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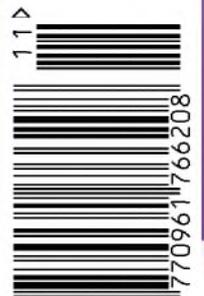
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**P**eople expect a hi-fi system to sound large and impressive – meaning panoramic sound stage and thunderous bass – that enveloping quality of power able to move physical objects! Not something you get from headphones. And KEF's looming large R7 Reference loudspeakers reviewed on p10 do just this. With relaxed ease. Founded in 1961 by the famed Raymond Cooke – who together with senior

engineer Laurie Fincham told me a thing or two about loudspeaker engineering! – KEF set the stage for properly engineered loudspeakers through the 1970s. They continue that mission today with products like the R7 that quite obviously stand out in their massive ability. I hope you enjoy our insight into these loudspeakers.

Talking of yesterday, good to see another budget turntable from Pro-Ject, able to spin analogue LP in all its old glory. Our review on p83 picks out the fact that modern materials and design techniques move the technology ahead: old glory yes, old fashioned sound no. Rather a bright new look at sound from LP that truly digs out the detail, rather than softening it. This is LP as it stands today, which with quiet vinyl and modern cutting lathes (often updated old ones!) is popular with the music business as well as audiophiles, and also with those who want to get closer to natural analogue sound free from digital distortions. At the price, the Debut Carbon Evo is a great starter package.

Rega are another UK brand name with heritage similar to KEF. Extraordinary in some ways that they successfully leveraged the design of a great tonearm, the RB300, to become one of Britain's premiere hi-fi brands. On p36 Chris Frankland spends time with the latest Rega Aethos amplifier that came highly recommended by his friendly local dealer. Chris knows Rega products well and brings his long experience to a review that I hope you find informative. No Press Release regurgitation here, solid insight instead.

Mustn't forget digital! And Melco. Their latest high-end hard drive music server, the N10 reviewed on p61 magically delivers lovely digital. Expensive yes, but also impressive. I hope you enjoy what this month's issue brings you, from yesterday and today.

**Noel Keywood**  
*Editor*



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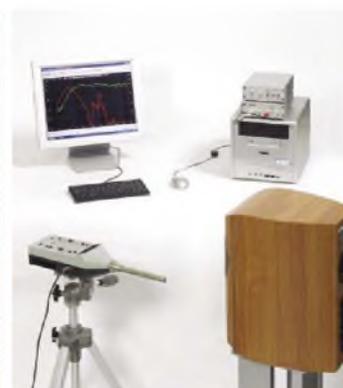
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To ensure the upmost accuracy in our product reviews, *Hi-Fi World* has extremely comprehensive in-house test facilities, and our test equipment - from big names like Rohde & Schwarz and Hewlett Packard - is amongst the most advanced in the world.

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

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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



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# contents



## LOUDSPEAKERS

### KEF R7 10

KEF's high-end Reference R7 floorstanding loudspeakers, reviewed by Noel Keywood. Towers of power.

## DIGITAL

### MELCO N10 MUSIC SERVER 61

A dedicated hi-fi music server from deep NAS experts Melco, takes Noel Keywood's fancy.

## AMPLIFICATION

### YAMAHA A-S3200 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER 16

Yamaha keep their place in the high-end space with this new all-analogue amplifier, Noel Keywood thinks.

### REGA AETHOS AMPLIFIER 36

Chris Frankland looks closely at Rega's new integrated amplifier – a power house with muscle.

## HEADPHONES

### KLIPSCH HERITAGE HP-3 HEADPHONES 22

High-end headphones from Klipsch of the USA impress Noel Keywood. Serious price, serious sound.

### PHILIPS FIDELIO X3 HEADPHONES 58

Philips bring their popular Fidelio headphones up to X3 status. X1 lover Noel Keywood listens in.



# NOVEMBER 2020

VOLUME 30 : NO. 9

## CABLES

### 48 TELLURIUM Q BLUE II 'SPEAKER CABLES

Martin Pipe checks out new budget loudspeaker cables from this specialist manufacturer.

## OLDE WORLDE

### 43 MURPHY A272 RADIO RECEIVER

Martin Pipe brings us insight into why the Murphy brand name was once popular with his look at their A272 VHF/FM home radio.

## VINYL

### 80 NEWS

All the latest and greatest vinyl releases for you, from the pen of Paul Rigby.

### 83 PRO-JECT DEBUT CARBON EVO TURNTABLE

Pro-Ject's new budget turntable package gets Noel Keywood listening.

### 90 AUDIOPHILE VINYL

Paul Rigby spins the latest batch of LP releases.

### 93 AUDIOPHILE BOOK

The Buzz Trolls. A children's book (?) about hi-fi. Paul Rigby laughs.



## REGULARS

### 7 NEWS

Words from the world...

### 15 COMPETITION

Your chance to win an EAT E-GLO Petit phonostage worth £1249.

### 28 MAIL

Five pages of your views, wonderful as always...

### 50 WORLD STANDARDS

Updated guide to the latest and greatest hi-fi hardware on sale.

### 40 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Ensure your copy every month and save money too!

### 64 AUDIOPHILE CD

Paul Rigby rounds up the latest audiophile CD releases.

### 67,69,71,73 OPINION

The team get to grips with matters music, hi-fi and life!

### 74 WORLD CLASSICS

Brilliant designs that have stood the test of time...

### 92 DIAL-A-DEALER

A comprehensive guide to UK hi-fi retailers.

### 95 CLASSIFIEDS

Second-hand bargains.

### 96 NEXT MONTH

What we hope to bring you in the next sizzling issue...

### 97 ADVERTISERS' INDEX

### 98 CLASSIC CUTS

Fleetwood Mac's Mystery to Me. A lesser known album but a classic thinks Paul Rigby.



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# news



## TECHNICS AMPS IT UP!

Upmarket Technics amplifiers, notably the uber-sophisticated SU-A2/SE-A1 combo of the late 1970s, were objects of lust to those unconvinced by the 'less-is-more' philosophy of some U.K. manufacturers.

The vinyl revival has given parent company Panasonic the excuse they needed to bring back Technics, new versions of the SL-1200 turntables spearheading the relaunch. And now there's a Technics uber-amp to go with the tasty turntables – and its oversized analogue output-level meters are suggestive of the SE-A1 power amp. The new "Reference Class" SU-R1000 integrated amplifier, available in the UK from November with an anticipated price tag of £6,999, is a digital design with lots of clever tech on board. It features balanced and unbalanced line inputs, an MM/MC phono stage, two USB ports for PC use and four conventional (S/PDIF) digital inputs.

The output of the advanced Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) amps hasn't yet been specified, but the output terminals they feed are chunky – and those meters register over 300 Watts per channel! In development since 2014, the new technologies at the heart of the SU-R1000 include Active Distortion Cancelling Technology (ADCT), a battery-powered timing source, Jitter Elimination and Noise-Shaping Optimisation (JENO), a new approach to power supply design and the judicious use of high-speed GaN-FET semiconductors.

ADCT, Technics tells us, eliminates "distortion generated in the power stage by the speaker's counter-EMF and power-supply voltage-drop".

The phono stage is also interesting, as it boasts something called "Intelligent Phono EQ". This harnesses the power of modern digital technology to achieve an accurate RIAA curve and improve crosstalk. A record supplied with the SU-R1000 enables the system to automatically calibrate itself for the user's specific cartridge, thereby ensuring the flattest possible response. Clever stuff.

Further details: [www.technics.com](http://www.technics.com)

## HIGH-END HANNA

Take a deep breath! Hanna of Japan make gorgeously smooth sounding moving coil cartridges – at budget prices. Their new Umami Red comes in at £3399! This is a top-end moving coil (MC) from Hanna, priced above most else rather than below. The promise is a great sound.

The word Umami is, we are told, Japanese for "a very pleasing or delicious flavour on the palette". Master cartridge designer Maseo Okada-san "applies this concept as he combines brilliant materials and classic Japanese techniques with modern audio engineering" Hanna say.

"The cryogenically treated MC generator features a samarium/cobalt magnet with a pure-iron square plate armature, hand-wound with high purity 30-micron copper wire. A nude Microline stylus is bonded to a solid Boron cantilever for tracing the most delicate musical nuances from the LP". We hope to review this "delicious flavour on the palette" in our next issue!

For more information visit [www.airaudio.co.uk](http://www.airaudio.co.uk) or call +44 (0)1491 629 629.



## B&W JUBILEE SILVER

To mark the 25th anniversary of its million-selling 600 series B&W has upgraded key models to "S2 Anniversary Edition" status. These are the 603 floorstanders (£1,499), the HTM6 centre (£449) and the 606 (£599) and 607 (£449) bookshelf speakers. All boast upgraded crossovers, as used in the 700 Series; these feature specially-made Mundorf bypass capacitors, for "greatly improved resolution and transparency".

Oak has been added to the repertoire of finishes, and the tweeters of all Anniversary Edition speakers will be inscribed with a "celebratory logo".

In other respects these new models are identical to the sixth-generation models with – depending on the model – "decoupled Double Dome" aluminium tweeters and "FST Continuum Cone" midrange/bass drivers.

Further details: [www.bowerswilkins.com](http://www.bowerswilkins.com)





## IN THE GROOVE WITH IFI

The £149 ZEN Phono iFi describes as “an entry-level phono stage to surpass all others”. From the same teams responsible for the iPhono3 Black Label and PH-77 models, the MM/MC compatible ZEN Phono is iFi’s first sub-£200 phono stage. A balanced, symmetrical dual-mono design implemented with audiophile-grade surface-mounted components and internal switch-mode split-rail power supply, the ZEN Phono has gain settings – confirmed by LEDs – that range from 36dB to 72dB; a wide range of cartridges can therefore be accommodated.

Also provided is a switchable subsonic filter, with proprietary ‘intelligent’ circuitry to ensure that deep-bass isn’t affected.

Unusually, the ZEN Phono features a 4.4mm Pentaconn balanced output as well as (unbalanced) phono sockets. It is compatible with devices like iFi’s ZEN CAN analogue headphone amp, although it will interface with XLR gear via adaptors.

Further details: [www.ifi-audio.com](http://www.ifi-audio.com), +44 (0) 1279 501111 (*Armour Home*).



## BIG MAC TO GO

Jeep is now planning to reinvigorate its ‘Grand Wagoneer’ brand, which disappeared in the early 1990s. If launched, it could cost over \$100,000 in fully-loaded form. It features a plug-in-hybrid powertrain, based around – apparently – a 305hp 3.6-litre V6 engine (19-24 mpg!).

What makes a luxury SUV worthy of inclusion in these pages is its sound-system. Bentley went to Naim, Lexus joined forces with Mark Levinson and Jeep have been working with – who else? – McIntosh.

The PR puffery is short on details; all we know is that “the system is exclusively-designed and custom-tuned...so that drivers and passengers enjoy an equally luxurious listening experience”. McIntosh’s “iconic styling cues with blue lights and aluminum frames” we are assured “will make the system instantly recognisable to McIntosh lovers worldwide”.

Further details: [www.jeep.com](http://www.jeep.com), [www.mcintoshlabs.com](http://www.mcintoshlabs.com)



## THE STORY OF MY LIFESTYLE

Once upon a time, the ‘Citation’ brand was reserved for the cream of Harman Kardon’s hi-fi crop. Today, though, it graces a £300 smart speaker – specifically the “powerful” Citation 200, which its manufacturer describes as “designed for portability and immersive sound inside and outside the home”. Its Scandinavian styling – the device is covered by a cleanable wool fabric from Kvadrat – hides a 25mm tweeter, 120mm woofer and “two passive radiators for even deeper bass”. Features include 8 hour battery life, 50W RMS of amplification, support for AirPlay and Chromecast, Bluetooth, 2.4/5GHz Wi-fi and the ability to join forces with other Citation smart speakers for a “multi-room audio experience”.

Further details: [www.harmankardon.co.uk](http://www.harmankardon.co.uk)

## AS IF BY MAJIK

The “next generation” Majik DSM (£2,950.00 to you, guv) from Linn is billed as your “first step into authentic hi-fi”. A combination of network music player, pre-amp and power amp, all the buyer needs to do is “just add speakers” (Linn recommends its Majik 109 bookshelf speakers, or the full-range Majik 140 floorstanders).

However, the Majik DSM – like its predecessors – has to be installed professionally by a “Linn Specialist”.

Linn claims the new unit will handle “anything you throw at it, wired or wirelessly, via WiFi or Bluetooth... Tidal, Qobuz, Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, your own stored music collection”. Other features include 24-bit 192 kHz support, customisable smart buttons, Internet radio (via Tuneln), multiple inputs (including HDMI and USB), a headphone output, 100W per channel of Class-D amplification and multi-room integration. There is also an inbuilt phono stage.

Further details, *Linn Products*, +44(0)141 307 7777. [www.linn.co.uk](http://www.linn.co.uk)





## BLUETOOTH KANN-DO

New high data rate Bluetooth 5 (2Mbps) is supported by Astell & Kern's latest portable hi-res player, the £1,099 Kann Alpha. A third-generation Kann model, the Alpha features a headphone amplifier that has been redesigned to offer the drive of previous units (12V rms via the balanced output) in a smaller physical package; battery life is extended to 14.5 hours too.

Bluetooth 5 is claimed to "provide greater range and a more stable wireless connection to headphones" and supports the 24-bit aptX HD and LDAC codecs to maintain sound quality.

Other features include compatibility with a wide range of codecs (including MQA, 32-bit/384Hz PCM and DSD256), Android operating system, 4.1in. touchscreen display, aluminium body designed for noise-suppression as well as strong ergonomics, streaming service support and 64GB of on-board memory that can be expanded up to 1TB via a microSD card. The Alpha also supports streaming services "including Amazon Music, Apple Music, Audible, BBC Radio, Bandcamp, Deezer, Qobuz, Spotify, Tidal and TunesIn".

Further details: [www.astellnkern.com](http://www.astellnkern.com)



## ROTEL PAYS TRIBUTE TO KEN

Musicians who left us too early were usually involved with musical projects right until their untimely deaths. Similarly, industry legend Ken Ishiwata - who died earlier this year - had been working with Rotel. The fruits of this partnership - special-editions of the A11 integrated amplifier (£499) and CD11 CD player (£399) - have been named 'Tribute', in Ishiwata's honour. "Ken was widely-admired in the hi-fi industry" Rotel CTO Daren Orth told us "for his unique ability to identify products for modification and then define the musical references, plus suggested component changes, to the engineers - in order to take the products' performance to new levels, often with minimal price increases".

Many specially-selected passive components, chosen for their higher performance, were fitted to the A11's pre-amp and output stage; its chassis, meanwhile, was damped to reduce ringing. Similar changes were made to the CD11 - component substitutions were made in its DAC section, electrical grounding was modified and the casework revised to eliminate unwanted vibrations. In both cases, claimed benefits include "an increase in resolution and detail...a more musical presentation with improved rhythm and timing".

Further details: [www.rotel.com](http://www.rotel.com)



## HEARING THE LIGHT...

Sonus Faber's new handmade Lumina range of bass-reflex speakers comprises three bi-wireable models. First up is the Lumina I standmount (£799), a compact bookshelf speaker that's suitable for stereo listening or performing surround duties in a home cinema set-up. The Lumina III floorstander (£1,999) is claimed to deliver "powerful and distortion-free music, with advanced speech intelligibility for games and movies".

Finally, we have the £649 Lumina Center I - a centre-channel speaker "aligned in both appearance and acoustics".

The "perfectly-squared" Lumina cabinets, built from real multilayer wood and Sonus Faber's trademark leather with chrome surrounds for the drivers, have a "minimalistic look...in order to emphasise the quality of materials used".

Inherited from the company's Sonetto series is the Damped Apex Dome (DAD) tweeter, which features a "Kurtmueller hand-coated soft-silk 29mm diaphragm". However, the pulp-coned 100mm (mid) and 125mm (bass) drive units were designed from scratch for the Lumina's.

Available finishes include Walnut, Piano Black and Wengè (a dark tropical hardwood with a distinctive pattern).

Further details: *Fine Sounds UK* (distributor): +44 (0)1592 744710, [www.sonusfaber.com](http://www.sonusfaber.com)



# Bright Knight

**A big floorstanding loudspeaker, KEF's R7s wow Noel Keywood with their vivid sound.**

I thought, when first seeing the R7s “wow, these are big”. They certainly look a little muscular because the cabinet is deep, but KEF disarmingly describe them as a mid-size three way. Which I guess is right, but the R7 is not for limited spaces, either in physical size or acoustic design. We're talking big sound here, including big bass, for a very reasonable £2600; it's easy to pay more (and get less).

Readers say “what do you mean by a big room” and I'd suggest much less than 17ft or so long would be inappropriately small. An R5 would better suit. This is drawn from my own experience where my 17ft long lounge is not ideal for large loudspeakers but our very large office / listening room (6550 cu ft) is perfect, the point being the bass power a loudspeaker like the R7 produces will over-excite a small room causing it to boom. Heavy furnishing, notably big foam filled settees makes a big difference here so it's impossible to be specific about what will work and what will not. My comments are necessarily general then, but I have to say something to get these loudspeakers into context, rather than flunk the issue.

In KEF tradition, the R7 is a tour-de-force in engineering. The drive units are all designed in-house, notable amongst them being the central Uni-Q drive unit with its ‘tangerine’ waveguides (fins). This is two drive units in one. At centre is an aluminium dome 25mm (1in) tweeter. It is surrounded by an aluminium cone mid-range unit in what KEF term a co-axial arrangement.

The point they're keen to make here is that the acoustic centres of the two units are aligned axially (front to back) to eliminate acoustic phase error between them. Putting tweeter at centre means there's no vertical distance (gap) between the two units either, as with conventional three-way loudspeakers, so you get a totally cohesive launch of the sound wave into the room. Typically, this sort of drive unit is described as a

“point-source”.

Being a technical loudspeaker, as it were, I am being a little technical here, but as KEF have ruefully told me in the past, some people think that what appears to be a single drive unit can't be as good as two of 'em! The Uni-Q is two drive units carefully arranged into one space.

Why do this? Because notionally sound is meant to come from one point and you do get a sense of focus and coherence I've found, especially noticeable when moving around: the sound stays the same.

How to describe a large shiny black cabinet? Bit like something from ‘2001 a Space Odyssey’. That dates me rather than the loudspeaker, but because the R7s stand 1062mm tall, are 200mm wide and deep at 383.5mm, they loom large, unless the lights are out. This is a big loudspeaker trying not to look it. And the reason for big is to get deep bass. If you want to go low cleanly then it's a large drive unit to move volumes of air without distortion, and a cabinet to cope. And that's what the R7 offers whilst trying to disguise the fact. Alternative finishes are white and a walnut veneer.

The woodwork and drivers add up to 31.4kgs (69.2lbs) per loudspeaker, so not an easy lift. KEF supply four bolt-on stabilising feet, plus adjustable spikes. No foam bungs for the ports, to damp bass down in a boomy room. These are easily obtainable and cheap – better than using a pair of old socks!

For bass duties KEF again use aluminium fronted drivers, two of them here. The all-aluminium driver array keeps character consistent; there's no change in tonal colour, as happens when drive unit materials differ. Aluminium comes across as fast and vivid, suggesting the R7 will not sound dark or damped.

The rear panel carries ports for the upper and lower chambers and they are stagger-tuned our measurements showed, to give smoother low bass output. This also improves the loudspeaker

as an amplifier load, again shown by measurement (see Measured Performance). There's a sturdy connection panel that allows single or bi-wiring, with an unusual screw switch to choose between these modes, rather than removable links.

Build quality and finish are immaculate. The front grilles can be removed easily, being held by magnets.

## SOUND QUALITY

I drove the R7s from our Creek Evolution 100A amplifier connected to an Oppo BDP-205D Universal player to spin CD. Hi-Res came from an Astell&Kern AK120 portable player hooked up digitally through an optical cable to the Oppo's digital input, so again this puts the internal ESS ES9018 DAC into play, for a smooth sound. They were given a 72 hour run-in.

Although I mention bass output a few times in this review, in use within our large listening room (26ft x 18ft x 14ft) the R7s came over as well balanced: there was no obvious or thundering bass. Yet at the same time there was laconic ease in delivering very low subsonic bass, the point here being the KEFs don't emphasise lows for effect – which you can do from a cabinet of the size – but just



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**The connection panel carries bass and mid/treble inputs for bi-wiring, but they are connected by a simple screw switch for mono-wiring.**

get on with being correct.

And when listening that meant almost drifting deep lows from tracks like Loreena McKennitt's *Gates of Istanbul* (CD), where there was powerful presence to low bass but it did not overwhelm.

The R7s came over as academically well controlled, but able to deliver cleanly. The striding bass line in Skunk Anansie's *Hedonism* (CD) was easily and clearly displayed in front of me – no hesitation, no limitation. As you can hope and expect from KEF, since they came up with the way to understand and design a loudspeaker for clean bass (Thiele Small parameters) long ago: the R7s are not about to get bass reproduction wrong. There is the room to consider of course, and it substantially affects what you hear – and therefore what I say – but if you have a decent sized room then the “medium sized” R7s are going to drive it well at low frequencies to give great sounding bass.

Yet it wasn't the deep and powerful bass of these loudspeakers that most captured my attention, rather than their projection of vocals. They are slightly emphasised in the upper mids and this served to push out Josefine Crohholm singing in *Your Wild Garden* (CD), making her vivid in front of me. The all-aluminium drive unit array and the subtle balances wrought in the R7 make it forward whilst being correct at the same time – yielding a very sophis-

ticated balance.

Whilst the mid-range is forward, there is no searing treble. With Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* (CD) cymbals were finely wrought and sweet in character, obvious yet not overwhelming. The whole performance came together nicely to sound sharply defined, clear and pacy, with no bits sticking out – like emphasised sibilants for example. KEF avoid all this, treading a path right down the accurate middle; not bright, not warm. Not dark either, quite a sheeny balance that's well lit.

Guessing a valve amplifier would suit, even enhance the R7s, I connected up our Icon Audio Stereo 30SE single-ended valve amplifier – and this was an interesting combination. The loudspeakers remained on the sheeny side: there was no softening effect – as some expect from a valve amplifier. However, there was a more relaxed and natural presentation that also better revealed stage depth. This worked well with Arcadi Volodos playing Liszt's *Vallee d'Obermann*, where the space within his Steinway piano and around it – likely picked up by one or two microphones – made for an atmospheric “being there” sound. It also added to the sense

of scale. And that is what I heard with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra playing Korsakov's *Scheherazade*: kettle drums sat well back whilst higher strings at left came over as well lit and obviously forward on the stage. The R7s were able to retrieve all this information and place it on a wonderfully svelte sound stage, cohesive, smooth and deeply revealing.

**CONCLUSION**

KEF's big R7 floorstander is a lot of loudspeaker at the price. It is an engineering wonder and worth hearing for just that alone. What I heard was great smoothness and coherence. Also big bass and a powerful, if not overblown sound. These KEFs are forward and projective; no soft and easy composure here. Not for bright sounding amplifiers and watch out for Class Ds with no meat on the bone. Paired with a quality linear amplifier however, the R7s have a svelte and dramatic presentation worth hearing.



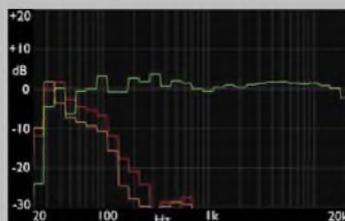
**Upper and lower reflex ports tune the internal bass chambers slightly differently, to smooth low bass and give an even amplifier load.**

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

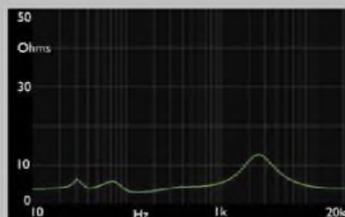
Frequency response of KEF's large R7 floorstander ran basically flat from 30Hz up to 20kHz – a very wide range. The lower port peaks at 30Hz (orange trace) and the upper port at 40Hz (red trace); they are staggered in deep bass output for consistent bass delivery.

This also reflects back into a peak-free impedance curve. The R7 is a big-bass

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**  
Green - driver output  
Red/orange - port outputs



**IMPEDANCE**



loudspeaker that runs very low so it is best in a large-ish room. There is some overall lift in lower midband output (+3dB), enough to add warmth and body to the sound, ensuring it isn't 'dry', as perfectly flat loudspeakers can be.

The output of the Uni-Q unit from 1kHz upward is smooth and notably peak free. Smoothness indicates absence of minor resonances, suggesting low colouration.

Sensitivity was on the low side for such a large loudspeaker, measuring 88dB from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input. I was expecting 90dB, especially as this is a 4 Ohm loudspeaker at low frequencies and draws heavy current. Modern amplifiers are designed for 4 Ohm loads, so no problem here – and 88dB is still very loud from one Watt. A 40 Watt valve amplifier with 4 Ohm output would do fine, for example.

The large R7s have both deep and powerful bass, measurement shows. They also have a very smooth midband and upper treble, peak free to avoid sharpness or spit. A fine measured performance all round. **NK**

**KEF R7 £2600**



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To do all this in a small case is the Petit's forte and requires quite a lot of modern electronic trickery. Whenever valves are involved big power supplies are needed – but not here. EAT have got a pair of valves working from a small external wall-wart supply that delivers in just 18V d.c. (1A). Petit offers valve sound from a small and compact unit measuring just 226mm wide, 262mm deep and 78mm high. OK, it isn't as small as possible, but it is small for a hybrid valve phono stage.

'Hybrid' because this is not an

all-valve phono stage, it is a transistor stage with valve output line drivers, known as cathode followers. The idea isn't uncommon, and it gives a fine result when done well, with good sound allied to small size and low noise.

The Petit has one pair of phono socket inputs, and one pair of phono socket outputs. It can't switch between permanently connected MM and MC turntables, but it can be quickly set to match any cartridge – MM or MC – from a single turntable, accommodating a change of cartridge in headshell as a most-likely example'.

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## QUESTIONS

**[1] EAT are -**  
[a] Austrian  
[b] Australian  
[c] Amazonian  
[d] Anatolian

**[2] The supply is -**  
[a] 250V d.c.  
[b] 1000V a.c.  
[c] 18V d.c.  
[d] 18kV a.c.

**[3] It uses -**  
[a] digital amplifiers  
[b] transistors and valves  
[c] steam injection  
[d] nuclear fusion

**[4] The inputs are -**  
[a] XLR  
[b] RJ45  
[c] 4mm socket  
[d] phono socket

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# Crystal Clear

Yamaha's top A-S3200 amplifier impresses Noel Keywood with its crystal clarity.

Last month we featured Leak going back to their stylistic roots with a wood-encased amplifier straight from the 1960s. This month I'm reviewing here the utterly gorgeous Yamaha A-S3200 amplifier that similarly harks back to this Japanese company's style and quality standards set long ago (1970s). But where Leak comes in below £1000 this flagship from Yamaha's latest amplifier range comes in at a not-insignificant £4,999.

And no sign of digital! You don't even get an app. But you do get an amplifier sublimely styled, built and

finished, with remote control. An amplifier so well made in fact it is a mechanical work of art. Yamaha have pulled the stops out here to make the best amplifier they know how to make (and they know how to make 'em) with no compromises. Listening to hoards of hermetically sealed miniature audio-quality relays clicking out a little tune inside every time I turned the front panel input selector told me a lot about design intent. This is the way to do it, the pure way to do it. And it's the way the A-S3200 does it.

Unsurprisingly, the A-S3200 has

a massive on-board linear power supply, its huge toroidal transformer contributing much to a weight of 24.7kg – a difficult lift I found. This is no lightweight and Yamaha admit it has been designed to be mechanically strong and rigid, so non-resonant. Measuring 435mm wide, 464mm deep and 180mm high it is still compact and will fit a classic 19in (483mm) wide rack.

Mains connection is through a normal IEC connector but there is no earth: it is I guess insulated to meet international safety standards and lack of earth is wanted to eliminate



any possibility of hum from the high-gain MC phono stage in particular. Fascinating that Yamaha – arch experts – go down this route.

The A-S3200 has been crafted to be a lovely user experience. Switch on is met by golden illumination from its dominant power meters, an expansive display that wings out as a visual statement. Big and open, not a restrained LED display. And lovely to see. For the price I guess anyone would want and expect such visual loveliness but modern product is too barren to provide visual intrigue. Yamaha nail it here, with an amplifier that shouts its status and their history.

As a pure analogue amplifier with no on-board digital the A-S3200 comes with a wide array of analogue inputs. First point to note however is that they claim this is an all-balanced design. Going fully balanced throughout raises lots of difficulties, in keeping the circuits stable and distortion free, and in adjusting volume on four channels in perfect synchronicity.

I've done some balanced design work with discrete devices (not chips) in LTSpice, sweated with prototypes and spoken to designers about the

servos needed to keep it all – literally – in perfect electronic balance (or distortion rises). Not easy. I don't know how Yamaha do it, likely in chips, but it does make for a complex amplifier.

