

# HI-FI WORLD

MAY 2011

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- HRT iSTREAMER IPOD DAC
- INSPIRE LINN LP12 VIVID **EXCLUSIVE!**
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'ILLUMINATES MUSIC LIKE VERY  
FEW OTHERS'

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RECOMMEND THIS AMP!'

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# welcome

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## verdicts

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



Despite all the talk of the brave new world of networked digital music playback, and its obvious increase in popularity over the past twelve months or so, there's no definitive, iconic computer audio product that has caught the public's imagination. Sadly, a ITB Network Attached Storage device doesn't quite have the same resonance in the hi-fi marketplace as a Nakamichi Dragon!

I personally hope that we'll get some interesting new boxes over the next few years, and suddenly people will be lusting after the hardware, lovingly stroking power switches in dealers' showrooms and longingly browsing the brochure PDF online! What the hi-fi market needs now, more than ever perhaps, is sexy equipment to get customers buying again...

Over in the analogue world however, there is no shortage of visually beautiful, lovely-to-touch hardware. Some turntables come close to being objects of art in their own right, as Michell's GyroDec [pictured top right] shows. There's not a single superfluous component on it, yet the deck has a sculptural rightness to it that would lift any modern home. It's amazing to think it is thirty years old; launched in the summer of 1981, few things about the design have changed on the surface, although there have been numerous subtle improvements underneath. Find out how it fares against four of the latest and greatest sub £2,000 turntables, including the SRM Tech [middle] and Notts Analogue [bottom] in our supertest on p13.

Elsewhere, we look at another design classic, Linn's Sondek LP12 turntable, which is a whole eight years older than the Gyro! On p100 I review a very clever, and surprisingly affordable package of modifications from Inspire Hi-Fi which transforms the deck's sound. There are few things in hi-fi which are as famous as this product, so I'm only surprised there haven't been more such packages in the past.

In-between these reviews, *Hi-Fi World* is as ever packed with an eclectic mix of the great and the good, this month with the emphasis on affordability. Look out for some very fine CD players, amplifiers and loudspeakers, plus a DIY amplifier project and a sweet sounding secondhand tuner you can pick up for peanuts. Enjoy!

**David Price, editor**

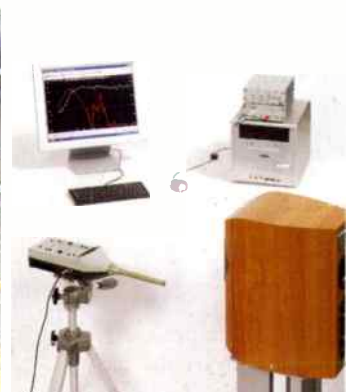
## testing

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

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

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

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



## ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

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*“Hart, We Love Sound!”*

The Hart EVO1  
Dual Monitor  
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*“Hart has delivered a true  
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September 8th, 2010  
by Jason Kennedy  
Source: HiFi+



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# news



## FIVE LIVE

The £9,500 ET5 is the new vice-flagship conrad-johnson preamplifier, described as "a single chassis, reference standard" device with an enhanced triode remote linestage. The circuitry of the ET5 follows closely that of the GAT big brother; the audio amplifier stage consisting of a single-ended triode amplifier provides the voltage gain. This amplifier stage is connected to the preamplifier outputs through a high-current MOSFET buffer, which achieves a very low output impedance, making the ET5 extremely flexible in the choice of interconnect cables and amplifiers,

it is claimed. DC voltage is supplied to the circuit by their latest discrete voltage regulator that isolates the audio circuit from the power line by maintaining negligible impedance across the audio frequency band. Infra-sonic noise is minimized by operating the tube filaments (heaters) on a dc voltage supplied by a separate regulated power supply. All control functions operate through microprocessor-controlled relays. The ET5 is constructed from "highest quality, carefully selected" parts; tubes have been carefully hand selected for minimum noise and microphonics. The same CJD Teflon capacitors that distinguish the GAT are used in the ET5 for output coupling and post-regulator power supply storage, and there are no electrolytic capacitors in the audio related circuits. The resistors in these circuits are special low inductance, high-precision laser-trimmed metal foil types. Switches are sealed relays with gold-plated silver contacts. For details, call +44(0) 20 8948 4153 or click on [www.audiofreaks.co.uk](http://www.audiofreaks.co.uk).

## WEDDING BELLES

My Audio Design have announced a limited edition of its flagship Royal Salute loudspeaker, designed to commemorate the forthcoming Royal Wedding. It sports bespoke silver detailing from Simon Benney, the world famous Royal Warrant Holding silversmith to the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Edinburgh and the late Queen Mother. Simon says, "the idea of the collaboration of Tim Jung of M.A.D. and myself is very interesting. The mixing of old traditional craft with modern technology is fascinating. I will create solid silver rings to go around the speaker head and the smaller speaker on the main body. These will have the English hallmark stamped around the rim with the silver polished to a bright finish and then covered with a platinum alloy. The contrast of the silver and the pearlescent white body of the speakers will look amazing and will add a touch of silversmithing craftsmanship to what is already a wonderful loudspeaker." Needless to say, production numbers are extremely limited and prices are on application. For more details, see [www.madengland.com](http://www.madengland.com) and [www.benney.co.uk](http://www.benney.co.uk).



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## COLOURFIELD

HECO's Music in Colour compact loudspeakers cost £399 per pair. A two-way bookshelf design, they sport bass-reflex loading, a 4.5" mid/bass unit, a 1" tweeter, a power handling of 70W RMS per channel, a quoted frequency response of 38Hz to 35kHz and a sensitivity of 89dB. Finishes are high gloss black, white, red or wenge; vital statistics are 150x235x200mm. See [www.heco-audio.de](http://www.heco-audio.de) and [www.soundthinking-store.co.uk](http://www.soundthinking-store.co.uk).

## BIG SPENDORS

The new £1,295 Sendor A3 is a compact floorstanding loudspeaker, said to incorporate advanced drive unit technology and cabinet engineering from the Sendor SA1 and A5 loudspeakers. It sports powerful electromagnetic damping of the Sendor bass drive unit and an optimised low Q acoustic enclosure; a large diameter free flowing rear mounted reflex port ensures deep, well controlled bass in any listening room. The 15cm bass/mid drive unit is designed and manufactured by Sendor, with their ep38 polymer cone. The 22mm wide surround tweeter combines the extended frequency response of a small diaphragm with the low frequency characteristics of a larger diaphragm to give stable low distortion response over a very wide frequency range, the company says. A phase linear crossover network is mounted on a non resonant panel which incorporates insulated gold plated terminals. High linearity audio grade capacitors are used, and the cabinet sports asymmetric aperture bracing to disperse internal standing waves. Finishes are light oak, dark walnut, cherry and black ash.

Sendor's new £850 S3/5R2 is said to "maintain the charm and enjoyable music making qualities of the original S3/5s while delivering significant improvements in low frequency articulation, dynamics, power handling, transparency and sound integration". A two way infinite baffle standmount design with a new 14cm Sendor bass/mid drive unit, it sports an ep39 polymer cone with phase correction technology and the new 22mm wide surround tweeter. "Single wiring via a pair of insulated gold plated terminals ensures uncompromised performance and consistent sound", says Sendor, and there are high linearity audio grade capacitors and a classic Sendor thin wall damped cabinet panel structure with controlled bracing. The cabinet is now constructed using different panel thicknesses. For more details, click on [www.spendoraudio.com](http://www.spendoraudio.com).



Sendor S3/5R2



Sendor A3

## MAGIC BUS

Artisan Silver Cables has a new silver USB cable, called the Silver Dream, available. "Many of Artisan's customers asked them for this product – which is designed to give the best possible optimized connection between a computer and an external USB DAC", the company says. They claim it makes "a magnitude of improvement over a stock USB cable". It uses four individual pure silver conductors, arranged in a four-way braid, each individually insulated in over-sized Teflon tubing. Price is from £99, depending on length. For more details, click on [www.artisansilvercables.com](http://www.artisansilvercables.com).



## KARAN DASH

Audiofreaks has announced a thorough revision of the Karan Acoustics range of solid-state electronics. Changes in the audio and power supply circuits, implementation of non-magnetic Vishay film resistors, use of Cardas Audio internal wire, input/output connections and speaker binding posts are said to benefit power output and sonics. All Karan Acoustics products are now also available in silver finish (black remains available as well) at no extra cost. Prices are up by ten percent across the range. For details call +44(0) 20 8948 4153 or [www.audiofreaks.co.uk](http://www.audiofreaks.co.uk).

## SMALL TIME

CEEntrance's new DACmini is an "audiophile quality" headphone amplifier and DAC preamp with multiple I/O options including: USB, optical, Coax S/PDIF, analogue input and output, and a front-mounted 1/4-inch connector for professional headphones. It is said to match Apple's Mac mini computer footprint, "creating a perfect platform for an audiophile-level music server". It sports galvanically-isolated, gold-plated output jacks, a proprietary JitterGuard jitter elimination system, and plug-and-play driverless USB connection on PC or Mac. The extended range volume control accommodates the widest array of headphones, from IEMs to professional high-impedance models. Priced at \$795, look out for a review in Hi-Fi World soon or click on [www.CEntrance.com](http://www.CEntrance.com).







Advance Acoustic MAA1000

## ADVANCED ENGINEERING

The new 1000 series from Advance Acoustic includes the MPP1000 stereo preamplifier and the MAA1000 mono power amplifier. The preamp is a dual mono design, with nine inputs including phono and a choice of balanced or unbalanced. Vital statistics are 155x144x430mm and 14.2kg. The matching power amplifier sports a 1000 VA power transformer, giving 400W into 8 Ohms; it works in Class A at lower levels and switches into B at either 40 or 80W. Two inputs, one balanced and one unbalanced, are provided, and there's a large analogue power meter with variable brightness. Vital statistics are 241x144x490mm and 36kg. Prices are £2,350 and £3,525 for preamp and power amp respectively. For details, click on [www.advance-acoustic.com](http://www.advance-acoustic.com).

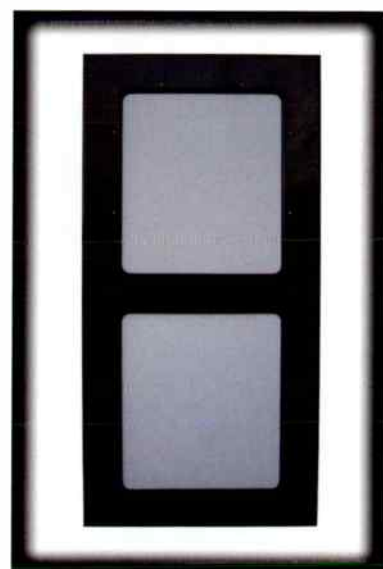


## LITE BITE

No sooner had the ink dried on the last issue of *Hi-Fi World* and news came through that Marantz had dropped the prices of its Pearl Lite separates. The SA-K1 Pearl Lite SACD player is now £750 (from £1,000), and the matching PM-K1 Pearl Lite stereo amplifier gets a similar price cut. With effect from the same date the £699 NA7004 network audio player will include a free AirPlay upgrade. This offer equates to a saving of £39. For details, click on [www.marantz.co.uk](http://www.marantz.co.uk).

## PANEL FIT

The intriguingly titled Bass-O-Nator is an acoustic treatment panel designed for professional recording studios and hi-fi listening rooms. Its primary function is to 'trap', or absorb unwanted bass frequencies and standing waves that can cause bass frequencies to be cancelled out in the listening position or cause boomy undefined bass reproduction. Its secondary function is to absorb mid/high frequency room reflections. There are two versions available, a wide band model that targets frequencies between 80Hz-200Hz, and for rooms with specific frequency problems custom tuned versions can be ordered. A custom service is also available where specific room problem frequencies can be identified. The Bass-O-Nator cabinet is built out of plywood and measures 1,200x600x160mm. They have an attractive painted wooden frame, which is available in any colour from the Pantone range, with either black or white fabric panels and they can be wall mounted or free standing with optional stands. The Bass-O-Nator is designed and built by studio designer Kevin Van Green, who is also involved with the Unity Audio Rock active speaker product. For details, call +44(0) 1440 785843 or click on [www.unityaudioproducts.co.uk](http://www.unityaudioproducts.co.uk).



## LOST AND FOUND

In a move which can do the music industry no harm, yet might usher forward the demise of CD slightly, news comes that Apple is in talks with recording industry executives to offer lossless music downloads. It is possible that these might not stop at just CD-quality 16bit, 44.1kHz files, but that some could be 'hi res'. Even standard ALAC (Apple Lossless Audio Codec) files would be a significant improvement on the low bitrate AAC files currently offered on iTunes.

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*"The whole auditioning process took about 30 seconds. Play a piece of music on GII Mini Sub. Play it again on Aquarius and wonder why you were so attached to the GII Mini Sub." "Very highly recommended"*

HI-FI PLUS, ISSUE 68,



SIRIUS



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## AIR FRANCE

Micromega's new AirStream WM-10 wireless DAC is said to be "the ideal solution for streaming digital music to a high-quality audio system". It combines a high-quality 24/96 DAC and built-in Wi-Fi receiver, and is designed for placement within a hi-fi or AV separates system. Music can be streamed wirelessly from a PC or Apple Mac to the AirStream WM-10, whereby the signal is converted to analogue and fed to the user's amplifier via the unit's audiophile-quality output stage and high-grade



cable connectors. The AirStream WM-10 uses the Wi-Fi 802.11n standard, specially optimised for music reproduction thanks to its fast data rates. The unit features "a sophisticated linear power supply", with R-core transformer. Micromega has also paid significant attention to the master clock with its own winding on the secondary side of the transformer, combined with sophisticated regulation. The AirStream WM-10 is designed to operate seamlessly with Apple iTunes, and can also be used with other software such as Rogue Amoeba's Airfoil. For more details, call +44 (0) 20 8971 3909 or click on [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com).

## LARGER THAN LIFE

Giant-Killer Cables is "a range of painstakingly hand-crafted audiophile-quality OFC and silver-plated OFC cables at exceptionally reasonable prices". There are two levels of performance available; the OFC Ultra-Pure interconnect starts from £49 for a half metre pair; whilst the silver-plated OFC Quad-Core Silver interconnects start from £99. HDMI and USB cables are coming, the company says. Giant-Killer Cables can be ordered direct from the website at [www.giantkillercables.com](http://www.giantkillercables.com).



## NATURAL HABITAT

The iPod dock race has just hotted up with the arrival of the elegant Conran Audio Speaker Dock, designed by Studio Conran and said to boast "truly outstanding audio performance, beautifully engineered by award winning loudspeaker company Q Acoustics". It can also stream "high quality" audio from a new generation of smartphones, tablets and other portable devices via 'aptX Bluetooth' from aptX



enabled devices, such as Apple Mac computers running OS X 10.6.4 onwards, Creative Ziiio tablet and forthcoming Samsung portable devices. There's also a conventional auxiliary input, six audio equalisation settings and a remote control which fits neatly into the side of the dock when not in use. Sir Terence Conran says, "we hope we have created a contemporary design classic." Available now in black or white finish, the Conran Dock has a suggested retail price of £249. For more information, click on [www.amourhome.co.uk](http://www.amourhome.co.uk).



## TALL STORY

KEF has announced the addition of three full-size floorstanding speakers to its all-new Q Series line-up; models Q500 [pictured], Q700 and Q900. Each speaker shares the same audiophile-grade technology in the same basic configuration: a new generation Uni-Q MF/HF array paired with a long-throw bass driver of equal size, and two matching ABRs. The difference is the size of the drivers; 130mm (5.25in.) diameter in the £700 Q500, 165mm (6.5in.) in the £1,000 Q700 and 200mm (8in.) in the £1,200 flagship Q900. See [www.kef.com](http://www.kef.com).

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Speakerflux



Lineflux (XLR)



Lineflux (RCA)



Powerflux-18UK

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Jumperflux-S



Jumperflux-B



Flux 50filter



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# ADL

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# Table Tops

Reflecting vinyl's continued resurgence, we thought it was time to pit two new sub-£2,000 turntables against some established favourites. Adam Smith does the honours...

**S**urprising as it may sound, but even in 2011 serious audiophiles largely agree that vinyl remains king. High resolution digital is a good and welcome thing, but is still no match even for good middle ranking black plastic players. And as for CD players, even though they're getting better by the day, they're limited by the paleolithic digital specification, drawn up before the Personal Computer was but a gleam in the eye of IBM executives!

Despite all the whizz-bang new technologies and gadgets to buy, play and stream digital music on all manner of gizmos and all number of price points, the vinyl LP continues to undergo a widespread resurgence. New turntables across the entire price spectrum are cropping up, the range of LP titles available is increasing daily and that most sorely under-populated section of the market, the vinyl related gadget, is seeing a welcome return to prominence.

For a while at least, it was felt by some cynics that perhaps this resurgence was simply an element of nostalgia, or a by-product of some of the other retro-fashion themes appearing in other walks of life. Some

felt sure that it was a format only being kept alive by DJs and their Technics SL-1200s, but the sad demise of the latter has not made one jot of difference to the state of the vinyl market. Black plastic is no longer a quirky outsider's pastime – it's back to stay!

With this in mind, we felt it was time to take a fresh look at one of the most hotly contested areas of the market, namely the price region that extends from £1,000 upwards to nearly twice that. Here, a significant notch up in performance should in theory be obtained over the likes of fine, more affordable designs like the Rega P3-24. Stepping up to the challenge are two new faces to *Hi-Fi World Towers* in the form of the SRM Tech Arezzo with Super Platter upgrade and the baby of Nottingham Analogue's range, the Interspace Junior. Alongside these is a new variant of a well known face, namely the Project Xperience V-Pack, and finally the latest incarnations of two established performers; the Roksan Radius 5.2 and the Michell GyroDec SE. Are these a sure fire route to affordable audiophile nirvana or is all this vinyl pomp and paraphernalia not really worth the effort? Read on...

#### THE CONTENDERS:

PRO-JECT 2 XPERIENCE V-PACK	£1,000
NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE INTERSPACE JR.	£1,150
ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2	£1,449
SRM TECH AREZZO PLUS SUPER PLATTER	£1,496
MICHELL GYRODEC SE/TECNOARM A	£1,800

#### REFERENCE SYSTEM

Ortofon 2M Black cartridge  
Sondex DE-1 phono stage  
Naim Supernait amplifier  
Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers



## PRO-JECT 2 XPERIENCE V-PACK £1,100

**P**ro-Ject's goody-laden package comes complete with one of Ortofon's brand new Vivo moving coil cartridges pre-fitted, but the turntable itself does not let the side down, offering a smart clear Acrylic plinth supported by three height-adjustable Sorbothane feet. The motor is isolated from the plinth and drives the periphery of the platter, which itself is a 2kg construction in a sandwich configuration. Power comes from a wall-wart style AC transformer but you can of course add the Pro-Ject Speedbox to allow switching between 33 and 45rpm at the touch of a button should you so wish.

The 9cc tonearm is a solid design, consisting of a single piece, carbon fibre headshell and armtube, the latter of which has a conical cross section to avoid the setting up of standing waves within the tube. Four ABEC7 stainless steel ball races form the bearing structure and the wiring is a single run of high purity copper from the headshell tags to the phono plugs. With the lid closed, the deck measures 133x460x360mm (H x W x D) and weighs in at 7.6kg.

### SOUND QUALITY

Kicking the listening session off with the Pro-Ject set things off to a fine start. The 2 Xperience V-pack offers a notable kick up in performance from a more budget deck, adding a greater sense of poise, precision and insight into the music. At the top end, the Pro-Ject is lithe,

detailed and blessed of a fine sense of tautness. Treble detail was plentiful and smooth, without ever becoming fatiguing, although I occasionally felt a little extra hint of crispness would not have gone amiss on cymbals. Equally and rather confusingly, an occasional spittiness was noted on poorly recorded material, the Pro-Ject becoming ever so slightly uncomfortable here.

Across the midband the 2 Xperience had no problems with any sort of music and was happy to murmur the delicacy of a string quartet, bang out a bit of electro-pop or groove along to some funky jazz! At all times it relayed the inherent

nature of the instruments playing and laid them out well within a well-ordered, if not vastly extended soundstage. Centre-stage performers were well highlighted and the stage depth set up by the deck was fine.

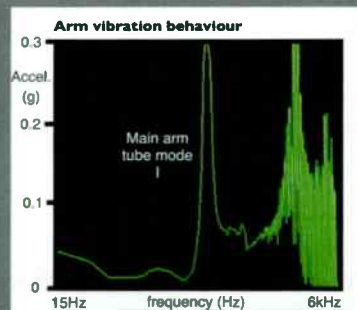
At the low end, bass was fulsome and well extended, without being overblown, and the Pro-Ject offered good levels of upper bass detail and a pleasingly deft sense of timing. At the very bottom, I felt that, although the Pro-Ject went suitably deep, it could occasionally be a little soft and unfocused, making dance music lack its customary tautness, and vigorously played orchestral tympani coming across a little limp at times.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Evolution arm of wrapped carbon fibre construction behaves much like other arms, with a first mode at 180Hz. That suggests more compliance in the arm material than metals, especially as mass appears low. However, the mode is well damped, being hardly a blip on our plot, suggestive of good dynamics and stage imaging. The arm rings however, with a strong third order bending mode at 540Hz. There is a lot of energy in the headshell and structure at 3.5kHz too, putting the Evolution below par against other arms in this area, as comparison of our analyses shows. It may well have a distinctive sound. So this arm is a mixture of good and not-so-good. The turntable ran 2.6% fast, a lot, and this may well raise pitch by an audible degree. Wow and flutter figures were good, if not exceptional.

Speed accuracy	+2.6%
Wow & flutter	0.168%
Wow & flutter (IEC weighted)	0.109%

#### ARM VIBRATION



#### WOW & FLUTTER



#### VERDICT ●●●● £

Super value for money package that offers a tidy and musically satisfying performance.

**PRO-JECT 2 XPERIENCE V-PACK** £1,000

Henley Designs  
+44(0)1235 511166  
www.henleydesigns.co.uk

#### FOR

- good upper bass detail
- fine midband insight
- smooth top end
- ease of setup

#### AGAINST

- low bass lacks impact



## NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE INTERSPACE JR. £1,150

**A**ltogether more quirky in operation and appearance, the deck conforms to an idea that the motor should only be just strong enough to turn the platter. To this end, the Interspace Jr. has no On/Off switch; as soon as the power supply is connected, the motor is energised and starting the platter is a matter of simply giving the platter a push with your hand! This feels very strange for someone used to the prodigious torque of a Garrard 301, but it's an interesting methodology in its own right and I adapted quickly enough.

The motor itself is fitted within the plinth and requires the pulley to be fitted before operation. This then drives the platter, which is the same as that used on the dearer Spacedeck, by a thick rubber belt around its periphery. The platter itself is an impressively heavy item and also comes complete with two peripheral damping rings to further remove any possibility of vibration or noise. The Interspace Jr. is only sold as a package complete with the Interspace tonearm, which is a unipivot design. Nicely made, the arm has a good cueing device but might upset hand-cuers owing to its lack of fingerlift, which is something that I feel is especially worthwhile on a single pivot design as a result of their inherent freedom of movement compared to a conventional arm. In all, it feels different to set up and use, but most definitely none the worse for this.

### SOUND QUALITY

I started off with the 'If Time Was For Wasting' track from Dylan LeBlanc's 'Pauper's Field' album and the results were nothing short of delightful. The Interspace Jr. offers an uncanny sense of space and atmosphere to proceedings that almost makes other turntables sound shut-in. The scale of the performance offered by the deck was positively commodious and it breezed through the track and several others after it, with a consummate sense of ease.

With this sort of material, it was difficult to find any real fault with the Interspace Jr. From the smooth yet crisp treble, down through a delightfully open and revealing midband to a bass that was highly capable and blessed with fine levels

of detail, the deck proved remarkably tolerant of a wide range of acoustic music, smooth classical and soft jazz. Each performance drew me in and was a captivating listen.

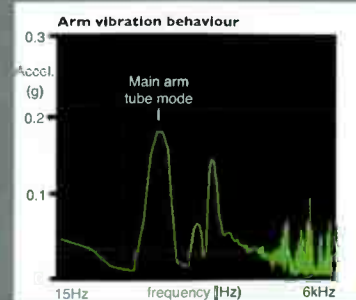
I chose to up the ante somewhat with 'Back it up' from Caro Emerald's 'Deleted Scenes from the Cutting Room Floor' LP. Whilst the Interspace Jr. maintained the firm beat behind the track very well, the deck seemed slightly overwhelmed by the rest of the performance, sounding thin and almost compressed. More heavy and rhythmically inclined tracks suffered similar consequences; the deck seemed to struggle with denser recordings at times. Still, the Interspace Jr. never sounded bad by any means, and generally proved a charming listening companion.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

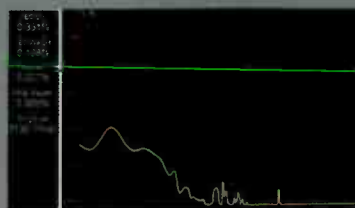
The Interspace arm has a first bending mode at 210Hz, of sizeable amplitude at close to 0.2g and with a fair area under the curve (energy). This means the main arm tube is quite stiff but it is none too well damped. It isn't so bad against old tube arms, but it is not up with today's best. The common third order mode is also present. The headshell is quite well damped, making for clean treble. Speed error of the Interspace turntable was minimal at +0.3% but over a long period Wow and Flutter was stubbornly high at 0.33% and our spectrum analysis shows a component at 1.2Hz as responsible. This result was below par against the other models of this group and in general.

Speed accuracy	-0.3%
Wow & flutter	0.331%
Wow & flutter (IEC weighted)	0.128%

#### ARM VIBRATION



#### WOW & FLUTTER



#### VERDICT

Great with smooth acoustic and classical music, the Interspace Jr. is a capable and likeable performer.

**NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE**  
**INTERSPACE JR. £1,150**  
 Nottingham Analogue Studio  
 +44(0)1773 762947  
 www.nottinghamanaloguestudio.com

#### FOR

- airy presentation
- fluid midband
- smoothly focused top end

#### AGAINST

- can sound muddled

2010S2

**CD Player**  
**Integrated Amplifier**  
**Power Amplifier**



3010S2

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



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





## ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 £1,449

**T**he Radius 5.2 is an outwardly simple and unassuming turntable that hides some clever engineering under its sleek exterior.

Its platter of machined acrylic is driven around its outer circumference by a belt, the motor on the Mk2 variant is new and features an improved aluminium pulley, a new location and better decoupling from the plinth. The belt is also a recent change that can be offered to previous Radius owners as an upgrade, being of silicone rubber construction and more carefully manufactured, promising greater torque and less noise.

The Nima tonearm is rapidly becoming something of a modern classic and the latest version of it incorporates some notable improvements over the original. With an aluminium alloy armtube and acrylic headshell and bearing yoke, the design is simple and cost-effective, but highly competent in action. Recent improvements include a grounded armtube modification to eliminate the risk of hum when touching the tube, along with an improved main bearing and yoke pillar, all meaning that the Nima continues to present a tempting package. The deck measures 150x350x400mm and weighs 7kg.

### SOUND QUALITY

An interesting experience after the Nottingham Analogue, it also offers a delightfully spacious and vivid interpretation of the music, which I feel is down again to the unipivot arm design. The whole upper midrange and

treble is presented in a swathe of detail and precision, the deck really pulling the heart of the performance out to present it in a highly enjoyable manner. The stage it presents is a deep one with fine perspective that works a treat for grand large-scale material, but it is equally capable of pinpointing a lesser number of performers as well. Whether string quartet or full orchestra, the Radius and Nima make the best of both and all in between.

Whether the old and acoustic or new and electronic, the Roksan pairing highlighted everything beautifully and made sure that every performance was knitted into a cohesive whole. There was never the sense that anything was wandering

off into the background as the Radius exercises a solid but fluid sense of control over the music to keep it perfectly in line. I was struck by the purity and insight from the treble in particular, offering a very lifelike rendition to real instrumentation.

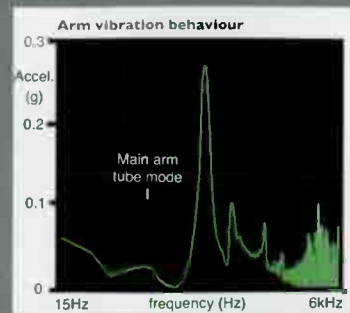
In bass terms, the Radius proved equally capable when fed a pounding drum beat or a thumping bass line thanks to a fine sense of timing and poise. Only down at the very low end can it occasionally falter, where deep bass notes can lack their customary sense of room-rearranging impact. This is only really noticeable in a direct comparison scenario, however, and the Roksan never sounds uncomfortable or strained. A fine package.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

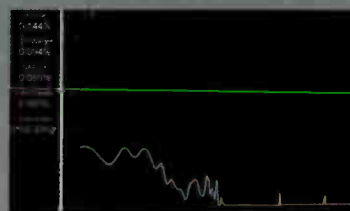
Roksan's Nima arm has a well suppressed first mode at 170Hz, but a substantial third order bending mode at 510Hz that nearly reaches 0.3g, seen as a large peak in our vibrational analysis. Above this lies the same sort of elevated output seen in a Rega, so here they are similar. The acrylic headshell works well, although it isn't as 'silent' as some. The Nima has a strong and well damped arm tube but it does have a 'zing', like an Ittok, and may well have a 'bright tone'. The Radius turntable ran a negligible +0.2% fast and had good if not exceptional speed stability figures, returning a low 0.144% unweighted wow and flutter, due to low basic drift our spectrum analysis shows, but a bit of wow around 2Hz affects the weighted value, pushing it to nearly 0.1%. This is still a good result though.

Speed accuracy	+0.2%
Wow & flutter	0.144%
Wow & flutter (IEC weighted)	0.094%

#### ARM VIBRATION



#### WOW & FLUTTER



#### VERDICT

Extremely thoughtfully designed vinyl spinner, with a balanced and highly enjoyable sound

**ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 £1,449**

Henley Designs

+44(0)1235 511166

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

#### FOR

- excellent stage depth
- insightful midrange
- effortless cohesion

#### AGAINST

- low bass could be tauter
- getting expensive!



**MICHELL GYRODEC SE/TECNOARM A £1,800**

**O** utwardly this deck has changed little since its introduction no less than thirty years ago (!), but under the surface, steady upgrades have ensured that it remains competitive. Indeed, any Gyro ever made can be returned to the factory to be brought bang up to date....

The signature feature of the GyroDec is, of course the acrylic/vinyl platter with its underslung revolving weights that add mass and inertia. Spinning on an oil-pumping inverted bearing, this platter is driven by a DC motor and the whole turntable subchassis is suspended. The 'SE' denotes a 'Spider Edition' and refers to the fact that the deck comes without its large and imposing Acrylic base and dustcover. These can be reinstated using an upgrade kit but Michell also offer the UniCover to keep dust out. Every part of the deck is immaculately finished but, be warned, there are quite a few parts and they all come separate in the box. The instructions are clear and concise but assembly is most definitely required!

The Tecnoarm is possibly the most famous incarnation of the modified Rega RB250 and is certainly one of the most comprehensive. Featuring a bead blasted and perforated arm tube with internal damping, a re-machined headshell, silver litz wiring in a continuous run from cartridge tags to phono plugs and the Michell Tecnoweight for the application of tracking force, no corners have been cut in modding this venerable design.

**SOUND QUALITY**

The first thing that strikes you when listening to the latest GyroDec is the staggering soundstage width. Like pressing the 'stereo wide' button on an eighties ghettoblaster, my speakers suddenly seemed to have moved about six feet further apart! What is even more impressive is that this is not accompanied by a blurring of focus in the centre; at no point does it seem like everything has been stretched too far and, in fact the Gyro SE was the only deck in the test to really put the backing bass drum behind Caro Emerald smack bang in the middle of the performance.

Helping things along immensely is the deck's wonderful sense of

overall cohesion. From the low bass to the high treble, everything about the Gyro SE is perfectly balanced and effortlessly musical performer, offering an almost disdainful sense of ease and effortlessness whether whispering out some solo acoustic guitar or hammering out a pounding dance beat.

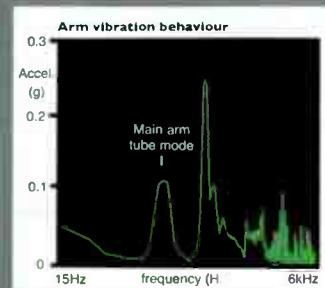
The Gyro SE achieves this feat by simply not doing much wrong in any area. Bass may lack the last ounce of the SRM Tech's punch, but is still deep, tuneful and taut; the midrange is detailed, precise and yet blessed with an underlying fluidity. At the top end, treble is perfectly balanced between crispness and smoothness. The resulting overall performance is utterly captivating.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The modified Rega arm has a first bending mode at a high 260Hz, meaning it is stiff and incompressible, as this is a high value. A third order bending mode can be seen as a tall, narrow peak at 720Hz. Above this frequency there is less energy than usual from a Rega based arm and it is here that the structural modifications appear to have worked. High frequency headshell and tube modes are also well controlled on this arm. Overall, even though the tube could be better damped to lessen the main bending mode, this Rega looks strong.

Speed error of the Gyro SE turntable measured +0.5%, not perfect Speed stability (wow and flutter) measured a very low 0.145% unweighted and 0.04% IEC weighted, so the Gyro SE is speed stable. NK  
 Speed accuracy +0.5%  
 Wow & flutter 0.145%  
 Wow & flutter (IEC weighted) 0.04%

**ARM VIBRATION**



**WOW & FLUTTER**



**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Style, heritage and above all sound, this evergreen classic really does have it all.

**MICHELL GYRODEC SE/TECNOARM A** £1,800  
 J.A. Michell Engineering  
 ☎ +44 (0)208 953 0771  
 www.michell-engineering.co.uk

- FOR**
- superb soundstage width
  - musical focus
  - rhythmic alacrity
  - glorious detailing

- AGAINST**
- fussy assembly process

So, another five turntables have passed through the Smith listening room and again, I am astounded at the sheer competence of them all. One of the units turning out to be a duffer would surely make a change, but I'm relieved to say that this was most definitely not the case; there will be no wooden spoon awarded today. Each deck shows that the art of the turntable and the turntable maker is still very much alive. Of course, they do differ in their respective performances and so different decks will suit different folks but there isn't a bad one amongst them...

Starting with the Pro-Ject, this is the cheapest deck on test coming in at just over half the price of the Michell so obviously it will be completely outclassed in this company, correct? Sorry – wrong! Frankly, I don't know how Pro-Ject does it, but the amount of performance and sheer value for money that this turntable offers is astounding. On its own, the turntable and arm are a very fine combination but when one considers that a good quality MC cartridge is also thrown in, the deal is almost done then and there! In performance terms I find that you always know what a Pro-Ject will deliver and I mean this in the best possible way. The 2 Xperience V-pack continues the company's traditions of offering a well balanced and musical performance that anyone can enjoy. Its minor sins are far from obvious and never detract from the fine performance of a very capable turntable.

“with the GyroDec you have a masterclass in vinyl replay...”

Moving to the Nottingham Analogue and SRM Tech, we find two very different sides to the sonic coin. The Nottingham Analogue Interspace Jr. is a very interesting device that is impressively solid, heavy and intriguingly designed. When it comes to softer acoustic and orchestral music it proved itself right at the top of the group, offering a captivating, insightful and capacious sound. I was smitten with it from the start but then things went a little awry when beats, rhythms and hefty bass were introduced, whereupon the deck seemed to run off into a corner and start whimpering, looking at me with big, sad doe eyes! With my engineer's hat on, I have to say I'm not entirely sure about the concept behind the drive system. Whilst the



***Michell GyroDec - thirty years old this year and this latest version is right at the top of the tree!***

minimal motor interference certainly has advantages, which can clearly be heard in the silent background that the deck offers, combined with its lovely insightful nature, the lack of torque when the grooves become more congested is, I feel, a downside. However, if you have little of that nasty loud stuff in your record collection, then I feel that to overlook the Interspace Jr. would be a grave mistake. When in its comfort zone, it is a stunning performer.

The SRM Tech, in contrast, is a polar opposite; it's the rebel of the group and it wants to party! I loved

this deck on its own back in the June 2010 issue of *Hi-Fi World* and putting it up against some of its contemporaries merely served to reinforce what an immensely capable turntable it is. Taking the insight, fluidity and poise offered by the unipivot Nima arm and adding in the drive system improvements that were made to the Mk2 variant all adds up to a deck that rarely puts a foot wrong. Yes, the Michell and SRM Tech were just that little bit more focused in deep bass terms but the Radius 5.2 fights back with a beautifully lithe upper bass and an impeccable sense of timing. It is, quite simply, a master musician.

Finally, we come to the Michell GyroDec SE. It has been a long time since I was able to spend time with one over an extended period and this just served to remind me what an astonishingly capable performer it is. Editor DP often mentions the width of soundstage it offers and, trust me, you won't believe just how true this is until you have heard one. Not only does the image width stretch off for miles in each direction, but the image focus across the centre of the performance is nothing short of staggering. Add in a sense of uniformity and ease across the whole frequency range and you have a masterclass in vinyl replay. Yes, the deck is a trifle fiddly to assemble but the results more than repay the effort. All in all, I could quite happily live with any of these turntables as they are all very fine performers, but if it were my hard-earned pennies being spent, then I would take the Gyro.

this deck for the sheer gusto that it imparts into music and it really is most at home with dance, rock and bombastic orchestral material. It takes music like this by the scruff of the neck and makes sure that you have no choice but to have a good time with it. Ask it to quieten down and play something more subtle, smooth and soft and it rises to the challenge very well indeed, but I felt that the slight lack of emotion that it displayed at times was less about it being incapable, and more about it wanting to let its hair down and party again. The Arezzo is a well designed and fun deck that it beautifully made and, to my eyes, incredibly stylish. It's the first deck I have heard from this company, but I look forward to hearing more.

