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WORLD



INSIDE: 12-PAGE BUYING GUIDE



CLASS AUDIO

Sugden's *red hot* new A21SE integrated amp

AMPLIFIER SPECIAL ISSUE:

- MUSICAL FIDELITY AS INTEGRATED AMP
- AFFORDABLE INTEGRATED SUPERTEST
- STATES OF MIND: TUBE vs. TRANSISTOR
- MARANTZ PM11SI INTEGRATED AMP
- NAIM HEADLINE HEADPHONE AMP
- JC VERDIER CONTROL B PREAMP
- EXPOSURE: PAST & PRESENT

- MICROMEGA CD132 CD PLAYER
- J.M. REYNAUD TWIN MKIII LOUDSPEAKERS

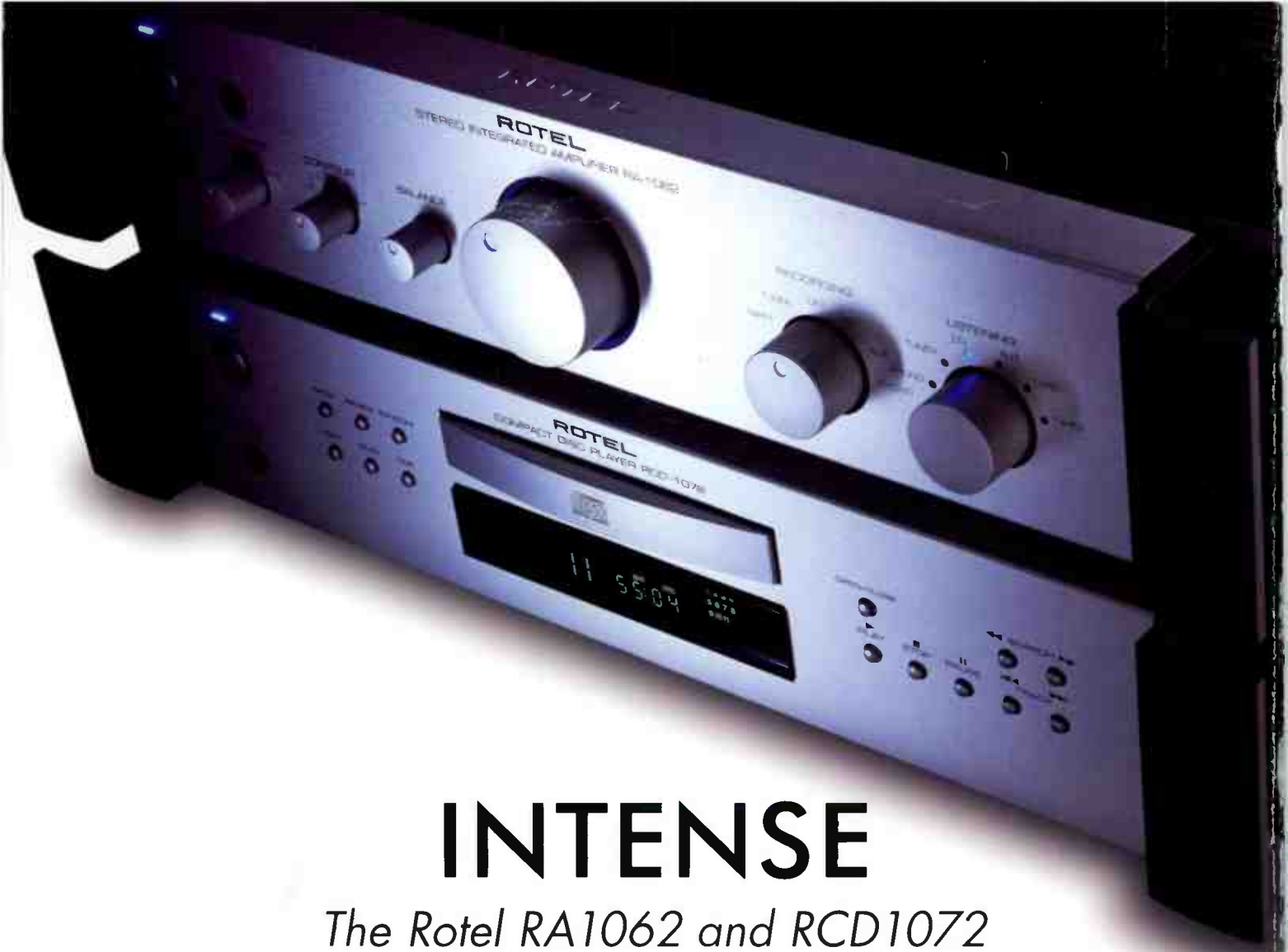
MAY 2005



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COMPETITION

10 PAGE HI-FI Q&A SECTION * CLASSIFIED ADS



INTENSE

The Rotel RA1062 and RCD1072

Individually, Rotel's latest CD player and amplifier will make a striking difference to the way you hear music. When they hook up with each other, though, it's a match made in hifi heaven. The chemistry is instant, thanks to a shared pedigree of meticulous component selection, painstaking refinement and balanced design by Rotel's award-winning team of engineers. It's an intense relationship, and a powerful listening experience. Get them connected.

To find out more about this perfect partnership, call B&W Loudspeakers UK on 01903 221500.



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welcome

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If you'd visited your local automobile emporium some thirty years back, the chances are that - irrespective of brand - you'd have found a range of mechanically crude, dynamically poor, rough riding and often plain unsafe cars on sale. Now, things couldn't be more different - modern motors are fast, smooth, safe and strong - and no matter which brand you buy, you're guaranteed accomplished engineering and fine reliability.

The same goes for hi-fi too, and nowhere is this more obvious than with amplifiers. Most mid-seventies integrateds were underpowered, shoddily built and suffered appalling reliability, and as for the sound - well, the less said the better... These days they're all engineered up to similar high standards, usually sharing largely similar components inside, too.

It's not all good news, however, because whilst the floor has been raised - so we rarely encounter real stinkers anymore - there's still a big difference between 'well engineered' and 'superb sounding'; strong measured performance alone does not a great amplifier make! That's why this issue goes in search of the best in affordable audiophile amplification...

Our supertest (p17) pits six top budget integrateds from Arcam, Cambridge Audio, Creek, Cyrus, Exposure and Marantz against one another, and our lead review (p12) looks at Marantz's superb high end design. We experience the weird and wonderful world of pure Class A with Sugden's stunning A21SE (p37), and compare and contrast tubes and transistors (p41). Ever wondered if amplifiers have actually got better? Well, we put a classic high end Exposure pre-power combination from the eighties against its naughties namesake (p32). Factor in a svelte tube preamplifier from JC Verrier (p46) and Naim's new headphone amplifier with four different power supply combinations (p49) - and much, much more - and any audiophile should be amplifier-aware after they've finished May 2005's *Hi-Fi World!*

David Price, editor



testing

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

verdicts

●	OUTSTANDING	simply the best
●●	EXCELLENT	extremely capable
●●●	GOOD	worth auditioning
●●●●	MEDIOCRE	unremarkable
●●●●●	POOR	seriously flawed
£	VALUE	keenly priced

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32 1989s vs 2004: Exposure classics old and new face off...



55 Gallic eccentric: Micromega CD132



52 Big fun: Musical Fidelity A5 integrated



62 less is more: Slim Devices MP3

12

High fashion: Marantz's stunning PM11S1



10

Show Time: Bristol Sound & Vision 2005

AMPLIFIER SPECIAL ISSUE:

STEREO TYPE 12

Dominic Todd auditions Marantz's new high end two-channel integrated amplifier, the PM11S1.

SIX BY TWO 17

Dominic Todd rounds up six affordable audiophile integrated amplifiers from Arcam, Cambridge Audio, Creek, Cyrus, Exposure and Marantz.

PROLONGED EXPOSURE 32

Channa Vithana puts a classic eighties Exposure VII-VIII pre-power against the company's latest and greatest XXIII- XVIII.

HOT STUFF 37

David Price swoons at Sugden's new pure Class A A21SE integrated amplifier...

STATES OF MIND 40

It's that classic conundrum - tube vs. transistor - but what gives the right sound for you? Noel Keywood adjudicates...

GLASS SYSTEM 46

It's always nice then, says David Price, to find a classy preamplifier in the shape of JC Verdier's Control B...

HEAD FUNK 49

Any serious stereo headphone system needs a Naim Headline 2, thinks Channa Vithana...

BOX CLEVER 52

What happens when you downsize a monster Musical Fidelity amplifier? Dominic Todd tries out the still-massive A5 integrated...

BOOK REVIEW 65

Noel Keywood reads Douglas Self's 'Audio Power Amplifier Design Handbook'.

DIGITAL

CD UK 55

French digital expert Micromega returns to these shores with its new upsampling CD132 CD player. Dominic Todd listens in

LOUDSPEAKERS

FRENCH POLISH 59

Channa Vithana auditions an extremely svelte sounding pair of loudspeakers from France, the Jean Marie Reynaud JMR Twin Mk IIIs.

COMPUTER AUDIO

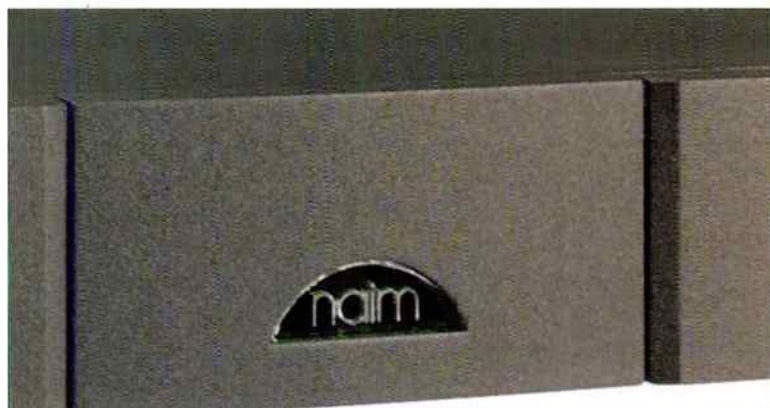
SLIM, FINE 62

Neal Gibbons tackles an PC-based, Ethernet replacement to his Naim CD5/ FlatCap 2 CD player, in the guise of Slim Devices SqueezeBox...

SHOW REPORT

BRISTOL FASHIONS 10

Sound and Vision is the UK's most successful hi-fi and home cinema show. David Price has the story...



49

7 NEWS

words from the front...

26 COMPETITION

Win a fantastic pair of DALI Royal Tower floorstanding loudspeakers, with £1,100!

67 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Ensure your copy every month and save money too

68 NEW MUSIC

Patrick Cleasby rounds up the latest high resolution digital audio releases

70 DIAL-A-DEALER

a comprehensive guide to UK hi-fi retailers

72 SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

purveyors of specialist hi-fi services

73 MEET YOUR MAKER

manufacturers detailing who makes what, and how to get in touch

74 WORLD AUDIO DESIGN

Superb sounding valve amplification for do-it-yourselfers

76 WORLD LIBRARY

a wide selection of specialist audio books for sale

78,79,80,81,82, OPINION

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

83 WORLD CLASSICS

brilliant designs that have stood the best of times, listed

91 WORLD STANDARDS

our fave raves - the latest and greatest from the world of contemporary hi-fi

98 KIT & COMPONENTS

purveyors of specialist hi-fi services

99 MAIL

eight pages of your views and comments

109 MARKETPLACE

masses of pre-owned audio equipment for sale

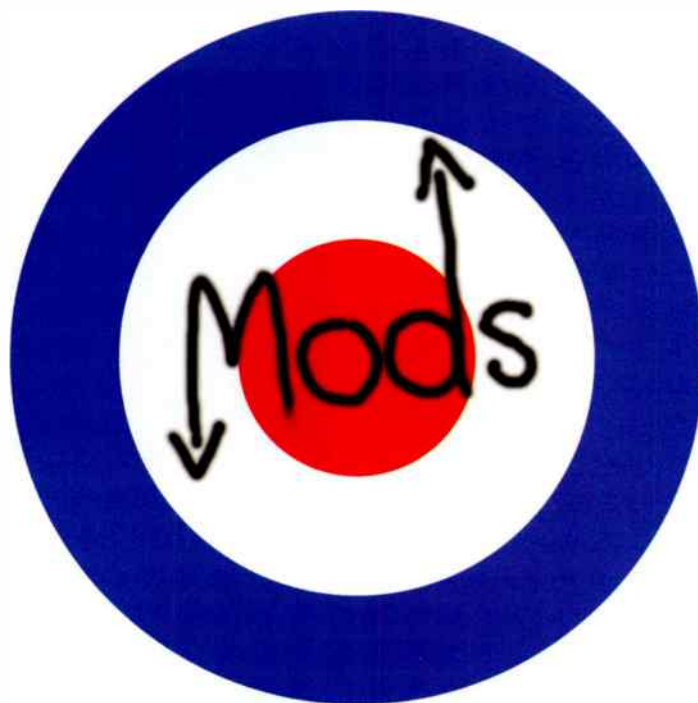
123 CLASSIFIEDS

five pages of second-hand bargains

129 ADVERTISERS' INDEX

130 CLASSIC CUTS

The 2004 remaster of The Cure's 1979 classic, 'Three Imaginary Boys', is reviewed by Patrick Cleasby.



Rockers



“Amazing value and massively impressive performance.” *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*

To find out more about the award-winning range of Cambridge Audio two-channel and home cinema hi-fi, visit our website or call 0845 090 2288 (+44 207 940 2200 outside the UK). Developed in the UK, Cambridge Audio products are available from specialist hi-fi dealers across the world.

www.thenewwave.co.uk

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news



FLYING SOLO

New from Arcam, Solo claims all of the performance of audiophile hi-fi separates in one slim, elegant chassis. Arcam says that no other style product on the market makes true hi-fi so accessible, combining high sound quality, total ease-of use, extreme flexibility and a real sense of

style. It boasts an audiophile grade CD player, top quality DAB & FM radio, 50W RMS per channel amplifier with high current drive, full clock facilities (wake to CD or radio), multi-room facilities built-in, simple intuitive operating system, large clear dot-matrix display and an elegant system handset. So Linn Classik beware! For details, call 01223 203 200 or click on www.arcam.co.uk.

MERIDIAN DAB-BLES WITH DIGITAL

Meridian Audio has announced a new variant of three of its popular award-winning G Series products to include DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting) tuners as well as conventional FM reception. The models available are the G51 DAB receiver (£2,350) and G01 DAB preamplifier (£1,725) and the G91 DAB DVD-Audio/video player/controller (£4,250).



SPOTTED: HI, MD!

Despite it being the home of some stultifyingly conventional mainstream audio products, Japan is surely the world's oddest hi-fi market. The continued success of relics like Ortofon's SPU and Denon's DL103 cartridges proves this, let alone the wide availability of Betamax and LaserDisc software even now! Where better then to sell lifestyle Hi-MD separates then, such as this Onkyo MD-133? It looks a gorgeous bit of kit, but don't bet on it reaching your local Sevenoaks branch...

TWO DIVIDED BY ZERO

Zero One Audio has launched two stunning new digital audio products: the Ti48 CD/HD Transport and the Ar38 Upsampling digital-to-analogue converter. The Ti48 (US\$2,480) is a high-performance CD transport with hard-disk drives that can digitally store up to 350 hours of uncompressed CD audio. The archived music can be easily accessed via Zero One's user-friendly server software and organised into playlists. Custom software allows users to switch between different oversampling/upsampling rates on the fly (from 16/44.1 up to 24/192), between different digital filters (from no filter to brickwall) and also 3 different dither settings. These options allow users to fine-tune the performance of the CD replay system to suit the music or the rest of the hi-fi system. Transfer of the digital audio from the Ti48 to the Ar38 DAC is via the Zero One 24/192 I2S digital link for ultra-low jitter, and other outboard DACs can also be connected via the standard (RCA) S/PDIF output with a data-transfer rate of up to 24/96. The Ti48 is constructed to audiophile standards with two separate power supplies, extensive internal shielding and a low-resonance aluminium chassis with a damped sandwich-base construction. The Ar38 DAC (US\$1,480) is a multibit, upsampling design with a fully discrete, zero-feedback, single-ended, Class A output stage that is DC-coupled. It has a unique I2S input that will accept digital audio from the Ti48 CD/HD Transport at sampling rates of up to 24 bits/192kHz for ultra-low jitter. The Ar38 can also be connected to other CD transports (or CD players with digital outputs) via the second digital input which is a standard (RCA) S/PDIF connection. It also features multiple low-noise, regulated power supplies and high-performance audio-grade components. The casing is all-aluminium, low-resonance with a damped sandwich-base construction. Zero One Audio sells direct via its online store to most countries and offers a 30-day home audition. For more information, see www.zerooneaudio.com.





SILVER REMINTED

Monitor Audio's S-series of mid-price loudspeakers has been a firm favourite here at Hi-Fi World, so we're interested to hear news of the new Silver 'RS' range. The company's C-CAM (Ceramic Coated Aluminium Magnesium alloy) driver technology, as used in the Silver series amongst others, has been developed for 'even more natural, transparent and accurate sound'. The styling is described as 'bolder and more architectural' than the Silver. Highlights include the Silver RS1 (£350) standmounter, Silver RS6 (£600) mini floorstander and Silver RS8 (£800) floorstander. For more details, click on www.monitoraudio.co.uk.

POWER CAP

Naim Audio's FlatCap is an ultra low noise external power supply delivering twice 24 Volts DC to Naim preamplifiers, phono preamps and CD players, and after five years of sterling service it has been replaced by the improved FlatCap 2x. Price remains the same at £515. Naim says the improvements to sound quality are subtle but significant: dynamics are more even across the audio band, bass lines are more easily differentiated and the system noise floor is reduced. It is the only Naim power supply that can simultaneously power two products. Physical changes are; a Fraim friendly stiffer thicker chassis, a new redesigned transformer with a higher VA rating, lower impedance and higher peak current capability. Heatsinks are also significantly larger. For more information, click on www.naim-audio.co.uk.



GOING MOBILE

The increasing popularity of full-track downloads and ring-back tones will help push mobile music revenues to more than \$9.3 billion by 2009, according to a new report from Juniper Research. While the downloads of mobile ringtones and realtones will comprise the bulk of revenues (\$4.8 billion), the market for full-track downloads is expected to increase from just \$20 million in 2004 to nearly \$1.8 billion in 2009, while ring-back tones, already generating substantial revenues in Asia, should be worth \$2.7 billion worldwide by the end of the decade. According to report author Dr Windsor Holden, "Last year we saw the major network operators and players taking the first tentative steps towards the mass distribution of master recordings via mobile handsets. This year the operators are substantially increasing their catalogues as more labels come on board, while the vendors are producing more handsets with integrated music players." Dr Holden added that it was likely that ring-back tones would generate the majority of their revenues amongst fashion-conscious teenagers and young adults. "By subscribing, they can demonstrate to their callers that they are keeping up with the musical times by having the latest number one on their ring-back tone as well as their ringtone," he said. Other findings include the fact that the total value of global mobile music market to rise by 39% in 2005 to nearly \$5 billion, that there are sixty million ring-back tone subscribers worldwide in 2005, rising to more than 300 million in 2009, and that the annual number of full-track downloads to reach 1 billion in 2008. For more information, see www.juniperresearch.com.

WAIT A MINUTE

Roberts' new Gemini 1 is the company's premium DAB PausePlus radio, incorporating a digital pause, rewind and record facility that allows you to go back in time and record for up to 30 minutes. The £200 design not only has a built in memory chip but is also supplied with a complimentary SD card that enables the radio to be programmed to record a specific programme at a specific time. For more information, click on www.roberts.co.uk.



L-INNDIVIDUALISM

Linn Products' new CHAKRA amplifier range and ARTIKULAT loudspeaker system made their debuts at the Bristol Sound and Vision show at the end of February [see p11]. The brand new CHAKRA power amplifier range is a series of high performance power amplifiers built around Linn's latest CHAKRA power amplifier topology, boasting significantly increased power, reliability and efficiency, whilst producing less heat, less distortion and using fewer components. A total of eight individual CHAKRA amplifiers designed for a variety of applications from stereo to multi-channel in either passive or active configuration provide consistent performance, controlled 'silent power' and pure sound, Linn says. The ARTIKULAT loudspeaker system contains three full-range models available with either AKTIV-bass or fully integrated AKTIV. The ARTIKULAT 350A floor-standing loudspeaker, ARTIKULAT 320A compact loudspeaker and the ARTIKULAT 340A centre-channel loudspeaker are powered and fully AKTIV. The ARTIKULAT 350, ARTIKULAT 320 and the ARTIKULAT 340 centre-channel loudspeakers all feature AKTIV bass with passive crossovers for the upper-bass, mid-range and high-frequency drive units. A dedicated AKTIV, servo-driven bass reinforcement loudspeaker, the ARTIKULAT 345, completes the range. Scheduled for launch in spring/ summer 2005, it marks the beginning of a busy year for the company, which is celebrating its thirty-three-and-a-third anniversary this summer... click on www.linn.co.uk



DIGITAL RADIO GAGA

Thanks to DAB, radio is experiencing a renaissance in the UK, according to figures released by British consumer electronics retailer, Dixons. The company also reports that digital radios are now outselling analogue radios for the first time. Digital radio closed the gap on its predecessor during 2004, accounting for one in ten portable audio products sold by Dixons until it finally overtook during January 2005. It is currently outselling analogue by two to one, making the format one of the fastest ever technologies to reach mass-market status. Year on year sales have doubled and Dixons expects demand for the format to continue throughout 2005, predicting growth of more than 50% in the market. Dixons is seeing demand for radios grow to levels unseen since the medium's heyday in the eighties. According to figures from the retailer, the last time that Dixons sold a comparable number was in 1985 – back when Mike Read and Steve Wright dominated Radio One and Stock, Aitken and Waterman held the top spot in the UK Singles charts. Interestingly, this radio resurgence is being driven by an unexpected demographic – fortysomething 'twiddle agers'. A study carried out among those buying digital radios revealed that more than two thirds of all the radios purchased over the last two months were bought by people in their forties, with just one fifth of those buying digital radios aged between 20 and 25. The Digital Radio Development Bureau (DRDB) predicts that almost two million homes will have a digital radio by the end of 2005 and almost a third of all UK households will have one by 2008.

For more information, see:
www.digitalradionow.com.

COPPER DATING

Aspiring Marantz CD63 KI DP owners who'd thought they'd missed the boat will be delighted to hear that due to the overwhelming success of the project, the company is gearing up for a second batch of player modifications. It has decided to extend the time the work will take to complete to eight weeks, however. This time, Marantz is asking people not to take their machines to dealers, so anyone interested in modifying their standard CD63KI Signature to KI DP spec should call Joe Thurston at Marantz on 01753 860 868 or email: joe.thurston@marantz.co.uk.

CORRECTION: apologies to Krystal Cables: in the March issue, HFW's resident ghost in the machine added an additional £500 to the price of their £85 per metre MERCURY power lead. Doh!

SHOWTIMED

The Organisers of Northern Sound & Vision show in January send the happy news that its attendance was 10% up on 2004, setting a new attendance record of 2,050. Saturday was an absolute winner with visitors solid throughout the day and the average visitor stay extending itself to 4.5 hours. There was also a considerable increase in the age group 25-35, and female attendance was up 7% too. Dates for next year have already been set as: 28-29 January 2006. For more information, contact Chesterfield Communications on 01829 740650 or email: roy@ch-st-grp.fsnet.co.uk.

NEAR ISSUE

June's Hi-Fi World joins the digital debate - and then some! Patrick Cleasby rounds up six top affordable hi res players and tells the story of DVD's past, present and future. Channa Vithana puts Metronome Technologie's high end CD3 Signature digital disc spinner against Clearaudio's superb Champion Level 1 turntable. We audition what we reckon is the best way to play CD on a DVD spinner, Naim's DVD-5, try Cary Audio's CD-303 CD player and David Price puts Marantz's SA-11S1 SACD player against the unique CD63KI DP! Factor in Cyrus's brand new Phono X phono-stage, Mission's superb e82 loudspeakers, and much, much more, and June is another unmissable episode...

MINI FOR NOTHING

Apple's new second generation iPod mini line up starts with a new 4GB model priced at just £139, and there's also a new 6GB model with 50 percent more storage priced at £169. Both iPod mini models feature increased battery life of up to 18 hours, USB charging and an ultra-portable, lightweight design available in four colours. iPod mini works effortlessly with Apple's iTunes, providing music lovers with access to the iTunes Music Store, and features Apple's patent-pending

Auto-Sync which works seamlessly with iTunes to automatically download an entire digital music library onto iPod mini with just one click, keeping it up-to-date whenever iPod mini is plugged into a Mac or Windows computer using USB 2.0. In addition to keeping the iPod mini up-to-date, plugging directly into the USB 2.0 port will also conveniently charge the iPod mini—so, one connection does it all! The prices include earbud headphones, belt clip case, USB 2.0 cable, and a CD with iTunes 4.7.1 for Mac and Windows computers. For details, click on www.apple.com/ukstore.





Bristol

Sound and Vision is the UK's most successful hi-fi and home cinema show, and the nineteenth at the end of February in Bristol, was the best yet. Roving reporter David Price has the story...



Linn's Brian Morris and HFW's Channa Vithana relax at dinner as HFW's Patrick Cleasby reprograms his iPod; one of four he was carrying (yes really), along with an HDV cam...



Your editor's award for best sound of the show went to Wilson Benesch, whose vinyl-driven set-up was gobsmacking, despite all the noise from men and mains alike...



This stunning limited edition GyroDec was 'back in black', complete with hidden SE-style sub-base and silver plated weights.



A new range of electronics, including a replacement to the superb Delphini, was sitting in the Mitchell/Trichord room.



An interesting new range of affordable separates from Talk Electronics going under the name of Saxon was on display; here's hoping it doesn't sound as rough!

Fashions



CROWD TROUBLE

Although there was a great spirit at the show - with thronging crowds behaving themselves most politely - there's always the odd couple who let the side down thanks to excess alcohol...



One of the best sounds around was the Cyrus room, which had an extensive new range on dem.



Both Linn rooms were constantly busy with some serious sounds from the Unidisk-based multichannel system downstairs, and, a gripping performance from ye olde vinyl upstairs...



Yamaha had a great looking range of hi-fi separates, but your ex-biker Ed couldn't resist a sexy pic of this trick R1!



SHOW TIME

Despite the grim West Country weather, attendance was as good as 2004. Although retailers will tell you it's a flat market, sales were markedly up on last year, with a younger visitor age profile, more women attending, and no less than 765 trade and press members there too. There were lots of high-value sales, and the best selling product was projectors. Huge sales of audio accessories like cables and headphones also kept exhibitors busy, and there was a fine range of specialist hi-fi. This year's press conference was on the vexatious topic of next generation on HD carriers, and representatives of Pioneer, Sony, Meridian and Arcam were on hand to tell us what they wished for - more than what they knew - as they suffer from unsettled spec fatigue...



Stereo

Feedback is a factor of amplifier designs that engineers have wrestled with for years. As to whether or not it is a good thing, is still a bone of contention as there are both good and bad amps' from both camps. Traditionally, Marantz have tended to favour conventional voltage to current feedback designs but, under the scrutiny of Marantz's technical guru, Ken Ishiwata, the new PM-11S1 uses the latter. The idea behind this is that today's better selling 'speakers tend to be harder to drive and so a current feedback design makes more sense.

Pick up this amplifier and you'd be hard pressed to believe that it would have trouble driving any loudspeaker. A good deal of that weight comes from the power transformer. At first sight it looks like a conventional toroidal, but there's actually far more to it than that. Rather like the Musical Fidelity A5cr pre/power amps' reviewed last month, the PM-11S1 features choke regulation. In this case, the regulation is inbuilt and not quite as sophisticated

as the MF, but it should still help to give a cleaner supply of mains to both pre and power sections.

The main power supply itself is a derivative of the 'Super Ring' design used in Marantz's MA-9S1 power amplifier. There are separate feeds for the digital control and analogue sections, and it is also claimed to have a very low operating noise – handy when the amp' is sitting right next to you. Left and right power sections are split and each feature their own, beautifully cast heatsink. Like many of the other electronics, the XL size output capacitors suggest that this is an amp' that will be more than capable of delivering its claimed 100wpc.

Moving on to the shielded preamp section and you'll again find that great use has been made of Marantz's HDAM (Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Module) discrete op-amps. Using their latest HDAM SA2 components they have provided each individual input with its own buffered stage. The idea is, that providing each line input with its own buffer amp', they'll be less

interference between input sources. Furthermore, the PM11-S1 also features a set of balanced inputs that incorporate an HDAM SA2-driven current feedback balance buffer.

Believe it or not, that HDAM SA2 crops up yet again in relation to the volume control. In combination with a Wolfson chip, it is designed to give a highly linear control, with steps of just 0.5dB across a wide 0-100dB range. More good news for the user is that it actually feels like a good old-fashioned analogue device! And of course, no high-end Marantz product would be complete without a healthy dose of copper plating, and the PM-11S1 is no exception. Construction is rigid and mainly of aluminium, with the majority of the chassis being copper-plated to reduce radiation interference.

As you'd expect from a Japanese super-amp' the PM-11S1 isn't exactly feature light. What Marantz call a 'Floating Control Bus System' lets the listener to connect up to four PM-11S1s, making it ideal as part of a multi-channel or multi-room system –


 A photograph of a Marantz PM-11S1 integrated amplifier. The device is a light-colored, rectangular box with a minimalist design. On the left side, there is a large, circular, silver-rimmed volume knob. Below it is a smaller, similar knob labeled 'POWER SOURCE'. To the right of the volume knob is a vertical column of five smaller knobs, labeled from top to bottom: 'ATT', 'W. OUT', 'BYPASS', 'TONE', and 'MUTE'. On the far left, there is a 'PHONES' jack. The Marantz logo is printed at the top left. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

marantz

FOLLOWED BY THE PM-11S1

type

Marantz is back with a range of high end stereo separates with serious audiophile intentions. Dominic Todd auditions the new PM-11S1 integrated amplifier...

an inspired idea. Bi-amping is also possible, and switched via a switch at the back. Bass, treble and volume can all be trimmed for both the left and the right channel. An MM/MC phono stage is standard, as is an exquisite metal-faced remote control (Musical Fidelity pay attention!), two sets of speaker outputs, three line-ins and two recording loops. The blue glow cast by the integral sidelights is evocative of older Marantz classics and, I think, suits this design well. For those who prefer the least disturbance possible, though, it is possible to switch both them and the main display off entirely. With its superlative finish, the overall sense is of a beautifully hewn and exquisite piece of high end exoticia.

SOUND QUALITY

Proving that size can be deceptive, the Marantz PM-11S1 isn't the Neanderthal bruiser that you might at first imagine. With Blondie's 'Happy Dog' I was surprised to find that the iron grip that I'd been expecting in the

bass wasn't there. Instead, the sound was more organic and, to use a cliché, more valve-like. Despite the slight softness - and it was just slight - the timing proved as accurate and upbeat as you could hope for. Without the expected overwhelming bass presence, it was also possible to focus upon the highly impressive midrange. Vocals were superbly articulated, natural and colouration free. There was intricate detailing throughout the frequency range, and the sort of cohesion that simply wouldn't have existed from a Far Eastern transistor amp' design of old.

Stunning vocal conviction was shown with Peter Cincotti's 'He's Watching'. As well as being firmly located within the soundstage, the Marantz struck exactly the right spot in terms of presentation: Forward enough to be differentiated from the rest of the musicians, but not so far as to sound forced and exaggerated. Equally well balanced was the treble response, which had plenty of detail for those who wished to 'listen in', but

not the grain or splash of powerful transistor amps' of old. Although the scale of the piece was fine, if you're expecting the clout of something like the Musical Fidelity kW500 or CAV A10, then you'd be disappointed. Even the, only, £500 more expensive Musical Fidelity A5cr pre/power offers a notably stronger control of the lowest bass notes. Having said that, the PM-11S1 is not overtly soft, and will still sweep through music with a degree of effortlessness that's rare for any transistor amp', let alone one costing this much. Even at high volumes, it remained composed, uncompressed and capable of accurate timbre from a wide variety of instruments.

The PM-11S1 was perhaps at its least convincing with Daft Punk's 'Aerodynamic'. Here the lack of weight from the bass did tell, and they'd be many an integrated at a £1,000 less (Musical Fidelity A5, for example) that would offer more presence here. Still, at least there was a freedom from bass overhang, and

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Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista Integrated. 12 months, boxed, spotless. Big knobs	£2700	£4000
Sonus Faber Musica Integrated amplifier. Elegant wood facia, tacky gold trim	£600	£1500
Sugden A21 Integrated with phono. Titanium finish. Modern classic.	£700	£1050
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TEAD Micro Groove standard. Moving coil phono stage (0.8mv / 1Kohm)	£300	£450
ATC SCM7 - very cute mini monitors on shiny stands. Perfect condition	£400	£700
Ruarck Crusader 2 loudspeakers. Black. Very nice condition.	£600	
Eastern Electric Mini-Max. Valve rec' valve line pre-amp. Sweet, new, boxed	£400	£800
Revox B77 Reel to reel tape machine with a load of black tape reels.	£400	
Canary 303 monos. 300B push pull. Lovely, beefy and very nearly new cond.	£3500	£7250
Canary 309 monos. 300B parallel push pull. Very beefy, 6 months use only	£4500	£10000
Canary 301 300B stereo power amp. Very nice sound. 4 years old, revalved	£2250	£5400
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THE RIVALS

Monster £2,500ish integrations aren't as rare as you might think. Perhaps the name that commands more respect than any at this, and far higher, price points, is Krell. At £2,700, the KAV-400xi is a comparative bargain – at least for a Krell – yet cost cutting isn't exactly obvious. In either the silver or black finishes it looks down right stunning. It's something to do with the combination of a surface sheen, immaculate panel finish and that red LED display, that can only come from truly esoteric kit. Yet, unlike other supermodels, the Krell does actually sound great too. True, there is no one area where the KAV-400xi is sensational, but its all-round abilities are hard to match at this price. The 200W power output ensures there's always plenty of weight to the music, yet the, fully balanced, Class A circuitry also imparts a true sense of precision and refinement. It's a class act. Another amp' with a similar sound, but derived at by totally different means, is the Pathos Logos. If anything, it looks even more magnificent than the Krell. If you were to spend £2,750 on an integrated amp', the chances are that you'd want it to look something like this. To my eyes the combination of precision cast heatsinks, with chromed valve reflecting mirror and solid rosewood insert looks just scrumptious. Others may disagree, but there's no denying the first-rate sound quality. Like the Krell, this is, in the best possible way, a consummate all-rounder. Massive transformers help deliver 110W of grunt, yet the dual mono design with separately engineered pre and power sections enable the Logos to offer this power with considerable insight and resolution, too. Costing a little more (£2,950), but well worth a listen if you're in this market, is the bigger brother to our sub-£1,000 amp' of the year. The Audio Analogue Maestro builds on all the strengths of its budget wonder kid, the Puccini Settanta, and adds a great deal more, to boot. Its own 70W derivative has long offered exquisite fluidity and staging, but perhaps to the expense of outright dynamic scale. With 150W on tap, this particularly Maestro has that problem licked. Yet, at its heart, this is still an extremely euphonic amplifier, with the ability to charm and seduce the listener like few others. Like the other two, it is beautifully built, even if it doesn't have the aura of the Krell or presence of the Pathos. Last but not least, there's the new Sugden A21SE – a brilliantly musical creation, but a little tweaky for some. It has trouble with low loads and/or low efficiency speakers, but match it properly and it's ahead of everything in its ability to transport you to the performance.

the expansive soundstage, like its cheaper sibling, the PM7200KI, could not be faulted. Although a matter of personal taste, I did find the portrayal of the electric guitar too sweet. Undoubtedly pleasant to listen to, but not raw enough to sound convincing to my tastes...

This refinement was also manifest with Halvorsen's 'Entry March of the Boyars'. For my taste, the brass simply sounded too smooth. What I would say in this respect, though, is that this balance would actually favour some 'speakers over others. It's perhaps no coincidence that the Mordaunt Short Performance 6's were, amongst others, developed with the PM-11S1, and it's a brilliant combination. A naturally extended 'speaker such as this will certainly suit the Marantz better than one that's more reserved. Back to the orchestration, and I found little to complain about. The superb integration made sense of symphonic work, and I got the sense that the

amp' was very much breathing with the music rather than fighting against it. Apart from the brass, everything from the delicacy of cymbal decay to the textured woodwind made for a highly enjoyable listen.

the Marantz, but for most of the time you'll be happy to just sit there and bask in the PM-11S1's intimate portrayal. A class act.

CONCLUSION

The PM-11S1 is a welcome addition to the super-integrated scene. It may not have the iron fisted dynamic control of some, but it more than makes up for it in other areas. In terms of detail retrieval it is one of the very best. Better still, is that this detail isn't thrown at the listener, but presented amidst a spacious soundstage. There may be the odd occasion when some might want for a little more exuberance from

RECORD TIME

Marantz claims that the PM-11S1's built-in phono stage would cost upwards of £1,000 were it to be sold separately. For a £2,500 integrated that's exceptional, should the claim be true! Well, it's certainly well engineered – the whole board is fitted within a copper shield and mounted as far away from the power amp' circuitry as possible. High quality resistors and capacitors are used for the MM/MC switchable design, and it even features HDAMs - the MC stage uses an older design, whilst the MM section uses the new HDAM SA2. Cartridge loading isn't adjustable – something that any £1,000 separate phono stage worth its salt would offer. Again, a current feedback circuit is used. I found the sound excellent - in terms of transparency and resolution, it was easily a match for partnering turntables of a similar price. In many ways, its natural gait, and excellent image depth reminded me of the Trichord Dino+, which is quite an achievement for any integrated. It sounds tonally full, musically engaging, fluid and confident – there's a sense of ease and flow which is quite unlike the phonostages fitted to other integrations. Yet it's still very fast and grippy too, with a clean and expansive midband, so don't the wrong impression that it's simply soft and warm – it isn't. Given the context, it's a superb achievement and, unless you're using a £1,000 superdeck running the very best arm and cartridges, you'll not feel the need for an offboard design.

VERDICT ●●●●●

This redoubtable integrated covers all bases with panache; the subtle, finessed, musical sound won't suit all systems – but with the right ancillaries it is superb.

MARANTZ PM-11SE £2,500
 Marantz
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- FOR**
- cohesive, beguiling sound
 - detail retrieval
 - excellent phono stage

- AGAINST**
- lacks ultimate authority
 - very tough competition

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The PM-11 has enough power to justify its size and weight, delivering 300W into 4ohms and 180W into 8ohms. Power supply regulation was fairly good, even though choke regulation suggests otherwise, due to a choke's DCR.

Distortion levels were low in the mid-band, but there was an appreciable rise toward high frequencies, a figure of 0.04% being returned at 10kHz, with 1W output. Luckily it was primarily second harmonic in nature and remained so right up to full output, so the pattern of distortion was steady - a good sign. I suspect FETs are being used here, possibly with limited feedback. Bandwidth was a massive 150kHz. Strangely, Marantz don't take the PM-11 S1 down low, the -1dB point being 8Hz, and output offsets were high at 27mV / 25mV, if not high enough to be problematic.

Noise was very low, in spite of buffered inputs.

The MM phono stage was a little disappointing, with slightly rising treble suggesting a bright sound. Japanese amps are rarely consistent between MM and MC for some strange reason. In this case MC was perfectly tailored, with correct equalisation, a tad of bass lift around 40Hz and a sensible upper limit of 40kHz. Neither stage has a warp filter. Input Z on MC was 100ohms.

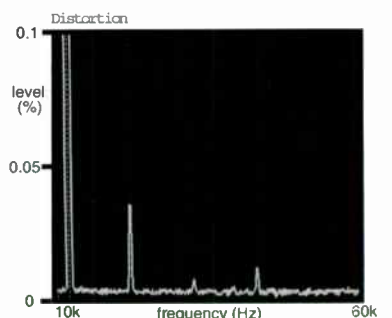
The PM-11 S1 measured well enough. It has a quiet, accurate MC stage and is massively engineered internally. With choke regulation and an 'interesting' output stage sandwiched between monster caps and heatsinks,

plus Cerafines everywhere, all on a copper plated steel chassis, with substantial internal screening, sound should be special. NK

Power	180watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	8Hz-150kHz
Separation	114dB
Noise	-99dB
Distortion	0.003%
Sensitivity	350mV
dc offset	27/25mV

Disc MM	
Frequency response	11Hz-150kHz
Separation	87dB
Noise	-88dB
Distortion	0.005%
Sensitivity	3.8mV
Overload	160mV

Disc MC	
Frequency response	12Hz-40kHz
Separation	80dB
Noise	-71dB
Distortion	0.006%
Sensitivity	0.3mV
Overload	14mV



Walrus



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So many exciting things, so little space to tell you about them in. Sorry, the pictures had to go...

Audio Aero - the Capitole CD Player. It's not often we get excited by a digital product, but this product of the French Aerospace industry (!) is really superb. It fulfils almost every possible digital wish as well as the obvious one of playing CDs. You can feed up to 3 wired and 2 optical digital sources up to 24bit / 96k standard through its superb DAC - Digital Radio, DAT, Minidisc, almost any current digital source can be fed through the Capitole's 24bit / 192k processing engine. If you purchase the version of the Capitole with analogue inputs, you can even feed two single ended and one balanced analogue source through the player's top quality stepped volume control and valve output stage, eliminating a preamp from your system altogether. This is now our reference digital source; we feel sure you will agree when you hear it.

Musical Fidelity is a permanent feature at Walrus. Les and I have been involved with them from the start, way before we founded Walrus. We remember selling their original product, The Preamp, back in the Eighties, a cute little beast it was too! We watched them grow from the original "garage-built" operation to the highly professional company they are now, with a range of superbly built and excellent sounding products, one of the few manufacturers to continue supporting and furthering the cause of High Fidelity when others were abandoning it. And, their products are consistently great value for money, something other manufacturers could learn from. The latest "X" series, now in v3 form, are very popular purchases: X-10v3 Buffer Stage, X-CANv3 Headphone Amp, X-LPSv3 Phono Amp, X-DACv3, X-PSUv3, all on demo and usually from stock. The recent A5 Series Amp and CD Player (with valve output stage), and the limited edition KW500 Amplifier (500W/channel) are also all on demo, and ought to be heard before you consider buying anything else of similar price. By the time you read this, we will also have the new top-end KW Preamp, KW Phono Stage, and the amazing KW750 Power Amp. We were shocked - even the preamp alone can supposedly sustain a 20W continuous output - who needs a power amp!! However, if you feel you do, the KW750 manages 750W per channel, adequate for most situations.

Brinkmann is a German company (still run by its perfectionist founder, Helmut Brinkmann) which we have been supporting for several years. Their range of products is small, but very high quality, the best known being the outstanding LaGrange turntable, one of the very finest turntables in the world, and now in full time use by at least a couple of well known reviewers. You really should make an effort to hear it, as a reference point, before considering any other top end turntable; the difference is clearly audible. At the other end of the spectrum, the Brinkmann Integrated Amplifier with, or without, integral valve output DAC should be auditioned by anyone contemplating mid-price amplifiers. It has the same standard of finish and reliability as all other Brinkmann equipment, with a beautifully even and detailed sound quality, plus a load of power considering its slim-line form factor. In the middle of the range sit the Pre and Power amps. We don't make a big song and dance about these, yet they get used extensively for demonstration of other items in our studio - you might well have heard them without realising it if you've had a demo with us in the last year or two - they simply do their job transparently and effortlessly!

It's always been difficult for a company which was very successful early on in its life to still make class leading products many years later; too many get distracted and lose their way. Spondor Audio, however, whose earlier designs such as the legendary BC-1 received so much acclaim, and who were one of the very few manufacturers to receive a licence from the BBC to manufacture the famous LS3/5A mini monitor, are now treating the next generation of audiophiles to the pleasures of their accurate, but never boring, loudspeakers. They've not been distracted by gimmicks, they continue to carefully produce most components in-house, and have been rewarded by excellent reviews and success for their S range of speakers. Key attributes are an even-ness most speakers can't match, with just a hint of warmth, and natural dynamics. Just as with the Brinkmann amps, we often use Spondors to demonstrate amplifiers or turntables. Again, they just do their job without drawing attention to themselves, drawing out the very best from the source components, possibly the highest praise you can give!

One of the most exciting pieces of equipment to arrive recently is the Shanling CD-T300 (pictured). This limited edition CD player (only 300 pieces will be made) is not only stunning looking, but equally stunning sounding! If you are at all interested in it, book soon to hear it and reserve yourself one; we can't see supplies lasting long. Don't forget, of course, Shanling's existing CD-T100 player, still deservedly selling well.



Running out of space now, so just room for a company Sonneteer; with their Orton integrated high quality transmitter and receiver set, either analogue, or digital via USB, for quality audio transmission around the house.

mention of exciting new products from British amp, and their new Bard Audio wireless system, a

Bye for now, see you soon! Pete and Les.

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SIX by TWO

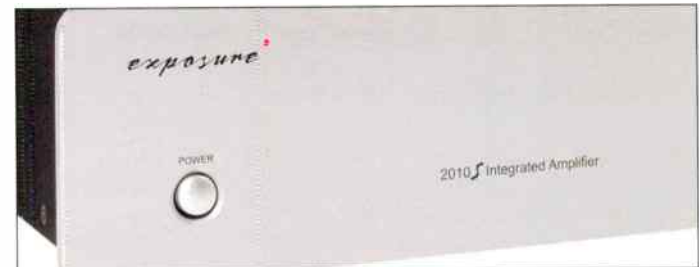
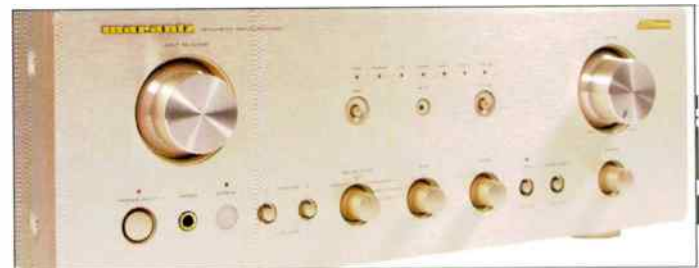
It's official: Two channel hi-fi is back. A few short years ago, it seemed as though we'd never be reviewing stereo equipment again, such was the move to multichannel. Yet with even bastions of the surround sound arena, such as Denon and Onkyo, producing some impressive new stereo gear, it's clear that the format is far from dead. With this in mind, we decided to round up six of the best affordable audiophile integrated amplifiers. Dominic Todd is your host...

