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# hi-fi

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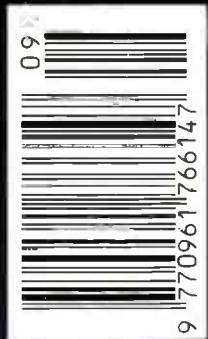
## WORLD

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# welcome

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## testing

Hi-Fi World has its own advanced test laboratory and acoustically treated listening room, and a dedicated team of experienced listeners. We review thoroughly by extensive auditioning, rather than by quick-fire group listening tests. Our engineering team designs a wide range of products in-house. No other hi-fi magazine is so expert and dedicated.



Shortly after my review of the Shanling SP80C tube monoblocs in March 2005's *Hi-Fi World*, Marantz's Ken Ishiwata telephoned from the People's Republic to tell me what he thought of Chinese valve amps. Given that KI's job requires him to spend a lot of time there, he'd obviously familiarised himself with China's homegrown stuff, and I was most interested in his opinion...

To paraphrase, Ken's verdict on the SP80C (and all other Chinese valve kit too, for that matter) was "close but no cigar". That's because, he said, they'd got most of the fundamentals right - strong transformers, chunky power supplies, good metalwork, etc. - but simply didn't have the know-how to fettle it all into musical sounding audiophile hi-fi separates.

Well, I couldn't have agreed more. While reviewing the SP80C, I was amazed by its raw power and speed, but still couldn't help but think it was work in progress. In short, given a few weeks of serious component substitution, some choice tubes and carefully selected internal wiring, it would have been total dynamite.

It's this process of tuning, tweaking, fettling (call it what you like) that's so vital to how our hi-fi systems sound. With real attention to detail, you can turn a so-so product (or collection of them) into something truly musically uplifting. The good news is that it's not necessarily expensive either, but the bad news is that most people wouldn't know where to start - or worse still don't even understand the need for it in the first place...

So that's why this issue is devoted to the noble pursuit of getting 'in tune'. We've assembled three 'balanced systems' (featuring, variously, Rotel, B&W, Michell, Trichord, Musical Fidelity, Densen, etc.) and auditioned one of the most hot-rodded silver disc players yet made in the shape of Townshend's TA565 CD. We look at Cyrus's complex but clever electronics upgrade path and try Arcam's superb new Solo system-in-a-box. And as for transforming your existing system's sonics, we have a host of superb, cost-effective accessories for you - plus in-depth features about cable choice, room acoustic treatment and mains power supply.

If you want to spend huge amounts of money on hi-fi then by all means do, but not before you've got the best out of the rest of your system - and serious attention paid to this month's *Hi-Fi World* should yield sonic dividends. Enjoy!

David Price, editor

## verdicts



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**EXCELLENT**  
**GOOD**  
**MEDIOCRE**  
**POOR**  
**VALUE**

simply the best  
extremely capable  
worth auditioning  
unremarkable  
seriously flawed  
keenly priced



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Townshend TA565 CD - the ultimate in hot rodded digital?



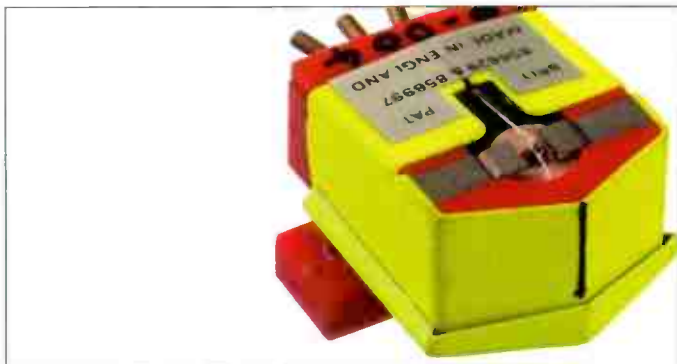
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# news

## CLEAR THINKING

Clearaudio's new Ambient is said to possess all the qualities of a truly high-end analogue turntable: quality build, selected materials and an elegant appearance. The chassis is developed from the 'Master Reference AMG Wood', consisting of a high-tech sandwich of 'Panzerholz' between two precision-machined aluminium plates. Panzerholz is extremely hard and more difficult to machine than stainless steel but when sandwiched between the aluminium plates is said to produce a combination of ideal mechanical and acoustic properties. The maintenance

free main bearing uses a polished and hardened steel shaft running in a polished sintered bronze precision cap. The motor is mounted in its own separate plinth, isolated from the main chassis. Also used is a custom version of the Clearaudio Syncro electronic speed controller, with a backlit blue LCD displaying the exact speed of rotation. The 40mm turntable platter is driven via a Clearaudio 'silent belt'. The Clearaudio Satisfy Directwire is said to have extremely high structural rigidity with ultra-low friction movement of the woven carbon fibre arm tube. The vertical bearing shaft is made out of wolfram, the polished ends of which run in sapphire watch bearings. The twin horizontal bearings use long life ceramic bearings and an unbroken run of Clearaudio's own Direct Wire from the cartridge to phono plugs. The deck measures 535x30x150mm and weighs 3.8kg. Prices are £2,285 for the Clearaudio Ambient and £555 for Satisfy Carbon Direct Wire. For details, contact Audio Reference on 01252 702705 or click on [www.audioreference.co.uk](http://www.audioreference.co.uk).



## ACTIVE, LIFESTYLE

NHT's new M-00 is said to be the 'Swiss army knife' of active monitor loudspeakers, as it's compact, portable, flexible, and capable of functioning in a wide variety of applications. It is claimed to pack substantial output, surprising bass response and startling accuracy in a remarkably small monitor. The fully magnetically shielded M-00's are sold individually, providing application flexibility in mono monitoring,

two-channel, 5.1 or daisy-

chained configurations for use in light commercial installations. For full range performance, the M-00's can be paired with the NHT Pro S-00 Compact Powered Subwoofer. NHT Pro European distributor Mi7 have appointed Absolute Music Solutions of Poole, Dorset (tel: 01202 684500) as the primary UK stockist of the NHT Pro range. Click on [www.absolute247.co.uk](http://www.absolute247.co.uk) for details...



## MORE ESOTERICA

Having reviewed what we think is probably the best SACD player in the world last month, the breathtaking Esoteric X-01, it was interesting to hear that the marque has a new £9,995 universal player too. The UX-1 SACD/DVD-Audio/Video player has all the features one would expect in a high-end universal player, including the ability to decode DTS96/24 format as well as Dolby Digital/DTS; a lip-sync function which corrects mistiming between audio and video; and a speaker configuration function which computes and adjusts the 5.1-channel surround sound installation environment. In addition, a Word Sync input port is provided for inputting an ultra-precise clock from the G-0s master clock generator. 44.1 kHz (up to 176.4 kHz) is supported for CD/SACD playback, and 48 kHz (up to 196 kHz) is supported for DVD playback. A TEAC universal clock (100 kHz) can be input so the video can also be controlled by an ultra-precise clock. The machine features a VRDS-NEO mechanism, high-precision disc drive system with magnesium turntable, 3-phase brush-less spindle motor and high precision bearing, pickup thread servo system to maintain accurate laser beam angle, machined aluminium disc tray and heavy weight steel chassis plus much, much more. Size is 442x153x353mm. For more information, call 01727 865488 or click on [www.symmetry-systems.co.uk](http://www.symmetry-systems.co.uk).

## NEW Q HERE

KEF Audio has announced the latest evolution of the award-winning Q Series, comprising eight new models from the affordable entry-level iQ1 bookshelf to the impressive iQ9 floorstander. All the new Q models incorporate KEF's patented Uni-Q® driver technology with several important upgrades - stiffer, titanium coated cones; much longer throw suspension (for better bass), copper clad aluminium flat wire voice-coils, elliptical tweeter dome profiles and rigid die-cast chassis. The result is a Uni-Q driver array that plays much louder, has superior bass response, significantly lower distortion and a sweeter top end. The bass units are also completely new and feature a much longer throw suspension design and twin faraday loops for greatly reduced distortion. The styling bears a family resemblance to the flagship KEF Reference models, with the Uni-Q 'pod' faired in to elliptical-section cabinets. All models have a nominal impedance of 8 ohms to allow easy matching of partnering electronics, and there's a choice of classic Black Ash, Dark Apple, Maple, Silver and new Walnut finishes. Prices range from £229.99 for the iQ1 to £799.99 for the iQ9. For more information, click on [www.kef.com](http://www.kef.com) or call 01622 672261.

## JORDAN'S RETURN

News comes that überphon has been appointed exclusive UK distributor of ALR JORDAN loudspeakers. All models from the Entry, Classic and Note ranges are now being made available in the UK, including the mini-bookshelf Entry 5 speaker retailing at £250 per pair, the Classic 5 floorstander (£1200/pair) and the top-of-the-range Note 9 (£7,300/pair). Further details of ALR JORDAN and überphon can be accessed via the web at [www.alr-jordan.com](http://www.alr-jordan.com) and [www.uberphon.co.uk](http://www.uberphon.co.uk).



## SHADOW DANCING

UK Distributor Shadow Distribution is introducing some exciting products to the UK. From Hong Kong you will see the arrival of 'Eastern Electric' ([www.easternelectric.co.uk](http://www.easternelectric.co.uk)) who make a range of award-winning, beautifully hand-built valve products that include CD Players and Amplifiers (shown). The Minimax Valve HDCD CD Player at £799 redefines CD performance at this level. French based 'Micromega' ([www.micromega.co.uk](http://www.micromega.co.uk)) returns to the UK with a renowned range of products including CD Players, Amplifiers and Home Cinema. Cutting-edge technology at a sensible price! Prices start at £399 (A60 Integrated Amp). For more information contact Shadow Distribution on: 01592 744779 or click on [www.shadowdistribution.co.uk](http://www.shadowdistribution.co.uk).

## MINI MAX

Most micro systems don't warrant coverage in a hi-fi magazine such as this, but Denon makes fine designs for student or second system applications. When replacing the popular D-M31 Denon could have added DAB radio functionality and kept the price the same and degraded the overall quality, or build a better product and charge more. It decided to follow two paths; the D-M33 is a direct and improved replacement for the D-M31 for those who don't want or can't get DAB or are on a restricted budget, while the D-M35DAB is a new model offering high-quality DAB and bigger better speakers at a higher price point. The D-M35DAB is all metal construction, with a clean look, large key buttons and an intuitive layout. The large, clear dot matrix display has two rows to carry DAB scrolling text plus station info. Enhanced Timer and Clock facilities make this an ideal system for the bedroom. A power supply upgrade and new Denon speakers help the D-M35DAB to deliver a larger and more powerful sound than the D-M31, says Denon. Prices are £379.99 for the D-M35DAB system, £300 as a CD/DAB Receiver and £380 with Denon SC-M73 speakers. For more info, call 01234 741 200








## MOVIE STAR

NAD's new L 73 DVD Surround Sound Receiver is claimed to have the same level of performance associated with their full-size separates. The compact one-box L 73 supports playback of DVD-Audio, DVD -Video, VCD, CD, CD-R, CD-RW, and MP-3 disks, and the DVD section features progressive scan via the Component Video output, with an additional Component Video input for adding a high definition satellite or other set-top box. It automatically detects and decodes DTS or Dolby Digital bitstreams. Besides these modes, Dolby ProLogic II, Dolby Virtual Speaker and Dolby Headphone are included. Additionally, NAD's proprietary EARS (Enhanced Ambience Recovery System) circuitry uses DSP

technology to extract the natural ambience in a stereo recording and redirect it to the surround channels, creating a warm natural reverberant effect without any artificiality. Power is rated at 5x 45W RMS, all channels driven simultaneously into 8 ohms. As usual with NAD, it uses only discrete output stages, including the surround channels. All features are easily accessed with the supplied HTR-L73 Learning Remote. The NAD L73 is available now from selected NAD specialist retailers at a suggested price of around £699.95 (including VAT). For details, call 01908 319360 or click on [www.nadelectronics.com](http://www.nadelectronics.com).

## GOLDEN SILENCE



Originally developed for airline pilots to reduce cockpit noise, Sennheiser NoiseGard ADVANCE Noise Reduction headphones dramatically reduce the audible impact of noise and thus the fatigue of travel, on airliners, trains, buses, or anywhere that substantial environmental noise is unavoidable. The new PXC 300 boasts upgraded electronic noise reduction over the PXC250 (as our tests show), with an overall reduction of around 80% in ambient noise (up 10%). Continuous noise between 400 and 1000 Hz is reduced by approximately -15dB (up from -10dB on PXC 250), and there's improved passive noise attenuation at higher frequencies too. It's supplied in a better shock-resistant pouch than before, and the leatherette ear cushions are slightly more comfortable.

Battery life is 80 hours from two AA cells (supplied) and total weight is just 65g. Highly recommended for trains, boats and planes, we say! For more details, call 0800 652 5002 or click on [www.sennheiser.co.uk](http://www.sennheiser.co.uk).

## DRIVING THE TECHNOLOGY



Fostex Company of Japan have appointed Wilmslow Audio as their new hi-fi drive unit distributor for the UK, reinforcing Wilmslow's position as the largest supplier of drive units and loudspeaker accessories in the country. The varied range of drive units produced by Fostex makes them an exciting addition to the self build market, with their highly regarded full range units already proving to be extremely popular for use in horn loaded cabinets. Wilmslow's portfolio includes ATC, Morel, Peerless, Scan-speak, Seas, Vifa and Volt – all as the main UK drive unit distributor. For details and price, or to request a free Wilmslow Audio colour catalogue visit [www.wilmslowaudio.com](http://www.wilmslowaudio.com).

## HEAR THIS

Following its huge success in the US, Audible has launched a UK website for British audio book lovers, [www.audible.co.uk](http://www.audible.co.uk). Audible has been available in the US for the past eight years, and enables you to download your favourite audio books, comedy, drama, radio programmes and audio editions of newspapers and magazines to play back on your iPod or MP3 player. Audio books have long been a firm favourite in the US, but may also become popular here as a dazzling array of content is already available for UK customers to download. From Shakespeare to Sheila Hancock, Law in Action to Little Britain, and The New York Times to New Media Age, there's something for everyone, including an exclusive interview with Little Britain star, David Williams, to celebrate Audible's UK launch. Audible.co.uk allows users to download or stream audio files from the Internet to any PC or Mac. Once an audio title is downloaded, it is yours to keep with no expiration and no limitations on repeated listening. In addition, the audio books and other content are usually priced 20-30% less than cassette tape equivalents. Customers can choose to buy a single title or subscribe to a recurring title (for example newspaper, magazine or radio programme) and have it automatically delivered to your desktop computer or mobile device before you get up in the morning or leave the office for the day. A variety of subscriptions are available to suit all customers' needs, but prices are steep; at £14.99 a month customers receive two free audio books per month, whereas £9.49 a month buys you one free audio book and one publication subscription of your choice per month. If customers commit to a year's subscription they will receive a free digital device.

# Walrus



11 New Quebec St, London W1

Some Digital and some Analogue news. And, don't forget the upcoming Heathrow Show ..!

Just because we are predominantly an analogue, vinyl based, retailer doesn't mean we don't care about digital. We realise that our customers, much as they love their vinyl collections, still need to play digital media occasionally! It's a pity that SACD never achieved the prominence it ought to have. But then, the choice of music is still very limited. Or, perhaps it's the other way round. Anyhow, when you get a good recording, SACD can be stunning. You guessed this was leading somewhere, and it is! Musical Fidelity have at last released their new kW Series SACD player. It features MF's trademark sophisticated choke regulated power supplies, and, unusually, the SACD and CD circuits and their power supplies inside the player are completely separate. Too often, when you buy a really good SACD player you still need to retain your existing expensive CD player to get the best out of the respective media. The MF player gets the absolute best out of both media, it really is one of the only genuine dual purpose machines on the market. Other details include technical specs (signal to noise ratio and jitter) which challenge the resolution of measuring instruments, and the ability to switch between two very high quality output stages, valve and transistor, to keep both camps happy! This is their best digital player yet, and one which it will be very hard to surpass (despite what MF say in their regular newsletters - existing owners know what we mean!) - if you are interested, don't delay in hearing it as I think the limited production run will soon all be allocated. Oh, nearly forgot, the price is a whisker under £4000 - very good value indeed when you see (and hear) what you get for the money.



Staying with digital, we've just taken delivery of the new "entry-level" Shanling CD player - the CD-T80 at £650 - and what a brilliant player it is. How they manage to make this superbly built unit for the price they do is quite scary. The fit and finish is absolutely top class, what you might expect if you pay double or treble the price, and the sound quality is on a par or better than just about anything else up to a thousand pounds. I'm told the importer is having a problem keeping up with the demand! If Shanling continue on present form, they will be (rightfully) dominating quite a few sectors of the enthusiast hi-fi market. We refer, of course, to their two existing models, the mid-range CD-T100 (£1650) which has been around for ages now but is still very competitive and looks as stunning as ever, and the relatively new limited edition CD-T300 Omega Drive player, featured in our last ad, for £3999. This new, very modern and attractive player is attracting huge interest. Like the Musical Fidelity it is also a limited edition model. If you fancy owning a top class CD player which will have lasting value, superb sound, and totally original appearance, come and demo it before it's sold out.



Our main business, in case you were wondering, is definitely still analogue! And, we have some exciting news on the turntable front. First, the affordable: Michell Engineering have released a limited edition (it's all limited editions this month!) turntable, loosely based on the famous Gyrodec. However, the Odyssey looks completely different, with a jet black acrylic base, black chassis, clear lid, and a special black version of the acclaimed Tecnoarm A, finished off with a black version of the HR power supply. It also has nickel silver weights, and a clear acrylic spyder like the Orbe. This special model, which only needs a cartridge to complete it, is not only stunning looking but very competitively priced at £2150. But, the most interesting thing is the exclusivity - only 100 pieces are being made. They will almost certainly become collectable. And, sadly, due to copy dates, by the time you read this we suspect there may not be many left, so please phone for current availability.

The other exciting news is the arrival at our shop of the brand new flagship turntable from Nottingham Analogue, the Deco. This model is about as exclusive as it gets, the price alone will assure that! Mass is very high, and the platter features a unique contoured design to aid energy dissipation. If you want to know more (and hear it) you'll have to pay us a visit.

Also new to Walrus is the Stirling Broadcast LS3/5a loudspeaker. Stirling is only one of two current licensees for this superb, classic speaker design. It might be an old design, but it still beats most other compact speakers, especially since Stirling made some small but important tweaks! Price is a very reasonable £890 to £973 dependent on finish. On demo now, please try to hear before you consider purchasing any other compact speaker.

On to this month's Featured Accessory, the Shure SFG-2 Stylus Force Gauge. This is a very simple well made balance which sells for £28, and will last you a lifetime. It measures tracking weight between 0.5g and 3g. For anyone who regularly changes their pickup this is an absolute must, unless you're rich enough to afford one of the swish electronic gauges such as the Martin Bastin gauge. Even if you have an arm which already has tracking force calibration, the Shure will be a lot more accurate.

Lastly, don't forget the Hi-fi and Home Entertainment Show at Heathrow, from the 23rd to 25th of September. I know it's a long way off, but put it in your diary now! We'll be there with lots of our favourite stuff in room Syndicate 16, feel free to turn up with your favourite LP or CD for a quick demo. See ya there!

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## AUDIOLAB REBORN!

The famous Audiolab brand is back. One of the best known and respected names in eighties and nineties separates hi-fi is returning to the high street, and the good news is that it's now even better. Hi-fi nuts will remember Audiolab as a purveyor of high quality, ultra-reliable audio separates from 1983 to 1997 - until the company was acquired by TAG McLaren Audio and its products tweaked and taken in a multichannel direction. Now, under the aegis of International Audio Group (which also owns Quad, Wharfedale and now Mission), much of the range is being relaunched. Fascinatingly, it retains all the original styling, circuit design and componentry, even down to the Elna Cerafine capacitors in the power supply stage of the Audiolab 8000S! The only change is that the finish is now silver (although a black option may be available at a later date, say IAG) and dramatically lower prices.

The range consists of the 8000S (£600) integrated amplifier, the 8000Q preamplifier (£600), 8000P stereo power amplifier (£400) and 8000M monobloc (also £400). There's also a brand new 8000CD CD player for (£600) which IAG says is far superior to the original. To give an idea of the savings, the 8000S in its final TAG incarnation (which was virtually the same bar the control knobs and feet, cost £1,300 - £700 more. Surprisingly perhaps, the 8000A integrated is not being reborn, as IAG didn't feel it to be sufficiently competitive in sonic terms in today's market, and its retail price also wouldn't have been significantly less than the 8000T which sounds obviously superior.

The range is now being manufactured in China at the IAG factory in Shenzhen (not by an OEM factory which also makes many other products for many other brands), but with engineers from the original Audiolab company (and latterly TAG McLaren) overseeing every stage from beginning to end. Audiolab says that, despite being in production for only two months, quality is even higher than TAG products, with identical Quality Control processes showing lower rejection rates than those achieved in the UK. *Hi-Fi World* has seen and heard the new range, and our experience confirms this - because everything from casings to control knobs are built in the factory, the finished products look and feel superb (even the tools to make the stuff is made in house).

Indeed, IAG says the products should be better than the originals, because they all include the board updates made by TAG McLaren Audio after the original brand had ended. As part of the IAG's acquisition of TAG McLaren Audio, the company has promised to offer provide full UK-based service support for TAG McLaren products - which due to the sophisticated nature of the multi-channel stuff, is no small undertaking. This is good news for owners, who may otherwise have found their kit virtually impossible to fix were it to fail.

IAG also says that a range of new Audiolab products are under development. Because the two-channel separates market is now smaller than ten years ago, it sees Audiolab as a niche specialist hi-fi brand rather than a rival to mass market brands like Denon, and is therefore going to concentrate on stereo stuff - so expect to see an 8000 phonostage, DAB/FM hybrid tuner and even a one-box Linn Classik/Arcam solo rival over the next six months. Very soon, there will also be an affordable AV processor in the shape of the 8000AV, said to retail for around £600, and an 8000x7 seven channel power amplifier. The first of the 8000 series models should be in the shops in September.

IAG also spoke to *Hi-Fi World* about its plans for Mission. Asked why they bought Mission when they already have a natural rival in the affordable audio market in the shape of Wharfedale, IAG said that it was because in some markets, Wharfedale has almost no presence whereas Mission is popular - hence acquiring Mission gives access to these markets. Watch out for full reviews of all the Audiolab range in forthcoming issues: It will be interesting how Cambridge Audio's forthcoming 700 series of separates, priced right against the 8000 series, compares...



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# Black Art

It was, of course, inevitable – when David Price was tasked to come up with a brilliantly balanced system, he came up with the best way to play black plastic at under £5,000...



I know this is going to grate with many of our silver disc playing readers – and to this I say ‘each unto their own’ – but when I had to chose a supremely capable, yet reasonably affordable system, it was a no-brainer: vinyl had to be the source.

Now, I shall respectfully ask everyone who’s into digital to skip the next paragraph or three, lest they lose the will to live as I wax (‘scuse the pun’) lyrical about what I sincerely believe to be the highest resolution domestic music carrier ever invented (the best is reel-to-reel at 15-plus inches per second, but this is really the province of pro audio). Yes, that’s right, I’m talking about the humble vinyl LP.

If this was an obscure, arcane and moribund format like Elcaset, then I’m sure you’d all be moaning, but vinyl (like punk music) is not dead – quite the reverse. There’s a welter of new vinyl releases (from

Coldplay to Kraftwerk), a vast number of rolling re-releases from Classic Records, Simply Vinyl *et al.*, and the world’s largest ‘legacy’ music carrier is also supported at every record fair and charity shop, not to mention from the classifieds of ‘Record Collector’ magazine (for which our own Paul Rigby writes) and indeed ebay. So that’s that myth (i.e. ‘death of vinyl’) expunged...

Now, which example of the breed to choose? Well, everyone has their own preferences, and mine is Michell. This company’s turntables are not everyone’s cup of tea, but that’s a debate for another day. I’m still of the opinion that – pound for pound – they’re very, very hard to beat, and some recent subtle tweaks make them harder still. Despite having access to some ludicrously expensive high end decks, I struggle to think how you can attain the sort of all-round performance achieved by the Odyssey (or the GyroDec,

upon which it’s based) without spending a lot, lot more. If maximum sound per pound is your goal, then nothing comes close, to my ears. And so to my system: Michell Odyssey turntable (with fitted TecnoArm a tonearm), Ortofon Rondo Bronze MC cartridge, Trichord Dino phono stage, Musical Fidelity integrated amplifier X-ISO and Pirsch I loudspeakers. These are not the best components in the world; rather they’ve been carefully selected because they offer particularly keen value for money, perform way, way better than their retail price suggests and – critically – sound dynamite altogether.

## SOURCE

This, by any other name, is a GyroDec. It’s very lightly modified but retains almost all the basic ingredients of a deck that I still use as a reference to this day. What the Michell offers is an extremely neutral



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and 'high resolution' window on the musical world, with no nasties. It can be upgraded and/or improved upon, but you'll be spending thousands and not guaranteed of such all round ability.

The £2,150 Michell Odyssey is a limited edition of one hundred, to commemorate John Michell's design of the 'Discovery' spacecraft in Stanley Kubrick's film '2001: A Space Odyssey'. In essence, it's a GyroDec with a damped chassis, additional isolation base (Orbe style, but skeletal) for extra isolation, plus a TecnoArm, plus the latest HR power supply – all in black. Finally, the gold plated brass weights become nickel silver. The sonic difference between it and a Gyro is minimal – in truth, the support you place the deck on makes far more of a difference to the sound – or even the way you set it up. Oh, and it looks stunning in the flesh, by the way ...

The GyroDec is a classic three-point suspension design. Introduced in 1980, it was a good twenty years ahead of its time in its basic architecture and topography. It was eerily prescient back then, and Michell have subtly updated it ever since, with the result that, from around 1991, it started to comprehensively outclass price rivals. It's also – in real terms – got far cheaper that it was. In 1980 it was twice the price of the Linn, and now it's about half the price despite being vastly more capable...

It's fair to say that until its appearance, all British belt drive 'superdecks' were variations on the theme of a Thorens TD150 (and that includes the Linn LP12 and Ariston RD11S). The Gyro – just months before the Oracle – was a new paradigm: it was 'exoskeletal' and removed the plinth (read: resonance trap) from the equation. Sadly, many casual observers treat the Michell decks with disdain because 'they look so good', but as John Michell used to say, he never styled them – they look

like they look because of what they are. This is to say that the bare bones (skeleton) are (is) on display, simply because there's no plinth to hide them.

The platter is Acrylic (in compound with carbon), and in conjunction with the silver plated bronze suspended weights and cast aluminium subchassis weighs a whopping 12kgs. Having designed suspension systems for Jim Clarke back in his racing days, John Michell always used to say that a high sprung mass (and conversely a low unsprung mass) gives the best damping – that's why modern supercars use aluminium and/or magnesium in their wheels and suspension systems (i.e. for a low unsprung mass), to make life easier for the suspension, thus helping keeping the wheels on the ground. The subchassis is suspended from extension springs, rather than sitting on top of compression springs, which is inherently less stable and also more difficult to tune correctly.

Indeed, the idea of the GyroDec was always that it was like a gyroscope – with balanced weights in all planes. The platter's centre of gravity is exactly in the point of rotation of the main bearing. The motor drives the platter exactly at this height, hence not inducing tilt motions into the platter/bearing assembly. The bearing itself is a bronze inverted design, originating from the co-operation between Michell and SME during the development of the latter's SMEV arm. The armboard is machined to match any given arm, bringing the total arm and armboard mass at 1kg precisely. This way the subchassis/platter/board system is always of known mass and balanced, regardless of the arm chosen. The centre of gravity of the whole floating assembly lies on the platter spindle. Drive is via an offboard DC motor, powered via the latest HR active power supply. The platter is

driven circumferentially by one round-section rubber belt.

The other key part of the Odyssey package is the Tecnoarm – this time finished in black. This is a radically revised Rega RB250 – complete with superior internal arm wiring, better cabling, a separate earth feed, and a remodelled rear counterweight assembly (substituting the plastic end stub for a metal affair and introducing the Michell Tecnoweight, a very elegant direct coupled counterweight, locked by an Allen bolt and boasting a lowered centre of gravity compared to Origin Live and/or Rega variants, somewhat reminiscent of the Michell Focus Arm of 1978). Significantly, the armtube is also drilled – common practice in aerospace applications to increase its rigidity and lessen resonances. The result is a dynamite sounding Rega arm – not even the basic Origin Live Rega mod compares, in my view.

Last but not least is the £500 Ortofon Rondo Bronze moving coil cartridge. This is the replacement for the MC30 Supreme, a cartridge I lived with (and loved) for several years back in the mid nineties. It's an extremely well made bit of kit, with a ground wood resin body (that's far less resonant than the aluminium bodies used before), a high quality generator and Nude Fritz Gyger 80 stylus on the end of a tapered aluminium cantilever. I found the Rondo Bronze tracked extremely securely at the recommended 2.3g and went 'hand in glove' with the Tecnoarm.

## AMPLIFICATION

Ask Antony Michaelson if the X-150 has been a runaway success and he answers with a resounding 'no'. But never let it be said that the market is a great arbiter of taste. In my view, this is a seriously capable little amplifier that, frankly, makes the opposition play catch-up. Just in case you noticed, it's not a so-called 'full size' separate, and for me, this is much of its appeal. It is uniquely styled and superbly built, and offers a

serious amount of bang per buck. It's also 'all you need' when you're not trying to put together a system full of sources. Rather, I can feed the latest Trichord Dino straight into one of the MF's two (!) line inputs and, that's it. Less is more – no complication.

Don't be fooled by the diminutive dimensions however - this amplifier packs real power. The Musical Fidelity uses its elaborately finned black painted alloy casing as a heatsink, its ribbed enclosure maximising the surface area. Inside is a grown up 70W RMS power amplifier, which is quite enough for most modern loudspeakers. It's a dual mono design, and there's also an ALPS volume pot, IEC mains connection and toroidal PSU in place. The brushed aluminium fascia is lightly populated by blue LEDs, which lend it a modern touch. It features a standard phono stage (which is surprisingly good, although not the equal of the Trichord Dino and/or the Ortofon Rondo Bronze) and pre-out sockets for bi-amping, and uses conveniently chunky loudspeaker binding posts.

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

If there is one, then 'the curse of *Hi-Fi World*' is the vast number of wannabee loudspeaker manufacturers phoning us up from their garden sheds in Rochdale or allotments in Basingstoke, telling us they make the best loudspeakers in the world (etc., etc.) and informing us that we would be missing a monumental opportunity were we not to review their amazing fare. Well, ninety nine times out of one hundred, it's a case of 'beam me up, Scotty – there's no intelligent life on this planet'.

Pinsh is one notable exception; they're a small UK manufacturer alright, but I happen to believe they have something special – namely a superb ribbon tweeter. Of course, ribbons are something of a *Hi-Fi World* hobby horse, but I'd go so far as to say that – with a few significant exceptions – any loudspeaker with a properly designed ribbon is superior

of ribbon tweeters to pro audio applications. The result is a London designed and manufactured tweeter that appears in no other loudspeaker on the market – yet. I say 'yet', because if they've any sense, various other high end manufacturers could usefully use this bit of kit. I suspect they won't, because sourcing Chinese OEM fare will be cheaper, and (as the Nick Lowe song says) so it goes...

The Pinsh One is a smallish bookshelf design of twelve litres, this one finished in black ash (cherry, maple, oak and walnut real wood veneers are options). The quality of the cabinet is excellent – no surprise, as it's sourced in

Scandinavia. It measures a compact 200x 300 x360mm, and the company claims a nominal impedance of 8 ohms, a frequency response of 40Hz to 40kHz and an efficiency figure of 88dB at 1 metre with 1watt. It's assembled in house in London, and Pinsh echo that old Robin Marshall from Epos (of ES14 fame) philosophy of the least amount of passive components in the crossover, the better. This is no hollow claim, because the ribbon is such that its frequency range permits a very 'non-interventionist' crossover – it works from 4,000Hz but can go much lower. The ribbon material composition remains confidential, but Pinsh says its is just 7mg, making it

wire wound, so there are no air gaps. Pinsh says the impulse response is 'fast enough' to follow the ribbon, but in truth it's more about 'damage limitation' than anything else, as a good ribbon is very, very fast. This is aided and abetted by a single small reflex port. Now, as you know I'm no fan of ported speakers, but in a small speaker they do less harm and bring useful sensitivity benefits – so I'll



let this one pass, especially when you consider how the system sounds...

**SOUND QUALITY**

Anything with a source this good is going to sound special, and so it comes as no surprise to learn that this is an extremely pleasant way to pass a day. Better still, the phonostage, amplifier and loudspeaker are more than capable of exploiting the extremely 'high resolution' (to use the current parlance) front end... Okay, I'm being a little disingenuous, as even the Michell when poorly fettled and matched can sound mediocre - see TUNING to see how I got it to give its best.

I have to say that I get to listen to a lot of nice kit these days, but few systems of this price come close. Given a decent vinyl pressing. It gives an incredibly enjoyable insight into the music. Of course, with Quad ESL989s and Yamaha NS1000Ms at the ready, I could easily detail the failings of the speakers but this is to

“this stunning sounding system is an extremely pleasant way to pass a day...”

to one without – and I'd put Pinsh firmly in the former category. The all important point is that the Pinsh One does not contain a cheap and cheerful Chinese sourced OEM ribbon. Rather, it's a Pinsh design, and critically, Pinsh started as a supplier

far, far lighter than conventional aluminium domes.

Down below is a single 5" 'OEM driver' (methinks of Scandinavian design) with frequency response from 40Hz to 4000Hz. It boasts a 75 mm aluminium voice coil aluminium



miss the point – pound for pound, I doubt if anything can beat this combination for sheer listenability.

The great thing about the Michell is its massively expansive sound – it throws a vast stereo image into the room, no matter what the ancillaries are – and so it was with the MF/ Pinsh combo. It's truly widescreen, making simple stereo recordings sound like surround. It's not quite as good front to back as it is left to right, but it still makes even the best DVD-Audio sound 'small time'. Next best is the Odyssey's tonality: I've heard few decks at any price which are so even from bottom to top, and so neutral (in their ability to convey the tonality and timbre of every instrument). Listening to a deck like

this is veritable riot of texture; something you miss with hazy, edgy, monochrome digital.

The

Ortofon is superb. It's – just - up to the job of getting the essence of the turntable and arm out to the public without fear or favour, by which I mean it's unfailingly neutral yet intricate and involving too. It's no Kontrapunkt B (in some ways it's tonally more neutral) in terms of rhythmic drive, but it's as good as any at the price, has masses of detail, true subtlety and tracks extremely well too. It is, for example, in a completely different league to the not so very much cheaper MC25FL – we're talking Premier League vs. local Sunday five-a-side here. What I love about it is

its all round competence; it's obviously more emotive than the old MC30 Supreme, and yet matches it in terms of bass grip and treble intricacy, yet brings a new level of dimensionality and midband incision – all for less money too... The Musical Fidelity X-150 is deceptively capable; as we found a year ago, it's oh-so-close to the Naim Nait 5x in grip and speed (no mean feat, this!) yet offers a fuller and gutsier presentation. This suited the Michell/ Ortofon's super neutral sound – the MF adds a welcome smidgeon of warmth and weight which the Pinsh Ones seemed to relish. These are very neutral speakers too – again just a tad warm and full in the bass (all ported standmounters seem to have a tiny peak around 100Hz to give them the perception of weight, and these are no exception). The result is that legendary analogue sound; big, expansive, three dimensional, warm, smooth and extended in the treble – and what treble!

The great thing about the Ortofon Rondo Bronze is its truly finessed and intricate treble,

something no digital source can give. The Musical Fidelity does little or nothing to conceal this and the Pinsh ribbon tweeters let the flavour flood out. It's a real revelation listening to high frequencies like these:

deliciously silky yet incisive, airy and extended, you soon realise you're listening to true exotica. Hi hats on Joe Jackson's 'Steppin' Out', for example, are delicious – and the Michell's legendary HF clarity makes them so crisp and explicit.

The theme continues right down through the midband – a fully open and detailed performance has you wondering why anyone would want more. There's grip, speed, dynamic articulation and rhythmic prowess in equal measure. The only problems arise in the bass. Or rather they would have, but Michell has just sorted this with the simple expedient of changing their belt supplier back to the original Japanese manufacturer they used many years ago! Michell replacement belts from recent years haven't seemed very happy on the spindle, wobbling around and generally protesting at having to turn

## TUNING

First, the Michell turntable is venerable to poor placement, so it's important to site the deck on a level surface, preferably on something the calibre of a Townshend Seismic Sink. Finding this a tad fussy, I've taken to using Audiophile Furniture Base SP01 isolation platforms under the Michell. One works great, two is better still. Next is the simple expedient of taking the dustcover off, which transforms the sound, and then the removal of the spring covers, which makes things truly gel. It's a shame, as some think the naked springs spoil the decks looks, but they surely have the opposite effect with the sound. Once you've carefully aligned the cartridge, and tightened it as much as Ortofon's deliberately soft metal screws will go (boo, hiss!), then this deck will begin to sing.

Suspension bounce is critical, and this is all about starting with a totally level surface upon which to place the deck. Do not use the spring height adjusters – they're good at fine tuning but any significantly differing levels will compromise the uniformity of the bounce. Next, make sure you've clamped the arm cable tightly, but with a good few centimetres of extra cable between the clamp point and the arm base (making a sort of 'half 'S' bend'). Finally, ensure the three springs are all locating dead centre on their spindles: all this done, the deck will bounce up and down at about 2-3Hz and give of its very best.

The electronics need next to no fettling, aside from the obvious expedient of using good quality power cables (I used Missing Link IECs for this review) and cleaning all contacts with Kontak (£12 a bottle). This latter point is vital (include even the cartridge tags, before you push the headshell arm leads on to them), as it brings vast improvements to even apparently 'brand new' equipment such as this. The Trichord Dino was hooked up to the Musical Fidelity amplifier via Brilliance Synergy interconnects (£55/m), which are an excellent budget choice – you'll have to spend a good £100 more to truly improve on them. The electronics were sat on Vibrapods (£5.50 each), and Chord Odyssey 2 (£18 per metre) loudspeaker cable was used (expensive, but you'll not want to upgrade again). The Pinsh Ones sat on Atacama 24 inch speaker stands, loaded with sand, and to complete the deal I sat on top of them to bed the spikes into the carpet.

the platter at all, but now we're back to the original supplier, it's so much smoother and this seems to have improved speed stability and tightened the bass no end. Although a belt drive will never match a direct driven quartz lock design, the speed stability is now very good indeed, and the strong, even, tight and propulsive bass shows this best of all.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, a gorgeous system, and one that's very close to what I use myself. In terms of musicality, tonality, textuality, dynamics, soundstaging and detail, this is real class. It's expensive, but believe me you can spend a lot, lot more and not get better. And the fact that it's also stunning to look at simply makes its case even more persuasively; as someone once said, it's a veritable 'Black Celebration'...

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# Shared Value(s)



**Dominic Todd tries a brilliantly balanced mid-priced system featuring two brands that share the same distributor – Rotel electronics and B&W loudspeakers...**

**O**ne of the joys of hi-fi separates is being able to mix n' match. Get it right and the overall sound quality can easily transcend the ability of the individual components. Get it wrong, however, and, as many readers will attest, the results can be disappointing to say the least. With this in mind, it's no wonder that many music lovers go for, what should be, the safe route of buying a matched system. Whilst it's not always the case, with most companies you can guarantee a degree of synergy by buying from the same brand.

“this is a case of the whole being more than the sum of the parts, even when the parts are already top notch...”

Components are often developed and tested together and therefore usually work at their best when partnered with matching ancillaries.

Rotel have long promoted their concept of 'balanced design', and whilst most Rotel products are tolerant enough to work with a wide variety of other components, a CD and amplifier should be at their best when partnered. Rotel is actually distributed by B&W in this country, so it came as no surprise that they recommended B&W speakers to complement the Rotel duo. Whilst they are a different brand entirely,

commonly distributed brands often have a synergy of their own. In the first instance, many distributors are already aware of brands that fit their sonic profile and will choose accordingly. Secondly, after brands have been coupled for some time, you'll often find development work carried out cross-brand. The latest Mordaunt Short speakers, for example, were developed with distribution partner, Marantz, supplying the electronics.

At the heart of this particular mid-range system lies Rotel's excellent RA-03 amplifier. Reviewed in the August 2005 issue, this five

globe amp' has already proved its mettle. Based on the well-respected RA-02, the RA-03 features a number of upgrades aimed at the audiophile. Rotel's own design of toroidal power transformer helps

produce a respectable 90 watts power output, and there is typical attention to detail throughout the power supply. Copper bus bars are used in high current stages, DNM have designed the slit foil capacitors and there's separate signal and power earthing. Meanwhile, at the output side of things, Burr Brown op-amps claim and, as we shall see, do, offer improved transparency and resolution. Without going over the top, pretty much every feature needed is supplied. Crucial to any matched system is a supplied remote control that will also control the

basic functions of the CD player. This, the Rotel amp' has.

In this case, that CD player happens to be Rotel's well established RCD-02. Like the amp' the RCD-02 shows evidence of being well engineered and solidly built, if not exactly adventurous in the use of new techniques. At the heart of the CD lies a Burr Brown IC that provides resolution claimed to equal 18-bit. HDCD decoding is also part and parcel of the chip. The transport mechanism is a Sony design, and the rest of the circuitry shows careful choice of good quality components. As with the amp', the power supply is to Rotel's own design, although this time it's a frame type and not a toroidal design. Again, all the basics are there featurewise, including a coaxial digital output, track programming and random playback. Amazingly there are still some manufacturers who use different casing styles for differing products. Fortunately, as you can see, this is not the case here, with the two components perfectly complementing one another aesthetically.

The aesthetics of the supplied B&W 602S3's finish may not be everyone's taste, but most will agree that this is a handsome large loudspeaker. Like the CD player, the 602S3's have been about for some time now, but also like the CD they are still highly respected. A 180mm (7") woven Kevlar bass cones mates up with a, carefully damped, metal dome tweeter. As with the Rotel electronics, the key is in the detail. The front baffle, for example, is double skinned with the outer,



polypropylene, casing being specially moulded to reduce diffractions and sharpen the imaging. The front mounted bass port features a tapered tube with surfacing detail first developed for the 800-series. Like the electronics, the build quality is good with the very professional finish you'd expect from a company of B&W's stature. Indeed, for long term durability there are few names at this end of the market that command such respect.

## SOUND QUALITY

With the system all in place, I began by listening to Tipper's 'Just As The Sun Went Down'. Almost immediately I was struck by the system's superb detail and its control. Ambient effects were superbly staged and projected. Each individual note had a crafted and complete quality often missing from equipment at this price range. Equally impressive was the layering of sound, which also revealed levels of detail again unusual at this level. The 602 S3's weren't quite as bassy as I remember, but then I was auditioning them on different stands [see **TWEAKING**] and, of course, with different components. Nonetheless, whilst I would have liked a tad more weight to the sound, the taut and tuneful bass was beyond reproach.

Josh One's 'Grey Skies' revealed a very slight boxiness to the low end. Whilst powerful enough in the lower mid-range it did lack extension at really low levels. Otherwise it was, once again, all good news. Vocals were reproduced with exceptional transparency, and the openness and spaciousness of sound was quite striking. Perhaps even more importantly than this was the manner in which the system tunefully strung the rhythms along. It showed great dexterity in handling even the most complex arrangement of rhythm. No doubt, in part, thanks to the height of the 'speaker once on its

dedicated stand, the soundstage had plenty of height. Yet, this must have been more than a consequence of its physical height, as the 'arc' of sound was still there with the 'speakers placed on lower stands, too.

Moving on to The Divine Comedy's 'Bad Ambassador', I found Hannon's vocals placed well forward of the rest of the mix, yet not intrusively so. Like the other instruments, the initial guitar introductions showed fine realism. Whilst the 'speakers may not have had quite the weight of equivalently priced floorstanders, they had enough in reserve for powerful dynamics: Plenty, in fact, to build the tension and emotion necessary to get a kick from a song such as this. Also pleasing to hear was the system's ability to handle high volumes without apparent compression or clipping. That having been said, I was always aware of the tweeters metal construction, although the Rotels' did appear to have something of a calming effect, especially with the soaring strings. Key to the systems appeal was, once again, its ability to involve the listener.

Neither was Involvement lacking in Tracey Chapman's 'Mountains O' Things'. The Rotel/ B&W system managed to pull off a superb balancing act in making Chapman's vocals sound smooth and sibilant free yet still soulful and full of character, colour and texture. The system was equally good at projecting the vocals well forward of the rest of the mix – highlighting them without being overblown. Whilst the percussion lay behind Chapman's vocals it was still reproduced with precision, great timing and, again, not in an overblown or relentless way.

An interesting quality that appeared with The Cardigans' 'Erase and Rewind' was that old Rotel characteristic of being able to pluck

notes out of a seemingly inky blackness of pure silence. Of course, there is still some background noise but, in comparison to most rivals, noise levels are extremely low and testament to the high levels of engineering quality. When I'd reviewed the amplifier individually, I'd criticised its lack of edge or rawness. This time, however, it was not a criticism that I could level at the system. No doubt the 'speakers helped, but the excellent attack shown by the percussion was greatly above my expectations. The pulsing bass was also present, if not quite possessing the final degree of solidity needed to be utterly convincing. The well-projected vocals were forward but managed to stay on the right side of the mark, managing to still be arresting, just as they should with this song. Once again, this systems faithfulness to the original artist is one of its most impressive qualities.

The final disc, as usual, was a Classical one. Chabrier's, Suite Pastorale, isn't always as tame as it sounds, with plenty of scope to catch out napping components. Yet, the Rotel/B&W combo was one system that refused to be caught out. The metal tweeter gave delicate percussion a super level of decay and detail, yet it did also allow the strings to be not quite as smoothly portrayed as some may like. Certainly the Rotels are as smooth as they come, so if you were to find the string balance a little bright, then it is to the loudspeakers you should look. Otherwise, instrumental timbre was excellent. Other speakers may have had an advantage in terms of refinement, but when it comes to dynamic contrast and sheer cohesion they wouldn't get a look in. Dynamic, hard-hitting, yet fluent and tolerably refined when needed. Just as with the other musical genres, this particular system made a pretty impressive case for itself. Yet even the best can often be improved...