Why bother? Most manufacturers don't. They prefer the easy route. But fully balanced, when in a state of balance, does cancel noise and distortion, making for a sense of purity in the sound.

With balanced internal circuitry balanced inputs become primary – and the A-S3200 has them. Not quite all possible I'll note. There's no balanced Phono input, nor a balanced power amp input that cuts out the volume control, like our Creek Evolution 100A that mates perfectly with our Oppo BDP-205D with volume-controlled balanced outputs. But this is a minor detail that's not going to be an issue in real life for most users. Best to bear in mind though that £4,999 buys a balanced amplifier that should be used with balanced sources.

Switch on invokes a prodigious amount of activity from internal relays that chatter amongst themselves. Turn the input selector and yet more

clicking sounds. Back in the 1990s, when running World Audio Design we all realised that the only way to perfectly switch low level audio signals was with super high quality Panasonic relays dedicated to the job. Quoted as good for 3 million operations, fast, filled with inert gas for zero-corrosion, and with super low contact resistance, these were the only answer. But even today they are rarely used: too expensive.

I was heartened to hear that Yamaha have gone down this purist path as the relays clicked away. Most manufacturers use simple, cheap FET switches that are silent and have a long life but introduce non-linearities and noise. It does make the A-S3200 seem a bit over-active at times, with all the clicking sounds, but that is a small price to pay for a purist approach – and Yamaha have not shied away from paying it.

Needless to say, there are oodles of analogue facilities. The meters can be switched from Peak to VU, or off. The headphone output has a switchable attenuator, there are bass and treble tone controls and a balance control. The tone controls have no bypass switch but at central click-



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stop zero measurement showed flat response.

There is a Phono stage for LP that can be switched to suit moving magnet (MM) or moving coil (MC) cartridges. Yamaha say it is an all-discrete design, avoiding the use of silicon chips. There is a basic EQ stage purposed for MM and an additional MC gain stage (usually  $\times 10$ ). See Measured Performance for more details.

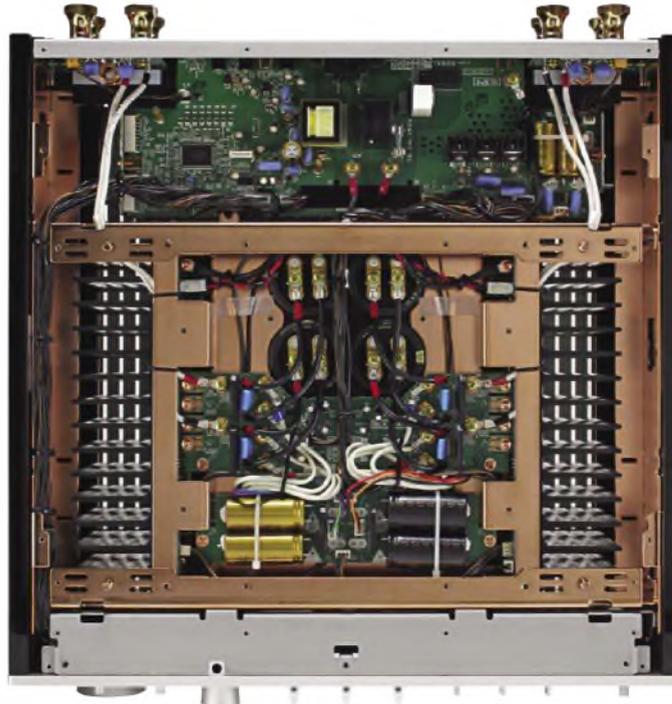
Yamaha's website shows the amplifier in a classic setting with turntable and Yamaha loudspeakers either side: that's the message. Back to high quality analogue – the balanced inputs purposed for high quality digital sources having balanced analogue output.

### SOUND QUALITY

I used the Yamaha with our Martin Logan ESL-X hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers, connected through Chord Company Signature Reference screened cables. Sources were an Audiolab M-DAC+ and a Chord Electronics Dave DAC, fed alternately by our Oppo BDP-205D player acting as a CD transport, optically connected with QED Quartz glass cable. Hi-res came from an Astell&Kern AK120 portable player connected optically. Interconnects were Chord Company Epic balanced analogue cables. LP was delivered in from an Audio Technica OC9X SH moving coil cartridge mounted in SME309 arm, on a Timestep Evo modified Technics SL-1210 Mk2 Direct Drive turntable.



**A massive toroidal mains transformer with smoothing/reservoir capacitors dominates the top view. The power boards sit next to the heat sinks at left and right, in classic arrangement.**



**A rigid steel chassis copper plated to reduce eddy currents is made obvious in this underside view. At left and right sit heatsinks below vents, but the amplifier ran cool in normal use.**

Spinning through a rake of high dynamic range CD tracks the properties of this amplifier became swiftly clear. Hand drums were very fast and impactful, yet there was lovely sense of tactile clarity to them. Very much a crystalline sound where properties of the crystal glow made it attractive.

If you think by "crystalline" I mean on the brightly lit side of things, then you're right! The A-S3200 is not a warm smoothy. It is fast and almost lacerative, but in an analogue manner

where there's no sense of edginess. John Campbell singing Down in the Hole sat on a stage with depth, a sense of icy clarity teasing out the finest details as if spotlight, tinkling sounds at track end jumping out at me.

The deep bass line at the start of Loreena McKennit's Gates of Istanbul fairly shook the room; there is a sense of massive bass power held under rigid control. Yamaha claim their earthing arrangement and strong chassis both contribute to bass quality. Can't make a judgement on this but with Safri Duo's Samb Adagio the strenuous synth bass was spat out with ferocious grip also.

Bass guitar behind Skin singing Hedonism was similarly stark, powerful and controlled, but the guitars of Skunk Anansie jangled hard.

It's common for readers to ask for almost-mythical "fast, tight bass with slam" – well here it is. But quite dry I'll note, bit like Chord Electronics Ultima 6 I reviewed last month.

As CDs and hi-res slid by I became increasingly aware that the A-S3200 has a strong sound character of its own. Along with deep insight and rifle-bolt precision it has a hard character – that crystallinity I mentioned earlier. As expected, Willy DeVille's Spanish Harlem highlighted this, where sibilants in the words "Spanish" and "It" ("It starts a fire there") had me dive for cover. He's close to the mic so strong sibilants are there in the recording, it's just that





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**KEF**

I don't usually get to hear them with such force.

The sense of grip and pristine cleanliness made me want to turn up volume. The A-S3200 is just sparkingly clean and rigidly composed in its sound – as I cranked up the composure remained and I did use rude volume at times – although the meters rarely flicked to 50 Watts (Peak).

High volume was just a tad more amenable from LP than CD, but both were similar in basic tonality – curious considering the differences between these technologies. And as measurement had revealed, there was no hiss at all with MC, no hum either; the Phono stage is absolutely silent – and of very high quality.

But again it had a hard quality. Jackie Leven's Young Male Suicide (Blessed by Invisible Woman) I use often and know well, and the crashing guitar intro juddered. I could hear every word from the invisible woman though – where sometimes she's vague. However, this is from an Audio Technica OC9X SH moving coil cartridge that, with boron cantilever, is itself a bit of a cool customer. A cartridge with a warmer sound would better suit methinks.



**The rear carries two sets of balanced Line inputs via XLR sockets (top centre) with attenuator and phase selector switches. Two sets of loudspeakers can be used, or both turned off for headphone listening, or both turned on for bi-wiring.**

Hugh Masekela's Uptownship, from his album Hope (180gm) delivered powerful kick drum strikes into the 'speakers at its start, and hand drums were etched in crystal: spectacularly fast and vivid. All the same, there was hardness of tone, a quality consistent with LP, as it was with CD; I expect differences to be greater, but that's not what I heard here.

**CONCLUSION**

Yamaha's A-S3200 has a style that was unique and admired long ago and to my eyes remains as clean and fresh today. Sharp lines, carefully chiselled and with wonderful quality

of finish. The controls work with slick precision too, to give a wonderful feel.

The new A-S3200 is a glorious technological update with advanced analogue circuitry and top quality audio components inside, items that started appearing in the 1990s. In dependable Yamaha fashion the A-S3200 offers superb sound quality, if with stark clarity of a modern variety. Arguably clearer and more insightful than most else, it does at the same time have its own strong crystalline character. A fabulous amplifier though – and a 'must hear' I'd say, for its depth of revelation.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Yamaha A-S3200 produced 100 Watts into 8 Ohms and 192 Watts into 4 Ohms. Yamaha quote 170 Watts into 4 Ohms so the amp meets spec. and has enough power to go very loud. The power supply, with its massive transformer, has very good regulation as power nearly doubles.

Frequency response ran flat to 70kHz, making this a wide-band amplifier, likely with MOSFET output devices. Yamaha make no mention of output stage configuration. Output noise was low considering high sensitivity/gain.

Tone controls gave +/-10dB bass variation and +/-8dB treble variation, plenty enough. Usefully small amounts of lift and cut (1dB) could be applied. The treble control, however, when used slightly reduced bass gain – a strange blemish. Bass had to be turned up slightly to compensate.

There was minimal distortion, just 0.01% in the midband (1W, 4Ω) with no rise toward full output. At 10kHz there was a minimal increase to 0.02% (1W, 4Ω) and just 0.01% -1dB below full output. So a very low distortion amplifier under all conditions.

The MM phono stage needed a low 3.2mV for full output (30V) and overload

was sufficient at 50mV. Gain rolls down below 20Hz to -7dB at 5Hz, giving some amount of warp suppression. There is a small amount of bass lift (+0.5dB) around 40Hz, enough to ensure bass weight. MC EQ was identical, there being no less low frequency gain – as can happen with MC.

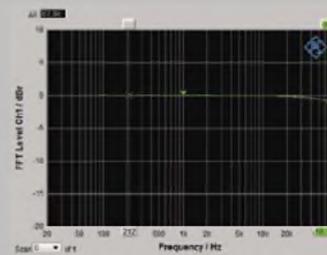
Gain values were high, MC needing just 0.17mV for full output, meaning it will suit all MC cartridges, no matter how low their output. Input noise for MC was just 0.17µV, suggesting very low hiss (0.1µV is possible). Input overload was however low at 2.5mV, where 5mV is common even for high gain stages such as this one.

The A-S3200 measured well in all areas. The Phono stage was undistinguished but in keeping with discrete design. **NK**

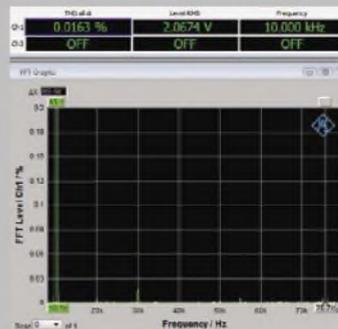
<b>Power</b>	<b>100W</b>
<b>Frequency response (-1dB)</b>	<b>10Hz-70kHz</b>
<b>Distortion (10kHz, 1W)</b>	<b>0.02%</b>
<b>Separation (1kHz)</b>	<b>91dB</b>
<b>Noise (IEC A)</b>	<b>-102dB</b>
<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>200mV</b>
<b>PHONO (MM/MC)</b>	
<b>Frequency response (-1dB)</b>	<b>20Hz-20kHz</b>

<b>Distortion (1kHz)</b>	<b>0.03 / 0.1 %</b>
<b>Separation (1kHz)</b>	<b>68 / 62 dB</b>
<b>Noise (IEC A)</b>	<b>-86 / -73dB</b>
<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>3.2 / 0.17mV</b>
<b>Overload</b>	<b>50 / 2.5mV</b>

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**



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**VERDICT**

Dramatic sounding balanced amplifier – concise and clear, but hard of tone.

**FOR**

- deep insight
- stage depth
- strong, tight bass
- power meters

**AGAINST**

- a bit remorseless
- no digital

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# Sonic Inheritance

**Klipsch invoke heritage with their new HP-3 headphones. Noel Keywood listens.**

**K**lipsch (USA) are a pushy company product wise, delivering in new products at low prices that challenge most else – as I found with The Fives active loudspeakers reviewed in our October 2020 issue. In contrast, here's a new high-end headphone from them – at no low-end price – instead a massive £1295.00. Gulp. The Heritage HP-3 is a statement product.

To make a visual statement on the street you need distinctive finish – and the HP-3s have plenty of that. The ear cups are fashioned from wood Klipsch say, but have a strangely smooth external finish that, under a magnifying glass, is free of grain and artificially patterned, looking and feeling to me like artificial veneer. Looks good at a distance, unconvincing close up. There are three available finishes: Ebony, Walnut and Oak.

The ear pads are made from soft leather and held in place by magnets – a novel approach. The headband is leather covered and the slide extensions at either side even have an engraved scale so any setting can be returned to, which I suppose is handy if they are shared between people of different head size. The scale was peculiar though, being marked in millimetres – unusual for a U.S. product unless ours were an export version. Five divisions (mm) were marked as 1, 10 divisions as 2, etc. – an odd way to calibrate; I suspect Klipsch feel 5mm is a suitable step distance and there are 6 steps, so 30mm movement in all.

Each earpiece has its own electrical input – a 3.5mm mono jack socket at the end of the machined alloy earpiece cradle. The

significance of this is the 'phones can be run in balanced mode where they don't share an earth line. However, as standard they come with cables terminated in 3.5mm stereo jack plugs that give unbalanced working – and that's how I reviewed our samples. An 1/4in (6.3mm) adaptor is supplied. Klipsch picture a dedicated headphone amplifier with balanced output on their website, but a balanced cable is then needed which doubtless they supply. But I have run plenty of 'phones fully balanced and it offers little improvement; the unbalanced part of the short cable (1.37m long) is only 90cms after all. A 2.5m long cable is also supplied.

The drive units use "a proprietary mixture of biocellulose and inorganic fibre" Klipsch say, and with magnets of high flux density they are efficient. However, with an impedance of just 25 Ohms, where most 'phones are either 300 Ohms or 40 Ohms (commonly used standards), the HP-3s will draw more current than most else and will be more suited to mains powered products than mobile 'phones but I used them with my iPhone to check compatibility.

The enclosure is open-backed behind the drive units, allowing sound to escape rearward. This gives lighter

bass than enclosed 'phones, but also less boomy sound; it's my preference. Open backed phones do let sound escape though – not so good when commuting. These 'phones are better off at home, where I found their 440gm weight acceptable, if not lightweight.

The HP-3s come extravagantly packaged in a large real wood case with sliding draws. The packaging exceeded the headphones in size and weight by large margin, coming in at 4.8kgs no less. I felt the packaging was excessive, both in space consumed at home and in amount of waste generated when discarded. Not sensitively packaged; much better could be done here. A headphone stand is supplied.

## SOUND QUALITY

Initially, I drove the HP-3s from an Audiolab M-DAC+ hooked up to a recent MacMini (Mojave OS) running Audirvana to read a stored music library, as well as a Chord Electronics Dave DAC, with its massive dynamic range.

To kick off, the HP-3s have an even and natural tonal balance, being neither excessively bright nor bass heavy. Also, they have none of the cuppiness of closed-back phones, as you might hope since they are open-



**At left the unbalanced cable with large 1/4in (6.3mm) jack for home use. At right the balanced cable with four-pole jack plug.**

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backs – and this does give them an airy sound.

Whilst not being bass heavy, the HP-3s were nevertheless bass strong. The pounding synth kick-drum in Safri Duo's Samb Adagio (CD) had enormous strength, making its presence dominant in the mix. It was tight and controlled too.

Opening bodrans in Sinead O'Connor's The Foggy Dew pounded out strongly and I caught every word as she sang, pipes trilling clearly around her. There was some slight hardness to her vocals at times, brought out by a smidgeon of upper midrange glare I fancy. Which is to say the HP-3s are strong up top, which helps toward their clarity, but they're not overly bright.

With some tracks, such as The Pink Panther Theme (CD) both I and my son (who's inevitably a headphone expert!) noticed a spikiness to cymbals I've not heard before, but this was not obvious on other tracks. Nil's Lofgren's Keith Don't Go is packed with fast transients from closely miked guitar strings and this slid by sounding impressive. So with CD a vivid sound with superb clarity and great balance, but treble just a tad 'obvious' – sufficient to draw comment

It took a move to DSD to show how revealing these 'phones really are. Haydn's Concerto for Horn No1 had strings well lit and

sheenily clear, whilst the horn jumped at me sounding full bodied and rich, pulled strongly from the background. The smoothness of DSD suited these revealing 'phones and they paid back the compliment by showing how good DSD is compared to CD.

Brahms Piano Pieces (Klavierstucke) Op118 slid by sounding lovely, with strong, well outlined key strikes making piano sound vividly clear. Perhaps some slight hardness of tone – but arguable! The HP-3s certainly analyse such performances and their forensic qualities were better suited to DSD than PCM I came to feel.

With Cyndee Peter's House of the Rising Sun (DSD128) there was stark clarity – but again I was made aware of every ringing cymbal tap. I got to hear it all, there's no doubt.

Pink Floyd's Money (DSD64) was almost frightening in its stark clarity, the drifting sax punching its way into my ears and as tempo increased (as it does in this track) the HP-3s captured every nuance of the soaring guitar work, with deep insight and

cutting speed. They conveyed the dynamic excitement of Money better than I have heard over the years – by large measure. Almost frighteningly revealing.

### CONCLUSION

The Klipsch HP-3 headphones exceeded my expectations. They are many steps up in terms of clarity and revelation than most others. With powerful bass of superb quality that did not overwhelm, a revealing mid-band and plentiful high treble. Excessive packaging and poor veneer finish are minus points to the whole offer, but as sound quality goes, amongst the best.



*The ear pads attach by magnets and can be simply removed to reveal the drive units, as at left. Each cradle carries a 3.5mm mono output jack, seen at centre, to provide optional balanced operation.*



*The HP-3s come in lavish packaging, comprising wooden carry box with pull-out draws.*

**KLIPSCH HP-3**  
£1295.00



**OUTSTANDING** - amongst the best

#### VERDICT

Insightful, open and airy – and with great bass. Dramatically good sound. Packaging and veneer finish questionable.

#### FOR

- clean, firm bass
- clarity
- insight

#### AGAINST

- 'obvious' treble
- poor veneer
- excess packaging

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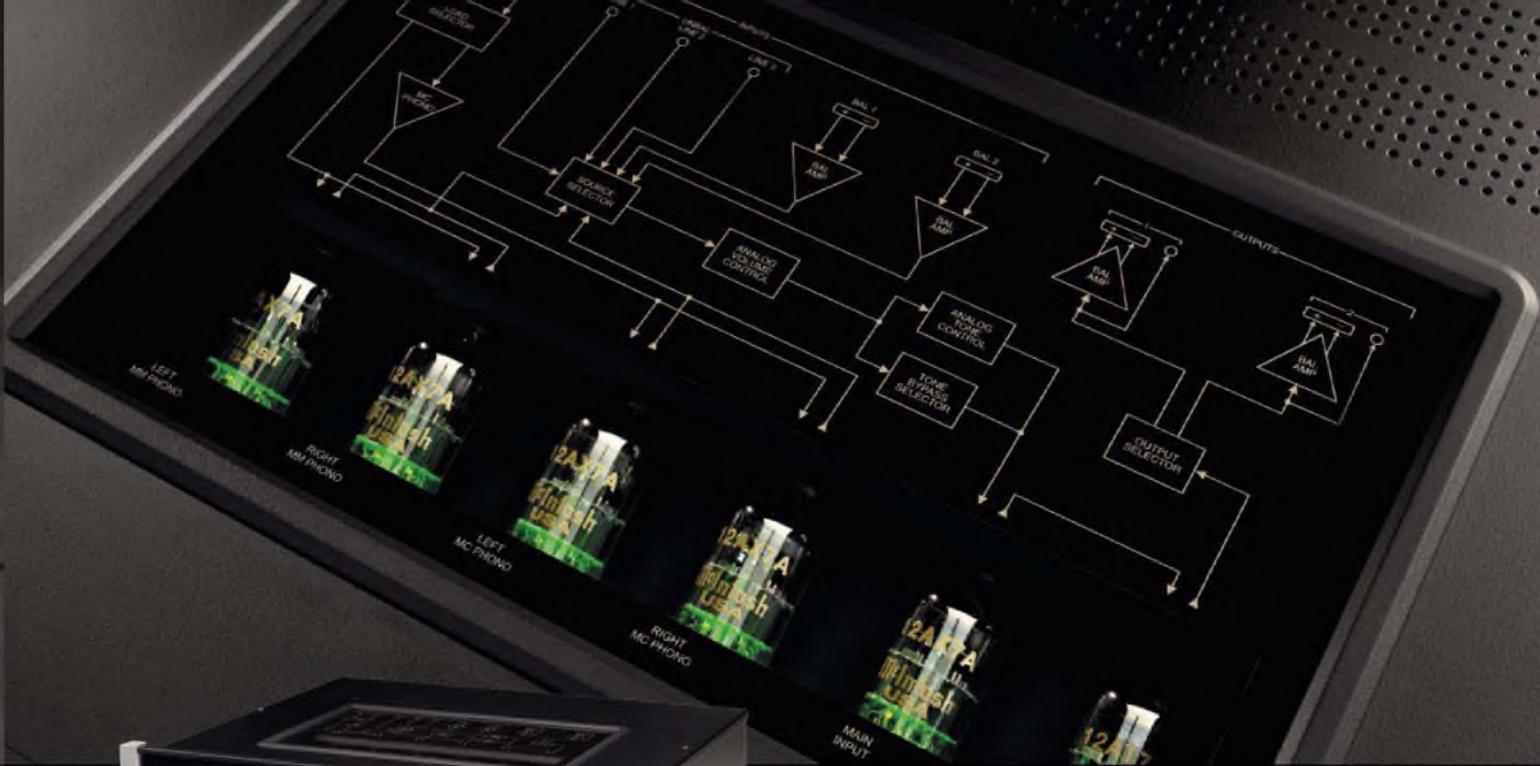


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# Mail



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Answers by: NK - Noel Keywood; PR - Paul Rigby; MP - Martin Pipe; DT - Dave Tutt; JP - John Pickford.



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[subject to availability - Satin Black / Satin White]

**A PAIR KEF Q150 LOUDSPEAKERS are on their way to ROBERT PARSONS, Letter of the Month winner in our October 2020 issue.**

## Letter of the Month

### PLAUDITS FOR PIXIES

I agree with Dave Tutt's observations of banal verbiage from DJs in his column, October 2020 issue. This was a result of "Needle Time" agreements, whereby radio stations were constrained to limited hours of music replay per day, so the DJ would fill in the enforced gaps with verbal babble.

Nowadays the DJ is a bland waffle celebrity. Daytime radio music replay is almost entirely bland familiar songs, all in 4/4 time, listened to as background music. Songs for people who don't like challenging music. John Peel was an exception, who advocated and promoted challenging, and adventurous music.

You say "correct me if you think I'm wrong, but I have heard guitarists who arrive at my workshop who play with more talent than the Pixies will ever manage".

"Talent" is something associated with reality TV talent shows. Perhaps you like *The Voice*, *Britain's Got Talent*, *X Factor*, *Eurovision Song Contest*, etc.? Rather like daytime radio, certainly with no musical challenge, there is plenty of bland waffle

Pixies composed all of their music, with the exception of a David Lynch cover "In Heaven (Lady in the Radiator

Song)" and The Jesus And Mary Chain cover "Head On"

The original incarnation of Pixies, two of the three guitarists in Pixies, Black Francis and Joey Santiago, played guitars for texture, colour, drone and effects, with dynamic outbursts. They never tried guitar strangling self-indulgent solos. The bass guitar player, Kim Deal, often played the melody. Pixies' music is a dynamic challenge, using and mixing unusual time signatures. Their dynamic albums give your amplifier's smoothing capacitors a real workout.

In a previous career I used to manage independent record shops in East Anglia (Parrot Records), those places that played and sold physical music formats. Mondays were new release day, and this was often a



**Pixies debut album 'Come On Pilgrim'. "This record was played on and off all day. We all agreed it was something special" says Dr Russell Sceats.**

surprising or anticipated pleasure. Once in a while an unexpected debut album would really amaze. The Gun Club's "Fire Of Love" in 1981 was the most unexpected and killer debut record. Where did those warped musical ideas come from?

I remember one Monday in 1987 when we unboxed Pixies debut "Come On Pilgrim". This was an amazing day.

This record was played on and off all day

Talking to other record shop staff, in other stores, we all agreed this was something special. The eight tracks were part of Pixies' demo recording, "The Purple Tape", recorded by the great Gary Smith at Fort Apache, and so good were these demo tracks that 4AD just put the eight straight to vinyl record.

When my long-time girlfriend/wife and I combined our record and CD collections, we have duplicates of many albums, including all of Pixies' albums and 12" singles. It's great to have spare Pixies

I'm sorry that this Pixies pleasure is not yours too Dave

Kind regards,

**Dr Russell Sceats.**

Hi Russell. I have nothing against the Pixies as such – although like all things the matter of taste in music arises here.

My point was that, had it been a DJ like Peel or Harris we would have had a little two line note that would have told us all we needed to know about said Pixies and that would have been it. Move on to the next tune and the next little snippet of information. No waffle, no wittering.

The BBC seems to have it in mind that we need to hear what the DJ says because it's important – when it is the exact opposite.

I well remember Nicky Horne on Capital Radio and staying up to listen when he played such diverse music as tracks from Consequences by Godley and Creme but during the same programme we had Polystyrene, The Buzzcocks and Led Zep. That spread of music on any station doesn't exist anywhere – a loss to us all.

I feel the BBC doesn't do music of any type justice, as the DJ is more important since they are supposed to be celebrities.

Oh – and I love odd time signatures so In the Dead of Night by UK ranks very highly with me – but again not everyone's taste. **DT**

Hi Russell. Thank you very much for your informed explanation about Needle Time agreements. Fascinating to find out what lies behind irksome entertainment. **NK**

### LEAK AFFAIR

Reading John Pickford's review of the Leak Stereo 130 and the CD transport (October 2020 issue) took me back to

the 1968 audio fair at the Hotel Russell in London, when as an eighteen year old audio enthusiast I went into the Leak dem. room. Who should be in there non other than Harold J Leak himself!

The demonstration was the promotion of the Stereo 70 amplifier; by 1968 the Stereo 30 was well established. Hannah Leak was pushing the buttons – dressed in a Melinex miniskirt.

I'm sure there were some people actually not interested in the Stereo 70!

It is hard to believe that the 1968 audio fair was an all analogue affair, the major sound sources being discs, open spool tape recorders and FM radio. Audio life was a lot simpler in those days, with none of the complexities of streaming and computer audio.

Here is a list of the exhibitors at the 1968 fair <https://worldradiohistory.com/hd2/IDX-Audio/Archive-Studio-Sound-IDX/IDX/60s/Studio-Sound-1968-05-OCR-Page-0022.pdf>.

I eventually owned a Leak Delta 70 amplifier, which essentially was a Stereo 70 amplifier made when Leak was owned by Rank. I also had the matching Delta FM tuner, which I hasten to add compared very well the new Audiolab 8000T in a local dealer's dem. room – much to the surprise of the staff!

The Leak valve amplifiers are very much sought after today, exchanging hands for serious amounts of cash. As John said in his review, the Leak transistor amps are '60s ornaments these days.

A book worth reading – if you can get it – is *Firsts in High Fidelity* by Stephen Spicer, published by Audio Amateur Press. The book is an incredible insight of a company from a bygone world. It is full of technical documents and letters confirming appointments of some of the staff, and recollections from the staff who worked for old H-J as he was known. Those times will never return, but it's



**Demonstration of the Leak Stereo 70 amplifier in 1968 had Hannah Leak pushing the buttons – dressed in a Melinex miniskirt Mike Bickley recalls.**

Copyright permission courtesy of Leak UK.

nice to wallow in nostalgia and they were – to me – the good old days of audio reproduction.

**Mike Bickley.**

Hi Mike. That's a wonderfully vivid picture you paint of the Leak Stereo 70 demonstration. I'm sure I would've enjoyed the audio fair '68 show, which ran from 18th - 21st April 1968, however I missed it by a whisker as I wasn't born until the following weekend!

Fascinating to read through the list of exhibitors and see so many names still going strong today. I use vintage equipment from Thorens, Goldring, Tannoy, Rogers, Mullard and, of course, Leak, all of whom were doing great business back in '68.

Interesting to see so many brands associated with the pro-audio industry at the show too – AKG, Beyer, Sennheiser and Shure still produce world-class microphones today, as well as the headphones they would've undoubtedly been demonstrating to 1960s audiophiles.

