch-screen shows the tuned frequency and gives access to the various other functions (power, mute, stereo/mono, selectivity, blend, display dim), while tuning itself is accomplished with the large and nicely weighted knob on the right, the touch screen, or the chunky alloy remote handset. The matching left hand selector knob is only used if and when other reception modules are added. The rear panel has an F-type aerial socket for FM antenna, an IEC mains input, and both balanced XLR and unbalanced phono output sockets.

**“Dynamic range is exceptionally wide, convincingly reproducing ambient acoustic background information”**

Our normal radio reference point is a MD 106T, two steps below the 109 in the Magnum Dynalab hierarchy. Changing between them takes a while because of the awkwardness involved in removing and replacing the screw-thread F-type aerial plug. However, with the 109 connected in balanced mode to Audio Research LS26/Reference 110 amplification and B&W 800D speakers through Transparent and Chord cables, its superiority over the 106T was obvious, rendering direct comparisons with the lesser model quite unnecessary.

The most obvious improvement is a reduction in background hash and noise. That's not to say the 106T is in any way poor in this respect – quite the reverse, in fact – but it's just that the 109 somehow manages to separate the musicians and voices from the carrier medium just that bit more completely and effectively, making it easier to focus exclusively on the content and ignore the fact that it's broadcast.

Dynamic range is exceptionally wide, convincingly reproducing ambient acoustic background information as well as low-level subtleties in the music and, most particularly, the delicate textures of classical strings. Applause is devastatingly realistic, partly because of the clarity that reveals the size of the audience, but also because this tuner makes no attempt to exaggerate the fine detail in any way. The MD 106T has a slightly bright and sparkly character, which is both involving and entertaining in the way detail is projected. The MD 109, however, manages to deliver just as much – indeed rather more – information without any such character. Rather it sounds

that much more effortless, neutral, and natural compared even to its junior stablemate, with a silky smoothness that's wholly seductive.

The two large swinging-needle meters made accurately tuning the continuous analogue band very simple indeed, though scanning with the remote handset proved an irritatingly unpredictable stop/start affair – using the tuning knob or taking the pre-set route are the less frustrating options. The RF spectrum is both unpredictable and uncontrollable, but as far as it's possible to tell the MD 109's radio reception performance is right up there with the sound quality, well able to dig out weak stations as well as handling strong ones with consummate aplomb.

This very special tuner might be costly, but it should give a lifetime's top-quality service and will always be a delight to use. For radio fans, it's the best that money can buy. ■■

*Paul Messenger*





A y r e

## Family Portrait



The Ayre 5-series has been created to provide a lifetime of excitement and discovery.

Combining stunning realism with exceptional clarity, the 5-series offers a dynamic high resolution presentation that draws you in to your favourite music as never before.

Ayre's bold unique design approach ensures superlative levels of performance. The 5 series employs Ayre's exclusive fully balanced, zero feedback circuitry, with special emphasis lavished on the power supply.

Every design detail is focused on a single aim, unprecedented musical delight.

 symmetry

t: 01727 865488

e: [info@symmetry-systems.co.uk](mailto:info@symmetry-systems.co.uk)

w: [www.symmetry-systems.co.uk](http://www.symmetry-systems.co.uk)



# PMC EB1

*The Professional Monitor Company brings large-scale studio sound to the home*

PRICE £5,995 per stereo pair CONTACT PMC, 43-45 Crawley Green Road, Luton LU2 0AA ☎ 0870 444 1044 🌐 www.pmc-speakers.com

**P**MC's EB1 is that rare thing: a proper loudspeaker, by which we mean that it makes no apologies about being substantial because it is designed for a purpose. That purpose is to deliver genuine welly in the domestic environment, something that's hard to achieve with speakers that stand lower than its 1.2 metres or weigh less than 48kg. Those are the sort of figures that matter when you're trying to deliver authentic bandwidth and genuine musical scale.

The EB1 is, in fact, quite elegant in its proportions and not, for instance, as tall as the Pioneer S-1EX that also features in this volume. It's also no wider than it needs to be to contain its 10-inch (250mm) bass driver. And

that's a proper bass driver. As proper as the method PMC chose to incorporate it. This is carried out using transmission line (TL) loading in place of the usual reflex porting. The EB1 features a three-metre long vent that, using a combination of different foams, damps out higher frequencies and reinforces the bass

**“Recordings that usually seem to have a hard edge to them are more relaxed, but you can still hear right into the mix”**

output below 40Hz – the body-vibrating end of the spectrum. By making the transmission line the correct length, the output it produces is in phase with what is coming out of the front of the bass driver. This

combination of driver and TL claims to take the bass down to 19Hz, which is below the limit of audibility but you can certainly feel it.

The EB1 has a flat bass driver made from a sandwich of carbon fibre outer skins with a Nomex honeycomb centre, so it is very rigid but not as light as a conventional cone. It therefore needs a substantial magnet and large-diameter, edge-wound voice coil to keep it under control. That is one reason why sensitivity is a little low for a speaker of this size at 89dB.

The 75mm soft-dome midrange unit is isolated in its own acoustically inert enclosure. Bitumastic is used to damp the chamber and is extensively used throughout to deaden the cabinet as a whole.

This is a speaker that you can play 'in anger' and thoroughly enjoy. As a result of PMC's 'pro'-audio background, all of its

speakers are designed to go loud but the bigger they are the more easily they do so and the more entertaining the bass. This is a speaker for rattling the cupboards and annoying the neighbours as much as it is for appreciating the fine details of a piece of chamber music. Yet both Mozart and Metallica

require wide bandwidth and good dynamic range to sound 'real', and there's no substitute for air-moving capability in either case. One just requires more watts than the other.

Fortunately, the EB1 works just as well at more moderate levels. In fact, the character doesn't seem to change that much whatever volume you plump for. It also sounds more sensitive than the specs would suggest thanks to the ease with which the bottom end breathes. We've tried smaller PMCs in the past and enjoyed them, but with a beast of this scale the transmission line comes into its own and delivers bass that few conventional designs can imitate.

The EB1 brings out detail across the board but seems to be particularly strong at the sort of frequencies occupied by percussion instruments such as cymbals, shakers and snare drums. The strength in this area is probably what gives the bass such a visceral quality. Even with relatively bass-light material there is an underpinning to the sound that comes from the speaker revealing every ounce of gravitas.

The EB1 also appeals because it doesn't have to try too hard. Recordings that usually seem to have a hard edge to them are more relaxed, but you can still hear right into the mix thanks to that hemispherical midrange unit. The highs are also pretty precise but smooth with it, providing the definition without adding glare or any unnatural sparkle.

Combining studio precision with musicality on a grand scale, this is one of the best arguments for large speakers that we've heard in a long time. We'd encourage anyone looking for a 'full immersion' sonic experience to give a pair of EB1s a long, hard listen. 🌟

Jason Kennedy

See the April 2007 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* for the original review of this product





A photograph showing a collection of vacuum tube amplifiers and blue capacitors. The amplifiers are arranged in rows, with their glass envelopes and metal bases visible. The capacitors are cylindrical and blue. The scene is set on a red surface, possibly a workbench or display table. In the foreground, a black box with a white label is partially visible, containing text about the Gadis amplifier model.

*Gadis*

DUAL MONO PURE CLASS A  
AMPLIFIER  
MODEL JA 200

made in France



# JADIS JA200

*Truly magical monoblock valve amplifiers for music lovers who can stand the heat*

PRICE £15,998 per stereo pair CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.jadis-electronics.com

**T**here are plenty of high-end hi-fi components that can stop you dead in your tracks. Size and style alone are often enough. First two boxes ticked, then. If the sight of this vast, four-chassis monoblock valve power amplifier doesn't root you to the spot, you've probably been distracted by something more interesting: like the sun going supernova.

There are fewer whose name can stop a conversation. But drop the words 'Jadis' and 'JA200' into any huddle of high-end buffs and an awed silence will ensue. This, of course, is Jadis, the cult French manufacturer of exquisitely musical valve amps, and JA200 its original statement amp; some say the most charismatic, cantankerous – in the early days

**“It has that unmistakable smack of authenticity; a weight and potency that’s so rare for a hi-fi system to capture”**

of its production, some 25 years ago – and magical-sounding power amp ever made. There are fewer still that put their owners to quite so much trouble before they'll give of their best. Even as the comparatively well-behaved behemoth it is today – the high-bias operation of early examples meant that the multiple pairs of 6550 power tubes ran hot enough to pop frequently when switching from Standby to Operation modes – the JA200 is fussy about room temperature. Between 68 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit is ideal, though by no means easy to maintain given the considerable heating effect it generates itself – and it takes about three hours to stabilise after being switched on. Prepared to wait patiently? You should. Each JA200 is rated at 160 watts, which would be a generous kick for a solid-state power amp but, for tube enthusiasts, is in Bugatti Veyron territory. And this is 160 watts of pure Class A, remember. As already mentioned, the heat these giants push out has to be experienced to be believed. Power consumption is pretty spectacular, too, at 480 watts per amp.

The old-school, open-chassis appearance is a near-perfect fusion of brutal and beautiful – of massive block transformers, rows of capacitors looking like hi-tech industrial smoke stacks, and fields of softly glowing valves. The valve complement for each amp is a single 12AU7, a pair of 12AX7s and ten

6550As (or EL34s) power valves, though, thanks to the auto-biasing, these can be substituted for KT88s or KT90s. As you can see, ours are running the 6550As.

Each JA200 costs £7,999 which, while hard to describe as a snip, doesn't quite drain the colour from your face like some high-end kit. That said, skimping on the rest of the system isn't really an option. So we haven't. Spinning the CDs and SACDs is Krell's Evolution 505 (£8,777), the preamp is the Reference 3 from Audio Research (£8,999) and – all right, maybe a degree of extravagance here – the Jadis amps get to strut their stuff with Wilson Audio's System 8 speakers, aka the Watt 8/Puppy 8 Reference Standard Three-Way Modular Loudspeaker System, at £24,950 (see p52).

Hi-fi is all about creating an illusion and, even with the very best systems, the sense that you're listening to a reconstruction never quite disappears. But it does here. The Jadis JA200 is so convincing it's scary. It simply doesn't sound electronic; it sounds like music itself. To try to describe it with the usual audio lexicon somehow seems hopelessly inadequate and vaguely insulting. Yes, it has crystalline clarity, fabulous resolving power, wonderful treble and bass extension, and midrange presence that's almost tangible. But there's something more than that, a sense of absolute solidity and authority that – as with being in the presence of live, breathing, musicians – is incredibly powerful. More powerful than any number of watts. It has that unmistakable smack of authenticity; a weight and potency that's so

rare for a hi-fi system to be able to capture yet so enthralling when it does. The full impact of an orchestra's string bass section should be palpable, and here it is. Brass instruments shouldn't just sound bright and metallic but deliver a whole world of harmonics and dynamic contrasts. This amplifier conveys that and, in so doing, opens up new dimensions of musical expression.

And it's all so sublimely effortless. The JA200s seem to have the aerobic capacity of a world class athlete: loping heart rate, huge lung capacity, systemic efficiency, phenomenal energy on tap, and always the implicit feeling there's plenty in reserve. With the Jadis amps, it's the musical message that's delivered full force, and with a grace that few more modern designs can even approach. The sound is lushly detailed and insightful yet effortlessly easy and musical. It's beautifully voiced and images precisely within a huge soundstage in which you'd swear you could sense subtle changes in air pressure. Sure, the amps will go loud without a hint of strain, but it's the way they create the almost tangible presence of real musicians in the room that marks them out as something very special. The JA200s let the music flow in a natural, unforced fashion that is simply magical.

Take Sting's live set, *All This Time*. With the Jadis amps in situ, the recording sounds more 'live' than it does on other systems. The rich double bass and subtle piano accompaniment to Sting's rasping vocal on *Moon over Bourbon Street* is almost mesmerising. So here it is, a power amp that can conjure up real magic, the kind of glorious, effortless sound that makes us realise why we love music so much. And why, regrettably, the pursuit of happiness can sometimes cost an arm and a leg. 🎵

David Vivian





Podium  
Sound



MADE IN UK

# Podium 1

*Full-range super-efficient flat panel loudspeaker*

*no crossovers  
no ribbons  
no electrostatic devices  
no cone drivers, no sub woofers  
no large amplifiers necessary*

**VERDICT** 

shown with rear  
cover removed

For more information please visit [www.podiumsound.co.uk](http://www.podiumsound.co.uk) or  
contact us on +44 (0) 845 229 7922 to order a product brochure.

#### Audio Destination

Tiverton, Devon  
01884 243 584

#### Brighton Hi-fi

Flimwell, East Sussex  
01580 878 101

#### Divine Audio

Market Harborough, Leicestershire  
01858 432999

#### Doug Brady Hi-fi

Warrington, Cheshire  
01925 828009

#### Loud & Clear

Bonnington Mill, Edinburgh  
0131 555 3963

#### Loud & Clear

Finnieston, Glasgow  
0141 221 0221

#### Mike Manning Audio

Yeovil, Somerset  
01935 479 361

#### Music Matters

Solihull, Birmingham  
0121 742 0254

#### O'Brien Hi-fi

Wimbledon, London  
0208 946 0331

#### Progressive Audio

Rainham, Kent  
01634 389004

## sound proof

Moon Electronics by Sim Audio, manufacturers of high end audio since 1980.

Multi award winning CD Players, Integrated Amplifiers, Pre-amplifiers, Power Amplifiers available only from specially selected dealers.



**redline**

 MOON ELECTRONICS

 Velodyne

 ARTISON

 ABBEY ROAD CABLE

Distributed in the UK by Redline T: 0131 555 3922 E: [info@red-line.co.uk](mailto:info@red-line.co.uk) [www.red-line.co.uk](http://www.red-line.co.uk)



# SME 20/12A

*SME 'gives it large' with a new 12-inch tonearm and turntable to match*

PRICE £11,132 CONTACT SME, Mill Road, Steyning BN44 3GY ☎ 01903 814321 🌐 www.sme.ltd.uk

**T**welve-inch tonearms are pretty exotic beasts. You might find them in Japanese high-end magazines and see them on the occasional Platine Verdier but for the most part they are the stuff of audiophilia nervosa in extremis. However, there are some sound reasons for an arm that is longer than the traditional nine inches: primarily, the longer the arm is, the less tracing error you get. Or to put it another way, the longer the cantilever will remain parallel to the groove as the stylus

traces the vinyl. The cost, of course, is that the longer the arm is, the more difficult it will be to control resonances within it. Oh, and the bigger the turntable that supports it has to be. With its massive, die-cast magnesium beam, the SME 312S, which comes fitted to the 20/12A, is designed to give you the benefits of the breed without its shortcomings.

## “The 20/12A is both a superb piece of engineering and an extraordinary transcriber of vinyl recordings”

transcribes the vinyl. The cost, of course, is that the longer the arm is, the more difficult it will be to control resonances within it. Oh, and the bigger the turntable that supports it has to be. With its massive, die-cast magnesium beam, the SME 312S, which comes fitted to the 20/12A, is designed to give you the benefits of the breed without its shortcomings.

When SME conceived of this turntable it was due to be a bigger version of the Model 20, but things seemed to have got a little out of hand in the evolutionary process and the 20/12A has ended up being a far more substantial turntable all together. In fact, it's closer to a Model 30. The aluminium chassis plates are considerably thicker and the suspension towers in each corner are a lot chunkier. With a 6.5kg platter sitting on a

19mm spindle and an all-up weight of 33.5kg, it comes pretty close to SME's range-topper in many respects. In truth, it is a completely new turntable that shares very few parts with either range-mate, but the name stuck. The 312S tonearm looks similar to the standard 312 but is made of magnesium like the Series V and has the fluid damping trough found on that model. It also has silver (internal) and silver-plated copper (external) wiring from van den Hul. The external power

supply is a highly refined, three-phase device that offers 33, 45 and 78rpm.

Feeding our test system, this proved to be an extraordinarily refined and revealing turntable that reproduces all manner of music and digs out the smallest nuances whilst swinging major-league dynamics. As ever with SMEs, the 20/12A is as self effacing as a record player can be. It simply gets out of the way and lets the music through, so that all the sonic character comes from the recording rather than the transcription process – pick-up cartridge allowing.

Nonetheless, it is possible to assess what this turntable does more effectively than its competitors. It is both cleaner and faster while also pushing the noise floor down thanks to vanishing levels of distortion. It might seem a

bit less exciting than a regular nine-inch arm turntable but that's down to a reduction in distortion. Some of vinyl's thrill power is a direct result of the euphonic foibles (distortion, in other words) that a turntable, arm and cartridge bring to the party. There is very little evidence of that here but that doesn't mean the sound is dull: it's as gripping as the music makes it.

With a decent cartridge such as the van den Hul Condor, this can be thrilling and revealing in equal measure. In fact, it left us wondering if the makers of certain classic albums from back in the day could hear the same results when they were monitoring in the studio. This question arose because of the extreme bass we found on Stevie Wonder's *Superstition*, which came across in overpowering fashion through our big ATC active speakers. In contrast to this, much more up to date recordings with heavy bass sounded tight, deep and controlled, so it's not the turntable losing control. As well as power, this SME also delivers that vital vinyl quality of openness through the midband, delving into the mix and pulling out the reverb to glorious effect.

The 20/12A is both a superb piece of engineering and an extraordinary transcriber of vinyl recordings. It delivers sonic precision and flow, whilst delving into the deepest details with ease. As a tool to illustrate just why wee vinyl heads still love analogue sound, it's among the very best. And it still fits on a standard support, just. 🎵

*Jason Kennedy*

*See the May 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# KEF MUON

*KEF pulls out all the stops to deliver its ultimate 'statement' loudspeaker*

PRICE £70,000 per stereo pair CONTACT KEF Audio (UK), Eccleston Road, Tovil, Maidstone ME15 6QP ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.com

**K**EF is a well-established and seemingly conservative company. It's not the type to produce extreme loudspeakers, or so we thought. Then the Muon came along and blew that notion completely out of the water. It is easily one of the most dramatic-looking speakers on the planet, standing six-feet tall and weighing in at 115 kilos. It's certainly not going to pass unnoticed in most living rooms.

The Muon started out as the Austin project, a showcase for KEF's engineers to show what they could do with the various technologies the company was developing if money were no object. Austin was previewed at the Munich

**“Muon is a terrifically transparent design, sonically speaking, and its sound reflects the sparkling quality of its casework”**

High End Show in 2006 but under black drapes, so only a few members of the press got to see the enormous and markedly prototypical speakers themselves.

However, that glimpse didn't prepare us for the product that was to appear at the 2007 High End Show. This time, KEF didn't even try to find a suitable room – instead, it put up a circular 'tent' on the exhibition floor and presented the speakers in a space with no real physical boundaries. But they still sounded great – a must-have for this year's *Collection*.

The Muon's distinctive and deliciously curvy shape is the result of a collaboration between KEF and industrial designer, Ross Lovegrove. It is acoustically designed to optimise radiation and aesthetically designed for the maximum 'wow' factor. Once you get used to it, though, it's surprisingly subtle thanks to the way it reflects its surroundings.

Inside the highly inert aluminium enclosure you will find vast quantities of a material that KEF calls ACE (Acoustic Compliance Enhancement), which is a form of activated carbon that is claimed effectively to increase the cabinet volume as seen by the drive units through a process called adsorption. The drivers that will benefit most from this are the four front-mounted 250mm bass units and the two that are mounted on the back. These are the first bass drivers we've come across to use neodymium magnets – vented ones at that – which are said to provide a greater symmetry of magnetic field and thus less distortion. The two rear-mounted drivers can be connected out

of phase, with the purpose of cancelling bass energy travelling back from the speaker in situations where this results in reduced sonic precision. You can switch them in and out by moving a jumper in the terminals; we found that switching them in brought extra clarity and definition to the bass.

Being a four-way, fourth-order design, the Muon has a lower-midrange unit, with a shiny phase plug, to handle the frequencies between the bass drivers and the midrange. This critical band is covered by a new Uni-Q coaxial driver that has a shallower cone than its predecessors for the purpose of enhancing its own dispersion

and that of the tweeter at its centre. The latter, a titanium compound dome, is braced by a voice coil for rigidity and driven by a vented neodymium magnet that is reinforced with two neodymium rings. The ventilation minimises pressure build-up behind the dome in the confines of its concentric placement within the magnet structure of the midrange cone.

A speaker this big and pricey has every right to demand top-notch ancillaries and in this case it certainly needs them. It is both tricky to drive in the bass and challengingly revealing of source components through the midrange and treble, so skimp at your peril.

We began our listening with the dCS Scarlatti CD/SACD player (p56) and Ayre's MX-R monoblocks (p40). While the 300-watt Ayre pairing delivered decisive grip, the sound lacked something in the timing department. So we replaced the Ayres with our trusty 200-watt Gamut D200 power amp, which improved the timing but lacked a little control. Take note: this is not the fault of the speakers, but a symptom of their highly revealing nature – they are as adept at highlighting the inadequacies of their partnering equipment as they are in letting its best qualities shine through. In amp terms, think top-end Krell, Classé, Mark Levinson, Musical Fidelity or Chord... plenty of power and finesse.

Careful positioning is also called for. In our initial listening session it was clear that the bass wasn't quite right, so we switched the speakers to a concrete floor instead of a suspended one. That did the trick: the bass was now as deep and articulate as one could hope for, delivering

the sort of rock-solid, sternum-shocking air movement that anyone would gladly give up a fine motor car or house extension for.

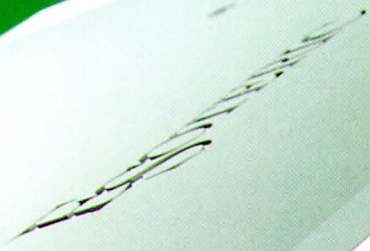
Despite its imposing size, the most immediately striking thing about the Muon's sound is its superb agility. This is a speaker that has been designed to deliver even-handed neutrality on a grand scale, without resorting to bloated artificiality. It's capable of generating a mighty soundstage that is tall, deep and wide, but only when called for; when the music demands intimate delicacy and fine detail, that's exactly what you get. In our listening room, with the rear-mounted bass drivers switched in and operating out of phase, the Muons impressed with the nimbleness of their bass, but those seeking a more fulsome bottom end might try these drivers switched in-phase instead – that'll get those trousers flapping!

The Muon is a terrifically transparent design, sonically speaking, and in many ways its sound reflects the sparkling quality of its casework. Expensive? Yes, but stunning in every respect. ■■

Jason Kennedy







PIONEER  
SUPER AUDIO

MODE

POWER





# ESOTERIC X-01D2

*Is this disc-spinner, from TEAC's high-end Esoteric brand, the best stereo CD/SACD player in the world?*

PRICE £9,995 CONTACT Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.teac.com/esoteric

This 25kg, one-box player is an updated version of the Esoteric X-01 that was covered in last year's edition of *The Collection*. It's the top model in the X series from Esoteric, TEAC's distinctly upmarket audiophile division, and is aimed at the music connoisseur with an understanding and sympathetic bank manager. It is a strictly audio player, intended for use solely with stereo CDs and stereo/multichannel SACDs, and it can be used with an external word clock such as the Esoteric G-0s model, which more or less doubles the on-the-road price.

From the outside, the X-01 and the new X-01D2 are near indistinguishable except when opening or closing the disc loading drawer, where the observant will notice a new internal shuttering arrangement, which covers the visible edge of the drawer, and locks when

though the default mode here is PCM. An iLink terminal with flow-rate control has been added to allow the transfer of DTCP-encrypted native DSD data from SACD with digital and analogue multichannel audio outputs available. Balanced (XLR) is also available from the two main channels, and WBT Nextgen RCA terminals deliver single-ended analogue audio.

The sonic story is emphatically positive, though great care must be taken with ancillary components if the most is to be made of the Esoteric player's abilities. Our sample was supplied with Transparent Audio interconnect cables, which are undeniably of high quality and worked well with the player. However, switching to Nordost's high-end Valhalla and Odin interconnects (see p120) produced significant strides forward; these extraordinarily explicit cables allowed the player to achieve

But the Esoteric is palpably the superior player. The general picture is that the sound is more stable and has greater gravitas and sense of occasion. It sounds more tactile, too. Listening to a recently acquired set of the late Bruckner symphonies (Gunter Wand/Berlin Philharmonic) and working primarily with the Wager movement of the Seventh Symphony, the sense of almost endless and indestructible power was nothing less than awe-inspiring once the system has been thoroughly warmed to its task. As with several other products in this issue, it's hard to overestimate how important this warming up process is – and even harder to understand why.

The glorious sense of harmonic richness, the range of tonal colour, the depth and 'body' of the sound are simply exquisite – especially, it has to be said, from SACD, or the better SACDs anyway. CD gets close, but ultimately lacks the complexity and depth of sound available from the high-resolution discs. Naturally we tried the DSD D-to-A option from CDs, which worked well enough but somehow lacked the fire and electricity of native PCM in this role. It is just the opposite with SACD, where the new DSD converter stage was subtly more dynamic and expressive than the PCM option that was the only available converter with the previous version. Maybe format conversion robs the sound of something important.

It's hard to be definitive about where this Esoteric stands in the World Premier League of audio players. As always, much depends not on the intrinsic merits of the player, but upon the minutiae of how it is set up and used – we've heard of year-old players that aren't yet fully run in. However, our provisional opinion, based on our experience of most of the leading contenders, is that the X-01D2 could just be the finest audio disc player in the world. In every sense, it's exceptional. ■■

*Alvin Gold*

**“The glorious sense of harmonic richness, the range of tonal colour, the depth and ‘body’ of the sound are simply exquisite”**

the drawer is in its closed position to provide some protection against airborne contaminants and acoustic feedback. Around here, what has been dubbed 'the Lexus mechanism' – because it is built like a high-precision brick outhouse – is supported by a 20mm-thick steel bridge. This mechanism is one of the latest iterations of the TEAC VRDS-NEO (Vibration-free Rigid Disc-clamping System) arrangements for which TEAC is justly renowned. The superbly engineered disc tracking sled assembly is from Esoteric's P-03 transport. Most of the changes, however, are hidden from view inside, and include new pre-loaded ceramic ball bearings, and extensive component changes to comply with the latest European regulations.

There have been major changes to the digital converter (actually converters) subsection. Previously, even DSD data from SACDs was converted to PCM for digital-to-analogue conversion. Instead, the new player defaults to DSD using an Analog Devices 1-bit AD1955, which processes DSD natively. But the circuit also provides an optional DSD to PCM conversion facility using four Burr-Brown PCM1704 DACs per channel in a full dual-differential configuration, so you can compare the two when playing SACDs. Similarly, PCM data from CDs can be optionally converted to DSD for digital-to-analogue conversion,

even greater expression, showing just how incredibly clear and open it sounds when in full, unhindered flight.

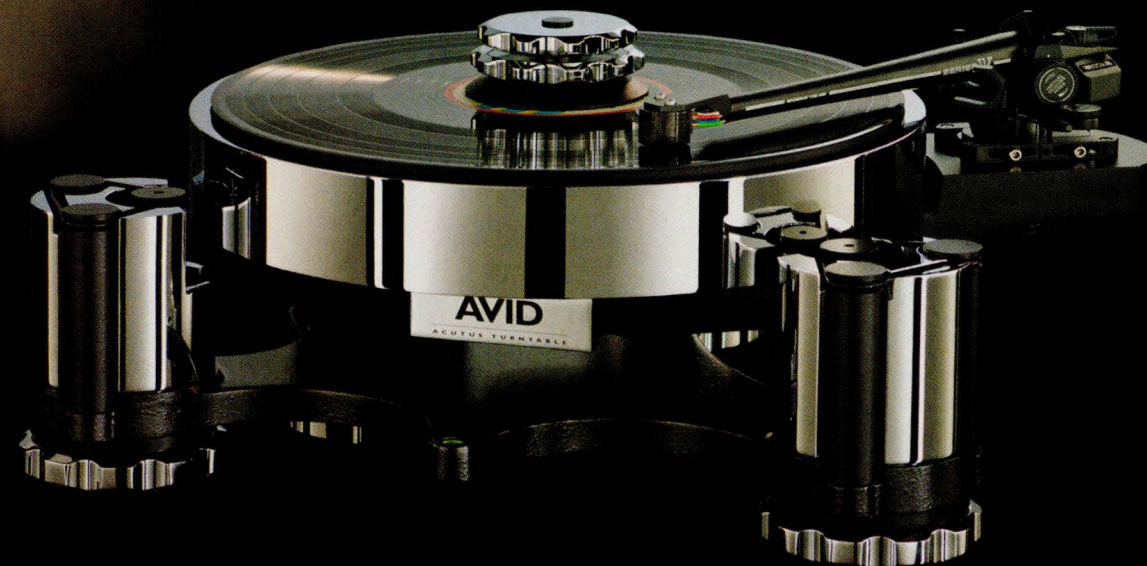
There are comparisons to be made with other players. The Marantz SA-7S1 CD/SACD player (see p95) has comparable articulation to the Esoteric, but it's simply not in the same class as the X-01D2 – and given the difference in price it would have been unreasonable to expect it to be so. Good as it is, its repertoire of musical expression is more limited. Remember, we're talking about a player here in the Marantz that is as good as they get around the £5,000 price point and is notably free of the subtle congestion or plain artificiality of some other similarly priced SACD players. So the Marantz certainly goes a long way in the right direction.







