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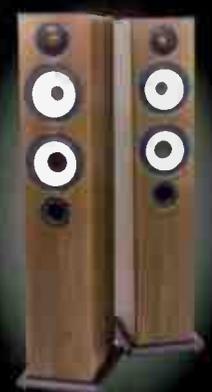
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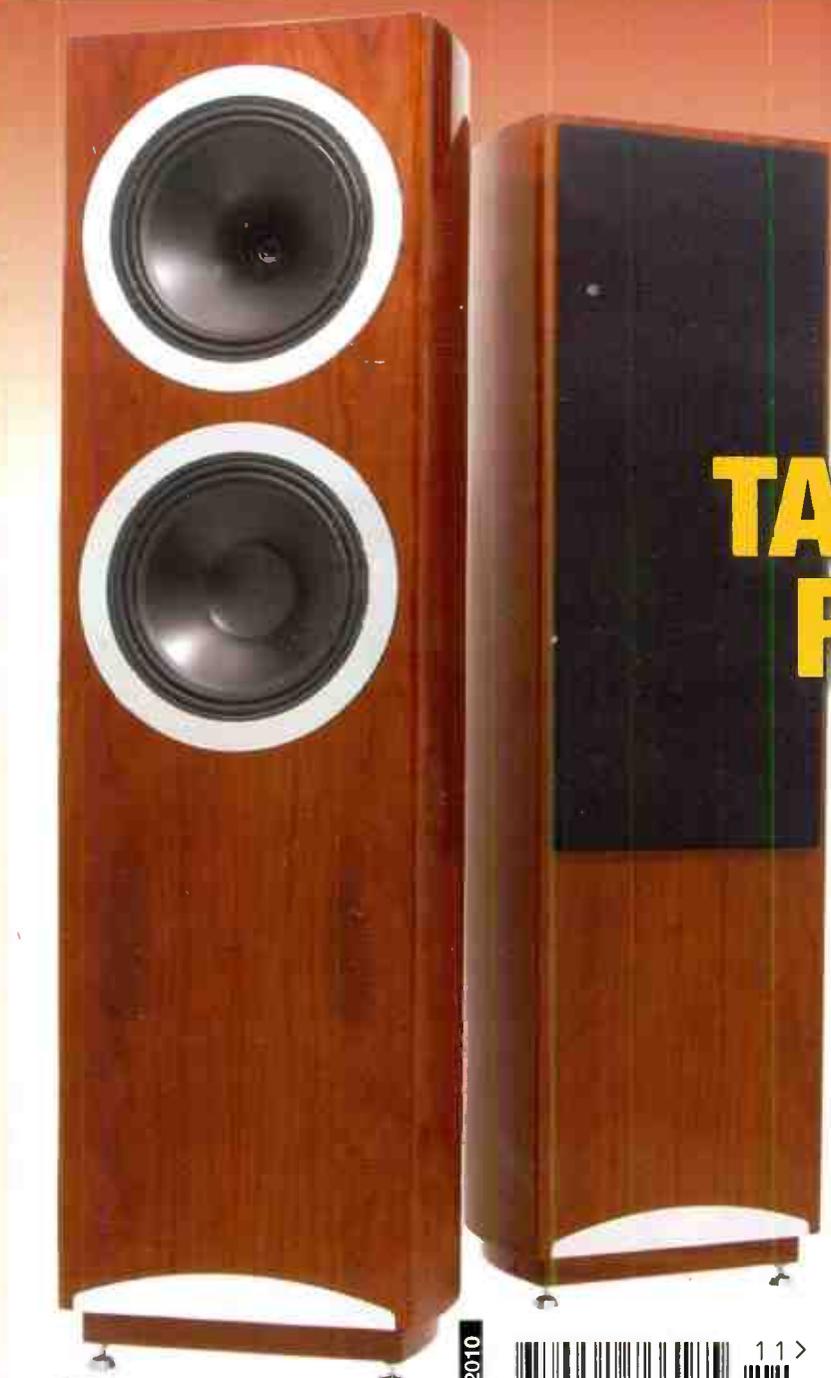
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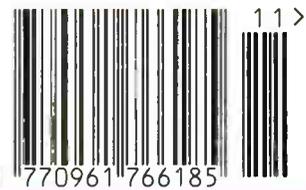
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loudspeakers



NOVEMBER 2010



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

EXCEPTIONAL SOUND SHOULD BE PART OF THE FURNITURE

"Wonderfully articulate speakers"

Sonus Faber Liuto Monitor – *BBC Music* (September 2009)

"There is a graceful musicality about this speaker that marks it out as special"

Sonus Faber Liuto Monitor – *Hi-Fi Choice* (August 2009)

"For such bijou speakers, the Toy's audio performance is immense"

Sonus Faber Toy – *BBC Music, Best Loudspeaker of 2008*

Sonus Faber has always believed that owning a pair of speakers should be a total aesthetic experience. Technology honed over decades to turn every piece of music into a special auditory occasion is part of the story. But equally important is the meticulous styling and natural materials chosen for the cabinets which house the drivers. Inspired by the craftsmanship of the original makers of classical instruments such as the lute and the violin, Sonus Faber's blend of fine woods and leather adds up to the last word in aspirational Italian elegance.

And yet, thanks to Sonus Faber's latest creations, such luxury costs less than you might think. The new Liuto loudspeaker collection reflects the smooth contours and classic joinery of the lute, delivering a sprightly musicality, as sensitive, rich and graceful to listen to as it is to look at. The lute shape is not just visually pleasing; its curves serve to stiffen the cabinet and dampen unwanted resonance, whilst the leather cladding stretched across the front baffle enhances dispersion. The result is a soaring, soulful sound.

Sitting alongside the Liuto range, Sonus Faber's Toy series sets out to destroy the notion that small speakers can't deliver wonderfully engaging sound. The warmth and responsiveness of their performance would challenge speakers three times their size, whilst never losing the sense of the fun and joy that the name evokes. Clad from head to toe in barred leather, these lovingly designed speakers are set to become style icons for the musical fashionista whilst simultaneously satisfying the audiophile.

Both collections have been specially selected for you by Absolute Sounds, the UK's leading importer and distributor of the finest, most desirable audio equipment the world has to offer.



The Liuto collection



The Toy collection

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verdicts

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



As great hi-fi debates go, you can forget CD versus LP, electro-static speakers v. moving coil, or even solid-state amplifiers against transistor. No, the big question for me is the far more fundamental question of "what is *the best*...?"

You see, I am all too often being asked, "what's the best £1,000 CD player or £10,000 super speaker?" Before I answer, I tend to get into a debate about the very epistemological basis of the question itself. Don't worry, I'm not going to get my pipe out, spark up and begin the philosophy lecture just yet. It's just that sometimes I find myself uncomfortable with the idea of there being such a thing as "the best" at all...

Let me explain. Imagine, if you would, that I walked into the local greengrocer's shop and said, "hey mate, what's the best vegetable under £3?" That's a bit like how I feel when I get asked to recommend "the ultimate £200 iPod dock" or "the best sub-£2,000 turntable"...

Think of it like this. Hi-fi is a bit like cooking. There are a lot of ingredients, and what (and how much) you put in of one particular vegetable, herb or spice depends on the quantities (and indeed the quality) of the others. So it's a touch too simplistic to be talking in absolutes. For me, the art of great sound is about taking your hi-fi separates as building blocks, and getting the best from them, both individually and as a whole.

So the answer is of course that the best is what's best for you. And this depends on a variety of factors, from your tastes, your ears, your expectations, the other items in your system and the sort of music you listen to most. Then there are other considerations too, like budget, family and even the volume levels you listen at. What's best for one can often be worst for another, as my other half keeps reminding me!

As a hi-fi magazine, we try to capture the essence of a product; its technical performance allied to its subjective one, relative to other products at the price. Of course we can and do opine on our favourites, but we always explain why first. I think that gives you a great 'start point' into buying decisions, so you can go on to find a good dealer and listen for yourself.

David Price, editor

testing

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

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

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

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



ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

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ADAPTIVE AUDIO



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THIRD DEGREE

Two new affordable separates from Leema Acoustics have just been launched to a waiting world. The new Stream III CD player and Pulse III amplifier are claimed to have "significantly upgraded performance with stunning aesthetics and a vast array of useful new features". The new 80W RMS per channel amplifier includes a configurable AV input, a switchable moving magnet and moving coil phono input, and a front panel MP3 player input. Additional features include record output, full remote control, headphone output and full short circuit protection, plus four digital inputs (two optical, one coax and one USB input). The new CD player has an all-new slot loading transport which is controlled by Leema's own custom firmware, with less jitter and digital error than could be achieved with off-the-shelf drives and software, it is claimed. The new Leema Quad DAC is a further refinement of Leema's own highly successful MD2 Multi-DAC giving a shorter signal path and even better performance, the company says. In common with the Pulse III, the Stream III features four digital inputs, plus USB digital output, which enables bit-perfect digital archiving. Both also feature Leema's new Navimech, which provides "delightfully simple and intuitive control". The new fascias are machined from solid aluminium. Prices are £1,495 each. For details, call +44 (0)1938 811900 or click on www.leema-acoustics.com.



ELITE SYNCOPATIONS

Quad had replaced the much loved 99 Series with an all-new range of components, including a CD player, radio tuner, preamp and two power amps. "Like their predecessors, the Elite components are compact in size and designed with performance, simplicity and versatility firmly in mind", the company says. The Elite models supersede their 99 Series counterparts product-for-product. The initial launch consists of five components: the Elite CDS CD player (£799.95), Elite FM tuner (£599.95), Elite Pre preamplifier (£849.95), Elite Stereo stereo power amplifier (£699.95) and Elite Mono monoblock power amplifier (£649.95). Two further components will join the range by the end of the year; a second CD player that incorporates digital preamp functionality and an additional stereo power amp to replace the existing 909. For details, call +44 (0) 1480 447700 or click on www.quad-hifi.co.uk.





GET YOURSELF CONNECTED

Audiolab have announced a new CD player and CD player/preamp, in the shape of the 8200CD and 8200CDQ. They feature extensive design input from John Westlake, digital designer of the legendary Pink Triangle Da Capo, and boast "class-leading sound with innovative functionality". The new players are the first products to emerge from Audiolab's latest generation of audio components, the 8200 Series, sporting clean-sheet circuit design and supplying a special array of facilities and connectivity options, including high-definition USB ports, the company says. Their architecture is perhaps best described as a 'DAC plus CD', rather than as a CD player in the traditional sense. The Sabre 32bit audio DAC from ESS Technology is said to be the cornerstone of the design; rarely used in CD players because it is much more expensive than other audio DACs, the company says. The provision of digital inputs – optical, coaxial and USB – means the 8200CD and 8200CDQ can be used to deliver top-quality sound from all kinds of digital sources, including audio files from computers and other media devices.

The 8200CD and 8200CDQ accept data right up to 24bit/96kHz via USB, with bit depth and sampling frequency shown in real time on the player's LCD display. In addition, the USB link is asynchronous – this means data is regulated by the master clock in the player, rather than by the computer as the source, helping to minimise jitter (digital distortion). The user can control the media player on his/her PC or Mac via the Audiolab remote, with the control signal transferred back to the computer via the USB port. This facility is compatible with all media players – Apple iTunes, Windows Media Player, etc. The Audiolab 8200CD is available from late August at £699.95, with the 8200CDQ arriving in September at £899.95. Both models are solidly built with all-aluminium casework and are available in a choice of silver (natural aluminium) or classic Audiolab black. For more information, click on www.audiolab.co.uk.



ONE TIME

Unity Audio Ltd has distributed professional speaker brands since 1995, and has now gone into manufacturing its own active monitor loudspeakers. The Rock comes in an attractive gloss black finish for domestic hi-fi use, and sports both XLR balanced and phono unbalanced connections, with a rear panel level control for direct connection to a CD

player. Esoteric Audio Research designer Tim de Paravicini has created an amplifier especially for this speaker, a 100W discrete Class AB design with custom wound transformers and dedicated LF and HF sections with overload/clip protection. The cabinet is designed by Kevin van Green, and sports a Corian/bonded plywood front baffle. It's a closed box design, the cabinet made from "top grade" 12mm 9-ply Baltic Birch rather than cheaper commonly used MDF. An ingenious bracing system has also been designed to stop cabinet flexing the company says.

A folded ribbon tweeter has been used which features a neodymium magnet system, giving higher efficiency, superior linear frequency and phase response. A 180mm woofer with a 0.2mm aluminium foil is chemically bonded to a rigid pulp fiber cone. This reduces harmonic anomalies and permits +/- 15mm of woofer travel producing accurate low bass frequencies. The new speaker retails for £2,232.50 per pair; for more details call +44(0)1440 785843 or click on www.unityaudio.co.uk.



TWO NICE

Teac's new AR650 is said to be "twice as powerful as many stereo amplifiers at the price, and has the ability to drive just about any speaker you care to partner it with". Carefully selected components create a crisp and clean sound quality that's also well defined, the company says. It sports seven inputs, including an MM phono stage, plus a microphone input with separate level control for those with a karaoke bent. Price is £249. For more information, click on www.TEAC.co.uk.

CLASSIC VINYL

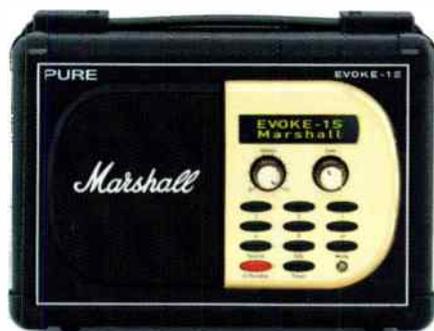
Classic LPs are offering an amazing 33.3% off of vinyl to mark the National Audio Show at Whittlebury, near Silverstone. Classic LPs, one of the country's biggest in-stock retailers of vinyl reissues and new releases, is holding a two-day record mega-sale to mark the date of the National Audio Show. The company is offering discounts of a third across the board on its entire stocks of approximately 2,000 brand new vinyl titles, including several hundred high-end audiophile LPs. Customers also get a complimentary record cleaning cloth with each purchase. Classic LPs' warehouse in the Malvern Hills will be open for business throughout the weekend of September 25th and 26th. For more information, click on www.classiclp.co.uk or call +44(0)1684 899457.



END OF A CENTURY

Denon is celebrating its one hundredth birthday this year, and has announced its special edition Anniversary Product Collection. It's comprises seven components, "each finely tuned, hand-tested and accompanied by a certificate of authenticity and a special collector's edition coffee table book". The PMA-A100 integrated amplifier includes special anniversary tuning, superior construction and strictly selected parts for higher sound quality. Its partner, the DCD-A100 CD/SACD player, features Advanced AL32 Processing and the latest 32bit/192 kHz DA converters. It also plays SACDs and is further equipped with various digital input ports, including a USB port for connecting an iPod or USB memory. Like the PMA, the DCD features a 100th anniversary signature badge affixed to the black high-gloss front panel. Interestingly, there's a turntable too, in the shape of the DP-A100 [pictured], a large quartz locked direct drive, it comes equipped with a DL-A100 cartridge, apparently a specially tuned version of the DL-103.

The AVR-A100 9.2 Channel A/V surround receiver sports Denon Link 4th, high-bit i/p conversion and scaling, but also advanced connectivity, network audio/photo streaming, gold plated inputs/outputs and cast iron footing to stabilise sound quality. The matching DBP-A100 Universal Player sports Denon's Direct Mechanical Ground Construction and Multi-layer Chassis Structure. The matching AH-A100 headphones have "a high-grade driver unit for superior sound quality", a newly designed skin-soft ear pads and headband, a luxurious storage case and wiping cloth. All Denon A100 anniversary products come in a special carton box with a five-year warranty and a signed certificate of authenticity from the chief production engineer plus a special Denon book. All products will be available from November 1st onwards and will only be sold at a few selected anniversary selection retailers. Visit www.denon100.com for more details.

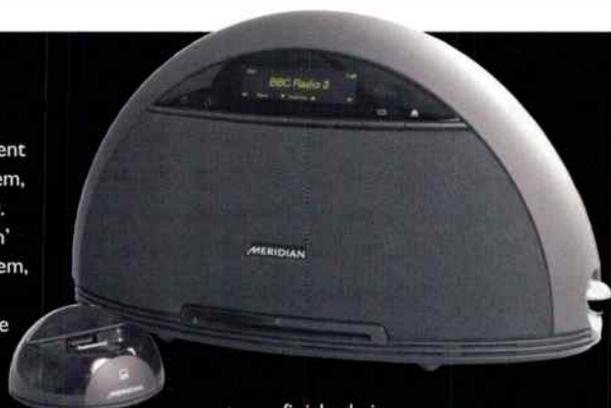


ROCKING GOOD NEWS

Lovers of the axe will cheer the return of the Pure Evoke Marshall DAB radio, in full Marshall stack dress! The £119.95 Evoke-15 Marshall Edition echoes the style of what are arguably the world's leading guitar amplifiers. The distinctive white "Marshall" lettering sits on black grill beside the brass-effect control panel that features a fierce red on black display. The radio has a bass reflex port alongside a custom designed 3" drive unit. This latest version sports ChargePAK compatibility (it will go a claimed 24 hours between charges), an OLED (Organic Light Emitting Diode) display that is clear from any angle; a light sensor which automatically adjusts display brightness; more station presets (30 digital radio or FM); an auxiliary input to connect an iPod or MP3 player; and FM with RDS for maximum station choice; textSCAN and Intellitext has also been added so that scrolling text can be paused and controlled as well as stored for browsing at a later date. For more information, please visit www.pure.com or call +44 (0) 845 1489001.

EIGHTY-TWO

Meridian has announced a replacement to its much loved F80 one-box system, in the shape of the new £1,500 M80. The 'Compact Entertainment System' includes a 2.1 DSP loudspeaker system, CD and DVD Player, DAB/FM/AM Radio, an i80 iPod Dock, and Multiple Analogue and Digital Inputs. The curved arch of the M80 houses a refined yet powerful loudspeaker of British hand-stitched leathers – A i80 iPod Dock is included with every M80, and allows the choice of music from an iPod to be selected via the M80 front panel – or from across the room using the remote control. Containing a powerful Meridian 2.1 DSP loudspeaker system in its unique, mineral-doped composite body, the M80 can fill a large room with sound, the company says. British designed and hand-assembled in Meridian's Cambridgeshire factory, it sports "the highest quality leathers, sourced in Britain and hand-worked by local experts with over thirty five years experience". For more details, click on www.meridian.co.uk.



system, finished in a range of Obsidian Black, Chestnut, and Ivory.

SOCKET CITY

Japanese high-end accessory specialist Furutech has launched a UK 13 amp mains plug, "designed from the ground up for exceptional audio and video performance". Their BSI 1363 compliant UK wall socket is available in both single and double socket versions; the Furutech FP-1363 features a nylon / fibreglass body and Alpha Pure Copper Conductors. Furutech's patent pending clamping system can accommodate cables up to 5.5 mm² and provides 17.142% more contact area than conventional designs, it is claimed. Alpha Phosphor Bronze Pin Supports ensure excellent contact and handling characteristics. The whole assembly is mounted in an ABS front plate with polycarbonate cover. All metal parts go through the company's Alpha Process cryogenic treatment to keep all connectors, conductors, and other metal parts in a perfect stress-free, stable and highly conductive state. Prices starts at £74.95 for the FP-1363-SG (single, 24 k Gold plated) and stretch to £134.95 for the FP-1363-DR (double, Rhodium plated) product. For more details, call +44 (0) 1276 501 392 or click on www.soundfoundations.co.uk.



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New Pearls from Marantz

David Price attends at the launch of Marantz's new Pearl Lite CD player and amplifier...

Marantz's Brand Ambassador Ken Ishiwata joined HFW editor David Price over the end-of-August bank holiday, at the launch of the company's Pearl Lite SACD player and amplifier at Zouch Audio, in Ashby de la Zouch. Hosted by proprietor Mike Statham and his lovely wife Lynn plus his excellent team, over fifty members of the public and Hi-Fi World readers also attended, getting the chance to hear the new system, along with the original Pearl and Marantz PM15 systems. A fine time was had by all, with much great music being played, helped along by some rather nice bubbly, strawberries and chocolate biscuits! The event was a resounding success, thanks to Ken and everyone at Zouch Audio Ltd. For more information on the Pearl series click on www.marantz.eu/kipearl



An energetic Ken Ishiwata was there both days, demonstrating the new Pearl Lite duo via a particularly well set up pair of Focal Chorus floorstanders...



top: Pearl Lite CD sports USB input and extensive digital connectivity; below: Pearl Lite amp has plenty of power and inputs plus fine sound...

Jetstream

Noel Keywood flies high with Tannoy's mighty Revolution DC10 loudspeakers...

Tannoy loudspeakers are just different, and the big ones in particular, like the DC10s here, induce a little awe in me. It's no secret that the Yorkminster and Westminster Royal SE I have a special regard for. As Tannoys get smaller their magic wanes, however. Their slide down into more prosaic realms puts them into contest with a lot of other cabinets and distinctions become less clear. The DC10 is, however, a big Tannoy that tries to hide the fact. It carries a classic Tannoy Dual concentric drive unit, but in domesticated 10in form, allowing a 339mm wide (13in) front baffle to be used. This is no Tygan covered wardrobe, Yorkminster style, but an elegantly shaped Cherry veneered and gloss coated beauty that stands 1,125mm high and weighs 34.5kgs. So the DC10 is big, but not outrageously so. It's around one-third the volume of a Yorkminster, for example; and I won't even mention the Westminster!

Even when they're small though, Tannoys are big. The DC10s are room shakers, producing vast bass and effortless volume. Yet in apparent contradiction, they need very little power and are better off being denied it. Look at them and you may think the 500 Watts peak power and 125 Watts continuous power Tannoy claim they can absorb suggest a big amplifier is required, but not so. Also quoted is a 92dB sensitivity that, unusually, was conservative. We measured a monstrous 94dB and I could get no more 5 Watts into the DC10s before being acoustically overwhelmed! This calculates out at 96dB 12 ft away (using -4dB loss for every doubling of distance in an enclosed room), or 92dB 24ft away.

I mention all this to get big, sensitive loudspeakers like the DC10s into perspective. Big Tannoys work right at the bottom end of amplifier output figures and this is where a large majority of amplifiers sound at their worst. The ideal amplifier for a DC10 is a 20 Watt Single-Ended (i.e. crossover free) valve amplifier of superb design, from Audionote or Almarro for example. I have heard Westminster

Royals driven by Audionote Keron amplifiers at Heatherdale and it was an experience not to be missed. The worst choice is a powerful transistor amplifier; you end up listening to crossover distortion and low level crud. So big the DC10s may be, but even in our 28ft square room 5 Watts was enough for me! That makes Tannoy's DC10 a different proposition to usual and one to be aware of, and beware of too. Not everyone agrees: Tannoy's German dealer for example was using high power transistor amplifiers at this year's High End Show in Munich, but it was painfully obvious to me. I heard the amplifiers, not the loudspeakers.

Installation was easy enough. Just slide out of the carton, screw in spikes, haul into upright position and position suitably. Producing vast bass, the DC10s are best kept away from walls and reflective surfaces, and are ideal free standing in a large room. They come with sturdy bi-wire terminals fitted with links, plus an earth terminal. I used the green earth leads I made up for the Yorkminsters. What Tannoy don't provide are foam port bungs and this the DC10s need I feel – more later..

The front grilles can be removed and underneath lie two drive units, or so it appears. In fact the upper one is a Tannoy Dual Concentric, comprising treble unit firing out through the centre of a 10in bass/midrange unit, loaded by a rear port. The tweeter takes over above a low 1.4kHz, so crossover is at a longer wavelength than in most loudspeakers, lessening phase error between midrange and treble. And the DC10 does in practice sound more 'solid', all-of-a-piece and less phasey than most.

The bass unit sitting below it works up to 200Hz and is also rear ported. As output from both ports is identical, our measurements show, the bass units and rear chambers are also identical I suspect. And finally the crossover is deep cryogenically treated, said to improve its retrieval of low level detail.

SOUND QUALITY

We gave the DC10s a few nights of running in but they had been used and did not sound especially 'tight'. One



night of Monitor Audio 'De-Tox' was applied too, just in case. I have yet to be convinced this makes a difference, but it is so weird I feel obliged to perform it all the same. Someone, somewhere obviously has some

'interesting' reasons for this disc, that I'm sure will make sense when I hear them!

Hooked up to our reference transistor amplifier, the Musical Fidelity AMS50 that runs in full

Class A, the big Tannoys sounded clean and even in nature but not especially engaging; there was no special essence, no *'joie de vivre'* as it were. The big AMS50 pumps current and often makes 4 Ohm loudspeakers work hard at low frequencies, but held in a grip of steel. Not so with the DC10s however. Instead, I got very large bass that was too inflated to make me feel comfortable.

Switching to our alternative Icon Audio MB845 valve amplifiers showed that with these loudspeakers valves are obligatory, something I have found before with Tannoys. This is not only a power issue. The DC10s have great insight, likely due to the high standard of component quality in the crossovers, and they open out with valves, sounding smooth, open and expansive. The MB845s pushed a little less low end power into the Tannoys than the AMS50 and this helped balance things out too.

All the same, the DC10s have enormous bass output and excited our room down at a subsonic 24Hz. To avoid this they need a room larger than 28ft long. In our room they really needed foam bungs, I thought, but had none, so I made some up using acoustic foam. They made less difference than expected, at least in taming deep subsonics on Alison Goldfrapp's 'Let it Take You' but over a variety of discs a good balance was achieved with the bottom ports fitted with bungs and the top ones left open. This gave better damped bass in our room and I wasn't distracted by excessive subsonics and the bloated sound that comes from

this effect. The DC10 still slid down low, as the synth notes fell through the floor to give a deep rumbling sound on Goldfrapp's 'Slide In'.

With bass damped down and amplifier choice sorted, I found it easier to move my attention away from deep bass issues and to the rest of what the DC10 could do. To give you an overall snapshot, this is a supremely smooth sounding loudspeaker with no emphases at all, but full bodied, muscular and extremely insightful. A typical Tannoy, in other words! An absence of midband peaking keeps singers back in the plane of the loudspeakers, albeit surrounded by a lovely sense of stage depth, and there isn't a hint of top end tizz. That's not to say the concentric horn loaded tweeter won't throw hard hit cymbals and rimshots with power, but it just doesn't over emphasise treble for effect. Images are large and well focused, hung out between the loudspeakers rather than in an arc over them, an effect influenced by ceiling reflection, or in this case its absence.

The DC10s deliver enormous power whilst remaining relaxed and totally unphased. There's no strain here but then looking at the figures that's only to be expected. Pressed back into our settee from huge volume the DC10s were just lazing along. It was when I put on Duffy's difficult 'Rockferry' CD that the DC10's talents started to become apparent. Their tremendous insight made every little subtlety of production apparent, spotlighting Duffy in front of the microphone with an expressive power that made lesser loudspeakers sound relatively bland. It was like listening to new, shiny 24/96 digital after being used to old 1970s PCM from CD; what you once thought was good has been exposed as wanting. The lovely part about it was that the DC10s are relaxed, laconic and totally unforced. They cruised along, throwing out one of the most insightful, informative yet relaxing performances I have heard for a while. Total silence suddenly broken by Duffy inhaling at the start of 'Syrup and Honey', made me sit up. The sparse, almost non-existent instrumentation, allows her to stretch out with a gorgeous range of vocal expression, quite her own, and the DC10s made this vividly apparent in front me, in a huge, perfectly formed canvas. This was the best I have heard the album, and by a large margin.

Tannoys are all about big bass and the DC10s don't disappoint. Bass lines from Angelique Kidjo's 'Agolo' thundered through our



a class above

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listening room with a power that I physically felt on the chest. With bungs out it was way too much in truth, but with bungs in the DC10s still made rivals sound wimpish. Pin sharp in their timing and clean as a whistle with interjections by horns, the DC10s showed they stride along with a grip on pace that is exceptional. Hand drums rang out in the left loudspeaker whilst bass drum strikes sent shivers across our room. Was I using Watts? Er, six absolute maximum, a meter told me. Meanwhile the Bruel & Kjaer sound pressure meter beside me indicated 110dB on peaks and 100dB rms (12ft away to listen near field). If I'd had a small 3W valve radio attached it would have gone just as loud for heaven's sake! It's difficult to believe what a 94dB loudspeaker sounds like - and a large subsonic explosion at the end of 'Tatchedogbe' barreled through the room shaking all around like a tsunami whilst I was musing on this, as if to say "you haven't heard anything mate". Other loudspeakers don't do things like this.

What they brought to Rock transferred easily and appropriately to classical performances. Quiet and waffle free, the DC10s delivered piano into the room with a power and alacrity that put the spectacular playing of Arcadi Volodos up onto a sonic pedestal. Clean as a whistle note to note, the DC10s were so beautifully clear. Volodos's quite unbelievable efforts sounded so vivacious in their speed and power I was more than impressed; it was like having the piano in the room.

All the strengths these Tannoys brought to music were usefully employed to put Renee Fleming between the loudspeakers standing large and clear. A single drum strike in 'Un bel di vedremo' from Madame Butterfly had conspicuous power and Flemming's strength of delivery was perfectly captured. Here the Tannoy's showed some hardness of tone across their upper frequencies, something I noticed with other types of music. At the base of the horn lies a 25mm Titanium dome tweeter and it lacks electrostatic sweetness, or ribbon incision. But it does a good job all the same and contributes usefully to the DC10's forceful dynamics. Tannoy have obviously worked to get it into better shape than most dome tweeters, so the DC10 remains couth in this area and still better than most loudspeakers. Renee Fleming's sustained highs flowed smoothly outward and I enjoyed the insight these loudspeakers brought to her work in front of the microphone. They

bring vocal performances alive and are especially strong with this type of material; natural recordings little mangled by a mixing desk are delivered with a lovely sense of purity and balance.

Large orchestral works became very large, taking on concert hall scale and here the DC10s reminded me of the Yorkminsters. The Royal Philharmonic playing Tchaikovskys 'Marche Slave' were laid out in a massive panorama before me and the sense of power and scale the DC10s created was unmistakable. They kept strings freely separated from the horns, meanwhile background timpani was doing its own bit of thundering in this rendition. The ease with which musical strands were kept separate and clear was a delight and well beyond what I am used to. The big Tannoys made it all sound very easy and were superb. Their supreme sense of balance held them in good stead here, whilst their dynamic clarity caused horns to blare out with a solid, incisive rasp that made me jump, and the fearful power of the performance had me transfixed - as I once was with Yorkies. Strings were intense but smooth and richly textured. In case you are wondering, DC10s don't have the bass quality of Yorkminsters, but then they don't have the cabinet.

CONCLUSION

These are the best Tannoys I have heard since the Yorkminsters, and are possibly more able at peering right into a performance, as well as sounding smoother and less hard in their treble. At an absolute level, they are real Tannoys too,



able to shake a room with an alacrity that had me holding onto the settee.

Able to make me jump at the power of sudden orchestral crescendos, they have a vivacity, coupled to brute strength that made both Rock and Classical viscerally exciting. Yet they also were magic with singers in front of microphones. An extraordinary and lovely pair of loudspeakers then, that left me silent at what they could do. What a way to spend £5,000! You'll need a home, and an amplifier, to match though...



VERDICT ●●●●●
Huge dynamics, great insight and an even tonality make this an exceptional loudspeaker.

Tannoy DC10T £5,000
Tannoy
☎ +44 (0) 1236 702503
www.tannoy.co.uk

FOR
- subsonic bass
- punchy dynamics
- superb insight

AGAINST
- excessive bass level
- no foam tuning bungs
- uninformative manual

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our frequency response analysis clearly shows the DC10 measures flat right across the audio band, with just the slightest treble loss around 20kHz. There's no upper midband lift to add detail, no treble peak to illuminate cymbals and no midband lift to throw vocals forward; with the DC10 Tannoy have gone for absolute, unvarnished accuracy. Interestingly, there were almost no undulations at high frequencies from the treble horn, as there have been with past Tannoys, and little difference between on-axis and off-axis listening, above, below or on either side of the cabinet. The DC10s have excellent dispersion then, smooth all round and this will help keep reflections reasonably in tune with the main forward sound. Also, the sound will stay consistent across a wide range of seating positions, and around the room.

Like all Tannoys, the DC10s go low. Bass output rises a little below 100Hz, all the way down to 50Hz our pink noise response (not published) shows. Below this both ports extend downward with unusual smoothness, as the red (top port) and yellow (bottom port) traces reveal. With output level just -2dB below the drivers at 80Hz, both ports contribute strongly to subsonic output and this excited a 24Hz mode in our 28ft measuring room, so subsonics are guaranteed even in large rooms, as expected of Tannoys.

Upping the pressure enormously (sound pressure as well as pressure on rivals!) is a massive sensitivity of 94dB sound pressure level from 1 nominal Watt (2.8V) of power. This partly comes about because of their prodigious low bass output, which always pushes SPLs up, and also because of a low 5 Ohms impedance and a d.c. resistance of just 2.6 Ohms. So the DC10s draw current but solid-state amplifiers deliver easily

enough and of course not many Watts will be needed in any case; a 40 Watt amplifier will be more than enough. This includes 40 Watt valve amplifiers with 4 Ohm taps. The flat tuned ports well damp the bass units, which makes for a 'flat' impedance curve and should produce bass that supports 'tunes'.

A 200mS spectral decay analysis (not shown) shows very low colouration and distortion was low too. Big loudspeakers have measurably clean bass and the DC10 was no exception, producing just 1.5% at 40Hz from its bass unit and a very low 2.5% from its port (6% is common). From 100Hz upward and across the midband distortion hovered around a low 0.2%.

The DC10 has a superb measured performance and will sound perfectly balanced, colouration free and very powerful. It has been very well engineered. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - top port
Yellow - bottom port

IMPEDANCE



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HI-FI WORLD

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HI-FI PLUS. ISSUE 68,



SIRIUS



ACCESSORIES



ORION



VISION



SIGMAS



TITAN



Dynamic Range

The sub-£1,500 integrated amplifier has never been better, thinks Paul Rigby, after trying eight of the latest examples...

Once upon a time, when hi-fi was young and Compact Disc was but a glint in the eyes of Philips and Sony, the 'integrated amplifier' wasn't the pure and noble breed it is today. Basically, it was a cheap stop-gap product you bought before you purchased your first 'proper' preamplifier/power amplifier combination; a sort of admission of audiophile penury...

This all changed around the mid nineteen seventies, when the likes of A&R Cambridge Ltd. and Lecson introduced far more expensive 'super integrations', which offered serious hi-fi performance in one box. Good as they were, the idea of separate budget pre-power amps remained in the audiophile's imagination right up until the mid eighties, when the next wave arrived; the Naim Nait, Exposure 10,

Mission Cyrus 2 and Inca Tech Claymore sounded better than many two box designs. Prices were high, but somehow buyers didn't mind; it was no longer shameful to be seen with the humble integrated amplifier.

The designs you see here are their spiritual heirs; indeed in the case of the Arcam and Cyrus they're actually direct descendents. They're massively more sophisticated and diverse than those eighties black boxes; witness the appearance of variously, tubes, transistors, remote controls and DACs. The only things that don't come as standard now are unreliability, dumpy styling (in some cases) and phono stages! So, please be upstanding for the Cyrus 8XPd, Audio Analogue Verdi Cento, Pathos Classic One Mk.3, Arcam A38, Electrocompaniet PI-1, Unison Research Seconda, Moon i-1 and Icon Audio 40 Mk.III. **DP**

THE CONTENDERS

ICON AUDIO 40 MK.III	£1,200
MOON I-1	£1,250
UNISON RESEARCH SECONDA	£1,250
ELECTROCOMPANIET PI-1	£1,345
ARCAM A38	£1,450
PATHOS CLASSIC ONE MK.3	£1,450
CYRUS 8XPd	£1,500
AUDIO ANALOGUE VERDI CENTO	£1,500

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Avid Acutus turntable
SME IV tonearm
Benz Glider cartridge
Icon PS3 phono stage
Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier
Icon MB845 monoblocks
Naim CD5 CD player
One Thing Quad ESL-57 loudspeakers
AE Radiance 1 loudspeakers



ICON AUDIO 40 Mk.III £1,200

Icon Audio's 40 has been steadily developed for nigh on ten years, up to Mk III status reviewed here. Although relatively compact at 390x410x210mm, at 25kg it's a big lift. Arrayed on the top of the fascia are the four EL34 (KT88 an option) valves plus one 6SL7/6N9 first stage valve and two 6SN7 phase splitters. Standing proudly in the middle is a Western Electric 274B valve rectifier.

The 40 can be operated in either Triode or Ultralinear modes which will affect the amplifier's sound presentation; the normal 40W RMS drops to 20W in Triode mode. Other audiophile touches include Rubicon/Nichichon power caps, silver Teflon cabling and hand wired, point to point circuitry. The fascia carries an Alps Blue volume potentiometer, power switch, source selector, tape switch, triode/ultralinear selector and a standby (H.T. off) toggle.

SOUND QUALITY

In Triode mode this amp made a very nice, beguiling sound, but I found that bass wasn't so well controlled, lacking structure and precision, despite the mids and treble offering sparkling detail. Ultralinear mode gave most of Triode mode's upper frequency detail, plus a weighty and solid bass that allowed the midrange to relax, like a football back-four in front of a trusted goalkeeper.

Starting with vinyl and the Pixies' 'Surfer Rosa' (4AD) and 'Bone Machine', both Black

Francis and Kim Deal's vocals had a smooth clarity. Upper frequencies produced plenty of sumptuous detail with delicacy when required, and both the stereo image and soundstage were impressively placed.

On to Rosemary Clooney and Duke Ellington's 'Blue Rose' (Pure Pleasure) and 'Hey Baby' which featured an impressive array of characteristic brass that the Icon separated and recognised with alacrity, displaying each instrument's personality. Clooney, for her part, was transcribed with a smooth delivery, oozing over the soundstage that provided plenty of space for her to roam.

CD next and Blond Redhead's

new 'Penny Sparkle' album on 4AD; 'Hear Sometimes' offered a satisfying, guttural thumping bass in a rounded form that blended well with the airy vocals and crisp, electro backing. This effortless, natural replay lead sensibly into Linn Records' 'Colloredo Serandae K.203 & Divertimento' by Mozart via the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. This recording sat in a seemingly vast space, the orchestra playing with ease with bucketfuls of air moving freely in between each instrument. Finally, the violin solo displayed a fragility and filigree detail that will put a smile on the face of any Mozart fan.

Quite an amplifier, and quite a start for this superbest!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Icon amplifiers evolve and this one is very interesting. Bandwidth is limited to 15kHz (-1dB) and -1.3dB at 20kHz (and is a little volume control dependent), so the Stereo 40 MkIII will sound warm. Power output measures 40 Watts (1.5% thd) into 8 and 4 Ohms (20W in Triode mode) so the 4 Ohm tap is effectively coupled. Distortion levels were low at 1W, just 0.16% at 1kHz and 10kHz. Bass distortion was also low at 0.5% and 1% near full output (3rd harmonic, a transformer effect). Triode mode reduced all figures to 0.2% maximum, so was very effective (Triode modes are usually ineffective). Sensitivity was very high at 260mV so even a low gain phono stage will match. Damping factor was low at around 2.5, so feedback is limited.

The Stereo 40 MkIII will sound warm, but clean and very tidy, with good bass. Low damping means using acoustically well damped loudspeakers,

but it measures well, exploiting EL34s very effectively. NK

Power	40 Watts
Frequency response	8Hz-15kHz
Separation	58dB
Noise	-96dB
Distortion	0.16%
Sensitivity	260mV

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Sparkling with detail, bristling with musical energy and smooth and sweet, this is an excellent performer at the price.

ICON AUDIO 40 MK.III £1,200
Icon Audio Ltd.
+44(0)1162 440593
www.iconaudio.co.uk

FOR
- tonally accurate
- insightful midrange
- tuneful bass

AGAINST
- nothing at the price



MOON i-1 £1,250

This particular design is the company's entry-level model, available in black or silver. It sports a custom toroidal transformer that helps to push out 50W of power into 8 Ohms, with the first 5W being full Class A, it is claimed. Other internal goodies include pure copper tracings and gold plating on the circuit board.

Weighing in at a reasonable 10kg and spanning 169x30x127mm, the front fascia of this compact design is ordered and unfussy, featuring, stage left, an array of source buttons plus mute and speaker off buttons (the latter being useful when you listen to headphones) plus a media player button relating to MP3 players and the like. Moving onwards to the right we find a rotary volume control and, to its right, a headphone socket and a socket for your media player.

Scouting around to the rear, the i-1 has six pairs of sockets including DVD and video ports that reveals the unit's lifestyle aspirations plus a pre-out socket pairing. There is also a set of SimLink connectors so that other Moon boxes can be linked to talk to each other. You also get a RS-232 port for custom integration and firmware updates.

SOUND QUALITY

Unsurprisingly considering its lack of tubes, the Moon doesn't quite have the same broad, expansive nature that was heard via the Icon. Actually, during the Pixies's 'Bone Machine', a lot of the air of that performance had seeped away and was lost, while vocals lacked a distinct character compared to the Icon 40. As a

consequence, bass output was also a little dry. The midrange, however, was beautifully smooth and detailed and lower frequency energy was available in abundance which provided weight to the music, adding a foundation upon which the performance sat. Similarly, the Moon lacked the Icon's sparkle or shine during the Clooney/Ellington album. On the upside however, Clooney's voice had a pleasing warmth that was aided by the Moon's own leanings toward meatier lower frequencies. This gave the vocal a fine, 'relaxing by an open log fire' quality.

It was only when my CD source was called upon, via the new Blonde Redhead album, that the Moon really woke up and sprang to life. Bass gained verve and pizzazz, plus a real

oomph that impressed so much it raised not one but both eyebrows. The supporting electronic backing also had a more dominating presence and the multiple layering of vocals, via the digital source, was clear. Such was its fine detailing that newly discovered, formerly subdued, synth runs were highlighted for the first time.

Moving to classical, Mozart benefitted from this shot in the arm, continuing apace with the delicate tones present, despite the Moon not offering the same midrange examination as the Icon. However, the i-1 did catch the essence and vitality of the performance with enough focus to satisfy those who might enjoy the precision of the ensemble and the energy behind it. A fine performer, in its way, and good value too.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Moon i-1 produced a modest 55 Watts into 8 Ohms but this nearly doubles to 100 Watts into 4 Ohms because of its large mains transformer and excellent power supply regulation. As most loudspeakers are 4 Ohms it is more a 100 Watt amplifier than a 50 Watter, so it will go plenty loud enough in use.

Distortion levels were low and as damping factor was high it looks as if the i-1 had quite a lot of feedback. The small amount of 0.04% seen in our analysis is classic crossover distortion, with an extended harmonic structure. Many modern amplifiers have banished such crossover, but at least with the Moon level is low.

Input sensitivity was on the low side at 340mV so an external phono stage will need good amounts of gain, around x200 for MM and x2000 for MC, if it is to match in reasonably well.

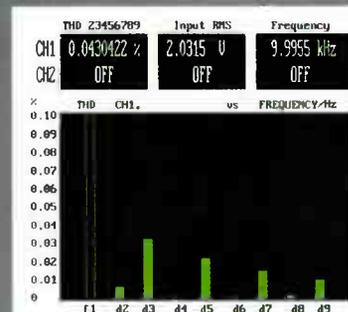
Moon have interestingly curtailed low frequency extension to 10Hz, something that can help an amplifier seem a little more dry and spry in its

bass, possibly because of d.c. servo behaviour.