Stephen Spicer's *Firsts In High*



**Leak Stereo 70 amplifier, visible at left in our picture of Hannah leak. Released 1968 it was powerful and sold well but by then Japanese amplifiers were starting to dominate. Copyright permission courtesy of Retrotech Audio [www.retrotechaudio.co.uk](http://www.retrotechaudio.co.uk)**

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Fidelity is a hard book to track down, having been out of print for many years, but it is on my radar so thanks for reminding me to keep searching. **JP**

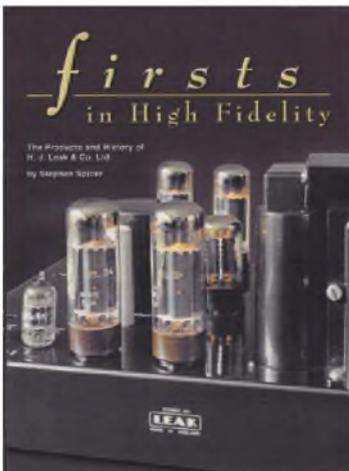
Hi Mike. And oh my goodness! Your mention of Firsts in High Fidelity caught my attention – I have that book and had forgotten all about it. Shame on me. It is indeed a definitive history of H.J. Leak & Co, complete with the amplifiers built before WW2 (i.e. 1939), including a full page reproduction of an advertisement for “the standard 13 Watt chassis introduced at Olympia 1936-37”. Better still (!) there is a picture of Hannah Leak in a Melinex dress, sitting in front of a Leak hi-fi system, dated 1968, taken from Leak literature.

This is an enormously comprehensive book, full of advertisements, product shots and circuit diagrams even. It also covers Leak through the later Rank years, as part of Rank Leak Wharfedale. First printed in 2000 by Audio Amateur Press, USA, ISBN 1-882580-31-1. Black-and-white only and well worth having, but not now in print. **NK**

### GET IT SERVICED

A house move across the water to the Isle of Wight and a change of employment has given me the right place to set up my old hi-fi and more time to enjoy it.

Sadly, my Meridian 506 CD died for the 2nd time and Meridian could no longer help so I turned to the internet and found meridian-unplugged.com and Mr Tech Guy www.mrtechguy.co.uk. Pleasingly, one of the guys at Mr Tech Guy, Russ,



**Firsts in High Fidelity.** "The book is an incredible insight of a company from a bygone world" says Mike Bickley.

had fixed my CD the first time it went wrong and it went back to the factory. This time round, however, it was terminal and not even a cache of spares tracked down in Australia could solve the issue.

Back to the Meridian forum to research a possible replacement and found some recommendations for the 596 – their CD/DVD player. Aha! That would let me junk my budget DVD and free up an input on the amp. "I wonder" led me to eBay and there was one for sale. Clicky-clicky and it arrived a few days later. The game was afoot.

I read the manual for my Meridian A500 speakers to check I had positioned them correctly. That was a mistake as it mentioned they could be bi-amped using a 551 integrated plus 555 power amp. Another "I wonder" and some more clicky-clicky got me a 555 on eBay followed by a Meridian Director DAC to handle my Intel NUC / JRiver media server.

Over the next few months, I had all my Meridian units serviced and re-capped by Mr Tech Guy. It seemed a shame to leave my LPI2 out and it was years since it was last serviced. Linn's own help desk was very helpful with suggestions and that led me to Nick at Audio T in Portsmouth for a service, upgrade with Girkus and Stack Audio's Serene platform and new AI VM95 stylus for the K9 cartridge. Nick also recommended Meze 99 Classics and very nice they sound too, whether direct from the main stack or, when on the laptop, via my Meridian Explorer DAC. I should also give an honourable mention to the friendly and helpful Linn Sondek LPI2 group on Facebook.

All of this was topped off, or rather, underpinned by a Stands Unique: another eBay find and another Meridian Unplugged recommendation. I was lucky enough to find the original designer, Rod Keith, still supplying accessories so now have a set of his Carbon Fibre Isolators under each unit (and some Herbies Audio Gliders under the A500 speakers).

Alongside this, my indulgent better half got me a birthday subscription to Hi-Fi World which further inspired me and is helping me get up to speed with what's happening in today's, er, hi-fi world. I used to buy it back in the day so good to see Noel K still doing his excellent stuff. Plus two other names that rang bells. In an earlier incarnation, I was with the satellite operator, Astra and that was trying to

**"Pleasingly, one of the guys at Mr Tech Guy, Russ, had fixed my CD the first time it went wrong" says Mike Locke.**

launch Astra Digital Radio which was a digital bitstream subcarrier multiplexed under the analogue FM audio for each transponder. Can't remember the tech details but it sounded good and I arranged for a test receiver / dish to be installed at Martin Pipe's house back in the 90s. It would be interesting to hear his opinion of how that compares to today's digital offerings.

Chris Frankland's by-line intrigued as I knew the name but simply couldn't cudgel the memory into action. Back to the internet and aha! In an even earlier incarnation, I had been at Kawasaki when Chris launched his motorcycle magazine. I may even have got him onto a press launch or on the press fleet list. Hi Chris, shiny side up! Didn't know you were also a hi-fi writer – but do now.

So what have I learnt from this, admittedly self-indulgent hi-fi journey? Why didn't I just junk this equipment and join the streaming generation? It would have been a lot cheaper!

I had never had my system set up in a proper orientation. Being in a new home let me correct that and hear it as the designer intended. With a proper layout, it sounded great. As a general rule, I prefer to get stuff working properly rather than junk / replace so that led to the service / upgrades. With each step, I found the sonic improvements discernible and since every change made the whole system sound better; I just kept going. It stopped me ditching my LPs and moving to all-digital. I am hearing new layers of sound on albums I thought I knew well. The soundstage is more open and clear and I can hear deeper into the mix, getting closer to what the bands and producers intended. Which is sort of the point of hi-fi.

I've reached a plateau for now and the time has come to give my unashamedly retro analogue system

(*tho with a deal of digital as well*) a good listening to. It's time to enjoy it and revisit my LP and CD collection. The new setup sounds glorious and I am really enjoying my listening. That's also the point of hi-fi.

It has been a great deal of fun. I've learnt a lot and found some great on-line friends. Read every issue of your favourite hi-fi publication: interesting opinions from experts and fellow-readers, a lot of eye-candy, and helps you keep up-to-date (plus reading about kit you're never going to afford I buy is great fun).

To those who have older I retro kit, I thoroughly recommend getting it serviced and, where relevant, upgraded. There's a world of specialists and specialist advice for pretty much every audiophile brand. And, unless, you're strong-willed, don't idly browse through eBay just to see if there's one for sale. Happy listening!

**Mike Locke,**  
**Freshwater,**  
**Isle of Wight.**

I do indeed remember you from your Kawasaki days, Mike. And you did lend me some very nice bikes, including a ZX10 that I took on test down to the south of France, a GTR1000 tourer I rode down to the south of Spain and a GPZ900R sportster I took to Rimini in Italy where I had a date with an exotic Italian (motorcycle, that is).

At that time, I was also editing Hi-Fi Review, for which Hi-Fi World editor Noel Keywood was one of my main contributors, but I never knew you were into hi-fi too. Thanks for lending me so many interesting motorcycles back in the day – and for being such a great supporter of Motorcycle Review. Hope you continue to enjoy your music. **CF**

Hi Mike. I can fully reveal that Chris Frankland now drives something with four wheels (oh shame!) and also revels in the wonders of an Audio Note valve amplifier (no shame). Since he also knows and enjoys Naim, Rega and Creek products (plus more) and spins LP as well – who better to write reviews for Hi-Fi World (I tell him!). **NK**

### LISTEN TO 3

*Dave Tutt's piece on Radio 2 and some of its DJs was spot on. I find Ken Bruce's programme listenable and enjoy Popmaster. I enjoyed Sounds of the 60s when the great Brian Matthew was at the helm, but when Tony Blackburn took*

*over, that was the end for me (sorry Dave!). When I start my day, I always listen to Morning on 3, on Radio 3.*

One thing I cannot abide is the pop and prattle at say 7am which inhabits a lot of radio programming these days, especially on local radio. Local radio Radio WM used to be a mine of information for listeners. Some of you may have heard of Ed Doolan. He had a 3 hour weekday programme devoted to fighting for the consumers and their rights: I've heard him take on councillors numerous times. More than ever now, we could do with the return of something similar.

**Mike Bickley.**

Hi Mike. I have to say that we are poorly served by the BBC in our radio requirements now. The National channels are no longer providing the sort of coverage that engages those that want to listen. I am sure it was the same in the '60s when so much new music could only be heard by tuning into the pirates. With such a large resource of content, be it music or spoken word, the BBC seems pretty much locked into a pattern that doesn't please anyone at any time of the day and the independent and commercial stations are playing catch up on something that no one wants to hear. Shame.

**DT**

### TRY INTERNET RADIO

*I wholeheartedly agree with your comments in your 'Opinion' slot regarding the BBC as a National Broadcaster. The inane chatter from both male and female so called DJs without decent music I find really depressing – apart from being a disgrace. The sad fact is that they think that they are good but I suppose a lot of this is down to the BBC with their luvvie culture of celebrities and paying them indecent amounts of money to be inflicted on us the listener.*

*To me, I think that the '60s probably represented one of the greatest periods for good music, I mean just look at the bands and singers who are still very much up there at the top of their game! Today, many of these get rich quick people are here today but gone tomorrow, they never had to work at their craft for many years before gaining recognition and then success, although there are a few exceptions.*

*As you say, there are good DJs, Bob Harris, Tony Blackburn and in the past I fondly remember the great Kenny Everett, Pete Murray and Jack Jackson. At least they made it interesting – but*



**"When I start my day, I always listen to Morning on 3, on Radio 3" says Donald Hawkins.**

*they did have really great music to play with!*

Finally, I am pleased that I have Internet radio, as scanning the globe there are some good stations out there putting out memorable 60s music, without the baggage of idiot presenters. Kind regards

**Donald Hawkins**

### VACUUM YOUR STATICS

*I invested in a pair of Martin Logan Puritys 10 years ago and once they were run in they just seemed to get better and better! They are powered by a pair of valve amps, Audion Black Shadows which do a very good job.*

*I also have a Michell Orbe with a Techno arm and an Ortofon Cadenza Blue moving coil cartridge, plus an Arcam CD transport with an Arcam Black Box D/A converter.*

*For VHF I use a Leak Troughline 3 tuner which has been rebuilt.*

*All these feed in to an Exposure XVII preamp. Over the last few months I was feeling that the sound was getting a little 'tizzy' – not so well defined*



**You must vacuum your Martin Logan electrostatics regularly, says Michael Clemence.**

as it was. I checked through all the interconnects and the mains connections to no avail.

In extremis, I read through the user manual for the 'speakers where I found an item about vacuuming the 'speakers on front and back. Also, under another head, about dust "It is a good idea to vacuum the electrostatic portion of each 'speaker three or four times a year". I did this and the sound was fully restored.

After ten years the Martin Logans must have got rather dusty and I'll now vacuum them regularly. So now you know!

I have a copy of the Syd Lawrence Orchestra LP which you mention occasionally. It is really something outstanding. I hope my neighbours like it too! Have you heard the Clare Teal recording with the Syd Lawrence Orchestra on the same label, also recorded direct to disc? I reckon this is rather good!

**Michael Clemence  
Wendover**

Hi Michael – and thanks for the reminder. We can now add a vacuum cleaner to our list of hi-fi accessories! There are plenty of hand-held, portable re-chargeable types nowadays that suit this purpose; I use a small Hoover at home, cost around £120. **NK**

### GET IT RIGHT

In your review of Klipsch The Fives, you commented on the power socket being located in the right hand loudspeaker, ideally requiring the wall mains socket to be located on the right. If this isn't the case, the right hand loudspeaker could be swapped with the left one, thus reversing the sound stage, and this wouldn't be a big issue for most users.

Well I don't fall into "most users" with this issue. Using as example a symphony orchestra where there is an industry standard regarding layout, to me it would be unlistenable for serious listening.

Now, I am not an imagery freak, not being fussy about image depth etc, but I do like right and left to be right and left. If I were in the market for The Fives, I wouldn't buy them. I hope that the HFW readership debates this in the letters section. I am surprised that this issue with The Fives, didn't appear under Against in the review summary box. Regards

**Mike Bickley.**

Hi Mike. You make a very good point about the need to get Left and Right right, if you see what I mean.

Not so important for Rock, but important for classical. The excellent diagram from [www.daviddarling.info](http://www.daviddarling.info) reproduced here shows an audience (sitting below) will hear the higher frequencies of violins to left but lower frequencies of cellos and double-basses to right – and this is how it should turn out in a hi-fi.

Since the loudspeakers will be 2-3m apart it only means a short power extension may be needed, should the right 'speaker be far from a mains outlet. The 3m long mains cable supplied is sufficient for most domestic situations I suspect.

Please accept my apologies for not understanding classical sensibilities; I should know better.

**NK**

### CARTRIDGE CHOICE

In the last month or so I have realised that my prime cartridge, a Benz Micro Ace L moving coil, has done quite a few miles and is not sounding its best, so I have started looking for what to buy to replace it – and maybe go up a notch.

As an interim measure I pulled out my backup Goldring Eroica L moving

cartridges are concerned. Most shops have some of my short list but not all – and the shops that do have most of them are a long way away.

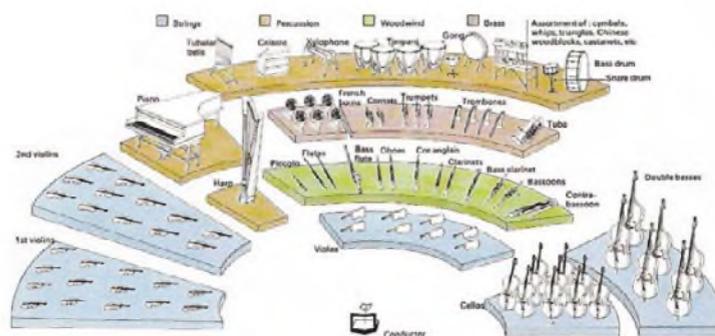
My shortlist started off as Ortofon Cadenza Bronze, Ortofon Quintet Black II and the Hana ML, but after listening to my Eroica L I wondered what you think of the Goldring Ethos (their new top of the line) if you have tested it.

The Ortofon Cadenza Bronze would stretch my budget quite a bit and prior to considering the Ethos, the Hana ML was top of my list. I would be running them through a Trichord Diablo with a PSU1 power supply and through a valve amplifier to Quadral Chromium 8 speakers.

If you have any experience of the Ethos when compared to the Hana ML could you give me your thoughts on the difference in presentation between the two? I know when you get to this value of cartridge its probably more about presentation than outright one cartridge is better than another.

Thanks for any advice you can give me with this query.

**Andrew Burtchall**



**Orchestras traditionally have asymmetric layout, violins at left double-basses at right, from the perspective here of an audience sitting below the conductor. "I do like right and left to be right and left" says Mike Bickley.**

**Reproduced by permission from [www.daviddarling.info](http://www.daviddarling.info)**

coil. In setting up I decided to take time over the setup as it will need to be in place and not disappoint while I decide on what to buy next. I spent a good hour or so to ensure it was all correctly aligned, utilising some very useful tools (a very small bubble level, a glass level to ensure arm/cartridge was level, and the supplied cartridge alignment tool that came with my VPI Scout). I have been very pleased with its sound.

So on to my replacement. I have read many reviews of the cartridges that I have in my short list but would like your advice on some aspects of each. I know I should listen to each and decide – but this is very difficult where

Hi Andrew. We have not tested the Goldring Ethos so cannot comment. We have tested the Hanna MH and ML cartridges though (March 2019 issue) and they were notably smooth and even in their sound – well engineered and good value. If at £999 they are the top end of your price range, perhaps consider an Audio Technica OC9X SH at around £560. Not quite as easy going as a Hanna, nor with the bass and space of the Cadenza Bronze, but great value all the same, with a superb stylus that is very analytical. You get to hear it all with this cartridge – and just look at that price! **NK**



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# Aethical Considerations

Chris Frankland checks out the powerful new Aethos integrated amplifier from Rega.

**W**hen I borrowed one of Rega's Elicit-R amplifiers some time ago I found it a tad lacklustre. And so when a retailer friend of mine suggested I ought to hear their new Aethos I was initially a little sceptical – but I trust his ears and

decided to do so.

During a brief phone chat with Terry Bateman, Rega's electronics guru, he told me that the Aethos is based around the same basic core circuitry used in many of its amps, such as the Brio, Elex-R and Elicit-R, but with a better regulated power supply, better quality transistors

and discrete circuitry throughout. It also has an Alps RK27 Blue Velvet motorised volume control as opposed to the standard item found in the Elex-R amp – because it sounds better, said Bateman.

The 125 Watt dual-mono design uses a fully discrete FET-based line amplifier with polypropylene capacitors



throughout the signal path, K-Power reservoir capacitors in the regulated power supply and a high current (16 Amp) output stage using four 160Watt Sanken Darlington output transistors per channel. It is rated at 125 Watts into 8 Ohms and 156 Watts into 6 Ohms.

The Aethos is pretty solid, weighing in at 17.5kg and measuring 95mm high by 433mm wide by 360mm deep. It uses a combined feedback with passive volume control plus line amplifier, originally developed for the Elex-R, but with discrete FET input op amps using Linear Systems LSK389 FETs.

It also – somewhat unusually these days – has a headphone output, but despite plenty of inputs (five line inputs plus tape), there are no balanced inputs or outputs.

Controls are minimal, the front panel sporting a simple row of buttons for record, mute and input selection. On the far right is the large motorised volume control knob.

### SOUND QUALITY

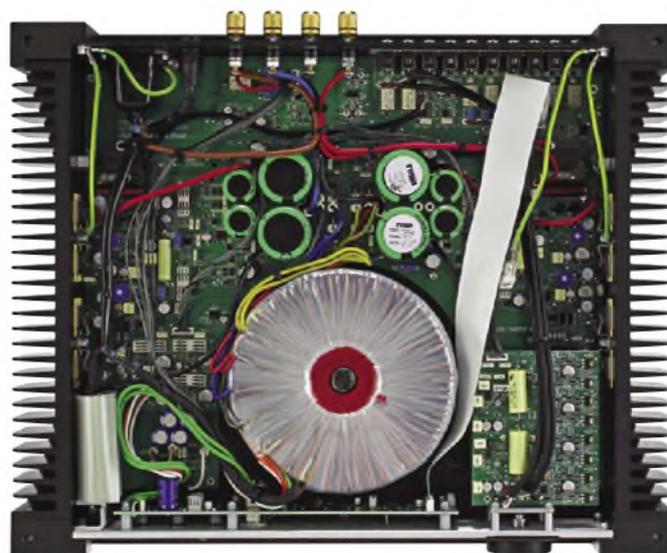
To listen to the Rega amp, I hooked it up to my Audio Note TT3/PSU-3/Arm2/101 turntable fed through an Audio Note S9 transformer and Puresound P10 valve phono stage. Speakers were the Audio Note AN-J LX Hemp. For CD I used an Audio Note CD4.1x, while hi-res files were

played from a Pro-Ject Stream Box Ultra and Pre-Box Digital RS2.

I love the style and sound of guitarist Jonathan Butler, so I was keen to hear how the Aethos would portray his guitar prowess. On the title track from his *Deliverance* CD, from the first few bars I breathed a sigh of relief, simply relaxed into the music and enjoyed the detail, tunefulness and dynamics of this great little amp. Percussion and drums were detailed, articulate and

had good snap and power, while the note shape and body of Butler's guitar were beautifully conveyed.

Enthused, I reached for the *Days Like This* CD from Van Morrison. On the title track, I was very pleased with how clean and intelligible his vocals were, how well separated the backing vocals were and the bite and power of the horn section without the stridency that can plague some components. Percussion and drums were again excellent and had plenty



*Large heat sinks at either side and a massive toroidal transformer (centre) of the linear power supply can be seen here.*

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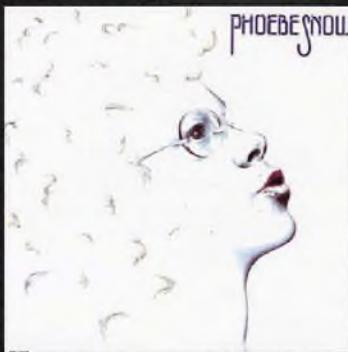
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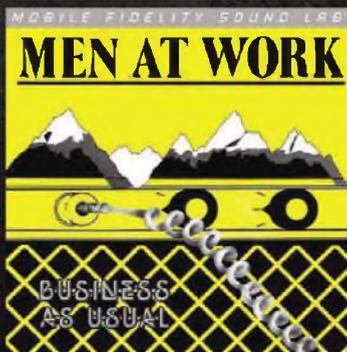
**Couldn't Stand The Weather**  
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of subtle detail as well as punch and dynamics.

Next I tried Lambert Hendricks and Bavan's live LP from the Newport Jazz Festival 1963. On Herbie Hancock's Watermelon Man, the Aethos conveyed the atmosphere and delicacy of this lovely mono recording well, perfectly capturing Yolande Bavan's gorgeous vocals, the superb sax of Coleman Hawkins and eloquent trumpet of Clark Terry. Drums were delicate yet powerful and the whole track flowed well.

For a bit of hi-res DSD, I chose Stevie Wonder's Master Blaster from Hotter than July. The Rega really nailed its punchy, staccato rhythms, conveyed his vocals eloquently and captured the pace and life of the track convincingly.

On all of these tracks, another impressive aspect of the Rega was its bottom end performance. Bass lines were full, powerful and tuneful.

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**CONCLUSION**

The Aethos is detailed and tuneful throughout the entire frequency band. It is dynamically stronger than the Elicit-R I mention earlier – by large margin – yet subtle and well balanced at the same time. For the money, the Aethos is difficult to fault. Well worth an audition.

**NOEL SAYS -**

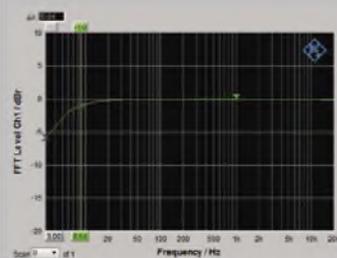
I had to have a quick listen to Rega's Aethos amplifier. Chris Frankland recommended we get it in after he and his local dealer had both been impressed.

The Aethos has massive bass power, making it dynamically strong, plus a wonderfully dark and deep midrange. I heard some upper mid-band glare through our Martin Logan ESL-X electrostatics, but was uncertain whether this was simply treble revelation, bearing in mind that digital treble commonly has "glare", or running in was needed. Whatever, the Aethos was both punchy and revealing, that's for sure. NK

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

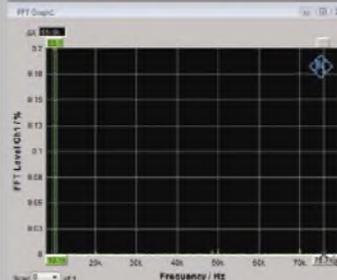
The Rega Aethos produced 136 Watts into 8 Ohms and a massive 240 Watts into 4 Ohms. That comes out at 170 Watts into 6 Ohms, which most modern loudspeakers nominally are, meaning the Aethos will go very loud indeed.

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**

Tot @ 100%	Level Mid	Frequency
0.0100 %	2.0615 V	10.000 kHz
OFF	OFF	OFF



Frequency response ran flat to 80kHz, making this a wide-band amplifier, courtesy of Sanken Darlington-configuration output transistors. At the low end there is a roll off of subsonic output below 8Hz.

Distortion was very low at all outputs and frequencies, measuring 0.003% in the midband (1W, 4Ω) with no rise toward full output. At 10kHz there was a minimal increase to 0.01% (1W, 4Ω) as shown here and just 0.01% 1dB below full output. So a very low distortion amplifier under all conditions.

Sensitivity was high, just 230mV of input being needed for full output (33V), giving a voltage gain of x143 (43dB). Noise was low at -98dB, considering high gain.

The Aethos measured well all round, having no weaknesses. It has massive power and low distortion. NK

<b>Power</b>	<b>136W</b>
<b>Frequency response (-1dB)</b>	<b>8Hz-80kHz</b>
<b>Distortion (10kHz, 1W)</b>	<b>0.01%</b>
<b>Separation (1kHz)</b>	<b>90dB</b>
<b>Noise (IEC A)</b>	<b>-98dB</b>
<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>230mV</b>

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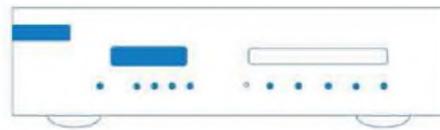
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# FM furniture

**Martin Pipe listens to the distinctive Murphy A272 – an early British-made FM radio from the mid-1950s.**

**F**rank Murphy was one of the great personalities of pre-war British radio. With pipe in mouth, he featured prominently in advertisements for his Welwyn Garden City-based firm Murphy Radio. Their products were revered for their good performance, attention to detail, cabinet appearance, high standards of construction and ease of use.

Murphy inspired loyalty from his staff at a time of severe economic

depression and personally waged a war on seasonal unemployment in the industry that was his calling. “Murphy Dealers are People You Can trust” – and they received copies of the fortnightly magazine *Murphy News*, in which the firm’s charismatic founder often used to stimulate discussion on topics as varied as pacifism and industrial relations. By 1935, the operation was turning over one and a quarter million pounds a year through annual sales of 80,000 sets.

After the war, Murphy Radio also sold television sets – and other new products like portable record players and tape recorders – to an increasingly-affluent British mass-market. Today, Murphy alas exists only as a brand-name for electronics imported from China.

During the mid-1930s, when Murphy was enjoying the fruits of his initial success, all broadcasting used amplitude-modulation (AM) on the long, medium and short-wave bands. But interesting things were happening



**A 1956 advertisement for the Murphy A272C, with period style!**

across the Atlantic.

New York-born radio genius Major Edwin Armstrong – who had already invented amongst other things the clever selectivity-boosting ‘superheterodyne’ concept, to which Murphy Radio switched in 1932 with its A8 receiver – was experimenting with a new technique that would boast greater clarity and freedom from interference. This was ‘wideband frequency modulation’. Experimental transmissions from the

RCA laboratory in the Empire State Building were followed, in 1938, by broadcasts from the New Jersey-based station W2XMN.

Back in the UK, the BBC was trialing Armstrong’s FM technology. On May 2nd 1955, FM broadcasting ‘officially’ began from the BBC’s Wrotham transmitter in Kent.

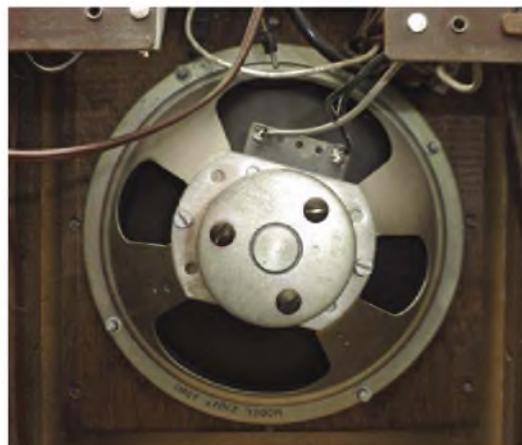
High fidelity from dedicated VHF/FM tuners, from Leak and Quad for example, was beginning to appeal to well-heeled hobbyists. Murphy Radio naturally wanted a piece of the action. It offered compact FM-capable ‘table sets’ and, pitched at a price-point between these and embryonic ‘hi-fi’ gear, radiograms with FM reception.

As well of these, though, Murphy offered the six-valve A272C ‘baffle console’ set featured here – it was sold between 1956 and 1958, priced at £38.15s.0d (approximately £1,000 today). An FM development of previous AM-only Murphys like the A146CM and A188C, the A272C still looks striking today with its side ‘wings’ and central speaker grille. The A272C will also receive AM services on the long-wave (LW) and medium-wave (MW) bands. In common with radio sets of yesteryear, facilities were provided for the crystal pickup of an external

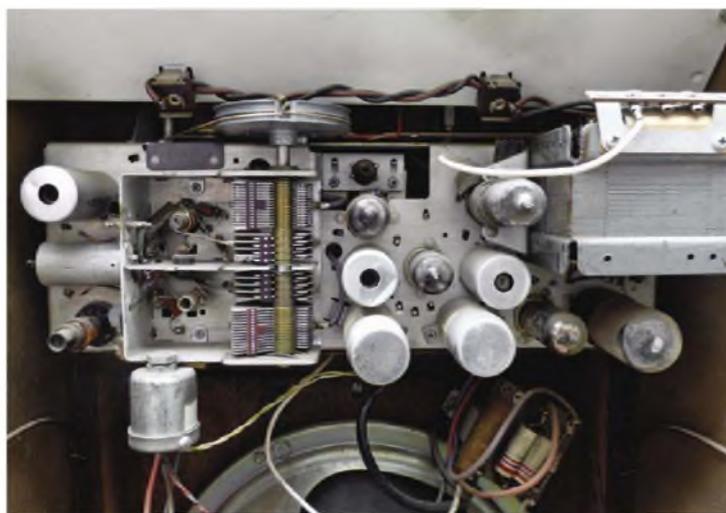
‘gramophone’ (thereby converting your A272C into a radiogram) and an external speaker – a flimsy slide-switch on the rear panel switches between this and the internal one.