The heart of any great stereo system is serious amplifier, and at the affordable end of the market at least, this means transistors. Fear not however, as – at this price point especially – the latest are very probably the greatest. It's the sweet spot where performance and value are optimised. What we have here, then, are five integrations that represent the backbone of the two-channel revival.

The first in this test is our wildcard – at £250 the Cambridge Azur 640A is half the price of the next cheapest here. Yet, anyone familiar with the amp will know that it's more than capable of holding its own against more expensive opposition. Certainly the finish is every bit as good as its rivals here. At the other end of the price spectrum we have the £600 Arcam A80 and Cyrus 6vs. Both designs make use of the best technology from multichannel, in that they're designed around a digital control 'engine', which allows for trick features such as individual input levels and even pre-programmed tone settings for different sources.

Keeping it simple are the Exposure 2010S and the Creek A50i. Both amps offer very little in the way of features, with even a remote control being optional on the Creek. Yet both have rich heritages and should prove formidable opposition. Of the two, it's the Exposure that has been updated the most recently, and this certainly shows in its quality of casing. Whether this translates to better sound quality too, we'll have to see...

Against these five UK designs, Marantz's PM7200KI at first appears unfocused. It's loaded with features, but misses out on the sophistication of the Arcam and Cyrus and is bulky when compared to the rest. Yet this is not an amp that should be taken lightly. The standard PM7200 offers a compelling option of a meaty 100w per channel or Pure Class A. With Ken Ishiwata producing his usual magic, this already impressive design is further enhanced. Six amps, then, with four distinct philosophies. Let battle commence!



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640A £250



The Cambridge Azur 640A may be by far the cheapest here, but it certainly doesn't look it. With a solid aluminium front panel and, reasonably chunky, acoustically damped chassis, the 640A is just as well finished as any of its rivals. True, the knobs are plasticky to the touch, and the legends are hard to read on the silver versions (which is why I'd, again, recommend the black), but it's not as though the others are without minor faults, either.

Inside, the 65w Azur continues its fine impression of a more expensive design. The oversized toroidal transformer is a match for the £500 models, and the use of polypropylene capacitors equally impressive. With the Azur range came Cambridge's first protection circuitry. The CAP5 protection protects both the amp' and 'speakers from damage caused by distortion, and is said not to effect sound quality, as it has no active circuitry added to the signal path.

Cambridge have kept the costs down by not including a phono stage – although a couple of excellent standalone designs are available – but this is still a feature rich amp'. It's not quite in the Marantz's league, but the spec' should still suffice for most. Twin tape loops supplement the 'four line level sockets and headphone output. Tone controls are included, but are easily bypassed, and there's also two sets of 'speaker outputs. Best of all is the standard remote control, whose metal facing made the others look cheap by comparison – remarkable given the cost of the unit.

SOUND QUALITY

Unlike its CD counterpart, the 640C, the 640A amp' is no giant slayer. It's fair to say that

the other amps' outperformed it here but then again, given the price differential, not by as much as you might think. One of the most impressive aspects shown by the Cambridge was its ability to separate vocalists from the rest of the mix. With The Brand New Heavies, the female vocals stood tall, were full bodied and were projected well into the room. Soundstaging was actually more generous than the leaner sounding Cyrus 6vs, if not quite as expansive as the PM7200KI. Given the price, I had few issues with the depth of bass but, against the others, it did sound somewhat soft by comparison. Better was the treble, which although not the most incisive, sounded smooth, and a great improvement upon the rather spiky efforts of previous Cambridge amps'.

The bold, yet slightly loose, soundstage, suited Joss Stone well. Her vocals had plenty of presence, and a sense of realism that bettered a few of the more expensive models. Ultimately, the 640A did lack a little focus, but you'd only really notice after comparison with the super sharp Exposure or Cyrus. Of more

concern was the soft bass, which, whilst not too bad, did slow the timing down. This wouldn't manifest itself so much with a leaner 'speaker, but could become an issue with a larger, and softer sounding, floorstanding 'speaker.

With Classical music the Cambridge proved just as adept as before. Strings were smoothly portrayed, and there was a fine balance between excitement and refinement throughout. Against the Exposure and Cyrus, though, the timing did sound just a little plodding here, with that softness of bass not helping the case. With its healthy 65w power output, power and energy weren't short, but there still wasn't quite the intensity of some – the lack of ultimate dynamic contrast was probably the culprit here. Otherwise, whilst not quite as precise as the Cyrus, the 640A demonstrated admirable detail retrieval.

Whilst the Cambridge can't quite compete with the others, its value for money can't be denied. With a lack of serious sonic nasties, and build quality to match the rest, it's a super buy for £250.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

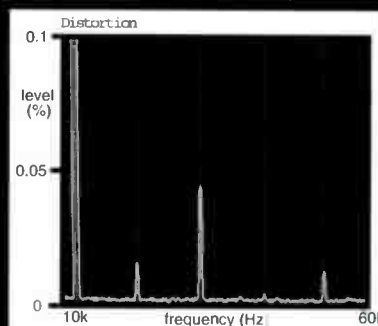
It doesn't feel too solid, but all the same the Azur has plenty of clout, turning out a useful 71W into 8ohms and 110W into 4ohms, more than enough for today's loudspeakers. Power supply regulation was very good, so the amp. should have solid sounding bass.

Distortion was low across the mid-band at around 0.002%, but it rose toward high frequencies, as is common. The harmonic structure is that of classic crossover. Luckily, at 0.05% into 4ohms at all power levels performance in this area is sufficiently well controlled to avoid obvious sharpness. The dominance of third harmonic is likely to lighten the sound just slightly.

For a budget amp the Cambridge measures well in all areas. I'd expect a light-ish air, with firm bass.

NK

Power	71watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	5Hz-38kHz
Separation	92dB
Noise	-99dB
Distortion	0.01%
Sensitivity	210mV
dc offset	1/2.2mV



VERDICT

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR

640A £250

Audio Partnership PLC

+44 (0) 207 940 2240

www.cambridge-audio.co.uk

FOR

- well balanced sound
- build and finish
- that remote again

AGAINST

- softened frequency extremes
- others more precise
- white on silver legends!

MARANTZ PM7200KI £499

Amongst the others here, the Marantz is by far the largest unit tested, and festooned with knobs and buttons. You can't argue with the feature count - there's a full system remote control, two sets of 'speaker outputs, separate record and listen selectors, twin tape loops, a processor loop, headphone socket and phonostage. It also features a Class A option which switches the amplifier from 95 watts per channel in Class AB mode to 25 watts in pure Class A. As you'd expect from KI fair, there's a full copper plated chassis, copper screws, a hefty copper-plated toroidal PSU and even copper shields for the HDAM op-amps. In addition, Elna or other high-grade devices have replaced many of the capacitors, there's an Alps volume control, and OFC wiring. Even the meaty 12,000µf output capacitors are fitted with damping material.

SOUND QUALITY

With the Class A/AB switching, the Marantz is an amp' of two distinct characters. Personally, I preferred the pure Class A setting, and so used this for the majority of the listening. With its lush balance and vast sound stage, the PM7200KI was in its element with Joss Stone. Her vocals had a fluid and seamless quality that none of the others could replicate. The bass guitar also produced the most depth here, although far from the sharpest timing. Certainly, in terms of pace and vitality the PM7200KI did struggle against the Exposure and Cyrus. That said, the PM7200KI can't be accused of being sloppy - instruments were well separated and the tonality could not be criticised.

The Brand New Heavies generally showed the Marantz in a favourable light. Of all the amps' here, it was the PM7200KI that produced the most weight and power with this track. Vocals were silky smooth and there was excellent projection. Timing was generally good, too, although there wasn't quite the incisiveness or energy of the Exposure in particular. Against the Cyrus, some could also find that the individual instruments and vocalists to be lacking in precision, as though the edges were slightly blurred.

As I've noticed before, listening to Classical music with the PM7200KI can be a slightly frustrating experience. Again, it was

focus that let the side down, with some confusion amongst the strings leading to a smeared string tone. Brass lacked a degree of bite. Whilst not being the most dynamically intense, the Marantz could still muster enough weight to give a convincing level of scale. Switch to Class AB, incidentally, and you'll find a punchy balance with snappy dynamics and drive to match the best here, but still it sounds too mechanical with most music.

With something of a split personality, the PM7200KI tries to be all things to all men. In some respects it works just fine, but in other cases the ideal balance lies, frustratingly, between the two 'Class' settings. Fantastic, but flawed.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The PM7200 has optional Class A working. It should, in principle at least, eliminate crossover distortion, although this is not say it will eliminate distortion. Unfortunately, Class A is horrendously inefficient, running the output devices hard all the time, which means oodles of heat. Power output is set mainly by heat dissipation, which with the PM7200 amounted to 28W into 8ohms and 50W into 4ohms. Switch it out and output rises to 72W into 8ohms and 132W into 4ohms, so the amp goes considerably louder in Class B (or A/B).

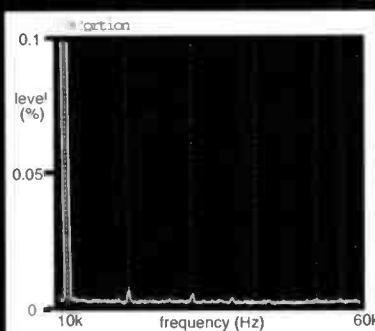
Class A has a reputation for sounding good, but this may be an historical hangover, from the bad old days when Class B meant searing distortion. Things have changed; in Class B the PM7200 produced as little distortion as in Class A, which is very little - around 0.01%. So Class A offers no measured benefit in this amplifier, unless your lounge is cold.

Frequency response was a wide 4Hz-115kHz and input sensitivity high at 160mV (CD, Tuner, Aux). The tone controls worked well and there is a useful MM phono stage that had accurate equalisation right down to 27Hz (-1dB), as well as effective warp

suppression (-13dB at 5Hz). The PM7200KI Sig is a well engineered amplifier. NK

Power	72watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	4Hz-115kHz
Separation	118dB
Noise	-88dB
Distortion	0.002%
Sensitivity	160mV
d.c. offset	21/28mV

Disc MM	
Frequency response	27Hz-88kHz
Separation	74dB
Noise	-82dB
Distortion	0.004%
Sensitivity	2.4mV
Overload	144mV

**VERDICT** ●●●●●£

Marantz UK
 ☎ +44 (0)1753 680868
 www.marantz.com

FOR

- sumptuous soundstage
- Class A switching
- fully loaded

AGAINST

- dated styling
- ideal sound seemingly between Classes!
- music sensitive

EXPOSURE 2010S £505

Audio aficionados will need no introduction; this is pitched as pure 'affordable esoterica'. Inside, the circuit board is of good quality and uses short signal paths. A reasonably sized toroidal transformer supplies the juice, with the MOSFET transistors placed beneath the main circuit board. A slab of aluminium, connected directly to the casing itself, provides cooling for these. Component quality is generally high, with polystyrene capacitors and solid aluminium electrolytic capacitors throughout. Both the volume and selector knobs are decent quality ALPS models. The main output transistors are, unusually, laid on their sides, and isolated from the board via a dense, foam pad.

The new 'S' version brings upgrades to both the power supply and output devices. The additional benefit of the 'S' upgrade has been a 25w power increase, taking the 2010S up to a healthy 75W. Featurewise the 2010S is on the minimalist side. There are five line level inputs, a single tape loop and a pre-output. Two sets of 'speaker terminals are provided (designed for bi-wiring with thick cables), but no headphone socket. Although technically a system remote control, the Exposure's is nothing like as comprehensive as that supplied with the Cyrus.

SOUND QUALITY

From the first few seconds of listening to The Brand New Heavies, I knew that the Exposure was the class act here. Rather like the Creek, it's the punchy, upbeat timing that's first to grab your attention. In terms of sub £1,000 amps', only the Naim Nait 5i does the whole rhythm and drive thing better and, even then, not by much. In the past, amps' with such a balance have risked

sounding harsh and sterile, but not so the Exposure. Like the Cyrus, the excellent attack comes without any undue harshness. It perhaps loses a little in ultimate treble focus to the Cyrus, but more than makes up for this with a much fuller bass response and a more musical, less mechanical nature.

Considering that the 2010S is a good deal less powerful than the PM7200KI (at least in Class AB mode), it came as quite a surprise as to just how close it came in terms of bass extension. With Joss Stone, the Marantz still ruled the roost, but the Exposure ran it a very close second. Factor in texture and control, and the Exposure eclipses even the mighty KI. Whereas, in the context of amps' costing two to four times the price of the 2010S I had found the amplifier to produce female vocals with a hint of 'steel', there were no such concerns this time around. Instead, Stone's vocals had a powerful, breathy quality that instantly made all the others sound synthesised by comparison.

Furthermore, staging was as equally solid and as well separated as the rest, too.

With Prokofiev's, Romeo and Juliet, the 2010S provided the most incisive and exciting sound of the bunch. It was the only one that could really pin you to the seat with the shock wave of music that is the introduction to The Montagues and the Capulets. For drama and tension few, if any, at this price, can do better. True, there wasn't the weighty scale to give the piece the ultimate authority it truly deserves, but then you'd really need to be looking at amps costing at least three times the Exposures price to make a decent fist of this. In terms of its rivals here, the bass response was just fine, with noticeably greater body and weight than the similarly taut Cyrus.

Despite all the drama and clout, don't for one moment get the impression that the Exposure is a bit of a roughneck. Timbre, orchestral balance and fine detail are the equal of any amp' here. None, however, can make such sense of the music.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

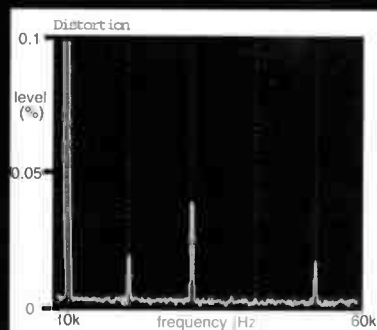
The 2010S doesn't lack punch. It turns out 78W into 8ohms and 120W into 4ohms, power enough to drive today's loudspeakers loud. Distortion was generally well controlled, although there was a rise toward high frequencies, especially with low loads. Pushing near full output at 10kHz into 4ohms the 2010S exceeded 0.1%, not the end of the world by any means, but easily bettered nowadays – or in the past by the Exposure VIII power amp also tested in this issue. Our analysis shows third harmonic dominates, so I would expect a slight lightening of the sound, in tonal colour, if anything.

Sensitivity of the CD/ Tuner and Aux inputs was a useful 280mV, sufficient to accept old cassette decks, tuners and such like. Noise measured a low -95dB but D.C. offsets on both channels were high at around 40mV – not damaging to loudspeakers, but ten times what is common.

The 2010S wins no prizes for its measured performance, but it is

satisfactory in every area all the same. NK

Power	78watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	8Hz-30kHz
Separation	120dB
Noise	-95dB
Distortion	0.02%
Sensitivity	280mV
dc offset	39/43mV

**VERDICT****EXPOSURE**

+44 (0)1273 423877
www.exposurehifi.com

FOR

- highly articulate
- timing and integration
- subtle, solid build

AGAINST

- limited features
- prosaic styling

CREEK A50i £510

Launched in 2003, the Creek A50i is the oldest amplifier here, and is also the plainest design. There are four line inputs, a tape loop and pre-outs, but that's about your lot. If you'd like either a remote control or turntable input, both will cost you extra – a whopping £85 in the case of the remote!

Inside the typically compact unit you won't actually find a list of designer brand components, but just good old-fashioned design integrity. The circuit layout has been carefully thought through, with good quality components having been used in critical areas. As with the others, a good quality toroidal transformer is used to supply the juice that, in this case, helps deliver the claimed 60 watts power output. As with Creeks of old, you'd rarely chose one for looks or build quality, but the prove, as ever, is in the listening...

SOUND QUALITY

Most group tests have their surprise 'dark horse' and the Creek A50i was very much that. Considering that it's by far the oldest design here, it put in a remarkably convincing performance. Starting with Classical music it proved to be a great deal more animated than the Arcam. It was really all down to the timing, which had such a sense of correct rhythm about it, that it was second only to the exceptional Exposure. In other instances, the A50i took a balanced approach that meant it may not have excelled in any specific area but overall proved deeply rewarding to listen to. The strings, for example, weren't as smooth as with the Marantz or Arcam, or as precise as with the Cyrus, but struck a balance that made

them more believable. The same was true of the brass, although in this case, the Exposure's extra vibrancy was missed. One area where it couldn't quite match the Exposure was in terms of dynamic scale. The introduction to The Montagues and the Capulets, didn't manage to quite make my hairs stand on end as the 2010S had done.

The A50i continued to make most of the others sound slow witted with Josh Stone's 'Super Duper'. It cracked along at a fine old pace, making it hard not to tap a foot along with its superior timing. Ultimate bass weight wasn't in the league of the Marantz, or even the Exposure, but was solid and deep enough for most needs. As a further bonus, and typical of Creek, was the tight and focused sound stage that made it easy to depict the individual musicians.

'Highest High' was produced with such a lack of fuss that it made most of the others sound strained and congested by comparison. The charming Creek would simply get on with the music and, in the best tradition of truly decent hi-fi, allow you to forget about the hi-fi altogether. This ability came from a combination of super transparency, which revealed detail without drawing too much attention to it, as the Cyrus 6 could, and that pacy timing that remained just on the right side of lean. Vocals were well resolved and had just the right measure of projection and body allocated to them.

Such is its balance of abilities that it's hard not to warm to the A50i. It can't match the ultimate power of the Marantz or vibrancy of the Exposure, but it's nevertheless still a top contender.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The compact and elegant A50i produces 50W into 8ohms under measurement, rising to 80W into 4ohms. These are tidy amounts, but they are a little down on the class average, which is around 80W.

The Creek was a little more affected by low loads than is common nowadays, distortion doubling from 0.005% to 0.01% at 1kHz (1W) and from around 0.016% to 0.03% at 10kHz. Luckily, as this was largely second harmonic and therefore not crossover, it should go unnoticed subjectively. And of course 0.03% still isn't too bad in any case.

The amplifier reaches down very low, to just 3Hz. The upper limit is not extended, measuring just 36kHz. I'd expect the amplifier to sound quite large bodied but mild-to-warm in presentation.

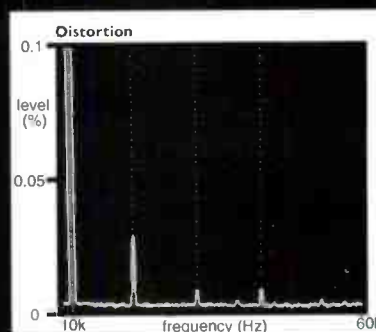
Input sensitivity was on the low side at 480mV, sufficient for modern sources, but not for old tuners, cassette decks and what have you.

The A50i measures neatly enough.

It isn't overly powerful but it is likely to sound clean and easy in the usual Creek manner. NK

Power 50watts

CD/tuner/aux. Frequency response 3Hz-36kHz
Separation 89dB
Noise -100dB
Distortion 0.016%
Sensitivity 480mV
dc offset 1.5mV / 2.4mV

**VERDICT**

Creek Audio
☎ +44 (0)1442 260146
www.creekaudio.co.uk

FOR

- truly involving sound
- not music dependant
- well finished

AGAINST

- tough new opponents
- no looker!

ARCAM A80 £600

Along with Cyrus 6, the £600 Arcam A80 is the most expensive machine here. In some ways this readily manifests itself, but in others it's not so obvious. Whilst there's nothing wrong with the neatly finished Arcam, side-by-side with the cheaper Cambridge, it looks little different. Internally, though, the A80 is a far more sophisticated beast. Again, like the Cyrus, the A80 uses a complex menu system to control all aspects of the amp from 'speaker switching right down to individual input level control. Better still, this is all readily visible by a large, clear display. In terms of features it's almost a match for the Marantz and, in some respects, better. For those interested in a basic multiroom system, the remote controlled 'speaker switching will be a boon. Input wise, however, the A80 isn't quite so generous. Although there is a standard MM phono stage, this is complimented by just four line level inputs and a tape loop. To allow for bi-amping, Arcam have fitted a pre-out.

The A80 uses the current feedback topology design of the highly successful A85. A toroidal power supply is standard, and the circuit board is to Arcam's usual high standard. There are some fine detail touches, too: Sorbothane damping on the volume chip and output capacitors may not sound like a great deal, but attention here can pay dividends in terms of sound quality – and does...

SOUND QUALITY

There's something very 'junior Quad' about the way the A80 gracefully flows through music. Expect a bit of vigour, though, and you're likely to be disappointed. Listening to The Brand New Heavies' 'Highest High', I found the timing to be slow and somewhat slothful, especially after the upbeat

Exposure and Cyrus. In addition to this, the vocals weren't especially well projected, meaning that the A80 struggled to really engage with the listener. Bass weight was good but, again, others, notably the Marantz, did a more convincing job still. Yet it wasn't all bad.

Staging and layering of sound was good, and the A80 always kept its composure. The sound was very well integrated and cohesive right through its, fairly broad, frequency response. Depiction of finer detail was as good as the others, and notes were well focused. With Josh Stone's 'Super Duper', I found the balance to be polished but, again, lacking sparkle. It's not that the A80 did anything wrong, it's just that it always seemed to play it just a bit too safe. Stone's vocals should sound exuberant and full-bodied, but the A80 made them sound overly refined. Still, they were at least well separated from the rest of the mix, if not pushed quite forward enough. Classical music is usually an Arcam

strength, but the increasing talent from the opposition has meant that Arcam no longer has the assailing lead here that it used to. With Prokofiev's 'The Montagues and the Capulets', the A80 demonstrated a firm and controlling grip on the complex and dynamic piece. Typically of the company, the string tone was smooth and sweet, a little like the Class A Marantz, if not quite so blurred. Brass had a fine, resonant character, but not the vibrancy of most of the others. Authority and weight I'd put at about class average, with neither lacking, really, for an amp' of this price.

Although Classical music is still an Arcam forte, I still found it difficult to truly engage with the music. In isolation it sounded good, superb in fact, but next to the Creek, Exposure and Cyrus it cried out for a bit more vim. Smooth and refined then, and a good bet to calm an overly eager system, but others here will engage you more with the music.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

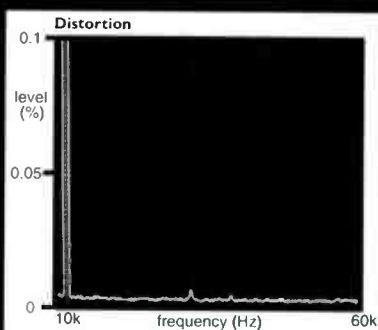
The A-80 all but hit 100W into 8ohms and managed a very healthy 170 into 4ohms, so although not a large amp, even by Arcam standards, it is muscular, with good regulation. Bear in mind that most loudspeakers these days have 4ohm bass units, so the 4ohm power is what you get in practice.

Better still, the A-80 delivered full power (-1dBV) with alacrity, at 1kHz and 10kHz, managing no more than 0.009% distortion into a 4ohm load. In fact, distortion behaviour was all but unaffected by load, an encouraging sign. The important 1W, 10kHz figure was 0.007%, our analysis showing third harmonic only.

Arcam have given the A-80 a very broad frequency response, measuring 4Hz-72kHz within 1dB limits. However, they have not given it tone controls of any sort. It does, however, have programmed control of input sensitivity, balance, volume control resolution and what have you, presumably from a microprocessor controlled gain block.

The A-80 is a compact power house with a fine set of performance figures. It measures very well, matching today's best. NK

Power	98watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	4Hz-72kHz
Separation	98dB
Noise	-90dB
Distortion	0.006%
Sensitivity	300mV
dc offset	4mV / 9mV

**VERDICT**

Arcam
 ☎ +44 (0) 1223 203203
 www.arcam.co.uk

FOR

- refinement
- cohesive sound
- control flexibility

AGAINST

- lacks pace
- bland presentation
- quality of rivals

CYRUS 6vs £600

The Cyrus 6vs's smooth, taut styling makes it the best looking of the group, and it's certainly the most compact. The modifications are essentially

where large value capacitors in the signal path have either been removed or bypassed and a 'virtual servo' (hence the term 'vs') replaces the existing servo amplifier. There are actually fewer esoteric electronics than before, but more attention paid to board layout and the use of close tolerance components.

Internal finish is typically neat with quality, star earthing used throughout. Instead of metal, the chassis is actually fashioned from a polymer composite but, thanks in part to a diecast magnesium outer case, avoids feeling plasticky. As with the Arcam, the Cyrus 6vs uses a digital control 'engine' to sort out everything from muting and balance to setting individual input levels. With six line-level inputs, one tape loop a handy pre-out and an MC-BUS output, the Cyrus is seriously well spec'd for one so small. At a later date, the £600 6vs can also be upgraded to full '8vs spec' for little more than the original £200 price difference.

SOUND QUALITY

If you like your music taut, pacy and precise, then the Cyrus 6vs would be a good starting point. Starting off with 'The Highest High', I found the Cyrus to have one of the most precise and focused sound stages here. Sure, it wasn't anything like as broad as the Marantz, or even the Cambridge for that matter, but when it came to image placement, it was still amongst the best. Compared to the

others, bass response was rather lightweight. The compensation for this came from the snappy timing and good transient attack. As Cyrus amps' have done, the 6vs did sound a little mechanical, but never to the extent of becoming harsh.

'Super Duper Love' showed the 6vs' fine transparency to excellent effect. Throughout the frequency response there was an absence of smear or veiling that made it possible to hear subtle nuances from each and every musician. Again, imaging was rock solid, although more weight from the bass would have been appreciated. Mind you, had the Cyrus 6vs had this extra bass, then I guess they'd be little reason for upgrading to the Cyrus 8vs...

With 'The Montagues and the Capulets', the Cyrus kept its cool during the more complex sections. By absolute standards, there was a

little muddle during the more demanding stretches but, given its price, the 6vs remained a model of clarity. There was plenty of drama when required, if not quite the thunderous bass to add real authority to the piece. Proving itself as a fine all-rounder, the Cyrus demonstrated an excellent timbre. Brass sounded crisp whilst the string tone provided a fine balance between refinement and bite. The sound was always finely etched and there was a pleasing lack of grain at higher frequencies.

In terms of both music genre and sonic measurements, the Cyrus 6vs is a fine amp that majors in pace, detail and precision, although wouldn't be the first choice for those looking for prodigious bass. It's the iconic packaging and compact size alone, though, that will make it the first choice for some.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Cyrus amplifiers generally exhibit low distortion right across the audio band, even up at high frequencies – always a critical region. The 6VS measured much like its stable mates in this area, returning just 0.008% distortion at 10kHz, from 1W output right up to full output. Our distortion analysis shows the harmonics produced are predominantly second and third order. Performance only deteriorated into a 4ohm load; then higher order components appeared. Luckily, most loudspeakers are 8ohms above 600Hz or so.

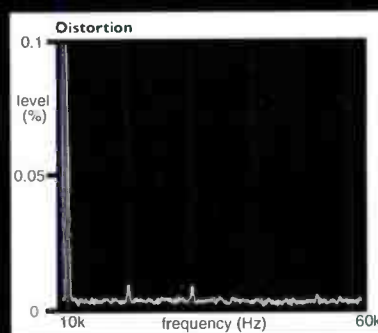
Frequency response was a wide 4Hz – 54kHz, within 1dB limits, sufficient for DVD-A and SACD. Sensitivity was usefully high at 210mV in for full output, allowing use with old, low output sources like cassette decks and what have you.

Power output measured 60W into 8ohms and 80W into 4ohms, high enough for most domestic situations.

The 6VS measures much like other

Cyrus amps, with low distortion at all frequencies. It will likely sound smooth and amenable. NK

Power	60watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	4Hz-54kHz
Separation	92dB
Noise	-90dB
Distortion	0.006%
Sensitivity	210mV
dc offset	21/-20mV

**VERDICT**

Cyrus

+44 (0) 1480 435577

www.cyrus.co.uk

FOR

- taut, punchy sound
- precision and detail
- iconic packaging

AGAINST

- bass light
- narrow staging

99 cd-s

99 cd-r

fm tuner

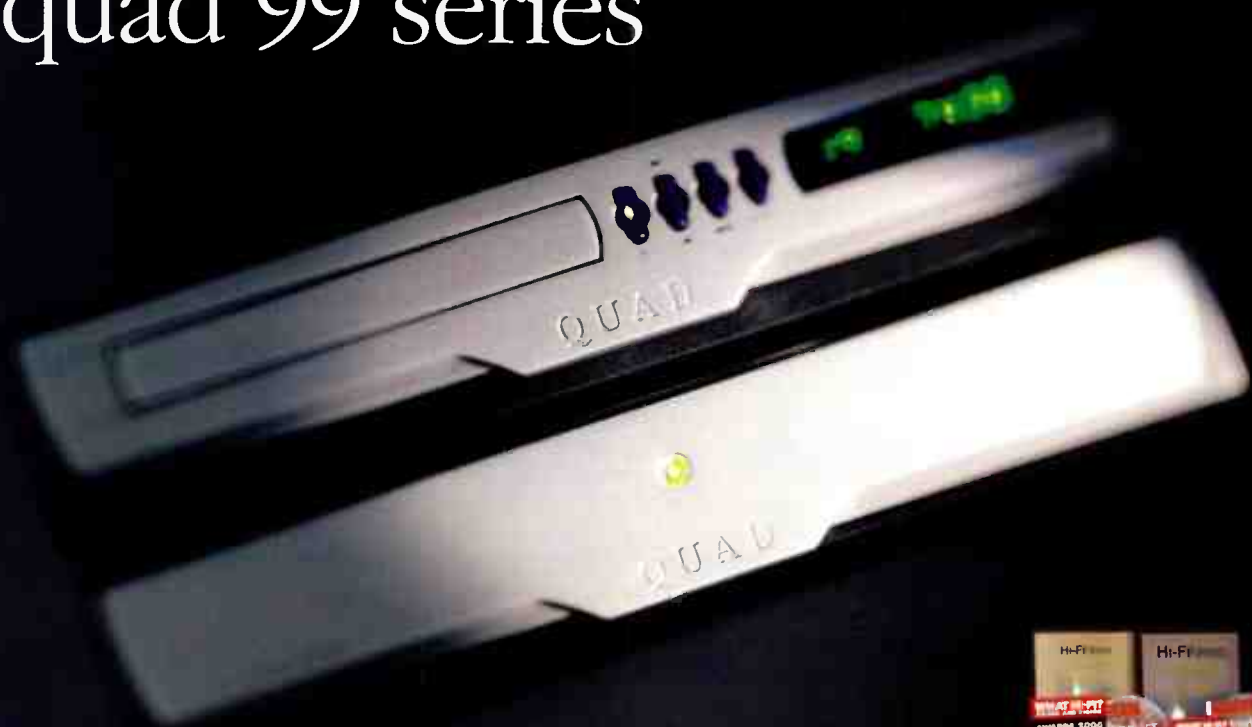
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conclusion

The stereo amplifier category is what's known in the retail business as a 'mature category'. That is to say that it's been around long enough for prices to be stable and quality predictable. It can therefore come as little surprise to find that all of these amplifiers are of decent quality, and all have their selling points.

Still, positions must be apportioned and podiums taken so, starting with sixth place we have the Arcam A80. Yes, you did read that right! Like I said, standards are very high in this sector, and the Arcam's sixth place does not in any way mean that the A80 is a poor amp'. In actual fact, the Arcam is probably the most refined and cohesive amplifier here. Yet, it's that very refinement that also makes it the dullest and least rewarding - to this reviewer's tastes at least! If you have a bright system that needs taming or prefer a smooth sound then the Arcam would make an excellent choice, but if not, your needs are best served by one of the others.

To be fair to the Arcam, overall it does sound better than the fifth place entry, the Cambridge 640A. Yet, what the Arcam can't justify is the £350 price premium over the Cambridge. Yes the Arcam is more polished, but the Cambridge isn't exactly uncouth and, in some cases, proved more engaging to listen to. It's also every bit as well finished as the Arcam, and runs it very close in terms of features, too. If this test were based purely on a points per pound basis then the 640A would very likely be in the top three. As it stands, though, a lack of focus means that it, unlike its CD brethren, can't quite challenge the top four.

Some may see the Marantz PM7200KI as something of an ugly brute, and I wouldn't disagree [steady on Dominic, I rather like it! - Ed.], but what can't be denied is its compelling sound quality. Switch to Class A and with the right type of music it can sound utterly bewitching. Music ebbs

and flows with a fluidity that makes even the most natural here, sound stilted by comparison. Switch to Class AB and, although that fluidity is gone, there's power and scale to eclipse pretty much everything at this price. Yet, whilst I have a great respect for the KI, I still find it ultimately frustrating. Simply put, I often found myself wanting that impossible setting between the two 'Classes' to 'Class A-and-a-half'. Sometimes, choice isn't always such a good thing...

It therefore leaves the bronze podium to be taken by the worthy Cyrus 6vs. This is a more consistent amp', although one that's still not

whatsoever, and the price of the optional remote control is extortionate, but start listening and all is forgiven! The A50i is both punchy yet refined, detailed yet fluid. It's simply a thoroughly pleasurable way to immerse yourself in music and that, after all, is what hi-fi should really be all about.

For all the Creek's charm, though, it doesn't win this contest. Instead, the laurel goes to the Exposure 2010S. The fact that I can barely criticise this amp', in any respect, rather says it all. It looks good, is solidly made, has the remote control that the Creek lacks but, best of all, it simply sounds by far the best

"In any A-B test here the Exposure strode through the music with a confidence that made its rivals wilt..."

without quirk. In terms of treble focus, precision and timing, it is one of the very best here. Yet it can also really lack bass, to the point of an inefficient standmounter being a bit of a no-goer. Bonus marks do however go to the Cyrus for the smart styling and compact dimensions. The fact that it packs almost as much as the Marantz, into a case that's nearly four times smaller deserves credit.

Surprise of the show for me came from the Creek A50i. It's not exactly an old timer, but it's one of those products that's been around long enough to be largely forgotten about. Ignore this amp', though, and you're missing out on one of the most musical ways to spend your £500. Yes, it has absolutely no features

here. In any A-B test here it simply strode through the music with a confidence that made its rivals wilt. The standout qualities are articulation, timing and integration, but there's really no area in which the Exposure doesn't impress to some degree. It wins this contest, and by some margin.



WIN DALI'S SUPERB ROYAL TOWER FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT GIVEAWAY!

Here's your chance to win a fantastic pair of Royal Tower loudspeakers from Danish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries, worth £1,100! In

February's *Hi-Fi World*, Dominic Todd wrote,

"As with other Dali speakers, the cabinet is assembled by hand in Denmark to a very high standard - 22mm MDF throughout, with centre brace and both front and rear reflex ports... cabinets are hand polished and lacquered, and the finish is generally superb... As with other Dali speakers, drive unit selection is both careful and bespoke. The twin woofers and tweeter are both based upon established technology and appear well engineered. The woofers feature doped paper cones and cast aluminium chassis... For the high frequencies, Dali has chosen a silk dome tweeter... The crossovers themselves, Dali are especially proud of. Each feature in-house, hand wound chokes, and good quality metallised polypropylene capacitors. All components are hardwired and the terminals except bi-wiring. This offers little in the way of groundbreaking technology, but just good old-fashioned attention to detail. I respect Dali for this, and know of many a successful speaker that follows the simple is best philosophy.

I found the sound quite unique, and unlike that of most British designs. Whist vocals were set well forward, the balance was extremely smooth. Bass was on the leaner and drier side (with) excellent integration between bass and midrange, especially for a twin-woofer design. Decent timing and control also benefited from the use of smaller woofers. As you'd expect from a narrow cabinet, the Royal Towers produced a broad soundstage and a particularly open balance... The real star was the midrange. Where other

floorstanders can sound rather confused and imprecise, the Royal Towers impressed with their vocal clarity and focus. Were you to listen to these speakers blindfolded, you'd be forgiven for thinking they were a larger stand mount design and not a floorstander which, depending upon your viewpoint, may or may not be a good thing... The Royal Towers have formidable talents that make them immensely appealing. The insight and realism offered from the midrange is quite exceptional. The handmade crossovers appear to work well, as the response from bass to treble is a good deal more seamless than many. The drive units may not be flashy, but they also have a winning way when it comes to vocal and instrumental texture. As a device to really feel the music from a musicians perspective, the Dali's score highly."

If you'd like to win this superb pair of speakers, then all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries by 30th April 2005 to:

May 2005 Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF.



QUESTIONS

[1] How does DT describe the finish?

- [a] generally superb
- [b] cosmic
- [c] sensational
- [d] out of this world

[2] What cone material do the bass units use?

- [a] doped paper
- [b] papier mache
- [c] polyester
- [d] carbon fibre

[3] How did DT find the sound?

- [a] quite unique
- [b] with difficulty
- [c] after a fashion
- [d] closed for the weekend

[4] What was the real star?

- [a] the midrange
- [b] Elton John
- [c] Wayne Rooney
- [d] the Popemeister

May 2005 Competition
Hi-Fi World Magazine
Unit G4 Argo House
The Park Business Centre
Kilburn Park Rd.
London NW6 5LF

RULES AND CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

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

entries will be accepted on a postcard only

**FEBRUARY 2005 SPENDOR S6e WINNER:
Graham Curwell of Stourbridge, West Midlands**

SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION

NEW STORES

ABERDEEN

57 CROWN STREET 01224 252797

Situated on Crown Street, the store has three fantastic demonstration areas where you can audition the very best in home cinema and hi-fi. Easy parking available at the rear of the store.



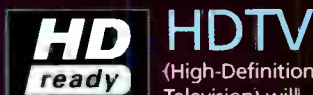
SWINDON 8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD 01793 610992

The Swindon store has reopened after a short break with an improved range of the best in hi-fi and home cinema. The excellent facilities and quality of service remain the same. The store is close to the town centre with parking nearby.

smart home show
14-17 April 2005
NEC, Birmingham

The new Smart Home Show brings together everything you need to create your own unique digital home.

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision Fusion Lounge (Stand 3409) allows you to experience an incredible 'real world' concept room, containing some of the world's best home entertainment systems - a 'must see' if you're looking to integrate music/home cinema systems into your home. Plus, when you visit the amazing Fusion Lounge, you could be in with a chance of winning £25000 worth of state-of-the-art equipment! Terms and Conditions apply



HDTV

(High-Definition Television) will start to be broadcast in the UK within the next 18 months. With almost double the resolution of normal broadcasts, HDTV is set to redefine picture quality.

In order to enjoy the benefits of HDTV, you'll need a suitable television. Most televisions in the world today will not show HDTV, but there are some that are HDTV ready.

Want to know more? Sevenoaks was one of the first to demonstrate HDTV. Most Sevenoaks stores have a dedicated satellite link to Euro1080, Europe's first HDTV channel and can advise you which screens are future proofed.

Contact your nearest Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store today and get ready for tomorrow. THE 'HD READY' LOGO IS A TRADEMARK OF EICTA.

With over 30 years experience, SEVENOAKS Sound & Vision is one of the largest and most respected Audio/Visual retailers in the country.

Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from Hi-Fi separates and systems to DVD recorders, widescreen plasma televisions and projection systems.

Our fully trained installation experts can neatly and seamlessly integrate a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.

Whatever your requirements, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products and the expertise to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

- THE BEST PERFORMANCE
- THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY
- THE WIDEST RANGE
- ... AND TOTAL PEACE OF MIND

ABERDEEN (NEW)

BEDFORD

BIRMINGHAM

BRIGHTON

BRISTOL

BROMLEY

CAMBRIDGE

CARDIFF

CHELSEA

CHELTENHAM

CRAWLEY

CROYDON

EALING

EDINBURGH

EPSOM

EXETER

GLASGOW

GUILDFORD

HOLBORN

HULL

IPSWICH

KINGSTON

LEICESTER

LEEDS

LINCOLN

MAIDSTONE

MANCHESTER

NEWCASTLE

NORWICH

NOTTINGHAM

OXFORD

PETERBOROUGH

PLYMOUTH

POOLE

PRESTON

READING

SEVENOAKS

SHEFFIELD

SOLIHULL

SOUTHAMPTON

SOUTHGATE

STAINES

SWINDON (NEW)

SWISS COTTAGE

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

WATFORD

WEYBRIDGE

WITHAM (ESSEX)

WOLVERHAMPTON



Arcam

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



NEW ARCAM SOLO ALL-IN-ONE MUSIC SYSTEM

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

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



Cyrus

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

RANGE INCLUDES

- CD6 CD PLAYER
- CD8X CD PLAYER
- 6VS AMPLIFIER
- 8VS AMPLIFIER
- PRE X VS PREAMPLIFIER
- FM X TUNER

Specialist hi-fi

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



Rotel

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

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

02 SERIES

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



B&W

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

- 600 SERIES INCLUDES**
- DM601 S3 SPEAKERS
- DM602 S3 SPEAKERS
- 700 SERIES INCLUDES**
- 705 SPEAKERS
- 703 SPEAKERS
- 1PM1 SERIES INCLUDES**
- PV1 SUBWOOFER



Project

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

- DEBUT III TURNTABLE WITH OM5E CARTRIDGE
- DEBUT PHONO SB TURNTABLE WITH OM5E CARTRIDGE
- 1 XPRESSION TURNTABLE WITH OM10E CARTRIDGE



PRICING POLICY

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

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

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

0% FINANCE OPTION*

Spread the cost of buying.

0% finance option* is available on the majority of products we stock.

*Subject to credit checks. Some products excluded. Minimum finance £200. Subject to status.

PLEASE NOTE

Some products/brands are not available at all stores. Please call to confirm or visit our website before travelling.

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

ADVERT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 05/05/2005, E&OE.



Roksan

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

Kandy

KA1 MKIII AMPLIFIER
KD1 MKIII CD PLAYER

Caspian M SERIES

CD PLAYER
AMPLIFIER
PREAMPLIFIER
STEREO POWER
MONOBLOC POWER

Monitor Audio

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

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



«RADIUS



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

NEW SILVER RS6



«BRONZE B2

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



KEF Q Series

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

Q SERIES INCLUDES
Q COMPACT BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS
Q4 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS
Q7 AV SPEAKER PACKAGE

Digital Radio

Harman Kardon

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

«PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2003

Pure

DRX702ES DAB/ANALOGUE TUNER

Wharfedale

«BEST BUY 2003

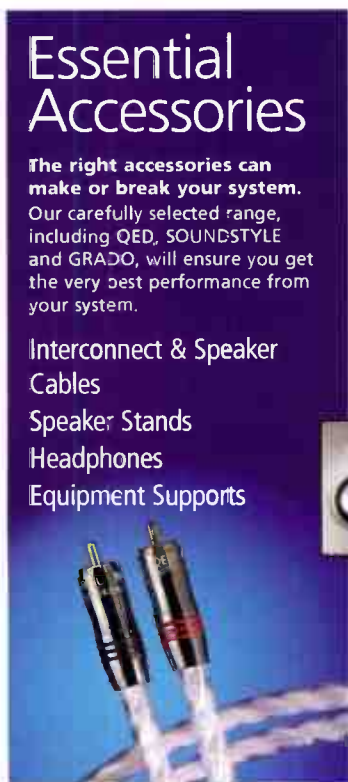
DIAMOND 9.1 SPEAKERS

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

Essential Accessories

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

Interconnect & Speaker Cables
Speaker Stands
Headphones
Equipment Supports



Marantz

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

«PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2003

RANGE SERIES INCLUDES
CD5400 CD PLAYER
PM4400 AMPLIFIER
PM7200 AMPLIFIER
ST4000 TUNER
SR4500 AV RECEIVER
SR5500 AV RECEIVER
DV4500 DVD PLAYER

Acoustic Energy

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

«AWARDS 2004 BEST BUY AWARD SYSTEM OVER £750 Denon D-ALC1

AE1 MKIII AELITE THREE

Denon

D-M31 CD RECEIVER

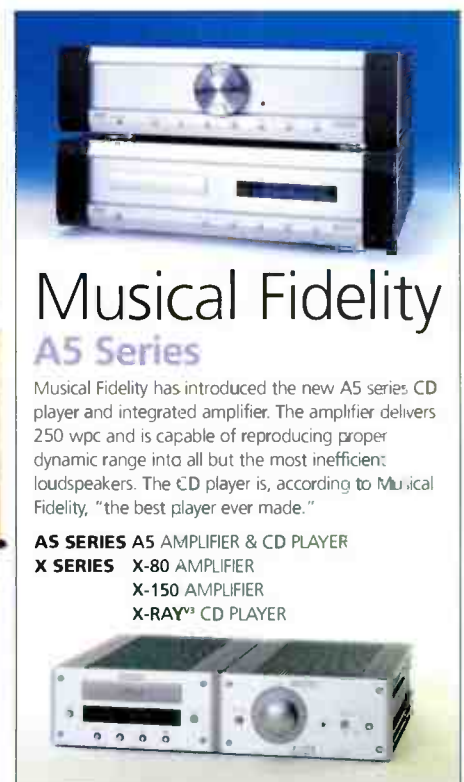
"Even better than the Award-winning DM30, making it phenomenal value for money."

Musical Fidelity

A5 Series

Musical Fidelity has introduced the new A5 series CD player and integrated amplifier. The amplifier delivers 250 wpc and is capable of reproducing proper dynamic range into all but the most inefficient loudspeakers. The CD player is, according to Musical Fidelity, "the best player ever made."

