

Hi-Fi

WORLD

NO. 35 JANUARY 1997

SUPPLEMENT

**BEST CHRISTMAS
MUSIC REVIEWED**
see page 25

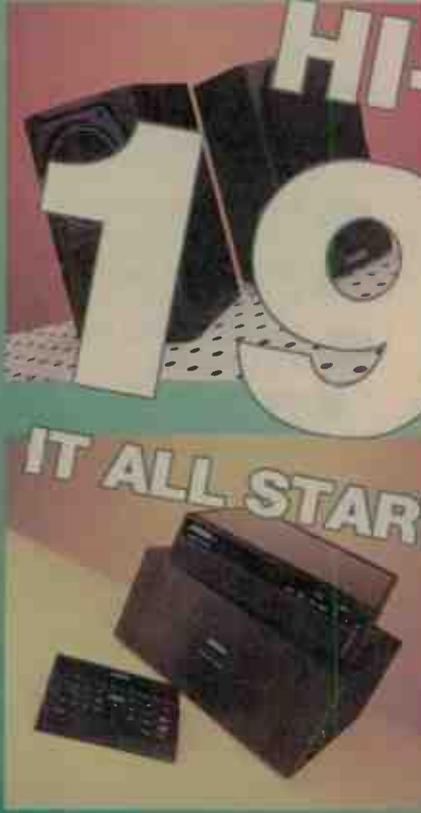
**CHRISTMAS GAMES
AND PUZZLES**
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WE PICK THE
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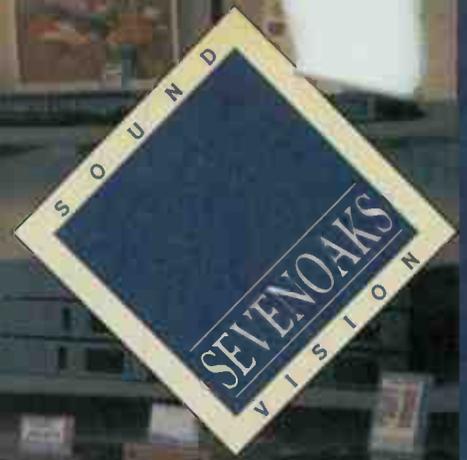
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IT ALL STARTS ON PAGE 3



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World Winners

Hi-Fi World 1996

We've reviewed a lot of hi-fi over the last year. With time to reflect, our editorial team have selected 31 products they feel represent the best hi-fi of 1996.

NAD 613 CASSETTE DECK



You might think a pre-recorded cassette of a (mediocre) 1965 recording wouldn't add up to much, but the clean opening bass line and sheer zest of the Beatles' 'Drive My Car', were a delight on the 613. It has a strong enough bass performance to sound meaty and full at low frequencies, which gives weight and substance to rhythm sections.

Extended treble gave a ring to triangles, cymbals and tambourines, and fine speed stability freed them from phase jitter and vague positioning on the sound stage.

Newer recordings, like Dream Harder from the Waterboys, generally came across superbly. Fine speed stability was apparent in the crisp control maintained over rhythm and the sense of general cleanliness and clarity achieved.

A gruelling test of speed stability was applied by recording Chopin's Opus 48, No 1 at the start of a tape (TDK SA). The 613 flew, it held sustained notes near perfectly.

I've no hesitation in recommending the new 613 - it's better value than rivals. NK

NAD 613 £230

NAD Marketing Ltd
NAD Building,
401-405 Nether Street,
Finchley,
London N3 1QG
Tel: 0181 343 3240

DENON DCD 315 CD PLAYER



The Denon plays all the instruments, in the right order, right down to the bottom of the scale and with

impeccable timing to boot. That makes it not only well worth a hundred and fifty brass roundels, it nearly makes it a miracle as well.

Putting Morrissey's 'Spring Heeled Jack' in the drawer, the opening bass notes simply thundered out over the floorboards, tight, strong and rhythmical. The bass isn't just noise, however. Kettle drums in a Malcolm Arnold piece had a leading edge to them that, while a trifle blurred, was better than can be heard issuing out of many pricier players.

Nor was there any of the hard edge on strings associated with the treble from budget players. It came almost as a surprise to hear a proper array of orchestral strings between the speakers, and, withal, a reasonable amount of spatial discrimination between them.

Pity the poor idiot who hasn't discovered this Denon and will never have a taste of what real hi-fi and real music can sound like for a mere £150. A hi-fi bargain. EB

Denon DCD-315 £150

Hayden Labs
Hayden House,
Chiltern Hill,
Chalfont St. Peter,
Bucks. SL9 9UG
Tel: 01753 888447



218 THX stereo power amplifier

worth looking into

The NAD 218 THX stereo power amplifier is one of the most sophisticated hi fi components we have ever produced. Yet for all its brilliant features and astonishing levels of performance, it remains true to the NAD "no nonsense" design philosophy.



The very first feature you'll notice is the weight of the 218 THX, due partly to the heavy construction of the chassis and front panel, designed for rack mounting, (its advanced specification makes the 218 THX ideal for professional studio use). But the increase in weight is largely due to the massive Hölmgren toroidal mains transformer.



WHY SO LARGE AND WHY HOLMGREN?

Apart from being the ideal design for the huge amounts of power it is likely to handle, the Hölmgren offers other advantages.

A conventional transformer can be affected by AC mains to produce hum or even buzzing, whereas a Hölmgren transformer isn't. Plus, a Hölmgren transformer because of its unique design, will not affect other adjacent components.

A feature which doesn't add much to the weight of the 218 THX but certainly adds to the weight of its performance is the bank of eight capacitors, rather than a single pair. This is a comparatively low cost benefit which makes a better power



supply because several smaller capacitors have a faster recovery time and have less equivalent series inductance and resistance than a single pair.

The 218 THX incorporates fully balanced XLR inputs, allowing the use of long runs of cable between pre and power



stages without the risk of interference.

This thoughtful yet simple feature offers the opportunity to set your system up more flexibly and of course it's a benefit if you are bridging two 218 THX's for mono and locating them nearer your speakers.

The circuitry includes left and right channel pcb's, offering lots of benefits. They include less



complicated pcb's meaning extra reliability, more separation of circuits, so like the Hölmgren transformer, less interference

going out or coming in. All this, plus lower build cost too, means more savings again towards the specification of better components.

Any amp which is overdriven, (unlikely on the 218 THX because it is so powerful) can produce distortion or 'clipping'. The NAD Soft Clipping circuit gently transforms the

waveform, rounding off the peaks, preventing "dynamic overload" and heading off damage to your ears and your speakers, without losing the sense of musical drama.

Hard Clipping



Soft Clipping



There are other more hidden features too which provide specific benefits. Typically, the 218 THX incorporates extensive non-intrusive protection circuitry. This prevents damage from accidental overload or misuse which can lead to overheating or circuit failure.

Finally for those for whom the letters THX are somewhat of a mystery, let us briefly explain.

George Lucas, creator of the 'Star Wars' epics, went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that the sound quality of his films exceeded anything Hollywood had previously produced and he laid down exacting

specifications covering distortion, noise, power etc. to encourage manufacturers to develop products which will reproduce his sound tracks to the standard they deserve.



NAD was first with a power amplifier which met these challenging standards and won the right to carry the THX badge. The 218 THX continues this principle of quality first.

So what do you get for your not insubstantial investment at the end of the day?

A thoughtfully designed, utterly reliable, acoustically stunning 2 X 200 watts, bridgeable to a more than you'll ever need 700 watts mono, with more headroom than your window frames will thank you for, which could even change the way you perceive music.

But with all this capability none of it is a fashion statement. The 218 THX is designed, not designer. Every feature of the 218 THX enhances performance and reliability.

That's why our slogan 'pure and simple' is as relevant today for equipment as advanced as the 218 THX as it was when NAD was created more than 20 years ago.

NAD ELECTRONICS LIMITED, NAD BUILDING
401-405 NETHER STREET LONDON N3 1QG. TELEPHONE 0181 343 3240

NAD pure and simple.



MERIDIAN 518 DIGITAL PREAMPLIFIER



In use, a CD transport feeds the 518 which de-jitters the signal and sets the volume level. The digital signal is then passed on to a CD convertor which is connected directly to a power amplifier. This removes a whole analogue section in the reproduction chain, and any associated degradation, replacing it with something that is actually improving the quality from your CD player. Not bad eh?

Coupled to a power amplifier with an input sensitivity of around 1V and using Harbeth's 83dB sensitive HL-P3ES loudspeakers, the 518 was working high up its volume range, driving the CD converter where it is most linear. Here, the results were breathtaking, its clarity and dynamics overwhelming.

Driving the power amplifier direct from the CD converter made such a difference to the solidity and attack of every transient. The Chemical Brothers were really funky, deep bass lines crisply captured with precise timing and resolution.

After living with the 518 for several weeks, I realised just how much extra resolution and detail it offers without becoming fatiguing. Vocals were smoother and clearer, improved focus giving them a superb sense of realism. P.J. Harvey grew on the stage to give a life size rendition of 'C'mon Billy', raw with emotion, which seared from the 'speakers.

If it suits your system, then for £895 this is one of the best CD upgrades you could ever make. DB

Meridian 518 £895

Meridian Audio
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cambridgeshire PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 434334

CYRUS 'power' POWER AMPLIFIER



The power-funk rock of the Chemical Brothers' up tempo 'Leave Home' revealed the tight grip this power amplifier maintains on proceedings. Although full in the bass, the Cyrus leapt into life, kicking out the beat with a solid punch. The tuneful Cyrus came into its own through the subtlety and deftness with which upper bass lines are played.

P.J. Harvey pulled forward on the stage, each note from a plucked viola behind her like a droplet of water spreading out across the set.