Life was simpler in those days. Four knobs cover tone (basically variable top-cut), volume, wavechange (gram, LW, MW and FM) and tuning. The only display this thing has – the warm glow of valves apart – is an adjacent pair of backlit tuning scales, the pointers of which move simultaneously.

As is usually the case with radios of this vintage, stations are listed on the dials. The right-hand one is reserved exclusively for the MW band, which was the predominant broadcast band and therefore somewhat crowded! In contrast, only three stations are shown on the FM



**A large 10in. full-range drive unit, supplied by Celestion, is used. It’s rather dull-sounding, because Murphy didn’t use a tweeter.**



**The A272C’s chassis features six valves. Most are internally-sophisticated designs that enabled the physical valve count to be reduced. One, the EABC80, contains no fewer than three diodes – plus a triode for good measure!**

band – Home Light and Third.

At this point, I should make it clear that the A272C – as with many British FM radios of its vintage – doesn’t cover the full 87.5-108MHz Band 2. Coverage goes no further than 100MHz, meaning that some stations – where I live (Southend), Classic FM and local station Radio Essex – are unavailable. All four national BBC services are within scope, though. 1950s listeners got a bit more choice via LW, judging by the eight European stations on the lower section of the dial.

The radio’s circuitry is basically of-its-time superhet stuff, but with additional complications introduced by its support for FM reception. An ECC85 double-triode, for example, handles RF amplification and frequency-changing (the IF here is 10.7MHz – much higher than the 470kHz of the AM section).



**Four knobs cover tone/power off, volume, wavechange/gram selection and tuning. The backlit side-by-side tuning scales are marked with stations. Right covers medium-wave, left covers VHF-FM and long-wave.**

Murphy paid particular attention to the A272C's final audio stage; a 6PI beam tetrode drives a 10in. full-range drive unit with 4W of so of power. This speaker, allegedly supplied by Celestion, is bolted to the interior of the front panel that acts as a baffle.

My A272C managed to escape recycling, and after a visual check was gently powered up using a variable transformer (or 'variac'). It worked, although the FM section proved to be rather insensitive. Matters improved slightly when the internal aerial – a dipole wrapped around the internal cabinetry – was replaced by a feed from an external one (a balun matching transformer was necessary). However, selectivity wasn't particularly good. At the time of writing, a strong local pirate station at 92MHz made listenable reception of Radio 3 all but impossible.

Said pirate constantly pumped out dance music and I was surprised at the quantity and depth of the bass that could be mustered. A medium-sized room could be filled with distortion-free sound. However, the sound distinctly lacks bite – it's a pity that Murphy didn't fit a tweeter, or at very least a driver with an additional central 'whizzer' cone for the treble. This impacts FM's potential somewhat; the main

**Hardboard backs, with cooling slots through which the reassuring glow of valves can be seen, were common practice in radio construction since the 1930s.**

improvement relative to AM stations is cleanliness.

There is a distinct lower-midrange 'plumminess' that's evident with speech; other vintage radios have similar presentation. A decent external speaker can however show what the A272 is capable of.

So what place does the A272C have today? The lack of full Band 2 coverage restricts its usefulness, and when analogue broadcasting comes to an end you'll need to apply audio from a digital tuner to its 'gram' socket (or use an external modulator) if listening is to continue.

Some of the Mazda valves specified by Murphy are difficult to get hold of nowadays, meaning that modification may be necessary. Some components – Hunts capacitors in the signal sections, for example – are prone to failure, and it's difficult to get to these in the hard-wired chassis. I'm sure that replacing these



– if this hasn't already been done – might improve the set's performance.

The external speaker switch is also known to give problems, and so many owners bypass it.

The biggest problem is that the A272C is imposing in terms of physical form – it stands 80cm tall – and may not fit in with many home decor schemes. However, enthusiasts with the space to collect radios do prize the A272C, on account of its sound quality and the unique look of its glossily-finished hand-built cabinet. When they crop up on the second-hand market, these radios tend to fetch £50 or so. Listening to it, I can however imagine what a 1950s listener – hearing FM for the first time – would have liked about it.



**Separate aerial inputs are provided for AM (medium/long-wave) and VHF. A matching transformer, known as a 'balun', is necessary for an external rooftop VHF/FM aerial.**

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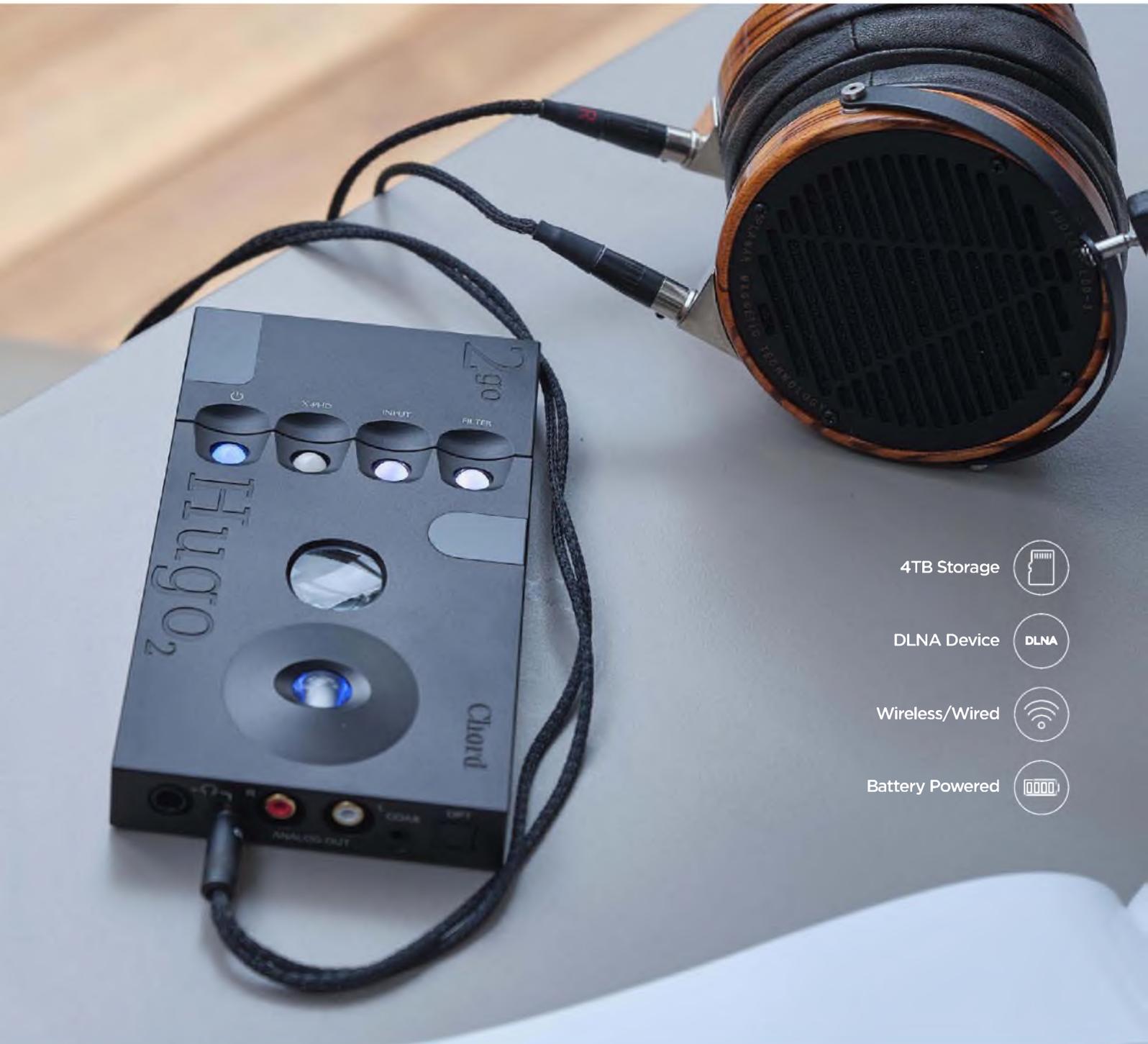
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# True Blue

**Martin Pipe checks out Tellurium Q's upgrade of its Blue budget speaker cable.**

**T**ellurium Q has been in business for just over a decade. From the beginning, founder Geoff Merrigan maintained that a product had to be

of frequencies, through a timing shift". Minimising this, it was claimed, will yield improvements in terms of clarity and transparency. To achieve their goal, TQ's engineering team relied on

embody the TQ philosophy were (and still are) divided into Blue, Black and Silver ranges, which are in turn subdivided into three levels – the result being, as Tellurium Q put it, a "3x3 colour/performance



"exceptional or it would not be released". And yet Tellurium Q had to offer value for money; back in 2010 they claimed the company was offering, for £1,000, cables of a standard that the competition was selling for £6,000.

When TQ began operations its design focus was the reduction of phase distortion and its "smearing

complex cable construction, using "multiple stranded conductors of slightly-differing materials, and various dielectric materials and geometries". Considerable attention had to be paid to every part of the manufacturing process, to the extent of using "non-standard mixes" of solder.

The products that would

matrix" that allows customers to choose the optimal interconnects and speaker cables for their systems. Lower-priced Blue products are said to tend towards a 'warmer and slightly-richer' presentation, while going towards Silver will allegedly give you a sound that is "more detailed, more revealing and with improved top-end". A

cable's character could therefore tame, or play to the strengths of, the equipment to which it interconnects.

Despite being at the lowest end of the TQ range (£16.50 per metre) the Blue speaker cable is a solid and well thought-out design that gives a good account of itself. The fairly flat nature of the cable has practical benefits, as it can be tucked away where competing varieties might struggle. Although the Blue are available with bare wires, they can as an alternative be terminated – by dealer or factory – with 'Z plugs', for a very reasonable £12. These simple but effective banana plugs, a tight (but

not impossibly-so) fit, are also seen on more expensive cables. A terminated 3m pair sells for £111, thereby bringing decent speaker cabling within real-world budgets.

I was sent a pair of 3m long Blues, which I compared to cheap unbranded speaker cable (of the sort you can buy in DiY stores). From the outset, I noticed more focus and musical engagement, even with modest equipment (Cambridge AXR100D amplifier and Q Acoustics I030 loudspeakers). We're talking chalk and cheese here, folks. Compared to expensive reference-class cables, used in a system comprising Cambridge CXN v2/Chord Hugo TT/Arcam A49/Quadral Aurum Wotan VIIIIs, I noted a slight drop in bass weight and refinement in the upper registers.

The presentation is perhaps a little on the smooth side, too.

But given their modest pricing, the TQ Blues put up quite a fight.

The past tense used earlier was deliberate – because these Blues, having been knocking around for a few years now, are themselves going that way.

TQ only sent them to me as a yardstick against which the Somerset-based company's latest budget contender – imaginatively christened the 'Blue II' – should be

judged.

In physical terms this new version seems pretty identical to what went before, but according to Geoff Merrigan there are major differences internally: "We have made changes to dielectric, conductors and, because of that, a minor change to conductor geometry". One thing that hasn't changed, however, is the pricing. Good news, in these difficult times.

In order to make the comparison more valid, the new cables were also 3m in length and terminated in the same Z plugs. The good news is that the core characteristics of the original Blues are retained – that innate musicality, coupled to a good sense of timing. Where the new models score is in their less-reticent treble; bass is a tad deeper and clearer, but the difference isn't quite as pronounced. The Blue II's ability to convey subtleties is excellent – it's at least as good as the original model – although it didn't quite reach the lofty standards of the reference cable. But that's comparing different sorts of chalk and cheese; the Blue II performs way beyond expectations delineated by financial considerations.

**CONCLUSION**

TQ should be congratulated for making an excellent budget cable even better – but keeping the price the same!



"The Blue II's ability to convey subtleties is excellent"

**TELLURIUM Q  
BLUE II**  
£16.50 PER METRE  
PLUS £12 FOR  
TERMINATIONS  
(£111 FOR  
TERMINATED 3M  
PAIR TESTED)



**OUTSTANDING - amongst  
the best.**

**VERDICT**

An affordable speaker cable, with taste of the high-end.

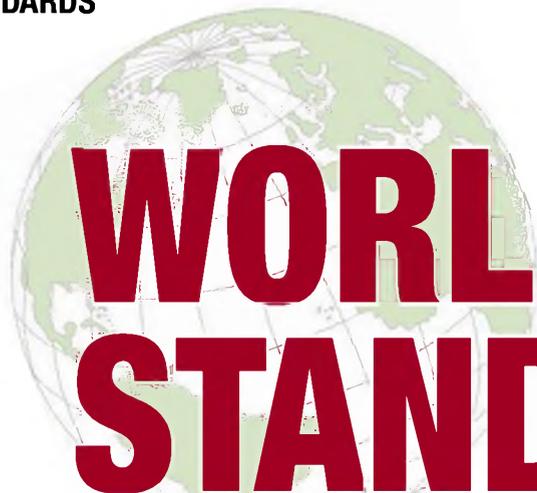
**FOR**

- musical budget cable
- practical design
- low cost

**AGAINST**

- nothing at the price

Tellurium Q  
+44 (0)1458 251997  
www.telluriumq.com



# WORLD STANDARDS

Your guide to the best products we've heard that are currently on sale in the UK...

## TURNTABLES

**AVID INGENIUM** £800  
Great bass response and upper midrange detail allied to clarity makes this a must-hear at its price-point



**CLEARAUDIO INNOVATION** £6400  
Expensive, but offers great results from a finely honed and beautifully finished belt drive turntable, with servo control from the platter to keep a grip on tempo like few others. Can be fitted with a Clearaudio tangential arm, or any conventional design. Awesome



**INSPIRE MONARCH** £4,350  
A rebuilt from the ground up Technics Direct Drive, having blistering pace and dynamics allied with smoothness, sophistication and purity of tone. A true reference.



**LINN LP12SE** £3,600  
The UK's most iconic turntable, the legendary Sondek goes from strength to strength. New Keel sub-chassis and Radical DC motor add precision and grip to one of the world's most musical disc spinners. Expensive though.

**MICHELL GYRO DEC** £1700  
Wonderful styling coupled with great build and finish make this turntable a delight for friends and family. It has an attractive clear acrylic dust cover, and you can mount just about any arm. A current design standard.



**PRO-JECT ESSENTIAL DIGITAL** £300  
A budget turntable that turns in a great analogue performance, but also has a hi-res digital output. Send 24/96 across your lounge via optical cable to a DAC and get great audio quality. Or record LP to your laptop.



**REGA RP3** £550  
The first of the super-quality Regas, little compromised by price and featuring Rega's outstanding RB303 tonearm, suitable for MM and MC cartridges. A standard at the price point

**TIMESTEP EVO** £2100  
The famous Technics SL-1210 MkII Direct Drive but with improved plinth, isolation, main bearing and power supply, plus an SME arm (add £1500). DD convenience, rock steady pitch and fab sound at a great price. Our in-house reference.



## TONEARMS

**ORIGIN LIVE ENCOUNTER MK3C** £1,745  
Origin Live combines carbon fibre and ebony to marvellous effect in its new 12-inch arm. Creamy and rich in presentation, the Encounter delves deep into the mix for a satisfying listen.

**HADCOCK GH-242 EXPORT** £810  
Consummately musical, lyrical sounding tonearm, but needs the right turntable.

**ORIGIN LIVE ONYX** £450  
Easy, smooth, creamy nature that reminds you why you're listening to vinyl in the first place. Essential audition at the price.



**REGA RB303** £300  
A one piece tapered casting makes this arm's structure almost unrivalled. Great dynamics and superb imaging, for MM and MC. Reference quality for peanuts.

**SME 312S** £1,600  
Twelve inch magnesium alloy tapered arm tube plus SME V bearings. An insightful yet smooth and relaxed sound. Superlative build completes the package. Our Editor's steed.



**SME 309** £1500  
A one-piece tapered 9in arm finished like a camera and slick to use. Superlative SME quality and sound at affordable price.

**SME V** £3000  
Offers rapid fire timing and a sense of precision, plus rock solid dynamics. Top dollar for deep pockets.

## CARTRIDGES

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-OC9 MLIII MC** £420  
A fine sounding MC with strong bass and super fine treble from a great stylus – yet inexpensive.



**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-F3/III MC** £150  
Great value entry level moving coil with detail and grip you just can't get from similarly priced moving magnets.

**BENZ MICRO ACE SL MC** £595  
Smooth, lucid and full-bodied, award-winning, hand-made cartridge from Switzerland.

**BENZ MICRO WOOD SL MC** £945  
Highly finessed Swiss moving coil that plays music with riflebolt precision.

**DENON DL-103** £180  
A popular and much loved budget MC with big bass, smooth treble and deep sound stage. Fantastic value.



**LYRA TITAN I MC** £3,500  
Breathtaking speed and dynamics from LP, helped by diamond coated, boron rod cantilever.



**ORTOFON 2M MONO SE MM** £80  
A mono cartridge purposed for The Beatles in Mono microgroove LPs. Fitted with a top quality Shibata tip. Fab for the four.



**ORTOFON 2M BLACK MM** £400  
As good as it gets from MM. Fabulous detail and insight from a Shibata stylus, good bass and excellent tracking.

**ORTOFON CADENZA BRONZE MC** £1,400  
A mid-price MC with a slightly livelier presentation than the super smooth Cadenza Black. High-end sound at midband price – great value.



**ORTOFON CADENZA BLACK MC** £1,800  
Ultra smooth and dimensional moving coil with bass and punch aplenty. Lovely stylus.

**ORTOFON A95 MC** £3,750  
Fast and extremely detailed, this is an MC cartridge that sets standards.

**REGA CARBON MM** £35  
Budget price for a competent cartridge with a fairly unflappable nature. Ideal for beginners.



**GOLDRING 1012GX MM** £250  
A glorious sounding cartridge with solid bass and strong dynamic punch, plus excellent treble from its Fritz Geiger stylus. Fun and affordable.



**SHURE M97XE** £80  
Big warm sound, but great tracking and bullet proof stylus protection from damped guard. A survivor.

**VAN DEN HUL DDT-II SPECIAL MC** £995  
Long-established cartridge from Holland with an open and dynamic sound.

**PHONO PREAMPS**

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 651P** £200  
Clean, concise sound from MM and MC cartridges at a very low price. A real bargain.

**ICON AUDIO PS3 MKII** £2,500  
All valve MM phono stage with MC transformer option, graced by big, spacious and relaxed sound.



**LUXMAN EQ-500 PHONOSTAGE** £4,495  
A fully-equipped phonostage from Japanese manufacturer Luxman that offers comprehensive cartridge matching allied to superb sound.



**LEEMA ACOUSTICS ELEMENTS ULTRA** £1,199  
Smooth and detailed sound with the ability to accommodate most modern cartridges. Exceptional value for money.



**PRO-JECT TUBE BOX DS** £425  
Compact MM and MC phonostage with valve output circuit and a big sound.



**QUAD QC24P** £995  
MM and MC, oodles of gain, a volume control – and valves! Looks superb and sounds even better: smooth, atmospheric and big bass.

**TIMESTEP T-01MC** £995  
New, minimalist phonostage that sonically punches well above its weight.

**PREAMPLIFIERS**

**ICON AUDIO LA-4 MKIII** £1,400  
Uses early 6SN7 triodes for liquid sound. Has plenty of gain and a remote control into the bargain.



**MF AUDIO CLASSIC SILVER** £4,500  
One of the best preamplifiers we've heard at any price, this transformer-coupled marvel does very little wrong. It's powerful, clean and open, yet delicate. Its sound is unmatched at or near the price.

**MING DA MD7-SE** £1,520  
A valve preamplifier with an open, effortless sound and a big soundstage. It has plenty of gain so will accept any source and drive any power amp. A real beauty.



**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS**

**ARIAND PRO845SE** £1,499  
Pure single-ended valve magic. Low-powered but immediately gorgeous, easy-going yet forcefully dynamic at the same time.



**AUDIO RESEARCH VS160** £3,500  
Power house sound with enormous pace and punch from traditional US muscle master Audio Research. Breathtaking, but expensive.



**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 651A** £350  
Dual-mono construction and meaty toroidal power supply combine to produce a solid and sharp sound with sonics far beyond its price point.

**CREEK EVOLUTION 100A** £1,500  
Superb build and smooth confident sound make this powerful amplifier a benchmark.



**CYRUS 8DAC** £1,400  
Trademark shoebox-sized Cyrus integrated now offering 88Watts per channel, plus DAC. Svelte delivery from a dainty case that fits in anywhere – and isn't Class D!

**EXPOSURE 1010** £495  
Entry-level integrated from Exposure has excellent upper mid-performance with an almost valve-like sound.



**ICON AUDIO STEREO 60 MKIII** £2,800  
Excellent tube integrated with plenty of power and an expansive soundstage, plus KT150 tube option and bias meter for easy adjustment.



**NAIM NAIT 5Si** £925  
Naim's fabled entry-level integrated amplifier is updated to si status. Demos Naim's superbly muscular sound at entry level.

**SUGDEN A21SE** £2,480  
Class A amp with fantastic sound quality producing hard, sculpted images, deep detail and tight bass. Just don't expect disco-like sound levels!



**POWER AMPLIFIERS**

**AUDIO RESEARCH VSI75** £7,498  
Powerful, fast valve sound that makes everything else look weak at times. Needs careful matching but well worth the effort.

**AUDIO RESEARCH VSI15** £5,000  
Oodles of power with enormous punch. Rafael Todes said it provided "shock and awe" while retaining incredible smoothness and texture.

**ICON AUDIO MB845 MKII** £7,600  
With 120W from big 845 valves right down to low frequencies, this power amplifier has massive dynamics and bass swing, yet is easy on the ear.



**ICON AUDIO MB81PP** £15,000  
Big Russian transmitter valves deliver 200W from these massive monoblock amplifiers. Frightening in every sense.

**MCINTOSH MC-152** £4,995  
Stunningly insightful sound with enormous bass punch from a uniquely designed transistor amp. Amazing audio, a league up, if expensive.



**QUAD ELITE QMP MONOBLOCKS** £2400 PR  
The proverbial iron fist in a velvet glove. Plenty of power but delivered with an assured and confident nature. Smooth on top and easy on the ear but can rock out when needed.

**QUAD II-EIGHTY MONOBLOCKS** £6,000 PR  
Powerful and expansive sound from modern design monoblocks that also look lovely. Superb – used by us as a reference.



**LOUDSPEAKER FLOORSTANDER**

**B&W 803 D3** £12,500  
B&W's updated statement floorstanders deliver depth and definition with breathtaking speed and authority, aided by a diamond coated tweeter. Expensive – but enormously impressive.

**CASTLE AVON V** £1,600  
A big floorstander at a modest price that suits the average room. Refined ribbon treble and deep bass give it a great delivery.



**EMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT-8B** £2,500  
Excellent U.S. planar magnetic loudspeaker at bargain price. Utterly superb - a must hear.

**EPOS K2** £1,000  
A fun sound that is tidy all round and very engaging, with solid bass. Music as you hope it to be.

**FOCAL ARIA 926** £1,400  
Simple, clean, neutral sound – easy going but well engineered and affordable.

**MARTIN LOGAN SUMMIT X** £16,698  
Matches Martin Logan's XStat electrostatic panel to a powerful subwoofer to provide extended, powerful bass. Dramatic sonic purity. Awesome – all but unmatched.



**MARTIN LOGAN ELECTROMOTION** £2,500  
Martin Logan's budget baby XStat hybrid electrostatic. Fits into any lounge to give electrostatic levels of clarity and imaging.



**QUADRAL CHROMIUM STYLE 8** £1,700  
A supremely smooth yet open sounding loudspeaker. Clean and detailed treble from a fine ribbon tweeter. Accurate yet informative and enjoyable. Pure class.

**QUADRAL ORKAN VIII AKTIVS** £6,200  
Active loudspeaker with tight, powerful bass, perfect accuracy and detailed treble from a ribbon tweeter.



**Q ACOUSTICS 2050i** £480  
A large floorstander at a budget price. Offers high sensitivity and big sound and has very few flaws for the price.

**SPENDOR SP100 R2** £6,495  
Retro looks but a sound that's hard to match. Spendor's 12" bass unit provides massive low-end grunt with a room-filling sound.



**SPENDOR A3** £1,300  
Fine little floorstander with a smooth, natural midband and even tonal balance. Ideal for smaller rooms.

**TANNOY DEFINITION DC10 TI** £6,000  
Enormous power with great projection. Glorious subsonics too. Need little power to go very loud and have superb finish into the bargain.



**TANNOY KENSINGTON** £9,950  
Big but not overpowering, punchy modern sound from classic cabinetry. Need little power to go very loud and suit a traditional home, or castle.



**LOUDSPEAKERS STANDMOUNT**

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO 1 V2** £225  
Civilised sounding speaker with fast and tuneful bass.

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 CLASSIC** £845  
Brilliantly successful remake of an iconic design; not flawless, but surely one of the most musical loudspeakers ever made.



**ELAC BS243** £1,000  
More transparent and spacious than they've a right to be at this price, these refined mid-price standmounters represent top value.



**EMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT-16A** £1,200  
U.S. planar magnetic bookshelf loudspeaker with unrivalled mid-band and treble. Hear it before all else.

**WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220** £200  
Builds on the success of previous Diamond ranges with better bass, more detail and a greater sense of scale.



**KEF LS50** £800  
Supremely musical mini-monitors which sound much bigger than they look.



**MARTIN LOGAN MOTION 35** £1,300  
Folded Air-Motion tweeter gives a taste of Martin Logan's electrostatic sound in a standmount. Different from the standard mini-monitor and all the better for it.



**PMC TWENTY.21** £1,575  
Transmission line loaded standmount with a big box sound from a compact cabinet. Punches well above its weight.



**Q ACOUSTICS 2020i** £165  
Great little bargain-priced stand-mounts with a friendly, tun yet surprisingly refined sound. Hard to better for a pair of starter loudspeakers.

**WHARFEDALE DENTON** £500  
A beguiling mixture of retro looks with modern, high-technology drive units. The Denton has an easy-going, big-hearted sound with a touch of trad warmth that should appeal to many.



**HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS**  
**CREEK OBH11** £150  
Designed specifically for low to medium impedance (30 Ohm – 300 Ohm) headphones the little Creek has a marvelously well-judged sound.

**CHORD MOJO** £399  
Class leading portable DAC and headphone amp with ability beyond all else. 3g, open spacious sound.



**EPIPHANY EHP-02** £99  
PP3 battery-powered portable gives great sound quality at an almost giveaway price. Happy with the output from an iPod or CD player, the little epiphany is a true bargain.



**ICON AUDIO HP8 MKII** £650  
The HP8 MKII valve-based headphone amplifier brings the spacious sound of valves to headphones. And it matches 'em all.



**FIDELITY AUDIO HPA 100** £350  
Great little headphone amplifier with a lively yet refined and open sound.

**MUSIC FIRST PHONE BOX** £276  
Brings a big stage, plenty of detail and rich, deep colours to the sonic spectrum.



**OPPO HA-2** £250  
Remarkable performance and sound from ESS Sabre32 DAC in a slim portable package.



**CD PLAYERS**  
**AUDIOLAB 8200CDD** £949  
Inspired CD player and DAC with price-performance ratio like no other. Capable of matching designs costing much more.



**CANOR CD2+** £3,100  
Musically coherent and tuneful valve-driven CD player from Slovakia. Lovely liquid sound.



**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 651C** £410  
Snappy modern presentation from this budget CD player. Cracking audiophile entry point for any digital fan.

**CHORD RED REFERENCE MKIII** £16,000  
A unique and massive engineering exercise that could well be the best CD player available. Chord's Pulse Array DAC technology produces a musical experience like few others. A true reference player.



**ESOTERIC K-03** £9,495  
Superb high-end silver disc spinner that is beyond criticism. Devoid of its own character but has a flawless presentation.



**EXPOSURE 101** £395  
Detailed player with fine sense of timing should be an automatic entry on any demo list at this price.

**ELECTROCOMPANIET EMP-1/S** £4,650  
Epic in scale, lavish in tone and exuberant in its musicality - this is a memorable SACD spinner. Quirky in operation and modest in finish, though.



**OPPO BDP-105D** £1200  
Universal player and DAC that makes CD and Blu-ray (+DVD) sound deep, spacious and full bodied. Reference quality that's affordable.



**REGA APOLLO-R** £550  
Rega comes up with a fine CD player again. Tremendous detail and an easy, unforced sound at all times. Few bells and whistles but made up for by its superb sonic ability.



**ROKSAN KANDY K2** £900  
A charmingly musical performer at the price - this is a surprisingly sophisticated CD player for the money.

**TUNERS**

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 651T** £299  
Value-packed AM/FM/DAB and DAB+ ready tuner. Precise and detailed with excellent resolution of spoken word.



