

# Hi-Fi WORLD SUPPLEMENT

JANUARY 1996

CHRISTMAS 1995 EDITION

**CHRISTMAS MUSIC  
REVIEWS - PAGE 25**

The Royal Philharmonic Collection

## The Christmas Album

A Collection of Contemporary and Traditional Christmas Music

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Chamber Choir of the Arts Educational School, Treg Park, The Ambrose Singers  
Conductor: Vaughan Williams



SBM

DDD



**WE PICK THE BEST HI-FI OF  
1995 - SEE OUR WORLD  
WINNERS ON PAGE 6**



**CHRISTMAS PUZZLES - PAGE 3**

**FREE CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT**



# sense of touch



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# POP SNOWFLAKE QUIZ ANSWERS



- 1. Dickie Valentine 1956; No1: Just Walking in the Rain (Johnny Ray)
- 2. The Wombles 1974; No1: You're the First, The Last, My Everything (Barry White)
- 3. Elvis Presley 1957; No1 Mary's Boy Child (Harry Belafonte)
- 4. Gilbert O'Sullivan 1974, No1: You're the First, The Last, My Everything (Barry White)
- 5. Dickie Valentine 1955, No 6; No1: Rock Around the Clock (Bill Hailey)

- 6. Max Bygraves 1959, No20; No1: What Do You Want (Adam Faith)
- 7. The Plastic Ono Band, 1969, No19; No1: Sugar Sugar (The Archies)
- 8. Russ Conway 1959, No11; No1: What Do You Want (Adam Faith)
- 9. Connie Francis 1961, No20; No1: Take Good Care Of My Baby (Bobby Vee)
- 10. The Beverley Sisters 1959, No20; No1: What Do You Want (Adam Faith)
- 11. Wizzard 1973, No23; No1: I

- Love You You Love Me (Gary Glitter)
- 12. Brenda Lee 1962, No30; No1: Lovesick Blues (Frank Ifield)
- 13. Johnny and the Hurricanes 1960, No6; No1: It's Now Or Never (Elvis Presley)
- 14. Elvis Presley 1964, No 44; No1: Little Red Rooster (Rolling Stones)
- 15. Harry Belafonte 1957, No1.
- 16. Elvis Presley 1966, No 29; No1: Green, Green Grass Of Home (Tom Jones)

- 17. John Lennon/Yoko Ono 1972, No33; No1: My Ding-a-Ling (Chuck Berry)
- 18. Big Dee Irwin 1963, No35; No1: She Loves You (The Beatles)
- 19. Mud 1974, No19; No1: You're The First The Last, My Everything (Barry White)
- 20. Slade 1973, No23; No1: I Love You You Love Me (Gary Glitter)



- 1. Christmas Island
- 2. Wombling Merry Christmas
- 3. Santa Bring Back My Baby To Me
- 4. Father Christmas do Not Touch Me
- 5. Christmas Alphabet
- 6. Jingle Bell Rock
- 7. Cold Turkey (Well, O.K., sort of Christmasy title..)
- 8. Snow Coach
- 9. Baby's First Christmas
- 10. Little Donkey
- 11. I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day
- 12. Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree
- 13. Rocking Goose
- 14. Blue Christmas



- 15. Mary's Boy Child
- 16. If Every day Was Like Christmas
- 17. Happy Christmas (War is Over)
- 18. Swinging on a Star
- 19. Lonely This Christmas
- 20. Merry Xmas Everybody

Two more for its position in which year they were in the charts. December. For the real buff planning on being next editor of the Guinness Book of Pop Records, two more marks for the No1 hit for the Xmas month the same year. And if you thought some of the Christie stuff was bad, you should see what got to No1 some of those years!

Who sang these (mostly pretty flaky) Christmas pop hits from the first twenty years of the charts? They just don't make 'em like that any more, thank Santa. One mark for the name, two for the same year. And if you thought some of the Christie stuff was bad, you should see what got to No1 some of those years!

# THE POP SNOWFLAKE QUIZ

## CHRISTMAS PUZZLES



# THE RESPONSE RANGE FROM PROAC. WHEN SECOND BEST WON'T DO.



The Response range blends inspired design with the finest components available to deliver incomparable sonic performance. Each model generates an awesome scale and weight of sound, yet with an impressive accuracy and clarity. Individually hand-crafted and beautifully finished, a Response is a loudspeaker for life.

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# CHRISTMAS PUZZLES



## TEST YOUR HI-FI IQ

### ARE YOU A HI-FI BUFF OR A HI-FI BORE?

1. A crossover is:
  - a) An opera singer recording an album of Blur's greatest hits
  - b) An electronic circuit to divide the audio signal in a loudspeaker
  - c) What trains travel over
2. A Thiele-Small parameter is:
  - a) A new design of parachute for the Red Devils
  - b) A fowling-piece
  - c) A measurement made on a drive unit to help with loudspeaker design
3. Dolby Pro-Logic is:
  - a) A surround-sound system for AV
  - b) A course taught as part of an Oxford philosophy degree
  - c) Thomas Dolby's latest album
4. Cabinet Q is:
  - a) The designer of James Bond's gadgets, newly promoted to Minister
  - b) Michael Howard's IQ
  - c) The quality factor of a cabinet
5. Golden Dragon is:
  - a) A brand of valve
  - b) A brand of Chinese beer
  - c) Barbara Cartland's favourite herbal concoction
6. A panel loudspeaker is:
  - a) Paul Merton
  - b) Made of thin sheets of plywood
  - c) A loudspeaker with a flat diaphragm
7. A metal dome tweeter is:
  - a) A sparrow in the roof of St Paul's
  - b) A treble driver using a metal dome
  - c) A tweeter for Megadeath fans
8. Western Electric is:
  - a) A manufacturer of valves
  - b) A privatised railway line serving the West of England
  - c) GEC's Texas plant
9. A Chario is:
  - a) A loudspeaker manufacturer
  - b) A two-wheeled Roman buggy
  - c) Something that swings low and sweet
10. A Meridian is:
  - a) A notional line at Greenwich
  - b) A chocolate bar
  - c) A piece of hi-fi from Cambridgeshire
11. A Quad is:
  - a) What jailbirds are banged up in
  - b) Probably an ESL-63
  - c) A square in an Oxford college
12. A Linkwitz-Riley filter is:
  - a) A type of filter alignment
  - b) A vintage sports car
  - c) A Polish-American senator
13. A Tukan is:
  - a) A large-beaked bird which used to advertise Guinness
  - b) What one can do less well
  - c) A Linn loudspeaker
14. A Strata is:
  - a) A plectrum for a Fender Stratocaster
  - b) A subwoofer
  - c) A layer of rock
15. A transformer is:
  - a) Someone who cross dresses
  - b) A device for transforming an alternating voltage
  - c) An album by Lou Reed
16. A Grasshopper is:
  - a) A moving-coil cartridge
  - b) The latest type of Flymo lawnmower
  - c) A small green winged insect
17. A tube is:
  - a) The London Underground
  - b) American for a valve
  - c) A television show
18. A drop-out is:
  - a) Timothy Leary
  - b) A New-Age traveller
  - c) An unwanted silence in a recording
19. A banana plug is:
  - a) A plug for speaker cables
  - b) A mention on radio of Bananarama
  - c) An advertisement for Fyffes
20. Current Dumping is:
  - a) A circuit design used in an amplifier
  - b) The EU selling surplus grapes cheap
  - c) Shell's plan to dispose of North Sea oil rigs.

Answers - 20/20 makes you a definite hi-fi bore!  
1: b. 2: c. 3: a. 4: c. 5: a. 6: c. 7: b. 8: a. 9: a. 10: c. 11: b. 12: a.  
13: c. 14: b. 15: b. 16: a. 17: b. 18: c. 19: a. 20: a.

## TEST YOUR HI-FI IQ ANSWERS





WORLD WINNERS



AT

# THE TOP OF THE TREE

**Here are twenty-nine products that we at Hi-Fi World feel offer outstanding performance and sound quality. They have been picked by the Editorial team from all the products we reviewed through 1995.**

**W**e've always tended to do things a little differently at Hi-Fi World, and our awards, now in their second year, certainly don't break this rule. The following pieces of equipment have been carefully picked by our expert staff after extensive listening tests in our carefully treated room, and full testing in our laboratory. They offer exceptional sound quality and value at their respective price points.

There are no set price points or categories for qualification; the list is made up purely from products we have reviewed and lived with over the last year that have stood out as sonically exceptional. These are the products we would want to own.

A good hi-fi system is best achieved

by carefully matching individual products together, to build on strengths and limit weaknesses. For this reason it is hard to recommend one product in a certain category. For example we have chosen this year to recommend both the Marantz CD-63SE and the NAD 514, which are the same price. Both are superb, but have quite different qualities that will suit different systems and different tastes. It would be churlish to make one or the other an outright winner when it will not always be the right choice.

By adopting this approach, we feel that our awards are fair in recognising quality for what it is, rather than setting rigid criteria which may unfairly favour one product or another. You'll see a wide range of equipment here, over a

wide range of price points. There are twenty-nine products selected this year, ten more than last, reflecting the quality of equipment we have seen over 1995. We don't set an artificial limit on the number of good products we are prepared to recommend. If it's good, we'll tell you about it.

If you are upgrading, or just getting into hi-fi for the very first time, take time to listen to any of the products here which fall within your budget. They all offer superb sound and will bring years of musical enjoyment which is, after all, - what it's all about!



# WORLD WINNERS



## SPENDOR SP7/1

### LOUDSPEAKERS (JAN. '95)

The SP7/1s aren't superficially impressive, showy or outspoken in any way. Get them home for a longer listen however, and they start to reel you in, captivating with their oh-so-modest charm. And if at first you question their ability to resolve detail, after a few days you'll be wondering why every loudspeaker can't play music in such an insightful manner.

Switching from CD to vinyl, the scale of the sound stage was still there, but the whole effect gained a richer, more natural ambience, with less emphasis on transient leading edges, and more on tonal definition and colour. The centre-stage image pulled into focus, with the kind of solidity that allows information to extend out towards you and grow in depth. I could happily live with these 'speakers - a rare sentiment. **DB**

Spondor SP7/1

£1,970

Spondor Audio Systems,  
Station Road Ind. Est.,  
Hailsham,  
E. Sussex BN25 7ER  
☎ 01323 843474



## ARCAM ALPHA 5+ CD

### PLAYER (MAR. '95)

Starting my listening with Soundgarden's Superunknown the Alpha 5+ really got its teeth into 'Black Hole Sun'. This player is blessed with deep and powerful bass, adding real weight to bass drum and underpinning the whole track.