Moving to the Roksan, I reviewed

# Box Office

**Big enough to fill any workplace with sound, let alone a domestic listening room, Hart Audio's EV01 Tri Monitor Modular loudspeakers are spectacularly out of the ordinary in conception and design. But how do they perform? Noel Keywood decides...**

**L**oudspeakers come in all shapes and sizes and I thought I had seen most, but the Hart Evo I breaks the novelty barrier! It's more a case of configuration than underlying principle though, a point brought home directly I listened to it. I heard a big Tannoy immediately, recognisable by great dynamics. I heard quite a lot more too, for this is in essence a very heavily modified Tannoy, a rebuilt one in fact. So the Evo I isn't just physically big, it is sonically big too.

I reviewed the Tri-monitor arrangement comprising the main full range cabinet with its Tannoy driver, assisted by two bass cabinets, each fitted with no less than *eight* 110mm drive units working in parallel. It isn't so usual to assist a 12in Tannoy dual-concentric like this because its large cone is capable of moving enough air on its own, but the option is available from Hart in order to provide massive bass power. With a quoted price of £20,000 for the Tri-monitor version that we reviewed, this combination is for those with deep pockets and a love of big bass, plus a home able to absorb a loudspeaker that stands no less than 6ft tall, or 184cms to be precise! Surprisingly, I found I was happy to use the main cabinet alone, without any low frequency



assistance, so the skyscraper version isn't obligatory, but one subwoofer seems the best compromise for most domestic situations. It extends bass right down to earthquake regions, to give pile driving subsonics.

David Hart takes a 12in Tannoy Monitor Gold drive unit, disassembles it and rewinds the voice coil with silver wire, he told me. He also attaches a more powerful magnet and – amazingly – this drive unit alone clocked up a massive 94dB sound pressure level in our tests, from just one watt of input! That's higher than most speakers on the market including Tannoys, except the really big ones. Since 94dB is pretty damn loud a few watts is all you will need for this beast and nine of them from a Single-Ended 300B amp, for example, would do fine unless you own the largest abode in Windsor and the corgis that go with it. As the main drive unit connects directly to an amplifier through normal loudspeaker terminals it is totally unassisted in itself I should point out. The point here is that the drive amplifier will be critical and solid-state isn't the best choice at such low powers.

The main cabinet also has onboard a 500W power amplifier and a host of contour controls to drive the passive bass cabinets, an unusual way of doing things. The bass cabinets are simply stacked above or below the main cabinet and connected up using cables terminated with Speakon loudspeaker connectors. This does mean that if you want to run the main cabinet alone you pay for the power amplifier too, so perhaps Dual is the most sensible arrangement, with Tri for the biggest rooms.

So much for the outline, to give a flavour of what we have here, because the Evo I is a little out of the ordinary. Now to a little more detail. The main cabinet is nicely veneered, although it is dimensionally a bit block like, at 43cms wide and deep, and 65cms high. David Hart recommended we place this unit on the floor, on a supplied steel base plate that angles it up toward the listener. Above this he suggested we place a dark veneer subwoofer unit facing inward to improve intensity of sound staging, and above that another facing backward or outward. The cabinets sit on and are separated by pliant rubber balls. It took three

of us to build this construction but it wasn't so difficult and worked perfectly first time. All the same, after measurement and listening I rearranged the system with the main cabinet sandwiched between the subwoofers. This reduced floor reinforcement of upper bass.

The main cabinet has a power switch at rear, low level line inputs (phono and XLR) and a high level input that accepts the loudspeaker signal. There are level controls, a frequency contour that adjusts upper bass frequency (a low pass filter) fed to the subwoofers, and a phase adjust control. A problem

"Its massive dynamic ability is arresting, for this is a loudspeaker that can really move furniture, especially with both subwoofers in use..."

with these controls is that they are not calibrated, making it impossible to dial in identical amounts of gain, for example, for left and right subwoofers. This made adjustment an approximate process.

**SOUND QUALITY**

I was a little sceptical about floor placement of the main cabinet, since my experience has shown you get earth bound left and right sound stage extremes. From the off though,

the Evo I imaged high and had a generous and dramatic sound stage. Only when a hard left or right vocal suddenly cut in – usually a refrain or quick interjection – did it appear to come from unrealistically close to the floor. Central vocals were pin sharp and solidly wrought, Jackie Leven singing down at me from a position around 5ft above the floor. A great feeling of depth and spaciousness to the sound stage made for exciting listening; placed like this the Evos don't image in a tight strip running from left to right between the cabinets like conventional loudspeakers, but manage to position a singer in an apparently cavernous space. Where this often makes for a smeared and imprecise main image though, the Evo I struck me as sharp and focused.

With the main cabinet atop one

subwoofer the sound stage became more linear and the sound a bit drier – less voluptuous shall I say! – but tidier and more composed.

Measurement showed the main cabinets handle most of the frequency range without assistance. I spent some time with them alone, driven by our Icon Audio MB845 MkII valve power amplifiers, and their sound staging was cavernously large.

As you might hope from supercharged Tannoy drive units, when running the main cabinet alone the sound displayed great dynamics. Bass was limited, but the main drive units have a feeling of

enormous dynamic freedom that a big cone gives. The central horn loaded pressure driver of a Tannoy Dual-Concentric works from 1kHz upward so bass, upper bass and most midrange frequencies are handled by the big bass cone.

Switching in one subwoofer brought enormous bass weight into play and a feeling of endless low frequency power. The solitary drum strike at the start of Angelique Kidjo's 'Agolo' moved the room;

*Rear of the main cabinet, showing heatsink of subwoofer amplifier, and its controls...*



# How many CDs do you own but never play?



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What's the point in owning hundreds of CDs worth thousands of pounds if you never listen to them? The problem with CDs is that it's quicker to make a cup of coffee than dip into a CD. Try timing how long it takes to pick a CD, load it in the CD player, play a snippet from a track or two, eject it and put it back where it came from. Then there is the problem of finding music. The print on a CD spine is tiny. What if the track is on a compilation CD? What if the CD is in the car? Then there is the clutter. You need to keep your CDs near the player or you won't play them. So you are forced to share your living space with literally hundreds of cheap plastic boxes.

CDs are a great way to listen to music but they are also inconvenient, inaccessible and a bit of a chore.

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The Brennan also records from vinyl and cassette so you can enjoy your entire music collection but keep the originals in another room or retire them to the attic.

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Martin is a physicist, computer engineer and silicon chip designer. He co-designed the world's first 64-bit games computer.

*"I always liked the promise of CDs. It wasn't so much the quality but the quick access to a given*

*track. After vinyl and cassette that was a real plus. My first CD player was a five CD multi-changer. I liked the idea of quick access to more than one CD and music that didn't repeat after 40 minutes. A few years ago I had a go at loading*

*my music onto a computer - but I never listened to it - I needed something simpler, more immediate. In the end the computer got a virus and the music files were lost - I still had the originals thankfully. The JB7 is really my personal ideal music player"*



Martin Brennan

To get the whole story on the Brennan JB7 and order visit [www.brennan.co.uk](http://www.brennan.co.uk)

# brennan



*Eight small subwoofer drive units offer a lot of cone area, plus high power handling of multiple voice coils.*

it had an easy freedom to its muscular power. The Evo 1's powerful gait painted The Stranglers singing 'Always the Sun' large in front of me, with Jean Jacques Burnel's bass lines striding along as clear as day. With the main cabinet lifted up I was less aware of upper treble roll off measurement had revealed.

A bit like Tannoy's DC10 I reviewed in our November 2010 issue the Evo 1's main unit revealed low level detail with remarkable ease, making studio tape hiss and recording edits obvious. This gave the loudspeaker strong insight and dug out a lovely sense of atmosphere in classical performances staged in a large venue. In Holst's 'The Planets' the Evo 1 pushed strings and brass out into the room nicely. Sudden interjections by strings had razor sharp timing, making the Evo sound fast and concise. It reminded me of a Tannoy on steroids, which is partly what it is of course. With an ease that you get from a big V8, the Evo 1s lazed along it seemed, carrying with them a degree of muscular ability that was mightily impressive.

Small blemishes were a bit of low level muddle when using floor placement, cleared by moving the main module up on top of the subwoofer, and some slight boxiness at times. And Tannoy's metal horn can have a hard demeanor at high levels, the corollary being they are forceful and projective.

**CONCLUSION**

The Evo 1 is a bit of a one off whichever way you look at it. It wouldn't suit small or medium sized rooms, but in a large space it may well look visually arresting. Its massive dynamic ability will be arresting too, for this is a loudspeaker that moves furniture, especially with both subwoofers in use. Its cost will put it beyond most of us but some may find its charms irresistible.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The frequency response here shows the main cabinet alone and with the subwoofer augmenting it. With the main cabinet lifted off the floor and atop one subwoofer the main driver smoothly covers most of the audio spectrum. Situated on the floor bass output is lifted by +3dB across a wide plateau. This is not especially accurate. The subwoofer lifts deep bass below 150Hz, although of course adjustment allows quite a lot of variation. Without the subwoofer the main cabinet does not go low, rolling off quickly below 60Hz. With the subwoofer output extends way down below 20Hz, meaning the subwoofer is able to deliver big subsonics. The in-room response with subwoofer switched on is quite exceptional.

At the other end of the audio spectrum treble starts to roll down above 9kHz. This will eliminate any

obvious sharpness and mute the hiss of strong upper treble.

The impedance curve has an unusual peak at 2kHz that may be attributable to a notch filter. At 70Hz a second sharp peak shows bass unit resonance in the sealed cabinet. Overall impedance is very high, measuring out at 10 Ohms. This makes the enormously high sensitivity of 94dB (subwoofer off) even more surprising, the figure rising to 97dB with it on and bass response set flat.

A decay spectrum revealed an oddly strong overhang around 450Hz, not visible in the main response curve. Otherwise the Evo 1 was fairly clean and colouration free.

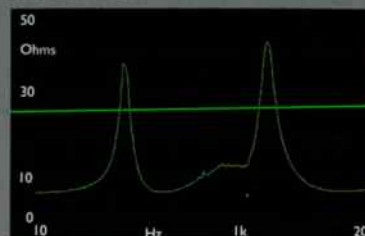
The Hart Evo 1 is fairly distinctive in what it does and is a characterful loudspeaker. It has plenty of strengths, measurement shows. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



*Green - main driver output  
Yellow - driver+sub output*

**IMPEDANCE**



**VERDICT** ●●●●●

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- AGAINST**
- appearance
  - size

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### HRT ISTREAMER £199

The number of devices designed to connect iPods to hi-fis far exceeds that of iPods themselves; there are umpteen little boxes, of varying size and sophistication that do the job to different degrees. The High Resolution Technologies iStreamer from 'Southern California' is a small gizmo that's effectively a high quality DAC in a box, connected to your iPod via its universal dock connector. It sports a small preamplifier section too, giving line level output via stereo RCA phono sockets. As well as the iPod, it works with iPads and iPhones also. It supports a maximum sample rate of 48kHz, unlike its Music Streamer bigger brother which runs at up to 24/96 resolution via USB.

It's worth noting that the iStreamer also requires AC power to run, so comes with a small adaptor that looks as if it might have been bundled with an Apple computer (although it isn't). This obviously limits the application of the unit; it's designed to be permanently hooked up into your home hi-fi, rather than being a portable box you can take on a plane, or suchlike.

It's a small, discreet looking product that can be hidden away from view, although it looks good with its white powder coated metal case and silk screened 'flash' logo. The gold RCA phonos are good too, and HRT have obviously taken care to make a product that's not as cheap and nasty looking (and feeling) as some rivals. One great feature about the iStreamer is its handy line of LEDs that tell you the sample rate running; so many DACs neglect to offer this.

All the cables are supplied, although the RCA phonos are very

much in the 'get you going' category; the unit benefits from using decent cables costing up to £100, although this of course depends to an extent on the type of files you play on your iPod; 128kbps iTunes downloads aren't exactly going to have you reaching for your best interconnect!

For the purposes of the test, I used an iPod Classic; with its 160GB hard drive it stores my main library of digital music, all of which is in Apple Lossless (ALAC); going down to 320kbps AAC (the best compressed format the iPod can play) had the HRT Streamer showing a dramatic loss of quality...

The standard iPod Classic is, I'm sorry to say, a rather sterile sounding affair, with a slightly gritty upper midband, an unlovely treble (it sort of says, "that's a hi hat cymbal, ta very much", rather than delighting in conveying its every last harmonic). Across the midband, the stock iPod is fairly clean but very two dimensional, and again has a grey and uninviting feel. Bass is reasonably taut but fairly anaemic. Given this rather motley collection of performance attributes, the HRT iStreamer didn't have much of a job to improve things, but I was struck by the fact that it more than went the distance. It didn't so much boost the sound as transform it...

Zero 7's 'I Have Seen' had my iPod sounding dramatically better than its stock analogue output, even via a high quality conventional analogue dock such as Arcam's iDock. The iStreamer gave the sound scale, weight and warmth, making the whole song seem much more like music and less like a computer running a music player application (which is basically what an iPod is!). The opening sequenced bass line

suddenly acquired a sense of life; it was more animated and sounded purposeful rather than ambling. It was also stronger too, sounding less lightweight and calorie conscious.

Up in the midband I was struck by the way the soundstage opened up and out; rather than things being welded to the plane of the speakers, I discerned a decent sense of depth. Although this wasn't as good as a proper hi-fi CD player, it was nevertheless a revelation from an iPod. It was also easier to hear different strands in the mix, with little details glistening out at me. Vocals sounded deeper and more expansive, with less grain and greater dynamic expression. Cymbals sounded sweeter and more silky.

The pattern continued on other types of music too; the HRT iStreamer gives a worthwhile boost to pretty much everything you play through it. It's a great product and I'd thoroughly recommend it, to those seeking a fixed, home hi-fi-based iPod upgrade. However, if most of your music is low grade compressed fare, just don't bother; it makes this more listenable but you're simply not getting the best from the iStreamer.

It's also worth mentioning that I'm sure many readers would love a rechargeable, portable version of this with a 3.5mm minijack; I know I would.

Finally, why don't HRT build this one into a dock; so you can just slot your iPod into it, rather than having to plug the lead in all the time? I'm sure this would win friends and influence people. All the same, this is a fine product from HRT. **DP**

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# SOUNDBITES



# Three Of A Kind

David Price finds Musical Fidelity's new M3 CD to be one of the most charismatic affordable silver disc spinners of late...



**T**he world of £1,000 CD players is a crowded one; there are umpteen I can think of around that price. It's not an inconsiderable sum of money, yet it's nowhere near the amount that some people spend on devices to spin their silver discs. Think of this market as 'entry level audiophile'; it betokens a certain seriousness on the part of the purchaser; they're into hi-fi sufficiently to splash out a sizeable amount of

moolah on something that can also be experienced for free on a computer near you, but then again they're not mortgaging their future on this fading format...

What buyers expect at this price is something that looks and feels just a little better than your average £600 or £700 machine, and the new Musical Fidelity M3 CD certainly gives that. Its chunky front panel is a custom-made aluminium extrusion with a neat satin finish, and is finished to a very high quality by the standards of the class; even the Cyrus CD8 SE feels a little low rent by comparison. The largish (440x375x100mm, 6.6kg) pressed

steel casework disguises its humble origins well; Electrocompaniet use the same but it feels a lot less luxurious on the £2,500 EMC-1UP, for example. The finish on the Musical Fidelity is very good then, but if you rap it with your knuckles it finally gives the game away, resonating just a *little* too much so as not to have an effect on the sound. After the warranty period is up, I'd counsel lining it with Deflex Sorbothane panels or similar, to cut down on airborne vibration. Before Musical Fidelity get the hump, it must be added that the same goes for most sub £3,000 machines!

One real highlight of the M3 CD is the slot loading arrangement;

for countless years I've moaned *ad infinitum* about wobbly plastic disc trays and now it seems I'm not the only one who's fed up with them, as slot loaders are appearing everywhere from Meridian to Rotel. Actually, Musical Fidelity's implementation feels very nice indeed; the Cyrus CD8 SE, which was the first to 'go slot', has a loader that feels just a teensy bit unsure of itself by comparison, whereas the M3s is slightly smoother and sure of itself and what it wants to do with the disc. This is tied to reasonably fast track access, which makes for a pretty positive 'action' when using the machine; it's slick and you don't trip over your fingers. Unless you have particularly fat ones, that is, as the M3 CD's buttons are tiny round affairs; they have a nice action but they're not overlarge. Next time I have the chance, I shall make a point of looking at the size of Antony Michaelson's fingers; do clarinetists have especially dinky digits?

The display is good in its way; it's a gently backlit inverse white on blue LCD affair; no prizes for legibility; you won't see it from the other end of your room, indeed some will struggle to see it from the other end of their equipment rack. But it looks classier than many, including the truly horrible display of Astin Trew's AT3500; it's amazing how a poor display can spoil the whole user experience, isn't it? Anyway, the overall effect is of a sophisticated product that's tastefully and distinctively designed, well built and nice to use. The back panel sports just a pair of gold plated RCA phono sockets and a single coaxial digital output, plus IEC mains in.

Inside, Musical Fidelity makes a point of using a "unique high-tech digital-stream noise filter", and the M3 CD is claimed to be unique for having a mains choke filter to remove unwanted noise from the mains and "allows the M3CD's five independent power supply units to work properly, regardless of mains irregularities", the company says. There's a 24bit Delta-Sigma dual differential DAC with 8x oversampling digital filter taking care of the arithmetic and analogue sound generation.

## SOUND QUALITY

This generation of Musical Fidelity products has quite a strong 'house sound' right across the range. From the humble £400 M1 DAC to the mighty AMS50 power amplifier costing many thousands of pounds, the engineers have voiced everything in a very uniform, predictable way. It's best described as clean, open and detailed, with a pleasant lilting

musicality, underlined by a strong backbone. In this respect I could be talking about any one of the M series, or indeed the AMS series. The M3 CD deviates from this not a jot; it's a very mature and polished performer at the price, but one that still has

Fidelity was full of detail, getting right into the mix and throwing out loads of information about percussive instruments, as well as giving a fine timbre to flutes and Hammond organ. It's a subtle performer in this respect, allowing the listener to enjoy nuances

"a relaxing and even handed musical performer with more polish than you'd expect at this price..."

a good deal of musical enjoyment stamped through its DNA like 'Blackpool' through a stick of rock.

It's important to say here that the M3 really benefitted from a good warming through; it didn't really start reaching its true potential until it had been on three or four hours, and after twenty four hours left on repeat it was really shining. Corduroy's 'One Born Every Minute' showed a deep and fulsome bass that was nicely fluid and bouncy, but just lacking the bass grip of its rival Cyrus CD8 SE. The M3 seemed stronger down below, but less controlled.

Moving up to the midband, and it proved impressively capacious, with a wide left-to-right soundstage that seemed to swell outwards ever more assuredly the longer it was left on (right at the beginning of its warm up cycle, the M3 CD almost sounded 'dual mono', but then filled out like a teenager with a fast food fetish). Inside this wide recorded acoustic, instruments and vocals were located accurately, although by the standards of your typical £2,000-plus machines the soundstage was a little lacking in depth. Also, whilst it just edged the Cyrus on scale, the latter just bettered it in front-to-back image placement. The Musical

of the performance that others gloss over. In a way, it rather reminded me of the M1 DAC in this respect; I wonder if there's a very strong resemblance in their respective circuitry designs?

This detailed, insightful yet engaging rhythmic sonic nature continued up into the high midband and treble, you'll be pleased to know. Indeed again its clean, extended treble was reminiscent of the M1, something which seriously impressed me last year. There's real atmosphere to the treble, yet silkiness and subtlety too; this you don't get in your average one grand CD spinner very often; the Musical Fidelity was a master craftsman at rendering those deliciously recorded hi hats on Corduroy's '10:28 from Shibuya'. I've not heard a Compact Disc player at or near this price deliver them with such silky smoothness, such intricacy and delicacy. Compare that to Astin Trew's AT3500 (now considerably more expensive, but once a £1,000 machine) and the latter sounds scratchy, rough and rolled off, despite its tube buffering). In this, again I could hear shades of the great M1 DAC.

Moving to Fun Lovin' Criminals' 'Up on The Hill', and the M3 CD



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World Radio History

showed it was no cerebral perfectionist. Here's a beautifully crafted piece of modern pop with a rap attitude and a soul groove; the Musical Fidelity captured it nicely, giving a surprisingly fluid (for CD) rendition. It caught the spaces between the notes very dextrously, at the same time throwing out pleasing amounts of subtle detailing. This is no barnstorming bruiser; rather it falls on the subtle side, but isn't soft and dull either. Vinyl users will understand this analogue; if it were a tonearm, it would be a Naim ARO unipivot. The M3 CD doesn't quite give you the full ten tenths of dynamics though; it's plenty good enough but its rival Cyrus just pips it with a fraction more force to rhythmic accents; the phrasing is ever so slightly more conspicuous on the CD8 SE. But then again, the Cyrus lacks a touch of the Musical Fidelity's grunt at the bottom end. You pays your money...

The M3 CD's spacious midband,

of the product, placing the band on a vast stage and giving a sense of their physical presence. Instead of being treated to a searing, crash-bang-wallop of a song as with some £1,000 CD spinners, the Musical Fidelity sounded altogether more refined and elegant. It's an interesting dichotomy, because I imagine many Who fans loved their muscular aggression, whereas others found them brilliant songsmiths and musicians; the M3 CD certainly indulges the latter.

**CONCLUSION**

In the genesis of the M3 CD, I rather imagine that the folk at Musical Fidelity had one ear on the class leading Cyrus CD8 SE, and the other on the Astin Trew AT3500 which is now too expensive to be regarded as a direct rival but has a lovely lilting musicality. In a way, the Musical Fidelity attempts to be a 'greatest hits' of both, bringing much of the

**REFERENCE SYSTEM:**

- Cyrus CD8 SE CD player
- dCS Debussy digital to analogue converter
- Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier
- Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers
- Black Rhodium Phantom interconnects

grip and detail and atmosphere of the former, together with the slightly sweet, tonally fulsome nature of the latter. In this it succeeds; it's not quite as grippy and the Cyrus, and not quite as lyrical as the Astin Trew, but it has few of their respective drawbacks either. Rather, it treads a very well judged path as a relaxing, even handed, musical performer with just a little more polish than you'd expect at this price; both in its musical performance and the build and finish of the product itself. At £999 I'd say it's extremely keenly priced for what it is and as such should win many friends.



and satisfying tonality mean's it's a delight with classic music. The exquisite Linn recording of Gottlieb Wallisch's reading of 'Mozart in Vienna', 'Sonata in D major, K.576 - I Allegro' showed this player to have a decently deep and creditably wide soundstage, with fine image placement. Its low level detail was such that you could almost hear the entire recorded acoustic of the concert hall, let alone the performers inside. The piano sound was a delight, with an unusually sonorous rendition of its glorious harmonics; so often I find piano via CD just wrong; kind of like someone's disconnected your tweeters; but not here. This player's natural fluidity and detail all came to the fore, along with its tonal purity.

Classic rock music, in the shape of The Who's 'In Tune', was also great fun. This player concentrated less on imparting the thunderous power of this great band at their peak, and more on the beauty of the song's arrangements and the great melodies. It also really pulled out all the finer aspects

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response measured ruler flat from 2Hz up to 21.1kHz, as our convolved impulse frequency response shows. The M3 will have an even tonal balance without either warmth or edgy treble, although a response like this does nothing to smooth less than perfect recordings.	0dB	0.0014
	-6dB	0.0012
	-60dB	0.202
	-80dB	4.4
Distortion levels were low through the player's dynamic range, the 0.202% figure at -60dB being good, if not quite up with the best and our analysis shows upper harmonics exist. The EIAJ Dynamic Range value reflects this, a value of 96dB being below what is possible, 98dB being common and 100dB the very best. It isn't a big shortfall but the M3 is not class leading all the same.	Separation (1kHz)	102dB
Jitter levels were very low and here the player is particularly strong, returning a random jitter level of around 5pS and slow rate clock drift of 60pS, whilst signal related jitter measured a low 50pS with a 1kHz, -60dB test signal.	Noise (IEC A)	-111dB
The M3 CD measured well all round, although it is not quite as linear as the best. NK	Dynamic range	96dB
	Output	2V

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**

**DISTORTION**

Frequency response (-1dB)  
CD 2Hz - 21.2kHz

Distortion CD

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
Highly refined yet musical mid-price silver disc spinner with excellent build and finish.

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- FOR**
- spacious, airy soundstage
  - midband detailing
  - rhythmic fluidity
  - build, finish
- AGAINST**
- softish bass



# Rising Son

**Rotel's little RA-04 SE is a fine entry level integrated amplifier, thinks Tony Bolton...**

**T**okyo based manufacturer Rotel was founded by the Tachikawa family in 1961, and over the last fifty years have built a reputation for making audio equipment which seems to offer just a little bit more than most of the competition. Although most manufacturing now takes place in a company owned facility in China, the family still control operations from the Japanese head office. Robert Burn, Product Development Manager for Rotel Europe, advised me that development of some models takes place in the UK, and it was here that the RA-04 model, introduced in April 2006, evolved into the RA-04 SE which we are considering in this review.

Introduced in October 2009, this conventionally styled unit uses the same 435x72x342mm (w x h x d) pressed steel casework as its predecessor, which is available in either silver or black. The front houses, starting from the left, the power button, topped by two blue LEDs. One indicates that power is present, the other lights up during switch on, but should otherwise

remain unlit, unless the onboard thermal and over-current protection circuits come into play. Beside these are two 3.5mm mini jacks for the headphones output and Media Player input (selected by turning the source knob to AUX 2). After this are three small knobs for speaker selection and treble and bass adjustment. Beside this is a small button which bypasses this circuitry entirely. Controls for volume, balance, tape monitor and the four line level inputs plus an inbuilt phono stage complete the picture.

The back is equally well populated with gold plated RCA phono sockets for all inputs, and the tape loop. Pre-Out sockets allow for bi-amping with a suitable power amplifier. Two sets of speaker sockets are provided, Speakers A being connected directly to the output stage of the power amplifier, whilst the B outputs are fed via inductors to allow the use of longer cables to power speakers in another room. If you bi-wire, as I did throughout this review, then the bass unit connection should be made here. An IEC mains input socket is fitted on the far right.

Despite its slim build the RA-04 SE weighs 5.9kg. Some of this is accounted for by the Rotel designed and manufactured 180 VA toroidal transformer. This is fed from a full wave rectifier (8A, 400V) circuit. Alongside the transformer are banks of Rubycon USR 6800 microfarad reservoir capacitors. A pair of transistors configured as series regulators provide the positive and negative feeds to the line stages, which use OPA 2604AP op-amps, and to the NE 5532 AP dual op-amp in the moving magnet phono stage. Should the tone controls be in circuit, they provide a claimed 4 to 6dB of boost or cut, centred around 100Hz and 10kHz respectively, via a NJM 2114 D op-amp.

The power amplifier is a traditional complimentary stage using matched 2SD1047 and 2SB817 bipolar transistors. These are 140v, 12A devices which are physically positioned near to the power supply. Other components, such as resistors and capacitors, are made by companies such as Rubycon, Panasonic and Welwyn. All of this is mounted on a PCB which features



"Rotel always seem to offer just that little bit more, and this amplifier is a perfect example of this..."

input signal tracks interleaved with grounded tracks to minimise crosstalk. Copper 'bus-bars' are used to convey high current around the circuit, which also features star earthing.

### SOUND QUALITY

I started my listening with the Rotel driving my Chario Ursa Majors, using both the Clearaudio Master Solution (with the Benz Micro Wood SL MC cartridge feeding through the Leema Agena phono stage) and Leema Acoustics Antilla CD player as sources. Being in the front room, it also found itself on A/V duties being fed by the digibox. In this environment the lack of a remote control proved slightly inconvenient, but the sound quality made up for it. I was impressed with the amount of background detail that came through; outdoor environments were portrayed with a sense of space around the main voices that was convincing, while studio spaces seemed accurately described, with the picture on the screen relating to the size of the space being portrayed in the sound.

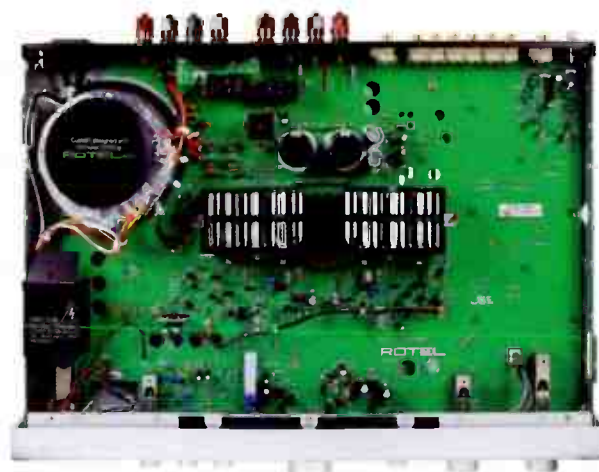
Moving on to music, I started off with Verdi's opera, 'Il Trovatore', with one of my favourite pairings of Renata Tibaldi and Mario Del Monaco taking the leads, I was very impressed with the quite gutsy way

this budget amplifier acquitted itself with fairly demanding music through a pair of speakers that are not the world's easiest to drive. Although they measure 91dB sensitivity, they are a nominal 4 Ohm load, and the twin 170mm subwoofers in each of the lower cabinets tend to soak up power when the volume is turned up a bit. This can result in some amps getting a little flustered and losing what grip they did have over the lower notes.

In this case the Rotel behaved very well. The clang and crash of the 'Anvil Chorus' was played without trouble at quite high volumes, while maintaining its musical integrity. Admittedly it wasn't the deepest or most seismic bass that I have heard, but I can think of very few amplifiers at this price that would have played this music with that amount of finesse. The 'Miserere' in Act 4 sounded lovely. The feeling of distance between 'Leonora' outside the tower, and Manrico's voice, coming from the prison inside, had their differing acoustics laid out for inspection. I could close my eyes and almost picture the scene. More importantly, the harmonies created by the two voices entwined around themselves, helping create the emotional intensity of two lovers saying their last farewells.

A couple of days later the Rotel

was moved upstairs to power the somewhat easier load of the Kelly KT3s. Measuring 6 Ohm impedance and 95dB efficiency these speakers are less demanding to drive from the power point of view. With the Sondek in charge running both the MusicMaker Mk III and the Origin Live Aladdin Moving Iron cartridges through the onboard phono stage, I was again impressed at the level of detail that this £300 amplifier was capable of putting out. I liked the fact it didn't try to overplay things with unnaturally big bass or over emphasised treble, but kept a grip on both the frequency extremes, and made coherent sense of the midrange.



# THE ROCK

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Playing a 1958 Mercury pressing of the 'The Flying Platters' I found myself immersed in the sounds of late fifties Doo-Wop. One of my favourite tracks on this record is 'Mean to Me' which features Zola Taylor on lead vocals, with the men providing backing harmonies and the occasional "wah wah", supported by a easy flowing orchestral background, rooted very much in the swing tradition. Although this record is in pretty good condition, it has a couple of marks here and there, and there were a few occasions where I was missing the stereo/mono switch which would have reduced these sonic distractions to a virtually unnoticeable level. Despite this, the music flowed in a foot-tapping manner which ended up with me playing the whole LP through, instead of just 'cherry-picking' a few tracks as I normally would when doing the 'serious' listening part of a review.

I was impressed with the way the phono stage handled such an elderly record. Older recordings, when played through cheaper phono stages and amps can very often sound a bit thin and ethereal, but this amp belied that, producing a sound that was solid and focused.

Moving a little more up to date, and into stereo again, I played Peter, Paul and Mary's eponymously named 1962 first LP on the Warner Brothers label. The men's voices were placed directly in front of each speaker, with Mary in the centre. Again the sound was focused and engaging, ballads having a thoughtful air about them and the more up tempo tracks displaying the energy and drive that made this group one of the most popular folk acts of the sixties. The guitars had a natural and shapely sound, with just the right amount of twang to be believable, although I have heard greater definition to the picking through, admittedly, more expensive amplifiers.

The group's version of Pete Seeger's 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone' showed this; the combination of strummed and plucked notes emanating from the left and right sides seemed to balance and correspond with each other, and provide just the

right level of backing to Paul Stookey's lead vocals.

By comparison the top ten hit 'If I Had A Hammer' displayed passion and intensity - they sounded as though they really believed in what they were trying to put across as part of the American civil rights and anti-war protest movement.

Coming right up to date I had a go at blowing the cobwebs out of the Kelly's bass ports with the Phony Orphants album 'It Cetera' on CD. This is pretty full on psychedelic trance, complete with pounding bass and strange noises swooping across the soundstage. Despite only having a claimed 40W per channel on tap, there seemed no lack of power to keep the drums and bass rolling at high volumes, and it was only when I really pushed the volume control round that I felt that the sound was beginning to lose cohesiveness (this

was so loud I only did it for a few minutes in deference to my hearing and neighbourly relations!).

### CONCLUSION

At the start of this article I said that Rotel always seemed to offer just that *little* bit more, and this amplifier is a perfect example of that. It seemed to have power capabilities beyond those specified on paper, and to put it across in a credible manner. Imaging and detail were very good, and it proved content to replay whatever was fed through it in an even handed manner. Practical drawbacks such as a lack of remote control and mono switchability were offset by the comprehensive nature of the sound. In my opinion it punches above its price by a noticeable margin, and as such, offers good performance at a very reasonable cost. It is a thoroughly thought out, and well developed design that will win many friends.

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The RA-04SE produced 60 Watts into 8 Ohms under test, and 90 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it has plenty enough power for modern loudspeakers. With a high damping factor of 76 via 'Spkrs A' bass control is good and the RA-04 SE might even sound a little dry with well acoustically damped loudspeakers.

Distortion levels were low all round and crossover distortion at high frequencies minimal, measuring just 0.02% worst case, when delivering full power at 10kHz into 4 Ohms - a gruelling test. The Rotel should deliver clean treble free from coarseness as a result.

The tone controls worked very well and have obviously been carefully contoured to give small but useful amounts of boost and cut at frequency extremes to trim common loudspeaker errors. Limited maximum boost of +5dB helps improve setting resolution.

The phono stage was accurately equalised with just a small amount of treble boost of around +0.2dB in the 75µS curve lifting detail a little. Noise was low, sensitivity high and overload high too.

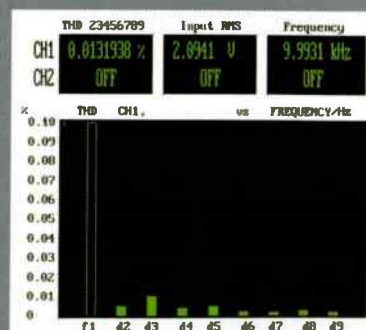
The RA-04 SE measured well in every area and has obviously had some effort put into it. NK

Power	60 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	8Hz-100kHz
Separation	63dB

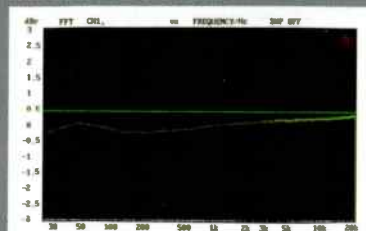
Noise	-78dB
Distortion	0.012%
Sensitivity	180mV

Disc	
Frequency response	18Hz-100kHz
Separation	62dB
Noise	-75dB
Distortion	0.03%
Sensitivity	3mV
Overload	180mV

### DISTORTION



### PHONO RESPONSE



### VERDICT

Well engineered and presented, smooth sounding budget amplifier.

**ROTEL RA-04 SE** £300  
 Rotel Europe  
 ☎ +44 (0) 1903 221763  
 www.rotel.com

### FOR

- smooth, mannered sound
- onboard phono stage
- good rhythmic ability
- solid imaging

### AGAINST

- no remote control

# mail



## LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

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

A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers are on their way to **PHILIP POSTINGS** Letter of the Month winner in our APRIL 2011 issue.

## Letter of the Month

### SOUND STAGING

Dave Mayer's letter (Hi-Fi World, February 2011) encapsulates the fragile and transitory nature of hi-fi excellence. A box full of electronics can, quite by chance, take us to a higher musical plane. But as Mr Mayer's letter shows, excellence and mediocrity are perched on a knife edge. The Surrey dealer mentioned in the letter would certainly have wanted to present his customer's music in the most impressive manner possible. So top quality components matched with the utmost care, would have been selected. Hi-fi retailers are in business to make money after all, so they are going to pull out all the stops. Yet both the dealer and Mr. Mayer agreed that the slightly ageing Teac / Trivista pairing was a major improvement. A lucky piece of system synergy perhaps, but also testimony to the fact that both hi-fi retailing and purchasing are fraught with difficulties. Finding something adequate is easy: finding something really outstanding appears to take an awful lot of time, effort and money and not a little luck as well.

Subsequently, Dave Mayer's Tri-Vista DAC was repaired and slightly modified by J.S Audio. A few small tweaks, with brand new 'better' components and suddenly the magic had evaporated. A coldly logical piece of technology which previously conjured art from thin air, now refused to respond to logic. A ghost in the machine? Audio circuit design as the new alchemy? Well maybe we shouldn't be distracted by such fanciful notions, because the next bit of the story is much more interesting.

According to his letter, as soon as Dave Meyer told J.S Audio how he wanted the Tri-Vista to sound, they were able to modify it to achieve a magnificent result. So does this mean



**For great sound staging and wonderful sound quality get Tannoy DC10s.**

there was a misunderstanding to begin with? Does Mr. Meyer like something about the un-modded Tri-Vista's sound which specialists J.S. Audio had either overlooked, or simply dismissed as unimportant?