**CREEK DESTINY 2** £550  
Creek's tuner expertise shines through in the Destiny 2. This AM/FM receiver is wonderfully three-dimensional and smooth.



**MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-90T** £1,900  
Exceptionally able, but commensurately priced, audiophile tuner that cannot fail to charm.



**DACS**

**AUDIOLAB M-DAC** £600  
Excellent sound from ESS Sabre32 DAC and impressive flexibility with a unique range of filter options make this a stand-out product. Low price is the icing on the cake.



**AUDIOLAB Q-DAC** £250  
Stripped-down version of Audiolab's M-DAC loses some features but retains much of the sound, making it a veritable bargain.

**ANTELOPE ZODIAC GOLD/VOLTIKUS** £3,095  
DAC/preamp/power supply combination majors on detail but has a remarkable un-digital sound. One of the best at its price.



**CHORD 2QUTE HD** £990  
Superb build quality and exceptional sound from this compact unit. Boasts the ability to handle DSD direct via USB and has an exceptional soundstage. One of the best DACs you can buy.



**DCS DEBUSSY** £8,000  
DCS's bespoke 'Ring DAC' circuit gives a beautifully-fluid, almost analogue sound that encourages long listening sessions. Not cheap but worth every penny.

**NORTHERN FIDELITY DAC** £650  
Packed full of features, including Bluetooth and USB, this ESS Sabre32 equipped DAC offers crisp, insightful sound at low price.



**METRUM OCTAVE** £729  
Unique two-box digital-to-analogue convertor with great sound at a great price. Cuts upper treble, though.

**NAIM DAC** £2,400  
Superb high-end digital convertor with a probing, punchy and forensically-detailed sound.



**TEAC UD-501** £699  
Feature-packed DAC with benefit of DSD playback. Superb sound means little to touch it at the price.



**RESONESSENCE INVICTA MIRUS** £4,499  
One of the most highly spec'd DACs available, with a smooth yet entralling presentation. Few approach it.



**NETWORK PLAYERS**

**CHORD DSX100** £7,500  
Chord's proprietary DAC circuit shines in their top-of-the-range streamer. Hear-through clarity with a sound rich in detail, dynamics and soundstage.



**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO NP30** £399  
Budget offering from Cambridge offers a great introduction to network streaming.

**CYRUS STREAM X** £1,400  
Gorgeous sound quality even from compressed digital music. New control app makes everyday operation a doddle.



**CONVERT TECHNOLOGIES PLATO** £2999.00  
A network player with amplifier that does it all, including turn LP to hi-resolution digital, and add cover artwork from the 'net.



**NAIM NDX** £2,995  
Clean, incisive and very detailed sound with Naim's traditional pace and timing make this one of the best network music players around.

**NAIM ND5XS** £2,175  
Great sound quality with traditional Naim heft. A wonderful DAC with full 24/192 handling. Only the display could be better.

**NAIM NAC-N172 XS** £1,650  
A pre-amp/DAC/streamer package provides a taught, rock-solid presentation with a tonally rich midband and a superior sense of rhythm.



**PRO-JECT STREAM BOX RS** £1,095  
Unusual valve-based streamer/preamp with variety of inputs and a lovely liquid sound. Not the most detailed but compensates with sheer musical verve.

**QUAD PLATINUM DMP** £2,500  
Combined CD/network player has all the usual Quad elements but with added zest and detail that brings life to everything you care to play.



## DIGITAL SOURCES

**ASTELL&KERN AK100 MKII** £569  
Portable high-definition digital player with superb sound quality. Punchy and fast.



**FiiO X3** £150  
Fabulous value player with nice easy sound and full range of abilities. Small and light. For newbies.

**LOT00 PAW GOLD** £1,500  
Reference quality sound; it's like carrying your hi-fi in your pocket. Equivalently large too, but stunning headphone quality.



**NAIM HDX** £4,405  
Interesting one-box network-enabled hard-disk music system that gives superb sonics together with impressive ease of use.

**NAIM UNITILITE** £1,995  
A 50W amplifier with traditional Naim heft, a CD player and vhf/fm radio, plus network input and Bluetooth make this a great all-in-one.



## PORTABLE SPEAKERS

**BYAN SOUNDBOOK** £149.99  
Superb design and great sound make for one of the best portable Bluetooth speaker/radios on the market. Not the cheapest – but worth every penny.



**IRIVER IBA-50** £69  
Big, warm sound with plenty of volume and clean at high levels. Muscular sound compared to many rivals.

## CABLES

**BLACK RHODIUM TWIST** £71/3M  
Twisted to fight off radio frequency, the Black Rhodium speaker cable is easy on the ear with a fine sense of clarity and focus. A remarkable performer at the price.



**MAINS CABLES R US NO.27** £95  
Offers a sprightly pace with a precise nature. Fast performance enhance frequencies and beautifully etched detail.



**CHORD SIGNATURE REFERENCE** £900  
Majors on timing, detail and openness. Capable of getting the best from most systems and a recommended upgrade.



**TELLURIUM Q BLACK** 280/3M  
A deep, dark, velvety performer that's nevertheless highly musical, it represents excellent value as mid-price cables go.

**TELLURIUM Q SILVER DIAMOND** £804/M  
An open, natural and transparent sound that is difficult to beat, from these great loudspeaker cables



## HEADPHONES

**AUDEZE LCD-3** £1,725  
A planar magnetic 'phone that offers monitor quality. Strong sound with silky, dark quality that others struggle to match.



**B&W P3** £170  
Beautifully presented headphones from the loudspeaker specialists. Feed them a good quality source signal and they reward with excellent sound.

**JAYS V-JAYS** £49  
Wonderful little budget over-ear portable 'phones with a clean, clear sound to beat the best of the rest at the price.



**NOBLE K10 INC. FITTING** £1,279  
Custom fit in-ear phones with 10 drivers deliver a sound that is out of this world. Personal and perfect.



**OPPO PM-1** £950  
Planar magnetic phones with a warm, easy but big bodied sound that draws you in. Need a lot of drive, but deliver superb bass.



**SENNHEISER HD700** £599  
Tremendously fast with a strong, focussed, lower-frequency range and a firm bass punch.



**YAMAHA HPH-MT220** £150  
Purposed for indoor monitoring yet light and comfortable enough to be used on the move. Excellent sound quality marred only by a slight warmth to vocals.



**Solid State Preamp**  
**McIntosh C47**

- 7 analogue & 5 digital inputs
- Decode & play back high fidelity DSD files via USB
- Limited stock at this price

**SAVE 40%**



36 Months Warranty

END OF LINE OFFER

**£4,995** **£2,995**



**Integrated Turntable System**  
**McIntosh MT1100**

- Turntable, vacuum tube preamplifier and amplifier all in one
- Includes Bluetooth and auxiliary inputs
- Just add speakers



ON DEMO

**£7,495** 36 Months Warranty



**Stereo Integrated Amplifier**  
**McIntosh MA252**

- 160 watts per channel
- Hybrid design: vacuum tube preamp and solid state power amp



ON DEMO

**£4,500** 36 Months Warranty



**Solid State Preamp**  
**McIntosh C53**

- DA2 digital audio module
- Supports up to DSD512 files
- 8 band analog equalizer
- 9 analogue & 7 digital inputs



AVAILABLE TO ORDER

**£9,995** 36 Months Warranty

JUST LAUNCHED



Only 1 available in the UK of 70 available Worldwide

**70th Anniversary**

**2-Channel Vacuum Tube Amplifier**  
**McIntosh MC2152**



- Commemorative system marked with matching serial numbers
- 150 watts x 2 channels
- (8) KT88, (4) 12AX7A and (4) 12AT7 vacuum tubes

**£25,000** 36 Months Warranty



Includes McIntosh History Book that contains a certificate of authentication

**2-Channel Vacuum Tube Preamplifier**  
**McIntosh C70**



- (5) 12AX7A and (1) 12AT7 vacuum tubes
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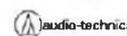
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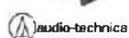
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# Excellent 3

Philips launch a new Fidelio headphone, the X3. Noel Keywood listens in.



I used a pair of Philips Fidelio X1s for a long time – until they expired. They were easy going, comfortable, and got it all right – without serious flaw. The new X3s I'm reviewing here continue the tradition. Price just £350, Philips describe the X3 as "audiophile" so their intention is good it seems.

Surprisingly, the finish has become more sombre, as our pictures show, the metal earpiece cradles now being anodised dark grey where before they were bright. Pared down construction has however reduced weight to 330gm on our scales (without cables) – and that is relatively light as over-the-ear 'phones go. The Philips brand name is barely visible as black lettering on the headband, reminding me of "black pack" cars (e.g. Land Rover) that are currently popular; the idea is to look mysterious I guess. The ear pieces don't slide-adjust on the headband, instead there is an elasticated under-band that performs its function well and is comfortable.

Unlike the single input X1, the X3 has an input on each earpiece, allowing it

to be used in balanced mode. For some reason Philips have elected to use a 3.5mm stereo jack plug as a connector on each earpiece, instead of the more common mono jack, making the cable 'handed', with Left and Right jack plugs. The plugs are marked but not clearly, and the headphones are also correspondingly handed but unmarked. All a bit strange I feel – but simple to sort out in use as the phones will remain silent until the cable is plugged in the right way around – and yes it caught me out!

Philips supply two 4m long cables, one a conventional unbalanced terminated by a 3.5mm stereo jack plug, the other terminated with a balanced 2.5mm four-pole jack plug for portable players so fitted. Since a 2.5mm plug is difficult to wire and snaps easily they're not universal by any means.

Using a common 3.5mm stereo jack on each ear piece allows a balanced cable to be soldered up to suit any player. It's better to buy a pre-made cable, since to build your own you need an appropriately small soldering iron and work stand with clamps, lights and magnifying glass. But Philips use of commonly-found jack plugs makes the X3s easy to adapt – cable wise – to an increasing number of exotic balanced output plugs/sockets.

An adaptor is supplied to match 1/4in (6.3mm) jacks.

In use I appreciated the light weight of these 'phones and their simplicity of use. No fooling around with earpiece adjustment: put 'em on and position to fit: simples.

### SOUND QUALITY

I ran the Fidelio X3s from an Audiolab M-DAC+ fed by an Audirvana Plus music player running on an all-solid-state MacMini (Mojave).

And straight away I was reminded of the X1s that I used for so long. Being open backed the X3s have a nice open sound – there are no cuppy reflections that you get with closed 'phones. Philips retain a good sense of balance in the bass too, making no attempt to strengthen things up Beats style, yet they play a firm and fluid bass line that my son liked especially, saying they were "expressive and controlled" in the bass. He was impressed that they could manage this at the price, after using Klipsch HP-3s (£1300) and being a long term user of (my!)



**Each earpiece has its own 3.5mm three-pole (stereo) input jack socket. An unusual choice: this is usually a mono (two pole) socket. But the stereo jack is more widely available, making a balanced or specialist cable easier to construct or purchase.**

magnetic-planar Oppo PM1s (£1000), to get the X3s into price perspective.

I'd describe the X3s as on the lighter side of things, needing to produce a little bit more low end heft and power from Mick Fleetwood's drum kit in Dreams (24/96) from Rumours for example – but there was speed, cleanliness and insight all the same. This propelled Safri Duo's Samb Adagio alright: it had massive pace and there was plenty of low end punch to the repetitive synth kick drum, although the strong presence of higher frequency percussion tended to draw my attention away.

Although percussion and highs struck out hard there was at the same time a sense of softness in the midband that made for a smooth and apparently easy going presentation generally.

Yet high treble is strong and where it exists in a recording the

X3s got a little forthright. There were times when the soaring voice of Johannette Zomer singing Handel's Lascia Ch'io Pianga (DSD) became hard for example, and Queen singing Killer Queen (24/88.2) carried obvious vocal sibilance.

Overall though, the X3s came across as balanced, if a tad soft in the mids. The sense of softness made for an easy, relaxing listen, which is important with headphones. Philips have succumbed to increasing treble to add apparent detail and at times this became intrusive I felt.

### CONCLUSION

Philips Fidelio X3s are nice at the price. I would have liked a little more midband revelation and less high treble, but as they stand you do get a very listenable experience. This is an audiophile headphone – as they claim – light and comfortable to wear and enjoyable. Great at the price.



**Two long (4m/12ft) cables are supplied, one with a standard 3.5mm jack plug, the other with 2.5mm jack plug having four-poles for balanced operation. There's also a 3.5mm-to-1/4in (6.3mm) adaptor.**

### PHILIPS FIDELIO X3 £350



**EXCELLENT - extremely capable.**

**VALUE - keenly priced.**

### VERDICT

Lightweight and comfortable, with easy going sound. High quality at a relatively low price.

### FOR

- warm-ish but amenable sound
- light weight
- balanced use possible

### AGAINST

- dull appearance
- strong upper treble

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# Ten Ten

Melco's high-end N10 music server gets a rating of ten, Noel Keywood thinks.

**R**egular readers will likely know that contributor Jon Myles – now playing hi-fi in the sky we hope (he passed away early 2020) – was a Melco fan. Jon upgraded his high quality NAS drive to a Melco N100 (see review March 2019 issue) and came away mightily impressed. From that point on he used an N100 in the office to deliver digital files into hi-fi systems

under review, being totally convinced the files were of immaculate quality.

Jon spent a lot of time playing digital from servers and had a keen understanding of the differences a good server could make. He would have liked the N10 I feel – reviewed here – which is a new and further up-market Melco server that comes with external linear power supply – cost a substantial £6750. Phew.

The N100 has an internal switch-mode power supply, likely necessary for small case size. The N10 is altogether different, even if it looks similar. The power supply has been extracted to sit in an external case and it is a traditional linear style supply.

Why do this? The technical reason is that linear supplies don't generate high frequency noise able to interfere with digital. Devil be





**The Melco Music HD iPad app control screen places artwork at left and a track list at right. Also, a variety of on-line services are available. Transport controls at bottom.**

gone then. Not only has the power supply been completely removed, it has also been reverted to what, I sense, is becoming an electronic religious experience in Japan, where using a linear supply has become an act of faith meriting bestowment of honour.

I'm not being cynical here, since I think they're right in that linear supplies consistently and almost super-naturally give best sound. Linear supplies are usually associated with analogue amplifiers though, not digital products; I was a little bemused about linear power delivery into a digital server but pondering on this I could see it has technical merits. Melco certainly seem to think so, placing a premium price tag upon the N10.

Both units are compact, measuring 215mm wide. The main unit is 269mm deep and 61mm high, the power unit similar at 215mm wide, 61mm high but 273mm deep (quoted). However, taking into account plug protrusion allow 350mm. They can be stacked or run side by side, connected by a short 470mm long cable, but the large Neutrik multi-pin connectors used effectively reduce useful length to allow side-by-side operation only; doubtless a longer cable could be constructed.

Melco use steel and aluminium clad cases that are solid and weighty, the main (head) unit coming in at 3.5kg, the power supply a solid 5kg.

The N10 stores music files on a 3TB disc – massive capacity. It

"I can only describe as the sweetest tone, as if there were honey on the strings!"

can also load or read from a flash drive (memory stick) inserted on the front panel, or an HDD drive. Similarly there are rear sockets for mass storage.

At rear lie an RJ45 ethernet connector for network connection (there's no wi-fi) and my BT home router saw it as N10 on the client list straight away. There are two

USB sockets at rear for connection of a USB DAC; there is no on-board DAC.

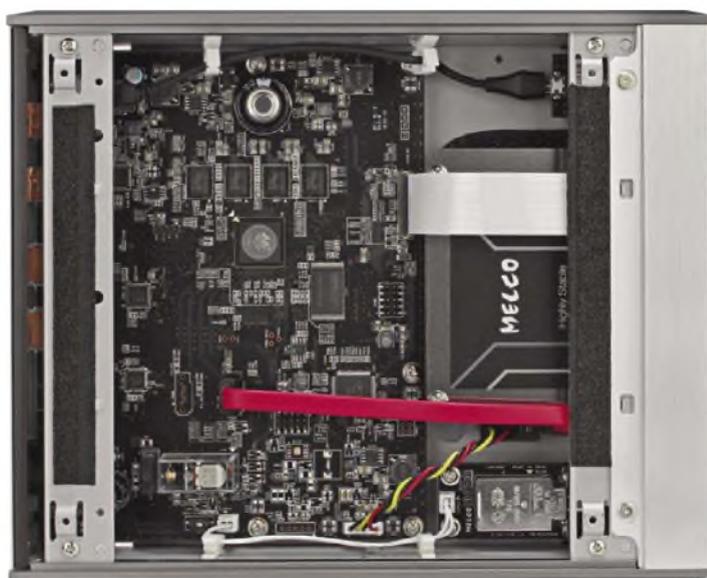
Operation is primarily from a Melco Music HD app available from Apple's App store, but disappointingly this is for iPad only; it will not download to an iPhone. Mconnect can be used too, but again not from an iPhone I found.

Front panel controls are basic – no separate transport buttons to provide Stop, Start, Pause or Play. A basic music file list can be brought up here and Play/Pause invoked using a Select function but the screen displays just four tracks. The track played is relayed in large scrolling script visible from a distance but the system is awkward to use, best seen as a fall back should the iPad expire or get taken by someone else for something else! The app was however easy to use, finding the player straight away. It

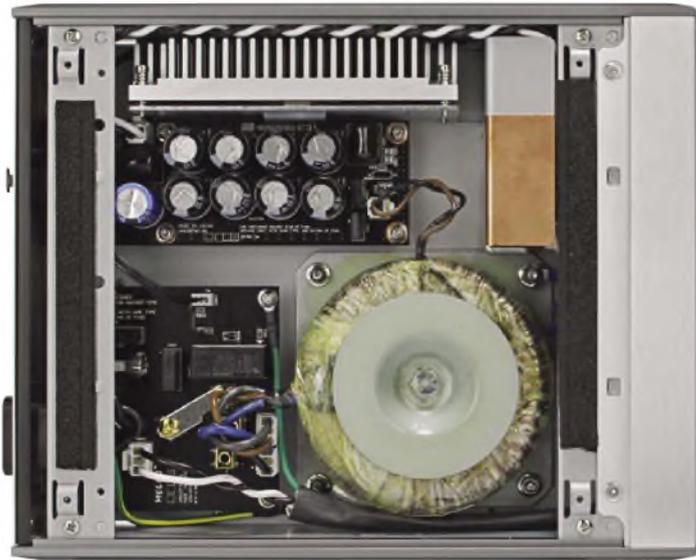
has an uncomplicated screen and logical layout, presenting songs in a scrolling track list.

### SOUND QUALITY

I used the N10 reviewed here through a Chord Electronics Dave DAC in the office, connected to an Icon Audio Stereo 30SE single-



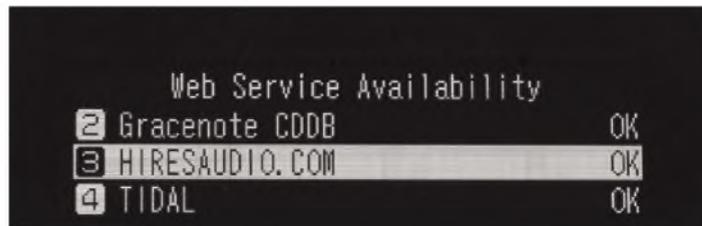
**Internally, the N10 carries a circuit board packed with Surface Mount Devices (SMD). Its 3TB hard disc drive (HDD) can be seen at right.**



**The linear power supply carries a large toroidal mains transformer, banks of smoothing capacitors and even a heatsink for what likely is a high current voltage regulator.**

ended valve amplifier driving Martin Logan ESL-X hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers. I used it at home connected to an Audiolab M-DAC+ driving Oppo PM-1 magnetic planar headphones, as well Klipsch HP-3s.

And what the N10 provides is deep and clean insight, with less glare than I am used to from some of our review tracks. Fleetwood Mac's Dreams (24/96) is always a difficult and confusing one, often sounding coarse up top – but from the N10 it was easily clear, with sweet treble from cymbals and a firm bass line. Best of all it had a flowing, organic quality that usually eludes digital. It quite obviously was digital, not at all like our LP tracks, yet at the same time it was sweet and almost lulling natural.



**The screen is mono only, low resolution and with small display area.**

Same with Benjamin Grosvenor playing Chopin's Nocturne No 5, where his piano had a silky smooth quality and each key was beautifully identified. Fine decays to notes were made evident, again bringing a naturalness to the sound; his gentle touch in a closing sequence was made obvious and compelling.

Curious to say, but I was always aware that the N10 had almost analogue bass – and plenty of it. Perhaps this is because it clears highs of glare so they don't dominate: Queen's Radio GaGa (24/88.2) was thunderous and deeply detailed, yet I wasn't assaulted. The synth line was deep and fluid, the chorus well separated.

Steely Dan's Time Out of Mind was solid and hard in progress – as it is: a synthetic performance if ever there was one, but I found it relatively rich in texture.

That quality passed through better into Marianne Thorsen playing a Mozart Violin concerto backed by the Trondheim soloists (24/96) where her violin had what I can only describe as the sweetest tone, as if there were honey on the strings! And what a lovely violinist she is.

The N10 seems able to inject a pristine quality by dropping out hash and glare. It strips away nasties to leave something not only finely rendered in detail terms, but more euphonic than is usual. Sort of subtle, but quite compelling in its own way – hence Jon Myles insistence on using the Melco N100.



**At bottom the linear power supply with its multi-pin Neutrik power output socket. At top the N10 'head unit' with USB sockets for mass storage and USB DAC connection. There's an ethernet link to router and one direct to Player.**

**CONCLUSION**

It's a lot of money, the N10, and I can say nothing about value here – it is in the eye of the beholder, who'll have a decent sized wallet methinks. But I have to admit that although adding a linear power supply to a digital product seemingly makes little sense it does work in practice. The N10 not only brought deep insight and cleanliness, best of all it was able to reduce nasties to produce a sound that was not just pristine, but sweet too – and that is not a term easily applied to digital. If you want a high quality music storage source, as well as one that can download from the 'net and read computer files, the N10 is top choice.

**MELCO N10 £6750**



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.**

**VERDICT**

A dedicated audiophile music server with fine sound quality. Expensive, but impressive.

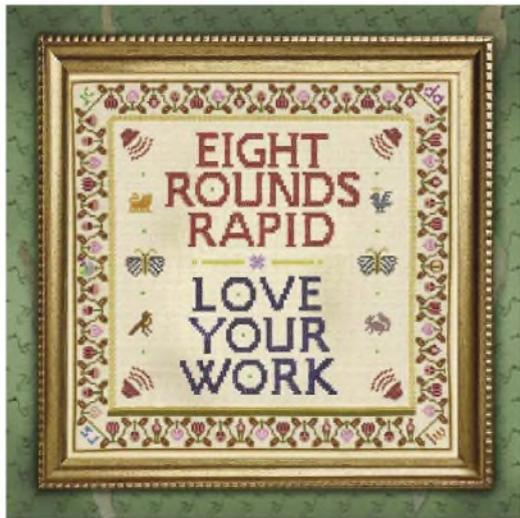
**FOR**

- sound quality
- ease of installation
- nice app

**AGAINST**

- iPad only
- poor manual control
- poor screen

[www.melco-audio.com](http://www.melco-audio.com)



EIGHT ROUNDS RAPID

Love Your Work  
Tapete

All the way from... Southend, this UK outfit leans heavily in the direction of punk and R&B. And when I say R&B I don't mean glossy soul-pop with the odd token rap to keep it 'street'. Oh no. I mean the traditional, frantic, sweaty, spittle-spewing R&B that infused emotion into every crevice of a song. Punk too, especially in the pinched, primitivist, stripped and direct delivery with a simplified instrumental backing.

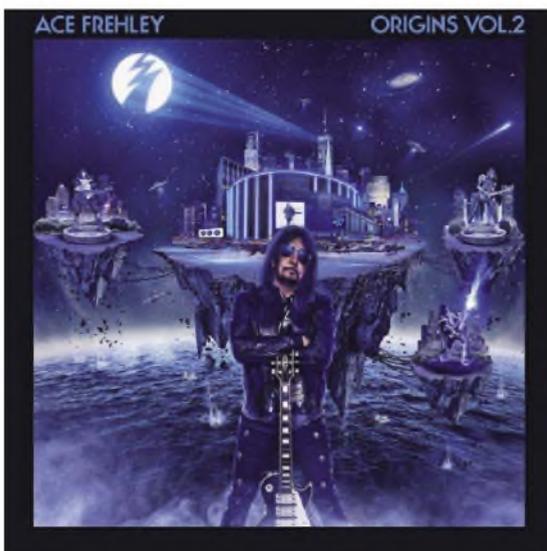
The band offer the sort of songs that get to the point and then call a taxi. They say what they want to say – and then they leave the building.

There's no dwelling on complex choruses, no long involved guitar solos, no snore-fest drum patterns – just a simple message. 'Passive Aggressive' is one delightful example, as is 'You Wait'. The latter title being the principle lyrical content of

the entire song. The latter is a song that keys into basic social interaction. It references slang terms. Moments in a conversation. It cherry picks familiar terms and links them together into an almost nervous, skittish, clipped series of disconnected language that is familiar enough to trigger a smile.

Then songs like 'Letter' and 'Black Tide' appear and the R&B term begins to rise in the consciousness. This is where the Dr Feelgood comparisons begin to make sense and possibly why the band toured with Wilko Johnson in 2013 and 2015. This album is full of brief thoughts, Post-It Note rock. PIN Rock, if you like. Is it moribund? Nostalgia for nostalgia sake? A nostalgic appeal to ageing punks and their larger spending power? Exploitative perhaps? I'd say not. In fact, if there was ever a time for punk and R&B to rise again, to shout out a chord of frustration and rage? It's now.

AUDIOPHILE CD



ACE FREHLEY

Origins Vol.2  
SPV

He of Kiss, co-founder of the same – and a guitar man who has been looking back, for a second time it appears.

You can buy the release as a double-blue vinyl set but I looked at the CD for this review which arrives in a digipak. And one minor point of note which I'm not sure if I like or not. When you receive a new CD, especially of late, it will feature a sticker on the shrink-wrap noting the highlights within. So here, for example, you'll read '11 Rock and Roll Classics' with a sample track listing on the sticker itself. Other CDs have a similar marketing approach.

Here though, that sticker is on the actual cover sleeve, not the shrink wrap. I haven't tried to remove it but it does spoil the lines of the artwork, which is certainly eye-catching.

Here, Frehley looks at his

inspiration "I just thought about the songs that I used to play in clubs when I was doing other people's material" he said. "I went through my album collection and thought about the songs that influenced me the most".

And it's a classic selection from Led Zeppelin's 'Good Times Bad Times', Deep Purple's 'Space Truckin'" and The Kinks 'Lola', to Paul Revere and the Raiders' 'Kicks' and The Beatles 'I'm Down'. There's even a Kiss outing on there, noted as a bonus track called 'She'. Guest artists include Lita Ford and Cheap Trick's Robin Zander.

I like the mastering on this one. It offers plenty of space for power chords to grand stand, for percussion to dominate and for vocals to drift across the soundstage with added reverb while bass is foundational in its solidity. A fun album, you'll have a whale of a time with this one.

Well, I use the 'Live' title as quoted but see that as a generalisation of what's to follow here because we have a grand total of five live albums from the group.

But first, for those unsure of the group, Colosseum emerged in the UK during 1968 from a bunch of ex-John Mayall and Graham Bond chums, you might say. They included Dick Heckstall-Smith on sax with bassist Tony Reeves and Jon Hiseman, who perched on the drum stool.

This first iteration of the band also included the weighty talents of Dave Greenslade on keyboards and Jim Roche on guitar. When Roche exited, stage left, the vocalist James Litherland took over that instrument.

1970 saw ructions when Litherland and Tony Reeves left but guitarist Dave Clempson, Mark Clarke on bass and the one and only Chris Farlowe took over the vocal

duties.

I dwell on the minutiae of each line up because the five albums included here span both, focusing on the periods 1969, 1970 and 1971 for their live works.

Those albums are: 'Live at the Piper Club, Rome, Italy 1971'; 'Live at Ruisrock Festival, Turku, Finland 1970'; 'Live '71'; 'Live at Montreux International Jazz Festival 1969' and 'Live at The Boston Tea Party'. The latter took part in 1969, during their first American tour and saw them paired with the Byrds.

In sonic terms, there's the compromise of sound quality that is so familiar in live albums – but live affairs are more about the occasion than the sound quality, which remains good throughout these recordings. The balance between the group and audience is good too. That is, the audience don't dominate but their energy and enthusiasm is apparent. Again, that is essential. You want your heroes to be bothered. And this lot certainly are!



## COLOSSEUM

Live Repertoire

# AUDIOPHILE CD

It's an odd thing. When a group grows and moves forward in terms of its development and creativity and the lead vocalist, the totem as far as much of the fanbase and audience would see it, does not. Then, in effect, the group evolve and out-grow the lead singer. That's what happened here when Brian Poole left 'Brian Poole And The Tremeloes' in 1966.