AS SERIES A5 AMPLIFIER & CD PLAYER
X SERIES X-80 AMPLIFIER
X-150 AMPLIFIER
X-RAY³ CD PLAYER



Nationwide Store guide



ABERDEEN 01224 252797 **NEW**
• 57 CROWN STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

BEDFORD 01234 272779
• 29-31 ST PETERS STREET

BIRMINGHAM 0121 233 2977
• ARCH 12, LIVERY STREET

BRIGHTON 01273 733338
• 57 WESTERN ROAD, HOVE

BRISTOL 0117 974 3727
• 92B WHITELADIES ROAD, CLIFTON

BROMLEY 020 8290 1988
• 39A EAST STREET

CAMBRIDGE 01223 304770
• 17 BURLEIGH STREET

CARDIFF 029 2047 2899
• 104-106 ALBANY ROAD

CHELSEA 020 7352 9466
• 403 KINGS ROAD

CHELTENHAM 01242 241171
• 14 PITTVILLE STREET

CRAWLEY 01293 510777
• 32 THE BOULEVARD *OPEN SUNDAY*

CROYDON 020 8665 1203
• 369-373 LONDON ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

EALING 020 8579 8777
• 24 THE GREEN *OPEN SUNDAY*

EDINBURGH 0131 229 7267
• 5 THE GRASSMARKET

EPSOM 01372 720720
• 12 UPPER HIGH STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

EXETER 01392 218895
• 28 COWICK STREET

GLASGOW 0141 332 9655
• 88 GREAT WESTERN ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

GUILDFORD 01483 536666
• 73B NORTH STREET

HOLBORN 020 7837 7540
• 144-148 GRAYS INN ROAD

HULL 01482 587171
• 1 SAVILE ROW, SAVILE STREET

IPSWICH 01473 286977
• 12-14 DOGS HEAD STREET

KINGSTON 020 8547 0717
• 43 FIFE ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

LEEDS 0113 245 2775
• 62 NORTH STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

LEICESTER 0116 253 6567
• 10 LOSLEY LANE

LINCOLN 01522 527397
• 20-22 CORPORATION STREET (*OFF HIGH STREET*)

MAIDSTONE 01622 686366
• 96 WEEK STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

MANCHESTER 0161 831 7969
• 69 HIGH ST, CITY CENTRE *OPEN SUNDAY*

NEWCASTLE 0191 221 2320
• 19 NEWGATE STREET

NORWICH 01603 767605
• 29-29A ST GILES STREET

NOTTINGHAM 0115 911 2121
• 597-599 MANSFIELD ROAD

OXFORD 01865 241773
• 41 ST CLEMENTS STREET

PETERBOROUGH 01733 897697
• 36-38 PARK ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

PLYMOUTH 01752 226011
• 107 CORNWALL STREET

POOLE 01202 671677
• LATIMER HOUSE, 44-46 HIGH STREET

PRESTON 01772 825777
• 40-41 LUNE STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

READING 0118 959 7768
• 3-4 KINGS WALK SHOPPING CENTRE

SEVENOAKS 01732 459555
• 109-113 LONDON ROAD

SHEFFIELD 0114 255 5861
• 635 QUEENS ROAD, HEELEY *OPEN SUNDAY*

SOLI HULL 0121 733 3727
• 149-151 STRATFORD ROAD

SOUTHAMPTON 023 8033 7770
• 33 LONDON ROAD

SOUTHGATE 020 8886 2777
• 79-81 CHASE SIDE

STAINES 01784 460777
• 4 THAMES STREET *OPEN SUNDAY*

SWINDON 01793 610992 **NEW**
• 8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD

SWISS COTTAGE 020 7722 9777
• 21 NORTHWAYS PDE, FINCHLEY RD *OPEN SUNDAY*

TUNBRIDGE WELLS 01892 531543
• 28-30 ST JOHNS ROAD

WATFORD 01923 213533
• 478 ST ALBANS ROAD *OPEN SUNDAY*

WEYBRIDGE 01932 828525
• 43 CHURCH STREET, THE QUADRANT *OPEN SUNDAY*

WITHAM (ESSEX) 01376 501733
• 1 THE GROVE CENTRE

WOLVERHAMPTON 01902 312225
• 29-30 CLEVELAND STREET

OPENING HOURS: PLEASE TELEPHONE OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE
E-MAIL: [insert store location]@sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

Who are Sevenoaks?

Established as Sevenoaks Hi-Fi in 1972, we have grown steadily onto one of the leading independent home entertainment specialists in the UK, earning a reputation for outstanding service, choice and value for money. In 1995, reflecting our commitment to the emergent new technologies in home cinema, our name was changed to Sevenoaks Sound & Vision. We now have 49 stores across the land stocking a broad range of exceptional equipment and accessories.

How to shop at Sevenoaks

When it comes to making big decisions about what to buy, there's no substitute for actually road-testing your prospective purchases - seeing, hearing and experiencing the products in action, with the benefit of our expert knowledge and guidance to help you choose. To get the most from your Sevenoaks Sound & Vision experience, simply follow this checklist:

- **ESTABLISH YOUR AIMS** - Are you tweaking an existing system to improve sound or picture quality, or are you looking for a more fundamental and comprehensive upgrade?
- **BRING YOUR FAVOURITE DISCS WITH YOU** - To ensure you get the most from the music and movies in your collection, it pays to test equipment using those very same discs or records. That way you can readily compare levels of performance. However, if you prefer, we can supply a selection of demo discs - current mainstream entertainment that serves to highlight the capabilities of the equipment.
- **JUST ASK** - If you are unsure of any aspect of the products or technologies available, or would like more information about installation options, simply let us know and our staff will be happy to help you out.
- **TAKE YOUR TIME** - We want you to be as happy as possible with your choices, so please take as much time as you need to determine which products are right for you.



Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Guide - 2005 Edition

Pick-up a copy of our **New 72 Page Guide** at your nearest Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store or order a copy via our Website. The brochure will be posted to you (UK mainland addresses only) free of charge.

Custom Installation

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision's Custom Installation Service enables the integration of a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home as neatly and seamlessly as possible. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.



Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards in all areas and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for a multi-room system, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control or lighting system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products available to cater for all your requirements.

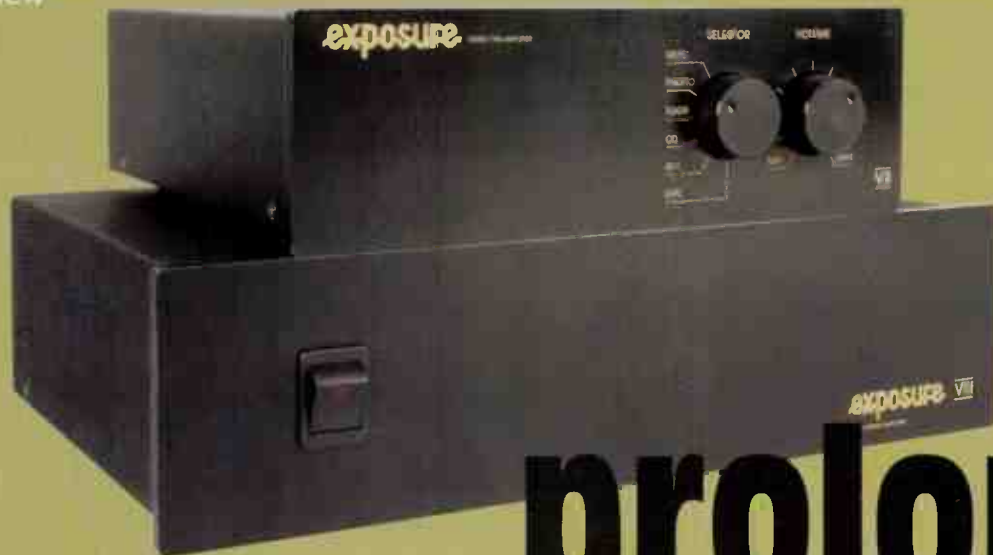


FREE CUSTOM INSTALLATION BROCHURE available now from your nearest store or via our website.

Sevenoaks Website

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest store. In addition, there are hundreds of **SPECIAL OFFERS** and **STOCK CLEARANCE** items available from our stores nationwide - many with savings of up to 50%. To view our regularly updated product lists, visit www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk and click on **special offers**

www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk



Back in the eighties, Exposure amplification won many friends, but how does it stack up today? Channa Vithana put a classic VII-VIII pre-power against the company's latest and greatest XXIII- XVIII...

prolonged

Exposure was born in 1974, and by the early eighties had become famous for its powerful yet musically eloquent amplification. Indeed, it became the brand of choice for those whom, while still sharing a musical aesthetic for rhythm and timing, craved something with a sweeter hue. With this in mind, we decided to re-examine a set of classic Exposure VII pre and VIII power amps, and then fast forward to the latest 'Classic' series XXIII pre and XVIII power.

It is fascinating to compare these two generations of Exposures. Aesthetically miles apart, they both use thick aluminium front plates that frame and extend beyond similar folded aluminium casework. Both have four countersunk cross-head nuts, two on each side of the case to affix to the main chassis. This may be a minor detail, but it works, as the countersinking along with the colour matching of the nuts to the casework gives a discrete but simple method of securing the casework - preferable to the bulbous and unattractive screws used by others. Both Exposures have high-quality braced phono sockets at the back, which for the 'ancient' VII and VIII is most impressive. Finally they share similar knob designs, which are ostensibly simple looking devices but are signifiers to Exposure's visual identity.

Looking at the VII and VIII brings back a lot of memories. I remember these all black designs during the eighties and they were, back then, unfairly described as 'agricultural' in appearance! They actually embody a great British tradition, some way like Naim of that period - in iconic, industrial, no-nonsense design. It's all about presence rather than beauty. As an alternative, this look (if not the build) for me is sorely missed. It

states only one thing - stripped to the bone performance. As such, the VII and VIII have confidence, eschewing every button, light, bell and whistle that typically augment amplifier function. The indented plastic controls, though crude, still have a solid feel and action to them after all these years. Compared to most modern amplifiers, the casework is a little 'flexible' at the rear when connecting phono sockets and hollow to the touch. The VII and VIII ceased production in 1992.

1989 VII PREAMPLIFIER

This VII (Single) is a simple affair featuring three line inputs, one tape, a switchable MM/MC phono stage and mute. It was available as a 'Single' or a 'Dual' (which enabled separate power supply feeds to each channel). The 'Single' VII could be upgraded to the 'Dual'. Internally the VII has an ALPS (Japan) volume potentiometer. There are two circuit boards - the top one states: 'Tested Aug 89'. At the back are high quality braced phono connectors including ones for preamp out and the two sets of phono cartridge loadings which are set at 470 ohms for MC and 47 K ohms for MM (with a toggle selector switch). Finally, four multi-way binding posts, turntable ground connection and DIN input to accept power complete the back panel. A DIN cable connects the VII to the VIII.

As well as accepting power from the VIII, the VII could also be upgraded with separate power supplies. These were; firstly the 2kg 'Type 6' which had high current capacity initiated from a custom 80VA mains transformer, along with two large Exposure reservoir capacitors. Secondly, the 14.5kg 'Type 9 Pre Amplifier Professional Monitor Supply' could upgrade the Dual VII. It uses four separately regulated and

independent 24v DC supplies. Exposure stated that, "Additional expansion is left available for new products in the future, such as an electronic crossover, all from one unit"! The Type 9 power supply uses two custom 325VA mains transformers in dual mono configuration, which could sustain separate regulated power supplies for the Dual VII. The VII measures 255x85x290 mm, weighs 7kg and runs warm to the touch in use.

1989 VIII POWER AMPLIFIER

The VIII's circuit is similar to the then top of the range 'Dual 4' Regulated power amp (which was almost twice as heavy - using a 400VA transformer). However the VIII uses a less sophisticated power supply in comparison, based on a 250VA custom transformer. This Transformer is split into two; enabling separate windings delivering 170VA to the power amplifier section and the residual 80VA used for the 24v DC regulated feed to the VII preamplifier. The VIII also features four Exposure 'Type 1004 DD' capacitors with two output devices per channel layered on top of each other with accompanying circuit board. The wiring is generally regimented - Naim style. On the back panel is a DIN socket which provides power to the VII pre from the aforementioned 80VA transformer winding. Quoted specifications were 50W RMS power output at 8 ohms, with 150VA transient power. Dimensions are: 345x95x260 mm and weight is 10kg.

2004 XXIII PREAMPLIFIER

Fast forward to almost ten years after the VII and VIII ceased production, and Exposure had a new line of high-end Classic products after the successful introduction of their lower cost 2010 and 3010 series. The

VERDICT

EXPOSURE VII/ VIII (APPROX. USED) £500

Highly charismatic performer that's brilliantly engaging in a musical sense, but tonally monochromatic and lacking finesse.

FOR

- superb bass quality
- thoroughly enjoyable sound
- iconic industrial looks

AGAINST

- tonally monochromatic
- frequency extremes



Exposure

new Classic XXIII pre and XVIII power were designed by Tony Brady. The likeness of the old casework is significantly updated. They feature solid aluminium front plates, and damped solid casework behind. Unlike the VII and VIII, they also have identical widths and depth, enabling a more synchronized look when atop a support. Regarding design direction, Andy Whittle says, "the reason for (the) design is to provide high quality fit and finish together with sonic benefits of aluminium".

The Classics are made in Britain, with great attention to detail, "all front panels, switches, buttons and knobs are manufactured in UK and machined from aluminium. Transformers high spec wound in UK, bespoke power supply caps. all output devices specially made to Exposure design in UK". While the main PCB is produced in Malaysia, it is sent to be hand assembled here in Britain.

The XXIII pre has three cylindrical knobs on the front similar in form to the old VII. These are understandably of a much higher standard though, and control Volume, Listen and Record. The knobs are recessed into the casework within finely countersunk openings featuring red LEDs where the indents on the old model used to be. They are well-weighted in operation and using the supplied HS100 remote proved to be precise and smooth for both volume and changing source. The Record knob features an off position to improve sound quality, while the remote has a mute button. I would have preferred a different fixing to the grub screw type used to secure the knobs as you can see the hole for the screw.

There are circular openings for an infra-red receiver and countersunk recessed power-on switch to complete the uncomplicated but

luxurious feel of the front panel. Both the Volume and Listen select knobs are remote controllable motor driven ALPS (Japan) types. At the rear are a series of high-quality braced gold-plated phono sockets. These enable 5 line inputs, one which can be modified internally with an add-on MC/MM phono card (similar to the one used in the standalone XXVI Dual Regulated Phono Pre-Amplifier) and a tape in/out. There is a turntable ground, three pairs of preout sockets (one XLR balanced) which can enable up-to three power amplifiers to be connected and an IEC mains power input socket. Internally the XXIII could pass for a serious integrated amplifier let alone a preamp; such is the enormity of its transformers! There are two large Exposure capacitors mounted onto a single suspended double-sided glass fibre PCB (along with discrete transistors for the audio output stages) for optimum layout and screening. Dimensions are 90x440x300 mm and weight 8kg.

2004 XVIII POWER AMPLIFIER

This features both balanced XLR and phono connections at the rear (with a set of balanced cables terminated with high-quality Neutrik XLR connectors). The XVIII can be bi-amped for which Exposure recommends using phono connections, however used as a stereo power amp, Exposure prefer the XVIII to be used with the balanced connectors linking the XXIII pre for "superior sonic performance over RCA phono sockets". There are four sets of recessed speaker cable sockets per channel enabling biwiring which according to Exposure "...can in some circumstances provide a useful gain in subjective performance". Finally an IEC input mains socket, enabling power chord

upgrades completes the rear.

Internally the XVIII features a similar design to the old VIII. There are four large Exposure capacitors and two output devices per channel with corresponding circuit boards. The main physical difference to the old VIII here is that the XVIII uses two Exposure transformers instead of one, and is therefore dual-mono. Power output into 8 ohms is quoted at 70W RMS. Dimensions are 115x440x300 mm, weight 11kg.

SOUND QUALITY

I used three 1989 recordings to assess both the new and old Exposures, these were: Lenny Kravitz - 'Let Love Rule', The Blue Nile - 'Hats' and Madonna 'Like A Prayer'. For pace I used the Damned's 'Anything' (1986). The VII/VIII were immediately stunning, with Kravitz's 'Sitting On Top Of The World'. They imbued the music with life-like alacrity; expressive, tuneful and deep bass was evident. Kravitz's vocals on this track were holographic and three-dimensional, while his bass playing was immaculate. 'Let Love Rule' continued an impressive timing relationship with the VII/VIII, while the string opening sequence to 'I Build This Garden For Us' was wonderfully emotional, with good texture. After this exciting immediacy, I noticed some hardness to the different vocal styles used by Kravitz, when he screams - to just singing in harmony, the VII/VIII struggled a little here, revealing a modest overall strain which led to a slight fatiguing quality.

Moving onto The Blue Nile, Paul Buchanan's vocals which are always flawlessly recorded, accordingly came out beautifully without harshness. The pulsating groove of 'The Downtown Lights' was just amazing, continuing the excellent LF results from the Kravitz recording. It was deep, soulful

VERDICT

EXPOSURE XIII-XVIII £2,798
Supremely well rounded solid-state pre-power, with power, poise and finesse in equal measures.

FOR

- fluid, expansive resolution
- neutral yet engaging
- build, operation, finish

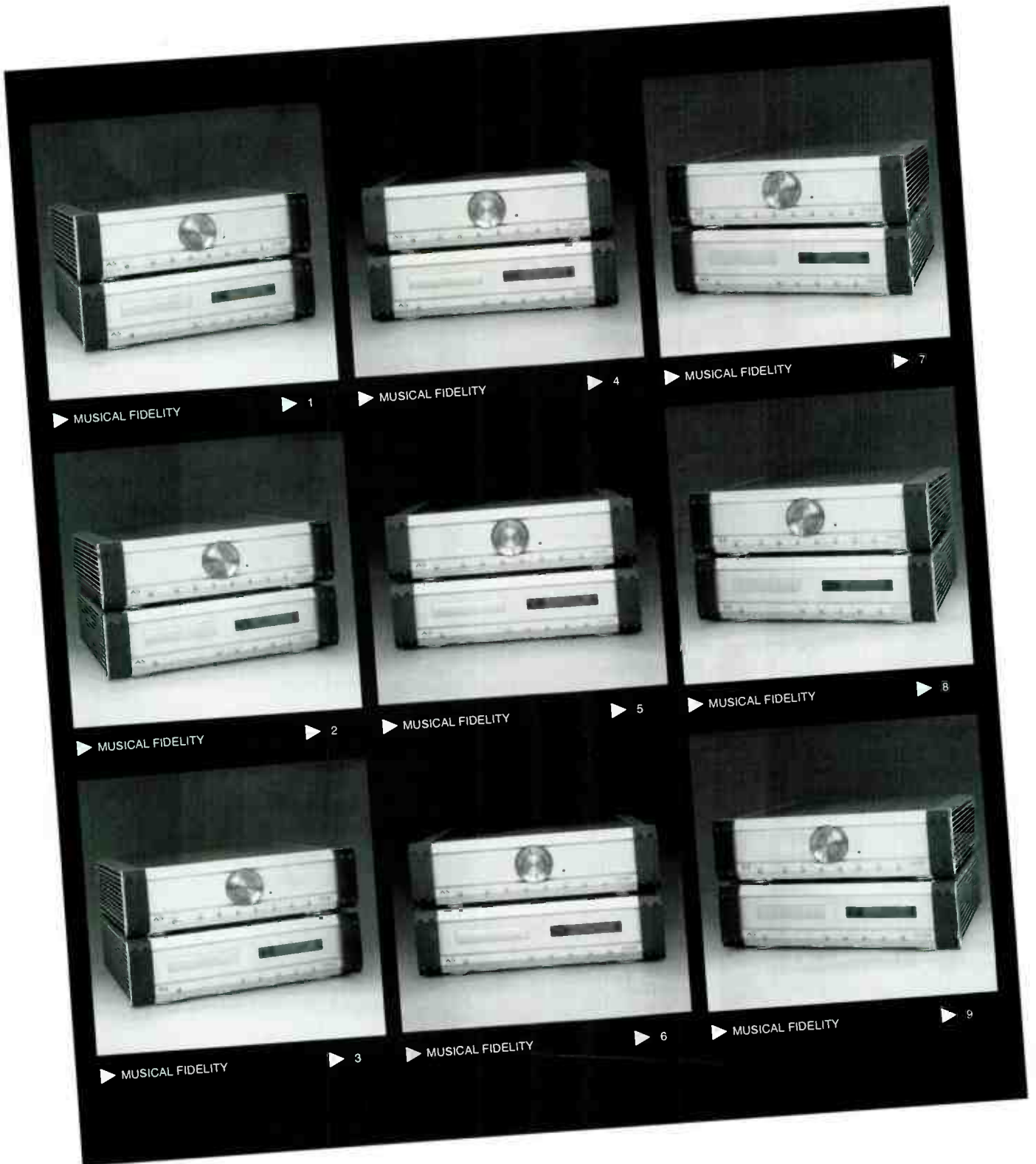
AGAINST

- comparatively softer bass

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and highly enjoyable. The chiming of the synthesiser melody however was less successful, resulting in a little glare.

Madonna's vocals which are inherently variable, didn't fare so well, with the VII/VIII's, revealing a HF strain when she goes for the difficult notes, additionally (to their credit) further revealing the different vocal samples used to assemble 'Like A Prayer'. The gospel crescendos and soloists were a little shut-in on the mix.. One thing was still current through the Madonna recording - the VII/VIII's innate rhythmical ability and deep, extended and tuneful bass was just so enjoyable. .

The new Classics, XXIII and XVIII proved equally intriguing. Speed and timing were very good, though a little behind on the VII/VIII's. However the new Exposures were stunning with the Damned's cover of 'Alone Again Or' combining speed and resolution. Bass on all the music was less fulsome and direct than the older models. However, this is not the whole story as the immediacy of the old Exposures faded, so their inadequacies were revealed. And this is where the new Exposures take off, being musical, powerful and neutral yet unflappable too in the frequency extremes. They also had an amazingly fluid quality to rhythms, conveying warmth and subtlety without losing out on velocity. Kravitz's vocals gained massively, becoming multidimensional and full of colour. 'Sitting On Top Of The World' was sweeter, better balanced and ultimately more neutral than on the VII/VIII's. 'I Build This Garden For Us' had greater control as Kravitz changed direction from screaming to harmony vocals. The guitar solo on this song was less vivid than on the old Exposures, yet I could now clearly discern the gorgeous organ melody that not only accompanied the solo in parallel but also when the keys were stabbed hard to match the crashing percussion. 'Flower Child' was handled with confidence by the new Exposures enabling the engrossing mixture of rolling piano chords and cymbal crescendos to be really appreciated while the old models were a little messy in comparison.

On Madonna's 'Like A Prayer' the gospel sections were handled vividly by the new Exposures, they were to the fore, emotional and clear. On 'Cherish', the vocals were sweeter, listenable and of higher resolution. The XXIII and XVIII also displayed a really beautiful fluid rhythm to this track. Onto The Blue Nile's 'Downtown Lights' and the new

Exposures revealed even more radiance to Buchanan's vocals. The bass on this track was fulsome and liquid, conveying the pulsing synthesiser rhythms glowingly. The melodic backdrop was superior on the new Exposures with more body and expansiveness, negating strain considering saturated of the musical elements within the recording.

CONCLUSION

The old Exposure VII pre and VIII power can be described as black and white - they express great feel and bass depth to recordings, making them exceptionally enjoyable. Essentially, they embody that old eighties mantra of 'musicality'. The new XXIII pre and XVIII power on the other hand also express the structure of the music from black to white but with manifold shades of grey in-between. They are not so-called 'hi-fi' in sound (which tends to concentrate on individual aspects of the music), rather they are what really great hi-fi instruments have always been about, and that is being able to do both 'musicality' and 'hi-fi' - as just one or the other is not good enough for me.

These new Exposures take the traditions of their past and add a new sense of fluidity and deeper emotional resonance to music. For some, the black and white dynamism of the old Exposure VII and VIII is perfection. For me if I had to choose one of these brilliant sets of amplifiers, then it will be the new XXIII and XVIII because it's a more complete, useable, real-world combination.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

EXPOSURE VII/VII

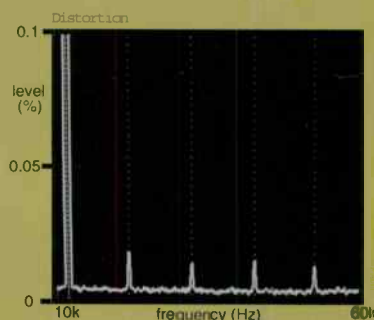
The Exposure VII doesn't even have a CD input, because it was designed in the halcyon pre-digital era! Both Tuner and Aux inputs serve, but with a very high sensitivity of 100mV volume (gain) will need to be kept right down. Frequency response is a nicely tailored 14Hz-31kHz through this input, and noise is low at -43dB, so it is fine for CD.

The preamp majors on LP reproduction, having carefully engineered MM and MC phono stages. Both have a warp filter at 45Hz that's no less than -22dB down at 5Hz, so there's very strong warp rejection. This means volume can be cranked right up, without being limited by cone flap. It also gives fast bass, lacking deep rumble (unlike Japanese amps). MC is massively sensitive, for high quality low output types, but there is some hiss. Overload margins are incredible, suggesting high voltage discrete circuitry. Equalisation (RIAA) was spot on, from 45Hz up to 35kHz on both MM and MC.

The power amp delivers 55W into 8ohms, but only 64W into 4ohms - odd. Exposures had very good regulation, I recall, but not this one. I suspect a replacement mains transformer with less copper is the reason. Distortion levels were very low, even at 10kHz into 4ohms, where a worst case result of 0.07% was delivered at full output. In the midband, distortion measured 0.006% - as good as today's amps. D.C. output offset was also low, so the D.C. servos and feedback were up to speed

too. The Exposure measures very well. It is tightly defined in all areas. NK

Power	55watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	14Hz-150kHz
Separation	74dB
Noise	-80dB
Distortion	0.02%
Sensitivity	83mV
dc offset	2/2mV
Disc MM	
Frequency response	45Hz-35kHz
Separation	78dB
Noise	-74dB
Distortion	0.007%
Sensitivity	3mV
Overload	380mV
Disc MC	
Frequency response	44Hz-33kHz
Separation	72dB
Noise	-62dB
Distortion	0.008%
Sensitivity	0.17mV
Overload	53mV



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

EXPOSURE XXVIII AMPLIFIER

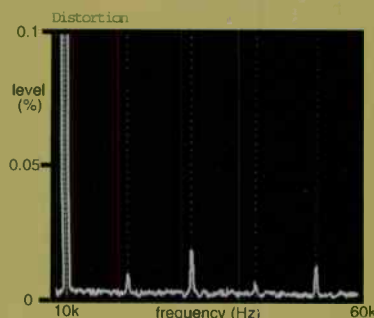
Like the 2010S, the XXVIII power amp has plenty of output, producing 78W into 8ohms and 120W into 4ohms, identical to that of the 2010S. However, distortion levels were lower, hovering around 0.008% in the mid-band and 0.02% at high frequencies, but the harmonic structure was much the same as the 2010S our analysis shows, with third harmonic dominant. I suspect difference in distortion level between these amps just comes down to accuracy of bias setting. Otherwise their measured performance is all but identical.

Frequency response measured 11Hz-28kHz, the upper limit being interestingly curtailed by modern standards, possibly to keep treble clean. Sensitivity measured 230mV, a high figure that makes matching with other items fairly assured.

Unlike the 2010S this amplifier had low d.c. offset and again looked better adjusted and more tightly spec'd, but

otherwise very similar. The XXVIII combo offers a good set of performance figures, not ground breaking but tidy in every area NK

Power	78watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	11Hz-28kHz
Separation	120dB
Noise	-97dB
Distortion	0.02%
Sensitivity	230mV
dc offset	8/0.8mV



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HOT stuff

David Price swoons at Sugden's new pure Class A A21SE integrated amplifier...

Sugden needs no introduction – anyone with more than a passing interest in audiophilia knows that the A21 is a generic series of amplifiers which started in the mid nineteen sixties with an 11 watt solid state bi-polar integrated amplifier. It was produced over a period of time in three series of models right up to the mid seventies. Then the A21a went on to become a nineties benchmark; a specialist product that promised clarity at the expense of all else. A front cover on *Hi-Fi World* some ten years ago attested our love for this extremely focused product that frankly sounded like nothing else on the market. Of course most people have

that only the best valves and V-FET transistors attain.

The trouble with the A21a is that it's an extreme product. If this Oxford-schooled boy may be allowed to adopt the gnarly northern vernacular, it's got 'bugger-all balls', meaning that extreme care has to be taken when matching it to those most devious and 'fair weather' of friends – loudspeakers. It doesn't like anything that's tricky in the load department and nor does it suffer inefficiency gladly. Think Musical Fidelity kW500 – then think the opposite – that's the A21a.

Of course I'm not having a dig. At around £1,000, it's stunning value considering what it does in musical terms. It's just those who like,

The common thread which runs through Sugden's A21 amplifiers is the pure Class A output stage operating with current feedback and a single voltage rail. As the manufacturer says, the potential of this output configuration is limited only by the preceding gain stages of the overall amplifier. The SE brings increased output power, wider bandwidth, reduced distortion and greater load tolerance to the party and adds remote volume control, relay switched input signals and a completely new casing. The completely new line stage amplifier with a cascode input stage, current feedback, with the input and output in phase is said to give all the benefits of high input impedance, high



never heard pure Class A operation, and often believe it to be super-smooth and 'valve-like'. It is neither; it's best described in terms of what it isn't. It's not grainy, mushy, grey, sat-upon, nervous or frigid like most transistors, and it's not soft, vague, euphonic, and loose like poorly implemented (i.e. most) valves. Rather, pure Class A, and specifically Sugden's implementation thereof, sits in a magical 'other world' of clear, incisive and neutral amplification, one

variously, power, current driving, facilities, fancy finishes or styling flourishes need not apply. (Indeed, Mr Michaelson will be happy to sell you his A5 for precisely this reason...)

The A21SE, then, is all about addressing these various 'issues'. I won't call them design faults or flaws, because that would be like criticising a Lotus Seven for its lack of weather protection, air conditioning or airbags. It's just that the SE is more things to more people.

voltage gain in its first stage, low distortion with wide bandwidth, low noise and very low output impedance. The line stages are supplied by their own current shunt power supplies driven by a separate transformer winding. The bad news is that the excellent phono stage, which is optional on the A21a isn't available on the SE, but those awfully nice Sugden people will – reluctantly mind you – flog you their 'Bijou Phonomaster' variant in lieu.



SOUND QUALITY

Being used to twenty thermionic watts per channel, it was always going to be interesting to ascend to the dizzy heights of thirty (into 8

Dan's 'Gauche' proved deliciously direct, open, clean and – most of all – musically involving. The first thing that strikes you is the tonality – or lack of it. It makes almost any other

pure Class A sits in a magical 'other world' of clear, incisive and neutral amplification, one that only the best valves and V-FET transistors attain...

ohms, claimed) of solid-state. Would my ears cope? Could the human body withstand this hitherto unknown level of electro-mechanical force? Would my speakers self-combust? Would life ever be the same again?

Well, as it turned out, such extreme sound pressure levels emanating from my reference loudspeakers were tempered by the stunning clarity and ease of the A21SE. If you'll forgive the *Spinal Tap* allusion, the best way to describe this new amplifier is like the A21a, but 'this one goes up to eleven'. It's very, very close to the 'a' in nature, but offers substantially more real-world driving power, meaning it's less at the mercy of unforgiving loudspeakers (and most are), which in turn allows the essence of the A21 sound to flood out, untempered and untrammelled.

Now, assuming that most have never heard the original, I suppose I better get down to specifics. Steely

transistor amplifier sound fuzzy, mushy, woolly, grey and compressed. It also makes them sound clumsy and unwieldy, with a surfeit of power but no useful way of exploiting it (think gas guzzling Yank-tanks of seventies). The A21SE is, by comparison, a Lancia Beta Monte Carlo – beautifully balanced, fleet of foot in the extreme and finessed, yet an extremely potent cool despite its lack of shove.

The interesting thing is that, despite its lack of absolute power, it's able to go from super quiet to very loud with dizzying speed. Dynamics are amazing, breathtaking even. The sound of a strongly hit snare pushes out of the mix with stunning clarity, and then fades away as instantaneously as it first came, and then comes back again on the next beat with the same visceral impact – and, importantly the Sugden strings this together with such aplomb. Each four bar phrase is brilliantly accented, pushing the music along in the way

that only the likes of a Naim NAP250, Graf GM20 or World Audio 300B can do.

Rhythmically and dynamically then, it's a revelation – but there are other amplifiers that do this brilliantly too. However, at this price (or anywhere near it), I've never heard one that has such breathtaking clarity. You see, you can make amplifiers sound fast by smothering them in negative feedback, which gives them an edgy, artificially incisive demeanour. Trouble is, they then sound glassy, cold, bright and totally unable to describe the textuality and tonality of the instruments or voices they're asked to reproduce. The A21SE is in a league above these imposters – it's so neutral, so self-effacing and so 'glass clear' that you can hear every last harmonic on the squelch of Walter Becker's analogue synthesiser, every last resonance in Donald Fagen's voicebox. Instruments, whatever they are, simply don't sound like crude approximations of themselves anymore – but full fat, real, living, acoustic excitors.

If that wasn't enough to have me questioning my allegiance to thermionic valves, then there's the small matter of the soundstaging. A DG vinyl pressing of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (Karajan) had me, to borrow a phrase from someone clever, 'doubting the very ground beneath me', so expansive, airy and dimensional it was. Instruments are located with rifle-bolt precision, locked in space like a picture nailed to a wall – giving the feeling of, simply put, 'being there'. Switch to the sugary pop strains Haircut One Hundred's 'Marine Boy' and – lo and behold – we're instantly in another acoustic recorded acoustic, like walking from the living room to the hall. There's tremendous depth, as the A21SE unlocks what lesser amplifiers simply appears to be a 'wall of sound', and opens it up to show us what's really there.

The midband is pretty revelatory, then, but the bass and treble are no poor relations. As I've said, the way instruments 'stop and start' is amazing, and nowhere is this more explicit than in the bass. It's super-fast, super-taut and yet just bounces along with 'valve-like' aplomb. It invests the track a wonderful 'naturalness' which makes complete sense – then you switch back to lesser amps and wonder why they can't do it this way. Treble is lovely too – but not, repeat not, warm or sweet. Rather, it's just neutral. Gone is the fizz, zing, imprecision, haze –

and in its place is something that sounds like real hi-hats being struck on a real drum kit, right in front of you. The filigree detailing is disarming, so fast and yet so unobtrusive, undistorted, unobtrusive.

Downsides? Few that I can think of, aside from a cheap-as-chips plastic remote control, and the fact that the controls don't move with a wonderfully smooth, precise gait. The A21SE has the feel of an extremely well made hand built kit – which I suppose is what it is – but lacks that luxuriously silky tactility owners of high end Japanese fare take for granted. There's also the fact that

ABOUT SUGDEN

A small to medium sized specialist amplifier maker for nearly forty years, Sugden describes itself as 'heavily reliant on our own design, development and manufacturing facilities as we believe it is, in house in hand and under control'. The average length of service of its employees is fifteen years, which it says must owe something to the fact that it builds individual units and delegates responsibility down line. Although its products are based on solid-state devices as opposed to tubes it would be wrong to assume they are based on pure solid-state technology. It much prefers what it calls 'the more euphonic performance of good Class A to the more favoured dry clinical and 'detailed' performance of some of the more popular solid state amplifiers on the market'. It does not outsource, board assemblies, metalwork, kits or complete audio electronic units from the Far East - all manufacturing, challenges and disciplines are part of the soul of the company.

VERDICT

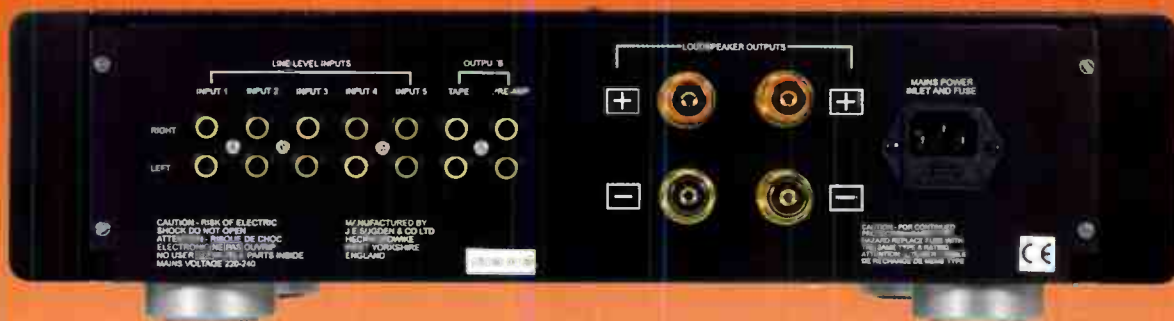
Brilliantly musical hear-through sound makes this one of the best transistor amplifiers ever made, but be prepared to forgive it its faults all the same.

SUGDEN A21SE £1,995

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despite its useful power hike, the A21SE still doesn't like tricky loads – it took one look at my reference Quad 989s and rolled over on its back like a dog in disgrace. Finally its pure Class A operation means you'll be have to be prepared to change the way you think about your household electricity bill, and open your windows in summer, too.

CONCLUSION

Musically brilliant is the best way I can describe it, but still you'll have to partner it carefully, buy your own phono stage and forgive it its lack of silky precision when you use the volume knob or source selector switch. The Marantz PM11S1 is the one to go for if any of the above troubles you, otherwise do yourself a favour and hear something that has nearly all of the strengths of tube amplifiers and almost none of the vices. Gorgeous.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Pioneer PL-L1000 turntable
- Koestu Rosewood cartridge
- Whest Audio PSU/MSU20 phono stage
- Marantz CD63 KI DP CD player
- Musical Fidelity X-10v3/X-PSU output buffer
- Mission E82 loudspeakers
- Wharfedale Diamond 9.1 loudspeakers



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

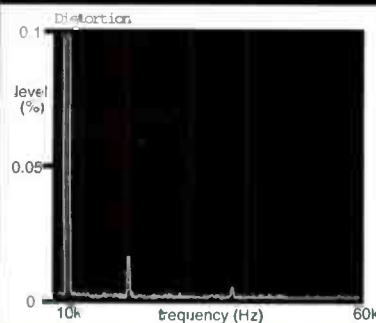
Running in pure Class A means the Sugden is running flat out all the time, even with no signal. In consequence it's side heatsinks run very hot, even though output measures a paltry 21W per channel, or 36W into 4ohms. Obviously, this is a specialised amplifier, with similar heat and output as a valve amp.

Class A is known for its low distortion and easy sound, but the A21SE doesn't match the best of today's amps in its distortion characteristics. It fares well in the midband, although a 4ohm load significantly raises levels, from 0.016% to 0.15% just below full output for example. At high frequencies the A21SE again manages well enough, until the load drops to 4ohms, then distortion increases to nearly 0.3% at 10kHz, close (-1dB) to full output. Luckily it is mostly innocuous 2nd harmonic our analyser showed. Ideally, this isn't an amplifier to be pushed too hard with low impedance loudspeakers. Luckily, most loudspeakers nowadays use a 4ohm bass driver married to an 8ohm tweeter, so impedance at 10kHz is commonly 8ohms or more.

Sensitivity was unusually high at just 83mV for full output and frequency response extremely wide, reaching 150kHz.

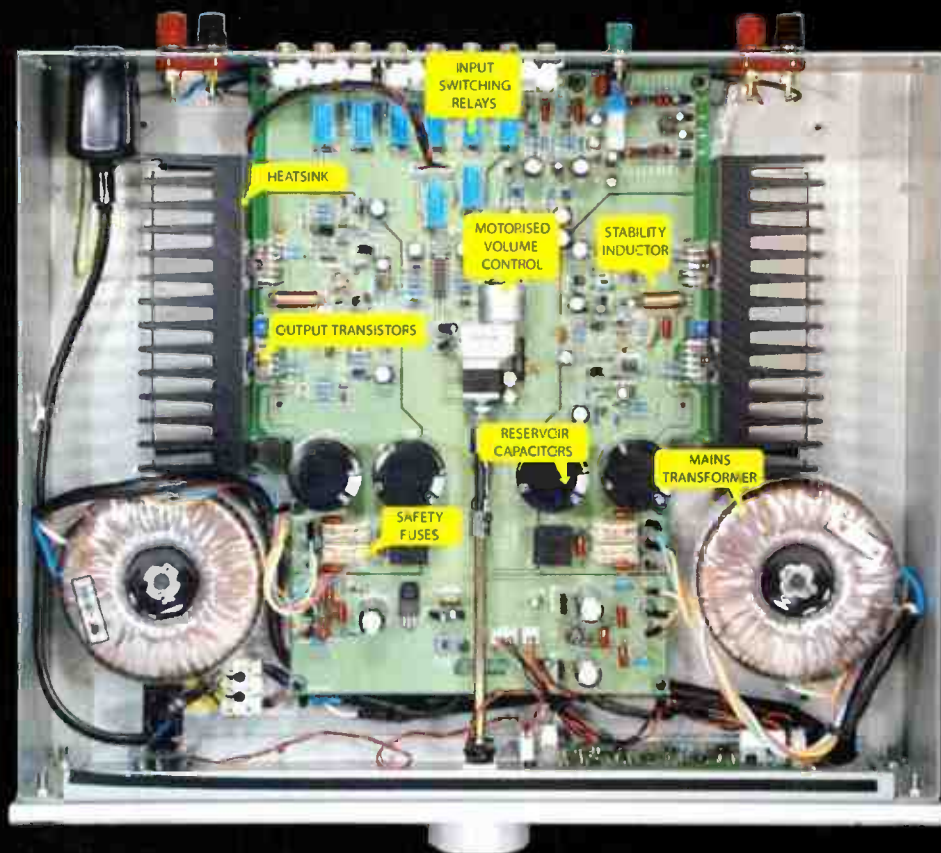
The A21SE is a highly specialised amp that should be matched with care. It has a fantastic reputation of course, that belies measurement. NK

Power	21 watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	14Hz-150kHz
Separation	74dB
Noise	-80dB
Distortion	0.02%
Sensitivity	83mV
dc offset	2/2mV



states of mind

It's that classic conundrum – tube vs. transistor. The debate creates strong advocates for either side, but what if you're agnostic, undecided and simply after the right sound for you? Noel Keywood adjudicates...



Transistor amps have now reached a state of robust reliability, where life is determined by the durability of moving parts like the volume control.

Measure a solid-state amp, and it's beyond criticism here too, a situation that has existed since the late 1970s. Transistor amps appear to have it sewn up; there's no realistic alternative. But this isn't quite the whole story...

In 1997 American workers were brought out of retirement to help reopen the Western Electric tube manufacturing plant in Kansas to meet continued demand for a tube they first produced in 1941, the 300A. The worldwide rise of the transistor had shut the doors late: 1988 no less. This caused audio enthusiasts around the world to stockpile the 300B, sending prices soaring. By 1995 it was apparent that valve manufacture was a viable proposition again; the Kansas plant reopened and is going today.

It wasn't greeted by an easy market though. Russian and Chinese

plants had rapidly filled the vacuum left by W.E.'s closure. Rather than reopening to supply a market free of competition, the Kansas plant found that whilst sales of valves were increasing by roughly 10% per annum globally, no fewer than 18 plants were now competing for a business worth \$400 million dollars annually. All the major economies - USA, Japan, Germany, UK, France contribute to this demand; it's not a narrow cultural phenomenon. Demand within China is also very strong. The valve is back.

So what is going on here? Why is it that just as the transistor is about to consolidate its dominance, valve sales are climbing globally and new audio valves, like the Svetlana SV572-10, designed specifically to feed this market, are appearing?

Hi-Fi World readers can be relied upon to state the problem succinctly: "I'm not into valves for the sake of it, but I find that I can't listen to a solid-state power amplifier for very long now; the Leak always sounds more melodic and smooth to me, notwithstanding its power limitations." So

says one reader this month, in our letters pages. And this is about an old Leak Stereo 20. What is so wrong with the transistor amplifier...?

TRANSISTOR

Transistor amplifiers have reached a state today where, under measurement, they are all but perfect. That they sound different to each other, and that they have a sound quality at all cannot be measured or proven. This hampers debate and development. Why bother to alter a 1978 design, say, when there's nothing wrong with it? Just repackage and remarket it.

This is the situation today. Luckily, most design engineers listen to what they design and give credence to the opinions of others. So development creeps ahead, constrained by cost. For example, when I questioned one well known UK manufacturer about their approach, he explained that for prototype assembly of a new design they sent all the electronic components needed to the Far East factory, rather than let them source

locally. As he put it, they "voice" their amplifiers for a smooth, almost warm sound, and the process relies much upon component choice.

All the same, transistor amplifiers have changed little over the years. Their basic topologies today are much the same as thirty years ago. They have been refined of course, and in the last five years have improved subtly but significantly in sound quality through the use of audiophile grade parts, such as quality capacitors like ELNA Cerafines and decent volume controls like the Alps Blue. Japan leads the UK here; British manufacturers are slow to recognise the value of audiophile grade parts.

What about Class A, MOSFET output stages and other circuit ideas? Again, they offer no measured improvement, simply because the standard bipolar Class B, or A/B, is already good enough. This isn't exactly true of MOSFETs, which produce less high frequency distortion once feedback has been applied. The irony here is that they need feedback - lots of it - to be usable in the first place, since MOSFETs produce more distortion

"solid-state can sound hard, mechanical, sterile, devoid of insight and flat in its soundstaging, like a sheet of acoustic wallpaper..."

PM11, switchable from Class B to Class A, suggest that Class A in itself offers little benefit, and certainly not the sort of change in sound needed to alleviate criticism of sound quality.

Criticism? Yes, in spite of their apparent perfection transistor amplifiers can still be difficult to listen to over long periods. What's wrong isn't necessarily obvious; it's almost subliminal. The feeling that music sounds sterile and is being reproduced mechanically, devoid of the fluidity and richness heard from real musical instruments.

The waning of casual, enjoyable listening is another tell tale sign of solid-state fatigue. Whether you sit and listen intently, or just enjoy background entertainment, high fidelity sound should always be captivating and enjoyable, in an easy unquestioning fashion.