Synthesised piano notes on Bjork's 'Crying' had terrific force behind them, notes punching out from the loudspeakers into the room. Again, with the more upbeat tempo of 'Big Time Sensuality' the lower octaves were scaled competently, the impact captured well, thundering out to roll forwards across the stage. The bright, sharp bite of the cymbals was crystal clear, floating above the hectic structure of instruments and airy vocals below.

The lively acoustic of Counting Crows' 'Omaha' was successfully captured and allowed to flourish in the capable hands of Alpha 5+ Its taut, muscular bass added substance to the otherwise light and open atmosphere of this recording, giving it greater body and sense of solidity.

One area where all CD players score well with a good recording is their ability to clearly focus a piece of music. You rarely hear a player that could be described as muggy. But only the very best players managed to pull off the trick of combining this with the ability to spread the sound stage wide and deep whilst holding image detail firmly in position. The Alpha 5+ did admirably well here, creating a wide stage with a good acoustic around performers, holding a clear central image in between the speakers. Here the Alpha 5+ is certainly ahead of its

class, giving a spacious sound with good body in the midband.

A good classical recording of Locatelli's 'Sei Introduttioni Teatrali, Opus 4' confirmed this; violins were pure in tone and full, with just the slightest rasp to high strings. They were well positioned and separated out clearly from surrounding instruments. Piano had real weight behind every note too, as well as a soft decay that gave it a strong sense of realism.

In sound quality it is firmly ahead of highly featured Japanese machines. And at around half the cost of a basic independent transport and convertor system, it's also great value and has to be worth an audition, even if it doesn't quite have the tidiness and polished civility of a good two-box player. **DB**

Arcam Alpha 5+

£469.90

A&R Cambridge Ltd.,  
Pembroke Avenue,  
Denny Industrial Centre,  
Waterbeach, Cambridge CB5 9PB  
Tel: 01223 561550



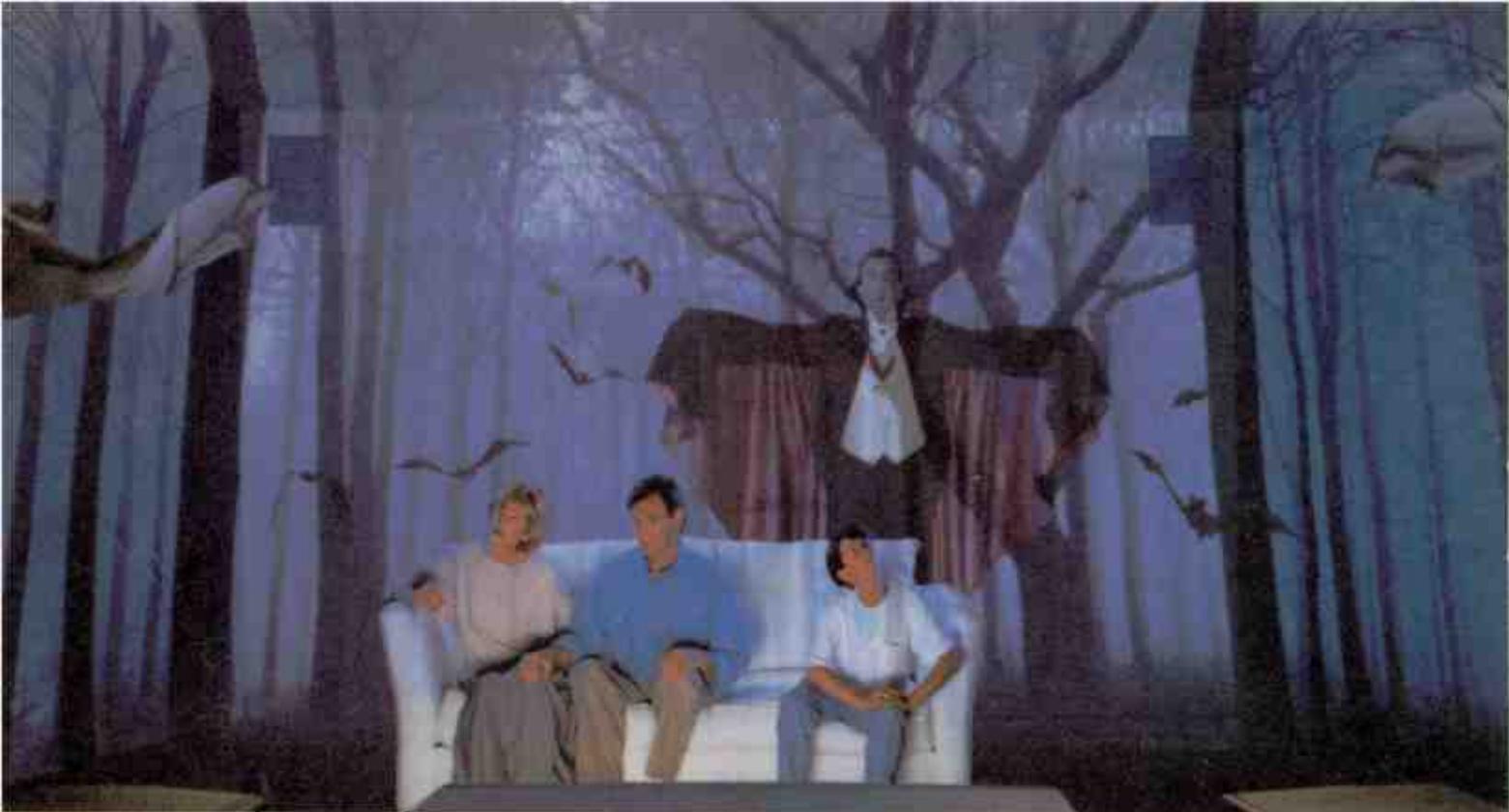
## ORTOFON MC 15 SUPER II

### MOVING COIL

### CARTRIDGE (MAR. '95)

Out-of-the-ordinary products like this need careful treatment if they are to shine, and there's no doubt in my mind that the MC 15 Super II is worth some effort in terms of system matching. It's fundamentally revealing and truthful, if it does come across as master tape-ish. The trick is to match it with good 'speakers of an opposite nature so that the two balance out - and there's no





# With Cinema DSP, you'll be amazed at what comes out of the woodwork.

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No, it's not your imagination. You're hearing sounds placed around the room, just as the director intended.

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As you might imagine, a breakthrough like this is no small feat. It's accomplished by multiplying the effects of Digital Sound Field Processing and Dolby Pro Logic.<sup>®</sup>

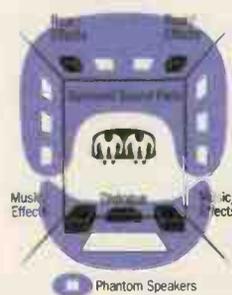
Digital Sound Field Processing is Yamaha's unique technology that electronically recreates some of the finest performance venues in the world. And Dolby Pro Logic is the technology responsible for placing sound around the room, matching the dialogue and sound effects with the action on the screen.

Together, these two technologies allow Yamaha to offer a complete range of home theatre components that outperform other comparatively priced products on the market.

Stop by your local Yamaha dealer for what could be a very eerie demonstration. Maybe we can't talk you into a system, but that doesn't mean we can't scare you into one.

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**YAMAHA**

Yamaha Electronics (UK) Ltd, 200 Rickmansworth Road, Watford, Herts. WD1 7JS. Dolby Pro Logic is a registered trademark of Dolby Laboratories Licensing Corporation.

To: Yamaha Electronics (UK) Ltd. 200 Rickmansworth Road, Watford, Herts. WD1 7JS. Tel: (01923) 233166

Please send me full information on Yamaha Hi-Fi Components and A/V Range.

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..... Tel. ....

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# WORLD WINNERS

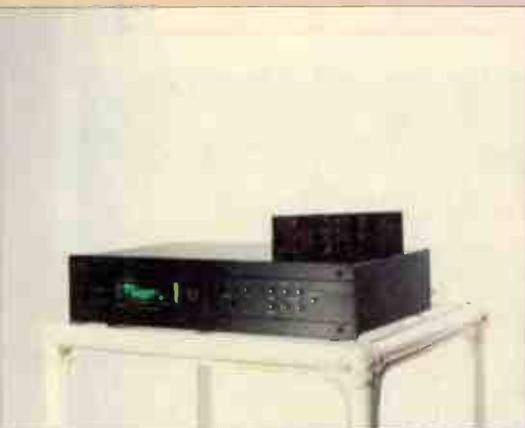


shortage of them.

In the right system, Ortofon's new MC15 Super II can show itself to be masterful. Although not as intrinsically sweet and melodious as more expensive MC cartridges, it is dry, accurate and revealing. Partnered with items of an opposite persuasion, it achieves a sonic balance and is deeply impressive - especially at the price. Definitely a sonic wonder; highly recommended. **NK**

**MC15 Super II** £109.95  
**Replacement stylus** £82.50 (new unit)

**Ortofon UK Ltd.,**  
 Chiltern Hill,  
 Chalfont St. Peter,  
 Bucks. SL9 9UG  
 ☎ 01753 889949



## FANFARE FT-1 TUNER

(MAR. '95)

At high-end prices one's looking for more than routine off-air sound. As with all high-end gear one is listening for tiny vocal nuances such as the difference between palatal and glottal sounds from a singer.

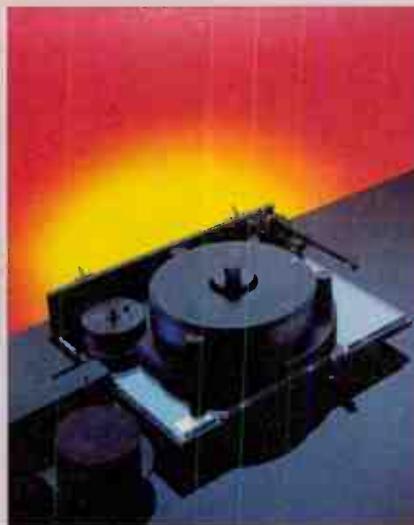
A fair array of jazz vocalists on Jazz FM provided just that, with a remarkably strong and firm bass line as well. The FT-1 produced near-CD quality here, double basses full of the distinctive twang of

strings, with or without buzz according to the key and fingering, just as they'd be heard live.

Acoustic instruments on Abdullah Ibrahim's 'African Marketplace' were splendid. Adding to the essential feeling of 'liveness' was the clarity brought to vocals, with the eerie sensation that a listener could almost trace the singers' tongues flicking back and forth as they enunciated their vowels.