The Moon measured well all round, but it is a little behind the leaders in this group. NK

Power	55 Watts
Frequency response	10Hz-85kHz
Separation	80dB
Noise (IEC A wtd.)	-106dB
Distortion	0.04%
Sensitivity	340mV

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Engaging solid-state sound with plenty of detail and punch, this is a fine mid-price integrated.

MOON i-1 £1,250

Renaissance Audio

☎ +44(0)131 555 3922

www.renaissanceaudio.co.uk

FOR

- musically satisfying
- explicit detail
- low frequency energy

AGAINST

- less romantic than tubes!

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AMPLIFICATION

Z-Systems RDP-1. Room-correction digital pre-amp. Cost new £3000+, barely used, mint example. £995

Jeff Rowland Coherence 2. World reference 2-box pre with battery supply. This cost new a staggering £14000, so at only £4295, you had better be quick.

Chord CPM-3300 Integrated amp. One owner, excellent condition with integra legs, silver with gold badge. 5yr warranty. (£6500) £2995

Ayre AX-7E integrated amp. Boxed, mint condition. Just over a year old, one owner. (£2795) £1395

Parasound 275 power amp. Only a few months old, one owner, mint, boxed. You can't go wrong at £199.

Parasound Halo P7 pre-amp. Only a few months old. Mint, boxed, one owner. New £1990, bargain at £995.

Chord SPM 1400E mono blocks. 480w into 8 ohms. Excellent condition, original boxes & packing. Integra legs - silver with gold badges. 5yr warranty, be very quick at only £5795. Cost around £16k each new!).

Chord SPM-1200B Power Amp. 250 wpc. Black with wooden side accents. Excellent condition, very recent Chord service. Original box & packing. Rarely available on the used market (£3950). Only £1395.

Bel Canto Pre 3 Pre-amp. Black with aluminium face. Original box & packing, immaculate (£1850). Only £995

Tube Technology Genesis 100w mono blocks with upgrade Gold Aero Valves and capacitors, plus matching Prophet 2-box valve pre. Cost new over £4000, absolute bargain at £1395.

Eastern Electric M520 Integrated Amp. One owner, 8mths old, perfect condition. Original packing, manual & remote. Group test & Editor's Choice award winner in Hi-Fi News. (£1995) only £1295

Counterpoint SA-12 Hybrid Stereo Power Amp. Dual channel tube/mosfet. 100w pc, 2 x ECC88 per channel (£1250). Only £495

ECA Technologies Vista Pre & Lectern Power Amps. Black with gold logos. Immaculate. (£1700) only £650

NuForce P9 reference 2-box pre-amp. Silver, mint, ex-demo unit. 5yr warranty, fantastic reviews, current spec (£2500). A bargain at £1450

Creek EVO2 Integrated amp. Black, boxed, ex-display, 5yr warranty, last two. (£680) Only £499

Quad 909 Power amp. One owner, silver, boxed, mint, only a few months old. (£1000) only £649

Quad II Eighty Valve mono blocks. One owner, unmarked, stunning performance, great reviews. Original box/packing. 5yr warranty. (£6000) £3695

Chapter Audio Preface & Couplet pre/power combo. Boxed, original flight cases, excellent condition. New over £9k, less than half price £4295

Art Audio VPI Pre-Amp (with MM Phono Stage). Chrome, spectacular condition, original boxes & packing. (£2600) only £1295

Creek EVO2 integrated amp. Silver, one owner, supplied by us. 5yr warranty. (£665) bargain at £495

MBL 9008A reference mono blocks (x2). Black/gold. Original flight cases, one owner, excellent condition, 5yr warranty. New £41000. Amazing value at £15,995.

Deltech DPA50S power amp. With Deltech 500S Slink speaker cable. Boxed, manual etc. (£990) £495

Eastern Electric MiniMax Pre/power combo. One owner, supplied by us, unmarked, as new, 2mths old, 5yr warranty. Stunning performance. (£2195) £1295

DIGITAL

Z-Systems RDP-1 - room correction digital pre-amp. Cost new over £3000, almost unused, mint. £995

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Cyrus DAB 8 tuner. Quartz finish, mint, boxed, only 4mths old. Bargain at only £395.

Cyrus CD8x. Mint, one owner, quartz finish, boxed, manual, great reviews. Only £449 with 5yr warranty. Matching Quartz PSX available only £275 (mint, boxed)

Acoustic Arts Drive 1 mk2. Current spec CD transport, boxed, mint, one owner. (£4500) £2250

Acoustic Arts DAC 1 mkIV - 66 BIT 1536kHz D/A CONVERTER BALANCED OUTPUT, stunning spec, mint, boxed, one owner. Sensational. (£4500) £1995

Naim CD5x, boxed, mint, as new. One local owner, only 18mths old. 5yr warranty. Be very quick at £995 (Flat Cap 2, also boxed, mint, available at only £349)

Sony CDP X55ES CD Player. Black with rosewood side cheeks, perfect condition. Full copper chassis, optical digital output, fixed & variable analogue options. Original packing, manual & remote. (£1400) Only £395.

NuForce MSR-1 music server. Boxed, new, unused, black. Great reviews, very versatile. (£2200) £1369. Loudspeakers

Sonus Faber Minima Amators. One owner, boxed, excellent condition, matching stands, 5yr warranty. (£2000) £995

Focal Electra 1037 Be Speakers. One owner, mint, boxed, manuals. (£7495) Be quick at only £3695!

Sonus Faber Cremona Auditors. With matching stands, excellent condition, original boxes & packing, in maple. A bargain at only £1395.

ADAM Audio ART Pencil Speakers. Cherry/Dark Silver. Excellent condition, original box & packing. (£3600) only £1795

Wilson Watt Puppy 5.1 speakers. Gunmetal, factory crates, excellent condition, all paperwork. Huge saving on new (£15000) at only £4995.

Quad ESL 989. Excellent condition, 5yr warranty. New £5900 so a real bargain at only £1795

Proac Studio 140 Speakers. One owner, 18mths old, perfect condition, cherry, original boxes. (£1650) £895

Audio Physic Virgo V. One owner, originally supplied by us, excellent condition, original boxes & packing, maple. (£5500) £3595

ATC SCM 50 ASLT (Towers) Active Speakers. Yew, 2010 models, mint, boxed. (£10815) £POA

ATC SCM19 Speakers. Cherry, one owner, 6mths old, excellent condition (few marks). (£1700) be quick £995.

Amphion Argon 3L Speakers. Scandinavian Birch, original boxes, packing & accessory pack. 8mths old. Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy Winner. (£2600) only £1695

Audio Physic Scorpio II. Latest model, cherry, ex-demo, unmarked condition. (£3773) £2750

Quad ESL 2905 Speakers. One owner, mint, boxed, amazing reviews, 5yr warranty (£7000) only £4990

Audio Physic Tempo VI Speakers. Maple, one owner, 6mths old, completely unmarked, original packing & literature. (£2612) Bargain at £1895.

Audio Physic Scorpio. Boxed, cherry, one owner, good condition (very minor marks). (£3800) £1695

ANALOGUE

LFD MCT Phonostage. Mint, one owner. Sensational performance only 18mths old. (£3400) Only £2500

Linn LP12 Arm Board. Original, as new. £35.

Linn Lingo PSU. For the Linn Sondek LP-12, wonderful condition, complete with LP12 switch, circuit board and interconnecting power lead. £495

Eastern Electric Minimax Phonostage. Boxed, unmarked, one owner, only months old. (£1495) £920

Quad QC 24P Phonostage. Mint, one owner, as new. Great reviews. (£1200) £795

MAINS CONDITIONING

Nordost Vishnu 1m mains cable. Excellent condition. (£404) £249

PurePower 700. Black, ex-demo. (£1595) £POA

Vertex Silver Plus Jaya. One owner, current spec model, excellent condition. A bargain. (£572) £365

ISOL8 Substation Vogue. One owner, originally supplied by us, mint, stunning. (£2595) £1495

Vertex AQ Taga. 6-way distribution mains filter. Great reviews, one owner, unmarked. (£868) £595

CABLES

Siltech Digital Signature Golden Ridge AES/EBU 1m XLR. (£995) £249

Russ Andrews 'Yellow Power' Mains Cable. 1m (£35) only £15

Chord Chorus RCA-RCA Interconnect. 1m (£280) only £110

Chord Carnival SilverScreen Bi-Wire Speaker Cable. 2m. (£133) only £45.

Chord Epic Super Twin Speaker Cable. Bi-Wire, 2m. (£413) only £185.

Vertex Hi-Res Solfonn (rca-rca) Interconnect. 1m, ex-demo, simply sensational (£2047) only £1120.

Vertex Silver Solfonn (rca-rca) Interconnect. 1m, ex-demo. (£1092) only £760.

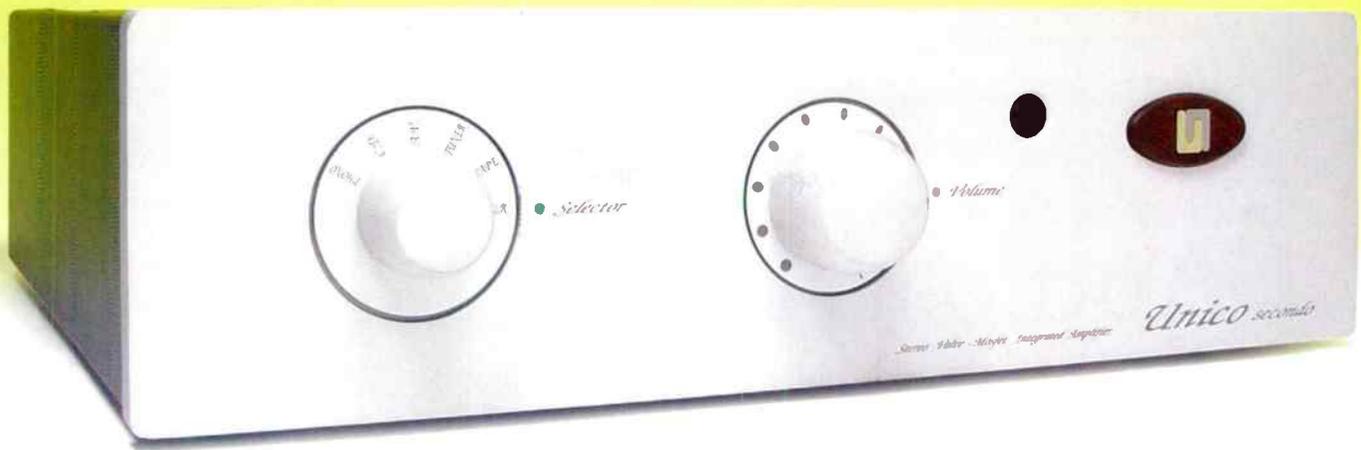
Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo Speaker Links. Set of 4, 80 x 65 x 30mm acoustic absorption module. (£540) £395

Chord Signature speaker cable. One owner, boxed, as new, 2.5m, amazing reviews. (£775) £445

Transparent Reference Digital BNC (75 ohm). Red Sleeve, 1m, new £850, huge saving at £279.

ACCESSORIES

Finite Element Segment X Rack. Black & silver. Complete with 5 piece dedicated spike set. One owner, assembled once (only a few months old) (£600) £275



UNISON RESEARCH SECONDO £1,250

A strangely quirky amplifier whose Italian lineage adds a *frisson* of the left-field. For example, check out the Italian website, find the Secondo and click on the English translation button that transforms the Italian text to... Italian! Then there's the power switch which is positioned on the right hand side of the chassis, which may be an issue regarding placement so be careful where you site this particular integrated. Thirdly, the fascia is appealingly designed with sculptured rotary knobs. However, when rotating the volume control it tends to scrape against the rear fascia, spoiling the effect. Next, the support documentation looks like it's been photocopied one evening after maths class and quickly stuffed into a bag with that night's homework and an empty lunchbox. This sadly gives the impression that the amp has been thrown out of the door as soon as it was built. But then there's a lovely wooden remote control that's part of the package. It's enough to make you stand and scratch your head!

The first of several solid state/valve hybrids in this group, the valves in this case are a pair of ECC83s. The Secondo's transformer and heatsink sits to the right of the case with two pairs of MOSFETs on the left. Weighing in at 15kg and spanning 435x430x130mm, the Secondo pumps out 100W at 8 Ohms. The front panel holds the rotary volume and source selector while, on the rear, two sets of speaker binding posts are accompanied by a pair of balanced inputs including those for a tape monitor, MM/MC phono, AV and sub out.

SOUND QUALITY

Diving into the Pixies, the Unison produced a far more lush vocal presence than the Moon could offer, together with a greater breadth and body. That said, the Unison does have a more forward nature that can at times threaten to 'shout'. Events never actually get that far mind you, but the threat is sometimes there. Midrange detail is as impressive as the Icon and, while bass might lack the tonal sheen of the same, the Unison displays more attack than the Moon and treble is full of air.

Moving to the jazz tones of the Clooney/Ellington album, 'Blue Rose', the tonal character of the early brass instrumental sequence is impressive, as is the later sax solo – a complex instrument for any amp to track successfully. The generously lit upper registers did strain a little on the ear,

though Clooney's interpretation was well documented as each nuance was carried easily.

On to Blonde Redhead, and the Unison supplied a superb bass performance from this digital source. Not only was it crisp and commanding but it provided rich lower registers with power to spare. Vocals were similarly full of emotion and vivacity. The overall effect gave the Unison an epic quality to its presentation. With Mozart, the broad elevation of all frequencies across the frequency spectrum gave the strings room to breathe while the more bassy wind instruments were also lifted from obscurity, to be displayed fully. The attendant violin solo was both smooth and unhurried. This 'highlight' effect may have removed an element of subtlety that was to be found via the Icon, but every aspect of the Secondo performance was visible for all to hear.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Power from the MOSFET output stage was very high, 112 Watts into 8 Ohms and 196 Watts into 4 Ohms, so the Secondo will drive any loudspeaker with ease. Power Mosfets are not especially linear and have to be 'straightened out' with high feedback. A modest damping factor of 26 suggests the Unico does not have very high feedback however, and distortion was on the high side, no less than 0.3% of crossover when delivering 1 Watt at 10kHz, into a 4 Ohm load. This isn't an especially impressive result, but unlike the Pathos, the valves in the Secondo are very linear; it's the modern Mosfets that do all the distorting!

Sensitivity was low at 400mV, via Line and XLR inputs. Our amplifier had a switch position marked Phono but there was no internal stage; this is for external stages. Bandwidth was normal, measuring 4Hz-51kHz.

The Secondo does not measure too well in some areas but it may well have

an interesting sound, possibly with an easy delivery and some air and space. NK

Power	112 Watts
Frequency response	4Hz-51kHz
Separation	70dB
Noise (IEC A wtd.)	-97dB
Distortion	0.29%
Sensitivity	394mV
Damping factor	26

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●£

Distinctive amplifier boasting air, subtlety and detail with power to spare; a charismatic performer.

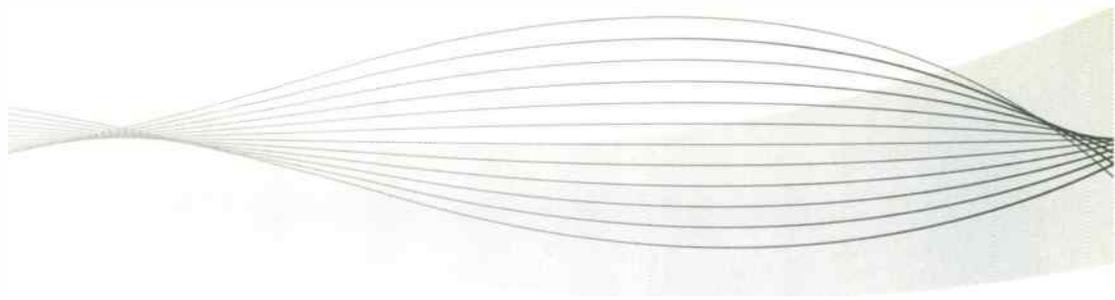
UNISON RESEARCH
SECONDO £1,250
 UK Design Ltd.
 (+44(0) 1753 652669
 www.ukd.co.uk

FOR

- midrange detail
- airy treble
- powerful lower frequencies

AGAINST

- well lit upper midband



Audiostyle *n.* hi-fi equipment that looks and feels as good as it sounds

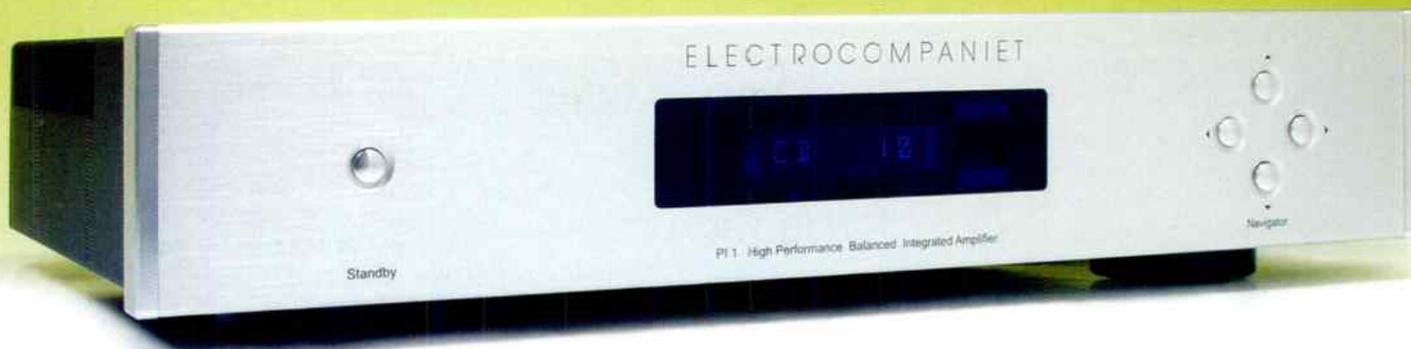


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ELECTROCOMPANIET PI-1 £1,345

We're still in Europe – Norway, actually – so the quirks continue with the PI-1! Utilising surface mount technology inside plus internal protection circuitry to ward against high temperature, DC offset and a short circuit at the output, I have heard the outside of the case described as 'modern' by some of my journalistic colleagues. If so, then this is why I yearn for the return of the phonograph cylinder and the Spinning Jenny, because the front fascia features a standby power button plus a diamond cluster of four buttons that select both the source and the volume. I dislike having to cycle through sources in this carousel mode, and detest having to drink a coffee and read volume three of Proust's 'À La Recherche Du Temps Perdu' while the volume chugs from zero to 127!

The amp, available in black or silver, puts out 50W into 8 Ohms, spans 420x340x77mm and weighs 6kg. The rear of the amp shows the speaker binding posts plus an unusual set of inputs. The CD inputs and auxiliary connections are balanced and the tuner and TV sockets are unbalanced. Balanced connection gives better sound quality from CD, but a player with balanced outputs is needed of course. So anyone buying this amp should have suitable matching sources for best results.

SOUND QUALITY

Things became much more complex when this amp entered the fray. It might not have the upper frequency extension of the Icon and Unison but the Electrocompaniet does have a better balanced, more neutral presentation than the Unison,

plus more tonal interest in the lower frequencies than the Moon amplifier. This is a very easy amplifier to listen to, with admirable detail present in both the midrange and treble areas.

Moving to the Clooney/Ellington album, via Pure Pleasure, and the sound proved more convincing than the Moon, with trumpets, trombones and saxophones offering a distinct rhythmic subtlety, while Clooney's vocal was unhurried. In fact, she swung her lyrics like a lightly worn ballgown on as the whole track passed by almost too quickly.

For the Blonde Redhead CD, the digital source benefitted from the relaxed attitude of the Electrocompaniet. Vocals were less well lit than the Unison and, because the Unison's 'spotlight' effect was removed, the musical output sounded more relaxed, unhurried and natural.

Bass still offered enough presence to keep the music moving forward with a jaunty pace, however...

The Mozart CD was then spun and, lo and behold, another supremely even performance hit the listening room. Okay, the PI-1 doesn't have the same transparent nature of the Icon or even that amplifier's ability to breath air into the soundstage. Yet the Electrocompaniet is still tremendously pleasing as a music producer. There is no 'side' to this amp, nothing that you feel that you must shy away from. Time, in fact, floats by...

Listening to this cultured amp is the sonic equivalent of floating on a rowing boat down in a sunlit river, willow trees dipping their lazy branches into the cool water, mayflies skipping above the surface and wood pigeons cooing from the branches. Nice, then.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The PI 1 produced a modest but useful 66 Watts into 8 Ohms, rising to 110 Watts into 4 Ohms. As most loudspeakers are 4 Ohms this is what it will deliver in practice and it is more than enough to go very loud.

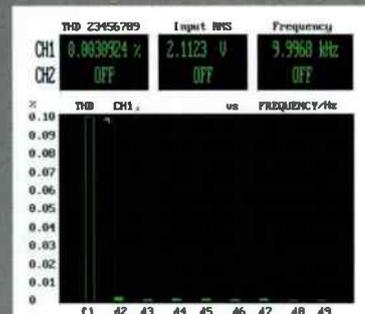
Electrocompaniet have minimal distortion and this one is no different. A low value of 0.01% distortion (10kHz, 1 Watt into 4 Ohms) via the Aux phono socket line input fell to a miniscule 0.003% through the balanced, XLR socket CD input and this was the lowest recorded distortion figure of the group. With a very high damping factor of 89 it is likely the PI-1 uses a lot of feedback to get this result. Voltage gain was on the low side, resulting in a low input sensitivity of 400mV via unbalanced and balanced (XLR) inputs, sufficient for silver disc players but not all phono stages.

This is a wideband amplifier; it measured flat to 100kHz through the Aux phono input and 74kHz through the CD XLR input.

The PI-1 is a well engineered amplifier that measures very well. It produces negligible distortion even at high frequencies and should sound smooth. NK

Power	66 Watts
Frequency response	3Hz-100kHz
Separation	84dB
Noise (IEC A wtd.)	-95dB
Distortion	0.01%
Sensitivity	400mV
Damping factor	89

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●● £

Offering a neutral sound that engages and delights with its fine musicality, this fine integrated is truly easy on the ear.

ELECTROCOMPANIET

PI-1 £1,345

Electrocompaniet Ltd.

+44(0)20 8893 5835

sales@electrocompaniet.no

FOR

- balanced sound
- neutral
- engaging

AGAINST

- control layout



ARCAM A38 £1,450

Arcam amplifiers always look and feel the part; cleanly designed, well built and fully featured. Inside, the A38 includes a low noise toroidal power source, hermetically sealed reed relays in the preamp section that have been lifted directly from Arcam's own C31 preamplifier for low contact resistance and a Burr Brown PGA2320 volume control.

The front fascia is busy, yet not cluttered. Sources include a MM/MC phono amp, DVD, PVR, satellite and AV for more lifestyle devices. To the left of these buttons is the volume control and a stereo balance button, a source selector for recording and a menu button that provides access to the volume resolution (standard, fine or reference), input trims to level off the varying sources that might be connected to the A38 so that each source volume is broadly the same, a volume maximiser and a processor mode. The latter tweaks the gain of the A38 for a surround sound set-up. Apart from the power switch, the only other front fascia control of note is the headphone socket.

On the rear, the 105W A38, spanning 430x370x110mm and weighing 9.5kg, includes two recording loops plus an array of inputs. A preamp cluster also allows you to add a preamp or add this box to a bi-amp system. Two banks of speaker binding posts are also joined by a remote control connection cluster.

SOUND QUALITY

Reflecting its fine build quality, the Arcam A38 proved a very solid performer when spinning the Pixies on vinyl; bass was

strong with an admirable punch, mids offered a decent degree of detail while the upper registers provided enough subtlety to keep me interested. As such, the Arcam impresses when compared directly to the Moon amp. It doesn't offer quite the same incisive level of the Icon, Unison or even the Electrocompaniet but it does share the latter's neutral bearing.

Playing the Clooney/ Ellington disc saw the piano as a stand-out instrument; its detail reproduction, especially over the midrange, was excellent. Other tones from the partnering brass were also beautifully rendered. Because of the dominance across the central frequencies, the A38 could be accused of lacking a little life and zip in the bass. That said, its midrange management proved ideal for jazz fare. The Arcam's inoffensive nature allowed it to tackle this genre

well. It doesn't like being rushed or overly disturbed though, which is why it doesn't appear to get on terribly well with rock ditties.

Talk of the devil, in popped Blonde Redhead and the Arcam delivered a fairly matter of fact rendition, lacking much in the way of pizzazz. Although strong, bass was a little woolly and indistinct while the electro backing was only reasonably carried.

Classical fare, I found, was like the jazz genre inasmuch as it's far more down the A38's alley. During the Mozart rendition, the A38 assumed its sensible calm, assured approach to music and life in general with a very pleasing reading of the work with some fine midrange detail easing through. This is a broadsheet reading amp, it is cultured in its musical aspects; just don't look for sensationalism or euphoria.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The A38 was one of the most powerful amplifiers of the group, managing 210 Watts into 4 Ohms and a still formidable 136 Watts into 8 Ohms, so it is not short of headroom and will go very loud. With a not too large damping factor of 30 the A38 may have just a little more apparent weight to its bass than many rivals, Naim excepted.

Distortion levels were very low even at high frequencies and crossover harmonics well suppressed our distortion analysis shows, at both low and high power outputs – a very good performance and one that suggests treble quality will be smooth and free from colour or coarseness.

As delivered with input sensitivity set to '0' the A38 is very insensitive, needing 760mV for full output. At maximum sensitivity of +12 however, the unit is usefully sensitive, needing just 190mV for full output and this will suit low gain external phono stages.

The FMJ A38 is powerful and likely to sound punchy, but smooth too. It measures well. NK

Power	136 Watts
Frequency response	2Hz-88kHz
Separation	85dB
Noise (IEC A wtd.)	-94dB
Distortion	0.022%
Sensitivity	190mV
Damping factor	30

DISTORTION



VERDICT ●●●●●
Civilised, well engineered and thoroughly rounded amplifier, although rockers should look elsewhere.

ARCAM A38 £1,450
Arcam Ltd.
+44 (0)1223 203265
www.arcam.co.uk

FOR
- quality feel
- powerful, effortless gait
- pleasing tonality

AGAINST
- rockers look elsewhere

PATHOS CLASSIC ONE MK.3

£1,450

Here's an appealing, neat and tidy design that not only looks attractive but also provides interest to the eye, as each little nook and cranny is visually examined and explored. Like the Unison Research Secondo, the Pathos offers the listener a solid state/valve combo that utilises both MOSFETs (that sit behind the red capacitors) and two small signal valves, sat in their quaint cages, for 70W of power. The tube-based preamplifier section of the amp is run in Class A power, with the power element of the amp producing a combination of Class A and Class B (i.e. Class A/B), depending on the volume, Pathos say.

The front fascia utilises electronic attenuators for both the volume and source select. Thus, spring-loaded knobs are twisted to the correct selection. I hated them with a passion as they are restrictive and slow. The power control is just a simple toggle switch and an attractive wooden design serves as the remote.

Moving to the rear of the chassis, which spans 130x230x530mm and weighs 12kg, reveals the speaker binding post on the upper surface of the rear chassis with a selection of inputs on the back. These include tape in/out sockets. You also receive a pair of balanced inputs for good measure.

SOUND QUALITY

The Pathos was the first amplifier in this test to properly challenge the early dominance of the Icon Audio model, especially regarding its excellent upper frequency extension. Sometimes I get the impression, for some amplifiers, that they are like a top Premier League football player, inasmuch as they perform when they want to and on their own terms. Playing the Pixies track, the Pathos supplied vocal nuances and a timbral delicacy that gave me the impression that all of the aspects of the music were being addressed to the best of the amp's ability. Guitars, for example, reflected the effort placed upon strings while bass had form and personality.

We had also to wait for the sheer sumptuous nature of the brass at the beginning of the Clooney/Ellington track to be replicated by the Pathos. In this particular case, however, there was a slight stridency, almost a brittleness, in the highest frequencies.

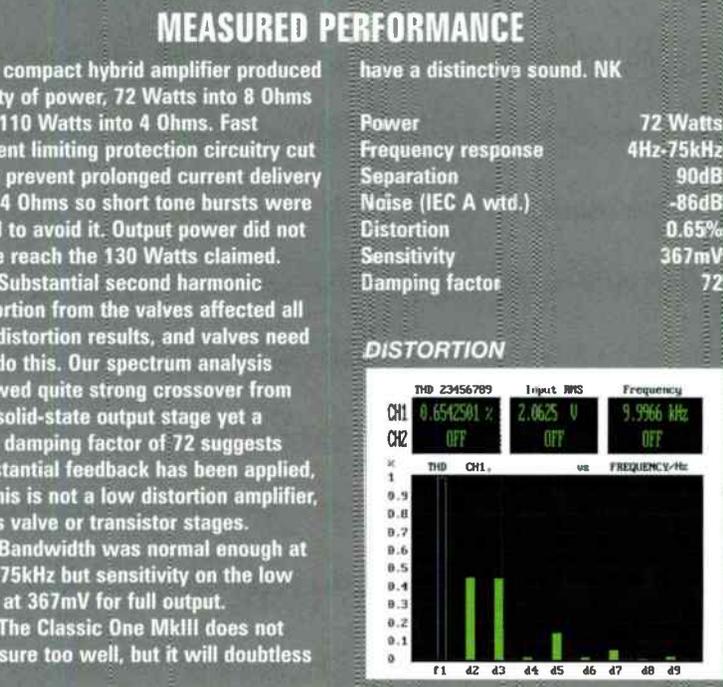
The Pathos handled Clooney's vocal performance well however, packed as it was with emotion and guile. Yes, during Clooney's vocal peaks, there was a particularly 'well lit' feel about the Pathos that prevented it from toppling the Icon into second place over analogue frequencies.

So how would it perform with a digital source? Pretty well, as it happened. Blonde Redhead saw the Pathos get the edge over the Icon Audio, as it added extra bass punch as well as matching the Icon's careful treatment of midrange frequencies.

So, the Pathos brought out as much detail as possible while not masking any particular part of the presentation. Both the vocal and electro backing displayed a healthy vivacity that delighted.

Moving to Mozart I was happy to hear the spaciousness I'd first encountered with the Icon; it was also present within the Pathos's performance. So the sweeping strings moved with a particular grace and the violin solo had a delicacy that added immeasurably to the final performance.

The Pathos was a fine performer that's destined to win friends.



VERDICT ●●●●£

Characterful hybrid amplifier whose polished yet engaging presentation will cheer many audiophiles.

PATHOS CLASSIC 1/3 £1,450
UKD Ltd.
 ☎ +44(0) 1753 652669
www.ukd.co.uk

FOR

- lucid midrange
- smooth upper registers
- chassis design

AGAINST

- ergonomics

Bowers & Wilkins

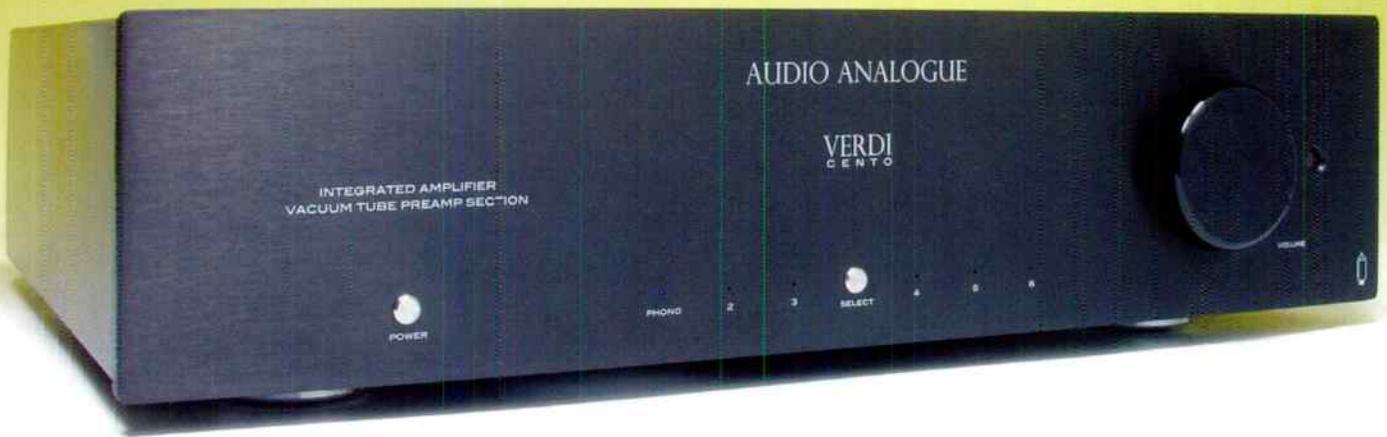
The origin of true sound

The all new 805 Diamond When it comes to faithfully reproducing sound at high frequencies, no other material on earth matches diamond. But up until recently, diamond dome tweeters were reserved for our largest, most expensive reference speakers. No longer. The 805 Diamond is the first

of its kind: the only Bowers & Wilkins bookshelf speaker to incorporate true studio-grade technology in the form of a diamond tweeter. Now you can experience the thrill of true sound in places you never thought possible.

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk





AUDIO ANALOGUE VERDI CENTO £1,500

It seems that hybrid amps are on the rise, at least in Europe, because this Italian sourced model is the third such integrated in this test to feature this arrangement. Valves populate the preamp stage, while the power amp, which pushes 100W over 8 Ohms, is controlled by the solid state section. The company has been quite attentive to the valves because of fears that they might add to the overall noise floor of the amp's output. Hence, the Verdi Cento features a discrete component voltage regulator from the dedicated high voltage secondary.

The front fascia, offered in silver or black, features a power button, a spring loaded rotary volume knob plus a single button to select your source on a carousel basis. Horrible! It's so easy to miss your desired selection which means going around again for another try. The rear offers binding posts for speakers plus a MM/MC phono connection, tape and the usual suspects. The amp also includes a preout connection that can be changed to a sub-out option via jumper changes on the main circuit board. The company recommends that this task be performed by a trained technician. A similar task is demanded if you want to change the phono mode from a low output MC to a high output MC or MM cartridge. You can also change the stereo balance, select bypass mode to utilise the Verdi Cento as a power amp and alter the volume scale to taste.

SOUND QUALITY

The Cento is a Curate's Egg of an amplifier, as it is absolutely brilliant in parts, with other

areas a little underwhelming. Vocals, for example, on the Pixies' track, were fine without being startling yet the guitar and upper bass drum work were very well portrayed.

The pattern repeated itself as the Clooney/Ellington vinyl was placed on my Avid turntable. Brass was superbly presented, with the saxophones sounding nicely fruity. Even the multi-part aspect of the saxophone solo was fashioned and tracked without problems. When Clooney began to pipe up and warble, her voice was rendered very well by the Cento but there was less interpretive fire than I'd have liked. The vocal lacked a dash of emotion, moving my attention to the surrounding instruments. You could say it's a brilliant hi-fi amp, but not the world's most beguiling and seductive, such is its delivery.

Switching to CD and the Cento stood to attention, raring to go. Playing the Blonde Redhead album, it injected strength and power into the music. The soundstage was big, powerful and bold while the electro backing came over well textured and rich. When the vocal began, it sounded much better, being handled with muscle, reflecting the Cento's obvious 'he-man' persona.

The good news continued with the Mozart CD. Okay, a touch of the fragility heard via the Icon and Pathos was missing but the Cento really did deliver all the important details of the performance.

Even if the Verdi Cento doesn't have the delicacy of an all tube amplifier, it's a big hearted, highly distinct performer all the same. Hard not to like, even at the price.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Another hybrid, with valve preamplifier and solid-state output stage, the Verdi Cento is based less on faith of approach and more on engineering outcome. So although it produces large quantities of power, 112 Watts into 8 Ohms and 170 Watts into 4 Ohms, distortion levels were kept in very tight check. On this amplifier then neither the valves nor the output stage had been left to freewheel and the result was an interesting set of figures, plus a distortion residual with just a trace of second harmonic buried in noise and no sign of crossover components. In this respect the Verdi Cento was one of the best amplifiers of the group and produced an impressive result. Unexpectedly, damping factor was quite low at 25, possibly due to the way an output Zobel inductor has been used. The figure may allow bass to bloom just a little (Naim's have a D.F. of 15).

Input sensitivity was low at 450mV, so external phono stages will need plenty of gain to match. An MM phono stage has been included, albeit one of

lowish sensitivity and low overload too, not so good.

The Verdi Cento measures well and looks interesting, but its phono stage is mediocre. NK

Power	112 Watts
Frequency response	14Hz-74kHz
Separation	94dB
Noise (IEC A wtd.)	-99dB
Distortion	0.034%
Sensitivity	450mV
Damping factor	25

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Imagine a bull elephant utilising its precision trunk to pick a delicate flower. That's the Cento – a muscle man in a tutu!

AUDIO ANALOGUE VERDI CENTO £1,500

Audio Analogue
+39 0572 954513

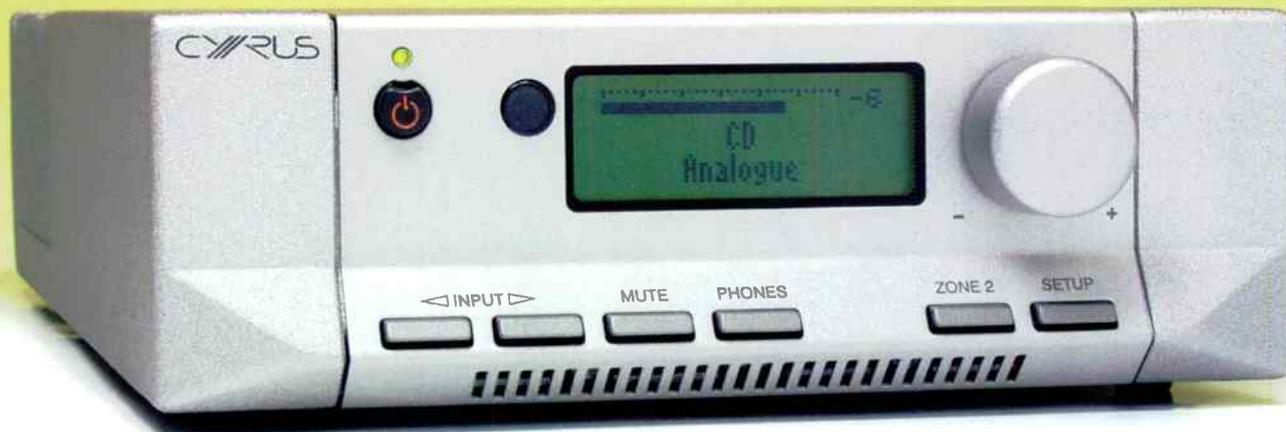
www.audioanalogue.com

FOR

- exuberant bass
- highly detailed sound
- engaging personality

AGAINST

- lacks midband delicacy



CYRUS 8 XP d £1,500

Resplendent in the standard compact chassis that wraps itself around most of the Cyrus product range, the 'd' features a built-in DAC to accompany the 70W power output, meaning that any connected digital source can take advantage of the facility – that includes a computer connected to the amplifier via the included USB connection. Featuring a twin transformer power supply, the 8XPd separates the control systems from the audio for a purer signal path. Spanning 73x215x360mm, offered in black or silver and weighing just 6kg, the 8XPd includes six analogue and five digital inputs, a zone two output so you can play any source in another part of your home, a headphone socket and a bi-amping feature. Other features include a return-to-factory upgrade to the DAC to Qx standard, plus a connector to add a separate PSX-R power supply to improve sound quality further.

SOUND QUALITY

On 'Bone Machine' the 8XPd exhibited surprising clarity in the mids, while the associated vocals proved an adventure in themselves with excellent texture. Guitars were brilliantly transparent and you could hear how much effort the guitar player was putting into his task. Moving to the drums, bass was sharp, crisp and punchy while treble was light and feathery.

This good start continued with jazz via the Clooney/Ellington album. Here, the Cyrus offered a precise rendition of the brass section and ensuing sax solo. Clooney's voice was very effective too. When she entered the track, the Cyrus

offered a superb rendition, showing why Clooney is viewed as being one of the best interpreters of a song in music history.

Moving to CD and the new Blond Redhead album, the Cyrus offered strong and effective bass while the lower registers surprised me by tracking a reverb effect off the back of the insistent drum bass that was often lost by other amps in this test. Vocals also had a quiet ease that hovered over the somewhat retro electro backing. The midrange was

detailed with a pleasingly transparent nature that takes you to the core of each instrument.

Moving over to the classical CD and Mozart proved that there was much to admire about the Cyrus's performance in this genre of music; both the sweetness of the violin solo and the lower frequencies that supported it were a joy.

It's a very well voiced integrated amplifier this, and all the more surprising considering its small size and flexibility.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The tiny Cyrus 8XPd produces a healthy 78 Watts into 8 Ohms and, due to good power supply regulation, 144 Watts into 4 Ohms. As most loudspeakers have 4 Ohm bass units they will draw this power, so in practice the Cyrus 8 has plenty of push and will go very loud. Where it is challenged is in cooling; our review unit soon shut down through overheating, even in relatively brief episodes. Music stresses an amplifier far less however. With a high damping factor of 72 bass will sound dry and controlled.

Cyrus amplifiers have always produced minimal distortion and the 8 is no different. At 10kHz into 4 Ohms, from low to high output it produced a maximum of 0.02% with a characteristic where second harmonic predominated at all levels; there was no change of spectrum due to the transfer function being dynamically skewed by feedback. As a result the Cyrus 8 will lack the slight harshness or muddle distortion induces.

Frequency response via the digital inputs was flat, with just the slightest high frequency lift from CD (44.1kHz sample rate). With 96kHz sample rate, the upper limit was 46kHz. Distortion levels were a little above what is usual these days, measuring 0.27% with 16bit and 0.15% with 24bit; the latter in particular can measure a lot better, 0.04% or so, whilst 0.2% is a

good result for CD. The presence of some higher order harmonics resulted in a poor EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 93dB with 16bit.

The Cyrus 8XPd was powerful for its size. Its digital section could usefully be more linear but has good bandwidth. NK

Power	78 Watts
Frequency response	1Hz-52kHz
Separation	91dB
Noise (IEC A wtd.)	-95dB
Distortion	0.02%
Sensitivity	234mV

DIGITAL

Frequency response (96k)	2Hz-46kHz
Separation	88dB
Noise	-93dB
Distortion (-60dB; 16, 24bit)	0.27, 0.15%
EIAJ Dynamic range	93dB

DISTORTION



VERDICT

Versatile, well equipped integrated whose clear, insightful musical sound should appeal to many.

CYRUS 8XPd £1,500

Cyrus Audio Ltd.

+44 (0)1480 435577

www.cyrusaudio.com

FOR

- emotionally inviting
- smooth, controlled sound
- packaging, flexibility

AGAINST

- speaker connections

Creating an integrated amplifier is pretty easy to accomplish, whereas making one that sounds really good at a particular price point is an altogether tougher proposition. It's also harder to do than to create a separate pre and power amplifier at the same price in some respects, given the constraints of packaging. With the latter, you can concentrate your skills on honing one relatively small link in the hi-fi chain. With an integrated amp, you have to juggle more plates in a smaller room and still come up trumps. Hence, this assemblage of amplifiers deserves our respect, because each is good in some way. As for our praise, however? Well that was apportioned a little more judiciously...

First up is the Moon i-1. This is a relatively inexpensive design which impressed with a clean and couth sound via my analogue source, but really got into the swing of things when offered a decent digital front end, which it seemed to prefer. This is an amp for those who want their music details presented to them on a plate; the Moon does just that, it plays a CD and it says, "right, there is your bass, there's the mids, that's your guitar, that's your drums, so stop fussing and get on and enjoy your music." It doesn't major on sweetness or subtlety, but it's still a nice thing to listen to considering that it's the lowest priced in the group.