From sounding challengingly hard at high levels to boringly flat at low

perceptible and very significant difference in sound quality. And in this area the Denon was easy to criticise; low price was its saviour. All the same, the brightly lit sound of the Denon (a classic case of cheap electronic components everywhere I suspect) is precisely the sort of sound that discourages long term listening.

This is at the root of what is wrong with solid-state. It can sound hard, mechanical, sterile, devoid of insight and flat in its soundstaging, like a sheet of acoustic wallpaper where singers and instruments lack depth, body and believable substance. It's a sound that mimics real life poorly.

Is distortion the problem? Not directly, I believe. 0.3% of crossover distortion at 10 kHz is audible - and it isn't nice, adding a hard, coarse edge to the sound. Over a long period you will be aware that the sound is truly "distorted". Around 0.1% is a safe limit. This was suggested way back in 1947, hence Harold Leak's famous Point One amplifiers. My own measurement and listening indicate that it's a limit that's still valid.

The subject of distortion gets a little more complex when we consider types and patterns of distortion. I use a valve amplifier with 0.6% distortion, but it's low order, mainly second and third harmonic, and unmodulated by feedback (there isn't any). The amplifier doesn't sound distorted, nor hard or harsh, even though it breaches the magic 0.1% threshold.

So whilst 0.1% isn't a hard and fast rule, within solid-state amps suffering crossover distortion, with its extended harmonic spectrum that the ear can readily detect, is best kept below 0.1% across the audio band, at low to high volume, even into the most difficult of loudspeakers. Most transistor amplifiers manage this through the use of feedback.

Feedback is needed to suppress distortion in any solid-state amplifier, but it does appear to contribute to dynamic compression and flat soundstaging. Some designers, however, insist that this is attributable to the way feedback is applied, or misapplied, than feedback in itself.

Coming soon are Class D digital



Copper plating a steel chassis eliminates eddy current induced hysteresis distortion. It's a popular technique in Japan, on upmarket models like the PM11 seen here.

than a standard transistor! So not everyone is convinced they offer much benefit. That's why enthusiasm for them has subsided...

Class A working is very inefficient, so Class A amplifiers are low powered and produce a lot of heat. Whilst good ones like the Sugden A21 have a great reputation, they are in general not measurably better in any area than conventional types. Amplifiers like Marantz's new

levels, solid-state amplifiers seem unable to deliver the sort of perfect sound measurement suggests they have achieved. The two don't correlate and pleasure isn't necessarily there. This was brought home to me again recently, reviewing Denon's new AVR-1705 surround-sound receiver alongside Arcam's new AVR-300. There was little in their measured performance - both were excellent - to explain an easily

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But they also produce mountains of high frequency distortion and often sound absolutely dreadful, I have found, far worse than you can conceive. Class D turns a digital stream directly into analogue in the output stage; fearfully clever but fearfully bad in equal measure. Definitely an audio nightmare...

TUBES

The case for the valve amplifier is based primarily on sound quality. The drawbacks of valve amps are numerous and real, and as if that wasn't enough the variation in sound quality between them is almost disconcerting. You'll have to take it from me, however, that I have heard valve amps, especially one we designed that used 211 valves, that humbled solid-state in absolutely every area. By this I mean vastly dynamic, yet with all the easy clarity valves are known for. But can you get this in real life, from your local hi-fi dealer? Are valve amps like this a realistic proposition in the home even?

An exposition on valve amps can easily challenge the world's paper supply, so I will keep this short. But let's look at their *raison d'être* first.

Valve amps, even with severe shortcomings, generally sound smooth and often warm. The original Quad II power amplifier is classic example. It has tiny output transformers that saturate (overload) gently and progressively at high frequencies, as you turn volume up, measurement shows. All the same, it's a sweet sounding amplifier if you don't push it hard, exhibiting an easy clarity, a nice sense of dimensionality and a notable lack of hardness or sterility. Just forget driving bass!

Harold Leak would better output trannies and the Leak Stereo 20 really is a classic to listen to. It has a beautiful sound, but I must qualify this by saying I'm talking about a good example whose internal components haven't expired, or aren't about to. Capacitors and resistors from the 1950s don't last.

So old valve amps sound great, but they also sound soft and warm for good technical reasons. Yet valves don't have to sound like this and many modern ones don't, but this is the common perception and it lingers on even in the audio

Valves exhibit an easy clarity, a nice sense of dimensionality and a notable lack of hardness or sterility - just forget driving bass...

business...

Winding the clock forward we come to modern valve amps. Nowadays money can be spent on the output transformer, a crucial item in any valve amp. Weight and size are less of an issue. Designs like the modern Quad Forty are an

In America, think Audio Research for a valve amplifier with superb output transformers, a fine measured performance and a muscular, modern sound. Audio Research combine solid-state control circuitry and input switching to bring valves up to date. They inevitably use America's most



Audio Research VS55i - a properly designed U.S. valve amp using 6550s.

interesting contrast to the old Quad II. Using KT88s - now in full production around the world, from Kansas to St Petersburg - the new Forty produces a useful 40W per channel and its output transformers

popular valve, the 6550. This is a rugged output pentode that lasts and lasts, and is inexpensive. Audio Research amplifiers demonstrate that valves don't necessarily sound soft and warm.



A World Audio Design 211 amplifier, using 1919 transmitter valves: the VT211. Take cover.

are light years ahead of its predecessor. It gives an altogether more vigorous sound, less warm and cossetting, but then modern KT88s are like that, when they deliver through decent output transformers.

Modern valve amplifiers vary more widely in their sound than transistor amps. Generalising, expect good dynamics, a lucidly clear midband free of hardness or grain, sonorous treble, strong resolution of



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Gain Control Range: 60dB

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Mains Input: 230V / 50Hz

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Michell Tecnoarm A This beautifully crafted Rega based tonearm features a bead blasted and perforated arm tube, easily adjustable VTA and monolithic litz pure silver wiring. Incredible resolution for the price: £420.

Audion Silver Night MKII A superb range of single ended 300B zero feedback amplifiers starting from just £2,000 for a power amp or £2,250 for the line level integrated version. Awesome 18W parallel single ended mono-blocks also available from £3,295. Excellent Premier MM valve phono stage also available: £600.



Music first Audio TVC pre amplifier Instead of using resistors to control the volume the TVC uses stepped transformers. Incredible transparency without any of the dynamic compression found in conventional passive preamplifiers. Copper wired version: £1 500. All silver wired: £2 700.

Opus Continuo Reference turntable with Cantus parallel tracking tonearm. Designed to compete with a master tape the Opus sounds exceptionally musical. Combination pictured costs £3,200 including The Cartridge Man Music Maker 3.



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the tonal colour of musical instruments, relatively deep and dimensional sound staging and - usually - a delivery that doesn't subliminally deflect you from long term listening. Sadly, I have to say that all this comes from a well designed valve amp, but not from the many bad ones that are around...!

What about soft or soggy bass? Bass quality will never match that of a solid-state amplifier, but it gets close enough to be inconsequential in a good design, unless you are a bass fanatic. Good bass comes from decent output transformers. Cheap amps with small output stacks will likely sound soggy and are best avoided.

There is a price to be paid for a great sound though. Valves age progressively. Output valves should last 3,000 hours or so, whilst the

all this...

Then there is the issue of the reliability - power valves can be temperamental. Whole batches can come out of a factory duff. Sometimes a new valve will work for a short period then suddenly go pop, usually when an electrode deforms under heat and causes an internal short. Heaters can die and the glass-to-base seal break.

Valve amplifiers run hot and use very high voltages. High power cathode resistors in particular tend to collapse, due to severe thermal cycling. There are ways to design and build a robust valve amp, especially today when quality high power resistors and high voltage capacitors are available, but they are expensive parts, often rejected by a limited build budget. The point here is that quality is the key to longevity with

here as able to provide accessible and efficient backup.

Finally, what type of valve amp should you choose? I favour balanced mid-price, mid-power types where the valves are run within their original design envelope. Fixed bias working gives more power, but a harder sound and the need to adjust bias, which is a hassle. High power valve amps generally don't sound nice, unless they're using 211 or 845 transmitter valves. These need 1,500V and are truly awesome, but dangerous.

Low power amps, like SETs (Single Ended Triodes) are pure sounding and very sweet, but with just 9W you need good loudspeakers, preferably sensitive floorstanders. High volumes are out, but then it is possible to get a gorgeous sound (I choose the adjective carefully) at entertaining volume levels if you match wisely. Audionote specialise in this sort of amplifier, as do Border Patrol.

The middle ground is taken up by push-pull amps producing 20W - 40W per channel, using EL34s, KT88s or 6550s. For most people this is the best place to look and listen. I am talking here basically about power amps. A good preamp may be needed, or a passive preamp. Stay with valves if possible. Hybrid amps, that use valve preamp stages and transistor output stages, are usually an unsatisfactory sonic compromise. Highly unusual valve amps, especially direct coupled types, are also generally best avoided (masses of distortion), and those pretty 6C33C Russian trawler transmitter types aren't serious either; they just look good.

Stay with dedicated linear audio valves like the KT66/77/88/90 series, the 6550, the 300B and the EL34 pentode. Used in a good, modern amplifier with quality components they'll give a sound that will, for many people, be a welcome relief to the 'perfection' of solid-state.



A tube designed specially for audio use, to satisfy tube freaks around the world. It's the Svetlana SV572-10, a super linear triode. Svetlana say it features -

Massive graphite anode with 125W rating.

Directly heated thoriated tungsten filament for soft glow and warm sound (!).

Transmitting tube design; hard glass envelope, white base.

Excellent gettering enhanced by titanium bonded with the graphite anode surface.

Superior to triodes such as the antique 211 or 845.

Svetlana don't say it also needs 1500V and you'd better have a good output tranny to avoid atomising your loudspeakers.

small valves will last 10,000 hours. When replacement is due, four new ones are needed (two push-pull pairs). At £25 apiece for EL34s or 6550s this will destroy the beer budget for a few weeks. If like me, you become addicted to the super linear 300B triode, then penalty will last a lot longer; they cost £60 - £300 each. And as if this isn't enough you will, at purchase time, have to decide which brand to buy. Do you get Shuguang Golden Dragons from China at £60 a pop and spend the next 3,000 hours in misery? Or do you get measured and certificated quads from Western Electric's U.S. plant at a massive \$1,800? Ouch! A trawl of the internet throws up masses of information and views on

valve amps.

It is wise to know where to turn should anything go wrong. This means having a circuit diagram and a local TV engineer perhaps who can handle repair, or a dealer able to provide a satisfactory replacement whilst your amplifier is being fixed. A valve amp isn't fit and forget - it needs overhaul. If you are lucky, not often. Long standing UK companies like Quad and Audionote obviously stand out

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Glass system

The trouble with tubes is that, thanks to the relative scarcity of pre and power amplifiers alike, market competition is poor and product standards often disappointingly low. It's always nice then, says David Price, to find a classy preamplifier in the shape of JC Verrier's Control B...



Now that solid-state has become ubiquitous, valve amplifiers of both pre and power varieties are relatively rare and esoteric pleasures. Still, the ranks have swelled over the past few years and there's at least a handful of high quality thermionic power amps I could recommend with relish. But why so few decent tube preamps, however...?

Indeed, it's all the more baffling when you think of the relative simplicity of a preamp against a power amp – we're only dealing with line levels, for which there are plenty of good tubes and circuits – and no need to suffer the tyranny of output transformers. Let's face it, making line level tube preamplifiers isn't rocket science. Then again, judging by most of the examples I've heard, maybe it is?

In theory though, a tube preamp should be a very good thing – as there's much they can bring to the

party. A good tube pre will give a large, bold, confident and dynamic sound, especially if – as is the case with the Control B – it boasts a tube phono stage too. Properly done, the pure signal emanating from a phono cartridge being ramped up to line level without anything transistor shaped getting in the way, and the sound can be magic – as anyone who's ever heard the old Audio Innovations P1 will attest.


JC Verrier's Control B (£1,200) is a fully-fledged tube pre, complete with phono stage. It sports five stereo inputs and one input/output for tape monitoring as well as main outputs for connecting it to a power amplifier. However, it's unusual inasmuch as there's also a direct phono output marked 'test', where sensitivity can be adjusted to enable 0, 6, 10, 14 and 20dB of gain. This enables one of the Control B's most useful facilities – the ability to match the gain of the line stage with the power amplifier. The volume

adjustments are made by separated potentiometers, one for each channel.

The line stage claims up to 20dB of amplification and the low impedance output necessary to drive a power amplifier. Each channel is made up of 3 triode tubes (all 12AT7, or equivalent ECC81 or 6201). The first stage is cathode connected to the second stage which is mu-follower configured. Absolute phase is maintained and the output can be adjusted for 0, 6, 10, 14 and 20dB of gain via 2 link settings. The phono stage gives standard RIAA equalisation; there are two link settings to switch between MM and MC (1.7mV and 0.3mV respectively). The latter is courtesy of two internal transformers with quality μ metal cores. Each channel is made up of three triode tubes (all 12AX7, or equivalent ECC83, 7025), with the first stage wired in the classical RC (Resistor-capacitor) manner in the anode circuit and this drives a

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Pioneer PL-L1000 turntable
 Koetsu Rosewood MC cartridge
 Goldring G1042 MM cartridge
 Whest Audio PSU/MSU20 phonostage
 MF Audio Passive Preamp
 Marantz CD63 KI DP CD player
 World Audio K5881 tube power amplifier
 Quad ESL-989 loudspeakers



J.C. Verdier

VOLUME

second stage wired in μ follower configuration.

Feedback from the output of the μ follower stage connects the RIAA filter to the cathode in the first stage; this provides very stable RIAA correction down to 20Hz.

Build quality is undoubtedly sturdy: the case made from thick steel sheet and the front plate finished in 10mm champagne finished brushed grained anodised aluminium. However, I can't say I'm impressed with the finish of the case – which resembles the rough crackle black of an MGB dashboard – and the screen printing on the fascia. Nor do the knobs feel quality items. Still, if you can overlook this 'home made' finish, there are pleasant surprises to come. The unit comes with a basic AC mains transformer, which connects into the back of the preamp via an XLR, but an optional high quality tube power supply is also available offering Dual Regulated power supply rails for the not inconsiderable sum of £1,075.

SOUND QUALITY

For the purposes of this review the Control B found itself in the unfortunate position of having MF Audio's Passive Preamp against it as a reference. In many ways, the best preamp is no preamp, and it then logically follows that the second best is a very high quality passive device – which is precisely what the MF Audio is. However, passives don't work with everything and even the great ones can suffer from a slightly dull, sat

upon sound given the wrong ancillaries. In the case of the MF, it's an unremittingly neutral device, that simply gets better and better as you further upgrade your source and power amplifier.

Kicking off with Chic's 'Forbidden Lover' on silver disc driving the CD input and the JC Verdier proved seriously impressive. Having just heard the same track on the MF Audio, I'd not expected such a big, powerful, soulful and expansive sound as the one that emanated from my Quads. This is very big hearted device, with particularly strong stereo image location and real rhythmic zeal.

In absolute terms, you're aware that it's valves you're listening to and not transistors, because the Control B is ever so slightly soft around the edges and lacks unerringly neutral bass and extended treble. It's also a tad two dimensional in its depth perspective recreation. However, these matters notwithstanding, it's a brilliantly communicative device. The track bounced along, with vocals strongly and sweetly carried bang smack in the middle of the soundstage. There was also a pleasing amount of low level detail which positively glistened from out of the mix. Although it will never be ultra-transparent (these are tubes we're talking about), it proved uncommonly neutral, and certainly not from the fat, bloated, creamy school of tube preamp design.

Moving to 'Take a Chance on Me' from Roxy Music, again on CD, the Control B impressed with its fantastically musical midband. This is its real forte; others (including the MF Audio) may better it in terms of transparency by some way, but it

often made the MF sound positively asthmatic in terms of rhythms – in my system at least. There's real snap to percussion, and although there's not the razor-sharp start-stop you get from top transistor preamps, still the JC Verdier manages to sound as engaging as live music. It sizzles along, investing tremendous life into the proceedings, communicating the performance like its life depended on it.

This was pretty much what I heard from the phonostage too – it's decently quiet, impressively open and majors on musicality. It's ostensibly pretty neutral, with slightly loose frequency extremes, but doesn't half fly in the midband. The Whest Audio PSU/MSU20 discrete solid-state reference was a fascinating counterpoint – even on MC it's outrageously open and clean with zero noise. By contrast, the Control B is inferior in all 'hi-fi' aspects (noisier, less precise, spacious or dimensional) but still plays music in a way that the Whest can't. It takes a straight path to the rhythms and dynamics, and jumps right into the groove. The MC input isn't quite as accomplished, but is still by any standards an impressive implementation. It's sobering to think that it does so well for little more than the price of the warmer and woollier sounding EAR 834P...

My problem with the JC Verdier Control B is the construction quality; it's inelegantly finished. This said, it's a heck of a lot of preamp for the money; it works very well and offers that most prized of commodity – a serious tube phono stage. It will never better the MF Audio and/or Whest Audio preamp or phonostage in 'hi-fi' terms, but those to whom this means nothing will be its most enthusiastic advocates.

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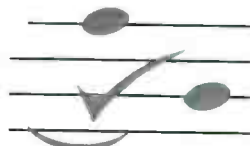
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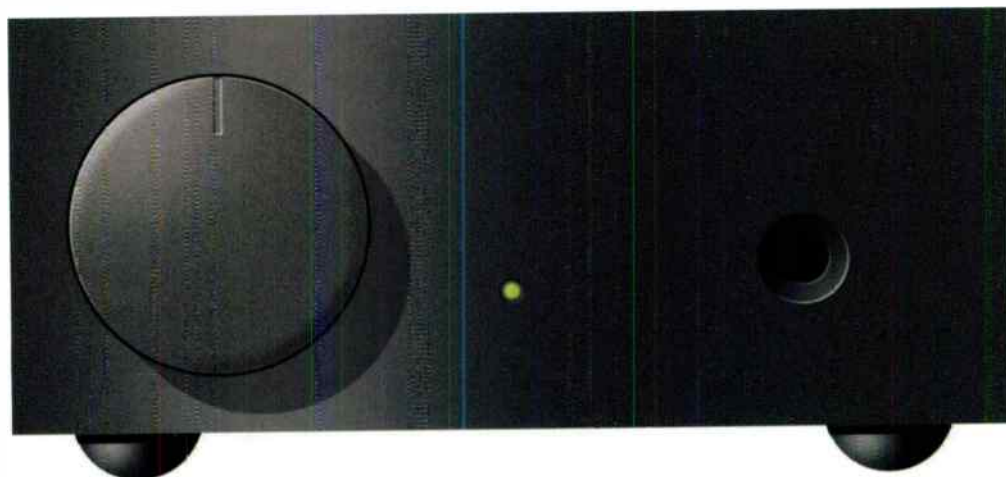
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Head **FUNK**



At its best, a good stereo headphone system focuses you into a space that loudspeakers cannot, making real musical concentration possible without outside everyday distractions. In the Naim Headline 2, Channa Vithana believes he has found a worthy headphone amplifier...

The Headline2 is Naim's own headphone amplifier designed to replace what it considers to be the cheap, nasty and unsatisfactory internal headphone outputs within many CD players and hi-fi amplifiers. It's a high quality affair, similar in formation to the last generation 'olive' Naims, this time with a continuous 4mm rectangular box-section sleeved aluminium (57x121x187mm) case housing slip-out board complete with solid (curved) front and folded back plate.

The Headline2 features a well-weighted and silkily effortless volume knob, green power LED and smooth operating quarter inch jack socket. The bluff and solid aluminium front plate is offset from the main casework with a small shadow band and the unit, as a whole is well built and finished. It has finely recessed openings for the volume knob and 1/4 inch jack socket, lending the Headline2 sans glowing Naim logo, a discrete and understated presence.

Internally it uses a high quality ALPS (Japan) volume potentiometer and two Elna capacitors with 10000µF capacity each. The circuit design is described by Naim as an, "extremely fast, low output power amplifier using discrete parts" utilising high power signal transistors in the output stage with vibration minimising board components and "thermally stable environments" for

some critical components for improved sound quality. Operationally the Headline2 uses a slow-start switch on circuit to avoid the need for mute relays or other contacts between the output stage and headphones. Its quoted specifications are a frequency response of 10Hz-72kHz (at -3dB) and a power output (into 8 Ohms) of 560mW per channel.

The Headline2 requires an external power supply for operation, that according to Naim, "allows the supply to be positioned away from the Headline, keeping interference from the transformer some distance from the sensitive circuitry, reducing noise". It has, incredibly, been designed to accept power supplies ranging from the i-Supply (£85), NAPSC (£235), Flatcap2 (£515), Hi-Cap2 (£925) and Supercap (£2,775)! Along with the Naims is a dedicated power supply for the Headline2 from Russ Andrews Accessories called the PowerPak III (£169) [note: check with Naim regarding the Headline2 warranty when using non-Naim power supplies - Ed.] So it's with the following four incrementally priced products where we shall see if the Naim upgrade philosophy of separated power supplies really does make a difference...

SOUND QUALITY

I connected the Headline2 to a Consonance Reference 2.0 SACD

player using an Amity HPA4S headphone amp (316 Euros) as a reference. For music I used George Harrison's remastered 'Cloud 9' on CD and the Scottish Ensemble's 'Ravel/Shostakovich' on Linn SACD. Starting with the i-Supply aspirated Headline2, the music as a whole had great timing. On the Shostakovich track six and Harrison's 'Got My Mind Set On You' the i-Supply was, on further listening a little strident with strings and had a slight grain in the midrange on the multi tracked vocals. The Amity HPA4S was the closest in price to the i-Supply/Headline2 and though producing its usual high quality presentation it struggled in the midrange revealing some compression in comparison.

The RATA PowerPak III focussed less on the structural and timing aspects of the music and instead preferred to reveal an intriguingly sweet, lush and velvety quality to the strings and vocals. This is typical of the sound RA equipment tends to favour. For example their RAVE I Amplifier is also based on the PowerPak III and has a similar quality. It also revealed a more expansive reverb echo on the opening compressed drum track on 'Got My Mind Set On You'.

The NAPSC produced an exceptionally clean delivery and the most energised sound of all the supplies reviewed. It had precision



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I-SUPPLY

This is Naim's new entry-level PSU, available in three variants designated s, h and i. Externally it's a 57x12x77mm plastic box weighing in at 800gms with a captive mains cable on one end and a 240V 5-pin DIN plug suitable for connection to Naim's Stageline phono stage(s) on the other. With additional adapters it can power the Headline2 (h) and power/charge an Apple i-Pod (i). It is described as a linear, regulated 24V "very low noise" supply.



VERDICT ●●●●●

NAIM HEADLINE2 £285
A consistently superior sounding headphone amplifier that's small and brilliantly upgradeable.

VERDICT ●●●●●

NAIM I-SUPPLY £85
A low cost PSU with good basic sound, although it can lack finesse.

POWERPAK III

The Russ Andrews PowerPak III is a digital 'Class T' switch-mode supply and is configured here to output 24V DC with a 1.5m mesh braided Kimber link cable and locking 2-pin plug for direct connection to the Headline2. It can be ordered for use with other Naim products that can use Flatcap2 and Hi-Cap2 supplies such as preamps and CD players with suitable plugs. It is also a plastic box measuring 75x43x145mm with a green LED for power-on and an IEC mains input socket.



VERDICT ●●●●●

RAA POWERPAK III £169.95
Great value PSU with a lovely smooth and silky midrange, although not as rhythmic as Naim rivals and a tad plasticky.

NAPSC

The NAPSC comes in identical casework to the Headline2, weighs 2.1kg and has a solitary green LED to indicate operation with an IEC mains input socket at the rear. It is a small fully regulated, low noise power supply delivering an 13V output, designed to power the Headline2 and the non-audio related circuitry in (Naim's) NAC202 and NAC282 preamps. Inside it features a single toroidal transformer with two tiny 10mf Elna capacitors and a larger 2200mf Sanwha type on a small output board with a captive lead terminated in a 2-pin plug for direct connection to the Headline2.



VERDICT ●●●●●

NAIM NAPSC £235
Brilliant timing, balanced musical structure and a discrete, understated aesthetic makes this superb value for money.

FLATCAP2

The Flatcap2 is enclosed in the latest full width Naim casing featuring sophisticated construction through extruded and internally profiled aluminium panels. At the front it has a glowing Naim logo indicating operation while at the back are six DIN sockets, labelled either with Power Out or Signal Out and a switched IEC mains input socket. It measures 70x432x304mm and weighs 5.4kg. Internally it has a large toroidal transformer and two main BHC capacitors, one delivering 4700mf and another larger one delivers 10000mf while there are three pairs of the smaller Elna types at 10mf each. These are mounted onto a circuit board connected to the DIN sockets completed with profiled heat sinks. Thus the Flatcap2 circuit configuration differs here from the others providing two upgraded power supplies to Naim equipment such as one for 112X pre-amp and another for Headline2 or CD5X or Stageline for instance. Naim says, "each of the pairs of power supplies has its own centre-tapped, secondary winding on the transformer, its own rectifier, reservoir capacitor and regulator circuits. The independent pair of supplies are not connected at all, allowing their use for any two products without introducing earth loop problems."



VERDICT ●●●●●

NAIM FLATCAP2 £515
Superb build and an extremely sophisticated sound appeal, but it lacks ultimate cohesion.

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www.naim-audio.com

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timing; excellent separation of instruments and a delightful balanced musical vista that was just right. The Flatcap2 had easily the best sound quality of all the supplies when considering the basics such as treble sophistication, midrange delicacy and bass delineation. However due to its weightier, deeper and quieter background - its timing was a little behind the NAPSC and as such, ultimately, less satisfying connected to the Headline2 when considering the whole musical structure - as the treble, mid and bass while excellent were slightly dislocated in comparison.

CONCLUSION

All the supplies here are credits to their respective designers in that they are so versatile enabling

different power supply configurations to more than one product. The i-Supply is a great first step into Naim upgrade philosophy and is not shamed by the other more expensive units and represents superb value. The PowerPak III faces stiffer competition from the NAPSC but for those who prefer a smooth, sweet and silky midrange it is the one. The Flatcap2 produces a very high quality tonal array but somehow doesn't seem to bring it all together, specifically for the Headline2. I feel its strengths lie as an upgrade to Naim's CD5X and 112X preamplifier. The NAPSC is my choice as the best supply here regardless of price, because its impeccable timing and balanced placement of instruments is wonderful. As a bonus it has an attainable price, producing in

CONNECTIONS

The Headline2 has a fixed signal lead with a DIN socket for connection to a Naim preamp, but requires a separate female DIN-to-phono adapter cable for direct connection to a non-Naim source or amp with tape-out. This is straightforward and can be obtained from a cable manufacturer like The Chord Co. who supplied their Chrysalis cable used for the review.

conjunction with the consistently superior Headline2, genuine high-end sound quality. The Headline2 and NAPSC are a far superior step up from the sub-£250 competition and therefore I have no hesitation in giving them the highest recommendation.

BOX Clever



Musical Fidelity's KW500 is one of the most mind-boggling monster integrated amplifiers yet made, so what happens when you downsize it and slash the price? Dominic Todd tries out the still-massive A5 integrated...

If you've already seen the reviews for the KW500, X-PREv3/X-P200 and A5 CD player, then you'll know that Musical Fidelity hardly seem to put a foot wrong these days.

Expectations for the new A5 amp, therefore, run high. First off then, for a £1,500 amplifier, the A5 looks very fine. In fact, apart from the lack of an outboard power supply, it looks much like the £4,000 KW500.

Perhaps it's a matter of taste, but I actually rather like the industrial Art Deco cues, and think that it manages to look a good deal more expensive than it actually is.

Corners certainly haven't been cut when it comes to case construction, either. The familiar, thick front aluminium panel, with black, faux rack handles is in place, as are the chunky ribbed aluminium side cheeks. As with other MF designs, the transistors are bolted directly to these, to act as the heatsinks so, be warned, they can get very hot – especially with the potential of 250 watts per channel needing cooling. Also, like other MF designs this is a dual-mono design, but it does not feature any valve stages. In fact, if you lift the substantial lid you'll actually find the inside's half empty. The toroidal transformer, however, is certainly beefy enough. There are few esoteric components for the audiophile to clock, but the circuitry is generally neat, well planned and features components of a good enough quality, such as ALPS for the

volume control and Jamco for the capacitors.

The preamp joins the two sides of the power amp' in featuring its own power supply. A claimed power output of 250 watts is a lot, even for this price of amp', but Musical Fidelity reckons this to be just above what should be the norm! They believe that any amp' below 200wpc, driving 'speakers of an efficiency of less than 95dB, will frequently clip. What this means for their own, lower powered amps', is unclear, but it can't be denied that well-engineered, high output amps' often create an effortless sound quality.

Inputs and features are pretty much as you'd expect. There's a full remote control, a tape loop, pre-out, processor input and a MM phono stage. All the socketry is standard phono and the 'speaker terminals accept bare wire or 4mm banana plugs. Some may miss XLR, balanced, inputs, but this is only a minor concern. My only grip with the ergonomics of the design is the lack of an LED indicator for the volume control. At a distance, it makes it hard to estimate the volume, especially under darker lighting conditions.

Oddly enough, one of the A5's key rivals actually comes from Musical Fidelity itself. The X-P200 power amp' was our power amp' of the year and, when teamed with a X-PREv3, makes for a stunning combination for £1,700. So stunning in fact, that it went on to win our

recent amplifier group test. That aside, other rivals you might want to consider include Naim's recently upgraded NAC 112x/NAP150x pre/power at £1475, the Cyrus 8vs/PSX (£1200) and the solidly competent Arcam FMJ A32 at £1,200.

SOUND QUALITY

It won't come as a surprise to hear that the A5 has no shortage of drive. Put an upbeat, busy, track on such as Dr John's 'Chicke Le Pas', and it's hard not to be impressed by the effortlessness of the way the amplifier will just sweep through the music. In this way it's, again unsurprisingly, reminiscent of Musical Fidelity's, X-P200 power amplifier. Like the power amp', the bass is on the softer side of neutral, but never sloppy or lacking weight. Generally, the sound remained impressively cohesive, even though it could never quite match the ultimate rhythmic snap of the rival Naim. Percussion, too, could have used a little more focus.

The slight softening of focus persisted with Claire Martin's 'Monk's New Tune'. The stage itself was vast, and Martin's vocals had masses of presence yet, within the stage itself, the individual vocals and instruments didn't always remain quite as steadfast as I would have liked. In short, it just lacked that final degree of precision that gives the listener the feeling of really being there. Nevertheless, the actual quality of Martin's vocals could not be faulted.



There was fine separation from the rest of the mix, and that excellent balance that most MF products seem to get just right these days, of projecting but not forcing the sound forwards.

With a more mainstream and commercial recording, such as Joe's 'Ride Wit U', the A5 showed up both the strengths and weaknesses of the track. There was superb control of the bass, and a super balance of taut, pacey timing combined with weight and power. Less desirable was the slight hardening in the upper-midrange. Although this didn't show itself elsewhere in the listening tests, it did remind me that the A5 was, after all, a powerful transistor amp', and therefore still prone to the traces of harshness indicative of these amps'. It was probably a characteristic of the recording, but it's still worth bearing in mind – this is certainly not an A1000 type of amp' that smoothes and soothes anything put through it. The payback for this, however, is a transient attack and an expansive staging that would make an A1000 appear weedy by comparison.

The Scissor Sisters' 'Comfortably Numb' proved highly enjoyable and thoroughly musical. Staging was, once again, wall-like in its sheer presence, and the song was driven along with great gusto. Although not quite as finely etched as some, separation was good helped, in no small part, by the

masses of space available within the staging. In terms of depth and layering I would even go so far to say that it's probably one of the finest integrateds around this price, such is its skill here.

Musical Fidelity amps' have often excelled with Classical music, and the A5 is no different. The string tone was ideal, being smooth, but not syrupy. Oddly, though, just as had been the case with the A5 CD player, I found brass sections too smooth. You may like the refinement that this brings about, but I wouldn't say it's an accurate reflection of what brass actually sounds like – at least not when blown in anger! By absolute standards piano could be said to lack a little body but by comparison with its peers, it's fine. Most impressive was the manner in which fine background detail was clearly portrayed without it being obtrusive. This, and the great sense of scale, tension and drama made for a highly involving, yet still refined listen.

CONCLUSION

The Musical Fidelity A5 has already received a keen response from many hi-fi dealers, and it's not hard to see why. For a start off, it just looks great. The

appearance may not be to everyone's taste, but the sheer presence per pound can't be faulted. The only real downside is the lack of upgrade potential that comes as standard with pre/power amps' or, in the case of Cyrus and Naim integrateds, in the form of a superior PSU. Sonically, the A5 is also pretty much all good news. The wonderfully expansive sound stage and ease of delivery is superior to anything else at the price. Scale, depth of bass and dynamic reach are all also in the higher echelons of what's available for £1,500. All in all, faults are very few and far between. That said, the A5 will, unlike many Class-A designs, expose a harsh recording. It also can't quite match Naim products when it comes to focus and precision. Finally, I would just say that the A5's biggest problem is actually the XPREv3 and X-P200 from the same company! They only cost slightly more and yet, with the ability to mono-block, offer even greater ultimate potential. For this reason, the A5 just misses full marks. As integrateds go, though, it's still mightily impressive and a worthy addition to the MF range.

VERDICT

Bold styling with sound to match make this a redoubtable performer – one of the very best value integrateds at or anywhere near the price.

MUSICAL FIDELITY A5 INTEGRATED £1,500
Musical Fidelity
☎ +44 (0) 20 8900 2866
www.musicalfidelity.co.uk

- FOR**
- class-leading staging
 - scale, authority & depth
 - appearance and finish

- AGAINST**
- slight loss of focus
 - lacking upgrade potential
 - volume knob needs LED!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Producing 220W into 8ohms and 360W into 4ohms the A5 has enough power to tackle any loudspeaker. Musical Fidelity believe all this is necessary to accommodate musical peaks. Bear in mind that these days nearly all loudspeakers have 4ohm bass drivers, so the higher power figure is the real one. It's a lot of power, especially for big loudspeakers that these days are usually sensitive too. The bonus isn't power though, so much as the benefits of available current, lower distortion from paralleled output transistors and such like.

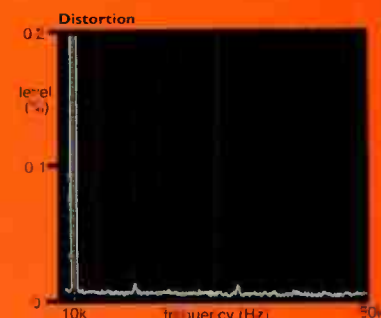
The A5, like all Musical Fidelity amps, produces negligible distortion right across the audio band, returning just 0.006% second harmonic at 10kHz our analysis shows, for 1W output. At full output, 10kHz it was little more at 0.012%.

Sensitivity was adequate for low output tuners and cassette decks, at 350mV. Noise was low, separation high and d.c. offset minimal.

The MM phono stage has no warp filter running flat from 7Hz to 37kHz. The MC input had a little less extension, managing 15Hz-27kHz. Both stages were quiet and had good overload. LP will have plenty of bass, but cone flap may occur at times.

The A5 is a powerhouse with a fine set of specs. It measured very well in all areas. NK

Power	220watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	5Hz-80kHz
Separation	113dB
Noise	-93dB
Distortion	0.002%
Sensitivity	330mV
dc offset	3/5mV
Disc MM	
Frequency response	7Hz-kHz
Separation	82dB
Noise	-82dB
Distortion	0.003%
Sensitivity	3.5mV
Overload	82mV
Disc MC	
Frequency response	15Hz-27kHz
Separation	80dB
Noise	-71dB
Distortion	0.004%
Sensitivity	0.55mV
Overload	12mV



HISTORY LESSON

In 1993 Musical Fidelity launched an integrated amp that, at the time, was one of the finest of its kind. Although costing a similar £1,400, the internal construction could hardly be more different from the A5. Yet it was still very special in its own way. Following on from Naim's insistence on separating amplifier's power supplies, the A1000 featured a separate box for its PSU. In fact, the box actually contained two supplies – one for the pre and another for the power amp' section. The main part of the amp itself was Class-A biased and output 50W. This may appear low against the A5, but the A1000 rarely struggled to drive most speakers, and had a stringency sound that made many of its rivals, at the time, sound stilted and mechanical. As well as providing a highly involving listen, the A-1000 was also beautifully finished. Few could object to the black high gloss finish, or the oversized control knobs that moved with delicious weight and accuracy. In fact, some still prefer the look of this unit to the latter, aluminium fronted, models. Available from as little as £400, these days it makes a superb second-hand purchase, especially if you're a Classical music fan.



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CD UK

Renowned French digital expert Micromega is making a welcome return to these shores with its new upsampling CD132 CD player... Bonhomie or anomie? Dominic Todd decides...

Micromega is back in the UK. For those who remember the awesome Trio of the early '90s, the innovative Stage range and lest we forget, one of the first CD-recorders ever, this is a return most welcome. During its absence from the UK, the company has been busy, like many other high-end hi-fi companies, developing a range of home cinema products.

Yet it's not a DVD player or a multichannel amplifier, that we're going to look at here, but the new two-channel upsampling CD player. Like more expensive rivals, the CD132 uses upsampling to enable

the Philips SAA7377 control circuit. Seeing as Naim, Musical Fidelity and other high-end players use this transport, its inclusion within a £600 player is extremely impressive.

Matching the high quality transport is a DAC of equal respect. The Analog Devices AD1853 should match the SRC (Sample Rate Converter) well. The power supply with constant current source and shunt regulators should ensure immunity from electrical interference.

Unlike many of its UK competitors, Micromega uses an R-Core power supply, rather like the ones used in high-end Sony players. They claim that its bandwidth charac-

Like most CD manufacturers these days, Micromega claims to have paid particular attention to the CD clock in order to reduce jitter to a minimum.

Technically then, this is an impressive player for its price, but compromises have been made in the case construction, which is disappointing. The main case is fabricated from an extremely thin metal, with a front panel that's not much thicker itself. When a Cambridge Azur 540c can do a much better job for a third of the price, this really isn't good enough. Perhaps more worrying still was the fit of the draw mechanism on our review sample. Hopefully, this was a one-off,



the use of less fierce filters downstream of the signal. Unlike these rivals, however, Micromega has chosen to use a sampling rate of 132kHz [see box] rather than the more usual 192kHz!

The rest of the player is rather more conventional, but impressively specified nonetheless. At its heart is a Philips VAM1202 transport. Unlike many, this is designed specifically for CD players and not multi-use computer applications – i.e. CD-ROM. The laser assembly is isolated from the draw by a series of rubber dampers, and controlled by a Micromega programmed version of

characteristics are better suited to low current applications, such as CD players, than the equivalent toroidal type. To avoid problems of electrical crosstalk, the analogue and digital stages have separate windings. The analogue side uses a choke system to offer a degree of mains regulation, whilst this isn't as sophisticated as Musical Fidelity's "cr" system, it should still provide a smooth mains input and an effective barrier from mains borne interference. The rest of the circuitry is well laid out and of good quality. Polypropylene film capacitors are used in all the filters, with fine quality resistors to match.

but the lack of apparent transit damage made me wonder how Micromega could send a player out with a draw that not only stood proud, but hopelessly misaligned, too? Compounding the impression of a less than immaculate construction was the orange peel effect paint of the lid...

Still, it wasn't all bad news. The buttons had a solid feel and were logically laid out. The blue display was both clear and yet not too distracting. The standard coaxial digital output was also welcome. All in all it's a pretty enough machine.

SOUND QUALITY

In the past, Micromega machines have tended to err on the warmer, smoother side of neutral, and the CD132 follows that tradition. With Natasha Bedingfield's 'Frogs and Princes', the sound proved refined and euphonious. There was both a

UPSAMPLING

An Asynchronous Sampling Frequency Converter (ASFC) allows the usual sampling rate of CD, 44.1kHz, to be upsampled to a frequency of, usually, 96kHz or 192kHz. Now, whilst this sounds great in principle, Micromega argue that the technology has its disadvantages, too. To convert between multiples that are not common requires two clocks. The first clock is a multiple of the first frequency and the second a multiple of the second. The circuit will operate multiplications then round-offs until complete. The disadvantage of having these two clocks is that of clock synchronisation or timing. For this reason, Micromega selected to upsample by an exact multiple of the original 44.1kHz. This leads us to the figure of 132.3kHz, which, give or take a decimal point, lends the player its name. Obviously, with an exact multiplication there is only need for a single clock, but there is another advantage here, too. During extensive listening, Micromega found that the sonic results were superior when the original frequency was multiplied by an odd number, in this case three, rather than an even one, which is why we aren't reviewing the Micromega CD176!

weight and depth to the bass response that most UK rivals would trade for a tauter, leaner sound. Yet, such a balance did have its downside.

Whilst the timing could never be accused of being stodgy, it wasn't exactly whip crack sharp, either. Certainly, the Naim, Exposure, Creek and Cyrus [see RIVALS] foursome could teach the CD132 something in terms of pace, rhythm and drive. Despite this, there was generally fine articulation and definition of both instruments and vocals. Vocal projection, in fact, was especially good and, along with decent sound stage width and depth, made for staging as good as anything else in the class. Whilst being grain-free, the treble response did lose a little in terms of focus. In this respect it reminded me of the Exposure 2010S which has a similar character when it comes to ultimate treble resolution.

With Norah Jones's 'One Flight

Down', the Micromega's vocal portrayal continued to impress. It demonstrated excellent separation from the rest of the mix, and projected the sound well into the room but, and this is important, it did so without undue ferocity. Anyone familiar with previous Micromega machines would recognise the delicate vocal response, with a freedom from harshness that holds up even at high volumes. Given the price of the machine the piano timbre was fair, but by absolute standards it could be said to lack something in the way of body. A little smearing was also present. As before, the piece, as a whole, was smoothly presented and well integrated. What it lacked, though, was both precision and detail from the rather too soft sounding percussion. Instead, the sound ebbed and flowed in a beguiling manner, but one in which ultimate detail retrieval took a back seat.

Switching to something more upbeat – in this case Eminem's 'Kill You' (!) – showed the CD132 in a

slightly turgid pace and lack of rhythm that failed to inspire and involve the listener. As before, most of the technicalities of sound, including staging, separation and integration were fine; it was just as though the whole sound had been treated to a quick coat of gloss before it exited the CD player. Cohesive and proficient then, but not especially invigorating – at least to my tastes...

By this stage I was beginning to get the impression that the CD132 was rather music dependant, and it was an impression that was further heightened by The White Stripes' 'I Want To Be The Boy To Warm Your Mother's Heart'. Here, the frustration of the Micromega's rendition of the previous two tracks was replaced by a most enthralling balance. The warm, organic bass was eminently suitable this time, and the guitar had just the right balance of resonance and bite. Indeed, the ability to play at high volumes without fear of harshness would actually, and somewhat perversely, make this an

"there's an almost analogue-like, seamless response... which can work extremely well..."

less flattering light. Here, the softened dynamics were obvious, with a lack of transient attack and "snap" that many would find spoiled the shock value of the similarly attacking lyrics. Fine bass weight was some form of compensation, but its sense of added warmth didn't seem quite appropriate here. That said, vocal clarity remained a strong point, making Eminem's rant easy to depict. The expansive and all-encompassing soundstage also impressed, and at least proved a fine match for the euphonic balance of the bass.

Another song that left the CD132 rather wanting was the Crash Test Dummies 'When I Go Out With Artists'. Although very different from Eminem, it was the

ideal CD player for Rockers. Equally impressive was the layering of sound. Lightening fast it may not be, but no one could argue with the Micromega's stage presence. Two-dimensional, the CD132 most definitely is not. Along with the fine guitar balance, the vocals proved, as before, to be similarly impressive, showing the CD132 to have a real strength in the midrange.

Whilst other forms of music had shown various levels of commitment from the CD132, with Classical music the Micromega could vary from impressive to nondescript several times during the same performance. Alexander Borodin's 'In The Steppes Of Central Asia' was a case in point. Whilst the string tone





was generally well judged, the brass could sound a little muted, if still resonant of timbre. Equally, whilst the piece flowed well at times, at others it was blighted by a lack of headroom that gave the impression of the sound being compressed. Compared to the class leaders, I sometimes felt as though the CD132 had sucked the emotion from the music, leaving it well presented but not especially compelling.

CONCLUSION

While it's great to see Micromega back in the UK again, since their departure much has changed. Rivals from Exposure, Creek and Naim offer a level of musicality and authority that, until recently, had been the preserve of machines costing £1,000+. Against this, the CD132 doesn't quite measure up. By comparison, its treble is not the most distinct and its bass response, if not exactly woolly, is not as pacey as the rest. Of less importance, but not especially impressive when you've spent £600, is the finish. Whilst the materials used are fine, the casing is simply too thin, and the draw alignment on our example shows worrying lapses in quality control. Micromega must look at this.

Yet, as ever with Micromega, there is the compensating factor of an almost analogue-like, seamless response. With some music, this can work extremely well, and is enhanced by a generous sound stage and better than average bass depth. Whilst I couldn't recommend this player to a universal audience, it would certainly suit some systems and tastes, down to the ground.

THE RIVALS

Rivals offering, admittedly 192kHz, upsampling are usually more expensive. Onkyo's C-1VL (£800) and Arcam's CD192 (£850) are cases in point. Yet the £600 market is still brimming with enough, conventionally engineered, rivals to give the CD132 a hard time. One of the most impressive players at this price has to be Exposure's 2010S. It combines a bespoke transport with a PCM1716 DAC to provide a thoroughly upbeat and pacey sound. It's one of the most musical machines at this price, with only a slight lack of focus and body letting it down. Unless your system is already overly lean sounding this is definitely one worth auditioning. If this is too clean cut for you, then take a listen to Arcam's CD82T. The former may be getting on a bit now, but the smooth, cohesive and, yes, warm, sound is the perfect antidote to not just the Exposure, but rivals from Creek (CD50II) and Cyrus (CD6x), too. Finally, for just a few dollars more, you might like to consider our favourite sub-£1,000 player. It's not often that hacks agree so universally, but most feel that Naim's £825 CD5i has it all. It has timing and rhythm to eclipse even the Exposure yet, unlike many, manages to achieve this without sounding in the least bit sterile. Indeed, in terms of natural musicality, at this price, it's in a gang of one.