The 'power' is something of a honey. Rich and smooth, but with a firm grip on timing and control, it possesses a fine blend of properties. Really silky solid-state power amplifiers like this one are still rare, even more so at under £500. DB

Cyrus power £499.90

Mission Electronics
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cams. PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 451777

HARBETH HL-P3ES LOUDSPEAKERS

First track I played on the HL-P3ES was 'I'm Hungry' by the Sugar Cubes, an



intricate track loaded with complex percussion and a vocal that cuts sharply through the mix. The HL-P3ES's steer a clear path through productions like this, tightly locating each and every instrument and vocalist in space.

Teenage Fanclub's 'Tears' was superbly projected onto a wide and deep stage, imaging was unquestionable in its correctness. The HL-P3s get it right. This track starts with a simple vocal accompanied by piano, both showed richness and presence. Then violin, viola and cello swell up from the right and glide onto the sound stage, whilst percussion and brittle, staccato guitar chords punctuate the melody from the left. Trumpets sang out the instrumental chorus with brassy hardness, along with violin which rose smoothly and with a great sense of acoustic space above other strings.

With the new HL-P3ES Harbeth have ensured that they stay at the top of the mini-monitor league. In my view they are still the finest mini-monitor available for under £1000. DB

Harbeth HL-P3 ES £799

Harbeth Acoustics
Unit 1, Bridge Road,
Haywards Heath,
W. Sussex. RH16 1UA
Tel: 01444 440955

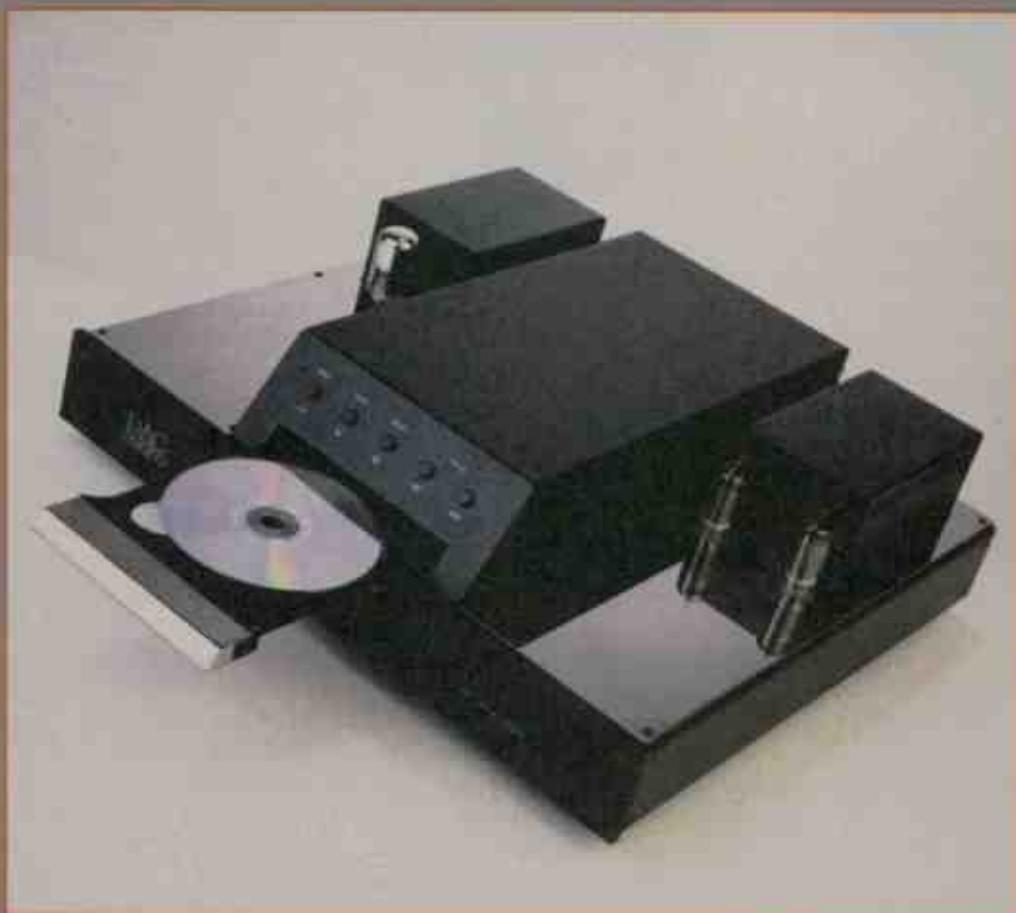
AURA VA 80SE-x AMPLIFIER



The line stage of the VA 80SE-x is identical to the standard VA 80, so shares the smooth, unflustered sound that makes it so confident with a wide range of music and styles. It is clear and focused, with clean treble and good bass timing.

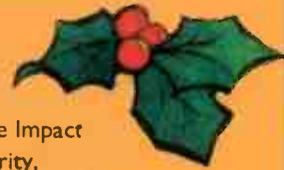
Testing the phono stage with Texas' 'Southside' on vinyl, the Aura gave a very complete picture of the performance. It was fast, strong and cohesive in its delivery, each cymbal

A PREVIEW OF NEXT YEARS
“WINNER”



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strike clear and sharply etched into the sound stage.

I stretched it with Senser's 'Peace'. The track's deep, heavy and melodic bass line and high percussion is enough to show up most amplifiers' limits. But I was surprised to find such a clearly structured, informative sound emerging from our Mission 752s.

For under £300 the Aura 80SE-x is quite an achievement. Through its line-level inputs it is clearer and smoother than just about any other integrated I can think of within its price range. It is especially pleasing to see that Aura haven't cut corners with the phono stage. This has great treble extension, which is both pure and clean, a smooth midband and solid tuneful bass lines. DB

Aura VA 80SE-x £249.95

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

MARANTZ CD-17 CD PLAYER



Playing Klemperer's EMI recording of the Flying Dutchman and Tannhauser overtures, the Marantz revealed the conductor's deftness of control. The Philharmonic not just followed his beat, but stayed totally in tune with him.

This needs truthful dynamics and a full range of tonal colours as well to come off. Here the CD-17 displayed some of the best characteristics of its elder - and more expensive - brother, the CD-16. Fortissimo horns weren't swamped by trumpets or trombones, nor first violins by the seconds playing a little softer. Walter Legge, who produced this recording, was a master of the recorded orchestral balance, and the CD-17 conveyed both its subtlety and the ambience of the Kingsway Hall without muddle or exaggeration.

Vocal purity was noticeable even on Elvis Costello's Kojak Variety on the Dylan song 'I Threw It All Away' when you could practically hear that the clothes peg he used for the essential Zimmerman nasal drone was obviously plastic, not wood.

The CD-17 passes the 'makes real music' test instead of simply spinning CDs, and that's the hardest test to pass of all. EB

Marantz CD17 £799.90

Marantz Hi-Fi UK
Kingsbridge House,
Padbury Oaks,
575-583 Bath Road,
Longford,
Middx. UB7 0EH
Tel: 01753 680868

CELESTION IMPACT 23 LOUDSPEAKERS



As they set about capturing the acoustic space and natural openness of Teenage Fanclub's 'Tears', I became aware that Celestion's Impact 23s had something quite special to offer. They had a clean, dry, coherent sound that had a rightness to it from the moment I pressed 'Play' on the CD player. Not a bad start for a £300 floorstander.

Tonally they are as pure and uncoloured as any at the price. So much so, they'd bring a hot flush to the baffles of many more costly rivals. Cellos had richness and body against the lighter timbre of violas, and violins soared

sweetly above them. Here the Impact 23s proved something of a rarity, allowing notes to flow smoothly upwards through upper midrange to treble.

Since I was really enjoying them, on went P.J. Harvey's album, To Bring You My Love. While 'Meet Ze Monsta' clearly showed they weren't shy of plumbing the depths, 'C'mon Billy' provided further evidence of their abilities in the higher registers. Polly's vocal had a large stage to play upon, strings echoing off the studio walls to create a great sense of acoustic space. Upper harmonics were captured well, the fabric dome tweeter smooth, clear and insightful to the end.

The impact 23s achieve more than most. Not quite a visual treat, but a sonic bargain nonetheless. DB

Celestion Impact 23 £299

Celestion International
Foxhall Road,
Ipswich IP3 8JP
Tel: 01473 322222

AUDIOLAB 8000S AMPLIFIER



Capitalising on the fine imaging properties of the Mission 752s I used, the 8000S made light work of producing a pin sharp image. Around a centrally placed, near holographic image of Dubstar's Sarah Blackwood, was a perfectly contoured landscape. Bass was fast, tight and rhythmic, with fine depth and colour.

The 'S' has an expressiveness and level of detail, backed by solid and weighty drive, that makes it sound twice the amp. you'd expect at the price. The articulation of every plucked bass note on the Charlatans' album was exquisite even on such a grungy recording.

With such a crisp, detailed and spacious sound the 8000S is impossible not to recommend. It has a strong delivery, placing performers firmly



within a wide stage. It married especially well with the Mission 752 loudspeakers I used, but beware of less euphonic designs, like Technics' impressive, yet unremitting SB-M300 loudspeakers. So match carefully and have fun, this one's impressive. DB

Audiolab 8000S £649.95

**Cambridge Systems Technology
Spitfire Close,
Ermine Business Park,
Huntingdon,
Cambs. PE18 6XY
Tel: 01480 52521**

ORTOFON ROHMANN MC CARTRIDGE



From Copeland's 'Rodeo' it was obvious that the Rohmann had as beat-happy an attitude as the reference MC7500. It was up on its points, quivering to every minute quaver and gripping the groove like a four-wheel drive. Brass had superb dynamics and rich, but accurate timbre, while the strings were both deep and sweet. There's a rich, full-sounding bass reminiscent of the Ortofon Supremes, but with tell-tale clarity that gives that 'stick on parchment' sound before the drum resonates. Very convincing.