*the sound  
of beauty*



EDITOR'S CHOICE  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine  
★

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
1997-2002  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
AWARDS  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

New Naim Slide



**AVID**

where design meets high fidelity

AVID HI FI LTD  
Unit 52, 137 North Gate, Alconbury Airfield  
Huntingdon, Cambs. PE28 4WX, ENGLAND  
Tel: +44(0)1480-457300 Fax: +44(0)1480-457057  
E: [info@avidhifi.co.uk](mailto:info@avidhifi.co.uk) W: [www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk)



# WHARFEDALE AIREDALE NEO

*Retro styling and a big, absorbing sound is the stuff of Brit-fi nostalgia*

**PRICE** £9,000 per stereo pair **CONTACT** Wharfedale, IAG House, Sovereign Court, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon PE29 6XU ☎ 01480 447700 🌐 www.wharfedale.co.uk

**H**ere's a loudspeaker strictly for those of a certain age. It's not that it is an old design, but all the design reference points, even its form factor and its retro styling, are from an all but forgotten period – around the time when Gilbert Briggs was king.

So what kind of beast is the Airedale Neo? It is a massive three-way floorstander, shaped vaguely like a truncated pyramid. All its panels are flat, so physically it has nothing like the complexity of rival designs from Bowers & Wilkins and others, which are often fabricated from composites or laminates that are squeezed into ever more improbable and exotic shapes.

The pyramid form means the drive units at the front can be allowed to lean slightly backwards, providing a measure of time alignment for listeners sitting in front. The rest of the design is also very straightforward, and equally retro. This is not meant in a pejorative way but you'll search in vain for the whizzy,

hi-tech diaphragms and other fancy parts that adorn the Airedale's competition. The drivers here include a 300mm trilaminate-cone bass unit and a 75mm textile-dome midrange driver covering from 800Hz to 3.7kHz, which is roughly the range of the human voice. The treble is covered by another soft diaphragm unit, with a 25mm diameter dome, which is said to hold up to an impressive 45kHz. What is common to all three is the use of Alnico for

the magnet structure. Alnico is an alloy of aluminium, nickel and cobalt, which has the advantage of a very impressive magnetic energy density, but which, for cost reasons, has largely fallen into disuse in the loudspeaker industry.

The Airedale likes room to breathe and, therefore, works best in larger rooms. It is somewhat directional, a side effect of the massive, flat baffle, which needs to be angled in towards the listener.

Other than this, the Neo is easy to get along with. It is arguably not the sharpest or most disciplined loudspeaker you will find. Instead, its strengths are its warmth, its easy going nature, its relaxed sense of scale and its broad, rich tonality. As we've already noted, it's an easy speaker to get along with, and ultimately a hard one to dislike.

But it does have some very real, almost hidden strengths. It is, for example, capable of

**“Its strengths are its warmth, its easy going nature, its relaxed sense of scale and its broad, rich tonality”**

being driven very hard, and to high volume levels, with no hint of aggression or of 'loading up' and becoming harder, or even changing in sound when the volume is turned up. All the while, when generating high volume levels, it has the ability to drive the room so that the sound is not just loud, but also conveys a real sense of almost magisterial power and authority. This consistency is undoubtedly the key to its easy on the ears quality, which is aided and abetted by a slightly recessed midband balance, which adds to the sense of spaciousness. This is a loudspeaker that on due consideration is at its best with large-scale material – rock, orchestral and jazz. By contrast it can sound a little overblown with small scale solo and instrumental music.

The Airedale Neo is number two in the Wharfedale hierarchy, and by any standards it is a bit of a wardrobe, but this gives a clue to where it has been aimed. Big wardrobes when made by the likes of Tannoy or JBL, in particular, have proved very popular in the Far East, in Japan especially, and this is surely the target for the Airedale Neo. Quite how speakers like this massive and blunt looking design fit into the Japanese urban landscape is anyone's guess, but there is clearly something in their psyche that goes for this type of loudspeaker. It's a little harder to see where it fits in the UK market. Its big, generous tonality and ample low-frequency bandwidth will clearly be attractive to many listeners, but the sheer bulk of the thing must give Wharfedale dealers a hard time. But if the retro styling appeals, it deserves a good, long audition. 🎧

*Alvin Gold*

*See the August 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*





**conrad-johnson**

**LP140M**  
*linear pentode amplifier*

**-johnson**



power



power



# CONRAD-JOHNSON LP140M

*Conrad-Johnson's declaration of the current state of the art in valve amplifier design*

PRICE £11,500 per stereo pair **CONTACT** Audiofreaks, 15 Link Way, Ham, Richmond, Surrey TW10 7OT ☎ 020 8948 4153 🌐 www.conradjohnson.com

There's always been something special about listening to a Conrad-Johnson power amp, and that magical musical quality positively drips from these new LP140M valve monoblocks.

The LP range is essentially a trio of amps – one stereo chassis and two pairs of monoblocks – of which the LP140M sits smack in the middle. The products are remarkably similar in design, both inside and out. The LP70S stereo amp and LP140M monoblocks share the same chassis, valve configuration and everything else. Only the number on the logo and the extra set of terminals differentiate the two. The bigger LP275M looks similar, but it's a bigger, taller box and each monoblock sports more power valves per side. Of course, this is an oversimplification, but not a major one: the basic circuits remain identical throughout, changes being limited to the driver stage, the size of the transformers and the amount of reservoir capacitance. And all of these differences between the chassis are dependent on the number of power valves in the system. This is perhaps as close to modular design as the high-end valve community gets.

The LP140M is a 140-watt monoblock design. Given this, together with the fact that the LP70S is a 70-watt stereo chassis, you can probably guess how much power the LP275M pushes out.

Each amplifier uses a trio of 6922 double triodes, taking on the roles of amplifier and cathode-coupled phase inverter/splitter. This gives a low-impedance feed to the power devices: two pairs of 6550s per channel. As ever, bias is performed using Conrad-Johnson's 'twiddle the screw until the LED goes out' system – which works perfectly – and, also as ever, the internal component tally reads like audiophile pornography.

Resistors are laser-trimmed Vishay metal foil types. The coupling capacitors are Teflon designs built to Conrad-Johnson's specs. All the other audio-circuit capacitors are polystyrene, while the power supplies use large-value polypropylene caps in parallel with polystyrene capacitors. Best of all, there are no electrolytic capacitors in the audio circuits or in the related power supplies. Proprietary wide-bandwidth output transformers contribute to excellent high-frequency performance. Even the machined, gold-plated OFC connectors and the internal wiring have been carefully selected for optimal sonic performance. Aside from the

valve bias process, user functions are limited to operating a big on/off button, while the back panel sports nothing more than a phono socket, an IEC mains socket, a fuse and a single set of speaker terminals. Minimalism rules!

This isn't a no-feedback design, but the level of feedback in the system is relatively low. There's just 12dB of loop negative feedback to help increase the damping factor and help drive more punishing loads. Naturally, given C-J's heritage, the quality of the transformers in each monoblock is first rate. As is the finish, up to a point. The elegant front panel moves from Art Deco to neo-classical. All it needs are Doric columns and you'd have something like Bath's Royal Crescent of hi-fi. The 'up to a point' observation kicks in because the gold finish with black powder-coat panels is

**“The LP140M makes a sound rich in analysis, detail and focus, but also musically refined and relaxing”**

beginning to look somewhat dated and struggles to fit in next to the black, silver and gunmetal finishes of most products. That said, the look remains an elegant one, just perhaps not as timeless as we once thought.

The Conrad-Johnson sound has been evolving for some time. The rose-tinted, romantic valve sound of classic products from the 1980s and 1990s has been on the way out ever since products like the ART preamplifier, and these LP monoblocks show just how far C-J has come. Yet, for all that, the company's amps are still the premier choice for audio romantics today, but for wholly different reasons than, say, a decade ago.

Where the romantic part kicks in is the sheer smoothness and creaminess of the sound. This is a hard thing to get across, because 'smooth' normally relates to a sound that's overly polished, unnecessarily glossing over details. Not here: the LP140M makes a sound rich in analysis, detail and focus, but also musically refined and relaxing. In some respects, the nature of the C-J sound seems to reflect the change in most people's lifestyles over the years. We are time-poor today, with precious few hours to sit in front of a hi-fi system compared to a couple of decades ago. So, where before we were ready to let our systems transport us, now we want instant gratification. The warm sound of old C-J

seems just too mellifluous for that quick-fire entertainment, and the cool glass of Chablis sound of modern C-J is far more approachable in today's climate.

What we have instead is analysis. Not cold, cerebral analysis; not just of the recording but of the intent of the composer. What we have instead is detail. Not bare-faced surface detail of sounds within the stage, but musical detail that leaves you enrapt and stunned at the skills of the musicians. What we have instead is imaging. Not simply a big soundstage, but a deft layering of instruments.

Interestingly, our listening notes for the LP140M throw out something you might not notice directly. Many amplifiers act like a time machine, transporting you back to the time when the recording was made. Many get you

back to the recording studio or the control room. But this C-J is rather different. Yes, all that recording studio detail is present, but it's rendered utterly unimportant. You don't listen to the studio, you don't even listen to the musicians... you listen to the music. You take in the music as a whole, its ebbs and flows, its glissandos and its almost glottal stops.

This is like coming full circle. Listening to the music, not the sound it makes, is something that happens with cheaper hi-fi. It's much harder to get a big and full sound that manages to focus your attention on the music with high-end kit, because it's easy to mis-focus on the details. But Conrad-Johnson does bring you back to the music every time, and does it wonderfully with the LP140M. ■■

*Alan Sircom*







PIEGA  
OF SWITZERLAND

PIEGA  
OF SWITZERLAND



# PIEGA TC70X

*A radical coaxial ribbon tweeter is not all that this Swiss speaker has to offer*

PRICE £8,500 per stereo pair CONTACT Hi-fi Brokers, 12 New Road, Greetland, Halifax HX4 8JN ☎ 01422 372110 🌐 www.piega.ch

**P**iega may not be a well known name in every part of the audio globe but it is, nonetheless, Switzerland's biggest dedicated loudspeaker manufacturer, and a company that has been producing distinctive designs for over 20 years. It was founded by industrial designer, Leo Greiner and engineer, Jurt Scheuch, who got their start with a hand-built ribbon tweeter in 1986. Since then they have mastered the art of using aluminium as a cabinet material and, in the

wooden cabinets. However, with judicious use of damping, 6mm-thick metalwork and the use of a trapezoidal shape, Piega has managed to suppress resonances within the audio band.

The TC70X lies in penultimate position in the Piega loudspeaker range. Second only to the CL90X, it stands just over a metre high and augments its coaxial ribbon with a pair of 18cm paper-coned bass drivers using MOM (Magnetic Optimised Motor) chassis. It claims a wide 26Hz to 50kHz bandwidth and offers a

**“The speaker is so quick and coherent, everything comes together musically to produce an extremely engaging sound”**

year 2000, produced the world's first coaxial ribbon treble and midrange drive unit – the first and only one, in fact.

The coaxial ribbon production is a painstaking and highly skilled process which is carried out by a father and son team. These guys are the only ones who have mastered the art of mounting the two ribbon units concentrically, a process complicated by the fact that the tension of the ultra thin ribbons varies with temperature and humidity. These drive units also require phenomenally powerful neodymium bar magnets that have to be placed in opposition.

This creates a drive unit that offers many advantages over conventional domes and cones. For a start, the mass of the ribbon is extremely low, which means it can accelerate and decelerate very quickly. It also offers a genuine point source with both drivers in the same plane – something that cone/dome coaxials can never do. As a result of constant phase response, it offers excellent off-axis response; in other words, it sounds the same wherever you are sitting – room allowing, of course. One other useful feature is high sensitivity and thus good power handling, thanks to those powerful magnets.

The second unusual characteristic of Piega speakers is the use of an aluminium extrusion for the cabinet. That's a huge extrusion in the case of the TC70X, which is 29cm deep. This makes for a particularly good quality finish and one that is further enhanced when it is finished in piano black. Aluminium is rarely used for large speaker cabinets primarily because it has a tendency to ring at certain frequencies, rather more intrusively than

relatively easy 92dB per watt sensitivity, so massive amplification is merely optional.

This is an extraordinarily revealing speaker that brings out the finest details in an incredibly clean fashion. It has qualities that one associates with full-range ribbons and electrostatics yet backs them up with a power and bass weight that panels cannot replicate unless they are the size of a wall.

The strange thing is how clean and smooth its presentation is. With conventional mid and treble drivers a degree of edge is introduced that one associates with bringing definition to the sound and thus, one assumes, resolution. This Piega gives the impression that still higher levels of resolution can be achieved without any edge being added and that this very edginess is an artefact of the traditional drive unit. The most significant revelation is that hard core saxophone and other brass instruments can sound remarkably nimble and dynamic without being harsh. This speaker allows the works of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane and even Pharaoh Saunders to be explored at appropriate volume levels without any discomfort. Of course, if you like your brass hard-edged and blaring this may not appeal but it certainly did to us.

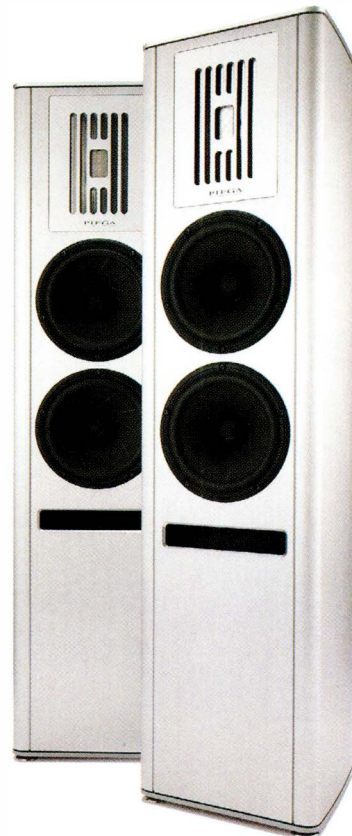
This might suggest a lack of sparkle or even treble roll-off, yet the Piega produces genuinely shimmering highs when the material demands. It also shows huge differences between recordings, some quite surprising, such as the way the drums on Steely Dan's *Gauche* have so much more punch than they do on *Led Zeppelin III*. But, in both cases, you can hear deep into the mix, the quietest sounds taking on clear forms so

that you can hear precisely what made them and how they have been treated.

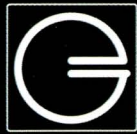
In a busy mix, such as Missy Elliott's *Busa Rhyme*, there are all sorts of sounds and voices around the central one that tend to form a partially intelligible backdrop. In a great system the Piega can show you exactly what these elements are and how they go together to make up the overall song. This degree of analysis might sound a little too much but, because the speaker is so quick and coherent, everything comes together musically to produce an extremely engaging sound. That speed is clearly a quality of the ribbon and one that you might not expect the bass drivers to equal: yet there is no sense of lag – quite the opposite in fact. While the cabinet can tend to join in at certain low frequencies, the system as a whole is remarkably nimble: instruments and voices are extremely convincing.

Piega's TC70X is one of the more subtle speakers at its price, notably more discreet than many competitors. If you want a seriously capable speaker that won't dominate the living room, it's in a very select class. 📊

*Jason Kennedy*







GOLDMUND  
SWISS MADE



Since its foundation in 1978 Goldmund has dedicated its goal to the accurate reproduction of sound and image.

Extreme technology and mechanical precision are two fundamental components needed to achieve the successful, accurate and unpolluted reproduction of original source material. Using no compromise in design ensures Goldmund can manufacture the most advanced equipment, components that open the door to transparency, clarity, timbre, dynamics and musicality. You move closer to the original performance, move closer to the music.

Welcome to a world of new sensations, uniquely Goldmund.

 symmetry

t: 01727 865488

e: [info@symmetry-systems.co.uk](mailto:info@symmetry-systems.co.uk)

w: [www.symmetry-systems.co.uk](http://www.symmetry-systems.co.uk)



# MCINTOSH MCD-201

*A high-performance audio disc spinner at a tempting price from one of high-end hi-fi's most famous names*

PRICE £3,320 CONTACT Market-Leaders UK, 292 Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 9PW ☎ 02392 528842 🌐 www.mcintoshlabs.com

The profile of the McIntosh brand has expanded significantly since it came under the umbrella of the D&M (Denon and Marantz) empire – not just in the US, its home market, but in the UK as well. That said, McIntosh has long had its own, very special, retro-tinged cachet. Yet the company has become a prolific producer of high-quality disc players of various types, namely CD, SACD and also universal AV players. The subject of this review is its solitary, dedicated SACD player: the MCD-201.

The player features McIntosh's distinctive glass front panel and fibre optics illumination that turns the panel into a well-lit SACD – but not CD – text-enabled screen that is easy to read, even from a significant distance. Some of the internal hardware is standard industry fare – the Burr-Brown hybrid DAC, for example – but other parts are rather more innovative. For example, there's its ability to read data off-disc at twice or four-times normal speed, for SACD and CD respectively, which gives the player ample opportunity to re-read data that may have become corrupted on first read through.

Another very useful feature is the high resolution, 140-step volume control that allows the player to connect directly to a power amp: so, if the player is the only source in the system, there is no need for a separate preamp. In fact, the player will output single-ended or balanced signals, with a choice of fixed or adjustable output level from dedicated sets of output sockets in both instances.

Although our well run-in test sample of the player was mechanically quiet, there have been

complaints that newly unboxed samples are on the noisy side. The answer, it seems, is to run the player in for an extended period, which allows it to settle down.

By high-end standards, this is a moderately priced machine. It is also a very fine one, both in CD and SACD trim, even if it's not exactly a match for the best – and most expensive – of the breed. On the negative side, the performance edge enjoyed by SACD is more

**“By high-end standards, this McIntosh is a moderately priced machine. It is also a very fine one”**

modest than in some competing machinery. The bottom line is that this is not, ultimately, a super-high-resolution player, though SACD discs do have an edge and the ability to illuminate fine detail that is not always apparent from CD. The reality is that CD is no match for SACD for much of the time. Overall, though, this is a player that simply plays discs well, however they are packaged, rather than being dedicated to showing the superiority of one format over another. The MCD-201 is particularly expressive with acoustic material on SACD, and just slightly less so with CD. CD tends to fare better with more muscular and dynamic material.

Ultimately, though, this really is a very accomplished-sounding player. One reason why SACD only sounds moderately better than CD is that this is a very good CD player, and both

formats excel with their smooth, relaxed presentation – similar in some ways to the Marantz SA-7S1 reviewed on p95, though not to the same standard of excellence – and for their smoothness. Don't take the 'relaxed' comment to mean that the MCD-201 lacks the kind of bottle needed with some music genres; this is an easy going but still full-blooded machine, and although it would be simple to see this as a classical and acoustic music player

above all, raw-sounding rock material and full-scale orchestral alike sound vivid and exciting if recorded to a sufficiently high standard. The ability to act as its own preamplifier also counts for something here too, though this relies on the host system being limited to disc-playing sources.

An extended version of the player with an external digital or analogue input would make it an even more appealing choice for many. But most players don't even have a volume control on their output, still less one that can live as part of a high-resolution system without spoiling the party, so McIntosh deserves full praise. At the price, it's a tempting prospect indeed. ■

*Alvin Gold*

*See the September 2006 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*





darTZeel

NHB - 18NS preamplifier

zero contact signal path



Source

Power Nose



Mono/Stereo



Mute



Pleasure Control

More



Balance

Right

darTZeel

NHB - 108 model one

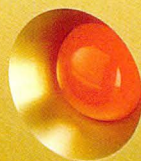
high speed audio buffer



Left Eye



Power Nose



Right Eye



# DARTZEEL NHB-18NS & NHB-108

*This stunning pre/power pairing helps to prove there's more to Switzerland than cuckoo clocks*

**PRICE** £27,900 (NHB-18NS: £15,900; NHB-108: £12,000) **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.dartzeel.com

**E**ven in the strange waters of high-end audio, darTZeel is an anachronism. The Swiss company appeared more or less out of nowhere a few years back with a stunning – if somewhat ‘bling’ – power amp, called the NHB-108. Now, there's a preamp to match, the NHB-18NS. It completes the system and makes it all the more, er, distinctive.

The name says it all. The acronym NHB is short for Never Heard Before, implying that these two do things no other amplifier can do. The suffix NS in the preamp is also an acronym: it's short for No Switches... which is pretty damned impressive in a preamplifier. It also serves to highlight darTZeel designer Hervé Delétraz's wry sense of humour – as if labelling the power switch at the centre of the front panel the ‘Power Nose’ is not enough of an indicator.

## “You feel like you are physically bonded to the mixing desk when listening through the darTZeel duo”

Both are impressive products, even after getting past the gold front panels, red top-plates, amber lights and Power Noses. The preamp is built larger than most power amplifiers and that's before you include the power supply box, which is slim and filled with batteries. In most cases, you run the preamp off batteries and, when you stop listening, the batteries start charging. A little LED starts glowing to tell you the amp is in charging mode. It's possible to have an extended listening session that exceeds the battery charge time: all that happens is that the amp switches into charge mode, and the preamp merely sounds remarkable instead of wonderful.

Inside the preamp itself, it's built like a computer, with daughter card modules running off a central chassis. But it's not built like most cheapo computers with wobbly, unsecured cards... this thing's built like a computer from the days when computers came with white-coated acolytes and air-conditioned clean rooms. It's built like HAL from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, except it won't lock you out of the pod bay.

As the name suggests, switches and relays are frowned upon in the darTZeel factory and their use is minimised. This is why the inside looks like a computer, instead of switching inputs through a selector switch or a relay and passing them through the same line stage, the

amplifier has a line stage dedicated to each input. So, the selector – marked ‘Enjoyment Source’ – allocates and turns on a set of line stage cards and then effectively drops out of circuit, leaving a source free from switches and relays. There is a switch at the back of each source to determine whether that source is a phono-, XLR- or BNC-fed source, but that too is out of the signal path. Even the volume control – ‘Pleasure Control’ in darTZeel speak – is different to the norm, using a resistor ladder but designed to eliminate tracking error.

The power amplifier is just as wacky as the preamp. Once again, there are no switches or relays in the circuit. Or, for that matter, fuses – that's a tough nut to crack and means the amplifier needs to be handled carefully when installing. No powering up and playing signals

without speaker terminals connected and the first time you switch the thing on, it might just turn itself off again. But sometimes we must suffer for our art.

The solid-state, 100-watt stereo power amp has a modular case, and each section of the amp is distinctly separated from the others, even to the point of a 20mm-thick false bottom. There's no global feedback, and this means an attendant rise in Total Harmonic Distortion, but that's wholly deliberate. The design stresses eliminating temporally-derived distortion over the removal of intermodulation and total harmonic distortion (like a single-ended valve amplifier) but claims linearity up to the 30MHz level, which can only be heard by dogs with microwave radios.

Remarkably, there are just 14 transistors in the circuit. And, despite the care needed in first power up, the company claims a life expectancy of up to 40 years for the NHB-108.

For a power amp, there's surprising user flexibility. The NHB-108 can be adjusted to handle speaker loads as punishing as one ohm; there are also jumpers to control DC offset and to eliminate any potential hum problems in balanced XLR or single-ended phono inputs – although we encountered no such problems. The company is clearly proud of the design, because it's supplied with a glass top to show off the internals.

It's worth noting the extent to which darTZeel goes to get the concept just right. As well as the usual phono and XLR sockets connecting amp to amp, there's a special 50-ohm BNC connection, marked Zeel, which works with the company's thin, perfectly impedance-matched cables.

We first encountered the power amp some time before the preamp and were stunned by the sheer speed of delivery it mustered. The preamp builds upon that and turns this into quite simply the fastest amplifier you'll ever hear. This is sometimes hard to understand, until you hear it. Then suddenly every other amplifier seems to get in the way temporally between you and the music. Think of the difference between two groups of musicians playing improvised jazz; one group has rehearsed together for months on end and knows each other's nuances perfectly, while the other group is a bunch of highly talented musicians who met up for the evening. Which one do you think will sound the most coherent? It's that temporal coherence that sets the darTZeel duo apart from all the rivals.

Naturally it delivers a top-drawer ‘hi-fi’ sound, with a fine, tight bolus of sound between the speakers. Of course it's detailed, with instruments clearly defined in their own spaces, and dynamics and voices are easy to follow. Yes, it's beautifully transparent sounding, combining somewhat the joys of valve richness with the heft of solidstate. But all these considerations are swept away by the sheer speed and directness of the sound. You feel like you are physically bonded to the mixing desk when listening through the darTZeel combo and all other considerations pale next to that directness.

This isn't just good hi-fi. It's the stuff of legend. If you can afford them, you must put the darTZeel duo on your short list. If you can't, start saving. ■■

*Alan Sircom*





# Sings Like a Class Leader



## *Gold Signature*

We've claimed that Gold Signature reaches unprecedented standards of design, innovation, performance, technical excellence, build quality and value in its class. But you don't have to take our word for it.

Of the GS10, Hi Fi Choice said '...this one most definitely sings...its appeal is obvious...it is a vice-free, expressive and refined speaker with more than enough subtlety and transparency to suit almost any taste, and the resolving ability required to extract the most from high-quality amplifiers and source components.'

And for Hi Fi World the GS60s 'are a class act...an addictive listen...clear, fast and detailed like little else'. It awards top marks 'for the totality of its engineering, superb finish and great price.'

If you're looking for affordable high-end performance and engineering wrapped in beautiful wood veneers and piano lacquer finishes, just listen to the chorus of acclaim.

For details of the new GS Series please visit:

**[www.monitoraudio.co.uk](http://www.monitoraudio.co.uk)**

mail: [info@monitoraudio.co.uk](mailto:info@monitoraudio.co.uk)

or call free on: 0800 0352032



 **MONITOR AUDIO®**



# TANNOY GLENAIR 10

*Tannoy plunders its rich archive to deliver a 'retro-modern' classic*

**PRICE** £3,299 per stereo pair **CONTACT** Tannoy, Rosehall Industrial Estate, Coatbridge ML5 4TF ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

**T**annoy's Glenair is an aesthetic update on the traditional style of the company's Prestige range. It's a model that, thanks to the economies of its Chinese manufacturing facility, comes in at a remarkably competitive price for the speaker you get. What brings the design up to date is the trapezoidal cabinet section and American cherry veneer, complete with a grille that forms a gentle curve. This shape is a popular one with Tannoy, which has used it on highly affordable models in the past because of the way that parallel surfaces are restricted to the top and bottom alone, an arrangement that reduces standing waves and thus improves sound quality.

Unusually the cabinet is made of birch plywood, a completely



different material to the MDF found in the majority of speakers and one that is likely to affect the sound in one way or another. This is braced internally and heavily damped to minimise resonance in the large side panels. The front grille is also rather different. It has a heavy frame and is held magnetically within a

**“One factor that contributes to the Tannoy’s musicality is excellent speed: its sound has very little overhang”**

surround on the front baffle. This means it sits flush and there are no plastic lugs on show if you take it out. Removing it requires a screw-in brass handle, the only remnant of Prestige styling aside from the gold metalwork of the distinctive dual-concentric drive unit. This particular Glenair is a 10-inch framed example with a pulped paper cone and twin rolled fabric surround, a retro approach that limits excursion and is much vaunted in Japan. There is also a Glenair 15 if you want a bigger drive unit. Tannoy's dual concentrics have a 25mm metal dome tweeter at their centre with a short exponential horn to boost the output level. This means the tweeter operates from the same axis as the bass driver, albeit not in the same plane, an approach that has proven popular with a number of brands and one that has had plenty of time to evolve.

The Glenair's cable terminals are arranged in a circular fashion and include a fifth connector beside the bi-wire pairs. This allows earthing of the speaker to the

amplifier, which brings a moderate but worthwhile improvement to imaging.

This is a reasonably substantial loudspeaker at a metre high but, like other Prestige models, it's reasonably efficient and doesn't demand a great deal of amplifier power. We got great results with a 20-watt Sugden A21, primarily

because of the amp's Class A operation. The Glenair's midrange is very revealing but a shade forward and you need to orient the speakers so that their axes cross in front of the listening seat for comfortable results.

Under such circumstances they have an uncanny ability to delve into the mix and deliver high levels of detail, the sort of information that helps construct a seemingly realistic soundstage in the room. Not the most neutral speaker on the block, the Glenair, nonetheless, seems to be rather good at instrumental timbre – the tonal colour that a trumpet or guitar produces, for example. Combined with the speaker's great dynamic capabilities, this makes for a highly engaging listening experience.

This is really the nub of this speaker's appeal: you want to listen to whatever you play. Now, this might seem a rather obvious statement; after all, why put something on if you don't want to listen to it? But when you review a lot of equipment, one of the problems that arises is that you can become bored with the music you use. You can change the music but that makes it harder to analyze the equipment. So, any component that encourages you to keep on listening is *de facto* a good one, even if it has foibles that mean it's not the most neutral around. One factor that contributes to the Tannoy's musicality is excellent speed: its sound has very little overhang and the bass seems as nimble as the rest of the band.

