

# HI-FI WORLD

AUGUST 2011

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music server

**EXCLUSIVE!**



**ADVANCE ACOUSTIC MAP306**  
integrated amplifier

**EXCLUSIVE!**



**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO NP30**  
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- > ORIGIN LIVE ONYX tonearm **EXCLUSIVE!**
- > T.A.C. V-60 TUBE amplifier **EXCLUSIVE!**

AUGUST 2011



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

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THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

'ILLUMINATES MUSIC LIKE VERY  
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# welcome

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## verdicts

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

## ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE

Go to our website [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk) to buy an electronic version of this magazine, individual issues, back issues or a subscription.



It's not every month that we give five pages to a single product review, but sometimes, when we feel something really warrants it, that's precisely what happens...

On p12, you'll find the brand new Audiolab 8200CDQ CD player/DAC/preamp – a £950 product that forms the heart of a digital system. Some other silver disc spinners have this functionality, too but not at this price – and it's the performance that makes it special. A wealth of engineering knowledge

has gone into it, and frankly it shows!

It's not the only especially interesting product we've got for you this month, either. Meridian's Sooloos Control 15 is the Huntingdon high end specialist's latest hard disk-based digital music server, and offers true 24/96 hi res playback and a user-interface that is second to absolutely none in the hi-fi world. See it on p46.

T.A.C.'s V-60 valve integrated amplifier is a curious confection of valves and transistors; it uses the latter to make the former work in a more modern way. It has a distinctive sound that's down to its unusual approach; read all about it on p20. AMR's AM-777 integrated (p50) is another tube/transistor hybrid, this time more straightforwardly using glass bottles in its preamp section and solid-state in the power amp; we think it's a great package.

Rega Planar turntable owners can now send their decks off to Inspire Hi-Fi, and for around £320 it will come back with the mother of all facelifts; it gets a chunky new real wood plinth, acrylic platter and mat! Read all about the Quest mods package on p100.

With their lovely ribbon tweeters Mowgan Audio's huge Etain loudspeakers (p80) aren't your run of the mill floorstanding loudspeakers either, whilst Bricasti's M1 DAC (p66) is that rarest of birds – a studio DAC that is if anything euphonic and romantic in its presentation. And don't forget the unusual Cambridge Audio NP30 (p24), which is a serious grown up network music player for the price of a cheap imitation.

All in all, August's Hi-Fi World is packed with some really great bits of kit, each of which stands out from the crowd in its own special way. Enjoy!

**David Price, editor**

## testing (see [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk) for full explanations of all our tests)

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.



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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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ORION



VISION



SIGMAS



TITAN



news@hi-fiworld.co.uk

# news

## LOOK SHARP

KEF has unveiled its most ambitious production loudspeaker to date, the Blade, marking fifty years of innovation, the company says. The new Blade is derived from the KEF Concept Blade, but there are several significant upgrades from the concept design. Blade is expected to be available from KEF retailers from July/August, priced at £20,000. At its heart is its Single Apparent Source technology, said to be a perfect extension of the new, fully pistonic KEF Uni-Q MF/HF array, which brings the bass drivers into the picture for the first time. Together they combine to form a seamless point source driver array handling the entire frequency range. Four new 9" bass drivers deliver the KEF Blade's distortion-free low frequency response. They are side firing so their acoustic centre coincides with the all-new Uni-Q midrange driver and tweeter, the result being "that the entire frequency range is radiated from one point in space", KEF says. It is impossible to determine where one driver stops working and the next begins, they claim. All this is housed in a rigid and heavy cabinet made from polished glass reinforced composite. The parabolic curvature of the enclosure increases cabinet rigidity even further and the drivers are fully decoupled, meaning that sound is only generated from driver movement and not from the cabinet. Standard finishes are gloss white or gloss black, while custom colours comprise Garnet, Sapphire, Grigio, Racing Red, Racing Blue, Pale Gold, Orange Sorbet, Graphite, Stardust, Lemon Sorbet, Lime Sorbet or Snow White. For more details, click on [www.kef.com](http://www.kef.com).



## TOTAL ECLIPSE

Aesthetix's Io Eclipse is rather immodestly described as "the world's best phono stage" no less! It is said to be an all-valve phono stage suitable for the most demanding cartridges, including low-output moving coils. "No expense is spared to achieve the highest audio performance possible", the company says, which explains its £14,000 price! The casework is crafted from constrained-layer damped panels machined from aluminum billet and sits upon four Harmonic Resolutions Systems' Nimbus Couplers specially made for Aesthetix. The bulk of the internal changes revolve around the new StealthCap from Peter Moncrief. Each individual StealthCap is painstakingly handcrafted using expensive exotic

materials to "dramatically reduce corrupting signal reflections in the capacitor plate, just as stealth technology in aircraft reduces radar signal reflections", the company says. The zero global feedback design offers 80dB maximum gain, selectable loading from 10Ω to 47kΩ and all valve amplification and output using a total of sixteen valves, eight of which populate the valve regulated power supply. Two sets of XLR and two sets of RCA outputs per channel are available, and there's the option of a "unique" mechanically switched discrete resistor volume control with forty six positions using Roederstein resistors, one for each channel. Vital statistics are 445x470x140mm and 16.8kg. For more details call Audio Reference (UK) Ltd. on +44 (0)1252 702705 or click on [www.audioreference.co.uk](http://www.audioreference.co.uk).

## AIR TIME

Marantz has two new budget AV receivers in the £529 NR1602 and the £349 NR1402.

"Both combine Marantz's legendary love for a musical sound and feature-counts ready for today's hottest home cinema technologies", the company says. The 7.1 channel NR1602 builds on last year's successful NR1601, and has 350W of discrete amplification. On the video side, there are four HDMI 1.4 inputs, while all analogue video signals are converted to HDMI level including I/P conversion. The onboard Ethernet port allows for audio streaming from home networks or subscription-based web services, and gives access to over 14,000 Internet radio stations worldwide. Marantz's NR1602 has AirPlay built-in to unleash the music libraries stored on your 'iDevice' to the AV Receiver. Thanks to the network connection, the AV receiver can easily be controlled through the free Marantz Wizz App for Apple iDevices. Add a front USB input with digital iPod/iPhone playback, Audyssey MultEQ room calibration. The NR1402 is a slimmed down 5.1 channel version without its bigger brother's network functionality. For more information, click on [www.marantz.co.uk](http://www.marantz.co.uk).



## DEBUT-ANTE

Pro-Ject Audio Systems has heated up the budget turntable market with the launch of their Debut S/E3. Said to "take all the impressive specifications of the current model, and improve on them even further", it uses a traditional rectangular plinth design which gets a high-quality Piano Black coat, as found on many of Pro-Ject's higher-end players. It sports a new 12" platter, compared to the standard 10" on the original Debut III, plus an improved tonearm featuring better bearings and an upgraded motor. A new suspension system is fitted, which decouples the motor from the plinth to reduce the transmission of unnecessary resonance, the company says. Similarly, the use of a new rounded belt with a smaller form factor allows for minimal contact area between the motor and the sub-platter. Finally, the Debut S/E3 employs a junction box on its underside, allowing users to upgrade their turntable interconnects, to suit their preferences. The new deck comes fitted with an Ortofon Super OM10 cartridge, and costs £250. For details, call +44(0)1235 511 or click on [www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk).

## TEN FORTY FIVE

45 Central is a ten-strong range of aluminium 45 adapters specially designed in the UK for playing 7-inch singles. They're superbly made from solid aluminium and finished to a very high standard we can confirm, with prices from £7.45 each plus delivery. "They provide DJs and vinyl connoisseurs greater sound performance and easier way to play their records", the company says. For more details, see [www.45central.co.uk](http://www.45central.co.uk). For more details, call +44 (0)7813 141606 or click on <http://45central.co.uk>.



## CANNED FEAT

Denon's new DN-HP500 are the company's most affordable closed back headphones, designed primarily for the DJ market. The £65 cans are said to produce "impeccably clean and vibrant audio", from their 40mm Neodymium Magnet drivers which give a claimed frequency response of 10Hz-28kHz. Sensitivity is 103dB and maximum input power is 1,300mW. For more details, click on [www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk).



## RESEARCH MACHINE

Audio Research have a new high end tube phono stage in the shape of the PH8. It is said to benefit from a number of circuit and parts improvements derived from the award-winning REF Phono 2. Rather than using the four 6922s of its predecessor, the PH8 uses two

6H30 tubes along with special low-noise FETs; vacuum tube regulation incorporates a 6550 and a 6H30, as featured in the REF Phono 2 and REF5. Capacitors are all the same types as those used in the REF Phono 2, including the same coupling caps, and Teflon caps used in both the RIAA stage and as bypass caps. There is also a new R-core transformer. Bandwidth is said to be "extraordinary", with -3dB points below 0.3dB and above 400kHz. Distortion is "vanishingly low", and gain is a healthy 58dB, allowing the PH8 to be used with low output moving coil cartridges and an appropriate line stage. The PH8 sports silver handles and small aluminum buttons under the display; black front panels and black handles are also available. On the rear panel there is one set of single-ended inputs and one set of single-ended outputs, a ground post, plus a removable 15A IEC cord. Its vacuum-fluorescent display that has eight selectable brightness levels, can be turned off or set to show input selection or tube hours. Vital statistics are 470x132x305mm and 6.8kg. For more information, click on [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com).





## 'SONY ME

Sony has a new speaker dock said to "let you enjoy music and videos from your Apple iPod or iPhone with room-filling, high quality sound". The RDP-X60iP is compatible with iPod/iPhones and is said to be "refreshingly easy to use". It comes supplied with a handy remote, allowing you to control the menu functions of your iPod/iPhone without getting up from the comfort of your chair. This wireless speaker dock with Bluetooth streaming boasts 2x20W output power. For details see [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk).



## MAD TWEAK

The Copulare Coral Lifter is constructed with porous ceramic aluminium composite to dissipate energy and minimise vibration transfer. The premium priced isolation pod (£300 for a set of 3) is claimed to dramatically improve the sound quality of hi-fi components, and is said to be particularly effective when under turntables.

For more details contact My Audio

Design ([www.madengland.com](http://www.madengland.com), tel: +44 (0)208 1239789).



## NAIM THAT TUNE

A new internet radio feature will be added to Naim's range of network and all-in-one audio players. Naim's Choice adds an extra menu item to the iRadio options. It highlights and gives easy access to internet radio stations that Naim consider to be of particular musical and/or sound quality interest or ones that are not available using the conventional 5\* V Tuner full service. An example of this at launch is the Radio Paradise 320kbps AAC stream, which is exclusively available to Naim NDX, UnitiQute and NaimUniti owners. Over the years Naim has developed a great relationship with Radio Paradise and the idea of an exclusive higher quality stream came from Managing Director Paul Stephenson. When the idea was proposed to Radio Paradise owners, Bill and Rebecca Goldsmith, they were delighted to assist. Radio Paradise prides itself on the sound quality of its output as well as the eclectic choice of music carefully selected and mixed by two human beings. Another featured radio stream is AVRO Klassiek from the Netherlands, which outputs classical music in a 320kbps MP3 stream. BBC Radio 3 HD's 320kbps AAC stream and Radio 4's 128kbps AAC stream have been included for Naim's UK owners. Unfortunately these higher quality streams are unavailable outside of the UK. Naim's Choice will be changed and added to as more fine quality internet radio stations start up or are located. Suggestions can be posted on the Naim Forum. As there are roughly 17,000 internet radio stations available on the Naim streamers it may take a while to evaluate. For more information, click on [www.naimaudio.com](http://www.naimaudio.com).

## NEAT AND TIDY

Neat Acoustics has launched a new floorstanding loudspeaker based on the Ultimatum XLS model. The XLi will be available in July at a cost of around £6,000 per pair, and is described as a new floorstanding loudspeaker of compact proportions, engineered to deliver greater performance than the Ultimatum XLS by using a floorstanding cabinet to deliver separate volumes for mass loading and crossover isolation. The mid/bass drivers in the XLi are mounted isobarically and combine with a Sonomex domed XL high-frequency unit, plus two EMIT type supertweeters said to extend to 40kHz. The lower part of the XLi cabinet is designed to allow it to be mass loaded for extra stability and to ensure the centre of gravity is ideally placed. The XLi cabinet is constructed from slow-growing birch ply chosen as it is extremely consistent and has the ideal resonance behaviour, Neat says.

The front baffle is from precision routed controlled-density fibreboard coupled to the front of the cabinet by a polyethylene membrane. This makes an extremely inert platform for the mid/bass and high frequency drivers, it's said. The lower cabinet areas are also extensively braced to ensure that they are acoustically quiet. The crossover is a minimalist four-element type (plus damping and attenuating resistors) employing precisely toleranced low-loss air-cored inductors and high tolerance polypropylene film and foil capacitors. The crossover enjoys the isolation of a separate and isolated cabinet section below the bass driver cabinet. Vital statistics are 1,000x220x370mm and 33kg apiece. For more details, call +44 (0) 1833 631021 or click on [www.neat.co.uk](http://www.neat.co.uk).



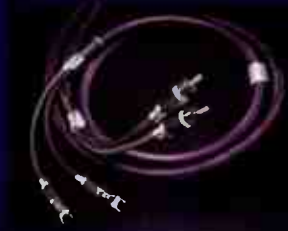
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# ADL

ALPHA DESIGN LABS

## Introducing Alpha Design Labs

Furutech is justifiably proud of its reputation for engineering, build quality and performance, and has won the loyal support of audio enthusiasts worldwide for their finely made and beautiful sounding cables and audio accessories. Now Furutech greatly expands its reach with a new entry-level line called ADL (Alpha Design Labs). ADL was created by Furutech to imbue its Pure Transmission Technology into carefully engineered innovative designs that everyone can afford. ADL components and cables are made with the same dedication to total resonance control and refinement as all of Furutech's many cables and accessories.

## ADL GT40 USB DAC with Phono stage !



The GT40 records vinyl and other analog sources at 16/44.1 or 24/96 using its bidirectional USB connection and switchable Line, Phono MM/MC analog inputs, plus it features L/R analog outputs, a separate headphone amplifier, gold-plated Teflon-insulated RCA jacks in a high-quality aluminum chassis with a beautifully machined volume knob. CD Redbook 16/44.1 and especially 24/96 files reveal a vivid, captivating sound unheard of at this price.



ALPHA Line - Plus

ALPHA Line - 1

ALPHA Line - 2



Formula 2 USB cable

Alpha design Labs Tokyo Japan

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## Sound Foundations

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## DOWN TIME

Rothwell attenuators [pictured right] are described as "the highest quality, lowest-loss way to reduce the overall gain of a hi-fi system". They're claimed to eradicate problems such as overload distortion in preamps caused by overly 'hot' outputs from CD players and channel balance problems caused by the volume control having to be set too low. They're available in RCA (£39) or XLR (£69) versions. Rothwell says they're designed for situations where the volume of a system is "plenty loud enough with the volume control set to the 9 o'clock position, but too loud with the volume control at 10 o'clock, and fine control at low levels is impossible". This may seem like nothing more than a minor irritation, the company says, "but in truth the performance of the system is being compromised". Although potentiometers work reasonably well over most of their operating range, they are notoriously problematic at extreme settings, they claim. The most obvious problem is channel imbalance - one channel will fade out (or fade in) quicker than the other, causing the stereo image to shift to one side - but on a more subtle level, the music may sound veiled and indistinct with the volume control turned down to the point where it is nearly off. This excess gain forces you to use the volume control over a limited portion of its travel.

Rothwell In-Line Attenuators, they claim, are the answer; they plug into any input sockets and reduce signal levels by 10dB. They can be used with integrated amps or pre/power amps, and are compatible with equipment over the entire price spectrum, from budget to high end. When used with integrated amps (simply plug them into any input sockets, then plug the source component into the attenuators) the volume control will be two or three 'hours' further round its range than it was before, giving better control at low levels and operating well away from the end stops. When used with pre/power amps they can improve the signal-to-noise ratio by 10dB, pushing the noise floor down enough to create "an inky black silent background from which the music can emerge with better resolved fine detail and transparency". This applies to even very high-end and very expensive pre/power amps.

The Rothwell MC1 Moving Coil Step-Up Transformer [pictured below] is a moving coil step-up transformer which will raise the output of moving coil phono cartridges to the level of moving magnet cartridges so that the signal can be fed into a moving magnet

phono stage preamp. This is the perfect solution for owners of low output MC cartridges and valve preamps (which are often MM only), the company says. They have been producing MC step-up transformers since 1989 and claim to have extensive experience and expertise. The sub-£300 MC1 has a high quality permalloy core and carefully designed windings to give a wide bandwidth with good bass extension, and thorough screening is provided by mu-metal cans to keep external magnetic fields down to the absolute minimum. Careful loading of the secondary windings - optimised for a subsequent MM phono stage - keeps transients beautifully clean for a detailed and revealing sonic performance. It is compatible with low output cartridges in the range 0.3mV - 0.6mV and has a voltage gain of 22dB - good for most of today's audiophile cartridges such as those from Lyra, Koetsu, Clearaudio, Grado, Van Den Hul, etc. For more information, click on [www.giantkillercables.com](http://www.giantkillercables.com).



## SUN TIME

Music lovers out and about this summer might like to know about Etón's new £100 Raptor solar-powered radio; it won't need batteries and can even charge your mobile phone. It also includes a handy LED torch, altimeter, barometer, compass, alarm clock and even a bottle opener. At just 320g it is compact and sports a rugged rubberised plastic body which is rated 'IPX4 splashproof', which means it withstands a direct, constant shower for five minutes. An aluminium carabiner clip on the top means you can hang it from a rucksack

or guy rope to soak up the sunshine and generate eco-friendly free energy. Hidden behind a protective rubber flap you'll find a USB output for charging gadgets including mobile phones, plus a Mini USB power input, so you can charge the Etón Raptor's lithium ion battery from the mains. There's also a headphone socket and an audio input, so you can play music from iPod or mobile phone as well as radio. For details click on [www.nevadaradio.co.uk](http://www.nevadaradio.co.uk) or call +44 (0)23 92 313090.



## CIPHER SPACE

Krell's new Cipher £12,000 SACD/CD player is said to "extend the company's elegant industrial design whilst advancing the state of the art in SACD/CD reproduction". It features an advanced disc utilising composite mounts to minimise vibration-induced errors. Special sound-dampening material is strategically placed inside the unit to reduce mechanical resonances even further. Krell custom disc drive firmware enhances reading accuracy, drive mechanics and operational parameters. As an ultimate final step, the separate SACD and CD laser heads are individually calibrated by hand for the precise output levels required for reference quality SACD and CD playback, the company says. All signals are fed into a custom designed Krell anti-jitter module that "reduces jitter to a virtually immeasurable level". From there, signals are fed to a 24bit/192kHz digital filter and then to a pair of balanced 24bit/192kHz digital-to-analogue converters (DACs). The Cipher uses one DAC per channel and feeds the native balanced current output directly to Krell Current Mode circuitry. Evolution CAST and balanced connections are included for optimal stereo playback. Multichannel SACD playback is also supported. Independent power supplies for the digital and analogue sections maintain signal isolation between these critical circuit areas. For details, see [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com).



# Pre-position

**David Price finds Audiolab's new 8200CDQ CD player/DAC/preamp fits in very nicely with his hi-fi lifestyle, thank you very much...**

**T**here are few products that I've waited for longer than this. As hi-fi launches go, it began to lapse into 'Kate Bush new album syndrome' – by which I mean it was rumoured for years, then announced, then shown to select members of the press, and then finally... *nothing*. Then another very long wait. But at last, as if by magic, the Audiolab 8200CDQ arrived at World Towers, a fading distant memory made real at last!

It was worse because I'd actually heard one about a year ago; it was precisely this that had me holding my breath right throughout last winter and this spring. Its designer John Westlake had blasted over from his Eastern European home in his S-Class AMG Merc, complete with his son who'd come along for the ride, to demo an 8200CDQ to me in my own house. It was when we put it up against a £12,000 dCS DAC, and the £950 Audiolab had by no means disgraced itself, that the penny began to drop that

this was a special digital product.

I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised. I've been well aware of Mr Westlake's CV and how handy he is with a piece of veroboard and a few silicon chips for many years now. One of the first things I reviewed for *Hi-Fi World* back in 1994 was the Pink Triangle Da Capo DAC, and this prompted me to – when my brother asked me for a budget CD player tip – recommend the purchase of a Cambridge Audio CD4SE. He still has that mid nineties silver disc spinner, and it still sounds superb; not surprising considering it was another box of bits first put together by John... In both cases, we had curiously, oddly, un-CD-like machines making music in a way that their price rivals frankly couldn't. The interesting thing to me was they didn't sound 'more analogue', they just sounded 'less digital' – taking them into a wonderful 'middle world' where music really resides.

So, here we are with the 8200CDQ, which is a CD player, digital preamp (i.e. DAC with input switching) and analogue preamp rolled into one. It's basically the

8200CD on steroids, and indeed John Westlake says the additional time spent on getting the CDQ right after the launch of the CD has made it all the more desirable. I don't know about that, but I can certainly testify to whoever's interested that it was a lot of time!

As well as being a CD player, the 8200CDQ has a choice of two preamplifier modes; digital or analogue. In digital mode you can switch between two optical (24/96), two coaxial (24/192) and one USB (24/96) inputs (or of course the inbuilt CD player) and control the volume digitally via the DAC. In analogue mode there are an additional three line-level analogue inputs.

The preamplifier section is fully balanced and all analogue input signals are converted to balanced form, helping to reduce distortion and noise. There's also a direct-coupled and discrete Class A headphone amplifier, accessible via a socket on the front panel. In both digital and analogue preamp modes, the output level can be increased to levels above 0dB to give real gain.







The player is notable for using the American ESS Technology Sabre DAC, a device which came out about three years ago but which has appeared in very few hi-fi products to date because – say Audiolab – it is too expensive. It's very sophisticated, with 256 individual DACs per channel within the chip, to increase inherent conversion resolution, while also reducing static conversion errors. The conversion process within the Audiolab CDQ results in the 512 DAC elements each operating at 84.672MHz, which makes for a conversion process that's switching 3,840 times faster than the typical audio upper bandwidth of 22kHz, thus keeping it well away from the human ear. As per Naim's DAC, Audiolab's CDQ operates either in integer Oversampling or Upsampling mode, depending on the input sample rate. All digital word lengths are extended to 32bits for internal processing, and it will accept up to 24/96 when working in DAC mode.

The 8200CDQ features in-house Audiolab developed, user selectable digital filters for optimal listening and measurement modes – in addition to the more conventional types for easy comparison – allowing the user to tune the CD/Q performance to their preference depending on system and musical tastes. They include Optimal Time Domain NOS (preferable for audio performance, slow in-band roll off), Optimal Time Domain ZS (preferable for audio performance, no in-band roll off), Optimal Frequency Domain (Measurement Mode filter), Standard Fast roll off and Standard Slow roll off.

In addition to the standard

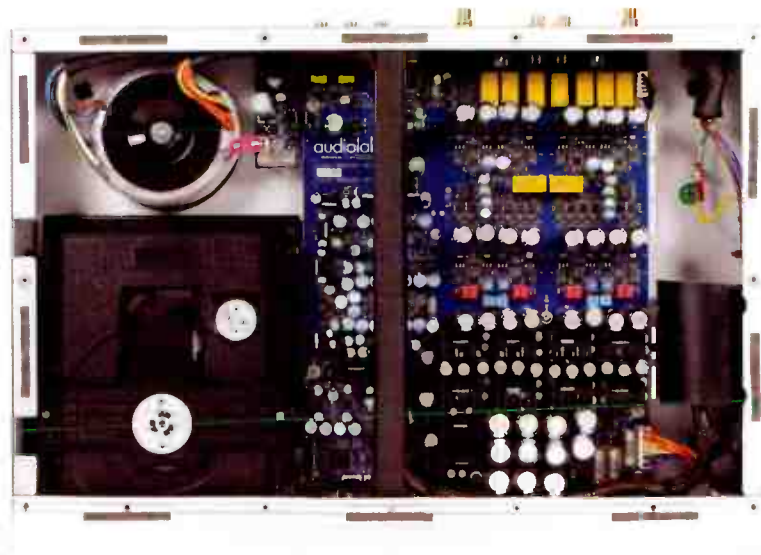
supplied filters, the CDQ allows user upgradeable digital filters via USB download, insuring future-proof customisable performance.

Along with being especially proud of the filtering, John Westlake has taken a lot of trouble over jitter reduction; a proprietary high performance discrete master clock is fitted. While the Sabre DAC's sample rate converter achieves 100% jitter attenuation within the digital domain it's claimed, external analogue domain induced artefacts via RF breakthrough and PSU coupling affect the DAC's ultimate sonic performance. So for this reason, Audiolab developed their Cascaded Asynchronous Time Domain Attenuator circuit. This is to isolate the DAC substrate from the potentially detrimental analogue domain of effects from non-synchronous digital input data. To achieve optimum performance, three identical cascaded stages are used,

with each individual stage providing increased isolation, Audiolab claim. It also sports an Asynchronous USB mode, where the DAC has total control over the timing of the audio data transmission, effectively clock-linking the computer to the DAC's internal clock.

Careful attention has been paid to the analogue output stage; the CDQ has true balanced analogue XLR outputs, connected directly to a pair of proprietary AudioLab FET based Class A stage buffers per channel. This results in a serious improvement of RF IMD rejection and no measurable RF rectification, Audiolab say.

The unit is fully DC coupled with no AC coupling capacitors. High tolerance polypropylene film/foil capacitors and special surface mount resistors are used in the signal path. The player features a total of 34 regulated supplies, 14 of which are

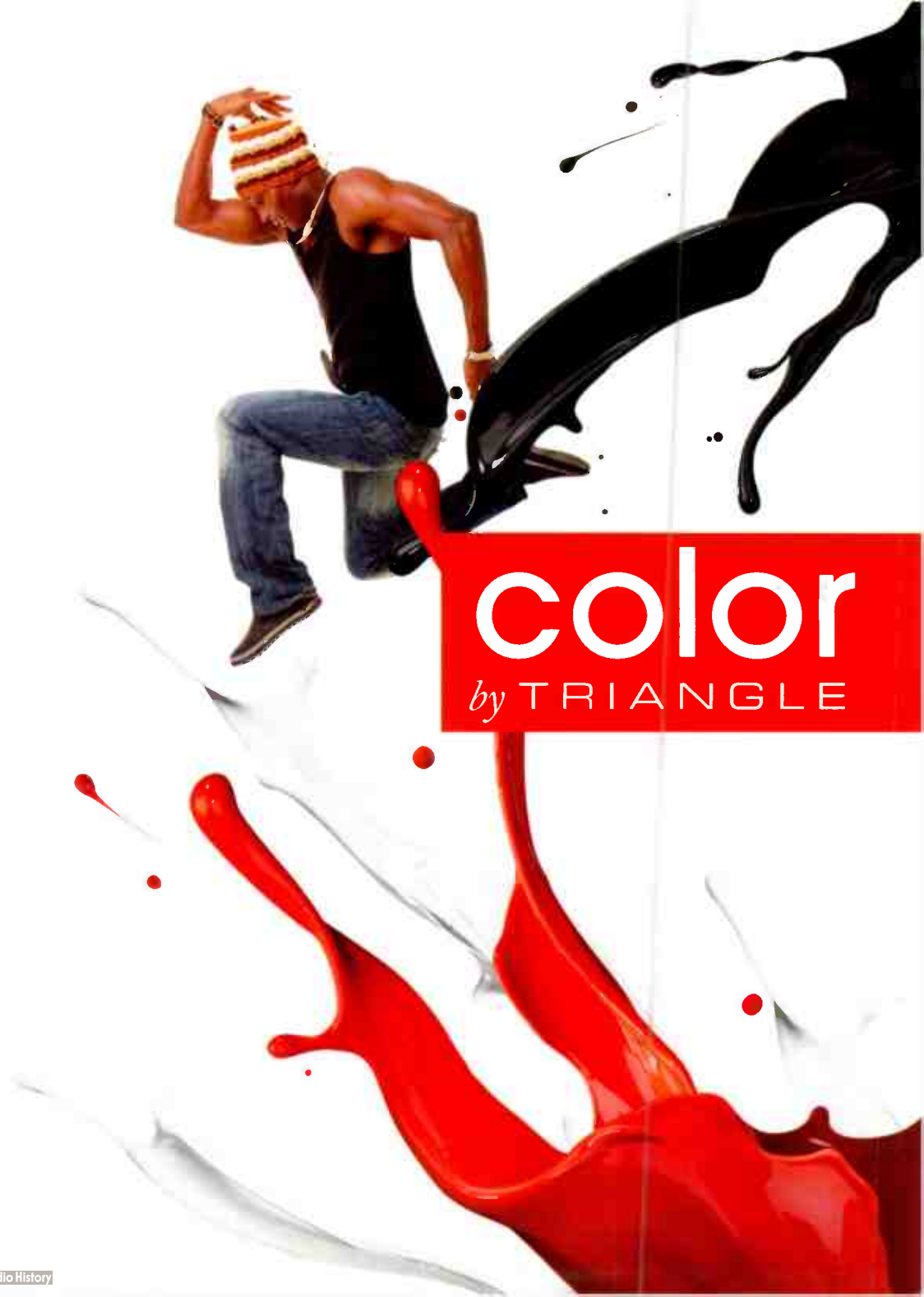


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ultra low noise discrete designs, combined with LC filtering for maximal interstage and RF isolation; a total of almost 250,000µF of bulk storage capacitance is used within the CDQ. Each section of the player is independently regulated, Audiolab says.

With such a lot of work gone into it, the 8200CDQ is still relatively innocuous for a standard sized hi-fi separate. Despite using aluminium throughout its casework, it's quite heavy by £950 CD player standards. I must say the finish is excellent, and the new style brushed aluminium fascia looks swisher than the previous painted design, even if it has lost a little of its character. Black or silver finishes are available.

## SOUND QUALITY

Having heard a pre-production prototype of the 8200CDQ in my own system, I wasn't as bowled over by its sound as I should have been – because I knew what to expect! Yet our early production review sample is better even than I remember the first machine, and that's no small claim; here is a sub-£1,000 digital disc spinner (and preamp, and DAC) that simply doesn't sound anything like its price. Put it this way; having spent more than a little time of late with the £2,500 Meridian G08.2 and the £2,995 Leema Antilla IIS Eco, the £950 appeared totally relaxed in such exalted company...

Indeed, it was quite spookily close to the latter in its general character, giving a slightly relaxed yet compelling sound; a little soft (or should I say 'not hard like most CD'), ever so slightly on the warm side of neutral (not a typical Audiolab trait), wonderfully expansive with a cathedral-like soundstage, and musical in a way that simply isn't associated with digital. The Audiolab 8200CDQ is a very accomplished machine in every respect, but for me its stand-out talent is to make music flow onwards and upwards, relentlessly yet caressingly, in a way that normally only good vinyl can.

Kicking off with some classic progressive rock, and Egg's 'Seven is a Jolly Good Time' is a characteristically spacey late sixties piece, all phased vocals and jangling guitars, backed up with some thick electric organ action and some wonderfully louche rock drumming of the Keith Moon school which could only have come from that time, with its profusion of exotic recreational substances (so I am told). This track is normally murdered by CD, which invariably sounds matter of fact, analytical and largely disinterested in the curious musical

happening it is supposed to recreate. But not so the Audiolab, which sounded almost enraptured. Certainly its performance was scintillating, capturing its madcap rhythms with utter faithfulness and ease where normal CD players simply walk on by, preferring not to bother. At the same time, a wonderfully full and thick bass punched along the rest of the song, underpinning a midband which was vast in scale; vocals towered over this, and small cymbals glistened

it was lithe and lightning-fast out of the blocks; this machine times with the best of them, yet displays no harshness to give an artificial edge.

Moving to a high end Sony CDP-R1a transport made fractional improvements around the edges compared to the 8200CDQ's internal CD drive; there was a deepening and tightening of the bass and I found treble to have a fraction more atmosphere too. This means that the 8200CDQ's DAC is easily

"after the Hong Kong handover, I retreated into my lab, only emerging out for the occasional meal and sleep; the origins of this design date back to then..."

behind sweetly.

Uriah Heap's 'Come Away Melinda' crystallised what's special about this silver disc spinner – the midband. Vocals were spectacular; tonally full and tactile, while the backing acoustic guitar part was rich yet precise. Set behind this, the Mellotron was a joy to behold, so natural in timbre (again normally an instrument that only LP can really get to grips with). The closing cymbal flourish was again quite arresting, the player giving a beautifully vibrant and tactile rendition of wooden sticks hitting metal, rather disguising the fact that I was listening to 16/44 Red

good enough to be used with top quality sources, but that there's very little wrong with its built-in disc transport. Interestingly, powered by my MacBook Pro via USB things took a small step backwards; the Audiolab made very nice music indeed but there was a slightly diffuse quality to standard 16/44 WAV files that I didn't get when playing their CD originals. It made a fine stab; musical and smooth, but I still feel that computers have a way to go to beat purpose-built disc transports.

Fed with 24/96 FLAC in the shape of the Beatles' 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps', the 8200CDQ



Book CD.

Jumping ahead in time a decade, and I found myself listening to UB40's 'King' from 'Signing Off'. A simple production done in a low rent studio, it nevertheless soared around me, the Audiolab throwing out a vast left to right stereo image as if someone had hit a giant stereo wide button. The track sounded truly cavernous, with instruments given loads of space and yet not one encroached on another to blot it out; the way the 8200CDQ did that great high end hi-fi trick of letting all the elements of a mix play along with one another with complete stability and clarity, was pure pleasure. Again, it showed itself as a slightly warm performer, filling the room with a deep and tuneful bass, yet this in no way made for a fat, bloated sound. Instead,

gave superb results, with a vast three dimensional soundstage and a gorgeous delicacy to Harrison's voice.

Experimenting with the filters is a whole new game of its own; early on I elected to use the Optimal Transient options which gave the speediest sound and the most natural rhythms, but there's plenty of choice for those willing to experiment. I suspect most will fix on their favourite and never change it, but those with wildly different source material may well flip between the various options more often.

As an analogue preamplifier the 8200CDQ is excellent in its way, offering a very clean and open sound that's characteristically Audiolab, although you'd have to say that a good budget tube design such as Icon Audio's LA4 gives a more spacious

and three dimensional sound, and better rhythmic flow – at the expense of the Audiolab's forensic detail of course.

**CONCLUSION**

As a standalone CD player, this is one of the most impressive new products I've come across in a long

while – especially at its amazing price of under £1,000. I'm quite serious when I say it's up there with many three thousand pound designs in most respects; only a slight lack of deep bass extension and grip, allied to outright dynamics, puts it behind – and in some aspects, such as rhythmic flow, it's arguably ahead.

Factor in that brilliant built-in DAC, USB connectivity and a very decent transistor preamplifier and it's an absolutely staggering package at the price. It's at times like this that I run out of superlatives, having used them all in previous reviews, so I'll put it this way – the new Audiolab 8200CDQ is a bit special, actually.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The analogue preamplifier has a gain of x4 (+12dB) maximum and can deliver 4V at its phono output before output overload occurs, a low value but sufficient to drive all power amplifiers. The XLR output has double the gain and can deliver double the output too, 8V maximum. So if you need high gain XLR is a must, but an XLR-to-phono lead or adaptor could be used. Frequency response was ruler flat across the audio band.

Frequency response rolled down above 12kHz with the Optimal Transient Filters, our frequency response analysis shows, an optional filter characteristic that can make music processed through the DAC sound warm. This included CD played on the preamp transport tests confirmed, the Audiolab measuring much like Chord Electronics' DAC64

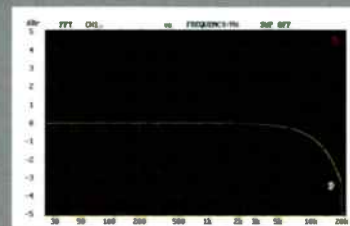
in this respect.

Distortion was low and EIAJ Dynamic Range high at 98dB, if not quite up with the best (100dB). Output was 2.3V with volume set to 0dB but up to the maximum possible 4V / 8V with volume turned up.

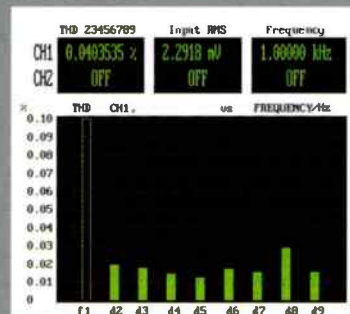
The 8200 CDQ measures well and should sound good. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)	2Hz - 12kHz
	2Hz - 21.2kHz
Distortion (%)	0.0008
0dB	0.22
-60dB	
Noise (e.i.n.)	3µV
Separation (1kHz)	102dB
Noise (IEC A)	-106dB
Dynamic range	98dB
Output (phono/XLR)	4/8V

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**



# TECH TALK

David Price talks to Audiolab's John Westlake...



**DP: Which version of the ESS Sabre 32 DAC do you use - is it the Reference? If so, why did you choose it?**

**JW:** Yes - we use their top and most expensive DAC, which – apart from ESS's proclaimed unique 32bit Hyperstream DAC architecture and Time Domain Jitter Eliminator – has a direct voltage output from the DAC array. No poor quality internal op-amps or IV conversion here!

In my very early twenties I designed one of my very first commercial DAC designs – the Pink Triangle DaCapo. This was a discrete DAC with two DAC elements per channel – four DAC elements for a stereo DAC. The ESS DAC takes

this many stages further with 1024 DAC elements for a stereo DAC – that's 512 DAC elements per channel. Both the DaCapo and ESS's DAC's produce a true voltage output node.

This direct voltage output allows us to passively filter RF products (with no active electronics) which are produced from the digital to analogue conversion process before they can cause potential RF related intermodulation distortion products in the very sensitive front-end circuits of the analogue output stages.

Simple Passive filtering can only attenuate these RF products to a reduced level – we then use

JFETs in the front-end of our Class A analogue stages which offer significant immunity to RF-demodulation. RF leakage from the digital conversion process is one of the main reasons we believe conventional digital designs have a tendency to sound hard and bright. The use of the JFET front end degrades the SNR, but in our opinion the sonic benefits outweigh the degraded technical measurements – sound quality over performance figures.

**DP: Is the digital filter your own design? What's your favourite setting?**



**JW:** Yes, the filters are developed by us. Dominik (the other half the design team) is responsible mainly for the software side of the product, although he's also been very supportive on the hardware side. The Optimal Spectrum and without question our favourite Optimal Transient type filters are direct descendants from our earlier R&D on FPGA based filter and modulator structures. The Optimal Spectrum filter is a 'perfect' digital filter at least from the frequency domain perspective – in that it achieves full attenuation by FS/2 (half the sampling frequency – as stipulated essential for 'Aliasing free' digital conversion by the basics of sampling theory). This differs from most digital filter designs, which only achieve -6dB at FS/2 to maximise the silicon area (i.e. reduce cost).

While the Optimal Spectrum filter has almost ideal frequency domain performance, it introduces both pre and post ringing within the time-domain. The Optimal Transient types on the other hand can be considered the total opposite of the 'Perfect Frequency Domain' filter – trading poorer frequency domain performance for 'optimal' transient performance – with zero pre or post ringing.

There are three versions of the Optimal Transient filters – and here's where it gets both interesting and frustrating! All three versions achieve exactly the same digital data – the final 1s and 0s are mathematically identical – but the calculations processed differently within the DAC. Think of it this way:  $4+0 = 4$ ,  $0+4 = 4$ ,  $3+1 = 4$ ,  $1+3 = 4$ ,  $2+2 = 4$ ; there are many ways to arrive at the same answer, but achieved via different mathematical calculations. These calculations are being processed on the DAC silicon itself, which introduces second order effects such as modulation of the internal PSU, modulation of the die level conversion clock – and even direct RF modulation across the silicon die itself. How much do these 'second order effects' affect the sound quality? Well, by listening to the first two permutations of the Optimal Transient filters (Optimal Transient and Optimal Transient XD) by a large amount is the surprising answer.

The Optimal Transient DD filter is a bit of wild card, as it takes into consideration the second order effects and applies corrective processing to nullify these effects – but once again its time domain and

frequency domain characteristics are the same as the first two variants. Minimum Phase filter is a hybrid of the two main Optimal types, in that it has reasonable frequency domain performance with no pre-ringing in the time domain. The Fast and Slow filters are standard digital filter types – mainly included for comparison – personally I give them very little time.

**DP: If there's one outstanding piece of the CDQ's design, what is it?**

**JW:** With over 30 PSU supply rails – close to 250,000uF of supply decoupling, a discrete ultra low short term phase noise (ultra low jitter) clock oscillator, discrete fully balanced Class A output stages, fully balanced analogue preamplifier signal path, and with all active gain stages operating in Class A, and no less than 1,700 components, generally we are very proud of the design...

Maybe stating the weakness would be easier – the earlier LCD display on the CD/CDQs drew a lot of flack (granted, not our proudest moment) – now its been updated to the OLED display (Older units can be returned for update to the OLED display). So the only real complaint we get now is the CD Tray, but as its only function is to load and unload the CD onto the optical block, it has no effect on sound quality. I'd rather spend our design budget on components that matter for sound quality than cosmetic items.

**DP: How long did the design take in total? What extra development work was done, to cause the long delay?**

**JW:** When does R&D end and product design start? I've been researching and developing DAC technology since before DaCapo – and in greater depth since the Hong Kong handover when at the end of the party and era, I basically just retreated into my Lab, only emerged for the occasional meal and to sleep. The origins of this design data go back to way before we started to work with Audiolab – it was to be launched under our product brand (Dominik's and myself) – but really the last thing the hi-fi industry needs now is a new brand. Audiolab has given us the ideal platform to launch our designs.

The more recent delays in the launch of CDQ where primarily due to production issues – really

lack of production line space. The overnight success of the Audiolab 8200CD has our production lines operating three shifts per day but we are still running on backorder. Component sourcing has also been an issue as the sales of the CD are beyond Audiolab's expectations, with 1,700 components in each CDQ – that's millions of component parts a month – it only takes one component shortage to bring the whole manufacturing process to a rapid halt – the recent disasters in Japan caused major headaches for the whole industry.

At the same time, we also had to be very careful with the quality control – expanding too fast and without care, quality is normally the first to take a hit. With lessons learnt from the CD, we deliberately have held-off CDQ and DQ to ensure we are able to maintain the quality level. CDQ / DQ benefited from this unexpected delay with the addition of the 12V Trigger (not on the very first CDQ units) – and the improvements in sound quality...

**DP: Which sounds better - the 8200CD or the CDQ?**

**JW:** By quite a margin the CDQ – the CD and CDQ where originally meant to sound identical apart from the additional preamplifier features of the CDQ – however in the time interval between CD's release and the CDQ's we where able to make changes in component quality of the CDQ's PSU sections that had a big effect on sound quality.

**DP: Is there a DAC/preamp planned?**

**JW:** Yes, completing the CD / CDQ series is the DQ which is a CDQ but without the CD Section – so a DAC / line level preamplifier. A network music player is also planned – but we are waiting for the industry to settle down – everything I've tried is too complex to use, I don't want to be a computer engineer to listen to music! You will see more Apple-compatible products in the not to distant future...

**DP: Are there any cool features hidden in the OS?**

**JW:** Well not so much hidden as not-obvious-without-reading the manual; on the OLED versions of CD/CDQ, holding down the Time/Info button will expand the text size on the display. Holding down the Display button gives you eight levels of display brightness!