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*AUDIO REVIEW Italy, July 2004, Claudio Cecchi*

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*HI-FI NEWS and record review, July 2004, Ken Kessler*

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Excellent finish and build quality makes  
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*HI-FI WORLD, August 2004, Dominic Todd*



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## CONCLUSION

I'd expected this system to perform well and, by and large, it exceeded expectations. Once wired up with the DNM cables and using the Atacama stands, I found the whole system just gelled. For an all in price of less than £1,400 it's difficult to see how you'd get more musical pleasure for your money. In terms of projection, timbre, layering, and timing this particular system leads the field at this price point. Bass, whilst not possessing the ultimate extension of larger floorstanders is at least tuneful and still powerful enough to convey large scale dynamic swings. The treble

## TWEAKING

As we've seen this is an extremely well balanced and involving system. Yet there are ways in which it can be tuned. Along with the 'speakers, B&W sent a pair of STAV20 stands. These, flat-packed, stands seemed reasonable enough, with twin columns and decent rigidity. Try to find any information on them though and you'll struggle. B&W don't seem too keen on promoting them in the UK as they're not on their website, or indeed even on a UK Google search! I found them for sale on a Danish site for about £50, which I guess would mean they'd sell for £40-£50 in the UK. With the 602s being a larger design, I found they worked best when spiked to the top plate. As is usually the case, the stands and 'speakers gave of their best when the stands were filled – I used my usual mixture of sand, lead shot and polystyrene chips (which helps prevent the sand from settling and solidifying). Used as such the bass response had a little more extension and weight, yet the 'speakers still weren't performing to their full potential.

Usually, I'd recommend the Partington Super Dreadnoughts, but at 24" they're simply too high. Next best, and a stand that I know works well with the 602S3 is the #75 Atacama SE5. This is a descendant of the highly regarded SE24, but in a more contemporary silver finish and, more importantly, a more suitable 20" in height. Used with the SE5, you'll find the 602S3s to be less boxy and even more open sounding than with B&W's own stands. Again, use top spikes and fill the stands (about three quarters) with sand/lead shot to get the best results. One final point worth remembering with stands is that, when you're sitting down, the 'speakers treble unit should be at ear height. With both these 20" stands I found the 602's right at the limit of acceptability. My listening position is quite high, so it wasn't so much of a problem, but if you listen from a lower point, such as a futon, then you'll need to consider a lower stand still. Again, turning to Atacama I found the SL400 to suit the design perfectly. It's 400mm (15.8") tall and, thanks to four columns, is extremely rigid. Like the SE5 it retails for around £90, although if you shop around you should be able to knock a bit off this.

Both Rotel's feature an IEC, or kettle type, mains connection; so upgrading the mains cable is easy. I have to say, though, that my experience with mains cables is that it's only the more expensive cables that make a significant difference. With this particular system, therefore, I'd say that the money is best spent elsewhere, like with the interconnect. Generally I use DNM Reson cables and found both interconnect and 'speaker cables suited the system down to the ground. Remembering that the amp uses DNM capacitors, the DNM cables make further sense, as this promotes a greater level of system synergy. Use these cables and you'll make the most of the systems excellent levels of transparency and resolution. A few pointers, though. Without doubt, the better DNM interconnect is the one with Eichmann Bullet plugs. At £75 it's not cheap, but you can put the money saved on mains cables towards it. The 'speaker cable is, at £7.50 per metre, just as great a bargain as it's always been. My advice though, would be to buy it unterminated. It's very easy to strip and offers a perfectly good connection without plugs. This gives you a further saving in order to put towards an extra length for bi wiring. As it's a solid core cable, try and keep cable lengths as short as possible – under 3m per side if you can.



performance managed to get the balance between detail and refinement pretty much spot on. Yes, you could occasionally tell that the B&W's used a metal dome tweeter but, thanks to the refinement of the Rotels, any potential peakiness was balanced out. Perhaps most importantly of all, the Rotel/ B&W system performed just as well with all types of music. From Trance to Classical, this combo will always give of its best - which is a rather more rare quality than you might imagine.

Sonic compatibility is, of course, just one of the reasons for buying a system. The other is aesthetics and whilst this will be of less importance to most readers here, it's still a relevant aspect. Whilst the Rotel combo isn't as neat as the Arcam Solo it doesn't exactly look ugly, and it will sound at least as good for less money (although a DAB radio's not included). The B&W's are a fine visual match, too. Whatever your views on how it look, though, just take a listen and I challenge you not to be won over. This is a case of the whole being more than the sum of the parts, even when the parts are already top notch. For less than £1,400 it's one system that I can recommend without reservation – and as regular readers will know, that's a very rare occurrence indeed!

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Review of SDA2175 Power Amplifier,  
Hi-Fi World, June 2005

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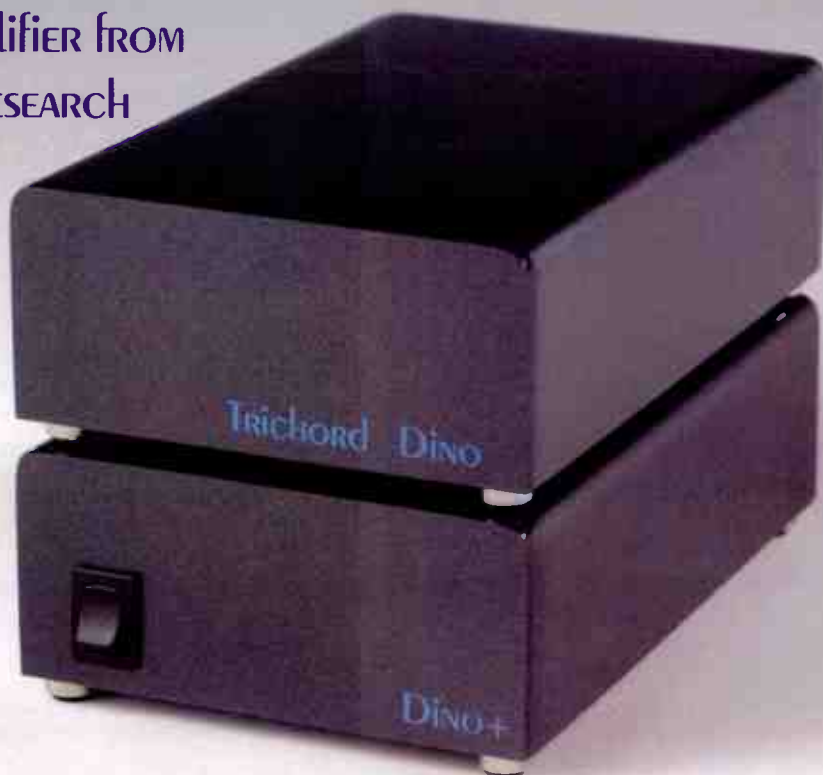
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# Style Counsel



**Although tragically styled and appallingly finished 'home made' hi-fi separates with the ergonomics of a circuit breaker box might appeal to some, most prefer their hi-fi to look the part as well as sound it. Here, Channa Vithana assembles a system which does just that...**

**R**emember the nineteen eighties? I do. There were some seriously cool looking bits of kit (Myst TMA, Naim NAIT, Onyx OA21, etc.) around, but some very dire ones too (names withheld to protect the guilty). In hi-fi terms, the upside of the decade was the sense of 'minimalism' it brought to product design – especially welcome after the excesses of the seventies. But there was also the downside, namely a rash (and that's what it was) of British 'cottage industry' manufacturers offering appallingly built, wretchedly finished 'audiophile' separates – with safety standards literally 'to die for'...

The nineties was not as distinctive a decade, stylistically speaking. We had the odd weird loudspeaker (Rogers dB101), a moment of madness from Arcam (remember the swoopy-fronted plastic Alpha series?) and a belated move away from black to silver. The best thing was that the cottage industry manufacturers died out [*presumably having electrocuted themselves on the live rails of their own products – i.e. the casings – Ed.*] and overall build got much better from UK plc. Cyrus introduced a classic diecast case design that still looks perfect ten years on and Meridian went wobbly after the glorious ergonomics and aesthetics of their seventies and eighties products. Ho hum.

Well, the good news is that now in the noughties, hi-fi has never

looked better. If you're trying to assemble a system that is genuinely capable sonically (i.e. an unadulterated audiophile product) and yet still looks striking, this is the decade to do it. Certain brands place far too much attention on aesthetics, and others far too little, but with this system you've got the best of both worlds...

## SOURCE

Zero feedback isn't recent technology, but is used extensively by Danish company Densen in their amplifiers, and also in the £1,350 B-400 Plus CD player - which has a 6watt class A zero feedback output stage [see box] no less! The B-400 Plus is furnished in Densen's lavish, svelte aluminium case (finished in either black or 'Albino' silver). The casework exemplifies Densen's approach in a minimalist understated style that disregards garish buttons, ugly monikers or flashing lighted logos. Indeed their logo/model number is confidently located on the top of the continuous L-shaped cover instead of being repeated or displayed at the front face.

The slim-line stance and elegant proportions really do strike a different chord to the bulky and clichéd norm of much of everyday hi-fi design. Build quality easily matches the design and the cleverness of the casework means that the fixing screws are located under the player. The Densen features two line outputs, digital DenLink, switchable BNC digital

output, 24bit D/A converter and a customised Sony Transport with special glass laser. Vital statistics are 7.5kg and 444x 310x 64mm. All Densens, including the casework and electronics, are designed and built in Denmark. The Densen can be operated with a finely crafted extruded aluminium system remote called the Gizmo which is an option at £150. The Gizmo is a real pleasure to use as it can be operated from almost any angle and can control a whole Densen system.

## AMPLIFICATION

Simaudio Ltd. from Canada started manufacturing hi-fi in 1980 and in 1997 began production of the Moon Audio series. Simaudio manufacture everything in-house that most competitors have to buy. This includes chassis parts, PCB assembly, and packaging materials. Moon has quite an extensive range which goes up to the 1000W/8ohm, 4000W/2ohm 'Rock' power amplifier at £35,000! The £1595 Moon i-3 integrated amplifier however is the company's 'entry level' component. It has a thick front plate (either silver or black) and finely crafted curved side heatsinks which give the Moon series its distinctive and visually attractive identity. Build quality is fantastic, while the simply laid out front panel has an excellent display which is clearly legible. There is a neat row of lozenge shaped buttons to the right for volume and input select. A small standby button situates in the centre below an eye-



catching Moon logo and blue LED. Moon includes an SRM remote made from a machined piece of solid aluminium which has volume, input, mute and balance laid out in a circular orientation and is a tactile delight. The Moon i-3 is rated at 100W/ 8ohm and 160W /4ohm, measures 430x 75x390mm and has a shipping weight of 10kg.

The Moon is specified with 40,000 microfarads of power supply capacitance and the large transformer located at the front of the chassis has a healthy 0.6KVA (600VA) rating. Just behind the power transformer is a symmetrically laid out main PCB. The signal path from input to speaker binding post is 18.5inches which is claimed to remove "virtually all potential sources of interference and producing a sonically faster transient response". The preamplifier section is described as class A while the power amplifier is class A/B. Moon use a "no overall feedback" policy for their amplifier designs for superior sound quality.

### LOUDSPEAKERS

The £646 Mil by Danish company Audiovector is an attractively designed and finished 2 way standmount made from a braced particle board cabinet measuring 200x350x270mm weighing 11kg. All finishes are hand polished, with the Maple, Cherry and Rosewood Mil's retailing for £680 (the black review pair at £646 is five percent less) while the White and Silver Mil's go for five percent more at £714. The Mil features a T 2004 LCC tweeter (Peerless/Vifa) and P 1804 bass/mid driver (Vifa). It is biwireable and has twin bass ports at the rear baffle while the tweeter has a large rear port. I had excellent results placing them 600mm from the rear wall and 2700mm apart. They have a quoted 8ohm impedance and 88dB sensitivity, 55Hz-25kHz frequency response and 120W power handling. The Mil's can be extensively upgraded [see **TUNING**].

### SOUND QUALITY

There is something special about the way this system sounds. Violins, viola and cello were played with real verve as the Densen/ Moon/ Audiovector (i.e. DMA in abbreviation) system communicated to me the essential and enjoyable Balanescu Quartet trait of tight, disciplined yet emotionally engrossing style in spades from the Nyman/Balanescu 'String Quartets' CD. The viola and cello came in beautifully to add expressive rhythmical order to the lower/mid frequency thrust while the violins were allowed to be really exciting without once defaulting into strident high frequency strain. I enjoy the way the Balanescu Quartet use the violin, cello and viola as almost sound effects within the main melodies as they pan from left to right and at no time did the DMA system miss a (violin, viola or cello) beat.

'Herzlich Tut Mich Verlangen' from the Bach Organ Masterpieces CD, was rendered deftly, enabling some rather nice low frequency notes to come forth and the good musical timing (and balance) ensured that these LF notes did not dominate the other higher up frequencies from the organ. 'Herzlich Tut Mich Verlangen' is quite a deep and darkly tinted recording which I find fascinating as it is slower paced and less bombastic than some of the other pieces on this CD. Thus the combination of the slower pace with the lower frequencies of the organ makes for a stunning end coda where the notes are left to linger for a few moments thus enveloping the room with a soothingly reverberant acoustic blanket. The measure of the DMA system is such that this end coda did not disintegrate into a subjectively distorted mess; rather it was like a warm, almost blissful rush as these notes held me in suspense!

Listening to the sleazy funk of Rick James was a delight on the DMA system. 'Give It To Me Baby' was really enjoyable as one of the finest opening bass lines started the groove, the DMA system easily revelled within it. The music was

vibrant, expressive,

clear and widescreen. Timing was beautifully done on 'Give It To Me Baby', where all the instruments gelled with the vocals to sound entirely natural. The Audiovector Mil's had a wonderful spatiality - no doubt due to their well ventilated rear tweeter port. Rick James provides another awesome and more famous bass line on 'Superfreak' which embarked with superb gusto and just got better as the song developed. The DMA system easily picked out the different vocal styles that Rick James uses to express a more lascivious tone when the lyrics of the song demanded it. Thus 'Superfreak' is transformed from being a great dance song with an over-familiar and much-sampled bass line into something more sexy.

Just like Rick James, The Balanescu Quartet and Bach, the elegant pop of 'Baker Man' by Laidback from the 'Trigger Happy TV' soundtrack also proved a delight as the DMA system allowed the gorgeously languid structure of this song to unravel some very nice arrangements. Both the lead and background vocals were deep, lush and enveloping. The eerie Swahili style chorus arrived and departed brilliantly throughout the song while the languid pace was not dealt into soporifics, rather just like the slow Bach piece before, the excellent musical timing made me take notice and ultimately enjoy the music. Blue Oyster Cult's '(Don't Fear) The Reaper' was as pleasurable as it was different to the other musical genres used earlier - as the dream-like vocals combined with the rhythms of the band brilliantly. The guitars weren't jarring either, sounding expressive and tuneful without going into subjective ringing colorations or distortion - which was especially pertinent on the explosive guitar solo in the middle. The DMA system's spatial ability was also welcome as it enhanced the epic harmony driven feel of the song.

### CONCLUSION

The upgradeable Densen B-400 Plus CD player and Moon Audio i-3 Integrated amplifier are both



individually and stylishly designed pieces of hi-fi at relatively affordable prices. The Audiovector Mi1 loudspeakers are attractive, well built and carefully thought out designs that offer extensive upgradeability. As a system the Densen, Moon and Audiovector work hard for their listener, showing an at ease synergy that can play a wide variety of music keeping its respective musical identities intact yet offering an enticing, expressive (when present) and emotionally involving musicality. This system is an alluring (and unfortunately rare) exemplar of high-

performance hi-fi that is well built, beautifully designed and eye-wateringly handsome, yet simple to use, upgradeable and attainable too.

## TUNING

Audiovector customers can upgrade a particular speaker model range from base level to its highest incarnation. Thus the base £646 Mi1 in our review can be transformed into the £920 Mi1 Super, £1,320 Mi1 Signature or the £2,040 Mi1 Avantgarde! The customer pays approximately 15 percent of the upgrade price extra for this service and it is completed in about ten days. All the Si and Mi speakers can be further upgraded to active status using the Audiovector Avex modular electronic crossover. Audiovector has supplied us with the £1,320 Mi1 Signature finished in cherry for comparison. It is pretty much a new speaker compared to the base Mi1 as only the particle board cabinet remains. The Mi1 Signature has a higher quality Evotech LCC tweeter (Peerless) which has a very attractive circular face plate and Audiovector P 2004 (Peerless) Bass/mid driver which uses an attractive metal basket chassis instead of the fibrous ABS type of the Mi1. The crossover is also changed to accommodate the higher quality drivers.

The Mi1 Signature has an attractively designed laminated front and rear baffle which are intended to stiffen the speaker and absorb energy from the rest of the cabinet structure. The laminated rear baffle is a work of moulded art and features mesh grilles over the large tweeter port and twin bass ports. The Mi1 Signatures have the same quoted sensitivity and impedance as the standard Mi1s but measure slightly bigger 200x350x290mm, weigh more at 14kg, have narrower frequency response at 45Hz-25kHz and manage 160W power handling.

Is the Mi1 Signature worth the extra money for an upgrade? The answer is a resounding yes. They allowed a deeper and superior resolved acoustic with especially good timbral elucidation to instruments. The move to higher end speakers from the model below (hopefully) brings with it better resolution and ultimately more rewarding sound quality. However some expensive speaker designs can do this but strip away the musical and emotional involvement in the quest for higher fidelity. This is not so with the Mi1 Signatures as they do indeed reward the listener with a refined, higher resolution sound but to their credit manage an even more involving and exhilarating presentation with superior musical timing to the standard Mi1s.

Last but not least, the owners of the original Densen B-400 CD player can upgrade to the B-400 Plus for £300 while the B-400 Plus can itself be upgraded for £1250 to the current top of the range £2,500 B-400 XS CD player which features Densen's Plus Bit (25Bit!) technology through installation of a higher quality DAC board. I have used the B-400 Plus in a high-end £6,000 Densen pre/power system and it fits into this exalted company with epic ease. I also have experience of the B-400 XS used in an £8,500 Dynavector pre power system with stunning results, which surely makes the case for the B-400 Plus all the more convincing.

## MUSIC

Nyman / Balanescu Quartet 'String Quartets 1-3' (1991/2002)  
 Marie-Claire Alain 'Bach Organ Masterpieces Vol.2' (1994/2003)  
 Rick James 'Street Songs, Deluxe Edition' (1981/2001)  
 Trigger Happy TV 'Soundtrack To Series 2' (2001)  
 Blue Oyster Cult 'Agents Of Fortune' (1976/2001)

## ZERO FEEDBACK

Densen says that feedback in hi-fi, "is used to compare the (signal) input with the (signal) output, and for adjusting the input so that the output is exactly the same as the input. In this way, at least in theory, the amplifier itself has no influence on the signal, as these influences will be adjusted away. However the signal always takes some time to pass through the amplifier stages, therefore the comparison of input and output is not the comparison of exactly the same signal. Consequently feedback, no matter to what degree, alters the signal and the result is that dynamics will be compressed, micro details compensated away, details smeared, soundstage altered, speed slowed down, transparency smeared and so on. Naturally, you will not have these problems with a zero-feedback design. However, the reason not all hi-fi designs are made this way is that without feedback it can be difficult to design and thus using zero feedback, the basic design must be (far superior) than feedback designs (to begin with), as the amplifier will otherwise not be stable. The combination of a better basic design and the zero-feedback technology results in extreme dynamics, detail level, amount of micro details, perfect soundstage, transfer speed, transparency and a wide open sound."

|  |               |
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**WIN STAX'S SUPERB SRS-4040 ELECTROSTATIC EARSPEAKERS IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT GIVEAWAY!**



**H**i-Fi World gives you the chance to win one of the very best headphones in the world, in the shape of Stax's SRS-4040 Signature System II electrostatic earspeakers. Here's what editor David Price said about them in our August 2005 issue:

"Stax only makes headphones – and they are supremely comfortable. They weigh just 295g plus cable, which is a brilliant 'wearability' enhancer... The SRM-606t Driver Unit's champagne gold front panel boasts a dual-gang volume control to the right, with one power On/Off switch and two input switches to the left. Immediately underneath are three five-pin earspeaker outputs. Round the back, there are two pairs of RCA ins, a ground, one pair of outs and one pair of XLR ins, plus the usual IEC power input. The SRM-006t now features a Class A tube output stage (6FQ7 / 6CG7) working with a low noise dual FET input, the amplifier using pure balanced DC configuration. It gives 60dB of gain with 300V R.M.S. (1kHz) output voltage for the electrostatic panels of the earspeakers.

As you might expect, the 4040 package doesn't sound like any other headphone. There are obvious reasons for this; electrostatic panels have super fast response times (due to the lightness of the diaphragms), in the 404s they are very well implemented... In a nutshell, these are the cleanest sounding headphones I've ever heard... the Staxes are very natural. Of course they're precise, but don't confuse precision with dispassion. The Staxes play what comes into that little amp box with eerie insight, as if a grimy

window has been forced open to reveal the bright, brilliant sunlight outside. It is utterly addictive and compellingly enjoyable. All of a sudden, you've got this magical shortcut to your favourite recordings, and you start attacking your record or CD collection in earnest. The brilliance of the Stax 4040 package is that despite the sharp relief it throws on the deficiencies of your power amp and loudspeakers (rendering them irrelevant at a stroke), it is never punishingly analytical. You never feel discomfort, or the sense that you're listening to the music because you want to hear all that new detail. Rather, despite that incredible technical insight, you listen because you want to get into the music. Like the record label of the same name, the Staxes have soul... You need to spend at least £10,000 to buy a power amp and speakers capable of

similar musical insight." If you'd like to win them, just answer the following four easy questions on a postcard and send your entries by 31st August 2005 to: **September 05 Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF**

**QUESTIONS**

[1] What is the name that Stax give to their headphones?

- [a] earspeakers
- [b] headbangers
- [c] wig-ticklers
- [d] bodice rippers

[2] What type of transducer is used?

- [a] electrostatic
- [b] electro-dynamic
- [c] electro cardiac
- [d] electrolytic

[3] How did DP describe the sound?

- [a] 'the cleanest sounding headphones I've ever heard'
- [b] 'aurally cosmic'
- [c] 'acoustically emancipatory'
- [d] 'sonically translucent'

[4] How much do you need to spend on an amp and speakers to beat the Staxes...?

- [a] at least £10,000
- [b] ten bob
- [c] five pounds fifty
- [d] absolutely nothing in particular

September Competition  
Hi-Fi World Magazine  
Unit G4 Argo House  
The Park Business Centre  
Kilburn Park Rd.  
London NW6 5LF

**RULES AND CONDITIONS OF ENTRY**

- ONLY ONE ENTRY PER HOUSEHOLD
- MULTIPLE ENTRIES WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY DISQUALIFIED
- PURCHASE OF THE MAGAZINE IS NOT A PRE-CONDITION OF ENTRY
- NO CORRESPONDENCE WILL BE ENTERED INTO
- THE EDITOR'S DECISION IS FINAL
- NO EMPLOYEES OF AUDIO PUBLISHING LIMITED, OR OF ANY COMPANIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRODUCTION OR DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZES, MAY ENTER

**entries will be accepted on a postcard only**

**JUNE 2005 MUSICAL FIDELITY A5 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER WINNER:  
David Peat of Carnoustie, Scotland**



# SEVENoaks

SOUND & VISION

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GOLD REFERENCE GR10 SPEAKERS



**£599 SAVE £200**  
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**PIONEER**  
PDP435XDE 43" PLASMA TV



From **£2499 SAVE £s**  
PRICE EXCLUDES SPEAKERS (NICWAOO)\*  
FLY TO NEW YORK OR BOSTON WHEN YOU BUY A PIONEER PLASMA. TERMS & CONDITIONS IN-STORE OR ONLINE

**SIM2**  
HT300 E-VOLUTION DLP PROJECTOR



**£5999 SAVE £2000**  
FREE 7" MOTORISED SCREEN WORTH £930 (NICWAOO)\*

**FREE QED SPEAKER CABLE OR INTERCONNECT CABLES WORTH AT LEAST £50**  
when you purchase selected Speakers or CD/Amplifier combinations. Ask in-store for details.

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\*Added Value Offers - From range available in store. Not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO). Advert valid until at least 27/08/2005, E&OE.

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 HULL  
 IPSWICH  
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 STAINES  
 SWINDON  
 SWISS COTTAGE  
 TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
 WATFORD  
 WEYBRIDGE  
 WITHAM (ESSEX)  
 WOLVERHAMPTON  
 YEOVIL (OPENING SOON)





## Specialist hi-fi

**Contemporary hi-fi** is constantly setting new standards in sound reproduction and design. Whatever you listen to, be it Robbie Williams or Rachmaninov, Sevenoaks can recommend separate components that will bring your music collection to life and complement your home. We're enthusiasts and experts, passionate about helping you build (or upgrade) a system that will delight for years to come.



## Rotel

Rotel is truly unique: a family-owned, specialist Japanese company whose passionate interest in music led them to manufacture audio components of uncompromised quality.

The **02 Series** is Rotel's entry-level range. The RCD-02 CD player combined with either an RA-01, RA-02 or RA-03 integrated amplifier represents true audiophile performance at an affordable price. For increased high-end performance, the RC-03/RB-3 pre/power amplifiers are available. The RT-02 tuner completes the range.

### 02 SERIES

- RA-01 AMPLIFIER
- RA-02 AMPLIFIER
- RA-03 AMPLIFIER
- RCD-02 CD PLAYER
- RT-02 TUNER
- TO SERIES
- RA-1062 AMPLIFIER
- RCD-1072 CD PLAYER

**ROTEL RA-03 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER**

"The Rotel is simply the best-sounding amp here, and one of the cheapest - if you're after an amp, you must hear it."

## Arcam

Arcam has spent more than a generation building some of the finest high-fidelity products the world has ever seen. Whether you're interested in two-channel or a complete multi-channel AV system, the Arcam DIVA series offers the music and movie lover the most complete range of high-performance home entertainment solutions from any specialist manufacturer.



### NEW ARCAM SOLO ALL-IN-ONE MUSIC SYSTEM

**SOLO:** A sleek, easy-to-operate system. Featuring an audiophile CD player, a 50 WPC amplifier combined with a DAB digital radio and a high quality FM tuner, the SOLO music system will captivate all who listen.

- DIVA SERIES INCLUDES**
- A65 PLUS AMPLIFIER
  - A80 AMPLIFIER
  - A90 AMPLIFIER
  - CD73T CD PLAYER
  - CD192 CD PLAYER
  - T61 TUNER
  - DT91 DAB TUNER
  - DV78 DVD PLAYER
  - DV79 DVD PLAYER
  - AVR250 AV RECEIVER
  - AVR300 AV RECEIVER



## Cyrus

If you've enjoyed listening to music before, try listening to it through a Cyrus system. With every product tuned by ear, Cyrus represents a quality of sound, which is rare at any price. Invest in a Cyrus system and you'll be rewarded with a wealth of sound you wouldn't have thought possible.

### RANGE INCLUDES

- CD6 & CD8X CD PLAYERS
- 6VS & 8VS AMPLIFIERS
- PRE X VS PREAMPLIFIER
- DAC-X DAC & FM X TUNER

### LINKSERVER SOLO

A Cyrus CD Player with built in 80Gb hard disk drive. Keep all your favourite music instantly accessible in a single, easy to operate component.



## Project

Project is currently one of the world's leading suppliers of turntables, with a range of models designed to satisfy all levels of expectation and budget. The range is simple to use, maintenance free and will function for a lifetime.



- DEBUT III TURNTABLE WITH OM5E CARTRIDGE
- 2 XPERIENCE TURNTABLE (PICTURED RIGHT)

## B&W

Since the outset, the focus of Bowers and Wilkins Loudspeakers has always been to offer the best possible musical experience. With a combination of the latest R&D techniques and a passion for music, B&W produces a diverse range of products befitting the largest audio manufacturer in the UK.

- 600 SERIES INCLUDES DM601 S3 & DM602 S3
- 700 SERIES INCLUDES 705 & 703
- PPM SERIES INCLUDES PV1 SUBWOOFER



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### £ PRICING POLICY

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention

### ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

The right accessories can make or break your system. Our carefully selected range, including QED, Soundstyle and Grado, will ensure you get the very best performance from your system.

### 0% FINANCE OPTION\*

Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the majority of products we stock.

\*Minimum 6 months on request. Limited credit available. Maximum 6 month finance. Subject to status.

### PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or see the brand locator on our website before travelling.

\*Added Value Offers - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO)

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## Roksan

Roksan designs and manufactures some of the most acclaimed hi-fi equipment currently available. All Roksan products are carefully evaluated by experienced engineers at every stage of the design process with the emphasis on performance and build quality.

### Kandy

KA1 MKIII AMPLIFIER  
KD1 MKIII CD PLAYER

### Caspian M SERIES

CD PLAYER  
AMPLIFIER  
PREAMPLIFIER  
STEREO POWER  
MONOBLOC POWER



## Monitor Audio

Since 1972 Monitor Audio has been developing and perfecting the implementation of metal drivers, innovative crossovers, and exemplary speaker cabinet construction and finish to further the ideal of achieving sound which is to the original "as close as it gets".

The range includes - Gold, New Silver RS, Bronze and Radius, a seriously compact system bringing true hi-fi performance to both music and movies at home.



MODELS INCLUDE  
BRONZE B2, B2 AV, B4 AV  
SILVER RS1, RS6, RS8  
GOLD REFERENCE 10 & 60



NEW SILVER RS6

“BRONZE B2

“Monitor Audio's Bronze B2s sound much more expensive than their £200 price tag would suggest. In fact, they sound superb... In the competitive world of budget hi-fi, speakers don't get much better than the B2s.”

## Acoustic Energy

Established in 1987, Acoustic Energy is one of Britain's premier loudspeaker manufacturers offering one of the most targeted range of hi-fi and home cinema loudspeaker systems on the market today.



### AELITE THREE

“The legendary AE1 lives on in this groundbreaking new version... It sets a new standard for small speakers.”



## Digital Radio Harman Kardon

### TU970 DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER

With Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) capability, this high-quality tuner delivers more stations and offers pure, distortion-free, CD-like sound, while providing useful radio and data services.



### Pure

### DRX702ES DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER



## Wharfedale

### DIAMOND 9.1 SPEAKERS


“The overall balance of the speakers is their finest characteristic. Thanks to near-perfect driver integration, music sounds wonderfully natural and transparent. This is a bar-raising effort from Wharfedale: these are ridiculously good speakers at the budget price level.” digital technologies from one of the oldest hi-fi names.



## FREE QED Essential Accessories

FREE QED SPEAKER CABLE worth at least £50 when you purchase selected Speakers over £200. Ask in-store for details. (NICWA00)\*

FREE QED INTERCONNECT CABLE worth at least £50 when you purchase selected CD and Amplifier combinations. Ask in-store for details. (NICWA00)\*



## Marantz

The Marantz 'Range Series' offers flexible system building options for every lifestyle.

### RANGE SERIES INCLUDES

- CD5400 CD PLAYER
- PM4400 AMPLIFIER
- PM7200 AMPLIFIER
- ST4000 TUNER
- SR4500 AV RECEIVER
- SR5500 AV RECEIVER
- DV4500 DVD PLAYER



CD5400 “This is a remarkable CD player for the money, with superb sound, looks and feel - A very solid buy and a lot of fun”

## KEF Q Series

The Latest evolution of the acclaimed Q Series demonstrates how the benefits of KEF technology cascade down from the Reference Series to more affordable ranges. New Q features all the inherent advantages of KEF UNI-Q® technology and are available in a variety of Finishes.



### Q SERIES INCLUDES

- Q COMPACT BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS
- Q4 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS
- Q7 AV SPEAKER PACKAGE

## Quad

Founded in 1938, Quad's history is one of audio excellence. Today's range includes both electronics and speaker systems.

### PRODUCTS INCLUDE

- 99 CD-PREAMPLIFIER
- 11L SPEAKERS



## Musical Fidelity

Musical Fidelity's X-Series combines exceptional build quality with value for money.

### X SERIES

- X-80 & X150 AMPLIFIER
- X-RAY CD PLAYER

### AS SERIES

- A5 AMPLIFIER & CD PLAYER







Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or see the brand locator at [www.ssav.com](http://www.ssav.com) before travelling.

## TURNTABLES

|                 |        |
|-----------------|--------|
| Goldring GR1    | £ CALL |
| Linn RANGE      | £ CALL |
| Michell RANGE   | £ CALL |
| Project RANGE   | £ CALL |
| Roksan Radius 5 | £ CALL |

## TUNERS

|                       |         |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Arcam RANGE           | £ CALL  |
| Cyrus FM X            | £ CALL  |
| Denon TU260L MKII     | £99.95  |
| Harman Kardon RANGE   | £ CALL  |
| Linn RANGE            | £ CALL  |
| Marantz ST4000        | £99.95  |
| Pure DRX-701ES DAB    | £179.95 |
| Pure DRX-702ES DAB/FM | £229.95 |
| Rotel RANGE           | £ CALL  |

## CD PLAYERS

|                        |         |
|------------------------|---------|
| Arcam RANGE            | £ CALL  |
| Cyrus RANGE            | £ CALL  |
| Denon DCD485           | £119.95 |
| Linn RANGE             | £ CALL  |
| Marantz CD5400         | £119.95 |
| Meridian RANGE         | £ CALL  |
| Musical Fidelity RANGE | £ CALL  |
| Quad RANGE             | £ CALL  |
| Roksan RANGE           | £ CALL  |
| Rotel RANGE            | £ CALL  |

## CD RECORDERS

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| Yamaha CDR-HD1500 | £469.95 |
|-------------------|---------|

## AMPLIFIERS

|                        |         |
|------------------------|---------|
| Arcam RANGE            | £ CALL  |
| Cyrus RANGE            | £ CALL  |
| Denon PMA355           | £159.95 |
| Linn RANGE             | £ CALL  |
| Marantz PM4400         | £139.95 |
| Marantz PM7200         | £239.95 |
| Meridian RANGE         | £ CALL  |
| Musical Fidelity RANGE | £ CALL  |
| Quad RANGE             | £ CALL  |
| Roksan RANGE           | £ CALL  |
| Rotel RANGE            | £ CALL  |
| Yamaha AX396           | £169.95 |

## SPEAKERS

|                                 |         |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One   | £119.95 |
| Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three | £229.95 |
| Acoustic Energy Aelite RANGE    | £ CALL  |
| Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII       | £ CALL  |
| AVI Neutron IV                  | £ CALL  |
| B&W RANGE                       | £ CALL  |
| KEF RANGE                       | £ CALL  |
| Linn RANGE                      | £ CALL  |
| Meridian RANGE                  | £ CALL  |

|                     |         |
|---------------------|---------|
| Mission m30i        | £89.95  |
| Mission m31i        | £119.95 |
| Mission m33i        | £199.95 |
| Mission m34i        | £269.95 |
| Monitor Audio GR10  | £599.95 |
| Monitor Audio RANGE | £ CALL  |
| Quad RANGE          | £ CALL  |
| Ruark RANGE         | £ CALL  |
| Wharfedale RANGE    | £ CALL  |

## HI-FI SYSTEMS

|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Arcam Solo Ex Speakers     | £ CALL  |
| Denon 201 Ex Speakers      | £469.95 |
| Denon DF101 Ex Speakers    | £289.95 |
| Denon DM31 Ex Speakers     | £179.95 |
| Linn Klassik Music Ex Spks | £ CALL  |
| Teac RANGE                 | £ CALL  |

## DVD SYSTEMS

|                              |         |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Denon DHT-500SD Inc 5.1 Spks | £429.95 |
| Denon DHT-550SD Inc 5.1 Spks | £599.95 |
| KEF KIT100 Inc Speakers      | £ CALL  |
| Teac RANGE                   | £ CALL  |

## MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Cyrus Link RANGE       | £ CALL |
| Living Control RANGE   | £ CALL |
| Yamaha MusicCast RANGE | £ CALL |

## DVD PLAYERS

| MAKE & MODEL               | REGION 2 | MULTI REGION |
|----------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Arcam RANGE                | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |
| Cyrus RANGE                | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |
| Denon DVD-1710             | £99.95   | £109.95      |
| Denon DVD-2910 Universal   | £489.95  | £499.95      |
| Denon DVD-3910 Universal   | £699.95  | £719.95      |
| Denon DVD-A1xv             | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |
| Harman Kardon RANGE        | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |
| Marantz RANGE              | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |
| Meridian RANGE             | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |
| Panasonic RANGE            | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |
| Pioneer DV370              | £59.95   | £69.95       |
| Pioneer DV575A Universal   | £119.95  | £129.95      |
| Pioneer DV668Av Universal  | £469.95  | £479.95      |
| Pioneer DV868Avi Universal | £799.95  | £819.95      |
| Samsung DVD-HD945          | £139.95  | £149.95      |
| Toshiba SD350              | £79.95   | £89.95       |
| Yamaha RANGE               | £ CALL   | £ CALL       |

## DVD RECORDERS

| MAKE & MODEL       | REGION 2 | MULTI REGION |
|--------------------|----------|--------------|
| Panasonic DMR-ES10 | £199.95  | £209.95      |
| Panasonic DMR-EH50 | £339.95  | £349.95      |
| Pioneer DVR-320    | £299.95  | £309.95      |
| Pioneer DVR-420H   | £349.95  | £369.95      |
| Pioneer DVR-520H   | £399.95  | £419.95      |
| Pioneer DVR-720H   | £469.95  | £489.95      |
| Pioneer DVR-920H   | £999.95  | £1029.95     |

## A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

|                                 |          |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Arcam RANGE                     | £ CALL   |
| Cyrus RANGE                     | £ CALL   |
| Denon AVC-A1XV AV Amplifier     | £ CALL   |
| Denon AVR1705 AV Receiver       | £199.95  |
| Denon AVR1905 AV Receiver       | £229.95  |
| Denon AVR2805 AV Receiver       | £549.95  |
| Denon AVR3805 AV Receiver       | £799.95  |
| Harman Kardon RANGE             | £ CALL   |
| Lexicon RANGE                   | £ CALL   |
| Marantz RANGE                   | £ CALL   |
| Onkyo RANGE                     | £ CALL   |
| Pioneer VSX-1014s AV Receiver   | £429.95  |
| Pioneer VSX-2014t AV Receiver   | £549.95  |
| Pioneer VSX-AX5Ai AV Receiver   | £799.95  |
| Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai AV Amplifier | £1999.95 |
| Rotel RANGE                     | £ CALL   |
| Yamaha DSP-AX7575E AV Amplifier | £399.95  |
| Yamaha RX-V357 AV Receiver      | £149.95  |
| Yamaha RX-V557 AV Receiver      | £299.95  |

## A/V SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

|                              |         |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Acoustic Energy RANGE        | £ CALL  |
| Artcoustic RANGE             | £ CALL  |
| Audica RANGE                 | £ CALL  |
| B&W RANGE                    | £ CALL  |
| B&W Mini Theatre RANGE       | £ CALL  |
| KEF KHT1005                  | £299.95 |
| KEF KHT2005.2                | £599.95 |
| KEF Q7 AV                    | £ CALL  |
| M&K RANGE                    | £ CALL  |
| Mission M Cube               | £ CALL  |
| Mission Elegante RANGE       | £ CALL  |
| Monitor Audio RANGE          | £ CALL  |
| Mordaunt Short Genie         | £649.95 |
| Quad L-Series                | £ CALL  |
| Wharfedale Diamond 9 HCP     | £ CALL  |
| Yamaha YSP-1 Sound Projector | £ CALL  |

## SUBWOOFERS

|                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| B&W RANGE                | £ CALL |
| M&K RANGE                | £ CALL |
| MJ Acoustics RANGE       | £ CALL |
| Monitor Audio RANGE      | £ CALL |
| Quad L-Series            | £ CALL |
| REL RANGE                | £ CALL |
| Wharfedale Diamond SW150 | £ CALL |

## PLASMA

|                               |               |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Fujitsu RANGE                 | £ CALL        |
| Hitachi 42PDS200 42"          | £1699.95      |
| Hitachi RANGE                 | £ CALL        |
| LG RZ42PX11 42"               | £1399.95      |
| LG RANGE                      | £ CALL        |
| Panasonic TH37PV500 (Wal) 37" | £1999.95      |
| Panasonic TH42PV500 (Wal) 42" | £2299.95      |
| Panasonic RANGE               | £ CALL        |
| Pioneer PDP435XDE 43"         | FROM £2499.95 |
| Pioneer PDP505XDE 50"         | FROM £3599.95 |
| Pioneer RANGE                 | £ CALL        |

## LCD TV

|                          |         |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Hitachi RANGE            | £ CALL  |
| LG RZ32L250 32"          | £999.95 |
| LG RANGE                 | £ CALL  |
| Panasonic RANGE          | £ CALL  |
| Sharp Aquos LC26GASE 26" | £699.95 |
| Sharp Aquos LC32GASE 32" | £949.95 |
| Sharp Aquos RANGE        | £ CALL  |
| Toshiba 32WL56 32"       | £999.95 |
| Toshiba RANGE            | £ CALL  |

## PROJECTORS

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Optoma H27 DLP   | £ CALL  |
| Screenplay RANGE | £ CALL  |
| Sharp XVZ91E     | £799.95 |
| Sharp RANGE      | £ CALL  |
| Sim 2 RANGE      | £ CALL  |
| ThemeScene RANGE | £ CALL  |

## ROKSAN KANDY MKIII CD & AMP



**£999 CLAIM FREE**  
QED CABLE WORTH £100 (NICWAOO)\*

## ARCAM

DV79/AVR300 DVD/AV RECEIVER



**£2299 CLAIM £400**  
TOWARDS THE SPEAKERS OF YOUR CHOICE (NICWAOO)\*

## SCREENPLAY

5700 DLP PROJECTOR



**£1999 CLAIM £300**  
TOWARDS THE SCREEN OF YOUR CHOICE (NICWAOO)\*

## MARANTZ

DV6500/SR5500 DVD/AV RECEIVER



**£599 SAVE £250** (NICWAOO)\*

## KEF

KHT2005.2 SPEAKER SYSTEM



**£599 CLAIM FREE**  
SPEAKER STANDS WORTH £80 (NICWAOO)\*

\*NICWAOO - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

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## Nationwide Store guide



### ABERDEEN 01224 252797

• 57 CROWN STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

### BEDFORD 01234 272779

• 29-31 ST PETERS STREET

### BIRMINGHAM 0121 233 2977

• ARCH 12, LIVERY STREET

### BRIGHTON 01273 733338

• 57 WESTERN ROAD, HOVE

### BRISTOL 0117 974 3727

• 928 WHITELADIES ROAD, CLIFTON

### BROMLEY 020 8290 1988

• 39A EAST STREET

### CAMBRIDGE 01223 304770

• 17 BURLEIGH STREET

### CARDIFF 029 2047 2899

• 104-106 ALBANY ROAD

### CHELSEA 020 7352 9466

• 403 KINGS ROAD

### CHELTENHAM 01242 241171

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• 33 LONDON ROAD

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### STAINES 01784 460777

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• 478 ST ALBANS ROAD

### WEYBRIDGE 01932 828525

• 43 CHURCH STREET, THE QUADRANT

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# To The Max



**You'll have to look really hard to find a company better at tuning hi-fi products than Townshend Audio. Channa Vithana reviews this, the latest high end TA565 DVD universal player, itself a heavily modified Pioneer machine...**

**W**hile most other high end audio manufacturers put an off-the-shelf transport, DAC, digital filter and analogue output stage together in their own box with a bespoke power supply, Townshend let somebody else do all that, and then take the lid off and start modifying the finished product.

It's no surprise that the £2,995 TA565 CD is a several-generations-old Pioneer budget machine. Max Townshend makes no bones about this, saying he chose it because it's the last Pioneer to have a fully discrete SACD section (that doesn't simply transcode DSD to PCM, rather keeping it separate all the way home). But then the fun starts, and the humble Pioneer gets a makeover the like of which 'Grand Designs' has never seen...

First is its Seismic Sink suspension, similar to that employed in the new Versatile Seismic Sink Stand (VSSS) in that it employs four highly compliant spring units in each of the four corners. The TA565 CD features conical springs in compression whereas the VSSS suspension uses tensioned polymer modules. Next is the comprehen-

sively filtered DC supply for the crucial analogue and digital circuits, and then there's the piece de resistance, Townshend's own transformer analogue output stage to do the current to voltage conversion. Townshend also omit the Pioneer op-amp and filter used in the front left and right channels.

The bottom case contains the new power supply transformers and Townshend Audio also employs a special new DCT to all the printed circuit boards and all the wire, including especially the 100 metres of wire in each transformer. They use an 'enhanced Deep Cryogenic Treatment (EDCT™)' which can only be applied to components which can endure extreme heating as well as extreme cooling. Townshend Audio says this treatment is far superior to the common DCT cooling only process, (and) can not be used on finished cables or assemblies as the plastic materials would all melt.

The TA 565 CD uses a stainless steel outer casing which comes in black 'crinkle' or plain brushed finishes. For £3,600, the TA 565 CD can be specified with a polished mirror stainless steel finish matching Townshend Audio's £14,000 floorstanding Glastonbury (GIII)

speakers. At the rear panel of the player (on top) there are the standard sockets for digital and analogue 5.1 connections along with new high quality phono output sockets connected to the transformer stages. Additionally there is a very good video on/off switch, then - DIN DC power supply input, figure eight AC input, remote control link and S-Video out. The bottom box has the DIN DC out socket to connect to the main player above with DIN to DIN cable, IEC power input and AC output.

## SOUND QUALITY

With 'Blitzkrieg Bop' from 1976 on the Ramones CD, the Townshend produced beautifully timed music in a manner that wasn't just related to the sheer addition of speed. Rather the Ramones' punk-pop slant was delivered with dynamism and control. It wasn't stripped of emotion to end up sounding like lame speeded-up pub rock as some rougher punk recordings can sound. Rather the vocals were handled very well, being clear and well defined while the music as a whole was exhilarating with nicely tuneful with unreserved bass – just as the Ramones should sound. 1981's 'She's



A Sensation' revealed more sublime vocals from Joey Ramone and the song has a very melodic pop-like composition which had widescreen spatiality through the Townshend. This quality was enhanced by the cymbals - which can normally sound splashy, aggressive and harsh on lesser players - being stunningly rendered. All the instruments were clear and separated but remained cohesive thus reinforcing the superb timing qualities of the Townshend. For instance, there is a wonderful nineteen fifties style rhythmic guitar melody which forms an undercurrent to this song that the Townshend ably revealed with nice timbre to flesh it out.