The Glenair 10 can delve right down into the mix but keeps the musical message at the forefront. It requires refined ancillaries but not necessarily expensive ones and can be heartily recommended for combining great looks with a highly engaging and revealing sound. 🎧

Jason Kennedy

*See the July 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*







# KOETSU URUSHI VERMILLION

*A wonderfully refined moving coil cartridge that combines smoothness with crisp, biting detail*

**PRICE** £2,699 **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.absolutesounds.com

**T**he founder of Koetsu, Yosiaki Sugano (1907-2002), who began manufacturing moving-coil cartridges back in the late 1970s, adopted an extremely low-key approach to marketing. He never promoted or advertised his products. He did not even produce any sales literature. The brand's reputation effectively grew by word of mouth alone. Quite simply, once you'd heard one of Sugano's cartridges, nothing else sufficed.

Apart from their superb sound, Koetsu cartridges are beautiful to behold. With bodies made from exotic materials – from various lacquered Urushi finishes, to the use of natural gemstones including Jade and Onyx – each comes packaged in a simple, attractive wooden box that has a sweet, pungent odour. Koetsu offers an interesting variety of different cartridges. While there are models at different prices and quality levels, there are also several at identical prices. The Vermillion retails for £2,699, so it's less expensive than models such as the Blue Onyx or Jade Platinum. Nonetheless, it has all the Koetsu hallmarks of subtlety and refinement allied to incredible detail.

Sonically, the Vermillion has that beautifully refined, almost velvety smoothness you expect from a Koetsu. It sounds detailed and dynamic, yet wonderfully poised and relaxed, providing a musical delivery that's utterly effortless and natural. The music just seems to 'happen' between the speakers. Voices and instruments materialise without effort or strain, sounding realistically integrated and absolutely natural in terms of tonal balance and timbre. Tonally, the presentation is smooth and finely shaded, yet crisp and tactile. It's an intriguing mix of opposites: mellow warmth and silky smoothness allied with immediacy and crisp attack.

The presentation is vivid yet natural and unexaggerated; transparent, with a full, solid bottom end, liquid midband and brilliant highs. Transient detail is crisp and pin-point sharp, yet there's no sense of forwardness or exaggerated brightness. Tonally, the sound is very open and natural. This ability to produce vivid, sharply focussed detail without sounding hard or over-driven is something of a Koetsu trademark. For the exceptionally well-heeled, there are even more expensive Koetsu cartridges to tempt you, but we have to say that – without the benefit of a direct comparison – it's hard to imagine this one being improved upon. It really is that good.

But everything is relative. The more expensive cartridges may offer even greater

refinement and detail but, compared to CD, the Vermillion has subtlety and fine detail that the latter can only hint at. There's a deliciously relaxed openness and refined smoothness, allied to tactile brilliance, that CD, for all its many positive qualities, fails to approach. Clarity is outstanding. Individual vocal and instrumental lines 'tell' with effortless ease. No matter how complex the music gets, you still hear every strand. The result is a sound that's highly detailed yet almost disconcertingly relaxed. Subtle tone colours and delicate changes of phrasing or dynamics are revealed without being thrust upon you.

One of the first LPs we played was Leopold Stokowski's 1969 recording of Debussy's impressionistic orchestral seascape *La Mer*, a Decca Phase Four Stereo disc. Phase Four

**“It sounds detailed and dynamic, yet wonderfully poised and relaxed, providing a musical delivery that's utterly effortless”**

aimed at vivid, larger-than-life sonics, with wide stereo and spotlit detail. The recordings were made with a 20-channel mixer and a great many microphones. Audiophile purists may harbour mixed feelings about Phase Four, but through the Vermillion, Stokowski's *La Mer* sounded beautifully spacious and incredibly detailed. True, you could still hear the way certain instruments had been close-miked but, nonetheless, the sound remained refined and completely integrated. Also, something of Stokowski's legendary ability to create uniquely subtle and sensuous timbres could be heard. There was a ravishing palette of tonal colours and fine shadings – all the more remarkable given the multi-miked nature of the recording. You could tell that the conductor and orchestra were creating a fabulous sound in the hall.

Although refinement and exquisite subtlety are among the Vermillion's special qualities, they're not adornments grafted on to each recording regardless. The more you listen, the more you appreciate the way the cartridge faithfully reflects the individual qualities of each recording. It really presents a transparent window onto the music. The sound can be sweet and beguiling one moment, then sharp, tactile, and crisp the next. Stereo soundstaging is wide and – on the right LP – vivid and holographic. The music 'materialises' between the loudspeakers; it kind of hangs in free space

between and around the enclosures, almost as though the speakers no longer existed. CD never quite manages this: it's something only analogue LP seems able to do, though don't ask us how or why. Nor are these qualities only apparent with special audiophile LPs. Often, the magic's there on quite ordinary pressings.

Surface noise is very low, and the cartridge tracks cleanly and securely given a good turntable and tonearm. We used the excellent Origin Live Aurora Gold turntable fitted with an Origin Live Illustrious MkII tone-arm, and set the playing weight to 2g.

The Vermillion has a healthy output of 0.4mV. While many Koetsus feature coil windings using 99.9999 per cent purity copper wire with a special silver cladding – a silver sheath slowly drawn over the copper

conductor – the Vermillion is said to have special Copper/Silver hybrid coils. The magnetic assembly employs Alnico for its concentrated power while the cantilever is made from Boron. It's quite a big cartridge, incidentally – 23mm long and 14mm deep – and also quite a heavy one at about 12.8g. Optimum playing weight falls between 1.8g and 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 a little.

Experience tells us that these pickups have a long working life. Even with extensive daily use, you can expect to get upwards of two or three years from a Koetsu, before a stylus change is called for. Each one is a miniature work of art, and the Urushi Vermillion is no exception. 🍷

*Jimmy Hughes*





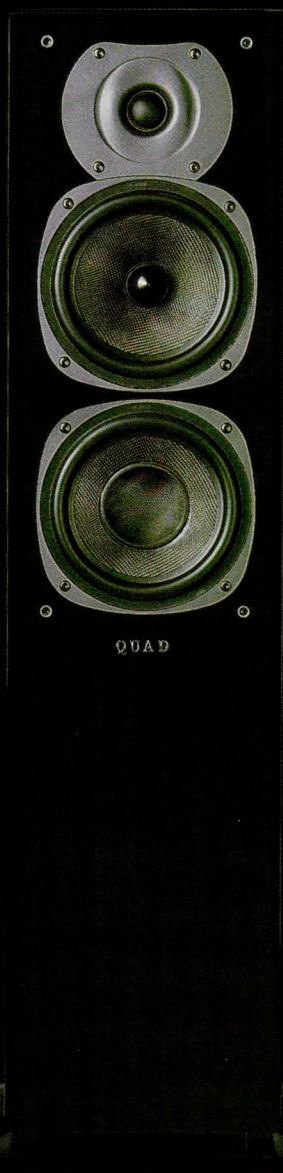
*"this system is something of a musical genius"*

– *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION



January 2007



## Performance series

L2 Series Loudspeakers  
99 Series Electronics



## A new breed

Quad L2 series Loudspeakers

The Quad 99 series electronics and L2 series loudspeakers are a match made in heaven. Detail, accuracy and refinement all combine to present one of the most musical and insightful systems available – and with our new 99CDP-2, will integrate seamlessly into your digital world allowing up to 6\* digital sources to benefit from our state-of-the-art DACs

\* CDP-2 includes 3 x Optical and 2 x Co-axial digital inputs.

# QUAD

*the closest approach to the original sound.*

Quad Electroacoustics Ltd,  
IAG House, Sovereign Court, Ermine  
Business Park, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29  
6XU

Tel :- 01480 447700, Fax :- 01480 431767  
[www.quad-hifi.co.uk](http://www.quad-hifi.co.uk)



# MARTINLOGAN VANTAGE

*Electrostatic performance close to that of the breathtaking Summit for under half that speaker's price*

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

**E**lectrostatic loudspeakers have many fine qualities. The best-of-breed designs add a touch of magic to sound reproduction that is very hard to achieve through any other means, and their slim-line form factors and sometimes semi-transparent construction mean that they can look as good as they sound. But, for the most part, they are not easy electrical loads – so they tend to give amplifiers a hard time – and they don't always interface readily

with bog-standard listening rooms. They're also expensive: not so much for any intrinsic reason, but because they tend to appeal to a relatively

shorter than the Summit, while the footprint is reduced from the 32x52cm of the Summit to 27.3x41.3cm for the Vantage. More significant

**“Moving from an average speaker to the Vantage is like throwing open a window instead of listening through glass”**

small audiophile community, which means they are not well placed as products to take advantage of the economies of scale.

The design of electrostatics took a step or three up the greasy ladder when MartinLogan announced its Summit model. MartinLogan has long been by far the most prolific electrostatic loudspeaker producer and, a little over two years ago, the Kansas-based company introduced the Summit to replace the Prodigy, a considerably larger and more expensive animal. The Summit was cheaper because of fundamental simplifications to the design, but these changes also meant better sound quality and much neater packaging. The main change was to the clamping of the electrostatic panel, so that a similar side-radiating area was housed in a very narrow frame and held under tension using pre-stressed, square-section tubing instead of a bulkier, timber-based frame.

The effect on sound quality was little less than startling. The Summit was sharper, leaner and offered better timing and a much more propulsive sound. The reduced size, accompanied by a slightly simplified hybrid bass section, also meant a much lower price. The Vantage is a follow-up to the Summit that looks similar and has broadly the same configuration, although the bass section features a single, slightly smaller, aluminium cone driver. The overall measurements tell much of the story. At 144.7cm, the Vantage stands 5cm

are some of the other figures. Bass, for example, extends to 24Hz (-3dB) in the case of the Summit, but a much less impressive 34Hz for the Vantage and, at the other end of the bass passband, the electrostatic panel works down to 270Hz for the Summit and 400Hz for the Vantage. These harder to interpret differences are more telling in the overall sound quality equation.

The Vantage is not a complete answer to those wanting a Summit on a tighter budget. The two speakers don't sound the same. The Vantage inevitably lacks the lower midband speed and articulation that is so special in the Summit, and the crossover in the Summit is at a much less audible frequency. The difference in bass depth is also significant. The Vantage definitely goes down less far, and it doesn't have the Summit's punch and authority. It's remarkable, however, just how good it is, and how close the balance of the two models turns out to be.

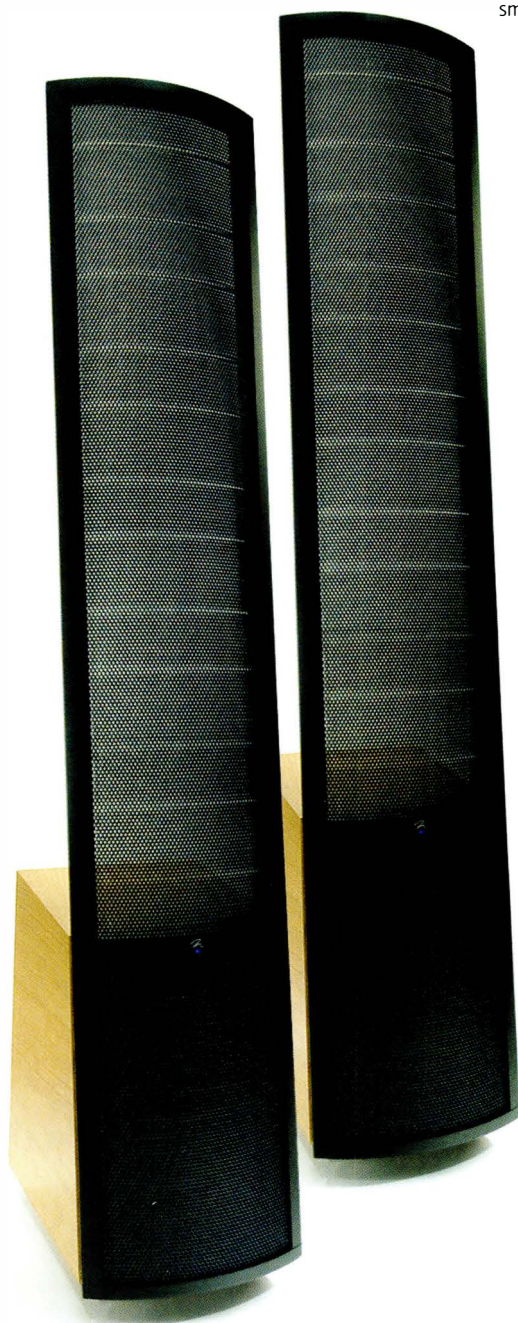
Given it's thoroughly reasonable price point, the Vantage possesses a number of very special sonic attributes that few speakers at a similar level can hope to match. Its imaging, its midrange detail, its stunning transient response; moving from an average conventional speaker to the Vantage is like throwing open a window instead of listening through glass.

The integration of the bass driver with the electrostatic panel has long been a thorn in the side of hybrid speakers such as this, but MartinLogan's latest speakers are remarkably good in this respect. That said, the Vantage is still best served by classical and acoustic music, rather than balls-out dance or rock.

The bottom line is: if you can afford the Summit, it's still the MartinLogan to go for. But the Vantage goes a long way towards delivering what the Summit does at a much lower price. And that makes it something special. 🍷

*Alvin Gold*

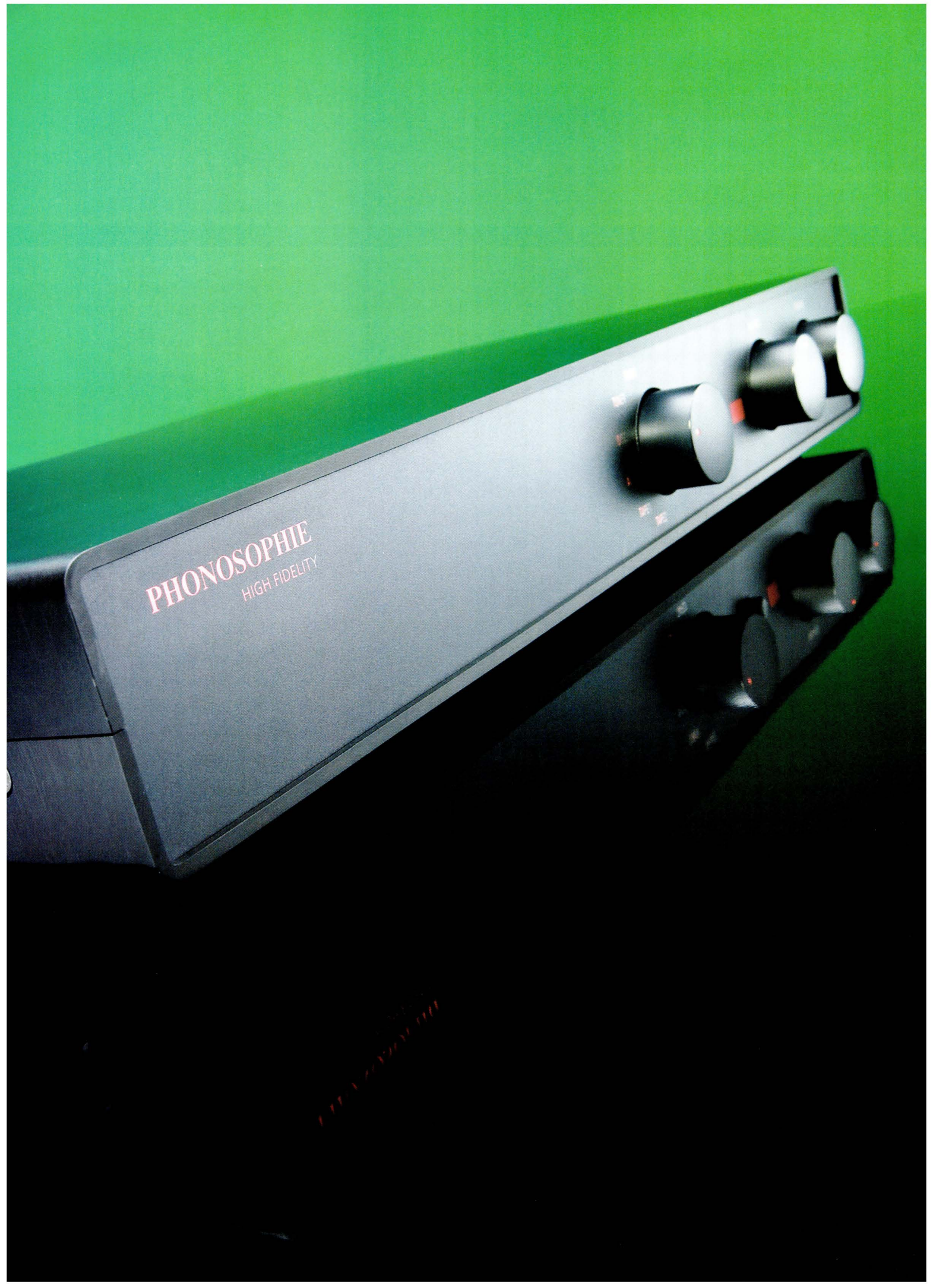
*See the Summer 2006 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*





PHONOSOPHIE  
HIGH FIDELITY

PHONOSOPHIE  
HIGH FIDELITY





# PHONOSOPHIE BI-AMP 1-4

*Additional power amp modules enable this unusual integrated to drive most speakers in bi-amp mode*

**PRICE** from £4,495 **CONTACT** Überphon, PO Box 134, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 2XZ ☎ 01730 261924 🌐 www.phonosophie.de/International

**A** German brand that is relatively new to Britain, Phonosophie – the ‘o’s are soft, as in ‘opera’ – was founded in the mid-1980s by the irrepressible Ingo Hansen, who had previously distributed Naim Audio in Germany. Naim’s influence is clearly visible in many of Phonosophie’s models, even though there are also distinct and substantial differences between the two brands and their philosophies.

Phonosophie’s extensive portfolio covers all product categories, with no fewer than sixteen amplifiers and numerous related accessories. Just three of these are integrated models, of which the Bi-Amp 1-4 is the most costly and elaborate. The base price is £4,495, but optional extras can boost that figure significantly, and several of these were included in our review sample.

As its name suggests, this amplifier is unusual in incorporating two stereo power amps – or rather four mono power amp modules, each rated at 50 watts into eight ohms or 75 watts into four ohms – within the same chassis. The idea is to use it to drive speakers equipped with twin terminal pairs – the majority of contemporary two-way and three-way models – in bi-amp mode, so that each terminal pair, with its associated driver(s) and crossover network components, is driven by a separate power amplifier, albeit from a common mains transformer.

The Bi-Amp 1-4 isn’t much to look at from a styling point of view, but it is very discreet, feels very solidly built, and its 4mm aluminium U-shaped top and base are significantly thicker than one might expect. The front panel has legends with red back-illumination, three knobs – volume, balance and input selection – and a monitor pushbutton. The remote handset, however, only provides adjustment of volume; input selection is regrettably only available from the amplifier fascia.

The basic model has six DIN line inputs, one of which may be configured for vinyl replay through already fitted BNC sockets by the addition of one of four plug-in boards priced between £325 and £675.

Among the more unusual options available here, and fitted to our review sample at an extra cost of £511, are the ‘Bi-Butt’ filter boards that use Butterworth type filters to limit the bandwidth of the power amps just beyond the top and bottom extremes of the audio band, which is claimed to improve dynamic performance in-band. Active filter

modules are also available for use with active/passive convertible speakers, for example, those from Linn and Naim.

Überphon, Phonosophie’s UK importer, treated us to an elaborate but undeniably interesting demonstration sequence, which not only showed the basic capabilities of the Bi-Amp 1-4, but also how sensitive it is to the state of tune of the rest of the system – a powerful indicator of the underlying quality of the component.

Using Triangle’s Magellan Cello speakers (see p96), driven from Phonosophie’s amplifier, CD player, support rack and speaker, interconnect and mains cables, we started with just two-channel stereo drive to the speakers, using the latter’s supplied brass links, and then substituted Phonosophie’s own bi-wire adaptors, which clearly lowered the

**“The Phonosophie is an exceedingly capable amp in bi-amp mode, with fine speed, scale and dynamic range”**

‘hash floor’ of the system. A further lowering of system ‘noise’ was audible when the equipment support stand was earthed to the amplifier through a silver tipped earth wire.

Naturally enough, moving from two- to four-channel – bi-amp – drive gave the most obvious improvement yet, crisping up the sound, subjectively improving the dynamic expression and increasing the apparent dynamic range. Other minor improvements were realised by filling unused DIN sockets with special shielding plugs, and ‘blocking’ the unused digital output on the CD player with a Digishield plug. A more obvious improvement was heard by changing the copper-tipped mains leads for silver-tipped types.

One can question whether these various extra tweaks are really such a good thing, on the grounds that they can leave the user permanently dissatisfied and forever listening to the system rather than the music. But they also show just how sensitive the Bi-Amp 1-4 is to tiny changes and thus how transparent it is.

While the Bi-Amp 1-4 undoubtedly works very well in a complete and controlled Phonosophie system, it also seemed a good idea to try it out in a different context, when simply inserted as an alternative amplifier in my regular, mostly Naim-based system. It couldn’t be a direct comparison as such, because the Naim amp combo costs five times as much, and comes in four times as many boxes, as the little integrated Phonosophie unit. Nonetheless, it ought to be interesting.

The straight changeover, with the Bi-Amp 1-4 operating in two-channel stereo, driving B&W 800Ds through Chord Signature speaker cables, revealed a sweet-sounding amplifier with good dynamic range but some loss of top-end sparkle and a lack of low-end grip and tautness. The sound was very pleasant but

lacking in tension and ambition, the amp not fully getting to grips with the tricky 800Ds.

Moving over to bi-amp operation wrought a real transformation – to a surprising degree, even to one who has spent a working life messing with hi-fi components. The bottom-end ‘sloppiness’ is largely banished and the overall timing is much better, although still lacking a little crispness. Top-end detail resolution is also much improved, though the mild lack of sparkle remains. The soundstage expands, giving a much more generous sense of scale, alongside tighter focus and a still more impressive dynamic range.

Putting the Bi-Amp 1-4 into context is difficult, because there’s little immediate competition. The lack of remote input selection might be a deterrent, and there’s no question that it’s a costly amplifier. But it’s also an exceedingly capable one in bi-amp mode, with fine speed, scale and dynamic range, especially in a complete Phonosophie system. 🌟

*Paul Messenger*





# EB1

## A serious loudspeaker that's all about performance

*"Effortless sound from the deepest bass to the highest treble."*

*"Combining this openness with deep and powerful bass extension is a good thing and something few designers achieve."*

*"Revealing and precise."*

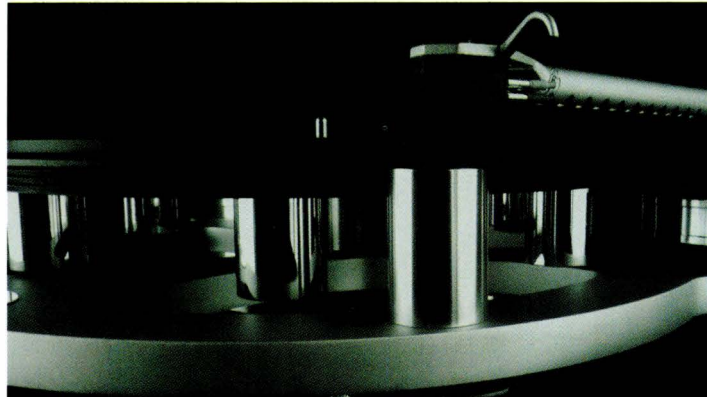
*"Remarkably entertaining."*

*Jason Kennedy, HIFI Choice April 07*

See [www.pmc-speakers.com](http://www.pmc-speakers.com)  
or 08704441044 for a dealer



**ATL**<sup>TM</sup>  
Advanced Transmission Line



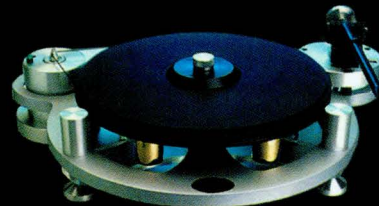
## BRITISH DESIGN AND ENGINEERING AT ITS BEST

After 35 years, Michell is still a family run business with a team of dedicated and proud craftsmen, producing quality turntables and accessories



Orbe SE

The Michell flagship for music lovers who are not prepared to compromise



Gyro SE

The classic Michell turntable, refined over many years of development to its current level of performance.



TecnoDec

Entry level turntable incorporating features from the classic Gyro



J A Michell Engineering Ltd  
2 Theobald Street, Borehamwood,  
Hertfordshire, England, WD6 4SE

Telephone: 020-8953 0771  
Fax: 020-8207 4688  
[michell-engineering.co.uk](http://michell-engineering.co.uk)



# MARANTZ SA-7S1

*Marantz has decided that the time is right to deliver its best-ever CD player, and the results are simply stunning*

**PRICE** £5,000 **CONTACT** Marantz UK, Kingsbridge House, Padbury Oaks, 575-583 Bath Road, Longford UB7 0HE ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

**M**arantz has just launched its most ambitious hi-fi components yet: a CD/SACD player, preamplifier and monoblock power amps unleashed under the new Legendary Series banner. *Hi-Fi Choice* had been waiting for its review sample of the SA-7S1 player for over a year before it finally arrived, following a host of tweaks and revisions aimed at delivering perfection. And boy, was it worth the wait.

The SA-7S1 looks rather like the older Marantz CD-7 and has a similar arrangement of switchable filters, but the CD-7 was a dedicated CD player. This is a stereo SACD-cum-CD player, and its real forerunner was the SA-1, Marantz's first and, until now, only high-end SACD player, which was discontinued some years ago when the SA-7S1 was just a gleam in its designer's eye. Reading between the lines, it seems at least possible that Marantz never intended to issue a follow-up to the SA-1. If true, this implies that the SACD format is showing more signs of life at this stage in its cycle than some at least may have anticipated.

One surprise was to find that the SA-7S1 uses a new mechanism made in-house, with a very substantial 10mm thick loader, rather than the Philips or other non-proprietary mechanism we expected to find when we applied the tin opener. The chassis is copper plated, and major sections of it are extremely heavy: the player tips the scales at over 22kg. Instead of opto couplers to sort out the earth returns from the various circuit blocks, the Marantz uses hi-tech digital Giant Magneto Resistance technology. Power supply design is unusually painstaking, and the main output is

available in single-ended and differential balanced form, the latter reflecting the internal circuit architecture.

The player is not exactly swimming in gadgets, but it includes absolute phase inversion, various anti-aliasing filters designed, for example, to give a more analogue like or a more neutral characteristic. For our money, the default setting (No. 1 for CD and SACD alike)

**“This is one of the most thoroughly musical and least mechanical-sounding players we have ever heard”**

is the most convincing and somehow even-handed of them all by a narrow margin. The Marantz can also use an outboard high-precision master clock, but the company doesn't make its own and, from discussions with the maker, we detected a note of scepticism about whether an external clock would make an improvement or simply a difference.

Musically, the Marantz performs superbly with both CD and SACD. There's something very easy and relaxed about this player, but it is not in any sense lacking in speed, dynamics or resolution. Just the opposite: this is one of the most thoroughly musical and least mechanical-sounding players we have ever heard, even by comparison with most other SACD players around this price level, or higher in some cases. There's an unmistakable warmth and grace about the sound of this player: not exactly a valve-like warmth but something with a more solid, tighter core, perhaps. It is,

nonetheless, expressed with an airiness and a natural quality that is simply not on the menu with the majority of players, at this or any other price, making the Marantz unusually graceful and easy to listen to irrespective of the musical genre involved.

SACD definitely has the edge on CD – at least it does in the majority of cases – but the Marantz is no less adept with CD, which has

clearly been treated very seriously. It lacks the atmospheric quality, spaciousness and articulation of SACD but the shortfall is not large. The Marantz also has an unusual ability to realise timing information in a coherent, foot-tapping way. The audio spectrum is completely homogenous: the bass is tactile yet subtle, allowing the music to do its own thing. There is no strain and no distinction between different frequency bands, as long as the rest of the system is up to its job.

Significant new technology has been developed over the last few years for this player, which also boasts superb engineering. In most respects it's at least on a par with the best available from elsewhere, which, on consideration, makes the player look like something of a bargain – even at £5k a pop. ■■

*Alvin Gold*

*See the September 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*







**TRIANGLE**  
ELECTROACOUSTIQUE





# TRIANGLE MAGELLAN CELLO

*This striking yet relatively compact French floorstander captures the spirit of music with aplomb*

PRICE £4,995 per stereo pair CONTACT UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iwer, SLO 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.triangle-fr.com

**F**ounded back in 1980, Triangle is a French brand that has its own distinctive take on loudspeaker design. It has enjoyed increasing success in recent years, and is currently expanding its operation.