**VERDICT** ●●●●● £  
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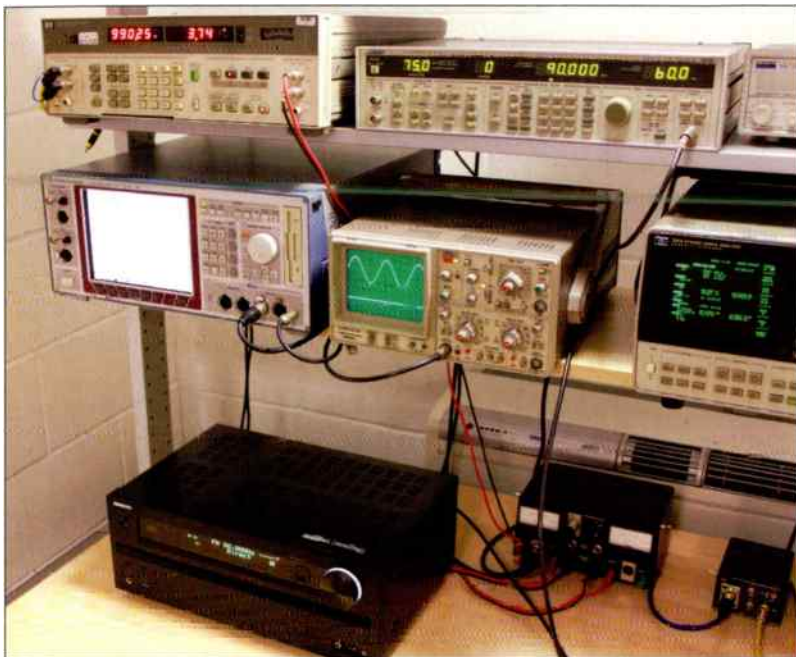
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- functionality, versatility
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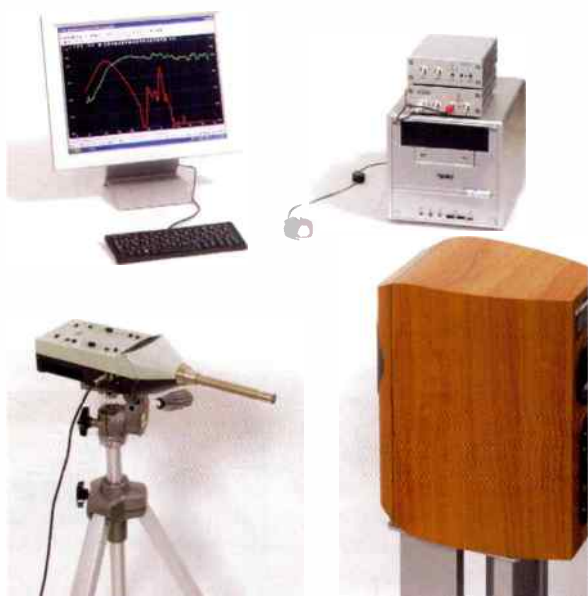
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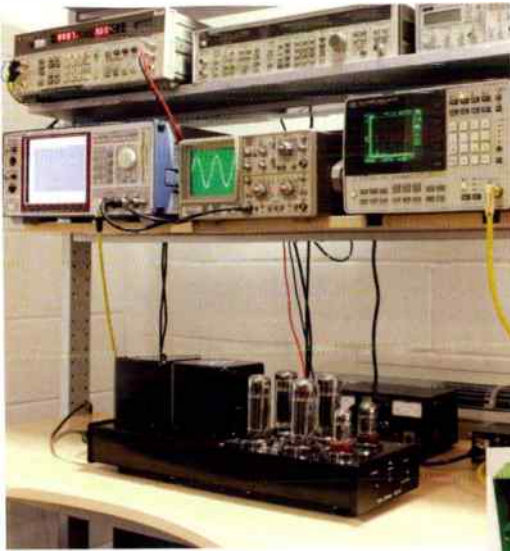


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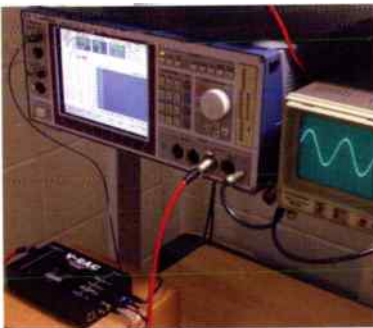
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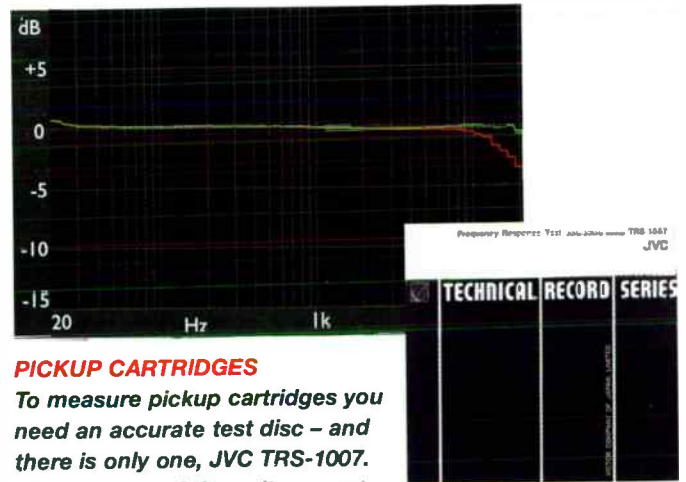
### DIGITAL CONVERTORS

DACs are connected to the digital signal generator of our Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser and their analogue output sent to the analyser for analysis. We can measure all parameters and even pre-jitter the signal to test effectiveness of reclocking, allowing us to uniquely determine impact on sound quality.



### TURNTABLES

Analysing turntable speed stability is thorny. We have just bought a Kenwood 180FL Wow & Flutter meter to get a high resolution analysis from its frequency demodulated speed stability output, important to see what Direct Drives are really doing.



### PICKUP CARTRIDGES

To measure pickup cartridges you need an accurate test disc – and there is only one, JVC TRS-1007. We have two of them. It was cut at half speed and needs special equalisation, but is super accurate. That is why our cartridge measurements are of unparalleled accuracy, matching those of Ortofon for example, who also use TRS-1007.



### VHF/FM TUNERS

Top quality VHF/FM tuners demand the use of a reference standard RF signal generator and for this we use a Leader 3412 Standard Signal Generator. An external MPX filter and post-equalisation network complete the picture, giving super accurate data for analysis in our Rohde & Schwarz UPL analyser.



### CD, DVD AND BLU-RAY PLAYERS

To test CD and SACD players you need top quality test discs – and they come from Philips, inventors of the medium. We use Philips discs, as well as Sony and Denon for CD. We use the expensive but comprehensive Burosch DVD test disc set, with top resolution 24/192 PCM data, for DVD and Blu-ray players.

# Two For One

**Combining classic tubes with solid-state supporting circuitry, T.A.C.'s new V-60 integrated amplifier attempts to give the best of both worlds. Noel Keywood finds it has its own quite distinct personality...**

**T**here are many ways to approach the design of a valve amplifier, and the T.A.C. V-60 treads a path of modernity. Their philosophy is that all the things that valves do 'wrong' are cleverly put right by transistors, but the essence of thermionic amplification is retained. This is precisely what Audio Research attempt to do too, happily combining that tube essence with modern solid-state supporting circuitry. So Tube Amplifier Company, a brand name of Sintron distribution of Germany, are in good company. Their new V-60 amplifier is a 'modern' valve amp that uses glass bottles throughout for audio amplification, producing a healthy 60 Watts per channel into 8 Ohm or 4 Ohm loudspeakers.

The V-60 weighs in at 34kgs (75lbs) making it a weighty beast. It is attractively styled and very well finished too. The chassis top cover has a brushed satin finish and the TAC logo is etched onto a protective acrylic front window. Those with children and/or pets will appreciate its a user-friendly design, with the

"I got a lusciously clear and specific midband with emphatic imaging and finely etched treble full of filigree detail..."

valves well protected from the outside world and vice versa. At front are small signal valves, two 6922s and two 6CG7s. Further back lie four 6CA7s per channel working in push-pull pairs; all are from Electroharmonix, a respected name. The 6CA7 is a sturdy Russian equivalent to Phillips EL34 pentode, an output valve known for its clear and sophis-

ticated sound. By this I mean it has a light and airy demeanour, producing plenty of fine treble detail smoothly. It is less gutsy than the KT88 and less of a slugger than the 6550, but is much loved in the Far East for its sonic character.

A push-pull pair of EL34s operated within sensible limits produce around 30 Watts under auto-bias, so the 65 Watts we measured from this amplifier is quite conservative, considering it has a fixed bias supply, which gives more power than auto-bias. The disadvantage of fixed bias is it must be manually adjusted to get a specific standing current, according to the output valve's transconductance. This varies between samples, and over time as the valve ages, so fixed bias amplifiers demand initial bias adjustment to set them up, then periodic adjustment every few months afterward. To avoid this the V-60 is controlled by a Blohbaum 'Biaswizard' automatic biasing scheme that automatically compensates, eliminating the need for bias adjustment.

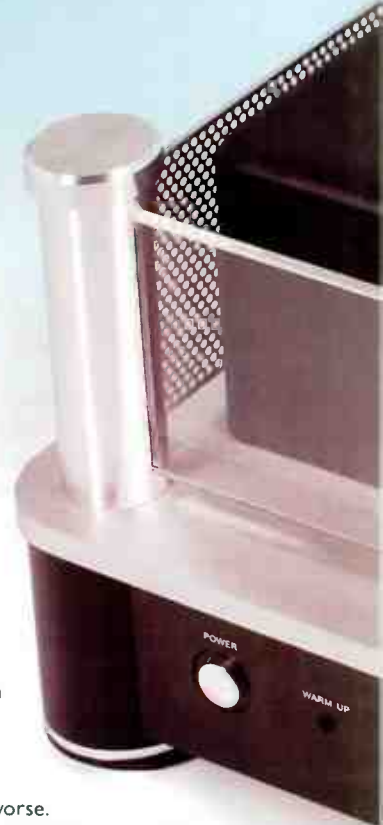
It's a fairly straightforward thing to do; indeed Andy Grove and I started out down the path of using solid-state circuitry to bias valves, back in the 1990s, for a World Audio Design amplifier. But it's not without its drawbacks however, as what you gain on the swings you lose on the roundabouts! Fixed bias provides a harder sound than auto-bias, and

at high levels distortion gets complex, making matters worse.

This, in a sense, loses one of the great strengths of valves, their lovely smooth sound. Then there's the threat of breakdown. Back-emfs in valve amplifiers can be vast – over 1000V. Transistors need a lot of protection to survive this environment and can fail. So all that solid-state support circuitry inside the V-60 is a mixed blessing; everything in valve amplifier design is a compromise and you don't get anything for free...

As tube amplifiers go, internally it's rather complex, as our pictures show; think of this as being quite different in approach to classic valve amplifiers such as a Quad IIs and their modern counterparts like Icon Audios which avoid using transistors, and aim for simplicity. If the solid-state devices are well protected then the V-60 should be reliable, but it is impossible to assess this; the amp performed dependably during the review period.

The T.A.C.'s handbook looks Chinese in its graphics and production, but fails to state country of origin. Contrary to EU regulations, no country of origin is marked on the amplifier either, externally or internally. It is manufactured in China







by Sheng Ya I believe, and is designed in Germany. Inside the V-60 follows modern best practice and looks normal enough; it carries Europe's safety certification CE mark too. There are four line level inputs and a tape output, but no balanced inputs, nor a phono stage.

### SOUND QUALITY

Pairing the V-60 initially with our Spendor S8es brought forth boomy bass from Angeliqe Kidjo's 'Agolo' album, reminding me in no uncertain manner that the bass units of this underdamped loudspeaker need to be held in check by an amplifier

with a low output impedance, or high damping factor. The high output impedance of the V-60 does not suit lightly damped loudspeakers and running it after - say - a transistor amplifier would lead you to believe it has soggy bass. With a loudspeaker like Triangle's large Antal EX however, with strong acoustic damping, it would work nicely, seeming to bulk up bass. So the V-60 has to be treated with care here; loudspeaker matching is always more critical with low damping factor valve amplifiers.

Connecting up the Mowgan Audio Étains reviewed in this issue brought about a complete change.



## TUNERS

**Magnum Dynalab FT 101A Etude FM Tuner.** Black, parchment dials, sensational tuner, isolated power supply switching, mint. (£1395) only £695.

## AMPLIFICATION

**ATC SIA2 150 integrated amp.** Mint, ex-demo. (£2838) £POA

**Quad UC 24 Pre Amp.** Original box & packing, immaculate, 18mths old. (£1000) bargain at £695.

**Balanced Audio VK-6200 Power Amp,** 4x 200w, sensational, 4 channel model so bi-amping is highly recommended. (£6000) Only £1950.

**Musical Fidelity A1 FBP Pre Amp.** Sensational two box fully balanced pre amp, black, original box & packing, MM & MC inputs, remote, as new, opened box only. (£1495) amazing value at £690.

**Shanling SP-800 valve monos.** As new, boxed, original packing, use directly with volume control, 40w valve power. (£2000) £1295 + 5yr warranty

**Quad 306 power amp.** Excellent condition with a 2yr warranty. £139

**Cayin 860 Valve Monoblock Pair (70w).** 16mths old, perfect, original boxes, 4, 8 & 16 ohm taps, built-in bias meter for easy calibration. (£4200) Bargain at only £1995.

**Mark Levinson 380 pre amp.** Excellent, boxed, original packing, metal remote. (£6000) £2898

**Naim NAC 62.** Excellent condition, only £169

**Naim NAP 150.** Boxed, excellent, bargain £375.

**Icon Audio MB25.** Stunning 30w valve mono blocks, great reviews, one owner. (£1995) £1095

**Pioneer A6 mk2 integrated.** Black, ex-display, mint, boxed, full warranty. (£499) £299

**Raysonic C200 all valve pre-amp.** Boxed, unmarked, stunning performance. Cost new £2595 so a complete bargain at £995.

**Eastern Electric M520 mkII Integrated Amp.** Our demonstrator, 6mths old, perfect condition, original packing & remote, won Hi-Fi News group test, awarded Editor's Choice. (£1995) only £1295

**Restek MPRE+ with MAMP monos.** Ex-demo, mint, boxed, 5yr warranty. Scored 85% in recent HiFi Choice review. (£3000) £1495

**ASTIntrew AT2000 plus integrated.** Black, stunning performance, originally supplied by us. Mint condition. (£1739) £1195

**ATC SCA2 pre-amp.** One owner, supplied by us, only 8mths old. Boxed, mint. (£5261) £POA

**Chord SPM-1200B Power Amp.** 250 wpc, black with wooden side accents, excellent condition, recent service from Chord. Original box & packing. Rare as used (£3950). Opportunity at only £1395.

**ECA Technologies Vista Pre and Lectern Power Amps.** Black with gold logos, immaculate. Very musical combination. (£1700) only £495.

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

## DIGITAL

**Antelope Audio Zodiac DAC +.** Mint condition, ex-demo unit, 5yr warranty. (£1895) £POA

**Ayre Acoustics CX 7e CD Player.** Silver, original box & packing, excellent condition, truly sensational CD Player. (£2395) only £1295.

**Sugden Masterclass PDT-4 CD Player.** One owner, mint, 12mths old, boxed. (£3539) £1995

**dCS Verdi La Scala CD/SACD DSD Transport.** Aluminium remote, as new, warranty, original box & packing, manual. (£9900) £2395.

**dCS Verdi CD/SACD DSD Transport.** Aluminium remote, as new, warranty, original box & packing, manual. (£9000) £1795.

**Naim CD2.** Excellent condition, remote, boxed, din interconnect, 12mths warranty. £595.

**Densen B-420.** Black, ex-demo, mint condition. (£1800) £1195

**NAD M5 SACD/CD player.** Part of the NAD Master's Series programme, great reviews. One owner, originally supplied by us. (£1600) £895

**TEAC VRDS 10 SE.** One owner, as new, original packing, 12mth warranty. VERY rare. £495

**Densen B-410 CD player.** Mint, Gizmo remote (costs £175), one owner, black, great reviews. (£1295) £695

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## QUALITY PRE-OWNED.

### LOUDSPEAKERS

**Quad ESL 2805.** Brown, one owner, boxed - a rare opportunity. (£5000) £2595 with full warranty.

**ATC SCM 50 ASL Classic Actives.** Walnut, ex-demo, mint condition. (£10252) £POA

**Klipsch Heresy III Speakers.** Walnut, one owner, supplied by us, mint, boxed, 99db efficient and a 5-globe HiFi World review! (£1998) £1495

**ADAM Audio A.R.T. Pencil speakers.** Cherry/dark silver, astonishing articulation, excellent condition, all original box and packing. (£3600) only £1695.

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

**Audio Physic Tempo VI Loudspeaker.** Maple, one owner, 6mths old, unmarked, original packing. (£2612) bargain at £1895.

### ANALOGUE

**Creek OBH-18 MM Phono Stage with OBH-1 PSU.** Immaculate, cracking phono stage. (£205) only £115.

**Thorens TD125.** Mint, bargain at only £189.

**Technics SL1100.** Mint, 2yr warranty. £225

**Garrard 401 Turntable.** Excellent condition, ready for plinth mounting, extremely rare, fetch very high Ebay prices, so bargain at £695.

**Restek MR1A+ Phono Stage.** Ex-demo, mint. (£1195) £695.

**Tom Evans Groove Phono Stage.** Boxed, excellent condition, (£1900) £995

**Whet Two Phono Stage.** Boxed, as new, ex-display, unused (£795) only £595

**Dr Feickert DFA-105 10.5" Tonearm.** Stunning, boxed, excellent condition, one owner. (£650) £395

**Jelco SA-750E 10" Tonearm.** Boxed, new, unused, fantastic reviews (£550) £295

**Trichord Dino MM/MC phono stage.** Great reviews, amazing value at only £219

**Eastern Electric Minimax Phono Stage.** Months old, one owner. Sensational (£1495) £1095.

### MAINS CONDITIONING

**Chord SuperScreen Mains Power Cord.** 1.5m, exceptional. (£70) only £49.

**Isol-8 Isolink Power Cable.** 2.0m, braided copper RF shielding, superior mains cable. (£85) only £55

**Isotek Elite 1.5m Power Cord.** 3 core annealed OFC, active RFI & EMI shielded, original packing. (£175) be quick at £85.

**Vertex Roraima.** 1m, 'raised logo' model, does wonders for your system. (£358) only £245.

**Van Den Hull BS Hybrid Mainstream mains power cord.** 2m, two available, both one owner, excellent condition (£350) £199 each.

**Vertex AQ Taga (2011).** 6-way distribution mains filter, great reviews, one owner, mint. (£906) £685

### CABLES

**Vertex Moncayo Speaker Cables.** 4m pair, 'raised logo' model, as new, 4mths old, terminated in WBT Spade to WBT Banana. (£1593) only £995.

**Siltech FW-6 Classic MK2 Firewire Cable.** G5 X-Balanced, 1m, great for all dCS combos like Scarlatti or Paganini. (£700) only £345.

**Kimber Monocle-X Loudspeaker Cable** 8ft pair, heavy braid model, WBT Spades at amp end, WBT Bananas at speaker end, original box & packing. (£980) only £435.

**Townshend Audio Isolada DCT 300 Interconnect** 3m, black braid directional model, RCA-RCA, (£648) Only £319.

**Synergistic Research Designers Reference (2)** Digital AES/EBU 1m, staggering digital cable with ridiculous transparency. (£1000) a must at £590.

**Black Rhodium Polar Ninja DCT ++ Bi-wire Loudspeaker Cable.** 2m pair, 2 - 4 terminations, banana to banana. (£1200) only £745.

**Black Rhodium Polar Gladiator DCT Loudspeaker Cable.** 3m pair, perfect, banana to banana. (£540) be quick at £285.

**Nordost Tyr 1.5m XLR.** As new, genuine UK cable (beware Ebay copies) one owner, (£1500) £795

**Vertex AQ Mini Moncayo Speaker Links.** Set of 4, 80x65x30mm acoustic absorption module - simply sensational. (£570) £POA

**Eichman Express Six 1m interconnect.** Boxed, excellent condition. (£195) £99

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

**Vertex Silver Solfonn (rca-rca) Interconnect.** 1m, ex-demo. (£1092) only £660.

**Vertex Silver Solfonn.** 1m XLR pair, new 'raised logo' model, one owner, perfect. (£1442) £895.

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

### ACCESSORIES

**Quad ESL-63 GFD MKIIS Speaker Stands.**

Perfect 'on axis' adjustment regardless of distance, original GFD set-up guide. (£210) only £95.

**Stillpoints Component Stands.** 2 available, 3 leg model, original box, etc. Mint. (£800) only £395.

**Musical Fidelity V-CAN.** Upgrade PSU, mint. (£195) £99

**Sennheiser HD600 headphones.**

Excellent condition, one owner. (£395) £175

### MISC

**Mission m7ds Surround Speakers.** Black, original packing, mint, great dispersion, only £40



They threw out this issue; there was some residue of softness to the V-60s bass, a lack of really incisive timing, at least when compared to our transistor Musical Fidelity AM550, but the V-60 otherwise found a truly symbiotic partner in the Etain. Even when not pushing the V-60, I got a lusciously clear and specific midband with emphatic imaging and finely etched treble full of filigree detail. Yes, there was that slight hardness of tone that auto-bias avoids, but I can imagine that those used to transistor amplifiers simply would not notice.

Essentially then, the V-60 is a transistor user's tube amp; classic single ended triode fans won't enjoy it, but those with a solid-state CV will find it special. Perhaps you should think of the V-60 as a 'super transistor amplifier' in some ways – but with more detail, more insight and better sound stage depth. It isn't a full on 300B and certainly no Almarro 318B, single-ended amplifier, and it lacks the bass slam and control of our MB845 MkIIIs.

The V-60 was lightning fast and clean across the midband, almost to the point of sterility. And yet it's so full of life, sounding exciting as it bubbles along through the music, full of itself. I said earlier that EL34s sound light and airy and that was the case with the V-60; it hardly has a warm demeanour; quite the reverse it was brightly lit with a strong white light. At times, especially on poor programme material, a little edginess crept through but there was so much going on in terms of treble detail, all hair-trigger fast, that the V-60 was impressive in its own way.

Turning volume right up so that the kick drum behind Adele's 'Rolling in the Deep' had me being beaten hard on the Hi-Fi World settee; I saw 25 Watts coming up on peaks and at this level the V-60 sounded commendably clean and fast, which is not something you could say about most 'old school' tube amp designs!

With classical music it gave life to violin sections of the London Symphony orchestra playing Tchaikovsky's Symphony No6, 'Pathetique', lifting them from the mix, as it seemed to do with other instruments, getting more from a recording than one would think possible after many amplifiers; here the 6CA7s were showing their mettle I believe.

At times higher frequencies became a little jittery and I wondered what was going



on, and whether I was hearing the complex distortion structures of this amplifier, for EL34s under conventional circuit arrangements stay clean until gentle muddle sets in. The V-60 generally managed well however, always sounding fast, detailed, lively and dramatic in a way that valve amps seem to be able to manage no matter what circuit designers dream up!

**CONCLUSION**

Obviously, the T.A.C. V-60 does not give you the classically sweet valve sound; instead it attempts to be something of a hybrid between the openness and lightness of tubes and the power and punch of transistors. It largely succeeds, and those accustomed to solid-state may love it; I'm not so sure that classic tube lovers will feel the same

way however! I have reservations about self-adjusting fixed bias valve amplifiers, but still enjoyed listening to the V-60 which is fast and vivid as valve amplifiers go, as well as solid in its imaging and gutsy too.

For me, the real issue for this amplifier is its competition, which is very tough at its £4,000 price point. Alongside some highly capable transistor integrations, there's the £3,500 Audio Research VS160 tube amp, which is a most worthy adversary. Then there are more conventional tube rivals from Quad, EAR and Icon Audio. All of these offer subtly different flavours of the valve experience, so as ever it's best to do the taste test before you buy! As the V-60 is attractively styled, solidly built and beautifully finished, as well as dramatic in its sound, it will find an admiring audience I suspect.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The V-60 produced a decent 60 Watts into 8 Ohms and 4 Ohm loads, around 65 Watts to be precise, so its manufacturer's specification is realistic. Being able to produce similar power from the 4 Ohm tap as the 8 Ohm full winding means coupling efficiency was good.

In spite of using feedback (I would guess from the way it clipped) output impedance was low at 8 Ohms, giving a Damping Factor of 1. With lightly damped loudspeakers the result will be soft bass. There will be no problem with well damped loudspeakers though, where low DF will actually give them fuller sounding bass.

Distortion levels were low at low power outputs but rose steadily to become high toward higher powers above 20 Watts. Our -1dB figures, of around 1.5% with many harmonics - not just second - are relatively poor. The presence of third harmonic suggests the transformers are responsible, but they managed to swing power at 40Hz all the same. The V-60 produced complex distortion patterns at high power, not just second harmonic, so it is best used at lowish outputs. These days, however, with a 4 Ohm floorstanding loudspeaker of good sensitivity little more than 10 Watts is needed.

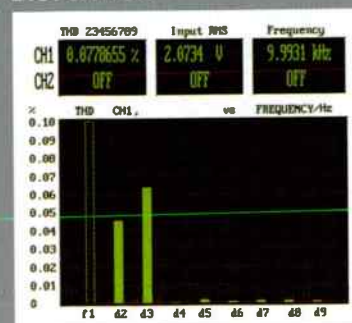
Noise was very low, there was

no measurable hum and frequency response wide at 7Hz-33kHz (-1dB). A healthy input sensitivity of 270mV allows external phono preamps with low-ish gain to be used.

The V-60 measures well. It is not the best a valve amplifier can do by any means, but it is fair all the same. NK

Power	66 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	7Hz-33kHz
Separation	60dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.07%
Sensitivity	270mV
Damping factor	1

**DISTORTION**



**VERDICT** ●●●●  
This complex mix of tubes and transistors gives a fast, vivid and explicit sound that will appeal to solid-state users but lacks the romance of classic valves.

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- AGAINST**
- brightly lit midband
  - soft bass
  - needs careful matching



# Social Networking

**Costing under £400, in the Cambridge Audio NP30 at last we have a network music player that's affordable for nearly everyone, rather than just the well healed, says David Price...**



**S**omeday, all hi-fi will be made this way. Well, sort of. Think about it – the Cambridge Audio NP30 is a small box with some silicon chips in it. That's far, far, easier to make – and indeed to tune for the best sound – than a small box with some silicon chips in it, a disc tray, a motor, a laser, the control circuitry and a proportionally beefier power supply to cope with it all. That's why, like it or not, we're surely going to see the end of CD players and then their DVD and Blu-ray spinning cousins, in the not-too-distant future...

And why not? Once you've used a network music player such as the Cambridge Audio NP30, it's pretty hard to get your head around

slotting silver discs into a similarly sized box, and then having to take the disc out later, put it in its case, and indeed store its case (and all your others) somewhere in your front room that's easy to access...

I personally like rooting around my records. My meticulously honed, time-honoured system of not knowing exactly (only roughly) where my records are means I have to flick through them for minutes, sometimes, to find the right one. Right, I want to play Boz Scaggs' 'Lido Shuffle' - so I'm going to have to thumb past Daryl Hall and John Oates, The Doobie Brothers and Kansas to find 'Silk Degrees', which is there somewhere in my 'seventies US rock' area. It's such a nice feeling, as it reminds me of all the great records I've got and the sheer tactile loveliness of the vinyl LP. But thumb

through my CDs? No thanks! With digital it's different – it's supposed to be convenient for Heaven's sake, and network music players (supported by a good user interface) are kings of convenience.

So, the low cost of manufacture allied to the wonderful ease of use, means we'll all be using network music players sooner or later. I'll be sticking to vinyl as my main source, but I do have a lot of music on my MacBook Pro now, and it's growing. A network music player such as this gives me instant, high quality access to it; I don't have to plug my computer into a USB DAC anymore...

Traditionally, there have been a few cheapo non-hi-fi solutions (Revo, Logitech, etc.), and some very expensive real hi-fi products, but little in the way of entry-level hi-fi or even mid-price network music





"it works very well, giving a highly listenable sound that's miles ahead of cheap computer peripheral market designs..."

players. This is changing, and fast. Musical Fidelity's £1,200 Clic was (is) a significant product, Marantz have the new NA7004 for £600 and now Cambridge Audio has arrived with the £400 NP30. Suddenly the market has come alive, and things are going to look very different soon. I'd be fascinated to see how many years it will take these aforementioned companies to stop making silver disc spinners. Lest we forget, the last Sony Trinitron cathode ray TV was only made in 2006; now it seems like one hundred years ago...

The Cambridge is an important machine too, as it's very affordable and yet very good. You don't get a lovely case and a gorgeous display *a la* Musical Fidelity, but you save £800 and frankly there's not a massive sonic difference. In terms of functionality, the NP30 is pretty comprehensive. It plays 24bit WAV and FLAC files (plus standard 16bit of course), but there's no Apple Lossless (so be warned those who rip their music to ALAC – no one else except Apple will acknowledge its existence, it seems). It also plays MP3, AAC, WMA and OGG Vorbis. It also directly connects to music streaming services like Rhapsody and Pandora, and offers easy access to internet radio (and associated podcasts). It plays off your PC, Mac or Network Attached Storage device, via Wi-Fi

(IEEE 802.11 b, g or n bands) or Ethernet. Cambridge Audio even offer their UuVol remote app for the Apple iPhone, which gives very easy access to all this.

The unit itself comes in Cambridge Audio's stock 'midi' sized case (67x270x285mm, 2.1kg); considering its price it's very well finished and doesn't feel cheap, just functional. No, it's nowhere near as nice to use as the Musical Fidelity Clic, or as well built, but then remember the price points! It's easy to set up – switch it on and it will scan your surroundings for a wireless network, and then it's a case of entering your password (if you have one; you should!). The text entry routine isn't great – it's a bit fiddly and not immediately obvious how to edit your mistakes if you can't be bothered to read the manual (which I never do, as a matter of policy). But a bit of fiddling and it had found my network, and then scanned for music-touting computers; it found my Mac, with its Twonky uPnP server software installed, in no time and then I could access my computer's music library.

Inside the box, the NP30 has all the relevant network music playing gubbins, feeding a Wolfson WM8728 24bit/96kHz capable DAC. This is the same IC found in the new Cambridge Audio 350C CD player, although similar Wolfson DACs are used by

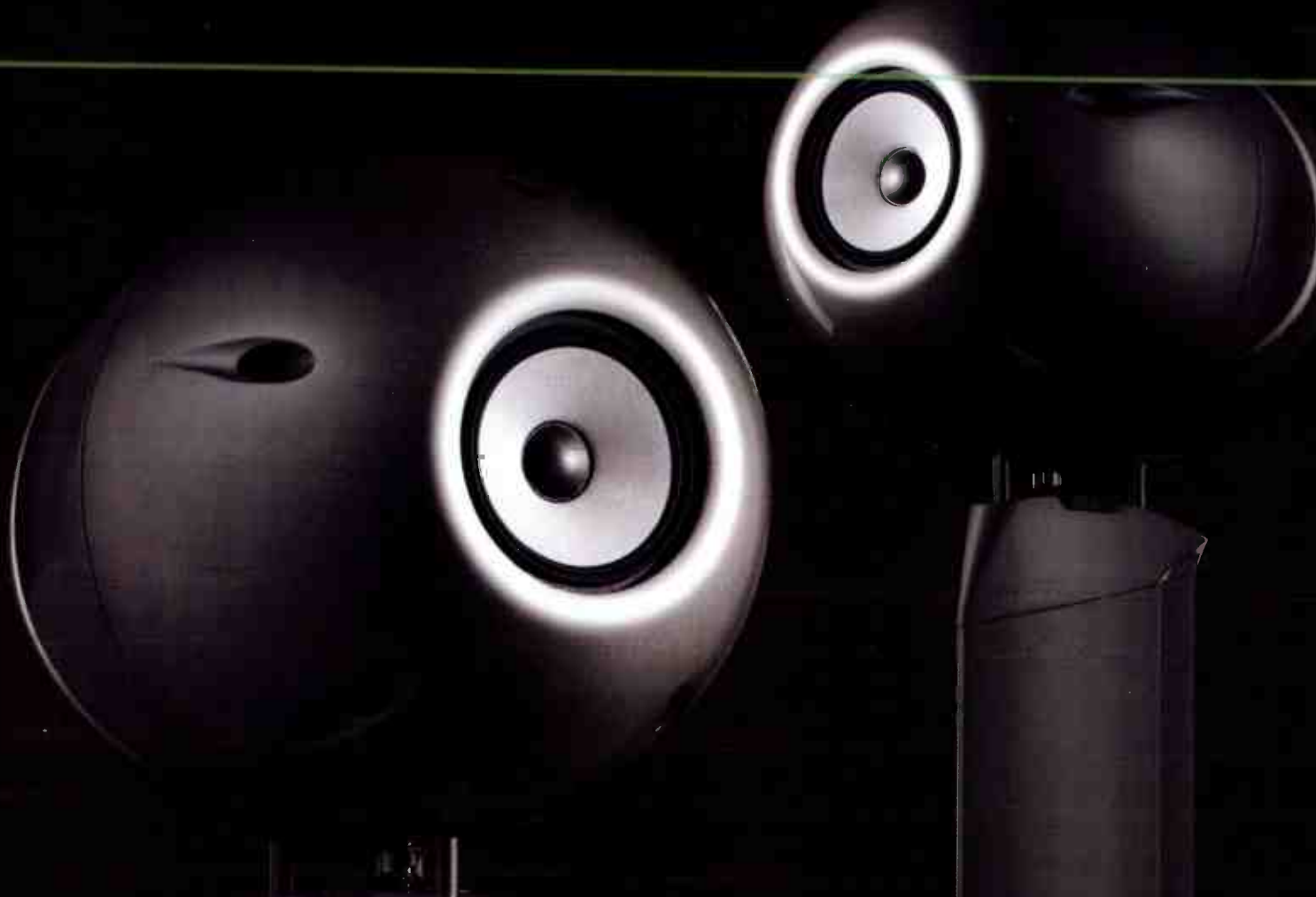
Logitech, Naim and Arcam too; it's capable of working from 16 to 24bits, from 22.05kHz to 96kHz. There's a modest switch mode power supply, working from 120 to 240 volts, and some special jitter reduction circuitry; Cambridge Audio claim less than 200pS. The back panel is a relatively sparse affair, sporting S/PDIF coaxial and TosLink optical digital outputs, plus two USB 1.1 sockets for memory stick playback; a small figure-of-eight 'calculator' mains input feeds it the juice.

### SOUND QUALITY

Here we have a device that sounds very much like a good modern budget CD player – unsurprising considering it shares a similar DAC to most of them! What this means is a clean, open and tidy presentation, offering a good degree of depth and insight into the sound, but just a little light in the bass, a touch subdued in



**ECLIPSE**



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**FUJITSU TEN**



the treble and subtly opaque across the midband in absolute terms. For £400, this is a very good result from a digital product of any type, and is certainly not to be sneezed at.

I kicked off with Madonna's 'Holiday', recorded from vinyl at 16/48, and was impressed with the natural flow of the music; the NP30 is detailed enough to tell you a lot about the original recording (and indeed the quality of the LP surface), delivering a big and bouncy sound with fine texturing. For example, those classic synthesisers used throughout the track sounded suitably squelchy and fat – just as they should – while the drum machine (now seen as gloriously retro; at the time state-of-the-art) clicked and fizzed away behind. Madonna's vocals were carried really well, with a fine and believable tone, and decent timing too. The synthesised bassline grunted away beneath, sounding quite fruity and punchy with it. Overall then, I heard a creditable rendition of a classic pop track, and nothing to remind me I was listening to an entry level digital product of any type.

Moving to some epic nineties power pop with The Waterboys' 'Glastonbury Song' (16/44 WAV), and again the NP30 satisfied my appetite. Even going through my high end reference system costing many, many times its price, this little silver box sounded at ease and in control. I heard a big, widescreen rendition of the song, not the anaemic, apologetic pastiche I'd expected; the Cambridge carried a good deal of the power of this great recording with a wonderfully resonant piano and great big thumping snare and kick drums, topped off by a clean and believable hi hat sound. There was no fizziness up top, the NP30's sins being those of omission, missing just that last *nth* degree of sparkle and delicacy. Again, I was impressed by the musical flow of this gadget; things rocked and rolled along swimmingly; there was no sense of it giving a grey, pale rendition as I'd feared. Again, this didn't sound like a budget digital device.

Moving to a 24/96 FLAC of The Beatles' 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' and I was struck by the step change in the depth of the soundstage; the speakers seemed to disappear into the room in a way they never quite achieved via 16/44; at the same time the track shimmered with detail, giving a lovely feel to singer George Harrison's voice; it really conveyed the fragility of it, and its unique tonal qualities. Guitars sounded pleasingly fulsome too, although this track did highlight

for me that whatever the NP30 is, it is not particularly warm; if there's a single criticism that can be levelled at it, it's the overall tonality of the unit which is never quite overflowing with warmth and body. Fair enough at the price of course, and you can always plug in your favourite DAC to upgrade it.

This was confirmed with Herbie Mann's live rendition of 'Summertime'; another off-LP recording at 16/48 this song sauntered along with a suitably relaxed rhythmic gait, displayed a decent tonality with no harshness to the flutes, and a good degree of stage depth that really gave me the feel of Newport Jazz Festival (which is where the original recording was made). Dynamic transients were a little compressed in absolute terms perhaps, and the very lowest levels of detail came over slightly masked, but overall it was a most pleasurable experience. Again I had to remind myself of the humble budget origins of the product, and the fact that the music was coming off the very same computer I was currently using to bid on eBay to buy a floral Paul Smith shirt!



market designs, and is of course upgradeable via its digital output. Being a little harsh, the cold blue display isn't very nice to look at and the navigation is slightly clunkier than some, but still the NP30 does its job very effectively. It's an excellent, honest, entry level machine that's quite possibly all many computer audiophiles will ever need.

**AUDIO FORMATS**

- WAV containing uncompressed PCM 16-24bit 32-96kHz
- FLAC containing losslessly compressed PCM 16-24bit 32-96kHz
- AIFF containing uncompressed PCM 16bit 32-48kHz
- Microsoft Windows Media Audio (WMA 9 Standard) 32-320kbps
- MP3 (CBR or VBR) 16-320kbps
- AAC, HE AAC and AAC+ (CBR or VBR) 16-320kbps
- Ogg Vorbis 32-320kbps

**CONCLUSION**

An excellent, well sorted budget product, the Cambridge Audio NP30 is a great 'gateway' into network music playback; I suspect it will get a good number of people into this new way of listening to high fidelity recorded music. It's pretty easy to use, requires no special computer skills (as long as you're able to download a uPnP server such as Twonky onto your computer, you're sorted), is pleasant looking, small in size and well built for the price. But most of all it works very well, giving a very listenable sound that's miles ahead of cheap computer peripheral

**VERDICT**

Excellent value entry level audiophile network music player, with decent build, good functionality and a highly acceptable sound.

**CAMBRIDGE NP30** £399  
 Cambridge Audio  
 +44 (0)845 900 1230  
 www.cambridge-audio.com

**FOR**

- price
- size
- build
- sound

**AGAINST**

- display
- user interface

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Frequency response of the NP30 was ruler-flat to 20.7kHz our analysis shows, with a 44.1kHz sample rate signal and with 96kHz sample rate. So tonal balance will be correct and the sound neither unduly sharp nor warm.

Noise (IEC A) -127dB  
 Dynamic range 92dB  
 Output 2.2V

Distortion with a 16bit signal was a little higher than a good CD player, measuring 0.31% at -60dB against a typical 0.22% from CD. This dropped a little all the same, to 0.24%, with a higher resolution 24bit signal.

EIAJ Dynamic Range was inevitably lower than from CD due to the little extra distortion, measuring 92dB against 98dB for CD. This is still respectable though. Output from a 0dB signal measured 2.2V, standard CD level.

Frequency response (-1dB)  
 CD 5Hz - 20.7kHz

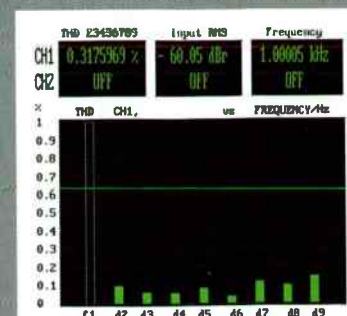
Distortion  
 0dB 0.001  
 -60dB 0.31%

Separation (1kHz) 99dB

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**DISTORTION**



# Image Conscious

**Tony Bolton finds Tannoy's Revolution DC6 loudspeaker is a highly focused performer...**

**I**t is always the mark of a company's success that its name becomes used to describe generic products from other makers. Hoover being probably the best known term. Tannoy, who started production of public

address systems in 1926, have also had their name applied as a descriptive term to other manufacturers PA systems over the years. The name Tannoy was first applied to the alloy of Tantalum and Lead used by company founder, Guy Fountain, to make

a solid state rectifier.

Over the last eighty five years the company has continued to be innovative, introducing the Dual Concentric speaker cone in 1949. This design has continued in various forms to this day and the six inch





examples seen here were first introduced some eighteen months ago on the Revolution Signature range of loudspeakers. In response to requests for a lower priced, but similarly performing version of the six inch Signatures, the Revolution series were introduced at the start of this year.

The main difference between the two series is in the cabinet shape. The curved sides of the Signatures have gone, to be replaced with the trapezoid shape seen here. This saves quite a lot in manufacturing costs and has allowed the driver and the crossover (the latter being mildly tweaked to allow for the different cabinet shape and capacity) to be transferred to this new model.

The driver has two parts, the high frequencies being handled by a 25mm Titanium dome with the proprietary Tulip Wave Guide, whilst the lower registers are fed through a 150mm treated paper pulp cone with a rubber surround, and a 44mm edge wound voice coil. Crossover frequency is 1.8kHz.

All of this is housed in a 365x202x253mm (h x w x d) rear ported cabinet made of 15mm particle board, that has an 18mm MDF front panel. Whilst the smaller 4 inch coned DC4 series reviewed by Paul Rigby in the March 2011 edition of *Hi-Fi World* are available in two finishes, the DC6 units only come in a real wood veneer described as 'Espresso' (not having come across an Espresso tree before, I made enquiries, only to discover that the wood is actually dark walnut!).

The crossover contains low loss laminated core inductors and Clarity Caps polypropylene capacitors which are mounted in a material called DMT. This stands for Differential Material Technology and is a substance that never sets solid and provides resonance protection to the caps. All of the wiring is silver plated 99.99999% pure oxygen free copper known as CS18, and made by Van Den Hul.

## SOUND QUALITY

I tried the speakers on both column and open frame stands, and found that the bass gained a little more extension and shape when using the former so all listening was done using a set of sand filled Atacamas. After a couple of days running in using the Isotek Burn-in disc I plugged the Tannoys into the Leema Tucana II and started listening to a 1958 copy of the London Baroque Ensemble playing Vivaldi's 'Concerto for two Clarinets, two Oboes, Strings, Bassoon and Harpsichord

Continuo'. The music is typical of the period, and the combination of instruments seemed quite well suited to the Tannoy's open and detailed presentation. I felt that there was a noticeable lift in the upper mid and treble areas which added a feeling of definition to the sound in a quite pleasant way, and with an older record such as this, increased the sensation of presence to the sound. I was pleased to note that the jangle of the harpsichord was detailed but not too overblown, retaining its place in the flow of the music.

Being a mono recording I expected the sound to be focused around the middle of the soundstage, and was pleasantly surprised to find that the sonic image actually occupied most of the space between the speakers, as well as extending quite a way back through the wall behind them. The presentation was uncluttered and well defined allowing for analysis of the differing strands, without distracting from the cohesiveness of the whole performance.

Since baroque music is quite light in its nature, I tried some organ music played on the organ of Westminster Cathedral. This version of Widor's 'Toccata from Organ Symphony No. 5 in F minor' is an old favourite of mine and was replayed here to good effect, although I would say that the bass, while very nicely shaped and detailed, was not the deepest that I have heard from standmount

had a definite affinity with my Icon Audio Stereo 40 Mk I. The fairly warm and rounded nature of this ten year old tube amp counterbalanced any forwardness in the treble from the speakers. I also found that the Denon PMA 2010 AE amplifier that I reviewed in the July 2010 edition of *Hi-Fi World* suited these speakers. Although it too had a little forwardness in the upper mid, the richness of its midrange and bass counterbalanced this and they worked very well together.



One of the records played repeatedly as I worked my way through the amplifier choices, was Frank Sinatra's well known 1956 LP 'Songs For Swinging Lovers'. The easy swing of the Nelson Riddle Orchestra just flowed out of the Tannoys. Again bass was well shaped

"I was impressed by their precision and musicality, and the speed with which they react to fleeting sounds..."

loudspeakers. There was enough there to be tonally satisfying, but not enough really subterranean stuff that would potentially annoy the neighbours. The trade off was a very sprightly performance from the lower registers, the bass stopping and starting very quickly, and giving a very tight feeling to the timing that was most enjoyable in the way it drove the music along.