Next up is the Arcam A38, a strong performer in every way that never excelled at any one aspect of musical performance but whose sum was greater than its parts. Temperamentally it preferred jazz or classical music. Picky? Well, not really; it just knows what it likes. But when it's in its comfort zone, the A38 does a great job. And there's no denying its superb build and feature set. It's a typical Arcam amp then, a classy bit of kit that's aimed right in the middle of the road. Many will appreciate this amplifier as a do-it-all modern music maker, although those seeking particular distinction with rock music might consider this...

The Unison Research Secondo is a curious amp with quirky ways. It's an odd design of dubious finish, but with a sometimes wonderful sound quality. A real conundrum of a hi-fi separate. Yes, it might have been a little strident; a product, possibly, of its solid-state guts; but it also offered some light, airy playback which is no doubt down to the valve element of this dual personality of an amp. A charismatic and distinctive design, many will take to it; no one should cross it off their shopping list.

Moving onto the Audio Analogue Verdi Cento, and another Italian odyssey! There's no denying the combination of solid-state and valve is an interesting one, but it doesn't necessarily offer the benefits of both; instead, as the Cento shows it makes for an altogether new flavour of brightly lit, spacious and powerful



Icon Audio Stereo 40 Mk III; best for value...

combination of solid-state and valves. For, with the Pathos, the experiment appears to have worked. Yes, there is a *slightly* forward air about the amp within certain high frequencies but there is so much else that is right about this design that this minor problem is just that. It seems to do

"both are excellent in their own way, so both must share the spoils..."

music. There was plenty to enjoy from this integrated amplifier; an audition is recommended.

In fourth place – and winning the secondary prize of best value for money offering in this group test – is the startling Electrocompaniet PI-1. It's startling because it was consummately well balanced all round; you just couldn't fault it. It did everything very well and has no real weak spots, regardless of the type of music you feed it. This is an amp for people who just want to listen to good music and who also have a life – unlike myself who has an unhealthy obsession with music and the boxes that produce it. Something of a wolf in sheep's clothing, this.

In third place is the diminutive Pathos Classic One Mk.3, and with this amplifier my faith in the possibilities of mixing that exotic

the impossible, by serving up a good deal of solid-state wallop and having some of that valve intricacy we all crave. Please do audition this, if you can.

Which brings us to a tie for first place. That's right, a tie. Incredibly, the cheapest amp in this group test has reached the top of the tree, hand in hand with the most expensive! So, there's a certain synchronicity about the choice. Such is the performance in Ultralinear mode, of the Icon Audio 40 Mk.III (its creation of space, broad soundstage and tight stereo image, the air it infuses into the music and the clarity of the detail that it extracts), that it would be foolish for me to ignore it and not allow it to share the bottle of champers on the winners' rostrum.

And yet the Cyrus, a design clearly superior to most of its competition with a strong sense of detail and transparency, power and fragility all rolled into one, is ultimately the better all rounder. Plus it has a wide variety of input and DAC upgrade options too, and arguably nicer packaging and superior 'spouse acceptance factor'. So there; it's a tricky call to make. Both are excellent in their own way, so both must share the spoils; I'll leave it to you to decide which one suits your needs better.



Cyrus 8 XPD; best all rounder.

Pre Ordination

David Price tries the freshly improved Mk II version of MF Audio's classic Passive Magnetic preamplifier...

Of all hi-fi components, for yours truly the preamplifier holds the least allure. High end turntables are sculpted shrines to vinyl fine, top CD players can be massive machines that disarm with their internal complexity, amplifiers are sometimes immense towers of power, while serious loudspeakers aspire to being striking pieces of furniture as well and thrilling transducers. So what then of the humble preamp?

Well, the Japanese did attempt some covering VU-meter and switch festooned contrivances in the late seventies, which certainly looked the part, but in truth what you need on a preamplifier is less, not more. That's why in my experience, the simpler this particular hi-fi separate is, the better it sounds. The object here is to have, as someone clever once said, a piece of wire with gain...

Quite literally, that is the MF Audio Classic Passive Preamplifier. As its creator Jonathan Billington states, the advantage of a passive preamp is that, compared to its active rival, it has "no interchannel modulation, no delay as capacitors recharge, no coloration from the warming up of active components and no thermal noise". The question then which presents itself is, if (in Jonathan's view) passive is better, then which sort of passive? Is it a transformer-based one such as the MF Audio or a resistive passive design, which is

basically a very high quality potentiometer in a box?

Jonathan argues that the former is superior, because "as you go down in volume on the resistive unit, you add source impedance and the cable capacitance, between preamp to power amp, begins to load the source at high frequencies resulting in high frequency roll off. With a transformer based preamp, as you go down in volume you reduce the source impedance (by the transformers turns ratio squared) allowing long lengths of cable to be used with no problems of HF roll off".

Whilst the MF Audio is passive, its transformers do actually provide gain if you want it. Able to give up to +6dB extra oomph, the Stevens and Billington TX102 attenuation transformer fitted is described as, "the result of thirty plus years of high end transformer design". It features twenty three separate 'taps' for a total of twenty four (including mute) volume steps. A separate source selector provides switching for six inputs (four via RCA phono, two via balanced XLR).

The unit itself comes in the familiarly unfussy aluminium case that's pleasingly compact at 88x216x200mm. The preamplifier is very well made throughout. All internal connections use 0.6mm silver coated solid core copper wire with PTFE insulation, point to point hand wired. The Silver version tested here features 99.99% pure silver winding and internal wiring, plus silver plated rear phono rocketry. MF Audio says "all components are of the highest quality; Neutrik XLR connectors and Swiss made ELMA silver contact rotary switches". This new upgrade to the original packs a denser, mark II version of the TX102 with a 25% larger core. It's claimed this makes

for lower saturation, improved level handling and better low frequency response and extension.

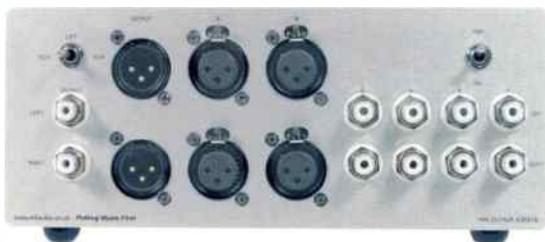
This new Silver wound Classic MkII preamplifier tested here costs £2,500 plus VAT, although owners of the existing Silver preamp can upgrade to the silver wound Mk II transformers for £1,100 plus VAT. The Copper classic preamp is £1,400 plus vat, with the upgrade to Mk I transformer costing £500 plus VAT.

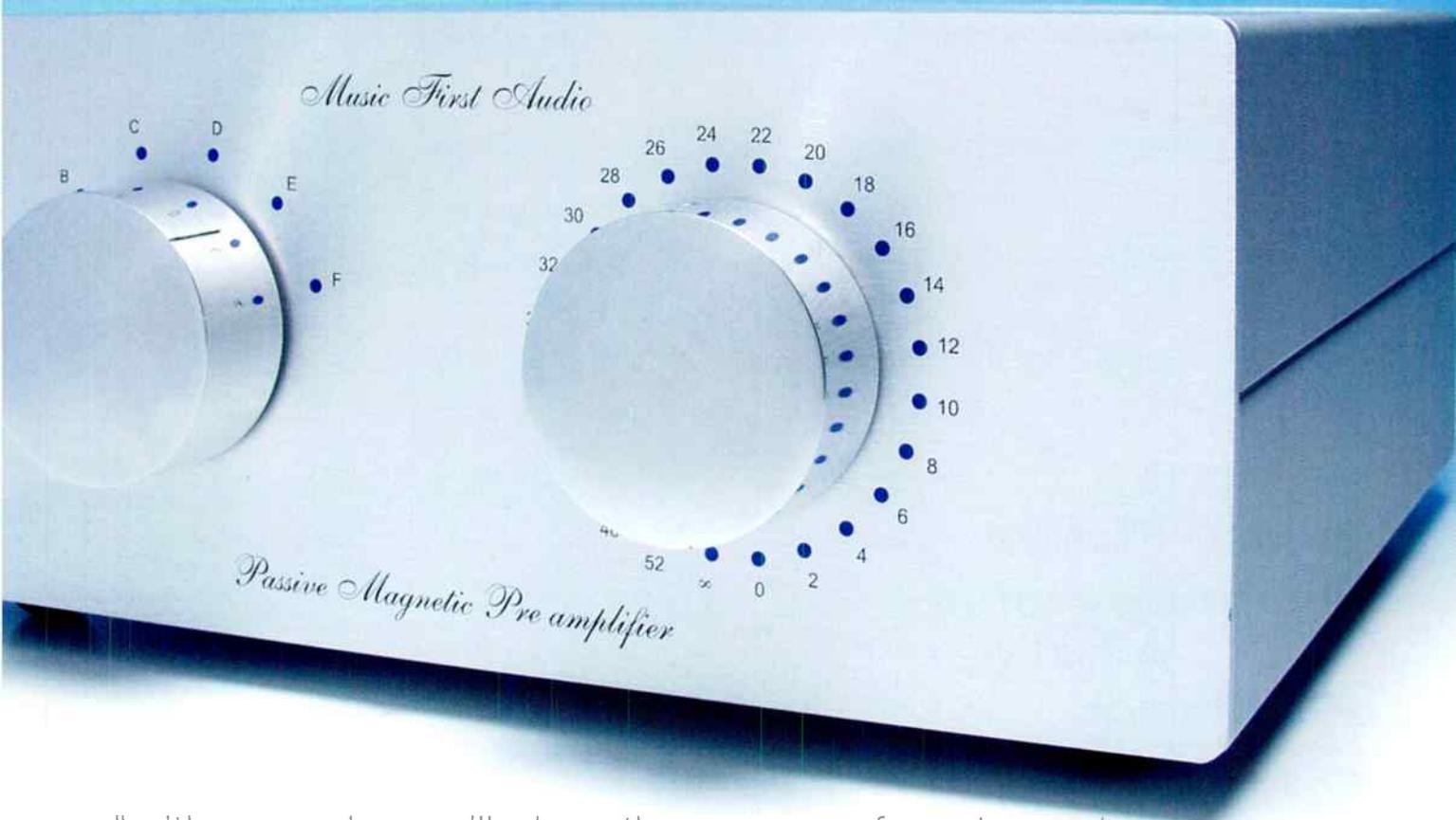
The benefits of a transformer preamplifier are of course myriad – in theory at least. The transformer isolates components, breaking ground loop problems and reducing noise, as well as matching impedance between components. The obverse is that because it's not an active circuit, there's far less componentry in the way, plus all the attendant issues of trying to get a noise-free power supply that won't sully the signal. Trouble is, whilst transformers sidestep a heck of a lot of hassle, if they're not very well done in the first place, the disadvantages outweigh the benefits. And any valve amplifier builder knows how hard it is to get proper transformers...

SOUND QUALITY

The first MF Audio Classic Preamplifier surfaced in 2003, and soon came to my attention as one of the best preamps I'd heard to date. That situation hasn't changed dramatically, as I've since heard some preamps that better it in certain ways (Musical Fidelity's Primo, for example, has a lovely expansive soundstage and an easy musicality that's always a joy), but never one that's better outright – and certainly there isn't one that comes close to its £1740 (minimum) price.

And so it is that I've been using the MF Audio ever since; first the





"with superb ancillaries, the sense of scale and perspective is little short of standing atop the Grand Canyon, looking down..."

copper wound version and then the silver. I'd say the latter is better, although I'd underline that in some systems, people may prefer the copper version; it's not an open and shut case, depending about your system's innate tonal balance. What I can be less equivocal about, however, is the difference between the original Silver preamp and the upgraded Mark II version with the larger cored transformer. Having the old one right next to it, I was able to make near instantaneous and direct comparisons, and the difference was striking.

Kicking off with Scritti Politti's 'The Word Girl', and the original MF Audio preamp greeted me with a big, powerful and detailed sound; one that really got right to the 'coal face' of the recording. I was impressed by the superb clarity of singer Green Gartside's vocals, and how deftly the MF Audio preamp counterpointed with the song's very 'busy' rhythm section. Dynamics were punchy, rhythms hypnotic, and the whole system sang beautifully...

Moving to the new preamp and even in the opening four bars of the song, I could hear more depth and power to the bass, along with superior grip. A somewhat mushy

low end, which I'd hitherto assumed was down to the World Audio K5881 valve power amp (when I switch to my Musical Fidelity AMS35i reference the bass tightens up enormously), was immediately revealed to have been down to the older MF Audio preamp. Don't get me wrong; the old one wasn't bad, it's just the newer one was obviously better. Bass guitar notes seemed to have acquired a beginning and an end now, rather than just a long and lovely middle.

Up top, treble now sounded a little cleaner and crisper too. Whereas the original preamp had a very good high end, better in my view than many £6,000 plus designs, the new one was more delicately etched and possessed of superior air and space; hi-hats 'fizzed' less and glistened more. Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five' was a great exemplar of this; the track was transformed with a more expansive recorded acoustic, underpinned by a slightly strong and obviously tauter bass, and set off by a lovely sparkly top end. By contrast, the original preamp seemed to sound bother a little drier and more woolly at the same time. This said, the latter did still sound quite lovely; it wasn't in any way a let down.

There's very little to criticise

with the new Mk II transformer-equipped MF Audio. Being brutally honest I'd say the new one did sound just a fraction more rigid than the old one, losing a little of the previous model's soft, lilting quality; the new one makes the music stand to attention more, stripping away a thin layer of romance. I think that the new machine is the more accurate, but there was no sense that the oldie is now 'bad'; it's just different. A little less close to the truth, but little the worse for it. On balance I'd go for the new one in my system.

CONCLUSION

A lovely product, the new MF Audio Passive Pre amplifier. At just under three thousand sponds, the price is creeping up but so is the ability, and once again I have to reiterate that you're into the £7,000 plus arena before it meets any real challenge to its sonic supremacy. If you've got the only model and are seeking more air, space, pace and grip, then this is for you. At the very least, make sure you try it before you buy anything else!

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Marantz TT-1000 turntable
Origin Live Encounter tonearm
vdH Frog moving coil cartridge
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage
MF Audio Passive Magnetic Pre amplifier
World Audio Design K5881 (modified)
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

VERDICT ●●●●●

A subtle improvement in bass, grip and clarity makes this product even more impressive, which is really saying something.

MF AUDIO SILVER CLASSIC II £2,937.50
MF Audio
+44 (0)1825 890970
www.mfaudio.co.uk

FOR

- transparency
- stage depth
- tonal accuracy
- bass grip
- balanced operation

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

2010S2

CD Player
Integrated Amplifier
Power Amplifier



3010S2

CD Player
Integrated Amplifier
Stereo Power Amplifier
Pre-Amplifier
Mono Power Amplifier



Colour : available in **TITANIUM** and **BLACK**



ISOL-8 POWERLINE AXIS £499

Today, as ever more electronic gadgets invade our homes, mains-borne problems become more of an issue. Whilst there are plenty of items that will filter, suppress, smooth and generally buff up your mains signal, one aspect that is often overlooked is the problem of DC on the mains. Whilst it is true that transformers cannot pass DC, one might think that it disappears and is not an issue but nothing can be further from the truth. The fact is that if there is, say, 500mV of DC on the mains, this means that the AC component no longer swings from +339V to -339V but from +339.5V to -338.5V; it is no longer evenly balanced. Furthermore, this 500mV

offset naturally causes a current to flow in the primary winding of the transformer of the equipment. If the resistance of the winding is, say 2 Ohms, then the current flowing will be 250mA, at a point where there should be no flow at all. The result is a possible saturation of the transformer's core during the positive half cycle of the mains signal, meaning that the waveform on the secondary is distorted. The end result of all this is deterioration in the signal to the power circuitry and, more often than not, a transformer that buzzes away in distress!

This new offering helps combat this; Isol-8's Powerline Axis distribution block is based on its Powerline 6 model. Not only is it a handsome

and well built chunk of metal but it incorporates a DC blocking filter using well specified components mounted neatly on a PCB and properly heatsinked, that should be more than up to the task of giving the most recalcitrant of mains supplies a firm helping hand in the right direction. All five outlets are of very good quality and are wired up with silver plated copper wiring as well as having natty spring-loaded covers that are protection rated to IP54, so dust and splashing water will never be an issue, although I don't recommend putting the latter to the test. £499 may seem a lot for what might appear to be a 'fancy mains block' but when one considers that the only other way of removing that troublesome DC is to use a full mains regenerator which is likely to cost many times more, the Powerline Axis suddenly looks like something of a bargain. If you are suffering from mains traumas that turn out to be DC related, I would strongly recommend checking the Axis out. **AS**

[Contact: www.isol-8.co.uk, +44(0)208 856 8856]

soundbites

SUPRA AGS-10K HUMBUSTER £99.95

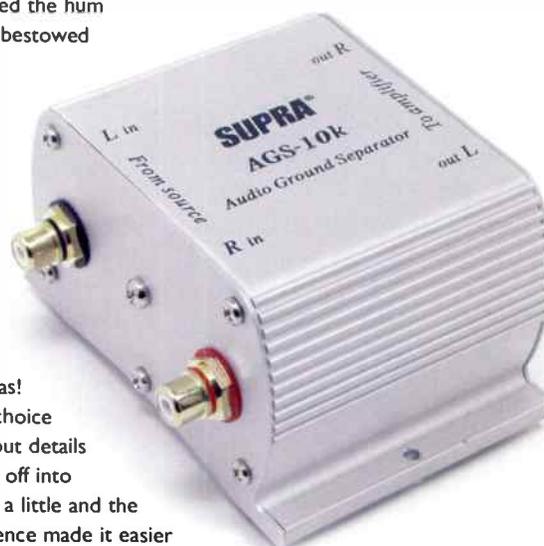
Back in vinyl's heyday hum was one of hi-fi's biggest problems, but nowadays it seems that earth terminals have vanished from amplifiers along with phono stages. Unfortunately though, hum has not gone away and the increasing use of digital sources often powered by poor Switch Mode power supplies is actually seeing it on the increase again. So, what is one to do without that earth terminal, and without the inclination to start ferreting around inside sealed equipment? Well, Supra have come up with a natty little device which consists of a pair of high quality audio transformers in a solid and stylish metal case that maintain a fixed input and output impedance of 10 kOhms and pass the signal straight through, whilst simultaneously introducing an isolation barrier that should kill any hum instantly. Inserting the device into the path between a cheap iPhone dock and amplifier definitely removed the 'hash' from the wall-wart power

supply, but I wanted to really give the AGS-10k a workout...

Unplugging the earth lead between my turntable and phono stage resulted in the sort of hum that can bring tears to the eyes of the uninitiated, but inserting the Supra betwixt phono stage and amplifier not only removed the hum completely, but bestowed such an inky blackness to the background that I had to brush the stylus gently to make sure signal was still there; fortunately it was! Spinning a few choice tunes brought out details that had drifted off into the background a little and the AGS-10k's influence made it easier to concentrate on every aspect of the music. Supra's AGS-10k is a very

handy gadget indeed and should be top of your list if you suffer from hum or noise related issues. **AS**

[Contact: www.supracables.co.uk, +44(0)1223 441 299]



Definition

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HI-FI CHOICE
magazine**

Definition DC10T

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Definition DC8T



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LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

Visit our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk or send your emails to letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk. Letter of the month wins a pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers.

A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers is on their way to **MARK WILKINSON**, Letter of the Month winner in our October 2010 issue.

Letter of the Month

VINYL DEMAND

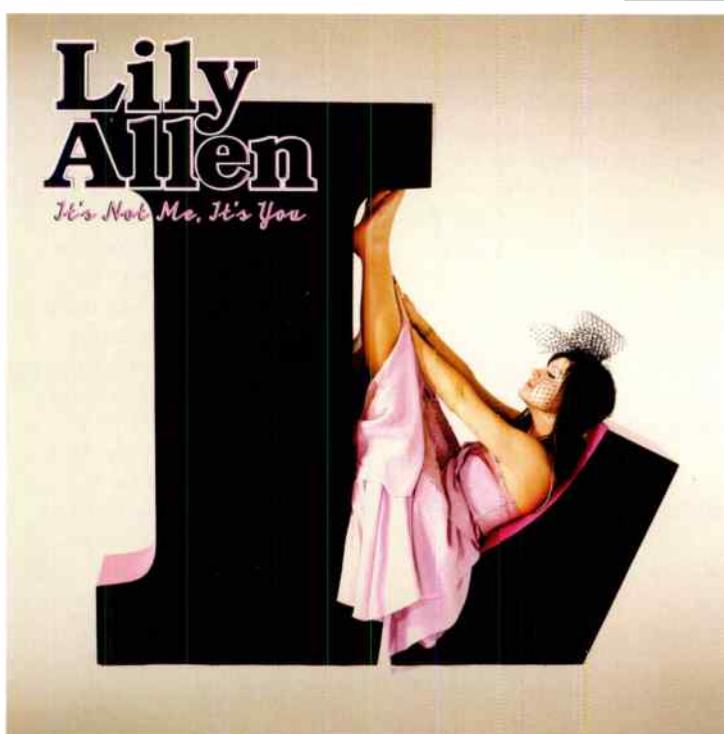
I read Graham Thomas's letter (HFW July 2010) with interest and with some agreement. There are two distinct issues when it comes to the quality of an LP.

The first is the production values and the mastering or remastering of the music. We hear the result of this in the way the music is presented. Whether this is perceived to be good or bad is to a large extent a matter of taste and is subjective.

The second issue is the one that I think Mr Thomas was alluding to and that is the quality of the pressing. Going back to the seventies I returned more LPs than because of poor pressings than I do now. In those days however, records were being mass produced and we paid what was considered to be the 'normal' price for them. There was perhaps a small excuse then for the occasional sub-standard pressing because of the volumes involved. Today, however, the market has changed and vinyl lovers pay a premium price for what should always be a premium product. Sadly, this is not always the case.

In my experience specialist labels who generally release reissues almost always provide a product that is top class in every way - both the mastering and pressing. Doxy releases, for instance, which retail towards the lower end of premium market, £15 for a single LP, never disappoints. My local dealer tends not to stock the more expensive labels such as Mobile Fidelity and Classic and so I cannot comment on those.

When I do encounter problems with pressings they tend to be with either new recordings or reissues from one of the major labels. I bought the Lily Allen disc 'It's Not Me, Its You'; in fact I



Lily Allen's 'It's Not Me, It's You' I bought three times, says David Jarvis...

bought it three times, but alas all three had exactly the same fault. The quality control must have been zero.

Only last week I purchased the latest Rufus Wainwright release on double LP. The surface noise on this disc was unacceptably high and again I had to return it. I didn't even bother to re-order because of my experiences with the Lily Allen record.

So it seems to me that the quality control at the pressing plants used by the mainstream labels leaves something to be desired.

As I said before, the way a disc is engineered and the resulting sound may not suit me but may please others very well and consequently I don't return records for that reason. I do sometimes

feel, however, that when the major labels reissue music from their own vaults they think that all they have to do is to put it onto 180g and that's it, job done. Too often I feel that the music sounds just a bit ordinary, a bit flat, a bit muddy. Now quite often I'm buying music that I don't know (more exciting that way, isn't it?) and so perhaps the reissue is a fair representation of the original, I don't know, but again this slight feeling of disappointment is less common when I buy a recording on a specialist label.

So come on record labels, you're making money out of a format that you thought was dead and buried. A bit more effort please.

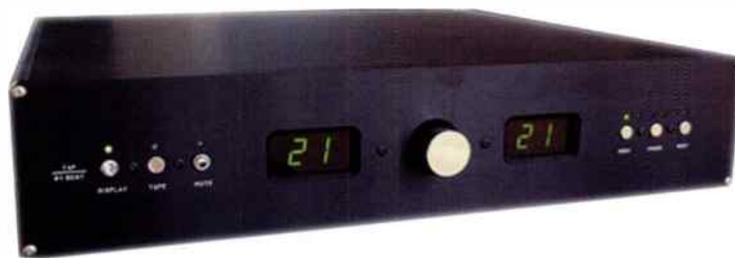
David Jarvis

Hear, hear! I think you're absolutely spot on, David. One of the bizarre things that's happened during the last decade - the time of the vinyl revival - is that 180g pressings and 'audiophile pressings' seem to have become one and the same. That's absolutely *not* the case; I've come across a good number of 180g pressings which sound dreadful. The reason is simply that the remastering has been done badly; just because it's then pressed on to thick vinyl doesn't mean that bad remaster is going to suddenly sound good again.

Furthermore, there's relatively little reason for using 180g vinyl; some of the best pressings I've ever heard hail from Japan and are actually about 90g (or less); less than standard UK pressings of yore. Sadly the audiophile vinyl reissue market has become a case of 'never mind the quality, feel the weight'. Happily, readers can look forward to an investigation into this in the near future. I have recently commissioned a shadowy, enigmatic character who shall remain nameless (some call him "The Disc Detective") to do some 'private investigations' into the subject; watch out for the feature soon! **DP**

FINAL TAP

I saw in May's issue that Tony Bolton is using a Bent Audio TAP-X and was interested in his views on this preamp. I have been using the autoformer 6 way version of this preamp for the last two years and have been very pleased with it. Initially I was using it with a Bryston 4B-SST and more recently with a Linn Klimax Twin.



TAP-X preamp has openness and detail in the sound and low volume controllability, says Tony Bolton.

My reason for asking is that I saw Tony was very impressed with the ModWright but wondered if he could comment about TAP-X compared with say a Bryston BP26 or a Linn Klimax Kontrol.

I know this may not make the letters page as he and I probably have the only two autoformer TAP-Xs in the UK but would be interested in Tony's views if he is able to respond.

Peter Williamson



Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace turntable was a hit with Rafael Todes.

Hi Peter, like you I am very happy with the TAP-X. I enjoy the openness and detail in the sound and the low volume controllability. I haven't heard the Bryston 4B-SST, but do know the 3B and 14B amplifiers so am assuming that there is a family sound. I would suggest that the Bryston BP26 preamp would have better dynamics and more slam than the TAP-X, but would lose out on musicality and fluidity. Bryston equipment, to my ears, can be a very unrelenting studio sound which can get tiring. The ModWright 36.5, I felt, bridged this gap, offering the no-holds-barred honesty of the Bryston with the musicality of the TAP-X. I haven't heard the latest generation of Linn amplification so cannot comment. **TB**

in very good order. This was taken to Martin Bastin who worked his magic on the deck and built a rather tasty burr walnut veneered plinth. The deck has remained in my system ever since and is fitted with a Roksan Tabriz zi and a modified Denon 103D cartridge, although a few other MC cartridges have been used in the past decade.

I ought also to mention the fitted SDS Isoplat and the excellent VDH spindle oil used to lubricate the main bearing. My previous deck, a Logic 101, was consigned to the loft for eventual sale.

Under pressure to reduce my hi-fi collection, I recently retrieved the Logic from the loft in order to prepare it for sale. Prior to storage, I had fitted it with an (unwanted) original Helius arm. I mean the first Helius design of many years ago and an unused Roksan Corus Black cartridge. The deck was thoroughly cleaned, a new belt fitted and slotted into my system (EAR phono preamp, upgraded WAD 6550 and Proac Tablette 50s).

Having become accustomed to the Garrard sound, I was taken aback by the somewhat different presentation of the Logic. Bass was surprisingly solid, but more fulsome and less dry than that of the Garrard. The music was now more airy and relaxed, had more depth and flowed beautifully. This was the case with the likes of John Lee Hooker (The Healer), classical works, by Butterworth and Beethoven, and acoustic folk.

On electronic based music or with more driving rhythms, I did prefer the more upbeat and forceful sound of the Garrard. Swapping cartridges did not alter these observations. So, which deck am I keeping? The answer, in true Adam Smith fashion, is (probably) both. The Logic is probably worth little on the second hand market and I cannot bear to part with my beautiful Garrard. I

SPACE CADET

I really enjoyed reading Rafael Todes review of the Nottingham Hyperspace turntable. It is good to see a review written by a classical musician who may approach sound quality from a slightly different perspective. The outcome of the review, in which he compares the sound of the Hyperspace to that of a Garrard 401 relates to the position I find myself in with my system. Ten years ago I purchased a Garrard 401 chassis

need to commandeer another room for a second system but can I afford the divorce that would follow?

Colin Topping

You'll suffer for your pleasures Colin!

Rafael has been very brave as well as aurally astute in identifying the Garrard sound and daring to suggest it was just "a sound" and there might well be valid alternatives.

Funnily, although I am the original 401 arch-exponent it isn't just sound quality that appeals to me, it is sheer usability. I just got fed up with fooling around with suspended decks, adjusting this, that and the other, coping with the religion and not daring to breathe just in case this brought the heavens tumbling.

The Garrard, as you know, starts with a resounding crash that warns of its coming intentions, and it's a sonic steamroller of a deck that shrugs off the outside world. It's great fun, but there are valid alternatives.

NK

REEL TAPE

I read Graham Morris's letter in the July Edition on the resurrection of his Philips N4150 reel to reel tape recorder and thought how people seem to start doing and thinking the same thing at the same time. I have a Philips N7150 tape deck bought in January 1983. Last but one rainy Bank Holiday I retrieved the box containing the tape deck from the bottom of a wardrobe to try it out. After years of it not being used it worked perfectly. I was half expecting it not to work at all. Listening to an old tape (running at 7 in/sec) through some Beyer headphones, I was amazed and had forgotten how good it was.

Are reel-to-reel tapes still available? I also have a Rotel Dolby B and C noise reduction unit bought to use with the tape deck. I need a reel-to-reel Dolby calibration tape to set both up. Do you know where I can get one? I am seriously thinking of refurbishing and updating both the tape deck and noise reduction unit, with new cabling, phono sockets, mains filters and anything else which could potentially improve the sound quality of both, and then using the reel-to-reel again, as I was so encouraged by the sound quality. If nothing else having a reel-to-reel tape recorder running looks so much more interesting than a CD player.

Peter Graves

Welcome to the wonderful world of reel-to-reel! You can buy tapes and spare reels from www.SoundHiFi.com on the 'Tapes' page. MRL sell calibration tapes but they are very expensive at about £80.00 each from www.jrfmagnetics.com/mrltapes.html. There

are two different reference levels of 850Hz at 320nWb/m for Europe and 250nWb/m for the USA. I would follow the instructions with your Rotel unit and use the built in test generator and aim at 0 VU?

Demagnetising and cleaning the heads and then replacing worn out electrolytics would be my first move. I have just done that on my Technics RS-1500 and am about to configure it with a Dolby 363 SR rack, so we are both on the same wavelength!

Dave Cawley Sound Hi-Fi

Reel-to-reel is a truly lovely format, and capable of superb sound quality if done properly. There's certainly nothing like the sight of two 10.5" metal NAB reels spinning in front of your very eyes; I find it most relaxing, and that's before I've even switched the amp on! However, just a short caveat; so many reel-to-reels on the secondhand market are absolutely cream-crackered, having been subjected to a total hammering for a least a decade before they reached semi-retirement, then went up in the loft, then came down again only to go on eBay. They tended to be bought by musicians, who were doubtless

romance of an open reel cloud your judgement! Repairs, if possible, can be expensive and then there's the small matter of the tapes. Yes, there's loads of old reels on eBay, but half of that will shed oxide the first time you play it – even if it really is 'new old stock'. I don't want to be hi-fi's answer to Victor Meldrew here, but it's important to point out that you're not going to get the sound quality or reliability of a brand new £1,000 Revox B77 (frozen in time from the late seventies) from a thirty five year old £50 Akai on eBay! **DP**

SACD LIVES

Sony Classical; BeArTon; Audite; Capriccio; Caro Mitis; Dacapo; BIS; OUR Recordings; 2L; Mariinsky; Praga Digitals; Triton; Accent; Cryston; Exton; Farao Classics; Melba Records; Channel Classics; Harmonia Mundi; Cybele; PentaTone; AliaVox; Dabringhaus und Grimm; RCA RedSeal; Oehms Classics; Tudor; Bridge; Claves; RCO Live; LSO Live; CSO resound.

I suppose I could go on! But listed above are just a few of the record labels currently releasing music on SACD format discs. I have only included those labels releasing what you would call "Classical" music but of course there



Philips N4150 open reel recorder. Great quality from the 1980s.

seduced by the sound-on-sound possibilities, so expect a thick coating of nicotine inside the cabinet, along with shot electrolytics!

My point is, apply normal standards of judgement to buying them second-hand. Hear them playing back, then recording, then playing back. Make sure the gain on both channels is similar and that there are no funny noises of any kind, or dropouts, or hum. If there are, this is a 'fixer upper' and should be priced accordingly; don't let the undoubted

are some excellent Jazz recordings also being released/re-released in the format and on labels additional to the above.

If as you state in your June 2010 edition the UK ran out of interest in the format with titles running to just "Avalon" and "Dark Side of the Moon" then why are there so many labels releasing discs in your country?

In the May 2010 edition of International Record Review there are at least a dozen SACDs reviewed and it's the same for the Gramophone magazine.



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Why would Jordi Savall start his own record label (AliaVox) and release titles as hybrid SACDs if the medium was redundant? And why would the London Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra do the same? Many of the labels I have listed (and others I have not) are run by musicians who like Jordi Savall want to present the music in the best available format, and to them (leaving aside the digital/analog debate) the best format is SACD.

Mr Price, I appreciate that your musical tastes may be different to mine but to make such a statement as you did when reviewing the Esoteric X-05 SACD player is most regrettable. I urge you to purchase a few Classical SACDs and at least acknowledge the existence of the format. The AliaVox recordings are all superb and the production values are excellent. Jordi Savall has surrounded himself with a wonderful group of musicians and the music they play – mainly from the baroque and early music periods – is enchanting! Or how about the recent Chicago Symphony Mahler Symphony No.2 with Bernard Haitink (CSOR901 916) – Editors Choice in the February '10 Gramophone; it would make a suitable test for any system! Those of us who love music and appreciate the quality of SACD over Red Book CD want the format to prosper. With positive acknowledgment from audio reviewers such as yourself the format will remain viable.

I use old Quad electrostatic speakers, old Quad valve amps and a recent Marantz CD/SACD player. The sound of SACD is beguiling!

regards
Nathan Stein,
Australia



You've got to have an Icon Audio PS1 tube phono stage says David.

Thanks for your views on SACD Nathan. We all have SACD collections and respect the format. But the simple truth is SACD is now barely



Yes, we did produce SACD back in 1991, but don't tell anyone! Sony's budget Blu-ray player, the BDP-S370 reviewed in our October issue, plays SACD. Spot the logo.

visible on the High Street (in the UK) and has become a niche format in sales volume. There's little interest today in a high quality audio-only disc and even Sony do not support it on their top-of-the-range BDP-5000ES Blu-ray player - shameful. The new BDP-S370 reviewed in our Blu-ray Group Test in the last issue does play SACD and it could just be that Sony have realised audio quality is still an issue and SACD has a market, albeit a small one. We have long supported SACD replay on Blu-ray players, much to the bemusement of the AV crowd, as this looks like the only hope for the future. **NK**

Nathan - thanks for your impassioned paean of praise for SACD. Ironically you're talking to one of the format's greatest fans (I love its sound), but that doesn't stop me making the factually correct comment that in the UK, the format is effectively moribund. Yes, there are some excellent specialist labels doing SACD (Linn, for example, take a bow!), but what we don't have here in the UK is the ability to go into an average high street CD shop and buy any SACDs. No amount of me effusing about the format's lovely sound, across any genre of music, is sadly going to change that, I fear. **DP**

STAGED ENTRY

I'm on the look out for a new phono stage in the sub £600 mark. As this is supposed to be a present for me (surprise surprise) I'm in a bit of a hurry to find out what to buy.

Now, my system: Project RPM with Roksan Corus, Jungson JA88D 2009 Edition and Yamaha NS1000M. What I want is a bit of a darker tonal colour, making things just a bit more pleasant without making that crystal clear midrange less, well clear. I was set on the Pure Sound P10 and may have a listen to it as there's a dealer in my area. However, I wonder if the Icon Audio PS1 may be a better choice? Or perhaps something completely different?

And yes David, I did get rid of that ChineseYaqin (you may remember my letter concerning Chinese hi-fi from a few months back). That still wasn't noise coming out of my Yams but the Jungson is a better match -). I hope you can find time to answer my mail.

Niels Stergaard
Denmark.

Hi Niels - with your system you've simply got to go for the Icon Audio PS1 tube stage. Scrimp and save for the extra cash if need be, as any solid-state phono stage at that price will have you running for cover! The Jungson isn't famously warm, and the Yamahas won't exactly hide this fact from you... **DP**

VICTORIANA

I currently live in an old Victorian stone built house, my listening room is a reasonably sized 18ft square (ish), with fairly high ceiling, around 11 - 12 ft. It has varnished floorboards with a large rug and fairly substantial sofas, and heavy curtains.

My current set up resulted in a massive revamp a number of years ago from an LP12 / Naim Audio amplifiers, CD player and 'speakers to a complete turnaround and entirely different set up. It was a long and pricey journey and I ended up with a set up, which, I have to say, pound for pound has left me satisfied. I like it very much, obviously not the best money can buy, but I believe I got good value for money, and it often puts a massive grin on my face.

The set up consists of an old Townshend Elite Rock/ Excalibur/ Dynavector DV 20 cartridge. I like the Townshend, they track like a train on rails and I'm a massive fan of the front damping. This sits on a Voodoo Airtek platform, much like a Townshend Seismic sink, but to be fair to Voodoo, a damn site better looking and excellent at its job; what a pity they are no longer with us.

My amplifiers, and this caused me no end of tears, have now settled at old style Quicksilver Audio Full Function Preamp and a pair of Quicksilver Audio

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V4 Monoblocks (120W push-pull). I have to say, that my experience has taught me that they were far superior to the much more well known Stateside brand that this set up replaced. The preamp has a large power supply, in fact its energy storage (122 Joules) was more than some of the power amplifiers I had along the way. It would be fair to say that, for its time, it was over engineered and it is armed with Telefunken valves. The V4 Monoblocks when matched are extremely musical, pack a punch when the transients start and are generally a delight to listen to. Perhaps not the last word in detail, but are an extremely enjoyable and involving listen. The Americans seem to rave about them, but they aren't very common on this side of the pond.

My other sources are a Sugden CD Masterclass, not the current model, but as CD players go, I think its reasonable and I can listen to it without too much heartache (vinyl person - can't help it), and a Nakamichi BX 300 E, which does a job for me. My speakers are Celestion A3s, which I also like.

My problem – and it's a bit of a major one – is when I move to a cottage (once again Victorian and stone built), my listening room will be around 10ft square, around 9ft high, and a set up like this will just be too large I fear. So I'm thinking less Watts perhaps, and certainly smaller speakers, as the A3s will be just too big for the room.

Should I be downsizing amplifiers and going the Single-Ended way (I've never heard SE designs) no dealers (that I know of) around here can demonstrate them to me, and would this be quite different from my current set up in terms of quality of sound?

The A3s would have to go, so what smaller speaker could I get, without losing quality, as I do like these, but, they will simply be too large for a 10ft sq. room.

I am willing to buy second-hand, and I am not hugely bothered by the budget as I would imagine that the sale of equipment would generate around the £2.5k mark, and I suppose I could add up to 1.5k if I needed to. Or perhaps, I should cancel the house sale and the missus could move without me!

Not sure how well that would go down, as she actually likes listening to the music as well, and probably needs me to bring the hi-fi with me; it goes down well with a glass of red. We listen to all types, from Rock, Jazz, Blues, Reggae, Classical, Zappa, Punk, Soul, etc.

Your advice would be greatly appreciated; keep up the good work, especially the vinyl section as it interests me greatly. Mmmm... now that Brinkmann Bardo's also got me thinking, Townshend or Direct Drive and a Divorce tee hee!

Ewan Scott

My advice is simple: cancel the cottage and set up a temporary potting shed in the garden with a bed in it, so the missus can experience cramped living conditions!

A 10ft square room is tiny, Ewan, and you'll miss what you've got, as the room is important. Luckily, your amplifiers are powerful enough to drive small, insensitive loudspeakers a pair of B&W 805 Diamonds are one possible choice.

Keep the amplifiers if you are happy with them, as you seem to be. Spend on the loudspeakers, and this could include the lovely Audiosmile Kensais perhaps. These appeal to everyone it seems so are a sure fire choice. **NK**

I love the AudioSmiles too, but I am not sure how well they'd work with tubes; actually it's likely they'll work well, as you don't have much air to move in that new room of yours! Probably the better option in the circumstances is a pair of Monitor Audio PL100 (£2,500) stand mounters; these are beautifully made and voiced speakers, with a smooth, sweet and open sound that I'm sure you and your music will love. The B&Ws should be great too, but are likely more forward and taut in their presentation, with a punchier but slightly less beguiling sound. **DP**

NEW DIMENSIONS AND SONICS

I am a born again hi-fi enthusiast. Nearing completion of an extension to my lounge area I am seeking comments from the experts in two basic areas.

Firstly the equipment. It is predominantly Naim – Naim Superait, Naim CD 5 X, Naim Hi Cap, all on Naim Frain. The mains conditioning cables and interconnects are Russ Andrews and the 'speaker cables are the Kimber 8TCs. The 'speakers are PMC OBls.

I have a galleried open lounge of approximately 24 by 12 feet to which has been added, a little to the side, an area of 12 by 15 feet. It is all open plan with no doors between new and old lounge. The height of the lounge at maximum in gallery is 20 feet. All the hi-fi will be in the newly added 'music room'. Can you advise on my current equipment which is all less than 2 years old?

My listening pleasures are varied from classical east and west, to jazz and Rock music, especially guitar music a la Hendrix, Clapton, Knopfler. I have a good CD collection but prefer my vinyl collection going back to the 70s! I like a solid bass to my Rock music. Is there anything you would change – not too drastically – to improve bass response in the system?

Secondly, I have a treasured,



Monitor Audio PL100 Platinum series loudspeakers are sweet and informative.

probably dated, Michel Transcriptor Reference turntable with an SME Mk2 arm with a Shure VS Tv cartridge. I need advice on this aspect. What phono stage(s) would be suitable and would you change turntable arm / cartridge? I appreciate age of the detachable shell of the SME but could that work with a modern cartridge? Finally with changes in radio transmissions is there a tuner that would suit?

Shindy Vasir

Hi Shindy - yes, that's easy. To add bass to your system, change the location of your speakers! PMC OBl is are big, powerful floorstanders and not naturally bass light; if they sound this way then they've most likely strayed a little too far into the listening room; push them back slightly and see what gives. You could always upgrade the power supply of your SuperNait amplifier to Flat-Cap, Hi-Cap or Super-Cap, and this would also yield stronger bass, although the loudspeaker-room interaction issue is certainly a cheaper alternative and may prove worth fifteen minutes of your time before you go off and spend thousands of pounds! Another thing to consider is of course upgrading your CD player; if it's Naim you like then the CD-X2 is a great machine, although not inexpensive...

As for your classic turntable, you could fit a modern arm but I think that it would look wrong; it would be kind of like putting 21" alloy wheels on a Jaguar E-type. Why don't you send your SME 3009S2 back to SME for a service; they do this brilliantly, and it's very cost-effective too. You'll get it back knowing it's giving its best. To this, add a modern moving magnet

like a Goldring G1042, and you'll have a nice sounding source. At the same time, make sure the deck's belt is perfect; you can buy new ones from Transcriptors (www.transcriptors.net). As for phono stages, why not invest in a Naim Stageline for your SuperNait; this would be the most elegant solution. Tuner? It's got to be a Magnum Dynalab MD-90T, hasn't it? FM has now had an indefinite stay of execution, which means we can all go out and spoil ourselves buying a real radio again. See my review on p70; hopefully you'll not trouble yourself with dark thoughts of DAB again...?