People have different ideas about what constitutes good sound and that is all part of tailoring audio equipment for various customers. But problems occur when manufacturers and reviewers don't define their particular 'house style'. For example, a manufacturer might emphasise the blisteringly fast

delivery of musical transients from their amplifier. However, the hidden sub-text is, 'all that clout is at the expense of tonal accuracy, but we don't think anyone would enjoy that anyway'. So the customer might audition a very expensive system and wonder why it leaves them cold. What they may not know is that the designer has already decided that some aspects of music reproduction - tonal accuracy or sound-staging for example - are simply not on the radar.

The problem is not that 'good

sound' is subjective. It is more to do with the fact that some people haven't been told that their sonic desires are irrelevant. This creates real difficulties for customers. Getting out to far flung dealers for lengthy auditions is very time consuming. It is a lot worse when the reviewer who gave your potential purchase five stars, hasn't told you that he doesn't share your sonic priorities.

A recent attempt to help people buy a decent system without too much fuss, is the return of the package deal. A carefully matched system from one source is currently on offer and best of all, it is good value for money. The gear has the seal of approval from a very experienced hi-fi journalist and I am sure some people will concur with his verdict that this is an excellent sounding system. Unfortunately, the old problem of lack of communication arises once again. Tucked away in one of the journalist's previous articles is the revelation that the audiophile obsession with sound-staging is just a phase we all go through. It is a relic of the early days of stereo, with steam trains chuffing from one speaker to the other and according to him, doesn't have much to do with our enjoyment of music.

I don't share his views but that is not the issue. When this journalist reviewed the mail-order system, he didn't announce that sound staging wasn't a major priority to him. So we don't actually know whether he assessed the equipment on the basis that poor imaging would be ignored. The fact is, sound staging is very important to many audiophiles. If they take the journalist's advice to buy the system, any disappointment will be caused by an entirely avoidable break down in communication and not nebulous differences in sonic tastes.

Hi-Fi World has opened up the debate surrounding valves vs transistors, vinyl vs digital, speed vs musicality etc. This seems to have prompted many manufacturers to provide more fully rounded products. So perhaps the bad old days of prog rock loving manufacturers and reviewers refusing to acknowledge the undoubted charms of a tonally correct sackbut, are all but gone!

My idea of audio Nirvana is a cavernously deep soundstage. The front to back dimension of the soundscape is more important to me than almost any other aspect of hi-fi so I would be grateful for any advice you can offer. The system consists of a Sugden Masterclass pre / power (the older 'Aztec' fronted version, reviewed by Andy Grove when he was at Hi-Fi World), Sugden CD 21, Michelle Gyrodec SE, Origin Live Illustrious, Lyra Argo (i), IPL Acoustics SSTL transmission lines (93 dB), Hart 'shunt feedback' phono stage,

Nordost Blue Heaven / CopperTech Alpha interconnects and Chord Rumour 4 bi-wired speaker cables. The listening room is 7m x 5.5 m x 2.3 m high. The speakers fire across the short axis.

The system images fairly well width-ways and the perceived image depth is about 4 feet, front to back. I am fairly certain that the soundstage depth is being limited by the speakers, as there is virtually no difference between CD or vinyl sources for image depth. When I first constructed the speakers the soundstage was nicely spaced out between the speakers, but completely flat. A hi-fi dealer suggested bringing the tweeters out about an inch to improve dispersion characteristics. The effect was immediate, with the image opening out to a perceived depth of about 4 feet.

I experimented by bringing the tweeters (and mid-range) out further, but 4 foot was the maximum possible image depth. I have experimented extensively with speaker positioning / toe in, but the present set up is about the best I can get it. If you think new speakers would help (floor-standers please), I would like advice on the best ones for image depth - to the exclusion of all other factors if necessary.

The Mordaunt Short Performance 6s are very nice to look at, but I don't know if they create a particularly deep soundstage. You reviewed some big Russian floor-standers, but I had difficulty finding the importer or retailer and am not sure if the Masterclass could handle the impedance curve. When Noel did the original review of the Triangle Antals I got the impression that the soundstage was substantial in both directions, but in his latest '30th Anniversary' review there is no mention of depth. I have heard good things about KEF Reference floor-standers, but have no idea how older secondhand models would measure up to brand new expensive versions. Would any of the KEF Reference range be suitable? Other options might be Martin Logan or Quad electrostatics, but would the Sugden handle the current demands?

I like classical, opera, jazz, soul,



**Martin Logan's forthcoming Theos merges their fine X-Stat electrostatic panel with unpowered bass cabinet.**

with occasional bits of pop. The Sugden seems to handle most types of music very well, despite being only 50 watts a channel. I might be able to stretch to a budget of £3000, but would much prefer to buy the same thing secondhand for less than this. So a plentiful used supply might be an advantage.

Your thoughts please.

Best wishes,

**Frankie**

Methinks you need big Tannoys Frankie, like DC10s, but they are right out of your budget. If you can, however, try to get a listen - then think about a bank loan! Yorkminsters may also work in your room, but this is a bit less certain as they do need a big space and 8-10m rooms (longest dimension). Second hand Tannoys are worth considering but their big Dual-Concentrics are popular and command high prices, and Tannoy have usefully improved the central mid/treble horn over the last few years, making it progressively smoother and more couth, so a recent model is best.

We await the Martin Logan Theos with eagerness. This uses their superb X-Stat electrostatic panel, atop an unpowered subwoofer, but



**The massive RRR FS100 from Rigonda Radio of Rega, Latvia – a massive loudspeaker with great bass.**

it may need more power than your Sugden can raise. Sound staging will be superb though.

The 'Russian' floorstanders were the RRR FX100s and they were superb for their modest price of £1000. RRR is short for Rigonda Radio Riga and they are in fact Latvian (they were at pains to tell us!). We have not heard from them for some time but I am on the lookout.

Both Mordaunt Short and Creek make loudspeakers that sound-stage well, with a strong depth perspective, but as you are so tuned into this aspect I cannot be sure they would satiate your desire! KEF are introducing new models and they look very strong to me; I like KEF References.

I think it shameful any reviewer can ignore sound staging, but in the past there has been emphasis on pace and timing, plus dynamics at the expense of all else. Unfortunately, these properties can be quite easily contrived – I know because I have done it when designing loudspeakers – and what you get is a highly specific type of delivery that suits Rock listeners who want a PA stack at home, but no one else.

The small conceptual difficulty total accuracy raises is that it appeals greatly to no one. It isn't by definition as good as a loudspeaker tuned for narrow purpose, at least when used for that purpose (e.g. tuned for Rock and playing Rock). Yet I can take heart – well we all can! – because Quad's

ESL-57 is as self effacing as they come, but just look at its legendary status and wide following. On that note you could of course consider something like a One Thing tuned ESL-57; it suits your musical tastes.

**NK**

### STOP THE BOUNCE

The solution to John Drew's problem of lifting and lowering the pickup arm on a bouncy suspended subchassis turntable (Letters, February 2011) is very simple. Cut a small block of rubber so that it just fits between the top of the turntable subchassis and the underside of the plinth top plate with 1mm clearance or so. Place the block on the subchassis in a convenient position as close as possible to the arm pillar, so that there is no contact when a record is playing but any movement brings the block into contact with the top plate and stops it moving any more. The result is a turntable which maintains the acoustic isolation of the suspended subchassis, yet is almost as bounce-free to cue as a solid plinth model.

While on the subject of tweaks, maybe those who still use old SME 3009 pickup arms should investigate the idea of packing mastic between the cartridge body and the headshell. SME used to recommend this in the arm's final years of production and supplied a suitable material, which was said to improve the sound considerably.

Finally (honestly!), for those who have followed the Denon 1031 Expert Paratrace stylus saga, I have discovered that although tracking is perfect at the 1.8-2.0g recommended by Expert Stylus, increasing this to 2.2g gives better tonal balance, removing the last traces of brightness and 'glare' from the sound. I suspect that in Adam Smith's old Empire 598 turntable, the sound could be disturbingly good.

Yours sincerely,  
**Alasdair Beal**

### WARM CASTLE

I hope you don't mind me writing out of the blue but, I have been looking to acquire a full range speaker to pair with my Arcam Alpha 10 integrated. I have been listening to Castle Inversion 15s for years and they are wonderful speakers and well matched with the Arcam, a little warm, very musical and yet detailed and accurate. The lower end though is missing and that is what I hope to correct. I expect that I will also upgrade the Arcam at some point as well, but for now I am focused on speakers.

I read your Sonus Faber Liuto review. That is one of the speakers I am interested in and I will be listening to them myself at a dealer here as a result. Another speaker I am considering is the similarly priced Dali Helicon 400.

This is a very different design, with two small woofers and not a real midrange, but I have heard the larger Euphonia series and they are some of the best speakers I have ever heard. I listen to a lot of piano music and acoustic music in general and I prefer the bass to be very well controlled but still forceful

when it is present. So my question is: have you reviewed or listened to any of the Dali line and could you reflect on the character of the sound produced by them as compared with the Liuto? I do not have the Helicon available here to listen to and I know both speakers will have their merits, yet I am trying to gather data where I can. Thank you for your time.

Regards,  
**Grant Fergeson  
Houston  
Texas**

Hi Grant. The Helicon series loudspeakers are impressive and the large 800 is now available at bargain prices on the net I see – a range change is imminent I suspect. Dali's drive units give a clear and timbrally neutral sound, unlike the alloy cones popping up everywhere, and their tweeter module comprising dome and ribbon, gives superb treble. I have heard the Liuto and it wasn't in the same league. Note that both have a bright balance; the Dali is meant to be heard off-axis (i.e. facing down the room, not at the listener).



**Dali Helicon 400 gives a clear sound with impressive treble quality but it has a bright balance.**

For what you seem willing to pay you should also consider a Tannoy DC10. This has an altogether smoother and less forced sound with stupendous dynamics. Its cryogenically treated crossover conveys real low level detail, without screaming treble. **NK**

### STANDMOUNTS

Perhaps you're able to help me with my quest for a pair of stand mount speakers of reasonable efficiency. I know there's a bit of a contradiction in there because monitor speakers are not well known for being sensitive. However, they have to work together with my Parallel Single-Ended amplifier which uses four 300B output tubes and deliver 18 watts of tube power. Doesn't sound like much but my amplifier was built to order, the transformers have been specially designed for this amp. It has a huge, oversized power supply which offers lots of reserve power, it doesn't shy away from a more demanding load. I don't want to lose too much extension in the bass department. That's why I'm not looking for a mini monitor but something more substantial with a larger midwoofer than the usual 6in units (or smaller) commonly used in stand mount speakers. Mini monitors also tend to compress when they're asked to reproduce large scale music at more elevated levels. By the way, I'm not a fan of subwoofers so I don't want to take that route.

You tested a very interesting monitor, the MAD Grand MM a while ago. Based on your very positive review this speaker might be a worthy candidate. You described them as big, bouncy and engaging with a holographic soundstage. Furthermore they rock and do classical music as well so they're real all-rounders it would seem. Since I have a broad taste in music that will suit my purpose well. Besides I like speakers with a fine dynamic expression, I find these sound more involving.

The point is that I'm not able to audition them where I live which means that I would have to purchase them in good faith. Can you tell me if these speakers will be a good match with my amplifier or do they need more power than my amplifier is capable of? I'm not listening at rock concert levels by the way, most of the time the sound level fluctuates between 80 and 85 dB when measured with a sound meter app that I loaded on my iPhone. That's measured from my listening seat ca. 2.5 - 3 mtrs from the speakers. Currently I'm using floorstanders with a 88 dB sensitivity and a 10 inch midwoofer which my amplifier can drive to satisfying levels.

The Cabasse Bora might be a contender, this model also uses a coaxial drive unit but is a genuine 3 way



### **MAD MyClapton Grand MM, a thoughtfully engineered loudspeaker.**

speaker because it has a dedicated 8 inch woofer, I don't think you've tested this speaker yet? I would be curious to see how these speakers compare...

Are there perhaps any other recommendations you could give me? Your advice would be much appreciated. Best regards,

**Ben van Baaren**  
**Netherlands**

I can't comment on the Cabasse, but can certainly vouch for the MAD MyClapton Grand MM. Don't be put off by the silly name (!); it's a very thoughtfully engineered loudspeaker that is quite different to the crowd. I found it capable of going very, very loud in a largish room with a 35W pure Class A Musical Fidelity; I barely got the volume control past the twelve o'clock position. As such I think you'd be pretty safe with your tube amp, unless you run a vast listening room and/or like Motorhead at real life levels. The speaker has a quite a robust 'rock' sound to it; it's not a shrinking violet with weak knees and an aversion to loud parties! Yet it's also very subtle and even handed, and doesn't possess a 'sweet spot', so it would suit classical well. I was most impressed with it, and all the more surprised that it was from a relatively unknown name. I'd try it if I were you. **DP**

### **CABLE CAPERS**

If you listen to a cable you do hear a difference, a real one. Change almost anything and you hear a difference. If there is a change and you can't measure it, then your testing system isn't good enough. I would refer Mr Howgego to the Vertex, Nordost, joint presentation at last years National Show, on new tools of measurement in

assessing cables, where they did detect a difference. I couldn't understand a word, but the graphs were pretty.

The problem to me is whether different is better. If you have shelled out money for a new cable, you don't want to appear a plonker if there isn't a difference, so you want to hear an improvement. I can always hear a difference, whether it is better sometimes needs golden ears, not my cloth ones.

Moving on to buying accessories, it does seem that second hand cable is often very cheap. Ironic, as it is one of the most unbreakable components. I recently treated myself to some second hand, real high end speaker cables, Virtual dynamic revelations. These were about £5500 new for an 8ft single run, I picked them up for a bit over 10% of that, perhaps because the company is out of business, not surprising at these prices, I hear you say. Still cheap mind you, compared to £20,000+, Nordost Odins, Siltech Forbes lake etc. After I struggled and swore, trying to fit the rigid, heavy cables, the difference was quite astonishing, in clarity, soundstage, neutrality, frequency extremes, quite astonishing. Easily equivalent to replacing my broken CD player recently.

For many, including Mr Howgego, power cables and products are the most controversial, as his letter intimates. Well I have borrowed some quality power cable from a US start up company, selling at a discount to get established. The owner suggested trying on the turntable power supply. Nah, it's a large, German, precision engineered unit and all it's got to do is turn a platter at 33 and 1/3RPM, waste of time. Blow me, if the small niggling worries about the table, the fuzziness at the leading edge of notes, the slight lack of base extension, hadn't largely disappeared.

Even I, a cable convert, didn't think a turntable power supply could benefit.

So to all you doubters, all you have to do is borrow some cables and listen without prejudice, as the CD once said. The trouble is of course, it opens up a whole new area for expense, doubt and tinkering.

**David Wise**

Hi David - yep, I'd say that's a very fair summation of the situation! Cables can make a profound difference, although it normally costs an even more profound sum of money to get ones good enough to do it! Ditto turntable power supplies; the Linn Valhalla taught us this as far back as 1981; a motor is only as good as the AC signal it's got feeding it. The better your PSU, the smoother and more detailed your deck sounds; even speed stability can be radically transformed. **DP**

### K5881

As a regular reader starting with your first issue it has taken me a long time to put fingers to keyboard in appreciation of your magazine. What has finally stirred me into action are the results I have achieved by introducing the WAD K5881 into my main system as a substitute for my long serving chrome bumper Naim NAP 250. The 250 needs repair, having developed a nasty buzz. I was resigned to pressing my NAD 3020 power amp section into service with my LP12, Ittok, Troika (rebuilt), olive Naim NAC82 with Supercap (so you know what kind of sound I like) to drive my SBLs.

However, the K5881 (which I built in 1996 and subsequently modded to Mk II) had been lying around barely used whilst my daughter was growing up, having never been dropped into a decent system before. I bought a 4 pin DIN to phono lead from e-bay as an experiment and plugged it into the Supercap and SBLs. I was met by a high level of hiss from the speakers, but overlaid with some very interesting and musical sounds. There is far too much gain in the system (for CD the volume control operates over a very small angular range) but better with vinyl as ever!

The hissy culprit is the NAC82 it seems. To add insult to injury (the injury being the cheapish lead between pre and the K5881) the hissy problem I volume control compression was improved enormously by fitting attenuators in line. The result is still well worth listening too and I think the 250 is going to struggle to be picked for the team when I get it back. The best is yet to come, I tracked down some Black Gates on e-bay and replaced the capacitors; having dug out the relevant



**The World Audio Design K5881 amplifier, an early gem. Tuned up it sounded lovely.**

DIY supplement from the late '90s. The bottom octave has returned whilst retaining the clarity, speed and definition of the standard amplifier. The 250 is now potentially on the transfer list. This leads me to ask two questions.

What is the optimum output transformer tap (4 or 8 ohms) for the SBLs? Currently set for 8 ohms.

Would the forthcoming relaunch of the World Designs Pre Amp kit be a good match for use with CD and a new phono stage (could be a superline/ supercap), replacing the 82?

Do you have any other suggestions for a thermionic pre?

regards,  
**Ian Tyldesley**  
**Bishops Waltham**  
**Hampshire**

Hi Ian. If you revive your K5881 and tweak it then you will be up alongside our Editor, David Price, in this department, for that is what he uses too, if not full time. K5881 and all our World Audio Design amplifiers were offered as a base version tuneable for better results. They respond well to being tuned because the basic parts were good, especially our Andy Grove designed and Morite built transformers.

There was a lot of gain in these amps, to allow a passive volume control to be used so they could operate direct from CD or most other sources. That means you can use a Creek OBH-22 passive with remote control, a Music First Audio Classic Preamplifier (step-up transformer), a World Audio preamplifier valve preamplifier or something like a Icon Audio LA4 MkII with its lovely 6SN7s. There aren't so many good transistor preamps, as a decent valve power amp will reveal, so be careful

here.

Generally, try and use a 4 Ohm tap first. Better to put a higher load on a lower tap than vice-versa; it minimises distortion. If you have or can borrow an ohm-meter (Maplins do 'em cheap) measure resistance by putting it across the loudspeaker terminals. Expect to read around 4 Ohms, because most loudspeakers use 4 Ohm (d.c. resistance) bass units. In which case a 4 Ohm tap is the right one. If you measure 6 Ohms or more then use the 8 Ohm tap.

There is no big issue here, quite frankly. You get a little more power from the 8 Ohm tap when feeding an 8 Ohm load, that's all. Sound quality changes little unless the amp is run hard. **NK**

The Musical Fidelity Primo works a treat as 'a thermionic pre', but sadly it's monstrously expensive for us mere mortals; if you want that



**A passive preamp like Creek's OBH-22 with remote control can be used with high gain valve amplifiers like K5881.**

authentic, classic, syrupy and silky valve sound then the Primo will deliver. I find the MF Audio Classic preamplifier (in any of its various guises) also works brilliantly with the modded K5881, but with a lot less 'bloom'. Indeed, the MF Audio/WAD pairing is quite delicious, the MF Audio having a very neutral tone that suits the WAD power amp very happily. The K5881 is quite a little

music maker given half the chance, and the result is a very clean and even, but feisty and forceful sound. **DP**

### WHAT I REALLY WANT

*I wish to have a new audio system capable to break the boundaries between me and the musicians. I do not really care about the hypes of high-end; you know what they are, I do not care about fake hyper details for example. What I really want is power to recreate the musical event in my listening room. I want to turn up and up the volume control without sign of strain, without compression and without distortions, with grunt at low frequencies; yeah*



**Monitor Audio PL300 offers a clean fast sound from a ribbon tweeter and C-CAM treated alloy drive units.**

*I want to feel the air moved by the woofers like a guitar player in front of valve Marshall stacks.*

*I have got old good memory by Linn Isobarik tri-amplified with electronic crossover and power amplifiers, and the same good feeling by Rogers LS 5/8 system with matched Quad power amplifiers. That is the sound of high fidelity for me, something capable to stand me up from the listening coach (couch?) and induce me to dance and have good times.*

*My personal music preferences are rock'n'roll of course, but I listen literally to all kinds of good music. Equally important is the fact that I do not want*

*to spend an arm and a leg to achieve this goal, let us say up to 10 to 12k all included, turntable/arm/cartridge + CD player + integrated or separate amplifiers (I do not care which format) + loudspeakers and all cables. If the amplifier can manage music, from modern sources like iPod and the likes (DAB, Ethernet etc) could be definitively considered a bonus.*

*Please I would be glad to read opinion from both David and Noel. Thanks for your competent and invaluable help.*

*Best regards,*

**Lou (Cesare Augusto)**

Monitor Audio PL300s get close to the Isobarik in some senses, being a loudspeaker designed to Rock. Monitor Audio introduced less expensive Gold variants at this year's Bristol Show and they may suit you too. **NK**

Hmmm... you want all this for twelve grand? I'm afraid you're into Usher Be-10 territory for the sort of power and punch you used to get from your old tri-amp Isobarik set-up, and these cost £11,000 for starters. These are, in my view, seminal rock loudspeakers; whilst they don't have the midband fluency of top Tannoys, they have massive scale and power and depth and precision; anything else sounds a tad too domesticated for no holds barred rock in my view. I would be tempted to purchase these and then slowly build your system around it. This could be done by purchasing secondhand, and/or in steps, but if you're as sure as you sound that you want a 'boundary breaking' system then this is really the only way...

My plan of attack would be to buy a new Michell GyroDec SE/Tecnoarm, fit an Audio Technica AT33MC cartridge and an Icon Audio PS1.2 phono stage. This will give you a really good analogue source that's upgradeable but not in any immediate need of upgrading. Then you're looking at buying an Arcam rDAC and plugging it into your computer; it has the superb DCS Asynchronous USB system so will get a very stable, low-jitter digital audiostream from your PC or Mac's USB output; it will also give your existing CD player (or whatever other digital source you have) a decent shot-in-the-arm; all for under £300. Next is amplification; as a stop gap, look at an Icon Audio 300B II integrated amplifier. Not only is this a nice smooth source for super revealing ushers, it has a bit of oomph in the bass giving a nicely 'gutsy' sound. There was real synergy between this and the NS1000Ms

in my system, and the NS1000Ms are similar to the Be-10s in many respects. I'm afraid this will have taken you closer to £14k than £12k, but it's the beginnings of a stunning top end system.

After the Icon Audio 300B has served its time, come back to us for that all-important choice of pre and power amps; there's a vast choice depending on your taste and how you feel you're getting on with the system as it is. You'd also then be advised to get a Cyrus SE transport for your CDs, and upgrade the Gyro to Orbe spec, with a possible move to a high end arm; we'd be happy to advise! **DP**

### ARCAM LOCK

*I have locked myself into Arcam over the years! My system consists of Arcam FMJ CD37, C31, P35 (a pair set in Mono, HF) plus 2 x P1s (Pair LF). I am using Atlas Elektra/lchor cabling throughout the system. I have a Isotek Titan GII and a Isol-8 Powerline Axis for mains conditioning.*

*The speakers I am currently using are Usher Mini Dancer Two floorstanders, in a room 16ft(L) x 14ft (w) x 11ft (h). As delighted as I am with this setup, I am craving more resolution and detail, while also adding as much as possible an open/deep soundstage for my predominately Jazz based CD collection. As good as the CD37 is I am tinkering with the idea of replacing it with the likes of Krell's new S-350A or Moon's CD3.3, which I feel may give me these qualities as well as a tighter/deeper bass, and more defined treble for the Ushers Beryllium tweeters! I am aspiring also to replace the Mini Dancer Two's with the Be-10 at a later stage. Currently have a budget of about £3k.....*

*Your guidance greatly appreciated.*  
**Dave Walsh**

I'd certainly say the Moon CD3.3 is a very worthy contender, but in terms of both outright performance and system synergy, at this price point it would have to be the Electrocompaniet EMC-IUP, which has a deeper and darker sound, along with a more robust bass and sense of life that I feel is unmatched at the price. Especially if you're aiming towards Usher Be-10s, you want to get as fulsome sounding source component as you possibly can, and the EMC-IUP is certainly this. **DP**

### REMEDY

*I have a very irritating problem and would be grateful if you could suggest a remedy. When I first start up my system and start the CD player, on many occasions I get sound from only one*

speaker. The left speaker plays but the right hand has no sound. This problem is strange because half the time it plays perfectly normally. I have purchased and fitted new interconnects to try and fix the problem, to no avail. My system comprises Arcam CD 73, Arcam A75 amp, and Dali Lector 2 speakers. I would be very grateful for any advice you can give.

**J. Chantry  
Doncaster**

We can't fault find at a distance, only suggest ways to track down the problem.

First, find whether it is only the CD player that gives one channel. If so, then the amp and loudspeakers are OK. You then need to replace the CD interconnect. If this does nothing the fault lies in the CD player and it needs repair or replacement. It could conceivably be the amplifier's input switching, in which case plug your CD player into AUX, or any line input, even Tape. In this case the amplifier is faulty of course.

If the fault affects all sources then the problem lies in the amplifier or loudspeakers. Swap the loudspeaker leads around on the amplifier. If the

factor was very low at 21" are comments to be found in the January 2011 issue.

In order to help put these comments into perspective, I hope Noel will bear with me as I define damping factor and attempt to explain its significance in sound reproduction. Noel's superior knowledge of the subject will be required at the conclusion of my ramblings!

*Damping factor is defined as the ratio of loudspeaker impedance to amplifier source impedance. If the amplifier source impedance is low in comparison with the loudspeaker impedance, then the low frequency resonance is brought under better control and the loudspeaker follows more closely the electrical signal from the amplifier.*

*In effect, the higher the damping factor, the higher the damping of the loudspeaker's bass resonance and the higher the quality of the bass reproduction.*

*I once read (admittedly in the dim and distant past!) that damping factors in excess of 5 bring diminishing returns in terms of quality of bass reproduction. This presumption is clearly at odds with Noel's comments!*



**Electrocompaniet EMC-1UP DAC has a sense of life unmatched at the price, says David.**

fault stays in the same channel, then one loudspeaker is a fault. If the fault swaps channels then the amplifier is at fault. It may be the output protection relays, or input switching.

If a loudspeaker is intermittent like this (unlikely) try checking / replacing connections. I hope this advice gives a way to isolate the fault and have it fixed. Good luck. **NK**

## DAMPING

*When measuring amplifier performance, resident expert Noel Keywood routinely comments on damping factor. For example, "damping factor was surprisingly low at 16" and "damping*

*factor was very low at 21" are comments to be found in the January 2011 issue.*

used as a low / high break point is 20 and I broadly agree with this. Below 5 an amplifier quite obviously exerts little bass control and such a figure exists with Single-Ended valve amps lacking feedback. No great problem here, providing they are used with reasonably well damped loudspeakers (no bass peak), like Triangle Antals. Valve amps with feedback sit in the 5-15 Damping Factor range (with an 8 Ohm resistor). Transistor amps generally run from 20-80. Anything above 20 exerts quite good subjective control. Note that Naim amps consistently measure 17, an interesting exception.

Our in-house Spendor S8es loudspeakers are under damped and boom with zero feedback SE amps, but sound controlled with our grippy Musical Fidelity AMS50 amplifier.

I hope this gives you some feel for the subject.

I have found it is best to use a low DF amp with a well damped loudspeaker, and a high DF amp with a lightly damped loudspeaker, broadly speaking. High damping factor figures (low output impedance) are not a figure of goodness in themselves.

There are three damping mechanisms in a loudspeaker, the great Laurie Fincham of KEF once explained to me: acoustic, magnetic and electrical. Broadly speaking, if a loudspeaker peaks up in its bass response, as many do, then it is lightly damped. If it rolls away steadily below about 200Hz it is well damped. Note that the latter suits wall placement and explains why small/medium sized wall mounters of yore gave 'tight bass' when driven loud by a Naim or Linn amplifier.

I'm sorry it is not all a bit simpler – but it just isn't! Feedback reduces output impedance in an amplifier, be it transistor or valve. Transistor amps can accept and also need higher feedback (to suppress distortion).

**NK**

## COMPUTER AUDIO

*Many thanks for your response to my last e-mail in December's issue. I thought I would quickly update you as to what I went for.*

*After reviewing a number of options, I decided on purchasing a Logitech SqueezeBox Touch and a QNAP NAS. Despite some scare stories on the web and the usual niggles (there's always a few), installation was surprisingly smooth.*

*The Touch has a nice user-friendly touch screen and remote, and very intuitive menus. The NAS is connected to my router so I can wirelessly download hi-res audio files from my laptop, and then afterwards stream them to the Touch without (this is very important)*

*Over to you Noel! How high a damping factor do you recommend, taking into account the impedance characteristics of today's loudspeakers?*

*In addition, would you please enlighten me as to which aspects of amplifier design bear directly on damping factor?*

**Alan RJ Scott**

Hi Alan. It is impossible to be precise about this but here is a guide, based on measuring Damping Factor and then listening to the amplifier concerned, with both lightly damped and heavily damped loudspeakers. The rule of thumb value commonly



having to switch on the laptop. The sound is excellent through an off board DAC, although it is very good through the Touch itself.

I'm not trying to plug this system, but it represents a neat solution for my needs. I haven't seen any sign of the Cambridge Audio NP30 to date.

Regards,

**Dr Paul Harris**  
**Whitehall**  
**London**



**A Logitech Squeezebox Touch and a QNAP Network Attached Storage device works for Dr Paul Harris.**

I contacted Cambridge and they told me the NP30 is still not ready, but it won't be long and we will get a sample to review. So we are all waiting eagerly. **NK**

Hi Paul - good to hear all this; I too haven't had a chance to play with the Cambridge Audio NP30 even though it's been 'an open secret' for nearly a year! Looks like they missed their chance to have you as a customer!

**DP**

### OLD CIRCUITS

I'm looking for a two-part supplement of a MC/MM valve phono head and pre amp designed by Chris Found quite a few years ago. There was also a previous design by someone whose name I cannot recall (but he did go on to work for Audio Note UK) which I am also looking for. Can anyone help? Both circuits used ECC88s.

Regards,

**Rey Bowen**

The design by Chris Found was published in the December 1997 DIY Supplement. The person who went to work for Audionote was Andy Grove who designed a transistor phono preamp in April 1994, but also designed World Audio Design valve phono preamps such as KLPP1. You can find a DIY Supplement Index on our new website, in the Olde Worldle section. We cannot supply DIY Supplements anymore but keep an eye on the World Design forum at [www.world-designs.co.uk](http://www.world-designs.co.uk). **NK**

### VINYL SET UP

I hope you can help me get more from my vinyl as you clearly have a great deal of knowledge in this area. I recently upgraded from a NAD 5120 to a Rega P3-24 / Elys2 with TT-PSU and whilst showing an obvious and major improvement over the NAD, I am sure I could be getting more out of it but am hampered by my ignorance of turntable setup and not knowing where I could tweak or upgrade to best effect.

I started on the hi-fi route about 25 odd years ago just as CD was taking hold. I did not have a huge collection of vinyl and it was not all in great condition, so it gathered dust for a while as I invested in CD. I bought the NAD to play some albums I couldn't find or did not want to buy again on CD - but vinyl listening was sparse as I grew my collection of CD's.

My system evolved over the years and now comprises Quad 99 CD-P2, Primare I30 and Spondor A5 with a Squeezebox Touch pumping FLAC into the Quad. I upgraded to the Rega because a) there was a great deal from our local dealer at the time and b) I almost never listened to the NAD.

I have always read with interest the quality that can be available from vinyl but have never heard it for myself. Within my own system the CD player has always shown better results than the vinyl equivalent but that is not surprising as some of my vinyl isn't pristine. Both the Quad (and previously Arcam Alpha 5 plus) are great players costing much more than the TT's in my system at the time. I have never had the opportunity to hear a really good system elsewhere so have no real reference points.

Recently I took custody of my Dad's

some audiophile pressings, if I could get the system to show the benefits.

The Rega and cartridge were set up by the dealer and I am sure they were set up correctly. What I tend to find with vinyl are two main issues;

I have to really crank the amp right up to get a reasonable level of detail and presence.

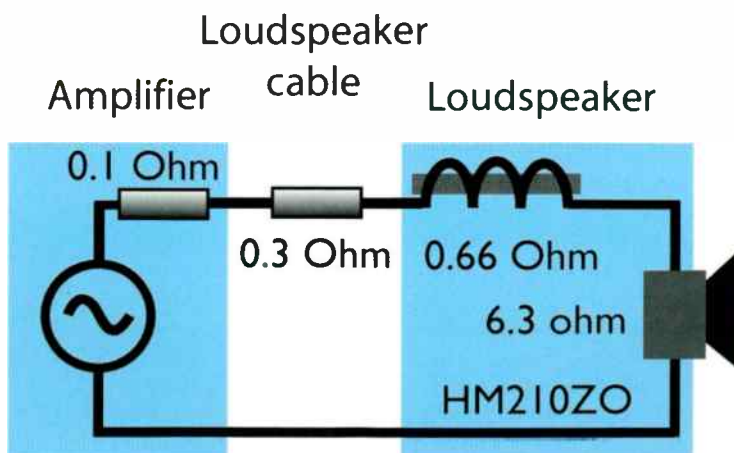
The soundstage and detail lag significantly behind either CDs or FLAC files via the Quad (though a lot better than the NAD).

Sorry for the long intro. My main questions are: am I expecting too much from a outlay of £400 for the Rega setup? I have read a lot about how musical it can be but I don't know what that is compared to? Can it be tweaked or upgraded to match or improve on the Quad? If not, what sort of spend and level of turntable will really reveal what vinyl is capable of?

I had expected (before gaining my Dad's vinyl) that it would probably be my last turntable purchase as my original collection did not really justify any more expenditure. However - if it is capable of showing the benefits of upgrades such as cartridges etc, then I would be happy to explore those. Any advice on upgrades that the turntable and my amp and speakers are capable of benefiting from would be very gratefully received.

In particular I have wondered if the phono stage is letting the side down. I am using a Project Phono Box II because this was "thrown in" as part of the deal when I made my amp and speaker upgrade. Is this why I need to crank up the amp so much to hear any detail or is that just an inherent problem with vinyl?

I would be particularly interested in



**The many influences upon Damping Factor are shown here and given a typical value. The amp here would be rated at 80, but the drive unit 'sees' just 6.**

old vinyl collection (classical) which is much bigger and in better condition than mine and I would really like to get the most out of it. I would also be interested in buying new vinyl, especially

your advice in this area and where the level of budget would be that you start to reach diminishing returns because the turntable or the rest of the system cannot deliver the benefits promised by

phono amps at that sort of money. I have no problem with spending more on tweaking the machine than the original cost if it and my system are capable of showing a good return on the investment – I just need help on what is possible and where to look.

I particularly enjoy a lush, full sound. I like detail but not cold and analytical detail – I would rather sacrifice that for an involving and musical presentation. I listen to a wide range of music from rock to blues, jazz and classical with the odd brass band thrown in for good measure.

Many thanks,

**Andrew Greensted**

Hi Andrew. Your Rega P3-24 is a fine machine and will take you a long way. The Elys 2 isn't so great however, and the Project Phono Box II is, as you suspect, also holding performance back, because it is a budget product. Low gain in this device is responsible for your need to turn volume right up when using LP.

A quick and easy fix is swapping the Elys 2 for a Goldring 1022 GX and then upgrading the phono stage to – if you can afford it – a Quad QC24P valve phono stage. Now I know this is disproportionately expensive at £1200 but have a listen if you can. Otherwise, get an ANT Audio Kora 3T or, stepping down a lot further, a Lehmann Black Cube. The Quad will give you the sound you want though and amaze you with its sound. This is the one to go for, even though it is a stretch. **NK**

#### QUARTER BACK DAC

I'm in the middle of my latest round of upgrades, the 4th since I bought a Marantz/Kenwood/JBL system costing about £1k after working all the way through my first summer at university in the late eighties. My last round of upgrades had left with me with an Arcam FMJ set up (CD, amp and power amp) bi-amped to a pair of Pro-Ac studio 125s. I should point out I have done the necessary in sorting out the infra-structure too with a Quadraspire stand and a Kimber loom (with Russ Andrews power blocks, cords and filters).

I lived happily with this for about six years, but over the last couple of years have started upgrading again. My first purchase was the Chord QBD76 DAC which made an unbelievable difference to the system; a stunning improvement to clarity, stereo imaging and sheer musicality. It made me realise how much more music was stored on those little silver discs!

Upgrade two was to the speakers. Out went the ProAcs to be replaced by a pair of Monitor Audio PL100s. These again have cleaned things up and have



**For a big, lush valve sound and oodles of gain, get a Quad QC24P phono stage.**

added a whole new layer of music at the top end thanks to their amazing ribbon tweeters. The improvements at the bottom end aren't so stunning but the 200s weren't available at the time and the 300s were too big for our room (and my wife's tolerance!). A possible further upgrade to these may complete this round but not yet!

Changing my integrated amp for a dedicated pre-amp would seem to be the next logical step (especially as I've kept the ProAcs and this would allow me to use the "old" stuff as a second system in my office). I've been coveting a NuForce p9 ever since I read David's review of it, although your recent review of the Music First Audio Silver Mk II has made me rethink things. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to easily audition these as there are no local dealers who stock either.

My question though is a more fundamental one. As I only use digital sources and am never likely to do anything different; my Chord DAC is used as the device to switch between different inputs (currently my CD player and my Wadia i dock). My current amp and my future pre-amp is therefore simply a volume control! As I was planning to then change my power amp to a pair of NuForce ref 9 SEs or similar I wondered whether there was another option. Do I actually need a pre-amp if I only need a volume control, or is there a better way of me spending what will be about £6k on amplification for my system?

Another interesting question and possibly a good future group test is how much improvement to this system will I get in adding a dedicated CD transport instead of the integrated Arcam. I suspect quite a bit. If so, how much better will a Cyrus XT SE be? And how much better again would a Chord Blu or something even exotic from Wadia, Esoteric or dCs be? Traditional logic

always said invest in the main source, but is that the transport or the DAC in a digital system?