Admittedly, price competition on this side of Atlantic is tough, but couch potatoes looking for a fully remote-controlled tuner with a serious audiophile pedigree should give this one more than passing consideration. **EB**

**Fanfare FT-1** £1350  
**RT Services,**  
 118 Mendip Heights,  
 Didcot, Oxon. OX11 7GT  
 ☎ 01235 8133058



## MICHELL ORBE TURNTABLE (APR. '95)

The Orbe not only reproduces the dynamics of instruments, but plays them in perfect consonance with each other. On a Dave Grusin LP, it suddenly became obvious that what normally is a tinkling sound on the right somewhere was actually finger-cymbals and each finger was practically visible.

The physical perspective of a recording was obvious, not just in the rock-solid positioning of players, but in

the ambient detail that placed even tiny echoes off studio walls. On Art Blakey's The African Beat it defined the physical shape of everything from flute to deep - astonishingly deep! - toms-toms, to the smallest flutter of fingers on a bongo. Tonally it is meticulously 'right' with crisp sheer treble and clean deep bass.

**EB**

**Michell Black Orbe excluding arm,**  
**inclusive of QC power supply.** £1950

**Michell Engineering Ltd.,**  
 2 Theobald Street,  
 Borehamwood,  
 Herts. WD6 4SE  
 ☎ 0181 953 0771



## AURA VA-80 AMPLIFIER

(APR. '95)

The Aura VA-80 continues the stripped-bare 'UK audiophile' tradition. Although of modest power output, it was superbly grippy. It worked in any system, sounding consistently impressive and was the most tonally neutral of all the amps on audition.

YMO's 'Music Plans' showed the VA-80 to be even more dynamic than the Pro-ject 7, possibly a function of its brighter tonal balance. It displayed lots of control, allowing notes to start and stop with great speed, and communicated the dynamics of the song in a manner out of step with its modest price tag. Although the Aura couldn't pump current NAD-style, it showed a clean pair of heels in other respects.

If you've already got a separate phono stage, the VA-80 is a formidable way to play records. But it will also get



# "SIMPLY THE BEST?"

- Hi-Fi World. October 1995

## You be the judge...

Certainly, amplifiers that sound as good or are built as well as these are few and far between. But exactly what is it that sets Unison Research apart from the rest? To begin with, a fanatical attention to quality in both design and construction. That, plus a generous helping of Italian artistry and real craftsmanship.

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The kind of sound which will put a smile on the face of any music lover, as the praise lavished by some of the world's top reviewers will testify.

"A *Classic*" enthused Hi Fi World. "*Simply sensational*" wrote Hi Fi News.

And the finish? "*It would do a Ferrari proud*" drooled one reviewer.

"*Drop-dead gorgeous*" wrote another.

If that sounds like your kind of amplifier, why not let your own eyes and ears be the judge? For more information on the Simply Two integrated amplifier (£995), the Simply Four (£1495), the amazing Smart 845 monoblocks (£2995), and the name of your nearest stockist, contact:



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## SIMPLY FOUR

by UNISON RESEARCH

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Each cable is custom made to order allowing the cable to be supplied in any length from 1.5m to 25m. A small range of alternative connectors are also available, offering different levels of performance.

BLACK VELVET is exceptional value for money at only £25 for 1 metre and £2.50 for each further stereo 0.5m. To keep the cost down for you the customer, BLACK VELVET is only available direct from APOLLO.

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Now that digital reproduction technology is so advanced, you can throw away all of your records.

"LOB LOCKS", as they say on the planet Anagramia

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MC 30  
supreme

ortofon

01753-889949

# WORLD WINNERS



the best from anything else you care to connect - indeed it soon found itself working as a reference amp, used to audition other equipment! Aura's VA-80 is excellent value for money - a testament to how good modern budget transistor amplifiers can be. **DP**

**Aura VA-80**

**£279**

Aura Designs,  
Marlborough Road,  
Churchill Ind. Est.,  
Lancing,  
W. Sussex BN15 8TR  
Tel: 01903 750750

attempt to convey the bassist's finger movements. Instruments retained more of their original timbre and feel - you could almost hear the vintage of that Stratocaster. The KEF Coda 7s have a damn good go at playing music in an involving and entertaining manner. **DP**

**KEF Coda 7**

**£129**

KEF Audio Ltd.,  
Tovil,  
Maldstone,  
Kent, ME15 6QP  
☎ 01622 672261

manner is absolutely captivating with classical music.

A properly designed three-way loudspeaker can be something special. They are more complex than two-way designs, but as Epos have demonstrated with the ES25s, the rewards can justify such complexity. They show that meticulous engineering and attention to detail can create something outstanding. **DB**

**Epos ES25**

**£1505**

Epos Acoustics,  
3 Ridgway, Havant,  
Hampshire PO9 1JS  
☎ 01705 407722



## KEF CODA 7

### LOUDSPEAKERS (APR. '95)

It soon became evident that the KEFs were playing music better than the Mission 731s. With more rhythmic push they were better able to impart music's emotion and drama. Although smoother, they also proved more detailed, throwing out extra strands of percussion and conveying a better sense of space around instruments.

United Future Organisation's 'United Future Airlines' threw more light on proceedings, the KEFs again proving the most enjoyable. Bass was more tuneful, pushing along the song with a real sense of purpose. The KEFs made a valiant

## EPOS ES25 LOUDSPEAKERS

### (MAY. '95)

The ES25s have an extremely coherent and focused sound, like Harbeth's HL-P3s with greater scale. Their midrange projects freely and smoothly to create a deep sound stage of exceptional clarity and body, notable with vocals and strings.

Bass is cleaner and more precise than most, revealing the detail of a bass guitar rather than portraying it as a powerful thud. Such bass resolution is a breath of fresh air, opening up a musical dimension that other loudspeakers only hint at.

The EL25s stay firmly in control at all times, offering a dry, neutral balance. This crisp, dry balance combined with their ability to resolve detail in a natural

## KEF REFERENCE SERIES

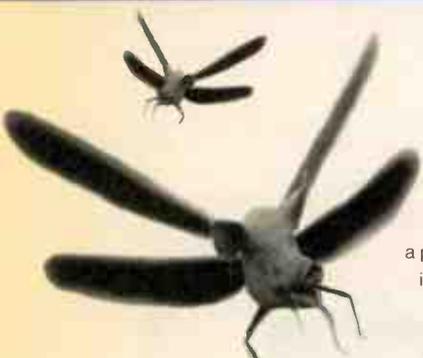
### MODEL ONE

### LOUDSPEAKERS (MAY. '95)

The KEF Reference Ones share the pinpoint imaging and walk-around soundstage of their bigger brothers, plus smooth, clean treble and midband. Bass isn't the fastest around, but it is agile. The magic of the KEFs is that they successfully combine detail and politeness.

Seal's eponymous debut album was an eye-opener, coming across with a greater sense of scale in the recorded acoustic. The KEFs threw out detail and were tonally inviting, imparting the timbre of the instruments, doubtless meticulously chosen by Mr Horn.





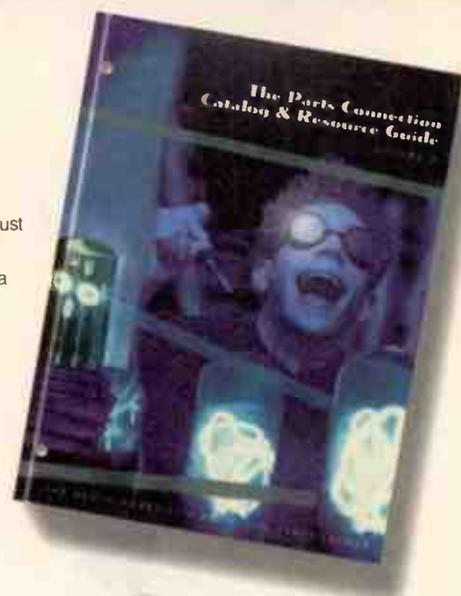
# When pigs fly.

Well, pigs have flown and **The Parts Connection Catalog & Resource Guide, Volume 2** has finally arrived.

It has been a long road, a lengthy wait, but the time is finally here. No longer just a parts catalog, but an essential resource guide for those DIY projects. Volume 2 includes some of the opening pages from the RCA Receiving Tube Manual, data sheets for many of the most popular tubes and schematics for several classic vacuum tube amplifiers and preamplifiers.

We have also added a whole slew of new products. An expanded selection of premium tubes from Golden Dragon, Audio Glassic and Sovtek, plus directly heated triodes like the newly manufactured Western Electric 300B and the Vaic Valve VV30B. More transformers from Magnequest, Plitron and Hammond, new capacitors, inductors, cable and more from all the best names in the business.

So, it took longer than expected. But we're confident that you will find it worth the wait. Make sure you get a hold of **The Parts Connection Catalog & Resource Guide, Volume 2** today. For just \$10 US you can land a copy of your very own, which includes a coupon worth \$10 off your first purchase over \$100 or \$25 off your first purchase over \$250. Contact The Parts Connection to order your copy today.



## New Old Stock Tubes to get you glowing.

Contact us to receive *The Breadboard*, our free bulletin - with over 100 NOS Tubes Listed.