DP

Hi Shindy. That looks like a nice system to us, one purposed to have bass grunt. If speaker positioning does not improve matters then going for huge Tannoys, which cope with big spaces better than all else is an expensive option. Big B&Ws from the 800 Series like the 800D with its twin 10in Rohacell bass drivers are another one, but all this is big money – think £10k+.

Your Shure cartridge seems to have had a change of identity – is it a V15? Perhaps a V15 VxMR? Whatever, a Transcriptors Reference is worth £1k or so if in top condition. Fitted with an SME Series II arm this is a real classic and something to be treated with care. I would tend not to expect too much from the old SME though; their arm tubes rang like church bells, giving them a light ringy quality, reasonably well disguised by the V15 with which they were usually



A Transcriptors Hydraulic Reference turntable, like Shindy Vasir's.

Torlyte Platforms.

I would like to upgrade my system in three stages: CD player, amp and loudspeakers but not necessarily in this order. I'm thinking of a new CDS3/PS555 but would I get a better system if I purchase a used CD555/PS555 for about the same price?

As for the amplifier, again would I be better off with a new Naim 252/Supercap/250 or, a used 252/Supercap/300 of about the same price?

For the speakers, I'm thinking between TMC or B&W- which model would be most appropriate or, do you have other suggestions? What are your advice about buying used speakers?

If buying second hand, I may not be able to get an audition, hence your valuable expert advice is important.

First, yes you would get a better sound via a secondhand CD555 than from a new CDS3 CD player, but this of course depends on the quality of the CD555; if it's been hammered every day, bounced around in people's cars all the time or been in a smoke filled room for long periods, it could easily be a long way from giving its best. As ever with these 'new versus secondhand' questions, consider what you're actually buying. As they say in the car game, "condition is everything", and this holds for hi-fi too. I've spent too much time with 'distressed' examples of high end hi-fi bought cheap on eBay, which sounds so bad a new factory fresh Cambridge Audio would run rings around it. So just be careful what you buy, if you buy secondhand...

This holds for the amplifiers too, although obviously it's perhaps less critical because there are no moving parts to fail or lasers to die. With loudspeakers, that's where your biggest risk is. There's a long, long way between a new set of speakers and one that have had a decade to decay; cone surrounds soften, drive unit suspension atrophies and crossovers gradually go out of spec. My advice is - as with everything used - see, hear and feel the thing you're buying first; do not buy it unseen as you'll quite possibly not get what you thought you'd paid for.

As for telling you which loudspeakers to buy, I'd no sooner do that than tell you who to marry. Only you can decide for yourself; speakers are the most personal of choices. Find a good dealer; there are plenty around, and you'll soon know when you're in one. Call Naim Audio first; ask them to recommend a Naim dealer near you; at least that way you can hear any prospective new speakers via your existing system.



Naim CDS3 CD player bettered by a CD555? It all depends, says David...

paired. Fit a brand new Goldring 1042 as it is very compliant and will not over excite the arm. It offers a fine sound at a reasonable price. **NK**

NAIM OF THE GAME

System: Naim CD/Hi Live Interconnect, Naim 82/Hi-Caps x 2/250, Shahinian Arc 'speakers, Russ Andrews Signature Powerkords throughout, Ultra Purifier Block Ag., Crystal 24 speaker cables,

With any of the above combination, would there be a huge upgrade over my present system?

Finally, what sort of price range would you recommend should I decide to sell my CD player, amp and 'speakers for? The items above are all unmarked, in excellent condition and with original boxes and manuals. please advice,
Aggie Yap

Naim will also advise about the used prices of their equipment, which has famously strong residuals. **DP**

IN THE LIBRARY

Adam Smith's column (July) reminds me that the Library of Congress in Washington, unlike some archives, always keeps its recordings in the original medium, only making transfers when required. Since the estimated life of LPs, for example, is several times that of CDs, let alone digital tape, this makes sense. In the 1950s, EMI made tape transfers of many of their 78s for LP reissue, then foolishly discarded the masters, which, apart from questions of longevity, made it difficult to extract more information as technology and transfer techniques improved, although some independent labels have managed it working from commercial pressings!

David Price, replying to a letter from Graham Thomas, is right about first pressings of LPs usually having the best sound, but I have found (and this will be heresy to some collectors) that Decca classical recordings of circa 1960 sound better on 1970s pressings, the remasters retaining the warmth of the valves in the original chain, but with more incisive highs from the later transistorised cutting heads (also, they had problems with lower frequencies on early stereo heads). This changed after Polygram took them over in 1979 and Philips did the pressings on softer vinyl.

Mark Hodgson

Thanks for that Mark. I have always been impressed by the absolutist approach America's Library of Congress have taken with U.S. musical heritage, kicking up a stink over music being consigned to data reduced MP3 form (and suchlike), when 'compression', more accurately termed 'data reduction', was the current big idea in the 1990s (how trivial some of these things are in retrospect). They have turned out to be very right of course. It's good to see the LP appreciated in this light too. **NK**

STURDY CASTLE

I recently purchased a Bose 5.1 'system', but remained dissatisfied with my music time. A close friend, who takes his music very seriously and has spent a huge amount of money on his equipment gave me a copy of 'Hi-Fi World'. The first item advertised I glanced at was a set of loudspeaker spikes at £700...

However, your magazine fired me up and I read the editions thoroughly as they became available. I sold the Bose, (at a big loss), put my wife on the streets and cobbled together enough to afford spikes for one speaker.

I scoured the Ads. (Friday, that is),

Amazon, and finally eBay...

For my money I purchased a NAD 5240 CD player, a Sony TA-FE330R amplifier and finally some old Castle 'Pembroke' standmount speakers. The speakers were faulty, and the NAD intermittently so. I had the CD player serviced and took the Castle speakers apart myself. I cleaned everything, soldered where necessary, and applied a lot of time to extremely well made outers. The wood glowed...

Everything worked and it sounds, to my ears, fantastic. The speakers were simply wonderful. Katherine Jenkins never sounded better, and Ennio Morricone brought Clint into the living room. I am simply thrilled.

I did, after reading your so-useful articles, clean all my fuses, and their copper cradles, bought some Heavy Atacama 4 pillar stands, purchased some high quality Oxygen Free cable, and high quality cabling for my iTouch cradle.

My audiophile friend was extremely impressed, particularly considering my total outlay was a bit less than £300, including the servicing. I can enjoy your magazine even more now and will gradually upgrade my components as the opportunity arises. I shall not be in a hurry to swap the Castles though

and restrained, yet very impressive all round and there are surprisingly few alternatives even now. It's a sound that's gone out of fashion, more's the shame, and that trad. cabinet work isn't so common any more. **NK**

I really can't overstate the importance of correct set up for your system. I've heard some very expensive modern systems sound rubbish, whereas in the same building there were far cheaper ones making heaps more music. Get your system on decent supports (bought in or home made), clean all the contacts everywhere (isopropyl alcohol is a good start point), tighten up your cartridge mountings and/or speaker drive units and get the cabling nice and tidy; then take care placing your speakers. You'll be amazed at the difference a few hours of fettling can make. **DP**

HARD MUSIC

Like many people in this country who've worked hard I ain't got much spare cash! I am currently putting my little girl through university, without her having to obtain a student loan. This adds up to around £12,000 per year.

All the same, I'm up to approx



No MP3 here! America's Library of Congress stores original historical documents and doesn't like the degraded record that is MP3.

– were they considered to be excellent speakers? I can understand the sheer enjoyment that your readers write about in their letters and thank them for the tips and interesting topics which I am beginning to understand.

Arthur Russell.

Thank you very much for your story Arthur – that's just how we like it. An easy introduction to decent sound quality and the joy it can bring when listening to music. You've obviously put some care into bringing it all back to life and this does pay off. If you are enjoying the Castles, which are very nice loudspeakers, then do not be in any rush to change them. If you are curious try and listen to a few alternatives every now and then. Castles were always civilised

£600 saved or so and I'm looking for the usual 'miracle' asked of you. I have asked in the pub, hi-fi dealers, work and forums and all I get is different but 'definitely right' answers. I have read your mag for donkeys years and never doubted your word, so here's my system – a typical hard saved for, not high end but damn good sounding one.

I have a full GyroDec, Origami'd RB300 arm, Ortofon 2M Black cartridge on a Sound Style rack with wooden top shelf. Sugden 'Stage Two' phono amp., Cyrus 8 VS2 amp. (since my old Naim NAT 140 blew up and I like it a lot – even prefer it!). KEF XQ1 loudspeakers sit on dedicated stands helped by REL T3 subwoofer, set very low as the KEFs reach down well enough. Interconnects and speaker cables are Chords.

It sounds great to me and seems

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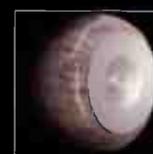
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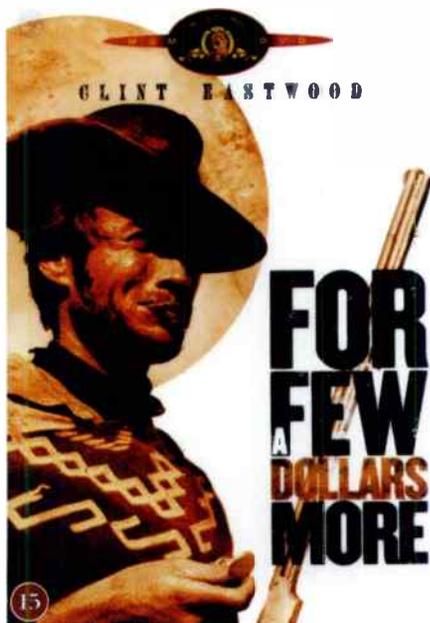
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iPod not included

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Bringing Clint into your living room, courtesy of Ennio Morricone's atmospheric soundtrack...

to play everything well. I listen to music from punk to Tchaikovsky, with even Coltrane in the middle. The areas I'm looking for improvement in are the impact and thump of leading note edges and the last degree of detail and separation between instruments when things get busy. The bass, soundstage, is beautiful and controlled and only on rare recordings does the treble become shrill. I have had moving coils from Sumiko, Audio Technica (AT OC9 Mk 2 which proved too toppy for my ears), Goldring, Dynavector and Denon, but for some reason my Ortofon gives just as satisfying a sound... I rate it very highly, yet I'm not against moving coils if that's your recommendation.

My personal favourite upgrades include the Ortofon 2M Black, a Cyrus 8 power amp to go on the integrated (or maybe two later), a new arm and I do like the engineering behind the Audiomod Micrometer arm. Gyro mods - Michell told me that as far as the Gyro goes then a HR power supply would make a bigger improvement than the Orbe platter.

After twenty five years in this hobby and 3000 odd LPs and having bought loads of mid price stuff (LP12, Projects, old second hand Naims, etc.), I am now having to spend even more wisely than ever so I'm looking to max my £600 for an upgrade I can hear! I did say miracle but I'm sure if you guide me, the right component will make things even better. Then in a year or so I might bug you again!

Ivor Jebson

Hi Ivor. That's a fine system and improving it unequivocally is a tall order. However, you do say what you don't like, which is handy guidance

for us, and I have a good idea what you are after. Trouble is, it doesn't cost £600! More like double - and it is an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze moving coil cartridge. This has a lovely rich sound, yet it is sparkingly clear and full of dynamic life.

An affordable alternative is an Ortofon Rondo Bronze, a budget version of the Cadenza that doesn't give so much away. Both have the levity you obviously enjoy and will suit the shiny top end of the KEFs. Yet both have a full bodied sound that is pleasantly powerful. **NK**

I think the first stage is the HR power supply for the GyroDec, but before you even do this, get the

deck set up properly. First, buy a new belt from Michell Engineering. Make sure the Gyro is totally level on what it's sitting on; don't use the deck's own level adjusters, so the springs can all work at an equal rate. Clean the surfaces that touch the belt with isopropyl alcohol. Set the springs so they bounce up and down evenly, without wobbling to one side or another. Take the dust cover off the Gyro, and take the spring covers off the springs. Tighten the cartridge up in the headshell till it's very tight. Clean the cartridge pins,



A smooth, full bodied sound for £600 - Ortofon's Rondo Bronze.

and the arm cable phono plugs, with isopropyl alcohol. You should find a real improvement in clarity, this done. Then go for the HR PSU, and spend the rest on music - or your daughter! **DP**

CASSETTE COLLECTOR

I have just finished putting my old cassettes into genre and alphabetical order. I then played some live broadcasts of choral work taken from Radio 3 using my Nytech receiver. I was absolutely

blown away with the naturalness and delicacy of the recordings. Then I noticed that the cassette player had a headphone socket. That's my late night listening sorted for a while. Well, until I can afford decent headphones and 'amp. **Ray Spink**

Rock on, Ray! **DP**

SEE THE LIGHT

What a wonderful discovery this magazine has been. After years of reading *What Hi-Fi* (great though it is) I'm not sure it really caters for the real hi-fi lover, and certainly not for classic hi-fi lovers. After reading the July issue feature on Pioneer's magnificent SA9500 amplifier it brought back not only the first memories of my father's brand new Technics system of the early eighties with more lights, switches and knobs than a Concorde cockpit, but of the many classic hi-fi components I have owned since (the SA9500 being one of them).

Now don't get me wrong, my current Audiolab 8000 preamp., 8000 CD and 8000 monoblocs running into Monitor Audio's RS1 and my beloved Technics SL-1200Mk11 and Arcam T32 tuner make a wonderful sound, but where are my fluorescent peak meters, my backlit tuning dial and weighted tuning knob, not to mention my backlit VU meters? Now, I'm not saying that this classic equipment is better sounding than modern hi-fi, only a direct comparison would decide that (maybe that's an interesting feature for *Hi-Fi World* to consider) but owning such kit that was also a joy to look at, the fantastic build and the features were all part of it. At the time of writing this I noticed a Pioneer A80 150W monster of an amp for a mere £175 on eBay. Now where could you buy an amp of that build and power output for that money? I guess what I'm trying to say is, we all listen to classic rock, classic soul or rock-n-roll, people buy classic cars, so why shouldn't we still enjoy classic hi-fi?

Jason Hall

Indeed, and why not? **DP**

BAD VOLUME

I have the original PS1 version of the Icon Audio PS1.2 Signature which won your phono stage group test. Tony Bolton preferred the Icon when connected directly into his power amplifiers, making use of its onboard volume control. I too initially used the PS1 to drive my Leak Stereo 20 and found that I rarely needed to use the volume control beyond the 10 o'clock position to achieve good sound levels.

I then tried the PS1 connected to my preamp which is a passive design by Classique Sounds, built into the

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Pioneer's SA9500 amplifier, a beauty from the 1970s.

casework of an original Leak Point One Stereo. Tony Bolton reviewed it favourably back in 2007 and I ended up buying the review sample. With this combination the Icon can be run at full volume and I have found this gives superior sound quality, with a more extended top end and improved depth of image, providing a more involving listening experience. I was prepared for a change in sound quality but did not expect to hear an improvement.

As good as the passive preamp is - and it is very good - I have always suspected that it was the Icon running flat out which caused this improvement. In the Measured Performance section of the PS 1.2 Signature review, Noel mentions that a volume control impedance matching problem in earlier models has been cured, so now frequency response changes little with level. Could he elaborate on this point? I would be interested to know how much the frequency response of earlier models differed with changes in volume as this might explain my subjective findings.

The Mono switch is only mentioned in passing during the review but it's worth pointing out that besides giving better focus when playing mono records it also eliminates unwanted groove noise, particularly noticeable on 45s from the 1950s and 1960s.

John Pickford

Hi John. How a volume control degrades frequency response at half volume is a trifle technical, if simple in terms of circuit design. It is a 'hidden' phenomenon many designers overlook however, so is not an uncommon problem.

A circuit analysis using LTSpice is shown here, together with the resultant frequency response. The designer simply has to ensure the volume control slider does not see a capacitive load, to avoid the problem.

I recall frequency response was around -2dB down at 20kHz, easily enough to be audible. I also suspect the volume control was not a super

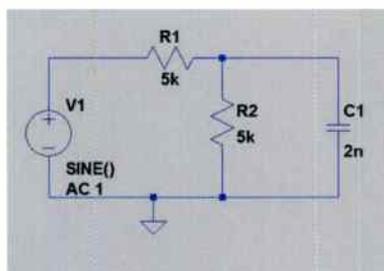
high quality audio type, like an Alps Blue, so when at half volume it had most sonic impact and produced general degradation. It almost certainly explains what you heard.

Thanks for the Mono switch observation. Tony Bolton makes this point as well: a Mono switch usefully cancels groove noise. **NK**

LOWTHER LABOURS

I hope you could advise me. I have a pair of Lowther Acousta 115 folded horn speakers with DX3 drivers. One of the drive units was damaged so bad it was replaced. Simple enough. When I replaced the driver, I noticed that the internal cable looked like the original; some fifty year old bell wire!!! So this is my question/ dilemma to which an answer would most appreciated:

Is it worth replacing the internal cable for a modern oxygen free one



A 10k volume control set half way offers maximum source impedance. Capacitance seen by the output slider will roll down treble. Diagram and analysis by LTSpice.

and replacing the binding posts for gold plated ones?

My dilemma - after speaking to Lowther they advised me to replace the cable by attaching the new cable to the old one and pulling it through; this represents some issues for me. Firstly

and most importantly, if it undoes while threading it through the two 180 degree corners of the horn, well, that's the end of my speaker - cable lost forever!!!!

Secondly, for some reason, Lowther can't tell me if the cable was nailed in throughout the wood work or not. I understand that the craftsman that made the speaker are probably dead but that's not the point, they still have the plans to which they would have followed. If the internal cable is dangling loose then it should be a straight forward job but surely a manufacture of this calibre would have nailed it in place, due to bass frequencies vibrating the cable. Surely, you would hear that? I put this to Lowther and the response was - if it nailed in just drill a hole through the cabinet! Now, wouldn't that ruin the acoustics????

After going through all that, will I actually hear the difference? Please help me as I do not want to tackle this without some professional advice due to the fact there is nothing actually wrong with them, in fact they sound excellent but can I better them?

Jonathan Highman

We do not know about the construction of your Lowthers and can only offer general advice.

If you are able to remove the drivers to access their terminals then can you try running them with a temporary substitute cable jury rigged from the front, to see whether any improvement is going to be worthwhile? It seems likely it will to us, but Lowthers don't draw much current and gains might be less than expected. It's difficult to say.

Just pulling on the cable would tell if it is free, or attached, would it not? You may like to consider poking a stiff springy wire through the loudspeaker, perhaps piano wire, to see if it follows the same path as the bell wire.

Rather than pulling heavy weight new cable through, dragged by old bell wire, I suggest you pull through strong, flexible nylon cord first. DIY shops have this sort of thing. Then use the cord to drag through the new wire. Good luck! **NK**

PLANAR TRUTH

I note with gladness your review of Magnepan MG12s but was disappointed it was not the MMG. The MMG is the direct descendent of the SMGa which was the model T of planar loudspeakers.

I owned a pair way back in 1989 when I lived in US of A but had to sell them to a friend when I returned. Recently I was given an offer I could not refuse on a new pair of MMGs and despite being perfectly happy with my

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Magneplanar SMG12, a planar magnetic loudspeaker.

current four pairs of loudspeakers accumulated over the years, I could not refuse.

Now I am very glad that I did not do the sensible thing and add another pair loudspeakers to my treasured collection of UK and Japan's finest cluttering up my small apartment. There is absolutely no need to tell me that I am barking mad - I have already been reliably informed of that fact several times already.

The midrange sounds superb as I always remembered and it images like no other. The rolled off treble of the SMG has been replaced by the brilliant treble of the ribbon tweeter. But it shows up the lack of extension in the bass - the older one was better balanced overall I think.

What has been most amazing is the reaction of my non audiophile friends who showed absolutely no interest in such things before. It ranged from offers to buy them on the spot to one female acquaintance who exclaimed, "the sound is like in 3D" and requested my permission to take a photo of my audio set up. I was so impressed by this I wanted to marry her on the spot but I changed my mind when she informed me that the photo was for her old dad who was interested in such things!

It is also amazing that this innovative product with excellent build quality and a very sensible price comes

from the US of A. I was under the impression that the captains of the industry in that country only knew how to make weapons ever more efficient at killing people or poor quality cars that no one wants to buy. If these captains of industry had any brains at all they should pay a visit to the boys at Magneplan and ask them how to

make a superb product that has never harmed any one (except perhaps the sanity of my neighbours) before it is too late.

K. Fonseka

NAUGHTY NAD?

I bought this crock... It has a 'Phono' input (@ 300 mV), so after many troubles getting the NAD number (01483 545613), they said "you have to buy a preamp now because most people don't have record players"!

Hmmm, so why does it say 'Phono'? This is a company gone profoundly bad. I think you should tell your readers that they deal with them at their peril.

Mark Deards

Hi Mark. This is not an uncommon practice, but it is a confusing one. It isn't just NAD who mark an ordinary Line input as Phono, which it is not, unless fed by an external Phono preamplifier. All we can say is: buyer be aware. Happily, there are plenty of decent phono preamps around at not high prices. Cambridge and NAD make them, for example. **NK**

ON A STAND

Having recently bought a second hand Unison Research Simply Four P, I decided to have it totally revamped by UKD. The amp came back like new and sounding superb (thank you UKD). My sources are a Shanling CD-T100 SE CD player and an Audio Analogue Maestro CD player/processor. My speakers are a pair of fifteen year old Mission 752s.

Although the 752s work very well with low powered valve amps, I feel that to get the most from my system I now need to part with them. I am looking at buying a pair of stand mounts because listening to speakers at various hi-fi shows the stand mounts really impressed me. My budget is around £1,250, of which some will

have to be for stands, but this is where the problem starts. There are so many at this price range, trying to sort out which ones are compatible with my amp let alone auditioning them all is a nightmare. I do have a few in mind like Opera Primare, Focal 806v and 807v. Front ported speakers would probably be best as I have to place them close to a rear wall. I am looking for something versatile as I listen to a wide range of music. Any suggestions please?

Evan Southgate

Hi Evan. You have to be careful about this. The Simply Four delivers 24W per channel in sweet thermionic Class A Watts. Stand mount loudspeakers are not the most sensitive of things, needing more than 24W to go at all loud. Worse, expensive standmount loudspeakers are usually less sensitive than cheap ones. Super high quality monitors from KEF and B&W are over your budget; you may want to listen to a Monitor Audio Gold GS10 which when run in is smooth yet fast and detailed. Consider also Spendor SA1s, which would suit EL34s. As your amplifier has 4 Ohm taps it will be able to drive such loudspeakers, if not to very high levels. Far under your budget are KEF iQ5s mini-floorstanders which, with reasonably good sensitivity, a nice clean sound and near wall placement would do a nice job for just £430. I think I am right in saying new iQs are coming soon, though. **NK**

DEALERS DO IT

I suppose nothing illustrates more the need to find a good hi-fi dealer than conflicting reviews in different hi-fi magazines. In a recent group test of CD players in Hi-Fi World, the Cyrus CD8SE came out top. In a similar review in another publication (blind listening) the Roksan Kandy K2 came top of the pile.

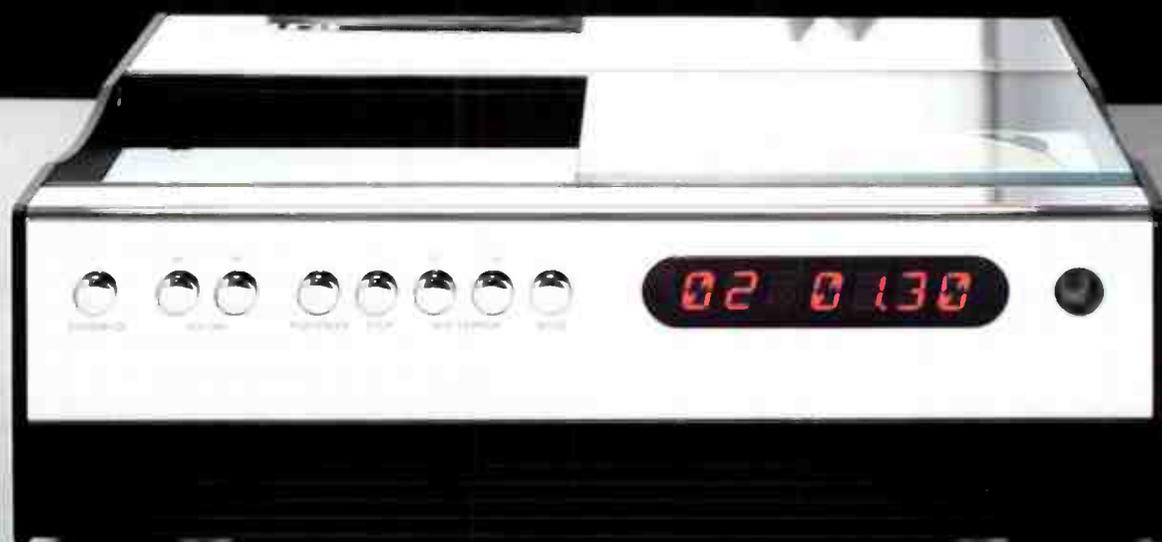


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World Radio History

Likewise your own review of the Triangle Antal Ex speaker was glowing, whilst another review in a group test was altogether tamer.

In a sense it also raises the question what actually is the job of hi-fi magazines, one which I am not going to try and answer here, but I guess to a greater or lesser extent we like to see a good degree of agreement amongst 'experts' in product reviews, so when different conclusions are reached it confuses us poor old consumers. So perhaps it's best that we ignore reviews, trot down to our local dealer and hope they can guide us to our own version of audio nirvana.

Tim Jury

We do constantly beseech readers to listen for themselves Tim, for between good products final choice is a matter of taste. The system and circumstances in which they are reviewed also enter the equation. This is where it is important to trot down to a dealer and have a listen, always assuming the dealer can demo in an appropriate environment with suitable partnering equipment. The products you mention all work well and are valid final choices.

Magazines should be able to sort the wheat from the chaff, and also

Noel's quite right; we've never taken the "we tell you which hi-fi to buy" approach. Whilst it might be snappy publishing to pretend that we have every answer for every customer, actually we don't. All we can do is 'steer' potential buyers to the products we think they'll like; but this still means they should listen for themselves. There's no such thing as a product that's right for everyone, no matter how well it measures, and so your own ears should be the final arbiter. We're totally upfront about this, and always have been; read our reviews and use them as a start point for shortlisting what you'd like to listen to at a good dealer. That's the way to do it! **DP**

BBC PROMS

Today, I decided I was going to spoil myself rotten, by spending the whole day at home, listening to the BBC Proms - Bach Day, on my expensive hi-fi system. It was enjoyable at first, but as the programmes progressed, I became aware that all was not well; something was lacking, but I couldn't put my finger on it. As good as the Brandenburg Concertos sounded, they just didn't sound the way my own records do. Instruments were not well defined and there appeared to be something

in Radio 3, to see what the broadcast sounded like on that. Even through my TV speakers, it sounded somewhat better, so as I now have my system set up to listen to the soundtrack from my DVD player, I flicked a few switches and pressed a couple of buttons and wound the volume up on my WAD K588 Mk2 Amp, which feeds Quad ESL-57s.

The outcome was far beyond my expectations. The improvement wasn't subtle; it was vastly superior. I could now hear not only the tune, but I could also hear the music. The muffled sound I had heard previously, turned out to be the Bass pipes and I could now hear the notes they were playing.

The rest of the hour passed too quickly for my liking, but at least I was now thoroughly enjoying what I was listening to. The organ sounded like an organ and I have sat in many churches and cathedrals in the UK and on the continent and listened to live organ recitals, so I know how they should sound.

So much for FM broadcasts from the BBC. Now we have conclusive proof, that they are compressing their output, especially from outside broadcasts. If this is an indication of what we can expect from DAB, then it is no wonder that the Great British Public is giving a large two-fingered salute to DAB and the government's Digital Directive.

I don't want it; most of my friends don't want it and if talking to my local Curry's shop is anything to go by, neither does the rest of the general public, as the recent 'Scrappage Scheme' offered by the new government proved. They had only one person who wanted to trade in his old AM/FM radio and that was only because it was going to cost him more to repair it, than it was worth as a trade-in. 'Nuff said? 'Nuff said!

Keep up the good work and long may you prosper, but most of all, keep up the campaign against DAB. Lets have lots more of those editorials.

Russ Betts

Hmmm...The BBC were experimenting with a high quality 320kbps stream for the Proms this year, available via their website. I wonder whether this had anything to do with high quality from Freeview. **NK**

I think the best government scrappage scheme would be to toss DAB in a skip. Then hopefully some check-shirted, hard hatted contractor could run over it in a JCB for good measure! Happily, metaphorically speaking, that's what seems to be happening now. I'm not a complete fan of the new government's cuts package, but one place they seem to have aimed it is at DAB, and amen to that! **DP**

Radio



Radio 3 on Freeview was best for Bach, says Russ Betts.

should be able to convey the merits/demerits of a product. A fairly cogent example are our loudspeaker reviews, where extensive measurement is able to describe quite a lot of what is heard. This is more substantive than subjective only assessments.

Measurement isn't able to say what any individual may prefer however, nor can it predict how a loudspeaker will interact with a specific room, although we are slowly getting a feel for this rather complex topic.

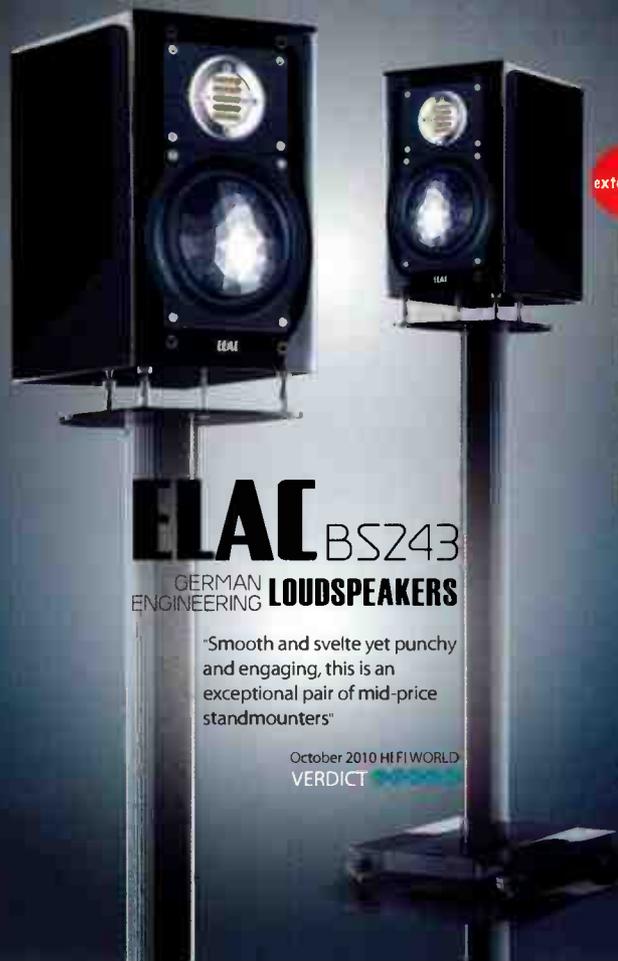
And then of course, perhaps most importantly, in this magazine we have what others think – as aired in these very pages! And that, as we all know here, is very popular and equally important. **NK**

smothering the music.

At 3pm, I switched off for the next two hours (World Routes and Jazz Library) and switched back on again in time for the David Briggs Organ Recital, on the Father Willis organ at the Royal Albert Hall.

Whilst listening to the Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor, BWV582, I noticed that the performance sounded somewhat flat and one-note. I could hear the tune, but it wasn't very musical and sounded somewhat muffled.

Being aware - from previous editorial in Hi-Fi World - that there were problems with outside broadcasts since the introduction of DAB radio and given my own observations regarding Radio broadcasts on Freeview, I decided to switch on my Humax PVR and dial



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Meet The Ancestors...

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In fact, the greatest damage to sound quality is done by vibration generated within the equipment itself; from the mains transformer, the power supply caps charging and discharging, every resistor or transistor that passes the signal. And although that vibration might be small, it's also right where the fragile audio signal is, right where it can do most damage. And to make matters worse, most of your equipment comes with soft rubber feet, meaning there's nowhere for that vibrational energy to go. It just carries on circulating round the unit's internals until it finally dissipates. That's why hard cones or couplers work under audio equipment; they offer an exit route for that energy, so that it can dissipate in the supporting surface.

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Hi-Fi World gives you the chance to win a fantastic mid-price integrated amplifier in the purposeful shape of XTZ's A100D3! Here's what Tony Bolton said about it in the September 2010 issue...

"The XTZ A100D3 is big. Not only does it weigh a lot, it is also very deep and filled the shelf of my equipment rack. Aesthetically, I found it pleasing, with a choice of finish of silver, black or the combination of the two. The front panel contained a large vacuum fluorescent display above a large centrally mounted volume control. Either side of this were two groups of three buttons, selecting (from left to right) Standby, CD, DVD Aux, Phono and Digital. Gold plated sockets for all of these inputs were at the back, with a choice of one Toslink

(Optical) and four coaxial digital connections to the onboard DAC, and a switch to choose between moving magnet or moving coil in the built in phono stage. The casework is made of solid aluminium, as is the substantial remote control. This contains duplicates of the front panel controls as well as display dimming, mute and selection of either Class A or AB operation. This is the bit that makes this amp really stand out from the crowd. In this mode the bias current through the two sets of four output transistors is increased, giving, it is claimed, a purer, clearer sound. Power is supplied through a large toroidal transformer which feeds separately shielded boards for power supply, output stages and the digital and analogue sections.

Using the XTZ's built-in DAC opened the sound right up. I was

aware of background details that normally are buried in the mix, as well as having a more realistic stereo placement, so purchasers with older CD players may well benefit from using the player as just a transport and doing the decoding of the digital signal in the XTZ. Moving over to the analogue CD input, and the soundstage seemed to flow out into the room, giving the impression that I was only a few feet away from a soloist standing in front of a band. Changing to vinyl as a source, and imaging was pin-point accurate with the performers well spaced and well described. Timing was good and quite vibrant with pop, dance and rock music. For a built in phono stage the results were very good. The XTZ offers superlative performance at the price; I do not know of anything at the price that even comes close. The A100D3 represents huge value for money. Try it, I think you will be very impressed."

If you'd like to win this superb bit of kit then all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard by 29th October 2010 to: **November Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF.**

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QUESTIONS

[1] Tony said the amp is...?
 [a] "big"
 [b] "rotund"
 [c] "large in girth terms"
 [d] "humungulous"

[2] What colour finishes are there?
 [a] silver and black
 [b] black and white
 [c] red and yellow
 [d] green and indigo

[3] The casework is made of what?
 [a] solid aluminium
 [b] pressed steel
 [c] pig iron
 [d] bauxite

[4] What type of operation is offered?
 [a] Class A or Class AB
 [b] Class A or Class D
 [c] Class AB or Class D
 [d] Class D only

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AUGUST 2010 WINNERS: TELLIURIUM Q CABLES
 Chris Edmund of Somerset - **ULTRA BLACK**
 Steve Galbraith of Edinburgh - **GREEN**
 Susan Davies of Birmingham - **BLACK**
 Alexandra Lobban of Cornwall - **BLUE**

Standing Ovation

Noel Keywood welcomes the arrival of Monitor Audio's new BX5 loudspeaker...

Here's a proposition that's difficult to ignore: a big sound from a small floorstander, and a good one quality wise, for £450 or so. It isn't unique as an idea, nor new; I have been recommending KEF's very similar iQ5 for some years now in our Letters pages because a loudspeaker like this ticks a lot of boxes for a lot of people it seems to me. For much less than a king's ransom you get a full on hi-fi loudspeaker that doesn't do anything seriously wrong, but does you give you a strong taste – let's say 60% of the full flavour – of a bigger, more sophisticated design. And it is very domestically friendly. KEF's iQ5 fits in anywhere and so does Monitor Audio's BX5. This proposition has got to be good, hasn't it?

But just don't cough. Because if you do it might fall over! Slim cabinets have a small footprint and are not the most stable of objects. Weighing just 12kgs, or 26lbs, the BX5 isn't going to do a lot of damage if it falls, but if boisterous small children are around then it may be under threat. Working against this likelihood is the fact that slim floorstanders are generally seen as size/ quality compromise, limited bass from a small cabinet getting a useful boost by near-wall placement. Placement close to a wall gets them out of harm's way, and of course frees up valuable floor space. To improve stability the BX5s come with a screw on plinth, fitted with height adjustable, chromed spikes.

The narrow 166mm wide cabinet houses one 140mm (5.5in) bass driver, one similarly sized bass/

midrange driver and a 25mm (1in) gold plated aluminium dome tweeter, fitted with protective grille. Both 140mm units use Monitor Audio's C-CAM cone material where an aluminium / magnesium alloy is heated treated then ceramic coated to improve stiffness. Monitor Audio say "C-CAM cones have a much higher resistance to bending stress and therefore exhibit much greater fidelity over their entire operating range". The tweeter also uses a C-CAM formed into a dome and gold plated. The three units look smart and modern.

There are two bass loading chambers. The lower bass unit is front ported and the upper bass/midrange unit is rear ported. Foam bungs are supplied, but you get just two and they are meant for the front ports. Their effect is quite obvious and a little interesting, more of which later. Monitor Audio fit bi-wire terminals as always, with links to allow mono wiring. They accept 4mm plugs, spade terminals and bare wires. Monitor Audio quote a 30W-120W power requirement and a high 90dB sensitivity and we measured 89dB – very close. That means a 40W amplifier will do, unless you want to go deaf fast.

The BX5s aren't as swanky in finish as the Platinums, but Monitor Audio always do a nice job and they pass muster. Ours had a nice Rosemah artificial wood veneer with a warm red hue that contrasted well with the light aluminium finish of the cones. Black cloth grilles are supplied for those who would rather not see the drive units.

What surprised me about





the BX5s was the design ethos behind them. Budget loudspeakers are commonly taken less seriously than more expensive models and can move quite a long way from accuracy, for effect. Our measurements showed the BX5s have been quite carefully designed not to do this; they were almost academically correct under measurement. In practice this results in a loudspeaker that's less overtly dramatic, but an easier and convincing long term listen. Booming bass and zinging treble catch a listener's attention in the showroom, but it is the home experience that matters and in excess can get tiring. Worse, once the brain latches onto a defect it can start to become annoying, then the game's over. It's best if loudspeakers are not heard;

combination. Neither were as suitable as our Icon Audio MB845 valve amplifiers that gently civilised the BX5's slightly edgy demeanour, but I'm not sure £450 loudspeakers are going to be used with valve amplifiers, especially expensive ones...

Imaging is in the plane of the loudspeakers but the aura of the sound stage was large and stage depth convincing. Eleanor McEvoy sat firmly centre stage singing 'I'd Rather Go Blonde' a little above the height of the cabinet tops. I suspect this effect is linked to high frequency dispersion and dome tweeters do a strong job here, unlike ribbons for example that throw little treble upward to the ceiling. The complex instrumentation seemed a little unclear in this piece and across all the CDs I span, the BX5s weren't as

"if you crave big, tight bass from a small loudspeaker that won't leave you penniless, these are the ones..."

they should melt away and let the music through. It's an important point, if one many listeners don't naturally understand, expecting sonic fireworks and being disappointed if they don't materialise.

SOUND QUALITY

The BX5s needed a lot of running in, like all Monitor Audios, and they got many nights of MA's own De-Tox disc. This softened a hard quality, leaving them sounding fast, sharply outlined with rim shots and the like, and very pacey. All Monitor Audios have an obvious high frequency content and in spite of the BX5's measured response they were quite forceful with cymbals and fine treble detail; I was left in no doubt about all this whatever I played. There was a small element of spitch to treble with albums having plenty of high frequency content, like Toni Braxton's 'The Heat' and a little nasality to her voice, but the basic balance was good as expected. The BX5s manage to sound detailed, fast and concise without being overtly imbalanced, so you sort of get both with this loudspeaker.

Amplifier choice isn't too easy; expecting them to be used with transistor amplifiers I used both our Leema Pulse and a Musical Fidelity AMS50. The Leema is a little bright, if a lot of fun, whilst the Musical Fidelity AMS50 was a little dry for the BX5's metal cones – not a symbiotic

adept in the way they kept stands apart as some, but then they are budget loudspeakers and not perfect at this price.

It was at low frequencies that the BX5s were especially strong and this will endear them to Rock enthusiasts especially. Bass went deep, it was well controlled and about as fast as you could ever expect, this side of a big Tannoy (bigger than the DC10 in this issue). Spinning Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance' had our room fairly shaking as the low frequency synths drove the song along, with little loss of power against much larger loudspeakers. Our AMS50 had fun here, and so did the little BX5s. This is where they picked up their small plinths and ran! Excellent bass control, nicely judged level and excellent damping came together to give a great result and if you crave big, tight bass from a small loudspeaker that won't leave you penniless, these are the ones. Whilst bass was tighter and cleaner with bungs in place I admit that I succumbed to the extra weight of bungs out, at least in our large listening room. You do get to hear a bit of box colour but it is slight and with Lady Gaga this hardly seemed an important issue. The metronomic bass beat pounded out of the small cabinets with an enthusiasm that had Monster charging through our room like an angry rhino.

Great fun then and balanced too, making the BX5 a fun rocker.

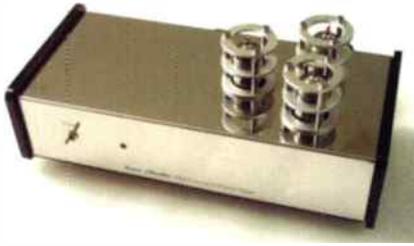
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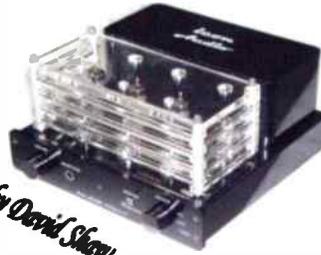
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The 6SN7 valve makes heavenly music! Will match L M or High imp headphones. Very very quiet. Built the same way as a small SE amplifier with 3 transformers wired point to point ECC83 and two fabulous 6NS7 output valves. That's why it weighs 5KG! 14cm w, 25d, 16h.

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But what of classical? With the Emersons playing Grieg's 'String Quartet in G Minor, Opus 27', violins were strongly lit and not especially smooth or well separated, but MA's metal cones never sound quite so convincing with this type of material. However, whilst not electrostatics and with a tad of boxiness with bungs out (time to jump up and stuff them in!) they still didn't sound shrill and tonally contorted as loudspeakers with peaky treble do and this is where the BX5's basic balance kept them well in court, in terms of fidelity.

The situation improved when reproducing the Royal Scottish National Orchestra playing Mars, from The Planets. Here the BX5s managed to capture orchestral scale and power nicely, especially in the rumblings of the kettle drum. Horns blared out strongly and strings were vigorous if a tad fierce, but the BX5s held it all together well enough, barring some muddle on crescendos.

Run from a Rega Elicit amplifier fed from a P3-24 turntable toting an Ortofon 2M Black the small BX5s were in their element, sounding fast and surgically clean, making LP seem like a more atmospheric version of CD. I would not recommend the cheaper 2Ms though as they are overly bright; best to stay with the ever safe Goldring



1000 series designs. With a nicely cut album like the first from the Scissor Sisters, bass was firm and very musical, individual notes perfectly captured and well expressed. Bass guitar rolled down the scale with an even step all the way down in 'Comfortably Numb'. Vocals in 'Mary', were clear enough, although the processing used to give them an electronic flavour was hardened up a

bit to make the delivery and little strident. Stage imaging was superb however. Even with a laid back but clean cut like Mark Knopfler's 'True Love Will Never Fade' the character of the BX5s was very apparent, clear, insightful with simpler cuts and with great bass lines.

