

# HI-FI WORLD

FEBRUARY 2010

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- ORTOFON A90 CARTRIDGE
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FEBRUARY 2010



**10 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)**

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## verdicts

- ● ● ● ● OUTSTANDING
- ● ● ● EXCELLENT
- ● ● GOOD
- ● ● ● MEDIOCRE
- ● POOR
- £ VALUE



It's at times like this that you have to stop, take stock and try to remember just what it's all about. When experiencing the £15,000 Klimo Tafelrunde turntable [reviewed on p10], that is...

Here we have a vast, sculptural apparition, the size of an industrial-sized coffee table, with various exotic protrusions, all elaborately surfaced. It's visually arresting enough to divert all eyes in the room to its delightful form. It presents itself, if I may borrow a phrase from the BBC2 cultural commentators, as kinetic art. It moves apparently to perform a function, yet surely its primary function is simply to be its beautiful self?

Well okay, it's really just a fancy record player. But using this exquisite bit of kit makes you reassess what hi-fi should be in the first place. It's very, errrr, *Italian*, don't you know? By which I mean lavishly designed, seductively shaped and utterly appealing to one's 'hi-fi heartstrings'. Yet there are some annoying imperfections you wouldn't see on a £300 Rega. For example, the cueing lever doesn't work right, so one is forced to hand cue (not a problem for Noel and I as that's what we prefer anyway). And some of that chromium plating is really rather poor; one wonders if it will fade like an old Lancia Beta in a Scottish winter?

Yet despite its obvious imperfections, the sound it serves up is as show-stopping as the aura it radiates out into the room. If you were to own one, it's the sort of thing your friends and family would remember you by, when you were gone, like Uncle Rupert and his orange Maserati Khamsin. People would talk about the time they came to your house to see your Klimo, and how they'd never heard anything like it before or after. The Tafelrunde is, in every sense, a seminal hi-fi product. Showy, sassy, sexy and faintly silly, owning one would surely become a vocation.

It is products such as these - glorious flaws and all - that remind us that hi-fi is more than a functional, utilitarian pursuit; it's a passion with great rewards awaiting the dedicated. And the good news is that, should you not have fifteen grand under your mattress, there are some equally special products - old and new - for a fraction of this. *Hi-Fi World* is as ever, your faithful guide. Enjoy!

**David Price, editor**



## testing

To ensure the upmost accuracy in our product reviews, *Hi-Fi World* has extremely comprehensive in-house test facilities, and our test equipment - from big names like Rohde & Schwarz and Hewlett Packard - is amongst the most advanced in the world.

Loudspeakers are measured using a calibrated Bruel & Kjaer microphone feeding a Clio-based computer

analyser, using pulsed and gated sinewaves, in a large room to eliminate the room's influence. Pickup arm vibration is measured with a Bruel & Kjaer accelerometer.

No other UK hi-fi magazine has in-house testing, and none has access to such advanced tests across all types of equipment. That's why you can depend on *Hi-Fi World* reviews.



## ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

Go to our website [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk) to buy an electronic version of this magazine, individual issues or a subscription. At present we do not offer back issues, but hope to soon.

Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd 86 Newman Street London, W1T 3EX Tel: +44 (0) 20 7396 8000 Printed by St.Ives, Plymouth Tel: +44 (0) 1752 345 411  
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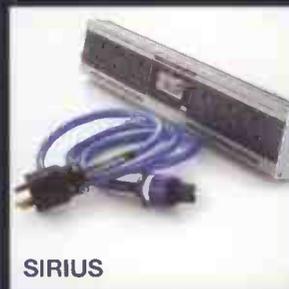
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*"The whole auditioning process took about 30 seconds. Play a piece of music on GII Mini Sub. Play it again on Aquarius and wonder why you were so attached to the GII Mini Sub." "Very highly recommended"*

HI-FI PLUS. ISSUE 68,



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# news

## SOURCE DIRECT

Helmut Brinkmann's new Bardo is the company's second turntable to feature the magnetic direct drive motor, as used in the Oasis, and is inspired by the design of their top-of-the-line models Balance and LaGrange. Interestingly, the Brinkmann has a slightly different 'take' on the direct drive popularised by decks such as the Technics SL1200 or the SP10 broadcast variant. There is only one bearing for the motor and the platter, a circular magnet is mounted into the bearing of the platter and is concentrically driven into rotation via coils on the circuit board under the magnet. An electronic circuit drives the coils via two magnetic sensitive resistors that react to the magnetic fields into a highly constant and slow circular movement. The motor is a relatively low torque design, designed to counteract cogging effects; its motor controller transfers just enough energy to the motor for it to remain at constant speed. The motor's stator consists of four specially designed field coils, which are mounted concentrically around the platter bearing. Based on listening sessions, Brinkmann decided to forgo the typical 90-degree mounting angle in favour of a non-standard 22.5-degree roster, which, due to the magnetic fields overlapping, further reduced cogging, the company says.

The standard Bardo sports the magnetic motor drive and platter of the Oasis turntable, with an acrylic platter top and standard small plastic housed power supply. It can also be purchased in three upgrade stages. Stage 1 features the metal cased power supply that is used for the Balance and LaGrange turntables instead of the standard power supply. The result is a more defined bass response and a wider room imaging, the company says. Upgrade stage 2 features a glass platter mat and a record clamp instead of the black acrylic platter mat that is shown in the picture. This results in a finely extended dynamic resolution. The combination of the two upgrade stages gives "nearly the bandwidth and dynamic resolution of Brinkmann's bigger turntables", it is claimed.

The tonearm base of the Bardo can be fixed to allow a simple and precise tonearm adjustment for all tonearms between 9" and 10.5". Brinkmann drill the base according to the tonearm the customer chooses. The output sockets are found on the back of the turntable, and can be equipped with RCA or XLR sockets, and it is also possible to install tonearms with DIN connectors or fixed cables. The two possible speeds, 33 1/3 and 45 rpm, are selectable by a switch at the front of the turntable and can be fine adjusted via two screwdriver holes that are located next to the switch. Vital statistics are 420x320x100mm, 14.8 kg. For more details, click on [www.symmetry-systems.co.uk](http://www.symmetry-systems.co.uk).



## NAT BEST

Serbian based NAT Audio's Se2se is described as "hot, huge and heavy", no less! A single-ended zero feedback Triode monoblock power amplifier, it weighs in at 34kgs and measures 300x610x260mm. Each amplifier features twin 211 new old stock Triodes which were manufactured in the 1940s. The company says this gives the Se2se, "70 Watts

of the purest Class

A power imaginable".

Also on the large size  
(483x455x260mm, 14kg)

is the NAT Audio Plasma R  
remote controlled preamplifier,

which is a dual mono, zero feedback

valve preamp with valve rectification and

'plasma effect' double regulation. The Plasma features two high current 6N30P-DR triodes per channel giving a low output impedance for drivability, it is claimed.

Prices are £10,114 pair for the Se2se monoblocks, £4,592 for the Plasma R. Contact Alternative Audio on +44(0)1984 624242 or click on [www.nataudio.com](http://www.nataudio.com) for more details.



## DISC SLIP

Late November saw the surprise announcement that Linn Products is stopping production of CD players. Since the Linn DS (Digital Streaming) products were launched a couple of years back, much of the demand for their optical disc players has disappeared, with sales of source components now being almost exclusively DS-based. The first manufacturer to announce it will give up on CDs from the start of next year, Linn will now focus on DS and of course the venerable Sondek LP12 turntable. The company foresees a move to what it calls 'Studio Master Quality' material, available for download from its website. "We're bringing hi-fi to a younger generation who already are not used to handling Compact Disc", Linn MD Gilad Tiefenbrun told *Hi-Fi World*. "The highly popular compressed file formats (MP3, AAC, et al.) are the McDonald's burger of the music business, and the hi-fi industry has to make a concerted effort to wean people off these on to something better".

The news comes soon after the BPI, representing the British recorded music industry, announced last month that 2009 had already broken last year's record number of legally downloaded single and individual track sales. Of 117 million sales, nearly 99% were digital downloads. But there is a different market for album sales, where CD sales continue to dominate, but their share of the market is sliding, it is reported. By way of comparison, in 2006, there were 154 million album sales, of which CDs accounted for 151m, and digital for 2.7m. In 2007, with 138m sales, 131m were CDs and 6.2m were digital. In 2008, there were 137m album sales, with 123m CDs and 10.3m digital downloads. Vinyl records, cassettes and other formats accounted for around 300,000, according to the BPI. This bears out Tiefenbrun's comment that, "when we launched, we thought there would be a minority interest in Linn DS. But CD sales are down 40%, while last year DS sales are up 40% plus; now the streaming products constitute over 30% of our entire company sales".



## TWO'S COMPANY

News comes of Denon's PMA-2010AE and DCD-2010AE "high-performance stereo combination". The DCD-2010AE SACD player is a heavyweight (14kg) with a precision mechanical ground construction on a triple-layer base. A newly developed Advanced S.V.H. Mechanism with low centre of gravity and anti-vibration aluminium diecast tray ensure optimal digital disc playback, the company says. It features new technologies such as Advanced AL32 Processing and high-grade 32bit/192kHz DA converters "guaranteeing the highest detail levels". The highly accurate master clock minimises jitter. In addition, there's a front USB port for connecting iPod/iPhone or USB memory and playing music files from those devices digitally. There is also a newly developed aluminium-topped remote control with all the functions needed for comfortable USB/iPod playback.

The PMA-2010AE integrated amplifier's 'Precision Direct Mechanical Ground Construction' is said to thoroughly suppress vibration thus minimising adverse influences on the output signal. The power transformer has been 'float' mounted using a variety of vibration-resistant materials and a radiator stabiliser. A chassis construction with six independent blocks and the large 27mm high-grade volume potentiometer further suppress external noise and unwanted interferences between the parts. Denon's UHC (Ultra High Current) MOS circuitry is used, with independent preamp and output stage power supplies. For more information, call +44(0) 2890 279830 or click on [www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk).

## THE RIGHT PROFILE

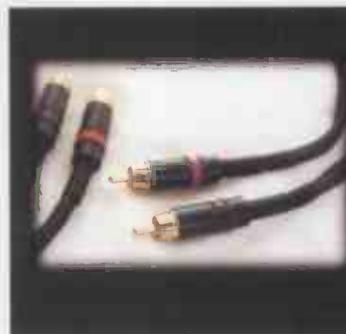
Sleek Audio's SA1 high end earphone is said to bring exchangeable wired and wireless connectivity. It sports a real Siam rosewood body that houses "the first ever 6mm custom tuned driver". Price is £70, or £160

including the wireless option. For more details, click on [www.sleek-audio.eu](http://www.sleek-audio.eu).



## SILVER CRAFT

Artisan Silver Cables' new entry-level pure silver interconnects are called Silver Star. With a claimed 85-90% of the performance of the pricier Silver Dream, the new cables cost just £99. See [www.artisansilvercables.com](http://www.artisansilvercables.com).



## STAR QUALITY

Here's something that may interest a number of classic loving *Hi-Fi World* readers. Comet's new 'repair service' offers repair of electrical items, regardless of where they were purchased. With 500 engineers available six days a week, it's a handy service to know about. The repair hotline is 08705 425 425, and it's open seven days a week, from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm Saturday and 10am-5pm on Sunday. Comet says home call outs can be booked for larger items such as kitchen appliances or TVs and smaller items can also be brought into Comet stores to be inspected. The company says that on average white goods, such as washing machines and fridges are repaired in under six days and TVs, cameras and camcorders in under five days. Over 65% of all appliances are fixed during the first engineer visit. In-home repair service for TVs or large kitchen appliances is priced at £29.36 for a call out. At the time of the visit the fault is diagnosed and customers are advised of the cost of repair. Labour charge following call out is fixed at £44.04, plus parts. Ring 08705 425 425 to book. For all other portable faulty products, take them to your nearest Comet store. TVs under 21", VCRs, DVDs and microwaves cost £44.04 to be looked at, while all camcorders and cameras cost £92.98. There's a minimum charge of £44.04, even if the product isn't found to be faulty. For more details, click on [www.comet.co.uk](http://www.comet.co.uk).

## SMALL TALK

Neat Acoustics' new Petite SX is the fourth generation of the diminutive standmounter, costing £1,250 per pair plus £203 for bespoke stands. In common with its larger Elite SX brother reviewed this month, the new Petite SX incorporates a staggered port-tuning design. A 32mm diameter port on the rear of the cabinet has a narrow operating band centred on 40Hz. An additional 50mm diameter port, also mounted on the rear of the cabinet, is tuned higher over a wider operating band. Usefully, for small rooms the larger ports may be closed using the supplied open-cell foam bungs. The main drive unit is the latest version of that used in Neat's reference Ultimatum range, with a 6.5in doped paper cone, ferrite magnet assembly and vented voice coil to enable high power handling without compression. The new 25mm tweeter is a soft-fabric dome type with internal damping and a non-resonant chamber. As with all Neat loudspeakers the crossover, though simple in execution, is the result of painstaking development, the company says. It's a three-element type utilising low-loss air-core inductors and a high-grade polypropylene capacitor. The slopes are first order (Bass/midrange) and second order (HF). All crossover components are specified within very tight tolerances in order to ensure excellent pair matching. The cabinet is precisely manufactured from selected MDF balance veneered and includes bitumen-composite damping panels. The result is a rigid, quiet inert cabinet complementing the high quality drive units. Vital statistics are 310x200x180mm. For details see [www.neat.co.uk](http://www.neat.co.uk).



## RADIO ACTIVE



Teac's new SR-3DAB is described as an elegant, feature-packed table top high-fidelity radio offering iPod and iPhone dock replay, FM/DAB/RDS broadcast and a CD-player, all for around just £199. Housed in a wooden cabinet, with a black textured leather-effect finish, operation is simple thanks to the sleek touch controls. Despite its compact appearance the versatile SR-3DAB is full of features: it's an iPod dock, a CD player, a DAB/FM radio, a clock with dual alarm. You can also plug in another portable audio device thanks to the auxiliary 3.5 mm stereo input (cable sold separately). It plays MP3s from a CD or by plugging in USB flash storage devices or SD cards. Complete with headphone jack, independent speaker chambers with bass reflex-port, remote control and iPod Dock adapters, the SR-2DAB can be purchased from John Lewis stores. For details of stockists contact TEAC on 0845 130 2511.

## PRO PLUS

Klipsch's new ProMedia 2.0 are described as "compact, powered speakers with real musical punch". They connect easily to Apple iPods, other MP3 players, portable audio/video devices such as televisions, CD and DVD players, as well

as laptop and desktop computers. Listeners can also simultaneously feed an audio signal (via 3.5mm jacks) from a laptop or PC and an MP3 player to the speakers for mixed sound playback, making this system an excellent choice for both multimedia presentations and entertainment, the company says. The ProMedia Ultra 2.0 consists of two magnetically-shielded satellite speakers, each equipped with a 15W power amplifier. Each satellite is a highly efficient two-way design that uses dual 2.5in fibre-composite cone drivers and a 1in metalised polymer tweeter. A Klipsch MicroTractrix Horn is coupled to the tweeter. The woofers are long-throw units powered by unique neodymium motor structures. One of the satellites – the control speaker – hosts a bass level control along with the main volume, a headphone jack and auxiliary input jack for convenience. Priced at £119 per pair, the ProMedia Ultra 2.0 is available for purchase now from [www.klipsch.co.uk](http://www.klipsch.co.uk), [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) and other leading retailers. For further product/stockist/trade info call 0845 0822454 or visit [www.klipsch.co.uk](http://www.klipsch.co.uk).



## FUZZY LOGIC

Logic3's £299 Valve 80 iPod speaker system "adds the warm tones of yesteryear to today's digital music to deliver the ultimate in modern home music entertainment", the company says. Using vacuum valve technology, highlighted by a pulsing colourful tube at the front of the unit, the Valve80 delivers "80 Watts" of sound from any iPod or other audio device. It sports a smart stainless steel body with a mirror finish, while on top, a steel cradle dock houses the iPod, leaving the exposed valve tube which pulse with light in time to the music. The twin, wooden cabinet, bookshelf speakers have a high-gloss piano black finish. It's available now at select retailers including John Lewis, Next, HMV, Micro Anvika and online at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) or [www.logic3.com](http://www.logic3.com).



## LOGICAL PROGRESSION

Fans of flare flapping axe heros indulging (themselves) in eighteen minute guitar solos look no further! Here's a great website devoted to the wonderful canon of rock music known as prog: [www.progmeister.com/home.php](http://www.progmeister.com/home.php)



## INSPIRATIONAL STUFF

Inspire Hi-Fi's brand new £399 i2 turntable is "manufactured to the highest standards, and completely British made", the company says. It's fitted with the new Inspire 251+ tonearm, which incorporates a modified counterweight and end stub, and comes fitted with a Sumiko Oyster cartridge (although other cartridge options are available). There's a high quality 12mm clear diamond polished acrylic platter, a "very rigid" plinth made from dense MDF which is then finished in dark and lighter grey acrylic, and a highly machined Inspire 'Puka' platter weight. The Inspire 3mm 'Acrimat' acrylic platter mat is fitted, plus a quality main bearing and subplatter assembly. For details, call +44(0)1246 568770 or visit [www.inspirehifi.co.uk](http://www.inspirehifi.co.uk).



# Arm's Length

Noel Keywood and David Price step back in amazement at the formidable Klimor Labor turntable...

**A**t the Munich High End Show earlier this year, we were drawn like moths to a flame by what must be one of the most imposing pickup arms ever, or four of them to be precise. They surrounded this Klimo turntable. Of course I pressed my business card into the hand of the exhibitor, Luca Gombi, imploring him to contact us about a review but was uncertain that such an exotic Italian creation would ever grace our pages. I was wrong. Luca contacted me shortly afterward, then flew to the UK to visit us in London. Not long after we received a large shipment of four boxes, plus a metal table frame and glass table top (Gestell) in its own wooden carriage frame. Inside the boxes, waiting to

be pieced together were a Klimo Labor 'Tafelrunde' chrome two speed turntable, accompanied by a Tafelrunde TPS power supply and the extraordinary Lancellotto tonearm. As Lancelot sat at Arthur's round table, so Lancellotto accompanies the Tafelrunde here, or 'round board' in German. I'm not quite sure how we get the Italian form of Lancelot, who originally appears in French literature, alongside a German round table, but as it's a folk story from past European cultures I guess it's nicely appropriate. And surely Lancellotto is an inspired choice of name for a pickup arm as visually imposing as this one.

Tafelrunde and Lancellotto together cost Euros 12,980 (£11,800 at the time of writing) and Lancellotto alone Euros 4,700

(£4,300). Tafelrunde must sit on a smooth, horizontal and vibration-free surface as it comprises three separate parts: motor, turntable and arm, the latter being linked by a rigid connecting rod. The Gestell table we received is purpose-made for this. Although a glass topped wall shelf would be a good alternative it would need to be at least 40cm deep. The Gestell table we received was 52cms deep, 75cms wide and 54cms high, the glass top being 15mm thick no less. Its feet are adjustable so the whole can be levelled. Neither the power supply nor any mains powered object like a preamplifier should go on the table, to avoid pickup of mechanical transformer vibration. We used both an Eastern Electric Minimix and Icon Audio PS3 phono preamps on our concrete



floor. In the arm we mounted an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze moving coil cartridge.

Our pictures show the Tafelrunde comprises a central turntable unit with heavy platter on top.

Linked by a chrome plated circular bar is the



base on which sits Lancellotto. The base slides along

the bar in order to set arm overhang, part of arm tracking error adjustment. The two phase 12+12 pole asynchronous motor sits on its own rubber pad, kept in position by its weight alone. Drive to the platter is through two circular section green belts. The power supply connects to the motor through a long flexible cable. Also supplied are a strobe disc for speed adjustment, together with a strobe light that connects into the power supply. Motor oil, a brace of metric hex keys, white gloves, an arm alignment protractor and earth cable are also included.

The build and set up process was long and quite complex, not made easier by instructions that lapsed into being incomprehensible. I suspect they had been translated from Italian to English by Babelfish or similar, because whilst I understood much of it, some bits like arm adjustment induced contra-rotating eyeballs. Anyone buying this extraordinary assembly would need to get a dealer to set it up, and even most dealers would be challenged. The arm would not align against a protractor and I guessed its headshell offset angle was wrong. I used Stephenson's arm design equations to work out correct headshell offset angle (and overhang) and found I was right: the headshell was angled at 22 degrees, when it should have been 15 degrees. I reset the headshell using a protractor, then slid Lancellotto's base along the rod to get 11mm overhang as the equations suggested. This then gave correct results on an alignment protractor.

All good fun, but this would be difficult to cope with without specialist knowledge and test equipment. The instructions provided no arm dimensions or performance figures at all and this obstructed setup. All dimensions quoted in this review we had to derive through our own measurements. So there is some work to be done before this turntable becomes a fully honed commercial proposition, at least in English speaking markets, but all the same after a lot of work the



### **The impressive Lancellotto 14inch arm, we fitted with Ortofon Cadenza Bronze MC cartridge...**

turntable system performed very well, our measurements show.

Lancellotto has an effective length – the distance from the cartridge stylus to the arm pivot – of 350mm. That makes it 13.8 inches long no less! It is obviously larger than the 12inch SME312 I have lived with for so long and know for its smooth sound. When properly aligned, Lancellotto will have even less tracking distortion than a 12in arm. At nearly 14inches long however, it will have high mass – this is unavoidable. At 15gms effective mass it was 1gm heavier than the magnesium 12inch SME312S. It means the cartridge has to move a heavier load over warps and big arms like this are not ideal partners for highly compliant cartridges. Luckily, most moving coil cartridges are not highly compliant, so tracking warps is not a problem with a heavyish arm, our measurements confirmed.

Lancellotto sits on a magnetically cushioned bearing system. No fewer than four brass counterweights are provided, two fitted and two spare, to cope with all cartridge weights. A small rear weight provides fine tracking force adjustment. Unfortunately, there is no bias force system, which is a pity. Bias is related to headshell angular offset and the low offset figure of Lancellotto demands less bias than usual, but it is still useful to have I feel, allowing MC cartridges to track higher cuts without mistracking. I had no trouble fitting an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze moving coil cartridge, which was set to 2.5gm tracking force.

Some hex key work was needed to get the arm's cueing platform height adjusted and then I found the arm lift platform was too short an arc to be able to lift the arm at the end of a side. It only worked over the

first half of an LP, a puzzling inability that we asked Klimo to explain. The arm can be height adjusted at its pillar base, but the headshell cannot be adjusted for cartridge azimuth (verticality).

Our Tafelrunde bearing system came pre-oiled but some had leaked out so I replenished it. The turntable bearing system sits on a PTFE disc, like Lancellotto, that sits firm on the glass table top. Putting on the two belts and threading them around the motor pulley was easy enough. Then the heavy platter is lifted on, a spindle carrier inserted in its top and a flat rubber mat placed on top. The mat had no recess to accept a disc label or stabilise dished discs, relying on the large chromed puck instead. This didn't always work however, badly dished discs still not contacting the mat around their circumference. A contoured mat is needed I feel, but this could be bought as an accessory as there are plenty of aftermarket mats available.

Tafelrunde is started by switching the power supply from Standby to On, after selecting speed. Ours span the platter properly at a steady 33rpm, but not at 45 rpm, the platter slowing down to some indeterminate speed.

As the strobe light did not work either all was not well with our supply. I checked its fuses as both 33 and 45 supplies are fused the instructions seemed to suggest, but I could find only one internal fuse and that was fine. Adjusting speed whilst testing invoked a lot of relay chatter from within and I suspect the power supply failed during this procedure. Reviewers are not known for their delicate ways! But then, protection circuits must protect: this is an argument that used to swirl around solid-state amplifiers, designers getting irate about their lovely creation being returned as a charred heap, after the protection circuits had been triggered and failed. As some designers have ruefully noted though, it can be more difficult to design protection circuits than the circuits you are trying to protect (I know this is true because I have to design bullet-proof, high speed protection for our test bench to protect our



**Supplied accessories...**

expensive test equipment). We have to assume that when Klimo ship product all this will be sorted out and that if failure occurs it can be rectified. The power supply worked fine at 33rpm so this is how we used the turntable.

At this point you may well think asking £12k is a bit steep for the Klimo Labor turntable system, but all the issues I have brought up are easily solvable. The simple fact is that whilst Tafelrunde isn't unique – Dr Feickert makes a similarly constructed turntable that we reviewed some months back – it is lavish in its own way and eye catching. Lancelotto is visually an extraordinary construction and it works well too. If you have the money and want an utterly unique pickup arm then it simply has no competition. It's true Italian style, taken to a level of complexity and sophistication that is breathtaking.

**NK**

**SOUND QUALITY**

There's no mistaking the physical size of this Klimo combo, and nor will it leave you in any doubt as to the scale of the original recording. Just as with the similarly esoteric EAT Forte



*Turntable without platter and motor, showing belt drive mechanism...*

itself suddenly seemed simple; whereas just about every other turntable I've ever played this track has made something of a meal of 'Lamb', the Klimo simply laid every ingredient out on the plate like a large pizza pie.

Phil Collins' unmistakable stick work was about as dynamic as I've ever heard it, this deck showing its superlative dynamics and brilliant incision. Bass drums were tighter than most decks are able to make a snare sound, and the cymbals sparkled as only a superb turntable tracking a top moving coil can make them. At the same time, the sense of effortlessness was sublime; despite chest pounding power, the Klimo seemed barely to be raising an eyebrow. There was no sense of strain, no notion that it was hanging on to the mix for dear life; rather it barely seemed to be so much as wagging its little finger. Few turntables have captured the power of this song as well as this, let alone picked through its murky mix with such ease, or conveyed its dramatic, histrionic dynamics as effortlessly and insouciantly as this.

Moving to more modern programme material, and Kraftwerk's 'Tour de France Etape 1', showed its massive bass drive in altogether more stark terms. A brilliant modern recording, the sinewy electronic bassline on this track is about as good as it gets, and the Tafelrunde shows why. Dizzily powerful yet utterly unforced, this turntable's motor seemed to be sending tree-stump pulling levels of torque to the platter, which wavered or wobbled not a jot. Real analogue bass such as this is a thing to behold alright, but even more satisfying was the way it slotted into the rest of the mix so seamlessly, distracting one's attention not at all from the infectious but delicate electronic percussion running further up the frequency scale. The verse's vocoded vocals had massive presence, running wide either side of

each loudspeaker, the Klimo showing its epic, widescreen nature to best effect, and showcasing the majesty of this sublime slice of modern electronica.

The solidity of the Tafelrunde, doubtless in no small part down to its Herculean proportions and that amazingly long tonearm, once again manifested itself with The Crusaders' 'Creole'. This is a lovely piece of mid seventies jazz-funk with the stratospheric production values you'd expect from the heyday of vinyl and indeed Joe Sample's own perfectionist tendencies. On some turntables, my Japanese pressing of this album can sound just a tad lightweight, but here it had what people used to call "bottom". The music assumed a physical presence that made it utterly compelling; the Moog synthesiser work was a dream, reminding me how sublime this classic musical instrument can sound. Full in texture, rich in tone and dripping with harmonics, it was an undiluted pleasure. The following track, 'Chain Reaction', showcased the deck's rhythmic alacrity; those trumpet and saxophone refrains rasped away, brilliantly syncopated to some delicious jazz drumming and lovely feathery hi hat work that took you away on the breeze. Whilst the bass, guitar and brass was never less than raunchy and earthy in tone, the percussion had a light touch that make the track blissful to behold.

It was clear that the low compliance Ortofon Cadenza Bronze was a great pairing for the high mass Klimo tonearm, as mastertape-like solidity and breezy rhythms such as these only come together when there's a famous mechanical match. Allied to that massively engineered turntable, the sound was engrossing across all genres. A spot of modern pop in the shape of Neon Neon's 'Raquel' showed that, massively insightful as it is, the Klimo isn't all about analysis. This is quite a cold and clinical recording, yet the

*Tafelrunde power supply...*



we reviewed last year, so the Tafelrunde is a sonic giant, with all the firepower at its disposal to launch an all-out assault on the recording. However dense or complex it may be, the Klimo penetrates the mix like an armour-piercing shell, cutting straight through to what's really going on.

Take 'The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway', the Genesis track from the album of the same name, for example. A prime example of prog pomp, it can sound hopelessly muddled with even very high quality machinery. And yet this turntable made it sound all so simple, almost as if was recorded live with a pair of crossed cardioid mics and an open reel spinning at high speed, rather than the 128 track (well, nearly) opus recorded at the Island Mobile Studio with umpteen overdubs. Peter Gabriel's voice was at once so clear, so direct and so solidly placed in the recorded acoustic. Speaking of which, the song's multilayered mix

deck didn't seem desperate to tell me this, preferring instead to get 'into' its hypnotic percussive loops and punchy sequenced bass rather than dwelling on the album's rather steely tonality. It's very detailed, but in a constructive, rather than a deconstructive, sense. Tonally then, the Klimo combo is near-as-dammit neutral; it's not warm and euphonic like a classic LP12, but neither is it quite as 'cool' as an SME Model 20, for example. I'd say you should avoid cold sounding cartridges, as the overall experience may be a tad too 'hi-fi' for your tastes, but a nice neutral-to-warm performer like the Cadenza Bronze let the recording's flavour flood out without overly influencing things.

One thing that never ceases to amaze me is the lack of popularity of classical music on vinyl; for me it's where black plastic really flies, in comparison to CD which sounds confined, unatmospheric and hard. The Klimo proved a brilliant partner for this genre of music, making a fantastic fist of the superb Linn Records box set of Handel's 'Messiah' (Dunedin Consort & Players). This deck once again stepped away from

the mechanics of a diamond tip wiggling its way along a vinyl groove, bringing instead a rendition you'd expect from actually being there at the actual performance. The authority the deck displayed as its fourteen inch arm sailed across the arc of the disc was impressive, giving tremendous body to the musicians and an expansive air to the recorded acoustic that makes classical music on vinyl an almost transgressive experience at times. Once again, the Klimo communicated all the music's pomp and grandeur, yet in such an unflustered way.

**CONCLUSION**

This is an expensive and complicated way to play vinyl LPs, and one that - without the services of an excellent dealer who's on top of the physical set up and alignment issues will be prohibitively difficult to get going for most people. But if you're able to get one, and get it going as the manufacturer intended, you'll find it to be a very special thing indeed; there's no doubt that it auditions as well as

some of the best turntable packages around and looks striking too. Yet for such an expensive design there are glitches; an errant armrest, some less than ideal finishing to the chromium parts and the general finickyness of it, that will dissuade some who'll be seeking an altogether more flawless (and some might say characterless) user experience. Like every thing of beauty, and indeed most things Italian, the Klimo Tafelrunde isn't always purely pleasurable, but once on song will have you enraptured like little else. **DP**

...and sturdy delivery boxes!



*We had received no reply to our queries by close of issue, so hope to bring Klimo's response in our next issue.*

**VERDICT** ●●●●

A fabulous turntable tour de force with eye-catching 14 inch arm, this package delivers sonics commensurate with its stunning looks.

<b>KLIMO LABOR</b>	
TAFELRUNDE + LANCELLOTTO	
EUROS	12,980
LANCELLOTTO ARM	
EUROS	4,700
GESTELL TABLE	EUROS 1,450
Klimo	
☎ +39 051 6926387	
www.kilmo.com	

**FOR**

- great sound
- aesthetics
- uniqueness

**AGAINST**

- unfinished design work
- mediocre minor detailing
- poor instructions

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our analysis of arm vibrational modes, made with an accelerometer attached to the Lancellotto's headshell, shows some expected characteristics for a long arm. The main arm tube bending mode is at a low frequency of 180Hz, but at less than 0.1g it is well suppressed in this arm, doubtless because it is tapered. So the Lancellotto is well damped and not unruly at its main modal frequency, and this usually translates to good lower midband lateral stage separation of instruments and solid bass dynamics. As usual there is a third order bending mode at 540Hz but this is again well suppressed, and being a narrow peak contains little energy. Above 540Hz the Lancellotto is very 'quiet' with little high frequency headshell related products above 2kHz (at right of trace). This suggests clean treble.

Arm/cartridge resonance with an Ortofon 2M Black was at 8Hz, a low value moving into the centre of the warp zone centred around 5Hz. This is a compliant moving magnet cartridge however and with less compliant moving coils the value will move up a little to around 10Hz, but the Lancellotto is still inevitably of higher effective mass than shorter arms, measuring 15gms, a penalty long arms carry.

The advantage of a long arm is lower tracking error and distortion. The arm has an effective length of 350mm, against a common figure of 228mm. As delivered tracking error was severe and not correctable by moving the arm (i.e. changing arm to turntable distance). The headshell was incorrectly set to 22 degrees offset and no overhang figure

was quoted in the instructions. Calculating correct values using Stephenson's equations I realigned the headshell (it's adjustable) to 15 degrees offset angle and set 11mm overhang, minimising tracking error distortion.

The Lancellotto arm structure is well thought through and delivers low levels of resonant distortions, as well as low tracking error when adjusted correctly.

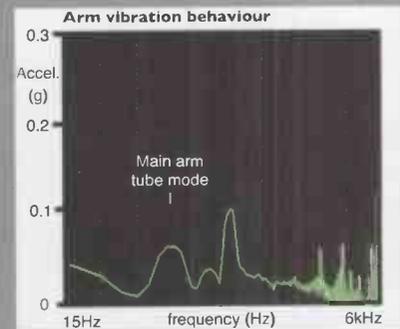
Wow and flutter measured a very low 0.078% unweighted and 0.054% IEC weighted our analysis shows. It was dominated by the turntable's basic rotational frequency of 0.55Hz (33rpm) and this lessened as the belt was tightened. Where most turntables benefit from a very slack belt this one was at its best with some belt tension applied and our speed stability figures are with a 21cm motor spindle-to-platter spindle distance. Then the unweighted value of 0.08% was held steadily and is as good as it gets. Similarly, the weighted value is also very low and in fact is determined by a peak around 8Hz, which is caused by frequency modulation components from arm/cartridge resonance. These are not true speed variations. So the Klimo is very speed-stable, up with the best turntables available.

Speed was adjustable to get the 3150Hz replay test tone frequency shown in our analysis, but this was a very fiddly business. Each click at the 50mHz setting gave a miniscule 0.1% speed change (it was meant to give 10%) and the 5mHz setting didn't work consistently at all; sometimes it changed speed, most times it did not! The adjustment knob, which has a rotary encoder on it so there

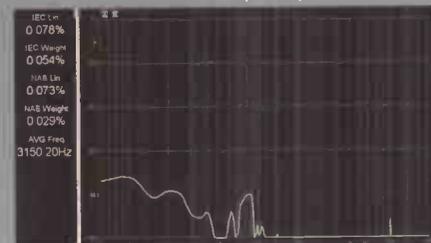
are no end stops, had to be turned slowly to avoid some form of protection relay kicking in and out. It was all very unusual, but the 50mHz setting worked well enough, allowing speed to be adjusted up or down.

With a lift/lower platform too short to lift the arm at the end of an LP side, and peculiar power supply behaviour, the Klimo needs details finalising. All the same, it measured well in basic behaviour and will give excellent sound quality. **NK**

**ARM VIBRATION**



**SPEED VARIATIONS (W&F)**



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# Canned Heat

Looking to buy a new set of headphones? Paul Rigby looks for the hottest value cans amongst seven sub-£1,000 designs...

**H**eadphones are a breed apart from all other hi-fi separates, because they're such *personal* items. After all, you don't have to wear loudspeakers, or strap CD players to your head! Because you can wear headphones for hours on end, physical comfort plays a big part in their suitability. Also, because they're less affected by room acoustics, music via 'cans' always sounds intrinsically different to loudspeakers, making personal taste even more of an issue.

Whilst we all know that headphones are ideal for late night listening, so as to not to disturb the family and neighbours, they can potentially offer better sound than even top monitor loudspeakers. So some people actually choose them for audiophile reasons, rather than solely for those of convenience. But the best results depend on a suitable headphone amplifier, so we decided to deploy two excellent but very different examples of the breed in the shape of ANT Audio's Amber 3T (solid-state) and the tube buffered Musical Fidelity X-Can v8P for our review. We found some phones worked dramatically better with one headphone amp than with the other.

So, given the right amplification, the scene was set for us to try a wide range of models, diverse in size, technology and price. All these were set against the humble Sennheiser PX100, which is a brilliant £30 reference open backed portable design which many readers will know and love. Read on to see how the contenders did...

## THE CONTENDERS

<b>Beyerdynamic RSX 700</b>	£160
<b>AKG K701 Ref</b>	£220
<b>Sennheiser HD650</b>	£270
<b>Stax SRS 2050</b>	£500
<b>Audio Technica Sovereign W1000</b>	£560
<b>Denon AH-D7000</b>	£900
<b>Grado GS1000</b>	£1,000

## REFERENCE SYSTEM

Avid Acutus/SME IV turntable  
Benz Glider cartridge  
Naim CD5 CD player  
Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier  
Atacama Equinox XLPro SE support  
Sennheiser PX100 headphones  
ANT Amber 3T headphone amplifier  
Musical Fidelity X-Can V8P headphone amplifier



## BEYERDYNAMIC RSX 700

£160



Uniquely in this group test, the RSX 700s are of a wireless type. That is, you are supplied with a headset, free of all the normal trailing wires and a 'docking station' that includes its own power supply. To get the system working, you twist and unlock one ear pad of the headset to reveal sockets for two AAA batteries. Switch on the power button on the outside of the same ear pad and select the correct wireless channel on both the docking station and headset. In this case it was the default, zero channel. You then adjust the volume, again on the outside of one of the ear pads, and you're away...

There are pros and cons to this product. Firstly, the comfort level was minimal. At 290g in weight, there is no feeling that the headset is moulding to your head and ears. In fact, the RSX 700s felt rather perched on top of my head. In addition, I did experience some initial buzzing, clicks and beeps before the system settled down but, more seriously, I experienced a constant but subtle high pitch hiss which was masked when the music began but

was present during quiet moments. That said, the RSX 700 was the most mobile system of the entire group and, with a twenty metre range, would be ideal if I had other things to do around the house while I listened to my favourite music. So they generally worked well, but weren't brilliantly built or faultless either.

### SOUND QUALITY

Initial impressions were of a light, clean and open sounding headphone, but one with a relatively low gain when compared to the reference Sennheiser PX100s whilst utilising the ANT Amber 3T headphone amplifier. Comparing the two with an eighties master of Kraftwerk's 'Numbers' from 'Computer World' (EMI), the RSX 700s showed a noticeable lack of lower bass against to the PX100s, which were able to deliver an appreciable thump to the track. That said, the RSX 700s did provide superior midrange articulation and a certain lightness of touch which was appealing to the ear, if a little bright.

This brightness receded when the RSX 700s were hooked up to

the Musical Fidelity X-Can v8P valve headphone amplifier. However, it didn't disappear altogether, which may be down to the RSX 700's basically well lit tonality and the Naim CD5 CD player source's rather forward presentation. The bright edge was still present when playing the mono master of The Beatles' 'Taxman' via the Revolver album (EMI). The acid test, the rather harsh rhythm guitar, was pushed forward in the mix, grating a tad on the ear.

The Beyers really only came to life when playing vinyl. Spinning Neil Young's 'Mideast Vacation', via 'Life' (Geffen) both the upper bass and lower midrange frequencies of this warmer format managed to coax a pleasing response from the RSX 700s. Young's vocals were coherently expressed and the headphones produced pleasing detail for the price range.

So those looking for a portable, home-based set of headphones should audition the RSX 700s. When coupled to the right components, they provide an enjoyable listening experience, but they're not the last word in audiophile performance all the same.

### VERDICT

Decent middle ranking wireless headphones, these offer fair build, nice sound and real ease of use.

### BEYERDYNAMIC

RSX 700 £160

Beyerdynamic UK

+44 (0)1444 258258

www.polaraudio.co.uk

### FOR

- portability
- convenience
- upper midband detail

### AGAINST

- comfort
- wireless issues
- careful source matching

## AKG K701 REF

£220



**T**hese open backed biwired headphones utilise what AKG calls 'flat wire voice coil technology' with a patented 'Varimotion' two layer diaphragm, said to enhance detail. The unit itself arrives complete with a storage cradle. Manufactured with a leather headband, the K701s are an easy fit, and at just 235g rest lightly on the ears. They do rather 'sit' on the head, though, in such a way that I fear for long term listening. However, they are much more comfortable than the Beyers. One important aspect of these 'phones is their cool design. In terms of how the K701s look, there's a distinct and pleasing retro feel.

### SOUND QUALITY

While lacking the sensitivity of the reference Sennheiser PX100s, the K701s, playing the Neil Young vinyl via the X-Can V8P amp, did exhibit great delicacy in the upper midrange that was not obvious with the Beyerdynamics. Plenty of air was apparent around the vocal while guitar reverb sailed off into the distance. Another first was the

discernible plucked guitar strings and snappy bass drums. Despite the fact that the K701s turned in far more midrange detail than the Beyerdynamics, the lower bass was noticeable by its absence – even when compared to the much cheaper PX100s.

Running The Beatles' 'Taxman' via the Naim CD5, showed how sensitive the K701s are to sources because the upper mids and treble were a little too bright for comfort with a strident rhythm guitar. Moving swiftly onto 'Numbers' via Kraftwerk, which is mastered with a very analogue tone, this track gave the best performance from any headphone on CD so far. Despite the missing lower bass, the track was comparatively well balanced while the upper mids and treble were highly informative, giving the music nuance and excitement. Surprisingly, instead of tipping the sound to a harsher tone, changing the headphone amp to the Amber 3T actually improved matters a notch as each electronic element was sharpened and emphasised.

I then introduced an original London/KAPP vinyl recording from

1958, Jane Morgan's 'The Day The Rains Came Down' and the track 'Everybody Loves A Lover'. This is an open, neutral, mono recording that would allow a top flight set of 'phones to fly. The K701s showed their sensitive, transparent nature as the Morgan song was tracked with care. Yes, the bass continued to take a holiday but the lower mids and upper bass did make a good fist of it to add colour. Upper mids and treble were both clear and thorough while the vocal exhibited subtle nuances. Switching back to the valve Musical Fidelity headphone amplifier improved matters still further. Morgan's attendant guitar accompaniment was fuller and more 'twangy' while the strings played in a rich fashion adding a romantic atmosphere to the arrangement.

A stylish yet fun design, the AKG K701s not only supply a slice of luxury for a nice price but deliver enough midrange and treble detail to keep you coming back for more, especially via the MF headphone stage and a vinyl source. They're a distinctively styled, well built mid-price phone, with an endearing spirit many will enjoy.

### VERDICT ●●●●

Highly transparent and source dependent, these headphones lack a little in bass performance but, for the price, excel in the midband.

AKG K701 £220  
Soundtech-Ltd.  
+44(0)1462 480000  
www.soundtech.co.uk

### FOR

- transparency
- midrange clarity
- funky design

### AGAINST

- careful source matching
- lower bass power

## SENNHEISER HD650

£270



**A**n audiophile stalwart, these open back headphones have been around for a good few years, and warrant inclusion thanks to their evergreen status. They sport distinct styling and fine construction quality; in fact, Sennheiser seems to me to be the headphone version of Naim in that you can always tell their design a mile away. The HD 650 is no exception with its elliptical earcups and strong metal outer grills plus the well-padded headband. Build quality is very high, again like Naim.

The HD 650s feature replaceable copper cables that attach to the earcups; these are Kevlar-reinforced and have very low noise handling. They can be usefully upgraded with products such as those from Stefan Audio Art. Weighing in at 260g, the HD 650s are little heavier than the AKGs, but obviously less comfortable. This is because wearing the HD 650s is comparable to placing your head in a woodworker's vice; your bonce is clamped firm! Happily, long term ownership sees them loosen up a bit.

## SOUND QUALITY

Diving into the deep end and the mono recording of Jane Morgan via the Music Fidelity amp, the HD 650s responded brilliantly with a supremely balanced performance. This is definitely a Yin & Yang design as everything appears to be in its place and working well: upper mid and treble detail abounds, upper bass provides a satisfying kick where necessary while there is sufficient lower bass to provide width and power to the recording. I did notice slightly less distortion with the HD 650s than any headphone tested thus far which meant that I could up the volume a touch without any aural discomfort. This allowed me to pick up subtle vocal resonances within Morgan's vocal performance. It was as if I had zoomed into her vocal chords and had a good look.

Playing the Neil Young track was a revelation. Impressive weight around the bass guitar and drums provided a true driving motion that reminded me of that company's own PX100s but with greater solidity and style while subtle upper mid events added a real sense of finesse that left the AKG

phones gasping in the wake of the HD 650s. Switching over to the ANT amp there was, as expected, a slight hardening that did produce a crisper bass guitar and more searing rimshots and prominent treble. However, there was nothing here that was offensive, merely a change in style and personal preference. The HD 650s retained their presentable and flattering output.