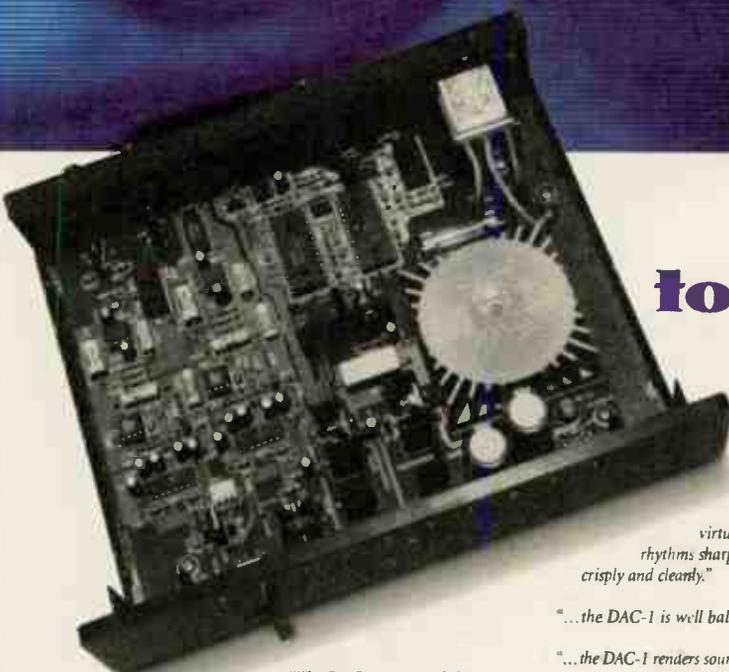
SKU #	TUBE TYPE	DESCRIPTION	MANUFACTURER	REMARKS	PRICE (U.S.\$)
52515	KT88-US	Beam Power Tetrode	National (Cetron) (USA) 1992/93	Made to MO Valve/GEC spec's, Gold Lion Eq	\$240.00 pr.
52518	211/VT-4C	Power Triode	General Electric (U.S.A.) 1942	In original U.S. Army boxes	\$175.00 ea.
NOTE: The above tubes ONLY do not qualify for our volume discounts.					
52522	807W/JAN 5933WA	Transmitting Tetrode	Sylvania (USA) 1961		\$17.50 ea.
56122	40KG6A/PL509	Beam Power Tetrode	USA	Singles individually boxed	\$25.00 ea.
52496	6C33C-B	Power Triode	Sovtek (Russia) 1993	Includes socket	\$50.00 ea.
53683	6080WC JAN	Dual Power Triode	Philips (USA)	White Box	\$15.00 ea.
53259	E34L	Power Pentode	Tesla (Czech) 1993/4	Matched Pairs Screened "Sonic Frontiers"	\$35.00 pr.
56157	6CG7/6FQ7	Dual Triode	RCA/Mix (USA)		\$20.00 ea.
56151	6LW6	Beam Power Pentode	USA		\$40.00 ea.
53117	12BH7	Dual Triode	GE (USA)	GE Box	\$17.50 ea.
52564	ECC808/6KX8	Dual Triode	Telefunken (Germany)	Spec's. Similar to 12AX7, Diamond Bottom!	\$40.00 ea.
52606	PCC88/7DJ8	Dual Triode	Mullard (U.K.)	(7.5V filament) Matched Pairs, Mullard boxes	\$20.00 pr.

PLEASE NOTE: Prices subject to change without notice due to availability from suppliers. Tubes are untested, AS IS, unless noted. Many other tube types available in small quantities. Mail or fax us a list of your needs! Prices are in U.S.\$ All tubes EXCEPT KT88-US and 211 qualify for VOLUME DISCOUNTS under our standard discount schedule; consult our catalog or call for further details and a complete listing of available N.O.S. tubes.

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*"...the pace, the progression of note to note in the music, was magnificent."*

*"What was far more important was the DAC-1's ability to portray all of the truly subtle signifiers..."*

*"...I think it's a killer unit - one that performs far, far better than its \$449.00 price tag would indicate."*

Wes Phillips, *Stereophile*, Vol. 18 No. 4, April 1995

*"...the kit arrives with one of the best written manuals you will ever read."*

*"The DAC-1's most compelling virtue is... [that] it bites into the music's rhythms sharply, reproducing dynamic accents crisply and clearly."*

*"...the DAC-1 is well balanced in its top to bottom tonality."*

*"...the DAC-1 renders sound stage dimensions superbly..."*

*"The DAC-1 really is a fine sounding converter and a cost effective way to step up from a CD player that has a digital output."*

Tom Müller, *The Audio Adventure*, Vol. 2, #1

*"The DAC-1 has a balanced presentation that I find myself enjoying increasingly as I listen to this product."*

*"The refined airiness was there, as was the feeling that the DAC-1 sounded more effortless when reproducing high level complex passages than the DITB."*

Bill Weigel, *Positive Feedback*, Vol. 5, #3

*"The instructions were superb in every way."*

*"...it came as no surprise to me to find a high level of component quality within the Assemblage."*

*"Treble is neither too soft or too dull, with just the right amount of crispness and sparkle to bring lack-luster recordings to life."*

*"With more complex passages, the Assemblage manages to bring a sense of order to the music, clearly differentiating between instruments and their respective melodies. A good perspective of depth and width certainly helped here, giving a large sound stage for the performers to work in."*

*"I suspect [The Parts Connection] will have a lot of success with the Assemblage DAC-1. It is easy and fun to build, competitively priced, and delivers fine sonic results too."*

Dominic Baker, *Hi-Fi World*, *DIY Supplement*, Jan 1995

At \$449 US, the Assemblage DAC-1 offers an outstanding value in digital conversion and comes with a **Satisfaction Guarantee** (return it within 30 days of purchase for a full refund), an **Assembly Guarantee** (if you can't get it running, we will!), a **Two-Year Limited Warranty** and **Phone Support** (Toll Free in the U.S. & Canada).

It comes in a small package (the DAC-1 is only 9.5" x 2" x 7") but packs quite a punch. With its fully assembled and tested board and comprehensive, fully illustrated assembly manual - the DAC-1 Digital Processor goes together in a snap (typically

about one hour) and requires only a soldering iron and a few hand tools. We've even included the solder!

The DAC-1's component list is exemplary. It employs a potted toroidal power transformer, low ESR power supply capacitors, Crystal CS8412 input receiver, NPC 5813 digital filter, and two Burr Brown PCM1702 20 bit DACs. The output stage is a direct coupled, Class A design, utilizing high speed Analog Devices ADB44 and AD847 op amps, film and foil polypropylene capacitors, and 1% metal film resistors. It accepts both Co-ax RCA and Toslink digital inputs.

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53343	I	7-11	2000-4500	55-75	300	\$760.00 pr.
53344	II	8-15	1800-3500	75-95	300	\$780.00 pr.
53345	III	12-20	1500-3000	100-120	300	\$800.00 pr.

Coming soon! Higher power VV38B, VV50B, VV52B.

## Western Electric's 300B is back.

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## WORLD WINNERS

KEF's Reference Series Ones offer most of the benefits of their esteemed bigger brothers, but avoid some, if not all of their pitfalls. For my money, thanks to their deliciously sweet, open, midrange, the KEFs ultimately come closer to true musical enjoyment than most of their competition. **DP**

**KEF Reference Series One £995**

**KEF Audio Ltd.,  
Tovil, Maidstone,  
Kent ME15 6QP  
☎ 01622 672261**

### MERIDIAN 551 AMPLIFIER

(MAY, '95)

Instantly impressive to listen to, the 551 has a smooth, powerful sound that puts it up with the best integrations under

£1000. Belly's new album, King, showed just what a smoothie the 551 could be. Without a hint of midrange coarseness, Tanya Donnelly's

breathy vocals soared gracefully upwards towards the crisp, focused cymbals. Treble is a touch bright in a harmonious way - open and delicate but solid, much like my benchmark Class A Sugden A21a.

The 551 has a sturdy bottom end too, putting real weight behind every note on Soundgarden's 'Black Hole Sun'. There's also a subtlety and finesse that suited the delicately played violin sonata of Guiseppe Tartini equally well. The Meridian 551 is a fine amplifier capable of doing justice to a wide range of music. **DB**

**Meridian 551 £795**

**Meridian Audio Ltd.,  
14 Clifton Road,  
Huntingdon,  
Cambs PE18 7EJ  
☎ 01480 457339**



### MARANTZ CD-63SE CD PLAYER (MAY, '95)

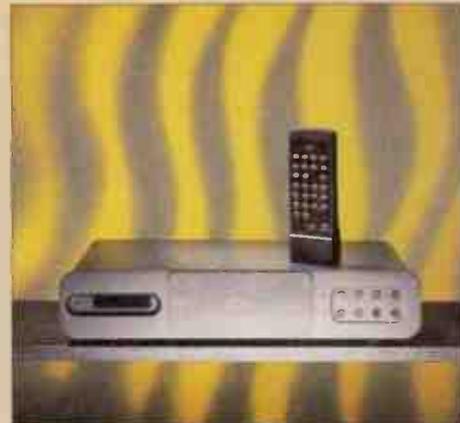
Vivid midband focus gave vocals a strongly etched outline with the CD-63SE. John Lee Hooker's voice croaked and rasped on 'Deep Blue Sea', an ability to convey strong dynamic inflections projecting his voice forward well.

Hard struck chords on Steve Earle's 'Someday' are a favourite test of mine and the Marantz again survived them with composure, conveying the bite of the strings without undue coarseness. And at the start of Jackie Leven's 'Gylen Gylen' the strings of a strummed guitar sounded especially sweet and clean.

This followed through into classical music well. Horns at the start of Scheherazade had richness and stayed well separated, exerting the nimble interjection intended when plucked - light, fast and attention catching.

Taken as a whole, the CD-63SE is one hell of a Compact Disc player. It's insightful and refined with a gloriously engaging and dynamic midband with sweet, pure treble. That puts it right at the top in this price bracket. It's a tribute to properly directed audiophile engineering. That really does make it special. **NK**

**Marantz CD-63SE £349.90  
Marantz Audio (UK),  
Kingsbridge House, Padbury Oaks,  
575-583 Bath Road,  
Longford, Middx UB7 0EH  
☎ 01753 680868**



### DPA RENAISSANCE CD PLAYER (JUN, '95)

When warmed up, instruments producing the complex Latin American percussion on both Songhai 2 and John Lee Hooker's Chill Out were so strongly etched across the sound stage I could barely believe how vividly this player imaged.

Unlike Pioneer and Denon, DPA don't use digital signal processing in their player. It's the properties of their in-house designed one-bit convertor that gives the Renaissance player its unique sound.

At the price, there no competitor to this product. It brings to percussion a richness of filigree detailing that's outstanding. It also gives bass lines and drums a peculiarly supple flow, yet firm power that will delight most listeners.

The new DPA Renaissance CD player offers breathtaking imagery, stunning dynamics and the magic ability to elevate all recordings to an equally high level of excitement; it puts music onto Prozac. This is a player I would recommend anyone to audition. **NK**

**DPA Renaissance CD player £895**

**DPA Digital Ltd.,  
Unit 7,  
Willowbrook Technical Units,  
Crickhowell Road,  
St. Mellons,  
Cardiff CF3 0EI.  
☎ 01222  
795621**



# WORLD WINNERS



## VAN DEN HUL MC10 MOVING COIL CARTRIDGE (JUN. '95)

From the second it hit the groove, the van den Hul MC10 had me enraptured. Bobby Gillespie's voice on 'Gentle Tuesday' suddenly sounded like he was crooning the lyrics, avoiding the insipid indie-style wailing that some other cartridges can produce. The bass line was immediately fluid and tuneful, guitar playing really emotive, while the drummer appeared to have more empathy with other players.

Treble was very finely etched, proving more detailed than that of competitors. Where gentle tambourines at the back of the mix had sounded fluffy and blurred, they become once again real tambourines.