A quick spin through Beethoven's Violin concerto produced an orchestral image of total stability and exogenous spread, with the whole of the first and second violins located in space with pin point precision. EB

Ortofon Rohmann £1000

**Ortofon UK
Chiltern Hill,
Chalfont St. Peter,
Buck. SL9 9UG
Tel: 01753 889949**

TANNOY PROFILE 63 ISE LOUDSPEAKERS



Tannoy's 63ISE is a tuned up version of the standard Profile 63I 'speaker. Improvements have been made to both cabinet (a more rigid MDF top panel) and the crossover.

Heavy keyboard notes on Bjork's 'Crying' from the Debut album, stopped and started with superb precision and accuracy; overhang and waffle were non-existent. Bjork's vocal had a wonderfully breathy quality to it, a real out-of-box sound devoid of any significant coloration.

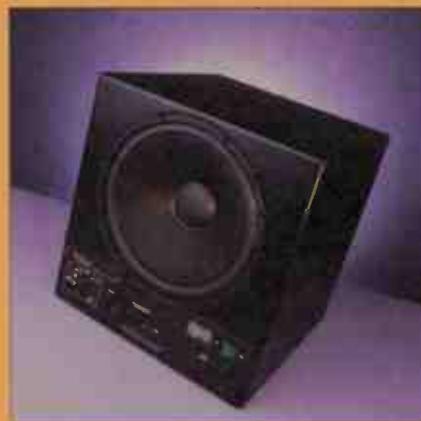
The Lightning Seed's 'Open Goals' had strings crisp and clearly defined, with a great sense of the acoustic space on this track coming from fine treble extension. A rich and funky bass line gave real body, and on 'Punch and Judy' even the cello helped to open out the stage and create atmosphere. Sound staging from the little Tannoys was first class, stretching well beyond their own compact boundaries whilst holding the image firmly in place.

Dynamic contrasts too were superb. Staccato struck chords ripped out of the left 'speaker straight at me, while backing guitars strummed softly at the back of the stage. DB

Tannoy 63I SE £169.90

**Tannoy
Rosehall Ind. Est.,
Coatbridge
Strathclyde. ML5 4TF
Tel: 01236 420199**

REL Q-BASS SUBWOOFER



Portishead's Dummy, particularly on the track 'It Could Be Sweet', allowed the REL to bring out bass to the full while still letting the rest of the music through. Dummy and Bjork's Post CD were good guides for setting up the system. Both have heavy bass tracks, but good vocals, so if they had been over-ridden by bass it would have been not only criminal, but obviously a mistake.

This is really where the subtlety comes in. A sub-bass system should bolster, not dominate, what is already an appealing sound. Taking a Tori Amos CD out of its case was inevitable. The acoustic thuds and rumbles from the grand piano on 'God' perfectly complemented what was coming through the Harbeth main 'speakers.

At this price, for the results that can be had (with a little bit of effort) the REL Q-Bass is something all bass-seekers should consider. Especially anyone who wants to hear the lower half of Barry White's vocal register and other whale sounds. HB

REL Q-Bass £349.99

**REL Acoustics Ltd.,
North Road,
Bridgend Industrial Estate,
Bridgend,
Mid Glamorgan CF31 3TP
Tel: 01656 768777**

NAD 412 TUNER

With Jools Holland's show on Jazz FM, featuring Sammy Rimmington, tonal colour was so good with the 412 it was actually possible to tell where a close-miked cymbal was being struck. The track was obviously recorded in a large hall with high ceilings, saxophone and



trombone soaring out above the audience. On a particularly energetic solo the power and inflexion of the drumming was real enough to place me in the audience.

Imaging was above standard for any tuner under £500, let alone one of less than half that price, with the various instruments hanging together coherently within the soundstage.

There was a sense of life and colour to its performance that the average synthesiser tuner doesn't even hint at, with well proportioned images hanging together in a three-dimensional soundstage. The 402 is dead. Long live the 412. JM

NAD 412 £189.95



NAD Marketing Ltd.,
NAD Building,
401-405 Nether Street,
London N3 1QG
Tel: 0181 343 3240

PIONEER CT-S740S CASSETTE DECK



Over a wide range of pre-recorded tapes the CT-S740S showed great consistency, offering a silky smooth sound from an impressively stable soundstage.

Having got replay performance right, I wasn't surprised to find record

performance was also superb. This deck does a fine job recording onto ferrics, chromes and metals.

Tuned in and with Dolby S engaged it captured the transients from Steve Earle's steel strung guitar well. The rub is that the TDK AR tape I used has a low frequency performance superior to metal tape, at half the cost. With Dolby S to suppress its hiss and minimise treble saturation, it offers impressive recording quality.

In many areas this is one of the best cassette decks I have tested for a long, long time. Pioneer weren't fooling around when they designed the CT-S740S. It's something of a bargain and one of the few decks available today I can award top marks to. NK

Pioneer CT-S740S £429.95

Pioneer High Fidelity (UK)
Pioneer House,
Hollybush Hill,
Stoke Poges,
Slough,
Berks. SL2 4PQ
Tel: 01753 789789

MARANTZ CD-63 MKII KI Signature CD PLAYER



One particular quality which emerged as listening progressed was the manner in which the Marantz presented music. There was an even-handedness which allowed me to look in on individual instruments as they appeared, rather than forcing me to follow the player's preference. I found myself noticing guitar notes and cymbals that had seemed merely incidental before.

Switching CDs to Archiv

Produktion's Vivaldi's Four Seasons produced a soundstage that was impressively deep, allowing the players of the English Concert sufficient room to really let rip. With the separation and clarity of imaging on offer, it was easy to make out the different layers in the mix and the positions of the various sections.

With the KI-Signature each note was enunciated separately, with its attack and decay natural and complete - a subtle difference to listen consciously for, but one which has a large impact on its ability to portray a performance convincingly. JM

Marantz CD-63 MkII KI Signature £500

Marantz
Kingsbridge House,
Padbury Oaks,
575-583 Bath Road
Longfield,
Middx. UB7 0EH
Tel: 01753 680868

TRICHORD GENESIS CD PLAYER



With Frank Sinatra's re-masters the Genesis displayed great dynamics and a very good impression of stage depth - something few players, even at twice this price, are capable of resolving. Sinatra's vocal was smooth, rounded and tonally faithful. The plucked strings of upright bass were captured complete with a lovely woody boxiness and a warm fullness that swelled out across the stage. Capturing the character of instruments is certainly a forte of the Genesis; brushed cymbals were soft with a smooth, even decay - realistic enough to have Frank dancing all night.

Strings, especially in the remarkable cello duets, oozed a tangible timbre on



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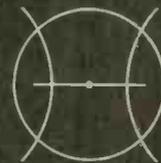
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GRAHAMS HI-FI

Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BS

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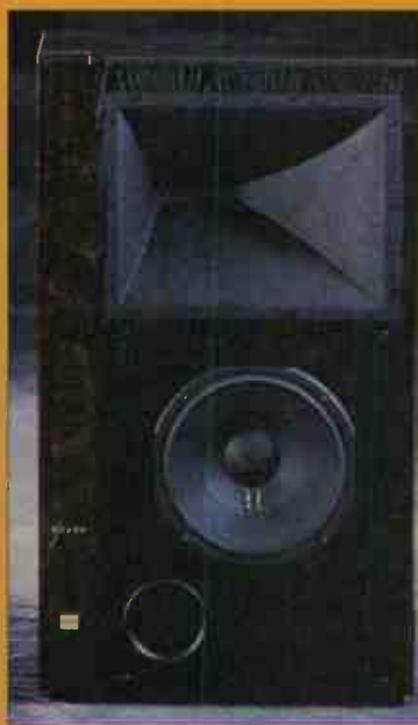
the Soweto String Quartet's 'Shut Up and Listen'. Violins were smooth throughout their range, with harmonics finely extended into the high treble. Bass was again full, but not overbearing, and played with such gusto and rhythm.

Trichord's Genesis certainly veers on the side of musicality rather than accuracy. It is one of the most musical players I've ever heard. Dynamic, bold and inspiringly musical, with celestial bass to boast of. DF-D

Trichord Genesis £549

Trichord Research,
73 Church St.,
Malvern,
Worcs. WR14 2AE
Tel: 01684 573524

JBL S2600 LOUDSPEAKERS



Like any good horn loudspeaker, the JBL's have an immediacy to their sound and the way it is projected. It's very free, open, with a great sense of scale and dynamics. Overall, the S2600s are one of the best balanced horn loudspeakers I've heard. Treble is smooth, sweet and has enough extension to bring atmosphere and spaciousness to music. They are impressively fast and clean. Percussion on the House Of Love's 'In A Room'

sent a crisp leading edge striking out into the room. Decay was beautifully captured too; after the initial transient strike it faded gently back into the soundstage

A crescendo really is a crescendo with the JBLs behind it. Musical peaks are conveyed with terrific power and authority, rather than blurred by confusion and compression.

Lou Reed's 'Perfect Day' was an absolute pleasure. Piano sounded pure and graceful, vocals intimate, strings smooth and rich in texture. Imaging was fantastic; I loved the way the JBLs painted a clear, stable and convincing picture that precisely pin-pointed where everything was located on the stage.