Playing 'Taxman' via The Beatles saw Paul McCartney wake up! His bass performance was impressive, prominent and articulate. Yes, the PX100 revealed the instrument but the HD 650 gave it personality and a character of its own. In addition, this was the first time during the entire test that I could sit back and actually enjoy this track. In addition, the rhythm guitar was now part of the mix instead of being disjointed and pushed into your face.

A dazzling pair of headphones that, for the price, excel in all areas of the sound spectrum while offering brilliant value. They do work particularly well with the Musical Fidelity headphone amp, and don't forgive poor sources easily however, which is important to bear in mind!

## VERDICT ●●●●●

Vivid sound and excellent build make these everything that most will ever need from a pair of headphones.

SENNHEISER HD 650 £270

Sennheiser UK  
+44 (0)1494 551551  
www.sennheiser.com

## FOR

- taut bass
- midrange finesse
- superb build quality
- upgradeable leads

## AGAINST

- a tight fit!

## STAX SRS 2050

£500



**S**urely the strangest set of headphones in this group, this open back entry level model from Stax is actually a set of 'electrostatic ear-speakers', as the company calls them, and an energiser box.

Effectively then, no headphone amp is needed; these work straight from a line output. As such, the package represents tremendous value for money.

They're rather *odd* to use. It feels like you're wearing two paperbacks on your head, albeit lightish ones that only weigh 300g. But considering their bulk, it is amazing just how comfortable they are. They have a very light touch; unlike the Sennheisers they don't lock your head in a vice. Still, the PVC cushion pad covers can get a little sweaty after long-term use, which is a pity. Build isn't bad, but you wouldn't want to abuse them like you could the Sennheiser HD 650s, and the best you can say about their styling is that it's quirkily retro...

### SOUND QUALITY

The superficial character of the SRS 2050s can be summed up thus; they

have superlative upper midband and treble but iffy bass. But that would be too easy and not provide the whole story. Playing The Beatles' 'Taxman', for example, and I found little in the way of rich, deep bass, but it was certainly fair to say that upper bass was plentiful and Paul McCartney's wonderful mid-track work was relayed well. Upper midband and treble are both detailed and eloquent with no harshness evident. Instrumental separation is excellent, broadening the soundstage and adding interest to the track.

'Numbers' from Kraftwerk lost the driving lower bass of the HD 650s but what the SRS 2050s did offer over and above the Sennheisers, was a crisper midrange and finer treble with a notable distinction that, in itself, produced its own energy, power and musicality. Every facet of the music in this area was examined and portrayed with intricate exactness. Tiny vibrations, completely missing from the Beyerdynamics and AKGs added a sense of flair to the SRS 2050's portrayal of the music. As

such, it became altogether more vibrant. Less hi-fi sounding than the HD 650s they may be, the Japanese Staxes still added something that the German Sennheisers couldn't.

Vinyl benefited even more. In fact, the Stax 'phones are very vinyl-friendly. You can almost imagine the phones wrapping an analogue arm around your favourite LP, dragging it down the pub for a few drinks, getting roaring drunk, admitting it loves the LP and vice versa - but only in a manly fashion - and then the pair waking up the neighbours with their midnight singing! Neil Young's midrange and treble output are not designed to impress with startling, short-term, feats. Instead, they offered exacting transcriptions with confidence and calm, nailing each detail with patience that makes long term listening a real pleasure. While the SRS 2050s have (lack of) lower bass issues, they can still rock with the best of them, exhibiting excellent musicality while adding grace and polish to the upper frequencies. A headphone for all music types and most listeners, these were a revelation at the price.

### VERDICT

Unique design gives these headphones special properties that all the others here lack; exceptionally musically insightful.

STAX SRS 2050 £500

Symmetry Systems

+44 (0)1727 865488

www.symmetry-systems.co.uk

### FOR

- superlative midrange
- delicate treble
- value for money

### AGAINST

- light lower bass
- odd styling
- sweaty earpads!

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Home Cinema Choice, April 2009

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**KEF**

INNOVATORS IN SOUND

# AUDIO TECHNICA ATH-W10000 £560



One of the best looking designs in the test, the closed-back W1000s are distinct in using cherry wood cups on the ear pieces. And not any old cherry wood, either. This is of the Hokaido Asada variety which is both light and rigid. The earpads sport faux leather (i.e. vinyl), so expect a bit of sweating up during long term use. Despite the ATH-W1000's large size and 350g weight, they're very comfortable indeed over long periods and are very well built. The design is completed by a long 3m cord which is cloth covered to cut down mechanical noise; a nice touch.

## SOUND QUALITY

Fascinating, and a little surprising too! They don't flatter poor sources gladly; for some reason the W1000s found The Beatles' 'Taxman' via the ANT headphone amp uncouth and rather distasteful. Despite tracking the instruments well it didn't have the musicality of either the Sennheisers or the Staxes while the troublesome rhythm guitar, which had tripped up both the

Beyerdynamic and AKG headphones did its worst here too. This upsetting effect gives you an idea how well the Sennheisers and Stax phones bring order to this chaos. The W1000s struggled to keep control of uncivilised upper mids and treble frequencies. The problems continued with the Kraftwerk CD track which exhibited stridency in the upper frequencies, despite excellent subtle detail extraction of electronic textures. In addition, in this digital domain, the upper and lower bass drive didn't quite have the same party atmosphere of the Sennheiser HD 650s.

Then vinyl was played and the W1000s showed the other side of their character. Playing Neil Young's 'Mideast Vacation' through the ANT amplifier, the mid and upper frequencies were very revealing. While the Sennheisers and the Stax showed an incisive edge, telling you that a string had, in fact, been plucked, the W1000s went further still, providing more information and disassembling the plucked string into various elements. Low bass, on this track, provided both power

and breadth. Moving to the Musical Fidelity valve amp, however, removed the slightly harsh edge which began to alert me to the transparent nature of the headphones. In general terms, with the valved amp, the W1000 was able to shine light into the dark corners of the recording.

Switching to Jane Morgan's original mono master on the Musical Fidelity amp, the W1000 handled the entire recording with aplomb. There was a supreme calm in its transcription, never rushing to deliver the information to you, it tracked the entire song with enormous clarity. Morgan's vocal, on the ballad 'You'll Be There' was smooth without a hint of harsh upper frequencies that were sometimes evident with the AKG, for example.

This is something of a schizophrenic pair of headphones therefore, and a design that is far better suited to the analogue domain rather than the digital. Whenever the W1000s see a vinyl source, they react very well indeed, but give them a CD and you'd better watch out!

## VERDICT ●●●●

A wonderfully delicate and incisive sounding design that's beautifully built and comfortable to wear, but doesn't flatter poor sources gladly.

**AUDIO TECHNICA**  
ATH-W1000 £560  
Henley Designs  
+44 (0)1235 511166  
[www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk)

## FOR

- delicacy, clarity, insight
- superb build
- comfort

## AGAINST

- lower bass
- revealing nature
- vinyl earpads

## DENON AH-D700

£900



**D**enon's two-channel products are well known in this country, but the company is less famous for its headphones which sell very strongly in its native Japan. This swish looking pair of headphones sport high quality transducers with damped mahogany earcups - the latter a popular touch on high end Japanese designs - held in place by a light and rigid magnesium frame. Leather earpads and headband complete the picture, making them more comfy on your shell-likes. All very nice, but the D7000s weigh in at a chunky 370g. This said, they're surprisingly nice to wear with a genteel fit and no long term listening issues.

### SOUND QUALITY

While the Audio Technicas concentrate upon the upper mid and treble areas, the Denons major on the bass. Playing Neil Young with the ANT amp, and the fine midrange and treble was completely overshadowed by the excellent bass reproduction, which was immediately in evidence bringing the power of the bass guitar to the

fore with presence and solidity. The Denon headphones declared, on this track, that might is right, showing a silky smooth surfaced iron fist! Moving to the Jane Morgan mono track on the ANT amp and the trademark twangy electric guitar offered far more power potential and gravitas than had been heard thus far. Morgan's voice, while not exhibiting the precision of the Audio Technicas, was both sweet and polished.

Switching to the Musical Fidelity headphone amp and the Denons almost fell apart. The D7000s obviously need a super-tight driver to reign in their exuberant bass response. Whereas the slight warmth and fulsome of the Musical Fidelity was ideal for the drier sounding Sennheiser HD650s, it proved the opposite with these, making for a bloated feel. Lacking precision, the upper frequencies could even be described as veiled. Unfortunately, this state of affairs occurred no matter what music was pushed through the 'phones - even when the forward sounding Naim CD5 was the source front-end. The Musical Fidelity amp rounded off far

too many edges.

Normal service was resumed when the D7000s were switched back to the ANT amp. Playing The Beatles' 'Taxman' brought forth a mighty grin on my face. With the Naim CD5 CD player, the track sounded much better balanced while the ANT headphone amp provided a swathe of energy that the D7000s needed in order to get going. The ANT supplied life and force in the track, blending bass and midrange detail that got the feet tapping while Paul McCartney's bass run was easily the most impressive reproduction in the entire test.

The Denon D7000s are superbly built, but at the asking price, so they should be. Performance was very surprising. These headphones have to be carefully controlled if you want to get the very best out of them and that means avoiding warming valves which only over emphasise low frequencies giving the ear too much of a good thing. Via a solid-state amp, its bass is impressive, lifting details from recordings that you probably never even suspected are there. Impressive, but expensive.

### VERDICT

Match carefully with a top notch, tight sounding headphone amplifier and the Denons' silky, sumptuous sound will seduce you.

**DENON AH-D7000** £900

Denon UK

+44 (0)2890 279830

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

### FOR

- sumptuous bass
- powerful presentation
- silky midband

### AGAINST

- need careful matching
- price

GRADO GS1000i

£1000



**T**op of the price pile, the new GS1000i is a dynamic open air design, its 'i' upgrade bringing improved transducers and a new eight-conductor cable design. Wooden earpieces are said to reduce harmful sonic resonances, but the most interesting aspect of the design to me is the very large, cave-like foam earpieces. Grado has apparently produced them to not only allow the ear to fit inside without any undue pressures but also to give the ears the best chance to find the aural 'sweet spot'. I must admit, popping the Grados on my head, the headphones felt comfortable, despite the relatively heavy weight of 311 g, but that, because of the asking price, I was looking for more. It seemed an aesthetically somewhat inelegant feature, although I'll admit long-term listening was a pleasure.

### SOUND QUALITY

Taking the Musical Fidelity valve route and Jane Morgan's album as a starting point, the Grados produced an immense sense of clarity and detail across the midrange and treble, along with lower bass power

that provided a suitable support but never overpowered - as the Denons sometimes threatened to do. In fact, the Grado headphones took the best elements of both the Denons and the Audio Technicas and cooked them up into something delicious. Certainly on this track, no weaknesses were evident. Morgan's voice was recognised as an amalgam of frequencies, a complex array of resonances and modulations that were rendered faithfully.

Moving to the Neil Young song with the same amp, and the GS1000i retained the power of the driving bass beat but blended that with delicately plucked guitar strings. That the tonal balance was achieved with such ease is a testament to the design. The Grados are transparent; there is no colour plastered on the music. Witness the amp change from the Musical Fidelity to the ANT: a slight hardness was immediately present via the ANT for example, although the quality and balance was maintained.

Retaining the ANT amplifier but changing formats to CD and The Beatles' mono version of 'Taxman' showed that, despite the

forward nature of the Naim CD5, the Grados maintained a sense of decorum while ducking and diving with all of Paul McCartney's bass convolutions and, at the same time, keeping the boisterous rhythm guitar in check and not allowing it to dictate proceedings.

During Kraftwerk's 'Numbers', the GS1000i showed great precision in how the track was presented to the ear. Indeed there was craft and care commensurate with that which the band took to create the music in the first place. Each electronic exclamation is scrutinised and offered to the ear on a silver platter. That's not to suggest that the 'phones are bereft of emotion, far from it. The analogue mastering of the Kraftwerk album adds a subtle warmth that was extremely effectively imparted.

Grado's new GS1000i headphones certainly tick most of the boxes; they take you joyously close to the original recording, yet are comfortable to wear over long periods. They're extremely expensive of course, but serious headphone users might just think they're fine value all the same.

### VERDICT

Superlative sound, but so it should be at this price. Quirky aesthetics not to everyone's taste.

GRADO GS1000i £1,000

Armour Home  
Electronics Ltd.

+44 (0) 1279 501111

www.armourhe.co.uk

### FOR

- lucid musicality
- detail, clarity
- comfort

### AGAINST

- finesse of build

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I found this group of headphones most interesting to review, thanks in no small part to the wide variety of design philosophies apparent. Also, because this group test spanned an assortment of price points, it was intriguing to see where each manufacturer's priorities fell. One decided that convenience was paramount by the use of wireless transmission, another espoused technological innovation via electrostatic transducers, while others sported clever materials use with exotic wooden ear cups.

that you plop your prospective purchase on your head before you flash that credit card!

Footing the winners list is the Beyerdynamic RSX 700. The wireless concept is a good one but I did find problems in its implementation here, and felt that the technology sometimes got in the way of enjoying the music when it should have had precisely the opposite effect. That said, the concept will still be of great use to anyone who wishes to listen to their system in a measure of privacy whilst moving around the house, or where their room is such that no conventional headphone leads are long enough. The Beyers sounded decent enough, but you wouldn't buy them if sonics were your priority all the same.

Next came the AKG K701 headphones.

I loved the design and felt that the AKGs were the first headphones of the test to take the sound up into an audiophile arena. Yes, their transparency not only revealed source harshness but accentuated a slightly strident tendency. However, they felt happier and sounded far more relaxed with analogue sources and smoother amplification, becoming nicely listenable.

As for the Denon AH-D7000 and the Audio Technica W1000 headphones? I felt it only fair that they both occupy joint fourth position - like opposing brothers held together by their differences. The Audio Technicas dominated the upper frequencies while the Denons took control of the lower areas. Some might raise an eyebrow that both the Sennheiser HD 650 and the Stax headphones have been placed above these quality products. However, in making my conclusion I felt that balance was the most important aspect for any headphone user. To do everything well was, I felt, far more important than doing one thing brilliantly. There is no doubt that both the Denons and Audio Technicas are supreme in some respects. However, critically, they are most definitely niche products compared to the far more universal appeal of the following...

Sennheiser's HD 650 headphones performed extremely well, with tremendous overall sound capabilities and no real weakness for a product in this price point. Well balanced with a driving bass and detailed midrange

and treble, many users will buy these headphones and then never feel the need to upgrade, as they're that good. The only downside is that vice-like grip they have, not only in the bass but around your face. Those with large 'noggins' may need to look to something altogether looser fitting, such as the second place product...

Stax's SRS 2050 is a special design, from a company that's been making electrostatic 'earspeakers' for several decades. Once they'd decided that this is the sound for them, Stax users rarely go back. They do have limitations, not least the lack of deep bass, but the overall balance elsewhere, the conspicuously

"listening to headphones is such a personal experience that a pre-purchase dem is critical..."

superior upper midrange and treble performance, won the day. The subtlety of these earspeakers needs to be heard to be believed.

Given the price, maybe you won't be surprised to find the Grado GS1000i headphones come out top. Basically, they did everything well and, as much as I looked for criticisms and weaknesses, I failed to find *any* so I promptly gave up and spent the rest of the test having a peach of a time listening to the music. They're almost as delicate as the Staxes, just as powerful as the Sennheisers, and cleanly etched as the Audio Technicas and as full bodied as the Denons, and put it all together so successfully. You could even say they have a slight whiff of the AKG's styling too! They're a magnificent set of high end headphones that are, surprisingly enough, worth every penny.



**Sennheiser HD 650 - best value.**



**Stax SR2050 - most interesting package.**

Listening to headphones is such a personal experience that a pre-purchase demonstration is critical. When listening to a loudspeaker, amplifier or turntable, the shape of your listening room, which can drastically change the sound, is usually already taken into account before a piece of hi-fi equipment is bought. But such concerns are not present when buying a set of headphones. Rather, your purchasing priorities should be skewed towards the shape of your head rather than that of your house. A bad fit can impact on your opinion of any headphone, no-matter how good they sound per se. So do make sure



**Grado GS1000i - best all rounder.**



# Bienvenue!

**Tony Bolton celebrates Micromega's return to the UK, finding the new CD-10 CD player to be full of Gallic charm...**

**F**rom the late nineteen eighties, Paris-based Micromega built themselves a reputation for good sounding and innovative products. Indeed they were amongst the first companies to introduce two box transport and DAC combos in 1988. Following quality problems with the supply of the Philips CD mechanisms then used, the company suffered a downturn in fortunes in the late nineties, leaving these shores some ten years ago, and closing in France three years ago...

In March 2007 the company was acquired by Didier Hamdi; motor cycle racing fans may recall him as the 1991 World Champion. Since then he has had many interests including owning the company that lights the Eiffel Tower, selling motorbikes and now, owner of a hi-fi company!

The founder of the company Daniel Schar is now head of R&D and, with Didier Hamdi has re-engineered the previous Micromega range to produce a new eleven unit lineup which includes amplifiers, tuners and a range of three CD players. These start at £799 for the CD-10 under review here, and covers the CD-20 (£1,227) and the CD-30 (£1,599).

Available in either black or the rather sleek silver finish of this example, the styling was both pleasing to the eye and functional. The front panel is made of aluminum and sports chamfered edges and recessed buttons below the blue dot matrix display. The slimline drawer occupies the top left of the fascia. The mains on and off is situated at the back, above the IEC socket, along with phono sockets for the analogue out and a coaxial digital

output. Dimensions are a compact 430x250x70mm and weight 4.6kg.

Internally the machine is well specified, with either Sony KHM 3413 or Sanyo SFH 8450 DVD mechanisms. These are controlled by a Philips SAA78247 circuit and Micromega's own software program. The conversion from digital to analogue is taken care of by a Analog Devices AD1853 chipset. The power supply for all of this is based around an R-Core transformer. This was chosen because they have a narrow bandwidth, compared to the wide bandwidth of toroidal types, and in moderate current situations this helps with noise rejection. The drive mechanism, feedback circuits and all user interface sections are driven from the 'digital' power supply, the analogue sections having separate rectification and filtering. At this point it is worth reading the



instructions because the Micromega has a lot of facilities that are accessed through the front buttons, that are not immediately obvious. These range from the useful, such as fast forwarding through a track, to the ability to adjust the speed the disc tray opens and closes!

### SOUND QUALITY

After unboxing the player I had a quick listen before leaving it with a burn-in disc to amuse itself for a couple of days. Initial impressions were of a full bodied sound, but somewhat tight and lacking in subtlety. After about fifty hours of use I listened again and found that the impression of richness of tone was still there but the tightness had gone to be replaced by a more flowing and open presentation.

First up for listening was the New Cologne Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. This is part of the Cologne Philharmonic, who spend their summers touring small venues in the smaller towns in the UK. Having had the pleasure of

seeing them several times and been impressed with their musicianship I bought some of their discs a couple of years ago. One contains, amongst others, Vivaldi's Concerto for flute and orchestra 'La Tempesta Di Mare'. As the name suggests the music ranges from calm and flowing to turbulent and back again. The CD-10 dived into this performance with gusto. Horns shimmered without bite, violins sang without shrieking and deeper toned stringed instruments had a lustre to the sound that almost reflected the polish on their wooden bodies.

Ignoring the enjoyment factor for a moment and being coldly analytical, I found the soundstage to be of

reasonable depth and width, if not the largest that I have heard digital players produce, but of satisfactory and realistic scale. I felt that the performers had space to breathe and move around themselves and each other. One of my usual gripes with digital sound is the lack of three dimensionality in the sound when compared with vinyl. Now this machine did not attempt a vinylesque soundstage, but what it did do was transmit the information to the listener in such an absorbing manner that I felt that I could look into the recording and be aware of each aspect of the performance that I chose to give my attention to.

A few hours of listening later

"In March 2007 the company was acquired by Didier Hamdi; motor cycle racing fans may recall him as the 1991 World Champion..."



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VIVID audio

and I was playing Billie Holiday. The recordings were from her early years when she was working with the Benny Goodman bands, in particular forming a close musical association with Teddy Wilson (B.G.'s pianist). 'Miss Brown To You' demonstrated the easy collaboration between the singer and musicians. In the late thirties there was no ability to edit recordings, so each disc was 'live', and the interaction of the artists showed

any silver disc spinner at this price displays sonic manners!

Coming right up to date with Shpongle's latest release 'Ineffable Mysteries From Shpongleland', which was released in November this year, and I found myself exploring sounds from Indian street performers blended with some truly strange electronica that was propelled along at a pleasantly gentle pace by pipes and drums. A most mellow blending

"one of the few affordable players I've come across that has the ability to present most musical genres in an entertaining and enjoyable manner..."

in the slightly sassy delivery of the lyrics, and the beautifully phrased piano incidentals with which Wilson complimented her voice. Again the CD10 rose the occasion making dance music something the listener wanted to move to, rather than sit and listen to. I was aware of the age of the recording, the clearly focused mono signal sitting firmly in the centre of the speakers. Here I felt the CD10 could have been a little more generous in its presentation of scale. The image was very cohesive but left a feeling that the performers were a bit bundled together in the middle, rather than being grouped there.

Returning to the world of stereo, and a completely different generation of music with The Yardbirds and the classic track 'For Your Love', and the raw blues was the complete antithesis of the relatively friendly sounds that had been played so far. I was wondering if the well behaved nature of the CD-10 might soften the edges of the music, but I needn't have worried, the rawness and drive that made the band fair competition to the other big R&B outfits of the period (the 'Stones, Animals, etc.) was portrayed in a pretty honest manner. Were I being churlish I could complain that the very last bit of grit was missing from the sound and that the sonic focus was on overall musicality and presentation, rather than the gutsy raw honesty that can make blues a spine-tingling experience. However, I am not going to start complaining when

via the CD-10, it was in its element presenting a musical panorama that I found quite absorbing.

This is one of the few affordable players that I have come across that has the ability to present most musical genres in an entertaining and enjoyable manner. It has more than a flavour of the similarly priced Njoe Tjoeb 4000 which uses a valve powered output stage. I have been

using one for a great number of years and I love it for its smoothness and musicality.

The Micromega CD-10 comes very close to this, which for a totally solid-state design I find impressive. If you are expecting (or wanting) the sharply defined, slightly stark presentation of budget and affordable CD players then look elsewhere. The CD-10 had definition, but didn't feel the need to shape the edges with a razor blade, and tended to have a more tactile sound than most. Its bass is not the deepest that I have heard - you won't be causing structural damage when playing the 1812 overture - but it is satisfying and responsive. The big complaint I had was with the remote, which worked, but was inappropriate to such a well presented machine. It looked as though it was a leftover from an early nineties stack system, and was a let down after the sophisticated appearance of the player...

**CONCLUSION**

I felt that the CD-10 represented a welcome return to the marketplace for this manufacturer. It seems to be well made and finished, and certainly sounds very good. If you are looking to spend up to £1,000 on a CD player, then this is a must for the audition shortlist.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response of the CD-10 measured flat across the audio band, reaching 21.3kHz, (-1dB) our convolved impulse analysis shows. The player will sound well balanced tonally and, because there is no peaking, reasonably free from treble sheen.

Linearity was good, distortion on both channels being low right through the players dynamic range, if not quite as low as class leading designs. An EIAJ Dynamic range value of 109dB is a little on the low side as a result, but no disaster.

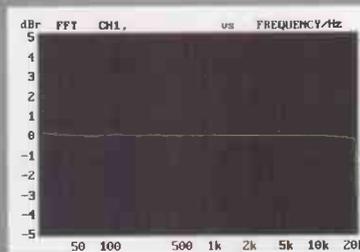
Channel separation was wide and noise low at -109dB. Output measured a normal 2.16V. Jitter on the digital output was a little higher than usual on quality players, around 200pS of signal related content with a 1kHz, -60dB tone, and around 20pS non signal related jitter. In absolute terms these are still reasonably low values however so the CD-10 works well enough.

Micromega's CD-10 turns in a good set of figures all round, but it isn't quite class leading. NK

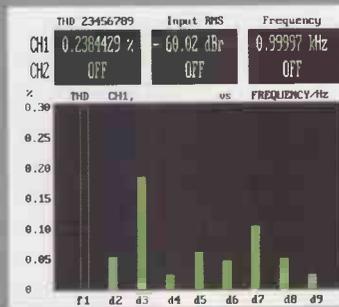
Frequency response (-1dB)	CD	2Hz-21.3kHz
Distortion	0dB	0.0007
	-6dB	0.0006

-60dB	0.24
-80dB	2.8
Separation (1kHz)	112dB
Noise (IEC A)	-109dB
Dynamic range	109dB
Output	2.16V

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



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 - good looks

**AGAINST**  
 - cheap remote control



# Star turn

**A star formula takes a turn for the worse, Noel Keywood finds with the Onkyo TX-NR1007 AV receiver.**

Products are a bit like people. They have a *raison de être*, dreamt up at conception, one that imparts a certain character. And unlike the TX-NR906 I reviewed one year ago (March 09 issue) and was impressed by, the TX-NR1007 and I never clicked. It's not a bad product at all, quite good in fact, in typical Onkyo fashion, but much of all it does was a little lost on me – and it disgraced itself.

Onkyo state clearly that the TX-NR1007 is a 9.2 channel receiver, meaning it has no less than nine amplifiers on board just in case someone out there is dreaming of sharing their lounge with nine loudspeakers, or should that be eleven loudspeakers because the '0.2' bit alludes to the use of two subwoofers! Yes, it's a mad, mad world in AV land where a mindless specification race demands ever more channels, power and sound wangling gadgets be crammed into a receiver. The list for this model is so long it isn't sensible to waste paper listing it all here: a full manual (14MB), set up guide and specification listing are available from Onkyo's European website at [www.eu.onkyo.com/products/TX-NR1007.html](http://www.eu.onkyo.com/products/TX-NR1007.html).

Why would you want nine channels? There is no compelling

reason, quite frankly. I swap between 7.1, 6.0, 5.1 and 4.0 and of them all am happiest with 4.0; more is not merrier, it is just more. But Onkyo tell us in their manual that an owner can enjoy Audyssey Sound Expansion that allows expansion of sound stage width and / or height by the use of extra loudspeakers, if desired. You can read about this in detail at [www.audyssey.com/technology/dsx.html](http://www.audyssey.com/technology/dsx.html) where three 9.1 options and even an 11.1 system are pictured and explained. Dolby now also provide an additional synthesised height channels in the Dolby Pro Logic IIz system and the TX-NR1007 has this system onboard too.

Multiple loudspeaker channels like this are best suited to dedicated AV rooms and not simple, high quality music replay in the home. Modern films on DVD and Blu-ray come with a 5.1 sound track (a few 7.1s exist, for example '3:10 to Yuma'), so the additional channels are synthesised (faked?) in the receiver, not a difficult thing to do using vector summation but rather bland in its result because no information is added. The whole multiple channel thing is a contrivance really.

And then of course there's the small matter of where to put all those extra loudspeakers. In the Onkyo living room, on page 17 of the manual, no fewer than nine loudspeakers can

be seen in front of AV man – and there's even room for a palm tree! Somehow, I think this is a fantasy most people don't suffer, unless perhaps they are loudspeaker manufacturers. It's where the whole AV thing becomes a bit daft in my view.

Four loudspeakers, comprising two surrounds and two backs sit behind me in my home and finding space for them is easy enough. It is the fronts I have a problem with and here I prefer to use a stereo pair, as per normal, for a properly balanced phantom centre image, as you get with normal stereo. I don't use a centre loudspeaker, because it compromises sound quality, shoving singers, drums and much else into one small box placed so low it sounds as if singers are singing on their knees. Centres are OK for cinema dialogue, but not for music. I did re-locate my Back loudspeakers for use as L and R Wide use, as Audyssey suggest, but was unimpressed, but then I run my AV system more as a quality hi-fi that also handles movie surround-sound well, than AV that handles music nicely; the emphasis is different and it is from this viewpoint that I realised the TX-NR1007 is more a movie machine than a hi-fi product.

There are other ways to use the nine onboard amplifiers. For example, the front L&R loudspeakers can be bi-

amped in a 7.1 system Onkyo suggest, or music can be fed to other rooms (zones). For hi-fi purposes though the extra channels offer little, if any benefit.

As always Onkyo offer a comprehensive set of good basic audio facilities, plus a few flourishes. All current Blu-ray audio coding schemes are fitted, including Dolby Digital Plus, Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD Master Audio. So it can handle any Blu-ray movie music track thrown at it, as well as normal (uncoded) PCM digital up to 24bit/192kHz resolution. Connect up a CD player digitally, via optical or electrical cable, and it will play CD. Connect up a DVD player or Blu-ray player via HDMI and it will play 24/96 digital sound track from DVD and Blu-ray and even the few 24/192 Blu-rays now appearing from labels like 2L of Norway.

One of the 'flourishes' I mentioned earlier is the presence onboard of a proper DSD decoder switched in by going to the Direct menu and selecting DAC Direct. This is for those who cherish SACD sound quality and have the necessary Denon or Oppo player able to output DSD code via an HDMI link into the receiver. Unfortunately, I was surprised to find that although basic conversion quality was good measurement showed, meaning Onkyo have used quality parts and not a scrappy solution like other manufacturers (hoping no one will notice), there was a problem. SACD replay was far too loud – and it was in mono. Whoops! I informed Onkyo UK and the factory in Japan was trying to replicate the problem, last I heard. As all earlier Onkyo receivers worked fine via DSD Direct this is a problem confined to the TX-NR1007 and two samples we tested. It may simply be a software fault solvable by a firmware upgrade.

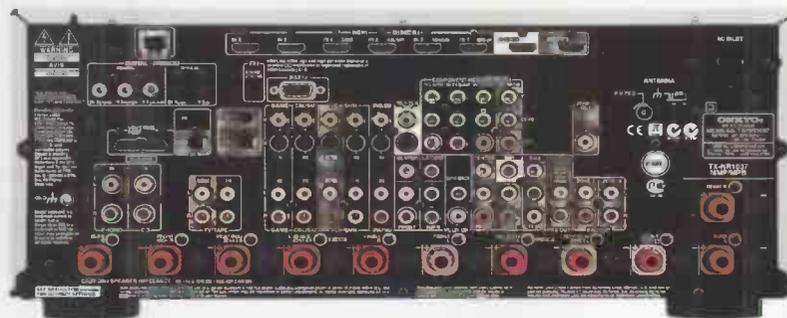
But that raised another problem: my receiver crashed when asked to perform a firmware upgrade via its internet link. It said "No upgrade" which perhaps meant no new firmware was available (the handbook says nothing about this message), but it would not switch out of this display and back to normal operation. I had to switch it off then back on; happily I did not have to re-set the processors, which entails losing all settings.

And talking about switching off and back on brings me to another but not final problem: the receiver switched off whenever I turned a Samsung TV off! I then had to turn the Onkyo back on to continue listening. It responded to other Samsung remote commands too, unfortunate since Samsung products are very common. Again, this is not a problem I

suffered with earlier Onkyo receivers, so why this one I don't understand.

Amongst the endless list of audio facilities, this receiver has a phono stage so a turntable with normal moving magnet cartridge (MM) can be hooked up; I used a Rega P3 with its excellent RB301 arm, fitted with an Ortofon 2M Black and it worked well.

Onkyo always fit a quality VHF/FM tuner to their receivers, something I particularly appreciate; there's an AM Medium Wave section too. Tuning in from the front panel is quick and straightforward and I had most of London's stations in within minutes, working from station frequency listings I have. It is best to do this and not rely on auto-tuning, which will detect unwanted relay transmitters; especially if you use an outdoor high gain aerial as I do. Most VHF stations



have a website with transmission frequencies. Once frequencies have been memorised – and there are forty memories – they can be selected by the remote control using an Up/Down button or from the number pad, using the station memory number. A Radio Data System is fitted so programmes can be sorted by type and Radio Text gives useful information on the station selected. A small red stereo indicator lights when receiving Stereo, but Manual Tune gives Mono to lessen noise with weak stations.

Onkyo do not fit DAB, but they say a DAB+ module is available as an accessory that plugs into a rear universal port. However, since the TX-NR1007 has internet radio this hardly seems important. The receiver logged into my internet router straight away through DHCP without the difficulties I have with many products, and the MAC address is clearly shown so the receiver can be identified on the router's client list. Internet radio brings in the outside world and Capital FM – that's Capital FM in Kenya! – talked about "going to the sandy white beaches or 'up country' to see Gran at Christmas" as I write in the gloom of a wet UK winter; what contrasts – one delight of internet radio listening. Around 10,000 stations are available worldwide, but quality can be poor.

Connecting up is much like getting into a wrestling match with an octopus, especially with all those loudspeaker connections. Black plastic plugs in the loudspeaker terminals can be removed to allow 4mm plugs to be used, but the handbook says nothing about this. As always set up is complicated but Onkyo's menus are amongst the best, even if the handbook's explanations of them are orientally obtuse. Multi-channel inputs are fitted, allowing analogue connection of an old SACD or DVD-A player. There is a multi-channel preamplifier output too, so external power amps can be used.

Audyssey loudspeaker set up and room tuning is provided but this so alters the frequency balance of loudspeakers I do not use it, preferring manual tuning, and Direct

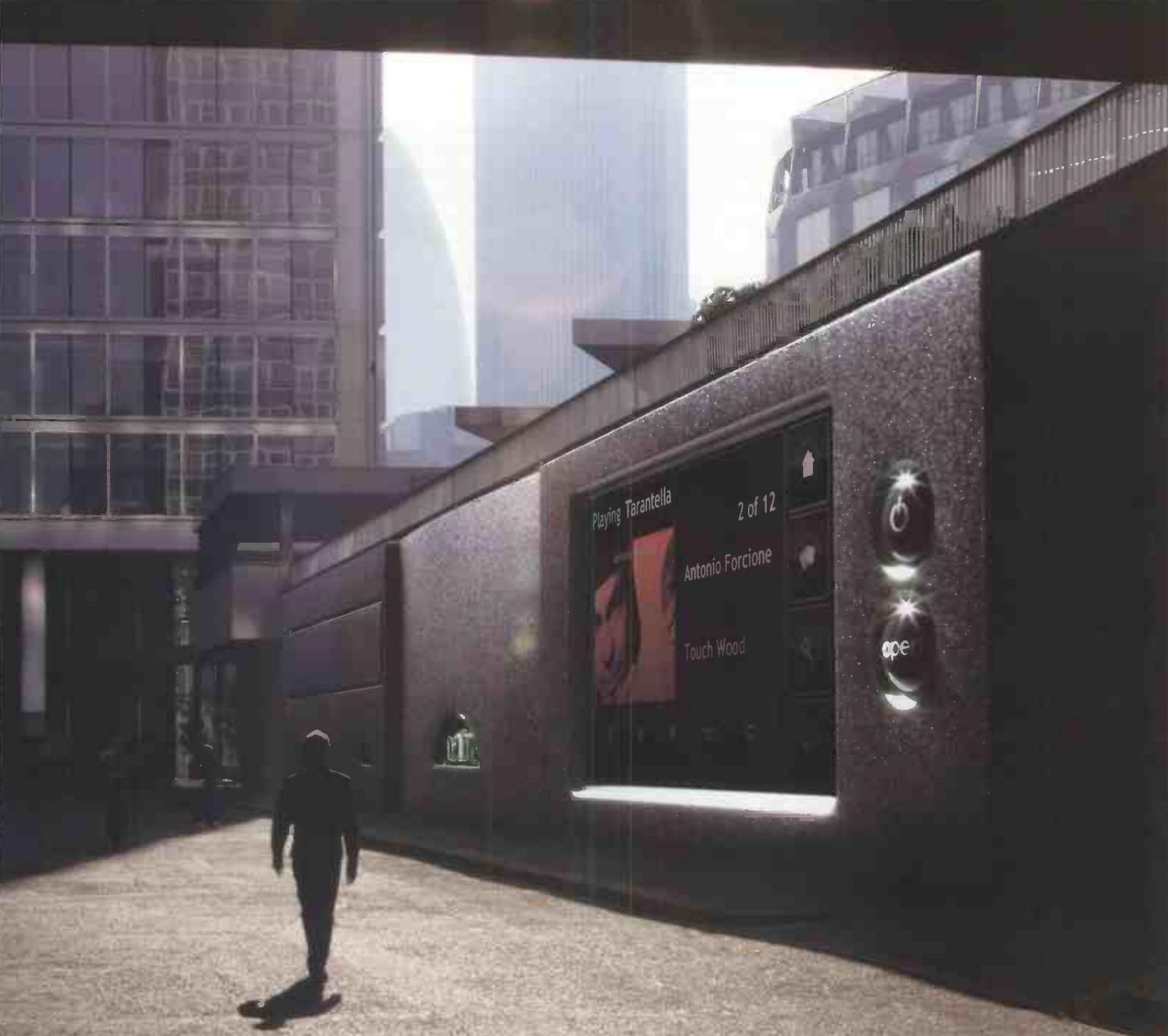
or Pure Audio (display off) mode for best sound quality. A seven band graphic equaliser is provided, as well as tone controls.

For wrangling audio, as I mentioned earlier, the TX-NR1007 has no peer. In addition to the Audyssey system, there are THX, DTS and Dolby sound processing modes, Neural Surround and Onkyo's own digital schemes. Dynamic volume compensation and much else is available and there is quite a lot of overlap between the systems. In spite of what each commercial protagonist says about their particular technology, it is all based on simple and specious theory, and what you get is often quite gross and arbitrary changes in sound quality, applied by the digital processors. This isn't really for audio buffs, which is why I bypass all processing by Direct and Pure Audio modes. But that does make a lot of what the TX-NR1007 offers redundant for audio purposes.

Switching from 'Tuner' to 'DVD' disabled Mode (Direct, Pure Audio etc) selection and I could only reinstate it by switching the receiver off, then back on again, another software glitch. Oh dear!

## VIDEO

Video processing is provided, in addition to the usual upscaling. Called



# Music Store

Introducing Naim's Award-Winning HDX  
The World's First Performance Upgradeable Audiophile Hard Disk Player

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- 24 bit/192kHz internal architecture with support for hi-resolution audio formats
  - Upgradeable with external Naim XPS or 555 PS power supply
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[www.naimhdx.com](http://www.naimhdx.com)



Naim HDX  
November 2008

Picture Adjust, it will zoom, scale, edge enhance and even noise reduce, if switched in. Note that much of this is available in modern TVs, and upscaling is available in most Blu-ray players, so I find no need to do any of this in a receiver.

As usual there are Composite, S-Video and Component video inputs and outputs with conversion between them. All this is old technology now, for connection to old TVs etc. There are six HDMI inputs and two outputs for TVs. But why no front panel HDMI input for a camcorder I do not understand. Only a Composite input is provided here, a low quality connection.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Like earlier Onkyo receivers I have tested, this one came with generous bass and a good sense of body to its sound, putting power behind the kick drum in John Meyer's 'Vultures' for example, from his Blu-ray 'Where

The Light Is'. I played all encodes of the Trondheim Soloists 'Divertimenti' in 24/192 code and the receiver correctly flagged up and worked with Dolby TrueHD, DTS HD Master Audio and PCM versions. It sounded smooth and svelte with CD code and even SACD, out of DAC Direct mode, played well. The TX-NR1007 has quite soft treble; this is not a sharp sounding receiver at all, and is very easy on the ear I found, whatever digital I fed through it from a Samsung BD-PI500 Blu-ray and Oppo DV-980H DVD player.

The VHF tuner reinforced this view because it was a little warm in its balance, but very smooth all the same and with plenty of bottom end power. As a result Radio 2 came in clearly and filled the room with a weighty sound. Radio 4 and London were absolutely hiss free in the silences between speech and the Onkyo conveyed a nice feeling of studio ambience.

I got a similar result from LP, with weighty bass, a full bodied sound and a big, broad sound stage across the room, courtesy of the Ortofon 2M Black in a Rega RB301 arm. In spite of its AV credentials the TX-NR1007 sounded lovely with LP and can do a decent record deck justice.

**CONCLUSION**

Like all Onkyo receivers the TX-NR1007 delivered a fine sound, one that above all is easy on the ear and enjoyable for its fulsome character. This is a receiver free from harshness or brightness and in Pure Audio mode was a joy to listen to.

Unfortunately, the many niggling faults I encountered put it out of recommendation. I think users would be quite perplexed by some of its foibles. The TX-NR906 seems a much more stable and better proposition for audio.



**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The TX-NR1007 produced a massive 170 Watts into 8 Ohms under test and 270 Watts into 4 Ohms. However, with a continuous tone test signal it wasn't long before current limiting relays clunked in to limit output to 40 Watts with the 4 Ohm speaker setting, to prevent overheating. Unlike the many other Onkyos I have tested, this one was particularly protective, output limiting very quickly. So I tested it with long duration sinewave bursts that better represent music and, with either 4 or 6 Ohm loudspeakers selected, it gave the outputs quoted here without the relays kicking in. So the TX-NR1007 is very powerful, for those that feel they need such powers. Onkyos always run hot and this model was no exception.

Distortion levels in the amplifier were reasonably low at around 0.04%. With Direct selected to bypass digital conversion bandwidth reached 110kHz; with processing this was brick wall limited to 23kHz by anti-alias filters. Sensitivity was high at 210mV for full output, so the analogue inputs will suit most sources.

The S/PDIF digital inputs (optical and electrical) gave good results with CD, frequency response flat to 20.1kHz and distortion very low at 0.22% with a -60dB signal. With a 24bit signal distortion dropped to 0.04%, as it did through HDMI also, another impressive result. Both 96kHz and 192kHz sample rate digital signals gave a bandwidth to 46kHz (-1dB) but where 96kHz cut off sharply at 46kHz, 192kHz extended to 100kHz (-4dB) so high resolution digital is handled well.

Unfortunately, the same did not apply to DSD code from SACD discs; bandwidth was just 21.6kHz with Direct selected. Only with 'DAC Direct' did full SACD bandwidth appear, but DAC Direct did not work properly.

The VHF tuner exhibited a smooth high frequency roll off in its frequency response, enough to make it sound a little warm, but smooth. Distortion was low at 0.1% and hiss was acceptably low too at -68dB, with an aerial signal of just 0.67mV or more. VHF sound quality will be very good.

The phono stage was accurately equalised, although it an unusual bass lift below 50Hz that will give low bass some heft. Sensitivity was normal at 4mV and overload ceiling respectable at 62mV. Hiss measured a low -82dB.

The TX-NR1007 measures well, although it does not match up to Onkyo's smaller receivers, notably the TX-NR906 which managed better with SACD in particular. NK

Power	170watts
Frequency response	2Hz-110kHz
Separation	53dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.03%
Sensitivity	210mV
Damping factor	58

<b>CD/DVD/SACD</b>			
Frequency response (-1dB)			
CD/DVD/SACD 2Hz - 20/46/46kHz			
Distortion			
	CD	DVD	SACD
0dB	0.008	0.008	0.005
-60dB	0.22	0.04	0.3
Separation (1kHz)		100dB	

Noise (IEC A)	-112dB
Dynamic range	-112dB

<b>TUNER VHF/FM</b>	
Frequency response	10Hz-5kHz
Stereo separation	43dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.1%
Hiss (CCIR)	-68dB
Signal for minimum hiss	0.67mV
Sensitivity	
mono	5µV
stereo	48µV

<b>PHONO</b>	
Frequency response	50Hz-33kHz
Separation	62dB
Noise	-82dB
Distortion	0.05%
Sensitivity	4mV
Overload	62mV

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE 192K**



**DISTORTION, 10kHz, 1W**



**VERDICT**

Easy, powerful sound, SACD decoding and internet radio but ragged in places.

**ONKYO TX-NR1007 £1300**  
 Onkyo UK  
 +44(0) 1494 681515  
 www.onkyo.co.uk

**FOR**

- good sound quality
- decodes all audio formats
- internet radio

**AGAINST**

- complicated
- unlovely appearance
- tricky to use
- dodgy SACD
- dodgy software upgrade

# Pure and Simple

Neat Acoustics has always given us simple, unreconstructed musicality in its loudspeakers, and the new Elite SX is no exception, thinks David Price.



There are some brands, such as Linn and Naim in electronics for example, whose sonic signature is so distinct that you can hear one of their products completely unannounced. A bit like sitting in a Lotus sports car, the way the thing does what it does is quite unique. I can count several loudspeaker brands that do this too; I never had trouble picking a Farad Azimera Mission, for example; whether it was the lowly 70 or the chunky 753, they seemed to do things in a certain way.

NEAT is another such example of a loudspeaker marque which has an identity so distinct that it might as well be written through the centre of each cabinet like the words 'Blackpool' in a stick of rock. Boss Bob Surgeoner is also the designer, and when he's not trialing crossover components and playing with drive units, there's nothing he likes more than playing electric and acoustic guitar. The result is that NEAT speakers have a characteristically 'live' sound; by which I don't mean shouty and boomy with acoustic feedback ringing around the auditorium. Rather, I mean it in the sense that there's a certain musical tactility designed in. There's also something designed out - razzamatazz. Rather, they're just businesslike boxes fitted with very carefully selected drivers and crossover components. No hocus pocus here...