All this results in a cartridge that's very hard to fault. Although it lacked tunnel-like front-to-back sound staging, on balance the van den Hul MC10 is a honey, pure and simple. **DP**

van den Hul MC10 £840

van den Hul UK,  
Unit 12, Imex House,  
6 Wadsworth Road,  
Perivale,  
Middx. UB3 7JS  
☎ 0181 810 9388



## LYRA LYDIAN MOVING COIL CARTRIDGE (JUN. '95)

The Lyra Lydian is an extremely smooth, civilised-sounding moving coil with no obvious weaknesses and more than its fair share of strengths.

Whatever music you ask it to play, the Lydian rewards with a balanced, polished performance. Its strong suit is impressive sound staging and imaging: it creates effects with great alacrity. But this is not to underestimate its impressive rhythmic ability.

ABC's 'North' revealed the Lyra's skill with percussion instruments. Hand claps and hi-hats alike were finely etched and had a gentle richness of tone. Plenty of bass poured forth, the Lydian going down deep with satisfying power.

It was difficult to fault such a transparent, balanced and detailed sound. **DP**

Lyra Lydian £649

Path Premier,  
Unit 2, Desborough Ind. Park,  
Desborough Park Road,  
High Wycombe,  
Bucks. HP12 3BG  
☎ 01494 441736

## HEYBROOK SEXTET II LOUDSPEAKERS (JUL. '95)

The new Sextet's bass is significantly stronger with greater extension and most importantly, superb fluidity and control. The peculiar rumbling deep bass of Angelique Kidjo's Aye album



best illustrated this. The Sextets resolved it well, showing a fine sense of note definition, making for impressively articulate bass lines.

Most importantly, Heybrook have retained the Sextet's wonderful imaging, close to that of the Quad electrostatic. It projects music out of the box like few others, producing a glorious sound stage with lifelike images, now with even more body and believability.

On the almost impossibly difficult task of reproducing violin the Sextet is better than ever - and something of a class leader. The pure, high-pitched solo of Samuel Magad at the start of Rimsky Korsakov's Scheherazade managed to show how this instrument can be both challenging to listen to, raw in the way its strings rasp under the bow, yet at the same time natural and unflagging through the Tonigen ribbon tweeter. Superb insight into the surrounding acoustic, gasps for breath by Magad and the most deliciously precise and sure stereo image all added to the excellence of the revised Sextet's performance.

**NK**

Heybrook Sextet £1129

Heybrook Hi-Fi Ltd,  
Estover Industrial Estate,  
Plymouth PL6 7PL  
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# WORLD WINNERS



## TEAC V-8030S CASSETTE DECK (AUG. '95)

The V-8030S is a veritable Rolls Royce of a machine, with substantial build and more facilities than you'll probably ever need, including Dolby S.

My listening started with Sheffield Lab's pre-recorded cassette of James Newton Howard and friends, which had a warm, solid synth bass line and crisp (never harsh) treble detail in the percussion. TEAC's V-8030S proved its ability with pre-recorded cassettes, almost matching my own Nakamichi Tri-Tracer.

On ferric (normal) tape, results with TDK AR were particularly good. High input levels of +4 were easily achieved and even with no Dolby a perfectly acceptable signal-to-noise ratio could be achieved. However, pulling record level back to +2 maximum to avoid treble overload, and switching in Dolby S gave near perfect results with TDK AR - uncanny.

The TEAC V-8030S worked a treat on metal tape (TDK MA), with strong preservation of detail and was capable of huge input levels (+8dB) with Dolby S and almost as much with Dolby B - here's a top deck that's wonderful to use and gives superb results, for those who want the best from cassette. **NK**

TEAC V-8030S

£649.95

TEAC UK Ltd.,  
5 Marlin House,

The Croxley Centre,  
Watford,

Herts. WD1 8YA

☎ 01923

819430



## UNISON SIMPLY 2 AMPLIFIER (AUG. '95)

The Simply Two can handle dynamics with extraordinary dexterity. The drum solo in 'One Love Stand' was tight and fast, with the stereo image projecting well into the room. Subtle little sound treats like the Fender Rhodes and Latin percussion rose almost as if by magic to the surface of a most convincing sound stage.

Talking Heads' live version of 'Psycho Killer' on Stop making Sense had a marvellous sense of space, and the sound of the crowd was particularly convincing. The Unison design is extremely musical and so compatible with a variety of styles. Even in the vocal extremes, where David Byrne really strains, the Simply Two maintained its composure with sufficient headroom to produce a flawless performance.

Tchaikovsky's Pathetique, sensitively conducted by Sir Yehudi Menuhin sounded magnificent. It is a work of contrasting deep melancholy and ecstatic jubilation. These emotions were perfectly translated by the Simply Two, and the genius of this great Russian composer was clearly portrayed in this autobiographical work. From the first solo bassoon to the soft woodwind and strings, the Simply Two performed like virtuoso. **DF-D**

Unison Research Simply Two

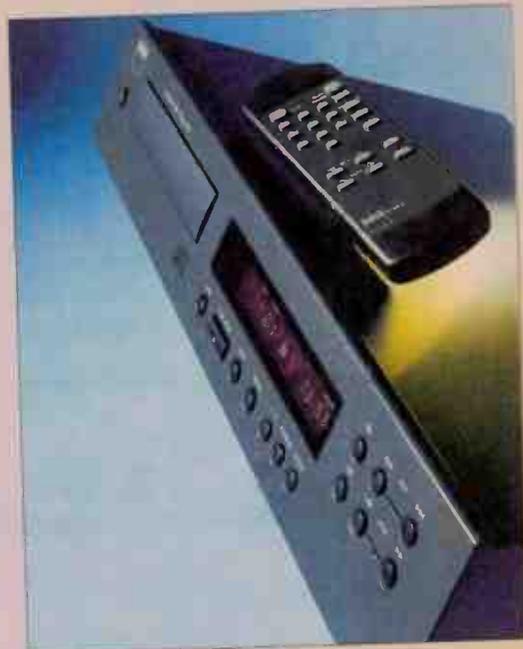
£995

U.K. Distribution,

23 Richings Way,

Iver, Bucks. SL0 9DA

☎ 01753 652669



## NAD 514 CD PLAYER (AUG. '95)

The first CD loaded into the NAD was Maxinquaye by Tricky, a good test of the 514's ability in handling deep processed bass and psychedelic instrumentation. The NAD had no trouble in conveying the deepest bass notes with conviction and weight. Vocals had good presence and a lack of 'glare' that allowed comfortable listening at high levels.

The NAD proved supremely relaxing to listen to and free from any distracting foibles. The NAD was also slightly less rough around the edges than the Marantz CD-63SE at times, and possessed class-leading instrument separation during loud and difficult passages. Combine this with its fine build quality, sensible blend of facilities and understated styling, and the 514 becomes a real force to be reckoned with. If you've already tried the CD-63SE and found it too strident, then the NAD 514 is the next best thing. **DT**

NAD 514

£349.95

NAD Marketing,

NAD Building,

401-405 Nether Street,

London N3 1QG.

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# WORLD WINNERS



## MARANTZ CD-16 CD PLAYER (AUG. '95)

Where most CD players have some area of their performance that you can pin-point, like a brightness to the treble, a coarseness to the midrange or strong bass, the CD-16 displays little character of its own, remaining extremely neutral, smooth and reserved in its performance.

The CD-16 has an uncanny knack of allowing you to forget the hi-fi and concentrate on the music. Indeed, after a while you forget it's even there. Belly's 'Judas my Heart', from their King album, enjoyed wide open acoustics, with superb detail resolution, drawing you deep into the music. Vocals were especially smooth and free from coarseness or grit, following majestically from the 'speakers.

This superb smoothness helped Salvatore Accardo's violin create a delicious open and clear performance, which was totally superb. Slight changes in pitch and the complex harmonic structure were captured without being overstated, to create a realistic and neutral performance.

This super-competent player remained unflustered by the multi tracked, heavily produced The The album Mind Bomb, with all its effects and complex interleaving. With a wide sound stage, images tightly focused, its coherence made sense out of a recording which trips up most players.

The CD-16 is one of the most universally consistent players around, bringing a level of musicality to all styles of music that

will provide years of long term enjoyment. **DB**

**Marantz CD-16**

**£1,399**

**Marantz Audio (UK),  
Kingsbridge House,  
Padbury Oaks, 575-583 Bath Road,  
Longford, Middx. UB7 0EH  
☎ 01753 680868**



## McINTOSH MA6800 AMPLIFIER (SEPT. '95)

As you'd expect, the MA6800 didn't so much play music as take control of it. There was an effortless drive to bass lines, REM's 'Low' with its mellow resonant bass guitar intro powered the 'speaker cones to their limit with control and precision. It had terrific upper bass punch, with dynamics to match, giving a crisp, firm attack to well recorded rock. The burst of leading edge dynamics you get from a guitar chord was captivating.

With a good recording such as Sheryl Crow's recent Tuesday Night Music Club, the overall scale of reproduction was massive, creating a three-dimensional sound stage. Stage height and width was expansive, and depth surprisingly good, if not quite up with the best. The MA6800 has a brightly lit treble, which helped to give the sensation of space and atmosphere, and an incisiveness with hi-hats and similar percussion.

Locatelli's Concerto for violin, string and basso continuo proved a good test of tonal character. The MA6800 is velvety smooth through the midrange, with just the slightest hint of grain - and then only on the fiercest notes.

In sound quality terms alone this amplifier could be bettered at the price. But for the listener who wants a versatile amplifier, the MA6800 looks good. Its strength comes from its unusually broad range of abilities, rather than for any one judged in isolation. **DB**

**McIntosh MA6800**

**£3735**

**MPI Electronics,  
13 Western Roa1  
Guildford,  
Surrey GU2 6AU  
☎ 01483 454993**



## UNISON SIMPLY 4 AMPLIFIER (OCT. '95)

The first piece into the CD player was a foné recording of I Violini di Cremona. This was quite apt really, being recorded in Italy where the Unison is manufactured, using Neumann valve microphones. Mendelssohn's Op62 was captivating, the tone and character of the Stradivari violin finding space to breathe and flourish in the gentle hands of the Simply 4. The firmly struck keys of a Steinway piano were rich with overtones, forming a solid foundation for the violin.

But does the Simply 4 have blood and guts beneath its genteel front? P.J. Harvey's 'Meet Ze Monsta' provided the answer with its raw electric guitars, heavy bass line and viciously struck cymbals. The Simply 4 sailed through this test, even on less sensitive 'speakers such as Heybrook's 86.5dB Heylos, with more than enough power





## WORLD WINNERS

and dynamics to make a clean stab at each transient. Most impressive though was the depth and power of its bass.