Orbital's 'Snivilisation' CD is a sophisticated, disciplined composition which is a beautifully crafted piece of electronica. However, the recording/mastering can occasionally sound brittle, harsh and dry on some CD players. 'Kein Trink Wasser' is a gorgeous and enjoyable piece which for the first third of its nine minutes has a metronomic and mesmerising keyboard/piano repetitive melody. The Townshend was able to lock onto the sophisticated melodies as they arrived aft and fore to the main composition and as such it was a pleasure to hear the undulating keyboard/piano sounds as they needled their way through the music and then appropriately resonated into the room when highlighted. After the first three minutes, the trademark Orbital electronic sounds come into the mix and the Townshend was able to separate out the differing tracks within this song such as percussion, beats, distorted bass melodies and warm, lush organic sounding synthesisers with aplomb. When the keyboard/piano melody returns after five minutes to join the already complex musical melange, the Townshend did not struggle and was never less than enthusiastic and relished all the extra instrumentation, thus creating a convincingly believable acoustic with authoritative musical timing.

The opening title track to the orchestrations from the 'Naqoyqatsi' CD had a really nice resonating timbre to the darkly brooding male vocals and the human heart beat was attractively animated as it brought forth the delightfully fluid cello of Yo Yo Ma. The cello sound was holographic and passionate, while its phrasing was first-rate as it went through a meandering melody. The sound was warm and enveloping but not soporific or dull. This was clearly present at the wilfully low volume

setting I chose. There wasn't a hint of smear that can afflict some digital sources either, while the dynamic swings and emotional impact of the orchestrations or percussion were left intact. As the piece builds, it changes tempo slightly and adds newer textural melodies which the Townshend conveyed with an appropriately deep and brooding sonic vista.

The seventeenth century Swedish organ on 'Cantino Belgica' from the Naoko Imai CD was gorgeously reproduced through the Townshend without any discernible coloration that can occasionally blight organ recordings when the more demanding notes are reached. Instead the Townshend just created a completely believable acoustic from the solo organ playing of Naoko Imai. It was, subjectively, both a high-resolution and low-distortion sound that had huge dynamic range. The Townshend was able to discern the

higher frequency melodies from the mid and lower ones with great skill and without ruining the successive concertinaed melodies as the resonating frequencies of each overlapped into the next.

On the Barb Jungr SACD her version of 'Love Letters' is an eerie, playful and absorbing rendition. Through the Townshend it sounded disarming where the vocals and music were liberated from the hi-fi and filled the room beautifully. Although it is a simple recording with minimalist instrumentation, the sound was huge as well as expansive, and when combined with Barb Jungr's vocals - 'Love Letters' was emotionally convincing through the Townshend.

When playing the Dire Straits SACD, the lullaby style of 'Why Worry' had the different acoustic guitars captured nicely by the Townshend with first-rate timbre. The multi-tracked vocal chorus was delivered with a delicate balance and the Townshend enabled me to enjoy this song from an ostensibly over-familiar album - simply for the music, acoustic and feel rather than the brittle, cold recording it can be on other players. The likeable, enthusiastic musical nature of the Townshend continued with the

nimbleness of 'Ride Across The River' where the keyboard melody was a delight while the bass was convincingly tuneful and deep.

'Dead And Bloated' from the Stone Temple Pilots DVD-A was surprisingly good, with huge dynamics, clear vocal intonations and wonderful electronic guitar timbre. I could not discern any harshness or glare through the Townshend; instead one could revel in the melodic but abrasive guitar rock of the Stone Temple Pilots at both higher and lower than normal volume settings without any ringing distortions. The powerful oscillating guitar melodies on 'Sex Type Thing' were stunning through the Townshend where the instruments timed beautifully allowing Scott Weiland's distinctive and dynamic vocals which can go from guttural lows to higher pitched wails to shine brilliantly.

So how does the Townshend compare in sound quality terms with

"the gloriously wide tonal palette... can only be down to those unique analogue audio output transformers"

the similarly priced Onkyo DV-SP1000E Universal Player (£2,800), which has become something of a hi res reference for me of late? The Onkyo preferred to concentrate on a more internalised musical formation in comparison, while the Townshend was subjectively quieter and had more headroom. As a result the Onkyo had an upfront immediacy and thus instantly sounded more

#### MUSIC:

Ramones 'Anthology' CD 1999  
Orbital 'Snivilisation' CD 1994  
Phillip Glass / Yo Yo Ma 'Naqoyqatsi' CD 2002  
Naoko Imai '7 Organs' CD 2004  
Barb Jungr 'Love Me Tender' SACD 2005  
Dire Straits 'Brothers In Arms' SACD 1985/2005  
Stone Temple Pilots 'Core' DVD-A 1992/2000

#### REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Eclipse A502 Single Input Amplifier (£875)  
Onkyo DV-SP1000E Universal Player (£2,800)  
Green Mountain Audio Callista Loudspeakers (£2,200)

engaging, and it did have better bass extension - if not bass tunefulness - in comparison. The Onkyo favoured a slight midband stance while the Townshend simply opened out the music and excelled dynamically. To my tastes, the dramatic sounding Townshend was better overall, although many would take the

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World Radio History





Onkyo's analysis – not to mention its far superior build and finish.

**CONCLUSION**

The Townshend was an utterly enjoyable listen and for its musical ability I can heartily recommend it. It was stunning in most aspects, and while not the world's supreme CD player still wasn't far off the pace of the very best - it is certainly one of the finest universal players in

production. The only thing that could be improved is the build quality, which while robust does not compare to the super-slick assembly and functionality of the £2,800 Onkyo DV-SP1000E or £2,995 Linn UniDisk SC for instance. The Townshend's S-video connection is entirely fine by me, as I have no complaints at all about its video quality. However others may be turned on by a player like the Onkyo

with its more up to date video connectivity (such as HDMI and DVI). Nevertheless, Max Townshend points out how the highest fidelity in the DVD video soundtrack can dramatically enhance the whole visual experience, and he's not wrong. Most importantly for *Hi-Fi World* magazine, the Townshend TA565 CD is an exceedingly musical hi-fi source component.

**THE EDITOR SAYS:**

Hearing high end hi res (DVD universal) players can be much of a muchness. They're all unfailingly even, detailed, smooth and tidy in presentation, with a good deal of dynamics and speed – but the Townshend 565 CD is something else altogether. Take Onkyo's DV-SP9000E as a case in point – it's about as good as you'll get from an all-purpose universal machine, quite frankly. It just does everything so professionally, and makes a great case for never spending any more money on any other disc player. But try the Townshend and suddenly you realise what you're missing: massive dynamic headroom, tremendous speed and – what really sets this apart from everything from Naim's DVD-5 to Linn's UniDisk SC – amazing tonal colour. It's not coloured per se, but rather it doesn't refract the music through a 'grey filter' like almost every other universal machine (admittedly the Onkyo's isn't grey, it's more champagne gold!) around. The TA 565 CD has the same gloriously wide tonal palette that makes the Sugden A21SE Class A integrated amplifier so special – and this, along with the speed and dynamic articulation – is what makes it so special with SACD and DVD-Audio. This, I think, can only be down to those unique analogue audio output transformers. Its CD abilities are also excellent, but don't hold up to Naim's DVD-5 in terms of speed and grip, for example. I suppose you could say it's not as impressive on CD, although in truth I think it's more a case of being so clean that it lets hi res truly tear off into the distance. Downsides; well it lacks the Onkyo's strong and muscular bass, and almost pedantic obsession with low level detail, and boy could it be better finished. I've only seen the crackle black finish, which looked a tad agricultural – but if the chrome finish of my Townshend Audio Maximum Supertweeters is anything to go by, hopefully this needn't be an issue. DP

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

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- build and finish

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

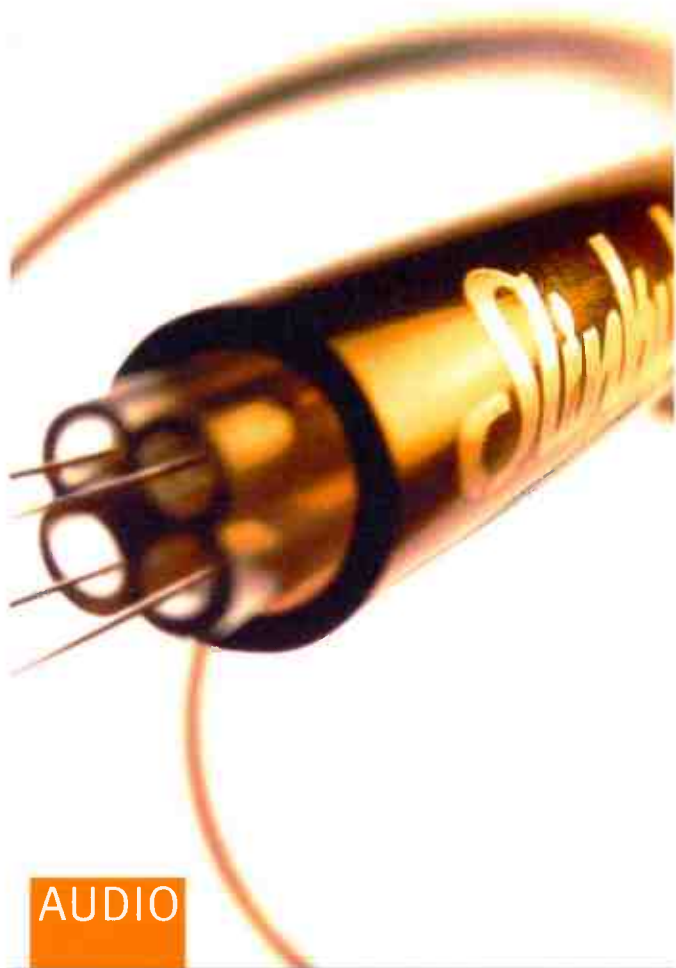
| Frequency response | 4Hz - 19.8kHz |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Distortion         |               |
| -6dB               | 0.004         |
| -60dB              | 0.18          |
| -80dB              | 3.2           |
| -80dB dithered     | 2.1           |
| Separation         |               |
| 1kHz               | -             |
| 20kHz              | -             |
| Noise (IEC A)      | -109dB        |
| Dynamic range      | 110dB         |
| Output             | 2.1V          |

The unusual output amplifier arrangement affected time domain behaviour, making convolution of an impulse impossible. Measuring frequency response with fixed tones as a work around gave a normal enough result our analysis shows, a small (+0.2dB) lift in output being visible around 8kHz, enough to give just a slight sense of detailing. Both high quality outputs had 100mV d.c. on them, so a.c. coupling within an accompanying amplifier is vital. Most are a.c. coupled on their inputs for safety, to cope with items such as this.

Distortion levels were very low and dynamic range high as a result. With just 0.004% at -30dB and 0.18% at -60dB the basic Pioneer player is very linear. Noise was low at full muting and output normal at 2V from the quality audio outputs. My review sample had its channels reversed and clipped on one channel with the other muted during separation tests, hence no separation figures. Likely due to a wiring error in the muting circuits, this does not affect real life performance as one channel doesn't mute with music.

The review sample was a hair-shirt item, unchecked and not working properly. However, the underlying player is a good one and the mods do seem to work well enough, given a chance.

NK



AUDIO

42

## Slinkylinks

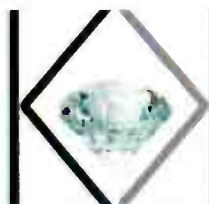
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STAX



# Balanced Thinking

Noel Keywood has an interesting and unusual hi-fi tweak that's both dramatically effective and reasonably priced, in the shape of a transformer-coupled balanced AC mains supply.

**S**traight from your local building site comes this idea for improving your hi-fi - and it isn't a slab of concrete to put under the turntable. Up one level in building site technology is the site safety transformer, on display in your local HSS hire shop as a big, yellow box with shuttered outlets. Inside lies a special transformer. It steps 230V mains down to 110V and has a centre tapped secondary. The idea isn't to get a purer sound from a Kango hammer, so much as to deliver no more than 55V or so relative to ground to avoid shock, even in the wet.

Improving safety isn't much of a priority in domestic hi-fi as it's safe enough, but this idea, albeit in different form, has other advantages. By reducing ground currents and noise it reputedly can improve the sound of a hi-fi system quite dramatically. But like all things hi-fi, there are those who talk it up and those who pooh-pooh the idea. The theory seemed sound enough to me, all the same, and at worst I could only blow up the television, computer and hi-fi all at once, so I picked up the telephone to order a transformer...

The idea of balancing the mains to reduce noise, hum and various ills in professional sound equipment - especially studios - isn't new, but so far it isn't an idea that's gained traction. If you want to read more, just take a look at <http://www.equitech.com/>, a U.S. company that specialises in supplying balanced power. They use toroidal

transformers, however, about which I have great reservations. We ditched toroidals in World Audio Design amps some time ago, taking good advice to go back to proper frame transformers (AKA E/Is) for best results. They're heavier and more expensive, but do the job better. I'm no transformer expert though and was prepared to take the advice of our transformer company, who not only wind fantastic audio transformers, but also happen to specialise in big power transformers, which are another area altogether. You can see what they came up with in the picture - lovely isn't it?

I should point out that this 35kg block of iron - a two man lift - isn't identical to a site transformer. It is similar in having a centre tapped secondary, which gives 125V relative to ground from a 250V supply, so it improves safety, but that is a side issue here. Site transformers step down the voltage; this one does not. It has a 250V output. It is also constructed specially to give a performance appropriate to its particular task, which means isolating the hi-fi from mains-borne noise as

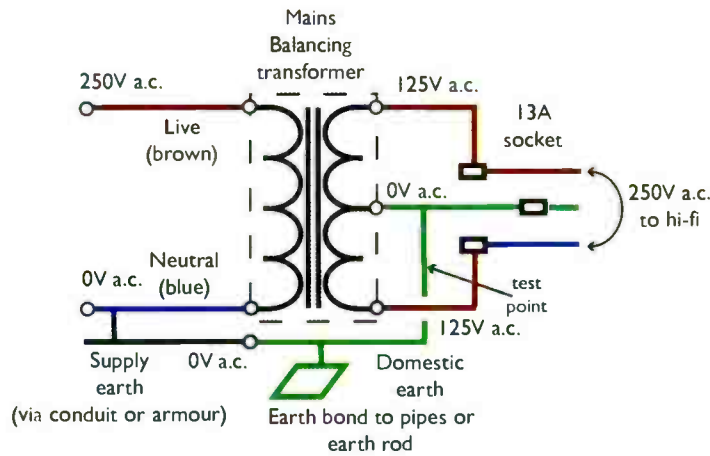
well as giving it a fully balanced supply, the two being different. What I wanted to know is, would it improve the hi-fi, or blow it up?

## SAFE HOUSE?

Perhaps this idea hasn't gained traction because it seems risky. This is ironic because it is in principle safer, but neither I nor experts at the Institution of Electrical Engineers, responsible for our Electrical Wiring and Safety Regulations, could be at all sure how items connected up to a centre tapped mains supply would respond. I asked them and they suggested any items connected should be 'suitable'. Er, yes, quite. Since the live and neutral wires of our mains supply are always treated as being live, even though neutral (blue) is earthed, it should all work well. Smoke would only appear if there was any ground referencing in the primary circuit, which there never is (I told myself)...

Building valve amplifiers has equipped me with a healthy fear of the mains and high voltages. Worse, for this project I realised I would





*How it works: the mains enters from left in this diagram, via usual Live and Neutral wires. The secondary winding, at right, delivers 250V out, but it is centre tapped to ground. This gives a balanced output that cancels ground currents, measurement shows.*

have to connect a spectrum analyser to the mains, something that would produce a very expensive puff of smoke if I got it wrong. My best friend and defence in situations like this is a large variable voltage transformer (Variac) capable of delivering 4amps. With this I could wind up the volts slowly and watch or smell for signs of distress, a precaution I routinely take with prototype valve amps.

The big question was: would a balanced mains supply evaporate the hi-fi, TV and computer? Initially, I gingerly wound up the Variac, praying that I wouldn't be greeted by that nasty burning smell you get from tortured electrical devices as they expire - but nothing happened. The Philips TV came on normally, the hi-fi had no problem with it and a whole bench of test equipment fired up and ran perfectly. Sure enough, a voltmeter showed just 125V relative to ground on live and neutral, but in spite of this complete rearrangement of working conditions everything worked perfectly. A Mac Mini computer and a home brew PC (switch mode supplies) were happy too, as were all its peripherals, like disc drives and what have you. A

popped back up on the router's DHCP Client Table, working properly. So it had survived too.

The transformer manufacturers asked me to run their beastie flat out to check voltage droop, and core and copper losses. It was specified to have superb regulation and run cool (much less than 130 degrees C) under full load, so I ran two electric fires and a hi-fi system from it for hours, drawing a full load of 10A, without the windings getting anything other than warm. The core gets quite hot though (I would guess 50-60 degrees), even with no load, because the primary is low impedance. This has to be accepted, since increasing turns would have run the core cooler at the expense of regulation. We used good grade laminations; top grade would have reduced core losses and heat a little - about 20% - at increased cost.

I could say this was a real industrial grade transformer, but it wasn't - it was higher than that. It was audio grade, as the designer knew I wanted top dollar regulation, conservative core temperature, good lamination quality, and heavy gauge copper windings to minimise full load heating. He chose a twin bobbin

picture. Transformers are normally wound coaxially, one winding on top of the other, giving tight coupling. Separate bobbins gives more room for heavy copper windings, with lower heat retention and better regulation. This was an audio special that performs better than would normally be considered necessary, and far better than industrial grade - we don't want any of that!

**SOUND TRANSFORMATION?**

At first, having got everything fired up I was slightly puzzled. There seemed to be a subtle cleaning and clearing of the sound, but with LP it wasn't great, although that is not to say not useful. I then realised that the record playing equipment I was using wasn't likely to be so affected by the reduction in mains related earthing currents and such like as modern solid-state equipment, something that measurement confirmed with surprising certainty. A Denon DVD-2900 player I use showed exactly the same benefit with CD, but to a greater degree. I should be excited, but it brought an added depth to the sound stage here that moved it up dangerously close to an Ortofon Kontrapunkt moving coil cartridge, albeit running through a lower quality phono stage.

After a while I felt that benefits were certainly there and worth having too; it was akin to using a good preamplifier. The extra sense of depth and space with CD were subtle but persuasive. I felt at this point that the improvement wasn't as large as I'd hoped for, but suspected they were likely to be equipment related and, possibly, the items I was using weren't deficient in their power supplies. Subsequent measurement provided some interesting support for this view.

A balanced mains supply is meant to reduce earth currents, and the multifarious problems they cause. A lot of ills are blamed on earth currents as both design and studio engineers know from bitter experience that all their best hopes and efforts can be dashed by unaccounted for earthing problems. Let's just say that earth currents are the bane of good audio, as tech. talk on all this is endless, as well as abstruse. Prodding around the system with a spectrum analyser I noted that my mains supply was delivering 250V, with 4% distortion, predominantly fifth order due to current draw at peaks by equipment outside my home, as I switched everything off before measurement. An extended harmonic structure looked much like

*"it was akin to using a good preamplifier - the extra sense of depth and space with CD were subtle but persuasive..."*

Belkin Ethernet wireless bridge lost its settings in protest, but after my usual mutterings and cursings over its infernal set-up procedure, it

arrangement to give loose mains coupling, in order to minimise noise and interference transmission. You can see this construction in the



"I did ask the manufacturers what sort of tranny would be needed to power a house, but was told it would need a crane..."

digital distortion. Switching on an entire hi-fi system did not change this one bit, with or without the transformer in circuit. This surprised me a little; I expected some small change, but I do have a stiff supply, as all house cables and the street supply are relatively new, and a low impedance supply will be resistant to change (i.e. have good regulation).

But as a balanced supply is meant to affect earth currents, perhaps I was looking in the wrong place. Consequently, I inserted a 4 ohm resistor in the earth line on a system and connected the analyser across this to sense earth currents, with and without the transformer. The result was fascinating. In conventional unbalanced mode I measured a paltry 100uV across it, at 50Hz, with everything blazing away. This is hardly large; I had expected at least a few millivolts, or ten times as much. But things were to get a little interesting. I switched off my WAD 300B valve amplifier and the figure dropped just 2uV or so, where I had expected it to collapse, because valve amps draw current. It proved to be my Denon DVD-2900 and Aqvox phono stage were contributing most to the earth current flowing. I presume due to earth leakage in their mains transformers. Whilst we've always used the best transformers possible in WAD valve amps I didn't quite expect my venerable 300B to produce virtually no earth current, as it's mains transformer produces massive H.T. voltages and large heater currents, raising the likelihood of large earth currents, at least, larger than you'd expect from a DVD player. So this matter of earth current isn't quite what you might expect, suggesting the results you get going balanced will be varied and difficult to predict. But what of balanced power?

This was even more surprising; the earth current disappeared almost completely when the balanced transformer was put in circuit, measuring a minuscule 5uV across the 4 ohm resistor. Now, switching on the Denon and Aqvox had no affect;

the figure stayed resolutely at 5uV no matter what I switched on or off. I was expecting the TV to be a sinner, but it wasn't, which perhaps explains why balancing did not appear to improve picture quality, as is often stated.

Quite obviously, balancing does alter earth current behaviour quite dramatically, virtually eliminating earth currents completely it seems. In my set-up, the currents were very small, but I suppose they should be. The corollary here is that in any set-up with large earth leakage currents, for whatever reason, installing a balanced supply is going to have a large affect. So whilst what I heard was subtle but useful, especially with CD, others might gain much more. Perhaps this is why balanced power is often seen as a magic bullet, capable of curing the most intransigent audio ills.

I did ask the manufacturers what sort of tranny would be needed to power a house, typically drawing 60A at full trot, but was told it would need a crane. A large hi-fi and TV will likely draw 4A, or thereabouts, and a transformer of this rating (1kVA) is liftable and not too large. My little monster is a reviewer' special, proportioned to avoid limitation. I will continue to run my system from it, but as it draws 150W or so at no load, it will be switched off when not in use; there are disadvantages too.

I intend to run two test benches from balanced supplies, as here is an area where minuscule voltages and currents are commonplace, making stray leakage currents strictly unwanted. But the reason balancing is becoming an issue in testing is

#### SAFETY FIRST!

A domestic balancing transformer should be housed in an earthed steel case, for safety and to constrain its magnetic field. The Institution of Electrical Engineers say a suitable residual current circuit breaker in both live and neutral output lines is a good idea for safety; both are live lines in this case. Residual current circuit breakers, or RCDs, trip out when there's overload or current imbalance between the live and neutral conductors, meaning current to earth somewhere - they reduce the likelihood of electrocution.

The 125V of a balanced system such as this one is still potentially lethal, although current through the body is halved. As accidents commonly arise from poorly executed electrical wiring, tinkering with the arrangement I have described is in itself a dangerous business. And whilst I didn't blow anything up, that's not to say it could not happen, although I think it highly unlikely.

The Institution of Electrical Engineers also say that both live wires should be brown as they are both phase conductors; there's no blue wire or neutral. Also, if you do decide to have a go the Institution of Electrical Engineers say don't forget the most important wire of all, the green-and-yellow earth conductor; your safety may depend on it.

because 24bit resolution digital audio demands ultra low noise, in theory down to 0.12uV if a full 144dB is to be realised. This is a little academic perhaps, but all the same it explains what's driving the idea of balancing in audio - including the mains supply. Soon, perhaps, something resembling a site transformer will become common in the home, as a balanced supply is a good way to run a hi-fi, as well as a Kango.



Three 'motor start' capacitors, of 20uF apiece. Connecting them across the secondary of the balancing transformer filters out mains borne noise and interference. This is another way to lessen noise input to the hi-fi system. Motor starts are high voltage polypropylene capacitors suitable for power work.

# Special

**However much you lavish on hi-fi hardware, the ultimate determinant of how well your system performs is how it interfaces with your listening room. The good news is that it's not all down to random chance, and that rooms with 'bad acoustics' can be coaxed into sounding far better with relatively little expense – if you know what you're doing. Noel Keywood does, and here he explains all...**

**O**f all the tune up solutions available for a hi-fi system, sorting out the room acoustics is one of the most important in my view. It's also one of the most satisfying, because you end up with a nicely furnished room with a lovely acoustic. It's audible when you walk in and put a cup down; there's a peaceful hush and the chinking of the cup seemingly doesn't disturb it. Draw the curtains and sit down on what should be a generously proportioned settee, and the silence is almost intense. Put on the hi-fi and it'll sound sweet and detailed, as well as precise in terms of timing.

Sorting the room is something I am obliged to do before using or assessing any hi-fi system and, to be frank, I have become so aware of the mess a poor room makes of a good system, I find myself unable to listen in an untreated room. Luckily, I have learnt that applying the necessary basic treatments is neither difficult nor expensive - in fact it's cheap. You can tune up your room sometimes just by moving a bookcase or two, buying a set of heavy, well lined quality curtains or, possibly, an acoustic panel or two at a cost of £30 apiece. The improvements you can make are not small; they are large and immediately obvious. In fact, although I use a measuring

unwanted reflections.

There's no need to worry too much about the theory that's always bandied around on this subject, but I should explain what you can and can't do, and why. And also what you

plus reflected sound from walls, floor and ceiling.

should try to do, and why. Room dimensions affect bass quality and there's not much you can do here without calling in the builders. But I will cover this simply, all the same, since poor bass isn't untreatable. My main concern is with wall, floor and ceiling reflections that confuse the sound (a time domain problem), add a lot of obvious distortion (an amplitude domain problem) and rob a system, betwixt speaker and ear, of a multitude of wonders within it. Your room is the last item in the reproduction chain and totally mediates what you hear.

## UPON REFLECTION

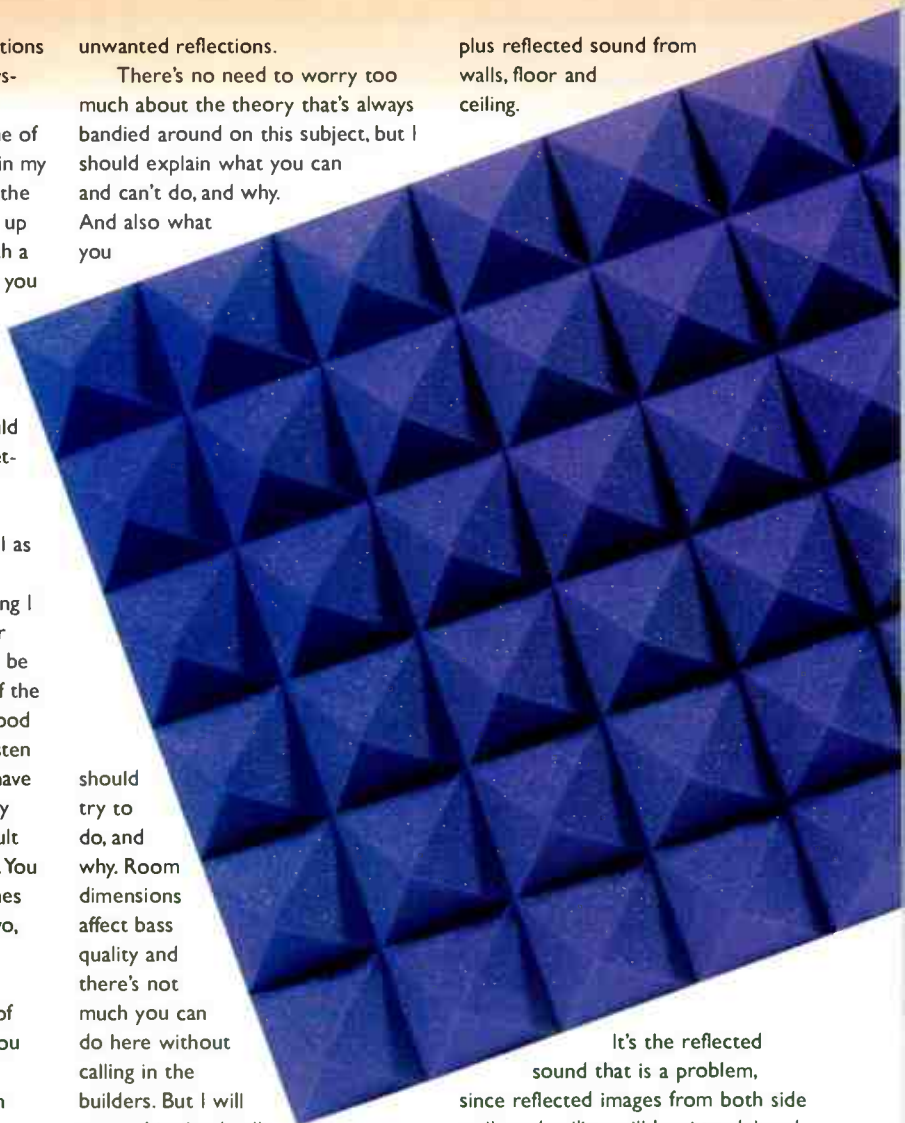
In your listening position, you hear direct sound from the loudspeakers,

It's the reflected sound that is a problem, since reflected images from both side walls and ceiling will be time-delayed and severely distorted in terms of amplitude. They rob a system of its basic cleanliness and smoothness, adding a coarseness that can be intrusive to the point of dominant. Then there's the sheer muddle you get from time delayed rubbish coming in late to overwhelm fine detail within the music; your ears and brain may struggle attempting to sort it all out.

There's no need to cover side walls completely to tame them. In theory, you need to put either a sound absorbing panel, or possibly a

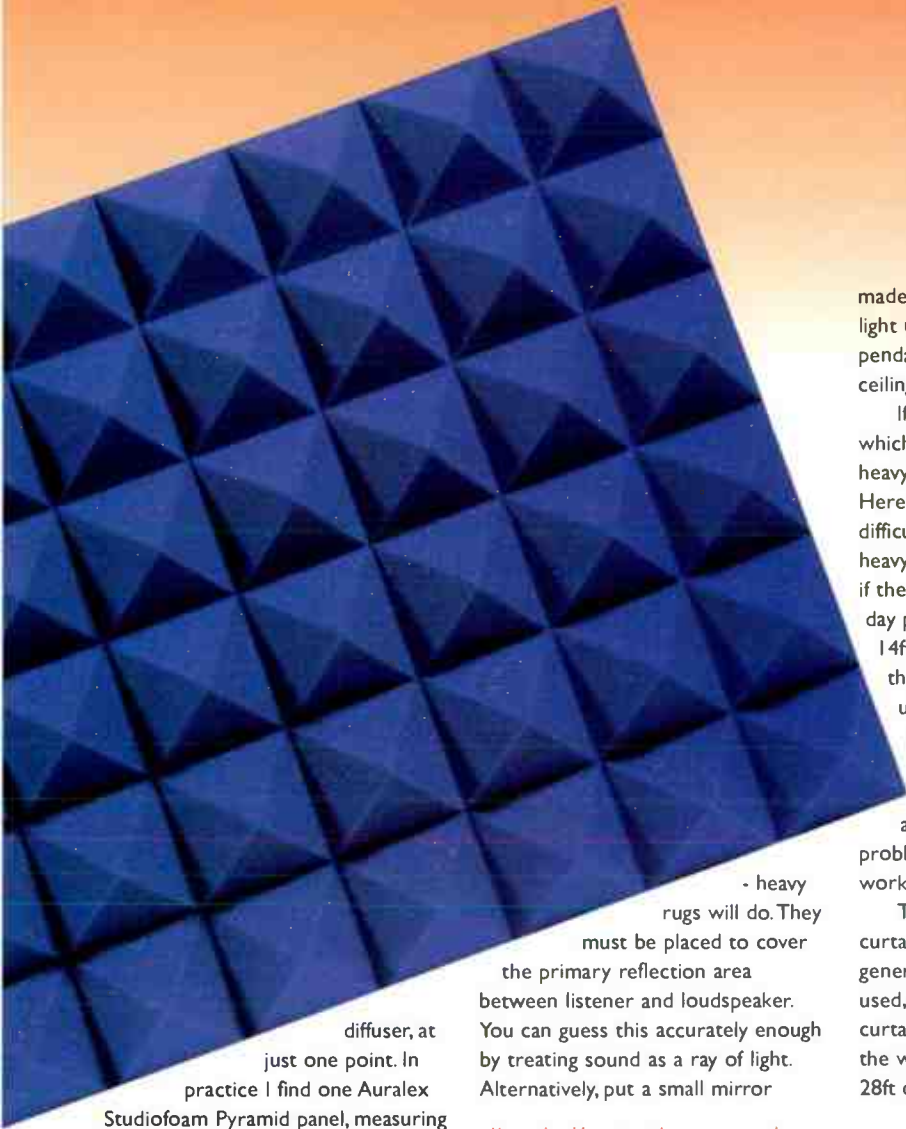
*"it's uncanny how much of a mess a poor room makes of a good system..."*

microphone and spectrum analyser, I rely more on my ears for this process, plus a few simple tricks like clapping my hands and listening to the decay, and moving my head around whilst listening to the hi-fi to detect phase problems caused by





# treatment



diffuser, at just one point. In practice I find one Auralex Studiofoam Pyramid panel, measuring 2ft x 4ft x 100mm deep, is enough to tame side wall reflections, and at £30 apiece from StudioSpares this amounts to just £60. If you have hard side walls, this is a simple and obviously effective solution from which you will plainly hear improvement. I mount these foam panels on thin MDF panels from Homebase, using double sided tape, and hang them from the picture rails. Best to make them light and movable, as you may need to experiment.

As an alternative to panels like this, you could move into position a bookcase, full of books to act as diffusers, or you could hang curtains, or rugs. I also use curtains and rugs, but two absorbers do most of the job in a controlled fashion.

Floor reflections are best absorbed by carpet. If you have a hard wood floor - popular nowadays

- heavy rugs will do. They must be placed to cover the primary reflection area between listener and loudspeaker. You can guess this accurately enough by treating sound as a ray of light. Alternatively, put a small mirror

(about 10in square) on the floor and move it until you can see an image of the loudspeaker's drive units, when sitting at the listening position. This is a trick you can use on side walls too.

Ceiling reflections are more difficult to treat. Most people do not want acoustic panels in the ceiling, studio style. StudioSpares stock a shallow diffuser panels though that, painted to match the ceiling, are not too obtrusive. Auralex DST-R sound tile reflectors are just 25mm thick for example, and cost just £3.22 per tile, each of which is 1ft square. Mounted on a rigid backing, like plywood or MDF, they could be

made into a combined diffuser and light unit, to replace the standard pendant lamp. Visually, this moves the ceiling up, making it seem higher.

If you have large areas of glass, which can reflect a lot of sound, heavy curtains are the best solution. Here things can get a little more difficult, as well as expensive. Really heavy curtains need a rigid metal rail if they are to draw properly. I spent a day putting up a standard plastic rail, 14ft long, and had to take it down; the runners and rail distorted under the weight of the curtains. Bending a metal rail into place around a large bay isn't easy. In another room I have a batten along the ceiling to avoid this problem; it gives a straight run and all works well.

To act as acoustic absorbers curtains need to be thick and generous in the amount of material used, the rule of thumb being the curtains must be twice as wide as the window, which in my case meant 28ft of curtaining. Complete with

“whilst the missus might be eyeing a big settee in DFS, you may alternatively see it as a great bass trap!”

lining this turns out to be a lot of weight, but then thin curtains won't do the job. Cost? Er, well, about that of a good hi-fi amplifier. It made me wince, but then people spend thousands on curtains and it need not go this far. By the way, when reviewing I put up the Auralex panel as this cleans the upper bass, even with the curtains drawn, so acoustic foam absorber panels are more effective, as well as cheap, light and simple. You don't have to wrestle with giant curtains, but then they do look a little nicer than foam panels.

Finally, if you sit against a wall, then energy reflected from it must

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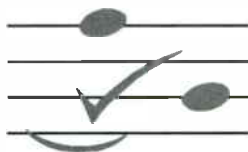
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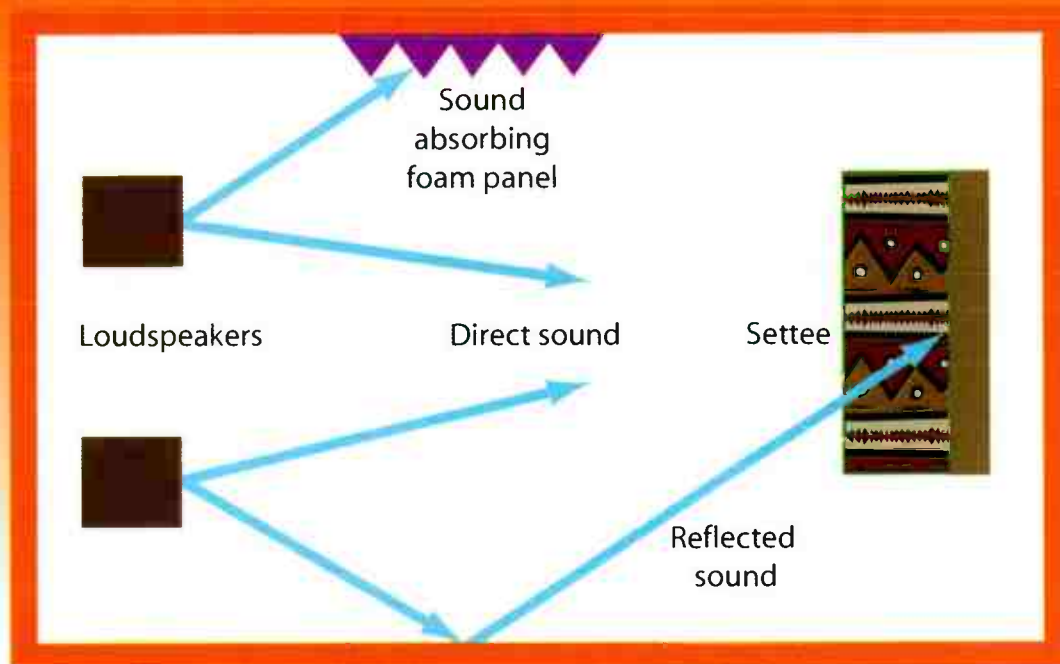
be absorbed or diffused to prevent comb filtering. Of the two I find diffusion gives a livelier sound; heavy rear absorbers can make the sound go almost dead, as in an anechoic chamber. However, this sort of thing can be situation dependent, so it is always worth experimenting. Again, mount rear diffuser panels on a light backing that can be moved. Cover it with a light fabric that matches the furniture.

Taming reflections in this fashion will sort out your hi-fi wonderfully, giving a superb sound. Most systems sound intrinsically a lot better than their owners people realise, including even the manufacturers, believe it or not, since comprehensively treated rooms that are at the same time representative of typical UK listening conditions are rare in hi-fi companies. Room acoustics is a subject few want to get involved in and over-treated rooms, with odd shapes, sloping ceilings and what have you generally sound weird, because they are weird. We are used to a certain sound balance and UK loudspeakers are, broadly speaking, tuned to work with UK rooms, not with funny acoustic concoctions. By the way, American homes are generally a lot larger than ours and really demand a different type of approach altogether. It is only 'small', hard surfaced rooms that have a deep reflection problem.

## THE LOW DOWN

Down at the bass end it's more difficult to tame a room that's misbehaving. There's far more energy to absorb, especially in a room's 'standing waves', as set by the basic room dimensions. As a room gets smaller, it's basic resonant modes rise in frequency and become more obvious to the ear. They also become less well damped and can sound quite lively. If we take 40Hz as the lowest frequency a room should support fully, the largest dimension can be no less than 13ft 6in. Taking into account modal gain, around 12ft is acceptable. Much smaller than this a room will sound very 'modal', or resonant, even if its modes are well spaced in classic 1:1.25:1.6 ratio, or the Golden Ratio. Whatever, the ratio, modern low ceilings, at 8ft or less will produce a mode at 70Hz or higher, at which frequency it is plainly audible. There's not a lot you can do about this, short of moving out...

What to do with a small room? There's an almost impossible conflict of requirements to resolve here, as you haven't got the space to house the absorbers you may need.



**Hard side walls and – especially – glass windows send back severely distorted reflections that dirty and muddle the sound. Getting rid of the main "images" on each side wall by using acoustic foam panels, or curtains or rugs, is a great way to improve sound quality. A sound diffuser, like a row of books, behind the settee is a good idea too.**

However, I have found tall, fully loaded bookcases (Ikea) in corners have quite an effect, as do well upholstered settees. Bear in mind that the foam used in settees is similar to that used in acoustic bass traps, so whilst the missus might be eyeing a big settee in DFS, you may alternatively see it as a great bass trap! I said earlier that all this need not cost too much. If a monster from DFS or World of Leather seems contradictory, check out Sofas and Settees on e-bay. With an astonishing 1,900 items listed you can get Harrods finest here for pocket money, providing you have a pantechinon to collect it.

Talking of bass traps you have to think big to absorb energy and most commercial types are too small to have much effect I have found. For example, a Big Bass Trap I have, comprising 3.3kgs of foam weighing 3.3kgs, cost £90 from StudioSpares, has little affect, as do a set of corner traps. Bookcases are better. And be prepared to use small loudspeakers in a small room, not just because they consume less valuable space, but also because they excite a room's modes less.

Whilst you can pressure drive a room below its lowest natural frequency with a subwoofer, forcing it to go as low as you wish in theory, quality is usually mediocre.

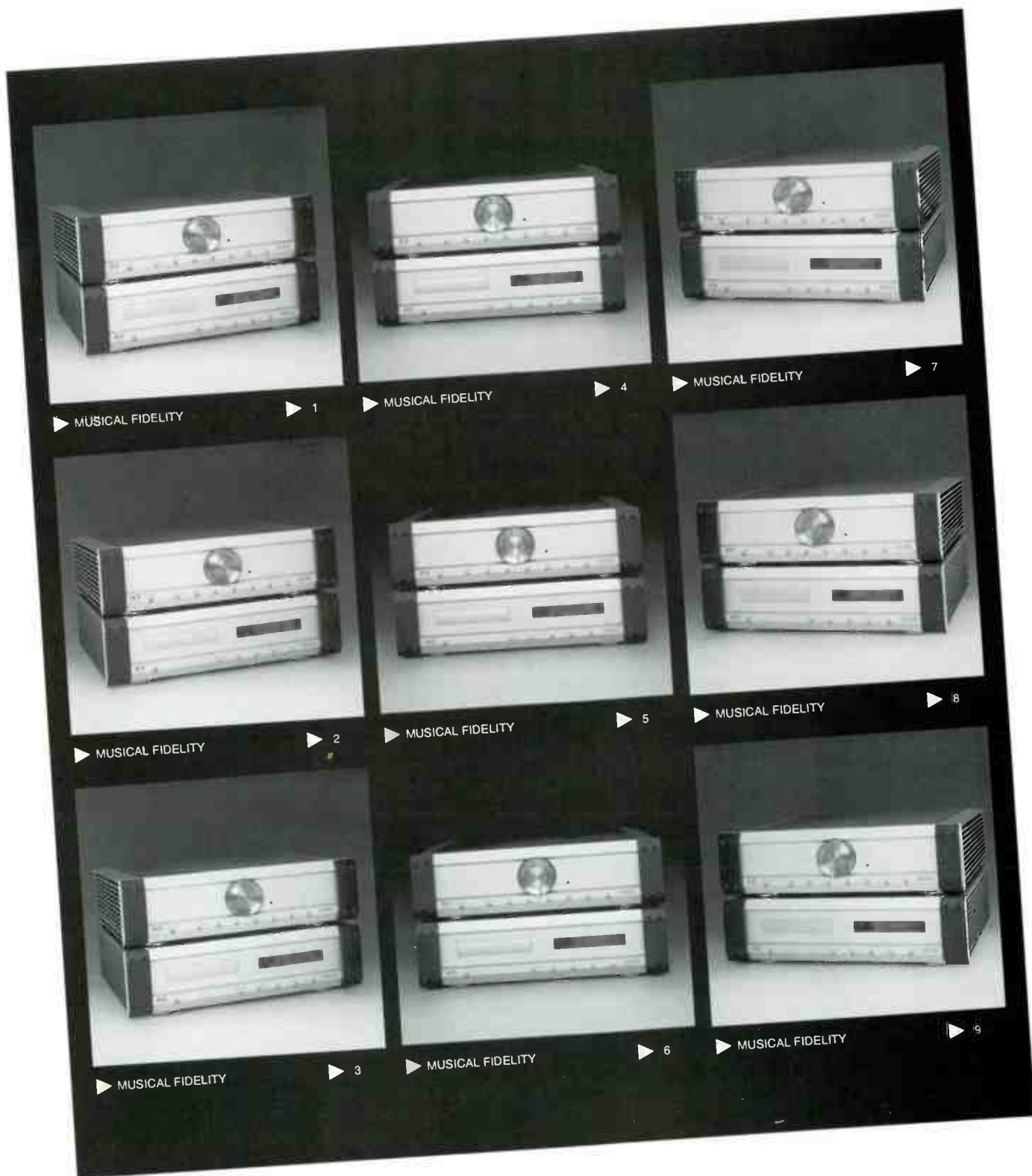
Medium size rooms, up to about 18ft in the longest dimension, are easier to tame. Move loudspeakers away from walls and corners to drive

the room less. You need to experiment to get the right balance here; there are no hard and fast rules. Use bookcases and settees to absorb bass boom. Sitting away from a wall will reduce the sound pressure maximum it supports due to its modal influence.

Large rooms do not usually boom, as their modes - ignoring the ceiling - are usually at such a low frequency they are difficult to excite. They are also better damped. The problem here is more likely to be one of insufficient bass unless large loudspeakers are used to pump in low frequency energy. This is what big floorstanders with multiple bass units are for. If you don't have a big room, beware that they will over drive a small or medium sized room, likely sounding bass heavy and boomy.

## JOB WELL DONE

Room tuning can be cheap - you don't have to buy a new home. Just use a bit of ingenuity to hide a pair of Studiofoam panels behind an attractive fabric and you may end up spending just £60 or so for a great improvement. Move a few bookcases into the right position and things will get even better. New curtains? Just what the acoustician ordered. And a big comfy group of settees will finish it all off. It's a great way to get fantastic sound quality in a room you'll love to listen in and in my view is one of the best tune ups you could ever do.



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# In Tune

David Price looks at some great ways to seriously raise your system's sound quality without breaking the bank...