The Elite seen here is the company's latest mid-price floorstander; descended from the Petite (remember those?);

the Elite was simply a floorstanding version of the above iconic eighties mini-monitor. It's claimed to have extremely low distortion, thanks in no small part to its twin ("staggered") port tuning. There's one 32mm hole on the back of the box that's tuned to around 40Hz, and another 50mm diameter port mounted in the base of the cabinet, which is tuned higher, over a wider operating band. This downfires to a solid and heavy slate plinth 20cm below.

The main drive unit is the latest version of that used in Neat's upmarket Ultimatum range, and sports a 6.5-inch doped paper cone, ferrite magnet assembly and a fixed aluminium phase plug to enable smoother integration with the tweeter. The treble unit sports a fabric dome with internal damping and a non-resonant chamber. Its duties are determined by a simple three-element crossover; first order (bass/midrange) and second order (HF) slopes are used. Low-loss air-core inductors are employed, as well as high-grade polypropylene capacitors. All crossover components are specified within very tight tolerances in order to ensure excellent pair matching, the company says.

## SOUND QUALITY

Being of relatively diminutive dimensions, I didn't find it hard to get the Elite SXs into the right position in my listening room, spaced nearly 4m apart and toed in to me. I did, however, find it tricky to choose an amplifier that really wanted to drive them; tubes and transistors alike didn't seem over keen on

the job, so I enlisted an amplifier that made mincemeat of my Yamaha NS1000Ms recently (in a manner of speaking), the Musical Fidelity AMS35i. Although not the world's most powerful solid-stater, the brio with which it serves up its forty something Watts, and the sheer imperturbable manner displayed, made me suspect a good match. I was right. However, it's fair to point out that not everyone's going to have a £6,000 full Class A powerhouse on hand to drive these £1,895 speakers.

Properly positioned and aspirated by a thumping great amplifier, I found the NEATs to be 'well lit' across the midband, but not intolerably so. They're less bright than NS1000Ms (not saying much, I know) and decently well integrated too, and so Be Bop Deluxe's 'Modern Music' didn't offend when the stylus hit the groove. The NEATs threw out a wide stereo image in my room; not the most cavernous I've heard but good for their smallish size, and didn't suffer overtly from 'sweet spots' when toed in.

I found them decent in the bass; lows were far from prodigious, but they did manage to get the essentials through, and I did like the timing with which the bass arrived at my ears. These are best described as 'snappy' sounding speakers, giving little rhythmically away to my reference Yamahas in this respect. The bass also integrates well with the midband; there's little in the way of obvious crossing over going on, although 4hero's 'Cosmic Tree' did show slightly curtailed female vocals; there was a subtle nasal quality present. Still, it didn't detract from the enjoyment of the song; I found the rhythms quite infectious. "Nice", "pacey" and "shuffling" were all words jotted down at this point, as the Elites really got to the centre of the song and made it an enjoyable musical event.

Treble proved sweet on this excellent analogue recording, but despite a little lift I couldn't help feeling it to be a little curtailed in terms of the air and space. Cymbal crashes were fairly couth and smooth sounding, but I felt the decay was a touch too hasty. These left the song with a slightly airless feel, as if you wanted to go and open the recording studio window. Tonally this followed lower down; brass instruments had a very delicate feel, but they did seem to be a little 'dry' and not dripping with all those harmonics that go to make hearing trombones and trumpets such a lovely experience live. That mighty rasp seemed as if hidden behind a green baize door.

Moving to Sub Ensemble's cover of 'Humans' on 4hero's new 'Extensions' album, and I truly enjoyed things. These are very subtle performers; even though they don't have a crystalline clarity to them, they're still delicate and finessed, capturing the song's gentle rhythms with alacrity. The Hammond organ came over as bright and explicit, with lovely rhythmic playing and a truly gripping counterpoint between bass guitar and snare drum accompanying it. The song just bounced along, the NEATs being exceptionally unobtrusive in a rhythmic sense. Tonally, trumpets could get just a little lively in their upper registers, but I'd still insist that - certainly via the smoothie Musical Fidelity AMS35i - they were never unpleasant. I also locked on to the lovely floating hi hat rhythms; again up top things weren't terribly open or spacious, but the drummer's rhythmic playing was beautifully picked out all the same. It made for a highly pleasurable listen.

By way of homage to NEAT's north east England location, I cued up one of my favourite local sons, Paddy MacAloon. The remarkable 'I Trawl the Megahertz' is a twenty two minute odyssey that's hard to categorise, although it does have classical music form (and instrumentation), and the Neat Elite SXs rendered it beautifully. Once again, you could tell these aren't winning prizes for 'the world's most tonally accurate loudspeaker', but once again you could hear precisely how - and why - Bob Surgeoner has voiced them like this. This track can sometimes drag through lesser loudspeakers, but via the Neats it proved utterly enthralling; spine-tingling even. I was left with the feeling, 'why don't I listen to this more?'

To be critical, left to right imaging precision wasn't outstanding, nor was there a strong sense of depth of the recorded acoustic; things seemed to hover around the plane of the speakers a touch too much. I also felt less able to 'feel' how good - or bad - the

recording was; precisely the opposite of my Yamaha references which seem to tell you all about the recording, warts and all, with the relish of a five year old who's just found his brother fallen over in the mud. Once again, I lamented the slightly unatmospheric treble, but then suddenly I realised I'd become absorbed in the music and it was twenty minutes later. The vocalist's dreamy ethereal quality carried beautifully, and I was under their spell. There aren't many speakers that can do this so well, and this - I'd suggest - is their magic.

**CONCLUSION**

Just what I expected, the NEAT Elite SXs are a country mile away from a neutral, matter of fact, analytical tool. Think of them more as entertainers however, and you're on to something, as they really can capture the emotion of a musical performance in a way that a good number of other, far more expensive designs can't. The question is then, whether you can live without the things they leave for the sake of the things they leave in! Only an audition will answer that question for you; frankly I'd initially thought I couldn't but now, two weeks on, I'm not so sure...

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Unerringly musical and consummately enjoyable, this loudspeaker is an essential audition for rhythm seekers.

**NEAT ELITE SX** £1,895  
 Neat Acoustics Ltd.  
 ☎ +44(0)1833 631021  
 www.neat.co.uk

- FOR**
- unerringly musical sound
  - dynamic articulation
- AGAINST**
- midband cuppiness
  - unatmospheric treble
  - requires careful matching

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our frequency response analysis shows the Elite SX measured relatively well right across the audio band, and was especially even at low frequencies. However, there is a broad uplift of +3dB in output across the upper midrange from 3kHz up to 10kHz which will add obvious brightness to the sound, as well as accentuate detail. The treble is peaky too and lifts by +3dB, suggesting there will likely be a sting in high treble.

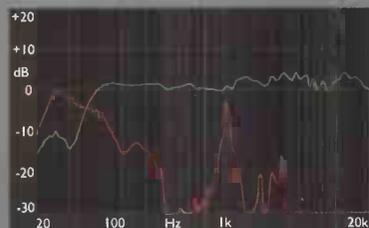
Not so obvious due to windowing of the gated sine wave test signal is a bass peak around 80Hz that an unwindowed third-octave pink noise analysis picked up, suggesting the Elite SX has slightly under damped bass that should sound lively. Output from the bass unit cuts off sharply below 60Hz and although the upper port makes a contribution below this frequency, acoustically peaking at a low 32Hz, its output was -4dB below the bass unit at 80Hz, where most ports are +6dB up or so, so port output isn't strong, although the floor port helps. The SX will likely have obvious and 'fast' upper bass, but little in the way of lower bass.

Sensitivity was on the low side at 85dB sound pressure level from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input power, mainly due to a high measured impedance value of 9.5 Ohms. Our

impedance curve clearly shows the bass unit measures out at 7 Ohms DCR and both motional impedance and rising voice coil reactance add to this value. As a result the SX will need a powerful amplifier to go loud, of around 60 Watts or more.

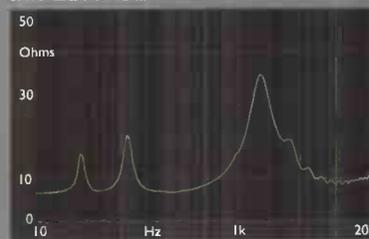
The Neat Elite SX will likely be detailed and lively sounding for its size, but it isn't especially accurate in its tonal balance and it needs power to go loud. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
 Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



**MEDIA  
TOTAAL  
AWARD**

**2009**

**BE STE VAN**

Definition DC8T

**EDITOR'S CHOICE**

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine



Definition DC10T

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# Green Day

Tim Jarman rides the airwaves with Naim's new NAT05 XS tuner...

**Y**ou don't see many of these any more. No, I'm not talking about products from Naim Audio, I'm talking about the humble FM tuner as a breed, now fast becoming 'hybridised' with DAB and/or internet radio capability. So I'm happy to introduce you to the new Naim NAT 05 XS, which is the latest model in a long series of FM stereo tuners the Salisbury company has produced, and one of the least expensive too at £925. An FM-only tuner is a brave move in the post 'Digital Britain' world, but in the context of a minimalist Naim system it makes perfect sense. I personally find the whole concept highly refreshing; this is one for the grown-ups; the iPod generation need not apply!

At the price, it's beautifully made and surprisingly solid. A few simple controls and green calculator-style display, along with the famous green illuminated logo, are all the front panel has to offer, so it couldn't be any simpler to use. A remote control handset is also included, yet this is not so well executed and would be more appropriate for a supermarket DVD player than a quality hi-fi separate. I think Naim should look into industry best practice as far as remote controls are concerned to help make the NAT 05 package feel complete. However, a few brownie points are earned back however for supplying a decent power cable terminated in a high quality (and rewirable) MK plug.

Setting the unit up is slightly fiddly if you are not used to the Naim way of doing things. Each of the four push

buttons only illuminates when it can be used in the mode selected but the basic display does not have room for very much information. Once your favourite stations are stored in the memory, things get easier, although putting the mains switch on the back panel has to earn a black mark in these environmentally aware times.

The art of designing a good tuner is in getting the gains and bandwidths of the many amplifying stages just right so that the resulting output covers the whole transmitted audio range with the minimum of background noise. In a stereo tuner the design of the decoder is another hurdle, there is more than one way of doing it and even with modern integrated circuits a high degree of care is required to get it right.

In the case of the NAT05 XS,

05 XS form a very elaborate 19kHz multiplex filter and line driver stage. Component choices and layout of this section are immaculate, as one would expect.

The power supply department is also characteristically over engineered, with generous use of voltage regulators and decoupling capacitors along with a mains transformer that in size terms wouldn't disgrace a small integrated amplifier. Once filtered, the signal emerges through either two standard RCA sockets or Naim's preferred five pin DIN. The latter is wired in the standard manner so the NAT05 XS will work with other DIN-socketed equipment that accepts line level signals. The real purpose of the DIN socket is of course for connection to other Naim equipment and a

"even with unfamiliar programme material, it sounded instantly intriguing..."

don't run away with the idea that custom Naim electronics start to caress the signal as soon as it enters the aerial socket however. The bulk of the work is done by an OEM module that's about the size of a small matchbox which takes in the tiny RF voltage and in return for a 9 volt supply and some digital control signals yields the left and right audio signals at something close to line level. The Naim magic takes over from this point, the bulk of the signal processing circuits visible in the NAT

basic cable terminated with quality locking connectors is provided with the tuner for this purpose. Whether the signal comes out of the DIN socket or the RCA sockets (or both) is determined by a setting accessed through the tuning display. Naim state that the DIN socket is the preferred choice but circuits for both options are identical so there is no real need to go rushing off to get special cables made if the rest of your system uses RCAs. They also warn against leaving the output mode set to make both

## The passion within

According to the world's press, our CD players are the best around regardless of price. At the core of our players is the unique Servo Evolution (SE) 'engine' that typically provides 20% fewer data errors than ordinary systems. The result of this is exceptional detail across the audio spectrum which provides a far more involving listening experience.

This Cyrus 6 XP includes all the essential features to optimise a high quality audio system. A full 40W + 40W//8 ohm output, six inputs, two output options, main room & zone two – enabling you to extend your system into another room. What is really clever is that the XP platform is upgradeable from the £900 6XP all the way up to the amazing DAC equipped 8 XP d QX model with USB and SPDIF options making this new range of amplifiers the favourite for audiophiles and computer based music lovers alike.

This new Hark II vertical system rack features adjustable shelving and is purpose made for the magnesium Cyrus audio components. This contemporary rack features a sleek extruded aluminium side blade and cleverly hides all of the wiring, whilst also providing a neat power distribution storage compartment. The slim plinth and studded feet provide a secure and stable base for your precious hi-fi components.

Our website has the contact details for our appointed retailers who will be happy to demonstrate why these new audio components set new standards.



SE technology award



SE CD player of the year



CD 8 SE CD player of the year



Cyrus 6 XP, November '09



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
CD PLAYERS  
CYRUS CD 6 SE



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
STEREO AMPLIFIERS  
CYRUS 6 XP



CD PLAYERS  
BEST CD PLAYER £1000 - £1500  
CYRUS CD 8 SE



CD PLAYERS  
BEST CD PLAYER £1500+  
CYRUS CD XT SE/DAC X



STEREO AMPLIFIERS  
BEST STEREO AMPIFIER £1000 - £1500  
CYRUS 6 XP 0



### Did you know?

The range of Cyrus CD players features a unique purpose built CD drive 'engine' called Servo Evolution (SE) that we have designed and developed purely for high-end audio.

We consider this bespoke CD engine to be the best in the world and as you can see the world's audio press seem to agree!



types of socket 'live' at the same time unless you absolutely have to. I can see no reason for this from a technical point of view, and was unable to hear any deterioration either.

Returning briefly to the OEM radio module that does most of the work in the NAT 05 XS, I was interested to see that it appears to include an AM receiver as well, which Naim have elected to leave lying dormant! BBC Radio 5 and Talk Sport listeners may feel that it's a shame that this wasn't enabled in the Naim application, although of course a MW button isn't going to impress the serious audiophile!

**SOUND QUALITY**

Getting down to business, and it won't surprise any Naim diehard to hear that the NAT 05 XS has a very tight and dry sound, which lets the detail that the FM system can offer really shine through. Listening using a quality rooftop mounted omnidirectional FM antenna fed through an amplified distribution system revealed respectable noise performance and a wide, well defined soundstage with stereo broadcasts. The Naim is wasted on highly processed local pop stations, their output is equalised and optimised for car radios and cheap portables so through the revealing NAT 05 XS they can sound a little too clumsy to be really enjoyable. However BBC Radio 2's adult orientated material was conveyed in a more satisfying manner, it gave the impression of a forward midrange, rolled-off bass and bags of fine treble detail.

The longer the tuner was used, the more the stereo image appeared to open up more, and the more the sound became engrossing. Even with unfamiliar programme material, it sounded instantly intriguing - proving the oft-repeated point that a good tuner is a great way to painlessly broaden one's musical horizons. Were one tempted to record a broadcast (and with the focus now on illegal downloaders rather than home tapers you may just get away with it!) then the Naim's careful filtering of the 19kHz stereo subcarrier and its by-products make it an ideal source, especially for Dolby equipped

machines.

I'm not convinced that the so-called 'Naim sound' is ideal for all types of broadcasts however; it's just that little too severe for the full enjoyment of BBC Radio 4 which really benefits from a warmer, richer bass to help one connect with the presenters. In absolute terms, voices did sound a little hard-edged and lacked texture through the NAT 05 XS. As a source of hassle-free background music for entertaining the tonal balance is not ideal either, the well lit midrange is a disadvantage in such circumstances as it gives the impression that the radio is talking over your guests unless you play it very quietly indeed. As a tool for serious radio music listening it is an essential audition, however.

**CONCLUSION**

If you have a Naim XS system (or even a substantial part of it) then the NAT 05 XS is surely an excellent addition. At a price which is sensible when set within the context of your overall investment it makes the system a far more useful asset, as you will get countless hours of extra pleasure without having to tangle with the internet or suffer the sonic disappointment that is DAB. In such a system the FlatCap XS power supply may also be worth a try but in a non-Naim setup the money may be better spent elsewhere, a first class aerial system for example, as the internal power supply arrangements appear more than adequate as they stand.

For non-Naim owners contemplating purchasing a NAT 05

XS, then those who like a detailed and analytical sound, or people running systems which are naturally on the soft or warm side, will like this tuner. It's definitely worth an audition, the well designed signal interface means that there should be no matching problems with a wide range of partnering equipment and although the styling is unmistakably Naim it is discrete enough not to clash with whatever you choose to use it with. All in all then this is a fine and welcome new FM tuner, which these days almost puts it in a gang of one.

**VERDICT** ●●●●£

Well made, intelligently engineered, fine sounding example of the modern tuner breed.

**NAIM NAT 05 XS** £925  
Naim Audio Ltd.  
+44 (0) 1722 426600  
www.naimaudio.com

**FOR**

- crisp, detailed sound
- superb build
- ergonomics

**AGAINST**

- slightly dry tonality
- cheap remote control
- dormant AM section!

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response of the NAT 05 XS, seen in our analysis, extends from 36Hz flat up to 13kHz, fairly truncated limits. Whilst most tuners are flat down to 20Hz or lower the NAT 05 XS rolls down below 80Hz and is -2dB down at 20Hz, a characteristic likely to make for a smidgen of lightness in low bass against a decent alternative, like the (now discontinued) Creek T50. A 19kHz pilot tone filter rolls off upper treble and is responsible for the 13kHz upper limit. It is possible to reach 16kHz and suppress pilot effectively, but differences would be difficult to detect. The NAT 05 XS will sound clean but not necessarily as open as some tuner designs. Evenness of output between these limits will make the tuner very neutral sounding though; it has a very flat response by any standard.

Distortion was reasonably low and whilst the figures are not so exceptional, our analysis shows it was predominantly innocuous second harmonic in nature.

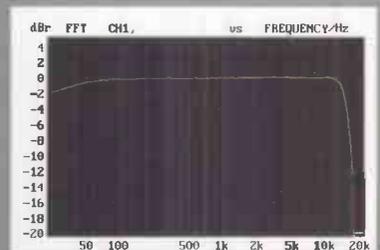
Measuring -67dB hiss was unexpectedly high for a quality tuner. I expect to see -72dB or so these days. The NAT 05 XS was 5dB worse and slight hiss may well be audible under certain circumstances, mostly during Radio 3 silences. Minimum hiss was reached with an aerial signal of 0.85mV or more, a respectable value. Sensitivity was poor at 75uV for -50dB hiss on a stereo signal and 27uV for a mono signal; this isn't a tuner aimed at long distance reception of weak signals. A good aerial is a must, but this applies to

even sensitive tuners. Output was a high 0.8V and separation wide at 42dB.

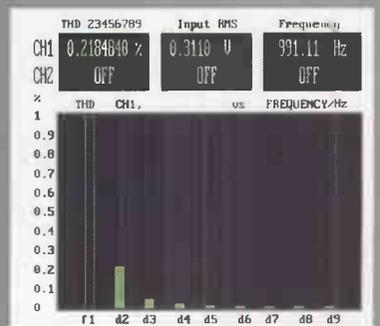
The NAT 05 XS offers a tidy performance, if not one at the cutting edge figures wise. It should provide a smooth sound all the same, likely with a little less low bass heft than some. NK

Frequency response	36Hz-13kHz
Stereo separation	42dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.2%
Hiss (CCIR)	-67dB
Signal for minimum hiss	0.85mV
Sensitivity	
mono	27µV
stereo	75µV
signal strength meter	none

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**





# Pearl Jamming



**To celebrate thirty years at Marantz, Ken Ishiwata has come up with the KI Pearls, an SACD player and integrated amplifier combination limited to just five hundred units. David Price suggests you shell out on them...**

**W**ere it almost any other hi-fi manufacturer, the idea of producing a strictly limited edition product to commemorate a key member of staff's anniversary might seem a rather vainglorious gesture, or to put it another way, just a little naff. But somehow such considerations don't figure when you're talking about Ken Ishiwata. He's a

flamboyant character alright, but not in a prepossessing or arrogant fashion; actually he's very self-effacing in a characteristically retiring Japanese way.

Meet him and he comes over as a modest man, yet of course he doesn't have much to be modest about. He's worked for Marantz for three decades now, and has contributed immensely to its modern identity; so much of the company's

essence has his *imprimatur* stamped through its centre like a stick of Blackpool rock. So, okay then, yes - it's alright for him to commemorate his own anniversary in this way, just as you wouldn't begrudge Steve Jobs for platinum plating a 2012 iPod, and putting his signature on the back...

The launch of the Marantz KI Pearls several months back was a suitably auspicious affair at The Ivy restaurant in London's Soho, with Ken making a captivating speech to a room of assembled journalists in which he traced his career trajectory, beginning by pointing out that he was born in 1947, the year before CBS in the USA officially introduced the mono LP. "But they had started to promote the format in 1947, the year I was born! What a coincidence!", he

added with glee.

"It triggered many enthusiasts to make good music playback systems at that time, like Marantz and McIntosh", Ken told us all. "Stereo LP was introduced exactly ten years after mono LP. That's the period founder of our company Saul B. Marantz introduced the legendary Model 7C Stereo preamp, Model 8B Stereo Power Amp and Model 9 Mono Power Amp. In my opinion, music is the highest form of art we humans have created. The way music touches you is so strong; there's no other art which give such emotional movement like music."

Ken recounted to the assembled Ivy crowd how he built his first mono amplifier when he was ten years old. "I used to play the violin and I wanted to hear old masters like David Oistrakh and Jascha Heifetz, but hi-fi was too expensive for me and for my family, so I built the amplifier myself." He remembered how when he was in high school, he had a friend whose father was an audiophile, who one day invited him to listen to his system. He'd heard it before but this time it was special. "That day, when he played the same LP I knew before, it sounded completely different! It was a Julie London album, and that day she was standing there in front of me! I'd never experienced something like this with hi-fi", he added.

What had changed, the story goes, was the Marantz Model 7C preamplifier. With its prohibitive price, Ken couldn't afford one but his friend's father kindly lent it to him. "I brought the product home and opened the unit and started to copy the circuit diagram", Ken confessed. "It took quite sometime to get all the parts but finally I'd managed to get them all and started to make a copy. I was so anxious to listen to the preamp when I finished it, but the sound was not the same... Then I started to exchange parts, like tubes, resistors, capacitors and so on, and found that when I replaced one part it all sounded completely different! Then I knew making good sounding hi-fi is not a simple thing at all, but I learned so much from this experience."

Ken's first industry job was for Pioneer. "I was sent to Europe, and was shocked to find so many wonderful products were there. Especially I was impressed with Braun. Yes, today they make shavers, but at that time they were making very high quality hi-fi with wonderful design; they were competing with B&O. What surprised me most was their tuners, which reproduced

wonderful sound from AM! This was the period I also experienced incredible British hi-fi. Does anyone remember the Ferrograph S2 speaker system? It made a wonderful stereo image! Of course there were Garrard 301 turntables with SME tonearms I loved so much".

Sadly my time with Pioneer was ended after some years in Europe, but I didn't go back to Japan", he continued. "In 1978 I joined Marantz Japan, and started to be involved in their new products, including the Marantz European speaker line. The first product I did was LD-50. This was the also the period Marantz introduced the ESOTEC line, which was a true serious attempt of Japanese Marantz in the high end area. It included the SM1000 400W per channel stereo power amp, the TT-1000 glass turntable and SC1000 preamp", he said.

"Right after this, Marantz's parent company Superscope US was in financial trouble and finally sold Marantz to Philips in the Netherlands. It was a wonderful opportunity for Marantz since it coincided with the time of CD's introduction. I was very lucky to be able to learn Digital Audio from Philips engineers. As I was able to speak English I was very often visiting Philips engineering with other Japanese engineers. Up until that time I was only involved in analogue audio, and didn't know anything about digital. But because of this experience combined with analogue knowledge I already had I could work on CD players. About this time founder of Marantz, Saul B Marantz, contacted me and said,

"Ken I have done as much as I could with Mono and Stereo LP, it's your turn to do something with Compact Disc" ", Ken recounted with a smile.

Well, Ishiwata of course indeed *did* do something with CD, putting the lessons learned when trying to copy that original Marantz preamp - namely that component choice is critical, way beyond them just being the right electrical specification - into the practice in the new digital age. What followed were a range of Marantz versions of Philips CD players, lightly but very carefully breathed on to give a more palatable sound. Given that Philips was doing some of the very best players at the time, the electronics engineering and mechanisms were second to none, this was a great base for Marantz silver disc spinners.

The Ken Ishiwata Signature range of Marantz machines put him, and Marantz, on the new hi-fi map. But it was all a result of happenstance; a combination of different factors that just came together at the right time.

He takes up the story. "You may remember Philips technology was based on 4 times oversampling digital filters, but using a 14bit DAC. The Japanese weren't using oversampling technology but they did manage to communicate the fact they were using 16bit DACs, and 16 is better than 14! The other sophisticated technology, like digital filtering, was too complicated for normal consumers to understand, so the Japanese won against Philips in the public imagination. Of course Marantz was using 14bit DACs, and couldn't sell any more machines in this environment. I was having lunch with the UK management, who were talking about being overstocked with two thousand 14bit machines they couldn't sell. The MD said we should 'dump' them for £100, but I said *no!*"

Instead, Ken modified each machine, and asked £50 extra for each one. Spending around £8 per machine, he remembers, made a far more musical player which received "raving reviews", as KI quaintly put it, and the two thousand units were duly gone in two weeks! "After that, I've done so many UK Special Edition CD players", he added sheepishly.

This is why we are where we are now, with the Marantz KI Pearl SACD player and integrated amplifier. Had Ken never come to Europe with Pioneer in the nineteen seventies, or had Saul Marantz never nominated him to work magic in digital, and had Superscope never sold Marantz to Philips, then none of this would have happened. And moreover, had 16bit not ousted 14bit in the public mind



circa 1985, Ken Ishiwata *might* still have been a backroom boy!

The Pearls are his monument to himself made real. They're unique, and limited, and designed very carefully to work together. "I simply wanted people using the KI Pearl to have the same experience as I did all those years ago, listening Julie London on my friend's father's Model 7C preamp", added Ken. And each Pearl purchaser gets a special 30th anniversary book, plus a special SACD recording, made by the man himself, of old Jazz standard numbers (for information on this, see [www.marantz.com/kipearl](http://www.marantz.com/kipearl)).

**SHELLING OUT**

Most obvious, from the outside, about the Pearls is the unique 'silk black' finishing. Many people reminisce fondly about the 'glory days' of Japanese high end, when every product came immaculately finished with battleship build. Well, they're not over, as these separates show. Actually, almost everything Marantz makes north of £1,000 has such a lovely finish (and the cheaper ones are still excellent), but the Pearl finish is even better still. It's not just the chunky brushed alloy front panels either, as the entire cases are *immaculately* presented and the tops hewn from 5mm aluminium. The controls move with a silky action, with the 'ambient lighting' - if you can call it that - producing a faint blue glow either side of the front panel centres, is lovely too. The rear panels are just as well presented; if ever there was an object lesson on how 'to do' a £2,500 separate, it is a KI Pearl.

Looking at the sizeable (440x419x127mm, 14.5kg) SA KI Pearl SACD player in detail, it sports a nicely aligned disc loader with a damped Xyron disc tray; it's not the world's slickest but is still far smoother than anything else I've tried at the price. The feet are large aluminium affairs, and confer a sense of solidity, as does the heavy copper plated chassis inside. "High quality audio components" are fitted inside, according to Marantz, and there's a chunky encased toroidal transformer. The mech is an SACDM-10, driving a Cirrus Logic CS 4398 DAC chip, with a variable position digital filter (switched by a front panel button). Marantz HDAM-SA and SA2 op-amp modules are used. One great feature is the optical digital input, along with a front-panel-switchable DAC mode. The Pearl SACD will play stereo SACD and CD, plus MP3 and WMA discs.

Whereas the silver disc spinner

is a no-frills (switchable DAC aside) product, the PM-KI Pearl integrated amplifier is more of a jack of all trades. It's most certainly not a stripped-out minimalist design, sporting as it does tone controls, a MM/MC phono stage and a good range of line inputs. Although slightly bigger (440x444x127mm, 20kg), it's an excellent visual match for the SA-KI, and shares construction

I'd say it sounded 'different' rather than better or worse; impressive considering the price differential.

Where the reference Sugden is a bright and spry device, the Marantz is altogether softer around the edges. It sounds obviously warmer, smoother across the midband and more silky in the treble. There was a touch more low bass, too. But don't conflate this warmth with any lack of passion or

"a wonderful combination to behold, my only criticism is that they'll not be around as long as their creator..."

details, including the thick alloy top cover and feet, copper chassis with heavy bottom plate and audiophile components. A symmetric parallel PCB layout featuring high grade audio components including Shottky diodes is used, along with HDAM-SA3 and HDAM-SA2 Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules and a large EI power transformer. There's a low noise backlit LC display (switchable), tone controls plus source direct switching to take the tone controls out of circuit (recommended). Marantz claim 90W RMS per channel into 8 Ohms, and 140W into 4 [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. Swish WBT speaker binding posts complete the picture around the back.

**SOUND QUALITY**

So, we've established the pedigree, the *raison d'être* and the build quality - what then of the sonics? Whilst it's missing the point to treat each in isolation; they were after all designed as a system; I first thought I'd have a quick listen to each separately. Kicking off with the PM-KI Pearl integrated, I put it against my reference Sugden IA4 (costing nearly £1,000 more), and was intrigued to say the least. Despite the Marantz's many bells and whistles, superior build and finish and lower price, it really didn't give much away. Indeed,

musicality, as the Pearl proved an engrossing performer. Indeed, it was fascinating how something that's not full of zing still has got such swing; the Marantz lilted along in a most believable and lyrical way. 4hero's 'Escape That' was engrossing via my reference Yamaha speakers, the amplifier displaying very little in the way of transistor 'hash' that greys and sullies the sound. It's a Class AB amp alright, but it doesn't sound conspicuously so. A tad out of focus compared to the Class A Sugden it may have been, but this didn't actually make it any less nice to listen to; quite the reverse in fact.

As for the SA-KI Pearl CD player all on its own, I again found it to be a most endearing performer. It's ever so slightly cleaner and more transparent than the PM-KI in absolute terms; where the amplifier just takes the gentlest edge off the recording, the silver disc spinner is more incisive; but still I wouldn't exactly accuse the SA of being biting. It's a smooth, mellow machine but with an awful lot of grip under its gentle skin. Empire of the Sun's 'Walking on a Dream', a knowingly retro piece of electropop (think Icehouse's 'Hey Little Girl' done twenty years after the fact) was pure pleasure. This player isn't full of bombast, desperate to pound out the

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
A fitting tribute to Ken Ishiwata, this is a beautifully presented, immaculately engineered system that delivers the sonic goods like few others at or near the price.

**MARANTZ SA-KI PEARL** £2,500  
**MARANTZ PM-KI PEARL** £2,500  
Marantz UK  
+44 (0)1753 680868  
[www.marantz.com](http://www.marantz.com)

**FOR**  
- rhythmic & dynamic fluency  
- lyrical musicality  
- smooth tonality  
- build, finish, features

**AGAINST**  
- limited numbers



beat in an overblown way; instead the song floated along in a delicate but emotionally engaging way. Bass was tight, taut and insistent (although not quite as powerful as, say, the £4,000 Accoustic Arts CD Player 1 mk2, for example), while the midband was open and expansive. Those affected Bowie-esque vocals had just the right amount of edge, and the SA-KI conveyed the phrasing beautifully. Treble was silky and in time. This player proved interesting, inasmuch as it lacks the amazing power and forensic detail retrieval of high end Japanese kit, but possesses a lyricism and subtlety that the aforementioned Nipponese products often lack. It's Japanese high end but with a European twist, one might say, and considering their DNA you can see how this came to be.

As a system, rather predictably, the KI Pearls made sweet music. There are few - if any - £2,500 CD and amp separates on the market that work as well together. Of course, it's understandable that some might be cynical about 'the Ken Ishiwata story' (after all it's a fairytale that's dripping with human interest, which of course makes for great PR), but listening to these two together show what's possible when a serious audio engineer gets to do something exclusively on his own terms. I slotted in Nick Drake's 'Treasury' SACD and cued up 'Hazy Jane II', then sat back basking in a creamy wash of sound from my NS1000Ms. Drake's voice was beautifully rendered, and smooth as it was, you could never call it bland. Beneath its silky exterior was a passionate and sensitive soul, and the Marantz combo caught this. It was soothing alight, but not in the sense that it just mollifies everything it's asked to play; there's no question of it cutting off the edge from a performance. Rather, it gets deep under the skin of the music and unwraps it in front of your very ears. The result is easy listening, in the best possible sense.

Dropping in a more challenging disc, in the shape of Goldie's 'Timeless', and 'You and Me' showed how fleet of the foot the Marantz combo can be. There's nothing better than the hectic drum machine loops and powerful break beats of drum'n'bass to trip a system up, but the Pearl combo wasn't having it. Despite the amplifier's apparently slightly soft bass and balming midband, it simply refused to let go of the track's sinuous rhythms, showing a great deal more control than some apparently far more aggressive performers. At the same time, those backing analogue synth pads floated

majestically in the background, and the track's edgy female vocals were carried with surprising ease.

I also found the system a superb vinyl playing tool; my well worn pressing of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (Karajan, DG) was a joy via my freshly Vantage Audio-rebuilt Marantz TT-1000 turntable. The amplifier set up a very wide, open and three dimensional soundstage, and although it wasn't the very last word in back-of-the-concert-hall detail, it was nevertheless extremely informative and organic sounding. Some solid-state amplifiers with merely average detail retrieval can 'frost' things, adding an edge that makes everything sound apparently more vibrant, but the Marantz avoided this. Strings had a beautiful texture, not one that I'd normally associate with a Class AB transistor amplifier, while there was a great sense of air to the recorded acoustic. The PM-KI Pearl is not one to throw everything bar the kitchen sink at you, in a bid to try to hold your attention.

**CONCLUSION**

Ken Ishiwata's thirty year long tenure at Marantz has been a fruitful one, and the KI Pearl system shows why. These are sophisticated hi-fi separates, carefully designed, beautifully built and very cleverly voiced to deliver the musical - as opposed to hi-fi - goods, regardless of why type of music you care to feed in. They're excellent on their own, but I'd suggest that the whole of the system is greater than the sum of the separates; together the Pearls really fly. A wonderful combination to behold, and excellent value too, my only criticism is that they'll not be around as long as their creator. Those five hundred units are sure to go soon.

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**

- Marantz TT1000 Esotec/Origin Live Enterprise C/Lyra Titan i turntable
- A.N.T. Audio Kora 3T Ltd. phono stage
- Sugden IA4 amplifier
- Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers
- Yamaha Soavo 1.1 Piano loudspeakers

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response with CD was flat, reaching 21.5kHz (-1dB) with little variation from flatness. This will give quite a shiny rendition from CD, one that is forthright and likely detailed.

With SACD frequency response extended to 30kHz before rolling off slowly to 100kHz where it was -15dB down our analysis shows. With Filter 2 selected the rolldown was quicker above 30kHz - not easily audible.

Distortion levels were very low with CD, with just 0.17% being measured at -60dB - a class leading figure. With SACD this dropped to 0.07%, again a very good result. The player was able to resolve a -100dB tone with SACD, with just 5% distortion, an exceptional performance typical of DSD code and one reason why SACD sounds so good.

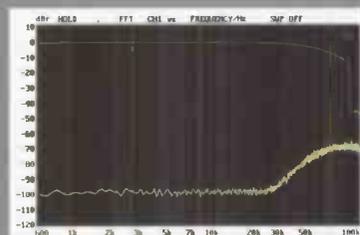
Dynamic range with CD was very high at 112dB and output a little high at 2.5V. There was some small amount of signal related jitter output, a -80dB, 1kHz tone producing 70pS jitter, where 30pS or less is possible.

The KI Pearl CD/SACD player offers fine results, as expected. It is a sophisticated design. NK

**MARANTZ KI PEARL CD/SACD**

Frequency response (-1dB)	CD	2Hz-21.5kHz
	SACD	2Hz-30kHz
Distortion	CD	SACD
0dB	0.003	0.002
-6dB	0.002	0.001
-60dB	0.17	0.07
-80dB	4.3	0.7
-100dB	-	5
Separation (1kHz)		115dB
Noise (CD, IEC A)		-97dB
Dynamic range (EIAJ, CD)		112dB
Output		2.5V

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE SACD**



**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

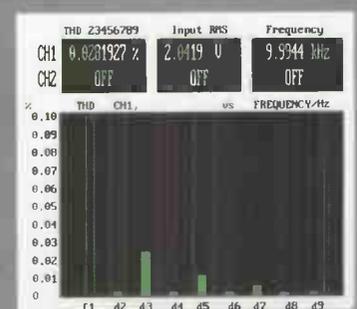
The Pearl amplifier produced a healthy 112 Watts into 8 Ohms under test, increasing to 182 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it has plenty of power for everyday use and will drive any loudspeaker to high volume even in large rooms. Although distortion levels were very low, measuring 0.028% at 10kHz, 1W for example, it did comprise classic crossover, so the Pearl does not try and eradicate this phenomenon as some modern designs do. Having a very high damping factor of 91 suggests a lot of feedback is used and it will likely have tightly controlled 'dry' bass.

The MM and MC phono stages are accurately equalised, frequency response stretching from 13Hz to 100kHz (-1dB) and the MC stage has x10 more gain than MM, which is much as expected. There is no warp filtering so bass will be extended. Noise was low and the input load for MC 100 Ohms so this amplifier will work well with modern cartridges.

The KI Pearl amplifier measures well, and seems to be a classic high feedback design. NK

CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	6Hz-136kHz
Separation	88dB
Noise	-94dB
Distortion	0.03%
Sensitivity	250mV
Disc (MM, MC)	
Frequency response	13Hz-100kHz
Separation	68,61dB
Noise	-85,-70dB
Distortion	0.004%
Sensitivity	3, 0.27mV
Overload	170, 17mV

**AMPLIFIER DISTORTION**



**MARANTZ KI PEARL AMPLIFIER**  
Power 112 Watts

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# MUSICAL FIDELITY

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## M6i Integrated Amplifier

200wpc integrated amplifier. Balanced inputs. USB. Home theatre bypass.

## M6CD/DAC

24bit/192k true upsampling CD player. 3 digital inputs.



# mail



## LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

Visit our website at [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk) or send your emails to [letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk](mailto:letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk). Letter of the month wins a pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers and one years FREE subscription to Hi-Fi World.

A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers is on their way to **ADAM STANHOPE**, Letter of the Month winner in our January 2010 issue.

## Letter of the Month

### BALANCED RETORTING

Please could you advise on my situation? I have installed the last spare stylus for my Shure V15VxMR cartridge, which I bought and kept on the news that the V15VxMR was about to go out of production. So in the near future I will need a complete replacement cartridge. What would your recommendation be?

I have considered another moving magnet like a Goldring 2500 or an Ortofon 2M Black. Alternatively, I could move to a moving coil which I have avoided so far due to the cost. Maybe this is a time to consider a moving coil and if so the budget I have in mind is £700 to £800 maybe £1,000.

I have recently acquired a Clearaudio Balance+ with a battery power supply which to me represents the best way forward for a disc stage, as it offers balanced operation from a very quiet low interference battery power supply. I am still sorting out balanced cabling for the Clearaudio and using phono to XLR adaptors, but even this arrangement demonstrates the benefits of balanced operation. With this quality disc stage a moving coil cartridge would be worth while.

The rest of the system is a Michell Orbe and SME V, Cambridge Audio 840E preamplifier, two bridged Myryad MA 240s and Centurion kit speakers from Wilmslow Audio. The whole system is connected using balanced XLR cabling and operates from a balanced isolation transformer. As you can tell I am a believer in balanced operation.

**Peter Graves**

Hi Peter. Pickup cartridges are ideal candidates for balanced operation and this type of connection only makes sense. It's a pity that as yet there is little demand, primarily



Clearaudio Balance + phono stage, MM and MC, and with balanced inputs and outputs. Price around £1550.

because few phono stages offer a balanced input and few arm manufacturers offer balanced wiring. My first encounter with this was the Aqvox 2Ci phono stage reviewed in our March 06 issue. Now Clearaudio have the Balance+. Obviously, German engineering has recognised an opportunity that the rest of the world has yet to appreciate.

I used adaptors for a short time but occasionally suffered intermittent contact and got better results with a dedicated lead from my SM312. SME offer balanced connecting leads.

With an SME V arm and balanced connection your set up is ready for a decent moving coil cartridge and as I love using the Ortofon Cadenza Blue (£1,000) at home in an SME312S this is what I would recommend. **NK**

There's no doubt in my mind that, given the quality of the rest of your system, it's now time to 'go' moving coil. Great as the Shure was, by spending around £600 on a Lyra Dorian, for example, you'll get vastly improved detail, dynamics and a sense of the music being far more

natural and less mediated. With its rising upper treble, this Lyra isn't everyone's cup of green tea, but the highly inert and well damped SME certainly 'contains' the situation better than most tonearms, letting the Lyra's brilliance flood out. If you're seeking something a little more 'organic' sounding and less incisive, then go for the Ortofon as per Noel's recommendation. **DP**

### PIMPING MY P5

Hi. I am writing to thank you for the advice you gave me in your October 2009 issue. I wrote asking about the merits of cheaper MC cartridges in my all Rega set up (P5, Mira3 and R3 speakers, plus Apollo CD player). Having read, learnt and inwardly digested your advice, I decided to go down the "high-end Moving Magnet" route. But also what came over loud and clear in the advice was the importance of a good phono stage, although I was unclear about what the benefits were likely to be. Therefore I could not justify blowing £600 on the phono stage recommended to me, but I wanted to make sure I went one better than the phono stage included in the Mira 3

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**Audio Analogue Verdi Cento rev2.0 integrated.** Ex-demo, black, as new condition. (£1599) £895

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**Martin Logan Vantage Loudspeakers.** 2yrs old in MINT condition with original box and packing. Dark cherry finish. Great reviews. (£5300) amazing value for money at £2495 with a 5-year warranty.

**Ref 3a Dulcet Loudspeakers.** As new (unmarked) in high gloss cherry. There are some fantastic reviews on these speakers and they cost new a very reasonable £1900.00 only a few months old and be quick at £995!

**ProAc Response 3.5 speakers in rosewood.** One owner from new, with original boxes/packing. Excellent condition and a bargain at only £1295

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**Linn Espék Loudspeakers with Kustone Bases.** Excellent condition in cherry. One owner, 5yr warranty for the new owner. (£2895) a bargain at £895

**Linn Katan Loudspeakers.** Finished in Ash black, excellent condition, one owner from new. (£800) £395

**ATC C6 1kw active subwoofer.** Finished in upgrade rosewood. One owner from new in excellent condition. cost new £5957 our price £2695

**Audio Physic Sitara Loudspeakers.** In Rosenut. Unmarked with original packing, boxes and literature. Recently 'Highly Commended' by Hi-Fi News, these loudspeakers feature the new Hyper Holographic Drivers. (£2000) £1395

**ATC SCM19** in Cherry, 1 owner, as new. (£1524) £995

**ATC SCM40 Loudspeakers.** 1 owner, 18mths old, in cherry. Boxed, manuals and balance of 6yr warranty. Slight mark bottom edge & rear edge (£2044) £1395

**Audio Physic Scorpio** boxed in Cherry, one owner from new, excellent condition. (£3800) £2495

**Klipsch P-39F Flagship Palladium Speakers.** Simply breathtaking with recent stunning review by Stereophile magazine. Ex-demo with a few minor marks. Finished in the Merlot veneer. (£14798) £POA

**Audio Physic Scorpio II** - Latest model, finished in cherry, ex-dem, unmarked condition. (£3773) £POA

**ATC SCM 50 ASL active speakers** in Yew, one owner, unmarked. Current spec (£8500) £5695

### ANALOGUE

**Eastern Electric Minimax Phono Stage.** This probably holds a record (no pun intended) for the most outstanding reviews of any product currently available. Boxed in unmarked condition. One owner from new, only months old. Simply sensational (£1495) £879

**Hadcock GH 242 Export Cryo.** Boxed in excellent condition, this has had one owner from new. New price is £945, has to be great value at £495

**Quad QC 24P Phono stage.** This is a mint one owner example and is as new. Great reviews. (£1000) £695

**Van Den Hul Colibri XGP** - regarded by many as the finest MC cartridge in the world. Full gold coils model. NEW, unused, 5 yr warranty. New £4500, now £2495

**Whest PS20 complete with MSU20.** One owner from new, stunning 2-box phono stage in black, original box and packing. Incredible reviews. (£1299) £595

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**PS Audio Power Plant Premier.** One owner, boxed, manuals, unmarked condition. A bargain at only £995

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**Transparent Reference Digital XLR** (110ohm AES EBU) - Red Sleeve - 2m cost new £1092, huge saving at £395

**Transparent Reference Digital XLR** (110ohm AES EBU) - Red Sleeve - 1m, cost new £856, bargain price £349

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**KEF iQ50, a good compact floorstander says Noel.**

amp. This is actually quite a good one, after all.