Moving back to gentler melodies, the Unison continued to impress, showing how even-handedly it can cope with a wide range of music and styles. It has an inherent rightness to its sound, the way it pulls a performance together, each instrument perfectly in time and clearly positioned across a panoramic stage.

All in all, Unison have put together a highly attractive package in the Simply 4, one that should be extremely popular with all music lovers. **DB**

**Unison Simply 4** £1495

**UK Distribution,**  
23 Richings Way,  
Iver, Bucks. SL0 9DA  
☎ 01753 652669.



### KENWOOD KT-6050L TUNER (OCT. '95)

Tuners like this have you sitting in your seat wondering at the sheer wealth of music out there, pulling you deeper even into music you thought you didn't like. I even found myself listening to Keith Jarrett's Cologne '75 concert with rapt attention. I normally find him a bore, but there was the full, gorgeous, embracing ECM sound. Catching a bit of Berlioz's Les Francs-juges on Radio 3 tempted me to listen later and longer, to an unfamiliar opera, Verdi's Aroldo. The reason was that the range of orchestral colours in the Berlioz was startling. Sweet strings, clarity and near-perfection in woodwind tone, and

above all a rich, warm sound that differentiated trumpets, from horns. It even a bass trombone from a tuba.

The KT-6050L almost put CD put power behind that awesome bass in Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Relax', despite Virgin's compression. Even then, Bob Marley's 'One Love' was strong enough for all but Cerwin-Vega fans - very, very tuneful and as clear and as detailed as the CD. **EB**

**Kenwood KT-6050** £299.95

**Kenwood House,**  
Dwight Road,  
Watford,  
Herts. WD1 8EB.  
☎ 01923 816444



### NAD 510 CD PLAYER (OCT. '95)

Gorecki's moving but sometimes quite maudlin 3rd Symphony is haunting with a treat of string arrangements. The 510 certainly had grace and composure here; the soundstage was wide, deep and well suited to such an orchestral work.

For piano fans, especially jazzists, it is well worth a listen to Harry Connick Junior's 'Our Love is Here to Stay'. The solo has a fantastic lower midrange with demanding attack, which once again the 510 cruised through with the utmost pleasure. Triplets in the higher register of the keyboard, as well as the resounding bass notes, revealed the tonal quality and action of the instrument. The 510 delivered musical expression really well.

Female vocals sounded smooth, crisp and deep. So were backing vocals in a commendably lifelike soundstage. High frequency dynamics, especially in Rickie Lee Jones' 'Livin' It Up', were especially impressive. The bell-trees, chimes and triangles really did have

acoustic timbre, revealing all the essential harmonics, an ability beyond the reach of many machines.

I tried a number of rock, dance and fusion tracks which all sounded equally well performed. The NAD is a more than competent all-rounder which will find many a home. Real piano lovers will drool. **DF-D**

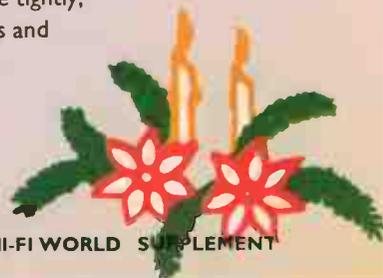
**NAD 510** £199.95

**NAD Marketing,**  
NAD Building,  
401-405 Nether Street,  
London N3 1QG.  
☎ 0181 343 3240



### DPA LITTLE BIT III CD CONVERTOR (NOV. '95)

On the end of a CD-63SE's coaxial output, first impressions were that DPA had engineered a phantom loudness button into the new Little Bit, as bass took a turn for the deeper and treble gained bite. But further into Linton Kwesi Johnson's In Dub it was clear the DPA didn't just add weight to the frequency extremes, it actually had a lot more grip too. Sequenced bass on Opus 3's 'It's a Fine Day' started and stopped more tightly, while cymbals and percussion detailing sounded brighter



# WORLD WINNERS



and more finely etched.

Ride's 'Twisterella' underlined the DPA's superiority. In its scale, the recorded acoustic was big and dramatic, with better space between Mark Gardner's vocals and the frenetic backing guitars. Drums cut through the mix, pushing the song along just as they're supposed to.

For £300, I can think of no other DAC I'd rather have. There's nothing around at the price to beat it. **DP**

**DPA Little Bit £300**

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Crickhowell Road, St Melons,  
Cardiff CF3 0EF  
☎ 01222 795621



## RESON rs1 TURNTABLE

(NOV. '95)

Michelle Shocked's Captain Swing was the first disc to hit the felt. The rs1 immediately struck a chord. The punchy fleet-of-foot sound leapt from the 'speakers with the alacrity this involving album requires.

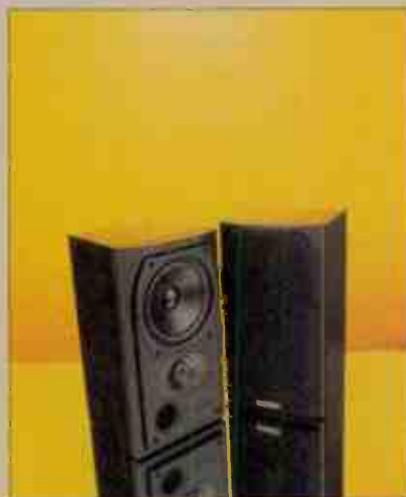
Paul Weller's Stanley Road offered a complete change of mood, which

the Reson readily adapted to. Although the pace was taken down a peg or two compared with Shocked, the rs1 still produced excellent rhythmic integrity that held the track together. It's a lean yet vibrant sound quality that really draws the listener in.

An adaptation of Duke Ellington's 'Come Sunday' by Alec Dankworth and Nigel Kennedy, on double bass and violin respectively, changed the pace of things yet again. With just two instruments it's a rather sparse piece, but one full of intricate detail nonetheless. The rs1 had no trouble depicting this. It captured every breath, every stroke, and really gave the listener the impression of being there. The double bass was produced with quite sufficient body and weight and resonance and woody timbre. That the Reson rs1 is an impressive turntable is without doubt. **DT**

**Virtual Reality rs1 £600**

Virtual Reality Audio Systems,  
PO Box 383,  
Brentwood,  
Essex CM14 4GB  
☎ 01277 227355.



## 25. MISSION 731LE

**LOUDSPEAKERS (NOV. '95)**

The LE is an extensive reworking of Mission's entry-level 'speaker, with some very original thinking. But most

importantly, they sound great. Where the starter 731s were dynamically a little flat and prone to flap their polypropylene cones at the slightest hint of volume, the LEs hold on tight, imparting transients in their full, uncompressed glory.

On the end of a Marantz CD-63SE and NAD 302 amp, the LEs worked superbly. Dynamically, the LEs are a dramatic improvement on the standard 731s too, with a confidence and poise unexpected at the bottom of the market. Notes started and stopped tightly, with little break-up on accents or peaks.

With Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, the LEs made a surprisingly sophisticated job of 'Moanin', Blakey's cymbal work showing commendable finesse. Sharper than the old 760iSEs, so refined were they I found it hard to believe it was the same tweeter as in the cooking version.

So neutral were the 731LEs that some may actually hanker after a bit of artificial warmth. Thanks to their super-rigid design the cabinet seems to all but disappear, losing that upper bass bloom that's a fact of life for most budget miniatures.

If you want to know what the rest of your system is doing, these are the only £150 loudspeakers that don't pull punches. Overall, I can think of no other 'speaker at this price I'd rather have. **DP**

**Mission 731LE £149**

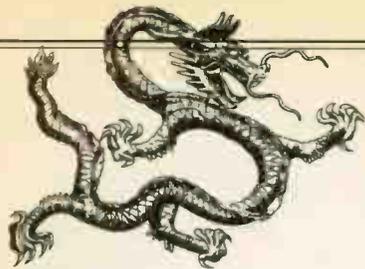
Mission Electronics,  
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What distinguishes the really good digital source (DAC or transport, or this case both) is its ability to portray real musical dynamics. Music swelled out of the Mac on a Ravel recording, giving one of the best impressions of true orchestral dynamics to be had from digital. There were the brass





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# WORLD WINNERS



instruments, clear and crisp, even the occasional oomphing of the tuba quite distinguishable from a bass trombone.

Imaging had a 'cut-glass' aspect which I favour anyway, laying out the components of a group or orchestra like the individual facets of a diamond. Fischer-Dieskau singing Schubert Lieder was simply entrancing. Piano and voice utterly stable, imaginable as being in the were room, with absolute control of the dynamics of the instrument and vocal nuances to boot.

Subtle and delicate when it needed to be, the Mac could put on the bover boots as well. You want power rock? A bit of House? Well, lead and rhythm guitars ripped out of the speakers, kick drums kicked, and House beats thundered across the floorboards. And subtle enough at the same time so if you wanted to know exactly what Rickie Lee Jones' Cabasse guitar sounded like, all you had to do was slide the CD into the McIntosh's drawer in preference to almost anything else. It's not just inspiring; it's inspired. **EB**

McIntosh CDM 7009

£2,535

MPI Electronics,  
13 Western Road,  
Guildford,  
Surrey GU1 6AU  
☎ 01483 454993



## PHILIPS DCC 730 DCC RECORDER (DEC. '95)

Starting with pre-recorded DCCs, Oleta Adams' 'My heart won't lie', from her Evolution album, sounded clean and CD-like in character, although there was a certain warmth and thickness to the bottom end. However, it was pleasant, in dynamic contrast to the gifted songstress' voice. Miss Adams' C7 midi piano sounded really natural, and not overly electronic at all.

Recording digitally the DCC 730 is more than capable of delivering arguably the best recording quality around for under £250. In terms of noise (i.e. tape hiss, hum etc.) the DCC attains near studio acceptability levels of. The dynamic range is good too.

The 18-bit converter is noticeably superior to 16-bit machines I have heard. This upgrade in specification is heard mainly in the overall smoothness and linearity of programme, and does induce a more 'analogue' presentation.

Those with a collection of analogue pre-recordeds won't be disappointed by the DCC 730 either. It had a tight grip on tempo and reproduced music cleanly. 'Free Nelson Mandela' fairly span along, as it should - a great sound from The Special AKA.