CONCLUSION

The BX5 is a fun budget floorstander. Graced with a big sound yet a strong sense of balance and control it works well as a high fidelity all rounder. Some of its sharp etched clarity was a bit artificial and could become intrusive with strings, but then a softer sound would have less apparent incision and speed. So with a wide range of ability, from its stereo imaging through to a great sense of scale and control with big performances it will appeal to all those who like their music strong and fast.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Technically this is an interesting and slightly surprising design. Inexpensive loudspeakers are usually voiced to shout in the showroom but this one has a remarkably flat frequency response our analysis shows, and will sound balanced by way of contrast. It's a good omen for easy long term listening, avoiding loudspeaker effects that intrude and become annoying.

Not only does treble measure flat and look even, but the upper midrange has no dip – in fact there's slight lift – and this will push detail forward a little, adding a little to vocal presence. Although the BX5 has no lower midrange lift to add warmth, it does have healthy bass output just a few dB up on forward response, down to 55Hz. Our green response trace shows this less clearly than a third-octave pink noise analysis also made.

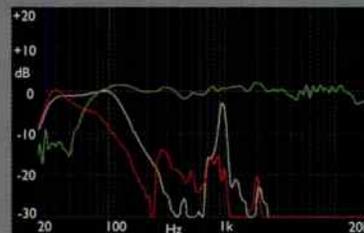
The rear port applies very broad damping to the bass unit, the white trace in our frequency response analysis shows, whilst the front port (red trace) adds a little low bass around 30Hz. Neither port was very 'loud' but that is to be expected when broad tuned. Their net effect upon the BX5's impedance was most impressive though, suggesting they apply almost perfect acoustic damping, in other words these are ports done properly. Better still, putting the supplied foam bung in the front port improved performance even more, eliminating the lower peak altogether. This makes the loudspeaker a near perfect amplifier load for transistor amplifiers, and valve amplifiers with a four ohm tap. The BX5 is likely to play bass tunes well; it does not mean it will have 'bouncy' bass

though. Bass distortion was low too, 2% around 40Hz from the bass driver and 7% from the port, whilst across the midband it was a normal 0.2%.

Sensitivity was high at 89dB, aided by a low measured overall impedance of 5 Ohms that draws amplifier current. It means the BX5 will go loud at low-ish volume settings, even with amplifiers of modest quoted power; a 40 Watt amplifier will do and this includes a 40 Watt valve amplifier.

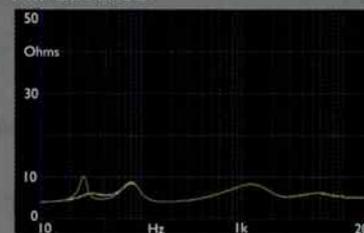
The BX5 is a surprising place to find such well honed engineering and academic accuracy, plus super high sensitivity and perfect amplifier matching. Quite a performance. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE



VERDICT ●●●● £

A dynamic and basically accurate budget floorstander with great bass. Fast and fun, if a little less than couch at times.

MONITOR AUDIO BX5 £450
Monitor Audio
☎ +44 (0)1268 740580
www.monitoraudio.co.uk

- FOR**
- great bass quality
 - natural tonal balance
 - amplifier friendly

- AGAINST**
- edgy with violin
 - a little nasal with vocals

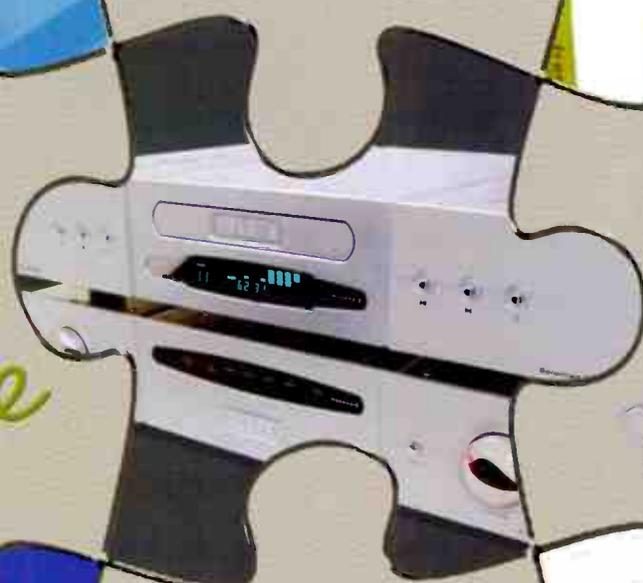


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van der Hul



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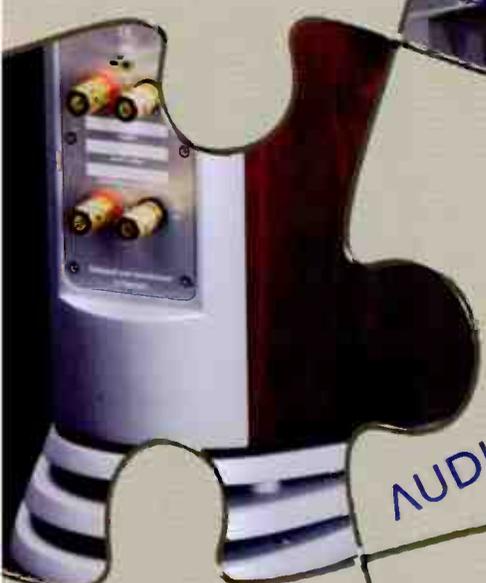


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A perfect fit



NORDOST MAGUS MAINS £129.99/1M

Given that serious hi-fi manufacturers make great efforts to provide their

electronics with the cleanest possible power, by the use of variously toroidal or R-core transformers, choke regulation and vast amounts of expensive smoothing capacitors, it logically follows that mains power makes a real difference to a hi-fi component's sound. With this in mind, using a standard IEC 'kettle' lead is a case of spoiling the ship for a ha'ppeth of tar, and if you possibly can, you should use a high quality mains power cable. At £129 per one metre (then £15 per additional half metres), the Magus features oxygen-free conductors, three in total within each cable, that are suspended within inert air. This monofilament technology is said to make for reduced contact with the surrounding insulation, which is slightly microphonic; the result should be better sound, and so it proved...

I tested a suite of Nordost Magus power leads that connected my meaty 845-powered Icon Audio

monoblocks, Aesthetix Calypso preamp and Icon Audio PS3 phono amp. They terminated in Quad ESL-57 loudspeakers with One Thing upgrades and various CD/vinyl sources along with multiple music genres. Compared to factory-supplied cables the Nordost Magus cables appeared to remove several layers of jumpers and scarves wrapped tightly around the artists' mouths, and a couple of duffle coats too. In short, they provided more life and urgency in the performance, effectively lifting a heavy veil from the music and letting it burst with energy, pizzazz and general zip when compared to the previous, drowsy, delivery. This upgrade power lead let my system portray drum strikes with crisp timing, while guitars played with gusto. Vocals were also delivered in a more natural manner while revealing subtle vibrato effects. Overall then, an excellent and affordable product that's very highly recommended.

PR

[Contact: +44(0) 1455 283251,
www.atacama-audio.co.uk]

soundbites

QED UPLAY £65

Here's a neat little gizmo that lets you wirelessly stream music from your iPod to your hi-fi system, inexpensively and with almost no setting up. The uPlay is essentially a small unit that is mains powered from a separate 'wall wart' power supply, that plugs directly into your amp's 'aux in' socket. It will then sync with Bluetooth enabled computers and notebooks, PDAs and Netbooks (including the Apple iPad); if you buy an additional iPod Bluetooth dongle (available separately for about £50), it will receive streamed music from this too. It uses the new apt-X Bluetooth protocol, which is an evolution of the cooking variety used to sync handsfree devices to mobile phones; the resulting Bluetooth HD-Audio stream is claimed to have extremely low latency and a strong resilience to errors, plus excellent sound, whether it is stored uncompressed or in an alternative compression (MP3, AAC, FLAC) format. Effectively, apt-X is a non-A2DP Codec within Bluetooth

A2DP running at 352kbps, retaining CD's 16bit, 44.1kHz specification.

An Apple iPod Classic equipped with a suitable dongle quickly paired up to the uPlay and suddenly music was coming out of my hi-fi system. Playing Apple Lossless (ALAC) files, I was very impressed by the ensuing sound. Whilst not the equal of a decent hi-fi CD player, the digital datastream via the iPod sounded smooth, open and warm, with a good degree of detail and delicacy; in other words quite an alien experience for those who normally experience the iPod via its stock analogue outputs. The sheer convenience of it all is a revelation; you can just sit on your sofa and scroll through your music with ease. Overall, this is a great



little gadget, and if and when iPods come with Bluetooth as standard it will be all the more compelling. **DP**

[Contact: +44 (0)1279 501111,
www.qed.co.uk]

WORLD STANDARDS

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

TURNTABLES

PRO-JECT GENIE 2 2008 £175

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

REGA P2 2008 £220

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

TECHNICS SL1200/II 1973 £395

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

REGA P3-24 2008 £400

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

MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £579

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



ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2010 £1,399

Effective, if expensive, update on the original formula. Highly musical, yet detailed and dimensional mid price turntable with a naturally open and easy sound.

FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860

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



MARANTZ TT-15S1 2005 £999

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

MICHELL GYRODEC SE2005 £1,005

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

ACOUSTIC SOLID CLASSIC WOOD

2008 £1,350

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

REVOLVER REPLAY 2007 £1,500

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

AVID DIVA II SP 2010 £2,000

New twin belt drive and power supply make this an even more commanding performer, although there's a substantial price hike. Its speed, dynamics and detail are hard to beat anywhere near the price.

MICHELL ORBE 1995 £2,500

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



LINN LP12SE 1973 £3,510

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

SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

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

ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,000

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

BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £4,495

Quartz locked Direct Drive makes for martortape-like speed stability, plus wonderful clarity and pace. Upgradeability and excellent build complete a formidable package.

AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

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

McINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

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

EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500

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

TONEARMS

REGA RB251 2009 £136

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

MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £442

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



ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

Expertly fettled Rega is still the 'affordable audiophile' choice, with an even, transparent and tuneful sound.

SME 309 1989 £767

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

SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127

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

AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 2007 £1,300

The classic Syrinx PU3 updated to spectacular effect. Hand made to order, with any mass, length and colour you care for. Fit, finish and sound truly impressive.

NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425

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

HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595

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

SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614

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

LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700

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

SME 312S 2010 £1,750

Twelve inch magnesium alloy armtube plus SMEV bearings makes an impressive transcription tool with a highly insightful yet composed sound. Superlative build completes the package.

GRAHAM PHANTOM 2006 £2,495

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

TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600

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

OL ENTERPRISE 3C 2010 £4,500

Few if any pivoted arms come close to this arm's combination of liquid musicality and forensic grip.

CARTRIDGES**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-95E****1984 £25**

Great starter cartridge that's detailed and musical beyond its price. Superglue the stylus in for better sound.

ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE**2007 £60/£120**

Modern, high resolution budget moving magnets that are always an engaging listen.

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

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

DENON DL103R 2006 £200

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

DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £250

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

ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350

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

DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395

Deliciously sweet sound with fantastic get-up-and-go makes this a great value budget MC. High output version works a treat with valve phono stages too.

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-OC9MLIII****2010 £399**

New stylus and cantilever breathe life into this feisty, punchy and detailed performer.

LYRA DORIAN 2007 £595

Incisive and musical, this baby Lyra is one of the most powerful and revealing MCs at its price point. Beware the sharp treble, though!

ORTOFON RONDO**BRONZE 2005 £500**

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

ZYX R-100H 2005 £625

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

BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650

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

TRANSFIGURATION AXIA**2007 £890**

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

ORTOFON CADENZA BLUE**2009 £1,000**

Musical, out of the box sound, allied to real finesse, makes this a great do-it-all high end moving coil.

ORTOFON MC WINDFELD 2008 £1,799

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

KOETSU RED K SIGNATURE**2007 £2,399**

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

DIGITAL SOURCES**MUSICAL FIDELITY V-DAC £170**

Clear, concise, low distortion sound belies giveaway price. Superlative value for money.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO**DACMAGIC****£229**

An innovative and flexible new DAC, this is a svelte, rhythmic and impressive performer.

**STELLO DA100****SIGNATURE £675**

Superbly finessed sounding DAC at the price, with strong driving bass and plenty of air and space.

**CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C 2006 £800**

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

NAIM CDS1 2008 £895

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

ROKSAN KANDY**K2 CD 2010 £900**

A charmingly musical performer at the price, this is a surprisingly sophisticated CD player for the money.

BENCHMARK DAC-IS 2009 £930

Power, precision and poise - allied to real seat-of-the-pants musicality, this DAC justifies its premium price.

CYRUS CDB SE 2008 £1,200

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

SIMAUDIO MOON 300D**2010 £1,290**

Lovely fluid sounding DAC with a deep, dark, velvety tonality.

**NAIM DAC £1,995**

Painstaking design has yielded a brilliant 'affordable high end' performer that throws bright sunlight on the recording, yet remains unremittingly smooth and musically engaging.

CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000

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

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

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

**ACCUSTIC ARTS CDP1MK2****2007 £3,985**

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

ESOTERIC X-05 2010 £4,495

Superlative 'affordable high end' CD/SACD spinner with excellent build, massive detail and great poise.

NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4,950

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 £7,050

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

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

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

DCS PAGANINI DAC 2007 £9,599

Digital rarely sounds better; dCS's bespoke Ring DAC makes for power, punch and insight on an epic scale. Add clock and upsampler for an even more profound experience. Justifiably expensive.

**LINN KLIMAX DS** 2007 £9,600

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

NAIM CD555/555PS 2006 £14,000

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

**RECORDERS****NAIM HDX** 2009 £4,405

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

SONY TC-WE475 2010 £130

Essential tackle for committed cassette users, this well calibrated double deck sounds way better than expected!

SONY RCD-W3 2002 £250

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

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

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

GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V

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

ICON AUDIO PS1.2 2007 £599

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

**ASTIN TREW AT8000** £880

Expansive, detailed, powerful and musical sound makes this a surprise entrant to the first class sub-£1,000 phono stage club.

ANATEK MCI 2007 £850

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

QUAD QC24P 2007 £995

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

TRICHORD DIABLO + NCPSU 2006 £1,198

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

ICON AUDIO PS3 2008 £1,500

Super sounding valve phono preamplifier, with an expansive, engaging and organic nature that makes vinyl sheer joy!

EMILLE ALLURE 2010 £2,495

Just as the name suggests, this is a lovely way to play LP with an exceptionally open and lucid sound.

**A.N.T. AUDIO KORA 3T LTD**

2010 £995

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

AMPLIFIERS**SUGDEN MYSTRO** 2010 £1,225

Sugden's first Class AB integrated in a long time surprises; rollickingly good fun to listen to, it loses surprisingly little in smoothness to its Class AB siblings.

**ICON AUDIO STEREO 25** 2008 £500

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

ROTEL RA-06 2008 £550

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

NAIM NAIT 5i 2007 £725

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

CAMBRIDGE 840A V2 2007 £750

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

JUNGSON JA-88D 2006 £899

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

**AUDIOLAB 8000S** 2006 £400

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

SUGDEN A21A S2 2007 £1,299

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

NAIM NAIT XS 2009 £1,250

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

ELECTROCOMPANET PI-2 2008 £1,430

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

SUGDEN A21A S2 2008 £1,469

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

ANATEK A50R 2007 £1,600

Simple integrated amplifier with super bass grip and effortless dynamics.

VINCENT SA-236MK 2010 £1,749

Big, powerful and expansive sounding hybrid transistor amplifier, with bright, spry and musical nature.

MOON I-3RS 2008 £1,890

Grippy and clean performer with fine soundstaging and build quality.

COPLAND CSA29 2006 £1,998

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

NAIM SUPERNAIT 2007 £2,475

Integrated *tour de force* from Naim that combines impressive functionality and connectivity with super sound.

LUXMAN L-550A 2007 £2,800

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

AUDIO RESEARCH VSI60

2009 £3,298

Load of tube power allied to a strong bass and smooth open midband makes this a grin-inducing listen.

LEEMA TUCANA II 2010 £3,495

Polished high end integrated amp that combines power, detail and genuine musicality with a good range of facilities.

**SUGDEN IA4** 2007 £3,650

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

QUAD II CLASSIC 2010 £4,500

Beautiful retro styled integrated amplifier with a subtle, supple sound - although needs matching to speakers that are easy loads.

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS351

2010 £6,000

Gorgeous, liquid sounding solid-state full Class A integrated with a supernaturally sumptuous bass; surely one of the very best integrations ever made!

AV AMPLIFIERS**ARCAM AVR350** 2006 £1,500

Superbly accomplished do-it-all AV receiver package, with an uncommonly, warm, natural and musical sound. A winner goes from strength to strength.

HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS**CHANNEL ISLANDS VHP-1/ VAC-1** £390

A truly exceptional headphone output stage; the best at the price and an essential audition.

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CAN V8 2008 £350

Open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop and the ability to drive anything to very high levels makes this a great partner for most mid-to-high end headphones.

SUGDEN HEADMASTER 2003 £600

Unusual combined preamplifier and headphone amplifier, this boasts a surprisingly smooth and open sound.

PREAMPLIFIERS**CREEK OBH-12** 2000 £220

Brilliant value budget passive, giving little away in sonics to far more expensive designs. Connectivity and build aren't great, but what do you expect at this price?

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003** £1,500

Effective pre with switchable gain via a transformer, and balanced operation. Open and incisive sound, yet makes most active rivals sound edgy by comparison. Silver version at the twice the price adds transparency.

**MODWRIGHT SWL9.0SE** £2,000

Captivating sound quality that will transform your system. Build quality is equally impressive and value top-notch. Highly recommended

NUFORCE P-9 2007 £2,200

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

**DPA CA-1** 2010 £2,650

Excellent solid-state preamp with a meticulously detailed and propulsive sound, but a deep velvety tonality.

MELODY PURE BLACK 101D 2007 £3,295

One of the best preamplifiers we have ever heard. Takes the clarity and openness we expect from valves and adds a staggering level of grip and detail.

MODWRIGHT 36.5 PRE/PSU 2010 £5,995

Exceptionally open and expansive, yet musically expressive sounding high end preamplifier.

MUSICAL FIDELITY PRIMO 2009 £7,900

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

POWER AMPLIFIERS**ROKSAN KANDY LIII** 2008 £600

Fine budget power amp that punches well above its weight.

QUAD 909 2001 £900

The latest current-dumper has a smooth and expansive character with enough wallop to drive most loads. Not the most musical, but super value all the same. Lovely build, finish and Quad's legendary service are nice.

NAIM NAPI50 2002 £795

Driven by a decent source and a NAC112, this gives highly enjoyable results - providing you like the Naim sound! Taut, fast and feisty despite its relative lack of power.

SUGDEN MUSIC MASTER 2003 £1,300

Quintessential Class A Sugden sound is not warm as many expect, but extremely neutral and open with real tonal colour. Superb when partnered with efficient loudspeakers like Revolver R45s, but many will find it underpowered.

**NUFORCE REFERENCE 9SE V2** 2006 £1,750

Brilliant value for money monoblocks with massive power and super-clean, three dimensional sound.

**ROTEL RB1092** 2007 £1,595

Hugely powerful digital amp with neutral midrange and a wonderfully spacious treble

CHANNEL ISLANDS AUDIO D100 2005 £1,595

Clean and musical Class D monoblock power amplifiers in a neat, small package.

ICON AUDIO MB845 2009 £2,499

Creamy and seductive yet blisteringly fast and musically lucid, this pair of 845 tube monoblocks is staggering value for money.

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...

ELECTROCOMPANIET NEMO 2009 £4,450 (EACH)

The Norwegian power station is as cool as a glacier tonally, yet impresses with its sheer physicality and fleetness of foot. 600W per channel makes for a massive bang per buck.

**DPA SA-1** 2010 £2,850

Pacey, engaging and rhythmic almost to a fault, this solid-state power amplifier isn't the world's most powerful but is none the worse for it.

SILK GLOWMASTER KT88 2007 £1,699

KT88 based power amplifier offers dramatic clarity and excellent bass heft.

**QUAD II-40** 2005 £3,230

Modern tube monoblock power amplifiers with plenty of power, liquid and open mid-band and spacious, airy treble. Explicit, engaging sound, but not as euphonic as some.

QUAD II-80 2005 £6,000

Quad's best ever power amplifier, this is a dramatic performer with a silky but dark tonality, blistering dynamics, serious power and a compellingly musical sound. They don't come much better than these...

MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS50 2010 £7,000

Wonderfully assured high end full Class A integrated proffering icy clarity allied to real musicality. Lacks the lucidity of the best tube amps but redeems with power and punch.

LOUDSPEAKERS**Q ACOUSTICS 2020** 2010 £140

Great little standmounters with a friendly, fun yet surprisingly refined gait. Excellent value starter speakers.

ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I 2007 £199

Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

B&W 686 2007 £279

B&W's new baby standmounters offer a sophisticated and mature performance that belies both their dimensions and price tag.

KEF IQ30 2009 £330

Beautifully built, classily styled standmounters with exceptional image projection and a very clean, detailed sound.



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

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3 2010 £299
Great small standmounters for audiophiles on a budget; dry punchy sound with impressive soundstaging at the price.

XTZ 99.25 2010 £640
Disarmingly open and refined at the price, these standmounters bring unexpected civility, refinement and insight to the price point. Exceptional value for money.



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

SPENDOR S3/5E 2004 £950
A natural successor to the BBC LS3/5a, whose impressive neutrality, imaging and evenhandedness makes this a superior, if less charismatic, loudspeaker.

RRR FS100 2007 £1,055
Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.

MAD MY CLAPTON GRAND MM 2010 £3,400
Distinctive coaxial standmounters with wonderful soundstaging, bright lucid midband excellent musical insight.



REVOLVER RW451 2006 £1,199
Very musical floorstander that's clear, concise and truthful, whilst being exceptionally amplifier friendly - a dreamboat for valves.

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

KIBRI NAIMA 2007 £1,550
Unusual-looking omnidirectional loudspeakers with an absolutely captivating performance. Huge soundstage and bags of clarity - brilliant!

GURU QM-10P 2007 £1,595
Quirky but adorable standmounters that are way off the pace in respect of detail and power, but amazingly capable at playing a tune and pulling you in to the music.

USHER BE-718 2007 £1,600
Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is subtle, smooth and emotive.

MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE 2008 £1,599
Brilliant entry level electrostatics, giving a taste of loudspeaker esoterica for the price of most moving coil boxes. Tremendous clarity, evenness and delicacy, although not the world's most powerful sound.

MONITOR AUDIO GS60 2008 £2,000
Still a great rock loudspeaker after all these years, with a vivid, lithe and engaging sound.

SPENDOR S8E £1,895
Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent all rounder.



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

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



MONITOR AUDIO PL100 2008 £2,300
The MA boys pull out all the stops for their flagship 'Platinum' series standmounter with stunning results.

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

EMMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT8B 2010 £3,000
Brilliant ribbon/moving coil hybrid with seamless, delicate and expansive yet tremendously musical nature.

MOWGAN AUDIO MABON 2007 £3,995
Massively capable loudspeakers that offer dynamics, scale and clarity in an elegantly simple package. Wide range of finishes, too.

B&O BEOLAB 9 2007 £5000
Technically impressive and visually striking loudspeakers with sound quality that more than matches their looks.

ARS AURES MI 2006 £5,995
Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful, assured and even-handed musical performance makes these an essential high end audition.

QUAD ESL-2905 2006 £5,995
The old 989 with all the bugs taken out, this gives a brilliantly neutral and open sound like only a top electrostatic can; still not a natural rock loudspeaker, though.

SPENDOR ST 2010 £5,995
This classy sounding, superbly presented big floorstander will appeal to those seeking high end sonics with subtle looks.

REVOLVER CYGNIS 2006 £5,999
Revolver pull out all the stops and show what they can do with this magnificent flagship loudspeaker. A superb monitor that is like a mini B&W 801D in many ways.

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

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



ISOPHON CASSIANO 2007 £12,900
Drive units featuring exotic materials allied to superlative build quality result in an immensely capable loudspeaker. Not an easy load to drive, however.

REVOLVER CYGNIS GOLD 2010 £14,995
Big banger with enormous scale and vast power, although requires the right room and doesn't cohere as well as a panel.

ACCESSORIES
MONITOR AUDIO IDECK 2006 £200
Fine design, impressive flexibility and a lucidly musical sound make the iDeck the current iPod dock champion.

ISOTEK AQUARIUS 2010 £795
Highly accomplished premium priced mains conditioner that delivers the sonic goods, unlike so many others.

TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM 2003 £800
Classy ribbon supertweeter with flexible level settings and cool styling - you'll be amazed at the difference it makes, especially with Quad electrostatics.

HEADPHONES
SENNHEISER MX-550 2005 £19
Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29

Cracking pair of lightweight open back cans ideal for personals, but good enough for real hi-fi use. Superb build allied to a smooth and engaging performance make them the spiritual successor to the HD400s.



GOLDRING DR150 2006 £70
Excellent build and fine sound makes these budget cans superlative value for money.

SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199

The company's best real-world cans to date. Open and smooth with plenty of detail. Brightly lit midband makes them an ideal partner for a valve headphone amp.

SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250

A super all round reference design with crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and comfort. Cable upgrade yields great results.

SENNHEISER HD800 2010 £1,000

The ultimate expression of the Sennheiser philosophy offers massive speed, clarity and insight, although lacks some of the charm of the softer, more beguiling rival Staxes.

**STAX SR-007T OMEGA II/SRM-007T 2006 £2,890**

Simply the best headphones we've ever heard at any price, these sweetly translucent electrostatic ear-speakers are like no other headphone, or loudspeaker for that matter...

INTERCONNECTS**TECHLINK WIRES XS 2007 £20**

Highly accomplished interconnects at an absurdly low price. Stunning value for money.

WIREWORLD OASIS 5 2003 £99/M

Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

CHORD COMPANY CHAMELEON 2 £90/M

One of our favourites, these are musical performers with a smooth yet open sound.

**DNM RESON 2002 £40/M**

Neutral and transparent - a steal!

VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST 2004 £260/0.6M

Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.

**TCI CONSTRICTOR 13A-6 BLOCK 2003 £120**

Top quality 'affordable' mains outlet block, with fine build and good sonics. Well worth the extra over standard high street specials, which sound coarse and two-dimensional by comparison.

MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE 2008 £375

Currently our favourite 'affordable high end' interconnects, with a deliciously smooth, open and subtle sound without a hint of edge or grain. Superb value, inasuch as it's as good as some designs at three times the price.

TUNERS**DENON TU-1500AE 2006 £120**

Excellent entry level analogue tuner; slick sonics and fine feature count makes it a bargain.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T 2005 £250**

Sweet sounding digital/analogue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.

ARCAM FMJ T32 2009 £550

Excellent hybrid FM/DAB+ tuner with a smooth, engaging sound. Factor in its fine build and it's a super value package.

CREEK CLASSIC TUNER 2006 £550

No tuner offers better sound per pound; wonderfully three dimensional and smooth from bottom to top.

MYRYAD MXT-2000 2005 £800

Truly sumptuous sound and excellent build is all most will ever need in a tuner; superb.

MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-100T 2006 £1,895

One of the best ways to hear FM that we know; superbly open and musical sound in a quirky but characterful package.

**SYSTEMS****YAMAHA CRX-M170 2007 £200**

One heck of a lot of quality performance on DAB, CD and FM for £200! Optional matching £120 NX-E300 loudspeakers aren't too shabby either.

TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £329

Nicely built and styled mini with fine performance on all sources that even plays DVDs!

NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429

Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system that shows just what a compact design can achieve.

ARCAM SOLO MINI 2008 £650

Half the size and two-thirds the price of a full-sized Solo, the Mini gives very little away in terms of performance to its bigger brother.

ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249

Excellent all-in-one system, with a warm, smooth and balanced sound to match the features and style.

LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250

Neat update of the original and best one-box stereo system; superbly musical sound beats equivalently priced separates.

MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500

Fantastically built and versatile DVD/CD/DAB/FM/AM unit, designed in conjunction with Ferrari. Ignore nay-sayers who sneer that it isn't a 'proper' hi-fi product; most see sense when they listen to it...

**AURA NOTE MUSIC CENTRE 2007 £1,500**

Lovely shiny CD/tuner/amplifier with fine sound quality and dynamic abilities.

SHANLING MC-30 2007 £650

Quite possibly the cutest all-in-one around with fine performance from the CD player, tuner and MP3 player input. Very low power, though.

**NAIM UNITI 2009 £1,995**

Uniquely versatile one box music system with excellent ergonomics and sonics to match. A landmark product for Naim.

LINN CLASSIK MOVIE 2007 £2,250

Superbly built all-in-one that offers excellent sound across all formats and is surprisingly easy to use.

MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1 2010 £6,990

Thanks to its crisp styling and bright, colourful touchscreen, plus excellent search facilities this is one hard disk music system with a difference. Best partnered to Meridian active loudspeakers.

MARANTZ 'LEGEND' 2007 £22,000

The combination of SA-7S1 disc player, SC-7S2 preamp and MA-9S2 monoblocks delivers a truly jaw-dropping performance. Start saving now...





Dyna Spectre

There's life in the old Frequency Modulation yet, finds David Price as he reviews Magnum Dynalab's tube equipped MD-90T tuner...

For the past couple of years, I've had numerous conversations with people lamenting the death of FM. Errrm, excuse me, when exactly did it die? As I write this I am actually listening to Radio 4's *PM* programme on 92.9MHz in the FM band, and I can assure you this wouldn't be very easy had Frequency Modulation already been switched off...

"Ah, but it's going to be switched off soon", you retort. Well, sorry but I don't think it is, actually. It's absolutely true to say that the government is switching off analogue TV at the moment, and that the last government had signalled its intention in the Digital Britain final report in June 2009 to switch off analogue by 2015, but subsequent to that things have changed...

Earlier this year, the general election brought a completely new

team in at the top, and one of the first things the new coalition government's Communications minister Ed Vaizey said was, "we will not switchover until the vast majority of listeners have voluntarily adopted digital radio... We will not switch over to digital until digital coverage matches FM". He then went on to add that, "We won't switch off FM and FM will always be available. FM will always be available for local radio".

So if he's to be believed, the worst case scenario for VHF fans is that the BBC Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4 will not remain on FM, whereas BBC local and commercial radio will. And this will *only* happen if DAB gets into the majority of households, which is a very big 'if'. Considering the glacial pace of DAB's take up to date, and the fact that so few cars have DAB (not least because it doesn't work very well in crowded urban

environments, as anyone who's tried to use a DAB portable will have discovered), and factor in the vast (near £1 billion) cost of providing 'full' coverage of DAB around this island, then I think it's going to be a very long time - if ever - that things will move to render the FM tuner redundant in the UK.

Had I been writing this review some fourteen months ago, in the immediate aftermath of Digital Britain, the elephant in Magnum Dynalab's room would have been the year 2015. After all, why invest nearly £1,400 on something that's got a precise product life of exactly (then) six years? Happily though, perhaps we'll now see a renaissance of beautiful, high end analogue tuners such as this, now that a (likely) permanent stay of execution has been granted. Indeed, in all seriousness, I think there are more question marks over the lifespan of



DAB than of FM; when the take up of broadband has outstripped that of DAB, why not just buy an internet radio or listen on your computer? That certainly seems to be the conclusion most people are drawing...

And so it is that I see myself admiring the Magnum Dynalab MD-90T, looking at its delicious fascia styling, peppered with analogue meters and LED digits, switches, knob and - here's the cream on the top - the inscription 'analog FM tuner'. If ever there's a product that grandstands the glory of its medium, this is surely it. The MD-90T instantly reminded me of my childhood gazing at high end FM tuners in magazines, in awe of their purposefulness. And yes, the golden rule was, the more high end a tuner was, the more meters it had; by that criterion alone the MD-90T is the analogue tuner equivalent of a Cadillac DeVille.

You've got to hand it to this company; when your first product was called the 'Signal Sleuth' (designed to boost FM signals) and the follow up was an analogue FM tuner (the FT 101) which is very similar to today's range, twenty five years later, you're a true specialist manufacturer. No rice cookers, bidets, home theatre systems or iPod docks for Magnum Dynalab! The company is proud to use its own bespoke circuitry and does not, as a matter of philosophy, produce FM tuners using digital synthesiser tuning.

And so it is that the MD-90T sports the company's well used MOSFET front end, said to provide three stages of "very careful and

precise amplification", with group delay filtering. A bespoke three-stage RF front end is used, along with a custom Auto Blend RF Circuit which constantly monitors and varies the stereo separation insuring optimal stereo quieting. The latest design of Magnum Dynalab circuit board is fitted, along with a redesigned power supply circuit. The MD-90T can now also house the company's 'analog remote system' inside the chassis allowing for precise analogue tuning through the optional infra red remote control. It sports automatic gain control. Finally, as the 'T' designation stipulates, there's a matched Philips military grade JJ 6922 tube in the final amplification stage.

The fascia itself sports a frequency display courtesy of very attractive, soft amber 0.5" LED digits, plus three backlit meters for signal level, multipath interference level and centre-tune condition. The large right hand tuning knob feels nice to the touch, although there's no flywheel effect. To the left are toggle switches for bandwidth, interstation muting and stereo/mono mode. The fascia's very nicely done, although the steel case behind doesn't feel quite as substantial as perhaps one might expect at the price.

SOUND QUALITY

First I have to say that I was impressed by the sensitivity and selectivity

of this device. Although this test was done with Magnum Dynalab's ST-2 fifty four inch, single element, dipole antenna, I first connected a T-shaped piece of 'wet string'. My house is deep in a Wiltshire vale, and has appalling FM (and for that matter TV) reception, whereas DAB as a concept doesn't exist unless you want to hear the sound of bubbling mud all day long. All the more interesting then that the MD-90T pulled in a Welsh language radio station with the aforementioned antenna. It also pulled in a wide selection of other stations, including BBC Radio 4 on 94.3 which I never realised was possible from this location. Anyone with signal strength and/or antenna issues will be heartened by this device...

Even with the wet string, this tuner sounded very nice indeed, giving me an FM experience I just hadn't realised possible these days.



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UNIVERSAL TURNTABLE MOTOR KIT - No one would blame you for being sceptical of an easy to fit, inexpensive dc motor upgrade. Especially one that improves on the best of other power supplies costing over 4 times as much or your money back. It is simply impossible to imagine the level of improvement attained by eliminating the motor vibration that your stylus amplifies over 8,000 times! Our DC motor kit offers massive improvements to all versions of Linn Lingo / Valhalla, Rega, Systemdeck, Roksan, Rock etc. The kits consist of a drop in replacement high grade DC motor and off-board 2 speed control box. Why not order now? - see web site or phone.

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- Advanced dc Motor Kit - £339
- Ultra dc Motor Kit - £570
- Upgrade Transformer - £195
- Upgrade DC 200 motor - £129 with kit

ORIGIN LIVE
Tel/Fax: +44 02380 578877
E-mail: originlive@originlive.com
www.originlive.com

Moving to the better dipole twig, the thought suddenly occurred to me that the sound quality of DAB and Internet radio is such that it is actively discouraging me from listening to radio broadcasts. An interview between Stephen Merchant and Harry Shearer on Radio 4 was so smooth, creamy and natural sounding I came away from the experience quite shocked. So much Internet radio I hear (and I hear a lot) is brittle and edgy, thin and two-dimensional, whereas via the Magnum Dynalab it was like having those two people in the room in front of me. The harmonics of the voices were remarkable, inasmuch as you barely hear them these days via digital. It gave them such an organic sound that was pure, unalloyed pleasure to hear.

Moving to Radio 2 and some Andrew Lloyd Weber show tunes; the London Symphony Orchestra's rendition of 'Love Changes Everything' was delightful. Violins had a natural 'wire' to them but didn't sound edgy, trumpets had a rich rasp and snare drums sounded like snare drums rather than sandpaper. Then there was also the curious phenomenon (for radio) where the instruments seemed to be located in different places, both left to right and front to back; there was even the sense of them being in a concert hall with its own acoustic. I don't know how they do this but it's an awfully clever trick and obviously not available via digital; I looked at the Magnum Dynalab's handsome fascia and its little blue 'stereo' pilot LED looked back at me...

Radio 3 was, just as predicted, the jewel in the crown of this tuner's capabilities. The Proms were magnificent, this tuner reaching right into the broadcast and grabbing everything to be heard, then relaying it out to me through my loudspeakers with delicacy, tenderness and love. Again, I found myself transfixed by 'the sound' of acoustic instruments via radio; I have simply grown used to them as digital facsimiles of themselves, with only the 'low hanging fruit' of the audio signal conveyed; all the rest of the waveform, the bits we're allegedly unable to hear, simply thrown away on our behalf!

But the MD-90T wasn't just better than MPEG, it proved better than an excellent synthesiser tuner too; my classic Aiwa AT-9700 was in money terms at least the equal of the Magnum Dynalab and holds its own against most modern designs, but in this case the same could not be said

of its sound, which was edgy and uninviting by comparison. I think there is very little, if anything, around at the price which compares.

CONCLUSION

The fascinating thing for me about the Magnum Dynalab MD-90T is that it reconnects you to a wonderful analogue source, which is so often overlooked. It shows, in no uncertain terms, that FM is by far and away the best music/speech transmission medium available to us, effortlessly spearing DAB and Internet radio through its very heart at the same time. And it isn't just the 'accuracy' of FM or the lack of any digital nasties



that seduces, it's the amazingly creamy sound it can display. Like coming back to vinyl after years with Compact Disc, you get a huge shock when you realise what you've been missing. But the MD-90T doesn't just sound great because it's analogue, it's so successful sonically because it is analogue done properly, and to modern standards. The RF section is sensitive and selective, yet never intrudes; the audio section is clean and smooth.

Whether or not all this is 'worth it' is of course up to you; suffice to say that, now it seems analogue is to live to fight (and win) another day, any considerations of value should be made on how much you think you'll use this product. If radio is a large part of your life, then I'd say you might find it actually represents really rather good value for money. The wonderfully tactile experience of 'tuning' the MD-90T is a joy in itself, but the real fun starts when the stereo beacon lights up and the listening begins.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Aiwa AT-9700 tuner
- MF Audio Passive Preamplifier
- World Audio K5881 valve power amplifier
- Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers



VERDICT

Exceptionally able audiophile tuner that cannot fail to charm, even at its premium price.

MAGNUM DYNALAB

MD-90T £1,390

Audiofreaks

+44(0)208 9484153

www.audiofreaks.co.uk

FOR

- creamy, beguiling sound
- design, build, styling
- attitude

AGAINST

- stereo LED should be red not blue!
- signal strength meter

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our analysis shows this tuner has a broad, flat frequency response gently rolled down at both low and high frequencies. The low frequency roll down is of little consequence it is so low, but the absence of mpv filter ripple and peaking will give the MD-90T a smooth sound that will have plenty of detail but lack brightness. It's perfectly judged as the sound of yesterday, without the drawbacks. A Leak Troughline gives very similar results. Distortion levels were low and – surprisingly – slightly tune dependent; this really is an analogue tuner! The tune accuracy meter was perfectly set to indicate lowest distortion at its centre on-tune position, so worked well. Our distortion analysis shows that as usual second and third harmonic dominated, so the low levels of distortion that exist are not a problem subjectively.

Full quieting was achieved at 0.8mV, so ideally the MD-90T needs this or more from the aerial if hiss is to sink to a respectable minimum of -69dB. At this level it will be inaudible.

A big disappointment was the signal strength meter. It races up to read 8 at an absurdly low 8µV and maximum of 8.5 at 60µV – far below the strength of signal needed for full quieting (800µV), so it does not show when reception is ideal, and it is no good for judging whether the aerial is adequate, deteriorating, etc. And if an owner were to decide to buy a new super aerial to get it to read maximum, believing this guaranteed best results, they would be disappointed (and misled) because it reads no higher than 8.5 no matter how strong the aerial signal. So the meter is not much use and it is misleading too (manufac-

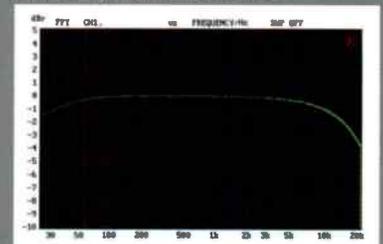
turers do this to make their tuners appear very sensitive).

Sensitivity was normal enough at 48µV for -50dB noise on stereo, and good at 3µV for -50dB noise on mono.

The MD-90T measures well and should give a fine sound, but it deserves better signal strength metering. NK

Frequency response	35Hz-10kHz
Stereo separation	28dB
Distortion (50% mod.)	0.18%
Hiss (CCIR)	-69dB
Signal for minimum hiss	0.8mV
Sensitivity	
mono	3µV
stereo	40µV
signal strength meter:	0-60µV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION





Pro Feeling

Tim Jarman goes live with Tascam's 202 Mk.V cassette deck...

Tascam's cassette and open reel machines have been a familiar sight in recording studios and broadcast stations for many years. As there are still a few professional applications for the Compact Cassette, Tascam, the pro division of Teac, have retained a recorder in their range, the 202, now in its Mk. V guise.

To dispel any doubt that this truly is a professional machine, Tascam have fitted 19" rackmount ears to the sides, although they can be neatly removed if necessary. There is more to professional levels of performance than a couple of bits of bent metal however, the proof of the pudding lies elsewhere.

The Tascam 202 is quite a bit more expensive than its obvious rival, the Sony TC-WE475. The Sony is

sold as a domestic machine but the quality of construction and general level of facilities is surprisingly similar when one compares the two. The Sony is slightly smaller and, to my eyes, marginally prettier. Playing tape deck 'Top Trumps' with the spec lists shows up some interesting differences; for a start the Teac can record on both decks where as the Sony can only record on one. This can be done in one of two ways, either you can record the same thing on both simultaneously or you can record on one deck (both sides thanks to auto reverse, also fitted to both decks) and then automatically on the other.

The first option is of limited use unless your job is recording interviews with suspects in police custody, but you could use it to make two identical mix tapes for

two prospective girlfriends at the same time, or make doubly sure that you record that special event or programme properly and without incident!

The sequential option is of far greater value, load up two C90 tapes (the longest that Tascam recommend that you use) and you get three hours of nearly uninterrupted unattended analogue recording, normally you'd need an open reel machine or a hi-fi VHS video recorder with a sound-only mode to make recordings of that length in one go. Something else that the Teac has over the Sony is a microphone socket, with its own level control. It's only mono though, and the quality isn't anything to get particularly excited about. Finally the 202 has a 'return to zero' facility on the tape counter and an "A-B repeat" function,



"this machine imaged well, presenting a large, expansive sound stage, which is an impressive feat for a cassette recorder..."

common enough with CD players but I've never seen a cassette deck that can do this before. The period can be as long as you like (providing that it is longer than 10 counter increments) and seems to be measured out accurately, but of course there is quite a big gap while the mechanism shunts about and winds the tape back.

The Sony isn't defeated yet, the Tascam only has Dolby B NR, cannot record on IEC type IV (metal) tapes and only has manual recording level control, making it look basic compared to the TC-WE475 which can record on anything, has Dolby B and C and offers a choice of manual or automatic recording. Without Dolby C the Tascam gives away about 10dB of potential signal to noise ratio but if you plan to use it to make recordings for your car or pocket personal then you are likely to be picking 'B' anyway, so this omission may not bother you too much. Equally, there isn't much new IEC IV tape stock about these days and regular TDK SA (IEC type II) is perfectly adequate for most home

recording needs. Automatic level control would have been nice though.