Though best-known for its popularly priced models, the gigantic, multi-driver Magellan (reviewed in the 2004 edition of *The Collection*), standing seven feet tall and shipping in three separate pieces for each loudspeaker, represented a major departure and upmarket initiative.

The Magellan first spawned a smaller Magellan Concerto variant and, in 2006, a five-strong sw2 series of Magellans was launched, including replacements for the aforementioned alongside still smaller Quatuor, Cello and Duetto variants. All have much in

**“The real strength of this speaker is its vigorous midrange dynamics, which are exceptionally expressive”**

common but this review focuses on the £5,000 Cello, the smallest of four floorstanders and likely, from visual inspection, to provide a good match for the relatively modest dimensions of most British listening rooms.

The cabinetwork is beautifully finished in high-gloss lacquer over mahogany veneer (burr walnut is an option), and the sides are curved so the speaker is narrower at the front and back than at the mid-point of the sides, which should reduce the focusing of internal reflections and standing waves. The front view is particularly imposing, with three cone drivers, all with shiny cast frames, plus a horn-loaded tweeter at the top and a flared, cast-alloy port near the bottom. The fainthearted might prefer to leave the full height grilles in place.

One reason why Triangle prefers to use horn-loaded tweeters is to achieve a good size and dispersion match between the tweeter and the midrange cone, to improve integration through the crossover region. The whole thing sits on a large, damped-steel plinth with a very generous stability margin and secure fixing for four hefty locking spikes. A separate adjustable, lockable cone at the front securely grounds the baffle. Two pairs of substantial socket/binders provide the bi-wire/bi-amp option.

The in-room averaged responses, taken for the stereo pair in the far field (between three and four metres from the speakers) show an

impressively flat response from the low bass (around 25Hz) right through to the highest treble, albeit with a slightly recessed presence zone registering -3dB to -4dB between 1.2kHz and 4kHz. The treble makes a full recovery above 4kHz, which means it's rather stronger than the norm, and therefore likely to sound a little too obvious.

Sensitivity is a healthy 90dB, though that's in part because the load seen by the amp is quite demanding, dipping below four ohms around 110Hz and again at 3kHz – both parts of the audio band where power levels tend to be high.

The result is fine overall neutrality alongside a top end that does indeed sound a shade strong and obvious. Good bass weight and extension is also predicted, though in practice the bottom end doesn't sound quite as

powerful and authoritative as the measurements imply, and one couldn't help wondering whether the slightly larger Quatuor, with one extra bass driver, might better match our fairly large (4.3x2.6x5.5m) room.

Still, the Cello's bass end works very well in terms of speed and agility, and is thankfully free from the sort of heaviness, thump and thickening that is all too common among floorstanders. Choosing the right model from a range of different size speakers to match a particular room is still very much a guessing game, but it's certainly a topic that deserves closer investigation. Very large speakers tend to be too bass heavy in the test room we were using; small ones are often bass light. Although the Magellan Cello was marginally lightweight in our room, it's probably just about right in terms of bass weight for most British rooms.

Proof of the Cello's innate transparency to changes further up the chain was amply revealed when working through a sequence of tweaks to the Phonosophie CD player/bi-amp system (see p92). Replacing Triangle's fitted brass terminal links – and one has to ask why manufacturers persist in using these execrable devices – with Phonosophie's wire links clearly expanded the audible dynamic range.

The real strength of this speaker is its vigorous midrange dynamics, which are exceptionally expressive in spite of some

coloration, making it easy for the listener to get into the music, and easy for the musicians to communicate their messages. For example, the Cellos reveal Christy Moore's very subtle mastery of microphone techniques during recordings like *Live in Dublin 2006* with effortless clarity.

Imaging is excellent too. Through the Cellos the BBC Prom No. 7, featuring Bruckner's Symphony No. 7, delivered a beautifully layered orchestral soundstage wrapped up in the rich Albert Hall acoustic, but this speaker certainly puts the listener quite close to the stage, and we imagine some listeners might prefer a slightly more distant auditory view of the proceedings. However, while the Triangle does have an engagingly up-front character, it manages to avoid ever becoming unpleasantly aggressive.

Provided the sources, amplification and ancillaries are good enough, this speaker delivers the magical musical insights that are the very essence of high-end hi-fi – and does so for a smaller financial outlay than most of the obvious competition. Given its price, size and sound, it's a tempting proposition indeed. 🌟

*Paul Messenger*





# Sonus faber®

CREMONA SERIES. LOOK TO THE PAST TO HEAR THE FUTURE.

## “FAST, TRANSPARENT, DYNAMIC, OPEN, CLEAR, VIVID.”

HI FI CLUBE / JOSÉ VICTOR HENRIQUES / CREMONA ELIPSA

Sonus Faber's introductions in the early "Noughties" of the floor-standing Cremona and the smaller Cremona Auditor were hailed as milestones in the industry's long standing quest to achieve the highly-desired marriage of both aesthetics and sound quality. Such a marriage would please both ends of the consumer spectrum, the audiophile as well as the cineaste

Indeed, it seemed incredible that the legendary, exquisite craftsmanship of the original Cremona and the Cremona Auditor could have been surpassed

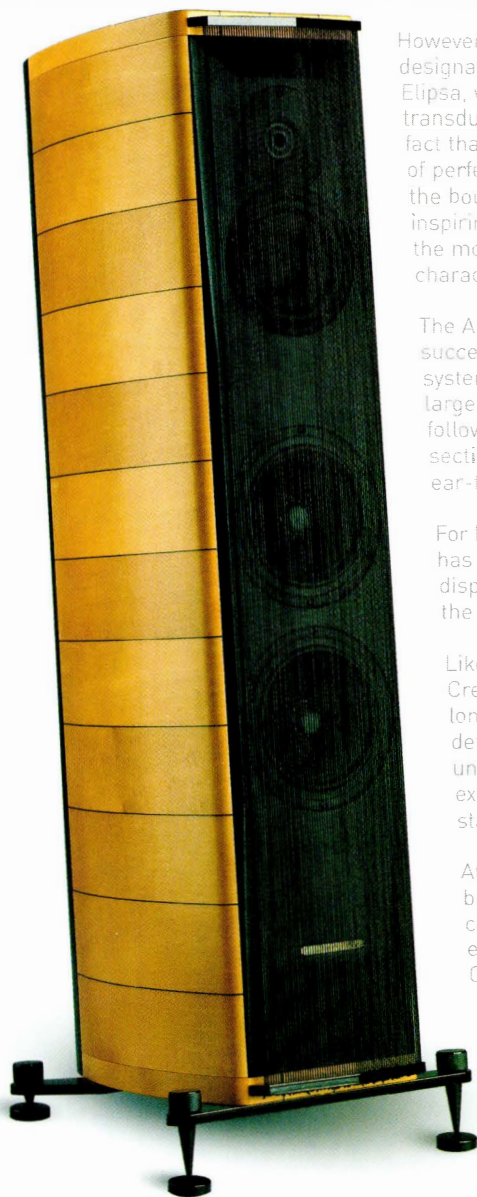
However, the recent launch of two new models with 'M' designations, along with a flagship speaker, the Cremona Elipsa, were inspired by that most astounding of transducers, the Stradivari. Thus, they are testaments to the fact that Sonus Faber's designers are in a constant process of perfecting the art of music reproduction, and of pushing the boundaries in the creation and engineering of awe-inspiring handcrafted works of art. These speakers are all the more precious because of their rarity, in a world characterised by so much automation and mechanisation.

The Auditor M, the smallest of the new Cremonas and the successor of the original Auditor, is a versatile two-way system ideally suited for smaller environments craving a large-scale musical picture. Its natural maple enclosure follows the Sonus Faber signature form of a lute in cross-section, while its components and final sound have been ear-tuned by the legendary Franco Serblin.

For larger rooms, the original floor-standing Cremona has evolved into the new superior Cremona M, which displays a more elegant, stylish finish and benefits from the introduction of new components

Like their Homage siblings, both the Auditor M and Cremona M reflect the findings of Serblin's longstanding research, with attention paid to every detail, from small components, to wiring, to the drive units themselves. Equally, the aesthetics and external details have been refined to indicate a new stage in the speakers' evolution

At the top of the new Cremona range lies the brand-new Cremona Elipsa, designed for the connoisseur with both the means and the environment to exploit a larger system. The Cremona Elipsa provides near-Stradivari performance in a more compact, economical package. Its sound is room-filling, open and natural, while its form is as beautiful as the speaker that inspired it. The Elipsa is, without question, another Sonus Faber masterpiece.



Sonus Faber CREMONA M



Sonus Faber CREMONA ELIPSA

For your nearest dealer contact:



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

Sonus faber.



# KRELL EVOLUTION 505

*A top-ranking multichannel CD/SACD player from Krell, the standard bearer of the American high end*

**PRICE** £8,777 **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8597 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

**D**isc players have long been a Krell speciality, the company's range having once been headlined by the stunning KPS-25 top-loading player, whose massive acrylic lid included an LCD shutter – don't ask! But the Philips mechanism it used eventually became unavailable and the model was pulled from the range. Sadly, Krell has continued to suffer due to the vagaries of mechanism availability – and, sometimes, reliability – since it moved to making SACD players. The SACD Standard, which in Krell's terms counted as affordable, was discontinued for this reason and replaced by a superior model with a better and, reportedly, more reliable mechanism.

This is a more sophisticated and costly model still, which is best seen as an elaboration of the Krell SACD Standard. The feature set is similar. Both, for example, will play any Red Book CD-compatible disc, including CD-R and CD-RW, and, incidentally, WMA CDs. In common with the junior model, this is a multichannel player, capable of playing the multichannel track of any SACD disc as well as the stereo counterpart and, of course, stereo CD, but the internal engineering involves fewer compromises. There is also a DVD-Video (but not DVD-Audio) version called the Evolution 525, but this review limits its focus to the 505 audio-only model.

This player is distinguished from the SACD Standard by more sophisticated power supply arrangements, with a transformer dedicated to the drive mechanism, and a separate transformer for the audio drive, optimised for Class A operation. The big difference, however, is the addition of a proprietary CAST (Current Audio Signal Transmission) interface, which eliminates multiple current-to-voltage

conversion stages. This really comes into its own with an all-Krell system that can be interconnected by CAST (the two main channels only, by the way), which means only a single stage of current-to-voltage conversion in the entire system. This eliminates at a stroke a number of distortion mechanisms, and effectively takes the interconnect cables between components, and the input and output connections, out of the sound quality loop.

**“With the Evolution 505 you're getting the best of both world's with something approaching the minimum of compromise”**

In common with other recent Krell components, build quality is extremely impressive, thanks partly to the use of fine material and finishes, and the rounded corner pillars – stylistically a master stroke – but the minor switchgear is a jumble to the uninitiated. Sonically, however, there are no caveats, at least once the inevitable warming up traumas have been negotiated: we suggest you put a disc in, select auto repeat and leave it behind closed doors for a week.

Another vagary that needs to be dealt with is the switchable digital filtering, of which there are four settings for each of the two disc formats. In general, the default settings (Filter One for both CD and SACD) provide marginally more compelling results. In both cases we're talking here about a very polished, colourful and, above all, exquisitely detailed sound. SACD can perform better than CD with the right recordings – primarily acoustic recordings made from analogue masters, or recorded to DSD

rather than PCM – but this is not an absolutely inviolable rule. In any case, the information about the provenance of commercial recordings is not always readily available.

In fact, this is a superb CD player, too, often sounding better controlled and again more detailed than many other high-end players. With all disc types this is an unusually sophisticated player, one which sounds polished and pure, though some may favour

the more architecturally oriented but often less detailed or refined quality of some direct competitors at the price.

Some enthusiasts say that they would no longer buy a high-end player that didn't support SACD. Would we agree with them? While adding SACD doesn't appear to have any noticeable negative effect on CD reproduction, and the number of important and musically worthwhile recordings on SACD has already reached the tipping point, especially if your tastes tend to favour acoustic and classical material, that choice has to remain a personal one. But with the Evolution 505 at least, you're getting the best of both worlds with something approaching the minimum of compromise, with Krell's legendary build quality to boot. In the world of digital audio disc players, this is undoubtedly among the very best. ■■

*Alvin Gold*

*See the January 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# STAX SR-007 & SRM-007TII

*Does this 'earspeaker' and 'energiser' combination add up to make the world's best headphones?*

PRICE £2,795 CONTACT Symmetry, Suite 5, 17 Holywell Hill, St Albans AL1 1DT ☎ 01727 865488 🌐 www.stax.co.jp

**H**ere's what may appear to be a trivial question: are what you see in the accompanying photo headphones or earspeakers? Stax has long called its 'phones earspeakers rather than the more usual designation, and we'll use the term here, partly because there is a subtle and useful distinction to be drawn. Stax spaces its capsules a little away from the ears, which gives a somewhat more speaker-like behaviour, though it doesn't go the extra mile by introducing inter-channel crosstalk. Stax is a long way from being the only company to make 'phones this way: AKG, Ergo, Sennheiser and Beyer also do so, and these brands are just the tip of the iceberg. But it is useful in a review context to make a clear distinction between 'phones of this type and the kind of rubbish you shove in your ears

## “Stax wrote the book on this kind of product, and this model encapsulates everything the company knows”

when using a personal stereo, whose geometry is absolutely inimical to good sound quality no matter how well engineered they may be. So, earspeakers it is.

The SR-007 is the top earspeaker in the Stax armoury, and the ARM-007 the top energiser, or it was until the SRM-007tII was launched. This is the top-of-the-range version of the four-valve energiser, which is itself up-market of the basic two-valve energiser. There are solid state energisers too, but we won't talk about them. Because the changes were specified and engineered by Kimik, a company owned by one Mick North, the resident engineer for Stax in the UK, it has become known as the Kimik modified version.

The package, then, consists of two parts: the SR-007 earspeaker and the SRM-007tII valve energiser. The business part of the bit you wear has a circular section which sits circumaurally, with a variable-thickness, leather-covered ear cushion, which can be rotated within limits to produce the desired ear seal. These are velocity 'phones, so the back of the enclosure is vented. The diaphragm, gold plated at the edges, has a larger active area than those in other Stax earspeakers, and is mounted in a metal frame inside a thick, insulated, low-resonance outer section. The speakers are connected by a springy hoop and a pliable inner cushioned section. According to Stax, the frequency

response is 6Hz to 41kHz, and the weight is 365g (not including the cable).

The hot-running energiser uses two-stage MOSFET amplification and a four-valve output stage, with Philips 6FQ7 small-signal valves whose heater source is built around an electrolytic capacitor and a high-speed Schottky barrier diode. Connections are to an XLR balanced input, a single-ended input, and a second single-ended input with matching output, effectively making the energiser a full-on preamp – and an unusually transparent one at that – controlled by two friction-coupled volume potentiometers. For the Kimik modifications, the Philips valves are specially selected, low-tolerance tubes from old (unused) stocks. Their pins are gold plated and the valves are cryogenically treated, a process that takes

up to four weeks. They are then fitted with EAT tube dampers, which consist of machined aluminium heatsinks damped by rubber gaskets. The main change, however, is to the set-up of the amplifier, which is minutely adjusted to minimise distortion. This is said to make a big difference and takes several days to complete.

A sample of the standard SRM-007 energiser was obtained for direct comparison with the Kimik modified version, and both were kept under power and run in parallel from the Esoteric CD/SACD player reviewed on p74 of this issue, using Nordost Valhalla and Odin interconnect cables.

It was quickly apparent which of the two energisers was better, but if all you had was the basic model in your system we doubt that you'd feel you were missing out on anything you couldn't live without. The basic character of the sound using the SRM-007 has a slight softness and natural sense of distance. It does not shout, even with the volume turned too high for the Health and Safety police, and a balance that is ripe and full, with a pleasing warmth and tremendous extension at both ends of the frequency spectrum. But the Kimik version has the standard model comprehensively beaten. It is sharper and leaner, with more detail and articulation. The musical effect is of greater transparency and focus. It is certainly a little lighter on its feet,

but it could never be accused of being bright or edgy. It is, in fact, easily the best balanced earspeaker, headphone or whatever you choose to call it that we have ever encountered. This comes as no surprise. Stax wrote the book on this kind of product, and this model encapsulates everything the company knows.

There are other differences, too. The Kimik model is a little sharper and leaner, with more detail and articulation, yet at the same time it has a beguiling, seductive quality all its own, and an even greater ability to track the dynamics of the music. There is greater structural attack and focus from the enhanced model, and greater detail resolution, too, which means a more expressive and clearer account of the music, and even less overhang. It is important to understand that it is not so much better that it devalues the excellent performance of the standard model, yet you will always know and appreciate just where the extra expenditure has gone.

The SR-007 is no lightweight, so you always know it's there, but you know it in the same way that you always know when you're wearing a particularly fine yet substantial piece of clothing such as a Crombie overcoat. The Stax sits firmly enough on the head to be completely secure; its footprint is widely spread, there are no hotspots and the ears are well enough ventilated that they don't heat up unduly. This is a model that can be worn for hours on end playing music at virtually any volume level, and the lack of environmental soundproofing is such that that you are not totally cut off from the fire alarm sounding next door. No guarantees, though... 📺

*Alvin Gold*





*exposure*



Those who appreciate good sound will prefer the tighter "S."

## New 3010S series:

Tighter bottom-end, livelier sound, more drive...same price

### CD player £1200

- Brand-new "CD solution" – custom-made transport mechanism, servo units and control mechanisms
- Twin Burr-Brown PCM 1704 mono DACs and a discrete output stage
- Low jitter clock and a large toroidal transformer with separate windings for the transport mechanism and audio stages.

### Integrated Amplifier £1000

- Larger power supply
- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- 6 line inputs, bi-wiring and bi-amping compatible
- Option to fit a MC or MM phono cartridge
- Remote control

### Power Amplifier £800

- Larger power supply
- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- Capable of driving sophisticated speaker systems, in bi-amping mode or monoblock mode
- Clean and extended low frequency response



# LYNGDORF TDAI 2200

*The room is a limiting factor for many audiophiles. Lyngdorf has the cure*

**PRICE** £3,400 (TDAI 2200: £2,300, Room Perfect module: £1,100) **CONTACT** Gecko Inc, Cherry Cottage, Galley Lane, Headley RG19 8LJ ☎ 0845 262 2882 🌐 www.lyngdorf.com

**P**eter Lyngdorf was there at the dawn of digital amplification. His Millennium amp was the first commercially available high-end digital model. In fact, it's still available, in MkIV guise. And now the Lyngdorf digital dream continues apace, in the shape of the new TDAI 2200 amplifier.

Although not as uncompromising as the Millennium, the modular TDAI 2200 is every inch the digital master. Within the 20Hz-20kHz limits, it's claimed to stick within 0.2dB of a ruler-flat frequency response. No analogue design comes close to that accuracy. The TDAI 2200 delivers 200 watts into eight ohms and 375 watts into four ohms, and works up to 33kHz. It also includes upgradeable voicing curve filters, to soften, open up or remove sharpness from a digital recording.

As standard, it doesn't even process analogue signals – you have to buy an A/D module to do that. But the most interesting option available is Lyngdorf's Room Perfect module. Together with a long length of cable and a very, very accurate measuring microphone, Room Perfect attempts to minimise the deleterious effects of your room, listening position and loudspeaker to deliver the best possible sound.

Here's how it works. Entering the Room Perfect set-up menu on the scrolling blue dot-matrix front panel display, you position the microphone as close as possible to your optimum listening position. This is the first of up to eight 'focus' measurements. The TDAI 2200 then goes through a series of eerie sound effects and prompts you to reposition the microphone. Now, place the mic randomly in the room (not between the speakers) several

times, until you have achieved a 90 per cent or greater 'Room Knowledge'. Now, you have a 'global' setting established. This is best done using a microphone stand. No stand is supplied but a good dealer should be able to lend you one.

Upgrades are key to the system and Lyngdorf is constantly sampling new installations and adding them to the room and speaker correction database. These come through as

**“It's hard not to be won over by the Lyngdorf concept, whether you like that cut-crystal sound or not”**

periodic updates that can be squirted through the RS232 connection as and when they become available.

This well-built amplifier is simple to use and navigate, thanks to a handful of small multifunction buttons, a large controller/volume dial and useful display. When we tested it back in issue 289 of *Hi-Fi Choice*, we felt that it could transform some systems in some situations. That's still true, although the series of updates and refinements make it more applicable to more situations than ever before. Nevertheless, it's still a question of how far you deviate from the audiophile ideal. If you have the best possible room, sit in the best position listening to speakers that are in the ideal placement points and the room is acoustically just about ideal, Room Perfect becomes a hard option to justify. Few of us have such an uncompromised listening environment, however, and that's where the TDAI 2200 with

Room Perfect starts to win you over.

What happens when the room isn't perfect is that RoomPerfect effectively perfects the room! It digitally processes the sound to bring it back to the audiophile ideal, reducing the flutter echoes, booms and flat spots of most living rooms. This makes it a potentially huge upgrade on any existing amplifier – just so long as you like the sound of the electronics underneath the room acoustics.

It's never going to be an amplifier that appeals to valve-loving romantics who want their music warm and cuddly. The analogue stages cut the digital cleanliness ever so slightly, but the fundamental character of the sound doesn't change. This is a digital amplifier with a clean-cut digital sound, no matter what. It's an crisp, accurate and precise-sounding amplifier, powerful enough to deal with large dynamic swings found in complex modern classical music, yet refined enough to cope with solo female vocals and the complexity of be-bop rhythms.

It's hard not to be won over by the Lyngdorf concept, whether you like that cut-crystal sound or not. It does so much to the sound of the room that once you've heard it, it can be hard to live without. 📡

*Alan Sircom*

*See the January 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*







00000000

MOON

05:11

Program

Repeat

Random

Display

Standby

Phase

Digital input

Time

ANDROMEDA CD PLAYER

MOON

ANDROMEDA RS POWER SUPPLY



# MOON ANDROMEDA REFERENCE

*A celestial sonic performance in guaranteed from this well-engineered Canadian CD player*

**PRICE** £9,990 **CONTACT** Redline Distribution, Unit 11b, 72 Newhaven Road, Edinburgh EH6 5QG ☎ 0131 555 3922 🌐 www.red-line.co.uk

**T**he Evolution series is a closely knit range of hi-fi components, offering a choice of CD players and amplifiers from the Canada-based Moon stable, by Simaudio. The products clearly have serious intent: all are either expensive and well engineered or even more expensive and even better engineered. The Andromeda for example – or Andromeda Reference Balanced CD Player to give it its full title – is a fully balanced differential player with nine-times (705.6kHz) internal oversampling. It is a two-box machine with the top-loading transport and D/A section housed in the larger – or at least the taller – of the two boxes. The slimmer enclosure, which can be safely tucked underneath the transport, houses the power supplies. Apart from the

**“It generates a tremendous sense of power and authority, arguably unmatched by any other CD player in our experience”**

transport, the player is entirely dual-mono and, although the internal circuit architecture is fully balanced, there is a single ended output as well. The weight of all this hi-tech wonderfulness amounts to over 30kg, a not insignificant proportion of which is the aluminium diecast remote control. There are not a great many amplifiers that weigh as much as this does, and still fewer CD players.

The Moon includes an electrical digital input so that users with other digital sources – such as a digital music server or a standalone transport – can take advantage of the sophisticated internal DAC, which boasts four Burr-Brown PCM1704U-K chips in dual differential mode. The up-sampling digital filter is also from Burr-Brown, the DF1704. The player offers a full roster of controls and displays, and also features an RS-232 port, SIMLINK data in and outputs, and an IR input for custom install purposes and to perform such duties as synchronizing display brightness and power on/off operations.

Wiring up the player is unusual. Two of what look like XLRs are used to connect the two components; though one consists of an XLR shell at each end, the internal section looks like a RJ45 data link, similar to the kind used in computer networks. The digital input is an S/PDIF socket, and the digital outs are available in S/PDIF and AES/EBU formats using a true XLR connector. No optical link is provided.

The disc is dropped into a well on the top surface of the player, a magnetic puck placed on top, and a manually operated slide cover maneuvered to cover the disc before the mechanism will spin.

There's quite a lot of interesting technology here, including proprietary toroidal transformers for the digital and analogue circuits. The transport mechanism is a Philips CD-Pro 2 M, which is mounted with a Simaudio-designed gel-based suspension. There are also some interesting proprietary tweaks to the voltage regulation and in the so-called Alpha Clocking circuit, which gives what is claimed to be an impressively low-jitter result. Other features include a four-layer PCB with separate earth and power planes, and a

very short, capacitor-free servo path. Pick the player up and you will understand without any further explanation that the claims of unusual structural rigidity are well based.

For this test, we used the player with a matching Moon P8 preamplifier (an equally elaborate two-box unit) and a Moon W-7 dual-mono power amplifier, all of which physically match and take up an unfeasible amount of shelf racking space. The electronics were partnered with the Focal Nova Utopia Be speakers, which are also reviewed in this issue.

The player has quite distinctive voicing: it is a powerful and dynamic performer, with

expansive imaging that is unusually well defined in both the lateral and depth planes. The bass is almost palpable in its weight and depth given the appropriate music material. It just seems to go down and down forever and, with the right music, it generates a tremendous sense of power and authority, arguably unmatched by any other CD player in our experience.

The midband and top are almost equally trenchant. Again, we're talking about a very positive and outgoing quality, with tremendous detail resolution and a surprisingly expansive sense of space and control. Most of all, this is an enormously powerful-sounding player, one which brings the physical elements of a musical performance to life with a sense of passion that lies outside the scope of virtually any other CD player. What the Andromeda won't do, of course, is step outside its remit as a CD player. There were times with a set of hybrid SACD recordings of Bruckner symphony recordings from Gunter Wand and the Berlin Philharmonic when we ideally wanted to be able to hear the extra layer of refinement and resolution that the best SACD players had already revealed in other review systems.

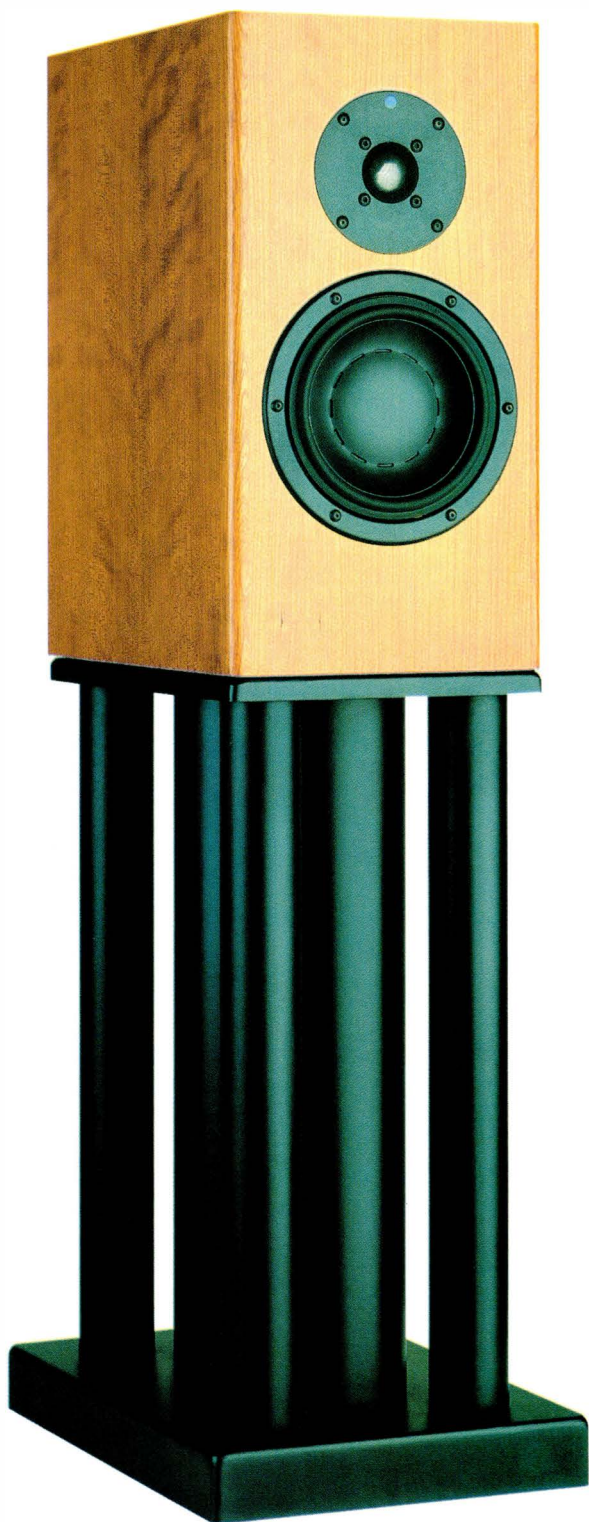
Never mind. By any standards this is a truly remarkable player. It is a heavyweight in every sense that, in certain respects, sounds like no other. There are grounds for saying that no SACD player can match the Andromeda as a purist CD player. And while SACD has its place, there are many types of music and many listeners for whom CD has a much broader and deeper appeal than any of the new-fangled formats. ■■

*Alvin Gold*





# Totem Mani-2



Two years of theoretical and practical research were needed to bring this small and remarkable loudspeaker onto the market (1990). Mani-2 was designed as a statement in pure musicality. Regardless of specifications, "Mani-2" channels primal energy and forces it into "being". Some have categorised it beyond the magical, the ethereal... simply, fundamentally visceral.