Here we have a digital recording system, with available pre-recorded material and the ability to compile personal selections digitally direct from CD. I'd say DCC has a future and the new DCC 730 is a good ambassador for the format. It's a bargain. **DF-D**

Philips DCC 730

£250

Philips Consumer Electronics Ltd.,  
City House,

470-430 London Road,  
Croydon,  
Surrey CR9 3QR  
☎ 0181 689 2166



## SHEARNE PHASE 3 POWER AMPLIFIER (DEC. '95)

The word 'neutral' these days is too often used as a synonym for 'boring'. That the Shearne Phase 3 power amp is decidedly not, but 'neutral' it is. Pressed into service via a passive pot for some hurried listening to a number of CD players, it became clear within minutes that the character of anything put through the cables into it was going to come out absolutely unaffected except by a tinge of richness at the bottom end.

Wired up to my usual Argo HR pre-amp it was difficult to believe the Decca Ashkenazy recording of Tchaikovsky's Sixth wasn't issuing out of big B&W monitors in one of Decca's Kilburn mastering suites. It was dynamic, big, brassy and thoroughly exciting.

The Phase 3 power amp is an astonishing sonic bargain. Shearne owners can start off a good few rungs higher up the quality ladder than most. **EB**

Shearne Phase 3

£619

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# CHRISTMAS MUSIC



## Christmas Juke Box

**Our all time pick of the festive bunch from traditional carols to seasonal pop.**



### Rock & Pop

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
**Yule Cool - 43 all time classics from the golden age of the Christmas song**  
VTDCD 36

● Peace on earth and good be to men. Yule Cool has once again been unleashed on an unsuspecting public in time for Christmas - what a joy.

This double slice of obscure Navidad cheer is so amazingly bad that it actually becomes quite cool to listen to. You know, in that groovy - what a cringe sort of way - it actually ends up being a laugh to flip on with your mates.

The 43 archaic singalongs on Yule Cool are a sleigh ride through the history of the Christmas song. And what a rich and wonderful history it is.

While the album is distinctly lacking in

terms of variety, it is overloaded with Christmas faves.

They're all here from Perry Como's 'I Wish It Could Be Christmas Forever', to Pat Boone's 'White Christmas', and of course, Les Paul's 'Jingle Bells' is there too. This is a cracker - full of classics to rock to when the relatives come Christmas Day.

To set the scene: you've eaten the turkey and Christmas pud, you've gobbled down tons of nuts and brussels, you've even packed away a little trifle and chocolate log. There you are stuffed to the gills and unable to move from the sofa. The family is gathered around, it's hot, and you're tipsy. What do you need to break the ice and break the monotony and boredom? A Christmas singalong, and Yule Cool is guaranteed to supply just that. It can't fail to get granny singing and send your nephews packing to watch Christmas Blind Date.

The interesting thing about Yule Cool is the amount of supposedly half-credible artists who made total gimps of themselves recording duff Christmas singles. I really thought more of (well not that much more) the Shadows, Ella Fitzgerald, Jim Reeves and Steeleye Span, who feature on this, if the truth be told, suspect CD.

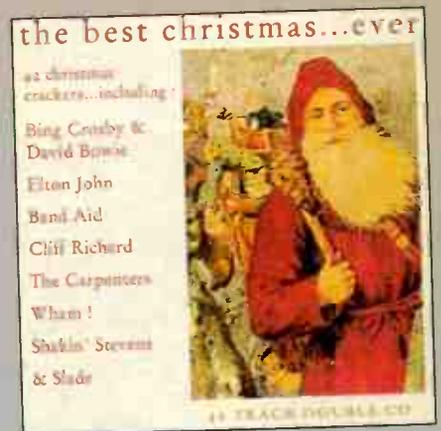
On the other hand there are some genuinely pleasant surprises. 'Christmas Trumpets' by Ray Anthony, a Benny Hill sound which has no doubt adorned many a 70s porn film, 'Baby it's Cold Outside' by Jimmy Smith and Wes Montgomery, a sort of old style Ronny Jordan crossed with Corduroy, and The Ventures play on 'Frosty the Snowman'.

As a parting shot, it would be fitting

to leave you with a couple of classic song writing lines from Nat King Cole's 'The little boy that Santa Claus forgot'.

"The little boy sent a note to Santa for some soldiers and a drum / And it broke his little heart when he found Santa hadn't come / . . . he saw all those lucky boys / then wanders home to all of last years little toys / I feel sorry for that laddie, he hasn't got a daddy."

Gets you thinking, doesn't it? And that, I guess, is what Christmas is all about. Hmm?



**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
**the best christmas... ever!**  
VIRGIN VID CD23

● In the old days Christmas meant one of two things - the endless reissues of Phil Spector's justly legendary Christmas Album, or the inevitable down-the-boozer singalong concoctions of the wonderful Max Bygraves (irony, irony). Things changed a couple of years back when Virgin put out this 42 song compilation that does its best to live up to its name. Inevitably perhaps, the prevalent image is a mixture of twee sentiment and the overtly religious. Despite this it's at least an amusing



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**B&W**

# CHRISTMAS MUSIC



party piece that inevitably kicks-off with 'Do They Know It's Christmas' and runs the gamut of musical styles and eras. These are mostly predictable chart regulars as far apart in time and technique as Bing Crosby's 'White Christmas' and Slade's 'Merry Christmas Everybody'.

This is not to say the double set isn't without its fair share of oddities and surprises - the perennial 'Blue Christmas' features as both a fairly commercial Miles Davis version (with unaccredited vocal coda - surely not Miles himself?) and a sentimental country interpretation from a pre-pigtailed Willie Nelson. The inimitable Eartha Kitt is a mite less sensual than usual on 'Santa Baby', but that doesn't prevent her Santa being something of a sugar daddy whose gift list includes "a '54 convertible... light blue" to which the lady adds "I want a yacht - not a lot". This contrasts with the inevitably sugary Andy Williams recommendation for a happy Yuletide - "so eat a peppermint stick / for old St. Nick".

Chronologically the set jumps about all over the place, with fairly recent openers such as Wham!'s 'Last Christmas', or Elton John's ebullient invitation for us to 'Step into Christmas'. The Spector stuff is echoed by the likes of 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town' from the Jackson Five, where Michael sounds (and probably was) about seven years old. The more oddball material includes Jonah Lewie's 'Stop the Cavalry' and Mike Oldfield's reinterpretation of Mozart with 'In Dulce Jubilo'. Perhaps the cleverest song here comes from post-punkettes the Waitresses with their ultra horny 'Christmas Wrapping'.

Adam Faith (in those early days a snarling leather jacketed yob) chips in with little more than a trite re-write of 'How Much is That Doggie in the Window', rerun as a 'Lonely Pup in a (Christmas Shop)'. This record is so bad I think it made its last appearance on

one of the late Kenny Everett's "Worst Records Ever" collections. The once much

boot-legged and highly collectable Bing Crosby / David Bowie collaboration 'Peace On Earth - Little Drummer Boy' is present, as well as the relatively unfamiliar like Freiheit's 'Keeping the Dream Alive' (very Beatles meet ELO).

The usual favourites are here too - Gary Glitter's 'Another Rock'n'Roll Christmas', that Slade one, etc. The only notable omissions are Lennon's 'Happy Xmas (War Is Over)' and Roy Wood and Wizzard's 'I Wish it could Be Christmas Every Day'. If by three quarters of the way through the record does tend to become a trifle mushy - Perry Como, The Weavers, The Temptations at their absolute nadir with a weedy 'Silent Night' - most of us are by then far beyond the pudding and port stage, and more ready for a slow schmoozer than a frantic pogo - have a good one.

## Jazz

Walk into any decent-sized record store in November and December and you can expect to be assailed by rack after rack of gaudily tacky sleeves. Most of which, rest assured, will turn out to be pretty worthless compilations shuffling the usual round up of horrendous 70s Christmas hits: Slade, Wings, Greg Lake. . . Still, as ever, a bit of persistence can pay off; there are gems worth looking for out there. These are a few I've picked. It's by no mean a definitive selection - how could it be? - nor a particularly objective one, but I guarantee this lot will warm the cockles of even the most Scrooge-like heart.

**NAT KING COLE AND DEAN MARTIN**  
**Christmas With Nat and Dean**  
EMI CD-MFP5902

● Nat and Dean alternate on this bumper 22-track collection. Nat, of course, had the perfect Christmas



voice: no matter what he sang, it conjured up images of a blazing log fire, the kids tucked up in bed, the curtains shut on a cold, cold world. So give him 'Joy to the World' or 'The Happiest Christmas Tree' and your Christmas is complete. This set includes him singing 'The Christmas Song' (better known as 'Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire') surely the finest moment of festive crooning ever recorded.

Dean Martin, of course, was a very different singer altogether. Cole was pure warmth and sincerity; Martin was always more knowing, with that edge of irony in his voice. Here he turns in, among others, 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer', 'The Christmas Blues' and that classic now immortalised in the Die Hard films, 'Let it Snow, Let It Snow'.

Other essential MOR and Crooning Christmas Classics we don't have time to cover include Peggy Lee's The Christmas Album, Ella Fitzgerald's Christmas, the fantastic Sinatra Christmas Album, and Bing Crosby's Christmas Classics. You can also hear more Nat and Dean, individually, on Dean Martin's A Winter Romance and Nat King Cole's The Christmas Song.

**PHIL SPECTOR**  
**A Christmas Gift For You**  
CDP793675 2

● Yeah, sure, an obvious choice, but this remains the essential Christmas pop album. 'This album was produced solely for you and only with you in mind,' said Phil, back in 1963. And you have to believe him! Each one of these songs is now a classic: Dalene Love's



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# CHRISTMAS MUSIC



'White Christmas', The Ronettes' 'Frosty the Snowman', Bob B Soxx and the Blue Jeans' 'Here Comes Santa Claus' and, of course, The Ronettes' 'I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus'. It's all there: Spector's perfect pop production, a classic Spector house band (look out for pianist Leon Russell, percussionists Sonny Bono and Jack Nitzsche, and even jazz guitar great Barney Kessel), and all those heartbreak voices. Perfect.



**ELVIS PRESLEY**  
**Elvis' Christmas Album**  
 RCA ND90300

● Presley is essential at Christmas; now we're all obsessed with authenticity and see Elvis as a musical irrelevance, it's all too easy to forget what a simply beautiful voice the man had.

There's something almost

operatic in his renditions of 'I'll be Home for Christmas', 'I Believe', 'Oh Little Town of Bethlehem' and the obviously deeply felt 'It's No Secret (What God Can Do)'.