For the more sombre business of archiving LPs or making tapes to listen to elsewhere manual level control is of course the preferred choice and the single rotary knob fitted to the 202 works smoothly and is easy to use. The fluorescent level meters look impressive but as the segments light up in pairs you only actually get nine per channel (the Sony has 14). 0dB is set a couple of dB above the standard Dolby level (which is also marked clearly on the meter) and the manual suggests that recordings should peak at this point, staying out of the red bits if possible. Despite HX Pro being included in the spec, this seems sensible in view of the rather modest looking heads that are fitted.

SOUND QUALITY

Bells and whistles aside, the big difference between the Tascam 202 and the Sony TC-WE475 is the sound. Regular readers may recall that the Sony has a slightly soft sound that tends to take the sheen

off CD recordings but the Tascam is the opposite of this. The impression it gives is that there is a treble lift and this gives a welcome boost to dull sounding pre-recorded tapes, providing they are in good condition otherwise. The downside is that the high frequencies can sound cracked and brittle if the tape is slightly worn and doesn't make perfect contact with the heads, as is often the case at the start of each side.

As delivered, azimuth, tape speed and Dolby level were well set, although a small inconsistency was noted in the level performance of the right hand deck when changing between the two directions. Each transport has a single DC servo motor that drives two small plastic flywheels. This is not an ideal



MUSICAL FIDELITY

M6PRE

Fully balanced preamp. Inputs: Phono. USB. Balanced. 4 line.
Outstanding technical performance.

M6PRX

260wpc. Dual mono. High current. Choke regulated.
Outstanding technical performance.



arrangement but the speed stability was fair, only long and sustained piano notes revealed a slight pitch waver, not an uncommon experience with cassette recorders.

Playing back recordings made on TDK SA tape (IEC type II) using another correctly calibrated machine again showed that the Tascam has a brightly lit character, sometimes overwhelmingly so. The treble has a real sting in its tail but this can help to add pace and drive to high energy music. I wouldn't recommend it over the Sony for classical or jazz but for close-miked rock and pop it can be a compelling listen, providing the rest of your equipment can take it.

I loaded a TDK SA90 and gave recording a go. With Dolby B only, the maximum signal to noise ratio is a claimed 69dB which is a good figure [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. Certainly, noise wasn't a problem in the listening tests. Playback demonstrated a bright sound that on occasion could be perceived as gritty but the recordings did play correctly on another machine whose presentation tended more to the warmer



end of things, suggesting that this is a good deck on which to make tapes for the car/Walkman/ radio cassette on the kitchen window sill.

A TDK D cassette (IEC type I) gave similar results. It was a little less bright and smoother in the bass but I did not get the same sense of treble focus.

Using TDK SA tape this machine imaged well and could present a large, expansive sound stage which again is an impressive feat for a cassette recorder.

CONCLUSION

As it is quite a bit more expensive than its Sony rival I was hoping that the Tascam 202 Mk.V would offer

a clearly noticeable step up in build and sound quality. Instead of this, I found that the two are really quite similar and trade off strengths and weakness against each other in roughly equal measure. If you need the Tascam's A-B repeat function then there really is no other choice and its dual recording decks with automatic sequencing, giving three hours of high quality recording time, are another almost unique proposition that some may find very attractive. These two points recommend it, as does the brighter tonal character if you like that sort of thing. The Tascam 202 Mk.V is not the bargain that the Sony TC-WE475 is, but it is still a decent recorder.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Replay frequency response was flat from 40Hz up to 10kHz and rolled off slowly above this frequency, according to the IEC Reference replay tape. Head azimuth was well set and replay equalisation accurate too. Bass rolled off below 40Hz but there were no head contour effect bumps..

Replay speed accuracy was good, just 0.4% fast on average with the adjuster at zero (centre detent position). There was some drift in this figure from tape start to end. Speed adjustment ranged from -21% up to +12%. Speed stability with pre-recorded tapes was a mediocre 0.25% W&F, IEC weighted with obvious capstan peaks.

The 0VU level was in perfect accordance with IEC 0dB level, as it needs to be.

Recording frequency response was reasonably flat with TDK D (IEC I ferric) with just slight treble lift (+0.8dB), enough to ensure recordings do not sound dull.

There was more treble lift with chrome tape (IEC II) and recordings will sound quite obviously bright.

The deck is not biased for metals and treble peaked up to +8dB at 10kHz, as a result, an unacceptable amount.

The reason this deck is not adjusted for metals became obvious with distortion measurement: it's heads are unable to withstand high levels of magnetisation. Distortion at 0dB with ferric tape was a high

2.6% at 315Hz and no less than 12% at 40Hz. The Sony TC-WE475 cassette deck managed just 0.6% at 0dB, 315Hz.

Noise measured -47db unweighted and -52dB IEC A weighted with ferric tape, Dolby out, normal enough figures. Dolby B introduced a -9dB improvement, as it should, noise then sinking to -61dB. TDK SA gave -3dB less noise, or -64dB with Dolby B engaged, a normal result.

The Teac was accurately adjusted for pre-recorded tapes and handles them well.

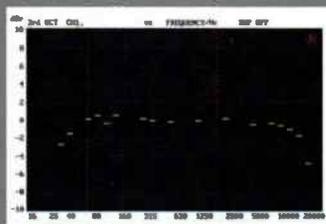
It did a reasonable job recording onto ferrics and chromes, but heavy bass and high record levels will cause muddle, because the heads saturate early. Recording level must be kept in check and 0dB as a maximum with musical peaks is about right. Recordings will sound bright no matter what tape is used. NK

REPLAY
Frequency response 50Hz-10kHz
Speed accuracy (Pitch at 0) +0.4%

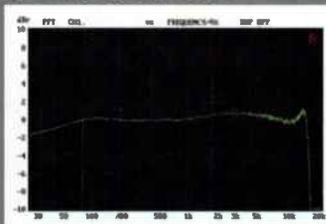
RECORD/REPLAY
Frequency response
Ferric (IEC I) 40Hz-15KHz
Chrome (IEC II) 40Hz-10kHz

Noise (IEC I,II, Dolby out) -52, -55dB
Distortion (0dB, TDK D) 2.6%
Speed stability (W&F, Wtd) .25%

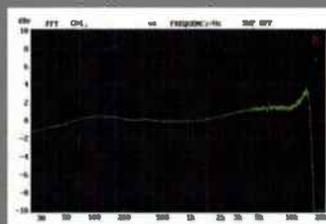
REPLAY FREQUENCY RESPONSE



IEC I (FERRIC) RECORD RESPONSE



IEC II (CHROME) RECORD RESPONSE



VERDICT

An interesting machine aimed at the professional user, whose bright sound may endear it to some.

TASCAM 202/V £399
Tascam UK Ltd.
www.tascam.co.uk

FOR
- three hour recording time
- tidy performance

AGAINST
- no Dolby C
- can't record on metal tape
- pricier than key rival

WORLD CLASSICS

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

We do not sell these products. It is for your information only.

DIGITAL

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD1 1986 £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.

TECHNICS SL-PI200 1987 £800
CD version of the Technics SL-1200 turntable. Massively built to withstand the rigours of 'pro' use and laden with facilities - a great eighties icon. Sonically, it's pure fun, with hefty bass that can still show weedy modern players a thing or two!

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 RD115 1972 £94
Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm. Scotland's original superdeck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

ADC ACCUTRAC 4000 1976 £300
Bonkers 1970s direct drive that uses an infra red beam to allow track selection and programming. More of a visual and operational delight than a sonic stunner.

PIONEER PL112D 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 PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals



PIONEER PLC-590 1976 £600
Sturdy and competent motor unit that performs well with a wide range of tonearms. Check very thoroughly before buying due to electronic complexity and use of some now-obsolete ICs.

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 GL75 1970 £15.65
Simple, well engineered motor unit with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearm. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists. Eminently tweakable. Similar 88 and 99 motor units are budget 301/TD124 rivals.

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. Recent 'SE' mods have brought it into the 21st century, albeit at a price.



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.

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.

REGA PLANAR 3 1978 £79
Brilliantly simple but clean and musical performer, complete with Acos-derived S-shaped 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.

SONY PS-B80 1978 £800
First outing for Sony's impressive 'Biotracer' electronic tonearm. Built like a tank with a clean and tidy sound, albeit lacking involvement. Scarily complicated and with no spares support - buy with caution!

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.

TONEARMS
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.

AUDIO TECHNICA AT1120 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.

ALPHASON HR100S 1981 £150
First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.



SME 3009 1959 £18
Once state of the art, but long since bettered. Musical enough, but weak at frequency extremes and veiled in the midband. Legendary serviceability and stunning build has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

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.

NAIM ARO 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 C51/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.

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

PREAMPLIFIERS

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

AUDIO RESEARCH SP-8 1982£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.

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



QUAD 22 1958 £25
The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocks - 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

HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110
Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

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

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.



LECSON API 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 monoblocks still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

MICHELL ALECTO 1997 £1989

Crisp, clean and beautifully controlled with gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 Orca this sounds delicious!

LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1 1949 £28

Early classics that are getting expensive. Overhauling is de rigeur 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.



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!

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.



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.

SEQUERRA MODEL I 1973 £1300

Possibly the ultimate FM tuner. Massive in terms of technology, size and features dedicated to extracting every ounce of performance from radio, including impressive multi-purpose oscilloscope display.



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.



SONY TC-377 1972 £N/A

A competitor to the Akai 4000D open reel machine, the Sony offered better sound quality and is still no slouch by modern standards

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 AB1 subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!

HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110

Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.



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 and imaging.



SPENDOR BCI 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.

IMF TLS80 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.

MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £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 floorstanders 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...

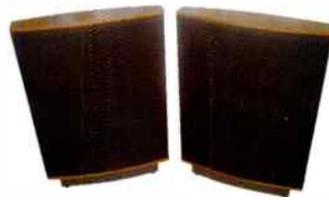


LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH

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!



CLASSIC CONTACTS

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

GT AUDIO
 (Graham Tricker, Bucks)
 Leak Troughline specialists. Also Quad and most classic tuners, radios and amplifiers restored, repaired.
 Tel: 01895 833099
 Mob: 07960 962579
 www.gtaudio.com

TECHNICAL AND GENERAL
 (East Sussex)
 Turntable parts - wide range of spares and accessories, plus arms and cartridges.
 Tel: 01892 654534

CARTRIDGE MAN
 (Len Gregory, London)
 Specialist cartridge re-tipping service and repairs. High quality special cartridges.
 Tel: 020 8688 6565
 Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net
 www.thecartridgeman.com

AUDIO LABORATORIES (LEEDS)
 (Phil Pimblott, Leeds)
 Renovation, repair and restoration. Specialist in valve hi-fi, radio transmitters, cinema amps, kit building.
 Tel: 0113 244 0378
 www.audiolabs.co.uk

QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS
 (Cambs) Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first. (Also Audiolab, Mission & Wharfedale).
 Tel: 0845 4580011
 www.quad-hifi.co.uk

Dr MARTIN BASTIN
 (Shropshire) Garrard 301/401 restoration, renovation and service. Special plinths; rumble cures, etc.
 Tel: 01584 823446

ARKLESS ELECTRONICS
 (Northumberland)
 Specialist in repairs, restoration and modifications to all amplifiers, valve or solid state, ancient and modern.
 Tel: 01670 829891
 Email: arklesselectronics@btinternet.com

SOWTER TRANSFORMERS
 (Brian Sowter, Ipswich)
 Large range of audio transformers for valve amps, cartridges, line drive, interstage plus all associated services.
 Tel: 01473 252794
 www.sowter.co.uk

WEMBLEY LOUSPEAKER
 (Paul MacCallam, London)
 Comprehensive loudspeaker servicing.
 Tel: 020 8 743 4567
 Email: paul@wembleyloudspeaker.co.uk
 www.wembleyloudspeaker.com

EXPERT STYLUS COMPANY
 (Wyndham Hodgson, Surrey)
 Stylus replacement service for all types of cartridge. Including precise profiling for 78s
 Tel: 01372 276604
 Email: w.hodgson@btclick.com

ONE THING
 (Coventry) Specialist in electrostatic panel manufacture and repair. Can refurbish ESL 57s and 63s as well as Leak Troughlines and Quad IIs.
 Email: one.thing@ntworld.com
 www.onethingaudio.com

LORICRAFT AUDIO
 (Terry O'Sullivan, Bucks)
 Garrard 301/401 and their own 501 repair, spares and service.
 Tel: 01488 72267
 www.garrard501.com

HADEN BOARDMAN
 Repair, service & modifications; classic & modern. Collection available. Redundant / faulty equipment purchased, selected new equipment available.
 Tel: 01942 790600
 www.audioclassics.co.uk

LOCKWOOD AUDIO
 (London)
 Tanooy loudspeaker parts, restoration and repair. Also Epos and TDL loudspeakers.
 Tel: 020 8 864 8008
 www.lockwoodaudio.co.uk

CLASSIC NAKAMICHI
 (Paul Wilkins, Worthing, West Sussex). Restore, Repair & Service Nakamichi Cassette Decks.
 Tel: 01903 695695
 Email: paul@bowersandwilkins.co.uk
 www.bowersandwilkins.co.uk

OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING
 (Bristol)
 Unit 2, 16 Midland Street, St Phillips, Bristol.
 Tel: 0117 925 6015
 www.octave-aw.co.uk

REVOX
 (Brian Reeves, Cheshire)
 Revox tape recorder spares, service and repair. Accessories also available.
 Tel: 0161 499 2349
 Email: brian@revoxservice.co.uk
 www.revox.freeuk.com

CLASSIQUE SOUNDS
 (Paul Greenfield, Leicester)
 ESL-57s restored, rebuilt, fully renovated or improved. Leak, Quad valves amps etc.
 Tel: 0845 123 5137/
 Mob: 0116 2835821
 Email: classique_sounds@yahoo.co.uk
 www.flashbacksales.co.uk/
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Art and Kraft

Tim Jarman remembers the stunningly styled early nineteen sixties Braun Audio 2 music centre...

So you think Apple invented the white box? Think again. German industrial designer Dieter Rams, working for Braun of Frankfurt, penned many products in this form during Germany's post war economic miracle period, most of which are now regarded as design classics. Braun is well known for small things like razors and kitchen gadgets, but they made hi-fi too; Rams even restyled the Quad ESL57 for the German market.

Indeed, his Braun SK4 radio/record player of 1957 was the first to have a clear plastic lid, something that is now so universal that you can't really imagine it being done any other way. Although there were many models, a real high point of the range was the Audio 2, a combined stereo radio and turntable unit. Take a look at the pictures, it's just another nineteen seventies music centre right? Wrong!

The previous model, the Audio 1, became widely available in 1963, the year that the transistor came of age and started to appear in powerful stereo audio units instead of being confined to tinny portables. Valve fans may shed a tear, but transistors freed the imaginations of the stylists and allowed new cabinet designs to be made into practical reality. The Audio

1, with its wide, low look, full width clear acrylic lid, built-in radio tuner and separate loudspeakers defined the look of the 'music centre' that would become the key mainstream audio unit not of the decade, but of the next decade. Consider this; Bang & Olufsen, famous leaders in audio-visual styling, did not make anything comparable until the Beocenter 3500 of 1973, that's a full ten years later.

The turntable of the Audio 1 was pretty basic and in standard form came with a ceramic cartridge but for a mere 160 Deutschmarks more you could have a magnetic one, complete with a transistorised RIAA preamplifier. The other key option was a stereo decoder for the FM receiver, which wasn't the last word in sophistication by modern standards, but could be made to give good results if the owner had invested in a decent aerial.

Braun claimed that the electronics were of "instrument quality" and that the amplifier was good for two channels of 14 Watts music power over a range of 20Hz to 30kHz. Music power is of course an inflated figure but the true power was still in the region of perhaps 6 to 8W, more than a compact valve unit of the day based on ECL82s or ECL86s could be expected to manage. The cabinet was made

mostly of painted steel and was expertly finished – and it needed to be. If you had money to spend on quality audio in nineteen sixties Germany, the chances were that you would be a professional of some sort and not the type of person to tolerate a sloppy standard of build in anything.

The Audio 2 was announced in 1964 in preparation for the 1965 model year. Although it looked superficially similar in detail most of it was new. The most striking change was the turntable, which had changed from something that looked as if it had come from a battery portable to something really special. The heavy steel platter weighed 2.3kg and was dynamically balanced. It was driven by an induction motor through a combination of both idler and belt drive. The finely balanced arm was tipped with the latest Shure M44 moving magnet cartridge, a model that is still a popular and credible choice today.

The turntable unit was of Braun's own manufacture and was built on a precision diecast floating subchassis. The controls for the automatic stop mechanism were linked in via Bowden cables so as to avoid transferring any vibrations and the motor, which featured an eddy current brake for fine speed

adjustment, was separately mounted on its own suspension. Starting was manual but clever detents in the cueing mechanism meant that it was easy to line the arm up with the start of any size of record. The cueing action itself was damped by viscous silicone fluid, another advanced feature for the time.

The revised amplifier was now good for about 10 Watts of reliable, cool running solid state punch whilst other parts of the circuit had been updated with silicon transistors and the FM stereo decoder was now standard equipment. This would have been a convincing package at the end of the nineteen seventies but in the mid sixties, to the British buyer still used to radiograms and box record players, it could have come from another world.

The replacement model, the Audio 300, came in 1969. This again looked much the same but the turntable was in detail slightly different, the FM tuner featured an FET front end and the amplifier power had been raised to a muscular 30 Watts. The Audio 300 would be the last of the 'white box' Dieter Rams designs in the music centre line. After that the Braun audio range became black and somewhat more sombre.

The natural home for a music centre, any music centre, is of course on a sideboard, but with the Braun Audio 2 there was another option. The L60 loudspeaker, effectively a big white box with two substantial drive units and a simple crossover inside, was in plan exactly the same size as the Audio 2 and once mounted on its tubular metal stand formed the perfect table on which to place the main unit. The other loudspeaker, similarly mounted, could then be positioned elsewhere for the best stereo imaging.

Placing the turntable on top of one of the loudspeakers may make the serious vinyl fan of today throw their hands up in horror but surprisingly it all worked pretty well, not least because the suspension was supple and well designed, the platter was heavy and the Shure cartridge was unusually resistant to jumping and skipping, a feature that professional DJs still value today.

SOUND QUALITY

If you know your nineteen sixties European hi-fi then I bet you think you already know what the Audio 2 is going to sound like. A heavy handed loudness circuit will make the treble sharp and squawky and the bass will be thick and ponderous, whilst the RIAA EQ will be all over

the place and there will never be quite enough power. Well, you could have been right except for one thing, pull up the volume knob and the loudness correction disappears, allowing the sound to pass through relatively unmolested. This function is not marked in any way, nor is the tape loop that is controlled by pulling up the balance control; you just have to find them for yourself.

Using L60/4 loudspeakers it is easy to relax in to the sound. There is nothing particularly exciting about it to begin with until you become aware of the turntable's timing talents and the amplifier's transparency. This combination zooms in on the midband, bringing to the fore musical nuances that perhaps you'd not noticed before. Push the volume control back in and its back to the pump and tizz of any old Continental exotic of this period. Do you want to hear what those old Beatles LPs were really supposed to sound like at the time? This is the tool.

In absolute terms the loudspeakers are not great, the bass drivers sounding stiff and papery and the cone tweeters being a trifle dull, but the combination with the main unit is synergetic, better (more modern) loudspeakers do not necessarily bring any more pleasure overall.

The radio tuner is pretty good too. As short wave carries entertainment broadcasts in Germany the Audio 2 covers this and its presence has raised the game of the AM tuner section design in general. Stations tune in easily and are mercifully free of hash and fuzz if a decent aerial and earth are used. The FM section also needs plenty of signal so unless the little meter is buried off the top of the scale and the stereo light is bright (as with many simple decoders its intensity varies with the signal level) you can't be sure of getting the full measure of performance. It is a natural partner for BBC Radio 3 and seems to make any concert a joy. At the other end of the artistic scale, the continuous high level of commercial pop stations seems to confuse it sometimes, leading to confusion and muddle at the top end.

BUYING

All these units are now very old and despite the 'instrument quality' claims there is still a lot to go wrong. One often finds a bizarre mixture of components inside. Top quality close tolerance resistors, all of which measure perfectly, can be found on some of the boards where as others in the same set are of the cheapest

carbon types and their values can be all over the place. The electrolytic capacitors used are also variable, some are German (usually okay but can go short circuit) and some are Japanese (which just slowly loose value and gain series resistance).

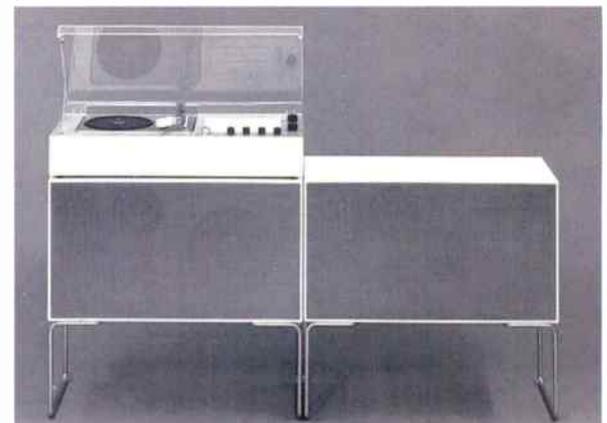
Weak bass and channel imbalance are both clear signs of capacitor trouble, although the unit may still work after a fashion with a large number of them in poor condition. Many of the transistors are germanium (the forerunner to silicon) and the ones in the signal stages can become noisy. Luckily they are mounted in plug-in holders so faults can be quickly diagnosed by swapping them from one channel to the other. Finding replacements is another story.

Be aware that the power amplifier heatsinks are not at ground potential so reassembling them without all the necessary insulators in place or shorting them accidentally to the casework (or each other) will instantly destroy the special germanium output transistors; you really do not want to have to go out searching for those. If the FM stereo decoder seems not to work (assuming that there's one still fitted) check the signal strength before delving in, a piece of wet string for an aerial will definitely not do here.

The turntable unit is simple and reliable. A lazy motor that takes ages to get up to speed should respond to careful cleaning and lubrication. Replacement Shure M44 cartridges and styli are still cheap and easily obtainable.

CONCLUSION

Today the Braun Audio 2 and its relatives are valued more highly for their looks and parentage than for their sound quality; as a result many lie inert and are just gazed upon wistfully from time to time. This is a waste, as the engineering is in most respects a match for the styling and the sound will not disappoint once any faults are cleared. So what are you waiting for, Apple fans?



A LITTLE AUTUMN CHEER

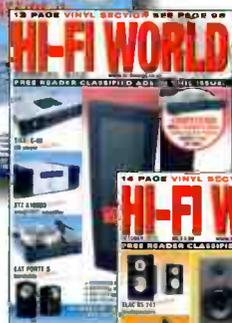
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THE DAMNED

SO, WHO'S PARANOID?

THE DAMNED *So, Who's Paranoid?* Devils Jukebox

I remember seeing The Damned live, at Liverpool's Royal Court Theatre around the mid nineteen eighties. 1984, maybe? The gig was part of a music festival sponsored by local radio station, Radio City. A few nights' worth of gigs were put on and three bands were seen each night. On the night I went there was a band from Denmark, whose lead singer had one arm. He had the disconcerting habit of swinging his empty shirt arm to and fro. Then The Damned appeared with the Icicle Works playing as joint-headliners...

There was lead singer Dave Vanian, black hair greased back, white make-up on his face, blousy shirt billowing and I thought then, as I thought when I reviewed this album, that they just didn't fit into the standard punk scene. Yes, they had energy and verve. They had power and pizzazz but there was something decidedly singular about The Damned. In many ways, they were a frustrated indie band looking for a hook, and punk offered that hook. Maybe it's just that their songs were too good. I know, since that time, that the band have been through many a shape-

shift in musical style and not always to a fan's liking but, underneath, they have always maintained an underlying quality to their songs. In fact, you listen to many of the tracks on this album, created in 2008 and featuring Captain Sensible, and you will hear more similarities to Icicle Works lead singer, Ian McNabb than to the cynicism of, say, John Lydon.

While not up to the standards of their classic era, there is still plenty to love on this LP. Vanian is in strong voice and there are many highlights throughout. I enjoyed it – I know the fans will too.

KATE BUSH *Hounds Of Love* Audio Fidelity

What a stunning album! From the off, the magnificent single, 'Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God)' introduces Bush's lyric as if she's already been singing the song for a minute and a half and you've just managed to tune in. Skipping through to the 'Hounds Of Love', and what could easily have been the gimmicky dog noises that would have proved extremely irritating via any other artist, and Kate just about gets away with it. Then there's 'Cloudbusting', in which Bush delights in playing with time signatures and

tonal variations.

Recorded in 1985, this was Bush's fifth album, and arguably her best to that date. 'Running..' became her second biggest selling single and gave her a big break in the USA. Probably more importantly, this album was the first production from her own 48-track studio. She had been receiving flak from EMI about the rising costs of her albums so Bush metaphorically thumbed her nose at the company and decided to build her own creative centre. It was probably because she could take more time and care on her records that this album reached such a creative polish with ideas bouncing off the walls.

For such an important and considered album it has been, therefore, absolutely critical that any reissue be approached with the utmost care and attention. Who better to tackle that project than the US-based audiophile outfit, Audio Fidelity? Mastered by engineering supremo Steve Hoffman and Kevin Gray at their RTI studios, 'Hounds Of Love' has a warm, rich sound that compliments the artist. As I have already said, Bush produced this album and, as producer, she loves to layer her music to keep the listener intrigued. Audio Fidelity has managed to make this album shine.

Kate Bush



Hounds Of Love

MADNESS



ONE STEP BEYOND...

MADNESS

One Step Beyond Size 12

Released as part of the Union Square imprints, this release is one of three vinyl reissues; the others being '7' and 'Absolutely' and what corks they are! Even before you place the vinyl on your deck, all of these packages drag you into the vinyl experience that, like the band, screams *fun*. To begin with, all of the releases have been issued as 10" gatefold releases with each album spread over two discs.

Once you open the gatefold you're then presented with a series of 7" single covers that will delight any collector and fan. For example, on 'One Step Beyond', the band's debut release from 1979, the centre gatefold shows the Japanese single release of 'My Girl' along with the German and Italian variants, The French release of 'The Prince' and the Spanish version of 'Night Boat To Cairo'. Each 10" disc is also accompanied by its own lyric sheet while the inner sleeve for each disc is resplendent in pictures of rare memorabilia and additional images.

As for the album itself? Exhausting. The sheer energy the boys bring to bear, the lust for life and the music they play, the mischievous and slightly naughty arrangements they adopt – all

add up to a real party of a disc (or, in this case, two).

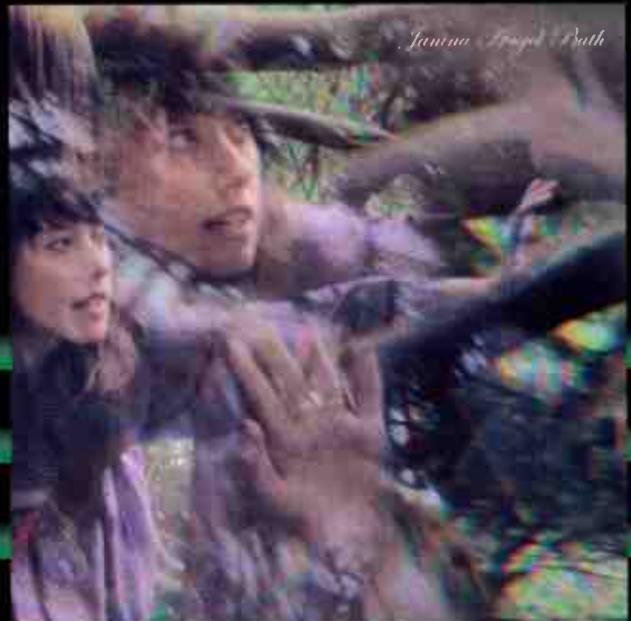
I must admit, I've never been a great fan of the band and never bought their albums. Although I have always had a soft spot for them and their approach to music in general. However, playing this album, it seemed to breeze by in mere moments, so easy is it to like and become trapped in its boyish charm and, even more, so easy is it to dance to. How can you listen to the title track and not?

JANINA ANGEL BATH

Gypsy Woman Prophase

Taking the folk genre by the scruff of the neck, Janina opens her musical direction to world influence. She's a multi-instrumentalist, playing everything from the tamboura, bansuri and Native American flute to the Farfisa, bowed guitar and your basic piano. There's no actual 'world music' going on here though. This is folk music with exotica draped upon it. As you can see if you check out her website (www.myspace.com/janinangel) Janina has a 'back to the earth' manner about her production and how she implements her music.

Arriving with a free 10" EP, there's a sparseness in her arrangements



that appear to be derived partly from Asiatic, possibly Indian and Buddhist cultures with her voice lying, untreated and naked, over the top of these cleanly recorded instruments. There's an almost supernatural aspect to her productions, however. She sings, they play but there's an unspoken third element that lifts the pieces higher. However, as the LP progresses, the music then almost transforms itself. It remains sparse and weed-free but Janina moves towards the mountain mystery of deepest American swamp blues which produces its own myths and black magic. The tone becomes a little more threatening too – from its wholly honest and pure beginnings.

There is one additional, unusual aspect to the Janina vocal, and it's how she phrases her words and integrates her lyrics into the song. It's almost as if her voice becomes part of the overall instrumentation as her delivery moves in rhythm to the backing noises, moving in tone and speed to become one with the arrangement. This is an unusual album but one that, for those who enjoy a more left field experience, will be a fulfilling journey. Check out more interesting and diverse music on the Prophase website on www.myspace.com/prophasemusic.

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- Hi-Fi World, Room Analyzer Review

Jimmy Hughes uncovered one of hi-fi's best kept secrets - XTZ. Here are just some of the comments from the exceptional Hi-Fi Choice (Issue 333) system review:

"An amplifier and CD player with this sort of finish and build quality for just £600 and £365 respectively? Unbelievable!"

- Hi-Fi Choice

"Musically, the presentation is clear and unpretentious - a very nice system that's a pleasure to listen to."

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Hi-Fi World
VERDICT ●●●●●

"The player itself tips the scales at a healthy 9kg and some of the features found on it are, again, astonishing considering the price."

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CD100 Review



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VERDICT ●●●●●

"...I settled down to do some serious listening, still half convinced that there should be another digit in front of the price tag..."

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A100D3 Review



HI-FI CHOICE
★★★★★

"There's not much that we can compare this amp to directly, at least not in the way of power amps, but among integrated models it competes with favourites from Creek, Cambridge Audio, Arcam and so on. That it does so, while retaining its own character - and its mode-switching feature too - is admirable."

- Hi-Fi Choice
AP100 Review

JAYS V-JAYS £49

Headphones are one of the few growth areas in audio right now, and this manifests itself in the seemingly never ending procession of new headphone types and/or brands. Sadly, standards are very variable, with many new entrants to the market being focused more sharply on 'bling' than swing. To wit, we've seen a number of very lavishly presented new products appearing, with all the signs of fancy detailing, that sound really rather rubbish.

This of course was my fear for these Swedish made phones, although a closer look proved reassuring before I even came to listen. They're very soberly styled, in a way that – compact size and low (59g) weight aside – could have emerged from the nineteen seventies or any decade after. It's not to say they're bland or ugly; just quiet, understated and neat in a timeless way. Considering their low price, I was also pleasantly surprised by their build, which proved absolutely up with anything from Sennheiser at or near the price. Their design is also semi-foldable (with two folding joints), making

them ideal for portables, whilst they'll be inconspicuous around the house. The slim 60cm cable isn't as microphonic as the rival Grado SR60is, for example, and intrudes less. The quality foam earpads make them very comfortable to wear; not sumptuous like the Grados or soft like the rival SR238i Sennheisers, but a nice firm, delicate fit all the same. They come supplied with a spare pair of foam cushions and an iPhone 2G/3G compatible 70cm extension cable, so you can keep your iPhone in your pocket and still control it remotely, should you choose.

Sonically they came as a *real* surprise, considering the brand was a total unknown to me. The v-Jay's 40mm Mylar drivers proved to have an extremely taut sound but one that avoided being analytical; instead they showed a natural musicality along with an unexpectedly refined and sophisticated tonality at the price. So many rival phones sound shrill or searing, but the v-Jays weren't anything of the sort. Isaac Hayes's 'That Lovin' Feeling' showed that they're not exactly fulsome and rich, yet they were open and natural

enough to communicate the warmth of this classic recording where it can so easily be sucked dry of its natural tonality. Vocals and instruments were expansive yet delicately rendered, and treble was smooth and crisp with a surprising amount of atmosphere right up top. Overall a truly impressive performer, one that's easily the equal of my favourite affordable headphone, the similarly priced, fully folding Sennheiser PX100. **DP**

[Contact: +44 (0) 1244 458885, www.jaysearphones.co.uk]



soundbites

BLACK RHODIUM SYMPHONY £200/1M

If cables are twenty first century tone controls, then Black Rhodium is bass up just a touch, treble down by the merest tad, and midband pulled back by a fraction. Of course, the more expensive examples of the breed you buy, so they get ever closer to that elusive 'tone defeat' position, but in a way I like them for their tonal signature, which makes most systems (including my own) just that little bit more palatable, amenable and listenable. Of course, other cables exist, and you could say that the Nordost reviewed on p59 has a radically different 'fingerprint', but I've yet to hear a single interconnect with *no imprimatur* at all. The Symphony is classic mid-price Black Rhodium, having much of their higher end cables' detail, but with more warmth that's useful for sub-£1,500 systems.

Made in England from two core screened cable, it sports silver plated copper conductors, low loss PTFE inner insulation, a silver plated copper braided screen and high quality RCA phono plugs. The company says, "an exclusive Black Rhodium post production process delivers improved sound quality", and there is careful control of the wire direction in the manufacturing process to ensure consistency.

Running between a Marantz KI Signature CD player and Musical Fidelity AMS35i Class A integrated, they showed commendable clarity, yet the music was conveyed with real smoothness

and devoid of grain. The Symphony's another deep, dark sounding cable with a hint of sweetness, making it ideal for cheaper systems. Few compromises were evident; bass was taut yet animated, treble sparkling but smooth.

Overall, this is an excellent mid priced cable, for those looking for something on the pleasingly mellow side of neutral. **DP**

[Contact: www.blackrhodium.co.uk]



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"funny how times change; I wonder where music fans will all be in 2020?"



david price

I don't know what you were doing ten years ago, or how you were living your life, but was it so *completely* different to now? For all the talk of the wonder of the internet age, wasn't so much of the development done in 'new media' (as it was so quaintly called, back then), in the nineties and not the noughties?

Well, I don't know. The events of September 11th, 2001 are still playing themselves out in world politics nearly a decade on, but arguably the hi-fi industry's '9/11' happened a month later, when Apple Computer launched the iPod in the United States. For obvious reasons, it wasn't exactly front page news, what with the turmoil of the previous month. But even if there hadn't been such an extraordinary news environment at the time, I'm still not sure it would have made such a splash...

To me, the iPod in its very first incarnation was not exceptional; there were certainly other 'hard disk-based music players' already around. Rather, what the iPod did so well was its packaging; its Jonathan Ive-designed interface made the iPod useable like no other digital portable, and this was tied in to an excellent 'music jukebox' software application that went by the name of iTunes.

Back in 2001, we were still very much in the heyday, lest we forget, of Napster. The very first iPod was literally an MP3 file player (AAC came later), and the presumed way of downloading your music was free, off the internet – and had been for years. One thing that began to change this was Apple's iTunes Music Store, which launched in the US in April 2003. Actually, to most enthusiast eyes, it looked faintly ridiculous; at the time, "why bother if it's free?", was the blank faced retort by your average avaricious adolescent downloader of music files. For such a long time, iTunes Music

Store did look an irrelevance, but this situation would not be permanent...

Proof of this came in June 2004, when the digital download chart was launched, and by December digitally downloaded single sales would overtake physical CDs. It's amazing in such a short time, how the music industry landscape changed. In 1999, the Recording Industry Association of America had been litigating in the US courts, trying to 'ban' MP3 players (on the pretext that they were illegal recording devices), and just five years later the entire music industry had restructured itself into selling its wares online, and was doing it so successfully that sales were outpacing physical copies. What really tipped the balance, I think, was Apple's entry into the market.

What followed was the slow, long decline of physical media in our high streets. First to go was VHS (it seems decades ago, but it was only in March 2006 that major retailers stopped selling this paperback book-sized plastic cassettes of magnetic tape!), then we saw CD singles beginning to disappear too. DVD movies took up pride of place in so-called 'music retailers' shelves, where CD albums (and before them LPs) had hitherto resided...

This period saw heated online activity too, all of which wasn't directly related to music buying (at the time), but which has come to play an important part. In July 2005 News Corporation had bought the recently launched MySpace, then YouTube got its official launch in November. In July the following year Twitter launched, then a month later Facebook arrived. Finally, a month after that, Google bought YouTube for a cool \$1.65 billion. This period of frenzied activity effectively put down the 'foundations' of the next way of consuming and buying music. My own online Facebook activity is mostly to

keep up to date with bands that I'm a fan of; strange to think that five years ago this simply didn't exist, and that to do the same I'd have had to wade through countless music magazines every month!

For me, another standout date of the last decade was Radiohead's launch of 'In Rainbows' in October 2007. Not because I'm a Radiohead fan (quite the reverse), but because it was done in such a way as fans could download the album in its entirety (effectively for free) then 'donate' whatever they wanted. Of course, the album later came out in CD and LP form, but it was slick marketing and showed us that the record companies, and bands, weren't as locked into the traditional model of music industry product shifting as some of us had thought.

The digital onslaught continued apace; the Beeb launched its iPlayer in December 2007, and in March 2008 Spotify launched; a completely new way of listening to, and paying for (or not as the case may be) music. More and more, the access points for entertainment and music were going online, and conversely we witnessed physical high street retailers ever less well stocked with goods, seemingly ever more imperilled. In December 2008, the sight of Zavvi going into administration only underlined how the decade had changed the way music fans live their lives.

In this past decade then, there have been no epic, ground shaking developments. Yet so many smaller changes have occurred that life is still dramatically different; your average Q magazine reading, Sony MiniDisc toting pavement bound music buyer is now on Facebook and MySpace, bouncing songs around his iPhone and getting them from all manner of websites, not least the iTunes Music Store. Funny how times change; I wonder where we'll all be in 2020? ●

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SUSSEX

"progressive rock remains a particularly fine cultural and artistic jewel..."



paul rigby

Classical music has always had a snob value of sorts. Regardless of its undisputed artistic merit, it is a class-ridden genre of music both historically and culturally. Nowadays though, it's far more accessible to all, yet does still retain its elitist tradition. In the USA, of course, where history began five minutes ago, 'classical music' is actually jazz, another genre of music that has snob value, but not in monetary or class expressions but in intellectual terms. This time, it's the redneck who is left scratching his head with eyes crossed...

In the UK, we have our quirks and problems, true. We feel inferior to the European mainland over the classical genre and inferior to the USA in the jazz genre. What do we have that is our own? Brash, bawdy, knock-about, energy, that's what; a state of mind that has crossed class and social boundaries, incidentally. Musically therefore, our talents lie not in what we do, but how we do it. So, for example, we might not have started the rock revolution but, despite fierce competition, we have implemented it, processed it and modified it better than anybody else. It's part of our Music Hall heritage; we have always known how to entertain.

To that extent, prog rock remains a particularly fine cultural and artistic jewel. A musical legacy that remains uniquely British, despite it assimilating just about every other genre of music you can think of - prog rock is, in fact, our classical music. Typically British however, prog rock doesn't create snobs - unlike jazz and classical music

in other countries - no, prog music is the victim of snobs, mainly of the three-chord variety.

One of those victims was Camel, creators of sublime music, notably their 1975 breakthrough album, 'The Snow Goose'. Despite the onset of punk and the concurrent anti-prog backlash, prog has not only survived but prospered. Now, Universal has released a new box set spread over four CDs called 'Rainbow's End: A Camel Anthology 1973-1985'.

Compiled by Mark Powell (himself the owner of the Esoteric music label www.cherryred.co.uk/esoteric), the collection includes some intriguing additions. "You've got the band's first ever BBC In Concert appearance from 1974 - two instrumentals," commented Powell. "Yes, there are familiar tracks included but there's also plenty of alternative takes plus other live tracks. For example, another In Concert appearance at the Hammersmith Odeon from 1981. I think that this is the first time that such a comprehensive Camel set has been issued in one place."

Ideally positioned for those who might not want to buy all of the Camel albums but might want to have a single collection of the band's work, the packaging is also highly recommended - as befits a 'classical' standard work. "The book that comes with the box set is particularly nice," said Powell. "We've found new photos and bits and pieces. It's got some things that people won't have seen before. We've trawled through the Decca archives. The end result has been quite a lavish booklet."

Speaking of classical music,

Decca's ethos, at the time of Camel's height as a prog band, was forged in the classical mainstream and so their attitude towards recording and archiving was meticulous. This has meant that the Camel masters have always been looked after, meaning that Camel fans should look forward to a good quality collection of CDs.

It is true that some of the bonus material here has already been seen on many of the 2002 album reissues via Universal and in Powell's own Esoteric reissues but some of the BBC tracks are unique and even these are of decent quality as, by 1974, the BBC were mixing their outside broadcasts in stereo. Not an awful lot has been done to these tracks either, in a processing sense. "Our philosophy is to 'leave well alone' in the majority of cases," said Powell. "There are a few pops and clicks that have been removed and the tracks have had a general tidy up in that sense. At the time, many tracks of Camel's album were very well recorded. So we've only done a little bit of de-noising, for example. If you get rid of tape hiss completely in the mastering process you can actually suck the life out of the recording."

The only alteration of the sound was done with tracks from the early eighties where bass had to be lifted a touch and vocals toned down a tad. This period of our music history is known as 'The Decade That Forgot About Bass'. So this is a fine set that will please occasional Camel listeners. More dedicated fans might want to think twice but I reckon that most completists will not be able to resist the urge. I couldn't! ●

Some things in life just speak for themselves



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"I hope the new government will act upon the CEG's recommendations, as opposed to acting against consumers like the last one did..."



steven green

The Consumer Experts Group (CEG), which is a government advisory body, has launched a devastating attack on the radio industry's and the previous Government's plans for digital radio switchover. In *Digital Radio Switchover: what is in it for consumers?* (<http://tinyurl.com/ceg-report>), the CEG described the 2015 "target" switchover date as being "far too early", and that the radio industry was attempting to "bully" and "scare" the public into adopting DAB. I couldn't agree more.

The report even questioned whether digital radio switchover should take place at all. The CEG pointed out that the radio industry's main justification for switchover was that it would save the commercial broadcasters money on transmission costs, but that the new Digital Economy Act had already made the financial situation much better for the industry. They also found that "there are no economic or technical barriers to FM continuing as a broadcast platform", and the only "clear benefit for consumers" they could find was that so-called "ultra-local" radio stations could launch in the FM band post-switchover – but even then, they didn't think the vast majority of listeners would be interested in listening to such small stations. The CEG recommended that, "a full cost benefit analysis from a user perspective must be carried out as a matter of urgency". That should make interesting reading, because the "partial" cost-benefit analysis that I wrote last month's column about only allowed £2 (on average) for each household to convert all of their analogue radio equipment to digital. If a realistic cost to consumers were calculated,

it would undoubtedly show that digital radio switchover would not be beneficial to the UK.