I have a new favourite loudspeaker - and that's something that doesn't happen often. The JBLs gave such a totally believable sound, that it will be difficult to live with anything else once they're gone. DB

JBL S2600 £3,500

Gamepath
25 Heathfields,
Stacey Bushes,
Milton Keynes,
Bucks. MK12 6HR
Tel: 01908 317707

SYSTEMDEK 2X2 TURNTABLE



Rhythmically, the 2X2 is impressively sure-footed. Its dynamic agility as it scales basslines helps it keep a tight grip on proceedings.

The acrylic platter, in a similar vein to Pinks, Voyds and Michells, seems to bring to the 2X2 a natural smoothness of tone along with great treble resolution. Gracefully sweeping along with the string sections of Vivaldi's Four Seasons, a foné recording on 180gsm

virgin vinyl, the air and space around the performance created a real sense of atmosphere. Violins played effortlessly; notes decaying gently as harmonics petered out.

I must say that I could find little to fault in the 2X2's midrange and treble. Its fine resolution creates a wide acoustic within which imagery is pin-sharp, especially with a good MC cartridge like the MC25 FL. DB

Systemdek SX2 £499.95

Systemdek
34 Kyle Road,
Irvine Ind. Est.,
Scotland KA12 8LD
Tel: 01294 271 251

ORELLE SA-100 AMPLIFIER



From Bjork's Post-Sugarcubes CD Debut, 'Venus As A Boy' was huge, with sumptuous strings and a clean and clinical top end. 'Aeroplane' showed off the Orelle's timing which was a good A-grade, and the sparse, brass-heavy 'The Anchor Song' revealed its truthful tone.

With Mozart's 21st piano concerto, Vladimir Ashkenazy caressing the keys, the Orelle was tonally spot on. There are few amplifiers at this price that deliver such a convincing display of orchestration either.

To get better than this you'll have to fork out more, probably quite a lot more. HB

Orelle SA-100 £449

Orelle
Unit 12,
Imex House,
6 Wadsworth Road,
Perivale,
Middx. UB3 7JS
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£35.00/m

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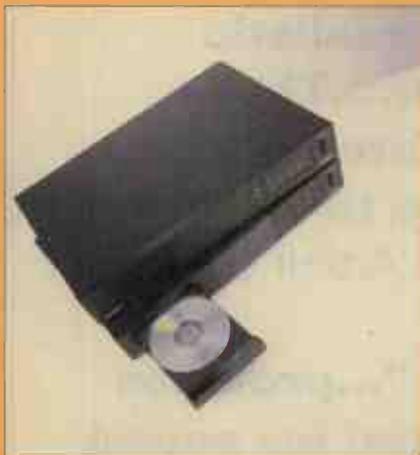
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AUDIOLAB 8000CDM CD TRANSPORT



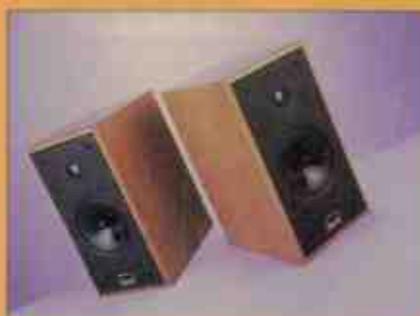
Comparing old with new, I found the new 8000CDM produced a cleaner sound with tighter, more dynamic bass than its predecessor. Tori Amos' 'Putting The Damage On', for example, had clearer, better projected vocals. Where brass was warm and muted on the new transport, it sounded slightly woolly on the older version. Carmina Burana also showed obvious improvements - timpani possessed greater impact and control, and there was more detail and dynamic contrast to the performance as a whole.

All that remains to be said is that we now have a shiny, new Audiolab transport sitting in our system here at Hi-Fi World. JM

Audiolab 8000CDM

Audiolab
Spitfire Close,
Ermine Bus. Pk.,
Huntingdon,
Cambs. PE18 6XY
Tel: 01480 52521

EPOS ES12 LOUDSPEAKERS



The 12s possess an amazing ability to resolve deep, deep bass. At their size, I can think of few 'speakers that match them when it comes to digging low without over emphasising.

Nightmare on Wax's 'Nights Introlude' had the ES12s clearly delineating the space and location each component of the melody was locked into. Interactions between instruments twisted together into a complex musical whole, the ES12s remaining unflustered.

'Ritratto dell'Amore - Le Chame' was as charmingly and elegantly played on the ES12s as Couperin intended. With a clean tone, violin expressed itself well, its signature formed from delicately structured harmonics.

Treble possessed admirable extension, having a sparkle where many metal domes can clang their metallic signature over the upper reaches.

Musicality is high on the list of the ES12s abilities. Captivating to listen to, they compel you to play track after track. DB

Epos ES12 **£495**

Epos Acoustics
3 Ridgeway,
Havant,
Hants. PO9 1JS
Tel: 01705 407722

MISSION 754 FREEDOM 5 LOUDSPEAKERS

In the 754s, the sweet and extended response of the silk dome tweeter marries harmoniously with the Aerogel midrange unit. Along with a well engineered and implemented crossover,



this makes for a near seamless tonal quality right across the frequency range. It endows the 754 Freedom 5s with great transient speed on leading edges and delicacy in their decay, producing a convincingly organic sound.

In the 754s, vocals and strings alike benefit from a neutral and spacious midband. They never sound slow, and better still, possess extremely well balanced bass.

It wasn't until a change of CD found Bjork's 'Violently Happy' playing that the 754s gave me a real taste of what they could do. With little overhang or waffle, subsonics rumbled and deep, punchy bass lines higher up on this track were well portrayed, each note developing a clear form within a tight envelope. Bjork's vocals were luscious, liquid and deep with emotion. DB

Mission 754 Freedom 5 **£1,299**

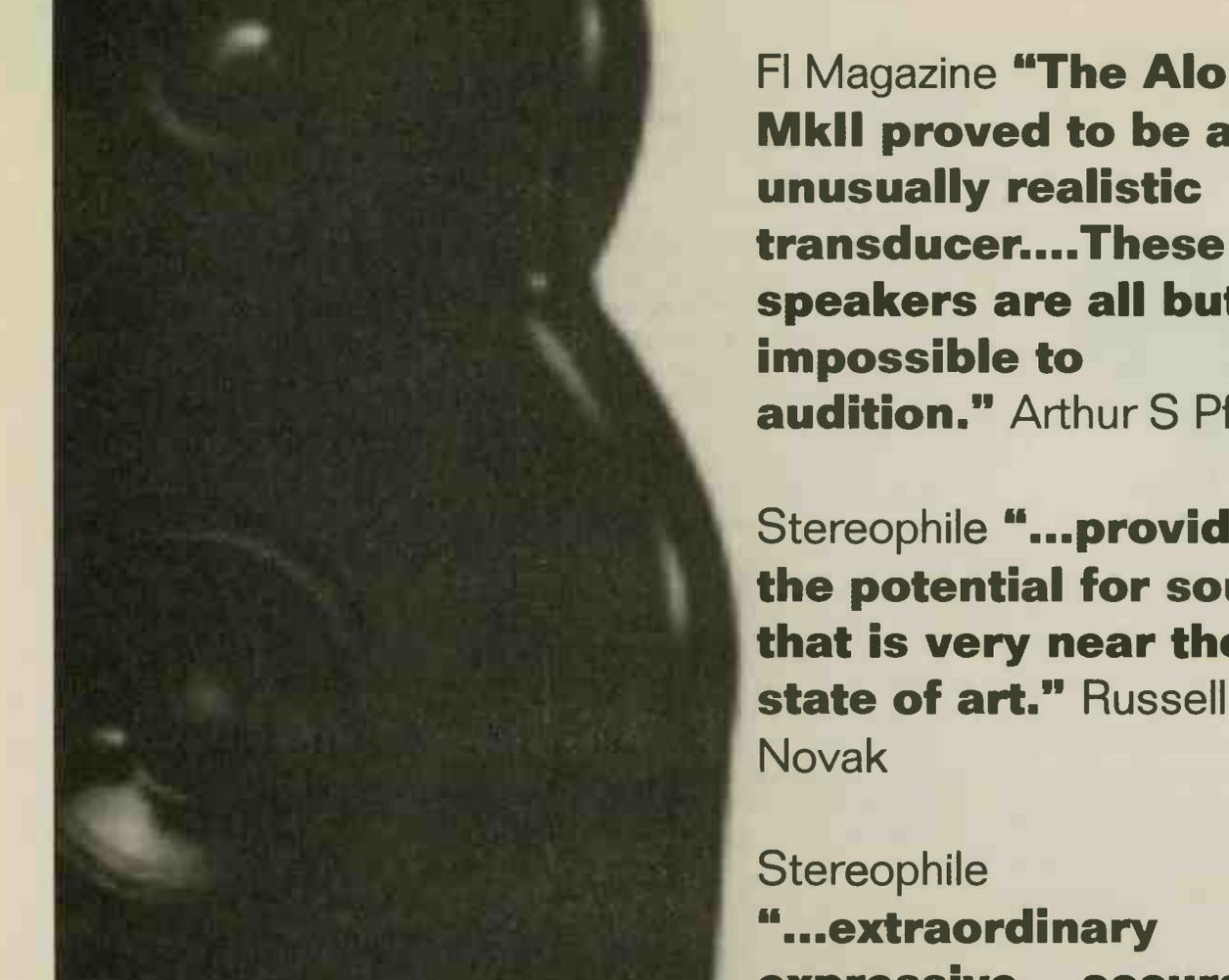
Mission
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cambs. PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 451 777

ROTEL RA-970BX AMPLIFIER



The Rotel RA-970BX was immediately at home with Satie's piano works - notes struck with realistic attack and resounding dynamics. There was no sign of break-up even at high levels. Strings too were fresh and rich with good presence, forward sounding, but smooth. Their resonant timbre complemented the tight, open bass produced by the Rotel.