Your thoughts would be gratefully appreciated

Best wishes

**Danny Brown  
Wirral, UK**

You are right in suspecting a silver disc system does not need a preamp. Also, it is better off without it I feel, although not everyone agrees. All silver disc players: CD, DVD and Blu-ray produce 2V output and all power amps, except a few like the big Electrocompaniet, need 1V for full output, so there is gain to spare. I was bowled over by the Music First Audio Classic transformer preamp and feel you should consider a unit like this for the superb Chord QBD76 DAC. You can buy without audition here because it is so neutrally perfect and sweet.

As the Monitor Audios are on the bright side I would suggest a



**Chord Electronics QBD76 – a high quality DAC with superb sound.**

Creek Destiny amplifier. I know it seems underpriced but it has a beautifully easy, almost lush sound that is quite unlike a typical transistor amplifier. Otherwise, try and listen to a Naim. These again are clean and smooth, as well as muscular. **NK**

Sorry to be a bore, but the MF Audio, even in its cheapest copper guise, is superb; I'd say it's a good way ahead of the NuForce P9 (which itself is very fine). As such, if cost is no object, go for this. The alternative is the Creek passive, which is decent and cheap, but no substitute for the MF Audio. You could even make your own, by buying the best Alps 50k Ohm potentiometer you can find, shove it in a Perspex box and wire it to phono sockets with silver wire; cost is about £40! You won't be disappointed by the NuForce Ref 9 SEs; they drive PL100s very well, although do look for a smooth, dark speaker cable like Black Rhodium's Tango. The Cyrus CD XT SE is an excellent transport, as good as many of the Japanese high end designs, but at only £1,000 or so; I'd strongly recommend this a partner for your excellent Chord DAC and personally wouldn't bother with the matching Chord transport (sorry Chord!) unless you crave its opulent look and feel. **DP**

### E-BAY TILL I DIE

It is very edifying when one of your favourite pieces of kit is recommended by a fellow reader. The product I refer to is the Technics SL10 record player, although there is some confusion with the previous letter (John Drew, Melbourne, Australia) when reference is made to Consonance Tone arm and Accuphase cartridge upgrades? This turntable does not have a replaceable tone arm as it is a parallel tracker with a very short arm. The SL10 also has a P mount cartridge arrangement which to my knowledge is not available on any manufactured by Accuphase? However I can say that this is one of the best, if not THE best record spinners I have owned and believe me I have had many, including, Linn Sondek, Rega, Garrard, Lenco, Rotel, B&O, Michell.

My first foray into parallel trackers was a Beogram 4004 followed by a Technics SLS which I picked up dumped in a skip! I instantly had a preference for the SLS which was quite a revelation considering its 'plasticky' build and feel. What is a testament to its build quality was the fact that it had come from a skip, undamaged (except for a few cosmetic scratches) and with its original cartridge in place. The deck was basically dusted off, plugged in and played. No mistracking, no distortion, just a rock solid, refined sound with great bass and treble response. I had a similar skip experience many years ago with a Goldring Lenco GL75, which at the time blew away my Rega Planar 3. I guess these finds are a pretty rare occurrence but for it to happen twice is good fortune indeed.

*I purchased the SL10 on ebay. I saw it advertised and did a quick online search to find out as much info as I could. The reviews were very good and stated that this was a much more refined and higher quality deck than the SLS, being of cast aluminium construction instead of the plastic. It also has a record clamp arrangement, built in MC step up transformer and a MC cartridge fitted as standard. Unfortunately the cartridge arrived minus its cantilever and stylus which was a major disappointment as you can imagine. Fortunately I did have a brand new P mount Goldring Electra (MM) cartridge which I had bought by mistake thinking it was a standard head shell fitting. I love this deck and cartridge combo and the Electra is a stunning cartridge for peanuts, around £45. I now feel at the ripe old age of 60 that this will be my final resting ground as far as vinyl replay is concerned. I will however take vinyl to my grave with me, although it will be a mighty heavy coffin to bear.*

*Just a note to finish on. At last year's audio show at Milton Keynes I purchased a Musical Fidelity M1 DAC which is fantastic, and it has renewed my somewhat previously tarnished faith in the silver disc. If you are using a middle of the road CD player as I am (Rotel RCD-1070) then this external DAC will transform it, or anything similar, into a £2k player. Also useful is the USB input which enables me to hook up my laptop and play decent music from my Windows Media files. Thanks to Zouch Audio for their advice on this.*

*My current system, if you are not already bored to death, is as follows; aforementioned CD and DAC, Rotel RC-1070 control amp with two bridged RB-971 power amps, Mission 753 speakers, Nordost speaker cables, Wireworld interconnects and of course my Technics SL10 turntable. Buy one if you can.*

*By the way, I make no apologies for being an avid eBay. I know that we are frowned upon by some audiophiles. All the above are from eBay sellers, and a fine bunch of people we are. We provide a ready market for buying bespoke hi-fi gear, which should give heart to those fortunate enough to afford new kit because there are people out here that will eventually buy their unwanted items, usually at better prices than trade in allowances.*

*Long live vinyl, eBay and the world of hi-fi!*

*Best Regards,  
Graham Cavill,  
Sheffield,  
South Yorkshire.*

Hi Graham - I'd echo your sentiments about the SL-10. I bought mine for £40, and although currently

awaiting a service from Vantage Audio, is a lovely performer. I'm not sure if I'd say it was better than a Linn (et al.) but it's still a great music maker in its own right and a testament to the brilliance of Japanese micro-electronics (and mechanics)! Likewise, I think the Musical Fidelity M1 is a superb bit of kit; it's only really comprehensively bettered by the £1,000 plus DACs, and even then it's not a profound improvement. I love its sheer value for money; only the Arcam rDAC approaches it in this way; sonically the two are close, but the Arcam has a slightly richer, fuller sound but with less detail, insight and treble finesse. Only if the Asynchronous USB facility was of real importance (and it will be to many) would I take the Arcam over the MF, or if I had an obviously tonally bright system.

As for eBay, many readers I meet seem to think that I'm somehow anti it. Well, having bought and sold hundreds of hi-fi separates over the years (for the Olde Worldes), I'm certainly not! But I must point out that it's no substitute for trying before you buy. Kind of like buying clothes on eBay, you can get some apparently superb bargains, but you just don't know if they're going to fit till you try. Ditto hi-fi; you might have picked up a classic for a song, but is it going to sound good in your system? It's a bit hit and miss, if you see what I mean? Given that many people upgrade in this way, that's fair enough. But if you're not into fiddling around for year after year and just want to listen to your music, going to a dealer and buying new might just be better value, and more rewarding. There's also the point to make that some sellers seem to think that "mint condition" means its only fallen off the sideboard once; I prefer buying 'in the flesh' where your eyes and ears decide, not other people's imaginations! **DP**



**Technics SL10 Direct Drive turntable. "Buy one if you can" says Graham Cavill.**



# Small Wonder

David Price tries My Audio Design's BBC LS3/5a-sized miniature monitor, the My1920...

**O**ne thing you can be sure about 'progress', is that it makes products ever more homogenous. We've seen this principally in cars; 2011

Euroboxes are invariably competent, strong and safe to drive, but make those of even twenty years ago seem wildly eccentric and characterful – and that's not saying very much! The same is happening in hi-fi too; twenty years ago it was perfectly possible to buy appalling 'hi-fi' (and brilliant stuff too), nowadays the gap has narrowed, prices have dropped, and even the bad stuff is more competent. With that however, has come less creativity and more generic design...

Loudspeakers are probably where this state of affairs is most acute. There are umpteen very good budget boxes by all number of big name manufacturers, and they're all

only subtly different; think moving coil two-way designs honed by computer with final voicing by some like-thinking yet gifted engineers. All well and good, but where have all the mad speaker men gone?

Well there are still some 'outriders' in the industry; indeed we've actually seen several new names enter it of late, surely the quirkiest of which is My Audio Design. It's run by founder and designer Timothy Jung, who has come up with a fascinating range of speakers, many of which are a product of his close collaboration with loudspeaker drive unit designers; he gets bespoke drivers made and makes bespoke cabinets for them, in all sorts of shapes and sizes. The My1920 is his smallest, attempting to give a largish, room-filling sound from a cabinet similar in size to a BBC LS3/5a, no less. It's emphatically

not an LS3/5a clone; it's engineered completely differently; only the size is similar.

"We have had so many requests for a small monitor like the legendary BBC monitors," Tim said, but he didn't think he could do one, until he met "Danish transducer gurus" Allan Isaken and Per Madsen, who led Scanspeak and Vifa. "This reignited our passion and courage to develop the new 1920". Tim's speakers typically have very long gestation periods, with a lot of tuning and voicing, including a lot of input from his wife Esther who is a classically trained concert pianist. For him the drive units are the heart of the loudspeaker; you can't make a good speaker from bad drivers, he tells me. The trick is then integrating them into the best box able to do the job at the price point.

The new Wavecor 22mm

neodymium super tweeter is said to be capable of 40kHz, but goes all the way down to 2kHz, where it crosses over with the Wavecor 145mm mid/bass driver, claimed to give a total frequency response of 58Hz-40kHz [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]. The mid/bass unit uses a special treated paper cone

"this loudspeaker sounds mature and sophisticated way beyond its size and cost..."

with a field-stabilizing ring inside the magnet assembly, to reduce high-level distortion. The voice coil is vented which is aimed to reduce distortion and compression. Because it is an open chassis the air flow speed is lowered thus audible distortion is minimised, it's claimed. The voice coil bobbin is made with special formulated fibreglass and the crossover is point to point wired with silver solder and ultra pure 99.99997% copper cable, with a bespoke My Audio Design ESA Diamond Silver capacitor, audiophile-grade air/iron core inductors, and 99.997% Diamond Silver internal wiring for the tweeter. "We measure all components, including all capacitors, which are custom built in England," he told me. "Some caps and components we use on the crossovers you can only normally find on extremely expensive speakers! The fully built crossovers are all individually tested with Clio before assembling".

The 280x190x230mm cabinet is made from the company's own DRC technology, which combines layers of materials in different densities to reduce and control unwanted resonance at various frequencies. It's available in Cherry and Walnut veneer; it certainly looks and feels very solidly built. "We build these speakers in an extremely time consuming way. By the time we had finished building the first batch, we noticed the silver price has already doubled!"

Placement proved a doddle; in my room they worked best about 20cm from a rear wall and seemed sufficiently sensitive to go very loud (in the context of small speakers) from the 35W my reference Musical Fidelity AMS35i Class A amplifier was able to muster; there's certainly no sense of these being the sort of power hungry, current sapping, amplifier cooling fan waking mini monitors that certain other companies will sell you...

## SOUND QUALITY

It's one thing to unleash a great long list of hyperbole about how your speaker is so special (all manufacturers do that), but it's another to make a special sounding speaker; the My1920 is precisely this. To those of us who spend their lives listening

to boxes of all sizes, you soon get a strong set of preconceptions about how something will 'taste' just by looking at it. In the pantheon of sub £1,000 small speakers, I'd be expecting a bright, explicit, in your face, punchy performance that would have me pinned to the back of my sofa. The M.A.D. couldn't be more different...

Kicking off with UB40's 'Tyler' and I was immediately struck by two things; first tonally the speaker is so rich and full for something so small. Second, rather than firing the soundstage out at you, the 1920 sounds so deep that it's almost recessed; you almost have to knock on the door and ask for permission to come in. That's by the standards of the class, by the way; my point is that you're able to 'listen in' to the mix in a way that's completely unknown in box speaker circles at this price. These two points together make for something that's rather different.

Of course, you're not going to get serious, big, grown up bass from a small speaker such as this, but it does sound oddly deep. And it's not in a boom-boom-boom sense, *a la* mid nineties Mission speakers voiced to go off into space at 100Hz to make things sound punchy. Rather, there's a decent degree of body and richness to the whole lower frequency arena, and yet it doesn't boof or boom or bonk. Bass guitars sounded fulsome and nicely tuneful; there was no sense of huffing and puffing around the bass port that some small reflex speakers give. Rather, the 1920 almost had the effortlessness of a bigger box, allowing the bass to do its thing without constipating the midband.

Speaking of which, the intermediate frequencies came over in a consummately smooth and relaxed way, yet were bristling with details. I found the vocals on 'Tyler', which can be a little brittle, were very natural and unforced, yet quite direct and intense too; this is a trick rarely pulled off by small speakers. There's no question of these being soft and dull though, as the speed with which they conveyed the drum kit, especially those wonderful rim shots, is almost up with the great Linn Kan, which managed to make certain percussive events feel like you were actually lying back in a special chair having dental surgery, so fast and bright they could be. Deep and warm they may be, but dull and slow they are not.

Moving to Age of Love's 'Age of Love', a pounding early nineties trance techno track, and the 1920s showed their mettle, gripping the dense mix with a firm hand. Even though they didn't push the soundstage out at me too firmly, they



nevertheless opened up an expansive acoustic around and behind the plane of the speakers. Again, I felt myself peering in to the proceedings, where – looking glass like – everything was revealed and placed with great clarity. It made listening to the track a joy, its rich tonality flattering the slightly topky CD pressing I was spinning. One key reason why the speakers sound so fast, I think, is the tweeter. This is an excellent unit, which seems uncannily transparent and atmospheric; I particularly loved the fact that it doesn't spit at you in the lower treble regions yet goes seemingly sky-high making for a very atmospheric, spacious sound.

Jonathon Freeman-Attwood's solo trumpet on a Linn SACD of

11



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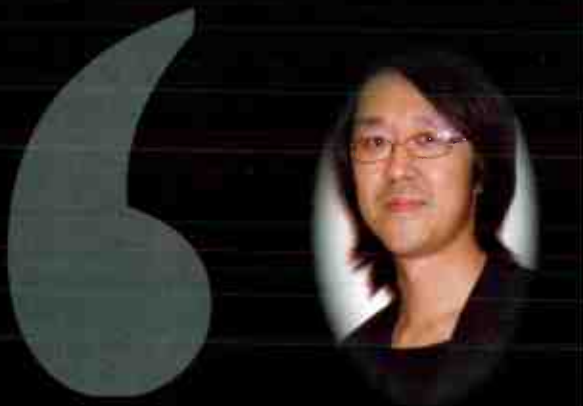
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## QUESTION TIME

David Price talks to My Audio Design's Tim Jung...

### WHY IS THE SPEAKER CALLED 'MY 1920'?

When we sat down to hear some old Jazz and Classical recordings, the speakers brought us back to Paris in the 1920s! It's an atmospheric yet musical sound, hand polished like antique furniture...

### WHY DID YOU DECIDE ON THIS EXACT SIZE?

Simply because it's easy to move around the house, easy to get the best listening position, and it doesn't occupy too much space so suits all kinds of rooms; it is wife friendly. I think it perfectly suits smaller listening environments in cities like London, Paris or Hong Kong. The precise box dimensions were arrived at by exhaustive listening and measurement; after four days of torture with sine impulse waves, we calculated the optimal box and port size and started building prototypes. Even exactly the same volume with the same port and the same cabinet materials, but in different dimensions, sounded very very different! As a result we scrapped quite a lot of boxes and damping material over the development period...

### WHAT ARE ITS RIVALS?

We'd simply say it's a new mini monitor to supersede the famous but flawed LS 3/5a!

### HOW WAS THE SPEAKER SET UP?

We wanted to achieve a high fidelity mini monitor with a musical sensibility. So the voicing of the loudspeakers involved a team of Jazz and Classical musicians, plus Rock fans too! The tests were conducted by me (a trained psychologist) using Group Analysis techniques; my wife is a professionally trained pianist and also one of the choir mistresses of the St. Martin-in-the-Fields. So we are all music lovers at M.A.D., and we design speakers in a distinctively different way to most other manufacturers. As well as textbook acoustic theory (the law of physics and technical measurements), we're highly attuned to psychological, perceptual, instinctual, emotional and musical issues. Recently we demonstrated the speaker to Julian Lloyd Webber and some other leading British musicians (with *Hi-Fi World's* editor there too). Julian's verdict was a wry, "very, very good – but why don't you make a better looking stand?"

### WHAT MUSIC DID YOU USE WHEN VOICING THE SPEAKER?

Oh, all kinds! Some tracks are live recordings of our own music, or that of musician friends. We use a variety of music ranged from old recordings such as Fritz Kreisler's recording from the twenties, to Muse and the improvisation of John Russell.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK IS ITS SPECIAL STRENGTH?

It's a very well rounded small speaker which suits rooms in all sizes. Our audition facility is almost 400 square feet, but even here you don't feel the speaker isn't up to filling the room with the spirit of the music, and in a small room you don't feel compressed. It's a 'volks loudspeaker', built and priced for every man and woman.

Greig's 'Holberg Suite' showed the 1920's lovely natural tone; the instrument was vividly recreated, but never once grated despite the tendency of small two-ways so to do. Daniel Ben Pienaar's accompanying piano was exquisitely delivered, with great body and credible timbre; again the 1920s didn't sound in the least bit veiled, despite being so smooth. At the same time, I could enjoy the instrument's rich harmonics wafting in and around the spacious concert hall, these speaker's superb treble showcasing this brilliant record to great effect. But as well as being excellent in a 'hi-fi' sense, these little boxes let the music flow with impunity; there was no feeling of them compressing the music's dynamics, or indeed its rhythmic flow. A splendid result.

## CONCLUSION

A real turn up for the books, this. I already know and like My Audio Design, not least for their quirkiness and desire to be different, but I hadn't expected such a highly capable small loudspeaker; one that's so different to so many of its price rivals in both conception and character. Put simply, the speaker sounds mature and sophisticated way beyond its size and cost, and bringing sweetness, space and smoothness to every recording it plays. My only criticism, and it's surely a churlish one, is that of styling; it adds nothing to the small speaker market in terms of aesthetics, simply reminding me of the dowdy LS3/5a. But there you go; this a speaker that should be heard and not seen.

**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
Exceptionally smooth, spacious and refined mini monitors that beguile and excite in equal measure.

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**MY 1920** £999  
My Audio Design  
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● sweet, extended treble  
● deep, dimensional midband  
● beguiling musicality  
● build, finish

**AGAINST**  
● styling

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The MAD MY 1920 has smooth bass and midrange coverage, our frequency response analysis shows, suggesting a natural balance with well integrated bass. Lack of undulations indicates low colouration too and the decay spectrum was suitably clean, a nice result. The small midband lift around 1.5kHz will push forward detail and make vocal enunciation clear, but a pronounced upper midrange dip will result in a softer presentation than a lot of modern loudspeakers, which with their raised midrange sound harsh. The presence of upper treble, above 10kHz, is enough to ensure the MY 1920 will not sound warm or dull.

Being a compact design suited to near wall mounting, bass rolls away below 120Hz according to a third-octave pink noise analysis (not shown) and forward output drops rapidly below 70Hz. The port takes over, having broad output centred around 65Hz our red trace shows, and it reaches down to 40Hz. As port output measured an unusually high +13dB above forward output at 80Hz the port makes a big contribution so bass is likely to be strung.

The impedance curve correlates with all this, showing clearly the bass unit is well damped and should play a bass tune without inhominess. The MAD is a substantially resistive load to an amplifier, so matching will be good. With a minimum of 4 Ohms and an overall measured impedance of 5 Ohms it also draws current, but is commensu-

rately sensitive, producing a loud 88dB SPL from one nominal watt (2.8V) of input. Amplifiers of 30 Watts or more will produce high volume.

Bass distortion rose rapidly below 50Hz, from 3% up to 20%, like many small loudspeakers. Midband distortion was low at around 0.2%.

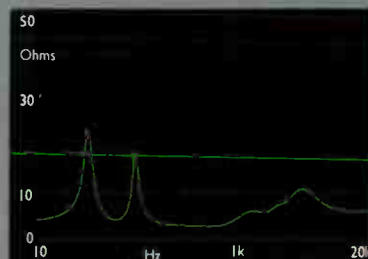
The MADs measured well. They should be weighty but smooth and easy going. NK

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

### IMPEDANCE



HP8 MkII



All Triode Headphone Amplifier

Stereo 60 MkIII



KT88/KT120 65W Integrated Amplifier

Stereo 25 MkII



Entry level 25W Integrated Amplifier

MB90 MkII Mono Amplifier



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## RUSS ANDREWS CD DCT £2.50 PER DISC

Deep Cryogenic Treatment (DCT) – sounds very sci-fi doesn't it? Well, it is in a way, although not to preserve your silver discs for eons; it's more about improving their sound! It's a non-immersive process, where the temperature of the treated CD falls dramatically to around -190°C. This is said to address the distortions in the grain of the metal and associated materials created during its manufacturing process.

I decided to give the process an A-B comparison, in conjunction with the Linn record label who kindly sent a selection of their CDs for treatment and then a duplicate set of untreated discs directly for comparative purposes.

Loading up the first disc, Alyn Cosker's jazz-fusion album, 'Lyn's Une', it was immediately apparent that there was a greater bass confidence in the overall presentation of the treated CDs. Lower bass exuded a power that was previously missing while the lower

mid frequencies provided a rich, deep flavouring and an almost analogue smoothness that gave the music a new sense of calm and authority.

Claire Martin's vocal jazz album, 'A Modern Art', was originally quite muddy, but the newly treated CD gave slightly better instrumental separation, giving the track more identity. The Martin vocal was also more detached from the previously claggy background, which had seemed to cling on to Martin like quicksand to a drowning man. Now, the Martin performance was offered more space to work with, and more room to manoeuvre, resulting in a performance with more emotion.

Finally Olivier Messiaen's 'Chamber Works: Hebrides Ensemble' provided an initial dream-like first track, 'Quatuor pour la fin du Temps' which, post-DCT, provided a greater sense of purpose, the swirling instruments had more individual roles to play as each exhibited a greater character, not least the



piano which now sounded positively haunting. Track two, 'Theme et variations', which kicked in with bold piano strikes, now sounded deeply resonant, more emotional and with greater drama and power. Fascinatingly then, the DCT process had a noticeably beneficial effect on all of the test CDs. Prices range from £2.50 per disc to £1.75 for batches of fifty or more. Recommended. **PR**

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# soundbites

## DURATOOL ULTRASONIC CLEANER £50

We in the hi-fi firmament often think of ourselves as occupying a unique niche corner of the technology world. Even we, however, can borrow ideas from other industries. Take the Ultrasonic cleaner reviewed here. You might think that this new cleaning gadget has been developed for hi-fi use but that just ain't so because they are widely used to clean delicate items such as jewellery, surgical instruments and lenses. You can even see bigger, more robust versions within the likes of the automotive and marine sectors. Whatever the size and price, the Ultrasonic cleaner is based on a consistent technique: they generate ultrasonic sound waves which agitate the surrounding water in which the soiled item sits, producing thousands of tiny bubbles that sneak underneath dirt on the item, lifting it away. Ideal, says Russ Andrews, for cleaning your CDs...

Duratool's own version works by filling the deep fryer-like bowl with lukewarm water. From there,

you place your CD onto a plastic spindle, which is removable and arrives in a separate plastic bag along with a range of additional support accessories for other items, and then into the bath. A single press of a button prompts the Duratool to run through a cycle of cleaning for around three minutes; there are no other controls. Russ Andrews would like you to use the Ultrasonic cleaner as part of a larger cleaning system; it recommends that, before you dunk your CD into the Duratool, you give it the once over with a Reveel wet wipe to remove fingerprints which the Duratool cannot. It's my opinion however, that the Duratool can do without the Reveel altogether. The gadget lifted the entire midband on its own, pushing new detail to the fore; mid frequencies had more insight and there was a greater personality in both vocal delivery and organic instrumentation while vocal performances gained space in which to perform which encouraged more personality and emotion. Definitely a gadget to investigate. **PR**

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# Basement



**With the hi-fi world seemingly migrating to the high end, there's little in the way of bargain budget separates these days. So Yamaha's CD-S300 was a nice surprise, says Tim Jarman...**

blame computer audio. Ten years ago, there was no alternative if you wanted a decent way to play your silver discs; you had to buy a CD player. As such, there were countless budget models to choose from. Now though, everyone's digitising their silver Frisbees and playing them off their hard drives – or so it seems – and the market for bargain basement separates CD spinners is all but gone...

Well not *quite*. Interestingly, in the past year or so the big Japanese companies have moved back into two-channel separates hi-fi. Yamaha is one illustrious name to have returned, and the £250 CD-S300 is their contender. It's a kind of 'my first hi-fi CD player', for people wanting to graduate off their iPod and into separates hi-fi. It will play normal CDs as well as those with MP3 files on them, making it a useful bridge between a computer-based music collection and a traditional hi-fi setup.

Any thoughts that this is just an entry-level range filler based on a stripped down budget DVD player soon disappear upon a detailed inspection of what makes up this machine. Just like models costing

many times more, the various electronic functions have been intelligently divided and their assemblies placed within the cabinet to the best possible advantage, those things that should be kept apart have been, and those that need to be close together are. In particular we find that the mains transformer (there's no noisy switch mode supply here) is well away from everything; it feeds a linear regulator (all discrete of course) which is right next to the logic and servo board to keep the important connections short. Particular attention has been paid to the analogue filters and buffer stages; these also have their own circuit board so that the grounding system can work independently to that of the digital sections. Close attention to detail has clearly been paid to both the layout and the component choices in the analogue circuits, and both are immaculate when also considering the price of the machine as a whole.

The outside of the CD-S300 may appear to some as rather generic and derivative but it is neat and well executed all the same. Clearly Mario Bellini, who styled Yamaha's stunning TC-800GL cassette deck in the mid

nineteen seventies, is no longer on the payroll, but viewed at a glance the CD-S300 could have been made at any time in the last twenty or so years, which goes some way to confirm the basic rightness of the design. Certainly it would not look outlandish or out of place when partnered with a wide range of amplifiers and other equipment.

All the usual appointments are present and correct on the front panel and there are a couple of interesting extras as well. Firstly a 'Pure Direct' function is an unusual addition to an entry level machine. What it does is to blank the track display and mute the coaxial and optical outputs so that the minimum amount of needless interference is generated, letting the best possible signal emerge from the analogue outputs. One could argue that the chance of this making an audible difference in the calibre of system to which such a model is likely to be a part of is minimal, but at least it shows that Yamaha's heart is in the right place and that they are taking the listener seriously.

The other novelty is a USB socket which can be used to connect an external storage device or an

# Traxx



"a highly accomplished modern machine whose sound is both orderly and mature..."

iPod. If an iPod is used then the CD player's remote control unit (a silver plastic affair of reasonable quality) can operate some of its basic functions which is convenient. The iPod also gets the benefit of the Yamaha's DAC and analogue stages which should represent a worthwhile improvement over a connection via the headphone socket, but such things I feel are only there to help you bridge a gap as you move up the hi-fi food chain, I doubt you'll be listening to low resolution downloads much once you've heard what the CD-S300 can do with old fashioned silver discs.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is a highly accomplished modern machine whose sound is both orderly and mature. The first thing that will hit you if you are leaving downloads and cheap CD players behind is the treble, which is pleasingly crisp without being excessively grainy and harsh, making a pair of half decent loudspeakers a worthwhile investment. Beneath this we find that the midrange presence makes vocals stand out, whether the mixing engineer originally intended them to or not. It is this detail that defines the Yamaha's overall character most

strongly; it is tonally a bit on the dry side which allows it to demonstrate its ability to communicate fine detail very vividly. This comes at the cost of sounding a bit bland in some systems; an amplifier with a bit of heft and urge would be needed to balance the system to my personal taste. Bass is also as dry and tight as one would expect but tuneful with it, again if you feel that you've outgrown the one-note boom of a compact all-in-one system then this will come as a welcome relief.

The Pure Direct button does indeed tidy things up around the edges but not to any great extent; you'd be doing well to spot the difference in a budget system but it is there, and who needs a track display anyway? Imaging is satisfactory with a nice solid spread of sound in the space between the loudspeakers but sometimes one can be left feeling that this is one area where a really excellent player really shines compared to one which is simply very good; the Yamaha falls into the latter category, as it can be a bit two-dimensional at times in absolute terms.

It's hard to criticise the CD-S300 when its modest cost is taken into

account but if pushed I'd prefer to swap some of that vocal presence for a bit more sparkle and sheen at the top end and a bit of warmth at the bottom. The good news is that this option is available because the two digital outputs allow you to experiment with different DACs, making this starter machine a good basis for a system that you upgrade. Adding Arcam's rDAC for example will more than double the cost of the basic player but it is still be very easy to spend more on a fancier model elsewhere and get less; like putting a better arm on a Technics SL-1200, this could be one of hi-fi's hidden bargains. The iPod and USB sources would also benefit from an upgrade like this so it really could be money well spent.

## CONCLUSION

It seems strange to talk about 'your first CD player' in 2011 but isn't this where we were ten years ago with turntables? Yamaha's CD-S300 is a good basic model that should also serve well as a transport to go with a modest external DAC. Either way the CD-S300 represents a painless first step into proper hi-fi – and who knows where that could lead?



## VERDICT ●●●● £

Fine sounding entry level machine whose performance belies its low price.

**YAMAHA CD-S300 £250**

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## FOR

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- excellent iPod connectivity

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Hi Fi News (Feb 2010 edition)

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# Off Air

Hitachi's early eighties FT-3500 is a long lost radio bargain, says Tim Jarman...

**B**ack in the early eighties, the world was being 'wowed' with digital tuners. No, not the sort that sound horrid and do an impression of bubbling mud when the signal fades (as it always does), but the type with analogue innards and digitally synthesised front end tuning system, including LED frequency displays. Models such as Hitachi's £200 FT-5500 became emblematic of the brave new high tech world of radio, selling bucket-loads despite their premium price tags...

Down in the real world of budget tuners however, the likes of Hitachi's (£65 in 1982) FT-3500 remained largely overlooked because they were devoid of frills and fripperies. Yet the FT-3500 is actually a superb sounding little unit that's a paired down, back-to-basics design purposed simply for making sweet music from analogue radio. Importantly, its old fashioned three gang variable capacitor FM tuning system makes it one of the last of the old generation, with no digital trickery whatsoever.

It's a basic AM/FM model with nothing much in the way of frills except Hitachi's 'Vector Tuning System'; flanking the red tuning pointer are two green arrows which on FM show the direction and magnitude of any tuning error (hence "vector"). The arrows appear once a signal is received and then all you have to do is to gently turn the knob in the direction of the brightest arrow until both are of equal brightness. In addition the overall brightness of both arrows indicates the approximate signal strength so

it is easy to compare the signal from two transmitters, and this latter function works on the AM bands too. To protect delicate loudspeakers the FT-3500 mutes itself when tuning between FM stations and so is silent when not tuned into anything.

The decoder itself is of the Phase Locked Loop (PLL) type which has to be one of the greatest advances in FM tuner design. Earlier FM stereo tuners used the actual pilot signal broadcast with the audio signal to control the decoding action but in a PLL set this signal is used instead to control a built-in oscillator which in turn generates a completely clean waveform locally. This arrangement makes for consistent and accurate FM stereo decoding, even under difficult reception conditions. The PLL decoder circuit of the FT-3500 is constructed on a single silicon chip of Hitachi's own manufacture.

Despite being thirty years old the FT-3500's FM sensitivity is high and there is a remarkable lack of mush to spoil the background. With manual tuning and no AFC you alone choose the exact point of tune and so are free to wring out every last drop of performance. At the sweet spot, BBC Radio 3's concerts are a treat, the stand-out feature being the solidity of the image that is portrayed. Across its width the image possesses remarkable depth, seeming to extend both forwards and backwards from where the loudspeakers are positioned.

Tonally the FT-3500 is even handed with a less forward midrange than some; treble is bright but well controlled, only occasionally does the familiar Japanese glare make its presence felt. Bass is punchy and

sometimes overly intrusive, although this is the fault of broadcasters who tailor their output to sound attractive on poor portable receivers.

The wee Hitachi deals with AM stations like BBC Radio 5 extremely well; there is no local interference being generated inside the cabinet and once the sturdy loop antenna at the back has been optimally positioned the quality of reception is excellent.

Obviously the background isn't silent like DAB but then the sound doesn't give the impression of being over processed, nor does it break out into shrieks at random intervals. Serious AM listeners can connect an external AM antenna in addition to the loop and properly engineered connections are also provided for both 75 ohm and 300 ohm FM antennas as well.

Japanese analogue tuners of this period are the most reliable pieces of hi-fi equipment I can think of, perhaps needing just a dose of contact cleaner on the waveband switches to restore original levels of performance. The only common fault is that the lamp which gives the power switch its distinctive gentle glow fails; not difficult to fit a new one. If the pointer doesn't move when you spin the tuning knob the drive cord may have snapped and mono reception only on FM (with a strong signal and the muting function not defeated) points to a defective HA1196 decoder chip (which you can still get by the way) but both these things are unlikely.

A decent used example can be yours for under £30; not bad for a superbly engineered, neatly presented no frills analogue tuner.



# Desk Jockeys

**A marriage of convenience or a match made in heaven? Paul Rigby looks at the NuForce Icon 2 amplifier and Amphon Ion speaker system...**

**H**i-fi components for use within a small room and/or near-field environment (such as attached to a computer set-up) are becoming more numerous and popular. How so? Well, the reasons are largely practical. For example, the average size of a new house is actually reducing with room sizes shrinking. Also, less houses are being bought for their owners to live in while more are being bought with a view to letting with many larger properties being converted to flats to maximise profits which, of course, means that living space is further reduced. The result is that, apart from the fact that there is less money floating around the economy (a situation that is likely to continue for some time, I'd imagine), the demand for systems based upon a pair of B&W 800Ds or even a pair of Quad electrostatics is abating...

So we now see hi-fi manufacturers seeking ways of not only reducing the size of their kit, but they are having to become more innovative in the design of that hardware. A task that, to compete successfully, requires great skill.

This test reflects a variation on that theme and a different sort of innovation as it presents a structured partnership between two established brands: NuForce and Amphon, offering an integrated amplifier and a pair of bookshelf speakers as a stylishly presented system.

It's a risky move because both pieces of technology have to not only be compatible but also bring out the best in each other. There's no point – as you sometimes find while testing hi-fi components – of matching two pieces of hardware only to find that one actually reveals previously unheard of weaknesses in the other.

So, taking the dinky NuForce

Icon 2 firstly, this amp's small form factor will be ideal for a cluttered living room, study or bedsit as it can be placed in numerous pigeon holes, hidden away under shelves or can be blended in amongst other personal items. Measuring just 150x90x30mm, the amp weighs in at only 0.45kg, offers 24 Watts into 4 Ohms and 18 Watts into 8 Ohms and is packed full of features. The front fascia features volume and input selector rotary knobs along with a headphone port. The rear includes a pair of phonos to connect to a console, set-top box, DVD or Blu-ray player; an MP3 player 3.5mm jack socket input; a USB port and a pair of RJ-45 sockets to connect to a pair of speakers using the supplied Ethernet/phono cables.

The Amphon speakers are designed in a minimal yet modish fashion as two-way affairs with a rear facing bass port, a 1" titanium treble unit plus a 5.25" paper-based mid/

bass cone producing 86dB sensitivity. Relatively compact in size, the speakers span 268x134x220mm and weigh in at a portable 5kg. The driver grilles can be ordered in a wide variety of colours but I sacrificed mine in the cause of improved sound, removing the mid-bass metallic grille. The treble grille was fixed.

## SOUND QUALITY

This review was approached in two parts. Firstly, as a potential small-room hi-fi and, secondly, as a near-field system for a computer set-up.

As part of a small room budget system, the NuForce and Amphion duo where connected to my reference Aesthetix Calypso preamp and low cost Pro-ject DAC Box FL. My first question was to ask if the pair could actually fill a room satisfactorily and this was replied with an affirmative. When pushed, though, the Icon 2 did sound a little hurried but, at reasonable volumes, the amplifier performed well. Taking a batch of rock CDs, the system was able to successfully convey the music's energy and excitement.

The attached Amphions, due to their small size, offered only restricted lower bass but, aided by the NuForce's inherent accuracy, the available bass was presented with an illuminating clarity and character. There was never a sense, with this system, that the lower registers were ever out of control, which gave music real bounce and fluency. Midrange was dominated by the Amphion's superbly insightful drivers which, despite a lifting of the mid frequencies, which threatened to become a little harsh with compressed test CDs, did reach deep into a mix and pulled out previously lost harmonic voices and more subtly placed instruments.

Replacing the budget Pro-ject DAC with the Icon Audio CD-X1 CD player and connecting the system to its valve stage, the grown-up nature of the Icon calmed and reined in the midrange, adding a sense of maturity and confidence to the overall sound.

Playing a mix of jazz CDs featuring a higher class of mastering, the cool nature of the Amphions midrange was still present but, combined with the NuForce's clarity, a wealth of detail was always on offer. Acoustic guitars were plucked with a metallic precision while chord changes were tracked as fingers changed position, and piano notes were well formed. Yes, vocals lacked an element of emotion and warmth but vocal delivery offered

impressive diction and was technically impressive.

For the near-field test set-up, the PC installation (64bit Windows 7, quad core, 8GB RAM) was very simple, requiring the USB cable to be attached and a few seconds wait for the drivers to be automatically installed. The speakers were positioned either side of my LCD monitor and the Nu-Force positioned on a lower shelf, for 'real-world' positioning.

Playback was carried out with WAV files. Tests proved that the NuForce/Amphion system was very comfortable in this configuration, sounding more impressive and relaxed in a near-field arrangement. Because the gain was lower, the NuForce offered a greater sense of power potential while the upper mid lift of the Amphions was reduced. At low volumes, the midrange clarity of the system was retained but a new instrumental separation was now evident, offering a great sense of

"as a near-field system, this combo really comes into its own..."

depth to the soundstage. The more manageable midrange allowed more emotion to be heard via jazz output, adding a sometimes playful aspect and lightness of touch to the vocals while an organic instrumentation featured an impressive, layered texture.