To cut a long story short, I preferred the Goldring 1042 over the Ortofon 2M Black. I found it impossible to keep still listening to the 1042. I nearly found myself moonwalking whilst playing Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' through the Mira 3 phono stage (that is saying something considering my levels of fitness are about nil!). Bass was gutsier, treble smoother and instruments just had more body and realism.

Adding the Creek OBH 15 was a revelation. The Clearaudio Smart Phono that I originally thought about was good, but it was quite forward, which I thought would get tiring. The Creek seemed to bend itself to the mood of whatever I played on it. Paul Simon's delicate arrangements on his 'Still Crazy After All These Years' were magical, yet an old sixties Reggae collection I have had muscle, bass and bounce in spades.

So these are my two purchases in order to 'pimp my PS'. They go some way to bringing about the much needed dose of listener involvement I was writing to you about. Also, I have allowed myself a little upgrade potential. Should I decide in the future to buy an MC cartridge, I can use the MC input on the Creek as a stop-gap until something better comes along!

Two questions. Firstly, out of interest, is this transformation in sound due to the cartridge and phono stage being transparent enough to allow the listener to hear more of the capabilities of the PS, or is it instead due to characteristics inherent in the 1042 and Creek?

Secondly, Noel recommended I think about upgrading my speakers. Given the price and quality of the rest of my system I would not want to

spend more than about £800 on this. My music room has a slanted ceiling limiting the height to not much taller than the R3's and I have a preference for floorstanders. I like all kinds of music, except modern R&B. My collection includes classical music, Beatles, Kula Shaker and a healthy dollop of nineteen sixties and seventies folk rock amongst others. So which should be included on my shortlist? I am all spent out at the moment, but it would be nice to have a goal for future upgrades.

Finally, I wish, through your pages, to thank the assistant in Audio T, Tunbridge Wells. Not only did he provide above and beyond service when choosing a cartridge, but also I asked him about the possibility of changing my speaker cable from the Puresonic stuff I have had for years. Particularly when listening to modern CD masters, there are certain bass notes which are over-powerful. They sound like the horn of an old fashioned steamer, and obviously have the effect of the music losing pace and grip. So, rather than try to extract another £50 or so from a gullible customer who believes spending money will solve everything, the assistant advised me on speaker placement and told me to save my money. I have followed his advice, and the problem is not as apparent now. We all find ourselves ordering goods from the Internet from time to time, but there really is no substitute for a knowledgeable and helpful dealer.

Thanks once again for the advice you provide via your magazine.

**Mark Pearce**

Thanks for your views on the Goldring and Ortofon cartridges Mark, which I think readers will find useful. The Goldring is more boisterous than the Ortofon, the latter being more a precision listening device and perhaps a bit cool for

a bit tiring, especially with modern cartridges that commonly have plentiful treble in any case.

KEF's iQ50 is a compact floorstander that may well suit. We also like the budget Q Acoustics 1050i, or you may want to raid the piggy bank for the new Monitor Audio RX8s. As always, do listen first because they are all very different in presentation, in spite of being well designed at a fundamental level. **NK**

### OPPO SERVER

Until about six months ago I was quite happy with my Denon DCD-1650AR feeding a Lite Audio DAC-60 tube DAC. The sound was quite pleasant without too many of the digital nasties often heard with CD.

Then one day in early May of this year, Oppo emailed to say they had a batch of their new BDP-83 Blu-ray players available for immediate shipping. I have been impressed with what Oppo players offer for the asking price in the past and I wanted to see how well Blu-ray performed on my 4.1 surround system (I prefer the sound without a centre channel). So following the approval of my wife, I ordered one.

A few days later it arrived. I hooked it up and quickly started enjoying how it was performing both visually and sonically. Then I got deep into the manual, which informed me this machine can actually be used as the central component in a music server system. The idea of taking all my CDs off the wall and sticking them in boxes in the garage was rather appealing. So I experimented.

After removing the BDP-83 from my surround gear, I connected it to my 2 channel system and went to work on assembling my own music server set-up. I bought a 650GB hard drive (the 1TB model I already had proved to be far



**Oppo BDP-83 Blu-ray player. It can be used as a server and plays all silver discs, including DVD-A and SACD.**

some tastes. It's a great cartridge for the price, and the Rega arm simply gets the best from it. These two give great results together. Creek always make a classy sound and the Creek phono stage will let through what the Goldring's signal, without addition. Too many phono stages have lifted treble, easily achieved by tweaking the 75uS equalisation curve, to emphasise detail and this can be

too slow with this task) and loaded it up with my collection of over 800 CDs all ripped at 320 kbps (the maximum resolution the Oppo can currently cope with). I then bought a dodgy 'name brand' 20" monitor to display track and file information (the interface is quite handsome and very logical) courtesy of Oppo's HDMI output, hooked it up to my DAC with my home made silver coaxial interconnect, and since then all

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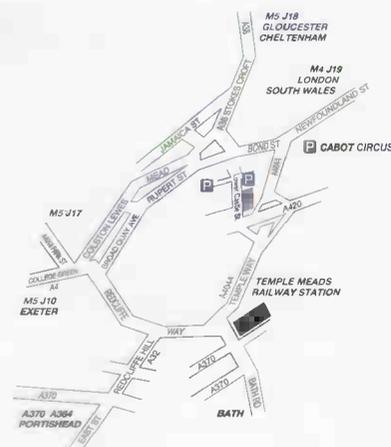
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has been completely lovely.

The Oppo's DAC is no slouch, but my Lite Audio DAC adds warmth and greatly improves imaging and dimensionality. I occasionally connect the Denon back up to the DAC to see if I'm going a bit hat-stand, but the music server invariably wins out. All the added convenience of the music server's interface is a very welcome bonus. There the Oppo shall stay. I have since bought a Sony BDP-S550 to take the Oppo's place in the surround system.

Here's what I need explaining; why is it the songs I ripped from my CDs now sound substantially better via this

does, but I can genuinely sit and listen to digital now without necessarily missing analogue.

### **Bernard Gibbes California**

It's cruel to mention the excellent Oppo BDP-83 to us Bernard. A European version isn't available and isn't going to be made available it appears, although the U.S. model can be used in Europe and is available in the U.K. for around £500, just under \$1000 I guess. As I understand it this is a Region A (USA only) player, but most discs are region-free these days

me down next to his Linn Sondek and calmly explaining to me that just like me he had his toys, that this was his toy and it was very fragile and I was never to touch it. And I never did. I pushed in his tweeters instead!

The audio bug didn't bite until I was seventeen. Prior to that I associated audio with boring hours spent out the back of an audio retailer while my Dad talked copious amounts of 'crap', I mean 'technical audio stuff', with his mates. However at 17 after telling my Dad that I needed my own system for when girls came over and asking if he could recommend a mini system the odyssey began. "Mini system?", he said, then made a noise with his mouth like a sloppy bowel movement. I was to find this to be a defining noise in my quest; components that were marginal coaxed this noise out of my Dad.

After telling me that "no son of his would ever own a mini system, convenience be damned," he led me into the local Cash Converters store. There he walked over to massive nineteen seventies Akai receiver and picked it up. "The most basic rule of thumb with audio is weight," he said, feeling the heft of the Akai. "Feel this," he said, handing over the weighty component. "It means it has a decent sized transformer, and you're not buying a box full of air." We left Cash Converters with the Akai and some paper cones, two way speakers and returned home. The quest however had only just begun...

My dad promptly recapped the Akai and opened up the speakers, replaced the internal damping material and recapped the crossover. Holding up a plastic capacitor he said "See this? This component is worth more than these entire speakers", before soldering it into place. Using my Playstation One as CD player (the best silver disc player up to US \$6,000 according to the 6 Moons website, don't you know? David, I wish I was making that up. You can see why I think credulity is cheap) and all hooked up with decent cables from his bits box I was off..

Since then my sonic odyssey has been like a nineteen seventies kung fu film, complete with a 'sensei' father who seems to like beating his student on the head with a bamboo stick for no apparent reason; not apparent to the novice anyway. (I should know, my first paying job was at sixteen as a Karate instructor. Hard to know which path has involved more pain...). Wonderful audio finds like a massive Denon direct drive with rosewood plinth were met with pronouncements like, "the motor unit is okay but its got a ridiculously complicated servo controlled arm that's just waiting to die. Get rid of it!" Entire B&O systems found in the chuck out were given "the noise" and dismissed as



**Bernard Gibbes system with Martin Logan Aeon 1 loudspeakers and Oppo BDP-83 Blu-ray player. Small wooden blocks cut from 2 x 4 are a very effective and inexpensive way to lift speaker cable. Everything sounds less congested with the lifters, says Bernard. LP storage from IKEA (they keep them as night stands).**

music server set-up than they did when the Denon CD player was acting as the transport? The Denon sonically out-muscled numerous other players used as transports; a Panasonic DVD-A310, a Marantz CD63se with a Trichord Clock 4 + PSU and a Sony CDPX339ES), but doesn't come close to offering the smoothness, richness and musicality of the music server. I really wasn't expecting the music to sound better, especially when you consider the 320 kbps compression.

My speakers are the brilliantly bouncy and revealing Martin Logan Aeon 1s. The unlikely, highly-complimentary amplifier in this chain is a Cambridge Azur 840A (although it did take a month of regular use before it started to sound sweet). Phono stage is a Jolida JD-9A with JJ valves. Subwoofer is a Yamaha Soavo 900. Interconnects are Klotz with Eichmann copper terminations, and speaker cables are 'CAT-5 Project'. I have a concrete floor with all the gear on a welded Target Audio 5 tier stand with various other anti-vibrations devices in use, including an SP01 beneath the BDP-83.

It may not boogie and swing in quite the way my VPI Scout/JMW/1042

so it will play nearly all Blu-ray discs. It works on European voltages too. Anyone interested in the BDP-83 Blu-ray player, which also plays SACD and DVD-A via the HDMI digital output (and DVD of course) will find the manual Bernard studied at [www.crtprojectors.co.uk](http://www.crtprojectors.co.uk).

I did ask Oppo Europe (Sweden) about this and they said that the BDP-83 was an import unsupported by them, and that their position is stated at <http://www.oppo.com>.

I could only speculate that the Lite Audio DAC is affecting sound quality and setting the standard. 320kbps is quite a decent code rate so should not affect things too much; usually massed violins or an orchestra at full tilt stress compression systems most; ordinary music often does not, especially if it is Rock that has already been mangled by compression and peak clipping in a studio. **NK**

### **FAMILY TIES**

When it comes to audio I'm a little spoilt. One of my earliest memories is as a four year old, my father sitting



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Time spent at my Dad's audio shop became like time in a Dojo. In between listening to components like the BW Nautilus, big Electrocompaniet amps and CD players, et al., my father told me stories, like the Audio Note/Ongaku

rubbish.) And I could ask you what the moniker "broadcast quality" really means anyway (Lest we forget, the "old stinker" Denon DL103 is a Japanese broadcast cartridge.) I could say that the TT-S8000 being Sony's best effort (it was) means nothing, not unlike the bronze medallist who "did his/her best".

Despite the resources Sony threw at

cartridge to replace the ceramic mono one in his Garrard SP25/IV; life was never the same after!

Regarding the Sony TT-S8000 turntable, you're right to say that its expense and rarity don't necessarily make it a great deck, so it's important to put things in context; it was this illustrious company's flagship consumer turntable, and also made its way to many broadcast situations (indeed, my own deck came out of a Scottish radio studio).

If you think 'Sony's best' means nothing, then I would suggest you learn more about the company, their products and their engineering pedigree - something that not even Matsushita can match, I'd venture to suggest. One very good starting point is Akio Morita's 'Made in Japan'; a fascinating read. I fear that you, like so many others, suffer from a very parochial view of this company; with no knowledge of their brilliant engineering achievements right across the field of video and audio in the nineteen sixties and seventies. When you do your fieldwork, study the Japanese home market products; most of the company's seminal designs barely got overseas...

I assume you've auditioned the TT-S8000 against the best modern (and classic) turntables in order to form your view of it as "MOR"? I have tried the Technics SP10/III, and



**Sony TT-S8000 – the company's flagship turntable. To learn more about Sony read Akio Morita's 'Made In Japan' says David, aware of the company's achievements from his days in Japan.**

demonstration at a hi-fi show, where after the lights were dimmed and the incense lit, the mega dollar CD player repeatedly failed to read the disc! Or beers with Max Townsend, and cable evaluations with Mathew Bond (who later formed Tara Labs). When it came to evaluating components my Dad always told me, forget the hype, trust your ears.

My way of rebelling was to disregard my father's strict advice on component choice and go on my own path. This was generally catastrophic but netted me a component I use and rate to this day, my Vacuum State preamp/phono stage. A minimal description of it over the phone (it was the designer's own example in an unmarked, generic chassis) and my Dad knew exactly what it was and to my surprise said it's an okay piece of gear.

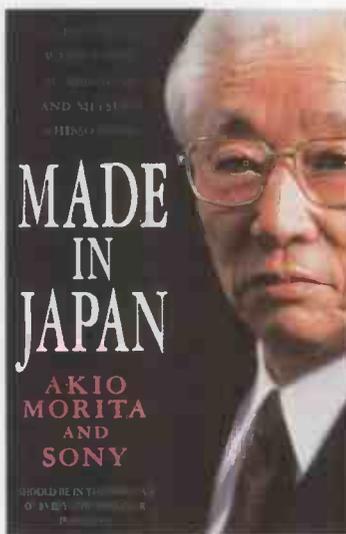
As a result of my father's retail connection and his insane audiophile friends, I've been fortunate in being able to listen to a huge amount of gear, and to be able to ask a lot stupid questions and best of all, to just absorb a huge amount of what it means to be on an audio path.

David, when it comes to your Sony TT-S8000 turntable, I could ask you what your published claims about it being rare and expensive have to do with its sound quality? (If rarity and cost were anything more than extrinsically linked to sonics then Rega arms, which are cheap and plentiful, would be

the deck, Matsushita already had their act together for a long time and were clear leaders when it came to Direct Drive technology. The others just did their best to catch up. Why do you think so many high-end Japanese manufacturers of turntables used proprietary motors from Matsushita rather than Sony? Both were huge manufacturers able to provide constituent components. No matter how many kilos of "Sony bulk mould compound" were used in the indisputably attractive plinth of the TT-S8000 it's still MOR in my opinion; above some and below others. What's my definition of "High End" then, you might fairly ask? Try a Technics SP10 MkIII. Matsushita's final word on the subject of vinyl replay and makes the MkIII look like a bit of a dweeb. So if my Dad's assessment of your Sony left you boggled then just put it down to one man's intolerance of hype and an understated, old school Aussie vernacular.

**Ben North  
Australia**

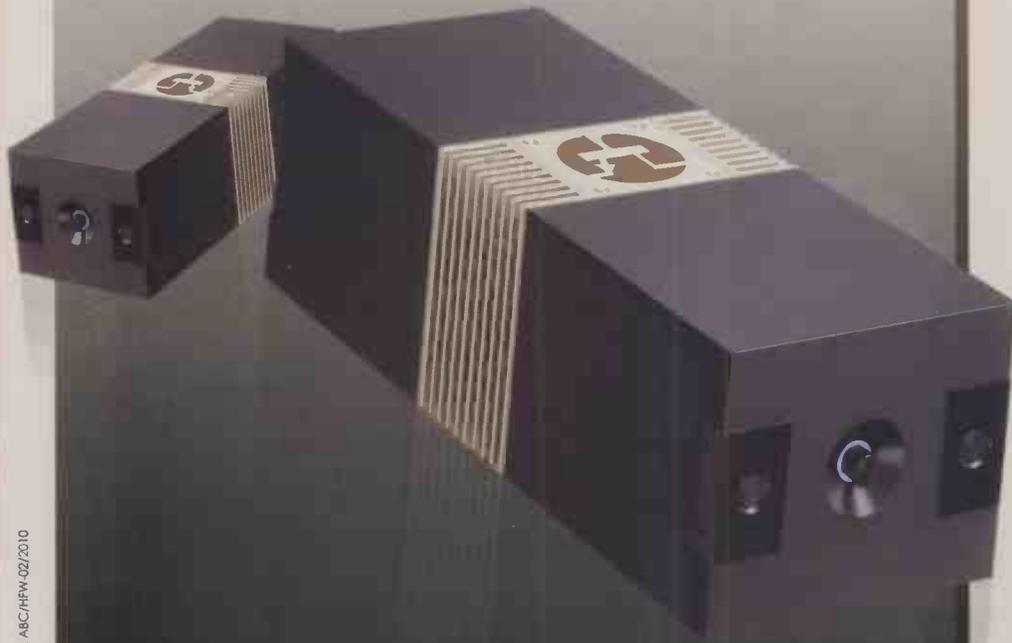
What a fantastic audio upbringing you've had - stories fondly and eruditely told - I thank you for that. How I'd have envied you at school with a dad like that. Love him as I do, my old man's passion was zoology, which didn't seem terribly exciting to a gadget-obsessed eight year old in 1976! Still, he did kick off my interest in hi-fi when he decided to buy a Goldring G850 stereo magnetic



**'Made In Japan' by Sony's founder, Akio Morita tells about their engineering excellence.**

had a II and an SPI5, SP25, SL150 (I and II), SL120, SL1200, SL10 (and the list goes on here). I've also borrowed an ELP Laser turntable, Trio Lo-7D, Linn LPI2, Garrard 401, EAT Forte, Avid Acutus, SME 10, and owned a Pioneer PL-L1000, Denon DP-3000, DP-2000, Marantz TT-1000, Revox B790, Sony Biotracers, and many more I'd rather forget! All listened to against the Sony in some context. Of

**Is the B-1A from Digital Do Main, the most affordable high-end amplifier in the world?**



design: © outcography, 2010. ABC/HFW-02/2010

Or should we say amplifiers because you can join B-1A's together when you want to increase performance and power. It protects your purchase and as your system grows so does your amplification and the performance!

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



★★★★★

" Many strive to build transistor amps with valve qualities, but few have succeeded to this degree. By re-creating the V-FET, DDM has built one of the most thrilling amplifiers on the market. The fact that the case design is so funky is a bonus. "

If you haven't noticed, we rather like this amp. In fact, it's one of the best we've heard in a long time and if you want an open transistor design with massive power, then it's easily the best at anywhere near it's price. "

Jason Kennedy  
HI-Fi Choice Dec 09 Issue

Hi-Fi World  
**VERDICT** ●●●●●

" Unusual and highly advanced power amplifier using special FETs, the B-1a is wonderfully detailed and concise. "

Noel Keywood  
Hi-Fi World Dec 09 Issue

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AND THERE WAS CHA'AM



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course, it's not uniformly the best of all the aforementioned, but it's not far off in some ways. I certainly think it deserves respect, whatever your Dad might think. Thanks for your input, as they say! **DP**

the right combination of power, grip, sweetness and musicality for years, and lo and behold the AMS35i comes along with it in spades! All the more odd that you should single it out for criticism, when you've spared

*the point where I honestly don't know the best route to take or if something else completely different would more advisable!*

Yours in hope of guidance,

**Stuart Helms**



**Musical Fidelity AMS35i amplifier**  
– a great sound from Class A.

### MOAN ALONE!

*I hate to moan, but having read the review of the Musical Fidelity AMS35i amplifier in your December issue I feel that I have to comment.*

*I once owned one of their early Class A models, the A2. This was a big black thing which produced 25 Watts per channel, and broke down a few times! It cost £600. The quality it produced was warm and spacious. Seeing the £6,000 price tag on the new MF amp I'm wondering why the company can no longer make a reasonably priced product any longer? Apart from their basic range of headphone amp and DAC, the remainder of their range is costly compared to other manufacturers.*

*Surely £6K is asking a bit for such a basic amp as the AMS35i? Are the components inside of some special quality? And why use medical grade stainless steel for the badge, and solid milspec aluminium for the front panel? If cost has to be spent anywhere, then surely it should go on the innards? I can not help but think that there will be a limited demand for this amplifier. If the British hi-fi industry wants to keep afloat then surely it should be competitive and offer affordable products?*

*Thanks for printing my letters regarding DAB radio. I see that the BBC are still coming out with the same load of bull.*

**Cliff Millward.**

Hi Cliff - a somewhat odd missive considering your usual high standards! Why do you think the AMS35i is 'basic'? As you've not seen one or heard one, why do you think you're entitled to describe it thus? The AMS35i is a superb device, and probably the best match for my NS1000Ms I've yet heard; I've been moaning about never quite getting

so many lesser designs the poison of your pen! Agreed on your last point however; you seem to put in a wonderfully terse and 'to-the-point' way that just can't be added to! **DP**

### THREE PROBLEMS

*After hearing an unmodified and vaguely set-up Thorens TD160 with K9 cartridge sound so full bodied and generally fantastic when compared to a Cyrus CD6, I realised I had to get a turntable. My current one is a mildly modified Acoustic Research Legend (which is older than me) with Linn LVX Basik Plus tonearm and Goldring 1012GX cartridge. This runs through a Graham Slee GramAmp 2 into a Naim Nait 5i and out of a pair of Castle Eden 'speakers.*

*I have three problems and solutions but would really like to know which would bring the greatest benefit.*

*1. Whilst the AR is fairly pitch stable, this is the one area my old Project Debut SE with Speedbox bettered it and one my ears tend to pick up on. I am considering something like the Origin Live motor upgrade.*

*2. The GramAmp 2 is a bit laid back for my taste and I would like something with a bit more get up and go. I have been looking at the Edwards Audio MCI which I believe you are reviewing/have reviewed or a Naim Stageline but ideally I would like MM and MC as I plan on upgrading in the future.*

*3. Not as related as the others but compared to my Arcam CD72 the AR seems to lack in the lowest bass notes and I wondered if a change to a Rega arm would help with this as well as give general improvement.*

*I really want to know which of these would give the greatest improvement as I have about £250-£300ish to spend so can go for one option and tend to take a long time considering my options to*

An Origin Live DC motor upgrade would definitely yield an improvement in pitch stability, as well as an altogether faster, punchier sound. But you might like to try 'the basics' before you resort to serious surgery. First, try to source a new belt for it; a Google search is a good start point; there's bound to be a huge cache of them somewhere in a warehouse in the United States. Expect the postage to be more than the belt cost! Next, thoroughly clean the main bearing and replace with Audio Origami's bearing oil; make sure you also clean all surfaces that come in to contact with the belt with isopropyl alcohol or similar. Finally, polish your mains plug pins and fuse with T-Cut and then clean with isopropyl alcohol. This might seem faintly ridiculous, but in my experience does slightly improve wobbly old belt drives whose power supply is being impeded by decades of scunge on the contacts.

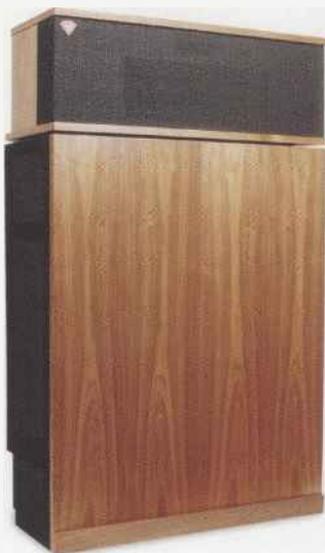
The phono stage I'd recommend is the ANT Audio Kora 3T; it's superb at the price and should pep things up musically speaking, but not in terms of tonal balance. Switching to the Goldring G1042 stylus (a very simple change) would help your front end usefully too. An OL modded Rega arm, or indeed an Origin Live OLI, would be a dramatic improvement on the old Linn LVX+. This was not a great arm, and was very much a 'get you going product'; alternatively, if you can find a mint secondhand Linn Akito arm for £200 or so, it would go straight in and be a great upgrade to the LVX+. **DP**

### HONKING HORNS

*The November Hi-Fi World article, Special K, about the venerable Klipschorn brought back memories from an evening over three decades ago when I met a very special early British audiophile, Percy Wilson. Work was slow that day and I phoned a good friend, Bud Fried, of IMF and later Fried speaker renown. Bud was always good for a fun audio discourse and during the conversation the subject swung to 'guess who's coming to dinner?' He told me he was holding a dinner that evening for Percy Wilson and his wife. I didn't know who Percy was at the time and Bud explained that for decades he had been at the forefront of British audio including becoming the technical editor of Gramophone magazine in 1924. And*

by the way also attending the dinner were David Hafler of Dynaco, Ortofon and Hafler companies, and Gordon Holt of Stereophile magazine and their wives. Would I like to come out for drinks and dinner if he could get another seat at the restaurant?

A little after five that evening I found myself on Route 1 in the midst of Philadelphia rush hour traffic cursing all the way convinced I wouldn't make it to Bud's home in time. Of course, I did and Bud had obtained another seat for me for dinner and off we went to the restaurant.



**Klipschorn – a folded horn popular in the U.S.**

That was quite an evening. I not only met everyone but I got to know Gordon Holt and we became good friends. But that is another tale and this letter is primarily about Percy and horns, a subject that he was quite well versed in.

Percy was a distinguished and interesting person. I recall two stories of crazy horns. There was the story about the audio enthusiast whose wife went away for a couple of weeks and while she was away he built a very large horn speaker into one side wall of a room in their home. He covered it with an attractive, acoustically transparent cloth hanging and when his wife returned he showed it to her proclaiming look what I bought for you, dear.

The second story was about another rabid audio enthusiast whose wife agreed to one last crazy project which was another large horn speaker that was literally the roof of the listening room. The horn was constructed of metal and to dampen it acoustically the metal was covered with tar. But it was one of the hottest summers in a long time in England. And people came from miles around to view the melting horn.

And finally there were Percy's two 'do nots' of proper bass horn design. You shouldn't fold a bass horn and

you shouldn't make it from wood. The Klipschorn was never mentioned but it's obvious that Percy was referring to it and that he had problems with the compromises it made. Folding leads to discontinuities is the smooth change in cross sectional area of a horn. And these discontinuities produce resonances that Percy found unacceptable. I have a friend who spent a lot of time working with transmission lines and he made the same points about folding a line stressing that the folds needed to be formed as smooth curves to ameliorate this problem. And Percy felt that wood was too resonant a material for a bass horn adding too much coloration to it. Bass horns are very susceptible to mechanical resonances. I recall an article in Hi-Fi News by John Crabbe about the second set of bass horns he built into his home (they were straight, by the way). They were constructed out of concrete to minimise mechanical resonances. But when he tried them he found even this format was not acoustically dead enough and he was forced to reinforce them further.

I personally suspect that the Klipschorn was not so bad as these two warnings suggest, that it simply wasn't a compromise that Percy could live with. And that the benefits of making a horn that people could afford and that would actually fit into some real rooms was worth the compromises made.

At the end of the evening I got to drive Percy and his wife back to their hotel in centre city Philadelphia with the promise to Bud to tell me the Zanzibar fallacy, another good tale but relevant to this one. It was a grand evening. Each year I would ask Bud if Percy was coming to visit the USA again but I never got to see him again. But that evening was special.

**Allen Edelstein  
New Jersey, USA**

### DIGITAL CONVERSION

I'd be grateful for some clarification. I'm in the market for DACs to upgrade my PC jukebox and have ordered an MF X-DAC and Cambridge Dacmagic. I would also like to upgrade my CD player (Theta Miles) and have noted your mention of the Stello DA100 signature. However, on Googling it I've found comment that the Russ Andrews DAC1 is a rebadged Stello and indeed the former may not be in current production.

I see you mention the DAC1 in your 'World Standards' section but the Stello is linked with the CD player. I have not been able to source the Stello DAC online and wonder if it is available in the UK. Could you please clarify. Many thanks and keep up the good work.

**John Rainey  
Philippines**

Hi John - the Stello DA100 Signature is my choice of sub £900 DAC right now, and an excellent upgrade to ageing mid-price CD spinners. At the time of writing, the manufacturer April Music Inc. is in the process of changing UK distributors, so it's best you contact them direct; they'll be able to give you the definitive answer! Call +82 2 3446 5561 or click on: [www.aprilmusic.com](http://www.aprilmusic.com). **DP**

### BIG TIME

What speakers would suit the Marantz SC7S2 preamp and the MA-9S2 monoblocks? Would the Usher BE 10s do the trick or the B&Ws 800s. Is there a speaker tailored to this "jaw dropper" of a system. What would the team there recommend for this system.

**Rob McIntyre  
Australia**

Oh - good grief! Another 'how long is a piece of string?' type question! Both the aforementioned would work very well indeed. My own preference would be the Ushers, but also consider the Martin Logan CLX if electrostatics are more your thing. Whatever you choose, you can



**For a "jaw dropper" of a system, try Usher's spectacularly good BE10 loudspeakers.**

relax in the knowledge that you'll have oodles of clean, smooth power - which is a rare luxury indeed. **DP**

### BOOM-BASTIC!

My system comprises: Michell Gyro SE turntable, with HR PSU and Orbe clamp, an Origin Live Conqueror Mk. II tonearm, Benz Micro Glider L2 cartridge, Musical Fidelity 1008 CD player, Musical Fidelity A-1008 integrated amplifier and Mission Elegante e83 loudspeakers and a REL Storm subwoofer. Cables are Chord Anthem 2 Interconnects, Chord Epic Super twin bi-wire speaker cables, Isotek Vision II Filter, Isotek Optimum power cord and an Atacama Equinox Rack. It is all mounted in a living room

of forty square metres.

I have read with interest the last review of the Musical Fidelity AMS35i in the November issue of Hi-Fi world. Until the last year, Anthony Michaelson's bottom line was that with loudspeakers having normal sensitivity, you are going to need at least 500W to reproduce music's transient peaks in your listening room at a realistic level. Therefore MF produced amps with 250W, 550W and 750W.

Now, suddenly, MF is producing new amps with only 32 Watts. Has Mr Michaelson changed his mind?

I remembered a huge improvement in bass performance when I changed my amp and increase the power from 100W to 250W. Suddenly my Mission Elegante e83 loudspeakers started to fly and the bass become clearly more powerful and tight. But probably in a normal use it was not necessary to have such power as Mr. Michaelson recommended last year.

In fact, in my MFA-1008 amp the volume control never passed the 9 o'clock position with CD and only with the low output of my phono cartridge did I reach the 12 o'clock position.

Sometimes I think that the advantages in musicality, spatiality and resolution of the LPs over the CDs in my system are in part due to the fact that the amplifier is working at its best with LP and underpowered with CD.

I am even considering the purchase of the Rothwell Attenuators and use them between the CD Player and the amp. What do you think? Have you tried the Rothwell Attenuators? Are they going to reduce the dynamics or affect other characteristics of the MFA-1008 amp different than gain?

On the other side, I am considering buying the new Graham Slee Reflex C phono preamp or maybe your recommended Icon Audio PS3. Do you think they are a big improvement over the phono stage of the MFA-1008 Amp? Do you have any other recommendation?

**Pablo**  
**Spain**

Hi Pablo. Rothwell attenuators will affect the sound little and allow you to turn volume up, often improving resolution on a logarithmic pot. track, making it easier to make fine adjustments.

The Icon Audio PS3 is an all-valve (tube) phono stage and sounds quite obviously different to transistor phono stages. It is smoother, darker sounding and atmospheric. It is my preferred choice of phono stage.

Yes, Anthony does seem to have had a change of heart! But quite frankly, product from most of the larger manufacturers

comes accompanied by descriptive literature that is full of - how you say? - cojones! Anthony might be subject to changes of mind, but his heart is in the right place and he's more straightforward than most in the end. More importantly, whilst we didn't exactly swallow his assertion that hundreds of Watts were not enough, we do measure power levels used during reviewing and can endorse low powers.

Better, I have been using an AMS50 for some time now and can



**Coming soon - a review of the Musical Fidelity AMS50 Class A power amplifier.**

endorse David's enthusiasm for these Class A amplifiers. The AMS50 is quite superb; funnily it sounds like a very powerful amplifier. How ironic! I hope to review it in our next (March 10) issue. **NK**

I think Antony's previous contention that you need x amount of Watts to get serious sound was a simplistic one, but partially based in truth. Obviously, it's the amp-speaker match that's critical; a super-efficient Klipschorn simply does not need big power to go loud effortlessly, whereas an 82dB mini monitor needs masses. So power is only one side of the equation; it's correct to draw attention to it, but it's not the beginning and end of everything. Actually, with 91dB speakers (i.e. my NS1000Ms) in my medium sized room, the Musical Fidelity AMS35i (40 Watts approx) went plenty loud enough, and remained beautifully silky whilst so doing. I can see that in a bigger room with 82dB speakers, you'd need more, and that's where Antony's super-power amps would come into play. So it's amp power, speaker sensitivity and room size that counts, and not just the former on its own.

The Icon Audio PS3 phono stage is superb, and a big improvement on the already fine onboard MF item; this would be my recommendation. **DP**

### TIME PASSAGES

For the past twenty five years I have owned a Pioneer SA 5500II coupled

with a pair of little known(?) Tangent TM 2 loudspeakers. Recently I bought a Pioneer P-D9J SACD player which I am very happy with in the above system. I thought it might be time to change my amplifier and as I liked the CD player so much I bought the matching A-A9J integrated. This has been a little disappointment. It doesn't sound as good as my old amplifier which has more bass and is much warmer and clearer. I can't quite believe that this can be the case. I did notice that input sensitivity on the A-A9J is 200mV rather than 150mV on my old amplifier and thought that this might be 'overdriving' the input stage somewhat. The question is - should I find a new amplifier and keep my old speakers or would changing my speakers make the AA9J sound more musical?

I hope you can help.

many thanks

**Philip Coles**

Hmmm... the perils of life! The two new Pioneer separates are of course electrically matched, so there's no issue here. The problem is that your old SA 5500 II came from an era where discrete transistors were king, with few ICs and no noisy digital bits onboard. The A-A9J is far more op-amp based, with all sorts of sound sullying adornments and complexities. It should produce a more detailed sound, but will also sound thinner and possibly harder too. I'd suggest you change the Pioneer for the likes of a Leema Pulse, which is a far more 'old skool' sounding production, and also audition the super new Sugden Mysterio. Anything less than these and I fear you'll not be content. **DP**

### POWER PROBLEMS

In the December 2009 issue there are a number of letters which deal with power supplies and mains and their effects on systems. As noted from your reply this can be a little more complicated than at first glance and things like the distance from the grid supply and also the density of users (rural areas have many less people on the same grid so are sometimes cleaner supplies as a result.

Given these variables could I make a suggestion for a feature that may well be of interest to many of your readers? Currently there are two digital out iPod docks, Wadia and Onkyo. The Wadia unit as expected from that company is expensive (relatively) but would be expected to be of good quality which the reviews seem to confirm. The Onkyo while fulfilling the same function is a much cheaper item and from the reviews in your magazine is still very good but not quite as good as the Wadia, at least I think that is what your reviewers are saying though I am not

sure if a direct A/B comparison has been done.

What the above both have in common is a pretty standard wall plug power supply which while adequate is not exactly the very best. Now Russ Andrews make a replacement for the Wadia and are currently looking at doing one for the Onkyo, so this could be a very good opportunity at a very basic level to see what difference just the power supply can make. Is the Onkyo plus uprated power supply better than the Wadia with its basic out of the box plug? Does the Wadia still sound better if both have upgraded power supplies? Could a DIY kit made by your World Design wing offer something even better than the RA equivalent?

There are certainly a number of themes and areas that could be approached and just maybe there could be some sensible conclusions on the importance of power supply. If it works for small items with basic supplies like



**Onkyo's digital ipod dock; it hooks up to their receivers.**

these two items, what does it do for more complex items such as CD players, amplifiers, etc.

Hope you do not mind this being a suggestion and would hope that you could consider it for the magazine or maybe just a letter response.

**Andrew Ebel**

Thanks for that Andrew. I am not sure it's terribly useful to compare two different products when assessing the importance of power supplies; surely the obvious thing would be to try the effect of the uprated PSU whilst keeping the main product the same? Having done this many times - most recently with the new upgraded ANT Audio Kora 3T Ltd phono stage PSU - I can confirm the power supply does make a big difference to the sound and should never be neglected. If you're ever in any doubt of this, just listen to the difference a SuperCAP or suchlike can make to a high end Naim amplifier! **DP**

### **MULTI CHOICE**

I'm toying with the idea of combining my hi-fi, Naim 112/150, Totem Arros, with

an AV receiver, say a Marantz of some description, and getting another pair of 'speakers to mount on the rear wall, I also have an IPL subwoofer (very good, you should try one).

I like the Naim type of sound and in order to retain as much of it as I can, would it be worth getting another Naim 150 second-hand, connecting both 150s to the pre-outs on the Marantz. I don't want a centre channel as this seems to spoil the stereo effect on most of the systems I've heard. I realise I would not be using the Marantz's power amps and



**Marantz SR-8002 receiver has pre-amp outputs and sounds good too!**

also the Arros are not the best choice as far as 'speakers go for this application but I run all my sound through the hi-fi from a Sky+ box, TV and radio, and they do quite a good job if not pushed too hard.

Please don't suggest a processor. Have you seen how much those things are, even second hand, and I would still need another power amp!

Could you also suggest a pair of 'speakers for the rear? I haven't got room for any more Arros on the floor so they would have to go on the wall. I forgot to mention I also have a Naim CDX II and a Rega turntable.

So, do you think I can get what I'm trying to achieve sound wise or will it be a total waste of time and money? Music is still my main source of enjoyment and it would be nice to try and combine the two if possible. I realise the receiver's preamps would not be as good as the Naim 112 but would I really lose that much? I'm 62 and the hearing is not what it was...

It would be nice to run two separate systems but I've not got the rooms available (the wife tells me). Your thoughts would be appreciated. Now I think I'll read the magazine again, just in case I missed something the first time.

**Ray Fordham**

What you want to do is easy enough to achieve, Roy. Whatever receiver you use, it must have a set of preamp outputs, but you know this. Levels can be equalised in the receiver to compensate for differing power amp gains, and you can use the Naims at

front or rear. Naim power amps will sound different to the onboard units used by Marantz, or any one else if it comes to that. However, rear loudspeakers often don't carry much music and the ear isn't too sensitive to sounds from behind. There might be times when differing power amp qualities become noticeable, but I think for the most part it will work.

I use a Marantz SR-8002 and rather like the quality of its solid-state amps. They're fast and punchy, without being coarse. You may find

you can live with the receiver driving all channels (Centre can be switched off as always, the signal being directed to Left and Right, in order to form a phantom 'stereo' centre image). If this is so, then you will not need to buy another Naim 150. Otherwise, it sounds as if you want the Naims driving the fronts and the receiver driving the rears. If you use different loudspeakers at rear obviously differences will increase and here I can't predict whether they will be acceptable to you or not.

An attraction of modern AV receivers is they are able to process all signal sources, so you can listen to anything and everything, even LP as many have phono stages. Do not, however, connect up a CD player via analogue connections: it is common for the input analogue-to-digital convertor to overload at 1.8-2.2V and CD players often give more, so you'll suffer input overload and distortion. Some receivers (inc. Marantz) do have attenuators to overcome this, but digital connection is the way to go. **NK**

### **TRIP OF PASSAGE**

Classic Cuts" (December 2009) recommends Stravinsky's last recording of his 'Rite of Spring', quoting (I believe) the catalogue No. of the original US Columbia issue, which is likely to be very rare this side of the pond; the photograph shows a reissue in a set, but also American.

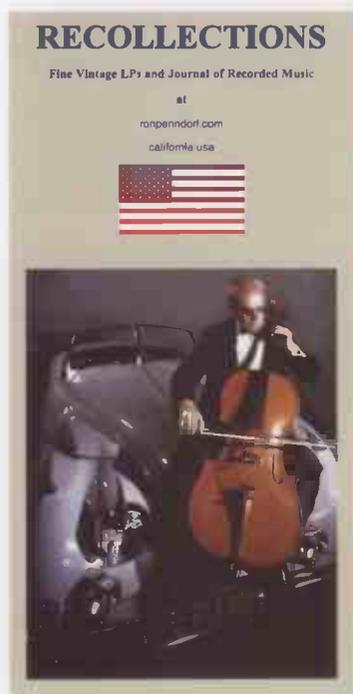
I've not heard the first CBS UK issue (SBRG 72054), but the sound on

many of their pressings of the 1960s and '70s was poor, with incorrect bias/ equalisation of the copy masters sometimes causing screechy string sound on recordings by Bernstein, Ormandy, Walter, etc., so seekers of used copies should exercise caution. Their American plant used a hard, almost brittle vinyl which gave a very clear signal.

**R. Mark Hodgson**

Dear Mark, I do agree that many of the CBS recordings of the 1960s and 1970s have a tendency to be harsh and screechy! The specific pressing I wrote about was part of the boxed set reissued by the Sunday Times in 1970, and was manufactured in England, quite possibly with different EQ settings to the original. If anyone is interested there is history of Columbia Masterworks Labelography (1948-1970) available at <http://ronpenndorf.com/labelography2.html>.

**RT**



Go to [ronpenndorf.com](http://ronpenndorf.com) for Labelography says Rafael Todes.

### "LEAN, MEAN FUNK MACHINE"

I guess that my setup needs to be updated at least by two parts, namely the tonearm and phono stage. I'm contacting you because these particular items are very hard if not impossible to audition personally and has to be purchased almost blindly. My current setup consists of Roksan Xerxes turntable with aluminum Pro-ject 9 tonearm and Ortofon Rondo Bronze MC cartridge. The phono stage is a budget miracle, the Creek OBH-15. Everything is further amplified with Triode TRV-35SE integrated amplifier. All this is transformed to air pressure variations by WLM Diva loudspeakers. So I guess it is easy to point out the possible

bottlenecks?

My musical needs consist of funk, rock, jazz and casual classical. The maximal toe tapping effect is required from the system and analytical dissection of the music can be done by others. My budget for the two components is approx. £2,000 and this can be divided as you see fit. So of you go brainstorming and partnering these items into a lean mean funk machine that I fantasize about.

**Kimmo Päiväsaari  
Finland.**

My suggested line of attack would be to fit an SME Series IV tonearm in the Roksan, which is a known excellent combination. You'll find masses more detail, power and punch, the SME letting the Roksan out of the starting block to really do its stuff. The Rondo Bronze is an excellent stop-gap MC; later on you should look to upgrading to a Cadenza Bronze. Regarding your phono stage, I'd suggest you upgrade to its spiritual successor, as it were, the ANT Audio Kora 3T Ltd.; I'm currently beguiled by this £1,000 bit of kit; it's outrageously good for the price and methinks a future classic. Don't be fooled by the dowdy, Creek-style case! **DP**

### DELIGHTFUL DEALER

I would like through your esteemed magazine to tell people about my dealings with my local dealer. I was diagnosed with a rare form of lung cancer and cannot get out very much and after having chemo and radiotherapy I decided to get the best stereo two channel I could get. I know you say audition at your dealers but I was not fit to get up to my dealer (Moorgate Acoustics). I rung him up and spoke to Paul Hobson and explained to him the things I was thinking of. I had narrowed it down to two marques and he said he would send Adrian around with the two amps., set them up for me and leave them with me for over a week and when I had made my mind up what I wanted he ordered them for me and then Adrian came back out and set it all up for me and left it all set up. I ended up with a Naim CD5XS, Nait XS, a Flatcap power supply and a headphone amp. It all sounds superb. I was amazed at a dealer going to all that trouble

**Glyn Davis  
London**

A heartwarming tale; you wouldn't get that buying online! **DP**

### POWER TO THE PEOPLE

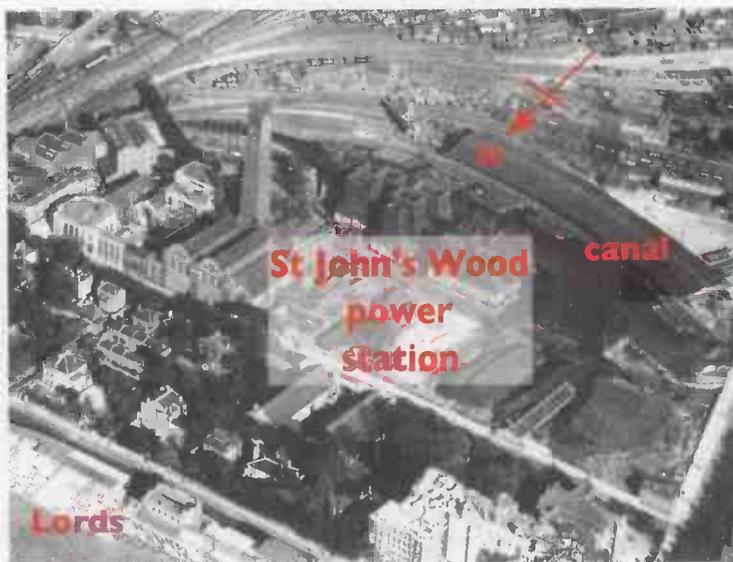
Thanks for the excellent advice to invest in an Icon Audio PS3. I recently acquired one through my usual helpful

dealer with the Jensen copper foil / paper-in-oil capacitors. We are still in the early stages of getting acquainted and I understand the valves will need thirty hours to burn in but early signs are very good. It looks and feels the part and sits well between my Orbe SE and SMEV combo and the (yes still going strong) Rotel RA-03. Test listening 'Little Earthquakes' revealed Tori Amos's renowned production qualities in somewhat finer detail than even I am used to (and I know it well). Well-produced albums like Simply Red's 'Picture Book' and Talking Heads' 'Speaking in Tongues' have been elevated to yet higher levels of detail, particularly where bass guitar definition is concerned. The whole presentation sounds quite bright but maybe that will settle down in time. I knocked up the bass trim on the RA-03 ever so slightly to compensate. I am really enjoying experimenting. In fact 'Super Trouper' is waiting on the sofa to be queued up the moment I press send on here shortly.