Don't forget how big the band were before then. Don't forget that this was the outfit that Decca chose, in preference to The Beatles. Dumping a lead singer who had lead them to eight Top 40 singles to that point was brave.

And yet it was the right thing to do.

Rick West on guitar, Alan Blakley on rhythm guitar, Dave Munden on drums and bassist Alan Howard said hello to new lead singer Len 'Chip' Hawkes.

From that point on, they could

do no wrong. Out-selling even The Beatles in the UK as the top British band and lying only third in overall sales behind US outfits The Supremes and The Monkees, totalling 131 weeks in the UK charts, racking up six Top 10 singles plus the classic 'Silence is Golden'.

This lovely box set documents this later period and does so by including all of the mono and stereo mixes of their recordings plus the hits, the B-sides, live cuts and even foreign language releases, plus alternative song versions and studio outtakes. Oh and there's a glossy, image-packed booklet full of informative liner notes. Phew!

Mastering has been carefully exercised. Yes, there are compressive elements here, no doubt from the original sources, but the label has infused it with air to soften edges while retaining both the natural energy and bounce of the original music.



## THE TREMELOES

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# CADENZA

The Cadenza Series of high-end Moving Coil (MC) cartridges allow you to get the most from your vinyl records. By carefully implementing cobalt-iron pole pieces, using new improved winding processes on the armature, and employing an extruded aluminium housing - amongst other changes - the Cadenza Series is able to out-perform all those that came before it.

The name *Cadenza* comes from the Italian word for cadence, which refers to a soloist during an orchestra performance where they play alone in an elaborate manner. It therefore seemed fitting that such a capable and nuanced cartridge series should use the same name.

Like other modern ranges, the Cadenza Series is structured in Ortofon's preferred colour-tier nomenclature; so there are Red, Blue, Bronze, and Black variants available to suit varying budgets and tastes.



## Red

This MC cartridge and introduction to the series features a Nude Fine Line stylus which delivers open, dynamic sound with a touch of warmth.



## Blue

Featuring much greater dynamics and resolution, the sound is more open and reproduces more accurate details thanks to the Nude FG 70 stylus.



## Bronze

A step up in the range, this cartridge boasts a Replicant 100 stylus to produce stereo imaging capabilities that illuminate the farthest corners of the soundstage.



## Black

Flagship of the range, the Cadenza Black is simply the best and features a Nude Shibata stylus which guarantees amazing tonal neutrality, dynamics and purity of sound.

# "What is it in the word 'power' that consumes us?"



Noel Keywood

**P**ower – what a word. And we all seem to want it. Power in our cars and power in our hi-fi of course. But power corrupts John Dalberg-Acton tells us (I had to look that one up!) and I think I see corrosive influence of a perceived need for power in hi-fi.

What on earth do we think this spec. means and why is it used to define ability? Drop the drive for power and things could change for the better. In particular, products could become smaller, cheaper, longer lasting and more recyclable.

Power has little meaning in hi-fi even though it is touted as a defining property. Why little meaning when it dominates specs? Because it's used as a yardstick for how loud a system will go and how good it will sound, on the basis that high power amplifiers sound better. As Francis Pryor would say (did not have to look him up) on text book views of British history "utter rubbish".

Two simple facts. Very little power is needed to produce high volume in the home. And the perceived need for power undermines the design and supply of low power amplifiers that don't need massive casework, don't require large aluminium heatsinks and cooling fans, do not consume current from the mains and therefore are not wasteful in the broadest sense of the word.

A modern floor standing loudspeaker goes very loud from one Watt of power, smaller book shelves go loud – if not very loud – from the same amount. Still loud enough to annoy the household when they are watching Netflix downstairs :-)) or provoke dark remarks from the neighbours.

I have measured power output against sound level and can assure you that much more than 20 Watts on peaks is going to sound very loud. An

amplifier of 40 Watts is fine for most of us. Yamaha's A-S3200 amplifier I review this month re-inforced the point: with its meters set to read peaks it was difficult to get past the 50 Watt mark. Cranking up volume just a tad more took me to 100 Watts on occasional short term peaks – but too loud.

Here's the techy green bit that I will keep simple. Once you restrict an amplifier to 40 Watts the whole design idiom changes. They can be shrunk down, the power supplies to them become unstressed and more reliable in the long term, so fewer failures and electronic junk as a result.

I've been forced to design high power amplifiers in the past and much of the effort goes into thermal management, meaning big, expensive aluminium heatsinks, often aided by cooling fans (and their noise) to keep the little transistors cool. Mechanical strength is needed to restrain a heavy mains transformer that will punch its way out when the box is thrown from the back of a lorry during transit. I'm talking about material strength here, not money spent on good components for best sound quality. That's where the build budget goes for a powerful amp: into power, not quality.

We do not need high power amplifiers and if we can abandon this idea – possibly by mandate – it would result in significant improvement. The large cases you see with high power amplifiers would become unnecessary. Every amp would become small, even miniature with Class D operation and switch-mode power supply.

There's plenty of leeway for specialist and repairable / recyclable designs such as the Icon Audio Stereo 30 SE valve amplifier (30 Watts) I choose to use. Superficially a large object compared with a small circuit board offering same power – but

working into the future, easy and cheap to repair if need be. I'll also give a call to the Quad Vena II, just 45 Watts. Lovely sound.

Sadly, power is with us as an all-encompassing term for strength and goodness. Power in our cars even though we will never use it, mostly to just drag weight around. A pointless exercise that populates the streets with excessively large power consuming vehicles – internal population, one tiny person. Their power specs are a pull – but why? What is it in the word "power" that consumes us?

We do not need power at any significant level in everyday life. Our large machines, aircraft and – in-extremis – rockets able to leave earth's gravitational pull, have emotional impact I guess. I'm a sucker for a space launch like that of Space X's Falcon Heavy – or Apollo 13 of course – but back on earth and in simple everyday life a few Watts or a few bhp will generally do. To wit those sassy little electric scooters now becoming part of the cityscape – as they whizz past silently I chuckle. Very little power but great pace – and with some grace methinks.

A thousand Watt amplifier? No loudspeaker can handle 1000 Watts without burning up. What Watts can they handle? One hundred Watts pushed into a loudspeaker on a continuous basis will destroy most of them. This is another issue in power madness that never gets coverage. It's unusable – bit like a 150mph car.

I'm coming to believe we should mandate against absurd power specifications or they will forever be used to (mis)sell product. And the great bit about this is that it benefits everyone, including manufacturers and the planet. Fewer raw materials, less transportation weight, potentially lower cost. And most importantly – better sound quality. ●

# THE VINYL REVOLUTION



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**Hi Fi News said:**

Any great turntable gives you a certain frisson when you hear it. It's that old 'shivers down the spine' feeling, a sense of being let into a world to which you had previously not been privy. This is a remarkable turntable, and arguably the apex of vinyl playback. It's difficult to see how the SP-10R motor unit can be improved upon. It is a definitive statement of engineering prowess, and marks the return of direct drive to the top tier of turntables.

Miyajima - Stereo - Mono - Denon DL-103 - Audio Technica AT33 & OC9

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# "In my world vinyl has to pass through a ritual akin to joining the Masons"



Paul Rigby

**W**hen you switch on your hi-fi. From that point. How long does it take until you're actually sitting down, listening to music? A couple of minutes? Fifteen? More?

Me? Just over three hours. Let me explain – and expound too. Because many of you won't agree or smile at all benevolently at my methods or even my reasoning. Some of you will laugh, shake your head and even advise a quick visit to Boots for a rushed prescription. There will be others who will doubt my sanity. Certain individuals, even those who might agree with what I'm about to say, will declare that life is too short to bother with all of my self-inflicted shenanigans. So what's all this about "three hours" then?

When a piece of vinyl enters into my life, it has to earn its place within my collection. Especially if it wants to stay there. It can't just swan in, kick off its shoes, put its feet on the table and airily wave its hand in the air and demand a beer, you know. It has to work for a place on my shelves.

In my world, vinyl has to pass through a ritual akin to joining the Masons. New or old, looked after or not, bought from a record shop or car boot, in the ultrasonic cleaner it goes.

Only an ultrasonic cleaner provides a cleaning action efficient enough to remove muck and grime, that has been stuck and caked onto grooves. More than that, only an ultrasonic cleaner has the attritional ability to actually remove the hardened oils naturally leached from within the vinyl during pressing.

It's the attrition that makes the

difference of an ultrasonic cleaner. No other vinyl cleaner on the market offers attrition as part of its cleaning make up. Ironically, the only other cleaner that comes vaguely close is the Disco Antistat (£46.50 from Amazon)

It's hardened oils that do more sonic damage than any dust and any grime you might care to mention. Manual cleaners have trouble with it, RCMs (record cleaning machines) are hopeless.

Ever seen an archaeologist working on a partially exposed piece of pottery, for example? Ever seen them reveal some detail by dusting first? Then they have to tackle the harder soil around it? RCMs are good at removing the dust. They can't remove the soil. An ultrasonic cleaner can do both.

One of my ultrasonic cleaning cycles lasts for fifteen minutes, on average. Why fifteen? Because you need to apply a surfactant directly to its surface and then make sure it gets into the grooves. That takes time and effort. Then you need to run the ultrasonic machine for its maximum cycle length. On average? Fifteen minutes.

Then you have to repeat. Six cycles in all. That's an hour and a half per record. Now that gives my vinyl record a ticket to my collection. It's a one-off thing. Just a one hit. Once I've completed an intensive clean, I only need to give my vinyl album a quick ultrasonic clean every what, ten plays or so? That will take a couple of minutes.

So, as you can see. The three hours I mention above is hardly consistent to every listening session.

And why do I do the above? Why do I put myself through it? Because it produces sonic improvements. I know, I've spent

years testing each and every stage. Don't believe me? Fine. I'm not here to change your mind. Thing is, now I know the difference all of that makes, I can't go back.

So that's the cleaning.

Then there's the warming up. Now my hi-fi is beset with valves. So I give everything an hour to warm. I switch on, then walk away and do other things and let everything stretch and yarn.

Oh – one critical warming-up note. Warm up the cartridge before you play. Let it run for one side of a vinyl LP before you settle to listen. It completely changes the character of the sound for the better.

Finished? No. There's more. I place my vinyl LP on a Furutech Demag. I have the older Mk.I version. I press the Demagnetise button once then I flip the LP and repeat for the other side to lower the noise floor.

Onto the turntable goes the vinyl. Then I take my Furutech Destat III to remove static. The Milty Zerostat reduces static. The Destat III actually removes it. All of it. That improves sound by also lowering the noise floor.

There are static hotspots on a belt-driven turntable: the pulley, outside of the platter where the belt moves and the spindle. Give each area a blast. If you use valves like me, give the output valves in particular a blast too. That means each of my valve monoblocks and my phono amp.

Then put a noise-lowering Gravity One from Origin Live on the spindle (there to lower noise again: its not a stabiliser or a clamp), check that the stylus is clean, grab a coffee and you're good to go. Listen and enjoy. ●



# DEBUT CARBON EVO

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# "Longer broadcasts gave the GPO time to track and shut down the transmitters"



Martin Pipe

I recently came across another clutch of reel-to-reel tapes, containing London radio broadcasts from the late 1970s. On the whole pop music was poorly-served by FM radio back then. As a result FM pirates mushroomed in the big cities. In London alone, we saw the emergence of stations catering for different communities (e.g. London Greek Radio), soul music (Invicta), dance (Kiss), reggae (DBC) and rock (Thameside).

One of my old tapes contained a broadcast from the latter. Surprised at how good it sounded, I decided to find out more.

And the Thameside story is an interesting one. The station went on-air in November 1977 with a mere 50 Watts of RF power feeding an aerial atop the Trellick Tower in Kensal Town (north London). In its early days, broadcasts only ran for an hour.

Early programmes featured album tracks and singles from Pink Floyd, 10cc, Queen, the Beatles, Joe Walsh and ELO. Music was interspersed with the usual DJ patter – but there were also jingles, news bulletins and pastiches of ads and TV programmes.

These creative and zany sketches, produced on negligible budgets by Thameside presenter 'The Birdman', would have given Kenny Everett a run for his money.

Other than adverts for car stickers and BBC-like reception advice, which were sent out free on receipt of a self-addressed envelope, there was no advertising of paid products...at least until Thameside T-shirts were introduced.

The lack of funding was reflected in the station's regular phone-in and postcard competitions that could win you...a packet of Spangles!

Doing so presumably allowed Thameside to spend what little money it did have on getting the music and sound-quality right; remember that in 1977 most stations playing its mix of pop and rock broadcast mostly on lo-fi medium-wave.

Limited resources certainly didn't stifle technical innovation. Thameside's solid-state FM transmitter design, the circuit of which leaked out, was clever and stable. Indeed, it was copied by the burgeoning number of FM pirates. And for a while, Thameside broadcast with Dolby FM encoding from consumer Dolby B encoders, alongside other equipment including budget Garrard turntables, domestic Akai reel-to-reel decks, a custom mixer, Lafayette mike and self-built 'cart machines'.

As time went by, Thameside's broadcasting hours were extended – while a new transmitter design of increased power (200W) gave the station a wider range; in one of the recorded shows I heard, a Watford-based contestant was competing for said Spangles.

Musical tastes were changing too. In late 1979, a listener by the name of Dennis Leigh sent in a demo tape under his pseudonym John Foxx. The DJ, maybe unaware that Foxx happened to be then-cult band Ultravox's ex-vocalist, wasn't enthusiastic: "No-One Driving? No-One Singing, more like!"

Foxx's first solo album *Metamatic*, released the following year and featuring a finished version of the song, is today considered a classic (it's one of my all-time faves).

In another show, the same presenter was heard making unfairly-disparaging comments about Elvis Costello after a play of his High Fidelity single. In time Thameside did however accept the 'new wave',

devoting increasing airtime to the likes of Martha and the Muffins, Depeche Mode, Squeeze and even the Dead Kennedys.

The station also arranged some quite ambitious outside-broadcasts, some shows even originating from the homes of listeners.

On top of such innovative activity were parties and meet-ups. Among these were regular fast-food reviews, Circle Line picnics and a birthday event that took place on a Thames cruiser!

But Thameside, which allegedly attracted 20,000 listeners on a good day, was being noticed by the authorities. Longer broadcasts gave the GPO more time to track and shut down the transmitters, which they did at an increasing rate despite a clever system that switched the high-VHF 'link' signal from the Thameside studio (in a secret location!) to different transmitters. When 'Buzby' was a bit too close for comfort, that transmitter went off-air and a more distant transmitter was turned on.

And clearly, the occupants of Broadcasting House were also aware of the situation. Thameside may have had a loyal core of listeners, but its audience was impacted greatly in 1982. That December, Anne Nightingale's Radio 1 show – which broadcast similar music, but in stereo – began to occupy the Sunday 7pm slot that was Thameside's original USP.

Following a raid in May 1983 Thameside disappeared entirely, resurfacing briefly in 1984 as a pirate TV station that attracted serious coverage in the *Daily Mail*!

All ancient analogue history today – when music is mere 'content', soullessly-streamed to 'consumers' by 'service-providers' – but I found it fascinating. I hope you do too. ●

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# "the cost of renovating these speakers was less than £60 of parts"



Dave Tutt

One of those speakers that, in the mid '70s was probably at the forefront of hi-fi came my way recently. I don't know if you remember the KEF Concerto speaker and the kit version that appeared at the same time but hopefully you will know the sort of thing I am writing about. The B139 bass, B110 mid-range and T27 tweeter were popular not only directly from KEF but there were also versions using the same drivers by several other manufacturers.

The ones gracing the workshop this week were one of the kit 'speakers but the cabinets had been well made from 25mm ply and then covered in Formica. Looking at this combination of materials I would have to say that, living near an ex Royal Navy dock yard, this would have been the source of the timber.

The open grain ply likely was shuttering or perhaps structural timber, probably MOD and professionally cut in a machine shop to make expert butt joints. The surface of the ply was flaking as I cut out an opening for a connection plate so it wasn't made for furniture use except where it could be covered by a hard wearing smooth mica finish. If you have been on any Navy ship you would know the sort of thing.

The tweeters were unreliable and intermittent and the T27 isn't exactly a nice sound – at least to my ears – and all those years under their belt hasn't helped. The combination of the B110 midrange unit being far too high in level created a sound that was not what I would call KEF, let alone hi-fi. Changing mid level at the crossover with a single resistor was enough to tame the sound.

By the way, the single resistor solution only works if its value

is less than 6 ohms. Anything greater you can make the sound uncontrolled in the mids which results in a harder sound across the driver range. That is mostly due to the lack of damping effect of the amp even though the driver is connected via a crossover. If you need more attenuation then either an L-pad control or a potential divider is necessary which puts back the damping.

The tweeter replacements were a pair of cheap but great sounding MCM 53-1080 soft dome types that are the same chassis diameter as the T27 but more robust.

The power needed to drive these speakers is rather more than you would expect. Most speakers, as they get larger, tend to be louder for a given power input but these are in need around 60 Watts where others of a similar size are happy with less. Part of this is down to the B139 bass unit which isn't a particularly efficient driver – and of course the whole output of the speaker centres around the bass driver, around which you have to adjust the levels of the other drivers. Modern 8-10 inch drivers for bass manage better, probably because modern magnets are more powerful.

As an example the Peerless Symphony 6.5 inch ones I mentioned in an earlier column show the B139 how to do things, with benefit from modern materials. I do wonder how the new versions of this driver perform but they are expensive enough to buy many of the Peerless so value for money comes into question too. I guess the B139 is sitting on 40 years of age whilst a modern replacement driver, be it a B139 shape or any other driver has all those years of development to show off its advances. After I added in a few new capacitors to the crossovers things were looking up!

Grille cloth was nailed on with thirty 15mm tacks per cabinet, looking like an afterthought to cover up the drivers. A bit of a DIY botch. The 'speakers were not mirrored pairs and with either grilles on or off there was little in the way of stereo image depth – although there was some width to it. Depth can be a complex issue to fix on old boxes. Little things like driver placement, how they are mounted on the baffle, how recessed, how close to the corners etc and where they are sat in a room and if they are on the floor or on stands all have an effect – and were all an issue here. Without making new baffles for these DIY 'speakers it was unlikely anything could be done about it.

The baffle is classic 1970s KEF kit architecture – slightly recessed into the cabinet edges. As a result new and properly fitted grilles were unlikely to make much difference to that aspect of the sound. I made new grilles from MDF cut as frames with new grille cloth stretched, stapled and glued in place.

So, the cost of renovating these 'speakers was less than £60 of parts including tweeters, new grilles, resistors, terminals and connection plates – but quite a bit of time and effort.

Do they sound better? Given the age and my reservations about the bass driver I have to say that if you drive them reasonably hard you can get some quite good sounds from them – but better with classical than full on rock. The bass does go low as befits the low resonance driver and its porting. The treble is now smoother with less bite but more detail which complements the mids nicely as the integration is much cleaner. Ultimately good for another 25 years I think. ●

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# WORLD CLASSICS

Here is our list of the great and good from audio's glorious past, products that have earned their place in hi-fi history. You'll also see some oddities which aren't classic as such, but are great used buys. The year of introduction is given, alongside the original UK launch price.

## TURNTABLES

**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



**FUNK FIRM VECTOR II** 2009 £860

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

**REGA P2** 2008 £300

Excellent value for money engineering, easy set up and fine sound

**MCINTOSH MT10** 2008 £8,995

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

**REGA P3-24** 2008 £405

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

**ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE** 2007 £4,050

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. Sound is edge-of-the-seat stuff.

**MICHELL GYRODEC SE** 2005 £1,115

Design icon with superlative build. Sound is beautifully smooth, effortless and exceptionally expansive.

**MARANTZ TT-15S1** 2005 £1,299

Cracking all in one deck/arm/cartridge combination, this must surely be the best sound/plug and play package at this price point

**MICHELL TECNODEC** 2003 £579

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



**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.

**SME MODEL 10A** 1995 £4,700

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

**LINN AXIS** 1987 £253

Cut-price version of the Sondek with LVX arm. Elegant and decently performing package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

**ROKSAN XERXES** 1984 £550

Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagging plinth top-plates make them a cubious used buy

**DUAL CS505** 1982 £75

Simple high quality engineering and a respectable low mass tonearm made for a brilliant budget buy. Polished, smooth and slightly bland sound

**MICHELL GYRODEC** 1981 £599

Thanks to its stunning visuals, this bold design wasn't accorded the respect it deserved. Clean, solid and architectural sound.

**TOWNSHEND ROCK** 1979 £ N/A

Novel machine has extremely clean and fluid sound. Substantially modified through the years, and capable of superb results even today.

**MARANTZ TT1000** 1978 £ N/A

Beautiful seventies high end belt drive with sweet and clean sound. Rare in Europe, but big in Japan.



**REGA PLANAR 3** 1978 £79

Brilliantly simple but clean and musical performer, complete with Accs-derived S-shaped tonearm. 1983 saw the arrival of the RB300, which added detail at the expense of warmth. Superb budget buy.

**SONY PS-B80** 1978 £800

First outing for Sony's impressive 'Biotracer' electronic tonearm. Built like a tank with a clean and tidy sound, albeit lacking involvement. Scarily complicated and with no spares support - buy with caution!

**TRIO LO-7D** 1978 £600

The best 'all-in-one' turntable package ever made. Clean, powerful and three-dimensional sound, ultimately limited by the tonearm.

**ADC ACCUTRAC 4000** 1976 £300

Bonkers 1970s direct drive that uses an infra red beam to allow track selection and programming. More of a visual and operational delight than a sonic stunner.

**PIONEER PLC-590** 1976 £600

Sturdy and competent motor unit that performs well with a wide range of tonearms. Check very thoroughly before buying due to electronic complexity and use of some now-obsolete ICs.

**PIONEER PL12D** 1973 £36

When vinyl was the leading source, this bought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL12D was off the pace compared to rivals.



**TECHNICS SP10** 1973 £400

Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SP10/II will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

**LINN SONDEK LP12** 1973 £86

For many, the Brit superdeck; constant mods meant that early ones sound warmer and more lyrical than modern versions. Recent 'SE' mods have brought it into the 21st century, albeit at a price

**ARISTON RD11S** 1972 £94

Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm, Scotland's original super-deck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

**GOLDRING LENC0 GL75** 1970 £15.6S

Simple, well engineered motor unit with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearm. Good spares and servicing support even today.

**GARRARD 301/401** 1953 £19

Tremendously strong and articulate with only a veiled treble to let it down.



**THORENS TD124** 1959 £ N/A

The template for virtually every 1970s 'superdeck', this iconic design was the only real competition for Garrard's 301. It was sweeter and more lyrical, yet lighter and less impactful in the bass

**TONEARMS**

**REGA RB251** 2009 £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 well to rewiring and counter-weight modification.

**HELIUS OMEGA** 2008 £1,595

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

**AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7** 2007 £1,300

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.



**GRAHAM PHANTOM** 2006 £3,160

Sonically stunning arm with magnificent bass celerity and soundstaging. Build quality up to SME standards, which is really saying something!

**TRI-PLANAR PRECISION** 2006 £3,600

Immaculate build, exquisite design and one of the most naturally musical and lucid sounds around.

**MICHELL TECNOARM A** 2003 £442

Clever reworking of the Rega theme, using blasting, crilling and rewiring!

**SME 309** 1989 £767

Mid-price 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.

**NAIM ARO** 1987 £1,425

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

**SME SERIES V** 1987 £2,390

Vice-like bass with incredible weight, ultra clear midband and treble astound, although some don't like its matter of factness!

**NAIM ARO** 1986 £875

Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes.



**ALPHASON HR100S** 1981 £150

First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.

**SME SERIES III** 1979 £113

Clever variable mass design complete with Titanium Nitride tube tried to be all things to all men, and failed. Charming nonetheless, with a warm and inoffensive sound.

**TECHNICS EPA-501** 1979 £ N/A

Popular partner for late seventies Technics motor units. Nice build and Titanium Nitride tube can't compensate for middling sound.

**LINN ITTOK LVII** 1978 £253

Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. The final LVII version worth seeking out.

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT 1120** 1978 £75

Fine finish can't compensate for this ultra low mass arm's limited sonics - a good starter arm if you've only got a few quid to spend.

**HADCOCK GH228** 1976 £46

Evergreen unipivot with lovely sweet, fluid sound. Excellent service backup.

**ACOS LUSTRE GST-1** 1975 £46

The archetypal S-shaped seventies arm; good, propulsive and involving sound in its day, but ragged and undynamic now.

**SME 3009** 1959 £18

Once state of the art, but long since bettered. Musical enough, but weak at frequency extremes and veiled in the midband. Legendary serviceability and stunning build has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

**PHONO STAGES**

**CREEK OBH-8 SE** 1996 £180

Punchy, rhythmic character with doodles of detail makes this a great budget audiophile classic. Partner with a Goldring G1042 for an unbeatable budget combination.

**MICHELL ISO** 1988 £ N/A

This Tom Evans-designed black box started the trend for high performance offboard phono stages. Charismatic, musical and punchy - if lacking in finesse.



**LINN LINNK** 1984 £149

Naim-designed MC phono stage built to partner the original Naim NAIT - yes, really! Fine sound, although off the pace these days.

**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS**

**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.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO** 2009 £7,900

Seriously expensive, but one listen explains why. Wonderfully exuberant sound that can only come from a top quality tube design.

**SUGDEN A21A S2** 2008 £1,469

Crystalline clarity, dizzying speed and forensic detailing. Power limited so needs sensitive speakers.

**CREEK OBH-22** 2008 £350

Brilliant value budget passive, with remote control, mute and input switching, plus an easy, a neutral sound.

**CAMBRIDGE 840A V2** 2007 £750

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

**SUGDEN IA4** 2007 £3,650

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

**NUFORCE P-9** 2007 £2,200

Impressive two box preamp with superb resolution and an engaging sound.

**MELODY PURE BLACK 101D** 2007 £3,295

The clarity and openness of valves plus firm grip and fine detail make this a preamplifier masterclass.

**AUDIOLAB 8000S** 2006 £400

In another life, this sold for three times the price, making it a stand-out bargain now. Very clean, powerful and tidy sound.

**MCINTOSH MA6800** 1995 £3735

Effortlessly sweet, strong and powerful with seminal styling to match.

**DELTEC** 1987 £1900

Fast, dry and with excellent transients, this first DPA integrated is the real deal for eighties obsessives. Ridiculously punchy 80W per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

**EXPOSURE VII/VIII** 1985 £625

Seminal pre-power, offering most of what Naim amps did with just that little bit extra smoothness. Lean, punchy and musical.



**AUDIOLAB 8000A** 1985 £495

Smooth integrated with clean MM/MC phono stage and huge feature count. Extremely reliable, too. Post '93 versions a top used buy.

**VTL MINIMAL/50W MONOBLOCK** 1985 £1,300

Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent used buy.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A1** 1985 £350

Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.

**MISSION CYRUS 2** 1984 £299

Classic 1980s minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradeable with PSX power supply.



**NAIM NAIT** 1984 £350

Superb rhythms and dynamics make it truly musical, but tonally monochromatic. Fine phono stage, very low power.

**CREEK CAS4040** 1983 £150

More musical than any budget amp before it; CAS4140 loses tone controls, gains grip.

**MYST TMA3** 1983 £300

Madcap eighties minimalism, but a strong and tight performer all the same.

**ROTEL RA-820BX** 1983 £139  
Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

**NAD 3020** 1979 £69  
Brilliantly smooth, sweet and punchy at the price and even has a better phono stage than you'd expect. The archetypal budget super-amp.

**ROGERS A75** 1978 £220  
Lots of sensible facilities, a goodly power output and nice sound in one box. The later A75II and A100 versions offered improved sonics and were seriously sweet.

**A&R A60** 1977 £115  
Sweet and musical feature-packed integrated; the Audiolab 8000A remains a classic.



**SUGDEN C51/P51** 1976 £130  
Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters. A sweet and endearing performer but lacking in power and poor load driving ability.

**SUGDEN A21** 1969 £ N/A  
Class A transistor integrated with an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

**ROGERS CADET III** 1965 £34  
Sweet sounding valve integrated, uses ECL86 output valves, even has a half useable phono stage, sweet, warm a good introduction to valves.

**CHAPMAN 305** 1960 £40  
Smooth pre/power combo with a sweet and open sound. Not quite up to Leak/Quad standards but considerably cheaper secondhand.

## POWER AMPLIFIERS

**ELECTROCOMPANET NEMO** 2009 £4,995 (EACH)  
Norwegian power station as cool as a glacier tonally, yet impresses with sheer physicality and fleetness of foot. 600W per channel.

**NUFORCE REFERENCE 9SE V2** 2006 £1,750  
Brilliant value for money monoblocks with massive power and super-clean, three dimensional sound.

**QUAD II-80** 2005 £6,000 PER PAIR  
Quad's best ever power amplifier. Dramatic performer with silky but dark tonality, blistering dynamics, serious power and compellingly musical sound.