Over the next few evenings I experimented with different amplifiers, finding that the DC6s

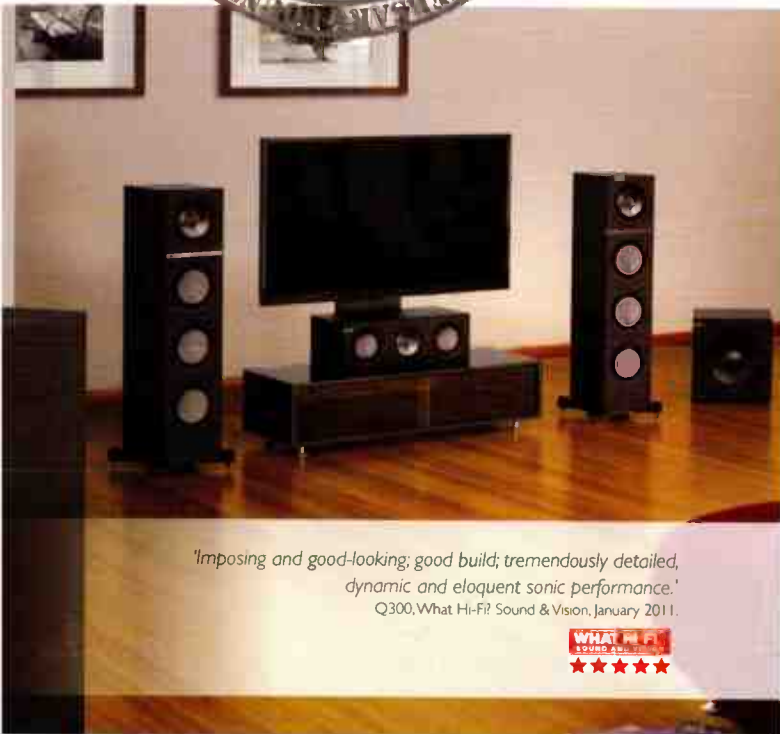
and agile, propelling the music along in a very natural manner which complimented the detail exhibited further up the frequency range. Sinatra's voice seemed a little in front of the orchestra and the sound (mono again) filled up the space behind him very convincingly. Although there is a frequency lift, it did not seem to be enough to overbalance the sound, but merely provided a better insight into the detail of the performance.

Moving over to CD, I played the



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"imaging was excellent, achieving a holographic three dimensionality I have only heard through far more expensive units..."

quite careful partnering. An amplifier or source that was bright sounding could result in a rather overdone treble that seared at the ears. Get the balance right and they are capable of describing sounds in a way that can be both convincing and very involving.

The 'Expresso' veneer was well executed and the magnetic fixings of the grills leave no unsightly holes if they are removed, resulting in a handsome and sophisticated appearance. They have certainly attracted favourable comments from visitors who have seen and listened to them, and were generally perceived to be more expensive than they actually are. Get the partnering electronics right and they offer an open and detailed rendition of your music that should prove very satisfying. With this in mind, I would unhesitatingly recommend an audition.

KLF's 'Chill Out'. Released in 1990, and regarded as one of the best albums of the ambient house music genre, the music flows in a continuous stream as it depicts a night-time journey up the American Gulf Coast from Texas into Louisiana. The samples of music are interspersed with sounds of traffic and trains, voices and background noises. Listened to in the dark it can be a very powerful experience...

The Tannoys' pin-point precision imaging came into its own here. Sounds moved seamlessly from left to right and back again, some started in the distance and gradually came forward, while others did the opposite. Each was beautifully depicted and shaped, and left me very impressed with the abilities of the DC6s to produce a sonic image that was focused and realistically sized.

## CONCLUSION

Overall I thoroughly enjoyed listening to these speakers. I was impressed by their precision and musicality, and the speed with which they can react to sounds that make a fleeting appearance. Background detail is actually explicit through these speakers, rather than being just an 'awareness' of something happening, as can occur with other transducers. They do not do floor shaking bass, but do provide a very tuneful description of bass notes in a very agile manner. Imaging capabilities were excellent, regardless of the age of recording, at times achieving a holographic three dimensionality to sounds that I have only heard through considerably more expensive units. They do however, need

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Tannoy get a nicely even bass and midrange from the DC6, much like their larger loudspeakers, with just a small amount of lift below 300Hz to add some body to the sound. The central horn comes in above 2.5kHz our impedance curve suggests and above this frequency output rises to a peak of +3dB at 4kHz, enough to give the DC6 quite obvious brightness and presence. This will strengthen detailing too. Treble then extends smoothly up to 20kHz from around 30 degrees off axis. The DC6s should be pointed straight down the room for best results and not toed inward toward listeners.

Bass rolls off below 120Hz, early for a cabinet of the size and likely meant to cope with near wall placement. The rear port has quite strong output (+7dB above the drive unit at 80Hz) and is tuned to 45Hz, so it will add heft to low bass notes; the DC6 does not have subsonics.

Sensitivity was healthy at 87dB from one nominal Watt of input (2.8V) so the DC6 will go loud with low power amplifiers, needing no more than about 60Watts and 40W will do in most situations.

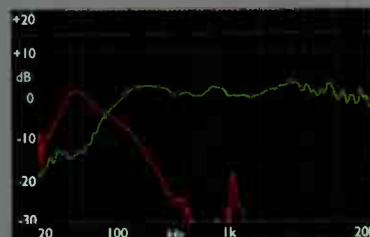
The decay spectrum over 200ms was clean and free from significant colourations or overhang.

As a load the DC6 is peaky and reactive so is not ideal and may

emphasise amplifier differences, working with some better than others. It measured out as an 8 Ohm loudspeaker.

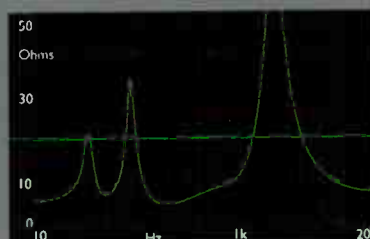
The DC6 measures well enough in all areas, even if it isn't technically ideal. Its properties are different from the norm, and its sound should be distinctive. NK

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

### IMPEDANCE



### MUSIC USED

KLF, 'Chill Out', Waxtrax Records TVT 7155

Frank Sinatra, 'Songs For Swinging Lovers', Capitol Records LCT 6106

'The London Baroque Ensemble' conducted by Karl Haas, Pye records CCL 30131

Jane Parker-Smith, 'Favourite Organ Masterpieces', Music For Pleasure MFP 57006

### REVIEW SYSTEM

Linn Sondæk/ Hadcock 242 Cryo/ Clearaudio

Concept turntable

Luxman E200 phono stage

Ah! Njoe Tjoeb 4000 Reference CD player

Leema Acoustics Tucana II amplifier

Icon Audio Stereo 40 mk I amplifier

Denon PMA 2010 AE amplifier

### VERDICT

An elegantly styled, very well engineered and distinctive sounding small standmounting speaker.

### TANNOY REVOLUTION

DC6 £549.90

Tannoy UK

+44 (0)1236 420199

www.tannoy.com

### FOR

- excellent imaging
- detail and definition
- fast bass

### AGAINST

- bass extension
- needs careful amp matching



**WIN A PAIR OF TRIANGLE'S SUPERB COMETE LE LOUDSPEAKERS WORTH £950 IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT COMPETITION!**

**QUESTIONS**

**[1] What anniversary are Triangle celebrating?**

- [a] their 30th
- [b] their 3rd
- [c] their 10th
- [d] their 1st

**[2] Who is the company chairman?**

- [a] Marc Le Bihan
- [b] Jacques Derrida
- [c] Carla Bruni
- [d] Jean Michel Jarre

**[3] What is the tweeter designation?**

- [a] TZ2500
- [b] CBX750
- [c] MTX125R
- [d] VF500FIL

**[4] Adam said the Cometes have Impeccable what?**

- [a] "timing"
- [b] "manners"
- [c] "looks"
- [d] "character"

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

**H**ere's your chance to win this fabulous pair of mid-price standmounters! This is what Adam Smith said in the July 2011 *Hi-Fi World*...

"Triangle continue their birthday celebrations with the release of the Comete Limited Edition. These herald the thirtieth birthday of the company. All too often such 'special' designs can be nothing more than a quick makeover in order to shift more boxes, but Triangle have ensured enough of a reworking that the units can be considered special. The most obvious sign of difference comes when you unpack the loudspeakers to find yourself trying not to blemish the exceptional gloss black finish. Around the back is a shiny plate confirming that you are indeed the owner of a Limited Edition pair of loudspeakers

and this includes the number plus an etching of the signature of the company chairman, Marc Le Bihan. The Comete LEs share the same 130mm bass/midrange driver as their standard counterparts, featuring a cellulose pulp cone with rubber surround on the outside and a hard rubber phase plug in the centre, but the tweeter is slightly different. Still based around a 25mm titanium dome with a front loading horn, the unit is designated the TZ2500 and its horn is now made from solid aluminium; Triangle promising that "its polished surface improves wave flow". Finally, internal wiring is improved over the standard model.

They are most certainly *not* a dull sounding loudspeaker; the detail they dig out of the music and serve up is astonishing at times. The tweeter is a thing of great beauty as far as I am

concerned, as I have seldom heard a unit that offers such precision, focus and speed but yet never once show the merest hint of edginess. The Triangles lay out the innermost complexities of a performance without any sense of strain or difficulty. Mozart's violins from 'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik' soared around my room with breathtaking speed, whilst the piano from Tori Amos's 'Pretty Good Year' shimmered gloriously in the centre of the soundstage. Aiding the Triangles' detail retrieval in knitting their performance into a cohesive whole was their fine low end performance. The Comete LE's go decently low and have impeccable timing. The soundstage they generate is better than many floorstanders and the detail which they effortlessly pull out of the source material makes the best of good recordings, no matter what genre of music is involved."

For your chance to win these superb speakers, just answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries on a postcard only by 31st July 2011 to:

**August 2011 Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF.**

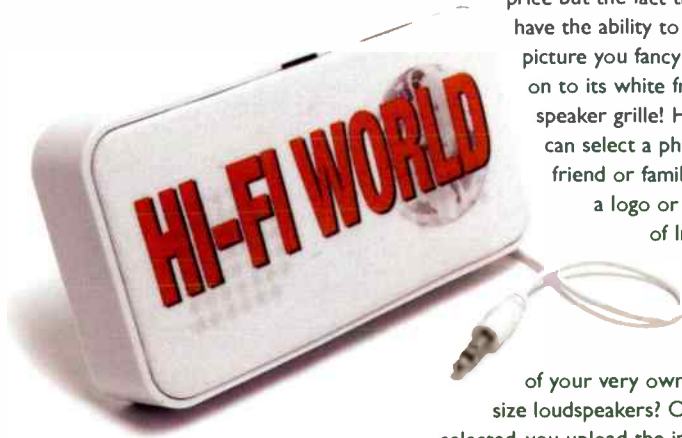
**RULES AND CONDITIONS OF ENTRY**

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

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

**MAY 2011 ELECTROCOMPANIET PD-1/EMS-1 DAC WINNER:  
 Mr. A. Gilson of Pontefract, West Yorkshire**





### DOODLE PORTABLE SPEAKER £29.95

We're used to seeing a wide variety of iPod/MP3 player docks on the market, but there are not so many basic, mobile speaker systems that can be plugged directly into such a player and, when not in use, can then be dropped into a pocket and taken with you when you are mobile. Doodle hopes to be different, but its principal selling point isn't so much its portability or even its

price but the fact that you have the ability to have *any* picture you fancy printed on to its white front cloth speaker grille! Hence, you can select a photo of a friend or family member, a logo or a piece of Internet artwork - or how about a picture

of your very own full size loudspeakers? Once selected, you upload the image to the company's website, resize it, manipulate its shape, add text to the image of different font types, colour and style, preview it to see if the final picture meets your approval and you're done!

The Doodle speaker itself arrives in a very simple chassis spanning 115x20x60mm and 272g. The front is plain except for your designer image and a power light while the rear sports a metallic kickstand for ease of listening plus an on/off switch, a bay for two AAA batteries

and a trailing mini-phono connector to connect to an iPod, MP3 player or phone plus a socket to plug in a supplied USB cable to connect the Doodle to a laptop. Despite its plastic construction and finish, the Doodle is quite sturdy and feels robust, essential for mobile use. I hooked up the Doodle to an iPod Classic, iPhone 4 and PC laptop for listening tests utilising varied jazz and rock WAV files. Okay, bass was non-existent due to the small size but there was a fair amount of midrange detail — it did distort at high volume however, on both the laptop and iPhone 4. Rock output was admirable with, for the size and price, a good attempt to portray the energy and the emotion of the piece. When jazz was played, I got a surprisingly intimate performance that slowly seduced the ear. An ideal mobile performer that offers a personal touch, a rare facet that can be applied to a 'cold, hard' piece of technology.

**PR**

[Contact: +44 (0)1993 862777, [www.origaudio.co.uk](http://www.origaudio.co.uk)]

# soundbites

### TDK 3 SPEAKER BOOMBOX £500

Back when tablets were bought to cure a headache, netbooks were instruction manuals for coarse fishing accessories and laptops held TV dinners, the luggable computer was hefted from car boot to office desk. The TDK 3-Speaker Boombox is the aural equivalent, especially with its strong, integrated carry handle that hovers over a pair of front-facing 152mm coaxial drivers plus an attendant subwoofer, powered by a 35W amp. The interface is exactly the same as the company's Soundcube (reviewed in the last issue of *Hi-Fi World*) with a mix of sturdy, retro-feel on/off/volume and selector knobs, a touch-sensitive source panel and high resolution, OLED display screens.

Around the back are connections for the FM and AM 'wire' aerials and a bay for twelve 'D'-type batteries, a ludicrously expensive mobile power option. On the right-hand side of the chassis is a USB port for iPod and USB flash drive, RCA sockets and an instrument port for guitar or

keyboard to sing-along with its (very) basic, built-in mixing capabilities. Listening is best done mounted on a decoupled surface to prevent uncontrolled bass and indistinct mids — I chose a pair of sturdy Atacama HMS 1 speaker stands.

Playing a selection of instrumental and vocal jazz at high volumes revealed superior build quality when compared to the company's own Soundcube. Via iPod and USB flash drive-sourced WAVs, upper frequencies were rather forward in nature. That said, detail extraction was good and accurate, with bass being sharp and punchy. Compressed chart CD-sourced WAVs were understandably hard in the upper frequencies on the Boombox, but rock fared better. In fact, the heavier the music, the greater the energy and the more raucous the source, the better the Boombox performed.

Despite the poor aerial, radio output was good. While talk-based radio such as BBC Radio 4, drew attention to hiss, music-based sources, such as BBC Radio 2 and

local stations, became strangely addictive, encouraging little actual listening and plenty of dancing.

Audiophiles will hate the Boombox due to its quirks and lack of sonic finesse. Yet, this TDK unit is like a friend who can be annoying and irritating at the best of times but whom you love to bits and wouldn't be without. **PR**

[Contact: [www.tdkperformance.eu](http://www.tdkperformance.eu)]



# mail



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.

## LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF iQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS

For more advice see Letters from earlier issues at [www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/letters](http://www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/letters)

**A pair of KEF iQ30 loudspeakers are on their way to ALEX COHEN, Letter of the Month winner in our July 2011 issue.**

## Letter of the Month

### ELECTRA-FYING

I took the opportunity to purchase a pair of Limited Edition Focal JM Lab Electra 907 Be standmount speakers a few years ago, as a starting point for a new hi-fi system. At the time, funds were not available to buy an amplifier and CD player that would realise the full potential of the speakers. So I bought a budget model, knowing that I would be upgrading at a later date and opted for a Marantz PM7001 integrated amplifier and a Marantz SA7001 CD player at about £350 each. Although the amp and CD player were quite good for items of their type and price, I realised at the time they were an inadequate match. The quality of the speakers with their beryllium tweeters really exposes their inadequacies, particularly with higher frequency vocals and violin etc, where the sound can sometimes be quite harsh.

I have quite eclectic taste, but the majority of my listening is classical music such as symphonies, opera and piano. Plus soul and jazz vocals from time to time. I am now looking for a substantial upgrade to the system and plan to do it in two stages, with a budget of approximately £6000 being spent on the amplifier first.

The second stage, to buy a new source, will then require a lot more thought. Do I buy another CD player of similar quality to the amplifier, or do I wait a little longer to see how things evolve with such equipment as music servers etc? Would it be a good time to change to something like a high end music server and will I be able to achieve the same sound quality as with

a CD player? Is this possible with the equipment available at present? From what I read, we appear to be on the cusp of new technical innovations and new models being brought to the market, which if things follow the usual trend will result in better quality sound reproduction, more choice and more competition. Do you have any inside knowledge, of what equipment of this type we might see in the next 12 months?

My listening room is not very large at 4.45m x 3.85m x 2.36m high with an irregular shape to one corner, plus solid concrete floor. Hence my reasoning to keep the Focal standmounts, which would probably cost in the region of £2600, to replace with a similar model such as the Focal 1008 Be.

The speaker stands are some I designed and made myself from solid maple, veneered MDF, polished stainless steel inlays and granite plinths. The tapered centre column is hollow and although I have not done this yet, they could be filled with heavy ballast such as lead shot, which would give an approximate weight of 30kg for each stand. Do you think this is worth doing and if so, what effect is it liable to have?

I would prefer an integrated amplifier and have an open mind as to whether this would be valves or solid-state, although my instinct is to go with solid-state for reasons



**Focal 907 Be loudspeakers on stands built by Jeff Sharratt – very nice too!**

of hassle free use. I have had four suggestions from various dealers, all different. One recommended something from the Sugden range such as the A21 SE, or a Sugden Masterclass IA-4. One recommended the Musical Fidelity AMS35i amp and the last dealer recommended a single ended triode, with 845 valves. Four different amplifiers, with common similarities, they are all integrated amps that operate in full Class A, with a similar output of around 30 to 35 watts. However, that's where the similarities end.

We all know it's just not that



simple and in the context of use with my Focal speakers and medium listening volumes, I would welcome your unbiased opinion on these Class A amps, their available headroom and suitability for Symphonic music with its wide dynamic range, as I was already thinking that Class A amplification might be the right way to go.

I would appreciate your opinion on the equipment mentioned above and suggestions for an upgrading path. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,  
**Jeff Sharratt**  
Lancashire

The clever match is that single-ended amplifier with 845 valves. Focal loudspeakers are quite challenging up top; I find the tweeter a bit hard and remorseless; it isn't on my list of favourites. A single-ended 845 amplifier of good pedigree should complement it nicely though and as the Focal is sensitive, limited power output is unlikely to be an issue. You don't say what its power is, but aim for 20 Watts minimum and hope for up to 40 Watts, for classical music played at reasonable volume. I suggest you ask for a demo. You may care to take a peek at an Almarro amplifier, using the spectacular 6C33C cold-war transmitter valves, as they sound lovely. Methinks you have nice listening times ahead. **NK**

Hi Jeff - the writing is on the wall; CD players are on their way out. I am not saying they'll have gone the way of the Dodo within a year or two, but prepare yourself for only a small range of hi-fi designs on sale new in five years from now. Many of us will have migrated to networked audio, most of us I suspect starting off by playing the music on our PCs or Macs, and then getting a Network Attached Storage device (i.e. fancy hard drive) which sits in the cupboard under our stairs



**Naim HDX offers good sound from hard disk, says David.**

and silently gets on with the job of delivering our digital media. I suspect these will be massive 50TB (or similar) capacity solid-state devices, and will also house most of our DVD collections too.

The short answer about sound quality, right now, is no. Pound for pound, a high quality transport (such as Cyrus's CD XT SE) feeding a DAC sounds better than a hard disk based music server. However, there are some very, very good ones, such as the Naim HDX and so if you want to go to this sort of product, the Naim is the one I'd recommend. Alternatively, if you don't want a built-in hard drive and prefer to play out via a networked computer, then you should look at either the Naim NDX or the Linn DS range; I haven't heard the NDX yet but I'd say the Linn Klimax DS, all £11,900 of it, is the best sounding network music player I've ever heard, by a large margin. It also has real 24/96 functionality, and is now very easy to use. Back in the real world, and the £1,200 Musical Fidelity Clic is a great mid-price hi-fi design. **DP**

### IPOD WAV

Am I missing something here? Adam Smith reviews the Wadia i170i152 in the April issue but apparently omits specifying the type of files he is playing on his borrowed iPod. He merely calls them 'exciting hi-resolution musical delights'. Those of us who use WAV files on our iPod Classics would be very happy to know (and probably, so would the good folks at Wadia) that the test was not undertaken with less than full WAV or AIFF files, because why would an average Joe who listens to freely downloaded MP3s (which cannot be called music at all in my opinion) buy one of these expensive Wadia sets? How realistic would such a test be if they were used to play AAC, so called Apple lossless (oh yeah), or MP3 files? How would one hear the Wadias at their best in such circumstances?

Actually, as a 'serious student of music' I would also quibble with Adam's sweeping conclusion as to 'how mediocre the little Apple sounds when played via its internal digital convertor and headphone output'. Yes, it's not a great DAC, but horses for courses, and while I would never put such a signal through my Naim/SF Cremona system because it would lose so much musically, I have had enormous pleasure with a pair of good quality Sennheiser on-ear noise reduction cans to the point of really thrilling reproduction, because of the amazing bandwidth of the Sennheisers and the proximity of the astoundingly good drive units in them. During a flight or in bed at night I have had some wonderful listening moments. And this bearing in mind that I play my vinyl on a fully loaded Brinkmann turntable, so my ears are not faulty.

Garbage in, garbage out, as Saint Ivor used to say! Give the iPod some great WAV files and a good set of cans and you can really startle people. I get sick of Apple and others calling the iPod



**A smooth sounding single-ended Class A valve amplifier like this Almarro 318B would suit Focal loudspeakers nicely.**



**Load WAV files onto an iPod and "you can really startle people" says Kingsley Flint...!**

'an MP3 player'. On a 160GB iPod you can load a lot of fine music in WAV format.

All the best,

**Kingsley Flint,  
Switzerland**

Kingsley, my apologies for the oversight in the review and I am happy to confirm that the borrowed iPod was indeed full of WAV files as the owner is very particular about such things and refuses to listen to anything lesser! In the rare event that I carry out any digitisation of my own music I also use WAV because, as you rightly say, AAC and MP3 just don't cut it in audiophile terms.

As to my comments with regard to the iPod's sonics, I stand by them. Yes, with a decent set of earphones and the aforementioned WAV files, the results for on-the-move listening are surprisingly capable, however I was still surprised at how a twenty-odd year old portable CD player still managed to better it. You also say yourself that you would not use your iPod through your main system and neither would I – it's all down to expectation and limitations. As a convenient portable music player, the iPod performs well with a little care, but I still maintain that as a high quality digital source for a main system, it falls rather short, even when played through a highly capable dock like the Wadia.

Finally, I do know where you're coming from with regard to the expression "MP3 player". It seems that the phrase has entered the world's vocabulary in the same way that we all 'hoover' our carpets, even though we're more likely to

be using a Dyson these days; and I am becoming rather tired of being sneered at by the anti-4x4 brigade for driving a 'Jeep', even though mine definitely has a Land Rover badge on the front! **AS**

If you're pleased with your iPod sound, I suggest you spend £15 on a good, lightly used Sony Walkman on eBay and a couple of ageing prerecorded cassettes. This will soon change your mind! iPods sound awful; I've reviewed almost every one since 2003, plus most of their commercial rivals, and I am afraid they compare poorly. More worryingly, they've got worse, particularly so in the past three or four years. My 2005 Mini sounds better than my 2007 Nano, which sounds better than my 2009 Classic, etc...

I am a big Apple fan (I'm writing this on a MacBook Pro) but I simply don't buy any argument about iPods sounding good – if you think they sound good you need to see what else is available; try Sony's 32GB flash memory powered NWZ-A846 for starters. iPods have two real strengths; first is the convenience (which is great but not exceptional anymore) and second are the peripherals; you can now get a number of devices to give them direct digital output, which at last makes them listenable through real hi-fi systems. But for those who think this is a major triumph of modern technology, it's worth pointing out that most Sony portable CD players and MiniDiscs had this feature twenty years ago. **DP**

**MASTER BLASTER?**

*I have just discovered a fabulous vintage CD player, which blows my Resolution Audio Opus 21 into the weeds... Currently it is playing "The Corrs" and*



**Panasonic have made hi-fi in the past and continue today with products like the DMP-BD45 Blu-ray we tested in our October 2010 issue.**

*Andrea is definitely in my bedroom singing! It can't be a recording...*

*I am referring to a Panasonic RX-DT610 which also has twin cassette decks and is a ghetto blaster type with battery operation, which I have not tried, but no doubt going to. DC will be even better if that is possible. Every scrap of information, every nuance, every guitar*

*string plucked is there, with space around the instruments and so much information is pulled of the disc, i am stunned. Doing some research it is a 1 bit, 4 DAC with 32 x oversampling, with "MASH". Just how good were these early Panasonic models? Were they ever reviewed? Or ignored in favour of the Technics models.*

*It has two RCA CD outputs on the back, which i have got transparent cables plugged in, which powers 2 x Cyrus Mono X's with pre amp and PSXR running with QED XT 400 speaker cable onto Dynaudio Contour 3.0 speakers with the much celebrated Esoteric tweeter. The Panasonic bass unit is now on my hi-fi rack, and sits on two pieces of wood, then two pieces of polystyrene (it works) to get that last bit of performance out of it.*

*So, my question is did Panasonic do hi-fi separates? And were the Technics CD separates sound that good? It would be wonderful to see what you think, gonna sell my Resolution Audio now... Thank you for such a great magazine Best regards,*

**Tim Harrison**

Panasonic was simply a brand name of Matsushita, as was/is Technics. In the nineteen seventies, Technics was actually sold alongside Panasonic separates in hi-fi shops, and they had parallel ranges. Technics was the 'premium' brand to the good but plain Panasonic, a sort of Audi to the VW that was Panasonic. So it's very, very likely that the Panasonic will have a Technics CD player inside, so to speak. I'd guess this would be a 1-bit MASH type DAC that they used throughout the nineties, but before this I think they did do some 18bit, 8 times oversampling machines if I remember rightly. Either way, try to find the vintage of your ghetto blaster and buy a Technics CD player from

that same generation from eBay; I doubt if you'll pay more than £50. That might give you that magical sound you love so much? Personally, I don't think the Technics CD players were that special – they were very 'Japanese' sounding, which means 'crash, bang, wallop!' But each unto their own... **DP**





**The astonishing Audio Research 610T monoblock power amplifier stands nearly 2ft tall and weighs 77kgs. It produces 600 Watts from sixteen 6550s operating in push-pull pairs - see them on top!**

### CLEAN SHEET DESIGNS

I've come to the conclusion: cleaning signal connections with pure alcohol (which was popular in the past) or the myriad other quite expensive cleaners available on the market today, is a waste of time. Well, I have never noticed an improvement in definition, clarity, tighter bottom end, clearer highs, more air, soundstage, imaging, and other descriptive wording we all read about, after laboriously cleaning all of my cable ends and amp sockets. There has been barely a black mark seen on the cloth and cotton bud after cleaning them all and there are plenty of them. I would love to hear of other readers comments regarding this.

I recently had mains cables (plus XLRs) made for me by a relatively new company, Custom Hi-Fi Cables, in Yorkshire, to replace the bog-standard ones supplied with all equipment. They have made a remarkable improvement to the sound and I cannot recommend these cables highly enough; they have been one of the most significant upgrades I have ever made a big call, I know. So, my advice is to think decent cables before changing anything else.

I have my room on a separate circuit and the stereo is also on its own circuit feeding wall sockets for most of the equipment; other gear runs from a good-quality power board. So, I am quite serious about giving the system a decent start. However, if the cleaning of cables/sockets did make a noticeable difference to me then, of course, I would clean them as is necessary, as I feel I have

purchased some nice gear over the years and would want to maintain the resultant sound through good maintenance.

Please feel free to give me your assessment of the equipment and any changes you feel could be made: Bryston 4B-ST power amp and BP-25 preamp with MPS-1 power supply using XLRs; Musical Fidelity X-Ray V3 CD as transport (QED digital coax to X-Dac), plus all the other V3 X-Series equipment (with four upgraded power spikes to the PSU): X-Dac, X-Can headphone amp, X-PSU, X-LPS phono stage, X-10 tube buffer (I love this piece of gear) (I have two of these, one for the CD and the other for the Project RPM 5.1 with Ortofon 2M Blue I have just got back into vinyl); Denon 2910 for DVDs; Sennheiser 650 and HD 250 Linear II headphones; Magneplanar MG-IIIa speakers with rear wave attenuators (highly recommended, as opposed to those ficus trees! - I don't like to use those horrible supplied resistors,

either) and using Nordost Blue Heaven jumpers from the crossover box; also Magneplanar MG-1.6/QR speakers (with no attenuation) using upgraded jumpers for the bi-wire terminals.

I love both of these pairs of speakers, so I swap them around from time to time. Speaker cables and interconnects are of the same make and are custom-made. The room is carpeted with a tile border and is 24ft x 16ft with 12ft raked ceilings, huge beams and is acoustically fine, only using foam in the corners where wall meets ceiling this helps with imaging; no other room treatment is necessary. The speakers fire down the long side and are approx. 4ft from the back and side walls, 5ft 6in apart with the ribbons on the inside.

I have had big thumpers (Celestion 66, old Jensen 15-inchers) in the past, but I have foregone the brutish bass and high efficiency for more finesse and accuracy with the panels these days.

Now, to my question. It is regarding the Bryston gear. Although I love the Canadian hardware and it sounds very good to me (and can happily live with it), I feel that a little more warmth could



**A more affordable alternative to a Magneplanar is Eminence Technology's LFT-08b.**

be instilled in the system, as it is all a bit clinical now that my preference is for the panels good, but clinical. The Musical Fidelity gear with its tubes adds warmth, but I was wondering whether a tube power amp would be an improvement over the Bryston. Should the Bryston preamp also be replaced? Can you suggest a suitable high-powered tube amp or monoblocks which could fit the bill, as the 4 Ohm Maggies do like a heap of power? My test sheet on the Bryston 4B is 290W a side into 8 Ohms (approx. 500W into 4), so I wouldn't want any less power. I know it is a personal choice which road I take, but I would value your opinion.

Thank you for your magazine, especially the mail pages. Keep up the great standard.

**Nick**  
**South Australia**

I'm sorry to be critical Nick, but neither Bryston nor Magneplanar have ever quite floated my boat. Brystons are very much 'studio practice', powerful, dry and rather remorseless. Irrespective, you cannot easily get 290 Watts per channel from a valve amplifier to match them unless it comes from Audio Research who stack 6550s eight deep a side to get required power from their 610T monoblock monster for example, a Mack truck of tube amps

You likely will not be using anywhere near 290 Watts into the Maggies since such power would reduce them to piles of ash. A pair of Quad II-eightys are excellent high power valve amps if you like



**Focal 1007 Be loudspeakers – expensive and high quality, but easy to knock over.**

to keep it simple but elegant. Their 90W output is sufficient to drive the Maggies very loud, without destroying them.

Moving upward power wise brings us into 211 and 845 territory,

with an amp like our in-house benchmark Icon Audio MB845 MkII producing 120 Watts per channel. Such amplifiers are expensive though.

Maggies can be improved upon. To be specific, try to get to hear an Eminent Technology LFT-08b if you can. As magnetic planar loudspeakers go it is one of the best. You will recognise its sound but find it an improvement I believe. **NK**

### CHILD'S PLAY

I'm hoping you can help me with a dilemma. I have a six month old baby son who is now mobile and interested in everything, including my 'speakers and hi-fi! Whilst we will try to teach him that the hi-fi is a no go area I suspect that this is not likely to be 100% successful and once he is a toddler and starts to have equally boisterous friends round the lure of the kit might be too much! Obviously, safety is paramount and I am particularly concerned with the possibility of my stand mount speakers being toppled. Space does not currently permit a dedicated listening room so the hi-fi is in the lounge.

My kit consists of a Project Xpression turntable, Cyrus CDXT SE/DAC-X transport and DAC with PSX-Rs, Sugden Masterclass IA4 integrated amp and Focal Electra 1007BE speakers. I have a large music collection spanning Rock, Indie and Americana and listening is split 80/20 in favour of CD. After some initial problems with the brightness of the sound I opted to upgrade my amplification and purchased the Sugden second hand. I now have a powerful, smooth sound that is very clear and detailed with a natural tone. I am able to enjoy music regardless of recording quality and the system is not fatiguing. These days I generally find myself listening at night once the baby is asleep and the system works well at low volumes.

I can see a couple of options to make things safer without sacrificing sound quality and would be grateful for your opinion on them or for any other ideas you may have:

1. Replace the standmount speakers with some floorstanders that will have a lower centre of gravity than the 1007BEs and be too heavy to knock over. The obvious choice would be Focal Electra 1028BE but I would be interested in any other recommendations you think would be worth a demo around the same price bracket. I have to listen across a long, narrow room and am around 10ft from each speaker, which are around the same distance apart. The room dictates that the speakers need to be positioned about a foot from the rear wall but they have plenty of free space around



**The Icon Audio HP8 valve headphone amplifier.**

them and are not close to any corners. The closeness to the rear wall is one of the reasons I opted for a standmount speaker originally. I do not want to lose the clarity and detail the Beryllium tweeter brings but definitely do not want a bright sound, if the tone has to be coloured I would prefer it slightly on the warmer side.

2. Sell the amp and speakers and buy a high quality headphone set up. Do you have any recommendations in this area that are of similar quality to my current kit and how do you think the sound would compare with my current set up? I currently use a Project Headbox and some closed back Sennheiser HD 265 headphones for occasional listening but would want to upgrade if headphones are my main listening point. If I took this option I would likely buy a cheap amp and bookshelf speakers that could be shelved well out of reach to allow for background listening and to teach the boy about good music! Again, if you could make some suggestions at as cheap a price as possible but certainly less than £500 for the pair bearing in mind the sound I like and my preferred music genres, it would be appreciated. Thanks in advance,

**Rob**

Hi Rob. Focal loudspeakers have a distinctive 'tone', partly through the use of beryllium, and if you are happy with them then I suggest you stay with them. Monitor Audio loudspeakers are a possible alternative, being as well made and finished as Focals, and with a similar presentation and capability.

I am not sure bigger floorstanders are the answer though; children soon grow big enough to push them over. Targets for inquisitive fingers and minds are the tweeter domes and bass/midrange dust caps, and my son liked to drop toys through the ports when he was small.

All of which suggests you might be best off with a headphone amplifier, one that uses valves and I



would recommend the Icon Audio HP8. I suggest you look further up the Sennheiser range for headphones, and audition the best you feel you can afford. Small loudspeakers like the new KEF Q100 or Q300 would likely suit, or Usher S-520s. Just bear in mind that children seem to grow up very quickly and what fascinates your son today will be 'boring' tomorrow against his new iPod or whatever it may be in 10 years time! Then you can wheel the Focals back out again. **NK**

I would be tempted to put your beloved system up in the loft, and buy an Arcam Solo Mini and a pair of Q Acoustics 2050 floorstanders (plus a good pair of headphones - or even Stax electrostatic earspeakers). This would be a far more child-proof system but would also sound good enough to tide you through the next couple of years. **DP**

### SHED CRED

*I wonder if there are other readers out there who share my problem. Does your hi-fi system, through necessity, share space with the television in the family room? Are you regularly denied access to said system because your wife insists*



**My companion in the shed, a Rogers Ravensbrook transistor amplifier, says Alan Scott.**

*on not being disturbed by your presence while she immerses herself in such fascinating TV programmes as Dancing on Ice and Britain's Got Talent?*

*If so, why not move out? No, I'm not advocating leaving the missus! Move out to the garden! All you need to achieve near audio nirvana is your very own garden shed, the bigger and more robust the better! My shed is only 9ft by 6ft, but small can be beautiful!*

*Employ a qualified electrician to install an RCD protected lighting and power circuit in the shed. Note that this is nouifiable electrical work which requires approval from your local authority building control department.*

*Now search your loft for the old hi-fi gear you stopped using years ago. I re-discovered my vintage Rogers Ravensbrook transistor amplifier which, after irrigating its control pots with contact cleaner, worked perfectly. I*

*paired the amp with a much less venerable Technics SL-PJ28A CD player, but not before I attenuated the player's line level output to match the 100mV sensitivity of the amplifier's radio input into which it had to be plugged.*

*The choice of loudspeakers for use in a shed is more problematical. For instance, my archived pair of Wharfedale Dovedale 3s (incorporating 12inch woofers) took up too much valuable shed space. What you really need in the restricted shed listening environment is a pair of small, near field monitors. However, there is no need to break the bank. I use a pair of (sub £100) JBL Control One mini monitors which come complete with wall brackets. As a bonus, their moulded cabinets and plastic coned woofers are able to withstand the extremes of temperature and humidity that can be encountered in a garden shed.*

*Finally, for both thermal and acoustical reasons, insulation should be attached to the internal shed walls. However, I decided to attach a mini-bar instead!*

*My Garden Sound Studio (as I like to call my shed) keeps me happy and keeps me (as you can tell) almost sane! I whole-heartedly recommend this solution to any reader who shares*

*my problem. Hopefully, your wife will appreciate your efforts to avoid disturbing her, as mine does.*

**Alan Scott  
Chelmsford**

An interesting letter Alan, which on first reading had me just about to call in the men in white coats to come and take you away.

But do you know what - I think you make a great point! This has only become clear to me now I've moved (I'm on to my third listening room in as many years) and the acoustics of my new place are dramatically different; far better in some ways and worse in others. The difference in sound between this new place and the last one is as large as that between a pair of £100 Mission bookshelf speakers and a £10,000 pair of Martin Logans

- I kid thee not! Sheds, I suspect, have good acoustics. Wood is a well damped structure and I am sure the internal construction breaks up standing waves. Factor in the fact it's probably a good long way away from the neighbours (unless they too listen in their sheds) and you're onto something. I think I can speak on behalf of all our readers and everyone here at World Towers in saying we'd love to see some pictures! **DP**

### MATCH MAKING

*I've often read comments about the matching of various components, but these are sometimes made in the context of a particular discussion. But are there any principles behind this? Is it just trial and error or left to dealer recommendation? For example, I take the case of my own very conventional system that is made up as follows: Linn Sondek, with all upgrades and recently serviced. Lingo Mk I power supply (11 years old, never serviced), Ekos tonearm (rebuilt by Linn 4 years ago), Linn Klyde cartridge (7 years old; due for renewal?), Linn Linto phono-stage. Naim NAC102 pre-amp (13 years old, never serviced) with HiCap power supply (just serviced by Naim), Naim NAP180 power amp (recently serviced), Ruark Solus 'speakers on Partington stands.*

*Now I once read a comment in World something to the effect that the Linto works well with Linn products, but with no indication as to how it is suited to other cartridges. So when World Standards recommends cartridges (say) it makes no reference to matching. Therefore, if I were to seek your recommendation for a replacement cartridge (which I am) on what basis would you make it?*

*Then there's another puzzle. In general, is a preamp/ power amp combination better than an equally expensive integrated amp? How long is a piece of string? I hear you ask. But, in terms money-for-money equivalents, which would be best, a Naim Supernait or my existing NAC102/NAP180?*

*Finally, with respect of the notion of Best Buy, I notice that Icon Audio products are very highly regarded in Hi-Fi World. For instance, Noel is highly appreciative of the effectiveness of the PS3 Phono Stage as a pre-amp and phono stage combination. To be specific, he said that it would be an admirable partner to the NAP180. Does that mean he prefers it sonically to the NAC102 (for instance)? Or is it on the basis of it being better value for money than a separate pre-amp/phono stage combination?*

*Incidentally, this places a question mark over the sacred tenet of Hi-Fi World philosophy: namely, that one*



**The Rega RB300 arm set a sensible design standard that others have matched. It has an effective mass of 12gms that cartridges are happy with.**

should audition equipment for oneself and not rely on the official opinions of experts. Unfortunately, in the case of Icon Audio, it seems that equipment cannot be auditioned at home (the only valid context for auditions). And this also must apply to cartridges.

On the topic of your new website, how will it affect the make-up of the monthly magazine? Will it be open only to subscribers? Will there be an online version of the magazine? Can there be an archive section that provides access to reviews and articles from days gone by? I would certainly subscribe for use of material like this.

Each month, a total of about 12 pages of the magazine are devoted to World Standards and World Classics. But the content of these sections changes very slowly and it is largely the same from month to month. So why not consign these two features to the website? They could be replaced by an ever-changing summary of the best recent products (over the previous 12 months perhaps). There could also be a Best Buy section along the lines used by Which? magazine.

The magazine could begin a series of educational articles on the principles that govern hi-fi. It could also provide guidelines on systems for beginners and outline the ensuing paths to upgrade. Readers could be encouraged to make a contribution to this, but there are some very useful websites that could form part of this programme ([decun.me.uk](http://decun.me.uk) and [reviewexplorer.com](http://reviewexplorer.com) for example). The process of demystifying many of the technicalities should attract more readers.

Although I very much like your sections on audiophile vinyl records, I note that there is little or no reference to classical music. Perhaps this is another opportunity for readers to provide views on good recordings and sources of purchase.

Anyway, even if Hi-Fi World remains totally unchanged, I shall continue to be a regular subscriber to my monthly glimpses into the unreachable sphere of audio nirvana.

**Peter Ruane**

Hi Peter. On cartridge matching our recommendation is made on what we

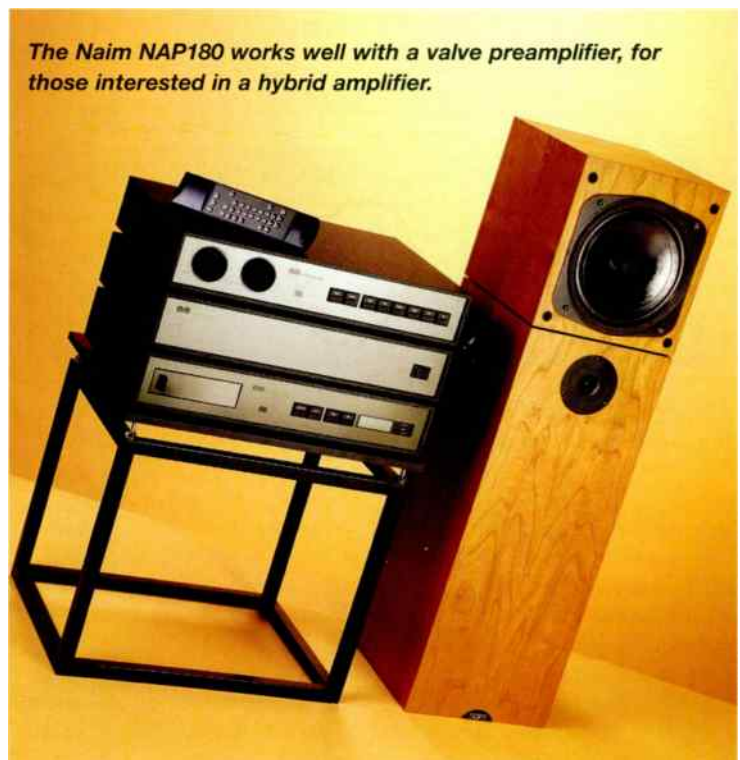
believe is likely to suit your system and your tastes, from a collection of products we feel are amongst the best at any particular time. You can see this in our pages when someone asks – say – for a smooth sounding moving coil (MC) cartridge costing no more than £500. That narrows the field down to a few models, from Ortofon, Benz Micro and Audio Technica at present (but not the AT OC9 MLIII). In most cases the arm in use will suit them, as most readers after such a device already have a good arm. If their arm is unsuitable then we say so.

If you are wondering whether it can all be narrowed down to narrow

too. Cartridge manufacturers tailor their hinge compliances accordingly so these days most cartridges in most arms will resonate in a region from 8Hz - 12Hz our measurements show and this is fine. There is no big issue here.