I enjoyed the letter in the latest issue on mains cables and conditioning. As you know this is a subject close to my heart. With regard to Noel's impressive and comprehensive reply, I would offer the following insights. Any distribution line will be subject to voltage fluctuations and these are mostly caused by reactive and resistive voltage drops in the system, and, to a lesser extent, harmonics generated by noisy loads as Noel has mentioned.

Before I joined National Grid, I was in charge of voltage control on the EDF Energy distribution system in London. Although the ESQC regulations and the British Standard, based on EU and CENELEC harmonisation agreements, call for a standard declared mains voltage of 230V, the tolerances from 2008 onwards were slackened to +/- 10% so the actual voltage range is 207 to 253V RMS. This was agreed chiefly to allow fairly cheap electrical apparatus to be sold into all EU member states. It is fair to say that the UK electricity supply industry effectively took no action as our previous standard of 240V +/- 8% almost lay within the new range.

You are quite right that in central London the system has a stronger source and higher fault level. In addition most customers sit very close to the main substation where the voltage target will invariably be 6.6kV or 11kV. Voltage drops at high voltage are simply discounted on the London system and the capacitive effect of much of the dynamic load, particularly in the West End and the City due to switch-mode power supplies in air conditioning etc actually gives a natural boost to the LV mains voltage level. The system in London is heavily interconnected on the LV and this gives maximum utilisation of



**St John's Wood power station - not a power station, but a sub-station, says James Watson.**

distribution transformers whilst helping to share load across LV mains feeders and dampening the effects of harmonics etc. Not to mention offering excellent security of supply.

The overall voltage level during the day is however, too high. I have been saying this for years. Most household equipment would function better and last longer on 220-230V rather than the usual 240-250V which most Londoners, including Hi-Fi World and Keywood Towers, experience. Many of the distribution transformers date from the early 1960s and as such were wound for 11,000/433V at no load. This drops to 415V on 80% rating and as such this is still too high as the declared three phase voltage should be 398 and not 415. These vintage transformers have no tapping switches or links to change and hence the only way to lower customer's volts would be to drop the main substation target to 10.8kV.

This is something I tried to bring in as a matter of policy and I did manage it in certain areas. However, I faced an uphill struggle educating our system control engineers, many of them used to working on more rural networks, that this was not low and was in fact the level they should be striving for. Now in my role in National Grid, I see that EDF Energy in London ask us to deliver 132kV into their system whereas their colleagues in Eastern and Seaboard prefer 136-140kV! They have many long overhead line routes whilst London's 132kV system is 95% underground cable.

Just one point to clear up Noel, St John's Wood power station closed down in the 1970s. This was known as Grove Road Power Station and was sited South of Lodge Road between Lisson Grove and the canal. I attach a photograph from 1963 in which you can just make out Lords Cricket Ground in the bottom

half of the picture. As HFW towers is on Kilburn Park Road, I would imagine (although I would need to check records to be absolutely certain) that you are supplied from EDF Energy's substation at Hyde Park Estate (off Edgware Rd) which in turn is supplied at 66kV from National Grid's substation on Lodge Road. Lodge Road itself is energised from 5 x supergrid transformers (SGTs), 4 off 275/66kV and 1 off 400/66kV situated at St Johns Wood 400kV substation which is on the site of the old power station.

I am sure a man of your expertise and experience is well aware of the difference between a power station and a substation but Abba is calling now, along with a pint of Fullers vintage ale on chill!

**James Watson**

To a simple layman like me a power station is a place marked by warning signs showing a man being felled by a giant zigzag accompanied by the words "Danger of Death, 220kV" or such like. Whether it is a power station with things going around and around or a sub-station without them is less important that what happens if you take a leak through the gate on the way back from the pub late at night!

I also call Grove Road "the

power station" because that's how my family unhappily referred to it, living close by what was a Luftwaffe target in World War II. It wasn't the most peaceful place to be, it seems!  
**NK**

### MODERN WORLD IN REVERSE

Thanks for your help with my Cyrus CD8SE disc read error problems; things have settled down and everything is working as advertised at last!

Well everything is finished now, the 211PP works just fine, a real eye opener into the recording. I used 6C45 and 1:2 phase split to drive them. Sound is detailed and dynamic, from inky black to full orchestral climax, with full grip on the speaker. Everything is so vivid and involving, well balanced across the freq band. Both vinyl and CD are revealing hidden joys. I only wish I lived somewhere cold and then I could save on the heating bill!

And to finish I took some more advice from you guys (not baby step upgrades but go for the best you can), So I also recently changed the speakers to JBL4343 (Tannoys were beyond my budget). Not sure the wife is too happy, but my daughter (and me) likes them, maybe need to move to a bigger place. One last thing to do is change out the



**Mitch Long's impressive 211 valve amplifier - something to keep the air con. working in Singapore. Note the natty LCD display (inset) showing HT at 0.95kV. We hope the cat can read.**

main bearing on the Technics 1210, (note the wood case) waiting for Dave Cawley.

My hi-fi is the modern world in reverse, it's getting bigger and heavier but I wouldn't have it any other way right now.

**Mitch Long  
Singapore.**

### PROGRESS

Having progressed from my first turntable bought in the 1950s, a Garrard 4HF running mono via a home constructed Baxendall based EL84 amp,

then onto a Pioneer PL12D (stereo via a second Baxendall amp), my current turntable is a Toshiba SR370 direct drive with an SME 3009 S2 improved tonearm. Incidentally the word 'hi-fi' was not used back in the 1950s, the subject was just referred to as 'quality sound'. The Toshiba is supported on Audio Technica adjustable, sound absorbent feet. The deck and arm were bought in the 1970s and are still going well. I have used an Audio Technica AT-OC9 MC but am currently using a Goldring 1042 MM. I run either cartridge through a Pro-Ject Phono Box SE (the older cube shaped one). I have rewired the arm and bypassed the SME connector with Litz wire supplied by Trans-fi Audio (the Terminator tonearm people).

The rewire and careful set up of the SME arm, especially the VTA that I have found over the years makes a large difference to general tonality, has considerably improved the overall sound. Bass is deeper and firmer, mids are more open and treble is sweeter and more defined.

However, I read that the 3009 is "off the pace compared to current arms". It is reported not to marry well with an OC9 moving coil cartridge and I am not sure of the Toshiba SR370's abilities against current decks. So what to do?

Assuming the Toshiba is still used, which arm to use? I have been assessing the Hadcock 228 or 242, the Jelco SA250ST, the Rega RB301 and a few others via the Internet and am now totally confused! Suspended decks, non-suspended decks, high/low mass arms, high/low compliant cartridges! Wow! Also do I trade in the OC9 for the latest ML version or do I upgrade the lot? I listen mainly to classical and female vocal but can be found engrossed in 10cc, Pink Floyd, Jean Michel Jarre, Jon and Vangelis or whatever!

My other sources are an AVI Laboratory series CD player, computer audio via a Toshiba laptop played through a Music Fidelity V DAC with Russ Andrews USB cable. The laptop is powered with a linear bench top power supply, which is a great audio improvement over the switch mode psu supplied (much smoother and less computer noise). Amplification is a WAD EL34 integrated with upgraded components and valves and with a remote controlled Panasonic pot. driving WAD 25T XL loudspeakers via Black Rhodium Tango cable. QED, Van den Hull, Russ Andrews and Artisan interconnects

are used. I occasionally also use an AVI Laboratory series integrated amp and a Quad FM4 tuner.

**Collin Alford.**

Having had a Toshiba SR370 (with the very same SME 3009 S2), I know it's a decent turntable, and certainly the equal of a Rega P3 or suchlike. However there's only so far you can go with it; putting an SMEV on it won't improve things much! The issue is whether you fine tune your existing deck as much as possible or sell it and buy something more serious like a Michell GyroDec SE. If I were you, I'd be tempted to do the latter, because you can happily spend half the price of a Gyro on trying to wring a few percent more out of the Toshiba.

The crux of the issue is your arm/cartridge matching. The SME 3009 simply doesn't work well with moving coils. It's a lowish mass arm designed for highish compliance moving magnets, and there's nothing you can do to change that. So if you're going the way of an Audio Technica OC9, then you'd need something like a Jelco SA250ST to match it. As you can see, that's a lot of dosh to spend on a

LA4 preamp.

Off went David with "job done" written all over his face. We listened for a while and found the detail and soundstage a bit lacking. We rummaged among our spare interconnects to find the ones that played the quietest through our speakers (Waterfall Victorias) and were least affected by the 845s transformer's magnetic field. In the end we decided the MIT AVIs were the quietest. Then I wondered if I could shield the interconnects themselves with aluminium foil. By covering the interconnects with alloy foil the detail and soundstage improved. The soundstage and detail had improved by blanketing all the interconnects with aluminium foil. And the hum was much reduced.

My question is, are there any interconnects of reasonable veracity that can shield against the magnetic field of the 845s so that the speakers don't hum?

**James Lees**

Hi James. I am sorry to say that I do not know the hum shielding abilities of commercial cables and



For an Audio Technica AT OC9 MLII buy a Michell GyroDec SE with Rega RB301 and be amazed, says David.

deck that's probably worth £150 tops now! So - buy a Goldring G1042, keep your Toshiba/SME and be happy, or buy a Michell GyroDec SE, Rega RB301 and AT OC9 and be amazed. This will bring a massively expanded soundstage, an enormous increase in detail, depth and dynamics and enormous potential for future upgrading. **DP**

### HUM ALONG

I was a bit annoyed by the hum from our Icon Audio MB845s and rang David Shaw at Icon Audio. He toddled round waving a pair of Cambridge Audio el cheapo twenty quid interconnects, connected them up and announced that our Chord Company Anthems and Russ Andrews 1011s were not magnetically shielded and that was the reason for the hum between the 845s and the Icon

have only encountered this problem on our test bench where I use Tributaries triple shielded cable. This is a U.S. brand and the cables are of impressive construction.

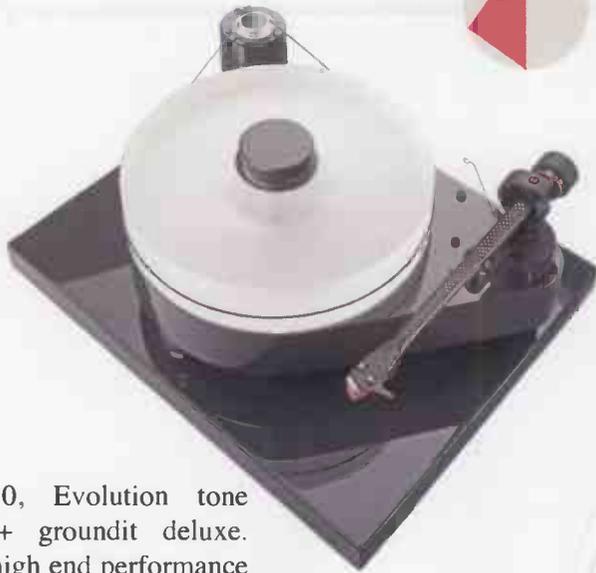
We do not suffer electrical hum between our LA4 and MB845s. And since the 845s hum a little in any case because they are directly heated triodes (with hum bucking potentiometers) I am surprised this is a problem. Are you sure this isn't a matter of cable routing? We did initially suffer hum with the LA4 (and various power amps) but repositioning cured the problem. I suspect signal output cable impedance rises at low frequencies due to the presence of an output blocking capacitor, making it hum sensitive. **NK**



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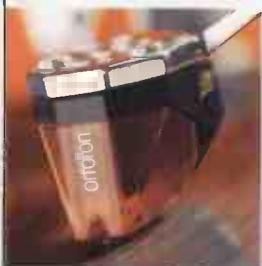
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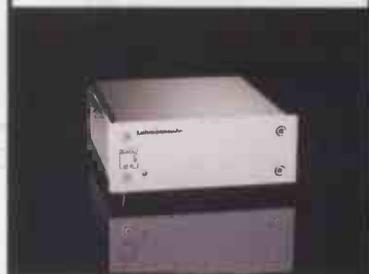
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SA-KI: "Fed all manner of SACDs from Mobile Fidelity, Linn, Telarc and other admirable die-hards, the SA-KI showed itself to be a thoroughbred player reminiscent of the far costlier Esoteric devices, though the voicing differs. Marantz itself used the adjective 'silky' to describe the Pearls' black finish."

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News Sept 09

PM-KI: "The phono stage was open, quiet and precise, especially the MM setting, and in every sense - from vinyl to CD to SACD - the bass was consistently quick. Decay or transient stops down below were as progressive or abrupt as required, high on perfect, while well-recorded bass drum kicks were reproduced with a vividly detailed sensation of pedal, hammer and skin in motion."

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News Sept 09

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The Emillé Labs KI-40L Review by Noel Keywood, Hi-Fi World August 2009 Issue

Hi-Fi World  
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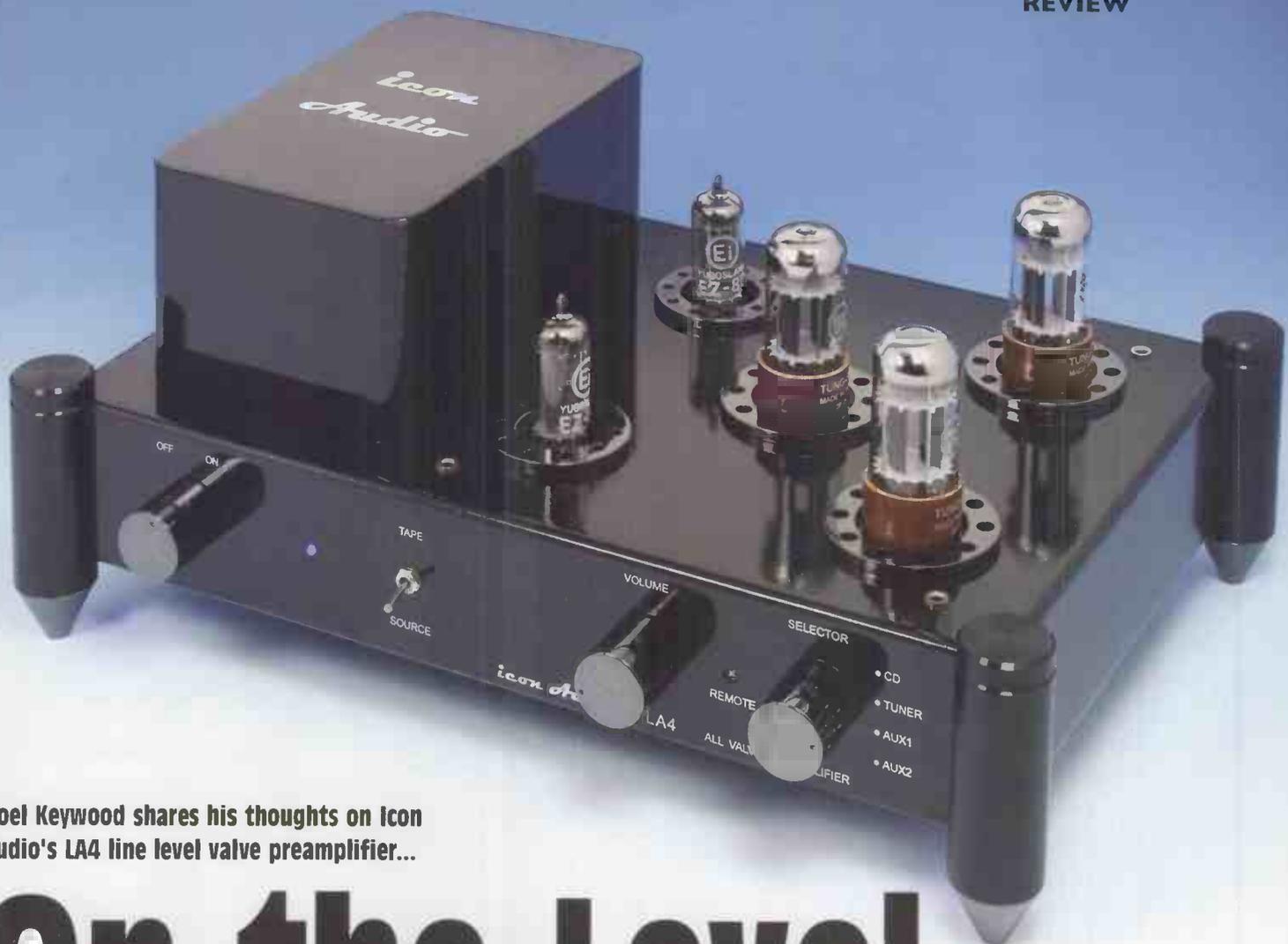
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Noel Keywood shares his thoughts on Icon Audio's LA4 line level valve preamplifier...

# On the Level

A cluster of octal-based 6SN7s on display in Icon Audio's LA4 preamplifier say much about its intended sound. The heart of any amplifier is the amplifying device(s) it uses and in this preamp they're very apparent. Okay, perhaps 6SN7s aren't exactly beautiful! – but they are lovely. Much as a brace of 300Bs or KT88s point to one sound or another, the easy natural warmth of the 1930s or the slightly more bracing delivery of the 1950s, so the sight of chunky 6SN7s says much about the sound of Icon Audio's LA4. It is a triode (two in fact) from the early days of valves, the 1940s, before a drive toward smaller size and lower power consumption took hold. Generous dimensions gave it low current density and low colouration as a result. It also produces negligible amounts of distortion, so feedback is not required. With the LA4, Icon Audio bring to market the classically 'easy' or fluid sound of the 6SN7 in a preamplifier, endowed with remote control of volume, at a

price of just £699. Remote control of volume is through a motorised potentiometer.

The LA4 is an arresting proposition because it opens up a lot of possibilities. Most obviously you might think that its primary role is to partner valve power amplifiers. However, as the latter often don't need a preamp, it is transistor power amplifiers the LA4 is a useful partner for – and believe it or not that includes Naims, which I have found respond quite nicely to a valve preamp in front! We didn't need a Naim for this review however, as Musical Fidelity had proudly delivered a massive AMS50 Class A power amplifier some weeks earlier and the LA4 partnered it well. Of course, I also used it with our resident and much loved Icon Audio MB845 valve power amplifiers.

The LA4 is a nice, straightforward design that is compact and fuss free to use. Weighing a manageable 14kgs it can be easily lifted into place, and dimensions of 375mm wide, and 275mm deep we

found easy to accommodate. A height of 170mm isn't much but it would not fit between some shelves in one of our racks all the same.

Valve preamps are always mild mannered devices that switch on quietly and this one was no exception. Power on is signalled by a bright blue front panel LED and by a blue glow from beneath the chassis, provided by another four LEDs in the base. As our pictures show, the base is raised up by four conical feet, and this gives room for the down lighting, but it also allows an upward air flow, although the LA4 does not run hot like a power amplifier.

The four switched inputs are all normal line level types, via unbalanced phono sockets at rear. There is no phono input so you'll need a separate phono stage for LP replay, and there is no balanced input nor a balanced output for connection to a power amplifier with a balanced input. Icon provide a tape monitor switch however, and there are two outputs, high gain (OUT1)



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and low gain (OUT2). The high gain one offers enough gain to suit most situations, for example amplifying the output of a low gain phono stage, 120mV or so, up to a strong enough signal for a power amplifier with 1V input sensitivity. The low gain output is needed between silver disc players, all of which give 2V out, and a sensitive power amplifier like the MB845, which needs just 0.5V. In this situation you can use a passive preamp like the Creek OBH-22 of course and I also used the Creek alongside the LA4 for the purposes of comparison.

You might think that a passive preamplifier with no valves or transistors inside has got to sound 'right' but experienced listeners would disagree. Let's say the two sound different, and the LA4 and other active preamps certainly seem to have more sonic appeal.

Supporting the three big 6SN7 double triodes that do all the donkey work are two smaller EZ80 double diode rectifier valves, each feeding a choke smoothed power line, one for each channel. Valve rectified power supplies consistently give a slightly silkier and darker sound free of hash, compared to the more common all solid-state bridge rectifier types. Whilst choke supplies give rotten d.c. regulation, anathema when you are suffering 'voltage regulator disease', they give zero noise and perfect audio band behaviour.

Icon's design approach is all normal, overground valve design practice, as we used at World Audio Design, and it is "tried, tested and works" in my experience. There's no rocket science here, no baloney, no feedback (the circuit works properly in the first place!), as few components as possible to colour the sound, no voltage regulators (they tend to blow up when you apply 250V to them!) and not even hum buckers to play with. But does it work?

## SOUND QUALITY

This is every bit a classic 6SN7 amplifier. The 6SN7 isn't a valve I have ever used in a circuit, but I have to agree with those that do use it – an increasing number of people – that it does have a lovely sound. By "sound"

I mean not much of one, other than a beautifully smooth, fluid and silky quality that is totally devoid of hardness, sterility or colour. The 6SN7 is real "essence of valve" in its sound,

something so natural you can't easily identify its presence. You get an easy purity to treble and a natural decay to triangle, cymbals and metallic percussion instruments that draws little attention to itself. Yes, the LA4 is on the soft side of the fence; it doesn't have lacerative speed but here you have to be prepared to accept that it teases out every little whisper, every little intake of breath of Joan Armtrading singing 'Love and Affection' for example, and puts her into a sense of space that conveys a feeling of depth and dimensionality.

The absence of any light thrown upon upper midrange detail totally removes glare and the intensity with which filigree information is presented, but whilst the LA4 seems almost laconic as a result, it constructs a rounded and credible picture that's not dominated by ear grabbing emphases. This is the 6SN7, a very mild mannered companion but also a svelte one, and its character is stamped heavily on the LA4 which, I am learning, is how Icon Audio and designer David Shaw likes it.

What you also get from the LA4 are firm dynamics, giving drums and percussion in the complexly orchestrated Yaleo, from Santana's 'Supernatural' album on a 24/96 DVD-A, the ability to really punch out. There's plenty of bass extension and the LA4 has strong bass and generally a fulsome sound at low frequencies.

Changing to the passive Creek OBH-22 was interesting; dynamic perspectives fell back to yield a more distant and compressed sound stage and this underlined how well the LA4 could separate instruments and give each its own sense of projective power, so they pushed outward

individually. However, the OBH-22 also showed there was some loss of low frequency insight through the LA4: it has plenty of punch and power, but bass lines were a trifle generalised; I could not really hear into instruments. All the same, take a dynamically strong and atmospheric delivery like Hans Theessink singing 'Mississippi' and the LA4 showed how it could capture and deliver his deliciously rich intonations right at me with a force and feeling that was utterly compelling. It's at times like this, when a performance sounds so grippingly natural that I know I'm listening to really good hi-fi product.

Over many weeks and under a wide variety of systems – such is a reviewers lot! – the LA4 did a great job. It always sounded silky smooth, grippingly powerful and studded with detail, if not the sort fine stuff exposed by glare: artifice. It is at the other end of the hi-fi spectrum to any solid-state preamplifier, I have to say, and some may find it a little too – well – euphonic perhaps. I have heard more concise presentations from 6SN7s even, thinking about the Melody Pure Black 101D, but we are talking big money here, over £3k.

## CONCLUSION

For what it is, Icon Audio's LA4 offers a lot of bang for the buck and will suit most systems, even those where it mediates between CD player and solid-state power amplifier as part of a hybrid setup. It's a great preamplifier, one that well captures the spirit of the 6SN7 and it is a preamplifier I would urge you to hear, for what it does is both distinctive and compelling.

## VERDICT

Gorgeously smooth, easy and dynamic sounding valve preamplifier offering excellent value for money.

ICON AUDIO LA4 £699

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## FOR

- smooth easy sound
- dynamic
- fulsome bass

## AGAINST

- no balanced input
- no balanced output
- bass quality

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

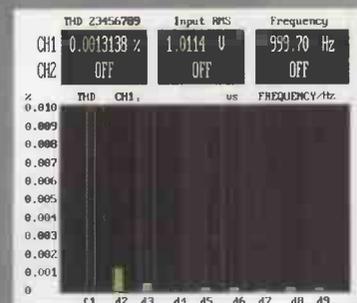
The LA4 has a broad, flat frequency response that stretched from 5Hz to 100kHz (-1dB), at all volume control positions from zero to maximum. It needs to feed a load of 10kOhms minimum to avoid bass roll off.

Gain was high at x8 (+18dB) on OUT1, just enough to match most sources (minimum 120mV or so) to most power amplifiers for full output. Distortion was very low at 0.001% and output overload very high at 25V. At 1 o'clock on the volume control hum output measured 0.24V at 50Hz which, after power amplifier gain (x20-x30) becomes a high 5mV or so at the loudspeaker. No more than 1mV is a good rule of thumb, but this is only a problem with a 1 o'clock volume setting, and as gain on OUT 2 was a very low x1.58 (+4dB) an alternative volume control setting is available. In use slight hum was audible at the loudspeaker at 1 o'clock, but not at the 9 o'clock setting we used.

The LA4 measured well except for 50Hz hum output at 1 o'clock on the volume control, which was a little high. Otherwise its two gain levels offer flexibility. NK

Frequency response	5Hz-100kHz
Separation	68dB
Noise	-90dB
Distortion	0.001%
Gain	x8 (18dB)
Overload	3V in / 25V out

## DISTORTION



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### MONITOR AUDIO AIRSTREAM 10

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There are countless DAB radios on the market these days, and ever more internet/DAB radio hybrids. The challenge then, for a premium priced product such as this, is to set itself apart from the fray by offering a unique user experience, be it through superior sonics, style or ergonomics. The Airstream 10 is certainly distinctively presented, with an unusual 'S' shape which allows the set to be placed both vertically for normal listening and on its lower side for desktop and bedside use. The rod antenna, which emerges from the 'top' of the set, has a hinged knuckle

at its base so that it can be angled upwards whichever position is chosen. Placed horizontally the sound from the loudspeaker can disperse in the gap left beneath it, a clever detail, but for the best results vertical placement is recommended.

A true jack of all trades, the Airstream gives FM, DAB and internet radio, as well as working as a uPnP streamer, either from a cable connection or a WiFi link; there's also a 3.5mm minijack line input for your iPod, Walkman or suchlike. A mains-only table radio, it comes bundled with a small external switch mode power unit. Our tests show it uses 6W of mains power even when in standby, so best to switch it off

at the mains when not in use. It's nice enough to operate, with a neat display and a feel of quality, although at this price of course that's what's expected. Sonically, it's pleasant with speech; Monitor Audio have obviously voiced it to give what in the old days would have been called a 'rich tone', as opposed to a neutral one. This flattered the middling sound of DAB, but we'd have liked a little more clarity for other sources. The FM section wasn't the most sensitive, so aerial positioning is important, although the DAB section was better in this respect than many. What really adds value to the Airstream is its ergonomic purity; the preset tuning system is excellent, with four illuminated touch controls around the display that can easily be set to call up your favourite FM, DAB and internet radio stations. The result is an elegantly packaged, easy to setup and simple to use product that looks the part. **DP**

[Contact: +44 (0) 1268 740580, [www.monitoraudio.com](http://www.monitoraudio.com)]

# soundbites

### THE BEATLES BOX OF VISION

£100

Released as an adjunct to The Beatles' remastered CD campaign, this elaborate and luxurious licensed release is initially presented as a hard cover box. Within is a bound series of plastic coated 'pages' designed to hold each and every Beatles album from 'Please Please Me' to the 'Beatles Love' compilation. Each slot includes a picture of each album, so you know where to place it. The slots don't get on with jewel or Anthology-sized cases, though – so you'll need to remove the CDs from the cases before you store them. An LP-sized 'Catalography' features the cover and track list information from every release from the UK and USA. Finally, you also get another LP-sized, 200-page, hard-backed book featuring all the artwork and liner notes from each UK and US-album.

The Box Of Vision set appears

to be targeted at a very specific niche fan. That is, those Beatles fans who are buying the newly reissued remasters individually and who don't have the current box sets (after spending all that money on the new box sets – I'll be damned if Box Of Vision thinks I'm going to break my new pride and joys) or who feel that it is imperative to have the current releases stored, cheek by jowl, with the other CD releases such as 'Let It Be... Naked' (but why no special storage area for the larger Anthology/BBC jewel boxes?). It is also useful for those who feel that the CD format is important but who yearn for the space and glory of LP-sized art and liner notes. If you fit within all of these categories or are a devoted Beatles fan and just must have every officially

licensed product on the market, then this box is certainly for you. **PR**

[Contact: [store.boxofvision.com](http://store.boxofvision.com), [orders@boxofvision.co.uk](mailto:orders@boxofvision.co.uk)]



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# Roksan

## Warranty Notification

Effective 1st November 2009, all Roksan electronics and turntables supplied via authorised dealers are to be covered by a 5 year parts and labour warranty.\* As a gesture to existing customers, this will also be extended to all current owners of K2 products.

In an age where product longevity and second hand resale values are constantly under threat, Roksan wish to reward their loyal customers by allowing their warranty to be transferrable from owner to owner. Thus, the warranty stays with the product from initial date of sale to 5 years old as long as it remains within the country of origin.

\* terms available upon request



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# A Nice Pair

**Tim Jarman remembers Sony's superb little late sixties separates, the TA-88 integrated and matching ST-88 tuner...**

**J**ust look at this gorgeous little pair! Compact, beautifully finished and great sounding, they are the genesis of miniature hi-fi. Look at that modern system on the shelf in your bedroom or your den; it all started here...

Ironically the pairing started as just a single unit, the tuner. This appeared in 1967 as the ST-80, a visually similar model that was designed to be a compact add-on to a larger system that could bring the benefits of FM stereo reception without too much extra fuss. Small tuners of this period tended to be either battery operated or powered from a specific model of matching amplifier but the little Sony is a

properly engineered standalone design with a built-in mains unit and a choice of two levels of audio output, just like a big tuner, only small. The ST-80 was improved in 1969 with a redesigned FM front end using field effect transistors (FETs); this version was designated the ST-80F.

A perfectly designed miniature tuner of course really needs a matching amplifier and this arrived in 1970. Known as the TA-88, this was styled and proportioned to match the ST-80F, now renamed the ST-88, perfectly. The TA-88 was only rated at 10W per channel but the design was pure early nineteen seventies high-end. In particular the power stages were DC coupled throughout with no transformers or capacitors

between the output transistors and the loudspeakers. Controls and gadgets were kept to a minimum but that didn't mean that the TA-88 was sparse, a high filter, auxiliary line input and a properly engineered tape loop were all included, again being small didn't make the *bonsai* Sony think small.

In making the TA-88 and ST-88 a pair Sony turned an obscure product from the backwaters of the range into an icon of the period. Introduced into the UK at around the same time as the original 13" Trinitron colour TV, it helped to confirm Sony as the premier manufacturer of high performance miniatures, a reputation that they still enjoy today. The system was expanded further in 1971 with

the addition of the SQA-100 quadraphonic decoder for SQ records. This component was not quite a perfect stylistic match for the other two units and is of limited usefulness nowadays; it's one for obsessive completists only. There never was a matching miniature turntable, cassette deck or loudspeaker for the TA-88/ ST-88 but the PS-5520, TC-134SD and SS-5088 were all the recommended choices from the full sized range. Although competent by the standards of the early nineteen seventies none of these are particularly remembered nowadays and so would be very difficult to find if you wanted to recreate the whole system in its original form.

Even using modern ancillaries, how much fun are you going to have with a basic analogue tuner and a ten watt amp? Actually, the answer is a lot. Both units are beautifully built, a joy to handle and the use of standard RCA connectors at standard signal levels mean that setting it all up isn't that hard. Even the mains leads use IEC plugs so you can play about with special audio cables if you must, however for authenticity the original types with moulded-in Sony logos are the only real choice. The loudspeaker and antenna connections are rather dated screw terminals however, so you may need some special leads or adaptors made up to suit them. A CD player can go straight in through the AUX socket; they must have known...

The amplifier, like many early transistor designs, is slightly noisier than those of today and produces an ever present background sizzle but this is soon drowned out once the music starts. With such a small amount of power Sony have wisely rolled the bass off slightly early, this avoids wasting energy in the low

frequencies that the expected small loudspeakers of the day would not be able to turn into sound anyway. Some small amplifiers get around this problem by boosting the bass response at low settings of the volume control but this approach can be a case of the cure being worse than the illness; the Sony may lack bass but its sound is honest and tight as a result – who wants to shake the walls and annoy the neighbours anyway? DC coupling of course makes the sound fast and detailed in the best Japanese tradition. You'd certainly never mistake it for smooth seductiveness of European exotica but if you like things analytical, then you'll really like it.

The tuner is also a gem. The circuit is pretty basic so a strong signal is needed for clean stereo reception, since unless the little green meter is up against the pin at the top of the scale things are going to be hissy, partly because the decoder is a simple regenerative type with no phase locked loop (PLL). Accurate tuning is essential if it is to work properly although a decent switchable AFC system helps with this and the nicely weighted knob and softly glowing tuning dial

**BUYING**

When it comes to buying, you will soon find that there are far more tuners than amplifiers around. There are two reasons. Firstly, the tuner was available for much longer and was often bought on its own to be used in other systems. Secondly, the amplifier, being DC coupled, is easily damaged by shorted loudspeaker leads. This is quite easy to do because of the rather crude terminals and although there are fuses to protect the amplifier they don't always get replaced with the correct 1.25A delay types, rendering the protection ineffective. Sony made all the transistors for the TA-88 themselves and none of them are routinely available any more. A skilled electronics engineer could substitute them with modern types but the best course of action is just to be careful and avoid the situation. Poor performance from units that have spent a hot life boxed in on bookshelves will probably be due to dried up electrolytic capacitors. Fortunately, these are comparatively cheap and easy to replace. The tuner is less of a problem area but the stereo decoder performance is very dependant on the accuracy of the alignment of the various coils and transformers. Random tweaking is the road to ruin so leave it to someone with the right gear who knows how to use it. Even replacing the tuning scale and meter lamps is not that easy as there is a fair amount of dismantling to do first, not that they fail too often.

make searching for stations a joy. Switching to mono reception on FM disables the pilot tone circuit rather than simply summing the left and right outputs so a worthwhile improvement in noise performance can be gained this way. With a good signal the sound is open and detailed, it romps along better with pops rather than classics and is perhaps a little cold for the perfect enjoyment of Radio 4 but the way the simple decoder tears open the soundstage and draws you in is remarkable, an experience that isn't necessarily available with many modern designs.

Sony always worked hard on their AM stages and the ST-88 is no exception, clean results even late at night are not beyond it, even when only using the built-in ferrite rod antenna. The antenna angle can be adjusted slightly but the narrow cabinet means that it won't move very far, still, it's hardly a big set to turn round a little!

**CONCLUSION**

Of course, unlike some of the vintage greats the TA-88/ST-88 is never going to be a main system contender, not unless your listening room is very small. It's an excellent introduction to classic hi-fi though, that's reliable, easy to use and dripping with charisma and cool. Trawling audio fairs, car boot sales and of course eBay is the best way to track them down. All you then need to do is clear a small space on your shelf, sit back and enjoy!



# Classical Gas

Rafael Todes is your guide to six great classical recordings through the ages. Whether you're already a connoisseur or just curious about expanding your musical horizons, give these a try...



**MOZART QUINTETS', AMADEUS QUARTET WITH CECIL ARONOWITZ 2ND VIOLA DG 2740 122 (LP), ADD 000289 477 5346 9 (CD)**

Mozart's quintets occupy a special position in the chamber music repertoire. Whilst he wrote his quartets with Haydn looking over his shoulder, he never had the compositional freedom that he discovered when creating his own medium, the string quintet with two violas. He played many of his chamber music works with Haydn playing the second violin part, himself on the viola, and the six quintets represent Mozart at his most creative. Here is an early one, K174, an arrangement of the Wind Serenade K388, and two pairs of quintets which are much later. These recordings of the works were made between 1968 and 1975 whilst the Amadeus Quartet was at the height of its powers. The vinyl recording captures the live sonorities of a quintet close up at full throttle - exciting, poetic, humorous and daring!

The G minor quintet (K515) is one of Mozart's darkest pieces, the

vast majority of his output being in a major key. When he ventures into the minor, it creates an overwhelming sense of melancholy. The slow movement contains one of the most haunting passages in the repertoire, played by the second viola like a voice from another world. Its pairing, the C Major quintet, by contrast is pure joy. An operatic dialogue opens the first movement, an amorous duo the slow movement - with the protagonists being the 1st violin and viola, lovingly played by Norbert Brainin and Peter Schidlof respectively. Such rich, noble sounds full of character are less frequently found in today's interpretations, making this an essential purchase.



**'MOZART SERENADES', EDO DE WAART, NETHERLANDS WIND ENSEMBLE, SERENADE K36 FOR 13 INSTRUMENTS, 'GRAN PARTIA' PHILIPS 799003**

There is a scene from the film 'Amadeus', when Salieri hears Mozart's music and meets him

for the first time. Mozart is busy frolicking in a nearby chamber and rushes back to conduct his piece once the ensemble has started. They play the slow movement of the Wind Serenade K361 and in the words of Salieri, "the beginning simple, almost comic. Just a pulse. Bassoons, basset horns... like a rusty squeezebox. And then, suddenly... high above it... an oboe. A single note, hanging there, unwavering. Until... a clarinet took it over... sweetened it into a phrase of such delight. This was no composition by a performing monkey. This was a music I had never heard. Filled with such longing, such unfulfillable longing. It seemed to me I was hearing the voice of God".

There's an unfussy elegance to this superbly recorded 1969 classic. The recording is relatively simple and untampered with. The double bass comes across with highly realistic rasping sound, to underpin the texture of the twelve wind instruments. The texture and spacing of the instruments is so life-like and clear that it puts modern high resolution recordings to shame. Another Mozart must have!



**'HAYDN, THE COMPLETE PIANO TRIOS', BEAUX ARTS TRIO PHILIPS 454098 (CD)**

Most people know that Haydn invented the string quartet and the symphony, but some of the most underrated of his great legacies are the forty three piano trios he left behind. They are witty, inventive and very beautiful. In the hands of this the greatest of all piano trios in my opinion - the Beaux Arts Trio - they are treated with great care and understanding. It is obvious from the recordings that they have lived with the trios for many years, and the recordings have that seasoned quality. There are nine CDs, and there is not a weak trio amongst them!

In the first batch, which includes pre-1780s material, we see piano sonatas with accompaniment from the other two instruments, especially the cello which doubles the piano left hand. The next cluster includes the 1780s trios with the violin striving for its own line. By the last and most musically mature group the 1790s trios we see now there is a real dialogue between piano and violin. The spiritual driver in the group seems to be pianist Menahem Pressler. He has a lightness of touch, and always has a sense of purpose to his phrasing. Like a musical wizard, he keeps you guessing what he will do with a phrase. A superb package.



**JANACEK QUARTETS, THE HAGEN QUARTET DG 427 669-2 (CD)**

Janacek was possibly the most individual of the early 20th century composers. His style seems to have given birth to itself; it is like no one else's. Short fragments of music, almost like speech, with a huge range of rapidly oscillating mood swings. His two quartets are programmatic; the first is entitled 'The Kreutzer Sonata' after the short story by Tolstoy. Two men meet on a long train journey; it

transpires that one of the men has murdered his wife in a fit of jealousy, convinced that his wife was having an affair with her musical duo partner, with whom she was playing Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata. The music has brutal sounds, which the Hagen Quartet embraces with relish, as well as the regretful moments, which they play mournfully. It's essentially an essay on the state of mind of the protagonist - very few composers could illustrate this range of anguish so clearly, originally and grippingly. The second quartet 'Intimate Letters' was written in 1928 and was inspired by his platonic obsession with Kamila Stösslová, to whom he wrote over 700 letters. It is extremely accurately and powerfully played on this superlative Deutsche Grammophon recording.



**BACH ST JOHN PASSION, ELLIOT-GARDINER, MONTEVERDI CHOIR ARCHIV PRODUKTION ASIN: B0000057CW**

Bach wrote several passions, of which the St. John and St. Matthew are the most famous. As a deeply religious man, the setting of the gospel according to St. John had special meaning, and was a labour of huge spiritual devotion. Written in 1724 and first performed in Leipzig it is the nearest Bach came to writing an opera, and has occasionally been performed in an operatic setting. On this epic recording, Elliot-Gardiner assembles a team that had performed and worked together a great deal, and the blend of soloists and orchestra captured beautifully on this Archiv recording works seamlessly.

Right from the opening chorus, the music has a driving, premonition-like quality which shows us the force of Bach's intensity of feeling about the subject matter. There is some glorious singing from evangelist Anthony Rolfe-Johnson, Stephen Varcoe as Jesus, and Michael

Chance "Es ist vollbracht..." with the lesser parts being performed superbly by members of the Monteverdi Choir. The use of period instruments as used here has now become the standard, it would be difficult to hear this work played on modern instruments, as they lack the clarity and are a far cry from the sounds Bach had in mind when he wrote the work.



**MOZART SYMPHONIES 38-41, CHARLES MACKERRAS, SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA LINN B0011J2R0K (SACD/DOWNLOAD)**

The last four symphonies of Mozart represent the culmination of his symphonic journey, as it similarly does for the eighty four year old conductor Charles Mackerras! He chooses an orchestra of modern strings, playing with sparing vibrato, drums with hard sticks, valveless horns and brass instruments, and 'classical' phrasing throughout to achieve a period/modern synthesis that takes the best from both worlds. As in the string quintets earlier, Mozart pairs the anguished G minor Symphony no 40 with the more joyful C major no 41 'the Jupiter' his final symphony.

The slow movement of the Jupiter uses muted strings, an original effect - but in the last movement Mozart borrows a theme from the very first symphony he ever wrote, invents four others, and then in an act of unparalleled compositional virtuosity, runs all five themes together as if to exit the medium with a very large bang! Listening to this on a studio master available from Linn's website, the detail of this musical soup becomes clear in a way I have not heard before with the high resolution format creating a rock-solid sound stage with really precise imagery. It enhances the revolutionary colours and textures that Mozart uses, making it an essential listen.

# WORLD STANDARDS

These are the best products we've heard that are currently on sale in the UK, complete with the date they were originally launched and their current retail prices.

## TURNTABLES

### PRO-JECT GENIE 2 2008 £175

A masterpiece of minimalism, this is well made for the money and includes a decent Ortofon OM3 moving magnet cartridge. Great sound per pound.

### REGA P2 2008 £220

Some say the cheapest real hi-fi turntable money can buy - excellent value for money engineering, easy set up and fine sound.

### TECHNICS SL1200/II 1973 £395

Slick build makes it a respectable performer, although the cheapo arm limits it - fit a Rega RB250 and it's suddenly a brilliant mid-price machine.

### REGA P3-24 2008 £400

Seminal affordable audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and really sings with optional £150 outboard power supply.

### MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £579

Superb introduction to Michell turntables - on a budget. Top quality build and elegant design make it the class of the mid-price field.



### ROKSAN RADIUS 5 2003 £750

Fantastic value allied to intelligent, interesting and 'out of the box' design makes for a wonderful entry-level superdeck. Open and musical sound is more inviting that Michell Technodec rival, and the bundled Nima Unipivot arm is a superstar.

### FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860

Innovative engineering gives a nimble, pacey and musical sound that's one of the best at the price.



### MARANTZ TT-155I 2005 £999

Cracking deck/arm/cartridge combination, this must surely be the best sounding 'plug and play' package at this price point.

### MICHELL GYRODEC SE2005 £1005

Design icon with superlative build and finish. Sound is beautifully smooth, effortless and exceptionally expansive. No longer peerless at the price, but still a brilliant platform.

### AVID DIVA II 2008 £1,200

Commanding performer with great speed, dynamics and detail allied to an expansive soundstage; surely the one to beat.

### ACOUSTIC SOLID CLASSIC WOOD 2008 £1,350

Majoring on impact, punch and drive, this is an impactful mid-price turntable in sonic terms as well as physical size.

### PROJECT RPM 10 2006 £1,500

Brilliant 'fit and forget' deck that gives everything it plays a clean, warm, enjoyable sound - but not quite as effective in absolute terms as some price rivals.

### REVOLVER REPLAY 2007 £1,500

Revolver spring back into the vinyl market like they've never been away, with a stylish and solidly built LP spinner. Welcome back!

### SCHEU ANALOG BLACK DIAMOND 2007 £1,500

Stylish and highly capable turntable with seriously impressive bass. Comes with tweaked RB250 and high output Benz Micro MC cartridge as a package - superb value for money.