**QUAD 909** 2001 £900  
Current-dumper has a smooth and expansive character with enough wallop to drive most loads. Not the most musical, but superb value all the same.

**NAIM NAP 500** 2000 £17,950  
Flagship amplifier will drive just about any speaker with ease. Factor in the company's trademark pace, rhythm and timing and it all adds up to one effortlessly musical package.

**MARANTZ MODEL 9** 1997 £8000  
Authentic reproduction monoblocks still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

**MICHELL ALECTO** 1997 £1989  
Crisp, clean and beautifully controlled with gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 Orca this sounds delicious!



**MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200** 1996 £1000  
200W of sweet smooth transistor stomp in a grooved tube! Under-rated oddity.

**PIONEER M-73** 1988 £1,200  
Monster stomp from this seminal Japanese power amplifier, complete with switchable Class A and Class B operation. Clean, open and assured sounding, albeit a tad behind the pace on high speed dance music. Rosewood side cheeks and black brushed aluminium completes the experience.

**KRELL KMA100 II** 1987 £5,750  
Monoblock version of the giant KSA-100 is one of the seminal 80s transistor power amplifiers. Massive wallop allied to clean and open Class A sound makes this one of the best amplifiers of its type.

**RADFORD STA25 RENAISSANCE** 1986 £977  
This reworking of Radford's original late sixties design was possessed of a wonderfully rich, old school valve sound with enough power (25W) and lots of subtlety.

**QUAD 405** 1978 £115  
The first of the current dumpers is a capable design with smooth, effortless power and a decently musical sound. 606 and 707 continue the theme with greater detail and incision.

**HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS** 1973 £110  
Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain.

**LECSON AP1** 1973 £ N/A  
Madcap cylindrical styling alluded to its 'tower of power' pretensions but it wasn't. Poor build, but decently clean sounding when working.

**QUAD 303** 1968 £55  
Bullet proof build, but woolly sound. Off the pace, but endearing nonetheless. Some pipe smoking slipper wearers swear by them!

**LEAK STEREO 20** 1958 £31  
Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier with decent power and drive. Surprisingly modern sounding if rebuilt sympathetically. Irrepressibly musical and fluid.



**LEAK STEREO 60** 1958 £N/A  
Leak's biggest valve power amp offers 35 Watts per channel and more low end welly than the smaller Stereo 20. Despite concerns over reliability rarity value means high price.

**QUAD II** 1952 £22  
The all-time classic valve amplifier with a deliciously fluid and lyrical voice. In other respects though, it sounds hopelessly dated. Low power and hard to partner properly.



**LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1, TL/12 PLUS** 1949 £28  
Early classics that are getting expensive. Overhauling is de rigueur before use, using original parts if possible. Surprisingly crisp and musical. Deeply impressive in fine fettle.

## PRE AMPLIFIERS

**AUDIOLAB 8000C** 1991 £499  
Tonally grey but fine phono input and great facilities make it an excellent general purpose tool.



**CROFT MICRO** 1986 £150  
Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

**CONRAD JOHNSON MOTIV MC-8** 1986 £2,500  
Minimalist FET-based preamplifier is brilliantly neutral and smooth with a spry light balance in the mould of Sugden. Something of a curio, but worthwhile nonetheless.

**AUDIO RESEARCH SP-8** 1982 £1,400  
Beautifully designed and built high end tube pre-amplifier with deliciously sweet and smooth sound. Not the last word in incision or grip.

**LINN LK-1** 1986 £499  
A brave attempt to bring remote controlled user-friendliness to hair-shirt audiophile hi-fi. Didn't quite work, but not bad for under £100.

**NAIM NAC 32.5** 1978 £ N/A  
Classic high end pre. Brilliantly fast and incisive sound that's a joy with vinyl but a tad forward for digital.

**LECSON AC-1** 1973 £ N/A  
Amazing styling courtesy of Allan Boothroyd can't disguise its rather cloudy sound, but a design classic nonetheless.

**QUAD 33** 1968 £43  
Better than the 22, but Quad's first tranny pre isn't outstanding. Responds well to tweaking/ rebuilding though...



**LEAK POINT ONE STEREO** 1958 £ N/A  
Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fi!

**QUAD 22** 1958 £25  
The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocks - cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

**WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3** 2010 £290  
Great small standmounters for audiophiles on a budget; dry punchy sound with impressive sound-staging at the price.



**YAMAHA SOAVO 1.1** 2009 £3,000  
Musical, transparent with impressive dynamics and cohesion. Excellent build and finish.

**USHER BE-10** 2009 £10,500  
Clever high end moving coil design with immense speed and dizzying clarity allied to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly, though...



**SPENDOR A5** 2009 £1,695  
Multi-talented floorstanders with generous scale and punch and Spendor's classic mid-range detail. Deliver a sound that thoroughly engages whatever you care to play

**MONITOR AUDIO PL100** 2008 £2,300  
The flagship 'Platinum' series standmounter has a lovely warm and delicate sound with superlative treble.



**MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE** 2008 £1,600  
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.

**PMC OB11** 2008 £2,950  
Cleverly updated floorstanders give scale and solidity in slim and well finished package

**ISOPHON GALILEO** 2007 £2,100  
Big standmounters that really grip the music and offer quite startling dynamics and grip.

**ONE THING AUDIO ESL57** 2007 £1,450  
One Thing Audio's modifications keep the good old ESL57 at the very top of the game.

**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&W 686** 2007 £299  
Baby standmounters offer a sophisticated and mature performance that belies both their dimensions and price tag.

**B&O BEOLAB 9** 2007 £5,000  
Technically impressive and visually striking loudspeakers with sound quality that more than matches their looks.



**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.

**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.

**B&W 801D** 2006 £10,500  
In many respects, the ultimate studio monitor; dazzling clarity and speed with commanding scale and dynamics



**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.

**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

**USHER S-520** 2006 £350  
Astonishingly capable budget standmounters that offer detail and dynamics well beyond their price and dimensions.

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 CLASSIC** 2006 £845  
Brilliantly successful remake of an iconic design; not flawless, but surely one of the most musical loudspeakers ever made.



**MISSION X-SPACE** 1999 £499  
The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy sound nevertheless!

**MISSION 752** 1995 £495  
Cracking Henry Azima-designed floorstanders combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves

**TANNOY WESTMINSTER** 1985 £4500  
Folded horn monsters which sound good if you have the space. Not the last word in tautness but can drive large rooms and image like few others.



**CELESTION SL6** 1984 £350  
Smallest two way design complete with aluminium dome tweeter and plastic mid-bass unit set the blueprint for nineteen eighties loudspeakers. Very open and clean sounding, albeit course at high frequencies and limp in the bass. Speakers would never be the same again...

**HEYBROOK HB1** 1982 £130  
Peter Comeau-designed standmounters with an amazingly lyrical yet decently refined sound. Good enough to partner with very high end ancillaries, yet great with budget kit too. A classic



**QUAD ESL63** 1980 £1200  
An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics.

**MISSION 770** 1980 £375  
Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs: warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound,

**ACOUSTIC RESEARCH AR18S** 1978 £125  
Yank designed, British built loudspeaker became a budget staple for many rock fans, thanks to the great speed from the paper drivers, although finesse was most definitely not their forte...

**YAMAHA NS1000** 1977 £532  
High tech Beryllium midband and tweeter domes and brutish 12" woofers in massive sealed mirror image cabinets equals stunning transients, speed and wallop allied to superb transparency and ultra low distortion. Partner carefully!



**JR 149** 1977 £120  
Cylindrical speaker was ignored for decades but now back in fashion! Based on classic KEF T27/B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but has clarity and imaging.

**KEF R105** 1977 £785  
Three way Bextrene-based floorstander gave a truly wideband listen and massive (500W) power handling. A very neutral, spacious and polite sounding design, but rhythmically well off the pace.

**IMF TLS80** 1976 £550  
Warm and powerful 1970s behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms not a forte.

**SPENDOR BC1** 1976 £240  
Celestion HF1300 tweeter meets bespoke Spendor Bextrene mid-bass unit. The result is a beautifully warm yet focussed sound. A little bass bloom necessitates careful low-stand mounting.



**HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS** 1973 £110  
Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

**BBC LS3/5A** 1972 £88  
Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects – articulation, stage depth, clarity – and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence.

**LEAK SANDWICH** 1961 £39 EACH  
Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.

**QUAD ESL57** 1956 £45 EACH  
Wonderfully open and neutral sound puts box loudspeakers to shame. Properly serviced they give superb midband performance, although frequency extremes less impressive. Ideally, use in stacked pairs or with subwoofers and supertweeters.

## SYSTEMS

**MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1** 2010 £6,990  
Crisp styling, bright, colourful touchscreen, plus excellent search facilities. This is one hard disk music system with a difference. Best partnered to Meridian active loudspeakers.



**NAIM UNITIQUITE** 2010 £995  
Great little half width one-box system with truly impressive sound allied to a wealth of source options.

**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.

**MERIDIAN F80** 2007 £1,500  
Fantastically built and versatile DVD/CD/DAB/FM/AM unit, designed in conjunction with Ferrari. Ignore nay-sayers who sneer that it isn't a 'proper' hi-fi product. Just listen.

**MARANTZ 'LEGEND'** 2007 £22,000  
The combination of SA-7S1 disc player, SC-7S2 preamp and MA-9S2 monoblocks delivers jaw-dropping performance.

**SHANLING MC-30** 2007 £650  
Quite possibly the cutest all-in-one around with fine performance from the CD player, tuner and MP3 player input. Very low power, though.



**AURA NOTE PREMIER** 2007 £1,500  
Lovely shiny CD/tuner/amplifier with fine sound quality and dynamic abilities.



**ARCAM SOLO NEO** 2006 £1,100  
Excellent all-in-one system, with a warm, smooth and balanced sound to match the features and style.

**PEACHTREE AUDIO IDECCO** £1,000  
Excellent sounding iPod dock, impressive DAC and fine amplifier section make this an excellent one box style system.



## TUNERS

**ARCAM FMJ T32** 2009 £600  
Excellent hybrid FM/DAB+ tuner with a smooth, engaging sound. Factor in its fine build and it's a super value package.



**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.

**MYRYAD MXT4000** 2005 £1,000  
Sumptuous sound and top-notch build quality make for a tempting AM/FM package. Warm and richly detailed on good-quality music broadcasts.

**NAIM NAT03** 1993 £595  
The warm, atmospheric sound is further proof of Naim's proficiency with tuners.

**CREEK CAS3140** 1985 £199  
Excellent detail, separation and dynamics - brilliantly musical at the price. T40 continued the theme...

**QUAD FM4** 1983 £240  
Supreme ergonomics allied to a pleasingly lyrical sound with plenty of sweetness and detail made this one of the best tuners around upon its launch.



**NAD 4040** 1979 £79  
Tremendously smooth and natural sound allied to low prices and good availability make this budget analogue esoterica.

**MARANTZ ST-8** 1978 £353  
Marantz's finest radio moment. Warm, organic sound plus an oscilloscope for checking the signal strength and multipath.

**YAMAHA CT7000** 1977 £444  
Combines sleek ergonomics, high sensitivity and an explicit, detailed sound.

**SONY ST-5950** 1977 £222  
One of the first Dolby FM-equipped tuners, a format that came to nought. Still, it was Sony's most expensive tuner to date, and boasted good sound quality with brilliant ergonomics.



**ROGERS T75** 1977 £125  
Superb mid-price British audiophile design, complete with understated black fascia. Smooth and sweet with fine dimensionality.

**SANSUI TU-9900** 1976 £300  
A flagship Japanese tuner. It boasts superlative RF performance and an extremely smooth and lucid sound.



**TECHNICS ST-8080** 1976 £180  
Superb FM stage makes for a clean and smooth listen.

**REVOX B760** 1975 £520  
The Revox offers superlative measured performance although the sound isn't quite as staggering as the numbers. Fine nonetheless, and surely the most durable tuner here?



**SEQUERRA MODEL 1** 1973 £1300  
Possibly the ultimate FM tuner. Massive in terms of technology, size and features dedicated to extracting every ounce of performance from radio, including impressive multi-purpose oscilloscope display.

**LEAK TROUGHLINE** 1956 £25  
Series I an interesting ornament but limited to 88-100MHz only. II and III are arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiplex socket. Deliciously lucid with true dimensionality.

## HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS

**GRAHAM SLEE NOVO** 2009 £255  
Dynamic headphone amplifier with a great sense of timing. Crisp, clear treble and warm midrange gives an involving sound



**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CAN V8** 2008 £350  
Open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop. A great partner for most mid-to-high end headphones

## CD PLAYER/RECORDERS

**MUSICAL FIDELITY TRIVISTA** 2002 £4000  
When playing SACDs, the sweetest, most lucid and lyrical digital disc spinner we've heard. Old school stereo, pure DSD design. CD sound is up in the £1000 class, too! Future classic

**MARANTZ SA-1** 2000 £5,000  
The greatest argument for SACD. This sublime Ken Ishiwata design is utterly musically convincing with both CD and SACD, beating most audiophile CD spinners hands down.



**SONY MDS-JE555ES** 2000 £900  
The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding

**PIONEER PDR-555RW** 1999 £480  
For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

**MARANTZ DR-17** 1999 £1100  
Probably the best sounding CD recorder made, built like a brick with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility



**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD4SE** 1998 £200  
A touch soft in the treble and tonally light, but outstanding in every other respect

**SONY TCD-8 DATMAN** 1996 £599  
Super clean sound makes this an amazing portable, but fragile.

**LINN KARIK III** 1995 £1775  
The final Karik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, grippy dynamic sound, albeit tonally dry.

**NAIM CDS** 1990 £ N/A  
Classic Philips 16x4 chipset with serious attention to power supplies equals grin-inducing sonics.

**TECHNICS SL-P1200** 1987 £800  
CD version of the Technics SL-1200 turntable. Massively built to withstand the rigours of 'pr' use and laden with facilities - a great eighties icon.

**SONY CDP-R1/DAS-R1** 1987 £3,000  
Sony's first two boxer was right first time. Tonally lean, but probably the most detailed and architectural sounding machine of the eighties.

**MARANTZ CD73** 1983 £700  
A riot of gold brushed aluminium and LEDs, this distinctive machine squeezed every last ounce from its 14x4 DAC - super musical!



**MERIDIAN 207** 1988 £995  
Beautifully-built two-box with pre-amp stage. Very musical although not as refined as modern Bitstream gear. No digital output

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD1** 1986 £1500  
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer



**MERIDIAN MCD** 1984 £600  
The first British 'audiophile' machine was a sweeter, more detailed Philips CD100. 14x4 never sounded so good, until the MCD Pro arrived a year later.

**SONY CDP-701ES** 1984 £890  
Sony's first bespoke audiophile machine used a 16x2 DAC to provide a clinically incisive sound: supreme build quality allied to the pure unadulterated luxury of a paperbook-sized remote control.

**YAMAHA CD-X1** 1983 £340  
Nicely built 16x2 machine with a very sharp and detailed sound, sometimes too much so. Excellent ergonomics, unlike almost every other rival of the time.

**SONY CDP-101** 1982 £800  
The first Japanese CD spinner was powerful and involving. Brilliant transport more than compensated for 16x2 DAC, and you even got remote control!



## ANALOGUE RECORDERS

**AIWA XD-009** 1989 £600  
Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn't half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!

**NAKAMICHI CR-7E** 1987 £800  
The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.



**SONY WM-D6C** 1985 £290  
Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single rec/replay head better than most Naks. Result: sublime.

**PIONEER CTF-950** 1978 £400  
Not up to modern standards sonically, but a great symbol of the cassette deck art nonetheless.

**YAMAHA TC-800GL** 1977 £179  
Early classic with ski-slope styling. Middling sonics by modern standards, but cool nonetheless!

**SONY TC-377** 1972 £N/A  
A competitor to the Akai 4000D open reel machine, the Sony offered better sound quality and is still no slouch by modern standards

**REVOX A77** 1968 £145  
The first domestic open reel that the pros used at home. Superbly made, but sonically off the pace these days.

## COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

**ESOTERIC P0** 1997 £8,000  
The best CD drive bar none. Brilliantly incisive, ridiculously over engineered.

**TEAC VRDS-T1** 1994 £600  
Warm and expansive sound made this a mid price hit. Well built, with a slick mech

**KENWOOD 9010** 1986 £600  
The first discrete Jap transport was beautifully cone and responds well to re-clocking.

## DACs

**DCS ELGAR** 1997 £8500  
Extremely open and natural performer, albeit extremely pricey - superb.

**DPA LITTLE BIT 3** 1996 £299  
Rich, clean, rhythmic and punchy sound transforms budget CD players

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DAC MAGIC** 1995 £99  
Good value upgrade for budget CD players with extensive facilities and detailed sonics.

**PINK TRIANGLE DACAPO** 1993 £ N/A  
Exquisite; the warmest and most lyrical 16bit digital audio we have ever heard

**QED DIGIT** 1991 £90  
Budget bitstream performer with tweaks aplenty. Positron PSU upgrade makes it smooth, but now past it.

## CABLES

**MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE 2008** £495/0.5M  
High end' interconnects, with deliciously smooth, open and subtle sound without a hint of edge

**TECHLINK WIRES XS** 2007 £20  
Highly accomplished interconnects at an absurdly low price. Stunning value for money.

**VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST** 2004 £250  
Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space.



**WIREWORLD OASIS 5** 2003 £99/M  
Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for 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

# vinyl section

## contents

NOVEMBER 2020

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### NEWS 80

All the latest and greatest vinyl releases for you, from the pen of Paul Rigby.

### PRO-JECT DEBUT CARBON EVO TURNTABLE 83

Pro-Ject's new budget turntable package gets Noel Keywood listening.

### AUDIOPHILE VINYL 90

Paul Rigby spins the latest batch of LP releases.

### AUDIOPHILE BOOK 93

The Buzz Trolls. A children's book (?) about hi-fi. Paul Rigby laughs.

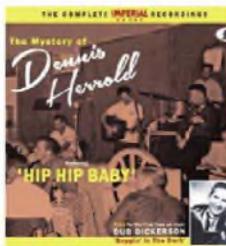
# news

## ROCK FROM THE BEAR

From Germany's Bear Family, a quartet of limited-edition, coloured vinyl, 10" LPs for you featuring classic artists and classic music, beautifully presented and nicely mastered. Billy Fury's 'The Sound Of Fury' is based on the UK sleeve and features two bonus tracks: 'Wondrous Place' and 'Gonna Type A Letter'.

'The Mystery Of

Dennis Herrold' features the rockabilly artist whose appearance on the scene was relatively brief. This new reissue contains the five tracks Dennis Herrold recorded for Imperial plus rarities.



Eddie Cochran's 'Dark

Lonely Street' includes hit tracks and rarities covering 12 tracks on the vinyl plus 28 tracks on the included bonus CD.

Gene Vincent's 'Sounds Like' was never released in the USA as a 10" LP but only as a regular LP with more tracks. This one is based on the Japanese issue.



## PATTERN-SEEKING ANIMALS

For this new release, 'Prehensile Tales' (Inside Out), think prog band, Spock's Beard. Why? Because everyone involved in this band has been or is involved in Spock's Beard.

The programming of the album sees a more poppy approach to begin with, while the more searching and complex arrangements enter the fray later across this double album.



## DEMON

From the UK outfit comes a couple of extras from the Average White Band. 'Cupid's in Fashion' (1982) was not a great release. One for the fans but it represents a creative dip.

'On the Strip: The Sunset Sessions' is a "reconfigured" 2LP version of 1980's 'Shine', "as they had originally intended". Thus four ejected tracks are back in, while two further tracks that were unable to be included on the album and remained unreleased until this century are here too.

Also look out for Leo Sayer's 'Living in a Fantasy' (1980), an excellent release, stripped back from the usual glossy production values.

Finally, 'Easy Street' is a 2LP dance compilation, derived from New York cuts from the likes of Hardhouse, Adeva, De'Lacy and Monyaka.



## SHEILA & B.DEVOTION

'King of the World' (Warner Music) offers many funky/disco highlights but includes the single that has a hook so large, Blue Whales were known to run in fright when it entered the charts. Spacer is that track, spawned by Chic's Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers. A hidden gem.



### THIRD MAN

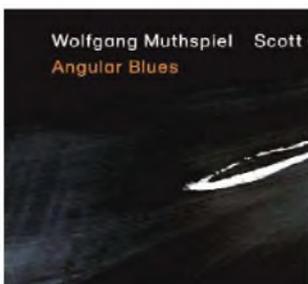
A gamut of new releases from this U.S.-based outfit includes Bonnie Doon. Third Man is known for its direct recording facilities and this is what's going on here as the lo-fi, laid-back, quirky Americana of 'Blue Stage Sessions' LP was recorded direct to an acetate to retain the energy and immediacy of the performance.

L-Seven, the Detroit post-punk band, initially formed in 1980, offers 'Unreleased Studio and Live', including a bonus 4-song 7" containing three studio tracks and one live outing.

'Totally Crushed Out' from That Dog is an indie rock release of melodic noise featuring quality songs and an attractive presentation. Rocking out with harmonious control? What's not to like? Oh, it's also enjoying its 25th anniversary. Also look for the band's 'Retreat From the Sun', first time on vinyl since its 1997 release.

Two now from Redd Kross of the early 80s, with a mixture of punk and bubblegum pop. They stayed firm members of the loud and proud school of rock music with 'Phaseshifter' and 'Show World'.

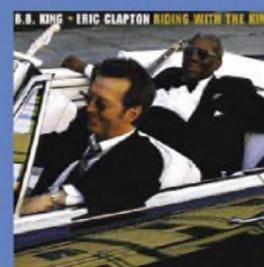
Also watch out for Tejano pioneer, Martin Solid & Los Primos offering Tex-Mex music, unreleased from 1958-1989 – plus Raconteurs man, Brendon Benson's 'Dear Life', a new album full of treated vocals and synths signalling an intriguing musical departure.



### WOLFGANG MUTHSPIEL/ SCOTT COLLEY/BRIAN BLADE

For their album, 'Angular Blues' (ECM), the trio offer jazz – yes – but it's restrained and delicate and slightly introspective and contemplative.

Muthspiel sports an acoustic guitar you see, which sets the finger-picking tone. One of quiet thought, one of musing and of drift.



### B.B. KING & ERIC CLAPTON

On 'Riding With The King' (Reprise) there's plenty of Kingesque songs here such as 'Days of Old' and 'Three O'Clock Blues'. The result is a very good album indeed but never a great one. The players never really relax or really enter the zone.



### ...AND FINALLY

Girls In Synthesis offer 'Now Here's An Echo From Your Future' (Harbinger). The presentation is certainly urgent, noisy, energetic and discordant.

The Grahams' 'Kids Like Us' (3 Sirens) offer a nostalgia-fest of classic 60s pop with 70s rock overtones.

From The Grateful Dead comes 'Workingman's Dead' (Warner Music) as a limited-edition picture disc. Pretty but don't expect great sound.

Proud Mary's 'Songs From Catalina' sees the UK outfit offer an Americana blues element infused with atmosphere that reminds me a touch of The Band. A sort of stripped, country-fied, folkish, tales of the backwater kinda impression. It's rather 'me too', though. Originality is AWOL.

From Yair Elazar Glotman & Mats Erlandsson comes 'Emanate' (130701), a modern experimental, analogue and electronic music LP. Drone-based, soundscape music that is determined to take its time.



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# Carbon Clear

Pro-Ject's new Debut Carbon Evo budget turntable gets a spin by Noel Keywood.

**C**alled Debut because this turntable is a starter package. It's simple in outline, harking back to earlier times in some areas, yet with modern updates to wring the best from LP at a price of

just £450.

What you get here is a three-speed turntable, that switches from 33rpm to 45rpm with no need to belt-change. It will spin old 78rpm shellacs, but this does require a belt-change. As an all-in-one package it

comes with a budget Ortofon 2M Red moving-magnet (MM) cartridge fitted, there's an elegant hinged clear acrylic dust cover and a wrapped carbon fibre tonearm – very modern. However, whilst the arm avoids using a traditional aluminium tube,





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*A sub-platter is driven by a precision flat belt for 33rpm and 45rpm speeds, switch selectable at front – beneath the plinth. A simpler O ring belt (left) must be fitted to spin 78s.*

to eliminate tuning-fork style tube resonance, it is trad. in other ways to keep construction simple and inexpensive. That means a bag of bits and a small set up procedure, but no big problem here for most users I feel.

The drive system, like the arm, is also a hybrid of old and new. There's tried and trusted belt drive from an a.c. motor to the platter hub, but the motor is fed by an internal electronic power supply to avoid mains fluctuations. Nowadays a common idea and one that works well, since the internal power supply is fed low voltage (15V) d.c. from

a small external wall-wart power supply unit, switch-mode of course. This means the turntable is not mains earth connected, point being the possibility of hum from an earth loop is eliminated. There are no high voltages in the turntable either: put it in a tub of water and you won't get a shock – to illustrate a point!

Slightly irritating here was the very short (120cm) power lead of the supply that will demand an extension lead in many systems I suspect.

Whilst a measly short power cable might seem like penny-pinching, Pro-Ject still manage to supply an attractive vacuum formed clear acrylic dust cover, that moves on friction hinges. It can be slipped off the hinges if preferred, as can be necessary in a shelf system where space between shelves is limited. The simple MDF plinth also has three height-adjustable feet so it can be perfectly levelled, as a turntable needs to be if the arm is to perform as expected.

The power rocker-switch is hidden underneath the platter at front left and is easy to get at. A small d.c. power inlet hides underneath and the signal cable outlets are easily accessible at rear, together with an earth terminal that must be used, not for safety but to earth internal metal parts to avoid hum pickup

from possible induction into them. All standard practice nowadays and a very good methodology too.

Weighing a relatively light 5.6kg and measuring 415mm wide, 320mm deep and 118mm high with dust cover closed, and 365mm with it open, plus 405mm deep to



*This is the 78rpm belt set up for spinning old shellacs. The large motor pulley diameter is profiled to accept a rubber O ring style belt.*

accommodate rear overhang of the cover, the Debut Carbon Evo is about as small as they come. A pair of signal leads with earth are supplied, measuring 1m long – setting maximum distance to an amplifier unless a longer lead is purchased separately.

Set up is mostly done at the factory, where the cartridge is installed and overhang adjusted for minimum tracking error. The counterweight that sets tracking force – 1.8gm for the 2M Red cartridge fitted – comes unattached. However, it is calibrated, so is simply screwed onto the rear of the arm, set to zero when the arm is in balance, then



*The arm has a damped cue platform with lever, a calibrated rear counterweight and simple weight-end-thread bias that passes over a wire support.*

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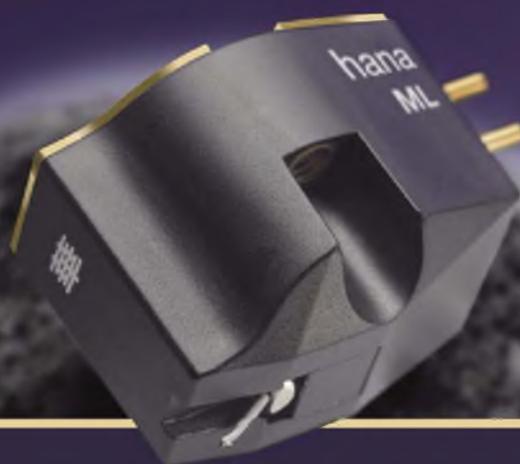
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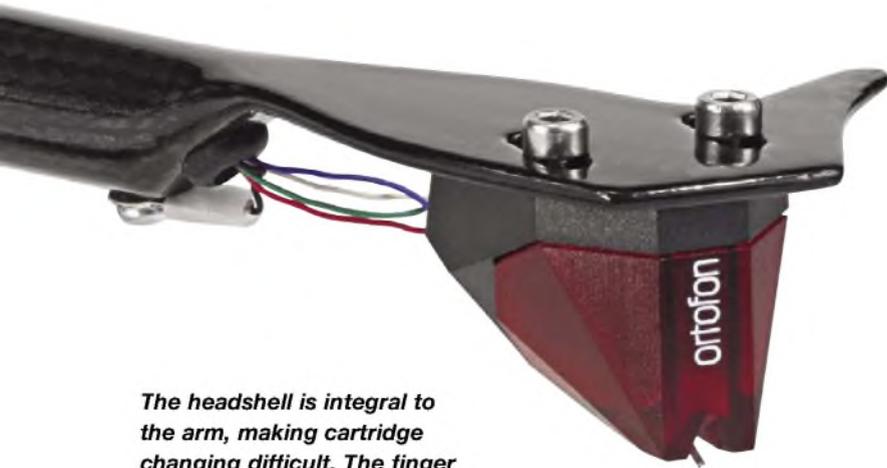
'The Hana ML in particular and the MH trailing close behind are every inch high end super cartridges, only without the high prices. As it stands, this is the best £3,000-£4,000 cartridge you can buy ... for £995.00p'

HI>FI+ ISSUE 172 REVIEW, HANA ML/MH



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**The headshell is integral to the arm, making cartridge changing difficult. The finger lift is flat and slippery – not ideal for those that manually cue.**

screwed forward to the 1.8gm mark; I used 2gm, the upper limit. Not that the 2M Red is a bad tracker, so much as the sense of security that comes from highest force when playing hot (loud) cuts.