At Totem, we continue our tradition of aesthetically, exquisite transducers.

Mani-2 is a culmination of several years research into necessarily monitor sized transducers / speakers, capable of both absolute sound staging and fine focus, real, full range sound, commanding your senses.

How to achieve full range, dynamic, distortion free, accurate, focalised music and bass in a small 2 way design?

It is optimised in the "Model one", it is maximised in the "Mani-2", a unique 2 way, 3-driver unit. The "Mani-2" utilises a unique push-pull/ vented configuration in which the inner and outer mid-woofer operate in exactly the same "extended" frequency range. The musical energy emitted from the external driver is, therefore, as distortion free as possible.

Proper engineering, special double box configuration and truly superior quality materials and damping procedures have made this possible. They are produced in four prestigious finishes: cherry, mahogany, maple and black ash.

Experience "Mani-2".

Trust your soul; follow your senses; let "Mani-2" steer you. TOTEM exemplifies continuity, non-obsolescence and true value. The musical truth follows.

## London Area

O'Brien Hifi, LONDON SW20 OTW, Tel: 020 89461528  
Cornflake.co.uk, LONDON W1T 2JU, Tel: 0207 6310472

Audio-T, CAMBERLEY, Surrey Tel: 01276 685597

Audio-T, READING, Berkshire Tel: 01189 585463

Studio AV Ltd., ETON, Berkshire Tel: 01753631000

Rayleigh Hi Fi, RAYLEIGH, Essex, Tel: 01268 779762

Rayleigh Hi Fi, CHELMSFORD, Essex, Tel: 01245 265245

Audio-T, TUNBRIDGE WELLS, Kent, Tel: 01892 525666

Rayleigh Hi Fi, SOUTHEND, Essex, Tel: 01702 435255

Rayleigh Hi Fi, COLCHESTER, Essex, Tel: 01206 577682

Norman Hobbs, HAYWARDS HEATH, West Sussex, Tel: 01444 413353

Audio-T, EASTBOURNE, Tel: 01323 731336

Audio-T, PORTSMOUTH, Hampshire, Tel: 023 9266 3604

Audio Destination, TIVERTON, Devon, Tel: 01884 243584

Movement Audio, POOLE, Dorset, Tel: 01202 730865/380018

Audio Excellence, BRISTOL, Tel: 0117 926 4975

Leicester Hifi, LEICESTER, Tel: 01162 539753

Audio Excellence, WORCESTER, Tel: 01905 619059

Audio Counsel, CHADLE, cheshire, Tel: 01614 916090

The Sound Organisation, YORK, Yorkshire, Tel: 01904 627108

Practical Hifi, WARRINGTON, Cheshire, Tel: 01925 632179

Loud & Clear, EDINBURGH, Tel: 0131 5553963

Loud & Clear, GLASGOW, Tel: 0141 2210221

Audio Excellence, SWANSEA, Tel: 01792 474608

## South East

## South

## SouthWest

## Midlands

## North

## Scotland

## Wales

To receive your free copy of our catalogue, please visit:  
[totemacoustic.eu](http://totemacoustic.eu)  
or call 003215 285585



[TotemAcoustic.eu](http://TotemAcoustic.eu)

joenit

United Kingdom Distributor  
[info@totemacoustic.eu](mailto:info@totemacoustic.eu)  
Belgium Tel: 0032 15 285 585



# NAIM SUPERNAIT

*Hardcore musicality joins all the mod cons in Naim's new flagship integrated*

PRICE £2,350 CONTACT Naim Audio, Southampton Road, Salisbury SP1 2LN ☎ 01722 426600 🌐 www.naimaudio.com

The SuperNait brings Naim's concept of the integrated amplifier fully into the 21st Century. Drawing on the heritage and the design of previous pre/power amp combinations, this latest model introduces various new – to the company – elements into the mix, such as the inclusion of an on-board DAC for connecting to iPods and computers, and the ability to drive loudspeakers that would have caused former Nait's to keel over. Furthermore, the SuperNait is upgradeable with external power supplies and can even be configured to function as a preamplifier or power amplifier, and to work in tandem with a power amplifier to bi-amplify speakers. In its striving to accommodate the needs of the modern buyer, it can even be integrated into an 'intelligent' home through its RS-232 connector. The Naim Audio integrated amplifier ('Nait' for short) has certainly come of age in a very decisive fashion.

Some things never change, though, and listening demonstrates that the SuperNait is a Naim amplifier through and through. It is discriminating about the sources with which it is partnered and will clearly reveal even minor differences in the cables used in the system. Improve the CD player you're using or upgrade the cable from your computer to the amplifier and the SuperNait will reflect that change such that you won't be able to ignore the difference. However, while it won't flatter an inferior source, it won't make you suffer torment – unless your sources or cables fall seriously short of the mark.

In a system that's working well, the SuperNait displays a beguiling dexterity with all manner of music and a musical empathy that's rare in even the highest end of high-end amplification.

It captures the flow of a piece with surprising sensitivity and digs deep into its emotional hardcore. In our initial review of the amplifier we listened to *We People Who Are Darker Than Blue*, from the Curtis Mayfield tribute album *People Get Ready*, and were left enthralled by its communicative abilities; the way it managed to get inside the rendition and convey what the players were doing and how that contributed to the soulfulness of the performance.

**“The SuperNait presents everything you choose to play through it in a manner that will excite, delight and engross you”**

And that is an area in which the SuperNait manages to surpass all its competition: it possesses an uncanny knack to present what truly lies at the heart of a musical performance. Regardless of the particular musical genre or genres that you enjoy, the amplifier presents everything you choose to play through it in a manner that will excite, delight and engross you. In effect, it seems able to present music with unerring – and often unnerving – fluency, tying together what might previously have seemed disparate strands such that their relevance becomes glaringly apparent and obvious.

On a less metaphysical stratum, the SuperNait also has a wonderful sense of balance and control about its portrayal. Its bass, for example, has striking power, grip and precision, allied with sensational pitch and pace that provides a solid rhythmic foundation for all manner of music that relies upon it for its impetus. It displays similar sure-footedness

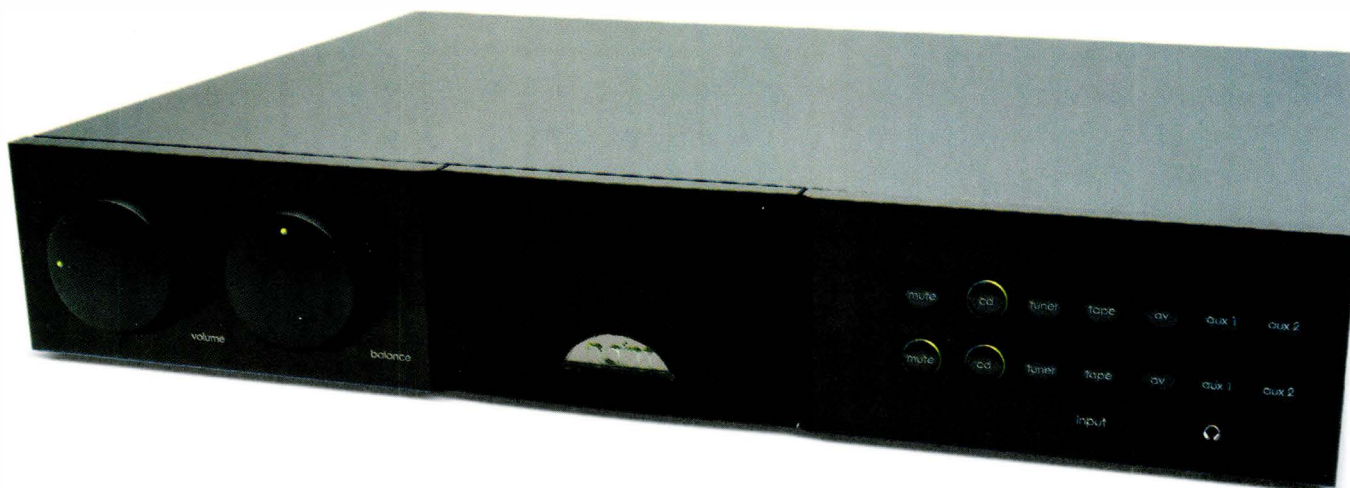
and solidity throughout the audio spectrum, particularly in its portrayal of vocals, rendering voices – especially tricky female ones – with a convincing sense of realism and body. Its high end is equally appropriately sorted; things that should cut pointedly through the mix do so, while other elements are clearly defined without drawing undue attention to themselves, leading to portrayals that are insightful without appearing

artificially over-etched. It even sailed gracefully through our acid test – Tower of Power's *Soul Vaccination* CD, which, through a hi-fi system with even the slightest lack of control will send listeners running out of the room. The SuperNait displayed no such tendencies but still managed to portray the staccato horn jabs and guitar chops with appropriate ferocity.

As we noted in the original review, if you pair the SuperNait with good-quality source components, capable loudspeakers and don't scrimp on the cables – we used Neat's outstanding Motive 1 floorstanders and Chord Company's speaker cables and interconnects, which made for a reassuringly synergistic pairing with the amplifier – it will affix a smile to your face permanently, regardless of your musical persuasions. 🍷

Malcolm Steward

See the June 2007 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* for the original review of this product









# UNISON RESEARCH REFERENCE PREAMPLIFIER & MONOBLOCK

*These statement amplifiers from Italy's Unison Research deliver unique styling and heavenly sound*

**PRICE** £32,495 (Reference Preamplifier: £9,995; Reference Monoblock: £22,500 per stereo pair) **CONTACT** UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iver SL0 9DA ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.unisonresearch.com

**C**onsider, for a moment, the conditions that gave life to the amplifier you see here. Italy. Good start. A mission, established by Unison Research over 15 years, to bring true high-end values to the market, through valve and solid-state electronics, with all the design flair, craft and passion for music – not to mention the best Barolo and espresso – being a small, specialist Italian company implies. Lovely. But inevitably there comes a point when, egged on by its customers, Unison Research has to show the world its 'best game'; the finest amplifier it knows how to make. And, things being the way they are in Treviso, that means two things. First, an all-valve, pure Class-A power amp with some real, drive anything muscle. Second, a preamp of identical quality and indisputable transparency.

The response is the Reference Monoblocks and matching Reference Preamplifier. You can appreciate from the photographs, to some extent, the contrasting wood and brushed stainless steel textures. What's less apparent is that the Monoblocks are the size of skateboard ramps and weigh 80 kilos each. Statement hi-fi, we love it!

The Reference Preamplifier isn't exactly svelte either, but then there's a lot to pack in and a lot to keep apart. The valve complement comprises no fewer than 18 signal triodes as well as two 300B power triodes. The triple chassis, dual-mono design fully separates the line and phono stages from the power supplies. The inclusion of the 300B, almost universally used as a power valve, in a preamp is highly unusual; Unison says it chose it for its excellent driving ability and linearity.

The RCA phono input and output terminals are gold-plated and balanced connections are also possible through transformer coupling. Interestingly the use of metal and wood is more than merely aesthetic. The stainless steel chassis cover, for instance, is non-magnetic with low thermal conductivity to ensure that the heat from the 300B doesn't affect the circuitry below. The solid wood parts are said to help limit vibration within the chassis, again with the benefit of reduced microphony.

Each Reference Monoblock power amp is a minimum feedback design capable of delivering 80 watts of pure Class A into eight ohms. The input stage uses twin triode ECC82s

for voltage amplification and, in the following stage, another pair of 82s are biased to drive the four directly-heated 845 triode valves and two 400-watt transformers working in parallel. A luxury product? Try this. The bias system for the triodes is fully independent for each valve to compensate for that valve's individual aging characteristics. And four independent circuits regulate the four grid voltages to maintain an optimal level of anode current for each triode.

Even if high-end audio is your natural habitat, this is a shockingly good amplifier. It isn't the clarity that startles. In fact, that's the whole point. It doesn't sound as if it's trying to impress by ramming its hi-fi credentials in your face. Its

**“For the increased emotional intelligibility alone, listening to Unison's best amp is a frankly wonderful experience”**

impact is altogether more transcendent and founded in the beautifully natural portrayal of tone and texture, a sense of balance and grace that draws you into the beating heart of the music. If it's the objective of the very best audio hardware to make you forget about the medium and connect with the music, the Reference combo pulls it off with talent to spare. Plenty of good-quality hi-fi makes a very fair fist of sounding natural and 'real', but this sounds as if the real thing is in the room with you: solid in three dimensions, a palpable presence.

An easy listen? Sure and, despite what some hard-bitten audiophiles might try to tell you, there's nothing wrong with that. Listenability and an unerring ability to be truthful aren't mutually exclusive. This amp will unearth detail right down to the inky black noise floor, yet it's also a musical communicator of the very highest order. If a recording is less than masterfully produced it will let you know but it

won't make a meal of the imperfections. Genius, however, shines through more brightly. No veneer, no rose-tinted filter, no innate desire to butter things up – just a bloodhound's nose for the musical trail.

True, the overall balance can seem a little laid back but that shouldn't be taken as a negative. It's mostly because the sound has no artificial edge or hardness. Perhaps one should call it an absence of hype. Huge dynamic swings are accomplished with such a sublime nonchalance, it's easy to underestimate what's going on. With suitably large and capable speakers (Unison owns Opera speakers, so we used the truly massive £22,000 Caruso

flagships) the deepest bass has the solidity and impetus to recreate the scale and reverberant characteristics of a venue – and that's a rare and thrilling treat.

Every type of music is given the same incredibly generous, unfettered treatment, but a current favourite – John Mayer's duet with Herbie Hancock, *Stitched Up* – has seldom sounded better. It's a well recorded track with startling life and colour but, through the Reference combo, it takes on an entirely greater sense of authority with breathtaking presence and, again, those effortless dynamic swings.

For the increased emotional intelligibility alone, listening to Unison's best amp system is a frankly wonderful experience. And so very dangerously addictive. As we discover time and again when we compile *The Collection*, there's the high end and there's hi-fi heaven. This one belongs very firmly in the latter category. ■■

*David Vivian*





# Heritage

1972 saw the introduction of Mark Levinson's JC-1 preamplifier, a concrete, functional symbol of Mark Levinson's approach to audio reproduction. It evidenced a signature blending of vision and science. It was the beginning of a series of groundbreaking audio components that helped to establish the high end as we know it today.

For over thirty years Mark Levinson components have defined the term 'high performance'.

Mark Levinson.

Since 1972.

The same name.

The same enduring standards.

The same extraordinary level of satisfaction.



 symmetry

t: 01727 865488

e: [info@symmetry-systems.co.uk](mailto:info@symmetry-systems.co.uk)

w: [www.symmetry-systems.co.uk](http://www.symmetry-systems.co.uk)



# MERIDIAN F80

*Meridian and Ferrari join forces to deliver the world's best tabletop DAB radio... with CD and DVD playback too!*

**PRICE** £1,495 **CONTACT** Meridian Audio, Latham Road, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 6YE ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.thef80.com

**D**epending on your viewpoint, the F80 could be viewed as Meridian climbing on the Ferrari bandwagon, or Ferrari knocking out a diffusion product. If you feel that way, go listen to what it can do. See how long you stay negative.

The F80 is an all-in-one tabletop system, with two speakers in the front, a subwoofer in the back, 80 watts of grunt and a lot of DSP underneath. It's clear the Ferrari connection is not mere badge-engineering from the layout of the product. Aside from the display and control panel, all the electronics (or 'engine') sit in a 'floorpan', while the display and speakers are housed inside the F80's 'chassis'.

Ferrari's input was not limited to naming bits of the product, because Ferrari engineers designed the arch shape and sourced the materials for the admirably stiff and acoustically dead body. The five cool Ferrari-colours accent the mineral-loaded composite arch, while the Meridian factor kicks in at the squidgy plastic volume knob at one side. Also, below the top of the arch is the control panel for the CD/DVD player, DAB/AM/FM tuner and the amplifier stage with optional inputs. These use smart buttons that change function depending on what section of the F80 you are using at the time. Fortunately, the display panel is just as smart as the buttons and little yellow-on-black words help to define which button does what. The CD/DVD slot and connections panel all sit at the

base of the player in the floorpan. Given the complexity of what's been squeezed in, it's all exceedingly neatly arranged.

At the back of the arch is a grab handle: although the F80 is not battery powered, it is transportable. It's also surprisingly heavy and has some clever touches. For example, given the likelihood of this system going in the open-plan kitchens of the rich and famous, the small remote control doubles up as a

**“What the Meridian F80 does remarkably well is fill a room with great sound. Surprisingly big rooms, too”**

fridge magnet and has splash-proof buttons. Both the remote and the main unit have the Ferrari prancing horse logo on them, which causes surprising amounts of excitement among onlookers.

Given Meridian's long-lived connection with DVD-Audio, it might surprise some that the F80 skips over this format, going instead for DVD-Video, CD and WMA/MP3-coded CD-Rs. Also, DVD die-hards may find the composite and S-Video outputs to be limiting in this age of digital HDMI connections. But this is missing the point: the F80 is not intended to be a replacement for a hi-fi or home cinema

system, but to be the coolest audio gadget since the iPod – and you can dock one of those as an option, too.

What the F80 does remarkably well is fill a room with great sound. Surprisingly big rooms, too. But it doesn't seem like this big sound is produced at the expense of any clarity: it just sounds big and powerful. That Ferrari chassis does make a lot of sense, making the internals of the F80 almost totally inert. That means no

stray buzzes, no feedback and no resonance, even at high volumes. There aren't other integrated systems that do that, at any price.

Each source performs similarly well, although the S-Video output does automatically limit the performance of the DVD-Video picture. The F80's sound is detailed, gently extended – but not aggressive – in the treble, solid and architectural in the bass and articulate in the midrange. DAB radio comes admirably close to the CD performance, while FM is brisk and clean. Even AM is surprisingly listenable. Compared to good separates, stereo separation is in low gear and the overall sound, though rich, warm and powerful, isn't the most subtle around. The upper bass can sound overblown in smaller rooms, too. But the F80 is good enough to take on many full-size systems and only lose out under close scrutiny, and that in itself is pretty astonishing for an all-in-one tabletop system.

Products pass through a reviewer's hands at a rapid pace. Our experience with the F80 – as with most products – was all too brief. This one left an impression, though. It's one of those products that's a 'keeper'. It's not just the sound, although that is a deeply impressive part of the equation. It's also because it gives you the chance to say, "I own a Ferrari"... and mean it. 🍷

*Alan Sircom*

*See the June 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# DPS 2 & 250

Can you guess the two classic 1990s turntables that inspired the simple, elegant appearance of this Dps deck?

**PRICE** £3,200 (Dps 2: £2,750; Dps 250: £450) **CONTACT** Andy Craig Systems, Iron Latch, Shawfield Lane, Ash, Aldershot GU12 6QZ ☎ 01252 328936 🌐 www.transcendencesystems.com

**D**ps stands for 'Der plattenspieler', the record player, a pretty straightforward name for a very clean-looking, almost necessarily German product. This turntable is built by Willi Bauer in Munich using the finest materials and with meticulous attention to detail. The result is a very fine-looking and even better-sounding plattenspieler.

Bauer's inspiration came from two turntables that he owned as a hi-fi enthusiast in the eighties and nineties. The first was a Pink Triangle Anniversary, which also had an acrylic platter but used suspension to isolate the sensitive bits from the world at large. The second was the Well Tempered turntable. This was where he found the multi-layer plinth idea.

The Dps 2 is the more affordable of two Dps models by virtue of it having the more down to earth power supply. This is still a substantial lump with superb metalwork and lovely switches but it is dwarfed by the three-phase supply on the Dps 3. The Dps 2 on its own costs £2,750 and is often accompanied by tonearms of a similar price such as those made by Graham Engineering, TriPlanar and the beautiful hardwood designs of Frank Schroeder. On this occasion, however, Dps has supplied its own re-working of a very modest tone-arm, the Rega RB250, which can regularly be found on turntables a tenth of the price of the Dps. Bauer selected the RB250 because it's the only Rega arm not to use spring downforce, which he dislikes the sound of. He then changes the counterweight and stub to tungsten alternatives and damps the arm tube internally before replacing its cabling with some of his own selection. So it's not an RB250 in the usual sense and, at £450, it costs somewhat more than a standard Rega arm, too. Bauer also dispenses with the big nut fixing and uses a grub screw in the turntable plinth to hold the arm in place.

The layer-cake design of the dps starts with a fairly thin polymer mat, which damps a slab of black granite that acts as a base and supports the motor and three foamed polymer pucks. The latter can be used to adjust the turntable for level and both damp and isolate the next stratum, which contains six layers of laminated birch ply and damping foil topped with a cork surface. This supports the black acrylic top plate of the turntable. The acrylic layer houses the bearing and the tonearm base, as well as providing a strong aesthetic contrast with the acrylic platter. The main bearing has a tungsten steel shaft, ruby ball and an

engineering plastic sleeve that deliberately introduces a degree of drag through the use of rubber 'O' rings and thick lubricant. This can also be related to the Well Tempered design and is intended to negate any flywheel effect in the platter, giving full control to the motor and peripheral drive belt – an approach that requires considerable precision from the motor and power supply. A record clamp, also in engineering plastic, comes with the deck.

We fitted a van den Hul Condor cartridge to the Dps 250 arm, set it up and spun some vinyl. This is not a bad way to earn a living, it has to be said, especially when the results are as revealing and involving as they are with the

hint at. This means that the nature of each recording is very clear, with one acoustic guitar sounding crisp and zingy while another is smoother and softer. The aforementioned dynamic skills give the music genuine life and vivacity, so bass notes have more grunt and electric guitars more scorch factor – when they're in the right hands, naturally. Rickie Lee Jones' super-slick band on *Flying Cowboys* aren't overshadowed by the one who calls the tune, but you can tell that they are all innately capable of doing so. This is a luxurious recording yet some turntables fail to show you as much. Not the Dps 2: here you know that they spent thousands of dollars to get that sound.

## "The Dps 2/250 delves deep into the soundstage to pull out those elements that other turntables only hint at"

Dps 2. It has a very refined and open sound that produces a wide and deep soundstage with plenty of space for musicians to express themselves. This turntable is also extremely good at the sort of things that valve amp lovers cherish, namely timbre and dynamics. These are both qualities that we associate with acrylic platters but on this occasion they are not partnered by a subtle tendency to ring or exaggerate, which can also be a quality of this material when there is inadequate damping. This is why Bauer chose to use a plastics bearing and the high viscosity oil on the dps, and it seems to do a remarkable job of bringing a calmness and poise to the sound.

The dps is extremely good at picking out fine detail, revealing the nature of low-level notes and delving deep into the soundstage to pull out those elements that other turntables only

On another album with a quiet intro that can at times seem like it's waiting for the action to start, this turntable delivers a sense of tension that was clearly intended by the musicians and is just as interesting as the more lively music that follows. This is due to great level-tracking of micro-dynamics: the ability to deliver subtle differences between the volume levels of different notes. This is probably related to the quality of imaging on offer, which, with a good cut, is precise and palpable with the sort of solidity that one normally associates with digital sources.

The Dps 2 is clearly a very fine turntable and the 250 arm does little to undermine it. A dearer tonearm might add more finesse but for the money this is a stunning combo that looks nearly as good as it sounds. 🎵

Jason Kennedy

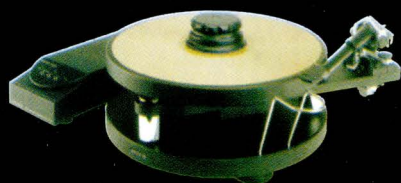




# SME

The way to play vinyl

Model 10A



Model 20/2A



Model 20/12A



Model 30/2A



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



Ask for details of this superb range:  
SME LTD • STEYNING • SUSSEX • BN44 3GY • ENGLAND  
tel: +44 (0)1903 814321 fax: +44 (0)1903 814269  
email sales@sme.ltd.uk or visit our website www.sme.ltd.uk

# HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND

For effective marketing  
of your second-hand kit

please contact  
James Rhodes-Baxter  
☎ 0207 042 4260

james.rhodes-baxter@futurenet.co.uk



# GAMUT CD3

*Gamut proves that dynamics and finesse are not mutually incompatible*

PRICE £3,500 CONTACT Audio Reference, Unit 8 Enterprise Park, Slyfield Industrial Estate, Guildford GU1 1RB ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

**G**amut is one of the most capable audio companies in Europe, manufacturing both electronics and loudspeakers from its base in Denmark and doing so with considerable panache. The CD3 is its most recent source component. In fact, it is its only source component and it's built to match the DI 150 integrated amplifier that blew us away last year.

For the CD3, Gamut's boss, Lars Goller has taken a comprehensive approach to chassis construction and shielding. The chassis is divided into three areas by what is effectively a tunnel of stainless steel. This forms a brace that supports both the disc drive mechanism and digital output board on rubber suspension. This beam also shields the sensitive signal processing and conversion circuits from the power supply with its high currents.

There are two mains transformers that feed the digital and analogue sections of the player in order to minimise any negative influence that one can exert on the other. The idea is to keep high-frequency noise out of the analogue stage to minimise distortion in this final part of the signal chain. The DAC board incorporates low-noise components that are designed to make for a better sounding player with increased stability and reliability over the CD1, which this machine has replaced.

The analogue output stage was 'tuned' using a psychoacoustic rather than purely measured approach when it came to component choices. The selection relied on listening results more than objective analysis, although the actual specs are said to be pretty good. The analogue output is delivered through both phono and

balanced XLR sockets, the latter offering a 4.35V output that doubles the single-ended voltage level and makes it eminently capable of driving long interconnects.

The CD3 is a good size lump with very well-finished casework. Probably for aesthetic reasons, the front panel buttons rely on words rather than symbols, and this makes them a little slow to navigate, while the dimming option extinguishes the illumination leaving no indications at all.

In the listening room this is a slippery customer that has few if any foibles for one to grasp. It doesn't make a song and dance about

**“The more music you play, the more it becomes apparent that you are hearing things that were not previously noticeable”**

any one audio quality in particular. However, its tremendously high resolution gradually makes itself heard. The more music you play, the more it becomes apparent that you are hearing things that were not previously noticeable. On one disc, for instance, it found detail in what previously seemed like moments of silence, unearthing very low-level harmonics and traces of natural reverb. While an inky silence might seem quite natural, it can be the result of opacity in many players.

The CD3 also carves out very solid and real imagery when the music has it to offer. A good live piano recording we rely upon offers up an extremely weighty instrument, sat upon a stage in an auditorium the size of which becomes fully evident as the music unfurls. The

player reveals the charged atmosphere of the concert as effortlessly as it places a female voice in stereo solidity between the speakers.

Gamut has always produced extremely dynamic-sounding components and in this department the CD3 is among the best regardless of price. It does the subtle stuff, the differentiation between notes, and the big stuff – the energy that gives a record life and spirit. This is clear with both fine and powerful music, helping make each piece seem more interesting and musically varied than usual.

We also enjoyed the way it is able to prize open seemingly compressed recordings and

deliver what sounds uncannily like openness in the soundstage. Some enthusiasts might enjoy a more demonstrative sound, with added muscle and nailed-down definition of leading edges but this is a more revealing and less characterful player than most. If you want a hard and fast sound we suggest you find some music of that ilk; old school Metallica, for instance.

This Gamut has superb resolution of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music that is irresistible. Ignore it at your musical peril. ■■■

*Jason Kennedy*

*See the January 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# PIONEER S1-EX

*One of the best kept secrets in high-end hi-fi finally comes out into the open*

PRICE £4,800 per stereo pair CONTACT Pioneer GB Limited, Pioneer House, Hollybush Hill, Stoke Poges SL2 4QP ☎ 01753 789789 🌐 www.pioneer.co.uk

This substantial and technologically advanced loudspeaker first appeared last year, yet because of its unlikely brand – and Pioneer is hardly best known in the UK for ‘serious’ loudspeakers – it effectively disappeared soon after it had been launched. It’s very difficult to sell Japanese speakers to UK dealers, presumably because there’s so much competition and brands this big have only limited track records in the market. The only notable exception was Yamaha’s NS1000 but that was decades ago.

**“This level of sophistication coming from a regular audiophile loudspeaker brand would cost nearly double”**

This Pioneer represents a lot of speaker for the money. On paper at least, this level of sophistication coming from a regular audiophile loudspeaker brand would cost nearly double what’s being asked here. The S1-EX is big: it stands 128cm high and weighs a disturbing 60kg on its adjustable spiked outrigger feet. Try finding anything of that scale for this sort of money from the regular high-end specialists. It won’t be easy.