## BRADSHAW ISOLATION PLATFORM £90

There's nothing new behind the idea of an isolation platform – the breed has been around since the eighties. However, the use of materials has progressed beyond the simple expedient of screwing spikes into Medium Density Fibreboard, and we're now seeing all sorts of elaborate materials being offered. Acrylic is one such type, and it has a very good and proven track record – not least because Michell Engineering has been using it extensively in its turntable bases (nee plinths) and dustcovers for twenty five years now. Acrylic (or Perspex as it is called) is actually an excellent damping material – it's very dead and devoid of ringing, something you can't say for any metal and even many types of wood. Trouble is that it's very expensive and tricky to machine, so the cost is often prohibitive. However, the Bradshaw Isolation Platform offers stunning value for money. Just £90 buys you a 450x350x400mm) 20mm thick clear Acrylic base (sizes up to 450x510x400mm are also available) complete with brass spikes. The finish is superb, and the platform looks exquisite, especially with 'skeletal' decks such as the Michell GyroDec SE (shown). Better still, the sound is obviously improved. It's a subtle but thoroughly positive transformation, with lower noise floors, tighter and more tuneful bass, and cleaner and more three dimensional midband and sweeter but more incisive treble. The Bradshaw Platform can only be regarded as superlative value considering the effect it has for the money. Master craftsman Michael Bradshaw also makes dustcovers for any turntable (or CD player for that matter) to order; a standard size cover for a Michell GyroDec SE (510x400x180H) in 5mm Acrylic is also £90, for example.

### CONTACT:

**Michael Bradshaw**  
01670828086  
michael@bradshaw4004.fsnet.co.uk



## VIBRAPODS £22/4

The importance of isolation cannot be understated. It's not a niche issue for serial tweakers, it's the beginning and end of whether your hi-fi's going to sound as it should. There are no small number of ways of isolating your equipment from air and structure-borne vibrations, one of the simplest and most effective being to place each component on a half inflated bicycle inner tube. This shows how the pressed steel and/ or alloy casing of most hi-fi separates act as large resonator boxes, shaking the microphonic electronic components and thus colouring the sound. The inner tube damps most of this out, transforming the sonics – but the trouble is, it's not exactly the most domestically acceptable solution! Foculpods are an excellent, affordable compromise. They look good and work extremely well. The effect is also cumulative, so the more components you isolate, the better the sound. Made from a sticky, rubbery compound, they come in five grades designed for separates of differing weights. Getting the right grade is key for best results. Vibrapods are easy to set up, and there's good advice on the website – we got best results by bypassing the equipment's own feet. Placed under a good sounding 'affordable audiophile' CD player (such as Musical Fidelity's X-RAY v3) yields amazing results. As small footprint (half size) designs like this only need three (available separately at £5.50 each) Vibrapods, the sonic improvement for £16.50 is all the more profound. Most obvious is the recorded acoustic, which becomes wider and more capacious; the midband becomes smoother and more detailed, the treble sweeter yet more detailed and the bass stronger

yet more tuneful. Combine these with Kontak and it's a completely different sounding device! It isn't a case of wondering whether you should try these, but rather you should be trying to justify to yourself why you haven't...

### CONTACT:

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## DENSEN DVDMAGIC £20

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run its process at normal or low volume, which takes about three minutes and repeat as necessary. The difference through the amplifier settings showed the music had become quieter meaning that the subjective dynamic range had increased thus enabling higher volumes to be used comfortably. The music becomes focussed, clear and could handle difficult crescendos with authority and less subjective distortion. The definition of music improved as a whole and then into details, for instance the DVDMagic was able to make bass lines in particular less flabby with superior timbral qualities, while the treble gained in resolution and control. The overall effect of the DVDMagic was a discernable improvement without stifling or highlighting any one part of the music tested. For £20 the DVDMagic is great value and highly recommended for improved sound quality and as a tool for breaking-in new hi-fi.

**CONTACT:****Densen****+45 75 18 12 14****[www.densen.com](http://www.densen.com)**

amazing the difference that final turn can make – the sound goes from vague to vivid, ponderous to powerful, dull to dynamic. Trouble is, most mounting hardware supplied with cartridges (even illustrious names, from Shure to Ortofon) is woefully inadequate for the job of gripping the cartridge body to the headshell. The result is that thousands of pounds of fancy vinyl hardware goes to waste... This affordable and excellent quality kit from Michell Engineering Contains two 10mm and two 16mm long stainless steel Allen bolts, washers, nuts and an Allen key. They're easily strong enough to clamp cartridge and arm together like there's no tomorrow – in fact, a word of warning: you'll be able to crack most cartridge bodies and/or headshells if you're not careful. So the trick is to tighten the nuts hard, but as soon as you sense that you're applying too much torque (i.e. lots of effort, no movement) then ease off just a touch. Remember off course that it's far better to take the arm off the deck when doing this, as doing in situ can – in extreme cases – wreck the arm bearings. Instead, put the stylus guard on, remove the arm and lie it on its side with its counterweight off. This done, when you've got things nice and tight, you can be sure that your vinyl source will give of its best.

**CONTACT:****J.A. Michell Engineering Ltd.****+44.(0)208.953.0771****[www.michell-engineering.co.uk](http://www.michell-engineering.co.uk)**

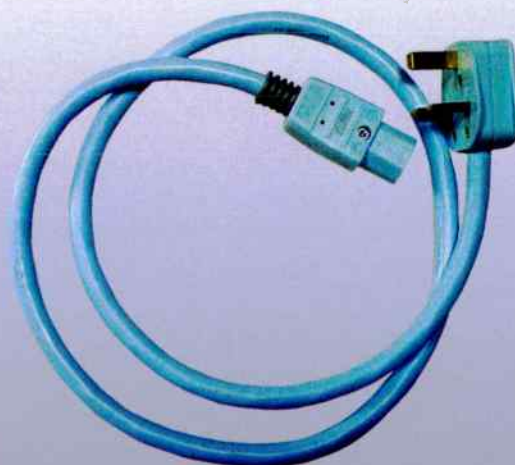
after shave) and a flash piece of packaging. They are then given a silly price (think one hundred times cost) and sold to dealers with margins big enough to keep the store owner in Porsche Cayennes for the rest of his natural... but not so Supra. This company makes it all in house in its Swedish factory, under the watchful eye of designer (and boss) Tommy Jenving – an accomplished ex-telecoms engineer. As such, this sub-£40 cable represents superb value for money; construction quality is superlative at the price and it has the rare accolade of being a CE-approved design. A fully shielded cable, it boasts three 1.5 sq.mm tinned Oxygen Free Crystal conductors with short pitch twisting of the cores to cancel radiation, plus extensive, earthed screening to reduce radiated noise. The 'total coverage' aluminium foil screen also eliminates RF pickup in the mains cable. Purpose designed as a mains cable (it isn't found in doorbell wiring), it has a flexible yet tough outer covering, making it easy to position and install. Finally, it's terminated with a high quality IEC plug on one end, and a Supra gold-plated 13 amp BS-approved mains plug on the other. LoRad is already being specified for use in medical facilities, hospitals and areas where mains borne interference can be a problem for other sensitive equipment, but is also effective where other (human ear-shaped) sensitive equipment is used. At the price, we've found that very little can touch it; it's not the best mains cable

in the world by a long way, but it gives two-thirds of what some of the most expensive mains cables we've heard can do, at a fraction of the cost. Compared to a standard IEC it's night and day – the Supra is dramatically cleaner, smoother,

sweeter and more three dimensional with a more musical, less mechanical sound. Right now, one of the best all rounders we've heard at under £100 per metre.

**CONTACT:****Glaive Limited****+44 01622 664 070****[www.supracables.co.uk](http://www.supracables.co.uk)****MICHELL ENGINEERING CARTRIDGE MOUNTING KIT £7**

Never let it be said that getting the best from a turntable is easy. In fact, it's a fiddly and fraught process that – whilst not technically insurmountable by any means – can be a downright pain. The essentials, of course, revolve around isolation, placement and suspension bounce, but then there's the small matter of setting up the arm and aligning the cartridge. But even if you get every last detail right, from your belt tension to your vertical tracking angle, if the cartridge is not tightened up properly in the headshell, it all goes to waste. It's

**SUPRA LORAD 1.5G £39.99**

Most so-called audiophile mains cables on sale are effectively rebadged, rebranded OEM Chinese fare, ordered in large quantities from wholesalers, terminated with a cheapo OEM Chinese plug, given predictably naff names (think 'Dungeons and Dragons' or 1970s

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### MISSING LINK SUPPLIER £70

Mains distribution boxes are a necessary evil; ideally the darned things wouldn't exist, as we hard wired our separates straight to their own dedicated spurs. While the sort of thing you pick up from Ikea for £6 is fine for bedside table lamps and mobile phone chargers, the cheap wiring and cable, allied to the lowest common denominator socketry and a noisy neon lamp, has an obvious effect – the sound gets thinner, harder and grainier, with bass suffering in weight and tunefulness. Now, there are plenty of aftermarket hi-fi designs to obviate this problem, but you can easily pay upwards of £200. Missing Link is a small specialist with a dazzling range of accessories, all of which show superb attention to detail. It claims to be the only British company that designs its own cables from the ground up, controlling every process from dielectric selection to material treatment. This said, their visual presentation (i.e. packaging) and appearance leaves a lot to be desired, but don't confuse this with the innate quality of materials, which is excellent – and ideal for the application. The Supplier 6 is a six-way unswitched mains outlet block, with the neon is then disconnected for the removal of undesirable line noise. The internal contacts are modified then hard silver-plated to reduce contact noise and pin arcing. Allied to the excellent EPS-500 plug (available separately) with silver plated fuse and a one metre run of silver plated copper Orbit mains lead (plus Ultra Clamp surge and spike protection for just £5 more), it represents excellent value. It's not the sexiest looking thing, but how it sounds is what's important here – and it is truly accomplished. There's real air and space to the acoustic, along with eerie, inky black silences and a conspicuous lack of grain or edge. Don't confuse this with blandness however, as music becomes far more detailed and yet more cohesive – things sound obviously less mechanical. Superb non-nonsense value for money.

#### CONTACT:

**The Missing Link**  
0115 877 9089

[www.the-missing-link.net](http://www.the-missing-link.net)

### THE CARTRIDGE MAN 'CARTRIDGE ISOLATOR' £80

Unfortunately, there is a 'loop' between loudspeakers and pickup cartridges, as the latter is very venerable to any and all vibrations coming from the former. It duly picks them up (along with the stylus/cantilever induced vibrations) and sends them back out through the speakers again, polluted sound and all... How then to overcome this problem? The answer is laughably simple – remove the cartridge from the loop! Pick up arm manufacturers has been trying to achieve this by various methods since the introduction of the microgroove record. Manufacturers have tried to float the arm tube in an air bearing and have had some success. Attention to arm resonance, bearing tolerance, arm mounting and cartridge set up has not solved the problems the transducer suffers. This innocuous looking stainless steel sandwich may be the answer. It is constructed from two sheets of stainless steel, with a piece of compliant material placed between them. The top plate has two studs protruding which have nuts run down them, to attach the plate to the pick up arm. The pick up cartridge is simply adhered to the bottom plate via two small locating pins as the cartridge is placed onto the glue film. This type of mounting removes the mounting bolts from the generator magnetic field; this is a good thing! Another advantage is that the cartridge has much better support across the complete cartridge body due to the adhesive used. To install the plate and cartridge combination is simple; all we have to do is increase the height of the pick up arm pedestal by about 4mm. Then we rebalance the pick up arm to the same tracking force as before the plate was installed. The difference is profound; the stereo image width grows, as does depth and height. Bass is crisper and more fluid. Transients are clearer and timing sharper. There seems to be much more space around the musicians with a much lower noise floor, and vinyl surface noise is often reduced to near-silence. Obviously, we haven't tried it with every turntable/ arm/ cartridge combination, but this is obviously an

extremely clever and effective little gadget, and all serious vinylistas should seriously consider trying it in their systems – at this price it's superb value for money.

#### CONTACT:

**The Cartridge Man Ltd.**  
020 8688 6565  
[www.thecartridgeman.com](http://www.thecartridgeman.com)

### PHONOSOPHIE CD FLUX £75

German brand Phonosophie's 200ml CD FLUX bottle

understandably doesn't reveal what all its 'secret' ingredients are but does state that CD FLUX contains ethanol.

The directions say that the printed side of a CD should be sprayed with two short bursts of the CD FLUX fluid from a distance of 15cm and gently coated with a soft tissue. It would be recommended not to use anything other than a soft tissue, as even kitchen paper towels might be abrasive to the disc surface. Also use caution when spraying and keep contact away from eyes. Then coat both the inside and outside edge of the CD evenly and finally with two more squirts finish off the reverse side of the disc. The effect CD Flux makes is in the order of replacing a good quality interconnect with an expensive high end one, where the music really opens up and the sound becomes, wider, deeper and gorgeously fluid. The music also times better where the above improvements result in a more natural acoustic. The CD FLUX was tried on an audio CD-ROM, DVD-A, SACD and standard CD and all the formats were obviously improved, with a subtly smoother and more three dimensional sound. It is probably best not to use the CD FLUX on self-labelled CD ROMs though. The CD FLUX at £75 is expensive compared to other CD cleaners but it is a high-performance product and lasts on a disc for about six months. Re-spraying is beneficial for two-three months intervals.

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# Cable Talk

Interconnects and loudspeaker cables come in thousands of weird and wonderful flavours - but there really is method behind the madness, as Noel Keywood explains...

Once upon a time it was all very simple: you used bell wire for the loudspeakers - and they had nasty spring clips to accept it. Phono leads were thin, grey straggly things with tinny little phono plugs at the end, topped off with a weak plastic body, and the aerial down lead was simply 'coax', onto which was soldered a coaxial plug - well, what else?

We all know that things aren't what they used to be - and thank heaven for that! I shudder when I see some of this stuff skulking around in my loft. But equally I find the increasing pace of change in connectors and cables can be almost alarming. So what's happening right now in audio? If you want to tune up your hi-fi, it's worth making sure it has decent cabling from end to end. Cables do make a difference, in spite of what a few sceptics might think. For example, I use some rare-in-the-UK American Tributaries, triple shielded silver video cables on the test bench, replete with gold plated, heavy duty plugs. Not only have they withstood



SOLSTICE 5



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S



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heavy use, but they also give consistently low noise in conjunction with the spectrum analysers, which is crucial. Good cables make a difference and it is just about

impossible to make up cables as sophisticated as this at home.

In most cases it is best to buy good quality cables already made up for you and the best really are very special. In particular they are superbly soldered and very strong. Expect a general improvement in clarity and smoothness, and in particular a greater sense of general precision, as if thin veil of haziness had been lifted. Top quality items introduce a sense of background darkness too, an intriguing benefit.

Whilst I could not make up cables like the Tributaries, I do have to repair and make up all sorts of other connecting cables, and they must be half decent. These days the choice of cables and connectors is very wide. You can get Taiwan's cheapest at Maplins of course, and a few better grades too, like Neutrik connectors and Vandamme wire. Maplins are just about the only high street store selling such items and their prices are low. But they don't stock some of the really glitzy plugs, like WBTs for example. "Who they?", you might ask. Good question...

*The WBT phono plug, with its point contact shield.*

## SIGNAL CABLES

Hi-fi enthusiasts aren't the only ones worrying about audio cables. They



probably use far less of the stuff than the BBC for example, or a typical music studio, it's just that they are prepared to pay more. High quality cables for audio in studios, stadiums and broadcast are made by both Klotz and Sommer of Germany, Belden of the USA and Vandamme of - believe it or not - the UK, to name a few. Go to [www.vdctrading.com](http://www.vdctrading.com) and you will find this manufacturer is based in the Kings Cross area of London, with factories in Italy and Taiwan. They are prepared to supply the public direct, have a trade counter in Kings Cross and product in Maplins. Where traditional pro cable manufacturers like the massive Belden, for example, shy away from hi-fi esoterica, Vandamme offer high quality silver plated OFC audio cables. But they explained to me that where large quantities are involved (they sell cable by the kilometre!), such as in studios and conference centres, cost is very much an issue, unlike hi-fi. Quality audio cables like this are priced on a per metre basis and run from £0.34 - £1 per metre approximately for signal cables and up to £3 per metre for heavy gauge OFC 'speaker cable. You can buy pro cables such as this from outlets like RS Components and Farnell (reels only), and StudioSpares (per metre).

At the other end of the scale, if not in name, lie Van den Hul of the Netherlands, who cater for the hi-fi market. They sell 100m reels of cable too, but at up to £10,000 a reel for The Inspiration Hybrid, for example - a mere £100 per metre. I use Royal Jade (monowire) and Teatrack (biwire) Hybrids as I like the easy sound of these cables, attributable to their carbon content. A good interconnect is something like The First Ultimate, price £200 for a terminated 0.8m length. You can buy Van den Hul cable off the reel from certain dealers (Centres of Excellence), like Sevenoaks Sound and Vision, if you want to make up your own cables. A popular choice, like The Wind, a single loudspeaker cable, costs £18/metre. As you need two lines per loudspeaker when monowiring, one 3m length to a loudspeaker will cost £108, so making up a pair will cost £216. This is not cheap, but if you have a really good system it isn't unreasonable either.

There are as many theories about how cables work as there are cables it seems. And their properties, sonic and otherwise, vary widely too. Whether a cable works in a system depends much on personal taste as far as sound quality goes, as well as



**A Neutrik professional XLR connector. Big, strong and able to take heavy balanced cables, but bulky.**

system characteristics. These days, hi-fi systems commonly sound bright and a bit sharp, not the ideal place to be using silver cables I would have thought, which in themselves seem to brighten the sound quite markedly. "Not so" say the folks at Wireworld (U.S.A.). Silver only "highlights the effects of inductive colourations" they explain. Their silver cables do not sound bright.

Interesting, no? Wireworld say flat, parallel loudspeaker cables of the sort that most of us use - including me - suffer inductive losses that blur and soften the sound. Their Symmetricoax 'speaker cables do not do this. You can buy this unusual cable from Wireworld UK, as well as their own copper spade terminals and 4mm plugs to terminate it.

But Siltec of the Netherlands insist silver needs to be accompanied by gold if cables and connectors are to sound right. And Kimber Cable, Monster, Chord, Transparent Audio Cable, Ixos and Tributaries all have their views too, all of which you can find on the internet - just type the names into a search engine, putting "cable" in the string to weed out Chinese manufacturers of knicker elastic and all the other strange things that come up.

It isn't practicable to make up the really expensive cables, nor wise, as they are difficult to prepare and solder, and you likely won't solder them as well as the major suppliers. All the same, I have to make up cables for a variety of strange situations, and here choice of cable, connector, solder and soldering iron are all crucial to quality. These homebrew cables need to be the

best quality possible and here it isn't just the cable that is an issue but the connectors.

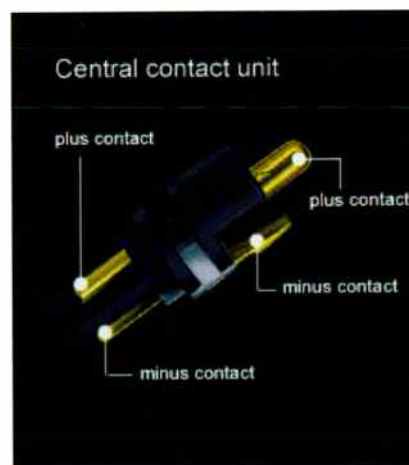
## CONNECTORS

At the top of the food chain lie WBT phono plugs and connectors, from Germany ([www.wbt.de](http://www.wbt.de)). These screw clamp types are nothing other than impressive. Nowadays, the circular ring earth pole of the traditional

*"cables are now a science everyone takes seriously..."*

RCA phono is giving away to a point contact design which is said to be better, incorporated into the WBT and the Eichmann Bullet.

The general consensus seems to be that simple turned brass plugs and sockets, gold or silver plated, are not ideal, even if they feel good, as brass isn't very conductive. It is strong, so



**A 4mm plug with spring loaded shield from Multicontact. Get it from RS.Components.**

most pro audio plugs use plated brass. Tellurium Copper cables and connectors are used by Clearer Audio and others to overcome this

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STEREO TIMES on the Aurora gold turntable & illustrious tonearm

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limitation, whilst Wireworld use oxygen free copper bodied connectors. So a connector isn't just a connector any more - you've got to check the chemistry! And whilst you are doing so don't forget the insulation. There's consensus here too: PVC is passé - it sounds bad - but PTFE, Teflon and such like are good.

Switchcraft of the USA make a peculiar right angled phono plug of very good quality, using a copper alloy body, gold or nickel plated. They also make decent XLR connectors. Wireworld have a special all-copper phono plug too, just for audio. For consistent quality throughout there's little to touch Swiss Neutrik connectors. They are very well made, accept large diameter quality cables, are easy to solder and have high

shrouded for safety, but a BFA socket will not accept a standard 4mm plug. It will accept a hollow, 4mm type plug that is able to spring open, so you will find this variant fitted to Van den Hul cables.

Standard 4mm plugs come in many varieties, mostly cheap and cheerful, with nickel plate that oxidises and becomes dull and dirty. Heavy duty plugs are commonly brass, gold plated, with a screw clamp for big cables. Whilst soldering gives a stronger and more stable joint over time, today's extremely thick OFC loudspeaker cables sink so much heat that they are almost impossible to solder. Only high power irons with the heater close to the tip can cope, or gas irons. Higher melting point lead-free solders make the situation worse. So if you intend to make up



**Wireworld's range of soft OFC copper connectors. These are strictly hi-fi.**

quality contacts. Being for pro use strength and longevity are as important as sound quality. More directed towards the hi-fi market are QED phono plugs and Eichmann bullet plugs, which use point contact like WBTs. You can find both these at [www.hificables.co.uk](http://www.hificables.co.uk), together with a wide range of proprietary hi-fi cables.

Loudspeaker cables are usually terminated by 4mm banana plugs, but in America they prefer spade terminals. The usual heavy duty loudspeaker binding post found on most amplifiers accommodates both, as well as bare wire. However, a European safety directive discourages use of bare loudspeaker terminals and unshrouded plugs, so the British Federation of Audio has devised the BFA plug, as used on Cyrus amplifiers, for example. It is fully

your own loudspeaker cables be aware of this difficulty. QED make the Airloc 4mm plug to overcome it: it is crimped in place.

Another interesting variant is the shrouded 4mm plug, which has a spring shroud that retracts as it is pushed into the socket. Made by MultiContact of Germany this neat idea prevents plugs shorting together, or to ground. Unlike the BFA plug it doesn't prevent insertion into a power outlet, for those that think this is a good idea. It doesn't accept thick cables either, a common drawback with 4mm types not designed for hi-fi use.

I've said nothing about the many other connectors found in hi-fi, from DIN plugs to XLRs. Generally though, all are improving in quality; even the humble DIN can now be



**Neutrik Pro-fi phono plugs - great quality at reasonable price.**

had in gold plated form, with locking collars and improved pins. The problem here is that DINs are too small to accept large diameter cables. XLRs on the other hand do accept big cables and are most commonly used for balanced connections, but they are bulky.

Cables and connectors certainly aren't simple any more, but as Vandamme pointed out, these days people aren't prepared to put up with noisy, crackly cables, radio breakthrough and what have you, especially at an event like the Live 8 concert which they helped cable up. Cables are now a science everyone takes seriously. Luckily, as I've illustrated here, hi-fi enthusiasts are spoilt for choice, since high-end audio produces some of the most radical chemistries and constructions in both cables and connectors you'll ever come across. They're a great way to tune up a system - just keep a Periodic Table close by.



**A 4mm plug with spring loaded shield from Multicontact. Get it from RS.Components.**

**Hi-Fi World** writers have extensive audio industry experience - from designing the best valve amplifiers, engineering bespoke pro audio installations and mastering digital discs to classic and modern hi-fi retailing. No other magazine has such a diverse wealth of editorial talent. No other magazine is able to combine the new and the old, the classic and the modern, the affordable and the expensive, the raw and the cooked, with such authority:

#### DAVID PRICE

A passion for music from an early age got DP hooked on hi-fi. His writing career began in 1990 with *New Musical Express*, and after writing for *Hi-Fi World* he joined the Doors team at *The Sunday Times*, and now edits the Home Entertainment section of *The Month* alongside this magazine. A compulsive record collector, vinyl is David's favourite tippie, and he's crazy about classic audio too - as his encyclopaedic knowledge of Japanese high end attests.



#### NOEL KEYWOOD

A leading technical journalist, his rigorous reviewing - informed by empirical measurements - has made an indelible impression on the UK hi-fi scene. After editing *Hi-Fi Answers* in the 1970s and contributing to *The Flat Response* and *Hi-Fi Review* in the 1980s, Noel went on to launch *Hi-Fi World* in 1990. His challenging approach has famously seen him expose digital audio's technical failings, and champion the cause of his beloved valve amplifiers and high sensitivity loudspeakers.



#### DOMINIC TODD

Working in hi-fi retailing since 1991 - at all levels including sales, management, purchasing, training and marketing - has given DT a forensic knowledge of modern audio and video equipment. Living at the 'coal-face' makes him brilliantly placed to comment on what kit works best and why, and to explain the politics behind it.



#### HADEN BOARDMAN

His knowledge of classic kit is almost unmatched - doubtless helped by him getting bitten by the hi-fi bug at the tender age of 9! Haden's tastes are very much of the 'valves and vinyl' ilk, his system displaying a welter of British names from the 1960s to go with his 1980s Marantz CD spinner. He's also a keen kit builder, and is not afraid to wield a soldering iron in the noble cause of superior sound.



#### PATRICK CLEASBY

After a stellar career in IT, Patrick's love of music drew him to the field of multichannel music mastering, which is now his vocation. His exhaustive knowledge of digital audio and surround sound theory and practice makes him perfectly placed to assess the latest DVD-Audio and SACD hardware and software alike.



#### STEWART WENNEN

A professional audio engineer since the 1970s, SW is still constantly amazed by the poor quality of kit that some manufacturers foist upon the buying public - but is also delighted when he finds a bargain. His redoubtable experience of designing and building his own turntables, electronics and loudspeakers through the years makes him an ideal *HFW* scribe, along with his obsession with music.



#### LJK SETRIGHT

A man whose reputation precedes him, LJKS has had a long and brilliantly distinguished writing career. Most famous for his quarter century of contributions to *CAR* magazine, he has also had over one hundred books published. A gifted, classically trained musician, his passion for hi-fi comes from an enduring love of music. A keen Radio 3 listener, LJKS's Linn Sondek turntable comes second only to his beloved Kremlinn tuner in his affections.



## WHAT IS HI-FI WORLD?

An independent hi-fi magazine of fourteen years standing, founded by Noel Keywood - one of the UK's leading technical hi-fi writers.

## WHY IS HI-FI WORLD SPECIAL?

Almost all hi-fi and home entertainment magazines are owned by large media corporations that publish anything that makes money, be it caravan, computer or mobile phone titles. But we're different! As the only magazine published by Audio Publishing Ltd., a small independent specialist publisher, hi-fi isn't just a business for us, it's a way of life.

## WHAT IS HI-FI WORLD'S PHILOSOPHY?

We are the only real world audiophile magazine you can buy. No matter whether something costs 20p or £20,000, we'll tell you if it's worth having - and why. Being independent, we can write what we like, and we do. If it's recommended in these pages, it's because we've lived with it - and rate it. If we don't, then we'll not gloss over the fact for reasons of commercial gain.

We don't print reviews of bad equipment - what's the point? So everything inside these pages is interesting or excellent, and usually both. Yet still we don't pretend everything is fantastic. Not even the best equipment is right for everyone - which is why go to great lengths to explain the respective strengths and weaknesses of each bit of kit. We don't knock stuff, we say why it will work in some systems and why it won't in others - so you can make your own mind up.

Unlike some titles, we don't delude ourselves that we're the ultimate authority on everything, but the huge experience of our team ensures that we're invariably pretty close to the mark. Importantly, we back our subjective findings with technical measurements - which ensures that everything we review is a representative sample, and that we know what ancillaries are best.

We don't pretend that every new product is better than its predecessor. We're happy to recommend classic hi-fi when it's better than modern stuff. This doesn't help our advertising revenues, but it gets you closer to getting a superb sounding system for the lowest possible price.

## WHAT'S THE HI-FI WORLD SOUND?

Go into your local high street electronics emporium, and you'll hear no end of cheap, forward, hard and showy sound bits of audio kit. As we listen to music hour after hour every day, we're not into this. We go for hi-fi - at any price - that has the ability to communicate what the musicians are trying to say. This means it must be rhythmically engaging and dynamically expressive - but must also be able to recreate a believable soundstage and a wide and varied range of tonal colours. We don't like a hard sound, nor do we enjoy the soft. It's got to be open and organic. Interestingly, there is kit at all price levels that offers this quality - although it often takes some finding. So we're happy to recommend anything from an old, long-discontinued £30 amplifier to a brand new pair of £6,000 loudspeakers - if they sound right!



# Super Sonic?

Digital radio for just £99. Panasonic's new RF-D1 neat DAB/FM portable has it all. How good is it wonders Channa Vithana...?

**T**his cute little portable gives you both old fangled vhf/fm, derided as hissy by the digital brigade, plus modern "CD quality" digital radio courtesy of DAB. So how does digital, with its wide variety of stations and hiss free reception, fare in a portable?

The RF-D1 uses weighty metal knobs for volume and tuning that are a delight, reminiscent of old analogue radios. It has ten presets for each band with display and memory store buttons along the front. There is additionally a 'sound EQ/s.virtualizer' button which scrolls through settings such as vocal, xbs, clear and soft to provide tonal adjustment. Additional functions include a clock, 'sleep' and 'play' timer and a dimmable display. It can be plugged into the mains using 9V AC adapter or use batteries for power and portability. However this radio needs current, no fewer than six bulky C size cells at around £2.40 apiece, totalling £14.40.

The display is a fine dot matrix type of a sort found on many portables. It has a small DAB reception indicator, but accurate tuning is best performed by using the DAB signal quality function. This displays the frequency of the station with reception quality as a series of 16 asterisks with zero being the lowest and 16 being highest. This enables several stations within an 'ensemble' to be stacked up, which can then be scrolled through. Finally it has an auto store that automatically collects and sequences in frequency order, the available digital stations which can be scrolled through using the tuning knob.

## SOUND QUALITY

I connected the RF-D1 to my amplifier with a Chord Co Chrysalis min-jack to stereo phono lead and selected the DAB option first. I tried Radio 3 initially, knowing it to be one of the highest bitrate DAB stations and was greeted by a surprisingly quiet and non-splashy sound, which

dispelled my perceptions of DAB somewhat. Switching over to FM showed it to be noisier, but also louder. Lowering the volume to compensate revealed a superior sound quality than its digital counterpart. There was a finer balance; more vibrancy and energy to the FM, with better defined vocals. Disconnecting the RF-D1 from my amplifier and using it as a portable made much better sense of DAB because here it was a logical choice over FM. With FM, using the telescopic whip aerial, the RF-D1 continued to sound a little noisy due to variable reception. The DAB signal remained consistent as before, with useful display and auto tuning functions.

Sound through the two internal speakers was adequate, nothing really special but using the 'sound EQ' and 's.virtualizer' settings helped at lower levels, but anything approaching loud sounded better without them. Radio 1 through DAB in the RF-D1 was also better than its FM side when in portable mode and the multitude of different digital channels was also a bonus. You can alleviate the sometimes-noisy FM reception by switching from auto stereo to mono. Comparing the surprisingly good transmission of digital radio from my cable set top box the RF-D1 disappointed in DAB mode, sounding shut in and lacking dynamics especially with speech, sounding less rounded and synthetic. Fortunately I had no

experience of sibilance through the RF-D1.

## CONCLUSION

A portable like this doesn't compare to full size components for quality, but it's small and easy enough to use. It also clearly underlines that digital radio suits portables, giving hiss free reception, as claimed. The RF-D1 has tactile controls on its side too, plus a good quality display. With aerial sockets, connectivity is good too.

This little radio is fine value for a dual band stereo portable. For example, compared to the Pure Digital Evoke 2 which is (R.R.P) £160, it is a penny over £60 cheaper. The RF-D1 isn't as handsomely finished as the wood clad stereo Evoke 2. With the exception of the solid control knobs and silver mesh grill, a rather cheap looking plastic finish hampers it. All the same, as a portable DAB radio it works very well: it is easy and enjoyable to use being reliable and consistent in its tuning. So I'd recommend it for those that want the programme variety that DAB offers, in a neat, portable package.

## VERDICT

Fine value stereo portable DAB that's usefully versatile too, but finish disappoints.

PANASONIC RF-D1  
DAB-FM £99.99  
Panasonic  
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www.panasonic.co.uk

**FOR**  
- DAB & FM  
- connectivity  
- tactile controls

**AGAINST**  
- plasticky finish



# *The colouration's in the finish*



# *Not in the music*



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# Boxing Clever

One of hi-fi's greatest proponents of flexible upgrade paths is Cyrus Audio, which offers existing owners the chance to extensively improve their systems through additional power supplies and DACs. Channa Vithana started from the bottom upwards...



**S**ome readers of this magazine chop and change their hi-fi on an almost weekly basis, pausing occasionally to wonder why – despite buying the coolest kit with the best write-ups – they still don't like their system sound. Others buy something after extensive auditioning at a dealer and slowly and surely upgrade it in ways they want - spending far less money than the former group and gaining lots more spare time to listen to music!

The former constituency won't be terribly interested in this feature, but those who are 'in it to win it', those genuinely trying to get closer to the music, might. The reason is that Cyrus Audio is one of the few hi-fi manufacturers that offers clearly delineated upgrade paths, often requiring very modest sums to be spent...

It all began with the Mission Cyrus Two back in 1985. This was a stunning little £299 amplifier that came with an additional rear socket for a 'PSX' power supply. The addition of this dramatically improved an already superb sounding bit of kit, for the modest outlay of some £149. It was a great idea, and (what became) Cyrus Audio ran with it. Now in 2005, almost everything is upgradeable by a PSX-R power

supply, and there are also additional factory upgrades too. In short, if you've bought a Cyrus product, unless you develop a distaste for exquisitely styled and built half-size separates with a clean but sweet sound, then you're very likely to stay with the brand...

Each Cyrus uses non-magnetic alloy casework designed to minimise microphonic effects for an effective shield from external electro-magnetic disturbances. This also eliminates coupling of the power transformer stray magnetic fields to the sensitive audio circuitry. Silhouetted, the Cyrus casework is discretely attractive with finely crafted heat sinks and an engraved Cyrus logo above. Each case measures 73x215x360mm, and is available in silver or black – which is surely the greatest dilemma!

## CLIMBING THE LADDER

For just £100, you can upgrade the Cyrus CD6 CD player to the latest £650 CD6s specification, and I found the difference between the two staggering. Using the £650 6Vs amplifier driving my reference £2,000 Waterfall Victoria or £1,320 Audiovector Mil Signature speakers, 'Sea Pictures' had a quieter background with the new CD6s and Janet Baker's voice gained greater texture, definition and sophistication

in comparison to the CD6. When she went for the higher notes, the CD6s was definitely more convincing, showing more control and less subjective coloration with a finer feel for the emotional vocal and instrumental phrasing. The CD6s also showed a big difference in the multilayered hard rock debut from Melissa Auf der Maur, where 'Taste You (French version)' had deeper and three dimensional vocals in comparison to the CD6. The music had more body and when the crunching guitar arrived, there was a discernibly finer vibrancy and impactful musical presentation.

Janet Baker's vocals had an increased sense of naturalness with the £1,000 CD8x CD player, in substitution to the CD6s. There was an enhanced spatiality to the music and vocals along with more air around instruments. Music additionally became more fluid through the upgrade from CD6s to CD8x. The vocals from 'Taste You (French Version)' gained in three dimensional feel, expanding further with greater interaction. The percussion and rhythmic elements became stronger and better defined especially when the composition became complex as the extra instruments came into the mix.

Adding the £400 PSX-R to the

CD8x allowed 'Sea Pictures' to become quieter still and Janet Baker's vocals became silkier and smoother as did the orchestration. There was greater depth to the vocals as she breathed in and exhaled. The music

was very good for individual instruments but ultimately the 6vs was more musically cohesive.

Adding a £400 PSX-R to the 8vs did improve matters considerably, with an even quieter background and

As a spanner in the works I compared the £1,750 combination of CD6s/DACX to the £1,400 CD8X/PSX-R. The perverse combination of CD6s/DACX was a fine match; however the £1400 CD8X/PSX-R easily bettered the more expensive but odd CD6s/DACX combination with a natural and finely crafted superior acoustic...

“unless you develop a distaste for exquisitely styled half-size separates with a clean but sweet sound, then you're very likely to stay with the brand...”

as a whole became lush and widescreen. The powerful orchestral crescendos were handled better with superior control, minimising some slight colorations apparent on the standard CD8X. On 'Taste You (French Version)' the heavy rock music also became smoother and silkier as did the vocals. The crunching guitar break was better than without PSX-R, with superior timbre to the drums and guitars.

Next the £1,100 DACX was connected to the CD8X/PSX-R and amplified with the 6Vs. I preferred the DACX set with the 'Slow Roll Off' filter setting. The difference with 'Sea Pictures' was huge and much bigger than adding the PSX-R to the CD8X. Speed and timing were clearly superior as the powerful orchestral crescendos were handled with a new epic ease and authority. Gone were the occasional colorations at the demanding sequences. 'Taste You (French Version)' through the CD8X/PSX-R/DACX enabled a new sense of exhilaration with staggering dynamics. When the powerful guitar break arrives, the addition of the DACX really let the music flow with greater control, fluidity and expressive vitality. Melissa Auf der Maur's bass playing also had improved tunefulness while her vocals became even more life-like.

For £250 you can upgrade the 6vs amplifier to the £850 8vs and it was connected to the CD8X/PSX-R/DACX. 'Sea Pictures' had a slightly warmer presentation with discernibly deeper and lush orchestration with a little more spatiality. However – interestingly – the sound along with Janet Baker's vocals didn't seem as involving as with the 6Vs – having less musically emotional vitality. Melissa Auf der Maur's vocals were better than the 6vs version though, but the sound as a whole on 'Taste You (French Version)' wasn't a great improvement on the 6vs overall, as the 8vs imbued a shift towards a deeper and smoother stance which

subjectively lower distortion to 'Sea Pictures' which invited higher volumes. The sound became more sophisticated and communicated emotion really well with greater subtlety. The music and vocals with added PSX-R on 'Taste You (French Version)' were also improved over the standard 8vs. The lack of musical impact and enjoyment of the standard 8vs in comparison to the 6vs was minimised and better resolution, timbre and bass tunefulness could be discerned. However for sheer musical enjoyment and emotional impact I still preferred the 6vs over the £850 8vs even with an additional £400 PSX-R!

Re-using the £650 6vs amplifier, I added another £400 PSX-R power supply to the DACX/CD8X/PSX-R (which formed a £2,900 four box CD player similar in ethos to the Cyrus Discmaster/ Dacmaster transport/ DAC of yore!), and what a combination! The vitality and identity of the music was intact but now had greater resolution and stunning musical cohesion. Subjective colorations were completely eradicated. Janet Baker's vocals engulfed the room and surrounded me without the slightest hint of grain as the orchestrated crescendos swelled. The same improvements were immediately apparent on the Melissa Auf der Maur song as the guitars gained greater timbre and the vocals improved to their finest of the whole listening session even more so than adding the already awesome standard DACX! When the hard rock crescendos hit, there was a stunning conviction to the music where instrumental separation was not only superior but there was simply more music coming out of this four box combination than before, incongruously, with nothing added or taken away.

**CONCLUSION**

For £100, the upgrade from CD6 to CD6s is heartily recommended as it made a far superior transformation. The £650 CD6s CD player and £650 6vs amplifier would make a splendid choice inclusive of high-performance, superb style and low-slung discrete proportions. Then I would recommend the £300 Cyrus cable combination as a reasonably priced but dramatically superior upgrade which confirmed the Cyrus system synergy approach. Next a CD8x for

**CYRUS TUNING**

I used the Cyrus interconnect and speaker cables to fine tune the Cyrus systems. The £200 (2x3m) Cyrus Speaker Cable uses specially formulated dielectric material and four 6N (99.9999% purity) Linear Crystal, Oxygen Free Copper conductors. The £100 (1m) Cyrus interconnect features 5N (99.999%) purity Oxygen Free Copper and is sheathed in a black woven material. It uses Eichmann Bullet Plugs which are intended to offer superior performance to normal all metal plugs through minimised use of electrical conducting parts. After running-in, the £300 Cyrus cable combination proved as good an upgrade as adding the £400 PSX-R to the CD8X! The music became beautifully well-rounded and the vocals in particular were also superior with the Cyrus cables when compared to a closely priced set of matched cables.





£400 on top of the CD6s is a comprehensively good upgrade. Adding a £400 PSX-R to the CD8x improves it in terms of sophistication and along with the 6vs amplifier and Cyrus cables would form a very fine hi-fi system. For a high-end route connect the CD8x/PSX-R to the DACX, as it is a stunningly astute piece of hi-fi which performs outstandingly well. With its added flexibility, plenty of inputs and upgradeability, the DACX is perfect also for, satellite, DAB, cable and hard disk recorders. Adding a PSX-R to the DACX will make for one seriously competitive £2,900 high-end CD player!

In this review context, I was disappointed with the £1,250 8vs/ PSX-R combination because while it offered a high-end sound in some respects with better individual instrumental and vocal performances, it didn't have the same level of musical involvement as the £650 6vs amplifier. This is odd considering the 6vs is a scaled-down and developed-from version of the 8vs. If I can be so bold, perhaps Cyrus should raise the performance of the 8vs and make it an 8x integrated instead, to bring it into a performance/ price line with the CD8x. Could an '8x' integrated be as significant an upgrade over the 6vs as the CD8x is over the CD6s? However, I wholly recommend the 6vs amplifier to form the start of an interesting and extended Cyrus Odyssey!

## GOOD

### CYRUS CD6S CD PLAYER

The new £650 CD6s is a replacement to the CD6 (see our CD6 review in the July 2005 issue, p52-55). Current CD6 owners can upgrade it to CD6s for £100. The CD6s is based on the £1,000 CD8x due to the quality of components used in the power supply, DAC and analogue filter stages. Clock stability is a key element in the signal processing chain and therefore includes a remote re-clocking circuit located at the DAC threshold to maximise jitter rejection. There is a toroidal transformer with two separate secondary windings (isolating), with power supplies for the differing power requirements of the digital and analogue sections of the player. Eight stages of power regulation provide further stage isolation. The CD6s has two sets of analogue phono sockets and an optical digital output. The CD6s can be upgraded to the CD8x for £400. It weighs 3.1kg.

### CYRUS 6VS INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

The 6vs has 40W/8ohms output. Similar to 8vs, it also uses voltage multiplying techniques with linear post-regulators for the power supply of the voltage amplifier stage, increasing and stabilising the supply, eliminating any trace of power supply ripple and noise. It features six inputs including tape monitor, biwirable BFA speaker output sockets, headphone connection at the rear, pre-amp out and remote control. The 6vs was featured in our May 2005 issue (p23) and is upgradeable to the 8vs for £250. Its continuous power is rated at 40W/ 8ohms. Weight is 3.7kg.

## BETTER

### CD8X CD PLAYER

The main differences between the £1,000 CD8x and CD6s are two toroidal transformers for the power supply with one transformer for the DACs/filter, two balanced differential DACs, electrical and optical digital outputs and PSX-R upgradeability. The CD8x also features a remote re-clocking circuit with close-tolerance crystal VCO located at the DAC threshold to maximise jitter rejection. The CD8x is also said to measure better with superior S/N ratio, dynamic range and lower clock jitter for example. Weight is 3.5kg.

### CYRUS 8VS INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

The £850 8vs is very similar to the 6vs in function but its two main differences are a higher 70W/8ohms power output and PSX-R upgradeability. Though sharing a peak current of 30A with the 6vs, the 8vs has a better power supply from its transformer with 300VA instead of the 6vs's 107VA rating. The 8vs also has a better S/N ratio and is heavier. Cyrus claim 70W/8ohms and a weight of 5.5kg.

## BEST

### DACX D/A CONVERTOR

The £1,100 DACX effectively makes the CD8x a transport, as it is digitally re-clocked by a close tolerance circuit with triple quartz references. The DACX is a two stage upsampling design where all sources are initially upsampled to 192k before analogue conversion by quad high-precision 24-bit converters operating in a fully balanced configuration. It has four coaxial and two optical digital inputs which are assignable through its display, phase inversion, two filter settings (fast and slow roll off) and with PSX-R upgradeability. The DACX features fixed level phono and balanced XLR output sockets. It is upgradeable for £1,200 to a high-end DACXP with volume control which includes a high-quality preamp and two additional analogue inputs. It weighs 3.8kg.

### PSX-R

The £400 PSX-R is a DC power supply upgrade which can automatically adjust itself to power differing Cyrus components. It features a 300VA transformer which employs an "enormous current delivery capability", with 30,000 microfarad slotted foil reservoir capacitors (ensuring that very low ESR and wide bandwidth are presented to the linear mode regulator stage that follows. Cyrus states that in lower power components such as the CD8x CD player, "the addition of the PSX-R provides a highly stable external power with massive inertia which ensures ideal battery like operation for such units". Additionally, for compatible Cyrus amplifiers, "the PSX-R while establishing a very stiff voltage source behind the power amplifier successfully inhibits mains related distortions and charging spikes from reaching the signal lines of the amplifier".





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£799.00

## A Brief Introduction

Eastern Electric is a joint venture between US-based Bill O'Connell and Hong Kong-based electrical engineer Alex Yeung which began when O'Connell met Yeung in the cyber world and eventually ordered one of his 5wpc MA-1 amps with RGN2504 rectifier and 6L6 output tubes.

The rest as they say, is history, and the results speak for themselves. A range of products that set new standards and a level of performance way beyond its price-point.

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Visit [www.easterelectric.co.uk](http://www.easterelectric.co.uk) for more information.