The final touch is to fish out the bias weight and thread from its bag, carefully thread the loop over a small rear rod and settle it into one of the three grooves; I used the furthest groove from arm pivot to apply maximum bias, as tracking tests show this is necessary for best performance when things gets difficult. Pro-Ject recommend the middle groove. Music LPs are usually cut well below that of test discs in terms of level, so no big issue here, more a matter of assurance.

The arm is entirely manual, so it must be cued down using the damped platform then cued up at the end of a side. Manual cueing using the finger lift is not easy because it is flat, slippery and close to the LP surface on this arm.

I should mention that a heavy 1.7kg pressed steel platter, with thermoplastic elastomer damping pad around its internal periphery, must be placed onto the hub and there's meant to be a felt mat it seems, but ours was missing – perhaps moths got there first!

Pro-Ject say the Ortofon 2M Red cartridge fitted has "a slight touch of warmth". Hmm. Back in our March 2015 issue review of the RPM 1 Carbon turntable similarly fitted I said "The Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge we first measured and reviewed back in 2007. Its stand-out feature is a flat frequency response with small treble lift, so it doesn't sound warm like MMs of yore". I have good memory of the 2M Red as such,

so I wondered whether the 2020 unit in this turntable had been softened up a tad from its predecessors – going back 13 years no less. More about this in Sound Quality and Measured Performance.

### SOUND QUALITY

I connected the Debut Carbon Evo to our Icon Audio PS3 MkII valve phono stage that in turn fed a Creek Evolution 100A amplifier driving Martin Logan ESL-X hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers through Chord Company Signature Reference cables. Chord Company Epic interconnects were used between phono stage and amplifier.

The short power cord barely

made it to the floor and one of the phono plugs in the signal cable was loose, intermittent and tripped the amps protection circuits a few times before I taped it in place.

Dropping arm onto my preferred starter LP for reviewing, Two Countries, One Heart, that is well balanced and cleanly (recently) recorded, the Debut Carbon got off to a great start. With Fanfare for the Common Man, kettle drum strikes were firm and clear and as the track played it was apparent that the 2M



**The thread-and weight bias system – a simple way of applying outward bias (anti-skating). It's fiddly to set up but works well.**



**The underside has a screened connection box (top left), three height-adjustable feet and a three-way rocker switch (bottom right) for 33rpm / off / 45rpm speed selection. All neat and simple.**

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COGAN HALL INTERCONNECTS VARIOUS	RING	TBA

## LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

XINDAK FS-1 2.5 METRE PAIR	MINT	£200
MOVING AIR ABBEY ROAD REFERENCE 5 METRE PAIR	DIS/DEM	£695
HCVLAND NINE LINE 2.5 METRE BI WIRE PAIR	DIS/DEM	£350
GOERTZ M12 VERACITY SILVER SPADES 7.5 METRE PAIR BOXED	DIS DEM	£695
TRANSPARENT MUSIC WAVE BI WIRE 7.5 PAIR!!	VGC	£695
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SONORAM PATEAU 4M PAIR VERY RARE	EXCLT	£695
TCI.KING COBRA STEREO BI AMP 4 METRE PAIR	DIS/DEM	£795
TCI.PYTHON 4 METRE PAIR	DIS/DEM	£195
CHORD CO.ODYSSEY 4 3M PAIR UNTERMINATED	NOS	£275
CHORD CO.ODYSSEY 1.8M PAIR TERMINATED	DEM	£149

Red cartridge is now more svelte than in the past. Gone is its slightly sharp top end, but at the same time this is not a warm sounding cartridge. It is as academically flat as CD and there was a sense of perfect balance to the sound.

What I loved straight away however was the detail in and the separation between the trumpets: we're talking high quality analogue here. Also, I could hear right into the character of the kettle drum, enjoying its lovely resonant overhang. Superb straight away – and immediately musically engaging. No digital



**The arm is a one-piece wrapped carbon fibre tube with integral headshell – for lightness and strength. This construction reduces the vibrational modes of a traditional aluminium tube.**

"lovely resonant overhang, superb straight away – and immediately musically engaging"

simulacrum here, instead believable musical instruments.

Two Countries One Heart also has a great end-of-side 'test track' where Rosella Caporale gloriously sings Time To Say Goodbye (I love the weepies!) and again the Debut showed it could deliver this track beautifully in true and best analogue fashion. Her soaring crescendo in the last grooves held steady and was brightly clear, but not sharp and edgy. There was a little glare and lack of solidity perhaps, but heavens this is a seriously budget turntable. In my head I am comparing it with our SME309 arm fitted with an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze MC cartridge, a quality standard imprinted into my brain.

The Debut with 2M Red cartridge came over generally as not-warm, strong mid-band insight pushing out vocals and instruments vividly. The penalty here is that old or damaged LPs can sound harsh or noisy, because the turntable reveals LP problems rather than ameliorating them. Best to have at least one or two audiophile LPs available with a critical turntable like this to know how good it can sound when fed decent material. I span a few older faves like Blues Breakers (Decca, 1966) and as expected the 2M Red revealed iffy recording quality (a hollow metallic sound) and Clapton's guitar solos were in my face from the 2M Red. No spit from groove noise though.

Switching speed to 45rpm for Mobile Fidelity's cut of Dire Straits Love Over Gold again showed a forthright sound lacking warmth, but

one clear and concise. With Walk of Life kick drum at start was firm and with powerful presence, ride cymbals cut out sharply. I was expecting this LP to sound a tad warm – as I know it – but not so. The 2M Red is more revealing than romantic.

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Evo was both speed accurate and speed stable under test. The 3150Hz test tone of our DIN 45 452 test disc changed little, from 3152Hz to 3155Hz – negligible speed error and very little speed wander as belt drives go, in fact close to Direct Drive. As a result there was little Wow, just 0.13% (DIN unwt'd). Notes will stay stable and there will be no wateriness of pitch that comes from a wandering turntable.

Our analysis shows some flutter components, measuring 0.07% – a bit above the usual 0.04% but difficult to say how or even if this will affect the sound.

The Ortofon 2M Red cartridge fitted to our review sample had a flat response and this will give it a tonally neutral balance with good delivery of detail. Treble now falls slowly above 8kHz our analysis shows (JVC TRS-1007 test disc), avoiding sharp treble. The elliptical stylus inevitably exhibits tracing loss on inner grooves (short mechanical wavelengths) as the red trace in our analysis shows, but not enough to sound dull at end-of-side. The 2M Red tracks very well – no problems here.

The Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Evo turntable measured well, its electronically controlled a.c. motor being speed

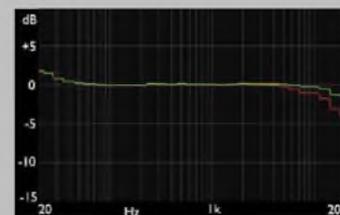
## CONCLUSION

Pro-Ject's Debut Carbon Evo turntable is a fine starter package, with assured performance. By this I mean no weak spots, such as unstable speed. The Ortofon 2M Red cartridge fitted technically works well, but it lacks warmth and 'the vinyl sound'. Great with modern, high quality LPs but not alluring with older stuff. All the same, this accepted, the Debut Carbon Evo package is a good one and right up there at the top.

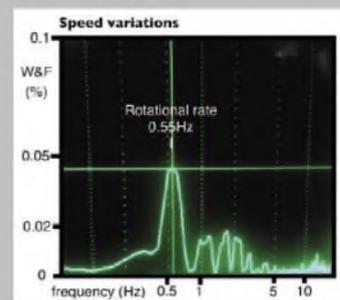
accurate and stable. The fitted Ortofon 2M Red cartridge gives a modern forthright sound balance, rather than a trad. warm one. **NK**

<b>Speed accuracy</b>	<b>+0.1%</b>
<b>Wow</b>	<b>0.13%</b>
<b>Flutter</b>	<b>0.07%</b>
<b>Total W&amp;F DIN weighted</b>	<b>0.08%</b>

## FREQUENCY RESPONSE



## SPEED STABILITY



## PRO-JECT DEBUT CARBON EVO TURNTABLE £450



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.**

**VALUE - keenly priced.**

### VERDICT

Good starter turntable package with revealing modern sound.

### FOR

- easy to set up and use
- detailed sound
- firm bass

### AGAINST

- sonically bright
- short cables
- difficult manual cueing

Henley Audio  
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DAVID ARNOLD &  
MICHAEL PRICE

Dracula  
Silva Screen

**A**n Original Television Soundtrack – in case you might have missed the televisual feat – this variant of Dracula is from the same team who created the BBC’s ‘Sherlock’.

The aim here was to merge both the traditional, in orchestral terms, with musique concrete and the use of samples and sound design.

Arnold commented “We created a bunch of quite awful sounds that were musical, one of which was actual real blood in a glass, with the finger run round the top of the rim... we created percussion things with coffins”.

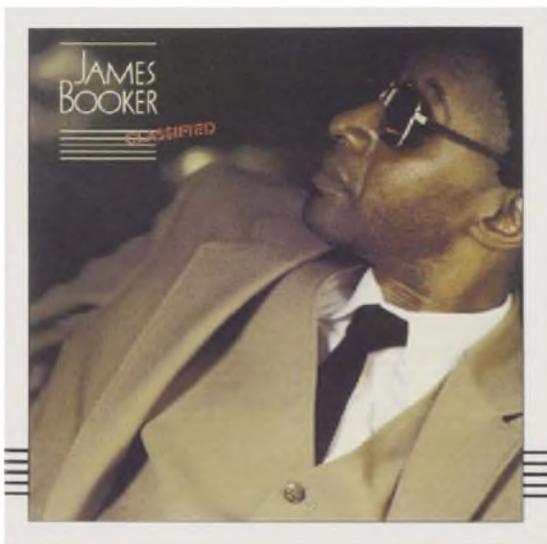
So you might get the gist of the direction of this double album – then featuring principles such as Cello soloists Tim Gill and Caroline Dale and Electric Cello from Peter Gregson. Classical soprano Grace Davidson and jazz singer Sumudu Jayatilaka are also featured on this release.

The album has been pressed on – well, what else? – red vinyl, snuggled into a gatefold sleeve packed with images from the TV series plus notes on the storyline and credits, while the gatefold is held together with a paper obi-type strip instead of shrink wrap. Silva Screen is nothing if not eco friendly.

The music itself offers a mixture of power and fragility. When looking to force the issue, the arrangement can be almost alien in nature, certainly foreign. That is ‘other’. Music from the outside, as it were. Invasive, music to tweak the attention, possibly attractive and exciting but also hiding an edge in the shadows that can be insinuated, if not seen. Even the soft and delicate moments are dragged by the hair to the harsh reality of the dark.

Collectors of horror soundtracks and Drac fans per se should grab this one pronto. Me? I have an urgent appointment behind the sofa.

AUDIOPHILE VINYL



JAMES BOOKER

Classified  
Craft

**B**ack in the fifties and sixties, this pianist from New Orleans was a major R&B figure, hitting the bass notes with a rabid left hand that forged his style and helped infuse his music with gospel overtones while his inventive approach to music added an unpredictability to his presentations.

He could sing too with a light, thin yet mobile delivery that had a funky twist.

From this ‘Doing the Hambone’ in 1953 to his organ instrumental chart hit ‘Gonzo’ in 1960, Booker would record and play with major artists like Ringo Starr, the Doobie Brothers and B.B. King.

Drug offences cramped his style a tad. Prison was a particular cramp, it has to be said. During the seventies he was back on the career trail appearing in the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festivals with a flamboyant image to boot.

This blues outing from 1982

was one of the best of its kind from that decade and it’s a tragedy that the man would die a year later at a young 43.

Booker was accompanied by Alvin “Red” Tyler on tenor sax, James Singleton on bass and John Vidacovich on drums.

Reportedly, the sessions were not easy and Booker’s behaviour was erratic because of his continuing drug use, but culminated with a series of stylish recordings that were apparently made right at the end of the scheduled session time.

What you have here is a remaster that has also been remixed and then pressed on black vinyl at the Memphis Pressing Plant. The music is contained in and around the stereo image which tends to focus the ear upon a single area but it also concentrates the Booker energy, as if you’re gazing at the band through a window, enjoying a private show which, actually, you are.

**F**rom Poland, the Marcin Wasilewski Trio comprises Marcin Wasilewski on piano, Slawomir Kurkiewicz on double bass, with drums from Michal Miskiewicz. The trio are no strangers to ECM, having first recorded for the label as members of Tomasz Stanko's quartet on the album 'Soul of Things' in 2001. Meanwhile, Lovano, who first recorded for ECM way back in 1981, is a tenor sax chappie from the USA.

This is the coupling's first recorded output and sees four new tunes by Wasilewski and one by Lovano. Thrown into the mix is a ditty from Carla Bley. Fans will be familiar with her 'Vashkar'. In fact, the combo liked the tune so much, they play it twice here, one spanning 4:38 and the other spanning 5:56.

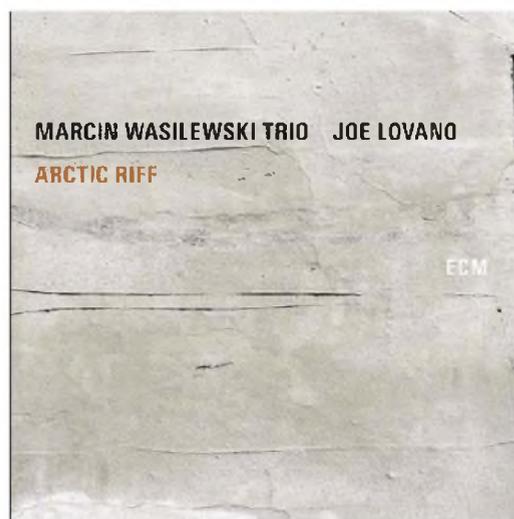
The style from this LP ranges in extremis, on occasion. For example, let's whisk over to side four of this

double album set where Lovano's 'On the Other Side' is an avant garde piece, a lucky bag of notes that each group member picks up and processes as thoughts and feelings dart in and out of the presentation with dizzying rapidity.

The next track is Marcin Wasilewski's 'Old Hat' which kicks back and flows like a creamy, sleepy river on a summer's day. The Lovano sax drifting like a trailing hand in the water, tracing the path of the attendant boat as it meanders.

Mastering is excellent, as is the pressing with a broad and spacious master allowing delicate details to roam around the stereo image and off from there. Hence, this music feels natural, there's never any hint of constriction and reverb is on call when required.

This is an album offering a balanced master, varying tempos, textures and tones but the players are always in control and always offering a fascinating narrative.



**MARCIN WASILEWSKI TRIO & JOE LOVANO**

Arctic Riff  
ECM

AUDIOPHILE VINYL

**A**n exclusive release for Record Store Day 2020, this LP is of particular note to hi-fi fans because it is the complete original soundtrack to Brian Eno's score for 'Rams', Gary Hustwit's 2018 documentary portrait of legendary German industrial designer, Dieter Rams.

You can see the man himself on this vinyl sleeve. Rams fans can even study the rear of the great man's head on the rear sleeve! For a moment I erroneously thought it was Eno himself. "My how he's changed!" thought I. Then I realised, "Ah, hair".

Rams designed a host of technologies for the original Braun company, including the LE1 electrostatic loudspeaker in 1960, the L45 speaker and TG60 tape recorder plus Audio 1 radio and record player in 1962 and Studio 1000 hi-fi system in 1965. You can still find Rams' designer hi-fi for sale on the likes

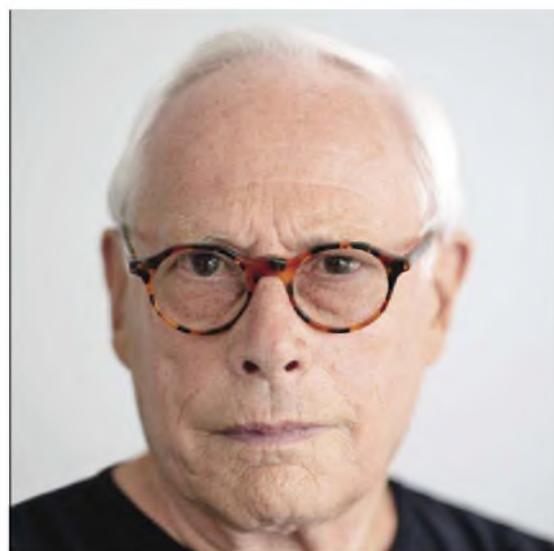
of eBay for around £200-£500 per item. I saw a series of turntables for sale as I was writing this review. For a hi-fi connoisseur, they remain the ultimate in designer chic.

This Record Store Day exclusive comes with full colour inner and outer sleeves, contains 11 unreleased instrumentals and is pressed on white vinyl with download code.

Coming off a neutral master, the electronica within this piece is suitably infused with electricity. That is, in tonal terms, there is a real static-encrusted sparkle of electric life running through that dares you to approach it.

It's music of power and edges then falls away to reveal tones and space. A contrasting, more contemplative and music ambience. Still bold but there are gaps and pauses here that remind you that Rams also designed simple structures. Furniture of sparse lines.

This is music by design...of design.



**BRIAN ENO**

Rams: Original Soundtrack  
Album  
Opal

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directory of Hi-Fi Dealers throughout the UK and Ireland.

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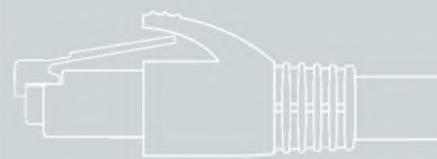
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# Quick Buzz

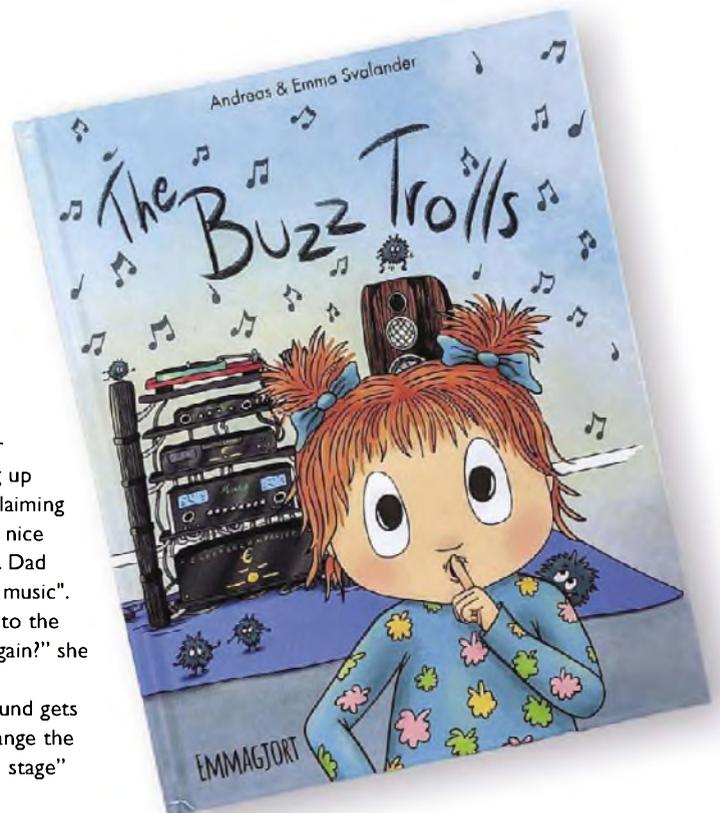
A short childrens' book about hi-fi and cable buzz catches the attention of Paul Rigby.

## THE BUZZ TROLLS

**Author:** Andreas & Emma Svalander

**Publisher:** Emmagjort

**Price:** £10.95



It could very well be the oddest book I've ever reviewed in this magazine. Why? Because it's a children's book. Except that it will probably be read by more adults than children.

Behind the project are Swedish husband and wife hi-fi retailers and authors. They run Svalander Audio AB, a retail business that serves the audiophile community in Västerås, a town approximately 70 miles west of Stockholm.

And the book is all about hi-fi. It runs for 34 pages. It's a hardback. It is also packed with high-quality children's book-standard illustrations.

This is because Emma Svalander is an illustrator, film maker and photographer. And the idea was her own.

It also caught the attention of UK hi-fi stalwarts, Russ Andrews, who have decided to make the book available to buy in the UK from its own website.

John Armer, managing director of Russ Andrews commented "Andreas sent us a copy of his book to read and we were rolling around when we read it. In an industry that can sometimes take itself a little too seriously, it is a refreshing change to see something like this book emerge from the imagination of someone right at the heart of the business we are part of".

Subtitled 'A little book about hi-fi' you can see why an adult would be drawn towards the book and why smiles will pop out of each and every page because it begins from

the point of view of a little girl, cuddly toy to hand, hair in bunches, big eyes looking up towards her father and exclaiming in innocence "My dad has a nice big hi-fi in our sitting room. Dad and I both love to listen to music".

"Why are we listening to the same song over and over again?" she asks.

"I want to see if the sound gets better or worse when I change the settings of the RIAA-phono stage" Dad replies.

You know, I've looked and searched but I can't seem to find a similar technological reference in my large collection of Enid Blytons here.

Not once does Noddy ever comment "Lollo knows that no one under the age of 20 is allowed to touch the record player or my MC cartridge" as Dad says to his friends in this book. Which did make me smile.

Then we get to know that all is not well with Dad's hi-fi. There's some noise emanating from it and the blame is swiftly laid at the door of the dreaded Buzz Trolls. You can see a picture of one of these nasty beasts about to sink its fangs into a hi-fi cable (I wonder if cable munching is covered in Kimber's cable warranty?).

The book continues on the quest to trap and remove the little critters.

Now, I'm not saying the children won't be interested in this book. Of course they will! I just wonder how many adult hi-fi fans might find this

little book in their stocking, come Christmas.

Armer added a more sombre yet, nevertheless, apt note when he said "I think the timing of this is perfect. In this period of upheaval and disruption, which is putting great stress on many people's mental health, music can be a real tonic. And while the hi-fi industry can't cure the world's ills, it can at least bring a little bit of relief through music".

It's a lovely little book and well worth reading over a coffee. And don't forget. As advised, remember to keep anyone aged under 20 away from your MC cart and you'll be fine. Give them this book instead.

'The Buzz Trolls' is available now direct from [www.russandrews.com/the-buzz-trolls/](http://www.russandrews.com/the-buzz-trolls/)

To view more of Emma Svalander's illustrations, visit [www.kreativaemma.se](http://www.kreativaemma.se).

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# free reader Classifieds

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** Only one advert per reader. No Trade adverts. This section is strictly for readers selling secondhand hi-fi equipment only. Maximum length per advert is 30 words, Adverts over 30 words will not be accepted. Telephone numbers and E-mail addresses are treated as one word. Model numbers are treated as one word i.e. Quad 303 = two words. Email your advert to; [classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk](mailto:classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk) or fill in the form on page 97 and post it to Hi-Fi World Free Readers Ads, Studio 204, Buspace Studio, Conlan Street, Notting Hill, London W10 5AP. Sorry, we cannot accept adverts over the telephone. The Publisher reserves the right to judge submissions.

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NEAT IOTA ALPHA loudspeakers. £925. Walnut finish in superb condition. Three years old. Lightly used. Buyer collects or £30 postage. Tel: 01768 428916. Email: [clncolindixon@aol.com](mailto:clncolindixon@aol.com). (Penrith, Cumbria.)

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# NEXT MONTH

## DECEMBER 2020 ISSUE

### PRIMALUNA EVO 400 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Powerful valve amplifiers can be – er – a little large. And often frightening in complexity. With their new Evo 400 amplifier PrimaLuna have come up with a 70 Watt per channel power house that fits a standard rack. It also accepts a wide range of valves, from standard to highest quality; this is an amp that can be tuned. Don't miss our in-depth review of its sound and all its options next month, in our December 2020 issue.

Also, we hope to bring you –  
MUSICAL FIDELITY M8XI INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER  
IFI ZEN PHONOSTAGE  
SONUS FABER LUMINA III SPEAKERS  
ELIPSON CHROMA 400 RIAA BT TURNTABLE  
...and much more.



This is a selection of what we hope to bring you, not a complete list. We regret that due to a wide range of issues, we cannot guarantee that all products listed above will appear.

**PICK UP THE DECEMBER 2020 ISSUE OF HI-FI WORLD ON SALE OCTOBER 30TH 2020, OR SUBSCRIBE AND GET IT DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR: SEE PAGE 40**

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 Decent Audio 34,35  
 Divine Audio 92  
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 Fine Sounds 30  
 Hard to Find-HiFi 56,57  
 Heathcote Audio 88  
 Henley Audio 18,42,60,66,70  
 Ian Harrison 86  
 Icon Audio 6  
 Infidelity 92  
 Jordan Acoustics 26,27  
 KEF 20  
 MCRU 38  
 Music First 68  
 Naim 14  
 NVA 24  
 Oxford Audio 92  
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# FLEETWOOD MAC

## MYSTERY TO ME RHINO



"you couldn't have written these events for a movie plot."

**Y**ou see, Fleetwood Mac hasn't all been about the late Peter Green or, on the other extreme, Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks. There was a bit in the middle. A bit that many people either ignore or know nothing about. And that's not fair. Not fair on both Bob Welch and Christine McVie to name but two. In fact, McVie was a busy bee in Fleetwood Mac way before Buckingham and Nicks turned up on the scene.

By the time of 'Mystery to Me' (which you can now find within the new vinyl and CD box sets, 'Fleetwood Mac 1969-1974' via Rhino) this album hit the streets in 1973, the band had gone through a swathe of change.

By 1973, Peter Green was already gone, felled by mental illness and drug abuse, Jeremy Spencer had run off to join a religious cult and the alcoholic mood swings from Danny Kirwan triggered his firing from the band.

You couldn't have written these events for a movie plot. They would have seemed a tad over the top. Fleetwood Mac, as a creative entity, was the essence of the 'over the top'.

In came guitarists Bob Weston and Bob Welch. Dave Walker also arrived to provide vocals. You can hear him on the band's previous record 'Penguin'. An album that was also released in 1973. Back then, there was less angst and the wringing of hands. Back then, groups churned out the things.

For this album, Walker had already hailed a taxi. He was told that his voice "didn't fit". Walker was once asked to describe his contribution to Mac and replied with a one-word answer "Minimal".

So Welch took over the vocal duties alongside McVie. The band were a touch incongruous in the UK, though. This was a land of T.Rex, Yes and Genesis. The British public were more a-tune to The Sweet's Blockbuster instead of Fleetwood Mac's cultured lead guitar, smooth presentation and vocal style of 'Emerald Eyes'.

Hence, in contrast to the UK contingent, Fleetwood Mac sounded more like a West Coast U.S. outfit. And that's where the group's success started to build because 'Penguin' found the U.S. charts and people found the band.

McVie commented "I didn't want to go to America – I'm a real Anglophile, I adore England – but the rest of the band promised me: we'll go for three months, because we had no career over there, nobody wanted to book us, and then we'll come back. Twenty eight years later I got to move back to England again".

And it worked. The quality of the song-writing on this album was and remains excellent. McVie, with a folk-ish delivery, arguably offered her finest outings on this LP via the magnificent 'Keep on Going'.

It's also arguable that Welch, his smooth and somewhat dreamy delivery – a sort of cuddly Chris Rea, less grit, more Tarmac – provided his best work here. Even his later solo career releases never really matched his songs heard on this LP.

Because the band sounded more West Coast than 'Top of the Pops', U.S.-based radio stations came a-knockin'. 'Mystery to Me' found a place in the U.S. Top 70 and eventually went gold.

This period of creative calm wasn't to last, though. Mainly because Bob Weston's raging hormones and Mick Fleetwood's wife wouldn't allow it. The affair cost Weston his job.

The album remains a top quality outing, all the same. Full of highlights including the above-mentioned 'Emerald Eyes' plus 'Hypnotized'.

Speaking personally? This album reignited my interest in the band after becoming fed up to the back teeth with 'Rumours'. I bought the latter in my early teens and was completely Rumoured out, as it were. So hurrah for 'Mystery to Me'.

But look, at least the band had gone through all of that hassle, all of the heart-ache, the trials and tribulations and the comings and the goings. At least after all of the above, they produced great music and then they could look forward to their mega-hit album release, 'Rumours' and a life of calm, at last.

At least, after all of the disorder, they knew that there was light at the end of the tunnel and all would be well. A life of success and tranquility, in fact.

"Rumours was the beginning of a lot of trouble and emotional turmoil within the band", said Mick Fleetwood.

Err, right. Well, maybe not then.

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