A Naim NAP180 works very nicely with a valve preamplifier I found and this is both a sonic assessment and a practical one. Valve preamps offer quite a different sound to transistor ones, with their more relaxed and fluid sound, as well as better stage depth and sweeter treble, plus an absence of glare or hardness. A NAP180 provides plenty of solid-state power and is smooth enough to carry these properties through to the loudspeaker. I tried the combo as a quick experiment and was quite taken aback at what a nice sound issued forth.

We implore everyone to listen if they can, because personal taste, often based on experience, is a major issue. Neither David nor I feel happy about providing definitive advice; we know there is no such thing. We just do our honest best and readers seem more than happy with the result.



**The Naim NAP180 works well with a valve preamplifier, for those interested in a hybrid amplifier.**

technical issues, such as arm effective mass, cartridge compliance and the arm's resonant frequency (and suchlike), as is sometimes suggested, the answer is a firm "no". Nowadays, most arms meet a sensible target effective mass value of around 10-12gms, Rega arms being amongst them, having set a useful working standard over the years. Rega arms demonstrate that an arm can be "light" (low effective mass) yet rigid

Consider this little notional difficulty if you will: my experience reviewing and designing loudspeakers informs me that all box loudspeakers are crap. "Rhubarb" I hear you say. "The man's taken leave of his senses!" Listen to an open dipole (e.g. Quad) then go back to a box loudspeaker and you will understand what I am getting at: you are listening to a box; we all are. Since this sound is for 99.9% of the population of the planet



an existential reality, then it is for them the truth. But it isn't – it's the sound of a box, of this I can assure you. So when is the truth not a truth and can I be right if 99.9% of the planet would be unlikely to agree?

Best not to get too involved with notions of right and wrong and absolute truths I believe. We simply suggest what items have merit and explain why. I even enjoy listening to box loudspeakers (well, a few!).

The new website was designed to support the magazine in many ways, as well as develop its own life, if slowly. Of least interest to most

*Arcam Universal - better DVD, much better CD, slightly soft SACD hum. What of DVD-Audio I hear you cry (whimper maybe) - well seems like CD in yer face, on 11, to me most of the time. Brilliant for the first couple of minutes and then that false, non organic digital glare seems all to prevalent.*

*So I waited for the Blu-Ray experience. Not an early adopter, I have 100s of DVDs and how much better would Blu-Ray be on a 32" set and surely it's just DVD-Audio really, which I'm not keen on? But in the end I paid a couple of hundred quid for a Panasonic BD80 a year or so ago. It's the more*

*the HDCDs sound nice?) I have heard.*

*By the way I think it was unfair of you (or silly of Panasonic probably more likely) not to include the current more expensive Panasonic in your fairly recent group test, the High Clarity ones really do seem to make a difference with audio which naturally is your main area of comparison. Don't think they spend any more money on the picture hardware or software but they do on the audio. And how good is the Panasonic as a CD player? No idea – haven't even stuck one in the tray, possibly because I'm worried that it too might sound better – the newest one has a "valve" setting for warm CD replay I believe.*

*So how much better if it was Cambridge Audio's much praised machine, or if the Panasonic had better interconnects or better isolation or electrical cable or was fed out via HDMI? The Cambridge could be my next universal. What do you reckon? How good are the Cambridge Audio analogue outs? I know I only should be thinking HDMI, but I like the kids DVDs not needing all the amps turned on to hear them and so want to use the HDMI straight to the TV, helps save the planet and sticky fingers claiming "I don't know how it got broke Dad, it wasn't me, it was working when I left it".*

*Or should I be happy with what I've got and stop spending money.*

*Or maybe I've just never heard a properly set up turntable playing well recorded/produced/pressed vinyl that's in good nick, and then I really would have heard High Definition musicality. Maybe that's just as well.*

*Regards - keep the magazine coming as I do like it, sometimes even the bits about those machines which play those fragile funny black circle things.*

**Matthew Mowle**



**Connect up via HDMI to a modern receiver like Onkyo's TX-NR609 for best sound from silver discs.**

readers I suspect, but of concern to manufacturers, is how we test their products. Being a design engineer myself I well understand how dismayed some manufacturers can be about the ways in which their products are assessed by magazines. That's why we are so strong on measurement, putting extensive details on-line for manufacturers to inspect and discuss if they wish.

After pleas from readers around the world we re-instated the old Buying Guide (see Olde Worlde) and have supplemented it with a long World Favourites listing. We will extend this soon to provide an even more comprehensive guide to obsolete products. These listings remain in the magazine because many prefer to see them on paper.

Old articles of interest will be posted, but not the entire back catalogue, which is too great. Our on-line magazine offers back issues to 2001. As yet, although the website is not running as an independent magazine but it may go that way in future. **NK**

### HIGH LIFE

*I shouldn't even really be reading Hi-Fi World with my love of universal players. Here's a brief recent-ish history.*

*Denon Universal DVD-2900 – built like a tank, great DVD, great SACD (yep get that organic feeling here), slightly soft CD.*

*expensive Panasonic ("High Clarity" audio you know) and got the important six analogue outs as my amp hasn't got HDMI.*

*Give it a go I thought. Wow. Not talking picture which is clearly miles superior, but how come a cheap Panasonic with it's captured electrical plug, not on as well isolated a support as the Arcam, connected via old cheap QED interconnects sounds as good as this! Put something like John Mayer's 'Where the Light Is' through it and it is brilliant, better than any other silver disc of any variety (did I mention some of*



**Is it under-damped or over-damped asks Joe, as the snow melts in Canada...**

Know what you mean about DVD-A sounding sterile but Blu-ray OK – yet both are PCM. My suspicion here is that high definition studio encoders (i.e. Analogue to Digital convertors) improved greatly in the intervening period between these formats so what we are hearing are better digital recordings. John Mayer's 'Where The Light Is' is one very good example of a sparkingly clean, modern (2007) high definition digital recording, its 24/96 code making CD sound bland and crude.

But you know what I am going to say Matthew – you must move to HDMI. Then Blu-ray's superiority will become even more apparent. A receiver like Onkyo's TX-NR609 would suit, then you could get the Cambridge 650BD Blu-ray player and play every silver disc you have, including DVD-As and SACDs.



**How do you modify a Technics SL-1200, asks Mitch Long? This is a Timestep Evo modified Technics, where the power supply and drive circuitry have been tweaked.**

There will be problems with the kids, as they will start stabbing the receiver remote control buttons willy-nilly and lock it up, if not blow it up! A simple stereo amp could be connected up via the analogue outputs, alongside the receiver, its output being sent to a pair of mini loudspeakers on the floor somewhere, perhaps hidden out of view and harms way. The Onkyo has a video pass through mode to accommodate this, so the TV will work even with the receiver off. Or just sell the kids!

**NK**

**TECH TALK**

Thanks to NK for replying to my question about testing solid-state amplifiers as published in the April issue. In the same issue, he responds to a question on speaker damping and amplifier damping factors. Quick question for him; what would he consider the Quad ESL-63 to be,

underdamped, damped, or ?? Just a quick reply would be appreciated.

**Joe Wdowiak**

(in Canada, where the snow is finally melting)

Simple – it is ?? That means there is no simple reply. The bass panel resonates at 90Hz, Peter Walker told me, and as you would expect, impedance rises to a very high value as a result. Technically then, it is lightly damped. Hope the grizzlies aren't awake yet. **NK**

**EXTREMES**

Sometimes your magazine drives me to extremes in reaction to your response to some reader's letters! Here in Singapore I just picked up your April copy yesterday. The Peter Schuster letter. Somehow I don't think the guy's first language is English, does he not want

do you modify a Technics? (what are the choices?). What should I do with my loudspeaker to improve (destroy) it? (I mean actual 'how to' not buy this and this).

Probably in the next few weeks I'll send you some info + photos on the end result of my Technics journey, but the situation in Japan is hampering the final piece of the puzzle. A cheap turntable mat using a coating that allows the record to be bonded to the mat in playing, but can be easily lifted on and off. The turntable is mounted on a massive plinth with a 12in arm (hybrid OL/local making), series 1shunt supply (sinks and sources), magnetic bearing and of course the mat.

Thanks,  
**Mitchel Long**

Hi Mitch. We don't care about the English, or lack of it, so much as whether the writer has something to say that might interest other readers. Personally, I rather like the fractured English of many overseas writers; it has its own charm. And generally the letters have valuable content, unlike a lot of the hollow opinion and personal insults traded by the twitteratti in many forums these days, for example. Looking forward to hearing about your Technics mods. **NK**

**INTRIGUE**

I am slightly intrigued by DP's reply to Peter Smith concerning vinyl to CD in your March 2011 issue. Having created a CD-R using a CD recorder surely this CD-R would be accepted by any computer for copying/editing/scratch removal or have I got the wrong end of the stick?

Also, of the many options for converting vinyl/cassette to CD which, in your esteemed opinion, gives the best sonic results.

**Wayne Allen**

to control volume in three independent listening areas from the same source? What's the Flamingo thing about?

Anyway, gripe over and I didn't even mention the great cable debate and usage of experts to wage war in your pages. Overall sometimes the responses don't seem so fair (sometimes the letters are not fair I grant, but you may choose not to publish!). Anyway, it's also your right to express your thoughts also as you deem appropriate.

Anyway the review of the Technics was very nicely done. As I've written in the past, DIY is a great way to get what you want. I think some articles on this would be interesting. For example, how

**Download the free Audacity sound editor software to record your LPs to computer...**

Hi Wayne - I think you've got the wrong end of the stick. You're right that a CD-R made on a CD recorder is perfectly fine for computer use. As for your second question, there are umpteen options. A CD recorder, recording direct from the





**Luxman's E200 phono stage is super sensitive and very quiet, matching even the lowest output moving coil cartridges.**

line outputs of your phono stage is a good start – especially if the CD recorder is of high quality and has good analogue-to-digital convertors.

The other way is to do it via your computer; get a USB analogue to digital convertor (such as an M-Audio Mobile Pre) and a software recording application (such as Audacity; <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) and record your vinyl or cassettes onto your hard drive. You can then edit, chop up or process the files to your heart's desire. The quality of this depends again on the quality of your analogue to digital convertor; spend thousands on a studio-quality product and you'll get better results than via the hi-fi CD recorder! **DP**

### STEPPING UP

You recently gave me advice on Townshend Rock References and tonearm choice between an SMEV and Excalibur. After battle commenced and more than a little help from J7 at Audio Origami, the SMEV was finally plumped for. The Excalibur is getting a good fettle from Audio Origami and will be sold on with the other Rock Reference.

The set up came with a Transfiguration AF 1 cartridge, which seems to have a very low output of 0.1mV compared to my old Dynavector 20X High Output 2.8mV. Obviously this has resulted in very low listening levels, and I have to turn a Quicksilver Full Function Pre Amp (old style) to full tilt to get any kind of air moving. The Gain of this pre amp is 39dB (at 1kHz) and at full tilt, there will be more noise picked up than desired.

It is also noticeable that some of my high frequency performance is lost in the mix, and I think it may be down to the very low gain, as the high frequency response seemed fine in J7's set up, but he was using a big Murantz Solid State amplifier and it was nice.

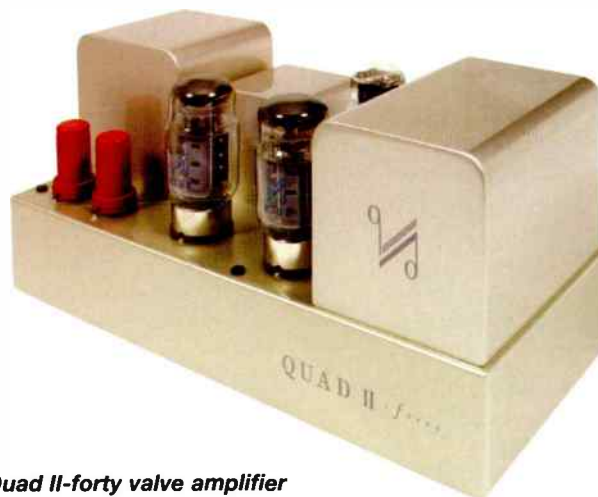
This high frequency response wasn't a problem with my old Elite Rock,

so I would think the Reference would have been similar in nature, but, a little moreish.

My suspicion is that the finer details of the midrange upward is getting hidden with the noise picked up when the pre is set very high, and I am listening to bass - low mid and high mid - swathed in noise.

There are a number of MC Step Up transformers out there, so any idea what makes I should be looking at and what kind of step up ratios I should be aiming for.

Any idea where I can demo Icon Audio stuff in the frozen north, as I am very curious about their stuff and am considering their MB 845s. I am not entirely sure how they made the massive leap from the Mark 1 to the Mark 2, and not convinced if the difference in cost merits such an outlay, but, its certainly a future consideration. Thing is I like the Quicksilver stuff, and a direct



**The Quad II-forty valve amplifier was designed to drive ESL-57s.**

listening test would be useful.

System info is Townshend Rock Reference, SMEV, Transfiguration AF1 (very good condition - checked at 60 x magnification), Quicksilver Pre amplifier, Quicksilver V4 Mono blocks, Sugden Masterclass CD player and Celestion A3 loudspeakers. Listening room is

around 12ft x 18ft, wooden floor – its an old cottage and the ceiling is around 10ft. I also have many cassettes and my Nakamichi BX 300E went pear shaped in recent transit damage, the front door was damaged badly. Do you know if this is salvageable, as I may even consider the Sony Wm D6C, or even another Nak. Your advice would be greatly appreciated, the magazine has provided me with a lot of useful info, and moments of hilarity when my letters have been printed as my partner thinks I'm quite silly to be so chuffed when they get printed.

The new website is a big improvement, are more historical reviews going to be added as time passes?

**Ewan Scott  
Aberdeen**

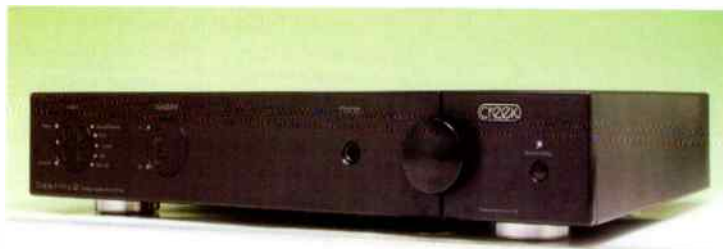
Best for the Transfiguration is Luxman's E200 phono stage we tested in the August 2010 edition, available on-line (go to our website and the Read Online button at top left). This is able to cope with ultra low output MCs. An Icon Audio PS3 may well be adequate as its input noise is low too, but no preamp is as quiet as the Lux by a big margin.

I phoned Nakamichi service, part of B&W loudspeakers, at 01903 695 695 and they told me they have parts for BX-300s and a stack of donor machines, so a repair is likely. Cosmetic damage may be difficult to eliminate though.

We have added some old DIY projects, 300B amplifier and KLS9 loudspeaker, and more old reviews and features will be added too, over the coming months. **NK**

### POWER PLAY

I own a couple of vintage amps., a Sugden A48 Mk 1 and a CR Developments Kalypso valve amp (15 watts). I wonder if you could help me as I'm not sure either amp would work with my vintage pair of Quad ESL57s. As the impedance drops like a bomb on the



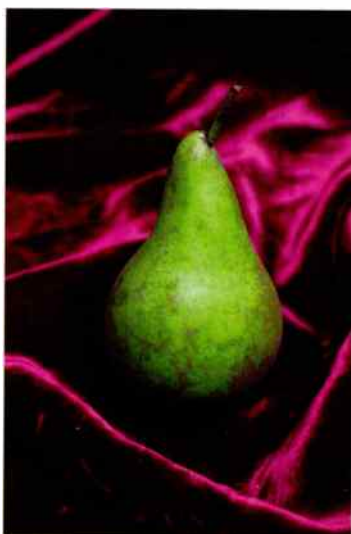
**Creek Destiny 2 amplifier, one of the best sounding transistor amplifiers available, thinks Noel.**

electrostatics, I'm concerned that I might damage the Sugden. Would the 15 watts output of my valve amp be a better match or not powerful enough? Your thoughts on this would be very much appreciated. I have a 303/33 Quad amp waiting in the wings if all else fails!

**James Turkie**  
London

Low loudspeaker impedance at 20kHz, right down to one Ohm or so with electrostatics, is only a problem if you turn volume right up whilst playing Rock music with strong treble. The current drawn may then blow an output transistor, although this is not likely, because the current pulses are not of a sufficiently long period to heat the p-n junction up to failure. So used at modest volume the A48 Mk1 should cope, but it isn't an ideal choice I must admit.

Valve amps have no such problem but 15 Watts isn't a lot for ESL-57s.



**For a bad cough, put one of these in a soup, the Chinese say.**

The 33/303 combo is ideal of course but a bit soft and murky by today's standards unless modified. Really, you should get a modern 45 Watter from Quad or Icon Audio. **NK**

**A DATE WITH DESTINY?**

I was impressed with your review of the Creek Destiny 2 Integrated amplifier, it sounds like my kind of amp! I have the Tact/Lyngdorf SDA-2175 power amp.

Other than one is an integrated, how would you compare them? You stated that the Creek would be your preferred totable amp?

**Gareth**

I thought the Creek Destiny 2 magnificent and superior to the SDA-2175, which to me was not going to set the world alight, even though it is a clever digital device. Just bear in mind the Creek does not have that nasty hard glare or sterility of most transistor amplifiers. It is a fabulous transistor amplifier in my view, one of the very best. **NK**

**CHINESE SOUP**

I am just recovering from the Hong Kong cough which I picked up recently!

**Peter Comeau**  
Head of Acoustic Developments  
International Audio Group  
Guandong  
China

We have the dreaded cough here in the UK. It's obviously got a season ticket with China Airways.

**Noel Keyword, publisher**  
Hi-Fi World  
London.

This Chinese remedy of pear and ginger soup has put me to rights. You need the full recipe for the soup: About 1 inch of fresh ginger stem cut into small strips.  
One pear – sliced.  
Tablespoon of honey.  
Pinch of salt.  
Simmer the ginger and pear together in a pan with just enough water to cover

the pear pieces for five minutes or until the pear is softened.

Take off the heat and stir in the honey and salt.

Drink the soup and eat the pear at the same time.

According to Chinese tradition the ginger and salt are good for the throat. The pear and honey are good for the nose and lungs.

**Peter Comeau**  
Head of Acoustic  
Developments  
International Audio Group  
Guandong  
China

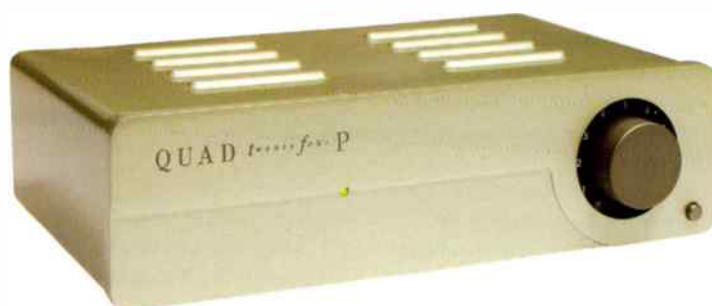
**STAGED UPGRADE**

As a new reader to your mag and a relatively novice system builder I wonder if you can put me on the road to improving my system.

My real passion is vinyl, although I do have quite a lot of CDs too. I have a Rega 25 turntable with an Elys 2 cartridge powered by a Nait 5 integrated amp and a cheap second hand Naim Stageline phono stage. Speakers are B&W 704s with QED XT400 cables in a room approximately 14ft x 11ft. CD player is a Marantz CD63Mk2 KI Signature.

Your response to Andrew of Greensted (May 2011) caught my eye and got me wondering whether a change to the Goldring 1022GX cartridge and Quad QC24P phono stage would be a significant step in the right direction, as I also have to turn up the volume significantly when playing vinyl. I have been delighted with the service from my old Nait and had planned to eventually upgrade to the Naim NAC202/NAP200 combo (when funds allow!). In the meantime I need a fix and wonder if the change of cartridge and possibly the phono stage could be the way to go? Also would the Quad complement the eventual addition of the Naim pair? I listen to mainly rock and blues.

Thanks,  
Kind regards,  
**Dave Muir**  
Chingford, UK



**With loads of gain and both MM and MC input options Quad's QC24P valve phono stage is a great way to go if you have a Naim and want to use LP.**



Dave – go for it. The Goldring 1022GX cartridge is both dynamic and fundamentally accurate, and it has a good stylus that digs out real detail, but with no top end sting. It will be an improvement over the mild mannered Elys.

The Quad phono stage is lovely and has oodles of gain, much more than most other stages, so you won't be winding up volume. Furthermore, you can move to Moving Coil later if you so wish and it will still sing. Additionally, putting valves in front of a smooth but grunty Naim set up works well I've found. And the Quad is punchy too. I wager you'll be very surprised at the improvement. **NK**

### LINN-DEPENDENT'S DAY

*I have an LP12, 1982 vintage, Lingo'd, Cirkused and Trampolinned, and with an Ittok LVII. My present cartridge is a Lyra Lydian, now getting a bit long in the tooth, and I've been wondering about replacing it. I bought your May edition to check out the Benz Ace review.*

*As I read the magazine I was attracted by the article on the Inspire LP12 rebuild. Finances would permit a rebuild or a new cartridge, but not both. Which should it be?*

*But wait! My eye was then caught by the comment on the Ittok in the World Classics section – "now off the pace". Should the Ittok be sent off for a rewire? Should it be replaced, and if so would something at around £700 plus trade-in give me a worthwhile improvement? Should I give up reading magazines that confuse me with too many desirable options (obviously I'm thinking about Motorcycle Sport and Leisure at this point)?*

*The Lyra could wait a bit longer before being replaced. Should I go for a rebuild of the deck, or of the arm, before changing the cartridge, and if so, which would give me the greater improvement? You talked me out of selling the LP12 and my vinyl collection a few years ago, and I'm so glad you did. Which direction would you point me in now?*

*The rest of the set-up is a Lehmann Black Cube, Naim Nait XS and Musical Technology Harrier SE speakers.*

*Yours,  
Alan Thorn  
Leeds*

If we talked you out of selling your vinyl, our existence is forever justified! **NK**

Okay – I'd say get your deck rebuilt first, and then go for an arm upgrade. If you like the Ittok sound then try Audio Origami's PU7 – it's a gorgeous design and way better than an Ittok. Then it's time for your new cartridge, but if you can possibly



**Get an Audio Origami PU7 to replace the Ittok, says David.**

afford it then go for a new phono stage first; the ANT Audio Kora 3T Ltd. is a far more musical and natural sounding device than your Lehmann Black Cube, in my opinion. **DP**

### BACK TO BLACK!

*After being out of the game so to speak for about eight years due to circumstances that need not concern us here I recently got a system set up again. Luckily, my vinyl and CD collection remained intact.*

*My current set up consists of - AR Legend turntable with outboard power supply, Mantra Logic Datum II tone arm, Ortofon 2M Red cartridge, Sony CDP - XB930 CD player, Pioneer A-300X amplifier and Lake Audio Model 5 point 2 floorstanders.*

*Everything was purchased second hand, bar the cartridge. Not the most exotic I think you will agree but the sounds it is making has left album sleeves and jewel cases strewn all over my listening room.*

*I used to crave upgrades all the time previously when I owned what most would consider a much better system. Proving that Nirvana can be had on a budget.*

*Wonder what that valve amp I've just seen advertised would sound like in this set up?*

*Kind regards,  
Derek Shorrock  
Farnborough*

Hi Derek. If you are happy it might be best to leave it that way. Your Chinese Lake loudspeakers are an unknown quantity to us. If you are interested in a valve amplifier then try and get one on loan to see how they fare with your Lakes and with your taste. If you buy one cheap direct from China, as you did with the Lakes, you are likely to get poor transformers and a mediocre sound, as well as fake CE safety certification and no ROHS compliance. **NK**

Not knowing your loudspeakers, Derek, I can't say. If they're small, inefficient mini monitors then any

valve amp will sound bad as it would be a poor electrical match for them. If they're nice and sensitive then it would have a fighting chance – but of course it all depends on the quality of the valve amp. **DP**

### CAUGHT IN THE VORTEX

*Might I be so bold as to mention VortexBox – a freely downloadable .iso of a complete Fedora 14 CD and DVD ripping streaming network server. Burn the .iso to a bootable disc, and use any old PC to build your VortexBox.*

*It installs faultlessly to build a stable reliable music network server. It will burn CDs to FLAC files, wav or mp3 – with adjustable bitrate. It rips DVDs to .mkv files, playable with VLC media player or HD Ryan Playon, and a 3Gb disc is very*



*cheap these days. It tags from a free database, and spits the disc out when complete.*

*On a PC, SoftSqueeze allows you to play tracks, random mixes or by artist or album. SqueezeBox server will stream all your PCs music to the network, and SlimDevices Squeezebox v3 (now Logitech, ebay 100!) is an ideal player, with optical output to Onkyo optical in stereo amplifier or DAC to amplifier.*

*With the world's greatest depression just starting, not all can afford RipNAS boxes, or Vox Olympian speakers: this is a great introduction to network streaming: I used an Intel 410 Atom motherboard in a CPC media case, with Pico psu from 12v- 30w consumption. Most hi-fi magazines will never mention this brilliantly written free program, which is a stunning Linux application.*

**Steve Sanford  
Lincoln**

That sounds like an unashamed attempt at free advertising Steve, but I guess a free Linux app for this purpose is a gift horse that should not be looked in the mouth. **NK**

# Cut Loos

**Meridian's Sooloos system has earned great respect throughout the industry, offering an intelligent and well-considered yet unique proposition. Rafael Todes tries the latest incarnation in the shape of the Control 15/Media Source 600...**

It was an inspired move by Meridian when they bought Sooloos in 2008; Sooloos were leaders in the programming side of networking, and Meridian had been early adopters in the digital (and latterly hi res digital) revolution, and had the necessary know-how to make digits sing. Here was a textbook example of symbiosis, if ever there was one!

This new combo is the latest incarnation of the device David Price tested back in the November 2009 issue of *Hi-Fi World*. The new Control 15 now has the ability to play 96kHz/24bit files which is a step increase on the Control 10 which could only play 48kHz/24bit; this is Meridian's first real foray into HDD-based hi res music playback networking and all the benefits that it brings.

Meridian build individual components for entire systems, and the Control 15 was supplied with a Meridian DAC, fed from the Control 15 by a CAT5 cable. Meridian recommend their DSP range of loudspeakers, which are fed digitally, with D to A converters in the speakers themselves. This, it is claimed, not only reduces jitter, but also enables crossovers to be digital, and it is indeed possible to change the crossover frequencies. For the purposes of this review, I used a Weiss DAC202 as a reference, fed directly from the Control 15 using a Chord digital cable.

The swish Control 15 comprises a touchscreen monitor, and is surely the very best hi-fi interface around? You're greeted with colour images

of your CD collection. This makes choosing music from a computer far more tangible than the ubiquitous iTunes affair. It's far easier to connect emotionally with a CD cover reproduced than a list! You can search by artist, date of ripping, audio quality, etc., or even mood. (Usefully, you can also exclude categories from your search).





Meridian have struck a deal with five different database providers, and the Control 15 cross-matches information from the different databases to provide the most useful and hopefully correct information. It works very well in practice, I found, although of course isn't one hundred percent flawless.

The supplied review unit came with around five hundred CDs preloaded on it, and I felt a bit like

a kid in a sweet shop with all the choice. This is not a standard feature of the Sooloos I hasten to add! But it did show me very quickly how inviting it is to use. Indeed, within minutes of its arrival, I was fighting off my kids who wanted to have a go; it's interesting to see that they would never go and put on a CD from the cupboard, but touching an image on the screen is a different proposition! I also observed that this method of

playing music is more wife-friendly – the unit has a positive wife acceptance factor like few pieces of hi-fi I've ever seen.

However, since editor DP wrote his original review of the Sooloos 2.0 package, the Apple iPad has raised the bar in terms of what we now expect from a good interface. Reading a magazine on an iPad is a pleasure, not only because of the screen quality, but also the ability to flick to the next page/screen. Sadly the Meridian lacks this functionality when scrolling through pictures of CDs, so it's not quite state of the art anymore. In hi-fi terms though, it remains on another level to rival products.

Meridian also provide an iPhone/iPad app which enables the user to choose music from an armchair. The functionality isn't as full as the touchscreen Control 15 unit, there are no pictures available before choosing your CD, only once the selection has been made. It also lacks the speed of the larger unit, but is nevertheless useful. As with most networking systems, you can 'create zones' in the house, and stream music wirelessly. However, Meridian advise against wireless connection as it is always subject to factors beyond your control. I found generally that streaming music from the server to my computer worked well.

The Control 15 can store up to 500GB of music, enough for 1,000 CDs. If you require more than this, the system is not particularly scalable and you'll have to start again with another server. I suppose 1,000 CDs would represent the upper limit of most people's collections, but this figure shrinks when you start to load high-res material which takes up much more space. I'd like to see more built-in storage coming soon, please!

Adding your CDs to the Control 15 is simplicity itself. There is a slot which accepts the CD, and around eight minutes later, the CD is returned, ripped and categorised.

It takes such a long time because

Meridian say their ripping algorithm is designed for sonics not speed. Higher resolution material is slightly more complicated

to install. It has to be downloaded to a PC or Mac, and then imported into the Control 15 wirelessly. The Linn Records hi res catalogue was only partially



20th anniversary edition amplifier of the Mei Xing Electronics Factory—the MC34-ASE

- The chassis of this amplifier is made by our newly acquired Japanese Fanuc CNC machining center and features a body of 6mm aluminium alloy. The feet's are made of aluminum alloy supporting good mechanical decoupling.
- The main components are carefully selected and imported from trustworthy distributors such as valves of the JJ brand as well as Jensen capacitors from Denmark. The raw materials are imported from Japan such as the steel, ALPS potentiometers and the wires for the transformers. It is with an aluminum remote control.
- This amp is hand crafted by our well trained and experienced stable workforce and undergoes stringent quality checks before it reaches the end user.
- The sound of this amplifier is best described as precise in the playback with high resolution and good responsiveness in the mid range as well as a lively and natural reproduction of sound.



Inputs: 4 groups  
 Outputs: 2 groups  
 Distortion Factor:  $\leq 0.8\%$   
 Maximum Output: 40W x2  
 Signal to Noise Ratio: 92dB  
 Frequency range: 15Hz ~ 65KHz  $\pm 1$ dB  
 Valves: (JJ) EL34 x4 (JJ) ECC82 x2 (JJ) ECC83 x2

**Mei Xing Electronics Factory**



Tel: 0086-756-3315656  
 Fax: 0086-756-3317676  
 Website: [www.mei-xing.com](http://www.mei-xing.com)  
 Email: [mingda@mei-xing.com](mailto:mingda@mei-xing.com)

The Mei Xing Electronics Factory was built in 1991 and specializes in valve audio amplifiers. We have our own CNC machining center with numerically controlled lathes and a professional technical team with many years of experience. Our products have won many prizes, including CHINA FAMOUS BRAND, INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS BRAND and are of course fully CE and CCC certified. Our products are very popular amongst our customers and have been sold to more than 40 countries.

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registered with the various databases, and required a few bits of meta data to be inserted - surprising as its superb recordings showcase the talents of the Sooloos.

**SOUND QUALITY**

First up was Schubert's 'Trout Quintet', Andras Schiff and the Hagen Quartet on Decca. It is not a recording I know, but what a delight at the flick of a screen to summon up this musical presence in the room with such ease. Schubert wrote this music to be played at home, and it includes the rather odd addition of a double bass. The Meridian captured the ambience of the hall beautifully, and it was a real joy to stare at the CD cover on the screen and not start a pile up of broken jewellery-case CD boxes!

Whilst the Sooloos is all about convenience, it is nevertheless a Meridian and so has serious sonic pretensions. With this in mind I compared elements of the system closely with top quality separates equivalents, to give a sense of perspective in terms of its musical performance. I used a Cyrus CD XT SE Transport connected with a Chord Indigo Plus cable and the Weiss DAC202 as a reference. Price for price, the total cost of this Meridian Sooloos system is £6,500; the Weiss DAC202 costs £4,600 which together with the £1,550 Cyrus Transport is £6,150; so that's what you'd be buying if you were spending the same amount on separates...

I first listened to Mahler's 5th Symphony, conducted by Leonard Bernstein, 3rd movement. The Cyrus/Weiss combination produced a really clear, sparkly sound, instruments clearly defined in space, beautifully separated in their different sections. It's some of the best Red-Book CD that I've encountered. The Meridian server, feeding the Weiss DAC and Indigo Plus cable delivered an ever so slightly less detailed but smoother sound. A touch of the sparkle had disappeared, but the resultant mixture was far from unpleasant to listen to, just slightly less incisive. Where the bass quality of the Cyrus was taut and punchy, the Meridian lost a touch of that grip, yet sounded fuller in some respects. In particular, double bass pizzicati seemed a touch too powerful yet looser. As a digital transport then, the Meridian does a very fine job but doesn't rival the very best optical designs.

Still, most people are going to run the Meridian as a whole system, and so I added the £1,700 Meridian DAC. This provided a richness that wasn't present with the Weiss, making for

a creamier and smoother sound. Understandably, compared to the £4,600 Weiss, the Meridian DAC lacked a little of its lightning transient attack and the violin section of the Vienna Philharmonic lost just a bit of subtle detailing.

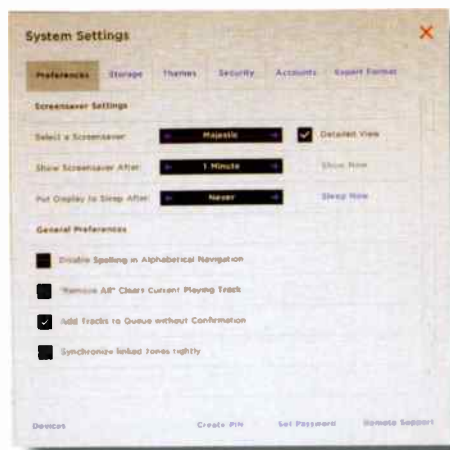
Next, I turned to some high resolution digital material on the Meridian, which is its *raison-d'être* over the previous Control 10. There is an excellent recording of the Dvorak 'New World Symphony', conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Here the Meridian really shone. As a reference, I used my Acer laptop running Windows XP, with a FireWire output via an Oiyaide cable to the Weiss DAC. The Meridian made the soundstage more expansive and three dimensional, and achieved a better separation of orchestral forces, rather like the earlier comparison. The differences were not huge though.

A more profound contrast emerged listening to Linn Records' 'Mozart 41st Symphony', where the laptop seemed to add a touch of grain and brass to the sound which isn't organic or desirable; not a huge amount but it's there. The Meridian's smoothness here was appreciated, plus it gave a slightly bigger soundstage. The way the trailing edge of the violin section sounded particularly different, there seemed to be an infinitesimal smudge at the end of notes in the violin melodies, which the Meridian avoided. Interestingly I listened to the same recording played on CD through the Cyrus transport, it didn't have the same soundstage, but it seemed to cope with textures more convincingly. It is a bizarre paradox that a better transport on lower resolution can hold a candle to a streamer at a higher resolution, but there you go!

**CONCLUSION**

This is an extremely interesting product which raises some fascinating issues. As an interface, it is revelatory in the ease with which you can select music. It is *sheer joy* to use, and invites people of any age or sex to use it. There are a couple of things that would be on my wish-list in terms of functionality, such as a slightly more sensitive and colourful screen, and an iPadesque wipe, but this aside, it is not far off the state of the art.

On the musical side, the Meridian has an unmistakable house sound that is smooth, mellow,



**Despite being so easy to use, the Sooloos is highly configurable...**



**A relatively simple set of connectons to the outside world make this a user-installable product, although Meridian dealers will be happy to oblige...**

and puts mellifluousness above detail. It makes everything it plays an enjoyable and refined experience, which is not always a given with digital. If there's a criticism to be made, then if anything it's that it's a little over-smooth, lacking in incision compared to the finest separates combinations. But there you go; the finest separates combinations are pains to set up and fiddly to use in the extreme compared to this sexy, ultra slick package. Inveterate twiddlers and/or sonic sticklers may still go for specialist separates then, but if you want a premium priced, fine sounding digital music centre with what's surely the swishest user interface, here it is!

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**  
 Weiss DAC202 digital convertor  
 Chord Indigo Plus cable  
 Cyrus CD XT SE CD transport  
 VAC Auricle Musicblocs power amplifiers  
 Chord Epic Twin speaker cables  
 B&W 802D loudspeakers

**VERDICT** ●●●●●

State-of-the-art user interface, fine sonics and true hi res functionality make this a unique product in the marketplace.

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**FOR**  
 - exceptional user interface  
 - svelte, musical sound  
 - design, style, finish

**AGAINST**  
 - limited storage

# Mini Max

Tony Bolton tries a fascinating hybrid integrated amplifier in the shape of Abingdon Music Research's AM-777...

**W**hen a company calls itself Abingdon Music Research, you might reasonably expect them to be based in the area of that Oxfordshire town. In fact the name was chosen as a tribute to free thinking that challenges the status quo, a methodology which enabled the BMC (British Motor Corporation) Competition Department (based in Abingdon) to develop the humble Mini into a world class rally car!

Founded in 2001 by Pat Wayne, Vincent Luke and Thorsten Loesch, the company is based in London, with a wholly owned assembly plant in China. The majority of the manufacturing is done in-house, and the parts that aren't, are contracted out to companies with a background in the aerospace industry. The transformers (of which there are three – one for the digital circuits, one for analogue, and one for the non-audio control functions) are made by an ex-military establishment in China, while the chassis manufacture is outsourced to Taiwan. The feet come from Canada, and use a type of rubber that is normally used to attach wings to an aeroplane...

AMR first came to note with their Reference Class 77 series of electronics. This latest range, the Premier Class 777 series, so far includes this amp, a matching CD player and a HD/Classic Digital Processor. The circuit layouts are somewhat unconventional. Most designers work with either valves or solid state electronics – AMR use both, in the same box.

Now, hybrid components aren't a new idea, but they are a rarity. In the case of the amp, the thermionic section is the preamplifier, with the power amp using transistors.

Both parts are housed in a beautifully machined alloy case, available in either silver or black, which measures a fairly standard 450x120x370mm and weighs 14kg. The Perspex screen which occupies a goodly part of the fascia houses the Vacuum Fluorescent Display, which gives a countdown in seconds after switching on, before the unit is ready for use. Once a couple of clicks have been heard, the display then shows the input selected and the volume setting. These functions are controlled by the buttons beneath the display, their usage indicated by engravings in the casework. At the back are four corresponding phono sockets for the line level inputs, one of which doubles as the only XLR input. Along with these is a USB socket which is connected to the onboard DAC, and a set of substantial speaker binding posts.

As previously mentioned, this is a hybrid design, using a Russian New-Old-Stock double triode valve (a 6H1N) for the preamp section. Each of the different sections of the preamp have carefully chosen capacitors – Sanyo Oscons in the digital section, Panasonic in the PSU and Elnas in the analogue stages. The DAC is a 16bit Philips multibit unit, similar to the one fitted to the company's matching CD player. The power amplifier section is also unusual in featuring a circuit called 'OptiGain' which feeds errors in the audio signal to the ground side of the output as well as the positive, causing the speaker to cancel out the errors. (a diagram showing this is on the 'Features' page of the AM-77 Dual Mono Amplifier section of the AMR website.)

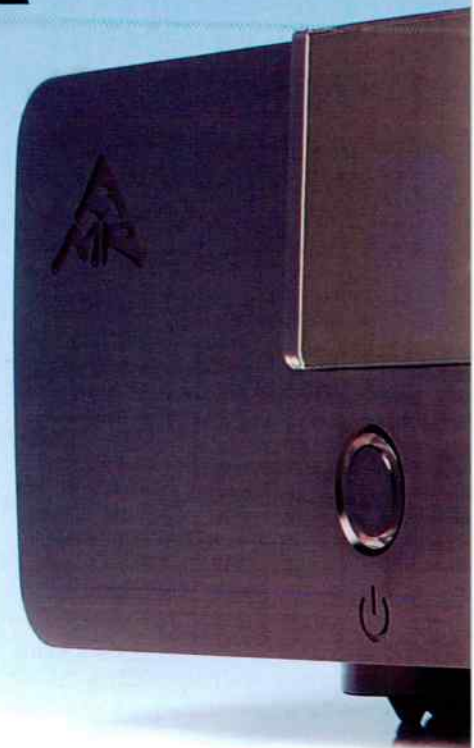
Apart from the circuit topology, there are other little examples of AMR logic. The remote control, a touchscreen device that accesses menu options as well as the usual

control facilities, has a bulge at one end that contains the batteries and also forms a foot, so the unit can be stood upright. It sounds a small thing, but it was one remote that I never lost amongst the detritus on the coffee table!

## SOUND QUALITY

I started my listening on the downstairs system, with the AM-777 powering the Charios. Although the amp is solid-state in the power section it effectively runs like a valve amp and has a switch labelled 8R and 4R at the back for matching the impedance of your loudspeakers. The amp is unusual in maintaining the same 60W per channel output regardless of the 'R' setting chosen. There are two other switches there, one for the XLR/ phono sockets and the other adjusts the unit's configuration from stereo amp, to monoblock, or bi-amp option. This allows for other units to be added as required to extend the system. It is also possible to use the AM-777 either as just a preamp or solely a power amp.

Having matched the 4 Ohm requirements of the Ursa Majors, I settled down to a progressive trance album by the Swiss based artist Cafu. This was his first full length album, released in 2007 and features distorted and twisted guitar sounds over a pulsing bass line with bongos,







high hats and synths completing the soundscape. I was immediately taken with the way the rather loping feel to the beat was transmitted. Although not the deepest or most floorshaking bass that I have heard through these speakers, it was alive and writhing on the carpet in front of me. This was reinforced by the speed of attack on the bongos. It had a flow that felt correct, not overly fast and furious, but just as it should be. I was also impressed with the spaces around the sounds. They were impressively black, and caused me to initially misjudge how big the soundstage was. Although not cavernous, it was big enough to house the musical events happening within it, extending a good eighteen inches beyond my speakers.

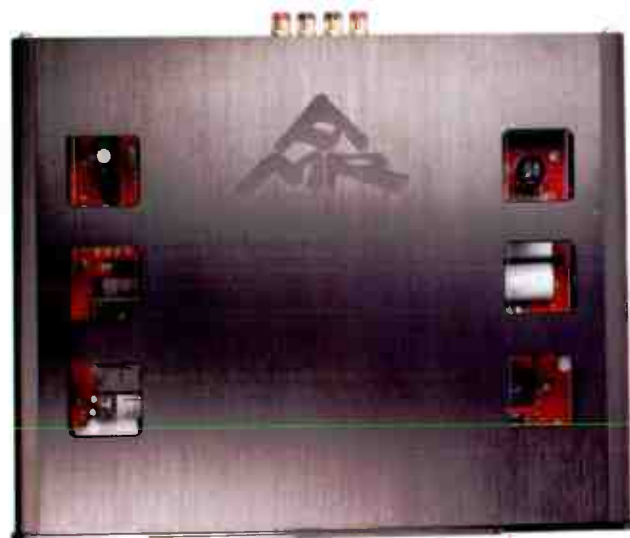
Having played this disc through the Antilla CD player, I then loaded it into my MacBook and played it again, but this time using the USB connection from my hard-drive to the AMR's DAC. Although not as well staged as the sound from the optical disc, the results were very creditable, retaining the tightness of the beat

and most of the detail in the imaging.