The Rotel's command continued with Paul Weller's Stanley Road. On this album the RA-970BX was stable and powerful, with huge headroom that allowed it to swing realistic dynamics with verve. Drums were also indicative



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England June 95

Hi Fi Choice
"Electrocompaniet's cheapest amp is the one to beat." Alvin Gold
England May 96

Hi Fi News & Record
Review **"AW100DMB combined with the EC-4 preamplifer is recommended for amplifier combinations over £2000"** Alvin Gold
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of its tight, fast upper bass. It is this control, coupled with a slightly rolled off treble, that enables the Rotel to go loud without the strain.

The Rotel reaches an impressively high standard at the price. JM

Rotel RA-970BX £249.95

Rotel
25 Heathfields,
Stacy Bushes,
Milton Keynes,
Bucks. SL2 4PQ
Tel: 01908 317707

KEF REFERENCE SERIES 4 LOUDSPEAKERS

The sound from the Ref 4s was immediately impressive, with an attractive bottom end warmth at low listening levels.



Soundstage depth was good too - almost on a par with Quad's electrostatics.

The integration between drive units works so well that the transparency for a multi-transducer design is little short of excellent.

With Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* the transparency and depth of soundstage that the KEFs managed to construct was extraordinary - I could have walked right in and picked out the individual instruments.

A Telarc recording of Tchaikovsky's 1812 emerged on a grand scale through the Reference Fours too. Timing, speed and midrange openness really allowed the orchestra to blast out triumphantly.

Pink Floyd's 'Brick In The Wall Pt 1' sounded magnificent. The low end bass richly illustrated the dynamics and transient ability of the Fours as Roger Waters' vocal remained lucid, liquid and emotionally intact.

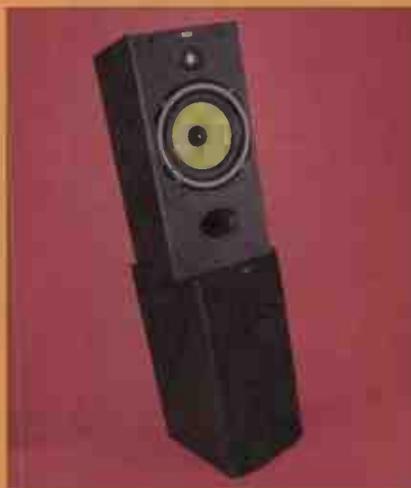
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KEF Reference Four (Black Ash) £3099

KEF
Tovil,
Maidstone,
Kent. ME15 6QP
Tel: 01622 672261

B&W DM 602 LOUDSPEAKERS



In the 602s B&W have got things just right, in fact considerably better than you'd expect from a reasonably compact box. They go very deep and are strong with it. In the right set up, the combination of taut, tight bass allied to an unrestrained confidence make these one of the best bass blowers I've come across at the price.

Midrange too was impressive, very pure and clear with little coloration. Female vocals benefited especially from this, showing real projection and an out of the box quality.

Treble was crisp, open and free from sharpness. Sound staging wasn't especially expansive, but imaging first rate; precise and focused where many more expensive boxes fail. JM/DB

B&W DM 602 £249.95

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

MISSION 73 II LOUDSPEAKERS



After a couple of days of running in, the 73 IIs were singing away merrily, radiating unholy amounts of bass for such a small speaker. In short, the 73 IIs are little go-go machines, Missions generic clean, punchy sound shining through. And unlike the old 73 Is, the 'i's seem happier at high volumes, steadfastly refusing to flap their cones against the end stops.

On olde worlde classic rock like America's 'Ventura Freeway', the 73 IIs were as smooth as a Swiss train. Imaging has always been a Mission forté, and seemed better than ever here, giving a nice out-of-the-box sound when playing the original seventies' vinyl pressing.

When the original 73 Is appeared, I still felt the classic 760is they replaced were the better loudspeaker. But the 73 IIs have reversed the situation, sounding faster, stronger, tighter and more subtle by comparison. At last, they've become musical little beasts that work well regardless of what's thrown at them. A great little speaker able to take on all-comers. DP

Mission 73Ii £130

Mission Group
Huntingdon,
Cambridgeshire PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 451777

KX-3080 CASSETTE DECK

The KX-3080 sounded as good as it measured: I was taken aback! It has a solid bass, unlike so many cassette decks, plenty of it, and can record into the red. My recordings peaked occasional on maximum (+7) and they sounded fine. That's a gruelling test of any deck, the sort of thing only a



Nakamichi could sail through.

With a smooth, natural tonal balance, clean treble and a nice general air of tidiness and clarity (low wow and flutter) I could tell this deck was doing fine.



Pre-recorded tapes sounded a little dull and generally I left Dolby B out and put up with extra hiss to ameliorate the problem. However, I was struck by the Kenwood's solid, clean bass which gave piano scale and power, where often I'm confronted by a tinkling sound. This feature helped Rock recordings too.

The KX-3080 is an expensive recorder stripped down it seems to me. At the price this deck is a bargain. NK

Kenwood KX-3080 £159.95

**Trio-Kenwood
Kenwood House,
Dwight Road,
Watford,
Herts WD1 8EB
Tel: 01923 816444**

**HEYBROOK HBI S3
LOUDSPEAKERS**



Right from the word go, the Heybrooks' presentation was surprisingly convincing for a £300 loudspeaker - they were substantial and had a realistic tonal range.

Vivaldi was favoured by the Heybrooks, their tonal resolution making easy work of separating violins from violas and giving the music a sense of verve and natural colour. The music moved with poise and purpose, whether the HBI S3s were dealing with the refinement of the first movement or the rage of Summer's storm.

Heybrooks' HBI S3s have impressive tonal qualities through the midrange. They have a naturalness to the way they reproduce strings that makes them cohesive and articulate.

Their dry, crisp sound with a good range of tonal colour makes them a fine choice for classical or acoustic based music. JM/DB

Heybrook HBI S3 £269.00

**Heybrook
Clemo Road,
Liskeard,
Cornwall PL14 3NH
Tel: 01579 342866**

**AUDIOLAB 8000CD CD
PLAYER**



When swapping from the Da Capo reference to the 8000CD for the first time, I thought I'd struck gold. It had a wide, open and spacious soundstage, wonderful presence to vocals, and biting attack on cymbals. The 8000CD had proper depth to its soundstage too. With such depth and body to vocals, The Cranberries played with real verve, creating a solid soundstage. Images were properly proportioned and precise.

The 8000CD was musical in a way I wasn't expecting, having the kind of tactile and believable feel for music that

made the Quad 67 CD so endearing. There's a sweetness in the treble that makes for enjoyable and unfatiguing listening.

Without doubt, the 8000CD is one of the best players around at £1000. It is thoroughly musical with a sweet treble, lucid and full midrange and powerful bass. It's been a long time coming, but Audiolab's first integrated CD player has proved itself well worth the wait. DB

Audiolab 8000CD £1000

**Cambridge Systems Technology
Spitfire Close,
Ermine Business Park,
Huntingdon,
Cams. PE18 6XY
Tel: 01480 415600**

**CASTLE AVON
LOUDSPEAKERS**



The Avons deliver unusually forward, out-of-the-box vocals that come across as impressively clean yet easy to listen to. Angelique Kidjo's megaphonic vocals hit me really hard, as I'd hoped. Her shouts on 'Agolo' were vivid and the complex percussion backing her wove a dense pattern of sound.

The efforts of Ashkenazy's right hand were highlighted in Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No2, and as the violins entered, I was reminded of just how

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sweet they can sound when heard through carbon fibre, the strings vibrating deliciously.

Castle's bass loading system gave the tightest, punchiest bass I've heard for a long time. Few 'speakers have their low frequency dryness and control, and Rock fans who love speed and grip will be happy. Castle's new 'speaker offers a level of insight, clarity and control that few rivals can match. NK

Castle Avon £699

Castle Acoustics
Park Mill,
Shortbank Road,
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North Yorks. BD23 2TT
Tel: 01756 795333

HARBETH HL-K6 LOUDSPEAKERS



The Harbeths were impressive from the word 'go', offering an unusual combination of classic monitor neutrality with real speed and grip. The HL-K6s show the smack of firm drive units and rigid cabinetry. Working on some powerful Dance courtesy of the KLF's '3 AM Eternal', they displayed taut, tuneful bass, a glass-clear mid and open, detailed highs.

As expected, the Harbeths were most impressive on Classical, such as IMP's recording of Bach's 3rd Concerto for harpsichord and strings in D major. The allegro of the first movement saw the K6s displaying excellent speed, clarity and depth, the mid-bass driver imposing very little tone of its own.

Cellos could have done with a touch more warmth, but were beautifully breathy and crisp, while violins were dry but never wiry. If you're after a sophisticated pair of loudspeakers for under £1000, you'd be mad to overlook them - they really are that good. DP

Harbeth HL-K6 £975

Harbeth Acoustics
Unit 1, Bridge Road,
Haywards Heath,
West Sussex RH16 1UA
Tel: 01444 440955

ARCAM ALPHA 9/9P AMPLIFIERS



The integrated immediately scored with Dolores O'Riordan's vocal. Smooth and full, it pushed clear of the 'speakers in a natural and unforced manner. Treble too was sweet, cymbals had just the right balance between realistic bite and soft decay, sounding clear and strong without searing my ears.