It’s not just about bulk, though. Pioneer has a strong background in loudspeakers. It started making them in 1937 and got into the ‘pro’-audio market with its TAD (Technical Audio Devices) brand in the mid-1970s. TAD’s chief engineer, Andrew Jones, presumably inspired by his days at KEF, created a coaxial midrange/treble drive unit incorporating a beryllium tweeter for the TAD M1 speaker that was launched in the USA but, unfortunately, never came to these shores. The S1-EX features a version of that drive unit, with a beryllium dome tweeter situated in the centre of a magnesium midrange cone. This coaxial unit is joined by a pair of bass drivers, which also use TAD technology and have a one-piece cone and dust cap made out of an Aramid sandwich structure.

TAD and other pro-audio companies have used beryllium tweeters for some time but the price of this material has largely kept it out of the domestic sphere. Things are now changing and the Pioneer EX series includes the most affordable examples yet produced. This is also the only example of a concentric or coaxial beryllium tweeter and metal cone driver combination, the intention of which is to

create a near point source, which is regarded as the ideal for any loudspeaker.

The bass driver is unusual in that it has a one-piece cone and dust cap, which makes it inherently stiffer. And, with its large 65mm voice coil, it delivers greater power handling capabilities. It’s a popular feature in pro-audio drive units, which need to be able to play long and loud in the studio environment.

The front baffle of this leaning tower of sound is carved from 80mm thick MDF, the shape being a three-metre-radius curve that’s

designed to time align the drive units for a listener sitting the same distance away. Given that these also form the front left and right channels in Pioneer’s EX multichannel speaker system, you’d need a big room to sit that far from each of the channels. Fortunately we only have to consider the one pair here, so we don’t need a room that’s at least six metres square.

The S1-EX encourages placement rather closer to room boundaries than expected given its size. The instructions suggest 20cm to the rear wall and 50cm to the side, providing an arrangement that worked well in our room and didn’t result in the bass boom that other large speakers induce under such circumstances.

A big speaker like this makes a large-scale sound. Just having the tweeter that far off the ground means that images are instantly more real, and the sound doesn’t stop there but carries on, up and out. When you get the placement right the speakers can also disappear sonically to a degree that is very rare. Those heavyweight cabinets must be extremely stiff because with some recordings you can close your eyes and be unable to point them out: the soundstage is entirely seamless from side to side.

Big can also mean fulsome bass but the S1-EX has a tight, well-damped bottom end that moves as swiftly as the rest of the range and makes for highly articulate low notes from all manner of instruments. There’s good extension to be had when you hook up a decent power amplifier and control does not seem to be an issue; when an explosive moment comes along the lack of overhang means that the bass kicks in with power and

gusto. Dynamic range is not something that one usually associates with speakers but this one has more potential than most to differentiate the quiet from the loud.

This speaker does a fine job of getting out of the way of the music, making it very hard to discuss it in review terms without getting carried away with the qualities of the material being played. Jose Gonzales’ rather crudely recorded but excellent album *Veneris* is a simple guitar and voice affair but in this company all its emotional power becomes apparent: you hear right through the recording process into the heart of the singer. This might sound rather ‘touchy feely’ but it is the nub of the matter: it’s the communication that we are listening for.

Although the driver technology in this speaker is derived from TAD, the designers are based at Pioneer in France and are to be applauded for getting this ambitious project together. All in all, the S1-EX it is a stunning success – and very competitively priced, too. The only reason that this speaker has slipped beneath the radar is the badge; don’t let audiophile snobbery stand between you and a genuine high-end bargain. ■

*Jason Kennedy*





TOM WAS AMAZED BY THE  
TUCANA'S VICE LIKE GRIP AND  
PRECISE CONTROL OF HIS  
LOUDSPEAKERS



INNOVATORS IN HI-FI TECHNOLOGY : LEEMA ACOUSTICS  
OFFER MUSIC LOVERS LIKE TOM OUTSTANDING  
TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

ONLY THROUGH HEARING WILL YOU TRULY BELIEVE.

TO LOCATE YOUR NEAREST DEALER

CALL LEEMA ACOUSTICS ON 01938 811900

OR LOG ON TO [WWW.LEEMA-ACOUSTICS.COM/TOM](http://WWW.LEEMA-ACOUSTICS.COM/TOM)



To locate your nearest dealer  
Visit: [www.leema-acoustics.com/tom](http://www.leema-acoustics.com/tom)  
Phone: +44 (0)1938 811900  
Email: [info@leema-acoustics.com](mailto:info@leema-acoustics.com)

BEAUTIFULLY ENGINEERED SOUND



# MUSICAL FIDELITY A1008

*One amp, two boxes, three connecting cables – this powerhouse is MF's muscular mainstay*

PRICE £2,999 CONTACT Musical Fidelity, 24/26 Fulton Road, Wembley HA9 0TF ☎ 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

**T**hose who remember the classic Musical Fidelity A1000 integrated amplifier will feel quite at home with the new A1008. Although this one's silver, not black, and it delivers hundreds rather than tens of watts, the new amp has a lot in common with its ancestors. It also has a lot in common with the huge and current kW 550 amp.

Musical Fidelity claims that – if you're using loudspeakers of 89dB sensitivity or higher – the A1008 and its bigger kW 500 brother are indistinguishable from one another. The bigger, more expensive amp will have the edge when played through less efficient speakers because of its greater headroom, but that's about it.

This amp absolutely dominates any table it rests upon and the external power supply, although narrower, is no less chunky. Even the connections between the two boxes are OTT, with two huge Speakon-connected cables for the left and right power amps and a slightly smaller XLR-type connector for the preamp and DAC feed.

The power amp stage comprises two monoblocks in the same case, capable of delivering 250 watts into eight ohms and a healthy 400 watts into four, running in Class AB. That alone sets it apart from most integrateds, but truly only scratches the surface of the A1008. It's a kitchen-sink approach. Inside, there's a fine, built-in 24-bit/192kHz Delta-Sigma DAC, not too dissimilar to the company's own X-DACv8. There's also a valve buffer stage in the preamp, reminiscent of the company's popular X-10D buffer. The circuit, featuring ECC88 double triode valves, effectively irons out any inconsistencies

between the output of the source component and the input of the amplifier. Alongside the normal line-level inputs, it sports not only a MM/MC switchable phono stage (now sadly a very rare thing in new amps) but also a USB socket, allowing the computer to join forces with the hi-fi electronics without compromising the sound through a PC sound card.

In the A1008, Musical Fidelity has managed to combine the grunt of a 250-watt power beast with the soft and gentle sweetness of a sensitive, 25-watt Class A flower. Hook the

similar, in all the right ways. Both deliver a performance that is closely comparable to the line stages: rich and detailed – but not hyper-detailed or etched-sounding – and effortless. Of the two, the DAC is more important these days, especially with that USB port, which does wonders for the sound from a PC, raising even a humble stock soundcard to the performance of the best in computer audio.

This amp doesn't shout its strengths at you; you just realise that you are listening further into the mix and you can understand an awful

**“Sounds project into the room with terrific aplomb and the nature of those sounds is extraordinarily easy to listen to”**

amp to the sort of efficient speakers that Musical Fidelity suggests in its literature and you get near-infinite headroom and dynamic range, together with loudspeakers seeming to love the chance of showing what they can do under ideal conditions.

This means you tend to use the volume control as a dynamic range adjustment, not a loudness setting. You'll quickly find you have no need to prove yourself in the volume stakes, and instead set the control according to what sounds dynamically correct. It's not a set-it-and-forget-it volume control, though, because the dynamic headroom varies from recording to recording.

Having scratched the surface, we now still have the DAC and the phono stage to work through. In fact, these sound remarkably

lot more of what's going on in the inner structure of the music. The midband is particularly fine: sounds project into the room with terrific aplomb and the nature of those sounds is extraordinarily easy to listen to. The words 'listener' and 'fatigue' simply do not exist side by side when listening to the A1008. Only a slight disassociation between the bass and the rest of the mix distinguishes this amp from the cost-no-object superstars... and you won't find any of those on the wallet-friendly side of £3k.

Apart from it not fitting on most equipment tables, the A1008 is a one-size-fits-all design. In many cases, it will make your speakers sound better, and it's great value because of that. 🍷

*Alan Sircom*

*See the July 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*









# NORDOST ODIN

*Nordost's new flagship cables take audio connections to a higher, more heavenly plane*

**PRICE** Interconnects: £10,000 per 1m pair; Speaker Cable: £12,500 per 1m pair **CONTACT** Activ Distribution, Unit 16, Plantagenet House, Kingsclere Park, Kingsclere RG20 4SW ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.nordost.co.uk

**W**hen it comes to picking the world's best audio cables, many critics around the globe have Nordost's Valhalla in first place. But that's now set to change, as Nordost has itself surpassed Valhalla with a new and even more costly flagship cable range called Odin.

Currently consisting of a speaker cable and a pair of analogue interconnects, Odin looks superficially similar to Valhalla and uses variations of the same technologies. A key feature of Valhalla is the helically wound filament of Teflon-like material that is wrapped around the conductor before an overall coat of the same material is extruded around the outside. This Micro Mono-Filament, as Nordost calls it, holds the cable away from the insulation over roughly 80 per cent of its length, reducing capacitance and offering what Nordost describes as the nearest approach to wrapping the conductor in air.

The Odin speaker cable uses two spirally wound Micro Mono-Filaments, which are wound around each other before being wrapped around the conductor. This further reduces capacitance and improves behavioural consistency, particularly where the cable has to go around a corner. The terminations are rhodium-plated versions of the familiar, hollow-pin 4mm plug.

The Odin interconnect is constructed as a tubular cable, but is based on similar principles. It is available with single-ended and balanced connections using WBT Nextgen RCA phono plugs or Furutech XLRs, depending on type. Both were supplied for this test, along with a sample of the speaker cable.

The main technical imperative with Odin is to maximise the 'speed' of the cable, expressed in Nordost's literature as the percentage of light speed at which signals are transmitted in a vacuum. In many data cables, for example, transmission velocities are typically in the 42 to 72 per cent range. Speed is related to cable capacitance, and Odin claims a transmission speed of 90 per cent and 98 per cent for the interconnect and speaker cables respectively.

In view of the preceding, if you are looking for a fairly subtle improvement from Odin over Valhalla you'll be quite wrong. The differences are massive. We confirmed this with a visiting rookie listener who had never heard cables like Odin before, still less a system like the one used as a host for this test (Esoteric, Krell and Focal). She immediately and correctly identified the benefits of Odin, despite her

initial scepticism about the costs of the cables and the system. It's expensive, but there is no doubt that it really works, and the benefits are exactly where you'd expect to find them. By comparison with Odin, even highly respected high-end cables sound woolly and shapeless, with notably lower levels of detail and articulation. And we repeat, the differences are not subtle, but like night and day.

Odin's sound is similar to Valhalla in many ways, but with some significant changes. There has been some criticism of Valhalla's lightweight tonality, for example, though this may have

**“If you are looking for a fairly subtle improvement from Odin you'll be quite wrong. The differences are massive”**

more to do with expectations than reality – it's a relatively thin ribbon cable, and the listener may expect to hear a lightweight balance. But Odin redresses the problem, real or imagined, with greater weight and a broader tonal range. Odin, in interconnect and speaker cable form – and, on balance, the latter probably has a greater influence on the sound compared to its rivals than even the interconnect – is more subtle and expressive than Valhalla. In fact, it is difficult to get over just how much better Odin is than Valhalla, and how much of this superiority is retained even in systems that are ostensibly not good enough for a cable this costly.

Odin is so improbably, gob-smackingly expensive, you have to ask whether its price bears any relationship to manufacturing costs, or whether it's some obscene wind-up – just a ruse for making money? That's a hard question to answer with any degree of certainty. The

insides of high-end cable manufacturers, of whom there are only a few serious examples around the globe, are not usually places that welcome visitors; partly because of commercial confidentiality and partly, in Nordost's case, because it makes cables for the aerospace, medical and computer industries, which adds whole new layers of commercial sensitivity. But let's put the question another way. If you were to set out to build something very mundane – an iPod, let's say – how much do you think it would cost? If you could only sell a relatively small quantity, or if the manufacturing process

could only cope with producing small numbers, you might suddenly find that the unit cost would escalate out of all proportion.

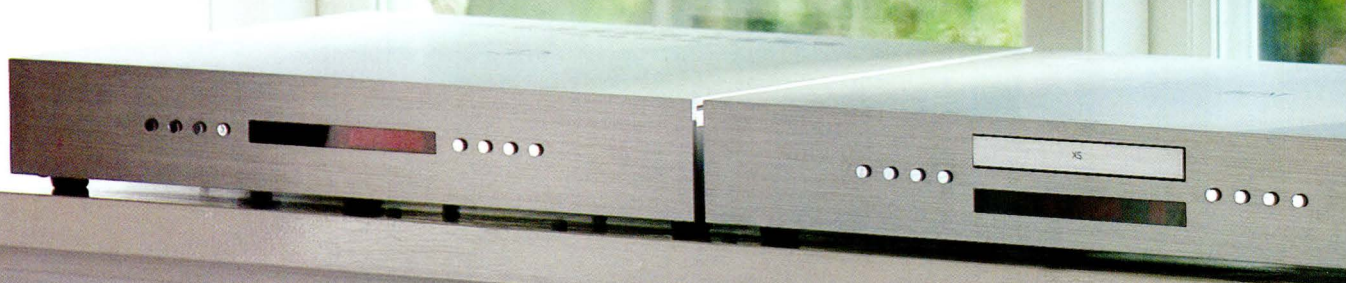
This is the situation with Odin. Not many people would require a cable of this complexity, so there will always be a premium to pay. Worse still, the nature of the manufacturing process is such that the stuff can only be produced at an incredibly slow rate, and with potentially ruinous levels of wastage. The unfortunate, unpalatable fact is that Odin is probably worth every penny in pure manufacturing terms. Would it pay its way in your system? Well, it all depends on your system, and your disposable income. But Odin is certainly no plot to part you from your money. Very few, after all, have this kind of discretionary income. The question arises whether it is the best cable you can buy. Well if it isn't, it's hard to imagine offhand what is. 🍷

*Alvin Gold*





Award winning musical sound  
Lifetime warranty  
Sexy design



## The Densen B-150 Integrated Amp

The new reference integrated amplifier from Densen is perhaps the most advanced integrated amp on the market. It is filled with advanced solutions, which all share the goal of giving you even more musicality and flexibility. The B-150 is basically a scaled down version of the B-250 and B-350 (Densen's reference pre/power combo) in one box with all the high end ingredients such as relay driven volume control, zero feedback technology, custom-made components and much more.

However, there is much more to a perfect product than just superior sound quality. It is our intention to make complete products. Not just products that are sonically superior, but complete like a perfect circle. As you learn about Densen, you'll discover that we go the extra mile in every aspect: design, user-friendliness, quality, warranty, upgradeability, production methods and of course sound quality. But you really won't have a clue about it all until you get to hear and see what we're talking about in real life. Then you will know what we mean when we say Air-Guitar factor (say what? check our website). There is one Air-Guitar / Air-Baton included with every Densen product.

Discover why we say:

LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BORING HI-FI



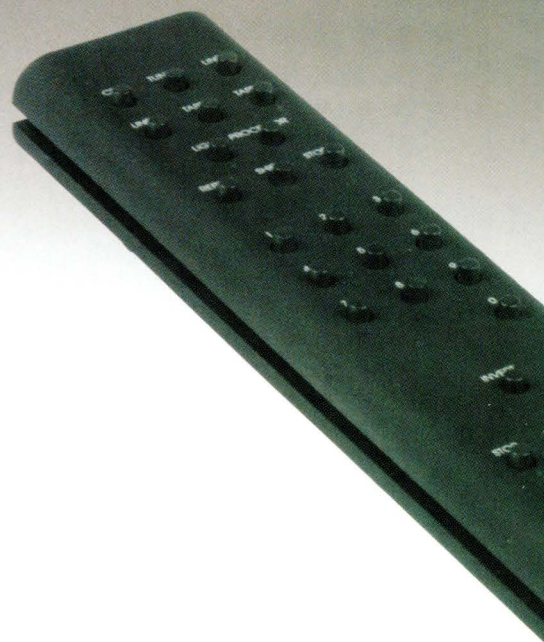
Best Integrated Amp  
Portugal 2006

### Authorised dealers:

Acoustic Arts, Bedfordshire, Tel. 01923 245250 - Adventures in Hi-Fi Ltd., Chester, Tel. 01942 234202 - The Audio Room, Hedon, Tel. 01482 891375 - Adams & Jarrett, East Sussex, Tel. 01424 437165 - Divine Audio, Leicestershire, Tel. 01858 432999 - Glasgow Audio, Glasgow, Tel. 01413 324707 - Hi-Fi Studios, Doncaster, Tel. 01302 725550 - Holburn Hi-Fi, Aberdeen, Tel. 01224 585713 - New Audio Frontiers, Loughborough, Tel. 01509 264002 - Phonography, Ringwood, Tel. 01425 461230 - Practical Hi-Fi, Lancaster, Tel. 01524 39657 - Practical Hi-Fi, Manchester, Tel. 01618 398869 - Practical Hi-Fi, Preston, Tel. 01772 883958 - Practical Hi-Fi, Warrington, Tel. 01925 632179 - R.J.F., Cornwall, Tel. 01209 710777 - Sound Seduction, Sevenoaks, Tel. 01732 456573 - VideoTech, Huddersfield, Tel. 01484 516670

Densen Audio Technologies - Phone: (+45) 75 18 12 14 - E-mail: mail@densen.dk

w w w . d e n s e n . c o m





# CLASSÉ CP-700 & CA-M400

*Classé brings curves to the world of consummate power and control*

**PRICE** £13,350 (CP-700: £5,450; CA-M400: £7,900 per stereo pair) **CONTACT** B&W Group, Dale Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 2BH ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.classaudio.com

**T**hese, believe it or not, are not the most ambitious amps in the Classé catalogue. That category is occupied by the Omega range, but these are the biggest of the Delta series models. As you might expect, they are heavy and powerful. The CA-M400 monoblocks are specified at 400 watts into eight ohms and weigh in at a disconcerting 37 kilos. Even the CP-700 preamp is a lump that deserves respect and comes with a separate power supply.

The styling is by Morton Warren of B&W 800 series fame, while the electronics are from one of Canada's most respected names, a brand that produces CD players whose prices begin at around two grand and whose top models run to over ten times that.

The Delta series casework is not just designed for looks: it also attempts to combat resonance by combining steel and aluminium atop large, energy-damping feet. Another feature of the range is the touch screen panel that gives access to a broad array of facilities: input naming; input gain setting, including unity gain for use in home cinema set-ups; and even altering the rate at which the volume

changes as you turn the large control knob. Inevitably the screen is less tactile than buttons but it doesn't take long to master, and if it's buttons you want there's a good selection on the chunky remote handset.

A fully balanced design, the CP-700 has four single-ended and two balanced inputs alongside outputs in the same formats, ports for custom

**“A beautifully built and supremely flexible preamp combined with a pair of awesome power amps – a classy trio indeed”**

install set-ups, and DC triggers to activate connected power amps. The monoblocks are equally well specified, with both balanced and single-ended inputs and no less than three varieties of transistor in an attempt to take advantage of the strengths of each. There are J-FETs at the input, MOSFET drivers and bi-polar output devices: a real cocktail that nonetheless manages to pull in the same direction and create a precise and coherent sound.

This pre/power amp combination seem remarkably well matched. The CP-700 is, if anything, slightly on the soft and smooth side while the CA-M400s err toward forwardness. The result is a powerful and well-balanced sound that resolves a mountain of detail and does so without sounding heavy-handed or, heaven forfend, slow. With carefully selected

cables – van den Hul's slightly lean Orchid interconnect and Townshend's calm Isolda DCT seemed to do the trick – the Classé pairing delivers a fast and yet refined soundstage where the notes stop and start precisely when they should. This is quite an achievement for a 400-watt amplifier, a breed that was once discounted by those seeking speed and dynamics; one might wonder if the hybrid of amplification devices is the key. It also does what a lot of fast and dynamic systems don't: it images, delivering deep and wide soundstages that recreate the ambience of live performances with considerable realism, if you are able to play the system at the right level.

Another contribution to the realism of such music is, of course, the bass, which has more girth than most thanks to the wattage on tap and the speed and dexterity with which it is manipulated. You get real air movement from timpani and even concrete floors can be provoked into resonance if the speakers are up to the job. We used B&W 802D speakers for the most part, but also tried this amp combo with the KEF Muons. This, it turns out, was a pretty perfect pairing.

This Classé combo lets you hear into the mix and appreciate all the elements that contribute to the end result. This degree of analysis could get in the way of the musical flow were it not accompanied by fluency and rhythmic solidity. Fortunately it is, so you hear the music before the detail, if you catch our drift.

So, to sum up... this is a beautifully built and supremely flexible stereo preamp combined with a pair of awesome yet sophisticated power amps at a very competitive price – a classy trio indeed. 🌟

*Jason Kennedy*

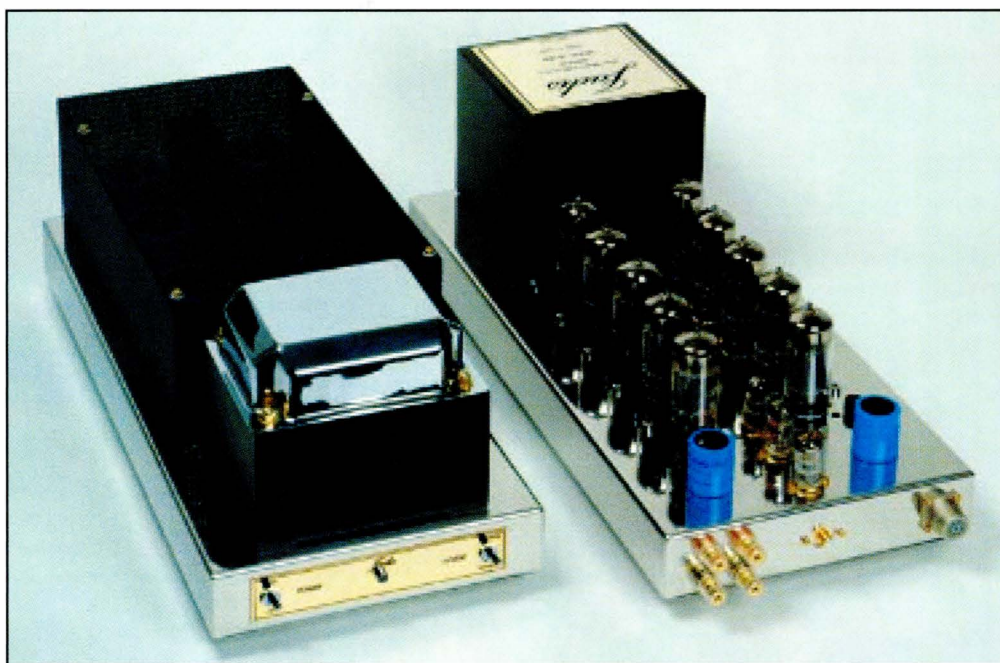
*See the May 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*





# PINEWOOD MUSIC

Pinewood Music is the partnership of Brian Rivas and Alison Holmes. Between us we have been handling the very finest in two-channel systems for 20 years. Whatever your high end aspirations, we are here to help you make the right choice and to care for your purchase in the years to come.



*One channel of the Jadis JA-200*

In continuous production for a quarter of a century, the Jadis JA-200 remains the epitome of valve amplification and, like all Jadis designs, radiates an enduring timelessness, a freshness and vitality that never fade. Pinewood Music is the only dealer in the country with JA-200s, and proudly offers you a rare opportunity to hear these wonderful creations.

**KRELL, WILSON AUDIO, SONUS FABER, MARTIN LOGAN, JADIS,  
AUDIO RESEARCH, COPLAND, DARTZEEL, MIMETISM,  
TRANSPARENT, YTER, FINITE ELEMENTE**

## The Pinewood Music Company

Telephone: 01460 54322 Mobile: 07860 351113 e-mail: [brianriv@mac.com](mailto:brianriv@mac.com)



STAX

# Dealer Directory





# 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. 2007 is proving to be a truly remarkable year, a classic one in fact for witnessing the introduction of several groundbreaking products. Certain of these are responsible for providing significantly higher levels of faithfulness in sound reproduction which clearly exceeded all of our expectations. More on these later.

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

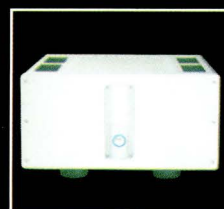
[www.kjwestone.com](http://www.kjwestone.com)



AUDITOR ELIPSA



PURITY COMPARE



EVOLUTION 302



# Preview - take five

## **audio research** 1. Audio Research Reference 7 CD player... "a record player for the digital age"

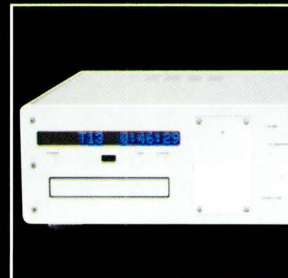
This press comment aptly sums up our thoughts on this wonderful CD player. For years now we have witnessed steady progress being made in improving digital recording techniques, we have also enjoyed the benefits achieved technologically in the replay. Sadly, however, there has still existed a sense that 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!



## 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!



## 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!



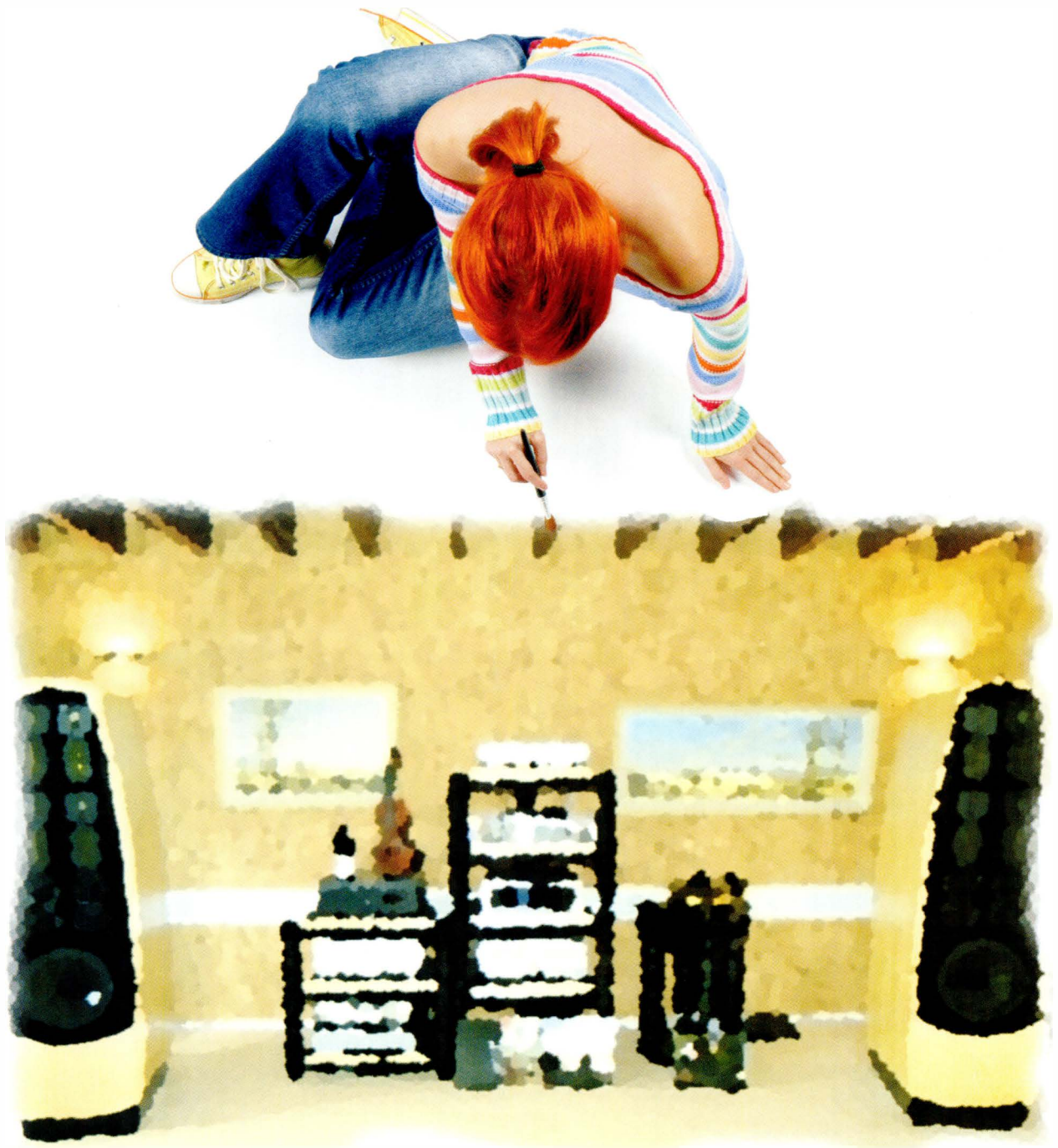
*Leaders in the worlds finest high-fidelity*

26 New Cavendish Street London W1G 8TY T: 020 7486 8262/3 F: 020 7487 3452

42 Cowgate Peterborough PE1 1NA T: 01733 341 755 F: 01733 358 141

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





In our mind we all paint  
a picture of that perfect  
Hi-Fi or AV system...