Later on I was still playing dance music but had moved back a few decades. The Temperance Seven were an anachronism when they first formed in the mid 1950s, playing very faithful versions of twenties and thirties hits. Their most successful era happened just pre-Beatles, taking 'You're Driving Me Crazy' to number 1 in 1961 and following that up with another three top 30 hits in a matter of months. The '... Ballspound Road Cocoa Rooms' LP was a 'best of' released some four years later and presented the sounds of the twenties in beautifully recorded stereo. Each band member had his spot, with elbow room around, the vocals of 'Whispering' Paul Macdowell a little to the front and dead central. Given the AMR's seeming love of all things rhythmic, as you can imagine, I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

The following day the AM-777 moved upstairs to drive my Kelly KT3s. These are a nominal 6 Ohm load, so I tried the 'R' switch

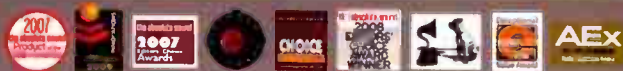
in both positions. I soon settled on the 4R setting again, since the other produced a sound through these speakers that was very bass-light. Rated at 95dB efficiency the Kellys were also far less demanding of the available power than the Charios (60W is the manufacturer's recommended minimum for these



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speakers). So I settled down to a fairly loud rendition of Janis Joplin's second LP 'Cheap Thrills'. The wail at the start of 'Summertime' which initially sounds almost random, but comes in perfectly on the note as the guitars join in, was intense and almost a tangible entity, and led into a very absorbing performance. The rawness of the vocals and the drive of the guitars was well displayed.

The following day I played mostly classical music before wandering through a bit of opera. The Trio ('Soave sia il vent') from Mozart's 'Cosi Fan Tutte' was a delight. Measured in pace, precise in placement, a showcase for the mixed harmonies of two sopranos and a baritone, with strings and woodwind providing complimentary harmonies – it showcased the AMR to perfection.

**CONCLUSION**

AMR designer Vincent Luke told me that part of their design specification was to provide the smoothness and delicacy of the single ended triode sound, with enough power to make it usable with a wider range of speakers than the normally low output power of such amps allows. In this respect I feel they have largely succeeded. The sound is highly focused, and given any sort of beat, meticulously timed. There is emotion portrayed, be it the earthiness of Joplin, or the wishes for safe travel of two loving girlfriends in 1790s Naples. I did feel that there was a certain reticence in the sound that initially was a little disconcerting, but actually felt correct. I liked the manners of this amp. – it didn't try to force the listener to take notice, but laid the music out on display, then seemed to step back and let the tunes speak for themselves.

The drawback is its ultimately limited power. In real terms 60W per side should be enough for most people, but fairly efficient speakers are recommended, and if you are into playing heavy rock music loudly, then you *might* be better served elsewhere. It worked quite well with the Chariots but was a lot happier wired into the Kellys. Having said that, I did have to play pretty loudly before the amp started to sound as though it was working a bit hard. Overall then, a very enjoyable and innately musical amplifier, well made and thoughtfully designed.



**MUSIC USED**  
 Mozart, 'Cosi Fan Tutte', Schwarzkopf, Ludwig, Kraus, Taddei, Steffek, Berry, Karl Bohm conducting Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus, His Master's Voice Records SLS 5028  
  
 The Temperance Seven, 'Direct From The Ballspod Road Cocoa Rooms', Music For Pleasure Records MFP 1322  
  
 Big Brother and the Holding Company, 'Cheap Thrills', Columbia Records PC 9700  
  
 Cafu, 'Wake Up', Plusquam Records PLU1CD114

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**  
 Clearaudio Master Solution turntable  
 Clearaudio Carbon Satisfy tonearm  
 Benz Micro Ace cartridge.  
 Ortofon Vivo Blue cartridge  
 Audio Technica AT-F7 cartridge  
 Leema Acoustics Tucana II integrated amp  
 Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Power output was a modest but useful 60 Watts into 8 Ohms from this large amplifier, rising to 72 Watts into 4 Ohms, with the rear panel slide switch set for 8 Ohm loudspeakers. With the switch at 4 Ohm both figures fell, to 40 Watts and 64 Watts respectively, but regulation improved slightly suggesting bass might sound a bit firmer. The amplifier has an unusually low damping factor of 11 whether set for 8 or 4 Ohm loudspeakers, so there appears to be series output inductor a bit bigger than the usual Zobel network, unless that is the designers have done this to better mimic a valve amplifier.

During power tests the AM-777 ran absolutely cool; there were no hot areas and little heat from the top vents. This suggests Class D working, as did the presence of a steady 28mV tone on the output at 84kHz, unaffected by volume. However, the AMR-777 was neither bandwidth limited nor did it produce unusual patterns of distortion and it has in fact a normal bi-polar output stage. Current limiting cut in after 20 seconds or so running into 4 Ohms so there is overload protection and this will limit heat production too.

At all output levels and frequencies distortion comprised just second harmonic, as our analysis shows, and this is subjectively innocuous, a very good result. Level measured just 0.06% at 1 Watt output at 10kHz into 4 Ohms.

Input sensitivity was low at 460mV via the phono line inputs and XLR set to Pro. Setting XLR to hi-fi dropped input sensitivity to a very low 1.3V, so Pro gives the normal result and 'hi-fi' likely cuts out a gain stage, perhaps the valve.

Frequency response via USB measured flat to 16kHz with a 44.1kHz sample rate digital signal, before rolling down. Full volume from a 0dB digital signal came up at -11 on the volume

control so there is analogue gain to spare.

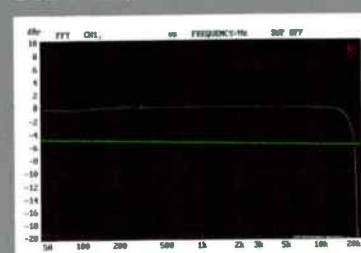
The AM-777 measures well and should certainly sound easy and full bodied like a valve amplifier. It has enough power to go very loud with largish modern loudspeakers. The valve preamp will add a sense of depth too, so all in all it looks strong as a flexible hybrid. NK

Power	60 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	5Hz-32kHz
Separation	72dB
Noise	-89dB
Distortion	0.03%
Sensitivity	460mV

**DISTORTION**



**USB FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Interestingly designed, beautifully built integrated with a charmingly lyrical sound.

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 www.selectaudio.co.uk

**FOR**  
 - excellent rhythmically  
 - smooth, musical sound  
 - USB input.

**AGAINST**  
 - needs efficient speakers  
 - bass extension





# Showtime

The 19th-22nd May saw Munich play host to the annual High End Show. Adam Smith is your guide to the pick of the delights on offer...



## HANNL

Starting off in the lower halls, the first bright colours to attract my eye belonged not to audio reproduction equipment but to some very funky record cleaners from German company Hannl. Available in a variety of shades in addition to the red and blue on show, these are very highly specified units that offer automated cleaning cycles and claim to be some of the quietest units available.

## ONIX

A familiar British name, Onix have undergone a rebirth under Chinese ownership in recent years and they marked their move upmarket even further at Munich with the unveiling of some serious higher end items including a magnificent CD player and digital music player. Battleship build quality allied to superb sound suggests that this company has a great deal to offer and that we'll be hearing much more from them.



## DR. FEICKERT

Continuing the vinyl accessory theme, our old friend Dr. Chris Feickert was showing his new Blackbird turntable, a beefed up version of the Woodpecker sporting twin motors. Also on show were examples of the new Platterspeed app for iPhone and iPad that allows for accurate speed setting. Used in conjunction with the new Dr. Feickert test 7 inch record that retails for around 15Euro, it offers a quick and easy start to vinyl setup without the necessity to invest in hundreds of pounds worth of test gear.





#### EPSILON

Epsilon used the show to launch both their 'Music Centre' music system and their flagship 4260 loudspeakers. The music system is an all-in-one radio, CD player, digital music streamer and amplifier using Bang & Olufsen's ICEPower modules, all housed in a very stylish circular cabinet. The 4260 loudspeakers hark back to Epsilon's flagship design from the 1970s, the 4050, and marry a 15 inch bass driver to Epsilon's traditional spherical midrange and tweeter pod. The room in which they were playing was quite small, but their sound was very promising indeed and I look forward to hearing them in a more suitable setting.

#### SWISSONOR

Moving deeper into the maze of rooms I encountered Swissonor's room, complete with a range of their superb valve amplifiers and high sensitivity loudspeakers. Sharing their room was Thorens TD124 guru Jurg Schopper and he had brought along a mouth-watering array of TD124s, several of which feature his TA10 tonearm. This is a brand new design that pays homage to the original EMT and Thorens tonearms of the 1960s - it looked superb and sounded even better with an Ortofon SPU on board. Best of all, though, he had brought along an example of a perfectly restored Thorens TD 224 auto-changer which, although not used as a source, was plugged in, loaded up with records and running through its change cycle over and over again. I could have sat and watched it all weekend!



#### ORPHEUS

Switzerland were represented well by the mighty range of Orpheus components and on demonstration were their Privilege lineup, including SACD player, DAC, preamplifier and monoblock power amplifiers. These played through their new loudspeakers, designed by fellow Swiss company Audiomanufacture. These are a fascinating design making use of three professional drive units heavily modified by Audiomanufacture's Sven Boenicke to such an extent that the twelve and six inch drivers are both run full range and only tuned by the highly complex cabinet compartments in which they sit. Furthermore the 15 inch bass driver uses only one inductor and the ribbon tweeter one capacitor, making them the most minimalist four way loudspeakers ever! The sound from the system was stunning with incredible scale and unexpected delicacy and insight.



HP8 MkII



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Stereo 60 MkIII



KT88/KT120 65W Integrated Amplifier

Stereo 25 MkII



Entry level 25W Integrated Amplifier

MB90 MkII Mono Amplifier



115W KT88/KT90/KT120

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**ANALOG DOMAIN**

Naturally, Munich wouldn't be Munich without something truly crazy, and I found it in the Analog Domain room. This German company proudly claim that they are "the craziest bunch of audio engineers on earth!" and they specialise in monster power amplifiers. Their top model, the Apollo monoblock was on static display and this weighs in at 85kg, costs 75,000 Euro each and produces 4,000W into 8 Ohms and 8,000 into 2 Ohms! The Calisto monoblocks were playing in the room, and despite being criminally underpowered at a piffling 550W per channel they had a lightness of touch and midband delicacy that was almost difficult to comprehend. I couldn't help wondering if my Leak 2075s, my ears or my neighbours would be the first things to give way if I borrowed a set...

**ADAM AUDIO**

Moving upstairs to the demonstration rooms, I found ADAM Audio in their usual spot, although once again sadly without the mighty and magnificent OSS flagship loudspeakers! Instead however, they were demonstrating the new Classic and ARTist ranges, plus the first showing of their brand new AP5 preamplifier. This is a neat unit offering a good range of inputs in both balanced and unbalanced configuration, plus a proper inbuilt MM phono stage with switchable gain. Available in black and silver, it is a neat and obvious idea to partner their active loudspeakers.

**EAT**

Euro Audio Team had static displays of all their lovely turntables lined up for admiration, but tucked safely away in a glass case was a prototype of their new deck, the Flat E. This borrows motor technology from the Forte S but tucks it away in a more slimline plinth and adds a rather striking new arm. Reminiscent of the original NAD 5210 flat arm, this is a unipivot design with a flat main 'tube' made from carbon fibre and looks very sleek and purposeful. We look forward to listening to it when it reaches production.

**ISOPHON**

Dr. Roland Gauder's Acoustic Consulting team have been very busy and the upshot of their labours was the new Berlina RC7 loudspeaker. Although sporting the Accuton ceramic drive units that Isophon utilise so well, this model has a unique cabinet, made up of alternating layers of wood and silicon coated soft fibre 'ribs'. With all the driver mated using symmetrical crossover circuitry and slopes of over 50dB/octave, the Berlinas are full of unusual technology, but the resulting sound was tight, focused and stunningly dynamic.

**KHARMA**

And so we come to my favourite room of the show; that hosted by Kharma Acoustics. Everything about this room was right, from the swish decoration to the subtle lighting and including the most comfortable chairs to be found in the entire show! The system itself comprised Kharma's Elegance DB9 loudspeakers powered by their Exquisite pre and power amplifiers and absolutely everything they did was right. From a whisper to a crescendo and everything in between, the Kharma setup did not put a foot wrong and I spent a good hour or two of my last day sat happily listening which, after all, is what it's all about!

# WORLD STANDARDS

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

## TURNTABLES

### REGA RPI 2010 £225

Pleasing sound, fine build and ease of set-up and use make this a great first 'real' hi-fi turntable.

### REGA P2 2008 £300

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

### REGA P3-24 2008 £405

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 mean it's still the class of the mid-price field.

### FUNK FIRM VECTOR II 2009 £860

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



### MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2005 £1,138

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.

### MARANTZ TT-1551 2005 £1,299

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

### ROKSAN RADIUS 5.2 2011 £1,450

Although getting expensive, the latest Radius is a highly grown up package with a flowing yet engaging nature; a fine package.



### AVID DIVA II SP 2010 £2,000

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

### INSPIRE ECLIPSE Sev2 I2 2010 £2,349

Finely engineered, smooth and detailed sounding deck offering valuable twelve inch tonearm compatibility.

### NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE HYPERSPACE 2010 £2,390

Deliciously spacious, lyrical and beguiling sounding turntable, but lacks ultimate grip.

### 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.

### DR FEICKERT WOODPECKER 2010 £3,445

Elegant deck with great low frequency solidity, coherent soundstaging and a precise midband.



### LINN LPI2SE 2010 £3,510

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

### ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE STORM 2011 £3,612

An excellent high end design with a smooth, solid, open and lyrical sound and razor sharp styling and build.

### FLETCHER AUDIO OMEGA .5 2010 £3,699

Charming high end turntable that's a fitting testament to the late Tom Fletcher.

### PALMER 3 2010 £3,750

Eccentric hand built high end turntable with a pleasingly smooth, sweet and lucid sound.



### E.A.T. FORTE S EVO I2 2010 £4,750

Excellent premium price turntable with power, precision and passion aplenty, but relaxed and easy going by nature too. Great value package with the Pro-ject Evo I2" arm option.

### ACOUSTIC SOLID ONE 2007 £4,050

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

### SME MODEL 10A 1995 £4,556

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

### 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.

### BRINKMANN BARDO 2010 £5,845

Unique high end direct drive turntable with amazing grip and focus, albeit not the most romantic of natures.



### 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 well to rewiring and counterweight modification.

### MICHELL TECNOARM A 2003 £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 3C** 2010 £599  
Excellent mid-price tonearm with a clean and open yet lyrical sound.



**HADCOCK GH-242 EXPORT** 2010 £770  
Consummately musical, lyrical sounding tonearm, but needs the right turntable. Excellent value.

**SME 309** 1989 £767  
Mid-price SME comes complete with cost-cut aluminium armtube and detachable headshell. Tight, neutral sound with good tonality, but lacks the IV's pace and precision.

**FUNK FIRM FXR II** 2010 £1,175  
Clever reworking of the ubiquitous Rega platform, the FXR II gives a wonderfully musical, almost unipivot like performance.



**AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7** 2007 £1,300  
The classic Syrinx PU3 updated to spectacular effect. Hand made to order, with any mass, length and colour you care for. Fit, finish and sound truly impressive.

**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 IV** 1988 £1,620  
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.

**SME 312S** 2010 £1,750  
Twelve inch magnesium alloy armtube plus SME V bearings makes an impressive transcription tool with an insightful yet composed sound. Superlative build completes the package.



**GRAHAM PHANTOM** 2006 £3,160  
Sonically stunning arm with magnificent bass dexterity and soundstaging. Build quality up to SME standards, which is really saying something!

**TRI-PLANAR PRECISION** 2006 £3,600  
Immaculate build, exquisite design and one of the most naturally musical and lucid sounds around.

**SME SERIES V** 1987 £2,389  
Vice-like bass with incredible weight, ultra clear midband and treble astound, although some don't like its matter of factness!

**LINN EKOS SE** 2010 £3,700  
Subtle mods over the years, including revised bearings and the recent new wiring has kept it a serious contender in the superarm stakes. Has a commanding musicality all of its own.

**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!

**AUDIO TECHNICA AT-F3/III** 2010 £189

Great value entry level moving coil with detail and grip you just can't get from similarly priced moving magnets.

**ORTOFON 2M RED/BLUE** 2007 £60/£120  
Modern, high resolution budget moving magnets that are always an engaging listen.



**GOLDRING G1042** 1994 £239  
One of the best MMs going, with sweet and extended treble and punchy, muscular bass.

**ORTOFON VIVO BLUE2011** £275  
Super new budget moving coil cartridge from respected Danish manufacturer; a real step up from previous efforts.

**DENON DL103R** 2006 £295  
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** £295  
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.

**ORTOFON RONDO BRONZE** 2005 £500  
Excellent mid-price moving coil with real rhythmic alacrity and a decent deal of finesse.

**LYRA DORIAN** 2007 £649  
Incisive and musical, this baby Lyra is one of the most powerful and revealing MCs at its price point. Beware the sharp treble, though!



**BENZ MICRO GLIDER L2** 2008 £650  
Crisp, clean and detailed MC; particularly impressive at both ends of the frequency spectrum

**ZYX R-100H** 2005 £799  
Exceptionally tight sounding and detailed cartridge with the musical skills to match, this is up with the best at the price, with a presentation all of its own.

**TRANSFIGURATION AXIA** 2007 £890  
Musically adept and highly resolute cartridge with impressive tracking abilities. Top end lift means careful matching required, however..

**BENZ MICRO WOOD SL** 2010 £945  
Highly finessed Swiss moving coil that plays music with riflebolt precision.



**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 CADENZA BRONZE** 2010 £1,350  
Smooth and engaging high end MC with a slightly warmer and more relaxed presentation than its superb bigger brother.

**ORTOFON CADENZA BLACK** 2010 £1,650  
Ultra incisive, transparent and dimensional moving coil with grip and punch aplenty.

**ORTOFON MC WINDFELD** 2008 £2,250  
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. Supelative value for money.

## CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 2010 £230

A flexible new DAC, this is an impressively rhythmic and detailed performer.

## ARCAM rDAC 2010 £300

Cracking budget DAC sporting a fulsome and musical sound with gorgeous build and styling.

## MUSICAL FIDELITY MI DAC 2010 £400

Surprisingly sophisticated upsampling DAC with oodles of detail and air, but bass isn't quite as powerful as it could be.

## STELLO DA100 SIGNATURE £750

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 CD5I 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-1S 2009 £930

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

## MUSICAL FIDELITY M3 CD 2011 £995

Excellent mid-price machine with slick slot loading and an open and inviting sound.

## ELECTROCOMPANIET PD-1 2011 £1,250

Quirky but highly capable digital convertor with an effective wireless radio option (£250) and balanced outputs.

## SIMAUDIO MOON 300D 2010 £1,290

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



## CYRUS CD8 SE 2008 £1,350

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.

## DENON DCD2010AE 2010 £1,700

Powerful, open sound allied to a rich tonality and satisfying subtlety make this an excellent mid-price buy.

## NAIM DAC 2010 £1,995

Superb high end digital convertor with a probing, punchy and forensically detailed sound.

## MERIDIAN GO8.2 2011 £2,400

Everyman's modern high end CD player, the stylish, well made Meridian has an extremely enjoyable yet refined and accurate sound.

## MARANTZ SA-KI PEARL CD 2010 £2,500

Finely honed affordable high end silver disc spinner, this has a musical lucidity that's unexpected at this price.



## LEEMA ANTILLA IIS ECO 2011 £2,995

Stable and smooth yet superbly detailed and musically engaging, this is class of the £3,000 CD player field.

## CHORD QBD64 2008 £3,000

Bespoke architecture gives a uniquely musical sound that's beguiling yet proffers dizzying incision and grip.

## ELECTROCOMPANIET EMC-1UP 2009 £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.

## WEISS DAC202 2010 £4,600

Brilliantly open and insightful sounding DAC with a range of useful features.

## ELECTROCOMPANIET EMP-1/S 2011 £4,650

Epic in scale, lavish in tone and exuberant in its musicality, this is a memorable SACD spinner. Quirky in operation and modest in finish, though.

## NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4,950

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

## NAIM CDS3 2003 £7,050

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

## dCS DEBUSSY 2011 £7,500

Compact, stylish DAC bringing the gloriously smooth, svelte, spacious sound of dCS to a wider audience.

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

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

## DCS PAGANINI DAC £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.



## NAIM CD555/555PS 2006 £14,000

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



## NETWORK

## NAIM HDX 2009 £4,405

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

## 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...

## PHONO STAGES

## CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640P 2009 £99

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

## GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V 2004 £370

Warm, open and musical nature makes this a great budget phono stage.

## ICON AUDIO PS1.2 2007 £599

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





**CHORD CHORDETTE DUAL 2010**  
£799

Well presented mid price designed with detailed sound and USB input for archiving.

**ASTIN TREW AT8000 2010** £880

Expansive, detailed, powerful sound makes this a leading sub-£1,000 contender.

**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.

**AVID PULSUS** 2010 £1,100

Powerful, propulsive, expansive sound puts this right at the top of the £1,000 phono stage tree.

**QUAD QC24P** 2007 £1,200

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

**ICON AUDIO PS3** 2008 £1,500

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

**SUTHERLAND 20/20 2010** £1,999

Well engineered, smooth sounding solid-state phono stage with a charm of its own.

**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.

**AVID PULSARE** 2010 £3,800

This superbly built, well specified phono stage has a powerful and authoritative sound that bristles with detail and energy.

**WHEST PS.30 RDT SE2011** £4,500

The least solid-state sounding Whest we've heard, this builds on the family strengths of precision and grip but adds a welcome poise and fluidity.

**NAT AUDIO SIGNATURE** 2011 £5,633

Sophisticated sounding, unusually engineered MM and MC phono stage, but faces stiff competition at this lofty price.

**AMPLIFIERS****ICON AUDIO STEREO 40/III**  
2010 £1,200

Excellent starter tube integrated, with plenty of detail and an expansively musical sound.

**AUDIOLAB 8000S** 2006 £400

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

**NAIM NAIT 5:** 2007 £725

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

**SUGDEN MYSTRO** 2010 £1,225

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

**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.

**CREEK DESTINY 2** 2010 £1,445

Beautifully voiced integrated amplifier with a distinctly seductive, tube like sound. A solid-state superstar!

**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.

**CYRUS 8XPD** 2010 £1,500

A quality integrated that suits all genres of music providing insight and clarity in a compact but flexible package.

**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 a lively, musical nature.

**NAIM SUPERNAIT** 2007 £2,475

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

**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-integrateds.

**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

**QUAD II CLASSIC INTEGRATED**

2010 £4,500  
Thoroughly modern music maker with classic style and great pedigree, this amp sings with gentle music but is no headbanger!

**SIM AUDIO****MOON 600i** 2010 £5,750

Sturdy build, useful facilities and a wonderfully relaxed, seamless and even-handed sound will win this many friends.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY****AMS35i** 2010 £6,000

One of the best high end integrateds we've come across, this combines hear-through transparency with musical get-up-and-go.

**DARTZEEL****CTH-8550** 2010 £16,500

Charismatic and quirky high end solid-state integrated amplifier with superb sound and a charming visage.

**HEADPHONE****AMPLIFIERS****FIDELITY AUDIO HPA 100** 2011  
£350

Great little headphone amplifier with a lively yet refined and open sound.

**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.

**PREAMPLIFIERS****CREEK OBH-22** 2008 £350

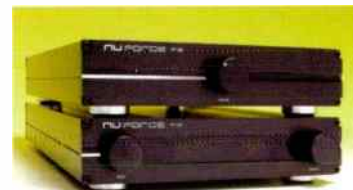
Brilliant value budget passive, with remote control, mute and input switching, plus an easy, a neutral sound.

**ICON AUDIO LA-4** 2011 £800

Uses early 6SN7 triodes for liquid sound, has plenty of gain and remote control.

**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

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

**MF AUDIO CLASSIC****CII SILVER** 2010 £4,500

One of the best preamplifiers we've heard at any price, this transformer coupled marvel does very little wrong; its powerful, clean, open yet delicate sound is unmatched at or near the price.



**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

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

**POWER AMPLIFIERS**

**XTZ AP-100** 2010 £520

Decently smooth yet usefully muscular, this power amp punches way beyond its price point in sonic and value terms.

**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 superb value all the same. Lovely build, finish and Quad's legendary service are nice.

**NUFORCE REFERENCE 95E V2**

2006 £1,750

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



**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.

**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.

**ELECTROCOMPANET 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.

**ICON AUDIO MB845 MkII** 2010

£5,500

With 120W from big 845 valves right down to low frequencies, this power amplifier has massive dynamics and bass swing, yet is easy on the ear.



**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.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY AM550**

2010 £7,000

Mighty, 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.

**MISSION MX2** 2011 £200

Sophisticated sound alloyed with real musical insight makes these small standmounters super value for money.

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY NEO I v2**

2010 £225

Civilised sounding speaker with fast and tuneful bass.

**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.

**WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.3**

2010 £290

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

**MORDAUNT SHORT AVIANO 2**

2010 £300

Classy sounding standmounter at a still affordable price.

**KEF IQ30** 2009 £330

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



**USHER 5-520** 2006 £350

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

**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 AE I CLASSIC**

2006 £845

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

**SPENDOR S3/S5E** 2004 £950

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

**MY AUDIO DESIGN**

**MY1920** 2011 £995

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

**ELAC BS243** 2010 £1,000

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

**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.



**ONE THING AUDIO ESL57**

2007 £1,450

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

**GURU QM-10P** 2007 £1,595

Quirky but adorable standmounters that are way off the pace in respect of detail and power, but well 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 £1,600

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

**SPENDOR S8E** 2008 £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.

**MONITOR AUDIO PL100** 2008 £2,300

The flagship 'Platinum' series standmounter has a lovely warm and delicate sound with superlative treble.

**EMMINENT TECHNOLOGY LFT8B**

2010 £2,300

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

**PMC OB11** 2008 £2,950

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



**MY AUDIO DESIGN MYCLAPTON**  
2010 £2,990

Powerful, dynamic, musical yet refined, this unconventional point-source design yields dramatic sonic benefits.

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

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

**YAMAHA SOAVO 1.1** 2009 £3,000

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

**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 £5,000

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

**TANNOY DEFINITION DC10T**  
2010 £5,000

Wonderfully wide and open, super fast and amazingly engaging to listen to.

**ECLIPSE TD712z/2** 2011 £5,100

Flawed genius, and wilfully so. These loudspeakers don't do everything well, but what they can do is profound and enthralling; rhythms, dynamics and soundstaging.

**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.

**VIVID VI.5** 2010 £6,000

Breathtaking transparency, superlative coherence and dizzying speed make these one of the best standmounters ever made - providing you like their 'studio sound'.

**GERMAN PHYSIKS LIMITED II**  
2011 £7,800

Don't be fooled by the austere looks; this is a superbly enjoyable omnidirectional speaker with a wonderfully fast, expansive sound.

**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 £15,000

Vast in scale with effortless dynamics and an easy, barrel chested bass, these big bangers are great for lowish power tube amps. Large room needed!

**MARTIN LOGAN CLX LINEAR**  
2010 £15,990

Meticulously crafted electrostatic that's free from traditional limitations, this is one of the very best loudspeakers money can buy.

**ACCESSORIES****WADIA I701** 2010 £349

The first iPod dock to extract the music digitally, letting you hook your little Apple direct to a DAC for superior sound.

**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****JAYS V-JAYS** 2010 £49

Wonderful little budget over-ear portable phones with a clean, smooth sound to beat the best of the rest at the price.

**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 makes these 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...

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**



## INTERCONNECTS

**TELLURIUM Q BLACK** 2010 £276/3m  
A deep, dark, velvety performer that's nevertheless highly musical, it represents excellent value as mid-price cables go.



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

**WIREWORLD OASIS 5** 2003 £99/M  
Excellent mid-price design with a very neutral, silky and self-effacing sound. Superb value for money.

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



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

**VDH ULTIMATE THE FIRST** 2004 £260/0.6M  
Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.



**TCI CONSTRICTOR 13A-6 BLOCK** 2003 £120  
Top quality 'affordable' mains outlet block, with fine build and good sonics. Well worth the extra over standard high street specials, which sound coarse and two-dimensional by comparison.

**MISSING LINK CRYO REFERENCE** 2008 £375  
Currently our favourite 'affordable high end' interconnects, with a deliciously smooth, open and subtle sound without a hint of edge or grain. Superb value, inasuch as it's as good as some designs at three times the price.

## TUNERS

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



**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640T** 2005 £250  
Sweet sounding digital/analogue hybrid with fine build and finish at the price.

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

**CREEK CLASSIC TUNER** 2006 £550  
No tuner offers better sound per pound; wonderfully three dimensional and smooth from bottom to top.

**MICROMEGA FM-10** 2010 £750  
Don't let the modest proportions fool you, this is a state-of-the-art modern analogue tuner with bespoke internals giving a warm, expansive sound.

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

**MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-90T** 2010 £1,295  
Exceptionally able, but commensurately priced, audiophile tuner that cannot fail to charm.

**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  
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**SHANLING MC-30** 2007 £650  
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**PEACHTREE AUDIO IDECCO** £1,000  
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**LINN CLASSIK MUSIC 2008** £1,250  
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**NAIM UNITIQUE 2010** £1,350  
Great little half width one-box system with truly impressive sound allied to a wealth of source options.



**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.

**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 jaw-dropping performance.



# Black Beauty

**As digital to analogue converters go, few are larger, more solidly built and more expensive than Bricasti's M1. Purposed for the studio market, professional musician Rafael Todes listened in...**



**Y**ou'd be forgiven if on hearing the name 'Bricasti', you asked "who's that?" It is a specialised pro-audio company based in Massachusetts, USA who are known for their Model 7 Digital Reverb Processor. Bricasti is not an Italian name of origin, but a synthesis of the names Brian and Casey, thrown together with an added "t" to roll off the tongue more easily! Having mastered the reverb field, they thought they'd try their hand at a DAC which shares some of the same processes...

As you'd expect from a high end unit purposed for recording studio use, the M1 is solidly constructed out of milled and machined aluminium sections. There is a slotted top panel which is unusual for a unit that isn't going to get that hot. The main panels are anodised and the text and markings are laser-etched. The front panel sports a red dot matrix display, there is a jog wheel which, in combination with the six buttons alongside, select input and filter type. There is a standby button on the front, and an on/off switch at the rear.

The back panel has both balanced and unbalanced outputs, and AES, S/PDIF, BNC, and Toslink inputs. There sadly is no USB input, so connection to a PC involves the use of a third party USB to S/PDIF converter.

For this I used the new Musical Fidelity gizmo, which had a huge advantage over the M2Tech HiFace of being plug and play and a great deal more user-friendly. There are no less than five digital oversampling filter settings on offer, which impart different characteristics to the sound; I selected filter one which was the least invasive to my ears.

Topologically, the M1 is an extremely well-engineered dual mono design. The left and right channels each have their own dedicated linear power supplies, digital to analogue convertors and analogue circuitry, meaning crosstalk is virtually non-existent, which should result in an accurate and substantial sound stage. The company says that the dynamic range for each channel is optimised using an ADI 1955 D/A convertor in a mono configuration. The clocking is done with a process called Direct Digital Synthesis (DDS) is said to result in vanishingly small levels of jitter.

## SOUND QUALITY

I had various preconceptions as to how the Bricasti would sound, as a piece of pro-audio kit; analytical and revealing, merciless to all faults! However I was in for a shock when I hooked it up. Using a PC based system, playing from RAM, with a CAT 7 cable, I clicked on Linn

Records' award-winning recording of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Charles Mackerras in Mozart's 39th Symphony, last movement. The overriding factors in the presentation was power and presence. The orchestra was full blooded, and rich sounding, an attractive sound to listen to, not a bleached analytical sound by any stretch of the imagination. As a listener, you are thrust into the front row of the concert hall, in the thick of the action.

One thing that struck me however, was in the general euphony of the sound: I was not getting quite the detail and range of tonal palette that I like. In particular tonal complexity to the string sound was missing it seemed. To be more specific, the leading edge of the violin's notes were great, but it was as if the body of the note was being pasteurised with a bland, woolly, but very pleasant gloop. I also would have liked to hear more detail in the bass department. There was weight and thump galore, but it felt a bit bloated.

Listening to Rimsky Korsakov's 'The Snow Maiden – Dance of the Tumblers', showed a brass section in its full glory; tight, punchy and not at all brash. On this superb recording, the Bricasti controlled the space beautifully, and when the strings started the fugato section, with the violins playing short spiky notes, the





"this does 'big' effortlessly, conveying its authority and shining a torch on the bottom octaves, testing my system to its limits! I've rarely heard CD sound so convincing..."

Bricasti was in its element with its tight leading edges. I contrasted the M1 to the slightly cheaper Bel Canto Dac 3.5VBS (£2,700) and power supply (£1,200), which couldn't separate the orchestral instruments half so well and lacked the shock and awe, but did have a delicacy to the string sound which was not part of the fibre of the M1.

On to a recording I made of my Quartet (the Allegri String Quartet, see [www.allegriquartet.org.uk](http://www.allegriquartet.org.uk)) playing live from the Salisbury Festival (which will in due course be available as a free high-res download from the new *Hi-Fi World* website). For me this was the most telling of all the music I listened to, as I have the live sound in my ear – as it were. The Bricasti had the extraordinary ability to make this unprocessed recording sound mastered. It was smoothing over some of the bow noises that

occur in the heat of battle, and was making a thoroughly euphonious sound, at the cost of timbral subtlety. My colleague's three hundred-year-

old Amati violin just didn't sound right. The pure sweetness of the instrument in the flesh, was slightly blandified, and thickened. I wouldn't





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have been able to recognise the instrument on a blind test. The Bel Canto by contrast made a much more vibrant sound, which seemed to make my colleague's violin more recognisable. Don't get me wrong, a lot of what the Bricasti was doing made the recording sound more engaging and pleasant, but it is a far cry from the Weiss DAC202 that I reviewed a few months back, which was a true horse from the pro-audio stable, in the way I expected the Bricasti to be, but wasn't!

Running Red Book CD from a humble Cambridge Audio 650BD on Mahler's 5th Symphony – Scherzo conducted by Leonard Bernstein, the CD having been milled by an Audio Desk cutter, I was stunned by the sheer balls of the DAC. It was really in its element coping with the huge forces of the symphony, separating the diverse orchestral textures, giving a weight and authority which I am not used to hearing through my Naim CD5X plus Flatcap 2X.

conducted by Solti on Decca, the soundstage widens and deepened over the Cambridge Audio 650BD, and the sense of weight of the huge Wagnerian forces made its presence felt. This music really suits the Bricasti, which does 'big' effortlessly, conveying its authority and shining a torch on the bottom octaves, testing my system to its limits! I have rarely heard Red-Book CD sound so convincing.

B&W's Society of Sound has a series of releases of hi res material available to subscribers, including a number of live concerts with the London Symphony Orchestra. Listening to Shostakovich's brutal 5th Symphony, with the recently deceased conductor and cellist Rostropovich recorded at 48/24, the unadulterated flow of the excitement of a live concert is beautifully captured, and unleashed by the Bricasti. There is

**REFERENCE SYSTEM**  
 Naim CD5X and Naim Flatcap 2X CD player  
 Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD Blu-Ray player  
 Cyrus CD XT SE CD transport  
 Musical Fidelity V-link USB convertor  
 Musical Fidelity V-Dac DAC  
 Audio Research SP9 Mk2 preamplifier  
 VAC Auricle Musicblocs power amplifiers  
 B&W 802D loudspeakers

analogue convertor which errs on the side of euphony as opposed to clinical accuracy. It conveys its digital soundscape with great width and depth, and has no shortage of ball-busting guts. It is an ideal upgrade for someone who has started with a Benchmark or suchlike and wants to delve deeper into the world of digital. It has an extremely polished sound which makes lengthy listening sessions a pleasure. It does not have a preamp or a USB connection, which may put some people off (the Weiss DAC202 for example has a preamp and a FireWire connection).



The huge soundstage was brightly lit, real weight to the bass, zing to the pizzicati, stunningly fast transients, and an interesting insight into how good a CD player with a humble transport can sound with the right DAC. I wanted to get up and dance!

Linn Records lead the field in well-recorded high resolution material, and listening to their recent release of Beethoven's 4th Piano Concerto with Arthur Pizarro at the helm, the sound again had a thickened feel to it. The piano sounds a bit more like a Bösendorfer than a Steinway, that steely diamond-cut brilliance that is the modern Steinway makes way for something more mellow and muffled. There is depth and space to the recording which shows up many lesser DACs, but I'm aware that the pendulum of harsh digital sound may have swung too far in the other direction.

Turning to the help of one of the best value transports around, and a Hi-Fi World favourite, the Cyrus CD XT SE, playing Red-Book CD through the Bricasti, the combination show what they are capable of. Listening to Wagner Overtures

simply so much musical clarity in what's coming out, coupled with the grunt of the basses and the sizzle of the brass.

**CONCLUSION**

This is a thoroughly engaging, well thought out and engineered digital to

It is not the sound I was expecting from makers of studio kit, maybe it's more the sound that pro-audio people think hi-fi guys expect! It has aspects in its warmth of valves and vinyl, and will score a big hit with new digital converts, or the digitally nervous!

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

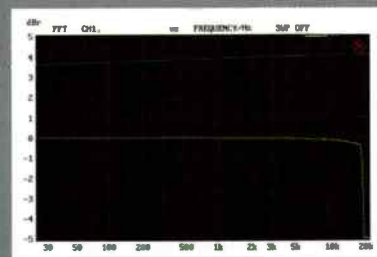
Frequency response remained flat at all six filter settings; no early roll off is available for a warm sound balance as is often the case. However, filter 6 does introduce more stop band attenuation than the others and a slightly curtailed upper limit of 18kHz and this should, subtly, give the easiest sound of all.

Distortion levels were very low throughout the DAC's dynamic range and a class leading 100.6dB EIAJ Dynamic Range value with 16bit (i.e. CD) points to lower than usual quantisation noise products and better sound quality. Linearity with 24bit was also exceptional, distortion at -60dB measuring a super low 0.017%, so this DAC gets the best from digital.

Output was a normal 2V from the phono sockets and a massive 6.9V from XLR.

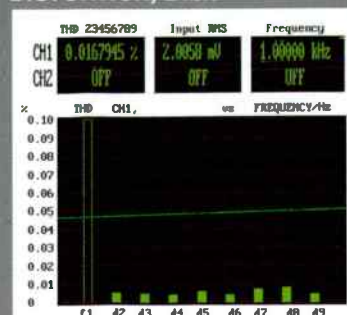
The Bricasti M1 does offer measurably improved performance on most else so there's something special going on inside. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



filter 6

**DISTORTION, 24bit**



**VERDICT** ●●●●●  
 Absolutely lovely sounding high end digital convertor with scale and swagger, yet still lacks ultimate resolution compared to some rivals.

**BRICASTI M1 DAC** £6,999  
 SCV Ltd.  
 ☎ +44 (0)20 8418 1470  
 www.scvlondon.co.uk

**FOR**  
 - size, scale, power  
 - euphonic nature  
 - build, finish

**AGAINST**  
 - lacks ultimate detail  
 - price



# Advance Party

**Advance Acoustics is a new name to the British hi-fi scene, but they've a wide range of interesting and affordable separates, of which the MAP-306 integrated amplifier is one. Alvin Gold takes up the story...**

**J**ust who are Advance Acoustic, and where does the MAP-306 that you see before you stand in the great and by some reckoning overcrowded firmament of integrated amplifierdom? Well, starting at the beginning, the company's trading title is Advance Paris, founded in 1995. From this the observant reader may have deduced that this is a French company, a contemporary of Micromega, and British counterparts like Roksan and Arcam...

Indeed, the company is based geographically on the outskirts of Paris, roughly equidistant from

Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports. Its stock in trade is the production of hi-fi components, mainly loudspeakers, disc players and amplifiers (bipolar and hybrid). But they are not made locally or even in France. Although headquartered and engineered in France, their products are made in China where the company is able to take advantage of the keen production costs associated with that country.

And there's no denying that the big, chunky MAP-306 is *spectacularly* priced. At just eight hundred and ninety five of your Eeeenglish pounds, this is a solidly built and well

specified integrated amplifier which costs considerably less than big name competition from the companies named above and a gazillion others. As the picture shows, the key visual features are its solid build quality and the pair of large power level meters scaled in Watts into 8 Ohms, with meter illumination enabled with a rear panel switch. Because loudspeaker impedance is much less of a constant than is popularly supposed,







of course their power readings will only bear passing similarity to the real power output at any time. So you'd not be a million kilometres out if you were to suppose that they're for cosmetic effect only...

Still, there's no denying its physical heft and robustness. Inside you'll find an extremely well reinforced structure with plenty of screening for individual circuit blocks, and more than respectable levels of fit and finish. You get the feeling that wouldn't feel too much pain if it was attacked by a steamroller – which is not what you can say about most sub £900 amps. A well specified power 600VA transformer sits at the heart of the power supply. The amplifier turns the scales at a substantial 15.5kg, and it measures 15.5 (h) x 44 9(w) x 43(d) cm, so it is an impressive lump in terms of girth, if nothing else.

The MAP-306 is an essentially conventional integrated amplifier. Full output (Class A/B) is specified at 100 Watts/channel into 8 Ohms, or 200 Watts into 4 Ohms which was broadly met on the lab bench – in fact slightly exceeded at 8 Ohms. The measured damping factor of 65 shows that the amplifier has control as well as power. There is also the option of running the amplifier with an enriched bias through its output stage, which is claimed to keep the

amplifier in Class A up to about 30 Watts, though the ever unreliable finger test suggests that it doesn't run hot enough under quiescent conditions to justify the 30 Watts that are said to be available in Class A, which by the way must be enabled with a rear panel high bias switch.

The remote control is based on a solid aluminium chassis, and the amplifier is equipped with a thick silver and black alloy faceplate which is home to the controls which cover all the basic functions including power standby, source selection, mute (which is otherwise available via a back panel switch) and volume. A similar set of controls is available on the aluminium bodied remote control, though the rotary native volume control is replaced by volume up/down buttons. There are four relay switched line level inputs, tape and an MM/MC phono input, with sensitivity set by another rear panel switch. The final feature of note is that the preamplifier can be unhooked from the power amplifier so that you can use the MAP-306 as a standalone preamplifier if this is what turns you on. What the Advance signally lacks is the ability to handle digital inputs natively, so it cannot substitute for a full on Apple docking

station, unless you're content to use an analogue output from your Apple source as the signal input.

## SOUND QUALITY

Most of the listening for this test was done using a Denon SACD/CD player and a pair of Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 LE loudspeakers, with which it did a creditable job after it had been run in for a couple of days, though this had to be done with a



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Phantom is made from two tightly twisted silver plated copper solid cores insulated in low loss PTFE, responsible for its fast detailed sound quality. DCT++ processing adds depth to the sound and enhances the timing of the music's rhythms. Termination using the highly acclaimed Eichmann Bullet plugs ensures the ultimate in musical detail shines through.

The Phantom is a very special interconnect for Black Rhodium and we have written a short account of its progressive development from cables that have won 5 stars in What HiFi? and 'Best Buy' in HiFi Choice to our new Phantom that we offer today. Hear this cable at you nearest Black Rhodium dealer and you will want to buy it!

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Rogers LS6 (s/h)	-	£75

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signal source connected as the amplifier turns off if run unloaded for any substantial period, presumably to improve its green credentials.

It lived up to its visual promise of being a muscular, solid sounding amplifier, and the bass drive is quite impressive, certainly bearing out the claims inherent in the power numbers. The preliminary conclusion then is that this is a good amplifier, an impression reinforced by the more than attractive pricing. But it is not perfect of course, quite understandably at just £895. The clue to its imperfections are clearly indicated in the lab tests. A long time ago (and I mean a *long* time ago) I learned to identify the particular issues associated with amplifier whose distortion residuals vary with level. There's no single absolutely consistent aural quality that is invariably associated with varying distortion residuals, but in general there is what might be described as a lack of comfort in the way that music is reproduced. A top class amplifier will generally sound absolutely seamless in the way that musical dynamics are presented, and this one doesn't achieve this, at least not quite. There is a slightly inconsistent quality here, an edginess or granularity to the sound that is imposed on the music that once identified is hard to ignore for people such as myself.

My particular tastes in music include a lot of instrumental music, either solo or chamber, and a certain amount of full bore orchestral material. I also listen to rock and other types of music, but it is rare to find other genres so fussy about how they're reproduced (though of course there are exceptions). The common factor here is material made using live instruments and voices, reproduced in a recognisable acoustic environment and my experience is that it is possible to find amplifiers that can cope with this kind of music transparently and without imposing their own character on the sound, and often without having to pay a king's ransom either. Valve amplifiers often have this capability – it is all but implicit in the well-worn phrase valve sound - perhaps more consistently than with solid state designs, though in many cases the latter fail in other areas.