Bi-amping with the Alpha 9P on bass duty, The Cranberries sounded altogether more powerful and definite. The qualities of the 9 on its own remained intact, but a stronger sense of power and solidity brought a larger scale to the performance. Treble improved too, becoming clearer, cleaner and even more detailed. At higher volumes it was sweet, but still powerful enough with cymbals to give good attack. In addition, there was more space and atmosphere to the music, decay on strings and hi-hats extended and natural. DB

Arcam Alpha 9/9P £499.90/£399.90

Arcam
Pembroke Avenue,
Waterbeach,
Cambridge CB5 9PB
Tel: 01223 203203

MERIDIAN 502/557 PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER



The 502/557 immediately made a positive impression with their rendition of Jimi Hendrix's 'Are You Experienced?' from Kiss The Sky. There was a naturalness to the presentation that caught my attention. They were an open window into the emotion in the music, not producing their own coloured version of events, but accurately relaying the feeling.

Timpani rolled and thundered and cymbals crashed as I embarked on Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. Strings and voices rose together in the crescendo of 'O Fortuna', building to a truly explosive peak. 'Reie', by contrast, showed off the 502/557's delicacy to good effect, soft strings and muted brass flowing gently along with accompanying background coughs and shuffles.

With a relaxed, natural rhythmic flow, firm control, broad soundstaging and wide tonal palette, the Meridian 502 and 557 are in a class of their own. JM

Meridian 502 £1295
Meridian 557 £1400

Meridian Audio
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Huntingdon,
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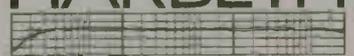


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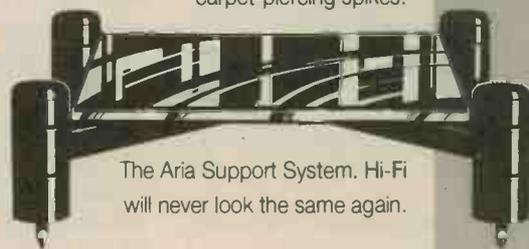
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A TRIVIAL PURSUIT?

David Price dreams up a few hi-fi brain teasers to keep you occupied - even frustrated (no peeping!) - over Christmas.

QUESTIONS

[1] In 1983 Linn produced their only tonearm that could not be used with the LP12. What was it called?
A) Atak C) Ittock LTD
B) Linniment D) Tiktok



[2] What was the very first production Marantz CD player called?

A) Mar1 C) CD289-3533
B) CD333 D) OTT 01

[3] The name 'Ortofon' is derived from which two Greek words, and what do they mean?
A) 'Ortof' (kettle) and 'on' (activate)
B) 'Orthos' (pure) and 'phone' (sound)
C) 'O' (wow!) and 'rtofon' (nice cartridge)
D) 'Or' (definitely) and 'tofon' (maybe)

[4] Which Japanese company fitted vacuum pumps to their top turntables?

A) Sansuki C) Technics
B) Luxman D) Muchovaci

[5] Which Welsh hi-fi manufacturer is famous for its use of surface mount techniques?

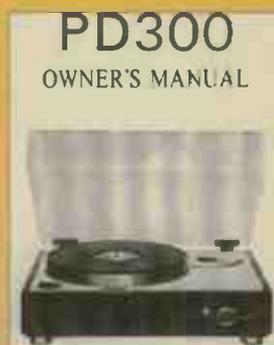


A) Leek C) DDT
B) PCB D) DPA

[6] What is NAD an acronym for?
A) New And Dynamic C) New Acoustic Dimension
B) Ned's Atomic Dustbin D) Natural Audio Delivery



[7] What was unusual about Marantz's ST-8 tuner?
A) It could transmit as well as receive



C) It had an oscilloscope
E) It had a built-in CD player
D) It was A.M.. only

[8] Where did Naim's ARO tonearm get its name from?
A) The fact it features an aluminium shaft used by Olympic archers for their arrows
B) Its designer: Andrew Robert O'Linn
C) Its constructional form: Absolutely Rigid Obelisk
D) Its design title: Arm and Related Orientation



[9] Which electronics manufacturer pioneered Motion! Feedback in the 1970s?

A) Technics C) Philips
B) Asda D) KEF

[10] What did Practical Hi-Fi and Audio change its name to in the early eighties?

A) Cosmopolitan C) Hi-Fi Views
B) Hi-Fi Today D) The Flat Response

[11] What was Meridian's first CD player called?

A) MCD C) GRP
B) DOA D) M&S

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[12] Which ex-Beeb engineer patented polypropylene for use in loudspeaker drive units?

- A) Spencer Hughes
- B) Marmaduke Hussey
- C) Dudley Harwood
- D) Gilbert Briggs

[13] Who sang 'Walking around with my head full of music, cassette in my pocket and I'm gonna use it'?

- A) (Sir) Cliff Richard
- B) John Lydon
- C) Chrissie Hynde
- D) Bob Dylan

[14] Which Japanese moving coil cartridge has been in production for over a quarter of a century?

- A) Denon DL103
- C) Sumiko Blue Point



- B) Shure ME75
- D) Lyra Lydian

[15] Who produced the brass headlamp surrounds for Chitty Chitty Bang Bang?

- A) John Michell
- B) SME
- C) Michaelangelo
- D) Roger Moore

[16] Why did Arcam never produce an Alpha 4 amplifier?

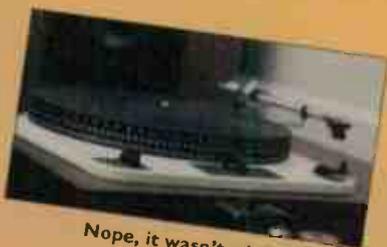
- A) They lost the plans
- B) The Alpha 5 amplifier was ready ahead of time
- C) Four is an unlucky number in some Markets
- D) They did, but it was for export only

[17] Who made the Stabi and the Stogi?

- A) Rumble Stiltskin
- B) Kuzma
- C) Baba Yaga
- D) Project

[18] What colour were the first Garrard 301s finished in?

- A) White
- B) Grey
- C) Pink
- D) Brown



Nope, it wasn't white.

[19] Which turntable featured in Kellogg's Start TV commercials?

- A) Michell Gyrodec
- B) Linn LP12
- C) Oracle Delphi
- D) AR EB101

[20] After what place in Norse legend did Linn name their first LP12 power supply upgrade?

- A) Surbiton
- B) Valhalla
- C) Apfelstrudel
- D) Darmstadt

[21] Who produced the Pageant, Carnival and Festival loudspeakers?

- A) Party Time Transducers
- B) Epos
- C) Mordaunt-Short
- D) McMillan



[22] SME, with their Series III tonearm, weren't the only manufacturer to use titanium nitride tubing in the late seventies. Who was the other?



- A) Technics
- B) HMV
- C) Rotel
- D) Diatone

[23] What was the first Rock album to be commercially released on CD?

- A) Val Doonican's Val Doonican

Rocks But Gently

- B) The Bee Gees' Living Eyes
- C) Sheena Easton's Working Girl
- D) Bon Jovi's Slippery When Wet

[24] From whose names is Spendor derived?

- A) Spencer and Dorothy Hughes
- B) Olaf Spend and Marianna Or

[25] Who produced the Planet turntable?

- A) Rega
- B) Impulse
- C) NASA
- D) DeLorian

[26] What was Mission's first pre-amplifier called?

- A) Mission Possible
- B) Pre 1
- C) Mission 771
- D) Mission Control

[27] What's the connection between small-screen brats The Kids from Fame and singer-songwriter Elvis Costello?

- A) They both like Bangers and Mash for tea
- B) They both went to Grange Hill school
- C) They both had UK hit singles called 'High Fidelity'
- D) They both started careers on the stage

[28] What's the connection between the B&W DM602 loudspeaker and the security services?

- A) The 602's mid/bass driver is made of Kevlar, as are bullet-proof vests
- B) Piles of DM602s have been used to scale the walls of prisons
- C) Both wear smart black uniforms



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Christmas Rock



LES NEGRESSES VERTES

EN PUBLIC

GREEN BUS 7243 8 41481 2 6

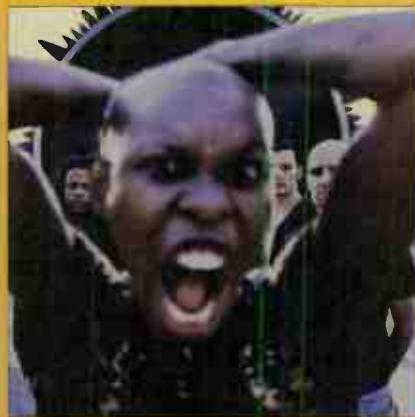
I've waxed wild about this French-based, multi-talented combo in these pages before. The dozen-odd Negresses (Green Black Women, whatever that means) started out as buskers on the streets of Paree and have an undoubtedly international appeal. Their blend of music includes everything from the fierce aggression of early Clash to 1950's chansonnier croons (touch of the Jacques Brel here, bit of the Aznavor there) plus sufficient international feels to give them both drive and a colour.

The live arena is likely where they work most efficiently as this is how they made their name, gained their early laurels, etcetera. . . Whether a double LP of songs is too much is a moot point. Some will enjoy it hugely whilst others may well think a briefer set would have worked better on the proverbial wax.

Give them their dues, they stick to French for sleeve notes as well as lyrics (excepting a surprisingly melodic Sex Pistols cover). Hence you probably need at least O Level French to work out what some of the songs actually mean. We have, par exemple, the moody 'Face A La Mer' ('Facing The Sea') or the more thunderous 'Tous Des Ouvriers' ('All Of The Workers', correct me if I'm wrong, please do mes amis).

En Public is a largely furious

construction which takes in the rhythms and feel of everything from South America to North Africa, the aforementioned Punk and the street vibes of Paris in its fecund, post-war high. And that's really a simplification. Live, this remains one of the most exciting - not to mention tune-packed - offerings to have hit the globe's stage in the past decade. Which is about as long as they've been doing it and hopefully at least as long as they'll continue to.