VERDICT

Wonderfully smooth and musically cohesive sound suits some tastes and musics perfectly

MICROMEGA CD132 £600

Micromega
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email:
 olive.goodwin1@btopenworld.com
 www.micromega-hifi.com

FOR

- soundstaging
- articulate midrange
- bass depth

AGAINST

- build quality
- lacks bite
- music dependent

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

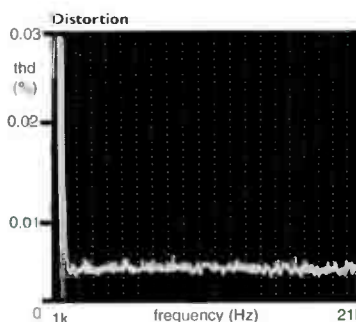
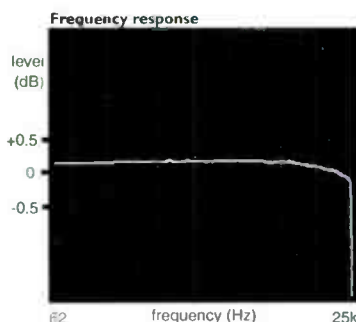
The CD132 is much like an Arcam in that it has slowly falling treble, our impulse analysis shows, from a well damped anti-alias filter. This gives good stop-band rejection and a smooth sound, largely free from the bite of flat-response players.

There was little distortion at higher levels, just 0.003% at -30dB for example - a typical music level. Our distortion analysis shows little quantisation noise and no visible distortion harmonics. Further down at -60dB the figures were still good: just 0.18%, hence an excellent EIAJ dynamic range value of 111dB. So this is a linear player, as distortion free as 16bits gets. Output measured an normal 2V.

The CD132 is a neat proposition of smooth 'natural' sounding response characteristic coupled with low distortion. It measured well. NK

Noise (IEC A)	-114dB
Dynamic range	111dB
Output	2.1V

Frequency response	4Hz -20.75Hz
Distortion-6dB	0.0003
-60dB	0.18
-80	4.4
Separation	
1kHz	112dB
20kHz	86dB



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STEREO TIMES on the Aurora gold turntable & illustrious tonearm

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Channa Vithana auditions an extremely svelte sounding pair of loudspeakers from France, the Jean Marie Reynaud JMR Twin Mk IIIs.

Jean-Marie Reynaud (JMR) began producing loudspeakers in 1967, and so the brand is now well established in its native France as well as gaining success across Europe and America. It has been until only recently that JMR has instigated distribution here in the UK through HiFidelity Audio.

These are rather attractive standmounters. The cabinet is formed and clad in an esoterically dimensioned three-quarter inch Medite with double (cherry stained) Aniegre veneer. The corners are all agreeably chamfered and the finish of the veneer is very good indeed. There are no nasty corner blemishes or flaws in the cabinet work. The grilles are eye-catching for a change featuring three point fixings and an oval sloped curve at the bottom. At the front they have a small metal badge with the JMR logo which is

smartly positioned on the top right hand corner; it is tastefully designed yet relatively discrete. As a speaker design, the JMRs are a success; they take the modern stance of narrow front baffle and deep cabinets and when matched to the stained cherry veneer works very well. This stained cherry is just right, an attractive matt finish and not too 'orange', and in the flesh, it has the right colour balance with a slight copper sheen. As such it wouldn't look out of place within both modern and traditional decors.

The JMR Twins are described as a three-way loudspeaker system using two drivers! The bass drive unit is situated above the tweeter and consists of a 6.7 inch diameter double magnet system, double moving coil with flat, ventilated spider. There's a positive half-roll peripheral surround in natural rubber with short fibre paper cone and a soft, decompressed central

dust-cap. The cut-outs for this driver are clean and precise with a hard outer foam surround leading into the main driver itself as described above. The outer hard foam has four cut-outs revealing four cross head screws that attach the driver to the cabinet - which I don't find very appealing, as hex head fixings are at least, aesthetically superior in comparison.

The tweeter is a 1.2 inch impregnated fabric dome with a central neodymium magnet system. It sports a "Horn front frame and wave guide for minimum lateral directivity and perfect conservation of energy at a distance of several meters". This 'horn front frame' is a flared plastic device attached to centre line of the tweeter opening and the wave guide is a series of grooves on both the top and bottom surfaces that are radiated and stroked outwards. The outer edges of the tweeter are

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SPECIFICATIONS:

3-way electric crossover, slopes 6 and 12 dB/octave, serial configuration for medium/treble, crossover frequencies at 1,400 and 4,500 Hz. Polypropylene capacitors with hand wound air coils. Dimensions: 16x8x10.5 inches, weight 7kg.

covered with a thin felt ring, JMR are not clear on the purpose of this ring; however I have seen aftermarket add-on felt rings which can be applied around the metal faceplates of dome tweeters to minimise reflection and therefore theoretically, reduce distortion. Below the tweeter is a long horizontal port opening with curved corners. This is described as a tuned triangular transmission line with slim anti-noise event port. It has a soft foam cover neatly flush mounted into the opening. At the rear are multi-way speaker binding posts situated within a standard plastic moulding, suitable for biwiring.

SET-UP

I spaced the JMRs at 2.2m wide with 450mm from the back wall and 700mm from the side walls. They sat atop 36mm thick birch ply stands onto a stone plinth. A 3.5x4.5m room with concrete walls and floating laminate floor over suspended timber floor was used. I preferred them firing straight ahead as they were entirely unfussy about placement, they were a pleasure to set-up. The instruction sheet was nicely detailed regarding positioning and set-up with due care on the subject of source and amplification. JMR recommend a minimum period of 50 hours 'breaking in' with a subsequent 200 to 500 hours of playing time to complete this process. I biwired them to the outputs on the Exposure XVIII power amp using Chord Company Odyssey 4 and Odyssey 2 speaker cable.

SOUND QUALITY

'Anything' was the Damned going mainstream in the mid nineteen eighties, and a far cry from their pioneering punk roots. So listening to their cover of Love's 'Alone Again Or' with its Spanish tinged guitars and high resolution musical structure was both surprising and – as it happened - quite wonderful through the JMRs. It starts off with a somewhat full bodied acoustic, gathering up slowly and then exploding into a massive Latin ensemble of soaring vocals, percussion, guitars and an amazing trumpet break by Kurt Holm. All of this could easily overwhelm a lesser speaker, yet the JMRs managed this song very well. They provided a

superb spatiality, and keen eye for detail, though never sacrificing their overall confidence

with the whole musical structure. As a result what I heard was one of those rarities in modern speaker design – quite simply naturalness! This naturalness can be described as a combination of rhythm, timing, resolution and texture shared within a collective delicate balance to produce a musical whole.

The overall sound of the JMRs was excellent at the price; however bass fiends may be disappointed as they don't go down so low. The trade off for the rest of us is in the actual quality of the bass present - regarding its tunefulness. The Damned's vocal version of 'In Dulce Decorum' continued this great sound, with a beautiful midband, and an unforced yet controlled quality. David Vanian's vocals were clearly revealed as he went through gothic pantomime to the truly affecting. 'Bagatelles' was another surprise, as the piano - which can be difficult on this piece with a tendency for ringing and coloration – was communicated with superb speed, combined with delicacy and deftness of touch. In comparison with the much more costly Waterfalls, the JMRs acquitted themselves very well considering their budget status. There was air and space between old notes decaying and new ones forming.

Luther Vandross's 1980 recording of 'Searching' is an excellent early example of deep house, at eight minutes long complete with a languid groove that seemingly goes on forever and undulating bass, it's a real gem, more satisfying than his latter mid-eighties pieces. It is a good test of speed as it is quite a dense recording with a dark hue and rather cavernous bass.

Consequently the JMRs showed off a glorious midband, with timing spot-on. The saxophone break was outstanding, with seamless integration into the music's structure, never sounding distinct or separated.

CONCLUSION

What was evident with the listening sessions,

both initially and through extended periods was that these JMRs had an exceedingly good treble and midband. They didn't suffer in the low frequency either, though they come across as initially bass light. However, through extended listening the bass quality and expression is first rate. Additionally the JMRs had a superb naturalness to them. They can be described as well-balanced and as such reminded me of the Castle Richmond 3i and KEF Q compacts with their superb driver integration, being generally unflappable. However, they take these strengths beyond those speakers (rightly so as the JMRs are a good deal more expensive) and add superior resolution, a fine, controlled yet sophisticated treble and great timing. They are well built and finished too, plus with the grilles on they look even better. An

excellent loudspeaker, well worth auditioning.

MUSIC USED:

- The Damned 'Anything' (1986)
- Luther Vandross 'The Best...The Best Of Love' (1989)
- Beethoven: 'Bagatelles' Wilhelm Kempf, Piano (Deutsche Grammophon)

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

- Origin Live Resolution Turntable £2,000
- Origin Live Encounter Version 2 Arm £995
- Origin Live Ultra Motor and Upgrade Transformer £745
- Clearaudio Symphony MC Cartridge £665
- Clearaudio Basic Symmetry Phonostage £540
- Exposure XXIII Pre Amp £1,399
- Exposure XXVIII Power Amp £1,399
- Waterfall Victoria TWN speakers £2,000
- Chord Co. 5m Odyssey 4 single wired £340
- Chord Co. 5m Odyssey 2 £170

VERDICT

Svelte, sophisticated and engagingly musical sound makes these loudspeakers an essential audition.

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 Jean Marie Reynaud
 C: +44 (0)1480 216 439
 www.hifi-jellymedia.co.uk

FOR

- natural sound
- treble, bass quality
- build, finish, colour

AGAINST

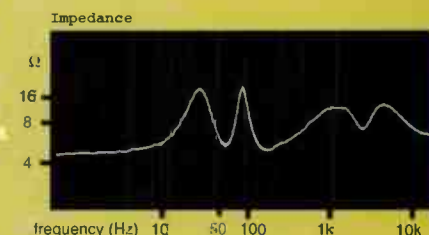
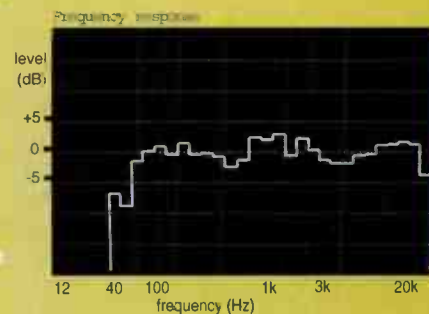
- bass weight

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Jean Marie Reynaud (let's say JMRI) Twin MK2s use fibre cone drivers and the tweeter has a peculiar phase plot to correct forward response. I expected high sensitivity and a fairly frequency response and this is just what I got under measurement. Limpness means colouration, but it doesn't have to sound bad. In spite of apparent driver peaking these speakers sound soft with a pink noise test signal, likely due to low output around 3kHz, the crossover region, where the ear is quite sensitive. Bass rolls off below 40Hz too, since this is a closed box design, but all the same there is output down to 40Hz (-6dB), so the Twin MK2s will have reasonably well damped bass of good quality I suspect.

Sensitivity was a high 88dB, so the speakers will go loud from little power. Measuring a nominal 100W, they use a 5ohm bass driver with a 6ohm tweeter as usual, for best voltage sensitivity. As a load they are reasonably unreactive and kind

to amplifiers. The Twin MK2s won't be the last word in low coloration, smoothness or sophistication, but they sound lively and well controlled. NK



Slim, Fine



Neal Gibbons tackles a PC-based Ethernet connected replacement to his Naim CD5/FlatCap 2 CD player, in the guise of Slim Devices SqueezeBox...

Whilst at a friend's house helping him audition new CD players, it dawned on me that to improve upon my existing Naim CD5/ Flatcap II would involve considerable expenditure... My friend duly bought his player and I went away to contemplate my next move. I looked at alternative players, dabbling with DVD/ SACD, but still nothing came close to my Naim. Then by chance I came across a discussion on the PinkFish Media bulletin board, which revolved around a little device called a SqueezeBox from Slim Devices in the USA. Great things were being said about the unit which plugs into a PC via an Ethernet link and can play music from the PC straight into your hi-fi.

Hmmn... this was worth investigating! I liked the idea of using a PC to store digital music, as I believe a computer hard disk is the best possible transport (short of solid state memory) for replaying it. But why not just use a soundcard? Well, the SqueezeBox differs in the way it communicates with the PC and interacts with the user - it has a large fluorescent display that relays information to the user and presents a user-friendly interface for playing music. Control is via an infra red remote, CD player style. As the connection to the PC is Ethernet, the

unit can be located many metres away from the computer, which has the benefit of putting the PC somewhere other than in your listening room where the whir of noisy cooling fans is intrusive. Of course, the downside is that you need a PC and knowledge about setting up a network...

THE UNIT

At just £140, it was too good an idea not to try. Two units are available, a wired one using standard Ethernet cable or a Wireless one that communicates using 802.11b and 802.11g. A wireless equipped PC or router would therefore be required and a good level of PC expertise to set it up, so I opted for the simpler and perhaps more robust wired version. One other computer item needed is a small Ethernet hub for connecting PC and Squeeze Box together, alternatively an Ethernet Crossover cable can be used to link the two directly.

The SqueezeBox duly arrived - my unit was finished in black but other colour options are available, it's a fairly unobtrusive box measuring 216x48x117mm and comes complete with a power supply, Ethernet cable, Phono leads, remote and manual. The large screen dominates the front, and to one side there's a headphone socket, at the rear two Phono analogue outputs, the PSU connector

and two S/PDIF outputs, optical and Phono. One item missing is the Slim Server software. This must be downloaded from the Slim Devices website, as does the software needed to extract music from a CD. I think it would better if Slim Devices included a CD containing this so users can be up and running with the minimum of fuss. The user's manual does not cover the software so I had to use the online web help.

SETUP

With the Slim Server software installed on my PC, I connected the SqueezeBox and PC to a 4 port hub. I chose a 'static' IP address (192.168.0.1) for my PC and rebooted. An IP address is like a postal address, the PC needs one and so does the SqueezeBox before they can communicate. With the network address now set I powered up the Squeeze Box as per the instructions, it prompted me to start the setup routine and asked for an IP address, I used 192.168.0.50, the unit can also use DHCP to locate an IP address automatically. With the network settings saved the SqueezeBox found the PC server and settled into standby mode displaying the PC time! Now to get some music on to the server!

The recommended software on the 'Net' is EAC; other software packages are available. EAC allows



you to extract audio from the CD in the digital domain directly on to your hard disk. This can be an uncompressed WAV file or an MP3 file using a CODEC of your choice, such as LAME, and it will also link into FLAC (Free Lossless Audio Codec). Supported formats are MP3, AAC, WMA, FLAC and WAV. I chose to extract with uncompressed WAV files. Why? Compression schemes like MP3 are lossy and don't fit with my high quality audio aspirations of replacing a top CD player! Also I researched the decoder chip used in the SqueezeBox and found that it performed no processing on uncompressed WAV files, the chip switches into pass through mode, good for sound quality I concluded. The downside is the extra hard disk space needed to store uncompressed audio files, one minute typically needs 10MB of disk space for a stereo file...

EAC recognized my CD-ROM drive and performed a test on it to determine the most accurate method for extracting audio. I found this a little hit and miss, as running the drive setup a second time gave a different set of results! I stuck with the first results and tested some CD's. EAC produces a report about the quality of the 'rip', my drive was consistently hitting 100%, great stuff! Each CD took about 5-7mins to 'rip'. EAC has the facility to access FreeDB an on-line CD database of every CD created. Every CD has a unique reference ID to identify it and with a simple key-press its possible to access the database retrieving the song titles, Album title, Artist, Genre and even the year of release - this saves a great deal of typing! This is such a useful feature that I would not contemplate ripping any CD to hard disk without it.

The last thing to setup is a 'music' store or structured directory for your music. EAC uses the Genre, Artist, Album Name and track name to automatically create a directory tree structure. IE: to create a directory tree automatically based on Genre, Artist, CD Title and song titles use %B%D\C%N - %T Every

time you 'rip', say, a Blues CD it will go into the Blues directory and be segregated by Artist then CD Title. So if your Music store was on your E:\ drive EAC will place the Blues directory beneath this IE: E:\Blues\Artist\Album Title etc. With a number of Albums now on my hard disk it was time to listen! I set the Slim Server software to point at my music store and then retired to my listening room! Note that it's also possible to play music from the Slim Server interface and not just the Infrared remote control.

SOUND OFF

Using the Infrared control is very easy. With play, stop, pause, skip forward and back functions plus the display can be dimmed or turned off completely, it's possible to repeat one track a whole album or even your whole music store and it's possible to use shuffle mode as well. You could shuffle your whole music store and hit play. A neat feature is the ability to create multiple playlists of tracks, this could be a party playlist or a chill-out-after-work playlist, anything to suit your mood. The Font size can also be increased or shrunk as well. The displayed text will scroll if it's unable to fit on the screen.

There is an extensive music search facility plus it's possible to 'browse' the music store directly. To play something, simply locate the music you want and press play! Lastly there is an inbuilt digital volume control that varies the analogue and digital S/PDIF output. It's possible to lock the S/PDIF output at maximum for a slightly improved sound quality.

Is it better than my CD5/FC2? Using the analogue outputs it presents a beguiling sound. With studio processed CDs (Dido for instance) it came across very well, the timing is good and the midrange had plenty of detail while the bass was punchy. However, feed it something faster, complex or of a more acoustic nature and its limitations, especially at the frequency extremes, clearly show.

Ultimately, there is a veil and lack of low level detail with the midband and treble, and bass is also somewhat

loose. It lacks the great dynamics of the Naim CD5 and can sound 'sharp' at times. Still, compared to a budget CD spinner it puts up a very good show. But I did not let this deter me from my goal, I felt there was a lot more to come from this little device [see **TWEAKING**].

To sum up the SqueezeBox is a very versatile device. It does some very clever things and brings an ease of use to digital music replay that anybody can use without having to use the Windows interface to play music. Whilst at first I did not achieve my goal of bettering my Naim CD5/FlatCap 2, it did lay down the foundations for a very good playback system that, given time, can be tweaked to better my current setup at a lower cost.



USEFUL LINKS

Slim Devices (www.slimdevices.com)
Exact Audio Copy (www.exactaudiocopy.de)
FreeDB (www.freedb.org)

TWEAKING

I first replaced the analogue output capacitors with some BlackGates. The improvement was subtle - a little smoother perhaps with a touch more detail. Next I looked at the PSU; the standard unit is a switch mode supply. I replaced this with a simple regulated linear design based around an off the shelf device. Ah! Now I was making headway, as the earlier tendency to sound sharp and a little distorted disappeared, more detail became apparent and the dynamics were improved. Time to experiment with external DACs! I looked at DIY examples but needed a quick solution and found an early Music Fidelity X-ACT, and the sound improved again, perhaps not as large a leap as with the PSU but a definite positive move. In comparison it did not have the scale, depth or ambience of the CD5/FC2 but it was getting closer and closer! Where next? I consulted a WAD bulletin board member and set about tweaking the X-ACT. I replaced the opamps and decoupling capacitors and implemented a better supply rail decoupling scheme. The SqueezeBox took on a whole new performance level. Now it was really challenging the CD5, the bass was as good and the midrange was arguably better with just the treble a little restrained. Studying the X-ACT output circuit I saw that the treble was being rolled off very early, I made some resistor changes to move the roll-off - and bingo! The treble was now clear and detailed. At last, the SqueezeBox was the equal of my Naim CD5. Of course, I feel there's more to come, good as the X-ACT now is I feel it could be bettered and I suspect a reclock of the SqueezeBox will really make it sing! Watch this space...

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Shadow

Audio Consultants



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Since a young age, Laurence Dickie has been passionate about music and the sciences but his particular obsession has been with loudspeakers. His achievements to date are noteworthy, to say the least, and he commands a deep respect from his peers. But, Dic does not simply design loudspeakers.....he takes the proposed design concept and improves it beyond the point most designers are happy to "sign off". Welcome to the world of Vivid Audio. Exclusive in Scotland.



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If you were fortunate enough to read one of the many recent reviews on the Triangle Magellan Concerto, you will be aware that this is a very special product indeed! When we first heard these with Nick Green of UKD who is the UK distributor - we said, 'We have to have these, they are amazing' and amazing they are! We have these on demonstration along with the rest of the Triangle range. 5 Stars and Editors Choice are all expressions synonymous with this range of superbly built, incredibly efficient and stunning loudspeakers.



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Audio Physic Virgo III cherry £2895
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Triangle Antal ES £595
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Kuzma Stabi / Stogi S £995
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AUDIO POWER AMPLIFIER DESIGN HANDBOOK

DOUGLAS SELF

Douglas Self is an institution of his own making - literally. He runs a busy and interesting website grandly entitled: The Amplifier Institute. Here you can get a good flavour of his writing style, rhetoric and general approach. You can also savour the contents of this third edition of the 'Audio Power Amplifier Design Handbook' (PAD for purposes of this article) rather than just reading my own appraisal.

Quoted to me by two design engineers who run UK audio companies as a valuable design reference, PAD comes recommended by those who know and practice the art of audio amplifier design. Whilst I am not a solid-state amp designer, I can well understand why Self is both strong on both basic operational theory and the practical working environment. From the effects of reactive loads, through biasing and to power supplies and, in particular little discussed or fully appreciated subjects like grounding, PAD really rips through the data. It is both thorough and very detailed.

There are few stones unearthed; the only ones that spring to mind are screening - a very esoteric but important subject - and hum induction, an insidious little problem, although distortion induction, which is discussed, uses the same mechanism. But that's a minor detail against long chapters of thermal stability and dynamics and - especially - all important protection circuits. Of course there are the basic building blocks, including input stage, voltage gain stage and - especially - output stages. All his observations and contentions are supported by original measurement data gleaned with an Audio Precision test set and the discussion is strictly about real life conditions and behavioural characteristics; there are very few equations. The full circuit of a 50W amplifier is given too, but component

values were unclear, which appears to be an artwork problem.

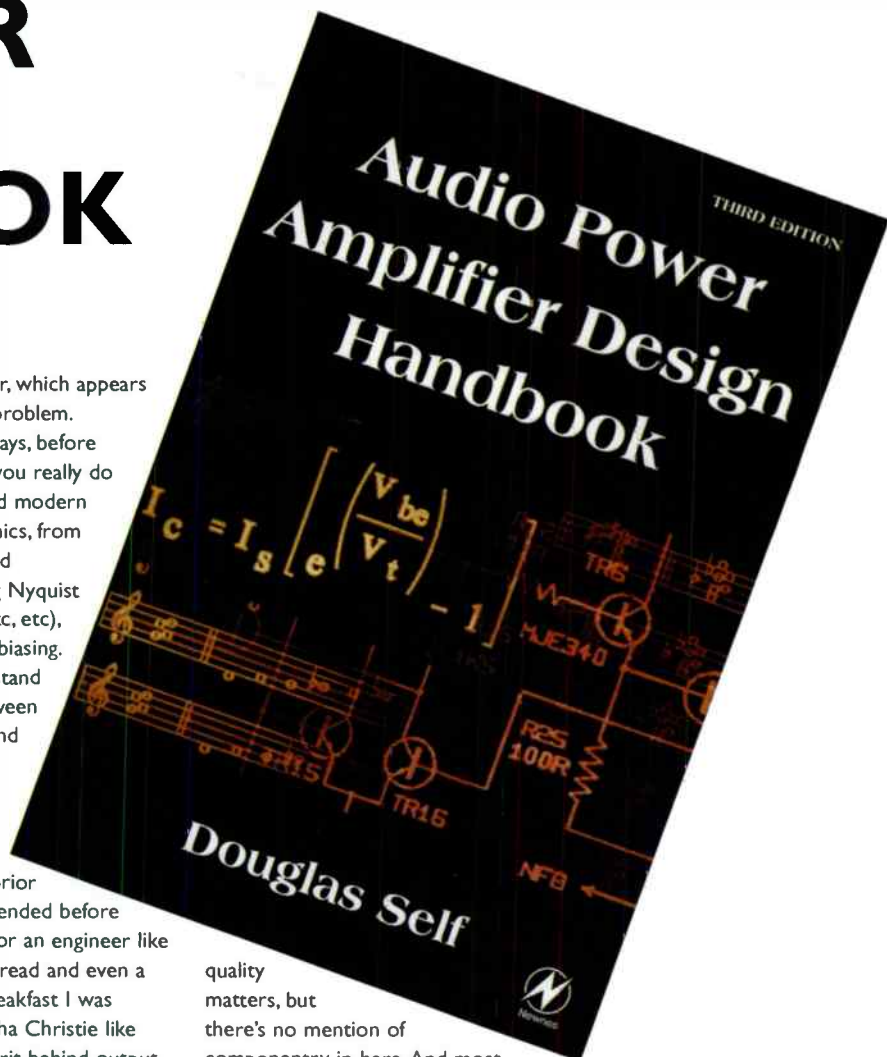
As Doug Self says, before reading this book you really do need to understand modern solid-state electronics, from Control Theory and Feedback, including Nyquist stability criteria (etc, etc), to semiconductor biasing. If you don't understand the difference between a current source and transconductance amplifier, nor can grapple with negative output impedances, then prior reading is recommended before tackling PAD. But for an engineer like myself it is a great read and even a racy one - over breakfast I was gripped by an Agatha Christie like search for the culprit behind output stage misbehaviour, but sadly in this instance Mr Self walked away from the pursuit just as he was closing in on the villain, an unstable output device suffering spurious oscillation, a grievous complaint in amplifiers, like Asian Bird Flu in chickens. In most cases, such as the Eight Mechanisms of Distortion Behaviour within a power amplifier, the culprit is tracked down, identified and cured. It's all good stuff!

Doug Self expresses strong opinions on most things audio and is dismissive of anything that cannot be quantified by measurement. Quite simply, it doesn't exist and to suggest it does is delusional. This is the limitation of the book and the approach; it admits to nothing outside that already known. Amplifier behaviour is dealt with strictly in terms of frequency response, distortion, slew rate, etc. But these parameters can be improved little nowadays, so further development is, by this view, pointless. Most designers nowadays acknowledge that component colouration does exist and, therefore, that component

quality matters, but there's no mention of componentry in here. And most designers and companies listen to their products too; not to do so is commercial suicide. Listening is irrelevant to Mr Self, a strange stance for a hi-fi designer you might think...

Greatest scorn is shown for anyone believing amplifiers have a sound quality that eludes current measurement methods and sadly this gets obsessive, as you can discover on the website: www.dself.dsl.pipex.com. But go also to a discussion site like www.diyaudio.com (solid state amps section) for a broader view if this subject interests you. Generally, Doug Self's published knowledge is valued and respected, whilst at the same time his limitations acknowledged.

This is largely my view. Doug Self's writing style is nothing other than racy and decisive - unusual in a field like this! His enthusiasm for the subject and level of enquiry are also impressive. I found the 'Audio Power Amplifier Design Handbook', 3rd edition, an education in many areas, although not all, and well worth having if you are thinking of entering the field of hi-fi amplifier design. **NK**



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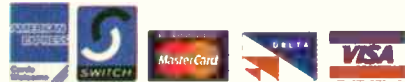
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BRYAN FERRY
BOYS AND GIRLS
 (HYBRID SACD: STEREO AND
 MULTI-CHANNEL DSD)

In January, EMI/Virgin released this gem for the European market with very little fanfare. It was a complete no-brainer that 'Boys And Girls' would make the ideal follow up to the masterful 'Avalon' SACD reissue, containing as it does a similarly tastefully judged mix of atmospheric and powerful song writing, something which cannot be said of all of Ferry's subsequent efforts. So 'Boys And Girls' is basically the 'Avalon' recipe once again, this time without Messrs. Mackay and Manzanera, but with a huge and impressive cast of sidemen in their place (Mark Knopfler? David Gilmour? Only your ears can tell you who does what, as there are no longer track-specific credits). There is even a similar brace of killer singles ('Slave To Love' and 'Don't Stop The Dance' for 'More Than This' and 'Avalon'). These songs have really stood the test of time. Again in parallel with 'Avalon' this album has been given the remix/re-master treatment by the original team (Bobs Clearmountain and Ludwig respectively), overseen by original producer Rhett Davies. The results are, if anything (and knowing the technical constraints under which the 'Avalon' SACD was put together), even better than the sublime multi-

channel 'Avalon'. For stereo enthusiasts the DSD track here demonstrates a hugely emphatic bass sound, and some holographic imaging, clearly besting Ludwig's five year-old HDCD transfer. The surround mix is as adventurous and inventive as that of 'Avalon', but somehow even more enjoyable. The only beef I have expressed to EMI is that the opportunity was missed to include the vaguely contemporaneous, very awesome, majestic Gilmour-soloing 'Is Your Love Strong Enough?' from the non-TD 'Legend' soundtrack – a hideous oversight. Sadly they agreed with me, but it was too late to do anything about it. Maybe when the Dual Disc comes out eh? Then we can have the video with old smoothie soloing on the stairs...

MARK KNOPFLER
SHANGRI-LA
 (HYBRID SACD: STEREO AND
 MULTI-CHANNEL DSD)

It's a tricky blighter in this game, confessing a liking for the lugubrious Geordie (no not that one - thankfully there's no Jimmy Nail this time!). What I mean is that the scars of 'Brothers In Arms' run deep – that's twenty years of hurt CD has caused us right there. But let's not forget that 'it' was preceded by four elegant, original albums, and Knopfler's first few soundtracks were masterpieces. Now I

haven't bought a Knopfler album since 'that one', but it is a signifier of how screwed up the multi-channel market is that I remember reading on one of the now long-defunct new format sites that MK's excellent second true solo effort 'Sailing To Philadelphia' was being prepped for DVD-Audio release fully four years ago – apparently never to be heard! Well, we may yet get that one in both formats, (wrestles with the video content for the DVD-Audio, apparently), but in the meantime we leap forward to his fourth solo album with 'Shangri-La'.

Prepare yourselves for this: are you sitting down? It's blooming brilliant! Admittedly, it's overlong as they all have been since... and the lyrical concerns and delivery are slightly aged and jaundiced, but it's beautifully recorded and the surround mix is a naturalistic classic, as is the stereo to be fair. There, that's another closet I'm out of, can I review the Gene Simmons Dual Disc next month now? P.S. Other interested parties should note that in the States, Warners have a CD and full DVD-Audio dual pack available (as is the plan with the proposed 'Sailing To Philadelphia' reissue), with 'making of type video extras – personally I am off to bag me a copy – it'll sound even better... and I'm not the only one who thinks so! 'Nuff said, I'll probably be shot for saying that [bang! – Ed.]?



KEANE
HOPES AND FEARS
(DUAL DISC: 24/96 STEREO
24/48 MULTI-CHANNEL)

Here is something that I really don't understand. Here we have one of the most successful Brit albums of last year, in fact the British album of the year at the Brits, with the band also emerging winners of the breakthrough act award, for what it's worth. Universal International pulled out the stops to get the multichannel version completed by gifted surround mixer (and son of master drummer Russ) Nathaniel Kunkel. It was then successfully authored and released in the States before the end of last year as both SACD and Dual Disc. Can you get either here? Fat chance.

You have to question Universal's commitment to SACD. I really wouldn't be surprised if the recently released SACD version of NIN's 'The Downward Spiral', and the much anticipated batch of Moody Blues titles are the end of it for them – after all, they have surely noticed that if even Sony have lost interest in releasing titles, (more on Sony's half-arsed Dual Disc endeavours next month), the jig is indeed up. It is to be hoped that Universal's attendance at March's UK Dual Disc launch will have convinced them to recant and join

Universal International's embracing of DVD-Audio, and Dual Disc in particular. Anyway, enough politics, what about the disc? I can't speak for the SACD (why bother when it's a PCM-originated project presented at an adequate resolution on Dual Disc?), but if you must have this album, this is the way to hear it. The stereo track is higher resolution than the feeble CD resolution which was trailed on the Universal New Formats website, and the surround track sounds equally full and present, if a little tame. There are no audio bonuses, which is a shame, but there is a reasonably complete set of singles videos. Knock yourselves out (in a wimp-rock style)...

SNOW PATROL
FINAL STRAIN
(DUAL DISC: 24/96 STEREO
24/48 MULTI-CHANNEL)

Now I know I have reviewed the SACD of this album before, but I wanted to highlight this disc's availability (in the States) to you, and make use of the opportunity to take back something I said six months ago. At the time I professed a preference for Keane over Snow Patrol, which I would now like to reverse. I am not sure if this is predominantly due to having witnessed the bizarre spectacle of a Rock City-full of middle aged people

going nuts for a plainly average Keane performance (even allowing for October colds - and let's face it, Snow Patrol aren't that much cop live either), or if it's just that the Keane album has a fast-food, quick-buzz kind of action, whereas the Snow Patrol grows with you over time, like all good albums should.

As is de rigeur with these new-fangled Dual Disc thingies we get a handful of videos, including an AOL Sessions version of 'Run'. But what really makes this album work (along with some interesting song writing) is its inventive way with recording technology, including the new version of the old 'vinyl drop on CD' routine, the inclusion of deliberate digital glitching sounds! It is an album which feels modern whereas Keane's unvarying Yamaha CP80 based sound just gets wearing, and reminds one of all the antecedents who used it back in its actual day (think 'October'-era U2). Snow Patrol's influences are obviously of a slightly later buzzsaw Pixies ilk, but are successfully subsumed into their own identity, while Keane's identity is hard to pin down. At least both albums are available in multichannel versions in both new formats, even if you have to go to the US for 3 out of 4 of them. Oh, and by the way, both Dual Disc tracks sound better than the SACD!

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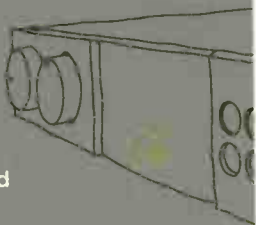
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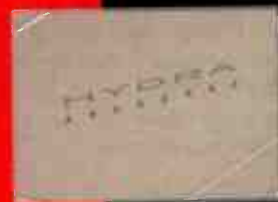
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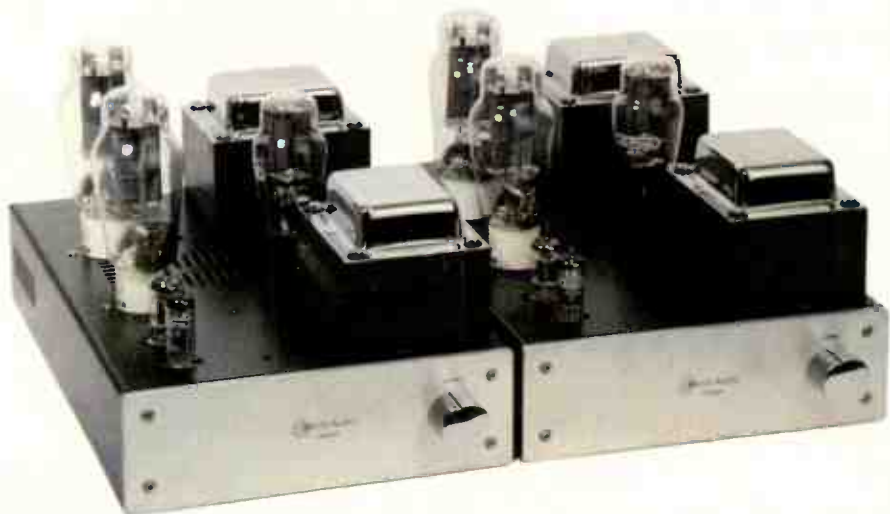


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Our Parallel Single Ended (PSE) power amplifiers offer ultimate sound quality. Each monobloc has two beautifully linear 300B directly heated triodes in its output stage, producing 20 watts into an 8 ohm load. At the front of the circuit we there is a 6AU6 pentode, followed by an ECC82 as the driver valve. This design uses a 5U4 rectifier valve in the power supply, in combination with a 10H choke, giving an extremely quiet supply. Both mains and output transformers are built on high quality E/I pattern cores.



Feedback can be switched in or out whilst running, using a rear panel switch. Complex layered and sectioned output transformers give full output and low distortion across the audio band even without feedback, making such an option possible.

This is one of the few amplifiers in the world so good it will work without feedback - and no feedback is the preference of most buyers. It gives a spacious, relaxed and fluid sound quite unlike that of solid-state amps, all of which use feedback to correct deficiencies.

By operating linearly in feedbackless, pure Class A, single-ended mode these

300B monoblocs are as pure as it gets - and sound quality reflects the fact. Fast, clean and clear in their presentation, at the same time their purity of sound is easy on the ear.

The kit is totally hard-wired; it does not use circuit boards. We can supply without valves, or with the superb Tesla 300Bs, Russian 5U4s and European 6AU6s & ECC82. Our 300B PSE kit bears an affordable price of £895.00 (UK price) excluding valves. Each monobloc weighs 23kgs (50lbs). External dimensions with valves: 25cm(w) x 38cm(d) x 22cm(h) per monobloc.

PUSH-PULL POWER

For more power, we also offer 300B in Push-Pull (PP) form. The 300B PP monobloc shares the same look and chassis as the 300B PSE monobloc. The 300B PP kit has been created for those who prefer a bit more power. With a pair of 300Bs in push-pull configuration providing 26 watts output, they will drive most modern loudspeakers to perfection. Andy Grove's design is totally feedbackless, using a 6AU6 pentode as the input valve and a 5687 as the phase splitter. The power supply uses a Russian 5U4 for rectification. The kit is constructed by hard wiring, so some experience is required. 300B PSE owners do have the option to buy the conversion kit for £250.00 to turn their monoblocs to push-pull status. Each monobloc weighs 23kg.

300B PSE MONOBLOC KIT £1197 per pair **300B PP MONOBLOC KIT £1197 per pair**

The PRE-II is a high quality valve pre-amplifier that will drive any power amplifier. It has a gain of x5 which, with CD, enables it to deliver a large 10V output swing. To keep the amount of active amplification low, this pre-amp uniquely uses a line drive transformer to deliver a pure signal to the power amplifier. There are six inputs, a tape monitor and two sets of output sockets. It is powered by the external PSU-II power supply. The volume control uses high quality Alps Blue potentiometer which, with our solid, turned brass, chromed knob, gives a quality feel rarely encountered these days.

PHONO-II is a dedicated valve phono stage for MM cartridges, with MC input transformers an option. By using all-d.c. supplies from PSU-II and a case in which there is no power supply, PHONO II is hum free, something that is difficult to achieve with valves. With accurate RIAA equalisation right down to 10Hz (-3dB) PHONO II gives a wonderfully pure, dimensional sound from LP, possessing a sense of life and dynamism quite different to solid-state preamps.

Finally, PSU-II is a power supply unit that feeds both the PRE-II and PHONO-II. Keeping the power supply separate removes hum, often the bane of valves.



Power Supply Unit (PSU-II)	£205.00
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Kel84 is an affordable, integrated valve amplifier for those who want to enjoy the valve sound, but from a simple, easy to build kit. It uses inexpensive EL84 output valves, known for their sweet sound, in conventional push-pull arrangement to provide 15 watts into an 8 ohm load. The output transformers are our own quality Ultra Linear design. Up front, the circuit employs an ECF80 input/phase splitter valve, which contributes to Kel84's extremely smooth sound.

The amplifier has very low hum and for simplicity it is built on a printed circuit board. A strong steel chassis is fronted by a 3mm anodised front panel and attractive brushed aluminium effect knobs. There are five line level inputs, plus one monitor input, with a tape output included, all controlled from the front panel.

At the rear is a mains switch/IEC power input, earth post, phono sockets, and 4mm banana sockets for loudspeakers. The Kel84 will highlight all the intricacies and depth of detail in your favourite recordings whilst retaining a warmth and fullness that is almost exclusive to pure valve amps and is rare at this price point.

Kel84 weighs 10kg. External dimensions with valves are 300mm(w) x 270mm(d) x 150mm(h). Single input version also available at £285.



KEL84 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT

£335



Our 6550 series amplifiers are built around the rugged 6550 beam tetrode that's popular in America. This valve is widely available at a good price. Producing no less than 40 watts into an 8 ohm load. (available in a 4 ohm version if required) our 6550 is a power house, since valve watts always sound louder than transistor watts!

The difference between our 6550 and most others is that we use valve rectification (5U4) and a choke pi filter, for a power supply that is quiet and free from solid-state hardness. This is a true high-end design from Andy Grove, hard wired. It is a cut above the many other 6550s, with enough power to drive most loudspeakers, including insensitive electrostatics for example. 6550 combines high



power with a top-end smoothness of sound, yet doesn't cost the earth to run, as the valves are inexpensive and have a long life.

The amplifier weighs 19kg. Dimensions are 390mm(w) x 330mm(d) x 190mm(h) with valves, or 220mm(h) with cage.

KIT6550 - An integrated amplifier with line inputs and volume control. Accepts CD, tuner, tape etc., but not LP.

KAT6550 - A power amplifier for use with a separate pre-amp. Paired with PRE II and PHONO II (+PSU II), can provide LP reproduction.

KIT6550 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT

£615

KAT6550 VALVE POWER AMPLIFIER KIT

£580

The Headphone II amplifier is a beautifully simple design using Mullard ECL83 valves, a triode and power pentode housed in the same envelope. It works directly from any source, be it CD, tape, tuner etc., or from an amplifier's tape out or pre-amp out sockets. The circuit uses high specification E/I output transformers that will drive any headphone load from 16 ohms to over 300 ohms depending on how the secondaries are wired up.

The Headphone II is a pure Class A single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for added sonic purity, and it is as quiet as a mouse. Treble has the crispness of the best solid-state, but with the tonal resolution and delicacy associated with valves. Bass is punchy and controlled without becoming artificial.

External dimensions 270mm wide, 275mm deep and 85mm high



HEADPHONE II

£285

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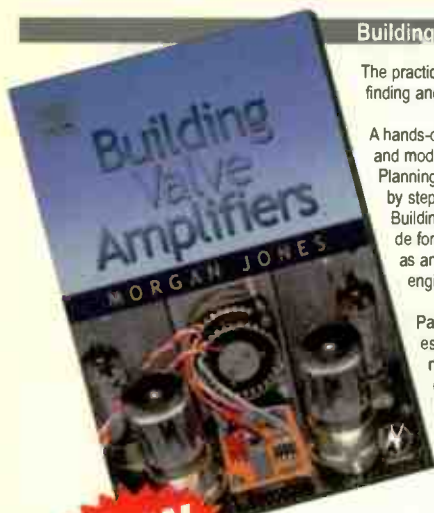
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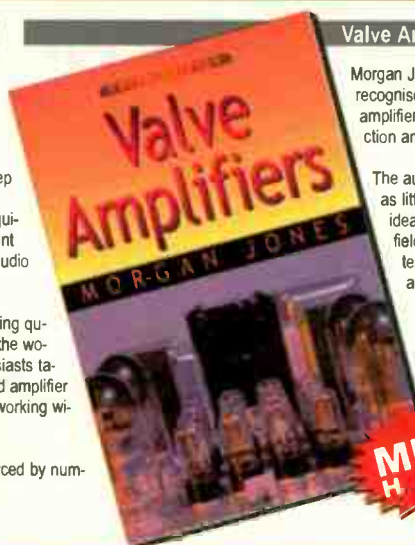
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KiT6550 with valves	£ 615.00	PSU-II mains transformer	£ 40.00	Kel80 PCB (pair)	£ 52.00
KiT6550 without valves	£ 485.00	300B mains transformer 300B	£115.00	KECL82 PCB	£ 25.00
Kel84 with valves	£ 298.00	6550 choke	£ 40.00	Headphone II PCB	£ 20.00
Kel84 without valves	£ 268.00	Kel84 choke	£ 20.00	PSU-II PCB	£ 20.00
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Headphone II	£ 285.00	PRE-II driver transformer (pair)	£ 80.00	Safety gloves SAFETY GLOVES	£ 25.00
300B PSE with valves	£1197.00 per pair	300B PSE output transformer (each)	£110.00	6550/34 safety cage	£ 80.00
300B PSE without valves	£ 895.00 per pair	300B PP output transformer (each)	£110.00	Step up transformers for MC to use with PHONO-II (pair)	£ 80.00
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As all the kits are capable of producing high voltages they require diligence and extreme care to build safely. Read the safety instructions thoroughly before construction. You must be able to solder to a reasonable standard and be able to read a circuit diagram. The KEL84 and series II kits are generally the most straightforward to construct as they utilise PCBs. None of the kits are suitable for children to build without total supervision.

If you are in any doubt about your ability to build one of our kits... give us a call! We'll give you straightforward, honest advice to enable you to pick a kit to suit your pocket and ability. We hail from an electronics background and have test-built every kit we sell. If you need help during assembly or just want to double check something... give us a call! If when you've done all the cold checks it won't fire up... give us a call! Around 95% of the calls we take for non-runners can be sorted in very little time with our guidance. We don't charge you extra for any of these calls, it's part of the package and at normal call cost. We do our best to cover normal working hours Monday to Friday but we're not a huge company so please be patient. If you get our answering service we're probably helping another customer and will contact you as soon as we are able. If you are one of the few that we can't get working you may send us the kit at your cost both ways and we will fix it for a reasonable cost based on workshop time. If we find it to be a faulty part (ie we agree it was defective when originally despatched) we'll bear the cost. If you've damaged it by poor construction or negligence then we'll charge you for the parts you damaged, fair enough? Before you buy an inferior kit take your time to find out what's included in the price. Before you buy an inferior kit find out how it sounds. World Audio Design. We're proud of our sound.

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Directions from the M25 London Orbital: Exit the M25 at junction 28 signposted Brentwood and Chelmsford. Take the A12 north bound heading Chelmsford and Colchester. Exit the A12 at the turning marked A414 Chelmsford and Harlow then at the Widford roundabout take the 1st exit heading Harlow A414. At the roundabout head right towards Writtle. At the T junction head right then left at the crossroads next to the Cock and Bell pub. When you see the village green to your left, take the next left and park up on the road adjacent to the green (near the Inn on the Green). Cross the road you just arrived on and locate Rumsey Row between the chemist and 'Which-Craft' WAD are located in the last unit on the right. If you have GPS, set it to "the Green" Writtle.