**AL GREEN AND ACE CANNON**  
**Christmas Cheers**  
 DEMON HIJKCD126

● Essentially, two sets by two R'n'B greats. Honking tenor saxophonist Ace Cannon squawks his way through your standard fare - 'Jingle Bell Rock', 'Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree', 'Let It Snow' - with great, blustering verve. Santa never swaggered so much. Meanwhile the Reverend Al Green is the perfect choice for some Christmas Soul. Green always did have soul music's most angelic voice (and to be fair, still does); on songs like 'White Christmas', 'What Christmas Means to Me' and 'Oh Holy Night', the tortured edge he always had when handling more explicitly erotic love songs is absent. This stuff he sings with a clear conscience and absolute joy.

**KENNY AND DOLLY**  
**Once Upon A Christmas**  
 RCA ND90615

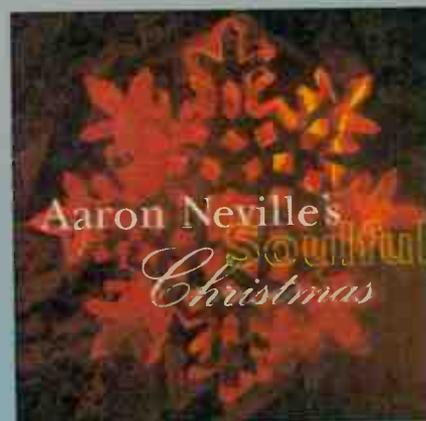
● A moment of high Christmas kitsch; music from Kenny and Dolly's 1984 Christmas special, complete with singing kids. 'Silent Night', 'A Christmas to Remember', 'The Greatest Gift of All: Christmas' and 'Country Music' a ways had in common something deeply



corny, and this album exemplifies it. Camp heaven.

**AARON NEVILLE**  
**Soulful Christmas**  
 A&M 540 127-2

● I make no apologies if this list has seemed a tad nostalgic; if you can't drop your 'cutting edge' attitudes at Christmas, when can you? And, sad to say, Christmas records these days simply aren't up to much, for reasons too numerous to go into here. Nonetheless, Aaron Neville's Christmas collection from a couple of years back deserves a special mention. Like Al Green, there's a touch of the angelic in Neville's voice. Here he and a bunch of slick sessioneers turn in a heart-warming Deep South R'n'B, taking on 'White Christmas', 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' and so on. Pick of the bunch for me, though, is a beautiful little version of 'The Bells of Saint Mary's': Neville's swooping falsetto at its most heart-rending.





# CHRISTMAS MUSIC

## Classical



### THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC COLLECTION The Christmas Album TRP083

● It's bad enough reviewing Christmas records two months before the event, so what it must be like to record them at the height of a very hot summer I cannot imagine. Nevertheless, a shirt-sleeved Royal Philharmonic Orchestra succeeded in getting fully into the spirit of things back in July, and in 'The Christmas Album' succeeded in producing not just a well-above-average Christmas offering, but a superlative recording in its own right.

'The Christmas Album' is a pleasing mix of the contemporary and the traditional. There are four new, or relatively new carols from the pen of that very fine choral composer and conductor, John Rutter, and two other new pieces from the conductor of this recording, Vaughan Meakins. John Rutter, especially, shows a complete mastery of the idiom, with music of delightful freshness and radiance. Carols for the 'nineties sounds a trifle pompous, but I'm sure today's children will come to love 'Candlelight Carol', 'Shepherd's Pipe Carol' and 'Donkey Carol' as much as those of us of rather more advanced years still cannot fail to thrill to the splendour of 'O Come All

Ye Faithful' and 'Hark The Herald Angels Sing'.

The technical quality of this recording is thrilling, thanks to Sony's 20-bit SBM (Super Bit Mapping) system. The glorious choral sound is impressively captured, but without swamping the orchestral contribution; and, at the other end of scale, the delicacy of the solo voices shines through.

Several of the traditional carols are in arrangements made by one of the Royal Philharmonic's double bass players, Gareth Wood, and these - not unexpectedly - make the most of the full forces of the orchestra, getting progressively grander and more brilliant with each verse. There is also a very jolly setting by John Gardner of that old favourite 'The Holly and the Ivy' - why was I reminded of Doris Day singing The Deadwood Stage? Howard Blake's 'Walking in the Air' is by now essential and features here in a very effective choral version.

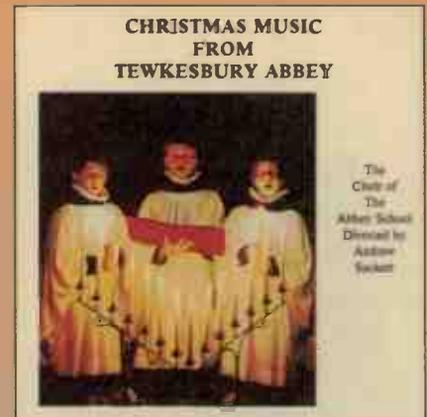
Altogether, The Christmas Album is one of the better musical offerings for the festive season to have appeared of late, evidently put together with a good deal of thought and care, and superbly played and recorded.

### THE CHOIR OF THE ABBEY SCHOOL

#### Christmas Music From Tewkesbury Abbey FOX 032cd

● This CD from Foxglove is of Christmas Music from Tewkesbury Abbey in Gloucestershire, with a broad selection of music sung by the Choir of the Abbey School under the direction of Andrew Sackett. The recordings are uniformly satisfying, clean-toned, airy and well focused, and the performances, of composers from Palestrina to John Tavener, are well-paced and finely-characterised. And you can enjoy 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' in two quite distinct arrangements, one for solo handbells.

Christmas Music from Tewkesbury Abbey comes on Foxglove FOX032cd, and the only disappointing aspect of



the production is the paucity of information contained in the accompanying booklet: there's not a word about the music.

If you want to explore beyond the usual Christmas repertoire, then the Tallis Scholars' Christmas carols and motets on Gimell (CDGIM010) has much to recommend it. The programme includes four medieval carols, including 'Angelus ad Virginem' and 'There is No Rose', three arrangements of the beguiling 'Coventry Carol', four settings of the 'Ave Maria', and four German chorales by Praetorius and J.S. Bach, all performed with the Tallis Scholars' usual precision and purity of tone and line.

However, if you want to recapture something of the true spirit of a medieval Christmas, then the Martin Best Ensemble's exhilarating mixture of the sacred and the secular on Nimbus Records (Thys Yool, N15137) is the CD to seek out. It magically contrasts a group of festive Wassail carols with a sequence of devotional songs to the Virgin, all performed with great intensity and not a little virtuosity, both vocal and instrumental. And the recording is knockout!

*Wishing you a very  
Merry Christmas*



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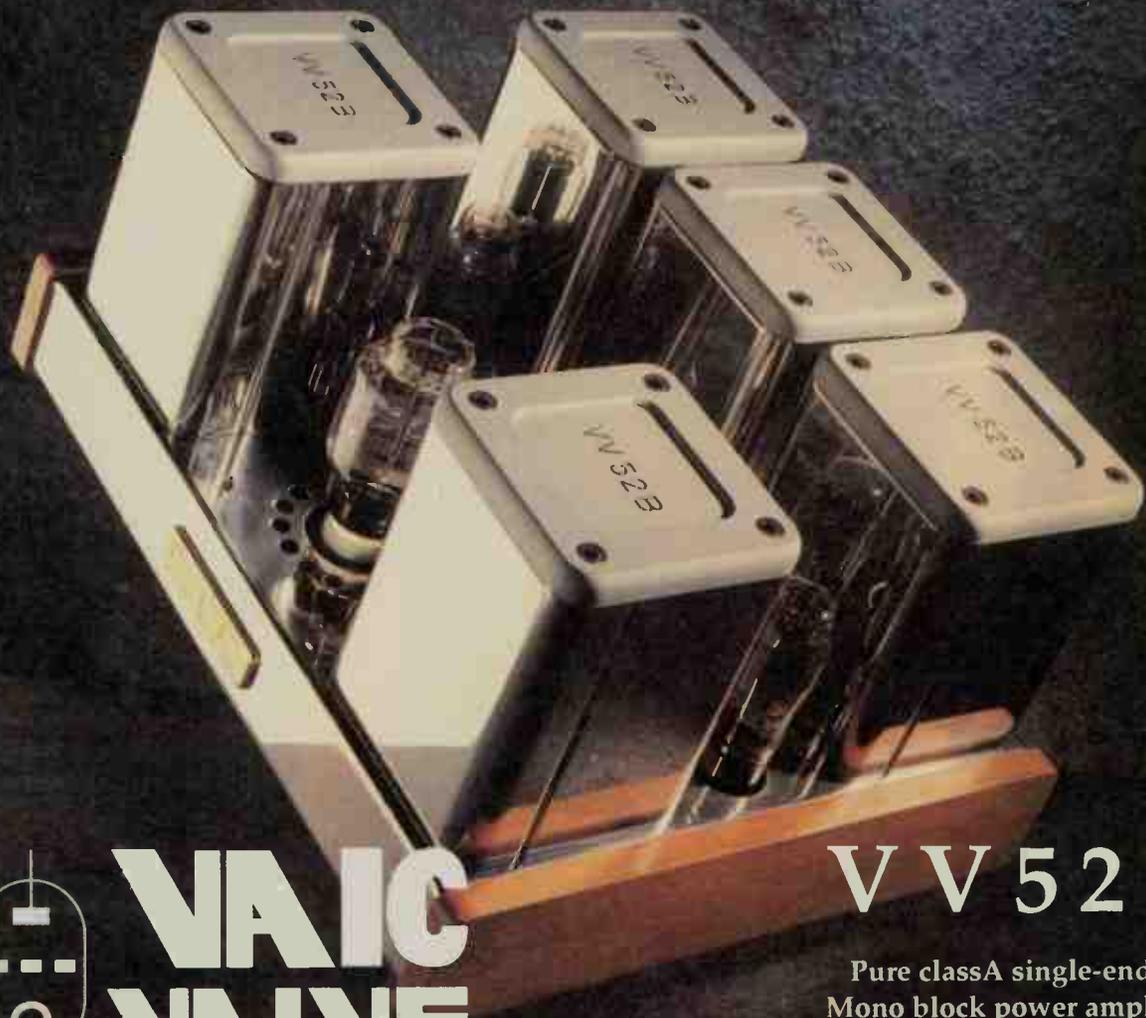
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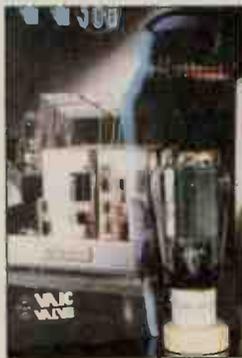


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