On this showing Advance Acoustics musters a strong, dynamic sound from the MAP-306, but it doesn't offer the clinical transparency, and the absence of texturing, that a truly first rate amplifier delivers across the board. In the final analysis



it is not a particularly sophisticated or a refined amplifier. It worked well with mainstream material such as processed modern pop, but with some well recorded Mahler Songs, and with Brahms Alto Rhapsody to give two examples chosen almost at random, musical reproduction was a little too choppy for comfort.

I had a similar experience with Strauss Alpine symphony, whose dynamic complexities defeated this amplifier, which just didn't scale the rapidly changing musical dynamics convincingly enough, and I had a similar feeling when listening to the late Beethoven piano sonatas (George Szell, Leon Fleisher – a classic old recording with real heart and passion). Ditto with the string quartets of the Second Viennese School - Schoenberg, Berg & Webern from the LaSalle Quartet with Margaret Price.

At other times however – playing The Beatles and Mark Knopfler for example – it coped just fine. At its best the music was layered convincingly, with a realistic sense of air and space. Mark's guitar playing, not least in some of his familiar early Dire Straits recordings, packed the usual sense of passion and despite the passing of the years, there was nothing tired about the sound. And ditto with some much loved recordings of Mozart Piano Concertos. But it is hard to completely gainsay the feeling that the very familiarity of these pieces could have blindsided me to subtle sonic failings in the way they were reproduced.

**CONCLUSION**

Although it does not set new standards,

this is a bold and dynamic amplifier that will cope with a wide range of musical expression. It worked quite well with the Mordaunt Short Performance 6 LE test speakers though it doesn't completely overcome a slight laziness in the sound that this speaker is often subject too, a nascent feeling that the sound wasn't completely under control, and that there was more to give if the amplifier just knew how to get to its core. So the bottom line is that here is an amplifier that goes a good long way to justifying its modest asking price, but without establishing new standards.

**VERDICT** ●●●●● £

Powerful, confident sounding integrated that's great value for money, but lacks the transparency and finesse of the class leaders.

**ADVANCE ACOUSTICS**  
**MAP-306** £895  
[www.soundthinking-store.co.uk](http://www.soundthinking-store.co.uk)

**FOR**

- strong, powerful sound
- decent soundstaging
- build and finish
- power meters!

**AGAINST**

- lacks ultimate transparency
- diffuse texturing

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The MAP-306 produced 112 Watts into 8 Ohms and a healthy 196 Watts into 4 Ohms under test. With a high damping factor of 65 this amplifier has both power and control, so it is likely to deliver healthy bass. With output stage bias current set to High on a rear slide switch the amplifier ran hot but not dangerously so.

Increasing standing bias current through the output stage extends the power range over of Class A operation and should reduce crossover distortion. In practice things were a little more complicated. A high bias setting did reduce distortion a little, but the distortion residual exhibited peculiar peak deformations, as if a current limiting circuit was operating. This produced a unusually extended distortion pattern at low levels. Above 8 Watts, likely with Class B operation coming into play, this cleared and the distortion residual settled to second harmonic. Overall however, the pattern of distortion changed substantially with output level – not a good sign. Modern amplifiers of good quality largely avoid the problem of a changing modulation pattern, which heightens audibility. Levels were low, around 0.1% luckily. All other factors measured well.

The MM phono stage was fine in all areas but the MC stage, probably a x10 preamp, has early low frequency roll off and will sound bass-light.

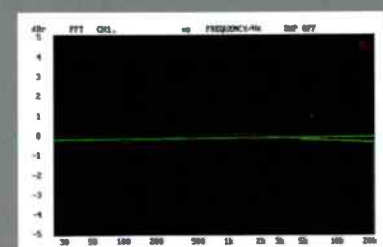
The MAP-306 has plenty of power and does a reasonably good basic job measurement shows, but it has niggling defects unnecessary today.  
 NK

Power	112 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	15Hz-50kHz
Separation	-77dB
Noise	-99dB
Distortion	0.07%
Sensitivity	340mV
Damping factor	65
Disc (MM/MC)	
Frequency response	20/55Hz-104kHz
Separation	65dB
Noise	-72/-61dB
Distortion	0.09%
Sensitivity	5/0.42mV
Overload	65/5mV

**DISTORTION, 1W, 10kHz**



**FREQUENCY RESPONSE, MC**



# WORLD CLASSICS

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

**We do not sell these products. It is for your information only.**

## DIGITAL

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD1** 1986 £1500  
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



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



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

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



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

**TECHNICS SL-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 SP10 1973 £400**

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

**REGA PLANAR 3 1978 £79**

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

**GARRARD 301/401 1953 £19**

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



**ROKSAN XERXES 1984 £550**

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

**SONY PS-B80 1978 £800**

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

**THORENS TD124 1959 £ N/A**

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



**TOWNSHEND ROCK 1979 £ N/A**

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

**TRIO LO-7D 1978 £600**

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

**TONEARMS**

**ACOS LUSTRE GST-1 1975 £46**

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

**AUDIO TECHNICA 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 C51/P51 1976 £130**  
Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN socketry. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

**VTL MINIMAL/50W MONOBLOCK 1985 £1,300**  
Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it shows. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent used buy.

**A&R A60 1977 £115**  
Sweet and musical feature-packed integrated; the Audiolab 8000A used its blueprint to great effect.



**CREEK CAS4040 1983 £150**  
More musical than any budget amp before it; CAS4140 loses tone controls, gains grip.

**AUDIOLAB 8000A 1985 £495**  
Smooth integrated with clean MM/MC phono stage and huge feature count. Extremely reliable, too. Post '93 versions a top used buy.



**MCINTOSH MA6800 1995 £3735**  
Effortlessly sweet, strong and powerful with seminal styling to match.

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

**MISSION CYRUS 2 1984 £299**  
Classic eighties minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradeable with PSX power supply.



**MUSICAL FIDELITY A11985 £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 rigueur before use, using original parts if possible. Surprisingly crisp and musical sound, that's far more modern than Quad IIs. Deeply impressive when in fine fettle.



**MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 1996 £1000PR**

200W of sweet smooth transistor stomp in a grooved tube! Under-rated oddity.



**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-JE55SES 2000 £900**  
The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



**PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 £480**  
For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

**MARANTZ DR-17 1999 £1100**  
Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



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

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

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

**ACOUSTIC RESEARCH ARI8S 1978 £125**  
Yank designed, British built loudspeaker became a budget staple for many rock fans, thanks to the great speed from the paper drivers, although finesse was most definitely not their forte...

**BBC LS3/5A 1972 £88**  
Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects - articulation, stage depth, clarity - and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers AB1 subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!

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

**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 / B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity and imaging.



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

**QUAD ESL57 1956 £45 EACH**

Wonderfully open and neutral sound puts box loudspeakers to shame. Properly serviced they give superb midband performance, although frequency extremes less impressive. Ideally, use in stacked pairs or with subwoofers and supertweeters.



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

**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.

**LEAK SANDWICH 1961 £39 EACH**

Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.

**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 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.

**QUAD ESL63 1980 £1200**

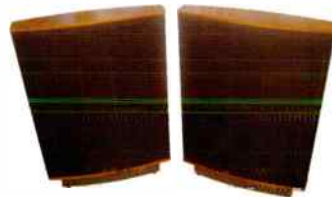
An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics

**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!

**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...



## 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

**QUAD ELECTROACOUSTICS**

(Cambs) Quad's service department, able to repair almost all Quad products, from the very first. (Also Audiolab, Mission & Wharfedale).  
Tel: 0845 458001 |  
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 IIs.  
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  
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# Big Time

**Noel Keywood covers before the vast Mowgan Audio Etain floorstanding loudspeaker...**

**S**tanding an impressive 4ft high against 3ft for a typical floorstander, the new Etain from Mowgan is big. Ours arrived in wooden crates, no less, which we had to unscrew, to contain their weight of 44.5kgs, nearly 100lbs apiece. Priced at £6,000 both size and price put them into a currently popular slot – with manufacturers that is – of a 'super-floorstander', an A-380 amongst jumbo jets as the missus might visualise it, if she has an interest in civil airliners that is! We've had many through our doors, starting with Monitor Audio's impressive Platinum PL300, followed by Spendor's ST and Tannoy's DC-10. That's a heap of talent the Etain must match or surpass. Beneath it price-wise lies the Spendor A9 and Triangle Antal EX, similar in size but less expensive by a large margin.

And in my view all these box loudspeakers face chilling competition from Martin Logan hybrid electrostatics and Eminent Technology's rare LFT-08b magnetic planar loudspeaker. Having just reviewed the imperfect LFT-16 and sat on the settee a little stunned wondering whether I should take them home and apply a few mods(!) to reach something quite extraordinary, the field at and above £1,000 is quite hot...

The Etain enters a market slowly moving ahead by turning away from dome tweeters to ribbons, electrostatics and magnetic planar

drive units that potentially offer better results. It joins them by bringing a Chinese manufactured dual foil concertina ribbon tweeter to the party – the second drive unit down from the top in our pictures. A ribbon is meant to give superb treble quality, so cymbals ring clearly and don't sound like an aluminium saucepan being hit by a hammer, whilst violin strings sound well separated, one from another, and don't screech.

Ribbons only cover higher frequencies; the Tonigen I used in our KLSI design (1993) reached down to 4kHz and the Etain's LCY-130 split ribbon did likewise in this 'speaker, our frequency response graph shows, although it is specced to 2kHz – likely optimistically. A midrange unit must be used to meet it. Mowgan use two from Danish AudioTechnology, one above and one below in a classic D'Appolito arrangement, intended to give a consistent and natural sound balance over a wide vertical angle so the sound stays the same from seated to standing.

Below these midrange units sit two bass units, loaded by a large rear port. Twin bass drivers this size move a lot of air and can handle a lot of electrical power, Mowgan claim 250







Watts. However, contrary

to what you may reasonably assume, bigger loudspeakers need less power, not more, because of their size. So whilst the Etains might handle 250 Watts you won't be using it unless you listen in one room with the 'speakers in another. To be more precise, they produced a massive 92dB (loud) from one measly watt, so 250 of them adds 24dB, giving 116dB total – otherwise known as deafening. My own experience shows 20 Watts is more than enough with a loudspeaker this sensitive – and that's running loud (95dB) in a big room (28ft).

The Etains are well made and carry a three way tri-wire terminal

connecting panel at rear. However, the standard of finish wasn't as slick as that of most competitors, especially Monitor Audio's PL300s, and their clear acrylic transparent grilles are an acquired taste.

Unfortunately, we ran into problems with our Etains. The foils of one ribbon tweeter bowed, one inwards one outwards, as if the supports had moved together. It was replaced. Then the other went out in sympathy a few days later – and this was before we had used them. There was variance in sensitivity between samples too, so where the Etain measured flat to begin with, with new tweeter treble was +2dB up and I had to fit a higher value attenuator resistor. As I'm used to spanning loudspeakers all this was a reasonably quick job for me, but subsequent measurement to re-

Audio Design kit loudspeakers and it prompted us to design KLS6 with its open backed midrange.

So the Etains sounded warm across the midrange, easy on the ear and considerably different to today's norm, as a result. They also have a slightly enclosed or boxy quality to their midrange too, yet this could be seen as a foil to current practice of using metal cone drivers with their zingy brightness, or Kevlar cones with a midrange peak, where clarity and insight come with a small sense of contrivance.

With Elvis Presley singing 'Fever' the Etains were nothing other than a picture of even handed perfection it seemed. They put the man centre stage, big in voice and cleanly outlined, back in the plane of the loudspeakers but with an image large enough to be close enough to reality. In fact, whatever male vocalist was at

"with Elvis Presley singing 'Fever', the Etains were nothing other than a picture of even-handed perfection it seemed..."

achieve response flatness requires a measuring microphone and isn't so straightforward, even if an iPhone can otherwise do the job these days. I've not encountered such problems with ribbons before and suspect that if ours were typical Mowgan will have to find a unit that's more durable and consistent.

### SOUND QUALITY

A fruitily large kick drum, with a nice fat resonant quality in Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism' signalled the size of these loudspeakers and testified to their abundant low end power, which is how a lot of listeners like it. The bassline was big, generously powerful and easy to follow. The Etains have plenty of low end power and proportionally are on the large side of the fence, even with our tight sounding Musical Fidelity AMS50 power amplifier. Where they score is in delivering well proportioned bass that goes low but is controlled and tuneful. Skin sang clearly centre stage and her vocal poise and clarity were excellent, due largely to those Chinese ribbon tweeters. The Etains have a soft, almost warm quality to them and are a little on the boxy side at times, and I was aware of this with Skin's vocals. This isn't down to the tweeter nor is it affected by it, but sounded to me as if it came from the two midrange units and the chamber behind them. We heard this effect many times when prototyping World

the microphone, from Willy DeVille to Jackie Leven, the Etains gave them oodles of body. This came from a generous upper bass/lower midrange power that brought warmth and body to instruments and vocalists alike.

Again the Etains differed from most else here. It's a balance that reminded me of loudspeakers I lived with long ago, like Leak 3090s and Wharfedale Airdales. The Etains are tidier and more judiciously balanced but similarly have a big, generous and easy going sound.

It was with searing treble from recordings like Sly and Robbie's 'No Name on the Bullet' that the ribbon tweeters really stood out in quality terms. Super smooth treble was obvious, yet neither searing or unpleasant, the click of stick in the background from Sly's drumset jumped out at me yet I didn't wince or find it unpleasant. Mr Shakespeare's thunderous bass lines rolled along powerfully, reaching down low and moving the room with strength.

And did the ribbon tweeters handle Nigel Kennedy's violin well? You bet! In fact, better than I had anticipated. I have never heard his violin sound so full bodied as it did in Vivaldi's 'Spring'. Accompanying orchestral violins jumped out a bit and were over-lit a trifle, pushed forward by treble level being a tad too high, but the quality of the

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**Quotes from David Price . Hi-Fi World  
Vivid Review . May 2011**

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.

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.

### Hi-Fi World Verdict

A superbly executed package of modifications for the Linn LP12, it wrings much more performance from this classic deck, at a low price.

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**Against:** • nothing



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World Radio History



instruments was superb. When playing almost alone in Massenet's 'Meditation' the Etains provided a level of smooth, sophisticated insight to this instrument that few other loudspeakers could match. Ribbons are a bit more emphatic than electrostatics and magnetic planars in this role, but a delight in comparison to the many metal dome tweeters around today. Classical music lovers would approve of the Etains here, and they would also like the size and power of the London Symphony Orchestra playing Tchaikovsky's Marche Slav, massive drum strikes sending me almost over the back of our musically battered settee. There was a subtly warm quality, but only against the many, many metal coned jobbies I review. And loudspeakers as big as the Etains produce a sound equally as large and unstrained: I wound volume up and up until the

concrete floors and steel frame of our offices shook but the Etains seemed unperturbed.

**CONCLUSION**

What the new Mowgan Etains offer is a full bodied, easy going and naturally balanced sound, underpinned by good quality bass and topped off by a very nice sounding ribbon tweeter that gives even and extended treble. Poor tweeter reliability is troubling though, and cannot be ignored, and for the price finish could be better too. All of which makes the Etain a great large loudspeaker with some special qualities, amongst which its lack of shout marks it out. Going forward, I trust that full production versions will have the tweeter issues sorted; in which case they come highly recommended.



**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

Our frequency response of the Etain clearly shows it goes very low, exciting the 24Hz main mode of our 28ft square room. This is going to add real heft to subsonics. Taking into account the generally high level of output below 150Hz, about +2dB up down to 50Hz, bass from this loudspeaker will sound powerful. The port is broadly tuned and works over a wide band from 50Hz down to 20Hz, exerting good damping on the bass unit, confirmed by the broad dip in the impedance curve centred at 33Hz, caused by the port. The low level of the residual peaks either side of this dip indicates low reactance, and impedance remains more even than usual as a result. The Etain has a 3.7 Ohm DCR no less, and dips to 5 Ohms in the bass region, even though it measured 6 Ohms overall. Prodigious bass output and low impedance combine to ensure the Etain exhibits high sensitivity, producing a massive 92dB from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input.

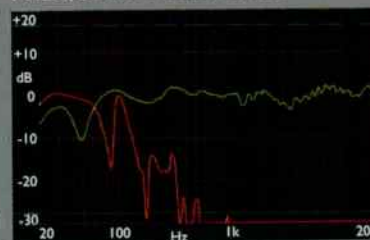
Above the bass region output remains smooth and even all the way up to 20kHz our analysis shows. This is for a microphone position slightly - around 15 degrees - off-axis. Treble peaks by a few degrees on-axis. For a neutral balance then the loudspeakers should be pointed straight down the room and not at listeners. Phase matching between the two midrange drivers and single ribbon tweeter, arranged in D'Appolito configuration, was good, giving the Etain fairly consistent off-axis output.

Colouration was low over most of the audio band our 200mS decay spectrum showed, but below 200Hz the cabinet gets a little hot and suffers overhang, there is so much low frequency energy being produced. This

is inevitable outcome of producing heavy bass from anything other than an enormous Tannoy-style cabinet. Bass distortion was low, measuring 3.5% from the drive unit and a very low 3% from the large port at 40Hz, mostly bass doubling (2nd harmonic). With the port and bass unit behaving well bass should sound solid and clean. Above 100Hz distortion hovered around 0.2%, about average.

The Etain is a large loudspeaker able to give massive bass with deep subsonics our measurements show. It will be of good quality too. Frequency response is very smooth all the way up to 20kHz, making the Etain an accurate loudspeaker. It measured very well all round and is likely to sound impressive. NK

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



Green - driver output  
Red - port output

**IMPEDANCE**



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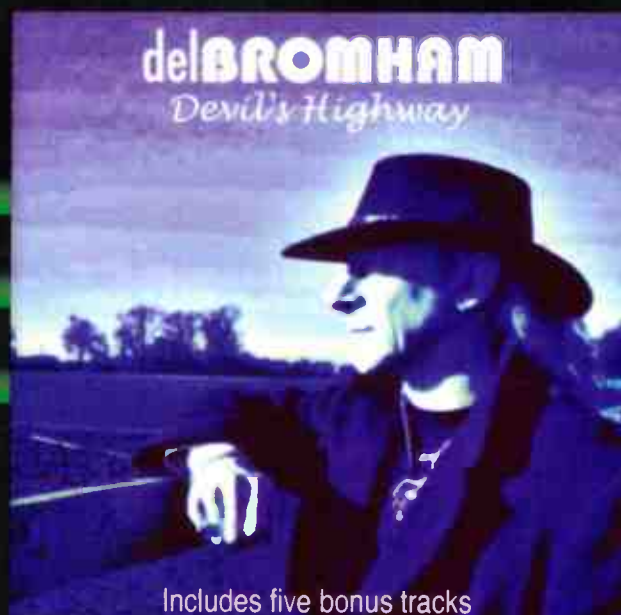
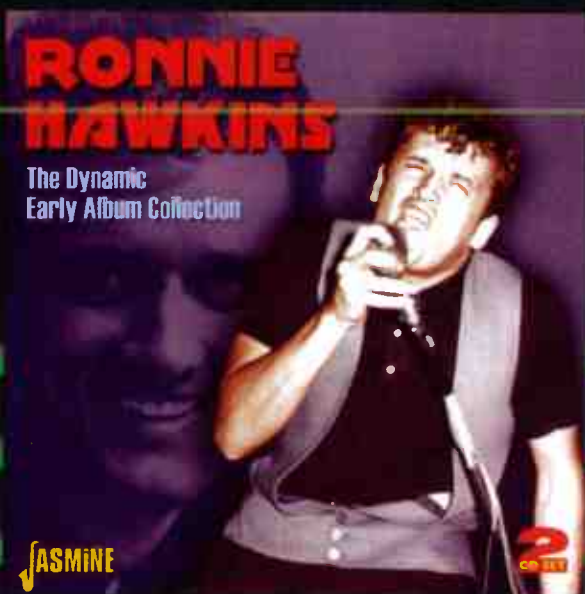
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**FOR**

- big, easy going sound
- clean and even treble
- well balanced

**AGAINST**

- soft midband
- tweeter consistency issues



**RONNIE HAWKINS**  
*The Dynamic Early Album Collection*  
**Jasmine**

Ronnie Hawkins still is a dynamic performer - in fact he is known as Mr Dynamo, at the age of 76! A rockabilly singer, Hawkins is in the odd position of being more well known for his backing group than as a singular performer. That group, The Hawks, featured one Levon Helm during Hawkins' prolific period in 1959 and 1960, in which he produced three albums. Canada proved to be particular fruitful for Hawkins but the majority of his backing outfit had other ideas so they proceeded to leave and returned to the USA. Helm stayed while Hawkins recruited replacements that included Robbie Robertson, Rock Danko, Garth Hudson and Richard Manuel. The group, in this form, followed Hawkins until 1963 but then moved on to back another singer, a folk chap called Bob Dylan. The Hawks would later change their name to The Band and legendary status.

So what we have on this 2-CD set is the creative height of one of the most energetic rockabilly singers of the period and the beginning of a major music force. An irresistible combination and one that is packed with value because this package

features his first four albums: 'Ronnie Hawkins' (1959); 'Mr Dynamo' (1960), 'The Folk Ballads Of Ronnie Hawkins' (1960) and 'Ronnie Hawkins Sings The Sings Of Hank Williams' (1962). The music here combines energy and power, even the ballads exude a restless vigour while his later folk and country fare still infuses a lively presentation with a sharp, incisive and emotional fervour. Look out for a range of other Jasmine releases, this month, including the Big Bopper's 'Oh Baby That's What I Like', Frankie Ford's 'Sea Cruise And Other Hits', Sammy Davis Jr's 'The Song And Dance Man' and Etta James' 'Tough Woman'.

**DEL BROMHAM**  
*Devil's Highway*  
**Angel Air**

Bromham is another singer whose fame stems from the people around him but, unlike Ronnie Hawkins, that was because he was the lead singer and guitarist for the rock band, Stray, who formed in 1966 and released their debut on the Transatlantic label in 1970 with a suitably quirky manager - Charlie Kray - brother of the infamous Kray Twins. The band split in 1976 and Bromham entered a solo career, new projects and revamped Stray reunions. This solo work was originally released in 2004

and has now been issued along with five bonus tracks.

Featuring a selection of solid blues-based tracks, the songs are largely penned by Bromham himself. Listening to his work, it has its roots in classic blues and blues-rock territory which will please the traditionalists out there. More so for one of the few tracks that was not written by Bromham, the Arthur Crudup-penned track, 'That's Alright Mama', "I stripped this one right back to acoustic guitars," said Bromham, "closer possibly to how Arthur Crudup wrote it. I wanted to step back from the version which Elvis Presley recorded, yet at the same time acknowledging how much he did to introduce blues artists to a wider market." A stylish rockabilly approach, the track has an interesting guitar arrangement that gives the song a real-home-made feel.

Other tracks mix the new with the past along with experiences that have steered Bromham throughout his career. Take 'Slave', a low-key rock piece with a melancholy edge that has the air of a slower Thin Lizzy piece: Bromham was almost a member of the band during the late seventies, after auditioning for the outfit. An album that takes a time-honoured approach to music, rock fans will lap this one up.



## DAVE MASON

*Certified Live/Let It Flow*



### DAVE MASON

*Certified Live/Let It Flow*  
BGO

Continuing the theme of the artist as part of a collective, but here Mason's personal fame is on a par with his contemporaries. Especially so for his membership of the sixties outfit Traffic, featuring Steve Winwood, Jim Capaldi and Chris Wood. When he split with the group, Mason associated himself with a variety of stars such as Eric Clapton, George Harrison and Cass Elliot but retained his individual status. As such, Mason's solo work is on the whole, rich in quality. BGO has already released a swathe of albums on value for money packages that include two albums on a single CD. Now, this new release presents another two albums: 'Certified Live' from 1976 and 'Let It Flow' from 1977.

'Certified Live' is part of the grand tradition of live double albums that were part of my musical childhood. They gave you a real fly on the wall feeling. I remember listening to them with a view to trying to catch the inter-band chatter or, as in this case, to wallow in the atmosphere. Also, for fans, it's a great way to collate rare cover versions such as Mason's covering of The Eagles' 'Take It To The Limit' or Dylan's 'All Along the Watchtower'.

'Let It Flow' is an excellent Mason release - arguably, within his top three of all time. This is partly helped by the inclusion of Mason's biggest single hit, 'We Just Disagree' along with 'Let It Go, Let It Flow' that supply the hook-laden rhythms that the album sits upon. There are plenty of quality support songs here too. Including the uplifting 'Spend Your Life With Me'. Also look out for BGO's other Mason releases: 'Mariposa de Oro'/'Old Crest On A New Wave', 'Dave Mason'/'Split Coconut and Alone Together'/'Headkeeper'.

### VARIOUS

*The Best of Excello Gospel*  
Ace Records

Nowadays, gospel has an odd image, especially in America, where it tends to be populated by well dressed, well groomed black men and women with perfect teeth spouting over-produced, well meaning but essentially vacuous statements about God and the universe in general. That's the schmaltz, but if you're looking for the real thing then check out this perfectly formed CD which focuses on the classic US-based label Excello, one of three top gospel labels of the fifties which included Bullet and Tennessee/Republic. Excello itself was part of the larger

Nashboro record company set-up by one Ernest L. Young who also had a record shop called, rather endearingly, Ernie's Record Mart. Excello was created specifically to promote Afro-American spiritual music in 1952. In 1955, it changed, being more focused on the R&B side of affairs (you can check out this musical output by Ace's sister CD 'The Real Excello R&B'). The music often featured wonderful harmonies including the slightly bizarrely named The Hendrix Singers who appear here singing 'On The Beautiful Shore'. I hasten to add that there is no connection with the rather good guitarist of the same name. That said, one member of the gospel group, a certain James Hendrix, still lives in a nursing home in Nashville - no doubt, triggering countless conspiracy theories. Then there's The Silvertone Singers, a deeply soulful outfit with a passionate delivery who uplift as they astound.

There are twenty-four tracks on this CD and everyone has the ability to hit you right in the solar plexus. It did me, and I'm an atheist! Excello fans also look out for a worthy 'Best Of', 2CD package subtitled 'It's Your Voodoo Working', just out via Universal which concentrates upon the later, mid-nineteen fifties R&B releases. PR

# Three's Company

Haden Boardman tunes in to the long lost classic radio that is the Trio KT-8005...

**T**he nineteen seventies were the high watermark of development for FM radio. It was a time when broadcast companies (and corporations, like the BBC) still put *quality* first. The idea of getting better sound for its own sake, as part of the forward march of technology, was still a given – as opposed to the notion of putting profit, or lower operating costs, before everything else...

In engineering terms, the seventies didn't suffer the blight of digitised radio links, nor had sound-degrading FM synthesiser technology been standardised; it was a time when the analogue tuning knob and the slide rule reigned supreme. A classic analogue tuner such as the Trio KT-8005, feeding a simple five foot horizontal dipole constructed and fitted for a few quid would give truly amazing results with any decent FM set.

The Trio company was formed in 1946 as the Kasuga Radio Co, in Komagane, Nagano prefecture, Japan. It does seem to have suffered a bit of an identity crisis, changing its name to The Trio Corporation in 1960, moving to Tokyo, and renaming itself again to The Kenwood Corporation in 1986. In Japan and America, the company sold under the 'Kenwood' brand name throughout the nineteen seventies, only losing the Trio name around 1990. In recent times the company has merged with another Japanese company; forming JVC Kenwood Holdings in 2008. The company first exported FM radios from Japan in 1958, and produced its first all transistorised hi-fi amplifier in 1962. They also manufactured a well-respected range of test equipment and amateur radio communication equipment too.

Back to their FM tuners, and under the Trio Kenwood moniker there are some very well-known models, most famously the L-01 T



and L-02T. The company really did produce an awful lot of different tuner models, from basic and not very exciting rack system separates, through to the couple of grand needed to purchase an L-02T. But over the past few years I have come across this particular model on many occasions, at audio jumbles and on the internet, and they have been selling for a fraction of the price of its more famous brothers (usually turning up with the matching KA8004 amplifier) but appearing on paper to offer quite similar, almost stellar performance to the big gun tuners that came later... and there seems to be a reasonable quantity available.

The KT-8005 AM/FM Stereo Tuner was launched in 1973, at a not unsubstantial list price of £248 (a QUAD FM3 was £75 at the time, the Trio's big rival, the Pioneer TX-9100 listing at £220, and the top of the range from Trio, the L700T, a remarkable £628!). The KT-8005 is immaculately finished, with an acid etched fascia, real wood cabinet (that does its best to look like plastic walnut) and shiny chrome trim. The styling is a matter of opinion, derived from a silver anodised fascia, black top with wooden sides. Proper little tell-tale lights (none of your LEDs here) indicate basic functions, there is a nice green slide rule display, and of course smooth flywheel tuning; all are fitted.

On the rear panel there are two sets of audio outputs, fixed and variable, a V-H oscilloscope output to allow precise aerial alignment (has anyone actually ever hooked a 'scope up to do this? – the tuning meter can also display multipath distortion at the push off a button) and the usual 75 & 300 ohm aerial connections are fitted, along with an odd little coaxial aerial connector, a ground terminal and an AM antenna point. The tuner can be set to mono, auto stereo or pure stereo, there is a two stage muting circuit, and a pretty powerful MPX pilot tone filter.

Of more interest to the audiophile, internally the unit is fully discrete, including the stereo decoder. The unit boasts an eight gang FM front end, four custom ceramic filters, instead of tuning coils, and uses lots of MOSFETs. The power supply is certainly not under nourished, a decent transformer is fitted.

Build is to a very high standard, the tuner weighing nearly twelve kilograms, and measuring 17 1/8" wide 6 1/2" tall, and 11 3/4" deep. Claimed FM R.F. sensitivity is 1.5uV. The AM section is also quite well specified. Audio phono sockets are nicely spaced to accept more modern connections, and are of reasonable enough quality, but very much of the time. On paper, the '8005 is better specified than its big brother the 700T.



Service wise, alignment on the models I have had through my hands has been pretty much spot on, no work needed. Despite what looked like slightly rough handling on a couple of the units, none have needed any of the tell-tale lamps replacing, nor the bulbs on the slide rule tuning display. One tuner got severely dropped in transit, damaging a little reed relay internally, and another was suffering from lack of use; the AM/FM/Stereo selector switch bank needing a deep clean, which was causing some rather random intermittent faults. Another bought at an audio jumble (claimed to be perfectly working) again needed a little work on the switch bank and had a minor fault on the stereo decoder board. Nothing

in the *H-Fi World* decoder, and other classics such as the Sugden R21/51. In general I quite like this decoding IC, and most Japanese tuners use either a variant of this under Hitachi or Toshiba manufacture. But here, the decoder is totally discrete, with not a chip in sight. And it sounds superb. Most discrete decoders are a little simplistic, using very basic circuits, giving a phasey, soft, almost ambiguous stereo image. Not here. I do not have the circuit, but it works! Stereo image was concrete in its presentation, almost as firm as the blessed Sequerra Model One... Sure, it lacked that particular tuner's absolute clarity, edge and sheer scale, but there are only a handful of tuner sets that have approached this reference standard.

commercial stuff, where dynamics demanded the set delivered. On some late evening Radio 2 material, it was again this sense of space, and scale that held attention better than most FM sets; there appears to be something very right about the sound of this tuner, it managed not to stamp its own footprint on the sound either.

There are not many stations I listen to on Medium Wave, but in the interests of science I pressed the AM button, and was quite pleasantly surprised at the sound quality. Most hi-fi tuner sets do a pretty awful job on AM, especially as it usually appears as an aftermarket afterthought, but the KT8005 was rivalling the best of my old valve radios here. In comparison to the Pioneer TX-9100, I preferred the Trio. The TX-9100 is a great tuner and one of my long standing favourites, much more musical than the later Pioneer TX-9500/TX-9800, which may be more sensitive in the RF department, but sonically are cold to my ears. The Trio was just that much more believable, still having a little of its own sound, but not stamping it on the music as much as the characterful Pioneer '9100 can do. From an RF point of view there really was nothing in between them. All the Pioneer TX-9\*00 models are established classics, the fact the Trio can be bought for much less points in its favour.

"a great but relatively unknown used bargain, here's your chance to relive the golden age of wireless for pennies!"

complex or complicated. Parts wise, as these units do not use any oddball integrated circuits or obscure transistors, they are a pretty safe second-hand bet.

In use, as seems common with most Japanese tuners, the signal scale meter is a little giddy and not particularly well calibrated. On every one of these units I have had, even the smallest amount of signal has the needle flying past the three-quarter mark; despite audible noise in the back ground. Still, the tuner is very sensitive, and from deepest Lancashire I was picking up with ease stations from Stafford, Yorkshire and beyond. The multipath display worked very well, but I do feel the two tuning meters fitted here to be a little small and a bit basic. On stronger local signals and the main BBC stations full quieting was achieved with very good, noise-free stereo separation, irrespective of the overly optimistic signal meter.

**SOUND QUALITY**

At the mercy of the broadcasters, tuning in to a Radio 3 lunchtime concert was quite a delight. The tuner conveyed a sense of air and atmosphere, and incredible three dimensionality that most sets would have rendered flat and in two dimensions. Most stereo decoders are based around integrated circuit designs, one of the best being the Motorola MCPI 340P, a PLL (phase locked loop) design which was used

Tonally, the KT-8005 has a warm balance. I would not say it was heavy sounding, but there was a lack of brightness, and it is quite a good balance to the overall sound. The bottom end in particular had real weight and slam. It worked incredibly well on some of the more compressed indie radio stations around the Manchester area. On a reasonable signal, the tuner was very quiet, whilst on a low RF signal the stereo decoder, lacking a high blend mode, became a tad noisy, and manually had to be switched in to mono. The muting circuit worked well, and with two settings perhaps I am being a tad churlish on the 'decoder. On the main stations I listen to, none of this a problem; full separation and quieting was achieved from quite a modest RF signal input, only a radio DX enthusiast may complain.

The more I listened to the Trio, the more impressed I became. It really is a fatigue-free device. A simple Radio 3 piano arrangement was well recorded and reproduced. Tonally the radio announcer was about spot on, with the right level of warmth, and absolutely no sibilance whatsoever to the sound. On more pop related programme, the tuner did not disappoint either. Despite the obvious compression on a lot of more

**CONCLUSION**

It really is hard not to be impressed with Trio/Kenwood's KT-8005. From the myriad of different models produced under this name there seems to be a reasonable and



available supply of this particular tuner. It is very underrated and inexpensive, yet sonically it is in the top draw. Although certainly no Sequerra, it still offers a taste of what an L-01T/02T can do for a mere fraction of the price one would have to pay for those range toppers – and it's also far cheaper than the grossly inferior Quad FM3. A great but relatively unknown used bargain, here's your chance to relive the golden age of wireless for pennies!

# New world

Hi-Fi World has a new website. It now carries many of our classic reviews, making them permanently available – and we will be steadily adding more.

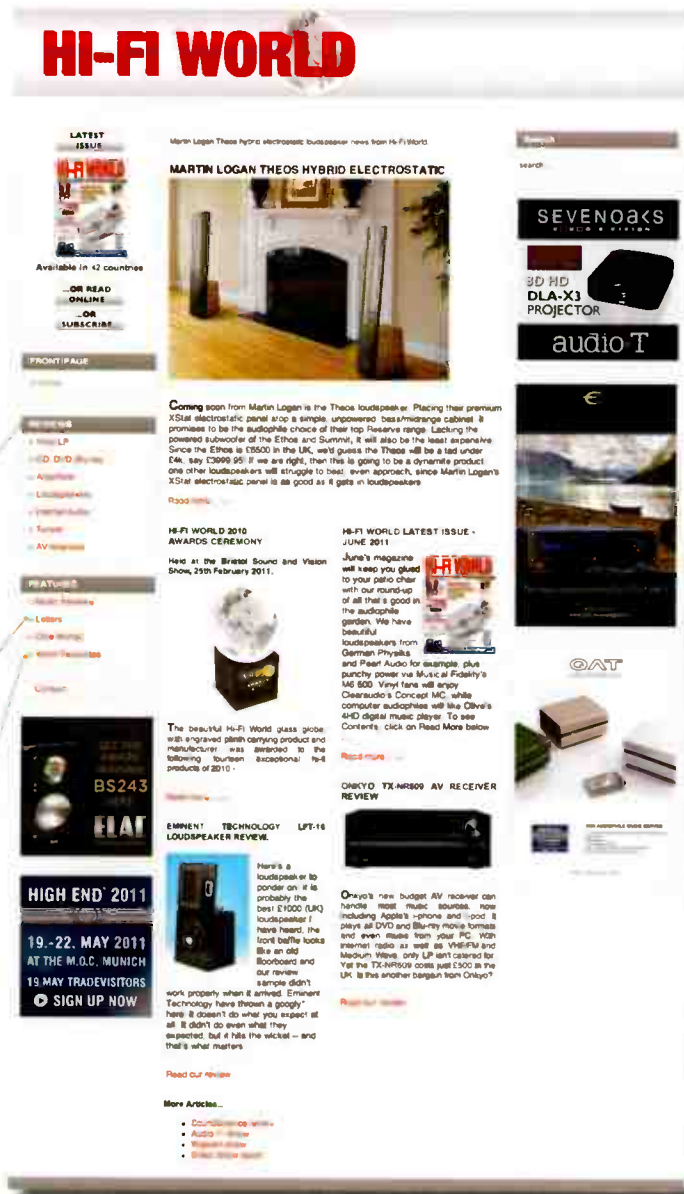
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Reviews unsuited to the magazine now go on-line. See our recent review of Eminent Technology's new LFT-16 loudspeaker for example. It didn't work properly but it was still worth an in-depth review. You'll find it interesting.

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World Favourites are listed, as are 2010 World Awards. We will be adding an Olde Worlde listing soon. There is so much to come from our vast archives, including our definitive picture library.





"2011 is the year that the network music player finally came of age..."



## david price

**N**etworked digital music playback isn't a new thing. I remember playing with an early (then SlimDevices Squeezebox some six years ago, and feeling oddly unmoved by it. Of course, it was a clever bit of technology, but back then it was very much confined to the sort of people who read 'Stuff' or 'T3', desperate to try out the latest thing so they can tell their trendy mates about it down at the old Dog and Bucket...

Having gone through what at the time seemed a long and tortuous set up routine, I managed to get the Squeezebox working and plugged its flimsy captive flying leads into my hi-fi amplifier. I was greeted by a pretty terrible din – like listening to AM radio with a headache, as I recall. Hmm, I mused; clever but not really the stuff of real hi-fi.

Well, it was early days. At the time, I was playing MP3s, something that's now reserved for podcasts and phone ringtones. All my digital music is either AAC or Apple Lossless, with more and more 24/96 FLAC and 16/44 WAV making its way onto my hard drive. Even my bog-standard AACs have gone up from 256kbps VBR (encoded on iTunes 7.0/Quicktime 7.1.3) to 320kbps (via iTunes 10.2.2/Quicktime 7.7.6) and sound quite a bit better as a result. I've also transferred vast amounts of my music compilations, done ten years ago onto a PC with Cool Edit Pro via a Zefiro ZA2 digital interface card, and recorded at 16/48, onto my new Mac. A decade ago I needed a huge dedicated second hard drive in my PC to store all this, now they're just dumped on my MacBook Pro hard drive, taking a tiny percentage of total disk space. Such is the onward march of technology!

After the 2004 Squeezebox, my next big moment with networked

computer audio was summer 2007, when I got the first Linn Klimax DS to review. This was like going from a base model Ford Fiesta hatchback to a McLaren MP4-12C supercar. Even though it was even more of a pain to set up – Linn kindly supplied me with a clonky old PC notebook with an expired demo version of Twonky, plus about three miles of Ethernet cable which had my front room looking like the back room of politician's campaign headquarters – the sonic results were spectacular.

It was a *complete* game changer for me, in the sense that I realised that networked music via computers could be as good as a serious CD player, or better. But I still couldn't get the pain of the set-up, and the general domestic upheaval the system caused, plus the need to use a horrid PC (I'm a Mac man, I'm afraid!) to play my music. Despite the fact that to my ears it sounded better than the gorgeous Linn CD12, I'd rather listen in low res 16/44 and not have a PC in my house, I mused. After all, it certainly wasn't as nice to use...

Well time moves on. Linn have a slinky interface (and Mac compatibility) for their DS products now, and the Squeezebox is now made by Logitech and is on to its tenth incarnation, complete with digital output and touch-sensitive screen (as you'll see if you read my review of it, next month). And these two product lines are no longer the only games in town, so to speak. Suddenly, as if by magic, we're getting a whole wave of network music players coming out, and over the past few months I've been quietly chewing through them all...

My whole attitude started to change with Naim's UnitiQute last year. Although not a 'proper' hi-fi separate (it's a 'lowly' all-in-one system), it has network music playback and internet radio built in

and proved surprisingly easy to set up via wireless. It also worked faultlessly; you can skim through your hard drive music collection effortlessly via its remote and it's all shown on a crisp, clear display. Suddenly I began to 'get it' – here was something that made networked music more of a help than a hindrance. I found myself playing CDs less – and worryingly, vinyl too. The ability to instantly call up via computer a track I hadn't played for years was quite liberating, instead of having to spend several hours thinking where I'd left my CD. Here was a *truly* convenient music system, where you don't have to fuss with formats as it's all just a button press away.

Things are now moving on apace. We've just got the affordable new Musical Fidelity CLiC, Cambridge Audio MP30 and Marantz NP-8004 in the space of the past few months, while NAD's C446 has just been announced, and there are rumours of more from Linn. Next month, I'm also reviewing the new Naim NDX with its network attached storage drive, the UnitiServe, too. Some of these products I can tell you are as easy to use as you could possibly want (Musical Fidelity), others are a tad fiddly but wonderfully inexpensive (Cambridge Audio), but they all have either affordability or ease of use on their side.

I predict that in six months' time we'll be looking back at 2011 as the year the network music player finally came of age. Just like CD, it's taken the best part of ten years to truly find its feet (the first SlimDevices SliMP3, the Squeezebox's forerunner, came out in 2001 – not that anyone noticed!), but at last it's getting to the stage where real human beings (i.e. music fans not early adopters) can buy in the confidence that they can set them up and use them in a simple, straightforward and enjoyable way. ●

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"the seeds of future greatness were being planted and lots of great music was being made..."



## paul rigby

One of my hobby horses is to promote little known music. There's far too much coverage given in the music press and other media to too few musical artists out there. There's a heap of talented singers and bands who don't get a look in and there's a mountain of older material that lies unfairly forgotten. But we're all busy people, trying to fit too much in to our lives as it is so a brief overview or guide illustrating what we are missing would be useful would it not? For those, for example, who might be interested to hear that there was life before The Beatles, there is a really busy person's guide to the music scene during those early days. Ace Records' 'The Golden Age of Rock'n'Roll' ([www.acerecords.co.uk](http://www.acerecords.co.uk)) is that guide, which is not quite as genre-restrictive as you might first think...

The 'rock'n'roll' bit merely reflects how popular that form of music was. What this series really concentrates upon is the American chart of that time: the Hot 100 hit records that were swimming around the scene between 1954 to around 1963. A time that is often seen as music's Middle Ages, presenting a black hole... not so much of knowledge but of general public awareness.

'The Golden Age of American Rock'n'Roll', a loose term that includes a wider array of genres within, is the core of the series that runs to twelve volumes but there are plenty of ancillary volumes which provide a more rounded view of the Hot 100 chart. There's the 'Doo Wop Edition', there's two volumes of these including many vocal group

hits from the likes of The Rays and The Clefones. There's the 'Bubbling Under' tracks that sat just below the Hot 100 chart (often regional hits which might have been popular only in a single state – the national hits often began like this when the hit spread from state to state like a virus). There's also a 'Country Edition' featuring thirty country songs that became pop hits, plus 'Follow-Up Hits' that followed up chart entries by the same artists and a pretty wacky 'Novelty Edition' featuring the likes of 'Martian Hop' by the Ran-Dells and 'Leader Of The Laundromat' by The Detergents. This is where you will also see comedians like Stan Freeberg. Very informative, packed with valuable information via wordy CD booklets, the rear of each CD volume features interesting chart position information, the attendant US label and if that song was ever released into the UK and if so, what UK chart position it hit.