Sounds of Music *will bring that picture to life for you!*



# Sounds of Music

**expert interior designers of music & video**

*At SOM we won't fool you with:*

'Best thing since sliced bread'  
'Blows everything away'  
'Nothing else comes near'

However, we do have some of the worlds very best hi-fi products on dem in 8 demonstration rooms.



We won't tell you what to buy but we will guide you through the maze to make sure you make the right choice for your particular situation.

We have a huge range of loudspeakers from the likes of QUAD (still one of the best speakers of all time) to Wilson, Kharma, Lumley, Ascendo, Rockport etc, some of the real contenders at the very top of the market. We have amplifiers from Avi to Ypsilon, two extremes and two world class products to rival the very best. We have cd players, cables, turntables, stands and of course, the Stratosphere so don't get fooled -- come and enjoy your ride through the best to arrive at the best choice for your personal application.

*At SOM we offer you 8 key things:*

- 1) A unique extendable one months home trial system (we will work with you for as long as it takes).
- 2) Superb demonstrations in 8 rooms.
- 3) Free delivery anywhere.
- 4) Free installation in the UK for any systems above £5K.
- 5) Expert room tuning advice.  
(Top equipment in a poor room is absolutely useless.)
- 6) Free parking at the door.
- 7) 75% buyback upgrade scheme.
- 8) Great ex-dem and S/H bargains.



So - do you really want to struggle with wrong choices and unretrievable purchases or do you want to be assured of the very best choice personally for you. SOM gives you the best in any situation.



**Call us today!**



*8 Demo suites allow you to hear and compare the best products from around the world:*

Acapella, Acoustic Arts, Acoustic Solid, Acoustic Zen, Aesthetix, Ascendo, Audio Analogue, Aurius, Atacama, Art Loudspeakers, ATC, Audience, Audio Physic, Audio Research, Avantgarde, AVI, Ayon, BAT, Base, Basis, Bel Canto, Boulder, Burmester, Clearaudio, CAT, Coda, Copulare, Copland, Dartzeel, DCS, Dreamvision, Dynamic Precision, Echo Busters, Edgar, Epos, Furutech, Gamut, Graaf, Graham Slee, Halcro, Hansen Audio, Harbeth, Hovland, Hyperion, JAS Audio, JM Lab, Koetsu, Kharma, Krell, LAT, Lavardin, Lexicon, LSA, Lumley, Lyra, MIT, Marantz, Martin Logan, Mastersound, MBL, Merlin, Michell, Monopulse, Music First, Music Tools, Nola, Nordost, NuForce, Opera, Ortofon, Parasound, Phonosophie, Prima Luna, Primare, QUAD, REL, Rockport, Sennheiser, Sequerra, Shanling, Shun Mook, SME, Sound Lab, Sonus Faber, Spondor, Stands Unique, Sumiko, T+A, Theta Digital, Tom Evans, Townshend, Transfiguration, Transparent, Trichord, Unison Research, Usher, Vitus, Vincent/TAC, Vivadi, Vivid, VTL, Vutech, Wadia, Waterfall, Wavac, Wilson Audio, Ypsilon and many more...



**Tel: 01435 865 212**  
Fax: 01435 865 213  
[www.sounds-of-music.co.uk](http://www.sounds-of-music.co.uk)

**Sounds of Music**  
Firgrove Business Park, Firgrove Road, Cross in hand, Nr Heathfield, East Sussex, TN21 0QL.  
By appointment only please.



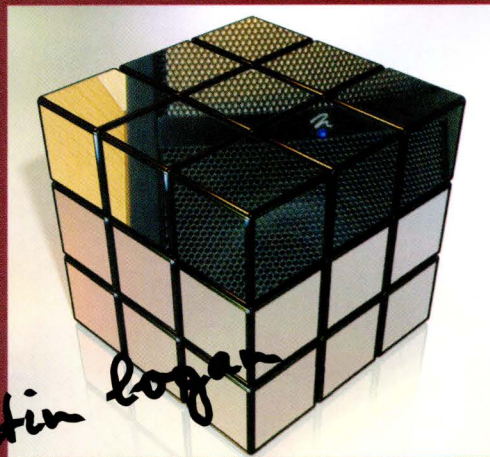
# Signature brands from Guildford Audio



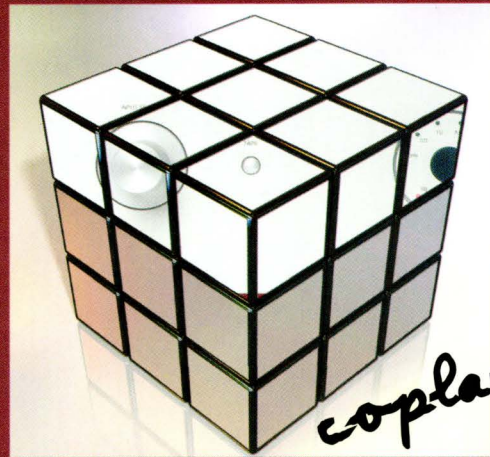
*dartzeel*



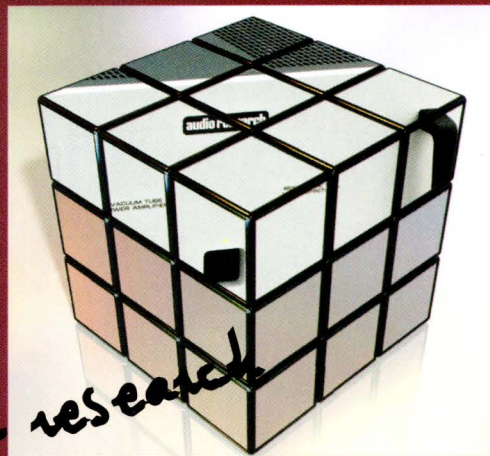
*sonus faber*



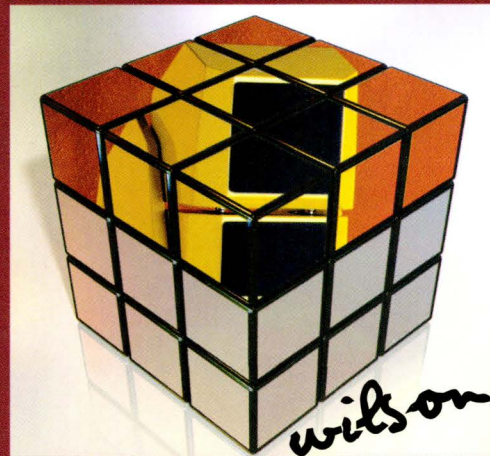
*martin logan*



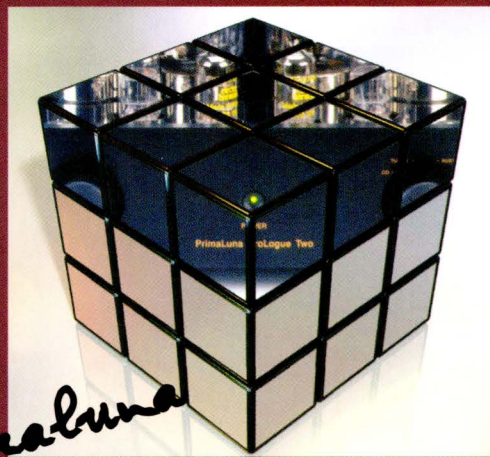
*copland*



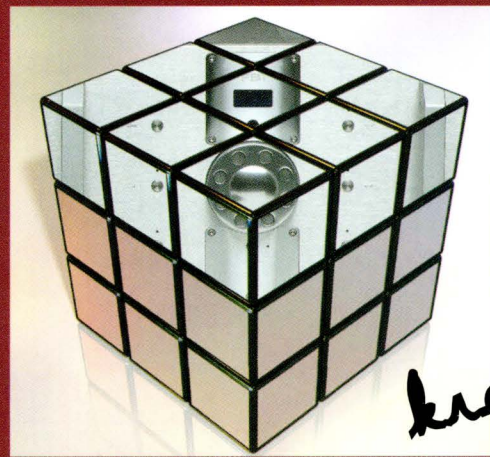
*audio research*



*wilson audio*



*primaluna*



*krell*



# OXFORD AUDIO CONSULTANTS



dartZeel



prima luna



copland



sonus faber



audio research



krell

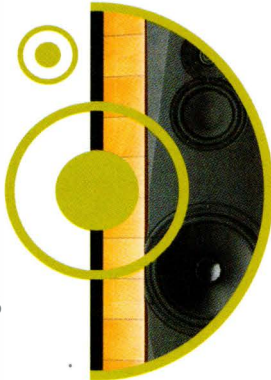


martin logan



wilson audio

delivers music to your ears like only the very finest italian loudspeakers can.



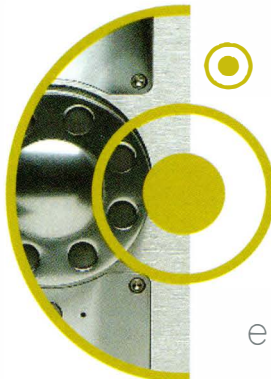
these products are workhorses, not museum pieces.



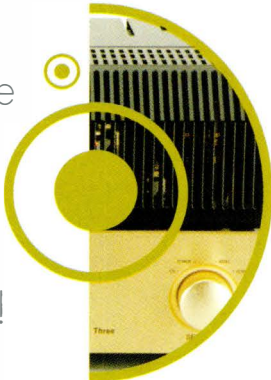
you'll rediscover music which you already thought you knew so well.



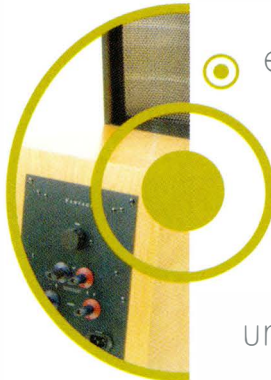
the premier manufacturer of high-end audio and home cinema equipment.



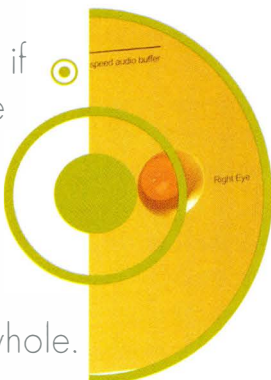
affordable valve products that really deliver the goods!



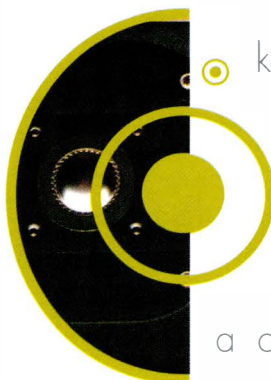
enjoy a rich musical and cinematic experience at an unrivaled price.



the true secret, if any, lies in the result which is brought about by the interaction of the whole.



known for their unyielding dynamics, precise imaging, and pinpoint accuracy.



## Oxford Audio Consultants

Cantay House, Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1JD  
Tel: 01865 790 879, Fax: 01865 791 665  
info@oxfordaudio.co.uk, www.oxfordaudio.co.uk

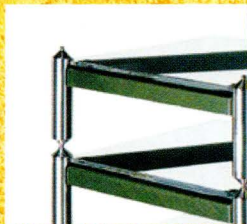


# Timeless collection



Zingali

Grand Prix Audio



Ayre



Simon Yorke



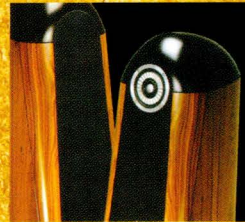
Esoteric



Pathos



Thiel



Call Audio Salon on 0845 4000 400 or visit [www.audiosalon.co.uk](http://www.audiosalon.co.uk) to find out more.

AUDIO  
Salon



# marantz®

## LEGENDARY

S E R I E S



On Demonstration at

# UNILET SOUND & VISION

35 High Street, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 4BY

Tel: 020 8942 9567

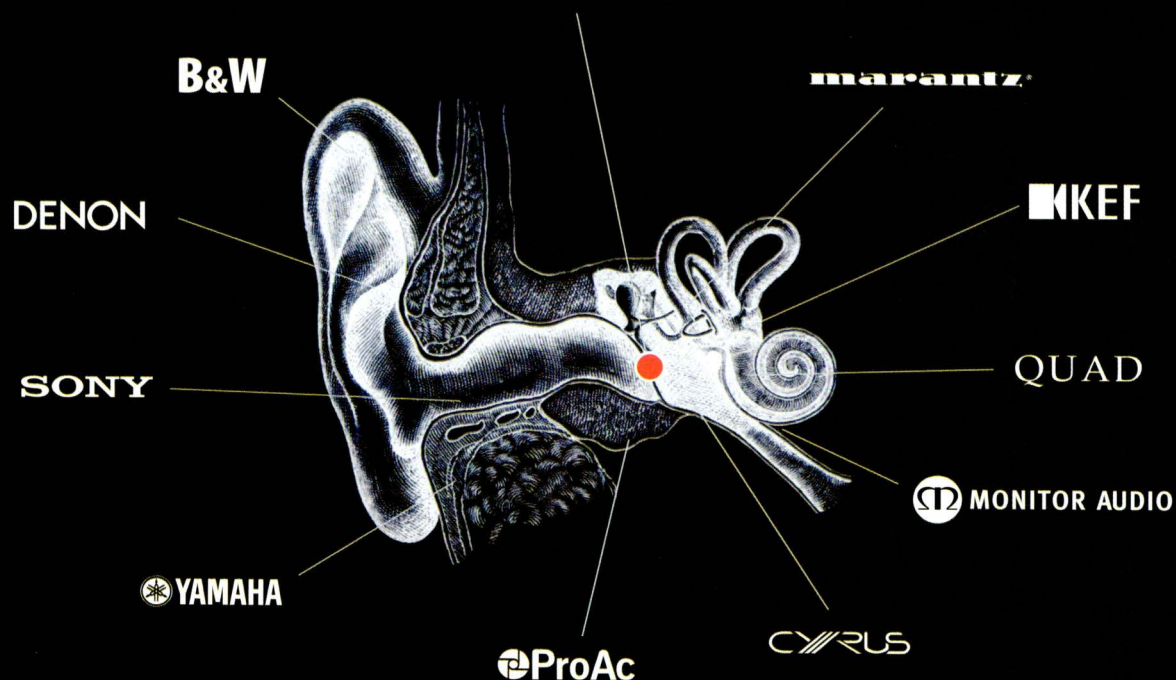
[www.unilet.net](http://www.unilet.net)





# When was the last time you heard something amazing

## Practical Hi-Fi



## Practical Hi-Fi

Obsessive about hi-fi.

### BLACKPOOL

81 Whitegate Drive, FY3 9DA  
Tel: 01253 300599  
Opening Hours: 9.30-17.30 Mon - Sat

### BOLTON

33-35 Knowsley Street, BL1 2AS  
Tel: 01204 395789  
Opening Hours: 9.30-17.30 Mon - Sat

### LANCASTER

84 Penny Street, LA1 1XN  
Tel: 01524 39657  
Opening Hours: 9.30-17.30 Mon - Sat

### MANCHESTER

65 Bridge Street, M3 3BQ  
Tel: 0161 839 8869  
Opening Hours: 9.30-17.30 Mon - Sat  
Please call for Sunday opening times

### PRESTON

43 Friargate, PR1 2AT  
Tel: 01772 883958  
Opening Hours: 9.30-17.30 Mon - Sat

### WARRINGTON

88 Bridge Street, WA1 2RF  
Tel: 01925 632179  
Opening Hours: 9.30-17.30 Mon - Sat



[www.practicalhi-fi.net](http://www.practicalhi-fi.net)



# SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

CUSTOM INSTALLATION CENTRES



## a vision for every home

Bedford ■	Chris 01234 272779
Bristol ■	Mike 0117 974 3727
Bromley ■	James 020 8290 1988
Cheltenham ■	Nick 01242 241171
Edinburgh ■	John 0131 229 7267
Epsom ■	Owen 01372 720720
Guildford ■	Ben 01483 536666
Holborn ■	Andy 020 7837 7540
Kingston ■	Luke 020 8547 0717
Leeds ■	Richard 0113 245 2775
Maidstone ■	Philip 01622 686366
Manchester ■	Andy 0161 831 7969
Oxford ■	Alan 01865 241773
Poole ■	Chris 01202 671677
Reading ■	Richard 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks ■	Daniel 01732 459555
Sheffield ■	Andrew 0114 255 5861
Southgate ■	Andy 020 8886 2777
Staines ■	Phil 01784 460777
Tunbridge Wells ■	Rob 01892 531543
Watford ■	James 01923 213533
Yeovil ■	Mark 01935 700078

- **Bespoke design and custom installation**
- **Home cinema and multi-room music systems from around £5k to £50k plus**
- **Project management**



Sevenoaks custom installation team

Sevenoaks custom installation centres create bespoke home entertainment systems of the highest quality that complement your home and lifestyle. Whether you are looking for home cinema, quality hi-fi or multi-room, Sevenoaks custom installation centres provide solutions that meet your exact needs and budget, transforming your home and increasing both your viewing and listening pleasure.

### Multi-room systems

A multi-room system puts all your home cinema and/or hi-fi equipment in one place and gives you total control at the touch of a button. Put screens and speakers in as many rooms as you want and control what you listen to or watch from one central hub. With hard-disk technology, you can store your entire DVD and CD collections in one place and play different films

or music tracks in different rooms at the same time.

Sevenoaks custom installation staff are experienced at installing both simple and complex multi-room systems, and ensuring they integrate with the look and feel of your home as well as being fully functional and easy to operate.

### How it works

Sevenoaks custom installation centres take in everything from initial site visits, designing and planning your system, project management through to liaising with builders and architects and installation, ensuring you get the most from your home entertainment system.

**With centres nationwide and over 30 years of experience, Sevenoaks custom installation centres create systems that will transform your life.**



# PREMIUM

The Superfi Premium collection draws together the top hi-fi and home cinema brands with our expert demonstration and installation services. The world's finest separates and systems – those that deliver performance without compromise – are ready for you to audition in a relaxed, friendly environment. We'll listen to your desires and guide you to the right solution.

THE FINEST AUDIO VISUAL COMPONENTS  
AVAILABLE IN-STORE TODAY  
VISIT A SUPERFI DEMONSTRATION  
ROOM TO DISCOVER MORE

# Superfi

**HI-FI SYSTEM**  
**LINN CLASSIK MUSIC**

WAS £1275  
SAVE: £595

**£679.95**

- CD, tuner and amplifier in one elegant solution
- Sophisticated features and performance, yet simple to operate
- Uncompromised sound quality from the audiophile experts
- Available online or from our Manchester shop



**FLOOR STANDING SPEAKERS**  
**WHARFEDALE EVOLUTION 2-30**

**£299.95**

- Outstanding real-wood finish in either cherry or maple
- Based on the 5-star-rated Evolution-30s
- 2 x Kevlar drivers for impressive, distortion-free bass extension
- Improved high-resolution tweeter delivers brilliant detail from all sources
- 5.1 package also available



Also available: Evo2-Centre  
£119.95 (Was £249.95, Save £130)

**CD PLAYER**  
**ROKSAN KANDY MK3**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★ MARCH 2007  
HI-FI CHOICE ★★★★★ ISSUE 259

- High end DACs, low-noise toroidal transformers with multiple independent power supply rails, internally isolated transport
- Black or silver

**£649.95**

"ITS MUSICAL EXPRESSION, TRANSPARENCY AND ALL-ROUND VIRTUES EARN IT A BEST BUY"  
HI-FI CHOICE




**SPEAKERS**  
**WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 9.1 ANNIVERSARY**

Individually numbered with certificate of authenticity  
Limited edition, real-wood walnut finish

**£179.95**

"STUNNING VALUE"

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2005



**AMPLIFIER**  
**NAD C320BEE**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★ MARCH 2006

- 50 watts x 2
- 2 x tape loops, 5 x line inputs
- Remote control
- Grey or titanium

**£149.95**

"A GENUINELY STUNNING AMPLIFIER FOR THE MONEY"  
WHAT HI-FI



**DVD PLAYER**  
**DENON DVD1940**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★ OCTOBER 2007

- HDMI output with HD upscaling
- Multi-format, multi-region playback

**£249.95**



**AV RECEIVER**  
**ONKYO TXSR605E**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★ OCTOBER 2007

- 7 x 80 watts
- HDMI v1.3 switching and upconversion

**£399.95**



**5.1 SPEAKERS SYSTEM**  
**KEF KHT3005**

**£599.95**

- Four satellites, dedicated centre speaker and stylish subwoofer
- Flexible desk stands/wall mounts included
- Silver finish

"STYLISH AND DESIRABLE – IT'S MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE"  
WHAT HI-FI DECEMBER 2006




**DAB RADIO**  
**PURE EVOKE 2**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★ JANUARY 2004

- DAB and FM reception
- Runs on mains or batteries
- Stereo speakers built-in, optical and line outputs
- Real wood veneer

**£59.95**



STORES – EACH OF OUR BRANCHES HAVE EXCELLENT DEMONSTRATION FACILITIES

**Birmingham**  
67 Smallbrook, Q'way  
01 21 631 2675

**Lincoln**  
271a High Street  
01522 520265

**Nottingham**  
15 Market Street  
0151 941 2137

**Coventry**  
2 Corporation St  
024 7622 3254

**London**  
2-4 Camden High St  
020 7388 1300

**Stockport**  
68-70 Lower Hillgate  
0161 429 9080

**Derby**  
22 Sadler Gate  
01332 360303

**Manchester**  
54 Bridge Street  
0161 835 1156

[www.superfi.co.uk/branches](http://www.superfi.co.uk/branches)



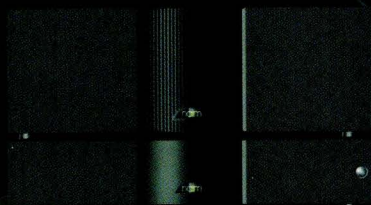


# 500 SERIES

Serious sound from serious retailers...



CD555 - CD Player



NAP 500 - Amplifier



NAC 552 - Preamplifier

...experience the  
500 series for yourself

## THE RETAILERS

**LONDON**  
Audio Venue Ltd  
020 8567 8703  
Billy Vee  
Sound Systems  
020 8318 5755  
Grahams Hi-Fi  
020 7226 5500  
Oranges and Lemons  
020 7924 2040

**SOUTH EAST**  
PJ Hi-Fi  
01483 304 756  
Soundcraft Hi-Fi  
01233 624 441

**EAST**  
Signals  
01473 655 171  
Tom Tom Audio  
01727 893 928

**SOUTH CENTRAL**  
HiFi Cinema  
0118 982 0402  
Overture  
01295 272 158

**MIDLANDS**  
Cymbiosis  
0116 262 3754  
Honeydale Audio  
01694 771 351

**WEST**  
Audience  
01225 333 310  
Gulliford Hi Fi  
01392 491 194  
Mike Manning Audio  
01935 479 361  
Sevenoaks Hi-Fi  
01392 218 895  
Ultimate Home  
Entertainment  
Solutions  
0845 6780 787

**NORTH EAST**  
Audio Republic  
0113 2177 294  
Audio Room  
01482 891 375

The Sound  
Organisation  
01904 627 108

**NORTH WEST**  
Acoustica  
01244 344 227  
Adventures In Hi-Fi  
01244 345 576  
Audio Counsel  
0161 4916 090  
Fortissimo  
0161 8325 060

**SCOTLAND**  
Loud & Clear Ltd  
0141 2210 221  
Robert Ritchie  
01674 673 765

**AUDIO EXCELLENCE GROUP**  
01179 264 975

**AUDIO T GROUP**  
01372 748 888



world class sound...

[www.naim500.com](http://www.naim500.com)

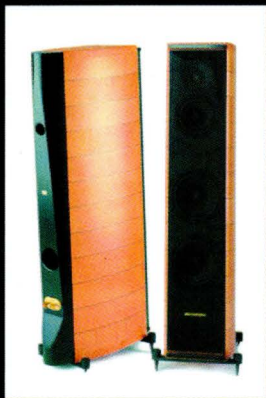




Independent audio consultants

visit our web site for full second hand listing

Acoustic Arts moved to a residential demonstration facility. Now you can park, relax and enjoy your demonstration.



sonus faber cremona m



wilson audio system 8



martin logan summit

Demonstration require advanced booking tuesday-saturday 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM  
t.01582.485.316 mail@acousticarts.co.uk www.acousticarts.co.uk

audio reseach . clearaudio . copland . denon . densen . focal jm-labs . grado . harman kardon . hutter . kef . koetsu . krell martin logan . michell . ortofon . qed . quadraspire . rotel . sonus faber . theta . transparent audio . velodyne . wilson audio

# Audio Destination 01884 243 584

> Devons audio specialists for two-channel / home cinema

## Ayre Acoustics

AX-7e, CX-7e, C-5xe, K-5xe, P-5xe and V-5xe on permanent demonstration.



**NEW Online Shop**  
Visit our web site to find out more details...

- Stockists of:
- Analysis Plus
- Audio
- Audio Physic
- Avid
- Ayre
- Bel Canto
- Chord
- Clearaudio
- Creek
- Graaf
- Grand Prix Audio
- Focal JMLab
- Heed
- IsoTek
- Leema Acoustics
- Lexicon
- Lyra
- McIntosh
- Monitor Audio
- Moon
- Nordost
- Pathos
- Primare
- Project
- Stax
- Stereovox
- Tannoy Prestige
- Teac Esoteric
- Thiel
- Totem Acoustics
- Unison Research
- VDH
- VPI Turntables
- and many more.

Open Monday - Saturday  
9am - 5pm

Audio Destination  
Suite 7a Market Walk  
Tiverton, Devon EX16 6BL

info@audiodestination.co.uk  
www.audiodestination.co.uk

Ayre

we all need air to breathe... why should your music be any different?



# O'Brien Hi Fi

60 Durham Road  
Wimbledon  
SW20 0TW  
020 8946 1528

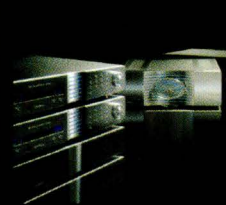
[www.obrienhifi.com](http://www.obrienhifi.com)



Avid



Moon



Krell

Sonus Faber

Martin Logan

Wilson Audio

Ayre

Copland

Naim

## music and film





It's show time again!

# the coffee break



loudspeakers

valve hi-fi

solid-state hi-fi

cd players

phono stages

cd transports

turntables

dac's

cables

mains conditioners

demagnetisers

equipment supports



## your opportunity to discover the finest blend of hi-fi!

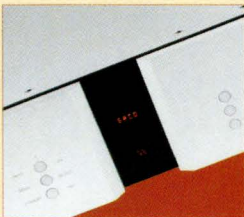


**BOULDER** They make the kind of products we all hope to one day aspire to. After many a request, Boulder has finally launched a more affordable range, allowing so many more to finally enjoy a Boulder unit in their system. The stunning new Boulder Integrated is amazing!

 [WWW.BOULDERAMP.COM](http://WWW.BOULDERAMP.COM)

**HOVLAND** Dedication and research has resulted in world-class components of truly enduring value. Each Hovland design contains original circuits, numerous proprietary parts, and custom wire. Perfect ingredients make for a feast for the ears!

 [WWW.HOVLANDCOMPANY.COM](http://WWW.HOVLANDCOMPANY.COM)



**LSA AMPLIFIERS** Available in three different versions: Standard, Signature and Statement. This fabulous range has have taken reviewers and customers by storm. Reproducing the finest aspects of two technologies, valve and solid-state every LSA model is a class leader.

 [WWW.THELSAGROUP.COM](http://WWW.THELSAGROUP.COM)

**VITUS** Refusing to compromise in any way, shape or form can be very expensive, but the results far outweigh the cost and the Vitus range is proof of this. Using only the finest materials, Vitus is for those who want the finest system without any of the all too common pitfalls and shortcomings found elsewhere State-of-the-art fulfilled!

 [WWW.VITUSAUDIO.COM](http://WWW.VITUSAUDIO.COM)



# Metropolis Music has searched the globe for the most exciting brands available today...

## LUMLEY

What better person is there for the job of creating a state-of-the-art turntable, than a passionate music lover who has sold some of the finest hi-fi products available, to customers all over the UK for years? Think about it... The Stratosphere turntable just runs circles around the competition!



[WWW.METROPOLIS-MUSIC.CO.UK](http://WWW.METROPOLIS-MUSIC.CO.UK)

## KHARMA

Listening to a Kharma is an indescribable experience. You have to feel Kharma to experience it. No matter how large your room, or how large your budget, the Exquisite, Ceramique and Matrix series will deliver your wildest expectations from the first moment you hear them.



[WWW.KHARMA.COM](http://WWW.KHARMA.COM)

## CODA

Any Product wearing the Coda emblem is born from the philosophies of innovative design, artistic expression, and no compromise engineering. Not surprisingly, Coda has a large and loyal customer base worldwide - testament to the quality and value of every product.



[WWW.CODA-CONTINUUM.COM](http://WWW.CODA-CONTINUUM.COM)

## AYON

These components combine premium design, new construction principles, advanced technologies, explosive dynamics, purity of tone, neutrality, finesse, emotional realism and stable sound stage projection... You could not ask for more realistic reproduction of music as a real live event.