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The train journey from London, Liverpool Street station to Chelmsford takes about 40 minutes, with 3-4 trains running per hour. You can then get a taxi or catch a bus (numbers 45A & 45C) to Writtle Village Green where you will find Rumsey Row between the chemist and 'Which-Craft'. WAD are located at the far end in the last unit on the right.

By Air

London Stansted, London's third airport, is only a 35 minute drive from Writtle with cheap flights to many EU destinations. Heathrow and Gatwick are also easily accessible via the M25 (90 minute drive).



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“just as Japan based much of its growth on audio, so China has majored on consumer electronics”



noel keywood

DVD players are selling on Amazon.com for £24.99. How much lower can an item like this go, and just how did it ever come about that a complex technology like DVD could ever be packaged and sold at a price that's out of all proportion to the technology involved? Dismissed by some commentators at present as affecting only the bottom end of consumer electronics, this sort of price erosion is affecting hi-fi too.

DVD hardware manufacture is now almost exclusive to China. Much like the Japanese economy through the nineteen seventies and eighties, the Chinese one grew at a phenomenal rate of around 10% per annum GDP through the nineties, a figure that has been maintained in to this Millennium. No matter how much anyone might want to argue about the precise figures, it's obvious to visitors to China's industrial regions that this is very real. New roads, factories and housing are being constructed at breathtaking speed. Surprisingly, they also align with the West industrially, adopting Western safety standards and quality control techniques, not only to be able to export into demanding markets like the EU, but also to raise their own standards to those of the outside world.

Just as Japan based much of its growth on electronics, in a way that eluded Britain completely, so China has majored on consumer electronics (CE), of which hi-fi is a small and specialised arm. As we are constantly told, the country's labour rates are very low and there's no shortage a migrant workers from the countryside outside the economic zones looking for any work within them. The migration of workers from the land to the cities, parallels nineteenth century Britain as it industrialised.

But whereas Britons left the land to live and work in often dreadful conditions in the cities, in China they are greeted by conditions that in some areas even we would envy. The factories I have seen are not Victorian by any means, but the work is hard enough, gruelling even. All the same, whilst China has a sea of workers looking for jobs in electronic factories, we are going to continue to benefit from very low cost electronic goods, including DVD players for £25 and a complete home cinema system (Tesco) for £80...

So much for today - I suspect tomorrow could be even more interesting. It's easy to dismiss China and its current situation as one based solely on the benefits of cheap labour. That simply underestimates the skills of the Chinese, as well as their recognised capacity for work and their rapid advance. And hi-fi is as good a place as any to see what tomorrow holds.

Take for example the Chinese interest and regard for all things British, something that baffles me a little I have to admit. I was assured a long time ago by a marketing person in Gold Peak, the Hong Kong battery manufacturer that bought both KEF and Celestion in the 1990s, that you only have to put a Union Jack on the box to sell hi-fi in China. The Chinese have been happy to buy KEF and Celestion, then Wharfedale and Quad, plus the Leak brand name in order to exploit the power of brand image. I wouldn't say these purchases have been easily digestible; Chinese management style can be brisk, to say the least, and their view of the ailing companies they ended up with wasn't especially flattering. But it does show in its own small way how expansive the Chinese can be. The Chinese Diaspora is, after all, the world's largest. It's also worth bearing in mind that as Japan industrialised it didn't

purchase foreign companies in this manner, so much as build satellite factories of home brands like Sony and Panasonic.

The Chinese see things very differently from the Japanese and we can expect to see and hear much more from them in future. Whilst Japan sunk back as its speeding economy slowed in the late 1980s, China shows no sign of being afflicted by such insularity. Quite the reverse, I expect it to be more outward going and even assertive in its dealings with the outside world.

Japan has a very dedicated hi-fi fraternity that supports an internal market large enough to warrant specialist products. Now, as China expands and personal wealth increases the Chinese too are starting to produce seriously competitive hi-fi products, such as those from Shanling for example. This is likely to continue, and if Shanling are anything to go by Chinese designed hi-fi may well turn out to be far more stylish than that from Japan.

I've seen it said that there's no money to be made in DVD any more, hence the need for Blu-Ray. But the need to be competitive will dictate that China also builds Blu-Ray hardware; it's virtually impossible to prevent this. Sony and Philips have numerous Far East factories and both will be under pressure to get Blu-Ray out fast and cheap to fight off HD-DVD.

Whilst Japan and America both enjoy huge industrial might buoyed by the large home markets, as China develops it too will start to innovate and become more independent. Already the Chinese have their own video system, albeit based on U.S. compression technology, and are looking at Windows-free computer environments. If they go down this route we may well be enjoying more than cheap DVD players tomorrow. ●

“in a world of well made, intelligently designed amplifiers, it’s no longer a case of getting what works – but what works best for us”



David Price

While last month’s LP issue was all about passing an analogue assault course, laboriously searching out the best set-up for everything, this month has been an altogether more philosophical challenge. The LP will forever be a tweeker’s paradise, that’s one of its delights, but today’s amplifier is a different ball game altogether. These days, you fit it and forget it; no tweaking is possible. I’m talking solid-state, where you can’t pull transistors out and change them for a new better version (one day!). Or perhaps I should say it’s best not to; I’m sure some do. Valves are changeable, but at a price. That makes them tweaky, but all the same we’ve kept our feet on the ground and taken a close and critical look at solid-state this month, since it’s what most people buy and will be using.

Every amplifier in this issue is – to all intents and purposes – superbly engineered. But warp back to 1975, and a be-flared, high heeled, medallion wearing ‘Dave’ Price would have had to cope with a brace of stinkers, touting low power outputs, tragic build quality, concomitant sonics and a propensity to go up in smoke like Cheech and Chong. Now though, any of the products reviewed in this issue are technically nigh-on faultless, and sonically pretty damn good too. So we then find ourselves in the far more rarefied philosophical climes of ‘what constitutes a great amplifier?’

It’s at this point that the vexed subject of valves vs. transistors rears its ugly head. Eagle-eyed readers will have noticed that, for this issue at least, we’ve focused in on solid-state (it’s not as if this magazine never takes

the tube, is it?), but I found this very question coming back to haunt me right throughout the making of this particular issue.

A call from Ken Ishiwata in Belgium kicked it off – he’d read my review of the Shaniing valve power amps of a couple of months back, and was interested in my findings. He spends a lot of time in China these days and he’d obviously had the chance to pull apart an SP-80C on his day off. All he could tell me was what they’d done wrong. If only Shanling had used this component here, that component there. His verdict was that it was a very good Chinese copy of an established circuit design, but with poor detailing. I countered that it was still a redoubtable performer, and that I’d agonised over whether to give the five globes it eventually scored, as it was so obviously flawed (fizzy, edgy tonality) yet so brilliantly capable too (power, punch, visceral impact).

This brought home to me how hard it is to assess an amplifier. When I recently had lunch with Mission’s chief designer – the very knowledgeable and enthusiastic (valve and vinyl fan) Peter Comeau – we’d been talking about how hi-fi hacks of the early nineteen seventies had reviewed equipment. Peter commented on how they’d spend two pages talking about the build, facilities and measured performance, then mention the ‘subjective sound quality’ as a parting shot in the last paragraph, sentence even! The Holy Grail was distortion, or lack thereof, and given swingeing amounts of negative feedback, transistor amps could bury it, and to hell with the sound!

It was only in the late seventies/ early eighties, with a new generation of hi-fi

scribes (including Peter), that so-called ‘subjective reviewing’ flourished. Suddenly there was more to life than Total Harmonic Distortion and power output into 8 ohm loads. Still, Peter and I agreed, the men of the moment couldn’t abandon tubes fast enough – and a world of feedback-riddled MOSFET devices took centre stage...

Fortunately (and thanks in no small part to our very own publisher), these are more enlightened days where people are assessing all amplifiers as inherently flawed, and making intelligent buying decisions as to which particular compromises they can live with, and which ones they can’t. In my reviewing, I’ll not think twice about switching from solid-state to tube if the former can’t deliver the goods (i.e. music), yet nor will I hesitate to switch back if I need something that glowing glass can’t give. In a world of very well made, intelligently designed amplifiers, it’s no longer a case of getting what works, but what works best for ourselves.

Which brings me to this month’s cover star, the Sugden A21SE integrated. This, I believe, is one of the most musical solid-state amplifiers I have ever heard – and yet it sounds oh-so different to another one of the most musical (the Naim NAP250). And it also sounds so different to the best tube amp I’ve set ears on, the madcap Graaf GM20. Here we have pure Class A solid-state, heavily class AB solid-state, and output transformerless pure Class A tubes – and they’re all magic, stunning even, and yet so different. All this leads me to reflect, if there ever is such a thing as amplifier perfection (where there’s one, natural, right product), then we’re still a heck of a long way from it... ●

"if the product is right, there will always be demand..."



dominic todd

Recently a few younger mates came around to my house. As they came in, they gawped straight towards my iMac and said something along the lines of, "wow, an iMac!". Fair enough, perhaps, as the iMac is still a striking piece of design, despite this particular one being the older, dome-base, model. Yet, what galled me was that to see the Mac they had all looked straight past a Musical Fidelity A5cr pre/power and CD player and the undeniably handsome Wilson Benesch Circles! Not a word was mentioned about any of these, even though they had a combined worth of around ten times that of the Mac and, in the Curve's case, enough carbon fibre on show to fashion a Formula 1 racing car wing. Upon reflection, I can't help but feel that this reaction is typical of the problem hi-fi separates face today: That of invisibility.

Sadly, looking at some recent figures from GfK – the people who measure consumer spending on electronics – the facts back up my own, and other commentators, gut feelings. That is to say that the hi-fi market is having a fairly rough time of it of late. Last year saw a further decline in the sales of hi-fi separates. If you look back, you'll actually see that it has been in steady decline since 2001, but 2004 saw some especially alarming figures. That MiniDisc sales should decline by 42% is perhaps no great surprise, but falls of 23% and 13% in terms of amplifier and speaker sales volumes is rather more alarming. As many retailers will tell you, this is only the beginning of the story, as it doesn't account for lower average prices (or value) and reduced margins. Sadly, after a

brief rise in 2003, the sales of turntables were also down last year. Mind you, the 5% fall in value against the 15% fall in volume at least shows that the average price, and therefore presumably in this case, the quality, improved last year. With a number of high-end turntables being launched last year, I feel that these figures are borne out.

Better news still comes from less traditional areas of hi-fi where, as you might expect, there have been significant improvements. In 2004 DVD continued its record breaking success with an amazing 6.2 million sales posted within the UK. In broad terms that means that, on average, 1 in every 4 households bought a DVD player last year! With the average price now below £100 and models starting from as little as £20, those sort of figures are perhaps not so surprising, and I can only imagine that 2004 has to represent a peak for sales of DVD players. DVD-recorders, though, are perhaps another matter, with a good few years of ascent to come.

DAB had a mixed year with excellent sales for portable units, but a lack of volume in the separates market accounting for a 26% fall in the sales volumes of tuner separates as a whole. I should think that this will continue to be something of a slow burn technology which, rather like Nicam TV, will take years to really have an impact: - How many new cars come equipped with DAB tuners, for example?

We all know that MP3 was something of a star performer last year, but an increase in volume of 572% surprised even the advocates. Perhaps it's little wonder hi-fi separates are losing out when it appears that

everyone is buying MP3 recorders and, but of less relevance to us, LCD flat screen TVs. With MP3 being such a big hitter it was perhaps a surprise to find that the sales of portable CD players actually increased by 23% in volume and that portable MiniDisc recorders fell by only 12%. With CD portables now commonly selling for less than £8, I should think that it will be some time before they suffer a serious fall. Portable MiniDisc, on the other hand, must surely go the same way as its full size brethren over the course of 2005.

Yet, whilst there is an element of doom and gloom within the separates hi-fi industry, there is still plenty of hope. With MP3 having proved such a phenomenal success for the portable market, there's surely some growth here in the separates arena. Cambridge are soon to launch a "jukebox" system, based upon the Azur 640C CD player, that could well prove to be a hit this year, and others are cautiously following. The accessory market, especially for headphones, has done well, and shows great potential for this year, especially if the MP3 market continues its growth. It should also be pointed out that there are still individual companies that had a profitable year in 2004, showing that if the product is right, there will always be demand.

Overall then, despite taking a bit of a hit last year, I feel that there is plenty to be optimistic about in the world of hi-fi. Now, if anyone in the hi-fi industry wants a hot tip on how to make their latest hi-fi separate really sell, I suggest making it out of white plastic and calling it a name with the second letter capitalised... ●

“he had implored Steinway in New York to make him an aluminium piano, but they had flatly refused”



It's set right

The President of the United States of America (then Harry S Truman) took amiss the loss of \$50m a year to a British shipping operator. That is what Cunard's liners Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, rehabilitated after the war, were gathering in their weekly transAtlantic services, and the US government resolved to redress the balance by funding 64% of the \$75m it would take to build a rival ship.

The designer commissioned for the job was one William Francis Gibbs. He designed a vessel, to enjoy brief fame as the USS United States, as big as the Queens but 30,000 tons lighter, because she was the first large ship whose superstructure was made entirely of light alloys. Gibbs was properly horrified by the idea of a fire at sea, and would have no wood in the ship if he could help it. He nearly succeeded, but in the end had to be content with boasting that the only wood on board was the piano and the butchers' blocks. He had implored Steinway in New York to make him an aluminium piano, but they had flatly refused.

The popular notion that for making music (and for making auditoria) there was nothing like wood is as understandable as it is unfortunate. Centuries of wooden boxes for every stringed instrument from virginals to violins, of wooden tubes for any wind instrument (other than trumpets, horns, and sackbuts) from shawms to swinepipes, even for some of the pipes in an organ, had made laymen suppose that the wood affected the tone. In vain did physicists insist that what mattered were the conformation and behaviour of the air inside the tube or box: music was natural, wood was natural, and that was that. Metal instruments were despised.

You cannot listen to a recorded flute and know from the sound whether it be

made of seasoned wood or silvered brass. I cannot tell blindfold whether I am playing a wooden or a metal clarinet (the sound really depends on the player, more than on the instrument), except that the metal one warms up more quickly. There are plenty of quite satisfactory plastics clarinets around, and there used to be a plastics saxophone, played by some eminent performers. If only somebody had tried to produce a serious metal stringed instrument, instead of limiting the effort to a cheap pressed steel toy violin... There are some beautiful and futuristic 'silent' electronic violins about nowadays, quite skeletal in their reinforced-polymer structures, but who dares perform publicly with them, or with some acoustic equivalent in carbon fibre and Kevlar? No, it is wood, wood, all the time and everywhere.

So we find it even in loudspeakers, in gramophones, occasionally in valve amplifiers, even – quite inexplicably, considering the needed rigidity – in pick-up cartridges. Yet these are all engineering products, and wood is not an engineering material. It warps, swells, shrinks, cracks, and creates all manner of unpredictable and quite intolerable disasters, most of them resulting from its porous, irregular, lamentably discontinuous structure.

Years ago I had some quite good Sony headphones, rendered suspicious by their wooden earshells, pleasant enough to look at but hardly to be trusted. As it happened it was not a failure of the wood that prompted me to discard them: an accidental shearing of the cable led to the discovery that, because of the way the cable was integrated with the rest, the possibility of replacing the cable was denied. If I wanted a new cable, I should simply buy a new pair of headphones. I did...

The pair I bought were not made by Sony but by Sennheiser – their latest HD560

Ovation II, if that helps you to date them. I had tried a Beyer pair, but Beyer were mainly in the business of making studio equipment, and consequently all their headphones were then of the closed type, which did not suit me at all. The open-backed Sennheiser seemed marvellous, if rather costly, and I was hooked. Only after protracted use did an intermittent drop-out of one channel prove tricky to eradicate, and for a while – being the sort of chap who does not readily change his allegiances – I thought of buying the latest Sennheiser again.

What worried me was that the latest Sennheiser never remains so for long. The firm nowadays seems to have adopted a mentality more appropriate to fashion accessories, and to be changing its designs as often as the girls change their lipsticks. Should I consider Beyer again? They are not given to seasonal changes – they still include their original pre-war model in their range – but they have expanded their outlook enough to include open-backed headphones among their offerings. I did; I was encouraged; I tried; I bought. The Beyer DT440 has been around for a year or so, and is cheaper than their super-duper professional models, but what makes it just the ticket for me is that its impedance (32 ohms) exactly matches the outputs from my Linn Wakonda and from my Sony Professional Walkman. I am sure that this makes an enormous difference to the performance of a headphone and accounts for the fact (and I do not doubt that it is a fact) that the Beyer gives much better listening than the 300 ohm Sennheiser did.

Nobody ever mentions impedances when reviewing headphones in magazines, but it is pointed out in a Beyer brochure that they matter. If you are a buyer, take note. ●

"it's impossible for anyone to say I have concealed my Apple tendencies – I have always been open in my admiration!"



patrick cleasby

It's confession time. In typical style my response to last month's Letter of the Month from Alex Ashworth in Australia – accusing me of unquestioning devotion to all things Apple - hadn't fully formed in my mind before the issue went to press, but it would have been along these lines, and at least I get more space to pontificate here!

I'm a bit mystified that it took as long as it did for me to get picked up on my Mac-loving shtick, but never mind. There is an extent to which I am playing up to my own persona, but there are deep-seated reasons for my undeniable enthusiasm. The one thing it is impossible for anyone to say is that I have concealed my preferences in any way – I have always been open about my admiration for Apple's strategy in this column.

Alex's letter was as partisan in its own way as I am, but perhaps knowing my leanings it was difficult for him to see that the group test was exactly about giving the opposition the 'fair stab' that he felt they were denied. They had their chance, and they failed to displace the iPod. (Incidentally, a result repeated in many other less exacting magazines than this one).

The first thing to say is with regard to the anecdotal example quoted in Alex's letter. As written it is methodologically flawed. You have to read it that he is saying WAV from an iRiver sounds better than 320kbps AAC on a 3G iPod. Surely not??

The second thing to say is that I was very careful to establish my own

methodology, which was to test headphone listening of the highest quality compressed codec each machine could manage. This means that while I might have had time to test the line-out capabilities of the iRiver in a standalone review, it could not be accommodated in my group test (and was not tested).

The final thing to say is that DP's belief that I was wrestling with myself was not the case – the iPod won on listening (remember that it was a 4G too) and it won on everything else too, with the possible exception of some of the Swiss Army knife capabilities of the iRiver, which was why it justifiably came second. But 'everything else' includes style, both externally and in terms of interfaces, and it cannot be avoided that the iRiver is butt-ugly on both points. It wouldn't surprise me if Alex is a Linux geek, as iRiver really is the Linux of portable MP3 players. And I like that!

Now, more on what kind of geek I am. This is going to give those who question my objectivity plenty of ammunition, but I am convinced that my journalistic integrity (cough!) is up to it. When I started my involvement with this magazine eighteen months ago it was with a 3G iPod review among other things. At the time I had been professionally authoring music DVDs using the Apple pro tools for two years. (I still do). Consumer gadgets were initially a distraction from real work, until the tide got too strong and I had to take an interest. As soon as I understood the iTunes/iPod thing I was convinced, much as I had been on a technical

level by OSX 10.1.3 (thankfully I started on levels of operating system, Final Cut Pro and DVD Studio Pro which basically worked).

And so it was that I came to add a third string to my bow, as six months after that I became the professional video solutions consultant at Jigsaw Systems, the leading UK Mac reseller. I don't sell, I don't make commission and consumer stuff is really a distraction to the professional digital creative marketplace we serve. There is no reason that my involvement with them should bias my critical objectivity - I am there because I am independently an evangelist for Apple technology, not vice versa.

Anyone who doubts this should take a look at next month's Roku Soundbridge review – here we have a superior Apple-competing Microsoft-supporting (my anti-Microsoft feelings had formed long before I even started to use Apple!) product which is given an admiring review – with the side-benefit of informed Apple development status to aid any potential purchasing decision. The one benefit the Jigsaw tie-up does bring is being extremely well-informed with current Apple goings on.

Apple may be well out in front in the digital lifestyle stakes at the moment, but that does not mean they may not lose that lead (they have before). If they do, you can rely on me to comment and review with equanimity, and if you don't believe me, you have the option of not reading me. But I guess we all hope that you continue to do so, after all, if you did not, you might be missing out, mightn't you...? ●

World classics

In this heavily revised section, you'll find the great and the good from audio's glorious past. Most are seminal designs which have earned their place in hi-fi history, but you'll also see some oddities which aren't classic as such, but are great used buys. The year of introduction is given, alongside the original UK launch price. Think we've overlooked something? Then write in and let us know!

DIGITAL

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

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

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

MARANTZ CD73 1983 [£700]
A riot of gold brushed aluminium and LEDs, this distinctive machine squeezed every last ounce from its 14x4 DAC -super musical



MARANTZ SA-1 2000 [£5,000]
The greatest argument for SACD. This sublime Ken Ishiwata design is utterly musically convincing with both CD and SACD, beating most audiophile CD spinners hands down.



MERIDIAN 207 1988 [£995]
Beautifully-built two-box with pre-amp stage. Very musical although not as refined as modern Bitstream gear. No digital output.

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRIVISTA 2002 [£4000]
When playing SACDs, the sweetest, most lucid and lyrical digital disc spinner we've heard. Old school stereo, pure DSD design. CD sound is up in the £1000 class, too! Future classic.

MERIDIAN MCD 1984 [£600]
The first British 'audiophile' machine was a sweeter, more detailed Philips CD100. 14x4 never sounded so good, until the MCD Pro arrived a year later.



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



SONY CDP-101 1982 [£800]
The first Japanese CD spinner was powerful and involving. Brilliant transport more than compensated for 16x2 DAC, and you even got remote control!

SONY CDP-R1/DAS-R1 1987 [£3,000]
Sony's first two boxer was right first time. Tonally lean, but probably the most detailed and architectural sounding machine of the eighties.



SONY CDP-701ES 1984 [£890]
Sony's first ever bespoke high end audiophile machine used a 16x2 DAC to provide a clinically incisive sound; supreme build quality allied to the pure unadulterated luxury of a paperback-sized remote control.

YAMAHA CD-X1 1983 [£340]
Nicely built 16x2 machine with a very sharp and detailed sound; sometimes too much so. Excellent ergonomics, unlike almost every other rival of the time.

COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

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



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

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

DACs

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



DCS ELGAR 1997 [£8500]
Extremely open and natural performer, albeit extremely pricey - superb.



DPA LITTLE BIT 3 1996 [£299]
Rich, clean, rhythmic and punchy sound transforms budget CD players.



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



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

TURNTABLES

ARISTON RD11S 1972 [£94]
Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm, Scotland's original super-deck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

PIONEER PL12D [1973] £36

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



DUAL CS505 1982 [£75]

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

GOLDRING Lenco 88/89 1963 [£15.65]

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

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



TECHNICS SP10 1973 [£400]

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

MARANTZ TT1000 1978 [£ N/A]

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



MICHELL GYRODEC 1981 [£599]

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

REGA PLANAR 3 1978 [£79]

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

GARRARD 301/401 1953 [£19]

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



ROKSAN XERXES 1984 [£550]

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

THORENS TD124 1959 [£ N/A]

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



TOWNSHEND ROCK 1979 [£ N/A]

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

TRIO LO-7D 1978 [£600]

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

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 AT 1120 1978 [£75]

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

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 has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

GRACE G707 1974 [£58]

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

REGA RB300 1983 [£88]

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



SME SERIES III 1979 [£113]

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

HADCOCK GH228 1976 [£46]

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



LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 [£253]

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

NAIMARO 1986 [£875]

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



TECHNICS EPA-501 1979 [£ N/A]

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

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS

DELTEC 1987 [£1900]

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

ROGERS A75 1978 [£220]

The prototypical Audiolab 8000a – lots of sensible facilities, a goodly power output and nice sound in one box. The later A75II and A100 versions offered improved sonics and were seriously sweet and open to listen to.

EXPOSURE VII/VIII 1985 [£625]

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

**SUGDEN CS1/P51** 1976 [£130]

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

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

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

A&R A60 1977 [£115]

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

**CREEK CAS4040** 1983 [£150]

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

AUDIOLAB 8000A 1985 [£495]

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

**MCINTOSH MA6800** 1995 [£3735]

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

SUGDEN A21 1969 [£ N/A]

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

MISSION CYRUS 2 1984 [£299]

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

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A1** 1985 [£350]

Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.

**NAIM NAIT** 1984 [£350]

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

NAD 3020 1979 [£69]

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

**MYST TMA3** 1983 [£300]

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

ROGERS CADET III 1965 [£34]

Sweet sounding valve integrated, uses ECL86 output valves, even has a half useable phono stage, sweet, warm a good introduction to valves

**ROTEL RA-820BX** 1983 [£139]

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

PREAMPLIFIERS**AUDIOLAB 8000C** 1991 [£499]

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

AUDIO RESEARCH SP-81 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 monoblocs - cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

QUAD 33 1968 [£43]

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

POWER AMPLIFIERS**LEAK STEREO 20** 1958 [£31]

Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier with decent power and drive. Surprisingly modern sounding if rebuilt sympathetically. Irrepressibly musical and fluid.

**LECSON AP1** 1973 [£ N/A]

Madcap cylindrical styling alluded to its 'tower of power' pretensions, but it wasn't. Poor build, but decently clean sounding when working.

MARANTZ MODEL 9 1997 [£8000]

Authentic reproduction monoblocs still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

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

LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1 1949 [£28]
Early classics that are getting expensive. Overhauling is de 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.



RADFORD STA25 RENAISSANCE 1986 [£977]

At the time, very possibly the least cool amplifier on the planet – and we're not talking heat dissipation here. This reworking of Radford's original late sixties design was possessed of a wonderfully rich, old school valve sound with enough power (25W) and lots of subtlety.



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



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

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

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

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



PHONO STAGES

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



LINN LINNK 1984 [£149]
Naim-designed MC phono stage built to partner the original Naim NAIT – yes, really! Fine sound, although off the pace these days.

MICHELL ISO 1988 [£ N/A]
This Tom Evans-designed black box started the trend for high performance offboard phono stages. Charismatic, musical and punchy – if lacking in finesse.

TUNERS

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



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

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

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

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

LEAK TROUGHLINE 1956 [£25]
Series I an interesting ornament but limited to 88-100MHz only. II and III are arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiplex socket. Fed by a modern outboard decoder they're deliciously lucid with true dimensionality.



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

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



REVOX B760 1975 [£520]
More of a semi-pro machine than a domestic bit of kit, the Revox offers superlative measured performance although the sound isn't quite as staggering as the numbers. Fine nonetheless, and surely the most durable tuner here?

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

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

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

SONY ST-5950 1977 [£222]
One of the first Dolby FM-equipped tuners, a format that came to nought. Still, it was Sony's most expensive tuner to date, and boasted a very good sound quality allied to brilliant ergonomics.



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

ANALOGUE RECORDERS

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



AIWA XD-009 1989 [£600]
Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn't half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!

NAKAMICHI CR-7E 1987 [£800]
The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.



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



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



SONY WM-D6C 1985 [£290]
Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single rec/replay head better than most Naks. Result: sublime.



DIGITAL RECORDERS

SONY MDS-JE555ES 2000 [£900]
The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 [£480]
For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

MARANTZ DR-17 1999 [£1100]
Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



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

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

LOUDSPEAKERS

ACOUSTIC RESEARCH ARI8S 1978 [£125]
Yank designed, British built loudspeaker became a budget staple for many rock fans, thanks to the great speed from the paper drivers, although finesse was most definitely not their forte...

BBC LS3/5A 1972 [£88]
Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects - articulation, stage depth, clarity - and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers AB1 subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!



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

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

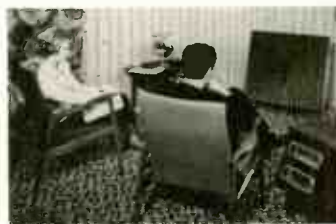


JR 149 1977 [£120]
Infamous cylindrical speaker that was ignored for decades but now back in fashion! Based on classic KEF T27 / B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity in imaging.



SPENDOR 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 bene-moth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

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Denon AVR 2803 AV Amplifier (1Yr G/tee)	(649.00)	£399.00	Naim NBL Speakers - Beech (2Yr G/tee)	(7700.00)	£3795.00
Linn Majik Phono Amplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(945.00)	£625.00	ProAc Studio 125 Speakers Maple (2Yr G/tee)	(999.00)	£699.00
Linn Kairn Pro Line Preamp S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(1400.00)	£599.00	Pioneer DVR3100* DVD Recorder/Player (1Yr/Gtee)	(349.00)	£219.00
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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...



QUAD ESL63 1980 [£1200]

An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics.



MISSION 770 1980 [£375]

Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs. warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound.



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!



LEAK SANDWICH 1961 [£39 EACH]

Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



MISSION X-SPACE 1999 [£499]

The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy sound nevertheless!



MISSION 752 1995 [£495]

Cracking Henry Azima-designed floor-standers combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

HEYBROOK HB1 1982 [£130]

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

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

TURNTABLES

AN TTI/ARM ONE/IQ1 1998 £725

Redesigned Systemdek IIX now off the pace, but the arm and cartridge are both star performers.

LINN LP12/ LINGO 1973 £2100

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

MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £575

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

MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2002 £870

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

MICHELL ORBE SE 2002 £1916

Cost-no-object evolution of the Gyro adds massy acrylic platter and two-stage isolation. Fantastically capable all rounder with commanding, powerful, detailed sound that gets the best from almost any arm and cartridge.



PRO-JECT DEBUT II

PHONO SB 2002 £170

Fuss-free all in one starter turntable, complete with built in phono stage. Not a star performer, but a fine midi system upgrade all the same.

REGA P3 2000 £298

Great entry level audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and responds well to careful siting on a Base platform.

REGA P25 2001 £619

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

SME MODEL 10A 1995 £3333

Exquisitely engineered deck and arm combo, but dry and clinical sounding compared to rivals. Accomplished performer with classical music, nonetheless.

CLEARAUDIO REFERENCE 1996 £4,070

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

ORIGIN LIVE AURORA

GOLD 2004 £1,470

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



GOLDRING GR-1 2004 £140

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

THORENS TD190 2003 £290

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

ROKSAN RADIUS 5 2003 £750

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



MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £399

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

ORIGIN LIVE AURORA 2003 £1600

Cleaner than a Linn LP12 and warmer and more mellifluous than a Michell GyroDec - but lacks the latter's incision and dimensionality. When fitted with an OLI arm, this package is all many will ever want...

CLEARAUDIO REFERENCE 2003 £4,000

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

TONEARMS

TECHNICS SL1200/III 1973 £395

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



HADCOCK 242 SE 2000 £649

Latest of a long line of unipivots, with added mass, revised geometry and better finish. Musical like few others at or near the price.

LINN EKOS 1987 £1700

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

ORIGIN LIVE ILLUSTRIOUS 2002 £1570

A modern superarm with battleship build. Extremely strong, even and open sound in the mould of the late, lamented Zeta, plus fine tonal colouring. Exquisite.



NAIM ARO 1987 £1425

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

ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2502001 £625

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

REGA RB250 1984 £112

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

SME 309 1989 £767

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

SME SERIES IV 1988 £1127

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

SME SERIES V 1987 £1614

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

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

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

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-110 1984 £29**

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

DYNAVECTOR DV10X5 2003 £250

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

GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135

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

LYRIA LYDIAN BETA 1998 £600

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

SUMIKO BPS 1995 £250

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

LYRA PARNASSUS DCT 1997 £1895

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

ORTOFON MC25FL 1994 £285

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

ORTOFON MC30 SUPR' 1995 £550

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

DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395

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

**MUSIC MAKER 1999 £575**

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

SHURE V15XMR 1994 £350

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

KOETSU RED 2004 £1,600

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

ORTOFON KONTRA PUNKT C 2004 £1,000

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

DIGITAL DISC PLAYERS**CREEK CD50II 2004 £699**

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

CYRUS CD8 2003 £1000

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

LINN GENKI 1999 £995

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

ARCAM FMJ CD33T 2003 £1,300

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

**LINN IKEMI 1999 £1950**

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

MARANTZ CD17 II 2002 £800

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

NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4950

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

NAIM CDS3 2003 £7050

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

PHILIPS DVD963SA 2003 £400

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

REGA PLANET 2002 £498

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

MARANTZ SA-17S1 2003 £1400

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

**REGA JUPITER 2002 £1000**

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA21 DAC 2003 £1,200

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

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640C 2003 £250**

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

CREEK CD50II 2004 £699

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

DENON DVD-2200 2003 £499

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

PANASONIC DVD-S75 2002 £120
Real ability and fine measured performance for an unbelievably low price. Impressive in its own way, if not truly audiophile. If you just want a cheap DVD spinner with DVD-Audio as a bolt-on goodie, this is the one.

PIONEER DV-868AVI 2003 £799
Pioneer's most accomplished mid-price machine to date, this boasts full DVD-A/SACD playback, a welter of facilities and the all-important HDMI video and I-Link audio digital outputs, making it nigh-on future-proof. Factor in fine – if not outstanding – sound and superb pictures and it's practically impossible to fault.

SONY SCD-XB790 2003 £250
Quite unlike any other budget Sony CD spinner we've heard, here's a very 'analogue' sounding machine that's smooth and warm and even. Factor in fine SACD playback and this machine is a brilliant budget buy – unless you want DVD-Audio that is, which it lacks.



ORELLE CD100EVO 2003 £1,200
Extremely engaging and musical sound, but maybe a tad too bracing for some tastes. Superb aesthetics complete an attractive package.

ARCAM CD73 2004 £400
The best all rounder at the price; unfailingly smooth and couch sound allied to fine build and attractive styling makes this a worthy upgrade to entry-level designs.

ARCAM DV78 2004 £800
We've not found a more capable 'real world' DVD player; peerless picture and CD sound at the price, although lack of universal playback will deter some.

ARCAM FMJ CD33 2004 £1,300
Consummate smoothie with an unusually organic and natural sound, but lacks the command of some rivals. Its all round sonic, aesthetic and ergonomic polish will endear it to many.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640C 2004 £250
The best budget CD spinner we've heard: warm and satisfyingly musical; fine build and aesthetics and that remote control make for unarguable package at the price.

DENON DVD-A11 2004 £1,600
Classic Japanese 'battleship' DVD universal machine does practically everything superbly, with no obvious weak points except the undistinguished CD sound. Top value.

EXPOSURE 3010 2003 £1,200
One of the most 'analogue' CD players, second only to the Shanling. Wonderfully beguiling balance leaves you looking for the tube output stage.

LINN CLASSIC MOVIE SYSTEM DI 2002 £2,500
Superb ergonomics and performance from this one-box beauty. The best 'home theatre in a box' you can buy.

LINN UNIDISK I.1 2004 £6,500
Surely the ultimate universal DVD player; superb in every department, but its CD playback shines brightest considering it's not a bespoke Red Book machine.

MARANTZ CD7300 2003 £350
Superlative build and styling for the money, and the sound is as good as you'll get below £600. Smooth, detailed and engaging beyond its price.

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-RAY V3 2004 £900
Striking looking mid-price stunner with very even, accurate and even sonics; perfect for those seeking detail and neutrality over character and/or colour.

NAIM CDS1 2004 £825
The most engaging mid-price CD player on the market, but with a surprisingly velvety sound. Delightful build and iconic styling make this one of Salisbury's true classics.

PIONEER DV-8681 2003 £800
The best mid-price universal player right now; CD sound is respectable, SACD and DVD-A impressive and the video truly special. Does everything very well for the price.

SHANLING SCD-T200C 2004 £2,150
Superb SACD player with tube output stage; arresting looks and truly special sound; be sure to go for 3DAcoustics version for best sound and UK after-sales support.

SONY SCD-XA3000ES 2003 £600
Surprising mid-price SACD spinner with multi-channel capability; sweet sound; not the best at the price but certainly the most versatile.

SONY SCD-XA9000ES 2003 £1,600
Slick, beautifully built high end SACD player with very transparent, if rather dry, sound. Unexpectedly sweet CD playback but not the most gripping at the price.

STELLO DP-200 2004 £1,495
Brilliant do-it-all upsampling DAC preamp with headphone output and phono in. One of the best digital to analogue converters around, allied to mind-boggling flexibility.

DIGITAL RECORDERS

APPLE IPOD 40GB £399
Genre-defining best of breed, thanks to supreme ergonomics and build allied to fine sound.

PIONEER PDR-609 2001 £200
Brilliant value CD recorder that makes excellent recordings from its digital inputs. Half decent digital converters, too.

PHILIPS DVDR880 2003 £370
Poor CD audio playback, but makes great DVD video recordings and boasts fine ergonomics. Top AV value.

SONY RCD-W3 2002 £250
Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for nonsense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

YAMAHA CDR-HD1300E2002 £600
HD means MD-style ease of editing, but compromises recording quality ever-so slightly. Add decent CD replay and it's a fine all rounder nonetheless – top value.



ONKYO MB-S1 2001 £1100
An interesting machine complete with MP3 functionality, but high price, fussy ergonomics and over-smooth sound make it mediocre value against the Yamaha.

PHONO STAGES

CREEK OBH-2ISE 2003 £250
Musically enjoyable yet highly refined for the price – a superb buy. Gives the Dino a real hard time.

EAR 834P 1993 £400
Classic tube design with a deliciously warm and expansive sound – shame about the loose bass and veiled treble!

LINN LINTO 2000 £900
A musical and incisive performer, with more speed than the Delphini at the expense of detail and tonal colour.

QED DISCSAVER 1995 £35
Rhythmic, bouncy sound via battery, although it's bright and forward. Great value, but £100 more on the X-LP is well worth it!

TRICHORD DINO 2002 £299
Great all rounder with switchable MM/MC. Fast, fluid and smooth like no others at the price.

TRICHORD DELPHINI 2003 £995
The very latest 'Never Connected' variant is easily the best, bringing velvety smoothness to an already refined and engaging performer. Neutral to a fault – some will mourn the passing of the charismatic ISO.

MUSICAL FIDELITY XLPSV3 2003 £249
Fine all rounder at the price, which a satisfyingly full bodied sound that's smoother than the Creek but a tad less engaging. Only Trichord's Dino, with its easy upgradability for just £50, reflects badly on this fine bit of kit.

PROJECT PHONOBOX LE2004 £99
Great little box that improves on most bundled phono stages found in budget integrated amplifiers, adding detail and definition and a measure of smoothness too. If £100 is all you're prepared to spend, then do it happily on this, but you'll get obviously better results from the £250 brigade.

WHEST AUDIO PS.20 /MSU.20 2004 £1,000
Disarmingly clean, smooth, open sound makes this the very best phono stage we've auditioned to date, but some will still prefer the gutsier feel of the Trichord Delphini.

GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLDV 2004 £460
Wonderfully warm, open and musical nature makes this an essential audition for those wanting a top value mid-price phono stage.

AMPLIFIERS

ARCAM DIVA A65 PLUS 2002 £370
Classic budget Arcam fare – decently sweet and open with sensible facilities and plenty of power.



ARCAM FMJ A32 2001 £1150
For those who value serious power and labyrinthine facilities over outright clarity or grip. A very impressive all rounder with an unusually muscular power amp at this price.

AUDIO NOTE OTO SE 2000 £1199
This baby tuber is beautifully sweet and creamy, but lacks solid-state's clarity, detail and incision. Low, low power means speaker choice critical.

AUDIO NOTE SORO SE 2000 £1699
Wonderfully out-of-the-box sounding tube middleweight is all about sweetness and fluidity. Limited power and loose bass, but little the worse for it.

CYRUS 6 2003 £600

Cracking do-it-all mid price design, bringing svelte sound, good connectivity and upgradeability and stunning style and build.

CYRUS 8 2003 £800

Unusually warm and lyrical for a solid-stater, with decent power and punch. PSX-R adds dynamics, detail and dimensionality.

**MERIDIAN 551** 1994 £895

Evergreen middleweight is a serious performer even now. Tonally a tad dry, it's still very smooth and svelte with bags of power, detail and grip. Class act.

SUGDEN A21A 1993 £1020

The most musical amplifier at the price, bar none. Delicious Class A sound is smooth, sweet and wonderfully transparent with true tonal colour. Low power, so match carefully.

AUDIO RESEARCH VSI552003 £2,895

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

CREEK A501R 2004 £550

Consummately smooth yet engaging sound makes it a serious player at the price, but don't expect Creek's traditional sumptuousness. Fine value nonetheless.

MONRIO MC207 2003 £1,100

Powerful, muscular sound allied to real finesse makes this unusual integrated an essential audition at the price.

MARANTZ PM-17MKII KI MODIFIED 2004 £1,500

Gloriously offbeat do-it-all design with a truly warm, smooth and three dimensional sound. Think of this as a latter-day Audiolab 8000a - with a good deal more colour and finesse - and you'll have its measure. Lowish power output at the price, but fine real world speaker driving ability.

UNISON RESEARCH S6 2002 £1,625

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

**ORELLE SA100EVO** 2003 £1,200

Fine build, exquisite design and a wonderfully lucid sound make this an essential audition at the price.

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-150 2004 £800

Brilliant shoebox-sized powerhouse is sweeter and more mellifluous than Nait 5i, but less taut in the bass. Oodles of power, striking aesthetics, sensible facilities and great build make this a rare bargain.

NAD C352 2004 £300

Classic NAD mix of smooth, punchy sound with plenty of watts and sensible, real-world facilities; a great introduction to real hi-fi.

NAIM NAIT 51 2004 £825

The most musically engaging integrated at or near the price; real sophistication in sound allied to grip and power aplenty. Iconic styling and great build complete a very pretty picture.

NAIM NAC282/NAP200 2004 £4,000

Wonderfully taut bass, lightening midband and incisive treble makes for an enthralling listen; this cracking combination looks great and is superb value too.

PRIMA LUNA PROLOGUE I 2004 £800

Unlike almost every other budget tube integrated we've tested, it's nicely built, decently powerful and engineered well enough to let the benefits of tubes shine out loud; sweet, open, liquid. Cracking value.

STELLO S200 2004 £1,495

Oodles of smooth, clean power with plenty of pace and pleasing subtlety too. Factor in exquisite build and a low price and this is true audiophile bargain.

AV AMPLIFIERS**DENON AVR-2803** 2003 £650

Superb mid-price 7.1 channel extravaganza with nearly all the decoding power you'll ever need. Powerful, open and clean sound (at the price) makes it capable with music, and superb on movies. Fine ergonomics and great build makes this receiver hard to beat as an all-rounder.

**NAIM AV2/NAP 150/NAPV 175** 2002 £4,190

Brilliant audiophile multichannel pre-power amplifier combo; not as good with music as a two-channel Naim set-up at the same price, obviously, but surprisingly close. Elegant control layout plus a strong, clean and brilliantly engaging sound make this a serious crossover product. Ultimately lacks power compared to similarly priced Arcam gear, but is more musically involving.

PIONEER VSA-AX51 2004 £1,000

The ability to hook up to Pioneer's DV-868i via i-Link (nee FireWire) means that this multichannel AV amplifier can do all the digital conversion onboard makes the a very special product, which when used with the aforementioned DVD spinner sounds better even than the sum of its parts.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY****X-CANS V3** 2003 £249

Mr Michaelson's best headphone amplifier to date, with an extremely open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop and the ability to drive any phones to very high levels. Errs towards brightness with some headphones, so match carefully and use smooth cables.

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

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

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003** £1500

Novel and effective pre with switchable gain via a transformer, and balanced operation. Open and incisive sound, yet makes most active rivals sound edgy by comparison.

NAIM NAC112 2002 £660

Affordable admission ticket to the Salisbury high end experience. Detailed and dynamic, if tonally rather lacklustre.

LINN LK140 2000 £800

Dry and grey sounding, but decently dynamic and musically engaging all the same. A worthy worker in a budget Linn system.

MUSICAL FIDELITY**A308 CR** 2003 £2400

Superb transistor behemoth, worth partnering with any high end CD player or preamp. Oodles of grunt served up with poise and purpose.

MARANTZ SM-17 2001 £700

Useful budget power amp with plenty of clean transistor power. Not the most transparent, but sweet and clean all the same. Fine build completes a great value package.

**NAIM NAP150** 2002 £795

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

QUAD 909 2001 £900

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

CROFT TWIN STAR 2003 £1750

With a taste of the best of both tube and transistor, this latest update of the Croft classic is a truly endearing experience.



GRAAF GM20 OTL 2003 £3,300

Awesome output transformer-less valve power amp gives dazzling speed and incision, with an ethereal soundstaging and delicious filigree detail. Tremendous punch belies its humble 20WV power rating. Factor in one of the most exquisite finishes this side of an Aston Martin and it's very hard to say no...

SUGDEN MUSICMASTER2003 £1,300

Quintessential Class A Sugden sound is not warm as many expect, but extremely neutral and open with real tonal colour. By comparison, tubes sound bloated and standard solid-state hazy and brittle. Superb when partnered with efficient loudspeakers like Revolver R45s, but many will find it underpowered.

**LOUDSPEAKERS****B&W CDMI NT** 2002 £750

Fine clarity and imaging allied to pleasing warmth and great rhythmic cohesion make these standmounters an essential audition.

CASTLE CONWAY 3 2003 £930

Superbly smooth and crisp performers, with a big hearted musical sound. Ultimately coloured though, with a slow, plummy bass.

CYRUS CLS70 2001 £800

Charismatic performer with a fast, tight and open midband, but lacks cohesion and scale..

KEF Q1 2003 £250

Highly polished and articulate standmounters at the price, but demand good ancillaries for best results.

KLIPSCH HERESY II 1997 £1100

An outstanding high sensitivity loudspeaker with midrange and treble horns coupled with infinite baffle 12" bass driver. Effortless, fast and accurate.

LINN NINKA 2001 £995

Major on rhythms and dynamics, making them an involving listen. Reasonably refined, too - but tonally disappointing.

EPOS ELS-3 2003 £200

Plenty of brio and a decent degree of refinement makes this budget baby a fine value contender.

**MISSION 782SE** 2003 £900

Bright and tight design capable of brilliant speed and grip, at the expense of warmth. Demands high quality, high powered ancillaries.