Billboard began the Hot 100, although it was known as the Honour Roll of Hits originally, in the early fifties. The Hot 100 grew from a mixture of radio play and sales, which was later associated with the radio play corruption 'Payola' scandal featuring the infamous DJ Dick Clarke, one of many DJs who had other vested musical interests and were accused of taking back-handers to artificially push songs up the chart. Which later begged the question, should some of those lower-ranked songs seen in the Hot 100 – present on these CDs – have been in the chart at all? It's entirely possible that many of those songs had to pay-up to get into that chart and then hope that the public took enough notice to increase the chart position from

there. Check them out and make your own minds up.

Compiler of much of the series, Rob Finnis, also explained that these songs are full of surprises, "Johnny Restivo's 'The Shape I'm In' on Volume Six has Paul Simon on guitar, for example. He's playing rhythm guitar so you can't hear much of him. Restivo was a teenage body builder, a bit of a 'hunk'. This was released when the likes of Fabian, and all of those pretty boys were popular. He was supposed to be a teenage idol. He didn't know what he was bloody doing but he looked good. Paul Simon was a friend of the producer at that time."

On the same volume, check out Ivan's 'Real Wild Child' which featured Buddy Holiday's drummer Gerry Allison but also included Buddy Holiday and the Crickets as a novelty piece. Rock fans might remember Iggy Pop's rather more recent, raucous version of the song. On that same volume incidentally, is The Stompers' Quarter To Four Stomp which, in the Hot 100, made exactly No. 100. "That one is an instrumental that squeezed in for one week, off of local play."

Then there are intriguing cultural differences where Dale & Grace had a Hot 100 No. 1 with 'I'm Leaving It Up To You' but that same single only reached 42 in the UK, "Well that was 1963," said Finnis, "and The Beatles were happening over here and the yanks were getting slightly squeezed out whereas, a year before, that song might have been a Top 10 UK hit."

So you can see that there are stories to be told, the seeds of future greatness were being planted and lots of great music was being made. This compact series is a great way to sample it all. ●

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"DAB broadcasters fighting radio listening via mobile phones are cutting off their nose to spite their face..."



## steven green

One thing it's safe to say is that DAB supporters aren't overly keen on the prospect of the public listening to the radio via the Internet, as they never let an opportunity pass them by to have a dig at it. Initially, DAB supporters' contempt was focused towards people listening to the radio via fixed-line broadband at home. Since the launch of the iPhone however, and the subsequent rapid growth in ownership of smartphones, they've increasingly turned their negative spin towards the mobile Internet – sometimes with amusing consequences when they've plainly failed to understand the basics of mobile phone technologies.

Something that DAB supporters were overjoyed about was when the mobile operator O2 decided to scrap its unlimited data package and replaced it with a relatively modest fixed monthly data allowance. O2 had the exclusive rights to the iPhone at the time, and the iPhone accounted for a large majority of all smartphones in-use, so the DAB supporters heralded O2's action as spelling the end of unlimited mobile data packages, and this in turn, they claimed, spelt an end to the mobile Internet being suitable for carrying radio.

What the DAB supporters completely failed to take into consideration however, was that mobile phone technologies evolve at a far faster pace than broadcast standards do, and as consumers replace their mobile phones so frequently, such as at the end of each contract, mobile networks are also able to roll out new technologies relatively soon after they've been released.

One such mobile phone technology in the pipeline is called LTE, which stands for 'Long Term Evolution' – a reference to the

evolution of the current 3G mobile phone system. LTE has the support of the UK mobile phone networks, and spectrum for LTE is due to be made available for it from next year, with commercial services expected to be launched in 2013, and large-scale migration of consumers from 3G/HSDPA to LTE is expected to take place in 2014.

Ofcom's research has shown that LTE is 3.3 times as efficient as HSDPA, which is the fastest technology used by mobile phone networks in the UK at the moment, and Intel's research has also shown that LTE 'cells' can serve over three times as many users as HSDPA. An alternative way of interpreting these figures is that the cost to the mobile networks of delivering data to users with LTE will be a third of what it is today via HSDPA.

In addition, there is a technology being lined up to eventually replace LTE, called LTE-Advanced. It isn't known at the moment how much more efficient LTE-Advanced will be compared to LTE, but it's reasonable to assume that it will provide another large jump in efficiency, and that will further reduce the mobile phone networks' cost of delivering data.

As we saw when fixed-line broadband took off, the ISPs kept the monthly cost of broadband roughly constant while the download speed and bandwidth allowances increased over time. And I would expect a similar thing to happen with mobile Internet data packages as people migrate from 3G/HSDPA to LTE and then to LTE-Advanced.

'Three' is the only mobile network currently offering an 'unlimited' data allowance (on its 'One' plan; iPhone 4 16 GB for £70, with a contract of £35 per month), with the other mobile networks typically offering 500 or 750 MB per month. Research has shown that half

of all mobile data users consume less than 150 MB, and 60% consume less than 200 MB per month. Typical mobile data users therefore have at least 300–550 MB left over at the end of the month. This begs the question of how much radio could be listened to with that unused data allowance.

Although people listen to a lot of radio altogether (20 hours per week, on average), only a very small percentage of that takes place when "mobile" on MP3 players with radios, on personal radios or on mobile phones. Nearly all of the bigger radio broadcasters now provide 48kbps AAC+ Internet radio streams for people listening on mobile phones, and such streams only consume 20.6 MB of data per hour. As the typical mobile data user has 300–550 MB of their data allowance left over each month, which is enough to provide 15–27 hours of listening per month, a typical radio listener could already listen to the radio on their mobile phone without expecting to exceed their monthly data allowance. Furthermore, when you take into consideration the expected increases in data allowances that will result from moving first to LTE then to LTE-Advanced, the DAB supporters' claim that mobile Internet radio had been killed off by O2 scrapping its unlimited data package was clearly wrong.

The DAB industry's motivation behind criticising mobile Internet radio is that they would like DAB chipsets to be included in mobile phones. However, as so few countries have commercially launched DAB or DAB+, the mobile phone manufacturers are years away from including DAB in their handsets. So the DAB broadcasters arguing against people listening to radio on their mobile phones are quite simply cutting off their nose to spite their face. ●

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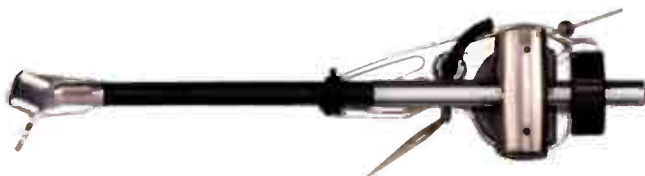
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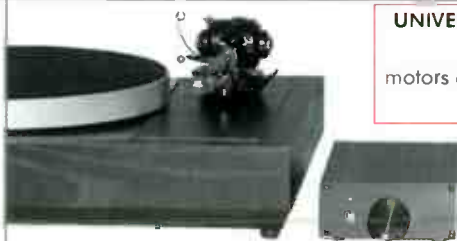
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"if you buy direct and cheap you are most likely going to end up with a mediocre product..."



## noel keyword

**W**hen is a bargain not a bargain? When it's a cheap loudspeaker from China! That's a warning to all those who think that importing direct from the Far East is as savvy as offshore banking once was, before governments got tough about it. Similarly, the Chinese government, well aware of the country's poor reputation for quality, got tough and insisted factories be licensed, inspected and meet international safety standards where appropriate. Just as 'secret' banking attracts the unscrupulous who mingle with the good, so does uncontrolled trading...

Many Chinese factories remain unlicensed and have a slack attitude toward both quality and consistency, as well as the safety and the wellbeing of their employees. Being able to sell their products direct to the West in a way that maximises on the appeal of low price by circumnavigating dealer markups, at the same time avoiding all responsibilities, is a dream to them. Buying from them supports their 'devil may care' approach and undermines all the many companies, both in China and the West, that genuinely want to improve quality and trade legally in a modern world.

If you wonder why I am writing this and what my motivations, maybe it is to lift slightly the veil that hangs in front of the complex situation that surrounds overseas manufacture, its complexity and its merits and drawbacks. If you buy direct and cheap you are most likely going to end up with a mediocre product. Far East manufacturers like Usher (Taiwan) and International Audio Group (China), both of whom I know well, not forgetting Gold Peak (Hong Kong) who own KEF and Celestion, invest heavily in research and development and nurture their brands. Others, having what has been described to me in the Far East as

"Chinese trader mentality", allow short term profit to override all else; they will take your money and run!

I know because I have suffered it – meaning I have been ripped off – and have had to open my eyes to how others live and trade. Complaining to me about this recently, Ming Da muttered darkly about the poor products of their unlicensed rivals, without mentioning names...

To trade, some element of trust must exist. But you can forget that in short term, "my profit is your loss trading", common in the Far East. It's no recipe for either a long term trading relationship that can be mutually beneficial in bringing good products to market and supporting them so consumers are safe, enjoy genuine quality and back up, nor is it a way to establish brand image. Which is why brand is a problem in the Far East and why they have few of their own with any quality connotations.

It is also why the Chinese do not trust indigenous brands and prefer anything with a Western name on it. I know this from first hand experience, and editor David Price who visits China regularly knows it well too; we are not guessing here.

I first met this branding issue, a result of low quality manufacturing, at a show in Kuala Lumpur some ten years ago. Confronted with a fine looking modern loudspeaker in a Celestion room with the brand name Ditton, I asked why it wasn't known about in the UK. "Ditton was designed by us in UK for the China market. Chinese want UK brand name goods; they trust them," I was told by a very attractive Chinese lady working for Gold Peak. Since she was raised in Hong Kong, educated in the UK and worked within China for Gold Peak, she had a deep understanding of East and West, differences of outlook and what consumers wanted. Her

story corresponded with those of others, as well as my own negative experiences, trying to negotiate the manufacture of World Audio Design amplifiers and sell magazines direct. Both were successful, but we made nothing from it; I won't go into details!

But 'Chinese trader mentality' as it was explained to me by a Chinese manufacturer, isn't all China is capable of. It is just one part of a complex picture. A lot of Chinese product is now of very high quality, as this month's lead review of Audiolab's 8200CDQ shows, often because in audio Western educated Chinese have invested heavily, bought Western brand names and even shipped in Western engineers to ensure they not only get it right, but move ahead with a world quality product. Here's a completely different picture of China – a modern one too.

China today makes fine goods that people around the world are happy to buy. These goods come from modern factories meeting today's standards, even if some do use high pressure assembly line working that make us wince. But China is large enough to support a bewildering number of manufacturers and audio has its fair share of them. So there is tremendous variety and because we now see high quality goods made in China, does not mean that all goods made in China are high quality. Ask the Chinese!

Wide variation exists, and from detailed explanations provided me by engineers that have worked in less controlled operations than IAG for example, a low skilled, poorly paid workforce contributes to this, alongside unsophisticated management. Production facilities are rudimentary and a superficial understanding of technical issues leads to 'high tech' designs that don't work properly. And that, dear reader, is where your 'bargain' comes from! ●

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## adam smith

**T**here are some debates that have raged for a long time within the hi-fi industry, and will continue to do so for many years to come. Over time, we've seen arguments along the lines of belt versus direct drive, VHS versus Betamax, FM versus DAB and open reel versus cassette, and these have waxed and waned according to the prevailing technology of the time. However, there is one contentious point that has never really gone away and that is the subjectivists versus the objectivists.

This is actually a complex point to ponder, but in simple terms can be summarised as follows; the objectivists rely on measurements, and to them a piece of hi-fi equipment is good if it exhibits a flat frequency response, negligible distortion, wide bandwidth and so on. All amplifiers sound the same if they measure similarly and there is no point in worrying whether what you are listening to is enjoyable because if the above criteria are met then the sound is accurate and that's all that matters. On the other side of the coin, the subjectivists don't give a hoot for graphs, distortion plots and numbers – they go on what the equipment sounds like. You could tell them that they're listening to high levels of crossover distortion in a unit that rolls off at 12kHz and they wouldn't care as long as they like it! Clearly never the twain shall meet with these two extremes but I personally feel that both have a point. As with so many things in life, balance is the key...

Considering the measurement aspect, from a designers' point of view it is essential. Whether it's a turntable, amplifier, CD player or speakers, simply guessing your way through to production is an absolute no-no. If the item in question doesn't get a few basic tenets right then it hasn't a hope in hell of

succeeding against properly designed competition. It's all too easy to concentrate on one aspect of a piece of equipment's performance only to inadvertently neglect another and a structured regime of measurement will ensure that this process does not go astray along the way.

One great snag that can be encountered here though, is knowing what to measure and how to interpret the results. Consider for a moment if I asked you whether you would rather listen to a signal that had distortion content of 1% or 10%? Thinking simply, I'll wager most people would say the 1% but during my visit to Bang & Olufsen a few years back, this question was posed of me by Tonmeister Geoff Martin, as he could simulate both. He then went on to play a 1kHz sine wave through both simulations – naturally the 1% distorted wave sounded bad but the 10% one sounded truly dreadful. He then switched the signal to music and again, the 1% distorted version sounded nasty but the 10% sounded barely any different to the undistorted signal! The key here was how the distortion was generated – the 1% was created by introducing crossover distortion at the zero crossing point but the 10% was created by clipping the signal peaks. This flattened the top of the 1kHz sine wave so that it effectively became a square wave, but only affected the very loudest parts of the music signal. Here, both type of distortion and signal level played an important part.

It would actually be incredibly easy to end the story here but it really isn't that simple. Unfortunately the end users are those funny things called human beings and the age-old trouble of perception comes into play here. After all, if you were to take a measurement-perfect hi-fi system, ask ten people to listen to it and give their opinions, I can

pretty much guarantee you'll get ten different answers! Everyone likes different things – some of these may well coincide with the idea of 'accuracy' but it is pretty difficult to sell someone a CD player that they don't like the sound of on the basis of "but this is how it should sound"!

When it comes to the review side of things, we at *Hi-Fi World* are great believers in measurement. As Noel's feature on the magazine's test facilities shows, we can measure pretty much anything, and over the years this has helped us to weed out the loudspeakers on which some kind soul had disconnected the supertweeters; the tuner that produced mono output even when its stereo light was gleaming merrily and the '30 Watt' valve amplifier that managed about 3 Watts before its distortion figure hit 10%. The measurements we take aid us in ascertaining the aims of the designer, how successful they were in implementing it and, simply, whether the item is working properly. Then, and only then, does listening start.

But listen we do, and we do so carefully, at length and with a wide variety of musical source material. Much as Noel and I love our test LPs, we don't actually play them much when away from the test bench! Like everyone else we use music, and we like to hear it at its best. The problem is, everyone's idea of best is different, hence why such a huge and diverse range of hi-fi equipment exists today and why so many healthy debates have always raged about which ones are better than others. Maybe we could ascertain the theoretical 'winners' on the test bench if we wanted to, but just as you should always buy a car based on how it drives and not on the facts and figures in the sales brochure, hi-fi is for listening to. Making a final decision for any other reason than how it sounds seems unwise. ●

# vinyl section

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AUGUST 2011

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David Price tries a great new Rega Planar mods package.

### ORIGIN LIVE ONYX 104

This new budget tonearm gets David Price's ear!

### SPINCLEAN 109

Paul Rigby tries a new affordable record cleaning system.

### ICON AUDIO PS2 110

Paul Rigby and Tony Bolton audition this budget phono stage.

# news

## MORE MO

Blimey! Mobile Fidelity have been busy of late with two new Frank Sinatra LPs; 'The Concert Sinatra' (1963, an excellent 'show tunes' collection) and 'Swing Along With Me' (1961, packed with humour and resembling his Capitol output), both released via Reprise, originally. Also look out for the artistically underrated and largely misunderstood KC And The Sunshine Band's self-titled album (1975). A superb piece with hits a go-go including 'That's The Way (I Like It)' and 'Get Down Tonight'. Other releases include Sisters Of Mercy's 'First And Last And Always' (1985), an innovative goth debut plus Dead Can Dance's 'Spiritchaser', the duo's final album that still pushes musical boundaries.



## ELP AND MORE

Fans of Emerson, Lake & Palmer will be chuffed to bits to see new editions of their work issued via Music On Vinyl ([www.musiconvinyl.com](http://www.musiconvinyl.com)), especially as MOV's pressings have been of such high quality. What we have is 'Emerson Lake & Palmer' (1970), 'Tarkus' (1971), 'Pictures At An Exhibition' (1972), 'Trilogy' (1972), and 'Welcome Back My Friends To The Show That Never Ends...' (1974). Expect to see a limited edition of 'Brain Salad Surgery' to be released in the near future. Other MOV releases include Primal Scream's 'Screamadelica' (1991) featuring a 16-page booklet with new interviews, John Mayer's 'Heavier Things' (2003) which is more laid back with a simpler approach than the title suggests; ex-lead singer of post-grunge outfit, Live's Ed Kowalczyk has his album, 'Alive' (2010), out as a reissue. This special edition includes a bonus 7" single including the previously unreleased 'Eat Your Love' and a new version of 'Grace'. Also look out for Billie Holiday's 'Lady In Satin' (1958), Ron Sexsmith's latest, 'Long Player Late Bloomer' (2011) and Yes's 'Live From House Of Blues' (2000), while Jimi Hendrix's 'South Satin Delta' (1997) has also been released as a double album.



## HiQ CLASSICAL

Cut at Abbey Road from original analogue master tapes, the HiQ series of classical audiophile recordings has been released covering a series of classics including Tchaikovsky's '1812

Overture' (Andre Previn), Beethoven's 'Triple Concerto' featuring Karajan's Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Holst's 'The Planets' conducted also by Previn, Grieg's 'Peer Gynt' conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham and Sullivan-Mackerras's 'Pineapple Poll' with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.



## METAL DUO

Two albums will be of interest to heavy rockers. Firstly, a reissue of Virgin Steel's 1986 LP, 'Noble Savage' (SPV; [www.spv.de](http://www.spv.de)) which presented joyous symphonic rhythms mixed with a little bit of jazz plus some impressive lead vocalisations. This coloured vinyl edition arrives with eleven bonus tracks. Also look out for The Trews' new album, 'Hope & Ruin' (Bumstead; [www.bumstead.com](http://www.bumstead.com)), an LP full of well crafted rock and harder-edged pop songs with plenty of melodic hooks from this Canadian four-piece.



## TAKE A LEFT...FIELD

Moving into experimental musical areas, Nicholas Bernier's 'Usure.Paysage' (Hronir; [www.soundohm.com/hronir-records](http://www.soundohm.com/hronir-records)) features found sounds that are both relaxing and vaguely unsettling while Peterlicker's 'Nicht' (Mego; [editionsmego.com](http://editionsmego.com)) blasts industrial noise at your ear in a technological frenzy: music from within a nuclear chain reaction!

Thymolphthalein's 'Ni maitre, Ni martéau' (Mego) sounds like chemically-treated jazz: organic instruments affected by archaic synths and treated piano. Gagarin Records' - I Historical Recordings ([www.gagarinrecords.com](http://www.gagarinrecords.com)) features an LP of treated field recordings including a Pygmy hunting ritual and Norwegian Whaling Festival music... different!

Waitiki 7 is a celebration of the Martin Denny-inspired lounge exotica. 'Waitiki In Hi-Fi' (Pass Out; [passoutrecords.bandcamp.com](http://passoutrecords.bandcamp.com)) is a latin-based celebration of hi-fi and vinyl as a format.

Cezary Gapik's 'Contrast I' (White Box; [whiteboxrecordings.blogspot.com](http://whiteboxrecordings.blogspot.com)) is a 400 copy, limited edition (100 in red vinyl) that thrusts uncompromising industrial noise into your face before settling to a bubbling inner space ritual meditation.



## ...AND FINALLY

A varied bunch, this month beginning with the wonderfully monikered V8 Wankers, a big, bold, flailing metal outfit whose 'Iron Crossroads' is out now on SPV ([www.spv.de](http://www.spv.de)). Loud, traditional hard rock. From the ridiculous to the sublime and another German label, Stockfisch ([www.stockfisch-records.de](http://www.stockfisch-records.de)) with Sara K's 'In The Groove'. DMM mastered, it's a considered compilation split between studio and live works...

Returning to notable names and Kurt Vile's new album, 'Smoke Ring For My Halo' (Matador; [www.matadorrecords.com](http://www.matadorrecords.com)) takes an introspective, slightly downbeat style that still explodes with a romantic beauty. Lana Loveland's debut, 'Order To Love' (Groovie; [www.groovierecords.com](http://www.groovierecords.com)) takes the ex-Fuzztones lady's garage and psychedelic ingredients and adds a pop sentiment and hooks to offer an attractive debut.

US-based singer-songwriter Alela Diane's new LP, '& Wild Divine' (Rough Trade; [www.roughtraderecords.com](http://www.roughtraderecords.com)), a reference to her new band, is now out. A lightness of touch, some added bluegrass banjo, bit of pedal steel guitar and you're sorted.

Out on Fat Cat ([www.fat-cat.co.uk](http://www.fat-cat.co.uk)) is Hauschka's new release, 'Salon Des Amateurs', complete with an MP3 download option. Featuring guest collaborations with members of Calexico and Múm, the album includes prepared piano experiments with tense weirdness. Rewarding exploratory investigations.

Finally, released for the recent Record Store Day event, Charles Douglas' 'The Lives Of Charles Douglas' (Broken Horse; [www.brokenhorse.co.uk](http://www.brokenhorse.co.uk)) has a long standing Velvet Underground-alike reputation and I can see why. It might just become a legend. **PR**



# Third Degree

**Rega's evergreen and largely ubiquitous Planar turntable is a brilliant base for Inspire Hi-Fi's Quest modification package, finds David Price...**

If there's an all time turntable top three, isn't it the Technics SL1200 first, the Linn LPI2 second and the Rega Planar 3 third? I'm not necessarily making any qualitative judgements here, but my hunch is that these are the three most recognisable – and likely best selling – record players of the modern age...

The Technics of course gains the top spot by dint of it being instantly recognisable to people who know nothing about hi-fi or turntables; it's just there in bars, clubs and bedrooms. The Linn is probably the world's most famous specialist hi-fi deck; it's the only name that your uncle Ken will know from the hi-fi world, as his friend down the Dog and Duck knows someone who bought one when his ship came in. Entering the more cloistered world of specialist hi-fi, the Rega Planar 3 is everywhere. So many people who went on to get Linns had a Rega first; it's the sporty BMW Three Series you have before you graduate to the M5 or 750, isn't it? It's the specialist audio equivalent of the masonic handshake; non-hi-fi people won't know it, but if you meet

anyone who knows what a Rega is, then you know they're an audiophile of some description!

For this reason, it amazes me why there aren't more mods for Regas. There are two points to make here; first, they're amazingly easy to mod - have you ever taken one apart? Even yours truly has done this, pretty early in his tweaking career; so the science of rockets it is not! Second, they're so cheap to buy secondhand; around £125 gets you a decent one, and the sound you'll get from this when properly fettled is out of all proportion to the price. In the old days, I used to run a Rega Planar 3 at the same time as my Linn LPI2, and in someways I preferred the '3; it has a dry, matter of fact but very smooth and unprepossessing nature. You can put a record on and just listen to it, whereas it's as if the Linn (or a Technics for that matter) is shouting "hey, look at me, aren't I a great turntable?"

Over the years, I've periodically reviewed Rega tweaks, from companies that surfaced quickly and then disappeared in as many months; I've tried upgraded bearings, power supplies, special turntable mats and feet. And yes, they all improved on the Planar 3, and that's of course before you so much as touch the tonearm. So I was fascinated to hear that Inspire Hi Fi are now in on the act; not least because their Vivid mods package for the Linn LPI2 is such excellent value and so effective. What could they be doing with the Rega?

Well, the new Quest upgrade for the older Rega Planar 2, 3, and newer P1, P2, P3 and P5 is said to

be "a complete package of finely engineered parts to replace some of the most fundamental components making up the Rega turntable". First, they say the deck can be made "so much better" by binning the nineteen seventies-era fibreboard plinth, in favour of Inspire's special replacement. This makes a lot of sense, as the stock plinth is simply a cheap way of holding all the bits together; it does *nothing* for the sound and indeed makes the deck extraordinarily sensitive to siting. In standard form, a well placed Rega can sound great (if you take the dustcover off, which acts as a vibration trap), but badly sited it's horrid...

The company designed and prototyped various options for their new plinth, and settled a 50mm solid birch ply design "beautifully finished and professionally routed out to take all the Rega parts from the old turntable". The outer dimensions are kept the same so the customer has the option of Inspire refitting the hinges for the original lid. Inspire's Bob Isherwood says, "the construction and density of birch ply is well known to be excellent when used in such quality turntables". The plinth can also come in a variety of veneers, such as Cherry, Maple, Light Oak and Rosewood.

The next key offender in the Rega's long list of faults is the glass platter. Remember this comes from as far back as 1977, when the deck was first designed; at that time it was regarded as a good material (the bar wasn't exactly set high in this regard, as everyone else was using Mazak which chimed like a church bell when you tapped it)! Not now though; we like acrylic platters these days, and Inspire offer a substantial 23mm thick machined acrylic one which fits perfectly on the subplatter. The







deck can then be used with the stock felt mat or Inspire's Acrimat can be specified; don't forget the felt was only used to damp the ringing glass platter, and is not an ideal material in itself. Any further resonances can be filtered out with Inspire Puka Record weight, Bob adds.

As for the rest of the deck; the arm is left alone, as are the bearing and subplatter, which Inspire say "are perfect for the job when used with their plinth and platter upgrades". Inspire will also supply and fit other arms to customer requirements. And if any other parts are required for a broken or damaged Rega, Inspire stock all the parts required, including tonearms, motors, bearings, subplatters, belts, PSUs and power switches; these can all be supplied and fitted to the customer's specification.

The rebuild itself costs £40 in addition to the £189 plinth and £89 platter; making a sum total of £318, which is not much for what looks like a new deck, and one which works much better than the original. Any Rega 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 two hours and involves a complete rebuild of the Rega; "every single part is taken apart and cleaned and refitted together with the new Quest parts". 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 deck 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 for an additional £17. The package is also available to any customer who wants to do the work themselves (some DIY knowledge required). Inspire can also make the Quest package to take a 12 inch arm (such as their new X200 tonearm).

As with the Inspire Vivid LP12 review a couple of months back, we did a direct 'before and after' comparison; the stock Rega Planar 3 was auditioned and then it was sent off for the Quest mods. I then auditioned the 'new' deck, and I can vouch that the general feel of the Quest'd Rega is quite different to

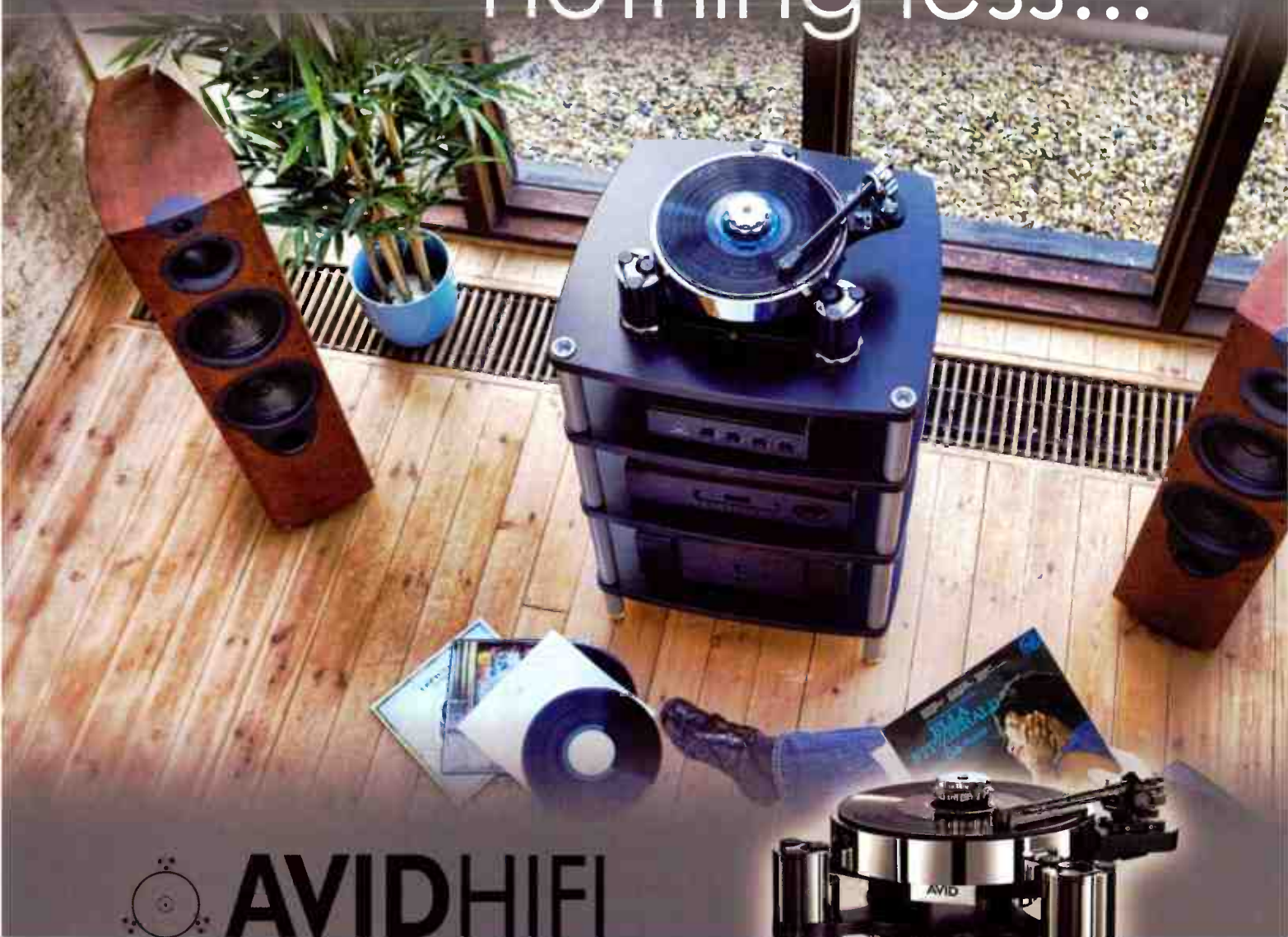
that of the standard Planar 3. It feels far chunkier, heavier and more substantial; in the standard Birch plywood it looks lovely, and I'm sure the veneered variants will be prettier still. Either way, the 'new' deck feels totally different, having the presence of a turntable approaching the £1,000 mark, I'd say.

### SOUND QUALITY

It was a fascinating, stark contrast; essentially the Quest has a chunkier, meatier and more self-assured sound than the stock Planar 3, which suddenly seems rather weak and ponderous. There's a greater sense of rhythm, although it's still in the Rega mould – which is to say laid back and not in-your-face as a Technics SL1200 is, for example. Dynamics are obviously superior, whilst the low level detailing improves a bit. But most impressive for me was the way that it was now far easier to hear different strands in the mix...

For example, on Sade's 'The Sweetest Taboo', the opening section has some percussion work which feeds into the main opening verse of the song, complete with its bass guitar line and keyboards. With the Quest, it was far easier

# "The Truth, nothing more, nothing less..."



 **AVIDHIFI**



"This is one of the great turntables in the world..." - March 2009 David Price, *HIFI World*

"Acutus Reference is one of the most musical-sounding record players you can buy" - March 2007 *The Absolute Sound*

"Fabulous detail retrieval and focused sound, the Acutus Reference SP delivers a captivating performance."  
- September 2010 John Bamford, *HiFi News*

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**Progressive Audio**, 2 Maryland Court, Rainham, Kent, Tel: 01634 389004

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Pulsare Phono Stage



to lock in on this percussion and follow it throughout the rest of the song, whereas on the stock Planar 3 it slightly dissolved into the mix, popping up only when you tried to listen for it. Also quite dramatic was the power and articulation of the bass guitar, which was quite a lot stronger and yet more relaxed too; its notes seemed to last longer and it didn't crowd out the other instruments in the mix. Sade Adu's voice was also slightly creamier, with less edge and less sense of 'glassiness'; it was delivered in a more immediate way, as I could hear the way it counterpointed with the percussion better.

Rush's 'Spirit of Radio' was another dramatic contrast. Via the stock Planar 3 it was enjoyably detailed and smooth sounding, yet a little flat dynamically and rather crowded across the midband; not surprising as it's an action-packed late seventies rock anthem. The Quest seemed to take some of the bite out of it tonally (it had previously sounded a little strident in the upper mid, especially on Geddy Lee's distinct vocals), make everything sound far more spacious and significantly augment the role of the bass guitar. Tonally richer, it felt like the song had been remixed for FM, rather than AM, radio. Again I was struck by how I could lock onto a particular instrument then follow it with complete ease; the whole mix seemed to have grown from left to right and front to back. The lead guitar part in particular seemed easier to follow, and far better located in what was now an excellently rendered recorded acoustic.

Even on really simple tracks the difference was stark; Peter, Paul and Mary's 'Moments of Soft Persuasion' (a late sixties mono LP on Pye) isn't exactly hi-fi but the Quest'd Rega made everything sound so much more complete. Again, the bass guitar became a living, breathing entity instead of an afterthought, adding depth and pace to the song, underpinning its gentle harmonies in a most enjoyable way. Vocals were less edgy than before; whereas I'd previously thought it was because the pressing was so old, I discovered hidden depths in the groove, so to speak, with the Quest smoothing and balm that inner groove distortion and giving depth and scale to what had been quite an anaemic and constrained

letterbox soundstage.

Of course, there were limitations. The Quest doesn't suddenly turn into a giant killing high end deck, suffering as it does from an ultimate lack of detail and forensic insight which you'd get from £1,500 designs. Although better than before, certainly the speed stability isn't quite up to the best at that price (I'll be trying the Inspire electronic PSU soon, I hope). But still it is perfectly listenable after having heard such a turntable, which the stock Rega is not. It gives the Planar platform a smoothness, and assuredness and a maturity which is simply unexpected given the low, low price of it all.

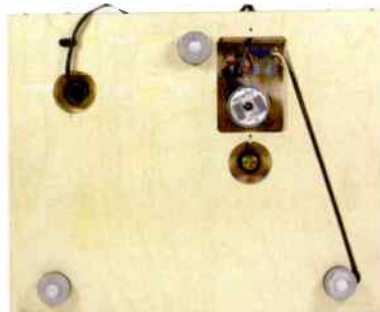
**CONCLUSION**

The question has to be asked again – why didn't someone do this sooner? The Inspire Hi Fi Quest is a simple but brilliant package that for the price of a fancy interconnect can transform your good budget turntable into a very capable mid-price design, the like of which you'd have to spend serious amounts of money to better. Not only does it offer substantial, real and

**PRICES:**

50MM BIRCH PLY PLINTH	£189
REAL WOOD VENEER OPTION	£89
23MM ACRYLIC PLATTER	£89
ACRIMAT	£22
RECORD PUK	£39
REBUILD	£40
ELECTRONIC 33/45 PSU	£299

useful sonic benefits, it changes the way your deck feels to use, making it far more satisfying and substantial. Super value for money, I'd invite all Rega owners to consider this.



**VERDICT** ●●●●●

Highly effective, great value mods package for a deservedly popular classic turntable.

**INSPIRE QUEST** **£318**  
(SEE TEXT)  
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**FOR**

- silky, spacious midband
- superior grip and focus
- enhanced dynamics
- fit and finish

**AGAINST**

- nothing



*Our review deck had Inspire's Acrimat turntable mat...*



*...the 23mm acrylic platter...*



*...and the Record Puk record clamp.*

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

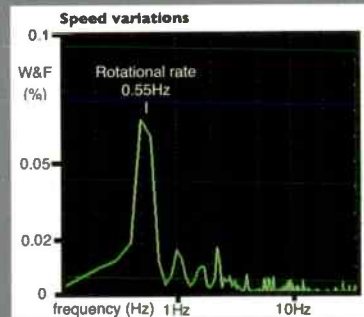
Tested before modification, the platter suffered a wow mode at the rotational frequency of 0.55Hz (33 rpm) like most Regas and this caused the Wow & Flutter meter to needle to swing about a bit, but not above 0.12%. Our spectral analysis of demodulated W&F shows this is a high peak at 0.55Hz.

After modification basic wow at 0.55Hz (i.e. once per revolution) decreased quite substantially (our DIN 45545 test disc was carefully centred to make it perfectly concentric by the way for all these measurements). However, second and forth 'harmonics' at 1.1Hz and 2.2Hz increased, whilst flutter above 5Hz decreased. So there were changes and the 0.55Hz reduction should steady tone slightly at least. Overall W&F figures read from the meter did not change, as the needle swung around too much for a steady reading. The spectrum analyses are long term (100) averages though, eliminating short term variation and gave repeatable figures that are comparable.

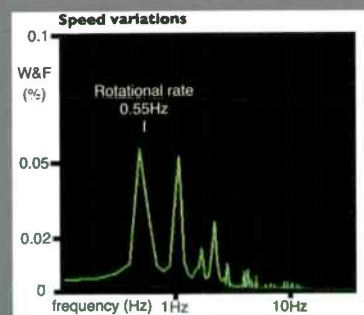
The Rega RB300's main bending mode lies at 180Hz but is very well suppressed our vibration analysis with an accelerometer shows. The usual third order mode lies at 540Hz and in this case is a narrow tall peak, encompassing little energy, so it isn't too bad. Rega arms have a characteristic plateau peak from 1kHz up to 2kHz and this can be seen too. With the Ortofon MC 25FL in place on this setup, high frequency modes are well suppressed, probably because its body damps the headshell well. This pattern remained the same after the turntable mods, as is to be expected. NK

Speed accuracy	+0.5%
Wow & flutter unwt'd	0.12%
Wow & flutter JIS weighted	0.08%

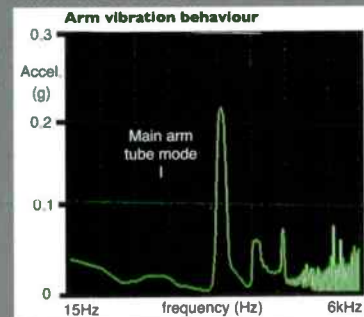
**SPEED STABILITY BEFORE MOD**



**SPEED STABILITY AFTER MOD**



**ARM VIBRATION**





# Arms Race

**After many years of cleverly tweaking Rega tonearms, Origin Live's latest entry level product is an all new, clean sheet design pitched directly against your common or garden modified RB301. David Price listens in...**

**W**e all know the Rega RB300 story. It was introduced in 1983, not so much to public acclaim as to hi-fi hysteria. In truth it was the world's first truly modern tonearm – sporting a straight pipe, tapered tube with integral headshell, high quality bearings and a small tungsten counterweight for just £90. Its brilliance was such that its natural rivals were the Linn Ittok LVII and Syrinx PU3, costing three times as

much; it wasn't better than these, but did better them in some ways, which was a staggering achievement...

What then followed was fifteen years of ubiquity; the arm just sold and sold, ending up on practically every turntable on sale, from Michells to Pink Triangles to Roksans – plus of course it came as standard fitment to the Planar 3, latterly P3, for which it was frankly far too good!

Nevertheless, there were always doubters. In August 1983, having

upgraded from a Rega Planar 3 with the old Acos-made S-shaped R200 arm to one of the very first new decks with the RB300, I was both delighted and disappointed. In some ways, yes, the new arm was dramatically superior – its focus, detail, grip and image placement was superb. But the music didn't flow as well, suddenly lacking that lovely lyrical quality that I'd always associated with the LP disc. Its soundstaging seemed narrower; possibly because the R200 was so vague and euphonic, but still



there was less scale, less warmth and less musicality...

It's fair to say I wasn't the only one who felt this way. A number of hi-fi writers said so pretty much immediately. Companies started doing aftermarket mods, particularly the tonearm wiring which Rega always rather disingenuously claimed to be excellent. Ho hum! Rewired RB300s *did* sound better, but it wasn't until Mark Baker from Origin Live got his claws into one that the arm took on a new life, in the late nineties. His structural modification, which involved replacing the resonant end stub, made a huge difference, bringing a far more natural and musical sound; suddenly the arm truly worked.

Fifteen years of modded Regas followed, with a number of companies turning out great products at an affordable price. For a while Origin Live built a range of arms from the Rega platform; the higher priced the model, the less of the original RB300 could be seen! But Mark Baker slowly evolved the Rega 'out' of his arms, and by

the middle of last year there were virtually no shared components at all in any except the entry level OL 1. Even the £600 Silver, which has started as an obvious RB250 variant, had become an entirely new product by the time I reviewed the 3c. All that was needed now was an OLI replacement...

Well, here it is. "There are a number of considerations on why a complete replacement became the right thing to do," Mark Baker told me. "Firstly, for reasons outside our control, the base was supplied as a three-point mounting and this was universally frowned upon as it makes accurate VTA adjustment a major pain. Secondly for political reasons our supply of arms had been sadly terminated..."

For the Onyx, Origin Live could have subcontracted production to low wage countries, but they choose to manufacture all parts themselves, which is "expensive" in the UK but allows absolute control in terms of quality and correct specification of alloys, Baker says. The secret of the new arm lies in its "careful choice

of materials" that are less expensive to work with than those at the top of the range. For example, the rear stub uses stainless steel rather than ultra hard steel alloy that needs to be polished, sent for hardening then repolished and sent for plating. Similarly the counterweight was manufactured from stainless instead of the more costly material they normally use. Also the counterweight has a rubber O ring to enable

"there's been something of a tyranny of Rega-based arms in the budget sector for too long..."

a friction slide on the rear stub instead of the superior hard clamping employed on the upper arms (which would also indent stainless steel), Mark Baker told me.

"The arm tube is a high grade aircraft alloy with special internal profiling to reduce ringing effects. This is largely modelled on the extensive research carried out in the development of the early Silver arm which left no stone unturned in terms of alloys. The headshell is black

advantage of a built in threaded VTA adjustment. Wiring is said to be a "high grade litz" type internally and the same external wire shared by all our arms up to the Conqueror.

The arm is well finished and nicely put together; it certainly doesn't have an air of cheapness about it, reminding me in a way of the long lost Linn Akito in its general neatness and look. Although there are the typical Origin Live

gripes; the hanging weight bias adjuster arrangement isn't as neat as the Rega's internal spring design, although I am sure Mark would claim it sounds better. Also, the packaging is very average and the instructions thorough but rather hard work to read; it's all forgivable at the price but others do better in these respects. With its standard 'old' Rega circular mounting, it proved a breeze to fit to my Technics SL1210 with Origin Live Rega armboard.

## SOUND QUALITY

Having heard umpteen Rega variants on the Technics SL1200, including a fairly recent specimen of Origin Live's own OLI (which the Onyx replaces), it was fascinating to hear the new arm. I kicked off with Blondie's 'Hanging

on the Telephone', a classic slice of late seventies new wave, and it proved a great way in to understanding the arm. Immediately my attention was drawn to Debbie Harry's sublime vocals, which sounded particularly natural and lyrical. The arm seemed very strong at conveying not just the timbre of her voice but the timing; the way that her vocal inflections worked with the snare drums and guitars was interesting to say the least, and *not* something I got from the more 'matter of fact Rega-based OL 1. The latter seemed more mechanical and rigid in its approach, with a feeling of being slightly more constrained.

The Buggles' 'Elstree' was another ear opener; being a Trevor Horn production (and indeed composition) it's full of little studio effects which the OL 1 would highlight in a highly conscientious way.

acrylic, chosen for its inert nature and low cost", he adds. "The yoke is no longer a soft cast aluminium as used on the OLI but rather a much harder and more substantial affair in which the vertical bearings are housed. The bearings are conventional ball bearings manufactured to our own low friction specification".

The base of the arm is a drop-in replacement for all Rega arms, which is "dead easy to fit and adjust without any complication" thanks to its identical geometry with Rega arms, and there's an adaptor plate that caters for SMEs. The Onyx also fits LP12s with a pre-drilled Origin Live armboard specifically tailored for it. The Onyx base has the added



# RETRO

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The Onyx however, seemed more locked into the lead keyboard line and the vocals, apparently better able to carry the tune. I'm not sure if it was quite as precise in terms of its imaging, but the soundstage seemed a little wider from left to right, and elements of the mix appeared bigger and more tangible, if perhaps slightly more diffuse. There seemed to be a little more stage depth too from the Onyx, making the Rega-based arm feel rather two dimensional.