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### CD Players

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| EAD DSP 9000 Pro S3 DAC pre            | £1495 |
| Wadia 302 CD player (£4000)            | £2995 |
| Meridian 566 24bit DAC                 | £450  |
| Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista CD Player    | £1695 |
| Sony 777ES SACD                        | £1095 |
| DCS Verdi latest spec                  | £3595 |
| Audio Analogue Meastro CD player       | £795  |
| Wadia 270 Transport, current spec      | £3950 |
| DCS Verdi La Scala Transport (£9499)   | £6995 |
| Audio Analogue Paganini (£950)         | £795  |
| Musical Fidelity A308CD player         | £995  |
| Roksan Kandy MKIII silver/black ex-dem | £450  |
| Audio Analogue Paganini                | £475  |
| Audio Analogue Meastro CD player       | £950  |
| Musical Fidelity Nu Vista CD           | £1695 |

### Amplifiers

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Quad II Forty valve pre/power system         | £2495 |
| Copland CTA 305 and CTA 520 pre/power        | £1595 |
| Boulder 1012 DAC pre (£12950)                | £6595 |
| Musical Fidelity A3 CR pre-amp (£1000)       | £429  |
| Musical Fidelity X-80 v3                     | £265  |
| ART Diavolo Power Amplifier (£5402)          | £1995 |
| Pathos Classic One mkII (£1400)              | £950  |
| Shanling STP-80 integrated valve amplifier   | £895  |
| Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista amplifier          | £1695 |
| Pathos Logos Integrated                      | £1695 |
| Audio Synthesis Passion Ultimate passive pre | £849  |
| Moon i5 integrated amplifier (£2695)         | £1695 |
| Plinius SA 100 MK3                           | £1695 |
| Plinius M16P (with phono stage)              | £1195 |
| Classe CA-401 power amplifier                | £2995 |
| Classe CP 47.5 reference pre amp             | £1295 |
| Musical Fidelity P270.2 power amplifier      | £495  |
| Quad II forty system, pre-amp+2 mono blocks  | £2495 |
| Plinius CD LAD balanced pre-amp              | £495  |

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Audio Analogue Meastro                    | £895  |
| Chord SPM 800 power amplifier             | £895  |
| Krell KAV 300i                            | £995  |
| Musical Fidelity A3.2 Integrated          | £595  |
| ES Lab DXS4 digital amplifier             | £1295 |
| Mark Levinson 28 pre-amplifier            | £995  |
| Mark Levinson 27.5 power amplifier        | £1995 |
| Croft TS1 with Epoch Pre (£3000)          | £1995 |
| Roksan Caspian M Series pre+monoblocks    | £2295 |
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| Conrad Johnson 16LS pre-amp (£8000)       | £3750 |
| Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta (£950)    | £790  |
| Musical Fidelity A3cr pre amp             | £475  |
| Sugden Masterclass Mono blocks (£6600)    | £3995 |
| Sugden Masterclass Pre-amplifier (£2300)  | £1299 |
| Audio Note Soro SE + built in phono stage | £1195 |
| Graaf GM50, KT88 valve amp, black (£4000) | £2790 |
| Musical Fidelity X-150 v3 (£799)          | £650  |
| Hovland HP100 pre+built in pstage (£5350) | £3595 |
| Hovland Raclia Power amplifier (£7995)    | £4995 |
| Hovland HP200 + phono stage (£7325)       | £4995 |
| Audio Analogue New Maestro (£1750)        | £1255 |
| Audio Analogue Primo Setanta              | £395  |
| Unison Research SR 1                      | £895  |
| Musical Fidelity A308 Power amplifier     | £995  |
| Musical Fidelity A308 Pre amplifier       | £995  |
| Roksan Kandy MKIII (silver or black)      | £450  |

### Loudspeakers

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| LivingVoice Auditorium mkII speakers (£1900)    | £895  |
| Diapason Karis III speakers + matching stands   | £1095 |
| Ref 3a Dacapo i, maple (£2700)                  | £1650 |
| LivingVoice Avatar II speakers in Maple (£2700) | £1850 |
| Audio Note AN-J speakers, black+stands (£2000)  | £495  |
| JM Lab Cohalt 816s (£999)                       | £595  |
| Triangle Heliade, Champagne finish (£595)       | £395  |
| Triangle Naia (£1995)                           | £1195 |
| ATC SCM-50ASL, Yew (£7947)                      | £4995 |
| Wilson Benesch ARC's with stands (£2500)        | £1699 |

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Soundlab Millennium M3+optional Toroidal     | £3995 |
| Triangle Australe in cherry (£3300)          | £1995 |
| LivingVoice Avatar OBX-R in Cherry           | £2695 |
| Wilson Benesch Discovery (£5700)             | £3895 |
| Quad 989 ESL Vintage, new £5000              | £3600 |
| Quad 988 ESL in Nouveau, cost new £3750      | £2999 |
| Audio Physic Spark3, Cherry or light maple   | £1250 |
| Audio Physic Tempo 3i, Cherry or light maple | £1395 |
| Audio Physic Tempo3i SE, Cherry/light maple  | £1799 |
| Audio Physic Virgo III, Cherry               | £2895 |
| Wilson Benesch ACT 1, Cherry                 | £3595 |
| Triangle Antal ES                            | £595  |

### Analogue

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Linn LP12, Naim Aero tonearm, Armageddon    | £1595 |
| SME 10, boxed AS NEW (£2800)                | £1895 |
| Audio Synthesis Passion Phono stage M/M/MC  | £795  |
| Linn LP12 + Ittok LVII and Valhalla PSU     | £795  |
| SME 20/2a + SME V tonearm (£5695)           | £3695 |
| Wilson Benesch Full Circle+Ply Cart (£2100) | £1495 |
| Musical Fidelity M1 turntable, boxed as new | £1990 |
| Pro-ject 2.9 wood + Ortofon 510 cartridge   | £350  |
| Michell Orbe SE boxed as new                | £1595 |
| SME 10A, boxed                              | £2495 |
| Nottingham Analogue Spacedec                | £695  |
| EAR 834P de-luxe phono stage                | £250  |
| Ortofon Jubilee - very low hours            | £795  |
| Trichord Dino - silver front                | £199  |

### Miscellaneous

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Stax SRS-4040 tube system                | £595 |
| ISOL-8 2k Qube2 mains conditioner        | £995 |
| Townshend Super Tweeters in Titanium     | £650 |
| Stax SRS 4040 tube system - boxed unused | £795 |

List is updated on a daily basis via website



# PRO FEEL

Stewart Wennen says the specially tweaked new London Professional pickup cartridge works as well in hi-fi as it does in pro audio applications...

Unlike the hi-fi industry, the DJ field has an enormous lack of serious pick up cartridges, so John Wright Audio Services' decision to release a professional version of the ubiquitous Decca London cartridge must have come as a nice surprise. Better still, it's also well worth any audiophile's attention...

Based upon the London Maroon, the Professional differs in that the ride height has been increased along with a change to the vertical compliance. The only visible differences are the colour, which has been changed to a very bright yellow; there is a black cueing line down the front of the cartridge, and the addition of another tie wire on the bottom of the transducer (there are now two tie wires). Using an ancient conical stylus profile the London Professional tracks at 2.5g, which – amusingly – puts it amongst the lightest tracking DJ cartridges around!

Providing you follow the set-up instructions to the letter, the London Pro is reasonably easy to get working well. Tracking appears very good, although setting the bias compensation is a particularly intricate operation – it's either right or it isn't. As you'd expect, hand cueing is easy too, even though the body of the cartridge seems rather large to my eyes.

Once well set up in a Technics SL1200/Origin Live Silver 250, initial

impressions were extremely favourable. Image height was very good, and the Pro gave enormous stage depth, with image width to die for. All of the London cartridges sound much better than they measure and so tracking proved solid and secure, although it's never going to be the match of similarly priced designs with Fine Line diamond profiles, such as Ortofon's super-couth sounding MC25FL, in this respect.

Ashford and Simpson's rendition of the classic 'Bourgie Bourgie' was one of the crispest I have ever heard via so-called professional equipment.

Horns were rock solid with the piano riffs delicately reproduced. The Beach Boys' 'Here Comes the Night' sounded glorious. Rich and sharp with a full bass, this transducer made it sound like a contemporary recording instead of a late seventies one. Indeed, whichever record you play, this cartridge has a tremendously big hearted and buoyant sound – one which makes bespoke hi-fi designs (such as the aforementioned Ortofon) sound frigid and pedantic. The London Pro is not anywhere near as incisive or tonally neutral, but it's a lot more fun.

There's something special about classic cartridges with conical styli – they don't make them like they used to. This is good and bad; in some ways the London Pro is an anachronism and an irrelevance; it's a crude and unsophis-



icated device [and one with questionable groove wear – Ed.], yet is also immensely musically engaging in a way that not even the superb Shure V15VxMR can match. As always with vinyl, you pay your money and makes your choice...

## VERDICT ●●●£

Ultra charismatic cartridge that's as musical as it is coloured. Shows any price rival how to play tunes properly, but has poor measured performance.

**LONDON PROFESSIONAL £400**

Presence Audio

☎ +44 (0)1444 461611

www.presenceaudio.com

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

This Decca is 'professional' as in Club use, hence the lurid yellow colour. Tracking force, at 2.5gms, is above that recommended for hi-fi models (1.5g-2g) and the stylus is spherical. All the same, our response analysis clearly shows it tracks the short wavelengths of inner grooves well, with slight loss above 10kHz only. Like other Deccas, this one is substantially flat in its frequency response, due to a low impedance generator. Even on outer grooves there's just a small lift in output above 10kHz of +2dB at 20kHz – almost inaudible at these frequencies, so the Professional will sound tonally neutral and likely highly detailed right across a disc, from outer to inner grooves.

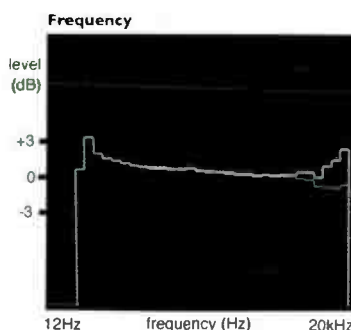
Lateral tracking at low frequencies caused the Pro problems. Like the old Blues it triangulated the signal, generating strong third harmonic distortion, mistracking at a low threshold. This is an amplitude problem though, because at 1kHz lateral tracking was superb – better than most. So the Pro is best kept away from heavy bass cuts, but it will handle strong vocals.

With 7% lateral distortion and 5% vertical at 45µm peak amplitude displacement the Pro distorts badly, sharpening the sound. This will help it sound incisive and fast, but also hard and brittle. Modern audio Deccas don't do this any more.

Output was healthy and VTA indeterminate as always, due to cantilever motion.

The canary yellow Pro is satisfactory for Club use perhaps, ignoring its dislike of large low frequency groove excursions. There are better Deccas for hi-fi work however. NK

|                          |            |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Tracking force           | 2.5gms     |
| Weight                   | 5gms       |
| Vertical tracking angle  | < 6degrees |
| Frequency response       | 20Hz-20kHz |
| Channel separation       | 25dB       |
| Tracking ability (300Hz) |            |
| lateral                  | 60µm       |
| vertical                 | 45µm       |
| lateral (1kHz)           | 25cms/sec. |
| Distortion (45µm)        |            |
| lateral                  | 7%         |
| vertical                 | 7%         |
| Output (5cms/sec rms)    | 5.6mV      |



# Signature Sounds



**If there's one hi-fi component that requires careful matching, it's a tube amp like Cary Audio Designs' SLI-80 Signature. Who better than 'glass audiophile' Haden Boardman to listen in...?**

**W**ith no less than ten tubes on display, anybody with a passing interest in valve amplifiers is bound to be impressed with this festival of glass and steel. American company Cary have a strong reputation manufacturing high value valve amplifiers from their factory in North Carolina. However, they are more famous for single ended power amplifier designs, rather than push pull integrated. This particular bit of kit is available for a very reasonable £1,700.

The amplifier provides inputs for three line level sources, CD, Aux 1 and Aux 2. There is no provision for tape outputs, however on the output side of things four and eight ohm loudspeakers are provided for at the flick of a switch, a headphone socket with speaker mute switch, a line level sub woofer output as well as remote control volume control.

Utilising a pair of 6550 output tetrodes in fixed bias mode requiring periodic checking with a voltmeter, (can I be churlish and ask for separate test points for to be provided for each of the output

valves?), the output stage is switchable between ultra linear operation, and triode operation. Power drops to 50 watts in triode mode, still pretty healthy. A low value of negative feedback (4 dB) is taken from its own separate winding on the output transformer. The makers claim a full power bandwidth 19Hz to 23kHz +/- 0.5dB. All quite impressive claims, but see **MEASURED PERFORMANCE**. Phase splitting is provided by a 6SN7 double triode, with the input being handled by a 6922 double triode. Unusually the power supply rectification is provided by a pair of 5U4 valves; most people would have just stuck a couple of diodes in, but purists will tell you the "softer" response of a valve rectifier, and lack of high frequency noise balance less efficiency and lower long term reliability (like all valves, eventually one is going to fail).

Instructions were detailed enough, with a good description of the designers' goals; specifically "overload recovery" and how the amplifier behaves when entering clipping. Very large, especially considering the use of valve rectifi-

cation, 1,200 uF capacitors are used in the power supply, something we will come back to later.

Build wise the amplifier is quite impressive; the chassis is very well finished in a textured black finish, with neatly anodised black knobs, and complimentary steel toggle switches. Speaker impedance selector switches are located at the side of some very nice five way binding posts, and all inputs are routed through good quality phono sockets. Mains input is handled via an IEC socket. The front panel offers up mains on and off (with the ubiquitous blue LED, nicely time delayed!) input selection, balance, motorised volume control, headphone socket and speaker mute. On top of the chassis two toggles switch between triode and ultra-linear operation.

## SOUND QUALITY

I wired the amplifier in to my Marantz CD12, and popped a set of vintage Tannoy 12" Monitor Golds (Chatsworth cabinets) on the end. Signature interconnects and Rumour speaker cable from Chord Co, with Russ Andrews power cables & mains filters were used throughout.



Thankfully the importers had run the amp in for two hundred hours, and the amplifier had been fully set up, shipped to me with "tubes" in place, so set up was a two minute job. I left the amp on for an hour or so to warm up before any serious listening began when it really sounded better. Although ultra-linear mode was tried, triode sounded marginally better and was used for the bulk of the listening

First track on was from Leonard Cohen's album 'Ten New Songs'. 'My Secret Life' is quite a weighty number, simple in its arrangement, with great backing singers complementing Leonard's sombre vocals. The track kicks off with a weighty drum beat, as I have heard this track hundreds of times before, indeed I was somewhat surprised at the extra weight that had suddenly developed. Cohen's voice was exactly where it should have been, and the backing singers well presented. Even from the first track, it was clear we were dealing with an amp with quite a lot of personality here - this thing really does have an obvious sonic signature.

An old classic in the form of Cat Stevens LP helped get the amplifier in its stride. The softly produced tracks totally suited the system. The album was beguiling to listen to. Vocals had an immediacy to them, as did the whole midband. Vocals are very much this amplifier's trump card; the midrange was sumptuous, and suited all things thrown at it. Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song' was truly moving and amongst the best I have ever heard. My usual "faves" Billie Holiday, Ella, Dinah et al were handled with ease and finesse.

As a recent convert to Gospel music (hard work for a devout atheist I can tell you) I have recently been enjoying The Black Boys of Alabama 'Atom Bomb' album. Unlike the previous material, this did not suit the Cary. Something in the mix of the system simply did not work, and the sound was heavy, laden, and frankly awkward. Biggest problem was the bass. As hinted at earlier, the Cary does have a fairly heavy bass, but on this track it totally lost control. Despite the power rating, it became clear this amp was simply not in charge of the loudspeaker in the lower bass... I changed speakers for something smaller, and perhaps a little thinner sounding than the classic Tannoy speakers, a small pair of Chario Academy Ones, hoping to re address the balance.

Repeating the same track, revealed very similar results. Bass notes tended to meld in to one

warm lump. Originally I had thought the speaker's resonance was having an adverse effect on the amplifier and had taken charge, but the more loudspeakers I tried, the more I realised that it was in fact the amplifier itself that had this laden sound. Any track with a strong bass line set the amplifier off, be it classical, jazz or drum & bass. The bass just took over, delivering a veil over the entire soundstage. Not wanting to read between the lines here, but my own theory is that the high value of the reservoir capacitors used are perhaps not providing the best time constants.

So far a glorious midrange, but a less than impressive bass. So how about the high frequencies? Although not as good as the mid-band, it was still quite listenable. Treble was, soft, lacking in edge, and almost a tad restrained. There was a slightly compressed quality, just slightly held

back. The amplifier created big soundstage, but one that was very much held between the loudspeakers.

The difference between ultra-linear and triode was not vast. Triode mode had less gain (obviously) and more air to the soundstage, with no less bite. Bass quality remained very similar whatever mode was selected. I have never understood the point in offering this kind of option; why not simply optimise the amplifier for the best mode of operation? The Cary book of words recommends triode, which I agree with. So why bother with ultra linear mode? Why not optimise the expensive output transformer for triode operation. Just my two pennies worth on that particular debate!

Comparisons to similar priced products proved hard. On hand was a budget valve amp about half the price, a Musical Fidelity A5, and the new Cyrus X power stereo/ Xvs pre. The Cary amp had much more of its own sound

than the other products listed to; specifically that amazing midrange and compromised bass.

## CONCLUSION

Well specified and nicely built, in the right system with the right music the Cary SLI80 Signature can really sing. The trouble is that as a real world proposition it is poor - it has one of the nicest midranges I have heard - and what a compliment! - only to be spoiled by that heavy, ponderous bass. No matter what speakers were used, any tune with a modicum of boogie and rhythm became spoiled, the amp taking over and over powering that glorious mid band. Treble is not as good as the mid-band, and I must admit I am somewhat sceptical of the power bandwidth rating...

So if you value vocals above all else, then you simply must listen to this amplifier - designs at twice the

"it was clear we were dealing with an amp with personality here - this thing really does have an obvious sonic signature..."

price cannot get near. But to counter this, those wanting speed and accuracy had better give it a wide berth. Ultimately, I was frustrated by this product. By my usual standards, it was simply too flawed to live with long term. Careful audition is recommended here. I feel it must be tried in situ. It really is a love-hate product, and something of a flawed diamond.

## VERDICT

Apparently great value, but ultimately compromised. Glorious mid band marred by poor bass - so audition with care!

**CARY AUDIO DESIGN SLI 80 SIGNATURE** £1,700  
Stoneaudio UK Ltd.  
☎ +44 (0)1305 257 555  
www.stoneaudio.co.uk

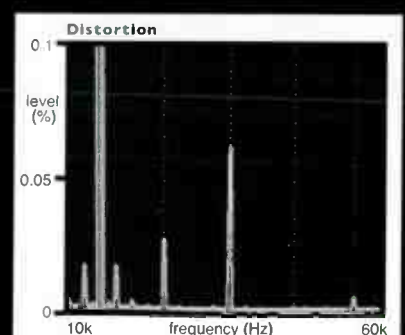
## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

This Carey, like others I have tested, had output transformer problems. At 1W output from the 4ohm tap the SLI-80 looked good, as valve amps based on 6550s can, producing 0.04% distortion (0.02% into 8ohms) across the audio band, rising to 0.2% (2nd harmonic) at 10kHz. At full output though (50W, not 80W as claimed) it produced around 1-3% into 4ohms, depending on frequency, dropping to just 0.2% (1kHz) into a higher 8ohm load - a huge difference. At high (10V) output in the midband (1kHz), distortion measured 1.1% into 4ohms but just 0.17% into 8ohms, showing clearly that the amplifier was hampered by load mismatching. Otherwise, frequency response was flat from 4Hz to 40kHz and free from peaking, and bass distortion was low, so the transformers performed well in these areas.

The SLI-80 looks good in principle, but it doesn't get near Carey's claimed

output of 80W and it is poorly load matched. **AK**

|                    |           |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Power              | 55watts   |
| CD/tuner/aux.      |           |
| Frequency response | 4Hz-48kHz |
| Separation         | 82dB      |
| Noise              | -91dB     |
| Distortion         | 1%        |
| Sensitivity        | 600mV     |



# One For All?

This is not the first compact system aimed at the audiophile, but with their typical attention to detail, Arcam's new Solo could well be the best yet. Dominic Todd downsizes for the day...

It was Linn's Classik that started it all. For around a grand, the guys from Glasgow provided the committed music lover with an amplifier, CD player and analogue tuner all wrapped up in Linn's typically exquisite and compact casing. Arcam knows this, and take one look at the Solo, and you'll see just how well.

To say that the Solo is comprehensively equipped is something of an understatement. Rather cheekily the amplifier section is rated by Arcam at 75 watts in to a 4 ohm load. The industry standard is usually measured into an 8-ohm load and, as you'll see from our measured performance, the truth is a power figure that's actually around half Arcam's quoted figure. Nevertheless, this is still a reasonable output, and Arcam have gone out of their way to make the Solo compatible with the widest range of 'speakers possible. To do this they've used what Arcam refers to as a 'bass correction system'. This may sound like nothing more than a fancy loudness control, but purists can leave it be - and there are still plenty of signs of Arcam's usual build integrity. High quality capacitors and a toroidal transformer show that Arcam hasn't lost its audiophile credentials, whilst much the same can be said of the CD player. As with some of the separate

Arcam CD players, the Solo marries a Wolfson 24-bit Delta Sigma DAC to a Sony transport. CD Text is compatible, as are CDR/W discs.

Perhaps the Solo's greatest selling point over its Scottish rival is the inclusion of a DAB/FM tuner. Seeing as Arcam was the first UK company to produce a DAB tuner this, perhaps, isn't all that surprising, but it does give the sort of flexibility that's crucial in a product such as this. Furthermore, Arcam have always been well renowned for their tuners and, taking a look at the Solo's specification, there's every chance that the tuner will be a highlight of the package.

As an indication of the likely buyers profile, a front-mounted input jack, designed to take the output from an MP3 player, sits alongside the headphone output. Around the back there's also an input labelled, 'game' alongside two others and a tape loop. A phono stage is not standard, but there is a PC keyboard input, an optical digital output and multi-room socketry. Those using the Solo as a second system may also be interested in the sleep timer, clock and alarm functions. There's little to fault about the simple, timeless styling or the fine build. Not everyone will relish the fact that the Solo is, at least at present, available only in silver.

## SOUND QUALITY

Using the Solo proved refreshingly straightforward, although I would have much preferred a proper volume knob to the push button

affair. Once under way, though, with B&W's DM602S3 'speakers, the Solo impressed. With Royksopp's 'Alpha Male', it soon became apparent that Arcam fans wouldn't be disappointed by the sound quality.

Typically of the brand, the balance was smooth, refined and focused. It also picked up the pace when needed and was energetic enough, even though bass extension wasn't especially strong. That said, the lean lower frequencies did at least allow for decent timing. No doubt Arcam would also argue that the bass correction system could be used, but in doing so I found that other aspects of the music were compromised - at least with the B&W 'speakers. As far as the soundstaging was concerned, there was very good width, but not much in the way of projection. This, I would have thought, would lend the Arcam towards partnering more forward sounding 'speakers.

This lack of projection was also noticeable with the Scissor Sisters 'Mary'. Considering the price, piano timbre was excellent and the vocals were well defined, textured and full-bodied - what a shame then that they weren't better separated from the rest of the mix. The staging could also have used a bit more height. The rolling bass lacked a bit of power and, over all, I felt the dynamic response to be not as good as that of a decent separates system.

With Blondie's 'Happy Dog' it was more a question of attack, or at least the lack of it. Although the guitars were nicely defined they simply sounded too polite. Likewise, the percussion lacked the impact





needed to make this song truly compelling. Otherwise there was good separation and the smooth vocals were free from any harshness or excessive sibilance. Whilst the song was pleasant enough to listen to, it did come across as rather bland – again suggesting the need for an upbeat sounding partnering 'speaker.

As has long been the case, the Arcam was happier with pastoral Classical music. Finzi's 'Eclogue for Piano and Strings' provided a piano timbre with decay and body that would be hard to beat at the price, even from a good separates system. The smooth, articulate strings were certainly on the warm side, but managed to remain beguiling rather than cloying. The music ebbed and flowed in a fluid manner that most systems of this size, and even price, often don't get close to matching. If you've heard enough of stilted, mechanical sounding systems, then the Solo could be just the tonic.

Sound quality with DAB was, as ever, limited by the lack of bandwidth with the medium and dependant upon individual stations' bit rate. Most stations output at 128Kbps (about the same as standard MP3). Listening to the pop music station, Core, I found that processed pop music sounded surprisingly bouncy and reasonably spacious. You'd be hard pressed to call it hi-fi, but the Arcam certainly did a better job than other tuners I've heard at this bitrate. Virgin radio did better than most with a bitrate of 160kbps, and boy could you tell. At least female vocals now had a bit of detail and there was some staging to speak of. Timing however, remained a little slow and stilted. Best of all, with a bitrate of 192kbps, was Radio 3. There was no doubt that this sounded best of all, being reasonable transparent and focused.

However, a quick flick over to the same station on FM, proved just how inferior DAB sounds. The analogue transmission instantly brought the music to life. It was like lifting a veil from the front of the 'speakers, with a great deal more realism and intensity being realised from the music.

Do bear in mind that this is not a reflection upon the quality of the Arcam's tuner; it's merely a limitation of the DAB format. Chose DAB for speech and background music and you'll be more than happy. The bonus with the Solo, though, is that excellent quality FM tuner on board, too.

**CONCLUSION**

If Arcam's aim was to create the most-rounded, best value, complete system under £1,000, then they've certainly succeeded. With the possible exception of a phono stage, the Solo wants for nothing. Perhaps more importantly, both the CD player and tuner sound extremely good. The sound from both is smooth, cohesive and reasonably well detailed. Yet, whilst the sound quality is first rate by system standards, it still doesn't compete with a decent quality separates system at the same price – and nor is it up to Linn Classik standards (which has a grippier, more propulsive and musical sound across all sources). To better the

Classik, the Solo would need more vigour with improved dynamics and bass extension. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the Arcam's typical buyer profile, I can't help but think that, with the Solo, they've knocked the nail most firmly on the head. Below £1,000, all-in-one systems simply don't come any more complete.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

A class leading system, with a balanced sound to match the features and style. Don't expect the Solo to trounce separates, though

**ARCAM SOLO** £995

Arcam  
 ☎ +44 (0) 1223 203200  
 www.arcam.co.uk

- FOR**
- well-balanced sound
  - comprehensively equipped
  - excellent tuner
- AGAINST**
- separates sound better
  - lack of volume knob

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Solo's amplifier produced 66W into 8ohms, rising to 80W into 4ohms. However, current limiting kicks in quickly with a 4ohm load, pulling steady output right down to 12W, likely to prevent overheating, as there's little cooling capacity, so this isn't a unit to be driven hard into modern loudspeakers, most of which use 4ohm bass units. The limiting looks a bit severe to me, considering this fact.

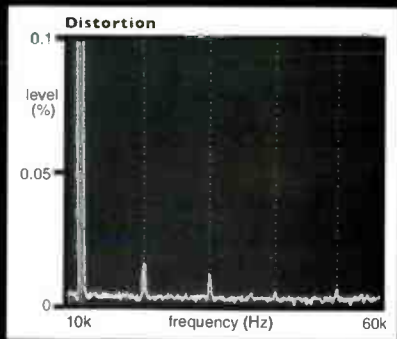
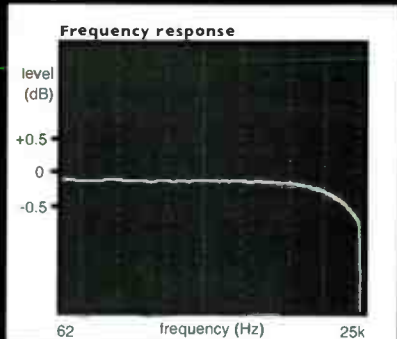
Distortion levels were low at 0.02%, with mild crossover generating a little second and third harmonics totaling 0.02%. Input sensitivity was a very low 640mV.

The CD player is a good one, with Arcam's characteristic treble roll off that gives a smooth, cohesive sound. Distortion levels were down with the best, so there's no scrimping here; it's a proper hi-fi unit. Jitter was very low, below 25pS, below 20kHz.

The VHF tuner section is obviously part of a Radioscape SDR DAB module. It has an unusual performance for VHF/FM, with wide channel separation, few spurious products, flat audio response to 15kHz (-1dB at 11kHz) and very low distortion at all mod levels. Sensitivity is extreme, with full quieting down to 33dBuV – considerably better than conventional tuners. Hiss is a little high at -63dB (IEC A wtd), although I've found the peculiar burbling, popping background noise of this SDR tuner not very audible in practice. Expect excellent clarity and extreme insight, if a slightly hard presentation. Impressive to hear, all the same.

The Solo looks better than good – technically it's advanced. Only early current limiting into low loads may be a problem, since all loads are low nowadays. NK

|                         |           |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Power                   | 66watts   |
| Frequency response      | 4Hz-60kHz |
| Separation              | 92dB      |
| Noise                   | -88dB     |
| Distortion              | 0.012%    |
| Sensitivity             | 0.64V     |
| <b>CD</b>               |           |
| Frequency response      | 4Hz-21kHz |
| Separation              | 112dB     |
| Noise                   | dB        |
| Distortion              | 0.004%    |
| <b>TUNER</b>            |           |
| Frequency response      | 4Hz-11kHz |
| Stereo separation       | 62dB      |
| Distortion (50% mod.)   | 0.06%     |
| Hiss (CCIR)             | -63dB     |
| Signal for minimum hiss | 33dBuV    |



# Zero Heaven?

**Is an expensive PC-based audio system worthy of the label 'high end hi-fi'? Zero One certainly seem to think so with their new no holds barred £2,260 upsampling Ti48 hard disk transport and Ar38 DAC combination. Neal Gibbons decides...**

**A**lthough I rather imagine not everyone will agree with me, the idea of a PC-derived CD playback system is an appealing one in my book. I can see potential sonic benefits in eliminating the conventional CD transport and replacing it with an 'ideal' hard disk drive, along with convenience bonuses too – it saves space storing many CDs on one HD and brings easy access to a large music library.

I was in for a shock when unpacking the Ti48 and Ar38. In today's world of electronic miniaturisation and size reduction I was not quite prepared for the physical enormity of them. The Ti48 hard disk system measured a large 450x350x170mm and the Ar38 DAC a slightly more manageable but still considerable 450x350x75mm! Fitting these onto my equipment rack was going to take some thought... The chassis seem to be well made, looking like it could stand several earthquakes. Finished in a pleasing grey gloss paint with a nicely machined 10mm thick Champagne grey front panel they looked elegant in a minimalist sort of way.

Neither the Ti48 or Ar38 have any fascia controls: the Ar38 has blue LED indicators on the front to indicate power and signal lock for S/PDIF or I2S while the Ti48 has a large blue alphanumeric display and DVD-ROM drawer. Power switches for both are rather inconveniently located around the back – given the size of the Ti48 and its possible location in the middle of a rack it would make sense to place these on the front panel I think. On the rear of the Ti48 there is an RCA S/PDIF, TOSLINK connector and I2S

interface.

Also present are 3.5mm jack sockets for analogue input and output but they were non-functioning on the review sample. The Ar38 has the same S/PDIF, TOSLINK and I2S connectors plus the RCA analogue outputs and a toggle switch to select between S/PDIF and I2S.

Inside the Ti48 is a bespoke PC utilising a professional audio soundcard powered by its own regulated low noise, linear and opto-isolated supply. This is shielded to minimise external interference and the card draws its power via a shielded cable and is further shielded its self. The soundcard performs no

digital processing or digital to analogue conversion – it's only used to relay digital audio information from the DVD-ROM or hard-drive over the I2S interface. I2S – what's that, I hear you ask?! Inter-IC Sound is an electrical interface standard used for transmitting PCM data from CD transport to DAC, usually used internally with the S/PDIF interface used to connect externally. I2S separates the clock and data signals making it an extremely low jitter (time dependant error) interface where as the S/PDIF interface is subject to variations and generally a high jitter performance. A low jitter





rate is desirable as it causes distortion of the signal during the digital to analogue conversion process, hence Zero One's use of I2S between the Ti48 & Ar38.

The Ti48 runs

being a cheap plastic affair with confusing labelling, more of which later...

A full 250GB worth of data storage is provided, allowing up to 350 CDs to be stored in full uncompressed 16bit/ 44.1kHz format - so the Ti48 features no

compression at all. My better half wryly asked me, "what happens

from my listening position and at no time did I feel it was intrusive.

The Ar38 DAC is listed as Zero One's entry level DAC but it still has some impressive features - and indeed it may be the only external DAC available with an I2S interface. Inside a Burr-Brown multibit PCM1704 DAC is used with a high accuracy custom made TCXO clock. The output stage is Class A single ended with zero global feedback, built using discrete components only, no op amps here! All the analogue stages are DC coupled meaning there are no signal degrading capacitors in the signal path and the design is a true dual monaural one. The Ti48 and Ar38 DAC are designed to be used together but can be used with other transports and DACs if required. The Ti48 has a S/PDIF output that is limited to 24-bit, 96kHz when used this way due to the S/PDIF standard. The Ar38 S/PDIF input will up-sample all data to 24/96 using its own CS8420 chip. The CS8420 is not used when the Ti48 is connected to the Ar38 DAC via the I2S interface.

## IN USE

It took me a while to get used to the user interface (UI) of the Ti48, I felt it wasn't intuitive at all. Despite reading the manual several times I found the key combinations and remote control labelling awkward to use especially when it came to entering non recognised CD artist and title information. Indeed at one point I was in fear of early hair loss! Zero One have thoughtfully included the excellent FreeDB CD database but when a new CD is introduced to the system and not found in the database you have to enter some information to describe it. The buttons of the remote are laid

when you run out of space?" and

"what happens if a disk crashes?"

With a standard PC you could easily backup your music or add more storage, but that's not so easy with the Ti48 - but I suspect Zero One could easily add a larger drive or even provide some sort of redundancy like a backup disk or perhaps disk to disk mirroring.

The Ti48 has been optimised for 'near-silent' running, with low noise cooling fans and a low resonance enclosure design featuring a damped chassis base made up of a foam layer sandwiched between two aluminium sheets of differing thickness. The hard disk and DVD-ROM are mounted on rubber grommets to further reduce noise. In use I could only just hear the Ti48

"finally I tried Jack Johnson 'Brushfire Fairytales' and ended up transfixed, just listening to the whole album..."

out 'mobile phone style' except there is no predictive text to help you! Zero One say they will update users every quarter with a new database sent on CD but I can't help thinking that as the Ti48 is essentially a PC they should have a way of connecting it to the internet so as to access the

Zero One's own

custom audio software that performs all the digital processing and is the key part of the system. It uses 64bit floating-point maths making it more accurate than a normal off-the-shelf chip they claim. There are user selectable digital processing functions which include 4 digital filters, 3 dither functions plus variable upsampling and oversampling to 192kHz, variable 16 bit to 24 bit conversion (word-length) and 3dB attenuation setting (for better system matching). I could see I was going to have fun trying out all the combinations come listening time... All functions are controlled and set by the supplied IR remote, speaking of which, for a serious system with high end aspirations the supplied remote left a lot to be desired -





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FreeDB database directly.

I had other 'niggles' with the UI like the display dimming after only 10s, not being able to scroll around menus and having to select 'Back' and press 'OK' to go to the previous menu. There was also a 'key bounce' problem on the remote IE if pressing the down key to select an item from a menu sometimes it would jump two selections. I am sounding picky and a little negative about the UI but it really lets the side down. It's the only way to interface with the Ti48 so it needs to be easy to use and intuitive in operation or Zero One need to include front panel controls. It's time they bought themselves an iPod to learn how make lots of functions instantly and easily accessible... This said, archiving CD to hard disk is a breeze once the control logic (?) is mastered - simply open the DVD-ROM draw, close it, go to the CD Player menu, if the CD is recognised select 'Grab Disk' and press OK! Five minutes or so later, and the operation is complete and it's ready for playing.

## SOUND QUALITY

While I copied a selection of CDs to the Ti48, I put the Ar38 through its paces via my modified SqueezeBox and S/PDIF interface (which regular readers will know is not far off the considerable heights of a Naim CDX CD player!) I was presented with a very smooth and open sound that had good stage depth and width. Compared to my upsampling MF A3.24 DAC the soundstage was better defined and larger, percussion came across with good detail and delicacy, female vocals especially, like Katie Buckhaven where reproduced with great detail, air and emotion. There was a small degree of grit or edginess with the A3.24's presentation that was missing on the Ar38. In the bass I felt it was not quite so successful, the A3.24 really drove along Mark Knopfler's 'Why Aye Man' underpinning it with an easy to follow bass line and rhythm, this was a little lost on the Ar38 and the track seemed to lack drive. On The Be Good Tanya's 'The Littlest Birds', bass was again a touch light losing the 'drive' but vocals came over with fine timing and separation - this is a difficult track to get the timing right yet the Ar38 handled it well enough.

Next it was time to try the Ti48 and Ar38 together and get into those user selectable filter settings. Hooked up via the I2S cable and with word length set to 24bit, TPDF Dither on, 192k upsampling set and 'purist' filter mode engaged I was greeted with

some very strange sound effects! The settings can be changed on the fly and the effect of each setting heard immediately. It states in the manual that some combinations are not desirable for a pleasurable experience or long term listening, and quick conversation with Zero One set me on the right path as I settled on 24bit word length with no dither, 176k upsampling and the HQ2 filter set.

I think Zero One could improve this by eliminating or blocking some of the non-compatible combinations and give better descriptions for some of the filters. HQ1 to 3 provide differing filter cut-off rates, HQ3 is the classic CD brickwall filter with sharp cut off at 22.05KHz, moving through HQ2 then to HQ1 and ultimately to 'Purist' changes the cut-off frequency and rate, getting less steep as you move along. The 'Purist' setting is aimed at acoustical material. Perhaps Zero One could add some predetermined combinations that are known to work well for differing material (i.e. settings for Rock, Blues, Jazz, etc.)

Once I had found my preferred setting, it was obvious these two units were made for each other, the benefits of using I2S were clearly audible. I started off with Cara Dillon and was sucked straight into the music 'Donald of Glencoe' came over clear and detailed, underpinned by a clear bassline. Cara's accent and voice inflections clearly discernible, the presentation was very even from top end to bottom. Next I tried Mark Knopfler's 'Why Aye Man' again, this time the bass line was easily followed pushing the track along with vigour, the soundstage was wider and I could pick out more detailing that was masked before.

On 'TV Screen' by Goran Begovic, the opening brushed cymbals shimmered left to right in front of me with real clarity and I was suddenly pinned back in my chair



## WHO IS ZERO ONE?

With commercial high-end aspirations, Alvin Heng set about designing a standalone hard disk based Audio Jukebox to better his Naim CDX. Employing the help of two engineers, he first demonstrated the audio jukebox at the Heathrow Show in 2002. The sound quality and functionality were well received but the looks left something to be desired. It taught him that there was demand for such a product but sound quality alone was not going to make it a success. It took three more years to get the software stable, to improve the casework aesthetically and to further improve upon the sound - but the effort is obviously worthwhile.

by the opening drum 'whack' with the voices of the choir soaring upwards and backwards during the chorus - captivating stuff. Peter Green's Splinter Group's 'Heart of Stone' saw his heavy nasal vocals coming over with real presence and clarity, the track again showing great rhythmic drive and timing. The Harmonica playing in the chorus had depth and space with uncanny realism. Finally I tried Jack Johnson 'Brushfire Fairytales' and ended up transfixed, just listening to the whole album...

## CONCLUSION

User interface 'niggles' aside, the Zero One Ti48 & Ar38 are very fine sounding pieces of hi-fi equipment indeed. Anybody reading this could say 'well it's just a PC in a fancy box', but that would belittle Zero One's achievement. Yes, the main component parts of the Ti48 are available off the shelf but at its heart there is a very clever piece of digital audio processing software, which coupled with the innovative use of an external I2S interface into a well-designed external DAC really works. Using hi-fi terms to describe the sound quality doesn't do the Ti48/Ar38 justice either, as the longer they were in my possession the more I appreciated the musical quality and cohesive performance they offered. This combination bettered my modified SqueezeBox / MF A3.24 set-up by some margin, and so I will miss them!

## VERDICT

This great sounding PC-based music jukebox pushes computer audio right up into high end audiophile territory, but its user interface could be better

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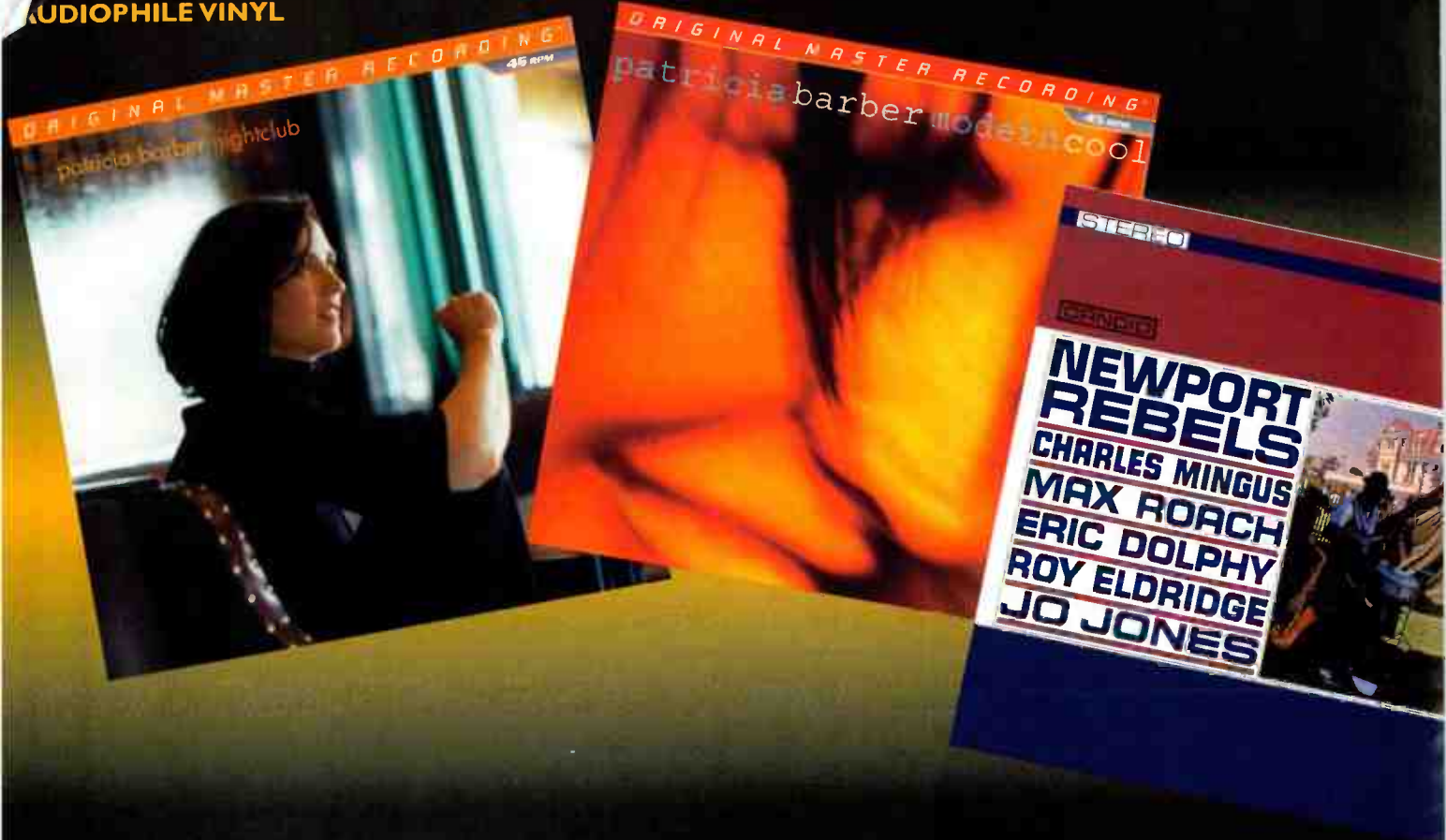
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**PATRICIA BARBER**  
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**MOBILE FIDELITY**

Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs is a label that's famous to every analogue addict who lived through the seventies, and it's not without a reason. The company has been almost religiously preoccupied with the sonic potential of vinyl and as such has been behind some superb releases [and some not so superb ones! – Ed.] These two Patricia Barber discs are cut at 45RPM in a bid to lower the noise floor and overload margins, and thus improve the signal to noise ration – and it works. Since 1977 MFSL has released two Patricia Barber 45RPM sets. She's a cool jazz singer, doing imaginative arrangements of classics like 'Alfie' and 'Bye Bye Blackbird' amongst more likely songs such as 'Autumn Leaves'. Her delivery always demands your attention, however. Thoughtful yet never predictable, Barber shines on these 45rpm sets.

It is interesting to compare both the MFSL 45rpm releases and those released via Classic. It is pleasing to report that, whilst a direct A-B comparison cannot be made utilising the Barber sets, the sound quality via both company's mastering techniques is outstanding. The MFSL releases have a clear advantage in packaging, however. Because 45RPM discs tend to span more than one disc, 45RPM sets cannot be wholly retained within an original sleeve. Hence, MFSL box

its sets. Classic use a relatively clumsy outer plastic sleeve affair. It also provides standard, hard white sleeves with plastic coated paper inners. MFSL has a more stylish, non-scratch, soft plastic sleeve option where one side of the plastic is encased by a paper stiffener. Serious stuff.