As a bit of fun, I then plugged in Furutech's high quality Formula 2 and Formula GT2 USB cables, which feature 24k gold-plated connections plus silver-plated Alpha OFC conductors with a three-layer shield. Priced at £55 and £95, respectively, per 1.2m these things are, to say the least, expensive, but did provide a rich, weighty bass response with an enhanced, silky-smooth midrange. If nothing else, this minor experiment provides notice that the sound within a computer is a rich source of tweaks and upgrade potential...

Back to the real world and that headphone socket. Plugging in a pair of Sennheiser HD650s into the headphone socket of the amp, I was impressed with the dynamic output of the Icon 2. For an amp in this price range, the output was surprisingly accurate, focused and detailed. The HD650's inherent bass rich demeanour was portrayed well and lower registers were controlled.

## CONCLUSION

Performing well in all areas, this system should really be viewed in two distinct ways. As a small room



system, the NuForce/Amphion pairing is a sparkling, although not exactly muscle-bound, combination. Yes, the pairing, in this setting, demanded that both the amp and the speakers be pushed, which revealed both units' less than admirable aspects such as the lifting midrange of the Amphions

and the slight lack of puff from the NuForce. But the latter's precision and control did flower in this environment, while the Amphion's ability to provide a comprehensive survey of the mix, offering bucketfuls of detail, maintained listener interest.

It is as a near-field system however, that this system really comes into its own. More at ease and able to present the listener with a convincing, effortless transcription, the Icon 2 absolutely *commands* the music, keeping it in a tight organised grip while the Amphion speakers were able to provide a more measured delivery meaning that, instead of distortive elements getting in the way, the midrange was more relaxed and free to transcribe detail.

All in all, the NuForce/Amphion combination is a good looking, compact system that will improve the sound quality of any desktop (or laptop) computer immeasurably and it is on this basis, rather than as a small room hi-fi, that the globe rating sits.

### REFERENCE SYSTEM

Icon Audio CD-X1 CD player  
Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier  
Pro-ject DAC Box FL DAC  
Cyrus CD8 SE CD player

### VERDICT ●●●●●

Best used as a near-field set-up but admirable as a small room rig, this pairing offers fine sound quality and value.

### NUFORCE ICON 2/

AMPHION ION

£899

Amphion

☎ +31 (0)493 744020

www.amphion.fi

### FOR

- great for nearfield use
- elegant design
- sonic precision

### AGAINST

- slight midrange lift
- limited power

# WORLD STANDARDS

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

## TURNTABLES

### PRO-JECT GENIE 2 2008 £175

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

### REGA P2 2008 £220

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

### TECHNICS SL1200/II 1973 £495

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



### REGA P3-24 2008 £400

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

### MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £579

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

### ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2010 £1,399

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

### FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860

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



### MARANTZ TT-1551 2005 £999

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

### MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2005 £1,005

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

### ACOUSTIC SOLID CLASSIC WOOD

2008 £1,350

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

### REVOLVER REPLAY 2007 £1,500

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

### AVID DIVA II SP 2010 £2,000

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

### MICHELL ORBE 1995 £2,500

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



### LINN LP12SE 1973 £3,510

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

### SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

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

### ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,000

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

### BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £4,495

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

### AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL 2007 £4,600

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

### McINTOSH MT10 2008 £8,995

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

### EAT FORTE 2009 £12,500

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

## TONEARMS

### REGA RB251 2009 £136

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

### MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £442

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



### ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2006 £599

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

### SME 309 1989 £767

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

### SME SERIES IV 1988 £1,127

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

### AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 2007 £1,300

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

### NAIM ARO 1987 £1,425

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

### HELIUS OMEGA 2008 £1,595

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

### SME SERIES V 1987 £1,614

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



**LINN EKOS 1987 £1,700**

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

**SME 312S 2010 £1,750**

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

**GRAHAM PHANTOM 2006 £2,495**

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

**TRI-PLANAR PRECISION 2006 £3,600**

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

**OL ENTERPRISE 3C 2010 £4,500**

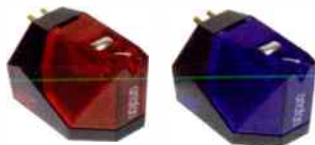
Few if any pivoted arms come close to this arm's combination of liquid musicality and forensic grip.

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

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

**ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE****2007 £60/£120**

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

**GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135**

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

**DENON DL103R 2006 £200**

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

**DYNAVECTOR DV10X52003 £250**

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

**ORTOFON 2M BLACK 2007 £350**

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

**DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395**

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

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

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

**LYRA DORIAN 2007 £595**

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

**ORTOFON RONDO****BRONZE 2005 £500**

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

**ZYX R-100H 2005 £625**

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

**BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2 2008 £650**

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

**TRANSFIGURATION AXIA****2007 £890**

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

**ORTOFON CADENZA BLUE****2009 £1,000**

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

**ORTOFON MC****WINDFELD****2008 £1,799**

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

**KOETSU RED K SIGNATURE****2007 £2,399**

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

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

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

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO****DACMAGIC****£229**

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

**STELLO DA100****SIGNATURE****£675**

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

**CAMBRIDGE****AZUR 840C****2006 £800**

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

**NAIM CDSi****2008 £895**

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

**ROKSAN KANDY****K2 CD****2010 £900**

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

**BENCHMARK DAC-IS 2009 £930**

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

**CYRUS CD8 SE****2008 £1,200**

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

**SIMAUDIO MOON 300D****2010 £1,290**

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

**NAIM DAC****£1,995**

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

**CHORD QBD64****2008 £3,000**

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

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

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

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

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

**ESOTERIC X-05****2010 £4,495**

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

**NAIM CDX2-XPS2****2003 £4,950**

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

**NAIM CDS3****2003 £7,050**

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

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

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

**DCS PAGANINI DAC** £9,599

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

**LINN KLIMAX DS** 2007 £9,600

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

**NAIM CD555/555PS** 2006 £14,000

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

**RECORDERS****NAIM HDX** 2009 £4,405

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

**SONY TC-WE475** 2010 £130

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

**SONY RCD-W3** 2002 £250

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

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

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

**GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V** 2004 £460

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

**ICON AUDIO PS1.2** 2007 £599

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

**ASTIN TREW AT8000** £880

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

**ANATEK MCI** 2007 £850

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

**QUAD QC24P** 2007 £995

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

**TRICHORD DIABLO + NCP5U** 2006 £1,198

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

**ICON AUDIO PS3** 2008 £1,500

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

**EMILLE ALLURE** 2010 £2,495

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

**A.N.T. AUDIO KORA 3T LTD** 2010 £995

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

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

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

**ICON AUDIO STEREO 25** 2008 £500

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

**ROTEL RA-06** 2008 £550

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

**NAIM NAIT 5i** 2007 £725

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

**CAMBRIDGE 840A V2** 2007 £750

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

**JUNGSON JA-88D** 2006 £899

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

**AUDIOLAB 8000S** 2006 £400

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

**SUGDEN A21A S2** 2007 £1,299

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

**NAIM NAIT XS** 2009 £1,250

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

**ELECTROCOMPANIE PI-2** 2008 £1,430

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

**SUGDEN A21A S2** 2008 £1,469

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

**ANATEK A50R** 2007 £1,600

Simple integrated amplifier with super bass grip and effortless dynamics.

**VINCENT SA-236MK** 2010 £1,749

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

**MOON I-3RS** 2008 £1,890

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

**COPLAND CSA29** 2006 £1,998

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

**NAIM SUPERNAIT** 2007 £2,475

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

**LUXMAN L-550A** 2007 £2,800

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

**AUDIO RESEARCH VS160** 2009 £3,298

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

**LEEMA TUCANA II** 2010 £3,495

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

**SUGDEN IA4** 2007 £3,650

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

**QUAD II CLASSIC** 2010 £4,500

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

**MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS35I** 2010 £6,000

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

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

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

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

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

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CAN V8** 2008 £350

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

**SUGDEN HEADMASTER** 2003 £600

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

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

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

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE2003** £1,500

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

**MODWRIGHT SWL9.0SE** £2,000

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

**NUFORCE P-9** 2007 £2,200

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

**DPA CA-1** 2010 £2,650

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

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

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

**MODWRIGHT 36.5 PRE/PSU** 2010 £5,995

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

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

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

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

Fine budget power amp that punches well above its weight.

**QUAD 909** 2001 £900

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

**NAIM NAP150** 2002 £795

Driven by a decent source and a NAC 112, this gives highly enjoyable results - providing you like the Naim sound! Taut, fast and feisty despite its relative lack of power.

**SUGDEN MUSIC MASTER** 2003 £1,300

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

**NUFORCE REFERENCE 95E V2** 2006 £1,750

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

**ROTEL RB1092** 2007 £1,595

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

**CHANNEL ISLANDS AUDIO D100** 2005 £1,595

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

**ICON AUDIO MB845** 2009 £2,499

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

**GRAAF GM20 OTL** 2003 £3,300

Awesome output transformer-less valve power amp gives dazzling speed and incision, with an ethereal soundstaging and delicious filigree detail. Tremendous punch belies its humble 20W power rating. Factor in one of the most exquisite finishes this side of an Aston Martin and it's very hard to say no...

**ELECTROCOMPANIE NEMO** 2009 £4,450 (EACH)

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

**DPA SA-1** 2010 £2,850

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

**SILK GLOWMASTER KT88** 2007 £1,699

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

**QUAD II-40** 2005 £3,230

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

**QUAD II-80** 2005 £6,000

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

**MUSICAL FIDELITY AMSS0** 2010 £7,000

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

**LOUDSPEAKERS****Q ACOUSTICS 2020** 2010 £140

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

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I** 2007 £199

Tidy and well balanced standmounters with pleasing clarity and detail.

**B&W 686** 2007 £279

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

**KEF IQ30** 2009 £330

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



**USHER S-520** 2006 £350

Astonishingly capable budget standmounters that offer detail and dynamics well beyond their price and dimensions

**WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3** 2010 £299

Great small standmounters for audiophiles on a budget; dry punchy sound with impressive soundstaging at the price.

**XTZ 99.25** 2010 £640

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

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 CLASSIC** £845

Brilliantly successful remake of an iconic design; not flawless, but surely one of the most musical loudspeakers ever made.

**SPENDOR S3/5E** 2004 £950

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

**RRR FS100** 2007 £1,055

Mind-boggling amount of loudspeaker for the money. Big and sturdily built with serious bass and awesome soundstage scale. A real bargain.

**MAD MY CLAPTON GRAND MM** 2010 £3,400

Distinctive coaxial standmounters with wonderful soundstaging, bright lucid midband excellent musical insight.

**REVOLVER RW451** 2006 £1,199

Very musical floorstander that's clear, concise and truthful, whilst being exceptionally amplifier friendly - a dreamboat for valves.

**ONE THING AUDIO ESL57** 2007 £1,450

One Thing Audio's modifications keep the good old ESL57 at the very top of the game.

**KIBRI NAIMA** 2007 £1,550

Unusual-looking omnidirectional loudspeakers with an absolutely captivating performance. Huge soundstage and bags of clarity - brilliant!

**GURU QM-10P** 2007 £1,595

Quirky but adorable standmounters that are way off the pace in respect of detail and power, but amazingly capable at playing a tune and pulling you in to the music.

**USHER BE-718** 2007 £1,600

Beryllium tweeters work superbly, allied to a fast and punchy bass driver. The result is subtle, smooth and emotive.

**MARTIN LOGAN SOURCE** 2008 £1,599

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

**MONITOR AUDIO GS60** 2008 £2,000

Still a great rock loudspeaker after all these years, with a vivid, lithe and engaging sound.

**SPENDOR S8E** £1,895

Generously large, silky smooth delivery, this dynamic sounding floorstander is an excellent all rounder.

**ISOPHON GALILEO** 2007 £2,100

Big standmounters that really grip the music and offer quite startling dynamics and grip.

**YAMAHA SOAVO I.1** 2009 £3,000

Musical, transparent large floorstanders with impressive dynamics and cohesion. Excellent build and finish.

**MONITOR AUDIO PL100** 2008 £2,300

The MA boys pull out all the stops for their flagship 'Platinum' series standmounter with stunning results.

**PMC OB11** 2008 £2,950

Cleverly updated floorstanders give scale and solidity in slim and well finished package.

**EMMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT8B** 2010 £2,300

Brilliant ribbon/moving coil hybrid with seamless, delicate and expansive yet tremendously musical nature.

**MOWGAN AUDIO MABON** 2007 £3,995

Massively capable loudspeakers that offer dynamics, scale and clarity in an elegantly simple package. Wide range of finishes, too.

**B&O BEOLAB 9** 2007 £5000

Technically impressive and visually striking loudspeakers with sound quality that more than matches their looks.

**ARS AURES MI** 2006 £5,995

Sublime build and finish allied to an insightful, assured and even-handed musical performance makes these an essential high end audition.

**QUAD ESL-2905** 2006 £5,995

The old 989 with all the bugs taken out, this gives a brilliantly neutral and open sound like only a top electrostatic can; still not a natural rock loudspeaker, though.

**SPENDOR ST** 2010 £5,995

This classy sounding, superbly presented big floorstander will appeal to those seeking high end sonics with subtle looks.

**REVOLVER CYGNIS** 2006 £5,999

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

**USHER BE-10** 2009 £10,500

Clever high end moving coil design with immense speed and dizzying clarity allied to epic punch. Needs the best ancillaries to fly, though...

**B&W 801D** 2006 £10,500

In many respects, the ultimate studio monitor; dazzling clarity and speed with commanding scale and dynamics.

**ISOPHON CASSIANO** 2007 £12,900

Drive units featuring exotic materials allied to superlative build quality result in an immensely capable loudspeaker. Not an easy load to drive, however.

**REVOLVER CYGNIS GOLD** 2010 £14,995

Big banger with enormous scale and vast power, although requires the right room and doesn't cohere as well as a panel.

## ACCESSORIES

**MONITOR AUDIO IDECK** 2006 £200

Fine design, impressive flexibility and a lucidly musical sound make the iDeck the current iPod dock champion.

**ISOTEK AQUARIUS** 2010 £795

Highly accomplished premium priced mains conditioner that delivers the sonic goods, unlike so many others.

**TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM** 2003 £800

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

## HEADPHONES

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

**SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29**  
Cracking pair of lightweight open back cans ideal for personals, but good enough for real hi-fi use. Superb build allied to a smooth and engaging performance make them the spiritual successor to the HD400s.



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

**SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199**  
The company's best real-world cans to date. Open and smooth with plenty of detail. Brightly lit midband makes them an ideal partner for a valve headphone amp.

**SENNHEISER HD-650 2004 £250**  
A super all round reference design with crisp, detailed and even sound allied to superlative build and comfort. Cable upgrade yields great results.

**SENNHEISER HD800 2010 £1,000**  
The ultimate expression of the Sennheiser philosophy offers massive speed, clarity and insight, although lacks some of the charm of the softer, more beguiling rival Staxes.



**STAX SR-007T OMEGA II/SRM-007T 2006 £2,890**  
Simply the best headphones we've ever heard at any price, these sweetly translucent electrostatic earspeakers are like no other headphone, or loudspeaker for that matter...

## INTERCONNECTS

**TECHLINK WIRES XS 2007 £20**  
Highly accomplished interconnects at an absurdly low price. Stunning value for money.

**WIREWORLD OASIS 52003 £99/M**  
Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

**CHORD COMPANY CHAMELEON 2 £90/M**  
One of our favourites, these are musical performers with a smooth yet open sound.



**DNM RESON 2002 £40/M**  
Neutral and transparent - a steal.

**VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST 2004 £260/0.6M**

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



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

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

**MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE 2008 £375**

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

## TUNERS

**DENON TU-1500AE 2006 £120**  
Excellent entry level analogue tuner; slick sonics and fine feature count makes it a bargain.



**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T2005 £250**  
Sweet sounding digital/analogue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.

**ARCAM FMJ T32 2009 £550**  
Excellent hybrid FM/DAB+ tuner with a smooth, engaging sound. Factor in its fine build and it's a super value package.

**CREEK CLASSIC TUNER2006 £550**  
No tuner offers better sound per pound; wonderfully three dimensional and smooth from bottom to top.

**MYRYAD MXT-2000 2005 £800**  
Truly sumptuous sound and excellent build is all most will ever need in a tuner; superb.

**MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-100T 2006 £1,895**  
One of the best ways to hear FM that we know; superbly open and musical sound in a quirky but characterful package.



## SYSTEMS

**YAMAHA CRX-M170 2007 £200**  
One heck of a lot of quality performance on DAB, CD and FM for £200! Optional matching £120 NX-E300 loudspeakers aren't too shabby either.

**TEAC DR-H300DAB 2008 £329**  
Nicely built and styled mini with fine performance on all sources that even plays DVDs!

**NAD C-715DAB 2008 £429**  
Small, neat looks cover a truly capable system that shows just what a compact design can achieve.

**ARCAM SOLO MINI 2008 £650**  
Half the size and two-thirds the price of a full-sized Solo, the Mini gives very little away in terms of performance to its bigger brother.

**ARCAM SOLO 2005 £1,249**  
Excellent all-in-one system, with a warm, smooth and balanced sound to match the features and style.

**LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008 £1,250**  
Neat update of the original and best one-box stereo system; superbly musical sound beats equivalently priced separates.

**MERIDIAN F80 2007 £1,500**  
Fantastically built and versatile DVD/CD/DAB/FM/AM unit, designed in conjunction with Ferrari. Ignore nay-sayers who sneer that it isn't a 'proper' hi-fi product; most see sense when they listen to it...



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

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

**SHANLING MC-30 2007 £650**  
Quite possibly the cutest all-in-one around with fine performance from the CD player, tuner and MP3 player input. Very low power, though.



**NAIM UNITI 2009 £1,995**  
Uniquely versatile one box music system with excellent ergonomics and sonics to match. A landmark product for Naim.

**LINN CLASSIK MOVIE 2007 £2,250**  
Superbly built all-in-one that offers excellent sound across all formats and is surprisingly easy to use.

**MERIDIAN SOOLOOS 2.1 2010 £6,990**

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

**MARANTZ 'LEGEND' 2007 £22,000**  
The combination of SA-7S1 disc player, SC-7S2 preamp and MA-9S2 monoblocks delivers a truly jaw-dropping performance. Start saving now...





# Rock Da House

Noel Keywood's abode shakes to the gripping sound of Unity Audio's The Rock active loudspeaker system...

**W**ith its ribbon tweeter and alloy bass midrange unit The Rock is an active loudspeaker tuned for speed, it appears.

Think superfast dynamics with plenty of punch, a loudspeaker that hits and runs. Unity Audio have put a 75W bass amplifier into each one and a 30W treble amplifier, so all you need is a CD player and volume control

and you're up and running with these £2,850 standmounters.

Oh, and a pair of stands and a mains supply. For The Rocks are compact standmounters whose onboard amplifiers need connection to a mains supply. There's no port anywhere; I looked and looked! So they can be placed against a rear wall if you so wish and they have been balanced to cope with such a position, we found.

At 11.2kgs apiece The Rocks are heavy but liftable. They measure 325mm high (13in), 220mm wide (8.7in) and 290mm (11.5in) deep. Inside lies Class A/B power amplifiers designed by Tim de Paravicini no less (using transistors, not valves, I should add!). It's coupled to a ribbon tweeter through an impedance matching transformer, as ribbons have very low impedance; the crossover is electronic.

The rear panel carries an IEC power input, a sensitivity (volume) control, a balanced XLR input and an unbalanced phono socket input, all of good quality. There's a rocker power switch with green power on LED; could editor DP's campaign against blue LEDs be working? Switch on and off were virtually silent and there were no violent cone excursions caused by d.c. offset in the power amps. caused by the power supply lines running up at differing rates. All this induces confidence, as does excellent build quality and finish...

Very impressively, Unity Audio use an Elac Jet tweeter (a folded ribbon) and an Elac bass unit, with alloy sandwiched onto a pulp fibre cone. Harold Leak obviously had a good idea then! I don't know whether you can stand on Elac cones though, as Harold did on his Sandwich cones.

## SOUND QUALITY

Active loudspeakers have their own particular style of presentation, their own special strengths – and The Rock displayed most of them. In case you've never heard an active, let me explain. Think *control*. As you might expect they keep a grip on absolutely everything, meaning timing is metronomic and attention to detail intense. Eliminating loudspeaker cables improves electrical damping so you get tighter bass, strengthening the overall feeling of control. They also spit out detail, again because there's little between drive unit and amplifier.

The Rocks tick all these boxes with ease. As Eleanor McEvoy's 'I Got You to See Me Through' kicked off, some microphone bumps were made rudely obvious. The Rock catches small events and makes them starkly apparent. Actives are exciting and impressive in this way, but be aware that they can also be stark and a little dry, according to design. What Unity Audio have done here is to combine two high quality drivers into an accurate whole and I was aware that The Rocks have little response irregularity across most of the audio range – subjective upper treble excepted. Basically, there's nothing to sugar the pill; you get the recording warts and all.

Running The Rock away from the rear wall to assess this position, I soon realised that they had to be placed further back to add some lower midrange warmth and body to vocals, as measurement had suggested. Their bass peaking made bass bouncy and obvious whatever I played, and there was plenty of clarity across the mid and in the treble but

they are not warm or full in balance. I have never come across a sloppy sounding active and The Rock fitted this mould comfortably. It is coolly accurate and very, very revealing, so cue the awkward recording of Duffy and the track 'Rockferry' with the 'graunch' of deliberately added digital distortion. The sound stage arced gently upward between the loudspeakers but stayed fairly well within their limits. Stage depth was a little limited. Strings on this disc, likely electronically generated, were thrown out by the ribbon tweeter and were less than sweet. The ribbon was a little acerbic with this track, but then I expected it, as the recording isn't so good. Some loudspeakers get through 'Rockferry' well; many don't. The Rocks threw out so much inner detail and upper treble energy that the track was done no favours; the Rocks are more revealing than

'Ago' start and stop with measured power. It was just so: not too loud or resonant, nor too muted. As 'Aye' span I was aware that although bass was strongly outlined and kept under good control, the small sealed cabinet makes for a resonant system that even the grip of an internal amplifier cannot quite disguise. The end result is a springiness to bass that came over as a little one note at times, as 'Azan Nan Kpe' made obvious with drum strikes of homogeneously similar character.

Yet with 'Lon Lon Vadjro' the bass line was superbly outlined, in genuine active fashion, each note in good accord with the last, so notes didn't come and go in level as they can with passive speakers. The strong walking bass line that kicks off 'Houngbati' was propulsive, speeding along with verve and seemingly perfect control. The Rocks

"distinctively voiced, they excel at a particular type of presentation; think speed and incision, strong dynamics and firm bass..."

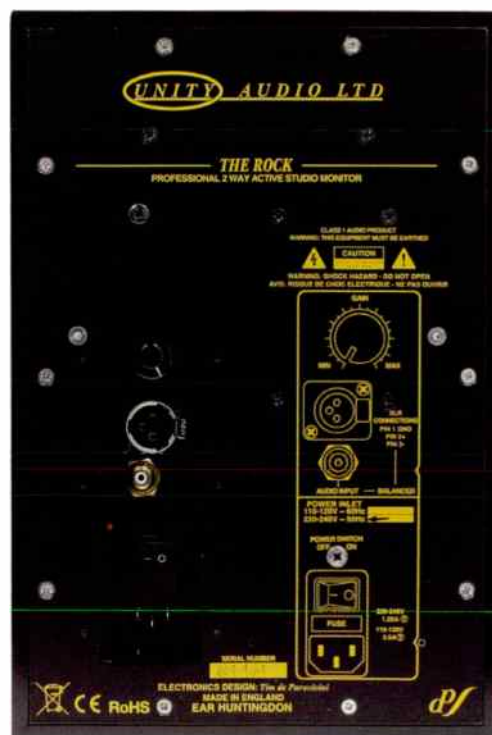
complimentary.

As 'Warwick Avenue' slid into view the gentle ring of cymbals was spotlit and strummed guitar made vibrant. But with 'Serious' I started to notice that the tweeter was a little obvious and somewhat dominated proceedings, adding some sibilance and a sheeny nasality to Duffy's voice that compromised her richness of vocal expression.

Being active and graced with a ribbon tweeter The Rocks have everything in their favour without need for further emphasis and at times I felt there was a shade too much emphasis in the upper midband. This spits out a torrent of conspicuous treble detail, but at the expense of naturalness and ease.

Spinning Angelique Kidjo's 'Aye' album to tax the bass department had the solo drum strike at the start of

were quite different from passive loudspeakers in the way they played bass and their confident and speedy nature is something to behold. You don't get subsonics, but it's just as well because when small bass drivers in small cabinets are forced to go low by the use of equalisation (basically, bass lift) the result is a sonic disaster, and distortion measurement shows



The rear panel carries balanced XLR and unbalanced phono inputs, a gain control and switched IEC mains socket.

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why. Unity Audio avoid this mistake so The Rock remains relaxed in what it does and our measurements show that at normal bass frequencies – meaning 40Hz and above – distortion was very low.

And finally, before leaving the difficulties of reproducing 'Aye', the complex arrangements remained well sorted and free of muddle.

How would Nigel and his amazing violin fare? Well, the ribbon tweeter did add extra sheen, bringing a lightness of presentation. But it also showed all those qualities ribbons are known for, such as incredibly explicit outlining of strings so that individual instruments in the backing orchestra stood out in stark relief. Meanwhile Mr Kennedy's solos had a pristine clarity that brought Massenet's 'Meditation' into perfect focus, the violin displaying impressively stable tonality, across the note scale and across an entire range of inflexions, from the gentlest long bowing of notes to accelerandi. The Rock benefitted from good inter-driver phase matching here and would please any listener I feel.

With orchestral music of broader scale, the Royal Harmonic playing Tchaikovsky's 'Marche Slave', The Rocks sounded large and dynamically unstrained. With the same verve and delight, keeping perfect timing, the orchestra bounced along gleefully, pipes trilling eagerly, strings suddenly interjecting with a fervour that was exciting. The Rocks seemed fast, although of course loudspeakers and orchestras don't speed up through particular hi-fi products; The Rocks just made it seem that way due to their grip on timing; events came and went in a flash; the Royal Phil were playing their hearts out it seemed.

Violins *en masse* were well lit, if a little short of rosin. There was a fine sense of dynamic scale in orchestral crescendos,

more than you'd get in a passive standmounter of the same size (if lower price). Toward the end of 'Marche Slave' though, the tweeter hardened quite audibly with repeated cymbal crashes, obscuring the music so much I had to swap to another system to be sure what



was on the disc (Spendor S8e loudspeakers and Robson Acoustics Regis with ribbon tweeter, plus Musical Fidelity AMS50 amp). I thought "this is Class D" before suddenly remembering it was not. The Rocks were less

than couch and capable here, where the Spendors and Robsons were fine.

Run a clean and simple Rock recording like Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism' and The Rocks sounded great – this is their *metier*. Skin's

vocals were thrown out with gusto, and bass strode along sounding strong and very much under control.

In a similar vein I knew that Toni Braxton's 'Spanish Guitar' would gain a new dimension through this loudspeaker and I wasn't wrong. Gentle clicks of the drum stick suddenly became impacts of fierce force; strummed guitar strings were lacerative. It was eye popping, but larger than real. Backing vocals were again a little hardened and pinched, an effect I noticed on 'Rockferry'.

**CONCLUSION**

The Rocks are distinctively voiced and excel at a particular type of presentation. Think speed and incision, strong dynamics and firm bass. They are cohesive too. But I had reservations about their treble behaviour at times, to the point where I had to switch to another system to get my bearings. Our measurements suggest midband peaking was responsible for this and some honing would not go amiss. As they stand their strengths are considerable; good quality components have been used all round and the resulting sound will appeal to anyone wanting lightning fast transients and a snappy pace.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our frequency response analysis, here using third octave measurement of pink noise, shows The Rock has a slight roll away in output below 400Hz. This will give dry bass and suggests The Rock is designed for near wall use. There is no port, so our usual red port output trace is absent.

Notable features are an absence of any high treble lift from the ribbon tweeter; designers commonly choose to boost ribbons so their contribution can be easily heard, because they possess a bright, incisive and razor sharp cleanliness that impresses. The Rock has been balanced more for accuracy however, although it will still have quite prominent upper frequencies.

Moving the measuring mic up and down showed excellent phase matching between the drive units, which gives a consistent sound from a wide range of listening angles, and a smooth reverberant field. The peculiar peak and undulations around 3kHz will add sharpness or spit of some sort.

Our 200mS decay spectrum was reasonably clean and resonance free except for a few hot spots at and below 200Hz, especially overhang at 70Hz, but small powered cabinets usually do this. There's no free lunch in loudspeaker design.

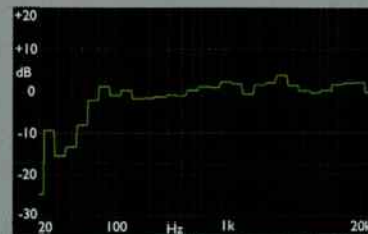
Sensitivity was very high, The Rock delivering 90dB Sound Pressure Level at 1metre from 120mV of input. That means it will go loud from a phono

stage, not bad!

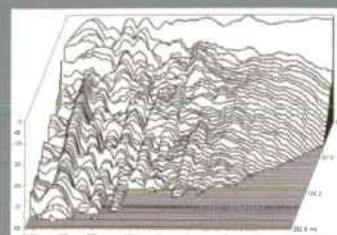
Distortion measured 4% at 40Hz, falling progressively to 1% above 70Hz so results here were good, although a small cone working hard was evident in a high peak value of 16% at 25Hz. Distortion was higher than usual above 100Hz too, measuring around 0.6% up to 900Hz, not so good as 0.2% is common.

The Rock is an active loudspeaker engineered for basic accuracy, clean clear treble and tight bass. It measured well generally, with a few blemishes. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DECAY SPECTRUM**



**VERDICT**

Fast and with firecracker dynamics, these are a bracing listen, but fun!

**THE ROCK** £2,850

Unity Audio

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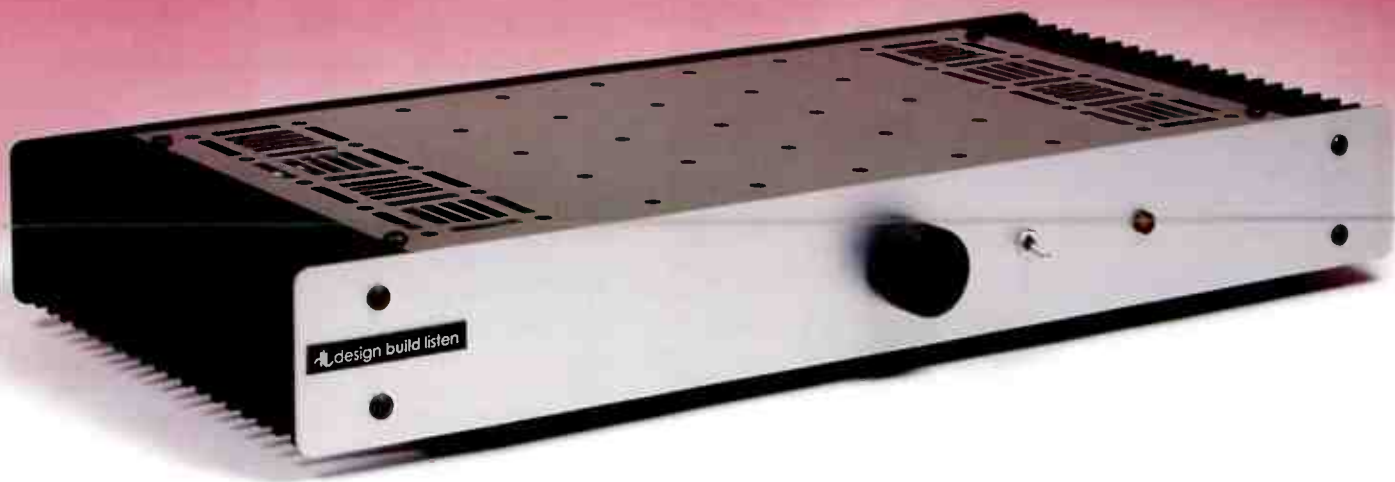
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# Building Block

**Tim Jarman builds his own Design Build Listen Piccolo integrated amplifier...**

**T**his little box looks a lot like many small modern integrated amplifiers; the difference is that you have to build it yourself. While this may not be everyone's idea of fun, it will certainly appeal strongly to hands on audiophiles and is also a great learning opportunity for those who want to become better acquainted with the more technical aspects of the subject of hi-fi in general and amplifier design in particular.

The details of most hi-fi equipment are often so shrouded in mystique and marketing hype that it is difficult for anyone, even a qualified electronics engineer, to discern if what is on offer is of any real value. A kit on the other hand must be by its very nature far more transparent as a full circuit diagram will almost certainly have to be included and the buyer may examine each part in as much detail as they wish. Pleading in the front of the instruction manual not to remove any of the covers will not work here, everything is laid bare!

The Piccolo amplifier can be built up in many different ways, from a fixed-gain power amplifier to a single input integrated design to a fairly comprehensive unit with multiple inputs and a tape loop. By changing the voltage of the mains transformer (not included to ease problems with

shipping and local mains voltage requirements) the power output and driving ability can also be varied, and if desired multiple mains transformers can be used to achieve true dual mono operation.

## INSIDE OUT

If you're a tube fan, then best turn the page because the Piccolo is an unashamedly solid-state, op-amp based design packing a pair of National Semiconductor LM3886 amplifier chips. The circuit inside these is a quasi class AB linear amplifier constructed using bipolar transistors that can produce up to 68W into a 4 ohm load if a 20V transformer is used and 50W into 8 ohms if a 25V transformer is chosen. The data sheet for this device (which includes an application circuit for a complete amplifier and copious extra technical extra information) can be freely downloaded from the National Semiconductor website ([www.national.com](http://www.national.com)), so why bother with the Design Build Listen kit at all? Well, if you want to build your own LM3886 amplifier the design of the circuit is just the start. You'll also have to draft and etch your own printed circuit boards, source all components and arrange for a cabinet to put it all in, all less than trivial tasks, especially for a beginner...

The Piccolo cabinet is sturdy

and attractive, if you are neat in the way you put it together; it is not especially obvious that the resulting amplifier is not a ready-made model. The £225 kit includes most of what you'll need but excludes the mains transformer(s) and wiring materials, not that these things are difficult to source in this county. I opted for a single 18V 160VA mains transformer (part number 223-8083) from RS Components ([rswww.com](http://rswww.com)) to ease construction and to keep the amplifier reliable and cool running. This is a good place to start and it is always possible to upgrade later if more power is required. Another choice that has to be made when ordering the kit is the resistance value of the volume control. A value of 10k ohms is recommended if your source is a CD player or a DAC and this gives the lowest noise; 100k ohms is more suitable for analogue sources like phono stages and tape recorders whose output impedance tends to be higher. To give the greatest versatility I opted for 100k and was pleased with the quality of the Alps control that was supplied.

Building the amplifier is not quite as easy as Lego, a certain amount of wiring and metalworking is required to complete it so you'll need a decent set of tools and the ability to mark out and drill metal accurately. The two amplifier circuits are assembled on printed circuit boards and providing that you can read the component numbers properly and insert the electrolytic capacitors and rectifiers the right way round



there should be no major difficulties assembling them. If you are building the amplifier as an integrated design with multiple inputs then the wiring can get quite complicated, I opted to use twin screened cable but the instructions make no particular mention of this, it is a good idea anyway as it helps to keep noise pickup to a minimum, as does paying careful attention to the exact layout of the earthing.

This is definitely *not* a kit for the absolute beginner, there is no specific assembly sequence and no numbered bags of parts, but for someone with some electronics experience it promises to offer an enjoyable week's worth of evenings to put it together.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Unusually for a piece of equipment under test it was possible to predict to some extent what the finished Piccolo amplifier would sound like before trying it, such is the level of detail in the supplied technical data. It is a largely DC coupled design that uses around 80dB of negative feedback (e.g. a lot!) to stabilise the amplifier and to define its frequency response. This high degree of feedback and the absence of any inductors or resistors in series with the output points towards a high damping factor too, so tight, dry bass is to be expected. The minimal HF filtering and the simple 'passive' preamplifier design suggest that the treble will be fast and bright and that the amplifier as a whole should be transparent and revealing. The gain in the centre of the audio band appears not to be that high, so a source with plenty of output level will be required for maximum output power. Remember that fitting higher voltage mains transformers only increases the available output power, it does nothing for the gain so if you can't clip the amplifier with an 18V transformer fitted then a 25V one won't help you much.

On test the amplifier was impressively quiet and well behaved; there was no popping and banging in the loudspeakers when switching on and off and no trace of hum or hiss once it was up and running. The tonal character was very much as the topology suggested it would be, the sound being dry and fast, like many modern amplifiers are. There is plenty of upper midrange detail and texture but little in the way of bass heft or warmth. The circuit is clearly capable of producing the current required for fulsome bass, the very deepest notes are clearly audible right down at the bottom of the register, there just isn't a great deal going on much above this

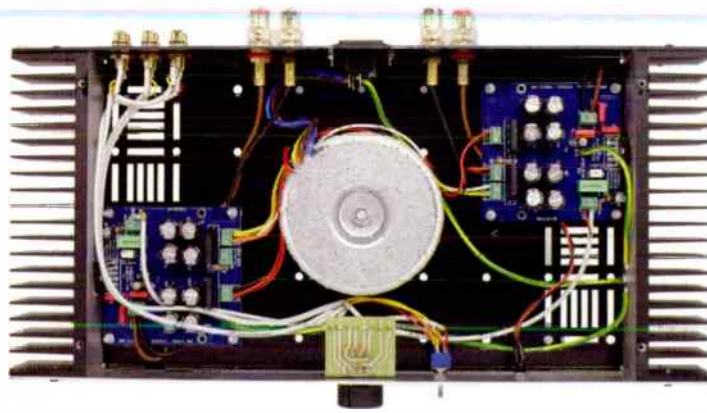
until the midrange starts. What bass there is, is tidy and well ordered. However, I suspect that a high damping factor is keeping the woofer cones

on a tight reign and placing them accurately rather than letting them flap about.