On DAB's sound quality, the CEG said that the low bit rates used are "inadequate for the high quality sound promoted as a benefit of DAB", and they recommended that stations should use a bit rate of 192kbps. However, it wouldn't be possible for all current DAB stereo stations to use 192kbps due to a lack of capacity (98% of stereo stations use a bit rate of 128kbps or lower), so the only way to deliver the CEG's recommended level of audio quality would be by switching to DAB+.

The CEG recommended that the UK should switch to using DAB+ as soon as possible after digital radio switchover, that all DAB receivers on sale should support DAB+ "as a matter of urgency", and that shops should clearly display which receivers do and do not support the new standard. I agree with all of that apart from the recommended timetable for switching to DAB+. In my opinion, we should fully switch to DAB+ at the same time as when the main switchover takes place. Switchover won't be possible for many years, so it makes sense to kill two birds with one stone, and around 95%+ of receivers in people's homes and cars would support DAB+ by then anyway.

The CEG also recommended that a date for switchover shouldn't be set until 70% of all radio listening is via DAB (DAB currently accounts for just 16% of all listening). As things currently stand, the Government has the option to set the switchover date to be two years after digital accounts for 50% of all radio listening. I totally agree with the CEG on this, although I have to say that I never took the 50% figure seriously anyway, because it would have been utter madness

to try and move the remaining 50% of listening to digital in just two years when it would have taken 15 or more years just to get up to 50% in the first place. Furthermore, over 100 million analogue radios, including the vast majority of cars, would need to be replaced or converted in that two-year period, and those 100 million radios would all need to be disposed of (and you're not allowed to throw radios out in the rubbish due to new EU waste regulations on electrical appliances).

The report was also highly critical of Digital Radio UK (DRUK), the radio industry body set up to promote digital radio switchover. The CEG said that DRUK couldn't be trusted to provide impartial advice to consumers because it would naturally represent the views of the radio industry; and that DRUK's recent 'Radio Amnesty' advertising campaign had caused "confusion" and "worry" amongst some consumers who feared that they would lose their current FM services – it clearly achieved DRUK's objectives then!

I've read many reports about digital radio by the radio industry, Ofcom or the previous Government, none of which have been remotely realistic about the problems with DAB, or about the major obstacles that would need to be overcome before digital radio switchover could take place. And, in places, some of the reports were simply dishonest or used underhand tactics in an attempt to manipulate people into buying DAB, or to manipulate public opinion. As such, this report by the CEG has been a *huge* breath of fresh air, and I just hope that the new Government will act upon its recommendations, as opposed to acting against the interests of consumers like the last Government consistently did. ●

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"the transmission of high quality audio via the internet is an inevitability even the BBC cannot ignore..."



noel keyword

I sometimes wonder whether *Hi-Fi World* is a little cruel to the BBC for so heavily criticising DAB and the whole debacle, but I stopped wondering and started laughing when reading listener's comments about a recent sound quality experiment the BBC ran for The Proms.

Us cruel? In the BBC's own online 'blog' (internet web log) covering this experiment, listeners praised the result, but took the opportunity to crucify them over DAB. It made us look like saints and – well – that's always a heavenly feeling!

You can find the blog at www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/bbcinternet/2010/09/bbc_proms_extra_high_quality_audio.html.

Having, the BBC said, a new outside broadcast van and spare capacity in the transmission chain, The Proms on Radio 3 would be transmitted through a high quality internet feed at 320kbps, in addition to the standard quality 192kbps feed. Both are AAC coded (data reduced or 'compressed') by having what is deemed to be unimportant audio stripped out, a contentious process. However critical I may be of this, I have found in the past that at 5:1 compression, or 256kbps, I was having difficulty (with ATRAC) telling compressed from original. So the BBC's choice of 320kbps using well implemented AAC is likely to be a high quality feed beyond serious criticism, at least by current transmission sound quality standards in the UK.

Although the BBC has a press office, it takes at least a week to answer any question we submit and it certainly did not contact us about publicising this interesting experiment, but then reading the blog I could see why. It was like pouring petrol on the burning issue of DAB!

We learnt about it in any case

and I listened in. The experiment suited me because I had hoped to go to the live concert in Hyde Park but seeing the enormous queues and with my young son unsure about anything lacking an electric guitar (I told him Brian May from Queen was on stage but he knows a rat without being able to smell it!), we did an about turn and headed home. Whilst my nascent axeman brushed up on the top ten guitar solos of all time on his bedroom PC, I was free to wind up the elastic in my PC and send audio via S/PDIF to the resident Marantz SR8002 AV receiver in the lounge next door. Although I have wired and wireless networks, I prefer to use a carefully set up direct connection for best sound quality.

And sound quality was very good. It had a freshness and dynamism that was thoroughly entertaining. Gone was the thinness of low rate, compressed MP2 of DAB and the peculiar wiry, shaky, amorphous sounding treble that turns violins into a generalised 'violin sound'. Timpany was nicely miked up and came through clearly, providing some punchy moments when their power was evident. Live performances come through better than pre-recorded and processed ones, when the stage equipment and mixing desk are good and used skillfully, and that was the case with this year's Proms.

In the blog, listeners were kind about the sound quality achieved on the XHQ feed, as it was called, but boy were they unkind about much else – and DAB in particular got a hammering. Almost every respondent mentioned it and sound quality was commonly described as "execrable".

It wasn't just the strength and astute nature of the criticism of DAB that surprised me though. It was the number of people who felt let down by poor sound quality and expected much better. Sound quality is an issue

with the broad listening public, not just for audiophiles.

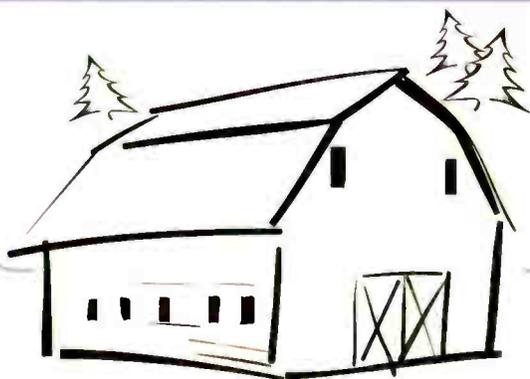
And why not? It is 2010 and as a few mentioned in this blog other European countries now manage better, seeing no difficulty in sending high quality sound over the internet. Which reminds me just how political it has all become in the UK because the BBC is so culturally dominant here, and how we have to suffer in silence their gaffs.

The transmission of high quality audio via the internet is an inevitability even the BBC cannot ignore. This is a medium that transcends boundaries and is able to pop their cosy UK bubble. It was once a proud boast of the BBC that they led with DAB. Now they are falling behind. So the transmission of higher quality audio streams via the internet wasn't exactly an altruistic exercise; it was a late response to what other countries do.

This was an uncomfortably political exercise for them and I have to wonder if there was some ambivalence toward it that explains why the experiment was little publicised. DAB was meant to represent high quality radio in Britain. Sending out a higher quality internet feed undermines DAB and just strengthens questions about its future.

One 320kbps feed for a few weeks is a sad response to the pressure for better quality that the blog made so apparent. But the enthusiasm for better sound was so overwhelming and the praise for the BBC's production efforts and all else that goes into The Proms so positive, that perhaps someone somewhere in the Beeb will finally get the message that quality counts, and all the effort that goes into The Proms deserves to be communicated fully to UK audiences. I laughed at the criticism, but it was good to see the praise too. ●

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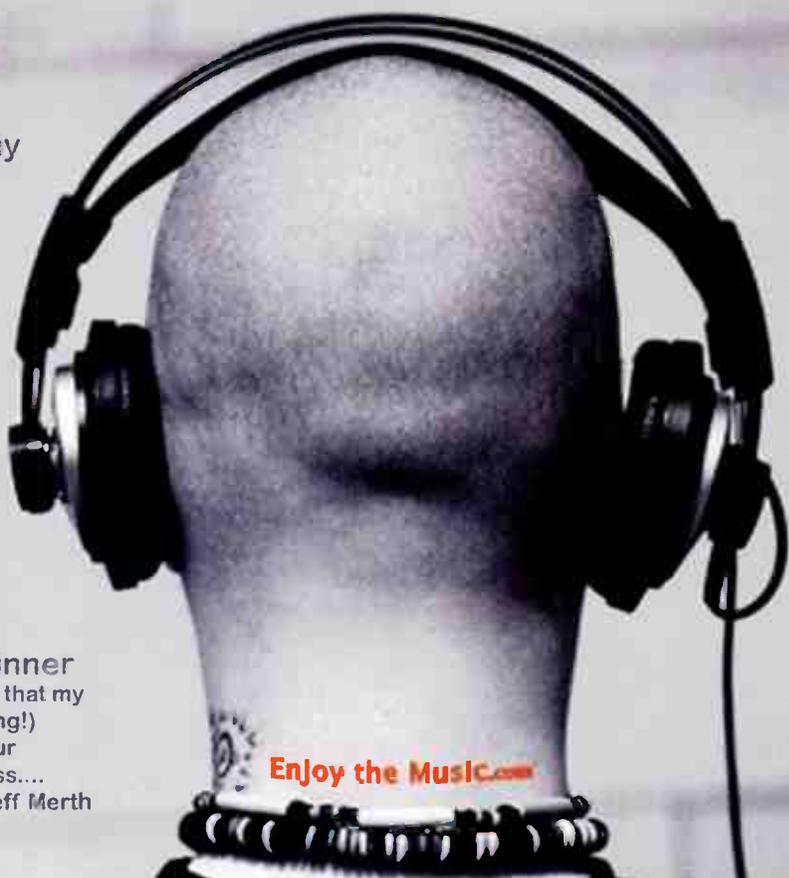
— Craig Mattice

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In fact, the Axiom Audio EP500 works so well that my wife and I both stood mouths open (not kidding!) as it shook the rafters and window glass in our house. Amazing! Love that palpable, tight bass.... Thank you again for the awesome prize! — Jeff Merth

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"look after that lovely gear you have at home, as you never know what tomorrow's classics will be..."



adam smith

It's no secret to regular readers that we are all rather fond of our vintage equipment at *Hi-Fi World*. Indeed, everyone involved with the magazine uses something that is no longer in its first flush of youth as part of their main system, and we are all delighted to stumble upon something classic and unusual. The thing is though, that I feel there are two camps at work here, as I suspect that Noel and David are far too dignified to go rummaging around in skips, poking through the goodies at local dumps and crawling around on their hands and knees every Sunday in a dusty car boot sale field [not true, but I'm happy to maintain the pretence - *Ed!*]. Others, such as Tim Jarman, Haden and myself have no such qualms however, but we may be coming off worse in one crucial respect. I suspect that Noel and David are far less exposed to the "my goodness, what the heck has happened to that?" experience!

Clearly, stumbling upon a mint, boxed Bang & Olufsen Beogram 4000 at the local bootie is the sort of experience we love, and it has happened to me on one occasion (£4, since you ask...) but this isn't a regular experience. More often than not, I am left bemused and bewildered by the astonishing state of the item I have stumbled on and cannot help but lose hours wondering how it came to be that way...

Of course, fair wear and tear is only to be expected. Old foam surrounds on loudspeakers disintegrate, turntable or cassette belts stretch, and electronic components fail with age. I have no problem with these aspects of being interested in old gear, and nor is it unreasonable to expect the odd

sign of age or use. I am sure I am not the first person who, years ago, clouted one of my barely run-in new loudspeakers with the television set as I heaved it into place in between them, resulting in a dent and scrape that made me feel sick at the time, and stood out like a sore thumb (well, to me, anyway...) for the rest of my ownership. Mishaps occur and these are part and parcel of the audio experience.

No, you see I am talking about the things that really *cannot* be explained. I once came across a rather tasty NAD 3240PE amplifier at a car boot sale for the mere sum of £8, but it didn't come home with me because of the sheer state it was in. Two of the loudspeaker sockets were broken off, the volume knob was missing and the top had a massive dent in it. Naturally it was caked in a thick layer of indeterminable filth and my resulting thoughts were split between surprise at the magnitude of the task that would be required to make it look presentable again, and the worry that it might be harbouring a communicable disease or two! How had it become like this, though? Back when it was new, someone would have walked into a shop and handed over somewhere in the region of £200, and taken it home. What on earth could have happened in the meantime to reduce it to the wreck that was sat in front of me?

It's not just amplifiers, either. I have lost count of the numbers of items I have encountered that one has to simply laugh about, otherwise depression or madness would be the result. How about a nice direct drive Pioneer turntable with a big hole where the motor should have been? An Arcam Alpha amplifier with half its components missing and a big crack across the PCB? A pair of Monitor

Audio R252 loudspeakers that had been painted black (badly) and that had no grilles because, according to the seller "one of the mounting pegs broke off so I threw them away"! All these seem to defy belief and yet still fall short of my absolute favourite, from a few years back.

The location was, once again, my local car boot sale and my seventh sense started tingling as I approached a stall that seemed to be mainly selling plants that were displayed in a variety of recycled household objects. Two of these were delightful displays of flowers in what appeared to be a pair of rather drab grey boxes. However, on closer inspection, these turned out to be nothing less than a pair of cabinets from a pair of original Acoustic Energy AE2s – superb classic loudspeakers that still fetch serious sums of money today.

Doing my best to disguise the tremor in my voice, I enquired after the rest of these loudspeakers and was told that the boyfriend of the lady in question had been given (yes, given) them, had taken the drivers out to use in his car and was going to throw the boxes away until she "rescued" them. I think she may have picked up on the anguished look on my face and attempted to help assuage any fears I had about the good wisdom of this decision by assuring me that the speakers "weren't very good – they blew up after a few days use in his car".

So there we have it but, please, I implore you, look after that lovely gear you have at home, as you never know what tomorrow's classics will be. And if anyone starts sniffing around your loudspeakers and throws the words 'my' and 'car' into the conversation, kick them out immediately, especially if their partner is wielding a bag of fertiliser! ●

vinyl section

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NOVEMBER 2010

www.hi-fiworld.co.uk**REGA RPI 100**

David Price enjoys this new entry-level turntable.

FUNK FIRM FXR II 105

David Price tries a new, excellent, affordable audiophile tonearm.

RECORD MAKERS 110

Paul Rigby looks at Stockfisch Records.

AUDIO TECHNICA AT-LP120-USB 116

David Price tries an interesting budget direct drive USB turntable.

news

PURE PLEASURES

Some wildly varying titles have just been released from the British audiophile record label, Pure Pleasure (www.purepleasurerecords.com) via significant musical figures. The first, Taj Mahal's 'The Natch' I Blues' (1968) is Mahal's brilliant second LP combining delta blues and more forceful electric variants. Sonny Rollins' 'Sonny Meets Hawk' (1963) pairs the great sax player with another, Coleman Hawkins. It's a multi-generational tussle that expounds freedom with gay abandon, in the old fashioned sense of the phrase. Also look out for Cab Calloway's 'Hi De Hi De Ho' (1959) which sees the top entertainer on top form with excellent backing.



MO-FI

A true classic of the new wave generation has just been released from the prestigious audiophile classic label, Mobile Fidelity (www.mofi.com). Elvis Costello's 'Armed Forces' (1979) showcased his maturing songwriting ability and arrangement style. It features the superb 'Oliver's Army' and 'Accidents Will Happen', as is worth the sticker price just for these gems!

RECENT SMASHES

Taking a generally contemporary spin on its latest batch of vinyl reissues, Music On Vinyl (www.musiconvinyl.com) has released Turin Brakes' 'Outbursts', the band's current edgy alt.folk album, released this year. Next is Kings Of Leon's 'Youth & Young Manhood', their hit and miss debut (2003) that re-examined US-based southern rock with honky-tonk flavours. Fatboy Slim's, 'You've Come A Long Way Baby' (1998), Norman Cook's best album, is presented here in its 'dirty' form with all of the naughty words intact while Frankie Goes To Hollywood's 'Welcome to the Pleasuredome' (1984) retains a general naughty air, made real by their overtly sexual/homoerotic marketing campaign. A classic 'moment in time' LP. Sex turns to love (with added lust) and Outkast's 'Speakerboxxx/The Love Below', oozing melodic g-funk and soul. Basically two solo albums stuck together in a 4LP gatefold package, this collection proved to be a musical highlight of 2003. Also look out for Iggy And the Stooges' Raw Power (1973) including the remastered original David Bowie mix plus the Iggy Pop 1997 mix; Jack Bruce and Robin Trower's 'Seven Moons' (2008), reuniting the pair for the first time since the eighties and Fleetwood Mac's 'Greatest Hits' (1971) which, for some reason, was never released in the USA.



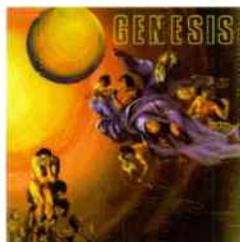
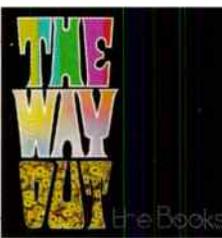
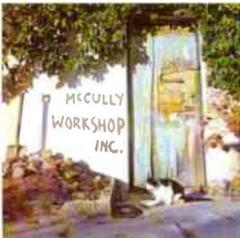
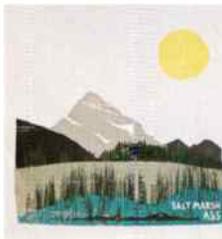
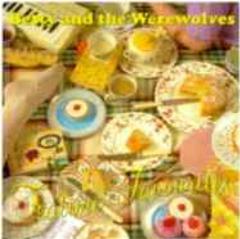
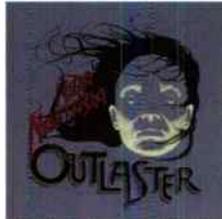
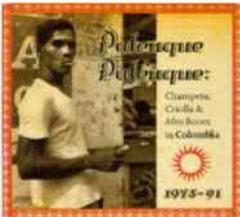


Radio City Big Star



BIG STAR

Once issued by Classic Records but now reissued by Concord (www.concordmusicgroup.com) on limited edition coloured vinyl, Big Star's big album duo: '#1 Record' (1972) and 'Radio City' (1974) paired the songwriting skills of Alex Chilton and Chris Bell, producing some of the earliest examples of power pop – at least of this high quality.



AND FINALLY...

A whopping great end piece, this issue, brings together a right ol'mish mash of genres, time periods and labels beginning with 'Palenque Palenque: Champeta, Criolla & African Roots In Columbia 1975-91' (Palenque Records; www.myspace.com/palenguerecords) and a 3LP investigation into afrobeat and Columbian dance music.

Next, a new vinyl duo from Damaged Goods

(www.damagedgoods.co.uk): Betty And the Werewolves' debut, 'Teatime Favourites', (populated by three girlies and a bloke) produces an edgy indie-pop while Cyanide Pills' self-titled debut release offers a stripped production, melodic punk-influenced party piece. Jocelyn Robert's newly released 'Monsonics' (Hronir; www.hronir.de) forms experimental sound collages that seems to plug in to Radio Earth as it dips into the music, noises, static detritus, found sounds and general polka dot sonics of everyday life. Next? A duo from Greece's Missing Vinyl

(www.veamusic.com/missing_vinyl/mv) and two LPs from the South African band, McCully Workshop. 'Inc' (1970) is an excellent psychedelic release while the band's follow-up, 'Genesis' (1971) explores the then new phenomenon of prog rock. Definitely worth investigation.

Out now on FatCat (www.fat-cat.co.uk) is Nina Nastasia's 'Outlaster' that moves away from the singer-songwriter's normally stripped style to a more lush arrangement. Her songs remain packed with emotion of intensity. Ass' (aka Andreas Soderstrom) 'Salt Marsh' (Static Caravan; www.staticcaravan.org) moves his alt.folkish tones forward to produce a fuller, more ambitious set of arrangements that sees Ass developing further as an experimental artist. The band's fourth album, 'The Books' 'The Way Out' (Temporary Residence; www.temporaryresidence.com) fuses electronic and pop with more roots-based forms that will be enjoyed by anyone who likes classic Warp label output. Junkboy's 'Koyo' (Enraptured; www.enrapturedrecords.com) is quite beautiful; delicate, melodic, pastoral pop with Elliot Smith influences. Imagine shimmering sunshine cascading through the leaves of an old oak tree...



A NEW MAN

Featuring the albums 'Tubeway Army', 'Replicas', 'Pleasure Principle' and the rarities disc, 'The Plan', Vinyl 180 (www.vinyl180.com) has released this superbly packaged box set. 'Tubeway Army' features the original blue sleeve art and is only available from Vinyl 180 as part of this box set while the record has been pressed on blue vinyl.

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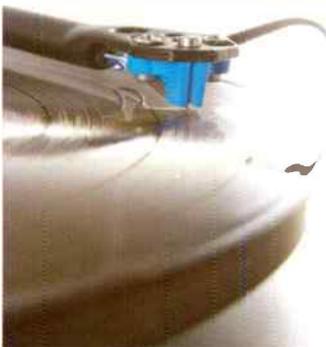
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Special One?

Surprisingly perhaps, the entry level 'real hi-fi' turntable market is a busy one these days, with competition getting stronger. And now, in to the fray comes the new RP1 from Rega. David Price tries it for size...

I'm not really one to get too excited by £225 turntables, although there's one notable exception to this rule - Rega. How so? Well, my first real hi-fi disc spinner was a Planar 3 (as it was then called), in an exquisite lilac pink and electric blue colour combination. Tracking an original Supex-made Rega R100 cartridge, I loved it, so much so that when I later upgraded to a Linn LP12 I wasn't wholly convinced that the Linn was comprehensively better in every respect...

Back in the nineteen eighties it was a brilliant budget deck, and one whose mantle has now only

recently been passed to the P3-24. But elsewhere in Rega's range, things have changed apace. One of the most surprising areas is the entry level market. Back when I bought my nineteen eighties Rega, they had a great starter deck in the shape of the Planar 2, but if you couldn't afford that then it was the ubiquitous £75 Dual CS505 for you, like it or lump it. These days, Rega have plugged that gap with the new 33/45rpm RP1, I presume in response to the onslaught from some pretty tasty Pro-ject decks, such as the Debut III. This company has been snapping at Rega's heels for longer than the company would care to remember...

Still, Rega have been making turntables for even longer. It was back in the mid nineteen seventies that they first made a name for themselves, with the strikingly styled and very cool Rega Planet. It sported a striking looking assemblage of three large cast aluminium alloy spokes in lieu of a proper platter, and didn't sound quite as good as it looked. Then, in 1977, it was quickly replaced with a near identical deck that boasted a vastly better sounding (and working) platter made of glass; appropriately enough it was called

the Planar.

For a while this deck, in Planar 3 guise, was the darling of the small independent hi-fi specialist dealer. Indeed, before CD came out there was actually a waiting list for the things, such was the high demand. But Rega really did itself proud when Planar 3s started being shipped with a new straight-pipe tonearm, from August 1983 onwards. The RB300 had arrived, and the British vinyl scene would never look the same again...

So it's important not to take for granted the company's reputation, if you're a particular type of 'affordable audiophile' turntable buyer; Rega has a great pedigree. All the more interesting then when a new 'entry level' deck arrives. The RP1 of course is a certain kind of 'entry level'; costing £225 it's more expensive than the P2 was not so long ago. It's also the replacement for the P1, which enjoyed a shorter life than is usual for a Rega. I presume the company believe the modification package the RP1 sports is so dramatic that it demands a new name, rather than just an 'i' suffix, or suchlike.





Where the P1 was basically a nicely covered piece of MDF with an AC synchronous motor installed on one side, a Rega RB100 tonearm on the other, and a main bearing in the middle, supporting a wood platter and felt mat, the RPI subtly changes the formula with the addition of a phenolic resin platter. Actually, the drive system on Regas is quite marginal in my opinion; like a classic Lotus race car it works *just well enough* to get the job done, and no more. Even on the Planar 3, which sported a relatively heavy platter, cleaning the belt periodically - plus all the contact points of the belt such as the pulley and inner platter - and setting the deck 100% level, audibly improved the speed stability. So the addition of this new platter, moulded to concentrate its mass around the outer part for better flywheel effect, is most welcome.

Rega also mention a "high

quality low vibration motor which would normally be used on a turntable costing two or three times the amount" being fitted; presumably superior to the P1. It's also said to have a new precision main bearing and subplatter assembly, plus the new 'hand assembled' RB101 tonearm which comes fitted with an Ortofon OM5e moving magnet cartridge. Three different hues are available, Titanium, Cool Grey and White; there's also a choice of different coloured turntable mats, too. Build quality at the price was actually quite impressive; not a million miles from the P2.

Setup is about as easy as it can get with a hi-fi turntable; it's the usual Rega procedure of removing everything from the packaging, putting the platter on the subplatter, and fitting the counterweight to the arm. The Ortofon cartridge comes prefitted and aligned, and the balance weight simply has to be moved to the end stop for optimum tracking force; the bias is already set. The usual Rega placement caveats apply; keep it as far away as possible from vibration (ground or airborne), and don't play

it with the lid on as it will sully the sound, if you can possibly avoid it...

SOUND QUALITY

Not having listened to anything at this end of the market for a couple of months, I was surprised by the performance of this wee turntable, which sounded decently speed stable, nicely musical, couth and enjoyable - and certainly well set up. There are none of the nasties associated with decks at around £100 less, and it's fair to say that the new Rega PR1 comfortably outpaces clones, rivals and wannabes at or near its price.

Swing Out Sister's 'You On My Mind' was just plain fun to hear. I'm not a huge fan of the Ortofon OMS5e cartridge (I'd have fitted an Audio Technica AT-110E, but there



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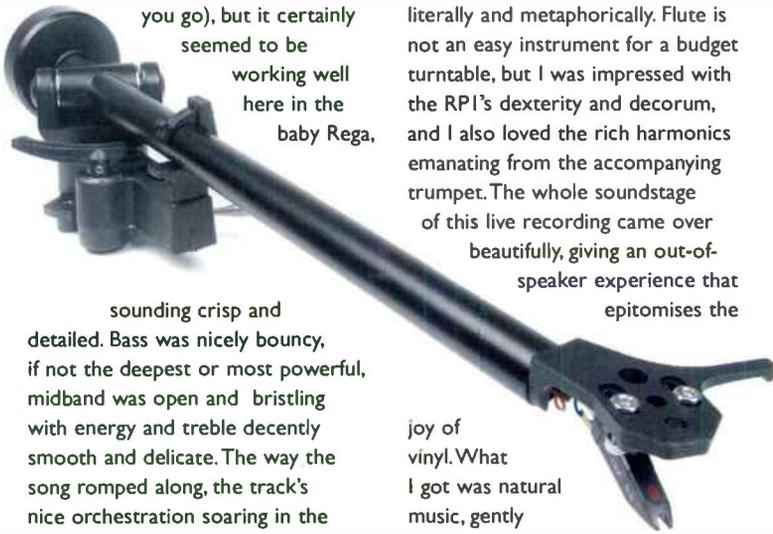
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you go), but it certainly seemed to be working well here in the baby Rega,

literally and metaphorically. Flute is not an easy instrument for a budget turntable, but I was impressed with the RPI's dexterity and decorum, and I also loved the rich harmonics emanating from the accompanying trumpet. The whole soundstage of this live recording came over beautifully, giving an out-of-speaker experience that epitomises the

joy of vinyl. What I got was natural music, gently ebbing and flowing, played in a smooth and beguiling, yet not boring, way. The sure-footedness of the Rega is down in no small part, I think, to that RB101 tonearm, which looks and feels like a class act - and

the bass. This was all well and good, but there was a slight lack of precision to some of the piano notes, counterpointing some heavy synthesised bass drum and snare beats, which didn't sound quite as sure footed as on, say the P3-24. No implicit criticism at the price here; I'm just remarking that this was the one moment that brought the Rega down to mere mortal status, after so much evidence to the contrary.

All the same, the RPI proved great fun to listen to, never sounding in any way unpleasant; indeed I was fascinated to find that this new baby Rega sounded less 'sterile' than my much loved (and far more expensive) old Planar 3; this is definitely a deck that likes playing music.

CONCLUSION

A fine package, then. You get a decently finished plinth, an unobtrusive belt-drive system, a truly excellent tonearm, a competent supplied and pre-aligned cartridge, all for the price of ten or so fancy vinyl repressings. Of course, the RPI isn't the best turntable around, or anywhere near it, but it does a fine basic job without drawing the listener's attention to any obvious weak points - and at £225 that's an achievement in itself. But this Rega doesn't succeed simply on grounds of competency; above all it's fun to listen to, nice to use and has a charm all of its own.

sounding crisp and detailed. Bass was nicely bouncy, if not the deepest or most powerful, midband was open and bristling with energy and treble decently smooth and delicate. The way the song romped along, the track's nice orchestration soaring in the background, Corrine Drewery's vocals caressing my earholes, was most enjoyable. Even at this price, analogue can do something that digital at any price just can't; the RPI reminded me of this.

Moving to The Dream Academy's

"above all it's fun to listen to, nice to use and has a charm all of its own..."

'Bound to Be', and the Rega caught the scale of this ambitious eighties production, not shirking from its complex texturing. Lead singer Nick Laird-Clowes' vocals sounded suitably urgent and searching, tightly located between the speakers. The rhythm guitar accompaniment came over with great urgency, yet the deck didn't get itself in a spin as the song moved to a crescendo; that characteristic eighties slap-bass was super fast and funky, while the backing cello work came over with body and power. Dynamic, punchy and propulsive, I was never aware that I was listening to a low rent turntable, aside from the occasional tendency for violins to shout just a touch in the upper midband, the Ortofon OMS5E obviously pitching in a bit to remind everyone it was still there!

A classic seventies pressing of Herbie Mann's 'Summertime' again did nothing but endear me to the Rega; my copy, already dog-eared when I bought it second-hand in 1987, has signs of previous use (to put it politely); the aforementioned track particularly so, and it's not helped by being the innermost song on the disc. Despite all this, the Rega managed to keep the Ortofon in the groove, both

sounds it too.

A bit of electronic beat-driven hip-hop with DJ Shadow's 'Midnight in a Perfect World' was the only track that in any way reminded me I was listening to a turntable that costs less than what many spend on cables. It set up a lovely, big, sumptuous, expansive soundstage, with a satisfying warmth going down low into

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Sony PS-6750 turntable
van den Hul Frog moving coil cartridge
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage
Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The arm has a well damped main bending mode at 225Hz. The narrow but tall peak in our vibration analysis is a related second harmonic at 450Hz and above it is the usually dominant third order bending mode at 675Hz. Although no one peak is either large or wide, there is still a lot of area under the curve and so whilst the arm will not be coloured or zingy, it may not be quite clinically clean, but then it is a budget arm and this is a good result.

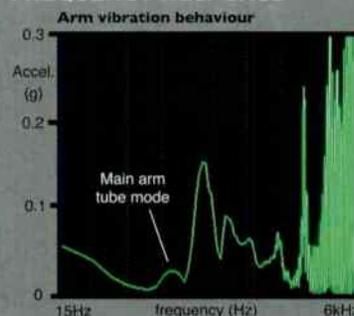
A little less good is the profusion of treble peaks at right, but a change of cartridge to a Goldring 1042 cured much of this. The budget Ortofon fitted had pronounced 'needle talk' and put a lot of energy into the arm.

The deck ran +0.4% fast but this changed irregularly due to random drift, giving a somewhat hard to pin down Wow & Flutter value, but performance

was decent enough here all the same, our analysis showing a typical 0.168% total unweighted wow and flutter figure, and a 0.106% IEC weighted value, both respectable results.

The Rega RP1 offers a fair measured result in absolute terms and is good as budget decks go. NK

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



VERDICT

Pleasing sound, fine build and ease of set-up and use make this a great first 'real hi-fi' turntable.

REGA RP1 £225

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FOR

- propulsive bass
- open sound stage
- refined midband
- build quality at the price
- relative ease of set-up

AGAINST

- no Rega logo on the plinth!

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QUALITY HIGH FIDELITY & VINTAGE

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 Audiolab 8000M (x2) british built mint boxed Each **E395**
 Audiolab 8000P british built mint boxed **E295**
 Audion single ended sterling 6550 tube fitted **E595**
 AMR 77 Titanium finish flightcased x dem **EPOA**
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 Naim Flatcap mint boxed **E275**
 Naim 62 pre amp **E195**
 Naim 250 power various from **E445**
 Naim Snaps PSU **E145**
 Naim NAC 145 **E195**
 PS Audio IV pre amp with separate PSU **E195**
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MISCELLANEOUS

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Funky Town

David Price gets down with Funk Firm's new FXR II tonearm...

Well, on one level, it's just another modified Rega. There will be some who dismiss the Funk FXR II out of hand for precisely this reason, because high end tonearms are supposed to be things of great beauty, rare, exclusive and hand crafted in a way that sets audiophile eyebrows raising. If your main objection to this new Funk arm is that it's not a Graham or SME, turn the page now...

Arthur Khoubessarian is a man on a mission: if you've met him before you'll know he has a child-in-

a-sweetshop enthusiasm for variously music, hi-fi vinyl, and engineering design. The reason he gives for doing the FXR in the way he has, using the Rega 'platform' so to speak, is value. "For me to launch a multi thousand pound product as a first product would continue the elitism of the high end vinyl market, and continue to contract it. What is so wrong with people actually experiencing and owning a superb sounding product *en masse?*", he proclaims.

There's a lot right about the basic Rega design, which Arthur hasn't touched, instead concentrating his fire on the weak points.

"The challenge was to create a balanced product for many people to experience and enjoy. Many people will have one "sitting in a drawer" that they feel they can take the risk to modify", he points out. He adds that the FXR II's "makeover" is so radical that there's so little left of the original that calling it a modded Rega is wholly inappropriate. Likening it to a Cosworth Ford or an AMG Merc "gives you an idea of the extent of the Funk transformation".

The RB250, RB300, RB251 and RB301 are great basic arms, although hindered by the lack of VTA adjustment and a slightly clunky bias

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adjuster. Then there's the middling wiring and high Q, narrow band resonance spikes in the arm tube, and bearing friction issues. "Stylus accelerations reach some 20,000g and the forces on the stylus are massive. Bias non-linearity or excessive frictional lateral loads will move the generator out of its optimal position (distortion) and accelerate stylus wear", he says. There's also the overall system resonance damping, what he calls "the 10Hz effect", which affects secure tracking, even if it's rarely heard directly.

Arthur says the FXR is designed to address all of these issues. Interestingly, he says "it would be easier to make a complete arm from scratch", pointing out that the arm has to be carefully dismantled from the original setup using custom made jigs and tools. The arm beam is then "parted off to a precise length" and the FXR tube is then jigged and bonded to the cut-down arm stub.

Before this is done, it has to be pre-assembled; he's a little bashful about this, as you might imagine, but suffice to say the object is to produce the most acoustically inert structure possible. The thin walled aluminium tube gets a carbon fibre cross section, tensioned within, which terminates in a custom headshell mount. The new bearing pillar is assembled with ABEC 7 bearings, adjusted and set. Once assembled, the chosen cabling/connector system is added. Along the way, five separate quality checks take place.

The arm's price "starts" at £1,175, whereupon customers can specify a range of options; there's a 12" version being talked about, and two variants to fit Linn geometry and mountings; one is for the standard LP12 armboard, the other a "direct drop in" variant for the Keel subchassis. There are also mounting options for SME's Model 20, 9" or 12". Wiring options include one piece wiring or detachable 5-pin plug connectors. Funk will also mod

a customer's existing arm for £900. As for colour choice, Arthur says, "it is identifiable at one hundred paces! Love it or hate it, it is uniquely Funk. If you want a black or silver arm, then buy someone/everyone else's!"

In the flesh, the FXR II is rather nice: of course it does look like a 'hybrid', but a very professionally done one at that, and any readers who like direct handcueing will enjoy the silky precision of the way the arm feels. Its distinct headshell, which is little more than a slide-in cartridge carrier, is designed to make cartridge installation easy and the cartridge tags are substantial enough to be fitted with fingers rather than tweezers.

SOUND QUALITY

Listening was done mostly on a Technics SL1200, which is a known quantity, but also on a Funk Saffire which I hadn't heard in my own system before. I also got the chance to do a direct A-B comparison between the FXR II and an SME Series V tonearm, using the same Denon cartridge and Technics decks. Listening in isolation saw me moving to a vdH The Frog moving

"this tonearm isn't difficult to describe; it has a big hearted, powerful and energetic sound that lets the music's flavour flood out..."

coil.

The FXR II isn't a difficult arm to describe; it has a big hearted, powerful and energetic sound that lets the music's flavour flood out. It reminded me of a King Charles Spaniel romping through a park, absolutely unstoppable and full of the joys of spring. It was a striking contrast to the SME Series V, which was an altogether more cerebral and ordered affair. Indeed, in some ways

the Funk arm made the SME sound positively aloof, despite its characteristic supreme grip and focus.

For example, 4hero's 'Cosmic Tree' starts with a slow building violin introduction, and even at its relatively low volume (compared to the crashing snare drum and bass guitar that follows), the FXR II sounded tremendously animated and fizzing with energy. I was struck by the phrasing of the strings, which the Funk accentuated, and the SME played down. The result was that the former arm came over as having more passion, or rather the music did; I felt gripped and locked in to the human 'vibe' in the recording studio, whereas with the SME I got a beautifully architectural description of the soundstage, provided matter of factly, with riflebolt precision.

Tonally the Funk proved pretty much spot on, I'd say, adding very little of its own character; against the SME it's a touch less 'dark' but you certainly couldn't call it bright or shiny in any way. Against the SME, vocals had a touch more presence, and came over with a greater sense of urgency too. Again, I found myself enjoying the phrasing of the singer's voice, whereas with the SME it was the sheer painstaking accuracy of the production I became preoccupied with. The former delighted me musically, the latter felt more like a brilliant measuring instrument.

In terms of soundstaging, the Funk was excellent, managing to make the Technics sound extremely expansive, despite the host SL1200's less than brilliant abilities on this score; indeed it has something of a 'stereo wide' quality to it, with instruments located in the mix with great boldness and power. The SME by contrast offered an even higher degree of focus in terms of where

instruments were in the mix, but seemed to 'distill down' the size of the soundstage itself slightly. Depth perspective was excellent with both arms, the Funk seeming a little more forward and out towards the listener, and possibly not dropping back so far. But it was marginal; both arms could be considered as being up at the top of the tree in this respect, the Funk being all the more remarkable because of its relatively lower price.



I also found the FXR II to be very handy in the low frequency department; Corduroy's '10:28 From Shibuya' is a beautifully recorded, bass-driven slice of modern Acid Jazz, and the Funk lapped it up. Its

the hi-hat was wonderful, again the Funk taking special trouble to tell you all about the musician's phrasing. In terms of dynamics, specifically those small nuances that make all the difference between passion and peace-work, the Funk was masterful

"In terms of those small nuances that make all the difference, the Funk was masterful..."

bass is very animated and tuneful, bouncing along like a rubber ball; this is something neither the stock Rega can do, or the SME. Whilst the latter was perhaps a touch deeper and more gutsy, there was less of a sense that the bass guitar was playing a tune; instead the focus moved to the texture of the fingers on the strings. The Funk sewed this lovely liquid bassline in beautifully with the rest of the mix, making the two one and the same. Again I found it able to inject extra vim into the performance, somehow extracting more passion from the musicians; rather like Coke in the nineteen seventies ad, it adds life!

The Funk's treble is excellent too; there's no sense of this being like a beguiling, bouncy unipivot with nothing at either frequency extreme. Right up past the hi-hats, the FXR II told me a lot about the treble and was decently crisp and silky with it. In conjunction with that big, kinetic bass and a clear, dimensional midband, it made for an enormously enjoyable performance. The rhythms of the snare drum playing off

at the price.

A pretty persuasive performer then; considering we're talking about a sub-£1,200 tonearm, it's difficult to think of anything that comes close. In absolute terms though, the Funk isn't utterly beyond reproach. Further listening with another SMEV showed a slight propensity to 'smear' the spaces between the notes. I must

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Technics SL1200
SME Series V tonearm
Marantz TT-1000 turntable
Origin Live Encounter tonearm
vdH Frog moving coil cartridge
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage
MF Audio Passive Magnetic Preamp
World Audio Design K5881 (modified)
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

emphasise that this is only to a *tiny* degree; the SME achieved more of the sense of the notes switching on and off like an LED. Funnily enough however, this didn't translate to it being more 'musical'. Indeed if anything, the reverse was true. This of course makes one wonder if Arthur is planning a higher priced, 'statement' arm; well I might think that, but he couldn't possibly comment!

CONCLUSION

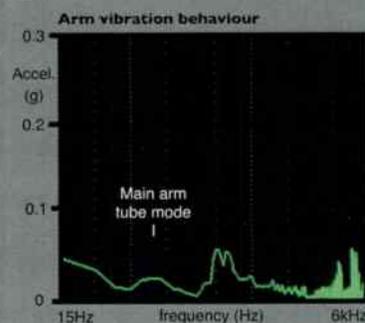
So, just when you thought it was safe to come out, to peruse the hi-fi world without the threat of another modded and/or cloned Rega striding the landscape, out comes the Funk Firm FXR II. But as you'd expect from a designer who did some of the most interesting things with turntables back in the nineteen eighties, this arm isn't just another 'me too' rewire and counterweight tweak. Instead, the mods are profound in nature and have a correspondingly dramatic sonic result. This is an open, spacious and animated sounding tonearm that succeeds spectacularly in the extraction of music from the groove. For the amount of performance it provides at the price, it's practically in a gang of one.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Funk FXR II arm uses a Rega RB300 arm pillar assembly, with a new arm tube grafted on. Comparison with the old tapered aluminium arm is interesting, even though the assemblies are a lot different. The lowest, primary arm tube vibrational mode is lower on the Funk than the RB300, at around 150Hz our analysis shows, but it is well damped and of very low amplitude. This leaves the rest of the lower midband clear of unwanted vibrational behaviour, which bodes well for bass dynamics, image stability and general tidiness. There is a small double hump just above 1kHz, and this is attributable to the Rega arm pillar assembly; it appears because a similar effect can be seen in the RB300 and 301 arms. Above 2kHz the Funk arm tube and headshell are unusually free of high frequency ringing,

much of this being attributable to the inverted headshell saddle cartridge fixing; headshells, integral or not, always measure worse than clamps like this. So the Funk FXR II measures surprisingly well for what is, visually, an unprepossessing design. NK

ARM VIBRATION



VERDICT

Don't be fooled by its Rega roots; this is an exceptionally lyrical and engaging sounding tonearm, even at its premium price.

FUNK FIRM FXR II £1,175

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www.thefunkfirm.co.uk

FOR

- bouncy, lyrical sound
- capacious soundstaging
- neutral tonality
- fine dynamics

AGAINST

- badge snobs look away!

Record Makers

Paul Rigby looks at Stockfish Records...

German-based Stockfish Records (www.stockfish-records.de) produce vinyl, SACDs and CDs featuring a wide variety of largely singer/songwriter material, often acoustic guitar but with folk, classical and jazz elements adding a frisson of variety to the label.

Artists include Sara K, Chris Jones, Ewen Carruthers, David Roth, the Sebastian Sternal Trio and many more. They've been in business for thirty-five years and create all of their music with the audiophile firmly

in mind. Owner Gunter Pauley explains, "we offer singer-songwriter material – mainly acoustic guitar oriented. It's my own personal preference but I've always felt that you should do what you love and not what you think people might want to hear".