**NEWPORT REBELS**  
**JAZZ ARTISTS GUILD**  
**PURE PLEASURE/CANDID**

Politics is often cited as the cause of all things bad that result, but here we have a superb album of jazz that bucks the trend. The Newport Festival was initiated in 1954 after Elaine Lorillard, a wealthy socialite in Newport, told her friend George Wein, "Oh, it's terribly boring in the summer. There's just nothing to do." The result was a jazz festival to bring a little life to the place. The festival did very well until a group of more progressive jazz musicians, frustrated with the festival's increasingly unadventurous programming, organised the Newport Rebel Festival and held it simultaneously. This is where this album derives, including Charles Mingus, Max Roach, Roy Eldridge and Jo Jones. It was a unique period as Nat Hentoff, who wrote the original liner notes in 1961, explains, "It was exhilarating for the musicians involved to realise that for once in their careers, they were capable of formulating and sustaining their own ground rules without booking agents, impresarios and

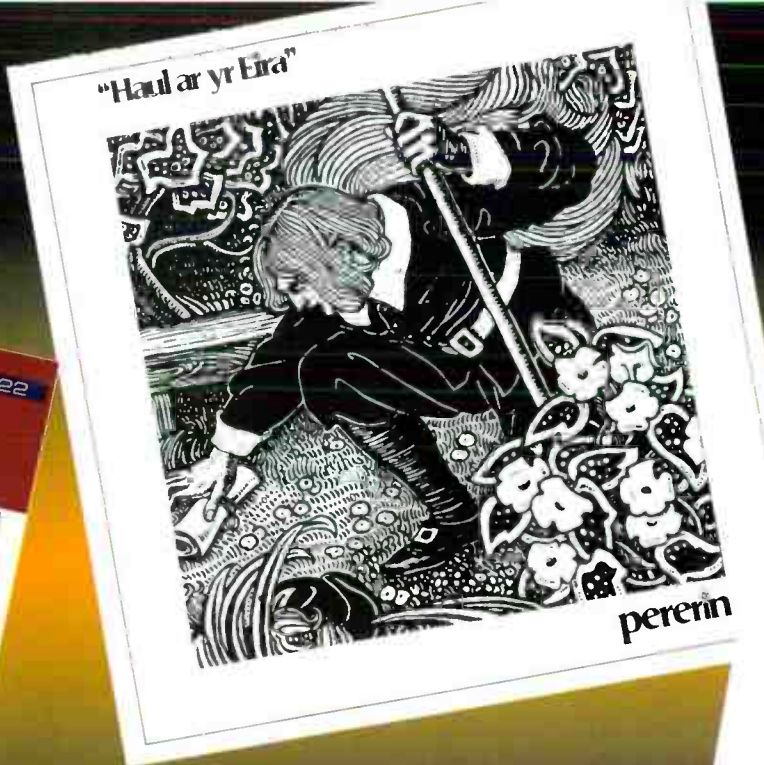
other middlemen. The rebels handled advertising and promotion; alternated as announcers of the rebels and took tickets... Mingus roamed the grounds besides, asking for payment from freeloaders outside the fence."

During that same year's festival, a race riot broke out in the town of Newport. The violence it created was to be echoed, country wide, in later years. The festival shut down for a year and never quite recovered its footing. Yet the quality of the music is very high. Roy Eldridge sets the album alight with his gutsy trumpet playing on Mysterious Blues and Me and You. His magnificent solos are a highlight to a landmark album. Also look out for the guest appearance by Abbey Lincoln on Tain't Nobody's Bizness, who opens up her former intimate club style. Technically, too, the album is spot-on. Fortunately, the sound is a direct-to-two-track recording which means that, for a jazz fan, the looked-for natural sound is not contaminated with unnecessary production paraphernalia. This is enhanced by the present day mastering, on 180gm vinyl via Pure Pleasure. The transfer is clean and considered, retaining the atmosphere of the original recording.

**PERERIN**  
**HAUL AR YR EIRA**  
**AKARMA/ GWERIN**

Yes, this is an Italian record label re-issuing an obscure Welsh, '80s folk/rock album! It would come as no surprise that you haven't heard of





the album, haven't heard of the band and, come to that, may not have even heard of the record label. However, that's exactly the point of reviewing this album... One joy of CD is how, in addition to new works, it has attracted, magnet-like, reissues of rare and obscure works from the spectrum of musical history, which is something the original dominant vinyl format never did with any conviction. Suddenly, we were finding rare demos and works in progress from Elvis and The Beatles, expanded versions of original albums from The Everly Brothers and lost gigs from Joy Division. When the hi res formats of DVD-A and SACD entered the commercial fold it was hoped that, in addition to their inherent sound benefits, these formats would continue CD's good work. However, this hasn't really happened. With new bands looking at their tight budgets, simultaneous new releases have been few and far between.

This leaves the dedicated muso looking for something more than the typical CD can provide and turning, once again, to audiophile vinyl. New vinyl issues are a regular occurrence, of course. Now, however, audiophile versions of new releases are making an appearance. Audiophile vinyl is also a principle source for expanded and enhanced original albums – Sundazed's recent Byrds release, 'Another Dimension', was a precise study of the popular Byrds album, 'Fifth Dimension'. Obscure re-releases are also a prime target for

audiophile vinyl, as this Akarma project illustrates. A rare record, even during 1980, the year or its original release, the album blends Welsh language folk with psychedelic rock (it even includes a Welsh language lyric sheet, for you to sing along). Mixing soaring ballads with ethereal guitar riffs, this is a beautiful album – Akarma should be congratulated in digging it up. Recommended to folkies out there, the rock elements will also attract fans of early Peter Gabriel-era Genesis and Jethro Tull. And the meaning of the band's name, Pererin? We think it is Welsh for Pilgrim – but maybe one of our Welsh speaking readers can confirm that point?

### KRAFTWERK MINIMUM-MAXIMUM EMI

The best gig I ever attended was a Kraftwerk in Liverpool's Royal Court 1981 [my best ever gig was Kraftwerk, Oxford Apollo, 1981 – same tour! – Ed.] Notorious perfectionists, Kraftwerk have a reputation for cancelling gigs if all the necessary conditions are not absolutely correct. So we were doubly lucky. I remember the sense of anticipation. As the lights dropped, a hail of high-speed electronic vocal and musical 'chatter' assaulted the audience. When the curtains opened what was revealed was an improvement on the bridge of Star Trek's Starship Enterprise. Technology oozed from the stage: lights flashed, buttons

glowed impressively, an alchemical 'otherness' was poised to strike. Behind a bank of keyboards stood, silent, unmoving, the four members of Kraftwerk. Standing immediately next to each member, in exactly the same stance and pose, was a mannequin replica of that band member. Seconds passed and nothing happened, and this was the scary bit – as not one member of the audience could distinguish between plastic and flesh and blood. Heady stuff.

Indeed Kraftwerk have been wowing audiences for many years and this four disk box set commemorates the fact. The latest band line-up of Ralf Hütter, Florian Schneider, Fritz Hilpert and Henning Schmitz toured the world, last year, playing 69 shows. This live set contains 22 tracks recorded throughout Europe, Japan and the US. The compilation features the classics such as 'The Robots', 'Tour De France', 'The Man Machine', 'Pocket Calculator', 'Autobahn' and, the track that launched a thousand techno dance bands, 'Numbers'. The set itself is presented in a sturdy box that, when opened, reveals four slabs of vinyl individually presented within their own sleeves. Each vinyl sleeve is illustrated with a photograph of the band 'in action', with a unique backdrop. The rear of the box gives a full track listing plus notes of the venue and date the gig was played. A band of immense importance, and this superbly produced vinyl box set shows why.

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The front end consists of a 6AU6 pentode feeding an ECC82 driver.

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KiT300 has volume and input selector knobs controlling a high quality ALPS Blue pot and a long life rotary wafer switch respectively.

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**KaT300 VALVE AMPLIFIER KIT \_\_\_\_ £720.00    KiT300 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT \_\_\_\_ £765.00**



Power Supply Unit (PSU-II) ..... £ 185.00  
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The volume control uses high quality Alps Blue potentiometer which, with our solid, turned brass, chromed knob, gives a quality feel rarely encountered these days.

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KEL84 weighs 10Kg. External dimensions with valves are 300mm(w)x270mm(d)x150mm(h)

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The amplifier weighs 19Kg. Dimensions are 390mm(w)x330mm(d)x220mm(h)

Prices shown include valves. Also available without valves on request.

Kit6550 £615

KaT6550 £580

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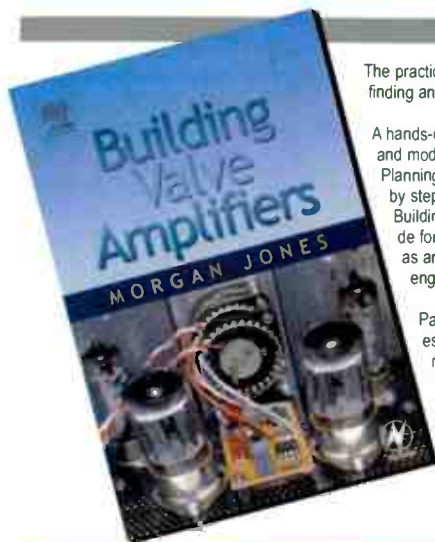
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“the audio world is going balanced everywhere else, so balancing the mains seems like an idea of its time...”



# noel keywood

**U**ntil recently I would never have considered rearranging my mains supply to improve sound quality. This has always seemed a step too far, a bit akin to calling the builders in to re-build your living room because it doesn't sound right. At some point your friends are going to think you've lost the plot and this must be getting pretty close to that point! But the audio world is going balanced everywhere else, so balancing the mains seems like an idea of its time.

What changed my mind was the sheer common sense of it all. Dropping mains volts from 240V to 120V relative to ground is quite a radical transition, not the sort of thing I would have thought casually possible before this idea surfaced. It's still a lethal voltage, but not as bad as 250V, that's for sure. In simple terms if you touch live and ground you get half the current through your body and, from what I've been told by Americans accustomed to 110V, it makes quite a big difference. Touching live in the States is no big deal apparently. I've got a feeling that I will hear more about this from readers (!) because I know quite a few of you are engineers and electricians and likely have had a 110V 'belt'...

I couldn't quite persuade myself to try this out personally as I already know what an electric shock is like. But then this is one reason why dropping the mains to a lower voltage appealed to me; it's the common sense bit, rather than the hi-fi bit. I doubt that many people die of electrocution in the UK each year, but there have been a few high profile cases recently and they don't make pleasant reading. Having pulled

a friend off a metal cased power drill that went live, I know what the impact is and have an interest in safer systems. The dilemma of whether to earth or not (earth bonding is mandatory I must point out) isn't solvable either and can be a contributory factor in electrocution, if you touch something that's live with one hand and something that's earthed with the other. Only an RCD can help here but I'm not sure many houses have them. Mine doesn't and it was rewired in the 1980s.

It was Americans again that lectured me once on how dangerous the British system was, after a friend of theirs had been mauled by it. 'Tis a pity that this is a debate we don't seem to have in Britain, or should I say Europe. Since the U.S. seems to get along well enough with a 110V supply, why can't we? Why does my house run at a stonkingly high 250V I wonder? To reduce resistive losses in the network? I have a suspicion there's a political reason somewhere. Does America suffer more electrical fires because of (I squared R) heating effects? Or is this how it once was with old Victorian cabling and we are just suffering the hangover?

Whatever, the prospect of turning my whole home over to balanced working did occur to me; I became convinced in advance that it was the simplest yet most sensible idea I've ever come across. But there are practical difficulties I discovered. I don't know what sort of transformers the Electricity Board uses, but my little jobby consumed 150W at idle, which doesn't make it the greenest thing going and it delivered just 10A. Not only would a 60A transformer suitable for supplying a home be a big chunk of

metal that three strong men could hardly move, it would run fairly hot and waste a lot of power. All the same you could conceivably, I pondered, install a step-down, centre tapped 110V transformer and buy U.S. domestic equipment. You would then have a house where electrocution was all but impossible, as live would be just 55V. All the bulbs would go dim and your razor would probably slow to half speed, however...

Temporarily at least, I've dropped these flights of fancy. But there might be mileage in there all the same. I can't help feeling balancing the mains is fundamentally sound in principle and even the Institution of Electrical Engineers found my experiments interesting, as none of us could be quite certain what the outcome would be. I thought they'd treat me as a raving lunatic, but happily they did not!

Unfortunately, my luck ran out in the end. It was late, I was tired and unthinkingly put a ground test connection on a floating live terminal whilst making distortion tests. There was a sizzling spark and a nasty phut from deep inside the spectrum analyser. Yes, we all fiddle with the mains at our peril! I didn't die but my poor old spectrum analyser did, joining the great analyser heaven in the sky. Before it departed though, I'd managed to hang three hulking great motor start capacitors of 20uF apiece off the secondary (delta connected) and confirmed by spectrum analysis that they were suppressing incoming noise and rubbish very effectively. So there's definitely mileage in this mains balancing malarkey. I can't help feeling I've a lot more to learn. ●



"it's outrageous that Ofcom are considering this proposal"

Steve Green is an expert on digital radio and modern communications systems. He'll be writing regularly on broadcasting issues, including audio in TV, the cellphone network and the internet.

Next month Steve talks about a modern radio scheme being chosen in preference to DAB.

# steve green

Up to now, Ofcom have regulated the audio quality of radio stations on DAB by enforcing minimum bit rate levels, because it is the bit rate that sets the nominal level of audio quality for digital radio stations. In a public consultation held earlier this year, however, Ofcom proposed a move away from this method of regulation and, instead, to use a measure called "diff-grades", which, in layman's terms is a measure of how much the audio is allowed to be degraded by the MPEG data compression process.

In principle, this isn't an unreasonable way to regulate audio quality, but what is so galling is the motive behind the proposal and the audio quality levels that they want to allow, because this clearly shows that Ofcom could not care less what the general public wants on digital radio.

Ofcom's motive for this proposal, as they have freely admitted, is to allow the commercial radio groups to lower the bit rates they use for stereo radio stations from the current minimum bit rate of 128 kbps to 112 kbps so long as they buy some new, slightly improved MPEG encoders. So, in effect, it is a lowering of the bit rates by stealth.

The commercial radio groups have been lobbying Ofcom for such a change for some time for the simple reason that it would allow them to carry ten stereo radio stations in each multiplex instead of nine at present; and more stations mean more profit once DAB has become mass market. From the listener's perspective, however, it means degrading the audio quality of eight radio stations in order to fit in one

extra station that they probably won't listen to anyway.

The BBC installed the new MPEG encoders in question for their stations on DAB at the beginning of this year, but I'm afraid that the audio quality on Radio 1, Radio 2, 6 Music and 1Xtra is still decidedly poor at 128 kbps, so I dread to think what radio stations will sound like at 112 kbps!

The problem with the audio quality at such low bit rates is caused by the fact that DAB uses the outdated and inefficient MPEG Layer 2 audio codec (MP2 for short), which was designed to be used at bit rates of 192 kbps and higher – with 192 kbps providing FM-like levels of audio quality. And, in fact, the BBC does use 192 kbps MP2 for Radios 1-4 on all of the digital TV platforms. It's also interesting to note that all TV channels on Freeview use bit rates of 192 kbps or higher for their audio streams, with the BBC using 256 kbps for the audio on all of its TV channels apart from BBC News 24 – CBeebies has a higher audio quality than Radio 3 on DAB!

The justification that Ofcom are using for putting forward this proposal is that a market research survey carried out by the DRDB (Digital Radio Development Bureau – the marketing arm for DAB in the UK) found that 95% of new DAB radio owners that responded rated the sound quality as being 'satisfactory' or better. However, this market research was carried out in June 2003, when over 95% of all DAB receivers being sold were of the small portable radio variety. So, Ofcom are proposing to make an irreversible change that will

permanently allow low audio quality on a radio system that will one day replace FM, based on the opinions of people listening to small portable radios that are completely incapable of reproducing hi-fi sound. This is utter lunacy.

What is most outrageous is that Ofcom are completely ignoring an important finding from a market research survey they themselves commissioned, which asked people that currently listen via analogue radio, "What do you see as the main advantages of listening to digital radio?" to which the two most-cited responses were "better sound quality" (63%) and "extra stations" (21%).

So, Ofcom's proposal to allow the broadcasters to add one station by degrading the audio quality on eight stations is clearly in direct contrast to what the general public actually wants from digital radio. Moreover, in response to Ofcom's public consultation earlier in the year, over one hundred individuals expressed their opposition to Ofcom's proposal and not a single one supported the move. Yet, at the Radio Festival in July, Ofcom's Chief Executive, Stephen Carter, dropped a major hint that they would still be going ahead with their proposal.

It's outrageous that Ofcom are considering this proposal, so blatantly against the wishes of the general public, and I'd urge anybody who opposes this to write to their MP (i.e. via a website designed for contacting your MPs, such as [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com)), because if this proposal goes through then it would be the final nail in the coffin for audio quality on DAB in the UK. ●

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# dominic todd

**U**nless you’ve been at Guantanamo Bay for the past year, you can’t but have heard how tough it is for retailers right now. Unless you’re Tesco’s, the news has been almost unrelentingly harsh this year. Hi-Fi retailers haven’t been spared the slow down in consumer spending, but the news isn’t as bad as it might be...

First, many hi-fi retailers actually recorded poor figures last year and, therefore, this year’s results are often no worse or even marginally better than the previous year’s. Another aspect often overlooked is that stereo hi-fi retailers deal with a smaller market and one, it’s turning out, that may offer less competition and therefore healthier margins as dealers can maintain higher prices.

Check the internet price comparison sites and you’ll see that whilst competition is rife amongst sales of plasmas, LCDs and MP3 players, traditional hi-fi components hardly get a look in. Select a CD player to price check and, whereas a year ago there would have been four or five retailers, these days you’ll often find just a solitary dealer. It’s also worth noting that although sales and profits may be down, most of the retailers are still turning a profit. If they weren’t, they simply wouldn’t be in business.

Whenever I hear of the tough times faced by retailers I can’t help but think they’ve got it easy compared to many of the manufacturers. Even though, as a nation, we may have thought that we actually stopped making things in the 1980s, the closure of Rover has reminded us that the UK still has a residual manufacturing industry that does

actually employ lots of people.

Although nothing like as big as Rover, in some respects Mission has a similar status within the UK hi-fi fraternity. It must therefore have come as quite a shock to hear that the company went into receivership at the beginning of May. At the time of writing the receivers are running the business as usual whilst looking for a buyer. Uncertain times follow, then, but not necessarily without hope. Mission’s ownership has already changed hands at least three times in its twenty eight years of trading, and it’s not been unusual for other British hi-fi companies to have had a similarly turbulent past.

When a company finds itself, as Mission has, in financial trouble, there are several outcomes that can arise. In some cases a loyal and, often brave, management team will attempt a buyout. Although the financial situation was very different, that’s exactly what happened at Arcam several months ago. Since then, although the business has yet to be tested, their product range has gone from strength to strength.

Sometimes when a company dies, it does so without trace, but this is rare these days. In most cases some form of buyout is made. This can occasionally take the form of the company lock stock and barrel buyout, with the continuation of business as usual or, in most other cases the buying of the brand name itself, with other assets being sold off. To varying degrees this is exactly what has already happened to a number of great, British hi-fi brands. The Chinese owned IAG group already owns Wharfedale and Quad and, it has to be said, has been a fine custodian of the marques – at least

in terms of product – and now Audiolab beckons, too. Similarly the London based Audio Partnership has swept up brands as diverse as Ariston, Gale, Mordaunt Short, TDL and Cambridge Audio and, by and large, given them a positive future. Cambridge Audio and Mordaunt Short, in particular, have never received so much praise as in recent years. Of course, the aspect of jobs is a prickly issue, for whilst both these companies employ UK staff, the actual manufacturing is generally, with the odd exception, based in China.

Either a management buyout or takeover by IAG are possibilities for Mission. Again, at the time of writing, the Armour Group, which owns a number of brands including Myryad, has also shown an interest. Whatever the outcome, it would be very surprising if Mission didn’t continue manufacturing and, at least in some form, manufacturing within the UK – at least with their high end ‘speakers. So where does this leave the rest of the industry? Well, by and large the manufacturing side has settled down and accepted current economic conditions. Low volume manufacturing can still make sense within the UK. Premium UK brands such as Linn and Naim have diversified their ranges and have proved that with good product there is still a market for UK built hi-fi at the high end.

No one can predict what will happen to the hi-fi industry in the future, but the one thing that is for certain is that, without the complacency that has existed before, the product available to the consumer is better value, better sounding and better finished than ever before. It may be tough out there, but it’s certainly not dull. ●



“except in that personal sense, there is no such thing as correctness in music”



# lj setright

**O**n BBC Radio 3 this morning, that admirable collector and critic of recorded music Rob Cowan invited listeners' views on the performance of Bach. It made me think of that transcendental 1915 recording of the double-violin concerto by Fritz Kreisler and Efrem Zimbalist, a supremely supple and musical performance about which I wrote in HFV a couple of years ago, calling attention to 'all the beautiful things that resentful post-1945 fashion has grimly expunged from performance practice'. It made me think of the extraordinary facility of the pianist Rosalyn Tureck for picking out the Bach note that really matters while giving due attention and sympathy to all the others, and of the sheer Bach excitement engendered by another pianist lady of more recent provenance, Joanna MacGregor.

It also made me think of a couple of damned Dutch dullards who occupied but scarcely enlivened Radio 3 recently with their academically 'correct' exposition of the Art of Fugue. They are not the only ones to be infected by that post-war pestilence of the latter 20th century, which caused the limitations of 'contemporary' performers to override the dreams and ambitions and possibilities inherent, whether the composers knew it or not, in the music they presented. Even some of the best of recent and current players – Tatiana Nikolayeva, Keith Jarrett, Andras Schiff – seem trammelled by their comprehension of what things were like when the music was written; even Glenn Gould, a man unlikely to be trammelled by anything, and who

regularly displayed welcome measures of imagination and sheer cheek, seldom achieved real grace. There is a parallel in the wearing of neckties: even the selection and knotting of the things can be inhibited to the point of stultification by the overwhelming compulsion to be 'correct'. Yet I am compelled to ask, is correctness what we really want?

Consider the music of electronic instruments – guitars, Moog, drums, Ondes Martenot, whatever: who can say how they should sound, or how they were meant to sound, either in an auditorium or out of recording and reproducing equipment? Can there be any such thing as an authentic sound from something artificially contrived by such technical means as were available – to the composer, to the player, to the man on the mixing desk, to the recording engineer, or for that matter to the hi-fi manufacturer and his installer?

Consider the appallingly loud and assertively fat sound of the modern symphony orchestra, in one of the huge halls for which it has been developed: is it, in that context, more 'correct' than the slighter, more characterful sounds of the symphony orchestra of 1920, when horns and woodwind were clearly differentiated in their tonal spectra, after the French fashion, rather than made to blend as they are today in the German fashion? Which would you rather hear performing Holst, Respighi, even Tchaikovsky – and where? Would you rather hear a recording of that performance through Tannoy Westminsterers or through BBC LS3/5As? Go through all the permutations and could you yet identify any of them as being

'correct'?

What you want to hear is what will seem correct for you, but it may not serve, impress, or even please, anyone else. Except in that personal sense, there is no such thing as correctness in music. There cannot be, because there is no absolute standard by which to measure and judge it. Sure, there is a good case to be made for philosophical pitch (middle C=256Hz) as a tuning standard, but even that is not fixed, and nothing else in music can be. The composer is not a god but merely somebody who has had an idea available for cogitation, interpretation, variation, inspiration, by any musician who cares to handle it. Swing musicians do this all the time; jazz musicians sometimes.

Nothing is fixed, and nothing can be: listen to a computerised rendition of the composer's original dots and what you hear may be supposed correct, but it will not be music; it will be nothing more than the skeleton to which the performer, the recording engineer, and all the rest of them, may add flesh. One might even add fancy dress; it, too, might be 'correct' – and even if not, it might yet be musically preferable. Did you ever hear the Swingle Singers perform Bach?

Once, long ago, I heard a couple of their recorded tracks. One was so-so; the other, the opening sinfonia from Bach's second Partita, was startling. It dug deeper, and came out with more expression of more wonderful ideas that lay buried in the dots, than any of the other performances that I have heard. It may not have seemed, to those who approach music as so many do, correct – but it was miraculous. ●

“podcasting could yet provide the most significant shake up in the mobile music market to date...”



# patrick cleasby

It has been a busy month in the world of internet downloads, both legal and illegal. The legal side of things is the most easy to cover briefly – as ever it is predominantly concerned with things Apple, as they continue to dominate the marketplace. All the usual marketing brouhaha has been applied as they build towards 500 million tracks sold in just over two years – it is impressive to watch the rate at which the onscreen counter climbs at Apple’s home page.

Less prominent are their next moves – concealed within the new 4.9 version of iTunes are a couple of significant advances. Firstly, as expected, Podcasting support has been added. More covertly, by connecting their current Motorola phones some observers have noted that support for Motorola iTunes phones is already in the software, even though the truly specialised phones are still to hit the market. This could yet provide the most significant shake up in the mobile music market, if the network providers can be convinced to run with Apple.

Podcasting support may be seen to be controversial as the navigation and search hook into the iTunes Music Store methods. This has lead commentators to note it would seem inevitable that Apple will seek to ‘monetize’ (horrible American jargon word, I’m sorry) Podcasting as soon as they are able. This seems contrary to the movement’s freewheeling ethos, and would eventually render Podcasts little more than regularly refreshed audio books. Suspicions were only reinforced when the RSS and XML hounds complained that Apple’s code

seemed to indicate that they intend to bring in a proprietary document type in their Podcast programming – once again contrary to the intended use of such open-source systems. It will be interesting to see how this pans out – it is unlike Jobs et al to deliberately provoke the ire of the open-source community, but there is a lot to play for. Statistics are already showing impressive usage rates for prominent programs – particularly in the states, where some of the key BBC Podcasts are evidently just as popular as they are here.

Over on the illicit side of the fence, further moves have been made to tempt the genie back into the bottle on both sides of the Atlantic. In the states the courts have decided that there is a case to answer in that the suppliers of a couple of the prominent peer-to-peer clients may have been guilty of incitement to breach copyright law. So a couple of the originators of the dodgy download enabler before last get sued out of existence – so what? There are plenty of alternatives around, particularly Bittorrent, which endures despite movie industry attempts to close down the websites which list the torrent files.

Far more likely to succeed (i.e. force the casual downloader to go legal), are the continuing moves to penalise serial uploaders. In this country the BPI have drawn attention to cases of large scale downloading by teenagers. Probably much like their parents they often do not realise that the default settings of many of these pieces of software mean once you have downloaded your pile of tracks you are automatically making it all available from your computer to fellow dodgy

downloaders – marking you as a serial uploader in the authorities’ eyes. Once a few parents have been stung for a few thousand quid the exposed rump of dumb dodgy downloaders may well recede, as it has in the states.

But the savvy computer-head will be wise to these newbie traps, and will undoubtedly be using torrents and newsgroups to locate compressed (or even lossless) digital versions of whole albums available in one place, rather than as the disparate tracks you tend to find spread across peer-to-peer networks. There are lone voices in the wilderness of the music industry now suggesting that the battle is already long lost, and revolutionary thinking is necessary to address the serious threat to musicians’ livelihoods. One of these is the legendary Blue Öyster Cult producer Sandy Pearlman, who was heard on the ‘Today’ programme recently around the time he was due to speak on the same subject at Patti Smith’s Meltdown festival. His simple concept of a low (5 cent?) charge for every track downloaded everywhere may be nice in principle, but would seem impossible to implement – and received little credibility on the radio when set against the man from the BPI’s ‘we will prevail’ bluster.

In my view there is room for a practical happy medium, and barring a few of the concerns voiced above, it would still appear to be Apple’s paid-for download model. Ask thousands of people around the world about the ease and rapidity with which they were able to get hold of a decent copy of McCartney’s Live8 version of Sgt. Pepper’s – they know the score. ●



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# World classics

In this heavily revised section, you'll find the great and the good from audio's glorious past. Most are seminal designs which have earned their place in hi-fi history, but 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. Think we've overlooked something? Then write in and let us know!

## DIGITAL

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD11986** [£1500]  
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD4SE** 1998 [£200]  
A touch soft in the treble and tonally light, but outstanding in every other respect.

**LINN KARIK III** 1995 [£1775]  
The final Karik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, grippy dynamic sound, albeit tonally dry.

**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



**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.



**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.

**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.

**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.



**NAIM CDS** 1990 [£ N/A]  
Classic Philips 16x4 chipset with serious attention to power supplies equals grin-inducing sonics.



**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!

**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.



**SONY CDP-701ES** 1984 [£890]  
Sony's first ever bespoke high end 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.

## COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

**TEAC VRDS-T1** 1994 [£600]  
Warm and expansive sound made this a mid price hit. Well built, with a slick mech.



**ESOTERIC P0** 1997 [£8,000]  
The best CD drive bar none; TEAC's Tokyo boys pushed the boat out in style. Brilliantly incisive, ridiculously over engineered.

**KENWOOD 9010** 1986 [£600]  
The first discrete Jap transport was beautifully done and responds well to re-clocking even today.

## DACs

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC** 1995 [£99]  
Good value upgrade for budget CD players with extensive facilities and detailed sonics.



**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.



**PINK TRIANGLE DACAPO** 1993 [£ N/A]  
Exquisite; the warmest and most lyrical 16bit digital audio we have ever heard. Clever plug-in digital filter modules really worked!



**QED DIGIT** 1991 [£90]  
Budget bitstream performer with tweaks aplenty. Positron PSU upgrade makes it smooth, but now past it.

## TURNTABLES

**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.

**PIONEER PL12D** [1973] £36

The beginning of the end for the British turntable industry. When vinyl was the leading source, this brought 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



**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.

**GOLDRING LENCO 88/89** 1963 [£15.65]

Simple, well engineered middleweight with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearms. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists.

**LINN AXIS** 1987 [£253]

Simplified cut-price version of the Sondek complete with LVX arm. Elegant and decently performing mid-price package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

**LINN SONDEK LP12** 1973 [£86]

For many, the Brit superdeck; constant mods meant that early ones sound warmer and more lyrical than modern versions. Beguilingly musical but now off the pace.



**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.

**MARANTZ TT1000** 1978 [£ N/A]

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



**MICHELL GYRODEC** 1981 [£599]

Thanks to its stunning visuals, this bold design wasn't accorded the respect it deserved until recently. Early examples sound cold and mechanical, but now right on the pace. Clean, solid and architectural sound.

**REGA PLANAR 3** 1978 [£79]

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

**GARRARD 301/401** 1953 [£19]

Heavy metal - tremendously strong and articulate with only a veiled treble to let it down. In many respects, better than the seventies 'superdecks' that succeeded it.



**ROKSAN XERXES** 1984 [£550]

Supposedly the first to 'better' the LP12. Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagging plinth top-plates make them a dubious used buy.

**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.



**TOWNSHEND ROCK** 1979 [£ N/A]

The product of academic research by the Cranfield Institute, this novel machine has an extremely clean and fluid sound. Substantially modified through the years, and capable of superb results even today.

**TRIO LO-7D** 1978 [£600]

The best 'all-in-one' turntable package ever made, Trio/Kenwood threw their 'engineering best practice' book at this one with startling results. Clean, powerful and three-dimensional sound, ultimately limited by the tonearm.

**TO NEARMS**

**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.

**AUDIOTECHNICA 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.

**ALPHA SON HRI1005** 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 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 has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

**GRACE G707** 1974 [£58]

This early Japanese example of the tonearm art has a smooth, lyrical sound. Imported by Linn, fitted to early LP12s. Sonically way off the pace now, though.

**REGA RB300** 1983 [£88]

Inspired budget esoterica. Detailed, tight, neutral sound but tonally grey sounding in absolute terms. Responds well to tweaking, and its cheaper RB250 brother better still.



**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.

**HADCOCK GH228** 1976 [£46]

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



**LINN ITTOK LVII** 1978 [£253]

Arguably the first 'superarm'; Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. Now off the pace, but the final LVIII version worth seeking out.

**NAIMARO** 1986 [£875]

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



**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.

**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS**

**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.



**ROGERS A75** 1978 [£220]

The prototypical Audiolab 8000a - 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 and open to listen to.

**EXPOSURE VII/VIII** 1985 [£625]

Seminal mid-eighties Exposure pre-power, offering most of what rival Naim amps did with just that little bit extra smoothness and sweetness. Still, it's by no means 'sweet' by today's standards, being lean, punchy, musical. It's also possessed of that quintessentially eighties look - frumpy black steel boxes with rough silk screened logos!



**SUGDEN CS1/P51** 1976 [£130]

Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN socketry. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

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

Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it shows. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent used buy.

**A&R A60** 1977 [£115]

Sweet and musical feature-packed integrated; the Audiolab 8000A used its blueprint to great effect.



**CREEK CAS4040** 1983 [£150]

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

**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.



**MCINTOSH MA6800** 1995 [£3735]

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

**SUGDEN A21** 1969 [£ N/A]

Class A transistor integrated with an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

**MISSION CYRUS 2** 1984 [£299]

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



**MUSICAL FIDELITY A1** 1985 [£350]

Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.



**NAIM NAIT** 1984 [£350]

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

**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.



**MYST TMA3** 1983 [£300]

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

**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



**ROTEL RA-820BX** 1983 [£139]

Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

**PREAMPLIFIERS**

**AUDIOLAB 8000C** 1991 [£499]

Tonally grey but fine phono input and great facilities make it an excellent general purpose tool.

**AUDIO RESEARCH SP-81982** [£1,400]

Beautifully designed and built high end tube preamplifier with deliciously sweet and smooth sound. Not the last word in incision or grip, but that didn't matter to those who aspired to it.

**CONRAD JOHNSON**

**MOTIV MC-8** 1986 [£2,500]

Minimalist FET-based preamplifier from the Yank valve specialists is brilliantly neutral and smooth with a spry, light balance in the mould of Sugden high end stuff. Something of a curio, but worthwhile nonetheless.

**CROFT MICRO** 1986 [£150]

Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

**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!

**LINN LK-1** 1986 [£499]

A brave attempt by the Glasgow boys to bring remote controlled user-friendliness to hair-shirt audiophile hi-fi. Didn't quite work, but not half bad for under £100.

**NAIM NAC32.5** 1978 [£ N/A]

The Salisbury company came of age with this, their classic high end pre. Brilliantly fast and incisive sound that's a joy with vinyl but a tad forward for digital.

**LECSO AC-1** 1973 [£ N/A]

Amazing styling courtesy of Allan Boothroyd can't disguise its rather cloudy sound, but a design classic nonetheless.



**QUAD 22** 1958 [£25]

The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocs - cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

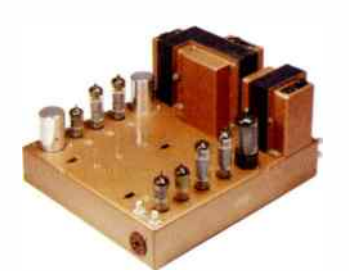
**QUAD 33** 1968 [£43]

Better than the 22, but Quad's first tranny pre isn't outstanding. Responds well to tweaking/ rebuilding though...

**POWER AMPLIFIERS**

**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.



**LECSO 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.

**MARANTZ MODEL 9** 1997 [£8000]

Authentic reproduction monoblocs 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!

**LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1** 1949 [£28]  
Early classics that are getting expensive. Overhauling is de rigueur before use, using original parts if possible. Surprisingly crisp and musical sound, that's far more modern than Quad IIs. Deeply impressive when in fine fettle.



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



**RADFORD STA25 RENAISSANCE** 1986 [£977]  
At the time, very possibly the least cool amplifier on the planet – and we're not talking heat dissipation here. 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 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.



**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.

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

**KRELL KMA100 II** [1987] £5,750  
Ludicrous monoblock version of the giant KSA-100 is one of the seminal eighties transistor power amplifiers. Massive wallop allied to a very clean and open Class A sound makes this one of the best amplifiers of its type, ever.

**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 eighties-tastic experience.



**PHONO STAGES**

**CREEK OBH-8 SE** 1996 [£180]  
Punchy, rhythmic character with oodles of detail makes this a great budget audiophile classic. Partner with a Goldring G1042 for an unbeatable budget combination.



**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.

**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.

**TUNERS**

**MARANTZ ST-8** 1978 [£353]  
Marantz's finest radio moment. Warm, organic sound plus an oscilloscope for checking the signal strength and multipath.



**CREEK CAS3140** 1985 [£199]  
Excellent detail, separation and dynamics - brilliantly musical at the price. T40 continued the theme...

**NAD 4040** 1979 [£79]  
Tremendously smooth and natural sound allied to low prices and good availability make this budget analogue esoterica. Needs a good antenna to work properly, however.

**NAIM NAT03** 1993 [£595]  
The warm, atmospheric sound is further proof of Naim's proficiency with tuners.

**PIONEER TX-9500** 1976 [£295]  
Another of the serious classic solid-staters. Boasts the usual high end Jap package of fine sound, brilliant sensitivity and superb build.

**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. Fed by a modern outboard decoder they're deliciously lucid with true dimensionality.



**YAMAHA CT7000** 1977 [£444]  
Reputedly the best of the classic Jap analogues, this combines sleek ergonomics, high sensitivity and an explicit, detailed sound.

**QUAD FM4** 1983 [£240]  
Supreme ergonomics and styling allied to a pleasingly lyrical sound with plenty of sweetness and detail made this one of the best tuners around upon its launch.



**REVOX B760** 1975 [£520]  
More of a semi-pro machine than a domestic bit of kit, 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?

**NAD 4140** 1995 [£199]  
Brilliant affordable digital tuner has a smooth, detailed musical sound plus sensible real-world facilities.

**ROGERS T75** 1977 [£125]  
Superb mid-price British audiophile design, complete with understated black fascia. Fine sound in the true Rogers mould – smooth and sweet with fine dimensionality.

**SANSUI TU-9900** 1976 [£300]  
A flagship Japanese tuner designed to steal sales from the likes of Accuphase and Revox, it boasts superlative RF performance and an extremely smooth and lucid sound, along with very fine build and finish.

**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 a very good sound quality allied to brilliant ergonomics.



**TECHNICS ST-8080** 1976 [£180]  
National Panasonic's specialist hi-fi brand was a big hitter back then, and this is no exception. Superb FM stage makes for a very clean and smooth listen with lots of detail and depth.



**ANALOGUE RECORDERS**

**YAMAHA TC-800GL 1977 [£179]**  
Early classic with ski-slope styling courtesy of Mario Bellini. Middling sonics by modern standards, but cool nonetheless!



**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.



**PIONEER CTF-950 1978 [£400]**  
Not up to modern standards sonically, but a great symbol of the cassette deck art nonetheless.



**REVOX A77 1968 [£145]**  
The first domestic open reel that the pros used at home. Superbly made, but sonically off the pace these days. B77 better, but couldn't match the Japanese.



**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.



**DIGITAL RECORDERS**

**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 outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



**KENWOOD DM-9090 1997 [£500]**  
Serious and sophisticated sound thanks to well implemented ATRAC 4.5; surprisingly musical MD recorder.

**SONY TCD-8 DATMAN 1996 [£599]**  
Super clean sound makes this an amazing portable, but fragile.

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

**ACOUSTIC RESEARCH ARI8S 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...

**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. Partner with Rogers ABI subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!



**LOWTHER PM6A 1957 [£18 EACH]**  
This seminal full-range driver is still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

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



**JR 149 1977 [£120]**  
Infamous cylindrical speaker that 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 rewards with fine clarity in imaging.



**SPENDOR BC1 1976 [£240]**  
Celestion HF1300 tweeter meets bespoke Spendor Bextrene mid-bass unit - and the result is a beautifully warm yet well focussed sound. A little bass bloom necessitates careful low-stand mounting, but these prove that the seventies did have some fine designs after all!

**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.



**KEF R105 1977 [£785]**  
Three way Bextrene-based floorstander (complete with castors!) gave a truly wide-band listen and massive (500W) power handling. A very neutral, spacious and polite sounding design, but rhythmically well off the pace. The quintessential nineteen seventies loudspeaker.

**IMFTLS80 1976 [£550]**  
Warm and powerful nineteen seventies behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

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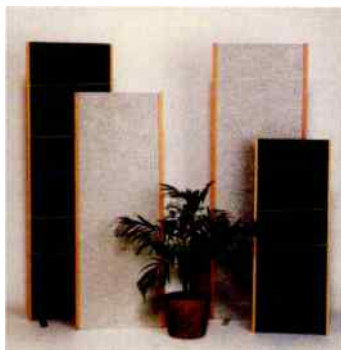
The Kontrapunkt series from Ortofon. Named as a sign of respect for possibly the greatest, and the last, of Johan Sebastian Bach's works - The XIXth Contrapunctus. From around £400 and available from most quality Hi-Fi stores.

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**MAGNEPLANAR SMGA198X [£800]**  
Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



**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.



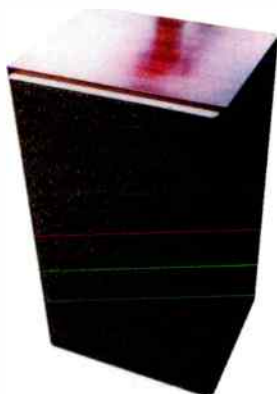
**MISSION 752 1995 [£495]**  
Cracking Henry Azima-designed floor-standers combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

**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.

**CELESTION SL6 1984 [£350]**  
Smallish 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...



**LEAK SANDWICH 1961 [£39 EACH]**  
Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



**QUAD ESL63 1980 [£1200]**  
An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics.



**YAMAHA NS1000 1977 [£532]**  
High tech Beryllium midband and tweeter domes and brutish 12" woofers in massive sealed mirror image cabs equals stunning transients, speed and wallop allied to superb transparency and ultra low distortion. Partner carefully!



**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!



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## Absolute Demos

|   |  |           |
|---|--|-----------|
| qualityaudio@2die4.com - +44 (0) 79 61 13 30 38 | Audiogram MB2- Integrated Amplifier                  | £265.00   |
|   | Audiogram MB1- Amplifier                             | £219.00   |
|   | Audio research VT100 MKIII -Valve Amplifier          | £4650.00  |
|   | Audio research 150.2 - Class T digital amplifier     | £1494.00  |
|   | Audio research 150.M5-Class T 5 ch digital amplifier | £4025.00  |
|   | Copland CSA301 MK1 - Valve Preamplifier              | £699.00   |
|   | Copland CSA303 - Hybrid Preamplifier                 | £650.00   |
|   | Copland CTA504 - Valve Amplifier                     | £1099.00  |
|   | Copland CVA 535- 5 X125W amplifier                   | £1700.00  |
|   | Jadis Orchestra - CD Player                          | £899.00   |
|   | Krell KAV250P - Preamplifier                         | £1499.00  |
|   | Krell KPS 25Sc-Preamplifier/CD player CAST2          | £18995.00 |
|   | Krell KSL - Preamplifier                             | £800.00   |
|   | Martin Logan Odyssey-Electrostatic Loudspeakers      | £4700.00  |
|   | Martin Logan Quest - Electrostatic Loudspeakers      | £2400.00  |
|   | Martin Logan Script -Electrosatic Loudspeakers       | £1225.00  |
|   | Mcintosh C200 - 2 chassis Preamplifier               | £4200.00  |
|   | Mcintosh MC2000 - Ltd. edition Valve Amplifier       | £9000.00  |
|   | Mcintosh CR16 - Multizone control system             | £2299.00  |
|   | Mcintosh MC58 - Amplifier                            | £1719.00  |
|   | Mcintosh MC202 - Amplifier                           | £1999.00  |
|   | Mcintosh MHT100 - Home theatre processor             | £3199.00  |
|   | PS Audio Ultralink II - DAC                          | £989.00   |
| PS Audio Reference Link -Digital Preamp         | £1999.00   |           |
| Sonus Faber Concertino Home Loudspeakers        | £399.00  |           |
| Theta Digital David II -CD/DVD Drive            | £2999.00   |           |
| Wilson Audio CUB - Loudspeakers Silver          | £2900.00   |           |
| Wilson Audio CUB II w/stands Black              | £5499.00   |           |
| Wilson Audio System 6 - Loudspeakers Cashmere   | £12500.00  |           |
| Wilson Audio Witt II Loudspeakers Black         | £5400.00   |           |
| Z Systems RDQ1- Transparent Digital Equalizer   | £1850.00   |           |

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# world standards

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

## TURNTABLES

**AN TTI/ARM ONE/IQ1 1998 £725**  
Redesigned Systemdek IIX now off the pace, but the arm and cartridge are both star performers.

**LINN LPI2/ LINGO 1973 £2100**  
The quintessential belt drive superdeck offers a beguilingly musical midband at the expense of lumpy bass and nebulous imaging. Latest Lingo brings a new lease of life, with even more punch and polish.

**MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £575**  
Superb introduction to Michell turntables on a budget. Top quality build and elegant design make it the class of the mid-price field right now.

**MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2002 £870**  
Its beauty is more than skin deep - superbly build and finish allied to clever design equals class leading performance. Latest DC motor with 'Never Connected' PSU make it all the more unassailable.

**MICHELL ORBE SE 2002 £1916**  
Cost-no-object evolution of the Gyro adds mass acrylic platter and two-stage isolation. Fantastically capable all rounder with commanding, powerful, detailed sound that gets the best from almost any arm and cartridge.



**PRO-JECT DEBUT II PHONO SB 2002 £170**  
Fuss-free all in one starter turntable, complete with built in phono stage. Not a star performer, but a fine mid system upgrade all the same.

**REGA P3 2000 £298**  
Great entry level audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and responds well to careful siting on a Base platform.

**REGA P25 2001 £619**  
Until the TecnoDec, the best mid-price turntable package. Fine build and elegant styling. Clean, open sound but limited at frequency extremes in absolute terms.

**SME MODEL 10A 1995 £3333**  
Exquisitely engineered deck and arm combo, but dry and clinical sounding compared to rivals. Accomplished performer with classical music, nonetheless.

**CLEARAUDIO REFERENCE 1996 £4,070**  
Fine bass articulation and power allied a stunningly open and atmospheric midband and beautifully etched treble makes this one of the very best sounding turntables at any price. Michell's Orbe offers marginally more impactful bass, but can't touch that amazing mid. Exquisite.

**ORIGIN LIVE AURORA GOLD 2004 £1,470**  
Seminal 'entry level high end' deck showing Mark Baker's characteristically obsessive attention to detail. The result is an extremely wide open and natural sounding machine that lacks the Michell GyroDec's slightly 'mechanical' nature - along with some of its scale and accuracy. Ideal for those seeking that classically beguiling vinyl sound.



**GOLDRING GR-1 2004 £140**  
Essentially a Rega P2 built down to very low price and bundled with a decent Goldring MM, this is cracking value for money. Head and shoulders above its immediate rivals, it offers a surprisingly musical and detailed sound that will stun those new to vinyl - which is precisely what it was designed to do.

**THORENS TD190 2003 £290**  
Ease of set up and use, allied to fully automatic operation mean that, although hardly the last word in performance, this deck is most certainly a model of convenience.

**ROKSAN RADIUS 5 2003 £750**  
Fantastic value allied to intelligent, interesting and 'out of the box' design makes for a wonderful entry-level superdeck. Open and musical sound is more inviting that Michell TecnoDec rival, and the bundled Nima Unipivot arm is a superstar.



**MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £399**  
John Michell's brilliant reworking of the Rega RB250 theme, using blasting and drilling techniques usually seen in motorsport! The result is the best sounding arm at £400, and as good as most at four times the price. Runs SMEV very close in all except bass, and betters it for musicality. Stunning.