### THORENS TD2030 2006 £1,895

Excellent design and a supplied Rega RB300 make this a highly capable vinyl spinner. Blue tint to the Perspex base is rather pretty, too!

### MICHELL ORBE 1995 £2,500

The top Michell disc spinner remains a superbly capable all rounder with powerful, spacious sound that's delicate and beguiling.



### LINN LP12SE 1973 £3,510

Surely hi-fi's most iconic turntable, the legendary Sondek goes from strength to strength. New Keel subchassis and Radikal DC motor add precision and grip to one of the world's most musical disc spinners.

### SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

Exquisitely engineered deck and SMEV tonearm combo that's an extremely accomplished performer with classical music.

### CLEARAUDIO REFERENCE 2003 £4,000

The company's best value vinyl spinner; good enough to get the best from almost any tonearm and cartridge combination. Brilliantly open and neutral sound; superlative pitch stability; stunning build and styling - Michell Orbe does most of this at half the price, however.

### ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,000

Huge turntable, both in terms of sheer mass and sonic dynamics. Fit up to three arms and enjoy, just don't damage your back moving it...

### AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

Stylish high end vinyl spinner with industrial strength build quality and a sound to match. Exceedingly neutral yet powerful sound is edge-of-the-seat stuff.

### MCINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

Big, expensive, controversially styled and glows more than some might consider necessary, but an astonishingly good performer.

### EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500

Lavishly finished two box, two motor turntable with gorgeous Ikeda 407 tonearm bundled. Exceptionally stable and unfussy performer with a relaxed but highly enjoyable gait.

## TONEARMS

### REGA RB25I 1984 £136

Capable way past its price point, the new 3-point mount version of the classic RB250 serves up a taut and detailed sound. A little lean for some tastes, but responds very well to rewiring and counterweight modification.

### MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £442

The late John Michell's clever reworking of the Rega theme, using blasting, drilling and rewiring! Surely the best overall performer under £500.



### ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

This expertly fettled Rega boasts a superbly even, transparent and tuneful sound. Gives away only a small degree of finesse and dimensionality to top arms.

### HADCOCK 242 SE 2000 £649

Latest of a long line of unipivots, with added mass, revised geometry and better finish. Musical like no others at the price.

### SME 309 1989 £767

Mid-range SME comes complete with cost-cut aluminium armtube and detachable headshell. Tight, neutral sound with good tonality, but lacks the IV's pace and precision.

### SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127

Offers nine tenths of the SME V's magic at just over half price. Exquisitely built and finished, and a design classic. Faces stiff competition these days, but lovely nevertheless.

**AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 2007 £1,300**

HFV's best tonearm of 2007 is a derivative of the classic Syrinx PU3 updated to spectacular effect. Hand made to order, with any mass, length and colour you care for. Fit, finish and sound truly impressive.

**NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425**

Charismatic unipivot is poor at frequency extremes but sublime in the midband; truly emotive and insightful.

**HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595**

Stylish and solid lump of arm with fabulous build quality, that turns in a dynamic and weighty performance.

**SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614**

The so-called Best Pickup Arm in the World isn't quite, but comes pretty close. Vice-like bass with incredible weight, ultra clear midband and treble. Does everything except beguile the listener.

**LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700**

Subtle mods over the years, including revised bearings and the recent new wiring has kept it a serious contender in the superarm stakes. Lacks the SME's slam, the OL's clarity or the ARO's emotion, but has a feisty musicality all of its own.

**GRAHAM PHANTOM 2006 £2,495**

Sonically stunning arm with magnificent bass dexterity and soudstaging. Build quality almost up to SME standards, which is saying something...

**ORIGIN LIVE CONQUEROR 3C 2002 £2,650**

Latest carbon tubed version of OL's penultimate arm is a breathtakingly capable device with a dizzyingly fast and neutral sound.

**TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600**

Stunning build, exquisite design and surely the most naturally musical and lucid sound around makes this a remarkable pickup arm.

**CARTRIDGES****AUDIO TECHNICA AT-110E**

1984 £29

Great starter cartridge that's refined, detailed and musical beyond its price.

**ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE**

2007 £60/£120

The first new budget MM designs for many years, Ortofon's 2M Red and Blue are high resolution designs that are an engaging listen

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

One of the best MMs going, with sweet and extended treble and punchy, muscular bass.

**ORTOFON SAMBA/SALSA**

2006 £150/£200

Fine cartridges that offer that MC magic at an affordable price. Samba is more dynamic and forward, Salsa rather smoother but both are great performers and track well.

**DENON DL103R 2006 £200**

Awkward to get working properly with a poor mounting arrangement, yet it rewards with a musical performance that makes similar priced cartridges sound cold.

**DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £250**

A distant descendent of the classic Ultimo 10X, this has warmth and sweetness in spades, allied to a punchy bass. Beats G1042 comfortably.

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-OC9MLII**

2007 £399

New and improved stylus and cantilever plus serious price reduction equals stunning dynamics and clarity. A real bargain

**ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350**

Staggeringly good high-end MM that uses a stylus from the MC Jubilee and easily rivals similarly-priced MCs

**DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395**

The best modern budget MC combines deliciously sweet sound with fantastic get-up-and-go. High output version works a treat with valve phono stages too.

**LYRA DORIAN 2007 £495**

Incise and musical, the Dorian is one of the most revealing cartridges at the price.

**ORTOFON KONTRA' B1999 £720**

Surprisingly articulate performer by Ortofon standards. All the brand's usual polish and detail allied to real vim. Loves making music!

**ORTOFON RONDO****BRONZE 2005 £500**

Excellent mid-price moving coil with real rhythmic alacrity and a decent deal of finesse.

**ZYX R-100H 2005 £625**

Exceptionally tight sounding and detailed cartridge with the musical skills to match, this is up with the very best at the price, with a presentation all of its own.

**BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650**

Crisp, clean and detailed MC; particularly impressive at both ends of the frequency spectrum

**TRANSFIGURATION AXIA**

2007 £890

Musically adept and highly resolute cartridge with impressive tracking abilities. Top end lift means careful matching required, however.

**ORTOFON KONTRA" C2004 £1,000**

The most secure tracking MC we've heard; its super clean, fast, detailed and neutral sonics make it a brilliant partner to warmer sounding turntables.

**ORTOFON MC WINDFELD 2008 £1,799**

Ortofon's new flagship MC is a sophisticated and alluring performer that takes the vinyl experience to a new level.

**KOETSU RED K SIGNATURE**

2007 £2,399

The new K Signature adds a hefty dose of insight and finesse to the already impressive Red and the results are fabulous

**DIGITAL DISC PLAYERS****CAMBRIDGE AUDIO****640C V2 2006 £250**

Superb entry level CD player; crisp, composed, musical sound plus fine build and ergonomics.

**REGA APOLLO 2006 £498**

Highly rhythmic and beguiling performer, although lacks some warmth of tone. Superb ergonomics and design

**RUSS ANDREWS****DAC-1 USB 2007 £599**

Not just a USB gadget, but a truly accomplished upgrade DAC that makes the best of CDs, MP3s and digital radio

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO****640H 2005 £599.95**

Fine sonics and decent build make this our favourite affordable HD music server.

**MARANTZ SA7001KI SIG2006 £600**

Brilliant CD/2ch SACD spinner with a big, sweet, analogue-like sound - CD is totally competitive at the price with the best dedicated machines..

**AUDIOLAB 8000CD 2006 £450**

Ultra clean and transparent sound with great detail retrieval; just a tad bright and analytical for some, though.

**SHANLING CDT-80 2005 £650**

Very impressive mid-price machine with a big, sumptuous, expansive sound - better still when tubes are changed.

**CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C 2006 £800**

Well built CD player with a silky, yet detailed sound and a whole host of useful facilities. Excellent value for money.

**NAIM CD5i 2008 £895**

Naim's new italic 'i' variant improves even further on the original mid-price classic, offering super tight, grippy and musical sound.

**EASTERN ELECTRIC****MINIMAX CD 2005 £925**

Highly accomplished tube-equipped all rounder with a clean, open and musically lucid sound; superb value.

**CYRUS CD8 SE 2008 £1,200**

New Servo Evolution mech makes this the most musically engaging machine at the price, with super smooth tonality to boot. Optional PSX-R adds bass and dimensionality.

**BENCHMARK DAC-1 USB 2007 £999**

Pro-biased DAC with useful range of inputs and impressive headphone outputs, too. Save £250 if you don't need the USB-equipped version.

**ELECTROCOMPANIE****PC-1 2008 £1,034**

Tidy and polished-sounding CD spinner with strong bass and an assured sense of confidence

**EXPOSURE 3010 2003 £1,200**

One of the most 'analogue' CD players, second only to the Shanling. Wonderfully beguiling-balance leaves you looking for the tube output stage.

**STELLO CD-T100/DA100 SIG 2008 £1,270**

Fine top loading transport linked via i2s to an excellent upsampling DAC. Confident, detailed, explicit and architectural sound but smooth too.

**REGA SATURN 2007 £1,298**

Wacky looks surround a highly accomplished CD spinner that marries a smooth midband to excellent bass grip.

**EDGAR CD-1 2007 £1,350**

Quirky Slovakian CD spinner with all-valve output and a truly spine-tingling performance.

**RAYSONIC CD128 2007 £1,599**

Spaceship styling and fine build around a highly competent mid-priced CD spinner means a feast for the senses.

**CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000**

Bespoke architecture gives a truly uniquely musical sound that's beguilingly musical in nature, with dizzying incision and grip.

**SHANLING SCD-T2000 2007 £2,250**

Updated version of original SCD-T200C standardises upgrades optional on the older model and adds a few more tweaks for good measure. The result is a stylish player that works superbly with both CD and SACD

**TUBE TECHNOLOGY FUSION 64 2006 £2,200**

Unique digital and analogue audio engineering makes for an exceptional CD player that, on some programme material, is peerless.

**NORTH STAR MODEL 192 TRANSPORT/EXTREMO DAC 2006 £2,918**

Superbly finessed and loquacious sound allied to excellent build and finish make for a brilliant value high end buy.

**ELECTROCOMPANIE EMC-IUP 2003 £3,450**

Quirky yet extremely capable high end upsampling CD spinner, with a musical fluency that beguiles more than it impresses.

**ACCUSTIC ARTS CDP1MK2 2007 £3,985**

Styling not to everyone's taste but build quality is impeccable and the performance is stunningly musical.

**NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4,950**

A fine high end machine, but add an XPS2 and it becomes one of the most characteristically engaging 16bit machines we've ever heard. Plays music with such passion!

**NAIM CDS3 2003 £7,050**

The most polished Naim CD to date; tremendously capable and musical, but lacks the Rottweiler quality of the cheaper CDX2-XPS2.

**ACCUSTIC ARTS DRIVE 1 MK2/TUBE DAC 2 2007 £7,980**

Superbly built high end CD transport and DAC combo that shows just what the format can be capable of. Very tangible, musical sound with wonderful dynamics and glistening harmonics. Only curious styling and clunky build detract from its brilliance!

**ESOTERIC X-01 2005 £8,995**

Breathtaking feat of digital audio engineering, and surely the best sounding combination CD/SACD spinner money can buy.

**LINN KLIMAX DS 2007 £9,600**

Landmark network music player, offering brilliant sonics at up to 24/96 resolution from hard disk/NAS. Expensive, but you can hear why...

**NAIM CD555/555PS 2006 £14,000**

Very probably the best CD player yet made - certainly the most expensive; a digital tour de force.

**DIGITAL RECORDERS****SONY RCD-W3 2002 £250**

Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for non-sense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

**NAIM HDX 2009 £4,405**

Interesting one-box network enabled hard disk music system gives superb sonics together with impressive ease of use.

**PHONO STAGES****CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640P £99**

Excellent entry level design that raises the bar for budget phono stages. Crisp, smooth yet brightly lit sound on both MM and MC that's a vast improvement on most budget inboard designs.

**PROJECT PHONOBOX LE2004 £99**

Great little box that improves on most bundled phono stages found in budget integrated amplifiers, adding detail and definition and a measure of smoothness too.

**TRICHORD DINO 2002 £299**

Great all rounder with switchable MM/MC. Fast, fluid and smooth like no others at the price.

**JOLIDA JD9 2006 £400**

Hybrid tube/solid state phono stage with a good range of adjustability. Excellent value for money and a fine, dynamic sound.

**GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V 2004 £460**

Wonderfully warm, open and musical nature makes this an essential audition for those wanting a top value mid-price phono stage.

**PURESOUND P10 2007 £400**

Guy Sargeant's new MM phono stage is an absolute belter. Simple but very effective.

**AQVOX PHONO 2 CI 2006 £598**

Brilliantly versatile yet affordable phonostage with a beguiling sound, but careful matching essential. Balanced operation of real benefit.

**ICON AUDIO PSI.2 2007 £599**

Excellent value valve phono stage with good range of facilities and fine imaging abilities.

**A.N.T. AUDIO KORA 3T LTD 2008 £775**

Exceptionally musical and natural sounding all discrete transistor phono stage, with highly lucid, valve-like presentation.

**ANATEK MCI 2007 £850**

Spectacularly good MC phono stage that offers serious insight underpinned by powerful and tuneful bass.

**LINN LINTO 2000 £900**

A musical and incisive performer, with more speed than the Delphini at the expense of detail and tonal colour.

**QUAD QC24P 2007 £995**

Dynamic performer that can be used on its own as a complete phono-level preamp.

**EASTERN ELECTRIC MINIMAX PHONO 2006 £1,099**

Highly capable valve phono stage with a relaxed yet involving demeanour. More beguiling than rival transistor designs, but sacrifices little in detail terms.

**TRICHORD DIABLO + NCPSU 2006 £1,198**

Highly musical performer, this is one of the best phonostages at or near the price, but lacks the polish of the rival Whest.

**ICON AUDIO PS3 2008 £995**

One of the very best valve phono preamplifier's we've heard, with an expansive, engaging and organic sound that makes vinyl a joy to listen to.

**AMPLIFIERS****AUDIOLAB 8000S 2006 £400**

In other life, this sold for three times the price, making it a stand-out bargain now. Very clean, powerful and tidy sound but not the world's most beguiling.

**ICON AUDIO STEREO 25 2008 £500**

Cracking entry-level valve integrated, with a warm and engaging sound. Limited power so needs careful partnering, though.

**ROTEL RA-06 2008 £550**

Vivacious sounding device that, whilst lacking the finer musical points, wears its heart on its sleeve and has plenty of power to match.

**NAIM NAIT 5i 2007 £725**

The italic 'i' version remains one of the most musically competent and dynamically engaging integrations at the price.

**CAMBRIDGE 840A V2 2007 £750**

Version 2 addresses version 1's weaknesses to turn in a mightily accomplished performance, offering power, finesse and detail.

**JUNGSON JA-88D 2006 £899**

Stunning value for money Class A monster integrated; extreme power and clarity at a puzzlingly low price.

**SUGDEN A21A S2 2007 £1,299**

More power and greater transparency improve even further on the already impressive A21a to give truly impressive results

**NAIM NAIT XS 2009 £1,250**

With much of the sound of the Supernait at half the price, this is powerful, articulate and smooth beyond class expectations.

**SHANLING STP-80 2007 £1,199**

Well built and surprisingly muscular valve integrated. Engagingly musical.

**CREEK DESTINY AMPLIFIER 2006 £1,200**

Superb build, useful power plus a deep full bodied sound make this an excellent mid-price buy.

**ELECTROCOMPANIET****PI-2 2008 £1,430**

Powerful integrated with seriously solid bass and impressive dynamic abilities. Superbly musical.

**SUGDEN A21A S2 2008 £1,469**

Crystalline clarity, dizzying speed and forensic detailing makes this seminal design the most musical at the price, but power limited so needs sensitive speakers.

**ANATEK A50R 2007 £1,600**

Simple integrated amplifier with spectacular bass grip and effortless dynamics.

**UNISON RESEARCH S62002 £1,625**

Tremendously musical and lithe sound with real finesse and subtlety too. Very slightly upper mid forward encourages careful partnering with ancillaries (Revolver R45s are ideal), but overall fantastic value for money.

**MOON i-3RS 2008 £1,890**

Grippy and clean performer with fine sound-staging and build quality.

**COPLAND CSA29 2006 £1,998**

Unfailingly svelte, sophisticated and smooth - both to listen to and look at - this is a truly desirable high end integrated.

**NAIM SUPERNAIT 2007 £2,475**

Technological and sonic *tour de force* from Naim that combines impressive functionality and connectivity with superb sound quality.

**VINCENT SA-TI/SP-T100 2006 £2,300**

Impressively built and stylish pre/power combo that take any kind of music and make the best of it

**LUXMAN L-550A 2007 £2,800**

Monster Class A integrated with powerful and revealing sound and a whole host of useful features, including a highly competent MM/MC phono stage

**AUDIO RESEARCH VS155 2003 £2,895**

The Naim NAP250's tubular alter ego; oodles of power allied to a strong bass and smooth open midband makes this a brilliant all round amplifier. Lacks the subtlety and finesse of the low powered single-ended brigade but makes up for it with sheer brio.

**LEEMA TUCANA 2007 £2,995**

Leema's success story continues with this integrated amp that combines power, detail and great musicality in a solidly built package

**SUGDEN IA4 2007 £3,650**

Goody amount of Class A power, icy clarity and a breathtakingly fast, musical sound make this one of the very best super-integrated.

**AV AMPLIFIERS****YAMAHA DSP-AX861SE2007 £700**

Highly capable A/V amplifier with mind-boggling array of surround sound options. Even has a decent MM phono stage!

**ARCAM AVR350 2006 £1,500**

Superbly accomplished do-it-all AV receiver package, with an uncommonly, warm, natural and musical sound. A winner goes from strength to strength.

**DENON AVR-4308 2007 £2,000**

Huge behemoth festooned with facilities and sockets, plus two remotes! Fortunately it's a brilliantly flexible and powerful performer.

**NAIM AV2/NAP 150/NAPV 175 2002 £4,190**

Brilliant audiophile multichannel pre-power amplifier combo; not as good with music as a two-channel Naim set-up at the same price, obviously, but surprisingly close. Elegant control layout plus a strong, clean and brilliantly engaging sound make this a serious crossover product. Ultimately lacks power compared to similarly priced Arcam gear, but is more musically involving.

**HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS****CHANNEL ISLANDS VHP-1/VAC-1 £390**

A truly exceptional headphone output stage; the best at the price and an essential audition.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CAN V8 2008 £350**

Open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop and the ability to drive anything to very high levels makes this a great partner for most mid-to-high end headphones.

**SUGDEN HEADMASTER 2003 £600**

Unusual combined preamplifier and headphone amplifier, this boasts a surprisingly smooth and open sound.

**PREAMPLIFIERS****CREEK OBH-12 2000 £220**

Brilliant value budget passive, giving little away in sonics to far more expensive designs. Connectivity and build aren't great, but what do you expect at this price?

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003 £1,500**

Effective pre with switchable gain via a transformer, and balanced operation. Open and incisive sound, yet makes most active rivals sound edgy by comparison. Silver version at the twice the price adds transparency.

**MODWRIGHT SWL9.0SE £2,000**

Captivating sound quality that will transform your system. Build quality is equally impressive and value top-notch. Highly recommended

**NUFORCE P-9 2007 £2,200**

Impressive two box preamp with superb resolution and an engaging sound.

**MELODY PURE BLACK 101D 2007 £3,295**

One of the best preamplifiers we have ever heard. Takes the clarity and openness we expect from valves and adds a staggering level of grip and detail. Stunning.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO 2009 £7,900**

Staggeringly expensive, but one listen explains why. Wonderfully exuberant sound that can only come from a top quality tube design.

**POWER AMPLIFIERS****ROKSAN KANDY LIII 2008 £600**

Fine budget power amp that punches well above its weight.

**QUAD 909 2001 £900**

The latest current-dumper has a smooth and expansive character with enough wallop to drive most loads. Not the most musical, but super value all the same. Lovely build, finish and Quad's legendary service are nice.

**NAIM NAP150 2002 £795**

Driven by a decent source and a NAC112, this gives highly enjoyable results - providing you like the Naim sound! Taut, fast and feisty despite its relative lack of power.

**SUGDEN MUSIC MASTER 2003 £1,300**

Quintessential Class A Sugden sound is not warm as many expect, but extremely neutral and open with real tonal colour. Superb when partnered with efficient loudspeakers like Revolver R45s, but many will find it underpowered

**NUFORCE REFERENCE 9SE V2 2006 £1,750**

Brilliant value for money monoblocks with massive power and super-clean, three dimensional sound.



**ROTEL RB1092** 2007 £1,595

Hugely powerful digital amp with neutral midrange and a wonderfully spacious treble

**CHANNEL ISLANDS AUDIO D100** 2005 £1,595

Clean and musical Class D monoblock power amplifiers in a neat, small package.

**SILK GLOWMASTER KT88** 2007 £1,699

KT88 based power amplifier offers dramatic clarity and excellent bass lift.

**ICON AUDIO MB845** 2009 £2,499

Creamy and seductive yet blisteringly fast and musically lucid, this pair of 845 tube monoblocks is staggering value for money.

**QUAD II-40** 2005 £3,230

Modern tube monoblock power amplifiers with plenty of power, liquid and open mid-band and spacious, airy treble. Explicit, engaging sound, but not as euphonic as some.

**GRAAF GM20 OTL** 2003 £3,300

Awesome output transformer-less valve power amp gives dazzling speed and incision, with an ethereal soundstaging and delicious filigree detail. Tremendous punch belies its humble 20W power rating. Factor in one of the most exquisite finishes this side of an Aston Martin and it's very hard to say no...

**ELECTROCOMPANET NEMO** 2009 £4,450 (EACH)

Monoblock power amplifier with breathtakingly open and fast sound, and apparently infinite reserves of power. Match with a smooth source for big audio dynamite!

**QUAD II-80** 2005 £6,000

Quad's best ever power amplifier, this is a dramatic performer with a silky but dark tonality, blistering dynamics, serious power and a compellingly musical sound. They don't come much better than these...

**LOUDSPEAKERS****ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I** 2007 £199

Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

**B&W 686** 2007 £279

B&W's new baby standmounters offer a sophisticated and mature performance that belies both their dimensions and price tag.

**USHER S-520** 2006 £320

Astonishingly capable budget standmounters that offer detail and dynamics well beyond their price and dimensions

**MORDAUNT SHORT AVANT 9141** 2007 £300

Another pair of storming budget floorstanders from Mordaunt Short. Detailed, punchy and crisp.

**REVOLVER RW16** 2004 £400

Outstanding standmounter with tonal accuracy and speed that totally belies its price; good sensitivity for a small box makes it great with valve amps too. A budget audiophile classic.

**LEEMA XERO** 2007 £650

Superb mini-monitors that belie their modest price tag with a bold and finessed performance

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEI CLASSIC** £845

Brilliantly successful remake of an iconic design; not flawless, but surely one of the most musical loudspeakers ever made.

**SPENDOR S3/5E** 2004 £950

A natural successor to the BBC LS3/5a, whose impressive neutrality, imaging and evenhandedness makes this a superior, if less charismatic, loudspeaker.

**WHARFEDALE OPUS 2-MH** 2007 £999

Large standmounters with impressive mid-range dome and fine integration across the frequency range.

**RRR FS100** 2007 £1,055

Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.

**YAMAHA SOAVO 2** 2007 £1,200

Just as capable as their floorstanding brethren, the Soavo 2s have an assured sense of sophistication and poise.

**REVOLVER RW451** 2006 £1,199

Very musical floorstander that's clear, concise and truthful, whilst being exceptionally amplifier friendly - a dreamboat for valves.

**ONE THING AUDIO ESL57** 2007 £1,450

One Thing Audio's modifications keep the good old ESL57 at the very top of the game.

**KIBRI NAIMA** 2007 £1,550

Unusual-looking omnidirectional loudspeakers with an absolutely captivating performance. Huge soundstage and bags of clarity - brilliant!

**GURU QM-10P** 2007 £1,595

Quirky but adorable standmounters that are way off the pace in respect of detail and power, but amazingly capable at playing a tune and pulling you in to the music.

**MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE** 2008 £1,599

Brilliant entry level electrostatics, giving a taste of loudspeaker esoterica for the price of most moving coil boxes. Tremendous clarity, evenness and delicacy, although not the world's most powerful sound.

**USHER BE-718** 2007 £1,600

Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is subtle, smooth and emotive.

**SPENDOR S8E** £1,895

Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent all rounder.

**MONITOR AUDIO GS60** £2,000

Brilliant modern rock loudspeaker with a fantastically lithe and engaging sound, but partner carefully with a warm front end.

**YAMAHA SOAVO I** 2006 £2,000

Musical and transparent floorstanders with impressive dynamics and cohesion. Fine build and finish.

**ISOPHON GALILEO** 2007 £2,100

Big standmounters that really grip the music and offer quite startling dynamics and grip.

**MONITOR AUDIO PL100** 2008 £2,300

The MA boys pull out all the stops for their flagship 'Platinum' series standmounter with stunning results.

**PMC OB11** 2008 £2,950

Cleverly updated floorstanders give scale and solidity in slim and well finished package.

**KEF iQ30** 2009 £330

Beautifully built, classily styled standmounters with exceptional image projection and a very clean, detailed sound.

**MOWGAN AUDIO MABON** 2007 £3,995

Massively capable loudspeakers that offer dynamics, scale and clarity in an elegantly simple package. Wide range of finishes, too.

**B&O BEOLAB 9** 2007 £5000

Technically impressive and visually striking loudspeakers with sound quality that more than matches their looks.

**ARS AURE5 MI** 2006 £5,995

Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful, assured and even-handed musical performance makes these an essential high end audition.

**QUAD ESL-2905** 2006 £5,995

The old 989 with all the bugs taken out, this gives a brilliantly neutral and open sound like only a top electrostatic can; still not a natural rock loudspeaker, though.

**REVOLVER CYGNIS** 2006 £5,999

Revolver pull out all the stops and show what they can do with this magnificent flagship loudspeaker. A superb monitor that is like a mini B&W 801D in many ways.

**B&W 801D** 2006 £10,500

In many respects, the ultimate studio monitor; dazzling clarity and speed with commanding scale and dynamics.



**ISOPHON CASSIANO 2007 £12,900**

Drive units featuring exotic materials allied to superlative build quality result in an immensely capable loudspeaker. Not an easy load to drive, however.

**ACCESSORIES****MONITOR AUDIO IDECK2006 £200**

Fine design, impressive flexibility and a lucidly musical sound make the iDeck the current iPod dock champion.

**ISOTEK GII VISION 2006 £550**

A genuinely effective and surprisingly cost effective upgrade, but results could vary so a home dem of the power conditioner is recommended.

**TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM****2003 £800**

Classy ribbon supertweeter with flexible level settings and cool styling - you'll be amazed at the difference it makes, especially with Quad electrostatics.

**HEADPHONES****SENNHEISER MX-550 2005 £19**

Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

**SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29**

Cracking pair of lightweight open back cans ideal for personals, but good enough for real hi-fi use. Superb build allied to a smooth and engaging performance make them the spiritual successor to the HD400s.

**GOLDRING DR150 2006 £70**

Excellent build and fine sound makes these budget cans superlative value for money.

**SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199**

The company's best real-world cans to date. Open and smooth with plenty of detail. Brightly lit midband makes them an ideal partner for a valve headphone amp.

**SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250**

Not the best headphone in the world, but a superb all round reference all the same. Very crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and fine comfort makes all most people will ever want. Cable upgrade yields great results.

**STAX SR-007T OMEGA****II/SRM-007T 2006 £2,890**

Simply the best headphones we've ever heard at any price, these sweetly translucent electrostatic ear-speakers are like no other headphone, or loudspeaker for that matter...

**INTERCONNECTS****TECHLINK WIRES XS 2007 £20**

Highly accomplished interconnects at an absurdly low price. Stunning value for money.

**WIREWORLD OASIS 5 2003 £99/M**

Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

**CHORD COMPANY****CHAMELEON 2 £90/M**

One of our favourites, these are musical performers with a smooth yet open sound.

**DNM RESON 2002 £40/M**

Neutral and transparent - a steal!

**VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST****2004 £260/0.6M**

Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.

**TCI CONSTRICTOR 13A-6 BLOCK 2003 £120**

Top quality 'affordable' mains outlet block, with fine build and good sonics. Well worth the extra over standard high street specials, which sound coarse and two-dimensional by comparison.

**MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE****2008 £375**

Currently our favourite 'affordable high end' interconnects, with a deliciously smooth, open and subtle sound without a hint of edge or grain. Superb value, inasuch as it's as good as some designs at three times the price.

**TUNERS****DENON TU-1500AE 2006 £120**

Excellent entry level analogue tuner; slick sonics and fine feature count makes it a bargain.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T 2005 £250**

Sweet sounding digital/analogue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.

**MARANTZ ST-7001 2006 £299**

Super performance on FM coupled with its ability to get the most from DAB broadcasts makes this the best affordable tuner.

**YAMAHA TX-761 2007 £350**

Sets the standard for FM performance at the price and is no slouch on DAB either.

**ARCAM FMJ T32 2009 £550**

The world's first DAB+ hi-fi tuner, and it also happens to be the best DAB/FM hybrid we've heard to date. A brilliant product that deserves to succeed.

**CREEK CLASSIC TUNER 2006 £550**

No tuner offers better sound per pound; wonderfully three dimensional and smooth from bottom to top.

**MYRYAD MXT-2000 2005 £800**

Truly sumptuous sound and excellent build is all most will ever need in a tuner; superb.

**MAGNUM DYNALAB****MD-100T 2006 £1,895**

One of the best ways to hear FM that we know; superbly open and musical sound in a quirky but characterful package.

**SYSTEMS****YAMAHA CRX-M170 2007 £200**

One heck of a lot of quality performance on DAB, CD and FM for £200! Optional matching £120 NX-E300 loudspeakers aren't too shabby either.

**TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £329**

Nicely built and styled mini with fine performance on all sources that even plays DVDs!

**NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429**

Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system that shows just what a compact design can achieve.

**ARCAM SOLO MINI 2008 £650**

Half the size and two-thirds the price of a full-sized Solo, the Mini gives very little away in terms of performance to its bigger brother.

**ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249**

Excellent all-in-one system, with a warm, smooth and balanced sound to match the features and style.

**LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250**

Neat update of the original and best one-box stereo system; superbly musical sound beats equivalently priced separates.

**MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500**

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**WIN A SUPERB  
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MODULAR ONE  
TURNTABLE  
WORTH £850!**

**T**his month, we're delighted to give away Isokinetik's superb Modular One (M1-Ref-251-CW) turntable. The prize's spec includes a reference 25mm acrylic platter, ISO 251-CW Cardas golden section litz wired tonearm with ISOend stainless steel end stub and ISOweight asymmetric counterweight. Supplied complete with an S1 platform, it normally retails for £849.99. Here's what Neville Roberts said when he reviewed a Modular One in the January 2010 issue of *Hi-Fi World* magazine...

"The first in what will be a series of Isokinetik turntables, it can be supplied as an entry-level unit which can then be upgraded by the user in stages, as funds allow. The deck can be supplied with either a Jelco or Rega arm; the ISO251C tonearm used here is the RB251 upgraded with the ISOtone wiring, incorporating Cardas golden section Litz wire, ISOweight asymmetric counter-

weight and ISOend stainless steel end stub. The turntable is designed as a fully customisable, upgradable base on which to build according to the user's personal taste, and pocket. The plinth is CNC machined from highly polished billet acrylic, giving it a great finish. The feet are machined from Delrin and have dense sorbothane anti vibration pads. The bearing assembly is made of phosphor-bronze and incorporates a ceramic ball. This assembly is fitted to an aluminium and ground-steel sub-platter which is precision engineered to exacting tolerances with 0.001mm concentricity between the axle and hub. A high quality asynchronous motor spins the platter at either 33rpm or 45rpm. The basic model is supplied with a 12mm diamond polished acrylic platter. Upgrades to this include a 25mm thick acrylic platter, as well as platters manufactured from Delrin or ply materials, together with a number of colour options. The whole unit looks impressive; everything has been manufactured and finished to a high standard. Although the style is simple and uncomplicated, it looks very modern

and elegant.

Baroque music had a real openness and transparency – breathtakingly realistic. Instrument positioning was excellent, both side to side and front to back. The trumpets in the Tchaikovsky symphony were extremely clear and open, yet strident as indeed they should be. The lower middle range was well controlled and tight. Moving down in frequency, the bass drums were punchy with great grip and also very well extended. With a CBS recording of Simon and Garfunkel the Modular One did an excellent job. The usually muffled midrange and limp bass were cleaned up and the bass was brought to life in a way I had not heard before. Bass was very tightly controlled and drums packed a real punch. The Modular One is a great looking turntable and its performance reflects the elegant and refined styling. Careful thought has been given to a product that can be upgraded easily by the user as funds permit. A unit of this quality can only be made by people who take pride in their work, as well as having professional skills. I'd say it's a very competitive product at the price indeed."

To win this superb turntable package, all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries by 31st January 2010 to: **February Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF.**

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- ONLY ONE ENTRY PER HOUSEHOLD
- MULTIPLE ENTRIES WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY DISQUALIFIED
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## QUESTIONS

- [1] What turntable is offered as a prize this month?**  
 [a] Amstrad TP12  
 [b] Pioneer PL12D  
 [c] Garrard SP25/6  
 [d] Isokinetik Modular One
- [2] What type of tonearm is included?**  
 [a] Acos Lustre  
 [b] Linn Ittok  
 [c] Dynavector DV505  
 [d] Isokinetik ISO 251-CW
- [3] Who reviewed the deck in the January 2010 issue?**  
 [a] Channa Vithana  
 [b] Patrick Cleasby  
 [c] Rafael Todes  
 [d] Neville Roberts
- [4] What is the turntable's ball made from?**  
 [a] plastic  
 [b] ceramic  
 [c] metal  
 [d] putty

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 Hi-Fi World Magazine  
 Unit G4 Argo House  
 The Park Business Centre  
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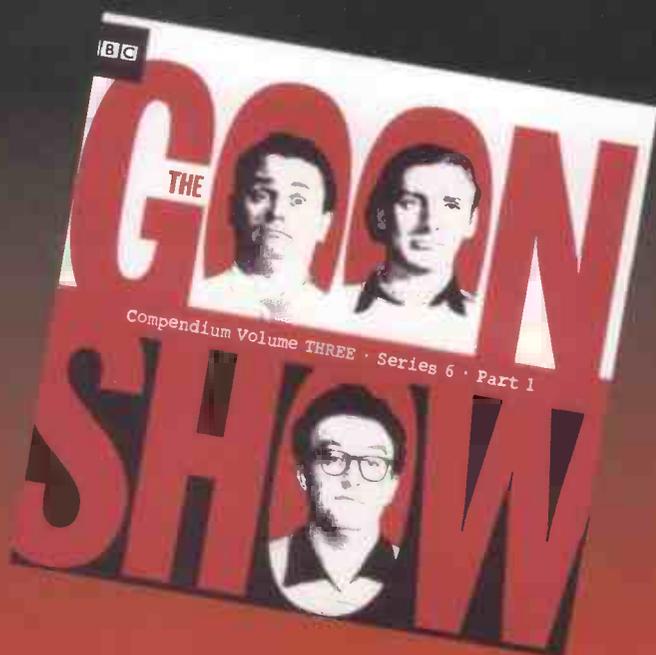
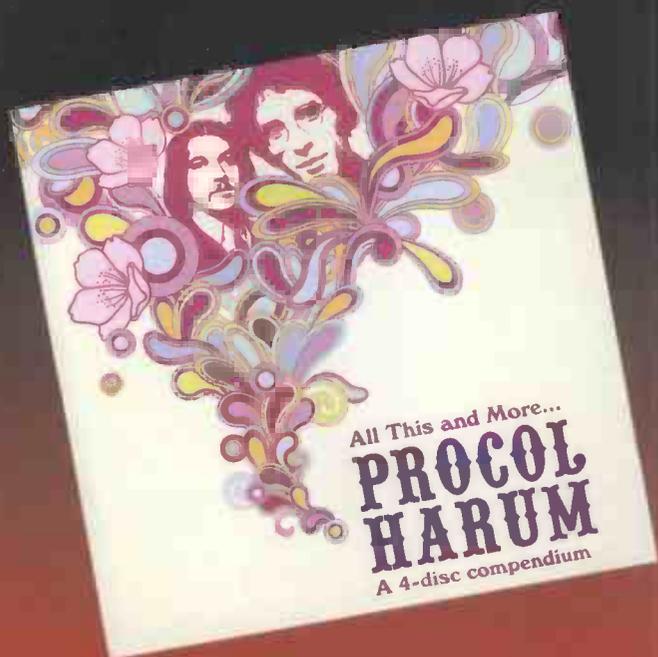
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**PROCOL HARUM**  
*All This and More*  
**Salvo**

Released as a four-disc group retrospective, this new box set features three CDs and a DVD, and is interesting because over half of the material features rare live cuts including Golders Green in 1974 and Isle of Wight in 1970. The DVD continues the live works including material from Danish TV in 1974. Featured within the packaging is an interesting 72-page booklet that gives background information on the included music plus a family tree of the various incarnations of the band. Rob Keyloch of Church Walk Sound Studio did much of the preparatory work in the creation of this box set and went into the project with a belief in how these things should be done. "You must go back to the source! It's a common mistake to just accept the given or available, processed, production masters and reprint them with a bit of noise reduction and volume levelling", he told *Hi-Fi World*.

Most of the included tracks were derived from the major studios of the day: Air, Pye, Criteria, Rampart and The Record Plant. "There were, of course, also a few 7-inch plastic reels that apparently had been in (lead singer) Mr Brooker's barn for

some time, these were the sort of reels where you would find rough mixes and backing tracks, part of the writing/recording process." The live sources were all high quality mixes of gigs from the early seventies. The only real trick, to maintain high sound quality, was to catch tape azimuth changes present on the original master tapes from the original reel-to-reel tape recorder, "...it could vary wildly from studio to studio and from day to day in the same studio." The result is a superb set of recordings that will put a smile the face of any Procol Harum fan.

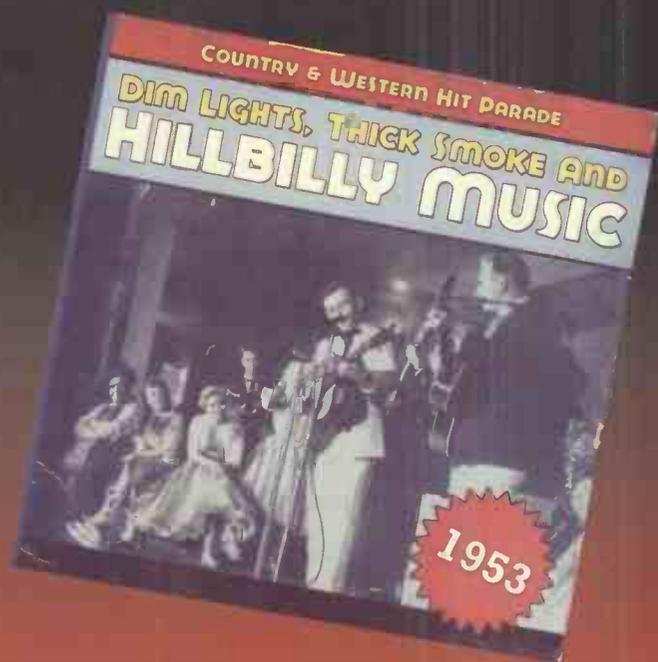
**THE GOONS**  
*Series 5 (Part 2) & Series 6 (Part 1)*  
**BBC Audiobooks**

Featuring Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers and Harry Secombe (plus a cast of additional twits), the long running Goons programmes not only set new standards in comedy - breaking new ground in writing, presentation and sound effects - but also influenced several major talents, most notably the Monty Python team.

This boxed series should not be confused with the other long-term Goons reissue project from BBC Worldwide under the Radio Collection imprint, which features shows under single CD volumes.

These boxes, which here feature seven CDs within each box, are meticulously researched and superbly produced under the guidance of Ted Kendall, one of - if not the - best engineers when it comes to remastering and reissuing old radio shows. Each Goon show is remastered from scratch using the earliest source in each case, often original transcription discs/acetates and third party master tapes, pieced together using the missing bits which were taken out by the censors during the fifties and sixties or were purposely trimmed because of transcription reasons.

In addition, you also get plenty of extras. The Series 5 box includes twelve episodes plus a previously unheard version of 'The Dreaded Batter Pudding Hurler (Of Bexhill-On-Sea)' and four limited edition postcards. The first volume in Series 6 includes thirteen episodes plus a rare chance to hear Peter Sellers appearing in 'The Listening Room' on the BBC's Light Programme in which he spoofs a very serious broadcast of the time called, 'The Critics'. Ten Kendall should be applauded for tracking down the early source material as the original master tapes of the unedited shows no longer exist. The result is an absolute joy to behold, and chuckle-friendly!



## GENESIS Live 1973-2007 & The Movie Box 1981-2007 Virgin Records

The massive reissue programme of Genesis studio albums has finally moved towards their live work. The 'Live' box features 11-discs (eight CDs and three DVDs that include 5.1 surround sound mixes). The set includes: 'Live' from 1973, the only official live album with Peter Gabriel, plus five bonus tracks, from 'The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway', recorded at the Shrine Auditorium, Los Angeles on January 24, 1975 and a 5.1 mix; 'Seconds Out' (1977) plus a 5.1 mix; 'Three Sides Live' (1982); a resequenced 'The Way We Walk', that was originally sold as 'Vol 1: The Shorts' and 'Vol 2: The Longs'. The new disc adds extra dialogue. The real bonus is 'Live At The Rainbow' (1973), first seen in the 'Archive 1' box set but expanded here with four extra tracks – although some of the band chatter is missing. The only real disappointment is no complete live version of 'Lamb Lies Down On Broadway'. As for the sound quality? Superb!

The 'Movie' box features four shows plus bonus features. 'Three Sides Live' (1982), the 'Mama Tour' (1984) (that includes 'The Making Of Mama' documentary) plus 'VH1:

Behind The Music', all appear for the first time. You also get 'Live At Wembley Stadium' plus 'The Way We Walk – Live in Concert'. Some fans may already have some of these DVDs but, for a box set such as this, they had to be included. On that basis, it's a pity that 'When In Rome' was not included. There is a 'reserved' slot available however, if want your individual copy to be part of the box set.

All in all, a fitting way to finish an epic re-release series. Most importantly, however, is the excellent mastering by Nick Davis.

## DIM LIGHTS, THICK SMOKE AND HILLBILLY MUSIC Various Bear Family

The only review this month that is not a box set, is still a collection of sorts. A series of five individual CDs, spanning 1951-1955, each package features between twenty-six to twenty-nine tracks per CD. Covering the Country & Western charts from the post-war period, this is a fascinating series that follows up an earlier release batch that concentrated upon 1945-1950. Each CD is beautifully formed. Effectively a mini-hardback book, each arrives with a 72-page booklet set within. The first few pages of each examines

the year in question in broad terms, setting that year in context with its neighbours. Then a track-by-track analysis is offered accompanied by rare photographs of posters, handbills and record labels.

The range of material on these CDs is a wonder to behold. For, in addition to the more well known songs from the likes of Slim Whitman ('Rose Marie'), Tex Ritter ('High Noon Do Not Forsake Me') and Hank Williams ('Your Cheatin' Heart'), you also get Zeb Turner With String Band ('Chew Tobacco Rag'), Ferlin Husky ('I Feel Better All Over More than Anywheres Else') and Curly Williams ('Half As Much'). These obscurities – even Columbia's powerful A&R man Mitch Miller didn't know who Curly Williams was, even though Williams was on the Columbia label at the time and had been for seven years – adds spice to a series that brings a range of welcome surprises such as a very thin Bill Haley wearing a cowboy hat and singing 'Rocket '88' (he was a championship yodeller in his spare time, apparently) and Link Davis ('Big Mamou') who was running a mixed race band in 1952. Well mastered, up to Bear Family's high standards, this is a charming and attractive CD series and educational to boot.

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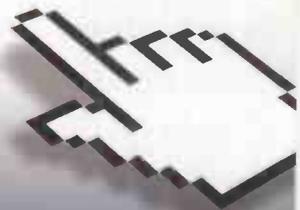
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"it was heartbreaking to box up my great sounding old system and move it to my new house..."



## David Price

**A**s I write this, it's almost six years ago to the day that I last moved home. As is usually the case with such ventures, it was a fraught and stressful time, but one that was aggravated somewhat by the last minute intervention of Mother Nature...

Now, every time I size up a potential new abode (which isn't often, thankfully), I naturally pay particular attention to the acoustics. Incredulous estate agents, landlords and tenants have all, through the ages, looked on in amazement as I've started clapping in the middle of their front rooms. This was of course not to show my appreciation of the domicile I was viewing, but rather size up dreaded room resonances. We all know what a clap sounds like, so you duly bring your hands together in an excited way and listen to the decay.