The amplifier images well, it seems to be able to throw pieces of the music right into the far corners of the soundstage, making listening to a recording is a bit like going to a fireworks show, look one way and immediately something happens over at the other side, drawing your attention this way and that throughout the performance. Treble, as one would expect, is bright so partnering this amplifier with similarly voiced sources and loudspeakers should be avoided; go instead for something a bit mellow and you should be okay. Clean treble is this amplifier's strength, but push it too far and bursts of gritty harshness can break out; this is familiar characteristic of amplifiers with wide bandwidths and lots of negative feedback. In comparison with modern ready built solid-state mid price integrateds, the Piccolo stacks up fairly well; its sound is agile enough for you not to have to make excuses when you proudly show your friends the amplifier you've just built yourself.

**CONCLUSION**

The complete kit is not especially cheap when compared to the lower end of ready-built integrated amplifiers, so the Piccolo isn't simply a way for the budget conscious to put a system together at minimal cost. Nor is it a sonic rival to some other kit valve amplifiers on the market, which are altogether more spacious and natural sounding. It is however



an interesting proposition for the solid-state oriented audiophile looking to gain some technical knowledge and who wants to customise their equipment to their exact needs.

There is plenty of room inside the cabinet to mount a phono stage for example, or a headphone socket or buffered tape outputs or tone controls or transformer balanced inputs or extra mains filtering. At a more advanced level one could even experiment with the filtering and feedback components in order to tailor the sound precisely to one's own personal preference. All these things are both possible and practical with a kit like this. Do be warned though, such activities are highly addictive and you may find you spend more time tinkering than listening, or eating or sleeping for that matter...

**VERDICT** ●●●

A neat kit that with care can be assembled into a decent sounding and professional looking integrated amplifier.

**DESIGN BUILD LISTEN**  
**PICCOLO** £225 [SEE TEXT]  
[www.designbuildlisten.com](http://www.designbuildlisten.com)

- FOR**
- fast, lively sound
  - tidy appearance
  - room inside for expansion

- AGAINST**
- limited bass
  - unatmospheric midband
  - proper electronics skills are required!

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The Piccolo produced 24 Watts into 8 Ohms and 42 Watts into 4 Ohms under test, without any unusual problems such as instability or unusual waveform distortions. It looked stable and well worked out, when under pressure, not always the case with DIY amps. With a very high Damping Factor of 109, likely because there was no output Zobel network, bass will sound tight and dry.

The good news was low distortion at high frequencies. Our analysis clearly shows just a little second harmonic is produced, meaning the Piccolo is free from crossover distortion and the roughness it produces. A consistent set of results across the audio band and at both low and high output powers again shows a stable amplifier.

This amplifier initially reached down to 200Hz in frequency response testing and had to be modified; transistor amps have no intrinsic difficulty handling low frequencies, unlike valve amps; a capacitor value was wrong. With the new capacitor fitted the amp's lower limit was a still puzzlingly high 34Hz; most designers run their amps down to 10Hz at least these days. At the other end of the spectrum the limit measured an acceptable 25kHz, at 6/10 on the

volume control. The Piccolo turns in a good set of results, although bass might be audibly a little lightened by a lower response limit set curiously high. This could likely be changed easily enough though, without detriment. All in all then, this is a neat design that works well enough yet would benefit from tweaking. NK

Power	24 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	34Hz-25kHz
Separation	81dB
Noise	-105dB
Distortion	0.06%
Sensitivity	420mV

**DISTORTION**



# THE PROFESSIONALS

Haden Boardman remembers Bowers and Wilkins' classic nineteen sixties P2H loudspeaker...

**A**s much as I am a nineteen sixties fan, I have to confess that the vast majority of that era's loudspeakers leave me cold. Even the high end Tannoy wardrobe models are a bit coloured and cloudy by modern standards. There are a few exceptional models, but on the whole, cabinet technology and the interim state between solid state high power/high damping factor and lower power/lower damping factor valve systems, caused quite some confusion...

Bowers & Wilkins are one of the most successful loudspeaker makers of our time. With a range extending from a few hundred pounds, up to the range topping fully active Nautilus transmission line shell shaped speaker system. The first speaker the company ever produced was the P1 'The Professional One', which with minor tweaks developed into this, the P2H. The 'H' stands for higher power handling, all of 25 Watts!



The original Professional One was introduced in 1966, a year after John Bowers teamed up with a childhood friend Roy Wilkins.



They set up a hi-fi shop – still in existence – in Worthing, East Sussex. John Bowers became much more interested in loudspeaker design. It

ould be quite common for a hi-fi retailer to manufacture their own cabinets and speaker designs in this period, with a massive choice of drive units from Elac, EMI, Fane, Goodmans, Wharfedale, to name but a few.

On the face of it, the P2H looks just like another sixties wardrobe, with the full length Tygan grille cloth, overhanging cabinet sides to the recessed front baffle, the standard teak veneer. It is decidedly taller than most designs from this era, almost modern in proportions. It must have impressed a few people, as one client bequeathed £10,000 to Mr Bowers in thanks, which must have helped get the fledgling B&W Electronics off the ground!

Looking around the back of the cabinet shows up a few differences from the norm. For a start, there is a mains connection, a three pin Bulgin plug, along with the speaker's audio input, a two pin Bulgin plug, and this unit has a large vent at the top of the cabinet. Most unusual...

(Speculation on my part lists the presence of one Alastair Robertson-Aikman of SME fame, as an influence on the 'P' models. His private music room utilised a custom design incorporating the very underrated 13 x 9 EMI elliptical drive units (virtually full range) and the very complex Fane ionic 601 tweeter. And to the P1 and P2H; virtually identical units. Steyning is not exactly a million miles away from B&W HQ.)

Further scrutiny of the P2H reveals an incredibly heavy cabinet, constructed from dense 25mm plywood. The knuckle rap test reveals an acoustically dead cabinet. The Fane Ionic 'lonofane' tweeter sits in its own cabinet at the top, mounted on

And it runs very hot; ours pulled 62W of power each off the mains, most of which clearly filled the room with heat (as well as ionised air)!

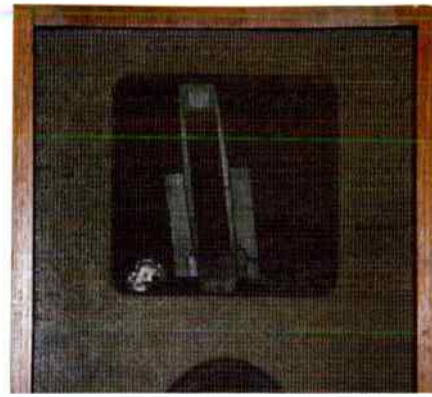
The ionic tweeter was actually patented by a French chap by the name of Seigfried Klein, and was licensed by Fane, Batley, Yorkshire. Specifications on the tweeter are a bandwidth of 3,500–50,000Hz (+/-2dB), with quite exceptional dispersion characteristics from the square section horn. Tweeter sensitivity is around 95dB/W. An input transformer is used to isolate and amplify the incoming signal. A ratio of around 33:1 is used. The tweeter's power supply sits in a separate little box, linked via a four core umbilical cable. This power supply unit is mounted firmly to the left hand side of the cabinet. Each tweeter cost 28 Guineas back in 1967. One word of warning; over time these units can and will fail. It is worth changing all the fairly basic components Fane used within the power supply and tweeter assemblies. Also a strip and clean down of the quartz cell is recommended. Ultimately the quartz cell will burn out and crumble; it is not unknown to find the electrodes within the tweeter cells totally fused together, burnt out and useless.

A version of the EMI 13x9 unit can be found in the bottom section. The P2H cabinet is unusual in it offers both sealed cabinet and reflex port options, on removal of a flap within the cabinet. No sharp port alignments here, then! The manual is quite clear on the sonic preference of the sealed option. The EMI drive unit can be traced back to the nineteen thirties; various HMV and Marconiphone radiograms were

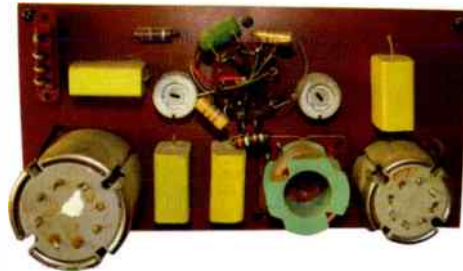
"sadly this incredibly powerful loudspeaker design is overshadowed by one of its component parts; the rare and amazing sounding FANE ionic tweeter..."

small rubber bushes, and with plenty of room to breathe. This is nothing to do with acoustics. The Ionic tweeter has no moving parts. It has no diaphragm, or magnet structure; it is based around a quartz cell which ionises the air, modulating this with music. The system is far from efficient, needing a very well mapped out horn on the front of the quartz cell, and requiring a high power valve driven (EL360 valve, or in this case a 6DQ6) oscillator operating at around 27MHz (don't think current EMC regulations would now permit!) along with power supply and crossover.

fitted with a variant. Let us not forget that EMI/HMV were very much at the forefront of high fidelity design from the massive manufacturing plant at Hayes in Middlesex. As part of American company Columbia, HMV was the first to launch Peter Goldmark's Long Playing 33rpm vinyl records in Great Britain (HMV's 'top dog' radiogram in 1948 used a triode connected KT66 valve amplifier and a bespoke ribbon tweeter, along with the elliptical bass unit). The company launched the not too successful 'Stereosonic' stereo tape based system in 1956, and of course



Top of the cabinet view; Fane Ionic tweeter hiding behind plain nineteen sixties grille cloth...



Precision components used in the crossover. Note factory preset controls.



User adjustable levels on back panel, direct to crossover printed circuit board.



Rear cabinet view. Small power supply on left, back view of tweeter. Crossover on cabinet back.

# Vinyl is black!



The Evo ! What an evocative name and rightly so too! The SL-1200 evolved from a Hi Fi turntable into a DJ deck and now we turn it back into a Hi Fi turntable again! Fitted with the legendary SME 309 tonearm and the Audio Technica AT33EV your emotions will run wild. The AT33EV is itself an evolutionary cartridge hence its EV suffix and matches the SME 309 so well. We have worked with direct drive turntables and moving coil cartridges for over 30 years now and the EVO has evolved into a mature product that is quite simply a world beater. We can supply completely new units with 5 year guarantees or we can convert your own, even if you bought it used.



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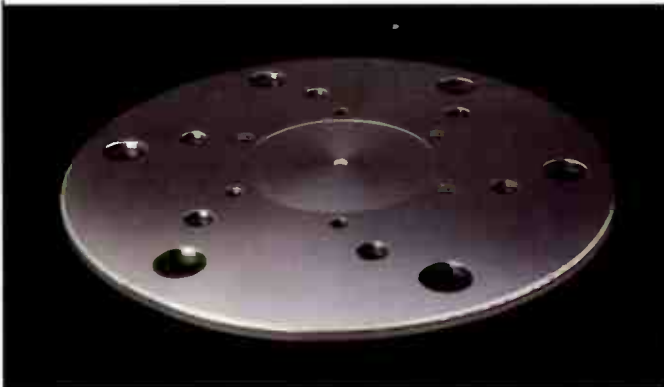
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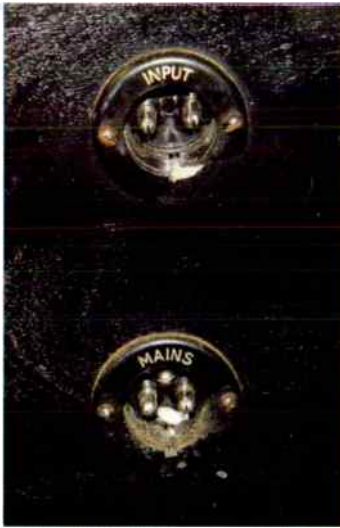
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**Popular back in the day; classic Bulgin connectors; 3 pin for mains, and 2 pin for audio...**

employed audio legend Alan Blumlein.

Despite its large cone size, some of the EMI units can reach past 12,000Hz. The majority of the cone is paper, but the centre is aluminium, with a small mechanical crossover area. Even without the FANE tweeter, these units can sound pretty good. John Bowers clearly thought so, also basing the company's smaller DM models – Domestic Monitors – on similar units, together with a GEC/Celestion HF1300 presence unit/tweeter; the DM 1 is more than worthy of its own article, as it's a rule breaking speaker in its own right.

The P2H crossover was state of the art by late sixties standards; small iron core chokes, printed circuit boards, military specification capacitors. Each crossover is factory adjustable, and user adjustable. Each P2H came with its own pen chart



**Crossover connection to and from main speaker cabinet. Design from a different era!**

showing just how flat and smooth the frequency response was. Crossover is set at 5,000Hz which gives intelligent separation between fundamental and harmonic frequencies.

As mentioned earlier, the cabinet has very dense construction. Build quality is superb on these units, no expense was spared in making what

Bowers must have considered very much a statement design. By modern standards the two pin Bulgin plugs are a bit of a pain. Internal cable is certainly better than the bell wire Tannoy used, but still no great shakes. The crossover uses odd little connection plugs; but these also provide easy access to bypass the some of the original cable systems without too much bother. The speakers are fitted with a tell-tale red neon lamp just above the tweeter aperture, but no power switch. The final nineteen sixties finishing touch is a set of Sheperd Castor wheels; no comments needed!

Other than the supplied pen trace, and comments about the inaccuracy at bass frequencies, other than power handling, not a lot is mentioned about the P2H specifications. In my room, sensitivity measured around 93dB, bass fairly flat from about 42Hz, past the 22kHz limit of my test microphone. It was still almost ruler flat; not bad after forty years of use. For auditioning purposes, my little push-pull EL84 based amplifier was used, with a Sowter transformer based magnetic passive preamp, and a Marantz Project D1 DAC (running modified CDM4 transport and computer sources).

**SOUND QUALITY**

Big, wide, and open, this is an incredible loudspeaker system. All speakers have a sound to them, and as stated earlier, most wardrobes from this era have more 'sound' than most. Not the P2H, though. The treble is amazing, as is its height and overall precision. An electrostatic quality greets, but with much more drive and punch; on percussion you get a real sense of speed and power in the upper registers. Of course the EMI bass unit has a powerful magnet structure, and the elliptical bass unit helps break normal cone resonance modes, all aided by the ultra-rigid cabinet to produce powerful uncoloured lows.

By modern high end standards, bass is a little light and a tad warm, but it is accurate and can have real slam to match the stunning high frequencies. Playing Abba's 'The Day Before You Came' was a delight. Jimmy Smith's 'The Cat' was similarly impressive in its weight, delivery and fine tonal balance. Midrange, mostly from the EMI unit, was again maybe a slightly coarser presentation than say a set of B&V's new, shiny 803s, but in the treble I am afraid it was the newer speaker that was sounding coarse in the comparison. The ionic driven Fane unit is stunning. There

are some mild sounds to the horn, but goodness they are very mild, and you really do have to listen for them; they're far less colored than any dome.

Playing John Potter (ECM The Downland Project, Care-charming sleep) put the emphasis back on the underrated EMI unit. The P2H certainly has a flat midrange; I feel it was engineered as a 'full orchestra' kind of speaker.

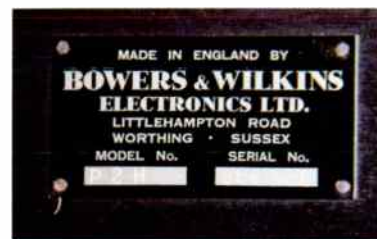
Playing a bit of Wagner's Ring Cycle (Decca) was breathtaking; drum and bass was impressive, but not the system's ideal choice; although if I had a chance to strip the cabinet and put it in bass reflex mode, this may have suited more modern electronica...



**The superb Ionofane tweeter, sadly worth more than the P2H speaker...**

**CONCLUSION**

Looking at the design and construction of the P2H you can clearly see the strong design ethos that John Bowers developed. The later 'Matrix' cabinets and the separate 'head' on the 800 range can both be seen in embryonic state on this clever design. The influence on current Bowers & Wilkins designs should not be undervalued. Sadly, P1s, P2s and P2Hs are quite rare birds. Limited longevity of the Fane units



**Early Bowers & Wilkins Electronics rear cabinet badge.**

saw a lot having various different tweeters fitted to the large top box, with pretty disastrous results, and what few were made have possibly long since been scrapped. Value wise, a set of P2H sell for less money than a pair of Ionofane tweeters do on their own; anywhere between £400-£1,000 depending on condition and a lot of money for a pair of tweeters. Sadly this incredibly powerful loudspeaker design is overshadowed by one of its component parts; the rare, and amazing sounding Fane ionic tweeter.

# WORLD CLASSICS

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

**We do not sell these products. It is for your information only.**

## DIGITAL

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD1** 1986 £1500  
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



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



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

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



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

**TECHNICS SL-P1200** 1987 £800  
CD version of the Technics SL-1200 turntable. Massively built to withstand the rigours of 'pro' use and laden with facilities - a great eighties icon. Sonically, it's pure fun, with hefty bass that can still show weedy modern players a thing or two!

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

## COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

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



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

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

## DACS

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



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



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



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



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



**TURNTABLES**

**ARISTON 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.

**ADC ACCUTRAC 4000 1976 £300**

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

**PIONEER 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 PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals



**PIONEER PLC-590 1976 £600**

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

**DUAL CS505 1982 £75**

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

**GOLDRING LENCO GL75 1970 £15.65**

Simple, well engineered motor unit with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearm. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists. Eminently tweakable. Similar 88 and 99 motor units are budget 301/TD124 rivals.

**LINN AXIS 1987 £253**

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

**LINN SONDEK LP12 1973 £86**

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



**MARANTZ TT1000 1978 £ N/A**

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



**MICHELL GYRODEC 1981 £599**

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

**TECHNICS SPI0 1973 £400**

Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SPI0/II will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

**REGA PLANAR 3 1978 £79**

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

**GARRARD 301/401 1953 £19**

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



**ROKSAN XERXES 1984 £550**

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

**SONY PS-B80 1978 £800**

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

**THORENS TD124 1959 £ N/A**

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



**TOWNSHEND ROCK 1979 £ N/A**

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

**TRIO LO-7D 1978 £600**

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

**TONEARMS**

**ACOS LUSTRE GST-1 1975 £46**

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

**AUDIO TECHNICA 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 and stunning build has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

**GRACE G707 1974 £58**

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

**REGA RB300 1983 £88**

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



**SME SERIES III 1979 £113**

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

**HADCOCK GH228 1976 £46**

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



**LINN ITTOK LVII 1978 £253**

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

**NAIM ARO 1986 £875**

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



**TECHNICS EPA-501 1979 £ N/A**

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

**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS**

**DELTEC 1987 £1900**

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

**ROGERS A75 1978 £220**

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

**EXPOSURE VII/VIII 1985 £625**

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



**SUGDEN 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.

**CHAPMAN 305 1960 £40**

Smooth pre/power combo with a sweet and open sound. Not quite up to Leak/Quad standards but considerably cheaper second-hand.

**PREAMPLIFIERS**

**AUDIOLAB 8000C 1991 £499**

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

**CROFT MICRO 1986 £150**

Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

**AUDIO RESEARCH**

**SP-8 1982 £1,400**

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

**CONRAD JOHNSON**

**MOTIV MC-8 1986 £2,500**

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

**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.

**LECSON AC-1 1973 £ N/A**

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



**QUAD 22 1958 £25**

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

**QUAD 33 1968 £43**

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

**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.

**POWER AMPLIFIERS**

**HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D**

**AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110**

Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

**LEAK STEREO 20 1958 £31**

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



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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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

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

**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.

**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.



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



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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

**SEQUERRA MODEL I** 1973 £1300  
Possibly the ultimate FM tuner. Massive in terms of technology, size and features dedicated to extracting every ounce of performance from radio, including impressive multi-purpose oscilloscope display.



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



**ANALOGUE RECORDERS**

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



**AIWA XD-009 1989 £600**  
Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn't half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!

**NAKAMICHI CR-7E 1987 £800**  
The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.



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



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



**SONY WM-D6C 1985 £290**  
Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single rec/replay head better than most Naks. Result: sublime.



**SONY TC-377 1972 £N/A**  
A competitor to the Akai 4000D open reel machine, the Sony offered better sound quality and is still no slouch by modern standards

**DIGITAL RECORDERS**

**SONY MDS-JE555ES 2000 £900**  
The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



**PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 £480**  
For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

**MARANTZ DR-17 1999 £1100**  
Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



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

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

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

**ACOUSTIC RESEARCH ARI8S 1978 £125**  
Yank designed, British built loudspeaker became a budget staple for many rock fans, thanks to the great speed from the paper drivers, although finesse was most definitely not their forte...

**BBC LS3/5A 1972 £88**  
Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects - articulation, stage depth, clarity - and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers ABI subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!

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

**HH ELECTRONICS TPA-50D AMPLIFIERS 1973 £110**  
Simple design with easily available components, solid build quality and fine sound make for a surprisingly overlooked bargain. Not exactly stylish, however.

**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 / BI 10 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity and imaging.



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

**QUAD ESL57 1956 £45 EACH**  
Wonderfully open and neutral sound puts box loudspeakers to shame. Properly serviced they give superb midband performance, although frequency extremes less impressive. Ideally, use in stacked pairs or with subwoofers and supertweeters.



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

**IMF TLS80 1976 £550**  
Warm and powerful nineteen seventies behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

**MAGNEPLANAR SMGA 198X £800**  
Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



**MISSION 770 1980 £375**

Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs. Warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound.



**MISSION 752 1995 £495**

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

**HEYBROOK HBI 1982 £130**

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

**CELESTION SL6 1984 £350**

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

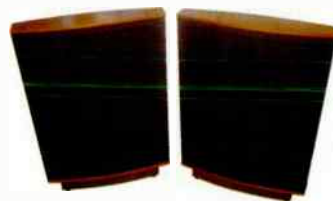
**LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH**

Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



**QUAD ESL63 1980 £1200**

An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics



**YAMAHA NS1000 1977 £532**

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



**MISSION X-SPACE 1999 £499**

The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy sound nevertheless!



**CLASSIC CONTACTS**

When a classic goes 'poof' your troubles have just started, but there may be a good ending. Replacing failing parts can improve the sound, so here is a short listing of all these companies who specialise in getting a classic up and running again after its deposited a small ring of soot on your ceiling!

**GT AUDIO**

(Graham Tricker, Bucks)  
Leak Troughline specialists. Also Quad and most classic tuners, radios and amplifiers restored, repaired.  
Tel: 01895 833099  
Mob: 07960 962579  
www.gtaudio.com

**TECHNICAL AND GENERAL**

(East Sussex)  
Turntable parts - wide range of spares and accessories, plus arms and cartridges.  
Tel: 01892 654534

**CARTRIDGE MAN**

(Len Gregory, London)  
Specialist cartridge re-tipping service and repairs. High quality special cartridges.  
Tel: 020 8688 6565  
Email: thecartridgeman@talktalk.net  
www.thecartridgeman.com

**AUDIO LABORATORIES (LEEDS)**

(Phil Pimblott, Leeds) Renovation, repair and restoration. Specialist in valve hi-fi, radio transmitters, cinema amps, kit building.  
Tel: 0113 244 0378  
www.audiolabs.co.uk

**QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS**

(Cambs) Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first. (Also Audiolab, Mission & Wharfedale).  
Tel: 0845 4580011  
www.quad-hifi.co.uk

**Dr MARTIN BASTIN**

(Shropshire) Garrard 301/401 restoration, renovation and service. Special plinths; rumble cures, etc.  
Tel: 01584 823446

**ARKLESS ELECTRONICS**

(Northumberland)  
Specialist in repairs, restoration and modifications to all amplifiers, valve or solid state, ancient and modern.  
Tel.: 01670 530674  
Email: info@arklesselectronics.com  
www.arklesselectronics.com

**SOWTER TRANSFORMERS**

(Brian Sowter, Ipswich)  
Large range of audio transformers for valve amps, cartridges, line drive, interstage plus all associated services.  
Tel: 01473 252794  
www.sowter.co.uk

**WEMBLEY LOUDSPEAKER**

(Paul MacCallam, London)  
Comprehensive loudspeaker servicing.  
Tel: 020 8 743 4567  
Email: paul@wembleyloudspeaker.co.uk  
www.wembleyloudspeaker.com

**EXPERT STYLUS COMPANY**

(Wyndham Hodgson, Surrey) Stylus replacement service for all types of cartridge. Including precise profiling for 78s. Tel: 01372 276604  
Email: w.hodgson@btclick.com

**ONE THING**

(Coventry) Specialist in electrostatic panel manufacture and repair. Can refurbish ESL 57s and 63s as well as Leak Troughlines and Quad lls.  
Email: one.thing@ntlworld.com  
www.onethingaudio.com

**LORICRAFT AUDIO**

(Terry O'Sullivan, Bucks)  
Garrard 301/401 and their own 501 repair, spares and service.:  
Tel: 01488 72267  
www.garrard501.com

**LOCKWOOD AUDIO**

(London)  
Tannoy loudspeaker parts, restoration and repair. Also Epos and TDL loudspeakers.  
Tel: 020 8 864 8008  
www.lockwoodaudio.co.uk

**CLASSIC NAKAMICHI**

(Paul Wilkins, Worthing. West Sussex). Restore, Repair & Service Nakamichi Cassette Decks.  
Tel: 01903 695695  
Email: paul@bowersandwilkins.co.uk  
www.bowersandwilkins.co.uk

**OCTAVE AUDIO WOODWORKING**

(Bristol)  
Unit 2, 16 Midland Street, St Phillips. Bristol.  
Tel: 0117 925 6015  
www.octave-aw.co.uk

**REVOX**

(Brian Reeves, Cheshire)  
Revox tape recorder spares, service and repair. Accessories also available.  
Tel: 0161 499 2349  
Email: brian@revoxservice.co.uk  
www.revox.freeuk.com

**CLASSIQUE SOUNDS**

(Paul Greenfield, Leicester)  
ESL-57s restored, rebuilt, fully renovated or improved. Leak, Quad valves amps etc.  
Tel: 0845 123 5137/  
Mob: 0116 2835821  
Email: classique\_sounds@yahoo.co.uk  
www.flashbacksales.co.uk/classique

save  
£200



## K2 series

Same amp, same CD, same speakers.....Different price

Now only **£750**  
Price per item



Leema were displaying their nifty new range of budget Elements products. The amplifier has digital inputs and an onboard high resolution 24/192 DAC, plus 80W when driving 4 Ohm loudspeakers...



Tannoy have fitted 8352 loudspeakers to the Burj Khalifa tower in Dubai, they wanted us to know, and now UK semi-detacheds can have the same technology in the new floorstanding DC6T they had on display!



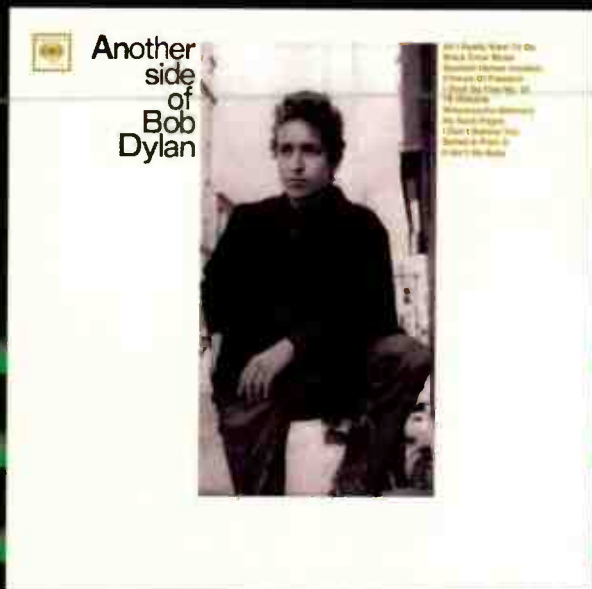
Spendor had a complete range of loudspeakers using their clear ep38 polymer cone material, for those not so keen on the zing from metal cones. An interesting new model was the small floorstanding A3 seen at the far end of the row here...



German brand Canton had this modern looking loudspeaker, the Reference 9.2, on display in their room. It is fitted with a ceramic oxide tweeter, sitting within a short horn to improve efficiency. Canton claim it gives exceptional results...



Dali were proud of their new small, budget (£370 approx.) Zensor loudspeaker, a design that should get the Dali message across to UK audiences.



**BOB DYLAN**  
*Another Side Of Bob Dylan*  
**Music On Vinyl**

Dylan fans should note that Music On Vinyl is releasing an array of essential Dylan LPs on 180gm vinyl under the 2010 Mono Remastered Series title. They include, 'Blonde On Blonde', 'Bringing It All Back Home', 'Highway 61 Revisited', 'John Wesley Harding', 'The Freewheelin'...', 'Bob Dylan' and 'The Times They Are A-Changin'".

'Another Side Of Bob Dylan' is almost a mirror image of the passionate, energetic, political 'The Times They Are A-Changin'". This album is Dylan at his most romantic and considered. In some respects, 'Another Side...' is more interesting because it is less focused than 'Times'. Dylan takes his time to address a variety of subjects with classics such as 'My Back Pages', 'Chimes Of Freedom', 'It Ain't Me Babe' and more. This an album full of poetry and grace.

In effect, what you have is the first eight albums remastered using the original mono masters and, like The Beatles mono releases, these Dylan reissues are uniformly excellent in that they prioritise the audiophile listener, leaving the 'loudness' question in the gutter, where it belongs, and letting the

Dylan flavour flood out. Reissue producer Steve Berkowitz explained that, "we went back and forth comparing the new mono LPs and CDs with the original LPs. They were the masters we served to replicate."

Listening to the new 'Another Side...' and comparing that with the original stereo version of the same, it is obvious that the mono version is vastly superior, the stereo mix splitting the artist and instruments artificially and in a forced fashion, the mono version sounds more organic, never mind the richer, fuller sound that this new reissue presents to the listener. There's also far more detail on view. Surely the best vinyl version since the original mono release!

**SUPERTRAMP**  
*Breakfast In America*  
**A&M**

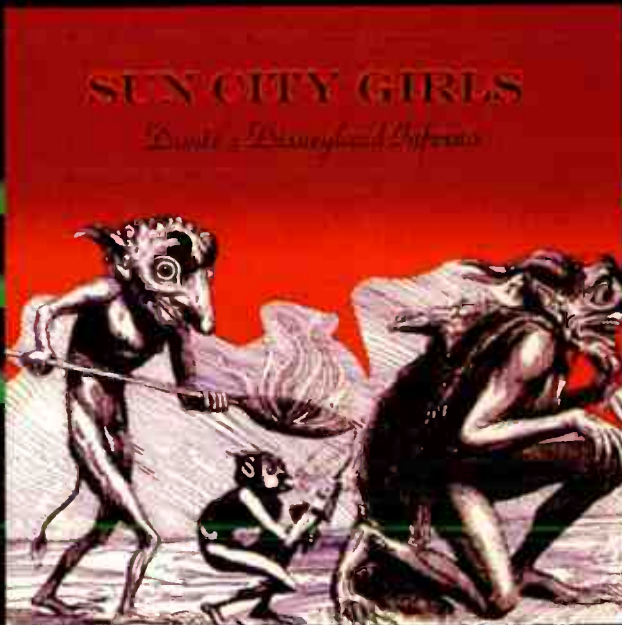
One of the most accessible, and certainly one of the most melodic rock albums of all time, this is one I fondly remember singing my heart out to when I first stumbled across it in 1979, the year of its release. 'Breakfast In America' has one of the purest collections of tightly constructed, memorable pop songs in the rock music firmament. From the tale of the destruction of innocence from the imposition of society's rules in 'The Logical Song', the tale of the

restless loner in 'Goodbye Stranger' and one of the most joyous and simplest tales of the expression of love in 'Oh Darling', the LP is packed with quality. Now, Universal, via its A&M imprint, has decided to give this album the special treatment it deserves with a deluxe version that remasters the original album and packs a slipcase full of goodies to boot.

The remastered vinyl version of the album (which is also accompanied by the CD version) processed in 2010 is sublime, providing a rich experience for Supertramp fans and walking all over the previous remaster which appeared in 2003. The new remaster is far cleaner which allows more detail to be heard and gives your hi-fi a fighting chance to dig deep into the mix. But that's not all, also present in the gatefold is a second CD that features live tracks taken from the 1979 tour that has been presented in an intimate and a splendidly raw manner plus a DVD that features singles videos from the album plus rare 'Old Grey Whistle Test' footage. Finally, you get a sixty-page hardback book full of interviews, photographs, lyrics, a poster, a replica concert ticket, patch and programme. The whole lot is stuffed within a hard slipcase cover. A cracking package – Supertramp fans get it now.







**SUN CITY GIRLS**  
*Dante's Disneyland Inferno*  
**Get Back**

One of the most eclectic bands of recent musical history, the Sun City Girls combine rock with a splintered form of folk and then mix in eastern rhythms but without any real structure, play around with noise and effects and avant-garde weirdness. As you can surmise, this is a band which is difficult to categorise. Consisting of brothers Alan and Richard Bishop with percussionist Charles Gocher, the group love to push boundaries to breaking point and then some. During their exploration, the Sun City Girls have released a whole host of limited edition vinyl and cassette editions since their birth in 1981. The band's first album release, in 1984, opened the doors to a positive deluge of material which has resulted in over 30 official albums with almost limitless amounts of unofficial works that continue to pop up with surprising regularity. The result is that the outfit has been seen as a standard or inspiration by which many left field artists have followed. Those who want to investigate should check out the band's *Abduction* (new releases) and *Sublime Frequencies* (archives) record labels.

This release sees the reissue of the band's 1996 album but as a very

well presented triple album wrapped in a pizza-style box along with a LP-sized, four sheet 'booklet' which provides a background narrative to the music. And as for that music? It can be summed up as wonderfully bizarre, mixing satanic mumblings and grumblings with primeval, gut wrenching growling, moving into rather nightmarish tales – sung by children – and then transforming into peculiar narration that ends with a Kennedy assassination retrospective – and that's just Side One! If you are a little bored with the standard musical fare that's pushed by mainstream press, give the Sun City Girls a spin.

**MAGNUM**  
*The Visitation*  
**SPV**

This hard rocking Brummie band have been treading the metallic boards since the release of their first album back in 1978 (*Kingdom Of Madness*). The group have earned a reputation of producing approachable melodic rock framed by a suitable story telling of journeys over the hill and far away, sometimes with the odd mystical being or set-piece battle thrown in for good measure. But always with a bit of a smirk on their faces while doing so. Following on from their 2009 outing, *Into The Valley Of The Moon King*,



which utilised early eighties arena-type, classic rock with slight prog influences, this new album – the band's sixteenth in their long career – continues the theme.

The band are magnificent in the sense that this melodic rock outing is grand and jaw-dropping in its overall scale. This is splendid rock: broad, vast, open and immeasurable. This is the sort of rock in which, guitarist, Tony Clarkin, should really be standing atop a storm-tossed, rocky outcrop, waves crashing against the surface, his hair billowing, lightning flashing all around with each plucked guitar string sending sonic booms throughout the land... or something. Well, you get the general idea.

Actually, that pictorial metaphor would sit rather nicely with the album's title track. It is noticeable how much bassist Al Barrow, is improving and growing with every album, it seems. Here his rhythmic repertoire seems to have added a funk-layer while his change in tempo triggers prog comparisons. The album itself arrives in two vinyl versions. The basic double album can be bought in limited edition coloured wax while the deluxe version arrives in a box with the CD version included with the vinyl plus a DVD with a live High Voltage gig, plus other additions such as interviews, lyrics and photos. PR

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"moving house definitely tops my list of things I hate..."



## David Price

**N**ot being quite anally retentive enough to make a long list of things I hate most, I couldn't tell you precisely where things like 'a trip to the dentist' or 'getting the car MOT'd' would figure on my grand scale of dislikes, but without a moment's hesitation I can definitely say that 'moving house' tops it. The notion of carting all my stuff from one place to another is not one that I cherish. Moreover, the prospect of having to disassemble my hi-fi then set it all up again elsewhere fills me with a cloying angst that's enough to have me waking up in the middle of the night, screaming. Did I mention that I hate moving?

And so it came to pass that last December, after a year long search, I finally found the right place and made overtures to one of our lovely state owned money lending institutions. My mortgage adviser stated that, just a couple of years ago, he could have got my cat a mortgage without so much as his paw print or a meow. Now though, given that the banks had lent money to everyone that they *shouldn't* have for a decade (thanks to Gordon Brown's 'light touch' regulation), they were now *not* going to lend anything to people to whom they *should* (thanks to David Cameron's heavier-touch regime)... Despite wanting details of every bag of salt and vinegar crisps I'd ever bought, plus my projected income to the year 2112 and all the coins down the back of my settee, they finally managed not to refuse me and the move was on...

Normally, such news would have been greeted with whoops of joy, but for me it was nothing of the sort. I merely looked at my hi-fi system and thought, "that's all got to come apart". Weeks later, acres of cabling had been coiled up, inches of dust

removed and it was all ready to go to the new place, step by step in the back seat of my car. Removal companies, no thanks! There was not a cat's chance in hell that anyone else was going to move my recently restored Marantz TT-1000 turntable or mint Yamaha NS-1000M speakers. As that immortal Spinal Tap line went, "don't touch this guitar; no, don't even look at this guitar!"