**ORIGIN LIVE AURORA 2003 £1600**  
Cleaner than a Linn LPI2 and warmer and more mellifluous than a Michell GyroDec - but lacks the latter's incision and dimensionality. When fitted with an OLI arm, this package is all many will ever want...

**CLEARAUDIO REFERENCE 2003 £4,000**  
The company's best value vinyl spinner; good enough to get the best from almost any tonearm and cartridge combination. Brilliantly open and neutral sound; superlative pitch stability; stunning build and styling - Michell Orbe does most of this at half the price, however.

## TO NEARMS

**TECHNICS SL1200/III 1973 £395**  
Slick build makes it a respectable performer, although the cheapo arm limits it - fit a Rega RB250 and it's suddenly a serious mid-price machine.



**HADCOCK 242 SE 2000 £649**  
Latest of a long line of unipivots, with added mass, revised geometry and better finish. Musical like few others at or near the price.

**LINN EKOS 1987 £1700**  
Subtle mods over the years, including revised bearings and the recent new wiring has kept it a serious contender in the superarm stakes. Lacks the SME's slam, the OL's clarity or the ARO's emotion, but has a feisty musicality all of its own.

**ORIGIN LIVE ILLUSTRIOUS 2002 £1570**  
A modern superarm with battleship build. Extremely strong, even and open sound in the mould of the late, lamented Zeta, plus fine tonal colouring. Exquisite.



**NAIMARO 1987 £1425**

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

**ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2502001 £625**

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

**REGA RB250 1984 £112**

Sold through Moth Marketing, this is capable far beyond its price point, with a tight, lean and detailed sound. Responds brilliantly to Origin Live counterweight modification, and well to rewiring.

**SME 309 1989 £767**

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

**SME SERIES IV 1988 £1127**

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

**SME SERIES V 1987 £1614**

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

**CARTRIDGES****ORTOFON KONTRA' B 1999 £720**

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

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-110 1984 £29**

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

**DYNAVECTOR DV10X5 2003 £250**

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

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

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

**LYRIA LYDIAN BETA 1998 £600**

An altogether more beguiling listen than the MC30S, although not quite as incisive. Superb all rounder, nonetheless.

**SUMIKO BPS 1995 £250**

Charismatic performer with rhythm aplenty, but in other respects way off the pace – lacks smoothness and sophistication of the DV10X5.

**LYRA PARNASSUS DCT 1997 £1895**

Jonathan Carr's masterpiece is a brilliantly lyrical and fluid performer, with a deliciously sweet tone and immense subtlety and polish.

**ORTOFON MC25FL 1994 £285**

Strong budget MC with a cleaner and more detailed sound than the Dynavektor; more sterile and less emotive, however.

**ORTOFON MC30 SUPR' 1995 £550**

Beautifully clean and detailed device with real finesse, albeit a tad mechanical sounding.

**DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395**

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

**MUSIC MAKER 1999 £575**

When mated with a good quality arm, this hand finished high-output pick-up gives an ear-boggling account of itself. Very high compliance ensures maximum information retrieval. An absolute (grain orientated) gem.

**SHURE V15XMR 1994 £350**

The most musical MM yet made – brilliantly dynamic and punchy in the classic Shure mould, yet refined and tidy too.

**KOETSU RED 2004 £1,600**

Although the new Koetsus have lost some of their 'romance', you'll not hear a more lyrical and emotive performer. Startlingly 'analogue' nature makes rival Ortofons and Clearaudios sound frigid.

**ORTOFON KONTRA PUNKT C 2004 £1,000**

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

**DIGITAL DISC PLAYERS****CREEK CD5011 2004 £699**

Extensive revisions make this an altogether more beguiling machine, and one of the best at its price. Extremely musical sound that's surprisingly upfront for a Creek design. Excellent mid-price purchase, with only its Marantz rival to challenge it.

**CYRUS CDB 2003 £1000**

Highly incisive, engaging, grippy and dynamic sound, but needs careful matching to smooth ancillaries. Optional PSX-R adds bass and dimensionality.

**LINN GENKI 1999 £995**

Undeniably fast, lithe, musical and fun - but some won't take to its dry, wry character. Works best in all-Linn systems, where it really rises to the challenge!

**ARCAM FMJ CD33T 2003 £1,300**

Superbly detailed midband allied to excellent bass extension makes this a powerfully musical machine in the best traditions of Arcam CD spinners. Nothing to criticise at the price, everything to recommend it!

**LINN IKEMI 1999 £1950**

Has the brilliant focus and clarity of the previous Karik III with a dose more tonal richness and polish. More grip and poise than most at any price - still superb!

**MARANTZ CD17 II 2002 £800**

Of-often overlooked middleweight boasts a truly beguiling sound with lots of tonal flavour. Sits awkwardly between the £600 and £1000 price points, where some brilliant value buys reside, though.

**NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4950**

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

**NAIM CDS3 2003 £7050**

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

**PHILIPS DVD963SA 2003 £400**

Creamy CD sound allied to superb SACD and DVD video playback makes this brilliant value for money.

**REGA PLANET 2002 £498**

Rhythmic and beguiling performer, although lacks the warmth of tone needed to better its Marantz rival. Superb ergonomics and design, nonetheless.

**MARANTZ SA-17S1 2003 £1400**

Brilliant CD playback comes close to the best at any price, while SACD performance is almost as convincing - superbly warm and three dimensional nature makes listening a joy. However, the lack of DVD-Audio decoding and poor feature count makes it look middling value compared to some of the universal players here.

**REGA JUPITER 2002 £1000**

A Planet on steroids, this machine adds depth and breadth to its baby brothers already impressive sound. Good, but facing stiff competition.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA21 DAC 2003 £1,200**

Superbly neutral and expansive sound makes this offboard digital-to-analogue converter an excellent upgrade to any mid-price CD player - fed by a decent transport, few 16bit players at any price come close.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640C 2003 £250**

Tremendously well-rounded yet engaging sound makes this the best budget silver disc spinner by far. Build quality is excellent at the price, and the styling bang up to the minute. Blistering value for money.

**CREEK CD5011 2004 £699**

Extensive revisions make this an altogether more beguiling machine, and one of the best at its price. Extremely musical sound that's surprisingly upfront for a Creek design. Excellent mid-price purchase, with only its Marantz rival to challenge it.

**DENON DVD-2200 2003 £499**

Superb do it all mid-price player; fine DVD-A and SACD sound allied to excellent video performance will be all many could ever want. Ultimately it's a little bright and mechanical sounding, but you have to go into high end territory to truly better it. Stunning value.



**PANASONIC DVD-S75** 2002 £120

Real ability and fine measured performance for an unbelievably low price. Impressive in its own way, if not truly audiophile. If you just want a cheap DVD spinner with DVD-Audio as a bolt-on goodie, this is the one.

**PIONEER DV-868AVI** 2003 £799

Pioneer's most accomplished mid-price machine to date, this boasts full DVD-A/SACD playback, a welter of facilities and the all-important HDMI video and I-Link audio digital outputs, making it nigh-on future-proof. Factor in fine – if not outstanding – sound and superb pictures and it's practically impossible to fault.

**SONY SCD-XB790** 2003 £250

Quite unlike any other budget Sony CD spinner we've heard, here's a very 'analogue' sounding machine that's smooth and warm and even. Factor in fine SACD playback and this machine is a brilliant budget buy – unless you want DVD-Audio that is, which it lacks.

**ORELLE CD100EVO** 2003 £1,200

Extremely engaging and musical sound, but maybe a tad too bracing for some tastes. Superb aesthetics complete an attractive package.

**ARCAM CD73** 2004 £400

The best all rounder at the price; unfailingly smooth and couth sound allied to fine build and attractive styling makes this a worthy upgrade to entry-level designs.

**ARCAM DV78** 2004 £800

We've not found a more capable 'real world' DVD player; peerless picture and CD sound at the price, although lack of universal playback will deter some.

**ARCAM FMJ CD33** 2004 £1,300

Consummate smoothie with an unusually organic and natural sound, but lacks the command of some rivals. Its all round sonic, aesthetic and ergonomic polish will endear it to many.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO****AZUR 640C** 2004 £250

The best budget CD spinner we've heard; warm and satisfyingly musical; fine build and aesthetics and that remote control make for unarguable package at the price.

**DENON DVD-A11** 2004 £1,600

Classic Japanese 'battleship' DVD universal machine does practically everything superbly, with no obvious weak points except the undistinguished CD sound. Top value.

**EXPOSURE 3010** 2003 £1,200

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

**LINN CLASSIC MOVIE****SYSTEM DI** 2002 £2,500

Superb ergonomics and performance from this one-box beauty. The best 'home theatre in a box' you can buy.

**LINN UNIDISK 1.1** 2004 £6,500

Surely the ultimate universal DVD player; superb in every department, but its CD playback shines brightest considering it's not a bespoke Red Book machine.

**MARANTZ CD7300** 2003 £350

Superlative build and styling for the money, and the sound is as good as you'll get below £600. Smooth, detailed and engaging beyond its price.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-****RAY V3** 2004 £900

Striking looking mid-price stunner with very even, accurate and even sonics; perfect for those seeking detail and neutrality over character and/or colour.

**NAIM CDS1** 2004 £825

The most engaging mid-price CD player on the market, but with a surprisingly velvety sound. Delightful build and iconic styling make this one of Salisbury's true classics.

**PIONEER DV-8681** 2003 £800

The best mid-price universal player right now; CD sound is respectable, SACD and DVD-A impressive and the video truly special. Does everything very well for the price.

**SHANLING SCD-T200C** 2004 £2,150

Superb SACD player with tube output stage; arresting looks and truly special sound; be sure to go for 3DAcoustics version for best sound and UK after-sales support.

**SONY SCD-XA3000ES** 2003 £600

Surprising mid-price SACD spinner with multi-channel capability; sweet sound; not the best at the price but certainly the most versatile.

**SONY SCD-XA9000ES** 2003 £1,600

Slick, beautifully built high end SACD player with very transparent, if rather dry, sound. Unexpectedly sweet CD playback but not the most gripping at the price.

**STELLO DP-200** 2004 £1,495

Brilliant do-it-all upsampling DAC preamp with headphone output and phono in. One of the best digital to analogue converters around, allied to mind-boggling flexibility.

**DIGITAL RECORDERS****APPLE IPOD 40GB** £399

Genre-defining best of breed, thanks to supreme ergonomics and build allied to fine sound.

**PIONEER PDR-609** 2001 £200

Brilliant value CD recorder that makes excellent recordings from its digital inputs. Half decent digital converters, too.

**PHILIPS DVDR880** 2003 £370

Poor CD audio playback, but makes great DVD video recordings and boasts fine ergonomics. Top AV value.

**SONY RCD-W3** 2002 £250

Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for no-nonsense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

**YAMAHA CDR-HDI300E2002** £600

HD means MD-style ease of editing, but compromises recording quality ever-so slightly. Add decent CD replay and it's a fine all rounder nonetheless – top value.

**ONKYO MB-S1** 2001 £1100

An interesting machine complete with MP3 functionality, but high price, fussy ergonomics and over-smooth sound make it mediocre value against the Yamaha.

**PHONO STAGES****CREEK OBH-21SE** 2003 £250

Musically enjoyable yet highly refined for the price – a superb buy. Gives the Dino a real hard time.

**EAR 834P** 1993 £400

Classic tube design with a deliciously warm and expansive sound – shame about the loose bass and veiled treble!

**LINN LINTO** 2000 £900

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

**QED DISCSAVER** 1995 £35

Rhythmic, bouncy sound via battery, although it's bright and forward. Great value, but £100 more on the X-LP is well worth it!

**TRICHORD DINO** 2002 £299

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

**TRICHORD DELPHINI** 2003 £995

The very latest 'Never Connected' variant is easily the best, bringing velvety smoothness to an already refined and engaging performer. Neutral to a fault – some will mourn the passing of the charismatic ISO.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY****XLPSV3** 2003 £249

Fine all rounder at the price, which a satisfyingly full bodied sound that's smoother than the Creek but a tad less engaging. Only Trichord's Dino, with its easy upgradability for just £50, reflects badly on this fine bit of kit.

**PROJECT PHONOBOX LE2004** £99

Great little box that improves on most bundled phono stages found in budget integrated amplifiers, adding detail and definition and a measure of smoothness too. If £100 is all you're prepared to spend, then do it happily on this, but you'll get obviously better results from the £250 brigade

**WHEST AUDIO PS.20****/MSU.20** 2004 £1,000

Disarmingly clean, smooth, open sound makes this the very best phono stage we've auditioned to date, but some will still prefer the gutsier feel of the Trichord Delphini.

**GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLDV** 2004 £460

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

**AMPLIFIERS****ARCAM DIVA A65 PLUS** 2002 £370

Classic budget Arcam fare – decently sweet and open with sensible facilities and plenty of power.

**ARCAM FMJ A32** 2001 £1150

For those who value serious power and labyrinthine facilities over outright clarity or grip. A very impressive all rounder with an unusually muscular power amp at this price.

**AUDIO NOTE OTO SE** 2000 £1199

This baby tuber is beautifully sweet and creamy, but lacks solid-state's clarity, detail and incision. Low, low power means speaker choice critical.

**AUDIO NOTE SORO SE** 2000 £1699

Wonderfully out-of-the-box sounding tube middleweight is all about sweetness and fluidity. Limited power and loose bass, but little the worse for it.

**CYRUS 6** 2003 £600

Cracking do-it-all mid price design, bringing svelte sound, good connectivity and upgrade-ability and stunning style and build.

**CYRUS 8** 2003 £800

Unusually warm and lyrical for a solid-stater, with decent power and punch. PSX-R adds dynamics, detail and dimensionality.

**MERIDIAN 551** 1994 £895

Evergreen middleweight is a serious performer even now. Tonally a tad dry, it's still very smooth and svelte with bags of power, detail and grip. Class act.

**SUGDEN A21A** 1993 £1020

The most musical amplifier at the price, bar none. Delicious Class A sound is smooth, sweet and wonderfully transparent with true tonal colour. Low power, so match carefully.

**AUDIO RESEARCH VS15S2003** £2,895

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

**CREEK A50IR** 2004 £550

Consummately smooth yet engaging sound makes it a serious player at the price, but don't expect Creek's traditional sumptuousness. Fine value nonetheless.

**MONRIO MC207** 2003 £1,100

Powerful, muscular sound allied to real finesse makes this unusual integrated an essential audition at the price.

**MARANTZ PM-17MKII KI MODIFIED** 2004 £1,500

Gloriously offbeat do-it-all design with a truly warm, smooth and three dimensional sound. Think of this as a latter-day Audiolab 8000a - with a good deal more colour and finesse - and you'll have its measure. Lowish power output at the price, but fine real world speaker driving ability.

**UNISON RESEARCH S6** 2002 £1,625

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

**ORELLE SA100EVO** 2003 £1,200

Fine build, exquisite design and a wonderfully lucid sound make this an essential audition at the price.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-150** 2004 £800

Brilliant shoebox-sized powerhouse is sweeter and more mellifluous than Nait 5i, but less taut in the bass. Oodles of power, striking aesthetics, sensible facilities and great build make this a rare bargain.

**NAD C352** 2004 £300

Classic NAD mix of smooth, punchy sound with plenty of watts and sensible, real-world facilities; a great introduction to real hi-fi.

**NAIM NAIT 5I** 2004 £825

The most musically engaging integrated at or near the price; real sophistication in sound allied to grip and power aplenty. Iconic styling and great build complete a very pretty picture.

**NAIM NAC282/NAP200** 2004 £4,000

Wonderfully taut bass, lightening midband and incisive treble makes for an enthralling listen; this cracking combination looks great and is superb value too.

**PRIMA LUNA PROLOGUE I** 2004 £800

Unlike almost every other budget tube integrated we've tested, it's nicely built, decently powerful and engineered well enough to let the benefits of tubes shine out loud; sweet, open, liquid. Cracking value.

**STELLO S200** 2004 £1,495

Oodles of smooth, clean power with plenty of pace and pleasing subtlety too. Factor in exquisite build and a low price and this is true audiophile bargain.

## AV AMPLIFIERS

**DENON AVR-2803** 2003 £650

Superb mid-price 7.1 channel extravaganza with nearly all the decoding power you'll ever need. Powerful, open and clean sound (at the price) makes it capable with music, and superb on movies. Fine ergonomics and great build makes this receiver hard to beat as an all-rounder.

**NAIM AV2/NAP 150/NAPV 175** 2002 £4,190

Brilliant audiophile multichannel pre-power amplifier combo; not as good with music as a two-channel Naim set-up at the same price, obviously, but surprisingly close. Elegant control layout plus a strong, clean and brilliantly engaging sound make this a serious crossover product. Ultimately lacks power compared to similarly priced Arcam gear, but is more musically involving.

**PIONEER VSA-AX51** 2004 £1,000

The ability to hook up to Pioneer's DV-868i via i-Link (nee FireWire) means that this multichannel AV amplifier can do all the digital conversion onboard makes the a very special product, which when used with the aforementioned DVD spinner sounds better even than the sum of its parts.



## HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS

**SUGDEN HEADMASTER2003** £600

Unusual combined preamplifier and headphone amplifier, this boasts a surprisingly smooth and open sound which suffers only when compared to preamps at twice the price.

## MUSICAL FIDELITY

**X-CANS V3** 2003 £249

Mr Michaelson's best headphone amplifier to date, with an extremely open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop and the ability to drive any phones to very high levels. Errs towards brightness with some headphones, so match carefully and use smooth cables.

## PREAMPLIFIERS

**CREEK OBH-12** 2000 £220

Brilliant value budget passive, giving little away in sonics to far more expensive designs. Connectivity and build aren't great, but what do you expect at this price?

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003** £1500

Novel and effective pre with switchable gain via a transformer, and balanced operation. Open and incisive sound, yet makes most active rivals sound edgy by comparison.

**NAIM NAC112** 2002 £660

Affordable admission ticket to the Salisbury high end experience. Detailed and dynamic, it tonally rather lacklustre.

**LINN LK140** 2000 £800

Dry and grey sounding, but decently dynamic and musically engaging all the same. A worthy worker in a budget Linn system.

## MUSICAL FIDELITY

**A308 CR** 2003 £2400

Superb transistor behemoth, worth partnering with any high end CD player or preamp. Oodles of grunt served up with poise and purpose.

**MARANTZ SM-17** 2001 £700

Useful budget power amp with plenty of clean transistor power. Not the most transparent, but sweet and clean all the same. Fine build completes a great value package.

**NAIM NAP150** 2002 £795

Driven by a decent source and a NAC112, this gives highly enjoyable results - providing you like the Naim sound! Taut, fast and feisty despite its relative lack of power.

**QUAD 909** 2001 £900

The latest current-dumper has a smooth and expansive character with enough wallop to drive most loads. Not the most musical, but super value all the same. Lovely build, finish and Quad's legendary service are nice.

**CROFT TWIN STAR** 2003 £1750

With a taste of the best of both tube and transistor, this latest update of the Croft classic is a truly endearing experience.





**GRAAF GM20 OTL 2003 £3,300**

Awesome output transformer-less valve power amp gives dazzling speed and incision, with an ethereal soundstaging and delicious filigree detail. Tremendous punch belies its humble 20W power rating. Factor in one of the most exquisite finishes this side of an Aston Martin and it's very hard to say no...

**SUGDEN MUSICMASTER 2003 £1,300**

Quintessential Class A Sugden sound is not warm as many expect, but extremely neutral and open with real tonal colour. By comparison, tubes sound bloated and standard solid-state hazy and brittle. Superb when partnered with efficient loudspeakers like Revolver R45s, but many will find it underpowered.

**LOUDSPEAKERS****B&W CDM1 NT 2002 £750**

Fine clarity and imaging allied to pleasing warmth and great rhythmic cohesion make these standmounters an essential audition.

**CASTLE CONWAY 3 2003 £930**

Superbly smooth and crisp performers, with a big hearted musical sound. Ultimately coloured though, with a slow, plummy bass.

**CYRUS CLS70 2001 £800**

Charismatic performer with a fast, tight and open midband, but lacks cohesion and scale.

**KEF Q1 2003 £250**

Highly polished and articulate standmounters at the price, but demand good ancillaries for best results.

**KLIPSCH HERESY II 1997 £1100**

An outstanding high sensitivity loudspeaker with midrange and treble horns coupled with infinite baffle 12" bass driver. Effortless, fast and accurate.

**LINN NINKA 2001 £995**

Major on rhythms and dynamics, making them an involving listen. Reasonably refined, too - but tonally disappointing.

**EPOS ELS-3 2003 £200**

Plenty of brio and a decent degree of refinement makes this budget baby a fine value contender.

**MISSION 782SE 2003 £900**

Bright and tight design capable of brilliant speed and grip, at the expense of warmth. Demands high quality, high powered ancillaries.

**MONITOR AUDIO B4 2003 £350**

An unusually smooth and lucid performer at the price, and its 3-way design means it drives rooms well. Fine engineering, but build and finish so-so.

**REVOLVER R45 2003 £899**

Wonderfully easy to drive floorstanders that are a dreamboat for tube amplifiers, and great for party-minded transistor users too. Great attack transients, fluid and musical bass and midband and couth treble make them fine all-rounders.

**W'DALE DIAMOND 8.1 2001 £120**

Still the best baby budget standmounters around. Tight and grippy thanks to Kevlar drivers, but invariably limited in the frequency extremes.

**MORDAUNT SHORT 9142002 £300**

Warm, detailed and articulate performer, but a touch loose in the bass and veiled up top. Fine partner for budget valve amps.

**NAIM ALLAE 2002 £1990**

Taut and grippy like few others, this speaker majors on transient speed. Surprisingly smooth for a Naim box, with nicely etched treble. As always, tonally dry.

**QUAD ESL-988 2001 £3400**

Wonderfully neutral and self-effacing with sublime imaging and projection. Treble lacks extension, bass lacks weight - although the pricier 989 answers the latter resoundingly.

**PERIGEE FK-1L 2002 £5000**

Charismatic Aussie ribbon design with deliciously open mid and treble, allied to fine bass weight. The right room and ancillaries essential. Engaging, musical and powerful sound. Superb.

**TDK S-80 2002 £90**

Ingenious NXT multimedia sub/sat system has a wonderfully even and open sound - like baby electrostatics.

**MARTIN LOGAN CLARITY 2003 £2,895**

Supremely transparent and open with brilliant depth perspective and image projection. The midband is up there with the very best at any price, while the bass and treble integrate well but don't especially shine. Dynamically limited, with middling bass punch, but that's not the point - that deliciously fluid and intricate midband wins great respect.

**TANNOY EYRIS DC1 2003 £699**

The combination of dual concentric treble/midband drivers plus supertweeters make for a very spacious and expansive sounding loudspeaker, albeit one that's a little bright and loose in the bass. An excellent mid-price design well worth auditioning.

**MONITOR AUDIO GR60 2002 £2,295**

In some ways, these come close to Yamaha's legendary NS1000Ms, thanks to their tremendous clarity, great transients and 'full-fat' wide bandwidth performance. Bright and clean, but never fatiguing or uncouth. A truly accomplished all rounder that gives a real taste of 'super-fi' at a reasonably affordable price.

**TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM 2003 £800**

Another brilliant niche product from Max, these ribbon aspirated supertweeters add space and atmosphere to any good high end loudspeaker, and more surprisingly perhaps make things more fluid and musical too. Superb affordable esoterica.

**KEF Q4 2004 £400**

Hard to argue with the value of this small footprint floorstander; very couth, even, dimensional and detailed sound works well in confined spaces and large rooms alike.

**ELAC FS207.2 2004 £1,000**

Deeply capable mid-price floorstanders, distinguished by superb JET ribbon tweeter which is unmatched by class rivals; engaging, slightly warm nature needs serious transistor power to sing.

**EPOS M22 2004 £950**

Classic Epos blend of speed, attack, power and punch will delight rock and techno fans alike, but classical and jazz buffs will crave more colour and textuality.

**MONITOR AUDIO S8 2003 £800**

Very few can rival this floorstander's all round ability; highly smooth, warm and three dimensional sound allied to an easy load and good sensitivity makes this hard to overlook.

**REVOLVER RW16 2004 £400**

Outstanding standmounter with tonal accuracy and speed that totally belies its price; good sensitivity for a small box makes it great with valve amps too. A budget audio-ophile classic.

**SPENDOR S3/5E 2004 £950**

A natural successor to the BBC LS3/5a, whose impressive neutrality, imaging and evenhandedness makes this a superior, if less charismatic, loudspeaker.

**TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM 2003 £800**

The best affordable supertweeter we've heard - you'd be amazed at the difference it makes! Classy ribbon design, flexible level settings, cool styling...

**HEADPHONES****JECKLIN FLOAT TWO 1998 £99**

Wonderful panel-like sound from these esoteric-looking headclamps.

**SENNHEISER MX-500 1999 £19**

Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

**SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29**

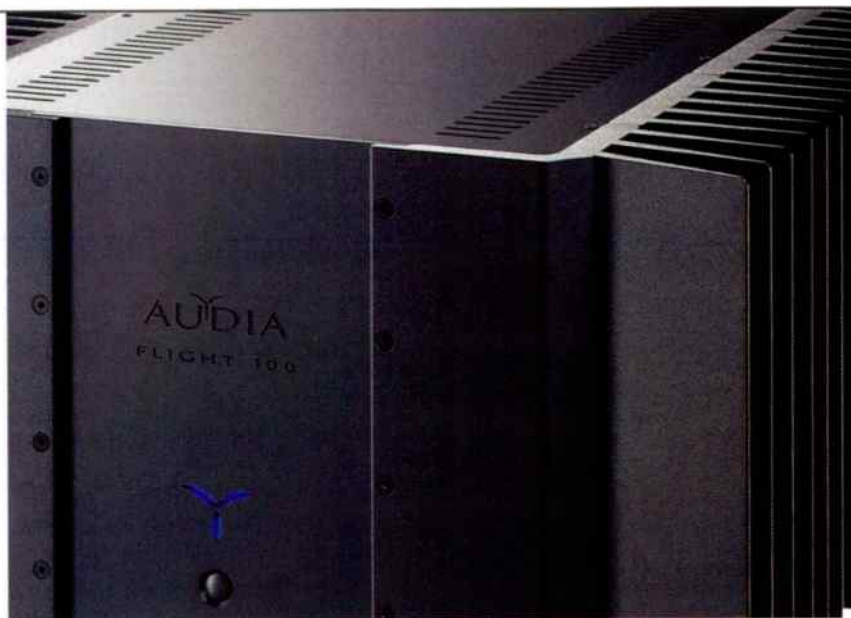
Cracking pair of lightweight open back cans ideal for personals, but good enough for real hi-fi use. Superb build allied to a smooth and engaging performance make them the spiritual successor to the HD400s.

**SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250**

Not the best headphone in the world, but a superb all round reference all the same. Very crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and fine comfort makes all most people will ever want. Cable upgrade yields great results.

To hear the fine detail you some times need a little ***muscle***

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**SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199**

The company's best real-world cans to date. Open and smooth with plenty of detail. Brightly lit midband makes them an ideal partner for a valve headphone amp.

**INTERCONNECTS****WIREWORLD OASIS 5 2003 £99/M**

Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

**CHORD CO. CHAMELEON 2 £90/M**

One of our favourites, these are musical performers with a smooth yet open sound.

**VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST £260/0.6M**

Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.

**DNM RESON £40/M**

Neutral and transparent - a steal!

**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.

**NORDOST BLUE HEAVEN £150/M**

Some of the fastest and most transparent cable around.

**TUNERS****ARCAM T61 2002 £250**

This sleek looking and refined sounding FM/AM tuner isn't the last word in musical involvement, but is fine value, nonetheless.

**ARCAM DT81 2003 £650**

A fine radio, hampered only by its seriously compromised DAB medium. Probably the best DAB tuner ever, but one for Digital Radio enthusiasts only...

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DAB300 2003 £150**

Fine ergonomics allied to great ease of use and respectable DAB sound makes this superb value.

**DENON TU-260L MK II 1998 £130**

If you want the best FM sound at the lowest possible price, then this ancient tuner remains peerless after all these years. There are better analogue designs around, but are either near-impossible to find or are now long-deleted.

**CYRUS FM X £500**

Great for Cyrus users, but its dry and precise sound can't match the best of the rest at the price. Worthy, nonetheless.

**MYRYAD MT 100 1999 £600**

One of hi-fi's nice surprises, this is a beautifully designed and built bit of kit with a deliciously sweet and svelte sound which really does justify its high price.

**NAD S400 2003 £600**

Highly accomplished specialist high end analogue tuner with a deliciously open and lucid sound, but it can't quite match the Myriad all the same.

**PRIMARE T21 2002 £600**

Seriously accomplished design with mature sonics, great styling and fine build.

**PURE DIGITAL DRX-702ES 2003 £249**

Great with Digital Radio, but thin a tad sounding on FM at times. It's a top hybrid, nonetheless...

**SYSTEMS****DENON D-M31 2003 £250**

Excellent CD receiver package with surprising sonics and a brilliant tuner as a bonus, although its amplifier section doesn't quite match the Onkyo. Optional speakers are mediocre.

**ONKYO CS-210 2003 £300**

Superb value thanks to excellent sound, great build and ease of use, but the bundled 'speakers' rather let the side down.

**LINN CLASSIK MOVIE SYSTEM DI 2002 £2,995**

Superb ergonomics and performance from this one-box beauty, but it's just a tad expensive and in value for money terms, compares poorly to the original Classik Music System.

**PIONEER NS-DV990 2003 £799.95**

Whiz-bang technology fest with DVD universal playback, discrete display and NXT flat panel speakers. Superb for the spare room or study - truly intelligent and elegant design - but don't expect it to match the sonics of AV separates.

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## Letter of the Month

### TOP 'LINE

I own a Leak Troughline tuner and couldn't agree more with your review. The sound quality of Radio 3 - BBC willing - is simply superb. How this can be when programme is relayed to transmitters digitally at only 32kHz/13 bit I leave to others to explain!

I bought mine from Classique Sounds. It had been serviced and realigned by One Thing, and modified for use with their outboard stereo decoder. The latter uses the best performing decoder chip ever made, the LM4500A - it sounds superb and offers a CCIR weighted signal-to-noise ratio of 76dB. The poor stereo performance of the review unit in this respect presumably arose from whatever decoder GT Audio use. It isn't down to the Troughline - the only hiss I hear is already on programme, or is very faint and is only heard at very high volume settings in quiet passages.

The only failing of the Troughline is its poor selectivity. It must be fed not just a strong signal but a clean one too. This is no problem here in Norwich, but it is highly susceptible to adjacent station interference and multipath distortion. And don't expect an unserviced unit to perform well - forty or more years will have taken their toll. Though valves, bases, capacitors and resistors can be renewed or upgraded without affecting alignment, any amateur tampering with presets or transformer cores will be met by disaster. One Thing offer a repair and realignment service which is both superb and reasonably priced. They only replace defective components, but complete renewal is unnecessary anyway.

I have made several modifications to both the tuner and decoder. I upgraded all the power supply capacitors to Cerafines and Blackgates, and installed a 20H choke after the input power supply capacitor. This is large, so I bolted it to the rear of the tuner. I revised some of the earthing arrangements, and upgraded the final two signal coupling capacitors. The unit was originally the stereo model (with the original poor decoder removed), but



**Leak Troughline - still the best way to play radio today.**

still had the original ECC84 front end; I modified the latter to use a 6922 for greater sensitivity (this involves rewiring the valve base, shortening L7 to 4 turns and adjusting R5; it doesn't affect alignment though). I replaced both the ECF80s with much less microphonic E80CFs (this can eliminate spurious low frequency noises).

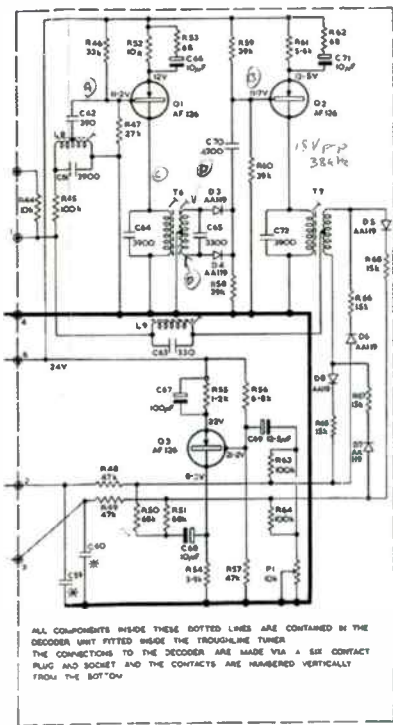
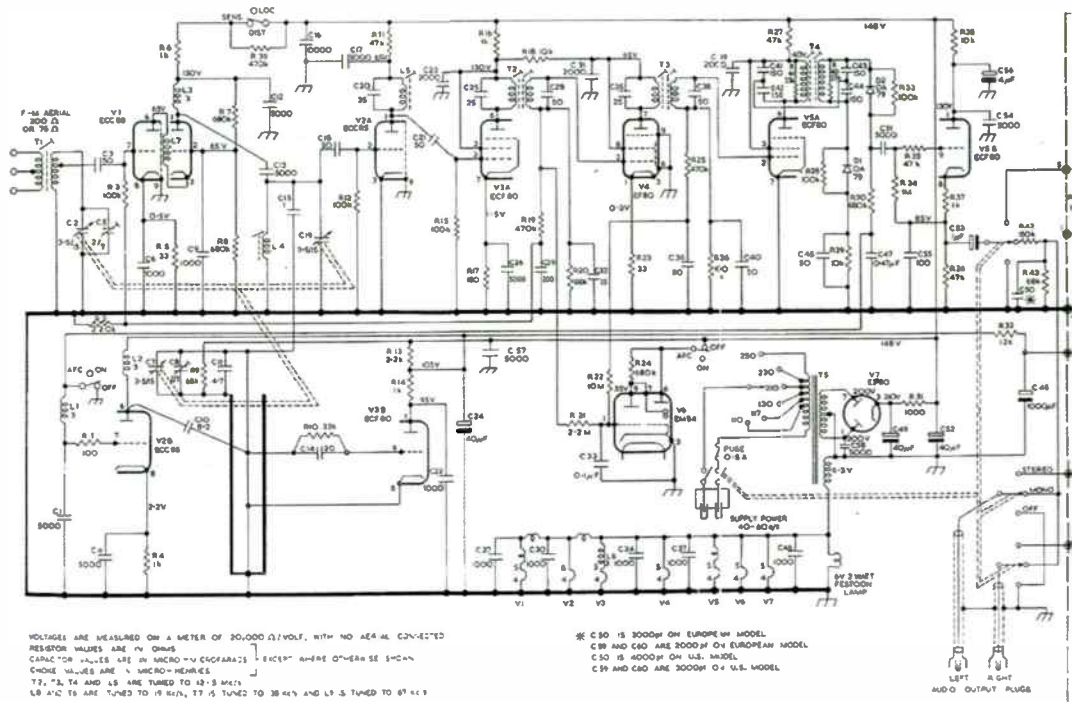
Finally, I replaced the preset on the input of the decoder with two resistors, chosen to give maximum level but without distortion due to decoder overload, and upgraded the power supply to the decoder with Schottky rectifiers and a Black Gate after the voltage regulator, fed a.c. from an unused output of my Musical Fidelity X-PSU v3!

Some other points may be of interest. The stereo Troughline was basically a Mark III and like the latter has the lower distortion discriminator fitted, better than the earlier Version IIs. (The better version has transformer cores with hexagonal holes, not slots). Whatever model, it sounds best to take the "multiplex" feed for a decoder after the cathode follower, provided the de-emphasis network is removed first (R42, R43 and C50 - replace with a 1M resistor. Take output from after C53). The multiplex output provided on the Mark II and mono Mark III is taken from before the follower (at the junction of C51 and R30), and is not ideal.

Though each step above paid dividends, I'd need an unmodified unit to accurately describe the overall improvement. The infuriating thing about tuners in this respect is the lack of control over programme, making comparative listening over time impossible. This is particularly irksome when trying to minimise/eliminate small background noises such as hum, buzzes and a "breathy" sound caused by imperfect tuning (I needed to master fine tuning of the discriminator transformer to eliminate the latter. The problem was self-inflicted and I won't go into it here. It is possible to fine tune this transformer by ear alone, and if there is any difference at all between the sound with AFC in and out this probably the cause).

I'm not an engineer and despite the above I'm pretty ignorant of r.f. circuit design. I was only able to make the modifications with the help of an expert. I'd love to acknowledge him, but I feel he suffered enough unsought attention already! He knows who he is - thanks again.

I've also built my own preamp (phono and line), and a single-ended power amp which uses fixed biased WE300Bs, driven by a 6S45 via interstage transformers, and powered by a choke input, valve regulated power supply. It's very similar to the two stage version of the Border Patrol SE300B, and sounds superb. Apart from the



usual SE attributes, it provides "solid state" bass (has to heard to be believed of a 8W SE amp). I owe a great debt to Gary Dews at Border Patrol who has advised me over the years. And I've just acquired some pre-built (normally supplied as a kit) Hammer Dynamics Super 12 loudspeakers- single full range drive units with super tweeters, sensitivity 97dB. Again superb. And the amps and speakers just love the Troughline...

Paul Needs

Thanks Paul. Not bad considering you are "not an engineer". Just as well, as we'd all be out of a job! I hope your letter inspires others to run this venerable tuner, but as you so usefully point out, it is a labour of love. Listening to a good condition Troughline is like being in the studio though - it is almost uncanny. What a pity a great experience like this is almost unknown to all except a few dedicated enthusiasts. However, the worth and value of second hand will continue to rise as more people come to understand that all that has been built in the past isn't junk - far from it in fact. I've just come back from Duxford, with its eternally wonderful fly pasts of pristine condition warbirds, like a flight of the most beautifully restored gleaming silver alloy Mustangs holding tight formation in a steady fly-by. Apparently the number of 'flyers' (serviceable planes, that is, not humans with goggles on) is rising progressively as people restore them and even Tom Cruise has one. It's what you put in your garage when you have everything else! Classic hi-fi is similarly a valuable part of our heritage, one that can be enjoyed today. Glad that you're doing it. **NK**

**RARE TUNER FISHING**

Thanks for the "air waves" special last month! Comparing Graham's Troughline with Tim De Paravicini's worked over Troughline with his external FM decoder, a Hi-Fi World Design from some ten years ago, which one would

be better? Do I have to ask Graham to re-do my Tim De Paravicini's Troughline?

And another question to Noel: you did a special on an open reel tape recorders (esp. the Revox G36) in an issue early or mid 90's and had an address for a guy, I think in the Midlands, for fixing, tuning and upgrading classical tape recorders (from valve Revox's to Elcaset machines). Any chance of digging out that contact, please? All my HFW mags are currently in storage in Sweden, so my "reference-library" is a bit impaired.

regards  
Fred S. Llanelli,  
S. Wales

No, don't have your T de P Troughline decoder altered, because it is quite unique. Tim made the main channel (L+R) all-valve; only the Stereo difference signal (L-R) is solid-state. Since much of what you hear is mono, or L+R in tuner parlance, you effectively have a valve decoder. It's a neat idea, very T de P and effective too, so best to keep hold of it in my view. I somehow doubt you would be able to improve much on this, although I have not carried out comparative listening tests. For tape recorder repair, contact Phil Pimblott at Audiolab (Leeds) on 0113 2440378 or Brian Reeves at 0161 4992349.

**IN THE PINK**

I've recently made the co-habbing move with my lovely wife to be... Hi-fi now needs to look nice and we have very





Use quality connectors too, like the Neutrik Profi plugs shown here.

different versions of nice... silver and glass look nice apparently, so do Partington Dreadnoughts! Confused by that one, anyway I digress.

The reason for the e-mail is that due to the hi-fi negotiating a new home, my existing speaker wire is no longer long enough, various lengths of Cable talk, QED, Ixos, etc. sit in the drawer waiting for a day to be useful.

All this change has led me back to 'home made' hi-fi, especially interconnects and mains and why not speaker cables! It has led to a degree of mild stress in speaker cable pursuit to get more information on the 'RS Pink cable' mentioned in this month's letters page, with reference to a letter in the May edition. Guess what, I started re-buying Hi-Fi World from the June edition and it's looking like a subscription is looming on the horizon now, as the other established periodicals don't really cater to the home tinkerer or those that can't just pop £3k on a CD player, or that feel three pages covering 25 CD players doesn't give subjective depth of what the product really is. Back to the point. Can you provide any more information on said Pink cables? I would be very grateful for any information you can provide.

#### Jason (born again tinkerer)

The cable spec is PTFE insulation 19/0.15 pink cable at £13.80 per 25m reel + VAT, or £16.21 total. Stock number is 359-510, from R.S. Components and I found it on p1-115 of the latest catalogue. This is a silver plated copper equipment wire with nineteen 0.15mm diameter strands, and an outside diameter of just 1.35mm, which is thin for loudspeakers. It is rated at 9A all the same. R.S. Components are industrial suppliers and only supply cable by the reel. This range of cables normally come in 100m reels, but you can get black, pink, red and yellow in 25m reels at what is a very reasonable price. I presume pink

doesn't sound better, but I am prepared to be corrected here!

PTFE insulation is quite highly regarded for its sonic properties, as is silver plated copper, but these are standard copper wires, not Oxygen Free Copper. R.S. also do OFC loudspeaker cables at slightly higher cost, but at fairly prosaic spec. The sheath is PVC and the cable is not silver plated; they likely come from Taiwan, looking much like Shark Wire to me. You can also get this from Maplins. Don't ignore the quality of your plugs. Our article on Connections highlights the fact that there are some very well thought through audio connectors available, using materials and techniques superior to those found on everyday commercial connectors. They should add the finishing touch to what may turn out to be a very good sounding cable. **NK**

#### BASS-IC ISSUES

I finally moved-in to a brand-new one bedroom top floor shared-ownership flat in March of this year. I was of course excited at the prospect of plugging-in the stereo into the quite large 20x 20 square living-dining area. But instead of the best room acoustics ever, all I got was a horrendously booming and indistinct bass, and not wanting to disturb my neighbour below I tried

different room and speaker arrangements and cutting the bass on the amplifier to zero - all with no real improvement.

The Tivoli Audio One in the kitchen is also unaccountably boomy and I have concluded that the problem probably lies with the construction of the walls and floors. In desperation I have disconnected the bass driver from the speakers and now listen to CDs and the tuner through just the tweeter and a mid range driver. It sounds a bit like my old Dansette: slightly more listenable - but not really hi-fi any more. My friends think I have lost the plot.

Please can you advise on possible remedies? I have installed wall-to-wall carpet but not yet put up any curtains: is this likely to help? Or should I purchase some new speakers? Something much smaller with a very tightly restrained bottom end perhaps? I haven't auditioned speakers since the early 1980s but am intrigued with descriptions of Elac's ribbon tweeters and Mission's smaller boxes. Can you suggest anything to get me started?

My current set-up is Heybrook HB3 speakers bought in 1983, A&R A60 integrated amplifier from same period, Musical Fidelity E50 tuner, various CD players, currently enjoying a late 1990s Technics portable which has no soundstage but plenty of bounce - good for Swing, 60s/70s Rock.

**Stuart Dunbar-Dempsey**

This seems a little surprising, because although your room is square, dimensions of 20ft give it a basic modal frequency of 27Hz, which is low. I would not expect your loudspeakers to excite this strongly, since they likely reach 40Hz or so. And big rooms do not tend to boom, partly because they are naturally well damped due to the mass of air in the room, and partly because our ears aren't too sensitive to frequencies as low as this. Since the ceiling is likely to be 8-9ft high I don't see any modal sensitivity here



When your Tivoli booms, it's curtains for your rooms...

either. So the structure could be booming, but in my experience lightweight partition walls act to suck out bass rather than reinforce it. And floors bounce at around SHz, because of the mass of timber in them.

I can only suggest the problem is a lack of damping in the room, and that you travel down the heavy furniture route, using well padded foam settees to absorb bass. Curtains and carpets won't do much, but tall bookcases in the corner, stuffed with books do seem to work, I find. I think your HB3 has a sand chamber in it. Filling this with dry silver sand (B&Q or Homebase) could well make a big difference, as it really tightens bass. Or you could try smaller loudspeakers, but I don't feel confident about the basic nature of the problem to predict an outcome here. It's probably worth getting a pair of good quality small loudspeakers, like the new KEF Q1s, as they may well suit and hardly break the bank. **NK**

### SLIPPERY CHARACTER

*I have just finished reading my last copy of Hi-Fi World and checked-out your website for the first time. I came across NK's article from some time back about his Garrard 401 and the bad initial rumble. I own both of the above turntables (3x301 and 1x401). Only one of the 301s has been in constant use for the past 12 years and can be seen on my website [www.blueangel-audio.com](http://www.blueangel-audio.com). I recently heard a bit of rumble and living in Cape Town, there are not too many possibilities for an oil change and tune-up service. After some careful degreasing of the idler wheel and inside of the platter, I used a syringe and added a few drops of Castrol Final Drive EPX 85W140, which I purchased after checking out various automotive lubricants. This was done about a month ago and cured the rumble within a few RPMs.*

*In my cartridge test room, I have a Micro Seiki BL-51 (rescued out of a car boot and in shocking condition). The belt was one mess of rubber goo twisted around the drive spindle and*

*the cover was cracked. About ten days after my purchase, I fitted a newly made clear Blue Angel blue Perspex cover, a new drive belt (new old stock - a packet of 10 for about £1) and polished the plinth and the aluminium fittings. Now, it looks like the day it arrived from the factory.*

*My other audio toys are Leak Stereo 20 (in daily use), turntables from Ariston, Rega, Dunlop Systemdek, Michell and a B&O 4002, all carefully restored and made like new again. Also in daily use is a piece of mystery equipment which I have had for several years: a Nagatron Model HA-9000 phono preamp. This can also be seen next to my turntable on the website. It is battery powered, taking 8 C cells which lasts forever, even in daily use. I so much would like to find the specs for this equipment and have searched the many internet references to Nagatron but never found any reference to this phono pre-amp. Have you heard anything of this equipment? Any info or web reference would be appreciated.*

**Andre Hanekom**  
South Africa

Thanks for the Garrard tip Andre. I like the Cape Town headshot on your site and your own impressive looking cartridge. It's not something I would like to try! If any readers can help with your Nagatron query please email in to us. **NK**

### SQUEEZE-Y DOES IT

*In reply to Dominic Gallagher, Hi-Fi World July, the SqueezeBox is only as*

*complicated as you wish to make it. My goal, as I stated in the review, was to better my existing Naim CD set-up. This I did in an admittedly tweeky sort of way. However, it's really no different to the way many people re-clock their existing CD players for improved performance.*

*It's not necessary to use additional power supplies or external DACs as I did; the sound is perfectly acceptable as standard. However, SlimDevices have not stood still: they have released a SqueezeBox MKII that has addressed the sound quality issues I set out to improve upon. The new SqueezeBox MKII is a very capable device straight from the box, much more so than the SqueezeBox MKI as reviewed. It still has the ability to link into an external DAC but many users would probably not feel the need to do so.*

*There is no scripting needed in EAC. The parameters I mentioned are a setting inside the software. The software gives you examples of what options to use; its very easy and simple to do - no need for MySQL! The SqueezeBox can hook up to a Mac for all those with a PC phobia, the Mac mini would be ideal, but why oh why would you want to control it with a mobile phone or PDA? The SqueezeBox remote is as complicated as it needs to be!*

*To round off, the SqueezeBox has great sound quality, is versatile and very easy to set-up and use. You don't need to be a PC geek to get into PC music!*

**Neal Gibbons**  
World Audio Design B.B.  
moderator



**Squeezebox – better than a Naim CD5?**

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### THE GOOD, THE DAB & THE UGLY

After reading your articles on Tuners and Radio Reception options in the last issue I have some comments. Last month I purchased a Sony ST-S900 DAB/ FM tuner. I, like others only use the supplied wire antenna as I live in a rented house and don't know how long I will be here. I think the DAB reception is quite good! It does not have the tone of the FM but is clear and has no background noise. And it does this with a small bit of wire attached for the antenna!