Bass was supple and bouncy in a way that the OL I never was. The latter seemed drier when playing a 12" single of De La Soul's 'A Roller Skating Jam' named 'Saturdays'. This is an infectious pop flavoured piece of hip-hop with a great drum and bass line, the beats heavily syncopated with the vocals. The Onyx really revelled in this track, showing a carefree nature that's closer in spirit to the SME M1 or Hadcock GH-242 tonearm than it is the Rega; the OL I always sounded frigid on music like this, failing to really get into the groove. Instead, it dutifully retrieved all the low level detail and delivered the bass in a determined, workmanlike way, but never seemed to be having fun. Such a contrast reminded me of my first experience with the RB300 in 1983 - it's a bit too clever for its own good, I'd mused.

'Spring' from a Deutsche Gramophon imprint of Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' pretty much crystallised the Onyx's character for me. Even on the relatively analytical Technics, the recording came over with real warmth and a tangible, almost 'touchable' quality that the OL I never had. The latter always seemed like a highly accurate

'field observer' by comparison, dispassionately recording events for others to interpret; whereas the Onyx got right into the fray of the musical event more and had some fun. I was pleased with its timbral accuracy; violins sounded like real instruments rather than digital facsimiles and cellos had just that bit more body. The soundstage had a greater sense of air and space, but again I felt it lacked the rifle-bolt precision of the Rega-based OL I across the midband. However, there was one genre where I felt it was behind the Rega variants; with electronic music such as Kraftwerk's 'Computerworld' the more rigid, tenacious nature of the OL I was preferable in some ways; there's just a touch more inner detail and a drier yet more sinuous bass. The Onyx could sound just a little too preoccupied with conveying the song's gentle melody, and overlooking those amazing rhythms a little. So the message is, as ever listen for yourself if you possibly can, with your own personal choice of music(s)...

### CONCLUSION

There's been something of a tyranny of Rega-based arms in the budget sector for too long. The reason for this is simple - they're so blooming

good, and can be made better still, cheaply. But even when expertly modified they never lose that Rega sound completely, which as anyone who's ever owned one will know is rather 'mechanical' and 'matter of fact'. The Origin Live Onyx however, finally takes you out of this budget tonearm 'honey trap' altogether - and so you get a completely different sort of presentation for your money. Whether you like it of course is subjective, but on most types of music I certainly found it preferable.

Put simply, it sounds more 'human', more (dare I say it?) analogue, and more (gulp) musical. So those who want a more cerebral, 'technical' presentation of their black plastic should choose a Rega variant, but I feel there will be large numbers of buyers who'd prefer the Onyx, thanks to its more organic character - especially on decks such as the Technics. Until now, such folk have had to fork out £725 for the SME M2-9 to get this sort of sound. The Onyx offers most of this arm's charms for £450. This brand new bespoke pickup arm represents excellent value for money and comes highly recommended.

### REFERENCE SYSTEM

Technics SL1210 turntable  
Origin Live Silver tonearm  
Audio Technica AT-F3 cartridge  
Icon Audio PS3 phono stage  
Musical Fidelity AMS35i amplifier  
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

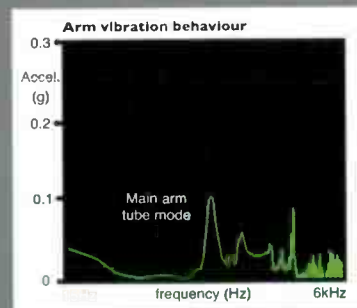
The Origin Live arm's main bending mode is very well suppressed, barely visible in our vibration analysis around 170Hz, meaning the arm tube is very well damped. The usual related third order bending mode is the high spike seen around 510Hz in this analysis from our accelerometer. There is a small plateau from 1kHz to 2kHz, which is a bit Rega-like. High frequency modes in the headshell and tube are very well suppressed. All in all the OL arm is very well behaved for a budget design.

The Technics SL-1200 used to test the arm suffers very little rotational frequency wow at 0.55Hz (33 rpm), an obvious and consistent strength of Direct Drive under test. The JIS weighted Wow and Flutter value of 0.04% was superb, but SL-1200s always produce this low figure.

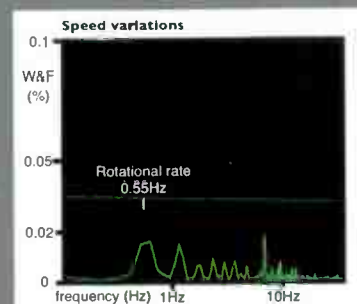
Under measurement both OL arm and Technics SL-1200 produce superb results. NK

Speed accuracy	no error
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### ARM VIBRATION



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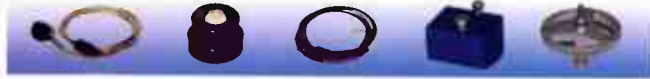
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### SPIN-CLEAN MANUAL RECORD CLEANER £80

You can spend as much as you want on your hi-fi but if your records aren't clean, then you're wasting your time. Whether they be old or new, cleaning your records should improve their sonic performance significantly. Of course, record cleaners – like hi-fi itself – arrive in different shapes, sizes and, more importantly, prices. This reasonably priced example, from the USA, resembles the classic Disco-Antistat in both style and operation but with several important differences...

Cast in bright yellow (to allow you to better see dirt sediment settling in the record well, apparently), the Spin-Clean asks you to place two rollers at the top of the well, in grooves to fit the size of your record – 45, 78 or 33rpm. Once done, you fill the well with water; in my experience you should always use the purer, distilled variety. A bottle of special cleaning liquid is supplied. You pour a few capfuls of the liquid over the vertically positioned pads that will do the actual cleaning. Once done, you are asked to lower your record into the bath and in-between the pads and then rotate the record clockwise and counter-clockwise three times. The pads scrub the LP

during this time. Then it's out with the LP for a dry with the supplied, lint-free cloths. And that's it – it's elegantly simple and easy to use, in a way that many rivals are not.

Deciding to give the system a challenge, I used a rather mucky original pressing LP by the singer Della Reese. In general play, this LP produced heavy noise that swept across the soundstage like an oarsman moves his oars through the water. It was offensive, sounding as loud as the music – just the right assault course for the Spin-Clean, then...

Yes, the instructions say that you should rotate the record *three* times clockwise and then three times counter clockwise but to be frank, I found little difference in the before/after comparison of the aural output of the Reese LP. The noise was just as high and just as intrusive after the standard clean. So I replunged and repeated the operation. This time, I rotated in both directions a total of *twenty* times per direction. Playing resulted in some improvement, around 50% in my estimation. This is a certainly decent outcome but I had nevertheless expected a little more from the system. This got me wondering if the LP itself had suffered from physical damage, and whether the wear and tear was

causing some of the noise, so I gave the LP the expensive Loricraft cleaning machine treatment. Listening to this confirmed that the crackles were all dirt because, post-Loricraft, the track was virtually noise-free.

Okay, comparing the Spin-Clean with the Loricraft is hardly fair, especially when you consider that the Loricraft costs about £1,500 more. That said, I felt that I was onto something, so I brought out my original Disco-Antistat which is based upon the same cleaning principle of the Spin-Clean and is operated in largely the same way but is priced at half the cost (£40) and cherry picked an equally nasty, noisy original pressing LP to test via Stevie Wonder. Sonically, it had to be said, the Disco-Antistat did a better job than the Spin-Clean. It didn't remove all of the noise but I would say that, on a typical cycle, the Disco-Antistat cleaned up to 75% of the noise against 50% via the Spin-Clean.

The reason for this? The cleaning brushes. This was the clue fed to me by the Loricraft. The Disco-Antistat uses a pair of fine brushes to get right inside the grooves to scrub the dirt away. The Spin-Clean uses a pair of felt pads which rub the surface and just a small portion of the groove wall. No matter how hard you try, the Spin-Clean can only clean a LP 'so far'.

Performing reasonably well, the Spin-Clean does improve the overall sound of your LP (as long as you rotate the LP for more times than is recommended) but that inherent design restriction will get you every time. Ultimately then, the company needs to rethink their product with a Mk.2 version with brushes in place of the pads. The Spin-Clean can be used with better effect on new LPs and lightly soiled records but it will struggle against heavily soiled LPs. **PR**

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**Icon Audio's new PS2 budget moving magnet phono amp takes an all-valve approach to vinyl amplification. Paul Rigby tries the tube wonder that's as cheap as chips...**



**I** have a problem with today's throw-away culture, because it has broken down the relationship we have with our technology. You know the drill – these days if something breaks, you chuck it out! But the handmade nature of Icon Audio products harks back to a bygone age where resources were valued and preserved, where design was uncomplicated and wholly mechanical. Of course, the products that they make, by their very type, simply aren't suited to high volume production line manufacture; valve amplifiers are not exactly packed with surface mount integrated circuits!

The new PS2 exists to fill a gap that Icon Audio's customers have found. As the two-box PS1 is about to rise in price due to rising material costs, there is a real need for a good quality, budget valve phono amp – hence this lower cost, one-box configuration. As Icon audio boss David Shaw confirmed, the PS2 cuts costs because, "we use a simplified power supply and a lot of jiggery pokery to try and get the transformer in there so it won't cause too much of a problem with noise. It uses the same circuits as the PS1. I used Mullard valves (ECC83) or the American equivalent – the 12AX7. They're the same, however.

These valves are also used in the PS1 and the power supply is designed sympathetically but simplified so the performance is not degraded to any extent. The construction is all metal – I used to work in the plastics industry for a time and I know that plastics degrade relatively quickly. So I use solid aluminium for the chassis and a solid steel bottom."

It's a small niggle but, spanning 270x140x700mm and weighing in at 2.5kg, the chassis design encourages you to use it from left to right on your hi-fi shelf instead of, like the MB 845 monoblocks, front to back. That is, the logo and power switch are positioned along one long edge with the input/output phono sockets, ground connector and fixed power cable along the other. As such, it's an inefficient user of space. Of course, in reality, you can position the phono any way you wish but usage and connections may be more problematic when used in 'front to back' mode...

The unidentified (why?) toggle switch on the 'rear' is an earth lift. Unless you use a wall wart power supply ("...which are cheap and generally sound awful"), you have to earth your component. The earth lift cuts hum if a hum loop exists.

Shaw is adamant that going down the valve route with a phono amp

is the right way. He believes that the right valves will be far more sympathetic to a typical RIAA curve contained within a piece of vinyl than a solid state amp will provide, meaning less focus on pops, clicks and surface noise. "The signal that is picked up by the cartridge is raw," said Shaw. "When it comes off the disc and goes into the preamp and it's not equalised, the valve has to deal with a tremendous range of sounds and frequencies. Transistors don't have a very good headroom. Valves, however, have an infinite margin.

"With the PS1 and now the PS2, this simple circuit, as basically created by engineers in the 1950s, declared that 'this is how we can get good hi-fi even in a moderately priced system' everything falls into place to make it work so well. You fiddle around with that at your peril", Shaw says. Okay, so what does this simple circuit sound like, then?

## SOUND QUALITY

The PS 2 might be a moving magnet device but, if you care to plug another Icon Audio device, the MCTX1 moving coil transformer, step-up (£299), into the PS2, it will enable the PS2 to play moving coil cartridges. The MCTX1 is a simple device with connecting RCAs and





"a successful blend of quality components combined in a cut price wrapper to provide an affordable one-box valve phono amp..."

a bypass button. So I afforded a brief series of sonic tests in this configuration first, before getting to the meat of the moving magnet tests. Running head-to-head with the cooking A.N.T. Kora (£495) and playing the Pixies' 'Where Is My Mind?' ('Surfer Rosa', Mo-Fi), the PS2 offered higher gain than the Kora at the same volume. The Kora provides a lower bass thump with slightly more impressive attendant rhythmic flow but the PS2 has the edge in upper bass and treble with more insightful examination of both acoustic and vocal output.

Similarly, With Kate Bush's 'Mrs. Bartolozzi' ('Aerial', EMI), the Kora presented superior bass welly, although the PS2 could be argued to

offer a more characterful bass output. The piano accompaniment offered more midrange exhilaration via the PS2 and a deeper organic flavour with more emotional emphasis than

the Kora.

Quickly moving onto the 12" promo of Autechre's 'Cichlisuite' (Warp), the Kora's greater lower frequency command told a more







## SECOND OPINION

There is a pleasing simplicity to the design of the PS2 that seems reflected in its approach to sound. It struck me as one of those pieces of equipment that doesn't try to impress, but quietly gets on with the job – and in this case, a job well done. For example, the unaccompanied male voices of the Capella Antiqua hung beautifully poised in the space in front of my loudspeakers, with the decay of the echo at the end of a phrase floating off into a very dark and silent background. Presented with more upbeat material, the PS2 demonstrated a good grasp of the complex rhythms and breaks used by Dave Brubeck. The precision of the stereo image was very good and the tonal balance seemed quite natural. It managed to be generous to any odd bits of surface noise of this 1966 pressing without lacking any sense of space around the high hats or the swish of Joe Morello's brushes.

It is a compliment to the PS2 that it found itself playing through the AMR AM-777 amplifier, costing over six times its price, and at no time did it seem out of its depth, unable to deliver the goods. The performance is very convincing, and can certainly hold its own in more expensive company. As an introduction to the delights of thermionic phono stages, at a reasonable price, I can think of nothing against it. Ideally I wish the mono/stereo switch had been kept from the PS1, but apart from that minor niggle, I find the PS2 to be something of an audiophile bargain. If you want a straightforward, good sounding, affordable phono stage, then look no further. TB



authoritative story than the PS2 but the complex synth orchestrations were better informed by the PS2, with extra layers of texture.

Overall, the Kora was slightly smoother than the PS2 but the former was a touch too tame in my system while the PS2 brought my reference hi-fi to life, adding transparency and detail. Interestingly, when comparing the jury-rigged, MC-modified, PS2 to my reference, two box PS3 (£1,500) in MC mode, the PS2 made a good fist of it. Yes, the PS3 wipes the floor with the PS2 in terms of control and presentation of lower frequencies, but the PS2 provides a natural, organic midrange with resonant organic instruments that competes well with the PS3.

Running the PS2 as a moving magnet box with the MM version of the A.N.T Kora (£325), the latter once again exhibited a high degree of bass drive, even at low volumes but did display a touch of midrange recess. The PS2 however, provided clean, airy mid and upper frequencies, via the Pixies track with a slightly slimmer bass track. Nevertheless,

its musicality is joyous. You are encouraged to pump up the volume.

Despite the A.N.T.'s admirable efforts in detail retrieval the PS2 had the edge in conveying the emotion with the Bush vocal, adding consistency and etchings of emotion to her output plus greater depth and nuance. Bass may have lacked a little depth but, instead, it felt more 'true' in how it was conveyed to the ear. The PS2 certainly provided more body and structure. Finally, via the Autechre vinyl, despite the Kora's remarkable clarity, the PS2 offered more pizzazz and a greater sense of life while the upper frequencies were pushed to new heights.

## CONCLUSION

Fitting neatly into the Icon Audio range, Icon Audio's new PS2 is a successful blend of quality components combined in a cut-price wrapper to provide a one-box valve phono amp for those who want a valve-based solution but whose disposable income has to be spread thinly among a variety of responsibilities. The PS2 is a valve amp for the people – long live the valve revolution.

## REFERENCE SYSTEM

Avid Acutus turntable  
SME IV tonearm  
Benz Glider cartridge  
Icon PS3 phono stage  
A.N.T. Kora 3T SE MM phono stage  
Aesthetix Calypso preamplifier  
Icon MB845 power amplifiers  
One Thing Quad ESL-57 speakers

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The PS2 is purposed for moving magnet cartridges, so there is no input transformer to raise cost. It offers very high gain of x300 (50dB), meaning it will suit insensitive modern integrated amplifiers with a low 400mV input sensitivity, unlike preamps with x100 gain, the most common value. Being valve it can swing 20V out so overload isn't an issue as 30mV from a cartridge – about the maximum possible – will give 9V output. That would overload most transistor (chip) based preamps.

Unlike all other phono stage manufacturers, who use a small degree of treble lift in the 75µS characteristic to add detail, Icon have rolled down treble a little, especially above 10kHz. As this perfectly balances the rising midband and treble of modern MM cartridges like inexpensive Ortofon (2M Red and Blue, etc), the net result is accurate from LR All the same, the PS2 will still sound warmer than all rivals, even if it is more accurate. It will sound warm with older cartridges like M97 x however.

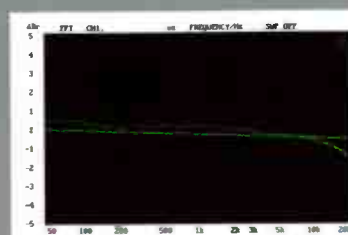
Hiss was on the high side at 0.7µV,

this being +6dB higher than transistor preamps, but as cartridge hiss swamps preamp hiss in any case the impact is less than imagined. Valve MM phono stages usually have a very slight hiss.

The PS2 measures well and should provide a balanced and attractive sound from MM cartridges. NK

Frequency response	5Hz-12kHz
Separation	74dB
Noise	dB
Distortion	0.2%
Gain	x300 (50dB)
Output	20V

## FREQUENCY RESPONSE



## VERDICT ●●●●●

Sparkling performer that injects excitement and vigour into vinyl playback, yet very smooth with it. An excellent budget phono stage.

ICON AUDIO PS 2 £450

Icon Audio  
☎ +44 (0)1162 440593  
www.iconaudio.co.uk

## FOR

- musicality
- upper frequency detail
- characterful bass

## AGAINST

- deep bass
- design niggles

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LINA LP12 (T)TICK/CARTRIDGE VALHALLA/CIRKUS/TRAMPOLINE  
REGA P3/B300/REGA CARTRIDGE  
REGA RB-300 TONEARM  
NOTTS ANALOGUE MENTOR  
EMINENT TECH MODEL 2 AIR BEARING LINEAR TONEARM  
MISSION 774 TONE ARM UPGRADED LEAD  
NOTTS ANALOGUE MENTOR TONE ARM (ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)  
ANTIQUE SOUNDLABS MINI PHONO (2 BOX WITH NOS MULLARD VALVES)  
AUDIO NEMESIS PHONO STAGE (E1000 +)  
PROJECT PHONO BOX (ONE OWNER)  
FIDELITY RESEARCH FR-1 MK3 CARTRIDGE  
REGA FONO MM PHONO STAGE

## DIGITAL

SHANLING OMEGA CDT-300 CRYOVAC VALVES  
LECTOR 77 2 BOX CD PLAYER  
MUSICAL FIDELITY TR-VIS SACD/CD PLAYER  
SONY SCD 777ES SACD/CD PLAYER (GOLD)  
AUDIO MEDIA KREDEL IRA CD PLAYER (CLOCKED)  
WADIA 1700 IPOD DOCK (E400+)  
BARCLAY DIGITAL F-1 SUPER TRANSPORT (22K1 NEW)  
ENSEMBLE DIBONDIO TRANSPORT DI-CHRONO DAC/PRE AMP  
CHORD 1500E DAC/DIGITAL PRE AMP (E6000 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
ACCUPIHASE DP-90 TRANSPORT (E8000?)  
THETA CARMEN CD/DVD TRANSPORT  
MERGE S-2000 160 GB MUSIC SERVER  
MICROMEGA STAGE 2  
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR DACMAGIC (CURRENT MODEL)  
ONKYO NDS-1 MEDIA TRANSPORT  
MERIDIAN 203 DAC  
DENON DPF-13030 200 DISC MULTIPLEXER  
MARANTZ CD-17 KI SIGNATURE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
PERPETUAL TECH. P3A 24/96 DAC MIDWRIGHT SIGNATURE-2 (LAST 1)  
PERPETUAL TECH. P3A 24/96 DAC MIDWRIGHT SIGNATURE-2  
PERPETUAL TECHNOLOGY P1A DIGITAL ENGINE (LAST ONE)  
PIONEER CLD 925 LASER DISC PLAYER (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
DENON 3910 UNIVERSAL PLAYER (ONE OWNER)  
VACUUM TUBE LOGIC JLT SACD/CD PLAYER (LAST 1 E1300)  
VACUUM TUBE LOGIC JLT SACD/CD PLAYER  
THETA DATA UNIVERSAL CD/D PLAYER (ONE OWNER) RARE  
THETA PRO GEN III DAC GLASS & BALANCED OPTIONS (ONE OWNER)  
MERIDIAN 602 TRANSPORT 606 DAC  
MICROMEGA CLASSIC SOLO XLR/DCA  
SONY CDP-X33ES CLASSIC HEAVYWEIGHT ONE OWNER  
SONY HAR LH-500 80GB HARD DISC/RECORDER  
NAD CS111 CD PLAYER  
DENON 2910 UNIVERSAL PLAYER

## PRE-AMPS

OPA ENLIGHTENMENT (NEW OLD STOCK-ULTRA RARE)  
ROGUE AUDIO 95 REMOTE VALUE PRE AMP (LATE MODEL)  
NAIM 102 REMOTE PRE (OLIVE CASE)  
MATISSE REFERENCE 2 BOX PREAMP 64 STEP ATTENUATORS ORDERED AT EXTRA  
COST/MIM&C PHONO STAGE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
MUSIC FIRST SILVER PRE SPECIAL ORDER TWIN VOL.POTS  
3 ROADZ BALANCED IRS.1 RCA/2 BALANCED OUTS (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
H-CAT 12-B PRE WITH WTC CONTROL (E2800)  
H-CAT P-12A PRE AMP (E2500?)  
PASS LABS ALEPH P PRE AMP  
JEFF ROWLAND COHERENCE-1 2 BOX PRE C/W PHONO STAGE AND  
ROGUE AUDIO 88 MAGNUM REMOTE PREAMP (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
DPA THREE BOX PRE AMP EXCLT  
ALCHEMIST FORSETTI 2 BOX PRE RCA/XLR (ONE OWNER)  
DPA 505 PRE AMP C/W PHONO STAGE  
MUSICAL FIDELITY A3cr REMOTE PRE AMP  
ANTIQUE SOUND LABS LJO1 PRE AMP/HEADPHONE AMP  
ANTIQUE SOUND LABS MINI PHONO (2 BOX WITH NOS MULLARD VALVES)  
ROKSAN LS-2 PRE AMP  
ROTEL RSP9018 PROCESSOR  
VTL PRE VALVE AMP DETAILS TO FOLLOW

## POWER AMPS

KRELL EVOLUTION 402 STEREO POWER AMP  
PATHOS INPOWER CLASS A HYBRID MONOBLOCKS (SUPERB E9K?)  
PAPWORTH 200M SPECIAL ORDER KT-90 AMPS WITH VOL.CONTROL  
SPECIAL ORDER BUILD (ONE OWNER FEW MONTHS USE ONLY)  
REMOVED FROM BOXES FOR TESTING ONLY (E6K NEW IN 1996)  
ART AUDIO JOTA CHROME/GOLD CHASSIS/VOL. POT. LITTLE USED SINGLE  
ENDED 32S VALVE AMP (ONE OWNER FROM NEW \$12000 NOW?)  
BALANCED AUDIO TECH. BAT VK-60 POWER AMP (E6K? ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
JEFF ROWLAND MODEL3 MONOBLOCKS  
MCDORMACK DNA-125 POWER AMP (ONE OWNER FEW MONTHS USE ONLY)  
DPA 505 POWER AMP & CABLES(ONE OWNER LITTLE USE)  
ROKSAN S1.5 POWER AMPS 2 OFF EXCLT CONDITION RARE  
DPA 505 POWER AMP & CABLES  
NAKAMICHI 620 WEDGE POWER AMP  
ROTEL RMB 1088 8 CHANNEL POWER AMP

## INTEGRATED AMPS

ONKYO TX-6800 AV-AMP (UNUSED)  
ART AUDIO INTEGRA 30W INTEGRATED IINC/P/ STAGE (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
KRELL KAV 300R ULTRA RARE 300W + TUNER (E3950 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-206 TUNER AMP (E4K)  
ADVANTAGE 1200 INTEGRATED AMP (2X)  
DENON AVC11 SR AV AMP GOLD (E2K ONE OWNER)  
WORLD AUDIO DESIGN KT-88 INTEGRATED VALVE AMP (WAD BUILT)  
ALCHEMIST APD-15 MKII INTEGRATED  
REVOX H-5 INTEGRATED & OPTIONAL H206 SYSTEM REMOTE (ONE OWNER)  
DEWON PWA 900 SIZEABLE INTEGRATED MM/MC PHONO  
YAMAHA AX-620 AV AMP  
NAKAMICHI AMPLIFIER-2 REMOTE INTEGRATED

## COMBO'S

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JEFF ROWLAND MODEL3 MONOBLOCKS  
ROKSAN LS-2 PRE AMP AND TWD S1.5 STEREO POWER AMPS  
UNION RESEARCH FEATHER PRE/30 POWER (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
DPA THREE BOX PRE AMP 505 POWER AMP & CABLES  
LYNX STRATOS PRE AND 2 MONOBLOCKS (ONE OWNER TIMEWARP STUFF!)  
DPA 505 PRE AMP C/W PHONO STAGE/ 505 POWER AMP & CABLES

## LOUDSPEAKERS

REVEL SALON ULTIMA 1  
FAB AUDIO MODEL 1 ONLY PAIR IN UK (E7.5K)  
ENSEMBLE FIGURA (SOLID ALUMINIUM E5800?)  
MARTEN MALES II CHERRY (8K+ NEW ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
BOLZANO VILLETTRI BV3003 & BV SUBWOOFER FANTASTIC!  
PDIUM 1a FEW WEEKS USE ONLY (E6000? NEW)  
HARPER QUARTETO FABULOUS FLOORSTANDERS (E4000)  
MIRAGE M1a BIPOLAR GIANTS (E6500) (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
AURUM CANTUS MUSIC GODDESS (E2500)  
AURUM CANTUS VOLLA (E2500)  
AURUM CANTUS VOLLA (E2500)  
THEEL CS 1.5 (ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
AURUM CANTUS V3M GLOSS BLACK (E1700)  
CELESTION A-2 SANTOS ROSEWOOD  
CURA CA-30 FLOORSTANDERS (E3000 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3 SE (LAST PAIR E1350)  
AURUM CANTUS V3M GLOSS BLACK (LAST PAIR E1300)  
SMELL TYPE-C MKIV AMERICAN WALNUT  
CAEDENE ELECTROSTATIC HYBRID  
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3SE  
PRDAC STUDIO 150  
T&A TMR-100 SIZEABLE TRANSMISSION LINE FLOORSTANDERS  
TLC CLASSIC ONES LARGE FLOORSTANDERS  
TANNY DC-200 ONE OWNER  
RUARK TALISMAN II OFFROAD X-OVERS  
TANNY 611 LOUDSPEAKERS  
MORDANT SHORT MS-815 FLOORSTANDERS (E450)  
TANNY R-3 FLOORSTANDERS  
KEF REFERENCE SERIES MODEL 70S AV SATELITES 2 PAIRS  
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO-2 STAND MOUNTS 2 PAIRS  
MILLER AND KREISEL KX-10 SUBWOOFER

## TUNERS

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SONY ST-370ES AM/FM TUNER ONE OWNER  
TECHNICS SD-505 TUNER (ONE OWNER)  
AV REF 7 BAND TUNER (ONE OWNER)  
KRELL KAV 300R RARE TUNER AMP (E3950 ONE OWNER FROM NEW)  
MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-206 TUNER AMP (E4K)

## TAPE/DAT/MINIDISC

REVOX A-77 MKIV HIGH SPEED TWO TRACK ONE OWNER FROM NEW  
MANUAL/REEL S/NABS/COVER ETC  
SONY 650ES CASSETTE DECK ONE OWNER  
PIONEER ELITE SERIES MINIDISC RECORDER (URUSHI CHEEKS 110W)  
TECHNICS BX RS501 CASSETTE DECK(ONE OWNER)

## MISC.

PS-AUDIO QUINTESSENCE POWER CENTRE (E1100)  
NAIM HI-CAP (SILVER BORDER)  
BLACK RHODIUM 8 WAY MAINS CORD  
RUSS ANDREWS POWER CORD  
AUDIOPLAN CLEAN POWER CORD  
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AUDIOQUEST RUBY 0.8 METRE PAIR  
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AUDIOQUEST AES/EBU PRO DIGITAL CABLE 1FT  
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MIT MH-750 2.5 METRE PAIR BI-WIRE  
RAPPORT (USHER) 5 METRE PAIR FACTORY TERMINATED  
DPA 5 METRE PAIR TERMINATED FOR 505 AMP  
XLD SIGNATURE 2 TYPE 5.2 4FT PAIR  
GED GENESIS SILVER SPIRAL 3 METRE PAIR  
XLD REF-2.5 METRE PAIR  
MIT MH-750 BI WIRE 3 METRE PAIR  
PS AUDIO X-STREAM 3 METRE PAIR (VERY HEAVY!)  
BLACK RHODIUM S-300 BI WIRE 7 METRE BI WIRE PAIR(E260)  
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living Control Room Box4 BNIB	1712	999
Mark Levinson No37 Transport S/H	N/A	1999
Mark Levinson No 360s DAC S/H	N/A	1999
Primare CD30.2 CD player S/H	1500	699
Quad CD67 RARE S/H	N/A	549
Wadia 170i Transport BNIB iPod dock	499	349

### Analogue

Heed Audio Quasar MM/MC 2 box Phono stage x-demo	740	499
Heed Audio Questar MM Phono stage BNIB	300	219
Kuzma Stabi S/ Stogi S double arm version Xdemo	2795	1750
Kuzma Stogi Tonearm x-demo	1390	799
Mark Levinson No320s Phono Module x-demo	995	649
Pink Triangle LPT/New Heed Orbit PSU/Roksan Tabriz S/H	N/A	599
Roksan TMS/Atremiz/DS5 Turntable S/H	N/A	2250
Well Tempered lab Amadeus BNIB	2195	1899

### Preamplifiers

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Conrad Johnson Classic Phono x-demo	2400	1750
Krell KAV250p preamplifier S/H	2398	995
Mark Levinson No380s Preamplifier	N/A	2499
Spectral DMC15SS new in box full warranty	6850	4995
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### Amplifiers

Audio Technica AT-MA50 Mixing Amplifier S/H	399	149
Audion Sterling MK1 valve Integrated S/H	1720	699
Bel Canto eVo4 Poweramplifier S/H	3400	1649
Chord Electronics SPM1400 B mono S/H	12000	4299
Electrocompaniet AW250R S/H	4999	2499
Graaf GM100 Power amplifier re-valved S/H	5999	2299
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Martin Logan Quest Light Oak (new panels) S/H	N/A	1299
Martin Logan Vantage dark cherry x-demo	5149	3499
PenAudio Charisma x-demo	2715	1899
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Von Schweikert Unifield One Monitor 8 months old S/H	4995	1999

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Electrocompaniet ECS1 M6 feet x4 BNIB	189	49
Finite Element HD03 master reference S/H	4500	1950
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JPS Ultra Dual bi wire 2x8 Spades to banana S/H	549	279
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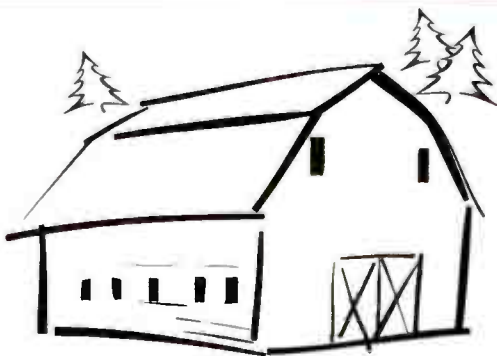
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VALVE SET. Four matched KT88's Genalex Gold Lion. Almost new with boxes and receipt. Used 6 weeks, no longer required. Paid £160. Sell £90. Tel: 0113 252 1016 or Email: adrian.todd@talktalk.net

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MARANTZ PM8003 integrated amplifier as new. Boxed and all original accessories. Immaculate. £450. Hifi award winner. Stephen.adolphus@gmail.com tel: 07787 574784.

CELESTION DITTON 44 speakers fully refurbished in excellent condition with original boxes etc. £225 ono. Call Steve on 01268 785808 (Essex) for details.

QUAD ESL63s, late serial nos, excellent condition, fully serviced 09 + unused George stands from One Thing Audio. Buyer to collect, Cheltenham area. £875 ono. Further details on 07958 675150.

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<b>PRE-AMPS</b>	Almaro 3188 (new)	£2695	CEC TL-1N CD transport, as new,	£5795
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TECHNICS SL1210Mk2 Fitted modified Rega RB300 arm £200. Roksan KT-I Mk III Tuner £50. Rega MC phono amp £50. Buyer collects from M25/A21 area. martin.bill@genie.co.uk

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**GUIDELINES FOR BUYING AND SELLING SECOND-HAND EQUIPMENT**

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1. Not everyone is honest - Buyer Beware!
2. Don't send cash!
3. Accept no verbal guarantees.
4. Have you heard the item or something similar? If not, why do you want it?
5. Don't pretend to have knowledge - it's your fingers that will get burnt!
6. Is it working? If not, why not? Can it be repaired and if so is it worth it?
7. Has it been modified and, if so, have notes been kept?
8. Was it any good in the first place?
9. Don't send cash!
10. If you are in the slightest doubt, arrange an audition (see point 5) if it's too far, wait for another time.
11. Either buy it or don't: vendors are excusably impatient with 'consultation' exercises.
12. Don't send cash!

**FOR THE SELLER**

1. Not everyone is honest - Seller Beware!
2. Make no verbal guarantees.
3. Even 'nearly new' is still second-hand. If the manufacturer's guarantee is no longer in force, your price should reflect this.
4. There is very little intrinsic value in second-hand hi-fi; it's only worth what someone will pay for it.
5. The best guide to pricing is last month's Classifieds: that a 'classic' was worth £xxx a year or two ago is no guide. Values fall as well as rise.
6. Amateur second-hand dealing is not a big money game: you win some, you lose some.
7. Be prompt with despatch. If in doubt about buyer's bona-fides, either wash out the deal or send C.O.D.
8. There will always be time-wasters; be tolerant within reason!





### BLACK RHODIUM PHANTOM £300/1M

This is one of Black Rhodium's best value new interconnects for a long time. It's a solid core, silver plated copper design; Black Rhodium say silver plating the copper gives a "much faster and more detailed" sound than copper on its own, and solid core is claimed to be able to deliver a "clearer sound at a lower

cost" than multicore. The cable, bespoke manufactured for Black Rhodium in the UK, is specified with a tight twist to reduce the possibility of distortion to the sound by RFI being picked up along the length of the cable, the company says. It sports Eichmann bullet plugs, which route the return conductor so it's connected to the socket via a single point rather than around its circumference, in effect giving a similar sound to when star earthing is used. The whole cable is Deep Cryogenically Treated for superior sound, after being covered with a high quality braid and used labelled heatshrinks for identification.

As with all Black Rhodium cables, it's very impressively voiced considering its price point. There's a sense of ease and of naturalness here that simply isn't present in several

rivals which attempt to deliver massive amounts of forensic detail but fall over their feet musically, so to speak. By contrast the Phantom provides a hauntingly real ('scuse the pun) rendition of whatever it's asked to play, giving a satisfyingly snappy and rhythmic presentation plus a nice wide and open soundstage sparkling with low level information. Yet it doesn't overlook the bigger musical picture, capturing powerful dynamics with ease without a hint of compression. I found it had a fine tonality, nicely lit across the midband but with an inherently dark, velvety patina to take the edge off strident recordings. In this respect it reminded me of some interconnects costing £1,000 or more; it's couth and sophisticated beyond its price point. An excellent value product then, doing all that you could possibly ask of a £300 interconnect and more; highly recommended. **DP**

[Contact: +44 (0)1332 342233,  
[www.blackrhodium.co.uk](http://www.blackrhodium.co.uk)]

# soundbites

### HI-FI RACKS RECORD STORAGE £SEE TEXT

It is so important for music fans to own a decent storage system; it's the one area of hi-fi that's too often ignored. Choose the floor and a nearby wall to prop your LPs against and you risk dirt contamination plus damp or spillage accidents. Picking a storage system with thin shelving results in bowing of the shelves themselves and possible sleeve damage. Keeping the LPs in a box means that you really don't know what LPs you own and you risk overfilling, warping and sleeve damage and so on...

This new company utilises a hand-made product using top quality hardwoods without a sheet of veneer or MDF in sight (oh, the relief!). Using a modular approach that allows you to build an LP-only, CD-only, DVD-only or a mixed LP/CD/DVD rack of varying heights and configurations, you can expand as funds allow. The company offers three capacities to suit: CDs (45 discs per shelf - £79); vinyl (248 discs per shelf

- £99) and DVDs (45 DVDs per shelf - £79) in either oak or satin black.

Because the company manufactures on site, you can also order bespoke shelving or physically tweak the products they already offer. Flexibility is the key. In purely aesthetic terms, the shelving is beautiful. It's a piece of furniture, fitting easily into the living room. For practical purposes, it is very easy to put together, is solid in its construction (there is no frame movement or structural 'creep') and feels like a tank when assembled. Bolts and location slots are well designed too. It's also fetishistic, as I constructed mine and then found myself... stroking it [steady on old chap - Ed.]. Those of a similarly unstable disposition might want to avoid the racks or seek immediate medical assistance! But seriously, a lovely product. **PR**

[Contact: +44 1572 756447,  
[www.hifiracks.co.uk](http://www.hifiracks.co.uk)]



# NEXT MONTH

September's Hi-Fi World is a veritable cornucopia of digital and analogue! Digiphiles will love Naim's new high end NDX/UnitiServe network music player/NAS combination, and portable fans will enjoy the new high end Studio V digital portable from HiSound. Vinylists will enjoy our look at the long lost Rega Planet turntable, and our review of the superb Audio Research PH6 tube phono stage. There's more though - from Aurum's classy A5 integrated amplifier [pictured] to JoSound's striking Jo45/1 loudspeakers. Here's just some of what we hope to bring you...

VINCENT SA-31MK/SP-33MK PRE-POWER AMPLIFIER

NAIM NDX/UNITISERVE NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER

CLEARAUDIO INNOVATION COMPACT TURNTABLE

AUDIO TECHNICA ATH-RE70 HEADPHONES

OLDE WÖRLDE: REGA PLANET TURNTABLE

HISOUND STUDIO V DIGITAL PORTABLE

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AUDIO RESEARCH PH6 PHONO STAGE

TEUFEL ULTIMA 800 LOUDSPEAKERS

AURUM A5 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

PRO-JECT DEBUT SE/3 TURNTABLE

JOSOUND JO45/1 LOUDSPEAKERS

MING DA MC300 PREAMPLIFIER

TEDDY PARDO TEDDYDAC DAC

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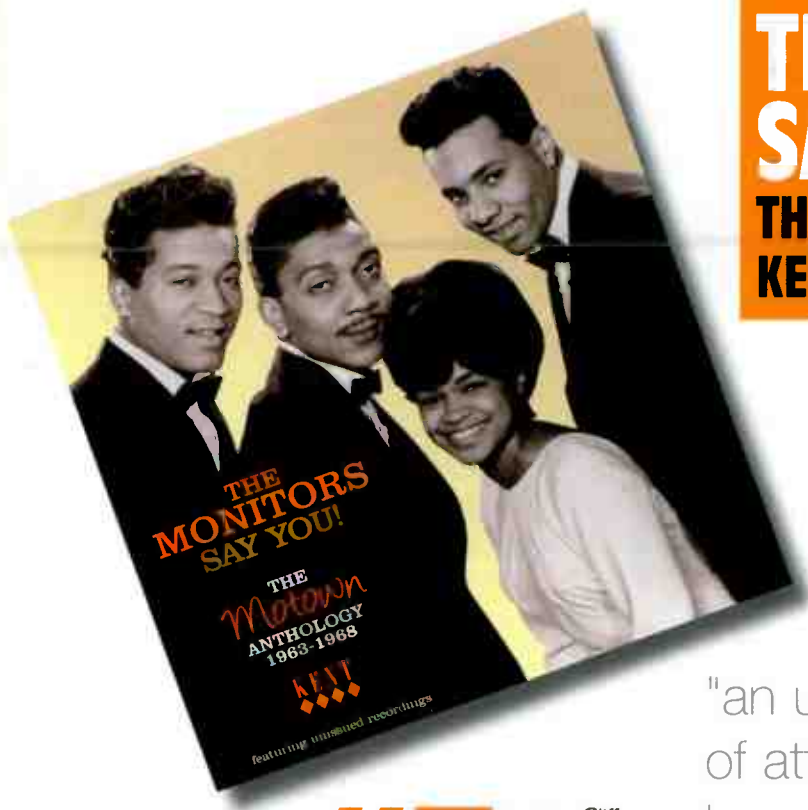
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### KENT

"an underground classic worthy of attention, from the little-known vaults of Motown..."

**"F**or every Cliff Richard that succeeded in the fifties, there was a Dave Sampson who didn't. For every Beatles that succeeded there was a Four Just Men who didn't. Although Motown was a self-contained company, it had budgets that it had to work within. Every artist was signed on a level playing field but those that took off received the promotional budgets. Those that didn't had to settle for what was left as well as not receiving A-list song material. Some groups that didn't make it had their talents channelled as writers instead and so didn't receive as much studio time as others."

So said Tony Rounce, compiler for the new Kent release that focuses on the little known Motown outfit The Monitors' classic collection of songs. Might have beens? Should have beens, more like. This was a group that *should*, to all intents and purposes, have been as famous as The Temptations or The Four Tops. They could have been the male stars of the label, in the same way that The Supremes ruled the female roost. This CD, in a way, was a classic waiting to happen. A retrospective classic, in fact.

Compiler, Tony Rounce, described how he got involved with this obscure Motown group in the first place. "We were asked by Universal Records to release a CD on another obscure Motown outfit, The Satintones which originally was supposed to come out in the USA but was deemed 'non-commercial'. Keith Hughes put that together – a

mine of information on Motown, he co-writes the notes and does the research for the famed, ongoing, 'Complete Motown Singles' series. Keith midwifed the deal for the Satintones – Motown's very first group. It gave us the impetus to continue with other projects, including this Monitors release."

The Monitors used to be The Majestics, who lived on VIP, a label run by Berry Gordy's first wife. In 1963, the outfit found a new lead singer, Richard Street. He had a day job at Motown as well as being in the group and it was this day job that proved to be the outfit's undoing. Street was in charge of quality control which meant that he decided which records were released. The inference remains unsaid, at least officially but, as Rounce believes, "... The Monitors were shoved further down the pile because Street didn't want any accusations of bias creeping in because the lead singer of The Monitors was also the guy who decided what records came out on Motown. Yet, The Monitors were fantastic and Street was a very expressive singer."

They did have one hit with a Vietnam war-oriented single in 1966, 'Greetings (This is Uncle Sam)', present on this CD, which revolved around the tale of a chap, who doesn't want to go to war, being called up; it hit the right note at that time in the USA yet this single was never followed up by the label. The next single was released around

a year later – far too late to gain momentum.

Amazingly, The Monitors were on Motown for the best part of six years, yet only released five singles. While their album, almost an afterthought, was released as the group were about to split up. The group's actual demise was down to the invitation to Richard Street to join The Temptations.

"The Monitors might have been a lower-profile group but they are much loved by collectors who used to buy the odd single, wish that they'd issue more but little knowing that the group were making the records but Motown was stockpiling them. The Monitors could have been a lot bigger; The Miracles, The Four Tops and The Temptations were the priorities. In fact, The Monitors had a similar line-up to The Miracles: three guys and a girl. Richard Street himself felt that The Monitors were kept on tap just in case The Miracles ever decided to leave for another label but the label couldn't break two acts with a similar visual look."

This CD includes the band's sole album, 'Greetings!... We're The Monitors', which includes tracks already released as singles plus two B-sides and a twelve unreleased tracks directly from the Motown vaults. A CD to illustrate the tenuous nature of musicians in the music business and how much luck plays a part in success, The Monitors are an underground classic and worthy of attention from the little known vaults of Motown. **PR**



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