The result was countless trips between old and new place, as the sum total of about twenty bits of hi-fi were moved gingerly. It was during this period that I began to ask myself searching existential questions, such as "why have I got three classic Sony high end cassette decks, two humungulous Sony open reels, three vast Sony top-end Direct Drives (all from the same 1978 model year, incidentally) and probably the largest FM-only tuner ever made?". Further grief ensued when humping my speakers from house to car to house, whereupon I realised what a slender thread my back hung on; the exertion was risking something very important popping out of joint.

Enough of my whingeing. Here I sit in my new place, system set up and working after days of fiddling with cables and equipment racks...

How then does it all sound? In a word, *horrid*. That sinking feeling I got when I first switched the system on and spun up a CD was worse than that of any lovesick adolescent being dumped. It was ruddy awful; I've heard better iPod docks in Currys Digital. And for it to sound this bad despite all the preparation I put in, planning the room around the system, rather than the other way! It was like jumping headfirst into a large tank of water with music playing outside...

Well, that's how it *did* sound. I have (with absolutely no relish, I assure you), put my system tuning

skills to use. I reckon I can set up a system reasonably well these days, getting it good within half an hour or so. I'm not boasting; it's like your central heating engineer knowing where to find the boiler; it sort of comes with the territory. So I grudgingly started fiddling with the speaker stands, then when I'd hit the sweet(er) spot I brought the spikes into play. Ditto the amp, which got its own Audiophile Base subtable, and the CD which had its interconnects changed for something altogether brighter, and had its case damped by a SoundDeadSteel top plate. Contacts cleaned, spikes and speaker drive units tightened, and equipment warmed up and we were rolling. As if by magic a stereo image appeared between the speakers, and bass was no longer a lolloping jelly-like dirge. A quick tweak of the Yamaha's level pads upwards and things started sounding respectable.

I'm still on the learning curve. The room needs more soft furnishings to calm standing waves, plus long, thick cotton curtains to go over the rattly blinds. I'll tighten the doors up on their hinges, add thick rugs in strategic places and scatter cushions too. But the basics are now right enough and the fact is that my new place has a largish, long and wide listening room with usefully (but not too) high ceilings and plenty of space for the music to breathe. I'm confident now that I should be able to get a very good sound, and being in a largish bungalow with garden all around, I can hit the loud pedal too.

Seeing the cat relaxed on the sofa, listening to the Fun Lovin' Criminals (a good description of him, incidentally) was a surprise; in my last house he'd run for cover the moment my system went on. Judging by the relaxed look on his face, maybe this place has the makings of a great hi-fi house? ●

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"Country music, as we know it today, effectively started in 1927 in a place called Bristol..."



## paul rigby

It never ceases to amaze me how confident we are, as music fans... or *think* we are. Many believe that the world's musical knowledge is laid bare before us, ready to be accessed via books or the Internet. It's just not so. There are plenty of holes in our knowledge and there is plenty of music, from the length and breadth of musical history, that is either lost to us or lying dormant, waiting to be discovered. Some of it is important too. In fact, so important that you really wonder how it can have remained 'lost' or ignored for so long...

Take the birth of country music, for example. You'd have thought that such an event would be pretty well documented, wouldn't you? With books (of the scholarly and coffee-table type) bursting from the shelves, multi-CD box sets telling the tale, DVDs... you name it. But no, not a bit of it!

You see, the birth of country music as we know it today (and moving on from the primitive 'hillbilly' field recordings of the early twentieth century) effectively started in 1927 in a place called Bristol, which straddles the state lines of Virginia and Tennessee, USA. It started when one man, Ralph Peer, turned up in Bristol as the representative of the Victor Talking Machine Company and set about searching for talent in the Appalachian area. It was a bit like X-Factor. People turned up to sing for Peer and, if he liked them, they were signed up. But this was unique, it was different, it was a new way of looking for talent and, boy, did it pay off. Despite being the birth of an entire genre, the event has been criminally ignored – until now. You can see how it paid off in the Bear Family's new

five CD box set, 'The Bristol Sessions: The Big Bang Of Country Music 1927-1928' ([www.bear-family.de](http://www.bear-family.de)).

As the box set producer, Ted Olson confirmed, "this gathering was amongst the most important recording sessions in the history of modern music. Yet they have never been properly documented. These sessions led to the discovery of The Carter Family and Jimmy Rodgers, two of the leading music artists in the history of country music. During those sessions, new, state of the art recording technologies were featured for the first time, which dramatically improved the sound quality of the recordings. It was the first major session in which electronic microphones were used in country music history, for example".

The question has to be asked, however. If this music is so important – why has no-one tackled it before? Olson did produce a book on the subject, in 2005 with the late Dr Charles K. Wolfe, one of the pioneers of country music scholarship and a minor CD project emerged from that but the reason seems to be partly based on a lack of archival scholars with time and resources and, "country music studies have always tended to lag behind other genres in scholarly attention. Country music has never received the attention that it has deserved," said Olson.

All the recordings used in the box set were taken from 78s from a variety of collectors from around the world. Christopher King, connected with the Rebel Record label, a bluegrass label and a Grammy award winning engineer, mastered the music.

A number of rarities were discovered by Olson and several alternative takes were sourced in the RCA archives plus a batch of

obscure recordings were unearthed via collectors but, "...there were a few recordings that were originally documented by Ralph Peer that were listed as recorded in Bristol but have never actually turned up – despite continuous close scrutiny by a number of scholars over the years. We've never been able to discover them. These were a small number of recordings that were probably never released on 78 and possibly only ever appeared on acetate test pressings and disappeared at some point or were melted down during the war."

Not only does this box set include the more well known 1927 Bristol Sessions, in their entirety for the first time, but it also includes the lesser known 1928 sessions which have never been placed on CD, in any form. The 1927 sessions generated a lot of attention and, once the talent had been discovered, all of the competing major record labels wanted to get in on the act. Especially, as the Appalachia area was previously ignored by the record companies. So other sessions were set up in other areas of the country.

Peer himself had so much initial success that he wanted to see if lightning would strike twice in the same place. Hence, the 1928 sessions. Lightning did not strike again, in business terms. The hits and the talent found were not of the same calibre. From an artistic standpoint, however, the 1928 sessions did generate lots of excellent recordings.

This set fills another gap in our musical knowledge and corrects a wrong by illuminating the modern dawn of an entire genre of music. Thanks goodness for scholars like Olson, roaming the musical landscape, Indiana Jones-like, saving our musical heritage! ●

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"given all the facts, I believe this was a publicity stunt orchestrated by the BBC..."



## steven green

**T**he BBC has performed a U-turn over its plans to close down the Asian Network digital radio station, as station boss Andy Parfitt informed staff in March that the station will continue broadcasting nationally via DAB. This is further evidence that supports my opinion that the plans to close 6 Music were merely a publicity stunt orchestrated by the BBC to help boost digital radio listening.

To recap, the BBC published a strategic review document in March 2010 outlining its proposals to close down services that it considered weren't providing value-for-money to licence fee payers, or where it considered BBC services had encroached into the territory of the commercial sector. Included in these plans were proposals to close the 6 Music and Asian Network digital radio stations. The reason given for wanting to close 6 Music was that it was deemed to provide poor value-for-money, and it delivered few additional listeners to the BBC, as the vast majority of its listeners also listened to other BBC radio stations. The reasons given by the BBC for proposing to close the Asian Network were that the mix of programmes on the station had become incoherent, and it had been steadily losing listeners. Rather than closing down the station completely, the BBC said it would remove the station from the BBC's national DAB multiplex and the station would instead be broadcast locally in areas where there's a large number of Asian people, with content specifically tailored for those areas.

News of the plans to close down 6 Music led to a huge campaign conducted via the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter to save the station from closure, and the BBC

Trust succumbed to public pressure and decided that 6 Music should not be closed down after all. There was also a far smaller campaign to keep the Asian Network open but, presumably due to its lack of support, the BBC Trust agreed with the BBC's proposals for the station to stop broadcasting nationally on DAB.

Soon after hearing the news about the BBC's plans to close 6 Music, I came to the conclusion that it was simply a publicity stunt for the station. The main reason I thought this was because the station's listeners had reacted so vociferously and passionately when TV presenter George Lamb had been made the mid-morning show's presenter that plans to close the station down completely would be met with a huge campaign to save the station. And that was precisely what did happen.

Another reason why I thought this was a publicity stunt was because the BBC's Director of Audio & Music (which is the new job title for the BBC's Director of Radio), Tim Davie, had form for orchestrating publicity stunts in his previous job as Director of Marketing for Pepsi, as he had organised for a commercial aeroplane to be painted all over in Pepsi's shade of blue! Tim Davie also had form for being somewhat liberal with the truth where DAB was concerned. For example, he had previously appeared on *Feedback* on Radio 4 claiming that DAB's poor sound quality was caused by people living too far from their nearest transmitter, which is utter nonsense, because DAB's poor sound quality is caused by the BBC using insufficiently high bit rates for its stations on DAB. It was also widely accepted that Tim Davie had been put in charge of BBC Radio because of his marketing expertise, so his success in the role was largely dependent on the

success of DAB.

If it was a publicity stunt, it has certainly been a resounding success. 6 Music's audience has risen by almost 65% as a result of the publicity it received, rising from 695,000 listeners in December 2009 to 1,137,000 in December 2010; and the Asian Network's audience grew by 33% from 360,000 to 477,000 over the same period. Ironically, one of the main reasons given by the BBC for deciding not to close the Asian Network down was that its audience had grown significantly over the last year. What an amazing coincidence!

So, both stations remain as they were before the BBC's strategic review, only now both stations have a significantly larger audience, not to mention that 6 Music has essentially been personally recommended to the public by those seeking to save it from closure, and digital radio as a whole has received a huge amount of publicity in the process. Given all the facts then, I can only conclude that this was a publicity stunt orchestrated by the BBC.

Despite Tim Davie's best efforts however, DAB sales remain in the doldrums, and the prospect of digital radio switchover remains as far away as ever. Ironically, given the BBC's bias against the platform's use for radio listening, the platform that received the biggest boost from the publicity stunt was in fact the Internet, as the growth in 6 Music and the Asian Network's audience contributed to listening via the Internet growing by 55% last year.

The people I feel sorry for in all this are those whom I fear were used by Tim Davie to 'save' 6 Music and the Asian Network, when I don't think the BBC ever had any intention of closing either of them down in the first place. ●

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"Hi-Fi World's new website performs many useful functions that complement the magazine..."



## noel keyword

**F**or longer than I would dare admit we have been working on a new website for *Hi-Fi World* and it finally went live just before the Bristol Show – and thank heavens, because it was driving me a little nuts. Dreamweaver is to me Nightmare Inducer!

The new site performs many useful functions that complement the magazine, and it will provide even more in the future. It's a resource that I hope will appeal to you, and new audiences as well.

What do I mean by that? Right now we are running a short piece on using Apple's iPhone 4 as a Sound Pressure Level meter. A mobile phone loaded with test technology costing just £11.99 is interesting to many, but a review would sit uneasily in the magazine, as it's just a little too 'off topic' for our core readership. It's perfect for the website though; I was inspired to write it simply by having readers and a manufacturer show me iPhone audio Apps at the Bristol Show.

Right now, there are so many new technologies related to audio flying around, that the magazine could never cover them. It has limited space and as paper costs and newstrade demands rise, this is unlikely to change. So 'left field' subjects to the magazine can be more easily accommodated on the website.

What are those subjects? Close to home are internet and computer audio, home network servers and today's digital products in general, including those for the iPod, iPad and iPhone of course.

Further from home are unwanted orphans like camcorder audio that camcorder reviews woefully choose to ignore, even though audio is as important as the video content. The subject of gathering good audio to

accompany video when shooting movies is a fascinating one, and so difficult or even impossible to achieve that film makers record and overdub dialogue after the video has been shot. Aerial shots in *Pirates of the Caribbean* were taken from a helicopter, for example, and having the sound of a helicopter, and passing jets, in the soundtrack of a pirate movie is hardly authentic. Having mics strapped to the actors isn't going to work either so they must speak their lines again in an audio suite, in sync with the video.

I have some great video ruined by "mum I want an ice cream" coming from behind the camera, and even at the Bristol Show recently some sequences were spoiled by loud talk from behind. Directional miking and good sound quality are difficult issues in a live environment. The potential is there to get a great sound, or ruin everything! This is about recording high quality audio, but it would sit uneasily in the magazine; the website can accommodate it.

Then there is some technical stuff that I know will bore most readers silly but would be helpful to the engineering side of the audio industry and also reassure them that our measurements are accurate and representative. I am not entirely happy about the graphical representation of Wow & Flutter from either our Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser or our Clio analyser. Running a spectrum analysis from the frequency demodulated output of a Rank Kalee W&F meter gave a clearer picture in the past, but the meter expired and, nowadays, W&F meters are rare beasts. Dave Cawley of Sound Hi-Fi agrees that this is the way to do it and wants to run a discussion about W&F in turntables, including high resolution measurements of Direct Drives.

That's useful, and also needed, but it is best run as an accessible archive on the website. It is too techie for the magazine.

Understandably, manufacturers would like to know how we test their products. After all, a lot of expensive development time goes into them (I know because I have developed both amplifiers and loudspeakers for this magazine) so they do not want to be misrepresented by amateur test equipment or inappropriate techniques. And some readers want to know more about what the measurements mean.

For both parties the website describes 'What It Means' and 'How We Do It' in all measurement categories. Take a look at Loudspeakers/ Tests/Distortion to see an unusual measurement we make but do not publish, or Vinyl LP/Tests/Arm tests, to see a Bruel & Kjaer accelerometer attached to a pickup arm to measure its vibrational signature, another rare measurement, but one yielding interesting results. The website can easily carry this as standing reference material that complements the magazine.

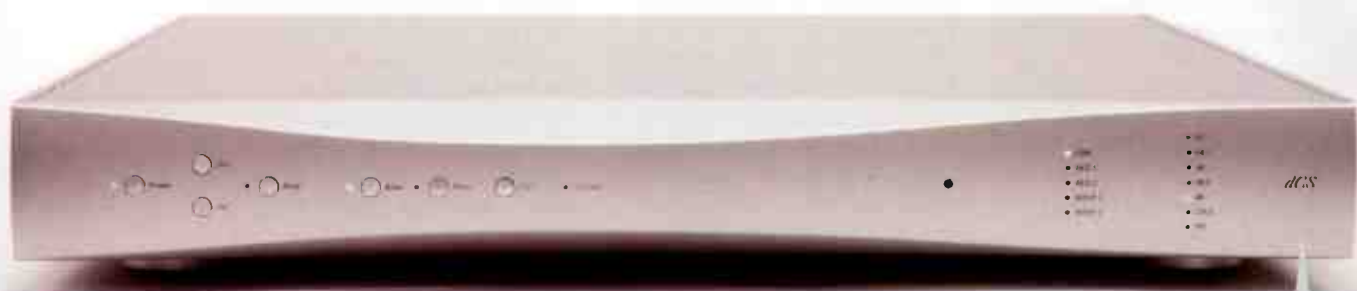
And then we have Olde Worlde and the world of old but gold products from the past, a topic invigorated by eBay. Plus – coming soon – the many company histories we have published in the past, from Garrard through to Strathearn, a company burnt into my mind because it was the only time I have had a machine gun pointed at me, in ravaged nineteen seventies Belfast!

So the website has *much* to do to support the magazine. It acts as an extension of the magazine and to broaden our coverage. Dreamweaver still gives me nightmares but I am learning to cope. The site itself is an altogether happier experience: I hope you like it. ●

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'I'd like to extend a huge personal thankyou to the Hi-Fi Wigwam team who did a superb job...'



## adam smith

**F**ollowing on from my nail-biting concerns last month, those of you who made the trek to the land of pork pies on Sunday 6th March will undoubtedly have seen the lovely pair of Leak 2075s adorning the Cottesmore Room at the Hi-Fi Wigwam Salford Hall show. Yes, I am delighted to report that in the final days leading up to the show the Leaks went back together without a hiccup... well, not *too* many anyway. It was on the Wednesday before the show that the last screw went in but it took me another day to work up the energy to lug the beasts up the stairs to my first floor listening room. It was a good job I did, though, as one tweeter turned out to be annoyingly silent. Given the commonly held views regarding the nature of the 2075s' tweeters, some would say this was a good thing but, no, I had to have it working!

Out it came and back downstairs to the workbench I went. Fortunately the issue turned out merely to be some tarnished wiring and thirty year old soldering that had decided to part company and with some care, steady hands and a pair of heat shunt tweezers, the problem was resolved very quickly. Back into the cabinets went tweeter number two and the results were actually quite impressive. I'm not going to go into the minutiae of the Leak's sounds right now as I feel that is probably best kept for a more comprehensive discussion under the Olde Worlde banner, but suffice to say I remembered why I loved my original pair so much. They are not replacing my Ferrograph SIs as my reference loudspeakers, but I'm very happy to have another pair in my life again.

As a bonus, you may remember mention of my reserve Goodmans Magisters. These turned out to have two tweeters blown beyond redemption, so naturally I was

relieved to hear the Leaks sing.

Rather shockingly, I might actually keep the 2075s as a cunning and devious money-making tool. You see, having parked them in front of my Ferrographs on their stands, I was astonished at the way the Leaks made the SIs look like a pair of dinky standmounters. Consequently if you have chosen a pair of loudspeakers that your other half thinks are too large, I am considering renting out the 2075s at a very reasonable daily rate so you can park them in your lounge, listen to the resulting shrieks of horror and then wheel in the speakers you really want with a resigned, "I suppose I'll have to make do with these, then" sigh – job done!

But anyway, enough about loudspeakers and more about the show. As you perhaps may have seen from Noel's report on Hi-Fi World's website, it was a truly impressive day out. This show was the biggest and best that the forum collective have done so far and I would like to extend a huge personal thank you to the Hi-Fi Wigwam organisation team who not only did a superb job but made it all look so easy (which I'm pretty sure it wasn't!). Everything ran like clockwork on the day and I heard nothing but positive comments from everyone I spoke to.

Salford Hall is a superb venue for such an event – see the website picture of its grandness – allowing plenty of space for everyone but with an innate quirkiness that somehow suits a hi-fi event down to the ground. If they'll have us back, I know we're all raring to go again next year, after the organisers have had a chance to recover of course.

I would also like to thank all the *Hi-Fi World* readers who popped in for a chat. As you may have realised I'm happy to natter about hi-fi and turntables until the cows come home, and the show brought plenty of

willing 'victims' my way. It was very interesting to hear the perspective of people who had never been to a show like this before and I think nearly all were very pleasantly surprised. One gentleman I spoke to was almost in awe, being used to the slickness and style of the conventional hi-fi shows that we all enjoy so much and I think he was half fearing that he might encounter a barely organised shambolic mess – he was delighted to be wrong and kept telling me so!

Finally, as to all those old clunkers in my room, I am pleased to report that they behaved beautifully all day. The only hiccup was my Technics RS-9900 twin box cassette deck on which I went to make some recordings on the Thursday night preceding the show, only to find that it decided to throw a hissy fit and refused to work properly. With turntables to gather and a van to load, I sadly had no time to pop its bonnet and poke around inside so it came along as static display only.

Other than that, all members of the Smith turntable collection were spinning sweetly and even the *Hi-Fi World* Cambridge CD1, fresh from a sedentary storage period of around five years sprang instantly into life when switched on, needing only a new loading belt for the drawer to make it run like clockwork.

I can only hope that the equipment I choose next year proves to be as amenable – I'm intending the theme to be the obvious progression from a 1970s system to a 1980s one, which may well put me up against the best of British 'cottage engineering' and could prove interesting. Still, just remember – the event of 2012 won't be in any Olympic stadium in July, it'll be in a hotel in March! ●

**(see Adam and his Leak 2075s in our Wigwam Show report, on [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk))**

# vinyl section

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MAY 2011

[www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk)

### INSPIRE LP12 VIVID 100

David Price tries this fantastic mods package for the Linn Sondek LP12 turntable...

### VINYL VAULT 105

Paul Rigby remembers Etta James' classic 'At Last' LP.

### BENZ MICRO ACE 106

Tony Bolton is beguiled by this reasonably priced moving coil.

### ORTOFON CADENZA MONO 109

If you're a mono record fan, then this is the cartridge for you, says Tony Bolton.

## VINYL LOVERS

New out on the Vinyl Lovers reissue label is the similarly romantic The Modern Lovers and 'Longbranch', a live gig from the Longbranch Saloon in Berkeley, in 1972, in which this fresh-faced young rock outfit dazzled its audience with Velvet Underground-influenced noise.

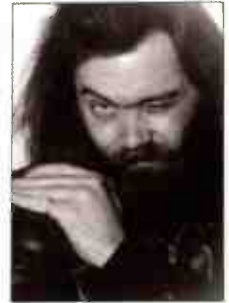


Rocky Erickson was a member of the legendary 13th Floor Elevators, the 1960s, drug-encrusted, garage/psyche band from the USA. Fast forward to 1986 and this LP which records a solo session... in a hotel room. Intimate? Oh yes. Former Big Star man, this solo rock effort from Alex Chilton, 'Like Flies On Sherbert' (1979) is contentious. Some think it a drug-induced mess, others a lo-fi masterpiece. You decide.

Alex Chilton



Like Flies On Sherbert



## news



## LONG LIVE THE...

...King. That's his name, Freddy King. Well, Freddy on these two early releases from Sundazed ([www.sundazed.com](http://www.sundazed.com)), 'Freddie' later. An electric blues guitarist, who created a string of instrumental LPs, 'Let's Hide Away And Dance Away' (1961) is the first instrumental album from the great man and one that became influential to a whole host of future guitar players including Stevie Ray Vaughan. 'Gives You a Bonanza Of Instrumentals' (1965), became King's second instrumental release and one that took the eye of Eric Clapton.

## A MIXED BUNCH

From Music On Vinyl ([www.musiconvinyl.com](http://www.musiconvinyl.com)) this month, is a right old hotch-potch of worthy reissues including Santana's underrated 'Santana 3' (1971). This issue features four bonus tracks; 'Gumbo', 'Folsom Street - One', 'Banbye' and the single version of 'No One To Depend On'.

'The Masters Series: Funk' is a collection of classic tracks over two LPs and includes Sly & The Family Stone's 'Family Affair', Locksmith's 'Unlock The Funk' and the immense 'Funkin' For Jamaica' by Tom Browne while, also over two discs is Rod Stewart's 'Fly Me To The Moon' (2010), volume five of his Great American Songbook series including 'Love Me Or Love Me', 'My Foolish Heart' and 'I've Got You Under My Skin'.

In complete contrast is The Charlatans' latest, 'Who We Touch' (2010), which sees the band coolly transforming their rock, adding depth and texture yet becoming more adventurous than ever.



## MO-FI SILVER LABEL

Five new releases have appeared on Mobile Fidelity's ([www.mofi.com](http://www.mofi.com)) silver label and what an eclectic bunch they are! The B-52s' self titled album (1979) merged pop with angular funk and lots of very silly image disasters from bad wigs to offensive colour coordination. I always remember, on the basis of restricted funds, buying Duran Duran's debut album instead of Echo And The Bunnymen's 'Heaven Up Here' (1981) and regretting it instantly (whereupon I rushed out, the following week, to correct my mistake). Now Mo-Fi has reissued the Bunnymen's dark, experimental LP. Bobby Darin's 'Love Swings' (1961) is packed with standards plus many tracks still unavailable on CD. An emotional trek through love, this is an affecting album and a now recognised classic by the born again swing artist. Also watch out for INXS's 'Kick' (1987), the band's best album by far offering four, Top 10 singles.



## ...AND FINALLY

DJ Marcelle's 'Another Nice Mess: Meets More Soulmates At Faust Studio Deejay Laboratory' (Klangbad; [www.klangbad.de](http://www.klangbad.de)), while hardly being succinctly titled, is an eclectic conglomeration of dance stylings spread over four sides of vinyl cramming in 49 tracks from the likes of Sub Dub and Pandit Pran Nath. 'Live from the Stockfisch' (Stockfisch; [www.stockfisch-records.de](http://www.stockfisch-records.de)) studio is Beoga's new album an Irish folk band who like to introduce world vibes into their music along with jazz and blues. A new self-titled, four-track, 10" EP from Spiders (Crusher; [www.crusherrecords.com](http://www.crusherrecords.com)), a Swedish quartet featuring members of bands like Graveyard and Witchcraft, this indie-rock band, with punk overtones, are full of energy and dynamism. Supersilent's '11' (Rune Grammofon; [www.runegrammofon.com](http://www.runegrammofon.com)) sees the innovative, left-field outfit swim in the waters of aural experimentation, exploration and varied time signatures with sometimes featureless musical landscapes becoming layered and angular.

Exploring the art of instrumental rock is the Notekillers' 'We're Here To Help' (Prophase; [prophasemusic.com](http://prophasemusic.com)). The new album is limited to 500 copies and is pressed on red, heavyweight vinyl. The band are obvious students of melody, never taking the easy route, always the most innovative pathway. Fans of The Pixies should investigate. Talking of which, 'The Best Of Pixies' (4AD; [archive.beggars.com](http://archive.beggars.com)) is now out. Subtitled 'Wave Of Mutilation', this retrospective double album is offered on colour vinyl. Two B-sides, Into The White and Winterlong, are included. Transept's new album, (Dronehenge; [trspt.net](http://trspt.net)), is limited to just 300 copies and offers quite beautiful layered, electronica with an organic structure that reminds me of some of the more uplifting Boards Of Canada productions. With only three tracks per side, they give themselves plenty of room to explore sonic deviations. Olof Arnalds' 'Innundir Skinni' (One Little Indian; [olofarnalds.com](http://olofarnalds.com)) is an Icelandic singer-songwriter with a high pitched, fragile voice. Delicate and moving, the album features a stellar support cast include Bjork and a member of Sigur Ros.

# Dek'd Out

**David Price listens to a fascinating new package of modifications for Linn's evergreen Sondek LP12 turntable...**

**O**f all the world's super decks, there is surely none that can compare? Okay, I know I'm going to get myself in hot water for saying this, but come on; Linn's LP12 was the first of a generation of turntables that took vinyl playback to a new high. I know the Garrard 301/401, and some EMTs, were better in some ways, a whole decade earlier, but my point is that as a package, unmodified and bought new and properly set up from a dealer, the Sondek gave *cracking* performance off the shelf. It put vinyl well and truly on the map as the *de rigueur* high end music source in the nineteen seventies.

Yes, I love Michells, Technics, Roksans, Pink Triangles and many others, but in the grand vinyl scheme of things, the LP12 was the superdeck to have in the seventies and eighties; heavens, even Inspector Morse had one! All across the nation, in casual conversations in pubs, at wedding receptions, airport lounge

*Fitted in conjunction with Inspire's Hercules PSU, this magic button gives you electronically switchable speeds; no more fumbling with that silly 45RPM adaptor any more!*

bars, or village greens, telling your friend you had "a Linn" was a badge of honour, your entry pass to the 'high end hi-fi club'. Many people who'd say they knew nothing about hi-fi would still have heard of a

Linn Sondek; their cousin's mother's brother would have told them how great it was. In this respect, it could sit with Porsche 911s and Rolex Oyster Perpetuals as consumer objects of desire that ordinary people had heard of.

So I still find it rather surprising that so few mods have come out for the LP12. We all know of the Pink Link of the nineteen eighties, and of Naim's subsequent Armageddon and then Linn's own Cirkus kit from the following decade, but it's rather curious that there aren't hundreds of mod packages by now, given the vast number of decks in circulation. Consider also that many thousands of those decks have been sitting on sideboards or in attics over the past decade, not used because they're 'out of tune' or out of adjustment and need setting up...

Enter Inspire Hi-Fi's new Vivid LP12 option. It's described as "a full and comprehensive package to the LP12 owner at a superb price whilst offering top quality and of course a major sound improvement". The package is designed for all LP12s, from pre-Valhalla to the modern Cirkus variants, its key component being the Vivid subchassis. Said to be "a critically controlled CNC'd acrylic

subchassis, 10 mm thick and of the perfect density to carry the machined aluminium parts which carry the spring grommets, the bearing and armboard." Inspire's Robert Isherwood claims that, "the density and machined quality of the components parts which make up the Vivid subchassis ensure that improvements in the quality of the music are quite dramatic – a good start to ridding some of that colouration..."

There's also a 10mm thick acrylic arm board, which can be supplied to fit any tonearm. It secures to the new subchassis with bolts into brass inserts fitted within the subchassis, so a true torqued fit is now possible. It replaces the MDF arm board and tiny wood screws. Also, the dreaded thin flexible bottom baseboard is replaced by 3mm thick rigid acrylic sheet, and instead of the small rubber feet, Inspire fit Sorbothane 'shock absorbers'. The feet house a metal plate within the Sorbothane which then screw solidly into the rigid baseboard, which makes for a very firm base.

The package even includes a new plinth, which Inspire says is "professionally manufactured by hand to an exacting standard". Isherwood notes that it has to be "perfect" to take the LP12 parts such as the top plate.







They come in a wide range of solid wood finishes, and there's a number of exotic wood finishes as a cost option, so now it's highly likely that you can get the deck finished in a wood to match your interior decor.

Next to get replaced is the power supply; the package includes Inspire's Hercules power supply which can replace either the ageing Linn Valhalla board or the pre-Valhalla power supply arrangement. It gives the advantage of electronic 33/45 speed change at the push of a button.

To complete the package, Linn's stock mat is also replaced by an Inspire Acri mat, which the company says is superior to the original equipment felt item; the use of acrylic in the subchassis means that there's less resonance in the deck's chassis, which in turn means there's little need to damp it with felt, says Isherwood. Acrylic is a naturally inert material and so can be used as a

platter mat, providing the subchassis parts are also acrylic, he notes. The 4mm Acri mat fits the LP12 outer platter ridge perfectly and has a record label recess. All parts of the package, apart from the power supply, are manufactured in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire.

Any LP12 owner buying the package can visit Inspire's unit, which is forty seconds off junction 29A of the M1 in Derbyshire, and have the kit fitted while they wait (providing they book in advance). The work takes approximately three hours and involves a complete rebuild of the LP12; "every single part of the Linn is taken apart, and every nut, bolt, spring and grommet is inspected and renewed if necessary. The original bearing, inner and outer platter are

retained, but are cleaned thoroughly before refitting, making the deck (complete with its new plinth) look new". Bob Isherwood says customers can actually sit and watch him do the work if they're interested; alternatively they can relax and listen to music in the dem room. If you can't attend in person, you can pack up your Linn and Inspire will arrange collection and then re-delivery after the work's been done; if you've lost the original box then Inspire can supply you one. The cost of this



*Inspire's Hercules power supply board offers switchable speed change and superior sound...*

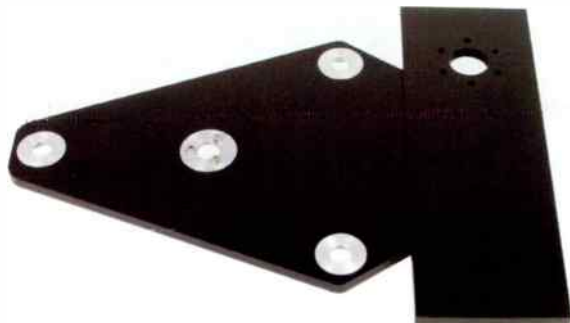


**Pictured above is the original LP12, before it got a complete Inspire Vivid mods package...**

is an additional £17 .

The cost for all of this is currently £740 all inclusive; this includes an LP12 plinth, subchassis with aluminium housings for the spring grommets and bearing, arm board, bottom base board, Sorbothane shock absorber feet, Hercules PSU, and Acri mat. Normally a full rebuild will be £40, but any *Hi-Fi World* reader having a complete Vivid package will get this free of charge until May 20th, 2011. Also, the package is available non-fitted for anyone who wants to do it themselves, although Bob says that some specialist knowledge is required! Inspire also provide single parts of the upgrade package such as the subchassis and armboard (£259); prices can be found on their website or by phoning or emailing with your requirements. There are also options of fitting new arms and/or clear lids. Currently Inspire are doing two full rebuilds per day and can have the LP12 returned in most cases within four days of its arrival in their unit.

How does the Inspire LP12



**...also part of the package is a brand new acrylic subchassis and armboard...**

Vivid look and feel 'in the flesh'? Superb, is the answer. There's no sense that the finish to the new bits is inferior to the Linn originals,

although obviously a gloss black acrylic armboard means a subtle change of look for the LP12, compared to the stock matt painted wood item. The plinth is a lovely bit of woodwork, something that I don't think will put off any Linn lover; it certainly looks and feels better than my old stock slotted Afrosomia plinth I had on my Sondek. The Inspire deck bounces as it should, and the overall feel is (providing your donor deck's top plate is unmarked) that of getting a 'new' LP12.

### SOUND QUALITY

In the case of *Hi-Fi World's* review, Inspire first sent us their 'hack' LP12. An oldie but a goodie, it was a well preserved Valhalla specimen, dating back (at a guess, to the mid eighties), and fitted with a Linn Ittok LV11 and Dynavector Karat DV17-3. I listened to it at length, and I have to say it was pure nostalgia for me. Having run an almost identical one in from around 1985 to 1994, it sounded just like I remembered mine – which was lovely, but coloured. For example, playing Pink Floyd, 'Us and Them', I instantly relaxed into the Linn's lovely rhythmic gait, enjoying the way the music wafted along in a balmg manner. The musical equivalent to a therapeutic body massage, the experience left me feeling all the better for it, but I have to say I was still left in the dark about the finer details of the recording. The deck sounded a tad opaque, almost as if it there was a dank, murky fog in the recording studio, clouding the view, as it were.

This I find to be a defining characteristic of stock LP12s; compared to rival Michells, Roksans, etc.; there's a lack of definition and 'inner' detail; the LP12 appears to suffer from a 'woody' colouration. The more I ran the gamut of my record collection, the more this

characteristic came out. In absolute terms, the Valhalla LP12 is nice and pleasing to listen to, with a soft, silky and musical sound and a lovely lolloping rhythmic gait. Yet it's tonally coloured and diffuse in its detail rendition; you get a sense that you're listening to the original recording through a cloud. There's also a slight softening of dynamics, the stock Linn lacking that last one tenth of articulation when called up to deliver a snare drum that's been smashed instead of hit. Also, its bass is a little soft and vague too; I found it pleasingly full of 'bloom' but not terribly accurate at catching when a bass guitar note properly starts and stops. I couldn't wait to hear the new Vivid mods package, and unpacked the freshly reworked deck with a sense of heady anticipation. That same Floyd track went on first, and a sat back intently. From the first note of the opening bar of the

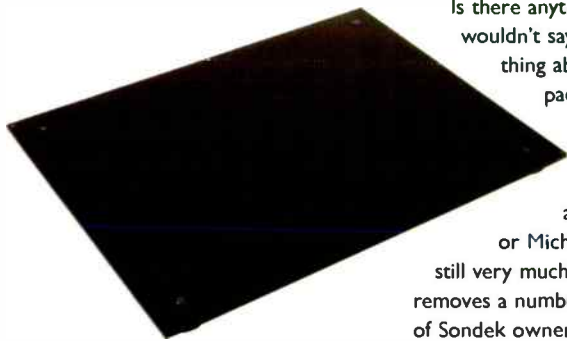


**...the Vivid package also includes a new plinth, in a wide range of real wood finishes...**

song, I could hear quite a dramatic difference. The Vivid package suddenly snapped everything into view, akin to pressing 'first pressure' on a digital camera to activate the autofocus. It was a dramatic change for the better, the modded deck giving the LP12 the ability to scythe through the mix like a hot knife through the proverbial churned fermented milk. I could suddenly hear so much more; the track felt more atmospheric, there was more detail to the opening guitar and bass guitar, more air around the hi hat cymbal, more weight to vocals, and best of all the sense that everything was now ordered in a coherent way, rather than being an assemblage of musical strands that just happened to be playing together.

Impressive stuff, but does the Vivid mods package turn the Linn LP12 into a dispassionate interlocutor, instead of the dyed-in-the-grain musical maker which it's famous for being? No, amazingly. Whilst all the whizz-bang detailing

and dynamics these mods release are fantastic, I had been worried they would come at the expense of the Linn's lovely lilting musicality. This weighed heavily on my mind because I'd first bought my Linn in a direct A-B dem against a Roksan Xerxes in the late eighties; the Roksan had shown far more grip, detail and definition and yet I loved the LPI2's



**...a new baseboard and feet are also fitted...**

musicality, and had duly opted for it over the – in some ways superior – Roksan. Yet these Inspire mods don't fundamentally shift the LPI2's character in a negative way; the deck's natural rhythmic grace is left unspoiled.

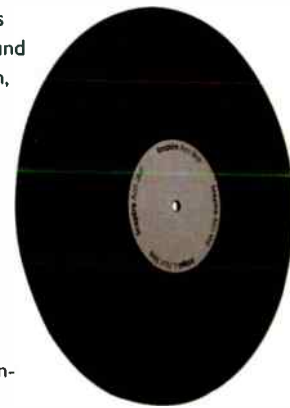
Cueing up, for example, Steely Dan's 'Home at Last'. This is all crashing piano cadences, bass guitar thumps and brass stabs, beautifully recorded and topped off with Donald Fagen's characteristic deadpan, laconic vocals. The stock LPI2 made a very nice noise with this track, sounding warm, full and slick – very nineteen seventies west coast US of A, cruising down Sunset Boulevard and all that. Best of all, it went for the song's gentle, insistent rhythms like a moth to a flame; the Linn locked on target and gave a mesmeric sound. It was only when I switched on my critical faculties and made myself 'snap out of' the magic of the song that I noticed the flabby bass guitar, the slightly shaky piano chords, and the oversmooth hi hat sound. There was also a sense that sudden dynamic accents could knock the song off course, so to speak. Via the Vivid LPI2 however, this completely disappeared. Bass was firmer, tauter and stronger (when it needed to be, rather than just giving a generous boom-boom-boom). The piano sounded as if it was mounted on solid ground, with individual chords sparkling with harmonics in a way they hadn't before. Guitar notes sounded stronger

and more cutting, yet closer to their real timbre. And all this time, that lovely rhythmic groove was retained, making the song seem even more emotive and arresting than before. Rather than thinking, "hmm... that's nice", my sentiments were now closer to "wow, geniuses at work"! If anything then, the Sondek's ability to involve you in the musical event isn't just retained, it's enhanced.