"I've had a lot of luck", adds Pauley. "We've found a niche in the industry – a niche that other, larger, companies have never found worthwhile to exploit. They, in effect, have always chased the hits to satisfy their voracious profit model. We don't have to". Pauley likes

to take care when recording his artists, and it shows in his studio production values. That is, unlike a typical pop recording that you might hear via a major label which shows all the signs of being a rush job, Pauley's works are, "more of a document for the future, a bit like a painting. I can't understand my label colleagues when they declare that a piece of music has a lifespan of, say, four weeks. I like to create music which is an ever lasting thing. When you work with a musician – an artist – you can see how seriously he is doing his job. Hence, it is a shame if you don't treat his work with the same respect. Surely, the very least you can do is to put as much effort into his music as he does?"

This is why Pauley's recording studios are filled with the best possible equipment he can get his hands on. And if not, he creates the stuff himself. "I started my studio with a home built mixer, thirty years ago," he declared. "I've known some people who might not particular enjoy the genres of music that we cater for but still buy our records because they are so well produced that they like to push them through their expensive hi-fi systems!"

What Pauley also recognises is that a mutual respect is then forged via the label and the artist, that fragile element called trust is built, the artist then relaxes and a better performance is produced, "so, everyone wins", smiles Pauley.

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Stockfisch's recording studio.



Direct Metal Master.

Check out Stockfisch vinyl and SACDs, and see what you think. They're a company that not only has a wealth of music on offer but firm audiophile values and views that no reader of this magazine should ignore.

SOUNDING OUT

Stockfisch has collected a number of artists on its roster over the years; here's a selection of what can be found both on vinyl and SACD...

VINYL

THE BASSFACE SWING TRIO

Tribute to Cole Porter

Intriguingly placing a picture of the company's DNM cutting lathe on the front cover instead of the artists themselves – obviously hailing its audiophile kudos – this album features eight tracks by Porter including 'Love for Sale' and 'You'd Be So Nice to Come Home to'.



THE PAPERBOYS

Live At Stockfisch Studio

Utilising traditional folk-related instruments such as flute, banjo, fiddle and whistles, this six-piece band has a gentle folk rhythm with a male and female harmonic delivery. Tracks include 'Comfort And Kind' and 'El Baile Del Puma'.



SEBASTIAN STERNAL TRIO

Paris

The jazz that this trio produces might be relatively low-key but it's definitely searching and quite adventurous. As with all of the vinyl on offer here, the production values are excellent with dynamics being top notch. The addition of the dulcet French tones of Anne-Marie Jean is a welcome one.



SARA K

Water Falls

Spread over two discs, this double LP offers a rather moody production that provides the listener with both air and atmosphere. Sara K's style is cool, investigating the lower registers. Anyone out there who likes Diana Krall should investigate...



DAVID ROTH

Pearl Diver

Roth's delivery has an easy-going, friendly warmth that, with his acoustic guitar accompaniment, is quite soothing in its presentation. He is accompanied by a range of musicians but his style remains intimate. Includes 'Rising In Love' and 'Before I Die'.



STOCKFISCH RECORDS

Vinyl Collection

A label sampler by any other name, this fine compilation of the company's artists features both David Roth and Sara K, featured above, but also other artists such as Mike Silver, Eugene Ruffolo, Ewen Carruthers and Steve Strauss.



SACD

EWEN CARRUTHERS

One Red Shoe

Having quite a folkish delivery, Carruthers sings his own songs and, like David Roth mentioned elsewhere, achieves an intimate atmosphere that draws you into the performance. He is not afraid to investigate varied instrumentation either: witness the inclusion of dobro, sitar guitar, shakuhachi and hulusi!



DENNIS KOLEN

Norheim Goldmine

Kolen has a very lyrical voice, one that has a gentle yet eager pace that moves the song ever onwards giving impetus to his music. Full of bouncy rhythm, Kolen's higher registers adds interest to his delivery.



CARL CLEVES & PARISSA BOUAS

Out Of Australia

This album provides a platform for both Cleves and Bouas to dominate the stage and push their own songwriting skills while the other offers harmony backing that adds meat to the performance.



BLUE CHAMBER

QUARTET

Children's Songs

An unusual album that takes jazzman Chick Corea's 1970s recordings to the fore – recordings that were not actually recorded by Corea until 1984. Each simple piece is well interpreted by this quartet playing piano, harp, vibraphone and double bass with elements of guest percussion thrown in.



ALLAN TAYLOR

Leaving At Dawn

Taylor, in creating this album talks about reintroducing stories in the old fashioned troubadour manner: tales, emotions and how we relate to each other, that is. His work is earnest and relatively intense in a quiet way.



STOCKFISCH RECORDS

Closer To The Music

The SACD section of the Stockfisch catalogue, like its vinyl counterpart, also has its label sampler but, in this case 'it' becomes 'they' as the sampler ranges over three volumes. As an added bonus, the third volume also includes previously unreleased tracks.



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audience



Overall, very impressive. Robert Townsend - Stereophile Jan 08

Audience have been producing High End Cables for some-time now culminating in the new Au24e. Top systems need the best and with Audience there are none to surpass them at their price points. 1m pair Au24e RCA interconnects cost just £729.00 with the matching 3m pair of speaker cables just £1,559.00. Very affordable excellence.

If your budget can not stretch to the Au24e then the Maestro might fit the bill at £259.00 for the interconnects and £670.00 for a 3m pair of speaker cables.

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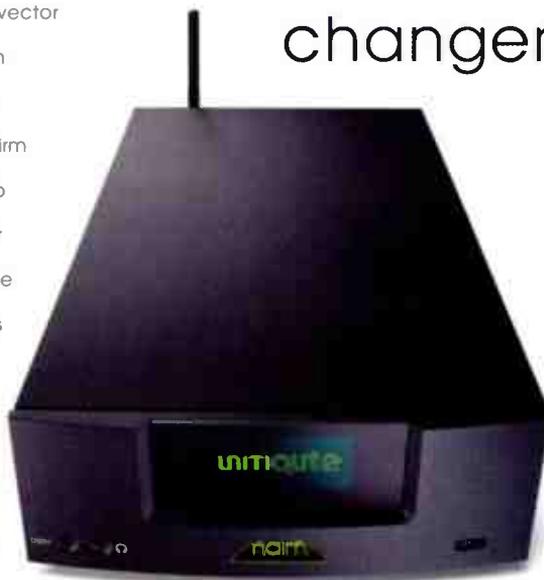
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The XP amplifiers are based on the circuitry of the top of the range DAC XP+. The entry-level 6XP includes 6 line level inputs along with a zone 2 feature while the 8XP d combines the XP series pre-amplifier with a newly revised power amp, and contains an onboard DAC for digital sources.

WINNER OF THE 2009 AWARDS **WINNER OF THE 2009 AWARDS**

8XPd PRE XP X POWER PSX-R

LEEMA ACOUSTICS



The Stream III CD player features an all-new slot loading transport controlled by Leema's own custom firmware providing secure and reliable disc handling and the best retrieval of digital information this is coupled with the new Leema Quad DAC is a refinement of Leema's own highly successful MD2 Multi-DAC giving a shorter signal path and even better performance. The Stream III features a USB digital output enabling bit-perfect digital archiving.

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CD17 CD37 A18 A28 A38

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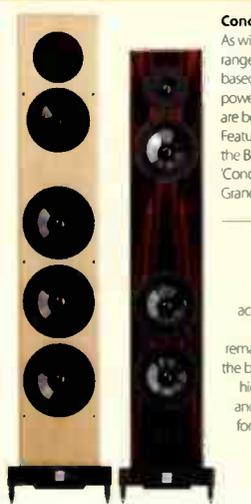
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The Plastic Age

David Price gets in a spin with the direct driven Audio Technica AT-LP120-USB turntable...



No sooner had the ink dried on the pages of the September 2007 issue of *Hi-Fi World* and yours truly was the subject of a right old rollicking from a large number of forum posters, berating me for celebrating (and I paraphrase) "cheapo plastic Jap crap". Yes, it was our Technics SL1200 tune up article, and a lot of people weren't going to take it lying down...

Perhaps it was understandable in retrospect, as the Technics was the antithesis of everything the makes up your classic British superdeck. For a start it was Direct Drive, and it also lacked sprung suspension, and wasn't 'supposed' to be a hi-fi design. Indeed, its ubiquity in nightclub environments was proof for many that it obviously couldn't be any good for audiophile applications. The notion of an excellent sounding, 'plug and play' turntable requiring almost no special treatment or intricate set-up? Perish the thought!

Still, a couple of years on and the SL1200 has become acceptable, after a fashion. I now regularly see people using them, often with different tonearms and/or power supplies, in quite serious audiophile



replacing high end British belt drives. The propaganda war, such as it was, has been won, perhaps? Well, just when I thought it was safe to come out of the kitchen, here comes this. Audio Technica's AT-LP120-USB is almost

an inch-perfect clone of the SL1200. Well, superficially at least, because it sadly gives succour to those who're not aware of just how good the Technics is. Those who still think the SL1200 is actually made of plastic, never having actually seen one in the flesh (in truth, the complete top section of the deck, inside and out, is cast aluminium alloy; the SL1200 has little plastic in it at all) won't be able to tell the difference. The AT-LP120-USB is just the deck that those who've never touched a Technics imagine it to be.

Of course, this is no accident. The SL1200 has become *de rigueur* in civilian circles; ask your postman to draw you a picture of a turntable and it will look a lot like this. So Audio Technica understandably styled their new budget deck very much in the same vein. They've even emblazoned the phrase 'professional turntable' on its plinth for good measure. And in one sense, they've taken some trouble; pick the Audio Technica deck up and it's a case of, "wow, that's as heavy as a Technics"...

So, if it looks like the real thing, and feels like the real thing (in weight terms) then perhaps it practically is the real thing? Sadly no, because whilst the 450x352x157mm AT-LP120-USB might be almost as heavy as a Technics, it's not almost as heavy for the same reasons. It weighs an impressive 10.7kg, but a little bit of screwdriver work ("reverse engineering") reveals it's got about four kilos of aluminium sitting inside its plinth just adding ballast. In short, the SL1200 is heavy because it's built that way, whereas the AT is a lightweight plasticky deck

but with heaviness added! Be clear about this; although the AT-LP120-USB looks like an SL1200, right down to its curiously similar tonearm, silver plinth and pop-up cueing light, it most emphatically is *not*.

Alright then, so it's no Technics, but maybe we should cut it some slack, Jack? After all, the 120-USB costs just £250, and that's a lot less than the SL1200, and the Audio Technica has a trick up its sleeve. That USB output connects directly to your computer, so using (the supplied) Mac- and PC-compatible Audacity software, the deck will let you record your LP to your computer hard drive, to burn to CDs or rip to MP3 (or whatever else is your digital file format poison). For many people (and let's not forget that these folk aren't necessarily tweaky types who read this magazine), this will be a great feature, and let's not forget that all the other USB turntables I've ever tried barely weigh in over about 3kg and have precisely zero aluminium inside (or anywhere else), so at least Audio Technica are making some sort of effort!

Other features of this deck include 'forward and reverse play capability' (presumably either for DJs or believers in hidden





messages about Paul McCartney in Beatles' albums), a cast aluminium platter (sadly of poor quality; the SL1200's 45rpm adaptor is far better made) with slip mat and a start/stop button, three speeds (33.333/45/78), a Direct Drive motor with quartz-lock. Audio Technica claims a starting torque greater than 1.6 kgf-cm, but this is in no way to be considered a strong motor; light pressure from a finger will slow it down, whereas the SL1200 simply digs in and speeds up again indignantly. There's a pitch control (with +/-10% or +/-20% adjustment) and a removable hinged dust cover of mediocre quality.

Then there's the rear panel, which has an RCA flying lead coming out the back, along with a little switch to flick between the built in phono stage and a line level output. There's also a USB socket too. The deck comes supplied with a CD-ROM of Audacity software, which almost isn't needed as it's a free and fast download from the net, in either Mac or PC format. That's not to say only Audacity will work; once you've set the computer's audio input to the USB audio codec, you're in business. It comes bundled with a nice long USB cable, and there's an Audio Technica ATP-2 magnetic cartridge

supplied.

Power up the AT-LP120-USB and you'll certainly not confuse it with an SL1200; whilst the motor hustles the platter up to speed quickly, it's not exactly overburdened with torque. The platter slows far more under load, and the strobe appears to be driven from the mains, whereas the speed comes from the internal crystal, making the strobe as useful as a chocolate teapot. Looking inside, whilst a passable piece of work considering its lowly price (it's barely more expensive than the Rega RPI tested earlier), there's so much cost-cutting going on that simply isn't there in the SL1200, which isn't that much more expensive. The Audio Technica's main bearing, for example, isn't replaceable, and is no great piece of work either.

Actually, the best bit of the deck for me proved to be the tonearm. It's another SL1200 clone; at least it's only a little less well put together than the Technics, whereas the rest of

the deck isn't on the same page. The arm felt quite nice to hand cue, had a decent range of adjustments and didn't feel like it had been cost-cut down to nothing. Ultimately though, you do still need to think of this deck as a cheap, entry level USB turntable that's been 'pimped up' to look like a 'professional' product; any other way of looking at it simply engenders great disappointment.

SOUND QUALITY

I did my first bit of listening with an Audio Technica AT-110E going into a standard MM phono input, which is a known quantity for me, and I'm sorry to say the AT-LP120-USB wasn't the world's most promising performer. Give it some simple music and it sounds nice enough, in an innocuous sort of way, but it lacks the visceral punch of even a well worn SL1200, and never gets away from sounding compressed and vague. Sky's 'Andante' proved fairly smooth but a touch wobbly; the Audio Technica lacked the sure-footed nature of almost every other Japanese direct drive I've heard.

In isolation, things weren't so bad; Caravan's 'In the Land of Grey and



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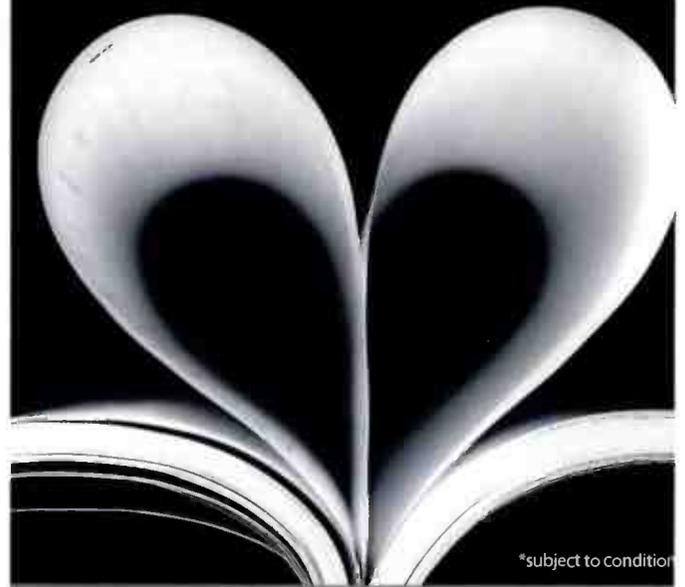
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'Pink' came over in a light, inoffensive and jaunty kind of way, it's just that the song lacked focus and precision. Interestingly this reminded me just how good bad vinyl used to sound; even cheap decks of yore would give wide soundstages, a warm tone and plenty of euphonic softness; what they lacked was precision, dimension and grip. When digital is bad of course, it tends to have grip and punch but contracts to a tiny soundstage and sounds cold and hard. In this sense, a mediocre turntable is more palatable, and I suspect many who've not heard vinyl in many years would actually be pleasantly surprised. Only when they moved to a similarly priced Rega RP1, for example, would they realise their shiny new Audio Technica wasn't as good as they'd thought...

Via its built in head amp, things took a slight turn for the worse, sounding thinner and more mechanical going into the line input of my amplifier. Bass was decently bouncy, and the midband fairly tuneful, on Kate Bush's 'The Sensual World', but tonally it was all over the place, managing to sound both coloured and thin at the same time, which takes some doing. The deck certainly isn't as neutral as the Rega RP1, having a quite thick and muddy bass, but not one that adds to the experience as per the SL1200. Treble is curtailed right up top, although it does a decent enough hi-hat when called upon so to do; again bad digital can sound worse. Overall though, I found the deck's rendition of this track limp and murky; not unpleasant in super-budget terms, just utterly mediocre.



Moving to the USB output, I duly loaded Audacity off the supplied ROM disc, and got going. If you've never tried this recording software you'll find it decently powerful, although seasoned Steinberg WaveLab or Cool Edit Pro users like myself won't be impressed; Audacity is a tad clunky and inflexible by comparison. Still, it's easy enough to use (once you've set the recording input in the 'preferences' section to USB audio, and remembered to tell it you're in stereo at 44.1kHz, 16bit. There are all kinds of recording quality options in Audacity however, so there's plenty of things to play with - including dither (remember Sony's 'Super Bit Mapping', anyone?). And so it is that I started my recording of Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five'; the native levels going into the computer weren't quite as high as I'd have hoped, but at least on the standard settings there's no chance of digital overload.

Having finished my 'session' (recorded in 16/44 .WAV format), I duly auditioned it through a Musical Fidelity MI DAC, played via my Mac's optical digital out. Although the signal wasn't that good in the first place, if anything the USB A-D convertor tidied up the sound just a touch, making the Audio Technica sound just a little more like a transcription turntable; it still had a long way to go, mind you! Slightly drier, and with a touch more apparent detail, the .WAV file cut out some of the gloopy mush of the original LP, making a decently listenable recording. But that's as far as I can go; although perfectly passable audio, it was barely hi-fi.

CONCLUSION

I suppose this deck is just about good enough for the sort of person that's going to buy it. This, I'd venture, is someone who's not had a turntable for twenty years, and simply wants to transcribe his or her vinyl onto their computer, so they can once again unlock what's been consigned to the attic for many years. In this respect,

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC or Mac with an available USB port (USB1.1 or higher)
CD-R or CD-RW writer for burning CDs & installation
Includes Audacity software for PC & Mac users
Audacity requires Mac running OS X 10.1 or later or PC running Windows (98 and above)
USB Function: A/D, D/A - 16 bit 44.1 kHz or 48 kHz USB selectable

it's a passable product, and no more. It works, it's fairly easy to use and it's cheap.

However, for serious audiophile archivists, this is emphatically *not* the thing to buy; instead get a Technics SL1200 (used if you can't afford the £499 new price), and a phono stage (if you don't already have one) and a decent basic cartridge like an Audio Technica AT-95E (£30) and record to your computer's line in socket. Better still, a USB analogue to digital convertor like the Fubar I-O USB would sound far better. I realise that this is considerably more expensive, but it is dramatically superior sonically.

The Audio Technica AT-LP120-USB isn't too bad up to a limited point, but I suspect the point will come to most *Hi-Fi World* readers too soon, so I'd really suggest they looked elsewhere. If all that glitters is not gold, then all that shines isn't silver!

VERDICT ●●£

Good concept spoilt by poor build. Handy for the most basic of hard disk recording, but audiophiles should look elsewhere!

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AGAINST

- poor sonics
- flimsy build
- derivative styling
- not the real thing!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The arm has a well controlled main bending mode at 267Hz and the common third order component at 800Hz, seen as a narrow high peak in our vibration analysis. Relatively speaking this is a good result for what looks like a dated design. More disappointing was the profusion of high order ringing modes around 5kHz. In this area the arm is very lively, more so than is usual.

Balancing the arm's high frequency liveliness is a budget MM cartridge whose output rolls down steadily above 1kHz, measuring -5dB down at 10kHz. This is classic generator loss, and AT have probably used a lot of turns to get high output, raising inductance in the process. There was no treble peak so the sound will be very warm. Tracking was very good however, marginal mistracking occurring only on the highest level cut of 90µm peak amplitude.

Frequency response via USB was identical to analogue and Audio Technica have judiciously set the 0dB digital overload ceiling +10dB above the best the cartridge can do, to accommodate ticks and pops, making digital overload unlikely. The hiss floor was around -8dB below groove noise so there was no problem here either.

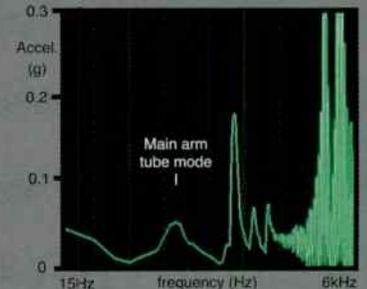
Speed stability was surprisingly poor at 0.263% unweighted Wow & Flutter, a large basic rotational

component at 0.55Hz being responsible (the test disc was carefully centred), with further components at 2.25Hz, 4.75Hz and 6.75Hz. The peaks nudged weighted wow to 0.091%. Even Rega's budget belt drive RP1 managed better, so the AT-LP120 isn't a serious Direct Drive in the Technics mould.

Although tidily designed, the AT-LP120-USB struggles to meet hi-fi standards. NK

ARM VIBRATION

Arm vibration behaviour



WOW & FLUTTER



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Ex - demo and second hand items

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Accuphase DP65 CD Player S/H	2800	1299	ProAc Tablette 8 Signatures Black 3 months old	899	599
Bel Canto DAC 3VB x-demo	2199	1499	Quad 63 Electrostatics S/H	N/A	799
Heed Audio DActilus DAC BNIB	370	269	Sonus faber Cremona Elipsa Maple x-demo	12980	7999
living Control Music Box 3 BNIB	2887	1499	Sonus faber Toy Tower leather BNIB	1650	1499
living Control Room Box4 BNIB	1712	999	Wilson Audio System 8 Dessert Sand 2 yrs old S/H	23500	12500
Meridian 506.20 CD Player S/H	N/A	349			
Primare CD30.2 CD player S/H	1500	749			
Quad 67 CD player S/H	N/A	625			
Analogue			Cables and Accessories		
Koetsu MCR-1 Transformer S/H	3333	1399	Attacama Equinox 3 tier stand x-demo	375	199
EAR834P MM/MC Phono Stage S/H	1190	579	Attacama Europa Reference 8 3 tier S/H	550	299
Heed Audio Quasar MM/MC 2 box Phono stage x-demo	740	499	Apollo 80cm single column Stands S/H	149	99
Heed Audio Questar MM Phono stage BNIB	300	219	Cardas Cables Golden Cross 3m speaker cables	1999	999
Kuzma Stabi S/ Stogi S double arm version Xdemo	2795	1750	Cardas Cables Golden Cross 8m set of RCA interconnects	3198	1499
Kuzma Stogi Tonearm x-demo	1390	799	Crystal cable Reference Balanced 1.0m S/H	1744	1199
Lehmann Black Cube Twin Phono stage x-demo	900	599	Eichmann Express 4 interconnects BNIB	80	49
Mark Levinson No320s Phono Module x-demo	995	649	Electrocompaniet ECS1 M6 feet x4 BNIB	189	49
Well Tempered Lab GTA x-demo	2495	1849	JPS Ultra Dual bi wire 2x8 Spades to banana S/H	549	279
Preamplifiers			Jadis KT90 Valves x 4 BNIB	600	300
Audio Research SP16 Phono Preamplifier S/H	2499	1399	Madrigal MDC1 1m AES/EBU 110 ohm Digital Cable S/H	420	199
BAT VK 52-SE Remote Controlled/Balanced Preamplifier S/H	9350	5999	Siltech HF9 AES/EBU 1m Digital S/H	420	199
Conrad Johnson Classic Phono x-demo	2400	1750	Spectral MI-350 20ft interconnect S/H	2100	899
ECS Finestra Preamplifier Phono S/H	N/A	399	Stereovox 2x2.5m HDXV speaker cable S/H	350	169
Quad 66 Preamplifier S/H	N/A	375	Stereovox HDVX 0.5M digital S/H	199	75
Amplifiers			Transparent Balanced Reference 2x30ft x-demo	6345	3499
47 lab 50 Humpty PSU x-demo	1999	1199	Transparent Reference SC 2x10ft x-demo	6192	3399
47 lab 50 w Gain card x-demo	1999	1199	VDH The Second 0.8m RCA interconnect BNIB	230	159
Audio Technica AT-MA50 Mixing Amplifier S/H	399	199	VDH 1st metal Screen 0.8m BNIB	220	149
Chord Electronics SPM1400 B mono Integra S/H	12000	4999			
ECS EA1 mono power amplifiers S/H	5999	1750	Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies		
Electrocompaniet AW250R S/H	4999	2999	Magnum Dynalab FTR remote/Tuner for Etude S/H	395	199
Electrocompaniet ECI5 Integrated Amplifier x-demo	2699	1999	Nakamichi DR 2 cassette deck S/H	600	149
Graaf GM100 Power amplifier re-valved S/H	5999	2499	Quad 66 Tuner S/H	N/A	289
Heed Can Amp Headphone amplifier BNIB	340	249			
Prima Luna Prologue 2 Silver x-demo	1575	1199			
Primare A30.1 Integrated remote balanced S/H	1500	749			
Quad 606 Power amplifier S/H	N/A	399			
Loudspeakers					
Martin Logan Fresco pair inc stands S/H	1500	699			
Martin Logan Quest Light Oak (new panels) S/H	N/A	1899			
Martin Logan Vantage dark cherry x-demo	5149	3799			
Monitor Audio RS8 Silver Natural Oak S/H	900	579			
PenAudio Charisma x-demo	2715	1899			
PenAudio Charm Sub modules x-demo	2175	1499			
PenAudio Serenade x-demo	7250	4999			

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WANTED: SINGLE ended amplifier. Audio Note Kit One, V.A.D. 300B etc, V.H.Y. Also want Fidelity Research FR-64. Tel: 01492 516 875 or Email: lensand@care4free.net

AMPLIFIERS: PAIR monoblocks 150w T&R MPP9 £500. Rothwell attenuators, two pairs -10dB, one pair -6dB. Headphone, Beyerdynamic DT931. Short Wave receiver, Lowe Electronics HF-225. Tel: Robert 01392 873 984 (Exeter)

FOR SALE: Quad 66 tuner, 66 pre-amp, 67 CD player, 606 power amp, ESL63 speakers. All as new and boxed. £1500. Collection. Stourbridge, West Midlands. Tel: 01384 392 009

FOR SALE: Pair B&W speakers Model DM 3. 2ft high, 1ft wide, on castors. Mint condition. Offers. Buyer to collect. Tel: Terry 07979 394 380 (Barnsley, South Yorks)

WANTED: FONS CQ 30 lid. For Sale: Systm 931S speakers £150. Tel: 01344 776 445 (Berks)

TANNOY DUAL Concentric 3LZ 10" Monitor Golds, mint, unmarked cabinets. Owned from new. Demonstration. Offers over £600. Also Sansui SPI0001 speakers, 3 way tone controls. Demonstration. Vgc. £150. Tel: 01455 220 214 (Coventry)

HI-FI CLEARANCE: Denon multiplay CD DCM-280, £20. Dual turntable CS-505-4, £40. Mordaunt Short speakers, MS-10, £25. Two Technics CD players, SL-PG-400A and SG-PG-490, £20 each. All above good condition. Tel: 01455 220 214 (Coventry)

ROKSAN KANDY CD player Mk3. boxed, unused, £225. Marantz PM8200 integrated amplifier, silver, powerful, excellent sound, boxed, unused, £150. Classical records, early pressings, list available. Tel: 020 7386 9177 evenings (London)

QUAD 33 pre-amp with cables £60. Plus Celef Mini-Professionals with Spondor stands. Offers? Tel: Mr Roberts 01923 822 581 (Northwood, NW London)

MELODY VALVE monoblocks, pristine piano black, still guaranteed, balanced/RCA, Jensens, 1%R, gloves (£7k8, accept 1/3 on or exchange for B.A.T. VKD5 SE Vgc. Wanted: Graaf GM20 OTL. Huge C.V. Polypropylenes, W.H.Y.? Tel: Salaam 07951 553 091

GOLDRING G1042 & G1006 cartridges, 50 and 10 hours use. Boxed. £75 the lot. Both as new. P+P extra. Tel: Dave 07729 600 847 (Littlehampton (West Sussex)

AMATEUR TAPE Recording magazines 1959. Vol 1 complete in binder. Offers. A&R A60 amplifier low one channel £25. Tandberg Solvsuper 10 valve hybrid receiver 1970 original owner £100. Tel: 01708 457 691

VINYL FOR Sale: Private collector needs room and must part with classical box sets etc. Some collectable. Many cleaned on my Loricraft PCMA. For details phone Peter on 01302 854 426

VOIGT PIPES and Quarterwave speakers. Wonderful sound. Tel: 01902 764 747

PAIR PMC FBI+ speakers, floor standers, excellent condition, can be seen working, £850 ono. Also Proceed PDT2 CD transport. Offers please. Tel: Mick 07956 984 409 or 020 8449 2305

MILLER & KRIESEL V.125 12" subwoofer, £185. Dual 505-1 turntable £40. Exposure Super 8 power amp £200. Rotel RCD 970BX £70. Rose RV23 two box valve pre-amp, £375. All excellent condition. Tel: 01722 334 694

CASTLE HOWARDS SE2. Finish in cherry, As new. Boxes too. £625. Tel: 01255 421 589

YAQIN SD-32A valve CD player, quirky looks! Nice sound (see Web), mint, £295. Q-Acoustics 1030i speakers, beech, mint, £70. Celestion Ditton 66 crossover only. £25. Tel: Chris 01273 541 462 (Sussex)

CYRUS PRE/Amp5 £150. Garrard 401 turntable, unsure whether working. Offers please. Cyrus power amp £100. Soundstyle rack with red marble effect glass shelves, £70. Tel: Martin 01159 134 579 evenings.

KHARMA CERAMIQUE 3.0 speakers, dark green piano gloss finish, stunning looks and sound from this high end speaker manufacture, all kharma speakers get rave reviews and these are in excellent condition with just one small mark on each speaker. can email pics if interested. csayers234@aol.com. asking £2300. tele- 07806455032.

ROKSAN RADIUS 5 perspex Nima arm, Ortofon MC10 Supreme, Trichord Dino phono amplifier. Eclipse 510-II amplifier, matching 508-II speakers, white. NAD C525BEE CD player, extras, condition excellent all £1000. Tel: 01834 813 199 evenings

MERIDIAN F80 CD/DVD/FM/DAB/AM black, new Jan 2009, very good condition, £800. Tel: 01733 742 674

REVOX PR99 MkIII two track HS full panel version, as new condition, all new headblock components, brakes etc. Rare chance to obtain. Pictures available. Tel: Julian 01246 275 479 evenings

WANTED: Uher 4400, four track battery/mains recorder, stereo or Sony TC800 or TC800B. Must be very good condition. Tel: Roger 0784 757 3031

DANSETTE RECORD player, working order. Tannoy bookshelf speakers S31-SE bi-wired, two Wharfedale Dovedale 3 speakers, 12" bass, mid, treble controls on back, 24"H x 14"W x 12"D. Perfect working order. Can demonstrate. Tel: 0115 975 4070

STAX SRS 2050 basic system comprising SR202 earspeakers and SRM 252 energiser. 4 months old. Warranty and packaging as new condition. £325 ono. Regulated 12v DC power supply £75. Tel: 01639 641 043

MANA BLACK metal spiked stands) for floorstanding speakers) pair £235. REL Storm III light oak, excellent + box £550. Meridian CD/DVD system + active speakers £1600 (£4200). Teac VRDS 10 black £320. Trio turntable £50. Wharfedale Diamond III's £50. Poss/P/Ex. Tel: Jim 01206 510 392 (Essex)

PRO-JECT RPM 5.2 turntable with Ortofon Rondo Red cartridge, £400, new, 20 hours usage. Pro-ject phono box SE, £100, new, 20 hours usage. Can demo for peace of mind. All packaging. Tel: 07908 918 344 and time day or evening

ROKSAN CASPIAN M Series-I CD player, black, as new, few hours of running in only. Original box & packaging with manufacturers warranty. £850 ono. Tel: 01525 854 225 evenings, 01582 886 276 day

WANTED: NAKAMICHI CR-7E cassette recorder. Tel: 01395 576 644

LOWTHER LOWTHER Wanted: Acousta twin cabinets wanted. Made late 1960s. Working drawings also wanted. L/S feet also wanted. Also wanted drive unit mounting screws. Tel: Jeff 020 8220 0380 (Greater London, Barking)

INTERCONNECTS: BRILLIANCE Hi-Fi pure silver, top of the range. 1m pair. Next Generation WBT phono plugs. Good reason for sale. Cost £700. Accept £230. Tel: 07854 266 620

COPELAND CTA405 integrated valve amplifier £1500. Copeland CDA823 CD player £1100. SME M10 arm £550. Denon DP-3000 turntable with oak plinth, SME cut-out. £350. Krell S-300i integrated amplifier £1700. Tel: 01474 326 220

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3CR pre and A3CR power amp £750 the pair. Graham Slee Era Gold V £200. Tel: Roger 01286 870 194 (North Wales)

TACT/LYNGDORF SDA1 2175 integrated amplifier. Superb quality build and performance. 200w per channel, silver finish and mint condition. Boxes. (£1895) £795. Tel: 07776 143 890 (Sou thampton)

LINN ACTIVE Kaber system, Karik MkIII, Numerik, 5103 preamp, Kaber speakers latest version, 3x LK100 amps, K600 cable, very good condition, all boxed, £2500. 1x L100 5120 centre speaker £250. Tel: Peter 07773 711 654, Email: peter.watson600@ntlworld.com

KIMBER D-60 1metre phono £250. Russ Andrews high current PowerKord 1metre £90. Russ Andrews Silencers £70 for 3 Kimber KCAG -14dB CD interconnect 0.5metre ultraplate phone £250. Other items. Tel: Mike 01902 884 694

MARANTZ PM66SE amplifier. Philips CD850 Mk2 CD, £140 pair. Awa A30 mini amplifier R30 FM tuner £70 pair. Grundig A5000 SXV 6000 120w pre power amplifiers £250. Kef Coda 3 £35. Tel: 01708 457 691

RUSS ANDREWS Classic Powerkord. Requires new Wattgate plug (easy to fit, £25). Was £110, now £30. Many awards. Chris, Bristol 0798 1025698.

RUSS ANDREWS Powermax Plus mains cable. WHF&HFC awards. Clean, precise sound. Was £45 now £20. Chris, Bristol 0798 1025698.

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*Subject to status. Ask instore for details. Not all brands are available in every shop so please check our website before travelling.

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INTERCONNECTS CLEAROUT!
Artisan Silver Drea m balanced 1m pristine £120 AH! ASDirect KBB Eichmanns 80cm £55. Audio Selection Flexible 80cm £20. Crystal Cable Piccolo (special) 50cm £65. Negotiate on P+P. Tel: Mike 01582 867 139

MARANTZ 8003 CD player, 6 months old, immaculate player, sweet articulate sound, SACD, little use, boxed, manual, remote, £800 new, sale £550. Tel: 07984 889 294

NAKAMICHI PA7 power amplifier £900 Nakamichi CA5 pre boxed £200 Nakamichi CR7 bowers and Wilkins service remote boxed £850 all superb condition with original boxes and packaging Dave 07554016461

WANTED Nice record player, Old Amplifier , Pre- Amp, Tuner and Classic Speakers, (Old Audio Equipment) will collect. If you have anything for sale please ring. Please ring 079 1659 7683

COPLAND CDA 266, CD player £400 ono, Unison Research Unico-1 amplifier £400 ono, Ruark Sceptre, stand mount speakers £200. all in good condition. 07970 986364.

NAIM AUDIO Hiline interconnect in immaculate condition, boxed. Superb upgrade. £395 Price to include postage Tel. Andy 07970078653(Worksop, Notts)

B&W 685 speakers in red cherry 6months old,boxed and in mint condition £265 tel 07771625297

KEF CONCORDE IV Speakers .Very good condition £40 . Buyer to collect. Tel 01902675060 (Wolverhampton). Davepunfield@hotmail.com

THORENS TD160 turntable. Mint condition. 01922 644775.

AUDIO SYNTHESIS Dax Decade DAC/Pre Amp 10/10 condition owned from new £1000. Lumley Reference M120 valve mono block's 120/70 watts Pentode/Triode final spec. £1500. Tel 07733381352.

ARCAM SOLO Movie 2.1 + rdock, Cost £1700, Sell £800. ContactL (07703) 061 999 or vincekaczmarek@hotmail.com

WANT: TEAC AZ 201 Oszilloskop 4-channel E: wanheim1-dixi@yahoo.de

FOR SALE. Nad 5120 33rpm only, 6050c tape, 4150 tuner. Rotel boxed rr222/ra211. Dyanatron srx26 with Garrard 2025 with stand and speakers. Bouyer ASI20 church amp. Offers rickiewilliams@live.com 07825156424

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SPENDOR C5E centre speaker. As new condition. Beautiful light oak finish. £300 ono. 07815 833279 leed1000@googlemail.com

ARCAM A38 integrated amplifier £895 (£1480 new); arcam cd37 player £795 (£1350 new); denon tu1800 fm-db tuner £150 (£250 new). All top of range in mint condition with boxes. 023 8073 8935.

AUDIONOTE 'E' loudspeakers. These are the silver-wired SPE-HE version (third up in the pecking order) fitted with the later blue hemp high efficiency cones. 98db. Very valve friendly. Maple veneers. Cost about £5,500... sell for £1950. Matching Audionote heavy stands, £200 (£400.). 01424 203192 (East Sussex).

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MARANTZ CD80 and Marantz CD94 mkII, legendary battleship build, excellent condition. Nakamichi DR10, serviced last year, little used, excellent condition. Quantity of NOS 8" and 10" Goodmans TwinAxiom and Whiteley Bros Stentorian full range drivers. Email: classichifiollector@gmail.com for more details.

TRANSCRIPTORS SATURN turntable with original transcriptors tone arm, excellent condition, custom made cover, collectors item, asking £295. tele- 07806455032.

FINAL 400i electrostatic speakers with rel Q200e subwoofer, excellent sound, finals are only 4 months old from new with boxes etc. both items in excellent condition, rrp price for finals alone was £2300, asking £895 for both , tele- 07806455032.

GRAAF GM 50/50 valve power amplifier, 50wpc, piano black finish, excellent condition, tesla KT88 output valves, can email pics on request. asking £895. tele- 07806455032.

RESTEK FANTASY II dual-mono interrgrated amplifier, 130wpc, chrome and black, pre out, remote control, red and black display, excellent condition, new price was £2300, selling for £695. tele-07806455032.

GARRARD 401 + SME 3009 Series 2 improved £225 Pair Tannoy Lancaster 15" Monitor Golds £250 Located near Southampton. Buyer Collects. Phone 023 8084 2516

SUGDEN BIJOU CD-Master, £800 and Sugden Bijou HeadMaster Pre-amp £500. Both 4 years old and in mint condition with original boxes and manuals. Contact Jeff on 01305 263069 (W. Dorset)

CODA CSX Stereo power amp (330watts @ 8 ohms). New NEVER played, 10yrs warranty, purchased in error. Genuine private sale, highly recommended in HI FI+ 2009 awards £3750 (£5275) For more information. 02392-376247/ jameshankin@btinternet.com

VDH D102 mk3 rca to xlr special £90. crystal cable piccolo rca 0.5m £75. original naim nac 82/180p owners manual and sales brochures as new £1.naim power lead £7. tel 01766 781211

WANTED. REEL to reel tape recorder, Sony TC377 or similar. Must be in good working order. Please call Lawrence 01633 421906 (Newport, Gwent)

TDL RTL4 speakers, £125.00 ono, genuine reason for sale. Buyer collects. East Sussex 07976 439105 garypa@orange.net

MUSICAL FIDELITY P180 (Mosfet) power amp, with choke regulated power supply. Condition is as new and was one of Hi Fi Worlds favorites: "powerfull and refined". £525. 07972 341692./ 01424 446282

LYNGDORF 2200 amplifier Roomperfect analogue inputs £3000 Tact 2175 amplifier £600 Dali MS4 speakers £3500 Tact sub woofers £700 all boxed excellent condition - tel 01670 517620 .'

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MUSICAL FIDELITY EI00 Integrated Amp. Finished in Beautiful Piano Black. Excellent Condition. Digital and Phono Outputs £250 Telephone Tony 02380 224003 Southampton

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Now is not the winter of your discontent; well not if you reserve yourself a copy of December's Hi-Fi World magazine! We've a bumper harvest of hi-fi produce for you to digest, from the superb B&W 804D loudspeakers and Icon Audio MB150 power amps, to Emille's stunning new ARA integrated and Weiss's cool DAC202. Factor in a host of other exciting new products spanning the genres and it's enough to keep the frost away. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you...

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THIN LIZZY

JAILBREAK

1976

"all the Thin Lizzy albums in this series deserve attention, and for fans they will be essential purchases..."

The UK-based reissue label Back On Black (www.backonblack.com) has announced that it will be releasing all the classic Thin Lizzy albums on 180gm vinyl and in thick card covers, with the first 1,000 copies pressed on coloured vinyl. That means we will see eight albums, initially: 'Jailbreak', 'Johnny The Fox', 'Bad Reputation', 'Live And Dangerous', 'Black Rose', 'Chinatown', 'Renegade', and 'Thunder And Lightning'. Speaking to the label, it also plans to release the earlier albums at a later date, so keep your eyes peeled for those...

Of this batch of initial releases, there are many classics, but 'Jailbreak' saw the band really take off, for the first time, as a major force in rock. Everything seemed to come right all at once. Phil Lynott's songwriting skills were honed by his increasing use of imagery, and he now had a hand in all of the songs which meant that the songs themselves were tighter and more mature, and Scott Gorham and Brian Robertson's twin-lead guitar sound gave the band a distinctive personality. Also, Lynott's voice had now developed enough to be used as an interpretive instrument which became part of the band's growing reputation.

"We did the deal to create the vinyl with Universal and we talked to the band and their management regarding merchandising and everything else," said Back On Black boss, Steve Beatty. "We requested the sources, to create the reissues, from Universal. On other projects, we've been used to coping with whatever we've been given. We sometimes

receive digital masters, for example, because the original record label may have binned the master tapes after digitally remastering them. However, when we put our request in for Thin Lizzy, a great big box turned up packed with the original master tapes! It was out of this world."

Which, to the delight of Lizzy fans the world over, means that all of the albums will be remastered direct from the original tapes. In addition, because the 'Jailbreak' album – and the rest – will be sold within a gatefold sleeve, the inside cover will hold a picture of the original master tape. As proof, as it were.

"We stood there, looking at this piece of history and thought, 'They couriered these things to us'. I wouldn't have sent these in a van. If it was me, I'd have said 'These are going nowhere.' Or, you pick them up personally and I want them back tomorrow.' They're like the crown jewels of rock, really."

The fact that so many albums are being released by his company is important for Beatty. "When some companies deal with bands they might reissue one or two of their LPs but we think fans want to collect the entire set." Good intentions are often voiced to this effect, from other outfits, but the implementation of securing a complete discography is, too often, unrealised. Back On Black's success is partly down to hard work. "We spent a lot of time with the band and its management and

then we declared to the label that we wanted to spend time and money on an entire campaign."

It's that work behind the scenes which counts a lot – a professional attitude that unfortunately, many other small independents cannot or will not undertake. But there's also been work on industry inertia, "Sometimes major labels say to me, 'What do you want to do vinyl for?' When I started this label, everybody I knew referred to vinyl and said, 'You're off you f****g head, mate'. I replied that digital is not record collecting and it's not music. I said that, well, we're all fans of this stuff and we think it's good."

Finally, a word has to be said regarding the artwork for 'Jailbreak' and for the rest of this series. "Our reissue sleeves look they've been made yesterday – which they were. The comparison is like switching from a black & white TV to HD colour," said Beatty. That is, an original sleeve has been scanned and then an artist has drawn over the top to create an exact match. The advantage being that the resultant colours are not only more vivid but today's superior printing techniques and processes make for a decidedly superior 'original' artwork.

All the albums in this release series deserve attention, and for fans they will be essential purchases, but if you really have to pick just one to get the ball rolling, then 'Jailbreak' is the priority. A real rock classic. **PR**

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