SKUNK ANANSIE

STOOSH

ONE LITTLE INDIAN TPLP85CD

Stoosh, the follow up to Skunk Anansie's blistering debut album Paranoid and Sunburnt, is anything but a gentle progression. Accommodating influences from as far and wide as Siouxsie and the Banshees, Annie Lennox and Girlschool - remember them? - this is a bizarre and not entirely cohesive album. In a word, it is 'noisy', taking much more from the Girlschool Heavy Rock influences than from sweet, old Annie's repertoire of pop pedigree.

Stoosh - Jamaican patois for smart in a streetwise way - is a real change in direction for singer Skin and the band. The bi-sexual West Indian princess-with-attitude (and I mean 'real-pain-in-the-arse-

attitude') has some voice on her, of that there is little doubt. But does she have to shriek quite so much?

On the final track, 'Glorious Pop Song', and to a lesser extent on 'Hedonism' and 'Twisted', the shaven-headed Skin shows that she can really sing without shouting. And it is with moments like these that we start to appreciate what Skunk Anansie can really offer.

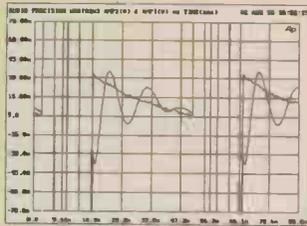
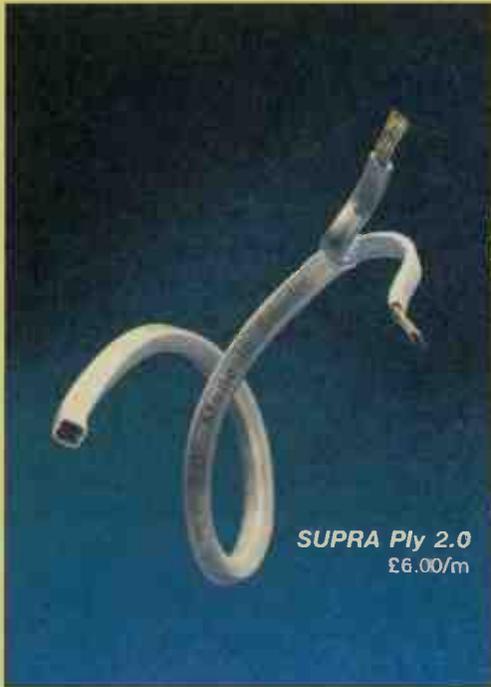
But take a first dip at the beginning, and Stoosh is like a bomb going off in your face. (Radio One DJ Simon Goodier won't argue after accidentally playing half of it live on his show instead of the melodious 'Infidelity' track.) With Skin screaming "Yes it's ~~political~~ political - course it's ~~political~~ political", it's no stroll in the park. This can only be described as hardcore Punk, with political overtones that I suspect Skin has etched on her heart.

Ultimately, 'Political' is no true stinker, it just grates. Following on is the considerably better, 'All I Want', which, while as heavy, is far more tuneful with its Pearl Jam feel. Next up is 'She's My Heroine', a Rock ballad to rival Guns and Roses or Nirvana in intensity. With Skin's piercing lyrical input over a slow, steady bassline and soaring guitar, this is a far cry from earlier Skunk records, and helps to explain why Stoosh has shot straight into the top ten on the Heavy Rock album charts.

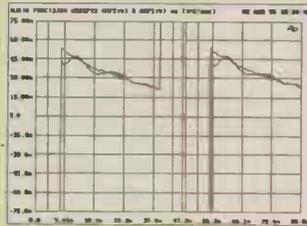
So where do the Annie Lennox comparisons come in? Well - and this could be a pointer to the future - on 'Infidelity' and 'Hedonism', and to a lesser extent 'Glorious Pop Song', the quite amazing vocal talent of Skin shines through in abundance. Could there be a solo career beckoning?

Stoosh is a major departure from Paranoid and Sunburnt, leaning much more to Punk and Heavy Rock than Indie Pop, and as such is a hard one to appraise. It's often noisy and sheds no new light on an already talent-brimming Rock scene. I'm not sure what Skunk are playing at here, but I suspect things will turn out right in the end ●

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The low, benign oxidation is discussed in Ben Duncan's article in Electronics World, February 1996: Modelling cable

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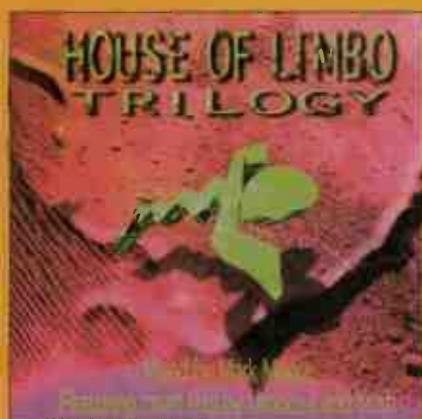
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Christmas Dance



VARIOUS
TRILOGY
LIMBO LIMB 61CDX

What a beautifully fitting combination of talent on offer here - and that's before I've even mentioned what's on the CD. For starters, Limbo Records is one of a dwindling number of truly cool independent labels left with top tunes under their belt. On top of that, Master of the Mix is Mark Moore, the man who brought us 'Theme from S-Express'. Around from the beginning (well, nearly), he's the one responsible for party-flavoured tunes spiced up with Rupert the Bear themes and Julie Andrews' 'Lonely Goatherd'!

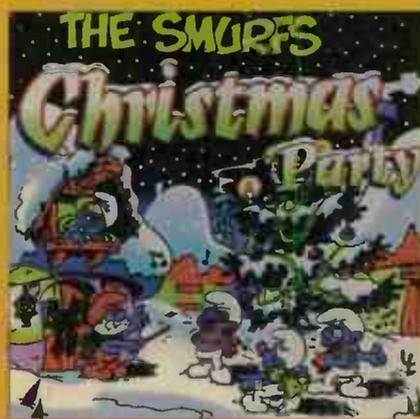
So what do you get for your Christmas wonga then, eh? Well, 17 tracks of the most delicious club anthems with a couple of chart hits thrown in for good measure. The last two House Of Limbo compos have been pretty stunning so there's a lot to live up to, but not to worry as this time around you're thrown right in at the deep end with Umboza's 'Cry India', a top 20 chart tickler no less.

And it doesn't let up there. The

seductive tones of Gypsy's 'I Trance You' come touched up courtesy of Aquarius, before Mark drops the groove into a little Havana number.

But, my lovelies, there's so much more for granny's £15. You get two, yes two, mixes of Josh Wink's hypnotic 'Thoughts of a Tranced Love', and Scottish techno-types Q Tex offer up a little anthem (that would promote some very silly gurning and shape-throwing from some of my friends). Not to mention smile-friendly floor-stormers from the likes of Tocayo.

Yep, the suspense is finally over. Limbo's on a roll with first, second and third time lucky.



THE SMURFS
THE SMURFS CHRISTMAS PARTY
EMITV CDEMTVI 40

Is it only me who used to fancy the little girl smurf with the pig tails? Oh, OK, it probably was then. Still, nothing

wrong with that. I hope. Anyway, you're probably wondering why I'm reviewing the Smurfs' new album in the Dance and Ambient section. No, I haven't lost the plot now - that happened long ago.

Just look at it this way. Think back over '96 and the great Dance tracks of the year - Orbital's 'The Box', The Prodigy's 'Firestarter', Underworld's 'Born Slippy', Stretch and Vern's 'I'm Alive', Tori Amos' 'Professional Widow', Apollo 440's 'Krupa', and CJ Bolland's 'Sugar Is Sweeter'. Yes, all of them great, kick-ass tunes and all big chart hits. 1996 showed that Dance has well and truly crossed over to the mainstream.

But there's one track missing from that list - The Smurfs' 'I've Got A Little Puppy'. It may be a rip-off of The Technoheads' 'I Want To Be A Hippy' but, quite simply, it is the best Techno track of all time. With that fat beat and cartoon rave feel, it's right up there with the Wombling Song and the theme from Rupert The Bear.

So after the massive success of 'Smurfs Go Pop', they're back with the Christmas album. Laugh not - this is the finest collection of Christmas tunes since I bought A Reggae Xmas from Woolies years ago. Thank God there's no 'A Spaceman Came Tralling'. Instead, there's hit after hit - 'Smurfing Around The Christmas Tree', 'All I Want For Christmas Is A Smurf Hat', and the unforgettable 'Smurfing Around The Christmas Tree'. Oh yes, a perfect combo of Casio synths and little blue people singing falsetto.

Roll on December 25th with this one in your stocking ■



Christmas Classical



JOSQUIN DESPREZ

**Missa de Beata Virgine/Motets for the Virgin
A Sei Voci; director, Bernard Fabre-Garrus**

ASTREE AUVIDIS E8560 (DDD/59.14)

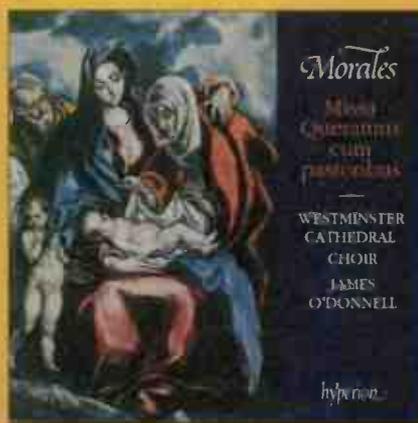
This recording by the French choir A Sei Voci has all the radiance and beauty you would expect from a programme of music celebrating the Virgin. The seamless interweaving of line and tonal purity brought to these settings by the eleven-strong ensemble is utterly beguiling. But there is an authority, too, about these performances, directed by bass, Bernard Fabre-Garrus and sumptuously recorded in the twelfth century Abbey of Fontevraud.