Is there anything I'd change? I wouldn't say so. The interesting thing about this mods package is that it doesn't set out to make your LPI2 sound like a Roksan Xerxes or Michell GyroDec; it's still very much a Linn, but it just removes a number of the downsides of Sondek ownership. Think of it like this; when you uprate the dampers and rebush the suspension on your MGB, you don't suddenly get a new Toyota MR2, you get the same characterful classic car that now handles and rides great. The Inspire package does the same; it retains the charm of the LPI2 yet removes most of the pitfalls. In absolute terms, your LPI2 still won't soundstage like a GyroDec, it doesn't have the amazing 'on-off LED' bass of the Technics SL1200, nor the pin-point imaging of a Xerxes; but it has four fifths of all the above plus its lovely 'essence of LPI2' which many still crave today. The kind of sound it delivers is a resounding two fingers aloft to digital audio.

I often think that high end direct

drives sound rather like 'hi res digital without tears'; well that's something you'll never be able to say about an LPI2. If there's one turntable that epitomises the flawed genius that is analogue sound reproduction, the Sondek is it. This Inspire mods package simply goes about removing a number of the aforementioned flaws, whilst retaining the basic Linn loveliness. On the face of it, it's a lot of money to pay for a turntable tune-up, but the results are so profound that, if nobody had told me, I'd have expected to cost four or five times more. Let's not forget that Linn's own Keel subchassis mod. on its own costs an awful lot more than £740...



**...and everything is topped off by an Inspire Acri mat, which replaces the stock Linn felt item...**

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## CONCLUSION

It's really very hard to criticise this mods package on any grounds; it gets a firm thumbs up. If you love the Linn sound and don't want to change your turntable but do want to dramatically improve it (relatively inexpensively), then I would recommend it wholeheartedly.

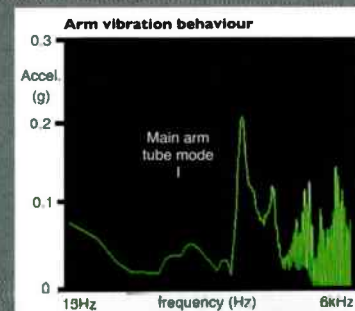
## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Ittok in original form is very stiff our analysis shows. Its first bending mode lies at a relatively high 300Hz, a function of stiffness, and it is very well controlled with a low amplitude of less than 0.1g. The second mode is small as usual, but the common third order bending more at 900Hz is high at 0.2g and has some associated peaking that encloses quite a lot of area, or audio energy. This is likely the source of the Ittok's well known 'zing' and distinctive tone. High basic stiffness gives good dynamics and a broad low frequency sound stage however.

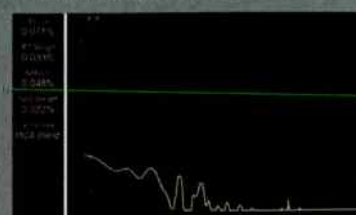
The Sondek had a few surprises. As supplied to us it ran -1.5% slow, which would likely lower pitch by a just audible degree. Speed stability was however as good as a direct drive deck, and it remained speed stable over a long period, giving an absolutely steady result and an amazingly low Wow and Flutter figure of 0.071% unweighted and 0.033% weighted. These characteristics did not change in the updated unit. NK

Speed accuracy	-1.5%
Wow & flutter	0.071%
Wow & flutter (IEC wtd)	0.033%

### ARM VIBRATION



### WOW AND FLUTTER



## VERDICT

A superbly executed package of modifications for the Linn LP12, it wrings much more performance from this classic deck, at a low price.

**INSPIRE LP12 VIVID PACKAGE £740 (see text)**  
Inspire Hi-Fi  
☎ +44(0) 1246 827272  
[www.inspirehifi.co.uk](http://www.inspirehifi.co.uk)

## FOR

- excellent midband focus
- super bass grip
- fine speed stability
- enhanced dynamics
- fit and finish

## AGAINST

- nothing

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aspect of vinyl playback"

Diva IISP Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*, January 2011

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Pulsare Phono Stage

# ETTA JAMES

## AT LAST!

### SPEAKERS CORNER



"there are times listening to this album, when will find a tear suddenly appearing whether you want it there or not..."

don't get on with contemporary R&B. It's a self-serving musical genre full of posing vocal gymnasts who hold no respect for the song and total attention towards their reflection.

I must extend a measure of respect to Beyoncé, however, who successfully portrayed Etta James in the film, 'Cadillac Records', in 2008, and can be seen on YouTube effectively singing James' signature song, 'At Last!'

For those who would like to hear the real thing and would appreciate how 'At Last!' came to prominence then introduce yourself to the welcome new reissue of this, James' best LP release. Originally launched in 1961 on the Chess label, the LP was significant for James, launching the artist into high gear from an earlier roller-coaster career.

The creation of the album was just one element of the chaotic contents of the Pandora's Box that was unleashed at this time as the singer fell into Heroin addiction, involvement in both unhappy and violent personal relationships, plus frustrating creative collaborations with controlling producers.

This generated an attitude within the singer that she herself reflected upon recently at the Austin City Limits music festival in Texas. "I used to be one of these people who was hard for the booking agent to deal with, hard for the promoter to deal with because there was always something. I think I was just very paranoid, listening to all the old entertainers and the warnings about the industry. I tried to be the strong

woman."

Her tumultuous personal life and her professional ructions, played out behind the scenes, never revealed themselves to the audience unless the interaction with each song was part of that process. What was part of the James style, as can be heard on this album, was her choice of song and that whole-hearted delivery by which James' entered a song and explored its consequences. Her song choice was important and targeted. In fact she looked for one particular facet of any song, "With me I think it's the story. When somebody comes to me with a song and I read the words in it I have to be able to relate to the words. When I hear, 'Fly me to the moon and let me dance among the stars', that's a little too out there for me. I got to have real down to earth hurting stuff that's for real and I can relate to."

That level of decision making is visible in the track listing for this LP where the style of song is not important – it's the song itself that is paramount. Hence, possibly unintentionally, the album is filled with a bubbling variety that helps to keep the LP fresh and vibrant. So, in addition to the stunning title track, you get a mix of jazz standards such as 'Stormy Weather' with blues tracks like 'I Just Want To Make Love To You'. She also has an insolent, in-your-face aspect to her delivery

which threatens to take no prisoners until you realise that it's just a flour glue and newspaper mock-up as she crumbles right in front of you, a victim of fragility.

To get that level of performance, James had to make sure that the song affected her first before it could hit the listener. "I had an attitude like Miles Davis. Whenever I saw him perform at that time, he had his back turned to the audience. We were in France together one time, driving in the car and I said, 'Hey Miles, why do you turn your back?' I used to ask a lot of questions like that back then, wanting to be a singer, wanting to know what was cool and what wasn't and he said, 'because I'm playing for myself.' That kinda made sense. Because there might be people in the audience that have come to see someone else or are just... there. I sing a lot for myself and then I hear what I'm doing and then I hear something really soulful that comes from me and then I know that it's touched my heart or it's made a tear appear in the corner of my eye."

There are times, listening to this album, where you too will connect with the songs and, through James' emotive delivery, will find a tear suddenly appearing whether you want it there or not. A classic album from a soulful lady, 'At Last!' has been well mastered and produced by the German audiophile label. **PR**

# Red Devil

**Can Benz Micro's Ace S-Class L deliver the super sound at a low price that it promises? Tony Bolton decides...**



If you happened to read the December 2010 edition of this magazine, on page 105 you would have read that I had fallen in love with the Benz Micro Wood SL cartridge. Well it has turned into an ongoing love affair that shows no signs of abating. So when the opportunity came up to listen to the Wood's cheaper sibling, the Ace S-Class L, I displayed absolutely no hesitation whatsoever...

The Ace, priced at £595, is the most affordable model in the Benz range to be handmade. Like the Wood it comes in three forms; low (0.4mV), medium (0.8mV) and high (2.5mV) output, coloured red, clear and blue respectively.

The original Ace was introduced in 2000 as a more affordable version of the Glider, itself dating back as far as 1994. The name is an acronym of Advanced Cartridge Engineering. Unlike the Glider which has its internal structure exposed to the elements, the Ace comes clothed in an acrylic body, partially for greater ease of handling, and also for the damping effect the bodywork is supposed to have upon the arm. The chassis of the cartridge is made of aluminium, and the internal arrangements follow the current Benz Micro layout of a solid Boron cantilever, sporting a side bonded micro-ridge stylus.

The cantilever is attached to hand wound wire coils, the thickness of which varies depending which output is specified. Coil impedance is quoted as 12 Ohms for the Low, and 24 Ohms for the Medium output units. The cross coil generator is a pure iron cross coated in enamel.

Since the Wood had taken up residence on my Clearaudio Master Solution turntable, it seemed reasonable to give it a rest while this cartridge was listened to, so the Ace found itself bolted to the Clearaudio Satisfy tonearm feeding a Leema Acoustics Agena phono stage and Tucana II amplifier into my Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers. Setting up took a little time since the short cantilever is hidden under the bodywork (although there is a small recess in the centre of the front to help align the cartridge when lowering it onto a record).

Suggested tracking weight range is 1.7 to 1.8g. After a bit of experimentation I settled on 1.7g

"at this price point I can think of nothing that manages such a fine balancing act..."

as giving the most balanced sound. Very small changes in tracking weight seemed to bring quite large changes to the sound. Too much weight resulted in a rather restrained and sat upon delivery. The 'sweet spot', when I found it, was very obvious – everything just suddenly opened up and snapped into focus.

The instructions recommend forty hours running in time, and based on my experience with the Wood which still carried on getting sweeter well beyond that number hours, I would estimate that sixty or more is really required before the final performance level is achieved. The good news is that the Ace sounded

pretty good straight out of the box. There were rough edges to the sound for the first half dozen hours, but these then started to disappear, and, in any case, were not as offensive or tooth rattling as a lot of cartridges can be for the first few hours.

## SOUND QUALITY

From the start I was able to appreciate the inherent musicality of the Ace. Some cartridges are analytical, some just boogie the night away. One of the things that I have come to love about the Benz range is their ability to combine both aspects, without giving undue emphasis to either.

Once most of the running in

time was completed I reached for the 'Benny Goodman Trio Plays For The Fletcher Henderson Fund' LP that I used in the Wood review. Originally recorded in 1940 for the radio station WNEW's 'Make Believe Ballroom' show, this record was released in 1953 on the Columbia label. It shows the Trio in full swing before a live audience and the Ace captured the vibrant feeling of the event in glorious detail. This is a regular test record of mine and most of the subtle detailing, such as the clink of glasses in the background and odd comments from the band, were all there, but just not quite as obvious as they were when listening to the admittedly consid-

erably more expensive Wood.

There was definitely a family resemblance in the way both presented a very rhythmic and focused picture of the scene. Bass bopped along in an irresistible manner, interacting with Gene Krupa's pyrotechnics on the drums, and Goodman's gyrations on the clarinet. I certainly didn't feel that I was listening to an elderly recording or piece of vinyl. The sound was solid, measured, precise and wholly immersive.

A while later and I had wandered through the decades a bit and was playing a 1967 Pye LP by Petula Clark called 'This Is My Song'. It features the hit single 'Don't Sleep In The Subway' penned by husband and wife team Jackie Trent and Tony Hatch. This particular record happened to be a decent condition stereo copy which displayed a good sized soundstage (though not quite as deep or wide as that of the Wood) with Clark in the middle and the orchestra framing her on the left and right. Again the music was driven along by the bounce of the beat, and Hatch's arrangement, with all the signature drum rolls before a chorus and trumpets echoing the inflections of her voice was a delight to listen to (and if I'm being honest – to sing along to).

This evening I explored the Ace's abilities with classical music with Mendelssohn's 'Hebrides Overture'. This was on a 1976 HMV Greensleeve release with Moshe Atzmon conducting the New Philharmonia Orchestra. Image placement was good. The orchestra felt as though they had space to breath around them and tonal qualities were everything that I am coming to expect from a Benz – richly detailed but not in a gooey or cloying manner. Rather the strings had a realistically raw edge as bows sawed across them, and trumpets had a slight rasp that made them believable. Even at nearly £600, there are a lot of cartridges that can make strings sound either thin and wiry, or else a bit thick and unresponsive. I was impressed by the even handed way that the Ace negotiated the differing requirements of a full orchestra, showing no favours, but bestowing no ills. The whole thing was so inviting that I not only played the rest of the side, but flipped it over as well.

'Electric Roundabout' by Human Blue was lapped up by the Ace, settling into the medium paced throb of the bass and drums, and letting the

midrange notes and noises wander around the room between the speakers, and occasionally across the carpet towards me. The synthesised high-hats were just that - synthesised. Not in an unpleasant way, but the resolution of this cartridge is such that the listener will always know if they're hearing a real or electronically generated sound.

As you've realised, I like the Ace.



It was tonally neutral, managing to juggle the demands of tonality, timing and imaging in a very even handed manner. At this price point I can think of nothing that I have yet heard that manages such a good balancing act, and portrays images in a life like way. Similarly priced Lyras are, for me at least, a little too forward in the higher frequencies, and the Ortofons that I have heard from the current range seem almost mannered in comparison, being very correct, but mindful of their behaviour, so that at times they seem a little stilted. The

Ace seemed to tread a tightrope between the two camps, and at the same time factor in the 'get-up-and-go' that is usually the preserve of more expensive models.

So having said all this, where does it stand in relation to the Wood? That they are closely related, there is no doubt, but the Wood plays the same music with more authority and power. Deep bass seems that bit deeper and the thwack of a drum stick against the skin of a drum had a bit more impact to it. There was more of the filigree detailing that helps shape and fill out a sound, and the presentation had an air of greater sophistication. However, the Ace is no slouch in these areas and I can see why it has been in production in various forms for eleven years now.

## CONCLUSION

The Benz Ace's sound is inherently right in pretty much everything it does, offering levels of openness and detailing that cost more from other makers. It is excellent value for money and, in this latest incarnation with the Micro-ridge stylus is, in my experience, unbeatable at the price. £5 shy of £600 is still a lot of money, but in this case it buys a taste of just how good high end cartridges can get. If you can afford a Wood, then I would say buy it, the extra performance is worth it, but if your purse stretches to the Ace then buy that with the assurance that you are buying a well established and highly tuned example of the cartridge maker's art.

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Ace was unusually flat, almost as flat as a CD player our analysis shows. This suggests not just a perfectly even tonal balance but also a lack of resonances and character. Inner groove tracing loss (red trace) was low, so the stylus is well shaped and aligned.

Distortion levels were very low, largely because Vertical Tracking Angle was absolutely correct at 21 degrees. Output was healthy at 0.6mV even from our low output Ls version so hiss will not be a problem with most phono stages.

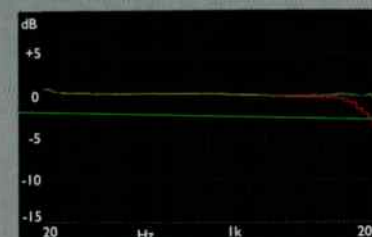
Benz suggest 1.7-1.8gms tracking force is ideal but quote tracking ability at the maximum of 2gms. Using this figure tracking was good if not quite up with the best, especially in the midband where 25cms/sec is possible but the Ace managed 18cms/sec. It should fare well in use, except possibly on some loud vocal sibilance and such like.

Measurement shows the Ace is a superb piece of micro engineering, placing it up with the best MCs available. It will have less character

than rivals and is for those who want a smoothly sophisticated presentation. NK

Tracking force	1.7-2gms
Weight	8.8gms
Vertical tracking angle	21degrees
Frequency response	20Hz - 20kHz
Channel separation	35dB
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	63µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	18cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	0.8%
vertical	1.7%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	0.6mV

## FREQUENCY RESPONSE



## VERDICT

A well mannered, detailed and musical handmade moving coil cartridge at a sensible price.

**BENZ MICRO ACE**  
**S-CLASS L** £595  
 Select Audio  
 ☎ +44 (0) 1900 813064  
 www.selectaudio.co.uk

## FOR

- excellent musical flow
- minimal surface noise
- open and detailed
- super value

## AGAINST

- nothing at the price

# RETRO

## REPRODUCTION

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Audio Research M300 MKII monoblock boxed	£2295	Rega 1011 turntable with Audio Technica tonearm	£195
Audiolab 8000C british built mint boxed	£395	Audio Synthesis moving coil phono stage	£495
AMR 77 integrated amp Titanium finish lightcased x dem	£995	Clearaudio Victory cartridge £1000 new	£445
Anatek monoblocks £2400 new	£995	Creek OBH 9 moving coil pre amp	£95
Ayre K-1 XE pre amplifier	£3395	Cyrus EQ7 phono stage	£345
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100wpc rosewood case one owner prestine condition	£495	Linn Sondek various	from £495
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Musical Fidelity A1 MKII excellent condition	£245	Michell Mycro	£295
Musical Fidelity A100 50watt Class A amp with superb phono stage	£395	Michell Hydraulic Transcriptor	from £295
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		Leak Troughline with GTA inboard decoder	£295
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# One Way Or Another

**Tony Bolton relives his favourite monophonic musical moments with Ortofon's purpose-designed Cadenza Mono moving coil cartridge...**

**R**egular readers may have noticed that I usually have a good gripe if a phono stage that I am reviewing does not have a Mono/Stereo switch fitted. This is because a mono record played in stereo will usually suffer from excessive surface noise. There is a very simple reason for this; a stereo groove carries separate musical information for each channel on each groove wall. As the stylus tracks this, it moves in all directions – horizontally, vertically and diagonally. A monophonic recording by contrast is laterally cut only, with parallel groove walls and a constant groove depth. If such a record is played with a stereo cartridge then any movement of the stylus in any other than a horizontal plane will be perceived by the listener as surface noise.

Switching a phono stage or amplifier to mono will solve most of this problem, but to really effectively reproduce mono records

properly requires a cartridge that responds electrically to only lateral movement. For years Ortofon have produced mono versions of their long lived SPU range, and have now brought out a mono version of the

"if you have many monophonic records in your collection, then a dedicated mono cartridge is most definitely the best way to play them..."





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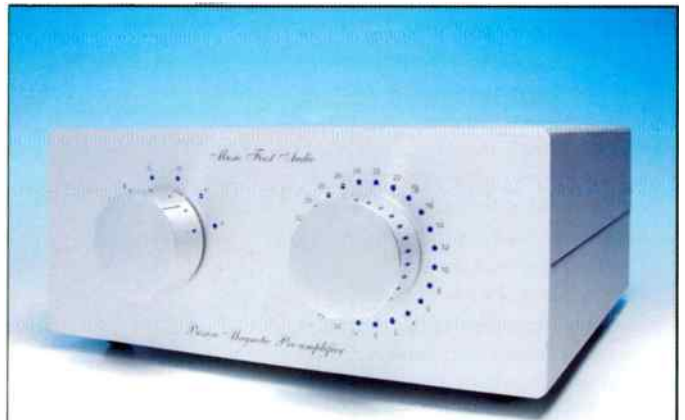
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Cadenza.

Leif Johannsen, Chief of Acoustics and Technology at Ortofon, advised me that the Mono was based upon the Cadenza Red model (reviewed by Noel on p101 of the May 2010 issue) and shares its Nude Fine Line stylus, aluminium cantilever, suspension and stainless steel and aluminium bodywork. The Cadenza Mono differs in having the armature rotated 45 degrees from the X shape in the stereo unit, to a + shape. The Red features coils wound around all four armature legs, whilst the Mono has windings on only the two lateral legs.

This produces an electrical response only to lateral movement of the cantilever.

Weighing in at 10.7 grams, this is a heavier than average cartridge, and the counterweights of both the Hadcock 242 Cryo on the Sondek, and the Clearaudio Carbon Satisfy on the Master Solution were both wound back to nearly the edges of the stubs to set the tracking weight at 2.5g. Alignment was easy with the clearly visible cantilever and the straight sides of the bodywork.

Running in seemed to take less time than I am used to with Ortofon cartridges. After only ten hours the sound seemed to stabilise, and has altered little in the many hours of listening since. To put the benefits of using a dedicated mono cartridge into perspective I borrowed a Cadenza Red (also £795) from distributors Henley Designs and compared the same records through both cartridges on both decks, using the mono switches on both the Luxman E-200 and Leema Acoustics Agena phono stages when playing the Red (this is not required with the Mono).

**SOUND QUALITY**

Whilst the Red gave a good account of itself, I found the sound a little insubstantial when compared to the Mono. Surface noise control was pretty good, but there were still odd pops, bangs and crackles that

accompanied the music. Changing to the Mono, and the surface noise simply didn't exist unless the record was very dirty and/or beaten up. What I got instead was a sound that was solid, dynamic and spacious.

Playing a cleaned 1953 Decca recording of Sargent conducting the LSO through Elgar's 'Enigma Variations' through the Mono, and I forgot all about stereo placement and imagery. The orchestra occupied most of the space between the speakers and the soundstage seemed to reach back through the wall and halfway down the garden. Tonal qualities of the instruments

were nicely textured and displayed, and seemed to have an immediacy and a tactile quality that the Red just could not get near.

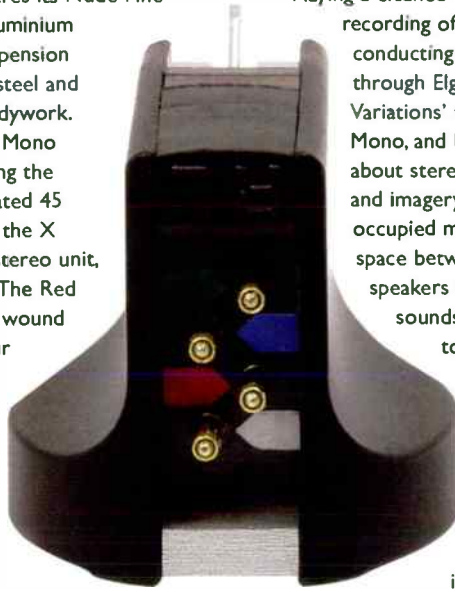
Having well and truly ransacked my nineteen fifties and sixties singles collection as well as LPs ranging from classical through jazz to sixties pop, I found the Mono seemed unperturbed by musical genre, and tracked virtually perfectly through

the most worn and damaged records that I could find. Good condition discs were replayed with a freshness and insight that had me questioning whether stereo was actually an improvement, or merely a sonic distraction away from the music!

I think this may partly be due to the snappier and more incisive sense of timing that the Mono displayed over the Red when playing rhythmic music. A first pressing of the Beatles 'Please Please Me', although the roughest condition record in my collection, still played with an excitement and zest that seemed to capture the energy of the twelve hour recording session at Abbey Road Studios that netted all fourteen tracks. Given the condition of the record it was by no means crackle-free, but the Mono dug deep enough into the groove to bypass most of the disturbance, and I could almost feel the shredded state of John Lennon's vocal chords on the last track, 'Twist and Shout'.

**CONCLUSION**

If you have many monophonic records in your collection, then a dedicated mono cartridge is most *definitely* the best way to play them. The results are tightly timed, awash with musical detail and colour, and generally undisturbed by sonic nasties. All I need now is a 78 version, and I, for one, will be in sonic heaven!



**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Lowish compliance gives the Cadenza Mono more in-band lift at very low frequencies our analysis shows, amounting to +3dB at 20Hz. Raised subsonic output will give it a weighty sound, exacerbated by an interesting upper midband roll off – unusual for a moving coil cartridge because they do not suffer generator loss of an MM. All the same, Ortofon have deliberately engineered this in, because the roll off is greater than all other models, including the stereo Cadenza Black. On inner grooves tracing losses magnify the effect, meaning the Cadenza Mono will sound obviously warm in balance and peak free in its treble.

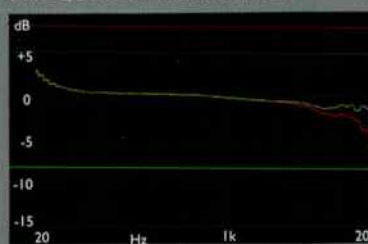
There are two signal coils, not one, so a mono button is not needed on the amplifier, and they give an in-phase output with lateral signals, but no output from vertical modulation. Tracking was very good, although top torture tracks were not cleared without mistracking. The cartridge tracked vertical modulation well so stereo records can be played and they will not upset it; there is plenty of vertical compliance.

Output was 0.45mV at 5cms/sec rms; not high but not low either.

The Cadenza Mono will have a distinctively warm and easy sound but it will also come over as smooth and cohesive. It measures well and will give excellent mono. NK

Tracking force	2.5gms
Weight	10.7gms
Vertical tracking angle	20degrees
Frequency response	30Hz - 18kHz
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	65µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	20cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	1%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	0.45mV

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



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"The PD-1 DAC is a typically quirky product from this Norwegian company; the front panel sports an interesting user interface with lots of bright blue LEDs. One long bar denotes the volume level, and there's another row of LEDs showing the source. These are controlled by a touch sensitive panel to the right. I was impressed by the rear panel, which has those all-important balanced XLR outputs. There also two coaxial inputs, one TOSLINK and a USB. Plus there's a connection for a small aerial, which

brings me to the optional partnering EMS-1 RF music streamer. You screw the aerial in and hook it up via a USB cable from your computer and then select it as your music output device in your computer's control panel. This done, the PD-1 and EMS-1 will 'sync' up with one another automatically. The DAC is an upsampling type; it goes up to 24bit, 192kHz via S/PDIF, but 16/48 is your lot via the USB input and also the RF link. The streaming facility worked well, with no glitches, but the bulk of my serious listening was done via the digital output of a high end CD player.

The first thing this DAC did was to improve on the sound of a £5,000 Luxman D-05 CD player. Mark Ronson's 'Bang Bang Bang' showed it to have a tonal balance on the

warm side of neutral, not exactly euphonic but certainly less forensic than the Japanese CD player; think camomile and honey, as opposed to lemon and lime. Bass was fuller, richer and more tangible, yet it started and stopped almost as quickly as the taut, tight Lux. The midband was more expansive... there was more room to roam inside the recorded acoustic. Rush's 'Afterimage' showed the best side of the Electrocompaniet; it proved smooth enough to make things listenable, and added a decently weighty bass and some lovely hi hat cymbal work to give a wider range rock sound that's closer to the vinyl version. This quintessentially Electrocompaniet product sounds great for the money, and works fine too. As such, I feel it will win a great many friends."

For your chance to win this great digital source, just answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard only by 30th April 2011 to:

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**QUESTIONS**

**[1] From which country does Electrocompaniet come?**  
 [a] Norway  
 [b] Denmark  
 [c] Sweden  
 [d] Finland

**[2] What colour LEDs does it use?**  
 [a] blue  
 [b] amber  
 [c] green  
 [d] red

**[3] What resolution does the DAC work up to?**  
 [a] 24/192  
 [b] 24/96  
 [c] 16/48  
 [d] 12/32

**[4] DP compared its tonality to which tea?**  
 [a] camomile & honey  
 [b] echinacea & raspberry  
 [c] Earl Grey  
 [d] builders'

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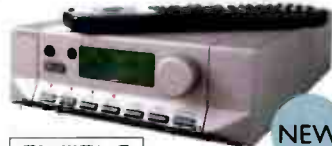
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Tim Jarman encounters Yamaha's unusually coloured MCR-040 mini system...

# Blue Beat

**Y**amaha's MCR-040 system is a neat way to provide a range of sound sources in situations where space is at a premium. The package includes loudspeakers, the NS-BP80, which are interesting for having a small frontal area but are as deep as the main CRX-040 unit. Each speaker contains a single 10cm driver and the rear of each cabinet has a hole that leads to a long tube, forming a reflex port.

Yamaha's 'Active Servo Technology' is used, where the amplifier has negative output impedance. Conventional amplifiers have finite output impedance which can be reduced to near zero by the application of negative feedback. More negative feedback will get you closer to zero but to go beyond it (and therefore achieve negative output impedance) requires the careful use of positive feedback, a technique that is seldom used as it tends to lead to instability.

More mundane is the CD player, iPod dock, FM and DAB tuners and two auxiliary inputs, one a 3.5mm line level analogue and the other USB. The only thing missing is an RCA line level output so you can't easily use the MCR-040 with a larger

amplifier or to record from.

The unit comes in a variety of colours and finish is decent, but sadly the main control knob is large, plastic and fluted around its circumference, making it look like the original one had been lost and that the one now present is all the electronics shop had! Come on Yamaha, put some aluminium bar in the lathe and turn up something a bit better! The other controls look like black plastic Smarties and work well, if only there were more of them. The unit can be switched on and off, the source selected, the CD drawer operated and the disc started and paused but that's your lot. If you want to do simple things like changing the CD track or the radio station then you'll need the remote control, which is not a thing of beauty either...

## SOUND QUALITY

Starting with the CD, the Yamaha has a sound that is common to many of today's compact units. Bass sounds strong given the size of the enclosures and I suspected that it may have been given an electronic boost, trying the NS-BP80s with a larger and more conventional system seemed to confirm this as the bass then took a back seat and

the midrange came to the fore. The lower treble also seems to have been lifted and as a result it squawks away quite pleasingly but as ever with no tweeters the music is never free to truly sparkle. It's well up to current standards for its category, but Yamaha could have easily achieved so much more with a couple of extra drivers. Listening through headphones confirmed that the CD player itself is neutral in character and well behaved; it's the highlight of the whole system.

Turning to the radio (which has a sturdy but curiously permanently attached 'throw out' antenna for both FM and DAB) a decent amount of sensitivity was noted on both bands. DAB was mercifully largely free of the dreaded 'bubbling mud' sound but still gave a somewhat confused and compressed sound with music that should have contained any amount of detail. FM performance was better, but not special. The inclusion of a timer facility really adds to the usefulness of the radio, which can be used in both alarm and sleep modes if you so wish.

Overall, this unit is a decent step towards proper hi-fi for those with small spaces. It is neatly laid out and better engineered than many rivals.

## VERDICT ●●●●£

Neat small system with decent sonics, fine build and an exotic choice of colours.

**YAMAHA MCR-040** £199  
**Yamaha Electronics UK Ltd.**  
 ☎ +44(0)1923 233166  
[www.yamaha-uk.com](http://www.yamaha-uk.com)

## FOR

- tidy CD sound
- sensitive tuner
- loudspeakers included

## AGAINST

- nothing at the price

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ARCAM A38 integrated amplifier, 140w/ch, extensive facilities, £850 (£1500 new). would exchange for Arcam Solo Neo. Q-Acoustics 1050i floorstanding speakers £140. Russ Andrews Picture Frame FM aerial plus cable £35. Tel: 023 8073 8935

LECTOR CDP o6t valve c d player, very good condition, boxed etc £550. ph 01638668299 (Suffolk)

QUAD 303 amplifier, 22 pre-amp also Leak Point 1 amplifier, Varislope 2 pre-amp, Troughline FM tuner - condition unknown - Loft clearance. Suitable for DIY/spares. Any offers Tel: John 01923 775 552

ROKSAN RADIUS 5 turntable for sale. Clear acrylic version with Origin Live Rega RB600 arm. Excellent condition. Also with Goldring GX1022 cartridge. Lovely deck. £850. Call Andy 01484 427 426 (West Yorkshire)

AUDIOLAB PREAMP & poweramp. UK built. Grey. £275 pair. Audiolab poweramp. Black. UK built. £240. Castle Howards SE2, rosewood. Very good condition. £525. Rega RB300, modded, £175. Counterpoint SA12 poweramp, vgc, £425. Tel: 01255 421 589

HELIOS STARGATE CD player. French, gloss black, high end top loader from the 90's. Offers around £350 if interested. Tel: Steve on 020 8857 5923 (S.E. London)

SONY XA333ES SACD player in black. Boxed with manual and remote. Can demo. Tel: £275. Tel: 01394 274 350

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RUSS ANDREWS 4vs speaker cable 4.5mtr stripped ends £90.00 1m Crystal "cu" interconnect 14db. £130.00 1m PBJ 11db £55.00 1/2m Silver Streak £100.00. including postage UK. 07938019165 evenings

RRR FS100 speakers for sale. A rare opportunity to own these highly reviewed speakers. Good condition and massive sound! £750.00. Call John on 07736638686. Kent

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# NEXT MONTH



June's magazine will keep you glued to your patio chair with our round-up of all that's good in the audiophile garden. We have beautiful loudspeakers from German Physiks and Pearl Audio for example, plus punchy power via Musical Fidelity's M6 500. Vinyl fans will enjoy our Timestep Technics SL1200 review, plus Clearaudio's Concept MC, while computer audiophiles will like Olive's 4HD digital music player [pictured]. Here's some of what we hope to have for you:

MUSICAL FIDELITY M6 500 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER  
BRICASTI M1 DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTOR  
GERMAN PHYSIKS LIMITED 11 LOUDSPEAKERS  
PEARL AUDIO BALLARINI 401 LOUDSPEAKERS  
ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE BARZETTI TURNTABLE  
OLDE WORLDE: LEAK 2075 LOUDSPEAKERS  
WHEST AUDIO PS30.RDT SE PHONO STAGE  
TIMESTEP TECHNICS SL1200 TURNTABLE  
CLEARAUDIO CONCEPT MC CARTRIDGE  
ROTH AUDIO OLI50 LOUDSPEAKERS  
MARANTZ UD5005 BLU-RAY PLAYER  
JBL STUDIO 130 LOUDSPEAKERS  
MISSION MX-2 LOUDSPEAKERS  
OLIVE 4HD DIGITAL PLAYER  
CAYIN 105i TUNER

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# ART PEPPER

## THE COMPLETE ART PEPPER AT RONNIE SCOTT'S 1980 PURE PLEASURE

"this box set shows Pepper at his best..."

**T**his is the story of, in the words of Pure Pleasure Records MD, Tony Hickmott, "an unearthed gem, a nugget." However, it is also the story of an audiophile company. Pure Pleasure is representative of a breed of independent record outfits that goes that bit further than the majors when tackling a reissue.

The story begins when Hickmott was reminded of two albums featuring the US jazz alto sax player Art Pepper, originally released via the now defunct jazz label Mole Jazz, of his stint at the London club, Ronnie Scott's, in 1980. Called 'True Blues' and 'Blues For The Fisherman', Hickmott believed that both deserved the reissue treatment because, "although they were issued on CDs by the same record label a little later, they hadn't been available on vinyl since their first release in 1980".

Like any good audiophile outfit, Hickmott went in search of the original masters. "I made contact with Graham Griffiths, one of the original partners of Mole Jazz, to enquire about the original masters. He pointed me in the direction of Laurie Pepper, Art's widow, based in the USA. She declared that she didn't have the masters for the original two albums. So, I did a bit of searching over here and found Peter Bould's details, the guy who did the original recordings."

When Pepper arrived in the UK in 1980, he completed a two week stint at Ronnie Scott's and Bould recorded two full nights of Pepper's work. The Mole Jazz albums were taken from the tapes. Hickmott

contact Bould's family but no masters could be sourced. Bould's wife redirected Hickmott back to Pepper's widow for more information. And this is where things got interesting because, although Laurie Pepper did not have the original masters for the two Mole Jazz albums, she did have the original masters for those two full days of original gig recordings.

"Now I had a problem," said Hickmott. "There was nothing on these twelve reels that would identify which elements were utilised within the original two vinyl albums. I had no idea what parts of these reels constituted the Mole Jazz releases. They were in there somewhere – but where? I was also concerned about the current condition of the tapes. Laurie wasn't in a position to play them and I had no access to find out."

Armed with as much information as he could muster, he decided to take a risk, putting up the cash to have the whole twelve reels of gig tape examined by a trusted US-based studio. Fortunately, the studio declared that the tapes were in good condition, apart from a couple of minor audio drop-outs.

Hickmott had taped copies created along with digital archive backups and decided that, "As I couldn't recreate the two albums exactly, the thought came to me about putting the entire two nights on to record. It was a gamble."

The tapes were then taken to Hickmott's regular mastering engineer, Ray Staff, amazingly enough the mastering engineer for the

original Mole Jazz releases and obviously familiar with the music. Each reel was edited down but the only deletions included extended applause and one or two meandering chats between the music. "We retained a lot of talking but not the irrelevant stuff. The twelve tapes edited down to seven LPs while retaining the original order of play over each evening."

I did wonder if Hickmott had ever been tempted to reduce the size of the final box set (a costly enterprise for any record label) by squeezing more music onto each vinyl side, and thus reducing the cost and size of the box set down to, say, five LPs?

"Oh, no!" he cried in horror, "it would have turned into a K-Tel release if I had! You can't do things like that. It was to be approached in exactly the same manner as our past releases, to achieve the best sound quality."

Hickmott confirmed that the set features the music played in consecutive order with no spliced performances spread over different sides. Each performance starts and stops on a single LP side. If run-overs had occurred, Hickmott confirmed that he would have added more vinyl to compensate – can you imagine a major label saying that?

The box set, including seventeen unreleased performances, shows Pepper at his best. Like an ageing Johnny Cash, Pepper seemed to decant his life's experiences into these shows. This is pure Pepper from Pure Pleasure. **PR**

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