MONITOR AUDIO B4 2003 £350

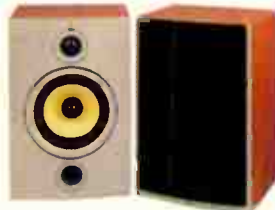
An unusually smooth and lucid performer at the price, and its 3-way design means it drives rooms well. Fine engineering, but build and finish so-so.

REVOLVER R45 2003 £899

Wonderfully easy to drive floorstanders that are a dreamboat for tube amplifiers, and great for party-minded transistor users too. Great attack transients, fluid and musical bass and midband and couth treble make them fine all-rounders.

W'DALE DIAMOND 8.1 2001 £120

Still the best baby budget standmounters around. Tight and grippy thanks to Kevlar drivers, but invariably limited in the frequency extremes.

**MORDAUNT SHORT 9142002** £300

Warm, detailed and articulate performer, but a touch loose in the bass and veiled up top. Fine partner for budget valve amps.

NAIM ALLAE 2002 £1990

Taut and grippy like few others, this speaker majors on transient speed. Surprisingly smooth for a Naim box, with nicely etched treble. As always, tonally dry.

QUAD ESL-988 2001 £3400

Wonderfully neutral and self-effacing with sublime imaging and projection. Treble lacks extension, bass lacks weight - although the pricier 989 answers the latter resoundingly.

PERIGEE FK-1L 2002 £5000

Charismatic Aussie ribbon design with deliciously open mid and treble, allied to fine bass weight. The right room and ancillaries essential. Engaging, musical and powerful sound. Superb.

TDK S-80 2002 £90

Ingenious NXT multimedia sub/sat system has a wonderfully even and open sound - like baby electrostatics.

**MARTIN LOGAN CLARITY** 2003 £2,895

Supremely transparent and open with brilliant depth perspective and image projection. The midband is up there with the very best at any price, while the bass and treble integrate well but don't especially shine. Dynamically limited, with middling bass punch, but that's not the point - that deliciously fluid and intricate midband wins great respect.

TANNOY EYRIS DC1 2003 £699

The combination of dual concentric treble/midband drivers plus supertweeters make for a very spacious and expansive sounding loudspeaker, albeit one that's a little bright and loose in the bass. An excellent mid-price design well worth auditioning.

MONITOR AUDIO GR60 2002 £2,295

In some ways, these come close to Yamaha's legendary NS1000Ms, thanks to their tremendous clarity, great transients and 'full-fat' wide bandwidth performance. Bright and clean, but never fatiguing or uncouth. A truly accomplished all rounder that gives a real taste of 'super-fi' at a reasonably affordable price.

TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM 2003 £800

Another brilliant niche product from Max, these ribbon aspirated supertweeters add space and atmosphere to any good high end loudspeaker, and more surprisingly perhaps make things more fluid and musical too. Superb affordable esoterica.

KEF Q4 2004 £400

Hard to argue with the value of this small footprint floorstander; very couth, even, dimensional and detailed sound works well in confined spaces and large rooms alike.

ELAC FS207.2 2004 £1,000

Deeply capable mid-price floorstanders, distinguished by superb JET ribbon tweeter which is unmatched by class rivals; engaging, slightly warm nature needs serious transistor power to sing.

EPOS M22 2004 £950

Classic Epos blend of speed, attack, power and punch will delight rock and techno fans alike, but classical and jazz buffs will crave more colour and textuality.

MONITOR AUDIO S8 2003 £800

Very few can rival this floorstander's all round ability; highly smooth, warm and three dimensional sound allied to an easy load and good sensitivity makes this hard to overlook.

REVOLVER RW16 2004 £400

Outstanding standmounter with tonal accuracy and speed that totally belies its price; good sensitivity for a small box makes it great with valve amps too. A budget audiophile classic.

SPENDOR S3/5E 2004 £950

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

TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM 2003 £800

The best affordable supertweeter we've heard - you'd be amazed at the difference it makes! Classy ribbon design, flexible level settings, cool styling...

HEADPHONES**JECKLIN FLOAT TWO** 1998 £99

Wonderful panel-like sound from these esoteric-looking headclamps.

SENNHEISER MX-500 1999 £19

Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29

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

**SENNHEISER HD-650** 2004 £250

Not the best headphone in the world, but a superb all round reference all the same. Very crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and fine comfort makes all most people will ever want. Cable upgrade yields great results.

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**INTERCONNECTS****WIREWORLD OASIS 5 2003 £99/M**

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

CHORD CO. CHAMELEON 2 £90/M

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

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Letter of the Month

TEN GRAND READY

I've reached that time in life when funds allow a certain amount of discretionary expenditure (within reason!), so it's either the local sports car dealer, or the hi-fi shop. Problem is, after neglecting the hi-fi for nigh on a decade, I really don't know where to begin.

My current system comprises a somewhat haphazard collection of LP12, Lingo, Akito and BPS, Alchemist Kraken amp, Arcam 1 CD player, Ruark Talisman II speakers and basic DNM speaker cable. Vinyl (main source) sounds pleasant enough but lacks real punch and sound stage. CD is very bright and, frankly, is hard to listen to for any length of time. Listening room is approx. 20ft square.

Where to start! Do I upgrade the LP12's arm and cartridge, if so what to? Do I then buy Naim amplification, or bin the lot in favour of something more modern such as a Michell Orbe or Origin Live Aurora? Would an OL arm work well on the LP12 and save money that could be used elsewhere? What arm/cartridge combos would you suggest for the Michell and OL?

I suspect the Alchemist is either seriously underpowered or not well matched to the speakers. Funds will probably allow a move to a pre/power combination such as Naim NAC112x and NAP150x. Or how about a Musical Fidelity A5? As vinyl will be the main source, should I consider valves? What about a phono stage? As for CD, I was thinking along the lines of Shanling CD-T100, Naim CD51 or Musical Fidelity A5. Your thought on speakers and cables would also be appreciated.

Part of my problem is that I have found it almost impossible to conduct meaningful A to B comparisons in demos. Dealers in Scotland are pretty thin on the ground and most seem to have a philosophy of slating any product which they don't happen to sell (funny that!). This seems to be particularly true of OL products for some reason... Objective advice is therefore sadly lacking. Your assistance in steering me through the mire of confusion would be much appreciated! Total budget is £10,000. On the other hand I could just buy an MX5!!
John Hall,

Your system is a pretty typical mid-price, mid-nineties one, and not half bad at all in its day. The thing is, with all that cash, you can make a serious difference – but how? First, do you want to keep your LP12? In terms of musicality, I do not think any other turntable currently made can touch it – it has that swing that some (me included) truly and dearly love. Trouble is, it's a good way off the pace now in most other aspects, such as soundstaging, tonal neutrality and image precision. I myself would go for a Michell Orbe (quelle surprise!) and Origin Live Illustrious tonearm and Ortofon Kontrapunkt C (£4,500 approx). I've lived with this particular combination for over a year in my own personal system, and it never fails to take my breath away. It's brilliantly neutral, powerful, expansive and intricate – and musical too – in a way I've never heard from any front end of any type at this price.

Next, as a brilliant foil, Musical Fidelity's A5cr pre-power (£3,000) would be the order of the day. Its nature is very similar to the aforementioned Michell front end, and has massive power allied to real finesse, and fine tonal shading, to make any speakers sing – and a great phono stage too.

Next – speakers. The best I can recommend under £2,000 is a pair of One Thing Audio rebuilt Quad ESL57s, which are truly spectacular and, in their way, better even than the ESL989s I use (they're more engaging, tighter and more expressive, if less physical).

You've now got a few pennies left for the Naim CD5i CD player at £825 – it's not the best silver disc spinner in the world, but listened to in isolation (i.e. not against a CDS3!) impresses greatly. Its faults are never obvious, but its strengths are – wonderful musicality, precision and stunning build and aesthetics. If you want to get into hi res, by all means make this a Pioneer DV-868 (£650), but the Naim's CD playback is streets ahead.

Finally, when you've sold your current gear, you'll have nearly £2,000 in change – which will get you a good late seventies Triumph TR7 fixed head coupe (with cash for new dampers and suspension bushes); this will shut down any MX5 on the twisties and sounds like a real car too... DP

MX5? You'd get more fun out of a wet facecloth, John! Can I direct to the larger motorcycles made by Kawasaki? NK



Greatness in an affordable package - the Naim CD5i CD player.

KO'D BY KI

I am writing to you to share my amazement regarding the CD 63 KI DP which I received back from Marantz one month ago, after a longer than expected wait. Up to a month ago and for the last 12 years, I had been using a Sony CDP-X33ES CD player which, while being very accurate, also has a glassy midband and generally a tiring sound. I use Eclipse TD 502 speakers which are very transparent and the whole system made for not so relaxing listening. I always knew that my CD player was the weakest link.

However, I have never been inspired by any of the new CD players reviewed in the mags or the new ones I heard in the shops. I was looking for a really musical sound, which I could listen to for hours, like analogue equipment. Anyway, machines I have been hearing in shops were not so good in that respect. I heard once the MF Nuvista 3D CD player which was good, but at £3k was way beyond my means. When I read the article in that issue of Hi-Fi World where KI explained the why and hows of the CD 63 modification, I became very interested in the process. You read a lot on the web about modding CD players, etc., but taking the step is difficult when jack-of-all Ltd promises to make any CD player better but throwing in expensive (and esoteric) components. However if the guy doing this is a guru, internationally recognised, working for the company who made the CD player he wants to mod., and the CD player in question is a recognised classic with higher than average second hand prices, that's got to be special! I also remembered that a few years back KI had already done a similar exercise with a two box

Marantz. The summer went before I was told to send the cheque and by early October, my machine was picked up. Then, the wait was much longer than I thought: it took three months for the machine to come back but that was worth it: the finish is immaculate (considering the whole lid and front had to be sand blasted and coppered) and I was very pleasantly surprised to see that the serigraphy on the fascia had been reprinted. Contrary to the HFW article where the pictures show all the legends on the fascia was missing, on my machine everything word (Play, Stop, etc.) was back there, in black over the copper face and it looks very good: its Feb!

And then the sound... Here comes the really nice part of the story: it is very fluid and yet ultimately precise: it feels like the ultimate balance. The

through my three hundred plus CD collection and revisited past treasures with glee and delight. So I would like to offer my thanks to KI for such an inspired design and such a master-stroke in balance and delicacy in making the CD 63 sing. I am flabbergasted at the performance and consider it a very good value at the price I paid. Out of interest, what's out there that (musically) compares to the CD 63 DP?

Frank

Nothing. **DP**

PROG ROCK (SLIGHT RETURN)

I am at this very moment (a very late hour in southern Sweden) listening to Genesis's 'Nursery Cryme' on a Dual 1225 I found in a flea market for nothing (almost). It sounds unbelievably



Classic Dual - Swedish prog rock turntable of choice.

sound is tight, precise and very well timed and yet I could listen to it for hours. It gives out the same relaxed, yet exciting feeling as when I hear good live

good compared to my olde turntable, has the original needle, and works like I don't know which Egyptian slave. Only major problem is, when one of my progressive rock friends is trodding too close to the anointed trophy, it skips and goes all strange because the dear thing is so damn Europeangly sensitive to Europeans walking the floors of its closeness. What to do about this, kind Sires?

most proggingly,
Sir Mattias Nihlén
Kingdom of Sweden



Marantz KI DP - musically, number one in a field of one.

Marantz CD player (was it the DA1??) by fitting some components of very limited availability. Anyway, everything in the HFW article said: KI is taking a risk here and his credibility would take a big dent if it all turned out to be a joke or a half baked cake!

So, I was so excited that I went and I immediately bought a secondhand machine after reading the article and left my details with

acoustic music: the same exhilaration and the same joy. It makes you want to get up and dance. It even has that effect on my significant other half (and she usually calls me a geek!). Imagine the pleasure you could get from eating enormous quantities of your favourite pudding and never get sick or fed up: that's what this CD player does to me. It is very nice and makes for very compelling listen: I have gone back

Hello Sir Mattias, and a goodly welcome to our magazine from the home of olde prog itself! I would venture to suggest that your progster friendlies don't venture so close to your little Dual's closeness, thus leaving its tiny springies to bounce to their hearts' desires. Verily and forsooth, your cohorts are walking too close to the edge... **DP**

ONCE IN A LIFETIME

As a long term reader of Hi-Fi World, I



Origin Live Silver tonearm - DP's fave sub-£1,000 rave.

have admired your stance on equipment and especially vinyl reproduction. I do not own a single music CD and do not intend to buy a player. *Biu Ray* may change things, however, but only if the sound is subjectively superior to that of vinyl. I have a Garrard 301 turntable fitted with an old SME arm - I forget which - and an Ortofon VM20 cartridge. Speakers are Quad ESL 57, driven by an EAR 859 amp with phono duties done by an EAR 834P MM/MC. This setup has given me much pleasure.

I now have £2,000 for a once in a lifetime vinyl upgrade: could you suggest an arm/cartridge combination that would represent an improvement? I plan to One Thing the speakers and possibly add a subwoofer and Townsend tweeters to produce a final system. Listening tastes are mainly middle of the road live rock albums - Genesis, Dire Straights, Joe Cocker. The live sound and the feel of being there is important. I also listen to classical and more recently jazz - I suspect my tastes are changing slowly to a more classical bent.

Help!

Paul Derlacki

I don't think SME will be too happy with you as a customer Paul. But at least you remembered the loudspeakers. However, I can sympathise, especially when someone has pinioned me at a Show and is reeling off a string of model numbers from twenty years ago, and I'm struggling to recognise any of them!

You've certainly got a nice smooth system. The 834Ps I have heard had rather large bass and were a little glutinous in character, so bear in mind that they are a limitation. Consequently, when upgrading from a VMS20 I would suggest you stay with a quality Moving Magnet (MM) type. For Rock you could try a Shure V15 VxMR, Goldring 1042 or Stanton 681EEE, all of which will be happy in any good arm. Try an Origin Live Silver arm

perhaps, or splash out a little more on an Encounter. Ideally, you need a valve phono stage and, within your budget, you would be best advised to get a World Audio Design Phono / Pre kit, plus the PSU II. Oh, and don't forget that a Martin Bastin Garrard plinth may well provide some useful support for your 301. This little lot, plus the One Thing's Quads, should give plenty more years of pleasure. **NK**

SNAP IT UP

Your advice on my next upgrade would be most appreciated, and if you can respond quite quickly, I might snap up the DPA 505 or the Alectos mentioned below before they sell. Over the years I have slowly upgraded my system and your reviews of products have been a great source of help, particularly the measured performance and frequency response curves which enable system tuning in advance of hearing the products. I remember when I was first looking for a cartridge with a bright character and sure enough, from your review, the Sumiko Blue Point fitted the bill perfectly. That was some years ago and I now have a system consisting of Michell Gyro upgraded to Orbe status and with QC, RB300 with Origin Live counterweight and Incognito wiring mods, Sumiko BPS cartridge, DPA 200S pre/power/phono, Audio Physics Virgo II loudspeakers, Micromega Premium DVD/CD upgraded recently to current spec.

My question is concerning what to upgrade next? For a while I have been unhappy with the overall warm balance of the system and think that this is down to the DPA 200s amplification. I have considered three amplifier options. Buying second-hand means I will have budget perhaps to upgrade the tonearm as well and get more bang for my bucks.

Firstly the DPA 505 pre/power which come up second-hand. Heard one of these several years ago and it was wonderful and had a leaner/brighter balance. Secondly the Michell Alecto monoblocs, but I've heard comments that these are very bright and I don't want to swing the other way too much! Also, there are Mark I and Mark II versions as you know (I have an Argo HR pre-amp sitting around idle at the moment to perhaps use with these if I bought them). Thirdly, a modern integrated such as Musical Fidelity or Chord or something similar. However this would burn all my budget and some more. I think being a drummer, I have a liking for a slightly bright balance with crisp sounding drums and cymbals - but without harshness. Can you give me some advice please? And may your magazine 'live long and prosper'...

Bob Hignett

Can I make a few observations here Bob, but will leave David to add in what's missing. I've never thought of DPA amps as "warm", but also wonder whether any modern amplifier is easily going to match up



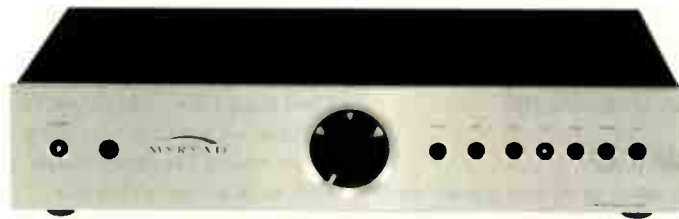
Ortofon Rondo Blue - Sumiko BPS beater.

in other subjective areas; they were exceptional products. Michell Alecto monoblocs I rate highly - a very open and spacious sound for solid-state. I would not label them "bright", but it could be said there is a light-ish air to their sound. A Myryad MI 120 will give you a fairly hard-hitting presentation that is clean and solid; it may well be your bag. Roksan and Cyrus also make great amps, or you could try something like the Marantz PM111 I spent some time with recently; it was shiny clean, if a little cold and detached. Just don't throw your DPA away first!! Cartridges wear slowly so you don't really notice that they



The attractive Sumiko Blackbird.

are going dull as the tip wears down. A new stylus for the Sumiko BPS might do yours the world of good. Or perhaps a new cartridge; a Sumiko Blackbird comes to mind, or one of the new Ortofon Rondo series, such as the superb new Blue. **NK**



Myryad MI 120 amplifier - clean, fast and hard hitting.

Hmm... warm balance with a Sumiko BPS – are you sure your ears don't need syringing? I'd counsel a cartridge upgrade – as NK suggests, the aforementioned Ortofon Rondo Blue (£400) would give a step change in sound quality, as your BPS is crude and scratchy by the latest standards. This new pickup is very neutral and fast, with a light and airy sound and strong imaging – snare drums come over particularly well, so I'm sure you'd love it. As for your amplification, I think Naim's NAC112x/ NAPI50x (£1,475) would be right up your sticks – it's an exceptionally pacey and engaging pre-power amp combination, and majors on dramatic impact and dynamic expression. Naim amplification also seems to work particularly well with Michell turntables, which are precise and neutral (albeit on the warm side of...) devices. This, plus the new cartridge, is sure to get into your groove. **DP**

NO ANSWERS

Your recent (Feb 05) issue on loudspeakers does little to answer some of the questions it raises: are flat panels or boxes 'best?'; stereo or multichannel?; floor standers or sat/sub? That's not a complaint, merely an observation. How could you ever hope to reconcile such subjective debates? Impossible of

course, but I would like to add my two-pennyworth.

NK in particular is aware of the importance of room effects, and your loudspeaker reviews do sometimes mention the critical nature of their placement. In my view this is paramount as many of the 'speakers I have taken home for review in my work for RS Components have sounded very different in my listening room to when in the shop's demo room. Also, some of my friends' hi-fi systems have benefited greatly (so they said) from a simple rearrangement of furniture and repositioning of 'speakers inside the listening area, to the extent of them no longer thinking they needed to upgrade to 'better' equipment.

Listening levels have a great - and probably underestimated – contribution

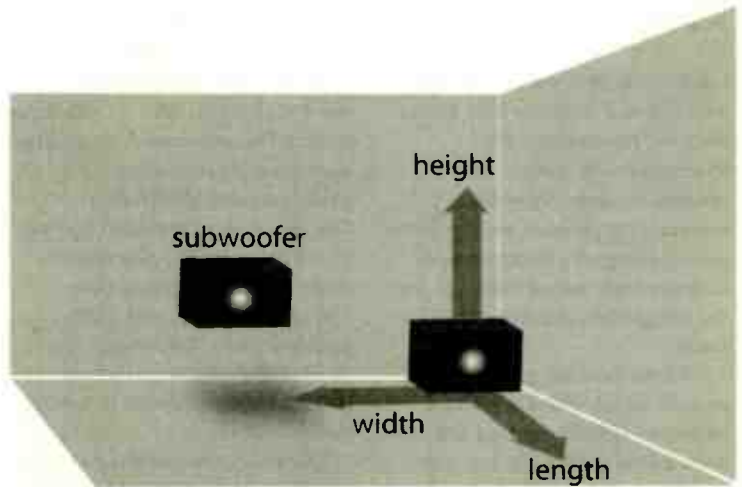
limited set of real world conditions. I have plenty more to say on the subject, but this letter is getting too long already.

My opinion? Loudspeaker reviews make interesting reading but should come with a health warning along the lines of, "The conclusions reached in this review are only true for one set of ears and one listening room. Do not make a buying decision on this evidence alone." Naturally, all intelligent and/ or experienced readers of this magazine know that already, but it bears repeating for the unwary. To go back to one of LJK Setright's points he made last year about subs, and even NK (or was it DP?) who said recently that you "...can't stand mount a subwoofer" - you can stand mount a subwoofer! I have a M&K 8" front-firing sub Blu-tacked to a rigid and spiked "midi hi-fi" stand from Argos (which also holds 30 CDs by the way). It's set back between my modified and upside-down Denon/ Mission stand mounted satellites at the same height, slightly offset to reduce booming. The result is everything LJK could want - and is achieved with only one sub, rather than two. I suggest he comes for a listen (but only at realistic volume levels!).

Ian Coulson

You hear more of the loudspeaker and less of the room as you get closer to it Ian. Conversely you end up listening to the room rather than the loudspeaker if you sit far away. So just what differences you hear between showroom and home depends partly upon listening

to perceived fidelity. Of course an acoustic guitar reproduced at its natural loudness level is going to sound better than a full symphony orchestra under similar circumstances - an orchestra in your listening room would excite all manner of unpleasant resonances, ditto a rock band at full tilt. Given such considerations, no transducer is ever going to be ideal except within the parentheses of its design brief or a



As you move a subwoofer toward the centre of each dimension, modal drive lessens and the sound becomes more even. If a subwoofer is moved to the centre of the room's width and raised from the floor on a stand, as shown here, both Height and Width resonances are reduced, giving more even, if less fulsome, bass.

Corner placement of a subwoofers drives the room's Length, Width and Height modal resonances most effectively, for BIG but boomy bass.

distance. However, like you I am often disturbed or even horrified at just how different speakers can sound in various rooms, especially when they're ones I have designed, know well and like - then hear them sounding terrible! It's very upsetting.

British domestic loudspeakers are balanced for solid walled rooms of 14ft - 20ft longest dimension, with ceilings of 8ft-9ft. Take them outside that and things don't sound right at all. In bigger (American?) rooms bass will be almost non-existent, and this can include some showrooms. Rooms with weak partition walls will suck out bass too, and again this can be a showroom. These are things to watch out for when listening outside your home, although it's not the whole story of course.

In the end it is certainly best to listen in your own home. However, we also measure loudspeakers, as I am sure you are aware, and can as a result give meaningful guidance on basic tonal balance. Providing you don't put your loudspeaker against one wall and then sit against the opposite one, which may be 20ft away, you should be able to discern what we measure, so it should make sense and be useful. Of course, furniture makes a big difference and, generally, the more the better I find. Big, well padded settees are great for damping down room modes, virtually eliminating room boom. Comfortable too, which also improves listening!

You can put a subwoofer anywhere. I prefer them out of the corner and into the room, since it gives the driest sound, with least overhang. It seems that this is what you are doing, since moving a subwoofer up from the floor drives the vertical mode (floor-to-ceiling) less enthusiastically - see our diagram.

Finally Ian, since you work for RS Components, your email tells us, I presume you are responsible for a loud buzz in the North East of England! See the following letter. **NK**

CABLE TALK

There is a loud buzz word in the North East of England about a cable being used as loudspeaker cable. I'm talking high-end users that are turning in droves to this cable. Please send some one to R.S. Components and purchase a 25 m role of ptfе 1910.15 pink cable at £15.40 per reel, stock number 359-510. I know this should not work but bass and treble blow away any cable up to the price of £20/m. I am not a gullible person and work as a social

worker. I have tested this against many cables and nothing comes close at the price in many high end systems. Try it - it's a the Holy Grail and bargain of the hi-fi world.

Sam Wilson

Thanks Sam. I'm about to jump on my little scooter and buzz up the M1. That does take you to Northampton, doesn't it? **NK**

Steady on Sam, you don't want to go depriving all those impoverished, stony-broke high end loudspeaker cable manufacturers of a living do you...? Whatever next? **DP**

ROUTE PLANNING

I am considering upgrading my CD player amongst other things and would like some advice on the best route. I would like to audition some universal players (inc. SACD/ DVD-A) and would appreciate your opinion. My overall budget for my hi-fi is circa £1,500. My current system all bought between five and ten years ago consists of Rega Planar 3/ Origin Live modified RB250 (arm/ counterweight, int & ext re-wire)/ Goldring 1042 (replaced this year), Marantz CD63SE, Leak Troughline tuner, Pioneer A-300R Precision amp (with £300 Tom Evans modification) and home built Wilmslow Audio Kevlar One standmount speakers on Atacama stands all wired with DNM reson interconnect and bi-wire cable.

I am quite happy with the overall sound of the system but would also like some advice on improving dimensionality and the soundstage of the system. I can do limited DIY and was thinking of removing crossovers from the speaker cabinets or taking on a DIY valve amp construction project (I love the sound of valves) to improve the sound or buying a separate phono stage for my turntable. Which is likely to offer the best improvement to the system?

Also, is it possible to connect one of these new CD/DVD players to a new LCD TV I'm thinking of purchasing, and also my computer and iPod as well? Or do I need a new amplifier? Finally, can you give me some advice on whether it

is possible to transfer my valuable vinyl collection onto digital storage such as my computer or whether I need to purchase something extra for this as well? Sorry for so many questions but I appear to be at a junction and would appreciate your valued opinion before handing over my hard earned cash.

Ray Hall

Your amplifier is decent enough to not be shown the door and the loudspeakers are an unknown quantity to me. Removing the crossovers will cost nothing and clean things up. I would say replacing the phono stage with a valve design will make most difference. Later you may want to change the amp for an all-valve design, but this is trickier, as there's a wide variation of types and sounds. Since you can DIY, get a World Audio Design Phono II with PSU II.

I use a Denon DVD-2900 universal player for general purposes and it's proved a sterling workhorse that I'd recommend. CD reproduction is very good, if not fantastic - a solid sound with good detail and insight, but a little mechanical. Now replaced by the 3910, which has an unresolved distortion problem with CD playback when the displays are on, you might be able to pick a 2900 up cheap. Otherwise, look at the excellent quality Pioneer universal players like the DV-868 (£650). All such machines can connect up to a TV directly through a SCART lead and the DVI interface is becoming more common too.

You can get video from a DVD player into the computer through a TV card from someone like Hauppauge, but DVDs are protected to prevent digital copying, so you will need to use an analogue S-Video input. Most DVD players output S-Video, so again, no problem.

To transfer LP to a computer, all you need in outline is a phono stage that feeds into the computer's sound card, or audio input. Connect the Tape Output of your Pioneer to the computer's audio input. As line level



Tom Evans Pioneer A300R – quintessential early nineties budget super integrated amplifier.

is usually around 200-300mV there's rarely a compatibility problem. Ideally, you do need a good 16-bit sound card, or preferably 24bit which will give a smoother sound. Then of course you should use a decent music editor. As the author at Delback notes, many have been snapped up by big companies recently. It's best if you go to this site to get more info on recording LP to CD:
<http://www.delback.co.uk/lp-cdr.htm>.
 Have fun. **NK**

Hi Ray – if you're running the onboard phono input of the A300R, then I'd advise you go to an outboard phono stage immediately; I myself had a Pioneer A400X, and whilst it was a very impressive little device, the phono section was an embarrassment – a cheap IC stuck in as an afterthought. I originally replaced it with the famous Andy Grove modified Rotel RB970BX, but when this went pop I moved up to a Trichord Delphini, which was a far greater improvement. The latest Dino isn't far behind this, so I'd have no hesitation in suggesting you went this way – unless of course you want to go the way of DIY tube stages, which sound far less mechanical, but a tad over-warm and loose for some tastes – your call! As for an amplifier – if you don't want to get the soldering iron out, I'd suggest the Musical Fidelity A5 (£1,500) – this is an extremely capable super-integrated with oodles of grace, space and pace – and a great phonostage too; not quite Dino standards, but not far behind. It also has a great range of inputs, so your connectivity issues are covered. **DP**

KEEP IT TURNING

Just a note following one of the letters/responses printed in the March edition of your mag. Call it a follow up letter if you like... You printed a letter from a guy who had a dead Voyd Valdi split phase p/s, and quoted him some reasonably expensive options to get it going again. I'd just like to point out that we can offer an alternative! Now, obviously we can't guarantee to fix everything but we have excellent engineering support and access to over 100 fully operational turntables built in the UK. This means that we can independently resolve most issues with Voyd decks and many others including the likes of Alphason, Ariston, Heybrook, Royce, Source, Systemdek, etc. It's also worth pointing out that the parts of Mr McNicoll's deck which are okay, could still be the saving grace for someone

else and as such we are happy to take such items in p/x for another turntable. Hope this helps.
Simon Griffin
turntableworld!
(tel: 01325241888)

turntableworld!
 30b Larchfield st, Darlington, DL3 7TE
 01325 241888 or
 email world@turntableworld.co.uk

CD PICKER

As a long term subscriber to your magazine since your first issue I am an avid reader of your letters page as well as the classified ads. I have been waiting in vain for the DVD-A/ SACD debate to resolve itself one way or the other only to see 'Blu Ray' appear over the horizon!

I have therefore decided to upgrade my dedicated Linn CD player (Linn Karik III and Numerik DAC; the latter being the non SMPS version) as I have a considerable number of CDs. The rest of my system comprises an LP12/Ittok III/K18 II, Quad FM4, Linn Kairn pre-amp, and active Kaber loudspeakers in a room measuring 12 by 20 feet. My musical taste runs mainly to classical CDs (solo guitar, violin, string quartets, choral, as well as large scale orchestral). Perhaps I shouldn't have sold my Quad ESL 57s but that is another story and in fairness to my current set up large orchestral pieces are handled much better as the Quads always struggled with loud passages.

My basic problem seems to be that whilst I can quite happily listen to other sources (e.g. vinyl, and especially, Radio 3, on my tuner) with CD I am less content, picking out the less strident discs in my collection to listen to. Given that a lot of Radio 3 output (with its limited high frequency response of 15kHz) is CD based, I suspect that it is the high frequency output of my current CD set up that needs taming. Whilst I can roll off my system's treble by altering resistors in the Kaber's active crossover this also removes some of the fine detail and the other sources lose their sparkle - I therefore need to change the CD player.

My budget is up to £2,000 but would I be better off upgrading the Numerik DAC alone which is now ten years old (the CD transport is just over three years old) rather than buying an integrated player such as the Linn Ikemi? I am rather taken with what I have read about the Musical Fidelity X-DAC v3, with accompanying X-PSU, and X-10 v3 output stage - am I heading in the right direction? What would be your advice please?

Bryan Grocutt

Hi Bryan – interesting predicament. The Karik III is a superb player, in my humble opinion, but it's very Linn-esque inasmuch as it's tonally dry (upfront and monochromatic; which could even appear as brightness with some discs) – and the Numerik is like this, but more so! If this combo is brighter even than your K18-shod LP12, then it must be seriously full on (as you may know, I'm no fan of the Linn K-series cartridges, much as I love the Sondek).

I think the Musical Fidelity combo is a good way to proceed – simply because you can start with the X-10 v3/ X-PSU on the end of your Karik/Numerik, and see what gives. Right now, I'm using this dynamic duo on the end of my Marantz CD63KI DP, and they improve even this august machine, bringing a more powerful bass and superior dynamic articulation, along with a slightly more expansive and detailed midband (treble is sweet enough as it is). You may find the MuFi combo takes down your treble just a tad, and gives a more finessed and natural sound – which is just the job. However, if this doesn't do it for you, then the X-DAC v3 is the obvious next step, powered by your existing X-PSU v3. With its 24bit architecture, you'll certainly find it smoother and sweeter tonally – but whether it will afford the grip of the Numerik I cannot say. Please email in and let me know, and if it doesn't give you what you're after, we'll have to take a different route – which I'll be only too happy to advise on at a later date. **DP**

HUM TO CHOPIN

On the basis of your review in the January issue I took the plunge and bought a Ming Da MC-7R preamp from Icon Audio who are importing them. This formed the basis of a new system comprising an Exposure 2010 CD, the Ming Da, Exposure 2010 power amp and Spendor S6 speakers. I shall write at a later date on this set up as, thanks to some careful buying, this all cost under two grand and sounds bloody marvelous!

With one exception, that is. I decided to invest in some good interconnects to complement the system and bought two pairs of Merlin Chopin. Using one pair from the CD to pre-amp and all is well and dandy. However using the second pair from the pre to power and I am greeted with some pretty bad mains hum. At first I feared a problem with either pre or power amp but after trying all the usual things I swapped the Merlins

from pre to power with a set of interconnects from my older system. These were made up by a local hi-fi specialist and were fine for my previous system - and more to the point are shielded, which as I understand it the Chopins are not. Hey presto, no hum. Oh, and the Merlins pick up a nice buzz from my lighting dimmer switch at night. So fine, just use the old ones. Problem is the Merlins sound much better. Despite the mains hum there is more detail, focus and everything else is just plain superior.

I realise the solution is possibly to invest in another set of better, shielded cables. But surely, accepting that valve amps are more susceptible to this problem than solid state, a modern amp shouldn't have such a problem. My father, who happens to be an electrical design engineer, feels this is a pretty bad fault even though the amp was built in China and is great value for money. (He said something about the smoothing circuit on the preamp out!) Having tested the Ming Da yourselves I wondered if you experienced similar problems and if you could offer some insight/opinion and alternatives. I talked to Merlin who say they have not experienced this problem before. As yet I haven't discussed this with the importer or manufacturer as I feel it would be of value to have an independent opinion first.

John

Hmm! It's difficult to make a certain diagnosis from a distance, but since ordinary shielded leads don't hum and the unshielded Merlins do, then you are almost certainly picking up a local hum field. The most likely source is the mains transformer of the power amplifier, but quite frankly

these are, nowadays, toroidal and have a low residual field. If they didn't then the power amp's own circuits would also pick up hum. Are you sure there are no other electrical items nearby? If there are, try switching them off to see if the hum stops. Make sure the Merlins don't trail over or under the amp's mains transformer too, and try a little rearrangement of lead position to see if hum can be usefully reduced. Pickup from the dimmer switch is ominous and I suspect you may have to revert to shielded cables **NK**

DIGITAL BUS BELLS

Richard Zarywacz's letter in the March edition totally misses the point that Jayne Lee Wilson made in comparing vinyl with CD. Jayne's point was, that good quality digital equipment will reproduce as good a sound from a CD, and I have to agree with her fundamental premise. I came to this conclusion following a wonderful concert that I attended by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, featuring an outstanding performance, on trumpet, by Ole Edvard Antonsen. Whilst I cannot say that his interpretation of Haydn's Trumpet Concerto was the definitive performance it was certainly outstanding and one that I will never forget.

In an attempt to revisit some of what I had heard the night before, I dipped into my collection; though I will be the first to acknowledge that a live concert in a good hall has a better sound than anything I play in my lounge! I began with a recording by Wynton Marsalis on an LP (CBS Masterwork) cut in 1983. It's almost totally free of pops and a full, rich,

smooth sound came through my 989s. Turning to my CDs I found a recording by Niklas Eklund (Trumpet Concertos, Naxos) recorded in 1999. This too was a wonderful rich sound and one that was equal in quality to the vinyl. Richard Zarywacz's point, that digital sound has some sort of time delay, maybe true for the bells on bus-rides, but is certainly not true of the delicious sound of a trumpet through my BAT VK D5SE, which substantiates the point that Jayne was making. Incidentally, the notes on the LP cover describes the original recording as digital; which tends to undermine Richard's point that the digital process has inherent flaws.

LJK Setright, in one of his recent, wonderful essays, pointed out that the variation in quality within each medium is far more significant than the differences between them, and who am I to disagree with LJK! However, to return to Jayne Lee Wilson's point about the importance of equipment, I would like to ask your opinion about a technical point (and maybe Noel Keywood can advise me here). Am I correct in thinking that CD code is limited to 20Hz, whilst an analogue system, could, potentially, go below this? Does it follow, therefore, that an LP has a potential advantage of sounding lower bass frequencies, even if the performance was digitally recorded. If so, would a subwoofer bring greater musicality to an LP, than a CD of equal merit? Your recent review of the REL Strata III does not touch on this and I'm curious to know, as a sub-bass just may be my next upgrade.

Phillip Evans

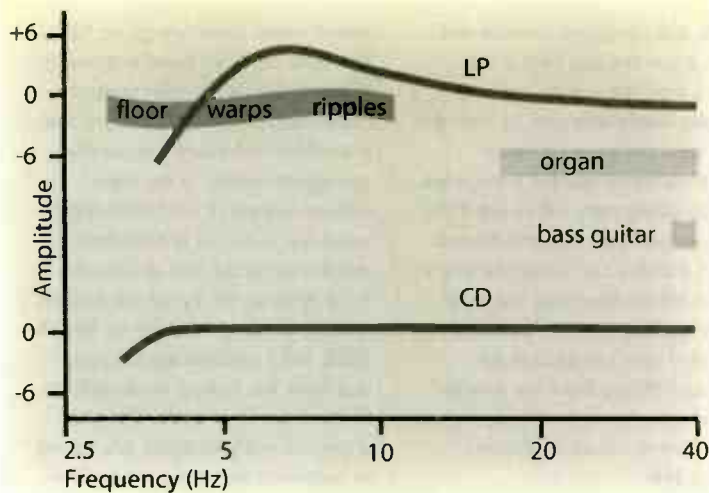
Oooh no! Digital can resolve lows more easily than highs and CD reaches down - on test discs - to 4Hz, whilst DVD-A and SACD reach 2Hz. LP has a problem here: in theory it can get low but in practice LP warps and ripples swamp musical notes. The enormous bass boost RIAA applies makes all this worse.

If you use a subwoofer with LP you will hear bass all right, but much of it is spurious subsonic noise. For tight, fast and clean bass from LP it's best to eliminate signals below 30Hz or so, hence the usefulness of a warp filter. However, you do get a stronger sense of ambience and space, as well as greater bass weight if you don't use a warp filter and I notice that the Japanese prefer it like this. So there's an argument to be made for either and to solve this the switchable warp filter is a boon with LP.

As far as most listeners are concerned, LP has more bass than



Ming Da preamplifier - hurrah or ho hum...?



Both LP and CD go low, but CD - including SACD and DVD - go lower, have a flat response all the way down and don't reproduce warps, ripples or floor movement.

CD, because of warp subsonics and their amplification by arm / cartridge resonance. Using a subwoofer with LP will give enormous bass sounds, but some of them are pretty unconnected to the music. I don't recommend it, although you might like the effect. **NK**

OLD SPINNER

May I first empathise with John Clarke (letters of the month Feb 05) I ceased buying HFW several years ago for the same reasons. However I was greatly relieved when I picked up a copy (Feb 05) which had a significant emphasis on hi-fi proper, especially the articles concerning my main interest, retro equipment. So having returned to the fold I put pen to paper in the hope that you can help me out...?

I've recently acquired a Technics direct drive turntable; model SL-150, complete with a SME3009 series 2 tone arm and Stanton EEE cartridge. I have been unable to find any information concerning this particular model and hope that you might be able to assist me in my search for an owner's manual, reviews, etc. I'm very impressed with the build quality of these Japanese direct drive turntables and I am sure there is room for tweaking and improvements. I can't think it would be difficult for this deck to outperform my Rega Planar 3 with ease. So far listening tests have been very encouraging.

I've collected several pieces of hi-fi equipment in recent years (Naim, Meridian, and Musical Fidelity) hence my rekindled interest in your magazine. Please keep up the good work with regard seventies and eighties classic hi-fi and reviews. Any help from yourselves or your readers would be greatly appreciated.

Pete Pretty

Having run equipment like this in the past, well at least a SME3009 Series II fitted with Stanton 681EEE, I have a good idea of what you are hearing. It's a great combo, no doubt, but attention to detail in modern designs has moved the game ahead. I would suggest you make sure the Stanton isn't worn. This is difficult without a reference or testing. You might try getting a new stylus assembly. Contact Lambapl on 01582 690600 or go to www.lambapl.com for more info. Check and clean all connections and replace old phono cables with good modern equivalents. Ensure you have a good

Hi Pete – I did an Olde Worlde on the SL150II in November 2002 – call us on 020 7625 3134 to get a back issue. It's an excellent deck to be sure, and given enough fettling should be able to usurp a Rega 3, although the Rega itself is also surprisingly good and also responds very, very well to tweaking (arm, acrylic platter, Origin Live DC motor, etc.) The only way you'll get your Technics to sing is to fit a modern arm on it – an Origin Live RB250 is a good base, although the Silver 250 would be perfect. OL even make a Technics armboard for the Rega, if I'm not mistaken.

Your Stanton will be usefully upgraded simply by buying a new stylus. As the SL150 is not independently sprung, then make sure you place it well – a Townshend Seismic Sink would be ideal, although Audiophile Furniture's Base SP01 is an excellent second best at one third of the price. As for the dreaded scourge of computer audio, well there are lots of people who actually rather like it, perish the wretched thought... **DP**

AIRPORT AUDIO

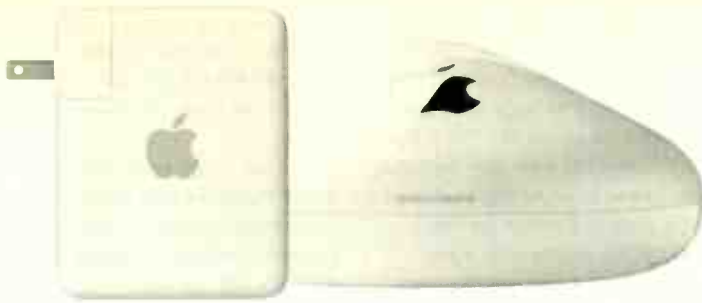
Thank you for addressing the computer audio issues that other hi-fi magazines still choose to ignore. Contemplating to link my iTunes equipped computer and my hi-fi system (Musical Fidelity A3.2 pre/ power, A308 CD and Wilson



Technics SL150 – great turntable in search of an appropriate arm.

phono stage too, like a Trichord Dino or Graham Slee Era V Gold, or even a Project Phonobox if your budget is limited. Again, the game has moved ahead somewhat, with better integrated circuits and audio grade components that together can give a cleaner presentation than of yore. Happy listening. **NK**

Benesch Arc speakers), I've read with great interest your article under opinion in the December 2004 issue. You mentioned at the end of the article that one could use Apple's Airport Express to feed a Musical Fidelity X-DAC V3. I've actually contemplated doing just that but read on MF's web site that their DACs do not decode MP3... It seems to



[Apple AirPort – have iTunes, will travel...]

me that this is an obstacle to linking my iTunes with the MF DAC. Do I miss something? How about AAC files? If the above mentioned is not an issue, then do you think I should consider investing in the Tri-Vista DAC instead of X-DAC V3, knowing I have an A308cr CD player? Please kindly help me to answer these points!

Eric

In outline, the simple answer is yes. The iTunes software player on your computer handles AAC, so there is no need for the Musical Fidelity DAC to do this. The signal is then transmitted from your computer via an 802.b wireless link, or faster 802.g (Extreme in Apple parlance), according to what you have installed on your computer. Since 802b gives 11mbps data rate this is adequate for music; 802g is unnecessary for this task alone.

It's best to be aware that there are a few issues (cough) to consider here. Since you will need to instigate wireless networking, a bi-directional link to your computer will be set up, even though you only intend to use it one way for outgoing music. All the same, it is then possible for someone to access your computer via this route, so you will need to enable the firewall in Windows XP or Mac OS-X. You don't say whether you are using a Mac or PC, but if the latter I could not be sure you won't run into obscure networking problems. I have a PC and a Mac on a wireless network and what Thursby Software (www.thursby.com) say about their less than transparent cohabitation is worth reading.

You won't need either WEP encryption or MAC address filtering in this role, unless the guy next door starts to transmit music too! However, you will have to consider these issues if you extend an insecure network link like this for Internet connection. This is when you realise that Wireless Networking isn't so simple, unlike cables. Have fun! **NK**

NEW INNOVATION

My system comprises Michell Gyro SE (DC Motor), OL1 arm (Silver wiring, better phono leads plugs etc.), and I also have a Rega RB600 arm with Klotz cabling to Neutrik phonos. The rest is Ortofon MC30 Supreme, Rega Fono MC head amp, CD from Arcam CD72T and Radio from Arcam Delta 280. Amplification is an old Leak Stereo 20 which I have replaced all passive components (Phillips/BC Electrolytics, LCR Polyprop coupling caps, Metal film 1% resistors). I am using a variety of front ends, but prefer my home made, valve, ECC82 based preamp, with one half of the valve as line amplification and the other half as a cathode follower giving a low Z output.

I've been using an Audio Innovations on trial from a local dealer, but it needs a lot of work - at very least replacement of the volume and balance pots which are about worn out, and add a lot of undesirable coloration to the sound. I'm reasonably happy with the sound quality but I'm worried that I'm pushing the Leak too hard, as I seem to listen at levels just off its clipping point. Certainly the system sounds way better than the Audiolab 8000A I used previously.

I've listened to the Audio Innovations phono stage using an old Linn K9 I had lying around and was

seduced by the nature of the valve phono stage. So I will need a step up transformer for MC cartridges if I keep it.

This has convinced me that I need to use a valve phono stage rather than a solid state, although I have an open mind on the subject.

The problem I need solving is this: if I stick with the Audio Innovations and replace the volume pot with a stepped attenuator which I currently use in the home brewed pre, and just leave the balance pot out of the circuit, would there be enough there to drive, for instance, a WAD 6550 power amp? Or will I need to stick an output amplification/ buffer stage inside the preamp. There's plenty of room inside the case to do this and I'm not afraid to wield the soldering iron to get this done. I'm no great fan of Passive preamps anyway, but that's with the Leak which seems to give a more "meaty" sound using an active buffer between the volume control and the input. I suspect it's to do with driving longish interconnect cables.