The abbey would certainly have been known to Josquin Desprez, even if - for such an influential figure - musical historians have failed to uncover a great deal about the life of Josquin himself. He was born around 1440, at Vermandois in Picardy and between 1459 and 1472 was employed as a chorister at Milan Cathedral. He then remained in Italy, until the first years of the sixteenth century which may have been spent at the French court.

Both during his lifetime and for some time after, Josquin's music was being used as a model by other composers. His Missa de Beata Virgine enjoyed enormous popularity, and for very good

reason. In the richness of its writing, and in the originality and power of its expression, the Mass has few peers in Renaissance polyphony. Writing in the sixteenth century, the Swiss musical theorist had no doubts about the stature of Josquin's Missa de Beata Virgine: "Finer music cannot be created," he remarked in his Dodekachordon.

To accompany the Mass, A Sei Voci offer equally seductive performances of five Marian motets by Josquin, including a setting of the Stabat Mater which, like the Mass, became one of Josquin's most celebrated and widely disseminated compositions. Above all, though, the singers of A Sei Voci emphatically demonstrate how Josquin's music effortlessly crosses four centuries to continue to touch both hearts and minds.



CRISTOBAL DE MORALES

Missa Queramus cum pastoribus/Motets

JEAN MOUTON

**Queramus cum pastoribus
Choir of Westminster
Cathedral; Master of the Music,
James O'Donnell**

HYPERION CDA66635 (DDD/65.23)

Anyone who has responded to the matchless series of recordings of the

music of Tomas Luis de Victoria by the Westminster Cathedral Choir (also on Hyperion) would do well to investigate this programme of music by Victoria's compatriot and near-contemporary, Cristobal de Morales. However, if a certain 'Spanish fervour' is detectable in the soaring lines of Victoria's polyphonic writing, Morales brings a more cosmopolitan quality to his music. The characteristics of Morales's style - its richly-woven textures, its sumptuous expanses of sound and its ingenious and unexpected juxtapositions - are all evident in his Mass Queramus cum pastoribus. In the tradition of the period, this was based on another work, an eponymous Christmastide motet by the French composer Jean Mouton (c.1459-1522).

Morales uses the components of the motet to often telling effect, not least in the monumental Credo and the sublime Sanctus, the opening of which has a breadth and spaciousness of overwhelming impact and splendour. That this is a movement concerned with contrasts is typified by the joyful triple metre of the Osannas which are followed by the spare, plaintive lines of the Benedictus. The concluding Agnus Dei, with its solemn yet radiant grandeur, is no less arresting and original.

As in his recordings of Victoria, James O'Donnell possesses the key to unlock the emotional and spiritual heart of this, at times, austere music. His Westminster choristers respond with passion and enthusiasm, both in the Mass and in the motets which precede it, all but one of which employs Morales's preferred scoring for five voices.

Engineered by Antony Howell, the full, vivid recording makes dramatically effective use of the spacious but not over-reverberant Westminster acoustic, playing its part in making this recording a success.

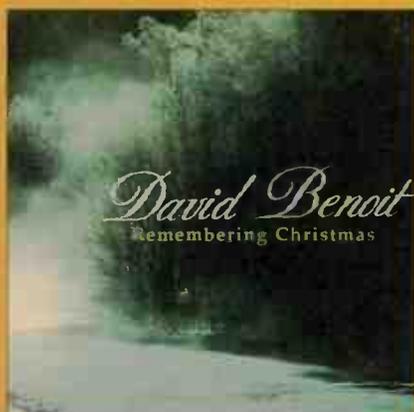


Christmas Jazz

DAVID BENOIT

REMEMBERING CHRISTMAS

GRP 98522



Christmas is a time for entertaining family and friends, a time for talking and catching up on news and gossip rather than hibernating in the warm glow of your latest kit valve amp or whatever, which can wait until the dark days of January are upon us. This means that you need wallpaper muzak to act as a backdrop for the scintillating conversation of cocktail guests. Something that soothes the post-prandial snores perhaps? That's what Christmas selections are all about.

Not. Despite packaging and presentation to the contrary, this is quite a bit more than your average cash-in on the season. It ranges from the relaxing, schmaltzy approach to the adequately-fast-but-not-muscley. Really, it's just what you want from a Christmas album without the kitsch.

It's based around a

piano/guitar/percussion sort of standard and includes a lot of the tracks you'd want in its dozen; 'Santa Claus is coming to Town', 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring', 'Do You Hear What I Hear?', 'Silent Night', and so on.

When I said it was without kitsch, I meant in the playing, not the selection. After all, even the kitsch ones are Christmas essentials. Benoit and his cohorts play adequately well if not superbly at all times. The recording is similar and certainly better than average for any time of the year, let alone a Nativity one.

It may not be the sort of thing you'd treasure for ever but you'll probably come back to it for years to come.

WORLD

A BRAZILIAN CHRISTMAS

ASTOR PLACE TCD4005



If cocktail jazz isn't your thing and you'd prefer something that reminds you of warmer climes, perhaps this will be more

your style. Still, as a believer in the old-school white-Christmas-and-turkey-roast plan for the season I have my doubts about this CD. I mean, just what is Dori Caymmi doing singing about Jack Frost's penchant for noses? Caymmi is Brazilian, so the accent doesn't really cut the mustard and anyway, who wants cold-weather songs on a tropical album?

While this must have seemed a great idea to all those marketing chaps, something deep within the dichotomy between Northern and Tropical cultures prevents much of this album from phasing into coherence. Tracks like 'The Christmas Song', 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' or 'Jingle Bells' don't quite gel - or perhaps it's just me. Yet 'Dance Natahl', 'Santa Claus is coming to Town' and 'White Christmas' (and others) are tracks which bring a whole new perspective to what are - if you'll pardon the pun - a bunch of old chestnuts.

Like most Brazilian music recordings in this country, the focus seems to have been on the raw drive and emotion of Latin music rather than clarity and presence. Many of these tracks, however, were not written to attack this way.

That said, it's an interesting compilation and some of the tracks are gems of a kind you'll find nowhere else. If you can prevail upon a vendor's goodwill to hear it before you buy it in this festive season, then make sure you do. But be warned, don't buy it as a present: it's a real personal choice thing.



Christmas Games and Puzzles Answers Page

ANSWERS

One point for each question answered correctly.

- [1] The limited edition 12in. Ittok from 1983.
- [2] The CD333, later renamed CD63 when it reached production.
- [3] 'Orthos', meaning 'pure' or 'perfect', and 'phone', meaning 'sound' or 'voice.'
- [4] Lux.
- [5] DPA Digital.
- [6] New Acoustic Dimension.
- [7] It had an oscilloscope rather than conventional tuning and signal strength meters.
- [8] From the fact it's made from an aluminium shaft used by Olympic archers in their arrows.
- [9] Philips.
- [10] Hi-Fi Today.
- [11] Meridian MCD.
- [12] Dudley Harwood, founder of Harbeth loudspeakers.
- [13] (Sir) Cliff Richard in 'Wired for Sound'.
- [14] Denon DL103.
- [15] John Michell, who also made some of the props for 2001 A Space Odyssey.
- [16] Because four is an unlucky number in superstitious far-Eastern markets.
- [17] Kuzma of Yugoslavia.
- [18] Grey, not the more common white you are likely to see.
- [19] Oracle Delphi.
- [20] Valhalla.
- [21] Mordaunt-short.
- [22] Technics.
- [23] The Bee Gees' Living Eyes.
- [24] Proprietors Spencer and Dorothy Hughes.
- [25] Rega.
- [26] Mission 771.
- [27] Both had UK hit singles called 'High Fidelity'.
- [28] Its bass/mid driver is made of Kevlar, also used in bullet-proof vests.

WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS

0-10

A low score means you're a sociable, fully rounded person with other interests - or the lobotomy didn't work.

11-20

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Hampshire Audio 01703 252827

Chelmsford
Rayleigh Hi Fi 01245 265245

Chelsea
Sevenoaks Hi Fi 0171 352 9466

Cheltenham
Sevenoaks Hi Fi 01242 241171

Covent Garden
Musical Images 0171 497 1346

Croydon
Sevenoaks Hi Fi 0181 665 1203

East Grinstead
Audio Designs 01342 314569

Edgware
Musical Images 0181 952 5535

Enfield
Audio T 0181 3673132

Gants Hill
Audio T 0181 5180915

Harrow
Harrow Audio 0181 8630938

Hereford
English Audio 01432 355081

Hitchin
David Orton AV 01462 452248

Hounslow
Musical Images 0181 5695802

Kingston
Sevenoaks Hi Fi 0181 547 0717

London
Auditorium 0171 2475000
Bartletts Hi Fi 0171 6072148
Hi Fi Experience 0171 5803535
The Listening Rooms 0171 2447750
Studio 99 0171 6248855
Thomas Heinitz 0171 2292077

New Malden
Unilet Sound & Vision 0181 9429567

Oxford
Audio T 01865 65961

Plymouth
Radford Hi Fi 01752 226011

Poole
Movement AUDIO 01202 730865

Rayleigh
Rayleigh Hi Fi 01268 779762

Reading
Audio T 01189 585463

Sevenoaks
Sevenoaks Hi Fi 01732 459555

Southend
Rayleigh Hi Fi 01702 435255

St Albans
Darby's Hi Fi 01727 850061

Swindon
Audio T 01793 538222

Watford
Sevenoaks Hi Fi 01923 212736

Weymouth
Weymouth Hi Fi 01305 785729

Woking
Bartletts Hi Fi 01483 771175

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