[WWW.AYONAUDIO.COM](http://WWW.AYONAUDIO.COM)

## ASCENDO

Key design features of Ascendo loudspeakers are: modular design, mechanical and electrical decoupling, variable Time-Alignment and three-way SASB-technology (dynamic current-damped Woofer/semisymmetrical Bandpass). You don't need to fully understand them, you only need to listen to realise just how special these speakers are!



[WWW.ASCENDO.DE](http://WWW.ASCENDO.DE)

## FURUTECH

New to MM is one of the most innovative and respected cable and accessory companies in the world. Their cables are double shielded, multi-stranded, 2 stage Cryogenic-Super Alpha-OCC etc etc. Actually, they just sound pretty good. And their De-magnetiser and De-stat are truly revolutionary. Improvements beyond belief? You'd better believe it.



[WWW.FURUTECH.COM](http://WWW.FURUTECH.COM)

## LSA SPEAKERS

These speakers may look quite ordinary at first glance, but the finest things in life can often be very deceptive. Designed more by the human ear and long listening sessions than just computer measurements, LSA speakers are almost organic in the way they reproduce music. Exceptional.



[WWW.THELSAGROUP.COM](http://WWW.THELSAGROUP.COM)

## AUDIENCE

When Audience develops a product, no consideration is given to the end price until the product is finished. Focus is placed on developing the very best product possible, regardless of price. Sounds like a winning formula and all the Cables have an unconditional lifetime warranty. They have the best mains conditioners too!



[WWW.AUDIENCE-AV.COM](http://WWW.AUDIENCE-AV.COM)

## EDGAR

Many would argue that introducing an affordable range of valve products into an overcrowded UK market is a little crazy. BUT every time a customer audition's Edgar, they ask us if we have made a mistake on the price and surely it costs twice as much? Need we say more?



[WWW.EDGAR.SK](http://WWW.EDGAR.SK)

## HANSEN

Truly innovative in their approach to loudspeaker design, the final result is nothing short of breathtaking. Hansen recently launched a more affordable model aptly named 'The Knight' and it has already become a runaway success. When you audition a Hansen, be sure to ask about the 'Cloaking Device'!



[WWW.HANSENAUDIO.COM](http://WWW.HANSENAUDIO.COM)

## BAT

The name Balanced Audio Technology refers to more than just their use of balanced circuits. It reflects the commitment to overall excellence. BAT bring the same uncompromising standards to every aspect of engineering, from circuit conception to vibration control and parts placement - as well as to visual design, customer service, and long-term support.



[WWW.BALANCED.COM](http://WWW.BALANCED.COM)

## MUSICTOOLS

With so many stands on the market, you are right to ask what makes Musictools different from the others? We think it's the approach, care, attention, design, value for money and most of all, total neutrality. Many a satisfied customer agrees as well....



[WWW.MUSICTOOLS.EU](http://WWW.MUSICTOOLS.EU)

## MASTERSOUND

Valve amplifiers that with every note of music precisely reflect the emotions of the composer and the performer. Beautiful soundstage, focus and dynamics will flood into your listening room and captivate you long into the night...



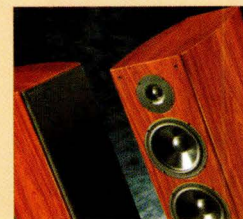
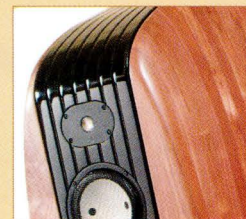
[WWW.MASTERSOUNDSAS.IT](http://WWW.MASTERSOUNDSAS.IT)

## COPULARE

The intention to create the ultimate custom-made sound furniture, will always entail the commitment to supreme quality. No other range of stands look as beautiful or perform like a Copulare-period. Their support feet are outstanding too!

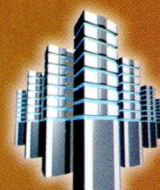


[WWW.COPULARE.DE](http://WWW.COPULARE.DE)



Distributed in the UK by [www.metropolis-music.co.uk](http://www.metropolis-music.co.uk)

Please call +44 (0) 1435 867 438 for more details and your nearest stockist.







## Vinyl

	Retail	Offer
AUDIO RESEARCH PH3 Phono Stage	2199	1295
AUDIO RESEARCH PH5 Phonostage Ex Demo	1799	1496
GOLDRING GL85 (Very nice condition)	NA	175
KOETSU Red K signature	2400	1298
LEVINSON 25 Phono stage	2950	1798
LINN LP12 Val/Ittock II Black Ash	2500	695
MICHELL Gyro SE/Techno Arm/BPS	1650	995
ROKSAN XERSES III / PS4 HCPS (no arm)	2900	895
ROKSAN ARTA Phono Stage	300	125
SME10A/309 Tonearm Ex Demo	358	2955
SME20/2A S/H	6320	4296
THORENS TD 280 Mk II	500	145
THORENS TD 165 MK11	N/A	128
THORENS TD 318	400	105
UNISON RESEARCH Simply Phono	900	595
WILSON BENESCH Full Circle (Ex Demo)	2000	1496



## Digital Sources

	Retail	Offer
ARCAM ALPHA 8 CD Player	499	125
ARCAM CD92 CD Player	800	455
ARCAM Delta 190 CD Transport (boxed)	500	228
ARISTON ACOUSTICS CDX 720	150	78
AUDIO ANALOGUE Maestro CD Player 192/24	1650	1350
AUDIO ANALOGUE PAGANINI CD Player	750	395
AVI S2000 MC Reference CD Player	1200	498
BOW WAZOO XL (incl Wand Remote)	3950	2196
CELLO REFERENCE DAC D to A Convertor	10000	3598
COPLAND CDA288 CD Player	1999	1195
CYRUS DAD 3Q CD Player	600	225
CYRUS CD7Q CD Player	1100	595
DCS Elgar Plus	9500	4998
DCS Verdi Encore	9500	4998
KRELL KAV280 CD Player	3999	2296
Krell 300 cd player	4298	1996

KRELL KPS 20i CD Player	10995	2995
KRELL KPS 25 24 bit (cast)	24995	8998
LINN KARIK	1850	395
MERIDIAN 507 CD Player	1195	596
MERIDIAN 602 CD Transport	1800	798
MERIDIAN 606 D to A Convertor	1800	798
MERIDIAN G91DH DVD Pre/DSP Processor	3895	3196
MERIDIAN G07 CD Player (Ex Demo - Blk)	1695	1395
MERIDIAN 598 DVD Player	2400	1398
PIONEER DVR7000 DVD Recorder	1299	496
PIONEER CLD-D925 Laser Disc Player	1000	298
PRIMARE D30.2 CD Player (Ex Demo)	1500	996
PRIMARE D20 CD Player	750	448
ROKSAN Attezza CD Player	1495	595
SHANLING CDT300 (as new) CD Player	4000	2798
SONNETEER BRONTE CD Player	100	595
SONY SCD-1 sacd player	2800	1498
TEAC P500 Transport	600	195
THETA MILES (Bal) CD Player	2895	998
THETA Carman CD/DVD Transport	3500	1296
THETA Pro Prime 11 D to A Convertor	1800	996
THETA DS Pro Progen	1395	596
THETA David Transport	4650	1495
THOR AUDIO DC-1000 Reference Valve DAC	4300	2768
TRICHORD RESEARCH PULSAR 1 DAC	1900	495
YAMAHA CDV1700 CD/Laserdisc	600	75



## Amplifiers solid state

	Retail	Offer
A & R A60 (classic) Integrated	395	115
ARCAM ALPHA 9 (incl mm/mc Board Int)	670	395
ARCAM Delta 110 Pre DAC (Audioquest wired)	550	198
ARCAM Delta 120 Power (Audioquest wired)	800	298
ARCAM Delta 290P	400	195
AUDIO ANALOGUE BELLINI Pre Amp	500	355
AUDIO ANALOGUE DONIZETTI Power	500	355
AUDIOLAB 8000C preamplifier	£495	£245
AUDIO RESEARCH LS9 Pre Amp	1949	698
AUDIO RESEARCH 150.2 2ch Power (New)	2300	1797
AUDIO RESEARCH 150m.5 5x150w Power (New)	6495	4997
AVI S2000 MP Pre	999	398
AVI S2000 MA Stereo Power	1000	395
BRYSTON BP25 Pre Amp	1500	996
BRYSTON 14B Power Amp	4995	3298
CHORD SPM1203 3 Channel Power	5500	2295
COPLAND CDA535 (5 x 125 watts) ex demo	2998	2348

CYRUS 5 Integrated	600	29
CYRUS DAC XP Silver Quartz (Ex Demo)	2200	170
CYRUS PRE X Silver Quartz (Ex Demo)	1000	79
CYRUS Smart power plus Silver quartz (Ex Demo)	700	52
DENSEN BEAT 100 Integrated Amplifier	695	44
ELECTOR MFL Pre	500	11
ELECTROCOMPANET EC1/3 Integrated Amplifier	1599	89
EXPOSURE 17 (prices)	1000	49
KRELL KAV300i Integrated amplifier	2700	149
KRELL KRC-HR/KPE Phono Stage	7940	379
KRELL KRS 2.3 box Pre/Phono Stage	9000	219
KRELL FPB 200 Power Amplifier	6995	299
KRELL FPB 700CX Power	14998	899
KRELL 400 xi Integrated Amp	2500	169
KRELL KSA100 Power Amp	4000	184
LECSON AC1 Pre Amplifier (Classic)	N/A	29
LEVINSON PLS 226 HC Power Supply(for 25 Phono)	1395	79
LINN Classic Movie AV Receiver	2895	139
LINN Kairn Pre	1750	74
LINN LK100 Power	NA	29
LINN Majik Integrated	600	34
McINTOSH CR16 Multizone controller (Ex Demo)	4467	349
McINTOSH MC 58 8ch power (Ex Demo)	2999	249
McINTOSH MHT200 AV System Controller (New)	5500	399
McINTOSH MC202 Power Amp (New)	2995	219
MERIDIAN 501 Pre Amplifier	895	39
MERIDIAN 562V Video switching unit	1295	39
MERIDIAN 568 ver II AV Processor	3300	229
NAIM NAC102 Pre + NAPSC	1000	59
NAIM NAP140 Power Amplifier	850	44
NAIM NAP 180 Power (olive)	1300	74
NYTECH CA302 Int (Classic)	NA	9
PARASOUND HCA 1206 6CH Power Amplifier	1995	89
PLINIUS M8 Pre - Bal - Remote (Ex Demo)	2300	189
QUAD 33 Pre Amp	375	7
QUAD 77 Pre (Carbon,boxed)	699	37
QUAD 77 Int (Grey)	700	24
QUAD 606 Power Amplifier	695	29
RED ROSE SPIRIT Integrated Amplifier	1200	69
REVOX B252 Preamplifier	995	29
REVOX B242 Power Amplifier	1495	29
ROKSAN Caspian M Integrated Amplifier (ex demo)	1000	79
SONY TAE-1000ESD Pre	495	19
SPHINX Project 12 Monos	3000	99
SPHINX Project II Pre Amp	1600	49
TALK ELECTRONICS Storm II Int	650	28
THETA CITADEL Mono Blocks Ex-Dem	17000	999
YAMAHA DSPE390	250	5



HI-FI  
TRADING  
STATION

The leading reseller of carefully  
hi-fi components and systems. Buy, s

www.hifitrading

The Trading Station | 42 Cowgate Peterborough PE1 1NA

BUSINESS HOURS: Tues - Sat: 10am -

ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED\*NEXT DAY DELIVERY AVAILABLE



## Amplifiers valve

	Retail	Offer
ARION Electra Integrated Amplifier	1500	595
ARION Talos Integrated Amplifier	1500	798
AUDIO INNOVATIONS S800 Power	1200	518
AUDIO RESEARCH CL 150 Monoblocks	9998	3998
AUDIO RESEARCH SP9 PRE-AMPLIFIER	1900	896
AUDIO RESEARCH SP16 inc phonostage	2250	1598
AUDIO RESEARCH REF 2 MK 2 Pre	10498	4995
AUDIO RESEARCH CLASSIC 120 Monos	7200	2898
AUDIO RESEARCH V70 Power Amplifier	3795	1698
AUDIO RESEARCH SP10 RARE	N/A	2497
AUDIO RESEARCH CLASSIC 60	3000	1095
AUDIO RESEARCH VS110 (EX DEMO)	3999	3198
AUDIO RESEARCH VSI 55 (EX DEMO)	2895	2296
AUDIO RESEARCH LS15 PRE AMPLIFIER	2999	1995
AUDION SILVER KNIGHT (300B'S) INTEGRATED	1495	796
AUDION Sterling ETSE Monos	2000	1295
CONRAD JOHNSON Premier 8 Monos	16000	5998
CONRAD JOHNSON PV11 Pre	1950	748
CONRAD JOHNSON PV12L	2000	995
COPLAND CVA306 (multi-channel) Pre - ex demo	1999	1598
DEBRAAF GM100 OTL 100 WATT (EX DEMO)	4995	4196
ADIS DA5 Power Ex Demo	2199	1797
ADIS DLP2 Pre Ex Demo	1799	1397
MANLEY Reference VTL Monoblocks	6000	2798
MATHOS In Control Preamplifier Ex. Demo	3690	2956
MATHOS Inpol II (New)	6500	5496
MATHOS Twin Towers Integrated	3700	1995
PRIMA LUNA PROLOGUE 2 (AS NEW)	1195	895
QUAD FORTY SERIES PRE/MONO'S (AS NEW)	4000	2996
QUAD 4 & A V10 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER (NEW)	4600	2496
WILSON RESEARCH S6 (all tube int) ex demo	1995	1598
WILSON S2K (S/E) INTEGRATED	1695	1196



## Loudspeakers

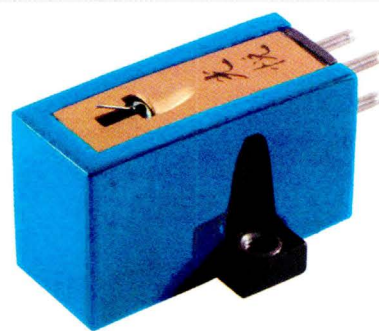
	Retail	Offer
ANTHONY GALLO Nucleus/sub/psu/stds Ex Demo	925	795
APOGEE Mini Grand GS (Ex Demo)	7597	4997
(Subs need paintwork)		
ARISTON QNR Monitors	1200	275
B & W Nautilus 804's Cherry	2500	1498
CASTLE HARLECH (dark oak)	950	498
DALI Grand Coupe	2595	1345
DYNAUDIO 3.3 Rosewood	3950	1995
GRADIENT SW63 for (Quad ESL63)	2000	995
HORNING AGATHON Loudspeakers	6800	3998
HYPERION 938L Loudspeakers	4000	2995
IMPULSE H7 black (horn loaded)	1200	295
KEF HTS 2001 x 3 Egg Speakers	600	295
KEF Q55	500	246
KEF Q85 (surrounds)	300	126
KLIPSCH SW15(15") Subwoofer	1500	798
KRELL Resolution 2 (as new)	7333	4996
KRELL RESOLUTION 3 - 2 way loudspeaker (EX demo)	3845	2847
KRELL Resolution C (centre - as new)	2980	1996
LEAK Mini Sandwich	NA	78
LEAK Original Sandwich 15 ohm/12"	NA	148
LEGACY Focus 20/20	4700	3298
LINN Kabers (passive)	2500	496
LINN Kabers (active)	3000	895
LINN Walls (white)	300	148
LUMLEY REF II 61G Loudspeakers	4000	898
MAGNA PLANAR SMGA	995	395
MARTIN LOGAN Ascent Electrostatics	4333	2496
MARTIN LOGAN PRODIGY	11800	4998
MARTIN LOGAN AEON I (New)	2997	2397
MOREL Music First 704	1000	398
M & K S90 Wall Speakers	1200	396
McIntosh MC CS350 Centre channel (Ex Demo)	2499	1997
McINTOSH LS320 (Ex Demo)	1950	1697
McINTOSH LS340 (Ex Demo)	4797	3297
MERIDIAN DSP5000C Mk1	1950	998
MERIDIAN DSP6000 (24/96) Blk	11000	4998
MERIDIAN DSW2500 (24/96) Blk	2950	1498
MERIDIAN DSP7000 (silver) (New)	16175	11996
MONITOR AUDIO Silver 6 (Cherry)	600	395
MORREL BASS MASTER 602 Oak	1600	445
NAIM Intro	750	450
ProAC Response 2.5	3300	1496
ProAC Response 3	4000	1596
ProAC Super Towers (teak)	1000	445
ProAC RESPONSE 3's	4000	1596
QUAD ESL63 (Brown Teak)	3500	795
QUAD ESL988 ELECTROSTATICS NOUVEAU	4500	2296
QUAD ESL989 ELECTROSTATICS BLACK (AS NEW)	5500	3495
REFERENCE 3A Veena	3000	1596
ROGERS LS 3/5A (150 ohm) Rosewood	1995	795
SONUS FABER Guarneri	5300	2998
SONUS FABER Stradivari (Ex Demo) Violin Red	22000	POA

SONUS FABER Gravis Sub (New)	1290	946
SOUNDLAB A1 Electrostatics (Cherry)	16000	5498
SPENDOR S9e (ex demo)	2895	2296
SWALLOW ACOUSTICS ALS11 (active)	N/A	298
TOWNSEND Ribbon Speakers	1295	495
TRIANGLE Celius Speakers Black/Cherry (new)	1095	896
TRIANGLE Magellan (ex.demo)	10000	7496
VIENNA ACOUSTICS Beethoven	2500	1498
WEGG 3 Stellar 1 (gloss black) Ex Show	4990	3998
WHARFDALE SFB/2 (Classics)	NA	398
WILSON Sophia Mk1 (gloss black) Ex Demo	11992	7496
WILSON AUDIO Max I upgraded to II spec	40000	21996
WILSON BENESCH Discovery (ex demo)	6000	4496
WILSON BENESCH Centre inc stand Ex Demo	1775	1496
ZINGALI Colosseum sub/sats	770	428



## Miscellaneous

	Retail	Offer
LUXMAN KX780 Cassette Deck	NA	298
NAGRA 1vs QGB Large Spool Tape Machine	NA	3398
NAKAMICHI ZXE Tri Tracer (incl. NRS)	1750	598
NORDOST SPM 5m Pair	4500	2495
REVOX B77 high speed (boxed)	NA	595
TEAC R1 DAT Recorder	1000	398
TEAC RH300 Mini Cassette Deck (champagne)	200	65
QUAD 66 FM TUNER	800	298
QUAD ACOUSTICAL FM2	NA	85



used and mint condition  
 exchange. Commission Sales.

ation.com

Tel: 0870 608 8211 | Email: info@hifitradingstation.com

30pm | CLOSED MONDAYS

COMPETITIVE FINANCE TERMS FOR PERSONAL CALLERS

**BEST PART EXCHANGE PRICES  
 GUARANTEED ON ALL LEADING  
 BRANDS NEW OR SECONDHAND.**

**A full 12 months warranty  
 service now available -  
 ASK FOR DETAILS**

**REGISTER ON OUR SITE &  
 RECEIVE £50 VOUCHER**



## TRANSMISSION LINE KITS FROM IPL ACOUSTICS

The IPL range now includes six superb bi-wired Transmission Lines using top quality drive units and components to achieve sound quality and bass extension equivalent to speakers costing in the range of £800 to £4,000. The Plus Kits include all that is required apart from the woodwork, but plain or veneered MDF cabinet kits are available. Please see website or catalogue for full details.

KIT	SPEAKER UNITS	CAB SIZE mm	PLUS KIT	P&P
M3tlm	5" IPL metal, 1" Seas treb	810 x 191 x 261	£215.00	£9.50
S3tl	6.5" Kevlar, 1" Seas treb	903 x 230 x 350	£220.00	£10.00
S3tlm	6.5" IPL metal, 1" Seas treb	903 x 230 x 350	£234.44	£10.00
S3tlm Rib	6.5" IPL metal, Ribbon treb	903 x 230 x 350	£337.28	£10.00
S4tl	8" Kevlar, 1" Seas treb	960 x 276 x 400	£258.00	£11.00
S5tl	10" IPL, 3" dome mid, 1" treb	1080 x 320 x 400	£419.00	£12.00



Send cheque (or postal order) made payable to IPL Acoustics at:

IPL ACOUSTICS, Chelsea Villa, Torrs Park, Ilfracombe, Devon EX34 8AY.

Tel: 01271 867439.

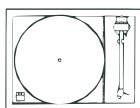
Alternatively visit our website at [iplacoustics.co.uk](http://iplacoustics.co.uk) or send a 50p SAE for catalogue detailing Transmission Lines, Hi-Fi and AV Kits, including:

Active Subwoofers, drive units, Silver PTFE cables, and Quality Accessories.

[www.iplacoustics.co.uk](http://www.iplacoustics.co.uk)



Records just get better, hear the new Sondek SE upgrades at..



[www.soundgallery.co.uk](http://www.soundgallery.co.uk)

65 castle street, high wycombe, bucks.

01494 531682

# AUDIO REPUBLIC LTD

*ONE OF THE FINEST COLLECTIONS  
OF QUALITY HI-FI AND AUDIO  
VISUAL EQUIPMENT TO BE FOUND  
IN WEST YORKSHIRE FEATURING*

*ARCAM • ART • AVALON •  
AUDIO RESEARCH •  
BENZ MICRO •  
CHORD COMPANY • COPLAND •  
CONRAD JOHNSON •  
DYNAUDIO •  
FINITE ELEMENTE • FUJITSU •  
HUTTER RACKTIME •  
KARAN ACOUSTICS • KOETSU •  
KRELL • LYRA •  
MAGNUM DYNALAB • M&K •  
MARTIN LOGAN • MICHELL •  
NAIM AUDIO • PARTINGDON •  
PMC • PROAC • QUADRASPIRE •  
REGA RESEARCH • ROKSAN •  
SILTECH • SME •  
SONUS FABER • SUGDEN •  
TRANSPARENT AUDIO •  
WILSON BENESCH*

*78 OTLEY ROAD,  
HEADINGLEY, LEEDS,  
WEST YORKSHIRE LS6 4BA*

*TEL: 0113 217 7294*

*WWW.AUDIO-REPUBLIC.CO.UK*

*EMAIL: SALES@AUDIO-REPUBLIC.CO.UK*



# Great idea No. 1

Make advert design affordable, so that our clients can easily change their adverts every month in the magazine.



design / pr specialist for the audio industry

a u d i o g r a p h y

+44 (0)20 8133 7006 / [tellmemore@audiography.co.uk](mailto:tellmemore@audiography.co.uk)



# shadow audio

## Marantz Legendary Series



### **(NEW) Pre-amplifier SC-7S2 £5,000**



The SC-7S2 thoroughly updates the distinctive voice of the original Marantz Model 7 preamplifier and further improves on the acclaimed SC-7S1. This work of art defines new horizons in both musical performance and contemporary elegance. It is an enduring testament to the synergy of today's technologies with frequency response and channel separation far exceeding conventional requirements. The best from Marantz just got better.

### **(NEW) Monoblock MA-9S2 £5,000**



We began with the historic Model 9. We improved that distinctive voice with the MA-9S1. And now we present the MA-9S2 as the latest step in our relentless pursuit of sonic accuracy. It defines new horizons in both musical performance and contemporary elegance.

The MA-9S2 represents over 50 years of expertise in amplifier circuitry, and sincere love of music.



SC-7S2 • MA-9S2 • SA-7S1

**marantz**<sup>®</sup>

Hi-Fi Choice September 2007. Alvin Gold wrote:

" If you want a disc player that will do the very finest musical job possible with your CDs and SACDs - the only really serious remaining audio disc formats - the Marantz SA-7S1 can even be considered a bargain at £5,000! "

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine



**VERDICT**



**(NEW) CD/SACD Player**  
**SA-7S1 £5,000**



Are technical accomplishments important in themselves or important for the benefits they bring? Marantz firmly believes the latter and proudly presents the SA-7S1 as a technical tour de force with one goal – to let you hear more musical detail than you thought possible from CDs and SA-CDs.

After all, what else is Marantz about?

**Shadow Audio**

20 - 22 Cadham Centre  
Glenrothes KY7 6RU  
Scotland

Excellent parking facilities at the front of the shop.

Relax and audition products in our beautiful demonstration suite.

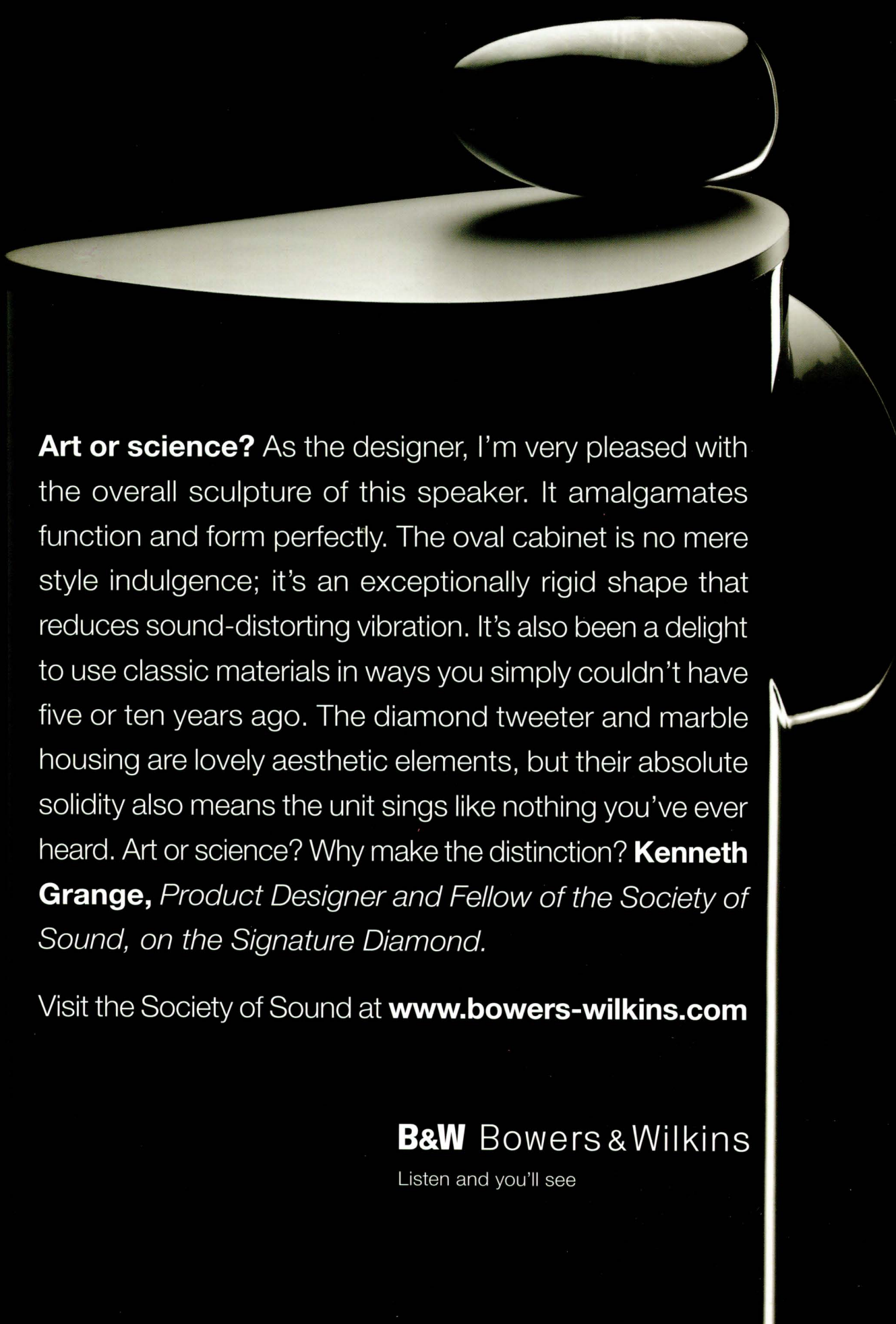
**sales line:**  
**0844 800 0073**

**sales line:**  
**0844 800 0074**

**email:**  
**info@shadowaudio.co.uk**

**web site:**  
**www.shadowaudio.co.uk**





**Art or science?** As the designer, I'm very pleased with the overall sculpture of this speaker. It amalgamates function and form perfectly. The oval cabinet is no mere style indulgence; it's an exceptionally rigid shape that reduces sound-distorting vibration. It's also been a delight to use classic materials in ways you simply couldn't have five or ten years ago. The diamond tweeter and marble housing are lovely aesthetic elements, but their absolute solidity also means the unit sings like nothing you've ever heard. Art or science? Why make the distinction? **Kenneth Grange**, *Product Designer and Fellow of the Society of Sound, on the Signature Diamond.*

Visit the Society of Sound at [www.bowers-wilkins.com](http://www.bowers-wilkins.com)

**B&W** Bowers & Wilkins

Listen and you'll see