I vividly remember moving into my North Somerset house on the very first day of 2004. Six hours later, I was in my newly delivered bed with a raging fever and flu. Worse still, on the fourth day of the new year, I was due to catch a plane to Las Vegas to experience the wonder of CES - the world's annual Consumer Electronics Show. For three days, I coughed, sneezed, shivered and sweated in bed, wondering if I was ever going to get there. As luck would have it, my fever just about dropped in time, and so - looking and feeling like the star of George A Romero's 'Dawn of the Dead' - I wheezed and sneezed my way to the airport.

It was a long flight out to Vegas, made easier by Lemsip Max and my desperate need for sleep. Still slightly delirious, as my head bobbed against my inflatable aeroplane travel pillow en route, all I could think about was "how is my new house going to

sound"? You see, I'd not had the chance to set up my system, and even if I had, my sinuses were such that I'd never be able to hear it. Vegas was great; I duly slept thirty six hours continuously after checking in, and then awoke feeling like I'd been given a brand new body. Seeing Carlos Santana play live, meeting some lovely people and enjoying the odd whiskey or two (purely for medicinal reasons, you understand) was a pleasure. But all the time I was out there, I kept being haunted by the fear that my house was going to sound bad upon my return...

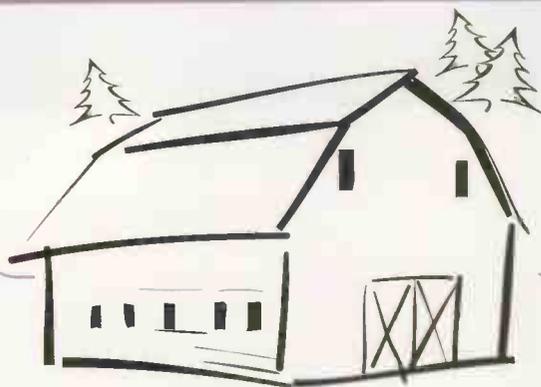
Well, with bemusing symmetry, I have just moved house again. And whilst no trip to Las Vegas is on the cards this year, nor is my regular Beijing/ Shanghai end of term jet jaunt, Mother Nature has duly obliged again with another stinker of a cold. As I write this (from under my duvet), my ears feel like they've been wrenched inside out then placed in a vacuum, while there's a loud high frequency whine issuing from my left lughole, almost as if I'd been standing sideways on at a Motorhead concert all night. Once again, the Lemsip Max (other cold and flu products are available) has been deployed and once again, all I can think about is the sound of my new listening room that I can't yet hear!

Worryingly, a few days back, between chores like ordering oil for the boiler and redirecting the mail, I had a sneak peak. Sadly my (soon to be) listening room sounded like the inside of St. Paul's Cathedral, albeit without the visual beauty or indeed the physical scale. Yep, you could say there's a bit of an echo. My last house didn't so much echo as 'zing', making it a particularly unappealing partner for my 'upper midband happy' Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers. Indeed, this was its

bugbear; I spent six years taming it with drapes over the radiators, long and sumptuous curtains, strategically placed scatter cushions, smooth sounding interconnects and even Blutac-damped speaker stands.

Actually, all this careful room tuning worked, and I finally got tantalisingly close to hi-fi nirvana, about six weeks before the move. The last iteration of my North Somerset system (Marantz TT1000, Origin Live Enterprise and Lyra Titan i turntable, feeding an ANT Audio Kora 3T Ltd. phono stage and Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated) well and truly made the grade. I was overjoyed that after all this time, I'd got everything working just as it should, perfectly matched to room, music and indeed listener. So it was *heartbreaking* to have to box it all up so soon and move it. And it's now all the more unpleasant to know that a once sublime system is sitting there poised for action, and very possibly nowhere near as good as it was simply because of its new environment. Of course, now there's no way of finding out until I've coughed and spluttered my way through at last another couple of boxes of Scotties...

What a shame to have to 'break up' that magical final North Somerset system. It's the very one that in a slightly earlier guise (summer 2007) was described by Lyra's Jonathan Carr (somewhat double-edgedly) as, "the best system I've heard... in this country". If, on the first install, I can get anywhere near the sound of three years ago I'll be delighted. Right now though, with my ears doing an impersonation of the sound of me deep sea diving through peppered porridge, I'm not going to find out just yet. Wish me luck for when me and my shell-likes come back up to the surface! ●



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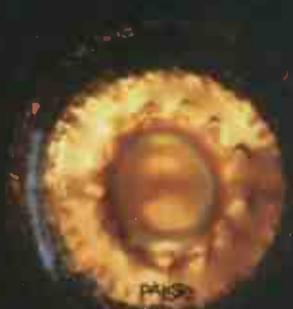
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"I get desensitised by umpteen hits packages of a legendary artist dumped onto CD..."



## paul rigby

**I**t was whilst researching the weird and wonderful musical canon that is Prog Rock, that it hit me. When I was searching for CDs to listen to, I was coming back, again and again, to the same small group of record labels.

Yes, the major labels have a wealth of material but you'd be surprised how little they have on offer, available to buy, right now. So much is delisted, more is ignored and many albums languish, desperate for a reissue done with TLC. So it's left to enthusiasts to take up the flag and wave it about a bit, hoping to grab your attention. Small record labels have grown up, whose owners have their own tastes in music – and it shows. Hence, small and mid-sized independents out there have tended to specialise in particular genres, corraling as many well known artists as possible along with those artists' long neglected classic albums. Long-forgotten and obscure releases that the major labels wouldn't touch because it wouldn't even cover their costs, never mind make a profit are rescued.

So I made a point of looking for patterns in the catalogues of some of the smaller labels and came across a real treasure trove from BGO (Beat Goes On) Records ([www.bgo-records.com](http://www.bgo-records.com)). Something I had never noticed before was just how many titles from BGO featured classic rock'n'roll. Yes, you will find rock'n'roll just about everywhere, oozing out of cheap (and often nasty) compilations. But here?

Here was a veritable undiscovered treasure house of true quality rock'n'roll featuring original albums and names that many will have forgotten about or possibly ignored.

Yet that wasn't the biggest surprise from the company. Upon closer examination, I realised that the label doesn't just focus on the American market. Oh no. If you're the sort of rock'n'roll fan who has a thing for British rock'n'roll, then look no further than BGO.

Take the USA to begin with, and the legend that was Buddy Holly. BGO can offer eight albums from the artist but via value for money 2-on-1 editions. That is, the company squeezes two albums onto one CD but does so without compromising the mastering quality. BGO's works are always well produced. So, you get classics such as 'The Chirping Crickets' and 'Buddy Holly' but you'll also find other albums, such as 'Showcase' and 'Holly In The Hills' that are not often seen but are valued by fans.

Take another example, the seminal artist, Chuck Berry. How many hits packages are out there, eh? Yet, how often do you see his original album, 'One Dozen Berrys' or 'Chuck Berry', for sale? Magnificent albums. Yes, they feature hits like 'Johnny B. Goode' but the rest are hardly filler material. These are the sort of tracks that won't appear on a hits package. In this way, you get to know the genius of the artist and not the edited highlights which are often too familiar. BGO also offers other original albums from the likes of Johnny Burnette, Bo Diddley and Eddie Cochran.

But what about the 'poor relation' in rock'n'roll circles – the UK? There's plenty to enjoy here too, much of it underrated, placed in the shade by the brilliance of the US output. Johnny Kidd & the Pirates, for example were one of the most

important British groups before the appearance of The Beatles while Billy Fury was arguably the most talented rock'n'roll artist that Britain ever produced. Both have excellent 2-on-1s on offer here via BGO along with other stars of the time such as Marty Wilde and Dave Berry.

However, it's the British 'failures' that strike the biggest chord. We like nothing better than an underdog and BGO have a great British selection from this period of rock. Take The Roulettes, who started out backing Adam Faith and had a dedicated following, sounding a little like The Hollies or The Searchers. Then there was The Hunters who briefly backed Cliff Richard (yes, it wasn't just The Shadows) and later recorded for the eccentric producer, Joe Meek.

All these groups and more are featured within the BGO catalogue. It is because the rock'n'roll albums and artists, from both sides of the Atlantic, are concentrated within the small space of a single independent label that they are so effective, as a group of discs and as a slice of rich cultural history.

I don't know about you but I get desensitised by umpteen hits packages of a legendary artist where a shovel full of tracks is dumped onto a CD. To have BGO offer the original album, with that artist's original track list and the original cover art – it immediately throws you back in time. You not only get a real flavour of the times but also what the artist was trying to do with that album and how the featured hit singles fitted into that period of their career. Seeing (and hearing) these works from BGO was a joy – a perfect antidote to the usual, crass, packages commonly thrown at us. ●



"I fear the BBC has deliberately degraded Freesat HD to make Freeview HD look better..."



## steven green

**W**hen the BBC HD channel started life on satellite, the consensus view of the picture quality was that it was "stunning".

On 5th August however, the BBC installed a new set of video encoders for the channel, and the BBC simultaneously slashed the bit rate level it was using from 16.5 Mbps down to just 9.7 Mbps – a staggering 40% drop!

No sooner had the BBC done this than a flood of comments were left on a BBC Internet blog about the BBC HD channel; over 600 comments were left on that blog alone; with people almost unanimously saying that the picture quality is far worse than it had been before the change. Common criticisms have been that the picture is far less sharp and contains far less detail than it used to; the picture is softer-looking; motion, in particular on sports coverage, is often blurred; and more blocking artefacts are visible. Another very common general criticism is that the quality can no longer be described as being high-definition, and many say that the quality is now little better than standard-definition TV.

The BBC responded to these complaints by claiming that the results of internal tests had shown that the quality at the lower bit rate levels with the new video encoders is either better or no worse than it was with the older encoders at the higher bit rate levels (the BBC used exactly the same argument about internal test results apparently showing no drop in quality when they reduced Radio 3's bit rate on DAB to 160 kbps in 2006). Those complaining about the picture quality of the HD

channel were having none of this however, as their typical reaction has been to say that their eyes do not lie, and they don't appreciate being told by the BBC that they're imagining things, especially when the difference in quality is as stark as it is (this also mirrored what Radio 3 listeners said back in 2006).

The BBC then adopted its default "we're right and you're wrong" stance, which it seemingly always falls back to when us plebs have the audacity to criticise its decisions. For example, one comment that nicely sums up the attitude displayed by Danielle Nagler, the Head of BBC HD, was the following classic piece of prerehearsed BBC obfuscation when she appeared on Points of View: "It is correct that we've reduced the bit rate. But there's no evidence that reducing the bit rate has an impact on picture quality, or that there's an absolute relationship between bit rate and picture quality." Danielle Nagler has also attempted to sound knowledgeable on the subject of video compression in the BBC Internet blogs she has written, although I strongly suspect that her true knowledge of the subject would fit on the back of a postage stamp. Actually, that's probably unfair, as it might stretch to two postage stamps if she waffles a great deal...

Another thing that people are understandably unhappy about is the fact that the BBC has steadfastly refused to say why the bit rate levels had to be reduced in the first place. They certainly didn't need to reduce the bit rates on satellite, because the BBC HD channel is being broadcast on a satellite transponder that is half empty! The BBC also won't have saved a penny by reducing the bit rate, because it pays a flat fee to lease

seven satellite transponders, and the BBC handles the 'uplinking' of the signals to the satellites itself.

In my opinion, the only credible explanation is that they've deliberately degraded the quality of the BBC HD channel on satellite and cable down to the level at which they'll be forced to deliver the HD channel at via the BBC's preferred digital TV platform Freeview. By the end of 2010 there will four HD channels being broadcast on Freeview (in London and in regions where digital switchover has completed), and by 2012 Ofcom is saying that five HD channels will be available. One Freeview multiplex is being devoted to carry all of the HD channels, and this multiplex will have a capacity of around 36.1 Mbps. This means that each HD channel will have an average bit rate of around 9 Mbps by the end of 2010, and an average of just 7.2 Mbps once a fifth HD channel is launched.

Another reason why I suspect foul play here is that Danielle Nagler's boss just happens to be Simon Nelson, who was the person that chose to use low bit rates on DAB in the first place, and he was also the person responsible for reducing Radio 3 to 160 kbps on DAB in 2006...

The fact is that there's an abundance of bandwidth available on satellite and cable, whereas bandwidth is in very scarce supply on Freeview. Transmission costs on satellite and cable are also a small fraction of what they are on Freeview. This being the case, it would be scandalous if the BBC got away with strangling the quality of the BBC HD channel on satellite and cable just because its favoured Freeview platform won't be able to deliver the channel at the same level of quality. ●

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"recording engineers do not really understand what they are doing with peak limiting..."



## noel keyword

I visited a studio recently and as always it was an interesting experience, but also a depressing one. As we stood in a small mastering room I couldn't help but be transfixed by the largest monitor loudspeakers I have ever seen that stretched from floor to ceiling in a room smaller than my kitchen. The engineer worked in the shadow of these monsters and swore by them and the sound they provided, but it bore no relation to any domestic environment. And as we stood and watched red lights were flashing brightly on his desk, giving it the appearance of a Christmas tree. Disingenuously, I asked him what they were (I knew) and he said "oh that's the peak limiters". Oh dear!

I was reminded of this visit a little later when into my inbox popped a reply from Friedemann Tischmeyer about my queries of his Dynamic Range meter at [www.dynamicroangemetering.com](http://www.dynamicroangemetering.com). This attempts to measure how much music is being 'compressed' by the sort of peak limiting I saw going on at the studio, my visit showing the disconnect between the way this process is viewed by studios, and the way it is viewed by the outside world.

I'd emailed Friedemann Tischmeyer in response to a reader's letter in our January 2010 issue about the cataloguing of CD dynamic range values using his metering system. It looked to me that the meter wasn't measuring dynamic range as it is commonly understood, the range between loudest and softest sounds on a CD. It appeared to be measuring peak-to-mean values, which give smaller figures than true dynamic range and Friedemann confirmed that this was indeed the case. "Technically you may be right" he said. "When we researched this topic we found out that some terms and parameters

are defined but the deeper we came into the jungle of loudness the less standardised things are. The term dynamic range is used here and there and "Crest Factor" also. My information gave me the impression that "Crest Factor" is more defined and standard than dynamic range. We needed a good catchy and easy to understand term for our aim so we redefined the term Dynamic Range.

There is no law and I am not aware of an AES paper about dynamic range. In case of the success of the Pleasurize Music Foundation with the work for more sound quality awareness, maybe the term Dynamic Range is redefined today."

The last bit is a bit cheeky, saying in effect that the success of the Pleasurize Music Foundation is able to change the meaning of dynamic range. Somehow I don't think so; there is a need for the concept and it has a generally accepted title that the Dynamic Range meter misuses, but no matter perhaps. I take Friedemann's point that what the DR meter measures, peak-to-mean or crest factor, is what studios choose to mince in their desire to make CDs sound 'loud'. So this meter gets to the heart of the 'compression is killing music issue' by measuring what I was watching during my studio visit: the compression of musical peaks.

CD has enough dynamic range – just – to avoid any need to compress peaks so as to make music sound louder. But people naturally tend to think something that's quieter is less dynamic in itself and that there's something wrong. Having to turn volume right up to make an amplifier go loud is one example, yet this actually means it is better (less gain, fewer amplifying devices) as an amplifier, not worse! The same applies to CDs: if they play loud they are better, many think. They are made

louder by lifting overall level, which necessitates compressing peaks. Ideally, it also means using brickwall limiters to make absolutely sure peak recording level is never exceeded, producing 'overs', because if this happens in a digital system serious distortion sets in.

The situation has become so bad and studios so blissfully unaware or uncaring about what they do that hard limiting and 'overs' do occur and are not uncommon. Friedemann Tischmeyer says. This is what I was concerned about during my studio visit by the furious and continuous activity of the red peak recording warnings. The engineer left the technology to look after itself as he busied himself with other things and it was at this point that I began to realise that the whole recording process had become so technologically saturated that engineers were no such thing and did not really understand what they were doing at this level, only that some irritating audiophiles more concerned with their hi-fis than music (as they saw it) should inconveniently complain about something obscure known as 'sound quality'!

Another site concerned with this is [www.turnmeup.org](http://www.turnmeup.org) whose title alludes to the need to turn up the volume of good CDs. Their overall music level is lower but their dynamic range greater and we have all heard these being used as demonstrator discs at hi-fi shows. One minute Hugh Masekela is talking about working deep in Johannesburg's mines, in 'Stimela', the next there is a shout as he mimics the 'whooh whooh' of a train transporting workers. It's a show favourite and a great display of what music with dynamic range sounds like. Trying to get studios to understand this is going to be an uphill battle, my studio visit suggested... ●

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"here's a hot-off-the press preview of what we can look forward to in the coming twelve months..."



## adam smith

**S**o, another Christmas has passed, and this year at least, I cannot help but think it's been another good audio-related twelve months. We have seen fine new products aplenty, but as we look towards 2010, I'm sure no-one in the industry will mind if I share with you all some hot-off-the press previews of what we can look forward to in the coming twelve months...

Firstly, the LP will continue to go from strength to strength, and SME will shock everyone by announcing the return of the autochanger. The 'Model 30/6' as it is likely to be named will not only resurrect the 'one record at a time' changing method of the classic Thorens TD224, but will go one better by selecting your music for you, unsleeving the LP, cleaning and playing it and then returning it to its cover. Obviously this technology will cost, and estimated price is likely to be around £60,000. Fortunately, for the less rich among us, Pro-Ject will take this baton and run with it, giving us the 'X-Change' by late summer, retailing at £499...

The DAB versus FM argument will take a surprising turn in mid March when, completely out of nowhere, Long Wave will make a comeback. Pure will be first out of the starting blocks with an all-in-one radio front end module that will receive DAB, FM and AM broadcasts and give them that lovely Long Wave truncated frequency response. As you listen throughout the day however, the signal will gradually start fading in and out, to vanish completely by the time darkness falls, and be replaced by random foreign stations and interference from the ignition systems of Peugeot 106s belonging to the local chavs doing handbrake turns in your nearest McDonald's

car park. Naturally however, the nationality of the foreign station, the time period of the transition and the intensity increase of the interference will be adjustable in the module's software settings.

Sticking with cars, other long-standing names in the audio world will follow the likes of Bang & Olufsen, Naim, B&W and Linn by supplying custom-made in-car hi-fi systems for certain manufacturers. The optional Avid Acutus turntable in the Rolls Royce Silver Ghost will prove to be a huge success, as will the Cerwin-Vega bootful of eighteen inch subwoofers in the Vauxhall Corsa. Sadly, however, the Koreans' attempt to follow suit by offering 'tuned by Alba' radios in the Hyundai range will prove less successful.

Finally, the next big retro resurrection will be the Compact Cassette. Spurred on by the likes of A.N.T. Audio's Alex Nikitin, plus our very own Tim Jarman, youngsters will be ditching their MP3 players left, right and centre, particularly when Apple announce the iTape in mid March, whereupon the first people in the queue for it will be David Price and Patrick Cleasby. Naturally, this will offer style by the bucketload but recordings made on it will refuse to play on any other recorder and if you insert a cassette recorded on any other machine, it will erase it instantly. However, this will spearhead cassette's return and, in the same way that fake vinyl groove noise has been added to chart hits in recent years, music producers will now start adding in wow and flutter effects, plus the horrible garbled noise that the Harry Moss cassette player in your Mk 3 Cortina used to make as it chewed up your favourite tape...

Now, before industry insiders come knocking at the door to lynch me for giving away their secrets,

let me stop and move to a more serious and more personal subject, namely my own intentions for 2010. Yes, that's right I've made some New Year's audio resolutions!

First, I shall stop measuring the lounge to see if I can squeeze a pair of ADAM Audio OSS loudspeakers in there. Even if I somehow managed to beg/borrow/steal the necessary £215,000, they still wouldn't go through the door. Although having said that, they would go in if the window was removed but then they would slightly obscure the television. And the door, fireplace and two seats of the sofa, if I'm perfectly honest...

Second, I will sort out permanent loudspeakers for the dining room that are both wife and ear-friendly. So far I have tried Mordaunt Short MS25i (too "not black") Tangent RS2s (too ugly), TDL Studio 0.5s (too sonically assaulting) and given up on the idea of Bang & Olufsen Beolab 3s (too expensive!). The current occupiers are Goodmans Maxim 2s, which are doing a surprisingly sterling job but since when has that ever stopped an enthusiast?

Third, I will stop sneaking over and swapping the polarity of the leads to loudspeakers at hi-fi shows and then complaining to the manufacturer about poor stereo imagery. It's not big and it's not clever.

Fourth, I will stop buying turntables [ha! Ed.].

Fifth, although that Technics SL-3350 on eBay at the moment is rather tasty, and quite rare...

Ermm, well, I think that's enough to be going on with and if you'll excuse me, I'm going to see if there are any mince pies left, and then the cat and I are going to settle down and carry on watching my new Knight Rider Season 3 box set. Happy New Year! ●

# vinyl section

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FEBRUARY 2010

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### CLEARAUDIO CONCEPT 100

Neville Roberts samples this new user-friendly turntable.

### ORTOFON MC A90 105

Noel Keywood auditions a quirky high end moving coil.

### ISOKINETIK REGA UPGRADES 109

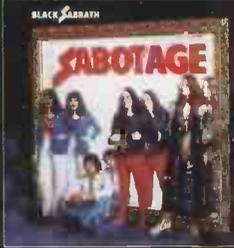
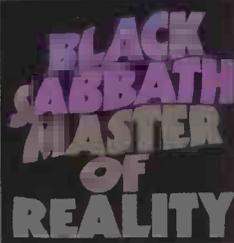
Neville Roberts reviews an upgrade package for the evergreen Rega P3 turntable...

### SOUNDBITES 115

Tim Jarman tries the Vinylcare record cleaning kit and David Price tests Orlgin Live's Arm Load meter.

## LET'S ROCK

Split between Vertigo and SPV is a selection of new releases and reissues. The latter encompass Black Sabbath and the Vertigo reissues of 'Master Of Reality', 'Sabotage' and 'Black Sabbath', the latter and 'Master...' arrive with a second disc of rarities and b-sides. On a more contemporary note, SPV has released Rhapsody of 'Symphony Of Enchanted Lands II: The Dark Special' – an album not a table top role playing game – the Italian metal outfit's 2004 release of 'film score metal' is both epic and extravagant. Finally, look out for Molly Hatchet's 'Silent Reign Of Heroes' (1998) that continues the solid, hard rock/southern rock style that their fans love.

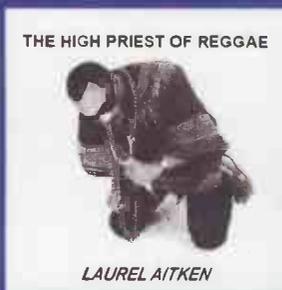
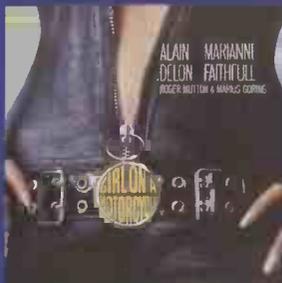


## news

### GETTING BACK

One of the great things about the Get Back label is the eclectic nature of its releases – as this latest batch testifies. Take 'Meet The R. Stevie Moore' by the man himself. A 'Godfather' of home recording who has produced over 400 albums (www.rsteviemore.com) of varying music types including indie, rock and pop. This double album is but a mere sampler. Equally eclectic is 'Girl On A Motorcycle' (1968) a soundtrack to a film starring Marianne Faithfull and Alain Delon, played by Les Reed with a full orchestra as instrumentals. Finally, continuing the varied approach is 'The High Priest Of Reggae' and 'Scandal In A Brixton Market', both by Laurel Aitken. The former is one of the best reggae compilations on the market while the latter, an essential reggae release from 1969, is a mixture

of new and old releases featuring Girlie and Rico Rodriguez.



### LILLITH'S LPS

Three releases from Lilith include a value for money MC5 double album, 'Shakin' Street' that also features the CD version of the same album. It includes a collection of demos, outtakes and live tracks from 1965-1971. Speaking of rarities, Garage fans faves, The Litter, saw the band's trademark garage style evolve into more of a hard rock/psych pathway on 'Emerge' (1969) adding flavours of Blue Cheer and Cream. Finally, Dr John's 'Anytime, Anyplace' also arrives with a free CD within. Originally released in 1974 on Barometer, this rare album features six bonus tracks.

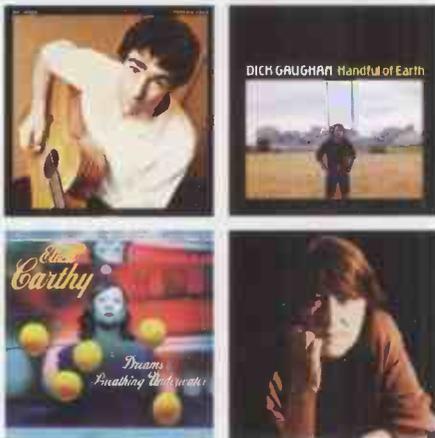
### VLADISLAV DELAY

...and his latest album, via the Leaf label, 'Tummaa', digs up this month's favourite word – eclectic – again. There's something in the wind, I reckon. Avant garde electronica from Finland that's dark, moody and full of introspection.



## FLIGHTS OF FOLK

There is so much classic folk out there, and hardly anyone was recognising it existed at all, never mind releasing it on vinyl. But now the Three Black Feathers label has ridden to the rescue with a series of classic folk releases via its Topic license. All are released on 200gm vinyl, mastered by Abbey Road as DMM pressings along with new interviews and liner notes. Included is Nic Jones' 'Penguin Eggs' (1982), an absolute classic album of traditional songs brought up-to-date with Jones' unique arrangement and excellent instrumental work. Next, Dick Gaughan's 'Handful Of Earth' highlights his expressive guitar playing over a emotional vocal delivery with a Celtic flavour while daughter of Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson, Eliza Carthy's 'Dreams Of Breathing Underwater' maintains the family values – in fact, she hasn't released a bad album yet. This example, from 2008, upholds her folk revivalist approach with eclectic twists. Finally, Lal Waterson & Oliver Knight's 'Once In A Blue Moon' is both quiet and reflective. A release that isn't afraid to take chances. As for the DMM process? It has been successfully implemented.



## SUNDAZED DUO

Fever Tree were a little known sixties psychedelic outfit from the USA. The best of the group's material was written by Tex Ritter and Mary Poppins soundtrack songwriting duo, Scott and Vivian Holtzman. This self-titled piece from 1968 combines covers from the Beatles with original rocking/electric ditties. Also look out for the Blues Project's 'Projections', starring Al Kooper. Oddly enough, the group was not all about blues but, as is heard here, they also infused folk, jazz and more. This edition features the rare mono mix.



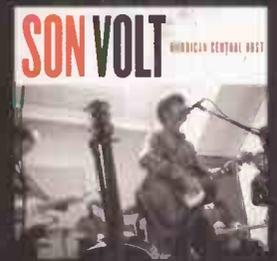
## DRONING ON

Full of atmosphere is Steven R. Smith's new album, 'Cities', via Immune Recordings ([www.immunerecordings.net](http://www.immunerecordings.net)) that combines slightly disturbing organic drones with some delicate acoustic work to form a delicious contrast. Think alt.folk instrumentals with a strong dash of classic 4AD contemplation.



## ...AND FINALLY

David Bowie's debut, self-titled album (1969), featuring the original version of 'Space Oddity', has now been reissued via EMI in a splendid gatefold edition. On a more contemporary note, Rounder has two LPs out and about. Sondre Lerche's 'Heart Beat Radio' offers easy going, melancholy pop that sometimes reminds me of Jamie Cullum's vocal delivery. Son Volt's 'American Central Dust', on the other hand, is more alt-country, featuring a stripped production with rock and roots touches.



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# Virgin Vinyl

A turntable said to work straight out of the box with no setting up, Clearaudio's new Concept is designed with first timers in mind. Neville Roberts goes for a spin...

It's a good idea this, and one that should have been had by a great many more purveyors of turntables. If we, the analogue addicted cognoscenti (if you pardon the rather grandiose term for 'vinyl snobs') are going to get our message out to the CD spinning, music downloading multitudes, there should be a great deal more simple-to-set up decks on sale, made by serious marques that also sell really tasty high end gear.

Who better than than Clearaudio, based in Erlangen, Germany, to do the job? They entered the market in 1978 with moving-coil cartridges based on their unique symmetrical generator, but their products now range from high-end phono cartridges, tonearms and stylish turntables through to phono preamplifiers and Class A power amplifiers.

The new Concept turntable is claimed to be a deck that works straight out of the box. It's equipped with a new tonearm that incorporates a friction-free magnetic bearing and is fitted with a high quality Clearaudio Concept moving magnet cartridge. Apart from low friction, the magnetic bearing allows

the arm to be shipped with the counterbalance weight and cartridge installed without risk of damage to the arm bearing. All the necessary adjustments are already completed at the Clearaudio factory - even the tracking weight and anti-skating force are pre-adjusted.

The turntable itself is spun by a belt driven decoupled DC motor fitted with low noise bush bearings (made of bronze and Teflon) and powered by a separate German power supply. Interestingly, all three speeds are possible, 33 1/3, 45 and 78 RPM, although I would be somewhat wary about letting the supplied Clearaudio Concept cartridge anywhere near a 78! The speed change is effected electrically via the selector switch situated on the left. This is a nice feature as many units in this price range require the user to move the belt to a different pulley on the motor spindle to select the required speed.

## PLUGGING AND PLAYING

The turntable is well packaged and, not being too heavy, it was easy to remove from the box. The subplatter is already fitted and secured by a strip of blue adhesive tape. This would not cause any problems for transit as the sub-platter itself is extremely light. In fact, the subplatter is just a plastic moulding with a thin lip at the base to facilitate fitting the belt and having a metal centre spindle; it does, to my mind, look a bit cheap, but of course this will be hidden from view when the main

platter is fitted. The arm design has the tonearm wire exiting from the top of the arm, rather than the conventional route through the base pivot. This means that the tonearm wires loop from the top of the arm and enter the base through a hole adjacent to the pivot, but this is very neatly done. The only control knob is the on/off and speed setting control on the left opposite the arm. The motor power supply is of the 'wall-wart' variety and will run from 100-240VAC 50-60Hz to provide the 12VDC required by the motor. Also included are a spirit level for levelling the turntable and a little bottle of synthetic bearing oil for lubricating the turntable centre bearing.

Setting it up was certainly very easy. Firstly, the turntable base is placed on a suitable surface of at least 17" x 14", according to the instruction manual. The base is of a non-suspended design and fitted with spiked feet, so a good, solid surface is essential. The spikes are quite small and unsophisticated - essentially a large diameter bolt with a spike at the end and a lock-nut. It's extremely important that the base is level and this adjustment has to be carried out in situ (see later). Next, the strip of blue adhesive tape is removed from the subplatter, allowing it to rotate freely. The manual very helpfully



The Concept sub-platter assembly.



contains 'before and after' pictures: the first showing the tape in place over the subplatter and the second showing what the tape looks like when removed – just so you know!

After fitting the drive belt over the motor pulley and sub-platter, the main 30mm-thick platter is then fitted. This is sensibly packed

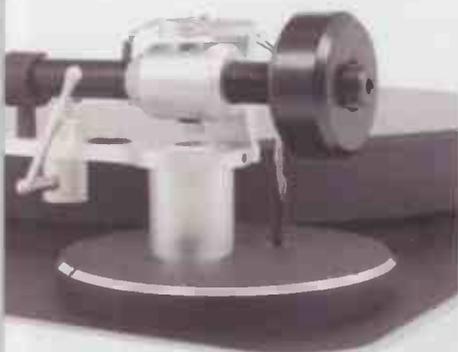
separately in order to avoid damage to the main bearing in transit. Following the removal of two more strips of blue tape and two pieces of packing foam rubber from the arm and cartridge, all that is left to do is to level the turntable by rotation of the feet spikes, using the supplied spirit level gauge for reference. Once the turntable is level, the feet adjusters are locked in place with their respective locknuts. Should you wish to do so, the manual does include instructions on how to adjust the tracking force, tonearm height (to set the VTA) and anti-skating device. I did adjust the tracking force myself using my digital gauge to ensure it was spot-on at the recommended 2.4g for the Concept cartridge.

This is easily accomplished by rotating the counterbalance weight.

I did have a small problem plugging in the power supply – the socket at the rear of the plinth is a bit flimsy and the one on my review sample disintegrated when I tried to push in the plug. I had to unscrew the socket to rescue the parts from inside the unit and make a connection! However, once I had sorted that, I was ready to connect the turntable to my amplifier and start listening!

### SOUNDING OUT

To get things started, I placed a copy of 'J S Bach Partita No 1' by Trevor Pinnock (from an Archiv 2-LP set 415 493-1) onto the turntable. The solo harpsichord displayed real detail and clarity, making for a pleasant albeit not enthralling listen. I then turned



*The Clearaudio Concept arm leadout wires are exposed.*



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**The straight arm uses magnetism to apply tracking force.**

to a recording of a full orchestra - 'Haydn Symphony No. 35' by L'Estro Armonico & Derek Solomons (from a CBS boxed set CBS D3 37861) - which gave an encouragingly full sound with rich instrumental tone (something you'll love if you've come straight from CD), although in absolute terms the soundstaging was a tad two-dimensional. As you'd expect from a deck of this type, the recorded acoustic was restricted to the area between the loudspeakers, but within this there was again an impressive amount of detail in the upper registers and the exciting content of the music was well

conveyed to the listener. Ramping up the tempo with Jean Michel Jarre's 'Equinoxe' (Polydor Deluxe POLD5007) demonstrated a good dynamic range with a crisp top end and meaty bass. This deck didn't seem to hold anything back from the recording with a fast and detailed performance that would mesmerise any digital convert! Checking the turntable speeds using my strobe disc showed that they were spot-on and there was no sign of drift when the cartridge was playing a record, which only served to reinforce my impression of this as an enjoyable performer.

A good punchy, yet tight bass response demonstrates that the arm and cartridge are well matched. Using my 'Vinyl Essentials' test record, I was able to confirm that the arm resonance was at 10Hz, which is comfortably within the acceptable range of 6-14Hz [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. However, the Concept cartridge tracking was a little disappointing and it could really only manage tracking a groove modulation amplitude of 40 microns without any audible mistracking.



**Headshell azimuth had to be adjusted by loosening a small lock screw.**

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the turntable performed satisfactorily across a wide range of musical genres. I have to say that if I had £1,000 or so to spend, I can think of several turntable units I would choose above the Concept on both sonic and build quality terms, but then again the Concept was clearly not designed for anoraks like me! This turntable succeeds in catering for those who might otherwise be deterred by the thought of all the fiddly adjustments required by its price rivals, which if we're honest is most people!

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Vertical tracking force is applied non-linearly by magnetism in the Concept arm, a byproduct being the need to measure downforce at exactly LP surface height; if the measuring gauge platform is 1-2mm higher as our electronic scales were, VTF will read around 1gm too high (i.e. VTF increases rapidly with stylus height). We measured VTF on a gauge carefully height aligned to account for this, but Clearaudio elect to supply the Concept 'dealer aligned' to overcome this sensitivity to set up. They also omit any mention of all this in the supplied instructions, choosing not to provide a tracking force figure even. Set up isn't easy, making cartridge changing a challenging process.

The headshell of our arm was visibly tilted and channel separation unbalanced (-20dB, -28dB) as a result. We loosened a small hex screw, set the headshell to horizontal and got balanced separation figures (showing the cartridge's modulation axes were reasonably well aligned at least).

The cartridge mistracked on one channel but not the other, due to bias force being far too low. On a 1kHz torture track the cartridge simply skated inwards right across

the grooves. Bias is another 'dealer adjustment' and was not set on our review sample. Since it requires test discs and equipment to do this properly it is more a factory setting than a dealer setting, and Clearaudio had obviously not set up this rather awkward design before shipping it.

Turntable speed stability was good, unweighted wow measuring 0.15% and weighted 0.07%. All the same wow components at 2.3Hz and 20Hz were obvious under analysis. The arm measured very well, vibrational modes being minimal. The cartridge had an unusually smooth response, with a slight downward trend toward high frequencies, plus satisfactory tracking. It should give very smooth sound, warmer than usual on inner grooves where tracking loss reduces output -3dB at 10kHz.

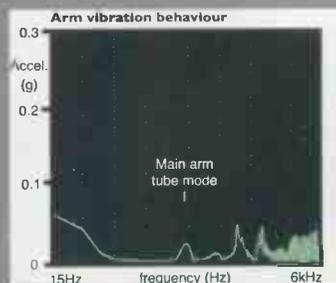
The Concept is a somewhat 'eccentric' design, redeemed by good basic arm and cartridge performance. Set up was poor. Sound quality wise it should be good. NK

CLEARAUDIO CONCEPT CARTRIDGE	
Tracking force	2.2gms
Frequency response	20Hz - kHz
Channel separation	21dB

Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	63µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	20cms/sec.
Output (5cms/sec rms)	5.6mV

TURNTABLE	
Wow	0.151%
Wow IEC wtd	0.070%
Speed accuracy	+0.4%

### ARM VIBRATION



### WOW AND FLUTTER



### VERDICT

Crisply styled, nicely packaged, easy to use 'my first turntable', although not the audiophile's first choice.

**CLEARAUDIO CONCEPT** £1000  
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### FOR

- styling
- ease of use
- decent sound

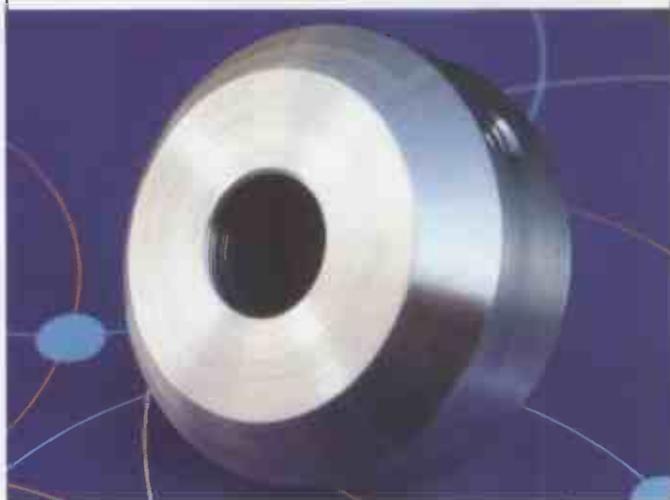
### AGAINST

- minor build issues
- difficult set up

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# Ninety Fine

Noel Keywood finds Ortofon's new MC A90 moving coil cartridge to be the smoothest of the smooth...



If you run an Ortofon Cadenza Blue at home and a Cadenza Bronze at work, and if you love both as I do, Ortofon's new range topping MC A90 pickup cartridge is a surprise. It is not an extension upward of all Cadenzas offer, the ultimate step above the forthcoming Cadenza Black, as you might expect from a range topper, but rather a model that seems to exist in its own particular and slightly peculiar niche. Another range topper and potential rival I listened to recently, the Lyra Titan i, underlined how the A90 inhabits a world of its own.

Expensive moving coil pickup cartridges get ever more sophisticated in their construction, to banish the smallest of stray resonances in the body that might colour the sound. Ortofon build the A90's skeletal frame using a Selective Laser Melting process of stainless steel, I was told by Leif Johannsen of Ortofon, in a short intensive lecture at the Ortofon stand at the High End Show in Munich, May 2009. At that time the A90 and Cadenza Black were unavailable, but the A90 has since reached the real world.

The SLM process enables Ortofon to build in some of the generator assembly to improve locational rigidity and potential loss of information from this source. The solid boron stylus cantilever is held by a firmly located tie back wire and high frequency behaviour damped by the company's Wide Range Damping system (WRD) where a small, heavy platinum disc is sandwiched between damping pads of differing properties (my mind drifts back to Shure's anti-resonant damper used in the V-15, oh so many moons ago!). The

effectiveness of this device is confirmed by the absence of high frequency peaking in our measured frequency response [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. But it is also one reason why the A90 lacks top end bite, or any sign of high frequency emphasis.

Attached to the boron cantilever is an Ortofon nude Replicant stylus that, they claim, gives extended groove contact together with a small minor radius so that short wavelengths can be read correctly. Our A90 was very similar to both the Cadenza Bronze (August 09) and Per Windfeld (April 08) in this area, but it is balanced differently and tracing loss has more impact on inner grooves as a result. As a seasoned Ortofon listener, I've yet to be certain about the differences between their Shibata tip and the Replicant, other than the latter seems a little more svelte and delicate in its rendition of treble. Perhaps this is as you'd expect, because the MC A90 suggests that, ultimately, this is where Ortofon want their statement cartridges to be.

The A90 comes well packaged, screwed to a clear acrylic plate supported by a sizeable box, albeit not one that's especially eye catching. Inside is a pouch with screwdriver, cartridge connecting wires and brush. Weighing 8gms, all arms will balance the A90 without difficulty. It is easy to fit because the body has tapped holes that accept normal fixing screws and Ortofon supply an unusual stylus guard that offers good protection should a fixing accident occur. Stylus guards are always a mixed blessing because they can be as likely to

destroy the delicate cantilever as dropping the cartridge, and here the A90 rates as fair; providing the spigots of the guard are located in the body holes it guides itself safely into place. Shaky hands aren't going to easily manage though.

I ran the cartridge in an SME312S arm, through an Icon Audio PS3 phono stage and via my World Audio Design 300B amplifier and KLS9 loudspeakers.

## SOUND QUALITY

By top end moving coil cartridge standards, like the Van den Hul Grasshopper and Canary, or Lyra Titan i mentioned earlier, the MC A90 is unusually gentle and delicate in its approach. This is a far cry from just about all else I can think of except - should I say this? - last month's Goldring Legacy. Other than in basic tonal balance and high end smoothness, there is no comparison to be made between them though, as you might expect from the £2,400 price difference! But as a first and lasting impression the A90 is just remarkably, unusually soft in its balance and easy on the ear. It is fractionally more laid back than even the Per Windfeld, if more composed in the broad canvas it paints between the loudspeakers, and also more sophisticated in dynamic terms, across the midband. That's not to say the A90 is especially forceful at low frequencies, where I found it surprisingly mild mannered and less obviously muscular in its bass delivery than the Cadenzas, that by comparison offer a Technicolour

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sound. The A90 provides an altogether different view and is a step by Ortofon toward a level of smoothness and sophistication even more accentuated than what has gone before.

Ortofon's claim that the A90 has extraordinary micro dynamics and is vibrant with finer detail was fully borne out. It has lovely portrayal of midband activity and offers a gently clarifying view on musical proceedings that is nothing other than pure refinement. That the midband and upper bass regions were both cohesively knitted together and gently forceful was unexpectedly made most evident by Creedence Clearwater Revival's 'I Heard It Through The Grapevine'. My 45rpm 200gm vinyl remasters well capture Stu Cook's energetic drumming but cartridges can struggle with hot cut 45s, the dynamics are so great. The A90 was both laconic yet powerful in its resolution of Cook's drum kit, sounding supremely relaxed yet startlingly generous in its portrayal. It doesn't quite have the low end punch of the Cadenzas and here again it comes over as 'the thinking man's moving coil', more concerned with an accurate yet refined view of things rather than sounding too hormonal.

The A90's intrinsic clarity is a simple one; it presents music in a soundstage free from clutter and artifice. There's no zingy treble, all but no surface noise, no ticks and pops and absolutely no sign of fizziness to triangles, cymbal crashes, rim shots or any other percussion. As I have come to expect from Ortofon styli, high frequency resolution was superb, giving cymbal strikes a nice even sense of balance between initial impact of the stick and sonorous decay of the planished metal's harmonics.

Another prominent feature of the A90 is its stereo staging. Full left or right intros were so dramatically

#### SECOND THOUGHTS:

This is a very fine, detailed and subtle performer, whose soundstaging precision particularly impressed me. I enjoyed the clarity this cartridge brought to older classical recordings, but felt that it came sometimes at the expense of body in the sound. This was most noticeable on woodwind instruments like clarinet and bassoon. I certainly found it worked better with the Icon Audio PS3 valve phono stage than via the Graham Slee Revelation, as the warmth and extra body of the former seemed to complement the slight brightness of the cartridge. Match carefully and it's a fine musical instrument, but will not be for everyone all the same. RT

outlined hard left or right I feared one channel had popped out at times: Crosby, Stills Nash and Young singing 'Teach Your Children' from 'Deja Vu' or the Rolling Stones' 'No Expectations' from 'Beggars Banquet' (DSD remaster on 200gm vinyl) both made me jump a little over this, with the strength of guitar coming from one channel making the soundstage apparently disappear until the song developed into a full stereo spread that filled the end of the room. The A90 positions instruments and singers with a calm confidence and lovely sense of cohesion within an overall picture that others don't manage so well.

All the same, the MC A90 does seem to me more of a designer's statement cartridge than something balanced to best broadly meet the wants of the outside world, and here the waters get murky. Most of the time I found the A90 a little on the mild side, rather than the wild side. Either the designer likes it this way or it has been balanced for a solid-state phono stage with raised treble (inaccurate 75µS EQ), and plenty of glare as a result (yeech!). In which circumstance the A90 will come across as a perfect remedy.