My other alternative is to buy a modern solid-state preamp, I have seen on ebay "new" Tag McLaren PA10 preamp at a very attractive price, which I assume are better than the Audiolab 8000C which preceded it. I'm not into valves for the sake of it, but I find that I can't listen to a solid-state power amplifier for very long now; the Leak always sounds more melodic and smooth to me, notwithstanding its power limitations. Carry on the good work in your magazine. As so many of your other correspondents say, it's refreshing to read a magazine which doesn't just extol the virtues of the latest shiny box full of digits! Perhaps this query would be better answered on the WAD forum?

Andrew Miller.



Leak Stereo 20 amplifier, a prized classic with a great sound.

Ah yes, I recognise the symptoms: "I can't listen to a solid-state power amplifier for very long now", and can see the denial: "I'm not into valves for the sake of it", yet it's quite obvious you are starting to acquiesce to the inevitable, once exposed to music through thermionic devices. First it was the Leak, now the Audio Innovations. The P2 has a gain of x280 through

enjoy themselves" implies that the REL has a crossover system that allows it to be integrated with the Quads such that the bass is reduced in the 989s and channeled through the REL. This is just not so, unless REL have done something I don't know about. Adding a sub, even a REL, does NOT reduce the bass output of the existing units, it just augments it to a level and frequency determined by the settings on the sub.

signals, allowing satellites - especially a Quad - to go much louder. However, RELs in the past - the Strata 1 I believe - did have this facility.

As any loudspeaker designer is aware, increasing bass output increases measured SPL (Sound Pressure Level) quite considerably. Adding a REL subwoofer will do this, causing the volume control to be backed off, so reducing level to the Quads. By how much depends upon the subwoofer settings and personal preferences. Of course, if you just switch the subwoofer in and leave it at that, without making a subsequent volume adjustment then, as you rightly say, nothing has changed as far as the electrostatic is concerned. But generally, people note that adding a subwoofer does seem to give a more relaxing sound and it is almost certainly that because less volume is used in the main channel. Remember that a powered subwoofer has a 100W or more amplifier inside it for bass alone, so it's hardly surprising acoustic power levels and SPL increase significantly when it is added. Perhaps we should have been a little more specific about all this, but going into each and every detail of reviewing conditions carries its own penalties too.

And finally, a little technical observation. Whilst it seems like a good idea to use a high-pass, in practice it puts a series of op. amps. in the main signal path, not a situation everybody is happy with, especially when there's an insightful electrostatic sitting at the end of the chain. So most subwoofers these days, including all the RELs, don't have such a facility. **NK**



The Audio Innovations P2 valve phono stage - an advanced design with tube regulated power supply and a great sound.

MM. This is high, giving no less than 1.4V out from a nominal 5mV in - more than enough to drive any power amp directly, including WAD6550. I would renovate the P2, perhaps bypassing the old pots. Why not just run it into your own ECC82 preamp? This can then drive the Leak Stereo 20. If you want more power, a WAD6550 is the way to go, especially for someone that can wield a soldering iron and is tuned into the World Audio Design Bulletin Board. **NK**

TACKLING BASS

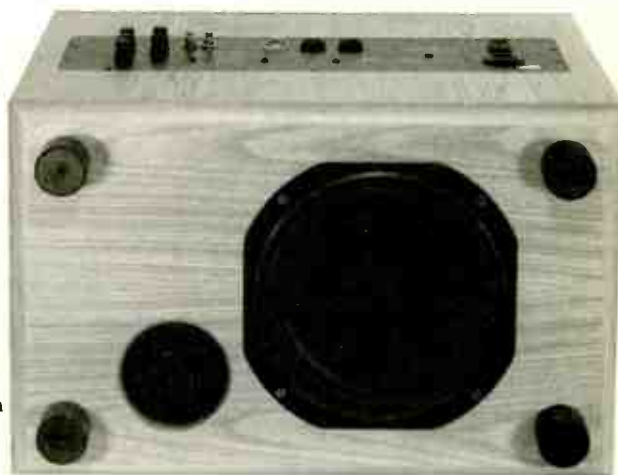
I have to take serious issue with David Price's review on page 37 of the March edition of Hi-Fi World. I'm not surprised I had to look in the index for the writer's name and not in the article itself as if I had written it, I would have wanted to be anonymous as well !

Make no mistake here, I am a Quad man having owned a total of seventeen of their products over nearly 40 years. And I have a REL Stentor which lends some serious weight to some CDs by the likes of Genesis and Pink Floyd. But to say "the Strata simply lets the Quad's upper bass do what it always wanted to, but was hitherto hidebound (whatever that means) by having to exert itself to shift air" and "the 989's LF panels can relax and

I'm afraid for the editor of the magazine to suggest otherwise calls into question his capability as a reviewer in my eyes. What would have been more interesting would have been to see some frequency response curves with and without the addition of the REL and Townshends just to see the real effect of adding them, even though in some cases we cannot hear the sounds produced.

*Yours sincerely
Charles Toop*

Yes and no is the answer to your assertion Charles. As usual, things are not black-and-white. Modern RELs don't have a high-pass section that eliminates bass information in a feed to a satellite; this is the situation you are referring to. Such a high pass eliminates bass



With 100W-500W of bass power on tap, a subwoofer really raises the sound pressure in a room, something neighbours are likely to notice more than you. Backing off the volume control a little makes sense and relaxes the main 'speakers too.

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- Beam Echo Avantic monoblocks re-issue superb attention to detail new £3600
- Cyrus Integrated Amp 3i boxed mint £1495
- Consonance Cyber 10 Integrated Amp 6550 valve tubes with superb headphones stage £350
- Denson DM10 new £1300 £599
- EAR 834P Valve Phono Amp £450
- EAR 834L Valve Line Stage £425
- Lumley 120 monoblocks recently re-valved with GEC valves £1195
- Mark Levinson M1150watts Power Amp works superbly with Electrostatics £395
- Mark Levinson ML12A Pre Amplifier with phono stage & outboard 124 PSU £795
- Marantz PM 65 Ki Sig Int Amp £245
- Marantz PM17 Integrated Amp £495
- Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 300 Power Amp boxed new £2395
- NAD C180 remote Pre Amp top of the range £195
- NAD C170 Power Amplifier excellent at driving difficult loads £295
- Naim 160 Power Amp bolt together case £295
- Nitech CA202 Integrated Amp £95
- Pioneer A100X £175
- Pioneer A300R £95
- Quad 86 Pre with Remote £495
- Quad 1 Forty monoblocks the new version of the classic boxed mint £2300
- Quad 303 Power Amp £195
- Quad 405 Power Amp boxed £225
- Quad 405 MKII Power Amp boxed £275
- Revox B750 MKII integrated boxed £195
- Roter RB870B3 Power Amp £195
- Roksan Caspian power amp £350
- Sugdan A48 orange front Integrated Amp £175

Speakers

- Audic Physic Virgo MKII speakers special birds: eye maple finish new £3900 £1895
- Collection Cittern 44 3 way speaker £195
- Daquest 9 KEF Drive unit: with Revelator Tweeter Bargain! £395
- Dynavector Countour 1.8 cherry finish £1800 new £795
- Dynaudio Countour 1.3 MKII cherry finish boxed as new £395
- Final Electrostatics £695
- Kel Reference 1.2 special burr finish £95
- Linn/Indes oakshelf speakers £95
- Mission 752 Freedom Birch/finish boxed as new £395
- Monitor Audio Silver 8i floorstanding speakers £495
- Near Vito floorstanding speakers with Ultimatum upgrade, birch finish ISO Bariks loading ribbon tweeter work well with Naim new £2965 £1795
- Planar Electrostatic speakers £795
- Tannoy MC20 £95
- Williamslow Audio transmission line speakers with volt drive units Hi-Fi News recommended £295

Turntables

- Ariston RD80 with Hadcock arm £225
 - Audio Innovations P1 phono stage £195
 - Linn LP12 Valhalla mint boxed £495
 - Linn Itok MKII boxed £295
 - Michell Gyrodec with QC power supply £895
 - Micro Seiki direct drive turntable model DQX/500 with matching tonearm £395
 - Project valve phono box 3 mths old £225
 - Pink Triangle export with Rega arm £395
 - STD with Mission 774 tonearm £195
 - Various Garrard turntable's with granite wood marble plinths available POA
- CD Players, DACs**
- A&H wedge shaped CD Player mint boxed £95
 - Audionote GDT Two with top loading Transport with top of the range Philips mechanism new £2200 £1095
 - Audio Alchemy DAC in the box £450
 - Coopeland CD4 266 £395
 - Cyrus DAD7 top loading CD Player boxed as new £495
 - Denson Beat CD Player new £1200 £595
 - Musical Fidelity FCD valve CD Player battleship build quality new £1500 £495
 - Meridian 508 CD Player £495
 - MicroMega Duo CD3 Transport boxed £495
 - MicroMega Duo BS2 DAC boxed £195
 - MicroMega Stage 6 CD Player £395
 - MicroMega Stage 5 CD Player £395
 - Naim CD5 boxed mint £795
 - Pioneer Precision PDS505 CD player £225
 - Pioneer POS700 heavy weight CD player £225
 - Perpetual Technology P1A P3A & monolythic PSU will split £1195
 - Quad 66 CD Player £350
 - Quad 77 standalone CD Player £395
 - Sony SACD XB940 new £550 £275
 - Teac VRDS7 £235
 - Teac VRDS10 boxed £395
 - Teac T1 Transport £395
 - Teac T - DAC £195

Tuners, Real to Real, Cassette Deck, misc

- Leak troughline Tuner 3 various ... from £50
- Quad FM3 Tuner (boxed mint) £145
- Quad FM3 Tuner £95
- Revox Tuner B750 legendary analogue Tuner boxed £495
- Revox A77 Open Reel £195

Dee in

- Michell Transcriptor reference turntable £495
- Pair of Audio Dynamic Solid wood horns special order new price £1000
- Pioneer TAD 2001 compression drivers new £1200 (as mentioned in hi-fi world)
- Kimber Orchid digital cable
- Quad 77 CD player
- Audio Innovation P2 phono stage

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The signature builds on the Classic 834P specification by adding a superb moving coil (MC) input stage, as well as the no-extra-price option of a high quality volume control. price £590.00

Top to the range, the Deluxe 834P comes in stunning chrome and gold cabinet, and has extra attention and quality control. With different moving coil input options, this unit will fit the most demanding of audiophile systems. For the true vinyl enthusiast. price £895.00

MC3 - The ultimate stage for MC matching with 3 fixed transformer taps to cover all types of moving coil cartridges, and separate left/right grounding. MC3 in used in the new £10,000 312 pre. price £630.00

Selected products from: ATC, Audio Physic, EAR Yoshino, Nottingham Analogue, Dynavector.

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Ex - demo and second hand items

	Was	Now			
Digital			Loudspeakers		
Densen Beat400+ x-demo	1295	979	ATC Active 10 SL x-demo	1650	1999
Accuphase DP77V CD/SACD player x-demo	7600	4999	ATC Active 20 SL x-demo	3250	2399
Audio Note CDT Zero/DAC Zero 2 box valve S/H	998	499	ATC SCM7 Cherry x-demo	499	375
Audio Research CD3 S/H	5490	2799	Quad ESL 63 Brown just serviced with stands S/H	N/A	1499
dCS Elgar 24/192 1998 Version S/H	8500	3299	JM Lab Micro Utopia Anigre with Stands S/H	3999	1699
dCS Elgar+ DSD 1394 Version S/H	9500	4500	Mordant Short 902 S/H	249	99
dCS Verdi SACD/CD Transport S/H	9000	4995	Martin Logan CLSII Anniversary Electrostatics 7 months Old S/H	6700	4295
Mark Levinson No31.5 Transport S/H	9999	4999	Naim Audio Intro Black Ash S/H	875	499
Mark Levinson No360s DAC S/H	7500	2999	ProAc CC1 Response Centre Speaker Black Ash S/H	599	329
Meridian 508.24 Clock III S/H	N/A	799	Peak Consult Incognito Rosewood x-demo	7500	5799
Meridian G08 CD S/H	2250	1899	Rega ELA Cherry X-demo	749	579
Naim Audio CD3 S/H	980	449			
Primare V10 CD/DVD Player x-demo	795	499	Cables and Accessories		
Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	1999	Cardas Neutral Reference 1m RCA-BNC S/H	550	375
Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Oscom/Balanced S/H	2990	995	Elemental Audio Speaker Stands Special Edition 21" S/H	1599	549
			Finite Elemente Pagode E14 Signature Maple 4 tier S/H	1200	849
Analogue			Finite Elemente Pagode E21 Amplifier Stand S/H	299	179
Clearaudio Accurate MC x-demo	2800	1699	Madrigal MDC 2 1m Fatboy Digital cable new boxed	319	159
Clearaudio Unify Unipivot Tonearm New&Boxed	795	599	Madrigal MDC1 1m AES/EBU 110ohm Digital Cable new boxed	420	199
Clearaudio Victory MC New&Boxed	1030	699	Nordost SPM 2x2m Biwired S/H	2199	950
Dynavector XX2 MC Cartridge 100hrs S/H	950	679	Sennheiser HD600 S/H	249	119
EAR The Head MC Transformer S/H	N/A	399	Sennheiser HD565 S/H	199	99
Heed Quazar 2 box MC/MM Phono stage new	550	395	Siltech SQ58G3 2x4m Balanced Interconnect x-demo	2370	1499
Koetsu Red K Signature 300hrs max S/H	1998	950	Spectral MI-330 15ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-demo	800	499
Kuzma Stabi/Stogi S Turntable New& Boxed	N/A	1399	Spectral MI-330 3ft Interconnect RCA-RCA S/H	625	399
Project 2 Turntable S/H	299	99	Spectral MI-750 15ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-demo	1400	799
Roksan Xerxes Cognoscenti XPS3 RW Rega Cut S/H	1500	599	Transparent Music Link Ultra XL 1m RCA S/H	999	499
Roksan Xerxes XPS1/Alphason HRS100 S/H	N/A	599	Transparent Music Link Ultra XL 2m RCA S/H	1299	599
Roksan Xerxes X /XPS3/Tabrizi S/H	2695	1699			
SME 20/2A Turntable S/H	5537	3799	Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies		
Systemdeck X II900/RB250 S/H	N/A	250	Magnum Dynalab FT-R Remote Switcher for FT101A/Etude	450	279
Trichord Research Delphini 4 box phono stage S/H	1999	1399	Magnum Dynalab MD106T 4 months old	3600	2999
Triplanar Series VI Tonearm S/H	3500	1999	Nakamichi BX300E 3 head cassette deck S/H	N/A	299
			Rega radio 3 Silver X-demo	398	279
Preamplifiers					
Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preamplifier X-demo	625	499	<i>Suppliers and installers of High Quality Audio Systems</i>		
Audio Research LS25 Preamplifier S/H	4999	2799	47 Laboratory	• J M Labs	
Hovland HP100MC Preamplifier S/H	5495	2999	Accuphase	• Krell	
Naim NAC102/K s/n125*** Preamplifier S/H	1089	549	ATC	• Kuzma	
Spectral DMC15 Preamplifier S/H	4800	3250	Audio Physic	• Lavardin	
Spectral DMC12 Preamplifier Line S/H	4250	1995	Audio Research	• Martin Logan	
Rega Cursa Preamplifier Black x-demo	598	429	Avalon Acoustics	• Michell	
			Avid	• Nagra	
Amplifiers			bel canto	• Primare	
Audio Analogue Corelli Stereo Power Amplifier X-demo	695	479	Benz Micro	• ProAc	
Audio Analogue Donizetti Mono Power Amplifiers X-demo	1050	729	Cardas	• Rega	
Audiolab 8000p Black S/H	N/A	199	Clearaudio	• Siltech	
Audio Research VT200 MkII Valve Power Amplifier S/H	9998	6999	Conrad Johnson	• Sonus Faber	
Krell KAV300i Integrated S/H	2790	1299	dCS	• Spectral	
Krell FPB300 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	9500	3799	Densen	• Nordost	
Krell KSA50 Class A 50 Stereo S/H	N/A	999	DNM/Reson	• Sugden	
Krell FPB 700cx Class A stereo Power Amplifier S/H	14989	8995	Electrocompaniet	• Transparent Audio	
Naim NAP180 S/H	1189	599	Finite Elemente	• Verity Audio	
Red Rose Sprit Integrated x-demo	1000	649	Graaf	• Wadia	
Rega Maia Power amplifier Black x-demo	548	399			
Sugden Music Master Power Amplifier S/H	1299	899			
Spectral DMA100s Amplifier S/H	4295	2250			

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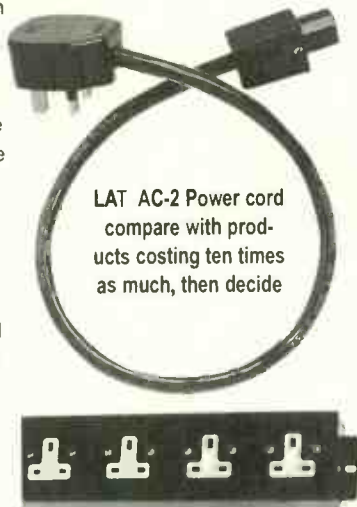
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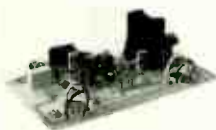
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- Revel Salon Speakers light oak/heather grey finish £995
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- Audio Note J Speakers (excellent condition, boxed) £625
- Genesis 350SE Speakers 10month old (retails £35000) £16995
- Eltax Floor Standing Liberty 5+ Speakers £140

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- Musical Fidelity MF3A Pre Amp & PSU £195
- Audio Note M8 Pre amp with Phono Stage (brand new, retails £19500) £12500

Mark Levinson ML32 Ref Pre with balanced phono stage
Audio Research SP14 Pre-Amp
Proceed PAV Pre Amp

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- Mark Levinson ML 336 Power Amp (cost new £9995) £4495
- Parasound HCA 1000A Power Amp £345
- Bryston 7B ST Mono Amps (silver 17") £2495
- Bryston 8B ST 4 Channel Amp £1595
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- Meridian 605 Mono Blocks £895
- Incardeck DIRK Integrated Amp £40
- Advantage Integrated Amp £1495
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- Mark Levinson 20.5 Ref Mono Blocks, immaculate condition & boxed £4995
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QUAD 99 two mono blocs	£725	TEAC PD 500r CD Player	£195
QUAD 77 integrated	£375	MYRAD CD20	£295
QUAD 33/44 pre-amps. 303/306/405 power amps always available	£175	EPOA Micromega stage 2 CD	£225
Exposure 11 and 12 Pre-amp and Power Supply	£575	Magaoka CD MG7700 [LUNN]	£195
Exposure Super 8 Power Amp	£375	DPA PD11 Series 2 DAC	£135
Arcam Alpha 8 amp	£215		
Marantz PM60100SE integrated	£175	OTHER EQUIPMENT	
Meridian 201 pre	£345	Graham Slee phono stage ERA GOLD	£460
Meridian 605 power monobloc [boxed]	£875	Graham Slee phono stage GRAH AMP 2SE	£195
Onix DA22 integrated	£175	Graham Slee phono stage GRAH AMP 2	£125
Musical Fidelity B1	£175	JBL 2405 tweeters	£500
Musical Fidelity A1000 Amp	£250	QUAD FM3	£100
Musical Fidelity A1 Amp	£250	QUAD FM4	£250
Musical Fidelity P140 Power Amp, boxed	£225	VITAVOX S2's compression drivers	£600
Sugden CS1/PS1	£295	Vitavox S2's (Various 4 cell horns)	£350

SPEAKERS			
TDL ELECTRONICS REF STUDIO 4 HUGE FLOORSTANDING MULTI-FACED			
SPEAKERS [seven units per cab. in black] £7500	£1750	Tandberg 3002 Pre Amp	£175
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Lowther Acoustas PM6A's MINT	£425	ONE METRE PAIR OF SILVER INTERCONNECTS. REALLY OPENS OUT THE	
QUAD ESL5's mid, one owner, since new! original packing boxes	£650	SOUND. WONDERFULLY DYNAMIC CBS	
Tannoy Canterbury's 12" silvers, beautiful	£3500	[OTHER LENGTHS MADE TO MEASURE]	
Tannoy Lancasters 15" GOLDS very nice	£1250	***BIGEARS SILVER SPEAKER CABLE 4 METRES TERMINATED £185***	

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Ex - demo and second hand items

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Digital			Loudspeakers		
Densen Beat400+ x-demo	1295	979	ATC Active 10 SL x-demo	1650	1999
Accuphase DP77V CD/SACD player x-demo	7600	4999	ATC Active 20 SL x-demo	3250	2399
Audio Note CDT Zero/DAC Zero 2 box valve S/H	998	499	ATC SCM7 Cherry x-demo	499	375
Audio Research CD3 S/H	5490	2799	Quad ESL 63 Brown just serviced with stands S/H	N/A	1499
dCS Elgar 24/192 1998 Version S/H	8500	3299	JM Lab Micro Utopia Anigre with Stands S/H	3999	1699
dCS Elgar+ DSD 1394 Version S/H	9500	4500	Mordant Short 902 S/H	249	99
dCS Verdi SACD/CD Transport S/H	9000	4995	Martin Logan CLSII Anniversary Electrostatics 7 months Old S/H	6700	4295
Mark Levinson No31.5 Transport S/H	9999	4999	Naim Audio Intro Black Ash S/H	875	499
Mark Levinson No360s DAC S/H	7500	2999	ProAc CC1 Response Centre Speaker Black Ash S/H	599	329
Meridian 508.24 Clock III S/H	N/A	799	Peak Consult Incognito Rosewood x-demo	7500	5799
Meridian G08 CD S/H	2250	1899	Rega ELA Cherry X-demo	749	579
Naim Audio CD3 S/H	980	449			
Primare V10 CD/DVD Player x-demo	795	499	Cables and Accessories		
Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	1999	Cardas Neutral Reference 1m RCA-BNC S/H	550	375
Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Oscom/Balanced S/H	2990	995	Elemental Audio Speaker Stands Special Edition 21" S/H	1599	549
			Finite Elemente Pagode E14 Signature Maple 4 tier S/H	1200	849
Analogue			Finite Elemente Pagode E21 Amplifier Stand S/H	299	179
Clearaudio Accurate MC x-demo	2800	1699	Madrigal MDC 2 1m Fatboy Digital cable new boxed	319	159
Clearaudio Unify Unipivot Tonearm New&Boxed	795	599	Madrigal MDC1 1m AES/EBU 110ohm Digital Cable newboxed	420	199
Clearaudio Victory MC New&Boxed	1030	699	Nordost SPM 2x2m Biwired S/H	2199	950
Dynavector XX2 MC Cartridge 100hrs S/H	950	679	Sennheiser HD600 S/H	249	119
EAR The Head MC Transformer S/H	N/A	399	Sennheiser HD565 S/H	199	99
Heed Quazar 2 box MC/MM Phono stage new	550	395	Siltech SQ58G3 2x4m Balanced Interconnect x-demo	2370	1499
Koetsu Red K Signature 300hrs max S/H	1998	950	Spectral MI-330 15ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-demo	800	499
Kuzma Stabi/Stogi S Turntable New& Boxed	N/A	1399	Spectral MI-330 3ft Interconnect RCA-RCA S/H	625	399
Project 2 Turntable S/H	299	99	Spectral MI-750 15ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-demo	1400	799
Roksan Xerxes Cognoscenti XPS3 RW Rega Cut S/H	1500	599	Transparent Music Link Ultra XL 1m RCA S/H	999	499
Roksan Xerxes XPS1/Alphason HRS100 S/H	N/A	599	Transparent Music Link Ultra XL 2m RCA S/H	1299	599
Roksan Xerxes X /XPS3/Tabrizi S/H	2695	1699			
SME 20/2A Turntable S/H	5537	3799	Tuners & Tape decks, power supplies		
Systemdeck X II900 /RB250 S/H	N/A	250	Magnum Dynalab FT-R Remote Switcher for FT101A/Etude	450	279
Triplannar Research Delphini 4 box phono stage S/H	1999	1399	Magnum Dynalab MD106T 4 months old	3600	2999
Triplannar Series VI Tonearm S/H	3500	1999	Nakamichi BX300E 3 head cassette deck S/H	N/A	299
			Rega radio 3 Silver X-demo	398	279
Preamplifiers					
Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preamplifier X-demo	625	499	Suppliers and installers of High Quality Audio Systems		
Audio Research LS25 Preamplifier S/H	4999	2799	47 Laboratory • J M Labs		
Hovland HP100MC Preamplifier S/H	5495	2999	Accuphase • Krell		
Naim NAC102/K s/n125*** Preamplifier S/H	1089	549	ATC • Kuzma		
Spectral DMC15 Preamplifier S/H	4800	3250	Audio Physic • Lavardin		
Spectral DMC12 Preamplifier Line S/H	4250	1995	Audio Research • Martin Logan		
Rega Cursa Preamplifier Black x-demo	598	429	Avalon Acoustics • Michell		
			Avid • Nagra		
Amplifiers			bel canto • Primare		
Audio Analogue Corelli Stereo Power Amplifier X-demo	695	479	Benz Micro • ProAc		
Audio Analogue Donizetti Mono Power Amplifiers X-demo	1050	729	Cardas • Rega		
Audiolab 8000p Black S/H	N/A	199	Clearaudio • Siltech		
Audio Research VT200 MkII Valve Power Amplifier S/H	9998	6999	Conrad Johnson • Sonus Faber		
Krell KAV300i Integrated S/H	2790	1299	dCS • Spectral		
Krell FPB300 Stereo Power Amplifier S/H	9500	3799	Densen • Nordost		
Krell KSA50 Class A 50 Stereo S/H	N/A	999	DNM/Reson • Sugden		
Krell FPB 700cx Class A stereo Power Amplifier S/H	14989	8995	Electrocompaniet • Transparent Audio		
Naim NAP180 S/H	1189	599	Finite Elemente • Verity Audio		
Red Rose Sprit Integrated x-demo	1000	649	Graaf • Wadia		
Rega Maia Power amplifier Black x-demo	548	399			
Sugden Music Master Power Amplifier S/H	1299	899			
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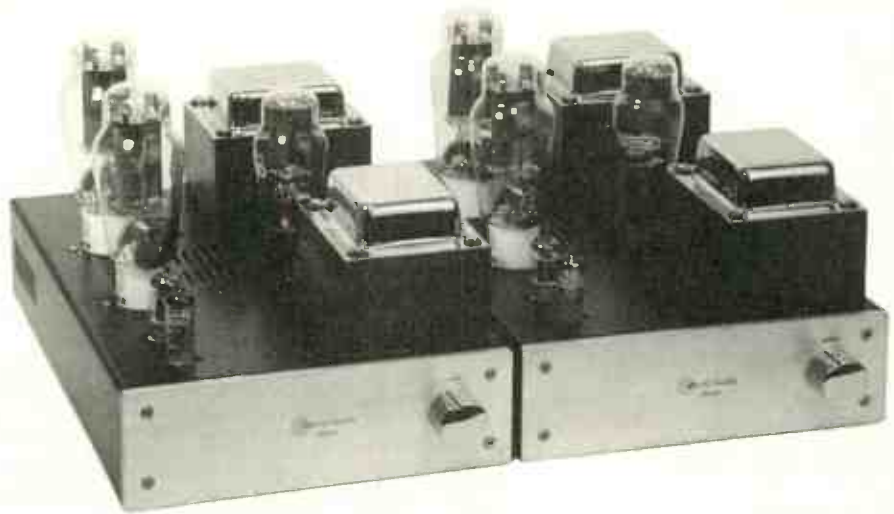
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SINGLE-ENDED PURITY

Our Parallel Single Ended (PSE) power amplifiers offer ultimate sound quality. Each monobloc has two beautifully linear 300B directly heated triodes in its output stage, producing 20 watts into an 8 ohm load. At the front of the circuit we there is a 6AU6 pentode, followed by an ECC82 as the driver valve. This design uses a 5U4 rectifier valve in the power supply, in combination with a 10H choke, giving an extremely quiet supply. Both mains and output transformers are built on high quality E/I pattern cores.



Feedback can be switched in or out whilst running, using a rear panel switch. Complex layered and sectioned output transformers give full output and low distortion across the audio band even without feedback, making such an option possible.

This is one of the few amplifiers in the world so good it will work without feedback - and no feedback is the preference of most buyers. It gives a spacious, relaxed and fluid sound quite unlike that of solid-state amps, all of which use feedback to correct deficiencies.

By operating linearly in feedbackless, pure Class A, single-ended mode these

300B monoblocs are as pure as it gets - and sound quality reflects the fact. Fast, clean and clear in their presentation, at the same time their purity of sound is easy on the ear.

The kit is totally hard-wired; it does not use circuit boards. We can supply without valves, or with the superb Tesla 300Bs, Russian 5U4s and European 6AU6s & ECC82. Our 300B PSE kit bears an affordable price of £895.00 (UK price) excluding valves. Each monobloc weighs 23kgs (50lbs). External dimensions with valves: 25cm(w) x 38cm(d) x 22cm(h) per monobloc.

PUSH-PULL POWER

For more power, we also offer 300B in Push-Pull (PP) form. The 300B PP monobloc shares the same look and chassis as the 300B PSE monobloc. The 300B PP kit has been created for those who prefer a bit more power. With a pair of 300Bs in push-pull configuration providing 26 watts output, they will drive most modern loudspeakers to perfection. Andy Grove's design is totally feedbackless, using a 6AU6 pentode as the input valve and a 5687 as the phase splitter. The power supply uses a Russian 5U4 for rectification. The kit is constructed by hard wiring, so some experience is required. 300B PSE owners do have the option to buy the conversion kit for £250.00 to turn their monoblocs to push-pull status. Each monobloc weighs 23kg.

300B PSE MONOBLOC KIT £1197 per pair 300B PP MONOBLOC KIT £1197 per pair

The PRE-II is a high quality valve pre-amplifier that will drive any power amplifier. It has a gain of x5 which, with CD, enables it to deliver a large 10V output swing. To keep the amount of active amplification low, this pre-amp uniquely uses a line drive transformer to deliver a pure signal to the power amplifier. There are six inputs, a tape monitor and two sets of output sockets. It is powered by the external PSU-II power supply. The volume control uses high quality Alps Blue potentiometer which, with our solid, turned brass, chromed knob, gives a quality feel rarely encountered these days.

PHONO-II is a dedicated valve phono stage for MM cartridges, with MC input transformers an option. By using all-d.c. supplies from PSU-II and a case in which there is no power supply, PHONO II is hum free, something that is difficult to achieve with valves. With accurate RIAA equalisation right down to 10Hz (-3dB) PHONO II gives a wonderfully pure, dimensional sound from LP, possessing a sense of life and dynamism quite different to solid-state preamps.

Finally, PSU-II is a power supply unit that feeds both the PRE-II and PHONO-II. Keeping the power supply separate removes hum, often the bane of valves.



Power Supply Unit (PSU-II)	£205.00
Pre-amplifier (PRE-II)	£215.00
Phono Stage (PHONO-II)	£110.00
Moving coil step-up transformer	£77.00

SERIES II MODULAR PRE-AMP KIT

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Kel84 is an affordable, integrated valve amplifier for those who want to enjoy the valve sound, but from a simple, easy to build kit. It uses inexpensive EL84 output valves, known for their sweet sound, in conventional push-pull arrangement to provide 15 watts into an 8 ohm load. The output transformers are our own quality Ultra Linear design. Up front, the circuit employs an ECF80 input/phase splitter valve, which contributes to Kel84's extremely smooth sound.

The amplifier has very low hum and for simplicity it is built on a printed circuit board. A strong steel chassis is fronted by a 3mm anodised front panel and attractive brushed aluminium effect knobs. There are five line level inputs, plus one monitor input, with a tape output included, all controlled from the front panel.

At the rear is a mains switch/IEC power input, earth post, phono sockets, and 4mm banana sockets for loudspeakers. The Kel84 will highlight all the intricacies and depth of detail in your favourite recordings whilst retaining a warmth and fullness that is almost exclusive to pure valve amps and is rare at this price point.

Kel84 weighs 10kg. External dimensions with valves are 300mm(w) x 270mm(d) x 150mm(h). Single input version also available at £285.



KEL84 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT

£335



Our 6550 series amplifiers are built around the rugged 6550 beam tetrode that's popular in America. This valve is widely available at a good price. Producing no less than 40 watts into an 8 ohm load (available in a 4 ohm version if required) our 6550 is a power house, since valve watts always sound louder than transistor watts!

The difference between our 6550 and most others is that we use valve rectification (5U4) and a choke pi filter, for a power supply that is quiet and free from solid-state hardness. This is a true high-end design from Andy Grove, hard wired. It is a cut above the many other 6550s, with enough power to drive most loudspeakers including insensitive electrostatics for example. 6550 combines high

power with a top-end smoothness of sound, yet doesn't cost the earth to run, as the valves are inexpensive and have a long life.

The amplifier weighs 19kg. Dimensions are 390mm(w) x 330mm(d) x 190mm(h) with valves, or 220mm(h) with cage.

KIT6550 - An integrated amplifier with line inputs and volume control. Accepts CD, tuner, tape etc., but not LP.

KAT6550 - A power amplifier for use with a separate pre-amp. Paired with PRE II and PHONO II (+PSU II), can provide LP reproduction.

KIT6550 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT

£615

KAT6550 VALVE POWER AMPLIFIER KIT

£580

The Headphone II amplifier is a beautifully simple design using Mullard ECL83 valves, a triode and power pentode housed in the same envelope. It works directly from any source, be it CD, tape, tuner etc., or from an amplifier's tape out or pre-amp out sockets. The circuit uses high specification E/I output transformers that will drive any headphone load from 16 ohms to over 300 ohms depending on how the secondaries are wired up.

The Headphone II is a pure Class A single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for added sonic purity, and it is as quiet as a mouse. Treble has the crispness of the best solid-state, but with the tonal resolution and delicacy associated with valves. Bass is punchy and controlled without becoming artificial.

External dimensions 270mm wide, 275mm deep and 85mm high



HEADPHONE II

£285

private ads

Dealers must not advertise in the Private Classified section. Monthly consecutive insertions will be considered Trade advertising. The Publisher reserves the right to judge submissions.

WANTED: OLD British valve amplifiers working or not. Output valves, old arms and cartridges or anything interesting or unusual from the 1950's or 1960's. Large pair of speakers or drivers. Tel: 01726 812 966 (May)

BORDER PATROL Amplifier just recently upgraded to S10 specification. Dual mono power supplies Weston Electric 300B valves absolutely mint condition. £6000+ new, £4000 ono. Tel: 01208 872316 (Cornwall) (May)

PIEGA P4L MkII floorstanding Swiss metal speakers £750 (£1650 new) AVI 2000 MP pre-amp £350. Rotel 991 power amp £250. Chord Chorus interconnect 1m £75. Tel: 0117 302 6534 (May)

WANTED: ROGERS, Kef, Spendor or similar, one pair of BBC LS3/5A speakers. Private buyer. Tel: 01394 388399 (May)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3 24bit CD player, silver trim, manual, box, remote, excellent condition, £450. Ortofon MC25E low use £130. JPM Minims £40. Tel: 0131 664 5433 evenings (Edinburgh) (May)

JEFF ROWLAND pre-amp Model Consummate, excellent condition £1595 (rare) Tel: 01224 483 642 evenings (May)

CROFT TWO box valve pre-amp, £100. Sound Developments four box valve preamp. Bit noisy, £100. Mission DAD7000 CD player £30. Tel: 01279 718 325 (May)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 amp (integrated) and A3.2 CD player. Very little use. Immaculate condition. 12 months old. £980. No offers. Tel: Rob 0116 281 1567 or 07973 501 199 (Leics) (May)

AUDIO AERO Capitole 24/192 CD player. 9/10 condition. £1900. Coincident Speaker Technology TRS-1 speaker cables, 3m single-wire pair. Reference cable £390. One of the best CD players. Tel: 07815 819 318 or Email: saifulkas-sim@hotmail.com (May)

QUAD QC Twenty Four pre-amp £395. Sondex S230 integrated stereo amp £95. Rotel RA 1412 110watts RMS 1976 classic £250. Tel: 01446 418 207 (May)

ARCAM P75+ power amps (2), boxed, mint (£370) £219 each. Bowers & Wilkins 602 speakers, black, £119. Tel: 0115 960 3934 (Nottingham) (May)

QUAD ESL57, black pair, vgc, serviced, £650. Naim CDI, vgc, £600. Gamma Rhythm Reference, upgraded capacitors & pot, with spare valves, vgc, £750. All offers welcome. Tel: 01234 852 675 or 07905 476 446 (May)

DENON TU260L tuner £48 ono. Linn Keilidh speakers, Kutstone plinths £275 ono. Linn Kolektor pre-amplifier £185 ono. Linn LK140 power amplifier £250 ono. Tel: 01634 363 374 (Kent) (May)

CHORD DAC 64, mint, £1250. Tel: 020 8473 6997 (May)

SPENDOR BCI speakers with Target stands £290. Audiolab 8000A amplifier £135. Marantz CD505E £25. Akai 4000D open reel tape deck £60. All good working condition with manuals. Tel: 0118 981 2166 (Hampshire) (May)

QUAD ESL63 loudspeakers, 1982, brown, one loving owner since new. Selling reluctantly as moving abroad. £750. Tel: 01903 505 868 or Email: mhawker@tiscali.co.uk (West Sussex) (May)

AKAI GX-625 open reel tape deck. 10 1/2" reels. 3 3/4 i.p.s., 7 1/2 i.p.s. 30Hz - 26,000Hz. Digital tape counter. Auto-repeat playback. Pitch control. Feather touch I.C. logic controls. Mint condition. Instruction book. Q.R. hubs. £250. Tel: 01284 810 874 (May)

QUAD 66 Control, 66 Pre, 306 power, 66 FM, 66 CD, instructions, £950 (£3000+). Tel: 07710 828 286 (Brighton) (May)

REGA PLANAR 25, RB600 arm, rosewood plinth, absolutely mint condition and boxed. (New 2004, hardly used), £450 ono. Audio-Technica Safety Raiser armlift, very rare, superb device, boxed, instructions, £40. Tel: 01285 862 539 (May)

REGA PLANAR 25 turntable. RB600 arm, mint and boxed, £450 ono. Audio-Technica Safety Raiser Armlift, brilliant device, boxed £35. Garrard stylus weighing machine. Tel: 01285 862 539 (May)

SONY SMALL monitors SS-1AL. Limited edition, very rare, based on LS3/5A. Pace, speed, control. Quality Sony units, 4 3/4" LT, bass 1 1/4" silk dome. Knock out sound. New (£500) £200. 01702 612 588 (Southend, Essex)

QUAD 405-2 power amplifier, excellent condition, unmarked, original packaging, manual (£265). Partington Super Dreadnaught 28" speaker stands silver, suit LS3/5A type speakers (£78). Tel: 0141 942 3500 (May)

AMC CVT3030 valve amplifier used approx. nine months stored since, boxed, perfect, £300. Creek 3140 tuner, boxed, perfect, £150. Tel: 01708 344 334 (Romford, Essex) (May)

VALVES FOR Sale: ECC81, ECC82, ECC83. 7 Mullards ECC82, 3 Mullards ECC83. Yellow logo's. 2 Mullards ECC81 plus few China Brimar Philips Beard used job lot £300. N.T.W. Tel: 01562 827 710 (May)

NAIM NAT 01 tuner plus Naim NA PST power supply original silver edged style. The classic FM tuner. All cables supplied. £895. Tel: Tom 020 8986 1762 (May)

VALHALLA SPEAKER Cables 2m, £2150 (£4200). Valkyrja 4m, £2250 (£5050). All original and mint. Valhalla 0.6m interconnects, professionally terminated 0.6m, £470 (£1935). Red Dawns 1.0m £200, 0.6m £180. New. Tel: 01895 677 714 or Email: shasha@fsmail.net (May)



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Mos Def	A New Danger	£14.90
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Ocean Colour Scene	Hyperactive Workout	£13.90
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REISSUES:

Aimee Mann	Bachelor No 2	£TBC
Byrds	Another Dimension (Sundazed)	£TBC
Carol Kidd	All My Tomorrows (Linn 180g)	£21.90
Christy Moore	Time Has Come/Voyage/Ordinary Man	£15.90
Emmerson Lake & Palmer	Emmerson Lake & Palmer (Earmark)	£15.90
Johnny Cash	Sun Singles 54-58 (Sundazed)	£TBC
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Sly & Robbie	Sly & Robbie's Taxi Sound	£TBC
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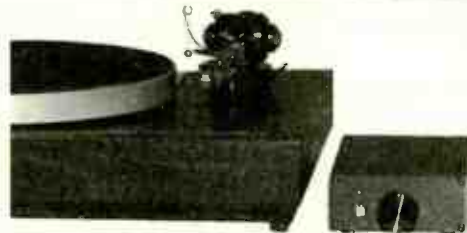
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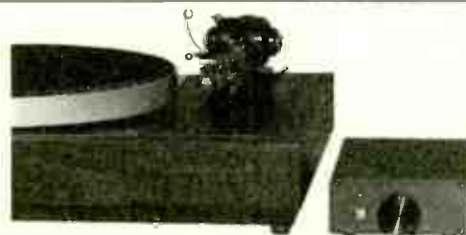
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ADVERTISERS INDEX

Absolute Sounds	90
Affordable Valve	128
Amadeus	44
Art Audio	118
Audio Atmosphere	109
Audusa	111
Big Ears	118
Billy Vee	88
BK Electronics	44
Cambridge Audio	6
Central Audio	116
Choice Hi-Fi	123,125
Classique Sounds	113
Custom Cable	115
DefinitiveAudio (Notts.)	14
Diverse Vinyl	124
Exposure	IBC
Heathcote Audio	115
Heatherdale Audio	114
Henley Designs	36,42,60,66
Hi Fidelity	14
Hi-End Cable	114
Hi-Fi Sound	117
Ian Edwards	88
Ian Harrison	113
Icon Audio	88,90
Kit & Component	98
Krystal Cable	54
Linn	BC
Mantra Audio	88
Midland Audio Exchange	110
Musical Fidelity	34
Musonic	118
Naim	48
Noteworthy	44
NVCF	118
Origin Live	58,124
Oxford Audio	116
Pinewood Music	113
QTA	114
Quad	24
Real Hi-Fi	114
Retro Reproduction	109
Rotel	IFC
Sevenoaks	27,28,29,30,31
Shadow Audio Con.	64
Sounds Of Music	54
Soundstage	112
Stowsounds	124
Sugden	58
The Chord Company	50
The Listening Rooms	112
The Right Note	48
Trichord	14
Tube Shop	90
UKD	44
Walrus	16
Williams Hart	112



THE CURE

THREE IMAGINARY BOYS

1979 (REMASTERED 2004)

The success of Bloc Party's debut album is a welcome reminder of how the union of three or four relatively inexperienced musicians in the studio for the first time can result in something quite magical. For we oldies it is extremely pleasing to see the pendulum swinging back to the live guitar-based sounds of the post-punk era, even if it is extremely irritating to hear sundry 6Music presenters constantly pointing out the bleeding obvious Franz Ferdinand/ Gang Of Four interface in lame trailers for their otherwise excellent station...

Bloc Party too get tarred with the Gang Of Four brush, but in truth Kele claims to have never heard any prior to being told of the resemblance, and the real link to the past in his music (and his artfully sloppy vocal style in particular) is with The Cure. The Cure's critical rehabilitation had already started with the name checks given to them by the likes of Interpol, and with their own respectable eponymous comeback album. The real re-evaluation is going to come with the progressive reissue schedule Universal have planned - with this, the band's 1979 debut, being the obvious start point (discounting the recent, unimpeachable 'Join The Dots' B-sides box set).

For those of us (mid-eighties students yet again) who came to the band around the time of the first (of many) compilation 'Staring at the Sea', the rudimentary, splashy cymbals sound of this album will never have any better exemplar than the brilliant

lead-off track '10.15 Saturday Night' (also available here both as a bizarre Robert Smith home demo, and as a more rounded full band studio demo). Drummer Lol Tolhurst's time with the band was to come to a sticky, alcohol-fuelled end ten years later (when he had long vacated the drum stool in favour of more competent performers and was place-holding as a colour-coded one-fingered keyboard player), but in common with Bloc Party, the 'drummer-through-necessity' nature of his amateurish thrashings lends a lot of the naïve charm with which this record is imbued.

Robert Smith personally compiled this deluxe double CD edition and the package exhibits similarly high standards to other recent Universal efforts such as 'Rattlesnakes'. Pleasingly, the short (35 minutes - those were the days!) album proper is left unencumbered with bonus tracks on disc one of the set, while disc two is jam-packed with bonus material, much of it previously unreleased. The sleeve notes unsurprisingly reveal that the content of the album is their then current stage set, played live in the studio. It was recorded in five nights, in the overnight downtime while The Jam recorded 'All Mod Cons'. (Also, watch out for the funny Smith quote about those other current fave retro influences - XTC - Kaiser Chiefs anybody?).

The Cure's studio catalogue has unbelievably never been through more than one iteration of mastering for CD. My reference is the complete (up to 'Disintegration') album box-

set 'Assemblage' from France fifteen years ago (Anyone want to buy one?!). I have no reason to suspect that the box-set version differs from the separately available original Fiction single CD version. The good news is that the original master was always very low level and weedy, and the new mastering (by Chris Blair at Abbey Road) does a decent job of punching it up, without going too over the top with the digital compression. As ever, the real reason for seeking out this package is the bonus material and the sleeve notes, and this one does not disappoint.

That second disc bears a healthy 64 minutes (20 tracks) of material including rarities, punky home and studio demos, live takes, and the two spectacular tracks which were later used to turn the spine of this album into the revamped 'Boys Don't Cry' disc, namely the classic title track, and 'Jumping Someone Else's Train'. The sound quality understandably varies, but everything is listenable, and the historical interest is undeniable.

Cure fans are likely to be shelling out a lot over the next few months, as we should shortly see a batch of three of these special editions, (the incredibly powerful ensuing trilogy of '17 Seconds', 'Faith' and 'Pornography') arrive together in April. I suspect I may be in the queue at Selectadisc too, and don't worry about potential SACDs, (this being Universal product), as reportedly Smith doesn't like the sound of DSD (wise man)! Multi-channel would also seem unlikely. So, as the man said, this is this... **PC**

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