I realise that in the ultimate set-up a top flight FM tuner with outside antenna will be miles better but it seems to me that it will be very few people who will be spending their cash on these tuners. Let's remember, I would think from most people's point of view, the radio is a means of listening to many varying types of music to see if you would like to buy the album.

And you commented on the fact that the Digi-Box's supplied for the digital Television reception give better bandwidth than DAB. I then went and had a look at my digi-box and you're right. But what did occur to me is that maybe the equipment manufacturers could produce a tuner (type box) which could use the frequency the digi-box uses but only decode the channels marked "Audio"? What rule states we have to listen to radio broadcasts on the DAB frequency? Of course the question then comes up, when they start allocating more TV stations to the Digi-box frequency, where do we think they will cut back to add these?, of course the Audio channels, because the digi-box frequency only has a limited bandwidth too.

I work in the computer networking field so am quite familiar with the audio compression codecs used for many transmissions (Music, Video & Voice over IP). There are always going to be new and better codecs produced all the time. Surely at some point we must "put a stake in the ground" and say "this is the one we will use".

Maybe a better option would be for the manufacturers to load the decode software on "flash memory" so we could download new decoding software as necessary, but of course this would cut their sales margins! To finish my rant! I would say the DAB/ FM reception on my Sony Tuner is pretty good and having purchased it for a discounted £169 I am very happy.  
**Andrew Burtchaeil**

I listen to Mojo radio on DAB, often all day whilst typing away, and I get great enjoyment from it. At times I could even be persuaded that it

sounds good too, until I spin the original recordings. Then I'm reminded that low rate coding systems give you a fairly crude representation of the original that's edgy, sterile and vapid. Considering so much audio information has been removed this is hardly surprising. That DAB gives worse sound quality than VHF/FM is now widely accepted; even the BBC have stopped saying it offers CD quality and have had to upgrade all their mp2 Musicam coders to stem the torrent of criticism about poor quality. But this isn't enough. Except



**Sony DAB tuner – better than expected.**

in a broadcast monopoly situation as exists with the BBC, the use of technology that degrades sound quality, for whatever reason, is unheard of: this is progress backwards! Neither DVD, HDTV or today's high quality MinDV camcorders have sold successfully on anything other than the promise of better quality - and they are selling well. It was always possible to produce an extensible system that could be upgraded at transmitter and receiver, but the dogma of the time - i.e. digital is perfect - precluded any consideration of this possibility. In real life commercial terms DAB is just thoroughly poor engineering, as we now realise today as digital encoding and delivery systems move on. You'll find Steve Green's column on Subscription Radio offers further fascinating insights on all this. It also shows how we are being hoodwinked and bamboozled by rigid European Broadcasting ideas, largely emanating from an atrophied EBU, whilst the rest of the world quietly moves on. Yes, DAB is good, but only for his free radio. It has little to offer quality wise, as you will discover if you try to listen to violins in a decent classical broadcast. **NK**

### TAKING THE TUBES

I need your help regarding valve amplifiers. I have recently tried at home a Tube Technology Unisis amp against my Musical Fidelity XP100 and XAS100. I found the valve amp at only 35W far more powerful than the Musical Fidelity, and when I put the

Musical Fidelity back into the system it sounded very tinny. I also have an MF X-Ray CD player original and Acoustic Energy AE1 speakers. Can you recommend any other valve amps for me to try at around the £2,000 mark that would give better sound than the above or any other useful information, as I have not used valve amps before and need your insight, rather than a dealer whose objective is to sell...

**Mick**

With a budget like that you could well try the much admired Unison Research S6, from which you will

have spare change. For a gutsier if not more subtle sound, then an Audio Research VS155 is an interesting choice. Nowadays with valve amps it is best to get one with a 4ohm output option, since modern bass units are now nearly always 4ohms and, if you are to suffer a load mismatch with valves it is better that it is a higher impedance than ideal, rather than a lower one. So a 4ohm amp is better driving an 8ohm load than an 8ohm amp is driving a 4ohm load.

You've heard the benefits of a valve amp. The drawbacks are higher running costs. However, both the S6 and VS155 are a fairly a straightforward proposition in this respect. The output valves, EL34s and 6550s respectively, cost £30 or so apiece, according to quality, matching etc., and they will last 2000 hours or so at least. A new set of four (two per channel in a push-pull amp) will set you back £120 or so, not a fortune every few years. A well designed valve amplifier is a durable item and should trundle on for years. The worst that can happen is that an output valve will, sooner or later, short out, potentially burning out the output tranny, cathode resistors and all. It's a rare occurrence. Fuses in each H.T. line can prevent such a collapse, so you might like to check that such things exist. Only fixed bias amps need bias adjustment, by the way and for simplicity I would suggest you steer clear of these.

I don't want to scare you but whole batches of output valves have been leaving East European factories



**Audio Research VS155 – you'll never miss transistors...**

in poor condition. They may be rejected 'seconds' that have escaped. Whatever, I would suggest you choose Russian Svetlanas or Sovteks, or possibly Chinese Golden Dragons, at least to avoid dud valves. I have seen two JJ 6550s collapse in a T+A valve amp under test recently, where an inter-electrode short blew the amp. The internet is awash with valve info, you will find. Choosing valves is like choosing fine wines, an art to be savoured! But equally there are some pretty ropey valves around at present, unlike the beautifully built and tested Mullards of yore, for example.

I hope you are not put off by this. In practice, providing you fit decent valves and well designed valve amp should give years of real pleasure. **NK**

Hi Mick – I'd counsel the Audio Research VS155. The Unison is superb at its (lower) price, but the AR moves things on further; it has real muscle, slam, drive and power – yet is sweet and warm and subtle too. Worth the extra. Oh and with an amp of this (superb all round) ability, and you'll never miss transistors too. **DP**

**PORTABLE PLEASURE**

*I always enjoy reading Hi-Fi World with its uniquely descriptive analyses (even if I have worn out my second dictionary) but after many years, I am drawn the conclusion that if it sounds good, it is good.*

*In your July 2005 issue, you looked at portable 'trannies', for want of a more esoteric term, but to my mind the best sounding VHF portable/ table-top wireless remains the Hacker Sovereign II of the late 1960s which, though monaural, puts to shame many of today's Hi-Fi systems. Bearing that in mind, my ancient 1970 system comprises a Garrard 401 (AT1005 + AT110E), Brenell IC-2000 semi-pro tape deck, Sony TC-K96R cassette deck, Armstrong 626 tuner/lamp a pair of Mordaunt-Short Pageants on 4" galvanised wire nail 'spikes' and the Hacker. What? No CD?*

*These I can listen to all day in complete comfort and pleasure so cannot justify replacing them with modern equipment. Am I missing the point somewhere? Can we therefore please have more modern versus classic comparative listening tests as I am sure many have never enjoyed the comfort of classic audio. While many bits can be got from e-Bay, they are at*

*least generally infinitely serviceable.*  
**Barry M Jones**

Somewhere between the old, warm but - if you pardon me saying - "muffled" sound, and today's hard, thin scratchy sound lies perfection. Granted, if you have to err then it is best done in the warm and comfortable direction, but enthusiasts will always want more than just this. I believe many DIYers - especially those on our World Audio Design Bulletin Board, have discovered this for themselves, well in advance of everyday commercial audio. Often it just means using the right parts, which are always good quality parts, but not necessarily expensive parts, carbon film resistors being one example of cheap but nice. If you are a whiz with an iron and don't mind rummaging around in ebay then putting modern bits into old kit can be surprisingly successful. **NK**

'Uniquely descriptive analyses'? Are you perchance alleging that my prose is of an overly purple hue, Barry? **DP**

**T-TIME PART 1**

Dear Mr Cadeddu,  
You recommend a stabilised 13.5V Samp supply Sonic Impact T-amp - where can I get one of appropriate quality? (I have one of these amps and am very impressed, my only reservation being the flat soundstage.)  
**Nick M Jones**

Hi Nick - decent stabilised DC power supplies are quite easy to find at any electronic parts store. They are very popular among Citizen Band (CB) users. There are just a couple of things you should avoid: First, a switching power supply. Easy to spot: these are extremely cheap, small and lightweight. Second, any

## Billy Vee

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DC power supply above 13.8 Volts. A 13.2 volts unit should be just perfect. Eventually, search for a finely adjustable unit (voltage can be adjusted within a given range, typically 12-14V). This way you can experiment different settings. There's no need to spend a lot of money, 25 UKP or so would buy you an appropriate PSU unit. Another option would be to use a sealed lead acid battery (SLA). Even a motorcycle battery would be fine (provided voltage and current are appropriate). If still in trouble, browse the RS or Maplin catalogues. I, for example, use a ZetaGi HP145 power supply. You can find info and pics here: <http://www.zgitaly.it> (also in English). As for the flat soundstage... wait and see what a decent PSU can do to the T-Amp!

**LC**

I'm using mine with the battery from my BMW F650FL motorcycle (which unfortunately means the bike is off the road, right now...) to great effect. I phoned my local BMW dealer and apparently a new battery costs £30 – so that's how much a battery PSU for the T-amp will cost you (and how much it will cost me to get my bike back on the road). Oh, and it lasts weeks between charges – the T-amp that is, not the bike... **DP**

## T-TIME PART 2

Having not bought any hi-fi mags for some time I was tempted into buying the June issue. I have been following the Sonic Impact T-amp on the internet and have two I use at home. I was starting to attribute the lack of magazine space on this subject to a conspiracy of silence, so well done for breaking the mould.

I can only agree that within its "envelope" this is a very fine sounding amp; even driving a pair of inefficient LS3/5as at modest levels it sounds very good. This of course highlights the lack of affordable high efficiency speaker kits - there appear to be lots of reasonably priced horn kits in Sweden and Japan - that would partner this amp well I would have thought. The T-amp upsets the usual economics of buying a system that's for sure. It'll be interesting to see the first Class-D budget amps to emerge.

A couple of things I'd mention: ThinkGeek are a very good company to deal with and mine came through within 2 days, but be aware that some weeks/ months later you may get a bill for UK duty from DHL to be paid on this item. I purchased the speakers in a



## Everybody's talking about Sonic Impact T-amp...

set with the equally mind-boggling cardboard speakers and sound pods. It all came through within two days but two months later so did a bill for £13 Duty. Not exorbitant but worth being aware of.

Of course the other thing about this amp which gets forgotten is it plugs a very useful hole in the market. You have a PC with cheap powered speakers. You have an old pair of hi-fi speakers that you'd like to use with the PC. Was there a small, simple amp on the market to assist you in this purpose? No - hence my first T-amp. Because it runs off 12v you can even power it from an unused 12v tap from the PC's internal power supply, though these are not considered fit for critical hi-fi listening. Mine runs a pair of Gennexa LX5s as PC speakers for music, games etc. Of course remember not to put non-shielded speakers too close to a monitor! The internet site [www.48hz.com](http://www.48hz.com) has some interesting kits in this space, by the way.

**Jonathan Ives**

If it's a choice between cock-up and conspiracy, then in most cases it's the former rather than the latter. In our case there's no conspiracy of silence, so much as an avalanche of interesting things in audio to cope with - and we can't cover all of it, or at least, not properly. It looks like Class D will become an enthusiasts play area though, as totally packaged chip solutions are developed where only big output inductors and power supplies, plus a snazzy case are needed. **NK**

## RIGHT NEXT TIME?

A few months ago, I had the chance to buy a mint Arcam A85 amp at a silly price and, unable to resist, I took the plunge, it probably being my only chance to buy a 'better' amp in this price bracket. It came with a pair of Castle Stirling floorstanding speakers which, because the finish didn't fit in with our decor, the wife 'suggested' we sell, keeping our existing Monitor Audio Silver Sis, even though the sound of the Arcam/ Castle combination appeared to gel nicely. The MAs were chosen over a long auditioning period and fitted in well with our system (Marantz

CD6000KI, heavily modded Rega Planar 3 and Aura VA100 Evolution amp with QED interconnects and Mountain Snow biwire speaker cabling, at the time.

Whilst I don't feel that I made a mistake in buying the Arcam, I seem to have lost the synergy of the original system. On CD in particular, the music seems to be confined by the speakers, as though struggling to burst into the room, lacking the transparent 'hear through' quality and detail that I seemed to have with the Aura/MA combination. There seems to be a lack of presence and a thickness to the sound which I find a little unsatisfying. Vinyl duties are taken care of via a Graham Slee Gram Amp 2SE through the Arcam and fare rather better sound-wise.

Could you please suggest alternative floorstanders that would give us back our system balance? Or would fine-tuning with a change of cabling achieve the desired sound? The listening / living room is small (4m x 4m) and we are forced to have the speakers around 2.5m apart and fairly close to the wall to fit everything in! Any advice gratefully received.

**Paul Leonard**

You are hearing the differences between the A85 and the Aura VA100 here, as your description fits in with my recollections of their sound. The Aura amps were smooth and easy sounding, quite natural and 'nice'. On the other hand, the A85 is more coloured, heavier sounding with more weight, and a tad thicker and more enclosed. You have become accustomed to the former rather than the latter. I really don't think you can retrieve the sound you once knew - and so carelessly threw away! - by replacing the loudspeakers. It is the amp that should go. Modern day Cyrus amps are pleasantly smooth, and they've a beguiling sense of space with the PSX-R power supply [see our Cyrus upgrade feature, p57 – Ed.] Otherwise, try if you can a Cambridge Azur 640A, which is open and dynamic at the same time.

You may well try altering balance by changing cables but I am not at all



**Naim Nait a quality smoothy.**

confident you can radically alter the sound of the A85 by this method. It may be worth trying the RS silver cable talked about earlier in the readers letters, as this might help, but don't blame me if your Mountain Snow biwire - well regarded - sounds better! Wireworld claim their coaxial speaker cable is a better amplifier load than other constructions and this again may just make the A85 a useful bit happier and more to your liking, but again I am speculating furiously! You may like to try it and see, in the best traditions of audio DIY. Good luck. **NK**

Hi Paul - I'd say you've 'side-graded' your amp, and you're not convinced that it's an improvement, although it's certainly a change. It's a classic example of speculative purchasing, because of the 'perceived value' of the product in question as opposed to its real sonic character. What can I say - I've heard this happen a million times... I'd counsel you find a good dealer, bring your speakers (or conversely borrow the amps) and audition the Naim Nait 5i, Cyrus 6vs and Musical Fidelity X-150. **DP**

#### **SOURCE DIRECT**

*I am from India and a regular reader of your magazine. I was going through your May 2005 issue and came across a letter 'New Innovation' from Andrew Miller. I am about to buy a tube amplifier made by an Indian hi-fi manufacturer Cadence. The manufacturer says that the amp has an EL34 power section and the preamplification is done by a very high-end volume pot. This configuration uses the gain of the CD player to feed the power section and works very well as all CD players of today give at least 2v output, which is enough to drive the power section. Now my question is: is this a normal design? Will there be a problem in running other sources like cassette player or tuners or world space?*

**Saradindu Bose**

You need to know the input sensitivity of the power amp to judge whether it is sufficient to handle cassette decks and such like. Most power amps - valve and solid-state - have an input sensitivity of 1V or better. This can be driven by CD directly through a passive volume control, as CD players always give 2V out, as set by Philips standards. Few other sources come close though. At the low end of the scale are old (legacy) tuners and cassette decks which typically produce 0.3V out. Very few power amps can reach full volume from such a small output. It is highly likely the Cadence amp will be unable to reach full output with such sources. You will need a preamp with gain, and most preamps have x3 gain or more. **NK**

#### **DISORDERLY COMPULSION**

*A couple of years ago, more or less, I was just looking to upgrade the cartridge on my Rega P25. It had been quite a while since I did anything with my (then) simple, moderate set-up. I guess I was happy enough. But as I flicked through your magazine and one or two others, I found I'd caught the audio bug again. One thing led to another, within a few weeks, along with a new cartridge, I got myself a phono stage, a CD player and a lovely new amp that came about a month or so later.*

*The new CD player and amp are the Marantz CD6000 KI and the Sugden A21a, bought largely after your recommendations. I've been collecting records for nearly 20 years, since I was 14 and first came to live in London. I know about Marantz's reputation with their CD players and was using one myself, an early, top-loading model which I had bought 2nd hand in the early 90s. Half the size, twice the weight and sounded better than most of the players of the day. So when I read, in World Standards, about the CD 6000's "vinyl-like and voluptuous" sound, I decided to get one. And, yes siree, it sure is voluptuous.*

*As for the Sugden, I managed to get one loaned to me for a few days (again, after seeing it in World Standard). And wow, what a revelation! It also seemed to get on very well with the Marantz and my Pro-Ac Tablette 2000 loudspeakers. Then came the review where you had it among valve amps and that nailed it. I traded in my Naim Nait 3.*

*This new set-up put me over the moon. My other bits being the aforementioned P25, Rega super Elys, Graham Slee's Gram Amp 2SE, Chord company's Rumour cables and Silver Siren leads. Still, I couldn't shake the old bug off. I wanted more. More verve. More dimensions and definitions. I did the sensible thing of trying out the more expensive, supposedly better Pro-Ac models (I've been told that Sugden themselves tend to partner their amps with them at hi-fi shows). But somehow they left me cold. I'd wanted something British and never really liked floor standers. After a few trips to demo rooms, I found what I was looking for in the Spendor SP311s. I've now been with them for about eight months and I love them dearly. With the Sugden, they provide such marvelously realistic sound. Voices and instruments are now much truer, with more spaces between them. I really could live happily ever after with the set-up, but there're just a couple things I thought you might be able to help with.*

*With the Spendors, the Marantz now sounds a little too lean and dry with early 60's pop things like Beatles/Stones or Motown. I've tried a couple of players in hopes of getting a bit more 'cream'. They sounded good but couldn't match the Marantz's finesse. Is there a compromise, without going over a grand?*

*A bit more serious this one. I tend to get these sort of piercing sensations in my ears if I spend some time in the listening position (with both sources), after 20-30 minutes minimum with the pain increasing if longer. It goes away about an hour or so from when I stop listening. This never happened with the Pro-Ac, which I ran the A21 with for nearly a year. The Spendors are placed exactly in the same spot (on filled high mass stands). I don't usually have it that loud and hardly ever go near the halfway point on the Sugden's volume knob. The room is smallish but with high ceiling. The seats are about 6 ft away from the speakers. Is there something not right with my ears (I had them checked and so far they're okay)? Or is it the amp/speakers combination? Something else? A dealer encouraged me to go for different (and rather costly) cables, but I'm not yet sure if*



that's the real case. I've also tried to talk to Spondor, who weren't really that helpful. I thought they sounded a bit over-defensive (and may be they should be so). I don't really want to have to change anything dramatically if I can help it. I think they (the amp and speakers) are both very special and charismatic products. But I don't want to end up getting something nasty - like tinnitus. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Lastly, just to say how fab I think your magazine is. It has this sensible, unpretentious quality not found in other hi-fi mags. And, it must've been said a thousand times over now, there's always something for everyone. Though I think the CD versus vinyl battles are especially entertaining. I'm a music collector, and I ventured into the world of hi-fi so I could get the best out of it (without breaking the bank). I have a vast collection of CDs but it's nothing compared to the size of my LP collection. There are some amazing sounding CDs in there and I've also got a handful of badly pressed, next to inaudible records. But there are just something about the ol' "black stuff" - the different pressings and issues, the matrix No. or sometimes the engraved names of persons who pressed them, the artwork, the different kinds of paper used for sleeves, etc. A couple of fine example of recent-ish (non-audiophile) releases - the Ry Cooder/Manuel Galban Mambo album (lavishing artwork and presentation) and Little Black Numbers by Kathryn Williams (on 220g vinyl - talk about unbreakable - and was, remarkably, the same price as the CD copy!). See if the CD versions can beat these for their scrumptiously collectible-ness, never mind the sound. Boy, the spaces on the shelves are getting tighter by the day. Compulsive disorder? You bet, and quite proud of it.

**S. Boonyai**

Suffering a piercing sound in the ears for one hour after listening is an affliction I've not heard of before. But since you didn't have it with the last 'speakers, and only with the Spondors, they must be the cause. As loudspeakers are passive (i.e. they can't produce signals) I can only assume their treble is somehow setting off this reaction. Proacs always did have very good tweeters by the way, so you may well be attuned to quality. I have become almost oversensitive to treble quality too and can understand reacting strongly to problems here. Unfortunately, there really is no alternative other than to change the

'speakers; I somehow doubt a cable change will cure this ill, although I could be wrong. Van den Hul's 'The Third', using all carbon construction, will give a very damped, smooth sound, but it's a little expensive.

There's not so much choice these days in small loudspeakers with ultra smooth treble, but Mordaunt Short's 912/ 914 are accomplished in this area. KEF have worked to improve the quality of their metal dome, they say, in the new Q Series, and they may be worth checking out too. I could also mention Castle Conways, but I suspect they would be too big. We plan to cover quality small loudspeakers in the next issue, and this includes ribbon tweeters, which can be super smooth and may be what you have unknowingly aspired to. **NK**

Thanks for an inspired letter Mr. 'S', and glad you like the mag - although you're on a yellow card for the beginning of the final paragraph, which is blatant 'toadying'. As you know, these overly effusive communiqués are regarded with extreme suspicion by me, as they artificially inflate my sense of importance in the great scheme of things. Too many of these missives, and I'll be dreaming of feigning holding back a tear as I accept my gong at an industry awards bash ("I'd just like to thank everyone who made this possible" - you know the thing...). Oh and aren't such "your mag is ace" letters the province of our esteemed rivals - if they bother to have letters sections at all? **DP**

### **SPEAKING AGAIN**

I am writing in response to the article last month on making your own interconnects. Maplin sell a pseudo balanced cable (the return has one strand less) in pure silver (Shark cable) that when used as a single line interconnect with silver bullet plugs out performs Audioquest Lapis (I know that is not a recent product but at £350 a metre you don't chuck them away) at a fraction of the cost - well worth a mention at under £100 including the plugs plus your time and some silver solder...

Another point that ardent tweakers may want to be aware of is that if, like me, they have old speakers like KEF

105s, they do wear out - or in my case I burn out the voice coils. Dave Smith at DK Loudspeaker Service (01708 447344) will rebuild the loudspeaker. I contacted Wilmslow Audio when I blew a voice coil on my bass unit in the Kef 105 and they quoted me £500 for a pair as they said I would have to have a pair. Dave rewound the coil for £72. I subsequently blew the other, so both have now been rewound. I only wish I had known about Dave fifteen years ago when I blew one of the tweeters as it would have been considerably cheaper than the last remaining replacement that I purchased from KEF's own old stock!

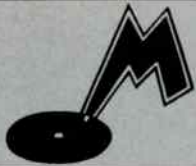
Given that you've done an edition on old analogue, old amps, and now old tuners, you have got to do one on old speakers. Please include KEF 105 originals. Mine are internally silver wired and have new capacitors in the crossovers, and they sound astonishing for their age when bi-wired (silver to the mid/treble and Audioquest Jade to the bass) and driven by the Musical Fidelity kW500, and I haven't heard anything yet that convinces me to part with huge sums of hard earned cash, that will improve on these old gems.

**Kevin Wood**

Hi Kevin - rest assured, we shall do a classic speaker special, but - as ever - these classic issues take ages to prepare, because we have to source the kit, transport it, (sometimes rebuild it), measure it, audition it, etc... In their way, KEF 105s are super speakers, but only an amp of the massive muscle of the Musical Fidelity kW500 will ever show it. With anything less, the KEFs just make the amp wince, huff and puff - and the noise is not nice. And as for valves, forget it! **DP**



**Musical Fidelity kW500 - possibly the only amp that ever got more than a squeak from KEF 105s...**



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| Red Rose Sprit Integrated x-demo                      | 1000  | 649   | Clearaudio ● Siltech  |           |
| Rega Maia Power amplifier Black x-demo                | 548   | 399   | Conrad Johnson ● Sonus Faber                                  |           |
| Sugden Masterclass Integrated S/H                     | 3150  | 1799  | dCS ● Spectral  |           |
| Spectral DMA100s Power Amplifier S/H                  | 4250  | 1999  | Densen ● Nordost  |           |
|   |       |       | DNM/Reson ● Sugden  |           |
| <b>Loudspeakers</b>                                   |       |       | Electrocompaniet ● Transparent Audio                          |           |
| ATC Active 10 SL x-demo                               | 1650  | 1199  | Finite Elemente ● Verity Audio                                |           |
| ATC SCM7 Cherry x-demo                                | 499   | 375   | Graaf ● Wadia   |           |
| ATC SCM50 ASL Active Loudspeakers Birds Eye Maple S/H | 7999  | 3999  |   |           |
| JM Lab Micro Utopia Anigre with Stands S/H            | 3999  | 1699  |   |           |
| JM Lab Mini Utopia Centre Anigre S/H                  | 1999  | 999   |   |           |
| JM Lab Sib XL x5 Grey S/H                             | 1000  | 650   |   |           |
| Lumley reference2 Signatures Mahogany S/h             | 4500  | 1499  |   |           |
| Naim Audio Intro Black Ash S/H                        | 875   | 499   |   |           |
| Peak Consult Incognito Rosewood x-demo                | 7500  | 5799  |   |           |
| Quad ESL 63 Brown just serviced with stands S/H       | N/A   | 1499  |   |           |

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| MERIDIAN M60C BLACK                     | 1000  | 495   |
| MUSICAL FIDELITY TRIVISTA SACD          | 4000  | 2495  |
| MUSICAL FIDELITY A3 CD                  | 800   | 395   |
| NAIM 500 s/n 179450/177734              | 12350 | 7995  |
| NAIM NBL BEECH s/n 159946               | 7500  | 3995  |
| NAIM 252 s/n193419                      | 4265  | 3195  |
| NAIM S/CAP2 s/n196744                   | 2885  | 2145  |
| NAIM CDX2 s/n206916                     | 2800  | 1995  |
| NAIM CDX2 s/n209469                     | 2800  | 1995  |
| NAIM 82 s/n 102930                      | 2600  | 1195  |
| NAIM FLATCAP s/n                        | N/A   | 250   |
| NAIM 180 s/n 106985                     | 1220  | 495   |
| NAIM SBL BLACK s/n 097689               | 2700  | 695   |
| NAIM 102 s/n 151705                     | 1210  | 495   |
| NAIM SNAXO 3-6 S/n 187399               | 829   | 395   |
| PATHOS LOGOS 3 MONTHS OLD               | 2850  | 1995  |
| REL STAMPEDE BLACK 2 MONTHS OLD         | 550   | 395   |
| SONUS FABER GRAVIS SUB                  | 1100  | 695   |
| SPECTRAL MIT 350 MK11 I MTR RCA         | 1500  | 695   |
| TANNOY DIMENSION 8                      | 4000  | 2295  |
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| WADIA 850                               | 5000  | 1995  |

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| Advantage                  | CD15 - nr mint boxed   | 1199 |
| AH! Njoe Tjoeb             | CD4000STD - ex, boxed remote, 6 months old c/w de mat        | 299  |
| AH! Njoe Tjoeb             | 99 - ex, Marantz based tube player                           | 199  |
| Arcam                      | Alpha 1 - nr mint, remote                                    | 99   |
| Arcam                      | CD82T - nr mint boxed  | 399  |
| Arcam                      | Alpha 9 - nr mint, remote                                    | 379  |
| Arcam                      | Alpha 7SE - nr mint boxed, due in                            | Call |
| Arcam                      | CD72T - nr mint, remote                                      | 199  |
| Audio Analogue             | Pagannini  | 679  |
| Audiolab                   | 8000DAC - ex, boxed  | 299  |
| Audiolab                   | 8000 Transport and DAC - ex, remote                          | 749  |
| Audio Synthesis            | DAX 2 - nr mint boxed  | 499  |
| Audio Note                 | DAC 1.1x   | 349  |
| AVI                        | S2000Reference - ex, boxed                                   | 449  |
| DPA                        | Renaissance - nr mint, boxed                                 | 299  |
| Marantz                    | CD80 - ex, boxed fantastic 80s heavyweight                   | 199  |
| Marantz                    | CD46 - ex, remote  | 49   |
| Marantz                    | DV4100 OSE - nr mint, remote, boxed                          | 129  |
| Marantz                    | CD17 KI - nr mint, due in                                    | Call |
| Meridian                   | 208 - ex, with built in preamp stage and 209 remote          | 349  |
| Meridian                   | 200 transport - ex, excellent                                | 249  |
| Meridian                   | 508/20 - nr mint, remote                                     | 699  |
| Micromega                  | Stage 1 - ex, smooth sound on a budget                       | 179  |
| Micromega                  | Stage 3 - nr mint superb cd player                           | 279  |
| MicromegaT-drive and T-dac | - vgc, remote, superb sound, £1000s new                      | 899  |
| MicromegaDuo CD3/BS2       | - nr mint, fully boxed, beautiful sight and sound            | 899  |
| Micromega Optic            | - nr mint, budget intro to the delights of Micromega         | 129  |
| Myriad                     | T20 - block, nr mint, boxed, remote, bargain!                | 249  |
| NAD                        | CS411 - nr mint, boxed with remote                           | 199  |
| NVA                        | The Transparent Statement - vgc, crated, ... ultimate NVA    | 1749 |
| Pass Labs                  | D1 DAC - rave item at \$5000...due in                        | Call |
| Philips                    | CD100 - ex, the first player!                                | 149  |
| Pioneer                    | PS-S904 - ex, boxed, stable platter mech                     | 199  |
| Quad                       | 99CDP - nr mint, boxed, remote                               | 699  |
| Quad                       | 67CD - nr mint, c/w remote                                   | 479  |
| Resolution Audio           | Opus 21 - nr mint crated 2 boxer, beautiful                  | 1799 |
| Roksan                     | Caspian original - ex, remote, just serviced                 | 349  |
| Roksan                     | Caspian M series - ex dem, save £350!!!                      | 749  |
| Rotel                      | RCD991AE - nr mint boxed                                     | 399  |
| SAT                        | CDFix - nr mint, boxed, dedicated remote, superb             | 699  |
| Sony                       | MDP850D - nr mint, laserdisc, VCD, CD, PAL, NSTC             | 149  |
| Sony                       | XA20ES - ex, boxed, remote                                   | 179  |
| TEAC                       | DV50 - ex dealer dem - SAVE OVER £2000!!!                    | 2399 |
| Wadia                      | CD3200T transport - ex, remote, bargain entry to Wadia sound | 649  |

## Systems, cables and miscellaneous

|                |  |      |
|----------------|--|------|
| Audio Analogue | Primo - CD and Amp, ex dem   | 649  |
| AVI            | 2000 series - ex, Ref CD, line preamp and pair monoblocks - awesome!   | 1279 |
| Beyer          | DT880 - ex dem   | 149  |
| JPW            | 204/200/208 - 5.1 Speaker package new bargain, save over £200!         | 399  |
| QUAD           | 33/303/FM3 - nr mint, Quad sleeve                                      | 299  |
| QUAD           | 67/66/66/606 - ex, CD/Tuner/Pre/Power with system remote               | 1449 |
| QUAD           | 34/306 FM4 - ex, cute combo  | 499  |
| TEAC           | A1/D1/T1 - Amp as reviewed in Hi-Fi World 08/05, CD and Tuner, nr mint | 449  |

## Amplifiers

|                  |   |      |
|------------------|---|------|
| Adcom            | GTP500II PreTuner and GFA545II Power - bargain!           | 399  |
| AMC              | 2445 - ex, well reviewed weighty poweramp                 | 199  |
| Arcam            | A85 - nr mint   | 419  |
| Arcam            | A75 - nr mint, boxed                                      | 249  |
| Arcam            | Alpha 9 pre /power - nr mint boxed, due in                | Call |
| Audio Analogue   | Puccini Setlanta - ex dem as new                          | 749  |
| Audiolab         | 8000S - nr mint   | 299  |
| Audiolab         | 8000Ms - nr mint monoblocks                               | 799  |
| Audiolab         | 8000P - nr mint, boxed                                    | 429  |
| Audiolab         | 8000A - ex, boxed, grey, mm/mc                            | 199  |
| Audion           | Silver Knights - Stunning boxed valve monoblocks          | 1199 |
| Audio Research   | LS7 - nr mint   | 699  |
| AVI              | S2000 - gc, integrated                                    | 349  |
| AVI              | S2000MP - ex, line level pre                              | 279  |
| AVI              | S2000MM - ex, pair monoblocks                             | 699  |
| AVI              | S2000MP/MM - ex, pre and 2x mono combo as above           | 899  |
| Creek            | 4330Mk2R - nr mint, remote. Fantastic little integrated   | 249  |
| Crimson          | 510/520 - nr mint boxed, cute blast from the past         | 199  |
| Crimson          | 610C/630D - nr mint, pre and monos, we love these to bits | 599  |
| Craft            | Linestage - nr mint, one pot special, superb              | 499  |
| Cyrus            | 7 - ex, black, boxed                                      | 429  |
| Cyrus            | 3 - ex, black, boxed                                      | 229  |
| Lumley Reference | ST70 - nr mint stereo valve power                         | 699  |
| Magnum           | MP300/ME125 - ex, 2 - ex, pre and monoblocks              | 599  |
| Magnum           | MA120 - ex, integrated, bargain!                          | 149  |
| Marantz          | PM66Se KI Sig - nr mint, lovely amp                       | 799  |
| Meridian         | 605s - ex, boxed pair monoblocks                          | 799  |
| Meridian         | 505s - ex, boxed pair monoblocks                          | 899  |
| Meridian         | 205s - ex, pair monoblocks                                | 599  |
| Mission          | Cyrus One - from  | 79   |
| Musical Fidelity | Rainbow - nr mint pre with phono stage                    | 119  |
| Musical Fidelity | Typhoon - nr mint power                                   | 149  |
| Musical Fidelity | Rainbow plus 2xTyphoon - nr mint lab powerhouse           | 379  |
| NAD              | 912 - good, monoblockable stereo power (2 available)      | 119  |
| NAD              | C320BEE - nr mint, remote                                 | 129  |
| NAIM             | 62/140 - nr mint, 1988 chrome bumper combo                | 549  |
| NAIM             | Nait 3 - ex, boxed  | 299  |
| Primore          | A20 - nr mint integrated                                  | 379  |
| Quad             | 405 - ex  | 179  |
| Quad             | 33/303 - nr mint  | 199  |
| Quad             | 50D - good, pair monoblocks                               | 249  |
| Quad             | 66 - ex pre with system controller                        | 299  |
| Quad             | 77 - nr mint integrated                                   | 299  |
| Rega             | Brio - ex, great little integrated                        | 129  |
| Rega             | Luna - ex, better more powerful brother of the Brio       | 179  |
| Roksan           | Caspian M Series - ex dem, pre and monoblocks - stunning  | Call |
| Roksan           | Caspian integrated - ex original, remote                  | 299  |
| Roksan           | Caspian Power - ex, original                              | 299  |
| Roksan           | Kandy Mk3 - ex dem, remote, boxed etc                     | 479  |
| Rotel            | RC995 - nr mint remote pre                                | 249  |
| Rotel            | RB981 - ex, block powerhouse                              | 225  |
| Shearwater       | Phase 2 - nr mint, boxed, blue marble styling             | 279  |
| Sugden           | ALJ1 pre/power - ex, black                                | 499  |
| Sumo             | Andromeda - ex, US monster bargain                        | 299  |
| Sumo             | Andromeda III - nr mint, boxed                            | 399  |
| TagMcLaren       | 60P - nr mint boxed                                       | 449  |

## Speakers

|                 |  |      |
|-----------------|--|------|
| Acoustic Energy | AE1 - ex, black triplex  | 399  |
| Acoustic Energy | AE105 - ex, in red cherry  | 119  |
| Acoustic Energy | AE1mk3 - nr mint, our dem pair in Piano black                        | Call |
| Acoustic Energy | Aelite 3 - vgc, dem pair in cherry                                   | 549  |
| Acoustic Energy | AE2 - ex, c/w dedicated stands                                       | 899  |
| Acoustic Energy | AE505 - nr mint, boxed rosewood                                      | 349  |
| Amphion         | Xenon - nr mint boxed, stunning!                                     | 1299 |
| B&W             | 580 - vgc, black floorstander  | 149  |
| B&W             | 60253 - nr mint boxed Sorrento                                       | 249  |
| B&W             | 80153 Matrix - ex, walnut  | 1999 |
| Castle          | Chester - good condition, mahogany                                   | 799  |
| Celestion       | 5000 - vgc, ribbon standmount  | 199  |
| Epas            | M15 - vgc, light cherry, boxed                                       | 279  |
| Epas            | ES14 vgc, walnut, dedicated stands                                   | 249  |
| Epas            | ES11 - boxed, stands   | Call |
| Heybrook        | HB100 - vgc, superb vfm  | 79   |
| JPW             | 200 - new, baby bookshelf, save...                                   | 79   |
| JPW             | 204 - new, great floorstander save proverbial shedload               | 269  |
| KEF             | Reference 104/2 - ex, rosewood                                       | 599  |
| KEF             | Q10 - nr mint, boxed   | 89   |
| Meadowlark      | Shearwater Holrod - nr mint boxed                                    | 999  |
| Mission         | 753 - nr mint, multidriver, bargain!                                 | 349  |
| Monitor Audio   | Studio Centre - vgc, boxed   | 199  |
| Monitor Audio   | Silver S8 - new sealed box   | 599  |
| Monitor Audio   | Silver S5 - new sealed box   | 349  |
| Monitor Audio   | Silver B1 - ex, cherry   | 349  |
| Monitor Audio   | S8 - nr mint boxed, cherry, 4 weeks old!                             | 499  |
| Mordaunt Short  | 912 - ex display, boxed  | 149  |
| NEAT            | Petite Mk1 - ex, boxed latest LF drivers fab monitor                 | 249  |
| NEAT            | Pathe Mk3 - nr mint, current model, stunning                         | 399  |
| NHT             | VT2 - ex, piano black monster floorstand with sidfire bass driver    | 749  |
| PMC             | F81 - ex, cherry boxed   | 499  |
| QUAD            | ESL63 - unused since coming back from Quad                           | 1299 |
| QUAD            | 12L - nr mint, boxed, birds eye maple                                | 449  |
| QUAD            | 12L - nr mint, boxed, ebony  | 399  |
| QUAD            | 11L - nr mint, boxed, birds eye maple                                | 299  |
| QUAD            | 11L - nr mint, boxed, yew  | 299  |
| QUAD            | 11L - nr mint, boxed, piano black                                    | 349  |
| REL             | Q50 - ex, black  | 199  |
| Rogers          | Studio Monitor - Original vgc, with stands - suit valve amps         | 199  |
| Ruark           | Templar - ex, boxed  | 199  |
| Ruark           | Equinox - ex, mahogany, c/w integrated stands                        | 799  |
| Tandberg        | Studio Monitor - Ex, large standmount                                | 399  |
| TDL             | Studio 1 - vgc, wood finish transmission line                        | 199  |
| Triangle        | Titus 202 - good, boxed  | 119  |
| Triangle        | Antal ES - ex dem, in champagne beautiful wall reviewed floorstander | 749  |

## Tuners and Tape

|           |   |     |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Arcam     | T61 - nr mint, boxed  | 159 |
| Creek     | 4030 - ex, great FM quality on a shoestring!                  | 99  |
| Denon     | DRS810 - nr mint, boxed, 3 head driver, very cute and capable | 199 |
| Myriad    | T30 - nr mint, boxed  | 99  |
| Nakamichi | 8X125 - ex, boxed   | 99  |
| Quad      | FM2 - vgc, just back from QUAD                                | 149 |
| Quad      | 66FM - nr mint  | 379 |

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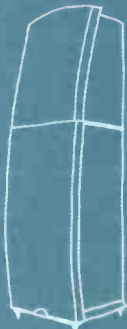
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Creek Audio manufactures in the UK. Current products include A50i, A50iR and 5350SE integrated amplifiers, CD50 Mk2 CD player, and T50 tuner. All products are similarly styled providing an easy mix and match choice depending on budget. Our miniature OBH range includes two phono pre-amplifiers, two headphone amplifiers and a passive pre-amplifier.

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COPELAND CDA823 CD Player, 6 months old system mismatch £1200 ono. Tel: Len 01744 732 133 St. Helens area. Would deliver 50 miles radius. (Sep)

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HEYBROOK SEXTET was £1100. Good condition £400. Tel: 01493 700 706 (Norwich) (Sep)

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### FOR THE BUYER

1. Not everyone is honest - Buyer Beware!
2. **Don't send cash!**
3. Accept no verbal guarantees.
4. Have you heard the item or something similar? If not, why do you want it?
5. Don't pretend to have knowledge - it's your fingers that will get burnt!
6. Is it working? If not, why not?
7. Has it been modified and, if so, have notes been kept?
8. Was it any good in the first place?
9. **Don't send cash!**
10. If you are in the slightest doubt, arrange an audition (see point 5) If it's too far, wait for another time.
11. Either buy it or don't: vendors are excusably impatient with 'consultation' exercises.
12. **Don't send cash!**

### FOR THE SELLER

1. Not everyone is honest - Seller Beware!
2. Make no verbal guarantees.
3. Even 'nearly new' is still second-hand. If the manufacturer's guarantee is no longer in force, your price should reflect this.
4. There is very little intrinsic value in second-hand hi-fi; it's only worth what someone will pay for it.
5. The best guide to pricing is last month's Classifieds: that a 'classic' was worth £xxx a year or two ago is no guide. Values fall as well as rise.
6. Amateur second-hand dealing is not a big money game: you win some, you lose some.
7. Be prompt with despatch. If in doubt about buyer's bonafides, either wash out the deal or send C.O.D.
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NEXT MONTH

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# EVERY WAY IS RIGHT

LJK Setright on performing Bach

Perhaps because I grew up when it was still fashionable, I have never been averse to what today's fashion-mongers decry as 'big-band Bach' – all titanic forces, stolid tempi, and the implacable inevitability that came with heavy-handed conductors who were convinced that everything Bach wrote was religious. I remember as though it were yesterday the full complement of the BBC Symphony Orchestra back around 1950, belting out the Suite No 3 in the Royal Albert Hall, with that vast and kindly trumpeter Ernest Hall (a fine teacher, I believe) floating out his solos like Noah sending up his dove from the Ark. I loved it.

That is not the only way of playing Bach. I have records of a variety of his works performed by Walter Carlos on the Moog synthesizer, by the Paris Saxophone Quartet, by the Swingle Singers, and by umpteen very different pianists from Rosalyn Tureck to Keith Jarrett, and (like Kipling's nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays) every single one of them is right. So are the academics, the organists and harpsichord-bashers and even the dimly expressionless and frequently out-of-tune habitués of the period-instrument sect. The music of Bach can accommodate them all.

Composers from Mozart to Grainger have made transcriptions of Bach. Why not? Bach did it himself,

often. Along comes Joshua Rifkin, though, and we cannot talk about transcription. The man who with his own two hands once gave us all a famous new insight into ragtime now appears as an earnest musicologist with some meticulously developed views on the performance of Bach cantatas. Half a dozen favourites from the church cantatas are gathered on a brace of CDs under the L'Oiseau-Lyre label to illustrate his views of what is intrinsic and what is potential in them; they need to be heard.

It is no hardship, I assure you. Although his orchestral forces employ 'authentic' instruments, there is nothing nimity-pimity about these performances, nor anything to cavil at in the quality of the recorded sound. The voices are all good, too, perfectly competent and gratefully musical – but there are never more than four of them.

This is the nub of the matter, as Rifkin sees it. We all know that each of the parallel lines of a Bach composition is not to be deemed an instrumental part or a vocal part but a 'voice' in the abstract disembodied sense of an element to be blended into (but to remain identifiable in) the music. Many of us know, or think we know, how and by whom these cantatas were performed when Bach wrote them. Rifkin, however, is not concerned with whatever liturgical conventions or limitations applied to those original renderings in St

Thomas's at Leipzig; his object is to present the music in a manner that allows us to hear it, not only as faithfully but also as intelligibly as possible.

There is no chorus, struggling to balance an unholy rabble of boys on the top line with a sturdy bunch of adults on the others. Every vocal line is sung by one adult and admirable voice – soprano, counter-tenor, tenor and bass-baritone – regardless of whether it was written for chorus or for soloists. Thus the voices are always perfectly balanced, the lines are always clear, the music as a whole structural undertaking always lucidly integrated. It is, throughout, a pleasure to listen to it.

This may not be the proper way to perform it. From my LP assortment of Bach cantatas I might select the Archiv Privilege recording (actually made in St Thomas's at Leipzig in 1966) of *Ein Feste Burg* – if only because the same cantata is among the Rifkin selection. Here we have the full chorus of that church, plus four superb soloists (topped by the heavenly Agnes Giebel, who surely did Bach's soprano lines better than anyone else ever) and the scrupulous Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, and the feeling that Creation took place so that in due course this LP might be made available to those who had the wit to buy it. This is the proper way to perform that work; Rifkin's is a necessary way to hear it. **LJK**