My system is honed for smoothness, from its 12 inch low distortion SME3 12S arm lacking the hard crack of a 9 inch, and a valve phono stage with valve power supply. Add in a 300B feedbackless amplifier and you have 'no glare central'. In this setting the A90 was arguably too self effacing: I wanted a little more top end energy and bite, and more bottom end weight. Curiously perhaps, I also would

have liked some of the apparent stage depth of the Cadenza Bronze; the A90 was uncommunicative in this respect. Whilst it was great at imaging, stage depth was not a strong property.

#### CONCLUSION

All this makes the A90 the world's smoothest operator in a system with solid-state phono stage and amplifier, and loudspeakers having a loudness control built in. In a system more honed, it may not suit. By current standards the A90 is a soft lullaby on a vinyl stage that is gentle and delicate, sensitive and easy going. It is also very truthful and expressive across the midrange, but with less to say about extremes it does not come across as a the world's most fearless orator.

#### VERDICT

Many will adore its distinctively smooth and mild mannered sound, but this slice of high end exotica lacks universal appeal all the same.

**ORTOFON MC A90 £3,000**

Henley Designs

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#### FOR

- smooth
- wide sound stage
- intense fine detail

#### AGAINST

- mild bass dynamics
- limited stage depth
- difficult to align

#### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The MC A90 has an almost ruler-flat frequency response that just about reaches Ortofon's claim for 20-20kHz within tight 1dB limits. It's quite an amazing feat in its own way and should result in super smooth, character-free treble. For some listeners used to the more typical high frequency lift most cartridges possess the A90 may sound a little reticent, possibly lacking in sparkle. Imposed on this is tracing loss on inner grooves, taking output down to -5dB at 20kHz, our red trace shows. This is enough to produce obvious softness or warmth on inner grooves, in comparison to most cartridges, including other expensive Ortofons, and is a bit of a surprise. The MC A90 will sound very mild mannered.

Tracking was good, if not quite up with the best. With 2.3gms VTF mistracking occurred in top level torture test tracks at 300Hz and 1kHz, but the stylus remained in the groove.

Although Ortofon quote a Vertical Tracking Angle of 23 degrees our German DIN test disc measured around 32 degrees and our American CBS STR-112 test disc correlated with it by returning a high vertical distortion figure of 6%. Curiously, in the past when Ortofon have claimed 23 degrees VTA our test discs have confirmed it. All their recent MCs have high VTAs however, and this doesn't help left and right image cleanliness, although the second and third harmonics produced

aren't readily detectable.

Output from the MC A90 was very low at 0.35mV at 5cms/sec rms (0.25mV at 5cms/sec peak). It will need a quiet preamp, but modern designs are satisfactory in this area.

The MC A90 measures well, although it has some distinctive properties. It will have a very neutral sounding tonal balance, tilting to a little warm on inner grooves. NK

Tracking force	2 - 2.5gms
Weight	8gms
Vertical tracking angle	32 degrees
Frequency response	20Hz - 18kHz
Channel separation	22dB
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	63µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	20cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	1%
vertical	6%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	0.35mV

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# Upgrade Planar

Rega's P3 is an evergreen budget turntable that's highly and easily upgradeable. Neville Roberts investigates a package of modifications from ISOKinetik...



**F**ew would disagree that the venerable Rega Planar 3 turntable is one of the best entry-level designs, and so it has been since its introduction in 1978. In 1983 it received the (then) new RB300 tonearm, and from then until quite recently remained almost the same, aside from a name change to P3 around a decade ago. As such, there are countless decks around on the secondhand market, and a whole culture of modifying them has sprung up.

ISOKinetik is one company that has specialised in this. Although the marque has only recently been involved in actual turntable manufacturing [see *Hi-Fi World* January 2010], they nevertheless have decades of involvement in audio equipment design and their mechanical engineers have been producing precision engineered products for many years. The company also has experience in sound recording in both live and studio environments, with a number of award winning albums to its credit.

## THE UPGRADES

Decks and tonearms can be upgraded in a variety of ways. These

upgrades fall into two categories; those that are easily reversible without permanently altering the original item and those that require a more committed approach, for example, tonearm rewiring. These simple enhancements can breathe new life into an audio system, without breaking the bank.

One of the simplest and best value for money products is the ISOweight, an underslung counterbalance which lowers the centre of gravity to a point closer in line with the cartridge. This should improve the tracking resulting in better focus and clarity. The ISOweight is used in conjunction with the ISOend, which replaces the plastic end stub on Rega RB250/251 arms with a steel stub.

The ISOsub subplatter kit comprises a replacement phosphor-bronze bearing supplied with either a ruby (as reviewed here) or ceramic 4.7mm diameter ball, together with an aluminium and ground-steel subplatter assembly. The subplatter is precision engineered with 0.001mm concentricity between the axle and hub. This greatly improves pitch control and should add grip to the lower and sub frequency ranges. The ISOsub is supplied together with

some ISOLube long chain carbon spindle oil.

The choice of materials for the bearing ball is interesting. Both the ceramic and ruby balls are essentially aluminium oxide Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and are extremely hard materials. The ceramic has a hardness of 1900 HV (Vickers hardness) and the ruby is slightly harder at around 2300 HV; a hardened steel ball would have a hardness of less than 1000 HV. As it happened, I did have the opportunity to try all three materials in the upgraded Rega, but found it difficult to quantify any audible differences between them within the time frame of the review. I think further listening tests may be called for here.

There are two ISOplatters available: the 12mm deep acrylic platter and the 25mm deep acrylic platter. The latter was used for this review. ISOKinetik considers that these platters change the overall presentation by reducing some of the harshness which can be associated with glass platters. The ISOplatters are used without felt mats as the vinyl mates well with the acrylic surface.

Moving on to the tonearm, ISOKinetik can supply shielded external only interconnects and

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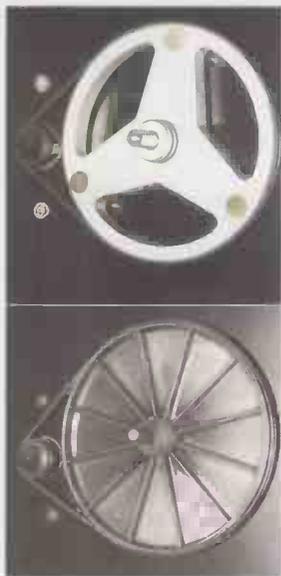
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*The original Rega sub-platter and ISOsub (top side by side.*

internal/external one-piece kits using several conductors, including Cardas golden section Litz, silver-plated copper, copper Litz and 99% pure silver in air/PTFE dielectric. Internal rewire kits are also available that use the above conductors supplied with

a Cardas 5 pin mini DIN connector and Delrin acetal resin sleeve for installing in the arm pillar, thus allowing a choice of external tonearm to preamp interconnects. However, the RB300 for this review has had the low-cost black interconnects and internal arm wiring replaced with ISOkinetik's Isotone upgrade, which incorporates Cardas golden section Litz wire and their distinctive purple interconnect cable.

The ISOdrive turntable motor drive system regulates the turntable motor using a quadrature-quartz speed generator to improve pitch stability and speed accuracy. As well as the Rega Planar 3 used here, the ISOdrive is suitable for the Rega Planar 2, P2, P3 and P25 as well as for various turntables manufactured by Linn, Manticore, NAD, Kuzma, Thorens and Systemdek. The ISOdrive produces switchable 50Hz or 67.5Hz at 115V AC to run the synchronous motor. This means that instead of having to remove the turntable and move the belt from the smaller top pulley to the larger lower one to effect the speed change, the drive belt can be left on the upper '33 1/3rpm' pulley and the button on



*The drive belt can be left on the upper '33 1/3rpm' pulley when the external power supply is used.*

the ISOdrive used to set the speed.

Finally, a trio of ISORbfeet were supplied, which are spiked aluminium feet incorporating Sorbothane isolation. These are placed or glued under the turntable to help isolate it from external vibration.

## TESTING

For the tests, I was supplied with two early model Rega Planar 3 turntables, both with fairly close serial numbers – one in its standard form fitted with an RB300 arm and the other deck fitted with the upgrades. A Denon DL-103 moving coil cartridge that had been fully run-in for around thirty hours and fitted with an ISOcartridge stabilisation upgrade was used on both decks. Incidentally, this threaded stabiliser is simply a support assembly that increases the mass by 3g and lowers the cartridge in the headshell and is a great improvement to the Denon for only £15.

The first thing I noticed about the ISOkinetik/Rega unit was the overall sense of quality. The upgrades seem to have blended well with the original Rega unit and there was no sense of bolt-on extras being fitted. I was familiar with the rather stunning look of the ISOplatter and ISOsub from my previous review of the Modular One turntable and, to my eye, it transforms the appearance of the fairly bland 'black-on-black' look of the Rega Planar deck.

Starting with the unmodified turntable, I slipped on a copy of 'Music for Four Harpsichords – C P E Bach Concerto in F major' (Decca Ace of Diamonds SDD 451). This is a great recording and it is quite a demanding test to be able to separate the furious plucking of the strings on four separate harpsichords; all four were clearly audible and

"The great thing about this upgrade package is that it can be done in stages as funds permit..."

were never lost in the orchestral accompaniment.

The first thing this shows is what a fine cartridge the Denon DL-103 really is at the price. For a moving coil cartridge that retails for around £120, it is a bargain – and very



*The ISOkinetik upgraded Rega RB300 tonearm is an inexpensive but effective mod...*



*The ISOweight, an underslung balance weight that lowers the armtube's centre of gravity, works well.*

much at home in the RB300 arm as my later tests also confirmed. The overall performance demonstrated why the Rega Planar has a well-deserved following amongst audiophiles. A swift check with my trusty 'Vinyl Essentials' test record, showed that the arm/cartridge resonance was at 8Hz – just in the acceptable range of 6-14Hz. However, the tracking ability of the Denon was impressive; it stayed firmly in the groove at the maximum

100 microns test track without any audible mistracking.

With full orchestral performances, such as 'Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 1' (from a Decca boxed set 15BB 218-220, The LSO with Vladimir Ashkenazy and Andre Previn), the music came across as clear and transparent, regardless of the complexities of the composition. The piano sparkled with a delightful tuneful Ashkenazy touch.

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The ideal RX6 multi-channel system utilises RX6s and the RX centre for the front channels, with the discreet RX-FX speakers in the surround role; all underpinned by the awesome RXW-12 subwoofer.



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Fidelity Sound of Pink Floyd's legendary 'Dark Side of the Moon' (MFSL 1-017) was very revealing. 'Money' came across as clear, detailed and open. Bass was well-controlled, splendidly punchy and tight.

Switching over to the modified Rega and repeating the same tracks was enlightening indeed. My 'eyes-closed' test of realism in the performance of the harpsichords in

the C P E Bach showed that things had clearly improved. What was particularly noticeable was the greater depth to the sound stage – the harpsichords

were not just positioned left to right, but front to back as well.

The Prokofiev again gave an altogether more believable performance than without the upgrades and the clarity and smoothness of the strings was an absolute delight. The bass guitar in the Pink Floyd was somehow more tuneful and definitely tighter and better controlled. The raspy vocals were altogether better reproduced. Even the cash registers glittered with clarity. The overall dynamic range had also improved.

A re-check of the tracking showed that, unsurprisingly, it was the same as with the unmodified arm, but the arm/cartridge resonance had increased to a very satisfactory 12Hz. Having the two decks side-by-side made it relatively easy to swap components between them and I was able to attribute the increase in resonant frequency to the ISOweight, making this a surefire recommen-

ation for the Denon MCs in the Rega arm.

**CONCLUSION**

The great thing about this upgrade package is of course that it can be done in stages as funds permit. Obviously, some items cost more than others and some make a more marked improvement than others, but there is no doubt that each item makes a positive contribution to the overall sound produced by the standard record deck.

So, what gives you the best 'bang for your buck'? Swapping around the various bits of the two turntables, I was able to come up with a winner. The ISOweight at under £50 is the first thing to have on your shopping list – it's great value and a surprising improvement. Being a larger and heavier underslung weight meant that it could be positioned closer to the arm pivot (which is a good thing) and this would also have contributed to the increase in arm/cartridge resonance that I found with the upgrade that brought it more comfortably into the good zone. In addition, the similarly priced ISORbfeet appear to have contributed the tighter bass and they also represent an excellent value for money upgrade to replace the flimsy rubber originals.

Next on the list should be the ISOsub subplatter and its matching ISOplatter – not just because it looks great, but it plays a very important part in improved dynamics. The Cardas arm rewiring certainly contributed to the better imaging. Finally, the imaging was further improved by the ISOdrive (I know, how can a turntable motor



*ISOkinetik's Isotone upgrade cable, comprising Cardas golden section Litz wire and distinctive purple sheath, improves the arm significantly.*

power supply improve imaging? But it does!) and this power supply seemed to be largely responsible for cleaning up the vocals.

The costs of each item are comparable with similar products from other suppliers. However, the quality of all the items is consistently high and the end result will be a turntable and arm that would cost considerably more to buy as a ready-made product. All-in-all, they make an already good deck great.

**VERDICT** ●●●●● £

Well structured, cost-effective package of modifications for a popular turntable.

ISOKINETIK ISOEND	£19.99
ISOKINETIK ISOWEIGHT	£49.99
ISOKINETIK ISO SUB KIT (C/W RUBY BEARING)	£99.99
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- FOR**
- great range of mods
  - all effective in their way
  - good value
- AGAINST**
- nothing at the price

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The ISOkinetik Rega modification was less successful than their own deck we reviewed last month, being affected by a distinct wow component at 1.2Hz, twice the platter's rotational rate of 0.55Hz (33rpm). This produced the high 0.326% wow figure seen in our analysis, and an IEC Weighted wow of 0.154%. Speed was just +0.4% fast, minimal error. This will produce slightly nebulous timing.

The Denon DL103 and Rega RB300 arm, with ISOkinetik counterweight, were vibration-free, producing an impressively clean result under analysis with our accelerometer. The DL103 cartridge offers a frequency response that is flat and smooth, much like that of the Clearaudio Concept; the two are surprisingly alike in this sense and both will lack the usual 'bright top' of many cartridges, although the Denon has a little more top than the Concept.

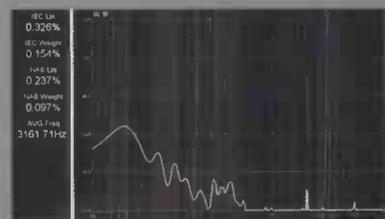
Also like the Concept, tracing losses reduce treble output on inner grooves to -3dB at 10kHz so the sound will be warm here. The Denon tracks very well and suits this arm combo.

The ISOkinetik Rega worked very well in most areas, turning in an impressive result in every area, except that of wow, where there was a problem. NK

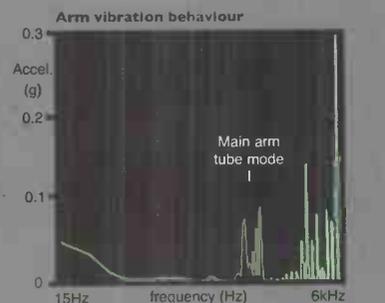
Channel separation	27dB
Tracking ability (300Hz) lateral	90µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	25cms/sec.
Output (5cms/sec rms)	0.7

<b>ISOKINETIK REGA TURNTABLE</b>	
Wow	0.326%
Wow IEC wtd	0.154%
Speed accuracy	+0.4%

**SPEED VARIATIONS**



**ARM VIBRATION**



<b>DENON DL103 CARTRIDGE</b>	
Tracking force	2.5gms
Frequency response	20Hz - 20kHz



*...this, the ISORbfoot; made from aluminium with Sorbothane isolation.*

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### VINYLCARE RECORD CLEANING KIT £79

An effective method of cleaning records is an essential part of any LP replay system, but record cleaning machines are still too exotic (and too expensive) for many listeners. So, a well chosen set of specially designed tools such as this Vinylcare Record Cleaning Kit is a welcome development. At its heart is Disc Doctor's 'Miracle Record Cleaner' cleaning solution and special pads, imported from the USA. Added to this in the kit is absolutely everything else that you will need, apart from the records and somewhere to work.

everyday replay. Next, the 'Disc Doctor' solution is brought into play. Using this with the special cleaning pads is where the work is done and it takes a bit of practice to get the action just right, but once mastered it's pretty painless. The record is then rinsed under a running tap (mind that paper label!) to remove the cleaning solution, this is probably the most fraught part of the whole process as it invariably involves getting under your wife or partner's feet, so be careful. The final stage is to wipe the record again with a second cleaning pad and the distilled water, after

The first step is to remove the loose dirt with the carbon fibre brush. As this brush is bound to get a bit mucky a second one is included for dusting off "cleaned" records before

which the record can be declared clean!

It is recommended to give the disc a once-over with the clean carbon fibre brush and the stylus a quick wipe with the Dry Clean pad (included) before listening, if you don't want your stylus to be the final link in the record cleaning chain. Finally, the record should be replaced in one of the polythene lined inner sleeves provided.

On audition, the results were most impressive; the obviously well-used test records looked clean, sounded good and the number of pops and clicks were not far off what one would expect from new ones, not bad for something that could have been a table mat or part of the clutter on a teenager's bedroom floor in its past life! As the Vinylcare kit is so comprehensive I'd recommend it most for those who are either new to LPs or are returning to them. The more hardcore disc spinner may find that they have a lot of the tools already but as these things don't last forever it's still worth considering.

TJ

[Contact: [www.vinylcare.co.uk](http://www.vinylcare.co.uk)]

# soundbites

### ORIGIN LIVE ARM LOAD METER £57

It's hard to understate the importance of Vertical Tracking Force (VTF, but normally called 'tracking weight') to a turntable playback system. No matter how good the deck is, or how expensive the tonearm may be, if the cartridge is not ploughing the groove at the right weight, nothing can sound right. Too low and things get skittish and harsh; too high and the disc sounds leaden and unengaging. That's why manufacturers supply recommended tracking weights with all their cartridges, along with the tracking force range which simply tells you the weights you can run without causing damage to the disc. The trouble is, many tonearms these days simply don't have tracking force dials, and if they are fitted, you can't be totally sure that they're

correct, which is why there's a good case to be made for investing in a product such as this.

There are of course a number of products around, including some good weighing scale-type designs from the likes of Ortofon and Shure to name but two. There are also some great high end electronic stylus balances too, some of which are closer to male jewellery than functional, utilitarian vinyl care products. This Origin Live arm load meter slots straight between the two extremes, giving a very accurate reading which correlated very closely to my reference Technics SH-50P1



electronic stylus balance.

The gauge displays figures from 5g down to 0.001g on a large LCD screen, with a claimed accuracy of +/- 0.002g. It's nicely compact at 99x44x22mm, comes with a neat vinyl case and uses two AG12 1.5v batteries. A decent quality product at an affordable price.

DP

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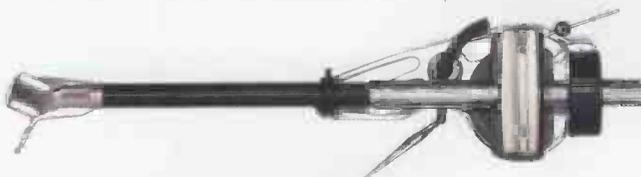
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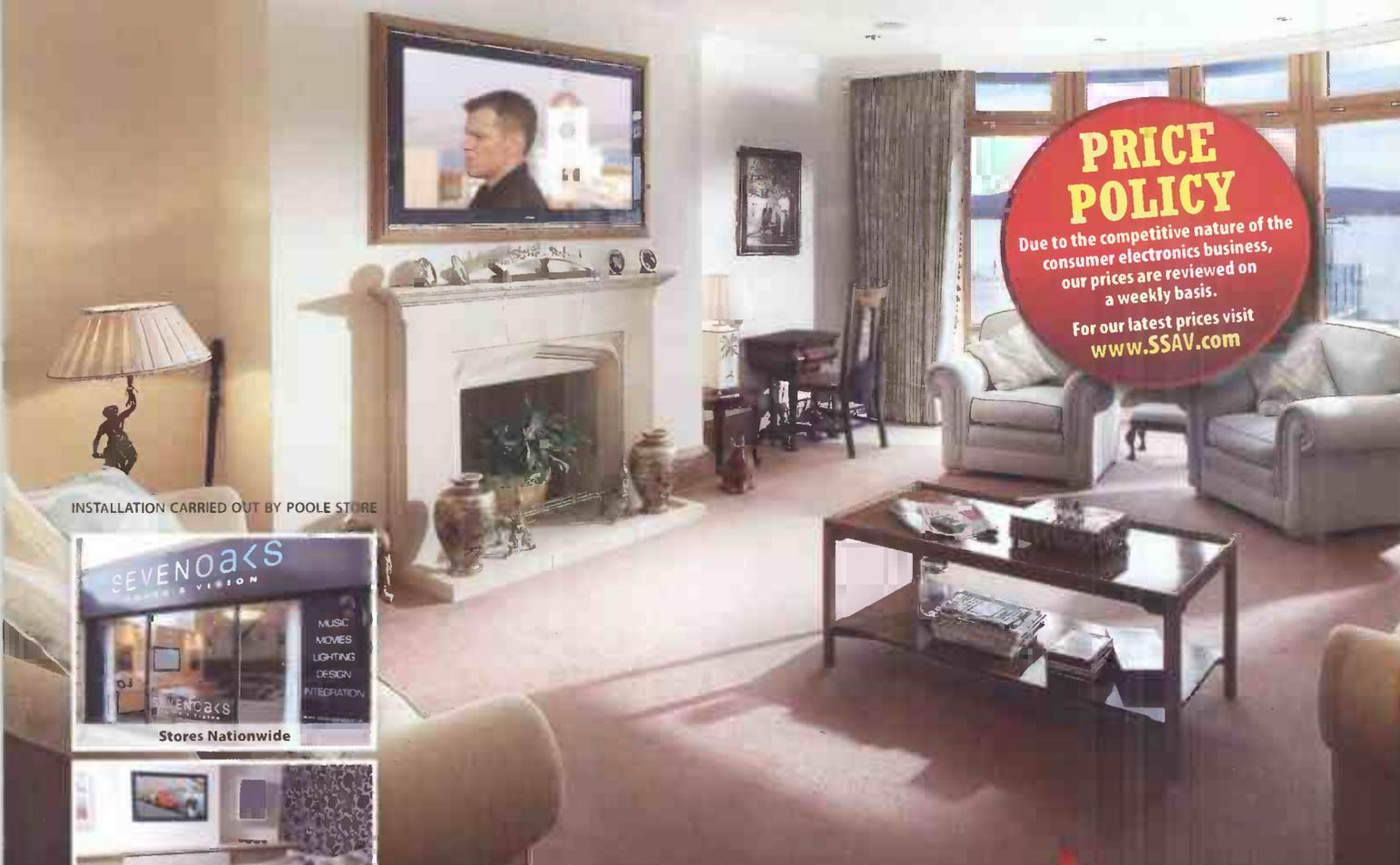
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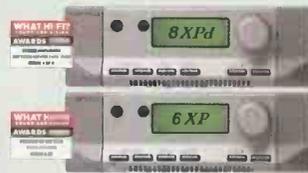
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The award-winning 'Servo Evolution' CD players - CD6 SE, CD8 SE & CDX tSE/DAC X



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2x LEAK TL25+ valve amps, 1 black 1 gold, Leak Troughline Stereo tuner, Leak Point One stereo pre amp, Leak Stereo 20 valve amp. Some valves missing. Davedha@hotmail.co.uk

LIBERTY AUDIO Suite, speaker designer equipment, complete with pc card, amplifier, cables, microphone tripod, netcalc, box-mod user manual, pc if needed at no extra cost email or phone mike 01189693377

QUAD ESL 2905. Absolutely perfect, 2 hours use only from new (4 weeks ago). Black/Silver. All accessories. Demonstration/ Pictures on request. Sell for £5500.00 (rrp £7000.00) Contact Neil on 01925 656990 or nemall@aol.com

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FOR SALE. Quad 57 electro-static loudspeakers. £1000 spent on complete rebuild by one thing audio, new style black cloth grilles, and new style stands, first class condition £720.00. Tannoy dimension 10 loudspeakers excellent condition, hardly used, new price £5000.00 sell for £2400.00. Ring for more information Graham, 01622-750732, Kent area.

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Wharfedale 60 Speakers by G A Briggs, 13" woofers, 8" mid range/tweeters, Sand filled rear cabinet panel, Danish design cabinets, very good condition, £50 pair. 01489891539.



## WDKEL84 Valve Amplifier Kit

*"The quality that can be gleaned from this amp is a fine introduction to the joys of the valve sound"*

The WDKEL84 features a pair of EL84 valves in Push Pull configuration per channel, providing two channels each 18 Watts into an 8 Ohm load. Available as a 5 input integrated amplifier with ALPS volume control.

**WDKEL84 kit** £499

**WDKEL84 built and tested** £649



## WD88VA Valve Amplifier Kit

*"The result is an amplifier that combines majesty, transparency and rhythmic boogie factor with the ability to swing and sing on all types of music"*

Often described as a 'sweet sounding' valve, our particular implementation of the KT88 makes sure that it is driven to its ultimate performance. Available as a 35W stereo power amplifier with single input volume control, or as a relay switched integrated with five inputs.

**WD88VA kit** £989

**WD88VA built and tested** £1289



## WDHD3S Headphone Valve Amplifier Kit

*"WDHD3S is a single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for added purity and is as quiet as a mouse"*

A beautifully simple stereo headphone amplifier design using Mullard ECL83 valves. It works directly from any source. The circuit uses twin high specification E/I output transformers that can be switched to drive any headphones between 16 to 300 Ohms.

**WDHD3S kit** £398

**WDHD3S built and tested** £528



## WD25A Standmount Speaker Kit

*"The one aspect that stands out is the easy ability to resolve instruments and voices ... bass quality and definition is a revelation"*

**Cabinet kit (pair)** £349

The aperiodic enclosure offers the bass clarity and definition of a larger closed box, together with the efficiency and easy amplifier load necessary for users of valve amplifiers. Available with SEAS STD soft dome treble unit, or high performance SEAS Millennium treble unit.

**WD25A STD kit (pair)** £269

**WD25A EX kit (pair)** £699



## WD25T Floorstanding Speaker Kit

*"The WD25T always sounds crisp and taut, but can 'rumble' menacingly giving impressive physicality reminiscent of far larger boxes. Imaging is superb, the midband is also special; it's very open with masses of detail about the condition of the recording"*

**Cabinet kit (pair)** £549

Cunningly arranged as an aperiodic enclosure leading to a lower sealed compartment, the WD25T combines the optimum damping of aperiodic loading with the bass extension of a large closed box. Available with STD soft dome or high performance Excel treble units.

Both the WD25 kits are based around a SEAS 26cm (10") paper cone bass unit with an efficiency of 89dB for 1W. The crossover has been developed for an easy drive 6 - 8 Ohm load making the system ideal for all types of amplifiers.

**WD25Tv2 STD kit (pair)** £329

**WD25Tv2 XL kit (pair)** £499



CYRUS CD6S CD player / Cyrus 6VS2 amp, both one year old in quartz silver, boxed in perfect condition. £650 (£1350). Collection preferable, but can post for £15 if required. Lee West Midlands 01384 412234

WANTED - A pair of Atacama BD200 or SL200 low level speaker stands. Must be in excellent condition. Email - kotcc@talktalk.net - mobile - 07708133972

EXPERIENCE S1000 Loudspeaker Cables 5M Stereo Pair. Spades One End 4mm Banana Plugs The Other. Drain Wire. White Fabric Outer Sheath. £75 Craig unstageatspeed@hotmail.com (Loughborough)

WORLD AUDIO Design PSE 300B mono amplifiers, build by ex-Audio / visual technician. BGate & PIO capacitors etc. Spares Excellent condition, totally reliable £900. Buyer to collect, Aberdeen area. ajfranklin@aol.com

LEAK 2075 speakers immaculate teak £595 JBE Slate Mk3 direct-drive turntable £395. 01798 813133 or reconcile @bdrls.freeseerve.co.uk

Technics SL-1210M5G top of range direct drive turntable, SME M2 tonearm, Sumiku BPS EVO3 moving coil cartridge, Funk Firm Achromat, all boxed, new in 2008/09, £895 worth £1650. tel 01492 878107.

SANSUI G9000 rare classic receiver. Fabulous tuner, 160wpc amp, pre-power separator, just serviced, vgc. Original packaging, owners and service manuals. £750ono. 01798 813133 or reconcile @bdrls.freeseerve.co.uk

ICON AUDIO 300B intergrated valve amp, under 1 year old and in excellent condition. 35w per channel and optional HT delay fitted. Lovely creamy sound with detail and good bass, just whats needed for those dark evenings beside the fire. Magical sounding amp that has to be heard to be believed. tel 078431246006 or 02886757357....email.. motox77@tiscali.co.uk

SONY AMPLIFIER STR-1070. Cinema surround sound, DTS, DD, RDS, Silver colour plus many other features. Brand new and never used when purchased due to circumstances unfortunately. Cost £500. Sell at £400 ono. Tel 01245 607755.

NAIM 112 pre, I50 power, flatcap2, excellent condition, boxed (£1850) £750 ono, Linn Ikemi, excellent condition, boxed (£1950) £800 ono. 01384 350412 (West Midlands)

I HAVE Audiolab CDM + Audiolab DAC for sale. jose.cortereal@btinternet.com

QUAD 33/405/FM3 for sale. Good working order £200.00. 01623 407031 Mansfield.

PIONEER CLD-D925 LD/CD, Yamaha DSP-A3090 amp 2 Mission 752, 2 Mission 751, Mission 75C speakers REL Strata II Sub-Bass All leads/ manuals Offers over £500.00 07541967951 mickdrube@yahoo.co.uk

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SONY D-50 CD player, 1984, Sonys second player, compact unit, portable, sadly dont have battery pack but comes with ac power dock. Solid construction. Ex working order. Piece of rare hifi history. Offers 07876 705266

ATC SCM50 ASL active towers in walnut, only 3 months old, very reluctant sale. Amazing speakers, used in studios worldwide. Mint 'as new' condition, boxes etc. Cost £9500, sell £6200. 07876 705266

BEL CANTO Pre3 pre-amplifier, excellent condition, boxed with user manual £550. Tel: 01603 702330.

PROAC STUDIO 250's, pair of quality floor standing speakers for sale, good condition, photos available. Original cartons with it but these are heavy speakers so collection would be the best option. £725. Tel Dave 01142360166 Sheffield. scooby @what20.freeseerve.co.uk

LINN KABER aktive speakers & 3x Linn LK100 power amps in black. All in (A1) excellent condition. Active cards included and all cables. (over £4000 new) Asking £1100. Tel 01647 61421. pat.tranter@yahoo.co.uk

AN AKAI AP-A305 semi automatic turntable for sale in Radlett. Needs new stylus but in good working order. Offers invited over £10.00. Contact Debbie, 07976 884184 or email dl@debbielavelle.plus.com.

CYRUS PRE vs2 pre-amp (Quartz silver) new unused/ boxed £395. 01483-271669 or 07759205820 (Surrey)

TOM EVANS amplifiers Linear B mono-blocks. 55 watts per channel. (new £8000) £4000 the pair, also Vibe Pre (new £2750) £1500 Tel 01689 819 455 t.plank@ntlworld.com

WANTED: MISSION 767 loudspeakers. Condition relatively unimportant (within reason!) but must be in good working order and preferably complete with original LFAU amplifier. Email: audiolaurel@yahoo.com Telephone: 07906 336176

HI-FI NEWS October 1956 to December 1965 in binders. £150. Tel: 020 8440 0660

VOIGHT SPEAKERS complete with Fostex drivers. Fabulous sound with low power amps. Very affordable. Tel: Don 01902 764 747

CLASSIC CONTACTS

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all those companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

**GT AUDIO** (Graham Tricker, Bucks) Leak Troughline specialists. Also Quad and most classic tuners, radios and amplifiers restored, repaired. Tel: 01895 833099 Mob: 07960 962579 www.gtaudio.com

**TECHNICAL AND GENERAL** (East Sussex) Turntable parts - wide range of spares and accessories, plus arms and cartridges. Tel: 01892 654534

**CARTRIDGE MAN** (Len Gregory, London) Specialist cartridge re-tipping service and repairs. High quality special cartridges. Tel: 020 8688 6565 Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net www.thecartridgeman.com

**AUDIO LABORATORIES (LEEDS)** (Phil Pimblott, Leeds) Renovation, repair and restoration. Specialist in valve hi-fi, radio transmitters, cinema amps, kit building. Tel: 0113 244 0378 www.audiolabs.co.uk

**QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS** (Cambs) Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first. (Also Audiolab, Mission & Wharfedale). Tel: 0845 4580011 www.quad-hifi.co.uk

**ARKLESS ELECTRONICS** (Northumberland) Specialist in repairs, restoration and modifications to all amplifiers, valve or solid state, ancient and modern. Tel: 01670 829891 Email: arklesselectronics@btinternet.com

**SOWTER TRANSFORMERS** (Brian Sowter, Ipswich) Large range of audio transformers for valve amps, cartridges, line drive, interstage plus all associated services. Tel: 01473 252794 www.sowter.co.uk

**WEMBLEY LOUDSPEAKER** (Paul MacCallam, London) Comprehensive loudspeaker servicing. Tel: 020 8 743 4567 Email: paul@wembleyloudspeaker.co.uk www.wembleyloudspeaker.com

**EXPERT STYLUS COMPANY** (Wyndham Hodgson, Surrey) Stylus replacement service for all types of cartridge. Including precise profiling for 78s Tel: 01372 276604 Email: w.hodgson@btclick.com

**ONE THING** (Coventry) Specialist in electrostatic panel manufacture and repair. Can refurbish ESL 57s and 63s as well as Leak Troughlines and Quad IIs. Email: one.thing@ntworld.com www.onethingaudio.com

**CLASSIC NAKAMICHI** (Paul Wilkins, Worthing, West Sussex). Restore, Repair & Service Nakamichi Cassette Decks. Tel: 01903 695695 Email: paul@bowersandwilkins.co.uk www.bowersandwilkins.co.uk

**HADEN BOARDMAN** Repair, service & modifications; classic & modern. Collection available. Redundant / faulty equipment purchased, selected new equipment available. Tel 01942 790600 www.audioclassics.co.uk

**Dr MARTIN BASTIN** (Shropshire) Garrard 301/401 restoration, renovation and service. Special plinths; rumble cures, etc. Tel: 01584 823446

**D.K. LOUDSPEAKER SERVICE** (Dave Smith, Hornchurch, Essex) Re-cone of hi-fi loudspeakers, high quality loudspeaker systems, P.A., power loudspeakers. Tel/Fax: 01708 447 344

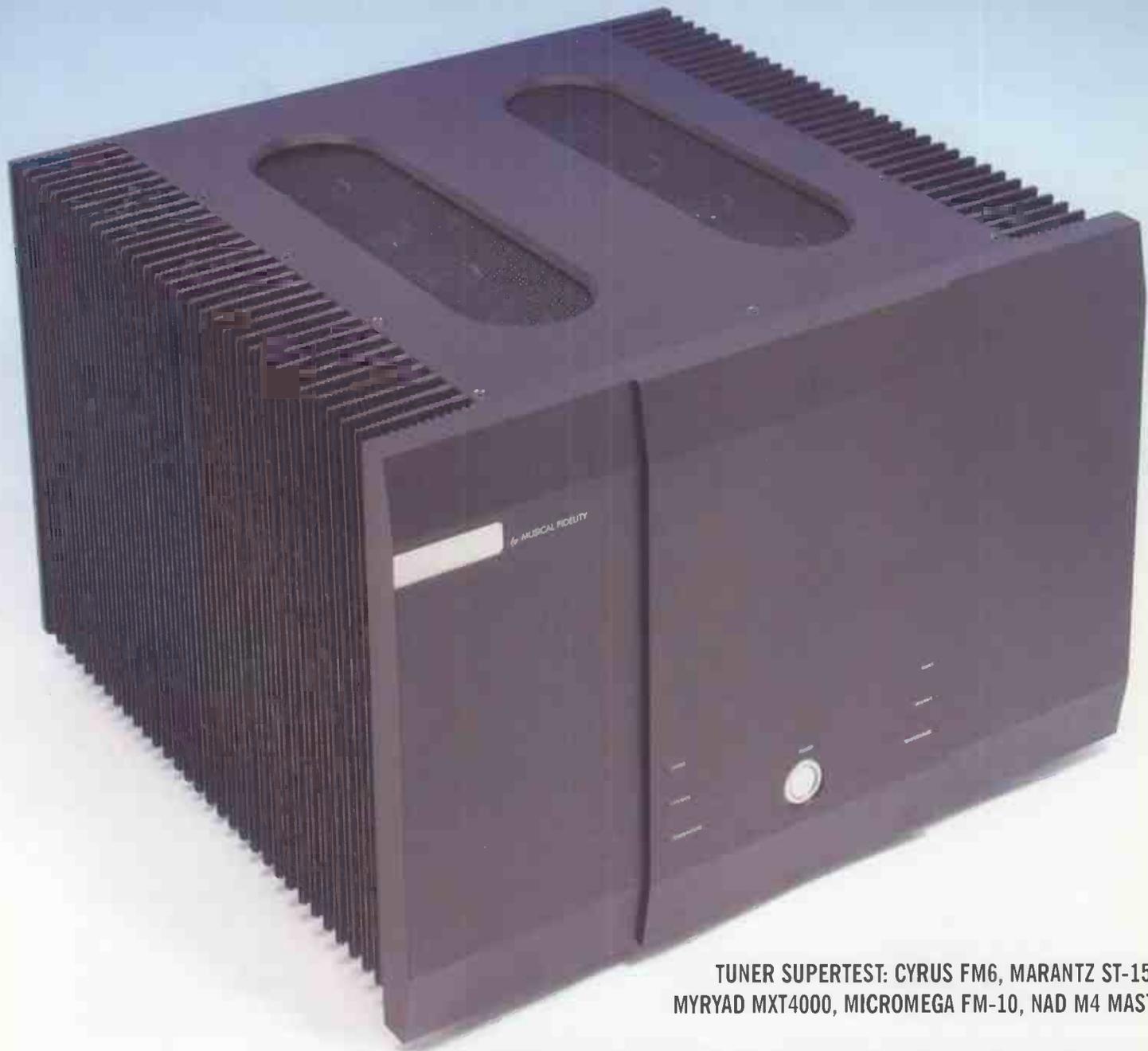
**LOCKWOOD AUDIO** (London) Tannoy loudspeaker parts, restoration and repair. Also Epos and TDL loudspeakers. Tel: 020 8 864 8008 www.lockwoodaudio.co.uk

**LORICRAFT AUDIO** (Terry O'Sullivan, Bucks) Garrard 301/401 and their own 501 repair, spares and service. Tel: 01488 72267 www.garrard501.com

**REVOX** (Brian Reeves, Cheshire) Revox tape recorder spares, service and repair. Accessories also available. Tel: 0161 499 2349 Email: brian@revoxservice.co.uk www.revov.freeuk.com

**CLASSIQUE SOUNDS** (Paul Greenfield, Leicester) ESL-57s restored, rebuilt, fully renovated or improved. Leak, Quad valves amps etc. Tel: 0845 123 5137 Mob: 0116 2835821 Email: classique\_sounds@yahoo.co.uk www.flashbacksales.co.uk/classique

**OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING** (Bristol) Unit 2, 16 Midland Street, St Phillips, Bristol. Tel: 0117 925 6015 www.octave-aw.co.uk



TUNER SUPERTEST: CYRUS FM6, MARANTZ ST-15S1  
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## NEXT MONTH

You'll be full of the joys of spring with March's Hi-Fi World, as we've a top mix of super new products and a few classic older ones! We announce the return of Deltec Precision Audio, with the brand new CA1/SA1 pre-power amplifier combination, and test the breathtaking Simon Yorke S10 turntable. We test the mighty Musical Fidelity AMS50 power amplifier [pictured] and there's a tuner supertest with some of the best analogue radios currently on sale. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you...

**PICK UP THE MARCH 2010 ISSUE OF HI-FI WORLD ON SALE JANUARY 29TH,  
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## JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC IN EUROPE

### SPEAKERS CORNER/VERVE

#### 1963

**B**ack in 1944, record producer Norman Grantz decided to arrange a concert in Los Angeles, as a fund raiser, and he invited a range of jazz greats including Illinois Jacquet, Jack McVea and Nat King Cole to take part. The event was very well received – in fact, it was a complete triumph and more concerts were subsequently arranged. Consequently, the invited guest musicians, whose line-up changed on a frequent basis, went on tour with the show while a series of LPs were released to celebrate the events. The shows also featured a certain amount of altruism on Grantz's part in that – as a passionate jazz fan – he paid his stars well (a novelty for those taking part, many jazz stars spent their lives being ripped off by other, unsavoury, music business characters) and Grantz was indomitable in his fight against racism of all sorts.

The long running series of 'Jazz At The Philharmonic' events has achieved legendary status amongst jazz aficionados and now, via Speakers Corner, you can buy a chunk of one of the tours that Grantz undertook. Specifically, on 21st November 1960, in the Konserthuset, Stockholm, Sweden.

Taking two years to develop, the company has released a magnificent box set of the event. Within the pizza-style container sit four LPs that represent four individual albums, released to commemorate the event and feature greats such as Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, Stan Getz, Benny Carter, Roy Eldridge and, a little unusually, Lalo Schifrin.

"Inky black silences draw you right into the performances, which light up with vitality and energy..."

Each album is presented as a single entity with an inner sleeve and card outer sleeve with full cover art and its own liner notes on the rear. You also get a LP-sized booklet detailing an interview with German promoter and tour director for this jazz event, Fritz Rau. A remarkable man, he brought just about every major star to the German shores from Hendrix to Dylan to Zappa and more. His brief thoughts on Grantz are enlightening.

It would be true to say that this set would never have been released but for a fortunate phone conversation with a journalist who alerted Speakers Corner that the original albums existed in the first place (You see? We do have some use after all). Speakers Corner boss, Kai Seemann, revealed that, armed with this new knowledge, he approached Universal where the following, highly paraphrased, conversation took place.

"I'd like to reissue the 'Jazz At The Philharmonic In Europe' albums please."

"The what?"

"'Jazz At The Philharmonic In Europe'... you own the original masters."

"Er...do we?"

The problem, you see, is that Universal only 'sees' a set of masters if it arrives in its system - a sort of database. But that system only flags a master's existence in the first place if the company has decided to release those masters as a CD. Yes, I know what you're thinking, how much music has Universal got in its vaults

that it knows nothing about? Let's quantify it as 'lots'!

"We had to supply Universal with all the necessary information about the albums, the tracks, the length of the tracks, which I timed myself," said Seemann. "I assume that they then went to the Verve archive and searched for it manually or that they had a specific entry within that individual Verve library."

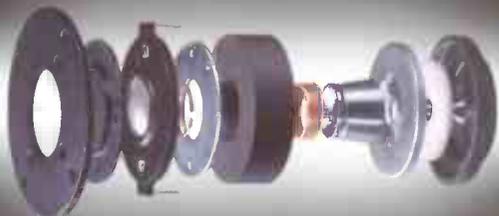
"I really had to push Universal to complete this project. Mainly because, when new recordings go onto the system, the label has to undertake a lot of paperwork: the artist's details, times, musician's details, who owns the rights... it's a lot of work. They try their best to avoid this so I really had to push them."

Think about those stories you hear of policemen not making arrests because they know it'll incur paperwork and you get the general idea of Universal's attitude to this project. Seemann however, feels lucky that the label does 'put itself out' for him but believes that, if it wasn't a jazz project, the label might not bother at all. Maybe this is why much classic pop and rock remains dormant in the Universal archives.

All the effort was worth it, however. Considering this is a live recording, the set offers an almost perfect remaster which I don't think could be bettered. Inky black silences, where appropriate, draw you right into the performances which light up with vitality and energy. The sheer clarity of this remaster is stunning, A jazz fan's dream. **PR**

# USHER

## DANCER mini small wonders



### Size really doesn't matter.

Close your eyes when listening to the Usher DANCER mini speakers, and you forget about their size immediately. The weight, energy and scale of ambience reproduced by these speakers simply defy their physical size. You'll also be pleasantly surprised that coherence and precision, often unique to small monitors, are an essential part of the Usher DANCER mini experience.

#### DANCER mini one

2-way system

1.25" be dome tweeter

7" woofer

sensitivity: 87 dB @ 1 watt/1m

nominal impedance: 8 ohms

frequency response @ -3 dB: 38 Hz - 40k Hz

dimensions (w x d x h): 31 cm x 36.5 cm x 105cm

#### DANCER mini two

2-way system

1.25" be dome tweeter

two 7" woofers

sensitivity: 90 dB @ 1 watt / 1m

nominal impedance: 4 ohms

frequency response @ -3dB: 28 Hz - 40k Hz

dimensions (w x d x h): 34 cm x 48 cm x 123 cm



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